Chapter IV: A Critical study of *Sea of Poppies*
4.1. Introduction:

Sea of Poppies is a novel by Amitav Ghosh, which was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize in 2008. The New York Review of Books describes it as: ‘a rollicking tale, or rather collection of tales-politically forceful, historically fascinating, and rarely subtle.’ [http://kontur.au.dk/fileadmin/] It is based on historical setting of colonial Desire and to fulfill its need of supply of opium to China. However, the principle aim of this chapter is to focus on critical study of Sea of Poppies and draw out notions as Colonial Desire and Hybridity.

4.2. A Critical study of Sea of Poppies:

The novel Sea of Poppies is actually set in India in the year 1838, when Britain is set on maintaining the opium trade between India and China as a reinforcement of its economic, political and cultural position. It is set on the banks of the holy river Ganga and in Culcutta. It is compares the river Ganga to the Nile: the lifeline of the Egyptian civilization, attributing the provenance and growth of these
civilizations to these selfless, ever-flowing bodies. Regarding to the plot, Dr. B.K. Nagarajan said in his article Deconstruction Human Society: An Appreciation of Amitav Ghosh’s Sea of Poppies,

*Sea of Poppies* tells the story of how it is that in the ship Ibis, headed to Caribbean sugar plantations; small new worlds are forged, bringing together north Indian women, Bengali *Zamindars*, black man, rural laborers and Chinese seamen. It is a story of people whose fate is written by poppy flower, the British who forced opium cultivation on farmers, the ruined lives of farmers, the people who were addicted and poor factory workers, deceit of the British, ship that transported the opium and which carried Indians to life of slavery. [Nagarajan: 2011: 102-103]

The novel begins at the villages of eastern Bihar by introducing first character Deeti, who is an ordinary village woman. It is a true picture of Indian village life. ‘The village in which Deeti lived was on the outskirts of the town of Ghazipur, some fifty miles east of Banaras. Like all her neighbors, Deeti was preoccupied with the lateness of her poppy crop: that day, she rose early and went through the motions of her daily routine, laying out a freshly-washed dhoti and kameez for Hukum Singh, her husband, and preparing the *rotis* and *achar* he would eat at the midday.’ [Ghosh: 2008: 1] Deeti is one of the outstanding characters in the novel, who belongs to upper caste though she suffers from gender bias since her childhood.

Deeti’s life turns around ‘laying out a freshly- washed *dhoti* and *kameez* for Hukam Singh, her husband, and preparing the *rotis* and *achar* he would eat at midday... after she'd bathed and changed, Deeti would do a proper *puja*, with
flowers and offerings.’ [Ibid: 3] Her life turn around her household chores: ‘With scarcely a pause for a mouthful of roti, Deeti stepped outside, on to the flat threshold of beaten earth that divided the mud-walled dwelling from the poppy fields beyond’. [Ibid: 5] In the first part of the novel, due to colour of Deeti’s eyes, she is called as: ‘chudaliya, dainiya as if she were a witch: but Deeti had only to turn her eyes on them to make them scatter and run off.’ [Ibid] At the begining, Deeti has drawn as pathetic, full of struggle for existence and ups and downs. She has married to an addicted husband Hukum Singh, a high caste Rajput. Her marriage was fixed without her permission as this proposal is seen as better than marrying to a man much older than Deeti. Hukum Singh got hurt on one of his leg while he was in British regiment due to which he cannot walk properly but this is seen as minor problem in her marriage with him. Her dowry contributes to building of roof of his husband’s house. He works in an opium factory in Ghazipur.

Deeti’s dreams are shattered on the first night of her marriage when her husband makes her inhales opium and she is raped in a condition of unconsciousness by her brother in law Chandan Singh with help of her uncle Bhyro Singh. It is only later she is travelling on Ibis that she becomes aware that her uncle Bhyro Singh was also responsible for her rape by her brother in law. She begins to doubt about her husband after he starts ignoring her just after her first night and she becomes pregnant. Her mother-in-law says that she is like Draupadi, a well known character from Mahabharta. She becomes sure that her mother in law knows everything about father of her child and to let slip out the truth from her mother-in-law, she starts giving her opium.

One day under the influence of opium in state of unconsciousness, Deeti confesses that her daughter’s father is her brother in law. The behavior of Deeti’s mother in
law shows how a woman is blinded in love of his son that she helps people to violate honour of a woman. While her opium addict husband is in his death bed, she is physically assaulted by her brother in law and in order to escape from him she says. ‘Listen to me: I will burn on my husband’s pyre rather than given myself to you.’ [Ibid 154] After her husband’s death, she is compelled to perform sati and to do this she is given opium to inhale and in such a state of unconsciousness, she sits on the pyre, and his brother in law says: ‘To have a sati in the family will make us famous. We’ll build a temple for you and grow rich on the offerings’ [Ibid: 155] She is saved by Kalua, an untouchable from a society which is ruled by patriarchal laws. Regarding to the custom of Sati, Dorothy Stein in her article *Burning Widows, and Burning Brides: The Perils of Daughterhood in India* throws light on the emergence of this custom:

The ritual of Sati is an ancient one, having been reported by Greek travelers to north India in the fourth Century B.C. Nor it was unknown in other cultures. It seems to have originated with fighting men trying to prevent the enemy from capturing any of their goods and chattels. Since it was a practice of kings and warriors, it was endowed with a social prestige what it never lost; indeed, the practice spread to the Brahman caste. Since it was associated with high rank, the performance of a sati became of itself a claim of social status. [Stein: 1988: 85]

Stein further explains that by the nineteenth century the custom became so prevalent that people belonging to any caste did not feel that they should be disassociated from the glory that the ritual brought. The reason for Deeti being forced to burn herself alive is not a religious one. The actual reason it during that
time a woman committing the custom was glorified and given a lot of gifts which were placed near her pyre.

