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The maximalist transformation of the female immigrant identity in Bharati

Mukherjee's *Jasmine* and *The Holder of the World*

By

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Mukherjee begins her 1988 *New York Times* article “Immigrant Writing: Give Us Your Maximalists” by declaring to American readers, “I am one of you now,” heralding her new identity as an American citizen and American author (Mukherjee 1). Her article encompasses much of the argument regarding immigration that provides the framework for two novels she wrote after this article, *Jasmine* and *The Holder of the World*. These books mark the beginning of maximalism's presence in Mukherjee's writing, where she began to work against the minimalism, which she pinpoints as the reason that “‘American fiction’ has become synonymous with the mainstream, big-advance, well-promoted novel or story collection, and that that American fiction - clever, mannered, brittle - has lost the power to transform the world's imagination” (“Immigrant Writing”). The minimalism that Mukherjee writes against opts for simplistic sentence constructions and character descriptions that leave most of the story's content in what is not said. This writing focuses mostly on lacking, either in its content or its subject matter, which is primarily concerned with social criticism. Conversely, maximalism defines itself similarly to Mukherjee's description of Mughal paintings. Mukherjee has explained that her novels seek to emulate the Mughal painting by giving multiple characters equal significance and putting multiple narratives together so that they are inextricably connected to one another (Chen and Goudie 78). Similarly, maximalism places secondary characters and details of equal importance to main characters. Like Picasso's cubism, maximalism attempts to meld all angles into one image that attempts to be more reflective of its subject than more two dimensional views of cultural ancestry, especially that of American literature. Maximalism also provides enough overlapping elements to create a hybrid space, a “borderland” for immigrants and those labeled as Other. In this hybrid space immigrants

move beyond the unwashed Ellis Island stereotype to experience more freedom to pick and choose which elements of culture to retain or adopt. Mukherjee's "New America" (as opposed to one comprised of mostly European immigrants) is portrayed in *Jasmine* and *The Holder of the World* by female characters that embody many ideals Mukherjee ascribes to recent and mainly nonwhite immigrants:

[America is] a world, by definition, of doubles. Characters in this world have the density of 19th-century presences; like creations out of Balzac or Dickens, they pass before me leaving real footprints. They have all shed past lives and languages, and have traveled half the world in every direction to come here and begin again. They're bursting with stories, too many to begin telling. They've lived through centuries of history in a single lifetime--village-born, colonized, traditionally raised, educated. What they've assimilated in 30 years has taken the West 10 times that number of years to create. Time travel is a reality - I've seen it in my own life. Bionic Men and Women are living among us. (2)

Mukherjee's "Bionic Men and Women" in this quotation present a parallel concept to Haraway's "Manifesto for Cyborgs." Most literary critics who have written about *Jasmine* or *The Holder of the World* examined these works as an exploration of the American immigrant as a hybrid, usually citing Bhabha when doing so. Mukherjee, in this *New York Times* article, certainly encourages the concept of immigrant as hybrid by characterizing "New America" as existing in constant reinvention and the tangling of timelines.

This reinvention and entanglement of time and place are prominent in Mukherjee's books, especially in *Jasmine* and *The Holder of the World*, both in their plot and characters as well as the works she chooses to interweave thematically in her own text. Mukherjee creates a maximalist text by fusing her narratives with canonical works such as *The Scarlet Letter*, *Jane Eyre*, and *Pygmalion* as well as the *Ramayana* and other sources of Hindu mythology. What is analyzed as a rewriting or deconstruction of canonical texts is only part of the process. The texts are broken down and then introduced as a new incarnation, one that adapts itself to the "New America" of maximalist writing. A significant example of textual reincarnation is that of Hindu goddess Sita. Sita, Ram's wife in the *Ramayana*, has been upheld for generations in India as an ideal wife, though left-wing Hindus increasingly challenge this view of Sita, claiming it portrays a misogynist expectation for women. If we ignore the significance this text has in *The Holder of the World* and implicitly in *Jasmine*, we lose a tie between Indian and Western culture that would directly apply to the female characters in Mukherjee's fiction. Mukherjee uses the *Ramayana* and other Indian cultural artifacts in an American context to emphasize a tie between the two countries, and the Indian texts therefore have equal significance to the canonical Anglo-American works that are more widely studied in relation to these books.

Both novels have significant portions of the plot in India and America, with *Jasmine* depicting more time in America and *The Holder of the World* focusing more on colonial India. When the novels straddle both worlds, they highlight the immigrant woman's ideological liminality. In *Jasmine* the plot follows the titular character in the process of becoming an empowered individual more than it does her process of becoming

an American. It is noteworthy that Jasmine's process of “becoming” does not have a foreseeable end, even on the last page of the novel. *The Holder of the World* also centers on becoming American, but the storyline explores the early formation of the country's ideology through the transformation of a Puritan woman in colonial South India during the 17th century.

The storylines of both books are as “tangled” as the identities of their main characters, which complicates any attempt to categorize the characters of the book or the plot into cultural archetypes. Part of the “tangling” results from the narrative, which is often told from the present looking into the past, but not in chronological order. Multiple characters are blended with narrative elements from canonical works and Hindu mythology. Finally, primary characters in both books change their names frequently and in the process embody different incarnations of themselves, much like Hindu deities depicted in the Bhagvad Gita.

This “tangling” has several functions. First, it provides enough starts and stops to different storylines that although the narrative reaches a conclusion it seems inherently incomplete, which leads to greater focus on the “becoming” process than a particular arrival at the end. This lack of a definitive limitation to the storyline frustrates categorization of both the author and the characters into stereotypes. It also provides enough overlapping elements to create a hybrid space, a “borderland” for immigrants and those labeled as Other. In this hybrid space immigrants move beyond the unwashed Ellis Island stereotype to experience more freedom to pick and choose which elements of culture to retain or adopt. Mukherjee works to make a space for South Asian writers and

“maximalist” texts within the American literary canon by interweaving reinterpretations of canonical texts.

Jasmine and *The Holder of the World* are compared in this thesis in part because they were written during a shift in Bharati Mukherjee’s thinking about immigration from India to the West, which works as a foundation for her concept of “maximalism.” Her previous books, *Darkness* and *Wife*, contain criticism of Canadian multiculturalism and express little hope for Canadian acceptance of South Asian immigrants. Though Mukherjee cemented her reputation as a more exilic writer like Rushdie or Naipaul because of these early works, it was after her immigration to the United States that she began identifying herself as an immigrant writer.

In her interviews Mukherjee recognizes that she puts more stock in Indian immigrant women than their male counterparts. She explains women undergo a more “psychological transformation” whereas men aim to make money and return to India. *Jasmine* is the clearest example of an Indian woman undergoing this psychological transformation, but the white American-born main characters in *The Holder of the World* expand the “maximalism” she attributes to “New America” and plant it in “Old America” and the Puritan immigrant foundations of the nation.

Mukherjee uses female main characters to show the psychological transformation of the New American immigrant and the personal freedom that can be obtained through this process. This use of female characters and Mukherjee’s maximalist ideals are similar to Anzaldua’s description of the Mestiza. Gloria Anzaldua’s “Mestiza Consciousness” blends the impurity of political and social signification with a rhizomatic play that extends somewhat beyond Haraway’s cyborg myth into questions of agency. Anzaldua’s

argument seems to be that the Subaltern (or Other) can speak without being relegated to a social category “because the future depends on the breaking down of paradigms, it depends on the straddling of two or more cultures” (2214). This straddling acts as a shifting yet dependable “center” from which the Subaltern can work, because the main commonality is their hybrid identity (2215). A hybrid identity cannot be categorically defined, but maintains enough stability to act as an audible “voice” if necessary. As a Mestiza, Anzaldua has no country; she exists on the borderlands.

As self-conscious borderland dwellers, the female characters seem advanced in their self-awareness although their identities and names are in a constant state of flux. These characters endure a great deal of suffering while undergoing psychological transformation, but most of this suffering seems to stem from resistance to the hybrid identities they are forced to assume. By embracing the self-contradiction that lies within the cultural archetypes, these women adopt the instability upon which a rigid “us/them” structure of knowledge is formed and use that instability to escape a reified and often oppressive social identity.

Jasmine

The first chapter explores how *Jasmine* traces the positive internal and external influence of a maximalist perspective. The character of Jasmine exemplifies the ideal, “New American” maximalist, and her widely ranging cross continental experiences serve as a fable for the becoming process of a New American. My analysis of this novel traces Mukherjee's use of intertextual elements as well as tropes that center on the concept of the continual recreation of self. *Jasmine* serves as an introduction to several concepts in

Mukherjee's concept of agency, mainly the hybridized self that extends beyond the lines of social categorization. This novel explores the process of becoming a maximalist instead of providing a focus on this perspective's wider implications.

The Holder of the World

Though Mukherjee challenges the concept of canonical literature that excludes new immigrants in *Jasmine*, in *The Holder of the World* she begins to develop her criticisms of a simplified view of American cultural ancestry. Whereas *Jasmine* traced the transformational effect of maximalism through a first-hand experience, Mukherjee's overlapping of character experiences gives maximalism a wider scope. Likewise, intertextuality features itself more prominently in the text and incorporates more literary sources to emulate the polyphonic interaction of her characters across time. In this chapter I trace the concepts of rebirth, hybridity, and psychic violence introduced in the previous novel and shows how Mukherjee applies these concepts to national identity. Mukherjee moves beyond analyzing the individual maximalist to revealing the country's secret maximalist identity by expanding America's past to include groups marginalized by an exceptionalist reading of national heritage. Mukherjee pushes for a wider acceptance of the "New America" brought in by immigrants, women, and other marginalized groups by claiming America as a maximalist country through this text.

