

I. Mukherjee's *The Holder of the World* as a Rewriting of Hawthorne's

The Scarlet Letter

Bharati Mukherjee, an Indian-American immigrant novelist and short story writer, was born in Calcutta, India, in 1940 during the last years of British colonialism in India. Mukherjee, born and raised in India, has been a Fellow of the American Academy and a Professor of English at the University of California since 1993. She has authored a number of novels and short stories that concern her immigrant experience as well as Indian heritage. Mukherjee's *The Holder of the World* (1993) is a historical romance written in a science fiction framework that depicts her Indian heritage and immigrant experience through the Western female Hannah Easton who experiences diverse socio-cultural British colonial India in the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth century.

Beigh Masters, mouthpiece of Mukherjee, is a controlled narrator who self-consciously narrates the events in the narrative being equally aware of both, events in the story and her act of narration. She lives in Massachusetts with her husband Venn Iyer, an Indian computer scientist. She is an asset hunter and her husband animates information in the computer. Venn Iyer, at his computer, is trying to recreate a day in the past so perfectly that someone who is now alive will be able to step into it, if only for a few seconds. Meanwhile, Beigh Masters stumbled on the record of Hannah Easton, a woman born in New England three hundred years ago. According to her, Hannah Easton is adopted and raised in Salem, marries an Englishman Grabiell Legge, goes to India with him, becomes mistress of the king of Devgad *Raja* Jadav Singh after the death of her husband, and suffers a lot in multi socio-cultural British colonial India. Finally, she returns to her native country, New England, with the baby of her

lover in her womb after the assassination of her lover, Jadav Singh, by the soldiers of Muslim Emperor Aurangzeb in a Hindu-Muslim religious riot in India.

Mukherjee rewrites Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* as *The Holder of the World* by constructing her own Western female protagonist Hannah Easton based on the female protagonist Hester Prynne in *The Scarlet Letter*. Both the novels are historical romances since they deal with the then historical facts with the help of imagination of romantic love affairs. *The Scarlet Letter* depicts the historical background of the mid- seventeenth century New England blending it with the romantic love between Hester Prynne and a Puritan minister Arthur Dimmesdale in the absence of her husband Chillingworth, whereas *The Holder of the World* deals with the history of British colonial India with its multi-culturalism and religious fundamentalism in the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth century with the romantic love affair between Hannah Easton and a Hindu *Raja* Jadav Singh, king of Devgad. In both novels, female protagonists are portrayed as sufferers under their rigid socio-cultural religiosity. In the former, Hester Prynne suffers a lot under the harsh and rigid law of Puritanism in New England due to her adultery with Dimmesdale as her child Pearl born out of her extramarital relation in the absence of her husband is the testimony of her committed sin, whereas in the latter Hannah Easton, a New England immigrant in India, suffers a lot in diverse socio-cultural and British colonial India before and after the assassination of Jadav Singh in a religious riot between the Hindus and the Muslims.

In the pattern of the immigrant rewriting of *The Scarlet Letter*, Mukherjee weaves the story of New England immigrant Hannah Easton in *The Holder of the World*. In the former the protagonist Hester Prynne migrates to New England from England, whereas in the latter the Western female Hannah Easton migrates to India

from New England. *The Scarlet Letter* is a good example of the genre of immigrant literature. It has many of the qualities we associate not only with classic immigrant literature but also with more recent examples of ethnic literature of New England by Maxine Hong Kingston, Bharati Mukherjee and others. In *The Scarlet Letter*, Hester Prynne and Chillingworth are actually English immigrants, who migrate to Amsterdam, Holland before migrating to New England. Therefore, both the fictions are immigrant writings.

Mukherjee exploits lots of oriental imagery in *The Holder of the World* as Hawthorne does in *The Scarlet Letter*. The objects employed by narrator Beigh Masters in *The Holder of the World* are iconic references to the mundane and mythical objects of the Indian society. Similarly, the objects employed by custom house narrator in *The Scarlet Letter* are iconic references to the mundane and mythical objects of the East India Marine Society. The correlation of the oriental imagery in *The Scarlet Letter* and those goods Hawthorne would have encountered in the custom house and the museum suggest that his literary imagination is powerfully grounded on the material objects from the orient. In other words, Hawthorne exploited the oriental objects from East India Marine Museum for his writing material.

The Scarlet Letter has a linear narrative with plot setting in New England only. But *The Holder of the World* has a circular narrative with plot setting in different locale: New England, England, British colonial India with major setting and again in New England that ruptures the linearity of narration of the story in the fiction.

In both novels, Puritan female protagonists are portrayed as sufferers but their nature of suffering is different. Hester Prynne, in *The Scarlet Letter*, suffers under rigid Puritanism and patriarchal New England society due to her adulterous sin committed with her lover, whereas Hannah Easton suffers under multi socio-cultural

British colonial India with conflicting religiosity. She is portrayed as a bold and revolutionary in the fiction. She dares to question rigid social norms and values of Indian society and discovers a new way of reality.

In thematic level, *The Scarlet Letter* and *The Holder of the World* are different despite their similarities in a number of matters. The former reinforces humanistic ideology with Puritan rigidity and pays less attention to dominant patriarchal society and British colonialism in the mid-seventeenth century New England, whereas the latter is written from the feministic perspective to give voice to the marginalized and suffered females in India including the protagonist Hannah Easton.

The Scarlet Letter offers resolution to the story, whereas *The Holder of the World* has openendedness without providing final resolution to the story. In the former, Hester Prynne dies in her old age and is entombed near the tomb of her lover, whereas in the latter finally Hannah Easton returns to her native land, Salem, pregnant with her lover's baby and bears the baby on the way towards her home and lives in Salem as white Pearl herself and her daughter as non-white Pearl. Therefore, *The Holder of the World* does not offer a final resolution to Hannah Easton's story in order to demand readers' participation in the story to conclude it as they understand.

Regarding *The Holder of the World*, a number of critics have posited their views since its publication in 1993. In this connection Paul Brians, a literary critic, puts his view focusing on the subject matter and the style of the novel. He says, "*The Holder of the World* is a fantastic historical novel set in a science fictional framework. [. . .] a puritan white lady takes her journey to India where she becomes the devoted lover of an East Indian *Raja*" (114). Brians points out the structure of the novel and Hannah Easton's experience of Indian culture with her lover but he does not say anything regarding narrative and intertextuality of the novel. The narrator's research to

construct Hannah Easton's story brands the novel a science fiction. The present researcher realizes that it is a pertinent issue to investigate the source from where and the way by which the novel has come into existence.

C.L. Chua's view regarding the subject matter of the novel is related to cultural, historical, and ethnic diversity in India. Chua views that *The Holder of the World* "challenges its readers' notions of discrete historical periods, culture, and ethnicities" (Para. 6). Chua faintly hinted the historicity of multi-cultural and multi-ethnic India in the fiction. Therefore, the researcher realizes the necessity of exploring brief Indian historiography exploited in the novel to show the interaction between history and fiction in it.

Ethan Casey's view regarding *The Holder of the World* is related to the historicity and intertextuality of the novel. Casey says, "[I]t is an audacious feminist writing of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850). [. . .] an attempt to narrate early modern history through [. . .] reconstructed conscious of a postmodern protagonist" (Para.10). It means that the novel is a feminist rewriting of *The Scarlet Letter* as *The Holder of the World* that recounts Hannah Easton's suffering in difficult politico-cultural Indian world. Casey says that the basis of shaping *The Holder of the World* is *The Scarlet Letter*. Therefore, the present researcher attempts to explore the basis on which the present novel is shaped out.

Sandhya Rao Mehta puts her view on the interconnectedness between *The Scarlet Letter* and *The Holder of the World* with the interconnection between their protagonists. In her own words:

Also we move in two time spans, three centuries apart, Bharati Mukherjee attempts to give her novel a greater complexity and depth. She draws the reader's attention to the interconnectedness between

cultures and lands and goes so far as to establish a claim that Hannah's life might have served as a model for the story of Hester Prynne which is told by Nathaniel Hawthorne in *The Scarlet Letter*! (qtd. in Dhawan 192)

Above lines imply that the complexity of the novel is due to its greater depth and intertextuality. Mehta says that the protagonist Hannah Easton of *The Holder of the World* is based on the protagonist Hester Prynne in *The Scarlet Letter*. Although Mehta gives clue to the intertextuality of the novel, she does not explore it in detail and says nothing about the narrative technique of the novel. The researcher realizes that narrative self-reflexivity and parodic intertextuality are yet to be explored in the novel.

Hannah Easton in India becomes the mistress of a Hindu *Raja* Jadav Singh by adapting solely to the Indian culture initially but later on she suffers a lot due to inappropriate Indian cultural norms and values for her and hence she questions and abandons such mores. In the same context, Mehta says, “[C]ulturally variant societies help to question and abandon conventional moral and social values. Hannah's life succeeds in questioning and discovering new ways of defining reality in a world which was essentially orthodox” (qtd. in Dhawan 198).

Vivian Gornic views that the novel is a science fiction with blending of history and romance. Gornic posits that the novel “is a historical romance framed in a science fiction staple (time travel), and it purports, in a surprise ending, to be relating the ‘true’ history of a famous character in American Literature” (15). In this sense, Gornic identifies the blending of history and romance and surprising ending in the novel. His view regarding the novel is about blurring the hierarchy between history and fiction which is the prominent quality of postmodern historiographic metafiction.

Gronic further says, “Hannah Easton returned to Salem pregnant with the Raja’s baby, to become [. . .] Hester Prynne” (15). This extract shows that the portrayal of Mukherjee’s protagonist Hannah Easton depends on Hester Prynne, the protagonist of *The Scarlet Letter*.

Focusing on the superficiality and intertextuality of *The Holder of the World*, Uma Parameswaran says:

The concept of using futuristic technologies of time travel is clever but remains superficial. Similarly, there is a curious disjointedness between the scrupulousness of Beigh’s research into logbooks, paintings et cetera, and the rather slapdash pulling together of loose ends as the author records that Nathaneil Hawthorne and the sources for *The Scarlet Letter* are related to Hannah Easton. Equally superficially treated is the unlikely parallel between Sita of the *Ramayan* and Hannah Easton. (Parameswaran 637)

From the above lines it is clear that Venn Iyer’s technology is perfect but superficial. Beigh Masters is transported for a few seconds back into Hannah Easton’s last violent days in India, where she solves a minor mystery that has been hanging down from the story like a loose end as Hawthorne records in *The Scarlet Letter*. The comparison of Hannah Easton and Sita of the *Ramayan* is unlikely parallel and superficial as well. The views of Parameswaram regarding the novel hinted the intertextuality and pastiche in the novel, yet leaving it to be explored in detail. The present researcher attempts to explore parodic intertextuality in the present novel with the exploration of interdisciplinarity and pastiche.

Parameswaran further says, “[I]n reconstructing a piece of Raj history, Mukherjee joins other novelists from her native India, such as Manohar Malgonkar

(*The Princes, The Devil's Wind*), Kamala Markandaya (*The Golden Honeycomb*), and more recently Gita Mehta (*Raj*)” (637). This extract shows that Mukherjee’s motive of writing *The Holder of the World* is to reconstruct history of British colonialism to join other native Indian novelists. Therefore, the researcher attempts to explore the politics behind Mukherjee’s parody of *The Scarlet Letter* as *The Holder of the World*.

Going through the various views of a couple of literary critics, the researcher finds that some critics faintly posit their views on historiography of the novel and the rest give the clue regarding the intertextuality of the novel. Most of the critics hint that the novel is a historical romance patterned to Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* in the form of science fiction. Thus, the researcher realizes reading the present novel from the perspective of ‘postmodern historiographic metafiction’ to explore narrative self-reflexivity, parodic intertextuality, interaction between fact and fiction, circularity of narrative, indeterminacy of meaning and openendedness to the story in detail to assert it as a postmodern historiographic metafiction with the politics of Mukherjee’s rewriting of *The Scarlet Letter* as *The Holder of the World*.

Mukherjee parodies Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* as *The Holder of the World* deliberately in order to draw readers’ attention to the way it has come into existence and to destabilize the reinforced humanistic ideology of Puritan individualism as well as ignored patriarchy and British colonialism in New England in *The Scarlet Letter* by the nativization of American historical romance in order to give voice to the marginalized females including the protagonist Hannah Easton in multi socio-cultural British colonial India.

Postmodernism is a radical and revolutionary break from modernism as well as continuation of it. In this sense, postmodernism is the condition of paradox in which we can see two unusual qualities at the same time. Regarding postmodernism

Brian McHale says, “[A]nd even more pungently, the term postmodernist [. . .] inevitably calls to mind a band of vainglorious contemporary artists following the circus elephant of Modernism with snow shovels” (*Postmodernist Fiction* 3). On the one hand, postmodernism is riddled with contradiction perpetuated with paradox and on the other hand, it advocates a radical critique of representation and philosophy. Jean Francois Lyotard mentions that postmodern is the dissolution of grandnarratives. In this connection, Lyotard examines the status of science, technology, knowledge and arts and he posits, “[P]ostmodern [is] incredulity towards metanarratives. This incredulity is undoubtedly a product of progress in the science: but that progress in turn presupposes it” (Introduction xxiv). This view of Lyotard regarding postmodernism shows that the faith of an individual towards grandnarratives has been lost and these grandnarratives no longer function well to enrich the life of contemporary people in society due to progress of science.

Postmodern fiction presents its readers with challenge: instead of enjoying it passively, they have to work to understand it, to question their own responses, and to examine their views about what fiction is. It has a self-reflexive acknowledgement of a text’s own status as constructed, an implicit/explicit critique of realist approaches to representation and narration of a fictional world, and a tendency to draw reader’s attention to his/her own process of interpretation as s/he reads the text.

Postmodernist fictions have no stable world behind the “stream of consciousness”, but only a flux of discourse in which fragments and incompatible realities flicker into existence and overwhelmed by the competing reality of language. In the words of Brian McHale:

Postmodernist fictions [. . .] are fictions about the order of things, discourses which reflect upon the worlds of discourse. As such, they

participated in that very general tendency in the intellectual life of our time toward viewing reality as constructed in and through our language discourses and semiotic systems. (*Postmodernist Fiction* 164)

McHale asserts that postmodern fictions depict the reality as constructed with the help of discourses and semiotic systems. Therefore, they help the readers to question such constructed reality and truth through the language and discourse.

