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A Study On Amitav Ghosh's Smokes And Ashes: A Journey From Colonialism To Modernity

Manjima Paul

Research Scholar, Department of English, Mansarovar Global University, Sehore, M.P., India.

ABSTRACT

Smoke and Ashes is widely recognized as a seminal work on the enduring consequences of the colonial opium traffic, which encompassed a turbulent period that extended from Bengal to Boston and revolved around China and Britain. The comprehensive scope of this book extends from the beginning of time to the present. Violence, according to Ghosh, is eroding nation-states on a global scale, and poppies, which significantly influenced the development of modernity, may also contribute to its demise. In this scenario, fossil fuels and climate change will be opium's strongest allies. However, the book concludes in a sanguine fashion. In spite of the concerning indications, the historical trajectory of opium, according to Ghosh, offers a sanguine prospect for worldwide environmental movements. An instructive case could be the transnational, multiethnic, and multiracial coalition of civil society organizations that, notwithstanding the formidable resistance from the British Empire, effectively diminished the opium trade. This article serves as a companion or a revisit to this voyage.

Keyword- colonial opium, transnational, multi-ethnic and multiracial coalition of civil society.

INTRODUCTION

Issues like independence, nationalism, and defiance of oppression were thoroughly treated in a history text. However, it briefly touched on the farmers who were forced to grow crops, including poppy, against their will, as part of its list of the many horrors of colonial rule. A key component of the British colonial mandate—the opium trade—was omitted,

nevertheless. While researching colonialism, we failed to uncover the 19th-century global network of drug lords who would have a lasting impact on human history. Even among indigenous groups, the opium trade dictated social stratification based on economic status. Because of that, we know which nations will be allies and which will be enemies. As a serious human condition, addiction begs the question of why it is under-recognized. In contrast to the stories of affluent people who began with nothing and grew successful—stories meant to inspire us to work hard and embrace capitalism—this knowledge is hardly recognized within households. Smokes and Ashes, a nonfiction work by Amitav Ghosh, is a broad and captivating exposé that is desperately required right now.

ABOUT THE SMOKES AND ASHES

"Smokes and Ashes" was born out of the research that Ghosh did for his acclaimed historical fiction trilogy, Ibis. In this final part of a nonfiction trilogy on the Anthropocene, the question takes on more significance. In the same way that "The Great Derangement" and "The Nutmeg's Curse" use historical-philosophical fables to discuss climate change and the East Indies spice trade, "Smoke and Ashes" reframes the Western view of "object biography." The present opium crisis in the world has its roots in the East, in the practices of colonialism and free commerce.

This book delves into cultural and economic history while also serving as a travelogue and biography. Here, Ghosh looks at the opium trade and its effects on the world at large, including on India, China, and Britain. Profits from the opium trade were crucial to the financial stability of the British Empire, which is why they oversaw the transport of the drug from India to China. Depending upon Ghosh's research, opium was instrumental in the creation of modern globalism, powerful American families and organizations, and large corporations. The consequences in the long run were considerably worse in India. While shedding insight on the globe's present unstable situation, the novel investigates the profound influence of a small plant on world history, touching on horticultural, capitalist, and colonial issues. It can also be said that the author skillfully weaves together horticulture history, capitalism mythology, and the cultural and social effects of colonialism.

This thought-provoking and meticulously researched book delves into the following topics: colonialism, opium trafficking, poppy warfare, capitalism, trade monopoly, and the white man's perspective on the "barbarians." His citations include works by both contemporary scholars and colonial officials.

Ghosh adeptly links opium's historical importance to modern free-market economies, the growth of consumerism and capitalism, the opioid crisis in America, and the complex workings of the pharmaceutical industry.

SMOKES AND ASHES: AN OVERVIEW

To begin his investigation, Ghosh provides an insight of a cup of tea. English citizens began to unofficially toast the thousand-year-old Chinese elixir in the 17th and 18th centuries. With a monopoly on the market, the East India Company was required by Parliament to have a year's supply on hand. One tenth of Britain's revenue, which it used to fund its wars, came from tea customs rates, which might exceed 125 percent. China was quite specific about what it needed from Britain, especially that it pays in silver, which was getting harder to procure. It was in its Indian colonies that Britain found it could solve its "balance of trade problem" by increasing opium trading.

