"[N]owhere was there anything green": Exploring Human Ecology and Gendered Perceptions of Land Disaster in *Sea of Poppies*

Sonia Irum [1]
Munazza Yaqoob [2]

Abstract

Environmental fiction with a human ecological perspective fosters a deep connection between humans and the natural world. It examines several areas of human-ecosystem interaction to raise environmental awareness in the literature. It functions as a human ecological approach that examines environmental concerns in relation to psychological and social factors affecting individuals. Amitav Ghosh's novel Sea of Poppies employs a postcolonial ecocritical framework to address the pressing issue of environmental degradation, examining its historical origins in India's colonial governance. Deeti in the novel shows how colonialism is unethical and illegal, leading to the destruction of ecosystems and regions. Deeti witnesses an ecological catastrophe during the First Opium War between Britain and China. Deeti's loss reminds us that people's insatiable desire to exploit natural resources for profit destroys the environment. Her narrative encompasses not only her arduous existence but also a fractured biosphere. This study employs a human ecological approach, utilising the theories of Murray Bookchin and postcolonial ecocriticism, to examine the representation of environmental devastation intertwined with social and psychological effects on colonised societies in the novel. The human ecological approach raises awareness and encourages ethical behaviour, protecting the biosphere from human avarice and its harms. Research indicates that colonialism and its associated technological-industrial complex harm the natural environment, social harmony, production, and human psyche and community interactions, as illustrated in Sea of Poppies. Through Deeti, Ghosh establishes a direct conceptual connection between postcolonialism and ecocriticism.

[1]Lecturer, International Islamic University, Islamabad
[2]Associate Professor, International Islamic University, Islamabad

Keywords: Human Ecology, Amitav Ghosh, Postcolonialism, ecocriticism, environmental consciousness

1. Introduction

According to Head (1998), environmental fiction explores the multiple dimensions of human interaction with the environment, aiming to increase eco-consciousness in literature. In this regard, Murray Bookchin (1996) is a foundational thinker in human ecology, who argued that ecological crises cannot be separated from social hierarchies and domination systems. So, environmental fiction serves as a human ecological study, examining the causes of environmental problems linked to people's psychological and social issues. Head, highlighting the concepts of diversity and sustainability in the approaches of ecocritics, believes that environmental fiction raises eco-consciousness in literature. With its human ecological perspective, environmental fiction fosters a strong bond between people and the environment. In order to promote a "sustainable, socially equitable, and spiritually rich way of life" (Drengson & Inoue, 1995, p. xix), the stories emphasise how important the environment is to us and how our relationship with it affects our psychological, mental, physical, and social health. Rob Nixon's (2011) concept of "slow violence" is equally valuable for understanding the environmental and psychological damage explored in *Sea of Poppies* (2008). In this regard, Amitav Ghosh, in his novel, chooses a period in colonial history when the English East India Company began cultivating opium as a cash crop and established an opium factory in Bengal and Bihar to supply the Chinese market (pp. 7-8).

Ghosh is among the few South Asian writers in English who integrate nature into the settings of their fictional works. Ghosh has himself written on environmental literature in *The Great Derangement* and in *Sea of Poppies*, using a postcolonial ecocritical framework, Ghosh manages to focus on the high-priority, real-world issue of the destruction of the natural environment, tracing its historical roots in the colonial rule of India (Gardner & Stern, 2002; Bechtel & Churchman, 2002; Schultz & Oskamp, 2000). "The heroes and heroines of Ghosh's novels are the native people…the tragedy and triumph of whose lives is narrated against the backdrop of colonial history" ("Royals into Exile," 2016, p. 21); colonial

perspective always sails through Ghosh's works. In such contexts, his novel, *Sea of Poppies,* is the first of the Ibis trilogy as a study of environmental disturbance and disintegration in the ecosystem during the First Opium War between Britain and China (Ghosh, 2008, pp. 102-104; Hanes & Sanello, 2002). *Sea of Poppies* serves as a poignant reminder that ecological damage often results from people's insatiable desire to exploit and exploit natural resources for material gain. It is a tale meant to show that colonialism involves more than the illegal taking of people's land and resources; it also involves unethical and illegal regimes that violate ecosystems and devastate areas. Thus, the anthropologist in Ghosh presents a close conceptual link between postcolonialism and ecocriticism.

