

Class Conflict Analysis in Qaisra Shahraz's *Zamindar's Wife*: A Marxist Perspective

Daffa Akbar Dejavu Santoso^{a*}, Athiyyah Amirah Ardine^b

^{ab} *Universitas Trunojoyo Madura*

*Corresponding author. E-mail address: davaakbards03@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study examines class conflict in Qaisra Shahraz's short story *Zamindar's Wife* (2013) through Marxist literary criticism. Employing qualitative content analysis based on Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' class conflict theory, the research identifies two primary manifestations of exploitation: psychological coercion through which the landlord Sarfaraz manipulates villagers into selling their land, and ideological resistance by Younis, an educated villager who challenges feudal authority. The analysis reveals that Sarfaraz's lavish dinner invitation serves as a tool of domination, creating false obligations that pressure economically dependent villagers into compliance. Conversely, Younis's refusal to attend the dinner and his rejection of land transfer agreements demonstrate how education fosters class consciousness, enabling the oppressed to recognize and resist structural inequalities. The findings highlight education as a critical catalyst for class resistance, illustrating that awareness transforms individual defiance into collective challenge against entrenched feudal systems. This research contributes to literary scholarship by offering a comprehensive Marxist analysis of class dynamics in South Asian literature, expanding beyond previous gender-focused interpretations to examine structural economic inequalities underlying social conflicts.

Keywords: Class Conflict, Feudalism, Marxist Theory, Pakistani Literature, Power Relations, Social Inequality

INTRODUCTION

Qaisra Shahraz's short story *Zamindar's Wife* (2013), set in rural Pakistan, provides a compelling literary representation of persistent feudal relationships where landownership determines social power and economic survival. The narrative depicts how the zamindar (landlord) Sarfaraz maintains dominance over tenant farmers through both economic control and psychological manipulation, while the educated villager Younis emerges as a voice of resistance against this exploitation. This literary work offers valuable insight into how class-based power structures operate in postcolonial South Asian contexts, where traditional feudal systems coexist with modern economic developments, creating complex patterns of domination and resistance.

The unequal distribution of power among social classes creates significant disparities that perpetuate social stratification and conflict. According to Marx and Engels (1888, p. 9), the ruling class consolidates its dominance by concentrating property ownership in the hands of a limited bourgeoisie, thereby restricting social mobility and maintaining hierarchical structures. In feudal contexts such as that depicted in *Zamindar's Wife*, landlords control land access,

forcing tenant farmers into economic dependency that enables systematic exploitation. This concentration of wealth and power prevents individuals from lower social strata from ascending the class hierarchy, deliberately perpetuating their subordinate position to preserve elite status.

Class conflict, defined as the antagonistic relationship between social classes with divergent economic interests, remains central to understanding social dynamics and power relations. Marx and Engels (1888, p. 3) characterize this phenomenon as continuous opposition between oppressors and the oppressed, where the economically privileged class systematically exploits the labor and resources of the disadvantaged. The bourgeoisie pursue wealth accumulation at the expense of the proletariat, creating tensions that inevitably lead to class struggle.

Existing scholarship on Qaisra Shahraz's *Zamindar's Wife* has primarily examined gender dynamics, women's oppression, and feminist resistance, leaving class-based analysis relatively unexplored. Mashori and Sabah (2015) analyzed the representation of the feudal lord and subaltern poor through Young's theory of subalternity, highlighting power relations in the village context. Their study identified Sarfaraz as representing dominance while Noor embodies resistance, yet their analysis emphasized human equality as a universal value rather than examining the economic structures and class antagonisms underlying these power relations. While their work acknowledges hierarchy, it does not systematically examine how landownership and economic dependency create the material conditions for Sarfaraz's domination and constrain possibilities for resistance.

