

## Domination over Nature: an Ecocritical Reading in Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies*

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### Abstract

This paper speaks about the importance of conserving and preserving nature with the help of incidents and characters in the novel *Sea of Poppies*. In today's world, humans are depleting, mismanaging, and destroying nature and its resources at an unpredictable rate. Humans should understand that the earth does not only belong to them, it also belongs to other living beings. Humans in the name of colonization, war, industrialization and development interfere with nature, which creates many problems for both nature and humans, so people should stop interfering with nature and take steps to protect nature. They think that they are the only living beings in the world who have rights over the earth and this attitude of humans creates many problems. Most of the Amitav Ghosh novels speak about different environmental problems, capitalism and colonialism.

**Keywords:** Conserving and preserving nature, ecology, ecocriticism, destroying nature, poppy, colonization.

Ecocriticism speaks about the importance of interrelationship between nature, human beings and non-human living beings through literature. Earlier, ecocriticism did not flourish. Many authors wrote on issues such as racism, poverty, gender equality and so on, but they did not address growing issues such as pollution, garbage disposal in bodies of water and so on. Following the emergence of several green movements, many novelists began to explore environmental themes in their works. Ecocriticism examines how nature is depicted in fiction, poetry and drama. Deep ecology is an environmental movement founded on the idea that humans

must change their relationship with nature. The Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess coined the phrase Deep Ecology. It is a philosophy based on the human relationship with Earth and recognizes that all living beings have intrinsic value. Deep ecology speaks about how humans should not destroy nature for their own greediness. The importance of nature and other non-human life, as well as the interdependence of human and non-human life, is emphasized in deep ecology.

There are many famous Indian nature-oriented writers. Some of them are Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, Amitav Ghosh, Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy, Ramchandran Guha, and Chandi Prasad Bhatt. Anita Desai vividly portrays the images of nature in her works. She is very fluent in German, Hindi and English. In the novel *Fire on the Mountain*, the author speaks about the relationship between humans and nature. This novel portrays how nature plays an important role in the characters life.

Amitav Ghosh is one of the important nature-oriented writers. Due to his passion for writing, he started writing literary works. *The Circle of Reason* revolves around a person who was suspected of being a terrorist. *The Shadow Lines* gives detail description about the lives of two families, one Indian and the other British. Both *The Circle of Reason* and *The Shadow Lines* are well-known novels that have been translated into many languages. *The Hungry Tide* speaks about the relationship between nature and humans. Some of his most famous works are *The Calcutta Chromosome*, *The Glass Palace*, *Ibis Trilogy* namely *Sea of Poppies*, *River of Smoke*, *Flood of Fire* and *Gun Island*. Amitav Ghosh's famous nonfictional works are *In an Antique Land*, *The Ghosts of Mrs. Gandhi*, *Dancing in Cambodia at large in Burma* and *Countdown*.

Most of the Amitav Ghosh novels speak about capitalism and colonialism. In today's world, climate change is one of the important problems faced by people. Amitav Ghosh addresses problems like climate change in his novel. This has a great impact on the readers and makes them understand the adverse effects of climate change. His writing makes people understand the different environmental problems.

*Sea of Poppies* speaks about the impact of colonization on land and also portrays the problems faced by Indian peasants during colonization. *Sea of Poppies* gives a vivid picture of how opium cultivation has its effects on both living beings and nature. It also explores how Indian people lived in harmony with nature before India was colonized by British. The British

forced peasants to grow drug plant, exploiting both nature and human beings.

Throughout the novel characters travel through the sea. The author has given more importance to nature throughout the novel. Some significant characters in the novel are Deeti, Hukam Singh, Kalua, Raj Neel Ratta Haldar, Benjamin Burnham, Paulette Lambert, Jodu and Zachery Reid. At the beginning of the novel the author provides a vivid description of the rural village which is situated on the outskirts of Ghazipur and the lifestyle of the people living there.

“The Ganga seemed to be flowing between twin glaciers, both its banks being blanketed by thick drifts of white-petalled flowers. It was as if the snows of the high Himalayas had descended on the plains to await the arrival of holi and its springtime profusion of colour” (Ghosh 1).

