



**INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF
MULTIDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH & REVIEWS**

journal homepage: www.ijmrr.online/index.php/home

**DALIT CONSCIOUSNESS AND SUBALTERN
REPRESENTATION IN THE SELECTED NOVELS OF AMITAV
GHOSH**

Dr. Ranadhir Bahadur Singh

Lecturer (English)

Govt. Higher Secondary School Kewra

Block – Pratappur, District – Surajpur (C.G.)

E-mail: ranadhir.rbsingh.singh@gmail.com

How to Cite the Article: Ranadhir Bahadur Singh (2026). Dalit Consciousness and Subaltern Representation in the Selected Novels of Amitav Ghosh. International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research & Reviews, 5(5),264-268.



<https://doi.org/10.56815/ijmrr.v5i5.2026.264-268>

Keywords

*Dalit Consciousness,
Subaltern
Representation,
Marginalized, Amitav
Ghosh, Postcolonial,
Oppression, Identity,
Labor, Migration.*

Abstract

Dalit and Subaltern literature in India is an emerging literature which act as a formal mode of expression to resist against caste oppression, social exclusion, and historical silencing. Although, Amitav Ghosh is not conventionally considered as a dalit and subaltern writer but his selected novels are often shown engagement with marginalized communities, displaced laborers, tribal groups, lower-caste characters, and subaltern histories. The paper examines dalit consciousness and subaltern representation in Ghosh's selected novels, particularly in *Sea of Poppies*, *River of Smoke*, *Flood of Fire*, *The Hungry Tide*, and *The Glass Palace*. The study explores how Ghosh rewrites and reconstructs history from below by foregrounding oppressed voices that colonial and upper-caste historiography neglected. Through themes of migration, labor exploitation, untouchability, resistance, and identity, Ghosh's selected novels intersect and introspect with subaltern and dalit literary concerns while expanding the discourse into global and postcolonial



[The work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution
Non Commercial 4.0 International License](#)

Ranadhir Bahadur Singh (2026). Dalit Consciousness and Subaltern Representation in the Selected Novels of Amitav Ghosh. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research & Reviews*, 5(5),264-268.

	contexts.
--	-----------

Dalit literature and Subaltern Representation occupies a prominent place in modern Indian literary discourse because it challenges the hegemonic structures of caste hierarchy and social discrimination. The term “Dalit,” meaning “broken” or “oppressed,” refers to communities historically marginalized within the caste system. Dalit and Subaltern writing emerges as a voice of protest, dignity, and self-representation under the influence of thinkers such as B. R. Ambedkar and Jyotirao Phule. In fact, Dalit literature and Subaltern voice are generally associated with writers belonging to dalit communities, the concerns of dalit consciousness and subaltern representation have expanded beyond caste identity to include wider questions of exclusion, dispossession, and existence. In the broader sense, the selected novels of Amitav Ghosh become highly significant. His fiction repeatedly highlights people pushed to the margins by colonialism, capitalism, caste hierarchy, migration, and imperial exploitation.

Ghosh’s narratives recover forgotten histories and illuminate the experiences of coolies, peasants, fishermen, tribal populations, women, and laborers. Though caste may not always be the overt center of his fiction, the structures of oppression resemble those addressed by Dalit and Subaltern literature. His works create a literary space where marginalized voices resist erasure and reclaim agency.

Dalit literature is fundamentally a literature of resistance. It rejects Brahmanical dominance and asserts the humanity of oppressed communities. According to B. R. Ambedkar, caste is not merely a social division but a systematic mechanism of inequality and exclusion. Dalit writers therefore expose humiliation, violence, poverty, and social segregation. The development of Subaltern Studies under scholars like Ranajit Guha also influenced literary criticism by emphasizing histories “from below.” Subaltern studies attempt to recover the experiences of people absent from elite historical narratives. Ghosh’s fiction strongly reflects this approach. His novels challenge official colonial histories and instead foreground ordinary individuals struggling against oppressive structures. The intersection between Dalit literature and Ghosh’s fiction lies in the representation of marginalized humanity. His works expose how systems of power reduce certain groups to invisibility while simultaneously celebrating their endurance and resistance.

