

## **Posthumanism and Artificial Intelligence in the Selected Fiction of Amitav Ghosh**

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### **Abstract**

This paper examines the discourse of posthumanism and artificial intelligence in the selected fiction of Amitav Ghosh, situating his work within contemporary theoretical shifts in English literary studies. Posthumanism questions classical humanism by challenging human exceptionalism and emphasizing the entanglement of humans, machines, ecology and technological systems. In the present age of rapid technological change, artificial intelligence has emerged as a powerful force reshaping knowledge, identity and cultural imagination. Amitav Ghosh's fiction engages with these transformations by foregrounding alternative epistemologies, nonhuman agencies and networked forms of intelligence. Novels such as *The Calcutta Chromosome* and *Gun Island* blur boundaries between science, myth and technology to question the limits of rational human control. Artificial intelligence in his narratives does not merely appear as machinery but as a distributed, collective and often unpredictable mode of cognition. Drawing upon posthumanist theory, particularly the ideas of Rosi Braidotti and Donna Haraway, the paper analyzes shifting notions of subjectivity and agency. Ghosh presents intelligence as relational and ecological rather than exclusively human or individual. His fiction also connects artificial intelligence with global power structures, scientific authority and environmental crises. By decentering the human, Ghosh anticipates contemporary debates on technology, ethics and the future of humanity. The study argues that Ghosh's engagement with posthumanism offers a critical lens to understand artificial intelligence beyond utopian or dystopian extremes. It highlights literature as an essential space for examining the ethical and cultural consequences of technological transformation. Ultimately, the paper positions Amitav Ghosh as a significant Indian English writer bridging humanist traditions and posthuman futures. This analysis contributes to contemporary literary studies by demonstrating how fiction responds critically to emerging technologies and redefines human existence within complex techno ecological networks. Such readings underline the relevance of Indian English literature in global posthuman and AI debates. Today and in future.

**Keywords:** Posthumanism; Artificial Intelligence; Amitav Ghosh; Contemporary Indian English Fiction; Human–Non-human Relationship; Technology and Literature

### **Introduction**

The rapid advancement of science and technology in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries has fundamentally altered the way human beings understand themselves and their relationship with the world. Traditional humanist thought, which places the rational, autonomous human subject at the center of meaning, knowledge and moral authority, has increasingly been questioned by new theoretical paradigms (Wolfe 1). Among these, posthumanism has emerged as a significant intellectual framework that challenges

anthropocentrism and foregrounds the interconnectedness of humans with non-human entities such as machines, animals, ecology and technological systems. In contemporary literary studies, posthumanism has opened new avenues for examining how literature responds to technological change, artificial intelligence and the reconfiguration of human identity in an age dominated by digital networks and scientific innovation (Nayar 7). Artificial intelligence, in particular, has become one of the most compelling symbols of the posthuman condition. AI disrupts conventional distinctions between human and machine intelligence, raising complex ethical, philosophical and cultural questions about agency, consciousness, control and the future of humanity (Hayles 4). As machines increasingly perform tasks once considered uniquely human such as learning, decision-making and pattern recognition, the boundaries between the organic and the artificial have grown porous. This blurring of boundaries destabilizes the humanist belief in human exceptionalism and challenges the idea that intelligence and agency are exclusively human capacities. Literature, as a reflective and critical cultural form, plays a crucial role in exploring these transformations. Through narrative, symbolism and speculative imagination, literary texts interrogate the implications of artificial intelligence not only as a technological phenomenon but also as a challenge to deeply rooted humanist assumptions about identity, autonomy and control. By engaging with posthumanist concerns, contemporary literature provides a vital space for examining how technological systems reshape human experience and redefine the meaning of being human in an increasingly interconnected, techno-cultural world (Braidotti 190).

