



# The Indian Ocean as an Archive: A Blue Humanities Perspective on Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies*

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**Abstract**— *The Blue Humanities is an emerging interdisciplinary field that focuses on the ecological, historical, and philosophical engagements with the ocean and aquatic environments. Despite their immense importance, oceans have often been overlooked in humanities scholarship, which has traditionally focused on land-based perspectives. The Blue Humanities aims to correct this imbalance by bringing attention to the ocean's centrality in human life and the ways it shapes cultural narratives, identities, and histories. The current paper uses the lens of blue humanities to explore Amitav Ghosh's Sea of Poppies which stands as a cornerstone of his literary exploration of oceanic themes. As the inaugural volume of the Ibis Trilogy, Sea of Poppies charts a world on the brink of profound historical change, where the rippling effects of empire, migration, and colonialism converge. Set aboard the Ibis, a ship traversing the seas of Southeast Asia, the novel intertwines the fates of a diverse cast of characters—indentured labourers, sailors, and opium traders—against the backdrop of the turbulent prelude to the First Opium War. The current paper aims to explore how oceans served not only as routes for transporting goods but also as medium for transmitting ideologies, technologies, and cultural practices. It also seeks to foster regional awareness of the vital need for oceanic sustainability.*



**Keywords**— *Blue Humanities, Marine Fiction, New Thalassology, Colonialism, Opium War*

The Blue Humanities is an emerging interdisciplinary field that focuses on the ecological, historical, and philosophical engagements with the ocean and aquatic environments. It intersects disciplines such as literature, history, environmental studies, anthropology, and philosophy, seeking to deepen our understanding of how humans relate to and interact with the marine world. Oceans, which cover over 70% of the Earth's surface, are not only vital ecosystems but also critical spaces of human culture, history, and survival. "The seas are no longer the vast unknowable and uninhabitable spaces of past imaginations; they are living systems whose entanglements with human cultures and economies are both intimate and planetary in scale" (Alaimo 4). However, despite their immense importance, oceans have often been overlooked in humanities scholarship, which has traditionally focused on land-based perspectives. The Blue Humanities aims to correct this imbalance by bringing attention to the ocean's centrality in human life and the ways it shapes cultural narratives,

identities, and histories. "We must view the ocean not as a placeless expanse but as a space produced through human histories, economies, and ecologies, which continuously evolve through interactions between people, non-human organisms, and material forces" (Steinberg 157).

This research paper uses the lens of Blue Humanities to study the Indo-Pacific region, a vast geographical area that includes diverse oceanic ecosystems, rich maritime histories, and a significant portion of the world's population. The Indo-Pacific is home to many small island nations and coastal communities that rely heavily on the ocean for livelihoods, cultural identity, and ecological balance. These communities are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, overfishing, pollution, and rising sea levels, making it crucial to adopt policies that integrate both environmental sustainability and cultural preservation. "The ocean is central to understanding capitalism's ecological crisis, as it has been a site of exploitation,

transportation, and resource extraction, often viewed as limitless but now increasingly recognized as finite and fragile" (Gerhardt and Moore 6). By recognizing the importance of understanding human-ocean relations, this research paper aims to contribute in fostering resilience to environmental changes, encouraging the sustainable use of marine resources, and protecting the cultural heritage of maritime communities.

The overarching vision of this study is to promote an integrated understanding of the ocean's role in shaping the cultural, environmental, and historical fabric of the Indo-Pacific region. The ocean is not merely a backdrop to human activities but a living, dynamic force that has influenced societies, economies, and ecosystems for millennia. Recognizing this, the current paper envisions the development of frameworks that position the ocean as central to both historical narratives and contemporary discourses on sustainability and resilience. By integrating diverse fields such as maritime history, literature, anthropology, and environmental science, this approach encourages a more holistic understanding of oceanic interconnections across geographical, political, and cultural boundaries.

