

Original Paper

Subalternity and Displacement in Rafia Zakaria's "Upstairs Wife": A Critique upon Pakistani Fiction

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Abstract

The study explored the themes of subalternity, displacement, and resistance in Rafia Zakaria's book "Upstairs Wife", which is set in Pakistan in the 1970s and 1980s against a backdrop of sociopolitical unrest. The research examined how characters—especially the heroine Amina—maneuver through overlapping kinds of oppression and marginalization within a patriarchal, economically stratified, and politically unstable society through careful reading and thematic analysis of the text. The research highlighted the widespread injustices and inequities that marginalized groups in Pakistani society must contend with, such as economic precarity, gendered subalternity, and religious othering. In addition, the research looked at the several ways that characters have been displaced on a physical, emotional, and political level. The research clarified the intricate processes of power, identity forms, and resistance among disadvantaged groups by examining the connections between subalternity and displacement. The findings provide insights for future study and scholarship on literature, identity, and power relations, as well as to larger conversations about social justice, empowerment, and human rights in Pakistan and throughout the world.

Keywords

Displacement, subalternity, diaspora, Pakistani fiction

1. Introduction

Scholars have been using literature as a prism to examine complicated socio-political issues more often in recent years, especially those involving marginalization, identity, and displacement. In the framework of Pakistani culture, Rafia Zakaria's "Upstairs Wife" presents a gripping story that deftly integrates themes of subalternity and displacement. Zakaria's book provides a nuanced analysis of the difficulties underprivileged people confront navigating emotional and societal turmoil via the

experiences of its protagonist, Amina. In order to develop better understanding about the concepts of subalternity and displacement as they are portrayed in “Upstairs Wife”, the study has examined how Zakaria highlights the ways in which power, identity, and agency intertwine in the story. The objective of this research is to examine the text’s depiction of the intricacies of subaltern life and experiences of displacement via a critical lens that is informed by feminist and postcolonial ideas.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, a postcolonial theorist, stresses the experiences and voices of underprivileged people who are suppressed by prevailing power systems. This is where the concept of “subalternity” originates. Within the framework of “Upstairs Wife”, Amina’s experience as a woman facing interlocking forms of oppression based on class, gender, and religion is embodied by subalternity. By describing her tale, Zakaria challenges readers to consider the difficulties of living as a subaltern and the struggle for autonomy under oppressive regimes. In addition, the story revolves on the idea of displacement on both a personal and political level. Amina’s psychological and emotional dislocation in her marriage to Sohail is indicative of more general family and social circumstances where alienation and estrangement occur. The characters’ sense of political dislocation is further exacerbated by the political unrest that permeates Pakistan, which is marked by military control, religious extremism, and social unrest. This research seeks to understand how people navigate identity, belonging, and resistance in unstable and changing environments by looking at the intersections of personal and political displacement.

This research study attempts to contribute to a better understanding of subalternity and displacement as represented in Rafia Zakaria’s moving narrative by means of a close reading of “Upstairs Wife”, augmented by critical analysis influenced by postcolonial and feminist theories. By delving into these topics, readers and academics alike may learn more about the intricacies of agency, power, and resilience in disadvantaged communities, which will eventually enhance our comprehension of how literature can shed light on urgent social concerns.

1.1 Conceptual Framework

The elements of subalternity and displacement in Rafia Zakaria’s “Upstairs Wife” are examined through the lens of multidisciplinary theoretical frameworks, which are mostly based in feminist and postcolonial theories. These conceptual frameworks offer a means of examining the intricate relationships between agency, identity, and power in the story.

1.1.1 Postcolonial Theory

This paradigm explores how colonial histories and legacies influences modern societies and human experiences, drawing on the writings of postcolonial theorists like Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. The perspectives and experiences of marginalized individuals are highlighted by postcolonial theory, especially those who are on the periphery of prevailing power systems. It challenges academics to consider how colonialism, gender, racism, and class interact in literary works and other cultural outputs. It is also noteworthy that Postcolonial theory offers a prism

through which to examine Amina's subaltern status in Pakistani society in the setting of "Upstairs Wife", examining the ways in which colonial histories continue to influence oppressive and dominating structures.

1.1.2 Feminist Theory

This theoretical approach provides a crucial foundation for comprehending patriarchy, gender dynamics, and women's experiences inside social systems. In particular, intersectional feminist perspectives highlight how gender is linked to other axes of identity, including race, class, and religion. In "Upstairs Wife", feminist theory allows researchers to analyze the intricacies of Amina's experiences negotiating patriarchal expectations and conventions.

Feminist theories of resistance and empowerment also offer analytical tools for examining instances of subversion and resilience within the text, as characters negotiate and contest oppressive social norms. This helps to illuminate the ways in which gender intersects with other forms of marginalization, shaping Amina's sense of agency and belonging.

Studies on displacement provide a framework for examining political, emotional, and physical displacement experiences in literary works and cultural narratives. In "Upstairs Wife", the theme of displacement manifests on multiple levels, including Amina's emotional estrangement within her marriage, the political upheaval of General Zia-ul-Haq's regime, and the broader societal disruptions caused by religious extremism and social unrest. This framework encompasses both forced displacement, such as migration and exile, and voluntary forms of displacement, such as travel and spiritual seeking. A framework for comprehending the manner in which various types of displacement interact and influence personal experiences is offered by displacement studies.

By including these theoretical frameworks, the research piece aims to offer a thorough examination of subalternity and displacement in "Upstairs Wife", shedding light on the intricate relationships between agency, identity, and power in the story. Informed by feminist, postcolonial, and displacement studies, Zakaria's multifaceted approach allows researchers to delve further into the socio-political aspects of zakaria's work and its significance for larger discussions of resistance, literature, and identity.

