Opium and the Ibis - The Transitional Journey in Sea of Poppies

In *Sea of Poppies*, part one of the Ibis trilogy, Ghosh pulls off a most remarkable transformation. In a novel that hinges on transgressions and focuses on deep and often violent change (both personal and social), [he is] cast anew as a writer who can inform, edify, provoke and entertain. This is a barnstormer of a book...

Avtar Singh, *Time Out Mumbai*

As discussed in the introduction of the thesis about the oeuvre of Amitav Ghosh, it is distinctive with its generic heterogeneity, or discursive inventiveness (as he values various kinds of discourses), voices and agents and narration of unanticipated connections between them. It also embraces into its fold the multiple voices and multiple ideologies of different cultures, languages and religions. It highlights the awareness of multiple histories, agencies and voices. *Sea of Poppies* (2008) seems to carry all these features. Bakhtinian polyphony and foregrounding of the process of focalization when transposed into Amitav Ghosh’s literary arena undergo an artistic reworking. His novels become polyphonic when he suffuses them with voices of different narrators and characters. Some of the speakers in his fictional world take contradictory philosophical and ideological stances but neither the character nor the narrator is subordinated by the authorial voice. This chapter substantiates this statement further.

As in the novels of Dostoevsky, the chief characteristic of Amitav Ghosh’s novels is “a plurality of unmerged voices and consciousness, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices” (Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics 6). Through polyphony, Amitav Ghosh deconstructs the accepted canons of Eurocentric grand narratives and tries to bring to the forefront those who were on the negative side of the binary: the subalterns, the marginalized, the downtrodden and the oppressed. His novels, thus, foreground the need to erase the boundary between binary oppositions like superior/inferior, positive/negative in such a way that the hierarchy implied by the opposition is thrown into question.
*Sea of Poppies*, shortlisted for Man Booker prize, makes serious efforts to bring the trials and tribulations of the marginalized people from the peripheries to the centre. Polyphony comes into the fold of the narration, thereby enabling the interplay of all the distinct multiple voices of the subaltern people. It is important here to observe the ways in which polyphony works. It is a misguided view that the more characters speak, see or think, the more polyphonic the text becomes. It is also a fatal mistake to conclude that the text is monologic because it is narrated exclusively by a narrator. Polyphony has much to do with “the ability or willingness to allow voices into the work that are not fundamentally under the monological control of the novelist’s own ideology” (Booth, *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* xix-xx).

As has already been mentioned in the introduction, focalization is a tool employed by Amitav Ghosh to emphasize all diverse viewpoints in his fiction, particularly in this novel. It is important to consider what is actually done (criticizing or praising of characters and so on) through the narratorial voice, or character’s voices, so that one may identify a variety of ideas, ideologies and subjectivities. It is important to mention here that the presence of multiple focalizers is an important condition for realizing Bakhtin’s polyphonic characteristic of “a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses.”

However, whether each voice or focalizer has an evaluative function is more significant. If one focalizer produces a world-view and other does not, or cogent opinions are consistently produced by a single focalizer, the text is not polyphonic in Bakhtinian sense, despite the presence of multiple focalizers. On the contrary, even a text with one predominant focalizer can be polyphonic. If such focalizer is far from the source of the story (Implied Author) as in the case of the narrator-character, for instance, the distinction between the focalizer and Implied Author becomes marked: the view opposite to the Implied Author’s own is permitted to exist, unless the focalizer is obviously this author’s spokesperson.

If the predominant focalizer is influenced by a variety of embedded focalizers, it may be interpreted as polyphonic. Even when the focalizer is a third person omniscient narrator, s/he can still produce a polyphonic effect, by appropriating characters’ idioms or representing *communis opinio* for instance. Amitav Ghosh makes use of these polyphonic instances in his *Sea of Poppies.*
Polyphony works extensively in *Sea of Poppies*. The following passage related to Deeti’s visit to opium factory is a focalization of the illtreatment of Indian workers working in the Ghazipur factory. The factory’s gloomy atmosphere and Deeti are focalized by the narrator. Both act as focalizers in the passage. The expressive elements are the words like the “immense iron-roof structure”, “enormous square columns”, “the ceiling soared so high”, “gigantic pairs of scales used for the weighing of raw opium”, “dozens of earthenware gharas”, “endless cavern of a hall”, “a host of dark, legless torsos was circling around and around, like some enslaved tribe of demons” filled her heart with fear, dread and sympathy for the workers. (93)

The adjectives used above mark the enormity of the factory and the astonished part of Deeti’s self who has never seen such place before. The visit is described so authentic that it seems as if the readers are actually seeing the dark, gloomy and dim interior of the factory with Deeti. The narrator presents it with her thought presentation. “Who would guess, in looking at them, how much time and trouble went into filling of these vessels? So this was where they came, these offsprings of her fields? Deeti could not help looking around in curiosity, marveling at the speed and dexterity with which the vessels were whisked on and off the scales” (93).

It is here that farmers come to get their harvest of opium weighed in the hope of fulfilling their contracts otherwise they will be under “a greater load of debt”(94). They are “tense and angry, cringed and resigned” and just left to wait. There are “bare-bodied men, sunk waist-deep in tanks of opium…to soften the sludge. Their eyes were vacant…they could move no more…These seated men had more the look of ghouls…the drug as to be indistinguishable from their skin”(95). And when a worker drops a ball of opium, it follows “howls and shrieks” set upon by “cane-wielding overseers.” The assembly room in the factory looked like a temple to Deeti with “dhoti-clad men, sitting crossed-legged on the floor, like Brahmins at a feast…” They pack opium exactly “one seer and seven-and-a –half chittacks of the drug....” (97).

So, polyphony can be seen at work here with distinct voices of a character and the narrator. The characters (like Deeti as in the above passage) act as evaluators and such role is a crucial point in the understanding of the novel as a true conglomeration
of distinct polyphonic elements. Let us take for instance another passage where Kalua is humiliated by three thakurs:

Ever since the night of her wedding, Deeti had been haunted by images of her own violation: now, watching from the shelter of the poppy field, she bit the edge of her palm, to keep from crying out aloud. *So it could happen to a man too? Even a powerful giant of a man could be humiliated and destroyed, in a way that far exceeded his body’s capacity for pain?* (57) (italics mine)

The focalizer is narrator and the focalized object is Deeti’s consciousness. Kalua’s humiliation is focalized and evaluated by the narrator. He is focalized and evaluated by Deeti also. The relationships between narrator, Deeti and Kalua can be figured as below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Narrator (focalizer)</th>
<th>Deeti (focalized object and focalizer)</th>
<th>Kalua (focalized object)</th>
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Deeti plays the role of both focalizer and focalized object. In examining ideologies and world views crossing in a text, the focalizer who presents cogent evaluation is significant, however embedded it may be (like Deeti’s interior view as illustrated in this passage). In considering the predicament of Kalua, Deeti’s function as evaluative focalizer may be more significant than his (Kalua’s) function as focalized object.

