



Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies*: Disseminating Diasporic Discourse

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DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.4866598

Abstract

Significantly occupied with arresting the outward progression of outpost diaspora from India in the nineteenth century, Amitav Ghosh's "Sea of Poppies" (2008) centers around one female indentured named Deeti, a widow of an elite class family from Ghazipur in Uttar Pradesh, who absconds with Kalua, the untouchable. Following the pages of Sir George Grierson's journal, Amitav Ghosh recuperates Deeti from history, less with the creative mind of a writer similarly as with the senses of an anthropologist. The novel handles the deficiency of Deeti's caste, its challenged status in the transient experience, and its last recovery as a theme-based topic. In spite of the fact that the customary caste chain of importance was essentially lost in the transitory interaction, the researcher contends, it kept on existing in surrogate structure and just stood by to be figured out as expected. This paper additionally contends that the old Indian diaspora's nostalgic quest for their familial roots in India is played in the novel with the recommendation that the hunt may uncover some awkward truth they might not want to know.

Keywords: Amitav Ghosh "Sea of Poppies", Dislocation, Hegemony, Diaspora, Caste.

Etymologically the word 'diaspora' came from the Greek verb *diasperirein* signifies "to dissipate" or "to spread about", which is formed by the expression of *dia* intends to disperse or to isolate and the word *speirein* signifies 'somewhere else'. As per the antiquated Greek perspective the word as recommending augmentation through outward movement and settlement. 'Diaspora' rapidly procured a more heartless and sad significance. In the Greek interpretation of the Old Testament it had been utilized to portray the persuasive scattering of the Jews. The demolition of the Temple in Jerusalem in 586 BC prompted the subjugation and relocation of the key military, common, and religious leaders of Judah and their outcasts in Babylon. Priests held that this destiny was anticipated in Deuteronomy where God had cautioned that anyone who resisted his law would be dissipated to all or any finishes of the planet. There they might 'discover no harmony'.

The historical backdrop of the term 'diaspora' compares to this organic interaction of transplantation and migration. It was initially utilized in the *Septuagint*, the Greek interpretation of the Torah, and was applied to the Jewish experience of the outcast which was taken in before examines 'as the paradigm for both exile and diaspora' (Baumann 19). Quickly the term conveyed the negative meanings of dispersal and disintegration. 'The Alexandrian Jewish-Greek translators of the Hebrew Scriptures adopted precisely the



disastrous connotations of current philosophical discourse' (Baumann 21). It was a reviled word and show expulsion by God.

Providing the mainstream critical views just as the critical impression of diaspora in contemporary basic examinations, William Safran contends in his article *Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return* that Diaspora Studies need to change its basic substitute courtesy of a more unique discernment. He broadens Walker Connor's wide working meaning of 'diaspora' as 'that segment of a people living outside the homeland' (Safran 83) by offering six essential trademarks generally shared by the diasporic groups.

'Diaspora' alludes to the dislocation of individuals from a particular unique 'center' (Safran 83) to at least two or more 'peripheral' (Safran 83) or regions. The dislodged individuals 'retain a collective memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland - its physical location, history and achievements' (Safran 83). They capture that they are not maybe welcome in the host country and subsequently, feel estranged from it. They appreciate the longing to get back to their hereditary country, 'their true, ideal home' one day at a suitable time. They have a firm conviction that they ought to be focused on the 'maintenance or restoration of their original homeland and to its safety and prosperity' (Safran 84). They keep on relating, actually or vicariously, to that country somehow or the other, and 'their ethno communal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such a relationship' (Safran 84). Regarding the above highlights, Safran refers to the Armenian, Maghrebi, Turkish, Palestinian, Cuban, Greek, and maybe Chinese diasporas as of now and of the Polish diaspora of the past, although none of them completely adjusts to the "ideal kind" of Jewish Diaspora (Safran 84). This is certainly not a comprehensive rundown however considering when Safran published the article (1991), it ought to be viewed as the start of the way toward recognizing the diasporic gatherings.