In the past, art and history were considered two separate genres. Aristotle advocates that a historian could speak only about what has happened, whereas the poet could speak of what might happen. This dominantly shows the clear cut boundary between history and fiction in the past. But for Linda Hutcheon, it is not always a fixed rule. She says, “[H]istory writing was seen to have no such conventional restraints of probability or possibility” (*A Poetics of Postmodernism* 106). She further posits:

The postmodern novel has done the same, and the reverse. It is part of postmodernist stand to confront the paradoxes of fictive/historical representation, the particular/the general, and the present/ the past. And this confrontation is itself contradictory, for it refuses to recuperate or dissolve either side of dichotomy, yet it is more than willing to exploit both. (*Poetics* 106)

From the above lines, it is obvious that historiographic metafiction first blurs the boundaries between the genres--history and fiction--and then exploits both of them simultaneously. Therefore, history and fiction are directly related to historiographic metafiction. It is a fundamental tenet of postmodern fiction and hence relevant to ‘poetics of postmodernism’.

The sole basis for this research is textual analysis of Mukherjee's *The Holder of the World* from the perspective of 'postmodern historiographic metafiction' developed by Linda Hutcheon. The present research makes comparative study of Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* and Mukherjee's *The Holder of the World* to explore narrative self-reflexivity, parodic intertextuality, interdisciplinarity, pastiche, circularity of narrative, indeterminacy of meaning and openendedness to the story in *The Holder of the World*. The researcher also explores the politics of Mukherjee's parody of *The Scarlet Letter* as *The Holder of the World*.

The implication of Hutcheon's 'postmodern historiographic metafiction' in *The Holder of the World* may be significant in this postmodern world to explore hidden aspects of any representations since the politics of historiographic metafiction is to rewrite history. It may also contribute to challenge originality of text and authenticity of author as well as to find out the interdependence of the texts in the present on the texts written in the past.

II. Narrative Self-reflexivity and Parodic Intertextuality in Mukherjee's

The Holder of the World

Narrative Self-reflexivity in *The Holder of the World*

Self-reflexivity is considered as one of the prominent tenets of postmodern historiographic metafiction that refers to the reflection of the work by itself. Narrative self-reflexivity refers to the reflection of the work through the narration of the self-conscious narrator. In this sense, it is the foregrounding of writing about the writing or fictionality about the fiction through the conscious narration in postmodern historiographic metafiction. In other words, narrative self-reflexivity is exploration of nature and status of any postmodern metafictional art by itself through self-consciously narrative technique of the self-conscious narrator. In this sense, self-reflexivity represents culture of auto-referentiality of text.

Mukherjee's *The Holder of the World* makes apparent about the artificiality of art and it helps to discard the willful suspension of disbelief. It means that the fiction explores its own status and nature as a fiction. But, the very exploration is not in direct assertive manner; rather it is in implied form.

In postmodern metafiction author exploits self-conscious narrator to reflect the nature of work by itself and to raise issue of intertextuality, documentation and traces of history. In this regard Hutcheon says that some postmodern novels exploit self-reflexivity to "raise the issue of how the intertext of history, its documents or its traces, get incorporated into such an avowedly fictional context, while somehow also retaining their historical documentary value" (*Politics* 97-8). In *The Holder of the World* Beigh Masters, mouthpiece of Mukherjee, self-reflexively narrates the sources of the story in the fiction as:

This is the best I can do, pulling it together from a hundred sources. I think of Venn, stitching together an October of four years ago, and realize that the most obscure person on the planet today is, comparatively, like a god: observed, adored, commented upon, celebrated. [. . .] for the linkages in my earlier investigations, still eludes my net. (88-89)

From the above lines, it is reflected that Beigh Masters, with her husband, weaves Hannah Easton's story on the basis of various sources and her earlier investigations. She is a self-conscious narrator in the fiction through whom the sources of the story in *The Holder of the World* are reflected.

Similarly, Beigh Masters self-consciously narrates Hannah Easton's and her mother's story as:

I am aware of multiple contingencies. It is the universe we inhabit. She might have been prisoner; they might have been her tender guardians. The fact is, she stayed in Salem with the Fitches through the famous witch trials, in which she played a small role as counselor of women who fled marriages and husbands they no longer understood. [. . .] Through the terrible winter of 1691, Hannah remained indoors, fed the news by her chair-bound brother, sung to and prayed over by her uncomprehending mother and father. (60-61)

Above extract shows Beigh Masters' self-conscious as well as self-awareness act of narration from which we come to know the historical background of the story of Hannah Easton.

In postmodern metafiction, self-conscious narrator connects the story of character(s) with the historical background of the fiction. In this regard Hutcheon

says, “[I]n postmodern fiction, self-reflexivity cannot be separated from the notion of difference because postmodern fiction/autobiography or biography links the postmodern metafictional concerns of narration and language directly” (*Politics* 70). In *The Holder of the World*, Beigh Masters describes Hannah Easton, Salem Bibi, as “the white wife from Salem—Precious-as-Pearl! I have come to this obscure, user-hostile museum to track her down. [. . .]. Only the moths will know this history” (13). She further says, “I want to stop and examine, but the decades are peeling by too quickly” (13). In these lines, Beigh Masters not only introduces Hannah Easton as Salem Bibi, Precious as Pearl, but also connects her life with the history of New England. It is the self-reflective nature of *The Holder of the World* through the self-conscious narrator Beigh Masters.

In postmodern metafiction, self-conscious narrator narrates the construction of character in the fiction. In *The Holder of the World*, Beigh Masters, regarding the construction of character, says, “[W]ith a thousand possible answers we can each create infinity of possible characters. And so we contain a thousand variables, and history is a billion separate information bytes” (7). From these lines, we come to know that fiction writer can create infinity of possible characters with a thousand possible answers.

In postmodern metafiction, self-conscious narrator sometimes goes to describe himself/herself. In *The Holder of the World*, Beigh Masters describes herself as: “My Yale thesis on the Puritans did lead to graduate school, but it also took me here. My life with Venn Iyer, father of fractals and designer of inner space, is no accident” (19). Regarding her personal life she further ponders on herself as:

I told myself, I didn’t have a child. Then at thirty I asked myself why I didn’t have a child. But by then, pills offered no protection; we were in

the Sargasso of disease. And so one night with my AIDS-free certificate in my handbag, I went to a lecture at Harvard Business School on assets recovery, and to a bar afterward, where I met Venn.

(34)

In the above lines, Beigh Masters describes herself and her meeting with Venn Iyer. She seems worried about her childless situation and therefore as a self-conscious narrator ponders on her personal life.

Self-conscious narrator in postmodern metafiction carefully narrates the event(s) as well as character(s) in the story. In *The Holder of the World*, Beigh Masters narrates the events in the fiction by being very much careful about her project. She says, “I have seen the Emperor’s Tear atop its golden orb. Three hundred years ago, it existed in her hands; I know where she came from and where she went. I couldn’t care less about the Emperor’s Tear, by now. I care only about the Salem Bibi” (19). In these lines, Beigh Masters is very much careful about the connection between the Emperor’s Tear and Salem Bibi. She knows well about the history of Salem Bibi. Therefore, while constructing Hannah Easton’s story, she cares a lot about her protagonist without being careless about the Emperor’s Tear.

In the same manner, self-conscious narrator has double consciousness towards the events in the fiction as well as the narration itself. In this connection, Hutcheon puts, “[T]he text’s self-reflexivity points in two directions at once, towards the events being represented in the narrative and towards the act of narration itself. This is precisely the same doubleness that characterizes any historical narratives” (*Poetics* 72). In *The Holder of the World*, Beigh Masters’ double consciousness is seen as she says, “[M]y life has gotten just a little more complicated than my ability to describe it. That used to be the definition of madness, now it’s just discontinuous overload. My

project is a little complicated” (7). It indicates that self-conscious narrator, Beigh Masters in *The Holder of the World* is equally aware of the events in the story as well as her act of narration.

Postmodern historiographic metafiction exploits overtly controlling narrator as well as multiple points of views and both of them play with the entire notion of subjectivity. In *The Holder of the World*, through the narration of self-conscious narrator, Beigh Masters, we come to know the construction of the story in the novel with multiple points of views and subjectivity of Beigh Masters and her husband as she narrates, “Venn inputs data more boldly, more mischievously than I do. I watch my convoy of East Indiamen voyage across his computer screen, freed of space and time” (91). The subjectivity is always entangled with power and subject’s personal ideologies either in historiography or in fictional writing. Therefore, it is clear that the issues raised by *The Holder of the World* are either subjective or product of ideology not all in all exact representation. Hence, we can say that postmodern historiographic metafiction helps to put all those ideas under erasure.

In *The Holder of the World*, Beigh Masters, mouthpiece of Mukherjee, is double conscious and overtly controlling while narrating the story. The nature and sources of the fiction reflect through the narration of Beigh Masters and she also narrates the construction of characters in the fiction. Through her narration we come to know the interaction of Hannah Easton with multi-cultural British colonial India in the fiction. Therefore, Beigh Masters is the self-conscious narrator in *The Holder of the World*.

Postmodern metafiction is the fiction about fictionality that openly comments on its fictional status and discusses the nature of fiction. Regarding metafictional writing Simon Malpas says, “[T]his is a self-conscious model of writing, a writing

that ‘meta-fictionally’ comments on and investigates its own status as fiction as well as questioning our ideas of the relationship between fiction, reality and truth” (*The Postmodern* 26). This extract implies that metafiction involves a significant degree of self-consciousness about itself as fiction and apologetic address to the reader. It makes joke of its own digressive form and interrupts the narrative to explain narrator’s procedures, and offers the readers alternative endings. Postmodern metafiction questions the relationship between fact and fiction self-consciously by drawing attention to its status as a linguistic construction and favors self-consciously depthless works of fabulation, pastiche and bricolage. Thus, postmodern metafiction is an attempt to liberate the art from the hierarchy of high culture and low culture.

Postmodern metafiction openly and self-consciously comments on the fictionality and fictional status of the work. In *The Holder of the World* the narrator Beigh Masters self-consciously and openly comments on its fictionality. Commenting on the fictional status of the novel, she says:

When I look at my notes, the five hundreds books consulted, the endless paintings, engravings, trade records, journals, the travel and the documentary picture taking, and stack them up in my study, they look impressive. And from them I have reconstructed a life through three continents and thirty years. And when I look at the raw data Venn’s programme has ingested to create ten seconds from just three years ago, with no character, no narrative, I think, who am I fooling? (279)

In the above lines, Beigh Masters mentions the sources of Hannah Easton’s fake story. According to her, Hannah Easton’s story is based on her notes, books, paintings, engravings, journals and so on. Thus, her story is entangled with the history

of three continents and thirty years. Therefore, the sources of the story of *The Holder of the World* are reflected as the narrator comments on the fictionality of the fiction.

In postmodern metafiction, author/narrator of the fiction comments on writing process of it openly and self-consciously. Commenting on the writing process of *The Holder of the World* Beigh Masters says, “[T]he process is the next step beyond the most powerful computer ever imagined, for now we are talking about the recapturing of past reality, not just the retrieval of information. Everything that has happened is still out there, somewhere, like light from distant stars” (280). From these lines, we come to know that *The Holder of the World* is fabricated on the basis of the data in Venn’s computer that recapture the past reality.

Postmodern metafiction questions the reference and auto-representation. In this regard, Hutcheon says, “[I]t problematizes the activity of reference by refusing either to bracket or to reveal in it [. . .] it says that there is no presence, no external truth which verifies or unifies, that there is only self-reference” (*Poetics* 119). In *The Holder of the World*, Mukherjee questions auto-representation and reference, emphasizes self-reference and also advocates variable reality denying the final truth. Mukherjee, through her mouthpiece Beigh Masters, says, “[E]very time traveler will create a different reality—just as we all do now. No two travelers will be able to retrieve the same reality, or even a fraction of the available realities. History’s a big savings bank, says Venn, we can all make infinite reality withdrawals” (6). It means that *The Holder of the World*, a postmodern metafiction, self-consciously depicts the discursive nature of all literary and historiographical references through the self-conscious and controlled narrator Beigh Masters. Therefore, the novel is self-contradictory being paradoxical and double in meaning. This self-contradictory nature

of the fiction helps to subvert and deconstruct the boundary between or among different disciplines.

Postmodern metafiction attempts to make the readers aware and active participants and self-conscious part of the meaning-making process. In this regard, Hutcheon says, “[P]ostmodern arts attempt to make the receiver into a Brechtian, aware participant, self-consciously part of the meaning-making process” (*Poetics* 86). In *The Holder of the World* Mukherjee wants to make the readers not as passive receivers but expects them to engage actively within textual circumstances. Beigh Masters narrates, “[W]e do things when it is our time to do them. They do not occur to us until it is time; they cannot be resisted, once their time has come. It’s a question of time, not motive” (70). From these lines, narrator calls for the attention of the readers to the happenings that occurs according to time and to take part in the meaning-making process accordingly. Therefore, *The Holder of the World* demands the active participation of the readers to understand its story to draw multiple truths.

In postmodern metafiction, the story and its meaning is reflected through different components incorporated in it. In *The Holder of the World* we can find the self-reflexivity in different elements such as in setting, epigraph, tone, voice, and even in use of language. For example, the lines from John Keats’ poem “Ode on a Grecian Urn” quoted as epigraph before beginning of every part of *The Holder of the World* controls the overall meaning of the text. The epigraph: “Thou still unravish’d bride of quietness, Thou foster-child of silence and slow time” (3) implies the purpose of writing the fiction to give voice to the voiceless females in India and it functions to out-pore the hidden motif of Mukherjee. By employing these elements, Mukherjee asserts the hidden purpose of her entire work.

