



## ***The Murder of Aziz Khan: A Cultural Materialist Perspective***

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### **Abstract**

This study seeks to explore the Pakistani English novel, Ghose's *The Murder of Aziz Khan*, through the framework of cultural-materialism, developed by both Williams (1977) and Harris (1979), focusing on the interconnected levels of cultural materialism, such as material conditions (Infrastructure), social organization (structure) and ideology (superstructure), which remain largely unexplored in the novel. For this purpose, the researcher adopts qualitative research approach and employs Catherine Belsey's (2013) method of textual analysis, exploring infrastructure, structure and superstructure as interconnected, by combining Harris's tripartite model with Williams' understanding of the dynamic relationship among material conditions, social structure and cultural production. The analysis concludes that different material conditions and social structures shape cultural differences. Since material conditions continuously restructure cultural meanings, therefore, future studies may reconsider literary texts usually studied through a static view of culture, which would generate deeper insights.

**Keywords:** Cultural materialism, base, structure, superstructure, textual analysis

### **Introduction**

#### **Background of the Study**

The current study analyses Ghose's novel, *The Murder of Aziz Khan*, through the lens of cultural materialism formulated by Raymond Williams and Marvin Harris. Williams (1977) introduced this theory in his book, *Marxism and Literature*, describing it as "a theory of the specificities of material, cultural and literary production within historical materialism" (Williams, 1977, p. 5). whereas, Harris (1979) described cultural materialism as a scientific and evidence-based framework for understanding culture, relating it to the material conditions of production and reproduction. He further states that cultural materialism attempts to "create a pan-human science of society whose findings can be accepted on logical and evidentiary grounds by the pan-human community" (Harris, 1979, p. xii). Thus, the theory uses a scientific strategy to find the facts about human cultures, suggesting that every sociocultural system is the outcome of dynamic interaction of the three main levels of cultural materialism, such as infrastructure, structure and superstructure.



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According to the theory of cultural materialism, the interaction among these three components is important because it determines the direction and speed of change. This explains society as a dynamic and interconnected process in which infrastructure, structure and superstructure continuously shape and reinforce one another through social practices. “The economic structure of society, the real foundation on which rises legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness” (Williams, 1977, p. 75).

Infrastructure refers to the material and economic conditions of life which include modes of production, land ownership and access to resources. While structure is the social system formed by the material conditions of production. The social organization, in turn, gives birth to a superstructure that refers to the ideology, social and cultural meanings, beliefs, ethical norms, and literature that interpret, justify, reinforce and sometimes contradict the existing social order. It is the symbolic or ideological segment of culture, involving rituals, taboos and symbols (Harris, 1979). The superstructure is not an independent sphere; rather, it is a product of the material conditions that shape people’s lived experiences (Williams, 1977). “With the change of the economic foundation the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed” (Williams, 1977, p.77).

This means that from infrastructural forms emerge social structures such as feudalism, Sardari systems, kinship networks, legal institutions and state governance, organizing social life and regulate access to land, labour and wealth. Williams further argues that these structures such as infrastructure, structure and superstructure are not mechanically determined by the economy; rather, they are historically produced and sustained through continuous social practice, often serving to protect the interests of dominant groups such as landlords, tribal chiefs and political elites. From these structures develops the superstructure which consists of ideological and cultural systems including customs, traditions, religious beliefs, moral values, social ethics and political narratives. Therefore, the theory of cultural materialism offers a theoretical framework to understand Pakistani society as interconnected whole, where economic conditions, institutional power and cultural meanings continuously interact to sustain and legitimize social inequality.

Ghose’s (1967) novel *The Murder of Aziz Khan* portrays the devastating impact of industrialization on the agrarian society of Kalapur, Punjab, exposing that the traditional landowners of the area such as Aziz Khan, were steadily and systematically dispossessed of their lands by the newly emerged industrialist class, the Shah Brothers, who came from Bombay on the creation of Pakistan in 1947. The story centers on Aziz Khan as he refuses to sell his seventy-acre land to the Shah Brothers, who, having established cotton mills in Kalapur, bought the land from all the local landlords except Aziz Khan. His resistance summons calculated retaliation from the industrialist class. The novel thus reveals that the industrialization which is backed by corrupt legal and financial systems, becomes a tool of exploitation, destroying lives, families and moral values. The novelist strongly criticizes the ruthlessness of the emerging industrial elite and laments the tragic loss of traditional rural life under the capitalist expansion.

The study aims to interpret *The Murder of Aziz Khan* from the perspective of cultural materialism. Cultural materialism studies cultural development within a society and relates it to the material conditions operating there. This study



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explores Williams and Harris's *core* elements of cultural materialism such as infrastructure, structure and superstructure in the novel, highlighting that changes in the economic bases of society affect social as well as ideological structures of the society. Moreover, the study challenges the static notion of culture, showing that cultural systems are dynamic and interconnected processes as propounded by cultural materialists, i.e. Raymond Williams and Marvin Harris.

In doing so, the study not only analyzes social practices and ideology in relation to material realities but also broadens the interpretive scope of cultural materialism for future scholarship. Therefore, it helps develop a dynamic, context-based form of literary criticism that sees literature as a cultural product shaped by clear narratives and the social and economic forces that underpin them.

### **Literature Review** **Cultural Materialism**

The term cultural materialism was introduced by Raymond Williams (1977) in his book *Marxism and Literature*. The roots of cultural materialism can be traced back to Karl Marx's materialist conception of history, which emphasizes that material conditions primarily shape social and cultural life (Marx, 1867).