Khoiriyah (2019) examined Noor's struggles through an Islamic feminist lens, demonstrating how the protagonist challenges injustice within her roles as woman and wife by invoking Islamic teachings on gender equity. While her study acknowledges resistance against patriarchal authority, it centers gender oppression rather than exploring how economic power and class position intersect with gender to create multiple, overlapping forms of domination. This gender-centered approach, though valuable for understanding women's experiences, does not address how feudal economic relations structure the possibilities for resistance or how Noor's class position as the landlord's wife creates fundamentally different material conditions than those experienced by female tenant farmers.

Roifah (2023) similarly focused on the portrayal of married women's lives in the story, examining domestic relationships and gender expectations within the household. These gender-centered analyses, while contributing important insights into patriarchal structures, have not systematically examined how class position determines characters' material conditions, social relationships, and capacity for agency. The concentration on gender issues has overshadowed the economic foundations that enable both gender and class oppression in feudal contexts, particularly how control over land creates power that manifests in both economic exploitation and patriarchal domination.

Afzal and Sheikh (2020) conducted a feminist stylistic study comparing representations of women in *Zamindar's Wife* with another South Asian narrative, analyzing linguistic patterns and discourse strategies. Their stylistic approach illuminated how language constructs gender roles and power relations, but did not extend to examining how economic language, property relations, and class-marked speech patterns reveal structural inequalities between landlords and tenant farmers.

This present study distinguishes itself from previous scholarship by foregrounding class conflict as the primary analytical focus, examining how all social relations in the narrative are structured by economic power and property relations. Rather than analyzing individual

characters in isolation or focusing exclusively on gender, this research examines how characters' class positions determine their interests, behaviors, and conflicts. By integrating Marx and Engels' (1888) class conflict theory with Weber's (2009) multidimensional analysis of social stratification, this study provides comprehensive examination of how economic power creates antagonistic relationships between social groups, offering deeper understanding of the structural inequalities that underpin both gender and class oppression in the story.

This study addresses two primary research questions: (1) How is class conflict portrayed in Qaisra Shahraz's *Zamindar's Wife*? (2) What forms of class struggle emerge between different social groups in the narrative? The significance of this research lies in its contribution to understanding how contemporary South Asian literature represents enduring feudal relationships and class-based oppression, illuminating broader patterns of social conflict in postcolonial societies where feudal elements persist within nominally modern political and economic systems.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework: Marxist Theory and Class Conflict

This study employs Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' (1888) class conflict theory from *The Communist Manifesto* as its primary analytical framework. Marxist theory posits that society is fundamentally divided into antagonistic classes based on their relationship to the means of production. The bourgeoisie, who own capital and productive resources, stand in opposition to the proletariat, who must sell their labor to survive. This structural antagonism creates inherent conflicts as the owning class seeks to maximize profit through exploitation while the working class resists this exploitation to improve their material conditions.

According to Barry (2009), Marxist literary criticism examines how literary texts reflect, reinforce, or challenge the economic base and ideological superstructure of society. Literature serves not merely as aesthetic expression but as a cultural product that reveals class relations, economic conflicts, and ideological struggles within specific historical contexts. Class conflict in Marxist analysis extends beyond economic disputes to encompass cultural, ideological, and political dimensions, as the ruling class utilizes various institutions to maintain hegemony over subordinate groups.

Draper (2011) emphasizes that class conflict arises from the fundamental exploitation inherent in capitalist production relations, where the bourgeoisie appropriate surplus value created by workers' labor. In feudal contexts, similar dynamics operate through landownership, where landlords extract rent and labor from tenant farmers who lack alternative means of subsistence. The concentration of wealth and power in elite hands creates structural inequalities that perpetuate across generations, as the ruling class employs both economic mechanisms and ideological apparatuses to maintain dominance.

While Marx focuses on the binary opposition between bourgeoisie and proletariat, Max Weber (2009) offers a complementary perspective by emphasizing social stratification based on class, status, and power. Weber argues that class position is determined not only by relationship to means of production but also by market position and life chances. In feudal societies, status honor and traditional authority intersect with economic power, creating complex hierarchies where landlords exercise dominance through multiple dimensions: property ownership, social prestige, and cultural authority. This multidimensional analysis helps explain how feudal systems maintain stability despite inherent exploitation, as

subordinate classes may accept their position due to status distinctions and traditional legitimacy rather than purely economic coercion.

