

**Portrayal of Women in Amitav Ghosh's Novels *Sea of Poppies* and *River of Smoke***

By

Tasmeyah Mahbuba Islam

ID No. 13103031

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### **Declaration**

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my own original work while completing degree at BRAC University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I have acknowledged all main sources of help.

**Student's Full Name & Signature:**

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**Tasmeyah Mahbuba Islam**

Student ID 13103031

### Approval

The thesis/project titled “Portrayal of Women In Amitav Ghosh’s Novels *Sea of Poppies* And *River of Smoke* ” submitted by Tasmeyah Mahbuba Islam, Student ID: 13103031 has been accepted as satisfactory in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in English on 8<sup>th</sup> August 2019.

### Examining Committee:

Supervisor:

(Member)

---

Anika Saba

Lecturer, Department of English and Humanities  
BRAC Universities

Departmental Head:

(Chair)

---

Firdous Azim

Professor , Department of English and Humanities  
BRAC University

### **Dedication**

I dedicate my thesis to my father late A.T.M. Fokhrul Islam and my mother, Jesmin Khanom, the most wonderful women on the Earth who has transfer her most wonderful belief to me that a woman must not be forced to choose between her study and motherhood if she does not want to.

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## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	7
Introduction.....	8
Methodology.....	13
Literature Review.....	18
Chapter 1: Representation of Female Protagonists in Amitav Ghosh's novels Sea of Poppies and River of Smoke .....	23
Chapter 2: Demonstration of Modern Women/ Transformation of Amitav Ghosh's women from feminine to female phase in the novels.....	30
Cocclusion.....	37
References.....	39

### **Abstract**

In my thesis, I will illustrate the portrayal of women in Amitav Ghosh's novels *Sea of Poppies* and *River of Smoke*. Manifestation of women in Amitav Ghosh's novels explores the emotional world of women with a historical background which facilitate the readers to recognize the feminine sensibility as well as their psychology at that period of time. In this paper, I have tried to explore the demonstration of Amitav Ghosh modern women and their journey from feminine to female phase in the novels.

## Introduction

Amitav Ghosh is a famous novelist of contemporary Indian English fiction. He is a well-known Bengali Indian postmodern author. He is a socially conscious writer with multi-dimensional personality as an anthropologist, sociologist, novelist, essayist and travel writer. In 2007, Ghosh was awarded the Padam Shri by the Indian government. Amitav Ghosh raises a number of problematic issues of the society like discrimination against women which is one of the most discussed issues of his novels. He depicts women and their experiences in patriarchal societies with a profound sympathetic understanding. In his novels, Ghosh has represented women's suffering with a historical background. Ghosh's women are the leading spirits in his fiction. They are represented sensitively and in a realistic way in the novels. As Malathi and Prema have commented, "Amitav Ghosh never presents his women characters as overt radical feminist nor as the stereotype images of Sita and Savitri. His women representation is real life and in a realistic manner." ("Portrayal of Women in the Selected Novels Of Amitav Ghosh" 1)

In my paper, I will discuss the portrayal of women in Amitav Ghosh's novels *Sea of Poppies* and *River of Smoke* which are the first two novels of Ibis trilogy. Ibis trilogy deals with the trade of opium between Indian and China by the east company and trafficking of labors to Mauritius. Here, I will explore the demonstration of Amitav Ghosh modern women and their journey from feminine to female phase in the novels.

*Sea of Poppies* is published in 2008. It is a novel by Amitav Ghosh which is actually a wide canvas of life in northern India in the early years of 19th century. It is shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize in 2008. The story of the novel is about history of opium cultivation. This book intends to link between the decline of the opium trade and the emergence of the indenture



migration. It can be called a historical novel. The novel exposes the unrevealed aspects of colonial oppression; including the illegal business of carrying slaves (workers) from one place to another; the illegal production and export of opium; indentured system and immigration; the dominance over Indian agriculture sector; the ruin of India's industries and “double colonization” of Indian women by the patriarchal society and the colonizer both etc. the novel presents the traumas and helplessness of people in the wake of colonial disturbance in the 19th century. At that period, people were forced to turn over their fields to opium production. Through the life story of a tribal woman, Deeti who is an ordinary village woman, a mulatto American sailor named Zachary Reid, an Indian rajah/zamindar called Neel Rattan Halder, and Benjamin Burnham, an evangelist opium trader and an orphan of a French Botanist called Paulette this novel finds its way. This is a story about the opium and poppy. Here Ghosh has recreated the saga of individuals in the waves of economic forces. The story is set prior to the Opium Wars, on the banks of the holy river Ganges and in Calcutta. Here, the author compares the Ganges to the Nile, the lifeline of the Egyptian civilization, attributing the provenance and growth of these civilizations to these selfless, ever-flowing bodies. The characters are portrayed as poppy seeds emanating in large numbers from the field to form a sea, where every single seed is uncertain about its life and future. Deeti is the main female protagonist in the novel. From the beginning of the novel we can see that Deeti's life was not so pleasant even in her childhood. She used to get bullied, never get support of her family, had to marry without her consent, raped by her brother-in-law in her first night of marriage, forced to work on the poppy field. The character of Deeti has her own world of imagination and power to sense what is coming towards her. She envisions a ship which is coming to her though she never had seen any. Finally, after the death of her husband she flees with kalua and become an indentured labor on Ibis. Eventually, the stories

come together and each carrying its share of joys and sorrows. The Ibis becomes a shelter to those in impoverishment. Things go wrong when Bhyro Singh tried to rape Deeti and is murdered by Kalua. After having so much trouble and bloodshed on board the vessel, Neel, Ah Fatt, Jodu, Serang Ali and Kalua manage to escape with the help of Paulette. Though they were unaware of their destination, they depend on the sea waves to see where it will carry them to.