The current paper's focus is Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* which stands as a cornerstone of his literary exploration of oceanic themes, a central focus in his acclaimed *Ibis Trilogy*, which also includes *River of Smoke* and *Flood of Fire*. One of the most celebrated and influential contemporary Indian authors, Ghosh has garnered international acclaim for his masterful storytelling, which seamlessly blends historical intricacies with environmental concerns. Through these novels, Ghosh intricately weaves the maritime connections between India, China, and the colonial British Empire, with the opium trade and life at sea as key focal points. His writing immerses readers in the complex human and ecological histories of the Indian Ocean, positioning the sea not merely as a backdrop but as a powerful, active force shaping the narrative. In *The Hungry Tide*, Ghosh shifts his gaze to the Sundarbans, the tidal mangrove forests of the Bay of Bengal, where the constant ebb and flow of the sea intricately redefines both the physical landscape and human existence.

Amitav Ghosh, born in Calcutta, has lived across the landscapes of India, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka, shaping his rich narrative voice. His academic journey took him from Delhi to Oxford, and finally to Alexandria, and his literary career has been as expansive as his geographical journey. Among his notable works are *The Circle of Reason*, *The Shadow Lines*, *In An Antique Land*, *Dancing in Cambodia*, *The Calcutta Chromosome*, *The Glass Palace*, *The Hungry Tide*, and the monumental *Ibis Trilogy*, comprising *Sea of*

*Poppies*, *River of Smoke*, and *Flood of Fire*. His ambitious novels employ intricate narrative techniques to probe the complexities of both national and personal identity.

Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* (2008) garnered international acclaim, earning a spot on the Man Booker Prize shortlist and winning prestigious awards like the Crossword Book Prize and the India Plaza Golden Quill Award. His non-fiction work, *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (2016), further cements his reputation as a keen observer of contemporary crises. His works have been translated into over thirty languages, bringing his insight to a global readership. Beyond the page, Ghosh has lent his expertise as a juror for the Locarno and Venice film festivals. Many of his essays have been published in leading publications such as *The New Yorker*, *The New Republic*, and *The New York Times*. A recipient of four Lifetime Achievement awards and six honorary doctorates, Ghosh's contributions to literature are widely recognized and celebrated.

Amitav Ghosh's oeuvre engages with the grand themes of travel and diaspora, history and memory, political conflict and communal violence, as well as love and loss, while consistently transcending the conventional boundaries between anthropology and artistic creation. His work, both fictional and non-fictional, unfolds across a transnational canvas, perpetually traversing nations, continents, and oceans. Deeply informed by erudition and rigorously researched, the scale of scholarship that underpins his narratives is nothing short of monumental. Yet, even amid such intellectual breadth, Ghosh remains attuned to the intimate, human dimensions of his subjects, grounding his epic explorations in the personal and the particular.

Throughout his expansive body of work, Ghosh portrays the Indian Ocean world as a palimpsest, where various networks—such as those of arms, marriage, oil, ships, planes, prisoners, trade, friendships, information, medical personnel, drugs, and smuggling—are layered upon one another. This depiction aligns closely with Indian Ocean historiography, which views the region as a broadly interconnected social space.

Ghosh's self-conscious connection to an Indian Ocean literary space should be situated within the emerging tradition of Indian Ocean literature written in English. The writers who belong to this small yet significant group include Michael Ondaatje, Abdulrazak Gurnah, M.G. Vassanji, V.S. Naipaul, Lindsey Collen and Romesh Guneseckera as discussed in my *Writing Ocean Worlds* (2021). In *Sea of Poppies*, the most important of these interconnected elements that bind and define the Indian Ocean world is the collection of words and languages that traverse and unite its distant shores. This linguistic

connection is illustrated by the lingua franca that emerged aboard the sailing ship in the novel.

With *Sea of Poppies* (2008), Ghosh departed from the formal experimentation of his earlier works to embrace a more conventional narrative structure. Set aboard the *Ibis*, a ship traversing the seas of Southeast Asia, the novel intertwines the fates of a diverse cast of characters—indentured labourers, sailors, and opium traders—against the backdrop of the turbulent prelude to the First Opium War. As the inaugural volume of the *Ibis Trilogy*, *Sea of Poppies* charts a world on the brink of profound historical change, where the rippling effects of empire, migration, and colonialism converge.