A single crop of white opium poppy was compelled by more than one million peasant households once the "Opium Department" took control of the economic operations, especially in the East. There was a system of informants and strict production quotas on one end of the spectrum and strongly protected factories on the other.

Despite China's prohibition on opium imports since 1729, the drug was still transported from mills in Ghazipur and Patna to Calcutta, where it was auctioned off to private dealers. From there, it was sold to Chinese smugglers on the Pearl River. Western merchants established a principal base of operations on an island in Canton (known as Guangzhou to European traders) after the two Opium Wars, which greatly reduced Chinese opposition. They did this while excluding Chinese people and Chinese legal jurisdiction.

The several well-known writers cited in Ghosh's work provide an indication of the enormous scale of the profession. His father was a sub-deputy opium agent in Bihar, and Orwell was born there. A tour of a plant was spotted by Kipling. Tagore

opposed the opium trade, whereas Dickens was in favor of it. It is highly probable that the ancestors of Ghosh settled in Chapra to oversee Bengali-language opium records. The opium trade also helped build the fortunes of a number of well-known Americans. Those men with powerful family connections in China may quickly amass enormous fortunes. At home, these Canton grads would flaunt their polished avarice while condemning the "corruption" of Chinese aspirations.

Opium's role in modern warfare, as well as its effects on furniture, architecture, and gardening, are all covered in Ghosh's extensive history. His use of forensic science to analyze artwork from opium factories is fascinating.

Because of his wide view, Ghosh's nonfiction has made a significant impact. According to him, the opium trade did not begin in the West. Similar to the Atlantic coast human trafficking, this activity was greatly expanded to support the colonial narco-state paradigm. These long-lasting structural disparities are still there today. Compared to the west, which fought against British colonization for a longer time, eastern India is poorer. The tea trade in India is heavily influenced by traditional social stratification based on caste and race. Opioid marketers are clinging to the past by painting addicts as helpless victims of their product.

We can say that Ghosh's description of Earth as "vitally, even dangerously alive" in "The Great Derangement" was uplifting. The idea that opium, even synthetic varieties like fentanyl, have free will in "Smoke and Ashes" isn't fully cooked. Nevertheless, this small matter pales in comparison to the monumental achievement of his grand purpose, which seeks to expose the long legacy of "racial capitalism" that has precipitated our present dilemma.

OPIUM AND COLONIALISM

Bihar is a key location in Purvanchal, which also includes parts of Uttar Pradesh and Jharkhand, where the opium trade took place. This trade, along with British policies, shaped entire economies and cultures, and it also spread ideas that are now considered global warming's greatest threat. Ghosh has shown how the local economies and social relations were affected by the opium poppy that the British grew in the central Gangetic plains through his meticulous reading of colonial history,

interspersed with stories from his Ibis trilogy and anecdotes from his own life.

Because of the 1857 mutiny and the subsequent British policies of forcing opium cultivation and moving military recruitment from Purvanchal to Punjab, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh were doomed. The so-called "bimaru" states' poor social indicator scores are a visible reminder of this. It is difficult, if not impossible, to remove the traces of the past since they are "sunk so deeply into the fabric of everyday life," as Ghosh puts it in this context.

Now we reach China, the second important stop along the opium poppy's centuries-long journey. Ghosh, speaking for the general readership, brings out our problematic stance towards China right from the start of the book. Like a location marked "Here be dragons" on an old map, China has been a blind spot for the author and many of us. Geographical obstacles and recollections of the 1962 India-China war are two of the many reasons that have molded this perspective. However, as the book explains, we have an issue with our lack of awareness regarding our northern neighbors, China, due to the interconnected nature of the opium trade and the subcontinent.

Ghosh uses a first-person account to transport the reader to China before exploring the storied past of opium smuggling into the country, which peaked during the British Empire. Having just returned from Guangzhou, he is now enjoying a cup of tea in his Calcutta study. As he sits there, he realizes that the porcelain cup, sugar, lacquerware tea tray, and tea itself are all connected to our centuries-old relationship with our northern neighbors, and that tea is even implicated in the opium story. It becomes abundantly clear by the book's conclusion just how interconnected everything is and how the shameful legacy of colonial opium policies continues to wreak havoc on Earth in other forms and with attitudes that are equally destructive.