JASMINE

In her article “Immigrant Writers: Give Us Your Maximalists” Mukherjee describes the maximalist characters having “shed past lives and languages, and have traveled half the world in every direction to come here and begin again... They've lived through centuries of history in a single lifetime - village-born, colonized, traditionally raised, and educated” (Mukherjee 2). *Jasmine* traces this journey of the maximalist immigrant's transformation. The epigraph to *Jasmine*, taken from James' Gleick's *Chaos Theory*, serves as a statement for the maximalist perspective. It reads, “the new geometry mirrors a universe that is rough, not rounded, scabrous, not smooth, It is a geometry of the pitted, pocked, and broken up, the twisted, tangled, and intertwined” (1). Jasmine's journey epitomizes the tangled geometry of a maximalist universe through a cultural version of what Gleick observes in physics. Her journey characterizes the melding of Indian and American cultures and how a more tangled view of cultural identity can positively transform those who come into contact with it. In this way, Jasmine's transformation provides a map for the “new” maximalist American. Mukherjee describes this novel as a fable of the new immigrant experience, highlighting the psychic violence and self invention she describes as necessary for an immigrant to be successful in America. Likewise, many non-immigrant characters face the same pressure to endure psychic violence as they adapt to America's changing cultural and ideological landscape. Jasmine exemplifies the positive image of a “maximalist” immigrant woman in this fable as well as the transformative agent that encourages other characters to embrace their maximalist selves. She is “reincarnated” multiple times through the roles and names she adopts. Jasmine embraces what she comes to understand as American culture and finally

comes to recognize her own wants, which Mukherjee argues is a large accomplishment in the life of an Indian immigrant woman. Mukherjee interweaves cultural artifacts from India and America including film, literature, and cultural archetypes into the plot as well as some classical Western texts to mimic Jasmine's maximalist interpretation of her life. Tangling these artifacts together in the plot, as well as the tropes of Jasmine's continual process of resignification and rebirth, reinvents the meaning of these artifacts and, by extension, the cultures they have come to represent.

To trace the way Mukherjee entangles several texts to resignify their meaning within the context of the maximalized immigrant's transformation this chapter will be broken into sections in order to examine each element in more depth. First the analysis of intertextual elements in the novel will provide a contrast between the absence of the immigrant voice in the traditional canonical narrative and the agency afforded the immigrant through a hybridized, maximalist narrative. The intertextual portions provide a textual framework for a similarly tangled concept of psychological transformation that characterizes the maximalized American immigrant. It is within this outlining of Jasmine's psychological transformation that several tropes are employed to metaphorically represent her development into a self-actualized individual. The tropic analysis pairs similar tropes together, though often several of these concepts overlap within the text. The analysis of the complication of birth/death imagery through Jasmine's pregnancy, her rebirths through renaming, and her sage identity maps the ability of the maximalist immigrant to form their identity free from social categorization. Finally, the tropes of psychic violence and technology show the drastic process needed to sever from social categorization to attain personal agency.

Jasmine complicates and hybridizes the process of becoming American using intertextual elements. References to canonical texts often represent obstacles in Jasmine's struggle to separate herself from her postcolonial Indian identity and Ellis Island American narratives. Most of these stereotypical archetypes contrast with the underbelly of American life- the "day mummies", the farm workers, the refugees, and the illegal immigrants who exist in the liminal waiting room between East and West. Through intertextual elements Mukherjee examines the tension immigrants feel in the liminal space between cultures as well as the agency this betweenness affords them. The English texts also represent Jasmine's struggle learning English and the ability to apply English texts she reads to her own experiences. Jasmine's speaking a new language and acquiring new names becomes a severing process from Orientalism, an act of rebirth in some ways that is just as violent in its complete erasure of the past as her committed murder of Half-Face. Jasmine adopts America's narrative and by doing so transforms its meaning.

Mukherjee states in "Immigrant Writers: Give Us Your Maximalists" that "lacking a country, avoiding all the messiness of rebirth as an immigrant, eventually harms even the finest sensibility. The work becomes the country; the author tyrannizes his creation with a czarist arbitrariness" (Mukherjee 2). Haraway expresses a similar sentiment when regarding women of color, writing that "Cyborg writing must not be about the Fall, the imagination of a once-upon-a-time wholeness before language, before writing, before Man. Cyborg writing is about the power to survive, not on the basis of original innocence, but on the basis of seizing the tools to mark the world that marked them as other" (2293). Mukherjee resists the "before immigration" wholeness of an exilic

postcolonial writer living in America and instead becomes an author tracing the borders between cultures using intertextual elements. By showcasing immigrant journeys through her work, Mukherjee demonstrates the maximalist writing that she urges others to embrace, flouting nativism that “whispers to the initiated” (Mukherjee 3). Drake argues, in “Looting America: Bharati Mukherjee's Immigrant Narratives,” that Mukherjee's maximalist writing also rejects postcolonial writing that defines itself in contrast to dominant white urban America. Instead, Drake explains: “The struggle against historiocultural erasure and for collective voice that this group privileges is different from, though related to, Mukherjee's struggle to rewrite normative narratives of American identity through writing immigration stories about personal and cultural transformations” (Drake 66).

In order to move beyond the “normative narratives” of postcolonial India Mukherjee rewrites English influence through Jasmine's marriage to Prakash. Jasmine equates her husband to Henry Higgins, shown in Prakash's tendency to align modernizing concepts with Westernization, which eventually produces his desire to become American. Jasmine ends the “Jasmine” identity Prakash gives her through sati as soon as she arrives in America, counteracting his essentialist view of the West with a distinctively Indian act. The rape nullifies Prakash's idealistic view of the West as “progress” and since “Jasmine” was born with this view she must die with the idealism. From this act on, Jasmine becomes her own Professor Higgins and defies the patriarchal implications of the original text. Mukherjee uses *Pygmalion* not in a deconstructive sense but as an expansion upon the original text. Jasmine takes what she finds useful from the *Pygmalion* archetype and symbolically burns the rest.

Jasmine similarly expands upon *Jane Eyre* through her Jane Ripplemeyer incarnation, which picks up where the original text ended. “Jane” is pregnant with the Rochester figure's baby. Someone they thought they were protecting disables both Rochester and Bud due to actions. Harlan is one of Bud's clients and Rochester believes that Bertha's seclusion is for her own good. However, Bud's paraplegic comes from his unwillingness to recognize the economic pressure on Baden's farmers causes them to lash out at moneylenders. Jasmine's pregnancy is a product of artificial insemination, and it is implied that she does not love her “Rochester.” When she lives with Bud Jasmine becomes increasingly aware of his willful ignorance of class or race distinctions, and he keeps his ignorance in order to maintain the delusion that he is still “the pillar of Baden” (200). Like *Jane Eyre*, Jasmine serves as a moral beacon for the corrupt “Rochester.” After meeting Jasmine, Bud is transformed by his Orientalist interactions with Asia, which motive him to “make up for fifty years of 'selfishness'” (144). Du, the Vietnamese refugee who becomes their adopted son fills the role of the ward Adele, and he is ignored as much by Bud as Adele is by Rochester. Furthermore, as Rochester ignores Adele in order to forget his past sins, Du stands as a continual reminder of the fallout from the Vietnam War as a victim of the resulting political instability. Bud adopts Du presumptively to make up for the “selfishness” of his past, but metaphorically this reads as an emblem of America's tendency to assuage political guilt with charitable contributions. Bud's concept of America never changes despite the evidence in his surroundings, and he continually regards Du with suspicion. Through her incarnation as the dynamic and individualistic “Jane,” Jasmine eventually grows beyond the role of exoticized moral compass. As she explains at the end of the novel, “I am caught between

the promise of America and old-world dutifulness” (240). Though presumably she chooses the “promise of America” by leaving with Taylor at the end of the novel, Jasmine is unsure of her fate.

Mukherjee models the framework of the maximalist text by extending the narrative of Western female archetypes in *Jasmine*. Whereas minimalism in its material austerity highlights “the enigmatic relationship between what is present in a text and what is implied through absence” (Trussler 1), maximalism expands beyond established structures and fleshes out what minimalism merely implies. Jasmine embodies and complicates Indian and American cultural archetypes or tropes through her various incarnations just as Mukherjee's appropriation of canonical works rewrites the initiated that these texts whisper to.

Jasmine's gender categorizes her as more susceptible to psychological transformation under Mukherjee's ideology. Additionally, her status as pregnant woman establishes her as the ideal representation of the maximalist ideology in this “fable.” Pregnancy is a trope of transformation for female Indian protagonists in several of Mukherjee's novels, especially *The Holder of the World, Wife, and Jasmine*. The products of the pregnancies in *Jasmine and The Holder of the World* are half Indian and half American, and the ties between these two countries features strongly. In *Jasmine* the child is symbolically linked both with Jasmine's development and the development of the maximalist text. Jasmine tells her story through retrospect to give ample connection to the act of rebirth that she undergoes throughout the book. At the novel's end, Jasmine is in her last term of pregnancy but the baby's gender or any identifying marks have been kept hidden from the reader. This is not surprising since the novel's focus on rebirth naturally

frustrates the idea of a linear birth / death process and of a static identity. Kuldip Kaur Kuwahara observes, "the experience of reading the novel is that of holding connected and contradictory layers of consciousness simultaneously" (Kuwahara 2). It is difficult to pinpoint when each incarnation of Jasmine begins and ends, even with her insistence that "We murder who we were so we can rebirth ourselves in the image of dreams" (25). The reader never witnesses the birth of Jasmine's child just as they never witness her maintaining a stable identity. The narrative stays in the gestational stage because it is a fable about the development of a new America and not its final arrival. More significantly, because the narrative never enters a final conclusion or birth Jasmine is never presented with the necessity to adopt a stable sense of identity. Jasmine's identity, much like Jasmine's child, seems to be forever in the fetal stages of development.

