

**People's Democratic Republic of Algeria Ministry of Higher  
Education and Scientific Research**

**Amar Thelidji University of Laghouat**

**Faculty of Letters and languages**

**Department of English**



## **Investigating Postcolonial Feminism in Amitav Ghosh's Novel *Sea of Poppies* (2008)**

A dissertation submitted to the department of English in partial fulfillment for the requirements of the Master Degree in Literature, Civilization and English Language Teaching

**Submitted by:** Messelem Maroua

**Supervised by:** Mr. Bakhouche Salah

**Academic Year 2019-2020**

# **Dedication**

This modest work is wholeheartedly dedicated to my family especially to my beloved mother and father for their unlimited love, faith and support. I would not achieve all of this without you.

To my dearest cousins, uncles, and aunts.

I equally dedicate this work to all my faithful friends and colleagues.

## **Acknowledgments**

The unique recognition and the deepest respect should go to my supervisor Mr. Bakhouche Salah, for his insightful criticisms, patience and guidance, for that I indebt my gratefulness to him.

I would like also to express my sincere thanks to all teachers for their pieces of advice and their total devotion in teaching us, who never hesitated to give help whenever needed. I should thank the members of jury for proof reading and examining this paper.

Finally, I extend my appreciation to the staff of English department for their help.

## Abstract

The present study is an attempt to investigate the manifestations of Postcolonial feminism during the nineteenth century through the literary work of Amitav Ghosh's novel *Sea of Poppies* (2008). It draws connection between colonialism and the patriarchy society that oppresses women. The study states the problem of patriarchy and colonialism in the life of women. The importance of this research lays in the significant attention of postcolonial feminism in the literary criticism and also in the nascence of Amitav Ghosh's novel *Sea of Poppies* (2008). The fundamental aim of this study is to analyze the aspects Postcolonial feminism in the novel through following qualitative approach to offer an exploratory research that analyses and interprets the case of study *Sea of Poppies* (2008). The overall structure of this research takes the form of three chapters: The first chapter provides a brief overview of Postcolonial literature, than it draws a logical connection between Postcolonial and feminist theories and also between Amitav Ghosh's real life and his fiction. The second chapter offers postcolonial reading to the novel *Sea of Poppies* (2008). The final chapter draws upon the entire thesis, tying up the various theoretical and empirical standards used in the previous chapters in order to explore the way women live in patriarchy society under colonialism. The findings indicate that women have a passive role in the Indian society. Also, the subject of the subaltern as an Indian woman is struggling against patriarchy and colonialism in the same time. Moreover, Patriarchy system can not imprison women for their entire life unless they took revolutionary attitudes.

# Table of contents

---

Dedication.....	<b>i</b>
Acknowledgement .....	<b>ii</b>
Abstract.....	<b>iii</b>
Table of Content .....	<b>iv</b>
General Introduction.....	<b>1</b>
<b>CHAPTER ONE:A General Review of Postcolonial Literature .....</b>	<b>5</b>
1.1.Postcolonial Literature: A General Review.....	<b>6</b>
1.2.Postcolonial Feminism as Feminism in Postcolonial Frame .....	<b>10</b>
1.3.Amitav Gosh as Postcolonial and Feminist writer: His Themes and Contexts.....	<b>14</b>
<b>CHAPTER TWO: The traces of Postcolonial Theory in the Novel.....</b>	<b>18</b>
2.1. The Theme of Colonialism and Imperialism.....	<b>19</b>
2.2.Postcolonial Ecocriticism in the novel .....	<b>25</b>
2.3.Exploring the Theme of Migration as a means of Transformation and resistance.....	<b>29</b>
<b>CHAPTER THREE: Feminism in the Novel.....</b>	<b>33</b>
3.1.The Status of Women in the Novel.....	<b>34</b>
3.2.The Representation of Subaltern woman in the novel.....	<b>36</b>
3.3. The struggle against Patriarchy and Social Conventions.....	<b>43</b>
General Conclusion.. ..	<b>47</b>
Bibliography.....	<b>v</b>
Webliography .....	<b>vii</b>

## General Introduction

It is generally agreed that literature is the authentic report of all ages. The literary works reflect in an artistic way the conventional aspects of political, social, cultural and intellectual of anytime period. The vast territories that the British empire once colonized, resulted in a fiction that tackles the effects of colonialism at many levels; especially the societal one. Thus, the Indian writer Amitav Ghosh engendered a fiction entitled *Sea of Poppies* (2008) that mirrors the British colonial time in India. This novel tells about the traditional, cultural and ideological aspects of Indians in Calcutta.

The importance of this project lays in the fact that postcolonial feminism has become one of the significant controversial discussions that have been widely vocalized in literary criticism. This, perhaps, is due to the growing interests in discovering the marginalized areas by mainstream Feminism which are the issues of Third world women. Correspondingly, many studies concerned the status of third world women did not fill the gap of highlighting the link between patriarchy and colonial system. In addition, what motivated this research is the fact that the fiction of the writer Amitav Ghosh is nascent to be studied in literature. Also, being aware of the reactive relationship between feminism and colonialism, the writer of the novel *Sea of Poppies* (2008) showed the link between colonialism and feminism through the events and the characters.

*Sea of poppies* (2008) by the Indian writer Amitav Ghosh is the first volume of the Ibis trilogy that contains *Sea of Poppies* (2008), *River of Smoke* (2011) and *Flood of Fire* (2015).

## General Introduction

---

Through a small historical narration where the events are set in 1838 just prior to Opium war, the writer managed to portray the socio- cultural circumstances in the middle of the colonial era of the nineteenth century. The story revolves around a female character named Deeti who suffered from patriarchy since her childhood. Deeti is married to a crippled rich man from the upper caste named Hukam Singh. In Hukam's family Deeti was raped by her brother in-law named Chandan Singh, and had a daughter named Kabutri who is fathered by Chandan Singh. After the death of Deet's husband , she decided to burn herself in her funeral husband's pyre. Fortunately, she was saved by Kalua, Hukam Singh's cart driver. Deeti and Kalua escaped together through a ship named Ibis and became migrants. In the ship Ibis Deeti and Kalua met many people who had similar unfortunate stories. Deeti is still subaltern woman who suffers from patriarchy even in the ship. When Bhyro Singh, the uncle of Deet's died husband, found Deeti and Kalua they escaped from Ibis with their friends.

The aim of this study is to shed light on the life of women under both patriarchy and colonial systems, through the examination of Amitav Ghosh's novel *Sea of Poppies* (2008). Furthermore, to determine how the social constraints and the colonial ruling would effect and change the life of women, by providing a conceptual theoretical framework based on the historical , cultural and ideological contexts of the novel.

The main question to be investigated in this research is:

- How is postcolonial feminism portrayed in Amitav Ghosh' *Sea of Poppies* (2008)?

This research also seeks to address the following questions:

## General Introduction

---

- What are the manifestations of Postcolonial feminism in the novel?
- How is the subaltern woman represented in the novel?
- What are the consequences of patriarchy on women?

To carry out this research, it is supposed that the significance of Postcolonial feminism lays in its focus on areas that were neglected by the mainstream feminism mainly the issues of the third world women such as dowry issues, honor killings, cultural and religious laws. Additionally, the aspects of postcolonial theory are the exploitation of the land and the indigenous people by taking the resources of the land and imposing the indigenous to work in exchange of nothing. Moreover, the subaltern woman is shown in the novel as a frail woman who is objectified by man, humiliated, alienated and selfless. Finally, patriarchy results in having revolutionary attitudes by women to free themselves from suppression and oppression.

In an attempt to answer the former questions that constitute the focus of this study, the framework of this extended essay will be divided into three chapters:

The first chapter is purely theoretical. It offers a general review about Postcolonial literature. It tackles the history and the shared points among the postcolonial literary works. Also, it offers examples of some literary works by prominent postcolonial writers. In addition, this chapter talks about postcolonial feminism and how it is related to both postcolonial theory and feminist theory. Then, the chapter introduces the writer Amitav Ghosh as a postcolonial writer, drawing the link between his personal life and his fiction.

The second chapter offers a reading of the novel from postcolonial stand point. It explores

## General Introduction

---

the theme of colonialism and imperialism in the novel. Moreover, it explores the effect of colonialism on nature by using the theory of Postcolonial Eco criticism. Then, it tackles the issue of migration and its relation to patriarchy.

The last chapter offers a detailed preview about the experience of women in the novel. It tackles women's status as seen in the novel. Moreover, it portrays the life of the subaltern woman by using the Subaltern theory combined with the Feminist theory. Then, it depicts how woman managed to empower herself in order to resist patriarchy system.

