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Depiction of Women: A Critical Perspective in the Novels of Amitav Ghosh

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Abstract: In my research study, I will be depicting the women characters in the novels of Amitav Ghosh. The paper focuses on the condition of women under the colonial rule where their position was very menial or substandard. One of the momentous aspects of Ghosh's novels is his inimitable portrayal of the feminine characters. He portrayed women characters as revolutionaries who seem to be aware of their milieu and their vulnerable positions within society. The crucial reception on feminism within the novels of Amitav Ghosh marks a discrepancy between the feministic criticism of the Indian landmass and the western landmass. In all his novels there is relative debate about the representation of gender and other issues of sexuality. But as a matter of academic assumption, women have played very significant presences in his all works. Amitav Ghosh through his novels has attempted to explore women's representation in the emotional world which helps the readers to understand the feminine susceptibility as well as its psychology. He depicted women in the novels as real-life and is realistic. He portrayed women as life-givers and are the leading spirits of his fiction. He portrays women and their feelings with sympathetic understanding.

Keywords: Feminism, land, masculinity, male domination.

In contemporary Indian Literature, Amitav Ghosh is the only Indian fiction writer who reflects the truth of Indian reality. Ghosh abides numerous responsibilities in the world of literature. He is an anthropologist, sociologist, novelist, essayist, travel writer, teacher and also worked for establishing peace as an ambassador.

He has been admired and a hugely respected Indian writer for his creative achievement and sublime attitude towards the development of Indian women. He portrays his women sensitively and in fact, they are the leading spirits in his fiction. They are distinct portrayals of cultural construction. Ghosh never presents



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his women as explicit radical feminists nor as to the stereotypical images. They are the characters of real-life in his novels. In his utmost novels, women neither fight against men with their feminine sensibility nor live as subjugated women in the male-dominated society. But they try to assert their rights as human beings in society with the help of education, employment, and their revolutionary attitudes towards life. Amitav Ghosh generally presents his female characters as revolutionaries and nationalists. They become revolutionaries in their respective spheres and fields. He tries to ascertain the sensitivity of women through his female characters, which helps readers understand feminist sensitivity and psychology.

Ghosh eludes feminist attitudes to bring out the social pain undergone by the women in his novels. Even though there are only a few women characters in his novels, they act as independent entities, growing and developing according to their inclinations and finding social acceptance, and defining their own space. They govern their own lives, fight their own battles, enjoy the fruits of victory, and never fear to taste the bitterness of defeat.

The Critical Explicate of the Feminist Perspective

This paper focuses on the portrayal of women in the selected novels of Amitav Ghosh- *The Glass Palace*, *The Hungry Tide*, *The Shadow Lines*, and *Sea of Poppies*. These novels of Ghosh foresee a perspective where women's empowerment will result in great changes within the larger social issues.

Ghosh portrayed women in their earlier life as puppets whose strings were controlled by culture and traditions. Women in his novels are seeded with the feminist attitude, which is nurtured by the social issues they face and the patriarchal supremacy that stifle them. In the novels, women are characterized as active, defiant, and responsible human beings. The women in his novels, strive hard to cross all the obstacles in their personal life as well as in society and try to come up in their life to the support of the country in any way. They can survive the world by the tool of education, employment, and their rebellious attitude towards life, and social activities. They not only assert their places in society but they try to help others by their revolutionary attitude and achievement. So Amitav Ghosh creates his women characters as revolutionaries.

He has attempted to explore the emotional world of women through the major characters like Dolly, Uma, and the Queen Supayalat in *The Glass Palace*, Thamma, Illa in *The Shadow Lines*, Piya, Nilima, Kusum, and Moyna in *The Hungry Tide*, and Deeti and Paulette in *Sea of Poppies*. All these



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women characters served the purpose of women protagonists and are independent on their terms. Ghosh has proved through these characters that women are much more determined in progress towards their desired goal, despite all odds they come across in the form of the male gender.

The character Dolly in *The Glass Palace*, at the age of ten, serves as a maid in the palace. When the king's family was cast out, she also accompanied the king's family to Ratnagiri. There she grows up into a charming girl. As she did not have anyone to share her feelings with, she was attracted towards Sawant, a servant in the palace, who serves the king's family in Ratnagiri. But later she comes to know that the princess is carrying the child of Sawant. Understanding the pathetic position of the princess she entombs her love and parts with him. *The Glass Palace*, which is a political novel, also depicts the fate of Queen Supayalath and Thebaw with those of the country at large. Women characters represent the readers though not explicitly but rather implicitly the differences between the ruling class and subaltern class. The novel conveys that even the princely state woman is more dependent on man and her marriage is even less a matter of personal choice. Marriage is a political arrangement in India. Since it is a patriarchal system women are innocent victims of it.

The Shadow Lines is a saga of three families and their interrelationships. He depicted women characters, the cultural depth, and feminine consciousness through family relationships in his novels. The women characters are represented as daring as men since they fight the challenges of widowhood, poverty, and injustice. Ghosh portrays women with a different perspective and fits them into a definite framework of liberty and freedom. This novel is a unique attempt to exemplify the importance of women who occupy a central position in the lives of every male character.

The Shadow Lines tells the story of a middle-class Indian family that is based in Kolkata. Thamma's character is depicted as a great revolutionary and bears strong nationalist feelings. She is the narrator's grandmother. Ghosh through Thamma's character delivers the foremost message that the ineffectiveness and irrationality of a nation can divide people without leaving their memory intact. Ghosh gives enough room to the British-ruled family. The character of Thamma is an acknowledgment to many eminent women in the nation who hold the creation of their children and loved ones through their work. The novel gives the most powerful message through a female character, calling it the inaction of nation-building, the absurdity of drawing a line that divides people indiscriminately with such memories intact.



