

Marginalization in Muhammad Hanif's *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti*

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Abstract

Marginalization is a significant and enduring issue in today's world, impacting religious minorities and women, especially in patriarchal societies. This paper delves into the portrayal of marginalization in Muhammad Hanif's novel, *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* (2011). The story follows Alice Bhatti, a Christian nurse living in Karachi, as she grapples with pervasive discrimination and injustice. Through this narrative, Hanif offers a critical perspective on the systemic inequalities confronting marginalized groups in Pakistan. Using Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the study explores how language and discourse mirror and sustain the marginalization of individuals based on religion and socio-economic status. A close reading of the text brings forward recurring themes of religious and gender-based discrimination, class divisions, and the complexities of identity that define Alice's experiences. Hanif's narrative serves as a sharp critique of societal norms that dehumanize and oppress individuals, especially those from minority backgrounds. Alice's interactions with her peers and the larger community expose deeply ingrained prejudices and violence, particularly targeting women and religious minorities. The analysis highlights how Alice's identity as a Christian woman from a lower socio-economic class intensifies her challenges, rendering her even more vulnerable. This research contributes to the existing body of knowledge by addressing a gap in exploring marginalized voices in Pakistani literature. By widening the focus beyond feminist viewpoints, it emphasizes the importance of understanding the broader socio-political forces shaping marginalized lives. Ultimately, the study underscores the potential of literature to drive social awareness and cultivate empathy, urging readers to confront the harsh realities of discrimination and violence that marginalized communities endure.

Keywords: Marginalization, Critical Discourse Analysis, Muhammad Hanif, Religious Minorities, Fairclough, Gender Discrimination

Introduction

Marginalization is a multifaceted social issue involving the systemic exclusion of individuals or groups from active participation in society. This exclusion often strips them of power and relegates them to the edges of social, economic, and political life (Amadiume & An-Na'im, 2000). In Pakistan, religious minorities such as Christians are particularly affected, frequently facing discrimination and violence due to their beliefs. Muhammad Hanif's novel *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* provides a compelling lens through which the struggles of marginalized communities can be explored. Hanif, a British-Pakistani author, uses his narrative to bring attention to the challenges faced by marginalized groups, especially women, within a patriarchal society that often regards them as inferior. The protagonist, Alice Bhatti, is a powerful representation of intersectional marginalization, as she is both a woman and a member of a minority religious community. Through her story, Hanif critiques societal norms that sustain discrimination and violence against those on the fringes of society. This study aims to examine how Hanif employs language as a tool to advocate for equality and bring attention to the struggles of the oppressed lower classes. Using Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the research will analyze the novel's textual content, discourse processes, and underlying social practices. The study's key questions focus on the socio-political aspects of marginalization, the depiction of oppressed groups, and the literary strategies Hanif employs to highlight and challenge systemic inequality.

Research Questions

1. How does *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* address the socio-political issue of marginalization in contemporary society?
2. How does the writer portray the marginalized class in *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti*?
3. How does the writer use literary language in favor of the suppressed class in *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti*?

Objectives

- To explore how Hanif depicts a stratified society with various classes.
- To analyze the portrayal of marginalized classes in the novel.
- To identify the socio-political discourses echoed in the text.

Significance

This study sheds light on the struggles faced by marginalized communities in Pakistani society, amplifying the voices of those who are often unheard. It delves into the challenges endured by the lower classes,

aiming to inspire meaningful social and political change. By addressing issues of inequality, the research contributes to the ongoing conversation about equal rights for minorities and seeks to challenge the deeply rooted caste system that undermines human dignity.

Literature Review

The scholarship on Muhammad Hanif's *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* is diverse and insightful, with researchers exploring the novel through various theoretical lenses. A significant portion of the existing literature focuses on feminist readings, particularly the depiction of women and the dynamics of gender in a patriarchal society. For example, Mubashir Atif (2016) highlights feminist concerns in Hanif's work, drawing attention to the struggles of female characters as they resist oppressive societal norms. Similarly, Abroo Nazar (2016) examines the silencing of subaltern voices, emphasizing the need to critically analyze the roles of women in Pakistani society.

