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AN EXPLORATION OF LINKAGE OF INDIAN MYTHOLOGY IN BHARATI MUKHERJEE'S JASMINE AND THE HOLDER OF THE WORLD

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Abstract:-The cultural make-up of the society generally reflects through the myths as they portray "a pattern of thinking which represents the collective unconscious of that particular culture" (Gandhy 76). India is a big storehouse of such myths. Indian epics like *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* are the best examples of it. The major intention of myths is to entertain and teach morality to the society. In short, myths are sacred stories on which the social norms rested.

Keywords: Mythology, society, Indian socio-cultural.

INTRODUCTION:

Moreover, Indian socio-cultural life rests on Dharma that means religion. It generally connects people under certain moral behavioral pattern. The Hindu religion is based on the belief in one absolute, timeless unending source of all creation. However, this one source is worshipped in the form of many gods, of which the three central ones are Brahma, the creator; Vishnu, the preserver; and Shiva, the destroyer.

Moreover, in Hinduism, a woman is expected to follow her *Dharma*, which has more to do with her duties as a daughter, wife and mother. Indian mythic women like Sita, Savitri, Draupadi, Kunti, Satyabhama, Urmila, et.al. are ideal icons for our womanhood. It emphasizes that woman should be compassionate and chaste as Sita, she should be *pativrata* as Savitri, she should be silent like Draupadi, she should be endurable like Kunti, she should be pure as Satyabhama, she should be passive like Urmila etc. Thus, these iconic women are model for our womanhood. Based on these myths and mythical women, the society forms certain rule and restriction on women. The society expects the same behavioral pattern from a woman. If the woman fails to fulfill such moral codes, she is considered as impure or faithless. Thus, by enforcing moral duties on women, especially in patriarchy, the society has been restricting women's freedom and humanitarian rights.

While comparing to the other Indian women writers, it seems that Bharati Mukherjee treats third world subjects somewhat differently. Her projection of "new woman" in the "new country" shows her revolutionary stance. She uses native myths in order to reconstruct them according to her intended intension. Her own experiences of migration, expatriation and immigration as well as her inter-cultural married life offer her an opportunity to deal with migrant's world. The psychological journey from expatriate Indian to immigrant American is linked to her physical voyage from India to Canada to America. Her writing strictly deals with her personal experiences of being migrant, of caught between the two lands and culture. She portrays culturally distanced migrants, their psyche, nostalgia, suffering, alienation, trauma along with migrants' desire to assimilate in the adopted land and culture. Being one of the prominent members of diaspora community, she deals with the cross-cultural relationship of the native and the alien land. She uses native myths in American contexts and thus destructs, and reconstructs it begetting "hyphenated mythology" (Kain 152).

In the present research paper the modest attempt has been made to study deconstruction of the native myths in the diaspora and thereby to pursue the cultural harms affected to the national culture through the fictional narratives of Bharati Mukherjee, especially in her two novels namely, *Jasmine and The Holder of the World*.

The well-known and most readable novel *Jasmine* is published in 1989, nine years after Mukherjee's move to America. It is a story of Indian peasant girl who successfully migrates to the foreign land. The narrative moves back and forth in the past and the present by depicting Jasmine's Indian life up to marriage and her widowhood life in America. It is a story of the transformation of Indian village girl into American young woman.

The novel opens with twenty-four year old widow's life in Baden, Iowa who recalls the astrologer's prediction of her

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fate when she was only seven years old. At the very outset, Jasmine's character becomes clear where she rejects to believe in the fate and luck and shouts at back on astrologer, "You're a crazy old man. You don't know what my future holds!" (01). It indicates her rebel against age-old traditions and customs and attempts to breakdown it. She believes in her own capacity, ability, and strength to transform the fate.

After shouting at the astrologer, the astrologer pushes her to the ground and she gets scar on her forehead. The scar on her forehead is taken by the family members as an obstacle for her marriage, but Jasmine takes it is as an extra achievement and says, "It's not a scar ... it's my third eye ... Now I'm a sage" (05). She compares her scar on the forehead with the third eye of God Shiva. Her comparison with the god Shiva, who is god of creation and destruction, lights on the ability to remake the world around her.

Accordingly, she destroys lives of the people around her. Directly or indirectly, she is responsible for her husband's, Prakash's, communal death in Amritsar. She finishes the life of the Half-Face imaging herself as a Kali, goddess of revenge. She alters happy life of Taylor Hayes, her partner in New York again she disturbs the life of Bud Ripplemayer, her lover. Apart from it, she destroys the traditional image of the third world women who generally considered as passive, submissive, and dependent. After destroying, she recreates new image of women as bold, active, revolutionary, and independent.

