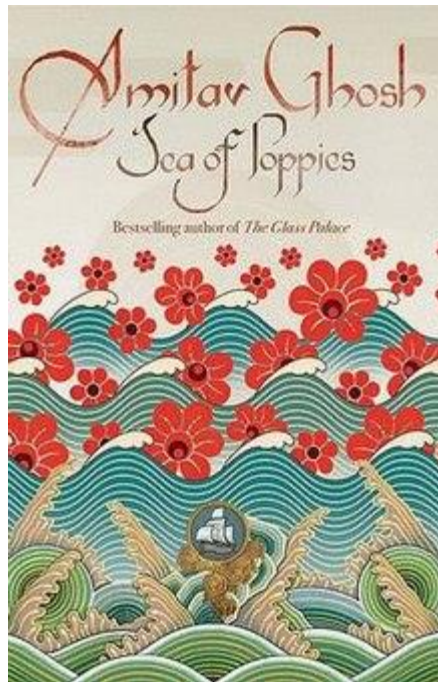


Colonial History in Amitav Ghosh's *Sea Of Poppies*

Mrs. R. Sowmiyalatha, M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D. Research Scholar
Dr. M. Kalaiarasan, M.A., M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D.



Courtesy: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sea_of_Poppies

Abstract

Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* is about the world just before the start of the Opium Wars. It centres on the *Ibis*, an old slaving-ship travelling around and across the Indian Ocean. The dynasty is set to cross continents, races and even generations. The novel captures a wide range of countryside, right from the flourishing poppy fields of the Ganges to the crowded backstreets of China. The novels rich variety of the characters makes the book interesting and occupying. In short, it is a work of art truly. The present paper deals with the colonial complexity and the history presented in the novel.

Key Words: Amitav Ghosh, *Sea of Poppies*, Water, Ibis, Colonialism, History.

Colonial History

Fictional writings of the modern English writers focus on the idea of different human circumstances instead of the portrayal of major occurrences. The nature of the narrative concentrating on the presentation of these situations becomes complicated and complex. The overwhelming presence of the story elements now seems replaced by creating different situations and the expression of the responses of the characters.

The modern readers influenced by the fast growing entrepreneurial culture are involved in the reading material which has immediate popular appeal. Fictional works are not the sacred works of art meant to be preserved for the fashionable readers. They view it like other art forms related to entertainment value like television serials and advertisements. This inclination of the readers has also crashed the nature of Indian-English fiction. The modern writers include the admired and simply explicable elements in their works in order to make their works reader-friendly.

The postcolonial perception, with its importance on the experiences of the erstwhile colonies of the British Empire, has resulted in the representation of cross-cultural contexts from a different view. It adjoins political overtones to literary writings. The colonial experience and the course of decolonisation find prevailing expression in Amitav Ghosh's novels. An interesting representation of the colonised culture is the persistence of colonial oppression in postcolonial cultures in a different form. The course of decolonisation recovers extended meaning in man-woman relationships by feminist Indian-fiction writers, especially women writers. The constructed nature of historical truth, cultural stereotypes and the concept of gender get highlighted.

Amitav Ghosh

Amitav's writings explore and dissolve the limits of genres, worrying the exiting divisions of discourse into anthropology, history, fiction and autobiography. His interests in the serious issues facing contemporary ex-colonies in Asia and Africa are reflected in his novels.

Postcolonial criticism has been called travelling theory, but the explanation applies evenly. The travelling theory seems to reviewing the post-colonial novel about the facts presented through colonial history by bringing them into the scope of fiction. Ghosh does not skirt difficult questions and he does not offer gentle answers that are sure to gratify his readers. His work is serious stuff but it is also equally enjoyable as any good story.

Sea of Poppies

In his novel, *Sea of Poppies*, Amitav Ghosh tries to fill in the blanks which are left by the series. The novel opens in 1838 on the eve of the Opium Wars set partly in Bengal, Grierson's inquiry and drawing on accounts the Englishman left. The *Ibis* has been reconditioned to transport the assembled coolies, its crew and passengers from Calcutta to the sugar estates of Mauritius.

The story is set on the banks of the holy river Ganges and in Calcutta. The story revolves round the river Ganges which is much more than a river to the local inhabitants. The author is undivided in comparing The Ganges to The Nile, the lifeline of the Egyptian civilization. He attributes the origin and development of these civilizations to these selfless, ever-flowing bodies. Further, Amitav Ghosh tries to project the characters as small poppy seeds radiating in large numbers out of the field, fabricating a sea, where every single seed is unaccustomed about its future.

The coolies are inspired and are powerless. Unlike Grierson, they did not leave diaries behind; after all, they could not even write. Ghosh, an anthropologist by training, is forced to think about them, who have limited sources, but he does so with the sense of an anthropologist than a novelist.

Covering More Than a Century

The story spans more than a century in the history of the subcontinent. People get occupied in unexpected relations across countries and cultures. Ghosh presents it accurately and attentively by

=====
Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 18:4 April 2018

Mrs. R. Sowmyalatha, M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D. Research Scholar

Dr. M. Kalaiarasan, M.A., M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D.

