CHAPTER - 5

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*The Holder of the World* is a tale about dislocation and transformation arising when two cultures come in contact with each other. This novel has a wide canvas that sweeps across continents and centuries, cultures and religions. Immigration, exile, alienation and foreign lands have always been the colour of Mukherjee’s palate and with *The Holder of the World*; she uses the familiar tones and shades to create a universe of infinite possibility and eternal time. Here we witness an unlikely and intriguing meeting of two worlds, the Puritan 17th and early 18th century American world trying to come to terms with the Mughal view of Indian life. Mukherjee lights up the making and very nature of the American consciousness in this novel. The inspiration behind this fantastic story was an ordinary incident on an ordinary day. The novel got started because she was at an auction of Sotheby in New York Whatever money her husband and she had saved was spent on Indian miniature painting and her aesthetics for the novel evolved out of her love for Indian miniature painting.

It was here that she saw a miniature titled “A European Woman in Aurangzeb’s Court”. A Caucasian woman stood resplendent in full Moghul
dress and Mukherjee suddenly realized that she was looking at a woman who three hundred years back had taken a lot of risks, had transformed herself. Earlier it was always the journey from East to West and the accompanying Chameleon-like changes, but now this trip is in the opposite direction.

The novel generated favourable response from the critics all over the world and people acknowledged Mukherjee’s skill in blending imaginary creations with historical facts. The New York Times Book Review admired The Holder of the World and said that, Ms Mukherjee draws everyone with vigour and scrupulous attention to details across time, from the present to the 17th and early 18th centuries, from Salem, Massachusetts to the Coast of Coromandel, in India - into the footsteps of not one but two extraordinary women. Altogether it is an extraordinary novel.

The Holder of the World demonstrates a consummate artistry to blend fact and fiction head and heart, science and religion, East and West, history and imagination, the Old World and the New World. Mukherjee has dedicated this novel ‘To Ann Middleton, and all travellers to utmost shores’. Here she creatively travels in time and space, past and present, exotic and known and this lends to this novel an extraordinary dimension never seen in
her writing before. It is a quest for identity, transformation and translation of protagonist’s personality under the stress of the circumstances.

The title The Holder of the World, the literal translation of Alamgir, is a name for the Mughal emperor, Aurangzeb. This is the story of two white women, one living in the seventeenth century and the other, in the present one, who becomes obsessed with retracing the former’s transformation from a Puritan girl brought up at Salem in Massachusetts to the ‘bibi’ of a Hindu King. For a brief, lightning quick flash, two women face the brown-skinned Indian maidservant, Bhagmati, The artist creates a complex plot, communicating through the two main voices the dense landscape of her novel. It begins with Beigh Masters, an assets researcher, a job she describes as “uniting people and possessions; it’s like matching orphaned socks, through time” [1]. Beigh Masters is the narrator of the story. She makes the intentions and objectives of the author transparent. The very beginning of the novel states that she lived in three time zones simultaneously, and she didn’t mean Eastern, Central and Pacific. She meant the past, present and the future.

At the moment, she is busy reading *Auctions and Acquisitions*, one of the trade magazines in her field with her lover Venn Iyer, an Indian Computer Scientist. She learn from the book that though people and their property get separated from one another, “Nothing is ever lost, but continents and centuries sometimes get in the way” [2]. It gives her a clue to a large gem acquired by a small museum situated between Salem and Marble head. Now she is trying to locate what her client calls the most perfect diamond in the world, ‘The Emperor’s Tear’. It belonged to the last of the great Mughal Kings, Aurangzeb, and was stolen from him during a battle against Raja Jadav Singh, the Hindu lover of the Seventeenth Century Puritan Woman Hannah Easton. As Beigh tries to trace the diamond she gets obsessed with Hannah’s life more than the diamond itself. All that she was interested was its inscription and the provenance. Anything that has to do with Mughal India draws her attention and she was very much interested in the story of Salem Bibi who was precious as a pearl.