Within this broader intellectual and cultural context, the fiction of Amitav Ghosh offers a rich and nuanced engagement with posthumanist concerns. Although Ghosh is often associated with themes such as history, colonialism, migration and climate change, his works also demonstrate a sustained interest in science, technology and alternative systems of knowledge (Ghosh). His novels frequently blur the boundaries between the human and the non-human, the rational and the mystical and the scientific and the mythical. This makes his fiction particularly relevant for a posthumanist reading that foregrounds artificial intelligence, distributed cognition and non-human agency. Ghosh's early novel *The Calcutta Chromosome* stands as one of the most striking examples of his engagement with posthumanist ideas. By reimagining the discovery of malaria through a complex interplay of science, secrecy and collective intelligence, the novel challenges the humanist ideal of the solitary scientific genius. Instead, it presents knowledge as dispersed, anonymous and resistant to institutional control, thereby anticipating posthumanist critiques of Enlightenment rationality (Hayles 5). The presence of advanced computing systems and speculative technological elements in the narrative anticipates contemporary debates on artificial intelligence and machine-mediated knowledge. Here, intelligence is no longer confined to the human mind but circulates through networks of humans, machines and marginalized epistemologies, undermining the authority of Western scientific rationalism.

In his later works, including *Gun Island* and his non-fictional reflections on climate and technology, Ghosh further expands his critique of anthropocentrism. Although artificial intelligence may not always appear explicitly as autonomous machines, technological systems,

data networks and global infrastructures function as non-human forces shaping human lives. These systems operate beyond individual human control, suggesting a form of agency that aligns with posthumanist thought (Braidotti 192). Ghosh's narratives repeatedly emphasize that human beings are embedded within larger ecological and technological assemblages, where agency is shared among humans, machines, environments and historical processes.

Posthumanist theory, as articulated by thinkers such as Rosi Braidotti and Donna Haraway, provides a valuable framework for analyzing these aspects of Ghosh's fiction. Posthumanism rejects the hierarchical separation of humans from non-humans and instead proposes a relational understanding of subjectivity, where the human subject exists as part of a complex network of biological, technological and cultural relations (Haraway 150). Artificial intelligence, as a manifestation of non-human cognition, thus becomes central to this rethinking of subjectivity. Ghosh's fiction resonates strongly with this theoretical perspective, as it consistently portrays intelligence and agency as collective, networked and ethically charged rather than individual or autonomous.

The relevance of studying posthumanism and artificial intelligence in Ghosh's fiction is further heightened by contemporary global concerns. As artificial intelligence increasingly influences governance, warfare, medicine and communication, questions about the future of humanity have become urgent (Hayles 6). Ghosh's literary imagination offers a space to reflect on these developments from a non-Western, postcolonial perspective. His fiction challenges the dominance of Eurocentric narratives of technological progress and highlights the importance of marginalized voices and indigenous knowledge systems in understanding the posthuman condition (Nayar 8). This study, therefore, seeks to examine how Amitav Ghosh's selected fiction engages with posthumanist ideas and representations of artificial intelligence, both explicit and implicit. It aims to analyze how his narratives destabilize humanist assumptions, reconfigure notions of intelligence and agency and envision a world where humans coexist with powerful non-human forces (Braidotti 194). By situating Ghosh within contemporary posthumanist literary discourse, the paper argues that his work occupies a significant position in Indian English literature and global literary studies.

In doing so, the study also contributes to broader debates on the role of literature in an age of technological transformation. Literature does not merely reflect technological change; it actively shapes the ways in which such change is understood and evaluated (Wolfe 2). Through its complex narratives and ethical depth, Ghosh's fiction demonstrates that literary texts remain essential for grappling with the cultural meanings of artificial intelligence and the posthuman future. Ultimately, this introduction establishes the foundation for a detailed exploration of how Ghosh's work bridges the transition from humanism to posthumanism, offering critical insights into the evolving relationship between humans, machines and the world they inhabit.