Class Conflict in Literary Analysis

Class conflict, as conceptualized in Marxist literary criticism, refers to tensions and struggles emerging from unequal distribution of power, wealth, and social status among different groups. Marx and Engels (1888) identify two primary classes in capitalist society: the bourgeoisie, who control the means of production, and the proletariat, who must sell their labor power to survive. In feudal contexts, analogous relationships exist between landlords and peasants or tenant farmers. These class divisions create inherent antagonisms, as the interests of owners and workers stand in fundamental opposition.

Draper (2011) argues that the bourgeoisie prioritize business interests and profit maximization in accordance with capitalist imperatives, leading to systematic exploitation of workers through inadequate wages, excessive working hours, and unsafe conditions. This economic exploitation forms the material basis for class conflict, while ideological and cultural domination reinforces these power relations. The ruling class uses its economic resources not only to extract surplus value but also to shape legal, political, and cultural institutions that legitimize their dominance.

Marx and Engels (1888) conceptualize ideology as part of society's superstructure, arguing that the ruling class controls not only economic production but also the production of ideas. The dominant ideology naturalizes existing power relations, making exploitation appear inevitable or even beneficial. This concept of false consciousness explains why oppressed classes may not immediately recognize their exploitation or organize resistance: the ideological apparatus of the ruling class shapes how subordinate groups understand their social reality. Education, media, religion, and cultural institutions transmit ideas that justify inequality and discourage collective action by the oppressed.

Power imbalances across social classes inevitably generate conflict, as those lacking economic and political power experience systematic injustice while elites protect their privileges (Saoudi et al., 2020). Social class, constructed on socioeconomic foundations, serves as a primary driver of conflict, particularly as wealth and power concentrate among privileged groups. When these imbalances intensify, they produce social tensions that may manifest as individual resistance, collective organizing, or revolutionary movements.

Marx and Engels (1888) observe that the bourgeoisie have extended their control by prioritizing urban, capitalist development over rural, agricultural economies, thereby transforming traditional social relations. In this dynamic, the dominant class exploits subordinate groups through various mechanisms: extracting rent from tenant farmers, paying subsistence wages to industrial workers, and maintaining ideological hegemony through education, media, and cultural institutions. This multifaceted exploitation creates conditions for class struggle, especially among the working poor who bear the harshest consequences of economic inequality.

The relationship between owners of productive resources and those who must work for them forms the core of class conflict (Marx & Engels, 1888). All oppressed classes ultimately confront the bourgeoisie, as the upper class utilizes its economic power to suppress lower classes. The poor must labor for the wealthy to secure basic survival needs, yet their work is systematically undervalued and their surplus labor appropriated for elite benefit. This exploitative relationship perpetuates ongoing conflict between upper and lower classes, manifesting in both overt confrontations and subtle forms of resistance.

Saoudi et al. (2020) note that upper classes frequently display discriminatory attitudes toward those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, resulting in mistreatment, ridicule, social exclusion, and various forms of abuse. Onwuegbuna (2021) adds that the working class, dependent entirely on wage labor for subsistence, often remains invisible in societies controlled by wealthy elites. These power dynamics ensure that the rich extract value from the poor's labor while maintaining systems that naturalize and perpetuate exploitation across generations.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design, specifically descriptive qualitative analysis, which is appropriate for exploring and interpreting social phenomena represented in literary texts. According to Creswell and Creswell (2022), qualitative research aims to understand meanings that individuals or groups construct regarding social or human problems, utilizing words and textual data rather than numerical measurements. The methodology seeks to interpret phenomena from the perspectives of characters and social contexts depicted in the narrative (Mohajan, 2018), examining how social structures, particularly class hierarchies and economic power relations, are represented in *Zamindar's Wife*. The primary data source is Qaisra Shahraz's short story *Zamindar's Wife*, published in the anthology *A Pair of Jeans* in March 2013. According to Yin (2016), qualitative data consist of meaningful units such as observations, descriptions, and expressions that facilitate comprehensive understanding. The researcher collects data comprising both narrative descriptions and character dialogues, focusing specifically on textual passages that reflect issues of social class, power relations, exploitation, and resistance. This approach is justified by several factors: the literary text exists in its original published form, aligning with Bogdan and Biklen's (2007) emphasis on utilizing authentic materials; the study focuses on characters' actions and dialogues that illustrate class dynamics; and the researcher provides theoretically informed interpretation through Marxist theory, enabling critical engagement to uncover deeper social meanings.

