

GENDERED DISCOURSE ON WOMEN'S IDENTITY: A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF 'OUR LADY OF ALICE BHATTI'Muhammad Afzaal¹, Dr. Hammad Mushtaq², Swaleha Bano Naqvi³**Original Article**

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Abstract

In addition to exploring how identity constructed through performance, this study inquired into how the construction of gender results in the emergence of power relationships between men and women. Focusing on selected extracts from a novel, this study applied close reading and textual analysis to the data. The study found that the female characters in the novel are embroiled in painful and complex situations, thus resulting in a war against the patriarchal society by the protagonist. The study further revealed that the patriarchal society creates the myth that women are overly emotional, weak, submissive, shy and dependent. This patriarchal subjugation perpetuates the oppression by defining limited roles for women. In addition to the circumscription of their freedom, the women have to face all sorts of discrimination, with men inflicting pain by means of physical, emotional and mental oppression and abuse. This study contributes to literature by demonstrating how the construction of suppressed identity is a source of pressure for women and how the redefinition of identity results in feminist resistance against the patriarchy within the theoretical perspectives of feminism.

Keywords: gender, women, feminism, discourse, identity, discourse analysis

Introduction

The exploitation of women and issues arising from gender roles comprise key social challenges globally as well as in Pakistan. In addition to being considered inferior, the female gender identity has been considered a marginalized identity. Identity has become a key challenge for women in our country, giving rise to recurring social, psychological, physical, and economic issues at all levels. The present study seeks to contribute to the identification of how society constructs an identity for the marginalised female gender in Pakistan. The current research is significant because the work helps to construct suppressed identity as a source of oppression for the women and its redefinition, resulting in feminist resistance against the patriarchy within the theoretical perspectives of feminism. This research provides critical insights regarding gender issues in *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti*.

Moreover, it facilitates researchers who are concerned with gender studies as well as the literary text in general and the postmodern literature in particular. Besides, this study contributes to sensitize society to avoid the exploitation of women and to encourage the readers of the study to

strive for ending gender violence. Furthermore, this study seeks to motivate feminist critiques for exposing gender imbalances through various Pakistani society's discursive strategies.

Hanif has used the word 'Choori' community for the Christians of the Karachi slums; this marked code is used to indicate the prejudice against members of different religions and castes amongst people. Alice Bhatti, a Christian nurse, has recently returned from Borstal Jail for Women and Children. She is introduced as distraught woman. She is over obsessed with her femininity and deeply frustrated. She is humiliated and exploited, not only because of she is a Christian but also because she is a woman, subject to the whims of a male dominated society. The female bodies are being used as locus of exploitation. Through the character of Alice, Hanif demonstrates how the male dominated society uses female body as the site of exploitation. Throughout the novel, women are physically, emotionally and mentally exploited by men, and their bodies are used as commodities to be exchanged by male members of postcolonial societies.

Research Questions

The major research questions of the present study are:

1. How do the female characters in "*Our Lady of Alice Bhatti*" redefine their gender role?
2. What are the lexical choices used in the construction/reconstruction of women's identity as others in the novel?
3. How does gender role make the women 'others' in the novel?

Previous Work

Ibsen (1879) in his play, "A Doll's house" endeavoured to develop a feminist consciousness. Later on, other writers in the West carried forward these ideas, for instance Thomas Hardy (1892), who in his novel *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* highlighted the plight of voiceless women. In her book "A Room of One's Own" Woolf (1929), Woolf also pointed out that women are treated unequally in society. So, in the western literature, the trend for portraying the abject plight of the women and advocate for their rights has existed for many decades. All the same, marginalisation was the key theme of the writers of the West to promote the right of subjugated people and apart from it post colonialism and feminism are considered both the terms. The colonizers treated people on the basis of their culture, economy and gender.

