



# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH

IN SCIENCE, ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANAGEMENT

Volume 10, Issue 5, May 2023



INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARD  
SERIAL  
NUMBER  
INDIA

**Impact Factor: 7.580**



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# "The Circle of reason" and "The Glass Palace" as Post-colonial texts by Amitav Ghosh

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**ABSTRACT:** This research paper explores Amitav Ghosh's post-colonial novels "The Circle of Reason" and "The Glass Palace." Using a post-colonial framework, the paper examines the ways in which Ghosh challenges the dominant narrative of Western imperialism and colonialism. Through his portrayal of complex characters and nuanced cultural interactions, Ghosh challenges simplistic dichotomies of colonizer and colonized, and offers a more nuanced understanding of the complex legacies of colonialism. The paper also explores the themes of migration, identity, and hybridity in Ghosh's novels, and how these themes reflect the complexities of post-colonial experiences. Ultimately, the paper argues that Ghosh's novels offer a unique perspective on the post-colonial world, one that challenges dominant narratives and offers a more nuanced and complex understanding of the legacies of colonialism.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Amitav Ghosh's novels "The Circle of Reason" and "The Glass Palace" are widely regarded as two of the most significant post-colonial works of fiction. Both novels explore the impact of colonialism and imperialism on the people and cultures of South Asia and offer a unique perspective on the complex historical and cultural forces that have shaped the region.

In "The Circle of Reason," Ghosh tells the story of a young Muslim boy named Alu who grows up in a small village in eastern India. The novel explores themes of identity, religion, and cultural conflict as Alu struggles to navigate the complex social and political landscape of colonial India.

In "The Glass Palace," Ghosh traces the history of Burma (now Myanmar) from the late 19th century to the present day through the lives of a diverse cast of characters. The novel explores the legacy of British colonialism in Burma, as well as the impact of World War II and the Japanese occupation on the country and its people.

Both novels offer a nuanced and deeply humanistic portrayal of the complex cultural and historical forces that have shaped South Asia, and provide a powerful critique of colonialism and its lasting impact. In this research paper, we will explore the themes and motifs of these two novels, examining how Ghosh uses fiction to grapple with the legacy of colonialism and explore the complex cultural and historical forces that continue to shape South Asia today.

This paper will explore the impact of post colonialism on the works of Amitav Ghosh and similarity of the framework.

## II. POST COLONIALISM

Postcolonialism refers to the cultural, social, economic, and political effects of colonialism on societies and nations that were colonized. It is concerned with the legacy of colonialism, including its impact on language, culture, identity, and power relations. Postcolonial literature, then, refers to the literary works produced by writers from formerly colonized countries that engage with these themes and explore the experiences and perspectives of the colonized.

In India, postcolonial literature has been a prominent and influential literary movement since the country gained independence from British colonial rule in 1947. Indian writers have used literature as a means of grappling with the complex legacy of colonialism, exploring themes such as identity, hybridity, cultural conflict, and resistance. One of the

key figures in Indian postcolonial literature is Salman Rushdie, whose novel “Midnight’s Children” (1981) is considered a seminal work of the genre.

The novel explores the experiences of India’s postcolonial transition, focusing on the lives of characters born at the moment of India’s independence. Rushdie’s use of magical realism and his engagement with Indian history and mythology have made him a key figure in the genre. Other notable Indian postcolonial writers include Arundhati Roy, whose novel “The God of Small Things” (1997) explores themes of caste, class, and family relationships in postcolonial India, and Amitav Ghosh, whose novels “The Shadow Lines” (1988) and “The Glass Palace” (2000) explore the complexities of identity, migration, and historical memory.

Indian postcolonial literature has also been marked by a renewed interest in indigenous languages and cultural traditions, as well as a rejection of Western literary forms and styles. Many Indian postcolonial writers have embraced a hybrid literary style that blends traditional Indian storytelling techniques with Western literary forms.