Postmodern metafiction is complex in nature and difficult to understand. This is due to the reason that the locus of meaning in postmodern metafiction shifts from author to the text to the entire act of enunciation. In the same context, Hutcheon posits:

If we let the self-reflexivity of postmodern art and theory guides us, we may find ourselves in a position to argue that the discursive practice suppressed by analytico-referential discourse is already on the way to becoming the model, the new set of analytical tools or ordering principles that marks the postmodern. (*Poetics* 86)

The complexity of *The Holder of the World* as the postmodern metafiction is depicted through Beigh Masters' narration: "[M]y life has gotten just a little more complicated than my ability to describe it. That used to be the definition of madness, now its discontinuous overload. My project is a little more complicated" (7). Regarding the complexity of the novel Sandhya Rao Mehta says, "[A]lso as we move in two time spans, three centuries apart, Bharati Mukherjee attempts to give her novel a greater complexity and depth" (Dhawan 192).

Postmodern metafiction destabilizes the hierarchy between fact and fiction. In this connection Linda Hutcheon contends:

Such novels both install and then blur the line between fiction and history. [. . .] but the simultaneous and overt assertion and crossing of boundaries is more postmodern. [. . .] postmodern fiction actually uses detail or historical data. Historical fiction usually incorporates and assimilates these data in order to lend a feeling of verifiability to the fictional world. (*Poetics* 113–14)

From the above lines, it is obvious that historiographic metafiction blurs the boundary between history and fiction self-consciously with the assertion of what it has done. It means that both history and fiction are embedded in postmodern historiographic metafiction and hence it is neither truly real nor false.

The Holder of the World destabilizes the boundary between history and fiction. It fictionalizes British colonial history by fabrication of Hannah Easton's story. Beigh Masters' following narration makes it clear:

“Mrs. Rowlandson's account is such as the common press should wish of savages and gentlewomen alike,” said Hannah. “Five years I dwelled in the forest and knew the forest and all its dwellers as a friend. And for perhaps a week, but especially for two days and nights, I knew it as a tempest. I count no man as my friend, nor as my enemy.”

(54)

In the above lines, Mrs. Rowlandson is a historical figure in American history and Hannah Easton is a fictional figure in Mukherjee's *The Holder of the World*. It is clear that the fictional story of Hannah Easton goes parallel with the factual captive story of Mrs. Rowlandson. Thus, it shows the blurring the hierarchy between history and fiction.

Postmodern metafiction is shaped by contextualization of the works of the past with radical changes in fragmentation. In this regard, Hutcheon opines that postmodern metafiction observes “qualities of totalizing order, only to context it, by its radical provisionality, intertextuality and, often, fragmentation” (*Poetics* 116). In *The Holder of the World* Hannah Easton's fragmented story is constructed in the context of colonial New England and British colonial India with the help of parody of

The Scarlet Letter. Beigh Masters following narration reveals contextualization and fragmented nature of *The Holder of the World*:

I knew my own family's names and fragments of rumored history, of course. When I got to England, I went straight to shipping records, the baptismal records, the recordings of deeds. Seeing the names of relatives, reading of their deaths and births and marriages all placed me within a context that I found somehow thrilling, as though nothing in the universe is ever lost, no gesture is futile. (23)

In postmodern historiographic metafiction, we find interlink between the subjectivity of the author and the outer world represented by him/her through self-reflexivity.

In this connection, Hutcheon says, “[I]ts specific and general recalls of the forms and context of the history writing work to familiarize through narrative structure, but its metafictional self-reflexivity works it render problematic any such familiarization. The ontological line is not effaced but rather is underlined” (*Poetics* 128). In *The Holder of the World* Mukherjee interlinks her subjectivity with the world interwoven in the fiction. It comes out through Beigh Masters following narration:

I could sense all the movements in his life, his determination to remake his life before it was too late, to go west to the colony instead of east, where surely his East India clerkship could have led him. I felt the same psychic bond with Edward Easton and Keats did with the revelers on the Grecian Urn. He became a footnote in my thesis, but an assurance to me that my research in that era was somehow blessed.
(25)

In the above lines, Mukherjee, through her mouthpiece Beigh Masters, interlinks her subjectivity to the outer world self-reflexively. Mukherjee moves to the West,

America, instead of East, India, with her husband. She weaves the story of Hannah Easton, daughter of Edward Easton, which reflects the immigrant experience of Mukherjee. For this purpose, Mukherjee constructs an immigrant protagonist, Hannah Easton, based on her own immigrant experience as she experiences in Canada and America being herself an Indian immigrant.

In *The Holder of the World*, the researcher has found the fictionality of fiction, self-conscious narrator, writing process of the fiction, questioning to the reference and representation, demanding readers' active participation and awareness, revealing the story and its meaning through different components, complexity, blurring the boundary between fact and fiction, contextualization and interlink between the subjectivity of Mukherjee and the world of her work. Therefore, *The Holder of the World* is a postmodern metafiction.

Interaction of History and Fiction: Fictionalization of History in *The Holder of the World*

The implication of historiographic metafiction is rewriting history. Therefore, historiographic metafiction is not only novel but also history that is palpably betwixt and between. It means that the entanglement of history and fiction is historiographic metafiction. To show the interaction between fact and fiction in *The Holder of the World*, the researcher realizes to trace brief historical account of British colonialism and the reign of Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb in India in the backdrop of which Mukherjee constructs the story of Hannah Easton.

In *The Holder of the World*, we find the traces of British colonialism in India in the early-seventeenth century. The Britishers came to India at the start of the seventeenth century. This was the time when British East India Company was established in India to break the Dutch monopoly over spice trade. Regarding the

British colonialism in India Alison Blunt says, “[T]he colonial and Indian Exhibition was widely reported throughout the empire, helping distant British subjects in their imperial homes to imagine the links between their own imperial domesticity and a metropolitan, domestic imperialism” (422). In *The holder of the World* Beigh Masters says, “[F]or most English colonists and certainly for Indians Sachems, however, the 1660s was a win or die” (26). The British India Company in India struggled and began for the right to trade and to do business in the early 1600s. By the late 1700s, the thriving firm of British merchants backed by its own army was essentially ruling India. Beigh Masters further narrates, “[T]here was wealth and trade and culture, history and the great common pulse of humanity that surged from the streets of London” (73). This statement clearly shows that the British colonizers in India are backed by their native country England.

British colonialism had much influence on the sound mobility and interaction between classes and castes in India. In this connection, James Clifford says, “[T]he domestic and imperial power of British women in India was thought to rely on their knowledge of imperial domesticity and their successful management of Indian servants” (431). Thus, there is still the legacy of British colonialism in India even today. In this connection Beigh Masters narrates, “Fort St. George, Fort St. Sebastian and all their related remnants of English and Portuguese colonialism are now located in the northern outskirts of the modern city of Madras” (95). These lines provide the testimony of English and Portuguese colonialism in India in the past.

In postmodern historiographic metafiction, we see the direct interaction of historiography with fiction. In this regard Hutcheon posits:

Fiction and history are narratives distinguished by their frames, frames which historiographic metafiction first establishes and then crosses

positing both the generic contracts of fiction and of history. [. . .] the very meaning of artistic originality is as forcibly challenged as is the transparency of historical referentiality. (*Poetics* 109-10)

In the above lines, Hutcheon means that historiographic metafiction crosses the boundary of fact and fiction to challenge the originality of art and transparency of historical referentiality.

In *The Holder of the World* Mukherjee fictionalizes historical figures and events of British colonial India with the secret life of a constructed fictional character, a puritan woman, Hannah Easton and a Hindu *Raja* Jadav Singh and fabrication of love affair between them in the backdrop of diverse socio-cultural British colonial India. Regarding the love affair between Hannah Easton and Jadav Singh as well as uncongenial environment for Hannah Easton in India Beigh Masters says:

With Jadav Singh, she had finally accepted how inappropriate it was in India—how fatal—to cling, as White Towns tenaciously did, to Europe’s rules. [. . .]. Hannah and Jadav Singh wooed each other in a cupola-roofed balcony overlooking the distant bay. [. . .] For fourteen days the King mounted his lady without surcease, “Forever regal,” he called his instrument; “Unbow’d,” she corrected. [. . .] and while the lovers tossed and twisted in the sweet carnality of their embraces, the drought season deepened in Panpur. (234-35).

The above lines show the deep and sweet love affair between Hannah Easton and Jadav Singh. But India is inappropriate and fatal strange place for Hannah Easton due to diverse socio-culturalism of British colonial India. Therefore, Mukherjee’s *The Holder of the World* deals with the fact of multicultural British colonial India with the fabricated love affair between fictional figures Hannah Easton and Jadav Singh.

Postmodern historiographic metafiction raises various issues related to history, culture, politics, economics and so on with their direct interaction with fiction. In this regards Hutcheon posits, “[P]ostmodern novels raise a number of specific issues regarding the interaction of history and fiction that deserves more detailed study [. . .] and the ideological implication of writing about history” (*Poetics* 113-14). From the above lines, it is clear that interaction of fact and fiction raises lots of issues in detail in order to rewrite history.

In *The Holder of the World*, Mukherjee rewrites the history of British colonial and multicultural India with the direct interaction of this history with fictional world she fabricated. Beigh Masters says, “[T]hey all spoke different languages, they owed fidelity to different masters, they worshiped different gods, and their ancestors had come from different countries. It had been inconceivable to a Puritan soul like Hannah’s” (100). These lines show multicultural situation of India in terms of language, religion, practice, tribes and so on. This situation of multiculturalism in India is uncongenial for Puritan Hannah Easton. Therefore, Mukherjee exposes unfavorable diverse cultural world of India through the first hand experience of the fictional figure Hannah Easton. Therefore, the fiction is the documentation of history of British colonial multi-cultural India dealing with the help of fiction writing.

Mukherjee, in *The Holder of the World*, exposes sexual victimization of Indian women during British colonialism with the interaction of fictional figures and factual account of the incidents. Beigh Masters’ following statement makes it obvious:

He moved so silently, so quickly, his arms were around hers before she could catch her balance. His open mouth was trying to kiss her, to close over hers before she could scream, and she could hear his low, guttural threats and promises. [. . .] She struggled free now and pushed

him away, and Cephus Prynne reestablished his guise of shabby, inoffensive officiousness, casually looking behind him, before she could scream. (121-22).

The above lines indicate Hannah Easton's forcible sexual exploitation by a British colonial agent, Cypus Prenny. This incident is the interaction between fictional character Hannah Easton and colonizers' factual immoral sexual activities over the Indian females. Through this incident Mukherjee tries to expose the sexual victimization of Indian females by British colonial agents during colonial period in India.

In *The Holder of the World*, Muslim Emperor Aurangzeb is a historical figure taken from Indian history. Aurangzeb Alamgir (1618-1707) was the sixth Mughal Emperor of India whose reign lasted from 1658 until his death in 1707. Regarding the beginning of reign of Aurangzeb in India, Hamida Khatun Naqvi posits:

Whereas the decadent character of Aurangzeb's Umerah is generally accepted, Pearson does not seem to have taken into account the fact that of his approximately 14,500 mansabdars in 1695, at least 8,000 existing in 1647 were together with the crown, received by Aurangzeb as a legacy of the house in 1658. (191)

In *The Holder of the World*, regarding the reign of Aurangzeb in India Beigh Masters says, "[W]hen the young and intolerant Aurangzeb, the Great Mughal, had defeated the Shias, he proved to be less forgiving of heretics and infidels than any of the five previous emperors in the hundred and seventy-five years of his illustrious lineage" (212). From this statement it is clear that Aurangzeb was known for being intolerant towards 'infidel' Hindus and Sikhs. During his reign, a number of Hindu temples desecrated, their facades and interiors were defaced and their *murtis* looted.

Emperor Aurangzeb, having ruled most of the Indian subcontinent for nearly half a century, was the second largest reigning Mughal Emperor after Akbar. In his period he tried hard to get a larger area, notably in South India, under Mughal rule than ever before. The Mughal Empire reached the zenith of its territorial expansion during the reign of Aurangzeb. During his life time victories in the South expanded the Mughal Empire to more than 1.25 million square miles, ruling over than 150 million subjects, nearly one-fourth of the world's population. In this connection, Fitz Lehman contends:

Athar Ali has done a superb job. He reasonably depends his limits of scope and time on the grounds that it is these high ranking men who held such power and wealth as to constitute a ruling class, as opposed to mere officials in the lower ranks; and the period of Aurangzeb's reign (1658-1707) is the period when the political system passes its zenith and begins on disintegrate. (448)

In *The Holder of the World*, Beigh Masters narrates the interaction between Hannah Easton, a fictional figure, and Aurangzeb, a historical figure. She says, “[W]hat I hadn't figured on was the secret life of a Puritan woman whom an emperor honored as Precious-as-Pearl, the Healer of the World” (20). In this sentence the ‘Healer of the World’ is Hannah Easton who interacts with Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb, the ‘Holder of the World’ in the history of Mughal administration in India. Beigh Masters further posits, “[T]he interesting problem was constructing an interactive model of historical or imaginative reality. Historical reality to begin with, since there was a data trail, indisputable facts to program in” (35). These lines obviously imply that the story in *The Holder of the World* is the imaginative reality with the interaction of fact and fiction.

For postmodernists, history and fiction have no existence in isolation. In this regard, Jacques Ehrmann posits, “[H]istory and literature have no existence in and of themselves. It is we who constitute them as the object of our understanding” (qtd. in Linda Hutcheon, *Poetics* 111). Therefore, Mukherjee fictionalizes religious account of India with the fabrication of Hannah Easton’s story with historical and religious facts to expose the impracticalities and extremities of religious fundamentalism in India.