In her novel "An American Brat", Sidhwa (1994) shows the cross-culture impact on the society and the thought processes of the colonised people in accordance with their customs. Ferouza the protagonist of the novel leaves Pakistan, the country of her birth, in order to get an education and become civilized in the US. In "The Bride", Sidhwa (2006) portrays the life and struggle of women like Zaitoon who are brought up in patriarchal communities. Sidhwa shows how women are treated in male dominated society in 'The Bride'. Her novel 'The Ice Candy Man' also portrays the situation of women and their bodies. The bodies of women are also colonised in the subcontinent.

Construction of Women of Identity

As a conceptual lens, feminism has been integrated into many research studies, and multiple scholars have highlighted the issues of the weaker identity. For instance, Simone de Beauvoir (1949) has talked about the self and reconstruction of a tongueless creature identity. However, the

reconstruction of identity in this connection has not been studied in the Pakistani Context. Therefore, this study has been designed to promote the solution to the tongueless creature.

Mostly the term postmodern feminism is regarded with the slogan to provide women their equal rights based (Butler; 1990; Afzaal 2020) and Foucault (1998) on the reconstruction of gender not on the basis of biological features. This theory negates the idea that the ideologies, facts and mind set of the people are fixed about men and women, especially at the birth of a child. Biological determinism is the only custom that is found almost in every society. The Postmodern feminism negates the view of gender and biological determinism and does not relate it with social values and status of humans. Harvey (1985) argued that the boundaries between human and animal, animal and animal and masculine are not clear. However, with the advancement of internet, the concept of discrimination among the gender and races has been unveiled to everyone.

Afzaal & Kanglong (2021) note that gender is a social decision, and that this decision of society makes someone a man or a woman, suggesting that gender is not natural or determined by birth. Beauvoir (1949) states that sex is biologically determined, while gender is something that is socially constructed (p, 4). This implies that gender is socialised and it is constructed through social practice. Butler (1990) has also argued against the system of categorising people, stating that gender should be seen as a natural human trait that can shift and change in a given context rather than one that remains fixed. Further, she asserts that women have been grouped together based on shared characteristics and interests which can restrict their ability to choose their own identities.

In addition, the feminist scholars consider gender as a social construct. The division of gender is an elemental aspect of society, as it is deeply rooted in social organisation and taught to individuals from early childhood to adulthood stages. This categorisation of gender varies from culture to culture, religion-to-religion and region-to-region.

Results & Discussions

The study is about the construction of identity across the gender, caste and religion in Pakistan which is presented in Hanif's novel. The story revolves around the girl Alice, a Catholic nurse who works at Sacred Heart Hospital. Throughout the novel Alice symbolises the confronted and appears to be the pictogram of corrupt Pakistani society. The study identifies several issues in the novel which demonstrate that Pakistani society is truly patriarchal, and male dominated.

This patriarchal subjugation perpetuates the oppression by defining a limited number of roles for women. This system dictates that women should be restricted to stay at home, bear children, raise the children, or become nurses and teachers. In addition to restrictions on their freedom, the women have to face all sorts of discrimination and infliction of pain by men, ranging from physical, emotional and mental oppression to abuse. They are often raped and sexually abused because the society dictates that women are inferior to men and deserve this treatment. Often the perpetrators, if caught, go free as the law favours the male. This system of patriarchy with its strong roots seems to be a hard nut for women to crack. This gender inequality not only creates dichotomy but also becomes the cause of exploitation of women in Pakistani society.

1-Not a single day - when she didn't see a woman shot or hacked, strangled or suffocated, poisoned or burnt, hanged or buried alive (Chapter 12, P.142).

Our society is an androcentric society wherein men play with the lives of women. The above extract reflects the experience of Alice, the main character of the novel. She encounters many such

men in the society who use women for their own interests. Through the experiences of Alice, the author is able to show how women are treated badly in the Pakistani society. The above text also highlights how women are labeled as the property of men. Simone de Beauvoir (1949) argued "all oppression creates a state of war; this is no exceptions." Men treat women as their pet and do not provide the fundamental needs of life. If men are not happy, need to fight or take revenge, they probably use women's body as an object to take revenge. Here women's body is used as a metaphor for a toy which is used by men to play with for their enjoyment.

