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**Gift in Green: An Ecocritical Reading of Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies***

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**Abstract**

This paper examines the novel *Sea of Poppies* from an ecological perspective. It highlights the importance of preserving nature through incidents and characters in the novel *Sea of Poppies*. In today's world, humans are destroying nature to a great extent, and it is past time to save it. Humans should be environmentally mindful and aware of the physical world around them. They should understand the value of all living things and their right to exist in our world. People used to worship the natural world. They regarded nature as their god and lived in harmony with it. However, in today's fast-paced world, people are destroying nature in the name of progress and industrialization. Most of Amitav Ghosh's novels address different environmental problems, capitalism, and colonialism.

**Keywords:** Nature, Ecology, Ecocriticism, East India Company, Destroying Nature, Poppy, Colonization

**Introduction:**

Nature writing consists of literary works that address nature, the destruction of nature, conservation of nature, etc. Nature writing includes both fiction and non-fiction. Novels, drama, essays, short stories, and other genres that discuss the environment are called nature writing. Nature writing addresses the facts of the natural world through fictional or real-life incidents. Nature writing makes the reader aware of the natural world and its importance. Some nature writing works explain how humans destroy nature and the ways to save or protect it. Many novels that discuss the environment or its issues help people understand the importance of nature through the characters, plot settings, and facts. In recent times, nature writing has gained significant importance. There are many environmental problems in the

world today, and nature writing makes people aware of these issues. Some novels, dramas, and essays also address the importance of nature and the consequences of destroying it.

In his works, Amitav Ghosh often discusses the environment. Most of his novels highlight environmental problems and how humans destroy nature. In *Sea of Poppies*, Ghosh explains the consequences of destroying nature. The novel is set in the 19th century and follows the lives of various characters connected to the opium trade. The main characters include Deeti, a poppy farmer's wife; Kalua, a low-caste ox-cart driver; Zachary Reid, an American sailor; Paulette Lambert, a French orphan; and Neel Rattan Halder, a disgraced Raja. The story revolves around the ship *Ibis*, which transports indentured laborers and convicts to Mauritius. Ghosh uses these characters to illustrate environmental issues.

#### **Ecocriticism in *Sea of Poppies***

Ecocriticism is a literary theory that examines the relationship between literature and the natural world. It explores how texts represent nature, environmental issues, and human interactions with the environment. Ecocriticism also considers how literature can raise awareness about ecological concerns and promote environmental activism. In *Sea of Poppies*, Ghosh portrays the destruction of nature through the opium trade. The British East India Company forces farmers to grow poppies instead of food crops, leading to famine and starvation. This shift destroys the natural balance and causes suffering for humans and animals. Ghosh writes:

"The fields would be heavy with wheat in the winter, and after the spring harvest, the straw would be used to repair the damage of the year before. 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 faraway villages, and the expense was such that people put off their repairs as long as they possibly could." (Ghosh 29)

This passage shows how the opium trade disrupts traditional farming practices and leads to environmental degradation.

#### **The Opium Factory and Pollution**

The opium factory in Ghazipur is depicted as a source of pollution. The effluents from the factory contaminate the Ganges River, making the water unfit for consumption. Ghosh describes:

"The river was the colour of chocolate; the air was heavy with the smell of excrement, both animal and human; and the walkway was clogged with ox-carts, loaded with great stacks of opium cakes." (Ghosh 192)

This pollution affects both humans and animals, highlighting the environmental impact of colonial exploitation.

#### **The *Ibis* as a Symbol of Displacement**

The ship *Ibis* symbolizes displacement and the disruption of natural lives. The

characters aboard the Ibis are uprooted from their homes due to the opium trade and colonial policies. Deeti's vision of the Ibis foreshadows her journey:

"She had never seen a ship like this before, with its hull sheathed in metal and its masts as tall as temple spires." (Ghosh 3)

The Ibis represents the forced migration and loss of connection to the land caused by environmental and economic exploitation.

#### **HumanExploitationandNature**

Ghosh links the exploitation of nature to the exploitation of humans. The farmers forced to grow poppies suffer poverty and indebtedness:

"The debts had grown and grown, until they were larger than anything they could ever repay." (Ghosh 45)

This parallel shows how colonialism destroys both the environment and human lives.

#### **ResistancandHope**

Despite the destruction, characters like Deeti show resilience. Deeti's escape and new life symbolize hope and regeneration:

"She would plant poppies in her new home, she decided, in memory of the fields she had lost." (Ghosh 400)

This act represents a reconnection with nature and a form of resistance against colonial oppression.

#### **Conclusion**

*Sea of Poppies* is a powerful ecocritical novel that highlights the destructive impact of colonialism on nature and human lives. Ghosh uses vivid descriptions and compelling characters to illustrate environmental degradation and exploitation. The novel calls for greater awareness and action to protect the natural world and prevent further destruction. By reading such works, people can understand the importance of nature and the need to preserve it for future generations. Nature is essential to human life. Humans should spend time with nature, which has a calming effect and provides peace. Spending time with nature improves mental health and cures trauma. Nature plays a vital role in human life, and humans must recognize this and take steps to conserve it. *Sea of Poppies* helps readers understand how nature has been destroyed by inhumane actions. Literature also raises awareness about the environment. The author vividly depicts nature through words and creates characters and subplots that deeply impact the reader. The author also illustrates how humans and other living beings suffer due to environmental problems.

#### **References:**

Ghosh, Amitav. *Sea of Poppies*. Penguin Books India, 2008.