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**Seeing Beyond the Visible: Visuality, Power and Knowledge  
in Amitav Ghosh's *Ghost-Eye***

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**Abstract:** Amitav Ghosh's *Ghost-Eye* (2026) explores memory, perception, science, and different ways of understanding reality. The novel asks whether things that cannot be explained by standard scientific methods should be seen as unreal. While most discussions focus on themes like reincarnation, ecology, rationality, and knowledge, this paper looks at how seeing and perception work in the novel. It considers how seeing is linked to how knowledge is created and accepted. Drawing on Michel Foucault's ideas about power and knowledge, examination, and regimes of truth, the paper argues that *Ghost-Eye* shows seeing as a way of interpreting and giving meaning to reality, not just discovering it. Varsha's experiences are examined, classified, and recorded by different institutions. At the same time, her abilities in remote viewing, bodily memory, and sensory perception expand the limits of what is usually accepted as knowledge. The novel's use of photographs and digital images also suggests that seeing something does not always mean understanding or knowing the truth about it. The paper concludes that the 'ghost-eye' is a metaphor for ways of perceiving and knowing that go beyond what is usually seen or explained by science.

**Keywords:** *Ghost-Eye, Visuality, Power/Knowledge, Regimes of Truth, Perception*

## Introduction

Seeing is often viewed as a key way to gain knowledge. When something is witnessed firsthand, it is often considered real. In contrast, things that cannot be directly observed are often met with skepticism. Still, seeing does not always give a full or certain understanding. What is seen can carry different meanings, and sometimes people know things without being able to explain how they know them. Amitav Ghosh's *Ghost-Eye* explores this complex relationship between seeing, perception, and knowledge. The theme of seeing appears right at the start of the novel. The Gupta mansion is enclosed by a wall and has a steel gate with a peephole through which the durwans can observe the visitors. This detail shows the difference between those who watch and those who are watched. People inside the mansion can see outside, but visitors cannot easily see in. From the beginning, seeing is linked to control, access, and authority.

The issue of who sees and who has the right to know becomes more important with the character of Varsha. When Varsha, at age three, says that her real mother's name is Jhorna. Her claim does not match the family's understanding of her identity. Because of this, her experience is investigated. Her body is examined, her memories are questioned, and her unusual abilities are tested in different ways. What starts as a personal experience soon becomes something that doctors, psychologists, and other adults try to explain. The novel shows a gradual shift from experience to examination, then to classification, and finally to knowledge. This is especially clear when Varsha is seen as a "case." This label changes how people see her. She is no longer just a child with an unusual story; she becomes someone whose experience can be studied and compared to others. The novel asks who has the power to decide what counts as knowledge.

This paper looks at how seeing relates to the creation of knowledge. It explores how different ways of observing and interpreting give authority to some types of knowledge and challenge others. Michel Foucault's ideas about power and knowledge, examination, and regimes of truth form the main theory for this discussion (Macmillan 155-172). Foucault's work is helpful because *Ghost-Eye* often asks who gets to decide if an experience is scientific, believable, psychological, spiritual, or impossible ("Foucault's Legacy on Power and Knowledge: A Critical Overview"). The novel does not simply set science against supernatural belief. Varsha's remote viewing, her memories, and her senses challenge the idea that knowledge must always come from normal observation. Shoma calls Varsha's ability "remote viewing", where she can "visualise places from afar" without being there. This paper argues that *Ghost-Eye* turns seeing into a question of knowledge and authority. Seeing does not just help characters find out what is real; it equally shapes how reality is understood and accepted. Through examination, classification, documentation, and different ways of seeing, Ghosh shows how

institutions build their authority. At the same time, Varsha's unusual perceptions challenge what is accepted as real knowledge. The novel goes beyond asking what can be seen and instead asks which ways of seeing are allowed to count as knowledge.

### Theoretical Framework

Critics have mostly discussed themes like reincarnation, ecology, rationality, and how scientific and traditional knowledge relate to each other (Mundackal). Rather than exploring knowledge in *Ghost-Eye* in general, this study looks closely at seeing and perception. It explores how seeing, observing, and interpreting are linked to how knowledge is produced. In this novel, characters often think that observing will reveal the truth, but what they see does not always give them a clear or definite answer. To explore this topic, Michel Foucault's idea of power and knowledge is especially helpful. Foucault argues that knowledge is not simply a set of facts separate from society. Instead, it is formed by institutions, practices, categories, and systems that decide what is accepted as true or valid. So, the key question is not only if something is true, but also how it comes to be seen as truth. Foucault's concept of examination is closely connected to Varsha's experiences. Examination means observing, testing, classifying, and recording a person. Through this process, someone becomes an object of knowledge. In the novel, this happens when Varsha's unusual experiences are first looked at from a medical perspective and later through psychological study.