Beigh lives with her Indian lover for nearly three years. “He animates information. He’s out there beyond virtual reality, re-creating the universe, one nanosecond, one minute at a time” [3]. Both Beigh Masters and her

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[2] Ibid., p.5
[3] Ibid., p.5
Indian lover are dealers in the things past. They claim "The past presents itself to us" [4]. Venn is of the view that "Every time-traveler will create a different reality - just as we all do now. No two travelers will be able to retrieve the same reality ... History is a big savings bank" [5].

The use of time travel to help Beigh (and the reader) unravel the mystery of 'The Emperor’s Tear' is a clever ruse. Her searches around museums, East India Company documents and colonial literature, her travels to India and auctions all over the world, are commendable efforts to reconstruct a daring woman's odyssey. She makes it seem plausible that a seventeenth-century Puritan woman- could have ventured into a different culture and met a Mughal ruler contemporary of the Sun King, of Peter the Great and of Oliver Cromwell. Beigh’s painstaking piecing together of Hannah’s life is like building a picture-puzzle across time. Solving the last clue through computer magic turns it into the stuff of high-tech occult. While it satisfies emotionally, one obviously remains unconvinced.

Mukherjee is eloquent and intelligent when she explores the complexities of cultural confrontation and the politics of otherness. Here she presents the difference between the Old and the New Worlds, represented by

America and India, as a clash of value systems, a confrontation between an austere, dark society and a culture in which nothing is more important than the celebration of beauty. As the narrator proceeds it unfolds the story of the Puritan woman of 17th century Hannah Easton, born in the American Colonies in 1670, a person who has never dreamt of in a Puritan society undreamed of in Puritan society. Inquisitive, vital, awake to her own sense of self and purpose, she is a spiritual aristocrat in an age of common believers. “She is from a different time, the first person, let alone the first woman, to have had these thoughts, and this experience, to have been formed in this particular crucible” [6].

As Beigh Masters fumbles for more details about Hannah Easton, she discovers in her a remote relative of hers. As she proudly claims that she is part of the story, and the Salem Bibi is part of the tissue of her life. She discovers that Rebecca Easton (Hannah’s mother) nee Walker’s grand mother was a cousin of Charles Jonathan Samuel Muster’s father, with whom Beigh claims her kinship though she is not sure “Back on the scepter’d isle, three hundred years ago, we were Musters, Or Musterers” [7].


She presents a detailed description of the settlement and adventures of the Musters on the Ellis Island and their coming to terms with the Eastons:

*The first Masters to scorn the strained stability of his lot was one Charles Jonathan Samuel Muster, born in Morpeth, Northumberland. In 1632, a youth of seventeen, C.J.S. Muster stowed away to Salem in a ship heavy with cows, horses, goats, glass and iron. What extraordinary vision he must have had, to know so young that his future lay beyond the waters...at the mercy of heathen Indians and the popish French.*

*By 1640 he was himself the proprietor of a three-hundred acre tract that he then leased to an in-law recently arrived, and then he returned to Salem and the life of a sea trade, Jamaica to Halifax. Curiosity or romance has compelled us to slash, bum, move on, ever since [8].*

The year that young Charles Muster secreted himself among the livestock abroad the ‘Gabriel,’ a noble woman in India died in child birth. That noble woman was the wife of most lucretious Mughal King Shahjahan, Mumtaz Mahal, whose memory the king immortalized by erecting the Taj Mahal, a symbol of everlasting love. Three years later when Jonathan was

barely twenty, he abandoned the country and built the first of many houses on a overlook commanding a view of the sea and the spreading rooftops of Salem. For the rest of his life he shuttled between civilized Salem and the buck skinned fringes of the known world, out beyond Worcester, then Springfield, then Barrington, gathering his tenant's tithes of com and beans, salted meat and barrels of ale, selling what he couldn't consume and buying more tracts of uncleared forest with the profit. He was a New World Emperor.

Beigh visited the Museum of Maritime Trade and found that the curator's note cards celebrate only Puritan pragmatism. There was no order, no hierarchy of intrinsic value or aesthetic worth; it's a fly's eye view of Puritan history. She also comes across the Mughal opulence and she wonders over the gulf between two worlds. "What must these worlds have thought, colliding with each other? How mutually staggered they must have been" [9].

