

LANGUAGE IN INDIA

Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow

Volume 12 : 3 March 2012

ISSN 1930-2940

Managing Editor: M. S. Thirumalai, Ph.D.

Editors: B. Mallikarjun, Ph.D.

Sam Mohanlal, Ph.D.

B. A. Sharada, Ph.D.

A. R. Fatihi, Ph.D.

Lakhan Gusain, Ph.D.

Jennifer Marie Bayer, Ph.D.

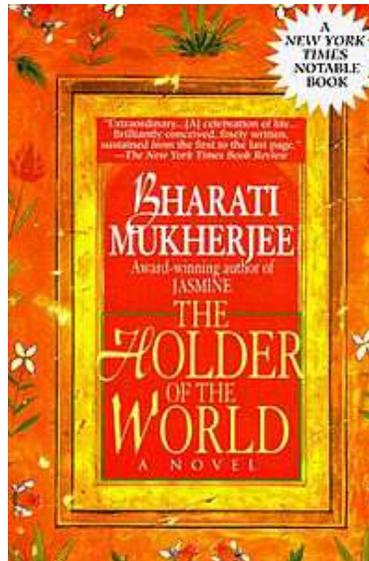
S. M. Ravichandran, Ph.D.

G. Baskaran, Ph.D.

L. Ramamoorthy, Ph.D.

Portrayal of Female Hero in Bharati Mukherjee's *The Holder of the World*

S. M. Nandini, M.A., B.Ed., M.Phil.



Archetypes of Heroism

Heroism is a matter of uprightness, the individuals becoming more and more truthful and honest at each stage of their mental development. Carol Pearson (1944) explicates the voyages of Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 3 March 2012

S. M. Nandini, M.A., B.Ed., M.Phil.

Portrayal of Female Hero in Bharati Mukherjee's *The Holder of the World*

399

female hero in her book *The Hero Within: Six Archetypes We Live By* (1989). In the Preface to the book she says that each person is governed by archetypal patterns and the process makes the person discover his/her uniqueness. And there is a rather predictable sequence of human development presided over respectively by the archetypes such as the Innocent, the Orphan, the Wanderer, the Warrior, the Martyr and the Magician. The progression is from suffering to self-definition, to struggle, to love. The journey is a matter of high level skills development. The hero's task always has been to bring new life to a dying culture. Upon his return the kingdom is magically transformed. This paper scrutinizes the psychic progression of Bharati Mukherjee's Female Hero Hannah Easton of *The Holder of the World* (1993), based on Carol Pearson's journey motif and taking the archetypes as Signifiers.

The Psychological Journey of the Female Hero

The psychical journey of the female hero not only leads to probing of the self but also makes her recognize the other side of her self. In this process of inward journey the protagonist has to encounter several hurdles and pitfalls. Carol Pearson asserts that the quest is available to every person and all have access to common archetypes that enhance personal development. The hero often begins as 'Innocent', but soon becomes 'Orphan', outcast, slave or stranger in a strange land.

Hannah, the protagonist of the novel *The Holder of the World*, becomes orphan after her mother's elopement with her Nipmuc lover. She is adopted by conventional Robert and Susannah Fitch of Salem. There she is brought up in an orthodox puritan environment. She discovers in herself an obsessive love of needle work. Even though she lost her mother at her young age she has a disturbing memory of her mother all the times. It is the memory of one psalm-singing night. Rebecca her mother sings psalm and her voice is quite strong and sweet. Hannah repeats the line in a quivery voice. Another incident she does not want to remember is her mother's elopement with her Nipmuc lover on one fine night leaving her child. She has witnessed her mother's fall. Hannah crosses the two stages, 'Innocent' and 'Orphan'. Pearson states:

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 3 March 2012

S. M. Nandini, M.A., B.Ed., M.Phil.

Portrayal of Female Hero in Bharati Mukherjee's *The Holder of the World*

The innocent lives in an unfallen world, a green Eden where life is sweet and all one's needs are met in an atmosphere of care and love. (25)

Whereas the Orphan is a disappointed idealist and the greater the ideals about the world the worse reality appears ... the dominant emotion of this world view is fear and its basic motivation is survival. (27)

Feelings of a Perfect Orphan

As a perfect Orphan, there is an awareness of pain and suffering in herself, which she could drown in an obsessive love of needle work. Her embroidery provided her way to give vent to her emotions and the conflict she tried hard to deny or suppress. Apart from needle work, she is also trained in doing nursing work. "washing and bandaging wounds, cleaning up pus and vomit, all this she found too passive, too mundane" (49). At that time she thinks of the beautiful moments with her mother in the forest but she keeps her memory of her mother a secret.

The arrival of Gabriel Legge in Salem, an event which ultimately alters Hannah's destiny, is more of a catalyst than a determining force in her life.

