

A Study on the Role of Amitav Ghosh's Novel Sea of Poppies

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Abstract

Amitav Ghosh's novel Sea of Poppies is a picture of colonialism and its environmental impact. Opium production and its devastating impact on people's lives and the environment are the subject of the novel. In this paper, I'll describe the changes that occur as a result of opium manufacture, as well as how Hukum Singh's death was caused by opium addiction. People are forced to grow opium on their farms by the British. Opium has an effect on the novel's typical behaviour of birds, animals, and insects As illustrated in this novel, colonisation wreaked havoc on the country's ecosystem in the nineteenth century. The hiring of a French botanist as assistant curator of Calcutta's Botanical Garden accomplishes nothing in terms of native species protection when compared to the devastation wrought by colonial authority. Paulette, a character in the narrative, is an example of a natural child. The parable emphasises the relevance of plant seeds in human life. For example, Deeti and Sarju regard them as precious assets for their future. The Ganga is revered as sacred by locals from Bihar to Calcutta, and it is regarded as the people's lifeline. Deeti sees her future in the storey thanks to the river's mystical influence. During colonial rule in India, Ghosh attempted to illustrate the devastation of natural habitat.

Keywords: characterization, amitav, amitav ghosh, sea of poppies, poppies

1. Introduction

1.1 About the Author

In the year 1956, Amitav Ghosh was born in the city of Calcutta. He is a well-known English-language Indian author who weaves together nature, experience, and history. His sculptures portray a conversation between man and nature. Among his numerous works of fiction are The Circle of Reason (1986), The Shadow Lines (1988), In Antique Land (1992), The Calcutta Chromosomes (1995), The Glass Palace (2000), The Hungry Tide River of Smoke (2005), Sea of Poppies (2008), and (2008). (2011). He was

nominated for the Man Booker Prize in 2008 for his novel Sea of Poppies. The first half of his Ibis trilogy, Sea of Poppies, is out now while River of Smoke is the second.

1.2 Eco criticism

Eco critique is a critical approach that looks at how the environment and landscape are depicted in cultural texts, with a focus on people's attitudes toward 'nature' and the terminology they use to talk about it. It links Other ecological disciplines and methodologies are compared to itself (and literary writings), believing that the rhetoric of cultural texts reflects and informs

material practises toward the environment. It also aims to raise awareness of the problem by connecting itself (and literary pieces) to other environmental studies and techniques (Nayar 242). Ecocriticism is described as "the study of the relationship between literature and the environment" in *The Ecocriticism Reader*, a famous anthology (Glottfelty and Fromm ix).

The pilgrim system and affordable weakening in India during the nineteenth century are shown in this novel. The novel's plot revolves around the opium trade with China before the Opium Wars, with India serving as the drug's distribution hub birthplace. The novel examines the changes in nature brought about by the development of opium and their effects on people and animals.

The story opens with blossoming poppy plants in a field, implying believe opium will have a big impact on people's lives protagonists. "It happened at the end of winter, in a year when the poppies were unusually slow to shed their petals: for mile after mile, from Benares onwards, the Ganga seemed to be running between twin glaciers, both sides of the river blanketed by thick drifts of white-petaled flowers," he writes. The high Himalayan snows appeared to have plummeted on the lowlands in preparation for Holi, the springtime festival of colour.

Character illustration of the negative impacts of opium cultivation in the landscapes of palatable food crops Deeti recounts how, in the past, crops were seen as consumables, and they were provided food

as well as materials to construct rooftops. It was a lovely life, but when opium was discovered, they were forced to choose between dying of desire or moving to Mauritius. She puts it this way:

In the winter, the fields would be full with wheat, and the straw from the spring harvest would be used to repair damage from the previous year. However, now that the sahibs had forced everyone to grow poppy, no one had thatch left; it had to be bought at the market from people from other villages, and the price was so high that many people put off repairs as long as they could.

As a result of the shift in development from food yield to money crop, Ghosh has attempted to persuade people that things that were once freely available to them have now become pricey.

Deeti explores the changes in their society that have resulted from modifications in the storey's trimming design. She remembers how opium was grown in between her mother's main crops of wheat, masoor dal, and vegetables, and how some of the poppy seeds were transported to the oil press, while the rest were saved for the house, some for replanting, and some for meat and vegetable preparation when she was a child. The sap was sieved for impurities and let to dry till the sun turned it into had akbari afeem; no one thought of manufacturing the wet, treacherous chandu opium that was made and packaged in an English factory and shipped over the sea in boats at the time.