The opulence of the Eastern World, their love for gold, diamond and jewellery drives the Westerners to disdain and despair. But their sense of snobbery does not permit them to kneel-down before the Eastern culture.

[9] Ibid., p.12.
They revel in their own sense of pride and superiority as is obvious from one of the inscriptions in the Museum, which records their reactions:

_We beat those Asians because our pots are heavy and black and our pothooks contain no jewels. No paintings, no inlays of rubies and pearls. Our men wore animal skins or jerkins of crude muslin and our women's virtue was guarded by bonnets and capes and full skirts. Those Indian guys wore earrings and dresses and necklaces. When they ran out of space on their bodies they punched holes in their wives' noses to hang more gold and pearl chains. Then they bored holes in their wives' ears to show off more junk, they crammed gold bracelets all the way up to their elbows so their arms were too heavy to lift, and they slipped new rings on their toes and thumbs so they could barely walk or make a fist._ [10]

Beigh Masters hunts for every minute detail about Hannah and she knows the traces of Salem Bibi pop up from time to time in inaccessible and improbable little museums. They get auctioned and sold to anonymous buyers. She believes that she knew her identity, and the anonymous donor. She is an ardent researcher, full of vigour, bubbling with confidence and

having faith in her sincerity to achieve her goal. She dilates on her personality and the mental make-up at this juncture. She knows for sure that there is one moment in every life when hope surprises us like grace, and when one is in love, or at least has its promise, jungle is landscaped into Eden.

She is confident of finding this Eden, passing through the jungle like obscure museums and auctions around the world. As she goes through the photographic records of Hannah's life in a museum in Massachusetts she gets the vision of the Old World, its exotic inhabitants etc.

The largest painting bears a catalogue name *The Apocalypse*, but the narrator calls it 'The Unravish'd Bride'. In this painting beautiful Salem Bibi stands on the cannon-breached rampart of a Hindu fort. In another painting she notices Salem Bibi's lover, once a sprightly guerrilla warrior, now slumps against a charred tree trunk. He grasps a nephrite jade dagger hilt carved in the shape of a ram's head and, with his last blood-clotted breath, pledging revenge. Salem Bibi becomes a co-wanderer of Beigh Masters, a constant source of vital energy, inspiration, adventure, odyssey, always whispering in her ears 'to go':

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Fly as long as hard as you can, my co-dreamer! Scout a fresh site on another hill. Found with me a city where lions lie with lambs, where pity quickens knowledge, where desire dissipates despair! [11].

Now she has the confidence to claim that she knows Hannah’s ins and outs. She knows her like a doctor and a lawyer, like a mother and a daughter. With every new thing she had learned, she came imperceptibly closer to the Emperor’s Tear. She also comes to know that, three hundred years ago, it existed in Salem Bibi’s hands. She also comes know from where Salem Bibi came and where she went. By this time she had started loving the Emperor’s Tear, but she only cared for Salem Bibi.

With this claim of Beigh Masters sufficient ground of plausibility was prepared. They were ready to plunge their head in the details of Hannah’s extraordinary life. Though, her movement had been a circular one, by no means she remained the same Hannah on her return to Salem. India had transformed her sensibility with the resultant change in her personality.

Hannah Easton was the only surviving child of Edward and Rebecca Easton, Rebecca Walker of Brookfield, in the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

First the Walkers had settled in Boston, or even Rhode Island but by 1653 Elias Walker, his wife and infant daughter, Rebecca, arrived in Brookfield and leased, from their distant relatives the Masters, three hundred acres of prime Quabaug River bluff and bottom land. At that time, Brookfield was a hesitant hilltop puritan outpost deep inside Nipmuc country. Elias Walker held the usual attitudes of his time, and ours, toward the Indians. Eight years later, the Walkers gained a neighbour, a sickly looking but resourceful recent arrival (from England) by the name of Edward Easton, who purchased with his English savings a brown ribbon of a field, a rickety shed, a cabin with privy and two barns. At the age of 15 in 1668, Rebecca Walker got married to Edward Easton. Hannah was born of this marriage after two years.