In this way, Kalua, an outcaste person, saves Deeti from the burning pyre and jumps in the river Ganga. Deeti sends her daughter to her brother’s home because she feels that Kabutari will be safe there. She rejects gender bias and marries Kalua as her second husband. She had rejected the body of the old Deeti, ‘with the burden of its karma; she had paid the price stars had demanded of her, and was free now to create a new destiny as she willed with whom she choose and she knew it was with Kalua that this life would be lived, until another death claimed the body that he had torn from the flames.’ [Ghosh: 2008: 175] After her rebirth, which was given by Kalua, she sheds humility and weakness possessed by her as Deeti. Therefore, she becomes sure and self-governing to take decisions about her life.

An entry on the board of Ibis is symbolic because Deeti enters the ship in gunghata as a new bride with people around her. Her change of name to Aditi while registering her name in migration list shows her search for identity because till now she was known as Kabutari-ki-ma ‘it was on her lips to identify herself as Kabutari-ki-ma, name by which she been known ever since her daughter’s birth – her proper given name was the first to come to mind, since it had been used by anyone it was good as any. Aditi, she said softly, I am Aditi.’ [Ibid: 233] She becomes leader of grimityas on Ibis. She is called bhaugi by men and women on the ship because she possesses the solution of their problems. She is confident and ready to fight for anyone in trouble.

Another women character is Paulette, daughter of a French botanist, who is born on a boat of Jodu’s father and her mother, and dies too on same the boat. She is
grown up by Jodu’s mother like her own child. As Paulette is born Jodu’s mother leaves him naked, lying on the boat and wrapped Paulette with blanket first to keep her close to her dying mother. She calls her Tantima- aunt mother. She learns Bengali and the first food she eats is rice and *dal khichdi*. Her personality is a combination of French and Indian culture. However, she is a wonderful example of open-mindedness, a person who pays equal respect to all cultures of the world.

*Her use of French, English and Bengali carries distinctive traces of specific cultural contexts so that she is bracketed within particular social groups the moment she is heard.* [Chaudhury: 2009: 171]

She is without any feeling of resentments and respects all natives. As multi-lingual speaker, she becomes a grimityas on Ibis as niece of Babo Nob Kissin to reach Mauritius.

Taramony, *guru ma* of Baboo Nob Kissin, is also remarkable character. She is the wife of his uncle who marries just six years before his death in order to get a male heir but results in failure. She is much younger than his uncle. His uncle’s last wish is to leave her in Brindavan to lead a life of widowhood which is full of suffering and hardship. As she is about the age of Baboo Nob Kissin, he is impressed by the spiritual knowledge of Taramony and her devotion towards her God Lotus eyed Lord that is lord Krishna. His feelings were same as her for lord Krishna: ‘You will be my Krishna and I will be your Radha.’ [Ibid: 162] They start living in a small house in Ahiritola waterfront neighborhood of Calcutta. There was no scandal on a woman living with her niece and a small circle of devotees and followers called her Ma and gave spiritual instructions to them. She dies of fever but tells him that she will come back and enter his body to fulfill their
goal. It is under the influence of guru ma that Baboo Nob Kissin is always ready to help women be it Elokeshi, mistress of Neel or Paulette. He becomes sensitive in solving problems of women.

Women on the board of Ibis like Munniah, who pampers in illicit relationship with a man working in opium factory in her village and becomes pregnant. Her decision to give birth to her child is supported by her parents on the contrary of her belief that they will expel her. But she has to leave her village as nothing is left for her parents and child are dead as they got burnt in the fire and she is left alone. She calls to mind a conflict when her affair with Jodu (Azad) is known to the people powerful Ibis; a relationship between a Hindu girl and a Muslim boy is not acceptable to them. Jodu is beaten ruthlessly and Munniah is locked in a room it is only after the involvement of Deeti that she is released.

Through the character of Heeru, the novelist has tried to portray plight of women left by their husband due to some ailment or incapability to give male recipient to the family. She is left by her husband in a fair due to her disease of forgetfulness. She agrees to marry on the ship with one of the indentured labour who is much older than her Portrayal of Women in Amitav Ghosh’s Sea of Poppies because she is told that women will be torn down in Mauritius as there are few women in comparison to men. Her marriage is for security to lead a peaceful life unaware of the hardship in Mauritius.

There are other few women characters avail on the board of Ibis, one of them is Sarju. She is an oldest woman on the ship, who calls a Dai midwife in her village near Ara. She had makes a mistake in the delivery of a Thakur’s son as a result she is punished by sending her away from her village to Mauritius. She is disadvantaged of company of family just because she belongs to a lower class of
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society. She dies on the ship and gives Deeti seeds of poppy, *bhang and dhatura* to keep with herself for future use in Mauritius. After receiving seeds from Sarju, Deeti realizes how important it is to take something for their future and as an agriculturalist seeds are most important in their life. They are like an asset for them.