Moreover, the archetypal image of 'the third eye of Shiva' indicates her ability to look at the world having extra perspective, which nobody has. The 'third-eye' might be indicates her 'in-betweenness' of being Indian and American. Here, Jasmine starts to survive in-between the war of her fate and her will to change it. Thus, the writer has offered the strength and potency to her rebellious character Jasmine from initial stages of her life. Thus, the writer uses the Shiva myth to show the belief of the Indian traditional society and handles it from her own viewpoint.

Prakash's accidental death in communal riots forces her to be exile. Here, the prediction of astrologer, to be widow and exile, comes in truth. She decides to migrate from India to America to fulfill the incomplete desires of her late husband. Jasmine starts her journey without knowing future and without thinking about the future calamities. Her journey to the West is a shocking one for her family members and relatives, "A village girl, going alone to America, without job, husband, or papers?" However, Jasmine replies, "I must be mad! Certainly, I was. I told them I had sworn it before God. A matter of duty and honor" (97). She has a firm decision to complete the mission of her late husband, she says, "We had created life. Prakash had taken Jyoti and created Jasmine, and Jasmine would complete the mission of Prakash. Vijh & Wife. A vision had formed" (97).

Like all Indian wives, Jasmine takes an oath to devote her remaining life like 'sati' for her late husband. Actually, the Sati was a practice of Indian society in which the woman had to burn herself on the husband's funeral pyre. In short, it is self-immolation of the widow on the funeral pyre of her husband. In Indian society, unfortunately, it was celebrated as a holy practice. It shows wifely devotion and self-surrender following the dharma of "path hach parmeswar". It was strong religious belief of Hinduism. Actually, it was very bad practice celebrated by the society. The dark intention, of patriarchy, behind it was to preserve caste system of India. It is well known that that time was of child marriage and if in future that widow develops any illegal relationship with the person of another caste then it will be harmful to the society's unique identity and purity. To avoid such and other problems emerging due to this surplus woman the Dharma places certain codes of behaving, which are mostly suppresses and dehumanizes women. The act of balding head of widow is also supplementary to it.

Mukherjee criticizes such patriarchal rules and destructs myths also in order to renovate them according to the women's point of view. The writer's this treatment certainly harms to the established codes of culture and society. Her heroine, Jasmine, prefers to be sati of Prakash not by burning herself but by devoting her remaining life to fulfill incomplete desires of her late husband. Moreover, here the picture of the protagonist is not like typical Indian wives who are loyal to their husband after the death also. Jasmine prefers many life-partners to fulfill her material and romantic dreams. At lastly, she prefers to go with Taylor Hayes, ex-boyfriend, having pregnant with Bud Ripplemeyer, another lover. It indicates that the protagonist of Mukherjee is very different from Indian women, especially widow, who remains faithful throughout her life. Furthermore, Jasmine's reincarnation from Sati to Kali is also delineated in the novel. In this regard, Sheffali Desai observes,

"Kali is patron of Bengali Hindus. She is visualized as having red tongue, a triangle hanging out, as she's doing a dance of destruction of evil. In this dance she's got all these bleeding weapons – scimitars and scythes – in her hand, and she's wearing a garland of bleeding, severed, mangled heads. So I needed for Jasmine to have a red tongue.... Jasmine got only one weapon at hand so she cuts her tongue – a moment that's meant to be traumatic, motivating, and mythologizing: she turns into this goddess of destruction" (Sheffali Desai 140).

Like Kali, a goddess of destruction and reformation, Jasmine finishes the malevolence from the society by comparing herself with the Goddess Kali, destroyer of evil. The Goddess Kali symbolizes Jasmine's potency and vengeful attitude to destroy the evil from the society and a revolutionary attempt made by Indian widow into America. Malashri Lal takes the incident as "a crude symbolism for India overcoming the 'evil' forces in America" (Awasthi 1993:305). Jasmine's attempt of liberating herself by overcoming all the barriers is prompted by her will to live and continue her life. She tries to be fully American by burning her Indian baggage:

"My body was merely the shell, soon to be discarded. Then I could be reborn, debts and sins all paid for ... I buttoned up the jacket and sat by the fire with the first streaks of dawn, my first full American day, I walked out the front drive of the motel to the highway and began my journey, traveling light" (121).

Jasmine's entrance into the new land starts by traumatic and brutal experience of rape by deformed captain - Half-Face, in whose ship she enters into America. After the rape incident, she wants to kill herself but before that she checked herself and found that her mission is yet not over. She says, "I didn't feel the passionate embrace of lord Yama that could turn a kerosene

flame into a lover's care. I could not late my personal dishonor disrupt my mission. There would be plenty of time to die ... I extended my tongue and sliced it" (117-118).