Margaret Cohen, in *The Novel and the Sea*, characterizes sea fiction as a “travelling genre”, highlighting it as a literary form rooted in maritime exploration that also transcended both geographical and temporal boundaries, spreading across oceans and ages (8). As maritime studies—also referred to as the “new thalassology” (Vink 43) and, more recently, the “blue humanities” (Gillis 2)—continue to gain prominence, it is important to approach Ghosh’s themes of ocean travel not merely as metaphors for land-based phenomena, but as representations of the sea’s distinctiveness, including its own realm of work (Cohen 14).

Amitav Ghosh’s body of work plays a significant role in the current resurgence of narratives focusing on maritime mobility and imperial stagnation, serving as a key example of how the genre has expanded beyond its Eurocentric North Atlantic origins to encompass the Indian Ocean as a revitalized space for South-South exchange. This region, explored across various novels set in different historical periods within Ghosh’s oeuvre, offers fresh perspectives on the genre of sea fiction. His oeuvre is replete with maritime journeys spanning locations such as Durban, Aden, the Andaman Islands, Calcutta, and Canton, as described by Anshuman Mondal and others (Mondal; Hofmeyr; Desai; Chambers). These routes trace a largely forgotten maritime world, which Ghosh himself has described as his “project”—to imagine, animate, and bring to life the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean (Boehmer and Mondal 7). This effort of filling in these gaps is crucial, as traditional works of sea fiction by authors like Melville, Cooper, Conrad, and Marryat are often incomplete when it comes to alternative maritime communities and geographies. Furthermore, in line with the traits of sea fiction, his work focuses on the dynamics and distinct aspects of life aboard ships.

Set during the early 19th century amidst the Opium Wars and British colonial rule, the narrative in *Sea of Poppies* follows a diverse group of individuals whose lives intersect aboard the *Ibis*, a former slave ship bound for Mauritius. As the characters embark on this transformative voyage, the

novel unfolds a layered exploration of colonialism, identity, and human resilience.

The novel examines how colonial powers used control of the seas to impose their governance and trade systems on distant colonies. In the field of Blue Humanities, scholars study how oceans served not only as routes for transporting goods but also as medium for transmitting ideologies, technologies, and cultural practices. The movement of goods, people, and ideas across water was both a mechanism of cultural domination and a process of cultural hybridization and adaptation within the colonies.

In *Sea of Poppies*, the Indian Ocean emerges as a pivotal stage upon which the narrative unfolds. The vast oceanic routes that bind the Indian subcontinent, China, Southeast Asia, and Europe serve as highways for the exchange of commodities, many of which were integral to the global economy during the colonial epoch—opium, cotton, tea, and spices. Set in the early 19th century, the novel is set in a time when the British East India Company, a powerful arm of the British Empire, wielded unparalleled influence over the region, commanding trade routes across the Bay of Bengal, the Arabian Sea, and beyond.

Colonialism was, at its core, a maritime endeavour. The construction of navies and the establishment of trade routes across the Atlantic, Indian, and Pacific Oceans were crucial to the expansion of European empires. European powers did not simply invade lands; they sought control of the seas, building ports and harbours that became vital to their imperial economies. These waters were militarized spaces where colonial powers vied for control of key sea routes.

Colonial powers sought mastery over strategic maritime passages to command the flow of global commerce. The oceans, vast and unyielding, became the conduits through which valuable commodities were extracted from the colonies and returned to Europe for exploitation. The Indian Ocean, in particular, served as a crucial artery for trade, linking the shores of Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, India, Southeast Asia, and China. The British East India Company, which exerted dominion over a major part of the Indian subcontinent, harnessed these maritime routes to monopolize the trade of precious goods such as tea, opium, and cotton, amassing wealth and consolidating power.