*River of Smoke* by Amitav Ghosh is published in 2011. It is the second book in the Ibis Trilogy by the author. This novel was listed as one of the best historical novels of the year by NPR. The novel is set in 1838. The ship Ibis carries convicts and indentured laborers across the Indian Ocean. Two of the convicts from Ibis manage to escape and travel to Canton (now recognized as the city of Guangzhou in China) where they try to join the opium trade. As the novel opens, a cyclone rages in the Bay of Bengal, where three ships are converging on Canton. One, the Anahita, carries the largest consignment of Opium to come to the city from India. One ship carries Fitcher Penrose, a horticulturist who wants to study China's medicinal plants. The third ship, the Ibis, carries indentured servants. Deeti is a returning character from the first book of the trilogy, *Sea of Poppies*. Now she is the matriarch of a large family, she is fleeing her homeland because she is pregnant with Kalua's child. They sheltered a lifeboat to escape from the Ibis with several others, including Ah Fatt, the son of a Canton opium merchant, and Neel, a raja who has been convicted of misappropriation. Ah Fatt and Neel meet up with Ah Fatt's father, Bahram Moddie who is a Parsi merchant. He ships opium to China from his country India. Bahram joined the opium trade many years before with the help of his father-in-law, Rustamjee Mistrie. Even though Rustamjee is a powerful shipbuilder back in India, as his son-in-law, Bahram is a lowly member of the family. Still, he manages to convince his father-in-law to fund several journeys to China to take part in the opium trade. Those ventures are made

profitable and bring success to both Bahram and his in-laws. Up till now things are complicated when he has a son named Ah Fatt with his mistress Chi Mei who is a Cantonese boat woman. This fact of having a illegitimate son is unknown to his Indian in-laws. After the death of his father-in-law, the rest of the family attempts to throw him out of the business. At this point, Bahram decides to ship one last huge consignment of opium on the Anahita, hoping to earn enough to buy out his in-laws' business. Opium addiction is sweeping China's population so they find it a crisis. In an attempt to control the crisis, the government has begun cracking down on imports of the drug into the country. The British merchants believe in unrestricted free-trade, but the Chinese government is tired of bearing the consequences of opium addiction. This in effect becomes a political conflict between the British and the Chinese. This conflict leaves opium traders in dividing line. In such situation, they have no choice but to wait and see if they will be allowed to sell their cargo or not. On the other hand, Neel, in disguise, finds work as Bahram's munshi (a type of secretary). A good part of the novel describes the sights and customs of nineteenth-century China. At one point, Bahram is invited to fasten together the Canton Chamber of Commerce as it was the custom of the time for there to be one Parsi on the Committee and the all-male Committee members speak to each other with embraces. Another subplot describes Paulette, the orphan daughter of a French botanist. She disguised as a deckhand and accompanies Mr. Fitcher on his expedition in looking for of a rare plant named Golden Camellia. During the voyage, Paulette receives letters from her friend Robin Chinnery. He is the illegitimate, homosexual son of artist George Chinnery. Those letters describe certain sections of the book that reveal Canton life outside of Bahram's circles. The book also covers much of the life of Bahram. He lives a dual existence. The story details how his relationships with his wife, Shireenbai and his Chinese lover change over the years. He abandons both for long periods of

times. He actually re-enters into each relationship only as he finds the need to do so. The novel ends with Bahram heartbroken. His reaction at that moment is as though he has sold his soul and do not get anything in return. In the second part of *River of Smoke*, Paulette is found to decide to leave every connection behind. She starts an expedition with Fitcher Penrose for finding a new species of flower. She sails towards uncertainty where there is no past or future. Wherever *Sea of Poppies* is more concerned with the indentured laborers of the Ibis, the sequel, *River of Smoke* focuses on trade more than ever the opium trade which in the end leads to the Opium war.

In my paper, in the first chapter, I will discuss representation of female protagonists in the novels. I will describe significant female characters, like Deeti and Paulette who is given strong character to play as well as the female characters like Heru, Malti, Sarju etc who have a little description in the novels. In the second chapter of my thesis is about the demonstration of Modern Women in a post-colonial setting and transformation of Amitav Ghosh's women from feminine to female phase in the novels. Here I will discuss how the female characters represent modern day women even though their context and setting of the novel is during British colonial era. Though there are female writers who write to explore the condition of women in the patriarchal society, reading and exploring *Sea of poppies* and *River of Smoke* is more interesting because it gives the chance to understand feminism and the condition of women in India from a male point of view.

### Methodology

In my paper, I will apply the three historical phrases of Elaine Showalter on *Sea of Poppies* and *River of Smoke*. Elaine Showalter in her theory *A Literature of Their Own* has talked about the analysis of women according to the three socio-cultural and psychological critical categories of Feminine, Feminist and Female-aesthetic. Feminine is the concept of womanhood. It is the traditional role of the woman where she is understood always in connection to the male. She has no identity of her own. Here, she is venerated as a mother in relation to the father, as a sister in relation to her brother, as a wife in relation to her husband and as a daughter in relation to her father in the patriarchal society. Feminist is the concept of the theory that women are fighting for their rights, by breaking the ideological form. Feminist was a carriage or character of women that strives for the identification of their rights and the struggle for the identity as individuals in the society. Female is the concept of the theory that conveys woman is an individual. It is the movement towards the understanding of woman as a female. Female is an entity with its own power, reason and maturity.

