

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

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Abstract

The novel Sea of Poppies by Amitav Ghosh is a depiction of colonialism and its impact on the environment. The novel is about opium production and its negative impact on people's lives and the environment. In my article, I'll discuss the changes that occur as a result of opium production and how addiction to the drug leads to Hukum Singh's death. The British force people to cultivate opium in their farms. In the novel, opium has an effect on the normal behaviour of birds, animals, and insects. The tale depicts how colonisation wreaked havoc on the country's ecosystem in the nineteenth century. In comparison to the harm wreaked by colonial control, the appointment of a French botanist as assistant curator of Calcutta's Botanical Garden achieves little for the conservation of native species. However, Paulette, a character in the story, is an example of a child of nature. In the novel, the significance of plant seeds in human life is emphasized. Women characters like Deeti and Sarju consider them as assets for their future. From Bihar to Calcutta, the Ganga is seen as the lifeline of the people, and it is revered as sacred by the locals. The mystical power of the river provides Deeti a picture of her future in the story. Ghosh attempted to depict the destruction of natural habitat in India during colonial control.

Keywords: *characterization, Amitav, Amitav Ghosh, Sea of Poppies, Poppies*

1. Introduction

1.1 About the Author

Amitav Ghosh was born in the city of Calcutta in the year 1956. He is a leading English-language Indian writer who combines nature, experience and history together. His sculptures depict a dialogue between man and nature. The Circle of Reason (1986), The Shadow Lines (1988), In Antique Land (1992), The Calcutta Chromosomes (1995), The Glass Palace (2000), The Hungary Tide (2005), Sea of Poppies (2008), and River of Smoke (2008) are among his many works of fiction (2011). In 2008, he was nominated for the Man Booker Prize for his novel Sea of Poppies. The first half of his Ibis trilogy is Sea of Poppies, and the second part is River of Smoke.

1.2 Eco criticism

Eco critique is a critical mode that examines how environment and landscape are represented in cultural texts, with a focus on attitudes towards 'nature' and the terminology used when speaking about it. It aligns itself with ecological activism and social theory, assuming that the rhetoric of cultural texts reflects and

informs material practises towards the environment, while also attempting to raise awareness of the issue and linking itself (and literary texts) to other ecological sciences and approaches (Nayar 242). An early anthology, *The Eco critique Reader*, gave a fundamental definition of eco criticism as "the study of the relationship between literature and the environment" (Glotfelty and Fromm ix).

The pilgrim system and affordable weakening in India during the nineteenth century are depicted in this tale. The novel's plot revolves around the trade of opium with China before to the Opium Wars, with India serving as the birthplace of the drug. The novel depicts the irregularity in nature caused by the rise of opium and its impact on persons and creatures.

The story begins with blossoming poppy plants in a field, indicating that opium will play a large role in the lives of the narrative's characters. As he describes it, "it happened at the end of winter, in a year when the poppies were unusually sluggish to shed their petals: for mile after mile, from Benares onwards, the Ganga seemed to be flowing between twin glaciers, both its sides being blanketed by thick drifts of white-petaled flowers." It appeared as though the high Himalayan snows had descended on the lowlands in preparation for Holi and its springtime riot of colour.

Character depiction of the harmful effects of opium growth in the terrains of appetising food crops Deeti recalls how before, crops were considered consumable, and they were given food as well as materials for building rooftops. It was a perfect life, but due to the discovery of opium, they were forced to either die of yearning or relocate to Mauritius. As she puts it:

The fields would be thick with wheat in the winter, and the straw from the spring harvest would be utilised to repair the damage from the previous year. But 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 living in outlying villages, and the cost was so high that many put off repairs as long as they could .

Ghosh has sought to persuade people that the stuff that was formerly freely accessible to them has now become expensive as a result of the shift in development from food yield to money crop.

Deeti considers the changes in their society that have been brought about by the changes in the trimming design in the story. She recalls how opium was cultivated between the primary crops of wheat, masoor dal, and vegetables when she was a child, and her mother:

Some of the poppy seeds would be sent to the oil press, while the remainder would be kept for the house, some for replanting, and some to prepare with meat and vegetables. The sap was sieved for impurities and let to dry till the sun converted it into had akbari afeem; no one thought of manufacturing the wet, treacly chandu opium that was manufactured and packaged in an English factory and shipped across the sea in boats at the time .