1.1 Research Questions

The research questions are:

- What psychological, social, and cultural impacts of environmental degradation are illuminated through the lens of human ecology in *Sea of Poppies*?

- How does Ghosh's narrative weave together postcolonial ecocriticism and human ecology to critique environmental and social devastation?

- In what ways does Deeti's experience reflect a gendered perception of environmental disaster under colonial rule?

1.2 Significance of the Study

This study employs a human ecological lens to analyse Amitav Ghosh's postcolonial novel, *Sea of Poppies*, thereby expanding ecocritical inquiry. Much ecocritical work has focused on environmental challenges in Western contexts, but this study examines the environmental, psychological, and social impacts of colonialism in South Asia, particularly how women internalise these effects. The research offers a nuanced perspective on how imperial violence impacted landscapes, identities, communities, and relationships with the land, particularly in emphasising Deeti's gendered perception of ecological disaster. The study also emphasises the role of literature in developing eco-awareness and

highlighting the often-overlooked links between environmental degradation, historical trauma, and human suffering. This strategy of merging human ecology with postcolonial ecocriticism offers a new critical framework for literary writings that address environmental and sociopolitical issues. This research helps decolonise ecocritical theory and expand the environmental humanities' ethical and activist possibilities.

1.3 Methodology

This article employs a human ecological literary approach, based on Murray Bookchin's concept of human ecology, which examines how social structures, human communities, and their environments interact in a systematic manner. This study examines how colonial exploitation alters both biological landscapes and human psychology by integrating Bookchin's concept with postcolonial ecocritical perspectives from authors such as Rob Nixon and Amitav Ghosh. Feminist ecocriticism, which examines how gender influences ecological experiences, contributes to the development of this methodology. For example, Val Plumwood's work on how gender affects ecological experiences helps us read Deeti's views on land disaster through an intersectional lens. The study closely reads *Sea of Poppies*, paying attention to narrative devices, images, and metaphors, to demonstrate how Ghosh employs these elements to illustrate how colonialism's economic and technological activities contribute to environmental disaster. The analysis situates *Sea of Poppies* within the context of human ecology to demonstrate how literature can reveal the mental and social consequences of environmental degradation, raise awareness of environmental issues, and provide a moral framework for combating the ecological damage caused by colonialism.

2. Literature Review

Bookchin's (1996) human ecology framework provides a vital perspective for this study. He argued that environmental degradation is inseparable from the social and political structures that enable human domination over other humans, and by extension, over nature itself. This insight helps illuminate how British colonial systems imposed not only economic exploitation but also deep ecological ruptures in colonised landscapes, as seen in *Sea of Poppies*. Nixon (2011) also demonstrates how gradual, often invisible,

environmental harm disproportionately affects marginalised communities and colonised peoples. Steiner and Nauser (1993) also advocate for a comprehensive human ecosystem that opposes a fragmented worldview. They assert that social, cultural, and ecological systems are interconnected and should be examined in conjunction. Their "anti-fragmentary" perspective endorses an interpretation of Ghosh's work, which posits that the psychological and cultural anguish of the colonial endeavour is intertwined with the environmental degradation it caused.

