

A Creative Protest against Punishment and Formation of a New Meaning of Life: An Analysis of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*

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Abstract:

Nathaniel Hawthorne's magnum opus The Scarlet Letter is a novella set in the 17th century New England which tells of Hester Prynne, a Puritan married young lady who has committed an act of adultery. This act of sin has upset the Puritan male authority very violently and under Puritan doctrine the punishment for such a sin is the death sentence. With this aim Hester, the mother of a baby girl, is put into the trial where she is given a 'compromised' punishment as her other partner of the sin is undetected. Surprisingly, Hester's secret partner is a young and influential minister who is also present in the trial process but remains silent and Hester also keeps her partner's identity secret. Finally, concerning the baby's security the authority imposes upon her a punishment of carrying an alphabet 'A' round her neck. But in order to establish justice, when Hester is presented before all for interrogation about the identity of her secret partner, she, with an unprecedented sense of defiance, denies revealing the name. Furthermore, she has embroidered the alphabet 'A' in the most attractive lurid red color to make it visible to all. Interestingly, she has let all know, in this very process of protest, her creative faculty in the skill of embroidery which later turns her into an entrepreneur. Focusing on her renaissance spirit, Bhabha's theory on space and identity and characteristics of an entrepreneur, this paper traces out Hester's creative mind behind her protest against the punishment and the subsequent formation of a new meaning of life.

Keywords: Creative protest; Puritan society; Renaissance spirit; Male dominated society; Sin and punishment; Entrepreneur

1. Introduction

A novella of sin and punishment Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* portrays an early Puritan society of New England where religion is the supreme authority to rule the people. In this society of religious extremity, the Puritans desire to maintain a "Utopia of human virtue and happiness" (Hawthorne, 2005, p. 36). The Puritan history tells that because of the religious oppressions in their mother country England they are forced to move to at first the Netherlands and later to New England. After their landing to this new place they have selected "a portion of the virgin soil as a cemetery, and another portion as the site of a prison" (Hawthorne, 2005, p. 36). With this philosophy of life, the new Puritan settlement is going on smoothly. In this Puritan setting of life Hawthorne has introduced an act of a sin called adultery and this act is committed by the heroine of the novella named Hester Prynne who is the wife of an English scholar and a doctor of high reputation. This act of sin is, as viewed by the narrator in the chapter "The Prison Door",—"a tale of human frailty and sorrow" (Hawthorne, 2005, p. 37).

It is surprising that Hester's secret partner is also a young and unmarried minister who is considered as "a miracle of holiness" (Hawthorne, p. 94) by the Puritan society. Therefore, their illicit relationship reveals that Hester's marriage is unsuccessful and being a sinner Arthur's religious responsibility to preach others not to commit sin is questionable. They both have been unaware of the Freudic idea of suppressed desire and when they meet each other in the forest, they are physically attracted and the act of adultery takes place. When the spell of physical attraction is over, it is Arthur who suffers intensely for his commitment to the Puritan ideology but for Hester it is not so because she exhibits a renaissance spirit that tells of the importance of human interest more than the religious interest. In this way, Hester believes that her relationship with Arthur is not a sin as she loves Arthur. Through committing sin, they turn themselves into sinners and with this new identity their relationship with the puritan society also changes and it is a new life defined by struggles and humiliation especially for Hester as she is a woman. Her new position in the society demands from her a protest against the punishment she receives. Thus, she responds to this new situation of life through a creative manner which is the skill of embroidery.

2. Research Methodology

This research work adopts a qualitative research methodology, which involves an intensive reading of the text. Furthermore, a deeper analysis and exploration of the key issues as delineated in the novella will allow us to understand and interpret the outlook of the author.

3. Discussion

3.1 Hester and Sin

Hester, as introduced by the narrator, is a married woman who is found as an adulteress and the male dominated Puritan society is determined to punish the sinner according to the Bible. In this regard the attitude of the Puritans toward women is important to analyze. According to Puritanism, women are treated as the agent of Satan, the arch enemy of human beings as Christianity reflects. In the relationship of adultery, we find that the woman is married in her status whereas the man is young and unmarried with the responsibility of guiding the Bostonians to the path of religiosity. After her arrival to the town, as per the system of the community, Hester has chosen the young unmarried minister Arthur Dimmesdale as her religious guide. This idea of her soul's guardianship is reflected when she says, "Thou wast my pastor, and hadst charge of my soul, and knowest me better than these men can" (Hawthorne, 2005, p. 76).

