

## STATUS OF WOMEN AND PARENT INSTINCTS IN AMITAV GHOSH SEA OF POPPIES

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### ABSTRACT

Amitav Ghosh is a Bengali Indian author best known for his work in English Fiction. His novel *Sea of Poppies* is the first part of his *Ibis* trilogy, a saga set just before the Opium Wars. This story is primarily a post modern device. It is an analogy of triple intertextual narrative. The story begins with Deeti, a young widow of an opium dealer later married and patroned by Kalua of an untouchable caste. Though she was predicted as an ordinary woman in pre Independent India, in the story stream she was presented as a main protagonist. Her motherly concern remain throughout for her daughter as well as for her fellow Companions. When situation presses, she always lost her in the thought of prolepsis and analepsis. The movement of the book is shown by three sections 'Land', 'River' and 'Sea'. The major characters predicted in *Sea of Poppies* meet in the *Ibis*. This paper aims to highlight the status of woman in the pre independent Indian society and the bonding of mother child relationship of all times, of all ages and at all places. It also focuses on empathetic feeling bestowed by major character blended with multicultural and multilinguistics.

**KEYWORDS:** Intertextual, Protagonist, Prolepsis, Analepsis, Empathetic, Multiculture, Multilinguistics

### INTRODUCTION

Amitav Ghosh is a Bengali Indian author best known for his work in English Fiction. The novel *Sea of poppies* is the first brain child of Amitav Ghosh followed by *River of Smoke* and *Floods of Fire* in succession. The story *Sea of Poppies* is set prior to the opium war on the banks of the holy river Ganges and in Calcutta. It is an analogy of triple intertextual narrative flowing with the momentum of three sections 'Land', 'River' and 'Sea'. The status of women in the pre- independent Indian society is portrayed through the life of Deeti and that of the other women characters.

The first story of analogy opens with Deeti, an ordinary village woman living on the outskirts of the town of Ghazipur, some fifty miles east of Benares. Her husband Hukam Singh had been wounded in the leg while serving as a sepoy in British regiment. The disability made Hukam Singh addicted to Opium. Deeti is also blessed with a daughter named Kabutri who is aged 6 Years at the beginning of the play. Whenever Deeti looks at her daughter, she used to immerse in the thought of Prolepsis and Analepsis.

Deeti was glad, for her daughter's sake that this was one aspect of her appearance that she had not passed on – she delighted in Kabutri's dark eyes, which were as black as her shiny hair. Now, looking down on her daughter's dreaming face, Deeti smiled and decided that she wouldn't wake her after all: in three or four years the girl would me married and gone; there would be enough time for her to work when she was received into her husband's house; in her few remaining years at home she might as well rest (5).

The above paragraph is evident that early marriage was prevalent at that time and Deeti is also a victim of early marriage. Kabutri who is of six-years is on the road of Marriage. Deeti was loaded with domestic works in the house as well as in the poppy field. She has neither physical support nor moral support. Deeti compares her own present life with her daughter's future. So she doesn't want to wake her daughter from her timely sleep. It remained the reader of the common saying, There is no substitute for a mother.

“A mother is the truest friend we have, when trials heavy and sudden fall upon us; when adversity takes the place of prosperity; when friends desert us; when trouble thickens around us, still will she cling to us, and endeavor by her kind precepts and counsels to dissipate the clouds of darkness, and cause peace to return to our hearts.” —Washington Irving

Kabutri also helped her mother in sweeping the poppy petals into a heap, kneading some atta and rolled out a few real rotis and so on. Kabutri and Deeti seemed to be a good companion to each other. Deeti who is an ordinary girl by birth proved to be extra ordinary in intuition. When Deeti saw the *Ibis* for the first time when she went to fetch water from the holy River Ganga along with her daughter, she was captivated by the appearance of the ship.

As soon as Deeti entered home, she entered her puja room and draws the portrait of the ship which she has seen and placed it in the puja room. When Kabutri asked for the reasons for the place of portrait in the pooja room, I don't know, said Deeti, for she too was puzzled by the sureness of her institution: I just know that it must be there; and not just the ship, but also many of those who are in it; they too must be on the walls of our pooja room (9). It all had happened in the second week of March 1838, for that was when the *Ibis* waited to take on a pilot to guide her to Calcutta.