Ghosh starts the opium story, drawing on a plethora of information from a variety of sources, with the Portuguese and the Dutch, who had found that opium could be used as a gift and a money to help trade flows. The Dutch taught the British numerous trade secrets, but the British, who came later,

became involved in multiple wars with the Dutch. Opium was discovered to be a simple substitute for bullion payments as the English became more and more indebted to Chinese tea as their demand for it grew. The opium poppy was coerced into cultivation by impoverished Indian farmers in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar as part of one of the largest drug-running operations ever recorded. After processing in Ghazipur and Patna, the finished product was sent to Guangzhou (formerly Canton) via the port of Calcutta.

A pivotal point in the opium trade's history was the processing plant that received its raw materials from the fields of northern India. Ghosh talks about how he struggled to gain a clear picture of the opium industry in colonial India and how it operated in Bihar while he was writing his trilogy. Lots of new research has come out since those three books came out, maybe even as a result of them, and he uses it to tell the story of the powerful Opium Department and the bureaucracy that surrounds the drug's manufacture.

Smoke and Ashes is clearly not just a history book; it reads more like a conversation, a Burkean parlour if you will, in which the author sits down with various historians and experts from the present and past to piece together the tale of the colonial opium trade using a wide range of materials. As a result, the piece deftly transitions between historical accounts and fictitious tales, gardening, book reviews, traveling, and a whole lot more besides. This book's strength is not just its main premise, which examines the influence of attitudes and policies from the colonial era on our current times of conflict, but also its genre-bending interdisciplinary approach.

Opium was also being grown in what is now known as Malwa, a region in west-central India, while the Bihari workers worked away at producing this drug under the watchful eye of the British. However, Indian commercial communities and diasporas of individuals like Baghdadi Jews and Parsis dominated the Malwa opium trade. This distinction allowed the benefits from Malwa opium shipped to China to trickle down to more parts of society than those from eastern opium, which mainly benefited the British.

According to Ghosh, the British were unable to break into the Malwa opium trade for a long time because the Maratha states fought so hard against the East India Company's legion of soldiers. At the same time that Puravanchal was falling into poverty and social stratification, Bombay's advantageous position, protected by hills and plateaus, allowed local and diaspora businesses to flourish in this area.

This different opium history in Bengal and Malwa explains why Bombay became more prosperous and cosmopolitan while Calcutta has kept the traits of a colonial capital, such as its economic hierarchies and old-fashioned clubs frequented by businessmen and corporate executives (like the one where I met the author). The author draws numerous intriguing threads from this split, one of which is the emergence of radicalism in Eastern Europe.

Once the British achieved military dominance over the Marathas in the early nineteenth century, they were unable to successfully penetrate the deeply embedded networks of opium manufacturing and trade emanating from the Malwa region. The colonial power saw this coming and decided to impose a transit fee on the opium being shipped out of Bombay instead. The vast trade in Malwa opium was an intriguing means by which Bombay's expenses were met. According to Ghosh, who cites a number of sources, Bombay needed heavy subsidies from Calcutta and Madras because its expenses were higher than its revenues at the time. The revenue crisis in Bombay was remedied by Malwa opium...The increasing opium reserves in Malwa effectively kept the Bombay islands afloat.

And Bombay wasn't the only one. Based on extensive research, Ghosh demonstrates that the opium trade, which relied heavily on the work of poor Indian laborers in Purvanchal's fields and was transported via Calcutta, was the driving force behind the expansion of towns like Singapore. However, the Qing rulers took notice as the British continued to import thousands of chests of this powerful medicine into China through Guangzhou, with the assistance of Chinese smuggling networks. In the end, the two opium wars were the result of Chinese attempts to end the drugging of its population, which coalesced behind Governor General Lin

Zexu. The colonial powers' stronger armed forces defeated the Chinese in both battles, leading to the imposition of unfair treaties on China and the handover of Hong Kong to Britain.

The little opium poppy was instrumental in all of this. This plant's significance as a historical agent is now readily apparent, as the author reminds us time and again. As if a "higher intelligence" were amplifying the worst aspects of human nature.