Sea of Poppies provides one of the clearest examples of caste oppression in Ghosh’s fiction. Set during the colonial opium trade in the nineteenth century, the novel portrays peasants, coolies, and indentured laborers trapped within economic and social exploitation. The character of Deeti represents the suffering of lower-caste rural women. Her life is controlled by patriarchal customs and caste restrictions. After the death of her husband, she escapes the violent social order by joining indentured migrants aboard the ship Ibis. Her migration symbolizes liberation from caste imprisonment.



Ranadhir Bahadur Singh (2026). Dalit Consciousness and Subaltern Representation in the Selected Novels of Amitav Ghosh. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research & Reviews*, 5(5),264-268.

Another character Kalua, an ox-cart driver from a lower caste, experiences brutal humiliation due to his social status. His relationship with Deeti challenges rigid caste boundaries. Through their union, Ghosh critiques the artificiality and cruelty of caste distinctions.

The Ibis itself becomes a symbolic space where caste hierarchies begin to collapse. Migrants from different backgrounds share suffering, labor, and displacement. Traditional social divisions lose meaning during the traumatic experience of migration. Ghosh thus imagines a new collective identity among oppressed individuals.

The novel *Sea of Poppies* also connects caste oppression with colonial exploitation. British imperial economic policies force peasants into opium cultivation, leading to poverty and displacement. Thus, colonialism and caste operate together as systems of domination.

A major concern of Dalit and Subaltern literature is labor exploitation. Historically, Dalits and Subalterns were mostly confined to the degrading occupations and denied social dignity. Ghosh repeatedly portrays laborers whose bodies become instruments of imperial profit. In *River of Smoke* and *Flood of Fire*, indentured workers and colonized populations suffer under global capitalist networks. Their exploitation resembles the historical experiences of Dalit communities deprived of economic autonomy.

Similarly, in *The Glass Palace*, workers and migrants are uprooted by imperial expansion. Colonial systems erase local identities and create new forms of subjugation. Ghosh highlights how marginalized individuals become victims of political and economic forces beyond their control.

The literature of Dalit and Subaltern were frequently emphasizes bodily suffering and social degradation. Ghosh's fiction similarly portrays hunger, violence, displacement, and humiliation as lived realities rather than abstract concepts. His narratives therefore create emotional solidarity with the oppressed. In *The Hungry Tide* expands the idea of Dalit and Subaltern consciousness into ecological and geographical marginality. The novel focuses on the Sundarbans, a dangerous and unstable landscape inhabited by poor fishermen, refugees, and laborers. Characters such as Fokir represent communities excluded from modern systems of education and power. Though illiterate, Fokir possesses deep ecological knowledge and emotional intelligence. Ghosh challenges elite assumptions that education alone defines human worth.

The novel *The Hungry Tide* also recalls the Morichjhapi massacre, where refugee settlers were violently evicted. This event symbolizes state violence against vulnerable populations. The refugees in the novel resemble Subaltern and Dalit communities struggling for survival and dignity against institutional oppression. Furthermore, Nature itself becomes a metaphor for marginal existence. The unstable geography of the Sundarbans reflects the precarious lives of socially excluded people. Ghosh demonstrates how environmental vulnerability and social marginalization intersect.



Ranadhir Bahadur Singh (2026). Dalit Consciousness and Subaltern Representation in the Selected Novels of Amitav Ghosh. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research & Reviews*, 5(5),264-268.