1.2 Background of the Study

This research paper's background on subalternity and displacement in Rafia Zakaria's "Upstairs Wife" is set within the larger framework of feminist studies, postcolonial literature, and sociopolitical processes in South Asia.

1.2.1 Postcolonial Context

Like many other postcolonial countries, Pakistan struggles to overcome the effects of colonialism and the challenges of nation building after independence. Pakistani society has been permanently shaped by the colonial past of British dominion over the Indian subcontinent, which shaped individual experiences, cultural norms, and socio-political systems. Scholars study how colonial history continue to influence modern power structures, identity forms, and cultural products under the framework of

postcolonial theory. Within this postcolonial context, “Upstairs Wife” appears as a book that provides insights into the intricacies of Pakistani culture and the lasting repercussions of colonialism on individual lives.

1.2.2 Feminist Perspectives

“Upstairs Wife” revolves around women’s experiences and gender issues. Like many patriarchal countries, Pakistan shapes women’s identities, possibilities, and restrictions through inflexible gender standards and expectations. Analytical tools for examining how gender intersects with other axes of identity, such class, religion, and nationality, are provided by feminist studies. Scholars analyze how women negotiate patriarchal systems, oppose oppression, and claim agency in their families and communities via a feminist viewpoint. Likely, “Upstairs Wife” tackles the challenges and resiliency of its female heroine—Amina—amid the patriarchal limits of Pakistani culture, providing fertile ground for feminist critique.

1.2.3 South Asian Socio-Political Dynamics

Geopolitical rivalries, ethnic conflicts, religious diversity, and complicated histories define the socio-political environment of South Asia, and Pakistan in particular. In light of the region’s history of colonization, partition, military rule, and social movements, “Upstairs Wife” offers a nuanced portrayal of Pakistani society and insights into the difficulties faced by individuals navigating personal and political upheaval. These events have left an indelible mark on both individual and collective identities. The story illuminates the ways in which gender, politics, and religion interact in Pakistani homes and communities. Scholars are better able to place “Upstairs Wife” in its socio-historical setting and comprehend its relevance as a literary work that addresses contemporary societal challenges by looking at the study’s history within these larger contexts. By employing multidisciplinary methodologies that draw from postcolonial theory, feminist viewpoints, and South Asian studies, scholars are able to provide intricate examinations of subalternity and displacement in Zakaria’s memorable story.

1.3 Rationale of the Study

The following important reasons support the idea of doing a research study on subalternity and displacement in Rafia Zakaria’s “Upstairs Wife”:

Literary Significance: “Upstairs Wife” is a novel in South Asian literature that presents a complex portrait of Pakistani society through the lens of political and personal upheaval. The novel, much praised by critics, is worthy of scholarly scrutiny and examination, especially given its examination of marginalized experiences and displacement-related topics.

Social Relevance: “Upstairs Wife’s” themes of subalternity and displacement are relevant to larger social and political realities in Pakistan and beyond. Scholars may contribute to larger discussions on social justice and human rights by examining these topics and shedding light on the intricacies of power dynamics, identity forms, and resistance within oppressed groups.

Theoretical Frameworks: To comprehend the intricacies of subalternity and displacement within literary texts, one might employ analytical methods such as feminist studies, postcolonial theory, and displacement studies. Through the application of these theoretical frameworks to “Upstairs Wife”, scholars can reveal deeper levels of importance and meaning within the story, enhancing our comprehension of the novel’s socio-political aspects.

Scholarship Gap: Although “Upstairs Wife” has received positive reviews, there is still a lack of research on the film’s thematic examination of subalternity and displacement. By writing a research paper on these subjects, I may close this knowledge gap and provide fresh perspectives on the novel’s relevance in the context of literature.

Interdisciplinary Approach: The examination of subalternity and displacement in “Upstairs Wife” demands an interdisciplinary approach that incorporates elements from several domains, including literature, sociology, anthropology, and cultural studies. Through overcoming these academic barriers, scholars are able to provide thorough evaluation that address the complex aspects of the novel’s themes.

Given these elements, writing a research paper on subalternity and displacement in “Upstairs Wife” offers a chance to expand on our knowledge of the socio-political significance of the book, make a valuable literary contribution, and participate in more general discussions regarding power, identity, and resistance in marginalized communities. By means of meticulous examination and thoughtful involvement, academics may elucidate the intricacies of Zakaria’s story and its pertinence to modern socio-cultural environments.

1.4 Research Questions

- 1) How does Rafia Zakaria’s “Upstairs Wife” portray subaltern realities in Pakistan’s sociopolitical setting, especially through the figure of Amina?
- 2) How does the concept of displacement come through in the story of “Upstairs Wife”, and how do political and personal forms of displacement interact and influence the lives of the characters in the text?
- 3) In what ways does “Upstairs Wife’s” examination of subalternity and displacement add to larger discussions concerning the relationships of power, the construction of identities, and forms of resistance among disadvantaged groups in Pakistan and throughout the world?

1.5 Significance of the Study

The research paper on subalternity and displacement in “Upstairs Wife” by Rafia Zakaria has important ramifications for the study of literature, sociopolitical discourse, and the development of identities and power structures in marginalized groups. The following important factors highlight the importance of this study:

- 1) **Literary Scholarship Contribution:** This research paper adds to the expanding corpus of knowledge on South Asian literature, postcolonial studies, and feminist theory by critically

examining the themes of subalternity and displacement in “Upstairs Wife”. It deepens our comprehension of the novel’s literary value within current literary landscapes and provides fresh perspectives on the sociopolitical aspects of Zakaria’s story.