Humanism, as a dominant intellectual tradition emerging from the Renaissance and later strengthened during the Enlightenment, is grounded in the belief that human beings occupy a central and privileged position in the universe. It celebrates human reason, autonomy, rationality, moral agency and progress, presenting the human subject as a self-contained, superior and universal entity. Within this framework, humans are viewed as distinct from and

superior to nature, animals, machines and other non-human forms of existence. Literary humanism, consequently, has traditionally focused on individual consciousness, moral choice, psychological depth and the affirmation of human values. While humanism contributed significantly to the development of modern science, democracy and literature, it also produced hierarchical binaries such as human/non-human, mind/body, culture/nature and reason/emotion, which reinforced domination over nature, marginalised communities and non-Western epistemologies (Wolfe 3).

Posthumanism emerges as a critical response to the limitations and exclusions of humanist thought, particularly in the context of technological advancement, ecological crisis and global interconnectedness. Rather than rejecting humanity altogether, posthumanism seeks to rethink what it means to be human in a world increasingly shaped by machines, artificial intelligence, biotechnology and environmental interdependence. Posthumanist theory challenges anthropocentrism by decentering the human subject and emphasizing relationality, hybridity and interdependence. It proposes that humans are not autonomous masters of the world but are embedded within complex networks of biological, technological, ecological and cultural forces. In this framework, agency is no longer exclusively human; instead, it is distributed across humans, machines, environments and systems. The transition from humanism to posthumanism is therefore marked by a shift from individualism to collectivity, from mastery to coexistence and from human exceptionalism to shared vulnerability. Artificial intelligence plays a crucial role in this transition by destabilizing the traditional belief that intelligence, creativity and decision-making are uniquely human capacities (Braidotti 195). Posthumanism acknowledges AI and other non-human entities as active participants in shaping knowledge and reality, compelling literature and theory to rethink subjectivity, ethics and responsibility. Thus, posthumanism represents not an end of the human but a reconfiguration of human identity within an expanded, interconnected and technologically mediated world.

Posthumanism as a theoretical paradigm has been shaped by the contributions of several influential thinkers who challenge the central assumptions of classical humanism and propose new ways of understanding subjectivity, agency and ethics in a technologically mediated world. These thinkers collectively question the idea of the human as a stable, autonomous and superior entity and instead emphasize relationality, hybridity and interdependence between humans, machines, animals and the environment (Wolfe 4). Among the most significant posthumanist thinkers are Rosi Braidotti, Donna Haraway, N. Katherine Hayles and Bruno Latour, whose ideas have profoundly influenced contemporary literary and cultural studies.

Rosi Braidotti is one of the leading voices in posthumanist philosophy. She critiques Enlightenment humanism for constructing a universal human subject that is implicitly male, Western, white and able-bodied, thereby excluding women, non-Western peoples, animals and machines. Braidotti proposes the concept of the “posthuman subject,” which is not an isolated individual but a relational and embodied entity constituted through networks of technology, ecology and social relations. For Braidotti, posthumanism is not a pessimistic rejection of humanity but an affirmative ethics that recognizes shared vulnerability and collective responsibility. Her emphasis on nomadic subjectivity highlights fluid identities that constantly

evolve through interactions with non-human forces, including artificial intelligence and technological systems (Braidotti 196). This perspective is particularly valuable for literary analysis, as it enables scholars to examine how narratives represent distributed agency and non-human participation in meaning-making processes.

Donna Haraway's work occupies a foundational position in posthumanist thought, especially through her influential concept of the "cyborg." Haraway's cyborg metaphor dismantles rigid boundaries between human and machine, organism and technology and nature and culture. By presenting humans as already hybrid beings, Haraway challenges the purity and superiority associated with humanist identity. Her *Cyborg Manifesto* argues that technological entanglements offer possibilities for resistance against patriarchal, capitalist and colonial power structures (Haraway 151). In later works, Haraway extends her posthuman vision through ideas such as "companion species" and multispecies coexistence, emphasizing ethical relationships between humans, animals and technological entities. N. Katherine Hayles significantly advances posthumanist discourse by focusing on the relationship between embodiment, information and technology. In her seminal work *How We Became Posthuman*, Hayles critiques the tendency to privilege information over material embodiment in cybernetic and AI discourse. She argues that posthumanism does not imply the disappearance of the body but rather its reconfiguration within human-machine systems. Hayles highlights how artificial intelligence and digital technologies challenge traditional notions of consciousness, agency and authorship (Hayles 7). Bruno Latour further contributes to posthumanist thinking through Actor-Network Theory, which dissolves the hierarchy between human and non-human actors and conceptualizes agency as emerging from networks of humans, machines and institutions. Together, these posthumanist thinkers redefine the boundaries of the human and expand the scope of ethical and literary inquiry. Their theories encourage a shift from domination to coexistence, from individuality to relationality and from human exceptionalism to shared agency. In the context of contemporary literature, especially works engaging with artificial intelligence and technology, posthumanist thinkers provide critical tools to analyze how narratives respond to a world where intelligence, agency and responsibility are no longer exclusively human but distributed across complex technico-ecological networks.