*Sea of Poppies* probes the history of colonialism through a multifaceted lens, spanning from the early 18th to the early 19th century. While the narrative primarily focuses on colonial dynamics in India, it also connects significant historical events such as the transatlantic slave trade and the opium trade in Southeast Asia. The novel follows the fictional journey of the *Ibis*, a former slave ship traveling from Baltimore to the southern shores of Mauritius to transport prisoners to a colonial penal institution. Ghosh

intricately develops the personal stories of characters from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds, including African American, British, French, Indian, and Chinese. Through a rich narrative dialectic, these characters embody various social roles and perspectives, illuminating the complex interplay of colonial and indigenous politics during this tumultuous period.

Set on the precipice of the Opium Wars which raged between 1839 and 1860, the novel offers a profound insight into the origins of these conflicts, which were inextricably linked to the maritime routes and the opium trade. The British Empire's monopoly on the opium trade was not merely an economic stratagem, but a political manoeuvre, one that would culminate in the brutal clash between Britain and Qing China in the form of the Opium Wars.

The first Opium War, ignited in 1839, was triggered by the Chinese government's resolute attempts to halt the illicit importation of opium, a substance that had wreaked havoc upon its populace. The British, however, were unwilling to relinquish the immense profits derived from the trade, which had become so deeply entangled with their imperial ambitions in the region. These wars, fought upon the vast oceans, saw the British Navy assert its dominance, safeguarding and enforcing the imperial control of the trade routes. This naval conflict was emblematic of the larger struggle for economic supremacy, a direct consequence of the British Empire's insatiable desire to maintain its hegemony over the maritime pathways that supplied opium to China and other corners of Asia.

In the novel, the story opens in the opium fields of Bengal, where Deeti, a young woman married to an opium farmer, experiences prophetic dreams, one of which foretells her destiny aboard the *Ibis*. Zachary Reid, a free black American sailor accused of a crime he did not commit, escapes the racial prejudices of America by joining the *Ibis*'s crew in Calcutta, unaware of its past as a slave vessel. Raja Neel Rattan Halder, a Bengali nobleman stripped of his lands by the British and falsely accused of forgery, is forced into servitude as a lascar, or ship's hand, on the *Ibis*. Alongside him is Serang Ali, a seasoned sailor and lascar leader, and Baboo Nob Kissin, an impoverished orphan from a weaver's family who seizes the opportunity to escape his dire circumstances.

As the *Ibis* sets sail, the ship becomes a microcosm of the larger world, bringing together people from various cultural, social, and religious backgrounds. The crew must navigate the harsh realities of life at sea while confronting the socio-political structures of colonialism, the exploitation inherent in the opium trade, and the rigidities of caste.

Ghosh intricately weaves historical events with personal narratives, examining the moral and human costs of the

opium trade and the colonial machinery that sustains it. The journey of the *Ibis* serves as a metaphor for both the literal and metaphorical voyage of the characters as they grapple with personal and collective histories. Tensions rise aboard the ship as conditions worsen, leading to a mutiny in which the lascars, oppressed by the officers, seize control of the vessel. Amidst the chaos, Zachary and Serang Ali emerge as unlikely leaders, steering the ship toward the distant island of Mauritius, where they hope to create a more just society. The novel concludes with the *Ibis* nearing Mauritius, leaving the future of the characters and their journey uncertain. This conclusion both encapsulates the tumultuous nature of their lives and signals the continuation of their struggle for a more promising future.

The opium trade forms the core of the novel. Ghosh does an excellent job of exploring the complex economic, social, and political factors that led to the spread of opium addiction in India and China. He shows how the opium trade was intertwined with the British colonial project and the larger global economy of the time. The novel also highlights the devastating impact that the opium trade had on the lives of people in India and China. Through the characters of Deeti and Kalua, for example, we see how addiction and slavery were both direct consequences of the opium trade.

The East India Company, in its unyielding dominion over these maritime passages, monopolized the opium trade, a key commodity in the expansion of colonial wealth. By controlling the flow of opium between British India and China, the British sought to reap immense profits, not only from the cultivation of the drug but also from its insidious distribution, weaving a complex and exploitative network that spanned continents.