Half-Face's treatment is a deeper wound for the woman of the third world, who struggle to preserve chastity and purity. Her bathing and slicing tongue are attempts of purifying. Despite of such a welcome, Jasmine courageously makes her mind to adopt new ways of life. Her decision of killing the rapist and not making suicide, like many other physically abused Indian girls, differentiate her from traditional-bound third-world women. The major change in her personality from devoted, silent Hindu-widow to the murderer comes due to Half-Face's abusive nature. After being raped by Half-Face, Jasmine extended her tongue and sliced it as an attempt of purifying. Later on she murdered that evil, she describes it as: "the room looked like a slaughterhouse. Blood had congealed on my hands, my chin, my breast. What a monstrous thing, what an infinitesimal thing, is the taking of human life; for the second time in three months, I was in a room with a slain man, my body bloodied. I was walking death. Death incarnate" (119).

No doubt, like all Indian women, initially Jasmine wants to kill herself but later on decides to finish the malevolence from the society and compares herself with the Goddess Kali, destroyer of the evil. The spiritual transformation of the heroine from silent, submissive devotee of Prakash to Goddess Kali indicates her spiritual transformation. The spiritual transformation of Jasmine led her to be a powerful woman. Her journey starts by intending to be 'Sati' of Prakash by devoting remaining life to fulfill incomplete desires or dreams of her late husband, but the situation forces her to be 'Kali', destroyer of evil.

Actually, Kali plays a significant role in feministic views as a goddess of strength and potency. She resembles power, freedom and equality for many women in the East as well as West. Kali is alone almost all Hindu deities, who has captured place in the Western land. Moreover, she is inspiration to liberate from patriarchy. She is symbolic motivation for female shakti.

Jasmine's full transformation from the victim of social evil into a revengeful criminal is a result of her imagining herself as the reincarnation of 'Kali', the Goddess of strength, which enables her to overcome her feebleness and destroy the evil. Apart from this, the Hindu religious belief of reincarnations is present in Jasmine, but it is handled from American point of view. Mukherjee points out in an interview with Alison B. Carb, "I believe that our souls can be reborn in another body, so the perspective I have about a single character's life is different from that of an American writer who believes that he only has one life. As a Hindu I believe in the existence of alternate realities, and this belief makes itself evident in my fiction".

Mukherjee's above ideology helps her to portray character of Jasmine more flexible and movable in the novel. Jasmine's life is a series of transformation and reincarnation; she lives many lives in a single life span. She has a faith in reincarnation and says,

"I tell her that yes, I am sure that I have been reborn several times, and that yes, some lives I can recall vividly... Yes,... I do believe ... we do keep revisiting the world. I have also traveled in time and space. It is possible" (126-127).

However, Jasmine rejects to believe on the astrologer's prediction of her fate, she believes on Swamis saying that human soul is eternal, the fire cannot burn it, water cannot drown it, winds cannot bend it. She says, "what if it is like a giant long-playing record with millions of tracks, each of them a complete circle with one diamond-sharp microscopic link to the next life, and the next, and only God to hear it all?" (126-127). Further Jasmine is also conscious that the fates are so intertwined in the modern world and a god cannot keep them straight (15).

Thus, the novel is a story of the different stages of being and becoming through complex and traumatic experiences at different situations. It is a tale of transformation in individual's mind-set and personality. Jasmine is presented as a successful immigrant, who has been wandering through many places: Hasnapur, Jullundhar, Florida, New York, Iowa and California by changing her names, such as: Jyoti, Jasmine, Jazzy, Jase, Jua-han and Jane and has indulged in affairs with many persons, like: Prakash, Taylor Hayes, Darrel, and Bud Ripplemeyer.

Thus, Mukherjee uses the native myths of Shiva and Kali to provide strength and potency to her new woman in the new world. Like Shiva, she destructs and reconstructs the world around her. Therefore, to compare with god Shiva is justifiable. Again, she kills the devil, Half-Face like goddess Kali, who kills evil is the society.

Mukherjee's next novel, *The Holder of the World*, is published in 1988. It deals with "the consciousness and relationship with American identity of those who are not securely of one ethnic group or the other, and that who are not African-American, who are not confidently Latin-American or Asian-American, but who are many, many different ethnicities together, which is the real America" (Interview with Byers-Pevitts). In the novel, she genuinely concerned with the new Diaspora culture. She successfully establishes the encounter of two distinct lands, the East and the West.

Mukherjee is well acquainted with the Indian community and so a number of major characters have been of Indian background. She is against multiculturalism, which might lead to dehumanization and ultimate lead to genocide. John K Hoppe rightly remarks that she is "plainly disinterested in the preservation of the cultures, the hallowing of tradition, obligations to the past; at least. She is not interested in the nostalgic aspects of such preservation" (136).