In Old World, Edward Easton had been an East India Company man with a sedentary occupation. Beigh searches for more details about Edward’s life and gets plenty of clues to reconstruct his life. She goes through East India Company ledger books, letters, books and papers stored in the India Office in white hall. Edward Easton's entries stand out because of the singular primacy and angularity of his handwriting. Beigh, a twenty-year old girl, really contemplating her place in the universe and the ways of the World had appropriated an ancestor, a man who had gone before her, and
though he was writing of strangers, she cherished his observations like an intimate letter from home:

*A petty ruler on the Coromandel Coast of India is given the gifts of armour, a wool coat and a spying glass.*

*A ship on its way to Masulipatnam is stocked with 1420 hogs and 250 oxen* [12].

What is known about the life of Edward, Hannah's father, is that he headed for the outer rings of settlements stopping over first in Billerica, then in Chelmsford, then in Lancaster. He was offered a modest book keeping job by John White's son-in-law, the Reverend Joseph Rowlandson, Lancaster's first minister - then in Worcester, and finally either running out of energy or finding in Brookfield the dreamscape for starting over. Beigh is proud of her discovery and boasts that; perhaps she was the only scholar in the world who had traced the work of an obscure clerk from London to Massachusetts. She could sense all the movements in his life, his determination to remake his life before it was too late, to go west to the colony instead of east, where

surely his East India clerkship could have led him. She felt the same psychic bond with Edward Easton that Keats did with the revelers on the Grecian Urn.

On September 29, 1671 Hannah turned a year old and first toddled far enough away by herself to be brought back by a Solicitous Nipmuc. On that very day Edward Easton died of a bee sting while savouring the poetic paradox in an imported, treasured copy of Paradise Lost and the physical paradox of constipation's painful pleasures in his outdoor privy. Hannah lost her mother Rebecca a twenty-two-year-old widow when the Nipmuc laid siege to Brookfield in the month of August in 1675. Rebecca loved to sing. The little daughter had a disturbing memory of her mother, which haunted her wherever she went. Her mother had deserted her in a Brookfield forest to run away with her American-Indian lover. Hannah knew that “It is necessary not only to retain the memory of her beloved, absent mother, but to deny its final blinding, lustful image. To preserve above all the orphan’s tragic tale above the wicked woman’s demonic possession” [13]. Hannah, a Puritan child was overburdened. She had witnessed the fall, but not that of Adam’s, but it was Rebecca’s fall. Her mother’s fall infinitely was more sinful than

the fall of a man. But one thing is without question that “Hannah Easton, whatever the name she carried in Massachusetts, in England, in India or even into history to this very day, loved her mother more profoundly than any daughter has ever loved a mother” [14].

Mukherjee has quite skilfully brought together the 17th century Puritan American society with the more liberated present day American society. Here we see Beigh Masters, a modern American researcher claiming her affinity with Easton family, comparing the circumstances of her own life with that of Rebecca and Hannah Easton:

Like Rebecca, I have a lover. One who would seem alien to my family. A lover scornful of our habits of self effacement and reasonableness, of our naive or desperate clinging to an imagined continuity. Venn was born in India and came over as a baby. His family are all successful; there was never question of anything different. He grew up in a world so secure I can’t imagine it, where for us security is another kind of trap, something to be discarded as dramatically as Rebecca stepped out of dog-blooded widow’s weeds into a life of sin and servitude [15].

[15] Ibid., p. 31
Hannah, 'the somber orphan' [16] is brought to Salem by Robert and Susannah Fitch. They rear her up with love and affection. Hannah has an extraordinary skill for needlework and soon her reputation reaches the masses:

Even at the age of twelve, Hannah Easton’s work is known and families who would not have admitted her step-parents to their parlours insist on showing her inside, offering her cakes and tiny tokens of additional payment. Susannah, her stepmother, praises her needlework skill. However, such is the fame of Hannah’s work and such is the charm of her magical personality that soon a marriage proposal comes for her from the Pynchons, one of New England’s respectable families. But Robert Fitch politely refuses the offer. The narrator thinks that after all it was for her own good as well as for the good of the country because if Solomon Pynchon’s marital overture had been accepted, the history of the United States would have been profoundly altered.

