

CHAPTER V

TRANSMUTING LIVES IN *SEA OF POPPIES*

The English sahibs would allow little else to be planted;
 Their agents would go from home to home,
 Forcing cash advances on the farmers....
 If you refused they would leave their silver hidden in
 your house, or throw it through a window. (SoP 30)

The quest for survival of the colonized was the result of colonialism. The pre-colonial India as viewed by Ghosh was entangled in the web of social evils like dowry system, child marriage, female infanticide, sati and caste domination. John Hawely remarks in *Beyond The Commonwealth: Amitav Ghosh and Contemporary Indian Writing in English*, “Ghosh works move readers beyond the “aesthetic of indifferences” that might content a lesser novelist who sets out simply to entertain and divert his or her audience from the world’s enduring problems” (165). Despite of the attempt to trounce the social evils of the pre-colonial India in the name of social development and upliftment, the independent India has to its share added to the list, religious animosity, riots and violence in the name of patriotism. Ghosh probes into the recesses of history to emphasis humanism.

Ghosh’s first book of his planned *Ibis* trilogy *Sea of Poppies* represents the evils that the British has embossed on the nation in the name of globalization. Ghosh has attempted the confluence of different nations, culture, tradition, caste and beliefs in this novel. The novel portrays the influence of imperial rule on converting the agricultural lands into savage grounds by poppy cultivation through the protagonist Deeti and acquisition of lands from zemindars like Neel Ratan Halder. It also deals with the tradition of the maritime districts of Bengal supplying lascars to the oceanic

trade through the character Serang Ali and slave trade under the modified term for slavery, as 'indentured labourers' to an unknown place called Mauritius for survival. The novel portrays the evils of the trade of poppies and exploitation of the colonized people in this trade. The diverse characters are united together with the common thread of humanism in the *Ibis*.

Ghosh has carefully selected the dark canvas of the black years of the nation - the First Opium War on which he paints the life of the characters with red symbolizing their bloodshed and quest for survival. He voices the oppression of the natives that were suppressed in the cosy lethal of opium and slave trade. The total setup of Indian society was crippled by these western traders by colonialism. Brinda Bose states in her introduction of *Amitav Ghosh: Critical Perspectives*, that Ghosh "has a keen understanding... of the political, historical, sociological and cultural nuances of his subjects... (18). He brings to light the dark years of India's political, economical and social underpinnings in this novel.

The novel forms the platform for the confluence of three plot lines; the story of Deeti and Kalua; the transformation of Zamindar Raja Neel Ratan to a convict and the story of Miss Paulette all end up as ship-siblings in the *Ibis*. The first plotline of Deeti throws limelight on the evil practices like sati, dowry system and child marriage. Neel represents the fate of zamindars who fell as a prey in the trap of the British like Mr. Burnham and the last plot of Miss Paulette brings to light the evils of the British on the lives of the people dependent on them.

The story begins with the first plot of the protagonist Deeti along with the destined fate of farmers of poppy cultivation, dowry system and sati. The very beginning of the novel gives a glimpse of its end through a revelation of a huge vessel to Deeti.

The vision of a tall-masted ship, at sail on the ocean,... Deeti....knew instantly that the apparition was a sign of destiny for she had never seen such a vessel before, not even in a dream... .. it was the chasm of darkness where the holy Ganga disappeared into the Kala-Pani, ‘the Black Water’. (SoP 3)

Her vision of a huge ship had a greater impact on her as she deems it equal to her gods that she even draws her apparition in her puja room. Deeti is married to Hukam Singh and have a daughter (Kabutri) of six years old of whose fatherhood is unknown to her. Hukam Singh is an ex-sepoy and works in Ghazipur Opium Factory by commuting in Kalua’s ox cart. He is an opium consumer – afeemokhar (SoP 34) and has never given her the taste of marriage life.

Deeti life is plagued with the doubt of her child’s fatherhood and her forced fate of cultivating poppy in her field. She had to work hard in her poppy fields just in order to settle the *asami* contract or the advance that they had forced her to get from them. Hukam Singh yielding to his addiction dies prematurely leaving his wife and daughter at the mercy of his family. Chandra Singh, Deeti’s brother-in-law had already pressed her to be his mistress and informs her that it was he who was responsible for the birth of her daughter. She considering her helpless situation declares to perform ‘sati’ in order to escape from the sensual clutches of her brother-in-law. Her devotion to her husband was pure that she enters the pyre in order to prove her chastity. Kalua, the ox cart driver, who belong to the leather caste community, rescues her from the fire and they elope to star their life anew.

The second plot line is Neel Ratan Halder, a zamindar of Rashkhali. He is one of Ghosh’s fictional characters representing the unfortunate lot of the zamindars. Neel is a young man in his late twenties had inherited the throne after his father’s death two

years before, and a proud father of his eight year old son. His father - the old Raja - had lavished his wealth on his concubines had left him as a debtor to the Burnham Company, which was owned by Mr. Benjamin Brightwell Burnham. Neel, without knowing his financial situation on learning the arrival of Mr. Burnham the owner of *Ibis* invites him to his estate for dinner along with Mr. Zachary Reid, the second mate and Mr. Doughty, the captain of the *Ibis*.

At the dinner Neel exhibited his flamboyance through his language making the guest aware of his education and concern over the matters of his state and of the world. He was informed of the intended war over China on account of opium by Mr. Burnham. Neel in the course of time becomes a prey to the avaricious and ambitious Burnham who snatches his estate and also pronounces him as a prisoner on account of forgery. Neel's arrest marks his transformation. He had no option other than to embrace his destiny as a prisoner.

Neel's humanistic concern is at the forefront in the prison. He undergoes inhuman treatment by the jailers and withstands all cruelties for his status and fame. He exhibits his humanism by initiating to clean up his cellmate Ah Fatt who is in the state of trance owing to his opium addiction. Neel's transformation is revealed through his act of rescuing Ah Fatt and both are transported to Mauritius in the *Ibis*. Thus Neel's life takes a different stride after the dinner episode.

The third plot line narrates the tale of Mr. Burnham and Miss Paulette. Mr. Burnham is the representative of the colonizers who immune the colonies with opium addiction. He had accumulated enormous wealth by exporting opium to China. His love for money blinds his humanism and empathy for his fellow human beings. He is self-centred and ambitious in nature. He had adopted Miss. Paulette Lambert the daughter of late Perrie Lambert, the botanist as an act of charity. He believed that

such act of charity will nullify his sin in accumulating wealth at the cost of other people's life.

Miss. Paulette was orphaned at the age of seventeen and was adopted by Mr. Burnham. She who grew up more in an Indian way, found it very difficult to cope up with the culture of the Burnham family. She felt the very right of personal freedom was denied to her. She was taught about the importance of knowledge in Scriptures and Penitence. Her poor knowledge in Scripture and also in English language always made her a laughing stock in the house that even Annabel, Mr. Burnham's daughter rejects her offer of help in any means. Paulette's reminisces of the days she spent with her father and Jodu's mother haunted here often.

Miss Paulette was brought up under the care of Jodu's mother whom she affectionately calls Tantima. Tantima was an Indian Muslim on whose boat Miss. Paulette was born. She witnessed Paulette's birth and the immediate death of her mother from then on she had nursed the baby as her own child. She affectionately calls her as Pugli and Jodu was her only playmate with whom she has shared a brotherly love and security. The humanistic concern of poor Tantima wins over the charity of Mr. Burnham. Tantima's affection was true and supreme, for she had adopted and brought up a foreign girl as her own girl.

Paulette's marriage proposal paved way for her escape from Mr. Burnham. She strongly opposed the marriage proposal by the rich and aged judge Mr. Kendle bush as she had liking towards Mr. Zachary Reid, the second mate of the *Ibis* for she considers him to be a genuine gentleman. Paulette witnesses Reid's humanism when he plunged into the water in order to rescue Jodu from being hit by the *Ibis*. She falls in love with him for his genuine behaviour of not doubting her relationship with Jodu and also helping her to conceal the secret of her brotherly relationship from

Mr. Burnham. It is this marriage proposal that serves the reason for her plight from the house. Paulette decides to return to her mother's town Mauritius and boards the *Ibis* as an indentured labourer with the help of Baboo Nob Kissan Pander, the gomusta of Mr. Burnham.

