



NARRATIVIZING NEOCOLONIALITY IN THE WORKS OF AMITAV GHOSH: A FANONIAN INTERPRETATION

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Abstract: The present research critically examines how Amitav Ghosh narrativizes neocolonialism by weaving socio-political, economic, psychological, and cultural dimensions into his literary works. The study explores how Ghosh critiques global capitalist hegemony, loss of indigenous cultural memory, and reproduction of colonial hierarchies by native elites, presenting them as ongoing extensions of imperialism. Ultimately, the research aims to establish that Ghosh's narrative technique offers multidirectional resistance to neocolonial structures by re-inscribing suppressed histories, challenging western epistemic authority, and restoring subaltern agency. The study concludes that Ghosh's works constitute a form of literary decolonization, provoking the need for critical reflection on how neocolonial forces persist in shaping global postcolonial realities.

Keywords: *Neocolonialism, Postcolonial Trauma, Cultural Alienation, Bourgeois Complicity, Epistemic Resistance, Narrativizing Neocoloniality*

I. INTRODUCTION

Amitav Ghosh, an eminent contemporary Indian novelist, anthropologist, and thinker, has significantly contributed to postcolonial literary discourse through his historically anchored narratives. His works illuminate the complex interplay between colonial history and its contemporary manifestations, challenging traditional power hierarchies and ideologies. In the context of neocoloniality, Ghosh's fiction moves beyond documenting colonial oppression to unravel how colonial power persists through indirect, structural, and psychological means even after political independence.

Ghosh uses a narrative approach grounded in deep historical consciousness to expose the invisible continuation of imperial control—manifested through economic dependency, environmental exploitation, migration, cultural distortion, elite complicity, and displacement. His characters, often situated at historical crossroads, embody the psychological dilemmas of identity fragmentation, alienation, and cultural dislocation that Frantz Fanon associates with neocolonial trauma (Fanon, 1961). Recent scholars argue that neocoloniality is no longer purely territorial but functions via epistemic dominance and global capitalist systems (Hassan et al., 2025), a view that resonates strongly with Ghosh's portrayal of postcolonial societies.

Unlike conventional postcolonial literature that focuses solely on colonial violence, Ghosh's works, such as *The Glass Palace* (2002), *The Shadow Lines* (1988), and *The Hungry Tide* (2004), demonstrate how native elites often perpetuate imperial ideologies, creating layered power structures. This reinforces Fanon's critique of the national bourgeoisie, who, rather than dismantling imperial control, inherit and sustain it (Fanon, 1963).

Thus, the present research seeks to analyze Ghosh's writings as literary embodiments of neocolonial continuity, exploring how he exposes persisting colonial mechanisms and reclaims suppressed narratives. By narrativizing neocoloniality, Ghosh not only records historical injustice but also encourages psychological decolonization and cultural resurgence through storytelling.

Research Questions

- How does Amitav Ghosh narrativize the persistence of colonial power structures in his works?
- In what ways do his characters experience psychological trauma, identity crises, and cultural displacement under neocolonial domination?
- How do Ghosh's narratives critique elite complicity and economic dependency in perpetuating neocolonial control?
- What narrative strategies does Ghosh employ to initiate decolonial thought and reclaim marginalized histories?

Research Objectives

- To examine how Ghosh depicts neocolonial structures in his works beyond political independence.
- To explore the psychological impact of neocoloniality on identity formation and cultural memory.
- To analyze the role of native elites in sustaining imperial power systems.
- To identify narrative methods through which Ghosh promotes decolonial restoration.

Significance of the Study

The present research holds significant relevance as it shifts postcolonial examination from the overt violence of colonialism to the more subtle yet pervasive operations of neocolonial power in contemporary society. By analyzing Amitav Ghosh's works through Fanonian theoretical perspectives, the study bridges literary discourse with political psychology, emphasizing how psychological trauma, identity fragmentation, and cultural displacement persist long after formal independence. It contributes to modern postcolonial scholarship by demonstrating that neocolonialism is no longer confined to territorial control but extends through economic dependency, environmental exploitation, and intellectual dominance imposed by global capitalist structures. Furthermore, the research highlights how native elites, instead of dismantling imperial frameworks, often become agents of continued suppression, thereby reinforcing Fanon's critique of the national bourgeoisie. In this context, Ghosh's literature emerges as a powerful medium for decolonial resistance, as his narratives recover marginalized histories, question Western epistemic control, and promote cultural resurgence. This becomes particularly relevant in today's globalized landscape where Western ideologies continue to shape economic models and intellectual paradigms. Thus, the study not only extends theoretical understanding of neocoloniality but also encourages psychological decolonization, advocating a return to indigenous identity, cultural memory, and historical consciousness as a pathway to genuine liberation.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Postcolonial literature, traditionally concerned with political resistance against imperial domination, has increasingly expanded to explore neocolonial frameworks that persist beyond formal decolonization. In line with this shift, Amitav Ghosh's works are widely recognized for their nuanced engagement with historical transitions, diasporic displacement, identity conflict, and power restructuring in the post-independence era. As Bill Ashcroft (2002) notes, postcolonial writers adopt a "writing back to the empire" strategy, portraying the continuity of oppression even after political autonomy is achieved. Ghosh's narratives, particularly *The Glass Palace*, *The Shadow Lines*, and *The Hungry Tide*, exemplify this approach by revisiting colonial encounters and revealing how imperial hierarchies sustain themselves through economic, psychological, and socio-cultural means.