Dalit and Subaltern feminism argues that caste oppression and patriarchy are interconnected. Women from marginalized communities experience double exploitation based on both gender and caste. In Ghosh's novels, women frequently resist oppressive social structures. Deeti in *Sea of Poppies* refuses sati and escapes patriarchal violence. Paulette, though from a different background, also challenges social expectations and restrictive norms. Ghosh portrays women not merely as victims but as agents of survival and transformation. Their resistance parallels the assertion of dignity central to Dalit feminist writing. Moreover, Ghosh critiques institutions such as marriage, religion, and caste customs that restrict women's autonomy. His female characters often cross boundaries of caste, language, nation, and identity, thereby challenging traditional hierarchies.

Dalit and Subaltern literature often reject elite literary language and incorporates regional dialects, oral traditions, and colloquial expressions. Ghosh similarly experiments with multilingualism and hybrid language forms. In *The Ibis Trilogy*, Bhojpuri, Bengali, Hindustani, pidgin English, and sailors' vocabulary appear alongside standard English. This linguistic diversity democratizes narrative space and gives authenticity to marginalized voices. Language in Ghosh's fiction becomes a tool of resistance against colonial and elite linguistic dominance. By allowing subaltern characters to speak in their own idioms, Ghosh restores dignity to historically silenced communities.

One of Ghosh's greatest contributions lies in rewriting history from the perspective of ordinary people. Traditional histories often glorify rulers, empires, and elite classes while ignoring laborers, migrants, and oppressed communities. Ghosh's fiction reconstructs alternative histories where marginalized individuals occupy the center of the narrative. This method aligns closely with Dalit historiography, which seeks to recover suppressed histories of oppression and resistance.

In *Flood of Fire*, colonial wars are not merely political events but human tragedies affecting ordinary lives. Similarly, *The Glass Palace* examines imperial history through displaced workers and migrants rather than kings and generals. Thus, Ghosh transforms the historical novel into a medium of ethical remembrance.

In conclusion, Amitav Ghosh is undoubtedly classified as a voice for Dalit and Subaltern, his novels strongly engage with themes to Subaltern and Dalit literature: oppression, marginality, labor exploitation, caste hierarchy, displacement, and resistance. His fiction gives voice to communities neglected by mainstream historiography and literary traditions. Through characters such as Deeti, Kalua, and Fokir, Ghosh portrays the resilience of marginalized humanity against systems of domination. His works reveal how caste oppression intersects with colonialism, patriarchy, capitalism, and ecological vulnerability. Ghosh's novels therefore broaden the scope of Dalit and Subaltern consciousness beyond caste identity alone and connect it with global struggles for dignity and justice. By recovering forgotten histories and foregrounding marginalized voices, he contributes significantly to contemporary discussions on social equality and human rights.



Ranadhir Bahadur Singh (2026). Dalit Consciousness and Subaltern Representation in the Selected Novels of Amitav Ghosh. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research & Reviews*, 5(5),264-268.

AUTHOR(S) CONTRIBUTION

The writers affirm that they have no connections to, or engagement with, any group or body that provides financial or non-financial assistance for the topics or resources covered in this manuscript.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

PLAGIARISM POLICY

All authors declare that any kind of violation of plagiarism, copyright and ethical matters will take care by all authors. Journal and editors are not liable for aforesaid matters.

SOURCES OF FUNDING

The authors received no financial aid to support for the research.

REFERENCES

- [Amitav Ghosh. *Sea of Poppies*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2008.](#)
- [Amitav Ghosh. *River of Smoke*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2011.](#)
- [Amitav Ghosh. *Flood of Fire*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2015.](#)
- [Amitav Ghosh. *The Hungry Tide*. New Delhi: Harper Collins, 2004.](#)
- [Amitav Ghosh. *The Glass Palace*. New Delhi: Harper Collins, 2000.](#)
- [B. R. Ambedkar. *Annihilation of Caste*. New Delhi: Navayana, 2014.](#)
- [Ranajit Guha. *Selected Subaltern Studies*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.](#)
- [Sharan Kumar Limbale. *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature*. Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2004.](#)
- [Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988.](#)
- [Gopal Guru. *Humiliation: Claims and Context*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009.](#)