The specific framework of cultural materialism was more formally articulated by Marvin Harris, stating that the primary causal factors in the development of cultural practices and social structures are environmental and economic conditions. Marvin Harris (1968) in his groundbreaking work, *The Rise of Anthropological Theory: A History of Theories of Culture*, established the theoretical foundation for cultural materialism, highlighting that social structures and cultural beliefs are shaped by material circumstances. Harris's work makes extensive use of new historical theory, which contends that the superstructure is determined by the infrastructure. He also believes that material conditions are the foundation upon which cultural structures and superstructures are built (Harris, 1968). Here, it is worth noting that his approach is in opposition to idealist theories, which emphasizes on ideas and beliefs over material conditions.

Raymond Williams (1977) asserts that "base and super structure" are concepts developed by Karl Marx in the realm of sociology. Base is directly connected to the production forces of society, whereas, superstructure encompasses ideological aspects of society. When linking the two, one comes to know that superstructure signifies cultural norms and ideologies including religious, political, social and economic institutions, and base is related to the operating material forces in a society. It is important to mention that changes in the infrastructure produce changes in the structure and superstructure.

Parvini (2018) states that in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, England had a stronger tradition of critical thought from the radical left, particularly among thinkers associated with the *New Left Review*, such as Raymond Williams, Terry Eagleton and E. P. Thompson. From this intellectual milieu, cultural materialism emerged, building upon and sometimes challenging the ideas of earlier Marxist thinkers and scholars. Unlike new historicism, cultural materialism has always maintained a more political and confrontational approach. It does not focus solely on understanding the past for academic purposes, but rather on



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comprehending the political present by examining its mediation through history, to effect change in the present. New historicists often interpreted historical events as instances of containment and the consolidation of power, cultural materialists saw them as sites of ideological contradictions, offering possibilities for dissent and subversion.

Bennett (2020) broadens this viewpoint to include the context of environmental changes on a global level. The research shows that material conditions also shape cultural responses to contemporary ecological challenges. Cultural materialism explains behavioral tendencies in people and cultural adaptation in response to ecological stressors. This interdisciplinary approach bridges various disciplines such as anthropology, environmental science and cultural theory. It also allows scholars and critics to study not only past societies but also modern global issues and challenges from a materialist angle.

The chief proponent of cultural materialism, Harris (1974) also explains the principles of cultural materialism through the analysis of the Hindu taboo against cow slaughter. He elucidates that this practice is not only a religious or ideological belief but also a practical adaptation to ecological and economic circumstances. In general, cows are essential for agricultural work and also provide milk, which is important for nourishment. Thus, the taboo supports the sustainability of the agricultural system and the production of milk. In his book, *Culture and Practical Reason*, Sahlin (2013) critically evaluates Marvin Harris's cultural materialism, mentioning that cultural practices and beliefs are connected with the material and socio-economic circumstances of society. He further says that human beings are not completely controlled by economic or material conditions as they possess the ability to think, choose and transform culture through their own beliefs and actions. He means to say that culture is not only shaped by material factors such as economy, resources and technology, but humans also actively interpret their world and introduce new meanings, symbols and practices. Sahlin called this ability, human agency. It means the power of individuals or societies to act freely and to make their own decisions.

### **Application of Cultural Materialism to Different Literary Works**

Cultural materialism is a critical approach that studies literary texts in relation to the material, social, historical and ideological situations in which they are produced and received (Williams, 1980; Dollimore & Sinfield, 1985). Cultural materialism has been sensitive to the issues related to marginalized groups and influential in their representation. Bekler (2021) mentions that Elizabeth Barrett Browning's 1856 verse novel, *Aurora Leigh* articulates rebellious and subversive features of women, particularly the protagonist of the novel. Her challenge against the patriarchal ideology is a precursor of the transformation of gender hierarchy and dominant capitalism. It is worth mentioning that cultural materialists such as Dollimore and Sinfield also register their commitment to the transformation of a social order that exploits people on the grounds of race, gender and class. Bekler mentions that Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* can be regarded as a masterpiece for providing an insight into the aspirations of women and encouraging women to take their place in the outside world by participating in professions usually regarded as masculine. Her work anticipates and contributes to the eventual transformation of social structures, making it an important text in the development of feminist and cultural literary criticism.



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Alan Sinfield (1992) concludes his work, *Faultlines: Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading*, with a provocative reading of *The Merchant of Venice*, that reveals the complexities of ideology, power and subversion in literature. His interpretation aligns with the wider goals of cultural materialism. He believes that literary texts both reflect and contest the dominant ideological structures of their time. He examines Shakespeare's play *The Merchant of Venice* as a text where competing ideologies intersect, especially around issues of race, religion and capitalism. He highlights the character of Shylock embodying the fault lines within Elizabethan society, particularly regarding anti-Semitism, religious intolerance and emerging capitalist values and traditions. He applies the concept of "subversion and containment," developed by the new historicist, Greenblatt, to show how Shakespeare's play seems to offer a space for dissent but ultimately reinscribes dominant values.

Gore (2021) discusses Shakespeare's *Othello*, and E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India*, from the cultural materialist perspective. The researcher demonstrates that texts across history engage with issues of power and inequality. Shakespeare's *Othello* can be examined in terms of race, authority and gender politics in the Elizabethan period. E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* reveals colonial power relations and cultural conflicts in British India.

Cultural Materialists seek to explore the issues of a society emerging with materialistic thought. Ramzan et al. (2023) examine Soniah Kamal's *Unmarriageable* 2019, and Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* through the lens of cultural materialism. Both novels address the core issue of marriage as shaped by society and capitalism. Their research highlights that mothers are often depicted as highly eager to arrange marriages for their daughters because of social expectations, family honour and cultural pressures. Fathers typically more concerned with financial stability, dowry and the economic status of the groom. Analyzed through the perspective of cultural materialism, they find that these patterns and structures reveal that marriage is not only an emotional or personal matter but is also strongly influenced by material and economic conditions, class and power.

Concluding the discussion on the application of cultural materialism, this study highlights that it has been employed by scholars such as Dollimore and Sinfield (1985), Bekler (2021), Gore (2021) and Ramzan et al. (2023) in the analysis of several literary genres, mostly drama, poetry and historical narratives, investigating the interaction between material conditions, power structures and cultural production.

