

## RELIGION AND NATURE IN AMITAV GHOSH'S SEA OF POPPIES

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### Abstract

*From the beginning of civilization, one can observe the existence of religion. It is remarkable that every religion, in one way or another is close to nature. Amitav Ghosh is a writer, who makes this fact very much noticeable through his novels. This paper examines, Amitav Ghosh's novel, sea of poppies with the perceptive of the connection of nature with religion. The novel sea of poppies is set in the year 1837, when England was ruling India and the illegal trade of opium was on its peak. On the backdrop of this circumstance, Amitav Ghosh weaves a story of Deeti, a simple village lady in Bihar and her lower caste lover and husband Kalua, a bankrupt Zamindar, a convict of forgery and a prisoner Raja Neel Ratan Haldar, a few other indentured labors on the ship Ibis and its second mate Zachary Reid and an orphan white girl Paulette. All these characters belong to different places, different culture and different religions. But destiny and nature brings them all together on the ship Ibis, which is headed to Mauritius. Culture and religion is an asset to the characters of the novel, as was the atmosphere at that time in India. The characters of the novel specially Deeti and baboo Nob Kissin are firm believers of Hinduism, and nature is the medium that connects them to their religious believes. Because of these believes, the story takes multiple turns and twists. People on the ship were afraid to go to a place which was so very unfamiliar and unknown to them. Also Hinduism forbids them to cross the black water. All these suspicions, fears as well as their zeal to get out of their miserable lives take the story in a different direction. Finally nature split them all, and each individual met their own diverse destiny. Amitav Ghosh is said to be a nature writer and how nature is the very base of any religion is very much evident in this book.*

**Key words:** Nature, Hinduism, Culture, Opium Trade, Indentured Labors, religion

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Religion and culture could be said to be the basic norms that plays a major role in binding the people of a community. In every community there are some basic religious and cultural traits which are to be followed to maintain acceptance in the public. If one tries to look deeply around these traits it could be found that these rituals or religious practices are often very much connected to nature. Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* is one such novel that very effectively brings out the connection of religious beliefs and nature as well as its soothing effects on the psyche of the characters of the novel who are in deep distress.

*Sea of poppies* is a story written on the backdrop of opium trade prevailed in India in early nineteenth century. The main character with which the story starts is Deeti and she is a simple, religious, ordinary Bihari(Indian) lady. The story starts with Deeti doing her daily religious practice of taking bath in the holy river Ganga and praying to the God Sun. just then she saw the ship Ibis which is going to play a major role in her life. Somehow the sight of the ship makes her predict that this ship is going to be a part of her life. Deeti has a habit of making drawing on the wall of her shrine, which are, she thinks a sign from God. She makes the drawing of the Ibis too in her shrine. Deeti is an ordinary village girl, who got married early, have a sick husband and a daughter, whom she loves earnestly. But she has no support from husband and she is financially unstable. As the story progresses, one can observe that these cultural traits are the things which keep her vital and confident. Praying nature as Sun, Moon, River even Trees makes her feel directly connected to the almighty which make her realize the importance of herself. It gives her confidence and zeal to live. Other than Deeti there are many characters in the novel who feel the same way about their culture and their religion. Raja Neel Ratan for instance is very religious person. He had to go through a lot of miseries in his life. He got bankrupt, he was accused of forgery and was forced to leave his land, his country and go to Jail. He was another man who was travelling on the Ibis. All the pain, humiliation and predicament of his life somewhat took his will to live any longer, but when he was going on that ship away from his own land, he saw a

temple from far away. He used to do his daily prayers there. He could see the sight of his land getting away and away from him. And that is when he decided to come back. He decided that he will suffer all the miseries, pull himself together and will do his best to keep his life intact. In this way one can see how the nature around which a person grows up ultimately gives him courage and determination to overcome the problems of life.

When the indentured labors were on the ship, they had to suffer a lot. These people were kept in the insidious part of the ship and rarely got a chance to get out to the open sky. Also these people did not know each other. Still they became friends and also found some common cultural practices among them. They used to talk about common things as how to make a pickle and what kind of spices are used while preparing a meal. They got really excited when they discovered that most of their marriage rituals are common. Two characters on the ship fell in love with each other and decided to get married. Here came the incident that gives them all a real pleasure and happiness. All the labors on the ship decided to make this marriage a real happy event. They all performed the rituals, danced and enjoyed and thus got away from the sufferings of their lives for a while. Their cultural and religious practices reminded them of their previous life, their roots and though for a short time but it made them forget the predicaments of their lives.

There are a strong presence of both nature and religion in this novel. There are so many religious rituals and practices of Hinduism. Like the ritual of Sati, in which the widow has to get burn along with her dead husband. Deeti was a religious lady but she did not decide to give up her life because of her faith but it was her fear that made her do that. Through this ritual she wanted to get away from the sufferings of her life but somehow she was saved by Kalua. Here one sees how religion has a major play in Deeti's life. Sometimes it gives her determination and a faith in herself and sometimes she uses it to end her agonies.

A deep observance could tell that it was both nature and religion that played a major role in *Sea of Poppies*. *Sea of Poppies* basically depicts Hinduism and in Hinduism nature and religion both are connected so strongly that they both have a play in this novel. Hinduism believes that God is omnipresent and each particle of nature is a part of God. The Sun, the Moon, Rivers, Trees even the Air all are the symbols of the power of God. In *Sea of poppies* it is rather difficult to separate religion from nature. For example at the end of the story there was a huge storm when few of the indenture labors and

prisoners were trying to escape from there. They got stuck in the storm. It could be said that it was Deeti's prayers that saved them as she predicted their survival or it could be said that it was nature that saved those people. Nature gives one peace of mind. It takes people to their roots their existence and gives them belief in the importance of their existence. So does religion. Apart from few bad religious traits it connects people to nature, and ultimately to their roots. So one can say that religion, culture and nature each work together, in the novel *Sea of Poppies*. Religion and nature has a great impact on the major storyline.

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