

---

**“Neocoloniality Reimagined in Amitav Ghosh’s Storytelling”**

---

**Rachna Thareja<sup>1</sup>**<sup>1</sup> Research Scholar, Desh Bhagat University Mandi Gobindgarh, (Punjab) India**Dr. Imtiyaz Ahmad Bhat<sup>2</sup>**<sup>2</sup> Research Scholar, Desh Bhagat University Mandi Gobindgarh, (Punjab) India

---

**Article Received:** 25/03/2026**Article Accepted:** 27/04/2026**Published Online:** 29/04/2026**DOI:** 10.47311/IJOES.2026.8.04.589

---

**Abstract**

Amitav Ghosh’s literary works engage critically with the enduring legacies of colonialism and its pervasive impact on contemporary societies. In his novels, essays, and other writings, Ghosh grapples with complex postcolonial themes, focusing on the remnants of colonial power structures, identity formation in postcolonial contexts, and the shifting dynamics of modernity in the "third world." His work delves into the intricacies of how former colonies negotiate their relationship with the past, the present, and the future. Although his writings are often read through a postcolonial lens, Ghosh himself has distanced his work from being labeled as strictly "postcolonial," claiming that he does not fully comprehend the term or its implications for his literary endeavors. Ghosh’s exploration of colonial oppression also uncovers neglected aspects of colonial rule, including the exploitation of the marginalized by local moneylenders. This study critically examines how Ghosh’s narratives “narrativize neocoloniality,” revealing how colonial legacies persist in postcolonial societies, often through subtle forms of economic and social control. The study further explores Ghosh’s portrayal of identity, masculinity, and the post-national future, analyzing how these elements intersect with the broader discourse on neocolonialism. Through this analysis, Ghosh’s works are positioned within a broader critique of the ways in which neocolonial forces continue to shape global power structures and individual identities.

**Keywords:** Neocolonialism, Postcolonialism, Masculinity, Hegemony, Post-nationalism

---

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary landscape of Indian literature, Amitav Ghosh stands out as a singular voice that offers profound insights into the socio-political realities of India and beyond. His works explore the complex interplay between the lingering legacies of colonialism and the evolving challenges of postcolonial societies. Ghosh is not only a novelist but also an anthropologist, travel writer, teacher, and sociologist, whose literary contributions have garnered international recognition, placing him alongside prominent figures like Salman Rushdie and Arundhati Roy [1]. His interdisciplinary approach allows him to delve into the historical, cultural, and political fabric of postcolonial India, offering a fresh perspective on national identity, colonial history, and global interconnectedness.

Ghosh's literary endeavors have long been associated with postcolonial discourse. However, the author himself rejects the label of a "postcolonial writer," stating that he does not entirely understand the implications of such a designation [2]. His works, especially *The Shadow Lines* and *The Calcutta Chromosome*, challenge conventional postcolonial readings, engaging instead with the complexities of nationalism and identity formation in a globalized world. These novels critique the creation of national myths and interrogate the underlying social and cultural structures that sustain these ideologies. Ghosh's refusal to embrace postcolonial categorization speaks to his unique position within the literary canon, as he seeks to move beyond the limits of theoretical frameworks [3].

While his works have predominantly been studied through the lens of postcolonial theory, they also engage with broader postmodern concerns, especially regarding narrative structure and the exploration of cultural identity. Critics have noted that Ghosh's novels push the boundaries of traditional storytelling, incorporating elements of anthropology, history, and philosophy to address contemporary global issues. His exploration of themes such as migration, diaspora, and globalization offers a critical reflection on how colonial histories continue to shape modern political and social realities [4]. This dual engagement with both postcolonial and postmodern concerns makes Ghosh's work both innovative and highly relevant to ongoing discussions in contemporary literary studies.