### **Literature review on *The Murder of Aziz Khan***

The novel, *The Murder of Aziz Khan*, reflects a deeply conflicting identity perception and location that is closely connected to biography of the novelist. He experienced multiple cultural transitions that shaped his literary voice and personality. Ghose's migration across different countries created a sense of displacement and hybridity in his identity. As a result, he was neither entirely integrated into the West nor remained fully a part of Pakistan. Ghose's writings and poetry both reflect this in-between position. His literary works portray characters who suffer from alienation, cultural fragmentation and belongings. Their identities are not fixed but continuously reshaped by dispossession and



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alienation from land, geography and changing material and social conditions (Khwaja, 2003).

Scholars have also expressed interest in Ghose's use of narrative techniques. Abbasi (2015) narrating the novel as a national allegory, describes that the experiences and conflicts of its characters mirror the broader social and political conditions of Pakistan after independence. Through struggles of the characters over land acquisition, the expansion of power, class and identity, the novelist shows the difficulties faced by the newly state of Pakistan, including corruption, disparity and the growing influence of industrialists in social and political matters of the state.

Extending the argument, the narrative of the novel exposes that Ghose makes use of symbolism to highlight the conflict between the traditional agricultural system and the developing industrial capitalism. Aziz Khan's land is a symbol of family heritage, livelihood and identity, whereas industrial technology denotes the disruptive force of growing capitalism. Through contrasting the land with industrial machinery, the novelist represents Aziz Khan's personal struggle as illustrative of the wider conflict between poor farmers and the rising industrial class in the newly established state of Pakistan. The narrative technique of the novel also shows that unchecked industrial growth damages economic security, cultural values and social unity (Afzal et al., 2024).

Moreover, discussing the narrative strategies of the novel, Aldama (2003) places *The Murder of Aziz Khan* within the more realistic phase of Ghose's literary journey. He claims that the novel follows a relatively simple and straightforward narrative style, with identifiable characters, familiar social conflicts and a logically connected sequence of events. Thus, this straightforward form of the novel, differs from Ghose's later narratives, which make use of more complex, fragmented, and new narrative techniques

Shamsie (2017) highlights that *The Murder of Aziz Khan* is a depiction of destructive capitalism in rural Punjab, where the growth of a powerful industrial class upsets the traditional agricultural system. She contends that the industrial ambitions of the Shah brothers resulted in the procurement of agricultural land, leading to the exploitation of farmers and rural working class, whereas the protagonist of the novel, Aziz Khan, stands against the expanding capitalist system in Kalapur.

Jajja (2012) analyzes the novel as a critical portrayal of rising capitalism in newly independent state of Pakistan, displaying how economic power gained from industry helped the Shah brothers to suppress workers, employees, farmers and finally state's institutions. Likewise, Ahmad (2013) examines that the industrial growth revealed in the novel is not based on fair practices, but on the exploitation of the poor farming class, their seizure of land, which means the loss of both their property and their means of livelihood. It is important to note that working class people are not only victimized, silenced but also denied the power to challenge the industrialists' authority. Moreover, they are used as poorly paid workers who play a major role in the increase of industrial profits, without claiming and gaining a share of it. So, the novel depicts the growth of industry as an unequal process that increases not only the wealth but also the power of industrialists while causing, suffering, poverty and dislocation for the poor working people of Kalapur. Thus, the analysis provides an important



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understanding of social and economic inequality in the novel, but it does not effectively explore how economic changes restructure social relationships, ideology and cultural development.

Afzal et al. (2024) study the novel, *The Murder of Aziz Khan*, from the perspective of Marxism, arguing that economic expansion with the growth of industrialization in Kalapur, causes not only social inequality but also develop changes in moral and cultural values of society. The social transformation in the novel is reflected in the central conflict of the novel, between Aziz Khan and the Shah brothers. Aziz Khan resists to sell his land to the Shah brothers, who making use of their industrial profit, forcefully buy the agricultural land, start exploiting the workers, leading to the weakening of traditional values and ethics. In a nutshell, the analysis shows that the growth of capitalism in the novel affects the social organization and the cultural practices of the people.

*The Murder of Aziz Khan* reflects an unequal distribution of power as the capitalist class controls material resources and social institutions, while farmers and workers largely remain powerless. The main character of the novel, Aziz Khan struggles to resist dominant structures of power, but finally is overwhelmed by the capitalist forces. Though the study elucidates class domination and calculated resistance, it gives inadequate attention to how material conditions shape social organizations, societal values and dominant, residual, and emergent cultural practices, thus creating space for investigating the novel through the lens of cultural materialism (Hussain et al., 2023).

Haq (2022) mentions that *The Murder of Aziz Khan* exemplifies the chaotic nature of a capitalist society, where the transformation of society is driven by the dominance of technology and the quest for survival of the fittest. The research work pinpoints the transformation of rural life in the novel, displaying that the formation of factories in Kalapur, Punjab, upsets its old agricultural community, introducing industrial capitalism and its materialistic values.

For a thorough understanding, it is important to comprehend the background of the novel. Siddiqui (2011) pinpoints that the novel offers a critical lens on post-colonial Pakistan, reflecting that capitalist growth in Pakistan has not profited all segments of society alike and has instead allowed inequality and poverty to remain as part of the society. As the industrial expansion in Kalapur strengthens the Shah brothers while Aziz Khan and other farmers like him face economic insecurity in the shape of land loss. Siddiqui, however analyzing the novel from a broader economic context, does not inspect that these material changes affect social relations, ideology and culture, hence leaving space for a cultural-materialist study of the novel.

