

## FEMININE ISSUES REFLECTED IN THE INDO-ANGLIAN FICTION IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE NOVELS OF AMITAV GHOSH

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### **Abstract:**

*Position of Indian women in society has been a matter of great discussion since ages. In an ancient period evidences show the women had equal position during the Rig Vedic period, it is believed that the position of wife was honored and women's position was acknowledged, especially in the performance of sacred ceremonies. Gradually women were traditionally discriminated against and excluded from political and family related decisions. Despite the large amount of work that women have to do on a daily basis to support their families, their opinions are rarely acknowledged and their rights are limited. These are the different aspects of impact of society on women. Amitav Ghosh has exposed the extant criticism significant socio cultural representations and one of the concerns is the representation of gender which has become the subject of much critical debate on feminism. One of the significant aspects of Ghosh's novels is his unique portrayal of the female characters especially in works, *Sea of Poppies*, *The Hungry Tide*. His women characters are revolutionaries who seem to be aware of their milieu and their vulnerable positions and are anxious to establish an identity outside traditional domestic sphere. The burning issues of woman liberation and woman empowerment against the background of changing global politics run undercurrent in all of Ghosh's fictions. Gender issues and society are the important lens through which we view people and life. This paper will mainly focus on the position of women as depicted in his novels like *The Hungry Tide*, *Sea of Poppies* and to explore their dedicated strive against the patriarchal society. The purpose of the paper is to depict the individual struggle towards relief from male enslavement from the contemporary society.*

**Keywords:** Patriarchal, Society, Woman Empowerment, Feminism, Unique, Contemporary.

### **Introduction:**

In every walk of life, women are now marching side by side with men. In every field, whether it is sports, politics or academics she proved herself not only equal

but a better one. The role of women in today's world has changed considerably with positive attitude. In somewhat way, she becomes self-sufficient, well aware and independent financially. She is the symbol of strength, love, sacrifice and courage. Amitav Ghosh is a prominent novelist of contemporary Indian English fiction. Indian English fiction writers depicted women and their experiences in patriarchal societies with a deep sympathetic understanding. The contemporary Indian novelists in English like Arundhati Roy, Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai, Shobha De, Sudha Murthy, Anita Nair, Jhumpa Lahiri, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Kiran Desai, Bharati Mukherjee, Kamala Markandaya, Amitav Ghosh etc. deal with this theme minutely in Indian social milieu. Ghosh's women representation portrays sensitively and in fact they are the leading spirits in his fiction. His women representation is real life and in a realistic manner. Amitav Ghosh through his women representation in novels has attempted to explore the emotional world of women that help the readers to understand the feminine sensibility as well as psychology. The terrain of gender inequality in education has seen much change in recent decades. Ghosh traces the evolution of the feminine world from the stereotypes to the feminists. His women characters are nothing but a continuous inspiration to the surrounding people. He portrays women and their experience with sympathetic understanding. Patriarchy, traditionally, refers to a system of social relations in which men become powerful and dominated women. Today everywhere there is undisputed norms of patriarchy and undoubtedly women become the victim of this sophisticated system. This leads to inequitable social relations is the political, social, cultural, and economic institutions of a society as well as in, and through, private domestic relations. Women at some places are adorned and worshipped sublime purpose, but under this beautiful cover she becomes the victim of brutal treatment given by men. Shouri Daniels describes the "female incarnate" thus: "She has no shape or form. She is everything or nothing. She is fluid.

Pour her into any mould and she takes it... Ideals and principles lie outside her nature.” (4) As she is the void, she becomes a being only in so far as she can be regarded as *an object* in relation to man who is of course the subject. With special reference of Amitav Ghosh novels, 'The Hungry Tides', Sea of Poppies, we will discuss one by one. 'The Hungry Tide' mainly deals with the roots problem of ecological crisis in the relationship of the society with nature and also the structure of the society inside. Also explores the symbiotic relationship between man and nature. His novels are the essence of analytical, critical, emotional and psychological expression of human life which is nothing but a cluster of relationships like filial relationship, conjugal relationship and sibling relationship. Though all the relationships are important part of life yet man-woman relationship is considered the most pervading human relationship. Now-a-days under modernity and rapid industrialization the views of the whole society changed toward women. We find growing awareness of their rights to individuality, empowerment, employment and marriage choice etc. Amitav Ghosh, an anthropologist-cum-novelist possesses a deep knowledge of human intellect regarding the various aspects of women life. The Hungry Tide Amitav Ghosh presents women as revolutionaries. For the betterment of society Kusum, Nilima and Piya come under the term revolutionaries. Women emerges as a strong competent like men, rather than the puppets in the hands of men. The taboo of helpless wiped out from her life. She becomes a source of direct money earners and not confined only to household works. She has established her identity in almost every walk of life. Amitav Ghosh's The Hungry Tide's theme is mainly concerned with Piya Roy, who is an American Cytologist. Piya's sizzling independent spirit had forced her to do research on River Dolphins so that she could be able to leave to Sunderban's Mangroves, the place she visited and the place she hated. Kanai Dutt and Piyali interact each other in Calcutta railway station. Kanai Dutt at first glance fall in love with Piya Later Fokir a poor fisherman who guides piya in all her research is proved to be her true friend. She get attracted towards the Fokir. However, when Kanai came to know that she loved Fokir, he is frustrated towards Piya even at the time of seeking Fokir in the storm. He also tried to stop Piya to go forward for seeking Fokir, but she did not heed the voice of Kanai Dutt. However, all his attempts fail. Her frustration at the sudden demise of Fokir, through uncongenial atmosphere at the remote area