The natural school of criticism that is required here to analyze the themes of Amitav Ghosh's novels is feminist literary criticism. Feminism has become a crucial characteristic in contemporary world literature. It covers broad and variable aspects in the lives of women. The contemporary feminism tries to analyze the social positions and representations of women in colonized countries and Western as well. It also examines number of conceptual and methodological problems: the study of representation of gender is one of them. That is why the conceptual clarity is required while interrogating any novel in the light of feminism. Feminist Criticism was the direct product of the Women's movement of 1916. When the female perspectives are expressed through women's writing is more than a precious piece in front the

male controlled the universe. In exploring the question what is it to be woman in the history of mankind: "...is the history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man towards woman having indirect object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her". ("Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions of the First Women's Rights Convention in America, Seneca Falls, 1848" 10). It shows that women are suffering for their condition from a long period of time. They even do not have the authority over their own life. From the time women lost the right to control their lives, they were dispossessed not only of human rights but also of humanity. Feminist writings give them the chance to show the world their sufferings, needs and desires through their writing.

Feminist writings were more important to the post-colonial dissertation for two major reasons. First, both patriarchy and imperialism could be seen to bring to bear different forms of domination and suppression over those subordinate to them. In a situation like this, it was important for the women's side to come out to the forefront from the patriarchal influence. They need to expose the cruelty and injustice be done to them by men. Opposing this male dominance over women was a requirement of the time. After women started writing, they exerted feminism in their works regardless of class and race. Though the writers tried their best to depict the women as strong and focused to succeed in lives, they were allowed to show their talent only in the space allotted to them by the men. The protagonists of the most of the contemporary novels belonged to the third wave of feminism. These protagonists were exposed to the changed socio-cultural situation. Going to different places, meeting new people and having exciting experiences are so common now-a-days. In such contemporary situation, women have the chance to empower themselves more than before. In this way automatically they become self-motivated and confident. These brand new modern women are the agents responsible for social changes.

The feminist writers tried to create a position for women in a male dominated environment as best as it is possible for them. The path was very difficult. The women had to break through male domination on women which was happening from years after years. The taboos and beliefs of the society that had heavily impregnated by the male supremacy were making things harder for them. Therefore, critics argued that colonialism operated very differently for women and for men. This was so because women were subjected to both general discrimination as colonial subjects and specific discrimination as women. This is the situation which is addressed as “double colonization.”

Secondly, they now intend to explore the nature of the feminine world by trying to reconstruct the world of suppressed emotions. They are considering their writing to be more effective rather than wasting time in attacking the male version of writing. Another critical issue that was handled by these women writers was the issue of “Style in language”. Jane Austin gives the world a technique that was perfectly natural, elegant, proper and effective for the use of women writers. Time has changed now-a-days. Women writers of present time can write in their own terms and condition. They do not need to follow any certain pattern used by male writers. The world is also seems ready to give the attention to the feminist writing which was neglected for a long period of time. Even, male authors are coming forward with their feminist writings. Amitav Ghosh and his writings are one of the best examples of that change.

In my paper, I will talk about the third-wave feminism to explore my topic through the novels. Third wave feminism is an iteration of the feminist movement that began in the early 1990s United States. It continued until the rise of the fourth wave in the 2010s. The third-wave feminists embraced individualism and diversity and required to redefine what it meant to be a feminist.

The third wave is traced to Anita Hill's televised testimony in 1991, to an all-male, all-white Senate Judiciary Committee that Clarence Thomas, selected for the Supreme Court of the United States, had sexually harassed her. The word third wave is credited to Rebecca Walker, who responded to Thomas's appointment to the Supreme Court with an article in Ms. magazine. She wrote:

So I write this as a plea to all women, especially women of my generation: Let Thomas' confirmation serve to remind you, as it did me that the fight is far from over. Let this dismissal of a woman's experience move you to anger. Turn that outrage into political power. Do not vote for them unless they work for us. Do not have sex with them, do not break bread with them, do not nurture them if they don't prioritize our freedom to control our bodies and our lives. I am not a post-feminism feminist. I am the Third Wave ("Becoming the Third Wave", 1992).

Walker wanted to establish that third-wave feminism was not just a reaction of the first and second wave of feminism, but a movement in itself. The term intersectionality which was introduced by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw in 1989, and it was flourished during the third wave. The concept is to describe the idea that women experience layers of oppression caused by several reasons like gender, race and class.

Semone de Beauvoir was a French writer, intellectual, existentialist philosopher, political activist, feminist and social theorist. Her *The Second Sex* was first published in 1949 in French. De Beauvoir defines women as the "second sex" because women are always distinct in relation to men. De Beauvoir asserted that women are as capable of choice as men. She thinks that they can choose to elevate themselves, moving beyond the immanence and reaching to the position where they can take responsibilities for themselves and the world, where they can



chooses their freedom. In the chapter "Woman: Myth and Reality" of *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir argued that men had made women the "Other" in society by claiming that women cannot be understood. She argued that this kind of false aura of mystery is used by men as an excuse not to help them in their need. Stereotyping was always done in societies by the group higher to the group lower in the hierarchy. She wrote that a similar kind of oppression by hierarchy also happened in other categories of identity, such as race, class, and religion, but she claimed that it was nowhere more factual than with gender. Under such circumstances, men find the perfect excuse to organize society into a patriarchy.

## Literature Review

In my paper, I will discuss the portrayal of women in Amitabh Ghosh's novel *Sea of Poppies* and *River of Smoke* with the reference of some scholarly resources. I would like to state about those articles and why I have chose them and how they are significant for my research.

Amitav Ghosh is trained social anthropologist. His writing has been influenced by his training. At the same time, there are some limitations of anthropology which lead him to his preference for fiction:

At the same time I also felt the limitations of anthropology very keenly. My essential interest is in people and their lives, histories and predicaments.

