



Colonial Landscape Navigation: Postcolonial Ecocriticism in *Sea of Poppies* by Amitav Ghosh

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Abstract

This article examines how colonialism, ecology, and postcolonial viewpoints interact in Amitav Ghosh's novel. The main themes and theoretical frameworks used to analyse the novel's representation of a colonial environment and its ecological repercussions are highlighted in this study. Sea of Poppies by Amitav Ghosh brings readers to a 19th-century India firmly enmeshed in British colonialism. This work explores the intricate interactions between people and the environment, exploring the massive ecological changes brought on by imperial conquest via a postcolonial eco-critical perspective. This study reveals the novel's ecological roots by looking at how Ghosh questions conventional narratives and presents a criticism of the effects of colonial rule on both human and non-human beings. The research emphasises the function of landscape as a place of contestation and resistance, illuminating how nature is exploited and perverted within the colonial setting by drawing on postcolonial theory and eco-critical frameworks. Important problems about power dynamics, environmental justice, and the connections between capitalism and ecological degradation are brought up by Ghosh's depictions of the opium trade, the transatlantic slave trade, and the privatisation of nature.

Keywords: Colonialism, Eco-Criticism, Landscapes, Environmental Degradation, Power, Nature, Identity, Resistance.

Introduction

In 'Sea of Poppies', Amitav Ghosh has written a fascinating novel that encourages its readers to delve into the complex relationships between colonialism, environmental destruction, and the resiliency of nature. This analysis uses postcolonial eco-criticism to explore the dynamic relationship between authority, the environment, and individuality in the novel's colonial settings. Ghosh's story reveals the negative effects of colonialism on the environment and portrays the natural world as a source of resistance and agency. This introductory section offers a synopsis of the major ideas and theoretical framework of postcolonial eco-criticism, laying the groundwork for a thorough examination of 'Sea of Poppies.'

Review of Literature

(Lavanya and Vathanam) investigates Ghosh's works, such as *Sea of Poppies*, *River of Smoke*, and *Flood of Fire*, from an Ecomarxist perspective. This study investigates how the pursuit of profit might lead to the destruction of natural habitats and the exploitation of vulnerable populations. Each novel's Ecomarxist ideas and storylines are highlighted in the article. The forced cultivation of poppies by the British government in north India, resulting in poverty and turning the farmers into indentured labourers, is used by the author to demonstrate the destructive nature of capitalist-driven policies in *Sea of Poppies*. In *River of Smoke*, protagonist Fitcher Penrose reveals the exploitative aspect of the capitalist system as he commercially discovers Chinese flora for European commerce.

(Jeyalakshmi) addresses the topics of colonialism, ecological variables, and their influence on environmental degradation through the lens of Ghosh's novel. This article discusses the impact of both natural and man-made settings on human behaviour and underlines Ghosh's status as a prominent Bengali Indian post-modern writer of English literature. Opium production and its negative impact on human health and the environment are the focus of this article. According to Jeyalakshmi, Ghosh uses *Sea of Poppies* to bring to light several problems, including the struggle for social, cultural, and ecological domination.

Poppies are grown at the expense of food crops in Bihar, causing ecological disruptions and a mismatch in the region's ecosystems. Animals, insects, birds, and plants all become helpless victims of environmental deterioration in Ghosh's depiction of the harmful effects of opium use in their lifetime. Jeyalakshmi further notes that the waste from opium manufacturers is a major contributor to human and animal health deterioration. The article also exemplifies environmental deterioration results by focusing on the racial alterations done to the environment to meet human demands. Jeyalakshmi's article sheds light on Ghosh's investigation of environmental issues and his portrayal of them in *Sea of Poppies*.

The article emphasises the importance of environmental awareness and the interdependence

between human activities and the natural world by analysing the themes of colonialism, environmental degradation and their effects in Ghosh's tale.

Postcolonialism

Postcolonialism is a critical theoretical framework investigating colonialism and imperialism's enduring effects on societies and cultures. It grew out of a need to counter colonialism's lingering impacts and challenges the prevailing narratives, power structures, and oppressive institutions that had been put in place at that time. Postcolonial theorists investigate how colonialism impacted and still shapes modern countries, individual identities, and international and intercultural interactions.