Regarding to the character of Ratna and Champa, the novelist has tried to represent life of women who have accompanied their husband when their land is confiscated. Both are sisters married to a pair of brothers whose land was contracted to the opium factory and then confiscated due to not being able to pay rent and driving them out to leave their village and go to Mauritius in search of fortune. Another woman named Dokhanee travelled with her husband to escape from the oppression of her abusive mother in law. And she is happy that her husband has joined her in her escape. She is unaware of the hardship and inhuman living conditions of plantation workers in Mauritius.

Neel’s wife Malti, who is shown how his wife is a passive victim and her condition, is not better than Deeti’s situation. Her life is controlled by patriarchal society. She is playing a role of mother and wife, without any outlook while her husband enjoys with his mistress Elokeshi who betrays him as soon as he loses his property. She is just a silent spectator in the house performing duties and never questioning her husband. But when Neel is in jail and is about to be deported to Mareech and all his estate is confiscated. She comes to jail to meet him and did not show any sign of disaster which has completely destroyed their life. She has to live in a small house and she only says to Neel is to take care to himself. She suffers due to mistake committed by her husband but never complains. Mrs. Burnham and her daughter are representative of the mindset of Britishers that they are superior than Indians and anything which is a part of Indian culture is looked
upon as inferior be it people, dress or language. This is the reason why Paulette finds it difficult to live in Burnham’s house their house and due to this she wants to escape to Mauritius. She is brought up in such an atmosphere where she is taught every culture has to be respected.

The novel *Sea of Poppies* also focuses on a ruined landowner, Raja Neel Rattan, Zachary: American sailors, Paulette, a French lady. Zachary Reid is son of an American slave-owner but whose color doesn’t openly reveal his black heritage. Neel Rattan Haldar, a wealthy landlord whose dynasty has been ruling Rakshali for centuries, is forced by Mr. Burnham to sell off his estates in order to pay for the debt he had incurred when trading opium with China at the height of the opium trade. But now that the opium trade has come to a standstill, as a result of the resistance shown by the Chinese authorities, he is left with no money to clear his loan. He is unable to envisage his poor state, and is tried for forgery. The court punishes him for working as an indentured labour for seven years in March. It is then that he meets Ah Fatt, a Chinese opium addict, his sole accomplice in his probation. Together the two are transported on the slave ship Ibis.

Miss Paulette, a French lady who is determined to run away from Mr. Burnham’s villa because the latter is trying to get her married to Justice Kendalbushe, of whom she disapproves. She has resolved to travel to Mareech, as her great-aunt did in the hope of finding a better future. Along with Jodu, her childhood friend, she boards the Ibis, unaware of her destiny. On the ship she falls in love with Zachary.

*Her relationships with Jodu and Zachary remain ambiguous, rendering amorous her identity in the context of her gender. She outperforms and transcends the limits prescribed by either of*
Nob Kissin’s, Jodu’s, Neel’s, the Burnham’s or Zachaty’s expectations of her as a gendered human being, nowhere does she move over to become her recognized gender’s ‘other.’ [Opp. Cite, 2009: 171]

As the different stories come together, each carrying its share of delights and grief, however the Ibis becomes a shelter to those in destitution. Thus on their way to the black sea, these characters are exposed to a suttee or widow-burning, a shipboard mutiny, a court case, jails, kidnappings, rapes, floggings, a dinner party and every refinement of sex. After much conflict and violence on board of the boat, Neel, Ah Fatt, Jodu, Serang Ali and Kalua manage to escape, unaware of the destination the sea waves would drag them to. Both Calcutta and the Ibis are polyglot communities.

*Sea of Poppies* is divided into three sections such as Land, River and Sea. Every section has its different historical and social set ups and each has ended in a new beginning. The first section ends with the beginning of new life of Deeti, the second section ends with the beginning of new life of Neel Rattan, and the third part ends with new outcome of all the characters of the novel. But historical setting or the sense of time and place is never absent in the novel. The colonial India was influenced by English that even language could not escape impact and Hindi became *Hinglish*. Therefore, Amitav Ghosh is greatly encouraging in his choice of words, phrases and idioms and is quite away from the British ways of using English. He rather coins his own spellings, sentence structure or grammar. The words like *thug, pukka, sahib, serang, mali, lathi, dekko and punkah-wallah; dhoti, kurta, jooties, nayansukh, dasturi, sirdar, maharir, serishtas* and *burkundaz* have succeeded in creating Indian true atmosphere in the novel. The novel throws light on people who speak everything from pidgin and *Bhojpuri* to the comically
mangled English of a Bengali *babu* and a young Frenchwoman. However, the novelist doesn’t provide only a political history, but an understanding of culture, religion, diversity, the opium trade, heritage and so much more. Even the history reluctant will learn plenty and enjoy being immersed in history.

Amitav Ghosh portrays the picture of all kind of classes suffered due to colonial rule by British. Colonial masters prepared people to be migrant, hybrid for their colonial desire.