Baboo Nob Kissan Pander on the other hand is a strong devotee of his aunt Taramony. He hailing from a ritualistic Hindu family always dreamt of building a temple for his aunt Taramony, whom he believed that she will use his body as a vehicle for transformation. He too decides to board the *Ibis* to reach Maruitius just in order to build a temple for Taramony and thus boards the ship as the supercargo of the ship.

All the main characters along with other minor characters like Munia, Heeru, Saju and Dhokeene become 'Ship-siblings'. Thus the voyage is set with all the characters lives being transmuted from the past to an unknown future in an unknown island Mauritius. They drift away from their present life, family, caste, culture, tradition and even 'self' to be transformed as transnationalist to an unknown place for survival.

Transmutation of India was a slow process. It began verily from exploitation of lands and subjugation of its people. Economic exploitation of the colony was the core motive for the British to establish their rule in the Indian subcontinent. The British entered the Indian subcontinent under the guise of traders through the East India Company. The company enforced the country's economic, social and political subjugation to the imperial rule. The nature of this subjugation changed over the course of their reign, owing to changes within Britain. Most economic initiatives undertaken by the colonial state was couched under the guise of development and 'modernisation', but they had a differential impact on the colony, often leading to

backwardness rather than growth; transmutation instead of transformation. Shalini Jain in her article *A Posthumanist Response to Amitav Ghosh's Sea of Poppies* states,

During approximately two hundred years of imperial rule, a range of economic, social, physical and political subjectivations were enforced upon the native populations, which resulted in the seismic change in their traditional occupation and livelihood (66).

These alien traders have not only sucked all the rich resources of the land; they also transmuted the lives of the natives by transforming them into refugees who went in different directions in search of survival. This quest for survival has been later refined itself in terms like migration, transnationalism and globalization.

Transmutation of the nation was initiated through trade and commerce. The concept of free trade was introduced by Mr. Burnham. The colonizers disguised themselves under the dignified term called 'Service' to humanity. His idea on free trade sums up his ambitious character. In his conversation with Neel, it is evident that his idea on exporting opium was a service to the people of China. He also justifies his action stating that it was on the account of spreading Christianity that he chose to export opium to China. He stated that, "Jesus Christ is Free Trade and Free Trade is Jesus Christ" (SoP 116). He is of an opinion,

If it is God's will that opium be used as an instrument to open China to his teachings, then so be it. For myself I confess I can see no reason why any Englishman should abet the Manchu tyrant in depriving the people of China of this miraculous substance" (SoP 116).

Sujitha S in her article *Redefining the Ideology of Storytelling in Amitav Ghosh's Sea of Poppies* records the process of imperialism that transmuted the nation thus,

Traversing the least trodden path of the Indian colonial history Amitav Ghosh deftly captures the sheer helplessness of Indian labourers and peasants as the factory's growing appetite for revenue rendered them exploited and by exposing the shrewd business acumen of British; who scrapped India of its riches and Chinese of their discretion by poisoning them with opium. (60)

Mr. Burnham uses religion as his means for wealth accumulation.

Mr. Burnham's love for money has dehumanized him to engage in merciless endeavour of slave trade and of exporting opium. Neel contradicts his opinion and blames him as the cause of all afflictions in the form of addiction and intoxications, Mr. Burnham nettled and retorted, "These ills you mention...are merely aspects of the fallen nature of Man" (SoP 116). He thereby fails to keep the command of God that states in the Book of Hebrews, Chapter 13 verse 5, "Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have..." (NIV, Heb 13:5). He fails to be a true Christian but uses his religion as a means to self accumulation.

Mr. Burnham gives a new definition for freedom. He even justifies his action of transportation of slaves in the name of Free Trade. His concept of freedom is revealed in his conversation with Zachary. When Zachary reminds him of the abolition of slave trade, Mr. Burnham was quick to retort that no law will stop the human freedom, as to him freedom is what the white man gifts the people belonging to the lesser race, he says, "Freedom...isn't that what the mastery of the white man means for the lesser races?" (SoP 79). Through the words of Burnham, Ghosh interrogates the need for celebration of independence of the nation, when it is given at the mercy of the superior lot. Ghosh, through Brunham words induces the reasoning

faculty whether the independence of the nation was achieved or granted by the colonizers.

Mr. Burnham exhibits his superiority in proving that slavery is a way of life. He substantiates his views drawing reference from Bible that the Egyptians were exercising their power and dominion over the Israel people in treating them as slaves and their deliverance by God began the Exodus of Israel people. He says,

...the Africa trade was the greatest exercise in freedom since God led the children of Israel out of Egypt. Consider, Reid, the situation of a so-called slave in the Carolians – is he not more free than his brethren in Africa, groaning under the rule of some dark tyrant? (SoP 79).

He justifies his act of transporting slaves but under different term called ‘coolies’. He is of the view that God has closed the door of slavery and opened it to coolies of Asia, for he says, “When the doors of freedom were closed to the African, the Lord opened them to a tribe that was yet more needful of it – the Asiatick” (SoP 79). From the words of Mr. Burnham it is evident that the forms of slavery vary in nature of work and the term used to denote slaves yet the abolition of slavery is just a mirage. Uma in *The Glass Palace* was right in her understanding of the imperialism and their concept of freedom as she retorts to Mrs. Dutt,

How was it possible to imagine that one could grant freedom by imposing subjugation? That one could open a cage by pushing it inside a bigger case? How could any section of the people hope to achieve freedom where the entirety of a populace was held in subjugation?
(TGP 189)

Uma’s words are proved right with Mr. Burnham’s intention of feasting India’s wealth of opium. He says,

Do you imagine that British rule would be possible in this impoverished land if it were not for this source of wealth? And if we reflect on the benefits that British rule has conferred upon India, does it not follow that opium is this land's greatest blessing? (SoP 115)

He under the guise of 'Free Trade' justifies his act of exporting opium even to the extent of intending war on China.

The imperialists like Mr. Burnham consider themselves as the superior race of all human beings. They assign themselves the role of destiny designer of other technologically weaker countries. He is of the notion that,

The war, when it comes, will not be for opium. It will be for a principle: for freedom – for the freedom of trade and for the freedom of the Chinese people. Free Trade is a right conferred on Man by God, and its principles apply as much to opium as to any other article of trade. (SoP 115)

Their justification for their sins is so insane that they even consider war as humane.

Mr. Doughty remarks on war as,

But it cannot be denied that there are times when war is not merely just and necessary, but also humane...Indeed humanity demands it. We need only think of poor Indian peasants-what will become of him if his opium can't be sold in China? Bloody hurremzads can hardly eat now: they'll perish by the core. (SoP 260)

These colonists seem to be considerate over the prospects of the millions of Indian peasants but actually they are very much interested on their own prospects. For Mr. Burnham tells Neel about individuals' responsibility in controlling their desire over their life and material and not on rules and bans of any commodity, he says,

...the antidote for addiction lies not in bans enacted by Parliaments' and emperors, but in the individual conscience – in everyman's awareness of his personal responsibility and his fear of God. (SoP 117)

He concludes to Neel, over his dinner table airing his opinion saying that, "Merchants like myself are but the servants of free trade, which is as immutable as God's commandments" (SoP 117). He also added to Neel's embarrassment, that all the wealth that he possessed and the revenue that he is enjoying are from opium. Mr. Burnham made Neel aware of his limitations and also grabbed all his possession and transformed into a pauper.