One of the most significant ideas emerging from posthumanist thought and strongly reflected in the fiction of Amitav Ghosh is the challenge to the long-held belief that intelligence is an exclusively human attribute. Traditional humanism associates intelligence with rational thinking, conscious intention and individual human agency. However, contemporary technological developments and posthumanist theory disrupt this assumption by revealing intelligence as distributed, collective and often non-human in nature (Hayles 8). Ghosh's fiction, particularly *The Calcutta Chromosome*, illustrates this shift by presenting intelligence as something that circulates through networks of humans, machines, data systems and marginalized knowledge traditions rather than residing solely within the human mind.

In Ghosh's narratives, knowledge is produced not by a single genius or authoritative figure but through complex interactions between people, technological systems and unseen forces. Computers, archives, medical data and technological infrastructures function as active

participants in the generation and transmission of knowledge. This representation aligns closely with posthumanist understandings of artificial intelligence, where cognition is viewed as an emergent property of systems rather than an isolated human capacity. By decentering human rationality, Ghosh undermines the hierarchy that privileges human intelligence over other forms of knowing. Moreover, Ghosh foregrounds alternative epistemologies that operate outside institutional science and Western rationalism. These forms of intelligence—often intuitive, collective or anonymous—challenge the assumption that progress depends solely on human mastery and control (Braidotti 197). The presence of machine-mediated knowledge and distributed cognition in his fiction suggests that intelligence operates across human and non-human boundaries, blurring distinctions between organic thought and artificial processing. Through this perspective, Ghosh invites readers to reconsider intelligence as a shared, relational phenomenon shaped by technology, culture and environment, thereby reinforcing a posthumanist vision in which humans are no longer the sole or superior bearers of intelligence. In contemporary posthumanist thought, artificial intelligence is no longer understood merely as an autonomous machine, humanoid robot, or isolated technological invention. Instead, AI is increasingly conceptualized as a complex system of interconnected networks that operate across human, technological, institutional and ecological domains. This expanded understanding challenges the conventional humanist perception of technology as a neutral tool entirely controlled by human intention. Rather, artificial intelligence functions as a distributed form of cognition embedded in infrastructures such as databases, algorithms, surveillance systems, communication networks, scientific archives and digital platforms (Hayles 9). Within this framework, intelligence emerges from relationships and interactions among multiple components rather than from a single human or machine source.

The fiction of Amitav Ghosh powerfully anticipates this posthuman understanding of artificial intelligence by portraying knowledge and agency as products of systems and networks. In *The Calcutta Chromosome*, for example, intelligence does not reside in a single scientist, computer, or technological device. Instead, it circulates through a web of human actors, machines, medical records, scientific institutions and hidden epistemologies. Computing systems and data archives play a decisive role in shaping what can be known, remembered, or forgotten. These technological networks operate beyond individual human awareness, suggesting that artificial intelligence functions autonomously as a system rather than as a programmable object (Ghosh). Such representations reflect a broader cultural shift in how intelligence is perceived in the digital age. Algorithms today influence financial markets, healthcare decisions, security systems and communication practices without direct human supervision. Similarly, in Ghosh's fiction, technological systems shape outcomes in ways that human characters cannot fully predict or control. This loss of centralized human authority signals a move toward posthuman agency, where intelligence is dispersed across machines, institutions and environments. Artificial intelligence as a system also raises important ethical and political questions, which Ghosh subtly addresses through narrative. When intelligence operates through invisible networks, responsibility becomes diffused. Decisions appear objective and impersonal, yet

they are deeply embedded within structures of power, inequality and historical domination (Braidotti 198).

