

# Redefining the Identity in *Sea of Poppies*

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### Abstract

*This article is an attempt to recount the specific concern on identity of Amitav Ghosh. Several constraints such as alienation, struggle for existence, dilemma of dual identity, sense of belonging and nostalgia that have been exemplified through the well-defined characters of his novels. Sea of Poppies is the novel selected for the study of colonial impact on identity based on culture and society. He has scrutinized the causes of the occurrence of identity crisis and the sense of being 'othered' by colonial society. This novel throws light on the individuals who lose their identity because of the cultural change and the constant oppression. Throughout the novel, the writer traces the lack of belongingness of the people in their own country. Considering, redefining the identity and re-establishing the self, the novel reflects on the people's will power and ability to overcome the crisis. This article focuses on characters in Sea of Poppies belonging to different levels of the society that suffers from the personality dilemma.*

**Keywords:** Identity, Identity crisis, Alienation, Colonial impact, Belongingness, Amitav Ghosh

"Identity crisis is a period of uncertainty and confusion in which a person's identity becomes insecure, typically due to a change in their expected aims or role in the society" (Erikson 165). Pertaining to this idea, the central characters in the novel, one way or another, suffer from identity crisis; some are not happy with what they have been called as or with their present identity and some are forced to adopt a new identity which eventually creates an inner conflict. Deeti is one such example of losing self-identity and living with the borrowed identity. She wished to have people call her by her own name 'Deeti' which she affirms to be her identity. However, she is called 'Hukam Singh's wife' or 'Kabutri-ki-ma' and not as 'Deeti'. In a colonized country, though both men and women fall prey for the oppression and marginalization, it is an undeniable fact that women are doubly marginalized; a woman has to confront oppression from both the colonizers and the patriarchy of the society. Deeti is seen desperate to create her own identity. When Hukam Singh dies, she decides to choose 'Sati' (jumping in the funeral pyre of her husband), with an idea that she would be able to get a new identity as 'Sati Savitri'.

However, she is not pleased with the notion of sacrificing herself for the loveless marriage. Kalua, the lower caste man saves her just before she could be thrown into the pyre and takes her along with him to a faraway place. When Deeti realizes what has happened, after she gains consciousness, she regrets nothing; indeed, she is delighted at her fortune for being saved from the danger. She is no longer the older self, she is rejuvenated with a new spirit, there she begins a new life with a new identity; the identity that she happily accepts unlike the previous one.

She did not feel herself to be living in the same sense as before: a curious feeling, of joy mixed with resignation, crept into her heart, for it was as if she really had died and been delivered betimes in rebirth, to her next life: she had shed the body of the old Deeti, with the burden of its karma; she had paid the price her stars had demanded of her, and was free now to create a new destiny as she willed (Poppies 178).

The above narration depicts Deeti's new life with a freedom to decide upon her own destiny. She happened to board 'Ibis' in order to escape from the village men's hunt for Deeti and Kalua. At the ship, she joins the other set of migrants. When they asked for her name, with a moment's thought, she said, she is Aditi. "No sooner had she said it than it became real: this was who she was – Aditi, a woman who had been granted, by a whim of Gods, the boon of living her life again" (Poppies 233). Aditi is her proper and originally given name but had never been used by anyone, only her mother knew the name, not even her husband and in-laws were aware of her original name.

She always wished to establish her identity, and now, is able to redefine herself with an identity, though not new, but with an emphasis on new purpose. She also changed the identity of Kalua as Madhu, her intention might seem too simple that is to escape from the search of village people, however, the change of identity, here, marks a great significance. "Yes, she said, raised her voice a little..." and said "I am Aditi, wife of Madhu" (Poppies 233). Now, Deeti has not only owned an identity as 'Aditi' but also achieved a status as a wife, which she has always yearned for.

Paulette is another character who is an example for identity being imposed. She is a French orphan, raised by Indian nurse-maid. She grew up with a culture of Indian and she felt quite at ease with the Indian way of living. After her father dies, Mr. Burnham and his family take her in. She is compelled to behave like a 'lady' with a western attitude and etiquette. She is completely lost in the new-found family and could not cope with the cultural changes. She is caught between Indian ways and Western Style. Though she is French, she doesn't behave like one, it makes her an alien in Mr. Burnham's family. Identity crisis creeps in as she is exposed to the ways in which she has to conduct herself that is totally new to her. She doesn't want to fit into the identity that is imposed. She decides to evade the struggle by fleeing to her native to find her roots and original identity.

Zachary, on other hand, is a son of a White father and a Quadroon mother. He undergoes ill treatment at his workplace because of his mixed race. He boards a ship named 'Ibis' in Baltimore to escape racism, unfortunately, he was signed as a 'Black' in the labour department. It is evident here that Zachary is neither White as his father nor a Quadroon as his mother nor a Black, as he is enrolled in the ship. Therefore, his identity is in dilemma.

Ghosh presents characters in such a way that projects the causes of identity crisis allied to the changes in culture, society, region, religion, race and gender. He does not stop with the projection but also gives solutions as such of the characters renewing their identity and getting rid of the clench of personality dilemma. He tries to weave the story around the characters such as Deeti, Paulette, and Zachary to show how they feel as if they have been lost and not happy with the identity they possess. His specific concern on bringing out the identity clashes and offering them a solution is quite common in most of his novels. Sea of poppies is one such novel that exemplifies this concept.

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