Jasmine's rebirths as Jyoti/Jasmine/Kali/Jazzy/Jase/Jane represent stages in Jasmine's ever-changing self-identification process and the cultural influence she undertakes at each stage. When Jasmine visits a swami in an ashram after Prakash's death, he tells her that a person's highest mission is to create new life (97). She later realizes that the identity of Jasmine and the dream of Vijn and Wife are her versions of this "new life" (97). It is through this redefinition of "new life" that Jasmine gains enough agency to transform herself into a maximalist immigrant. The process of resignification in Jasmine's name changes does not stick because the group categorical identification's inner effects do not retain themselves in Jasmine's view of her identity. Jasmine's selves do not follow the concept of wholeness and often overlap; frustrating the power the signifier has over the signified. Reincarnation's heavy influence as a trope distinguishes Jasmine's narrative as maximalist since it does not follow the traditional American narrative's

logical, linear story arc. Hindu texts, namely for their focus on reincarnation and pluralistic deities, are the clearest Indian cultural influence on these rebirths. Jasmine, like the Bengali interpretation of Kali, encompasses birth and destruction at the same time. Her journey also reads as a realization of Hindu theological beliefs about the soul, as Carmen Wickramagamage illustrates in her analysis of *Jasmine*. Wickramagamage argues:

[Jasmine] presents her view of identity and culture as one that sometimes creatively reworks, but more often merely highlights, the emancipatory narrative of self and identity embedded within the Hindu culture... Jasmine's belief of provisional identity, then, merely reworks one of the basic tenets of Hinduism, which exalts the loss of 'I-ness' as the ultimate aim of all those who subscribe to the Hindu view of human existence. (174)

The loss of "I-ness" in Hindu culture, Wickramagamage adds, prescribes the eventual breakdown of "I" from "not-I", thus giving "cultural sanction to multiple reinscriptions of self that allow the migrant soul to be reborn in other bodies in other cultural spaces" (175). The text's tangled structure allows Jasmine the freedom to float between classic Western feminist female characters such as Jane Eyre, Eliza Doolittle and Calamity Jane to powerful Indian goddess Kali. This structure also prescribes the breakdown of cultural barriers in such a way that it nullifies the boundaries between American and Indian classic literature. Here Mukherjee provides not only a space for the Indian immigrant in the American canon, but also subtly makes the argument that Indian women do not

adhere to their passive Orientalized stereotype. She uses the pitcher as a visual representation of performative femininity within Hindu culture, namely due to its connection to water gathering (women's work) and the force needed to break it. Mukherjee enables Jasmine's maximalism to be seen as feminist in ways that defy both historical conceptions of women by breaking the "pitcher" that divides American and Indian feminine roles represented in these characters. Through interwoven identities of fictional women that gain agency through their ability to transform themselves, Mukherjee sets a literary precedent for Jasmine and therefore asserts her place as an American feminist character.

Wickramamage's analysis of Hindu interpretations of the soul provides a map for how the Hindu self-concept as a breakable pitcher gets translated into the American trope of the pioneer. As pioneers within American culture were seen to violently break with their past to explore new territories, the "self made man" trope of identity that encompasses the mythical pioneer experience becomes Jasmine's new totem. This trope emerges as early as Jasmine's youth in Hasnapur where she views "Seven Brides for Seven Brothers" and "Shane." Both films present an idealized depiction of the American west filled with rugged outlaws and lumberjacks stealing startlingly complicit women for their wives. Jasmine states that this version of America does not translate for her, but this early introduction of western mythology serves as a benchmark for her transformation.

Jasmine is Jane Russell or Calamity Jane in Bud's eyes, and this fits Mukherjee's characterization of the maximalist immigrant to some extent. Hoppe elaborates on the pioneer's role pioneer in *Jasmine* by stating that Mukherjee "forwards a distinction between 'pioneers' and pitiable others for whom attachments to personal and cultural

pasts foreclose possibilities. These pioneering characters undergo personal changes in their movements from culture to culture, changes that Mukherjee characterizes in the strongest terms” (Hoppe 1). Mukherjee insinuates that people like Jasmine and those who write about them are part of the country's established cultural framework by situating Jasmine in the American pioneer archetype. However, Calamity Jane's story is similar to Jasmine's in a way that is distinctively unflattering. Calamity Jane, like Jasmine, is idealized the same way that the American west is idealized. Jane Russell's depiction of the historical figure is glamorous, clever, and independent. In contrast, Calamity Jane did little of what her legend dictates and was in reality prone to prostitution, alcohol abuse, and was a single mother who laid claim to multiple husbands as well as multiple locations (224). Jasmine herself sees the darker side to this characterization, stating, “Bud courts me because I am an alien. I am darkness, mystery, inscrutability. The East plugs me into instant vitality and wisdom” (200). Bud's view of Jasmine's identity clashes against her name, showing that Bud does not view her as the American ideal as much as the Orientalized view of Eastern wisdom. When she is not afforded the pioneering identity she seeks in Baden, Jasmine moves on. She alludes to her appropriation of the pioneer archetype at the end of the novel by declaring, “Adventure, risk, transformation: the frontier is pushing indoors through the un-caulked windows” (240). Here Jasmine redefines the frontier as the promise of transformation and opportunity instead of a physical place while she retraces the early American pioneer's western route. Jasmine's psychological and physical adventures are entwined. Her appropriation of the Hindu sage archetype enables her to avoid the categorical restriction of the original Calamity Jane era pioneers and still retain characteristic of this role that allow her more agency.

What enables Jasmine to shift between identities without experiencing a physical death is her sage atman. The sage, or holy person, operates in a liminal space between worlds and therefore has the power to work beyond the standard perceptions of reality. Jasmine's journey gives her sage-like powers because she views others and herself from a distance. This ability gives her greater control over her destiny. Throughout her shifting between incarnations Jasmine keeps her "third eye" a scar she receives in the first chapter of the novel. Jasmine's mother explains to her that only the holiest sages develop eyes in the middle of their foreheads. This eye serves as an eye into an enlightened state, sometimes indicating clairvoyance or wisdom. Many mid-forehead markings on statues or on people are symbolic of the third eye. However, as with much of her other symbolism, Mukherjee uses the third eye as an alternative meaning. In the Hindu religion it is said that if Shiva opens his third eye the physical world will cease to exist. Kuwahara indicates that this mark serves as a reminder of the power of fate as well as the symbol of Jasmine's defiance of that destiny. While the astrologer views the mark as an indicator of her destructive fate, Jasmine chooses to resignify the mark as her power to see her own path. The first chapter introduces the conflict between the Hindu "cultural sanction to multiple reinscriptions of self" (Wickramamage 175) Jasmine desires and the stagnant, seemingly tragic lives most Hindu Indian women are fated to in Hasnapur. The astrologer recognizes Jasmine as a woman doomed to have little power over her own life. The widow in traditional Hindu culture becomes only a shell, shown by their removal from social interaction and their forced impoverishment. In Hasnapur being assigned the widow's fate is only better than that of the outcast. Jasmine ends up both. Sati, the ritualistic suicide of a woman on her husband's funeral pyre, is seen as a comparatively

positive destiny. However, Mukherjee frames what is understood to be a doomed fate to a fate of transformation and hope. Widowhood, the life of an exile in a foreign land, and sati all serve to gain Jasmine more agency over her destiny. Sati used to obtain agency subverts the objectification of Indian women by both India and the West.

In *Jasmine* both physical and psychic violence reject the linear, logical and traditionally Western concepts of stable identity and control over destiny. Sati has also become a point of focus in theoretical discussions on the Orientalizing of Indian culture and undergoes “tangling” similar to other cultural artifacts. Both Said and Spivak cite sati as a major example of Western cultural misrecognition, namely for the English colonizers' tendency to forbid sati as it was seen as a barbaric act. Mukherjee, like Said and Spivak, asserts through *Jasmine* that sati can act as a vehicle for positive change for women, especially when it can be performed as an act of personal freedom or personal expression. Timothy Ruppel argues, “the narrative structure [of *Jasmine*] is that of a journey and passage, a liminal state, which places the third world inside the first world. In the process, the narrator must continually remake herself to avoid the threat posed by enforced identity” (184). In *Jasmine*, sati functions as a symbolic act that enables Jasmine to sever the restrictions tied to Indian selfhood to embrace the opportunities she identifies in America. Men cannot perform sati and therefore do not have the vehicle necessary to be reborn into a “new” American. However, Jasmine can never completely adopt the idealized maximalist American identity and totally immolate her Indian self. Fanon suggests in *Black Skin, White Masks* to do so would be to fully accept Western culture and white colonial identity as superior to anything African, or in this case Eastern (Fanon

2). Jasmine would be Orientalizing her own past by viewing her Americanization as a strict evolution.

The ritualistic sati also exemplifies Mukherjee's tendency to use violence to enable characters' drastic change within their lives. Accompanying Jasmine's assertion that it is essential to "murder who we are" to achieve personal dreams, Mukherjee also states that psychic violence is a necessary ingredient for self-transformation. Critic Samir Dayal contends that the violence in *Jasmine* is necessary to effectively reject Jasmine's previous trope of dutiful Indian wife. He states that Jasmine "learns to resist a final or simple reversion to the ossified stereotype of the feudal Indian wife and to subvert the West's desire to territorialize her, to render familiar her strangeness" (Dayal 61). Violence plays a pivotal role in Jasmine's life starting from when she is almost strangled by her mother post delivery (40). The first description of Jasmine's mother is that of a "sniper" which highlights inherent violence in northern India during this time and also the subjugation of Indian women within Guarajati society. The Indian violence in this novel is much more openly recognized than violence in rural Iowa. Nonetheless, the violence erupting from social tension in both American and Indian rural landscapes accentuates similarities between their cultures. Mukherjee plays with parallelism among her characters in many of her novels regardless of their culture, implying that the recipe for positive change is the same on any continent. The role of violence in this novel is not an exception. Violence works as a rejection of stereotypes and a vehicle for transformation for some characters. It also works as a consequence for those who resist transformative change. Both Jasmine's father and Bud meet violent fates that they fail to predict because of their insistence on clinging to idealized pasts. Jasmine's father, "Pitaji" surrounds himself with

reminders of Lahore, which is where he lived before the violence of the Indian partition riots. Bud ignores the frustration of the farmers he provides loans for in order to avoid recognizing the decline of the Midwest small family farm. Both men are in a position of power in their communities and refuse to sever themselves from their pasts using psychic violence. They refuse to admit the death of their old lives and consequently become victims of violence performed by those representing the present social reality. For Pitaji the violent confrontation with reality comes in the form of a bull suddenly goring him to death. Jasmine explains that her father planned out how he will die, which situates him as one in total control of his fate (58). His sudden death exhibits the faulty thinking in this approach, one that stands in contrast to the maximalist fable that envelops Jasmine.