The methodological approach taken in this study is the qualitative method to provide analytical and exploratory research. It endeavors to depict cues from the novel that constitute Postcolonial feminism. The convention followed in this research is based on the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*- eighth edition.

In a nutshell, returning to the posted questions and the hypotheses discussed through this study, it will be possible to provide an important opportunity to advance the understanding of postcolonial feminism. This analysis seems to offer a new area to be explored in order to have a view about this topic.

# ***Chapter One:***

***A General Review of Postcolonial Literature***

### Introduction

Over the past half century, there has been an increasing flow of postcolonial and feminist fiction from countries formerly colonized by European powers. This fiction marks the transition from colonialism to self-determination and confronts the conditions of Post-coloniality in Africa, the Caribbean, Indian and many other pre-colonized countries. A writer like Amitav Ghosh has been a trailblazing figure when it comes to Postcolonial and feminist literature. Concurrently, his writings have provided the nourishment for Postcolonial and Feminist theories to be the prime site to exercise Postcolonial studies. Indeed, his production of *Sea of Poppies* has become a major industry to Postcolonial and Feminist theories. The novel *Sea of Poppies by Amitav Ghosh* depicts the sufferings of women as a subaltern subject to both patriarchy and colonial oppression which would strengthen the interwoven chain of connection linking the theories Postcolonialism and Feminism. Likely, Postcolonial feminism has never functioned as a separate entity from Postcolonialism and Feminism. This chapter lays the theoretical ground for this research. It attempts to demonstrate a brief overview of postcolonial literature, than it sheds light on postcolonial feminism. Moreover, it asserts the usefulness of postcolonial feminist theory in conducting the textual analysis of the postcolonial texts, and finally it projects light on Amitav Ghosh as Postcolonial writer and his mode of writing.

### 1.1. Postcolonial Literature: A General Overview

Postcolonial Literature is the writing; be it, novel, poetry or drama which has been “affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day” (Ashcroft et al. 2). This literature was produced by people who belong to the previously colonized countries like India,

## Chapter One: A General Review of Postcolonial Literature

---

Zimbabwe, Pakistan, Egypt, South Africa and many others. These countries, to a greater or lesser degrees, share a history of cultural colonialism, the imposition of the colonizers language as well as the educational, political and religious institutions along with the economic ideologies. In this respect, the writers of *The Empire Writes Back* have added

What each of these literatures has [sic] in common beyond their special and distinctive regional characteristics is that they emerged in their present form out of the experience of colonization and asserted themselves by foregrounding the tension with the imperial power, and by emphasizing their differences from the assumption of the imperial centre. It is this which makes them distinctively post-colonial. (Ashcroft et al.2)

Postcolonial Literature emerged synchronously with the freeing campaigns when each country was fighting for its way towards independence. However, it began as a coherent literary movement in the mid-twentieth century as many postcolonial classical texts were published roughly between 1950 and 1990. For example, *Devil on the Cross* (1980) by Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, *Midnight's Children* (1981) by Salman Rushdie and *Nation and Narration* (1990) by Homi K. Bhabha.

In fact, the cultural belongings of postcolonial writers are different. They are positioned between diametrically different nationalities, ethnicities and societal backgrounds. Therefore, the writer's postcolonial literary productions differ in accordance with the privacies of their belongings.

However, postcolonial literature engendered by whomever writer whose land was formerly

## Chapter One: A General Review of Postcolonial Literature

---

subjugated under colonial reign share some significant concerns. First, postcolonial writings reclaim back space and place since colonialism exploited resources and claims them for itself, not to mention enslavement and indentured labor policy besides the forced migration exercised against the indigenous people to move to another place and leave the space free for the settlers what is termed in postcolonial field as *diaspora*. In this regard, the writer of the book *Postcolonial Literature: An Introduction* said

Postcolonial literature seeks to address the ways in which non-European (Asian, Africa, South American, but also settler colony) literature and cultures have been marginalized as an effect of colonial rule, and to find, if possible, modes of resistance, retrieval, and reversal of their 'own' pre-colonial pasts. That is, this literature seeks to understand, negotiate, and critique a specific historical 'event'- colonial rule- while looking forward to a more just, socially egalitarian world order. It is a literature of resistance, anger, protest, and hope. It seeks to understand history so as to plan the future. ( Nayar 6)

Postcolonial literature came as a reaction to the contemptuous deeds made by the colonizer against the colonized. One of these deeds is the alienation of indigenous population; hence, this literature plays the role of the connector between the indigenous people and their homeland, through the emblematic narration, descripting and dramatizing. Furthermore, postcolonial writings share the concern of asserting the cultural rectitude of the indigenous society given the fact that the culture of the colonized nation is often suppressed and denigrated in favor of the ideological conventions and the cultural preferences of the colonizer. Thus, Postcolonial Literature sought to assert the validity of the

## Chapter One: A General Review of Postcolonial Literature

---

ritual and the richness of the colonized subject, and aspired to restore the cultural heritage that was gradually degraded under the reign the colonialism. Revising the history has always been a major mutual concern among postcolonial literary writings.

The colonizer had always been trying to make the colonial subjects outside history and had always been justifying the inclusion of violence against those who resist the colonial rule and even against those who were acquiescent. These actions along with distorting the truth were the major catalysts for Postcolonial literature writers as it has always been their preoccupation.

Postcolonial Literature better describes the dynamic interaction between the dichotomy, colonizer- colonized. Such vibrant interplay can be described via motifs like cultural dominance, hybridity, double colonization and gender issues, quest for identity along with peculiar presentation styles.

Some of the conspicuous names in Postcolonial literature have engendered famous literary works that better proved the success of depicting the vibrant interaction between the colonized and the colonizer. Moreover, these works showed the mutual concerns among all Postcolonial Literary works which are revising the history, re-framing and re-defining the colonized culture.

To illustrate, Frantz Fanon in his Postcolonial Literary production *Black Skin, White Mask (1952)* used his personal experience in describing the psychological effect and the emotional damage that colonialism has caused to both colonizer and colonized. In another work *The Wretched of the Earth (1961)* he argued that the violent revolution by the African farmers can bring a new world into being. The book *Orientalism (1978)* is where Edward Said demonstrated an assessment and a critique of the

view Westerners have towards Easterners mainly the representation of the West to East as the other, anti-imperialist, primitive and dishonest. Homi Bhabha wrote his books *Nation and Narration* (1990) and *The Location of Culture* (1994) where he offered underpinnings for Postcolonial Literature using psychoanalysis and semiotics to explore Spaces created by dominant social formations. In addition, there is Gayatri Spivak whose collection of Postcolonial critics focused on the intersection of gender, culture and ethnicity of the pre-colonized subjects.

Postcolonial Literature is able to provide a space of cultural mediation from myriad ethno-cultural backgrounds. Hence, it offers possibilities to challenge the dichotomies center-margin, self- other, here-there, white- black, male-female and have the thinking to transcend the discourse of cultural containment.

### **1.2. Postcolonial Feminism as Feminism in Postcolonial Frame**

The productive area of confluence between Postcolonialism and Feminism made it possible to combine these two theories against the experience of double colonization; given the fact that, colonialism and patriarchy system have been historically entwined. Moreover, the departure of the imperial ruling has not necessarily meant an end the oppression against women in Postcolonial societies.

Thus, the cross-fertilisation of the theoretical underpinnings of Postcolonialism and Feminism engendered a roughly novel wing of Feminist theory but in Postcolonial frame. Therefore, before discussing Postcolonial feminism it would be important to know first about Postcolonial and Feminist theories as separate entities.

## Chapter One: A General Review of Postcolonial Literature

---

Postcolonial theory is a field of study based on body of theoretical thoughts destined to analyze the aftermaths of colonialism. Postcolonialism means an after-colonial development. This theory emerged around the 1980s.

However, it gained currency in the academic study in the 1990s. Additionally, the term Postcolonialism is applied to describe resistance against the continuous effect of colonialism; be it, psychological, cultural, linguistic, religious, moral, economical or societal. That is to say, the subversion of euro-centrism and fighting the left-over of colonial rule is the major project of Postcolonial theory. Moreover, it is concerned as well as with the production of Literature which is the prime site where the experience of colonialism and the colonial relations are critically scrutinized.

For Feminism, then, it is a theoretical approach that emerged resolutely to stand for women's rights and interests. Bell Hooks defined feminism as “a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression” (1). As much as feminism is considered as a movement it can be considered as a theoretical body of thought that underpins this movement. Feminism is wide and complex theory as it did not remain as a standalone theory. However, it has been branched into different fields like philosophy, Literature, sociology and many others, which explains its ability of treating all what matters women through its waves.