According to Ghosh, we need to pay close attention to the ways opium has interacted with humans throughout history since it is a historical force in and of itself. These relationships are heavily influenced by power and class dynamics, which makes them hard to conceptualize. The lack of a common language to discuss the past in a way that acknowledges the agency of things other than humans only makes matters worse.

Although there is valid criticism of China's growing authoritarianism in the modern era, Ghosh demonstrates how China was a victim of colonial policies that targeted its own people, drugging and impoverishing them, by meticulously researching the opium trade's past. On the other hand, this book does a good job of highlighting the cultural legacies that nations like India, the US, and the UK inherited from the China opium trade.
The China opium trade seeded a variety of partnerships and cultural flows in an area spanning banking to art, and it involved major Parsi figures (like Sir Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy), Baghdadi Jews, Hindus from Gujarat and Marwari, Muslims from Bohra and Memon sects, and Armenian traders, in addition to the British. On the founding committee of the Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation, one of the world's largest banks, were three Parsis and a representative of a Baghdadi-Jewish enterprise. However, tanchoi (benarasi) silks, knickknacks, garden flowers, dressing tables, and Guangzhou studio-created artwork are only a few examples of the wide range of products that bear the cultural imprint of the China trade.

The rich opium trade also drew the Americans. American businessmen who became involved in the opium trade, sometimes referred to as "Canton graduates," were also

deeply impacted by Chinese art, architecture, and craftsmanship. They brought this appreciation for beauty and craftsmanship back to the United States with them, along with vast quantities of capital that they used to invest in sectors such as railroads, textiles, iron production, hoteliering, and investment brokerage.

Opium smoke, however, carries with it the ashes and malignant growth of bygone eras. While tracing the origins of the opioid epidemic in the United States, Ghosh demonstrates how opium has a strange knack for "inserting itself into human affairs" in a manner that mixes the past with the present. In particular, he examines the part played by the Sackler family, who amassed billions from OxyContin and other prescription opioids. He demonstrates how the drug manufacturers lied about the "miraculous relief" they provided, the unfulfilled demand for their products, and the rarity of addiction in order to cover up their own complicity. Similar sentiments were held and proclaimed by the colonial opium dealers as well.

Corruption, deceit, and regulatory capture in the United States laid the groundwork for the opioid crisis, much like opium traffickers in Qing China took advantage of systemic weaknesses. Among many similar echoes, the promotion of opiates among hard-working people in both 19th-century Asia and 21st-century America is noteworthy.

Author reveals current logic of free trade based on greed and self-serving interests as he dismantles various justifications and prejudices, such as racial Chinese peculiarities and the imperatives of free trade, which enabled the continued smuggling of this dangerous drug to China. The free-market principle of supply and demand was a guiding principle in the British opium trade. The British insisted that they were merely satisfying a rising demand for opium, despite the many negative consequences, including as widespread addiction and economic hardship.

In his work, Ghosh depicts that the majority of Western observers in the nineteenth century generally assumed that rising demand was the primary factor propelling the expansion of imports. This conformed to the principles of free-market economics, which posited that the market's "invisible hand"

would eventually balance supply and demand. These concepts would quickly become utterly dominant among Anglosphere elites; they surfaced in the late 18th century, at the beginning of the British opium-pushing effort. Supply and demand, they assumed, worked similarly to the rules of nature (or the unknowable will of the Protestant God). This book argues, among other things, that the free-market ideology is dominant in today's globalized world, where people's ravenous want for resources is harming the environment and all forms of life. Much to how opium-stricken and destitute China impacted India, this situation benefited colonial powers and certain segments of society.

No one can deny that the colonial opium-smuggling operation, which harmed significant segments of society and produced a nation of addicts, was powered by the same deceitful logic as today's fossil-fuelled expansion and mindless consumption. We know there is no easy way out of opium's lingering influence at a time when the United States is still grappling with the opioid crisis and social unrest and development metrics repeatedly highlight the issues in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Amitav Ghosh's persuasive writings make it crystal clear in this era of intensifying climatic conflict that we must embrace with humility the historical agency of opium and other non-human actors; failing to do so would be a grave mistake.