Ghosh draws his thread of characters from different class of the transmuted society which had been under suppression and modification in the hands of an alien ruler. The characters encompass people of different castes and classes such as Deeti, an upper class woman, wife of Hukam Singh, a high cast Rajput – an afeemokhar. Kalua, the ox-cart driver, a giant of man from the leather – worker caste. Neel Ratan Hadler, a zamindar of Rashkhali, the Bengali aristocrat; Ah Fatt, a half-Parsi and half-Chinese opium addict, Mr. Burnham, the owner of Ibis and British opium trader and his gomusta Baboo Nob Kissin Pander. James Doughty, the captain of the Ibis; Zachary Reid, the second mate, an American sailor, who is a mulatto with an American slave mother and white American father, which gives a hint of American slavery. Miss.Paulette, the daughter of French botanist Mr.Pierre Lambert, is under the guardianship of Mr. Burnham after the death of her father. Azad Naskar – known as Jodu with whom Miss Paulette shares her sibling's affection. Besides, there are other minor characters like Heeru, Sarju, Champa, Ratna, Dookhanee and others join together with the major characters on the Ibis. Cathleen Schine in *Adventures in the Opium Trade* writes,

Ghosh tracks the lives, and the language, of an unlikely collection of men and women – princes, sailors, merchants, pirates, peasants, and runaway girls – all of whom eventually converge on an American schooner called the *Ibis*. (39).

The *Ibis* sails over the notorious black waters from Calcutta to Mauritius.

Ghosh has hewn the novel with motley characters ranging from the upper class to the lower class people, whose voice against the suppression goes unheard and at last transmuted. The destinies of these characters are intertwined on board of the slave ship “*Ibis*” bringing these characters as one under the term called ‘Ship - siblings’. He unifies them on the basis of humanism shedding off all differences and sharing equality under one roof of the ship *Ibis*. The characters were forced to flee for survival as transnationalist by transforming their identity and also as transhumanist subjected to the situations and the story is steered consistently on the base of humanism.

Deeti is the wife of Hukam Singh belonging to the upper class rajput family, who are known for their valour. Her marriage proposal to Hukam Singh was put forth by her elder brother Kesri Singh. Hukam Singh and Kesri Singh had been in the same battalion of the British army and had fought together for a couple of overseas campaigns. Hukam Singh was a sepoy and held the position of a balamteer in Burma when he was wounded fighting for the army. The wound left him crippled and also turned him to be a ‘afeemkhor’ – opium addict (SoP 98). The rajputians were known for their valour and patriotism. They were used as puppet in the hands of the colonizers to fight against their opponents. Their valour and patriotic commitment was little served.

The *Ibis* is the destination for all the characters to be transformed as transnationalist. *Ibis* is a coolie ship which is used to send labourers overseas. The

vessel 'Ibis' is the destination and destiny for all the characters in the novel, "...the *Ibis* was not a ship like any other; in her inward reality was a vehicle of transformation, travelling through the mists of illusion towards the elusive, ever-receding landfall that was Truth" (SoP 423). The ship is the memory of slavery that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* had put an end to.

The *Ibis* was built to serve as a 'Blackbirder' that is meant for transporting slaves. It had transported slaves from West Africa to America, "...the schooner's human cargo had been accommodated, was riddled with peepholes and air ducts, bored by generations of captive Africans" (SoP 12). But after the formal abolition of the slave trade this schooner was intended for a different purpose and was changed hands. The new owner of the ship is Burnham Bros. bought in order to export opium to China. Mr. Benjamin Brightwell Burnham the proprietor of the Burnham Bros. hurried the schooner from Baltimore to India for his intended trade in opium for his has established his head office in Calcutta. The schooner though hired for the export of opium, it's first sail under Mr. Burnham was intended to export slaves to the plantation of Martitus, as Monsieur D'Epiny, the owner of the sugarcane plantation at Maruitius had sent a note to Mr. Burnham stating that he wanted coolies to work in his plantation. This note has intended the course of the *Ibis* to transport coolies to the netherworld.

Transformation of the characters is due to the transient sufferings that transmuted the source of their livelihood. Deeti, the protagonist of the novel represents the agricultural folk of the nation. The novel portrays the transformation of peasants to pauper like Deeti. Imperialism has devoured the richness of the agricultural lands as the lands were used for poppy production sucking the very livelihood of the poor peasants. British forced farmers to grow indigo and opium

which enabled them to hoard wealth through export but it left the peasants with almost nothing to live on. The gift of imperialism was that it transformed the green carpet of the nation into snow clad regions. Ghosh records the transmutation of Indian terrain thus,

Ganga seemed to be flowing between twin glaciers, both its banks being blanketed by thick drifts of white-petalled flowers. It was as if the snows of the high Himalayas had descended on the plains to await the arrival of Holi and its springtime profusion of colour (SoP 3).

Yet the imperialism has transmuted the life of these dependents that they are sucked out from the very essence of their live – the lands.

Deeti's life is transmuted by poppy cultivation. To her these poppies are life sucking evils. She ruminates her forced situation of growing poppies and all its troubles that fate has entrusted on the peasants,

Come the cold weather, 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 *asami* contracts. 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 thumb print was forged: he earned commissions on the opium and would never let you off. And, at the end of it your earnings would come no more than three-and-a-half sicca rupees, just about enough to pay off your advance. (SoP 30)

Thus the agricultural lands were usurped for the cultivation of poppy. She grieves on seeing her land shrouded with white poppy flowers. The situation is well revealed

through Deeti's words in need of roofing her parched hut after harvest. She contemplates,

...in old days, the fields would be heavy with wheat in the winter, and after the spring harvest, the straw would be used to repair the damage of the year before. But now, with the sahibs forcing everyone to grow poppy, no one had thatch to spare – it had to be brought at the market, from people who lived in faraway villages, and the expense was such that people put off their repairs as long as they possibly could. (SoP 29)

Poppies were grown for luxury in the days of old. These drugs were grown in clusters between the fields that were used to grow staple crops like wheat, dal and vegetables. These were stored up in order to use it during the time of illness and its oil is used for cooking. But with the spread of imperialism the farmers were no longer at ease to plant their fields with the crops of their choice; rather they were left with no option other than to plant poppies. In the words of Santwana Halder in *Some Hidden Facets of the Colonial Rule in India: a study of Sea of Poppies* opines,

The British businessmen wanted to earn easy money from cash crops and to meet their greed the Indian farmers were compelled to produce cash crops according to their liking of the colonials, depriving themselves of wheat and paddy that they needed most to support themselves (84).

Poppies, the then seed of luxury have now become the essential crop for production.

Cultivation of poppies cannot be done as that of cash crops. The planting poppy requires a lot of time and hard work. Deeti recalls the amount of hard work involved in cultivating poppy,

...no one was inclined to plant more because of all the work it took to grow poppies – fifteen ploughings of the land and every remaining clod to be broken by hand, with a dantoli; fences and bunds to be built; purchase of manure and constant watering; and after all that, the frenzy of the harvest, each bulb having to be individually nicked, drained and scraped. Such punishment was bearable when you had a patch or two of poppies – but what sane person would want to multiply these labours when there were better, more useful crops to grow, like wheat, dal and vegetables? (SoP 29)

The colonizers accumulated wealth with the input of much hard work and labour by the peasants. These poppies played a vital role in their everyday life of the peasants. They used these poppies for cooking, cleansing and massaging. Deeti's one of the main ingredient was poppies, she used poppies to make,

a dish of stale alu-posth, potatoes cooked in poppy-seed paste...After massaging poppy-seed oil into Kabutri's hair and her own, Deeti draped her sari over her shoulder and led her daughter towards the water, across the field. (SoP 7)

Though the poppies were grown they were used only for household purposes and not for making profits. If only these peasants had known the value of these seeds that their land produced they would have definitely empowered the colonizers. Thus the nation's root –the lands – was trampled of its fertility by growing the poppy seeds.