More recent studies have extended this focus to consider the intersectionality of gender and religion in the context of marginalization. Aamer Shaheen (2014), for instance, employs magical realism to analyze Alice Bhatti's character, interpreting her as a symbol of resistance against patriarchal oppression. Sara Baig (2017) delves into the social and religious injustices faced by Alice, portraying her as a saint-like figure who transcends her marginalized identity. Although these works provide valuable insights into feminist themes, a significant gap remains in the literature when it comes to analyzing Hanif's broader advocacy for marginalized communities beyond gender. Most studies prioritize feminist perspectives, often neglecting the intersections of class, religion, and ethnicity. This research seeks to address this gap by using Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to explore how Hanif not only highlights women's struggles but also brings attention to the plight of Pakistan's Christian minority.

Furthermore, the literature points to a need for a deeper exploration of how language operates as a tool of power and resistance in Hanif's narrative. Through CDA, this study will examine how Hanif uses linguistic choices to challenge societal stereotypes and advocate for the rights of marginalized groups. While previous research has laid the groundwork for understanding the feminist dimensions of the novel, it has yet to fully address the broader, intersectional nature of marginalization, which encompasses socio-economic status and religious identity. Some scholars have also started to explore the role of language in shaping societal perceptions of marginalized communities. For instance, Farooq Yousaf (2016) and Muhammad Uzair (2014) discuss how language constructs gendered and religious identities, reinforcing existing power dynamics in Pakistani society. Their findings underscore the importance of analyzing the linguistic

strategies used by authors like Hanif, whose work both reflects and challenges these entrenched structures of inequality.

Despite the extensive research on *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti*, there remains a need for a comprehensive analysis that examines the multi-layered nature of marginalization depicted in the novel. By employing a critical discourse analysis framework, this study aims to bridge that gap, shedding light on how Hanif portrays the intersections of gender, class, and religion. In doing so, it will contribute to a more nuanced understanding of Pakistan's socio-political realities and the systemic injustices faced by its marginalized communities.

Research Methodology

This methodology section provides a clear and thorough overview of the research design, data collection methods, and analytical framework, ensuring the study is firmly grounded in qualitative research principles. It aims to address the nuanced complexities of marginalization as depicted in Muhammad Hanif's *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti*.

The study adopts a qualitative research approach, guided by Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). This framework views language as a powerful social instrument, uncovering how power structures are created and sustained through discourse. The analysis is organized into three key dimensions:

1. **Textual Analysis (Description):** This dimension focuses on a close examination of the language, structure, and stylistic features of the novel. It explores Hanif's use of vocabulary, syntax, and narrative techniques to portray marginalized characters and themes. Key passages are analyzed to highlight Alice Bhatti's experiences and those of other marginalized figures, emphasizing the linguistic tools Hanif employs to represent their struggles and resilience.
2. **Processing Analysis (Explanation):** This dimension examines the processes involved in the production, distribution, and reception of the novel. It considers the socio-political context in which *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* was written and published, particularly the prevailing conditions in Pakistan. The analysis also looks at how readers and critics have responded to the novel, investigating how cultural and societal factors have shaped its interpretation. By understanding these processes, the research situates the novel's discourses within their broader societal and cultural contexts.
3. **Social Analysis (Interpretation):** This final dimension interprets the novel's themes as reflections of larger socio-cultural practices. It examines how the narrative engages with issues such as religious discrimination, gender-based violence, and class inequality, connecting them to Pakistan's societal realities. This dimension aims to uncover the power structures that perpetuate marginalization while highlighting the potential of literature to inspire awareness and social change.

Data Source

The primary data for this research is sourced from the original text of *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti*, published by Vintage Books Random House India in 2011. The novel consists of thirty chapters and 339 pages, providing a rich narrative for analysis. The researcher employs purposive sampling to identify key passages that illustrate themes of marginalization, discrimination, and the struggles of the protagonist, Alice Bhatti. This approach allows for a focused examination of the text while ensuring that the analysis captures the complexity of the issues presented.