The novel as a maximalist fable rejects nostalgia, which can be seen through Jasmine's criticism of Pitaji's efforts to hold on to his Lahori life. ". . . That pitcher is broken," she says, referring to his Lahori past, "It is the same air this side as that. He'll never see Lahore again and I never have. Only a fool would let it rule his life" (43). One of the most pervasive representations of stagnancy is the dog carcass that Jasmine encounters in the first chapter. Jasmine's interaction with the dog carcass in the river also involves four of the instances of the uncanny that literary critic David Punter describes in "The Uncanny." These instances further elucidate the connection between lack of movement and death. Punter lists "strange kinds of repetition" involving doubling or *deja vu*, a sense that things are fated to happen, anthropomorphism, and animism as instances of the uncanny, and each of these manifestations of the uncanny occurs surrounding the image of the dog's corpse (Punter 131). The sight of the decaying dog in a river stays with Jasmine throughout the book in *unheimlich* reminders of the astrologer's prediction. This

image's re-emergence in various forms ties together Jasmine's old and new countries in a decidedly Gothic way as the physical and cultural landscape she encounters gives the impression that she has been there before. It is the symbol of the stagnancy that prevents Professorji, Pitaji, Bud, and Darrel from moving beyond their old definitions of themselves even when holding on to these selves may mean death. The dog represents to Jasmine what she does not want to become, to the extent that she smells a glass of water for signs of the stench of the river.

The rotten dog carcass stays with Jasmine because to her this image is a symbol of her worst fate. Hoppe states “this image of stasis, passivity, and rot establishes her negative horizon, the 'fate' she will succeed in avoiding. Mukherjee establishes this mortal stasis as a component of the past, and it becomes Jasmine's goal to move away from the past at all costs, including the cost of self-knowledge, a stable identity” (140). The dog's eyes are consumed, and Jasmine not only equates eyes with seeing the world around her but also a “third eye” having agency over her own future. The rotten body contrasts with the jasmine flowers Jasmine is often compared to, “small and sweet and heady” (77). The river and the dog are more closely related to Jasmine's father's sarcastic description of her as “a lotus blooming in cow dung” (46). Escaping the dog becomes Jasmine's motive, and presents a reason why stability seems so threatening to her. For Jasmine, “experience must be forgotten, or else it will kill” (33). Characters such as Pitaji and Bud serve as reminders that clinging to past experiences can lead to a fatal lack of movement.

The symbolic presence of the dog is also repeated in Jasmine's first violent act, which she performs so closely to the first instance of her speaking up for her own fate

that the two seem inextricably connected. The first time the symbol of the dog re-emerges is three days before Masterji, the Sikh English instructor, comes to ask Jasmine's father if she can continue her education instead of marrying a local widower. The women of the village are out to relieve themselves in the fields, and this is described as “the most companionable time” among the women. During this time the women of the village talk about sex and make jokes that were not deemed proper for women to make elsewhere. Jasmine explains that men would hide in the bushes and watch, but as long as the women were together they did not come close (55). Though the men do not typically approach, there is still some fear of them as incidents of “rape, ruin, and shame” were known to happen (55). The women here feel power in their numbers, and thus realize the freedom to speak openly in a way that they would not normally experience in their village. The emergence of the rabid dog in this environment exhibits a threat to autonomy outside of the Hasnapuri gender hierarchy. Descriptions of this particular dog are personified in its described size, its manner of moving, its relative hairlessness and its pink skin (55). The seemingly human behavior and appearance of the dog matches the threat of violent male behavior which the women are traditionally powerless to prevent. The dog's presence in a crowd of trembling, mostly naked women also holds the threat of sexual violence, the “rape, ruin, and shame” alluded to earlier.

The threatening presence of dog imagery complicates the use of violence in *Jasmine*. The Sikh extremist, Sukhwinder, is described in ways similar to the rabid dog when he leaves a bomb-laden boom box outside of a sari shop that Jasmine later argues was meant for her. Jasmine explains earlier that the Khalsa Lions had taken to dressing like Hindus in order to get closer to their targets. For this reason Sukhwinder has the

partially bald, pink-faced look of the mad dog - "his hair was burry [sic] short, his face baby smooth" (93). The narrator introduces Sukhwinder the night she hears her husband Prakash's voice for the first time, and the Sikh's presence bookends their relationship. He is often presented as the foil to Prakash, who values modernity and sees traditional views of women as "feudalism" (77). In this way Prakash and Sukhwinder present the war between Jasmine's will and her fate. Sukhwinder is a proxy for the grotesque of the dog in urban areas such as New York and Jullundhar, where the dog cannot reach her. He calls Hindu women "bloodsucking banyans", tying in the imagery of the astrologer's banyan tree where the "she-ghosts" of Hansapur lay trapped. Jasmine hears Sukhwinder shout, "Prostitutes! Whores!" before he runs off, which is a statement meant for her. She survives and her husband Prakash dies, fulfilling the first part of the astrologer's prediction (93). The imagery of the dog reappears as Jasmine seems to be escaping her fate to frustrate her attempts at control and individual freedom. Jasmine dislikes dogs because they represent the factions within India, and eventually America that try to forcibly preserve traditional and often oppressive mores. It is no coincidence that the first time Jasmine is reminded of her assigned place in society is also the first time the dog appears.

Though the threat of the dog and the threat of the Sikh extremists are tied together, it is Jasmine's unique presence that allows the dog to surface. This imagery and the transformation of its use from dog to human shows the dehumanizing nature of violence and the unheimlich nature in which the astrologer's prediction re-emerges. The dog imagery highlights the unworldly nature of Jasmine herself. Part of this unworldly nature is because of Jasmine's identity as an illegal immigrant; one of the many who take an

underground labyrinthine route to get to America asking only to “be allowed to land, to pass through, to continue” (91). The lounge that Jasmine describes as being the waiting room for the New World is in itself a liminal space. As Ruppel observes, “the narrative structure is that of a journey and passage, a liminal state, which places the third world inside the first world. In the process, the narrator must continually remake herself to avoid the threat posed by enforced identity” (184). Through her avoidance of an enforced identity Jasmine seems to become uncannily detached from her own life, speaking about her past in a distant tone usually reserved for speaking of the dead. Jasmine is told she has no accent when she speaks English, but that she does not have the Midwestern accent, either. Her voice is compared to the disembodied, computer generated accent of automated telephone messages (13). The reader is forced to interpret events through Jasmine's chronology, which works regularly against definable boundaries between Jasmine and what she describes. This style of narration gives Jasmine a position of agency to define her own history, but does not allow the reader to gain perspective beyond her interpretation of events. If Jasmine finds another immigrant snobby, whiny, or pathetic in their attempts to hold on to the culture of their previous country the reader is forced to agree with her. In this way Jasmine and others are afforded agency, but the maximalist inclusion of immigrant perspectives is lost.

Violence is not the only vehicle that facilitates change in Jasmine or represents adaptation to new lives in *Jasmine*. The “pitted, pocked, broken up” nature of identity that facilitates necessary change is hybridized. Jasmine cannot completely escape the ghosts of her past or completely murder her Indian self; she instead becomes a mosaic of selves. The use of technology by many of the characters represents the mixing of

fragmented selves resulting from the cultural adaptation necessary for the survival of the new maximalist immigrant. Mukherjee asserts that the new immigrant is bionic.

Bhabha explains, “The social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation “(Hoppe 148). Jasmine's narrative naturally places itself in the technological realm of hybridity as well as the role of cultural hybrid she adopts because of her resemblance to the cyborg way of adapting described in Haraway's “Cyborg Manifesto.” Haraway argues that women of color are to some extent cyborgs, more specifically what Audre Lorde describes in *Sister Outsider*. Sister Outsider within the United States, Haraway argues, is “a cyborg identity, a potent subjectivity synthesized from fusions of outsider identities” (2293). More specifically, as an Indian Jasmine is representative of her native country's reputation of having remarkable skills in technological fields that originally were associated with the West. Aneju points out that Jasmine's exile from India “marks the place where all immigrants struggle with antithetical forces and then come to terms with a third, hybrid way of existence that allows them to move back and forth between two worlds with the least possible dissonance“ (Aneju 73). Though she does not have such a close relationship with adapting and understanding technology as many of the male characters, Jasmine is also transformed by its influence. She relearns English from the repair manuals for electronic devices Prakash brings home. She also tends to describe the use of technology in a way that implies that it enables its user to have control over fate, especially the fate ascribed by feudal culture enforcers such as the astrologer introduced on the novel's first page.

Many characters with whom Jasmine feels affinity used technology as a bridge between cultures. Prakash sees his knowledge of electronics as his ticket to America, education, and freedom. He is “an engineer, not just of electricity...but of all the machinery in the world, seen and unseen. It all ran by rules, if we just understood them” (78). He is a rationalist, and in being so seeks to convince Jasmine that the Western upholding of rationalism is superior to the “feudalism” she grew up with in rural Indian culture. Prakash becomes Jasmine's Professor Higgins, whereas Sukkhi is like Shiva (known to some as the god of destruction) in his use of technology. These respective Western and Eastern influence upon their ways of viewing India's future also represents the lingering influence of the Partition riots over Jasmine's life in India. Sukkhi uses common items like stereos and transforms them into bombs, which further sets him as a foil to Prakash's Gandhian beliefs in nonviolence. Both of these polarizing perspectives result in little change, whereas Du and Jasmine achieve more success in their use of violence for neither completely passive nor needlessly aggressive purposes. Both Du and Jasmine use technology for purposes of connecting seemingly opposed ideas, which serve as a metaphor for their hybrid cultural identities. Du, Jasmine's adoptive son and Vietnamese-American refugee, finds new uses for machines by combining parts in ways that may seem nonsensical or mad to an outsider. Du has a hyphenated identity, both culturally and in his role of Jasmine's son. “He is the son Prakash and I might have had” she explains (155). The bead of soldering she applies to Du's project in Baden (155) mirrors electrical work she preformed with Prakash (89), further emphasizing the tie technology provides between seemingly opposed concepts. Du's use of recombinant electronics is a metaphor for the immigrant's ability to meld seemingly opposed

identities and find a new function in their combined parts. Du explains he has “altered the gene pool of the common American appliance” which also implies the change to the gene pool of the common American he also represents. The reference to genes also indicates Du's adept adaptation to English and American culture, to the extent that he is often called a “quick study.” Du's transformation is much more rapid than Jasmine's and seemingly does not come at the cost of his sense of self. However, the tough exterior that allows Du to not notice the Baden winters while wearing a t-shirt also hides much of his motives and opinions from Jasmine. The bond the two characters share over their experiences with violence and technology as a means for adaptation or survival does not afford them a mutual understanding. The appropriation of Western ideologies in a hybridized, synthetic fashion allows individual agency but does not allow the connection with others by itself.

