

# Amitav Ghosh's Deeti: a Feminist Perspective

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### Abstract

The writings of Amitav Ghosh are generally seen as exercises that extend beyond genres which apparently frame them. This study analyses the subaltern that represented by Deeti in Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies*. The subject of the subaltern as an Indian woman is struggling against patriarchy in society. Amitav Ghosh portrays the female character Deeti though imaginary as a metaphor of caste, religion, life, and slavery. The character performs a variety of roles and found herself down stamped and rules. The character revenges back to find her new life. This character is used as a metaphorical tool to portray independence and slavery. The author creates a new dimension to nineteenth century people through the vision of the imaginary character Deeti.

**Keywords:** Patriarki, Poskolonialisme feminism, binary oppositions.

### Introduction

Postcolonialism is the study of cultural legacy about colonialism and imperialism. The main focus of this study is the human consequences of control and exploitation of colonized the people and their lands. Yet the term continues to be used from time to time to mean simply 'anti-colonial' and to be synonymous with 'post-independence', as in references to the 'post-colonial state'. In actual postcolonialism has to be understood only about colonialism, myth and history, language and landscape, self and other are all very important ingredients of postcolonial studies. It means that the physical area of postcolonial study is wider than any other discipline in literature. Moreover, Spivak mentioned in her critical theory about post-colonial in *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (1987) deserves special mention including the essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' She widened the scope of subaltern literature including the works of literature of marginalized women. She makes a harsh comment on the male dominant society and shows the secondary position, inferior role given to women in patriarchy. She has to bring children into the world. Beauvoir pointed out that such pervasive socialization shapes women's desire to "choose" motherhood. In *Sea of Poppies* Amitav Ghosh has shown that Deeti, in spite of being married to an impotent man tries to find satisfaction and fulfillment in life by being *Kabutari-ki -ma*. But when fate offers her an opportunity to be more than just *Kabutari -ki -ma* she immediately grasps it.

She is able to separate herself as a warrior from those 'ordinary' people, male or female, who are willing to drift with the current and bend with every breeze. While her opium addict husband is in his death bed, she is physically assaulted by her brother in law "Your husband and I are brothers after all, of the same flesh and blood. Where is the shame? Why should you waste your looks and your youth on a man who cannot enjoy them? Besides, the time is short while your husband is still alive- if you conceive a son while he is still living, he will be his father's rightful heir." (Ghosh 157). Unable to tolerate the behavior of her brother-in-law she warns him: "Listen to my words: I will burn on my husband's pyre, rather than give myself to you (Ghosh 158). Through these words of Deeti, Ghosh expresses the assertive nature of Deeti to restore the dignity of womanhood. Malathi and Prema has commented that 'Ghosh develops women who are strong, who can express themselves, do things, travel, come to their own decision. Deeti's family is forced to cultivate poppy in their land by the sahibs as " the English sahibs would allow little else to be planted; their agents would go from home to home , forcing cash advances on the farmers, making them sign *asa'mi* contacts. It was impossible to say no to them: if you refused they would leave their silver hidden in your

house, or throw it through a window. It was no use telling the white magistrate that you hadn't accepted the money and your thumbprint was forged: "(Ghosh 30). Because of such economic exploitation, a housewife like Deeti is forced to work in the field after serving her household duties. Not only the poor farmers even the beautiful creatures of nature are also shown to have adverse effect of this forced poppy cultivation. As Deeti notices "The sap seemed to have a pacifying effect even on the butterflies, which flapped their wings in oddly erratic patterns, as though they could not remember how to fly"(Ghosh 28). Starhawk recognizes connections between the exploitation of nature and the oppression of women across patriarchal societies. It is also based on the recognition that these two forms of domination are bound up with class exploitation, racism, colonialism, and neocolonialism.

The first story in this novel tells about Deeti as the main women characters. Deeti was a poor woman married with Hukam Singh, a rich man from high strata in their society. In Hukam's family Deeti was raped by her brother-in-law, Chandan Singh and had a daughter called Kabutri. Her mother-in-law and her uncle Bhyro Singh were never love her properly. They tortured and mocked her every time. Then Deeti decided to burn herself with the late Hukam Singh in Sati. Unfortunately, she was saved by Kalua, Hukam Singh's driver and then they escaped together to the ship namely Ibis. They became immigrants in there and met other people who had the same faith like them. Patriarchy is also occurred in Ibis and Deeti was still became the subaltern subject, but she through that things with her friends. When Bhyro Singh found her and Kalua, they escaped from Ibis with their friends.

#### **Review of Literature**

The true meaning of postcolonialism is about colonialism, contains of the legend in society, language and landscape. Then the other things are also important to describe postcolonialism studies. It means that the physical area of postcolonial study is wider than any other discipline in literature. Moreover, Spivak mentioned in her critical theory about post-colonial in *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (1987) deserves special mention including the essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' Spivak widely mentioned the range of subaltern in the works of literature to agglomerate the women. While Bhabha argued that colonialism is the set of logical assumptions about the other lands and indigenous people. In his book "The Location of Culture" (1994), Bhabha writes, 'The purpose of colonial discourse is to elaborate the colonized people becomes the dilapidated groups according to their race and cultures, to give the reason to specify the system in colonialism' (Mondal, 2014:2967).

#### **Methods**

The present study data source is mainly in the novel by Amitav Ghosh *Sea of Poppies*. The study will be taken from the quotations, dialogues, and descriptions from the novel.

