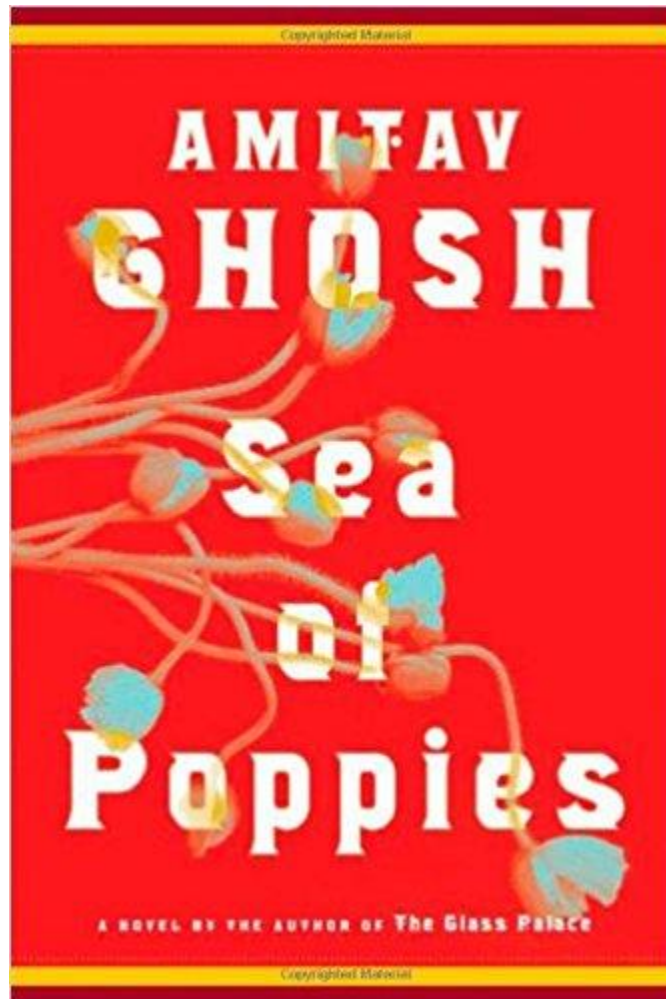

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Dr. R. Anuja, MBA, M.Phil., Ph.D., Editor

Aspects of Gender Conflict in English Literature

Subordination of Feminine Gender in Indian English Literature
*A Case Study of **Sea of Poppies***

C. Swathi, M.A., MBA, M.Phil., Ph.D. Research Scholar



Abstract

This paper deals with the central women characters in the contemporary author Amitav Ghosh's novel *Sea of Poppies*. The novel focuses on the colonial rule and the happenings in the novel were during the nineteenth century. This paper discusses the subordination of feminine

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gender in Indian English Literature. All the women characters in the novel are discussed briefly but the core importance will be on the character named Deeti. Next priority is given to the character Paulette who is the daughter of a French botanist, and she lives in Calcutta. Importance is given to Deeti and Paulette since these two characters play the major role throughout the fiction.

This paper discusses also the other minor woman characters like Heeru, Sarju, Munniah and also others who travel on board as indentured labourers on Ibis, a vast ship which moves from Calcutta to Mauritius Islands. The story presents a broad depiction of the suffering of woman and their suppression in different angle and the complete hardship. This fiction can be considered as a terrific one since it unfolds the details about the Opium war. The major and minor women characters have added fragrance and radiance to this great work.

Key words: Amitav Ghosh, *Sea of Poppies*, subordination, feminine gender, colonial rule

Womanhood

In Indian literature, women's voice shows concern about the behavior of man towards a woman and the position of that woman in the family and the society. According to Indian mythology, Sita in Ramayana is a legendary female figure but at the same time the character shows how a woman should struggle for her identity and to gain honor. On the whole womanhood is considered as the supreme model of purity, peace, love, and compassion.

In this current world Indian women face numerous problems of suppression along with inequalities which are to be dealt with immediate effect. Women in Indian culture faced so many discrepancies like child brides, illiteracy, dowry, murder, sexual harassment, and even they face difficulties with some religious and social practices that prevail in the society. Indian woman have a very little influence on their own destiny, a noteworthy change to their state will be there if only an activism arises through various movements so that it will play a considerable role in the women empowerment.

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Sea of Poppies

The novel *Sea of Poppies* takes place in north India and Bay of Bengal, during the year 1838 there was a British hit on the Chinese ports which was well known as the Opium war. Ghosh begins his fiction in the village of eastern Bihar with various characters like Deeti, her opium addict husband who works at the British opium factory at Ghazipur; Kalua a so-called low-caste carter, and further we have Raja Neel Rattan, a bankrupt landowner, Zachary Reid an American sailor, Paulette a young Frenchwoman, her Bengali foster-brother Jodu, Benjamin Burnham a British merchant, his Bengali agent Baboo Nob Kissin.

