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Unheard Voices and Intersecting Inequalities: An Intersectional Analysis of Hanif's Novel *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti*

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ABSTRACT

The present study explores different dimensions of inequality based on which people are marginalized and subjugated. The different dimensions like race, gender, religion, sex, physical abilities, and class difference intersect to reflect multiple simultaneous oppressions of women. The voice of a marginalized character, Alice, is raised to reflect the miseries of women in the Pakistani context. The study employed Dill and Zambrana's (2009) intersectionality to explore multiple simultaneous oppressions of Alice in Hanif's *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti*. The qualitative paradigm is used to critically analyze the text and explore different dimensions of inequality. It selected Hanif's *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* as primary data, while it also took relevant secondary data from different scholarly articles and sites. Belsey's (2013) textual analysis guides the researcher to make meaning of the text by close reading. The study is significant for literary

students because it gives an insight into the miserable lives of women based on various intersecting identities. The oppressed and marginalized woman is given a voice to resist the disparities in society. Moreover, the study reflects that gender and sex are not the only factors of women's subjugation. Rather, other categories like race, class, and religion intersect to subjugate the women.

Keywords: Intersecting axes, Voice of Marginalized, Intersectionality, Hanif

Introduction

Women are one of the most important components of human social development. Whether at home or outside, they play an essential role in the overall make-up of society. Without women, the human species would end. Women so strongly influence the different aspects and patterns of organization that their essence cannot be denied. It is a woman who bears a child in her womb and gives birth to a new life. She is a mother who teaches her children how to talk, walk, eat, run, write, read, and succeed at different stages of life but they are not fortunate enough because they have not been provided the place they deserve and taught to spend the bad time they got in life. Age-old practices of patriarchy are at the center of women's subjugation, sufferings and regrettably, these practices still exist in extensive amounts. Divisional trends have been established in patriarchal societies that pave the way for men to be seen to be superior to women. According to Plant et al. (2000) study females more frequently express emotions of embarrassment, sadness, love, sympathy fear or guilt, etc. Females are considered less aggressive and proud as compared to men based on which different roles are attributed to both genders. The study reflected those even emotions are stereotyped based on a particular gender. The stereotypical markers such as dependency, shyness, and weakness are the qualities that lead to stereotypical features and stereotypical roles such as childbearing, homemaking, teaching, and nursing. The representations of women are set and forced to exist within these restricted realms. Mostly Ladies endure cruelties, atrocities, grisliness, and repulsiveness. They are threatened and humiliated in their workplaces. They do not have the same position in society, although they must play their function more than other genders in society. Many post-colonial authors of the subcontinent such as Nadeem Aslam, Sara Suleri, Arundhati Roy, Kamila Shamsie, Bapsi Sidhwa, and others have talked about this matter in their works. All of these sought, in their

style, to elucidate the reasons responsible for the sexism and oppression of women and to regard them like those in male-dominant cultures.

"*Our Lady of Alice Bhatti*" is Mohammed Hanif's second book and it was published in 2011. In "*Our Lady of Alice Bhatti*", Hanif talked about some of society's most disturbing angles and revealed the grim communal facts in a brave and open way. He has shown how women were marginalized and discriminated against based on their beliefs, class, ethnicity, and gender. He has also mentioned that Pakistan still has male dominant culture. In this study, our aim and focus are on the character of Alice Bhatti through the lens of intersectional analysis. As like a feminist, Mohammad Hanif's voice becomes satiric and acerbic when he narrates the dejected condition of women in a society where,

"[...] cutting women is a sport older than cricket, but just as popular and equally full of complex rituals and complicated rules ..." (Hanif, 2011, p. 96).

Through the main character of the novel Alice Bhatti and several female personages in the book, Hanif portrays the psychological anxieties and agonies of women. Because she is a Christian, a woman, and has a low social status, she faces triple marginalization. Mohammad Hanif has stated complete information about Alice: when she moves outside, she takes protective measures and cares about her gait, manners, and dress. This novel also observes there are many problems for women with respect to their employment and occupation.

Some of the studies argued that various factors like race and gender overlapped to subjugate women simultaneously. Crenshaw (1991) claimed that such axes of inequality jointly subjugate the woman to live a miserable life. She introduced the perspective of intersectionality to identify different issues of society and formulate such notions that can work to bring social change.

Other scholars like Dill and Zambrana (2009) advanced Crenshaw's theory of intersecting by contributing the notion that apart from gender and sex there are other identities like ethnicity, physical ability, religion, social class, economy, and sexuality that intersect to oppress the woman in a society. The recent study employed Dill and Zambrana's (2009) intersectionality to analyze Hanif's *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti*. It reflected the female subjugation and oppression based on intersecting identities and raised the voice of the marginalized group by highlighting their issues.

Objectives of the Study

1. To identify different intersecting identities causing marginalization

2. To raise a voice of the marginalized through Hanif's *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti*

Research Questions

1. What are the intersecting identities causing marginalization?
2. How Hanif's *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* does voice the marginalized?