It is known to us that society is guided by rules and regulations for humans to observe so that people can live there morally and peacefully. According to the novel, as long as the characters are inside the territory of the society there is no happening of deviation. Whenever they are in the outskirts of the human society, they feel attracted to each other naturally forgetting their societal ideologies and a physical relationship occurs between them. To make the happening worse Hester gets pregnant and it is revealed to all that her child is begotten through an act of adultery. Hester's such act of adultery recalls to Emma Bovary in Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*. Like Hester, Emma goes for extra marital relationship for her quest of ideal love responding to instincts. In doing so, both of them repudiate the codes and conventions of the society they live in.

Hester's nature of relationship with the society takes new turn after her involvement in sin. Her act of sin has created a kind of agitation among the Bostonian Puritans who exhibit a demand of punishing Hester in the most befitting manner. In this regard the reactions of women are worthy to note. Their cruel remarks convey that they are highly ashamed of the sin as the revealed sinner is of their own gender. Therefore, gender issue is an important aspect in the novella. Again, the Puritan philosophy tells that according to the idea of the Original Sin, it is Eve who, being influenced by Satan in disguise, convinces Adam to disobey the instructions of God and finally they are expelled from heaven. Thus, women are the agents of Satan and from this line

of thought it is not illogical for the Puritans to think about women with negative attributes.

3.2 Hester and Punishment

In the Puritan society the role of gender tells that women's position is far inferior to man. But Hawthorne's New England Puritan society as described in *The Scarlet Letter* points out that Hester is at the center and the two male characters Roger and Arthur are in the margin. Thus, Hester is at the seat of the Subject whereas the two men are the Other. When Hester's role expands, the other two male protagonists also get new dimensions in their character. Here Hawthorne provides us a new definition of the Other in the paradigm of the sexual politics. Hester's being at the center as put by Hawthorne is very much opposite to Simon de Beauvoir's definition of 'woman' in the chapter "The Psychoanalytic Point of View" of the book *The Second Sex* where she says, "She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute—she is the Other" (Beauvoir, 1997, p. 16). Here in the novella *The scarlet Letter*, Hester is the essential Subject or the One and on the contrary, the two male characters are the inessential Object or the Other. Therefore, Hester holds a position to question the male authority which is unlike Beauvoir's question, "Why is it that women do not dispute male sovereignty?" (Beauvoir, 1997, p. 18) Furthermore, we find that it is Hester who has chosen not her husband but her beloved Arthur as her sexual partner. Thus, being a woman in the Puritan society Hester is the Subject who possesses the ability to hold the position of the Subject.

In the pillory scene of the chapter "The Market-Place" Hester is presented before all with her new born baby girl. Women of diverse ages are seen producing harsh comments against Hester. They even cannot accept the punishment given to Hester by the authority. Through Hester's committing the sin of adultery, for the first time, they have become very much aware of their gender identity and out of gender consciousness they demand harsher punishment saying, "At the very least, they should have put the brand of a hot iron on Hester Prynne's forehead" (Hawthorne, 2005, p. 39). Following this utterance another woman remarks, "This woman has brought shame upon us all, and ought to die. Is there not law for it? Truly there is, both in the Scripture and the statute-book. Then let the magistrates, who have made it of no effect, thank themselves if their own wives and daughters go astray!" (Hawthorne, 2005, p. 39) In the above statement, it is seen that the woman is cursing the magistrates as she is not satisfied with the punishment given to Hester.

Since the revelation of Hester's committing sin she faces every possible challenge as a sinner in the Bostonian Puritan society. Her extraordinary strength of mind gives her courage to withstand any punishment. In the chapter "The Recognition" the narrator records,

The penalty therefore is death. But in their great mercy and tenderness of heart, they have doomed Mistress Prynne to stand only a space of three hours on the platform of the pillory, and then and thereafter, for the remainder of her natural life, to wear a mark of shame upon her bosom (Hawthorne, 2005, p. 46).

In this way, Hester has received a unique punishment which cannot be put into a time frame, rather a perennial one as long as she lives on this earth. Now, her punishment will serve as a "living sermon against sin" (Hawthorne, 2005, p. 46) to all the people of Boston.