*Sea of Poppies* closely touches the core areas of the Blue Humanities. As observed earlier, a striking illustration of the confluence of water, trade, and colonialism in the novel is the opium trade between British-controlled India and Qing China, a trade that played a pivotal role in the Opium Wars. British merchants, driven by profit and imperial ambition, transported opium cultivated in India across the seas to China, exchanging it for the luxuries of tea, silk, and porcelain. This illicit trade, conducted upon the waves, became the primary conduit through which colonial powers amassed their wealth and expanded their dominion over Asia. The consequences of this trade were far-reaching: it irrevocably altered the geopolitical order, catalyzed the subjugation of China, disrupted its traditional economy, and forced the imposition of unequal treaties, marking a dark chapter in the annals of colonial history.

In the novel, water serves as a symbol of both border crossing and the formation of identity. The sea functions not only as a literal space of movement but also as a metaphor

for the intricate interactions among cultures, peoples, and histories. In such literary explorations, the sea becomes a potent reminder of the enduring legacy of colonialism—encompassing exploitation, migration, and the entangled nature of global trade networks. While the sea facilitates commerce and the movement of people, it simultaneously embodies themes of loss, alienation, and the fragmentation of cultural identities.

Another factor which plays a crucial role in blue humanities studies is maritime language, which offers valuable insights into the social, cultural, and environmental interactions within maritime settings. The blue humanities examine the connections between humans and the ocean, exploring how literature reflects and influences our understanding of the sea and maritime life. By analyzing maritime language—such as specialized terms, dialects, and the linguistic blending found among sailors and coastal communities—scholars can investigate themes like mobility, trade, migration, and colonialism, as well as how maritime environments shape human experiences and identities.

In *Sea of Poppies*, the use of maritime language, including terms like “laskari” (the sailors’ common language), underscores the diversity and interconnectedness of the oceanic world, illustrating the fluid nature of communication and identity in these spaces. The development and use of such language in literature also highlight the sea as both a place of separation and connection, serving as a conduit for the exchange of goods, cultures, and ideas. Thus, studying maritime language in the context of blue humanities enhances our understanding of how the ocean has been depicted in literature and its links to broader themes like migration, imperialism, and globalization. It reveals how the sea has fostered both unity and division, shaping the world through the varied and sometimes fractured ways people communicate across its vast waters.

The maritime world in *Sea of Poppies* is brought to life through the portrayal of sailor speech, with the depiction of a recreated lingua franca shaped by the narration of life aboard ships. The novel introduces a maritime language, ‘laskari’, the dialect spoken by sailors from across the Indian Ocean region. Ghosh not only describes but also enacts the mixed, oceanic nature of the lascar dialect, providing both spatial and historical context while using the language within the narrative. For example, ‘laskari’ is described as a “motley tongue, spoken nowhere but on the water”, while simultaneously being used in the description itself:

From the silmagoors who sat on the ghats, sewing sails, Jodu had learnt the names of each piece of canvas, in English and in ‘laskari’—that motley

tongue, spoken nowhere but on the water, whose words were as varied as the port’s traffic, an anarchic medley of Portuguese calaluzes and Kerala pattimars, Arab booms and Bengal paunch-ways, Malay proas and Tamil catamarans, Hindusthani pulwars and English snows—yet beneath the surface of this farrago of sound, meaning flowed as freely as the currents beneath the crowded press of boats. (Ghosh108)

The numerous “foreign” words create a reading experience that is both unfamiliar and densely aural, resembling a “farrago of sound” (108). Through this extended metaphor, the variety of words used to describe the different ships is mimetically reflected in the diversity of the ships themselves. The various ‘laskari’ names—such as calaluzes, pattimars, booms, paunch-ways, proas, and catamarans (108)—mirror the eclectic mix of boats. However, as the paragraph concludes, despite the diversity of sounds, “meaning flowed as freely as the currents beneath the crowded press of boats.” This phrasing suggests a fluidity and interconnectedness that exists beneath the surface of seemingly disconnected multilingualism.