Ahmed (2009) studies *The Murder of Aziz Khan* from a sociopolitical perspective, declaring it a critique of post-independence inequality in the society. The novel shows that affluent industrialists, using their economic resources, political contacts and control over the state's institutions exploit poor rural people such as Aziz Khan. Therefore, the novel reveals, corruption, social inequality, the exploitation of farmers by the powerful industrialists and their increasing power with the rapid growth of industry after the independence of subcontinent, and the creation of Pakistan.

While discussing the environmental dimensions of the novel, Afzal et al. (2024) highlight that with the expansion of industrial capitalism, both marginalized



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groups and the natural environment are simultaneously exploited, as fertile lands are converted into industrial zones and working class of the society is made to work on meagre wages, causing an extreme social and economic imbalance in the society. This research study interprets, Aziz Khan's dispossession of his seventy-acre land by the Shah brothers, as an example of how agricultural land, natural resources and human labour are reduced to as means of generating profit for the capitalist class. This is worth mentioning that the interpretation of the scholars aligns closely with a cultural materialist framework because it highlights that environmental exploitation is closely connected to class dominance and economic interests.

Depicting the judicial developments in the novel, in the wake of industrial growth in Pakistan, Hussain (2011) describes that *The Murder of Aziz Khan* portrays legal and judicial institutions as helpless before the economically and politically influential industrialists of the state, indicating a gap between the formal ideal of judicial independence and its practical working, as the constitution of Pakistan guarantees the separation and independence of judiciary. The study finds that Ghose intentionally frames downfall of Aziz Khan in order to reveal the brutal consequences of inequality and systematic injustice, giving preference to material wealth over justice.

Concludingly, the novel, *The Murder of Aziz Khan*, has been discussed from diverse perspectives by scholars such as Siddiqui (2011), Hussain et al. (2023) and Afzal et al. (2024), highlighting the transformation of society from feudalism towards new emergent capitalism after the division of the subcontinent. Shamsie (2017) states that the novel depicts a gradual shift from traditional and cultural patterns to modern ways of living. Similarly, Haq (2022) has highlighted that the novel depicts a complete overhaul of the society under the impacts of industrialization. Although these studies explain inequality in the society, systemic corruption, displacement, dispossession and the shift from feudalism to capitalism, however, they pay inadequate attention to the dynamic relationship among material conditions, social organization, ideology and cultural change. Therefore, this study attempts to address this gap by combining Williams' (1977) cultural materialism with Marvin Harris's (1979) model of infrastructure, structure and superstructure, to evaluate how material transformation leads to wider changes in the structural, ideological and cultural practices of the society.

## Research methodology and Theoretical Framework

### Nature of the research

The research is qualitative in nature. The primary source is original text whereas secondary sources include research articles, journals, scholarly books, critical essays and other academic publications related to the selected novel. Catherine Belsey's (2013) method of textual analysis has been used to analyze the text, while Williams and Harris provide the theoretical lens (cultural materialism) for the interpretation of the text. Textual analysis is a wider term for multiple research methods applied to describe, interpret and understand texts. Moreover, the study is kept trustworthy by linking each claim closely to textual evidence from the selected novel.



## Textual Analysis

Textual investigation is one of the most proper tools or procedures for literary examination. Noonan (2008, p. 413) characterizes textual analysis examination as, "a technique for data analysis that intently looks at either the content and meaning of texts or their design and discourse." In this strategy of data analysis, "texts are ... dismantled to look at how they work, how they are developed, the manners by which meanings are created, and the nature of those meanings" (p. 865). McKee (2003) mentions that a literary text does not have one fixed or universal meaning. The meaning of a text changes depending on the social, cultural, historical and ideological setting in which it is read or interpreted.

## Theoretical Framework

Cultural materialism as an approach to literary and cultural analysis was developed by Raymond Williams, a British cultural theorist and critic. Williams (1977) introduced this concept in his work, *Marxism and literature*. His contributions to cultural materialism have had a significant impact on the field of cultural studies (Brannigan, 2016). "Culture" refers "to not only a body of intellectual and imaginative work, it is also essentially a whole way of life" (Williams, 1958, p. 311).

Cultural materialism analyzes societies through three interconnected levels of the sociocultural system: infrastructure, structure and superstructure. The infrastructure includes modes of production and reproduction such as technology, work patterns, birth and death rates, and population density. The structure consists of domestic and political economy, such as modes of family, gender and age roles, modes of political organization and warfare. Finally, the superstructure consists of ideological and behavioural patterns such as religion, science, art, music, dance, literature, sports and rituals (Harris, 1979).

Cultural materialism is indebted to Raymond Williams for its radical political approach, as he treated culture and literature as active material and social practices. Cultural materialists show that literary texts are instruments of the dominant socio-cultural order. This study is limited to the analysis of *The Murder of Aziz Khan* by Ghose from the perspective of culture materialism by Williams and Harris.

## Representation of the Three Levels of Cultural Materialism, i.e. Infrastructure, Structure and Superstructure in *The Murder of Aziz Khan*

Williams and Harris's theory of cultural materialism elucidates society as a dynamic and interconnected process in which Infrastructure, structure and superstructure continuously shape and reinforce one another through social practices. "The economic structure of society, the real foundation on which rises legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness" (Williams, 1977, p. 75).

## Infrastructure in *The Murder of Aziz Khan*

Williams' cultural materialism holds that a society is primarily shaped by its material and economic conditions, which he defines as the "base" or infrastructure. In the novel, *The Murder of Aziz Khan*, a feudal system, land ownership and its cultivation form the dominant economic structure; therefore,



power, social position and cultural practices are rooted in the control of land. However, when the industrial system dismantles this feudal structure, the economic base changes from land to capital, factories and wages of labour. Resultantly, social relations, class structures and cultural values also change. For Williams, the economic system forms the foundational framework, influencing the political, legal and cultural organizations of society.

