

The Status of Woman in Amitav Ghosh's Oeuvre – a Feminist Perspective

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Abstract: *The critical reception on feminism in the novels of Amitav Ghosh marks a notable divergence of interests between the feministic criticism of Indian subcontinent and the western academy. Feministic criticism from Indian academics mostly concentrated on the novels of Amitav Ghosh such as The Shadow Lines, The Calcutta Chromosome, In an antique Land, The Glass Palace, The Hungry Tide and Sea of Poppies that dealt with the questions of national identity and feminism in the sub continent. Ghosh repeats some of the national gestures of portraying women as emblematic figures signifying 'culture', 'tradition', 'nation' and authenticity. This is precisely a counter argument for the novel's gender politics. In all his other novels there is relatively little debate about the representation of gender and other issues of sexuality. But as a matter of academic speculation, women have become very significant presences in all his other works. Examining this aspect, James Clifford in the article 'The transit lounge of culture' says that we hear little from women in other novels, but it is only in The Calcutta Chromosome the women figures emerge as central organizing principle (Times Literary Supplement 3 May, 1991). The Glass Palace and The Hungry Tide presented detailed and individualized women characters than Ila and grandmother of The Shadow lines.*

The extant criticism on Ghosh's work has exposed significant socio cultural representations. One of the concerns is the representation of gender which has become the subject of much critical debate on feminism. The theme of Shadow lines is perceived for the inversion of passive male characters at the expense of active female characters. This article in all its satirical representation critiques on feminism from all the perspective of Gender. It reveals the complicit formulation of post national future within the framework of benign masculinity. Ghosh associates undesirable nationalism with feminism. However, for my article presentation I have chosen the title called "The status of woman in of Amitav Ghosh's Oeuvre - A feminist perspective" which makes an exploration of the status of woman in the novels of Ghosh who have faced problems and challenges of contemporary society. However I tried to interpret the nature of this article by observing it from the various cultural aspects of contemporary Indian society.

Keywords: *feminism, land, masculinity, male domination, Draupadhy, wife, oeuvre, antique.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary Indian Literary scenario Amitav Ghosh is the only writer who reflects the truth of Indian reality. He bears numerous responsibilities in the world of literature. He executes with admirable aplomb as an anthropologist, sociologist, novelist, essayist, travel writer, teacher and slips into global responsibility for establishing peace as an ambassador. He has excelled the global literary standards set by the post colonial and post modern writers like Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, Vikram Chandra, Sashi Tharoor, Arundhati Roy etc. He has become the colossal central socio literary figure with a substantial body of work drawing the global attention. He has become the only negotiator to mediate the core social and cultural problems of India and other colonized nations. All his major works have enjoyed immense academic attention across the globe and it has invited and produced a great amount of literary criticism. He has created a wide readership and a strong critical endorsement that reflects the attention of serious academicians and scholars. All the post colonial and post modern predicaments are wrestled to demonstrate a high level of self consciousness which continues interrogate the social, philosophical, cultural issues of the world in all its relevance and freshness. His works have initiated the emergence of critique of nationalism and universalism. His intellectual insights, conceptual, theoretical and textual experiments have engaged and interpreted the complex colonial and post colonial situations. They have established a peculiar paradox of reading and appreciation eloquently responding to the post colonial and post modern issues of evolution and

transformation of the world. Making his debut with *The Circle of Reason* in 1986, he has produced the ground breaking novels till today with *River of Smoke* (2011) that interrogate the history of humanity with discursive discourses. His non-fictional writings are equally challenging and stimulating offering philosophical and cultural elucidation on different themes such as fundamentalism, history of the novel, Egyptian culture and literature. Despite this vast amount of creative and critical output surprisingly there is a small amount of critical reception. But his works have become the most favoured areas of scholarly exploration for many of the young scholars and academicians. These explorations have become part of unpublished research that focused exclusively on the relevance of Amitav Ghosh to the contemporary times.

Patriarchy, which is the ruling social system almost all over the world, ordains that *woman's* place is the home; her role as a *wife* and *mother* is quite often synonymous with her total human existence. The term "*family*" derives from Latin "*Famulus*" which means a household slave and *familia* signifies the totality of slaves belonging to the one individual who is the male head, the limitation imposed on *woman* for her family function is not however confined to the West, despite the Latin Philological lineage. In India, in China, Greece and Rome, woman has always been relegated to background for her family roles and the task of civilization "has become more and more man's business." One therefore expects the presentation of *women* in literature, created and dominated by man, to be mere role-fulfillments.