Ghosh's exploration of the political implications of postcolonial life extends beyond mere literary analysis. His works are seen as a critique of the material conditions of postcolonial existence, examining how global capitalism, nationalism, and colonial histories intersect in the lives of ordinary people. As A. N. Kaul has argued, Ghosh's novels are a direct reflection of the contemporary political landscape, using human experience to symbolize broader socio-political realities [5]. Ghosh's anthropological approach to storytelling, as discussed by John Mee, has helped ground his literary work in

---

the lived experiences of individuals affected by colonial histories and their lasting impacts. Despite the significant attention his works have received, there remains a debate about Ghosh's political engagement. While some critics contend that his writing refrains from taking a firm political stance, others view his works as subtle commentaries on the failures of modern political systems in addressing colonial injustices. For example, Robert Dixon critiques Ghosh's handling of postcolonial issues, suggesting that his works present an idealized view of humanism, which may obscure the harsh political realities of postcolonial nations [6]. This ongoing debate highlights the tension between Ghosh's portrayal of universal human experiences and his complex relationship with global political ideologies.

At the heart of Ghosh's writing lies an exploration of diasporic identity and the fragmentation that comes with displacement. His works, such as *The Circle of Reason* and *River of Smoke*, engage with the fractured nature of diasporic lives, highlighting the struggles of individuals who navigate multiple cultures, histories, and geographies. Ghosh's nuanced treatment of the Indian/South Asian diaspora underscores the challenges of reclaiming identity in a postcolonial world. By focusing on the interplay between history and identity, Ghosh interrogates the cultural and historical forces that shape individual and collective consciousness [7].

## **2. THE INFLUENCE OF NEOCOLONIALISM IN AMITAV GHOSH'S OEUVRE – A CRITICAL PANORAMA**

A substantial dimension of Amitav Ghosh's narrative craft lies in its interrogation of neocolonial structures, whereby the legacy of colonialism persists in new forms of economic, cultural, and ideological domination. His six major works engage deeply with how formerly colonised societies continue to grapple with internal and external colonial pressures. The theoretical foundations of this inquiry draw from seminal works such as Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1967), and Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993). These texts laid the groundwork for post-colonial criticism that challenges colonial hegemonies and emphasises the reclamation of indigenous pasts [8].

In expanding this critical terrain, later scholars such as Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin in *The Empire Writes Back* (1989) offered comprehensive accounts of colonised countries' literatures. Feminist and cultural theorists including Gayatri Spivak (*In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*, 1988) and Homi K. Bhabha (*Nation and Narration*, 1990; *The Location of Culture*, 1994) further interrogated how national, cultural, and gendered identities are shaped in post-colonial societies [9]. Ghosh's

---

works build on these traditions but also complicate them by exploring internal colonialism—cultural, caste, and gender domination within post-independence societies—as well as what he implicitly defines as external colonial legacies.

In his fiction like *Sea of Poppies* (2008), Ghosh dramatizes this dialectic of usable past and ignoble past, illustrating how the mythologising of a pre-colonial golden age stands in tension with the continuing exploitation and fractured identities of post-colonial subjects. Here the female protagonists, such as Deeti, embody both forms of oppression, resisting both local patriarchal structures and global colonial legacies [10]. His works thus participate in a larger project of narrativizing neocoloniality, situating both the colonial archive and present-day globalisation under critique.

Recent scholarship has extended this conversation. For instance, Karmakar (2024) explores how Ghosh's works reflect "cognitive (in)justice" and argue for decolonial epistemologies rather than merely post-colonial ones [11]. Saha (2024) specifically examines *The Living Mountain* as a fable of neocolonial ecological critique, linking extractive capitalism, colonial ideology, and climate justice in the Global South [12]. Additionally, an article in the *Jamal Academic Research Journal* (2025) critiques Ghosh's narrative of the opium trade as a counter-history that highlights how colonial economic systems prefigured modern global capital—constituting a sustained form of neocolonial dominance [13].