Amitav Ghosh describes the lives of the people exist in at the coast of old Calcutta, where Raja Neel Rattan who is amusing British merchants and sea-man aboard his budge row with sparkling wine and chicken and top of forthcoming Chinese hostilities but soon the tables are turned and the same choosy Bengal sovereign is ruined because he is convicted of deception and is bankrupted. In this way, novelist’s narration is quite neutral and especially the treatment of the Englishman with the Indian is also worth-noticing. The judges treat Raja Neel Rattan unmindful of his position and place: ‘The temptation that afflicts those who bear the burden of governance’, said the judge, ‘is ever that of indulgence, the power of paternal feeling being such as to make every parent partake of the suffering of his wards and offspring’s. Yet, painful as it is, duty requires us sometimes to set aside our natural affections in the proper dispensation of justice.’ [Ghosh: 2008: 236] The trial of Neel Rattan and later on the treatment with the Raja like an ordinary man and his painful conviction of Kalapani seems to touch the pulse of time.

The ship Ibis which is making arrangements to set for sail to Madagascar loaded with a cargo of Girmitias, in which Kalua and Deeti are also present, and convicts, like that of Raja Neel Rattan. The characters like Zachary, the captain chilling worth, Sarang Ali (boatswain) and his cruel treatment with the sailors and convicts
remind of the India under colonialism. With such exactness events Ghosh intends to show something else. He does not pose himself bending towards a peculiar direction rather; he looks at the things without any personal indulgence. Another significant character Paulette, the daughter of French botanist fostered in Indian atmosphere is forced back into European pretensions of close class and snobbery in the household of Benjamin Burnham, the rich merchant of Calcutta, makes the reader think in another direction against the archetype of British rule. The historical fiction of Amitav Ghosh are driven by what he said in a note to The Glass Palace as a near obsessive urge to render the backgrounds of his characters lives as closely as he could.

In *Sea of Poppies*, Ghosh seems to trace the history of late 18th century Asia when in 1838 the opium wars are about to begin. Though at the centre of the novel is the Ibis, an old slaving ship voyaging across the Indian Ocean, yet it is not just a sea faring yarn. Here the comment of Sanjay Sipahimalani appears appropriate: Ghosh takes his time in building up the characters, filling in their backgrounds and circumstances leading to their current predicament. In characteristically limpid prose and with the eye of a social anthropologist- a discipline in which he’s well-versed- he details the customs, diet, cloth and social restrictions of these individuals who are to be thrown together on the ibis to become ‘Jahaj-bhais’. [http://drshaleenkumarsingh.blogspot.com/] Like his previous novels, in An Antique Land the blending of fact and fiction or a coalescing of different areas of human knowledge, Ghosh mingles History Geography, Voyages, trade, adventure, magic memory and multiple points of view in this novel. Though it is quite improper and injudicious to put a historical novel in comparison with the History because the former is concerned with reality or the fact and the latter is concerned with fiction or imagination.
Regarding to this R. K. Dhawan said: ‘The novelist concerned with history is beyond the traditional way of assessing events; he has to blend history with his vision and philosophy.’ [Ibid] The novel deals with the history though a camouflage. In Sea of Poppies, Ghosh opens many floodgates of knowledge about the co-existence of different cultures, caste and creed in Indian and Britain. Ibis, the ship is a platform where different characters like Paulette, Sarang Ali, Zachary, Deeti, Kalua, Neel Rattan and Baboo Nobkissin exchange their ideas and represent different cultures and the ship and in fact the ship becomes a conglomeration of diverse cultures, tradition, customs and even religious. Ibis again becomes a distinct place which can be clear from the words of captain which are translated by Babloo Nobkisssin: ‘The difference is that the laws of the land have no hold on the water. At sea there is another law, and you should know that on this vessel I am its sole maker. While you are on the ibis and while she is at sea, I am your fate, your providence, your lawgiver. This chabuk you see in my hands is just is just one of the keepers of my law. But it is not the only one- there is another.’ [Ghosh: 2008: 404] In fact, the atmosphere of ship is quite different to the atmosphere of the land.

Deeti, villagers and farmers are forced to cultivate poppies for the opium trade. During 1838, the British were illegally selling opium to China per year. The poppies were grown and harvested and packed in India and shipped on vessels like the Ibis. As notoriously turned China into a country of opium addicts, ‘the British also, in a less familiar but equally lucrative and destructive part of their trade policy, turned India into a country of opium suppliers and themselves into the largest drug dealers in the world. Chinese attempts to block the importation of opium, which led to the Opium Wars, are one side of the story.’ [http://www.powells.com/] It shows that Indian farmers, traders, sailors, and
investors caught up in the enormous wave of opium-fueled nineteenth-century imperial greed. They are all part of another side of the same history.