In contrast to Europe, the Indian subcontinent has refused to evolve through successive stages of history and continued an archaic existence and this failure illustrated in the repeated political defeats, economic subjugation, marked sterility in the creative efforts in every field of human knowledge has led to a total ossification of the Hindu Psyche. The ancient modes and ideals instead of undergoing revision and transformation in consonance with the changing time have tended to dominate the ethos in decadent forms. Therefore, the ever-obedient, every-suffering *sita* who ended her life in self-immolation has remained the dominant feminine archetype.

Since the totalitarian expertise in destroying the identity, the very soul of human being is now a recognized phenomenon, it should not shock us to see that *women* steam-rolled and flattened into the family roles tend to be dehumanized in so far as they are invariably stripped of all the individualizing traits of a sentient being. 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.

2. THE FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE OF CRITICAL ELUCIDATION

In Amitav Ghosh's *In an Antique Land*, the word "*antique*" which means "*ancient*" is deliberately used to *portray woman as "antique"* and in "*antiquity*," *woman* as metaphor for "*land*," is used. *Woman* as always passive and submissive like *land*.

Elaine Showalter in her theory of *feminist* criticism has talked about the analysis of *women* according to the three socio-cultural and psychological critical categories of *Feminine*, *Feminist* and *Female-aesthetic*. *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.

According to Elaine Showalter, "In the Feminist phase or the winning of the vote, women are historically enabled to reject the accommodating postures of femininity and use literature to dramatize the ordeals of wronged womanhood" (2). *Feminist* is the concept of the theory that they are fighting for their rights, trying to break from the ideological form. *Feminist* was a stance or tone of women that strives for the recognition of their rights and the fight for their identity as individuals in the society.

According to Elaine Showalter, "In the Female phase women reject both imitation and protest-two forms of dependency and turn instead to female experience as the source of an autonomous art"(3). *Female* is the concept of the theory that conveys woman is an individual. The movement towards the understanding of woman as a female, as power, as an erotic symbol of desire is the recognition given to her maturity.

In the novel *In an Antique Land*, the presence of woman is not felt in most parts of the novel and if present, woman is always mentioned in relation to the male. The names of all the women characters are not mentioned. One of the women characters whose name is mentioned is Ashu-Ben Yiju's wife. Ben Yiju married Ashu who, according to Goitein, was 'probably beautiful.' Ashu is not mentioned anywhere else in the entire corpus of Ben Yiju's documents, although her children figure in it frequently. Ben Yiju did not once refer to her in his letters or jottings.

Busaina, Khamees's sister's introduction is physical. She is mentioned a tall and sweet looking. She is referred to have left her husband and moved back to Nashawy with her children. Although she had given her husband two fine, healthy children, the two of them had never really got on. They had quarreled all the time and in the end things had come to such a pass that her husband had announced that he was going to marry again. She and her husband used to quarrel all day long because she had to have her way in everything. He did not accept this, as he might have wanted a submissive woman as his wife, who would never decide anything by herself and would always depend on her husband for everything and accept his decisions.

Khammes's wife did not have children, and having failed to father any children, he had taken a second wife, but with no result. His wife had walked off in a rage, shouting to the world that it was his fault that he was childless, not hers. He does not accept that it is because of his fault that he is childless as hinted by his first wife and goes on to take a second wife, but with no result. Amm Taha says that he uses Hoopoe's blood for a spell for women who cannot bear children. It signifies that it was considered that if a man could not father children it would only be because of his wife's fault.

Ben Yiju's daughter name is not mentioned whereas his son's name Surur is mentioned. This indicates that women were not considered important-even to mention their names. Ben Yiju's daughter is mentioned in his letters as "I have left a daughter, his sister." The wives of Imam are mentioned. They are identified as Imam's first wife and Imam's second wife. Sakkina, Shaikh Musa's wife, is portrayed as a shy woman. She was so shy to answer the author that Ahmed had to speak for her. She was very young and she was a fraction of her husband's age.