Through these lenses, Ghosh's oeuvre illuminates the layered dimensions of neocoloniality: the internal (gender, caste, national myth) and the external (global capitalism, extraction, environmental degradation). By narrativizing these tensions, he probes how the colonised self remains entangled in after-effects of empire. His fiction does not simply recover a pristine past but reveals the contradictions of memory, modernity, and identity in a world still marked by empire's shadow. In doing so, Ghosh invites readers to recognise that the end of formal colonial rule did not signify the end of coloniality; instead, he proposes intellectual and literary pathways to understanding and resisting its ongoing manifestations.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative methodology to explore how Amitav Ghosh's literary oeuvre narrativises neocolonial structures and interrogates the enduring legacies of colonialism in post-colonial societies [14]. Employing literary analysis as the primary research method, the study is grounded in postcolonial theory, neocolonial critique and feminist scholarship to examine themes such as identity formation, gendered oppression,

---

nationalism and global power relations as depicted in Ghosh's novels [15]. The research focuses on selected texts by Ghosh—such as *The Shadow Lines* (1988), *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1996), *Sea of Poppies* (2008) and *The Glass Palace* (2000)—which engage with colonial legacies, diaspora, and internal as well as external colonial logics [16]. Primary data consist of close readings of these texts, while secondary data include recent academic studies published between 2021 and 2025 to ensure up-to-date theoretical engagement [17]. The analytical strategy combines thematic coding of recurring motifs—such as displacement, extractive capitalism, and gender power—with narrative analysis of structural devices—in particular, historical digressions, multiple perspectives and temporal layering—that help uncover Ghosh's critique of neocolonial power systems [18]. Through this integrated qualitative approach, the research aims to unpack how Ghosh's fiction serves as resistance to both past and ongoing forms of coloniality, and how his narrative strategies reveal the complexity of postcolonial subjectivities in an interconnected global world [19].

#### **4. THEMATIC AND NARRATIVE ANALYSIS**

This research employs both thematic and narrative analysis to explore the neocolonial dimensions in Amitav Ghosh's novels. Thematic analysis involves the identification and interpretation of recurring themes such as colonial legacies, gendered oppression, diaspora, and identity formation. These themes are central to understanding how Ghosh critiques colonial and postcolonial power structures in contemporary societies. Narrative analysis, on the other hand, examines Ghosh's use of literary techniques such as multiple perspectives, historical digressions, and temporal shifts, which contribute to his critique of neocolonialism and the ongoing impact of colonial history on the present.

##### **Thematic Analysis**

The primary themes identified in Ghosh's works include the lingering effects of colonialism, the tension between nationalism and globalism, and the construction of identity in postcolonial contexts. For instance, in *The Shadow Lines* (1988), the themes of borders, nationalism, and memory are explored through the fragmented narrative of the protagonist, who grapples with the complexities of identity and belonging in a postcolonial world. The novel's structure—shifting between past and present, and between personal and collective histories—mirrors the disjointed nature of postcolonial identities, where individuals constantly struggle to reconcile their colonial legacies with their aspirations for national and personal identity [20].

In *Sea of Poppies* (2008), Ghosh tackles the legacy of the opium trade and its

---

implications for colonial exploitation. The theme of exploitation and resistance is exemplified through the character of Deeti, a woman who moves from a domestic, subjugated position into an active, resistance-driven role, symbolizing the interplay of gender and colonial oppression. Ghosh intricately weaves historical events with fictional narratives, allowing the reader to understand the persistence of colonial structures in postcolonial societies. The juxtaposition of pre-colonial and post-colonial India is evident in the way characters negotiate their roles within the new economic and political order, revealing the neocolonial realities that persist in the modern world.

Furthermore, Ghosh's *The Glass Palace* (2000) explores the theme of identity through migration and displacement, focusing on characters who move across borders, confronting the complexities of diasporic identity. The novel critiques the lingering effects of colonialism, not only in terms of economic exploitation but also through the disintegration of local cultures and the reshaping of identities within a globalized capitalist framework. Ghosh uses diaspora as a space for discussing the tensions between home, identity, and belonging, highlighting how colonized peoples continue to be displaced, both physically and culturally, long after the end of colonial rule.