Scholars like C. Chittra (2013) argue that Ghosh's fiction captures the internalization of colonial values and the paradox of individuals who are both colonized and agents of colonial power. This concept of duality corresponds to Fanon's analysis of the "unstable identity" of the formerly colonized subjects, reflecting their oscillation between cultural authenticity and assimilation to colonial ideologies. Diasporic themes studied by Suresh (2019) emphasize how forced migration and displacement create psychological fragmentation and existential rootlessness, a condition central to neocolonial discourse. Ghosh's representation of diasporic struggles further resonates with recent studies on memory and trauma, where identity loss becomes a key marker of neocolonial impact (Hassan et al., 2025).

Eco-critical perspectives, such as those presented by Nazia Hasan (2019), expand the discussion to environmental exploitation, showing how colonial forces manipulate natural resources to reinforce economic supremacy. This idea intersects with contemporary theories of imperial capitalism, suggesting that environmental control is a modern form of neocolonial domination. Furthermore, Mukherjee (2015) highlights Ghosh's narrative focus on marginalized individuals as an act of literary resistance, reclaiming suppressed histories and countering dominant western representations.

From a psycho-feminist perspective, Usha and Ratnaker (2014) examine the emotional and social consequences of patriarchal and colonial systems on women's identities, further reflecting the cumulative impact of structural power. Their analysis aligns with Fanon's assertion that psychological liberation is

fundamental to emancipation. The existing scholarship collectively underscores colonial trauma, identity dislocation, and socio-economic manipulation; however, limited attention has been given to the systematic narrative projection of neocolonial ideology within Ghosh's works, forming a critical gap this research addresses.

Thus, the present study extends beyond traditional postcolonial critique to investigate how Amitav Ghosh's narrative strategies reconstruct historical consciousness, question elite complicity, and challenge the normalization of neocolonial structures. It recontextualizes existing research by applying Fanon's theoretical paradigms to literary analysis, thereby establishing a novel framework—narrativizing neocoloniality—as a method to decode subtle postcolonial suppression embedded within Ghosh's fiction.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical foundation of this research is principally based on Frantz Fanon's critical analysis of colonialism and neocolonialism, derived from his seminal works *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) and *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952). Fanon argues that imperial power does not end with political independence; instead, it transforms into indirect mechanisms of oppression sustained through economic dependency, intellectual domination, psychological subjugation, and cultural assimilation. He contends that former colonial powers maintain influence by manipulating state systems, where native elites emerge as intermediaries, continuing the legacy of imperial control. This notion directly aligns with the character structures found in Amitav Ghosh's works, particularly *Rajkumar* and *Saya John*, whose economic ambitions parallel Fanon's concept of the national bourgeoisie who consolidate power for self-interest while perpetuating colonial hierarchies.

Fanon's Marxist lens critiques economic manipulation as the core driver of neocolonialism, where postcolonial nations rely on external financial systems, trade, and military support. This concept is mirrored in Ghosh's depiction of resource exploitation and capitalist expansionism in *The Glass Palace*, where imperial economic infrastructures are appropriated by local enterprising elites, reinforcing dependency and systemic inequality. Fanon asserts that, "The bourgeoisie of newly independent countries... serves as an intermediary for imperialism," describing how social hierarchies continue through inherited colonial structures (Fanon, 1963).

Moreover, Fanon's psychological analysis is crucial in understanding identity loss, cultural dislocation, and trauma. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, he explores how colonized individuals internalize inferiority and seek validation by imitating the colonizer. Ghosh's characterization of *Rajkumar* embodies this phenomenon, as he adopts colonial mannerisms yet remains perpetually excluded—representing Fanon's dilemma of the culturally displaced subject. Similarly, *King Thebaw's* forced exile reflects traumatic displacement and psychological fragmentation that Fanon recognizes as consequences of colonial disruption.