Again, the position of women in the Puritan society can be interpreted through the lens of racism as Hester is, through the trial scenes, ruled by the male authority as a superior gender. The definition of racism as discussed in Audre Lorde's "Age, Race, Class and Sex: Women Redefining Difference", conveys "the belief in the inherent superiority of one race over the others and thereby the right to dominate" (Lorde, 2004, p. 855). Thus, we find in the novella that the society Hester lives is a society of inequality where the men in power dominate the women and Hester herself is a glowing example as she alone shoulders the punishment and her male counterpart goes unpunished.

Symbolic punishment given to Hester in the form of carrying an alphabet 'A' round her neck has a similarity with the punishment given to the Old Mariner to carry the dead albatross round his neck as described in Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. Though the punishment is apparently similar, the causes are different. Also, the nature of sufferings of the sinners is different. For Hester it is public humiliation which causes a kind of trauma. For the Old Mariner it is the series of physical sufferings which create in him a sense of repentance. But at the end both the sinners attain freedom.

3.3 Hester as an Entrepreneur

The word 'entrepreneur' as Oxford English Reference Dictionary refers to is a person who undertakes an enterprise or business, with the chance of profit or loss. To relate the meaning of an entrepreneur with the novel, a focus is needed to give on how Hester, over the years of struggles, becomes an entrepreneur.

We find Hester in the chapter “The Market-Place” in a new look as she is carrying an alphabet ‘A’ which is not the same colorless alphabet “A” given by the authority as a punishment. She has, with her artistic ingenuity, transformed the alphabet ‘A’ into a very attractive one which bears her excellence in embroidery skill. Here, her motive is not making any profit or loss but to protest against the punishment but eventually, it will give her a new meaning of life. The narrator says,

On the breast of her gown, in fine red cloth, surrounded with an elaborate embroidery and fantastic flourishes of gold thread, appeared the letter A. It was so artistically done, and with so much fertility and gorgeous luxuriance of fancy, that it had all the effect of a last and fitting decoration in the apparel which she wore; and which was of a splendor in accordance with the taste of the age, but greatly beyond what was allowed by the sumptuary regulations of the colony (Hawthorne, 2005, p. 40).

Thus, the transformation of the alphabet ‘A’ has become a synonym for Hester as an entrepreneur. Robert D. Hisrich and Michael P. Peters in the book *Entrepreneurship* have dubbed an entrepreneur as an ‘innovator’ (p. 9). To them an entrepreneur is ‘an individual developing something unique’ (p. 9). To highlight the function of an entrepreneur the authors also clarify:

The function of the entrepreneur is to reform or revolutionize the pattern of production by exploiting an invention or, more generally, a united technological method of producing a new commodity or producing an old one in a new way, opening a new source of supply of materials or a new outlet for products, by organizing a new industry (Hisrich & Peters, 2002, p. 9).

This above-mentioned definition of an entrepreneur conveys the fact that to be innovative with newness in product making is an inseparable part of entrepreneurship. An entrepreneur requires to have a creative mind and the capacity to analyze the needs of the place and environment and Hester proves her capacity of entrepreneurship very successfully.

The art of needlework is common to Puritan women and Hester also knows it well. But the uniqueness lies in Hester is her capacity to produce artistic work which claims her excellence in the field. Women of Boston town hate Hester for her sin but they do not hesitate to appreciate her extraordinary sense of needlework. In this regard, it can be remarked that like a successful entrepreneur the art of needlework in the hands of Hester gets a revolutionary touch and through this she has uplifted the aesthetic sense of the Bostonian

customers who now demand from Hester all types of domestic clothing. This demand increases more and more and Hester's acceptance to the society also grows to a higher level. Actually, she has transformed a hostile environment to a favorable one in which she has forged a space. She has been able to overcome the existential crises most importantly for her daughter Pearl. In this struggle of life, she is completely alone though she is married and has a beloved. But the men in her life named Roger and Arthur are timid enough to reveal their identity. So, she is a lone fighter in this new land who manages everything for survival.

In her new identity as an entrepreneur, life offers more and more acceptability with the passage of time and the idea of punishment for her is gradually fading away. This has been possible for her as she has added newness in the needlework and this "creating something new with value" (Hisrich & Peters, 2002, p. 10) is an essential need for a successful entrepreneur. To quote the narrator—

But the point which drew all eyes, and, as it were, transfigured the wearer,—so that both men and women, who had been familiarly acquainted with Hester Prynne, were now impressed as if they beheld her for the first time,—was that SCARLET LETTER, so fantastically embroidered and illuminated upon her bosom. It had the effect of a spell, taking her out of the ordinary relations with humanity, and enclosing her in a sphere by herself (Hawthorne, 2005, p. 41).