Postcolonialism is a critical theory focusing on the uneven power relations and persistent cultural effects of colonial encounters and authority. The project's overarching goal is to provide individuals oppressed by colonialism with a platform to share their stories and perspectives. Cultural hybridity, identity formation, symbolic politics, and reclaiming indigenous knowledge and traditions are just a few of the many areas postcolonial theorists investigate.

Postcolonialism seeks to promote social justice, decolonisation, and the empowerment of marginalised populations by critically analysing the legacy of colonialism and imperialism. It gives a theoretical basis for analysing and confronting the inequalities and oppressions that continue to exist even after colonial control has ended (Fanon).

The widespread production of opium in India during British colonial control is shown in the first novel of the Ibis trilogy, *Sea of Poppies*. Amitav Ghosh vividly describes how the British coerced Indian farmers to cultivate opium on land previously used to raise grain. Ghosh's story vividly depicts the scale of opium cultivation, with fields of poppies reaching down the Ganges River.

The river seems like it's running between two glaciers, and the white poppies evoke the Himalayas' snowy peaks; this picturesque scene announces the approach of spring. The brutal truth of the repercussions, though, lurks behind this beauty. Growing opium interferes with harvesting other crops vital to the local people's survival. (Ghosh).

Sea of Poppies is a fascinating account of a man-made calamity that shook the foundations of 19th-century northern Indian society on economic, social, and cultural levels from a socio-environmental standpoint. The novel paints a moving picture of the human damage wrought by imperialism against this setting. The *Ibis*, a repurposed slave ship, gathers an eclectic assortment of people in Calcutta as it prepares to sail with many indentured coolies bound for Mauritius. Everyone on board is a misfit, drawn together by chance, whether they are sailors, stowaways, coolies, or prisoners. A destitute Raja, a widowed villager, a mulatto American freedman, and a feisty European orphan are some of the people you'll meet. At sea, old familial connections are dissolved, and the passengers start to see one other as Sahaj-bhais, or ship brothers, bound for fresh beginnings on the islands where they are being carried.

This story shows how exploitative colonialism is and how it affects people socially and culturally, causing them to change their ways of life. The social and economic inequities, power dynamics, and personal hardships shown in *Sea of Poppies* are all a product of the colonial age. Ghosh's novel is a tribute to the strength and agency of people despite the hardships brought on by the empire.

Sea of Poppies

The large-scale production of opium under British colonial authority in India is revealed in the first novel in the *Ibis* trilogy, *Sea of Poppies*. The British compelled Indian villagers to cultivate opium on rich agricultural grounds that were often utilised for growing conventional food crops, as Amitav Ghosh graphically describes. The scope of opium planting is shown in Ghosh's story, which paints a dramatic picture of poppy fields extending along the banks of the Ganges River.

From a socio-environmental standpoint, *Sea of Poppies* tells a gripping story of a man-made catastrophe that threw the 19th-century social, economic, and cultural stability of life in northern India into disarray. The novel provides a moving depiction of the human destruction brought on by imperialism in this setting. The *Ibis*, a former slave ship, is being converted in Calcutta to carry many indentured coolies to Mauritius as various individuals

gather. The people on board are a mishmash of sailors, stowaways, coolies, and prisoners thrown together by chance. They include a destitute Raja, a widowed villager, an American freedman of mixed race, and an independent-minded European orphan. They see themselves as jahaj-bhais, or ship-brothers, destined to establish new lives on the far-off islands to which they are being taken, and the *Ibis* becomes a furnace where their previous familial connections are washed away. This story highlights the exploitative aspects of colonisation while illuminating the social and cultural repercussions of upsetting long-established customs. The socio-economic inequalities, power relationships, and personal hardships connected to the colonial period are reflected in *Sea of Poppies*. Ghosh's novel shows the strength and agency of people in the face of the difficult conditions imposed by the empire.

Deterioration of the Environment as it is Portrayed in the Novel

Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* depicts the severe environmental degradation in the background of British colonisation in India. Ghosh emphasises the ecological effects of colonial exploitation via vivid imagery and gripping anecdotes, calling attention to the destructive effect on the natural environment and the lives of local inhabitants.

This debate examines how the novel depicts environmental deterioration and includes critical viewpoints and sources to support the argument. The opium fields, which the British forcefully grew on productive farmland, are portrayed by Ghosh as a potent emblem of environmental destruction. The novel paints a grim image of once-vibrant agricultural regions becoming monoculture opium crops.