DISCUSSION

Throughout Smokes and Ashes, we learn how, throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, India was the world's foremost opium producer while it was a colony of the British Empire. It explores the unique circumstances that affected many regions due to the cultivation of opium. There were far-reaching consequences for the emergence of modernity and modern globalism stemming from the opium trade's revolutionary effects on the United States, Britain, China, and India. The colonial opium trade was the genesis of numerous significant businesses. My family's history is deeply influenced by the migratory and settlement patterns brought forth by the opium economy.

The centrality of the opium poppy plant makes this narrative both remarkable and illuminating. The historical value of plants like sugarcane, tobacco, and cotton has faded with the passage of time. On the flip side, the global opioid crisis is a direct result

of the opium poppy's dramatically enhanced potency. In Smoke and Ashes, we learn how this common, unremarkable plant has shaped our modern world and how it is now contributing to its demise.

Within the pages of this book, Ghosh lays out a case for the existence of historical agents who are not human. The question "What if humans are not the most powerful species on the planet?" is being posed in a more diplomatic manner. Envision a world if the poppy plant took advantage of people's weaknesses—their inability to tolerate pain and their insatiable appetite—to perpetuate itself. Instead of being nurtured, what if the poppy plant is impacting our economics, laws, cultures, and ideas?

In his nonfiction book The Nutmeg's Curse, published in 2021, Ghosh argued how the moniker "Anthropocene" suggests humans have tremendous power, which is a negative. In reality, this story shows how delicate humans are. The unique pain-relieving properties of the plant can be so overwhelming that they overwhelm people. That's how it becomes ingrained in communities, posing a threat to their very survival. The continuous conquest of the poppy is conveyed by Ghosh's use of the present tense. The current civil upheaval in Manipur, the military cartels in northern Mexico, and the opioid epidemic in the US are all, according to Ghosh, traceable back to the opium trade of the 19th century. Recognizing that the idea of human omnipotence is completely false is something that Ghosh stresses. "This is something that climate change is revealing to us." By building a variety of systems to control landscapes, we thought we had complete control over nature. However, now those very landscapes are fighting back and claiming dominance.

Although it may not be the most restful book, Smoke and Ashes is an engaging and fast-paced thriller. Ghosh freely admits that writing this book was not an easy task. His investigation took him to a pit of despair, and he almost gave up on it altogether. His decision to publish the book at long last, exposing a purposefully concealed past, is something for which I am eternally grateful. The story, he says, is a depressing look into human nature, and that's why everyone should read it. "Much of what we learn about the past is actually propaganda—a web of falsehoods that has supported an intricate system."

But Ghosh takes great pains to assure us that he does not see the future in a completely gloomy light. This terrible history, in his opinion, should motivate modern-day climate activists to take action. It proves that plants also have agency, and that agency may be stronger than we realize. Even in the depths of despair, people have banded together to make incredible strides forward throughout history. More powerful than contemporary energy companies were the rich European empires that were restrained by a massive worldwide anti-opium movement in the late 19th century. "I find some optimism in that." Recognizing the need to keep trying is an inevitable part of being human.

In the context of India's colonial past, Ghosh initially investigates the remarkable history and impact of tea. Because of the international origins of their constituent parts, tea cups may not always originate in India. The material used to make the cup is "china," which comes from the country directly to the north. The origin of the term "China porcelain" comes from the fact that this type of porcelain was initially made in China.

At first, tea was considered a luxury good. It originated in China and made its way to Britain via India and Ceylon. A lot of people in South Asia started drinking tea instead of milk or coffee in the early 1940s, thanks to some clever advertising campaigns.

The tea was sweetened with sugar, or "cheeni," a word with Chinese origins. As a result of British sugar plantations in the Caribbean, sugarcane became widely available after the 17th century. An Asian worker cultivates an herb in China and India, and South Asians appreciate a drink made from the herb and sweetened with a product that gained popularity in the Americas as a result of African slave labor on British plantations. It is an essential part of society standards and daily life that could not have been possible without empire.

But the East India Company (EIC) oversaw the tea trade, and they had a problem: how to pay for this Chinese export. The metal most often used was silver. The historical practice of European nations was exploiting slave labor to mine silver and maintain trade balance with China. An international financial crisis comparable to modern balance-of-payments problems arose in the 18th century as a result of falling silver holdings.