In Amitav Ghosh’s *Sea of Poppies*, there is a predominant focalizer and that is narrator. He is meticulously using shifts back and forth, giving his remarks, comments and observation and also succeeds in presenting focalized object(s) and focalizer(s) according to the situation and story of the novel. But one very crucial point to be made over here is that the focalizer that is not predominant can have stronger influences on our interpretation of the novel. Even if the whole novel is dominated by the external, narrator-focalizer, important evaluation of character may be transmitted...
through one of the internal focalizers. As illustrated in Captain Chillingworth’s words below which he speaks in the response to the excuses and false pretensions of “the high spirits and general good cheer” (261) of Britishers for war against China:

The truth is, sir, that men do what their power permits them to do. We are no different from the Pharaohs or the Mongols: the difference is only that when we kill people we feel compelled to pretend that it is for some higher cause. It is this pretence of virtue, I promise you, that will never be forgiven by history.(262)

The captain is the focalizer here who focalizes the partial and unjust way of Britishers like Mr Burnham who pretend to wage a war in the name of God and human freedom. In this passage, the focalizer as a character, who functions as secondary, is no less influential than the predominant focalizer, the narrator.

Amitav Ghosh’s *Sea of Poppies* has the blend of direct speech and indirect speech. The traces of a character’s subjectivity manifested in Free Indirect Speech are the signs that the narrator speaks or wants to speak from that character’s viewpoint. Amitav Ghosh believes in the possibility of coexistence of multiple focalizers in the novel as in this case, it is also impossible absolutely to attribute the focalizer to any specific character. In the following passage, when in jail, Bishu-ji tells Neel:

> He (Aafat) is all you have, your caste, your family, your friend; neither brother nor wife nor son will ever be as close to you as he will. You will have to make of him what you can; he is your fate, your destiny...

(316)

These lines emphasize the narrator’s perspective through the speech of Bishu-ji, interestingly a minor character of the novel whom the author gives due credence and importance as a focalizer and his subjectivity is a result of what the narrator wishes to say about the close relationship between Lei Leong Fatt and Neel later on in the novel.

Another passage of the novel is discussed below where Paulette insists Zachary to allow her to sail to Mauritius. She gives him the example of her grand aunt Jeanne Baret, also known as Madame Commerson:
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 volunteer to see for herself the riches of the earth...this idée set her afire and she decided that she too, by all hazard, would be an expeditionnaire. But of course it was not to be expected that the men would permit a woman to join the ship...(255)

What makes this passage complex is the fact that Paulette has never met her but perhaps heard the story from her parents. So, the focalizer of those words would be her parents. However, in telling her grand aunt’s story to Zachary, Paulette may be adding her own evaluation to her parents’ original version of the story. The expressive elements such as “made her burn”, ‘had a passion most heated for science”, “by all hasard” show the feelings of pride and honour she feels for her great-aunt and the hope that she has for herself to be on board. In the description of Madame Commerson, the readers can discern two subjectivities—one of Paulette’s parents and the other is of Paulette. As this example shows, we come across cases defined as poly-focalization where one expressive element contains plural focalizers or subjectivities.

Further in this argument, another significant issue is the careful handling of different viewpoints in many different discourses, like those of natural science, etymology, religion, myth and diary notes. Even the tuned differences in the prosodies of characters attempt to lend voice and independence to multitude of others. Deeti is the author’s favourite character (he has stated it in many interviews) but it is worth examining to what degree the narrator’s sympathy is elicited in the novel.

On the other hand, in the case of some characters namely Mr. Burnham and Mr Chillingworth, it is relevant to notice whether the narrator’s irony is a dominant key to the issue of monology and polyphony. Related to the openness of the narrator are his/her dual functions: “storyteller”, who shows his/her own subjectivities openly and adds explicit evaluations and “historian”, who remains impersonal and accurate. Polyphony becomes conspicuous when the two functions clash and the narrator reveals a contradiction by alternating between “impersonal” and “evaluative” attitudes toward a character. My argument is that this clash is noticeable in the process of characterizing the main characters.
Let us take another passage in which the judge comments before giving verdict to Neel Rattan, a very privileged Bengal monarch who has to pay a heavy price by not being ready to pay the debts owed to with Mr Burnham and in return he is convicted on the charge of fraudery. “Here at this point, Ghosh’s narration is quite impartial and especially the treatment of the Englishman with the Indian is also worth-noticing. The judges treat Raja Neel Rattan unmindful of his position and place:

The temptation that afflicts those who bear the burden of governance, said the judge, is ever that of indulgence, the power of paternal feeling being such as to make every parent partake of the suffering of his wards and offspring’s. Yet, painful as it is, duty requires us sometimes to set aside our natural affections in the proper dispensation of justice… (236)

The focalizer in the above passage is the judge who represents the impartial judgment that law-bearers should possess. The focalized object here is the judgment to be given to Neel and the aura that the judge creates around him in the court is the focalization of this passage but a very interesting thing that relates to polyphonic ambience is when one moves to next passages where the narrator describes and comments Neel’s physical responses and his comments which are contrary to the superficial impartiality of the judge who is just another pawn used by Mr Burnham against Neel Rattan. The narrator is ironical in remarking on the partiality harboured by the British judges against the Indians in nineteenth century. The said observation is extracted from the passage:

One of the effects of this operation was that it robbed the language of its immediacy, rendering its words comfortably abstract, as distant from his own circumstances as were the waves of Windermere and the cobblestones of Canterbury. So it seemed to him now, as the words came pouring from the judge’s mouth, that he was listening to the sound of pebbles tinkling in some faraway well… There was something about this that seemed so absurd to Neel …for if his presence in the dock proved anything at all, it was surely the opposite of the principle of equality so forcefully enunciated by the judge?… in

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this system of justice it was the English themselves- Mr Burnham and his ilk- who were exempt from the law as it applied to others: it was they who had become the world’s new Brahmins. (237-239) (Italics mine)

The narrator uses specific words to highlight the superficiality and mechanical process related to the judgment process. The words like ‘operation’, ‘robbed’, ‘abstract’, ‘distant’, ‘faraway’, and ‘absurd’ connote the negation of the so-called unjust judicial laws of Britishers. The focalization is now the artificiality of the Britishers in pretending about their impeccable judicial system. The narrator has meticulously managed the focalization with words like ‘seemed’, ‘comfortably abstract’, ‘pebbles …in...well’, ‘the opposite of the principle of equality’ and ‘the world’s new Brahmins.’ These words are part of a language which is about language, that is, a metalanguage devise to serve a particular purpose, that of the obfuscation of justice. Language is, thus made ‘comfortably abstract’, thereby deceiving others of the true meaning. So, we can say that the narrator’s perspective and the character’s perspective are held at contradictory positions but even then both voices have their distinctive role to play.