The researcher serves as the primary instrument for both data collection and analysis, as effective interpretation of social phenomena and ideological meanings embedded in literary texts requires human judgment and theoretical knowledge (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). This study applies the observation and documentation technique outlined by Miles et al. (2014), involving several systematic stages. First, thorough, repeated reading of the short story develops comprehensive understanding of content, context, characters, and conflicts. Second, the researcher identifies and marks relevant passages—specifically narrative descriptions and character dialogues relating to class position, power imbalance, exploitation, and resistance. Third, collected data are organized and classified according to analytical categories derived from Marxist theory: evidence of class structure, manifestations of landlord power, peasant subordination, forms of exploitation (economic and psychological), instances of class consciousness, and acts of resistance. These thematic codes enable systematic analysis of how class conflict operates at multiple levels in the narrative.

The data analysis follows the interactive model proposed by Miles et al. (2014), comprising three interconnected stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. In data condensation, the researcher selects textual passages directly relevant to class conflict while eliminating content that does not contribute to Marxist analysis, ensuring analytical focus. In data display, selected evidence is organized in structured formats according to thematic categories, revealing patterns and relationships. In conclusion drawing and verification, the researcher interprets findings, formulates conclusions based on textual

evidence and theoretical principles, and validates interpretations through consultation with academic advisors, ensuring conclusions are grounded in textual evidence and consistent with Marxist theoretical principles. This systematic approach ensures rigor and validity in analyzing how class conflict is portrayed in the literary text through a Marxist lens.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Structure of Class Relations in *Zamindar's Wife*

The narrative of *Zamindar's Wife* depicts a feudal social structure characteristic of rural Pakistan, where landownership determines all social relations and creates rigid class hierarchies. The text establishes Sarfaraz's dominant position through inherited wealth and extensive landholdings: "Sarfaraz was a wealthy landowner who had inherited the land from his family. He owned almost all the land in the village" (Shahraz, 2013, p. 89). This concentration of property in a single family's hands exemplifies Marx and Engels' (1888, p. 9) observation that ruling classes maintain dominance by concentrating ownership among a limited elite, thereby preventing wealth distribution and social mobility.

The villagers, in contrast, occupy a subordinate class position defined by their lack of property and dependence on Sarfaraz's land for survival. The narrative notes that "the local residents could only work as farm laborers on his land" (Shahraz, 2013, p. 89), indicating their proletarian status within the feudal system. This economic dependence creates a fundamental power imbalance, as the villagers cannot refuse Sarfaraz's demands without risking their livelihoods. Marx and Engels (1888, p. 3) characterize this relationship as one of continuous opposition between oppressor and oppressed, where those with economic power systematically exploit those without alternatives.

The feudal structure maintains itself through both economic mechanisms and ideological domination, what Marx terms the base and superstructure. Sarfaraz's control over land translates directly into control over villagers' lives, as they must accept his terms to access the means of subsistence. This economic coercion operates alongside cultural expectations of deference and loyalty to the landlord, creating a system where exploitation appears natural or traditional rather than as structural violence. Barry (2009) notes that capitalism and feudalism alike concentrate wealth and influence in elite hands, affecting not only economic relations but also ideas, culture, and social institutions that legitimize ruling class control.

