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The Invincible Spirit of Women in Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies*

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Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* is the first volume of the trilogy, the other two being *River of Smoke* and *Flood of Fire*. He paints his characters with due care especially female characters. They are victims of patriarchal society and opium trade. They are submissive but self-respected persons. They face every odds and evens of life tactfully with boldness. They are not great leaders who are trying to change the world's scenario, but simple women who do their domestic chaos in an ordinary way. The paper focuses Deeti and Paulette as the major female characters in *Sea of Poppies*.

Key Words: Dignity, self-respect, victim, fate, opium, female, Spiritual

Ghosh describes Deeti as simple pious village woman, busy in her domestic chaos and opium farming. She is affectionate mother and faithful wife. As her husband is disabled, she has to work hard in her field. Like most of the farmers she also has to grow opium in her field forcefully. She regards opium farming as most painful business that the farmers had to do in those days. Her whole life is filled with challenges. Since her childhood she has to face ignominy for her colour of eyes. People use to call her witch: "This had the effect of unnerving the young, and of reinforcing their

prejudices and superstitions to the point where they would sometimes shout taunts at her- *chudaliya, dainiya*- as if she were a witch: but Deeti had only to turn her eyes on them to make them scatter and run off" (5). She thinks that, as she is born under the influence of planet Saturn, her life would fill with disharmony, discord and unhappiness. Her nightmare comes true when she is married to Hukum Singh. He was former sepoy in British Indian army and had to go to other countries to fight on behalf of his masters. Being wounded in a war, works in Ghazipur opium factory owned by 'East India Company'. Deeti's dreams shattered on her marital bed when she faced this bitter truth that he is an *afeemkhor*. Every one betrayed her on whom she relied blindly. Her parents who were responsible to find her a perfect match, instead inquiring about Hukum Singh they removed their burden by marrying her. Her mother-in-law wounded her dignity and womanhood by allowing Chandan Singh to rape her in front of her and Hukum Singh. It is so disgraceful to think about a woman who herself allows to rape her daughter-in-law in the name of so-called family's honour as her son is impotent for the conjugal relation. But Deeti is not the person who might give up easily:

Deeti was forced to conclude that he could never be a husband to her, in the full sense, either because his injury had rendered him incapable, or because opium had removed the inclination. But then her belly began to swell with the weight of a child and her suspicions acquired an added edge: who could have impregnated her if not her husband? What exactly had happened that night? (36)

She tried hard to get out of the puddle of false relations. Her body might become impure in her unconsciousness but her soul was innocent and pure. In spite of inability of her

husband she never tried to deceive him even in her dreams. She was always faithful towards him but he never gave a moment of peace and love to her. Even his death brought crises in her life that takes her to his funeral pyre. Ghosh is successful in expressing the true character of Deeti who restore the dignity of womanhood and determination to progress towards her desired goals. She never gives up in front of patriarchal society. Being aware of her fate, Deeti send her daughter Kabutari to her brother's house to save her from Chandan Singh's cruelty. Here we can see the dark side of patriarchal society where everyone wanted to take advantage of a woman who is in the clutches of poverty and despair. When Hukum Singh was on the deathbed, Chandan Singh biological father of Kabutari, daughter of Deeti offered her to become his mistress after his brother's death. He says:

Your husband and I are brothers after all, of the same flesh and blood. Where is the shame? Why should you waste your looks and your youth on a man who cannot enjoy them? Besides, the time is short while your husband is still alive-if you conceive a son while he is still living, he will be his father's rightful heir. (57)

Deeti retorts him badly for his shameless offer: "What kind of devil, she said, can speak like this in front of his own dying brother? Listen to my words: I will burn on my husband's pyre rather than give myself to you"(158). She was about to meet her doom, when Kalua saved her brushing everyone who came there to see her burning in fire with her husband. Her quick decisive power takes her to Ibis in search of safe haven in Mauritius. She behaves like a shield in front of other female characters boarding on Ibis. Her sense of dignity and power of thinking shapes her into a leader among "*girmityas*". Everyone respected her for her free spirit.

It happened that more and more people took to calling her Bhauji: it was as if she had been appointed the matron of the dabusa by common consent. Deeti gave the matter no thought: there was nothing to be done, after all, if everybody wanted to treat her as if she were their older brother's wife. She might have been less sanguine if she had considered the responsibilities that went with being a Bhauji to the world at large. (430)

She scolds Munia for flirting with Jodu. She arranges marriage of Heeru on the ship.