There is another example of the conglomeration of different voices distinctly playing their role. *Ibis* is a very crucial motif in the novel that links three sections of the novel. It is a place where different characters, perspectives, beliefs, traditions, cultures and mindsets are allowed to exist. The atmosphere of ship is quite different to the atmosphere of the land. The cruel treatments with the slaves or the Girmitiyas, the snobbery of the English and the power politics that run among the Britishers and the Indians and also among the Indians themselves also are manifested openly. The harshness of Captain Chillingworth’s words is translated by Baboo Nob Kissin:

> The difference is that the laws of the land have no hold on the 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. This chabuk you see in my hands is just one of the keepers of my law. (404)

The Britishers just wanted to make the poor Indians kowtow to their whims and unjust fancies. The above passage clearly indicates the desperate situation of the
indentured workers forced on board who are filled with ‘an unspeakable dread’ (406). The captain expects submission and obedience from the helpless workers through the whip. As the judge, the captain also talks in the guise of law to give himself authenticity and considers himself worthy of propriety. The elements of excessive pride and callousness are manifested through the ‘I’, ‘sole maker’, ‘I am your fate’, ‘providence’, ‘lawgiver.’ The narrator allows all the characters to develop fully in the course of the novel and gives his comments and observations simultaneously.

Going forward with the thread of focalization to analyse the novel, there are passages which describe the intelligence of the writer’s skill of language. In the following passage the narrator comments when Ah Fatt tells Neel about his village:

> It was not because of Ah Fatt’s fluency that Neel’s vision of Canton became so vivid as to make it real: in fact, the opposite was true, for the genius of Ah Fatt’s description lay in their elisions, so that to listen to him was a venture of collaboration, in which the things that were spoken of came gradually to be transformed into artifacts of a shared imagining (375).

If one reads it carefully, the words like ‘fluency...vision...became so vivid...real’, ‘elisions’, and ‘shared imagining’ suggest the comment of the writer on the art of writing. When a creator creates some work of art, imagination is at work to make it more convincing and real. The actual challenge of description is not to describe things mechanically. The novelist should suggest and leave gaps so that readers does important role of filling those gaps. It is a great joy involved in the reading process to discover the unsaid and incomplete things.

Many reviews of the novel support this argument of heterogeneity in the novel. Lise Guilhamon opines, “One of the most striking stylistic features of this novel lies in its linguistic heterogeneity : the Anglo-Indian dialect of the British in India’ (Mrs Burnham), the pidgin that came from China and specialized nautical jargon of lascars, the American English of a Mulatto freedman from Maryland, as well as Bhojpuri, one of the main dialects of Hindi and French mingle and mix in the text. The introduction of this new language in the novel does not impede the reading process of readers and readers find a new and interesting game to understand on their own and achieve confidence, thereby…”(12). Raja Huilgol in his book review of the novel comments, “Ghosh interweaves a babel of pidgin, Bhojpuri, French and comical English, entertaining the reader with his mastery” (1).
Shirley Chew comments, “With the colourful characters, another bedazzling aspect of Sea of Poppies is the clash and mingling of language. Bhojpuri, Bengali, Laskari, Hindustani, Anglo-Indian words and phrases and a fantastic spectrum of English... create a vivid sense of living voices as well as the linguistic resourcefulness of people in Diaspora. The words like thug, pukka, sahib, serang, mali, lathi, dekko and punkah-wallah; dhoti, kurta, jooties, nayansukh, dasturi, sirdar, maharir, serishtas and burkundaz have succeeded in creating true Indian atmosphere in the novel.” (“Strangers Under Sail”)

Amitav Ghosh expresses the creative joy of writing fiction when he tells Priyamvada Gopal in an interview:

For me, the novel is the most complete form of expressive utterance. Not only does it allow you to tell a story, but it also permits you to create the world within which that story is told. This means that a novel can create its own linguistic universe, and this was to me one of the most exciting things about writing *Sea of Poppies*. (“Confronting the Past”)

He further asserts it in terms of the present novel:

*Sea of Poppies is* not about any one thing, any more than the past (or the present) are about one thing. There can no doubt that colonialism was the dominant political reality of nineteenth century India. Yet, it is important to remember that it was just one aspect of that reality: people also lived and laughed and loved, as indeed people do everywhere no matter what their political circumstances. (“Confronting the Past”)

In the novel, the vision of Amitav Ghosh on the nineteenth century India appears to be different. He adds, “When I look back at the nineteenth century, what strikes me is the resilience, the resistance, the willingness to change and the determination to learn. The past cannot and right not to, be planed down to one dimension.” (“Confronting the Past”)

Amitav Ghosh sends a beautiful message of solidarity and oneness among the workers on board through the motif of *Ibis*. The comment of Sanjay Sipahimalani appears appropriate, “Ghosh takes his time in building up the characters, filling in
their backgrounds and circumstances leading to their current predicament. In characteristically limpid prose and with the eye of a social anthropologist- a discipline in which he’s well- versed- he details the customs, diet, cloth and social restrictions of these individuals who are to be thrown together on the ibis to become ‘jahaj-bhais’.” (“A Sea change into something rich and strange”)

Amitav Ghosh seems to be interested in dealing with the characters who have set on a new journey in their life. The first section ends with the beginning of new life of Deeti, the second section ends with the beginning of new life of Neel Rattan, the insolent in particular and the third chapter ends with new fate of all the characters of the novel.