Thus, Hester is now recognized as a woman of extraordinary embroidery skill and it is echoed in the quotation, "She hath good skill at her needle, that's certain," remarked one of her female spectators;" (Hawthorne, 2005, p. 41) and with this skill she will establish her rights. Her skill speaks in favor of her and this is how she voices out her inner feelings.

Hester has an innate mind to be rebellious and her sense of protest against punishment is voiced out without any words but with a gesture when the narrator says, "When the young woman—the mother of the child—stood fully revealed before the crowd... with a burning blush, and yet a haughty smile... Neighbors" (Hawthorne, 2005, p. 40). Here her 'haughty smile' tells that she denies the trial as well as the punishment.

3.4 Hester's Protest as a Woman

Nathaniel Hawthorne's introduction of Hester in the chapter "The Market-Place" is in a very captivating manner. The chapter tells that Hester is a tall

young woman “with a figure of perfect elegance on a large scale” (Hawthorne, 2005, p. 40). She draws the attention of all with her “dark and abundant hair” (p. 40), “richness of complexion” (p. 40) and “the feminine gentility of those days” (p. 40). The dress she puts on also tells what her personality is. To quote, “Her attire, which, indeed she had wrought for the occasion, in prison, and had modelled much after her own fancy, seemed to express the attitude of her spirit, the desperate recklessness of her mood, by its wild and picturesque peculiarity” (p. 40-41). Thus, Hester is not a typical Puritan woman with a submissive and surrendering mind but a woman of boldness and she is prepared to fight for her rights under any situation. According to Michel Foucault (1998), there is a relationship between the idea of power and the idea of resistance. Resistance takes birth where power is in force. Thus, when we find Hester protesting against punishment, she is, in her supreme consciousness, resisting her position in the society not only as a woman but also as a mother figure. Hester’s such personality produces a sense of shock to the Puritan society as it is habituated to find women in subordination.

In the chapter “The Recognition” we find Hester as a woman of uncompromising attitude when she is under interrogation about her secret partner. The ironical fact in this scene is that the minister who is interrogating her is her secret partner called the Reverend Mr. Dimmesdale. The whole crowd, Governor Bellingham and the Reverend Mr. Wilson everyone is sure that the other sinner’s identity will be revealed and thus the justice will be ensured. Dramatically, Hester denies uttering the name and to the authority this denial is quite unacceptable. At this an angry remark follows. To quote the narrator, “Woman, transgress not beyond the limits of Heaven’s Mercy!” cried the Reverend Mr. Wilson, more harshly than before” (p. 49). Then he continues, “Speak out the name! That, and thy repentance, may avail to take the scarlet letter off thy breast” (p. 49).

Thus, Hester is discovered as a woman of audacity when she gives a far more shocking reply to the authority against the offer given to her to reveal the name. Her sense of protest is worthy to note when she, in high sense of courage, emphatically utters “Never” (p. 49). This single word reply suggests Hester’s uncompromising attitude toward the authority. Then she continues saying, “It is too deeply branded. Ye cannot take it off. And would that I might endure his agony, as well as mine!” (p. 49) Therefore, through her mind of protest and denial she actually challenges the male dominated Puritan authority and at the same time she reveals to the witness the fact that both Arthur and the token of punishment are inalienable parts of her existence. In this way, Hester has destroyed the male superiority.

When this dramatic trial scene is going on, from the crowd another male voice speaks out to draw the attention of Hester. To quote, “Speak woman! Speak; and give your child a father!” (p. 50) With the same spirit of protest and denial Hester replies, “I will not speak!” (p. 50) To our utter surprise, the owner of the male voice is Roger Chillingworth, Hester’s husband who has remained disappeared for nearly two years. Recognizing who the stranger is Hester in her strong determination says, “And my child must seek a heavenly Father; she shall never know an earthly one!” (p. 50) This reply of Hester surprises Dimmesdale more and he decides to end up interrogation process saying, “Wondrous strength and generosity of a woman’s heart! She will not speak!” (p. 50)

Therefore, here it is established that Hester is in no way a typical Puritan woman. Rather she is a woman of strong mind who knows very well what her rights are and she also knows how to protest against any injustice. Actually, she has become the spokesman of all the voiceless women of the Puritan society.

