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THE MARGINALIZED ON THE MOVE: SEA OF POPPIES

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Abstract:

Ghosh always looks into the root causes that reflect the historical as well as anthropological facts to renegotiate the subaltern discourse from the perspective of conventional diaspora. The novel, *Sea of Poppies* is one of the works that discusses a well-designed and societal constructed unprivileged mass who are oppressed and exploited subjects. The novel also highlights the lives of marginalized subalterns who are conditioned by the activities of the privileged people, economics and trade of the empire of the time. This chapter describes and portrays precisely how the present is shaped by British-India. The chapter also highlights how the colonialists have subdivided the present India into various sections. The novel also clearly presents how human and cultural destruction and decadence have taken place, which was caused due to imperialism. This statement applies to all the novels of Amitav Ghosh including *Sea of Poppies*. The novel also reveals colonial oppression caused by a few white men who are desperate to re-establish the trade of opium and indentured laborers in the place of slavery, which was abolished by them. As mentioned, Amitav Ghosh examines subaltern problems from the perspectives of anthropological as well as historical points of view. He renegotiates a discourse on sub-alternity from the point of transmittal diaspora through the European colonies. In the course of this novel, he tries to explore how this world is made of a few privileged people, masses of oppressed and exploited subjects. Apart from this he also discusses the lives of the marginalized sections conditioned and controlled by the movements of people and tradesmen of imperialism. Subsequently, the novel deals with the developments of the incidents that have been delineated in connection to the present and it being structured by the British-India. Further, he also pays special attention to portraying the human devastation and decadence caused by imperialism.

Key words: Diaspora, subaltern, historical, cultural destruction, exploitation.

The novel is set in the times of Anglo-Chinese Wars, which have taken place during the times between 1838-1843 and 1846-1860s. During these times, two major incidents took place in the British India. The two incidents are farming of opium like a business-related harvest for Chinese market in the states of Bengal and Bihar, which were part of Eastern Indian states of the Bengal Presidency and the forceful transportation of Indians as indentured workers to British colonial islands like Fiji, Mauritius and Trinidad. These indentured workers are more of exploited in the cutting of sugarcane fields. Furthermore, these indentured workers are found to have encountered cultural, traditional and linguistic diversities in those British colonies. Therefore, a cultural, traditional, and linguistic blend appears to have taken place amid the Indian ethos and colonial sensibilities in those colonial islands. The novel portrays the new evolution of an Indian subaltern society which is culturally, traditionally, and linguistically different from the original. Apart from this, the novel also highlights the saga of a newly evolved Indian subaltern society structured by the imperial rule in the islands. Subsequently, the novel portrays how these destitute were forced into the cultivation of opium. Moreover, the narrative discusses at length aspects like deprivation, emotions, and the subsequent developments that have taken place.

It may be remarked that the author is very much successful in bringing out and exposing the actual reality of the caste binarism, which existed in the society at the time. The idea he thought while writing the novel is to bring out and expose through a critical analysis of the socio-cultural conditions that have structured a dehumanized subaltern community in a wretched condition. Amitav Ghosh also prepares a new ground to construct a new identity, which enables the proletariat to stand on their own in the caste based stratified society/social order. Further, the author explains about the opium war as a crucial event in the world history, which replaced regular edible crops with poppy cultivation, a non-edible and profitable crop of opium. Additionally, Ghosh highlights how the replacement of regular edible crops with poppy crops pushed the indentured labour of India into a chaotic condition in the British colonies. Subsequently, the novel projects the author's consideration for the indentured workers and projects them directly or indirectly to give a new identity in the caste structured society. His earlier novels also deal in a similar way by projecting the migrations of people from one place to another without destination, who are found crossing national and political boundaries for livelihood. The author also discusses the lives of deprived men and women, questions of past, gender, identity, caste, culture, trade and commerce.

Ghosh projects how the Indian peasantry surviving in the British colonies have been forcefully sent beyond their geographical and political boundaries. He tries to construct a new identity and apply it to the caste based structured society. For this, he projects the saga of the indentured workers in a special way. The unique quality of the novel is the investigation part, which looks deeper and deeper into the lives of the dehumanized subaltern community surviving under the imperial rule. Ghosh exemplifies the realities that took in the lives of the indentured workers of India in the British colonies. He wanted to give them a space in the caste based society/stratified society so that it enables them to express their unavoidable problems and unending sorrow in the mainstream of structured society, which is constructed on oppressive mechanisms of social order. He also attempts to support the subaltern community and make them aware that they also have space to express their continuous sorrow in the British colonies. He asserts that this would serve as a revelation to all such kind of indentured Indians in the colonies under the Imperial rule.

In the novel, three symbols are frequently used viz., Land, River and Sea. The element of Sea is used as a symbol of easy transportation, which was used for the slave trade. *Ibis* is one of the ships, which carried enormous number of slaves to different islands that were under the possession of the

Imperialist. The River is another symbol, which is frequently used in the novel. It shows the power of imperialists and their ships like *Ibis*. Finally, the element of Land, establishes the connection between the ships and the persons, related to the ships from the lands.

The novel explains all these incidents by portraying how the undermined sections of the society were turned and forced to be agricultural labourers in the colonial India and later sent to other British colonies like Mauritius and so on. As the Bhojpuri woman Deeti foresaw, the vision of *Ibis* in the beginning of the novel is one of the best examples of oppression of the farmers. As the novel proceeds further, it explains the condition of Deeti where she loses her husband who served in the opium factory. After his death, the opium factory authorities took his land away by force.