The fiction of Amitav Ghosh reveals his prime obsession with history. He gives a new dimension to history even when he fictionalizes the fact. As his fiction is replete with political, historical and social consciousness, he excels his contemporaries and shapes his novels according to the need of History. Therefore, fact is fictionalized without any loss of grace and dignity adds the charm of reading. In Sea of Poppies the fact of opium wars remains the chief theme, yet the characters, dialogue and language are supporting factors. David Robson says rightly, “If opium were the dominant theme of Sea of Poppies, it would probably be a less interesting book. Instead, Ghosh has used the voyage of the ibis as the centerpiece of a much broader canvas, a seething human diaspora in which every character has a story to tell and every passenger is on the run from someone to something.” (“Into the Opium Wars”)

The collage of uniquely delineated characters each having distinctive traits or characteristics is teeming with multifarious characters. Characters work as strategies for focalization. Amitav Ghosh himself declares that “writing is about people.” Every book begins with a character. Deeti is the central character of the novel. What strikes him most is the departure that people like Deeti undergo during migration. He is interested to explore the forces that propel her go across the province, country and finally sea. She is the one who has never seen sea, who is so afraid of sea but her circumstances take her on board and meet other people. (an interview with Anuradha on CNBC in “Beautiful People”)
Although the characters seem to be victimized in the beginning but as the plot advances, each of them exhibits a strong sense of individuality, resource and resilience in the face of personal adversity and overcomes social and economic hurdles. The novelist convincingly juxtaposes their victimization and their own unique individuality. They strive to make a new destiny for themselves. Zachary, Paulette, Deeti, Azad, Neel, Kalua and Serang Ali undertake challenges and face ordeals on their way to a new destination set forth either by their choice or circumstances. They are constantly in the process of travelling and in a way experiencing transformation.

Deeti and Paulette are among the vibrant and vocal characters who know when, how and where to speak. They are equally sensitive to their surroundings and alert in their responses. Deeti’s ‘puja room’ has relics and other tokens of remembrance of her dead brothers, sister, father, mother and grandparents. She has the habit of drawing images of her dear people and cherished things in her life and places them in that room. When she envisions the image of ship, it also “finds place in her shrine” (9) and the narrator describes the precision of her drawing, “her drawing was an uncannily evocative rendition of its subject” (10).

She is a vital block in the entire edifice of the gender assertion. She is the conscious being who is adept at making images and thoughtful enough to envision some distant relationships with the “sureness of her intuition.” She reminds the readers of Rukmani of *Nectar in a Sieve* who is closely attached to the land on which she works and her liability for the domesticity. She manages to overcome many obstacles on her way and her circumstances turn the direction of her life completely. The narrator recounts the merciless and clever trick of the Britishers who used to force the Indian peasants to grow opium. It was a very difficult crop to grow “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: purchasesanure and constant watering; and after all that, the frenzy of the harvest, each bulb having to be individually nicked, drained and scraped” (29).

Deeti is the one who does not want to remain as an object. She is drugged on the first night and is raped by Chandan Singh, a fact, she is not aware of. But she is not the one who will lead life ignorantly and wait for another blow to her spirits. She
is not a god-like character who always sacrifices herself and never does any wrong. Infact, she starts giving datura to her mother-in-law secretly and under the trance her mother-in-law reveals the truth and refers to her the name of Draupadi “who bears the children of brothers for each other…” (39).

Deeti is as assertive as any intuitive and conscious person would be in the time of difficulty. She feels “assailed by the sirdars” in the packaging room of the opium factory when she goes to fetch her unconscious husband. They asked a number of questions and scold her for being late and unconcerned about her husband for sending him to the factory. The narrator comments on Deeti’s nature, “Deeti was not of a mind to ignore these attacks.” She is not submissive and knows her right to speak where she is treated wrongly. She instantly spoke, “And who are you to speak to me like that? How would you earn your living if not for afeemkhors?” (98)

On *Ibis*, she witnesses a new realization of her own self which is empowered enough to lead others and acknowledge others. She gives herself a new identity and name with her ship siblings: Aditi. Running away with Kalua to aboard *Ibis* is not an easy decision for Deeti as she is so firmly grounded in her roots. She decides to leave her daughter behind for her better future but the fear of the unseen and unnamed always haunts her:

> How could he conceive that she would go to a place which was, for all she knew, inhabited by demons and pishaches, not to speak of all kinds of unnameable beasts? How could he, Kalua, or anyone else, know that it wasn’t true that the recruits were being fattened for the slaughter? (303)

Paulette is another crucial character of the novel and plays the role of a focalizer. Through her character, the novelist articulates various themes of the novel. She, like Deeti, is very reflective and insightful. She voices one of the main thematic concerns of the novel while talking to Deeti that they are “ship-siblings- jahazbhais and jahazbahens- to each other” (527). Deeti is struck with this simple but forceful idea. There are “no differences between…[them] jahaz-bhai and jahazbhen to each other…children of the ship…[that is] a great wooden mai-bap, an adoptive ancestor and parent of dynasties to come” (528).
Her decision to disguise herself as Putleshwari and run aboard Ibis has made Jodu, Neel and Zachary amazed at her new image which does not put anyone in doubt. Neel acknowledges it, “You are a woman of extraordinary talent, Miss Lambert- a genius in a way” (497). Paulette does not reply in a way dwelling on flattery but she puts her card advocating the plurality of selves in a human being, “Is it forbidden for a human being to manifest themselves in many different aspects?” (497) She is philosophical but at the same time recognizes its pragmatic streak also. When Zachary gives her explanation about the matter of his race, she replies softly, “Are not all appearances deceptive, in the end? Whatever there is within us- whether good, or bad, or neither- its existence will continue interrupted…no matter what the drape of our clothes, or the colour of our skin?” (501)

She is a true admirer of Nature. She is conscious of the concern for plants which are a “slender link with her past” (131) and a soft heart for people around her. Even then, there is her private self “in the seclusion of her bedroom” where she rises in “pre-dawn darkness” (123) “to work on the unfinished manuscript of her father’s Materia Medica of the plants of Bengal (128-129). She is too pensive and considers it “ungrateful” and disloyalty to her benefactors to think of her past life and reminds herself of good fortune in being with Mr. Burnham’s family. She was very close to her father and used to assist him in his work. She learnt Latin from him and Indian languages from his learned munshis. She herself learnt French volitionally. All this marks her effort and observation to be an “accomplished botanist and a devout reader of Voltaire, Rousseau and M. Bernardian de Saint-Pierre” (131). She is like the unnamed narrator of The Shadow Lines who remembers the clarity of things and people told through various stories. She reflects the novelist’s initial effort of giving scholarly strain to a primarily shy character like Alu in The Circle of Reason, thereby experiencing the clash of ideas leading to his/her awareness of practical life.