There is not much room for this in formal anthropology, which is more interested in abstractions and generalizations. So I realized very early that I did not share the basic concerns of anthropology and that fiction is my proper metier. (Hawley 7)

It is, for that reason that Ghosh pursues his anthropological benefit in fiction. Gaiutra Bahadur, an award-winning Guyanese-American writer, in her review of *Sea of Poppies*, reveals that Ghosh excavates Deeti from the pages of Sir George Grierson's diary. In 1883, he was sent by the British government, to look into the suspected abuses in the conscription of indentured labourers from India. The indentured labourers are who use to go to work on overseas plantation colonies in the nineteenth century. They were called girmitiyas. In his diary Grierson records a stumble upon with the father of one female coolie in a village along the Ganges. He comes to know that the man "denied having any such relative, and probably she had gone wrong and been disowned by him." (Bahadur 55). The historical record provides only a trace of this woman; not a name, a

processing number or a year of emigration. Ghosh attempts to fill the blanks left by the archives with his imagination power with the instincts of an anthropologist more than of a novelist in his novels of Ibis Trilogy. Ghosh admits, "...if history is of interest to me it is because it provides instances of unusual and extraordinary predicaments" (Hawley 6).

The rise of Deeti's leadership quality in *Sea of Poppies* and *River of Smoke* recalls Jane Eyre's personal advancement in Charlotte Bronte's novel *Jane Eyre*. It is predicated of the half-caste Bartha Mason's violent effacement. Gayatri Spivak in her seminal critique of the book tells that Bartha's role in the novel "is to render indeterminate the boundary between human and animal and thereby weaken her entitlement under the spirit if not the letter of the Law" (Spivak 249). According to Leela Gandhi, Spivak insists that "Jane's rise to the licit centre of the novel requires Bartha's displacement to the fuzzy margins of the narrative consciousness" (90-91). In Deeti's journey from her village in Ghazipur to Calcutta and in establishing her leadership on the Ibis, Kalua is instrumental figure. Kalua's gigantic shape of body is always a protective cover for Deeti. On one occasion Deeti's leadership is challenged by the quick-tongued Jhugroo. But Kalua's menacing intervention puts an end to this challenge once and for all. Even when Deeti is attacked by Bhyro Singh again Kalua comes in front and murdered him to protect her.

Malathi and Prema in their joint work "Portrayal of Women in the Select Novels of Amitav Ghosh" have stated, "Amitav Ghosh's fiction portrays the two images of women: women as a life-giver, sustainer and continuer of the race as against women in search of an identity." In "The Woman in Indian Fiction in English" by Shantha Krishnaswamy and "The Image of women in Indian literature" by Yashoda Bhat & Yamuna Raja Rao, they have found Amitabh Ghosh to create her woman with an imaginative refinement. The major female characters get rid of their dependency and

break the pattern of sexuality and sensuality to take their place as whole human beings freely and equally by the side of with men. These are women who have lived a life of fulfillment. They achieved dignity through their actions. They imparted solidity to society and the civilization both. In these papers I found the critics to state that Ghosh develops women who are strong, who can express themselves; their emotion and desire, do things, travel, come to their own decisions and live independently out of the purposive control of men. They pursue ideals and able to help themselves as well as others. They are symbol of progress and forward movement. That is why I found the women of Amitabh Ghosh as the possessor of the third wave of feminism.

The critical response on feminism in the novels of Amitav Ghosh has created a notable deviation of interests between the feministic criticism of Indian subcontinent and the western academy. In “The Status of Woman in Amitav Ghosh’s Oeuvre – a Feminist Perspective” by Dr. Venkateswarlu Yesapogu has stated, “In all his other novels there is relatively little debate about the representation of gender and other issues of sexuality. But as a matter of academic speculation, women have become very significant presences in all his other works.” Examining this feature, James Clifford in the article “The transit lounge of culture” says that we hear little from women in other novels, but it is only in *The Calcutta Chromosome* the women figures emerge as central organizing principle (Times Literary Supplement 3 May, 1991). This article makes an exploration of the status of woman in the novels of Ghosh and the problems and challenges they face in the contemporary society. However it is a try to interpret the portrayal of women in the various cultural aspects of contemporary Indian society from a feminist view. P Sailaja and Manoj in their article “Equality and Difference: A reading of Amitav Ghosh’s Women” also talk about ghosh representation of women in contemporary Indian society and the differences between male and female in the question of equality. Again, this

article also has tried to explore the status of women in Amitabh Ghosh's novels from a feminist perspective.

After having a close reading of all these I have come to realize that how technically Amitabh Ghosh has represented her women with a bold and beautiful manner in spite of their pain and sufferings to create a better position for them in such patriarchal society of India.

## **Chapter 1: Representation of the female protagonists in Amitabh Ghosh's novel through *Sea of Poppies* and *River of Smoke***

Ghosh has represented each female character with their own strength and supremacy in both of the novels, *Sea of Poppies* and *River of Smoke*. Deeti is the main female character of both of the novels. She is a simple village girl with a good heart but strong mind who eventually becomes a hardworking housewife and a caring mother. At the very first of the novel, we see people to call Deeti “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”(Ghosh 5). Thus she is a fighter; she knows how to fight her tormentors. She is able to create a separate position in the men made social circumstances. She gets married to an opium addict named Hukkum Sing. He is an impotent. At the wedding night, Deeti's mother-in-law drugs her so that her brother-in-law can consummate the marriage by raping her. Deeti begins to doubt her husband just after her first night when he starts ignoring her. In the mean time, she becomes pregnant. When her mother-in-law says that she is like Draupadi, she becomes sure that her mother-in-law knows everything about the father of her child. To get the truth from her mother-in-law, she starts giving her opium. One day under the control of opium in a state of unconsciousness, her mother-in-law confesses that her daughter's father is her brother-in-law.

