

ECOCRITICISM IN AMITAV GHOSH'S SEA OF POPPIES

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Abstract

This paper is to examine the perspective of Eco criticism in Amitav Ghosh's famous novel "sea of poppies". Amitav Ghosh is an Indian writer famously known for his work in English fiction. Eco criticism is the study of relationship between the literature and the earth's environment. In the context of scope, the critics call this as a broad approach. It takes an interdisciplinary point of view by analysing the literary works with the context of environmental issues and nature. This novel "Sea of Poppies" is a historical novel which assembles from different corners of the world sailors, marines and passengers for the Ibis, a slaving schooner now converted to the transport of coolies and opium. This novel gives us a preview how in the nineteenth century colonialism demolished the ecosystem of the country. In this novel Amitav Ghosh tries to show the loss of natural environment during the colonial rule in India. So through the concept of eco criticism, I focus on the changes that happen due to the cultivation of opium, and how its addiction leads to the death in the novel 'Sea of Poppies'.

Keywords: Eco criticism, Colonialism, Ganga, Opium, Nature, Seeds.

INTRODUCTION

The Novel "Sea of Poppies" was written by Amitav Ghosh. He is one of the leading Indian writers in English who intermingles nature with experience and history. His most of the works show an interaction between nature and human. He is famously known for his work in English fiction. He has written nine works, and received several awards for his writing. This novel "Sea of Poppies" is a historical novel and, it was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize in 2008. This novel deals with the cultivation of opium and its dangerous effect on the life of the people and the environment. This novel assembles from different corners of the world sailors, marines and passengers for the Ibis, a slaving schooner now converted to the transport of coolies and opium. The whole story of the novel set prior to the first Opium war, on the shores of the holy river Ganga and in Calcutta. In this novel the author compares the Ganga to the Nile, the salvation of the Egyptian civilization, and attributes the provenance and development of these evolutions to these selfless and ever flowing bodies. Throughout this novel the author portrays the characters as Poppy seeds originating in large numbers from the field to form a sea, where he shows that every single seed is uncertain about its future.

This novel gives us a preview how in the nineteenth century colonialism demolished the ecosystem of the country. In this novel Amitav Ghosh tries to show the loss of natural environment during the colonial rule in India. The story is encompassed of intermingling narratives involving a village woman named Deeti, an American sailor named Zachary Reid, Indian rajah Neel Rattan, and the opium trader Benjamin Burnham. Deeti is the main protagonist of the novel, she is a young woman of an upper caste, who lives in a village about 400 miles from the sea. She is married to Hukam Singh, an Opium addict, and wounded in battle. So throughout life experiences. Throughout this novel the author examines that how the addiction of Opium leads Hukam Singh to death.

THEMES

The major themes of the “Sea of Poppies” are the way in which the people of India have no control over their own fates. The novel takes place during the Opium War, when Great Britain used India to grow poppy seeds that were sold, as opium, to the Chinese to create a more promising balance of trade for Britain. Just because India was a counter in the Opium Wars, so are the characters in the novel. For example, Deeti is the widow of a man whose brother raped her to impregnate her, because her husband was addicted to opium and was too unconscious to have children. As a widow, Deeti is expected to throw herself on the funeral bonfire. Instead of that, she falls in love with an untouchable and escapes on-board a ship called the Ibis that brings coolies, or workers from Calcutta, to Mauritius to work. And the other passengers on the ship, such as Paulette, a French girl disguised as a coolie, are also stirred almost by fate. The treatment of women is one of the most important theme of the novel, in this novel Paulette and Deeti are forced into unhappy marriages. And the family that adopted Paulette, the Burnham’s, do not identify her intellect and want to force her to marry someone she does not love. Instead of that she loves Zachary, who is the biracial crew member of the Ibis. Deeti’s and Paulette’s escape on the Ibis is their attempt to recover above their lives.

ECOCRITICISM IN SEA OF POPPIES

Eco criticism is the study of relationship between the literature and the earth’s environment. In the context of scope, the critics call this as a broad approach. It takes an interdisciplinary point of view by analysing the literary works with the context of environmental issues and nature. Eco criticism means how nature is presented in literature. The difference in the ecology due to the farming of opium and its effect on human beings and animals is shown in the novel Sea of Poppies. In the beginning of the novel the blossoming plants of poppy in the field gives us an idea that opium will play an important role in the lives of the characters throughout the novel. The humiliating effect of the cultivation of opium is that it has terminated the cultivation of eatable food yields. As Deeti think of, how eatable

crops were grown earlier and they not only gave them food but also the material for making roof. She says that, it was the perfect life but due to the cultivation of opium they have to die from hunger. The author tries to place stress that the material which was easily available to the people earlier but now it became expensive due to the change in cultivation from food harvest to cash harvest. The variety of the crops is lost due to the cultivation of opium and whoever rejects growing Opium they are compelled and finally it results in debt and movement.

In this novel, it is not only human beings who become an addict to opium but all living beings in the environment are affected by it. The character of Kalua used to give opium to his ox to eat. Only then it will relax. In this novel Sea of Poppies Amitav Ghosh says that sweet smell of the poppy pod attracts the insects like bees, Grasshoppers and wasps and in a few days, they get struck in the liquid fluid out of the pod. He says when the sap turns black their dead bodies merge with the fluid and became a part of the opium which was sold in the market. The dust of opium in the Opium Factory causes people to sneeze as even animals cannot escape and the ox of Kalua starts sniffing when it went to the factory with Deeti and her daughter. Through this novel, the author shows how fishermen use opium to catch fish. The bank of the river was filled with broken earthen ware shares which were brought to the factory with raw opium, due to the presence of opium in the water fishes could be caught very easily. In this novel the author portrays the pollution of water of the river Ganga is show through the flow of sewage of the opium factory in the Ganga. This river was worshipped by most of the people in India, and this water is used for drinking by all livings. But because of the sewage it becomes unhealthy for drinking. The author compares it with the river Nile, the life line of the Egyptian civilization.

The landscape on the rivers coasts had changed a great deal since Deeti's childhood and looking around now, it seemed to her that Karamnasa's influence had fallen over its banks, spreading its disease far beyond the lands that drew upon its waters: the opium harvest having been recently completed, the plants had been left to waste away in the fields, so that the countryside was covered with the gasping bits and pieces. The city of Calcutta is shown as overfilled, filled with immorality and with no greenery in the novel. But at the present situation very few trees can be seen. These are the changes that happen due to the cultivation of opium, and how its addiction leads to the death in the novel 'Sea of Poppies'.

CONCLUSION

In this novel Amitav Ghosh represents the harmful effect of colonial rule in India during the nineteenth century. The cultivation of opium destroyed the ecological balance of nature. It ceased the cultivation of food crop. It leads to hunger, migration and degradation of environment. He has tried to show that every crop has its own importance and when it is grown in additional it creates imbalance in the ecology. Through this novel Amitav Ghosh tries to show the loss of natural environment during the colonial rule in India. These are the changes that happen due to the cultivation of opium, and this how its addiction leads to the death in the novel 'Sea of Poppies'.

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