Mukherjee fictionalizes history of religious antagonism and bitter reality of religious riot in India. According to historical account, in 1670 Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, assassinated commander Afzal Khan and later, nearly killed the Mughal Viceroy Shaista Khan, while waging war against Aurangzeb. Mukherjee fictionalizes this historical event by the fabrication of antagonism between historical figure, Aurangzeb and fictional figure *Raja* Jadav Singh, king of Devgad and assassination of the latter by the former’s army in a religious riot. Beigh Masters narrates the religious riot as:

Jadav Singh lifted his shield, spurred his caparisoned *tattu*, and uttered a war cry. The Muslim warriors answered from atop the ridge. Like an upward—flowing river, the hundreds of Devgad soldiers stormed the escapement. Thousands of the Emperor’s cavalymen spilled down the defile, arrows flying spears thrust forward. Hannah caught a glimpse of the Raja’s scarlet knuckle cloth. All around her she heard the chants of *Jai Ram! Jai Devgad! Jai Singh!* (244)

Above lines imply the antagonism between the Hindus and the Muslims results in perilous riot between them that can cause death of any people of any side. Describing the death of Jadav Singh in the religious riot Beigh Masters says, “[I]n battle as in chess, positioning and superior numbers lead to the checkmating, the killing, of the

King. *King is fallen!* She heard, early in the battle [. . .]” (245). Therefore, with the fictionalization of religious account, Mukherjee exposes alarming situation of religious fundamentalism in India.

In this way, it is true that both fiction and history are ideologically constructed and metafictionally assertive cultural signs in *The Holder of the World*. Moreover, *The Holder of the World* is the exploration of the nature of work by itself through the narration of controlled and self-conscious narrator Beigh Masters, Mukherjee’s mouthpiece. It has two directions at the same time: narration of events in the narrative and act of narration in the fiction. Thus, *The Holder of the World* has narrative self-reflexivity.

Parodic Intertextuality in *The Holder of the World*

Parody is the imitative use of the words, sentences, styles, attitudes, tones or ideas of an author in the past to make them ridiculous with the purpose of correction as well as derision in the present. In this regard Brian McHale says, “[P]arody, of course, is a form of self-reflection and self-critique, a genre’s way of thinking critically about itself” (*Postmodernist Fiction* 145). In this sense, parody is a kind of satirical mimicry usually achieved by exaggerating certain traits using more or less the same technique as the cartoon caricaturist. According to Simon Dentith, parody is an engaging and lively introduction to a prominent concept in cultural and literary studies that makes the most complex debates accessible to readers. Defining parody, Dentith further says:

Parody celebrates the subversive possibilities of parody as its essential characteristic; parody in this view typically attacks the official word, mocks the pretensions of authoritative discourse, and undermines the

seriousness with which subordinates should approach the justification of their betters. (*Parody* 21)

Intertextuality is the interdependence of the literary texts in the present on the texts that were written in the past. It means that a literary text is not an isolated phenomenon but is a 'mosaic of quotations' and that any text is the 'absorption and transformation of another'. So, intertextuality is the shaping of text's meaning by other text(s) and hence it refers to the author's borrowing and transformation of text(s) in the past or reader's reference of one text in reading another. Graham Allen defines intertextuality as:

Postmodern architects practice what we can style an intertextual architecture which appropriates styles from different eras and combines them in ways which attempt to reflect the historically and socially plural contexts within which their buildings now have to exist. (*Intertextuality* 184)

From the above lines, we come to know that intertextuality refers to the appropriation of styles from the past and exploit them in the present to reflect the sense of the past in the present in order to point out the nature of work. It means that intertextuality, for Allen, is "something which exists between a text and all the other texts to which it refers and relates" (1). It indicates that, in a sense, intertextuality is the repetition of text written in the past.

But such repetition for John Barth is nothing more than replication of exhausted forms of earlier text. It implies that long lasting formal experimentation has left contemporary writers with nothing new to do. However, he believes that "[. . .] art and its form and technique live in history and certainly do change [. . .] to be

technically up to date is the least important of a writer [. . .] this least important attribute may be nevertheless essential” (*Postmodern Literary Theory* 312).

Parodic intertextuality refers to making a text a ‘mosaic of quotations’ by offering sense of the past in the present. Parodic intertextuality is beneficial for postmodern authors, readers or critics to refer to works that aims at fictionalizing actual historical figures or events. Hence, parodic intertextuality is one of the prominent features of postmodern historiographic metafiction. In this regard, Hutcheon contends:

The intertextual parody of historiographic metafiction enacts, in this way, the view of certain contemporary historiographers: it offers a sense of the present of the past, but a past that can be known only from its texts, its traces—be the literary or the historical. [. . .] There is always a paradox at the heart of the ‘post’: irony does, indeed mark the difference from the past, but the intertextual echoing simultaneously works to affirm—textually and hermeneutically—the connection with the past. (*Politics* 125)

In postmodernism, parody and intertextuality are interchangeable terms. Linda Hutcheon says, “[P]arody -- often called ironic quotation, pastiche, appropriation, or intertextuality -- is usually considered central to postmodernism, both by its detractors and its defenders” (*Politics* 89). It implies that parodic intertextuality shows how present representation comes from the past and what the politics behind this representation is. Parodic intertextuality foregrounds the politics of representation as well as questions the humanistic assumption of artistic originality, author’s authenticity, singularity of truth, capitalistic notion of ownership and so on. In this sense, “the notion of original as rare, single and valuable is called into question”

(*Politics* 89). Therefore, parodic intertextuality in postmodern historiographic metafiction does not disregard the reference of the representation but “uses irony to acknowledge the fact that we are inevitably separated today from that past” (90).

Bharati Mukherjee parodies Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*, a genre of historical romance, as *The Holder of the World* in the same generic form. *The Scarlet Letter* is a historical romance that fictionalizes the history of colonial Puritan New England in the mid-seventeenth century with the romantic love affair between Hester Prynne and Arthur Dimmesdale. Hester Prynne, protagonist of the novel, her daughter Pearl, her lover Arthur Dimmesdale, and her cuckolded husband Chillingworth are the fictional figures and their story and relationship is woven in the backdrop of history of British colonial Puritan New England. In this connection, Charles Ryskamp says:

The characters named in *The Scarlet Letter*—other than Hester, Pearl, Chillingworth, and Dimmesdale, for whom we can find no real historical bases—were actual figures in history. The fictional protagonists of action move and gain their being in part through their realistic meetings with well-known people of colonial Boston. (Gross et al. 198)

This extract shows the interaction between the fictional figures and historical figures in *The Scarlet Letter*.

Regarding the source of *The Scarlet Letter*, Earnest W. Baugham posits, “[T]he most abundant evidence for New England practice and for the overlapping of civil and church punishments between 1630 and 1650 comes from John Winthrop’s *Journals*” (209). In this extract, John Winthrop is a historical figure who established first colony in New England in 1607. The punishment given to Hester Prynne by rigid

Puritan society is the fictional fabrication of the real New England practices and church punishments between 1630 and 1650 recorded by Winthrop. In the same connection Charles Boewe and Murray G. Murphey say, “[I]t is not surprising that Hawthorne drew upon historical personages for minor characters and seemingly invented his major ones—that, after all, is standard practice in the historical novel” (Gross et al. 205). All the above arguments contribute us to say that *The Scarlet Letter* is a historical romance.

Mukherjee’s *The Holder of the World* is a historical romance that fictionalizes British colonial history of India in the late-seventeenth century and early-eighteenth century with romantic love affair between fictional figures Hannah Easton and Jadav Singh. Beigh Masters narrates, “[T]he fortune was in a convoy of East Indiamen headed for the Coromandel Coast of India by way of the Cape of Good Hope. Hannah’s name appears in *Madras Records*, the Fort St. George consultation books, as having disembarked in that English settlement in early 1695” (89-90). This extract shows Hannah Easton’s story is woven in the historical background of British colonial India in the late-seventeenth century because Mukherjee shows the fascination with the troubled British colonial history in India.

In *The Scarlet Letter*, we find the romantic love affair between Hester Prynne and Arthur Dimmesdale. Regarding the love affair between them, Nina Baym says, “[H]e enters the romance with a simple, childlike aspect and totters out of it like an invalid” (Gross et al. 406). She further contends, “[O]ne of these plot structures in the story of star-crossed lovers, whose union, for one reason or another, is forbidden within their society and who, hence, are separated” (407). In this extract “star-crossed lovers” are Hester Prynne and Arthur Dimmesdale who are finally separated because of their forbidden love within their rigid Puritan society. In *The Holder of the World*

we find romantic love affair between *Raja* Jadav Singh and Hannah Easton. Regarding their love affair Beigh Masters says, “[F]or what its worth: The lady pushed the Lion of Devgad down on the carpet alive with lion hunters grasping griffins with amber manes. The lion trembled under her touch at first, and then, as though he too was under a spell, submitted to her slow deliberate caresses” (229). This extract shows the romance between *Raja* and Hannah Easton and hence the novel is romantic.

Therefore, Mukherjee’s *The Holder of the World* is a genre of historical romance as it fabricates the story of romantic lovers in the backdrop of history of British colonialism multi-cultural India written in the form of *The Scarlet Letter*, a genre of historical romance.

Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* is an immigrant writing since it deals with the story of immigrants, Hester Prynne and Chillingworth. In the fictional story, Hester Prynne migrates to Holland with her husband Chillingworth and he sends her to New England. Therefore, *The Scarlet Letter* is a good immigrant literature since it is a story of English immigrant Hester Prynne, protagonist of the fiction. In the pattern of *The Scarlet Letter* Mukherjee fabricates the story of her protagonist Hannah Easton, a New England immigrant, in *The Holder of the World*. Hannah Easton migrates to England from New England and to India from England with her husband Gabriel Legge. In the same context Beigh Masters says, “[B]ut now I know: Hannah took that embroidery with her to England and then to India when she married” (47). This extract clearly shows that Hannah Easton is a New England immigrant whose story is woven especially in the factual background of India. Therefore, *The Holder of the World* is an immigrant writing written in the same pattern of *The Scarlet Letter*.

Mukherjee parodies Hester Prynne of *The Scarlet Letter* as Hannah Easton in the *Holder of the World*. Thus, Hester Prynne, the protagonist of the former, is the role model for Hannah Easton, protagonist in the latter. Both of them are immigrants who suffered a lot in their strange location due to socio-political and religious fundamentalism. Hester Prynne keeps extramarital relation with her lover Arthur Dimmesdale and bears a child called Pearl in the absence of her husband Chillingworth. Due to this adulterous sin, she suffered a lot in the rigid Puritan society in New England. In this context, Nina Baym says, “[T]he life of a woman, who, by the *old colony* laws, was condemned always to wear the letter A, sewed on her garment, in token of her having committed adultery” (Gross et al. 205). Hannah Easton loves Jadav Singh after the death of her English husband Gabriel Legge. She suffers a lot in multi-cultural British colonial India. Regarding the suffering of Hannah Easton, Beigh Masters says, “It would be a bleak, gray, dismal life, she feared, after some of the excitements and colors and violence of the Coromandel Coast” (199). Hester Prynne charges with the scarlet letter “A” to be worn on her breast as the symbol of her adultery. In the same pattern Mukherjee uses the letter “I” as the symbol of Indian lover for Hannah Easton. Beigh Masters narrates, “[. . .] *I* boldly sewn in red to her sleeve. I meant “Indian lover”, though there was no sign, apart from the progeny, of the Indian’s existence” (284). Moreover, Mukherjee uses symbols to attribute Hannah Easton as Hawthorne uses “A” to symbolize Hester Prynne as “Angel”, “Able” and so on:

“A is for Act, my daughter!” [. . .]. “B is for Boldness,” Hannah pledges. “C for Character. D is for Dissent, E is for Ecstasy, F for Forage. . .” And I, thought Hester, remembering the women who wore

it emblazoned on their sleeves, is for Indian lover. “I is for Independence,” said Hannah. (55)

Above extract shows that Mukherjee’s use of symbolic letters for the characteristics of Hannah Easton is in the pattern of Hawthorne in *The Scarlet Letter*.

Hester Prynne involves in embroidery needle work for the welfare of poor people. “And once Hester was seen embroidering a baby-garment with such a lavish richness of golden fancy as would have raised a public tumult had any infant thus appareled been shown to our sober-hued community” (*The Scarlet Letter* 196). Like Hester Prynne, Hannah Easton also involves in a needle work: “Hannah discovered in herself an obsessive love of needle-work, which was, she suspected, an overflow of a nascent fascination with—or falling for—finer things” (*The Holder of the World* 41).

Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* has New England setting with linear plot narrative by ambivalent first person narrator. In this connection, David Leverenz says:

The narrator recurrently echoes the minister’s sense of this ‘softening’ charge. “Providence, in the person of this little girl, had assigned to Hester’s charge the germ and blossom womanhood, to be cherished and developed amid a host of difficulties”. The narrator veils his ambivalence about Hester’s intellectual independence and her passionate desire by reinforcing what Nancy Chodorow has called “the institution of mothering” as the cure for all her ills. (Gross et al. 419)

Mukherjee’s *The Holder of the World* has settings in three different places: New England, England, India and again New England. The circular setting of the fiction results in its circular narrative.

The first person narrator, Beigh Masters, in the fiction is self-conscious and self-reflective. Her nature is obvious from her following statement:

I am aware, as I write this three hundred years later, of the greatness of Henry Hedges. His accounts (in four thick volumes) are the core of nearly any serious study of South India in the early British times—but what it must have felt like, to have been a twenty-five-year-old Salem woman, discovering them for the first time, digging them out of folded silks in the drawers of those hand-carved dressers, along with the folios of the bright, unappreciated court paintings of the Mughal masters?
(126)

Parody, in postmodern fiction, does not only destroy the past but preserves and questions it. In this regard, Hutcheon says, “[T]o parody is not to destroy the past; in fact to parody is both to enshrine the past and to question it” (*Politics* 126).

Mukherjee parodies *The Scarlet Letter* as *The Holder of the World* not only by destroying *The Scarlet Letter* but by enshrining and questioning it. The former reinforces Puritan humanistic ideology and religious fundamentalism by ignoring colonialism and patriarchy in New England. The rigid Puritan society does not search for Hester Prynne’s male partner who is equally responsible for her adultery. The male dominated puritan society only tortures and punishes Hester Prynne being careless about her partner. Similarly, Puritan minister kills himself in the pillory to atone his sin of extramarital relation with Hester Prynne in rigid Puritan society. Mukherjee enshrines humanistic ideology, patriarchy and religious fundamentalism from *The Scarlet Letter* in her *The Holder of the World* and questions them at the same time. By questioning the humanistic ideology of ‘duty’ and ‘judgment’ Hannah Easton says:

Duty! Duty, judgment! I have heard enough of duty. And of judgment.
You cloak your lust for vengeance and for gold and diamonds in the

noble words of duty and judgment and protection and sacrifice. But it is the weakest and the poorest and the most innocent who suffer, who sacrifice, whose every minute of every day is obedience of duty. (269)

With the parody of Puritan rigidity from *The Scarlet Letter*, Mukherjee exposes religious fundamentalism in India in *The Holder of the World* by exposing the practices of the Hindu and Muslim religions.

