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**BHARATI MUKHERJEE'S *THE HOLDER OF THE WORLD*: A UNIQUE FUSION OF
FICTION AND HISTORY**

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ABSTRACT

Bharati Mukherjee's almost all the works are about female protagonists. Her female characters belong to every class. Through her whole work we found the struggle of women, their frustration to assimilate herself into two culture and at the end face the humiliation from the new society. Through the novel, *The Holder of the World*, I have presented the strange story of the character Hannah Easton. The story reveals that how American culture meets two different cultures i.e Mugul and Indian Culture. The novel is a perfect mixture of fiction, science and history.

Key words: Alienation, cross- culture, expatriate, immigrant etc.

The story starts with Beigh Master who is living in three zones as she says, "the past, the present and the future." (5) Beigh Master is first narrator of the novel. She is modern American woman, who is doing research on the life adventures of the 17th century. Venn is a South Indian Computer Specialist. Beigh Master and Venn were living together nearly for three years. Venn was Beigh's lover. Beigh likes to read about Auctions and Acquisitions. It was her hobby to research about antiques, precious stones etc.

The second narrator of the novel is Hannah Easton, but her life story was told by Beigh Master. She told that Hannah Easton was the only child of Edward Easton and Rebecca Easton. She was born in 1670, in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. It was colonial time when she was born. Beigh starts the story that in 1668, Rebecca got married to Edward. After marriage they both came to Indian Edward joined the East India Company. Beigh had collected these information from the company's books and papers which were stored in Indian office. She also found that she had a close relationship with Hannah. She said, "Hannah Easton is a relative of mine." (22)

Hannah's father had not much skills and money, he become a village farmer. When Hannah was one year old, her father died due to bee sting. Rebecca becomes widow at a very young age, she had a sweet voice, she loved singing. Through singing she encourages Hannah. This was the disturbing memory which Hannah had and her life was going to be changed. Rebecca runs away with her Nipmuc Indian lovers and leaves her child behind, "she does not cry, and the vow she makes, bobbing in the arms of the nameless women. She has known all her life." (29) Hannah had been send to orphanage by Nipmuc women. Beigh said that she also had a lover like Rebecca had. Her lover's name was Venn but before him, more men came into her life like Andrew,

Blake, Chase, Devon etc. At last she met Venn on, "a lecture at Harvard Business School on assets recovery."(34) He did a kind of data processor. Beigh was much impressed by him but she thought that Venn would be alien to her family.

Through Hannah's story she came to know that she loved needlework, embroidery. Through this hobby she likes to express her nostalgic feeling of her infant days and towards her mother. Hannah's closest friend's name was Hester Manning. She was beautiful and daughter of Smith. Both were fifteen years old and had a tragic life, but both had a opposite fates as well. Hannah was adopted by the Robert Fitch family. Living with them she thought that she had no family and place, she lived with them as an orphan daughter. "I count no man as my friend, nor as my enemy."(54) Hannah lived eight years with Fitch family and Beigh had got only one record. She found letters, "These are letters written not by her nor to her, but about her."(55) Another important character who suddenly came and claimed that he was the son of the owner of the swallow. His name was Gabriel Legge. He was tall and handsome, he has an eye patch. Sudden arrival of Gabriel Legge in Salem, indicates that Hannah's life and destiny was going to be changed. In Salem no one was able to match with Gabriel Legge. People imagine him as a future Salem, a perfect ruler. Hannah and Gabriel got married. Beigh had a confusion towards Hannah's decision to marry Gabriel. "For her, he was 'inappropriate' and 'untrustworthy'."(69) She accepted Hester as a betrayer. She thought that, "Guilt, perhaps, a need to punish herself for the secret she was forced to carry? Unconscious imitation of her mother, a way of joining her by running off with a treacherous alien?"(69)

After marriage, she feels lonely because there was absence of love, passion and personal relationship between Hannah and Gabriel. She spends her most of the time in writing letters and in garden. She had married to Gabriel Legge, who was mysterious to her because he did not told her to whom he had sailed the ships and the captain's name whom he served. Afterwards Hannah Easton Fitch Legge had left Salem for England in 1692. She had shown there that, "the colonists were not graceful or respectful enough to the crown and the Mother country."(72) But for Hannah, "The New World was hard and savage; it was refined and cultured; it was soiled and sinful."(72)

