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Narrativizing Neocoloniality in The Works of Amitav Ghosh: A Fanonian Interpretation

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ABSTRACT

This study critically investigates how Amitav Ghosh uses socio-political, economic, psychological, and cultural elements to narrate neocolonialism in his writing. Through detailed textual research, the study shows how Ghosh depicts postcolonial society, where political freedom fails to erase colonial attitudes, economic dependency, and imitative consciousness. Based on Frantz Fanon's theories of colonial trauma, cultural alienation, bourgeois complicity, and psychological fragmentation, the study examines Ghosh's characters' identity crises, displacement, and subjection under subtle neocolonial frameworks. The research intends to show that Ghosh's narrative style resists neocolonial institutions by re-inscribing suppressed histories, undermining western epistemic authority, and restoring subaltern agency. The study indicates that Ghosh's works are literary decolonisation, prompting critical reflection on how neocolonial forces shape global postcolonial reality.

Keywords: *Linguistic Imperialism, Narrativizing Neocoloniality, Postcolonial Identity Reconstruction, Historical Trauma.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Amitav Ghosh, a prominent Indian novelist, anthropologist, and thinker, has contributed to postcolonial literature with his historically anchored narratives. His works challenge power hierarchies and ideologies by revealing the complicated relationship between colonial past and its repercussions. Ghosh's fiction explores how colonial control endures via indirect, structural, and psychological mechanisms after political freedom.

Ghosh employs a narrative technique rooted in history to reveal imperial control's concealed persistence through economic dependency, environmental exploitation, migration, cultural distortion, elite involvement, and displacement. His historical figures represent Frantz Fanon's neocolonial trauma-related psychological issues of identity fragmentation, alienation, and cultural dislocation (Fanon, 1961). Recent scholarship suggests that neocoloniality is no longer geographical but driven by epistemic dominance and global capitalist systems (Hassan et al., 2025), which aligns with Ghosh's depiction of postcolonial societies.



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Ghosh's works, such as *The Glass Palace* (2002), *The Shadow Lines* (1988), and *The Hungry Tide* (2004), show how native elites maintain imperial ideals and create layered power systems. This supports Fanon's indictment of the national bourgeoisie, who inherit and maintain imperial rule (Fanon, 1963).

Thus, this study examines Ghosh's writings as literary manifestations of neocolonial continuity, revealing colonial dynamics and reclaiming hidden narratives. Ghosh tells stories about neocolonialism to document historical injustice and promote psychological decolonisation and cultural revival.

1.1 Significance of the Study

This research focuses postcolonial attention from colonialism's overt atrocities to neocolonial power's covert but ubiquitous activities in modern society. The study links literary discourse and political psychology by analysing Amitav Ghosh's works through Fanonian theoretical views, emphasising how psychological trauma, identity disintegration, and cultural displacement endure after independence. It shows that neocolonialism now includes economic dependency, environmental exploitation, and intellectual supremacy by global capitalist structures, contributing to modern postcolonial studies. The research also shows how native elites typically act as agents of suppression, supporting Fanon's critique of the national bourgeoisie. Ghosh's writing recovers marginalised histories, questions Western epistemic dominance, and promotes cultural rebirth, making it a potent decolonial resistance tool. This is especially important in a globalised world where Western ideals drive economic and intellectual models. Thus, the study advances theoretical understanding of neocolonialism and promotes psychological decolonisation by returning to indigenous identity, cultural memory, and historical consciousness for true emancipation.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Postcolonial literature has evolved beyond political resistance to imperial rule to examine neocolonial systems beyond decolonisation. In keeping with this trend, Amitav Ghosh's works are known for their nuanced exploration of historical transitions, diasporic displacement, identity struggle, and post-independence power restructuring. Postcolonial writers “writing back to the empire” show the continuation of oppression after political autonomy, according to Bill Ashcroft (2002). Ghosh's *The Glass Palace*, *The Shadow Lines*, and *The Hungry Tide* revisit colonial experiences and show how imperial inequalities survive through economic, psychological, and socio-cultural mechanisms.

According to C. Chitra (2013), Ghosh's work depicts the internalisation of colonial values and the paradox of colonised people becoming colonisers. Fanon's “unstable identity” of historically colonised subjects reflects their oscillation between cultural authenticity and colonial assimilation. Suresh (2019) examines how forced migration and relocation cause psychological disintegration and existential rootlessness, key to neocolonial discourse. Ghosh's depiction of diasporic challenges aligns with modern memory and trauma studies that identify identity loss as a neocolonial sign (Hassan et al., 2025).

Nazia Hasan (2019) exposes environmental abuse and how colonial forces use natural resources to maintain economic dominance. Environmental control may be a modern type of neocolonial dominance, according to imperial capitalism ideas. Mukherjee (2015) further notes that Ghosh's narrative focus on marginalised people as literary resistance reclaims suppressed history and challenges western portrayals.



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Usha and Ratnaker (2014) analyse the emotional and social effects of patriarchal and colonial institutions on women's identities from a psycho-feminist perspective, highlighting structural power. Their analysis supports Fanon's claim that psychological liberation is essential to emancipation. The literature emphasises colonial pain, identity displacement, and socio-economic manipulation, but this study tackles Ghosh's systematic narrative projection of neocolonial ideology, a vital gap.