Amitav Ghosh brings into light the oppression of the poor by the moneylenders. Along with the oppression of the poor, the book also highlights the aspect of colonial oppression, which was not discussed much in the history books. By nature, the colonizers, i.e., the English are good at earning easy money. For the above-mentioned cause, they are found to have compelled the Indian farmers to produce cash crops in the colonies. As a result, the Indian staple crops of the poor as well as the production of crops as paddy and wheat had been reduced drastically.

Simultaneously, there was lot of awareness among the Bengal farmers in cultivating the Indian Indigo crop.

Ghosh gives a clear picture of discrimination in the narrative, discrimination in terms of race, caste, creed, region and the dialects. The third section of the novel depicts the chaotic and pathetic conditions of the people who were on the *Ibis*. This part also reveals the suppression and physical harassment undergone by the passengers on the ship, which is protracted by both White men and their Indian agents on the ship. The captain of the *Ibis* seems to be liberal but due to the circumstances to follow the White man orders Bhyro Singh to beat Kaula. Kaula undergoes the physical harassment for no wrong. In order to escape from further punishment Kaula runs off from the *Ibis* with a woman who hails from a high-ranked strata in the society and deserves more punishment.

The novel is a representation of political intrigues of opium trade. It creates many characters and history alone speaks about itself through the incidents that reflect history. In most of the incidents these characters were influenced and shaped by the socio-political forces, which seem to be beyond the control of the characters. The novel or the narration never overweighs due to the anti-colonial sermons though it does not represent the dreams of illusions, hypocrisy, greed, cruelty that are underpinned in the

colonial rule. In real, Ghosh has brought out the universal sufferings of the human beings that were caught in the hands of colonial shackles.

Unlike other colonial authors viz., E. M. Forster, Joseph Conrad as well as Rudyard Kipling, who represented the imperialists at the core of their narratives, Ghosh assigns an inferior rank to the British imperialists and gives prime importance to the neglected subjects in the colonial period. In this context, *Sea of Poppies* is reminiscent of recreating a forgotten history or by-gone era of colonial imperialism. He also contributed to the Indian literature the element that history meant not the spectacular incidents and heroic characters but the ordinary lives, their fates and their destinies. In this way, Ghosh had won the readers mind by giving a new definition to history and the characters involved in it. His narrations are more about the proletariat and the incidents that are ordinary and forgotten by people. In this way, he brings forgotten lives in history onto a lively platform than the dry discourse of incidents. Moreover, he gives fictionalization to those characters and the incidents. His characters in the history are not like Helen, Spartacus, Alexander and so on, but are suppressed and oppressed by the imperial rule beyond human comprehension.

Amitav Ghosh constantly startles his readers. By means of every text, he surprises them with a fresh-theme as well as a novel

background. Besides, in each tale, the author attempts several things in a fresh manner. In his novel, *Sea of Poppies*, Ghosh tries to portray subalternity in an incredibly fundamental and grand style. Many incidents perhaps are already found in his previous books. These incidents pertain to issues, viz., the mass relocation of individuals from a nation, island and a realm that has taken place over the Indian Ocean since times immemorial, lives of standard people whose accounts, surrounded against the stupendous recorded stories, call for various methods for taking a glance at past, culture and personality. The British traders under the seal of the organization concealed the act of replacement. The farmers and labourers of Eastern provinces of Bihar, in addition to regions of Bengal, were forced to turn their productive farming grounds by the administration authorities for opium cultivation. In addition, this caused a far-reaching neediness and appetite since farms that had at times delivered food were at this time besieged with the growing surge of poppies. At this point, Britain had nullified subjugation and the colonial estates in the West Indies and Far East required individuals as indentured labourers, a different name for slavery - 'girmityas,' obligated workers through marked contract or 'girmit' (a debased subordinate of English 'understanding'). Coolies in ships ventured to every part of the Indian Ocean under ghastly conditions to get away from the terrible hardship in their motherland as well as to cater

decrepit labour for the imperialist sugarcane plantations on isles, like Trinidad, Fiji and Mauritius.

Sea of Poppies portrays colonial history in Asia, how they were formed in that period. The author inconspicuously clarifies the role played in the opium trade by those colonial forces made India into its poppy field. Set in a time of agrarian outrage, *Sea of Poppies* expanding western interest for profit though the unpalatable harvests were causing starvation in the subaltern world. Ghosh unmasks to the contemporary reader the colonial past of Indian socio-culture. This representation of the past is merely an act of recovering crucial to their sustenance. Sub-continental authors like Amitav Ghosh's, Rabindranath Tagore, Ismat Chughtai, Premchand and many others are encompassed with profound pledge altruistic qualities. At the end *Sea of Poppies* arrives at breathtaking conclusion where Ghosh leaves a few open ends unfastened recommending for the continuation to the next novel which will without a doubt proceed into the opium wars itself with a large number of similar characters. Ghosh's work talks about comparing historical advancement of contemporary subtleties of Indian polity with Indian culture that talks about discourse on colonialism. Indeed, the novel is an analysis of the socio-political development of subaltern culture in India wandered into one of the terrible zones of Indian history.



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