In her skimpy village, Deeti’s hut needs a new roof, but there is no thatch to repair it: ‘the fields that once grew wheat and straw are now filled with plump poppy pods.’[Ghosh: 2008: 18] Her husband is an opium addict due to the work of same factory. She notices on her wedding night, when her husband blows opium smoke into her mouth and allows his brother to rape her unconscious body because he is incapable of performing his conjugal duties. However she realizes that the father of her child is her leering, slack-jawed brother-in-law. Her husband is a victim of the British two times over: ‘a sepoy who served them in campaigns overseas, crippled by his battle wounds, he has turned to opium for the pain, which has crippled him further. You should know, he tells Deeti of his cherished opium pipe, that this is my first wife. She's kept me alive since I was wounded: if it weren't for her I would not be here today. I would have died of pain, long ago.’ [Ibid]

Amitav Ghosh’s portrayal of the opium factory where Deeti’s husband was works horrifying. When Deeti’s husband dies, she is required to set out on a hazardous journey that leads her to the Ibis, the ship she saw in her vision. In fact, the Ibis is the doubtful fortune of all the major characters, a magnet powered by the opium trade that attracts victim and oppressor equally.

The Ibis exists not only to unite Ghosh’s dissimilar characters on their journey into Diaspora. It is also a symbol of the India, and indeed the world, that readers of some of his earlier work will recognize: a world composed of human needs and desires, of aspirations and betrayals, all of them historically, geographically, morally, and inextricably linked. The second mate on the Ibis is a handsome twenty-year-old with curling black hair from Maryland named Zachary Reid. His mother was a slave, his father the slave owner who freed her so that Zachary could be born a free man. He boards the Ibis as the ship’s carpenter, but through a series
of accidents and desertions, most of the crew is lost, and by the time the *Ibis* reaches India, Zachary has been, out of necessity, promoted to second mate.

Sailors can be known as lascars, who take over for the washed-out crew, novelist firmly establishes that the *sea of poppies* is also a sea of language. The original crew, including Zachary, throws around a deliciously low naval patois, a rich, wanton echo of Patrick O'Brian’s snappy sailor slang, a vernacular full of ruffles and rum-gaggers who suffer from squatters and collywobbles and dine on lobscone, dandy funk, and choke dog. The lascars, in contrast, speak an entirely new language. They are a group of ten or fifteen sailors who come from places having nothing in common, except the Indian Ocean; among them were Chinese and East Africans, Arabs and Malays, Bengalis and Goans, Tamils and Arakanese.

Lascar, the leader of the *Ibis*, is a betel-chewing Arakan named Serang Ali, who speaks a simple, sly, Yankee-Chinese colloquial speech. When the captain falls ill and the untried Zachary has to try to navigate, Serang Ali impatiently takes over that task: ‘What for Malum Zikri make big dam bobbery'n so muchee buk-buk and big-big hookuming? Malum Zikri still learn-pigging. No sabbi ship-pijjin. No can see Serang Ali too muchi smart-bugger inside? Takee ship Por'Lwee-side three days, look-see.’ [Ghosh: 2008: 12] It is really no less understandable and no more unusual than the swell sailing vocabulary of O’Brian, but the meaning is absolutely different. O’Brian’s colloquial speech expresses a single community of irregular souls, joined together, all bent on a single task: sailing a ship. Here the novelist suggests a collection of exiles from the four corners of the globe, men swept together by the nineteenth century's version of globalization.

When the *Ibis* reaches India and an English pilot boards to steer the schooner up the Hooghly River, Zachary hears yet another vernacular: ‘Damn my eyes if I ever saw such a caffle of barnshooting badmashes! A chowdering of your chutes is
what you budzats need. What do you think you're doing, toying with your tatters and luffing your laurels while I stand here in the sun?’ [Ibid: 17] The English of the ruler has been penetrated by the vocabulary of the ruled. A little later Zachary asks the pilot the meaning of the word zubben, and he is patiently said: ‘The zubben, dear boy, is the flash lingo of the East. It’s easy enough to jin if you put your head to it. Just a little peppering of nigger-talk mixed with a few girls. But mind you’re Oordo and Hindee doesn’t sound too good: don’t want the world to think you’ve gone native. And don't mince your words either. Mustn’t is taken for chee-chee.’ [Ibid: 33] If the researcher is stumbling in this flashy, dancing language, novelist suggests, so was India.

Amitav Ghosh described about Paulette who is a young woman and daughter of a French botanist, whose speech is studded with fluent Bengali and earnest Francophone malapropisms. When her father dies and she is taken in by the rich merchant Benjamin Burnham, to be properly domesticated and taught to stop wearing saris and climbing trees, ‘Paulette had discovered that at Bethel, the servants, no less than the masters, held strong views on what was appropriate for Europeans, especially memsahib’s. The bearers and khidmutgars sneered when her clothing was not quite pucka, and they would often ignore her if she spoke to them in Bengali - or anything other than the kitchen-Hindusthani that was the language of command in the house.’ [Ibid: 42] However, Paulette works hard to learn how to speak the language expected of her, but the exchanges she has with Mrs. Burnham and that lady’s brilliantly wrought Victorian memsahib chatter are moments of lovely comic incomprehension: ‘Just the other day, in referring to the crew of a boat, she had proudly used a newly learnt English word: ‘cock-swain’. But instead of earning accolades, the word had provoked a disapproving frown. When they were out of Annabel’s hearing, Mrs. Burnham explained that the word Paulette had used smacked a little too much of the ‘increase and multiply’ and could not be used in company: ‘If you must buck about that kind of thing, Puggly
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dear, do remember the word to use nowadays is “rooster swain”.

Here, the novelist employed the comic malapropism as an emblem of the farcical mess Britain has made in India.