- 2) **Interaction with Socio-Political Realities:** “Upstairs Wife’s” examination of subalternity and relocation offers an eye through which to interact with more general socio-political realities in Pakistan and elsewhere. Scholars can contribute to larger discussions about social justice and human rights by illuminating the nuances of power dynamics, identity formations, and resistance within marginalized communities through examining the ways in which personal and political upheaval intersect within the narrative.
- 3) **Intersectional Analysis:** This research study provides a thorough comprehension of the intersections of gender, class, religion, and nationality within the book through an intersectional analysis informed by postcolonial, feminist, and displacement studies. Through an investigation of the ways in which various axes of identification influence personal experiences of subalternity and displacement, academics may provide nuanced interpretations that are meaningful to a variety of readerships and add to the discourse surrounding intersectional identities and social justice.
- 4) **Pertinence to Current Concerns:** The issues of displacement and subalternity that “Upstairs Wife” examines are still very important in today’s globalized, migratory, and culturally changing sociopolitical environments. By examining these topics critically, academics may contribute to larger conversations on resistance, resilience, and social transformation by providing insights into how people manage their agency, power, and sense of belonging in unstable and changing environment.

2. Review of The Related Literature

2.1 Description of the “Upstairs Wife”

Our lives’ public and private domains are inextricably linked in ways that are beyond comprehension. For example, one lady is forced to give birth at home in the middle of family strife while Hindus and Muslims struggle over land in India, creating carnage and making it hazardous for anyone to venture outside their houses. In the same way, a lady returns to her father’s home after a personal tragedy brokenhearted and determined to carry on his heritage and lead her people and, eventually, the nation. A man is allowed to have up to four wives in Pakistan, which might cause a woman to be crushed and publically humiliated if her husband chooses to use this legal privilege. Journalist and human rights advocate Rafia Zakaria examines this interaction between the public and private spheres in her debut book, *The Upstairs Wife: An Intimate History of Pakistan*. Zakaria’s aunt Amina’s experiences are paralleled in the novel, which is a combination of family tale, biography, and historical chronicle of Pakistan. Her husband remarries during a pivotal moment in history.

On December 27, 2007, *The Upstairs Wife: An Intimate History of Pakistan* opens. A second devastating piece of news breaks while Zakaria's family is waiting to hear about aunt Amina's polygamous husband: Benazir Bhutto has been slain in Rawalpindi. Every phase of aunt Amina's marriage narrative, like the first, is associated with a historical event in Pakistan. The book is readable and often interesting, with deft wording that begins and ends with a captivating message. One day when Rafia was little, Aunt Amina pays them a visit and spends the night and the next several days at their house. In Pakistan, married women do not spend the night in their parents' houses; therefore it was unimaginable at the time.

The story gradually becomes known over the next few days: Uncle Sohail, Aunt Amina's husband, had made the decision to remarry and take on a second wife—something that was legal but rarely accomplished. He had approached her for permission, but she had declined, so he had chosen to move forward nonetheless. After becoming agitated, Aunt Amina went to her folks' house. At some time after the elders from both sides convene and deliberate the matter, Aunt Amina returns to her husband's house to cohabit with a second wife. Rafia Zakaria now travels back in time to give us her grandmother's tale from her time in Bombay, India, prior to the partition. She then tells a third tale about Pakistan after it gained its independence. Zakaria interweaves three narratives: the tales of her aunt, grandmother, and Pakistan.

Zakaria exhibits a unique skill in depicting society from both a private and a public perspective. The author does a good job of revealing insights into the nation's larger geopolitical issues as well as detailing Amina's wedding and the upstairs wife's misery at being reminded by semi-malicious bystanders that she is unmarried. For example, emotional accounts are given of the Ojhri camp blasts, the Swat earthquake, and the deadly Bushra Zaidi bus tragedy. Despite this tragedy, the author's love for Karachi is apparent in the meticulous attention to the city's historic landscape, as Zakaria describes the aging of Saddar, the significance of Clifton, and the emerging middle-class environment of Gulshan-e-Iqbal with an almost panoramic grace.

It wouldn't be a stretch to say that Zakaria is one of the few Pakistani writers with such a mastery of evoking the image in words. Her work skillfully blends picture and feeling in a way that is visually appealing and compelling, while still maintaining a sense of wit and metaphor.

After her husband's new wife moves in on the level above her own apartment, Zakaria skillfully captures the once-bubbly Amina's spiral into sorrow as she continuously navigates the intricacies of her new existence. According to the Holy Quran, which states that a man should only have more than one wife if he can treat them both with "perfect justice", the plan called for the husband to spend one week with one wife, the next week with the other, and so on. But in reality, the arrangement turned out to be more complicated than that, and Zakaria explores the nuances of these connections to gain a full understanding of them.

The plot of “The Upstairs Wife” develops gradually: A scenario from Pakistani history is linked with each new scene of Amina and Sohail’s marriage. These combinations frequently have a wry grace. Within days of Pakistan’s forfeiture of East Pakistan (Bangladesh), which Zakaria refers to as “the first and only public surrender in modern military history”, Uncle Sohail proposes Aunt Amina to marry him. That same year, Aunt Amina returns home upset, and Benazir Bhutto returns home after a seven-year self-imposed exile from Pakistan. Zakaria effectively contrasts individual aspirations and divides with public ones. While Aunt Amina may be the only woman on the lane forced to share her husband, she is by no means the only one who finds it difficult to accept the “perfect justice” that Pakistani law has awarded her. Others mention in passing the various factors that molded the nation between 1947 and 2007, the year Benazir Bhutto was killed: migration waves, sectarian strife, a string of military takeovers, political unrest, tensions from the Cold War, conflicts with India and Afghanistan, the 9/11 attacks, and so forth. Here, there isn’t just one through line. There are unanswered questions that may fill multiple books due to Zakaria’s pick of historical events. The personal narrative of Zakaria is also not discussed. “The upstairs bedroom windows from which Amina first saw Sohail became mine”, she says about the family house. Her aunt’s fate was clearly a source of great personal worry from a young age, as seen by the sensory details she lavishes on the narrative. But more precisely, how would it have influenced her perspective and decisions as an adult? Zakaria mentions in passing in the epilogue that she disobeyed her own scheduled marriage. She refers to the cherished aunt whose window she inherited and adds, “My story was built on hers”.