Another important concept for this paper is Foucault's idea of a regime of truth. Rather than thinking there is only one way to understand reality, this idea lets us look at the different systems that shape what is seen as true (Lorenzini). *Ghost-Eye* shows several of these systems. Scientific interpretations, psychological views, family beliefs, spiritual ideas, and Varsha's own experiences all try to explain what happens to her. In this way, an experience that was originally personal and temporary is given a permanent form. Once it becomes part of an archive, it can be examined, interpreted, and used as professional knowledge. Foucault's ideas help us see how *Ghost-Eye* explores the link between knowledge and authority. However, the novel cannot be fully explained by Foucault's theories alone. Ghosh not only shows how institutions shape knowledge, but also brings in ways of seeing that do not fit these systems. Varsha's experiences are partly outside usual explanations. The 'ghost-eye' can be seen as a symbol Ghosh uses to explore the limits of accepted knowledge and the chance for other ways of perceiving (Mundackal).

### From Experience to "Case": The Examination of Varsha

A clear example of how knowledge is produced in *Ghost-Eye* appears when the adults examine Varsha's unusual experience. When Varsha claims that her real mother is Jhorna, her family struggles

to understand her. Since her statement does not match what they know about her, they look for an explanation instead of accepting it right away. Monty is the first to examine her, focusing on both her physical health and her mental state. The medical examination shifts how Varsha's experience is seen. What starts as a child's statement now needs to be observed and tested. Monty checks her temperature, heartbeat, breathing, and eyes, and asks her questions about memory and understanding. This process brings her unusual experience into the realm of medical knowledge. Varsha is no longer just a child telling a strange story; she becomes someone who must be examined to find an explanation. Michel Foucault's idea of examination helps explain this process. For Foucault, examination is more than just testing someone. It brings together observation, judgment, and classification. He writes that "the examination combines the techniques of an observing hierarchy and those of a normalising judgment" (Foucault 184). He also calls it a "normalising gaze" that lets an individual be "qualif[ied]" and "classif[ied]" (Foucault 184). This idea helps us understand Monty's examination of Varsha. Monty is not just checking for a physical illness. He is also trying to fit her experience into a category he can understand. He asks if there is something wrong with her body, if there is a psychological reason for her behaviour, or if her memory is normal. These questions show how examination helps make an unusual experience understandable. Monty is the examiner, and Varsha is the one being examined.

Foucault also links examination to visibility. The person being examined becomes more visible to the institution. Foucault says that examination "establishes over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates them and judges them" (Foucault 184). For Varsha, her body, behaviour, memories, and responses all become things to observe and interpret. The more she is examined, the more she is seen as an object of professional knowledge. Varsha's body plays a key role in this process. Monty looks at her birthmarks and wonders if they relate to the injuries Varsha remembers from a past life. Her body becomes a possible source of evidence. The adults do not just ask if Varsha's story is true; they also search for physical proof to support or question what she says. In this way, her body becomes part of turning her personal experience into evidence. At this stage, Foucault's idea of power and knowledge matters. The person who can examine also has more authority to interpret the results. Monty's role as a doctor gives his observations special credibility. Varsha has the experience, but Monty has the professional language to explain it. The novel shows a difference between having knowledge and having the authority to define it.

However, Monty's examination does not solve the mystery. He cannot find a physical problem to explain Varsha's experience. Since medicine cannot explain it, the investigation shifts to psychology. Shoma gets involved, and Varsha's experience is examined from a new professional perspective. The shift from medicine to psychology is important. It shows that when one system of knowledge cannot explain something, another may be used. Varsha's experience becomes the focus of different

professional discussions. The main question is not just if her experience is true or false, but also which field has the authority to explain it. This is particularly relevant here. Foucault argues that examination, along with its methods of documentation, turns an individual into a case. He writes: “The examination, surrounded by all its documentary techniques, makes each individual a ‘case’” (Foucault 191). This idea connects closely to Varsha’s situation. Once her unusual experiences are investigated by medicine and psychology, they can be observed, described, compared, tested, and interpreted. She is no longer just a child with a strange experience. She becomes a case for professional knowledge. Foucault also explains that the individual who becomes a case can be “described, judged, measured, compared with others” and “classified” and “normalised” (Foucault 191). This matters for Varsha because the adults keep trying to see if her experiences fit what they think is normal. Her unusual memories and abilities stand out because they do not match common ideas about childhood memory and experience. Everyone behaves in the same way. Rather, disciplinary systems create certain standards against which people can be measured. Once such standards exist, differences can be identified and classified. In Varsha’s case, her unusual experiences become noticeable because they do not fit easily into the accepted ideas about how a child should remember, perceive, or acquire knowledge.