Deeti is an embodiment of courage and resilience. She has been a victim of the patriarchal society tangled and thrown in the dark shadows of life in the name of gender discrimination, dowry system and sati. She had embraced unhappiness as the gift of her stars. She believed that her life, right from her childhood was ruled by the

stars and her fate is at the mercy of Saturn – a planet that is feared to bring unhappiness. She was married to a crippled and an impotent man like Hukum Singh because her family was in a position to afford the dowry demanded by his family. The dowry demanded from the Deeti's family was to repair the roof of the groom's house. All the more she was denied wifely pleasures but was used to bear the seed of her in-laws family by her brother-in-law. She even bore a daughter and was plagued with the doubt of who her father was. She had to resist and abide the society's norms denying all pleasures and happiness.

Indian society never allowed women to be independent. It regarded women as a means of pleasure and a tool for reproduction. Deeti was used just as a tool of reproduction. She had to withstand the passive physical harassment depriving her of marital pleasure. All the more even when Deeti's husband was alive and sick in bed her brother-in-law persuades her to be his wife, he says,

And this is why I say to you: wouldn't it be best for you to do willingly now what you did before without your knowledge? 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?... Don't you see that I'm offering you your best hope for the future? If you keep me happy, you will be well looked after" (SoP 157).

Deeti's chastity was robbed off by the whole family as she was only a tool for the growth of their family generation. Her brother-in-law also revealed her the secret of her daughter's fatherhood that happened at the very first night of her wedding, he said, "You know very well how your daughter was conceived – why pretend? You

know that you would be childless today if not for me” (SoP157). Such shameful act is considered shameless for the high caste people of Deeti’s family.

Deeti’s mother-in-law celebrates her as Draupadi, she says, “...the earth has never seen a virtuous woman than Draupadi, of the Mahabharata, wife to five brothers. She’s a fortunate woman, a *saubhagyawathi*, who bears the children of brothers for each other... (SoP 39). Deeti is compared with the epical character of Draupadi.

The Draupadi of Mahabharata was considered virtuous because of her immediate obedience to her mother-in-law and not because of being wife to five brothers. She always had a special attachment towards her lover than the other four brothers. She was devoted towards her husband like that of Deeti. But Deeti proved to be even more virtuous than Draupadi for she chose to perform sati than to be a wife to her brother-in-law. Deeti’s mother-in-law by comparing Deeti with Draupadi, tries to justify her act of helping her daughter-in-law to be molested by Chandan Singh. For such a shameful act of hers, she proudly calls Deeti as Draupadi. Deeti’s mother-in-law was at loss of explanation when Deeti asked her the reason why she calls her so. This incident proves that the high caste people were at their liberty to go against the law because there was no one to question them. It was these high caste people who designed and decided the limits and limitations of low caste people like Kalua. High caste people always enjoyed the privilege of going against the law of nature and become inhuman to rule and illtreat other fellow human beings in the name of caste.

Deeti was celebrated for her decision of committing sati. The sudden demise of her husband left her with no option in order to live with dignity and respect. She chose sati than to be the wife of her brother-in-law. She was truly committed to her husband even though she was deprived of sensual pleasures by her husband. Her

family members were happy of Deeti's decision so that the family could become wealth on account of her and so she is celebrated her as a goddess. To them, "To have a sati in the family will make us famous. We'll build a temple for you and grow rich on the offerings" (SoP 158). The whole family welcomed her decision as they would become famous on behalf of her sacrifice.

Indian society had subjugated and suppressed women to be dependent on the patriarch. Deeti, throughout her life was made to suffer. Dowry has engulfed her dreams about her marriage and ended her life as a wife of a handicapped impotent afeemokhar (opium addict) and embrace widowhood at a young age. She had to opt for sati in order to retain her chastity. In all such circumstances her life was at the mercy of the society. But her revival came in the form of Kalua who had the humanistic concern over the life of Deeti. He rescued her unconscious from the funeral pyre. Deeti regarded her rescue as a new birth and a new beginning.

Deeti's transformation is evident when she accepts her new life as new birth and marries Kalua. M.Sreelatha in her article *Reconstructing Identities in Amitav Ghosh's Sea of Poppies: A Postmodernist Perspective* opines, "Deeti can be seen to transform herself into a new identity allowing for meta-fictional reflection and an acceptance of destinies" (5). She even ventures to explore life beyond the sea by crossing over the black water to order to initiate her new life by becoming 'grimity'. She recollects the day she witnessed the large group of grimityas on foot from Kaula's cart on her way to her husband's opium factory. She remembers the meaning of the term 'grimityas',

They were so called because, in exchange for money, their names were entered on 'grimits'- agreements written on piece of paper. The silver that was paid for them went to their families, and they were taken

away, never to be seen again: they vanished, as if into the netherworld (SoP 72).

She had never thought that she would be one among them and tries to associate her vision of the tall masted ship in relation with her future to be a 'grimityas'. Omendra Kumar Singh in *Reinventing Caste: Indian Diaspora in Amitav Ghosh's Sea of Poppies* comments,

The prospect of losing one's caste was, therefore, unthinkable for permitted no possibility of social life outside the caste system. The crossing of the sea, the *kala pani*, has remained a powerful symbol of travel across troubled waters to lands from which no body returned home. (49)

Initially Deeti did not approve Kalua's idea of joining the group, for she remembered her very thought on hearing Ramsaran-ji mention of a *jahaz* – a ship that is employed for the transportation of these people,

Deeti clapped a hand over her mouth as she recalled the ship she had seen while standing in the Ganga. But why had the apparition been visited upon her, Deeti, who had nothing to do with these people? What could it possibly mean? (SoP 72).

The very thought of this frightened her, as she remembered the feeling of her's on seeing the group. She ponders,

How was it possible that the marchers could stay on their feet, knowing what lay ahead? She tried to imagine what it would be like to be in their place, to know that you were forever an outcast; to know that you would never again enter your father's house; that you would never throw your arms around your mother; never eat a meal with your

sisters and brothers; never feel the cleansing touch of the Ganga. And to know also that for the rest of your days you would eke out a living on some wild, demon-plagued island? (SoP 72).

But now Deeti had no other option other than to accept the offer as she was closely sought after to be slaughtered.

Indian system of caste domination is clear with Kalua's humiliation. Kalua, the giant of a man belonging to the leather class community was treated with contempt. His strength was used to represent his village in wrestling competition. He was hired by the rich zemindars of his village to exhibit his strength in winning the opponents just in order to get an ox cart for his livelihood from the zemindars. Kalua became a creature of amusement in the hands of these rich people. Deeti witnesses his humiliation hidden from the poppy fields. She saw the brutal treatment of the three sport loving land lords on Kalua forcing him to mate with a mare. This scene brought Deeti to tears as she identifies herself with Kalua, as to her, she is unaware of the father of her child for the past seven years. Thus Kalua becomes a toy in the hands of these beastly human beings forcing him to violate the law of nature and that of a rule from Bible "Cursed is the man who has sexual relations with any animal" (Deu 23:27) written in the book of Deutronomy, in verse 23 of chapter 27. Domination over another human being thus existed in the name of caste.

The dominance of caste is expressed in the words of Bhyro Singh in the *Ibis*, when Deeti informs him of her pregnancy he says, "A child from that scavenger? By the time I'm done with you, his spawn will be dribbling out of you like an egg yolk" (SoP 477). He also informs her that he has planned to put an end to her husband by sending him to the north where he'll be killed by the plantation workers. In *Ibis* too, Deeti's uncle Bhyro Singh plots to kill Kalua by whipping him sixty times. Kalua's

every effort for survival was doomed in the name of caste. In a society where ‘killing’ becomes virtuous and forgiveness becomes sin, there humanism is lost. Ghosh probes into the cruelty of caste domination, superiority of white men and subjugation of powerless.

Neel, the zemindar of Rashakali, a strict Hindu orthodox is tossed with the wave of misfortune that has now transformed him as a prisoner. Neel’s treatment in prison was the cruellest for a person of his status. Here he had lost his own identity and had to become one among the inmates of the jail, which was the most difficult of all, yet he had no option. He was a mere instrument in the hands of time and fate. Neel who had never ate anything prepared by unknown hands was now “handed a wodden basin, a tapori of the kind that was used to serve all the lock-up’s inmates: looking under the lid he saw that it contained a gruel-like mixture of dal and coarse rice” (SoP 267). This made him realize that he was deprived of any respect and that he was viewed nothing more than a mere thing.

