

# A Postmodern Historiographic Metafictional Study of *Sea of Poppies*

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## ABSTRACT

This paper explores the deconstructive elements through historiographic metafiction in Amitav Ghosh's novel *Sea of Poppies*. Ghosh sheds light on colonial history of South Asia. He highlights the power structures in relation to the other subjects in *Sea of Poppies*. The power structures imposed many unjust tasks on the "other" subjugated subjects to maintain power. The novel narrates the history of the subaltern class of society thus decenters the metanarratives of over riding official documented history.

**KEYWORDS:** Historiographic metafiction, Deconstruction, Metanarratives, Mininarratives

*Article Received: 10 August 2020, Revised: 25 October 2020, Accepted: 18 November 2020*

## INTRODUCTION

This study explores the deconstruction of history in *Sea of Poppies*. The works of fiction deconstruct the traditional authoritative history and record the occluded histories of the marginal class of society. They provide an alternative idea of "histories" and present a space for investigation and exploration of the subjugated groups that suffered due to colonization. Fiction deconstructs history through different literary tools such as metafiction, parody and intertextuality. Linda Hutcheon claims that both history and fiction signify systems, discourses and human construct. She asserts in her book *A Poetics of Postmodernism*:

Historiographic metafiction refutes the natural or common-sense methods of distinguishing between historical fact and fiction. It refutes the view that only history has a truth claim, both by questioning the ground of that claim in historiography and by asserting that both history and fiction are discourses, human constructs, signifying systems. (93)

Postmodern historiographic metafiction questions the Eurocentric forms and kinds of knowledge which are completely based on ethnocentric cultural and ideological assumptions. The excavation of the mini narratives creates new knowledge and challenges the

authoritative conventional supremacy of occident over historical records. The insertion of *petit recits* (mini narratives) into history broadens the horizon of remembered past knowledge and, at the same time, brings to the fore previously overlooked histories. In the traditional historical accounts, while one story is exposed or recorded countless histories remain silent and doomed to be buried untold and lost. The excavation of the untold past has a healing effect as it talks about the lost inheritance of the subjugated subjects thus resists the dominating discourses. The postmodern historiographic metafiction opens space for the multiple mini narratives which enable the multiple "silenced" and "othered" voices from different cultures to be heard. Linda Hutcheon postulates:

History is not made obsolete: it is, however, being rethought-as a human construct. And in urging that history doesn't exist except as text, it does not stupidly and "gleefully" deny that the past existed, but only that its accessibility to us now is entirely conditioned by textuality. (*The Politics of Postmodernism* 16)

The notion about the past is always subjective as it involves subjective acts and factors such as the selection, construction, and evaluation of specific past events. Thus, Historiographic Metafiction asserts

that historical meanings do not lie in the events rather in the systems which subjectively construct them for ideological purposes.

### Postmodernist Narrative of History

Postmodernism is marked with different prognosis “ends” such as the end of grand narratives, end of ideology and end of all convictions, philosophies and beliefs which were once considered enduring. The endist thinking is one of the most striking characteristics of postmodern culture. The strong belief in history as a progressive tool is dismantled in the postmodern era as postmodernism deconstructs the metanarrative of history and claims diverse multiple approaches to history. To Fredric Jameson, an American critic, postmodernity is marked by crisis and loss of history, and this maddening condition “determines a series of spasmodic and intermittent, but desperate, attempts at recuperation” (xi). Postmodernism shows cynicism about extended narratives of history and linearity of the historical actions and events. It draws attention to the culturally subjective historical knowledge and affirms that it is a cultural and personal human construct which is not the only reliable source of information about the past. The validity of universal history as an objective truth, will of power and a grand narrative for progress is rejected in postmodern era. Postmodernism not only denounces the meta narrative of history but also the cultural and universal ideological perspectives which history has elaborated and penned. Foucault regards history as an instrument and tool of power. Foucault notes in his book *L’archéologie du Savoir* that knowledge indeed is power and the production of knowledge (science and history) involves the power of society in so many ways. Hence, power operates in society in different ways through the institutionalized discourse which produces knowledge. Foucault’s dictum of history is diversity of discourse; historical events and facts exist as discursive practices imposed by the narrative powers. In discourse, power works strongly and some of the discourses which dominate our world determine the truth and meaning of our society. Other discourses, which get subjugated and marginalized, are equally important and provide another version of truth in postmodernism. According to Foucault, history can never be objective as it involves the subjectivity of the historian, as well as, the cultural context. Foucault notes that the historians should concentrate primarily on the linguistic medium instead of the pretention of recording the objective truth of the world. He notes “Language occupied a fundamental situation in relation to all knowledge: it was only by the medium of language