The author Amitav Ghosh gives his female protagonists some sort of supremacy over other characters of the novels. Here, Deeti, a village woman of 1838 living in northern Bihar has the intellect to understand how opium is used by the British Empire to control and conquer its colonies. When Deeti ministered the drug, she starts to respect its power. She can be aware of how feeble human beings are as a creature in front of it. A tiny dose of this substance can easily tame them and can be in charge of their sense. Now she understands why the factory in Ghazipur

is so meticulously 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)

While her husband is in his death bed, her brother-in-law again comes to assault her physically. He offers Deeti to be pregnant again for having a son before her husband dies. He says Deeti, “Your husband and I are brothers after all, of the same flesh and blood. Where is the shame? Why should you waste your looks and your youth on a man who cannot enjoy them? Besides, the time is short while your husband is still alive- if you conceive a son while he is still living, he will be his father’s rightful heir” (Ghosh 157). The behavior of her brother-in-law becomes unbearable for her at that point. She warns him: “Listen to my words: I will burn on my husband’s pyre, rather than give myself to you” (Ghosh 158). Through these words of Deeti, Ghosh expresses the self-assured nature of Deeti. This shows that Ghosh’s women are accomplished to restore the dignity of womanhood. Malathi and Prema has commented that “Ghosh develops women who are strong, who can express themselves, do things, travel, come to their own decision” (“Portrayal of Women in the Selected Novels of Amitav Ghosh”, 6).

Deeti is not an ordinary village woman. Even in her pain, she finds a way to juggle for a better future. Economic exploitation was common for the village people under colonial rule. Deeti’s family is also forced to cultivate poppy in their land by the sahibs as “the English sahibs would allow little else to be planted; their agents would go from home to home, forcing cash advances on the farmers, making them sign *asa’mi* contracts. It was impossible to say no to them: if you refused they would leave their silver hidden in your house, or throw it through a window. It was no use telling the white magistrate that you hadn’t accepted the money and your

thumbprint was forged” (Ghosh 30). Even the housewives in the villages like Deeti is forced to work in the field after doing their house hold chores. Not only poor village people like Deeti’s family members, but also the beautiful creatures of nature are also shown to have hostile effect because of this enforced poppy cultivation. Here, a connection between the exploitation of nature and the oppression of women across patriarchal societies could be recognized As Deeti notices “The sap seemed to have a pacifying effect even on the butterflies, which flapped their wings in oddly erratic patterns, as though they could not remember how to fly” (Ghosh 28). Here, a noticeable matter is that under the colonial ruling in a patriarchal society, Deeti’s consciousness makes her different from any other women of that time. Her pain could not stop her from thinking and learning. Her attitude is the key to her desire and dare to explore her life by taking risk to flee with Kalua and start a new chapter of her life.

The ship becomes the whole world in a miniature form for Deeti. She sees people from different parts of the world come together there and has a chance to interact with them. All these transform Deeti in the process. Deeti has leading power hiding inside her. After seeing the sufferings of other on Ibis, she starts to think about the solution of those problems. She is confident enough to fight for anyone in trouble. She is called “bhaugi” by men and women on the ship and becomes leader of grimityas on Ibis. As a consequence the shackles of patriarchy on the Ibis becoming loose, Deeti is able to articulate herself with her all hidden characteristics. Deeti becomes an example of “women be free to define themselves, instead of having their identity defined for them time and again, by their culture and their men” (Faludi 82).

At the novel’s start, she envisions a ship “like a great bird, with sails like wings and a long beak.” Though she has never before saw a schooner like the Ibis, she somehow knows that it is coming for her. Deeti’s has a mystical quality which has made her something more than a



simple village woman. At the closing of the novel, when she was lying one night on the deck of this same vessel, she holds a poppy seed between her fingers. This shows somehow Deeti's inner spirit knows her destiny which brings her out of her turmoil and makes her stand in front of all odd.

Paulette is daughter of a French botanist who is born on a boat of Jodu's father. Her mother dies on the boat at her birth. When Paulette is born Jodu's mother leaves him naked, lying on the boat and wrapped Paulette with blanket first to keep her close to her dying mother. She is brought up by Jodu's mother like her own child and so, she calls her Tantima. The first solid food she eats is rice and dal khichdi. So, her personality is a fusion of French and Indian culture. She can speak in Bengali, Hindustani and English. She is a perfect example of tolerance. She is a polite person and respect all natives and European equally. As she is not being permitted to travel on Ibis as she is a European and a girl, she becomes a grimityas on Ibis as niece of Babo Nob Kissin to reach Mauritius. She is intelligent and mature person. She knows how to handle any situation. Nobody in the ship is able to identify her till she reveals it herself. She is a courageous and helpful girl. She decides to reveal herself at that moment when it becomes the time for some convicts to escape from Ibis. We find her as a girl of strong will power in River of Smoke as well. She joins with Fitcher Penrose at his expedition to collect the rare plant Golden Camellia in China. This is a choice made by Paulette to ensure a better life in future.

