

# The Views and Ideas of Amitav Ghosh on Women Sufferings in His Novel 'Sea Poppies

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**Abstract**—The female characters in Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* are the subject of this research article. It will concentrate on the predicament of women in the nineteenth century, when their circumstances were made worse by colonial control. Opium has a direct or indirect impact on the lives of all the female characters in the book. Each woman's character will be briefly discussed, with a particular emphasis on Deeti. Paulette, a French botanist's daughter who lives in Calcutta, respects Indian culture just as much as French people do. Sarju, Heeru, Munniah, and other minor female characters in the book are indentured servants who go from Calcutta to Mauritius aboard an Ibis. The story paints a striking image of women's oppression. The life of a widow and how they were sent to Brindavan to endure a life of pain and adversity are depicted via the character of Taramony.

**Index Terms**—Colonial, Culture, Opium, Suffering, Women

## I. INTRODUCTION

One of the most influential authors in Indian English literature is Amitav Ghosh. In 2008, his novel *Sea of Poppies* made the Man Booker Prize shortlist. The historical context of colonial control in India and its need to provide China with opium is the basis for the story. He depicts ladies in a realistic manner. Compared to the male characters, there aren't many female characters in his book. He has attempted to demonstrate in *Sea of Poppies* how women might be empowered in order to eventually become self-sufficient. The historical backdrops of colonialism, the production of opium in India to meet the demand for opium in China, and the movement of indentured laborers to Mauritius to work on plantations are the basis for his story. The novel paints a clear picture of the predicament of women under colonial control in this milieu. However, there are similarities between

the misery of an agriculturist and a woman in a Zamindar family.

The female characters in the book are the subject of this article. One of the main female characters in the book is Deeti, and the entire plot centers on her. Every segment of Indian society's female population has been portrayed by Ghosh. Upper-class women's status is not all that different from that of lower-class women. In the book, women experience caste, class, and gender oppression. Ghosh has written about the spiritual love that exists between a devotee and their god. He attempts to demonstrate how a child's growth, regardless of discrimination, leads to appreciation for all cultures, whether they are Indian or European, through the character of Paulette.

## II. WOMEN AND SUFFERING

Deeti is just a typical villager. One of the main characters in the book is her. In the book, she has experienced gender bias since she was a young girl. According to the novel's opening chapter, she is referred to as "chudaliya, dainiya as if she were a witch: but Deeti had only to turn her eyes on them to make them scatter and run off" because of the color of her eyes. Her husband, Hukum Singh, was a member of the same British army battalion as her brother, Kesri Singh. Since this proposal is viewed as preferable than marrying a man who is significantly older than Deeti, her marriage to Hukum Singh is set without her consent. During his time in the British regiment, Hukum Singh suffered a leg injury that prevents him from walking normally, although this is viewed as a minor issue in their marriage. Her dowry goes toward his husband's house's roof construction. He is employed at a Ghazipur opium mill. On the first night of her marriage, her dreams are dashed when her brother-in-law Chandan Singh, assisted by

her uncle Bhyro Singh, rapes her while she is asleep after her husband forces her to inhale opium.

It isn't until she is traveling on Ibis that she realizes her brother-in-law raped her and that her uncle Bhyro Singh was also involved. When her spouse starts ignoring her shortly after their first date and she gets pregnant, she starts to have her doubts. According to her mother-in-law, she is similar to Draupadi. She starts giving her mother-in-law opium to expose the truth because she is certain that she knows everything about the father of her child. One day, when unconscious from opium use, she admits that her daughter's father is actually her brother-in-law. Deeti's mother-in-law's actions demonstrate how a lady can become so consumed by her son that she aids in the violation of women's honor. Her brother-in-law physically assaults her as her opium addict husband is near death, and she says she is trying to get away from him. "Listen, instead of giving myself to you, I will burn on my husband's pyre." She is forced to perform sati after her husband dies, and in order to do so, she is given opium to inhale. While unconscious, she sits on the pyre, and his brother-in-law remarks "To have a sati in the family will make us famous. We'll build a temple for you and grow rich on the offerings".

