

Contextualising Environmental Catastrophe in Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies*

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Abstract

This paper examines how Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* implies that human exploitation or systems of dominance over other humans are more likely to be the root cause of environmental issues than anthropocentric views alone. He investigates the nature of changes in the 19th and 20th centuries to the global environment. This novel describes how over use of nature has led to ecocritical degradation. Ecological imperialism takes the form of environmental racism. He draws attention to the way that imperialist rule forces only the growth of poppies throughout all of Calcutta, including Bihar. Due to her lack of money, Deeti also utilises opium as a means of payment to repay Kalua for his benevolence. Bees are drawn to the pleasant scent of poppies, according to Ghosh. The fisherman in the book uses opium to catch fish more quickly. Like other monkeys, monkeys are also victims of opium. They never engage in social interactions, fight among themselves, steal items or food from others, or descend—they just descend to eat and then climb back up. Holy River's state is defined by Ghosh as unfavourable to the environment. Ghosh pays attention to his social ecology wisdom, which clarifies the notion that environmental issues are not just caused by human exploitation of nature; human exploitation of nature is also a factor.

Keywords: Environment, Human, Ecocritical, Nature

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Amitav Ghosh is a renowned artist in the world of Indian Literature in English. He has tackled a wide range of subjects, but he has concentrated on two crucial tasks: making fake recorded statistical data points and expressing concern about one's physical state. His writings cover a wide range of environmentally important topics. Whether deliberate or not, it is most likely the result of his frequent gatherings in other locations, such as India and other nations.

In *Sea of Poppies*, it is explained how humans use nature for personal gain. It is the primary cause of the environmental problem in this book since it makes clear that people are stronger than non-people. Ghosh helps the reader see how the British government had exploited nature through the opium trade with China by using opium as a symbol of nature. This book tells the tale of Indian colonisation. It is the tale of several individuals, each with a unique 19th-century background. Many environmental issues are present now, including hazardous waste, air, noise, water, earthquakes, tsunamis, and the devastation of livestock.

Because natural resources are exploited so poorly and nature is ruined because of wishes being gratified, there is an environmental problem.

To satisfy individual avarice, nature is damaged. It is our responsibility to disrupt the natural order, which affects social structure in addition to biological needs. The British make a lot of money through the illicit opium cultivation that is explicitly shown in this story. Ghosh describes how British imperialism had an impact on the political, social, economic, and environmental spheres. They alter the conventional crops and have an impact on the environment. The British laws that they gathered to impose taxes on the "zamindar." People suffer because of colonization's hand because they are poor natives. In other words, both lands and labours were exploited by the colonial. They also swap out seasonal crops like wheat and pulses for cash crops like opium, which is currently of interest to them. Opium is seen by Ghosh as an imperial power's strength.

In numerous interviews, Ghosh claimed that the opium is the most valuable ornament on Queen Victoria's crown. According to Carl Trocki, opium was a significant export from British India and a significant source of income for the government in the 19th century. This book has a large cast of people who are related to opium. One of the key characters, Zachary Reid, an American sailor, is Burnham Modi, an opium broker for the East India Company. the rationale behind ending the lucrative opium trade of the East India Company. Ghosh uses the opium factory to illustrate the detrimental effects of British colonisation in *Sea of Poppies*. The largest and oldest opium factory in the nation was created by the British and named East India Company, situated in Ganzipur. When Deeti visits the opium factory with her ailing husband, she demonstrates how the plant avoided having a detrimental impact on the area around it.

Ghosh describes the ecologically crucial deterioration due to over usage of nature in *Sea of Poppies*. Ecological imperialism takes the form of environmental racism. He draws attention to the ways that imperialist rule in Bihar and in all of Calcutta forces solely the growth of poppies. "The connection in theory and practice of the race and the environment

so that the oppression of one is connected to and supported by the oppression of other," as noted by American philosopher Dean Curtin, also goes by the term "environmental philosopher" (129).