that the things of the world could be known” (The Order of Things 322). The history, according to Foucault, is understandable not through its content but by the structure of language which creates meaning. It is within language that the relations of power /subordination and domination are established. History is mostly constructed by the hegemonic power structures, therefore, postmodernists deconstruct the totalizing nature of historical truth and follow Foucault’s notion of history as a system of language of the socially created relationship among words and things. Postmodernism challenges the certitude of traditional power structures and the social hierarchies which focus on the meta narratives. Science, history, and reason. The grand narratives are used to exploit, suppress and subjugate cultures and people who did not share the same perspective of the world. Postmodernism rejects the totalitarian narratives as they impose a single vision of the world and universality over pluralism. Postmodernists claim to democratize history and acknowledge the differences and otherness. They deny the totalitarian approach of the grand narrative of history and attempt to produce histories that raise the voice of subjugated silenced class of society which were ignored in conventional authoritarian history. Postmodernists challenge the conventional methods of historical narration and highlight the heterogeneous perspective of historical records. The search for truth, according to postmodernism, is a western illusion, as truth is never discovered but constructed as a human fabrication, always conventional and relative and constantly changes with the passage of time, never absolute and static. The incredulity towards grand narratives in this way doesn’t mean the end and death of history rather give rise to a proliferation of narrations and stories. Postmodernist history calls for deconstruction and destabilizes the unilateral historical records.

### Manifestation of Historical Discourse

There is the insertion of the colonial discourse in *Sea of Poppies* that highlights the historical time when the colonizers came in direct contact with the colonized and the devastating influence of the colonizers on the colonial subjugated subjects was clearly visible. The inhabitants of Ghazipur represent the history of economic subjugation of the colonial subjects by the British colonizers. The British trading company forced the natives to stop the cultivation of staple food items and rather cultivate poppies. The whole community of Ghazipur used to cultivate poppies which were used by the British companies for a profitable opium trade. Ghosh brings to the fore the transformation of feudal suppression of the subjugated subject into the imperialist subjugation

and exploitation. Poppies symbolized both misery and contentment as the production of poppies distorted the whole agricultural system but, at the same time, it was a means of livelihood for the natives under the colonial rule. Ghosh explicitly recaptures the agricultural subjugation and exposes both the roles of British colonizers as well as the native elites who get pleasure from the economic rewards by getting involvement in such tasks. This is depicted in Neel Rattan's and his late father's portrayal of luxurious life in consequence of gaining benefits gained from opium production. Deeti, a subjugated character, joins the profitable business of opium/poppies, lives in a thatched shed with a very little amount of food, and Raja Neel, the hereditary Rakshali *zamindar*, gains profit, and the major portion of the profit was consumed by the British merchant Mr. Burnham. Ghosh questions the traditional history as he brings to light the discriminative attitude of the colonizers with the indigenous labor class and nobility. The moment the natives resisted they had to bear the severe consequences. The trial of Raja Neel Rattan in the court is an explicit example of the colonial subjugation as Justice Kenddalbushe accuses Neel for an undone crime and says:

A man in the first rank of native society, whose sole intention is to increase his wealth at the expense of his fellows? How is society to judge a forger who is also a man of education, enjoying all the comforts that affluence can bestow, whose property is so extensive as to exalt him greatly above his compatriots, who is considered a superior being, almost a deity, among his own kind? How dark an aspect does the conduct of such a man assume when for the sake of some petty increase to his coffers, he commits a crime that may bring ruin to his own kinsmen, dependents and inferiors? Would it not be the duty of this court to deal with such a man in exemplary fashion, not just in strict observance of law, but also to discharge that sacred trust that charges us to instruct the natives of this land in the laws and usages that govern the conduct of civilized nations? (249)

Amitav Ghosh exposes colonial subjugation at different levels as the trial of Neel in the court is totally unjust and the discourse of power turns the whole scenario against Neel making him feel guilty for an undone guilt and crime. Neel is accused of the crime of forgery and is punished in a very cruel way because he did not submit to the will of Mr.