## **Economic Transformation in Kalapur: From Feudalism to Industrialism**

It is the economic reality of the society that the mode of production, ownership and material relations shape life (Williams, 1977). The infrastructure refers to the material base that shapes social relations, class structures and beliefs and values operating in society. Ghose's novel, *The Murder of Aziz Khan*, captures the gradual shift in the economic base from the agrarian mode of production to an industrial setup during the post-colonial period. The novel also reflects the social and cultural transformations that accompanied the advent of the Shah brothers, from Bombay to Kalapur, on the creation of Pakistan. In the novel, the new capitalist elite, the Shah Brothers, are industrialists who profit from factories and trade.

In contrast to the Shah brothers, Aziz Khan, a self-sufficient landowner, represents the old agrarian economy, where land defines one's status. The clash between Aziz Khan's self-reliant agricultural life and the capitalist hunger for profit mirrors the transition of the economic base from feudal to capitalist production, and this change determines social relations, class conflict, and moral values in the society depicted in the novel. For instance, Ghose refers to the mode of production in the agrarian society of Kalapur, represented by Aziz Khan and the local farmers, in which land ownership forms the economic base of their social relations and cultural practices. According to Raymond Williams, every society is structured upon its infrastructure (economic base), which includes the mode of production. In the novel, Ghose depicts the agrarian economy of Punjab as the infrastructure. As he says, "cotton was the principal produce of the land" ( p. 13). Similarly, Aziz Khan was leading a satisfactory life, thinking that "the land would always give him work and sustenance, however poor he was" ( p. 52). Aziz Khan belongs to the category of family farmers, or middle peasants, occupying a position between large landlords and capitalist farmers. Ghose depicts this, "Together with his family, Aziz Khan had forty-six peasants working for him. ... [H]e supervised the work on his land himself" ( p. 18). These farmers, collectively working on their farms, rely mainly on family labour rather than hired workers. Their farming is mainly aimed at fulfilling family needs rather than generating large profits. In the wider structure of the rural economy, family farmers represent a transitional mode of production, balancing between traditional agrarian forms and emerging capitalist relations, maintaining their stability even as the economic base of society begins to shift.

On the arrival of the Shah brothers in Kalapur, they introduce industrial capitalism, bringing mills, machines and wage labour into a system once governed by traditional ways. Haq (2022) mentions that *The Murder of Aziz Khan* depicts the chaotic nature of a capitalist society, undergoing transformation which is driven by the dominance of technology. Therefore, the land, once valued for its social and traditional worth becomes a commodity for



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revenue generation. This transformation from agrarian to capitalist society in South Asia, particularly in Pakistan, reflects the broader global shift in the mode of production. Under British colonial rule, South Asia's traditional agrarian economy based on feudal system, hereditary landlords and peasant labour was restructured through policies such as the Permanent Settlement of Bengal (1793) and the Punjab Land Alienation Act (1900), which converted land into private property and integrated agriculture into the capitalist market system (Islam, 1995).

Land, which had been a communal or hereditary means of subsistence, became a commodity, and peasants were drawn into the cycle of rent, debt and wage labour. After the independence of Pakistan, these feudal remnants persisted but gradually gave way to a hybrid capitalist-agrarian system in which industrialists and landlords' interests merged. As Raymond Williams and Marvin Harris explain, such economic changes at the infrastructure level inevitably reshape the structure and superstructure. Therefore, the rise of industrialization, urban migration and the introduction of capitalist agriculture changed both class relations and cultural consciousness.

Ghose points to an important historical shift from an agrarian (land-based) economy to an industrial capitalist mode of production after Pakistan's independence. For instance, he refers to the mode of production in the capitalist system:

We work six days a week on normal wages and for over time we get only twenty-five per cent extra. We get no paid holidays except religious festivals. ...without us there would be no production and, therefore, no profit for the capitalists. (Ghose, p.192)

Ghose directly reveals the economic base of a fictional society, Kalapur, and describes the conditions of industrial labour and their very activities through which material life is produced. The workers receive low wages and no paid holidays, showing economic exploitation, a key characteristic of a capitalist mode of production. It depicts the exploitative nature of the base, showing that the material processes of production shape human experience and social relations.

These base structures, the agrarian and the capitalist, flow into one another which signifies that the old and new economic systems remain interconnected and intermingled with each other. In the novel, this intersection is embodied in the character of the broker, Muhammad Hussain, who serves as a mediator between agrarian producers and the capitalist class, the Shah brothers. Hussain is not only an economic agent but also serves as a structural bridge within the society's infrastructure, linking feudal relations to the capitalist market. Hence, brokers like him facilitated trade, while exploiting both sides at the same time. This illustrates the transitional stage of post-independence economy of Pakistan, where capitalist modes of production are gradually absorbing agrarian set up. Hussain reveals, "I'm just a broker. You know how I got to be called a broker?" (p.231). This reflects that the job of a broker is to facilitate exchange yet thrives on exploitation. Thus, his character dramatizes cultural materialism's main idea that human identity, culture and ideology are not autonomous but also produced by the material conditions. Ghose talks about the importance of the brokers in these words: "He has no other source unless he becomes his own broker" (p.106) Here, Akram highlights the importance of a broker while talking to Ayub about Aziz Khan's economic and social limitations



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as a traditional landowner in a changing society. His inability to read or write, his dependence on old-fashioned means of transport and his reliance on family and peasants expose his weakness to compete in an ever-evolving world.

Moreover, as society moves from a farming to a capitalist system, peasants, landlords, and traders begin to think differently. They start believing in making a profit, competing with each other, and focusing on personal success rather than community welfare. Thus, through the broker's intermediary role, the novel dramatizes a central tenet of cultural materialism: that material conditions and relations of production determine the forms of social and cultural life, shaping human behaviour and ideology within the incumbent economic position.