The exploitation of indigenous ecologies and the subjugation of the colonised community are compared by environmental racism. Ghosh illustrates how poppy fields are overflowing with flowers, and how people are forcing poppies to thrive in spite of the current state of starvation and poverty. There are not enough food resources for them to support their family. They have experienced health issues. The cultivation of single crops is the only cause of this disease.

The natural world is vital to human existence. Deeti has a close relationship with the natural world in this book. Her mother-in-law gave her opium on the first day of her marriage, and her brother-in-law then sexually assaulted her. She relies on her land to provide for all her needs, but in the end, she loses it. Opium has also taken a toll on her life. The terrible living conditions and way of life of the populace following the entrance of the imperialists are described in *Sea of Poppies*. Ghosh draws attention to the ways in which British colonists coerced indigenous people to embrace new crops and British culture.

Ghosh illustrates how the greenery and verdancy of nature relieves stress and strain in life through the example of the character Deeti. Biological researchers claim that simply paying attention to one's surroundings, one might lessen stress and tension. A healthy environment promotes national and individual development. The quality of the surrounding environment affects development and success. Ghosh concentrates on the peasant dilemma using opium. The farming class is depicted in the novel. Deeti says that they coexisted peacefully with the natural world back then. They cultivate vital crops like wheat, dal, veggies, etc. before the year. Very few farmers cultivate opium for personal use or medical purposes. They sell the remainder to Patna-based "pykari" traders (105).

In *Sea of Poppies*, the commerce and cultivation of opium are highlighted along with its impact on the lives of the people. Ghosh tells the stories of people from across the world. He also united individuals of many racial, religious, and caste backgrounds. During the period of imperial greed, opium fever strikes traders, farmers, sailors, and investors. There are three primary sections to this novel: land, river, and sea. He illustrated colonialism's impact on the environment in the book. He stands for the times of colonialism and British dominance in all spheres of life - political, social, economic, and environmental. The tale focuses on opium farming and the negative effects it has on both people and animals.

The protagonist of this book, Deeti, is married to Hukamsingh, a worker in an opium plant in Ghazipur. To conceal the truth of Hukamsingh's impotence, her mother-in-law gives Deeti opium on her first wedding night, and her brother-in-law rapes her. When it comes down to it, Hukamsingh is not Kabutri's biological father. To reveal the mystery surrounding her child, she feeds opium to her mother-in-law. Her daughter Kabutri has a father named Chandan. Following Hukamsingh's passing, Deeti moves her daughter in with her in-laws. Following Hukam Singh's passing, the Deeti is made to become sati. After giving herself opium to breathe, she sits on the chitta (pyre) in a condition of oblivion. Her brother murmurs softly that the family's pyre ritual will make them well-known.

In the past, Deeti recalls, everyone grew vegetables, rice, wheat, and masoor dal in their fields; however, in the present, sahibs compel everyone to produce poppies. Sahibs compel farmers to produce poppies and forbid them from growing any other crops. People forcefully adapt to the new crop by going from house to house offering monetary advances and binding contracts if the recipients reject them. If the recipients refuse, they conceal money and silver from the household, proving their criminality, and expel them as indentured servants from the land beyond the sea. Crops like wheat, dal, and other vegetables were useful before the British arrived. However, British forces ordered opium to be treated with more care and changed crops. Children and low-income workers are compelled to labour in unhygienic conditions.

Ecocritics think that humans are to blame for the devastation of the natural world. Ecocritics want to avert catastrophe for the planet. Ecocritics expresses joy, grief, fear, hopes, and ambitions associated with nature and related issues via literary works. Holy River's state is defined by Ghosh as unfavourable to the environment. Opium manufacturing waste effluents flow into the sacred Ganga. The Ganga is further contaminated by opium waste. Ghosh depicts the state of Indian farmers, the country, and the land. Farmers were allowed to plant anything on their property before to colonisation. They can grow vegetables, wheat, and dal. Poppy plants were not given a preface back then, but the British colony altered every aspect of production. At initially, Deeti observed that poppy plants were planted next to each other, but these days, farmers solely plant poppy instead of other productive crops. Poppies are not produced on a huge scale; instead, they are shipped to an opium plant and exported outside of India.