Hannah could not understand Legge motif to come to London. He travelled the oceans but unfortunately the news of his death came to her, he died for defending his king against the Portuguee. After Legge's death she becomes the 'widow Legge' at the age of twenty three. And this was her third Epistle to the Salem press on the comforts of widowhood. She never spend her life as solitary, this thing was found Beigh from her letters when she was living in the England. That was the Era of Restoration Comedy. On November 1693, she helped a family, they got a terrible accident. Man and his wife were saved but their seven year old boy, "was thrown onto the stone bridge."(80) She help the boy against his father's will by using her experienced treating skull wounds. Hannah knows the herbs, how to use it, dressing and the wound to drain. As she had a imaginary power, who know every part of the body. With the help of her life experience the boy came out of the coma after several days. Parents were happy and congratulate her.

"It did not end there. Her identity had been discovered. The doctor sought her out on other cases of head injury. She was not just a Sailor's widow; she was in some way a woman blessed with healing power."(83)

One day a man named Hubert came to her, he was injured and he was recommended by the Dr. Aubrey. Hubert's sophisticated behaviour towards Hannah inspire her to leads a new life rejuvenates her. He tried to encourage her inner desire and hidden qualities. Hannah also found that Hubert had a calm nature. But unfortunately her desire was not fulfilled because after some time Gabriel arrived. He was not dead but was captured by the Portugees. Hannah was surprised to see him alive. Gabriel decided to go to India and Hannah also wanted to go with him because for her this was the last way to see vast and active life, especially India the country of tradition, emotion and feelings. Hannah Easton wanted to escape from the conventional society so she decided to marry an Irish adventurer Gabriel Legge.

Hannah came to India with her husband Gabriel Legge and first time she saw the white town of Fort St. Sebastian. Her husband joined the East Indian Company and become a factor. Europeans had built their

cities / colonies like Calcutta, Madras and Bombay. Hannah spends plenty of time in imagination. She describes the scene of the coastal area where shopkeepers had set up their stalls, school children's were eating their Tiffin in sweaty uniforms and monkey snatches their food from their hands. After Europeans, Portuguese, French and British came to India, they started their business. They bring lots of cargos from the ships, like wooden trunks, silks, linens, table clothes, furniture and other heavy items.

Gabriel had explained his story, when he got lost and about the dark nights at sea. He also explained about the caste in India, how different people speak different languages and worshiped different Gods also. As Gabriel had joined the East India Company so for him it was like little Manhattan. Hannah came in a cargo with her husband and two junior clerks. It was the time of violence and disturbance between political and economic activity when Hannah arrived in India. But her important and primary concern was to found a peaceful and meaningful life. As soon as she walked on the side of the Coromandel Coast she starts feel the sense of belongingness.

Most of the time Gabriel keeps himself busy in seeing things. Hannah saw at the Coromandel that Tamil boatmen's mass of Gold and silver were sharply observed by the customs officials in the service of the Mugal Emperor Aurangzeb. The company's factors, cash keepers and local merchants were bargaining like they were fighting in a war. The Emperor Aurangzeb's representative name was Nawab Haider Beg. He was the Governor of the Roorconda. It was the large suba or stale where English, French, Dutch, Portuguese were trading. Hannah had never seen lots of different colours, like silks, brocades, cottons etc. She had not seen so much people at the coastal area. The local employees were weaker than the Europeans.

She observed that Gabriel's behaviour have been changed after returning from the dead. He became more aggressive and angry. Hannah feels lost, for whom she came to India neglects her, this thing frustrated her. She thought that may be Gabriel had his own personal lust or obsession. Hannah spends her days in day dreams. She imagined her own house, which was white in colour, flowers, trees, insects etc. The Fort St. Sebastian had provided a house to Hannah which earlier belongs to Henry Hedges.