Because of the growth of opium, the variety of yields is lost, and whomever rejects developing opium is confined. Finally, it causes obligation and migration.

Sweepers' creative use of brush to clean chests and toilets is an excellent example of material obtained from nature for cleaning. It is made at home by individuals using the spines of palm fronds and is not available in the market. Individuals in the area then use it to clean their homes.

It isn't just people who become addicted to opium in the story; it affects all living organisms in the environment. Kalua gives his bull opium to consume in order for it to relax. Deeti uses opium as a form of payment for Kalua because she lacks the financial means to do so.

In the novel, the creepy crawlies that drink the nectar of the poppy blossom become intoxicated and behave strangely. According to Ghosh, the delicious aroma of the poppy unit attracts creatures such as honey bees, grasshoppers and wasps, who are then hit by the fluid spilling out of the case after a few days. He claims that when the sap darkens, their dead bodies converge with it and become part of the opium sold on the lookout. The sap seemed to have a calming effect on the butterflies, who flapped their wings in strangely random patterns, as if they couldn't remember how to fly. One of these landed on Kabutari's hand and refused to take flight until he threw it up in the air. Opium significantly impairs the monkeys' normal neuro-cognitive processes, affecting their normal social behaviour with other monkeys in their society. As Ghosh puts it:

They would descend from the trees to lap at the sewers that emptied the factory's effluents; once satisfied, they would return to the branches to resume their examination of the Ganga and its currents . Opium dust, which comes from an opium manufacturing facility, causes people to sniffle on a regular basis and affects people's nasal passages, as well as the nasal passages of animals that reside near the plant. The bull of Kalua, for example, begins sniffing after visiting the plant with Deeti.

Anglers have also used opium to catch fish. This type of fishing has a massive impact on the water circle and its little living forms. The earthen product gharas, which were taken to the processing facility with crude opium, feature in the story. As Ghosh puts it, "this stretch of river bank was unlike any other," since the ghats around the Carcanna were piled high with thousands of broken earthenware gharas—the round-bottomed vessels used to transport raw opium to the factory. Because it was widely believed that fish were more easily captured after nibbling on the shards, the bank was always filled with fishermen.

2. Characterization

The novel delves into two massive 19th-century economic events: the development of opium as a cash crop in Bengal and Bihar for the Chinese market, and the shipment of Indian indentured workers to cut sugar canes for the British on islands like Mauritius, Fiji, and Trinidad. The poor Indian peasant was the main victim of the opium war. Peasant farmers have been forced to convert their fields to opium production, resulting in widespread poverty, hunger, and servitude as lands that were once a source of sustenance have

been inundated by a growing wave of poppies. The British pushed people to plant poppies instead of more important crops like wheat, paddy, legumes, and vegetables. In fact, the novel is set on a period when the western world demands profitable but inedible crops, causing starvation in the developing world:

"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 because of the labour involved in growing poppies...

When you had a patch or two of poppies, the punishment was bearable...but who in their right mind would wish to multiply these labours when there were other, more valuable crops to plant, such as wheat, dal, and vegetables? But the factory's desire for opium seemed to never be satisfied as those toothsome winter crops shrank in size." (Page 29 of Sea of Poppies)

The novel depicts Indian labourers and farmers as handicapped, marooned, exploited, and defenceless as a result of the British government's voracious need for income. By poisoning them with opium, the British robbed India of its wealth, freedom and peace, as well as their discretion and knowledge. The tale begins in a distant village that has been ravaged by these events. Deeti watches as her docile husband succumbs to addiction, collapsing at an opium-packing plant where glazed workers move 'as slowly as ants in honey.'

In Sea of Poppies, a group of characters gathers in Kolkata to board the Ibis ship at Hooghly. They come from a variety of races, as well as different classes, creeds, and gender. The reader becomes thoroughly acquainted with the characters and their distinct cultures and traditions and thanks to Ghosh's profuse and subtle detail. Ibis, Deeti Singh, Burnham Brothers, Kalua, Zachary Reid Serang Ali, Putli, Jodu, Mauritian, Raja Neel Rattan Halder, Baboo Nob Kissin, AhFatt, and other key characters appear in the narrative.