Furthermore, Ghosh's portrayal of artificial intelligence as a networked phenomenon aligns with posthumanist critiques of anthropocentrism. Intelligence in his fiction is not limited to human consciousness or machine computation but emerges from interactions between humans, technologies, environments and cultural memory. By presenting artificial intelligence as a system rather than a singular entity, Ghosh resists simplistic representations of AI as either a utopian solution or a dystopian threat. Instead, his fiction invites readers to examine the structural conditions under which intelligence operates and to recognize cognition as a collective, relational and ethically charged process embedded within complex technoelectrical networks.

A central feature of posthumanist thought is its emphasis on non-human agency, a concept that challenges the humanist belief that only human beings possess the capacity to act, decide and influence the world. Traditional humanism views humans as the primary agents of history, knowledge and change, while nature, animals, machines and objects are treated as passive entities to be used or controlled. Posthumanism, however, redefines agency as a distributed and relational force that operates across human and non-human actors. In this framework, agency emerges from interactions among humans, technological systems, ecological forces and material objects rather than residing solely within human intention or consciousness (Latour 63).

The fiction of Amitav Ghosh strongly reflects this posthumanist emphasis on non-human agency. His narratives repeatedly portray nature, technology and material environments as active forces that shape human lives and historical outcomes. In novels such as *The Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island*, rivers, tides, storms, animals and ecological systems do not function as mere backdrops to human action; instead, they intervene decisively in the narrative, often disrupting human plans and exposing the limits of human control. These non-human elements possess a form of agency that compels human characters to respond, adapt, or reconsider their assumptions about mastery and dominance (Ghosh).

Ghosh also extends the idea of non-human agency to technological systems and scientific infrastructures. Machines, archives, data networks and communication systems in his fiction influence knowledge production and social organization in ways that exceed individual human intention. These systems operate with their own internal logics, shaping outcomes independently of human desire. By representing technology as an active participant rather than a neutral tool, Ghosh aligns his fiction with posthumanist critiques of anthropocentrism. Artificial intelligence, in this sense, becomes part of a broader assemblage of non-human forces that co-produce reality alongside humans. Moreover, Ghosh's emphasis on non-human agency carries profound ethical implications, as it challenges human exceptionalism and calls for responsibility toward ecological and technological others (Braidotti 199). By foregrounding the power of nature and machines, Ghosh encourages a more humble, relational understanding of existence. Through this posthumanist vision, Ghosh reimagines the world as a dynamic network of interacting agents in which humans are only one among many participants.

A crucial dimension of posthumanism and artificial intelligence in the fiction of Amitav Ghosh is the ethical warning that runs implicitly yet powerfully through his narratives. Unlike many speculative or science-fiction writers who portray artificial intelligence either as a utopian solution to human problems or as a catastrophic threat that overwhelms humanity, Ghosh adopts a more nuanced and critical stance. His fiction does not sensationalize AI as autonomous super-machines; instead, it presents technology, scientific systems and intelligent networks as deeply entangled with human power structures, historical violence and environmental degradation. This perspective transforms artificial intelligence into an ethical question rather than a purely technological one (Wolfe 5).

Ghosh's ethical warning begins with a critique of human arrogance rooted in Enlightenment humanism. He repeatedly suggests that the belief in human supremacy—especially the assumption that humans possess complete control over knowledge, nature and technology—has produced devastating consequences. Artificial intelligence, when developed within this mindset of domination and mastery, becomes an extension of the same logic that justified colonial exploitation, environmental destruction and the marginalization of alternative knowledge systems. In this sense, AI is not inherently dangerous; it becomes ethically problematic when it reinforces unequal power relations and amplifies existing systems of control (Braidotti 200).

