

Feminism in the Light of Ecocriticism: An Analysis of Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies*

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Abstract

A medium that depicts life in all its facets is literature. Ecofeminism is a movement that compares the exploitation and devastation of the natural environment with the oppression and enslavement of women. One of India's best-known English-language writers, Amitav Ghosh blends history, experience, and environment. Opium warfare represents a grave event in India's colonial past. The losses of India's natural environment and the miseries of its women during the colonial era due to opium plantations have been accurately shown by Ghosh. This paper examines Amitav Ghosh's well-known novel *Sea of Poppies* within the framework of ecofeminism and from the perspective of ecocriticism.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, Ecofeminism, Opium, Nature, Women

1. Introduction

An interdisciplinary field of study called 'green study' looks at how people interact with their surroundings and how they affect the natural world. The universe's greatest and most priceless gift to humanity is nature. It is the main source of every element required by every living thing on Earth. Like a mother, nature provides for us. It has forms and ideals, and in the modern world, people are either ignored or driven only by self-interest. However, the generation that preceded us was highly aware of the environment and actively worked to preserve it. They had good agro-business practices, planted saplings, preserved birds, and preserved water bodies as a habit. Working towards a coexisting environment on all fronts is urgently needed so that the next generation can see the colourful species and trees.

The term 'eco' refers to the natural world. The term 'criticism' has a broad meaning and is related to literature. Thus, the study of the connection between literature and nature is known as ecocriticism. In addition to being the inspiration for the Ecocriticism movement, Rachel Carson's novel *Silent Spring* (1962) contains some of the earliest instances of modern environmental writing. Human evolution has left civilization mostly dependent on the natural world. The world is impacted by nature in addition to linguistic and social components. Nature also serves as the foundation for human life and progress.

Therefore, these are a few of the causes behind the rise of ecocriticism, particularly in the 1990s. William Rueckert initially introduced the term ecocriticism in his book *Literature and Ecology: An experiment in Ecocriticism* summarises the basic goal of ecocritics as “to find the grounds upon which the two communities - the human, the natural - can coexist cooperate and flourish in the biosphere” (Rueckert 107).

Feminism’s credo is to dismantle gender stereotypes, which persist among those who support equality in various parts of the world. Liberal feminism, Marxist feminism, Radical feminism, Cultural feminism, and Ecofeminism are some of the sub-movements that have emerged from the feminist movement. One essential element of feminism is ecofeminism. There are several ways that women relate to nature. The phrase was originally used in 1974 by French feminist and activist Francoise D’Eaubonne in her book *Feminisme ou la Mort*, which Ruth Hottell translated into English. She seeks to draw parallels between nature and women in her work, comparing “the oppression of subordinate groups (such as women and people of colour) to the oppression of nature by man” (d'Eaubonne 127).

A philosophical and political theory known as ecofeminism seeks to link the domination of capitalism over the earth and the exploitation of women and the environment to gender inequality and the exploitation of women. By the late 1980s, ecofeminism had not only spread to new areas of study but also developed into two different schools of thought: Cultural Ecofeminism and Radical Ecofeminism. Radical ecofeminists contend that patriarchal society and domination ideologies conflate nature and women, allowing for the exploitation and oppression of both. This was made possible by seeing women and the natural world as commodities, which allowed them to be browbeaten. Conversely, cultural ecofeminists emphasised the connection between women and the environment as stemming from a natural nurturing tie between them. Because of this common experience, women are more conscious of the harm and deterioration of the environment.

The novel *Sea of Poppies* depends significantly on nature. It is the first volume of Amitav Ghosh’s Ibis trilogy and, it was included for the Man Booker Prize in 2008. The whole plot of the book takes place in Calcutta and on the banks of the sacred Ganga River, before the First Opium War. There are three portions to the novel: Land, River, and Sea. Every part shows the awful conditions of the environment together with the suffering of women. Both the lush land and the society of India underwent significant transformations with the entry of colonial invaders. According to Ghosh, the problems with opium and poppy farming altered human nature—not for the better, but for the worse.

The indigenous were compelled to grow poppies more and more for financial gain when British imperialists established a new cultivation of opium. With the help of a little plot of land used to grow poppies, Deeti, a young lady married to opium addict Hukum Singh and mother of her seven-year-old daughter Kabutri, maintains her household. After her husband suffered a seizure and passed away a few days later, Deeti finds herself in a precarious situation. She is losing money as a result of her debt rising, her land being mortgaged with no chance of recovery, and the nearly nonexistent profit from that year’s poppy crop. She is much more distraught upon learning who her child’s true father is. As her opium-addicted husband was incompetent, her brother Chandan Singh made her cataleptic on her wedding night with the help of other family members; this made her to become pregnant.

In India, poppies were also cultivated before to colonisation. Poppies are planted in little bunches in the centre of winter crops including wheat, masooral, and vegetables by Deeti, who is Kabutri's age. Deeti's mother sends some of the poppy seeds to the oil press; the remaining seeds are stored for cooking and further planting. Things were different when Deeti's daughter was her age. Back then, poppies were considered a luxury, growing in tiny clusters amid the fields that produced vegetables, wheat, and masoor dal, the primary winter crops. A portion of the poppy seeds would be sent to the oil press, while the other ones would be kept for her own use, some would be replanted, and some would be cooked with meat and vegetables (Ghosh 29).

Deeti learns that the main field has a small amount of poppy seeds sown alongside winter crops prior to colonization. Deeti was unable to see the main crops after the colonization; instead, poppies can be seen all over the land. The land became infertile as a result of this large shift from poppy to opium; English took the local's territory all over India to grown opium. As a result, native land was exploited. Deeti is longed for her childhood that gave her winter crops. Ghosh beautifully paints the character of Deeti as a hard-hit victim of opium.

In the novel *Monoculture of the Poppy*, opium has a detrimental effect on all living things in the surroundings, not just humans. Kalua's ox used to be given opium to eat in order to help it calm. According to Ghosh, the fragrant scent of the poppy pod draws in insects such as wasps, grasshoppers, and bees within a few days, after which they are sprayed with the liquid that comes out of the pod. He claims that their dead bodies combine with the sap, become black, and end up as part of the opium that is sold at the market. Since even animals are unable to flee the opium factory, the residue of opium causes humans to sneeze, and Kalua's cow starts to smell when she visits the factory with Deeti and her kid. "Deeti and Kabutri started to sneeze as Kalua's cart continued towards the factory's main compound; soon, Kalua and the oxen were sniffing too..." (Ghosh 91). Humans and animals are equally impacted by the dirty air.

The factory's waste contaminated the Ganga River, affecting aquatic species. Most Indians venerated this river, and living beings drank from its waters. But it becomes dangerous to drink due to the filth. The story highlights the value of the natural world and the interdependence of humans, animals, and their habitats. Social justice was nonexistent during the colonial era without environmental justice. As a result, the story portrays Calcutta as being overpopulated, morally corrupt, and devoid of greenery.

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