Data Collection Techniques

Data collection is conducted through document analysis, which involves a close reading of the text to identify significant themes, patterns, and discourses. The researcher systematically reviews the novel, taking notes on relevant passages and quotes that exemplify the experiences of marginalized characters. This qualitative approach enables the researcher to engage deeply with the text and to draw connections between the narrative and the broader socio-political context.

Analytical Framework

The analytical framework for this study is grounded in Fairclough's (1989) three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which highlights the interconnectedness of text, discursive practices, and social practices. This framework enables the researcher to examine how language shapes and reflects power dynamics, social inequality, and marginalization. By using this model, the study aims to uncover how Hanif's narrative both mirrors and challenges the marginalization of minorities in Pakistan. The application of this framework allows for a deeper understanding of how language serves as both a tool of oppression and a means of resistance, ultimately offering a more nuanced view of the socio-political issues presented in the novel.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are a key priority in this research. The researcher is mindful of the sensitive nature of the topics explored in *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti*, including issues of gender, religion, and class. Efforts are made to approach the analysis with care, respect, and sensitivity, ensuring that the experiences and voices of marginalized individuals are accurately and thoughtfully represented. Additionally, the researcher acknowledges the importance of situating the findings within the larger discourse on marginalization and social justice, with the aim of contributing meaningfully to ongoing conversations about these vital issues.

Data Analysis

The analysis of *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* uncovers the complex experiences of Alice Bhatti, a Christian nurse in Karachi, who represents the broader struggles of marginalized individuals within a patriarchal society.

The findings are organized around key themes that emerge from the text, shedding light on the systemic discrimination faced by Alice and other marginalized characters. These themes are grouped into three central categories: discrimination against minorities, the victimization of women, and class stratification. Each theme reveals the deep-rooted social injustices that shape the characters' lives and illustrates the novel's critique of these pervasive issues.

Discrimination Against Minorities

A central theme in *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* is the systemic discrimination faced by religious minorities, particularly Christians. Alice Bhatti's experiences powerfully illustrate the societal attitudes that dehumanize and marginalize individuals based on their religious identity. For example, during her nursing interview, Alice encounters Ortho Sir, who makes a derogatory comment about her name and background: "I am surprised that you are trying to hide basic information. Your full name is Alice Joseph Bhatti. Are you ashamed of your father's name?" (p. 8). This statement not only reflects the prejudice against her Christian identity but also highlights the expectation for minorities to conform to the dominant culture.

Alice's interactions with her colleagues further underscore the pervasive discrimination within the healthcare system. The language used by her peers belittles her status, reinforcing the idea that she is unworthy of respect and dignity. The novel demonstrates how these discriminatory attitudes are deeply embedded in society, resulting in the marginalization of individuals like Alice, who are viewed as "chooras" or untouchables. This dehumanization is apparent in the way Alice is treated by her superiors and colleagues, who consistently regard her as inferior due to her caste and religious background.

Victimhood of Women

Our Lady of Alice Bhatti also powerfully addresses the victimization of women in Pakistani society, where they are frequently subjected to violence and oppression. Alice's experiences in the hospital serve as a stark reflection of the broader societal challenges women face. Hanif writes, "During her house job, she worked in Accidents and Emergencies for six months, and there was not a single day—not a single day—when she didn't see a woman shot or hacked, strangled or suffocated, poisoned or burnt, hanged or buried alive" (p. 96). This vivid description of violence against women emphasizes the normalization of brutality in a patriarchal society, where women's lives are often regarded as expendable.

Alice's own journey is marked by a series of traumatic events that mirror the harsh realities many women face. Her decision to marry Teddy Butt is depicted as a means of survival, yet it ultimately leads to her destruction. Teddy, representing the oppressive forces of society, severely

disfigures her by pouring acid on her, symbolizing the extreme violence women often endure. The narrative paints a grim picture of how societal norms force women to navigate a perilous world, where they often pay the price for the actions and decisions of the men around them.