Zachary Reid, another notable character in this novel also has an impact of his mother's brought up. It was zachery's habit to think, every day, of atleast five things to praise, a practice that had been instilled by his mother as a necessary corrective for a tongue sported too sharp an edge (10).

When I started counting my blessings, my whole life turned around – Willie Nelson.

According to Zachery, the purpose of the *Ibis* is to serve as a 'black birder', for transporting slaves. Throughout the novel, the ship is referred as 'She' and not 'he'. The *Ibis* is compared to a woman who is always dominated by male community. Not only the *Ibis*, but women lived in that historical era remained to be the slaves under men. Masculine domination is so rooted in collective unconsciousness that is carried on for ages and ages.

One day Deeti gets the news of her husband being unwell and is asked to fetch him back. Deeti connects the news heard with the ship *Ibis* she had seen. The vision of the *Ibis* left an everlasting impression in the minds of Deeti. She feels that there is some close relation between her and the schooner. Deeti reaches the opium factory where her husband was working, with Kalua. Hukam Singh was brought back home. A few days later Deeti sent her daughter Kabutri to the house of her brother, Havildar Kesri Singh, the sepoy. When Kabutri was leaving to her uncle's house, Deeti carefully bundled Kabutri's clothes and also handed over her remaining pieces of jewellery : an anklet and a bangle. Deeti as a woman is an example for motherhood and sacrifice. When the boat sailed away, with Kabutri in it, it was as if Deeti's last connection with life had been severed (156).

Children are the anchors that hold a mother to life – Sophocles.

Kabutri, the only companion who made Deeti's life meaningful so far left to her uncle's house happily. Kabutri was overjoyed at the prospect of visiting her cousins and living in a house hold filled with children (156). Kabutri left the

house with the innocence of her childhood.

Deeti's intuition that her husband would not be able to go back to work was soon confirmed (150). Hukam Singh passed away. Deeti prepared her mind for her own end. She prepared herself to be consumed by the cremation fire of her husband – Sati. Kalua rescued Deeti from the flaming pyre and placed her on the bamboo platform which was constructed by him across the river. Deeti imagined herself that she was carried to the god of death, Jamaraj. When Deeti open the eyes and come to know that she was still alive, she had curious feeling of joy mixed with resignation. She felt although she has got rebirth She had shed the body of the old Deeti, with the burden of its karma; she had paid the price her stars had demanded of her, and was free now to create a destiny as she willed, with whom she chose – and she knew that it was with Kalua that this life would be lived, until another death claimed the body that he had torn from flames (175).

Deeti and Kalua exchanged the garlands and had become life partners. Both Deeti and Kalua on their journey of escapism reached the dwelling where Kabutri was living with the family of Deeti's absent brother. Deeti couldn't move beyond without seeing her daughter. Her parental instincts made her to exchange few words under privacy with her daughter.

Sometimes the strength of the mother is greater than natural laws – Barbara Kingsolver

Deeti and Kalua forced by circumstances boarded on the ship of the Ibis. It is the place where the analogical characters meet together. It is the place where all the women exchanged their salad days. Deeti fell silent as the other women spoke, for the recollections of the others served only to remind her of Kabutri and the memories from which she would be forever excluded: the years of growing she would not see; the secrets she would never share; the bridegroom she would not receive. How was it possible that she would not present at her child's wedding to sing the laments that mothers sang when the palanquins came to carry their daughter away?(387).

The pond is dry

The lotus withered

The swan weeps

For its absent love

When Deeti sang the above lines in remembrance of her daughter, the crowd also joined with her in singing. Men also forget their quarrels. There are no words to explain the pain undergone by the bride and her parents when her child is exiled from her home.

Deeti was addressed as *Bhauji* by the fellow companion of the *Ibis*. She is bearing Kalua's child in her womb. Deeti, as a *Bhauji* organized the wedding Heeru's wedding. As the wedding arrangement was going on, Deeti for the first time felt an unmistakable movement in her womb. She felt as if her belly were the sea and the child a vessel, sailing towards its own destiny. Deeti enjoys her motherhood with Kalua.

When Munia was captivated unknowingly, Deeti with immense spirit saved her life. Deeti, the feminine protagonist of this story though at the beginning led a common life like that of an ordinary woman in pre independent India, in the stream of the story, through her care and concern won the heart of many people. She deserves to be called as *Bhauji*. At the end of the story, Deeti raised herself as a woman of post modern India bold to go anywhere, matured to take proper decisions during critical situations.