Burnham. "A man in the first rank of native society, whose sole intention is to increase his wealth at the expense of his fellows?" This interrogative sentence ironically refers to the history of colonization from the perspective of the subjugated subjects. Neel Rattan is a nobleman who is unable to resist superiority of the colonizers which they maintained through different strategies. Justice Kenddalbushe uses religious discourse to maintain his power as he blames Neel for both ethical and religious crime. His words *A man in the first rank* are ironical as Kenddalbushe and Burnham are the ones who occupy properties by hook or by crook at the expense of the native blood. Neel Rattan is blamed for an undone crime which exemplifies the colonial unjust acts.

The relationship among the subjugated native, elite native and the colonizers is highlighted by Amitav Ghosh in *Sea of Poppies*. Neel Rattan as a native elite is also treated in the same way by the colonizers as they used to treat the peasant class. Neel's character is very much representative of Achebe's "man of two worlds" as he illustrates in his *Colonialist Criticism* that the colonialist:

created the 'man of two worlds' theory to prove that no matter how much the native was exposed to European influences he could never truly absorb them; like Pester John he would always discard the mask of civilization when the crucial hour came and reveal his true face. (qtd. in Ashcroft 58)

Although Neel is highly educated and well versed, yet he fails to fall in the category of favorites because he shows resistance against Mr. Burnham which makes him bear severe consequence. Ghosh ironically rewrites the history of colonization in the Indian subcontinent and sheds light on the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized by focusing on the colonized subject. Justice Kenddalbushe's words "How dark an aspect does the conduct of such a man assume when for the sake of some petty increase to his coffers" highlight the justice system in the Indian subcontinent. The word *dark* used by Justice Kenddalbushe is ironic as it is used for Neel but indicates Kenddalbushe's and Burnham's unfair and unjust conducts. Ghosh ironically illustrates the history of judicial system in the colonized Indian subcontinent where the natives suffered at the hands of the colonizers.

*Sea of Poppies* is a mental representation of both the colonizer and the colonized in a blatant manner. The colonizers tamed the native mind with a hegemonic strategy through the use of discourse. Justice

Kendalbushe uses the religious discourse to accuse Neel Rattan, he exalts himself and devalues Neel by the use of religious discourse as he says “but also to discharge that sacred trust that charges us to instruct the natives of this land in the laws and usages that govern the conduct of civilized nations?” The words *sacred trust, civilized nations* and *us* draw a boundary between the colonizers and the colonized. Ghosh, on the one hand, shows the way native is made “other” in the colonial process and then deconstructs the binaries of us and them by raising the native voice in *Sea of Poppies*.

Amitav Ghosh recaptures the punishment and torture given to the colonized by the colonizers in his narration. The native peasants are forced to cultivate poppies and the labor in the opium factory destroys their health. The laborers in the opium factory suffer a lot and are paid a very little amount of money. Ghosh presents a glimpse of the opium factory workers as they are intoxicated by the smell of poppies and are supposed to be very much vigilant as the English officers keep an eye on them and use the worst ways to punish in case of negligence. The inhuman labor condition of the native workers in the opium factory gets relected through one of the main characters Deeti who visits Ghazipur opium factory to take her unwell husband. Children work in the opium factory too and bear the same torture as Deeti experiences during her visit when “suddenly one of them indeed dropped their ball [of opium] sending it crashing to the floor, where it burst open, splattering its gummy contents everywhere. Instantly the offender was set upon by cane-wielding overseers and his howls and shrieks went echoing through the vast, chilly chamber” (97). The context shows the colossal torture and inhuman working conditions in the opium factory that simply benefit the colonizers.

Ghosh represents the physical subjugation of all classes in *Sea of Poppies*. *There is the* subjectivation of natives by the colonizers, subjectivation of the subjugated class by the native elites and subjectivation of women by men. Neel and Ah Fatt belong to the elite class but undergo physical tortures too. The way Neel’s forehead is tattooed with the word forgery is an inhuman treatment. Mr. Crowle’s behavior with Neel and Ah Fatt is completely bestial as he plays with them and asks both to urinate on each other. Mr. Crowle’s ill-treatment with the lascars is highlighted by Amitav Ghosh to represent the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. The way he treats a lascar and punishes him because he mistakenly threw a little gravy shows a real picture of colonization. Moreover, Ghosh

illustrates the ill-treatment of the native by the elite natives as Kalua is exploited sexually by them.