The above lines emphasize the importance of poppies throughout the novel. Ghosh speaks about how poppy plantations have a great impact on both farmers and nature. The British forced local farmers to plant poppies on their farm throughout the year which made the land unhealthy. Due to British colonization both nature and people suffered. British interference with nature was very high, causing problem for local farmers. Even in today's world, human interference with nature in the name of war, industrialization and development is rapidly increasing. This interference is dangerous for both humans and other living beings.

According to deep ecology, humans have no right to destroy nature except to satisfy their vital needs. Before British colonization local farmer lived in harmony with nature they fulfilled their basic needs from their own natural crop. However British forced local people to plant poppies and drugs on their land which create problem for both nature and human beings.

In the old days the fields would be heavy with the wheat in the winter, and after the spring harvest, the straw would be useful to repair the damage of the year but now, with the sahibs forcing everyone to grow poppy, no one had thatch to spare— it had to be bought at the market, from people who lived in far away villages, and the expenses was such that people put off their repairs as long as they possibly could (Ghosh 29).

The above lines depicts the problems faced by farmers due to British colonization.

Farmers were forced to plant poppies which were not profitable for them. Their income and lives were adversely affected by poppy plantation. Before British colonization farmers produced poppies in small quantities for medicinal purposes. Local farmers did not over exploit nature by planting poppies in large quantity. The farmers were forced to cultivate poppies throughout the year, disrupting their regular planting habit which made the land unhealthy.

Before colonization local farmers led peaceful and happy life. The local farmers were living in harmony with nature. However, colonizers greediness created problem for both nature and human beings.

In the olden days, farmers would keep a little of their home-made opium for their families, to be used during illness, or harvest and weddings; the rest they would sell to the local nobility or to Pykari merchants from Patna.(Ghosh 29).

The British did not consider the well-being of local people or land they exploited the rich natural resources of India. Their only goal was to generate revenue through natural resources and the labour of local farmers. The character Deeti expresses that growing poppy is punishment for farmers. She speaks about how planting useful crops like wheat, dal and vegetables is easier than planting poppy. The British showed their domination over nature which created problems for both nature and humans. Their domination towards nature not only affected the life of local farmers but also had a great impact on the environment.

the sweet, heady odour of the bleeding pods had drawn swarms of insects, and the air was buzzing with bees, grasshoppers and wasps; many would get struck in the ooze ... the sap seemed to have a pacifying effect even on the butterflies, which flapped their wings in oddly erratic patterns, as though they could not remember how to fly. One of these landed on the back of Kabutri's hand and would not take wing until it was thrown up in the air (Ghosh 28).

The above lines illustrate how opium affects nature. Animals, birds and small insects were also adversely impacted by the opium. poppy cultivation disturbed the harmony of nature affecting the land on which poppies were grown. The British was greatly profited from poppy

export. The whole flora and fauna were affected because of poppy production. The richness of the Indian soil was exploited by British.

Ganga River was also polluted because of opium industry the pot in which the raw opium bought by the farmers was thrown into the riverbanks of Ganga which polluted Ganga and also affected the aquatic organism in the river. The people were not able to drink water from Ganga. The poppy industry had a profound impact on the lives of many people, especially affecting farmers and those employed in poppy industry. Those who were employed in the opium industry regularly inhaled the opium smoke, resulting in health issues.

Rare was the passer-by who could brave this mist without exploding into a paroxysm of sneezes and sniffles— and yet it was miracle, plain to behold, that the coolies pounding the trash were no more affected by the dust than were their young English overseers (Ghosh 91).

Agriculture is one of the important professions for humans to satisfy their vital needs like food, clothing and shelter. Humans should do agriculture without interfering or disturbing nature. Humans should take steps and measures to reduce the use of pesticides and fertilisers. Using fertiliser and pesticides has a great impact on soil, water and air. Agriculture is one of the most eco-friendly professions a human being can do. During colonization local farmers were compelled to cultivate crops that are not profitable for both nature and humans.

### **Works cited**

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