Hoppe states that “for Mukherjee, the postmodern, post- colonial subject should be like an electronic component: functional, modern, and entirely flexible” (Hoppe 149). While arguably the subjects in *Jasmine* neither solely exist as postmodern or postcolonial manifestations, Hoppe's assessment of technology as metaphor in Mukherjee's works matches her use of other tropes in the novel. In addition to the flexibility and modernity of the circuitry they use, Mukherjee's maximalist characters also synthesize opposing ideologies to the extent that the original makeup of each ideology or archetype can no longer be extracted.

Samir Dayal argues that in *Jasmine* “it is often hard to separate perpetrators from victims, destruction from creation, and violence from its opposites” (Dayal 72). If there is one consistent theme throughout *Jasmine*, it is this ambivalent line between archetypes

and ideologies that seem initially to be widely divided. The ease with which characters like Du and Jasmine negotiate their psychological transformation into maximalist Americans implies that East and West are not as polarized as essentialist interpretations of these cultures present. Jasmine's sage identity translates easily into the pioneer because both identities allow her to journey beyond the edges of social reality. Both the act of reincarnation and the use of technology allow characters to bridge opposing ideologies as well as discard old concepts when they are no longer of use. Jasmine's pregnant body and the waiting room between India and America that she occupies during her surreptitious flight between countries also allow her the space to "shuttle" between identities in a liminal and constrictively instable environment. Mukherjee challenges simplistic readings of violence, technology, pregnancy, and the pioneering spirit by presenting these tropes as tools used in a non-traditional and not always positive sense. Instead of working from the unsaid implications of words in minimalism that may leave non-native Americans fumbling to recognize implied meanings, Mukherjee takes maximalism to a state of literary cubism. In order to sustain the text's inclusivity the character of Jasmine cannot always be the feminist ideal of strength and she cannot achieve her version of the American Dream within the text. The true victory in *Jasmine* is for each character touched by the maximalist perspective that Jasmine embodies to begin to survive and recognize their desires on their own terms. By doing so each character, like Jasmine, is presented with the possibility to resignify and reinvent themselves in the image of their dreams.

THE HOLDER OF THE WORLD

The Holder of the World reads like a continuation *Jasmine's* exploration of how the psychological transformation of women through a maximalist perspective leads to positive change in themselves as well as the world around them. To begin with, the novel focuses on a more expansive and transnational maximalism than *Jasmine*. Mukherjee states in "Immigrant Writers: Give Us Your Maximalists" that "the New America I know and have been living in for the last seven years is a world, by definition, of doubles. Characters in this world have the density of 19th-century presences; like creations out of Balzac or Dickens, they pass before me leaving real footprints" (Mukherjee 2). *The Holder of the World* brings forth the density of America's past to a maximalist perspective beyond the immigrant experience is possible. Mukherjee incorporates the tropes of reincarnation and renaming as well as more extensive intertextuality to reflect this widened scope in the text. India and America become doubles through Beigh's mirroring of Hannah's experiences across time, modeling the maximalist's fluid perception of self. *Jasmine* explored the hybridized space within an individual maximalist identity, and *The Holder of the World* uses its larger overlapping elements to provide a hybrid space inclusive of those labeled as Other within the bounds of American national identity.

This chapter first explores the sources Mukherjee most relied upon to provide a context for this novel. Mughal culture and *The Scarlet Letter* serve as a background to challenge reified concepts of American culture tied to Exceptionalist ideology. As these two influences are featured heavily and influence the use of other tropes, I analyze how they structure the text before the analysis of other artifacts. Mukherjee uses other texts such as "Ode to a Grecian Urn" to deconstruct England's role as the main cultural

influence for both America and India. I first analyze how the model of a Mughal painting mirrors Mukherjee's use of multiple characters across time to develop into an interwoven picture of national heritage. The tropes of renaming and reincarnation largely function similarly to *Jasmine* in this novel, though renaming often strengthens the ties between disparate people. The overlapping use of technology and intertextual elements provide a liminal space for maximalized characters to share experiences. These elements are analyzed last to emphasize how the New American national identity is defined.

A seventeenth century Mughal painting held for auction in New York that featured a white woman dressed in Mughal court dress inspired Mukherjee to write *The Holder of the World* (Alam 130). Mukherjee has explained that her novels seek to emulate the Mughal painting by giving multiple characters equal significance and putting multiple narratives together in such a way that they are inextricably connected to one another (Chen, Goudie 78). Mukherjee asserts the place of maximalist immigrant writing in equal standing to other great American works by painting Indian influence on the canvas of colonial American history. Mukherjee re-envisioned *The Scarlet Letter* as a story inspired by a woman who in turn was influenced by Mughal culture. In doing so, Mukherjee transforms a story that focuses on the victims of moral absolutism and moves beyond a questioning of Puritan moral conviction to instead question exceptionalist interpretations of American ancestry. Additionally, Mukherjee works to create an intertextual dialogue between the literatures of India and America to emphasize the interwoven nature of their cultural histories. Like a Mughal court painting, Mukherjee works to frame seemingly unrelated events as equally important and to eliminate the boundaries constructed between these events by Westernized history. According to Michael Worton and Judith

Still, the use of intertextuality “is an attempt to struggle against both complicity and exclusion – perhaps something, some shifting of barriers, can thus be achieved” (Worton and Still 33). Intertextuality functions in *The Holder of the World* as a textual representation of Mukherjee's adoption of a hybridized authorial identity and the hybrid identity that immigrants adopt in order to gain agency. Mukherjee also works beyond what her text declares is an overly simplified view of American cultural heritage by including American history in this shifting of barriers. She asserts in “Immigrant Writers: Give Us Your Maximalists” the implied meanings behind minimalist fiction especially can go unheard by those who have existed beyond the self-referential boundaries of American literature (Mukherjee 2). Mukherjee challenges the nativism behind some canonical American fiction by interpreting the works that serve as literary ancestors through the maximalist lens. By focusing on the colonial past of both America and India, Mukherjee ties the seemingly disparate literary histories of both countries through the influence of English culture. Mukherjee reconstructs the idea of American exceptionalism by first asserting India's cultural value beyond England's colonial influence and then illustrating the equally significant influence Indian culture has on America's national identity. Through this deconstruction Mukherjee shows that the exclusivity and nativistic tradition of canonical American literature is in fact a gross misinterpretation of America's literary and cultural ancestry.

The traditional lines of literary and cultural ancestry are represented most visibly by Keats's “Ode to a Grecian Urn” in *The Holder of the World*. Though Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter* is most often recognized as a significant presence in the novel, Mukherjee uses “Ode to a Grecian Urn” as a framing device for each section in order to hint at its

significance. These epigraphs often offer commentary on concepts of white racial and class superiority attributed to English influence. Mukherjee mildly criticizes the overemphasized significance English writing has on American ideas of canonical literature through the fragmentation and decontextualization of Keats's poem. Most significantly, the resignification of Keats's passages provides Mukherjee the opportunity to unsettle the English's place of historically cultural superiority to India, mostly resulting from England's propagation of this idea until India's independence in 1947. Often the epigraphs take on a different meaning when paired with the text they introduce, and mostly the contrasts in meaning give the epigraphs an ironic tone. The first selection introduces Hannah with the quote, "Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness, Thou foster-child of silence and slow time" (4), which characterizes Hannah as the still largely unknown Salem Bibi who has silently influenced American literature for centuries. More ironically, this epigraph describes Hannah as "unravish'd", though her life experiences dictate otherwise. Mukherjee selects excerpts in the same chronological order as they appear in the poem, with two being selected from the lover's scene and the two later epigraphs from the description of the sacrifice. The frozen figures on the Grecian urn translate easily to the novel's exploration of how history and its artifacts can form a culture's understanding of itself. Fakrul Alam in his book *Bharati Mukherjee* states that these epigraphs show Mukherjee's emphasis on the role creative imagination plays in reanimating slow time into events and characters. Furthermore, "Mukherjee implicitly makes the point in her novel that the creative imagination can evoke the past much more effectively than a mechanical system of retrieval" which Alam argues can be seen through the character Beigh successfully uncovering Hannah's story by continually going

beyond the facts she possesses (131). Emulating Beigh's journey through her prose, Mukherjee illustrates through her creative "time-retrieval" that the cultural understanding gleaned from these frozen images of history often marginalizes or ignores groups who had as much claim to the past as those more easily remembered. Rastogi concludes that by including these epigraphs Mukherjee subtly reinforces her conclusion that American Literature owes a debt to Indian influence that she carries throughout her novel via her references to Hawthorne and Pynchon.

As the first epigraph shows, Mukherjee often reinvents meaning for Keats's stanzas in the context of her characters and often transforms the lines into having transnational implications. Hannah is literally a foster child and still represents the "foster child of slow time" that the woman frozen in history on the urn represents. These intertextual elements tend to work similarly to the exchange of names by destabilizing traditional understanding of history and cultural lineage to both discourage the hegemonic categorization of groups and to correct the absence of the Other from these texts. The later epigraphs further emphasize this destabilization, and contrast more ironically with the text. The second epigraph, "Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard are sweeter; therefore soft pipes, play on" is positioned before a description of the ruins of Fort St Sebastian which is now populated by Indian farmers. This gravesite of English colonial influence has little interest for its current inhabitants, represented by Beigh's guide who prefers the idea of a "South Indian Silicon Valley" (95). The epigraph emphasizes the silencing of English colonial influence on Indian culture. The third epigraph similarly seems to mock the maiming of Trighanbottham's nose as it refers to a sacrifice (208). These epigraphs work against their seemingly structural function to

instead destabilize traditional views of England as a powerful cultural and political influence. The deconstruction of the epigraphs subverts the white patriarchal cultural superiority that categorizes and marginalizes many of the people Mukherjee's characters represent, therefore making it more possible to hear the silenced voices of history.

