



# "Centering The Margins": A Postcolonial Study" in the Selected Novels of Amitav Gosh

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## Abstract

**"The seeds of colonisation have sprouted so deep in the bright soul,  
And the intensity of glow has blinded humanity as whole".**

The emergence of postcolonial literature has contributed a critical role in redesigning literary landscapes and outlooks. "Centering Margins: A Postcolonial Study" explores into the intricacies of this literary genre, targeting to shed light on the voices that have long been marginalized and overshadowed.

The colonial period, spanning centuries, has left permanent imprints on customs, cultures, the social orders, and literatures across the world. The dominance of colonial powers give rise to the suppression and subjugation of colonized peoples, leading to cultural erasure and loss of identity. Postcolonial literature emerged as a response to dominant imperial experiences and its aftermaths, seeking to retrieve narratives and voices that have been overshadowed.

This paper presents a critical examination of marginality and its centrality in the selected works of Amitav Ghosh's novels "Sea of Poppies," "River of Smoke," and "The Glass Palace." In these Novels Ghosh has employed intricate narratives that weave together the personal and the historical experiences, often shedding light on the lives of those on the edges of the grand accounts of imperial powers. Through a comprehensive examination of these three novels, this research paper explores how Ghosh fetches marginalized perspectives to the forefront, challenging central historical discourses and offering substitute ideas.

"Sea of Poppies," the first novel in the Ibis trilogy, is set against the milieu of the 19th-century opium trade between India and China. "River of Smoke," the second Novel, describes the aftermath of the opium suppression in Canton and the lives exaggerated by these events. "The Glass Palace" covers over a century and touches the colonial and post-colonial histories of Burma, India, and Malaysia through various characters who experience the shifting regimes of power, identity, and belonging.

In these novels, Ghosh employs a varied cast of characters—sailors, slaves, traders, soldiers, and orphans—whose stories are often put aside in official historical descriptions. The paper highlights how Ghosh's narrative

approaches, such as polyphony, multilingualism, and a focus on the socio-cultural aspects of marginalization, serve to center these marginal figures. The characters' voyages across seas and borders symbolize their search for individuality and place in a fast-shifting world.

The paper contends that Ghosh's work is crucial in understanding the intricacies of diaspora, displacement, cross culture and intermixing. By centering the margins, Ghosh not only gives voice to the voiceless but also renovates an additional comprehensive and subtle historical account that admits the interrelation of human experiences across time and space. The study concludes that Ghosh's novels offer a noteworthy contribution to postcolonial literature by redefining the relationship between center and margin and by emphasizing the resilience and agency of those who inhabit the gaps of history and culture.

**Keywords:** Amitav Ghosh, colonialism, postcolonial literature, "Sea of Poppies," "River of Smoke," "Flood of Fire," "Glass Palace" Crises, Imperial, Subjugation, Dominant and Dominance, identity, Colonizer, Colonization, marginalized voices, indentured labour

## 1. Introduction:

The impact of colonialism is so vast that more than one-third of the societies living in the world today have had their lives influenced by the experience of colonization. It is not so difficult to find how significant this has been in the political and economic domains, but its general influence on the lives of contemporary common inhabitants is often less evident. Literature extends one of the most imperative means in which these new insights are voiced and it is in their writing and on other side arts such as painting, monuments, music, cravings, and dance that the everyday realities practiced by colonized peoples have been strongly encoded and so extremely dominant. Ghosh has given the vent for the expression of untold miseries that were prominent in most imperial cases. The power of presenting different incidents and connecting them with real history facts is really a perfect tool employed by Amitav Ghosh in his Novels.

The Medium of Expressions in Ghosh's Ibis trilogy consists of three novels namely Sea of Poppies, River of Smoke and Flood of Fire. All these three novels are stunningly portraying specific historic events like opium war and trade as settings. Ghosh has employed a perfect plot and narrative technique, which is most relevant and connected throughout the proceedings. Ghosh portrayed a fictional ship named "Ibis" as a means of culture in which folks from different nations, cultures and Castes were enforced to amalgamate with each other, unfamiliar almost their upcoming purpose.

Ghosh also has given vent to the expressions of women by familiarizing certain influential characters like Deeti and Paulettie Lambart, thus constructing a sense of individuality for women secessions. Paulettie though being a white woman was curbed by her step father Burnham, but she devastated all the fetters and entered into the ship called Redruth, which is on its voyage to Botanical expedition. Ghosh as an eminent novelist concedes about the position of women in each and every phase of the society. The subjugation enforced on women by both patriarchal system and colonial power, disappears her identity which is expressed beautifully and effectively by Gosh. The woman as a figure of pleasure is crumpled amongst the male-dominated class and imperial power. Gosh voiced how the woman sandwiched between the tactics made by both sides and claims that she is lost as a third-world woman in the perceptions of tradition and transformation. An examination concerning post-colonialism exposes this notion that imperial control and patriarchy styled the women sidelined. Postcolonial women are subjugated and plagued so that they do not have the power of determination by themselves.

