

Socio-Culture aspects in Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies*

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Abstract

The paper identifies the socio cultural scenario of 19th century and the belief and practise of the people as present in Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies*. The narrative has three main events, the first opium war, the trade between India-China and British, the final, the migration of the peasants to the plantation in the British colonies. In presenting the history of opium trade and indenture labour in 19th century in India during colonial rule, Ghosh has shown the social condition of the people especially status of women in a male dominated society. The practise of polygamy, dowry and sati which was practised during medieval period are shown in this novel. This paper throws light on the socio cultural representation given by Amitav Ghosh in his novel 'Sea of Poppies'.

Key word-exploitation, indentured, migration, polygamy, discrimination, suppression

Introduction:

Literature is a form of human expression. Literature influence the society and society is reflected in literature at all languages and at all the time. There has been a close interaction between literature and society. Literature of any age cannot escape from the influence of the social scene. Therefore it is found that literature reflect the society when it is created. Literature also reflects the tendencies and concerns of the age, social conventions historical events, religious and political are reflected by the writer in the theme he chooses.

Chaucer's Canterbury tales reflects the society by the characters whether a knight the prioress, the monk the fat fryer, the sailor, the squire the priest all are truly representatives of their type in the contemporary society. He is a critic of his society.

Shakespeare in his plays dramas etc brings ghost, witches, conies and fools as per the liking of the people and a part of English society of his time. Alexander Pope's "rape of the lock" is a reflection of the society and pungent satire. Hence Pope is a reflector of the society of that age.

After the first world war Indian novelist like R.K. Narayana, Mulk Raj Anand were influenced by the ideologies that challenged colonialism and capitalism. The social, economic, religious and political problems drew the attention of the writers of the post independent era. Writers like Amitav Ghosh greatly influenced the political and cultural milieu of post independent India. His works reflect historical and social consciousness that goes side by side with colonialism.

Socio cultural theme in *sea of poppies*:-

It is a historical novel that happens in 1838 on the eve of opium war. the narrative begins with a arrival of a slave ship called Ibis with the abolition of the slave trade it was used for the transport of indentured coolies from Calcutta to the British colony of Mauritius. The people taken as indentured labours are no difference of caste, colour, religion, language as they move towards to the similar fate. They are tagged as "ship siblings" (356)

The novel is divided in to three part The land The river and the sea. the introduction of all the characters are seen in the first part of the land and in the second part the ship is moored in the river all the characters get into the ship with some destiny and the third part they get to Ibis to a new life that was waiting for them in Mauritius. Deeti is the first character of the novel a young uneducated innocent Brahmin mother in Bihar who faces sexual abuse from her own brother in law. Hukam Singh her husband who works in the Ghayipur opium factory was caught addicted to drugs. This addiction killed him. Deeti is saved from her husband's funeral pyre by Kalua the ox cart driver, an untouchable who falls in love with her. So both of them ran away from the family to save their life from the hands of their family members, so they boarded on the Ibis which is on its way to Mauritius. Deeti belongs to upper caste, Kalua to lower caste. Ghosh shows how caste system had an impact on 19th century and also the practise of sati shows the religious gender bias which was existing in the society. Mainly women are suffering silently in the hands of patriarchal code and system of society. Here Deeti who is living with her daughter Kabutri living an awful life, one day Deeti ran away with Kalua leaving her daughter to her aunt. The next generation women also suffers that is Kabutri, without the care and guidance of a mother. Deeti was saved by Kalua from sati when her husband Hukam Singh died. While she jumped into the

river Ganga , she had shed the body of the old Deeti, with the burden of its karma. The main character Deeti changed her name Aditi when she entered the Ibis as a new bride. When she eradicated her old name and life she became bold and problem solver, she fights for other people for their welfare, here we can see the socio political aspects in sea of poppies.

Another character Panlette daughter of a French botanist who is born on a boat of Jodu's father and her mother dies on the boat. she is bought up by jodu's mother like her own child. exploitation of women by men is shown by Ghosh through this character. Panlette is under the custody of Burnham after she is orphaned, but she is forced to sexual harassment by the respectable Mr.Brunham. Zachary is remained of his mother, a slave women, who was sexually exploited by her father, the white, plantation owner. she had told him know as a young girl of fourteen years she was unwilling to move , when old Mr.Reid told her to stop weeping and get over to the bed "It had still twisted him in a knot to hear his mother speak of that time in Mr.Reid's cabin in the wood's" (305)

Those incidents not only depict the exploitation of women but also the muteness of women in the society as Gayatrispivak pointedly observes. The status of widow women in India was shown in sea of poppies as a poignant picture of Deeti in resplendent white sari being carried to her husband's pyre to be burnt alive with him. She was dragged and brought to the remarriage, were the remarriage of the high caste widow is a sin. It was perceived as the defilement of the purity of their social status .The widow should spend her widowhood in loneliness.

The record of the affliction and humiliation to which Kalua is subjected speaks the pathos of an untouchable's existence in pre independent India.Kalua the ox cart driver of low caste truthfully portrayed the life of untouchables, they are treated as sub human and they were not allowed to have their dwelling inside the village. Kalua lived in the out skirts in the chamar-basti a group of huts inhabited by chamar's. It was a social taboo prevailed in those days. The hut were these people lived has no door. The door way of the hut is dark and low so that the untouchable has to stoop down for the high caste people in the society.

Inter caste marriage and inter religious marriage were considered as social taboos. Jodu , a Muslim is beaten to death when he is found with a Hindu girl, an out caste marring a women of high caste is considered as a crime more than a murder.

Superstition:

The novel also shows the superstitious belief and practices in the society in those days, fine example is Deeti. She believes that her brother kessrisingh was depicted by few strokes that

represented his rifle and moustache. To leave the dishes unwashed over night was believed to invite an invasion of ghosts and unclean food is considered to be inauspicious.

After the trade, Bruham carried many gift like, saffron and nuts. Another incident when Neel was taken to the court before that he was made to eat rich meals which composed of various auspicious fruits and vegetables, to clear his impure. The sweeper, toilet bucket and porters of night were considered to be the carriers of ill omen. Parimal even made sure that the constable who accompanied Neel were Hindus of the high caste.

Conclusion:

Ghosh had given a clear picture of the 19th century Indian society with its beliefs, customs, practices, social evils and problems like poverty, discrimination practised by upper caste people towards lower caste people. The novel also brings out the sufferings of female characters by men in this patriarchal society and keeps treating women in a secondary position.