Ghosh emphasises the effect of opium cultivation on water resources and the actual alteration of the terrain. The heavy irrigation needed for opium growing depletes water resources, resulting in environmental imbalances and worsening the land's deterioration. Regarding this, critic Isabel Hofmeyr observes, "Ghosh's description of the Ganges River, turned into a toxic waste dump from opium production, reflects the devastating consequences of colonial exploitation on water resources".

Environmental deterioration has far-reaching effects on the physical environment, society, and culture. The way of life of the local inhabitants is disrupted by the loss of ecological balance and traditional agricultural practices, which results in socio-economic challenges.

Ghosh emphasises the connection between environmental degradation and social injustice by depicting the pain of the marginalised groups relying on the land for survival.

This relationship is succinctly put by critic Rob Nixon, who says, “Ghosh shows how environmental devastation is inextricably linked to the social, economic, and political inequalities of colonial rule.” (Nixon 125).

Navigating Colonial Landscapes: Postcolonial Eco-criticism in *Sea of Poppies*

The novel *Sea of Poppies* explores the interconnected themes of colonialism, ecology, and postcolonial self-understanding. Using a postcolonial eco-critical perspective, this talk examines the novel’s depiction of colonial landscapes, human-nature connections, and the ecological implications of imperialism. This analysis sheds light on the novel’s complex interplay between authority, environment, and personal identity. *Sea of Poppies* is criticised for its colonialist undertones and for the concerns it begs about the state of our planet today. Moreover, it highlights the need for postcolonial eco-criticism in comprehending the multifaceted effects of colonial legacies on the natural world and human lives.

The novel highlights the negative impact of opium cultivation on water resources. Ghosh emphasises the heavy irrigation necessary for opium farming, which depletes water supplies and pollutes waterways. Ghosh’s portrayal of the Ganges River as a “toxic waste dump from opium production” highlights the disastrous effects of colonial exploitation on water resources, according to critic Isabel Hofmeyr. This depiction emphasises the link between environmental degradation and the colonial mission. It shows how pursuing economic gain via opium extraction costs the natural environment and the populations depending on it.

Conclusion

Amitav Ghosh’s *Sea of Poppies* thoroughly investigates the connections between colonialism, the environment, and human experiences because of the merger of postcolonial and eco-critical viewpoints. Readers are encouraged to critically examine the complex web of power dynamics at play through the novel’s depiction of degrading colonial landscapes, broken human-nature relationships, and the ecological consequences of imperialism. Ghosh’s evocative images of farmland being converted to opium crops are a potent metaphor for the destruction of natural resources.

The replacement of traditional agriculture highlights the disturbance of local ecosystems and the threat to livelihood practises by cultivating a single cash crop. As David L. Anderson suggests, the forced cultivation of opium poppies represents the exploitation of the land, with devastating consequences for both the environment and the communities that rely on it.

Sea of Poppies sheds light on how colonialism shapes human-nature connections and the resistance that might arise in such settings. Ghosh portrays nature as providing protagonists on the margins with agency, consolation, and empowerment to subvert established hierarchies. Characters’ interactions with nature highlight the need to recognise indigenous knowledge and appreciate traditional ecological practices. The novel challenges the idea of a fixed hierarchy between coloniser and colonised by underlining the agency of both people and environment and the possibility for resistance and survival within colonised societies. The novel’s examination of colonial landscapes and environmental deterioration has resonance beyond its historical setting. Ghosh’s writing is consistent with “slow violence,” which focuses on the cumulative effects of environmental degradation and its disproportionate toll on vulnerable populations. This highlights the critical need to reevaluate our current policies and solve environmental inequalities.

Ultimately, *Sea of Poppies* demonstrates how literature can change minds, dismantle myths, and propel people into action. Ghosh’s skilful storytelling and insightful exploration of colonial landscapes and ecological degradation force readers to negotiate

the boundaries between postcolonialism and eco-criticism, illuminating the far-reaching effects of colonial legacies on the natural world and our shared identities.

This novel serves as a timely reminder that a critical examination of the past is essential to shaping a more sustainable and equitable future for all of humanity, even as we continue to struggle with the environmental issues of the present.

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