Additionally, Fanon emphasizes that true liberation requires "mental decolonization", not merely political independence. This is relevant to Ghosh's narrative strategies, which actively recover suppressed historical perspectives and challenge western epistemic dominance. Scholarship in 2025 further supports that neocolonial oppression now functions through cultural imperialism, media influence, and ideological penetration (Hassan et al., 2025), reinforcing the importance of literary resistance in modern postcolonial discourse.

Thus, the theoretical framework combines Fanonian critique of neocolonial power structures (economic, psychological, and socio-political) with an examination of Ghosh's narrative resistance, positioning his works as instruments of literary decolonization. This framework enables the study to move beyond traditional postcolonial analysis toward identifying how literature reveals—and resists—the subtle continuation of colonial authority embedded within contemporary global dynamics.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a qualitative and interpretive methodology grounded in literary analysis. A close-reading technique is employed to examine selected texts by Amitav Ghosh — primarily *The Glass Palace* (2002), *The Shadow Lines* (1988), and *The Hungry Tide* (2004) — focusing on how narrative elements articulate neocolonial dynamics. The analysis relies on textual interpretation, character evaluation, thematic tracing, and contextual mapping, placing the literary representations within broader socio-historical and theoretical frameworks.

Frantz Fanon's theories on neocolonialism, identity fragmentation, and psychological trauma serve as the primary theoretical lens, while secondary frameworks include postcolonial literary criticism and cultural memory studies. The methodology incorporates intertextual analysis to connect Ghosh's narrative strategies with historical conditions of colonial transformation and post-independence political structures. Theoretical triangulation is applied by aligning Fanonian concepts — such as the role of native bourgeoisie,

existential exile, and cultural alienation — with textual evidence from Ghosh's novels to reveal covert neocolonial mechanisms.

Data is gathered from primary sources (Ghosh's literary works) and secondary sources including scholarly articles, critical essays, journal publications, and theoretical writings. Peer-reviewed works by Ashcroft, Chittra, Mukherjee, Hasan, Miller, and Usha (2014) are analyzed to identify gaps in existing scholarship regarding neocolonial narrative critique. Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) and *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) are systematically applied throughout the analytical process.

This study does not rely on hypothesis testing but follows an exploratory approach, examining how neocolonial structures are represented and challenged in Ghosh's narrative constructions. The methodology emphasizes phenomenological interpretation, analyzing how characters psychologically experience neocolonial trauma and identity disorientation. The research also integrates contextual historical analysis to link Ghosh's narrative settings with real-world postcolonial conditions, making the study both literarily and socio-politically relevant.

The outcome of this methodological approach is to interpret Ghosh's literature as a medium of resistance and decolonial intervention. By decoding narrative illustrations of economic exploitation, cultural displacement, and elite complicity, the analysis uncovers how literature articulates the persistence of colonial ideologies in contemporary global structures.

V. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The discussion is divided into two major sub-sections to systematically address both structural (economic & political) and psychological (identity & trauma) impacts of neocoloniality as reflected in Ghosh's works.

Colonial Sabotage and Economic Dependency

Frantz Fanon emphasizes that even after political independence, former colonies remain entrapped within economic power structures that secure continued imperial influence. He notes that the national bourgeoisie acts as an intermediary, maintaining wealth and authority in alignment with colonial interests, thereby reinforcing neocolonial oppression (Fanon, 1963). This concept is vividly illustrated in Ghosh's *The Glass Palace*, where opportunist characters like Rajkumar and Saya John thrive by adopting and exploiting colonial trade mechanisms. Rajkumar, initially impoverished, rises by aligning his business pursuits with British economic structures, symbolizing the internalization of capitalist motivations and participation in colonial exploitation. His empire is built on the cheap labor of Indian migrants — reflecting Fanon's argument that colonial economic systems are reactivated under native leadership, perpetuating inequality.

The novel further depicts the manipulation of natural resources as an extension of imperial capitalist dominance. When King Thebaw rejects British demands over teak, the British wage "a war over wood," symbolizing how environmental exploitation becomes a justification for colonial expansion. Hassan (2019) observes that such ecological destruction reflects broader motivations of imperial control disguised as industrial progress. Ghosh's portrayal of British annexation and subsequent capitalist ventures underscores the neocolonial model where global economic hierarchies reconfigure themselves within postcolonial territories through trade, resource extraction, and elite economic complicity.

Additionally, the resentment expressed by Burmese locals toward Indian businessmen — "rich Indians live like colonialists... lording it over the Burmese" — demonstrates how neocolonial supremacy is perpetuated not only through Western intervention but also through indigenous assimilation into colonial hierarchies. This supports Fanon's assertion that liberation is incomplete unless oppressive economic structures are dismantled. Ghosh's narrative thus exposes neocolonialism as a continuation of imperial exploitation using indirect control through economic dependence, resource annexation, and native elite agency.