of Sunderbans in a heavy Cyclone makes her desperate. However, Piya is ready to leave to America after the cremation of Fokir, but her love for him does not die (419) Tutel was nearly five years old boy. Piya had seen the sufferings of his mother. It's impossible for Piya to put the incident out of her mind as this is irreparable loss for Tutel and his family. She felt and ruined her conjugal life. She "drifted into sundarban mangroves like a passenger drifts towards an unoccupied chair in an airport." (424) It is indeed very astonishing that a young woman who cannot speak nor even understand the language of the place can dare to visit the alien land without any companion or even a translator. She is exposed to dangers from several ways: she is aware of the fact as well. Yet her courage and her determination render her unyielding who would not stop at any condition until she reaches her destination. Her deviation from norms is marked at the very beginning of the novel that starts in a crowded Indian railway station where her "neatly composed androgyny of her appearance seemed out of place, almost exotic" (Ghosh 3) Piya does not at all resemble the so called enchanting heroine of romantic fictions, rather she is identified by "the unaccustomed delineation of her stance. What is more striking is her worldview- at a so early an age, she has embraced solitude. She does not need any companionship or assistance of others, but prefers to be alone. "It's easier to slip through the net if you're on your own." (Ghosh 12) She is not the "tasty young morsel" to be taken advantage of, but a woman who deserves respect, modesty, courtesy. If the nasty forest guard or Mejdha represents the oppressive patriarchy who debase women, Fokir affirms Piya that uncorrupted human hearts still exists.

Nilima Bose is another character who was not the one who easily gives up. She marries Nirmal and the ceremony is solemnized going against family, society, norms, by reading of Blake, Mayakovsky and Jibanananda Das, a unique wedding contemporary society was not accustomed to. Although her own decision may lead her to happy life, But this does not put an end to her struggle; in fact it was only the beginning. Her husband Nirmal is a Marxist intellectual due to some political tension, he had to leave Kolkata and settle in one of the islands of the tide country- Lusibari. Nilima accompanies him and also manages a job of school teacher for Nirmal using influence of her family. With western education, urban ways of life, it was not easy for her to adjust to the new ways of life. She gradually understands that she has to make a

firm ground for her to stand upon in order to get rid of the existential catastrophe. Her struggle is her own; she does not get any support from her Marxist husband who lives in his own erroneous world of idealism. Patriarchy society tried to choke her voice from the very beginning, but she is firm. She handles all the problems intellectually. Again she is childless, thus has failed to fulfill the „essential duty“ of a woman i.e. to give birth and bring up children. She has no child of her own; instead has the hundred daughters she looks after in women’s union. Elaine Showalter in her theory of feminist criticism has talked about the analysis of women. Feminine is the concept of womanhood, the traditional role of the woman, in relation to the patriarchal society where she is understood always in connection to the male. She has no identity of her own but is venerated as a mother in relation to the father, as a sister in relation to her brother, as a wife in relation to her husband and as a daughter in relation to her father. The Hungry Tide is a captivating read with fearful instances of a tidal country dictated in line with superstitious beliefs, the poverty of the islanders and the effort made by Nilima lead the path of such illiterate island dwellers from their subjugated existence to a healthy, educated and liberated livelihood. Nilima at a point says, I am not capable of dealing with the whole world’s problems. For me the challenge of making a few little things a little better in one small place is enough. That place for me is Lusibari. (Ghosh, The Hungry Tide, 387) Unlike her idealistic dreamy husband, she remains within possible and practicable limits. In the process she is stern and strict. Yet she reveals her deep love, though suffering immense pain. Here we find the strong determination of Nilima, her sacrifice, her adjustment towards every situation and in spite of complaining all, she mould herself into it.