She comes from a patriarchal environment where Kalua, an untouchable, saves her. After saving her from the flaming pyre, Kalua leaps into the Ganga River. She believes that Kabutari will be secure at her brother's house, so she sends her daughter there. She marries Kalua as her second husband and rejects discrimination. She had paid the price the stars had demanded of her, shed the old Deeti's body and its karma, and was now free to choose who she would live with in her new destiny. She knew that this life would be lived with Kalua until another death claimed the body he had torn from the flames. She no longer possesses the weakness and meekness that Deeti had before her rebirth. She gains the self-assurance and independence to make decisions regarding her future. Since Kalua consults Deeti before making any decisions and shields her from all harm, her marriage to Kalua might be viewed as ideal in terms of mutual understanding. Since she enters the ship in gunghata as a new bride with everyone surrounding her, her arrival on board Ibis is

meaningful in this instance. Since she was previously known as Kabutari-ki-ma, her decision to alter her name to Aditi when she registered it in the migration list demonstrates her quest for identification.

it was on her lips to identify herself as Kabutari-ki-ma, name by which she been known ever since her daughter's birth –her proper given name was the first to come to mind, since it had been used by anyone it was good as any. Aditi, she said softly, I am Aditi.(233)

She rises to the position of Grimityas leader on Ibis. Because she has the answer to their issues, both men and women aboard the ship refer to her as bhaugi. She is self-assured and prepared to defend anyone in need. According to Susan Faludi 82, "women should be allowed to define themselves rather than having their identity defined for them repeatedly by their culture and their men." Ghosh has attempted to demonstrate how sociopolitical shifts cause women to undergo significant transformations in order to overcome their hardships. Paulette, a French botanist's daughter, is born on Jodu's father's boat, and her mother passes away there as well. Jodu's mother raises her as if she were her own child. Jodu's mother wraps Paulette in a blanket to keep her near her dying mother after leaving him naked and laying on the boat after Paulette is born. She refers to her as her aunt's mother, Tantima. Rice and dal khichdi are the first solid foods she eats after learning Bengali. She combines elements of Indian and French culture in her personality. As someone who treats all cultures with equal respect, she is the epitome of tolerance. She respects the locals and Europeans equally and has no ill will. She speaks English, Bengali, and Hindustani. As Babo Nob Kissin's niece, she turns into a grimity on Ibis in order to get to Mauritius. Since she is a girl and a European, she is not allowed to fly on Ibis, and Ibis passengers are girmityas. Until she discloses it herself, no one in the ship can recognize her.

Additionally fascinating is Taramony's role as Baboo Nob Kissin's guru mother. She is his uncle's wife, who unsuccessfully marries barely six years before he passes away in an attempt to have a male heir. His uncle is significantly older than her. His uncle's final request is to abandon her in Brindavan so she might live a life of pain and adversity as a widow. Given that she is roughly Baboo Nob Kissin's age, he finds Taramony's spiritual wisdom and her devotion to her

God Lotus-eyed Lord, Lord Krishna, impressive. He felt the same way she did about Lord Krishna."I will be your Radha, and you will be my Krishna" (162). They first reside in a modest home in Calcutta's Ahiritola riverside district. There was no controversy around a woman who lived with her niece and a small group of followers and devotees who called her Ma and received spiritual guidance from her. Although she passes away from a fever, she promises to return and inhabit his body in order to achieve their objective. Baboo Nob Kissin is always willing to assist ladies, whether they are Paulette, Neel's mistress, or Elokeshi, thanks to the influence of Guru Ma. When he solves women's concerns, he gets sensitive. The situation of upper class women in Bengal who were married to men much older than themselves and forced to live a reclusive life of penance and misery in Brindavan after their husbands passed away is something that Ghosh has attempted to depict. He has also spoken of the pure and spiritual love that exists between a guru and a shishya, as well as between God and his disciple.