Neel’s egalitarianism has paved way for introspection that naturally made him burst out like the volcano transforming him into a man of substance. The situation in jail made him re-analyse and introspect his nature.

...but why, then, had he never before eaten anything prepared by an unknown hands? He could think of no other answer other than ease of habit:... He had thoughts of his everyday routines as performance, a duty and nothing more; one of the many little enactments that were required by the demands of the social existence, by samsara – none of it meant to be real; it was just an illusion, no more than a matter of playing a part in the great charade of conducting a householder’s life.

And yet there was nothing unreal about the nausea that had seized him now; ... (SoP 268)

Neel understands that all these days in his life he had only lived for others opinion and but has failed to live for his self contentment. Moreover, he feels that he has no identity of his own in blindly following the way of his father or his ancestors.

Neel's life in prison has taught him the very essence of life. It has taught him the struggle for survival. "Neel stood up and walked away, trying to steady himself: it was clear now that this was not just a matter of a single meal; it was a question of life and death, whether he'd be able to survive or not" (SoP 268). Neel could experience and envision his transformation at this crucial point of time.

Returning to the tapori, he seated himself beside it, lifted a few morsels to his lips and forced himself to swallow them. It was as if he had ingested a handful of burning embers, for he could feel each grain blazing a trail of fire through his entrails – but he would not stop; he ate a little more, and a little more, until his very skin seemed to be peeling from his body. That night his dreams were plagued by a vision of himself, transformed into a moulting cobra, a snake that was struggling to free itself of its outworn skin (SoP 268).

Thus from that night Neel became a transformed individual looking at life anew and afresh. He also promises his wife of his return and was ready to embrace his exile as a transnationalist.

Deeti, the protagonist is transformed from a dependent housewife to an independent leader – Aditi- of the woman folk to whom everyone looks up for guidance in the *Ibis* on their journey of becoming transnationalist. Kalua is transformed from a voiceless ox-cart driver of the leather caste community to Madhu,

the voiced guardian of the grimitays in the ship. Neel, the zemindar of Rashkali becomes the prisoner and is transformed as a new person in reviving the life of his cell mate Ah Fatt; Jodu joins the group of lascars and falls in love with Munia. Paulette joins the group of women under the disguise as an indentured labourer and falls in love with Zachary Reid. Baboo Nob Kissan is transformed as a woman letting him as a vehicle for his aunt Taramony. Thus the *Ibis* serves to be the destination of all these transformed characters turning them all as transnationalist and some as transhumanist.

Deeti and Kalua transform their identity as Aditi and Madhu in order to survive. The meaning of her new name 'Aditi' suggests to a mythical Hindu goddess who releases from sin and to a person having a deep inner desire to use her abilities in leadership and to have personal independence. M.Sreelath in her article *Reconstructing Identities in Amitav Ghosh's Sea of Poppies: A Postmodernist Perspective* quotes,

The leadership traits that Deeti possess can be associated to Bass' transformational leader who creates significant change in the life of people. The followers of such a leader feel trust, admiration, loyalty and respect for the leader who offers an inspiring vision and give them an identity. Towards her fellow people on the ship, Deeti's conduct is typical of a considerate and trustworthy leader. (7)

Both the characters despite their caste and gender were subjugated by the dominant high caste patriarch society. Jasleen Johal in his article *Caste Operating Relationships in Sea of Poppies* opines,

When Deeti and Kalua elope with each other they become conscious that they have transgressed the rules, norms and rituals set by the caste

system. Kalua having suffered and being exploited at the hands of the “powerful” caste people has been totally aware of what could happen as a result of their throwing away the rules and norms of the caste system. Thus when they encounter an opportunity to run away, they utilise it and sign themselves as indentured labourers. (5)

Their subjugation was itself as cruel as colonization.

The couple are forced to join the group of indentured labourers and board the *Ibis* with their new names, identity and caste. She introduces herself to the other grimitiyas as “Chamars” (SoP 234) of leather caste workers and invents her own story to narrate to others. Omendra Kumar Singh in *Reinventing Caste: Indian Diaspora in Amitav Ghosh’s Sea of Poppies* comments,

Though Deeti assumes another name and caste and thus erases her caste identity, she is distinctly recognisable for her hereditary caste characteristics. It was her traditional high caste qualities which enabled her to assume leadership of grimitiyas on the *Ibis* and, by implication, on the plantation colony of Mauritius. (52)

But Deeti’s high caste quality had bestowed on her the leadership quality on *Ibis*.

Thus a muted woman is transmuted to be an independent leader.

Ghosh’s characters are forcefully or doomed to become transnationalist leaving aside their family, relations, assets and affinity towards their nation - patriotism. Natasha Garrett in her doctoral thesis *Transnationalism, Home and Identity: Personal Essays* comments that, “Transnationalism is an experience that is a part of the daily existence of a large group of people that live outside their home country” (10). The transnationalist characters in this novel are forced to one way traffic where ‘return’ becomes impossible. Deeti and Kalua, Neel, Paulette, Baboo

Nob Kissin and other minor characters are transformed as transnationalist to Mauritius.

Deeti's rescue determines their transformation from Deeti to Aditi and Kalua to Madhu. Her rescue by an untouchable stirred vehemence and anger in their family and the two was sought after to be killed. They in their pursuit of escape join the group of indentured labourers disclosing their identity and creating a new identity as Aditi and Madhu of 'Chamars' community and board the *ibis* to Mauritius. Thus Deeti's premonition of the vessel is the revelation about her future that the river Ganga has gifted her. Every women character are portrayed as victims of the inhuman patriarchal society.

Deeti's first step to become a transnationalist happened by crossing the river Ganga. All the 'grimietyas' from different part of the regions were made to camp in the banks of the river. It was here she happened to meet women of different backgrounds with their own sad tales. All the characters in the novel shed their own life and embrace their destiny as 'Ship-siblings'. Deeti becomes a leader and everyone calling her "Bhauji: it was as if she had been appointed the matron of the dabusa by common consent" (SoP 430).

Munia is closely associated with Deeti by calling her *bhauji hamar* – sister-in-law. She reveals her sad story to Deeti that she had been victimized by a man – a pykari agent from Ghazipur opium factory under the guise of love. The man showed her too much of attachment on her until the day he feasted on her. Then she was forced to satisfy his hunger for pleasure and she bore him a baby boy. Munia, feared her family for dishonouring the family. But to her surprise her family stood by her side and approached the agent for justice but in vain. When the baby was eighteen

months and Munia sleeping in the field at the time of her month, her house was set ablaze claiming the life of her parents and her child.

Heeru, another women character was forcefully doomed to *Ibis* as she was purposefully refused by her husband. She had lost her son in a cattle mela at Sonapur just a month before her separation from her husband. Her husband had intentionally taken her to the temple of Hariharanath and left her amidst the crowd of the temple and fled back to his place. She on her way back to her house learnt through her neighbour that her husband had intentionally left her in order to settle with a woman of his choice. She having no option had joined the group of indentured labourers to explore her life in another world.

The two sisters, Ratna and Champa, were forced to seek their survival as indentured labourers in the *Ibis* they have given their land on contract for the opium factory. As they could no longer support their family they had joined the group in search of fortune. Dookhanee too boarded the *Ibis* just in order to escape from the cruel hands of her mother-in-law.