Veritably, Feminism as a theory has been underpinned on couple of ideas. First, the stratification of the society is a male-centered and the woman is treated as a second class citizen based on that unfair stratification. Second, there is an inequality in treatment, in everything in a way it supports male needs and interests. Third, the traditional beliefs of the society nurtures the supremacy of men

and hence the subordination of women. Forth, the main opponent of Feminism is the patriarchy system.

Regarding the history of Feminism, as a concept it was first coined by the Frenchmen Charles Fourier (1772-1887) in 1837. Charles Fourier saw that the standards of the bourgeoisie society, oppressed women; moreover, the women of his century were highly obliterated as they were marginalized and treated like property. Additionally, he believed in the idea that a better society can be realized through granting more freedom and rights to women.

In this respect, Charles Fourier said: “The extension of women's rights is the best principle of all social progress”. Generally speaking, after coining the term feminism the inclusion of the issue of women's rights became recognized in 1848. Taking a step back few centuries, the origin of the word Feminism is derived from the Latin word *femina*<sup>1</sup> which means woman.

Historically speaking, Feminism went through three phases or waves. The first wave occurred in the 19<sup>th</sup> c and early of the 20<sup>th</sup> c. It focused on the educational rights of women and the betterment of the working conditions. This period of feminist activity was concerned with ‘women's suffrage’<sup>2</sup> to a large extent. The second wave feminism occurred in the period (1960-1980) where the focus was heavily put on the societal and the domestic issues like addressing the cultural and the conventionalized societal norms towards women, permitting abortion and birth control to lighten the burden on women and rising the awareness about the sexual liberation. The third wave feminism took place between 1990-2000. It was born as a reaction to the failure of the second wave. More

---

<sup>1</sup> “Feminism.” *Dictionary.com*, Dictionary.com, [www.dictionary.com/browse/feminism](http://www.dictionary.com/browse/feminism).

<sup>2</sup> “Women's Suffrage.” *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 24 March. 2020, [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women's\\_suffrage](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women's_suffrage).

importantly, it transcends the debate to the use of the propaganda and the media portrayal to change the stereotypes of women.

Postcolonial feminism is novel theoretical thought that grew up out of colonialism, imperialism and Eurocentric Feminism. It emerged in 1980s mainly as a reaction to the Western bias Feminism that focused on the experiences of European women. This Western Feminism universalizes and homogenizes the experiences of women all over the world without putting them into their historical, social, religious and cultural context.

Neglecting the contexts women's concerns has narrowed the scope of Western Feminism hence it has caused a deficiency in voicing and treating women's problems. That is to say, western Feminism overlooked the different kind of problems which are odd for the European atmosphere. For example, dowry issue, honor killings, domestic violence, education deprivation and more. What complexioned Postcolonial feminism is its claim that women are experiencing a double colonization as they are suffering the experience of colonialism and patriarchy at once.

Colonialism led to the decline of the status of women in a way or another. It has applied on women what is called "the double-othering" due to their belonging, ideology, culture, religion and gender. Therefore, Postcolonial feminist theory as a metis of both Postcolonial and feminist theories is actually a critique of the perceived defects of both postcolonial and especially feminism.

Within this context, Postcolonial feminism criticized postcolonial theory for its male-centricity feature that has accorded a little attention to female gender. Therefore, many critics question the rareness of women existence in the postcolonial discourse. Among the suspicious critics of the male-

centered predilection of any post-colonial discourse is the Caribbean-American critic, Carole Boyce Davies. She questioned in her book *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject* “Where are the women in the theorizing of post coloniality?”(80).

Veritably, the real allegiance is proffered the male line as the works of male critics are highly manifested such writers like Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, or Frantz Fanon and many famous others. On the other hand, the contributions of the female scholars and critics are less acknowledged such writers like Bell Hooks, Audre Lorde, or Angela Davis. Postcolonial feminist mainstream insists on Postcolonial theorists to treat the issues of gender as important as the other postcolonial concerns and motifs such as indignity of indigenes, diaspora, nationalism, ambivalence, discourse of construction and deconstruction, abrogation and appropriation. In addition to this insistence, Postcolonial feminist theorists accused Postcolonial theorists of marginalizing and misrepresenting women in their postcolonial activities. This can be shown via many instances; for example, Edward Said’s *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) on the relation between culture and empire, where he discussed very few female writers among many male writers like Edward Morgan Foster, Joseph Conrad, Albert Camus, Rudyard Kipling. *Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse* by Homi Bhabha on the way the colonizer effects the colonized subject and make a split in identity in addition to the effect of mimicry on the colonial authority without any reference specifics of gender.

### 1.3. Amitav Ghosh as Postcolonial and Feminist Writer: His Contexts and Themes

Amitav Ghosh is one of the contemporary Indian writers in English. His concerns with the tyrannical colonial powers, and the colonized society with high visibility to subaltern women, served as a main inspiration for the postcolonial and the feminist Literature. A novelist, essayist and short story writer with sense of history, politics and geography has wielded tremendous literary productions where he shows his ability to create an idiosyncratic contract between the characters. Therefore, the writings of Amitav Ghosh are oscillating between interesting themes such as the issues of the colonized Indian refuges under British Raj, the caste away othered people, migration, globalization and the voiceless subaltern women in the Indian society. These three themes are predominantly associated with Amitav Ghosh's novel *Sea of Poppies* (2008), his fascination with marginalized histories is reflected in his works and his aspects of life.

Before delving into Amitav Ghosh's themes and style of writing, it would be important to consider, first, his biographical information with the personal history and some momentous historical events that impacted his mode of writing because" Already he was identifying writing as his "real" life, distinct finally from his teaching and research. But the subjects he would choose to address the style he would choose to employ were still in flux. The events of 1984 seem to have solidified his thinking in both regards" ( Hawley 3).

As can be concluded from this quote, the writings of Amitav Ghosh are highly affected by the events seen along his life time as well as his personal history backdrops. His recurring themes and forms of writing are still going towards newer directions in accordance with the lived events of his

age.

Amitav Ghosh was born on 11 July 1956 in Kolkata, West Bengal, India. His father is the diplomat Shailendra Chandra Ghosh, served before as a colonel in the army who travelled a lot during Ghosh's childhood which means that Amitav Ghosh had the chance to see and coexist with different cultures. For example, India, East Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Iran, and Bangladesh, although, it must be noted that Ghosh belongs to the Bengali Hindu family which is very patriarchal that follows the traditional joint family system. His belonging to the Bengali Hindu household in addition to the cultures Ghosh lived with, during his childhood explains his ominous description of the patriarchal contexts to his stories.

Before embarking into the journey as a writer, Amitav Ghosh went through different academic experiences. He received many diplomas in different majors like History (1979), Arabic (1979), Social Anthropology (1982), and Sociology (1978). Moreover, he worked as a journalist for The Indian Express newspaper in New Delhi and then as a visiting professor in many universities like the University of Virginia (1988), the University of Pennsylvania (1989), the American University in Cairo (1994), Columbia University (1994-1997), and finally in the department of English at Harvard University (2004). Additionally, he worked as Professor of Comparative Literature at the University of New York where he lives with his wife, Deborah Baker, and his children

I was twenty-eight. The city I considered home was Calcutta, but  
New Delhi was where I have spent all my adult life except for a few  
years before, upon completing a doctorate at Oxford, and recently found

a teaching job at Delhi University. But it was in the privacy of my baking roof top hutch that my real life was live. I was writing my first novel, in the classic fiction , perched in a garret. (Ghosh 46)

Amitav Ghosh, here, is drawing on the fact that his own writings are reflections to the actual life. He also adds that:

On the morning of 31 October, the day of Mrs. Gandh's death, I caught a bus to Dlehi University as usual, at about half- past nine. From where I lived, it took an hour and a half: along commute, but not an exceptional one for New Delhi. The assassination had occurred short before, just few miles away, but I had no knowledge of this when I boarded the bus. Nor did I notice anything untoward at any point during the ninety minute journey. But the news, travelling by word of mouth, raced my bus the university. (46)

Indeed, his non-fiction *The Imam and The Indian* (2002) is an mirror of the events of the year 1984. In this year, the life of Amitav Ghosh has been irrevocably shaken. There were riots, violence, military attacks and more importantly the assassination of the prime minister Indira Ghandi. In *The Imam and The Indian*, Ghosh shows the commiseration of the Indian civilization as well as the Egyptian one laying the claim to the violence of the West. As if he is incensing on these events through this non-fiction. Ghosh wrote: "I see that the experience of that period were profoundly important to my development as a writer" (46).