There is a change in her personality as her softness and silence later on transformed into boldness and intrepidity. She may be naïve but she is not stupid because she understands that Mr Burnham’s desire to improve her knowledge of the Scriptures by reading to her is a ploy to receive a severe beating on his bare buttocks, since he is a “sinner.” She knows that she can expect to be turfed out if Mrs Burnham suspects that her husband is finding it difficult to sit down. However, fate intervenes, for soon after the dinner, Paulette finds that Justice Kendalbushe wishes to marry her.
So, she decides to run away and joins the *Ibis* disguising herself in a sari. So, she decides to escape Bethel. She becomes so determined to go to Mauritius Island, that she manages to board *Ibis* as an indentured labourer.

Jodu is the most cheerful character in the novel who lives life to the most. He does not carry baggage of the past once he is on the board except that he misses the company of Paulette. He is ambitious and optimist for his bright future: “...And I’ll be the Faghfoor of Maha-chin...” (319) The way Jodu and Rajoo has “the run of vessel” enables the narrator to show the mingling of focalizer(s) and focalized object(s). *Ibis* is seen by the readers as well as these two characters. They head for the officers’ section, the *peechil-kamre* (the after cabins), the *beech kamra* or midships-cabin, the cuddy, the *Kaptan’s* stateroom, the migrants’ part of the ship-*dabusa*, the fana, the *chokey* (318). They give an extensive view of the structure of ship which is the brilliance of the novelist who makes things real and visible as they are before the eyes of his readers. Jodu emerges as a character who is not afraid to take risks. Mamdoo-tindal asks him to reach up to the kursi of the foremast:

This was a test, Jodu knew, so he spat on his palms and muttered a bismillah before reaching for the iskat. Less than halfway up, he knew his hands were scraped and bleeding- it was as if the hempen rope had sprouted thorns- but his luck held. Not only did he get to the kursi, he even managed to wipe his bloddy hands on his hair before the tindal could see his cuts. (320)

Jodu knows very well that the pain that he has undergone will help him “take...place on the mast” and feels “triumphant...as he eased himself into the kursi: what throne, after all, could offer as grand a view as the crosstrees, with the sun sinking in the west...” (320)

Zachary, another crucial character who rises “from the merest novice sailor” to second mate of *Ibis* represents the clarity of thoughts, reason, fellow feelings, chivalry towards women, impartiality for subordinate crew and somewhat patriarchal views as expected from a man of the nineteenth century. He is the *Ibis*’ foreman, who is a mulatto from Boston, who has concealed his mixed race status from his British employers with the fear of discrimination and loss of livelihood. His impartiality is brought to light when he argues with the Captain (who favours Bhyro Singh’s decision to take revenge from Kalua as he has rescued Deeti), “And surely we can’t let him[Kalua] be flogged for it while he is in our custody?” (482)
He is influenced and motivated by the spirit of his dead mother. He has great eagerness to learn the sailor’s trade. *Ibis* provides him with “a quick, if stern schooling, the log of her voyage being a litany of troubles almost from the start” (12). He is the one to get more courage with each difficulty to move ahead. This characteristic makes him all the more endearing to the readers.

A diverse group of characters with their own individual dialectical variations of language and identity make their appearance in the novels of Amitav Ghosh, contributing, thereby to their heteroglossic quality. Lascars are quite extraordinary group of people who get familiar with many languages, cultures and people. They are seafaring characters who know very well to survive in any tough circumstance and proudly embrace the transnational identity. The novel rediscovers the Asian nautical world which is not properly represented in history.

The eighteenth and nineteenth century crew consisted of mainly Asians and they were adept in learning new languages, life styles and cultures of other people. Through travel, each of the writer’s character learns to transform and disguise themselves. As Amitav Ghosh echoes Rilke’s quote in *The Hungry Tide*, “Life is lived in transformation.” There is process of reinvention and change that regularly goes on among characters in the story. Amitav Ghosh informs the readers about them that they are “group of ten or fifteen, each with a leader who spoke on their behalf” (13). They are “Chinese and East Africans, Arabs and Malays, Bengalis and Goans, Tamils and Arakanese.” In this novel, there is a lascar company engaged on board “that was led by one Serang Ali” (14).

With this new crew, Zachary gets a new education about nautical vocabulary and their different ways- the clicking of dice, games of Parcheesi unfolding on chequerboards of rope, the cheerful sound of sea-shanties and the odour of spices, a new set of provisions in the ship’s stores. He gets used to words like ‘dal’, ‘masalas’ and ‘achar.’ He has to become habitual of terms like ‘resum’ instead of ‘rations’, ‘malum’ instead of ‘mate’, ‘serang’ for bo’sun, ‘tindal’ for bo’sun’s mate and ‘seacunny’ for helmsman (15). Serang Ali is instrumental in Zachary’s “transformation into a sahib” (23). He comes to his aid in the matter of clothes and other things. “Malum Zikri one big piece pukka sahib now. Mus wear propa cloths” (50).
Neel and Elokeshi are blend of opposites- one is solemn and somber and the other is flirtatious and giggly. With Elokeshi, Neel enjoys a very cosy physical relationship. As a dancer, their love making is resonated with ‘rhythm’, ‘the cycles of beats’, ‘their changes of tempo’, ‘a mounting, quicking tal’ and ‘final beat’ (81-82). She submits an affidavit in the court against Neel by appearing as a witness against the charges held against him. The narrator gives her thought presentation after she learns from Neel that money is problem in the Raskhali zemindary, “she sensed now that something was really awry and that she might have to re-examine her options” (90).

The name of Neel’s wife Malati is mentioned for the first time on page 88 to show the disinterestedness Neel has for her as he is “settled on Elokeshi” (88). Although, at later stage he will introspect himself for his betrayal and Malati also emerges as a strong character. During his stay in jail at Alipore, she came to meet him without any veil or purdah. He says, “You’ve come like this?... To a place where everyone can see you?” He asks her if she will be able to bear the shame to be in public view and she answers, “It wasn’t for my own sake that I kept purdah- it was because you and your family wanted it. And it means nothing now...” (269) (Italics mine) Even a minor character like her, has a major role in the novelist’s forum of human assertion where she (Malati) is not ready to be always treated like a commodity. She asserts herself strongly in the time of difficulty.