Deeti's narrated her made up story, that she was Kalua's wife since the age of twelve and was living on the roadside with their cattle. As they could no longer endure the jealousies of pehlwans and strongmen of Benaras, as they could never beat Kalua in a combat, they were off the place and joined the group of indentured labourers. She also concealed their original identity and embraced her new transformation as Aditi and Madhu who belong to Chamars community. Apart from these people there were other men too with their own and trivial reasons to board the *Ibis*. Thus, Deeti and Kalua end up in the ship 'Ibis' as Adthi and Madhu, the transformed individuals boarding the *Ibis* as indentured labourers, where they become a part of a group who are being taken to Mauritius as labourers. Deeti is now

transformed and is celebrated as a woman of virtue. Thus the characters embrace their new identity, nationality and destiny. Natasha Garrett in her doctoral thesis

Transnationalism, Home and Identity: Personal Essays states that

The possibility of living across two (or more) countries, languages and cultures changes the way new migrants position themselves in relation to their home and host country, and the way they understand the concepts of home, language, family and identity. (13)

Thus the transnational individuals' transform themselves into a new nation. They foray into their future forgetting the memory of their identity and homeland to a new land and nation.

The departure of the *Ibis* was decided not by any of the human faculty but by the quirk of the tides. On the day of the *Ibis* departure, the sea was highly busy and populated with boats that brought the passengers of the ship from every direction. Deeti organized the evacuation of the camp and led the women folk to the boat that is to carry them to the *Ibis*. By now Deeti is well aware of everyone's life and character and she herself is fondly called as Bhajuji, and "Deeti led the women out of the hut with their saris draped carefully over their heads and faces" (SoP 354) and boarded the boat of Baboo Nob Kissian's in which there was another women sitting. Being aware of a stranger Deeti artfully introduces the women to the stranger by pulling back their ghuntas as everyone present there women. It was here that Miss Paulette joins the group of the grimityas. Deeti when asked Paulette her name she told her that her name was Putleshwari called as Pugli. All the 'Ship- siblings' like the phoenix that gets new life from the ashes looks forward for their new life in Mauritius.

Neel's process as transnationalist was initiated with his transfer from Lalbazar to Alipore jail. The novelty of the treatment in Alipore jail is stricter than the old one.

The rules of the jail exposed him to greater humiliation that he had never imagined of, despite his protest. He was thoroughly and completely checked and was also given an identity by tattooing on his forehead that he had to bear in his remaining days. He being almost naked was forced to open his mouth with a wooden wedge and his very teeth were also counted. The worst part was yet to come as he was stripped off fully naked and made his limbs set apart exposing his nakedness to the jailer's scrutiny. Neel thought it would have been better to die than to endure such humiliation. Such investigation was done in order to check the presence of lice, crabs, vermin, lesions and birthmarks. To Neel this disinterested touch of mastery made him feel that he was purchased by this new owner of his body,

...it was as if his body had passed into the possession of a new owner, who was taking stock of it as a man might inspect a house he had recently acquired, searching for signs of disrepair or neglect, while mentally assigning each room to new use. (SoP 289).

With all this treatment Neel had lost his sense of shame. When he was asked to tie a loin cloth around his waist, which he was unused to, asked the sepoy to do it,

A look of pity came into the eyes of the sepoy: Have you lost all shame? And Neel nodded, as if to say yes, that's right: for it was true that at this moment he felt no shame at all, nor any other form of responsibility for his body; it was as if he had vacated his own flesh in the process of yielding it to the tenancy of the prison. (SoP 291)

Neel had to experience transmutation of his self seeking refuge in his body.

Neel was also tattooed on his forehead, as it was the law that all transportees had to be marked so that they would be recognized if they try to escape. Thus he was tattooed that read "forgerer alipore 1838" (SoP 292). With all this the tattooist's voice

murmured in his voice that the ink has been watered and lasts only a few months, because he was from his village. Thus Neel was forced to shed his sense of shame as he was almost naked before many eyes that feasted on his humiliation.

The convicts were the first to board and then followed the migrants. The announcement of Neel's transportation to Mareech gloomed his memory with the incident of the past. His departure is compared to his death by drowning in the sea as the sea will transform him as a castaway. It was then did his cell mate Ah Fatt spread his arms around his shoulder as if to console him from his misery and told him that he is Lei Leong Fatt and people call him Ah Fatt, he also added, "Ah Fatt your friend" (SoP342). From then on there was a strong bond of friendship, love and empathy that the two shared. Their relationship was so intimate that the subedar in the ship would gift them with the lashes of their whip if they found to be helping with each other.

The immigrant indentured labourers were camped awaiting their turn to board the Black birder – the *Ibis*. The *Ibis* was the destination of all aspiring survivors promising new life in a new land as transnationalists.

The crew of the *Ibis* consisted of a captain Mr. Crowle, with Mr Doughty, Zachary Reid as second and third, Serang Ali and his group of lascars among whom Jodu was one, Subedar Bhyro Singh – Deeti's uncle, and other maistries and Baboo Nob Kissin- the super cargo. The maistries were responsible to maintain order in the ship. The setting of the ship was different. The convicts were allotted a place below the deck and were not given the liberty to mingle with the group of migrants. The women have separate places and men were on the fore front. They were allowed to meet only at the time when the food was served. When the *Ibis* was ready for its exploration all the coolies were made to gather and announced the laws of the ship. It was translated to them by the gomusta that,

The greatest and most important difference between land and sea is not visible to the eye. It is this, the difference is that the laws of the land have no hold on water. At sea there is another law, and you should know that on this vessel I am its sole maker. While you are on the *Ibis* and while she is at sea, I am your fate, your providence, your lawgiver... But remember, always, there is no better keeper of the law than submission and obedience. In that respect the ship is no different from your own homes and villages. While you are on it, you must obey Subedar Bhyro Singh as you would your own zemindars, and as he obeys me. (SoP 404)

The every word of captain made the bones of the migrants freeze. It was as if “they were entering a state of existence in which their waking hours would be ruled by the noose and the whip” (SoP 405). Thus the inmates of the ship were introduced to their new fate and new rules that they had to abide by throughout their journey.

Transportation was a blessing to every character as they pass on to their future with renewed hope. The course of the *Ibis* has set in a mood of longing and separation in the minds of the migrants. It was now that Deeti perceives the reason of her premonition,

it was because her new self, her new life, had been gestating all this while in the belly of this creature, this vessel that was Mother-Father of her new family, a great wooden *mai-bap*, an adoptive ancestor and parent of dynasties yet to come” (SoP 357).

Deeti, to whom leaving the land is as equal to invite death, is now on the Black waters looking on the land in desperation. She thought,

How had it happened that when choosing the men and women who were to be torn from this subjugated plain, the hand of destiny had strayed so far inland, away from the busy coastlines, to alight on the people who were, of all, the most stubbornly rooted in the silt of the Ganga, in a soil that had to be sown with suffering to yield its crop of story and song? It was as if fate had thrust its fits through the living flesh of the land in order to tear away a piece of its stricken heart (SoP 399).

For Deeti *Ibis* has become her only source of survival and the sea her home. She feels that the sea had the power to wash her past and rendered a new opportunity, a rebirth to live her life. She says, “Surely all the old ties were immaterial now that the sea had washed away their past?” (SoP 431). Here again the fate has bestowed them with a new family, new relationship and new bonding, “...their rebirth in the ship’s womb had made them into a single family” (SoP 431). Thus all the characters join together in the *Ibis* – their new home, destiny and destination.

The women migrants were entrusted with menial duties that are to be performed for the officers, guards and overseers. They were given duties like washing clothes, sewing buttons, repairing torn seams and so on. They had the liberty to make their choice, Paulette opted for washing clothes along with Heeru and Ratna, While Deeti, Champa and Sarju chose to do the sewing, Munia, opted to look after the livestock in the ship. Apart from womenfolk, the convicts, Neel and Ah Fat were also allotted work on the board. They were expected to make usable pickings from a basket full of stuff that would be given to them every morning. They were not allowed to the deck to mingle with the migrants, but were released to do their washing and

bathing and few minutes exercise. The worse of all falls with Bhyro Singh, who use the convicts for his amusement. The convict's routine ends with the pretence,

the pretence that they were a pair of plough-oxen and he a farmer, tilling a field, seemed to give him endless delight; he would loop their chains around their necks, in such a way that they were forced to stoop as they walked; then shaking their fetters like reins, he would make a clicking, tongue-rolling noise, as he drove them along, occasionally slicing at their legs with his lathi. It wasn't just that the infliction of pain gave them pleasure... the blows and insults were also intended to show everyone that he, Bhyro Singh, was uncontaminated by the degraded creatures who had been placed in his power. (SoP 383)

As to Bhyro Singh, Neel and Ah Fat were oxens as he considers them as impotent creatures. If any attempt of help rendered between the convicts themselves would result in kicks and blows. Thus was the treatment given by Bhyro Singh to the migrants and convicts entrusted into his power.