## Chapter One: A General Review of Postcolonial Literature

---

Among Ghosh's prominent literary works that perfectly presents the co-existence between Postcolonial and feminist approaches in his *Ibis trilogy* that comprises *Sea of Poppies* (2008), *River of Smoke* (2011), and *Flood Fire* (2015). In this work the confluence between history and fiction is obviously done which reveals Ghosh's interest in historiography. He managed to develop a historical fiction by power creating an interaction based on different cultural belongings and languages in which Ghosh highlights the historical roots of globalization and the historicity of the colonial.

### Conclusion

To sum up, Postcolonial literature is a literature of resistance, it seeks to refresh minds about the lost heritage of the colonized nation. The vast majority of Postcolonial writers are originally from the nations that were once colonized by the European powers as they witnessed the tyranny and the oppression exercised on them. Postcolonial feminist theory is actually a reactive movement against Feminism for it heavily focused on the issues of western women at the expense of Third world women. Likewise, the Indian writer Amitav Ghosh wrote the novel *Sea of Poppies* (2008) to highlight the sufferings of women in the India as the majority of his fictions are a mere reflection of his society and his personal life.

***Chapter Two:***

***The Critical Reception of Postcolonial***

***Theory in the Novel***

### Introduction

In *Sea of Poppies*, Amitav Ghosh incorporates the elements of colonialism and imperialism as comprehensive and undisputable themes throughout the story. The narrative of the novel is mainly governed by postcolonial issues like the economic and the societal exploitation of the colonizer at many levels and dimensions. This chapter uses Postcolonialism as a main theory to help in the textual analysis of the novel. In this respect, the aim of this chapter is to focus on critical study from postcolonial lens and to draw out notions like colonial desire, resistance, migration, diaspora and hybridity. This chapter traces the aspects of postcolonialism in the novel. Moreover, it throws light on the effect of colonialism on human and nature.

### 2.1. The Theme of Colonialism and Imperialism

Colonialism and imperialism are ubiquitous concepts at any postcolonial study. Colonialism is the act or the practice of making settlements in remote territories for the sake of dominating the land and subjugating the human resources. Imperialism, in contrast, is the idea or the ideology that puts colonialism in its applicable frame. By way of illustration, imperialism is the underpinning of colonialism. For example, the ideology of “White Man’s Burden”<sup>1</sup> that is consisted of the three C’s Civilization, Christianity and Commerce. These three C’s are used to justify and legitimize the act of colonizing.

Colonialism and imperialism are holistically seen through the British rule in India. However, they are presented in more specific way through the individual stories of each character who escape

---

<sup>1</sup> “The White Man's Burden.” s, [www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/the-white-man-s-burden](http://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/the-white-man-s-burden).

## Chapter Two: The Critical Reception of Postcolonial Theory in the Novel

---

from the tragic reality via the Ibis ship and thus form cosmopolitan small society. The experiences of Characters like Deeti, Kalua, Neel Ratan Halder, Zachary Reid, and Paulette Lambourn and more characters elucidate colonialism and imperialism in its close image. These characters can be considered as epitomes through which people can feel the sufferings of the colonial subjects.

Correspondingly, Ghosh in his novel has implemented several characters from different backgrounds of caste, religion, culture, nation and race. Thus, these characters besides some metaphorical tools are used by the writer as symbolic portrayal to articulate the colonial subjugation of colonizer.

Amitav Ghosh used poppy as a metaphorical tool at many contradicting dimensions. He depicts the poppy flower as a painkiller of any physical injury. On the other hand, he depicts it as a cause of war; that is to say, the Opium War of 1838. Likewise, Ghosh depicts poppy flower as a means of earning a livelihood for those who work in opium factories under the British rule. On the other hand, he depicted it as a reason of poverty and famine.

Poppy flower has ruined many Indian's live in a way it became inseparable part of their daily routine. The writer highlights the situation of people who were forced to grow poppies as follows, "Like all her neighbours, Deeti was preoccupied with the lateness of her poppy crop: that day, she rose early and went through the motions of her daily routine" ( Ghosh 3). As the quote indicates, the poppy crop became a main source of concern for the Indians that invades even their motion of ideas. As if their life is meaningless they do nothing as important as to cultivate poppy crop.

## Chapter Two: The Critical Reception of Postcolonial Theory in the Novel

---

Deeti, is a pivotal character in the novel she is a victim of the physical, economic, political and social colonial subjugation. The colonial desire to grow poppy instead of useful crop, rendered her migrant to escape the plight of her reality. In fact, Deeti's mission to grow poppy as almost the only plant has profoundly turned her life upside down. On her wedding night, she was drugged by the opium smoke and rendered unconscious to be raped by Chandan Singh, her brother-in-law, because her husband Hukam Singh is sexually impotent as he could not maintain conjugal duties.

From postcolonial lens, this barbaric deed is because of the colonial desire to allow poppy crop to be almost everywhere and indulge Indians with it as an essential part of the imperial plan to facilitate more control of minds and bodies. Indeed, this has resulted in manipulating the ethical principles of the society because the poppy has invaded minds.

The character Hukam Singh, Deeti's husband, is a victim of the British colonization in two facets, he is an opium addict due to working in an opium factory under the colonial coercion in Ghazipur. Moreover, he got "wounded while serving as a sepoy<sup>1</sup> in a British regiment"(Ghosh 2). As if he turned to consummate opium in order to escape reality and lighten his physical and emotional pain. Unfortunately, he died because of the extreme taking of opium portions.

*Sea of Poppies*(2008) takes the factory of opium as one of the most important settings in the novel. Thus, Ghosh described the conditions of the factory as an efficient way to deliver a vivid picture about the sufferings of the Indian peasants. Therefore, Ghosh described one of the factories of opium production as follows

---

<sup>1</sup> "Sepoy." *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 13 Sept. 2020, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sepoy.

The walls of Ghazipur's opium factory were partially obscured by mango and jackfruit trees but the British flag that flew on top of it was just visible above the foliage, as was the steeple of the church in which the factory's overseers prayed. At the factory's ghat on the Ganga, a one-masted pateli barge could be seen, flying the pennant of the English East India Company. (Ghosh7)

In the above quotation, Ghosh's description of the hazardous conditions of the opium factory is an expressive way to envisage the oppressive atmosphere created by the colonizer. A factory that partially lacks walls means that it is not protected from any natural catastrophes; especially, the tropical areas like India which is more prone to heavy rains and different weather problems. Ghosh also indicated an important manifestation of the British imperialism in India which is the flag. Ghosh compared the way the British flag stands above the factory as the steeple of the church reveals the veracity of the British desire to instill its imperialistic symbols.

Through the characters Benjam Burham and Raja Neel Rattan, the writer tried to show the way British colonizer perceives the sense laws and penal system that claims to apply justice among natives. Moreover, this character is a fine means to reveal the plight of the colonial-made land owner and the colonial-made trader on the society and the economy of the colonized state. In fact, Ghosh tried to give a sense of the way British authority exercises control on natives, pretending of applying justice which is in turn an indirect way to oppress natives and let natives oppress each other in a way that

## Chapter Two: The Critical Reception of Postcolonial Theory in the Novel

---

serves the colonial desire and facilitates the application of the agenda of imperialism. The existence of such type of people would help in reinforcing the economic power of the colonizer with their unscrupulous trade deeds. These two characters were stereotypes of the colonial collaborators who help the colonial power to achieve its imperial agenda.

Neel Rattan Halder is a victim of British policy who faces a punishment of seven years servitude in penal settlements of Mauritius Islands. This character is a Hindu Raj and a wealthy landowner of an inherited estate named Rakshali. His family dynasty was ruling this estate for many prior generations. This character had blindly obeyed the British terms and instructions. He enjoyed a privilege of the profits of the company in exchange of his colonial services. He was impoverished as he lost his properties and his caste in society as a result of a crafted crime designed by his shrewd rival in trade Mr. Burnham, a British opium business man.

The background of Neel's trial is because of the troubles of opium trade. By way of illustration, the company of Mr. Burnham had failed to produce more productions to its clients in China which created a dire need for the debts that they owed to Mr. Burnham's company. In analyzing the complex way colonial power perceive its policy to apply justice and discipline, the treatment that Neel Rattan Halder received as a result of the punishment of his trial has a lot to elucidate in this concern

The novelty of this treatment confused Neel into thinking that some sort of mistake had been made. Still grappling with his dhoti<sup>1</sup>, he protested: Stop! You can't treat me like this; don't

---

<sup>1</sup> "Dhoti." *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 22 Sept. 2020, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dhoti.

you know who I am?

there was a momentary check in the motion of the hands

that had been laid upon him; then someone caught hold of an

end of his dhoti and gave it sharp tug. The garment spun him

around as it unraveled, and somewhere nearby a voice said:

... Now here's a real Draupadi... clinging to her sari<sup>1</sup>...