Hannah marries Gabriel Legge, the same man who had been courting her intimate friend Hester Manning who was found one day dead, fully recognizing the fact that he was untrustworthy. It is noticed that she is

[16] Ibid., p.39.
unconsciously imitating her mother’s behaviour - running off with a treacherous yet exotic alien. “He claimed to be the son of the owner of the Swallow, three hundred and twenty tons. He had come from London, but hailed from Ireland, to scout the colonies for investment, for new forms of imports and exports to the New World to mark its growing stature, its great wealth and taste for finer things” [17]. The tall and dashing Gabriel Legge has an eye patch. But there is no doubt that he has an extraordinary capacity for making stories: “Tortured? Punished? Heroic? No one knew for sure. He had a thousand stories of imprisonment by Turks; banishment to forests; brigands, highway men, pirates” [18].

Hannah’s acceptance of Gabriel Legge, a man of dubious character raises a lot of questions in the mind of the narrator and at last she comes to the conclusion that unconsciously she imitates her mother by this act:

Why would a self-possessed, intelligent, desirable woman like Hannah Easton suddenly marry a man she recognized as inappropriate and untrustworthy? Why would she accept Hester Manning’s castoff, or betrayer? Guilt, perhaps, a need to punish herself for the secret she was forced to carry? Unconscious imitation of her mother, a way of joining her by

[17] Ibid., p.62.
[18] Ibid., p.63
running off with a treacherous alien? Gabriel Legge with his tales of exotic adventure was as close to the Nipmuc lover as any man in Salem. She sought to neutralize her shame by emulating her mother's behaviour [19].

Hannah finds to her dismay that Gabriel’s father far from being a ship owner is an indebted drunk from Morpeth. Gabriel’s life too is a mystery. He was able to describe the interior of a Mongol tent, the smell of camels, the pink flesh inside the trunk of a raja’s elephant, but he was not able, or would not wanted to answer the simplest question about the ships he sailed or the captains he served.

However, Hannah is inquisitive and tries to drink every draught of the life’s cup. When Gabriel goes to his mysterious missions she finds a good engagement in the duty of a nurse. She can now use the same needle efficiently to the skull of men, which she once used on clothes. Gabriel Legge proposes her to accompany him to India where he works as a junior factor in East India Company. Such is the curiosity of Hannah that she instantly accepts the offer and sets for India leaving aside her fortune and reputation in Stepney, England. While in England Hannah’s perceptive eyes

[19] Ibid., p.69.
are quite alert to notice the attitude of American colonies towards the English Crown. She notices mutually contradictory feelings in two groups of people. On the one hand there were colonists who were “not grateful or respectful enough to the Crown and the Mother Country and the colonists were ignorance personified and insufficiently ashamed of their backwardness. For them England was refined and cultured and colonies were soiled and sinful. On the other hand, there were colonists who were proud of their backwardness. They revealed this, in using and broadening their own American accent, which had already ironed out the multifarious wrinkles of British regionalism.

Hannah’s arrival in India in 1695 is set against a period of tumultuous political and economic activity. Here she, as well as, we the readers confront the realities of British industrialists in India. They had not come to India in order to breed and colonize, or even to convert. They were here to plunder, to enrich themselves. But Hannah’s primary concern in this new world appears to peel the superficiality and social grace and dwell beneath it in a quest for a meaningful life. In fact, as soon as she steps on the shores of the Coromandel Coast, she feels an instinctive sense of belonging and decides that she did not aspire to return to England upon the completion of Gabriel’s tour. Hannah knew she’d been transported to the other side of the world, but
the transportation was more than mere ‘conveyancing’, as it was for Gabriel
and the others. Many years later she called the trip, and her long residence in
India, her translation. Hannah is alive to the life around her. She is not afraid
of the ‘exotica’ instead she is thrilled. It is this curiosity and enthusiasm
towards life, which makes her a contemporary of the narrator who cannot
withhold her sense of admiration:

She knows that she has come halfway round the globe and the life in
the Indian sub-continent is entirely different. She cannot use her own
western parameters for measuring this world. Her reactions are that of a
tourist. In some original sense of the word (as a linguist is to language), she
was a tourist. She was alert to novelty, but her voyage was mental interior.
Getting there was utmost important, but savoring the comparison with
London or Salem, and watching her life being transformed, that was the
pleasure. She never ever judged India in respect to England, or of
Christianity.

During their voyage her husband endlessly talked about the life and
society in India. He had tried to explain her that every one on Coromandel,
belonged to a caste, if he was Hindu, a right-hand or left-hand caste, and
everyone was either Shia or Sunni if he was Muslim. They all spoke
different languages, they owed fidelity to different masters, they worshipped
different gods, and their ancestors had come from different countries. It was all nightmarish for her. The immense variety was thrilling and exciting but it had been inconceivable to a Puritan soul like Hannah's. Her world was not so varied, not so diverse. So she wondered that they were not just pagans and Mohammedans, but different gods and different ways of worshipping the same God.

Right from the moment Hannah sets her feet on Indian soil she is aware of the fact that she belongs to the land and people of this country are her brethren, and that she has got nothing to do with the race of those Britishers who have come here to plunder, to lead a life of comfort, lechery and convenience. Her encounter with English women, the wives of other factors, furthers her impatience with their pretensions to nobility and their self-conscious superiority among the local community. These were women who led ordinary lives in England but claimed command and respect here, always eager to display it in all its vulgarity. Martha Ruxton and Sarah Higginbotham are both examples of English snobbery and disdain characteristic of the women in the colonies. Their life of reason and etiquette is sharply opposed to the dubiously adventurous and morally ambivalent lives of their husbands whose 'bibis' becomes the primary topic of conversation among these women:
To Shakuntala Bharvani, “It is very much a colonial novel at one level, with several details of colonial life woven in” [20]. While fusing history with fiction, Mukherjee never shirks from reflecting post-colonial anxiety. The lucrative life style, cruelty, lechery, the Britishers’ feeling of disdain towards the natives are contradicted with the deplorable plight of the Indian masses. The fort in which the Britishers lived was Little England. The Fort St. George Council’s penal code encouraged straight and narrow living. Uncleanness, lying, cheating, drunkenness, swearing, missing morning or evening prayers, using seditious words, mutinying, dueling, all were punishable with whippings, mountings of the “wooden horse”, confinement and fines. The factors show that their life in India is extraordinary and they are the very angels sent by the British God, the British Crown. They feel that they have a licence to commit whatever atrocities they like in view of their ‘White superiority’. Self-pity, unaccountability and hypocrisy were recast as virtues and renamed forgiveness, solidarity and tolerance. The novel also draws our attention on the mysterious deaths of these factors who were more or less victims of intrigue planned by their own counterparts.

The Chief Factor Cephus Prynne's body was recovered in deplorable condition. However, Hannah “looked on Cephus Prynne’s murder as emancipation... the workings of an alien providence” [21].

Hannah has an altogether different experience with the first manifestation of a bibi that she comes across in the form of Bhagmati. Pulling herself down from the terrace of Hannah's house, she is dressed in sheer muslin white, which mesmerizes Hannah's consciousness. It is an image that persists in her mind as suggestive of the sensuality, magical attraction and passionate representation of this land. In fact, as Gabriel Legge sets out with the Marquis on a mission of piracy, Hannah feels no remorse or longing for her old world, for she has yet to come to terms with this passion, with the sensuality and life of emotion which Bhagmati represented in that fleeting moment on the terrace.