Thus, this work goes beyond postcolonial critique to examine how Amitav Ghosh's narrative tactics recreate historical awareness, question elite complicity, and fight neocolonial normalisation. It uses Fanon's theoretical paradigms to reframe literary analysis and create a new framework—narrativizing neocoloniality—to decipher Ghosh's fiction's subtle postcolonial repression.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The critical study of colonialism and neocolonialism in Frantz Fanon's landmark writings *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) and *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) underpins this research. Imperial authority, according to Fanon, becomes indirect tyranny through economic dependency, intellectual dominance, psychological enslavement, and cultural absorption after political freedom. He believes former colonial powers maintain influence by influencing state structures, using native elites as intermediaries to continue imperial rule. Amitav Ghosh's characters, especially Rajkumar and Saya John, share Fanon's idea of the national bourgeoisie, who consolidate power for self-interest and maintain colonial hierarchies.

Marxist Fanon sees economic manipulation as the main cause of neocolonialism, as postcolonial nations depend on foreign finance, commerce, and military backing. In *The Glass Palace*, local entrepreneurial elites use imperial economic infrastructures to reinforce dependency and systemic inequity. According to Fanon (1963), the bourgeoisie of newly independent countries perpetuates social hierarchies through colonial structures.

Fanon's psychology helps explain identity loss, cultural displacement, and trauma. *Black Skin, White Masks* examines how colonised people internalise inferiority and imitate the coloniser for recognition. Rajkumar, played by Ghosh, adopts colonial characteristics yet is always excluded, illustrating Fanon's culturally displaced subject. Fanon recognises colonial disruption's traumatic displacement and psychological disintegration in King Thebaw's forced exile.

Fanon stresses that true emancipation demands “mental decolonization” not just political independence. Ghosh's narrative tactics actively restore suppressed historical viewpoints and challenge western epistemic dominance. In 2025, research shows that cultural imperialism, media influence, and ideological penetration fuel neocolonial oppression (Hassan et al., 2025), emphasising literary resistance in postcolonial discourse.

Thus, Fanonian critique of neocolonial power structures (economic, psychological, and socio-political) and Ghosh's narrative resistance are used to decolonise literature. This paradigm lets the study go beyond postcolonial analysis to examine how literature reflects and resists the subtle continuance of colonial authority in global dynamics.



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4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Literary analysis underpins this qualitative and interpretive study. Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace* (2002), *The Shadow Lines* (1988), and *The Hungry Tide* (2004) are examined utilising close reading to examine how narrative aspects express neocolonial processes. The study places literary representations in socio-historical and theoretical frameworks through textual interpretation, character evaluation, thematic tracing, and contextual mapping.

Frantz Fanon's theories on neocolonialism, identity disintegration, and psychological trauma are the main framework, while postcolonial literary criticism and cultural memory studies are minor. Ghosh's storytelling tactics are linked to colonial change and post-independence political institutions via intertextual analysis. Fanonian ideas like native bourgeoisie, existential exile, and cultural alienation are aligned with Ghosh's books to uncover covert neocolonial mechanisms using theoretical triangulation.

Primary (Ghosh's literary works) and secondary (scholarly papers, critical essays, journal publications, and theoretical writings) sources provide data. To identify neocolonial narrative critique scholarly gaps, Ashcroft, Chittra, Mukherjee, Hasan, Miller, and Usha (2014) peer-reviewed works are examined. Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) and *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) are used throughout analysis.

This study explores how Ghosh's narratives depict and criticise neocolonial institutions without hypothesis testing. Using phenomenological interpretation, characters' psychological experiences of neocolonial trauma and identity disorientation are examined. Ghosh's narrative settings are linked to real-world postcolonial contexts through contextual historical analysis, making the study literary and socio-politically relevant.

This strategy interprets Ghosh's literature as resistance and decolonial intervention. The approach shows how literature expresses colonial ideology in global frameworks by decoding narratives of economic exploitation, cultural displacement, and elite complicity.

5. 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.

5.1 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.



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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.

5.2 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.



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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

6. CONCLUSION

Amitav Ghosh's books demonstrate how systematic economic systems, elite complicity, environmental exploitation, and psychological trauma perpetuate colonial oppression, making them strong literary tools of resistance. Through Fanon's theoretical lens, Ghosh's narratives show the invisible continuity of imperial authority, showing that the true struggle for independence continued into capitalist intrusion, cultural erasure, and identity manipulation.

Rajkumar exemplifies Fanon's thesis that postcolonial bourgeoisie replace colonial masters while exploitation. King Thebaw's forced exile represents psychological relocation, while Dolly's disengagement represents gendered identity breakdown under neocolonial pressure. Ghosh uses storytelling to challenge western myths and promote decolonial awakening by documenting colonial history and reclaiming suppressed voices.

Research shows that actual freedom needs psychological decolonisation, cultural authenticity, and rejection of colonial frameworks. Ghosh, like Fanon, believes freedom must come from the once colonized's thought, history, and identity, not political sovereignty.

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