The silenced voices of history are brought to life through *The Holder of the World's* narrative, with an emphasis on women characters that existed on the margins of colonial society. Like *Jasmine*, Mukherjee gives her female characters in this novel shifting identities that allow them to move freely beyond cultural boundaries. The characters Beigh, Hester, Bhagmati, and Hannah defy categorization as they adopt each other's names, histories, and even each other's bodies. This intimate connection between female characters also subverts the dependence upon male influence by enabling the characters to reach across to inspire one another regardless of time, distance, or ethnicity. In this way *The Holder of the World* paints a much more optimistic picture of the role women play as the pioneers in cross cultural transformation. Whereas *Jasmine* stops short of showing its titular character achieving autonomous selfhood, even the Puritan, Hannah ultimately makes decisions concerning her fate without male permission or influence. Beigh and Venn's relationship appears more hopeful and more egalitarian than Jasmine's relationships with her many "husbands" in that they are mutually influenced by one another. Sen shows through his analysis of the connection between Beigh, Hannah, and Bhagmati, "feminine and immigrant space are not as different from the dominant culture as they are made out to be" which in turn shows that "succumbing to the drive toward hybridity and cultural exchange has to be a participatory exercise" (278). If Sen's analysis holds, this means the female characters have worked beyond the identity politics that

otherwise restrict both social categories from having more extensive influence. The removal of these strictures through mutual influences enables female characters to have a dramatic impact on history.

Hannah and Beigh bridge India and America across historical and ideological connections, but it is Hannah's journey that provides much of the framework. Hannah Easton, the character most similar to Jasmine in this novel, travels from Puritan Salem to England to colonial India before turning back to settle in America for the remainder of her life. Hannah undergoes a process of reincarnation throughout these travels and, like Jasmine, considers herself to be a caretaker of others. The role of caretaker allows each character to initiate positive transformation in other as reincarnation transforms the individuals' identity. Hannah shows an adeptness of balancing her need to embrace her new selves in India with the desire to exert a nurturing influence. Through Hannah's travels, colonial India and colonial America become related in their struggles for independence and the influence each has had on their respective nationhoods. Sen's assessment "the Hindu philosophical paradigm of macrocosmic transformation that had once made India the metaphorical holder of the world and has now passed its mantle to America" (54) most clearly shows itself in Hannah's transformation. As *Jasmine* showed an Indian coming to a more complex and hybridized understanding of self through America the *Holder of the World* reverses the flow of influence. The emphasis in Mukherjee's narrative upon the sophistication and power of 17th century Indian culture asserts the country's right to the title of "Holder of the World", even as they are slowly being weakened by English colonization. Hannah represents the ties between England, America, and India; each has been a "Holder of the World" in its own right. America and

India are often paralleled through Hannah's interpretation of the struggles in each country, namely the violence and the injuries she witnesses as the native dwellers of both continents struggle with Western colonization. "The Holder of the World" takes on a more individualized significance through Hannah's story. Jasmine serves as the model for the way to a maximalized understanding of self Hannah models the new "world holders." These "world holders" have mastered not only the areas past countries have been, but time and space are also easily mastered. Hannah's subconscious connection to India is a clear illustration of the knowledge open to these "world holders" who embrace a similarity via difference mindset. Hannah's needlework shows the Taj Mahal rising and reflects much of colonial India before she had seen it (Mukherjee 44). This needlework employs a sense of destiny for Hannah and indicates she is subconsciously with India. Whereas Jasmine's ascribed destiny seemingly enforced repressive cultural traditions, Hannah's psychic connection to India blurs the line between Salem and Fort St. Sebastian is similar to Jasmine's employment of her sage identity to transcend the cultural strictures limiting her freedom. Her ability to limit immersing herself in one culture is similar to a sage identity in that Hannah can adapt quickly to different countries and political environments. Hannah adapts so successfully that she recognizes parallels between places in ways that indicate her capacity to move into a postcolonial mindset much more quickly than her white English or American counterparts. Clairvoyance enables Hannah to synthesize parts of American and Indian culture in such a way that she begins to see the English ideas of genealogical superiority over Indians on both continents as damaging. It also gives her the inner premonition to stay in India after her husband is presumed dead, which results in her no longer calling herself an English woman (214). As a colonial

woman, Hannah was still considered English, so this seemingly slight change occurring while in India results in a psychological severing from colonial rule. Her daughter, Pearl, Mukherjee's rendering of the eerily adult Pearl from *The Scarlet Letter*, is the fruition of Hannah's journey and the person described as carrying on her mother's fight for freedom from England. Hannah's child is the clearest metaphorical connection between America and India's national identity as she is born halfway between the countries during the ocean voyage and she dedicates her life to advocating for American independence (284). The marginalized existence of Hannah and Pearl when they return to Salem society enables them to “[indulge] a liberty of eccentric dissent” and their opinions are even “considered advantageous to the maintenance of social order” (285). They are described as living in a “House of Enchantment”, which had the strong food and drink of a presumably Indian diet (285). Both Hannah and her daughter are described in a manner that would easily have labeled them witches, though it is their otherworldly aspects that enable each of the Easton women to publicly advocate for American independence. By the end of the novel both Hannah and Pearl publicly declare “We are Americans to freedom born!” which heralds the beginning of revolutionary ideas in “old” Salem that were present in the New Salem. Only in India can Hannah completely understand the need for American independence through the attempts to resist colonial power she witnesses in India. She becomes the first American woman to obtain a transnational identity, and this transnational identity allows her to think of a world beyond English influence.

Krishna Sen points out that by including people of all backgrounds in the hybridization that immigrants experience, this novel work as a homage to the

transnational identity represented by Americans who view current culture beyond exceptionalist and European boundaries (Sen 49). Mukherjee also traces the connections between India and America through spice routes and the otherworldly connection that modern asset hunter Beigh Masters has with Hannah Easton. Mukherjee implies that, like Hannah Easton, Americans must have been influenced by India and return from that influence inspired to expand their ideas of what is quintessentially American by placing a heavy Indian influence on the start of America's development into an independent nation. She also takes this implication further by positioning Indian influence at the pre-history of American politics and literature. At this formative juncture in the history of both nations Mukherjee also explores the simplification the past undergoes in historical accounts and implies that this simplification is responsible for the exceptionalism that appears in American literature. Furthermore, Mukherjee works through the perspective of those marginalized by an exceptionalist American history in order to debunk the "city on a hill" mythology that is responsible for much of exceptionalist ideology.

The Holder of the World includes Native Americans more predominantly than *The Scarlet Letter* and therefore points out another often excluded, yet heavily influential group in American history, literature, and culture. Hannah Easton's mother abandons her in order to run away with her Nipmuc lover, a decision Hannah does not seem to understand until her affair with an Indian raj takes place. In these parallel relationships between mother and daughter, the tie between the "Indians" of the New World and the Indians of the East shows the effects of colonization on both continents. Mukherjee ties the country mistaken for India by Columbus and the India he sought through this play on words and the "Indian Lovers" of Hannah and Hannah's mother. She includes another

play on *The Scarlet Letter*'s symbolism by highlighting the red "I" representing "Indian Lover" in the alphabet of Puritan sins. Here, Mukherjee faces the long standing prejudice against cross racial relationships in Western culture through Hannah's mother, Hannah, and Beigh. Krishna Sen observes, "Mukherjee has in fact refigured [cross racial relationships] here as inclusive, culturally potent and therefore redemptive" (52). *Jasmine* presents its titular character as a metaphor for a maximalist perspective on what it means to be an American immigrant. Similarly, Mukherjee presents the "Indian Lover" relationships as a metaphor for the cross cultural bonds that tend to be erased from history and American literature books. Jasmine serves as a controversial lover for several white male characters who initially frame her in terms of a more stereotypical role such as teller, nanny, or illegal immigrant. As each white male interacts with Jasmine they are forced to move beyond their Orientalized conceptions, and thus the individual romantic relationships tend to serve as the site of the most climactic confrontations between traditional conceptions of immigrants and the immigrant's perspective. This interaction results in a dramatic transformation on the part of the white American male, though not always in a way of interest to them. Conversely, Hannah becomes the transformed white American in *The Holder of the World* as a result of Indian Lovers. Her embrace of Indian culture, specifically what Simon termed the "macrocosmic transformation" embedded in sacred Hindu texts, is initiated much earlier by witnessing her mother's relationship with her Nipmuc lover. However, Beigh's narration indicates that Hannah's view of Indian men as weak (114) or small and delicate (132) only changes through her relationships with Bhagmati and Jadav Singh. Mukherjee highlights these cross cultural relationships as the

site for mutually beneficial psychological transformation by placing a similar symbolic emphasis on the “I” for “Indian Lover” as Hawthorne’s “A.”

Hannah herself rewrites the Puritan alphabet through the whispers of her absent mother, replacing the signifier of “Indian Lover” with “Independence”, which foretells the discovery of independence she finds through Jadav Singh (54). Christian Moraru points out these letter based symbols often “spell out and cherish a whole paradigm that Hawthorne’s world...tones down, represses, marks for control, stigmatization and colonization: desire, sexuality in general, the female body and power, the “menacing’ mysterious native, and so on” (265). The alphabet, as well as the continual process of renaming or cross-naming characters allows those repressed by “Hawthorne’s world” to resignify themselves and therefore regain power over their identification.

The cross racial relationships and the cross identification through names enable the pre-revolutionary characters such as Hannah and Jadav Singh to claim more agency over their historical representations through their ties to modern characters like Beigh and Venn. Conversely, Hannah’s life serves as an opportunity for self recognition by Beigh and Venn. Beigh explains “together and separately we remember what happened to Hannah Easton Fitch Legge aka the Bibi from Salem so that we may predict what will happen to us within our lifetime” (91). This remembrance allows both characters to draw closer to Venn’s Nirvana of the perfect design, in this case meaning the perfect understanding of how individuals work within a larger framework of their time. Beigh asserts that a schoolmaster documenting the voyage to India made the mistake of inserting Hannah, “the flower of the New World Zion, into the Old World hierarchy”, a result of his strict adherence to class consciousness (90). Both Venn and Beigh seek to

work beyond restrictive notions of human interaction, and their cross cultural process of learning from one another makes a more maximized view of the world possible. “Before you build another city on the hill, first fill in the potholes at your feet” Beigh instructs (91). In this quote, Mukherjee directs a jab at American exceptionalism through the notion begun with John Winthrop's speech “A Modell of Christian Charity”, often referenced in America as a model for the rest of the world. Here Mukherjee implies that in order to achieve such a heightened state of influence that Winthrop's “city on a hill” implies it is first necessary to understand the full origins of American culture and political ideology. These potholes are filled in through the “Indian Lover” relationships and the lines of cultural ancestry become more entangled and less exceptional.