Hannah found a young serving girl at Henry's home. Her name was Bhagmati, which means, "Gift of god."(120) Hannah had written all the history of Henry, that he belongs to New Science and Humanism. He had a brilliant mind and passionate about extraordinary things. His interest towards India was acquisitive. After coming to India she feels surrounded herself by English men and women, her life become confined. They all wanted to show their Englishness. For them, "E for English, Extraordinary, Ethical."(127) At the coromandal they made the fort into little England and made their own code which was to "Excess in All the Things."(128) She spends her time with English women like Martha Ruxton, who was the wife of Cephus Prynne and Sarah Higginbotham, the second factor's wife. Both the women belonged to colonizer country. They had their superior life, command and respect among the local peoples of Coromandel. They had ordinary life and like to share or display the vulgarity of White men's life. For them 'bibis' was the main topic of conversation in White town. Hannah wanted from them just their gossips and that may be Gabriel Legge had found a bibi for himself that is why he did not spend much time with her. Hannah does not know the meaning of 'bibi', but later she understand that it means young native black girl who could be the servant of the English or the Muslim nawabs. She thought, the women of Coromandel are beautiful than English women so Englishmen were attracting towards them. In her loneliness she thought about sensuality. She started walking alone on the street especially on the Black Town. She wanted to observe black women's life and wanted to transform herself in Indian life style, tradition and religion.

Through Gabriel's diary Beigh found that it was deserted for him to leave Hannah with maid Bhagmati and spends difficult time with Cephus Prynne and Samuel Higginbotham.

After getting scuffled Gabriel spend his most of time in drinking and not in company reporting. He becomes hero among the Europeans who were not the company's employees. He spends his time with pirates, interloper, Freeman etc in the Suchikhanna. The Suchikhana was the social club Hall for importing meetings. Hannah believed that this new world had so many things to reveal but it shows us calm and peace. She was unable to understand Bhagmati as well.

Gabriel had a democratic thinking. He worked well with Indians rather than English people; it was Hannah's personal thinking. After spend much time in India she decided to let him (Gabriel) go in his pirated world. Hannah was not devastated by Gabriel's departure. He was not domestic person and always look forward. During his absence, Bhagmati becomes her close relative. They share their feelings and language. Hannah wanted to know about Lord Hanuman because she had heard so many things about Hanuman. "Bhagmati could neither read nor write, but she was so agile memorised and charismatic tongued."(171-172) Bhagmati recite the story of Hanuman to Hannah that he helped Prince Ram to save his wife Sita from the capture of Ten- Headed demon called Ravana. After listening to the story, she was happy that Gabriel was helping and fighting for the locals not for the firangis. After the story she was more captivated by Sita than of Hanuman. Sita's story consumes her. "In Bhagmati's honey- toned recitation Sita is the self- sacrificing ideal Hindu wife. But the space she assumes in Hannah's fantasies is of a woman impatient to test herself, to explore and survive in an alien world."(173-174)

Hannah's life somehow is like Sita's life. Hannah was adopted as Sita was adopted by King Janaka. As Sita banishes the comfortable life of court and started living in the forest. Hannah did the same thing with Gabriel Legge. The white circile around the hut was made by Lakhman to save Sita. For Hannah this white circle represents white Town. Gabriel started his own trading work at the Coromandel and he has his mistress. And one night a big cyclone came and everything has been destroyed Hannah thought that Gabriel has been drowned but thought that Gabriel has been drowned but through Beigh's research she comes to know that he saved himself. Hannah leaves the company's enclave with Bhagmati.

The story starts with Raja Jadav Singh, who was the king of Devgad. It was a place full of swamps, and jungle. It was hundred miles long and fifty miles wide. His father was the follower of Hindu and taught him how to become a king. He got the knowledge of; Kautilya's Arthashastra, the Art of State Craft. He struck his coins in Sanskrit, not in Persian. Aurangzeb had defeated the shias and take over the coromandel coast of Roorconda. After depriving shias sultans, he expelled all Hindus from their assumed power. He appointed Haider Beg, as the Vassal- nawab.

