

# The Plight of Women in Amitav Ghosh's *Ibis Trilogy*

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### Abstract

This paper deals with the plight of women characters in Amitav Ghosh's *Ibis Trilogy*. It focuses chiefly on the colonial rule that the situation is even shoddier. Opium affects the life of all women characters in a straight line or in a roundabout way. It aims to tell in brief about the women characters with the extraordinary spotlight on the characters of Deeti, Paulette, daughter of a French botanist living in Calcutta; she respects Indian culture even though being a French woman and Shireen in particular. It represents exploring the emotional world of women, which helps the readers to connect and empathize with their situations. Through these characters, the lives of women are described and the survival of life with suffering and hardships.

**Keywords:** Colonial, Culture, Opium, Plight, Suppression, Hardship, Women.

Amitav Ghosh constructs characters that make us believe his stories and creates curiosity to gain knowledge of more about them. The *Ibis Trilogy* represents Ghosh's longest and most striving works in his writing career. The ensemble women characters live and breathe in our minds long after even if the books are put down. His *Sea of Poppies* is the first part of the trilogy, and the remaining two parts are *River of Smoke* and *Flood of Fire*. Ghosh always portrays the actual tales of South Asia to give it an extraordinary position among world history and literature. He has also shown the upshot of British rule in India. Ghosh illustrates the combination of cultures in his writing as uttered through language that he deals with. All through his literary career, Ghosh's stock of themes includes travel and diaspora, history and memory, political struggle and communal violence, love, and loss. Inequity against women is also one of the issues deals usually in his works.

The writer, drives his strength from transforming forgotten stories, the histories of subalterns who are till now considered outside history itself, into major and important, if not, grand narratives. His work is characterized by a thematic apprehension with modernity, globalization, and the vicious production of the recent nation-state. Ghosh's writing is relentlessly conscientious to details of local people and places, while also indicating their imbrications in global historical movement. Through his unswerving critique of the operation of empire and the legacy of the colonial encounter, Amitav Ghosh emphasizes the bang of colonialism on a shaping modern understanding of subjectivity and nationhood.

The famous work of Ghosh, *Ibis Trilogy*, is a collection of three books of historical fiction, which mainly focuses on the opium trade between British India and China. Ghosh primarily concerns the characters in his works.

In this work, also he portrays a Humpty number of characters belongs to all social classes and their conditions. Women's characters are not exceptional in his works. In the *Ibis Trilogy*, he gives much space to them to occupy in his books and portrays their plight in a well-equipped manner, and it sounds efficient. In all three books, women play a signifying role of their own.

The trilogy has the most influential character called Deeti, who belongs to an upper caste and orthodox family. She accepts to her marriage only because of her brother, Kesari Singh, who promises to marry her for Hukum Singh. He works in the army and later wounded and starts his job in the opium factory, which is nearer to his place, which is fifty miles away from Banaras. Deeti is a very submissive woman to her family, who works very hard for their welfare. There is a vast age gap between Hukum Singh and Deeti. Hukum Singh's brother Chandan has an eagle eye on Deeti. It is who always teases Deeti in some way or another.

After getting a daughter, Kabutri, she comes to know about the maneuver done to her by her own family. From her opium drugged mother-in-law, she comes to identify that she disables and opium addict husband is impotent during the night of her wedding she is drugged and was raped by a brother-in-law, Chandan with the help of his mother. Being a mother, she too hides her son's inability. It is because of the social setup during that time. Though that time, people slaved to British people, and women doubly slaved to both the British and the male in their family. Knowing all these things, she is not supposed to do anything against this and is dumbed down. It is purely because of the patriarchal society constructed during that period by our people. This scenario shows the gender bender of that time. Deeti is very much concerned about her daughter, who is very much conscious. Even though she finds that Kabutri is not born to Hukum Singh, she leads her life with him until his last breath. Deeti goes to the extent of doing Sati instead of surviving the rest of the living with Chandan. She, however, manages to pyre Sati is stopped by Kalua, a low caste man who drives cart for Hukum Singh. The men of the time won't see the faces of low caste people and considers that as a bad one for them. If it is the condition of men think about the situation of women, their work is to