Consciously taking one's journey, setting out to confront the unknown, marks the beginning of life lived at a new level, for one thing, the Wanderer makes the radical assertion that life is not primarily suffering, it's an adventure. (51)

Wanderer Archetype

Hannah agrees to marry Gabriel Legge, an adventurer and sea farer because she visualizes liberation from a constrictive society. But her marriage life in London does not give the companionship she needs. Gabriel has neither sensuality nor patience to listen to Hannah. She seems to spend most of her time in her little cottage tending her garden and writing memoirs and letters to her friends in America. The female hero ultimately becomes alienated and suffers an irksome surrounding of captivity. Pearson makes a categorical remark: "For many people *alienation within captivity is the initial stage of wandering*" (59). She further observes: "The new feminist hero leaves her parents, husband, or lover and takes off too. For women, leaving the Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 3 March 2012

S. M. Nandini, M.A., B.Ed., M.Phil.

Portrayal of Female Hero in Bharati Mukherjee's *The Holder of the World*

husband, lover, or family is a recurrent form of the Wanderer archetype in contemporary times that Erica Jong writes in *How to Save Your Own Life*, “Leaving one’s husband is the only, the cosmic theme.”(59). Erica Jong’s (1942) sharp remark makes one ponder about the claustrophobic tendency of the modern women who are thrust in life to carry on a quest.

Arrival in India

Hannah’s arrival in India in 1695 is set against a period of tumultuous political and economic activity. But Hannah’s primary concern in this new world appears to peel away the layers of superficiality and social grace and dwell beneath it in a quest for a meaningful life. In fact, as soon as she steps on the shores of Coromandel Coast she feels an instinctive sense of belonging and decides that she does not “aspire to return to England upon the completion of Gabriel’s tour” (104).

When she comes to know about Gabriel’s unfaithfulness she makes up her mind to go from Coromandel for London. During the voyage due to unexpected heavy wind the boat turns and luckily Hannah manages to survive with the help of her friend cum servant maid Bhagmati. Finally they become the guest of Raja Jadav Singh, the king of Devgad. Hannah falls in love with Raja Jadav Singh and willingly becomes his bibi, suspending all morality, all expectations of conventional relationship. Jadav Singh offers Hannah a life of limitless possibilities, of passion and sensuous pleasures undreamt of in the English world. The eastern love makes her more emotional. She is aware of the transformation of her mentality, her whole personality. Ultimately she discovers that “the survivor is the one who improvises not follows the rules” (234). Hema Nair makes an assertive comment: “Hannah is a stunning creation, a bold mind striving for identity in strange surroundings, a timeless creature trying to survive in a rigid, inexorably defined society” (*The Toronto Review* 106).

Jadav Singh bundles Hannah and Bhagmati into one palanquin and servant disguise in royal Jama as Devgad’s Lion King and set them off to Devgad. At that time Bhagmati holds out the Raja’s dagger and gives it to Hannah. They find Raja Jadav Singh lying beside his dead white horse. Seeing his condition, Hannah becomes ferocious and thrusts the dagger into Morad

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 3 March 2012

S. M. Nandini, M.A., B.Ed., M.Phil.

Portrayal of Female Hero in Bharati Mukherjee’s *The Holder of the World*

Farah's exposed flesh. Hannah saves Raja's life but he is left with one arm. The strong Warrior archetype gives her the vitality to battle and cross over the obstacles. At last life inside her compels her to offer her life to end the war. She and Bhagmati enter the secret passage in the child-queen's palace in Devgad,

She flounced into the war camp with Bhagmati, demanding and expecting to get an audience with the Emperor at once so that she could free the two warrior-kings from their self-destructive obsession. (261)

Transformation of Hannah as Warrior Woman

The Warrior archetype is the definition of heroism in any culture. The major difference between the Wanderer and the Warrior is while the former identifies the dragon but induces the hero to avoid it, the later confronts the dragon as well as engages in fight with it. The Warrior archetype is assertive and willing to fight to defend oneself. Pearson observes: "The Warrior also helps us to speak out and to fight for what nourishes our minds, our hearts, and our souls and to vanquish those things that sap and deplete the human spirit by speaking the truth about them and by refusing to countenance them or to allow them into our lives" (75).

Hannah Easton buries her puritan past and emerges as a real fighter of life. The love she gets from Raja Jadav Singh makes her reckless and daring. Now she can face the 'holder of the world', the Alamgir the great Mughal Emperor Aurangazeb, with courage and confidence. 'Martyr' indicates the willing sacrifice that is surrendering one's self for the benefit of others. In a warrior culture, achievement is everything; yet apart from the achievements one likes to be valued as a person. People need to have a larger meaning to guide their actions, so that they do not come simply from a desire for personal power or money – this is the worth of a Martyr. The decision to care, even at the cost of self sacrifice, is a choice here for life and against despair.

Her plea before the emperor to stop the war against her lover is a superb piece of oratory.

I have come late in my life to the feeling of love. Love for a man, love for a place, love for a people. They are not Devgad people or Roorconda people, not Hindu

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 3 March 2012

S. M. Nandini, M.A., B.Ed., M.Phil.

Portrayal of Female Hero in Bharati Mukherjee's *The Holder of the World*

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 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 heart of men? (268)

Ultimately she wins the heart of “Alamgir” who hails her with a precious title: “for your white skin, for the luster of your spirit, for the one-in-a-lakh, I give you these pearls. I call you Precious-as-Pearl” (270). Beigh Masters, the narrator of the novel, passes the final judgment about Hannah’s character and personality: “Wherever she stayed . . . she would have changed history for she was one of those extraordinary lives through which history runs a four-lane highway” (189).