2—When trapped at home, look at your woman from a different angle, pretends she is someone else's wife (Chapter 21, P. 234).

Teddy, Alice's husband, is told by Inspector Malangi, that when you are trapped at home with his wife then he should think of her as another person's wife, so that she becomes interesting for the former. Here the text shows how men use their language to construct social world in which women is worthless.

According to Fairclough (1992), gender is learnt, and once it is learnt it produces, reproduces and legitimises the choices and expects conformity to one category. This categorisation is not done at the individual level but at the intuitional, social, cultural and at interactional level that assists in establishing dialectical and asymmetrical relations. Most men, when at home with their wives, feel that they are in an unpleasant situation in which they lack freedom, and they feel they cannot escape from it. The word 'trapped' is significant here. Women are only for enjoyment, other than which they have no existence.

3-You will walk down your street and people ask for your advice because they think you are a man of the world, and then you go home and you start discussing weather with your wife or the damp in the walls and she will prove in an instant that you are the world's biggest idiot (Chapter 21, P. 237).

Sharing his views with Teddy, Inspector Malangi dilates that women are dim-witted and it is useless to discuss even minor issues with them. The comparison between wives and damp in wall clearly shows that just like the presence of dampness in wall is unpleasant, any discussion with wives also gives the same feeling, suggesting that it is man who is born to rule them, so there is no need to give any importance to women.

4-Women make you weak and impotent because they make perfectly normal men feel they are fools (Chapter 21, P. 237).

According to Inspector Malangi, women are not human. They are born for manly desires alone. They don't have the right to rule over men's mind. Teddy acts on the advices of Inspector Malangi. The use of lexical choice like 'weak' and 'impotent' and 'fool' clearly describes the status of women in Pakistani society. The use of 'perfectly normal' 'automatically' is making women as abnormal. They are considered as the 'other' and less than human beings, thus being perceived as useless commodities. Simone de Beauvoir (1949) notes that... her wings are cut and then she is blamed for not knowing how to fly.

5-Life has taught Alice Bhatti that every little step forward in life preceded by a ritual humiliation. Every little happiness asks for a down payment (Chapter 7, P. 82).

The extract shows how woman are typically oppressed and tortured. Alice is an untouchable of Pakistani society and she is doubly marginalized for being a member of the minority and a woman.

Simone de Beauvoir (1949) argues that women are oppressed, subjugated, and considered as inferior to males, simply because they are women. She adds that gender identity is created consciously with the help of social and cultural practices, whereas men define their own world, and women are only intended to live in it. Simone de Beauvoir (1949) highlights that women are unable to change the world like men can and that they are unable to live their lives freely as men can, with most of them being unaware of their own oppression. The author has created a fictional world where there is an establishment of self and other. The woman is usually considered worthless, and she possesses no value in the society. Alice has compared her fate with the red colour which represents danger, seduction, fire and violence.

6- She has lived long enough to know that cutting up women is a sport older than cricket but just as a popular and equally full of obscure rituals and intricate rules..." (Chapter 12, P.141).

The above extract sheds light on some key aspects in the subjugation and objectification of women and exposes the ugly social realities of our society. It also reflects the ways women are marginalised and discriminated on the basis of their gender, class and religion and also shows how the patriarchal traditions remain entrenched in Pakistan. De Beauvoir (1949) says that the epithet of female has the sound of an insult, (p, 1), implying that women are subjected to social inequality and discrimination. Further, she affirms that man is in charge of the development of a world in light of his esteem, his standards, and his abilities. She is unsurprised by the way that woman has accomplished nearly less in a male-oriented culture. The tone used in this extract becomes very satiric and acerbic as it shows the miserable situation of females in our society.

7- There is a deep hidden well of sadness in every woman, as inevitable as a pair of ovaries, and on certain afternoons its mouth yawns open and it can suck in every colour in this world (Chapter 13, P. 145).