Baboo Nob Kissin is one another character who educated in Sanskrit. He was attaches himself to his uncle’s virtuous widow, Taramony, and devotes his life to making money so that they can one day build a temple. He works his incline to the position of gomusta, or agent, in charge of shipping migrant labor for the firm of Burnham Bros, while also pursuing a lucrative money lending business on the side. When Taramony dies, Baboo Nob Kissin feels her soul place to stay itself in his body, merging with him, and he begins to take on female characteristics, wearing his hair loose, his clothes flowing, adorning himself with jewelry. Even his body begins to change, becoming softer and more womanly. When Baboo Nob Kissin meets Zachary on board the Ibis, he takes it into his head that the young sailor is an incarnation of the god Krishna. Because Burnham has decided to send the Ibis, before it begins its opium work, on a trip to Mauritius carrying a human cargo of migrant labor, Nob Kissin, wanting to stay near Zachary, suggests that Burnham send him along on the journey: ‘It will facilitate my work with coolies, sir, so I can provide fulsome services. It will be like plucking a new leaf for my career.’ Mr. Burnham cast a dubious glance at the gomusta’s matronly form. ‘I am impressed by your enthusiasm, Baboo Nob Kissin. But are you sure you’ll be able to cope with the conditions on a ship?’ [Ibid: 54] Paulette also wants to join the Ibis. Her life has become unbearable with the Burnhams. She runs away, and it is Baboo Nob Kissin, in his capacity as the moneylender who once helped her father, to whom she turns for help. She explains to him that she plans to disguise herself as an Indian coolie and travel with the indentured servants: ‘Miss Lambert,’ said the gomusta frostily. ‘I dare says you are trying to pull out my legs. How you could forward such a proposal I cannot realize. At once you must scrap it off.’ ‘But Baboo Nob Kissin,’ Paulette beseeched him, ‘tells me: what difference will
arrive to you if you add one more name to the list? You are the *gomusta* and there are so many labourers.’ [Ibid: 67] Nob Kissin does eventually help Paulette get on the *Ibis*, but he is also, in his role as an adviser to his English employer Burnham, the brains behind a far less humanitarian act: a lawsuit that lands a young nobleman in chains, locked in the *Ibis*’s hold and on his way to a sentence of forced labor.

Raja Neel Rattan Halder is the *zemindar* of Raskhali, a young man from an old and landed family. He is educated and as a authority, he has become an art in the Halder family: ‘The sport was much beloved of the Halder men folk, and as with other such favoured pursuits – for example, music and the cultivation of roses - they had added nuances and subtleties that elevated the flying of kites from a mere amusement to a form of connoisseurship. While common people cared only for how high their kites soared and how well they ‘fought’ with others, what mattered most to the Halders was the pattern of a kite’s flight and whether or not it matched the precise shade and mood of the wind. Generations of landed leisure had allowed them to develop their own terminology for this aspect of the elements: in their vocabulary, a strong, steady breeze was ‘neel’, blue; a violent nor’easter was purple, and a listless puff was yellow.’ [Ibid: 74] However, Neel has come into the title of *zemindar* and has hereditary the extensive Halder land holdings. His English is far more sophisticated than his guests as is his responsiveness. He introduces his little son as, ‘Is this little Rascal your Upper-Roger, Raja Nil-Rotten?’ ‘The upa-raja, yes,’ Neel nodded. ‘My sole issue and heir. The tender fruit of my loin, as your poets might say.’ ‘Ah! Your little green mango!’ Mr. Doughty shot a wink in Zachary’s direction. ‘And if I may be so bold as to ask - would you describe your loin as the stem or the branch?’ Neel gave him a frosty glare. ‘Why, sir;’ he said coldly, ‘it is the tree itself.’ [76] In this way, Mr. Burnham was the pious and ambitious merchant of Liverpool, who speaks the Queen's English with none of the low and invasive colloquial speech of other
British characters. He was the catalyst of almost every horror that befalls victims and the weakest character in a literary sense, a villain as easily recognized by the modern sensibility as the mustachioed evildoer to the audience of a silent movie. But it is often true that the historical details are more real than the characters; the language they speak more alive, more interesting and nuanced than the characters speaking it. He is not the only morally prejudiced character, but he is the one given the most central and instructive assignment.

With Nob Kissin's advice, Burnham catches Neel in a financial trap, frames him for fraud, then strips him of his lands, his wealth, his family, his caste, and his freedom. Neel, the fastidious aesthete, winds up scraping crusted vomit off his cellmate, a Chinese opium addict withdrawing painfully from the drug. Together, they are shipped off on the *Ibis*. Deeti, too, ends up on the ship she envisioned in the novel's opening passage. She has lost her daughter now, lost everything of the little she had, and is, like the other passengers, escaping one life for another. After her husband's death, Deeti is rescued from the flames of sati by Kalua, a man of lower caste, a solitary giant who has always loved her from afar. Together, she and Kalua sell themselves into indentured servitude in order to escape Deeti's enraged in-laws. They find themselves, with Neel, in the dark hold of the *Ibis* on their way to the island of Mauritius.