Now another hand took hold of his Kurta and tore it apart so as

lay bare his underclothing.

...More of a Shikandi<sup>2</sup> if you ask me...

The butt of a spear caught him in the small of his back, sending

him stumbling along a dark vestibule, with the ends of his dhoti

trailing behind him like the bleached tail of a dead peacock. (Ghosh 157)

As can be concluded from the quote, the idea is not to dispense justice and discipline but to offend and humiliate the natives. The short dialogue between the jailor and Neel Rattan Raj reveals the way the colonizer looks to the colonized as an inferior that even the rank of Neel Rattan Halder as land owner and colonial collaborator did not exempt him to be humiliated. The colonizer deemed him as barbaric Hindu Raj who has to be disciplined and taught civilization no matter what his rank might be.

---

<sup>1</sup> the traditional clothes of Indian women

<sup>2</sup> "Shikhandi." *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 4 Sept. 2020, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shikhandi.

Through the character Neel, the writer showed that even high caste people are weak and powerless in front of the colonizer. Also he showed the way British colonialism took the full control over all layers of the society. Thus, it was easy matter for the colonizer to strip off Neel's caste and render him oppressed with a low caste.

### 2.2. Postcolonial Eco Criticism<sup>1</sup> in the Novel

Natural landscapes have a paramount importance in Ghosh's novel *Sea of Poppies* (2008). The novel is divided based on three symbols of nature Land, River and Sea. Moreover, the whole novel is mainly set in the nineteenth century opium poppy cultivation which in turn a natural setting. Therefore, it contains plentiful ecological pictures through which Ghosh had brought Postcolonialism and eco criticism together in order to initiate the environmental awareness. He, through his story, scoured the monoculture system as being something damaging to the indigenous ecology and plead to vary the species being planted. Likewise, Thomas Aquinas, the Italian theologian, stressed on the same principle, he said: "The goodness of the species transcends the goodness of the individual". That is to say, the benefit of variety and diversity is more abundant than monism.

Postcolonial eco criticism is the study of the ecological issues along with discovering the relationship between human and nature. Eco criticism shows the way nature is presented in Literature under the naming Green Literature which initiates the environmental issues in order to give an implicit message about preserving the nature.

In the beginning of the novel, the blossoming plants of poppy flowers in the soil of Indian earth as

---

<sup>1</sup> .The study of the relationship between human and nature in the colonial settings

the only plant gives a hint that opium will have a paramount effect on the life of the indigenous people. The writer skillfully portrays the invasion of poppy on the earth as follows

....when the poppies were strangely slow to shed their petals: for mile after mile, from Benares onwards, the Ganga seemed to be flowing between twin glaciers, both its banks being blanketed by thick drifts of white petalled flowers. It was as if the snows of the high Himalayas had descended on the plains to await the arrival of Holi and its springtime profusion of colour. ( Ghosh 3)

Ghosh, in the quotation above, tended to transfer a picture about the degree to which the poppy plant is overspread on the land of the colonized. The flowers of poppy invaded the vast majority if not the all of the fertile land near of Ganga River along the way from Benares to the Northern Bihar, which located in Ghazipur. Such description shows that it is almost impossible to find other type of plant in the soil other than the poppy plant.

The novel shows how the effect of opium went beyond the human species to the non-human items. To begin with, Ghosh alarmed about the pollution of the water sources mainly the Ganga River. A river that means to the Indians something more than just a source of water; but also, it has a spiritual value as this river was worshipped by the majority of Indians at that time. The pollution of Ganga River is caused by the chemical deposits and the sewage sludge coming from the factory of opium. As a result of this, the water became unhealthy to drink for all the living creatures and the

adjacent landscapes had changed to deterioration.

Ghosh depicted this miserable situation as “This stretch river bank was unlike any other, for the ghats around the Carcanna were shored up with thousands of broken earthenware gharas- the round bottomed vessels in which raw opium was brought to the factory” (92). According the quotation, not only the flow of dangerous chemical liquids that ruined the nature of the bank but also the broken containers where the opium drugs were carried. This is sign of the mercilessness degree of treating nature by the deliberate British colonial intervention.

In fact, when water is contaminated, the fish and the different water bodies are affected too. The aquatic life was damaged due to the abundant flow of chemical wastes. In the novel, Ghosh showed that even the fish are under this serious addiction. He portrayed this aquatic disturbance via the denoting that fish were easily seduced and easily caught using opium “ The believe was widespread that fish were more easily caught after they had nibbled at the shards, and as a result the bank was always crowded with fishermen” (92).

Through the character Kalua, the writer further unveiled the consequences of the unbalanced ecological system. Having an ecological vision, the writer taunted the monoculture as colonial imposed system of cultivation given the fact that every type of crop has its own function in nature; hence, the variation is vitally important and when a certain crop is grown up excessively it will create imbalance. Consequently, such strategy of plantation rendered human as poor, hungry and male nourished

The town was thronged with hundreds of other impoverished transients, many of whom were willing to sweat themselves half death for a few handfuls of rice. Many of these people had been driven from their villages by the flood of flowers that had washed over the countryside: lands that had once provided sustenance were now swamped by the rising tide of poppies; food was so hard to come by that people were glad to lick the leaves in which offerings were made at temple or sip the starchy water from a pot in which rice had been boiled. ( Ghosh 202)

As cited above, the excerpt portrayed the miserable conditions of human indigenous. Implicitly, it manifests the power of ecology in determining the fate of people and their well-being. In addition, it shows how the colonizer was controlling and oppressing to the point of manipulating the ecology of the colonized land.

According to the novel, every character is cursed by the unbalanced ecological system that is caused by the colonizer. Kalua's ox is used by Amitav Ghosh as an epitome to show that even animals are addicted to opium drug. The animals started sniffing opium. Consequently, the character Kalua used to feed opium to his animal; otherwise, it would not stop being grumpy. Not only this, the dust of opium factory makes Kalua's ox sneezing as other species of animals which did not escape the

plight of opium drug.

The natural chain of opium drug victims was in its way of progress. Thus, Ghosh drew attention to the societal results of this ecological chaos. By way of illustration, it led to a conspicuous societal degradation and moral transgressions like what happened to Deeti when she was impregnated by her brother-in-law Chandan Singh in her wedding night and also what happened to the character Ah Fat when he was falsely accused of robbery. Above all these consequences, this ecological chaos led to migration.

### **2.3. Exploring the Theme of Migration as a Means of Transformation and Resistance**

Ghosh presents the theme migration through the journey that the characters embarked for, in order to escape the plight of the authoritarian colonization. The journey of each character is urged by the past they lived that is imbued with oppression and injustice created by the colonizer. The writer implemented the ship as a symbol of transformation and also as a place that holds the individual stories of each character altogether into a cosmopolitan society. Embarking for a journey where the future is surrounded with uncertainty is itself an act of resistance. It gives a sense that they refuse and deny exploitation, and oppression exercised on them. Therefore, they aspired for a new life without oppression.

The characters Deeti and Kalua chose to migrate and react against the manifestations of the myriad tyrannical deeds. Deeti knew that such an act would cost her to lose her societal caste and her familial ties. Nevertheless, she favored to leave forever and sail across the black water, ignoring how her life will be afterward. Ghosh described Deeti's feeling in the following lines

She tried to imagine what it would be like to be in their place to know that you were forever an outcaste; to know that you would never again enter your father's house; that you would never throw your arms around your mother; never eat a meal with your sisters and brothers; never feel the clearing touch of the Ganga.( Ghosh 71)

As seen in the above quotation, Deeti is afraid of the fact that migration would make her losing the family ties forever. The experience of losing her belongings including her family and her caste would complicate the matter of identity for her.

Deeti and Kalua are characters from different societal castes. Deeti belongs to high caste while Kalua is untouchable man. That is to say, only a sight of his face would bring a curse of bad luck according to the Indian society. There is something interesting about incidents that led Deeti and Kalua to travel together. Deeti was treating Kalua is shown in the following lines “ Deeti, too, was careful to keep her face covered in the driver's presence: it was only when she went back inside, to wake Kabutri, her six- year- old daughter, that she allowed the ghungta of her sari to slip off her head”( Ghosh4).