Colonial History in Amitav Ghosh's *Sea Of Poppies*

his meticulous research. The novel begins and ends in Burma, a country physically so attached to the readers yet about which their unawareness and unresponsiveness have been dreadful. In childhood, all occasionally heard of rich Indian families which had come back from Burma to escape Japanese bombing.

Deeti

Deeti's weakness may stem from Ghosh's desire to be an archaeologist of the powerless. That is a noble ambition, but it turns Deeti into little more than a skeleton on which to hang a history. She has the quality of mystical that nags. In the start of the novel, she envisions a ship "like a great bird, with sails like wings and a long beak" (Gaiutra Bahadur, 2008). Though she has never before laid eyes on a schooner like the *Ibis*, she somehow recognizes that it is coming for her. Near the end of the novel, lying one night, she clutches a poppy seed between her fingers. 'Here', she tells her lover. "Taste it. It is the star that took us from our homes and put us on this ship. It is the planet that rules our destiny" (*Sea of Poppies*, 452). These are beautiful lines, but they do not ring true. Ghosh still looks to be following Deeti's ghost in the archives.

Supayalat

Thebaw's proud queen, the readers learn now from Amitav Ghosh's book, was Supayalat, feared and well-liked by the people of Burma. The abrupt elimination of the king and the loaded queen from Mandalay to distant Ratnagiri in the west coast of India, the overturn movement of Bahadur Shah Zafar's banishment to Rangoon a generation ago, was an insightful shift by the conquering British, victorious in mortifying the royal couple entirely, also erasing them from public remembrance at home. Forgotten and abandoned, the king and queen led a life of increasing shabbiness and gloom in an alien land while their nation got exhausted of its valuable natural resources - teak, ivory and petroleum. The greediness and insatiability intrinsic in the colonial process is seen powerful in what happened in Burma, and the author does not polish over the fact that Indians were keen associates in this British enterprise of ravages. Two-thirds of the British army consist of Indians when Burma was occupied, years later the Saya San rebellion was unkindly concealed by setting up Indians soldiers.

Poppies in Rural Life, Water, etc. in Ghosh's Novels

Poppies pervade all aspects of rural life: to feed the insatiable British market, fields that once grew grain and vegetables are given over to unfulfilling opium harvests, which by forcing an ever-worsening cycle of debt on to factory owners and moneylenders, leave many peasant farmers incapable to provide themselves with even the most basic forms of nourishment.

Ghosh has often made literary hay from the complex nature of colonization. The bigoted, profit-hungry British are aided on their way by the likes of Bhyro Shing, a violent Subedar who enjoys flogging his countrymen when they step out of line. Ghosh cautiously unravels the elaborate reverences, prejudices and rituals of nineteenth century Indian life. His characters are high-caste landlords and self-made men, judges, peasants, mariners and missy-mems, as well as Hindus, Muslims and Christians of varying sects and levels of orthodoxy, but he never underrates the importance of their individual beliefs. Despite his conviction that his own adherence was a duty and nothing more, he finds himself assailed by nausea so powerful that he could not bring his fingers to his mouth.

Water, often a strong presence in Ghosh's fiction, plays a defining role in both the style and the substance of *Sea of Poppies*. As the protagonists make their different ways to the *Ibis*, the story

=====
Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 18:4 April 2018

Mrs. R. Sowmyalatha, M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D. Research Scholar

Dr. M. Kalaiarasan, M.A., M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D.

Colonial History in Amitav Ghosh's *Sea Of Poppies*

darts back forth between a mass of narrative strands; by the time the schooner finally sets out on its significant journey across the Black Water, the novel becomes a tale of swashbuckling adventure on the high seas. Ghosh constructs complicated characterizations and moments of suspense with an equally sure hand, creating such a smooth narrative flow that the slightly forced cliff-hanger ending comes as quite a shock.

References

Bahadur, Gaiutra. *Sea of Poppies by Amitav Ghosh*. The New York Times Sunday Book Review. November 28, 2008. Print.

Ghosh, Amitav. *Sea of Poppies*. John Murray. 2009. Print.

Wroe, Nicholas. *Amitav Ghosh: 'There is now a vibrant literary world in India – it all began with Naipaul'*. The Guardian. 2015. Print.

Mrs. R. Sowmiyalatha
Ph.D. Research Scholar in English
Rathnavel Subramaniam College of Arts and Science
Sulur, Coimbatore – 641402.
Tamilnadu
India
sowmiyaprakash13@gmail.com

Dr. M. Kalaiarasan
Associate Professor of English
Rathnavel Subramaniam College of Arts and Science
Sulur, Coimbatore – 641402
Tamilnadu
India
kalai.spk@gmail.com

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 18:4 April 2018

Mrs. R. Sowmiyalatha, M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D. Research Scholar

Dr. M. Kalaiarasan, M.A., M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D.

Colonial History in Amitav Ghosh's *Sea Of Poppies*