

**DEPICTION OF DEETI IN AMITAV GHOSH'S  
SEA OF POPPIES- A CRITICAL STUDY**

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**Abstract:**

*Amitav Ghosh is one of the much-admired writers in English of Indian Diaspora. His remarkable novels are The Circle of Reason, The Calcutta Chromosome, The Shadow Lines, The Hungry Tide, The Glass Palace along with Ibis Trilogy that includes Sea of Poppies, River of Smoke and Flood of Fire. His well-known non-fictional writings are In an Antique Land, Dancing in Cambodia and At Large in Burma, Countdown and The Imam and the Indian. Critically the present paper explores depiction of Deeti in Ghosh novels.*

The notable awards that he has received from India are Jnanpith Award, Sahitya Akademi Award, Ananda Puraskar, Dan David Prize and Padma Shri Award. All the three novels of his Trilogy are the account of an amazing blend of history and fiction in the backdrop of Opium Wars between China and The British by recapitulating the memoir of 1830s. Anshuman Mondal sums up the basic thematic issues in Ghosh's works:

...the troubled (and troubling) legacy of colonial knowledge and discourse on formerly colonized societies, peoples, and ideas; the ambivalent relationship to modernity of the so-called developing' or 'Third' world; the formation and reformation of identities in colonial and post-colonial societies; the question of legacy for those previously seen as the objects but not subjects of history; the recovery of lost or suppressed histories; an engagement with cultural multiplicity and difference; and an insistent critique of Eurocentrism in general (Mondal 2).

Amitav Ghosh through the novel *Sea of Poppies* presents the pathetic picture of women in British India in the 19<sup>th</sup> century under the colonial rule and ill effects of opium which the British have promoted. He portrays women characters Deeti, Paulette and the other minor characters in the play as strong beings, conscious of their right in their society and willingly breaking the established norms that ruin their self. Deeti is a simple and a docile woman, conscious of her fate due to the horoscope that predicts of her disastrous marital life. Deeti's prospects have always been bewildered by her stars, her fate being ruled by Saturn, a planet that exercised great power on those born under its influence. She knows that if she were ever to be married it would probably be to a much older man, possibly an elderly widower who needs a new wife to nurse his brood. Deeti's own brother, Kesri Singh brings the proposal about Hukam Singh, an opium addict. According to the custom dowry is given to her in-laws for marriage. In the patriarchal society, marriage is a business which fixes the price in the form of dowry. On her wedding night, Deeti comes to know that her husband is an opium addict.

Her husband confesses that the marriage between them is merely to fulfill the traditions of the society. He openly declares that opium is his first wife and she be the next. His mother knowing her son's impotency, in order to safeguard the honour of the family, determines to have a child born to Deeti through her second son, Chandan Singh. She along with the other family members decides to intoxicate Deeti with opium during night to impregnate her. Unaware of the treacherous plans of the entire family, Deeti inhales a puff of opium just as to solace her.

He took a mouthful of the smoke, placed his mouth on hers and breathed into her body himself. Her head began to swim, but whether from the smoke or from the touch of his lips she could not tell. The fibres of her muscles began to soften and go slack... (Ghosh 35)

She never realizes what happens to her after this. Chandan Singh's gestures and body language appear very strange that she does not trust that husband has courted her. The happiness and wishes of mother-in-law and her husband's uncle SubedarBhyro Singh and her husband's lethargic behaviour and languid nature deepen her suspicion and questions arise in her mind that could have impregnated her.

When Deeti realizes that she has been raped by her brother-in-law, she finds no way to escape from her husband's home because of the patriarchal practices. Hukum Singh, works as an employee in an opium factory dies at his early age due to excessive use of opium. The traditional patriarchal society which is overburdened with its prejudice and superstitions can address a woman a witch just because she has light grey eyes. After seven years of married life, she transforms physically as well as psychologically. She foresees a blank and insecure life as a widow while she nurses her husband.

Ghosh instills a confronting attitude in Deeti to resist the advances of her brother-in-law and not to respond to him when he acknowledges boldly and shamelessly that he is the father of her child. When her in-law advances become so aggressive she hides a knife in her sari for self-protection. She even retorts him as, "Listen to my words: I will burn on my husband's pyre rather than give myself to you" (Ghosh 158). Through these words, Ghosh reveals not only, the woman's courage and conviction on the face of adversity but also asserts that she cannot be conditioned by passive sexual role and that sexuality is under women's control.

After her husband's death, as promised earlier, she is about to fall into the fire, she is rescued by a low caste man, Kalua. During the funeral, Kaula enters the bamboo platform reaches the top and pulls Deeti away from the flames. The escape from the flames is the turning point in the life of Deeti. She dares to do whatever the society has prohibited a woman to do. The first step she takes is to get involved with Kalua, who belongs to low caste and detested by high caste Hindus. She breaks the norms boldly to save Kalua, when he is wounded. In gratitude, he offers his hand to escape from them. He rescues her from the humiliating tradition of sati.

Deeti, discards the veil of superior attitude about her caste and community and to redefine her individual identity, marries Kalua as her second husband. It is indeed, not only a beginning of another life but also an act of Deeti's emancipation, challenging patriarchy that proclaims caste discrimination and also subjugation of women. Deeti and Kalua decide to join the labourers who are taken to Mauritius in a ship called *ibis* to escape life threat from the relatives of her mother-in-law. She accepts a new caste and becomes a Chamar with Kalua, her new husband.

The next daring activity of hers is to cross the river. Again to refer to the Indian tradition, a woman of high caste is to forbidden from crossing the river. If they do, they lose their caste. Deeti has nothing to worry as already she loses her caste marrying a lower caste man. In addition, a western woman, Paulette who sails along with them in the same ship clarifies the doubt of women with a daring and intelligent answer that no one loses their caste by crossing the water. Transformed Deeti, dreams a life and wanting to live it on her own terms with courage and hope. Women must be able to command freedom and courage from within to venture into new life in the society. The women with determination decide the course of life in the way they want to live and transformation brings determination in Deeti.

Deeti takes a new role as a reader with bold voice, during the voyage. When a dead Coolie is about to be thrown into the sea without any final rites performed, Deeti takes an obstinate position and does not approve of this disparaging gesture of the ship authorities. "He may be dead but he's still one of us: you can't just throw him away like the skin of the peeled onion" (Ghosh 414). She demands a respectful homage for the coolie. This event encourages other women to trust her and disclose all their problems.

Deeti's marriage to Kalua has not led her to go astray. It is her sense of morality and love and care

for others that transform her to be a leader. When she has known that Subedar Bhyro Singh, the man responsible for the catastrophe of her first marriage is trying to spoil the life of Munia, she along with all the migrants revolt against the atrocities of him and compels him to let the Coolie girl free. When Deeti encounters him, he ridicules her with hatred as “The grey eyes; I remember them, filled with witchery. The eyes of a chudail, some people thought- but I always said, no, those are the eyes of the whore...” (Ghosh 476).

Amitav Ghosh like his contemporary Shashi Deshpande attacks the patriarchal system for its inequality. He believes that social beliefs and practices have been formed into traditions only to upload their burden on women's shoulders. He also affirms that to make changes in the age old traditions, both men and women need to develop a renewed and modified mental outlook so that the creative energy of the women can be used for the welfare of the society. Through the portrayal of Deeti in *Sea of Poppies*, Amitav once again proves his woman as strong, realistic, courageous, self-reliant, decisive and energetic in his works.

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