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She decides to sort all the differences: “It does not matter whether we recognize each other or not. We are the same flesh, the same blood, the same bone and now at last, after all these years, perhaps we will be able to make amends for all that bitterness and hatred” (Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines*, 129).

Despite all this, Thamma remains a great revolutionary in the novel. May is another revolutionary character like Ila and Thamma. She is bold and practical in her discourse. In actuality, she knows about his obligations and her shortcomings. She communicated her feelings legitimately. She doesn't comprehend that the statue of Queen Victoria has a place with the historical backdrop of India and its kin. As a woman of modern civilization, Ila wants to be free of adherence, relationships, responsibilities, and everything. She is stubborn and lives in her world. She is very positive, firm, and determined to preserve her marital relations.

The Hungry Tide is a farsighted novel with remarkable insight, beauty, and humanity. In this novel, he shuttles the rigorous research that allows a mixture of fiction and fact to the extent that they stand undifferentiated. In this novel, he touched upon various topics from refugees, freedom, and war, to life in the Sunderbans, the absence of language in communication, development, women trafficking, and much more. Amitav Ghosh takes the reader through a whirlwind of events and emotions. The novel depicts women's diverse experiences through the characters of Nilima, Kusum, Piyali Roy, and Moyna Mondal.

Kusum, a tribal woman, felt like an outsider on maid land. She travels to Morichjhapi with her son Fokir to join the refugees of Bangladesh, who later become the cause of her life. Kusum reveals that women are neither submissive nor uncomplaining, nor incapable of protest at the impediment of society. Nilima of Lusibari belongs to a patrician family with a first-class educational background. Nilima leads the lives of uneducated island dwellers from here to subdue the existence of an educated and liberated livelihood.

Nilima at a point says,

“I am not capable of dealing with the whole world's problems. For me, the challenge of making a few little things a little better in one small place is enough. That place for me is Lusibari.” (Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide*, 387)

Unlike her impractical dreamy husband, she was always contained by possible and practicable limits. In the course, she is harsh and strict, but she reveals her deep love, though suffering immense pain for her inconsistent behaviour.



Piyali is a marine biologist, and since she was brought up in the United States, she cannot speak her mother tongue, Bengali. But she never considers that as a hindrance, as her profession demands independent travelling. As a young lady, she faces trouble in the form of forest guards however she was prepared to face such hurdles. She was rescued by Fokir, and she feels comfortable travelling with him. Though she could not understand Fokir's language, a tribal fisherman, she could exploit his knowledge about the tide, country, and its inhabitants. She defines her life through her career and says her home is where Oracella is; she stands as a strong representative of the present generation.

Moyna is a woman with self-respect and also with soaring aspirations which is unlikely for a tribal woman. As a tribal, possessing basic things and living life with self-respect is challenging. These women, Nilima and Kusum, Piya and Moyna share a commonness of enduring. It was their desire for continuous affirmation that made them strong. They never lose their faith in the magnificence of their existence.

Sea of Poppies is based on the historical setting of colonial rule in India and to fulfil its need of a supply of opium to China. In the novel, women characters are few in comparison to men characters. In the novel, he has tried to showcase how women can be raised so that they may become independent in the future. Ghosh has represented women from every section of society. The position of aristocratic women is also not very different from women of the low class. Women in the novel suffer from gender discrimination, class, and caste formation.

Deeti as a striking character in Sea of Poppies emerges as a cheerless, good-hearted character but feels that she is carried away by fate. Ghosh pictured her as a simple ordinary innocent village woman and she is the most unfortunate who believes that she was born under the spell of the wrong star and that is the reason why she suffers throughout her life. Even though she is unfortunate she accepts her opium-addicted husband Hukum Singh and she supports her family financially by working in the poppy field and even by selling her own belongings. Though nothing happens as per her desire, she finds happiness through her daughter Kabutri. They all willingly accept life as it is, whether it is desirable or undesirable.

Deeti wants to be Sati herself in order to escape from the cruelty of her own brother-in-law's lust. Deeti was now aware of her rights, respect, and identity so she retorts with anger to him:

“Listen to my words: I will burn on my husbands' pyre rather than give myself to you.” (Ghosh, *Sea of Poppies*, 158)



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Fortunately, she was rescued from Pyre (Sati) by Kalua. Deeti plays all the roles whether it's of mother, wife, or nurse, and shoulders the burden of housework. The novel tries to reformulate the tradition. The women protagonists like Dolly, Piya, Deeti, and Miss Paulette all tried to cement the eminence of women in a male-dominated society.

Amitav Ghosh has delineated effectively the Indian women's world and their ever-changing outlook with the glances of customs, conventions, and social changes by the character of Deeti and additional women characters in the novel. This novel is often perceived as a real post-modern feminist novel that brings about or creates compassion for the condition of women in a particular social milieu.

Amitav Ghosh endorses that the restructuring of the society from the evils like caste system, discrimination based on gender, ill-treatment of women, child marriages, poverty, exploitations, devilish tradition, etc. is the real need. Through his novels, Ghosh's humaneness approach gives voice to the modest women characters. He wants to free the entire world from the turmoil of caste, race, gender, religion, untouchability, and boundaries that hinders human development. Amitav Ghosh's fiction paints the two images of women: women as a life-giver, sustainer, and continuer of the race as against women in search of an identity.

Ghosh's main characters purge their dependency needs, break the prototype of sexuality and sensuality and take their place as human beings who are free and equal along with men. These are women who have lived a life of fulfilment and achieved dignity through their actions. They imparted permanence to society and gave civilization continuity. Ghosh build-ups women who are strong, passionate, accomplish themselves, travel, and can make their own decisions and live independently. They are symbols of growth, progress, and forward movement.

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