The physical subjugation of the colonized subjects is represented by Ghosh in *Sea of Poppies* through the mental representations of the colonized subjects in relationship to the colonizers. The colonizers with a superior notion of “self” degrade and punish natives badly. Mr. Crowle’s punishments to the native for the minute things are a striking example of this fact as he punishes one of the lascars just because he mistakenly threw gravy and had to embrace death in a penalty. Ghosh deconstructs the Euro-centric discourse by bringing in the cruel and dark side of the picture of colonial history.

### Manifestation of Religious Discourse

*Sea of Poppies* brings to light different aspects of the colonial era in the Indian subcontinent. It illustrates the religious discourse which was used as a tool to subjugate the native. Ghosh represents the subjugation of the native by the colonial authorities by using religious discourse as a tool to determine the hierarchy of class and caste within the native society. The character of an untouchable Kalua is portrayed ironically as he is representative of the caste system in the Indian subcontinent. Ghosh elucidates the exploitation of the colonized since the colonizers supported the class and caste practices as these were beneficial for maintaining their dominance. Ghosh ironically illustrates Kalua’s character and postulates “Kalua, the driver of an ox cart, was a giant of a man, but he made no move to help his passenger and was careful to keep his face hidden from him: he was of the leather-workers caste and Hukam Singh, as a high caste Rajput, believed that the sight of his face would be ill for the day ahead”. The caste system in the Indian subcontinent was used as a tool against the natives for dominance as Crowle beats Jodu a Muslim to death for the crime of being involved with a Hindu girl which was prohibited in both Muslim and Hindu religions (Jain 4). In the same vein, Crowle supported Bhyro Singh to flog sixty lashes to Kalua as it was supported as a religious duty because Kalu was accused of the crime of elopement with Deeti while she was about to perform *Satti*. Crowle, the British captain of *Ibis*, knew certainly that flogging will kill Kalua but still he supports Bhyro Singh just to maintain his dominance. Singha postulates that the “Colonizers constructed their knowledge of indigenous tradition in ways which conformed and extended relations of domination and subordination” (Preface xi). Ghosh elucidates the function of religious discourse in power maintenance. The opium war of China is another striking example of this fact as Mr. Burnham

legitimizes it through the use of religious discourse and replies to Neel Rattan:

The antidote for addiction lies not in bans enacted by parliaments and emperors, but in the individual conscience—in everyman’s awareness of his personal responsibility and his fear of God. As a Christian nation this is the single most important lesson we can offer to China—and I have no doubt that the message would be welcomed by the people of that unfortunate country . . . merchants like myself are but the servants of free trade, which is immutable as God’s commandments. (122)

Ghosh traces the history of opium trade between China and British India in *Sea of Poppies*. He highlights the power of discourse through which the whole process of colonization took place. Mr. Burnham’s character is representative of the British East India Company as he uses religious discourse to *naturalize* the trade of opium. The words *as a Christian nation* are used to construct the binary of us and them between the European and other religions. Mr. Burnham as a producer of this dominated discourse constructs ideology of the Occident as a superior standard entity. Ghosh rewrites history to resist the colonial discourse to regulate harmony and balance in society.

Ghosh highlights the mental images of us and them which are constructed through the discourse of power. The subjugated subjects in this scenario are the Indian natives. The Opium War benefited England for many years in the form of the Treaty of Nanking (1832). The war was legitimized by the use of religious discourse for material benefits. Mr. Burnham is shown ironically as a true representative of the colonizers who maintain power through the use of discourse.

### **Manifestation of Feminist Discourses: Gendering Historical Narrative**

The postmodern critics postulate that the grand narrative silences and excludes women activities, voices, and experiences from history and uses history as a tool to sustain its patriarchal hegemony over female. According to the critics, the dominant culture privileges male voices and excludes female voices by considering them insignificant. Postmodern Historiographic metafiction questions the validation of the documented history for excluding female agency. Seyla Benhabib discusses the silence and exclusion of both women and the colonized in historical discourse and highlights the commotion of difference through silencing and exclusion as she asserts “we need only remember Hegel’s belief that