The setup of the *Ibis* was such that the women were given a separate place lowers the board and the men had to occupy the space open above the board. They could not communicate freely with their man. Each one had been assigned a job to do during their day time. Their food and rest was confined to special timings otherwise they had to confine themselves to the space allotted for them, any disturbance would be severely handled. Omendra Kumar Singh in *Reinventing Caste: Indian Diaspora in Amitav Ghosh's Sea of Poppies* comments,

With the rationing of food and water, the living conditions of the grimitiyas on the *Ibis* are hardly distinguishable from those on the plantation colony. Besides, there are overseers and *maistras* to watch

their activities, *subedar and silahdars* to beat them down and the white colonial officers to be served. Women were also required to do menial work like washing clothes, sewing buttons, repairing seams and taking care of the livestock. (53)

The *Ibis* itself is 'a microcosm of the plantation colony of Mauritius' (53).

The *Ibis* transported not only the indentured labourers but also their beliefs. The migrants transcend their past and move on to their future by seeking a new life through marriage among themselves like Eck Nack and Heeru. Eck Nack expressed his willingness to marry Heeru and the marriage was organised by Deeti in the ship. Paulette developed a liking towards Zachary Reid; Jodu and Munia too fell in love with each other and started to meet secretly. In one such meeting they were discovered by a subedar and Jodu was badly hit by him and Munia was caught and was subjected to imprisonment and this caused a commotion amidst the group. Munia was held up as a trap to catch hold of Deeti by her uncle Bhryo Singh. He despite being Deeti's maternal relationship humiliated her calling her a whore by narrating the incident of her first night, making her feel ashamed and embarrassed. Meantime, Munia alters Kalua by shouting to Deeti, and Kalua in turn rings the alarm bell that captures everyone's attention and Bhryo Singh had no option other than to release the two women.

Bhryo Singh being offended by Kalua's act, took him to task and requested from the captain for sixty lashes, which would be sure to put him to death violating the basic rule of the Bible that states in the book of Deutronomy, chapter 25 verse 2,

If the guilty man deserves to be beaten, the judge shall make him lie down and have him flogged in his presence with the number of lashes

his crime deserves, but he must not give him more than forty lashes.

(Deu 25:2)

But his sin itself had engulfed his life from Kalua whom he had intended to kill.

Ghosh's transhumanistic values are evident with his important characters Deeti, Kalua, Zacharya, and Neel. Kalua the low caste man heeded to his voice of humanism and rescued Deeti from the funeral pyre. Deeti opts death in order to retain her chastity. Neel extends his humanistic concern to Ah Fat in rescuing him from death of opium addiction and Zachary obeyed his human instinct to save an innocent life and jumps into the water in order to save Jodu, disregarding his race, class and caste.

The domination of the white was so powerful that Mr.Crowle expressed his discontentment to Zachary as he belongs to the black community – a metif, “my mother was a quadroon and my father white. That's make me a metif” (SoP 507). There by Jodu and Zachary was one in the eyes of Mr.Crowle despite of their nationality. This instinctive support of Jodu and Zachary for a human in distress is also portrayed in the many instances when Zachary and Jodu come to each other's rescue, even risking lives in the process. Shalini Jain in *A Post Humanist Response to Amitav Ghosh's Sea of Poppies* opines,

Both transcend racial and class barriers and prejudices to simply reach out to help a fellow human in extreme distress, with no self-interest at heart. Further complicating a simple white man versus black man binary. (72)

Ghosh proves that humanism encompasses all differences like race, caste and nationality.

Zachary Reid is an embodiment of universal humanism. He the second mate of the ship was totally against the cruel treatment against the migrants. He though knew the world less but the ships more had the quality of being human. He was not biased with the people of the crew and so Serang Ali the head of the lascars became the catalyst to his transformation. He shows his discontentment for the treatment of the migrants in the ship, especially for Kalua, for his simple act of self-defence. He, though being the second mate of the ship, was against the Mr.Crowle for his inhuman treatment in using Ah Fatt and Neel for his amusement. It so happened that Mr.Crowle and subedar induced Neel to urinate on Ah Fatt, he on refusing the act, tempted Ah Fatt to urinate on Neel promising to award him opium in return. Ah Fatt has been sentenced to transportation for the act of robbing opium. Being an addict, he lost his control over his mind and subjected to his body which has been attuned to the taste of opium that renders humans as a tamed animal.

Kalua represents the subjugated lot of Indian caste system. The Indian society is always defined by the presence of the caste system. Indian caste system is divided according to the works performed by the people. According to Herbert Hope Risley:

A caste may be defined as a collection of families or groups of families bearing a common name which usually denotes or is associated with specific occupation, claiming common descent from a mythical ancestor, human or divine, professing to follow the same professional callings and are regarded by those who are competent to give an opinion as forming a single homogeneous community. (68)

He is termed as untouchable and considered as a mere thing in the hands of the rich zemindars. He enduring all hardship proves to be the real human amidst the inhuman society. He knowing very well the end of his punishment willingly gives himself to be

executed just in order to save his wife Deeti. This act of Kalua raises him from an ordinary man to a transhumanist, who volunteers to sacrifice his life in order to save his loved one. Yet Bhryo Singh demanded the presence of every migrant in witnessing the death of Kalua and made them squat around the deck in order to have a better view. He muttered in Kalua's ears, "*Kutta!* Scavenging dog, see what you have earned for yourself? You'll be dead before I'm done with you" (SoP 487). These words have triggered his anger against Bhryo Singh, as his words were echoing in his head, Kalua thought, "Yes what I am is enough ... through this life and the next, it will be enough ... this is what I will live through, again and again and again..."(SoP 488). Kalua bit the rope that wound his wrist with his teeth in order to prevent from biting his tongue. He bit the rope for every lash that the rope was almost gone and he tactfully whisked the lash against Bhryo Singh and strangled him to death in no time. Thus Bhryo Singh sought his own death from the hands of the Kalua whom he wanted to kill.

Neel's process of transhumanization is evident with his transformation. His episode in jail has gifted him with lifelong friendship with Ah Fatt his opium addict cell mate. Ah Fatt was a half-Chinese born to an Indian Parsi from Bombay. His father Bahramji Naurozji Moddie is a famous merchant in Bombay and is known as Barry in Fanqui town of China. His father named him Framjee Pestonjee Modiee but his mother who knew the world better and the state of such children named him Leong Fatt. He was obsessed to travel to west – Hindustani, but it resulted only in turning him an addict.

Ah Fatt is the representation of victims of self ambitious man like Mr. Burnham. He was given up to opium and was arrested on account of robbery. Neel despite the misery of imprisonment was shocked to discover the fate of his cell mate who was nothing more than a wounded animal, curled in his own filth under the

charpoy. The constable prodded the heap with a stick, asking him to come out and see his new cell mate,

... a limb came snaking out from under the bed and Neel saw that it was a man's arm, encrusted with filth. Then the head showed itself, barely visible because of a thick coating of matted hair, and straggling black beard that was twisted into ropes. As the rest of the body slowly emerged, it showed itself to be so thickly mired in dirt and mud that it was impossible to tell whether the man was naked or clothed. Then suddenly the cell was filled with the smell of the ordure and Neel realized that it was not just mud the man was covered in, but also faeces and vomit. (SoP 315)

Such was the pathetic state of Aafat. He being an afeemokhor was unaware of personal hygiene, discipline and morals; whereas, Neel belonging to the aristocratic community paid utmost attention to personal hygiene, discipline and moral of living. Neel who spun around and clutched the bars of the cell in disgust and screamed, "You can't leave me here, have some pity, let me out..." (SoP 316) has later decided to accept his destiny. The response that came enthralled his life with fear,

Listen – if you think you can hide from this man you are wrong. From now on, you will never be able to escape this Aafat. He will be on your ship and you will have to travel with him to your jail across the Black Water. He is all you have, your caste, your family, your friend; neither brother nor wife nor son will ever be close to you as he will. You will have to make of him what you can; he is your fate, your destiny. (SoP 316).

