Amitav Ghosh was born in 1956 in Calcutta. He was educated at the Doon School, and graduated from St. Stephen’s College, Delhi. He got Ph. D. in Social Anthropology at the Oxford University. He has been a Visiting Fellow at the Centre for Social Sciences, at Trivandrum, Kerala (1982-83), a Visiting Professor of Anthropology at the University of Virginia (1988), the University of Pennsylvania (1989), the American University in Cairo (1994), and Columbia University (1994-97), and Distinguished Professor of Comparative Literature at Queens College of City University of New York (1999-2003). In the spring of 2004, Ghosh was a Visiting Professor in the Department of English at Harvard University. In 1999, he joined Queen’s College in the City University of New York as Distinguished Professor in Comparative Literature. His novels are The Circle of Reason (1986), The Shadow Lines (1990), The Calcutta Chromosome (1995), The Glass Palace (2000), The Hungry Tide (2004), The Sea of Poppies (2008) The River of Smoke (2011) and the Flood of Fire (2015). Amitav Ghosh himself categorizes his In an Antique Land (1992) as biography. He has also written three anthologies The Imam and the Indian (a large collection of essays on different themes such as fundamentalism, history of the novel, Egyptian culture and literature) and Dancing in Cambodia, At Large in Burma and Incendiary Circumstances. He has also written a large number of essays. His most recent book is The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable (2016), which is an analysis of the era of climate change. Tabish Khair appreciates this book as a movement “from hidden human voices to the many, and even more obscured (but by no means powerless) non-human voices that echo us when we speak” (Khair: 4). According to him
in this book, “climate change is not viewed just as a crisis of ‘nature’, but also as “a crisis of culture, and thus of the imagination” (Khair: 4).

He got so many national and international awards for his fiction and nonfiction. For his The Glass Palace he got Myanmar National Literature Award in 2012, Tagore Literature Award, from Sahitya Akademi for Sea of Poppies in 2012. His River of Smoke was shortlisted for Man Booker Asian Prize in 2012. He got Blue Metropolis International Literary Grand Prix in 2011, Doctorate, Honoris Causa, Sorbonne in 2010, Dan David Prize 2010. The jury that conferred one million-dollar Dan David Prize praised his work by stating that “Ghosh’s work provides a transnational understanding of the self, seen as the interaction of the many identities produced by the collision of languages and cultures; displacement and exile--lives torn between India, Burma, England, and elsewhere; families torn by the violence and psychological turmoil of colonial rule and postcolonial dispossession; a globe wrecked by two world wars and their ancillary bloodshed” (Swarup:13).

His The Sea of Poppies won India plaza Golden Quill Award for best novel in 2009, Crossword Book Award, for best novel of the year in 2009 and shortlisted for Man Booker Prize, 2008. He was awarded the Padma Shri by the Government of India in 2007. His The Hungry Tide was finalist for Kiriyama Prize, San Francisco in 2006 and won Crossword Book Award, for best novel of the year in 2005. He got Frankfurt eBook Award The Glass Palace in 2001, The Arthur C. Clark Award for The Calcutta Chromosome in 1996 and The Prix Medicis Étrangère, for The Circle of Reason in 1990. All these awards and critical responses Amitav Ghosh got from around the world established him as one of the most significant Indian writers of his generation. Much critical attention has been paid to his
fiction in India and abroad. His major novels are translated into a number of languages that has helped him to reach a wider readership.

Ghosh has developed a substantial body of work that resonates with some of the central concerns of postcolonial theory. In his works, he concentrates on a core set of issues however, each time he explores them from a new perspective. Ghosh has disowned the idea that his work is a representative example of postcolonialism, or that he is a post-colonial writer. Despite his denial to subscribe to any of the categories, his interest in the issues related to “language, textuality, and discourse, and the ways in which human perception, comprehension, and experience is invariably shaped and, to varying degrees, determined by them” (Mondal: 20) indicates his conscious or unconscious inclination toward postmodernism and postcolonialism, and attracts contemporary scholarship towards his works that establishes him as a major writer. In his fiction, he deals with the ambivalent relationship of the Third World with modernity, the construction and reconstruction of identities in colonial and post-colonial societies. He also concentrates on the question of agency for those formerly seen as the objects but not subjects of history; the recovery of lost or suppressed histories; a rendezvous with cultural diversity and difference; and an insistent critique of Eurocentrism in general.