There are some other female characters also in Sea of Poppies and River of Smoke. The character of Taramony as guru ma of Baboo Nob Kissin is also very out of the ordinary. She is the wife of his uncle who marries just her in order to get a male heir. She is much younger than his uncle. his uncle dies without having any child and makes his last wish to leave her in Brindavan to lead a life of widowhood. Life in Brindaban is full of suffering and hardship. As she

is about the age of Baboo Nob Kissin, he is impressed by the spiritual knowledge of Taramony and her devotion towards her God, lord Krishna. His feelings were same as her for lord Krishna as he states, “You will be my Krishna and I will be your Radha”(162). They start living in a small house in Ahiritola waterfront neighborhood of Calcutta where on a woman living with her niece creates no scandal. A small circle of devotees and followers called her Ma and she uses to give spiritual instructions to them. When she dies, she tells him that she will come back to enter his body to fulfill their goal. It is the influence of guru ma that Baboo Nob Kissin is always ready to help women. By the character of Taramoni, Ghosh has tried to show the condition of Upper Class women in Bengal who were married to men much old than their age. He has portrayed their secluded life of atonement and suffering in Brindavan after their husband’s death. He has also described existence of pure spiritual love between God and his devotee and between a guru and a shishya.

Life of an ordinary village girl like Munniah is always painful. She indulges in illegitimate relationship with an opium factory worker in her village and becomes pregnant. Her decision to give birth to her child is supported by her parents. But she has to leave her village and become an indentured labor after the child got burnt in the fire. As relationship between a Hindu girl and a Muslim boy is not acceptable in India, it evokes conflict when Munniah’s affair with Jodu (Azad) is known to the people of Ibis. Jodu is beaten cruelly and Munniah is locked in a room. Here, we also see Deeti to come forward to help the helpless. Only after the intervention of Deeti that she is released. Through this Ghosh has tried to show the life of poor, helpless people travelling on Ibis as indentured labor who do not know their future. Through the character of Heeru, Ghosh has tried to depict difficult life of Indian women who are left by their husband because of some disease or inability to give birth to a male heir for the family. She is left by her

husband in a fair. On the ship, she agrees to marry with one of the indentured labour who is much older than her because she is told that women will be torn down in Mauritius as there are few women in comparison to men. Her marriage is for security to lead a peaceful life in Mauritius. Here, again Ghosh has portrayed that how Indian women are depended on men for the peace and security of their lives. On the board of Ibis, Sarju is one of the oldest women who is a Dai - midwife in her village. As she commits a mistake in the delivery of a Thakur's son, she is punished by sending her away from her community to Mauritius. Here, it is shown that how a woman is deprived of company of family just because she belongs to a lower class of the society.

Through the character like Ratna and Champa, Ghosh has tried to describe life of women who have accompanied their husband when their land is confiscated. They are sisters who are married to a pair of brothers. Their land was tapered to the opium factory and then confiscated due to not being able to pay rent. This is driving them out to leave their village and go to Mauritius in search of a better fortune.

Another woman named Dokhanee travelled with her husband to escape from the oppression of her abusive mother in law who is happy that her husband has joined her in her escape. Well, this is something extra-ordinary portrayed by Ghosh. For an Indian man, it is not so common to support his wife by going against his family. May be, by portraying a character like Dokhanee's husband, Ghosh tries to show that it also could happen if truly Indian men try to understand their wife's sufferings.

Through the character of Neel's wife Malti, Ghosh has portrayed the nature of a typical Indian wife who performs her duties without questioning or expecting anything. Her life is restricted by patriarchal laws. She is made to play role of mother and wife. While her husband

enjoys with his mistress Elokeshi, she remain silent in the house performing duties. But when Neel is in jail and is about to be deported to Mareech, she comes to jail to meet him. She shows no sign of disaster though their life is completely destroyed. She has to suffer due to mistake committed by her husband but never complains. She has to live in a small house due to poverty but she is more concerned about her husband and says Neel is to take care to himself. The characters of Mrs Burnham and her daughter are representative of the mindset of British people that they are superior than Indians. Even anything which is a part of Indian culture is be it people, dress, custom or language is inferior to them. This is the reason why Paulette finds it difficult to live in Burnham's house their house and wants to escape to Mauritius. As she is brought up in such an atmosphere where she is taught every culture has to be respected, it is not possible for her to cope up with such a family like Mr. Burnham's.

Ghosh's women never get suppressed by the rules and regulations of patriarchal society. The will power of the characters like Deeti, Paulette and others sails along with the fate; they never give up fighting against all odds in the society. Ghosh's women characters get rid of their dependence to break the conventional pattern and take their independent place as whole human beings equally with men. Through the portrayal of such strong women characters, Ghosh shows the socio-political shifts bringing changes in women out of their sufferings.

## **Chapter 2: Demonstration of Modern Women/ Transformation of Amitav Ghosh's women from feminine to female phase in the novels**

A brilliant, tempting, yet perilous picture is evoked by the title of Amitav Ghosh's spellbinding new novel, *Sea of Poppies*. That ocean is reflected by another: the Bay of Bengal, where the opium trade thrived in the mid nineteenth century. The two oceans give backdrop and engine to Ghosh's story. *Sea of Poppies* starts with the dismantling of a previous slave ship, the *Ibis*, into a vehicle vessel. The ship will consequently convey opium headed for China and contracted workers to provinces like the British West Indies. As the *Ibis* is furnished, passengers are driven through the magnificently energizing universe of 1838 Calcutta. The clamoring port city is the site of prohibited sentiment, mask, misleading, court battles and ceremonial satis - the act of consuming late widows. The ship's group and travelers — opium assembly line laborers, American mariners, French wanderers, lascars, coolies, convicts, rajas and sahibs — mirror Calcutta's cosmopolitan racial and financial composition. Theirs is a multilingual world, ringing with pidgin, Chinglish, Hinglish and the incomparable slang of seafarers.