Ibis board members include women like Munniah, who has an affair with a man who works at an opium mill in her area and gets pregnant. Despite her fear that they may expel her, her parents accept her wish to have a kid. However, she is forced to leave her hamlet because her parents and child have perished in the fire and she is left alone. When the people in charge of Ibis learn of her affair with Jodu (Azad), they become agitated since they don't approve of a Hindu girl and a Muslim lad dating. Jodu suffers severe physical abuse, and Munniah is imprisoned in a room until Deeti steps in to save her. Ghosh has attempted to portray communalism in this way, despite the fact that passengers on Ibis are uncertain about their future.

Ghosh has attempted to portray the predicament of women who are abandoned by their husbands because of illness or incapacity to bear a male heir to the family through the figure of Heeru. Because of her illness of forgetfulness, her spouse abandons her in a fair. Because she is informed that women will be destroyed in Mauritius because to the low number of women compared to men, she consents to marry an indentured laborer who is significantly older than her on board. She married for safety so she could live a quiet life without knowing about Mauritius' struggles.

There aren't many women on Ibis like Sarju, a renowned midwife in her community close to Ara and one of the ship's oldest ladies. She is punished by being sent from her community to Mauritius after making a mistake during the delivery of a Thakur's son. She is denied family companionship just because she is a member of a lower social level. She offers Deeti poppies, bhang, and dhatura seeds to store for later use in Mauritius before passing away on the voyage. As an agriculturalist, seeds are the most important thing in their life, and Deeti understands the importance of taking something for their future after obtaining seeds from Sarju. They are like an asset for them.

Ghosh has attempted to portray the lives of women who accompany their husbands when their land gets confiscated through the characters of Ratna and Champa. Their farm was contracted to the opium factory, and when they were unable to pay the rent, the land was confiscated, forcing the sisters to leave their town and travel to Mauritius in pursuit of wealth. Another woman, Dokhanee, fled the oppression of her cruel mother-in-law by traveling with her husband. She is also pleased that her spouse has accompanied her on her flight. She is ignorant of Mauritius's plantation workers' plight and appalling living circumstances. Malti, Neel's wife, serves as an example of how his wife is a passive victim whose state is no better than Deeti's. The patriarchal laws govern her life. While her husband enjoys his time with his mistress Elokeshi, who betrays him as soon as he loses his property, she is forced to play the roles of mother and wife without any expectations. She never questions her husband and simply performs her tasks as a silent observer in the house. However, Neel's entire estate is seized while he is incarcerated and on the verge of being deported to Mareech. When she arrived to the jail to meet him, she showed no signs of the catastrophe that had ruined their entire life. She just tells Neel to take care of himself, and she must live in a tiny place. She endures hardship as a result of her husband's error, but she never grumbles. Here, Ghosh has attempted to portray the characteristics of an ordinary Indian wife who goes about her chores without asking anything in return. Mrs. Burnham and her daughter's characters exemplify the British belief that they are superior to Indians and that anything associated with Indian culture—whether it be people, clothing, or

language—is inferior. Paulette finds it difficult to remain in Burnham's home because of this, and as a result, she want to flee to Mauritius. She is raised in an environment that instills in her the value of respecting other cultures.

### III. CONCLUSION

Throughout the nineteenth century, Ghosh attempted to portray the suffering of women from all facets of Indian society. He has addressed social issues such as sati and the groom's brother raping him in the guise of marriage to hide his impotence. the suffering and loneliness of widowhood as it relates to Calcutta-based Brahman ladies who are sent to Brindavan. Ghosh provides us hope that women can receive support from their male peers, as demonstrated by Deeti's backing from Kalua. They have the capacity to gain autonomy and assume leadership roles, as exemplified by Deeti. In this novel, they are on par with men. He has made an effort to portray women's identity quest and their entitlement to a dignified and free life. Women are powerful, travel, and make decisions to lead independent lives in his book. They are not under male control. They are free, forward-thinking folks.

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