Through the lens of resignification, names trace a more complex sense of identity in *The Holder of the World* similar to Jasmine. Since names both track the similarities between characters as well as their psychological transformations they also offer a way to trace the lines of intercultural influence. Bruce Simon argues that the symbolic presence of Hester acts as a “floating signifier” that represents the “complicated desires” of Bhagmati, Hester, Rebecca, and Beigh. Through Sen's view of Hester as a reincarnated being it is possible to trace the polyglot influences of Hinduism Mukherjee cites and to recognize the reincarnation process of personal transformation that was present in *Jasmine*. Hannah Easton, arguably the main character of the novel, adopts several lives along with several names, just as Jasmine does. Her journey is in some ways the opposite of Jasmine's in that she travels from West to East and Hannah's self discovery lies in her embrace of Indian culture without becoming its permanent citizen. Arguably this lack of a defined loyalty enables Hannah to embrace a more multidimensional understanding of

her identity. Hannah's naming allows her to transform herself without fully losing her connections to her past selves. Hannah is born Hannah Fitch and becomes Hannah Legge who eventually becomes the Salem Bibi and “Precious as Pearl.” When she returns to America she answers to “White Pearl” whereas her Indian-American daughter is called “Black Pearl”, tying them together as the collective product of her extra-marital relationship.

The multiplicity Mukherjee gains with character name play give her another opportunity to dissemble an exceptionalist understanding of American cultural ancestry. The name of Hester represents a tie to canonical literature through *The Scarlet Letter* and also illustrates the theme of “similarity through difference” that permeates much of the plot. Hester Manning, Hannah's close friend from the Salem community, ties Hawthorne's character to his family history through his mother's maiden name (Manning), thus emphasizing the role fiction has as a historical influence. Hawthorne's great-great grandfather also appears, accentuating the tie between Mukherjee's narrative and the real influence of India on America's prehistory. By re-naming her servant Bhagmati “Hester” Hannah recognizes the tie between the two colonies and highlights their similarities. When Beigh “becomes” Bhagmati through the “time retrieval” machine, she experiences this tie as well and serves as the model for the “new American” by expanding her perception of the world beyond the time and American view of the world she is expected to occupy by those represented by her boss, Bugs Kilken. This broadened perspective allows Beigh to discover the resting place of the diamond, which, symbolically, remains in the belly of Bhagmati (280). The placement of the jewel and Hannah's biracial child continue Mukherjee's use of the pregnant woman as a symbol for positive transformation,

though unlike *Jasmine* the novel allows the product of each “pregnancy” to gain an established meaning. The diamond holds different significance according to how singular a character understanding its value in relation to discovering a greater truth about historical influence that can be learned from tracking the Salem Bibi. Bugs Kilken and Aurangzeb view the diamond as a symbol of their status and therefore the diamond slips from their grasp. Bhagmati, Hannah, and Beigh find the diamond as a result of their search for intercultural understanding and it lands in their collective possession through the shared knowledge of its location. The diamond serves as a catalyst highlighting the tension between the adherences to ideas of exceptionalism to the maximalist ideals of embracing intercultural similarities despite political or economic gain. It stands as a symbol that the true Holders of the World are those who do not vie for supremacy over other groups.

The *Ramayana*, with the included Western texts, frustrates the concept of traditional cultural categorization. The *Ramayana*, a Hindu scripture sometimes used for spiritual guidance, remains a heavily influential text in Indian culture. Mukherjee points out that the representation of women in both literary artifacts can be construed as incomplete when integrating this text with *The Scarlet Letter* through Hannah's story. When Hannah Easton becomes the Salem Bibi, she ceases to resemble *The Scarlet Letter's* Hester Prynne and instead begins to re-enact the life of Sita, the self-effacing wife of Ram. Sita, the incarnation of goddess Lakshmi on Earth, is a figure of wifely devotion for those who regard the *Ramayana* as a spiritual text (Narayan xxiii). Sita follows Ram into the wilderness after his banishment despite the danger and insists that it is the wife's duty to stay by her husband regardless of circumstance (Narayan 53). After she her

capture by the many-headed Ravana, Sita is cast off by Ram who believes that she may have been raped by her captor. Ram considers her unclean and no longer holds her to be his wife. Sita, instead of protesting, prepares to throw herself onto a funeral pyre as she believes she cannot go on living without Ram. After she emerges unscathed, having passed a test of her purity, Ram reinstates Sita as his wife. In Beigh's retelling of this story (unlike the popular Narayan depiction) Sita is sent to the wilderness after Ram still has lingering doubts of her purity (Mukherjee 177). Sita then gives birth to twins and eventually is asked by Ram to prove her purity once more. She refuses to do so and instead opts to be reabsorbed into the Earth as a protest of her unfair treatment (177). Beigh, who points out that while this second version depicts a much more assertive Sita, asks "Where is Sita's version of her captivity in Lanka?" (177). She argues that through reading about Hannah's similar experience of captivity it is possible to infer what Sita would have written (177), but inserting Hannah as Sita's proxy could be seen as a Western reinterpretation of an Indian woman's experience. However, the patriarchal rationalization of women's treatment as second class citizens in the *Ramayana* reads as feminist message by translating Sita's voice through Hannah's experience. Jadav Singh doubts Hannah's loyalties as his Bibi in ways similar to Ram after she begs him to stop fighting (256). Beigh also states that Hannah compared herself to Sita in that they were both foundlings (Sita was discovered in a fallow field) and faced the choice between staying in a hostile environment and trying out new surroundings (176). Instead of viewing Sita's decision to be banished with her husband as passive obedience, Hannah instead interprets this decision as "banish[ing] herself from court life and set [ting] up pastoral domesticity free of court customs and taboos" (176). By translating this

experience into Hannah's decision to become a Bibi and thereby taking charge of both her fate and sexuality, Mukherjee presents the *Ramayana* as a text that can encourage agency in women in a manner similar to her pre-history of *The Scarlet Letter*.

Though the *Ramayana*, “Ode to a Grecian Urn”, and *The Scarlet Letter* stand as the largest intertextual presences, Thomas Pynchon's *V* also has a significant presence in the novel. Christian Moraru traces many of these work through its literary tools, namely the “geographic, geopolitical, and cross-cultural dynamic of mysterious femininity” found in Pynchon's *V*. Mukherjee extends her play on the infamous adultery “A” by envisioning Hannah as the “V” from Thomas Pynchon's novel in order to flesh out history in a way similar to Venn's time retrieval machine. “V”, the sought after woman seen to tie together seemingly unrelated historical events, fully materializes through Hannah, who “was everywhere, an encoder of a secret history” (60). Mukherjee makes a direct reference to the character of “V” through Beigh and also includes Pynchon's ancestor as Hannah's failed suitor (55). The text names the Pynchons as “one of New England's upstanding families” (56), which situates Thomas Pynchon as the inheritor of both the American literary and historical lineage. Mukherjee uses Hawthorne's ancestry to highlight what Beigh calls his incomplete retelling of Hannah's experience, and therefore it is safe to assume this reference to Pynchon's heritage also holds some air of criticism. The depiction of the elusive “V” also renders itself overly simplistic and incomplete when contrasted with the maximalist figure of Hannah. While Moraru states that Mukherjee imitates Hawthorne and Pynchon, this hint of criticism suggests that Mukherjee does not simply follow their example. The role of technology in *The Holder of the World* strengthens the integration of concepts that this use of intertextuality

represents, which repeats its role as a tool for enacting individual agency that Mukherjee introduced in *Jasmine*.

Technology as a metaphor in *The Holder of the World* affects the general plot more significantly than in *Jasmine*, furthering the novel's purpose on continuing to expand upon the presence of hybridity in the lives of maximalist thinkers, depicted in a more character-centric manner in the previous book. Venn Iyer, Beigh's longterm lover, is the main catalyst for the role of technology as a bridge across boundaries of history and culture in the book. Venn, like Beigh, reaches into the past to construct a better idea of its influence on the present. He is also responsible for Beigh being inspired to look at time as interwoven instead of a linear strand, which ultimately leads her to embody the past through his time construction machine. Venn's use of information to replicate the past circumvents the place genealogy has in claiming certain cultural experiences. The discussion of moving beyond the genealogical history of cultural experiences especially applies to hybrid identities. Critics of the term "hybrid", such as David Palumbo-Lu and Robert Young claim the term is tied to an idea of color-blindness and mixing pot ideology (Simon 414). Mukherjee works around the polarity of an intercultural relationship plagued either by assimilationist or separatist ideologies by employing the concept of similarity via difference, characteristic of the relationships between her characters. Furthermore, the presence of Venn's time machine, and in a broader context, technology in general, also enables Mukherjee to complicate the concept of reincarnation and rebirth in turn by complicating the idea of individual identities.

The inclusion of the individual in history is made possible by a "personality genome" which is necessary because each person's experience of time is different (6). In

this analogy Mukherjee presents the difficulty of national history by self-contained timelines. Venn's machine provides more detail to extensively documented scenes; in a similar way, historians paint Western history as much more detailed due to the wealth of documents available while Africa is represented as more mythical since colonial occupation erased much of their original cultural history. The documented information available in the West compared to the oral history of Africa depicts a more "real" reality for one and a more "surreal" reality for the other. Beigh explains the abundance of text coming from the West provides the foundation for this, and here Mukherjee's use of technology replicates the function of history in creating a potentially misinformed view of cultural influence. Venn, Beigh says, "wants to avoid that fatal unclutteredness" that can turn the past into a cheap set instead of an accurate depiction of time "though he knows he can't" (Mukherjee 6). Beigh calls her project "more complicated" (6), and through her attempt to weave all of the artifactual evidence into a single narrative Mukherjee shows that level of simplification to be nearly impossible. Beigh and Venn's work complement each other in their discovery of multiple realities within histories previously defined as a linear narrative. Venn's ability to make history multidimensional reworks the "genome" that defines a person's place in history as Beigh's research reveals interwoven national histories that redefine the concept of American ideological heritage. There exists a metaphor in both projects for how hybridized individuals operate within a larger society that accepts the linear view of national heritage. Mukherjee uses both Venn's project and the search for the diamond that Beigh embarks on to serve as a metaphorical argument for how a maximalist perspective is hybrid without relying on melting pot ideology. Both Venn and Beigh cease to view history, or even lifetimes for

that matter, as individual timelines. Maximalists view history, including their own heritage, as a plane of intersecting identities, places, and cultures. Mukherjee asserts the precedent that literary, historical, or cultural ancestry sets out does not behave in a linear fashion through her characters. Instead, as Rastogi posits, “to subvert cultural hegemony *The Holder of the World* conceives of an elaborate analogy of similarity via difference” (271). This “similarity via difference” aids in working beyond the post ethnic stage of transformation to include those whom minimalism embraces in the process of hybridizing their identities.