In Sea of Poppies, Deeti is a remarkable character who undergoes suffering in her wedded life and under the memshabis. She emerges as a miserable, mystified, good hearted woman robbed by the fates. She is a simple and ordinary village woman. From her birth, she is a prey to the upheaval and has never experienced pleasure in her life. Her marriage solemnized to an opium addict Hukham Singh without her consent. As marriage has become a business the price, she pays for her husband by thatching the roof of her husband’s house. This shows the prevailing dowry system in India. Dowry remains an hitch in many young women’s life. Deeti plays the role of mother, wife and nurse and shoulders the burden of house work.

A hard hitting incident in her life is that she is unaware of the fact that who became the father of the child that she begets. Even her mother-in-law, also support her son in the plight she faced. This mirrors the mistrust, gloom and violence caused by a woman to another woman. To trace out the culprit, Deeti drugs the food of her mother-in-law to know the fact. Her mother in law refers Deeti as ‘Draupati’ who bears the children of brothers. Her inner chaos is so bitter that she is unable to speak them out and remains silent. Deeti is enveloped in darkness by the unconscious state of her poppy addict husband. Though she is deserted by her husband but she never denies and she nurses her husband by selling all her properties. Considering her loneliness her brother-in-law threatens to grab all her properties. She remains as a silent listener. When she is unable to bear the behavior of him further, she raises her voice telling him: Listen to my words: I will burn on my husband’s pyre rather than give myself to you. (Ghosh, Sea of Poppies, 154) The utter depression resounding in these heart rending expression reveals the mind of Deeti’s traditional value of compassion and correct living. No one helps her at the death bed of her husband. She takes precautionary steps to thwart her daughter’s future to be at stake. After his death Deeti is socially despised to commit sati because of the persistence of tradition by the society. Her family members say, to have a sati in the family will make us famous. We’ll build a temple for you and grow rich on the offerings. (Ghosh, Sea of Poppies, 155) The basic teaching imparted to every woman in a patriarchal traditional society is to commit sati in the funeral pyre of her husband. Some accept sati voluntarily while some are forced. Deeti does not mount the funeral pyre of her husband, unlike the traditional ladies to commit sati. But she is victimized to commit sati by her family. Fate rescues her from being victim in the form of a low caste Kalua to whom first she veils her face with the gungtta of her sari out of caste inequity. This shows the reason for the survival of India despite the sweeping winds of modernity. It reveals the plight of women after her husband’s death. After her rescue from the shackles of humiliating tradition, she discontinues bearing the brunt of caste discrimination and accepts the low caste Kalua as her second husband. She had shed the body of the old Deeti, with the burden of its karma; she had paid the price her stars had demanded of her, and was free now to create a new destiny as she willed, with whom she choose and she knew that it was with Kalua that this life would be lived, until another death

claimed the body that he had torn from the flames (Ghosh, *Sea of Poppies*, 175). After her rebirth she sheds the blatant diffidence and emerges as a new Deeti with mettle power to rebel the predicaments. Through the portrayal of Deeti's character, Ghosh shows the socio political shifts bringing about changes in women out of their sufferings. The feminine quality of the novel *Sea of Poppies* is also evident in some of the small but authentically feminine actions of some of the characters. Deeti had been cornered by her own brother, and husband, betrayed by her brother-in-law, insulted by the Bhyro singh uncle of her husband and rendered destitute by the people of her own family members. "She has no right anywhere-as daughter, wife. This shows how Indian women oppressed by the Indian society, her own family engulf all her desires and dreams. Women still pressurized with such circumstances and become victims of cruel society. Deeti suffers from gender subalternity due to patriarchy that exists in their society and their imperial masters.

#### Discussion:

In the novels of Amitav Ghosh one can find the various aspects of women. He has portrayed the women characters with all strength and contrast. Through the characters of Piya Roy, Nilima, Moyna, Deeti he shows the signs reformation of the society from the evils like discrimination, ill-treatment, poverty, exploitations etc. right from ancient times we have that Indian women are an epitome of sacrifice always considering others before self, Women have always sacrificed their own identity for the betterment of family. She has struggled for her own survival to create her own

identity, though she is bestowed superpower of patience still within herself she is in deep conflict. The lives of these women are a saga of existence caught between pressure of the family and hopes aspiration of the new which have the features of his novels. Sometimes they are seen making bold and courageous choices to carve new identities and at the other times seen succumbing to the overwhelming odds. Amitav Ghosh has tried to explore of these myriad nature of women and her lives which he has successfully portrayed.

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