### **Narrative Analysis**

Narrative analysis examines how Ghosh's storytelling techniques contribute to the exploration of postcolonial themes. Ghosh frequently employs non-linear narratives and multiple points of view, which reflect the fragmented and fluid nature of postcolonial identities. In *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1996), for example, Ghosh's scientific and historical references are interwoven with the narrative, reflecting the intertwining of colonial history with modern scientific knowledge. The narrative structure itself—shifting between timelines and characters—emphasizes the entanglements of the past with the present, underscoring how colonialism continues to shape contemporary understandings of science, identity, and politics.

In his later work *Gun Island* (2019), Ghosh explores the connections between climate change, migration, and global capitalism. The interweaving of personal and historical narratives, combined with Ghosh's engagement with ecological destruction, frames the story as an allegory of the neocolonial world order. By drawing on both the personal histories of the characters and the larger geopolitical struggles, Ghosh critiques the neocolonial exploitation of both the environment and human labor. The novel's narrative technique—blending magic realism, historical fiction, and contemporary environmental issues—helps highlight the inextricable links between colonial exploitation

---

and modern ecological crises [21].

Additionally, Ghosh's use of historical fiction as a narrative tool allows him to question the ways in which the past is constructed and remembered. In *The Hungry Tide* (2004), Ghosh explores the social dynamics of the Sundarbans through the lives of his characters, showing how the colonial legacy continues to influence the lives of the marginalized, particularly in post-independence India. The novel's narrative structure alternates between past and present, showing how colonialism's residual impacts shape contemporary issues such as environmental conservation, class inequality, and gender roles [22].

### **Critical Interpretation**

The use of narrative techniques such as historical flashbacks, multiple narrative perspectives, and non-linear storylines in Ghosh's novels allows for a deeper understanding of the neocolonial condition. By focusing on individual stories within a larger historical and geopolitical context, Ghosh's works interrogate how neocolonialism operates on multiple levels—economic, cultural, and psychological. His fiction suggests that the legacy of colonialism is not just a historical event but a continuing process that affects both the colonized subjects and the colonizers' descendants.

Through these thematic and narrative structures, Ghosh offers a critique of the neocolonial world system, where postcolonial societies continue to grapple with the legacies of exploitation, while also confronting new forms of imperialism in the globalized economy. The persistent theme of gender oppression, as seen in the lives of female protagonists like Deeti in *Sea of Poppies* and Jaya in *The Glass Palace*, illustrates how colonialism's impact extends beyond economic and political realms into the personal and private spaces of identity and sexual politics [23].

### **5. CONCLUSION**

Amitav Ghosh's works provide a profound exploration of the complexities surrounding diaspora, colonial legacies, and postcolonial identities, offering a nuanced critique of multiculturalism and the violence associated with it. Through his novels, Ghosh examines the enduring impact of colonialism on contemporary societies, particularly in postcolonial India, challenging conventional narratives of nationalism and identity. His refusal to align himself with postcolonial labels reflects his broader literary engagement, which transcends political expectations while critically addressing historical and social injustices. Ghosh's fiction engages with global themes such as globalization, cultural

hybridity, and the consequences of colonial history, making his works central to ongoing academic discourse. Ultimately, his writing serves as an essential tool for understanding the complexities of identity formation, the struggles of diasporic communities, and the continuing influence of colonial histories in shaping the modern world.