2.2 Narrative Reviews of Previously Conducted Research on Upstairs Wife

Abd el-Aziz, H. (2022) examined how Zakaria has navigated both public and private spheres, keeping in mind how immigration and mobility have reshaped Muslim women’s identities along cultural, ethnic, and religious lines. She also emphasized women’s empowerment in Pakistan by defining women’s choices that guarantee their future agency and give them authority, as well as by telling the tales of women told by women. In summary, the study examined how Zakaria empowers Pakistani women by elevating them from the periphery of the home to the social realm and challenging both personal and collective perceptions in a nation experiencing transformation. FAROOQ, A., REHMAN, H. J. U., AYAZ, M., and RAHMAN, A. U. (2023) conducts a historical analysis to demonstrate the political and historical fiction classification of Pakistani English fiction. They spoke about the concepts and demonstrated how Rafia Zakaria’s *Upstairs Wife* exposes Pakistan’s turbulent political past.

2.3 Description of Subalternity

A term that emerged from postcolonial studies, “subalternity” describes the state of marginalization, oppression, and subservient status that some groups in society endure. This is especially true for those who have historically been marginalized by systems of power like capitalism, colonialism, imperialism, patriarchy, and caste hierarchies. The phrase was developed in postcolonial studies to characterize the social, political, and cultural state of people that are oppressed, marginalized, and placed in a

subordinate position inside a hierarchical power system. Although the idea first appeared in the writings of Italian Marxist academic Antonio Gramsci, it became more well-known thanks to the works of researchers of Subaltern Studies like Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Ranajit Guha.

Originally used to describe lower-ranking military subordinates or members of the British army, the word “subaltern” was subsequently adopted and broadened by Gramsci to include people who are excluded socially and politically as well as those who are economically disadvantaged. Peasants, indigenous peoples, women, members of racial and religious minorities, members of the working class, and people who have been colonized are just a few examples of the diverse identities that make up subaltern groupings. Within the framework of subaltern studies, Spivak’s seminal article “Can the Subaltern Speak?” explores the nuances of representation and agency. She draws attention to the difficulties in accurately portraying the experiences of marginalized groups, contending that representation itself is rife with power relations that further silence and marginalize the voices of the oppressed. In addition to stressing the significance of amplifying subaltern perspectives, Spivak highlights the necessity for academics and activists to practice “strategic essentialism”, which acknowledges the constraints and difficulties of representation.

Thus, being subaltern involves more than just social or economic disadvantage—it also involves resistance, power, and representation. It draws attention to the ways that oppressive and dominating institutions interact with and mold the experiences that marginalized groups live, and it emphasizes how crucial it is to give these groups’ voices and perspectives a central place in movements to oppose and change these systems.

Subalternity fundamentally deals with the experiences of people who, for a variety of reasons—including race, ethnicity, gender, class, religion, or other—are marginalized in popular discourse and under the control of dominant groups. Subaltern groups frequently have their voices suppressed, misinterpreted, or ignored. The word “subaltern” refers to and describes colonial communities in postcolonial studies and critical theory that are socially, politically, and geographically excluded from both the metropolitan heartland of an empire and its colony’s power structure.

Karl Marx’s theory of history uses the proletariat’s perspective to examine and analyze the political role of subaltern populations. It holds that the economic relationships between a society’s social classes determine the what and who of social class. Since the 1970s, the word “subaltern” has been used to refer to the colonial peoples of the Indian subcontinent; it is imperial history as it is presented from below, from the viewpoint of the colonized peoples, as opposed to the viewpoint of the Western European colonizers. By the 1980s, South Asian historiography began using the Subaltern Studies approach of historical inquiry. The idea of the subaltern emerged as an intellectual discourse technique for the study of non-Western peoples (of Africa, Asia, and the Middle East) and their relationship to Western Europe as the center of global history. It was initially developed as a Eurocentric approach of historical inquiry. The paradigm for historical study of the subaltern’s encounter with colonialism in the

Indian subcontinent emerged from subaltern studies.

Subaltern Studies, postcolonial theory, and critique acquired traction in the latter two decades of the 20th century, particularly in Third World nations because of globalization. Subaltern studies draws inspiration from Marxism and Poststructuralism and integrates into postcolonial criticism if it is understood as a branch of postmodernism.

Displacement in Fiction

The issue of displacement in literature is complex and includes aspects related to the physical, emotional, cultural, and psychological spheres. It centers on people or groups being uprooted from their comfortable surroundings, willingly or inadvertently, and the difficulties they then have in adjusting to new situations. The theme of displacement and the pursuit of belonging has been addressed in a variety of genres, historical eras, and cultural situations. It is a reflection of the universal human experience.

The representation of actual travel and geographical relocation in literature is one important facet of displacement. Characters may be compelled to from their homes because of natural disasters, political turmoil, war, or economic hardship. The protagonists' physical dislocation frequently acts as a springboard for narrative inquiry when they encounter foreign social systems, cultures, and landscapes. As an illustration, consider the wanderings of Odysseus in Homer's "The Odyssey", the Dust Bowl migrants in John Steinbeck's "The Grapes of Wrath", and the experience of refugees in more recent works such as Mohsin Hamid's "Exit West".