Amitav Ghosh belongs to a new breed of novelist that has changed the mode of representing Orient as Rukmini Bhaya Nair says, “the crucial change to have come about in the past decade or two is that ‘the Orient’ is now increasingly represented not so much by a Paul Scott or a Pearl S. Buck as by best-selling writers like Jung Chang or Vikram Seth speaking in their ‘own’ voices” (Nair: 170). Rukmini Bhaya Nair quotes Gayatri Chakravorti Spivak who propounds that the Indian novelist writing in English though
“mimics the partitioned subject of imperialism once more—both inside and outside the neo-colonial ‘machine’—but this time round he holds textual power” (Nair: 172). This power is evident in the way they break the myths created by the Euro-American thinkers and critics about the so called Third World Literature as Fredric Jameson says, “All third-world texts are necessarily, I want to argue, allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as what I will call national allegories, even when, or perhaps I should say, particularly when their forms develop out of predominantly western machineries of representation, such as the novel” (Jameson: 69). Amitav Ghosh answers these thinkers in an Interview by pointing out that writers in Europe and America are equally obsessed with the idea of nation in their novels. He says:

In fact, it is precisely the First World novel that is most commonly about nations and nation building. Consider for instance, the peculiar obsession with ‘Englishness’ that runs through so much of nineteenth and twentieth – century British writing. This is even more strikingly evident in the US today, where nothing seems to be of interest unless it is American (‘the American family’) or has ‘America’ or ‘American’ in its title (witness such phenomena as American Beauty, Riding in Cars in America etc.) (emphasis in the original) (Hawley: 10).

This statement by Ghosh shows that contemporary Indian writers holds textual power and indicates new political location of all Indian writers or rather Third World writers in general and Amitav Ghosh in particular. However, he is against looking at political dimension of literature. In one of his Interviews, he criticizes thinkers’ who look at writing as a political act when he says:
I hear a lot of writers say that writing is all political. I think they’re really misusing the word “political.” I think what they really mean to say is that writing is fundamentally ethical. And it’s something that writers feel discomfort with because they don’t want to think of themselves as being moralizers or this and that. But in fact that is really what it is. I mean a writer reflects continuously on ethics, on morality, the state of things in the world. Some do it by, as it were, reflecting on the immoral [laughs]. Some do it by reflecting upon conscious ethics or conscious morality. But I think it’s really impossible for people to pretend that writing does not address issues of ethics . . . it does. It just constantly addresses the issue of “who are you,” “what is right conduct, what is wrong conduct.” I don’t mean to say that writing is necessarily prescriptive . . . I don’t think that is what it is at all—that would be much more like philosophy or something and I would not be drawn to that because I don’t think I’m in a position to be telling people what they should be doing, as a rule (Sankaran: 13).