### **Structure in the Novel: *The Murder of Aziz Khan***

In the novel, *The Murder of Aziz Khan*, the infrastructure or base which is the economic system of a society, consisting of land ownership and cultivation, and turns into capitalist industrial expansion, material disparity and class-based access to resources. The social organization of the novel is constructed upon these foundational elements. In the beginning, feudalism being the economic system, supports family-based collectivist social structure. On the establishment of industry in Kalapur, the industrialist class, the Shah brothers, get a huge portion of the land, capital and business networks, therefore, their affluent material position permit them to exercise influence over the police, land offices and local administration, triggering the development of the institutions that serve their economic interests. This shows that the organization of a society is not incidental but emerges from its material conditions (Bukharin, 2013). In the novel, economic supremacy of the emerging the industrialist class, shapes a legal system that supports land acquisition, an administrative system that caters to their demands and interpret their expansion as normal and progressive.

In a nutshell, the evolving economic base continuously redesigns social institutions and the institutions, once developed, strengthen the economic base. The capitalists' wealth creates controlling institutions, and in turn, those institutions help them acquire more land and resources. Thus, the novel reveals that material conditions generate specific social institutions and ideological grooming, which then continuously strengthen the infrastructure that shaped it.

### **Kinship-Based Collective Farming: A Feudal Social Structure**

In rural Punjab, families often serve as the cornerstone of social organization. In Pakistan, family, kinship, clan, community and class are social institutions that form a bridge between the individual and society. They are the building blocks of social organization, shaping and promoting cultural systems (Qadeer, 2006). Likewise, "Family is the basic social cell, a form of organization of human collectives that has always existed, multi-functional and multi-tasking, primarily focused on procreation and raising progeny" (Sorys, 2020, p. 16). (These families may be extended, spanning multiple generations, but they usually operate within a framework of kinship, collective farming and traditional norms. These tightly woven family networks, shared values, traditions and practices are transmitted and maintained across generations. The system of extended family not only plays a central role in providing labour for farming, but also preserves social cohesion by reinforcing common rituals, mutual obligations and a sense of ownership. In this way, the family functions as both the basic unit of social life



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and a vehicle for the transmission of norms that help perpetuate what is regarded as acceptable behaviour, social duty, and relationships within the broader community. "Individuals draw their values from the cultural, social and institutional frameworks in which they live. Their outlook on life is all determined by socio-economic and cultural factors such as family ties" (Ang & Fredriksson, 2017, p. 240).

In the novel, farming and kinship operate as basic structures shaping the social life of rural communities of Punjab. Families such as Aziz Khan's work collectively on their farmland, where every individual contributes to the household's agricultural resources. This collective labour is not only an economic arrangement but also a deeply rooted kinship system that organizes authority, cooperation, inheritance and mutual support.

Viewed from the perspective of cultural materialism, this situation reflects that material conditions, such as land ownership, labour relations and agricultural practices, create a distinct social structure in which power is exercised by a central figure through immediate supervision rather than distant ownership. This implicitly supports Williams's idea that the economic base gives rise to the social structure, shaping relationships and authority in society.

### **Marriage: A Sacred Social Institution, Undergoing Transformation with Economic Development**

Marriage is one of the most fundamental social institutions, holding a sacred social status in nearly every culture across the world (Khatun et al., 2024). According to Abrahamic religions, it is a divine union that is blessed by God and emphasizes virtues like sacrifice, loyalty and respect for one another. It is worth mentioning that in traditional Punjabi society, marriage and status of wife are treated with deep sanctity (Zaman, 2014). It means that a wife is not only a life partner but also a symbol of family honour, lineage and moral responsibility. These cultural and social understandings place heavy obligations on husbands, who feel socially and morally bound to protect and provide for their wives.

The novelist also depicts that both family and the sanctity of marriage are deeply honoured in Aziz Khan's family. Through Aziz Khan's approach, the novelist shows how this religious obligation can go. He borrows money for his wife's treatment, at a high interest rate, from the Shah's brothers. Though, it is not financially wise, yet the cultural and emotional weight of saving his wife surpasses all economic deliberations. Therefore, his decision of borrowing money at a high interest rate reflects a value system, where the preservation of marriage and the well-being of wife become more important than material possessions.

However, it is to be noted that changes in the base (infrastructure) bring significant changes to the social structure. This also transforms people's approach to matrimonial relations. Marriage in the agrarian class was considered a sacred institution, but taken for granted by the members of the newly emergent capitalist class. For instance, in the novel, Razia (Ayub's wife) tears the sacred bond by having an extramarital affair with her brother-in-law, Afaq. The character of Razia depicts this immorality, who had gone over to the UK to meet Afaq for close intimacy, even though she was a married woman. The novelist depicts this in these words: "And now Razia, perfidious to her husband, had come to him [Afaq] from across two continents" (p.249). This highlights that



Razia has broken the sacred bond of her marriage by travelling all the way from Pakistan to England to fulfil her carnal desires. Razia's extramarital relation is symbolic of the moral corruption and hypocrisy within the feudal-capitalist class.

### **Corruption in the Legal and Judicial System: A Social Structure**

According to cultural materialists such as Marvin Harris and Raymond Williams, the legal system should not be viewed as an independent entity but rather as a component of overall framework of society, closely linked to its economic condition. The material circumstances that influence social relationships and power are the settings in which the legal, land law, mortgage and loan systems function. In the novel, the transition from a feudal-agrarian system to a new capitalist one alters not only production patterns but also monetary and legal procedures. Aziz Khan and other traditional landowners are marginalised by the new economic forces that reorganize social hierarchy through land ownership, credit arrangements and institutional authority. Thus, the novel demonstrates that the financial and legal systems are deeply embedded in society's growth, promoting shifting class dynamics and contributing in the redistribution of social power.

The judicial system that we practice today has evolved over a long period of time, spanning roughly over a whole millennium. The system has passed through several epochs covering the Hindu era, Muslim period including the Mughal dynasty, British colonial period and post-independence period (Hussain, 2011). Justice is a fundamental right of every citizen. Articles 10 A & 25(1), of the 1973 Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, talk about the 'right to fair trial' and equality of citizens.