Another important aspect of literary analysis is emotional displacement, in which characters experience alienation or disconnection from their surroundings even in familiar settings. This may be the result of existential anxiety, social exclusion, or personal trauma. The psychological intricacies of displacement are a topic that writers frequently explore, showing individuals battling emotions of isolation, loneliness, or displacement even in the middle of vibrant cities or close-knit communities. For instance, the characters in Virginia Woolf's "Mrs. Dalloway" negotiate the fractured structure of contemporary urban life, while Holden Caulfield's sense of alienation in J.D. Salinger's "The Catcher in the Rye" reflects a larger existential melancholy common among teenagers. The difficulties of managing several cultural identities and negotiating one's sense of self in various social circumstances are examined in the book Cultural Displacement. For instance, characters in immigrant fiction frequently explore the conflict between cultural preservation and assimilation as they navigate the boundaries between their native country and their adopted one. Authors that tackle the intricacies of cultural displacement include Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie ("Americanah") and Jhumpa Lahiri ("The Namesake"), emphasizing the ways in which people must reconcile divergent cultural norms, traditions, and expectations.

Furthermore, authors use displacement as a symbolic element in their works to delve further into issues of human condition, change, and metamorphosis. The emotional or physical travels of characters frequently reflect inward searches for atonement, enlightenment, or self-discovery. In addition, the

displacement motif may serve as a critique of social institutions by drawing attention to problems with injustice, inequality, and authority. For example, in Ralph Ellison's "Invisible Man", the protagonist's invisibility is both a metaphor for African Americans' social marginalization and a more general existential invisibility that people who feel invisible or unacknowledged by the world around them experience.

Literary representations of displacement cover a wide range of events, including real-world migrations, psychological turmoil, cross-cultural discussions, and allegoric travels. Writers illuminate the common human search for identity, belonging, and purpose in a world of perpetual change and flux by delving into the complexity of relocation. Another well-known instance of displacement in English literature may be found in the writings of authors such as Joseph Conrad, whose book "Heart of Darkness" examines the protagonist Charles Marlow's literal as well as metaphorical voyage into the Congo. Marlow's move from his comfortable European surroundings to the center of Africa is a metaphor for the voyage into the shadowy recesses of human nature and the darkness that exists inside civilization itself.

In modern literature, such as the writings of writers like Zadie Smith, displacement is also evident. Characters as Archie and Samad, who are immigrants forced to flee their home countries and settle in England in her book "White Teeth", have to deal with questions of identity, cultural integration, and the legacy of colonialism in their new environment. In English literature, displacement is a potent narrative device that writers use to explore intricate ideas of identity, belonging, and the human condition via the experiences of people who are uprooted from their comfortable environments. Readers are prompted by the stories to consider their own sense of place in the world and to feel sympathy for others who have to deal with the difficulties of being uprooted.

One important idea and topic that appears in both postcolonial and contemporary literatures is displacement. It attempts to understand the identity problem brought on by modernism or colonialism as a critical idea. People that were colonized were compelled to leave behind or break away from their home countries, initial locations, cultures, customs, and languages. Because he was no longer a part of the tradition he had grown up with for ages, modern man was changing into a separate, displaced subject. However, there is a subtle difference that should not be overlooked between the colonized and contemporary displaced subjects.

Three prominent characteristics of their displacement are alienation, disassociation, and deracination. Their literary works encapsulate the agonizing narratives of their culturally and existentially estranged identities. It needs a "first place or some basic identity" to withstand the pain of being uprooted. It's fascinating to see how the notion of displacement itself incorporates the idea that "the first place of any creature turns into its paradise". In essence, displacement is the source of several issues. One finds it difficult, for a number of reasons, to separate oneself from the new location, nation, and language that they either decided to adopt or were forced to embrace. On the one hand, one cannot forget the people,

culture, landscapes, and language of the abandoned place. A certain inevitability of settling in a new nation contrasts with nostalgic memories of one's motherland. Because of its wide spectrum of effects on post-colonial countries and people's psyches, displacement is a hot topic in postcolonial literature. Two phases of displacement take happen. One is psychological, while the other is physical. In order to depict the struggle, postcolonial writers concentrate on both stages in their work.

2.4 Narrative Reviews of Previously Conducted Researches on Subalternity and Displacement

De Jong and Mascot. (2016) introduced the special issue "Relocating Subalternity: Scattered Speculations on the Conundrum of a Concept", in which they address the "foreclosure" of subalternity by starting with Spivak's unique invocation of (gendered) subalternity and its scholarly reception. They suggested that removing the subaltern from her (non)place may open up positive opportunities for carrying out a fruitful "ab-use" of the concept of subalternity, even though the gesture of (re)locating invariably sets off a tense dialectic between the attempt to define contingent empirical loci and subalternity's resistance to being empirically circumscribed.

According to Thomas, P. D. (2018), since the early Subaltern Studies collective's innovative reading of Antonio Gramsci's carceral works, the subaltern has often been viewed as an excluded person. In his paper, he made the case that fresh tools for "refiguring" the subaltern may be found by doing a contextualist and diachronic analysis of the evolution of the idea of subaltern classes over the course of Gramsci's whole Prison Notebooks. In order to understand certain aspects of Gramsci's theories, he put out three substitute figures: the "irrepressible subaltern", the "hegemonic subaltern", and the "citizen-subaltern". Such a reconfigured idea of the subaltern has the ability to provide insight on the paradoxical evolution, far from being exhausted by the eclipse of the conditions it was called upon to analyze in Subaltern Studies.

Mehzabeen, M. (2022) concentrate on the post-colonial era's displacement theory. She attempted to highlight the difficulties and issues POC experienced in the post-colonial era with her article. This covers cultural displacement, shifting perspectives on displacement, and beneficial literary opportunities resulting from displacement. Saha, A. (2015) investigated how postcolonial writers dealt with the problem of displacement in their writings and representations. Here, the diverse depictions of displacement in Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival*, Coetzee's *Disgrace*, and Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*—three books that also depict the struggles and outcomes of three locations—were examined from a variety of angles.