Inspector Malangi tells Teddy that he can do anything for a woman but that it is very difficult to keep a woman happy. Teddy is told that whatever he does, the woman will remain fulfilled. He relates the feelings of a woman with the ovaries which clearly shows how man thinks about woman as a useless thing, good for little more than reproduction. Here the use of the metaphor also reflects the idea that a woman is considered as a lifeless object and perceived as something inanimate by man. Also, the last phrase of the above extract 'suck in every colour of this world' depicts how patriarchal society degrades woman through its language because colour represents happiness and life in this world and without colours, beauty and happiness are not possible. As a result of this oppressive system, what the man says is law, and the men make little effort to keep the women happy. A key difference between women and other communities that have been oppressed is that they can never live isolated from men, as Jews have been isolated from Christians and blacks from whites. She belongs to a lower —caste—a term de Beauvoir (1949) mostly uses to emphasise the nature of female subordination. In spite of her lower position, woman always lives nearby her "master".

8- Mostly people call her 'daughter' or 'sister' and then do exactly what they would do their own sisters and daughters: they treat her like a slave they bought at a clearance sale (Chapter 10, P. 122).

The above extract shows how women are called 'daughter' or 'sister', yet enslaved in the same way as the women at the homes of the men who use these titles. Alice is likewise aware of this treatment of man and she has to face it daily in the hospital where men call her daughter and

sister. After that she is treated in an inhuman way. According to de Beauvoir (1949), men treat women as a slave while persuading them that they are queens. In this extract, 'most people' represent the patriarchal system which treats women in an inhumane manner in our society at all levels. The lexical choices, like 'daughter', 'sister', 'slave', 'bought' and 'clearance sale' are ideologically important. The comparison of 'sister' or 'daughter' with 'slave' clearly shows that men perceive women as worthless beings.

After cutting the VIP patient's visitor with the blade, Alice is suspended for two weeks from the hospital. Sister Hina Alvi tells Alice that this suspension is for her own benefit and that she will be paid for these days as well. Alice believes that she is being punished for resisting an armed assault (p, 125). When Alice Bhatti takes the views of Sister Hina for complaining police against the sexual assault that she faced when she was doing her duty in the VIP room of the Sacred, Hina Alvi tries to show the ugly face of the police department which is also working against female members of the society. She also tells her that the patient's visitors did not complain to the police. This indicates that they want to deal the matter by themselves and it would create problem for her. Simone de Beauvoir (1949) comments on the women who try to get the role of transcendence, deny being an object, and get some mastery over their lives and how they are treated badly by patriarchal society. This sort of woman has to face many negative stereotypes and is likened to 'the praying mantis.' This unfavourable symbol is used for the woman who threatens males' dominancy and is accused of 'cannibalism' and regarded as 'the praying mantis'.

9- Suspicious husband, brother protecting his honour, father protecting his honour, son protecting his honour, jilted lover avenging his honour, feuding farmers setting their water disputes, money lenders collecting their interest (Chapter 7, p. 96).

The above extract clearly shows the power relation between men and women, with the power resting in the hands of the male characters of the novel. Women do not have the fundamental security they need, and the men consider them as toys in their hands. They molest them and regard them as useless creatures and take them as their property. The above text also shows the bitter reality of our society that if men have to take revenge on any other man, they take it out on female members. To ensure their respect, they even slaughter the women just to show their control over the other. It also reflects the cunning nature of male-dominated society where woman's body is worthless, and they can use it for solving all disputes of their life.

Beauvoir (1949) notes that if you live long enough, you'll see that every victory turns into a defeat. The lexical choice like 'honour', 'water disputes', 'interests' and 'life's arguments' all show that women's body is less important than all these matters of life in patriarchal society. This additional note shows that the relation between men and women is a relation of dominant and subordinate, with women being used as object, passive and receiver. The above text also shows that women are killed by men either for their 'honour' or their extreme love for them. Men never accept their defeat and women are an easy target, with the woman's body being the only solution for their disputes.

10- They are fakes even when they are dead. These women, I tell you, they continue to peddle these fantasies from their coffins. You can't trust them even when their hearts stop beating" (Chapter 28, P. 308).