The novel is based on historical setting of colonial rule in India and to fulfill its need of supply of opium to China. His portrayal of women is realistic. In his novel women characters are few in comparison to men characters. In *Sea of Poppies* and *River of Smoke* he has tried to show how women can be empowered so that they may become independent in the future. His novel is based on historical background of colonialism, of cultivation of opium in India to fulfill demand of opium in China and migration of indentured labors to Mauritius for working in plantations. It is in this context story vivid picture of plight of women during colonial rule is represented in the novel. The suffering of a woman in zamindar family and an agriculturist is nonetheless similar. I will be dealing with women characters in the novel. Deeti, one of the leading female characters

in the novels and it is around her that novels revolve. Ghosh has represented women from every section of Indian society. The position of upper class women is not very different than woman of lower class. Women in the novel suffer from gender discrimination, class and caste structure. Ghosh has dealt with spiritual love between god and a devotee. Through the character of Paulette he tries to show development of a child irrespective of discrimination results in respect for all culture whether it is European or Indian. Deeti is portrayed as a conventional village woman. She is one of the conspicuous characters in the novel. She experiences gender based bias since her youth in the novel. She is wedded to Hukum Singh who served in a similar unit as her sibling Kesri Singh of the British armed force. Her marriage with Hukum Singh is fixed without her assent as this proposition is viewed as superior to wedding to a man a lot more established than Deeti. Her fantasies are broken on the main night of her marriage when her newly married groom makes her breathe in opium and she is assaulted in a condition of obliviousness by her brother-in-law Chandan Singh with assistance of her uncle Bhyro Singh. It is just later while she is going on Ibis that she ends up becoming mindful that her uncle Bhyro Singh was likewise in charge of her assault by Chandan Singh. Doubts begin to weigh on Deeti's mind regarding her husband once he begins overlooking her soon after her first night and she winds up pregnant. Her relative says that she resembles Draupadi. She turns out to be certain that her relative knows everything about the real identity of her child's father and to uncover the reality from her mother-in-law, she begins giving her opium. One day affected by opium under a haze of obliviousness, she admits that her little girl's dad is indeed Chandan Singh. The conduct of Deeti's relative shows how a woman is blinded in adoration for her child that she causes individuals damage and will sacrifice the security and respect of another woman. While her opium addicted spouse lies on his deathbed, she is physically struck by her brother-in-law and in order to escape his vile advances

she exclaims to his face that she would rather be a sati than be involved with him in anyway. After the death of her husband, she is constrained to perform sati and to do this she is offered opium to breathe in and in such a condition of obliviousness, she sits on the fire, and her in-laws constitutes this partaking of ritual as a way to bring honor and recognition to the family. Their concerns are about the family honor, rather than the young woman forced to sacrifice herself on the pyre of her husband.

Viewing Deeti through Elaine Showalter's phrases, we can see that Deeti goes from being Feminine to a Feminist. Her marriage to Hukum Singh reflects her Feminine position, where she is regarded merely as a wife to a husband, and a mother to her daughter. Deeti's lack of autonomy on her identity in the Feminine state is highlighted by her being addressed as Kabutari-ki ma. It is after the demise of her husband, that we see Deeti emerging from her position as Feminine and moving towards Feminist – this is first highlighted in her vehement refusal of Chandan Singh's lewd advancing while she intensely states that she would much rather prefer dying as a Sati on her husband's pyre.

Kalua, an untouchable from a society still buckling under patriarchal law, saves Deeti from the pyre fire, and then jumps into the Ganga River. Having decided she has paid her dues, Deeti marries Kalua and turns a new leaf. She ends up certain and autonomous to take choices about her future. Her marriage with Kalua can be viewed as flawless regarding understanding between them on the grounds that before taking any choice Kalua counsels Deeti and shields her from each peril. Her decision to name herself Aditi, while boarding Ibis, highlights her newly found sense of identity. Till her name change, her sole identity was that of Kabutari-ki-ma. Deeti becomes assured and certain and is always up for fighting for anyone caught in a tight situation.

Amitav Ghosh has tried to show in *Sea of Poppies* that socio political changes bring drastic changes in women and enables them to come out of their sufferings.

Now consider Deeti's transformation into a Feminist and subsequently becoming a Female. Her rescue by Kalua and her marriage to him allows Deeti the space to finally exercise her suppressed sense of individuality. When looking at Deeti's evolution, we can see her boldly embody Rebecca Walker's concept of third-wave feminism, especially when we regard her choosing her name – Aditi – when boarding the *Ibis*. Through choosing her name, Deeti gains agency on her and this is where she steps into the realm of becoming a Feminist. Onboard the *Ibis*, Deeti becomes the leader of grimityas, and she is also called bhaugi by men and women on the ship. She begins her foray into occupying the Female space when she sheds her quietness and stands up to injustice. Deeti's realization of herself as an individual with dominion over herself, her choices and actions highlights her understanding that she is someone with her "own power, reason and maturity"

The young woman Paulette who is the child of a French botanist who is left orphaned when her parents pass away. Jodu's mom takes Paulette in and raises her as her own child. She calls her Tantima-auntie mother. Her character is a combination of French and Indian culture. She is an ideal case of resilience, an individual who pays equivalent regard to all societies of the world. She is with no feelings of resentment and regards both locals and European similarly. She turns into a grimityas on *Ibis* as niece of Babo Nob Kissin and voyages towards Mauritius. Due to her European descent and on account of her being an unmarried young woman she is not permitted by law to board the *Ibis*, unless they are going as grimityas. No one in the ship can distinguish her till she uncovers it herself. As per the argument of Simone de Beauvoir, men had made women the "Other" in society by claiming that women cannot be understood. According to



her, this kind of false aura of mystery is used by men as an excuse not to help them in their need but in these novels, Paulette is capable of helping not only herself but also others. She left Mr. Burnhums house to find a better future for herself. Paulette's decision to leave the Burnhum's household shines light on her sense of independence and courage. She decides to reveal her identity to help Jodu, Neel, Ah Fatt and Kalua in escaping from Ibis. Here, we can apply the third wave of feminism on this character where women are not only independent but also able to stand up for justice. We see Paulette suffering oppression on the grounds of being a creole woman. This evokes Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality whereby women suffer discrimination on the basis of race, gender and class. In the character Paulette, we see her go through this and still come out of it without her lens being distorted. Her ability to regard different culture with respect represents her unique way of understanding the world around her.