The novel has produced two enormous economic themes of the 19th century: the cultivation of opium as a cash crop in Bengal and Bihar for the Chinese market, and the transport of Indian indentured workers to cut sugar canes for the British on such islands as Mauritius, Fiji and Trinidad. Ghosh also talks about migration as a colonized agency. He endeavors a picture of migration blessed by the British, who enforce opium cultivation in Indian villages leaving the labourers to lead lives of utter starvation and poverty. ‘They (*girmityas*) were so called because, in exchange for money, their names were entered on *girmits*—agreements written on
pieces of paper. The silver that was paid for them went to their families, and they were taken away, never to be seen again: they vanished, as if into the netherworlds. [Ibid: 72] The depiction of migration and displacement has a colourful dimension.

Despite the fear and apprehension that the migrants face in their journey, the relationship they establish among the fellow migrants offers them respite. The camaraderie, oneness and the bond of friendship amongst fellow migrants is also a subject of migration that Ghosh brings to attention. The bond established among the migrants in the foreign land is of greater worth to the novel’s narration than what the future holds for the migrants once they reach their destinations. ‘When you step on that ship, to go across the Black Waters (Indian Ocean), you and your fellow transporters will become a brotherhood of your own: will be your own village, your own family, your own caste.’ [Ibid: 314] There is left no more social distinctions and religious discriminations on the basis of their caste.

Literally the migrants become one, which paints a picture of unity of the migrants. The moment of departure was a time of loss and displacement, but the indentured girmiitiyas found the means to endure it - their greatest resource was their capacity to take pleasure in the little things of life. The theme of migration and displacement is incomplete without a discussion on Ghosh’s reflection of Diaspora. Patrick Iroegbu considers Diaspora as a,

…term applied to a minority ethnic group of migrant origin which maintains not only sentiments but equally material links with its land of origin. [http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/]
The idea of Diaspora as migration and colonization signifies a collective suffering, an exile where one dreams of home but lives in an exile. Thus the idea of Diaspora acknowledges that notion of the old-country deep in language, religion, culture or folklore and a migratory person is always linked with its past history. The novel *Sea of Poppies* refers the Diasporic consciousness evolves among workers and they are addressed as girmitia noticeably. It is a journey on the ship *Ibis* where most of characters tell their own history and contribute in a collective history.

Either it is Deeti-Kalua; running away from the village, Raja of Raskhali, Paulette Lambert; a colonial daughter looking for a new life, Jodu; aspiring to become a lascar or Babu Nobkissin; undergoing a spiritual metamorphosis. On their way to Black water to the island of Mareech, these characters are exposed; give an insight in the broader social classes of the British Raj. [http://www.museindia.com/]

The novel is draw out the opium trade begins at Deeti’s small opium farming village in the state of U. P. It also shows the dark web of the empire’s history as a mixed cast of characters for whom the *Ibis* is a projection of the uncertainties of their lives and routine of home. Cut off from their roots, in transit and looking ahead to a fresh start, the migrants are prone to invent new names and histories. For Deeti, this migration brings a new opportunity to identify her. Amitav Ghosh creates multi-cultural identity of people belong various caste, religion, race, nation, culture which is known as Hybridity. There are mixture of languages as Bhojpuri, Hindustani, Bengali and Anglo-Indian words, it creates a colorful sense of living voices as well as the linguistic resourcefulness of people in Diaspora.

The novel proved Ghosh as a Diasporic writer who bringing back the picture of nation at one particular episode of history. The notion Empire was used at two
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points of view by the white man and by the black. Therefore, it turned towards anti and post-colonial discourses which has use all their powers to disperse the myths created by the colonial histories. The process of de-mythization has not been completed till now, and the post-colonial discourse continues to perform its task even today. The narrative is of interlinked lives of various brown and white characters, and the narrative perspective is the critical one.

The post-colonial history is a site where the creation of a narrative to counter the colonial narrative takes place. Its aim is a continuous questioning of the grand narrative of progress and civilization being handed over to the inferior races. The novelist shifts the point of focus of his history-as-story very uncomfortably for the prototypically constituted western eyes, to the filth the West had created and its mechanism of generating it. Opium and coolies were exported from India. The coverage of exploitation in the country that produced the human and material produce was limitless.

Opium ruined lives. It ruined the lives of the poor Indian farmers whose very lifestyle. The nasty series of debt that the farmers of the opium belt entered made any idea of escape impossible. The grain crops and vegetables were not grown. There was only a sea of poppies in all the fields. To feed their families they took more debt and thus they became more confirmed in their state. Opium broke the very fabric of the society, as was the case when Deeti and Kalua came across the impoverished transients in Chhapra, ‘driven from their villages by the flood of flowers that had washed over the countryside.’ [Ghosh: 2008: 298] Hunger pressed them so much that they were ready to forget all bindings of caste, religion and concern for life and it safety. They only had one thing in their minds: survival. That’s why they signed agreements to work on the farms in some unknown lands, even hazarding to cross black waters.
Sea of Poppies is an account of the effects of racialization and rationalization of history on the subject races: colonized, tormented and exploited. It is a typically postcolonial response to the collective past of Asia. It is a rational attempt to present human condition at the level of individual emotions and destinies, and at the level of nations as players in the international arena. It challenges the grand narrative of capitalism: capital accumulation through free trade, leading to overall wellbeing through the trickledown effect, and the whole nation’s developing due to the way in which the invisible hand directs the market. These grand narratives of the colonial era are challenged effectively in this novel that offers an alternative point of view very strongly and convincingly.