In this regard, Ghosh's narrative is a literary testimony to colonial environmental violence that unfolds over long timeframes, damaging land, culture, and human relationships. Additionally, Ghosh (2016) himself critiques how modern literature fails to address climate change and ecological crises, calling for a more urgent engagement with environmental catastrophe in narrative. His own fiction, including *Sea of Poppies*, models how environmental and colonial histories can be powerfully intertwined. Therfore, being a fierce denunciation of what Robert Young suggests as "capitalist economic exploitation, racism, colonialism, [and] sexism" (Young, 1990, p.1), *Sea of Poppies* appears as an "exhumation" of a "subjugated, [and] subaltern pasts" (Gandhi, 2003, p. 59) presenting threatened indigeneity of natives of Ghazipur. In the capitalist world, according to Morris (2002), "whatever a man gains, he gains at the expense of some other man's loss" (p. 32). Life-threatening conditions, such as famine, are created for the natives in *Sea of Poppies*, who are forced to leave their land. It forces readers to consider and contemplate what it means to be human and what their relationship should be with the rest of the living world (Myers, 1998, p. 20). Hence, Deeti's character as a "primary victim" (Pinheiro, para. 2) is seen as culturally associated with nature, and this association results in the 'othering' of both her and nature, as explained by Plumwood in her theory of ecofeminism (23). As the Human ecological approach to the study of literature involves critical attention to the conditions that undermine the well-being or flourishing of human and nonhuman species (Irvine & Warber, 2002; Roszak, 1995), it raises consciousness and has the potential to motivate people to act ethically. It is a valuable tool for protecting the biosphere from human greed and its catastrophic impact. The novel presents an "economic and social exploitation of the rural

folk, injustice meted out to the colonized, and the plight of suppressed classes and castes in India" (Dhanaraj & Sundarsingh, 2015, p. 2).

3. Analysis

Ghazipur, on the Ganges River, not far from the state of Bihar's border, is one of Uttar Pradesh's most productive agricultural regions. As Ghosh informs, Ghazipur is a land of mango and jackfruit trees (Ghosh, 2008, p. 7), but now both banks of the Ganges are "blanketed by thick drifts of white-petalled flowers", the poppies (p. 3). Deeti's village is four hundred miles from the coast on the outskirts of the town of Ghazipur (a town close to the Uttar Pradesh-Bihar border in India), "some fifty miles east of Benares" (p. 3). Deeti notes that the colonisers are pressuring locals to cultivate poppies in place of their traditional crops and that her hamlet, which also symbolises India, has changed as a result:

> [A] dense thicket of mangroves, and a mudbank that appeared to be uninhabited until it disgorged its bumboats—a small flotilla of dinghies and canoes, all intent on peddling fruit, fish and vegetables to the newly arrived sailors (p. 10)

Deeti, the main character in *Sea of Poppies*, engages the reader to study the novel as a postcolonial ecocritical text (theory of colonial plundering of indigenous lands) as she perceives this interconnectedness while witnessing the atrocities committed against humans, and she does so by engaging with nonhuman life values and giving voice to nature. This aligns with current ecological humanities research, which emphasises the interconnectedness between human and nonhuman worlds. Deeti, who represents native Indians, is perturbed by the installation of the Sudder Opium Factory in Ghazipur by the British and East India Company, which causes unrest amongst her people (p. 6). She is a witness to the brutality inflicted by the colonial regime, represented by this opium factory, against the land and its entire ecosystem. She is expelled from her village and habitat and is ultimately cut off from her property. Native Indians were sent to Mauritius, Trinidad, and Fiji to cut sugar cane for the British. Therefore, Deeti's uprooting is a case study that traces the impact of human avarice, enabled by the employment of

technology, on the destruction of the lives of natives and indigenous inhabitants.

The opium factory in the novel is a powerful symbol of human technological intrusion into the natural world. Deeti observes that since the factory is set up in the village, its life, which was in "alliance with nature" (Yaqoob, 2010, p. 98), is disrupted. Modernity's delocalised impact (Giddens 1990; Appadurai 1996), brought by the colonisers' massive ship *Ibis*, unsettles Deeti, who stands for a human connection with the environment as both a biological organism and a social being. As she watches the foreigners run the opium production and exert total control over village life, she begins to feel like an outsider, even in her own community. She misses the local food "succulent satua-stuffed parathas, mango pickle, potatoes mashed with masalas to make aloo-ka-bharta, and even a few sugared vegetables and other sweets—parwal-ka-mithai and succulent khubi-ka-lai from Barh" (Ghosh, 2008, p. 188). This is what Dryzek (1987) points out as "human encroachment on natural systems" (p. 22), which is seen to occur and expand at unprecedented levels and rates. Hence, the novel serves as a timely reminder that the human and natural worlds are inextricably intertwined, with human and technological intrusions tarnishing the natural beauty and inflicting misery on humans alike.