But at the same time Mukherjee questions such religious fundamentalism by exposing bitter reality of religious riot between the Hindus and the Muslims.

Regarding this situation Beigh Masters says:

The *Raja* raised his sword, addressing his officers: "Today is but another death. Who frightens and who fears is irrelevant. A warrior faces death with cowardice or courage". The words were no longer empty; the morning light revealed that all along the ridge, Morad Farah's men squatted like birds of prey. (243-44)

The above extract shows religious riot between the armies of *Raja* and Aurangzeb with the implication of death of somebody. Therefore, by exposing the negative aspects of religious riot, Mukherjee questions religious fundamentalism in India.

Hawthorne in *The Scarlet Letter* uses allusions, symbols and imagery from the orient. The allusions are: Ann Hutchinson (a religious dissenter who was excommunicated in the 1630s by the Puritans), Ann Hibbins, Richard Bellingham, Martin Luther (a leader of the Protestant Reformation in Germany), Sir Thomas Overbury, John Winthrop (first governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony), Hester Prynne (loosely based on Hawthorne's wife Sofia Peabody), the story of king David and Bathsheba (depicted in the tapestry in Dimmesdale's room). The objects employed by custom house narrator in the fiction are iconic references to the

mundane and mythical objects of the East India Marine Society. Mukherjee parodies most of the allusions from *The Scarlet Letter* in her *The Holder of the World* and exploits lots of oriental imagery as it has already been done by Hawthorne in *The Scarlet letter*. The imagery taken from the Museum of Maritime Trade are animal skins wearing, earrings and dresses and necklaces, crammed gold bracelets and so on. The objects employed by Mukherjee in the novel are iconic references to the mundane and mythical objects of the Indian society. In this context Beigh Masters says, “[I]n this Museum of Maritime Trade, the curator’s note cards celebrate only Puritan pragmatism. There is no order, no hierarchy of intrinsic value or aesthetic worth; it’s a fly’s-eye view of Puritan history” (12).

Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* gives resolution to the story. In this regard E.W. Baughman says, “[I]n *The Scarlet Letter*, Dimmesdale’s story ends with the public confession of his sin, the acknowledgement of Hester as his partner, and the recognition of the Pearl as his child. [. . .] As the author has managed the plot, no other ending is possible” (207). From this extract, we come to know that *The Scarlet Letter* has no possibility of any alternative ending because the author has offered resolution to the story. Mukherjee parodies *The Scarlet Letter* as *The Holder of the World* by offering alternative endings to the story to make readers’ participation in the conclusion of the story.

In *The Scarlet Letter*, we find relation of friendship, love affair, betrayal, jealousy, and mutual help among major characters which is also parodied in *The Holder of the World* also. In the former there is love affair between Hester Prynne and Dimmesdale, jealousy between Dimmesdale and Chillingworth. The jealousy is seen as Dimmesdale says, “‘Hester,’ cried he, ‘here is a new horror! Roger Chillingworth knows your purpose to reveal his true character. Will he continue, then, to keep our

secret? What will now be the course his revenge?” (*The Scarlet Letter* 147).

Similarly, the betrayal between Hester Prynne and Chillingworth is seen as: “‘Yes, I hate him!’ repeated Hester, more bitterly than before. ‘He betrayed me! He has done me worse wrong than I did him!’” (132). In the latter, we find love affair between Hannah Easton and Jadav Singh, jealousy between Aurangzeb and Jadav Singh and friendship between Hannah Easton and Bhagmati. Hannah Easton befriends Bhagmati and “she asked Bhagmati, her only true companion, to make voyage [. . .]” (*The Holder of the World* 198). Similarly, Hannah Easton betrays Gabriel Legge: “She did not believe him, but she too longed for escape” (67). In this connection Sandhya Rao Mehta says, “Hannah’s married life in London is itself a testament to the total absence of passion, personal involvement and love between her and her husband” (Dhawan 195). This extract clearly shows the betrayal of Hannah Easton to her husband, Gabriel Legge. The jealousy between *Raja* and Aurangzeb is seen as: “[. . .] he was waging border wars against *Raja* Jadav Singh a few miles to the north and west” (137).

The above mentioned relations between the characters in the fiction not only depict history of their personal life but also assert the historical facts of the contemporary time. Each and every character in both novels not only thinks about their own life but also of others, which shows interrelation between and among their historical past.

Parody functions to question about humanistic assumption of artistic originality and also foregrounds the policies of representation. In this connection, the prominent critic John Barth contends that “intertextuality replaces the challenged author—text relationship with one between reader and the text one that situates the locus of textual meaning within the history of discourse” (qtd. in Hucheson, *Politics*

126). Mukherjee questions the artistic originality of *The Scarlet Letter* and its policy of representation by rewriting it as *The Holder of the World*. Foregrounding the policy of Hawthorne's *The scarlet Letter* Beigh Masters says:

And so all of this had happened a century before the writer's birth, a century and a half before he wrote his morbid introspection into guilt and repression that many call our greatest work. Preach! Write! Act! He wrote against the fading of the light, the dying of the old program, the distant memory of a shameful, heroic time. (286)

Parody in postmodern historiographic metafiction makes postmodern readers aware of what the texts assert or question by making them habitual to deal with textualized traces of any text. It "demands the reader [for] not only the recognition of textualized traces of the literary and historical past but also the awareness of what has been done—through irony—to those traces" (*Politics* 127). In this connection Beigh Masters says, "[T]he past presents itself to us, always, somehow simplified. He wants to avoid that fatal unclutteredness, but knows he can't" (6). It means that parodic intertextuality in *The Holder of the World* helps readers to identify the traces of the present text from the past, *The Scarlet Letter*, and to make them aware about the subject matter portrayed in the fiction.

Parodic intertextuality in postmodern historiographic metafiction offers a sense of the past in the present through the previous texts. This intertextuality paradoxically echoes the connection of the present works with the past textually and hermeneutically. *The Holder of the World*, parody of *The Scarlet Letter*, echoes its connection with *The Scarlet Letter* textually and hermeneutically.

In postmodern fiction different traces of history, sociology, politics, economics, geography and so on can be observed. In this connection, defining

interdisciplinarity Joe Moran says, “[I]nterdisciplinarity interlocks with the concerns of epistemology—the study of knowledge—and tends to be centered on problems and issues that cannot be addressed or solved within the existing disciplines, rather than the quest for an all inclusive synthesis” (*Interdisciplinarity* 15). For Moran, interdisciplinarity of the postmodern texts has the relationality with previous texts or forms. Moran suggests postmodern readers to incorporate a comprehensive insight to analyze postmodern texts and he critiques more radical nature of knowledge.

Postmodern historiographic metafiction, through parodic intertextuality, makes the readers aware that history is not the transparent record of any definite ‘truth’. In this regard, Dominick La Capra argues that “the past narratives [are] in the form of text and textualized reminders – memories, reports, published writing, archives, movements, and so forth” (qtd. in Hutcheon, *Poetics* 129). In *The Holder of the World* we find different records, letters, journals, religious metanarratives, references from different books from different writers and most importantly parody of *The Scarlet Letter*. Beigh Masters’ following statement makes it clear:

As the focus narrows, the facts grow surer. We have the shipping and housing records, we have the letters and journals and the *Memoirs*, and of course we have *The Scarlet Letter*. Who can blame Nathaniel Hawthorne for shying away from the real story of the brave Salem mother and her illegitimate daughter? (284)

From the above extract it is obvious that *The Holder of the World* consists of different disciplines of writings which are interrelated to construct the story of the fiction. And this shows the interdisciplinary nature of the fiction. Therefore, *The Holder of the World* challenges the conventional forms of fiction and theory of writing history with acknowledgement of their inescapable textuality.

Postmodern fictions raise a number of issues like historiography, fiction, autobiography and metafiction with the interaction between or among them. In the same context, Hutcheon contends, “[P]ostmodern novels raise a number of specific issues regarding the interaction of historiography and fiction [. . .] issues surrounding the nature of identity and subjectivity [. . .] ideological implications of writing and history” (*Poetics* 117). Regarding the construction of story in *The Holder of the World* Beigh Masters narrates:

It has taken me a year and a half to assemble these notes, to make my travels, take my pictures, and attend the auctions. Yes, I bought *The Apocalypse*, or *The Unravish’d Bride*, that terrible tableau of Jadav Singh’s suicidal attack on the fort of Aurangzeb, at a small auction of “colonial memorabilia” in Bangkok. (277)

From the above extract, we come to know that *The Holder of the World* raises a number of issues like travel notes, pictures, auction reports, history of Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb and so on which are interrelated to construct the story of the fiction. This nature of *The Holder of the World* shows its interdisciplinarity and its implication is rewriting history out of interaction between fact and fiction.

A Marxist literary critic Fredric Jameson contends that postmodernity has replaced conventional parody with pastiche. For him, pastiche refers to the blending of earlier division of serious and popular or high culture with low cultural production. Jameson defines “[P]astiche is thus a blank parody, a state with blind eyes [. . .] the producers of culture have no where to turn but to the past: the imitation of dead styles, speech through all the masks and voices stored up in the imaginary museum of a new global culture” (qtd. in Allen, *Intertextuality* 184). Mukherjee’s *The Holder of the World* blends high culture of the characters in the *Ramayan* with low culture of the

characters in the novel. Beigh Masters narrates, “[B]ut more than the story of hanuman, it is the story of Sita’s captivity that consumes Hannah. Rebecca had embraced her alien lover. Rebecca chose to stay in her Lanka with her Ravanna. But Mary Rowlandson, the virtuous Puritan woman, had been dragged from Lancaster” (173). This shows that Mukherjee turns to past story of the *Ramayana* to parody Sita, the protagonist the *Ramayana*, to construct her protagonist Hannah Easton. In this connection Sita and Hannah are compared in terms of their suffering in male chauvinistic society and hence it is the blending of high culture and low culture.

Similarly, Mukherjee turns back to the *Geeta*, the Hindu Bible, and takes references from it in her *The Holder of the World*. In the *Geeta*, Krishna said to Arjuna: “There is no greater good for a warrior than to fight in righteous war” (qtd. in Mukherjee, 254). Mukherjee borrows this extract from *Geeta* to construct her protagonist Hannah Easton who fights against unrighteous activities prevalent in India. In *The Holder of the World* Hannah Easton fights righteous war against anti-humanistic and unrighteous activities in India. Beigh Masters’ following statement makes it clear:

The night that Hannah was consigned to the zenana, the women’s rooms, as a wife but no more than a wife, she had a vision. The life inside her compelled it; she would offer her life, if necessary, to end the war. Only a person outside the pale of the two civilizations could do it. Only a woman, pregnant woman, a pregnant white woman, had the confidence or audacity to try it. (259)

Above lines show Hannah Easton’s courage and audacity to fight a righteous war in India which is the parody of Arjun’s righteous war fought in the direction of Krishna

mentioned in the *Geeta*. This interrelation nature of war fought by Arjun and Hannah Easton shows the pastiche in *The Holder of the World*.

In the same manner, Mukherjee refers to a series of texts such as *Auctions and Acquisitions*, *The Apocalypse*, *Paradise Lost*, *The Bay Psalm Book*, *Memoirs*, *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, *Madras Record*, *Ramayan*, *Geeta*, *Quoran*, *Tales from the Coromandel* and so on. The interesting thing is that some of the texts cited in the fiction do not exist: ““*The Utmost Parts*” (Anonymous, Salem c. 1680) sold to an anonymous buyer on the open market at sotheby’s (Tokyo), in 1983 for \$6,000. Besides me, only one person in the world knows the names of both Anonymouses” (44). While others are real texts, however obscure in order to encourage the readers to wonder he or she determines what is real and what is not. Similarly, Hannah Easton’s memory is also included in the fiction. Hannah sings: “desire of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance; and the utmost parts of the earth for thy possession” (43), from the compulsion of memory.

From the above arguments, we come to know that interdisciplinarity is interdependence between or among the multiple disciplines and pastiche is the postmodern culture of turning back and hence is similar with intertextuality. These both prominent tenets of postmodern historiographic metfiction are found in *The Holder of the World*.

Indeterminacy, Circularity of Narrative and Open-endedness in *The Holder of the World*

The notion of single, fixed and determinant meaning of anything is challenged in postmodern historiographic metafiction with the help of intertextual parody. In this connection Hutcheon opines, “[P]ost modern intertextuality challenges both closure and single, centralized meaning. [. . .] The typically contradictory postmodernism art

both provides and undermines context” (*Politics* 127). In *The Holder of the World*, Mukherjee provides and undermines context to challenge the authenticity of the writer and originality of his/her work “even putting a plural ending on the word God: it became her secret blasphemy. *Gods*. It all went back to her earliest years in the forests” (100).

In this connection, she uses different issues like patriarchy, religious rigidity, liberal humanistic ideology and colonialism from *The Scarlet Letter* and undermines them in *The Holder of the World*. Challenging single, fixed, and determinant meaning of anything, Beigh Masters says, “[N]o two travelers will be able to retrieve the same reality or even a fraction of the available realities. [. . .] we can all make infinite reality withdrawals” (6). This statement regarding the construction of story of *The Holder of the World* shows the indeterminacy in the meaning/truth of the fiction.