Sea of Poppies depicted the diverse forms of Colonial Desire such as physical, economic, political, religious, judicial and social. Deeti is a victim of sexual, economic and social subjugations, driven to attempt sati. Deeti and her husband Hukam Singh effectively represent the economic forms of colonial subjection imposed upon them by the British trading company. Forced to stop growing wheat, cereal and pulses, which have been staple food items in the Indian subcontinent for centuries, Deeti and her farming community are now producers of poppies, which are used by the British factories to extract opium for a lucrative global export trade. The poppy functions as a metaphor at many opposing levels: as the creator and palliative agent of physical misery, as the cause of agricultural collapse, but also the sole means of eking out a livelihood under the British rule, and as the incentive for trade and war.

This is evident in the initial portrayal of Neel Rattan and his late father’s business dealings with the colonizers. Deeti occupies the lowest end of the hugely profitable opium production machinery, living in an inadequately thatched hut with little food to eat, with Raja Neel Rattan, the hereditary zamindar or head of the vast Rashkali estate, occupies the middle tier of profits, which are reaped most
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of all by the British merchant, Mr. Burnham. The great divide between the lives of indigenous natives like Deeti and Neel is evident; while both are subject to the power of the British, it was the peasant who lived a subsistent life, while the nobility enjoyed a lavish life of good food, music and entertainment, as long as they remained on the right side of the imperial powers.

In *Sea of Poppies*, Ghosh illustrates a length of suffering and punishment devices used by the British. A description of the conditions prevalent in the Ghazipur Opium factory reveals the inhuman working conditions of its employees, as witnessed by Deeti, who is summoned to take her sick husband home from work:

‘Her eyes were met by a startling sight – a host of dark, legless torsos was circling around and around, like some enslaved tribe of demons… they were bare-bodied men, sunk waist deep in tanks of opium, tramping round and round to soften the sludge. Their eyes were vacant, glazed, and yet somehow they managed to keep moving, as slow as ants in honey, trampling, treading … these seated men had more the look of ghouls than any living thing she had ever seen: their eyes glowed in the dark, and they appeared completely naked.’ [Ibid: 95] Even children were not secure from working in this opium-filled environment, and their punishments were as harsh as those for adults: ‘suddenly one of them indeed dropped their ball [of opium] sending it crashing to the floor, where it burst open, splattering its gummy contents everywhere.’ [Ibid: 96]

The depiction of Hukam Singh’s illness does not a product of any financial recompense from his factory. In selecting Deeti’s mode of suicide, Ghosh exposes the ancient Hindu practice of *sati* or self-immolation by a widow on her husband’s funeral pyre. Despite the barbarity of such a practice, there is no British legal protection offered in the form of police forces to stop Deeti from committing such an atrocity. While British law is enforced to reap profit by subjugating the natives
as in the case of Neel Rattan, it is conspicuously absent in preventing social atrocities, giving the lie to the veneer of British imperial policies disguised as civilizing endeavors.

It is clear that Ghosh’s projection of colonial temperament of subaltern response is an exercise in particularization. Colonial experience in Sea of Poppies is evoked through some samplers that facilitate the movement of the narrative: while this is not fully realized India of the early nineteenth century, the cultural matrices are elaborately networked. [Opp, Cite, 2009: 165-66]

As social subjugation, the novelist analyzes the structure of traditional Hindu society with its rigidity against inter-caste marriages, the professed superiority of the high-caste over the low caste, and exposes the multiple layers of subjugation prevalent in society. Against this overriding concern to maintain class divisions, the victim was powerless to raise his/her voice. It was doesn't matter that Deeti willingly married Kalua, what mattered was that her male relatives avenge themselves for the sake of their family honor. It was as a result of the strenuous efforts of the Indian intellectual and social reformer Raja Ram Mohun Roy to abolish this cruel practice that saw the outlawing of sati in 1829. Thus, Colonizers constructed their knowledge of indigenous tradition in ways which conformed and extended relations of domination and subordination.

4.3. Summing Up:

Sea of Poppies records several main characters from various class, caste, religion, race, culture, nations which are symbols of Hybridity: Kalua, an untouchable man from a socially lower class, rescues Deeti, a poor high-caste Hindu widow, from her husband’s funeral pyre. Finally they elope and marry, but now have to seek
safety from the fury of her dead husband’s relatives. Paulette, a orphan French girl escaping from her British foster family, also seeks refuge aboard the Ibis. Jodu is a Muslim lascar in the ship, whose romantic entanglements with a Hindu girl Munia, on her way to Mauritius, bring down the wrath of religious bigots on the ship. Neel Rattan is an impoverished Hindu raja, a victim of British power politics, who faces a penal servitude of seven years in Mauritius.

The lives of fictional characters meet aboard the Ibis, and the first novel of this trilogy ends on a dramatic note of suspense and excitement, as these victims of colonial brutalities fashion a daring mid-sea escape from the ship, and are now poised in great danger, with half of them trapped on board, and the remaining a drift on a raft amidst a stormy ocean. Thus, the range of characters from diverse backgrounds is a literary device Ghosh employs to highlight the many forms of subjugation common under imperial rule in India, and also explore the various types of resistance put forth by men and women who are victims of colonial desire of colonizers.
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