Deeti

Deeti is a straightforward, religious lady, gentle in character and she is also a competent housewife, she is married to Hukam Singh who is a crippled worker in the Ghazipur Opium Factory. The very first day of her marriage was a tragedy; her impotent husband drugged her with opium, so that her brother-in-law could consummate the marriage in her husband's place. It takes place as it was planned by her mother-in-law.

Throughout her life Deeti is filled by unhappiness and disharmony. Deeti's husband dies and her brother-in-law is the real father of Deeti's daughter Kabutri. Deeti decides to choose the custom of Sati, through that she can have an honorable death instead of an immoral life. "It was myself I saved today, he said in a whisper. Because if you had died, I couldn't have lived; jinda na rah sakela ...", says Kalua (*Sea of Poppies*, 179).

Kalua

When Kalua, who is the ox man expresses his true feeling for Deeti, she feels a relief, before which she was ready to die to safeguard herself from the cruel brother-in-law, but when Kalua, from the neighboring village comes for her rescue from the burning pyre of her husband she feels that she will have a good companion throughout her life and her life is secured.

The couple leaves the place and unites, they love each other and they respect each other too. Deeti needs a man in her life to lead a safe and secured life, it is impossible for her to meet

the perils which arise in her life as a single women, the village to which they belong to, was not ready to accept their relationship and to escape from the problems they become indentured servants on the *Ibis*, a vast ship. They expect their life to be fresh and happy.

Zachery Reid

At the ship Zachery Reid, an American sailor receives a lot of attention, he lives from his childhood in the same ship and he is ready to die in the same ship, because it is very close to his heart.

“Plucking a few long hairs from her head, she strung the flowers together to make two garlands: one she gave to him, and the other she took herself, lifting it up above his head and slipping it around his neck. Now he too knew what to do and when the exchange of garlands had bound them together, they sat for a while, awed by the enormity of what they had done. Then she crept into his arms again and was swept into the embracing warmth of his body, as wide and sheltering as the dark earth.”(122)

New Life for Deeti

When Kalua saved Deeti, she feels that she is reborn, she gets self-confidence and she feels that she can take decisions independently and her marriage with Kalua would become a fresh restart to her ruined life. He is ready to protect her from every danger which arises. Instead of being a widow she enters in to the life in *Ibis* as a new bride.

Paulette

The novel also deals with another important character Paulette, who is a French orphan and she has grown up in India, her father was a botanist, her mother died in childbirth, she was brought up by Jodu’s mother and her father. Mr. and Mrs. Burnham take Paulette into their home after her father’s demise. Paulette decides to run away because Mr. Burnham tries to get her married to his friend who is a stern elderly justice named Kendalbushe.

Once at a dinner at the Burnham's, Paulette meets Zachary Reid, the American sailor, she was instantaneously drawn to him and he was also drawn to her, Paulette learns Bengali, her attitude and identity is a mixture of French and Indian culture, she gives equal respect to both the cultures, because of her behavior and disguise nobody in the ship can identify her till she reveals her originality to everyone.

Munniah

Munniah is the girl who gets pregnant because of the illicit relationship with a man working in opium factory, but her parents support her. She became lonely because all the other family members died in a fire accident. Then she had an affair with Jodu and again she gets into trouble because the boy is beaten to the core and she is locked in a room. Deeti comes to rescue them.

Heeru

Even though the people who travelled in *Ibis* did not know about their future in the foreign land to which they were going in the ship, even then they faced problems due to the vengeance between people. Heeru is the best example of the women who are left alone by their husbands because of silly reasons. Here Heeru is projected with a disease of forgetfulness. Ratna and Champa are with their husbands but they travel in *Ibis* because their land has been confiscated by some people.

Malti

Neel's wife Malti suffers under patriarchal laws. She works for her family in different roles. She suffers in her life because of the mistake done by her husband but she is quiet till the end, and she is not complaining about her husband.

Different Kinds of Sufferings of Indian Women

Throughout the whole novel, Ghosh tries to describe different kinds of sufferings that Indian women undergo in different situations, sati, rape, suppression, betrayals and so many. Each and every woman needs someone to support them instead of blocking them in the name of

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culture. They will achieve a lot like the character Deeti in the fiction. Even after many destructive events in her life, only because of the positive support of Kalua Deeti was able to achieve things.

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