#### **Discussion**

To make this point understandable, this study will depict the representation of the subaltern subjects that will be represented by Deeti. Not only that, but the subaltern subject also lives under the patriarchy and this study will discuss how this subject fight against the patriarchy in society. This term was created from Colonialism era that distinguishes the lower and upper class in the society. The whole of this story is telling about the colonized people in their land, but it will represent from the view of Indian Woman called Deeti. She was being a subaltern subject in her life, because her roles, religion, and social structure. This is happening not only because the colonials, but the society also made her became the victim. People thought the colonials are so much must be respected rather than indigenous people. This phenomena creates the patriarchy in the society. It is the term to differentiate people based on their hierarchical strata.

In *Sea of Poppies*, Deeti as the main character of India women had been alienated from the circumstances which are the submissive of her husband and his family. She had been forced to marry her brother's friend and served her husband's family as a daughter-in-law also a wife. In Deeti's case, her husband's family never showed their respect for her. Like many India families and other India people, caste is the number one in a relationship, including Hukam Singh's family. Deeti was from a lower class than her husband's family and all of the family members are rude to her because of that. The only reason Deeti became Hukam Singh's wife because of Hukam is her brother's friend. Not only have that reasoned, but also as physically Hukam Singh has imperfection legs and only Deeti who wants to marry him. Surprisingly, she found something pathetic on her wedding night that makes her life was changed forever. As a woman who already familiar with the opium, she knew well what she smelled was opium. She was more believed when he showed her a box of opium that belongs to him.

"See-do you know what's in here?"

"Afeemnaikhe?" She said. "Isn't it opium?" (Ghosh, 2008:19).

Deeti chose to run and find another place that nobody recognized her and Kalua. She and Kalua keep going to still alive and ran away from their past. In the middle of their journey, they stay in a stranger land. Their confusion brings them into a boat that will take them into a new place. Surprisingly, when they decided to continue the journey and being the immigrants, Deeti heard something about Bhyro Singh, her husband's uncle who always rude to her. The conversations about Bhyro Singh wanted them to die. Here is the conversation that heard by Deeti.

According to the first statement problems, the first representation of Subalternity is when Deeti being a wife from the rich imperfect man. Her husband's family tortured her, such as rape her, makes her a housekeeper and mocks her with many jibes. Moreover, she had a daughter from her husband's brother after he raped her. Because of that, her mother-in-law called her 'Draupadi' because she had a kid from another man. Unfortunately, like the Draupadi that was accepted her faith by marrying

five men, Deeti also accepted her destiny for being a mother from the man she hates the most. However, after she met Kalua she had hopes that she had another chance to love someone she wants. Although Kalua is from the lower classes like her, Deeti feels like she will be a better woman when Kalua is around her. When Chandan Singh mocked her by telling the truth about her wedding marriage, Deeti said something that makes her in a dangerous moment. She challenges Chandan Singh to burn herself with her dying husband when he dies. Deeti knew that was a bad decision, but for her, it was the better choice rather than being a second wife from a man that she hates the most. Then Hukam Singh was finally dead, Deeti felt so sad and scared. On the day of Sati a miracle comes to her, Kalua saved her from Sati and he took Deeti into the Ganga River.

After they escaped from their village, they decided to be immigrants by changing their identities. Deeti replaced her name as Aditi and Kalua as Maru. They both were married in fugitive and Deeti was pregnant. They met Deeti's husband's uncle Bhyro Singh which is the main leader in the land they heading for. But before they arrived in there Bhyro Singh wants to kill them one by one. Amazingly, Deeti and Kalua had some friends who want to escape too. So they help them to be free people without anybody's commands.

The second statement problems show that Indian women also fight the patriarchy that binding them for so long time. Although they are not rebel or resist, in this study, the Indian women are doing something to release from the colonials. From the escapee, he speaks what is on their mind, and leaves the Ibis. It is shown that Indian women are not always quiet when they had tortured by others. But they also can do something, although they still respect their cultures. Because they know that they live with their cultures since they were born and they love the cultures.

### Conclusion

From the findings above, this study has been concluded that Deeti becomes the subaltern subject after she married. In her husband's family, she has to face the patriarchy. Either in her husband's family or in the Ibis. This study finds out that the circumstance around her makes her become the subaltern subject. She is a poor woman, not an intelligent woman, and from the lower class. The main reason for that is because the family patriarchal and social patriarchal that repeatedly Deeti became the submissive in her life. Although she tried to protect herself by escaping from her Sati with Kalua and they became the migrants in the Ibis. Then she got help from her friends who has a similar unfortunate life. Then they

left the Ibis to find another better place. These ways are implemented on the system, by using subalterns, oppression, submissive, and patriarchy. Some characters in this novel have their own roles which representation the Subalternity approach by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Most of them are victims that being the subjects who cannot speak what they want. Subalternity imposed within the society resulted in two ways. There are refuse the patriarchy and experience the alienation and humiliation. Through Subalternity they show that subaltern is not always a weak people who never can speak for what they belong to. If it is hurt them so much, they will speak to get their own freedom as human beings. Also, patriarchy is not the wall that imprisons them from freedom. Patriarchy is just mindset from some people who have more power than others to oppress them. Moreover, the alienation and humiliation that they experience along their life make them got a new strength. They got something to be obtained for the rest of their life.

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