Ghosh describes the traumatising conditions experienced by low-income labourers who are forced to labour in hazardous environments. The agents are employed as labourers for their personal gain. The opium factory is used to describe environmental injustice. Every employee in the opium factory witnesses Deeti. Deeti rides Kalua's oxcart to the opium factory with her daughter Kabutri to take her ailing, opium-addicted husband. Deeti noted that the working conditions are appalling. Ghosh introduces environmental injustice by having the Deeti enter the opium factory:

This vision along with the overpowering fumes - made her groggy, and to keep herself from fainting she began to move slowly ahead. When her eyes had grown more accustomed to the gloom, she discovered the secret of those circling torsos: they were bare bodied men, sunk waist- deep in tanks of opium, tramping round and round to soften the sludge. (94-95)

In this section, Ghosh tells the story of how the British have ruined the environment and taken advantage of labourers' lives. Additionally, they make the kids work in an unclean environment. The opium factory workers, according to Deeti,

resemble ghosts. They receive the same treatment as animals. Deeti notices that the employees are nude and resemble circling torsos.

In *Sea of Poppies*, Ghosh illustrates how the British have taken advantage of nature and native people, forcing the latter to alter the former. The exploitation of the environment and colonialism both affect indigenous people. Poppies suffer not only the native population but the entire ecosystem as a whole because of recent cultivation. The new crop completely alters indigenous life. As was previously indicated, the first shift is the year-round production of poppies. Rather than other seasonal crops, they compel farmers to plant exclusively poppies. They must sign the contract as well. More opium is produced by farmers who are employed by the colony.

Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* reflects the eco-critical condition. Humans and nature are exploited by imperialism's laws and power, which centre on environmental justice and related issues. Racism in the environment? Ghosh also describes the appalling conditions faced by labourers and coolies on plantations. The terrain exhibits both environmental injustice and racism.

In the past, poppies were only planted in small clusters for luxury, but the British forced farmers to grow poppies on large tracts of land. It takes a lot of time and work to plant poppies, and plugging land takes longer. Farmers and indigenous people receive that kind of retribution. According to Ghosh, people do not value another crop as highly as the poppy. Because of this situation, farmers are not even making more money. Farmers deal with a lot of issues caused by factory owners. The farmer is coerced into selling their produce exclusively to the East India Company. Farmers are not allowed to supply the East India Company with opium at their own pricing. Ghosh claims that the opium factory's surroundings are unfair. For those who labour in the opium industry, Deeti is observed. Using Kalua's ox cart, Deeti drives her six-year-old daughter Kabutri to the workplace. Deeti witnesses the appalling working conditions of manufacturing employees.

Ghosh describes Deeti as an ecological metaphor. Poor people are forced to work in dangerous conditions in opium factories. In the same factory, even the kids are employed. The workers in this factory are in a highly vulnerable situation. They treat them like animals and work without breaks. They were beaten for their error. The factory has an unclean, dangerous, and harmful atmosphere. The factory's air was both scorching and foul-smelling. The facility is filled with the pervasive stench of opium. The sense evokes feelings of sympathy and terror. There is a strong odour of fatigue and miasma throughout the vicinity. Deeti, Kabutri, and even Kalua's oxen feel uncomfortable in the factory air as Kalua's cart arrives to take Hukamsingh through the compound.

Ghosh draws attention to how drugs affect both living and non-living things worldwide. The effects of opium also ensnared the monkey. Their chitchat stopped. They are not the same as other people. They do not have enough medication in them. He demonstrates how imperialists ruled over the environment as well as the soil. They simply pollute the environment to satiate their avarice. He observes the state of the animals in the factory's surrounding polluted area with gentleness.