2.5 Synthesis and Thesis Statement

Rafia Zakaria's "Upstairs Wife" synthesizes the literature on subalternity and displacement, revealing a nuanced interaction between academic frameworks, feminist analyses, and literary critiques. This analysis, which draws on feminist theory, postcolonial theory, and literary criticism, offers a thorough grasp of the socio-political settings and thematic issues of the book.

Fundamentally, “Upstairs Wife” explores the stories of marginalization and relocation in Pakistan’s patriarchal and unstable political environment. The novel provides a sophisticated examination of power relations, identity constructions, and resistance within oppressed populations through the eyes of its heroine; Amina. Within the context of wider theoretical frameworks like feminist theory and subaltern studies, the story explores how people navigate belonging and agency in oppressive regimes.

Thesis Statement

“In ‘Upstairs Wife’, Rafia Zakaria deftly examines the complexities of displacement and subalternity within the complex web of Pakistani culture. Zakaria sheds light on the intricate relationships between power, identity creation, and resistance in oppressed areas via the persona of Amina. The book provides remarkable insights into the manner in which political and personal crises collide to create people’s sense of agency and belonging when read in the context of larger theoretical frameworks and feminist analyses”. This well-crafted thesis statement highlights Zakaria’s deft handling of intricate socio-political topics within the “Upstairs Wife” story and summarizes the main points of the research paper. Scholars may contribute to larger conversations on power dynamics, identity forms, and resistance within oppressed groups by delving into the intersections of gender, class, religion, and politics.

3. Research Methodology

Research Design: Rafia Zakaria’s “Upstairs Wife” employs a qualitative research methodology to analyze subalternity and displacement, with the goal of exploring and interpreting the novel’s complex themes and narratives. Using theoretical frameworks and critical views to provide light on the socio-political circumstances and thematic issues of the tale, this qualitative research approach enables a thorough analysis of the text.

The book “Upstairs Wife” itself serves as the main source of data for this study. The book provides complex stories, characterizations, and thematic explorations that shed light on subalternity and displacement in Pakistani culture, and these elements form the basis of the analysis. Additionally, information was gathered from David Waterman’s book “History Memory, Fiction”. Secondary data sources also support the study by offering theoretical frameworks and critical viewpoints that guide the interpretation of the novel. Examples of these sources are research articles, theoretical writings, and critical assessments. The population for this research comprises various personalities in the “Upstairs wife” each of whom comprised different traits. Purposive sampling is used in this qualitative study to pick texts, articles, and academic publications that provide pertinent insights into the subjects being studied. To enable a detailed examination of the novel’s thematic issues, important passages and fragments from “Upstairs Wife” that highlight significant subaltern experiences and displacements are also chosen through theoretical sampling.

The textual analysis of “Upstairs Wife” is the main method used to gather data. In order to pinpoint important themes, storylines, and instances of subaltern experiences and displacement, this entails closely reading and interpreting the book. Academic publications, theoretical writings, and critical evaluations are employed to enhance the textual examination of “Upstairs Wife”. These resources offer critical viewpoints, historical background, and theoretical frameworks that help readers understand the novel’s topics. The purpose of the literature review is to support and contextualize the results of the textual analysis through triangulation.

Searching the narrative for instances of subalternity and displacement was the primary objective of the analytical criteria. Textual sections and fragments are categorized thematically according to recurrent themes of displacement and subalternity. Thematic coherence, contextual knowledge, interdisciplinary engagement, comparative analysis, and critical reflection are given top priority in the data analysis criteria of this research study. Following these guidelines will enable the research to provide a thorough and perceptive examination of subalternity and displacement in “Upstairs Wife”, so adding to the larger conversation on literature, identity, and power relations in marginalized communities.

4. Narrative Analysis of Data

The narrative analysis of “Upstairs Wife” entails a close examination of textual excerpts and passages to uncover underlying themes, motifs, and narrative elements related to subalternity and displacement. Through a systematic analysis of the novel’s narrative structure, character development, and plot dynamics, researchers can gain insights into the lived experiences of marginalized individuals within Pakistani society.

4.1 Identification of Key Themes

Finding significant issues in the book about subalternity and displacement is the first step in the investigation. Finding recurrent ideas, themes, and narrative strands that, especially via the persona of Amina, represent the realities of disadvantaged people is required to accomplish this. Reflecting the socio-political and cultural conditions in which the story is set, themes like marginalization, silence, resistance, physical displacement, emotional displacement, and political displacement emerge as major themes in the narrative.

The issue of marginalization runs throughout “Upstairs Wife”, depicting the manner in which people—women in particular—are sidelined in Pakistan’s patriarchal and socially stratified society. Rafia Zakaria illuminates the intricate relationships between privilege, power, and oppression in Pakistani culture by delving into the lives of Amina, the protagonist, and other characters.

- 1) **Gender-Based Marginalization:** The novel’s examination of marginalization places a strong emphasis on the widespread prejudice and oppression that women experience due to their gender. As a woman in a culture where males predominate, Amina faces marginalization in a variety of forms. These forms include restricted mobility and autonomy, expectations of

subservience and obedience to male authority figures, and limited access to education and economic possibilities.

- 2) **Economic and Social Marginalization:** Characters in “Upstairs Wife” face discrimination not just because of their gender but also because of their socioeconomic position and rank. Because of their lower socioeconomic standing, Amina’s family, for example, experiences social and economic exclusion. Social standards that elevate money, position, and social ties exacerbate this marginalization by pushing those from marginalized origins to the periphery of society.
- 3) **Religious and Ethnic Marginalization:** The story delves into the subject of religious and ethnic minorities’ marginalization in Pakistani culture. Characters that emphasize the ways in which religious minorities are oppressed and alienated from mainstream culture include the Hindu friend of Amina and the Christian neighbor of Sohail, who both experience prejudice and persecution as a result of their religious convictions.
- 4) **Marginalization Intersections:** Crucially, “Upstairs Wife” illustrates how different types of marginalization connect, showing how people can endure numerous levels of oppression as a result of intersecting identities. As an illustration of the intricate interactions between gender, class, religion, and ethnicity in influencing experiences of marginalization, consider Amina’s experiences as a lower-class woman from a religious minority background and how these experiences compound her marginalization within Pakistani culture.