Sudden Cyclone attack had destroyed the coromandal, there was no place for Hannah to live. Bhagmati helped Hannah to save her life from the angry mob. They had to move out before the pathway becomes flooded. Unfortunately the bridge broke, it was The Robert Clive Bridge but after the cyclone the bridge has broken and so many people were drowned, the bridge was called as, "the Bridge of Drowning."(216) When Hannah opened her eye, she found herself in hill fort. She asked that they are prisoner or not. Bagmati replied to her, "We are in Panpur Palace. We are the guests of Raja Jadav Singh, The Lion of Devgad. Panpur is his Vassal."(218) Mugals called him as the Rat of the coromandal and English people had a contact with the Mugal Emperor Aurangzeb.

According to the English people Muslims were intelligent than Hindus. "Hinduism a profound form of primitivism Muslims might be cruel, but true obscenity attached itself to Hindus."(219) Hindus have a lot of tradition boundaries, superstitions, lots of religious, they worshiped lots of images. Venn try to explain the true concept of Hinduism. They believe in cosmic or supernatural power who governed the Universe. Hannah was in the Hindu World. She could see the Panpur Fort, which was covered with high brick walls and a moat with full of crocodiles. Muslim soldiers and English men also were preparing the war against the king, they were aware that, "the Lion resumed the English widow."(221)

Hannah was affected by Raja Jadav Singh's glance. She knew the meaning of Singh. Which means Lion but she did not know the literal meaning. She had a confusion that the king had saved her from an angry people or it was another plan to use her just like Prynne, Higginbotham, Marquis, Pedda Timanna and at last Gabriel. They used her for their selfish ways. She thought that, "Was he merely using her, a *firangi* haj- insulters widow, to taunt his potent enemy, Aurangzeb the Grand Badshah."(226) Raja Jadav Singh permitted her to live or stay as long as she wants in the palace. Hannah's feeling of love was different between Gabriel and Raja. She feels different love towards the king. It was like immortal love for Hannah. Hannah entered into the world of romance. She falls in love with Raja as her mother was. She was ready to abandon herself in front

of the Raja but it was love at first sight. It was true love for Hannah but not for Raja Jadav Singh. He takes Hannah as his White Bibi or mistress. Once again Hannah's life was going to be changed and transformed by the hands of Raja. The Nawab Haider Beg had a ruthless commander named Morad Farah, Haider Beg had send him for battle infidels. His attendants closed the river route. Ha had killed so many animals, birds. His cruelty cross the limits, he had assaulted farmers, their wives and children. But Raja Jadav Singh had no response. Victims started coming at the Panpur Fort to speak their problems.

When Hannah saw the condition of the people she became speechless and thoughtless, it was horrible scene for her. She was unable to think anything like this. "She had not been raised in a world of savagery, not on the scale of India. The vast inequality, as well as the injustice and superstitions of India, seemed to her unnatural and unbearable."(237) Hannah wishes to being humiliated by the victims. She feels regret and ashamed of her happiness. She feels responsible for all this. "She could not imagine their survival, their future, nor her possible connection to any of them, and not seeing herself or her lover belonging with them, she would have scourged them from the face of the earth."(237)

Bhagmati was also facing the problem she had been beaten by them brutally. Victims had no honour, protection and peace. For them peace was like a curse. Hannah started imagining her past where her mother committed the same crime as she had done at Coromandel coast. King's loyal persons were killed by the army. He sent a message to the Englishmen for help but Englishmen were loyal towards the Nawab. The Emperor did not stop here. They reached Devgad's palace and captured it, destroyed so many temples and took pearl stone from king's mother. Hannah felt alien in the fort of Panpur and felt weak before the enemy. Jadav Singh makes an agreement with them in exchange for Panpur Fort. He gave, "fifteen chests of gold, twenty chests of silver and a cash tribute of eight lakhs- eight hundred thousand rupees to Morad Farah."(240) Jadav Singh had taken Bhagmati with his huge army. Hannah could see upon his face that he wanted to defend his people, he knew only his duty to lead the army and fight. Hannah heard the sound of, "Jai Ram! Jai Devgad! Jai Singh! (244)

As Hannah saw the war first time, it was full of arrows, spears, swords etc. Lots of warriors were dying, fields was full of dead bodies and blood. She saw Morad Farah seated upon the Elephant. Fighters were dying at the side of Raja Jadav Singh. After living for a long time in India she has realized that behind every pleasure has a cruel thing or side. Hannah was captured by Morad's elephant. It lifted her up where Morad Farah was seated. He asked her about the Raja but she also did not know about him. Raja's body was founded by them with his white horse and Bhagmati. Hannah has hidden the long dagger in her Sari, she used the opportunity and put the dagger into Morad Farah's muscle. Now she becomes the real commander of the big beast animal. She took the position and ordered to lift the Raja's unconscious body at the howdah platform. They climbed on the elephant and started moving ascending to the guidance of Bhagmati.