A linguistic cohesion occurs within framework of a deeply multilingual setting, a challenge that is directly addressed in *Sea of Poppies*. Pugli speaks Bengali, French, Latin, and English, but when taken in by a colonial household, she is required to speak only “kitchen Hindusthani” (*Sea of Poppies* 379). Neel finds it odd that she speaks Bengali when her fellow travelers speak Bhojpuri and assumes her knowledge of English suggests involvement in prostitution. Pugli, in turn, wonders what language Neel and Ah Fatt might share, these “skeletal Easterner” and “tattooed criminal” (379). The cramped space of the ship, where all the characters eventually come together, amplifies, rather than diminishes, the variety of languages. The ship thus becomes akin to a miniature Babel, much like Herman Melville’s depiction in *Redburn* (1850). However, considering that ships were effectively operated by “‘laskari’ forces from all over”—a term that broadly encompassed Arabs, South Asians, Malays, East Africans, Filipinos, and Chinese—the workers needed a common means of communication (Ghosh, Of Fanas and Forecasts16).

The linguistic creativity in *Sea of Poppies* arises from, evokes, and responds to the challenge of depicting a multilingual environment. Historian Michael Pearson argues that the early modern Indian Ocean was profoundly multilingual, presenting a challenge that had to be addressed for the successful execution of the distinctive, long-distance, yet face-to-face trade in the region. As he describes, “Communication was difficult because there was a real gallimaufry of people around the littoral of the Indian Ocean.

Even in one particular location, and referring to one group, we find the sort of cosmopolitanism which meant linguistic brokers were essential" (Pearson 32).

Ghosh positions 'laskari' as the lingua franca of the Indian Ocean, a language that emerged not from a nation but from the sea and the nature of labour itself. This emphasis on a language shaped by work in a context of movement ties the novel to an earlier tradition of maritime fiction, though with important distinctions. As Cohen observes, the connection between the novel's narrative and the work of the sea is partly rooted in their shared approach to language. In exploring the relationship between maritime, ship-centered literature and the world of labour—what Conrad refers to as 'craft'—Cohen highlights the importance of the "plain style." This linguistic convention, seen in mariners' journals and the language of labour at sea, was carried over into the realist novel.

The sea, in Ghosh's depiction, becomes both a physical boundary and an arena of economic subjugation, where imperial powers assert their dominance over the movement of goods and human lives. When the British East India Company tightens its monopoly over the opium trade, the maritime passages transform into sites of fierce geopolitical struggle, where the tides of profit ebb and flow, shaping the destinies of the native populations caught within the imperial web of exploitation.

The opium trade between India and China, along with its far-reaching consequences, occupies a central thematic role in *Sea of Poppies*. Ghosh intricately situates this illicit commerce within the broader framework of colonial exploitation and economic hegemony, revealing how the British Empire, through the agency of the East India Company, relied upon the movement of goods along oceanic trade routes to consolidate its wealth and advance its imperial objectives.

In the early 19th century, the British aimed to remedy their imbalanced trade with China, which showed a burgeoning demand for Chinese goods such as silk, tea, and porcelain, but little interest in British products. The solution to this dilemma came in the form of opium, cultivated in Bengal and Bihar (modern-day India) and transported across the seas to China. The opium trade thus became emblematic of the British Empire's exploitation of its colonial holdings, turning resources extracted from its territories into commodities for the international market, yielding vast profits. Opium, both as a commodity and a tool of imperial control, emerged as one of the principal engines of British economic might.

In the novel, the global opium trade is not merely a background element but a driving force of the plot, symbolically intertwined with the very bodies of the

colonized peoples, who are coerced into growing, harvesting, and transporting the opium under duress. The protagonist, Zachary Reid, a former American sailor, along with other characters such as Deeti and Puran Singh, find themselves caught up—whether willingly or by force—in the machinery of this trade. Through their stories, Ghosh vividly portrays the personal and societal repercussions of the opium trade, demonstrating how entire communities are subsumed into the colonial system, both as victims of economic exploitation and as migrant laborers in the service of imperial power.