Deeti's vulnerability is exacerbated by the fact that her livelihood depends on agriculture. She is more connected to her natural environment because she maintains the household and produces food for her family. She possesses "both indigenous knowledge of and an ecological perspective on the environment" (Dove, 2006, p. 197). The novel illustrates how her roles as a household manager and social participant are both influenced by the exploitation of natural resources. Structural changes in society brought about by colonial administrations erode the sense of self-identity and uniqueness held by Deeti and other indigenous people. Ghazipur's community is presented as an indigenous community that has "a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories…in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions, and legal systems" (Cobo, qtd. in Brondo, 2013, p. 91). They become marginalised members of society as the colonial administration takes over, and they are

compelled to give up their traditional crops in favour of planting poppies.

The novel also informs that the men are "'feminised' by the colonizers to justify their oppression", and women like Deeti are further "oppressed by their own men, hence 'doubly colonized'" (Jabeen, p. 1). Deeti gets raped by her husband's brother after being given opium by her mother-in-law the night before her wedding. Consequently, Kabutri, a daughter, is born to her. This conceals her husband's impotence, and it is assumed that the couple has consummated the marriage. According to Dhanaraj and Sundarsingh, the multifaceted exploitation of Deeti made her "subjected to physical, sexual, and emotional abuse. Not only is Deeti raped on her wedding night by her brother-in-law, but with her husband on his death bed, she is also subjected to sexual harassment by him" (p. 2). Therefore, Deeti becomes an important character to study as Gayatri Spivak (2006) observes, "in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow" (p. 287).

Bihar and Ghazipur, as presented in the novel, serve as examples that support the claim that submitting nature to market forces can savagely disrupt natural systems, sociocultural structures, and the psyche of people. With the arrival of sahibs and their opium enterprise, Deeti observes the decline of her people and land. She courageously confronts the tragedy of her people being forced to perform backbreaking labour in an opium factory, grow poppy crops in place of food on their agricultural land, and being turned into corpses with no control over their bodies due to the heavy drug effects of opium, as well as her own rape after being drugged.

Deeti's rape by her brother-in-law after being forced to inhale opium is the fictionalised symbolic signification of such projects. Deeti's husband breathes opium into her body himself, and her lungs are filled with smoke, "drugged and held down, to be raped" (Ghosh, 2008, p. 39) by her own people; she begins to lose her connection with the world (p. 36). Later, when she, too, mixes opium in her mother-in-law's food and makes her go "lazing in the shade of a mango tree" (p. 35), she thinks about the frailty and defenselessness of human beings, who can "be tamed by such tiny doses of this

substance" (p. 35). Like her land, she has been ruined; her body is forcibly used and then defiled by the opium business.

The disinterestedness of the upper class of her society and their alliance with the colonial masters, the foreigners, bring catastrophe to Deeti's land. She is also utterly disappointed to realise how her own people have played their role in disrespecting their land, making her indigenous society's pure and contented life socially and mentally sick. What made Deeti lose her hope and courage to resist the changing ethics of her society and land was the heinous act committed by the rajas of Bihar. She witnesses an inhuman act committed by the three young landlords at night, who force a low caste man, Kalua, to mate with a horse (pp. 52-53). Ghosh, as this incident unfolds, draws the attention of the readers to the air, which is filled with the toxic smell of poppy flowers and has possibly affected the landowners, causing them to lose their sense of humanity and engage in the sport with Kalua to humiliate him, leaving his entire body covered in filth.

When Deeti visits the opium factory in search of her husband, the place appears to her "like a dim tunnel, lit only by a few small holes in the wall…hot and fetid" filled with the smell of "liquid opium mixed with "mixed with the dull stench of sweat". The horror to her sight was "a host of dark, legless torsos" which were "circling around and around" (pp. 87-90). These ghastly "demons" she discovers are opium factory workers. She sees the bare-bodied labourers "sunk waist-deep in tanks of opium, tramping round and round to soften the sludge". She can not believe they are humans who are nothing more than "ghouls than any living thing she had ever seen". The situation of factory labourers in postcolonial ecocritical terms is the dehumanisation of the human subjects, drawing attention to the oppressive colonial regimes that treat humans merely as tools to run the machinery of their empire and use them to the limit of their endurance to maximise their profit.