They reached at the Devgad palace with stolen elephant. Hannah had taken her wounded lover's body. The queen mother ordered her servant to put her son's body in her palace, she order Hannah to put away her hands because she was the one who is responsible for Raja's death and she has polluted his caste as well. But Hannah refused to do so. The queen mother expressed her feeling into her own language that Hannah brought bad luck for the king. Bhagmati translated it for Hannah, she told to the queen that how Hannah had killed the General and brought the king from the field. But the queen mother blamed her to kill the king and his enemies. She said, "Let him die in peace... this woman has taken his manhood. He has become a woman, so let him die in a woman's palace."(251) Hannah wanted to make him alive so with the surgical skill power she started sewing his body. During this time she was thinking about her past time which she had spend with the king that how he read the Gita for her, sing and played music for her. She learnt from the Gita that, "There is no greater good for a warrior than to fight in righteous war."(254) As Hannah was not his wife but just a bibi had no right to do anything. She thought and compared herself with Gabriel's black bibi who, "had seized happiness for Gabriel and for herself; a bibi had the power to laugh in the face of a firangi wife."(254) Hannah thought that she was the one who is responsible for having the war between Aurangzeb and the king. After five days, the king awoke but he lost his one arm, it was bad for the whole palace because helpless king has no use for any kingdom. The king said that, "When a tiger grows old, the younger ones must drive him out."(255)

Hannah tried to convince him to go home with her but he refused her proposal. Hannah told her story that how she came here, how her family member changed themselves, how she married to an English man and become widow now she become his bibi in a Sari.

She said that change is part of our life. She also told him that she was carrying his child but for the king, leading his soldiers and fighting was prime duty. He accepted his mistake that he was busy in a passionate life with her and makes him to forget about his public service and fighting war. She diverted his attention and becomes the main reason behind the destruction of the kingdom. He said that she can live in the palace as much as she wants. Hannah was the only woman, a pregnant white woman, who had the courage to end the war. As the story told that she also refused the proposal of king and went in the battle to persuade peace. She was captured by Aurangzeb's army with her maid Bhagmati, because had killed his very important man, Morad Farah. But Aurangzeb did not wanted to kill her, he was impressed by her determination and her loyalty towards the king. Aurangzeb said, "As woman serves man, man serves the will of God. You have placed yourself where no woman has a right to be. I have decided to be merciful and return you to your people."(267) but Hannah did not want this, she saw the big army who were preparing themselves for the great war between the Emperor and the king. She was also aware of the Raja's condition.

Hannah did not know that why he came here and wanted to kill the King. She blamed him that he is lustful for vengeance, for gold and diamonds. She has lost everything and had no desire for herself. She wanted to confess him not to fight and expressed her feeling towards the king:

"I have come late in my life to the feeling of love. Love for a man, love for a place, love for people. They are not Devgad people or Roopconda people, not Hindu people or Muslim people, not Sunni or Shia, Priests or untouchables, servants or kings. If all is equal in the eye of Brahma as the Hindu say, if Allah is all- seeing and all merciful as you say, then who has committed atrocities on the children, the women, and the old people?"(268)

The Emperor was impressed with her attitude he always send her many precious gifts but Hannah refused to accept it. He wanted to give her pearls and call her "precious- as- Pearl"(270) Both Bhagmati and Hannah had a mission to stop the war but they failed to stop it. Aurangzeb decides not to move from his plan and after killing he wanted to convert Raja's kingdom in his empire. When Raja was killed in the war, Hannah again started live in Salem with her daughter and the pearl which was given by Aurangzeb to her.