Postmodern historiographic metafiction mocks any notion of single origin with the help of parodic intertextuality by restoring history as well as questioning the authenticity of locating the discourse of both history and fiction with an ever expanding intertextual network. In this sense, history is constructed by the mutual interrelationship of dominated and dominators rather than basing on single truth or definite fact. In this regard Hutcheon says, “[F]iction and history are narratives distinguished by their frames, frames which historiographic metafiction first establishes and then crosses positing both the generic contracts of fiction and history” (*Poetics* 110). In *The Holder of the World*, there is mutual interdependence of British colonial history in New England and British colonial history in India being both are the histories of dominated and dominators. Regarding the construction of such history, Beigh Masters narrates, “[E]very time-traveler will punch in the answers to a thousand personal questions—the team is working on the thousand most relevant

facts, the thousand things that make me me, you you—to construct a kind of personality genome” (6). This statement shows the British colonial history in *The Holder of the World* is a mutual interrelationship of dominated and dominators rather than basing it on a single truth or definite fact.

The terms ‘right’ and ‘false’ are applicable in the case of fiction because it bases on context. The context determines the nature of truth or falsity even though there is no an ultimate truth but truths in plural. In this connection, Hutcheon posits:

Historiographic metafiction suggests that truth and falsity may indeed be the right terms in which to discuss fiction, but not for the reasons offered above. Postmodern novels [. . .] assert that there are only truths in plural and never one Truth; and there is rarely falseness *per se*, just others’ truths. (*Politics* 128)

From the above extract, we come to know that historiographic metafiction suggests that truth and falsity are terms used in discussing fiction since these terms are relative and depend upon the perspectives of individuals.

Mukherjee’s *The Holder of the World* suggests the same fact which is clear from the Beigh Masters’ following narration:

I move from unfurnished room to room between *us* and *them*, imagining *our* wonder and *their* dread [. . .]. More layers; the crates are like archaeology pits. I want to stop and examine, but the decades are peeling by too quickly. Not all that survives has value or meaning; believing that it does screens out real value, real meaning. (13)

In the above extract, Hannah Easton’s perspective “*our* wonder and *their* dread” implies that truth is relative depending upon the perceiver since someone’s wonder is others dread in the same geographical and temporal context. Similarly, it is also

obvious that time plays a vital role in changing reality and value. It means that fictional truth of a certain time may not be the same in the other temporal context.

Mukherjee's *The Holder of the World* challenges single, fixed and determinant meaning; mocks at notion of single origin/truth and asserts that the terms 'right' and 'false' are fictional having no ultimate reality. Therefore, there is indeterminacy of meaning/ truth in the fiction.

A number of theorists have defined the way of narrating stories in the fiction. In this connection, Mieke Bal explores the theory of narrative and defines a narrative text as "a story that is told in a medium, that is, it is converted into signs" (*Narratology* 8). She further posits narratology as the "theory of narratives, narrative texts, images, spectacles, events, cultural artifacts that tells a story" (1). It implies that narrative system or principle employs certain elements of narrative such as actors, time, location and so on to achieve the goal.

Similarly, Denial Pundey contends regarding narrativity as well as its features after deconstruction: "[. . .] Narrative is equated with the production of historical, literary, cultural, and even scientific knowledge" (*Narrative after Deconstruction* 1). It indicates that narrative after deconstruction has brought different types of knowledge together with the help of language. And deconstruction is the most elaborative theory of language that shows the paradox within itself and influences the understanding.

Postmodern metafiction, by circularity of narrative, rejects the linear, progressive notion of time, civilization, history and society. Progressive history refers to the concept of history as a series of events progressing towards enlightenment, understanding and the end of human conflict. But postmodernism discards the so-called 'myth of history'. In *The Holder of the World* the circularity of time can be

seen in the Beigh Masters' narrative: "I live in three time zones simultaneously, and I don't mean Eastern, Central and Pacific. I mean the past, the present and the future"

(5). This statement shows that the time in the story of the fiction is circular that ruptures the linear progressive notion of time.

Postmodern metafiction rejects the traditional concept of historical development as a series of determinate cause and effect. Undermining cause and effect is a primary feature of postmodern rejection of Victorian modes of linearity and stable narrative. Mukherjee's *The Holder of the World* rejects concept of historical development in chain of cause and effect. In this connection, Beigh Masters says, "[I]n this Museum of Maritime Trade, the curator's note cards celebrate only Puritan pragmatism. There is no order, no hierarchy of intrinsic value or aesthetic worth; it's a fly's-eye view of Puritan history" (12). This extract shows the disruption of the chain of cause and effect in every action since there is no order and hierarchy of the actions in *The Holder of the World*.

The crisis of linearity in postmodern fiction occurs due to the portrayal of different characters' life story in it. In *The Holder of the World*, we find narrator Beigh Masters' story within Hannah Easton's story. In the fiction Beigh Masters' narrative is about Hannah Easton's Journey from New England to India. But Beigh Masters and her lover Venn Iyer have also their own life story to tell in the fiction. In the same context Beigh Masters says, "[L]ike Rebecca, I have a lover. One who would seem alien to my family. A lover scornful of our habits of self-effacement and reasonableness. [. . .] Venn was born in India and came over as a baby. His family is all successful. [. . .] He grew up in a world so secure I can't imagine it" (31). From these lines it is clear that while narrating the story of Hannah Easton and her mother,

Beigh Masters narrates her and her husband's story. It causes the crisis in narrative linearity in *The Holder of the World*.

In the same manner, we find circularity in the setting of *The Holder of the World*. The setting of the novel moves from New England to England to India and finally to New England. Beigh Masters says, "Hannah/Pearl returned to Salem with the infant and immediately began the search for her mother. [. . .] I boldly sewed in red to her sleeve. It meant "Indian lover," though there was no sign, apart from the progeny, of the Indian's existence" (284). This extract shows shifting of setting of the fiction from India to New England.

In *The Holder of the World*, two notions of progress contribute for the crisis of linearity of narrative in it: the critique of colonial supremacy and the disruption of humanistic ideology and patriarchy. Beigh Masters' following narration testifies this argument:

I've always seen it as a painting about a woman misplaced in time. The man who'd titled it for the museum appreciated its carnage. Historians take note: the Devgad battle was Aurangzeb's last victory. The flea on the Coromandel Coast, the English concession, proved to be carrying a kind of plague. (277)

In the above extract "painting about a woman misplaced" feminist perspective of disrupting patriarchy, "the Devgad battle was Aurangzeb's victory" is related with humanistic ideology and "the flea on the Coromandel Coast [. . .] carrying a kind of plague" is the critique of colonial supremacy. Such type of dual notions of progress disrupts the linearity of narrative in *The Holder of the World*.

Therefore, *The Holder of the World* rejects linear notion of time, civilization, and traditional concept of historical development in the chain of cause and effect. It

also has portrayal of story within story, circular setting and dual notions of progress. Thus, all these elements contribute to the circularity of narrative in the fiction.

Open-ended postmodern narrative takes the form of false narrator. Such narrator describes the story without knowing all details of what s/he is describing. It is because postmodern novel demands the participation of reader to critique and decide his or her own version of truth or falsity. Mukherjee's *The Holder of the World* tries to establish that meaning is neither depends in text, nor in context, reader and the author. This is because the author in the postmodern novel does not believe in single, fixed and exact meaning rather believes in multiple meanings. Beigh Masters' following statement further clarifies it:

He could not understand Hannah. What she had witnessed, what she suppressed. It is just that Hannah is a person undreamed of in Puritan society. Of course she must suffer "spells" and be judged an invalid. [. . .]. Either she will take society with her to a new level, or she will perish in the attempt. Either people will follow, or they will kill her.

(59)

The above extract shows Hannah Easton's multiple way of moving ahead in her life. Her nature cannot be understood easily and therefore the narrator leaves her progressive story in the cross roads even in the middle in order to demand readers' participation for making the progress in the story on the basis of their understanding.

In the same manner, Mukherjee's *The Holder of the World* also explores the notion of circularity and ever ending notion of ideas with the help of Hannah Easton's journey. Her journey begins from New England and finally she returns to the same, her native land, after her stay in England and India. The death of her husband Gabriel Legge and the assassination of her lover Jadav Singh do not end her life rather she has

multiple possibilities of continuing her life journey. Beigh Masters' following statement makes it further clear:

Hannah/Pearl returned to Salem with the infant and immediately began the search for her mother. She found her in a workhouse for the mad and indigent in Providence Plantations [. . .]. She claimed he'd been killed chicken coops to feed his children. And her daughter had a batch as well, her black-eyed, black-haired, lively daughter, named Pearl Singh. The town gossips named them White Pearl and Black Pearl.
(284)

Finally, Hannah Easton returns to her native land, Salem, with the *Raja*'s baby and searches for her mother. She lives there as White Pearl herself and her daughter as Non-White Pearl.

Therefore, the fiction does not offer any resolution to the story of Hannah Easton and hence *The Holder of the World* has openendedness to the story.

Politics of Rewriting of *The Scarlet Letter* as *The Holder of the World*

The politics of narrative self-reflexivity and parodic intertextuality in postmodern historiographic metafiction is to make postmodern readers aware of what the texts assert or question by making them habitual to deal with textualized traces of any text. Regarding the politics of postmodern historiographic metafictional art, Hutcheon says, “[P]ostmodern art cannot but be political, at least in the sense that its representations—its image and stories—are anything but neutral, however ‘aestheticized’, they may appear to be in parodic self-reflexivity” (*Politics* 3). Parodic intertextuality in postmodernism is often used by marginalized groups to attack the center. Hutcheon advocates double coded politics of parodic intertextuality that “both legitimizes and subverts that which is parodied” (97). Moreover, such strategies are

often used by postmodernist feminists in historiographic metafiction to point out historical power of cultural representations and to contextualize it in order to destabilize it. This extract makes it clear that the politics of intertextuality and self-reflexivity in postmodern art is to parodize the issue presented in the hypotext to destabilize the notion of the past and construct the alternative way of reality.

Bharati Mukherjee nativizes American historical romance in *The Holder of the World*. Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* is a historical romance setting in the mid-seventeenth century Puritan Boston during the years 1642 to 1649. It tells the story of Hester Prynne, protagonist of the novel, who conceives a daughter through an extramarital affair with Puritan Minister and struggles to create a new life of repentance and dignity. By nativizing this New England historical romance, Mukherjee fabricates Indian historical romance by creating her own protagonist Hannah Easton, a white girl from the West, based on Hawthorne's Hester Prynne. To expose the history and atrocity of British colonial India as well as adverse effects of Indian multiculturalism and religious fundamentalism, Mukherjee fabricates romantic love affair between Hannah Easton and Indian *Raja* Jadav Singh and Hannah Easton conceives *Raja's* baby like Hester Prynne conceives Dimmesdale's. Therefore, Mukherjee's *The Holder of the World* retells Hawthorne's 1850 novel *The Scarlet Letter* placing the story in three centuries. The setting of the novel is the twentieth century Boston, late-seventeenth century and early-eighteenth century colonial New England and British colonial India.

Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* centers on New England featuring moral allegories with Puritan inspiration, inherent evil, sin of humanity, and act of atonement. By nativizing the features of *The Scarlet Letter*, Mukherjee's *The Holder of the World* centers on British colonial India with brilliant moments, vivid images of

the harshness of colonial life and the decadence of India's Coromandel coast with the critique of colonialism and religious fundamentalism in India. Beigh Masters narrates:

The locals were fisher-folk and boatman, mostly Hindu with Muslim overloads, everyone on the Coromandel, Gabriel had tried to explain to Hannah on those endless dark nights at sea, belonged to a caste if he was Hindu, right-hand or left-hand caste, and everyone was either Shia or Sunni if he was Muslim. (100)

Thus, Mukherjee's *The Holder of the World* is a provocative novel contrasting the cultures of the East and the West in which the threads of the story unravel amid the lushness of her prose and the intensity of events.

The powers of witches are condemned in *The Scarlet Letter*, whereas they are in positive messages presented in *The Holder of the World* that seems to Hannah Easton in magical forces which are essential for the survival of a number of characters. Beigh Masters narrates, "[H]is *rani* was an American woman! A Salem witch—true! She had magical powers, killed whole armies, operated on everyone, transplanted body parts before Christian Bernard. True, True" (257)!

In *The Holder of the World* Mukherjee nativizes reinforced Puritan individualism and ignored patriarchal ideology in *The Scarlet Letter*. Mukherjee exposes the bitter consequences of religious fundamentalism by exposing atrocity of religious riot between the Muslims and the Hindus. In this connection, Beigh Masters narrates, "Bhagmati tried to dissuade her with stories balladeers told all over Hindustan of the Emperor as father killer, brother killer, son-disinheritor, brutal converter of infidels and dedicated desecrator of temples and churches" (260). Beigh Masters' statement "India seemed determined to teach her the cruel side of every

pleasure, the evil behind every innocence” (247) shows Mukherjee’s critique of Indian norms and values under the religious fundamentalisms.

In postmodern fiction, legitimacy of the grandnarrative gets questioned due to the rejection of system of knowledge by the theorists of postmodern era. The death of metanarratives in postmodernism takes the form of a false narrator who narrates the events in the fiction without detailed knowledge of them. This is due to the fact that very few are able to determine what is true and what is disbelief and there is nothing to prove whether a statement describing a real situation is true.

Jean Francois Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition* states that knowledge in this postmodern era is not grounded on metanarratives. The very fact of this is that knowledge in postmodern era is the “matter [of] TV games” (76). According to Lyotard, knowledge is not fixed, rigid and permanent one due to the fact that it keeps on changing along with historical, social and cultural ups and downs. He asserts that the notion of truth with capital T and rigidity in fixed meaning has already gone away in this postmodern age.

Regarding the critique of metanarrative Simon Malpas posits, “[P]ostmodern critique produces the field in which it intervenes: it occurs without the stable ground of a grandnarrative, but it emerges in the context of those narratives to challenge and subvert them” (*The Postmodern* 131). Mukherjee’s *The Holder of the World* incorporates the elements of postmodern historiographic metafiction, like self-reflexivity, intertextuality, interdisciplinarity, circularity of narrative and openendedness which ultimately helps to critique essentialist notion of liberal humanism, religious fundamentalism, colonialism and patriarchy.