In *The Calcutta Chromosome*, this ethical concern is articulated through the depiction of scientific authority and institutional knowledge. The novel exposes how official science, supported by technological systems and data archives, claims monopoly over truth while suppressing non-Western, collective and anonymous forms of intelligence. Here, artificial intelligence and scientific systems function as gatekeepers of legitimacy, determining whose knowledge counts and whose is erased. Ghosh's ethical warning lies in showing how such systems can obscure accountability by appearing neutral and objective, even while they perpetuate exclusion and domination. The danger, therefore, is not intelligence itself but the concentration of power within opaque technological structures (Ghosh).

Another major ethical concern in Ghosh's fiction relates to environmental crisis and ecological imbalance. Ghosh consistently links technological advancement with ecological vulnerability, suggesting that human refusal to recognize non-human agency has pushed the planet toward catastrophe. Artificial intelligence, when deployed without ecological awareness, risks accelerating environmental exploitation by enabling more efficient extraction, surveillance and control of natural resources. Ghosh warns that technology divorced from ethical responsibility intensifies the human tendency to treat nature as inert matter rather than as an active, responsive force. His narratives imply that ignoring the agency of rivers, forests, animals and climate systems leads to unpredictable and often irreversible consequences.

Ghosh also raises ethical questions about responsibility in a world governed by complex technological networks. When artificial intelligence operates through systems and algorithms rather than individual decision-makers, moral accountability becomes diffused. Decisions appear automated, impersonal and inevitable, allowing humans to evade responsibility for their outcomes. Ghosh's fiction cautions against this erosion of ethical agency. Importantly, Ghosh

does not advocate a rejection of technology or artificial intelligence; rather, he calls for a reorientation of values grounded in humility, coexistence and relational ethics. Ultimately, the ethical warning embedded in Ghosh's fiction serves as a call for critical consciousness in the posthuman age and positions literature as a vital space for reflecting on the moral consequences of technological transformation.

### **Conclusion**

The present study has examined the discourse of posthumanism and artificial intelligence in the selected fiction of Amitav Ghosh, highlighting how his narratives critically engage with the changing relationship between humans, technology and the non-human world. By moving beyond the traditional humanist framework that places humans at the centre of meaning and agency, Ghosh's fiction aligns with posthumanist thought in its emphasis on relationality, hybridity and distributed intelligence. His works challenge the assumption that intelligence, control and moral authority are exclusively human attributes, instead presenting knowledge and agency as collective and networked phenomena shaped by technological systems, ecological forces and marginalized epistemologies. Through texts such as *The Calcutta Chromosome*, *The Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island*, Ghosh reimagines intelligence as something that circulates across human and non-human domains. Artificial intelligence in his fiction does not appear merely as advanced machinery or futuristic robots but as systems, networks, archives and infrastructures that shape human experience in subtle yet powerful ways. These representations resonate strongly with posthumanist theories that view AI as embedded within social, political and ecological contexts rather than as an isolated technological object. By foregrounding non-human agency, Ghosh destabilizes human exceptionalism and exposes the limitations of anthropocentric thinking. Equally significant is the ethical warning embedded in Ghosh's engagement with technology and artificial intelligence. His fiction cautions against uncritical faith in technological progress and highlights how intelligent systems can reinforce existing power hierarchies, obscure accountability and accelerate ecological destruction when guided by human arrogance and domination. At the same time, Ghosh does not reject science or technology outright; instead, he calls for an ethical reorientation grounded in humility, responsibility and coexistence with non-human entities. Literature, in this sense, becomes a vital space for reflecting on the moral consequences of AI and technological transformation. In conclusion, Amitav Ghosh's fiction occupies a crucial position in contemporary Indian English literature by bridging humanist traditions and posthuman futures. His work contributes meaningfully to global debates on posthumanism and artificial intelligence by offering a non-Western, postcolonial perspective on technology, ethics and the future of humanity. The study demonstrates that literary narratives remain indispensable for understanding the cultural, ethical and philosophical implications of artificial intelligence in the posthuman age.

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