Beigh Master has taken one year and a half to assemble the notes upon the History of Aurangzeb, Hannah and the Raja. Historians found that Devgad battle was the Emperor's last battle and he won the war/victory. Beigh has narrated the story with the help of five hundred books, she had searched Hannah's life story. Through this search Beigh had searched her own self. She also found that she had a blood relationship with Hannah. And shows that Hannah was the Salem bibi, she keep changes her name like Hannah Easton, then becomes Fitch Legge, then Hannah become Salem bibi.

In early novels of Bharati Mukerjee, the protagonist's journey is usually for the West. But in The Holder of the World, a White Puritan woman came to East and changes herself. Here we found, transformation and migration but in the opposite direction. Hannah is quite different. She loves her needle work and later she uses this skill in surgery.

Hannah like other protagonist keeps busy herself in day- dreaming. Most of the time she likes to sit alone or writes memoirs. She has nothing to do except this work. When Hubert came in her life she feels new desire. Hubert was the one who encourages her hidden talent. Hannah did not accept her sudden departure and could not believe that India will change her life forever.

Raja Jadav Singh gives her passion, pleasure and possibilities towards life. He gives her those things which Gabriel did not give her. Hannah received every little thought of Jadav Singh. Before him nobody gives her importance and love. Jadav Singh's death makes her realize about Indian values and morality. And after getting this new experience, she confronts Aurangzeb and did not receive his superiority, his gift of pearls.

The Holder of the World is not only a historical novel but also a novel of expatriation because Hannah faces geographical as well as cultural diversities after coming to India. Bharati Mukherjee beautifully uses her skill to present this novel from the present to the past, the 17th and the early 18th century. And it is quite difficult to understand the novel only one reading. The title of the novel, *The Holder of the World* is taken from Alamgir, it was the name of Aurangzeb and *The Holder of the World* is the literal meaning of Alamgir.

The story has been started by Beigh Master's search for, 'The Emperor's Tear' and ends with the Hannah's life story. Hannah's story makes her obsessed more than diamond and wanted to unravel the mystery of 'The Emperor's Tear.'

In the novel whatever we come to know about Hannah, we get it through Beigh Master. It was shaped through her own culture. As Beigh had said that Hannah was writing her history and it was quite true from the angle of socio- cultural perspective. Beigh Master had a desire for *The Emperor's Tear*. She comes across a series of Mughal time miniature paintings. In which a yellow haired woman was considered as the legendary Salem Bibi. Beigh also found that in another painting, same woman was holding the Emperor's Tear. Beigh's inner voice told her that the woman in the painting was Hannah Easton and later she became the Salem Bibi. Beigh started her research upon the Emperor's Tear which was disappeared, upon Hannah's life who changed herself into Salem Bibi and last decided to come back to England after having an affair with Hindu Raja and facing the war between the Raja and the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb.

Beigh wanted to display Hannah's fabulous life that belongs to Colonial New England. Both Hannah and Beigh had a great passion to transform their life. Hannah falls in love with an Indian, like her mother. Hannah and her mother decided to take Indian culture than Puritan society. Somehow like Hannah, Beigh also had a little interest in Indian culture and life.

She knew it very well that the king did not love her, he gave her pleasure with little possibilities and Hannah was ready to abandon her English world because during the colonial time British ruled over the lives of Indians. But here a Black ruled over the White and she was ready to sacrifice her life for him. She embraces east world, Indian values and morality. To save her Indian lover, she was ready to confront with Emperor Aurangzeb. Aurangzeb shows his superiority to give her pearls. After fulfilling her duty, at the end she returned to Salem with the passionate memory of her Indian lover, her dutiful maid Bhagmati and most precious pearl which was her daughter, 'Black Pearl'.

Hannah Easton had chosen the unfulfilled life. She wanted to spend her life as a wife of a man from another race or an alien. She has a desire which cannot be expressed in puritan society and tried to express her feeling through embroidery work. After listening the story of East country by her husband Gabriel, she cannot detach herself from Indians. Although she lives among English men and women but she was too much eager to transform herself with Indians. She had tried everything to merge herself with Hindu Culture but she was rejected by Indian Culture because of her white colour and different culture.

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