Because of the spread of opium, the variety of yields has diminished, and everyone who

refuses to develop opium is imprisoned. Finally, it leads to a feeling of obligation and migration.

Sweepers' inventive use of brush to clean chests and toilets is a great example of cleaning with natural materials. It is not available on the market and is created at home by individuals utilising the spines of palm fronds. Local residents then use it to clean their homes.

Opioid addiction impacts all living species in the environment, not just humans. Kalua feeds his bull opium to ingest so that it can rest. Because she lacks the financial means to compensate Kalua, Deeti utilises opium as a form of payment.

The creepy crawlies that drink the nectar of the poppy blossom become inebriated and act abnormally in the novel. According to Ghosh, the poppy unit's exquisite perfume attracts species like honey bees, grasshoppers, and wasps, who are then stung by the fluid seeping out of the case after a few days. When the sap darkens, he claims, their bodies converge with it and become part of the opium sold on the lookout. The sap seemed to calm the butterflies, whose wings flew in strangely irregular patterns, as if they had forgotten how to fly. Kabutari's hand was hit by one of these, and wouldn't fly till he threw it up in the air. Opium affects the monkeys' regular neurocognitive functions, disrupting their usual social behaviour with other monkeys in their environment. They would descend returning to the branches to resume their investigation of the Ganga and its currents,

they leapt from the trees to lap at the sewers that discharged the factory's effluents, as Ghosh puts it. Opium dust, which comes from an opium manufacturing facility, causes people to frequently sniffle and affects people's nasal passages as well as the nasal passages of animals living near the plant. After visiting the factory with Deeti, the bull of Kalua, for example, begins sniffing.

Anglers have used opium to catch fish in the past. This method of fishing has a significant impact on the water cycle and its inhabitants. The earthen product gharas, which were transported with crude opium to the processing facility, are featured in the story. Hundreds of shattered ceramic gharas—round-bottomed vessels used to transport raw opium to the factory—were piled up on the ghats surrounding the Carcanna—as Ghosh puts it, "this stretch of river bank was unlike any other." The bank was always crowded with fishermen since it was popularly thought that fish were more easily trapped after nibbling on the shards.

2. Characterization

The novel explores two major 19th-century economic events: the rise export of Indian indentured servants to cut sugar cane for the British on islands like Mauritius, Fiji, and Trinidad, and the cultivation of opium as a cash crop in Bengal and Bihar for the Chinese market. The opium war's major victim was the poor Indian peasant. As lands that were once a source of sustenance have been overrun by a swelling wave of poppies, peasant farmers have been forced to switch

their crops to opium growing, leading in widespread poverty, hunger, and disease servitude. Poppies were encouraged to be planted instead of other vital crops such as wheat, paddy, legumes, and vegetables by the British. In fact, the novel is set during a time when the western world seeks lucrative but inedible crops, resulting in starvation in developing countries: " "Because of the labour involved in growing poppies, a few clusters of poppy were enough to meet a household's needs, with a little left over to sell: no one was inclined to plant more...

The penalty was acceptable when you had a patch or two of poppies...but who in their right mind would want to repeat these labours when there were other, more valuable crops to sow, such as wheat, dal, and vegetables? As those toothsome winter crops diminished in size, the factory's craving for opium seemed to never be fulfilled." (From *Sea of Poppies*, page 29)

As a result of the British government's insatiable appetite for revenue, Indian labourers and farmers are shown as disabled, stranded, exploited, and defenceless in the novel. The British robbed India of its wealth, freedom, and peace, as well as the poisoning the Chinese with opium, they were robbed of their discretion and knowledge. The story begins in a remote village that has been completely destroyed by the events. Deeti watches as her dutiful husband succumbs to addiction at an opium-packing plant where glazed workers move 'as slowly as ants in honey.'

A group of characters assemble in Kolkata to board the Ibis ship at Hoogli in Sea of Poppies. They are of many ethnicities, as well as various social classes, creeds, and genders. Thanks to Ghosh's abundant and delicate description, the reader becomes well acquainted with the characters and their various cultures and traditions. In the story, characters such as More who feature include Ibis, Deeti Singh, Burnham Brothers, Kalua, Zachary Reid Serang Ali, Putli, Jodu, Mauritian, Raja Neel Rattan Halder, Baboo Nob Kissin, AhFatt, and others.