Africa has no history. Until very recently neither did women have their own history, their own narrative with different categories of periodization and with different structural regularities” (213). The traditional history records the accounts of great men and their heroic deeds which indicate a central position of men in history while women are absent or shown through man’s perspective. The work of fiction deconstructs such hegemonic centrism of man and raises the subjugated women voices of history. The fictional writers attack the authoritative historical discourse which is constructed as a grand narrative to support patriarchy and male domination. The postmodernist writers deconstruct and challenge all meta narratives including the traditional metanarrative of history for its hegemonic centrism. The woman is presented as “other” in the historical meta narratives by the dominant ideologies which is deconstructed by the postmodern writers by using different tools such as intertextuality, parody and metafiction. These writers bring in multiple competing voices from history to deconstruct the role of the center and to raise the subjugated voices. The notion of women as silenced object is discussed by many critics and theorists. Simon de Beauvoir in her work *The Second Sex* discusses the condition of women in society and the way she is constructed as an object by the dominant male discourse as she says “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (295). She actually means that it is not that the women are insignificant by birth, rather their identity is socially constructed. Helen Cixous asserts the same notion that female identity is constructed by the male dominating discourse to maintain dominance over women. According to Cixous, the binary of men and women shows women as marginalized objects. The feminist critics postulate that the historical documents are the records of the great men in which women are always silenced or represented through male gaze as Scott asserts in his work:

Feminists have long criticized traditional accounts of the past for excluding women: they have provided supplements to existing histories, and replacements as well. They have offered critical analyses of the reasons for women’s exclusion. They have argued that attention to women would not only provide new information, but expose the limits of histories written only from the perspective of men. (Scott 12)

The postmodern writers deconstruct the domination of the center and provide agency to women voice by narrating history through fiction.

*Sea of Poppies* deconstructs history and raises subjugated voices at different levels through intertextuality. Amitav Ghosh manifests the feminist discourse in the historical narrative of the colonial era in British subcontinent. Ghosh sheds light on the critical condition of women who were doubly colonized by both the British colonizers as well as the native patriarchal society. *Sea of Poppies* revisits the ceaseless movement of people, and highlights the lives of subjugated class whose history is framed against the meta narrative of history. Ghosh's narrative deconstructs the binary classification and provides due space to the female characters. Deeti's character is a striking example of suffering as she suffers in her conjugal life and maltreated by the *memshabis*. Through Deeti's character Ghosh raises the issues of women in Indian subcontinent as Deeti's whole life has been a kind of suffering since her childhood. Deeti is shown married to an addict man Hukam Singh without her will and consent. Her marriage is a kind of business agreement and she pays for it by thatching her husband's roof in dowry which highlights the dowry system in the Indian subcontinent. The most critical incident of her life is the one when she fails to identify the real father of her child. The turmoil within Deeti's mind keeps her silent as she is unable to speak. Ghosh makes the subjugated woman speak in *Sea of Poppies* by exposing their feelings and emotions. On her wedding night, Deeti is deceived by both her husband and in laws as they envelop her in darkness, make her taste opium and in her intoxicated state she gets raped by her brother in law. Though she gets deceived and deserted by Hukam Singh she still nurses him and sells all her belongings for his treatment and cure. Her brother in law harasses and threatens her for which she raises her voice when he proposes her:

Your husband and I are brothers after all, of the same flesh and blood. Where is the shame? Why should you waste your looks and your youth on a man who cannot enjoy them? Besides, the time is short while your husband is still alive-if you conceive a son while he is still living, he will be his father's rightful heir. Hukam Singh's land will pass to him and no one will have the right to dispute it. But you know yourself that as things stand now, my brother's land and his house will become mine on his death. *Jekar khet, tekhar dhan*-he who owns the land, owns the rice. When I become master of this house, how will you get by except at my pleasure? (Ghosh 165)

Ghosh's fiction reflects oppression on woman and deconstructs the dominant discourse by giving dominance to the female characters. *Sea of Poppies* narrates the buried stories of the past and highlights the silenced voice of the subjugated class. In *Sea of Poppies* Ghosh gives agency to absence and polyphonies with multiple competing voices. Ghosh subverts the dominant discourse as he raises the issues of different subjugated groups and deconstructs the hegemonic centrism. He shows the suppression and subjugation of a poor subjugated female character Deeti who is subjugated in each and every walk of life. Chandan Singh harasses Deeti and tries to exploit her physically by different ways as he offers her to have sexual relation with him so that Deeti conceive an heir that can be given Hukam Singh's name as was done in Kabutri's case. The character of Chandan Singh is a true representative of dominating patriarchal society of Indian subcontinent in the colonial era.