For many of the women characters their physical appearance and their clothes speak for them, as is the case with the three women in sheikh Musa's house-one in the first bloom of her adolescence with a gentle, innocent face and a rosy complexion. She was pale, pretty, and self-possessed young woman, dressed in a long, printed skirt, the other was dark and thickest, and she was wearing a black fustan and the author goes on to say that her clothes and her bearing spoke of a college, or at least a high school education. The author knocks at the door of Ustaz Sabry's house and a woman dressed in the severe black robes of an elderly widow. She is described as a thin lady with thin, fine-boned cheeks. The identity of these women is physical. Women are also portrayed as objects of entertainment. The girl dancer mentioned in Nashawy was young, dressed in a simple, printed cotton dress, with a long scarf tied around her waist whose dance was a source of entertainment to the people gathered.

Most of the women characters perform the duties of a servant. The two women in Shaikh Musa's house come into the room carrying a pair of trays loaded with food; Sakkina appears in the doorway and gives Hasan a tray with three glasses of tea on it. Shaikh Musa's wife ushers the guests into the guestroom, showing them the way with a kerosene lamp and goes back to bring some tea and food, later she gives the lamp a final scrub and opens the door to show another room. The women carry food for their men out to the fields. Imam's first wife brings in a tray of tea, and women walk towards the town balancing baskets of vegetables on their heads. These women are nameless and perform functions.

Abu-Ali would always berate his wife or roar abuse at her. In another context, a vendor says that he would rather divorce his wife than sell the fruits for a lesser price in the market. Here women have been portrayed as a commodity. The other women characters mentioned in the novel are Ahmed's mother, Nabeel's mother, Ismail's mother, Ali's mother, Amm Taha's first wife and his second wife. To conclude, Amitav Ghosh is being provocative, he is drawing attention to this antiquated attitude of the patriarchal society towards women.

The natural school of criticism that comes to the fore to analyse the themes of Amitav Ghosh's novels is Feminist literary criticism. It has circumscribed the contemporary classifications of First World Feminism, second World Feminism, third world Feminism, Fourth world Feminism and also Dalit Feminism. The radical expansion in the definitions of Feminism has covered extensive and variable

aspects in the lives of women. From the contemporary understanding, Feminism tries to analyze the social positions and representations of women in colonized countries and western locations. It has also raised number of conceptual, methodological problems involved in the study of representation of gender. Therefore, the conceptual clarity is required in interrogating these novels in the light of Feminism.

It is in the light of these perceptions of Feminism the themes of the novels of Amitav Ghosh like *Dancing in Cambodia at Large in Burma*, *In an Antique Land*, *The Imam and the Indian*, *The Hungry Tide*, *The Glass Palace* and *Sea of Poppies 2008* should be analyzed. *Dancing in Cambodia at Large in Burma*, *In an Antique Land*, and *The Hungry Tide* thematically stand for South Asian Feminism as they take deal with the existential problems of immigrant women in the West. *The Glass Palace* and *Sea of Poppies* represent third World Feminism as they take us into the pre and Post-colonial times of India. The changing social transmission of India is viewed from the Feminist perspective. *Sea of Poppies 2008* sets the tone for the Fourth world Feminism as it has emphasized the theme of Dalit's betrayal, exploitation, plight and emancipation.

Feminist Criticism was the direct product of the Women's movement of 1916. Because Feminism has become a vital aspect in literature in contemporary society and the female perspective, expressed through women's writing of all kinds is considered to be more than a valuable connective to an all male view of the universe. In exploring the question what is it to be woman lie the history of mankind: "History of mankind is the history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man towards woman having indirect object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her."(10) (*Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions of the First Women's Rights Convention In America*, Seneca Falls, 1848). It is perceived that the very subjection of women is consolidated by religion. *The Holy Bible* holds such observations and perceptions: "Wives submit yourselves to your husband's as to the Lord. (*Ephesians, 5:22 The Holy Bible*). This concept of women consolidated by Christianity affected their status for centuries. Gradually women lost the right to control their lives and as a result, they were deprived not only of human rights but also of humanity.

Literacy spread rapidly and women began to utilize the power of the pen. Betty Frieday, the mother of Modern Feminism with the publication of *Feminine Mystique* (1963) initiated this new change. The new women's movement expanded into a commanding political force. "*Women are an oppressed class . . . We are exploited as sex objects*" (42). This is obvious in the life of Deeti in *Sea of Poppies (2008)* Deeti is also shown by Amitav Ghosh as breeder of domestic servant. So like this women are exploited as sex objects, breeders, domestic servants, our prescribed behaviour is enforced with threads of physical violence" (Lisa Turtle *.Encyclopaedia of Feminism*,(42).