Robin Cohen properly recognizes the significance of William Safran's definition and develops his hypothetical situation on it. He offers changes of two of the previously mentioned highlights set by Safran and adds four more, 'mainly concerning the evolution and character of the diasporic groups in their countries of exile' (Cohen 6). The two alterations are concerned with the diasporic gathering's relationship with the native land. He expresses that the journey from the centre to the periphery is 'often accompanied by the memory of a single traumatic event that provides the folk memory of the great historic injustice that binds the group together' (Cohen 6). He changes the fifth component by moving the concentration from the support or reclamation of the country to its 'very creation' which 'covers the cases of an "imagined homeland" that only resembles the original history and geography of the diaspora's natality in the remotest way' (Cohen 6). Other than the adjustments of these two trademark highlights, Cohen likewise gives some extra highlights. According to him, the diasporic mass may 'disperse for colonial or voluntarist reasons' (Cohen 6). This is a most controversial take-off from the 'prototypical Jewish diasporic tradition' (Cohen 6) and, widens the extent of the term by including the individuals who moved deliberately since the



beginning to look for work abroad and can be applied to ‘imperial and colonial settlers’ (Cohen 7).

Cohen causes us to notice the positive parts of diaspora. This adds up to a paradigmatic shift in Diaspora Studies. He declares that ‘tension between an ethnic, a national and a transnational identity is often creative, enriching one’ (Cohen 7) and offers the case of the diasporic Jews who added to the fields ‘medicine, theology, art, music, philosophy, literature, science, industry and commerce’ (Cohen 7). This they did regardless of the way that they endured a level of ‘subterranean anxiety in the diaspora’ all through the ages and in numerous spaces.

Cohen discusses the dislocation of an aggregate mass with regards to ‘solidarity with co-ethnic members in other countries’ (Cohen 7). Cohen's observation of the lateral dimension of the ethnic relationship motions towards a transnational turn in Diaspora Studies to be examined instantly. Roger Rouse, in his article *Mexican Migration and the Social Space of Postmodernism*, offers a fascinating contextual investigation of the improvement of a parallel relationship of a Mexican ethnic local area from the rustic *municipio* of Aguililla since the mid-1940s. This *municipio* turned out to be important for an energetic organization of monetary and sociocultural exercises because of the transcultural development of its occupants, the majority of whom got comfortable in the metropolitan neighbourhood of Redwood City on the edge of the Silicon Valley of California. Rouse's investigation shows that they stayed in contact with their local space through familial, sociocultural, and monetary organizations. Subsequently, they keep up ‘these spatially extended relationships as actively and effectively as the ties that link them of their neighbours’ (Rouse 29). They add to the dynamic cycles in the family and the local area back home. Rouse comments, indeed, through the persistent dissemination of individuals, cash, merchandise, and data, the different repayments have gotten so firmly woven together that, from a significant perspective, they have come to comprise a solitary local area spread across an assortment of destinations, something may be alluded to as a “transnational migrant circuit” (Rouse 30). Now and again, in this way, diasporic dislocation of a specific ethnic local area to an alternate, especially an adjoining, nation may bring about the improvement of an enthusiastic organization of monetary, social, and social exercises. Such exercises thrive without severe administrative advances taken by state specialists. Commencement of observation by the state normally controls such ethnic developments and systems administration.

The extra highlights referenced by Cohen vouch for the lateral dimension discussed by Rouse and accordingly update the idea of diaspora. These attributes explicitly destabilize what Clifford calls “localizing strategies” by which he signifies limited local area, natural culture, and periphery. Clifford, indeed, accepts that ‘it is not possible to define “diaspora” sharply, either by recourse to essential features or to private oppositions’ (Clifford 254). Rather he proposes his concept of ‘a loosely coherent, adaptive constellation of responses to dwelling-in-displacement’ (Clifford 254).



Amitav Ghosh's outstanding novel *Sea of Poppies* (2008), shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize and which is the first of an extended set of three books known as *Ibis Trilogy*, manages a disorganized journey across the Indian Ocean to Mauritius Island getting back to a self-reflexive inquiry regarding the country. Its story unfurls in north India and the Bay of Bengal in 1838 just before the British assault on the Chinese port, generally known as the first opium war. Set in 1838, not long before the opium war (1839-1842), this novel typifies the colonial history of the East. In the novel, Ghosh amasses the mariners, voyagers, and sailors from various corners of the world aboard the ship *Ibis*. This, a slaving yacht currently changed over to the vehicle of coolies and opium to China. In carrying his group of characters to Calcutta out of the dark water, Ghosh furnishes the readers with all way of stories, and outfits himself with the workforce to man.