Rafia Zakaria depicts how people are uprooted and displaced within Pakistan’s socio-political context in “Upstairs Wife”, which delves into topics of physical, emotional, and political displacement. The book sheds light on the complex effects of relocation on relationships, communities, and individual identities via the stories of people like Amina, Sohail, and others.

4.2 Physical Displacement

Characters who are compelled to flee their homes and towns for a variety of causes, such as political violence, economic hardship, and social constraints, serve as examples of the novel’s recurring issue of physical displacement. When Amina’s family is compelled to relocate from their ancestral home in India to Karachi following the partition, they undergo bodily dislocation. They are forced to adjust to a new environment and way of life as a result of this displacement, which uproots them from comfortable surroundings and cultural settings. In addition, as individuals move from Pakistan’s rural areas to Karachi in pursuit of social mobility and economic opportunity, the book depicts instances of internal displacement inside Karachi itself. The patterns of urbanization and population mobility inside Pakistan are reflected in this internal migration.

4.2.1 Emotional Displacement

“Upstairs Wife” delves into both physical and emotional displacement, examining how characters deal with emotions of estrangement, loneliness, and separation from their loved ones and environment. Amina feels emotionally displaced in her marriage to Sohail as a result of Sohail’s emotional detachment

and adultery, which strains their bond. The psychological effects of interpersonal conflict and emotional neglect are highlighted by Amina's sense of alienation and disconnection from her spouse and community as a result of her emotional estrangement. Other characters in the book, like the Hindu friend of Amina and the Christian neighbor of Sohail, also go through emotional displacement while figuring out what it means to be a religious minority in a culture that is dominated by Muslims. Their sense of emotional dislocation is exacerbated by their experiences with discrimination and persecution, which breed emotions of insecurity and estrangement.

4.2.2 Political Displacement

Another theme covered in the book is political displacement, which refers to how people are muted and sidelined in Pakistani politics, especially during General Zia-ul-Haq's oppressive rule. As they struggle with Zia's harsh Islamic laws, which restrict their freedom of speech, assembly, and dissent, characters like Amina and Sohail find themselves politically displaced. Those who dare to confront the established quo feel politically dislocated as a result of this political persecution, which muzzles voices of dissent and struggle. The novel also portrays more general socio-political upheavals, such the declaration of martial law and the suppression of oppositional media and voices, which add to Pakistani society's prevailing sense of political turbulence and unpredictability.

Understanding the sociopolitical and cultural background of "Upstairs Wife" is essential to comprehending the forces that mold the lives of the characters and the story's events. The novel, which is mostly set in Karachi, Pakistan, in the 1970s and 1980s, offers a complex portrait of the nation's sociopolitical and cultural environment at a time of profound social and political upheaval. The following are some essential components of the sociopolitical and cultural context:

Political Instability: Pakistan saw significant political instability in the 1970s and 1980s, which was marked by military dictatorship, political persecution, and civil unrest. The work makes analogies to political leaders like General Zia-ul-Haq and events like the declaration of martial rule, the suppression of the media, and the silence of dissident voices in order to hint at this instability.

Military Dictatorship: During the time covered in the novel, Pakistan's socio-political scene was greatly impacted by General Zia-ul-Haq's military rule, which was established in a coup in 1977. With far-reaching effects on society, Zia's dictatorship enforced Sharia law and marginalized religious and ethnic minorities. Zia also adopted orthodox Islamic policies.

4.3 Gender Dynamics

The book examines the intricate relationships between gender and patriarchy in Pakistani society, as well as gender roles and women's rights. The difficulties and limitations women have when attempting to establish agency and autonomy within familial and social systems are brought to light by Amina's experiences as a woman living in a culture that is controlled by males.

- 1) **Cultural customs and norms:** The lives and decisions of the protagonists are greatly influenced by cultural norms and traditions, which have their roots in religion and society

expectations. The people in the book negotiate traditional beliefs with desires for social and economic growth, illustrating the contradictions between tradition and modernity.

- 2) **Urbanization and Migration:** The story of the novel is set against the backdrop of Karachi, a fast expanding metropolitan hub. The varied population of the city, which is made up of immigrants from Pakistan's rural areas and other regions, is a reflection of the larger patterns of internal migration and urbanization that influence the city's socioeconomic dynamics and cultural exchanges.
- 3) **Ethnic and Religious Diversity:** People from a wide range of ethnic and religious origins live in Karachi, which adds to the lively cultural fabric of the city. But there are also disputes and tensions that emerge between various racial and religious groups, which are a reflection of larger societal divisions and power struggles.

Through presenting the story in the socio-political and cultural framework of Pakistan in the 1970s and 1980s, "Upstairs Wife" provides insights on the intricacies of identity, power struggles, and societal transformation in the backdrop of the nation's changing environment.

4.4 Character Dynamics

Amina: As the book's main character, her experiences provide a starting point for examining issues of displacement and subalternity. Readers are able to observe Amina's issues with emotional relocation, voice suppression, and marginalization in her marriage to Sohail via her point of view. Amina's path also demonstrates female independence and fortitude in navigating patriarchal standards and society expectations.

Sohail: Throughout the story, Sohail, Amina's husband, serves as a figure of authority and power. Amina's experiences of marginalization and displacement are frequently influenced by his choices and behaviors, especially when he balances social constraints with his own aspirations. The complexity of gender dynamics and power dynamics in Pakistani homes is shown by Sohail's persona.