Feminist writings were of crucial interest to the Post-colonial discourse for two major reasons. First, both patriarchy and imperialism could be seen to exert different forms of domination over those subordinate to them. Because of this, it was important for the experiences of women under the patriarchal influence to come out to the forefront and expose the undue cruelty be held on them by men. It was necessary for the women to oppose this male dominance over them. We observe that women continued to define the borders of the community, class and race. They tried to exert feminism in their works. Though the writers try to depict the women as strong and focused in their vision to succeed in lives, they were, however, ablest to succeed in their lives only in the space allotted to them by the men.

The protagonists in the most of the contemporary novels belonged to the third world of feminism. These protagonists were exposed to the changed socio-cultural situation. Traveling in contemporary situation has facilitated the third world women for empowerment. The women, once they became mobile, automatically tended to make themselves dynamic and in turn became agents responsible for social change.

The Feminist writers tried to stamp their authority in a male dominated environment as best as it is possible to them. It was a very difficult path, as the women had to break through years of male dominance, taboos and beliefs that had heavily impregnated the society. In addition, critics argued that colonialism operated very differently for women and for men. This was so because women were subjected to both general discrimination as colonial subjects and specific discrimination as women addressed as 'double colonization.'

It is from these perceptions one should view the contribution of women writers of the nineties like Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Gita Mehta, Gita Hariharan, Bharati Mukherjee, Uma Vasudev and Arundhati Roy. Undoubtedly, it is understood that they have perceived a good job in exposing the fallacies of the male –dominated society and letting the public beware of the various atrocities heaped upon women who dared to cross the various rigid boundaries that were laid on them by society. The novels of Amitav Ghosh like *The Glass Palace*, *Dancing in Cambodia at Large in Burma*, *In an Antique Land*, *The Hungry Tide* and *Sea of Poppies 2008* have beyond a shadow of doubt, been successful in opening the reader's mind and heart to view the life of a woman from a women's point of view.

The debate in several colonized societies over the deleterious effects of gender or colonial oppression on women's lives continues to hold its significance in the analysis of the society. Feminism, like post Colonialism, is concerned with the ways to which representation and language were crucial in order to identify the formation and construction of subjectivity. Both for the patriarchal as well as the matriarchal community, language was crucial in order to identify formation and for the construction of subjectivity. Language subverts patriarchal power and brings more authentic forms for negotiating gender equality.

In a totally male dominated environment, it was a major effort for the women writers to expose what society called as the mechanics of patriarchy. To fight against the cultural a mind set in men and women, one of the first things that these women writers did was to make their writings more eclectic. They began to write based on the findings and writings of other criticisms. This is vividly presented in these novels. Secondly, instead of attacking the male version of writing, they now decided to explore the nature the feminine world by trying to reconstruct the world of suppressed emotions. Lastly, attention was given to the need to bring about a new game of women's writing in a way that, previously neglected women writers were now given new prominence. Another critical issue that was handled by these women writers was the issue of 'Style in language'. It was Jane Austin who devised a technique for writing that was perfectly natural, elegant and proper for the use of women writers. Women could now write in clauses that were linked in loose sequences, rather than balanced and patterned as used by male writers.

The women protagonists of Amitav Ghosh like Dolly, Piya, and Deeti and also Miss Paulette were trying to cement the prominence of women in a male dominated society. The observation of Deeti, in *Sexual/Textual politics* justifies the action executed by these women protagonists in these novels: The relationship of women like as mother, as wife, and as friend. These relationships are completely devalued; indeed, I have never come across a woman who dies not suffering from the problem of not being able to resolve in harmony, in the present system. As per as Ghosh's observation of Deeti is concerned which finds illustration in the theme of *Sea of Poppies*. It is also observed that this is the theme of the relationship between mother Deeti and daughter Kabutri. Kabutri became victim of maternal apathy. Kabutri did not know what it was to be a child like.

Mother daughter relationship is very crucial and it is this relationship that helps the daughters overcome the ambivalences and to gain confidence to go out into the World. Kabutri does not have a sympathetic shoulder to weep on. She could never share her feelings with Deeti. However, she yearned for affection, for some sign of a special concern. Though Deeti succeeds to marry a Dalit Kalua, she fails in securing any space for herself as well as for her daughter in the family or in the society. Being the victim of gender discrimination, she survives to acquire the intellectual heights of Bhyro Singh a high-caste Rajput.