In *Sea of Poppies*, the sea becomes both the literal and symbolic arena where these imperial dynamics play out. It is a place of escape—where characters flee the oppressive weight of colonial subjugation—but also one of entrapment, where figures like Deeti and Puran Singh find themselves ensnared within the broader machinery of global exploitation, their bodies transported across the ocean against their will. The maritime route from India to China, laden with the opium that fuels the British Empire's economic engine, transforms into a powerful metaphor for colonial subjugation—an embodied representation of the forced movement of both goods and people. In Ghosh's narrative, the sea is depicted not only as a space of colonial domination and economic extraction but also as one brimming with potential for resistance and transformation.

The movement of individuals across the sea thus becomes a site for cross-cultural encounter and collective struggle. The diverse crew aboard the *Ibis*—comprising Indian and foreign labourers—forms a microcosm of the colonial world, wherein people of disparate backgrounds and experiences are bound together in a system of unequal power. Yet, even in the midst of such inequity, the sea becomes a space where bonds are forged, and networks of solidarity emerge, as the characters, united by their common plight, begin to resist the forces that seek to keep them subjugated.

The sea, furthermore, emerges as a powerful space of migration—whether voluntary or coerced—through which indentured labourers, former sailors, and enslaved persons are transported, their lives inextricably linked to the global currents of exploitation. As they journey across these treacherous waters, they undergo not only personal transformation but also participate in united defiance against the very systems that have tethered them to this expansive, interconnected network of oppression.

Thus, we see how water is a multifaceted symbol that bridges the themes of colonial trade, migration, and economic exploitation, all intricately interwoven through the workings of the opium trade in the novel. The sea, both as a tangible space and a metaphorical boundary, represents

the global flow of commodities as well as the profound inequalities and human suffering wrought by these imperial trade routes. Through Ghosh's richly textured narrative, we come to understand how water, far from being a mere vessel for the transport of goods, played an essential role in the colonial exploitation of both people and resources, while simultaneously serving as a site of cultural exchange and resistance.

The novel reveals how the opium trade, conducted across the seas, was not only a means of expanding and consolidating colonial power but also a force that perpetuated human suffering on a global scale. The sea, ultimately, is both the means by which imperial powers sustain their control and the stage upon which the human dramas of those oppressed by the colonial system unfold—stories of migration, resistance, and transformation carried forward upon the tide of history.

This analysis also highlights the significance of the Blue Humanities wherein water is seen not just as a physical space but as a dynamic and central part of global history. It is the medium through which colonialism, migration, and trade unfolded and continues to unfold. Water was the force that enabled European powers to establish global empires, facilitated the movement of enslaved and displaced people, and acted as a conduit for the movement of goods across the globe. Through the lens of Blue Humanities, we gain a deeper understanding of how water shaped the cultural, social, and economic dynamics of the modern world, and how these legacies continue to resonate in the present day.

In this way, through its vivid portrayal of life at sea, the devastating consequences of the opium trade, and the intertwined fates of its characters, Ghosh creates a compelling and thought-provoking tale. The novel not only immerses readers in a pivotal historical moment but also invites reflection on the broader human experience, leaving them eager to follow the next chapter in the *Ibis Trilogy*.

To conclude, the present study seeks to foster regional awareness of the vital need for oceanic sustainability. As climate change, overfishing, and pollution continue to threaten marine ecosystems, there is an urgent need for strategies that promote sustainable ocean stewardship. An involvement of academic institutions, governments, and local communities can advocate for collaborative initiatives aimed at educating future generations on the importance of ocean conservation and the sustainable use of marine resources. By examining *Sea of Poppies* through a Blue Humanities perspective, the paper underscores the necessity of a regional paradigm shift, where the ocean is not seen as a peripheral or isolated entity but as a vital part of the Indo-Pacific's cultural and environmental future. Through education and cross-sectoral collaborations, we can

contribute to a deeper, more sustainable engagement with the ocean, ensuring that the Indo-Pacific's rich maritime heritage is preserved and its ecological future safeguarded.

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