Plot Developments:

- **Important Events:** The storyline of the book is interspersed with significant occurrences that influence Amina's experiences and life course. These incidents include Sohail's choice to wed a second woman, Amina's psychological anguish after learning this, and her final path to empowerment and self-discovery. Every incident advances Amina's story arc and clarifies the themes of resistance and displacement.
- **Turning Points:** Character dynamics and story developments change as a result of crises and revelations, which act as turning points in the story. For instance, a pivotal moment in their relationship occurs when Amina confronts Sohail about his second marriage, which causes both characters to pause and consider themselves. The novel's overall narrative tension and philosophical depth are enhanced by these pivotal moments.

- Subalternity: Amina's experiences throughout the book perfectly capture what it means to be a subaltern—one who is marginalized, has their voice suppressed, and has little agency within prevailing power systems. The struggles of disadvantaged people to claim their identity and agency in patriarchal and politically volatile environments are reflected in her story arc.

5. Justification of Research Questions

5.1 How does Rafia Zakaria's "Upstairs Wife" depict the experiences of subalternity, particularly through the character of Amina, within the socio-political context of Pakistan?

In "Upstairs Wife", Rafia Zakaria uses interlocking layers of marginalization within Pakistan's sociopolitical setting to describe Amina's experiences as a subaltern. Amina's experiences as a lower-class Hindu woman showing the intricacies of power relations and societal disparities, including religious othering, economic precarity, and gendered oppression. Notwithstanding these difficulties, Amina's story also demonstrates fortitude and acts of defiance, highlighting the complex relationship between subaltern agency and institutional limitations in Pakistani culture.

5.2 In what ways does the theme of displacement manifest within the narrative of "Upstairs Wife", and how do personal and political forms of displacement intersect and shape individual experiences within the text?

"Upstairs Wife" explores the issue of displacement in its physical, emotional, and political manifestations. The characters undergo three types of displacement: emotional and psychological (due to relationship breakdowns and identity issues), physical (because to migration and relocation), and political (due to censorship and persecution). In Pakistan throughout the 1970s and 1980s, personal and political upheavals intersected to shape individual lives within an unstable and unpredictable terrain. These kinds of displacement interact and affect individual experiences, reflecting the country's wider socio-political backdrop.

5.3 How does the exploration of subalternity and displacement in "Upstairs Wife" contribute to broader conversations about power dynamics, identity formations, and resistance within marginalized communities, both in Pakistan and globally?

"Upstairs Wife" provides insights on power dynamics, identity forms, and resistance within underprivileged groups in Pakistan and throughout the world through its examination of subalternity and displacement. The book highlights the challenges of negotiating patriarchal, socioeconomic, and religious systems by illustrating the intertwined experiences of marginalization and oppression that people like Amina endure. By reading Amina's story, readers are encouraged to consider more general questions about agency, resiliency, and the transforming force of resistance within underprivileged groups. This helps to advance worldwide discussions about social justice, empowerment, and human rights.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

In the end, the examination of Rafia Zakaria's "Upstairs Wife" offers significant perspectives on the subjects of subalternity, displacement, and resistance in the context of Pakistani socio-politics in the 1970s and 1980s. The novel offers significant thoughts on power dynamics, identity forms, and resistance by illuminating the overlapping realities of oppression and marginalization encountered by individuals within marginalized groups via the narratives of Amina and other characters.

Subalternity research exposes Pakistani society's widespread injustices and inequities, especially those pertaining to gender, socioeconomic class, religion, and ethnicity. Through Amina's story, the intricacies of negotiating patriarchal norms, economic precarity, and religious prejudice are examined, bringing to light the agency and resiliency of those who live on the periphery of society. In a similar vein, how relocation is portrayed highlights the upheavals that mold people's lives in a politically unstable and socially stratified environment. Character struggles are exacerbated by the intersection of political, emotional, and physical displacement, which reflects larger trends of social instability and upheaval.

Recommendations:

In light of the examination of "Upstairs Wife", the following suggestions might be made for more study and scholarly work:

- 1) **Additional Investigation on Intersectionality:** Future studies should examine how experiences of subalternity and displacement in Pakistani society are shaped by the intersections of gender, class, religion, and ethnicity. Scholars can get a deeper grasp of how several axes of identity interact to form people's experiences of marginalization and resistance by using an intersectional method.
- 2) **Comparative Analysis:** "Upstairs Wife" may be compared to other literary works or historical accounts that tackle related issues of resistance, subalternity, and displacement in comparative studies. Scholars can learn more about the universality of Zakaria's ideas and the particulars of its socio-political environment by placing the book within larger literary and historical contexts.
- 3) **Postcolonial Theory Engagement:** Increasing our knowledge of postcolonial theory might improve our comprehension of the novel's themes and narrative devices. Through the utilization of postcolonial frameworks like the notion of hybridity by Homi Bhabha and the notion of the subaltern by Gayatri Spivak, researchers are able to provide intricate analyses of power dynamics, identity constructions, and resistance in the text.
- 4) **Empirical study:** By analyzing actual accounts of subalternity, displacement, and resistance in modern Pakistani culture, empirical study may supplement literary analysis. Researchers can get insights into the lived reality of oppressed populations and the tactics they use to

challenge oppression and express agency through the use of surveys, ethnographic studies, and interviews.

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Web Resources

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- <https://www.dawn.com/news/1181140>
- <https://tribune.com.pk/story/882492/book-review-the-upstairs-wife-hopes-and-betrays>
- <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/29/books/review/the-upstairs-wife-by-rafia-zakaria.html>
- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Subaltern_\(postcolonialism\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Subaltern_(postcolonialism))
- <https://literariness.org/2016/04/08/subaltern-postcolonialism/>
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