On hearing this Neel dreaded that his survival is worthy nothing than death so as to share his remaining days with this filth filled Aafat. Neel having understood his fate leapt back with optimism and displayed his transformation through his actions of being transhumanized.

Neel's humanistic values are evident in his decision to clean up his cell mate. Neel's transformation was influential to the inmates of the prison. According to the proverb, "Where there is a will; there is a way", everything fell in its place and helping hands popped up from everywhere rendering aid and assistance to his noble mission of bringing back life on an human being who is almost in the state of frenzy. Neel's intention to give life to his lifeless cellmate has transformed into a transhumanist. He,

Closing his eyes, he thrust his hand blindly forward, and only when the handle was in his grasp did he allow himself to look again: it seemed miraculous then that his surroundings were unchanged, for within himself he could feel the intimations of an irreversible alteration. In a way, he was none other than the man he had ever been, Neel Rattan Halder, but he was different too, for his hands were affixed upon an object that were ringed with a brighter penumbra of loathing; yet now that it was in his grip it seemed no more no less that what it was, a tool to be used according to his wishes. Lowering himself to his heels, he squatted as he had often seen sweepers do, and began to scoop up his cell mate's shit (SoP 323).

Neel's act defines his humanistic concern over other human being despite the caste and nationality. Santwana Halder in *Some Hidden Facets of the Colonial Rule in India: a study of Sea of Poppies* opines,

Neel Ratan was taken across the black water in the ship *Ibis* where he had to suffer such humiliation as could never be dreamt of by a man of his status. He was to stay with a man who lay unconscious, making the place of shit and urine and Neel had to cleanse the place as sweepers do (90).

His action is evident in proving the trace of his transhumanistic characteristic in him.

Neel is an embodiment of living transhumanization. He bravely declined the offer of the inmates and assistance of the jailer as he had decided to explore this mission all by himself. His mission started with cleaning up of the man's body, which was nothing more than a collection of bones arranged in the shape of a human being. He also feed him with stale rice given in the jail. He also summoned for a barber to shave his hair and beard. He was shocked to see the swarming hoard of lice that fell to the ground like a waterfall he had to pour bucket full of water to destroy the insect before infest on the other inmates. Having paid attention to his personal hygiene, he discovered that his cell mate was a young fellow who was totally given up to opium, and tried to communicate with him. To Neel, "To take care of another human being – this was something Neel had never before thought of doing, not even with his own son, let alone a man of his own age, a foreigner" (SoP 325), his suffering has taught him to be humane towards his cell mate.

Neel's humanism is exemplary to other people in the jail. As to Neel, having done so much yet being unreciprocated by his cell mate for his question, 'What is your name?' seemed a great victory for he "interpret the gesture not as a refusal but as a postponement of a reply" (SoP 327), yet this was, "just as a craftsman's love for his handiwork is in no way diminished by the fact of it being unreciprocated?" (SoP 326). Thus Neel could experience his transformation and became the instrument who

influenced the members of the other cell who came to his aid even without asking. His transformation lifted his status amidst the prisoners and gained him honour.

Opium has transmuted the life of every character. The importance of opium and the impotency of human being against these small seeds are revealed through Sarju's words who thrusts a pouch of opium into her hands and said,

In this, she whispered, there is wealth beyond imaging; guard it like your life – it contains seeds of the best Benares Poppy... Keep them hidden till you can use them; they are worth more than any treasure.

(SoP 451)

Deeti accepted the seeds with gratitude and gazed at the seed in retrospection of her past and suddenly it dawned on her that it was this tiny seed that had been controlling her life till that very minute,

...suddenly she knew that it was not the planet above that governed her life: it was this minuscule orb – at once bountiful and all-devouring, merciful and destructive, sustaining and vengeful. This was her Shani, her Saturn. (SoP 452)

She understanding this truth dropped a ball into her husband's mouth and said, "...taste it. It is the star that took us from our homes and put us on this ship. It is the planet that rules our destiny" (SoP 452). Thus it is not the colonizers but the opium that determines the destiny of every individual and nation.

The currents of the relationship changed when the *ibis* is at sail. Zachary who was forced to taste opium by Mr.Crowle, is almost in state of unconsciousness when Miss Paulette expresses his liking to him but was not able to reciprocate. Moreover Serang Ali, who was once Zachary's mentor, now informs of his plan of departure from the *Ibis* because of the misunderstanding of Zachary who suspected him for

having revealed the secret of his birth to the Captain and Mr.Crowle. But their conversation was soon interrupted by Ah Fatt, who took vengeance on Mr.Crowle for arousing his longing and thirst for opium and cheated by throwing a goat shit into his mouth. He gave a full thrust into his ribs with his knife and left the room unlocked with just a warning. He made sure that the other guards and overseers were also locked up in their rooms so as to make an easy escape from the Ibis.

The escape from Ibis was a miracle for the survivors. It was Serang Ali who had plotted for the escape with his long boat. The escapers Serang Ali along with Jodu, Neel, Ah Fatt and Kalua with the help of Baboo Nob Kissin, had planned for their secret escape during that very night that would change their destiny. As planned Ah Fatt gave his knife the taste of Mr.Crowle's blood and also made their mission an easy task by locking up the guards. Meanwhile, the cyclone had already tussling and tossing the ship with a heavy down pour of rain making things worse. The escapers being determinant as it was their only chance had left the Ibis on the long boat. It was the lightning that gave Zachary the chance to behold the escapers for the last time,

In that unearthly light, a longboat seemed to leap out at Zachary, from the crest of a wave: although it was some twenty yards off the Schooner's beam, the faces of the five men who were in it could be clearly seen. Serang Ali was at the rudder, and the other four were huddled in its middle – Jodu, Neel, Ah Fatt and Kalua. Serang Ali had seen Zachary too, and he was raising his hand to wave when the craft dropped behind a ridge of water and disappeared from view. (SoP 511)

Thus they set ashore in their new life boat making their dream of survival come true once again with the hope of meeting their dear ones on the land of Mauritius.

Ghosh in this novel interlocks India, China, Britain, and North America together with the common theme of survival through the process of migration as indentured labourers on the deck of the *Ibis*, a transport ship destined for Mauritius. Thus all the characters undergo identity transformation. Deeti becomes Aditi, Kalua becomes Maddow Colver to hide their real identity or perhaps they want to live a new life with a true and respectful identity. Mr Zachary Reid, runs away from the American racial discrimination. is transformed into Malum Zikri, Jodu turns to be Azad Naskar, Paulette, impersonating into the gumasta Baboo Nob Kissin's niece Putleshwari or Pugly, is running away from a rigidly defined and divided European community in India. Raja Neel Rattan Haldar becomes Neel and transported as a convict for the offence he has not made. All these individuals forge a new identity, a new place for survival as transnationalist and also adding meaning to their live as an embodiment of transhumanization and the colonial setup acts as a catalyst for their transformations.

The novel *Sea of Poppies* vividly portrays the process of transformation in every character, who willingly embrace their destiny to shed off their affinity towards their nativity to be transported as a transnationalist with a new hope of finding a new life even at the cost of their life thereby becoming a transhumanist. All the characters exhibit their rich trace of humanistic concern over other individuals. The following chapter briefs the discussion of the previous chapters.