Ibis is a slave-trading ship that is pressed into service to deliver girmitiya, or indentured servants, to plantations on Mauritius's island. It is manned by a British captain, an American second mate, Indian law enforcement officers, and a crew of lascars. People of many nations, origins, and religions are among its passengers, with some crossing the oceans to escape domestic crises and others being transported as prisoners. Their old familial ties and traces are washed away as they cruise down the Hooghly and into the Indian Ocean, and they begin their lives 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 as if they were admitting, through their silence, that they, as men, had no words to describe the pain of a child exiled from home." (Page 366 of Sea of Poppies)

As the shipmates create new links of empathy, the sea becomes their new homeland. They rename themselves jahaz-bhais and jahaz-bahens, abandoning the constraints of caste, community, and religion. Singing and ritualistic acts become their only escape from colonial realities and the unknowns that await them in the distant Mareech islands. The ship eventually becomes the focal point for a diverse cast of personalities.

Ghosh also highlights the deplorable position of women in ancient and colonial India, who have been exposed to various persecutions at the hands of men who have treated women as nothing more than objects of carnal desire and domestic employees. Enforcing protagonist Deeti Singh to sit on her husband's funeral pyre and commit sati, as well as the life that her six-year-old daughter must face, which includes her marriage in three or four years, emit a strong odour of gender bias.

Zachary Reid is a young sailor from Baltimore who has left America because he has been harassed by other American sailors due to professional envy. Zachary Reid has raised his soul above his station and the possibility to develop to officer status, something that was unattainable for him at home, thanks to the backing of the lascars and Serang Ali, the lascars' leader. Despite the fact that Reid's upbringing is similar to the lascars', he is a foreigner, a guy with no known caste inside Indian society, and Serang Ali sees him as a 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 his most likely soul match. Benjamin Burnham is an unscrupulous British entrepreneur who owns the Ibis and is involved in the opium trade in Ghazipur, fifty miles east of Benares, which his family controls. Burnham has kept the Ibis intact since the slave trade was abolished and has merely resorted to transporting exiled inmates and coolies. Despite the fact that Burnham is the son of a Liverpool tradesman, his willingness to finance and run these exploitative industries has resulted in great wealth and a lavish lifestyle that he would not have been able to afford in England.

Neel Rattan Halder is a landowner and opium trade profiteer from Bengal. He is a hedonist, decadent, and promiscuous individual. For refusing to sell his holdings to Burnham, he must pay the price. A British jury convicts him of forgery and deprives him of his royal inheritance. Not only that, but he's been thrown out of his palace, separated from his kid and wife, and forced to share a chamber with a filthy criminal named Ah-Fatt, all while being transported aboard the Ibis.

Paulette Lambert's foster brother and childhood companion, Jodu, is the offspring of a wet nurse. He is a poor fisherman, and after his boat is hit by the Ibis, he is able to find work aboard. Ah-Fatt is a hideous and inhuman character born to a Parsi father and a Chinese mother. He seeks for his father, who has shunned him in order to escape social humiliation. In India, he is on trial and has been confined to a dark cell in a filthy state. He is in the same cell as Neel Rattan Holder. They are initially at odds, but as time passes, they become closer, and this intimation and camaraderie make the storey a most captivating and pleasant voyage. Benjamin Burnham's accountant, treasurer, and personal assistant is Baboo Nob Kissin. The fact that Lascars laboured in the harshest and squalid conditions on East India Company ships, and died disproportionately on ships during the first and second World Wars, reveals their presence in Ghosh's story. They've scarcely been acknowledged or given their due in official naval histories. The pidgin employed by the lascar is abundant and reverberates throughout the story.

Unforeseen fate is born for the slave ship and the passengers on board. A calamitous cloud hangs in the sky, the sea darkens, and the storm refuses to save anything for tomorrow. As predicaments pile up, indentured labourers and lascars do not breathe a sigh of relief. The novel ends with the Ibis in the middle of a storm in the middle of the ocean. Serang Ali, the lascars' leader, has abandoned the ship, together with the

convicts and the condemned; of the major characters, only Deeti, Paulette, Nob Kissin, and Zachary have survived, watching the drama of doom and ruin played by Nature on the doleful stage of the sea from the deck.

3. Conclusion

Ghosh also provides women a voice by providing strong female characters such as Deeti and Paulette Lambart, giving women a sense of belonging. Despite the fact that Paulette was a white woman, she was oppressed by her stepfather Burnham, but she broke free and boarded the ship Redruth, which was sailing to Botanical Expedition. As a well-known author, Ghosh recognises the importance of women in all aspects of society.

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