In the backdrop of the opium trade, which is an energizing story all by itself, laden with insatiable covetousness, power-mongering, and racism, *Sea of Poppies* expands the meaning of diaspora as a third space, neither home nor metropolis, yet where a background marked by its own is unfurling. In the novel, Amitav Ghosh addresses multilingual groups of India on *Ibis*, with the vivid characters, the novel is the conflict and blending of dialects: Bhojpuri, Bengali, Lascari, Hindustani, Anglo-Indian and so on. The blending of these dialects makes a distinctive feeling of living voice just as the phonetic cleverness of individuals in diaspora. Ghosh has confidence in Eastern Humanism and shared points that pervade irrespective of race, class, and culture. Political commitments decide a significant number of relationships in the novel, however generally neglect to extinguish the substance of individual human feelings, recollections, dissatisfaction, and yearnings.

The novel is a critic of the socio-cultural advancement of Indian diaspora, of battle by the downtrodden and outcasts of colonial India, and the impartial record of the Indian peasantry constrained into opium development. It is a novel of diasporic sensibility and recreation of identity. The possibility of diaspora as migration and colonization implies an aggregate injury, a banishment where one longs for home yet lives in exile. Diaspora is a transnational organization of scattered political subjects. The *Ibis*, which was a transport for slaves, is being refitted to take an enormous mass of indentured migrants called 'girmityas' to Mauritius. On one hand, it is a vessel to ship the 'girmityas' from India to the plantation estate settlement of Mauritius, however on the other, it is a microcosm of the ranch province itself. Paul Gilroy, in *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993), has called the ship which transports labourers while in transit to plantation colonies "a living, micro-cultural, micro-political system in motion" (Gilroy 4). Deeti portrays this "as a vessel that was the Mother-Father of her new family, a great wooden mai-baap an adoptive ancestor and parent of dynasties to come" (Ghosh 356-57) is reminiscent of their new assenting country, the manor province of Mauritius.

Ibis dwells of individuals of various identities, castes, customs, doctrines, and practices, some escaping from the troubles at home, some being moved as convicts. It is loaded with a large number of characters both high and low, including a blended race



fledgling mariner from Baltimore, a Rajah in debt to a British, a Chinese crook, a French stowaway, a Malay crew member, ranchers, troopers, and a horde of contracted Indian labourers. As the travellers of the *Ibis* sail down the waterway Hooghly into the Indian Ocean, their old family ties are washed away and they start their lives once more. The ocean turns into their new country as the shipmates form new obligations of sympathy and comprehension. They abandon the constructions of social caste, geographical location, and religion; rename themselves as ‘jahaj bhais’ and ‘jahajbahans’ (Ghosh 356). Wretched from their habituated life and finally uprooted from their homeland, the travellers forced to resettle, went through a horrible transformation that changed their feeling of subjectivity and influenced their point of view toward their general surroundings.

The excursion of the voyagers on the ship *Ibis* appears as a model of the local community involved trading off with social and social conduct in another life changing the circumstances to new facilities of having a place. In the novel, practically all the characters feel the feeling of longing and belonging. Indeed, they long for the region where they had come from. The boat turns into a substitute space for individuals to shape their new identities, personalities, and new networks too. Travel uncovered new places and causes the travellers to account new narratives. Regarding this, Robert Dixon properly says of Ghosh that the reality Amitav Ghosh has had the option to move uninhibitedly in his composition “between anthropology, history, and fiction is symptomatic of the extent to which traditional boundaries between those disciplines have themselves broken down.” (Dixon 13) The characters on the boat experience new places and occasions, contrasting them and the previous occasions, and live the past in the present in an alternate area.

In his novels, Ghosh has depicted his diasporic emotions, loss of identity and rootlessness. While experiencing *Sea of Poppies* we can analyse the vexed diasporic encounters of colonial India with that of a similarly bothered history of Africa. A predicament was experienced by ‘jahajbhais’ of the *Ibis* while they were crossing the abyss of darkness where the Ganges vanished into ‘kalapani’. Inside the novel the power of Kāla-pani taboo to deconstruct territorialized types of personality is reached out past the South Asian characters of the novel as both the horrible “third” space of diaspora and a phase by which novelty enters the world through worldwide maritime ecologies. The boat turns into a vehicle for the enunciation of polyphonic diasporic relationships across a culture that survives yet doesn't completely remove territorialized types of Identity. On the *Ibis*, people of different groups or sorts start to form among the travellers. Relationships are manufactured or separate, clashes explode and singular predeterminations experience alter of course. Cut off from their foundations on the way and searching ahead for a new beginning, the migrants are inclined to design new names and identities.