It is injustice and inequality that tends to unravel the fact that feminism is the consequence of the culture or society shaped and governed by men to suit their needs and interests regardless of women's basic needs and happiness. In her eventual realization, she understands that society is meant for the pleasure and profit of male sexuality and women need to fight against these things courageously. *Sea of Poppies* is perceived as Post-modern feminist novel that evokes sympathy for the condition of women in a particular cultural milieu.

The Glass Palace, which is a political novel, also depicts fate of Queen Supayalath and Thebaw with those of the country at large. *The Glass Palace* presents women characters, who represent the readers though not explicitly but rather implicitly the various deferences between the ruling class and sub-altern class. To examine the novel from feminine discourse of the status of women in princely India, it conveys that even in the princely state a woman is more dependent on man and her marriage is even

less a matter of personal choice. Marriage is a political arrangement in India. Since it is a patriarchal system women are innocent victims of it. One of the examples of this moribund tradition is the treatment meted out to a widow like Deeti who is ritually cursed herself by her own family members who assembled at her husband's funeral in *Sea of Poppies* (158,177). The novel *Glass Palace* is set in the three South Asian countries Burma, India and the Malaysia, which share the history of colonialism. In the novel, the Burmese Queen represents the ruling class and Dolly represents the subaltern class. In a way, the Queen could be categorized as the member of the 'First world' which 'referred to the rich' (BP: 174), bourgeois class in the 'Third World' frame.

Normally people think that when a woman rules the country, the empowerment of women will take place. *Margaret Thatcher and Indira Gandhi*, the two prominent women leaders ruled the great nations, Britain and India. Even in their rule, women suffered the problems of inequality, gender discrimination and the male oppression in the society. *Queen Supayalath* was not far from them. She was the dynamic ruler of Burma. Power politics was everything for her. She did nothing towards the upliftment of the Burmese women. She recruited many girls in the palace only for servitude. All of these girls were orphans who had neither families nor friends.

Sea of Poppies the novel from feminine discourse of the status of women in India is revealed that a woman is more dependent on man like Deeti for her second marriage. For example, there is a superstitious tradition of *Sati* (Pyre); that Deeti the central protagonist is ritually cursed herself in order to escape from the cruelty of her own brother-in-law's lust. Fortunately, she was rescued from *Pyre* (Sati) by Kalua. *Sea of Poppies* tries to redefine the tradition. The true sati is not woman who jumps into the funeral pyre of her husband but one who has will to continue when the familiar world fragments around her. (158,177).

In this sense, Deeti is true sati, because she is whole-heartedly ready for sati, in order to escape from sexually harassment of her own husband's brother. I think she thought, "It is better to die a celebrated death rather than to exploit sexually by Chandan Singh" (158). Her own husband's brother, to succumb to all kinds of pressures and trials are exploited at significant junctures in Deeti's life. It made her stand apart from the rest of her contemporaries and the dignity with which she manages to suffer the dignities imposed on her and maneuvers herself through the rigmarole of political maze that surrounds her. According to Kalua, though he is an untouchable and downtrodden, he did not flinch for the upper Caste people's harassment and also he tried to stand on his will. Here in this point of view a man cannot govern unless he confronts his fear. Another major influence on him are Zachary the pilot guide and Nob Kissin who consoled him at the time of flogging but who also passes on him and his nationalistic ideas on them at the judgment.

Deeti's story is the story of unwanted Indian wife who in spite of her humiliations at the hands of her second husband proves to be a good wife in the society. Even before her first husband's death, she is also tried to be good and loyal wife though she is sexually harassed by her own brother-in-law Chandan Singh who always tried to exploit her sexually and mentally.

From the beginning of her arrival as a bride into her husband's house, she was utterly abandoned by her husband, because he was an impotent, an afeemkhor and an addict of opium, as well as she was also raped by her brother-in-law in her very first wedding night, she was conceived by a daughter named Kabutri. From then onwards she was being sexually tortured, harassed and exploited by her family members. In the same way, Chandan Singh used to tease her like 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. Hukam Singh's land will pass to him and no one will have the right dispute it, otherwise my brother's land and his house will become mine on his death. So that if you keep me happy, you will be well looked after. So, like this Deeti suffered a lot from her own family members. When she becomes a mother, she worked very hard for the sake of her daughter. She also worked hard in poppy fields as well as in the house. She always stood by her lame husband up to his cart and factory. She also maintained rigid behavior from her brother-in-law.