The feeling of gratitude is what drives Kalua to save Deeti from being burned in her husband's funeral day. Kalua was humiliated and treated badly by three of high cast landowners. Deeti saw that directly so that she helped him to clean himself since he could not do that alone because he was injured. Although Kalua is untouchable man, this did not prevent Deeti to migrate with him. She even found the idea something lively and interesting

Even then she did not feel herself to be living in the sense as before: a curious feeling, of joy mixed with resignation, crept into her heart, for it was as if she really had died and been delivered betimes in rebirth, to her next life: she had shed the body of the old Deeti, with the burden of its karma ; she had paid the price of her stars had demanded of her, and was free now to create a new destiny a new destiny as she willed, with whom she chose- and she knew that it was with Kalua that this life would be lived.

( Ghosh 175)

As can be concluded from the quote, the travel of escaping away from authoritarian society and colonizer represents for Deeti a journey of new beginning, freedom and individualism. As if she is new born into a new life. Though she is aware of the consequences that would happen after her escape with Kalua, the idea of being migrant into unknown future made her feel joyous. Therefore, she acquired an urge to accept the new version of herself, and free herself of the burden of the past.

When embarking for the journey of migration, Deeti and Kalua presented themselves as Aditi and Madhu. Changing their names is a sign that they completely free themselves from their prior life. They left their names with the the life they lived before.

She believed that this voyage represents new Deeti that is free from the burden of the past. The way Deeti represents her new identity as a migrant can be shown in the following lines “ ...given name was the first to come to mind, and since it had never been used by any one, it was as good as any. Aditi, she said softly, I am Aditi”(Ghosh 233).

## Chapter Two: The Critical Reception of Postcolonial Theory in the Novel

---

For the other migrants, too, every one of them has a personal story. They have a reason why they chose to leave and let everything behind. They feared of the inscrutable future. Nevertheless, They aspired for a promising future because migration was their only outlet to achieve an internal self-development. Instead of accepting the conditions of being oppressed and allow the colonizer to consummate their personality and freedom, they chose to migrate. These migrants also have their own urge like Deeti.

### Conclusion

In a nutshell, the imperial and the colonial rule is highly manifested through the novel. The individual story of the character is written by the colonial system as it heavily affected their life and shaped their fate. The colonizer managed to shake the equilibrium of nature by imposing the plantation of opium at the expense of the other beneficial crops. Migration is used as a metaphor by the writer Amitav Ghosh to signify resistance and transformation. It expresses the refuse to live in a place where oppression exists.

***Chapter Three:***  
***Feminist Criticism of the Novel***

### Introduction:

In Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* (2008), women hold a significant presence. The active female characters are highly appearing at the expense of the passive male characters. Woman is used by Amitav Ghosh as an emblematic figure to signify culture, tradition and societal conventions, through which the writer represented the issues of gender and sexuality. In order to depict the sufferings of women in the colonial atmosphere, Ghosh incorporated the elements of Feminism with colonialism to bring a clearer image of the sufferings of women in colonial setting. The narration of Deeti is the main focus of this analysis. The main theory adopted in this chapter is the Feminist theory combined with the Subaltern theory of the critic Gayatri Spivak. This chapter seeks to analyze how patriarchy is related to women characters as subalterns and how colonialism reinforces subalternity to render women subject to both patriarchy and colonial powers.

### 3.1. The Status of Women in the Novel

Through the female characters, Ghosh wanted to portray the sufferings of the Indian women during the colonial period of the nineteenth century. The plot of *Sea of Poppies* (2008) is made of different sub-plots of many female characters like Deeti who is the main character and other minor characters like Miss. Paulette Lambert, Muniah and many other female characters.

These sub-plots contain many socio-cultural problems like widow-burning, the misery of marriage, rape, sexual harassment and social abuse. The individual stories of each woman character can reveal a lot about the situation of Indian women during the nineteenth century.

Deeti is an Indian woman from a small village in Northern Bihar. The analysis of this character

### Chapter Three: Feminist Criticism of the Novel

---

can be approached from different lenses. Her personality holds frailty and strength in the same time. Deeti's suffering as a woman is analogous to many cases of women in India. She witnessed gender bias from her childhood. Her marriage was settled without her consent. This is a sign that the entity of woman is totally not respected. This incident proved that woman has no right to decide for herself like a conscious human being. Deeti was a child when she was married to a crippled man who is much older than her. A society that tolerates the marriage of a child to an impotent man is extremely ruled by faulty ideologies.

Deeti was abused by her husband's family. They raped her in a family accomplice even her mother-in-law is involved. The involvement of Deeti's mother-in-law in the rape shows how strong the ideology of patriarchy is ingrained in their mind. Moreover, it shows how blindly mothers are in love with their sons. Hukam's mother knows very well that her son is not able to have children due to his injury. Nevertheless, she concealed her son's impotency and allowed Chandan Singh, her other son, to rape Deeti. Ghosh portrayed this experience to show how easily the honor of women is violated for the sake male satisfaction.

After the death of Deeti's husband, she suffered the misery of widowhood. She was assaulted by her brother-in-law who offered on her to be his mistress. "Why not do willingly now what you will be compelled to do a short while hence? Don't you see that I'm offering you your best hope for the future? If you keep me happy, you will be looked after"(Ghosh 104). According to the quotation, we can come to the conclusion that woman is seen as an object of entertainment only. The dare of Chandan Singh to present such an offer demonstrates the low position of the woman in the society.

## Chapter Three: Feminist Criticism of the Novel

---

Miss. Paulette Lambert is also a female character in the novel. This character is from French origin. However, she was born and raised in India. When Paulette's mother died, she was raised by an Indian wet nurse. Paulette's personality is a combination of French and Indian culture. She respects all cultures and languages. Through this character, the writer wanted to manifest the plight of being a female no matter what the origin might be. Miss. Paulette is from a Western origin. Nevertheless, she suffers the experiences of the local Indian women.

When Paulette's father died she was moved to the house of Mr. Burnham. Paulette's experience is somehow similar to Deet's one. Paulette suffered from sexual harassment by Burnham. Moreover, this latter wanted to get her married to a man whom she disapproved. Burnham wanted to use Paulette as a means to fulfill his interests without considering her satisfaction. The plight lived by women characters by the novel confirms the famous statement in his book *The Second Sex* of the writer Simon de Beauvoir: "One is not born, but rather becomes, woman".

### 3.2. The Representation of Subalternity in the Novel

The naming Subaltern was adopted by Antonio Gramsci to stand for the lower social caste people who have been marginalized in favor of the high social caste people. However, the critic Gyatri Chakravorty Spivak interpreted this concept from a feminist stand point. She linked this concept to women whose both inner and outer voices have been muted because they are subjected and not able to articulate their essential needs in society.

Spivak's theory of Subaltern focuses on the aspects of feminism. Therefore, her essay "*Can the Subaltern Speak?*" (1985) highlighted the low societal position that women occupy, denoting to the

### Chapter Three: Feminist Criticism of the Novel

---

interfering socio- cultural circumstances that resulted in having women a lower social class.

Henceforth, according to Gayatri Spivak

Within the effaced itinerary of the subaltern subject, the track of sexual differences is doubly effected. The question is not female participation in insurgency, or the ground rules of the sexual division of labor, for both of which there is 'evidence.' It is, rather, that, both as object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and can not speak, the subaltern as female is even more in shadow.

( 28)

As cited above, when the subaltern is a female the suffering is doubled and the situation would be worse. Indian culture has always looked to women as inferior objects to men. The Ideological constrains helped men to remain in their supreme stature especially religious ones. The ideological restrictions were in favor of men in justifying their unscrupulous attitudes towards women and marginalizing them deeply as far as the societal laws dictated.

Amitav Ghosh implemented many female characters in his novel every one of them has a different unfortunate story. Nevertheless, what is mutual among all female characters in the novel is

### Chapter Three: Feminist Criticism of the Novel

---

the fact that sufferings as subalterns in the society are further challenged by their thier gender. Deeti remains the best representation of the female subaltern among the female characters in the novel. Her suffering is narrated with careful precision. The writer expounds on the every detail of her daily life. Thus, her life incidents can be thoroughly analyzed. Deeti is an Indian woman from a Hindu society. She is faced to subjugation on two main levels. Firstly, the foreign subjugation which is the subjugation of the colonizer, people believed of the superiority of the colonials as they must be respected over the indigenus; second, is the local subjugation which is the societal oppression.