When he says that literature cannot be analyzed as a political act, he adopts a position that looks at literature as divinely inspired so that the politics of caste, class and various types ingrained in the literature can be justified as naturalized entity. This thesis goes against the recommendation of Amitav Ghosh and looks at politics in literature and the role of literature in consolidating particular political structures and attitudes. In short, this project follows the idea that “the poetic and the political are inseparable” (Clifford: 2). In his novels instead of looking at what is right or wrong from social point of view he invents characters who are somewhat spiritual in nature, for instance Nirmal, the school
Headmaster, in *The Hungry Tide*, Jethamoshai in *The Shadow Lines*, Mangala in *The Calcutta Chromosome* and Baboo Nob Kissin Pander in the *Ibis Trilogy*. In most of his novels, he confuses the social issues with spiritualism. In the depiction of these characters, Amitav Ghosh confirms to the Orientalized version of Orient and projects Indian culture as merged in spirituality, which according to Eric Hobsbawm is an “invented tradition,” (Hobsbawm: 1) and Orientalist scholarship has much to do with it. The West associates India with superstition and irrationality and very ironically Ghosh tries to challenge this notion by glorifying superstition in the name of spiritualism for instance in *The Calcutta Chromosome* he shows that Ross’s research is remote controlled by a group of native technologists of interpersonal transmission, which allows them to enter new bodies. This image reverberates with Western stereotypes of the Hindu belief in reincarnation. He gives a great deal of space to the obscure group around Lutchman and Mangala involved in primordial cult including human sacrifices to a mother goddess and marginalizes the whole range of Indians working very close to nature and using the principles of natural science. Here he becomes an Orientalized Orient who marginalizes the people with scientific temperament and rational nature. Spivak uses the term “Postcolonial informant” for this kind of writer who “has rather little to say about the oppressed minorities in the decolonized nation as such [...]. Yet the aura of identification with those distant objects of oppression clings to those informants as [...] they identify with the other racial and ethnic minorities in metropolitan space (emphasis in the original) (Spivak: 360). Amitav Ghosh is inclined towards this position.

Most of the critics do not study Amitav Ghosh by following the lead provided by Spivak. For instance, Anshuman A. Mondal appreciates Ghosh for deconstructing the myth
of stable identity when he says, “For him, the question of ‘identity’ is always implicated in representations of the ‘self’ and of the world around it; identity does not stand alone nor is it derived from some inborn ‘essence’ within a given human being; rather, it is made or ‘fashioned’ by language and representation….Moreover, Ghosh’s texts also represent the correlative view that identity is therefore ‘unstable’ and fluid” (Mondal: 20-21). However, a close study of Ghosh’s novels reveals that despite his characters’ movement around the world they confirm to the Orientalized version of the Orient and their identities are not that fluid. For instance, he his glorification of Jagadish Chandra Bose’ experiment that turns out to be a fiction rather than science crystalizes Indian identity as per the notions propounded by the Orientalists. Instead of showing Indians capable of understanding principles of natural science he tries to ‘Indianize’ scientific rationality in India by identifying antecedents and equivalents in classical Hindu religious and philosophical texts that are texts about religious rituals and hence a source of irrationality and superstition. He confirms Orientalist depiction of Indians as irrational beings by interceding science with religion.

Ghosh’s work has received a lot of critical attention for instance, Tabish Khair’s long chapter on The Calcutta Chromosome in his Babu Fictions: Alienation in Contemporary Indian English Novels. Claire Chambers has written articles on The Circle of Reason and the relationship between science and pseudo-science and The Calcutta Chromosome as post-colonial science fiction. Most of the critical works produced on the novels of Amitav Ghosh are in the form of edited collections of essays on his novels for instance Meenakshi Dalal edited Amitav Ghosh: Critical Perspectives. G. A. Ghanshyam Devasree Chakravarti and Rakhi Nara edited Amitav Ghosh: A Traveller Across Time and
Space. There are some more edited books on Amitav Ghosh such as *The Fictional Craftsmanship of Amitav Ghosh* by Arvind M. Nawale and Nibedita Mukherjee, *The Novels of Amitav Ghosh: An Analytical Appraisal* by Vivekanand Jha, *History, Narrative, and Testimony in Amitav Ghosh’s Fiction* by Chitra Sankaran, Tabish Khair’s *Amitav Ghosh: A Critical Companion* and many others these edited books are a loose group of articles concentrating either on one novel or one aspect of Amitav Ghosh fiction. Along with these edited books there are some single author books that either deal with one aspect or one novel for instance, *Amitav Ghosh: A Critical Study* by B. K. Nagarajan, John C Hawley’s *Amitav Ghosh* Brinda Bose’s *Amitav Ghosh: Critical Perspectives* and *Amitav Ghosh: Contemporary World Writers* by Anshuman Mondal.

