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## DEETI - THE METAPHOR IN AMITAV GHOSH'S *THE SEA OF POPPIES*

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### ABSTRACT

This paper titled, "DEETI - the metaphor in Amitav Ghosh's *The Sea of Poppies*", focuses on how the author, Amitav Ghosh, uses the character Deeti as a metaphor. Amitav Ghosh is a Serious historical and Fictional writer born in Calcutta in a Bengali family. His Father, Shailendra Chandra Ghosh a Military officer. Wife Deborah Baker, The author of Laura Riding biography *In Extremis: The Life of Laura Riding* (1993) and a senior editor at Little, Brown and Company. Ghosh became a faculty at Queens College, New York as Distinguished Professor in Comparative literature, also became a visiting professor at Harvard University. He came back to India, later he published the Ibis Trilogy. *Sea of Poppies* (2008), *River of Smoke* (2011), and *Flood of Fire* (2015). He was awarded the Padma Shri by The Indian Government and Elected as the Royal Society of Literature in 2009 and named a Ford Foundation Art of Challenge Fellow in 2015. In many subtle ways, the author tries to bring out the hidden sufferings of humanity. He talks about culture, race, history, people, war, suffering, and capitalism in a metaphorical manner in the novel. The author Ghosh portrays the female character Deeti though imaginary as a metaphor of caste, religion, life, and slavery. The character performs a variety of roles and found herself down stamped and rules. The character revenges back to find her new life. This character is used as a metaphorical tool to portray independence and slavery. The author creates a new dimension to nineteenth century people through the vision of the imaginary character Deeti.

Keywords: Metaphor, capitalism, independence, Amitav Ghosh

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### INTRODUCTION

*The Sea of Poppies* is the first part of the Ibis Trilogy. The next two parts are *The River of Smoke* and *Flood of Fire*. In the novel, *The Sea of Poppies*, Ghosh tries to bring out the lives and human suffering during

the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The novel speaks from the heart of the characters and elucidates the feelings felt by the common men and women during this tumultuous period. Ghosh tries to find the reality behind every historical moment and processes the objectives

through the imaginative characters. This is one reason why this novel can be called as the "History of Humanity." As a writer, Ghosh endeavours to recreate the life of ordinary people during the extraordinary historical times. In *The Sea of Poppies*, the author weaves a story of the Opium War and describes parts of the difficult times through the character, Deeti.

#### **DEETI – A METAPHOR**

Deeti, an imaginary character introduced by the author, is a young woman from a small village far from the East Coast. Deeti is married to Hukhum Singh, who served in the British army. His brother, Kesri Singh also served in the same battalion. Crippled Hukhum Singh leaves the army and joins the Opium Factory at Ghazipur.

Deeti plays an important role in this history-based novel. In fact, Deeti is metaphorically used to describe an individual's fight for freedom and independence. Though a caring mother and an efficient wife, Deeti faces lots of physical and emotional troubles at home. She is raped by her brother-in-law in the first night when he made her inhale Opium. Her husband is indifferent to her and her mother-in-law doesn't show her any love or affection. After her husband, Hukhum Singh dies, her brother-in-law tries to force her to accept him as a partner. Deeti, however, refuses to do so. As she doesn't accept Kesri Singh, she is forced to undergo Sati. Kaula, an untouchable man, from the neighbouring village helps Deeti escape Sati. He helps her board a ship that transports slaves from Mareech to Mauritius. Both Deeti and Kaula begin a new life after they board the ship. Hiding their real identity, they change their names. Deeti becomes Aditi, and Kaula becomes Maddow Colver. Deeti and Kaula, both escape the clutches of so-called culture and tradition to create their own lives.

There is a significance in the author choosing the name Aditi. According to the Hindu Mythology, Aditi means, "one who is a protector and wades away all sins". In that one name, the author tries to show Deeti as a protector and at the same time brings out the fact that she was running away from the social cruelty. Renaming Deeti as Aditi, Ghosh describes a

complex transformation from slavery to freedom. It shows the journey of personal change that happens in the travel from Meerich to Mauritius.