3.5 Hester’s Protest as a Mother

The chapter “The Interview” presents a different Hester after her returning to the prison. Now she is suffering from “a state of nervous excitement” (p. 50). Not to allow anything wrong to happen the jailor employs for her a doctor as he thinks that after such a spell of public humiliation she can take any attempt to do harm either to herself or to the baby. To quote the jailor, the doctor is “a man of skill in all Christian modes of physical science” (p. 50) who is well versed with the knowledge of “medicinal herbs and roots” (p. 50). Surprisingly, the doctor is Hester’s dead husband Roger Chillingworth. To clarify the mystery, the narrator tells that though the couple plans to aboard the ship to come to New England together, to complete an important piece of work the husband sends off the wife telling her that he is going to join her by the next ship. The husband starts his journey according to the plan but because of a shipwreck while crossing the Atlantic he meets an accident and luckily survives and finally he finds himself imprisoned in the hands of the Red Indians where he has to be captive for nearly two years. From this perspective it is not wrong for Hester to think that her husband is dead. However, the doctor attains freedom through the attempt of curing one of the chiefs of the savages by his herbal knowledge.

Hawthorne creates a sense of anxiety in the mind of Hester as her husband unexpectedly comes back. But is Hester ready to welcome her husband Roger? No, she is not as she has a relationship of love with Arthur and she has a baby

girl. In this regard, we should not forget how Roger, hiding his identity, behaves with Hester from the crowd of the market. Still the author arranges a meeting between Hester and Roger not based on their marital status but based on the doctor-patient relationship. Their interaction inside the prison is important to analyze. As Roger offers medicine to Hester she speaks out, "Wouldst thou avenge thyself on the innocent babe?" (p. 51) This utterance reveals Hester's concern as a mother for the baby's safety and absence of trust on Roger. Thus, they are separated in all possible ways.

As a mother Hester's life is embedded with one after another challenge as the daughter Pearl grows up. She encounters a threat from the male dominated Puritan authority. The chapter "The Elf-Child and the Minister" tells that the Puritan authority is worried because the child is growing up under the guidance of an adulteress and so the child is needed to be separated from its mother. At this Hester says, "I can teach my little Pearl what I have learned from this!" (p. 75) The word 'this' signifies the alphabet A and it is a 'badge of shame' to the authority. To support her right to the child she argues further saying, "this badge hath taught me,—it daily teaches me,—it is teaching me at this moment,—lessons whereof my child may be the wiser and better, albeit they can profit nothing to myself" (p. 75). At this moment of Hester's motherly protest, the Puritan authority finally has approached Arthur Dimmesdale to settle the issue without knowing that he is the father of the child. Now, Hester has a stronger voice because Arthur is her secret partner and beloved. Rhetorically, Arthur ends the debate saying, "And, moreover, is there not a quality of awful sacredness in the relation between this mother and this child?" (p. 77) Thus, Hester's motherhood is protected through Arthur's timely intervention and this is the first happening where both Arthur and Hester communicate effectively for a common goal. This incident also establishes through a process of protest to protect the sacred rights of a mother.

3.6 Hester and the New Meaning of the Alphabet "A"

The meaning of the alphabet 'A' in the beginning of the novella has been adulteress or adultery to indicate Hester or her act of sin. This meaning is deconstructed by Hester to signify something positive which shows that she is rehabilitated in the society and behind this transformation her embroidery skill plays an instrumental role.

Hester's skill as an entrepreneur allows her to protest against the Puritan authority in a creative way since the moment of her imprisonment. Her visit to the Governor's hall in the chapter "The Governor's Hall" is for delivering a pair of gloves, which she has "fringed and embroidered to his order" (p. 68). Indeed, she has traded her creativity as an entrepreneur. It is surprising to note

that Governor Bellingham who is an authority to punish Hester is the same person who orders her to deliver a pair of gloves. Thus, the Puritan authority exhibits hypocrisy through this incident.