Ghosh rewrites history in his fiction to highlight the previously absent characters. In his narration, the history is never a story of "great man" but a representative of multiple voices. In the above stated lines, Ghosh illustrates the hegemony of the dominant patriarchal discourse as Chandan Singh says, "Your husband and I are brothers after all, of the same flesh and blood. Where is the shame?" He legitimizes the illegitimate act by the power of discourse as he says that the wife may have a sexual relation with husband or his brother as they belong to the same family. She couldn't raise her voice against the tyranny of the cruel rape committed by Chandan Singh on her wedding night. Instead of helping Deeti to take care of dying Hukam Singh, Chandan Singh's concern is to get hold of Deeti's physical being. He threatens her for being deprived of the property of her husband.

The discursive practices are highlighted by Ghosh to show the power of the discourse which constructs Deeti's character as a subjugated female. Deeti is a subjugated subject; but even then she raises her voice both verbally and nonverbally against the tyranny. Ghosh represents the conflict which goes on in Deeti's mind, First when she takes revenge by mixing opium in her mother in law's food and secondly she prefers death over being exploited sexually by Chandan Singh as "she knew she would not be able to make her own body obey the terms of bargain, even if she were to accede it . . . listen to my words: I will burn on my husband's pyre rather than give myself to you"(165). Deeti's subjugation results in resistance and she raises her voice against the dominant discourse and prefers to die right at the

same moment with her husband instead of being exploited. Deeti's decision is ridiculed by Chandan Singh with a superior and authoritative tone as he says "Do you think it's easy for a worthless woman like you to die as *Sati*? Have you forgotten that your body ceased to be pure on the day of your wedding?" Ghosh decentres the role of "great man" in the historical narratives. Ghosh illustrates the mental representations of both Chandan Singh and Deeti as Chandan Singh considers her unsuitable for *Sati* and at the same time, tries to exploit her for his sexual pleasures. The characters of Deeti and Chandan Singh in this scenario highlight the friction between the center and the margin which are mere constructions of the powerful dominant discourses. Ghosh brings in multiple voices of history to highlight the discursive practices which create the negative image of the subjugated ones.

Women are shown suppressed and subjugated in the colonial and patriarchal set up. *Sea of Poppies* highlights the various ways by which women are exploited: sexually, physically, mentally and economically. Ghosh undermines the dominant patriarchal discourse in two ways as he draws a comparison between the ways women are exploited by both natives and the colonizers. The character of Paulette is representative of the first wave of feminism as she has a French background and she was suppressed by her foster English family. Paulette was brought up in Bengal so she was more fluent in Indian language and comfortable in Indian dress as compared to French language and dress but was forced to be a "memsahib" and behave in English ways. The religious teaching of Bible was the main component in the transformation process of Paulette to be a memsahib. Mr. Burnham teaches her Bible and interprets the religious discourse for his personal sexual pleasures. Paulette wants to join Ibis just to get rid of the sexual assault as she narrates the whole scenario about the religious teaching of Mr. Burnham to Zachary Reid:

And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, ox, and sheep, and ass, with the edge of sword. Then he put the *jharu* in my hands and said: "I am the city and this your sword. Strike me, smite me, and burn me with your fire." He knelt, as always, with his face at my feet and his poop-deck in the air. How he squirmed and squealed when I flailed the broom upon his rear. (315)

Ghosh destabilizes the historical official discourse by giving voice to female subjugated characters from

different classes of the Indian subcontinent. Mr. Burnham uses the religious discourse for his own personal pleasures and exploits Paulette in the name of religion. He quotes Biblical verses and interprets them in his own way just to get sexual pleasure out of Paulette. In the sacred mission of civilizing the subjugated ones, Mr. Burnham naturalizes and legitimizes his act by connecting it to religion. He asks Paulette to punish him for his wrong deeds so that he could be chastened but, in fact, he simply exploits her for sensual pleasure.