Psychological Coercion and Ideological Domination

One of the most sophisticated manifestations of class conflict in the narrative occurs through Sarfaraz's manipulation of social obligations to serve economic interests. The landlord invites all villagers to an elaborate dinner at his estate, a gesture that superficially appears as benevolent hospitality but functions as psychological coercion. As the narrator reveals, "At first glance, this looks like the kindness of a landlord to his people. However, behind it all, Sarfaraz has a hidden intention. He wants to influence the villagers to sell their land for his bauxite mining project" (Shahraz, 2013, p. 92). This manipulation exemplifies how the bourgeoisie employ ideological and cultural means alongside economic power to achieve their objectives.

The dinner invitation creates a sense of obligation and indebtedness among the villagers, who interpret the gesture as kindness requiring reciprocation. The narrative describes how Sarfaraz "creates a sense of discomfort or a sense of obligation in the villagers, so that they feel compelled to follow his will" (Shahraz, 2013, p. 92). This psychological mechanism

demonstrates how class domination operates not only through direct coercion but through manipulation of social norms and cultural expectations. The villagers find themselves “subtly pressured by the power and false kindness given by Sarfaraz” (Shahraz, 2013, p. 93), unable to refuse his subsequent demands without appearing ungrateful or disrespectful.

This form of exploitation represents what Marxist analysis identifies as ideological domination through the superstructure, where the ruling class secures compliance through cultural and psychological means rather than overt force. Draper (2011) emphasizes that the bourgeoisie maintain control not solely through economic ownership but through shaping social relations and expectations that naturalize their dominance. In this case, Sarfaraz transforms traditional hospitality into a tool of economic exploitation, using cultural practices to advance his mining interests at the villagers' expense.

The concept of false consciousness illuminates why villagers may comply despite recognizing harm to their interests: the ideological framework of feudal loyalty and patron-client relationships obscures the exploitative nature of Sarfaraz's demands, making resistance appear not only risky but culturally inappropriate or ungrateful. The land sale Sarfaraz seeks would benefit him enormously through mining profits while dispossessing villagers of their remaining property and traditional livelihoods. The narrator emphasizes that he pursues this “for his own benefit, without thinking about the fate of the community” (Shahraz, 2013, p. 93). This single-minded pursuit of profit at others' expense exemplifies Marx and Engels' (1888) observation that the bourgeoisie exploit the proletariat for personal gain, pursuing wealth accumulation regardless of social consequences.

Education, Class Consciousness, and Overt Resistance

The character of Younis introduces a contrasting form of class conflict based on educated awareness rather than economic power. Unlike other villagers, Younis has access to higher education in the city, providing him with critical perspective on the feudal system. The narrative identifies him as “a young villager who is studying in the city” and notes that “he is the only villager who has access to higher education” (Shahraz, 2013, p. 94). This education enables Younis to recognize that “the system that has been running so far is unfair” and to understand that “Sarfaraz only wants to take personal advantage of the village land without thinking about the fate of the community” (Shahraz, 2013, p. 94).

Younis's educational experience has fostered what Marxist theory terms class consciousness: awareness of one's class position, understanding of exploitation, and recognition of collective interests opposed to ruling class interests. His refusal to attend Sarfaraz's dinner and rejection of the land transfer agreement represent conscious political resistance rather than mere personal defiance. The text states that Younis “refuses to attend the dinner and also refuses to sign the land transfer letter” (Shahraz, 2013, p. 95), actions that directly challenge the landlord's authority and economic designs.

This resistance threatens Sarfaraz precisely because it is grounded in ideological clarity rather than emotional reaction. The narrative notes that “Younis's attitude made Sarfaraz furious, because he realized that education could be a threat to the feudal system that had benefited him so far” (Shahraz, 2013, p. 95). The landlord recognizes that education enables the lower class to see through ideological mystifications and challenge structures that appear natural or inevitable to those without critical awareness. This validates Marx's argument that the ruling class maintains dominance partly through controlling ideas and limiting lower class access to knowledge; Younis's education disrupts this ideological control, piercing the veil of false consciousness that sustains feudal authority.