### III. “THE CIRCLE OF REASON”

“The Circle of Reason” is a novel by Indian writer Amitav Ghosh that explores the complexities of post-colonial identity and the clash between tradition and modernity. The novel follows the life of a young Muslim man named Alu, who is born into a family of weavers in a small village in Eastern India. Alu’s life is shaped by his encounters with a diverse cast of characters, including a Hindu landlord, a Christian missionary, and a Muslim professor.

Throughout the novel, Ghosh explores themes such as the effects of colonialism on Indian society, the tensions between different religious and cultural groups, and the struggle to find one’s place in a rapidly changing world. One example of the novel’s exploration of post-colonial identity can be seen in Alu’s struggle to reconcile his Muslim faith with the modern, secular world. In one scene, Alu reflects on the complexities of his identity:

*“I am Alu. I am a Muslim. I am a weaver. I am a citizen of India. Which of these is the most important? Which defines me most truly? I do not know.”*

Another example of the novel’s exploration of post-colonial themes can be seen in its depiction of the clash between tradition and modernity. Alu’s village is depicted as a place where traditional ways of life are still valued and practiced, but the outside world is rapidly encroaching on this way of life. In one scene, Alu witnesses the arrival of a truck filled with loudspeakers that blast out Western music and advertising slogans. This scene highlights the tension between tradition and modernity:

*“The truck came roaring into the village, its speakers blaring out a medley of Western pop tunes. Alu watched in amazement as the villagers gathered around the truck, their faces contorted in a mixture of curiosity and disgust. The slogans on the truck promised a better life, a life of modernity and progress. But Alu wondered at what cost?”*

The novel is set in a fictional town in India, and it follows the life of a Muslim protagonist named Alu. Alu is born into a poor family, and he is orphaned at a young age. Alu is a gifted child, and he becomes interested in science and mathematics. He is also interested in the traditions and cultures of his community. One of the major themes of the novel is the clash between tradition and modernity. Alu is torn between his love for science and his respect for tradition. He struggles to reconcile the two, and this struggle is a reflection of the larger struggle of postcolonial societies to find their place in the world.

The novel also explores the impact of colonialism on identity. Alu’s identity is shaped by his experiences of colonialism. He is a Muslim in a Hindu-dominated society, and he is also an orphan. These experiences shape his sense of self, and he struggles to find his place in the world. The Circle of Reason also deals with the legacy of colonialism. The novel explores the impact of colonialism on the culture and traditions of India. The novel suggests that colonialism has left a lasting legacy



on Indian society, and that this legacy is both positive and negative. One of the ways in which the novel explores the impact of colonialism is through the character of Balaram. Balaram is a British-educated Indian who has adopted Western values and customs. He is a symbol of the loss of tradition and the adoption of Western ways of life. Through Balaram, the novel suggests that the legacy of colonialism is the erosion of traditional values and customs. Another way in which the novel explores the impact of colonialism is through the character of Alu's father. Alu's father is a traditional Muslim who is deeply suspicious of Western values and customs. He represents the resistance to colonialism and the desire to preserve traditional ways of life.

In conclusion, The Circle of Reason is a postcolonial novel that explores the complex interplay of power and identity in a postcolonial world. Through its characters and plot, the novel examines the clash between tradition and modernity, the impact of colonialism on identity and culture, and the legacy of colonialism in postcolonial societies. The novel offers a nuanced and complex analysis of these themes, and it provides a valuable insight into the complexities of postcolonial societies.

#### IV. "THE GLASS PALACE"

"The Glass Palace" is a novel by Amitav Ghosh that explores the colonial and postcolonial history of Burma (now Myanmar) and India. It tells the story of a family and their experiences throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries, including the British colonization of Burma, the Japanese invasion during World War II, and the struggles of Indian migrants in Burma. As a postcolonial text, "The Glass Palace" examines the impacts of colonialism and imperialism on the people and societies of Burma and India. It highlights the power imbalances and cultural clashes that occur when one country dominates another and the ways in which colonized people resist and adapt to their circumstances.