Mr. Burnham is engaged in the sacred task of civilizing others by dividing the world into binary pairs. Paulette is a character who is taken in terms of "white man's burden" to be civilized. Paulette is more Indian in her ways of life as she gets influenced by Jodu and his mother. She feels comfortable and good to be in Indian dresses as her craving for Indian dress *Sari* is so high that she tries to wear it at night when there is no one in her room. After knowing the *serpent inside man* she tries to escape the place and asks Zachary Reid and Jodu to permit her to join Ibis. Ghosh shows the oppression on women in Indian subcontinent by both colonizers and natives. Gender functions in the society in the same complex and pervasive way as the system of subjugation and oppression. Eckert in his work *The Whole Woman: Sex and Gender Differences in Variation* says:

Whereas the power relations between men and women are similar to those between dominated and subordinated classes and ethnic groups, the day to day context in which these power relations are played out is quite different. It is not a cultural norm for each working class individual to be paired up for life with a member of the middle class or for every black person to be so paired up for life with a white person. However, our traditional gender ideology dictates just this kind of relationship between men and women. (253–254)

Ghosh raises the voice of a female subjugated oppressed subject in his *Sea of Poppies* and shows the specific inhuman way by which a woman is harassed and exploited against the norms of society. The way Deeti prefers death over a sexual assault and Paulette's escape into Ibis from the English foster family are the striking examples of Women agency. Ghosh provides agency to the subjugated characters in his fiction and deconstructs the meta narrative through intertextuality.

### Manifestation of Environmental Discourse

*Sea of Poppies* an amalgamation of multiple competing voices which resist against the system of domination. Ghosh elucidates the impact of dominance and oppression on both the marginalized natural environment and human beings. The suppression of the natural environment during the process of colonization created trauma in the marginalized groups. Ghosh highlights the tyranny on the earth which is associated with the lives of humans. Ghazipur village is negatively affected by colonization. The population of Ghazipur is deprived of land and is forced to cultivate opium which damages both the natural environment and its inhabitants. O'Brien argues in the same vein in his work "Reading Eco criticism in a Postcolonial Context" that "the process of colonialism was fuelled by a desire for an unmediated possession of the world—with devastating cultural and environmental consequences"(177). Ghosh shows the function of the dominant culture which controls the physical environment and land through different strategies such as land appropriation, industrialization, agriculture which inflict cultural trauma and a sense of displacement on the native marginalized subjects. The land is taken by the colonizers with a hegemonic centrism to harvest resources but, in fact, they exploit those resources for their own benefits, assemble a cheap labor force, pollute water and land with the plantation of poppies and stripe and streak the land. Ghosh's fiction exposes hegemony through which the colonizers deprive the native of the very sense of belonging and make it difficult for them to produce food on their lands. Deeti narrates the whole story regarding the plantation of Poppies to her daughter Kabutri in which she talks about the hegemonic control of the colonizers through which they occupied the land and used it for their own benefits. Ghosh illustrates the disparity in ecology on human and non-human objects which was caused by the opium cultivation. The characters in the novel are shown severely affected by the opium plantation as Ghosh says:

It happened at the end of winter, in a year when the poppies were strangely slow to shed their petals: for mile after mile, from Benares onwards, the Ganga seemed to be flowing between twin glaciers, both its banks being blanketed by thick drifts of white – petalled flowers. It was as if the snows of the high Himalayas had descended on the plains to await the arrival of Holi and its springtime profusion of color. (3)

The given text provides a glimpse of Indian subcontinent under the colonial rule. Natives were

forced to cultivate opium instead of other eatable crops and the whole valley was flowing with white opium petals. The quote "for mile after mile, from Benares onwards, the Ganga seemed to be flowing between twin glaciers, both its banks being blanketed by thick drifts of white – petaled flowers" highlights the colonial strategies through which they ruled the Indian subcontinent. Cultivation of opium disturbed the harmonious pattern of the native life completely as the edible food crops cultivation was replaced by the opium cultivation. The edible food did not only provide them food but stuff for building roof as well. Things which were available previously became expensive because of the cash crop (opium) cultivation. The expensive life made the native suffer from hunger and forced them to migrate to Mauritius. Ghosh highlights the devastating effects of colonial rule which destroyed the whole ecological system. The land, environment and animals are also shown as subjugated subjects in this discourse as they are the tools through which the colonizers maintained their supremacy. Kalua the untouchable gives opium to his ox so that it gets relaxed, in the same way, the harmful effect of opium is shown on the butterflies too as Ghosh says, "The sap seemed to have a pacifying effect on the butterflies, which flapped their wings in oddly erratic patterns, as though they could not remember how to fly. One of these landed on the back of Kabutari's hand and would not take wing until it was thrown up in the air(28). Ghosh furthers illustrates the destructive effect of opium on monkeys in the vicinity of English opium factory. The affected monkeys could not chat and fight like other monkeys because of the drowsiness produced by opium. They could only come down from the tress to eat and climb up again "When they came down from the trees it was to lap at the sewers that drained the factory's effluents; after having sated their cravings, they would climb back into the branches to resume their scrutiny of the Ganga and its currents (91). Ghosh traces multiple versions of history *Sea of Poppies* and raises the voices of the subjugated human and non-human beings.