Furthermore, Younis does not merely protect his own interests but actively works to raise other villagers' consciousness. The narrator emphasizes that he "opened the eyes of other residents that they have the right to defend their own land and lives" (Shahraz, 2013, p. 96). This collective organizing represents a crucial stage in class struggle, as individual resistance transforms into collective consciousness and potential for organized action. Draper (2011) emphasizes that class conflict escalates when workers develop not only awareness of their exploitation but also solidarity and collective identity as a class with shared interests.

The conflict between Younis and Sarfaraz thus represents the clash between feudal ideology and emerging class consciousness, between naturalized hierarchy and demands for justice. Younis embodies the possibility that "people from the lower class will not always remain silent and accept the situation" (Shahraz, 2013, p. 96). His resistance demonstrates that "when someone from the lower class has education and social awareness, he can be a trigger for change and even a threat to established power" (Shahraz, 2013, p. 96). This validates Marx and Engels' view that the oppressed class, once achieving consciousness and organization, becomes capable of challenging ruling class hegemony.

The Role of Education as Catalyst for Resistance Movements

The narrative emphasizes education as a crucial factor enabling class resistance, suggesting that knowledge provides tools for recognizing and challenging exploitation. Younis's university education exposes him to alternative social arrangements and critical frameworks for analyzing power relations, contrasting sharply with villagers whose experience remains confined to traditional rural life under feudal authority. The text notes that "his presence in the village brings a breath of fresh air because he begins to realize that the system that has been running so far is unfair" (Shahraz, 2013, p. 94).

This representation aligns with Marxist understanding of consciousness development as essential for revolutionary change. Marx and Engels (1888) argue that while objective economic conditions create the potential for class struggle, subjective factors including awareness, organization, and ideology determine whether that potential is realized. Without understanding their exploitation, workers may accept their conditions as natural or inevitable through false consciousness; with consciousness, they recognize their collective power to demand change or transform society.

Sarfaraz's furious reaction to Younis's defiance reveals his understanding that education threatens feudal control. The landlord recognizes that an educated, critical populace will not accept exploitation passively. The narrative states that Sarfaraz "realized that education could be a threat to the feudal system that had benefited him so far" (Shahraz, 2013, p. 95), acknowledging that knowledge undermines the ideological justifications sustaining his dominance. This fear of educated resistance explains why ruling classes historically restrict educational access or control curricula to prevent development of critical consciousness, maintaining the superstructure that legitimizes their economic base of power.

The story thus illustrates education's dual role in class conflict: as a tool for individual advancement and as a catalyst for collective resistance. Younis uses his education not merely to escape his class position but to challenge the system oppressing his community. By "opening the eyes of other residents" (Shahraz, 2013, p. 96), he transforms individual knowledge into collective consciousness, demonstrating that "education and awareness can be powerful tools of resistance for the lower class to fight against injustice that has been going on for a long time" (Shahraz, 2013, p. 96).

Literary Value and Implications for Understanding Class Dynamics

Shahraz's narrative accomplishes significant literary and social critique by depicting class conflict through both subtle psychological manipulation and overt confrontation, demonstrating the multifaceted nature of feudal domination. The story avoids simplistic portrayals of villains and heroes, instead showing how economic structures shape all characters' behaviors and possibilities. Sarfaraz acts according to his class interests, employing methods available to him as landlord; villagers struggle within constraints of economic dependency; and Younis represents the transformative potential of consciousness.

The literary technique of contrasting the dinner invitation's surface appearance with its underlying purpose effectively illustrates how ideology masks exploitation. Readers initially perceive hospitality before the narrator reveals economic motives, mirroring how false consciousness operates in actual social relations. This narrative strategy invites readers to question apparently benevolent gestures by those in power, developing critical awareness analogous to Younis's educated consciousness.

The class dynamics depicted in *Zamindar's Wife* illuminate broader patterns of feudal persistence in postcolonial South Asian societies, where formal democratization and legal equality coexist with entrenched economic hierarchies. Despite Pakistan's formal status as a democratic republic, rural areas often maintain feudal relationships where landlords exercise economic, social, and political control over tenant farmers and agricultural laborers. Shahraz's narrative reveals how these traditional power structures adapt to modern contexts, with landlords pursuing contemporary economic ventures like mining while maintaining feudal social relations.