Some of his novels have received more critical attention than other novels in India and some others have received more attention outside India. *The Shadow Lines* has received a lot of critical response in India; many edited books concentrate only on this novel. In the Western circles, more work is done on *In an Antique Land* and *The Calcutta Chromosome*. Some aspects of his novels like postcolonialism, nationalism; transnationalism and diaspora are discussed more. Some aspects like feminism and gender in the novels of Amitav Ghosh are discussed only by a few. Rajeswari Sunder Rajan points out despite Ghosh’s inversion of the usual passive/active signifiers he associates himself with the passive male characters, who are evaluated positively, at the expense of the active female ones. Some Indian critics see his work as adopting a postmodern idealism that renounces the political responsibility to examine the material conditions of post-colonial experience. These critics direct their criticism towards *The Shadow Lines* for instance A.N. Kaul’s in his article “A Reading of *The Shadow Lines*” argues that the novel shows that the
shadow lines between nations are an illusion and there are no real lines and to him Ghosh seems to value only fluid romantic subjectivity expressed through the primacy of the imagination. Gauri Viswanathan in her article “Beyond Orientalism: Syncretism and the Politics of Knowledge” criticizes Ghosh’s adoption of syncretism.

Despite wide range of critical work on the works of Amitav Ghosh, the relationship between novels of Amitav Ghosh and the discourse of Orientalism is not explored by anyone. Orientalism is primarily a term used for the depiction of aspects of Eastern cultures in the West by creative writers through literary works. As a field of learned study, it came into being with the decision of the Church Council of Vienna in 1312 to establish a series of chairs in Arabic, Greek, Hebrew and Syriac at Paris, Oxford, Bologna, Avignon and Salamanca as pointed out by Edward Said in his Orientalism (1978). It encouraged many writers who took up the project of representing, imagining, and translating the Orient through textual codes and conventions. Orientalism was converted into a discipline; it started constructing the Orient in a closely controlled way through its own societies, periodicals, traditions, vocabulary and rhetoric.

Renaissance Orientalists like Erpenius, Anquetil-Duperron and Sir William Jones carried this specialization to new heights. To borrow Boehmer’s phrase “this textual take over of the Non-Western world” enabled the colonial forces to transform the Orient to suit their needs (Boehmer, 1995:19). During the Romantic era, Orient was viewed as a place of mystery. Later on the changing requirements of the Victorian era required the mysterious East to be transformed into something inferior and primitive so that West can project itself as superior and advanced. Their intention of mere advancement or extension of geopolitical influence was further refined by including in its scope the project of capturing
the mental landscape of Orientals through creation of its own epistemology, which was
implemented, with the help of political apparatus, military and educational system. Thomas
Babington Macaulay’s “Speech on the Government of India” (1833) proves this point of
view when he says:

The spectre may pass away from us. Unforeseen accident may derange our
most profound schemes of policy….But there are triumphs which are
followed by no reverse…. Those triumphs are the pacific triumphs of reason
over barbarism; that empire is the imperishable empire of our arts and our
morals, our literature and our laws (Stokes: 45).

By 1914, about 85% of the globe had come under the colonial rule. During this
time, Britain hosted frequent “imperial conferences” to counter the raising nationalism,
which were renamed as “Commonwealth Conferences” after the Second World War by the
colonial authority itself to appropriate the anti-colonial movements. A. Norman Jeffares,
while addressing the first Conference of Commonwealth Literature at the University of
ideas, new interpretations of life to us” (Jeffares, 1965: XIV). The statement hints at the
colonial attitude towards the Orient that renders it a playground for Western desires,
repressions investments and projections.

Postcolonial critics like Fanon, Said, Aime Cesaire, Albert Memmi, and O.
Mannoni, along with postmodern intellectuals such as Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin
and Hannah Arendt explored the connections between the intellectual production of the
colonial world and its growing global dominations. Their critique of empire, which
established that textual control can be fought by textuality alarmed the colonial authorities.
In the post-colonial period when most of the former colonies got political freedom the neocolonial forces adopted a new strategy of fabricating “its allies by proposing a share of the centre in a seemingly new way (not a rupture but a displacement): disciplinary support for the conviction of authentic marginality by the (aspiring) elite” (Spivak, 1993:57) so that it can emerge as the sole proprietors of both the neo-Orientalism as well as the anti-colonialism. Therefore, in reversal of Benjamin Disraeli’s statement that “East is a career” for the Western Orientalists, it has now become as Ray Chow points out “a career for the displaced Easterners” (Chow, 1993:13).