Mukherjee in *The Holder of the World* tries to dismantle the very essentialist notion of humanism. She tries to establish the human centered systems of norms and

values based on the fallacy of essentialism. Dismantling the essentialist notion of humanism Hannah Easton says, “[I]f all is equal in the eye of Brahma as the Hindus say, if Allah is all-seeing and all-merciful as you say, then who has committed atrocities on the children, the women, the old people? Who has poisoned the hearts of men” (268)? This extract shows Mukherjee’s call for equality of all humankind, the children of Brahma. Mukherjee’s this advocacy dismantles essentialist notion of humanism in terms of power, religion, caste and so on.

The metanarrative of colonialism is 'civilization mission'. In the name of civilization, colonizers colonize the native people and exploit resources not for the betterment of natives but for themselves. The colonizers never provide to natives what they promise for them. Therefore, it is metanarrative of civilization mission. In *The Holder of the World* Mukherjee explores and critiques such metanarrative of colonialism by exposing the atrocities of colonial factors in Indian world. In *The Holder of the World* the exploitation of Indian people and resources by British colonizers is reflected as Beigh Masters says, “[T]hey had not come to India in order to breed and colonize, or even to convert. They were here to plunder, to enrich themselves (under the guise of a Royal Charter) and pay their fees to the ruling nawabs” (100). She further narrates, “[E]veryone grew rich- the shareholders back in London, the sharp-trading, black-marketing factors, the various local *nawabs* and, finally, the Great Mughal himself, old Emperor Aurangzeb in his Deccan war tents” (102). From these lines it is clear that the activities of colonizers are quite opposite of their mission of civilization. In British colonial India “English factors passed easily over these religious and political borders, enjoying trading rights in both jurisdictions, but among locals the borders were strongly defended” (220). This extract shows that

British colonizers were free to cross any jurisdiction for their trading rights and benefit but Indians were restricted by them.

In general, Mukherjee exposes perilous situation of Indian people and Indian females, in particular, during British colonial period in India. Regarding the pathetic situation of Indian people during this period Beigh Masters says, “[T]he cousin and two bargemen had been killed, the women robbed, and Bindu Bashini herself violated and thrown into the river. She’d been meant to drown. A dishonored Hindu girl couldn’t go back home. To have been abused was to have brought shame to the family for its failure to protect her” (223). In colonial India “the raped wives and daughters of limbless parents broke into zanana, beat Bhagmati and set fire to her Hedges shrine” (237-38). From these lines, it is clear that the Indian marginalized females were suffered a lot by the atrocity of British colonial agents in India.

In *The Holder of the World*, Mukherjee exposes corrupted Indian world during British colonial period. This is due to Britishers’ vested interest of accumulating property by exploiting Indian natural and human resources with out caring of Indian people. In this context Beigh Masters says, “[T]he world was rotting; there was no honor, no protection. These people were innocents, the troops were innocents, but corruption was everywhere. Peace brought profit to everyone, but peace was a curse word on the Coromandel Coast” (238). During colonialism British colonial army in India were loyal to their English people and indifferent to Indians. This becomes obvious from Beigh Masters’ following narration:

The loyal *Subedar*, his near double, had been killed outside the gates, his body thrown to the crocodiles. The *Raja* sent his most persuasive minister to Higginbotham, requesting English gunners and long-range

guns in exchange for rebates on indigo prices, but the English man, loyal tool of the *Nawab*, refused to meet him. (238)

Gabriel Legge is a major symbolic figure of British colonization in India. Beigh Masters introduces Gabriel Legge as an agent of colonialism as “in fact, made Gabriel a hero among Europeans who were not in the employment of East India Companies owned by rich men in London and Paris and Amsterdam and Copenhagen” (145). The death of Gabriel Legge in the novel is symbolic of the death of British colonialism in India. Beigh Masters describes the death of Gabriel Legge as “the data on Gabriel’s death had been given to me the day I stumbled on Hannah’s things stuffed in a cardboard box in the hallway of the maritime museum in Marblehead”(206). And “in December 1700, Hannah became, to her satisfaction husbandless” (207).

In this way, Mukherjee in *The Holder of the World* follows the historiographic metafictional quality in order to enshrine and critique the metanarrative of colonialism. She critiques colonialism by exposing atrocity of colonial agents in India, exploitation of Indian natural resources, pathetic predicament of Indian females and corrupted Indian world during British colonial period in India.

In the same manner, *The Holder of the World* critiques the metanarrative of patriarchy. Patriarchy constructs the binaries of male and female to rule over the female. In these binaries the former has good connotations like rational, independent, strong, active, sensible and so on, whereas the latter has given negative ones. Patriarchal society considers male as the guardian/protector of female and female is incomplete without male. But, feminist movement severely assault such binaries by deconstructing male-centric notion of patriarchy. Mukherjee in *The Holder of the World* enshrines and critiques the notion of patriarchy to give voice to the male dominated females in India. She exposes practice of polygamy in India and at the

same time critiques it as one of the evils of patriarchal notion to blur the hierarchy between male and female. Showing the practice of polygamy in India Beigh Masters narrates:

After thirty eight years of barrenness (they had, of course, married as children), his father had taken on a second wife, the very young, very beautiful daughter of a minor Deccani *Raja*. [. . .] He banished his first wife. [. . .] The second wife provided him with extreme and unholy pleasures, and eventually a son. (231)

Above extract tells about the second marriage of Jadav Singh's father. He banishes her first wife since she turns to be barren and his second wife provides her with extreme pleasure and a son.

But as revenge, the first wife sleeps with court painter and begets Jadav Singh. In this context Beigh Masters says, "The first wife, however, got her revenge. After forty years of barrenness, his first queen gave birth to Jadav Singh, whom she had miraculously conceived by laying in her spurned bed with a court painter's likeness of her husband, the king" (231-32). This extract shows the female's voice and revenge against male's domination and exploitation of female. Moreover, it blurs the hierarchy between male and female.

In *The Holder of the World*, we find deconstruction of patriarchal notion in Hannah Easton's statement: "'I am neither wife nor queen", Hannah retorted. A *bibi* had the right, the duty, to live for love. Gabriel's black *bibi* had seized happiness for Gabriel and for herself; a *bibi* had the power to laugh in the face of a *firangi* wife" (254). Thus, Hannah Easton begins to love in response of Jadav Singh's love to her without caring of the society and she does not care much his lover Jadav Singh as well. Beigh Masters says, "Jadav Singh continued to court her for one *pahar*, or one

quarter of each night. Hannah seems not to have asked him where he went after she relinquished him. [. . .] With Gabriel she had clung to Salem's do's and don'ts" (234). These lines show Hannah Easton's restricted situation under the male made rules for female when she was with Gabriel Legge. But later on she goes against patriarchal norms and values which are biased and inappropriate for female. The following statement clarifies Hannah Easton's revolution against patriarchy:

She had pulled and pummeled the familiar rules hoping they'd help her own evolution. With Jadav Singh she'd finally accepted how inappropriate it was in India—how fatal—to cling, as White Towns tenaciously did, to Europe's rules. She was no longer the woman she'd been in Salem or London. [. . .] She was no longer a wife. She was the *bibi*. (234)

In the above lines, Mukherjee critiques familiar patriarchal rules in India, through her protagonist Hannah Easton, which are inappropriate and restrictive for Indian females.

Mukherjee parodies Sita's story from the *Ramayana*, a Hindu mythology, in *The Holder of the World* in order to enshrine patriarchal practices prevalent in India and critique them to blur the hierarchy of male versus female. In *Ramayana* Sita, the protagonist, is a passionate figure who sends Rama, her husband, to pursue the golden deer out of her passion for it. Bhagmati narrates, "Sita pleads and nags Rama into pursuing the animal deep into the forest" (174). Rama departs to fulfill Sita's passion for the deer and after sometime Rama's cry for help is heard by Laxman, brother to Rama, and Sita in the hut. Bhagmati narrates, "Sita again driven by new emotions—this time fear and rage rather than greedy longings—forces Laxman to break his pledge to protect her and go off to Rama's rescue" (174).

Mukherjee exposes restricted situation of Indian female and their dependence on male for their security in *The Holder of the World* by the parody of Sita's story from the *Ramayana*. It is obvious from Bhagmati's following narration:

Before leaving, Laxman draws a white circle around the hut within which Sita is to confine herself, and be safe, while she is alone. [. . .] Sita brings the holy man water and food, but in her dutifulness steps out of the white circle. Ravanna seizes her by her long hair, hoist her into a flying chariot, and carries her off to Lanka. (175)

Above extract shows the restriction provided for Sita, female, inside a white circle for her security in absence of Laxman, male. Symbolically, it is the restriction made by male for female out of their patriarchal notion.

Male chauvinism in India is revealed through Rama's suspicion for Sita's fidelity: "Ravanna has desired you and gazed upon your beauty. Honor has required me, your husband and king, to avenge this evil. Now the same honor requires me to renounce you" (175). To show her fidelity "Sita proves her purity to her husband and to her society in a trial by fire. The god of fire, Agni, embraces her and expels her unscorched" (176). This extract shows the plight of Indian females who should prove their fidelity and purity in male chauvinistic society. Rama accepts her when "Sita passes the trial by fire [. . .] installs her in the palace as his queen and gladly fulfills his conjugal duties and passions" (176-77).

But in patriarchal and male chauvinistic society, Rama cannot fully trust on Sita's purity even she had proved it through ordeal. This becomes obvious from the statement: "At night he lies awake torturing himself with imagined violations Ravanna may have committed on Sita. No, it's worse: he can forgive Ravanna his rape. His fear is that Sita might have enjoyed it. After the first, no future lover leaves

a mark: *Rama doesn't know*" (177). This distrust drives Rama to banish Sita in her situation of pregnancy that makes a life of pastoral contentment for her in the forest.

After installing patriarchy and male chauvinistic Indian society in *The Holder of the World*, Mukherjee questions it and blurs the hierarchy between male and female. After some years "remorse and loneliness bring Rama into the forest where he accidentally rediscovers Sita" (177) and he eager to restore her in his palace but "he begs Sita for one more trial by fire" (177). This time Sita revolts against Rama and refuses to take ordeal. Sita's questioning to the unfair patriarchal society is clear when Bhagmati narrates, "[T]his time she stands up to Rama and the unfair institutions of Ayodhya. She flings herself to the ground. And miraculously the Mother Earth that had given her birth now swallows her whole, leaving no trace of Sita the mortal" (177). This extract clearly shows Sita's revolt against unfair patriarchal institutions of Ayodhya, in particular and revolt of Indian dominated and marginalized female against unfair and patriarchal social practices in India in general.

Therefore, Mukherjee gives voice to the male dominated females in India by destabilizing the hierarchy between them. Mukherjee questions and critiques Indian unfair institutions and patriarchal practices through the mouth of her bold and revolutionary protagonist Hannah Easton who goes against male directed duties of female and by parody of bold actions of Sita against unfair chauvinistic society of Ayodhya in *The Holder of the World*.

Mukherjee critiques the *Ramayan*, a grandnarrative of Hindu mythology, by the comparison between Sita, the heroine of the *Ramayan* and Hannah Easton, the protagonist in *The Holder of the World*. Beigh Masters narrates:

Hannah finds herself attracted to the events in Sita's life. Like Hannah, Sita was foundling. The Fitches recovered her from their doorsteps; a

childless king, Janak, had unearthed the girl infant with his plow and named Sita, or “furrow”. Sita adjusted to life as a king’s adopted daughter and a prince’s wife as willingly as Hannah had to her girlhood in Salem. (174)

The comparison between Sita and Hannah Easton is unparallel since Sita is the protagonist in the *Ramayan*, the grandnarrative of Hindu mythology and Hannah Easton is a common character from marginalized society. But Mukherjee’s intention of doing this is to critique metanarrative of Hindu mythology by making it common.

Similarly, Mukherjee critiques metanarrative of religion in *The Holder of the World*. Beigh Masters’ following narration shows Mukherjee’s intention of critiquing religious fundamentalism in India:

The idea of Hinduism was vaguely frightening and even more vaguely alluring to Hannah. English attitudes saw Islam as a shallow kind of sophistication; Hinduism a profound form of primitivism. Muslim might be cruel, but true obscenity attached itself to Hindus, whose superstitions and wanton disregard of their own kind—burning young widows, denying humanity to those they called untouchable—excited contempt. Muslims had restrictions, which were noble and manly; Hindus had taboos, which were superstitious and cowardly. (219)

Above extract shows characteristics of different religions practices in India in negative connotation.

Similarly, Mukherjee exposes perilous situation in India due to the religious riot between the Hindus and the Muslims that resulted from the antagonism between them. Describing such situation Beigh Masters narrates, “She smelled the blood, vomit and feces of men yielding to panic, or to death, and heard the enemies’ eerie

whoops of hate. Bhagmati tugged at her sari and held out the Raja's ceremonial dagger" (245). This extract shows the dangerous consequence of religious riot.

In this way, Mukherjee's *The Holder of the World* critiques the metanarratives of liberal humanism, colonialism, patriarchy, and religion. Moreover, she critiques British colonialism, religious fundamentalism, and patriarchy in India.

Bharati Mukherjee is an Indian immigrant who migrates to Canada and later on to America. So, she has immigrant and fugitive experiences in the strange location with different mores. To expose her fugitivity she creates the protagonist Hannah Easton, white fugitive, in *The Holder of the World* on the basis of the other white fugitive Hester Prynne, the protagonist in *The Scarlet Letter*.

Hester Prynne is an English immigrant who migrates to Amsterdam, Holland with her husband Chillingworth from England before migrating to New England. Her husband, an elderly scholar, sends Hester Prynne ahead to New England to live but never follows her. In foreign culture and strange location, she need to reinvent herself as an American and so out of her passionate nature she has an affair with a Puritan Minister, Arthur Dimmesdale and gives birth to Pearl out of her extramarital relationship. The rigid Puritan society makes her to wear the scarlet letter, a patch of fabric in the shape of an "A", on her breast throughout her life to punish her adulterous sin. Arthur John E. Hart posits, "[T]he Puritan society sees the letter in a different light; it represents a symbol of guilt, the individuals violation of the moral code. Probably because she is partly Puritan also, Hester feels guilty too; therefore she cannot deal with the "leaden inflicting glances" of the onlookers" (384).