4. Installation of the Opium Factory

With an "increasingly addictive" narrative (Dalrymple, 2008, para. 11), *Sea of Poppies* is a novel of addiction. Deeti's husband, Hukam Singh, was wounded in the leg as a sepoy in the British Regiment. Opium relieved him of the pain caused by the battle, but it also made

him addicted to drug consumption, eventually killing him. Ghosh uses Opium as a symbol in the novel. Opium, a product of the factory installed and run by the colonisers and capitalists, is a profit-making business project that ignores human and land ethics. The novel informs:

> British rule in India could not be sustained without opium…in some years, the Company's annual gains from opium are almost equal to the entire revenue of…the United States…it is opium that has made this age of progress and industry possible: without it, the streets of London would be thronged with coughing, sleepless, incontinent multitudes. (pp. 105-108)

Deeti feels annoyed to think about present times, as now the sahibs force everyone to grow poppies to produce "Chandu", "afeem", and hard "abkari", which are packaged in the English factory to be sent across the sea in boats. The English sahibs never allowed the natives to plant anything else: "their agents would go from home to home, forcing cash advances on the farmers, making them sign asámi contracts" (p. 31). It was impossible to say no to them.

Deeti becomes deeply sad to see that crops are "steadily shrinking in acreage" (p. 31), and the banks of the Ganges are shored up with broken earthenware vessels of opium. It is crowded with fishermen because the fish nibble at the shards and become drowsy, making it easy for the fishermen to catch them (p. 96).

Similarly, an article in the *Bihar Times* reports that the entire factory is infested with monkeys from Ghazipur. As the "latest victim of this British legacy of Opium", according to the source, squads of monkeys can be seen "roaming around lazily in search of an opium piece or scrubs…they do not leave the place and 'seemingly have become addicted to Opium'. A worker in the factory further adds that '[m]ost of the time we have to drag the dozing, addictive monkeys from the place by holding their tails'" ("A Visit to Ghazipur Factory", 2010). Ghosh writes:

> This stretch of riverbank was unlike any other, for the ghats around the Carcanna were shored up with thousands of

> broken earthenware gharas—the round-bottomed vessels in which raw opium was brought to the factory. The belief was widespread that fish were more easily caught after they had nibbled at the shards, and as a result the bank was always crowded with fishermen. (p. 84)

Ghosh further adds:

> [A] miasma of lethargy seemed always to hang over the factory's surroundings. The monkeys that lived around it… unlike others of their kind they never chattered or fought or stole from passers-by; when they came down from the trees it was to lap at the open sewers that drained the factory's effluents; after having sated their cravings, they would climb back into the branches to resume their stupefied scrutiny of the Ganga and its currents. (p. 84)

Deeti feels that the native upper-class people are equally responsible for the ecological and social corrosion, and such people, according to Yaqoob (2010), are "culturally sick and are making their own wealth by robbing other people and their own country" (p. 97). Deeti feels disoriented in her own land and among her own people after the arrival of the masters and their business of opium.

Deeti finds it hard to steer her life and be safe from the spread of socio-ecological deterioration. She leaves her native place and sets out on a journey to gather her human self away from the changing landscape on the rivers and at the shores of the Ganges and the countryside "blanketed with the parched remnants" of poppies. She feels utterly sad to see that "[e]xcept for the foliage of a few mango and jackfruit trees," there is nothing "green to relieve the eye" (Ghosh, 2008, p. 178). She runs away from her village, which suffers the loss of the vegetables and grains, the local crops that had sustained her society, and where her people, the farmers, are "the agents of the opium factory" (p. 203). Her short stay in Chapra town adds to her misery, where "hundreds of other impoverished transients" are made to displace themselves by the "rising tide of poppies" (p. 213). The flood of poppy flowers has ruined the countryside and disrupted the provision of sustenance. This has stricken the people with starvation, distortion, disease, disintegration, and utter misery. Deeti and hundreds of others like

her, who are displaced from their native villages and communities, are further shipped to far-off places to be made useful for other industrial projects managed by the colonial masters.