Bihar was part of the East India Company's expansion in the 18th century. Opium was first investigated by the East India

Company for local use. The book paints a detailed picture of Ghazipur, the birthplace of opium growing. Initially being "contented and tranquil" and subsequently becoming "dazed," local monkeys and fish were impacted by effluents from the factory. Even now, the factory is still making opium for medicinal uses.

Colonel Watson proposed an audacious solution to the deficit — exchanging opium for Chinese tea — during an EIC conference in Calcutta, according to Ghosh. Designed to mimic the Dutch strategy of selling Bengal opium in other markets, this plan was put into action in the 1770s.

The region between Patna and Banaras became the epicentre of opium cultivation as the traffic flourished. Especially in his debut work, Sea of Poppies, Ghosh uses Ghazipur as a major setting in his Ibis Trilogy. In Smoke and Ashes, Ghosh reflects on the studies that backed up his earlier creative choices.

Like an opportunistic pathogen, opium was most devastating to communities that had never been exposed to it before. The Chinese people were unprepared and easily addicted, in contrast to India's history of drug usage and relative resistance.

Just as interesting are the geopolitical undercurrents. The East India Company carved up a lucrative niche for itself in the 17th and 18th centuries before losing it in 1834. Both the years 1839–1842 and 1856–1860 saw the Opium Wars. Trade disparities and the opium trade ignited the China-Britain (and France-French) wars. The Opium Wars dealt China a major economic, diplomatic, and geographical blow.

As a result of the opium epidemic, the European perception of China shifted from one of admiration to one of derision. The British tried to shift the blame away from addiction by claiming that non-white people had an innate propensity for immorality and addiction.

The present efforts by major pharmaceutical companies to place the blame on American individuals struggling with addiction for the opioid epidemic are reflected in this. The victims were mostly white and located in Western countries, which made it difficult to dismiss their agony, according to Ghosh, who contends that the recent strategy was failed.

Readers are also encouraged to recognize the profound significance of nature as the book delves into narratives involving plants, power, and humans. Ghosh stresses the need for modesty in our approach, drawing attention to the fact that humans are intrinsically linked to the environment. A superior intelligent, patient, and long-lived non-human creature has supplanted the colonizers, according to the author.

In the late 19th century, notable individuals from India, such Rabindranath Tagore and Dadabhai Naoroji, spearheaded a global campaign against opium. Some people didn't believe that China's addiction to opium was attributable to India's manufacture of the drug. Ghosh compares the critics of the past to the people all around the world who are rising up in rebellion against the fossil fuel sector now.

Chapters about the origins and development of tea, the forced cultivation of opium, Bihar's part in the opium trade, the causes of the Purvanchal regions' poverty, George Orwell's childhood, the resistance of Maratha warriors who shaped Bombay into a global metropolis, the evolution of the Parsis into a powerful trading community, the founding of banks and universities, and the Canton graduates were the ones that are interesting.

The opium poppy, according to Ghosh, is unlike any other psychoactive chemical because of its special and enduring relationship with the frailties of the human body and mind. The narrative of opium usage, he argues, must include more than just the 'demand' component. There was a strong correlation between the emergence of early 19th-century capitalism and the expanding opium market.

Why hasn't anyone brought up the idea that opium was the hidden force behind the rise of Western capitalist modernity? According to Ghosh, the opium trade's lucrative riches were often utilized to finance remarkable charitable endeavors in the countries where it flourished, which is why the drug's significance in the history of Western civilization is generally disregarded. Significant infrastructural projects and various cultural and educational organizations have emerged as a result of the opium trade in Britain, the United States of America, and India. Still hidden is the untold story of unfathomable misery and devastation.

Two narrative strands are interwoven throughout Smoke and Ashes. One explores the hidden history of the English East India Company's opium trade, manufacture, and disputes with China during the nineteenth century. The second one delves into the current opioid issue in the United States, comparing it to its effects on the Qing Empire in the past. The capacity of the poppy plant to adapt and enhance its addictive characteristics through novel ways of growing and processing, together with the continued recognition of opium as a lucrative resource by companies and cooperating governments, connects the two arcs.