The Author metaphorically describes the change of the character of Deeti to Aditi. The change of name also shows the reality in history and the need for freedom in an individual.

"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 new destiny as she willed, with whom she chose... (SOP,178)"

Amitav Ghosh shows that Sati as a sacrifice is not a solution for any situation and death can never be honour to anyone.

In another metaphor, the author uses Kaula to describe the search for freedom. It is done in the scene when Kaula saves Deeti from Sati and takes her away to Calcutta.

"It was myself I saved today, he said in a whisper. Because if you had died, I couldn't have lived; jinda na rah sakela ..." (SOP,179)

In this scene, the author clearly depicts the two social evils – widow honour killing and the caste system. Here, the author brings out the two sides of human character. One side of character where jealous and cruel Deeti's relatives wanted to cast her into husband's burning pyre to bring honour to the family. On the other side is humanity - the compassion and kindness that Kaula shows towards Deeti, and helps her escape her brutal killing. The author also shows in this scene how people are exploited and made slaves.

In the later part of the novel, after Deeti escapes the slavery at home, she is portrayed as a migrant by the author. Deeti keeps moving from one place to another place. When she is in Varanasi, she bemoans her lost life and feels sad thinking about her child and dead ill husband. Though she feels lost without her family, she sculpts a new identity with Kaula's help. She takes small, but purposeful steps to become a bold and confident woman. The Grimitiyas people start looking upon her as their God.

### THE IBIS- A Carrier of Hope

The novel start with the lines:

"The vision of a tall masted ship, at sail on the ocean, came to Deeti on an otherwise ordinary day, but she knew instantly that the apparition was a sign of destiny for she had never seen a vessel before, not even in dream'... it was the Chasm of darkness where the Holy Ganga disappeared into the Kala-Pani, 'Black water'. (SOP,1)"

Deeti had a vision of going in a ship, and later her dream comes true when she travels to her freedom on the Ship Ibis. The author also uses the ship that carries Kaula and Deeti as a metaphor to describe the transformation from slavery to independence. He names the ship carrying slaves as "Ibis". The name Ibis refers to a sacred bird in ancient Egypt, which is associated with God Thoth. The Symbol is a connected with the moon and associated with arbitration, magic, writing, science and judging the dead. Moreover, Thoth was an Egyptian God who served as a mediator between the good and the bad making sure that neither of them were a decisive victor.

In the same way, the historical ship just served as a means of transportation for those who wanted to escape their personal and social problems to seek freedom. There was no judgement of their past or their future, whether good or bad. The people in the ship were traveling towards their destiny. Most of them were going to work as slaves in Mauritius, but there were also some people like Nob Kissin and Paulette, a French orphan, who were hopping to fulfil their professional dreams. The other characters, Zachery Reid, an American sailor, Neel Ratan, a wealthy rich zamindar, and Mr. Burnham travel in the Ibis carrying their joy and sorrows in their hearts as they journey towards their destination.

### CONCLUSION

Set in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, The Sea of Poppies is novel that combines history and literature with a realistic view of people and their suffering. The Sea of Poppies brings out gender identity, social identity, ethnic identity and national identity. Each of the characters in the novel creates a connect of their past

with the present. The memories, desires, and new associations take them towards their destination. The novel uses metaphor as a tool to bring out the suffering and pain of an individual. Ghosh here uses the character Deeti as a metaphor to show his views about the life of a woman in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The author weaves the lives of the imaginative characters into the historical events to bring out hidden truths. Using imagination, the author re-invents history and sheds light on the lives of the ordinary people. He uses metaphor to project the idea of freedom, individual independence and a need for identity. The ship Ibis and the Character Deeti are metaphors of the vehicle of transformation and the transformer, respectively.

"The Ibis was not a ship like any other; in her inward reality she was a vehicle of transformation, travelling through the mists of illusion towards the elusive, ever receding landfall that was Truth' ( SOP, 390).

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