Documentation is another key part of Foucault’s argument. Examination does not stop with observation. It creates records, descriptions, and classifications that can be kept and used later. Foucault says examination “introduces individuality into the field of documentation” (Foucault 189). This is relevant to Shoma’s work in *Ghost-Eye*. Varsha’s experiences are not just observed; they are also recorded. Once documented, they can be studied and interpreted again. The process can therefore be understood in the following way:

experience → observation → examination → documentation → classification → knowledge

Varsha begins with an experience that is personal to her. Through the process of examination, Varsha starts with a personal experience. Through examination, this experience enters a professional system. Her body is observed, her memories are questioned, her abilities are tested, and her statements are recorded. In this way, her personal experience slowly becomes part of institutional knowledge. She possesses forms of knowledge that cannot easily be explained by her immediate surroundings. Her familiarity with fish and with aspects of rural Bengali life creates a problem for the adults who are investigating her. If knowledge normally comes from experience, education, or one’s environment, then how can Varsha possess knowledge that seems to go beyond these sources?

The fish experiments matter here. Shoma does not just accept Varsha’s claims. She tests them by giving Varsha different types of fish and watching her reactions. Varsha’s unusual knowledge is brought into a controlled setting where it can be tested. This follows the basic idea of science: an

unusual claim must be observed before it can be accepted as reliable knowledge (“Foucault’s Archaeology of Knowledge: Power and Knowledge Reexamined”). But the experiment also creates an interesting reversal. Varsha begins as the person being examined, yet her responses reveal knowledge that the adult investigator does not possess in the same way. Varsha starts as the one being examined, but her answers show knowledge that the adult investigator does not have. Her sensory knowledge of fish becomes important evidence. The child being studied also becomes a source of knowledge. In Varsha’s case, however, she becomes both the object and the source of knowledge. Adults observe and test her, but they also learn from what she knows. The movement of knowledge is therefore not completely one-directional. This is why Ghosh’s view of science is more complex than simply rejecting it. The novel does not say science is useless. Instead, it shows what happens when science faces something that does not fit its usual categories. Investigators can observe Varsha, record her responses, and test her abilities, but these methods may not give a full explanation.

The problem, then, is not simply whether an institution can investigate something. The bigger issue is whether it has the right categories to understand what it finds. Varsha’s experience shows a gap between investigation and explanation. Something can be closely observed and still be hard to explain. Foucault helps us understand how Varsha becomes visible as a subject of knowledge. She is observed, tested, documented, and classified. But Ghosh does not allow this process to completely determine the meaning of her experience. Some part of what Varsha experiences remains outside the categories used to examine her. The novel therefore shows both the power of institutional knowledge and its limitations. Varsha’s experience brings us back to the link between knowledge and classification. For something to be accepted as knowledge, it usually needs to fit into a framework where it can be named, explained, and validated. Varsha may have knowledge, but the adults still have to decide if it fits their systems. *Ghost-Eye* suggests that making knowledge is also about having the power to decide what counts as knowledge.

### **The ‘Ghost-Eye’ and Alternative Perception**

The idea of the ghost-eye offers a new way to think about perception. Shoma calls Varsha’s ability “remote viewing,” meaning she can picture a place without being there. This questions the common belief that a person needs to be physically present to see something. Usually, people rely on their senses to understand the world. They see something because it is in front of them, and being there allows them to confirm what they see. Varsha’s ability questions this link between being present and knowing. She can know about a place without being there, so for her, seeing is not limited by distance. This matters because Ghosh does not treat remote viewing as just a strange or supernatural skill. Instead, he uses it to challenge how we usually think about observation. Varsha’s ability raises the

question of whether knowledge can still be considered valid when it does not come from normal physical observation.

The novel also shows that perception is more than just seeing. Varsha knows about fish through her other senses too. Shoma refers to her “haptic memories,” meaning some memories come from physical and perceptual experiences (Garrington 531-540). So, Varsha’s knowledge can include taste, touch, smell, and body memory, not just sight. This helps us understand what visuality means in the novel. The point is not only about eyesight. Ghosh starts by asking about seeing, but then explores how people understand the world in many ways. What we know can come from different senses and experiences, and not all knowledge can be measured or explained in the usual ways. This complicates the link between *Ghost-Eye* and Foucault. Foucault shows how Varsha’s experience becomes something for experts to study and for institutions to label (“Foucault’s Archaeology of Knowledge: Power and Knowledge Reexamined”). But Ghosh does not let these categories fully explain Varsha’s experience. There is always something they cannot fully understand or control. This is especially clear when Shoma sees that Varsha’s abilities change if she knows she is being watched. When Varsha realises she is being observed or tested, it becomes harder for her to repeat some of her unusual experiences. This creates a contradiction: the investigators want to watch Varsha to understand her, but their watching might change what they are trying to study. As a result, the usual relationship between the viewer and the viewed becomes uncertain. Varsha is the child whom adults watch and study. But she can also observe things far away. So, the child being watched can also be the one who sees others. That allows Varsha to see things that ordinary people cannot see. It represents another way of experiencing and knowing the world. Through Varsha, Ghosh questions the boundaries between the viewer and the viewed, presence and absence, and the visible and the invisible. The ghost-eye thus becomes a way of thinking about forms of knowledge that cannot always be comprehended through ordinary ways of seeing.