Martyr Archetype

From Hannah’s speech it is evident that ‘Martyr’ archetype in her in the final stage of the novel: “I speak one who has lost everything, who owns nothing, and who desires nothing for herself”(268).

Pearson cryptically sums up the merits of the ‘Martyr’ archetype:

The final lesson of the Martyr is to choose to give the gift of one’s life for the giving’s sake, knowing that life itself is its own reward and remembering that all the little deaths, the losses, in our lives always have brought with them transformation and new life, that actual deaths are not final but merely a more dramatic passage through into the unknown. Until we are willing to give our lives to life, we always will be possessed by martyrdom. We may reject sacrifice philosophically, but we will find that inevitably we martyr ourselves to our wandering, to our warrioring, and even to our magic-making. The more freely and fearlessly we give, the less it feels like sacrifice and the more it feels simply like an expression of who we are. That is how we learn that, ultimately, we all are one and that what binds us together is love. (115)

Discovering Identities in a Hostile World

Pearson makes yet another valid observation: “As Orphans, Wanderers, Martyrs, and Warriors, we find our identities in opposition to a world imaged as hostile and dangerous. As Magicians, we claim the universe as home, a friendly inviting place to be, and in doing so, we reclaim innocence. Our relationship with life, we learn, is like that with a potential lover” (117). The Magician sees life in a similar way to that of the ‘Innocent’, but claims more power. While Innocent will trust the universe to make things happen, the ‘Magician’ will be more active change-maker. “the archetype of the Magician teaches us about creation, about our capacity to bring into being what never was there before, about claiming our role as co creators of the universe” (116) observes Pearson. At this point the hero understands that the universe is not static but dynamic always in the process of being created all the time and since each human being is involved in that creation, all human beings are magicians.

Hannah is ready to protect her Indian lover in spite of his disassociation from her. The suspension of morality and the openness to new experiences make Hannah confront Aurangazeb and even bow to his gifts of Pearls as a symbol of his superiority and might. Her duty finally accomplished, she returns to Salem.

Heroism for this age requires us to take out journeys, to find the treasure of our true selves, and to share that treasure with community as a whole—through doing and being fully who we are. To the degree that we do so, our kingdoms are transformed (152).

When the hero returns, the kingdom is magically transformed. As the hero changes, the reality also changes. “the more we have the courage to be ourselves, the more change we have of living in communities that fit for us” (153).

Return Home

Hannah returns to her native land not as a reformed American but a rebel living on the fringes of society. Hannah finds final contentment and joy in the adopted land and it is the

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 3 March 2012

S. M. Nandini, M.A., B.Ed., M.Phil.

Portrayal of Female Hero in Bharati Mukherjee’s *The Holder of the World*

morality of this land that Hannah carries along with her. Hannah's life succeeds in questioning and discovering new ways of defining reality in a world, which was essentially orthodox. The novel ends with Hannah's return journey to Salem where she locates her mother in a mental asylum, brings up her 'black' daughter Pearl Singh and fearlessly stays in Salem all her life along with her mother's five half Nipmuc children. Even though the story ends in the same vein her whole personality undergoes a sea change during her restless moves from Salem to Stepney, Coromandel to Devgad and then back to Salem:

In one rainy season, Hannah Legge had gone from woolen clad English married woman on the Coromandel Coast to pregnant sari-wearing bibi of a raja; a murderer [she murders Morad Farah, one of the Great Generals of Aurangzeb], a widow, a peacemaker turned prisoner of the most powerful man in India . . . she wasn't Hannah anymore; she was Mukta, Bhagmati's word for "Pearl". (271)

The female Hero's Return can be traced in *The Holder of the World*. Bharati Mukherjee suggests such an aspect towards the end of the novel and thus presents the complete life cycle of the Female Hero.

References

Jong, Erica. *How to Save Your Own Life*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1977.

Mukherjee, Bharati. *The Holder of the World*. New York: Knopf, 1993.

Nair, Hema. "A Puritan in a Mughal Court" *The Toronto Review* 12, 2

(Winter- Spring) 1994: 106.

Pearson, Carol S. *The Hero Within: Six Archetypes We Live By*. San Francisco: Harper, 1989.

S. M. Nandini, M.A., B.Ed., M.Phil.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 3 March 2012

S. M. Nandini, M.A., B.Ed., M.Phil.

Portrayal of Female Hero in Bharati Mukherjee's *The Holder of the World*

Assistant Professor of English
Velammal College of Engineering and Technology
Madurai – 625 009
Tamilnadu
India
nandinism@gmail.com

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 3 March 2012

S. M. Nandini, M.A., B.Ed., M.Phil.

Portrayal of Female Hero in Bharati Mukherjee's *The Holder of the World*