This work examines the selected Fictional works of Amitav Ghosh that has evolved out of their close observation in subaltern historical practice and that perfectly links the gap between these marginalized communities by exploring their life, political setup, issues of caste, race, culture, indentured labor and colonialism. Gosh has focused on many consequences by which the marginalized communities came under power. The beauty of his works lays in the fact that show the mental constructions of the marginalized communities and their weakness which made it possible to come under suppression and struggle. The facts are connected through the political setup of marginalized to the close reach of individual levels. Here the narratives are used in the form of individuals who present the whole environment of the subjugation by means of brute forces. Through their narratives, the voice of unvoiced is told in such a perfectly portrayed art that links with the real facts of history and political situations during the colonial rule. The works of Amitav Ghosh and has also shown the weaknesses of the marginalized people which gave a green signal to colonial power. So that the western was able to rule. The works of the writer not only depict the sufferings of oriental races but also the marginalized community of European natives. How their lives got affected by the imperial power. The works also present how the common people like technicians, teachers and priests from Europe were persuaded to migrate to third world countries (Asia and Africa) to change the demography and get assistance to establish their power in their political and industrial sector.

Amitav Ghosh is perfectly concerned with the same themes like revisiting history, problem of displacement and identity crisis. Ghosh is one of the prominent writers who belong to post-colonial era. He was born to an Indian middle-class family on 11 July 1956, in Kolkata. In 1986, he published his first book *The Circle of Reason*.

Amitav has written several books such as *The Shadow Lines* (1988), *In an Antique Land*, (1992), *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1995), *Dancing in Cambodia* (1998), *Countdown* (1999), *The Glass Palace* (2000), *The Imam and the Indian* (2002), *The Hungry Tide* (2005), *Sea of Poppies* (2008), *River of Smoke* (2011) and *Flood of Fire* (2105). Amitav Ghosh won several literary awards, for the book *The Circle of Reason*. He has received the Sahitya Akademi Award and the Ananda Puraskar for *The Shadow Lines* and *Hutch Crossword Book*

Award for The Hungry Tide. He was awarded the PadmaShri by Indian government in 2007. He received Crossword Book Award for his book Sea of Poppies in 2009 and was also shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize.

## A. Research Objectives

The objectives of centering margins in the works of Novels of Amitav Ghosh can include the following:

1. To examine the representation of marginalized societies and characters in the novels of Amitav Ghosh.
2. To research the narrative techniques and storytelling strategies used by Ghosh to convey subjugations of marginalized individuals to the forefront.
3. To examine the juncture of historical setting, colonial legacies, and the agency of marginalized voices in the novels.
4. To recognize how Ghosh's works challenge conventional Eurocentric literary standard by promoting the voices and sufferings of the marginalized.
5. To investigate the broader implications of centering margins in literature and its role in fostering diverse and inclusive narratives.
6. To critically engage with the themes of imperial power, cultural shifts, and revolts as depicted in Ghosh's novels.
7. To evaluate the impressions of centering margins on the readers' understanding of historical events, globalization, and the intricacies of identity and depiction.

### 2.1 Research Problem Statement

To examine and inspect the representation of marginalized communities and individuals within the context of colonial history and globalization in Amitav Ghosh's novels "Sea of Poppies," "River of Smoke," and "Glass Palace."

This paper aims to explore the incidents in which Ghosh depicts the lives, struggles, and agency of marginalized groups and individuals, including laborers, migrants, indigenous communities, and those exaggerated by social and economic inequalities. By probing these marginalized voices, the study seeks to put light on the junctures of identity, power, and resistance in the historical narratives depicted in Ghosh's novels.

### 2.2 Themes of Centering Margins in Ghosh's Works

Ghosh's work brims with themes that reflect the postcolonial narrative of centering margins. His novels often delve into the complexities of colonial history, the clash of cultures, and the impact of globalization on marginalized communities. "The Shadow Lines," for instance, examines the partition of India and Bangladesh, illustrating how historical events revolve through generations and how marginalized identities emerge from the shadows of history.

The story of Kalua in "Sea of Poppies" is also remarkable in this continuation. Kalua was crushed extremely on the ship by the Indians for getting married and pampering a high caste woman. This episode can easily be cited against imperialism that destabilizes the British proclaim of social reformation in India. In Sea of Poppies, there are several characters whose positions in the society keep shifted. King Neel and his family can

be stated here as once the center of authority and society turns as a marginalized on the ship. Deeti can also be quoted as once wife of high caste Hindu in the form of woman or became target by marrying Kalua.

Similarly, "The Sea of Poppies" delves into the history of the opium trade, shedding light on the exploitation of marginalized labourers and the interconnection of global trade networks. Ghosh's novels offer a fascinating portrayal of the lives and struggles of people who have been pushed to the margins by colonial powers and capitalist systems.