The Mental Burden of Colonization: Trauma and Identity Crisis

Fanon argues that the most damaging consequence of colonialism is psychological — the internalized inferiority complex that leads to identity erosion and cultural alienation. Ghosh's characters exemplify this internal destruction, particularly King Thebaw and Rajkumar, whose identities collapse under forced displacement and assimilation pressure. Thebaw, once the monarch of Burma, is exiled to India, stripped of sovereignty, and reduced to "the memory of what he had once been" — signifying existential dislocation. This disempowerment is aligned with Fanon's perspective that colonial displacement uproots individuals, leading to irreversible identity fragmentation.

Rajkumar's efforts to emulate colonial culture — "tried his best to dress and speak like the English" — parallel Fanon's "White Masks" theory, where colonized subjects seek acceptance by mirroring colonial mannerisms but remain perpetual outsiders. His struggle embodies cultural imitation without belonging, highlighting the psychological impossibility of reconciling colonial influence with indigenous identity. As

Fanon (1952) explains, colonized individuals internalize the colonizer's values, experiencing trauma when their authentic self fails to align with imposed cultural ideologies.

Similarly, characters such as Dolly reflect psychological retreat from colonial complexity, aligning with feminist interpretations (Usha & Ratnaker, 2014). Her eventual withdrawal into monastic life symbolizes resistance against identity crisis through spiritual detachment, exposing the gendered dimension of neocolonial trauma.

Ghosh's narrative suggests that liberation must extend beyond political change—healing requires reclaiming cultural memory, language, and self-worth. This aligns with Fanon's declaration that true decolonization is possible only when colonized subjects overcome the colonial mindset and reconstruct identity through indigenous consciousness.

Table 1: Interpretative Synthesis

Colonial Impact Type	Fanonian Concept	Ghosh's Illustration
Economic Dependency	Bourgeois complicity	Rajkumar's capitalist expansion
Resource Exploitation	Imperial capitalism	War over teak (wood conflict)
Identity Crisis	White Masks Theory	Rajkumar's imitation of English culture
Psychological Trauma	Alienation	King Thebaw's exile
Cultural Erosion	Loss of memory	Substitute elites replacing colonial masters

VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

This study concludes that Amitav Ghosh's works serve as powerful tools of literary resistance against neocolonial domination, revealing how colonial oppression persists through systemic economic structures, elite complicity, environmental exploitation, and psychological trauma. Through Fanon's theoretical lens, Ghosh's narratives expose the invisible continuity of imperial authority, demonstrating that the true struggle for independence did not end with decolonization but shifted into subtler forms of control, such as capitalist intrusion, cultural erasure, and identity manipulation.

Characters like Rajkumar represent the compromised native elite, embodying Fanon's critique that postcolonial bourgeoisie replace colonial masters while maintaining exploitation. King Thebaw's forced exile exemplifies psychological displacement, while Dolly's disengagement reflects a gendered perspective of identity disintegration under neocolonial pressure. Ghosh's narrative strategies not only document colonial history but reclaim suppressed voices, challenging western narratives and advocating for decolonial awakening through storytelling.

The research affirms that true freedom requires psychological decolonization, restoration of cultural authenticity, and rejection of inherited colonial frameworks. In line with Fanon, Ghosh's works suggest that liberation must originate within the mind, history, and identity of the formerly colonized, not merely through political sovereignty.

Recommendations

- Promote Psychological Decolonization**
 Encourage educational and cultural systems to focus on mental liberation by revisiting historical narratives from indigenous perspectives and rejecting colonial epistemic dominance.
- Reinforce Indigenous Cultural Memory**
 Strengthen local literature, history, language, and artistic expression to counter neocolonial identity erosion and restore cultural authenticity.
- Critically Evaluate Economic Dependency**
 Policymakers should reduce reliance on external power structures that mirror past colonial dynamics—by fostering economic self-sufficiency and promoting sustainable local industries.
- Dismantle Elite-Driven Hierarchies**
 Address the role of native leaders who perpetuate exploitation for personal gain by reforming socio-political institutions to promote equitable governance.
- Adopt Ghosh's Narrative Model in Academic Studies**
 Academic researchers should use narrative reconstruction as a method of resistance, analyzing suppressed histories and challenging global capitalist ideologies through literature.
- Further Research Scope**
 Future studies may expand this research by applying Fanonian and postcolonial frameworks to other contemporary writers or by evaluating how digital globalization now reshapes neocolonial power dynamics.

Final Thought

As Fanon asserts, “It is not enough for the colonized to rid themselves of the colonial master; they must also rid themselves of the colonial mindset.” Ghosh’s literature embodies this transition—from colonial woundedness to decolonial narrative empowerment—making his works essential in rethinking modern neocolonial trajectories.

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