Amitav Ghosh represents the human and non-human entities in the social setup of colonial era in the Indian subcontinent. The ecological context is highlighted ironically by Amitav Ghosh as both the human and non-human objects were highly affected by the colonial rule. The colonizers controlled the natural objects in the Indian subcontinent. The cultivations were controlled in a forceful manner and the native subjects were forced to cultivate opium for the benefits of the colonizers. The excess of one specific crop, opium, disturbed the ecological environment and resulted in a disturbed life of the



natives. The river bank was filled with *opium gharas* from English opium factory and the presence of opium infected the sea life too and made it easy for the fisherman to hunt fishes as Ghosh says, "This stretch of river bank was unlike any other, for the *ghats* around the Carcanna were shored up with thousands of broken earthenware *gharas*- the round-bottomed vessels in which raw opium was brought to the factory. The belief was widespread that fish were more easily caught after they had nibbled at the shards, and as a result the bank was always crowded with fishermen"(92).The fishes and the water of Ganga were both polluted by the influence of opium which resulted in many health problems experienced by the inhabitants of the native land.

### Parodic Rewriting in *Sea of Poppies*

Linda Hutcheon argues that parody is one of the most striking elements of postmodernism. It is paradoxical in nature as it subverts and incorporates the object of parody at the same time. Postmodern parody is neither de-historicizing nor ahistorical but rather shows how the present representations originate from past and what ideologies derive from both difference and continuity. It is concerned with the multiplicity of truths as Hutcheon postulates about Salman Rushdie's *Shame* and traces history of Pakistan and India in the novel which is written in the discourse of colonizers as the narrator puts that he is forced by history to write in English (qtd. in Hutcheon 108).Hutcheon argues that the historical tradition of writing has made fiction superior to history as it is about the representations of particular societies.Postmodern Historiographic parody demarginalizes literature thematically and formally by confronting history. Postmodern parody suggests that to re-produce and rewrite past in fiction is to open it to the present in order to stop it from being decisive and conclusive. According to Hutcheon,Susan Daitch's *LC* is a novel which parodies past in a self-conscious way with double layered reconstruction of past. Daitch's protagonist, Lucienne Crozier, is shown as the witness of 1848 historical revolution of Paris as a marginalized character (qtd. in Hutcheon 110).Coover's novel *The Public Burning* shows "history itself depends on conventions of narrative, language, and ideology in order to present an account of "what really happened" (Mazurek 29). Postmodern Historiographic parody rewrites history through fiction in a

subversive way and brings a different version of truth, as Doctorow says "history is kind of fiction in which we live and hope to survive, and fiction is a kind of speculative history . . . by which the available data for the composition is seen to be greater and more various in its sources than the historian supposes" (25).

*Sea of Poppies* makes a connection between present and past by rewriting the history of the colonial era in the Indian subcontinent. Ghosh's narrative world highlights the dejection, displacement and dislocation of the characters who suffer injustice and inequality. Ghosh records the history of mid-nineteenth-century Indian subcontinent, British imperialism, Opium War and the migration of the Indians to the Mauritius Island. The Britishers entered India as The East India Trading Company in 1708 and by 1757 AD gradually became the larger ruling group of the Indian subcontinent, Sri Lanka and Burma.During the two hundred years of rule many forms of subjugations and suppression were forced upon the native subjects which resulted in the change of livelihood and traditions.Gosh narrates the history of Indian subcontinent where the traditional feudal system changed into *zamindari* system in which the tax collector was the proprietor of the land. The natives were forced to change the agricultural production from wheat to opium.

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