The chapter “Hester at Her Needle” reveals that Hester’s prison life comes to an end. As long as she is in the prison, life is of one type undisturbed by others. But now, as she is out of the prison, she has to encounter “a more real torture” (p. 55) in the hands of the Bostonian Puritan people. At every moment she has to struggle for survival. She is hated by all and harsh comments are thrown at her very often. To avoid this excruciating psychological pain, she can go back to Europe where she can hide her “character and identity under a new exterior” (p. 55-56) but she is adamant to fight and protest for her new identity. The narrator remarks, “Hester Prynne, therefore, did not flee. On the outskirts of the town, within the verge of the peninsula, but not in close vicinity to any other habitation, there was a small thatched cottage” (p. 56). In this thatched cottage Hester restarts his life along with her daughter Pearl with a new spirit of creativity in embroidery or needlework. She has no friend on earth to help her and in this lonely struggle of life, with a strong sense of self-reliance, she forms a new identity, the identity of an entrepreneur. The narrator says, “She possessed an art that sufficed, even in a land that afforded comparatively little scope for its existence, to supply food for her thriving infant and herself” (p. 57). Her advertisement technique is to show her skill of embroidery through “the curiously embroidered letter, a specimen of her delicate and imaginative skill” (p. 57). As she is successful in drawing the attention of the Bostonian young ladies, her new identity as a fine and innovative cloth maker reaches to every corner of the society. Within a short time, she gets an overwhelming amount of order both from common men and men in power. Her products include “deep ruffs, painfully wrought bands, and gorgeously embroidered gloves” (p. 57). Now, people look for colorful and gorgeous clothing which is contrary to the Puritan dress code. Such a change is made possible through Hester’s fighting spirit. Her range of customer is also increasing day by day. The narrator comments—

In the array of funerals, too,—whether for the apparel of the dead body, or to typify, by manifold emblematic devices of sable cloth and snowy lawn, the sorrow of the survivors,—there was a frequent and characteristic demand for such labor as Hester Prynne could supply. Baby-linen—for babies then wore robes of state—afforded still another possibility of toil and emolument (p. 57).

Thus, Hester’s achievement continues and her needlework “became what would now be termed the fashion” (p. 57). A successful entrepreneur needs innovation in product making and Hester has been able to introduce a new

trend of 'fashion' and so she is a trend setter. As an artisan and icon of fashion she is now famous to all. People no longer consider her as a sinner. Therefore, "The garments that had been wrought by her sinful hands" (p. 58) are now "seen on the ruff of the Governor; military men wore it on their scarfs and the minister on his band" (p. 58). Her skill is also visible on "the baby's little cap" (p. 58) and "in coffins of the dead" (p. 58) or on the white veil of a bride. This is a new Hester; this is her new position in the town of Boston.

Hester has changed the society and in this process her mind is also changed. A new dimension of her mind is narrated in the chapter "Another View of Hester." Her psychological condition is now completely transformed. She is now turned "from passion and feeling, to thought" (p. 107). She believes that "the world's law was no law for her mind" (p. 107). Such mind of Hester is "common enough on the other side of the Atlantic" (p. 107). Truly, Hester is transformed as she "has encountered, and lived through, an experience of peculiar severity" (p. 107). According to the Bostonian people, she has achieved the status of sisterhood "with the faithful labor of her hands" (p. 105). Now, her service is meant for all. She is always ready to serve anyone with utmost dedication. The narrator says, "None so self-devoted as Hester, when pestilence stalked through the town. In all seasons of calamity, indeed, whether general or of individuals, the outcast of society at once found her place" (p. 105). Thus, "Hester's nature showed itself warm and rich; a well-spring of human tenderness, unfailing to every real demand, and inexhaustible by the largest. Her breast, with its badge of shame, was but the softer pillow for the head that needed one" (p. 105).

Hester is now called "a Sister of Mercy" (p. 105) and so "many people refused to interpret the scarlet A by its original signification" (p. 106). To the Bostonian people "it meant Able; so strong was Hester Prynne, with a woman's strength" (p. 106). Thus, the common people's outlook toward Hester is changed from negativity to positivity with numerous attributes. But the authority of the Puritan community takes much time to change their mind about Hester which is reflected in the comment when the narrator says, "Day by day, nevertheless, their sour and rigid wrinkles were relaxing into something which, in the due course of years, might grow to be an expression of almost benevolence" (p. 106). Hester is now a woman of great influence which is explained in the following statement—

Individuals in private life, meanwhile, had quite forgiven Hester Prynne for her frailty; nay, more, they had begun to look upon the scarlet letter as the token, not of that one sin, for which she had borne so long and dreary a penance, but of her many good deeds since. "Do you see that woman with the embroidered badge?" they would say to

strangers. “It is our Hester,—the town’s own Hester,—who is so kind to the poor, so helpful to the sick, so comfortable to the afflicted! (p. 106)