Deeti understands the mystery of opium and its massive production through the diligent efforts of the colonial masters and industrialists at the Ghazipur factory. She understands "if through the operation of a little amount of that 'product' she can have control" of the elderly woman, then as she can envision "with more of it at her disposal, why should she not be able to seize kingdoms and control multitudes?" (p. 40). Ghosh further uses the symbol of opium as the profit-oriented business project of colonialism to exploit the indigenous lands' resources and control the natives and their resources. There are several descriptions in the novel showing the natives of Ghazipur lying unconscious with no control over their bodies, minds, and their land…just bodies or instruments used in an opium-making factory. People suffer a "paroxysm of sneezes and sniffles" (p. 95), "gagging" (p. 98) on opium's "sickly odour" in the environment (p. 97), labourers in the opium factory in the dim tunnel work in "hot and fetid" air in the reek of the dull stench of sweat mixed with opium (p. 98). In the dark, gloomy, and poisonous atmosphere of the factory, the labourers appear as a "tribe of demons" and "ghouls" with "vacant eyes" (p. 99), which agonises Deeti to see people of her land living under an "opium-induced dream, implanted by someone else" (p. 38). Deeti also observes that nonhuman species are affected too by opium as the "sweet, heady odour" draws insects like bees, grasshoppers, and wasps. Poppies 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" (p. 29). Deeti believes that the opium factory has rendered the entire village intoxicated.

5. Land Degradation

As Deeti depicts colonial subjects robbed of land, occupation, and environment, the novel as a postcolonial ecocritical text links colonialism as a business project that denies indigenous societies like India their natural resources and disintegrates ecosystems by degrading land, environmental conditions, displacing people, and disintegrating their communities. Deeti represents indigenous people who are economically, socially, intellectually, physically, and

politically subjugated by natural resource exploitation. She informs the reader that the colonial industrial encroachment changes the native population's subsistence and employment structure, and ruins the landscape's natural beauty. Deeti, representing the indigenous community, rejects the gradual replacement of nature with factories and technology as she thinks, "what sane person would want to multiply these labours when there were better, more useful crops to grow, like wheat, dal, vegetables?" (p. 31). She can see how, even after the massive engagement of labourers and long hours of duty, "the factory's appetite for opium seemed never to be satiated" (p. 31).

6. *Ibis*, the Ship

In *Sea of Poppies*, the ship is another powerful symbol of colonial greed and a "frantic search for profit or power" (Orr, 2002, p. 174). Sachs (1997) also views Western imperialism as an "unfettered enthusiasm for economic growth" (p. 26) that subscribes to the growth of capitalism, bringing environmental degradation. *Ibis* in *Sea of Poppies* represents British colonisers and their modernist way of living and technology and an "environmental nightmare" (Watts, 1998, p. 15), a source of pollution to land (Ghosh, 2008, p. 8), an "apparition", and "a sign of destiny" (p. 3) for Deeti. *Ibis*, through the Ganges, brings shipments of technology and modern equipment from abroad and takes away indigenous raw goods and products made from indigenous resources, utilising indigenous human labour abroad. Though *Ibis* becomes a shelter for characters who are deemed unable to dwell on their native grounds, these indigenous people are exiles forced to leave their homeland because of profit-oriented destruction brought by this schooner.

Native industrialists like Benjamin Burnham of the Burnham Bros., the ship's major trader, are portrayed as local colonisers. Like many local opium capitalists, he is instrumental in the empire's horrific exploitation of the locals and their land, destroying the ecosystem. As the novel informs, they not only serve their colonial masters but also imbibe their monstrous greed. While she was on the ship serving as an indentured enslaved person under Burnham, Deeti observes that to have a clear sight between the river and his house Mr Burnham had shaped the grounds to his desires by odering "clearing of every unseemly weed and growth that obscured his

view of the river—among them several ancient mango trees and a heathenish thicket of fifty-foot bamboo" (p. 92). He is an old slaver who declares with a sense of false moralisation that merchants like him are the "servants of free trade" (p. 108).