The diasporic cognizance is firmly connected with the issue of identity and feel longing. The characters in Ghosh's novel have decided to traverse the Indian Ocean to a weird island where they should rebuild new identities. Being from various layers of Indian culture, these characters oppose the hard colonial setup and outline their game-plan to cut a special



identity out of the traumatic conditions. In any case, it is a character in motion since every one of them are over in a hurry toward self-arrangement and recreation. In *Sea of Poppies*, there is another discovery that individuals relocated themselves in constrained but chosen condition since they were not owing a decent status in their country and therefore they acquired by and the large new characters of ‘jahaj-bhai’ and ‘jahaj-behan’ to characterize their existentialism. In the novel, every one of the characters attempts to interface his/her past with the present, memory with want, old binds with new affiliations, and moves to arrive at their objective with a solid level of vacillation.

Victims of diaspora are not at the edge constantly. They do not bring out self-centeredness for being alienated from home but instead attempt to be accustomed to new circumstances. The issue of identity has in reality been a significant distraction with Ghosh in the current novel. It seems, by all accounts, to be affected by the ethno-political dimension that continually change characters’ directions to recreate new personalities in the new milieu. In his books, individual identity is demonstrated to conflict with aggregate or collective identity. To recover the subaltern voices, Ghosh approaches a transcendental humanism by building up certain postmodern qualities like fictionality and ease of every desultory arrangement.

In the novel, individuals who are strongly rooted in the beginning, follow a slow interaction of separation and dislocation. Maybe obliging the inquiries of personal identity and recognizable proof, we come across a genuinely exceptional assortment of characters. Inside the layers of strangeness, we face different questions of dedication and identity, questions which are, partially, imperative to the development of the obscure future that this novel leaves us with. Ghosh maintains a strategic distance from familiar figures from history and takes the marginalised class of society that can give him a superior purpose of fictionalizing and to his end.

Ghosh enriches the character of Deeti with the conventional qualities of upper-class Hindu while Kalua, the untouchable Dalit, carries on like one from the lower strata of society. Even though Deeti accepts another name and caste and hence removes her caste identity, she is unmistakably conspicuous for her hereditary caste consciousness. It was her conventional elite class that empowered her to accept the leadership of *girmitiyas* on the *Ibis* and, by suggestion, on the plantation settlement of Mauritius. She acquaints herself and Kalua with other *girmitiyas* as “Chamars” (234), of the leather labourers caste. All in all, Deeti's high caste Hindu identity is coded regarding her leadership. In the hierarchical caste system and privileged caste and traits of authority and order being equivalent to one another, Deeti's higher rank proceeds to exist and is regarded in any event, even when she assumes a lower caste. Ghosh must cause Deeti to lose her upper-class identity as opposed to elevating Kalua to a higher rank. Ghosh, a social anthropologist, recommends that having endured disgrace, affront, and maltreatment for millennia, untouchables could not carry on like upper caste individuals, for in India the caste that decided then how a specific individual would act towards different castes in the public eye. Kalua's submissive conduct with Deeti's husband



Hukam Singh, daffadar Ramsharanji, Gomusta, subedar Bhyron Singh and others plentifully demonstrates this view. His imaginary rise to higher standing would unquestionably have made him helpless, and drove both Kalua and Deeti to death, for the novel shows that “family's honour won't be restored till they're dead” (Ghosh 224).

Through Deeti's narrative of endurance and survival as an indentured worker, Ghosh endeavours to reproduce through the historical fiction the lost individual records of the main flood of South Asian coolie after the end of British bondage. In doing so, he also endeavours to make up for an obvious shortcoming in the advanced history of work dislocation and relocation. Ghosh proposes that for the abroad Indian migrants in the quest for their lost roots, revelation of some disgusting story at the root of their precursors' movement from India as contracted workers. Lately, as the Indian demeanour to abroad diaspora has gone through significant changes, and as an ever-increasing number of Indians came into contact with them, the abroad diasporais have energetically responded to the Indian motion. Obviously, the memory of lost roots forces the Indian diaspora to think back with nostalgia to their motherland.

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Author (s) Contribution Statement: Nil

Author (s) Acknowledgement: Nil

Author (s) Declaration: I declare that there is no competing interest in the content and authorship of this scholarly work.



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