Therefore, Deeti is subjugated by her husband and his family and even by her family. The family of Deeti's husband never showed respect to her. She was considered as a servant who is responsible for serving all family members. Nevertheless, the family members treated her in a rude manner. They raped her, mocked at her and disrespected her. The way Deeti married her husband Hukam Singh has a lot to reveal about the subalternity of the Indian woman. Deeti married Hukam Singh because he is her brother's friend. More importantly, because her family thinks that her marriage to a crippled man from a high caste is better than any other option. This incident shows that the voice of women is silenced. They could not decide about their fateful things like marriage. Deeti married an unknown man at a young age without any questioning the decision of her brother. Because she is a subaltern and the subaltern can not speak in such society.

The way Deeti married Hukam Singh also reveals that she was a subaltern before her marriage. However, when she got married things went even worse. Her marriage consolidated her rank of being a female subaltern. She could not even ask her husband about the reason why he married her if he

### Chapter Three: Feminist Criticism of the Novel

---

would allow his brother to rape her. Instead, she kept her mouth silent and pretended to be a happy wife in front of her husband.

The writer gave his character Deeti the intelligence to excavate the truth about her rape. Through some signs she knew that she was raped by her brother-in-law on her wedding day. Deeti doubted a lot when Hukam Singh started ignoring her after her wedding night. Moreover, when she found that her husband is addicted to opium, she directly recognized that what made her in a state of unconsciousness is opium. As can be shown in the following quotation:

As for Deeti, the more she ministered the drug, the more she came to respect its potency: how frail a creature was a human being, to be tamed by such tiny doses of this substance! She saw now why the factory in Ghazipur was so diligently patrolled by the sahibs and their sepoy for if a little bit of this gum could give her such power over the life, the character, the very soul of this elderly woman, then with more of it at her disposal, why should she not be able to seize kingdoms and control multitudes? And surely this could not be the only such substance upon the earth?

(Ghosh 38)

In the excerpt above, Deeti is confessing the power of the drug. As if she is saying though opium is such small creature, it can render the strongest creatures into tamed objects. Deeti, here, is

## Chapter Three: Feminist Criticism of the Novel

---

confessing the potential of opium in changing the fate of her life. Through this substance, she became sure of her subalternity. The smell of this substance was a clue to know the truth and be sure that she can not ask questions about what makes her wondering.

Ghosh portrayed interesting types of oppression in the middle of the patriarchy phenomenon. Through Deet's mother-in-law, Ghosh wanted to show that even female abuses female in favor of patriarchy system in the society. Deeti's mother-in-law used to nickname her 'Draupadi'. The meaning of this nickname is illustrated in the following quote " Because the earth has never seen a more virtuous woman than Draupadi, of the Mahabharata, wife to wife brothers. It's a fortune woman, a saubhagyawati, who bears the children of brothers for each other" ( Ghosh 32).

This nickname became redundant on Deet's ears. This name has the same meaning as woman who bears children from her brother -in-law. Thus, Deeti understood that the real father of her daughter Kabutri is Chandan Singh, her brother- in-law. Not only that, she knew also that her mother-in-law knows everything. However, Deeti could not do anything or even ask her husband because she can not speak. She was afraid of being a widow. In her culture, if a woman returned back to her family as a widow, this would bring shame to her family and to the whole culture. Therefore, Deeti preferred to keep her mouth silent and remain with Hukam Singh. Thus, she is a real representation of the subaltern woman.

The writer Amitav Ghosh through his character Chandan Singh, unveiled the extent of women's sufferings because of caste. Chandan Singh, Deet's mother-in-law, and the whole family were so rude to her.

### Chapter Three: Feminist Criticism of the Novel

---

They believed that she does not deserve the wealth of Hukam Singh because she is a subaltern in the society.

When Deet's husband was fighting death, his family was happy for that; especially, his brother Chandan Singh because he knows that the wealth of his brother will return to him after the burn of Deeti in her husband's funeral pyre<sup>9</sup>. Moreover, he believed that he can do anything to Deeti since she can not do anything to him because of caste. Accordingly, he tried to tease Deeti in front of his brother who was fighting death. He even confessed the truth about Deet's rape in front of his ill brother by saying "He couldn't have done it then any more then he can now. It was me; no one else" (Ghosh 103). This quotation is the best confirmation that Deeti is a subaltern who can not speak or defend herself.

Chandan Singh dared to say these words explicitly because he already knows that he is stronger than Deeti and his caste is higher. He added "Why not do willingly now what you will be compelled to do a short while hence? Don't you see that I'm offering you your best hope for the future? If you keep me happy, you will be well looked after"(Ghosh 104). Chandan's behavior towards Deeti shows to what extant society is dominated by men who deem women as subaltern.

Similarly, Deeti was humiliated by Bhyro Singh, her husband's uncle. This character is an epitome of the group whom Jacque Derrida labeled them as "Dominant indigenous groups on the all -Indian level"(qtd. In Spivak 79). Due to his caste that granted him power to find Deeti on the ship Ibis. According to the story it is clear that Bhyro Singh was acknowledged about every single step of the couple Deeti and Kalua. Nevertheless, he did not reveal anything.

---

<sup>9</sup>.The burn of the died body

### Chapter Three: Feminist Criticism of the Novel

---

The reason why he kept hiding that he found Deeti has a lot to reveal about the ideologies ingrained in the heads of the members of the society towards women. When Deeti asked Bhyro Singh “Why didn’t you say something earlier?”(Ghosh 331). He replied “A bring shame on myself? Acknowledge a tie with a woman like you? A whore who’s run away with a filth- sweeper? An overheated bitch who’s brought shame on her family, her village, her in-laws?” ( Ghosh 331)

Bhyro Singh displayed explicitly the stand point of the society towards the actions of Deeti. A society that expects her to be fully submissive to its abusive constraints, just because she is a woman who favored to escape from utilitarianism, she became a wrongdoer in the eye of her community.

The female character Malti, Neel Rattan Halder’s wife, is a woman whose situation is somehow similar to Deeti. This character demonstrates how passive wife would be in the middle of a society that is ruled by patriarchal system. Malti’s life is fully constrained by patriarchal rules. She was aware that her husband is ruined landowner who spends most of his time with his mistress Elokeshi. However, she could not talk to warn him about the consequences of his ruthlessness. When Neel Rattan Halder went to jail because of Mr. Burnham’s financial trap, she did not leave him as his mistress Elokeshi did.

All the property of Neel Rattan Halder was seized as a part of the punishment which made Malti and her children to live in a small house. Malti has a lot to say to her husband Neel Rattan Halder. Nevertheless, she only said to her husband to take care of himself. Neel’s wife Malti is an example of how passive wife would be. Malti was a silent spectator who never questioned the matters of her husband. She has to perform the house duties and play the role of a mother without complaining the

mistakes of her husband that led her and all the family to such miserable consequences. Just like Deeti who had to bear the misery of her addicted husband but never complained. Amitav Ghosh used the character Deeti and Malta to demonstrate the life of the wife in the Indian society marginalized women and objectified them. Deeti and Neel's wife really conforms the saying of Gayatri Spivak "The subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern is female is even more deeply in the shadow"(28).

### 3.3. The Struggle against Patriarchy and Social Conventions

It is generally thought that power is attributed to masculinity and certain biological manifestations that are related to physical strength. However, the power of some female characters in *Sea of Poppies* (2008) has nothing to do with masculinity. Ghosh gave his female characters a sense of power that is different from the conventionalized one. It has to do with determination and will power to resist all what threatens their dignity.

In the first chapter of the novel Ghosh shows the way Deeti's reaction on the bullying of the street. He depicted her as person who deals with bullying in a flexible way. Due to Deeti's eyes color that sounds unfamiliar from the usual in her town, she was called as *chundaliya, dainiya*. As can be shown in the following quote

This had the effect of unnerving the young, and of reinforcing their prejudices and superstitions to the point where they would sometimes shout taunts at her- *Chundaliya, dainiya*-as if she were a witch: but Deeti had only to turn her eyes on them to

### Chapter Three: Feminist Criticism of the Novel

---

make them scatter and run off. Although not above taking a little pleasure in her sake. (Ghosh 8)

It is worth noting that these names *Chundaliya*, *dainiya* are used to label superstitious things according to the Hinduism culture. Here, the writer wanted to give a hint to the reader that Deeti has a sense of power inside her. This is shown through her cold reaction to the bullying. She just moved her eyes away from them, then she continued her way. Deet's reaction is a sign of self-confidence. Additionally, the quote reveals that Deeti was trying to obtain satisfaction in life through her daughter which is a source of power for her.