mind the house, care their children, packing lunch for them, cultivating poppies, and the major work is doing poojas to the god in their home. Particularly Deeti in her house has an exclusive place for gods. A shrine is made for prayer in the house. She usually draws the picture of their dead ancestors and her living family members in that, and the room fills with the odor of incense, and the walls are black due to the persistent worship done to god. That is the condition of women during that time beyond they are restricted from doing none, and that is their routine. Even Deeti feels for her daughter's marriage as she is very young to undergo as she feels that Kabutri should be happy until she goes to her husband's house. Her release by Kalua and her insolent reception of his love are her first steps towards self-realization. By the time we get to River of Smoke, we see Deeti as the matriarch, presiding over her clan and her impenetrable paintings of the life-stories of the Ibis cast shows the accepted feminism more of Indian writing could do with.

Next comes the other significant and sturdy character, Paulette Lambert is a young French woman, daughter of a liberal French widower living in Calcutta. Her mother dies of child birth, and her father is always struggling and borrowing money from moneylenders. With the help of a neighboring native woman whose husband had run out on her, Paulette's father raises her alongside the woman's son, Jodu, and the two children became close playmates and became brother and sister. She is raised by her father, who cataloged plants from his mortgaged estate in India. Unusual for her day, she is educated in a diversity of languages and has a modern streak of independence. When Paulette's father dies, she is taken in by a wealthy opium trader. Still, she later realizes that she had no substitute but to run away from him because of his furtive decadent habits and to avoid the marriage with an old aged man. During one of the parties in Benjamin's house, she meets Zachery and instantly likes him. Paulette, when she runs away from sexual harassment at the hands of her guardian, or when she volunteers to migrate to Mauritius and comes up with an idea of a new community of "*jahazbhai* and *jahazbehen*," and especially when she decides to cross-dress to live undisturbed as a botanist at the gardens near Port Louis, displays the same fiery defiance and

independence of spirit. Ghosh's women are very powerful, shrewd, and yet impenitently feminine.

In Bombay, Bahram's widow, Shireen, struggles to muddle through with the inestimable problems twisted by her husband's death. The vast financial liabilities resulting from Bahram's failed opium venture (the central plot of *River of Smoke*) are partly taken care of by Shireen's brothers, who use this as a tool to condense their sister to complete subordination. The real mishap for her is the shocking finding that Bahram had a wife in China, Chi-Mei (now dead), through whom he had a son, Ah Fatt alias Freddie, first introduced to readers in *Sea of Poppies*, as a mysterious prisoner on board the *Ibis*. The disclosure about Chi-Mei is made by a close friend of Bahram, the Armenian Zadig Bey, who then manages to convince a very hesitant Shireen to take on a journey to China both to visit her late husband's grave in Hong Kong and perhaps meet Ah Fatt. The speedy change of Shireen is a bit unpersuasive — from her embracing of European-style attire to the ease with which she can switch the resistance to her growing closeness to Zadig Bey.

On the other hand, we can see that the trip is hugely therapeutic for her, bearing in mind that her marriage with Bahram had not been chiefly satisfying for the couple. The women in this trilogy are similar in one way or the other and their sufferings and plight too. Their concern is that they have to lead their life according to their wish and liberty and not bound to the traditional perspectives.

Ghosh tries to give a depiction of women's searching for identity and their right to survive a life of liberty and seriousness. In his novels, women are powerful; they travel and make decisions to endure a self-determining life. The men do not defend women. They are individuals with freedom and progress. Ghosh's women are prevailing, sharp, and, yet, unremorsefully feminine. Forms of slavery, kind of dismantlement of the self, a complete loss of identity are the plight of women in Ghosh's *Ibis Trilogy*.

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