Amitav Ghosh in his novel **The Hungry Tide** deals with the theme of displacement of the tribal people. He deals with the issue of environmental concerns, how the flora and faunas have been marginalized by the humans by considering themselves as the superior beings. It is a novel which tries to represent the contemporary scenario of our nation that how politics plays an important role in determining the lives of marginalized people.

### 2.3 Representation of Marginalized Voices

At the heart of "Centering Margins" lies the depiction of marginalized victims that have long been omitted from conventional narratives. Ghosh's characters derived from diverse upbringings and speak from a range of experiences, donating a variety of cultural characters. By foregrounding these voices, Ghosh contests the dominant historical and literary narratives that have often obliterated or misinterpreted the privileged ones of marginalized communities.

In "**The Hungry Tide**," Ghosh represents the characters from the Sundarbans, a marginalized region in the Bay of Bengal. Through their stories, he explores the intricate relationship between humans and nature, and the struggles of those whose lives are entangled with the ever-shifting tide.

Environmental destruction has been a burning issue for the past few decades. The ego-centred attitude and rational thinking of man has created imbalance in the whole environment and its surroundings. The novels selected for this study highlight environmental concerns and highlight human actions, technological progress, and industrial development responsible for environmental degradation.

In addition to environmental degradation, a major issue of **The Glass Palace**, the novel also deals with themes such as war, migration, deportation, history and colonial exploitation. Focusing on the British invasion of Burma, Ghosh raises questions about the exploitation of nature by colonists and local people in the form of the teak and rubber trade and depicts the conflict between humans and the environment. He also portrays the exploitation of animals and killing of birds by humans for their personal needs. Similarly, Ghosh mainly focuses on the exploitation of natural resources in Burma for trade, Gosh attempt to portray the oppression of man by man, the environment by man, and reject man's cruelty to animals for his greed. They are conscious of the non-human "other" and speak for their equal rights and protections as humans themselves have.



## 2.4 Historical Revisionism and Decolonizing Knowledge

Ghosh's narratives embrace a form of historical revisionism, questioning the authority of colonial accounts and offering alternative perspectives on historical events. In doing so, he contests the Eurocentric favouritisms that have fashioned historical events and pursues to decolonize the archives of history.

## 2.5 Hybridity and Cultural Exchange

The concept of cultural hybridity is prominent in Ghosh's works. He explores how cultures intermingle and impact each other in the framework of colonization and globalization. His characters often navigate the complexities of identity and belonging in a world where cultural boundaries blur, nurturing a sense of cultural pluralism that resists homogenization.

## CONCLUSION

The culmination of our journey through the post-colonial landscapes of Amitav Ghosh's literary worlds brings us to a profound appreciation for the ways in which Ghosh has masterfully illuminated the complexities of human existence in the wake of colonialism. As we draw the curtain on this scholarly endeavour, we reflect on the pivotal themes and insights that have emerged throughout our exploration.

Our quest commenced with a critical examination of the theoretical and historical foundations of post-colonialism in this paper. In this foundational research, we endeavored to provide readers with a solid framework for understanding the socio-political contexts in which Ghosh's works are embedded. Post-colonial theory, as we learned, is not merely an intellectual construct but a lived experience, shaped by the historical trajectory of colonialism, imperialism, and the subsequent quest for self-identity and autonomy.

We recognized that the post-colonial perspective is not monolithic; it is multifaceted and dynamic, offering a rich tapestry of voices and perspectives. The study of post-colonial literature requires an appreciation for the heterogeneity of narratives and the diverse ways in which authors engage with the legacies of colonialism. In essence, post-colonialism provides a critical lens through which we can dissect and interpret the works of Ghosh allowing us to unearth the hidden nuances of their narratives.

The colonial era, which spanned several centuries, was marked by profound upheavals, both for the colonizers and the colonized. The imposition of foreign rule disrupted existing social, economic, and political structures in the colonized regions. Indigenous populations faced cultural assimilation, displacement, and often brutal suppression of their autonomy and rights. It was within this crucible of colonialism that the seeds of post-colonialism were sown.

Post-colonialism, as a theoretical framework, emerged as a response to the complex and enduring legacy of colonialism. It sought to critically examine and deconstruct the power dynamics, cultural impositions, and structural inequalities that colonial rule had perpetuated. Central to the post-colonial perspective is the

recognition that colonialism was not merely a historical event but an ongoing process that continued to shape the lives of people in the aftermath of formal decolonization.

As we bid adieu to the literary worlds of Ghosh, we are left with a profound appreciation for the transformative power of literature. Their novels are not mere stories but profound reflections of the human experience, compelling us to engage with the pressing issues of our time and actively contribute to the creation of a more just and equitable world. In their hands, literature becomes a catalyst for change, a force that encourages us to confront uncomfortable truths, bridge divides, and work collectively towards a brighter and more compassionate future.

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