Ghosh invests Deeti's character with the power to understand and inform the readers of the close link between the opium factory and the ship *Ibis*—the two powerful symbols of colonial greed and plundering, which destroyed the land and people. Deeti experiences the fear of the impending danger of the ship's arrival and its contact with the 'sacred waters' of the Ganges (p. 10). On her daughter Kabutri's inquiry, Deeti replies, "Beti—I saw a jahaj—a ship" (p. 8). *Ibis*, as a "blackbirder" (p. 12), transports people from indigenous populations, including enslaved individuals, indentured servants, and plantation labourers, to various distant and alien lands, from Calcutta to Mauritius. As plantation labourers, these natives are exposed to heavy pesticides and are made to do backbreaking work for very meager wages by the colonisers, who are the capitalist industrialists.

The ship episode symbolically signifies the catastrophic and claustrophobic experience that the indigenous Indian communities had to undergo under colonial rule. The narrative informs us that Deeti and all others are packed into the dark "airless and leaden gloom" of the dabusa on the *Ibis*, where "unstirred air" smells like "sewage" and makes breathing difficult and combines with the "midday heat" and the "fetid stench of hundreds of enclosed bodies" (p. 386). Deeti and her people on the ship are traumatised and disoriented. Readers are informed that the men on board treat them like beasts, and as a result, Deeti can see how her people are also turning into beasts, feeling no inhibition in coupling in secret, as "beasts, demons and pishaches" (p. 449).

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, Deeti's figure in *Sea of Poppies* serves as a powerful lens that documents the political, social, economic, and environmental transformations in India resulting from British colonisation, which precipitated significant challenges for the indigenous population. Readers can meticulously examine the numerous environmental changes that occurred during colonial rule

through her narrative. These changes significantly influenced individuals' perceptions, communities, and cultural frameworks. The novel illustrates how colonial industrial and technological practices, driven by profit and capitalist greed, disrupted the land's harmony and productivity, while also undermining human communities, their relationships, and psychological well-being.

The polluted, suffocating environment of the ship powerfully evokes Deeti's memories of her homeland, once fertile and beautiful before the colonial imposition of the opium economy. She painfully tells Kalua the feeling of land pulling them back (Ghosh, 2008, p. 417), and later remarks how poppy seed took them from their homes and put them on the ship (p. 469); the narrative makes visible her profound sense of dispossession. These experiences highlight a gendered perspective on environmental catastrophe: Deeti's profound bond with the land and its devastation reflects the patriarchal oppression she endures as a woman, illustrating how colonialism and its industrial apparatus exploit both women's bodies and nature as sites for reproduction and profit.

Through Deeti's perspective, Ghosh's novel amalgamates postcolonial ecocriticism and human ecology to critique the imposition of colonial economic institutions that compelled the replacement of subsistence food crops with more lucrative cash crops, such as opium, disregarding the fundamental needs of the local populace and the ecosystem at large. Deeti's thoughts show that the overproduction of opium caused the agricultural, familial, and community stability of her village to fall apart, just like how her own reproductive body was taken and sold.

Ultimately, *Sea of Poppies* compellingly advocates for the need to restore harmony with the earth, emphasising a human ecological perspective that prioritises the relationship between individuals and their environment. Deeti's experience mirrors that of several indigenous and native communities whose anguish stems from environmental degradation inflicted by avaricious, materialistic individuals and colonial enterprises. The novel promotes an ethical and ecologically aware reconfiguration of human interactions with land and nature, emphasising its significance for both academia and the future of our planet.

References

A Visit to Ghazipur … Sea of Surprises. (2010). *Bihar Times*. http://www.bihartimes.in/articles/amarnath/opium.html

Appadurai, A. (1996). *Modernity at large*: *Cultural dimensions of globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota.

Bechtel, R. B. & Churchman, A. (2002). *Handbook of environmental psychology*. New York: John Wiley and Sons.

Bookchin, M. (1996). *The philosophy of social ecology: Essays on dialectical naturalism* (2nd ed.). Montreal: Black Rose Books.

Brondo, K.V. (2013). *Land grab: Green neoliberalism, gender, and Garifuna resistance in Honduras*. University of Arizona Press.