The story also demonstrates how class conflict manifests differently across contexts, taking forms specific to local economic structures and cultural practices. While Marx and Engels developed their theory primarily through analyzing industrial capitalism in nineteenth-century Europe, the feudal setting of *Zamindar's Wife* shows that fundamental class antagonisms persist across different economic systems wherever property concentration creates dependence and exploitation. The mechanisms differ—industrial capitalists extract surplus value through wage labor while feudal landlords extract rent and control land access—but both systems rest on ownership concentration enabling systematic exploitation.

Furthermore, the narrative suggests that postcolonial contexts present unique challenges for class consciousness and resistance. Traditional cultural norms emphasizing deference to authority, communal obligations, and patron-client relationships may inhibit recognition of exploitation as structural injustice rather than natural hierarchy. Younis's education in the city, away from traditional rural culture, proves crucial for developing critical perspective; this suggests that consciousness development may require exposure to alternative social arrangements and ideological frameworks that challenge dominant narratives perpetuated through the superstructure.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined class conflict in Qaisra Shahraz's *Zamindar's Wife* through Marxist literary analysis, revealing how feudal power structures create systematic exploitation and resistance in rural Pakistani society. Rather than simply retelling narrative events, this research demonstrates how the story illuminates fundamental Marxist concepts: the material base of class relations through landownership, the ideological superstructure that naturalizes

exploitation, false consciousness that inhibits resistance, and the development of class consciousness through education that enables collective struggle.

The analysis identifies two primary manifestations of class conflict within the narrative, each revealing different dimensions of how ruling classes maintain dominance. First, psychological coercion through which the landlord Sarfaraz manipulates social obligations demonstrates how ruling classes employ cultural and ideological mechanisms alongside economic power. The elaborate dinner invitation functions as subtle coercion, creating obligations that pressure villagers to comply with his land purchase scheme for bauxite mining. This manipulation exemplifies Marx's concept of the superstructure: cultural practices, social norms, and ideological frameworks that legitimize economic exploitation by making it appear natural, traditional, or even benevolent. The villagers experience false consciousness, unable to recognize hospitality as a tool of domination because their ideological framework interprets landlord generosity as requiring loyal reciprocation.

Second, ideological resistance through which the educated villager Younis challenges feudal authority demonstrates that class struggle requires both objective economic conditions and subjective awareness and organization. Younis's refusal to attend Sarfaraz's dinner and rejection of the land transfer document represent conscious political resistance grounded in understanding of feudal exploitation. His education enables recognition of systemic injustice and provides frameworks for challenging naturalized hierarchies. Furthermore, his efforts to raise other villagers' consciousness suggest the potential for individual resistance to develop into collective class struggle, threatening the feudal system's ideological foundations and the material base it protects.

The findings reveal that class conflict operates through interconnected material and ideological dimensions, as Marx and Engels' theory predicts. Economic power concentration in Sarfaraz's hands creates dependency that enables exploitation (the base), while ideological domination through cultural norms and expectations secures compliance without requiring constant coercion (the superstructure). Younis's resistance challenges both dimensions simultaneously: materially, by refusing land sale; ideologically, by rejecting the landlord's authority and exposing exploitation to other villagers, thereby combating false consciousness.

This research contributes to literary scholarship in several significant ways. First, it provides comprehensive Marxist analysis of class dynamics in contemporary South Asian literature, expanding beyond previous gender-focused interpretations to examine structural economic inequalities underlying multiple forms of oppression. While gender analysis remains valuable, this study demonstrates that understanding class structures and economic power relations is essential for comprehending how patriarchal and feudal systems interact to create complex, overlapping forms of domination. Second, the study illustrates how literary texts can effectively represent and critique abstract theoretical concepts such as false consciousness, ideological domination, and class consciousness development, making these ideas accessible and concrete through narrative and characterization. Third, the analysis demonstrates the continued relevance of Marxist theory for understanding contemporary postcolonial contexts where feudal elements persist within nominally modern systems.