The cross-cultural conflict is more visible when Hannah used the myth of Indian culture to judge herself. India is a rich storehouse of myths and legends. Sita Myth is one of the important myths of India. She is ideal icon of womanhood for all married women in the society. Hannah compares herself with Sita form Ramayana. She knows that Sita crossed the white circle and suffered much. Therefore, she decides to remain within the protective magic circle she has drawn for herself. She feels herself attracted to the events in Sita's life. Hannah leads life somewhat similar to Sita.

"Sita was a foundling. The Fitches recovered her from their doorstep; a childless king, Janaka, had unearthed the girl infant with his plow and renamed her 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. And then, because of machinations against her husband, her life changes

abruptly. She has to choose between continuing her life in a palace wracked with malice, jealousy and intrigue or breaking away and trying out new surrounding and whatever they will bring" (174).

It seems that like Sita, who was not King Janaka's natural daughter, Hannah is not natural daughter of the Fitches. Sita accompanies her husband, Rama, in his exile in the forest. Hannah also accompanies Gabriel Legge in his move to India. However, Sita kept herself chaste by concentrating her heart on Rama throughout her long imprisonment in Lanka by Ravana. Hannah never thinks to be loyal to her husband who is dead now. She develops illegal sexual relationship with Raja Jadhav Singh of Devgad.

In Bhagamati's honey-toned recitation, Sita is the self-sacrificing ideal Hindu wife. But the shape she assumes in Hannah's fantasies is of a woman impatient to test herself, to explore and survive in an alien world (173-74). In this regard, Nalini Iyer observes,

"Bhagmati's story also stand in contrast to Sita's: Bhagmati was raped and immediately disowned by her family, whereas Sita was rejected later for the public's perception of her lack of chastity, and subsequently Bhagmati managed to survive by becoming an English factor's mistress. An important distinction between Sita and Hannah and Bhagmati is that neither Hannah nor Bhagmati abstained from forbidden sexual relationships, whereas the mythical Sita's chastity is a dominant cultural trope for ideal womanhood in the patriarchal Hindu culture. The crucial distinction between Hannah and Bhagmati is that of choice. Bhagmati's rape disempowers her in a culture that values virginity and chastity, whereas Hannah chooses to break social norms concerning interracial relationships and the power of women to choose their sexual partners. Both Hannah and Bhagmati appropriate and adapt Sita's story to reconcile and understand their narrativization and appropriation of Sita's story suggest that identity formation for a native woman and an immigrant woman are different because of cultural location and racial identity rather that a similar because of their shared identity as woman" (quot. in Nandini S. M. 2012: 116-117).

The writer makes it clear that Sita is the perfect wife who is self-sacrificing and self-effacing, and she wants to attack and critique the same. Geoffrey Kain rightly observes,

"the religious and mythic synthesis defines the progress of the narrative and informs the psyche of the central character, on the one hand, on the other, provides for us a thematic archetype that is unique because of its skillful blending of cultural traditions into what might be identified as "hyphenated mythology"" (151-52).

Hannah knows that she "had been transported to the outer side of the world" (104) and "getting there was important" (104). Hannah is quite ready to accept changes and challenges. It seems that there is a great gulf in-between mythical Sita and fictional Hannah. Hannah kills Morad Farrah in order to escape herself as well her lover Raja Jadhav Singh, but Sita cannot help herself to escape from Ravana's abduction. Moreover, both Sita and Rama were loyal to each other, but Gabriel and Hannah's case is different. The couple, Hannah and Gabriel, is disloyal, and self-satisfactory.

Thus, myths are place-bound and culture-bound. They are not applicable in the alien culture. Mukherjee compares her American protagonist with Indian 'Sita', who is ideal for all married women. Situating Hannah on the place of Sita, certainly, harms to the traditional bound Indian society and fractures the native culture. Furthermore, Aurangzeb's cruelty forced Hannah to compare him with Ravana, the demon-king of Lanka. She says that Aurangzeb was a demon king in Muslim disguise. In the light of the discussion, it seems clear that the encounter of the two alien cultures often results into the cultural fracture. Thus, situating Hannah or Bhagmati on the place of Sita, definitely, harms to the traditional-bound Indian society and culture.

However, Mukherjee firmly opines, "myths are told and retold in such a way as to buttress patriarchy" (Sheffali Desai: 140) and so her characters either reject Sita or reevaluate why Sita did what she did. Thus, she intends to make up her own myths. She says,

"I ... want to get away from a lot of the mythologies that were so genederist, that were created to reinforce patriarchy or the class system – not just caste system, but class system" (S Desai 136).

In short, her characters accept the dangers and take the risks "to make the leap into a truly new future" (Hoppe 138). Thus, the writer is looking for "every side to break down in some way and constantly create a new whole" (Sheffali Desai 142). Mukherjee's application of the native myths in the American environment certainly harms to the native culture and values. She intensely remakes the myths to change the established beliefs.

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