



Research Paper

## Marginalised Communities: A study of Sea of Poppies

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**ABSTRACT:** In this paper I examine the work of Amitav Ghosh as offering a fictional method that has evolved out of his immersion in subaltern historical practice and one that successfully bridges the gap between these marginalised communities issues of caste, race, culture, indenture labour and colonialism. I show this through his deployment of story in the novel, *Sea of Poppies*, where Ghosh is not simply using the subaltern method but pointing to the possibilities of powerless or unimportant position of people in a society. Ghosh releases the marginal as a referent in the present. The novel form has been used with fresh insight and a keen awareness of its representational power; and the close relationship that exists between fiction, characters, and the cultures, have been inevitable sources for the novelist. Ghosh continuously brings up the issue of the writing of marginal micro-histories and sometimes uses his development of family narratives in some of his novels as examples to question the radical post-foundationalism in Chakrabarti's treatment of history. In his novels, Amitav Ghosh has engaged himself incessantly in the task of putting the marginalised/otherised individual back in the centre of the narrative, and saving him from getting lost in the hegemonic narrative of the nation. The aim of the proposed paper is to study and analyses women characters cause and reason of marginalisation in the society who chose a very uncommon profession in those colonial times as a colonized subject. This study puts its emphasis on Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* (2008) to reveal the problems of the Indian women and to expose different oppressions imposed on them by patriarchal society. Its purpose is to explain the concept of marginalisation by focusing on Deeti, the main female character of the novel, and some other minor characters, for example, Elokeshi, Paulette, Heeru and Munia as subaltern to show their unpleasant condition in Indian society. This study also concentrates on the role of patriarchy and its attempts to put the women in such an undesirable situation. It challenges the wrong images created by the male-dominated society about the women. The patriarchal society does not care to the Indian women's social and economic rights and does not let them take part in important activities of society. These male agents of power support the patriarchal society and accept its notions regarding women in order to reach their own wishes. Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* produces a situation in which various aspects of the Indian women's problems are portrayed. Power makes the condition of the Indian women more complicated and brings them more difficulties. In such a repressing atmosphere the desires of these women have therefore been oppressed by the male-dominated forces and they are not even allowed to speak. Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* successfully captures the agony of the dispossessed and marginalized people. The novel gives vivid picture of the suffering of women refugees and indenture labour in the black water which offers home for a number of endangered and threatened species.

**KEYWORDS:** Marginalisation, Colonization, Oppression, Power, Male-Dominated Society.

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### I. INTRODUCTION

Ghosh's Ibis trilogy consists of three novels namely *Sea of Poppies*, *River of Smoke* and *Flood of Fire*. All these three novels are beautifully picturises some historical incidents like opium war and trade as settings. Ghosh made a ship called Ibis as a microcosm of culture in which people from different nations, cultures and castes were forced to intermingle with each other, ignorant about their future destination.

Ibis trilogy is a story set in the first half of the 19th century. It speaks about the opium war and trade and trafficking of coolies to Mauritius. The first volume of Ibis trilogy, *Sea of poppies* speaks about the stories of Deeti, an ordinary village woman of higher caste and her husband Hukum Singh, an opium addict worker in Gazhipur opium factory. Here Ghosh picturises Deeti, one of the central characters in the novel as marginalized woman because being a woman and a wife of an opium addict. Throughout the novel the reader can analyse the emotional pangs she was forced to withstand. At first she was seduced by her husband's brother, when she was unconscious then she was forced to attain sati from which she narrowly escapes with the help of Kalua, a down

trodden man of low caste. Her husband's relatives chased them furiously. All through the sufferings one could notice Deeti and Kalua undergo their difficulties voicelessly, but towards the end of the novel there emerges a new man and a woman in Kalua and Deeti. They began to raise their voice against the atrocities leveled against them and poor Lascars by the colonial authorities. Deeti's courage is clearly shown when she raises her voice against the cruel Bhyro Singh, an Indian born British officer. What does this mean? She said, in a show of defiance. Why did you want to see me alone? (SP- 475).

Ghosh critiques the structure of traditional Hindu society here, with its rigidity against inter-caste marriages, the professed superiority of the high-caste over the low caste, and exposes the multiple layers of subjugation prevalent in society. It was immaterial that Deeti willingly married Kalua, what mattered was that her male relatives avenge themselves for the sake of their family honor.

It emerges as the most eloquent example of a post-colonialist text. This text also intends to render the post-colonial and sexual harassment and also the exploitation and the plights of Dalit's argument. It was clearly projects the effects of the dismantling of Euro centric discourses and clearly interprets the ideas and the ideologies of colonialism and sexual harassment of own family and also the plights and exploitation of Dalit by upper-caste. He shows that how the castism and superstitions ceased the current society of Indian states and also focuses on how the castism and superstitions unified the Indians in anti-colonial nationalist movements such as against *satisahgaman* (*sati*) etc. There are the various forms of colonial subjection, mainly physical, economic, political, religious, judicial and social. Deeti, the poor woman who is a victim of sexual, economic and social subjugations, driven to attempt *sati*.