Deeti favored to burn herself in her husband's funeral pyre rather than to be the second wife of the man whom she hated the most. She challenged her brother-in-law by strongly refusing his offer. In reality, she challenged herself at the first place when she took decision that put her life in a great danger. However, taking such decision is a brave action from her. The way Deeti refused the offer of Chandan Singh is a sign that Deeti got rid of her sensuality and frailty. After she was a passive sufferer who could not speak or question her husband and his family, she is now able to face her tormentors. The way Deeti replied to her brother-in-law is shown in the following quotation "What kind of devil, she said, "can speak in front of your dying brother? Listen to my words: I will burn on husband's pyre rather than give myself to you" (Ghosh 158). Through these words, Deeti proves that she is able to fight for her dignity and express herself as a woman in the society of patriarchy.

Deet's tentative try to fight patriarchy is to escape away from her husband's family. She chose to be burned on Sati to avoid a further abuse from Chandan Singh. This is a clear sign that her dignity could

### Chapter Three: Feminist Criticism of the Novel

---

not bear more drudgery of humiliation. Surprisingly, she was saved by Kalua. The way Kalua saved Deeti can be shown in the following quotation

Kalua placed the platform against the fire, scrambled to the top, and snatched Deeti from the flames. On reaching the water, he thrust the platform into the river and placed Deeti upon it. Then, pushing free of the shore, he threw himself flat on the improvised raft and began to kick his heels in the water, steering out towards midstream. All of this was the of a minute.

(Ghosh 119)

Deeti chose to escape with Kalua and run far away from her husband's family. Together they embarked on a ship named Ibis heading to Mauritius. By doing this, Deeti made a ground breaking step in her life. She became able to take decisions by her own and travel away.

On the ship Ibis she had to face patriarchy. This time Deeti developed a new personality. She challenged her identity and left her past behind. Deeti faced Patriarchy on Ibis with a refreshed spirit. She became the one who makes settlement and pose solutions to the problems of the board members whom she befriended. This is a clear sign that Deeti developed her personality into strong and confident woman who managed to express her existence in her environment.

The second and the last action to fight patriarchy is her plan to escape from the ship Ibis. This ship is a small community that gathers different types of people who forms a cosmopolitan society. This small community is analogous to the society in the land. Thus, Deeti is seen as a subaltern who has to

### **Chapter Three: Feminist Criticism of the Novel**

---

be committed to the system of patriarchy. Her escape from the ship Ibis is not an easy task especially when, Bhyro Singh, her husband's uncle, is a hindrance.

Deeti is aware of what it means to escape from a big ship like Ibis. Nevertheless, she does not hesitate because the will power inside her is stronger than her fear. Fortunately, Deeti with the help of her friends on the ship managed to escape far away and live the life they ever wanted. This is prove that Deeti is not a weak lady and when the oppression reaches its zenith things will change.

## Chapter Three: Feminist Criticism of the Novel

---

### Conclusion :

To conclude, the main reason of women's sufferings in the novel is the societal ideologies that stand in favor for men at the expense of women. Women have a passive role in the Indian society as she has no right to question the man. Marriage is a factor that strengthens women's subalternity in the society. Patriarchy did not imprison women all their life, through their different revolutionary attitudes women managed to prove that patriarchy is just a faulty mindset from people who seek to exploit women for their weakness.

### General Conclusion

On the whole, this study presented an overall survey and an analytical insight into the conditions of women in the nineteenth century in the colonized India. Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* (2008) is the finest example that not only gave a comprehensive idea about the life of Indian women but also Third World Women. The problems of Indian women are caused by two imbricated factors which are Patriarchy and Colonialism. These two factors are strongly linked to each other because the idea of Patriarchy emerged from colonialism. People believed that the colonial powers must be respected because they are supreme and stronger. Therefore, the idea of Patriarchy came to be analogous to this belief, women should be subjected to men because they are stronger. Accordingly, Postcolonialism and Feminism are related to each other.

The historical Context of the nineteenth century in India contributed on a large scale in giving a vivid example about women's sufferings. In that, it revealed the consequences of the colonial oppression on women.

The writer Amitav Ghosh represented the life of Subaltern women through the main character Deeti. Subaltern woman is represented as a frail, anxious, passive wife who does not question her husband for she is afraid. Also, Subaltren woman is a woman whose intellectual and emotional side are neglected at the expanse of her body. Women were depicted as a means of pleasure and profit of man's sexuality and societal faulty ideologies like Sati. Patriarchy system results in two contradicting things which are fear and submission than revolutionary attitudes.

## **General Conclusion**

---

The character Deeti can be deemed as an epitome to represent analogous experiences of women in patriarchy society. Also, as a bildungsroman for she managed to move herself from the passive role given to her by the patriarchy society into another level of the unmoved confidence.

# Bibliography

- Ashcroft, Bill, et al. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. Routledge, 1989.
- Bhabha, Homi K. *Nation and Narration*. Routledge, 1991.
- Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Second Sex*. Vintage Classic, 2015.
- Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Penguin Classics, 2020.
- Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth: Frantz Fanon*. Grove Press, 2004.
- Rushdie, Salman. *Midnight's Children*. Vintage Books, 2013.
- Hawley, John C. *Amitav Ghosh: an Introduction*. Foundation Books, 2005.
- *Historical Companion to Postcolonial Literatures: Continental Europe and Its Empires*. Edinburgh University Press, 2008.
- Huggan, Graham, and Helen Tiffin. *Postcolonial Ecocriticism*. Routledge, 2010..
- Huggan, Graham, and Helen Tiffin. *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2015.
- Ghosh, Amitav. *Sea of Poppies*. Penguin Canada, 2009.
- Ghosh, Amitav. *The Imam and the Indian: Prose Pieces*. Penguin Books, 2010.
- Khan, Akhtar P. *"Can the Subaltern Speak?": Indian Women and Feminist Writing*. 1991.
- Lewis, Reina, and Sara Mills. *Feminist Postcolonial Theory: a Reader*. Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2010.

- Nayar, Pramod K. *Postcolonial Literature: an Introduction*. Pearson Longman, 2008.
- Perry, Kay. *Sea of Poppies by Amitav Ghosh: Notes*. CAE Book Groups, 2009.
- Plain, Gill, and Susan Sellers. *A History of Feminist Literary Criticism*. Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Scholz, Sally J. *Feminism: a Beginners Guide*. Oneworld, 2010.
- Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. Penguin, 1995.
- Said, Edward W. *Culture and Imperialism*. Vintage Digital, 2014.
- Thiongo Ngũgĩ wa. *Devil on the Cross*. Heinemann, 1987.

# Webliography

- “Amitav Ghosh.” *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 15 Aug. 2020, [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ Amitav \\_Ghosh](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amitav_Ghosh).
- Lewis, Jone Johnson. “Feminism: Ideas, Beliefs, and Movements.” *ThoughtCo*, [www.thoughtco.com/ what-is-feminism-3528958](https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-feminism-3528958).
- Ghosh, Amitav. “Sea of Poppies Study Guide: Analysis.” *GradeSaver*, [www.gradesaver.com/sea-of-poppies/study-guide/analysis](https://www.gradesaver.com/sea-of-poppies/study-guide/analysis).
- Lyden, Jacki, and Amitav Ghosh. “Caste, Colonialism And A 'Sea Of Poppies'.” *NPR*, NPR, 9 Nov. 2008, [www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=96713674](https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=96713674).
- *Portrayal of Women in Amitav Ghosh's Sea of Poppies*. [www.ijhssi.org/papers/v2\(5\)/ version-4/G2504648.pdf](https://www.ijhssi.org/papers/v2(5)/version-4/G2504648.pdf).
- “Postcolonial Criticism Summary.” *Enotes.com*, Enotes.com, [www.enotes.com/topics/postcolonial-criticism](https://www.enotes.com/topics/postcolonial-criticism).
- *Postcolonial Feminism: Looking into within-beyond-to ..* [academicjournals.org/journal/IJEL/article-full-text-pdf/71109E63948](https://academicjournals.org/journal/IJEL/article-full-text-pdf/71109E63948).
- *SuperSummary*, [www.supersummary.com/sea-of-poppies/major-character-analysis/](https://www.supersummary.com/sea-of-poppies/major-character-analysis/).
- *The Status of Woman in Amitav Ghosh's Oeuvre a Feminist ...* [www.arcjournals.org/pdfs/ijSELL/v4-i2/6.pdf](https://www.arcjournals.org/pdfs/ijSELL/v4-i2/6.pdf).
- “Waves of Feminism.” *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 7 June 2019, [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Waves\\_of\\_feminism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Waves_of_feminism).