Kalua, a so-called outcaste man who is comforted with Deeti’s love and support, transforms completely from a silent and less confident man to a strong character who voices against the unjust colonizers and rigid Indians like Bhyro Singh who try to control the weak sections of society. His transformation echoes the metamorphosis of Alu and Fokir in The Circle of Reason and The Hungry Tide respectively. In the beginning, his simplicity is highlighted. His mind has “remained slow, simple and trusting.” He has a shy, timid and peaceable disposition and “had no greater ambition than to make a living by transporting goods and people in his cart” (54).

But towards the end of the novel, he turns out to be strong enough to fight back with Bhyro Singh. His mind is so alert now that he listens to “the echo of Bhyro Singh’s voice, in some part of his head he was counting the subedar’s paces,
numbering the seconds till the next blow...” (488). He keeps pace with “each of the syllables marking one of the subedar’s paces, going away and turning around...” He remembers minutely, “the enumeration of the syllables, the crack of the lash, and the tightening of his teeth- again, and yet again...” Finally, “the drumbeat in Kalua’s head had attuned itself so accurately to the subedar’s paces that he knew exactly when the lash was uncoiling through the air, and he knew, too, exactly when to pull his hand free.” Kalua emerges to be the sole dispenser of justice and not just remain a victimizer only. He jerks the subedar’s neck with such a force “that before anyone could take a step or utter a sound, the subedar was lying dead on the deck...” (488-489).

Benjamin Brightwell Burnham represents those callous Britishers who just knew how to go on with their mercenariness and holding up his firm views on trade and war in India and China. His alliterative name hints at the boastful and bragging behaviour of the *Ibis* owner. He is in favour of opium war against China and has no trouble invoking his God in the service of opium, “Jesus Christ is Free Trade and Free Trade is Jesus Christ...If it’s God’s will that opium be used as an instrument to open China to His teachings, then so be it...” He has always explanations and pretensions ready for the others. When Zachary asks him if the English laws have banned slave trade, he answered, “It’s sad but true that there are many who’ll stop at nothing to halt the march of human freedom...the Africa trade was the greatest exercise in freedom since God led the children of Israel out of Egypt”(79)

By yoking the freedom of the Chinese people with the availability of the opium drug, Benjamin Burnham unwittingly lays bare the empty rhetoric of the imperialists, whose moral judgment is completely clouded by the vision of mercenary profits. Amitav Ghosh’s indictment of an opium war approximately two hundred years ago finds a compelling echo in the contemporary state of Afghanistan, infamously notable for its drug production capacity, while being torn apart physically, politically and economically by western and native vested interests.

The narrator comments on the opium trade that particularly interested Britishers. In east India, he states, “opium was the exclusive monopoly of the British, produced and packaged entirely under the supervision of the East India Company...”(85) He calls the English sahibs ‘the cold weather’ who “would allow[the Indian farmers] little else to be planted; their agents would go from home to home, forcing cash advances on the farmers, making them sign asami contracts.” (30)
This satirical display is further reinforced by Mr. Doughty, the captain of the ship, who relishes the prospect of going to war, and uses the excuse of the plight of the Indian farmer as justification: “Indeed, humanity demands it. We need only think of the poor Indian peasant – 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 crore” (260). He has conveniently glossed over the fact that it was the British who forced the Indian peasants to abandon cultivating their staple food crops and start producing opium for Britain’s benefit.

Adding a quasi-religious tone to his justification, Justice Kendalbushe gravely adds: “a war is necessary if China is to be opened up to God’s word.” (260). The falsity of these justifications is further bought to light by Tony Davies, who draws attention to Nietzsche, one of the earliest philosophers who saw through “the illusory or fraudulent pretensions of much nineteenth century humanism” (Humanism, 36) and the “the tendency of such schemes [of secular Salvationism] to conceal quite disreputable motivations ... beneath their professions of universal altruism.” (Humanism, 36).

Captain Chillingworth represents the opportunistic attitude of the British who believe in racial discrimination. “The day the natives lose faith in us, as the guarantors of the order of castes- that will be the day, gentlemen, that will doom our rule. This is the inviolable principle on which our authority is based…” (485) His blunt pronouncement exposes the “selfserving pretensions” (Davies 37) of humanism’s tenets, even while he perpetuates them in his profession.

Such ironic delineation of characters brings forth the element of caricature extensively employed through the characters of Benjamin, Chillingworth, the judge and Nob Kissin. The satirical handling of certain characters does not only limit to British characters but also to Indian characters as in the case of Nob Kissin. He thinks his version to be always true and is undergoing certain changes in his mind and body which he relates to his attachment to Ma Taramony. He fails to understand the true meaning of love and devotion but that leads him to be a sole benefactor of Neel Rattan.

Nob Kissin remains a lone seeker of identity which he terms as spiritual but his baffled love for lord Krishna leads him nowhere. Nob Kissin’s over obsession
with his search for divine manifestation in and around him strangely comes for the rescue of Neel and Ah Fatt with Nob Kissin’s fine arrangements for their food and escape. Handing over the keys to Neel, the comic element reaches the high point in Nob Kissin’s appeal, “Do you see her now? In my eyes? Ma Taramony? Is she here? Within me?” (503) Neels’ response of having seen her as “a mother incarnate” (503) makes Nob Kissin aware of “a strange affection” that “Taramony’s presence was fully manifest in him” and he feels himself to be “the key that could unlock the cages that imprisoned everyone” (503). He rushes to Kalua also to assure him for his escape but in all this over indulgence, Mr. Crowle finds him in “blissful joy of pure ananda” with closed eyes and “arms raised in the air”(504). Nob Kissin, unknowingly, lets him notice the paper of the list of crew members in which the real race of Zachary is mentioned which is enough reason for Mr. Crowle’s bitterness with Zachary.

All the above discussion leads to a decisive point helpful in the analysis of the novel, that is, the larger discourse of imperialism. In her doctoral dissertation, The Rhetoric of Posthumanism: A Study of Four Twentieth-Century International Novels (1998), Lidan Lin calls attention to the powerful nexus between the growing powers of imperialism, capitalism and the principles of enlightenment humanism which nourished the appetite for western powers who, combined together, gained dominance over eighty percent of the world’s land area between the seventeenth and twentieth centuries.