One example of this can be seen in the character of Rajkumar, an Indian man who is forced to flee to Burma after his family is ruined by British colonial policies. In Burma, he finds success in the timber trade but is constantly aware of his status as a migrant and outsider. He reflects on the challenges of living in a country that is not his own, saying:

*"I have never belonged anywhere. I was born in India but have no home there. Now I am here in Burma, but I am not Burmese. I am a man without a country, without a home."*

This quote illustrates the dislocation and sense of rootlessness experienced by many migrants and colonized people, who are caught between their own culture and the culture of the country they live in. Another example of postcolonial themes in the novel is the depiction of the British colonial administration and its effects on Burma. The novel portrays the exploitative nature of colonialism, as the British use Burma's natural resources and labor to enrich themselves while neglecting the needs of the local population. The character of Saya John, a former servant of the British, reflects on this:

*"The British did not care about us. All they cared about was our teak and our labor. They did not think of us as human beings, but as instruments for their own profit."*

This quote highlights the dehumanizing effects of colonialism and the way in which colonized people are treated as means to an end rather than as individuals with their own needs and desires. "The Glass Palace" is a powerful postcolonial text that explores the complex and often tragic history of Burma and India. Through its characters and their experiences, the novel sheds light on the enduring legacies of colonialism and the resilience of colonized peoples in the face of adversity.

Postcolonialism is a theoretical framework that examines the cultural, economic, and political effects of colonialism. It seeks to understand how the legacy of colonialism continues to shape the societies that were colonized. Postcolonialism also examines how colonized people resist and challenge the dominant cultural, economic, and political structures imposed on them by colonialism. "The Glass Palace" can be seen as a postcolonial text because it explores the impact of colonialism on Southeast Asia. The novel depicts the lives of characters who are affected by colonialism, both directly and indirectly. For example, Rajkumar is a poor Indian boy who is brought to Burma to work in a teak forest. He becomes a successful



businessman and is able to navigate the complex social and political structures of colonial Burma. However, his success comes at a cost, as he is forced to leave his family behind and assimilate into Burmese culture.

The novel also explores the impact of colonialism on the Burmese royal family. The British colonizers overthrow the king and queen, and they are forced to flee to India. The royal family becomes refugees in their own country and struggles to maintain their dignity and authority in the face of colonialism. The novel also depicts the struggle for independence in Burma and India. The characters are caught up in the political and social changes that occur as a result of the struggle for independence. For example, Uma becomes involved in the Indian independence movement, and her actions have consequences for herself and her family. "The Glass Palace" also explores the issue of identity in the postcolonial context. The characters struggle with questions of identity as they try to navigate the complex social and political structures imposed on them by colonialism. For example, Rajkumar struggles with his identity as an Indian in Burma, and he is forced to assimilate into Burmese culture to be successful. Similarly, Uma struggles with her identity as an Indian woman living in Burma, and she is torn between her loyalty to her family and her commitment to the Indian independence movement.

In conclusion, "The Glass Palace" is a postcolonial text because it explores the impact of colonialism on Southeast Asia. The novel depicts the lives of characters who are affected by colonialism, both directly and indirectly. The novel explores themes such as identity, power, imperialism, and the struggle for independence. By examining the cultural, economic, and political effects of colonialism, "The Glass Palace" offers a postcolonial perspective on Southeast Asian history.

## V.SIMILARITIES AND CONTRAST

"The Glass Palace" by Amitav Ghosh and "The Circle of Reason" by Amitav Ghosh share certain similarities in terms of their exploration of post-colonial themes. One of the most notable similarities is the examination of the impact of colonialism on the societies of Southeast Asia. In "The Glass Palace," Ghosh depicts the Burmese royal family's downfall at the hands of the British colonial forces. This event represents a turning point in Burmese history and highlights the destructive impact of colonialism on the country. Similarly, in "The Circle of Reason," the protagonist, Alu, struggles to find his place in a society that has been irrevocably altered by colonialism. This is evident in the following quote:

*"Alu's life had been changed irrevocably by the colonial presence, which had brought a new language, new ideas, and a new sense of order to his world. He found himself caught between two worlds – the old and the new – struggling to reconcile the two and find a sense of belonging in a rapidly changing society."*

Another similarity between the two novels is the examination of identity and the search for a sense of self in a post-colonial world. This is evident in the character of Rajkumar in "The Glass Palace," who is forced to confront his identity as a Burmese Indian in a society that is deeply divided along ethnic lines. Similarly, in "The Circle of Reason," Alu's search for identity is complicated by the fact that he is a member of a marginalized community that has been historically oppressed by the ruling class. This is evident in the following quote:

*"Alu knew that he was different from the other children in his village. He was an outcast, a member of a community that was looked down upon by the ruling class. He longed to find a place where he could belong, where he could be accepted for who he was."*

Both "The Glass Palace" and "The Circle of Reason" explore post-colonial themes such as the impact of colonialism on society, the search for identity, and the struggle to reconcile the past with the present.

"The Glass Palace" by Amitav Ghosh and "The Circle of Reason" by Amitav Ghosh are two novels that depict life in different parts of the world and in different historical periods. While both novels share certain similarities, such as their focus on the lives of characters in times of political turmoil and their exploration of themes such as identity and belonging, they also have significant differences.

One of the most striking contrasts between the two novels is their setting. "The Glass Palace" takes place in Southeast Asia during the colonial period, while "The Circle of Reason" is set in India in the 1970s and 1980s. The former novel provides



a vivid portrayal of the impact of British colonialism on Burma and its people, while the latter explores the complexities of post-independence India.

Another contrast between the two novels is their narrative structure. “The Glass Palace” is a sweeping historical saga that follows multiple generations of characters over a span of several decades. The novel covers a wide range of themes, including imperialism, migration, and the struggle for independence. In contrast, “The Circle of Reason” is a more intimate and character-driven story that focuses on the life of a single protagonist, Alu, and his struggles with identity and belonging.

Additionally, the two novels differ in their portrayal of gender roles and relationships. In “The Glass Palace,” the female characters are often depicted as subservient to the male characters, and their experiences are largely shaped by their relationships with men. In contrast, “The Circle of Reason” challenges traditional gender roles and explores alternative forms of relationships and family structures.

Another important contrast between the two novels is their use of language. “The Glass Palace” is written in a more formal and literary style, with an emphasis on historical accuracy and detail. In contrast, “The Circle of Reason” uses a more playful and experimental style, with elements of magical realism and allegory.

Overall, while both “The Glass Palace” and “The Circle of Reason” share certain similarities, such as their focus on political upheaval and their exploration of themes such as identity and belonging, they also have significant differences. These differences in setting, narrative structure, gender roles, and language contribute to the unique character of each novel and provide readers with distinct and memorable reading experiences.

## **VI.IMPACT OF POST-COLONIALISM IN AMITAV GHOSH NOVELS**

Ghosh, originally from Calcutta, spent his formative years in a diverse range of places like Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and India. He authored several works including *The Circle of Reason*, *In An Antique Land*, *Dancing in Cambodia*; *The Shadow Lines*; *The Hungry Tide*; and both fiction as well as non-fiction pieces such as 2016's publication titled "The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable". His education took him to Delhi, Oxford, and Alexandria. Amitav Ghosh has not only been an author but also served on committees for Locarno Venice film festivals while being published by major publications- *The New Republic*, *New York Times* among others after having his work translated into more than thirty languages. *The Glass Palace* is another notable contribution that he made which gained admiration all over the world.