Deeti and her addict husband Hukam Singh effectively portray the economic forms of colonial subjection imposed upon them by the British trading company. Forced to stop growing wheat, cereal and pulses, which have been staple food items in the Indian subcontinent for centuries, Deeti and her farming community are now producers of poppies, which are used by the British factories to extract opium for a lucrative global export trade. She now becomes a symbol of the labourer caught up, as Karl Marx puts it, in the transformation of feudal exploitation into capitalist exploitation (*Capital* 787).

Deeti, Paulette and Munia are portrayed as victims of a patriarchal and feudal society (both native and western), all three women show courage and resilience in times of adversity, refusing to accept the existing status quo of second-class citizens with no agency. Having been rescued from the funeral pyre by the heroic action of Kalua, Deeti acknowledges her feelings and respect for him, and upon her initiative, they marry in a simple ceremony to commemorate the sacredness of their union. Their marriage is thus a resistance to the prevailing caste divisions between them, and an assertion to lead their lives based on their own feelings of love and equality, as opposed to subjugation to tradition and custom. Repressed by social mores in her village, Deeti could not even reveal her face to Kalua, and had to keep it hidden by the folds of her sari whenever they interacted. Now she revels in the freedom of acknowledging him as her husband, and the poignant description of their marriage ceremony, with two garlands made of wild flowers, reflects the beauty and truth of their own union.

One of the main and significant elements that Ghosh attempts to expose in *Sea of Poppies* is the patriarchal system dominated over its different parts which creates an undesirable condition for the Indian women. Ghosh illustrates Deeti who marries Hukam Singh only because Deeti's own brother, Kesri Singh, had proposed the match. The two men had belonged to the same battalion and had served together in a couple of overseas campaigns (SP- 21). In a patriarchal society, it is the law of the male member of family that controls their values, dreams and desires. Brother is the representation of the men in a particular community surrounded the women. They control everything in the family, the law, the rules, desires, decisions, personal affairs and the women have to obey, because, as Landry and Maclean state, they are inescapably patriarchal (SP- 86). Patriarchal system creates a situation for the woman, as Spivak declares, figure of woman is at issue, one whose minimal predication as indeterminate is already available to the phallogocentric tradition (1988: 82). She explains the unpleasant situation of the women in patriarchal societies and under their rules. Power of colonialism in particular establishes a kind of oppression based on a central consideration named colonial power and some untrue suppositions regarding the Orient through which different dimensions of the social and personal aspects of the life of the colonized people such as economic, political, cultural, and religious have been under its control. Responding her brother-in-law's proposal and answering his threat concerning that she will be burnt with her husband in his funeral pyre, Deeti imagines better by far to die a celebrated death than to be dependent on Chandan Singh, or even to return to her own village, to live out her days as a shameful burden on her brother and her kin (SP- 108). Obviously Ghosh attempts to portray the position of the Indian women in such a rigid society in which there is no equality between its different groups.

Spivak condemns *Sati* and writes obviously, I am not advocating the killing of widows (1988: 97). She considers *Sati* as an act in which a great number of the widows are killed without a logical reason. She portrays that *Sati* is introduced by patriarchal society as a reward for the widowed women and shows the imperial powers

as a social mission in order to legitimize itself among the colonized people. These explanations are constructed based on some wrong images which only help them to reach their desired goals.

The oppression imposed on women by both patriarchal system and imperial power, Spivak states: between patriarchy and imperialism (...) the figure of the woman disappears (...) into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the third-world woman caught between tradition and modernization (1988: 102). She sees the woman as a figure crushed between the male-dominated society and colonial power. She notices the woman disappeared completely between the strategies made by both sides and argues that she is lost as a third-world woman in the concepts of tradition and modernization. An analysis regarding post-colonialism reveals this idea that imperial power and patriarchy make the women marginalized. Postcolonial women are humiliated and oppressed so that they do not have the power of determination by themselves. Women are marginalized from the main activities and events happened in society. The marginalized person cannot take part in social activities both directly and indirectly considered as the consequence of the Western structure and imperial law. In this concern Ashcroft and others state the perception and description of experience as marginal is a consequence of the binaristic structure of various kinds of dominant discourses, such as patriarchy, imperialism and ethnocentrism, which imply that certain forms of experience are peripheral (ibid, 135). The patriarchy, imperial or colonial power, and ethnocentrism are the major sources in creating marginality. When imperial power sends the women into the Mauritius as the working forces by its controlling rule, they are kept in a place in which they are seen as the inferior people and as the animals by the other people from their own country, the ones who consider themselves as the dominated group.

## II. CONCLUSION

Ghosh also gives voices to women by introducing certain powerful characters like Deeti and Paulettie Lambart, thus creating a sense of identity for women secessions. Paulettie though being a white woman was suppressed by her step father Burnham, but she destroyed all the shackles and entered into the ship called Redruth, which is on its voyage to Botanical expedition. Ghosh as a prominent writer acknowledges about the importance of women in each and every aspect of the society.

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