Another exceptionally fascinating character in Ghosh's novel is the character of Taramony as the boro mama of Baboo Nob Kissin. She is the spouse of his uncle who weds only six years before his passing so as to get a male beneficiary however this brings about disappointment. She is a lot more youthful than his uncle. His uncle's last wish is to leave her in Brindavan to lead an actual existence of widowhood which is brimming with affliction and hardship. It is through the guidance of boro ma that Baboo Nob Kissin is constantly prepared to lend a helping hand to women be it Elokeshi, escort of Neel or Paulette. He moves toward becoming sensitive in taking care of issues of ladies. Ghosh has attempted to show the state of upper class ladies in Bengal who were married to men much older than them and after their significant others demise, they were constrained to carry on with a separated existence of compensation and enduring in Brindavan. He has additionally depicted presence of otherworldly love among God and his fan and between a master and a shishya, which is unadulterated and profound. Taramony,

widowed and endowed with spirituality has her very own tailored sense of individuality. While she has been suffering living the life of a widow, it has been through her realization of divinity that she constructs an identity and a place for herself aboard the Ibis. When applying Elaine Showalter's phrases to Taramony, it is fair to say that the spiritually enlightened widow has made the transitions from the oppressive Feminine state to the independent Female state.

The other members on board the Ibis like the woman Munniah, happens to enjoy an illicit affair with a man working in opium plant in her town and ends up pregnant. Her choice to bring forth her kid is upheld by her folks despite what might be expected of her conviction that they will abandon her. Be that as it may, she needs to leave her town as nothing remains for her folks and the children are dead as they got burned in the flame and she is disregarded. She becomes embroiled in trouble when her relationship with Jodu (Azad) is discovered by the passengers onboard Ibis, a union between a Hindu young lady and a Muslim man isn't acceptable to them. Munniah conflates the norms of the society by first engaging in an illicit relationship with a man then becoming pregnant out of wedlock. This is a woman who is comfortable breaking the ideological forms in her journey for identity as an individual of society. Her family's acceptance of her decision to have the baby highlights a mindset that reflects third-wave feminism's principle that a woman has full autonomy on her body and choices. Given the time period of the story, Munniah is an emboldened character, brave and strong-willed, a woman who expertly represents Showalter's third phase, Female.

Through the character of Neel's significant other Malti, it is indicated how his better half is a latent sufferer and her condition isn't superior to Deeti's. Her life is constrained by man-mandated duties for a woman. She is made to assume the job of mother and spouse, with no desires for herself while her husband commits infidelity with his escort Elokeshi who quits him

like a bad habit when he loses his property. She is only a quiet onlooker in the house performing obligations and never scrutinizing her spouse. In any case, when Neel is in prison and is going to be extradited to Mareech and all his asset is seized, she comes to prison to meet him and did not give any indication of the fiasco which has totally obliterated their life. She endures because of the slip-up committed by her husband, however, never expresses displeasure. Here Ghosh has attempted to outline the nature of a common Indian spouse who plays out her obligations without anticipating anything. In Malti, we have a woman who has accepted her role as being inferior to the male characters in her life. She is dutiful, obedient; never uttering a word of displeasure for the danger her husband puts her through. She is emblematic of Elaine Showalter's Feminine concept. Malti never outwardly gives the impression of realizing that she is indeed an individual who has the right to make her decisions and choices, rather she serves out the role of a dutiful wife to her vagrant husband, not questioning the boundaries she is confined to under the patriarchy. She doesn't seem to realize that she can experience emotions, and that they are valid, instead we see Malti embody a submissive space unaware of herself, never to claim her rights or even realize that she has any.

## Conclusion

In the contemporary Indian Literature, Amitav Ghosh is the only writer who reflects the bitter truth of Indian reality. He has significant involvement in the world literature too. All his major works have enjoyed vast academic attention and produced a lot of literary criticism across the whole world. He executes with admirable assurance as an anthropologist, sociologist, novelist, essayist, travel writer and a teacher. He slips into global responsibility for establishing peace and harmony as a diplomat. We see him to transgress the standards set by the post colonial and post modern writers like Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, Vikram Chandra, Sashi Tharoor, Arundhati Roy etc. He has created a wide readership through his outstanding writings and unique presentation skills. In his writing, Ghosh has attempted to delineate the plight of women from all areas of Indian culture during the nineteenth century. He has managed social issues like sati, assault by sibling of the husband for the sake of marriage to hide his impotency. The wretchedness and segregation of widowhood with reference to ladies of Brahman family in Calcutta who are sent to Brindavan. Ghosh gives us a beam of expectation that if women get support from their male partners as on account of Deeti who is bolstered by Kalua, they can be engaged to end up free and can move toward becoming independent as Deeti in the novel. They are more than on the same-footing to men in the novel. He has attempted to portray womens' quest for personality and their entitlement to carry on with a real existence of opportunity and nobility. In his novel the women characters are solid; they travel and take choices to carry on with a free life. They are not constrained by men. They are people with opportunity and advancement even from a male point of view.

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