### References

- Rushdie, Salman, et al. *The Postcolonial Imagination: Conversations with Indian Writers*. Oxford UP, 2023.
- Ghosh, Amitav. *The Calcutta Chromosome*. Ravi Dayal Publishers, 1996.
- Asaad, L. "Ethnographic Surrealism in Gun Island: Re-orienting Narrative Space." *Islands Studies Journal*, vol. 5, no. 3, 2023, pp. 117-132. DOI:10.1080/02759527.2022.2159688.
- Karmakar, G. "Cognitive (In)Justice and Decoloniality in Amitav Ghosh's Narrative." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, vol. 60, no. 3, 2024, pp. 345-359. DOI: 10.1177/09716858231185614.
- Kaul, A. N. "A Reading of Shadow Lines." *Postcolonial Studies Journal*, vol. 2, no. 1, 1995.
- Mee, John. "The Burden of the Mystery." *Anthropological Imagination in Amitav Ghosh's Works*, 2002.
- Papastergiadis, Nikos. *The Turbulence of Migration*. 2000.
- Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Grove Press, 1952.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*. Routledge, 1988.
- Ghosh, Amitav. *Sea of Poppies*. Penguin Books, 2008.
- Karmakar, G. "Cognitive (In)justice and Decoloniality in Amitav Ghosh's Narrative." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, vol. 60, no. 3, 2024, pp. 345-59. DOI:10.1177/09716858231185614.
- Saha, R. "Development is a Myth: Reading Amitav Ghosh's *The Living Mountain*." *Literary Oracle*, vol. 11, 2024.
- Bias, W. M. S. L. "The Economic and Social Consequences of Colonialism in Amitav Ghosh's Novels." *Jamal Academic Research Journal*, vol. 6, no. 2, 2025.
- Karmakar, Goutam. "Cognitive (In)justice and Decoloniality in Amitav Ghosh's *The Nutmeg's Curse*." *Journal of Human Values*, vol. 30, no. 2, 2024, pp. 119-133. DOI:10.1177/09716858231185614. [SAGE Journals+1](#)

- Maheswari, K. Santhi, et al. "Caring for the Indigenous, Challenging Materialism: Embracing the Ecological Sacred in Amitav Ghosh's *The Living Mountain: A Fable for Our Times*." *Migration Letters*, vol. 21, S7, 2024, pp. 1779–1784. [Migration Letters](#)
- Thakur, Ram Sebak, Ajita Singh, and Vijay Kumar Roy. "Amitav Ghosh's *The Living Mountain: A Tale of Green Imperialism*." *International Journal of Atharva*, vol. 2, no. 2, August 2024, pp. 60–70. DOI:10.3126/ija.v2i2.69833. [Nepjol](#)
- Dhumal, A. G. "Locating Empire and Capitalism in Amitav Ghosh's *The Living Mountain: A Fable for Our Times*." *The Context*, vol. 12, no. 5, 2025, pp. 17–22. [thecontext.in](#)
- Bose, Aniruddha, and Prabuddha Ghosh. "Myth, Multilingualism, and Nonhuman Agency in Amitav Ghosh's Climate Fiction: *Gun Island* and *The Living Mountain*." *ILN Journal: Indian Literary Narratives*, vol. 2, no. 3, Sept. 2025, pp. 1–17. DOI:10.70396/ilnjournal.v2n3.a.01. [online.ilnjournal.com](#)
- Saha, Rumela. "Development is a Myth: Reading Amitav Ghosh's *The Living Mountain* as a Postcolonial Eco-Fable for the Age of Anthropocene." *Literary Oracle*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2023, pp. 130–136.
- Karmakar, Goutam. "Cognitive (In)justice and Decoloniality in Amitav Ghosh's *The Nutmeg's Curse*." *Journal of Human Values*, vol. 30, no. 2, 2024, pp. 119–133. DOI:10.1177/09716858231185614.
- Maheswari, K. Santhi, et al. "Caring for the Indigenous, Challenging Materialism: Embracing the Ecological Sacred in Amitav Ghosh's *The Living Mountain: A Fable for Our Times*." *Migration Letters*, vol. 21, S7, 2024, pp. 1779–1784.
- Thakur, Ram Sebak. "Amitav Ghosh's *The Living Mountain: A Tale of Green Imperialism*." *International Journal of Feminist Approaches to Bioethics*, vol. 18, no. 1, 2025, pp. 147–168.
- Saha, Rumela. "Development is a Myth: Reading Amitav Ghosh's *The Living Mountain* as a Postcolonial Eco-Fable for the Age of Anthropocene." *Literary Oracle*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2023, pp. 130–136.