While enlightenment humanist philosophy stressed on the importance of reason, rationale and the spirit of scientific enquiry, it also encouraged a unilateral, western view of what constituted progress, civilization, and truth. Reinforcing Lin’s assertions is Jeannie Im, who points out: “The paradox of Enlightenment humanism was that, in positing a universal, human subject as the agent of history, it provided an alibi for imperial expansion as an engine of modernization, progress, and civilization” (Modernity in Translation, abstract). Amitav Ghosh’s engagement with the historical era of the nineteenth century then serves to show the obverse side of the principles of humanism.

More interestingly, his posthumanist responses to such injustices and inequalities foreground his broadminded, all-encompassing vision, and also give his narrative much of the zest and interest that arises from clashes between forces of
domination and subjection. I will now make evident the particular strand of
posthumanist philosophy I see so clearly in Amitav Ghosh’s work. This myriad range
of characters from diverse backgrounds is a literary device Amitav Ghosh employs to
highlight the many forms of subjugation common under imperial rule in India, and
also explore the various types of resistance put forth by men and women who are
victims of political and economic hegemonies.

The novel is about India in the nineteenth century and records its political and
socio-economic conditions that led to mass migration of impoverished Indian peasants
and others as indentured labourers to the Mauritius Islands. The novel employs many
conventions of the historic novel which Georg Lukacs describes as invoking “certain
crises in the personal destinies of a number of human beings [that] coincide and
interweave within the determining context of an historic crisis” (qtd. in Cooppan, 41),
the author recreates a vibrant world, peopled by characters of different cultural and
economic backgrounds, and through their interactions with colonial and privileged
native powers, exposes the nexus of colonialism, imperialism, and enlightenment
humanism that was, in far-reaching ways, responsible for much of the perpetration of
political, economic and social injustices in the Indian sub-continent during imperial
rule. Shalini Jain rightly opines the subtle nuances of the subjugations in the novel:

Deeti, the poor woman who is a victim of sexual, economic and social
subjugations, driven to attempt sati; Neel, the pleasure-loving native
raja, lost in the world of poetry, western philosophy and nauch-girls;
Burnham and Doughty, the Englishmen with a ruthless streak for
power and profit, etc. But what enriches each of his characters is
Ghosh’s attention to detail in crafting a unique personality for each of
them. This is achieved to a great extent by the individualized idiom of
speech attributed with great verbal felicity to every character, from the
creolized jargon of the lascars, to the Queen’s English spoken by the
western-educated raja, to the broken English, French and Bengali
spoken by Paulette. This rich mélange of tongues used with seamless
ease (if sometimes unintelligible to non-native speakers) creates a
vivid sense of living voices as well as the linguistic resourcefulness of
people in diaspora. (67)

The novel recounts in detail the selfish motives of British rule by forcing poor
Indian peasants to cultivate crash crops like the opium whose export brought huge
profits to the Empire and leaving them in the lurch by overlooking their basic necessities. A description of the conditions prevalent in the Ghazipur Opium factory reveals the inhuman working conditions of its employees, as witnessed by Deeti, who is summoned to take her sick husband home from work:

Her eyes were met by a startling sight – a host of dark, legless torsos was circling around and around, like some enslaved tribe of demons... they were bare-bodied men, sunk waistdeep in tanks of opium, tramping round and round to soften the sludge. Their eyes were vacant, glazed, and yet somehow they managed to keep moving, as slow as ants in honey, tramping, treading ... these seated men had more the look of ghouls than any living thing she had ever seen: their eyes glowed in the dark, and they appeared completely naked. (95)

The white officers always with “armed with fearsome instruments: metal scoops, glass ladles and longhandled rakes” (95) used to keep watch and maintain discipline over these workers. Even children were not spared from working in this opium-filled environment, and their punishments were as harsh as those for adults: “suddenly one of them indeed dropped their ball [of opium] sending it crashing to the floor, where it burst open, splattering its gummy contents everywhere. Instantly the offender was set upon by cane-wielding overseers and his howls and shrieks went echoing through the vast, chilly chamber” (96).

Amitav Ghosh’s narrative exposes various colonial methods of subjectivities and demonstrates the powerful and spirited instances of resistance. It also takes on the task of critiquing extant Indian social and traditional powers, which were often manifestly patriarchal, feudal and anti-feminist in nature. Deeti’s familial circumstances are very true in this case. On her wedding night, she is drugged and raped by her brother-in-law with the planned plot of her in-laws’ family for the sake of hiding the drugged inability of her husband. She is even forced to be burnt alive on the pyre of her husband in the name of tradition and religion. Her circumstances and inner spirit gradually make her intrepid and audacious and she leads migrants on the Ibis.

Amitav Ghosh’s response to colonialism is then not only a rejection of its dominant ideologies, but also a powerful propagation of a posthumanist philosophy, which advocates the renegotiation of Enlightenment humanist power relations. Included in this renegotiation are the long-standing privileges afforded to Caucasians.
over Asians, Africans and other indigenous peoples, the superiority of men over women, of the individual ‘I’ over the Other, to enumerate only some of its most important binaries. Further, Amitav Ghosh attacks traditional dogmas and beliefs that continually drive wedges between people, preventing unity and reducing their power in the face of oppression. In the novel, the novelist shows that the sati system prevalent in India diminishes the image of woman in the society. It is only because of miraculous circumstances that Deeti manages to escape death with the help of Kalua. The ill treatment of the poor Indians by the rich Indians and the Britishers created a vast gulf between the sections of society. Finally, the novel’s contemporary relevance can be proved through the inherent dangers of our current attitudes that shape the existing climate of concealed economic imperialism, racism, suspicion and intolerance pervading many communities and countries across the globe.

Within this discussion of subversion, Amitav Ghosh’s *Sea of Poppies* foregrounds heterogeneity of women’s voices. By emphasizing the various levels of complicity with and resistance to patriarchy and colonialism, the novel negates the notion that Indian women’s voices constitute a homogeneous “third world voice.” The novel uses a multi-layered textuality to negate the homogenizing effects of recuperating a singular voice from the margin. The novel uses the voices of female characters and a narrator-focalizer to tell their interweaving stories. The author intelligently merges the roles of female characters with focalizers by bringing out the individuality of their thoughts and beliefs. As mentioned earlier, the female characters in the novel act as narrative focalization. It may, therefore be seen to privilege diversity and heterogeneity where the emphasis is “not on [a] naïve return to origin but on retrieval, rediscovery and reinvention” (Bryce 620).