Another renowned female character is Paulette. She is the daughter of a French Botanist Mr. Pierre Lambert. Her father was a shunned from the respectable English Society for denying the existence of God and sanctity of marriage. He and Paulette believe in humanity instead of any religion.

This description was neither unjust nor inaccurate, Paulette knew, but that was not how she chose to remember her father: for of course the great majority of those who benefited from his kindness were people desperately in need- waifs and urchins, porters crippled by their loads and boatmen who had lost their boats. And even now, after being thrown into the care of people who were, after all, strangers, no matter how kind, she could not bring herself to reproach her father for the greatest of his virtues, the one thing she had loved in him most. But yes, it was also true, and there was no denying it, that her lot would have been different if he had been-like most other Europeans in the city-bent upon his own enrichment. (135-136)

After her father's death Mr. Burnham takes her to his house as a case of charity. But she had to face humiliation in his house due to her Indian upbringing. Like Indians she loves

to take dip in Hooghly River. Her daily bathing habit did not change in Burnham house, although Mrs. Burnham forbid her to take daily bath:

Through years of habit, Paulette had grown accustomed to daily baths and frequent dips in the Hooghly: it was hard for her to get through a day without being refreshed at least once by the touch of cool, fresh water.... Mrs. Burnham, who, with her usual indirection, had made puzzling reference to the many reasons why frequent cold baths were necessary for a man but unseemly, even perverse, in the gentler, less excitable sex; she had made it clear that, so far as she was concerned, a bathtub was the pukka amenity for memsahib, to be used at decent intervals of every two or three days. (124)

Her habits and tastes were like Indians. Unbearable environment of Burnham's house and eccentric behavior of Mr. Burnham takes her to Ibis. Her secret wish is to become a botanist like her great aunt.

'Yes, indeed it is', said Paulette. 'You see, before she was married, my grand-aunt's name was Jeanne Baret. Even as a girl, she had a passion most heated for science. She read about Linnaeus, and the many new species of plants and animals that were being named and discovered. These diverse facts made her burn with the volonte to see herself the riches of the earth. What should happen then, Mr. Reid, but that she should learn of a great expedition, being organized by Monsieur de Bougainville, with the intention of doing exactly that which she wished? This idée set her afire and she decided that she too, by all hazard, would be an expeditionnaire. (255)

She shares her wish with Zachary. Her adventurous spirit wanted to travel far islands and countries in search of rare species of plants. She is in love with Zachary Reid, but his reluctance to take her with him to Mauritius annoys her and she disguises herself as a Bengali girl and boards on the Ibis. Her appearance as an Indian girl was so perfect that even Jodu didn't recognize her-

Down by the boat, the sight of Jodu, rising to his feet to wave, gave Paulette such a scare that she nearly fell into the water. Although her ghungta was certainly her most important means of concealment, it was by no means the only one; she had also disguised her appearance in a number of other ways: her feet were lacquered with bright vermilion *alta*; her hands and arms were covered with intricate, hennaed designs that left very little of her skin visible; and under the cover of her veil, the line of her jaw was obscured by large, tasselled earrings. In addition, she was balancing her cloth-wrapped belongings on her waist, in such a fashion as to give her the gait of an elderly woman, shuffling along under the weight of a crushing burden. (359)

She wanted to complete her father's manuscript about rare species of plants. To fulfill this purpose she determines to travel towards faraway places. She was so sure of her purpose that no perils during journey could stop her. Malathi and Prema comment: "Ghosh develops women who are strong, who can express themselves, do things, travel, come to their own decision and live independently. They are out of the purposive control of men. They pursue ideals, which they as individuals value. Ghosh's women are the symbol of growth, progress and forward movement" (3).

To conclude, Gosh's women characters are victims of patriarchal society and opium trade. They are deceived by their own relatives, but strong determination and correct decisive power make them the real fighters. They made their way to the unknown island to make their fate. They are sure to keep their place safe in the society of men. They face every odds and evens of life tactfully with boldness. They are not great leaders who are trying to change the world's scenario, but simple women who do their domestic chaos in an ordinary way. Their decision taking power is better than men. Their impressive figure make men elf in front of them. Thus the women, when, Amitav Ghosh portrays are down trodden and submissive but their fighting spirit makes them the winner.

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