With Gabriel Legge turning to piracy and becoming the Robinhood of the Coromandel Coast, she is not left with much option. Circumstances of her life start changing at a frantic pace in the year 1700. First she leaves Gabriel on grounds of faithlessness and next sees his ship sinking. She herself should have been drowned when a bridge collapsed but she is saved

by Jadav Singh, the Raja of Devgd only to become his bibi afterwards. Is it not ironical that the same Hannah who leaves her husband for keeping a ‘bibi’ in the end becomes a ‘bibi’ herself carrying an illegitimate child? However, this incident is imperative for the total transformation of her personality, because her yearning for a kind of passionate salvation as a way of recreating her mother’s choice in the forest is largely fulfilled in her encounter with Raja Jadav Singh. Her courtship with the Raja indicates a relationship based entirely on Indian, ‘Eastern’ values and morality with little reference to the life left behind. He offers Hannah a life of limitless possibilities and sensuous pleasures undreamed of in the English world. It is this experience of being overwhelmed in love, of being possessed to the point of distraction that Hannah embraces with the totality of her being and little moral speculation. In Massachusetts Bay, life had been very hard, the summer was short, the freaks of nature were given less opportunity to emerge and there was no comfort to thrive. But India opens new avenues of life for her. She identifies herself completely with her Indian lover. She has seen ‘Firangis’ plundering the Indians but what mesmerizes her is not the profit-hungry motives of ‘firangis’ but the sturdiness of a religious faith that allowed hundreds of thousands of devotees to worship a god-head that chose to reveal itself as a scarlet-faced, yellow-furred, long-tailed monkey. She is
very afraid before coming into actual contact with Raja Jadav Singh. She cannot hide her skepticism towards the Eastern faith.

She loved Raja very much. She would sacrifice anything for his touch. What she felt for the Raja was of a different order from what she had felt for Gabriel, or not dared to feel for Hubert. Gabriel and Hubert, for all their distinctive eccentricities, were men cast in one familiar mold, men who thrilled and disappointed within a predictable range. The Raja was an agent of Providence. He had saved her life, then saved her from the chilly, unfulfilled life of a governess. Jadav Singh continues to court her one-quarter of each night for a fortnight. This alters the sensibility of Hannah. The Eastern love makes her more emotional. She is aware of the transformation of her mentality, her whole personality.

Ultimately Hannah discovers that the survivor is the one who improvises, not follows, the rules. This comes as an indirect message of the author herself. She stresses again and again in almost all her fictional writings that only those people can survive in an alien world who are elastic and who can shape themselves according to the availability of space by improvising upon their native rules. Jadav Singh’s death and Hannah's encounter with Emperor Aurangzeb mature her experiences in terms of her journey to the world of the mysterious East. She is ready to protect her
Indian lover inspite of his dissociation from her. The suspension of morality and the openness to new experiences make Hannah confront Aurangzeb and even bow to his gifts of pearls as a symbol of his superiority and power. Her duty finally accomplished, Hannah returns to Salem but not before paying her deepest tributes to Bhagmati, her Indian Hester Manning. However, this rechristening of Bhagmati is viewed as "the ultimate colonization" [22] by Hema Nair.

Hannah’s journey to India is fraught with images of adventure, action and passion. She returns to her native land, not as a reformed American but a rebel living on the fringes of society. Like Jasmine, Hannah finds final contentment and joy in the adapted land and it is the morality of this land that Hannah carries along with her. Bharati Mukherjee describes The Holder of the World, as a post-modern historical novel but at its most basic level, it is a novel of expatriation, of a quest not only to geographically diverse lands but to culturally variant societies as well. Hannah's life succeeds in questioning and discovering new ways of defining reality and her identity in a world, which was essentially orthodox. Hannah altogether is a stunning creation, bold in nature, striving for identity in strange surroundings, a timeless creature trying to survive in a rigid, inexorably defined society.

The novel ends with Hannah’s return journey to Salem where she locates her mother from a mental asylum and brings up her “black” daughter Pearl Singh and fearlessly stays in Salem all her life - along with her mother’s five half Nipmuc children, and Beigh Master’s tracking the most perfect diamond in the world the Emperor’s Tear.