The novel can be read in terms of the various ways in which it seeks to work towards Jane Bryce’s categories of “retrieval, rediscovery and reinvention” (Bryce 620). These categories are harnessed through the narrative structure of the novel and shifting focalization of landscape, female body and transgression of mind and body. Deeti’s shrine, the Bhojpuri songs of the migrants, the sharing of recipes of different dishes among female migrants are all various techniques of Jane Bryce’s categories. In such a novel, where horrors of imperialism are set as the background, the spirit of resilience and transcendence of the characters make it a pleasurable and enlightened reading. Indentured workers sang themselves going aboard *Ibis* and it becomes a vast house for all the people to unite and share love and affection. The tone of the story is sometimes funny and the curiosity of the reader is ignited time and again. The writer
The novel is involved in the process of rediscovering and reinventing one’s identity. Through this process, the characters relive and recreate their identity by boldly facing the challenges of patriarchy, the social and psychological facets of female oppression, the workings of the unconscious and the importance of imagination. Deeti’s courage to know the truth of her marital rape from her mother-in-law, the visit to the opium factory to find her husband, the consequential change with the arrival of Kalua in her life, her approach of taking things in her stride; all this represents Deeti’s attempt to rediscover her true self and reinvent the repressed as the vocal and manifest unspeakable rage and pain through her decisions and leadership on the Ibis.

Deeti’s journey is not one that progresses from entrapment to rebellion or any kind of escape. On the contrary, it is a journey of circularity that includes “retrieval, [a] rediscovery and reinvention.” It is this process of circular retrospection that enables Deeti to reinvent the markers of identity and establishes her position on the Ibis as a responsible leader. She must also learn to rediscover the intuition of other important characters like Paulette, Jodu, Neel and Zachary and not see them as manipulators or disingenuous.

Consequently, she must retrieve the markers of her traditional reasoning and enlarge her vision with camaraderie towards them. It may be argued that the novel seeks to (re)draw the links between the myriad identities of people with the intervention of destiny. However, the (re)drawing of these links does not imply that destiny is the only maker of people. Consequently, Deeti must reassess the stories of her fellow ship mates so that they are meaningful to her.

Deeti and Paulette also reinvent the markers of their poverty and gender by disproving the patriarchal notions of people like Zachary that women alone can not excel ahead in life. In a novel that draws such close links between the journeys of land, sea and river with life journey, Deeti and Paulette disprove the contemptuous patriarchal remarks regarding women. The garden and land as cultivated by them on their own and the way Paulette follows Bible and Deeti worships and controls house on her own ensures their self independent vision and strong identity.
Through reinvention, retrieval and the “rememory” of the stories of Deeti, Paulette, Jodu, Neel, Nob Kissin, the novelist shows that identities need not necessarily be seen in terms of binaries of colonizer/colonized; self/other; male/female which contaminate: they can instead enablingly inform and re-invent each other. Identity can not be singular. People become malleable within the circumstances they adapt themselves. The characters are in constant process of reinvention and change which is the story of travel.

All characters experience transformation. The novel has myriad concerns about secret between a brother and a sister, genealogy, skin colour, history of American mulatto, black man dressed by a lascar to be able to go to a ceremonial dinner to pass himself as a lord. He is mistaken as lord. Deeti, who is burdened by the poverty and responsibility of her family, is transformed as an able leader on the Ibis. Paulette transforms completely by the end of the novel by becoming more assertive and vocal. The writer does not, thus, believe in singular identity of a person.

The readers’ realizations and reinventions are also made through the distance created by the voice of the mature “reinvented” narrator and the narrator/focalizer. The telling of the story also exposes the numerous ironies and ambiguities that the character is blind to because of the surreptitious way(s) in which both colonialism and patriarchy are naturalized and implanted in the female body. The journey of female indentured workers creates space for the narratives that fall through the cracks because of the predominance of male narratives that do not privilege the multi-vocality of female stories.

Amitav Ghosh’s concern for the dispossessed and disinherited migrant workers on the Ibis is expressed through the fictional characters like Deeti, Jodu, Paulette and Neel. The forceful stay in a very narrow space of the indentured labourers on the ship reveals the callous and indifferent manner in which the subalterns were oppressed by the colonial power. The subaltern women were doubly oppressed, first, by patriarchy and the other by the colonizers. The predicament of Deeti is pitiable under the selfish British rule which forced the farmers to cultivate poppies only to flourish the opium trade and at family front, her relatives try to dominate her.

In his portrayal of the ruthless suppression of Indians (either elite people like Neel or poor migrants) by the British Empire, Amitav Ghosh lashes his tongue against the Britishers who were least bothered about the welfare and well being of the
suffering subaltern farmers, migrants or even a raja. The marginalised subalterns of India are given due recognition in the fictional works of Ghosh. As mentioned in the introduction, the Bakhtinian theories have relevance to Amitav Ghosh’s fiction which resists hierarchy and closure; opts for open-endedness and does not provide a definite and final ending which are the characteristic features of polyphonic fiction. Like Dostoevsky, Amitav Ghosh leaves his ideological tensions unresolved leaving many loopholes for the readers to interpret future in their own way.

Thus, in the polyphonic method a prominent space is provided for the readers to interrogate and interpret the text. *Sea of Poppies* ends with the disappearance of prisoners and lascars, the storm that is about to begin, the incomplete journey of the rest of the people on *Ibis* unforeseen so far by the readers and leaving them bewildered about future, indirectly hinting that life is a long journey with many twists and turns. The ironies and ambiguities of *Sea of Poppies* reverberate beyond the ending. According to Rachel Blau DuPlessis, writing beyond the ending is:

> a transgressive (re)invention of narrative strategies…that express critical dissent from dominant narrative. These tactics…take issue with the mainstays of the social and ideological organization of gender, as these appear in fiction. Writing beyond the ending…produces a narrative that denies or reconstructs seductive patterns of feeling that are culturally mandated, internally policed [and] hegemonically passed. (qtd. in Pauline Uwakweh 78)

Amitav Ghosh continues his distinctive interest in annihilating the hierarchal domination, this time in *Sea of Poppies* using the art of focalization by accentuating the heterogeneous viewpoints and ideologies. He does it against the background of the historical event of opium trade and the British policy to force this trade on China with the consequence of wars. Amitav Ghosh presents this fictionalized history which is an allegorical representation of subverted history in which an attempt is made to fill in the gaps and absences. He tries to present the marginalized people in his “imaginary” record, who were wiped off from the pages of history.