Thus, she deprived her of the rights of maternity, just as her brother-in-law had raped her, of the dignity of being a wife. The very moment of great shame comes to her that when she discovers that she was conceived by her husband's brother's sexual plot. However, she proves herself as a strong woman and goes to great lengths to as a strong woman to overcome from her brother-in-law's sexual harassment. She has a mind of her own. She rejected her mother's in-law advice saying that you

would become *Draupadi of Mahabharata*. Because there is the inner meaning of her mother-in-law. Later Deeti came to know the meaning of the words of her mother-in-law. Her mother-in-law and Bhyro Singh, Uncle of her husband have tried to create a right impression on the thing, which had committed by Chandan Singh in her very first wedding night. Actually, any Indian woman cannot agree to have polluted wedded first night, but never allow a strange man even to touch to put his arm around her body. As the Deeti heard when her husband Hukam Singh said that opium is my first wife, then her heart and mind have been sunk and all her hopes were dashed to the ground. Later onwards Chandan Singh have started black mailing her. However, it is a life and death problem for *Deeti*.

Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* mainly concerns *Piya Roy* who is an American Cytologist. *Piya's* fiery independent spirit had forced him 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 detested. Her frustration for sudden demise of Fokir, through uncongenial atmosphere at the remote area of Sundarbans in a heavy Cyclone made her desperate. *Piya* cannot tolerate with sudden demise of Fokir in a heavy storm. Already Kanai Dutt loved *Piya* when they met together in Calcutta railway station. However, when he 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 were failed.

However, *Piya* is ready to leave to America after the cremation of Fokir, but her love for him did not die (419). She is responsible for Tutel's further life upto an ending suffering. Because she loved Tutel as she has the love of Fokir. She felt happy for the understanding of Moyana and Neelima for establishing the trust for the small children. *Piya* with her trodden youth, oppressed existence and frustrated dreams should drift towards Tutel, and his mother. She transgresses the "Love Laws" as a representative of the Fokir's son. Tutel, a child of broken home; when Fokir died by the Cyclone at the very young. "A viable disable age", Tutel was nearly five years old boy. *Piya* had seen the sufferings of his mother. It is the memory that *Piya* could never put out of her mind, and ruined her conjugal life. She "drifted into sundarban mangroves like a passenger drifts towards an unoccupied chair in an airport" (424).

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, sister and citizen" (177,191).

3. CONCLUSION

This is precisely a counter argument for the novel's gender politics. In all his other novels there is relatively little debate about the representation of gender and other issues of sexuality. But as a matter of academic speculation, women have become very significant presences in all his other works. Examining this aspect, James Clifford in the article 'The transit lounge of culture' says that we hear little from women in other novels, but it is only in *The Calcutta Chromosome* the women figures emerge as central organizing principle (*Times Literary Supplement* 3 May, 1991). Mangala as the subaltern leader attempts to subvert the discourse of science articulating an alternate mode of knowledge. *The Glass Palace* and *The Hungry Tide* presented detailed and individualized women characters than Ila and grandmother of *The Shadow Lines*.

Another pertinent critical aspect to be considered is Althusserian reading of these novels. Louis Althusser, an Algerian Marxist critic also known as structural Marxist critic in revisioning Marxist Interpretation of literature talked about the ideological structures and 'repressive structures' in his popular essay 'Ideology' state Apparatuses: Notes toward an Investigation' in his book *Lenin and Philosophy of other Essays* (1980). He considers 'Family' and 'Educational Institutions' as ideological structures. They are equally oppressive and exploitative like Govt Structures (Army, Judiciary, Political party system etc.). It is pertinent to observe that the lives of women are exploited in vortex of ideological structures. Marriage and family are the institutions that bind the lives of women and disallows them from liberation just like Deeti, *Piya*, and Paulette.

However, women protagonists in *Sea of Poppies*, *The Hungry Tide*, *The Glass Palace* and *The Imam and the Indian* are the victims of ideological structures and as well as male dominated society. In their struggle to liberate themselves from the 'ideological structures', they confront the repressive

structures of the society. They become sacrificial beings in the process of liberating and establishing alternative structures of living. It is from this perspective Althusserian reading paves way for Marxist Feminist reading of these works. Marxist Feminism which is particular in considering 'personal identity' with 'class identity' becomes the justified critical application. Lillian Robison a Marxist Feminist critic in her work *Sex, Class and Culture* (1978) identifies the systematic exclusion of women in every cultural production. The themes of the six works reveal how the women protagonists struggle from the systematic exclusion.

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