Dalrymple, W. (2008, June 16). *Review: The Sea of Poppies*. Financial Times. https://www.ft.com/content/c473716e-38da-11dd-8aed-0000779fd2ac

Dhanaraj, A. & J. Sundarsingh. (2015). Socio-cultural aspects in Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies*. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*, *20*(3), 1-4.

Dove, M.R. (2006). Indigenous people and environmental politics. *Annu. Rev. Anthropol*. 35, 191-208.

Drengson, Alan. R. & Inoue, Y. (1995). *The deep ecology movement: An introductory anthology*. Berkley: North Atlantic Books.

Dryzek, J.S. (1987). *Rational ecology: Environment and political economy*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Gandhi, L. (2003). *Postcolonial theory: A critical introduction* (2nd ed.). New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Gardner, G.T. & P.C. Stern. (1996) *Environmental problems and human behavior*. Boston, Allyn and Bacon.

Ghosh, A. (2008). *Sea of Poppies*. London: John Murray.

---. (2016). *The great derangement: Climate change and the unthinkable*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Giddens, A. (1990). *The consequences of modernity*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Hanes, W.T. & F. Sanello. (2002). *The opium wars: The addiction of one empire and the corruption of another*. Illinois: Sourcebooks.

Head, D. (1998). The (im)possibility of ecocriticism. In Richard Kerridge and Neil Sammels (Eds.), *Writing the environment, ecocriticism and literature* (pp. 27-39). London/New York: Zed Books Ltd.

Irvine, K.N. & S.L. Warber. (2002). Greening healthcare: practicing as if the natural environment really mattered. *Alternative Therapies*, *8*(5), 76-83.

Jabeen, N. (2016). *Women and the Environment of the Global South: Toward a Postcolonial Ecofeminism* [Doctoral dissertation, North Dakota State University]. NDSU Repository.

Kumar, C. (2016). Royals into exile: A study of Amitav Ghosh's 'The Glass Palace'. *International Research Journal of Interdisciplinary & Multidisciplinary Studies (IRJIMS)*, *II*(IV), 21-28.

Morris, W. (2002). Art, socialism and environment. In L. Coupe (Ed.), *Green studies reader: From romanticism to ecocriticism* (pp.32-36). Flance, USA: Routledge.

Myers, O.G., Jr. (1998). *Children and animals: Social development and our connections to other species*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Nixon, R. (2011). *Slow violence and the environmentalism of the poor*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Orr, David. W. (2002). *The nature of design: Ecology, culture, and human intention*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Pinheiro, G. (22 May 2020). Change is coming, whether you like it or not": Greta Thunberg as a threat to the stability of capitalist and patriarchal system. *Gender Justice*. https://www.justgender.org/change-is-coming-whether-you-like-it-or-not-greta-thunberg-as-a-threat-to-the-stability-of-capitalist-and-patriarchal-systems/

Plumwood, V. (1993). *Feminism and the mastery of nature*. London: Routledge.

Roszak, T., M.E. Gomes, M.E & Kanner, A.D. (1995). *Ecopsychology: Restoring the earth, healing the mind*. San Francisco, CA: Sierra Club Books.

Sachs, W. (1997). *The development dictionary: A guide to knowledge as power*. London: Zed Books.

Schultz, P.W. & Oskamp, S. (2000). *Social psychology: An applied perspective*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Spivak, G. C. (1998). Can the Subaltern Speak? In C. Nelson & L. Grossberge (Eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (pp. 271-313). Macmillan.

Steiner, Dieter & Nauser, M. (Eds.). 1993. *Human ecology: Fragments of the anti-fragmentary views of the world*. London and New York: Routledge.

Watts, M. J. (1998). Petro-Violence: Some thoughts on community, extraction, and politics. Institute of International Studies, University of California, Berkley. https://escholarship.org/content/qt7zh116zd/qt7zh116zd_noSplash_c509f116eb14f83038977be89f01740a.pdf?t=krn825

Yaqoob, M. (2010). Human perversion and environmental space: An ecocritical reading of Mohsin Hamid's *Moth Smoke*. *International Research Journal of Arts & Humanities, 38,* 93-104.

Young, R. (1990). *White mythologies: Writing history and the West*. Routledge.