In the above extract, Inspector Malangi reconfirms this patriarchal ideology by explaining that women are not trustworthy and are trouble for men. They are not trustworthy even after death. The text also shows that his gender ideology greatly influences Teddy and he reconfirms his experiences

and practices, leading him to commit one of the most abominable crimes against women which is the throwing of acid on a woman. The extract also shows how men relate bad traits of women to portray a negative image of women and marginalise them through the use of their language. The position of man is self, essential, and subject while woman as other and objective. There are some lexical choice like 'fake', 'peddle 'fantasies' and 'trust' that are significant, reflecting the gender position of men and perpetuating gender inequality in a patriarchally structured society. According to Simone de Beauvoir (1949), men considered themselves as subject and essential, implying that women are the object and inessential.

Linguistic Features

The present study found that Hanif has used many linguistics items in order to highlight the issues of women in our country. These include selected lexical items such as:

Table 1 Lexical Choices

Lexical Items	Realisations
shot, hacked, strangled, suffocated, poisoned, burnt, hanged, buried alive	These words connotatively and denotatively show the extreme pain experienced by women, and the writer uses these words to show that women have to suffer and bear their suffering alone in the society.
faceless woman	The visual code clearly shows the homogenisation of woman in our society, also denoting her otherness and marginality.
Cutting up, loose change, something	These lexical items clearly reflect how women are marginalised as 'others' and how they are treated as inferior to men
Lewd gestures, whispered suggestions, uninvited hands on her bottom	The writer uses these lexical items to reflect the harsh reality that encages the female members of the society in distress.
Daughter, sister	These lexical items have a positive denotative meaning. However, connotatively these have a negative meaning in Hanif's world of fiction. The men call women 'daughter' and 'sister', afterwards treating them t in an inhuman way.
Honour	Denotatively this lexical item has a positive meaning, but the author uses a satirical tone while using this lexical item to reveal how women have been exploited by men in the name of so called 'honour'
Woman's body	The woman's body does not merely connote female sexuality and gender. Rather the writer uses this lexical item to give a whole new connotative meaning to the physical violence, showing women's body as being more important than all matters of life in patriarchal society. The female body is used as a victim of society where it left its prints.

Conclusion

The study exposes the hypocrisy, lust, brutalities and perversions of the male characters. Despite their surface superiority, the protagonist of the novel, Alice Bhatti, has the strength to resist all sorts of aggression. The most agonising aspect is that the helplessness and plight of women is unnoticed by the society and the people appear indifferent to their painful condition. Most women have suffered some form of sexism and been treated as less than men. However, both the sexes are the same and as human beings should enjoy an equal status in the world. However, in the Pakistani society depicted by Hanif, the societal gender is constructed at time of birth of a child. For example,

one person may be extremely extroverted and another extremely introverted, with many permutations between the two extremes. While these differences exist, it is also true the two sexes are the same. Both sexes want to be heard, connected and loved. The differences do not mean that women are inferior to men or vice versa. Patriarchal Pakistan continues to perpetuate the subjugation of women. These traditions need to be challenged and be questioned continuously so as to create a catalyst for change and emancipation of women. While the women of the West have found their liberation, Pakistan continue to be lag behind in this feminine liberation. The women of Pakistan need to rise up and declare war on the subjugation of women that leads to pain and misery and suppression for the feminine sex. Often women prop-up the patriarchal society through internal oppression.

In the end, on the basis of results drawn from the analysis and discussion, it is significant that Hanif has portrayed the true image of the Pakistani female and highlighted their issues in *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti*; the voice is bitter and ironic. Through his work, Hanif has projected and explored the various types of patriarchy and their effects in Pakistan. He explores the marginalisation and suffering of women in his novel when breaking the norms of society. He has highlighted the issues of the minority class who are accorded the derogatory epithet of 'churra' (sanitation worker), commenting how they are economically downtrodden, intimidated, and accorded a lower place in the country. Similarly, he also shown the plight if women and their rights in the novel. He has presented the real condition of women by depicting how Alice has been treated and the plight of women has also been shown in society.

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