Ghosh also describes his worries for the Ganga, a sacred waterway. Not only do British citizens release waste products into the air, but they also contaminate water. Ghosh is concerned not only with human and non-human concerns but also with aquatic life forms. The effects of opium also affect the river's fish. Fish in water are easily caught, even by fishermen. Neel Ratan's late father and his persona conduct business with British people. Raskhali estates are owned by Neel Ratan. The families rely on Benjamin Burnham's company, which he formed. Later, Neel is tricked by Burnham's corporation into taking on numerous debts related to the opium trade. Burnham demands Neel to sell his estate in order to pay off the loan, but Neel is not prepared to part with his property. He is thus unjustly the victim of Burnham's forgery. Burnham sells his property, and as punishment for working on the island of Mauritius for seven years, he is mistreated, imprisoned, and sent overseas. Neel and Deeti are both victims of British authority in this tale. The British rule over their lives as well as their territory.

Ghosh describes how monoculture goes against the natural law in the conditions of both humans and non-human animals. The British Empire purposefully contributed to environmental problems. They turned people into opium addicts and encouraged opium farming. After using drugs, people get physical and emotional comfort and forget all strain. Ghosh conveys to the readers the harmful effects of opium on health. Ah Fatt, another character, smokes opium on a regular basis. His hometown is Canton. He is the son of Chinese mother boat woman Chee Mai and opium seller Baharm Modi. He was forced to relocate to Mauritius as an indentured servant after being the victim of a robbery case involving British nationals. Neel Ratan, a prisoner at Alipur, is the other person who is with him in this state.

Neel discovers the cause of Ah Fatt's physical and mental weakness. He developed an opium addiction, which made his muscles weaker. Through the grime on his skin, the outlines of his muscles would occasionally show through, constricting into knots and then temporarily releasing before seizing up again; it looked like a group of rats wriggling inside a sack. When Neel discovers that opium has an impact on both the body and the psyche, he is astounded. Deeti is an additional victim of opium. Every day, her husband's Hukamsingh health deteriorates. He is unable to eat or sleep. Here, Ghosh warns readers about the harmful effects of opium and emphasises how harmful it is to one's health. It destroys society's dreams in addition to the entire family. He sheds light on the harm caused by opium. A person's body and brain suffer when they are addicted to drugs. Ah Fatt is used by Ghosh as an example. This practice causes the body to become ill

with numerous other illnesses and disorders. Ghosh uses the persona of Hukamsingh to illustrate his points. Drug addiction has a negative impact on social and familial relationships as well. Drugs alter one's way of thinking. Sexual, verbal, emotional, and physical abuse are all possible.

Ghosh draws attention to the issue that this novel's Deeti character faces. Her land was taken forcibly and turned into an opium plantation following the death of Hukamsingh, an employee of the opium factory. Everything is lost for her. Society forces her to marry Hukamsingh's younger brother or perish in her husband's funeral pyre. However, Kalua, a lower cast ox-driver, comes to her aid. They next arrive in Chhapra. Different circumstances exist. The residents of the island exhibit distinct behavioural patterns. They also had separate communities, cultures, religions, and castes. Ibis now includes Deeti, Kalua, Paulette, Neel, AhFatt, and more travellers. Because of what they have through in the past, they have little respect for the current society.

Individuals in the community form social bonds. Decentralised societies are encouraged by social ecology. Ghosh aspires to create a society devoid of hierarchy. Deeti moves to a new society and meets new family members, leaving behind her background, caste, village, and family. Even though they cannot get married in their home country, Deeti and Heeru are linked to a new marriage relationship. They both married into distinct castes. For migrants, a ship is like heaven, where all their dreams come true. Seawater erased every unpleasant memory from the past. Here, Ghosh offers a new country and a new house called Ecotopia, where people of many castes, religions, societies, and cultures coexist together. Additionally, they support one another when the ship sinks and climbs, as many migrants become ill and lose vitality. They contaminate the ecosystem as well. The impacts of the vessel's motion were amplified by the vomit smell, which exacerbated the already offensive odours in the enclosed area. It appears a wave of nausea would soon overflow the hold. Ghosh pays attention to his social ecology wisdom, which clarifies the notion that environmental issues are not just caused by human exploitation of nature; human exploitation of nature is also a factor. He conveys to the next generation that all living things on Earth, including non-human animals, are entitled to freedom, respect, and humane treatment; they should not be treated like slaves. The power to survive is bestowed by nature.

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