Hester Prynne endures years of shame and scorn and suffers a lot in rigid Puritan patriarchal New England society. Shamed and alienated from the rest of the community, she becomes contemplative and speculates on human nature, social

organization, and larger moral questions. Hester Prynne's tribulations also lead her to be stoic and a free thinker. She also becomes a kind of compassionate maternal figure as a result of her experiences. Therefore, she urges Dimmesdale to give up the name Arthur Dimmesdale and make himself another to renounce his American identity. Her such expression shows that how much she is suffered and tired in American society as an immigrant. Dimmesdale does not want to renounce his American identity. Therefore, he dies himself in the pillory being unable to leave the one culture for the other.

Albeit Hester Prynne suffers a lot in patriarchal Puritan society, she really succeeds in reinvention that redeems not within the Puritan community but outside of it. She rethinks herself in this new world and transcends the community that has branded her with that scarlet letter "A". Through her sympathetic nature and hard work, she transforms the letter "A" as the symbol of "angel", "able", "affectionate" and so on with positive connotation in the society.

Hester Prynne makes sure that Pearl returns to Europe, however saved, from an American culture. In her old age, she dies and is entombed near the grave of her lover late Dimmesdale. Regarding her end narrator of the story says:

And after many, many years, a new grave was delved, near an old and sunken one; in that burial-ground beside which king's chapel has since been built. It was near that old and sunken grave, yet with a space between, as if the dust of the two sleepers had no right to mingle. Yet one tombstone served for both. (*The Scarlet Letter* 197)

The above statement clearly shows that Hester Prynne is discriminated even after her death also. Being a female adulterer in rigid Puritan society, she has no right to mingle to the dust of her lover even after her death albeit her lover is equally

responsible for her adulterous act. This is the patriarchal ideology that dominates female in the male dominated rigid Puritan New England society.

Hannah Easton, a unique woman undreamed in puritan society, was born in the forests of Massachusetts in the American colonies in 1670. At the age of 15, she moves to Salem with adoptive parents after her father, Edward Easton, dies of bee sting and her mother, Rebecca Easton—during the French and Indian war—runs off with a lover from the Nipmuc tribe. Vital, inquisitive and awake to her own possibilities, Hannah Easton travels to England and finally to Mughal India with her white husband, an English trader, Gabriel Legge. Beigh Masters says, “[B]ut now I know: Hannah took that embroidery with her to England and then to India when she married” (47). Her oddnesses, though, are no impediment to marriage with the dashing adventurer Gabriel Legge who joins the East India Company before going independent as a private—a calling that will bring him fame and wealth, but also, at last, death. After the death of Gabriel, Hannah Easton becomes a widow, in her satisfaction, at the age of twenty three. Beigh Masters narrates, “[T]he news of Gabriel Legge’s death arrived loudly and irreverently with a toss of gravel on her sleeping-room window. “Widow Legge, a message””(78).

After the death of her husband, Hannah Easton suffers a lot in multi-cultural British colonial India. In India “her life is at the cross roads of many world” (60). In this connection Beigh Masters narrates, “Hannah was a stranger to all these conventions. The explosions and the indisputable disclosures in its wake shattered her marriage as definitively as a bat bite and ended Higginbothams” (198). Therefore, in Indian multiculturalism Hannah Easton becomes pure product of her time and place with the experience of wide range of norms and values that would be extreme even today’s world.

After the death of her husband, Hannah becomes the lover of a Hindu *Raja* Jadav Singh. Revealing her passion for *Raja*, Beigh Masters narrates, “[S]he wanted the *Raja* and nothing else, she would sacrifice anything for his touch and the love they made” (229). With her lover, in British colonial India, Hannah Easton experiences extreme exploitation of the British soldiers. In this connection Beigh Masters narrates, “[T]he winning soldiers scattered immediately, freed for the day to take pleasures in neighboring villages, to loot them, kill the infidels, rape the women, burn the evidence” (245). In such a situation, Hannah Easton lay across her friend Bhagmati, both wearing *saries* giving away their religion are at risk.

Hannah bitterly feels the casteism in multi-ethnic India. The Queen Mother, mother to Jadav Singh, becomes furious to Hannah Easton and says, “Hannah had already polluted her son’s caste [. . .] Hannah had brought bad luck. The *Raja* had felt the fort healthy and ready to battle, he met the *firangi* and a spear had found his heart” (250-51). Moreover, scolding Hannah Easton she adds, “[H]er white, casteless hands had touched him, touched his blood, her hand that had touched beef; even if she brought him back from Yama’s grip, what sort of half-human monster would he be” (252)?

Hannah Easton experiences adverse impacts of religious fundamentalism in India. In a religious riot between the Muslims and the Hindus, she loses her lover *Raja*. The Muslim soldiers assassinated Hindu *Raja* Jadav Singh leaving Hannah Easton a loverless widow. After this Hannah Easton pleads before Emperor Aurangzeb for peace crying from her heart: “Oh, Great Emperor, build your city, build your mosques and your palace, but stop this war before it destroys the world! You speak of mercy, but where is the quality of your mercy” (268-69)? Finally, she returns to her home land, Salem, with her lover’s baby in her womb and gives it to

birth on the way towards her home. She lives in Salem as ‘white Pearl’ and her daughter as ‘non-white Pearl’.

In 1940, Bharati Mukherjee was brought up in a Bengali Brahmin Family, the most elite caste level of Indian Society. Along with her Indian heritage, she has the colonized identity of all India, subordinate to the British Raj. Mukherjee enters English Schools in Britain and Switzerland and, later on returns to India.

In 1961, Mukherjee meets Clark Blaise at the University of Iowa writing Workshop and marries him instead of accepting the Indian nuclear physicist arranged by her family. Mukherjee notes that she had chosen otherwise, she would still have written—but “elegant, ironic, wise stories . . . marked by detachment” (Steingberg 47). Marriage outside her culture takes Mukherjee beyond her safe enclave of certainty in which she had been raised, offered new possibilities for her to explore. That awareness of different cultures is further developed when Blaise decides to embrace his Canadian heritage. For Mukherjee, Canada “was like going to England, a step backward to an old world, a hierarchical society” (Connell 11). While her husband regains a sense of his ancestral identity, Mukherjee wants to get from that sense of belonging. She says, “I did not want anyone to know where I fit in, so I could be whoever I wanted to be” (Connell 11).

In terms of her flexible identity, Canada is a step backward. She is labeled a ‘dirty Paki’ there and over next fourteen years sees and experiences tremendous racism that colors her writing and can still be sensed in Mukherjee’s sharp memories: “If one hadn’t played in snow and grown up eating oatmeal one didn’t have any thing relevant to say to Canadian readers” (Carb 651). Feeling beleaguered in Canada, Mukherjee becomes, as she describes herself, a ‘shrill’ civil rights activist (Connell 12). Despite her affection for the West, Mukherjee clearly feels the need to claim her

identity as different in a powerful way as a means of warding off the racial slurs to which she is subjected. These tensions emerge in *The Tiger's Daughter* (1972), a novel about a woman's claustrophobic entanglement with family and friends and in *Wife* (1975), in which the main character kills her husband after the couple has immigrated to the United States and the wife has been so torn between cultures that she begins to lose her sanity.

In 1973, Mukherjee and her husband go to India for a year; *Days and Nights in Calcutta* (1977) details their different responses to the country. This trip helps Mukherjee see that despite "all the trouble I was going through in Canada, it was still the new world that I wanted to live in, and that the old world was dead for me" (Connell 15).

In 1980, Mukherjee resigns her post at McGill University and brings her family back to the United States. She feels, she says, terrible about so disrupting their lives, but "it was a question of self preservation" (Carb 652). In America, a major concern she has to negotiate is her own identity: in her introduction to *Darkness*, Mukherjee describes "immigrants as 'pathetic lost souls' in contrast to the expatriate, who with irony and detachment drifts aloof from his or her new world" (Nazareth 184). Undergoing a metamorphosis from her early work and experiences in Canada, Mukherjee rejects elitist detachment and joins herself to "the underclass of semi-assimilated Indians instead of seeing my Indianness is now a metaphor, a particular way of partially comprehending the world" (Nazareth 184).

Mukherjee contends that each of us lives in a community, a culture, a background we have built up out of ethnic, religious, regional, or other affiliations, we carry with us prejudices, connections, defenses, that are idiosyncratic and impenetrable to all except those closest to us. Yet Mukherjee insists that when such

multiple worlds meet, the result can be a glorious of the leaves of the kaleidoscope, that complexity intermix and produce a new pattern.

Mukherjee encounters some resistance, particularly from what she sees as the “imperialism of western feminism” (Connell 22) that requires women to act in their own self interest rather than being willing to please others. Polly Shulman points out that Mukherjee’s message may be that “everyone is living in a new world, even those who never left home” (19). Eleanor Wachtel writes that for Mukherjee the conflict of societies “is not simply a culture gap; the immigrant changes the way Americans see themselves” (250). We are all part of the multicultural fabric. Mukherjee celebrates; we ignore the inextricable, many-colored threads of our plurality at our own cost.

In this way Mukherjee, by rewriting *The Scarlet Letter* as *The Holder of the World*, exposes her fugitivity in the strange locations, Canada and America, with different mores by the portrayal of the story of fugitive Hannah Easton, protagonist in *The Holder of the World*. The story of Hannah Easton is based on the story of the other English fugitive Hester Prynne, protagonist in *The Scarlet Letter*.

Therefore, Mukherjee’s politics of rewriting Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* as *The Holder of the World* is to nativize American historical romance in the backdrop of British colonial and multi socio-cultural India in order to critique grandnarratives of colonialism, religion and patriarchy, and to expose her fugitivity to give voice to the marginalized Indian females including Hannah Easton.

III. *The Holder of the World* as a Postmodern Historiographic Metafiction

Bharati Mukherjee rewrites Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* as *The Holder of the World* by enshrining of as well as departing from the elements in the original text. The former is a genre of historical romance which blends the love story of Hester Prynne and Arthur Dimmesdale, a Puritan minister and history of colonial Puritan New England in the mid-seventeenth century. In the latter, Mukherjee parodies New England historical romance and nativizes it by creating love story between Hannah Easton and *Raja* Jadav Singh in the backdrop of multi-cultural British colonial India in the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth century. Therefore, *The Holder of the World* is the indianization of the American historical romance portrayed in *The Scarlet Letter*.

Mukherjee parodies *The Scarlet Letter* in *The Holder of the World*. The former is an immigrant writing that tells the story of Hester Prynne, protagonist in the fiction, who migrates to New England from England. The latter is written in the pattern of the former which tells the story of Hannah Easton, protagonist, who migrates to England from New England and finally to India with her English husband Gabriel Legge. Thus, Mukherjee borrows the pattern of immigrant writing from *The Scarlet Letter* in *The Holder of the World*.

The sources of *The Holder of the World* and its writing process reflect through the narration of Beigh Masters. In the fiction, Beigh Masters is the mouthpiece of Mukherjee who self-consciously narrates the protagonist as well as events in the fiction and time and again her autobiography also. She also narrates construction of characters and story in the fiction. While narrating the story, she is equally conscious regarding the characters as well as events in the fiction. Therefore, Beigh Masters is

self-conscious narrator in the fiction and the fiction is about the fictionality of the fiction or writing about fiction. Hence, *The Holder of the World* is a metafiction.

In *The Holder of the World*, Muslim Emperor Aurangzeb is a historical figure in the Indian history who ruled India from 1658 to 1707. In the fiction, Mukherjee fabricates the story with the interaction of historical figure Aurangzeb and the fictional figure Hannah Easton. Moreover, the history of British colonial India is treated with the help of fabrication of love story between fictional characters, Hannah Easton and Jadav Singh. It also presents the antagonism between Aurangzeb and Jadav Singh and constructs the assassination of the latter by the army of the former in a religious riot of Hindus verses Muslims. Therefore, *The Holder of the World* is the interaction between fact and fiction and hence blurs the boundary between history and fiction.

Mukherjee parodies *The Scarlet Letter* as *The Holder of the World* by questioning the originality of the previous text and authenticity of the author. She critiques Puritan humanistic ideology reinforced by Hawthorne in the former and gives voice to the marginalized females in the latter by advocating for anti-essentialist notion of humanism. She enshrines issues of British colonialism, multi-culturalism, religious fundamentalism as well as patriarchy in India and critiques them by exposing their adverse effects in India.

The Holder of the World has circular narrative without final resolution to the story of the protagonist Hannah Easton. The rupturing of linearity in narration and offering alternative endings to the story is the metafictional quality in the fiction and it demands readers' active participation in meaning-making process. Since there is no final truth offered, we find indeterminacy of meaning in the fiction. The author constructs the story of Hannah Easton from the notes of diaries, biographies,

memories, photographs, letters and so on. While constructing the story, Mukherjee brings lots of references from various texts written in the past for example the *Ramayan*, the *Geeta*, John Keats' poetry and other many more not only real but some hypothetical texts or issues as well. Similarly, the fiction deals with history, romance, scientific discovery and cultural study. Therefore, *The Holder of the World* is pastiche with interdisciplinarity.

The politics of rewriting *The Scarlet Letter* as *The Holder of the World* is to rewrite Indian British colonial history by nativization of Puritan New England historical romance from the former. For this purpose, she fabricates romantic love affair between Western female character Hannah Easton and Indian *Raja* Jadav Singh in the backdrop of multi-cultural British colonial India. Mukherjee critiques metanarratives of colonialism, religious fundamentalism and patriarchy by exposing their negative impacts in *The Holder of the World* to give voice to the marginalized and suffered females in India. Besides this, Mukherjee exposes her fugitivity by creating the story of a white fugitive Hannah Easton as the protagonist in the fiction whose role model is other white fugitive Hester Prynne, the protagonist in *The Scarlet Letter*.

In this way, Mukherjee's *The Holder of the World*, a historical romance written in the pattern of immigrant writing, is the parody of *The Scarlet Letter*. It is a metafiction with the interaction between history and fiction. Moreover, it has narrative self-reflexivity, parodic intertextuality, and circularity of narrative, openendedness to the story and indeterminacy of meaning. Therefore, *The Holder of the World* is a postmodern historiographic metafiction.

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