Ghose implicitly discusses the legal system of Pakistan, particularly during the re-emergence of the new class and the period of industrialization. He explores that capitalism became deeply embedded in the country's infrastructure, extending its influence across various institutions including the legal system which gradually reshaped itself in accordance with the new power dynamics that emerged after the country gained independence 1947. The novelist criticizes the capitalist system, revealing its detrimental effects on societal norms and values. He illustrates how capitalism disrupts pre-capitalist social equilibrium, leading to class conflict and socio-economic exploitation (Afzal et al., 2024).

The novel reveals how a 13-year-old girl, tragically becomes a victim of Afaq's assault in Aziz Khan's fields. Instead of implicating him in the case, he receives clean chit and Rafiq (Aziz Khan's son) is blamed and declared as the committer of the crime. The prosecutor paints him as a "sexual maniac" who preyed on innocent girls and ultimately murdered a poor girl, Jameela Bano. The judge is deeply impressed with the eloquence of the prosecutor's English language. The prosecutor said, "The outcome of such an evil-minded maniac can only be tragic." The tragedy is not his, but ours: we have lost a flower of this earth because this maniac flouted social law, abandoned the customs of his country, and forgot his religion" (p. 134). The Prosecutor's speech is filled with emotional appeal, religious touch and psychological speculation without objective reasoning, signifying theatrical and rhetorical trial, not a just and fair one. The speech appeals to societal fears and moral outrage, demanding strict punishment with no mercy. The prosecutor impresses the audience and the judge, who praises his eloquence and sentences Rafiq to death. Ghose, exposes the flaws of a



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corrupt judicial system where verdicts are influenced more by the skill of the lawyers and prosecution in presenting their arguments than by a genuine search for truth or proper inquiry.

Similarly, the colonial mindset has been adopted by the legal system in Pakistan. The legal system still bears the legacy of its former colonial rulers, such as the British Empire and conducts court proceedings in English, a language that ordinary men such as Javed do not understand: “[T]here was a verbal dialogue, which he did not understand. His own despair at losing his brother increased the confusion in his mind” (p. 136) This linguistic barrier excludes the common people from the legal process, reinforcing their disempowerment.

The peasants and other farmers, unable to question the legal system, start believing Rafiq’s guilt and abandon his family, fearing they too will be doomed in the process. This is a clear repression of truth and the manipulation of justice that also shows the hollowness of the legal system, controlled by those with power and education, silencing any voice of resistance.

To conclude, the novel does not depict the legal system as a protector of justice but a tool of oppression, bending under the weight of money and muscle and inevitably powerless when it comes to restraining those who hold true power.

### ***The Murder of Aziz Khan: Depiction of Superstructure***

The core elements of Raymond Williams’ cultural materialism, such as infrastructure, structure and superstructure, are mutually interconnected in a progressive chain through which a society organizes itself. The infrastructure, which forms the material base, produces the structure, which refers to the social institutions, class formations, and structural designs that control daily life. This structure, in turn, gives birth to the superstructure, which refers to the realm of ideology, social and cultural meanings, beliefs, ethical norms and literature that interpret, justify, reinforce, and sometimes contradict the existing social order. It is the symbolic or ideological segment of culture, encompassing ritual, taboos and symbols (Harris, 1979). The superstructure is not an independent or purely intellectual sphere; rather, it is a product of the material conditions that shape people’s lived experiences (Williams, 1977).

### ***Forbidden Love, Desire and Taboos: Reflected as Superstructure***

The novel reveals the violation of marital chastity under the capitalist class highlighting that even ideologies are volatile and shaped by material conditions. The novel also shows that social taboos serve the interests of dominant classes by subordinating the interests of the lower strata of society. Social taboos in a society are not applied when it comes to tackling matters related to the capitalist class. Therefore, in spite of all immoral practices between Afaq and Razia, they were not punished as the local Punjabis are punished to death after the discovery of having an illicit relationship. This shows that de facto immunity from punishment can run with class status, kinship, wealth, ethnicity, or status as a political elite (Jensenius & Wood, 2015).

Muslim country and Islamic beliefs, teachings and customs strongly shape daily life for the Muslim majority (Zaman, 2018). In Pakistan, Islam serves as a dominant cultural force integrated into the superstructure of society. As the basic unit of society, Islam places great importance on the family and declares it sacred. In the novel, the Shah brothers, who came from Mumbai to Kalapur, brought



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tremendous changes to Kalapur's social structure with their development of industrialization. Being the bourgeoisie class, they transgressed the cultural, social, economic and religious standards operating in the society. For instance, Afaq and Razia's illicit relationship has no place in the strict conservative society of Kalapur during the 1960s and 70s, as they disregarded the sanctity of family, religious teachings and deeply rooted cultural norms by engaging in an illicit relationship, reflecting a moral collapse within the new emergent industrialist class, the Shah brothers. This deviation from traditional values leads to the moral disintegration of society and the disentanglement of familial bonds.

However, instead of bringing Afaq to book, Akram considers him, a worthy individual for businesses. This demonstrates a shift in values from traditional familial and cultural commitments to a business-centered mindset symbolizing the ruthless effects of industrialization and capitalism. This shows that in their search for economic gain, they are willing to sacrifice family bonds and cultural values. As Akram says, "We need our own people to look after all these enterprises. One's own kith and kin, even if they're criminal or plainly stupid, are preferable to outsiders" (p. 270). For his [Afaq] role in maintaining the commercial interest of the family, Akram tries to convince Ayub to overlook his immoral action of having an illicit relationship with his wife. This mirrors a clear moral transformation within the newly emerged capitalist class, the Shah brothers, where economic interests dominate ethical, emotional and social responsibilities and values.

