



PERSPECTIVES ON CULTURE AND COGNITION

An Interdisciplinary Approach

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Puritanism, Anne Hutchinson and Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*

Dr. Tania Chakraverty

Much of the American character in its foundational years was formed in the crucible of Puritanism. The Puritans who arrived in America after 1620 primarily had two motivations; one was flight and the other was a positive mission. Fleeing from religious oppression by the High Anglicans under Archbishop Laud, driven by the corrupt English church, the Puritans having discovered a new paradise, wanted to weave new biblical myths into the new found land. They thought of themselves as god's chosen people, fleeing from oppression in Egypt to a new Canaan. Nandana Dutta states:

Having left England and Europe because of religious persecution, the Puritans were also keen to practise their religion without the constraints put on Protestants by the Catholic Church. Religion indeed was the most important factor in their lives and all the characteristic ways in which they lived and thought in the new land derived from their absorption in ideas of the individual's relationship with God especially, their obsession with sin, divine retribution, God's grace for the elect and redemption (Dutta, 2016, p.65).

In terms of doctrines, Puritanism was rather similar to other theologies during the Reformation but as Susan Manning points out, "its distinctiveness lay in the rigour with which it applied its principles to life, the strong codifying impulse which tended to resolve any complex or ambivalent position into a simpler polarized one" (Manning, 1995, p.4). Puritans were obsessed and horrified with the idea of the 'Fall' and felt that humans were righteously damned. Coupled with this was another belief, that God had selected some for salvation through grace. The fate of the Elect, like that of the Reprobate or the damned, was also fixed and unalterable. Susan Manning opines that the world for them was structured as a series of dramatic oppositions, the binaries being: "good and evil, man and God, the Elect and the Reprobate, Faith and Works" (Manning, 1995, p. 5).

In spite of the period being one of subjection under the English monarch, lack of proximity and the constant establishment of colonies in America made monarchy a