### **Archive, Photography, and Mediated Vision**

The novel explores knowledge in more ways than just direct observation. It also looks at how experiences are recorded, saved, and later understood through technology. Shoma’s archive is a key example. She listens to people’s stories and writes them down for her work. Recording an experience changes it. What was once personal and temporary becomes a written record that can be read, compared, and interpreted later. The archive makes these experiences last, turning memories into something more permanent. In this way, documentation links personal stories to shared knowledge. When an experience is added to the archive, its ownership changes. At first, the experience belongs to Varsha, since she lived it. But after Shoma writes it down, it becomes part of a professional system

where others can study and interpret it. The archive not only keeps Varsha's experience but also puts it into a new context of knowledge.

Photography brings up a similar issue in the novel. In Varsha's photograph, she looks straight at the camera. This means she is not just someone being watched. Instead, her gaze seems to meet the photographer's gaze. This creates a reversal in the usual relationship between the viewer and the person being viewed. Normally, the person behind the camera controls what is photographed, and the viewer later looks at the image. In Varsha's photograph, however, the subject appears to look back. The person who is being observed therefore seems to become an observer as well. This makes the relationship between the observer and the observed less fixed.

A later scene involving the apparition makes the connection between seeing and knowledge more complicated. Tipu uses his phone camera to show Dinu what is happening at the Manasa temple. Dinu notices a glowing sphere surrounding what appears to be the outline of a woman, but he cannot identify the image clearly because of his fever and the poor phone connection. The camera therefore gives him access to an event that he cannot witness directly, but it does not give him certainty about what he is seeing. Tipu understands the image as an apparition connected with Varsha, while the League of Rationalists gives it a rational explanation, identifying it as a gas flare. The same event therefore produces different interpretations, showing that an image does not have one fixed meaning. What is seen still has to be understood through a particular system of knowledge and belief.

This idea relates to Foucault's concept of regimes of truth. What people accept as true is not just about what they see. It also depends on how they understand what they see (Ayala-Colqui). In the novel, the same image can be proof of something supernatural for one person and just a natural event for someone else. This process can be shown as a simple sequence:

experience → observation → documentation → image → interpretation.

At each stage, the original experience goes through another layer of mediation. It is observed, recorded, photographed or sent digitally, and then interpreted by someone else. So, the camera does not always make things clearer. Like a medical exam or an archive, it can give more details, but those details still need to be interpreted. Ghosh questions the idea that seeing more always means knowing more. In *Ghost-Eye*, simply seeing something does not necessarily mean a person understands it.

## Conclusion

*Ghost-Eye* shows that seeing is more complex than just looking at something. Visual perception does not immediately become knowledge. Experiences need to be examined, recorded, classified, and

interpreted before they are accepted as knowledge. Varsha's story makes this idea clear. Monty's medical exam turns her strange experience into something that can be studied by professionals. Later, calling it a "case" puts her experience into a specific system of knowledge. Shoma's archive goes further by turning spoken stories into written records. These examples show that knowledge is not simply about finding something new. It is also about how knowledge is collected, organised, and given authority.

At the same time, Ghosh does not show institutional knowledge as the only way to understand reality. Varsha's remote viewing, her memories, and her senses challenge the limits of traditional ways of knowing. The novel does not say these experiences should replace science. Instead, it asks us to think about whether something should be dismissed as knowledge just because it cannot be explained or tested by familiar scientific methods (Mundackal). The novel explores this idea through different ways of seeing. It starts with the peephole in the Gupta mansion, then moves to medical observation, Varsha's remote viewing, Shoma's archive, photography, and finally the digital image of the ghost. In each case, seeing seems to give access to reality, but it does not always lead to a single, fixed understanding. People can look at the same event and see it in different ways.

In this way, the 'ghost-eye' is more than merely a strange ability that Varsha has. It stands for a different way of seeing the world, one that does not always fit with usual ideas about how knowledge is gained. It also blurs the line between the watcher and the watched. The child who is studied by others can also be the one who sees beyond their limits. So, the main question in *Ghost-Eye* is not only what can be seen, but also how what is seen is interpreted and understood. The novel also asks a bigger question: can something be considered knowledge if it cannot be explained in the usual ways? Through Varsha's experiences and the different ways of observing presented in the story, Ghosh shows that knowledge depends on how individuals interpret what they see and grant it authority. What is seen matters, but the manner in which it is understood and accepted matters just as much.

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