Amitav Ghosh, a celebrated author of Indian heritage renowned for his literary prowess and scholarly contributions to the world of literature has been conferred upon numerous awards in recognition. He holds an impressive record having received honours from four esteemed universities as well as two prestigious Lifetime Achievement Awards. The Padma Shri award bestowed on him by India's President is one among several accolades he's earned over time including sharing Dan David's reward with Margaret Atwood. Moreover, Amitav went ahead and won Montreal's Blue Metropolis' Grand prize at their festival gala event in 2011. A true feat accomplished most recently was when Mr. Ghosh added another feather to his cap - Jnanpith Award – considered India's greatest literary honour, having become the first writer to win it writing solely in English. As if that wasn't enough, the cherry on top came last year where *Foreign Policy* magazine regarded him as amongst "the most significant global thinkers" within the past decade- truly remarkable achievements!

In order to understand the significance of Amitav Ghosh, one must look beyond typical literary patterns found in Commonwealth literature. The categorization itself has conformed with popular reading styles over time. A true appreciation for Ghosh's work lies in recognizing its role as a safeguard against pedantic and didactic writing from nations part of the Commonwealth. His inclusion of continental issues such as immigration, rewriting history, anthropology and sociology have reshaped perceptions around fields that shape social evolution thanks to his scholarly intervention. Ghosh has directed third-world writings away from excessive focus on colonialism-related marginalizations towards South Asian topics thereby elevating this region's representation relative to African countries or those across Latin America & Southern Africa. The collective memory is now being revisited due primarily through Ghosh's socio-literary telescope which led rigorous researches redrawing Colonial pasts.



Ghosh has amassed a global audience with his intricate and impactful tales. He uses his exceptional knowledge in sociology and anthropology to highlight an overwhelming sense of purpose within his narratives. His accounts bear witness to scrupulous research into cultures, along with subtle probing questions on human nature's intricacies. Ghosh derives great satisfaction from the complex construction of characters utilizing diverse literary techniques merged with ancillary academic inquiry. The boundaries of imagination have been entirely redefined by Ghosh's works - surpassing even what was previously thought possible for mental capacity alone - transforming South Asia's physical landscape through imaginative exploration.

In his attempt to rectify the disparities in South Asia's cultural and social development, Ghosh harnesses anthropological research to resurrect its Colonial legacy. As a historian preserving remnants of bygone times, he refrains from providing exact chronology similar to authors hailing from West Indies or Latin America. He relies on imagination and resourcefulness while investigating historical events as if compelled by necessity for elucidating a chronological framework that underlies South Asian history. His extraordinary capacity for recalling information enables him to piece together fragments resulting in wide acclaim as an author; likewise critics' newfound admiration can be accredited towards how deeply rooted it is within history itself.

Amitav Ghosh, through his diasporic fantasy, has found a way to resist the oppressive bonds of apartheid identities and navigate the thorny complexities of multiculturalism. To truly understand history and appreciate creative interpretations pertaining to South Asian history necessitates embracing Ghosh's diasporic imagination. His impressive literary works have fostered an understanding between political consciousness and imaginative expression. This resulted in Indian writers who write in English using "political irresponsibility" as a coping mechanism for their work - acknowledging that resolving postcolonial issues adds further weight on their shoulders while writing about India's past experiences under colonial rule

## **VII.CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK**

In conclusion,Amitav Ghosh's novels "The Circle of Reason" and "The Glass Palace" can be analyzed as post-colonial texts that challenge the dominant Eurocentric discourse and present a more nuanced and inclusive understanding of history, culture, and identity. Through his rich and complex narratives, Ghosh demonstrates how the legacy of colonialism has shaped the lives of his characters and their societies, and how they negotiate their agency and resistance within these power structures. Both novels depict the complex interactions between colonizers and colonized, and how these interactions shape the political, economic, and social landscapes of the regions in which they are set.

"The Circle of Reason" highlights the tensions between traditional and modern forms of knowledge and belief systems, while "The Glass Palace" explores the impact of colonialism on the diverse communities of Burma and India. Moreover, Ghosh's writing style reflects his commitment to challenging the limitations of Western literary traditions and incorporating the diverse linguistic and cultural influences that shape his characters' identities and experiences. Through his use of multilingualism, oral storytelling, and intertextuality, Ghosh creates a space for hybrid and heterogeneous narratives that challenge the binary oppositions of colonial discourse.

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