The findings also illuminate how education functions as a catalyst for class consciousness and resistance movements. Younis's transformation from accepting feudal hierarchy to recognizing and challenging it occurs through exposure to alternative ideological frameworks during his urban education. This suggests that consciousness development requires not only material experience of exploitation but also intellectual tools for analyzing that experience critically. The landlord's fearful reaction to Younis's educated defiance reveals ruling class

awareness that knowledge threatens their dominance, explaining historical patterns of educational restriction and ideological control by elites.

Future research should examine the intersection of class and gender in Shahraz's work, analyzing how economic position and gender identity interact to create multiple, overlapping forms of oppression and resistance. While this study has focused primarily on class conflict, comprehensive understanding of social dynamics in *Zamindar's Wife* requires examining how feudal economic structures and patriarchal gender norms reinforce each other. Additionally, comparative studies analyzing class conflict across multiple South Asian authors would illuminate regional patterns and variations in how contemporary literature represents feudal persistence and resistance.

REFERENCES

- Afzal, A., & Sheikh, A. A. (2020). Representations of women in Daniyal Mueenuddin's Saleema and Qaisra Shahraz's *Zamindar's Wife*: A feminist stylistic study. *International Journal of Linguistics and Culture*, 1(1), 48-64. <https://doi.org/10.52700/ijlc.v1i1.10>
- Al-Khafaf, Z. (2021). A study of hegemony and class conflict in Gaskell's North and South. *European Journal of Social Science Education and Research*, 8(3), 171-178.
- Barry, P. (2009). *Beginning theory: An introduction to literary and cultural theory* (3rd ed.). Manchester University Press.
- Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (2007). *Qualitative research for education* (5th ed.). Pearson Education Inc.
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2022). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (6th ed.). Sage Publications Inc.
- Draper, H. (2011). *Karl Marx's theory of revolution* (Vol. 2). Aakar Books.
- Khoiriyah, K. (2019). Noor's struggle as reflected in Qaisra Shahraz's *Zemindar's Wife*: An Islamic feminist perspective. *English Language and Literature International Conference*, 3, 156-164.
- Marx, K., & Engels, F. (1888). *The Communist Manifesto*. Progress Publishers.
- Mashori, G. M., & Sabah, S. (2015). Feudal lord and subaltern poor: A study of Qaisra Shahraz's short story "Zamindar's Wife". *International Journal of English Language, Literature and Humanities*, 3(7), 582-594.
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications Inc.
- Mohajan, H. K. (2018). Qualitative research methodology in social sciences and related subjects. *Journal of Economic Development, Environment and People*, 7(1), 23-48.
- Nassaji, H. (2015). Qualitative and descriptive research: Data type versus data analysis. *Language Teaching Research*, 19(2), 129-132. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168815572747>
- Onwuegbuna, M. (2021). *Class conflict in Richard Wright's Native Son and Festus Iyayi's Violence* [Unpublished undergraduate thesis]. Mountain Top University.
- Roifah, M. (2023). The portrayal of married woman's life in *Zemindar's Wife* by Qaisra Shahraz. *Prosodi*, 17(1), 90-101. <https://doi.org/10.21107/prosodi.v17i1.19517>
- Saoudi, I., Gana, S., & Moalla, S. (2020). Class conflict and discrimination in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. *International Journal of Humanities and Cultural Studies*, 7(2), 1-14.

- Shahraz, Q. (2013). Zamindar's Wife. In *A pair of jeans and other stories* (pp. 87-102). Saqi Books.
- Weber, M. (2009). *From Max Weber: Essays in sociology* (H. H. Gerth & C. W. Mills, Trans.). Routledge.
- Wellek, R., & Warren, A. (1956). *Theory of literature*. Harcourt, Brace and Company.
- Yin, R. K. (2016). *Qualitative research from start to finish* (2nd ed.). The Guilford Press.