Beigh's “personality genome” matches her with Bhagmati. This pairing leads to the symbolic placement of the diamond in the servants' belly because Beigh's perception of past events interacts with the artifacts that have been used to artificially bring the moment new life. Beigh's connection with Hannah moves her beyond a Eurocentric or exceptionalist perspective and instead focuses on similarities across seemingly insurmountable time and space boundaries. Krishna Sen argues that making the hybridized identity transnational through the connection between Beigh and Hannah Mukherjee “destabilizes the normative status of “whiteness” as a signifier of American identity but simultaneously clears a space within that identity for the inscaping of the Other” (49). While Jasmine destabilized the identity of American immigrant, what Sen points out here is that Mukherjee builds a space for her characters to move beyond the cultural lineage that often alienated and silenced Jasmine. The linear nature of the birth/death process of identity made it possible to read *Jasmine* as an assimilationist text. Similarly, *The Holder of the World* arguably contains similar Orientalizing descriptions that place India as an exotic backdrop instead of a complex, Mughal painting-like

representation. The clearest evidence of this polarization occurs in the passage describing Hannah's needlework and in the description of the paintings that Beigh finds in the Marblehead museum. When Beigh examines a Mughal painting containing an image of Hannah, she observes that the picture of Mughal culture as destructive, "in every way opposite of fertile Marblehead" (17). While this can be read as an Orientalization of India, one of the other paintings represents the exoticized view of the West that Indians also arguably had as Beigh describes the jellyfish, wolves, "black robed women with haggard faces" and "a circle of Indians in bright feathered headdresses" (16). Rastogi suggests that Mukherjee exaggerates both cultures to emphasize that despite their lack of seeming similarity, both America and India share a similar history and have served as mutual influences. The mutual exoticization notwithstanding, Rastogi points to the question that seems to be behind much of the novel as a rationale for these exaggerated renderings: how did the Mughal painter know how to paint New England? (273). Sen also points to the misadventures of Gabriel Legge, the assertion of America's relatively primitive culture, and the arguably opulent Mughal culture as evidence that Mukherjee did not romanticize either culture in her depictions (54). Mukherjee challenges the idea of cultural ownership by depicting characters transformed by their relationships with the complexity inherent in both countries. This participatory engagement in hybridity gains the female characters more agency and ultimately more connection with those who would otherwise be seen as existing in opposition to the agency of a Hannah or a Jasmine.

In this constantly shifting interpretation of the Other through renaming and intertextuality, Mukherjee illustrates the argument she presents fellow recent immigrants in "Show Us Your Maximalists": "See your models in this tradition, in the minority

voices, the immigrant voices, the second-generation Jews and Italians and Irish and French-Canadians. We are in their tradition. We may look a little different, and carry different-sounding names, but we mustn't be seduced by what others term exotic" (Mukherjee 4). Mukherjee lays claim to the ownership of America in a way that abolishes hierarchies between ancestral lines by placing the recent immigrant, especially the "mainly oriental, largely Hispanic" people she sees in the green card petition lines in the Puritan, pre-American tradition. The psychic connections between continents that maximalist women such as Hannah and Beigh obtain serve to model the abolishment of boundaries between East and West, especially when these boundaries surface in American society. This abolishment of boundaries and their relationships of "similarity via difference" serve as a reminder of the transformative influence maximalism has over oppressive historical practices on either side of the world. Rastogi asserts that *The Holder of the World* "searches for a dialectic of intercultural negotiation through which mainstream American society is dramatically altered as much as it alters its own immigrant population" (269). American society's transformation, as Beigh often represents in the novel, begins with acknowledgement of the scope of the nation's history, politically and otherwise, extends far beyond its national boundaries. Furthermore, the destabilization of individual cultural experience through the interwoven identities of Mukherjee's characters provides a more complex and presumably more accurate of the past's influence on America's present identity. Mukherjee claims the right of those often labeled as Other to claim ownership of a country's heritage by complicating American cultural heritage into interwoven and overlapping influences spanning the globe, whose citizenship they already possess. *The Holder of the World* complicates the idea of national

identity in much the way that *Jasmine* destabilized the concept of individual identity. In doing so, Mukherjee maps the maximalist claim to mutual influence and growth through the ownership of American literature and history equally among Americans of all backgrounds.

CONCLUSION

Jasmine and *The Holder of the World* mark the beginning of what would become Mukherjee's trademark style in her next three novels *Leave it to Me*, *Desirable Daughters*, and *Tree Bride*. Each novel juxtaposes texts, people, and environments that are seemingly polarized due to class, race, traditions, religions or national identity in way that calls into question their differences. Hindu multiplicity and American inventiveness no longer solely belong to the traditions of either East or West, further calling into question the argued necessity for assimilation of marginalized groups. *Jasmine* especially marks the transition in her writing from exploring an individual Indian immigrant's struggle to adapt to an often resistant culture to exploring how a maximalist immigrant can work as a transformative agent in ways not available to those who cannot look beyond their own social categories. *The Holder of the World* explores the "New America" Mukherjee references beyond the recent immigrant experiences and works beyond national boundaries to explore the idea of national heritage. This writing stands as a contrast to minimalist writing that Mukherjee accuses of "naming the dread, invoking the villains and the victims, but avoiding the confrontation" (2) in her 1988 *New York Times* article.

Mukherjee's use of intertextuality in these two novels serves as a cross cultural confrontation by matching American and English canonical literature with Hindu mythology or pop culture. Mukherjee reveals each text's individual incompleteness without the perspectives other texts provide through her pairings of canonical texts with modern situations or Indian classics. Mukherjee also complicates the supremacy of the male farmer, pioneer, and even the early American patriot as the creators of American

identity by claiming the illegal immigrant, the American Indian, and women as equals. Mukherjee expands the American identity beyond linear hierarchies based on exceptionalist cultural mythology by destabilizing accepted categorizations of each of these figures.

While Mukherjee's works to focus on the transformative agency of groups ignored or marginalized by nativistic conceptions of American culture, she does not restrict the maximalist's ability to exist in a culturally hybridized space to those labeled as Other. Overlapping texts and characters undo "us/them" boundaries that exist as a result of heritage based notions of national identity. Mukherjee rejects the notion that maximalism has a genetic component by confounding the notion of static identity. Though immigrants feature heavily in both *Jasmine* and *The Holder of the World*, it is the cross cultural relationships that are the most redemptive and foster the most maximalist change. Hannah, Beigh, Taylor and other characters that are traditionally included in the fold of American exceptionalism present themselves as equally capable of embracing selves that change along with the "New America" immigrants from non-European countries usually represent. When she emphasizes the connections between seemingly polarized opposites, Mukherjee emphasizes their influence on each other. The psychic connections between continents that maximalist women such as Hannah and Beigh obtain serve as the liminal space in which hybrid identities gain the freedom to choose the self they want to become, much in the way that Jasmine and Hannah's otherworldliness allows them to escape categorization. As characters from polarized backgrounds become more entangled, they serve as a symbol for the "nation of doubles" that Mukherjee assert

is a defining characteristic of America. The national identity through this doubling allows America itself to become hybridized.

In Mukherjee's vision of America, past and present are constantly reinvented because “there are no absolutes, only correct contexts” (2). Mukherjee presents maximalist ideals such as Hannah and Jasmine as the chief contextualizers through the exploration the idea of America's past and present identity in terms of “correct contexts.” The act of reincarnation through renaming, technology, and psychic violence that both maximalist women employ enable them to understand identity in terms of shifting contexts. Mukherjee characterizes these maximalists as “liv[ing] through centuries of history in a single lifetime” and this “time traveling” ability enables the maximalist ideal to live simultaneously as part of America's traditions and future. The maximalist ideal is primarily carried by women in these novels because Mukherjee most admires America because of its capability to self invent. The presence of the pregnant woman becomes a symbol for self invention and a constant state of rebirth. Women in Mukherjee's novels show how psychological transformation and personal agency that exist beyond political and social signification. The women also use the self contradiction of dwellers on the borderlands between birth and death of selves to enable those they come into contact with to experience the same freedom. They stand as the symbolic mothers to the “New America” and the pioneers who first discovered its landscape. Mukherjee's maximalist women carve a space for all Americans within a new, hybridized world by breaking down the paradigms within social hierarchies. In this process all Americans become maximized immigrants by constantly arriving to a new country, traveling to the uttermost shores within their ever changing national identity.

FURTHER DIRECTIONS OF STUDY

In spite of the wide inclusivity Mukherjee aspires to in her maximalist writing, both *Jasmine* and *The Holder of the World* have been criticized in part for portraying social groups or places in an overly stereotypical fashion. Though some of these criticisms result from a strictly postcolonial reading of the text that ignores Mukherjee's self identification as an American author, it should be noted that the characterization of Sikhs, the disabled, and most men in these books fall under largely negative and stereotypical categorization. *Jasmine* contains several examples of largely silent and underdeveloped male characters. Michelle Favis asserts in her article "A Voice for Bud Ripplemeyer" that *Jasmine* reduces both Taylor and Bud to the representation of concepts instead of complex people that she views as equal to herself. Similarly, Prakash and Jadav Singh tend to represent Orientalized views of Indian males in their descriptions. Prakash has an aspect similar to a Bollywood movie star and Jadav Singh is reduced to an impulsive and overly sexualized figure when contrasted with Hannah.

Some of what is read as stereotyping of male characters instead represents fable characters, a manifestation of the ideal maximalist or a representation of a certain ideology. However, this argument does not fully explain why Mukherjee tends to universally portray her female characters as claiming more subtle and complex personalities. This pattern of male character portrayal extends into other novels such as *Wife*, though more complexity is added to the main male characters in *Desirable Daughters* and *Tree Bride*. While arguably an analysis of male roles in Mukherjee's novels could largely affect analysis of her maximalist ideals, it would also require its own chapter in another thesis or dissertation exploring her novels.

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