Additionally, the novel delves into the concept of honor, showing how it is frequently tied to the actions of women. Alice's experiences expose the societal pressure on women to conform to traditional roles, with their worth being measured by their ability to maintain family honor. This pressure is intensified by the patriarchal structure that subjugates women, as seen in Alice's relationship with Teddy Butt, who ultimately strips away her sense of self. The novel poignantly illustrates how societal expectations and norms perpetuate the marginalization and victimization of women, leaving them vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.

Class Stratification

Hanif offers a sharp critique of the class system in Pakistan, revealing how individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds, like Alice, are marginalized not just because of their gender, but also due to their religious and caste identities. The novel starkly contrasts the lives of the elite with the harsh struggles of the lower class. For example, Alice's father, Joseph Bhatti, is described as a "shit cleaner," a profession that relegates him to the lowest rung of the social hierarchy. The stigma associated with his work only deepens Alice's marginalization, as she is often judged by her father's lowly status.

The narrative also highlights the intersectionality of class and gender, particularly through the character of Margret Bhatti, Alice's mother. Margret works in the homes of the wealthy, but her life is marked by exploitation and abuse. The circumstances surrounding her death—claimed to be an accident but shrouded in mystery—underscore the precarious existence of women in the lower class. Hanif writes, "It is claimed that she slipped from the stairs, but the hidden reality is different" (p. 12). This ambiguity highlights the societal indifference to the lives of marginalized women, who are often rendered invisible and voiceless.

Moreover, the novel critiques the hypocrisy of the elite class, who maintain their privileged status through the exploitation of the lower classes. Characters like Begum Qazalbash, who embodies the elite, are portrayed as morally corrupt, benefitting from the suffering of others. The text exposes how the elite perpetuate the cycle of poverty and discrimination, reinforcing the social hierarchy that traps individuals like Alice and her family in a continuous cycle of marginalization.

Intersectionality of Marginalization

The analysis of *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* uncovers the intersectionality of marginalization, where Alice's identity as a Christian woman from a lower socio-economic background intensifies her experiences

of discrimination. The novel highlights how these overlapping identities create a distinct set of challenges for individuals like Alice, who must navigate a society that is often hostile to their very existence. For example, Alice's position as a woman in a patriarchal society further amplifies her vulnerability, subjecting her to both religious discrimination and gender-based violence and oppression.

Alice Bhatti's character poignantly represents the struggles of marginalized individuals in Pakistan. Her experiences mirror broader societal issues such as discrimination, victimization, and class stratification, drawing attention to the urgent need for social change. The narrative stresses the importance of recognizing the humanity of every individual, regardless of their background, and challenges readers to confront the uncomfortable realities of discrimination and violence.

Conclusion

This research paper delves into the theme of marginalization in Muhammad Hanif's *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti*, shedding light on the complex interplay of gender, religion, and class that shapes the protagonist, Alice Bhatti's experiences. By applying Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis, the study uncovers how language serves both as a tool of oppression and a means of resistance within the narrative. The findings highlight the systemic discrimination faced by religious minorities, especially Christians, in Pakistan, while also emphasizing the added vulnerabilities experienced by women in a patriarchal society. Alice's journey poignantly illustrates the harsh realities of living at the intersection of multiple marginalized identities, where societal norms dictate her worth and agency. The novel critiques the pervasive attitudes of prejudice and violence that affect marginalized individuals, urging readers to confront these uncomfortable truths. This study also fills a gap in the existing literature by broadening the focus beyond feminist perspectives, bringing attention to the socio-political context that informs the lives of marginalized communities.

Ultimately, *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* stands as a powerful reminder of literature's potential to inspire social change and foster empathy. Hanif's narrative not only amplifies the voices of the oppressed but also challenges readers to reflect on their own perceptions of marginalization and discrimination. As society continues to grapple with inequality and injustice, the insights from this research underline the need for advocacy and awareness in creating a more equitable world for all marginalized groups.

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