To conclude, Ghose reflects that their actions reveal the broader ideological transformation brought about by capitalism, in which traditional and cultural values are marginalized in favour of profit, revealing that capitalist logic penetrates not only markets but also family and social structures.

### **Critique of Capitalism**

The novel is a critique of capitalism, land-grabbing and the destruction of agrarian life. The novelist reveals that capitalistic industrial progress is based on the ruthless exploitation of the poor. Akram, the eldest among the Shah brothers, exploits people by tricking them into giving him money to establish his factory. His younger brother, Ayub, exploits them by crushing the workers' union so they cannot secure their rights. Moreover, Afaq, who does not produce wealth but merely consumes it, exploits another kind of proletariat, i.e. women. The common characteristic of the brothers is that they want personal gratification, the satisfaction of their ego, rather than community's good.

Through these events, the novelist highlights that industrial development is built on the suffering of the lower classes. It exposes the hypocrisy of capitalist success, which is not achieved through innovation or hard work, but through the oppression of workers and the manipulation of social systems: "Akram sees money as a symbol of this gratification and is the archetypical capitalist, the kind of exemplar who is shaping the values of the Pakistani society in the making" (Ghose, 1967, p. 23)

The novelist also highlights that capitalist's approach is not only centered on profit incentive but also on gratification of their egos. This is evident from Ayub's words, telling Akram that what they really want is not Aziz Khan's land but to humiliate him:



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At first, we had economic reasons for wanting his land. And then, gradually, we realized we were fighting against the pride of one man. And our own pride, our own honour was in question. Are the economic reasons still valid? (Ghose, p.283) Therefore, in Ghose's opinion, a capitalist gradually turns into a monster, using his money and power to maintain his honour and to spoil others. Siddiqui (2011) in his work *Experiences of capitalism in India and Pakistan* also discusses the ruthless approach of capitalism: "Capitalism has failed to remove poverty and inequality despite its long history of penetration in South Asia under colonial and neo-colonial regimes and in spite of being backed by the new technology and increased amounts of credits" (Siddiqui, 2011, p. 37).

In a nutshell, the novel has crafted a complex tale of greed, corruption and social oppression highlighting the uncomfortable version of Pakistan, where easy money is acquired through corruption, bribery and control over means of production. The judicial system has been depicted aligned with capitalist class, safeguarding their interests through partial courts and exploitative procedures. Even social practices such as sanctity of marriage, loyalty to family and morality transform under new material circumstances, produced by the advent of industry. Moreover, social taboos, once held supreme, are no longer sacred. Forbidden sexual affairs surface, and the moral codes of life once guarded in the agrarian structure collapse within the capitalist structure of the society, as commercialism supersedes family sanctity. This moral and ideological breakdown in the novel reflects Williams' stance that changes in the material base redesigns superstructures. Finally, the narrative of the novel depicts the structural consequence of infrastructural transformation, which destroys the very cultural values that once held the society intact. The novel can be seen as a critique of the existing power structures that marginalize and exploit peasants and local farmers.

### Findings of the Study

1. The study reveals that the economic conditions shape and influence the characters' lives and social hierarchies. This means that economic conditions form the foundation of society and that changes in economic patterns inevitably affect social structures. It means social structures are fluid rather than fixed. In Ghose's novel, *The Murder of Aziz Khan*, this interplay among the economic setup, social structure and ideological development is evident, exposing a complex relationship among infrastructure, structure and superstructure, in which economic transformations shape social institutions that are both ideologically sustained and challenged through cultural practices.

2. The study, at the level of infrastructure, focuses on various economic structures that shape society, culture and individuals' lives, as portrayed in the novel. The novel traces the transition from a pastoral and feudal agrarian economy to industrial capitalism in Punjab which reveals that industrialization not only dismantles feudal system but also develops different forms of exploitation

3. The research explores that from the economic bases/infrastructures, as explained by Raymond Williams, emerge specific social structures that organize and regulate practical experiences of survival. For instance, in the novel, kinship-based collective farming in Kalapur is deeply rooted in a feudal agrarian society, whereas the advent of industry shapes a social structure of competition that upholds wealth and legitimizes inequality.



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(4). The study finds that the novel challenges grand narratives, universal truths and dominant economic and social structures, as depicted in the novel. The novelist gives voice to the marginalised and voiceless individuals, such as Zakia (Aziz Khan's wife) who is often ignored in history and mainstream literature. The novel not only challenges grand narratives, which celebrate only elites or national heroes, but also exposes hidden inequalities, giving narrative space to the voiceless individuals.

5). The research also identifies that the novel challenges and resists dominant power structures, exploring economic and cultural elements such as limited freedom, social inequality and exploitation. Ghose reflects on injustices, inequality and discrimination, highlighting the experiences of ordinary and marginalised individuals. It signifies that literature does not create an imaginary escape from reality, rather it provides a space where real social and economic struggles are analysed, exposed and criticised. The novelist shows that issues such as class division, gender discrimination, unemployment and a lack of resources shape the lives of people.

### Conclusion

By analyzing the novel through the three interconnected components of culture, such as, infrastructure, structure and superstructure, presented by Ramond Williams (1977) and Marvin Harris (1979), this study proves to be both constructive and generative, yielding numerous progressive insights. The study reveals a complex interaction among these three structures, in which economic transformations shape social institutions that are both ideologically sustained and challenged through cultural practices. This analysis affirms Williams 'claim that culture is material, historical and politically active rather than static in nature. In the novel, the shift from traditional agrarian society to capitalist landownership represents a basic change in infrastructure. This type of economic transformation leads to the erosion of communal bonds, ethical norms and moral responsibility. The dispossession of landowner, Aziz Khan, by the new industrialists, the Shah Brothers, reveals that capitalist infrastructure reshapes social structures and ideology. To conclude, the study exposes that different material conditions and social structures shape cultural differences. This also shows that culture is dynamic and it changes with changes in material conditions.

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