The slave-trading ship Ibis is pressed into service to transport girmitiya, or indentured labourers, to Mauritius' island plantations. A British captain, an American second mate, Indian law enforcement officers, and a lascar crew are among the suspects on board. It transports people from many countries, backgrounds, and religions, with some crossing the oceans to flee domestic conflicts and others being transferred as though they were detainees. Their old familial ties and traces fade away as they cruise down the Hooghly and into the Indian Ocean, and they begin anew: "Slowly, as the women's voices grew in strength and confidence, the men forgot their quarrels: at home, during village weddings, it was always the women who sang when the bride was torn from her parents' embrace – it was almost as if they were admitting, through their silence, that they, as men, had (See page 366 of *Sea of Poppies*.)

As their shipmates create new relationships of empathy, the sea becomes their new home. They adopt the surnames jahaz-bhais

and jahaz-bahens, rejecting caste, society, and religion. Singing and religious practises are their only way of escaping colonial realities and the unknowns that await them on the distant Mareech islands. The ship quickly becomes the focus of a wide range of personalities.

Ghosh also highlights the vulnerable position of women in ancient and colonial India, who were exposed to various persecutions by males who saw women as nothing more than objects of carnal desire and domestic employees. Deeti Singh's forced sati on her husband's funeral pyre, as well as the life her six-year-old daughter is compelled to live, which includes her marriage in three or four years, stinks of gender bias.

Zachary Reid is a young Baltimore sailor who has left the nation due to bullying from other American sailors who are envious of his success. Zachary Reid's soul has been lifted beyond his position and the possibility of advancement to officer grade, something that was previously unattainable for him at home, thanks to the Lascars and their leader, Serang Ali. Despite having a similar upbringing to the Lascars, Reid is a foreigner, a man without a known caste inside Indian society, and Serang Ali considers him as superior to the Lascars. Paulette Lambert, the educated daughter of a French republican freethinker and horticulturist in Calcutta who was adopted by Burnham after her parents died and nurtured by a Bengali wet nurse, is Burnham's most likely soul match. Benjamin Burnham is a corrupt British

businessman who owns the Ibis and is involved in opium trafficking in Ghazipur, a town fifty miles east of Benares that his family controls. Since the abolition of the slave trade, Burnham has resorted to carrying banished convicts and coolies on the Ibis. Burnham's readiness to finance and oversee these exploitative companies has resulted in immense wealth and a sumptuous lifestyle that he would not have been able to afford in England, despite the fact that he is the son of a Liverpool tradesman.

Bengali landowner and opium trafficking profiteer Neel Rattan Halder He is a hedonist who is decadent and promiscuous. He must pay the price for refusing to sell his interests to Burnham. He is found guilty of forgery by a British jury, and his royal inheritance is taken away from him. Not only that, but while being brought onboard the Ibis, he was driven out of his castle, separated from his child and wife, and forced to share a chamber with a filthy convict named Ah-Fatt.

Jodu, Paulette Lambert's foster brother and childhood buddy, is a wet nurse's progeny. He is a poor fisherman who is able to get work aboard after his boat is hit by the Ibis. Ah-Fatt is a monstrous and inhuman character who was created by a Chinese mother and a Parsi father He's hunting for his father, who has abandoned him in order to prevent public humiliation. In India, he is on trial and has been confined to a filthy, dark cell. He is in the same cell as Neel Rattan Holder. They are at odds at first, but as time passes, they become closer, and the story is made fascinating and delightful by

the anticipation and camaraderie. Benjamin Burnham's accountant, treasurer, and personal assistant is Baboo Nob Kissin. The fact that Lascars toiled in the worst and most wretched conditions on East India Company ships, and died disproportionately on ships during the first and second World Wars, reveals their existence in Ghosh's account. They've also gotten very little recognition or credit in official naval histories. The lascar's pidgin is profuse, and it reverberates throughout the storey.

The slave ship and the passengers on board meet an unforeseen destiny. The sky is darkened by a dreadful cloud, the sea darkens, and the storm refuses to save anything for tomorrow. Indentured labourers and lascars do not sigh with relief when their problems mount. The tale concludes with the Ibis in the midst of a storm on the open sea. Only Deeti, Paulette, Nob Kissin, and Zachary have survived Nature's doom and gloom drama, performed on the bleak theatre of the sea. The lascars' leader, Serang Ali, has abandoned the ship, along with the convicts and the condemned; only Deeti, Paulette, Nob Kissin, and Zachary remain. have survived.

3. Conclusion

Ghosh also gives women a voice by creating powerful female characters like Deeti and Paulettie Lambart, who make them feel like they belong. Despite being a white lady, Paulettie was oppressed by her stepfather Burnham, but she managed to break free and board the ship Redruth, which was sailing to Botanical Expedition. Ghosh, as a well-

known novelist, understands the value of women in many sectors of society.

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