Thus, the Bostonian people start to believe that “the scarlet letter had the effect of the cross on a nun’s bosom” (p. 106). The impact of the alphabet ‘A’ is talismanic to some extent as “it imparted to the wearer a kind of sacredness, which enabled her to walk securely amid all peril” (p. 106) and “had she fallen among thieves, it would have kept her safe” (p. 106). This extraordinary change has been possible only because of her unique embroidery skill. This change is further recorded in the chapter “A Flood of Sunshine” when the narrator says, “The scarlet letter was her passport into regions where other women dared not tread. Shame, Despair, Solitude! These had been her teachers,—stern and wild ones,—and they had made her strong, but taught her much amiss” (p. 128).

3.7 Hester’s Migration and the Status of Subalternity

The Puritan history tells that their migration from the mother country England to the Netherlands is because of religious persecutions. Thus, their migration exposes them into a series of challenges. As the Puritans are followers of the Old Testament, they possess a hostile and prejudiced mentality against women. The idea of the Original Sin influences them extremely and their demand for Hester’s sin is the capital punishment. Therefore, Hester encounters double marginalization as she is first of all a woman and then a sinner. The structure of the Puritan society tells that the male dominated authority is the elite with the power of voice whereas Hester, being a woman, is the entity without voice. Having no voice is a characteristic of the subalterns. Postcolonial literary theorist Gayatri Spivak (2010) in her essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” argues that there is no listener for the subalterns and this is their fate. Thus, to be voiceless for the subalterns is an acceptable trait of their personality. As Puritan women are traditionally voiceless under the male rule, the Bostonian society expects Hester to be a subaltern. But Hawthorne has shown that under the elite male rule Hester has spoken out not to utter her secret partner’s name which signifies that she has a strong sense of resistance, choice, and voice by which she shines out with a new identity.

As a member of the Puritan society Hester has never imbibed in her the teachings of Puritanism and so she does not think that her relationship with Arthur is a sin. This reflects her renaissance spirit where human interest receives more priority than spiritual interest. She firmly believes that her marriage with Roger is without the essential element love. So, she denies the

marriage which is echoed in the chapter “The Interview” when she says, “I felt no love, nor feigned any” (Hawthorne, 2005, p. 53).

3.8 Hester and The Third Space

Hester’s entanglement between Puritan philosophy and renaissance spirit poses for her a sense of duality or in-between position. Postcolonial theorist H. K. Bhabha (2006) points out the nature of in-between position when he says, “These ‘in-between’ spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining of the idea of society itself” (p. 2). Bhabha shows that holding in-between space gives a new platform to an individual by which the person can create new identities which renew his relationship with society. Again, Bhabha’s (1994) theory of the “Third Space of Enunciation” says, “And by exploring this Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of ourselves (p. 39).

This idea of the Third Space can be befittingly applied to explain Hester’s creative protest against punishment and the subsequent struggles of life. Hester originates from England and then settles in Puritan society of New England and later discovers herself in a new space in the same society through committing adultery. Therefore, her third space is the post-sin life in the society. This third space gives her a chance to challenge her rights and she is successful to influence the narratives of the male authority and power paradigm of the society. It gives her a new avenue to look at life with a new identity.

4. Conclusion

Nathaniel Hawthorne’s novella *The Scarlet Letter* is a tale of a Puritan woman Hester who is married but dramatically involved in an act of adultery that puts her in a harsh world of masculine rule. In her post-sin life, she encounters a cruel society with which she is not familiar. On top of that, she is alone to fight for her rights as a woman, as a mother and as a beloved. In this new episode of life, she has to protest against the punishment she is given and in doing so she takes a creative path which is her embroidery skill. She has employed this skill so artistically that the male authority has to accept her as a part of the society. In a word, her role as an entrepreneur strikes the society tremendously and in course of time, she dedicates her life to serve the Bostonian people whoever is in any kind of need at any emergency moment. Thus, the society that punishes her for committing sin is the same society which is dependent on her for services. She has seen her life in Europe, she has experienced her

life in New England as a married woman and finally she faces a life of sin of adultery and the subsequent motherhood. Her metamorphoses of life make her confident. She is no longer a subaltern, rather empowered through her extraordinary performance in embroidery skill.

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