The Third World migrant intellectuals are converted into the carriers of the task, which was once started, by Erpenius, Guillaume Postel, Anquetil-Duperron, Sir William Jones etc. In this way as Arif Dirlik says postcolonial writers are caught in the contemporary Orientalism which “is designed to avoid making sense of the current crisis and, in the process, to cover up the origins of postcolonial intellectuals in a global capitalism of which they are not so much victims as beneficiaries” (Dirlik, 1994: 353). That is why despite the fact that migrant intellectuals from former colonies have been instrumental in making postcolonialism an academic discipline in Western Universities, especially in America, many critics of colonialism agree that it hardly deals with the contemporary needs of the countries with a history of colonialism, such as India; as its imperatives are set elsewhere. It is more subtle in its working as it deprives the oppressed of even the vocabulary of protest and rightful demand of protest against exploitation by taking up the burden of representing them that denies them the right of self-representation.

These displaced native intellectuals come from the colonized world, which was made to internalize the ideological procedures of the colonial mission through the
assimilation of English text that spread the colonialist imperatives within the unsuspecting native body. It rendered them human individuals, who as per Poststructuralist theory formulated by Gilles Deleuze in his *Anti-Oedipus* (1977), are not sovereign subjects with autonomous agency over their consciousness that is constructed discursively through shifting discourses of power, which endlessly speaks through them by situating them in particular positions and relations. Furthermore, the class, which has the means of material production at its disposal, has the control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that in consequence the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are, in general, subject to it. By controlling the material production directly or indirectly in nearly whole of the world, the First World also controls the mental production i.e. production, publication and popularization of literature and other discourses. The novels of Amitav Ghosh will be studied against the background of this theoretical framework that will help in positioning Orientalism in his fictional writings.

Despite a long list of critical works on Amitav Ghosh, none of the books or articles deals with the theme of positioning orientalism in his novels. This study will be first of its kind where a novelist who claims to speak on behalf of Oriental subaltern and who historicize the Oriental experience is going to be questioned from within. It will add a new dimension to the study and understanding of Amitav Ghosh’s fiction. This thesis’s contribution to the existing body of work on Amitav Ghosh, Orientalism, colonialism and neocolonialism is the development and use of the analogy between biological genes and linguistic structures, which is not directly discussed by any of the theorists. Application of this theoretical modal will establish the relationship between the project of Orientalism
started by the Europeans and the literary production by Indians in general and Amitav Ghosh in particular.

Chapter Two locates Amitav Ghosh in the discourse of Orientalism and Orientalism in the works of Amitav Ghosh. This chapter provides the framework to study the novels of Amitav Ghosh and questions his novels by foregrounding how socio-linguistic engineering made colonialism a continuous phenomenon without any break. That is why development of colonial discourses during colonial era and the establishment of postcolonial studies in the First World has a very close relationship.

Chapter Three shows when “reason” becomes religion it causes tragedies as it happens in Amitav Ghosh’s *The Circle of Reason*. Balaram’s obsession with phrenology and carbolic acid becomes a kind of religious ritual and leads him to tragic situations. The depiction of Balaram and Alu as representatives of India in particular and the Orient in general brings in the discourse of Orientalism in the picture. Here he misses the opportunity to depict the Oriental subject as rational being rather he confirms to the Orientalist idea of the Orient. This chapter examines Ghosh’s depiction of characters from India and al-Ghazira in the novel who lack the ability to respond accordingly. This novel’s location in Orientalist discourse and Orientalist discourse’s location in this novel is clear from the fact that a novel dealing with scientists like Pasture, Joliot-Curie, C. V. Raman, Meghnad Saha and some others is divided into sections- Satwa, Rajas and Tamas taken from Hindu scriptures-- the sources of pseudo-sciences similar to phrenology.