The opium trade and international finance are two topics that Ghosh investigates during his visits to Guangzhou and Ghazipur. The Foreign Enclave in Guangzhou commemorates the illicit import of opium to China and the city's artistic and botanical achievements as well as its technical prowess, cultural openness, and technical know-how, whereas Ghazipur is home to India's oldest opium factory. While introducing us to people like opium merchants in Malwa and poppy growers in Purvanchal, Ghosh takes us on a tour of the regions engaged in the commerce and manufacture of opium. We also meet the Boston Brahmins in the United States and the rich merchants in Bombay. Exploring the Salem Peabody Museum and Bombay's J.J. School of Art brings home the ways in which these locations were interdependent due to the opium trade's power and wealth flows.

As a cautionary tale about the opium's impact on human life, Ghosh investigates the cyclical pattern in its production, distribution, and use. Poppy plants have a natural tendency to counterattack, making it difficult for the capital to establish control over them. A sobering reminder of the difficulties of attempting to utilize the opium crop for egocentric capitalist goals is the present opioid problem in the United States. Let it be and embrace it; the moment has come.

Even novelist Amitav Ghosh, returning from a trip to Guangzhou, had this epiphany over tea at his Calcutta mansion. His cup of tea, called 'cha' in Bengali, brought back a memory of the word 'chah' he had used in Guangzhou, he says. In Smoke and Ashes: A Writer’s Journey Through Opium’s Hidden Histories (Fourth Estate India), his most recent non-fiction work, this story is featured. It becomes clear that China has had an impact on his life as he observes the porcelain cup, sugar,

peanuts, and lacquerware tray that are all associated with tea and peanuts. Despite how pervasive China actually was, I thought it was practically non-existent.

China has become increasingly prominent and aggressive in India's geopolitical landscape in recent years. In the aftermath of the border battle in the summer of 2020, the Indian government prohibited certain Chinese imports, such as the social media platform TikTok and the online game PUBG. The two countries have vied for influence in their vicinity and in the South China Sea, where China's territorial claims in Taiwan are anticipated by security analysts to possibly become the next worldwide hotspot after Ukraine.

Trade between the two nations has also continued to increase significantly during the Covid-19 pandemic. China sold $56.53 billion worth of products and services to India in the first half of the year, while India exported $9.49 billion to China. This is the second-largest trading partner of India, behind the US. China is not prominent in the world perception of most Indians.

This is the outcome of several centuries of colonial propaganda and historiography, as demonstrated by Ghosh. Ghosh in this book disputes the commonly accepted narratives put out by colonial administrators and historians, many of whom were heavily swayed by Enlightenment principles. He concentrates on items and creatures that have had a mysterious and often unrecognized impact on human history. One of these commodities is tea, which, until around the mid-19th century, was the primary reason China was the largest supplier to Britain. The other substance is opium.

Throughout a significant portion of human history, opium was limited in distribution and primarily used by the upper classes due to its high cost and the complexity involved in its production. During the late 18th and early 19th centuries, European conquerors entered the Asian market by using free-market concepts and force to establish opium cultivation, processing, and commerce in newly acquired territories. Ghosh states that the Dutch were the pioneers in intertwining opium with colonialism, establishing the initial imperial narco-state that relied significantly on drug profits. The British perfected the model of the colonial narco-state in India.

For example, his analysis of the colored lithographs of the opium factory in Patna created by Captain Walter Stanhope

Sherwill, a British colonial army commander, in the mid-19th century. Ghosh describes how the prints transformed the Patna factory into a grand structure resembling a cathedral or an Egyptian temple, with high ceilings, impressive columns, and shelves extending towards a vanishing point to convey a sense of advancement and expansion. However, they do not provide any information regarding the working circumstances of the Indian workers in the facility, who worked under harsh conditions and were under regular supervision. Ghosh demonstrates wonderful sensitivity in this.

This book's extensive scope covers the narrative up to the present day. Ghosh argues that violence is weakening nation-states globally, and suggests that poppies, which played a significant role in shaping modernity, will also play a role in its downfall. Fossil fuel and climate change will be opium's strongest allies in this scenario.

Nevertheless, the book concludes optimistically. Ghosh concludes the book by stating that despite the ominous signs, the history of opium provides a promising outlook for global environmental movements. They might learn from the transnational, multi-ethnic, multiracial coalition of civil society groups that successfully reduced the opium trade, despite facing strong opposition from the British Empire.

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