Chapter Four deals with *The Shadow Lines* and shows how the narrative of the novel confirms the idea of nation as “minoritarian phenomena that could be termed “nationalitarian,” through the incidents related to the life of Ila in London, Grandmother’s
idea of nationalism and murder of Tridib by a nationalist mob in Dhaka. Another major relationship foregrounded in this novel is between national land and the citizens. Ghosh in this novel questions the non-porous nature of national boundaries especially the ones in the psyche of people, to cross these borders is much more difficult as compared to political borders. Amitav Ghosh points at this textual attitude of the ruling elite in Orient through Tha’mma’s ideas of nationalism, which are more exclusive than inclusive. She, who is herself a refugee and wants to bring one of her relatives from Dhaka who will be a refugee in Calcutta, has utmost dislike for the lower caste refugees. She considers them cause of all problems and equates them with filth. Despite his achievement, in questioning nationalism Ghosh fails to transcend the upper caste religious nationalism because he diagnoses its cause in the nature of individual when the real cause lies in the historical construction of the consciousness of the Orient.

Chapter Five deals with the study of The Calcutta Chromosome and shows how Colonial powers in India either glorified or condemned all irrational and superstitious acts practised by some people here. The colonial powers through their project of rewriting the Orient on the one hand convinced the Orientals that they are devoid of any meaningful science and possess only ancient technologies; on the other hand, through their hold on the institutions of international importance they make them feel proud on these ancient technologies. This novel is a complex amalgamation of science, technology, mythology and philosophy.

Chapter Six through the study of The Glass Palace looks into the history of expansion of British colonialism with the help of Indian Army. Ghosh shows how the larger forces changed the world by making use of human beings as its tools. However, the author
does not apply this formula to upper class and upper caste Indian Diaspora in Europe and America and portray them as enlightened, nationalist and humane at the same time. He neglects the vital fact that those who seem to oppose it are also part of large capitalist machine. It also foregrounds that the Indian diaspora belonging to lower caste and lower class played an important part in pre-British period as well as during British period. Ghosh also takes up the case of poor Indians who migrated during British colonial period and helped the British capitalist ventures in the colonies.

Chapter Seven locates Amitav Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide* in colonial and neo-colonial machines and vice versa and finds that these are the major forces responsible for the emergence and canonization of Indian diaspora literature. Analysis of this location expands the scope to study the writers of Indian diaspora writers by including things from past to present, publishers, readers, critics, and many other elements. This chapter studies *The Hungry Tide* as a neo-colonial machine and looks at it as an extension of capitalist machine that emerged in Europe due to a particular configuration of linguistic genes. This chapter shows how Amitav Ghosh in this novel claims to voice the subaltern but avoids both colonial and caste dimensions of their pathetic situation. Colonial rule that empowered the upper castes by enclosing land in their favor on the one hand and transferring power to them at the time of independence was responsible for the eviction of untouchable migrants. When India became a nation state a large part of land and powers were enclosed with the state, which was largely owned by upper castes that is why when the upper caste Hindus migrated from Bangladesh and occupied vacant lands, their colonies were legalized immediately because they belonged to ruling castes.
Chapter Eight studies three novels together because the story, character and plot of these three novels are the same. The *Ibis Trilogy* by Amitav Ghosh is located in the years of 1838-1841. It shows how capitalist machines that emerged in Europe in the Sixteenth Century have reached maturity and with the colonial expansion reached the Orient. This chapter throws light on the role of various capitalist machines like war machine, opium trade in the Orient and their conflict and association with feudal machines already present in the Orient and to some extent in the European society. This chapter shows how Amitav Ghosh ignores this very important dimension of colonizaton by Orientalizing India through the translation and canonization of Brahmanical texts and using for legal purpose. The caste hierarchies that were weakened slightly during the Mughal rule could unite the Indian masses against the British colonial authorities. This discourse once made part of the legal system only increased the hatred and conflict between different layers of Indian society.
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