Delimitation

The present study explores Hanif's *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* from Dill and Zambrana's (2009) theory of intersectionality to reflect multiple oppressions faced by women and intersecting axes of inequality. Although it is a multidimensional novel that can be explored from various other perspectives this study selects intersectionality as a lens. The theory of intersectionality focused on different intersecting identities of women that led to their oppression and used the text to give voice to the voiceless, suppressed, and oppressed women. Moreover, it explored only the protagonist of the novel, Alice, to reflect women's subjugation.

Significance

The present study is a useful document for literary students. It gives a detailed insight into the oppressive and miserable life of women. It highlighted different axes of women's subjugation other than gender and sex. The different intersecting identities like race, religion, and class are identified to reflect multiple oppressions faced simultaneously. This study used literature as an essential medium to raise the voices of the voiceless and victimized women. Moreover, it added to the existing stock of knowledge by analyzing Hanif's *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* from the perspective of intersectionality. The multiple oppressions faced by women are addressed from a novel perspective, highlighting other factors of women's subjugation.

Literature Review

According to Crenshaw (1991), different identities of an individual cannot be divided into separate categories. This paper reflected different strands of life like race, gender, sex, class, etc intersect to subjugate a particular group, especially women. She argued that no single identity dominated the other. She posed a perspective that would help to speak against marginalization. It highlighted the differences among groups and attempted to formulate a theoretical basis for addressing these issues and bringing social change.

Staunaes (2003) asserted that different categories like race, gender, religion, and sex are not properly ordered. The different sets of racial, sexual, national, religious, and gender occur simultaneously. His studies showed that all members are the same, and no social group has superiority over others.

Weber (2005) claimed that the perspective of intersectionality developed an understanding of social inequality and discrimination in health care based on race or ethnicity. The study reflected that different factor like race, gender, sexuality, and religion intersect to alienate a particular group. It also explored the importance of those identities that jointly oppressed the inferior, especially black women.

Hankivsky et al. (2010) explored intersectionality's role in the improvement of women's health field. This paper highlighted different identities of a woman, which influenced their lives and formulated novel methods to address issues and bring positive change in society. It explored differences in groups and attempted to identify various factors that affected human life.

Nash (2008) argued that intersectionality is the major tool used to reflect marginalization and oppression. He believed that feminists and anti-racists should understand the obscure and biased nature of intersectionality to develop a more complex way of theorizing identity and oppression. This paper highlighted the fact that variant factors intersect to develop the identity of a particular group and oppress them in relation to the dominant group.

Iyer, et al. (2008) investigated the role of intersecting gender and class, which influenced health care. Based on the identity constructed by these identities accessibility of health facilities is decided discriminating people into different groups. It explored the impact of economics in creating gender inequalities in health. This paper found out that Intersecting economic class and gender inequality might determine the availability of healthcare facilities for an individual. The researcher claimed the importance of intersectional studies for policymakers to facilitate the public in terms of health care.

Davis (2013) highlighted the success of intersectionality within feminist theory. This paper claimed that the obscure nature of intersectionality led to its success despite the confusion of its implication in feminist theory. The open-ended and ambiguous nature of this perspective demanded further studies, which formulated a new critical perspective to address major issues of

women. It highlighted that a good theory is the one that goes through the process of development.

Valentine (2007) explored the fact that intersectionality is employed by feminists to reflect the intersection of various identities. It equipped the feminists to identify different identities that led to the subjugation of women. It equipped the feminists to identify different identities that led to the subjugation and oppression of women. This paper studied the way feminist geography contributed to the theory of intersectionality to highlight inequalities in society.

Verloo (2006) highlighted a set of inequalities like race, gender, ethnicity, etc. This paper illustrated the role of intersectionality to reflect the differences in inequalities faced by a particular group. It reflected intersectionality as a lens that is used to question the generalization of issues faced by women. It showed that the generalization of inequalities covered the real victims of the discrimination. The theory of intersectionality is posed as a method to highlight the differences in issues faced by different groups.

The literature review showed that intersectionality has been explored from different dimensions and different research methods producing different results. The studies illustrated that intersectionality gave a novel lens to identify different categories of race, gender, sex, etc that influenced the life of a peculiar group and highlighted the prevailing prejudices in society. It helped the researchers to theorize the identity and oppression of inferior groups, especially women. Some researchers employed intersectionality to reflect that discrimination and oppression are not based on gender and sex only rather several other factors like race, religion national identity, physical identity, economy, etc intersect and cause subjugation of a particular group. They explored through the lens of intersectionality that some groups are privileged while others are marginalized. Other researchers explored the way intersectionality collaborates with feminism to reflect the subjugation and marginalization of women and highlighted the differences in the sufferings of women from different parts of the body. These studies explored the role of different intersecting identities that marginalized and oppressed women. The present study dealt with the identification of different identities that intersect to subjugate the female in Pakistani society. It employed Dill and Zambarana's theory of intersectionality to raise the voice

of the marginalized women, who led a miserable life due to different factors like race, sex, religion, physical abilities, class, etc.

Theoretical Framework

The present paper undertakes Dill and Zambrana's (2009) theory of intersectionality as a framework to develop the whole stance on and argue the objectives of the study through the text. This particular perspective deals with the connection between sexuality, physical ability, ethnicity, gender and sex, social status, etc. They explored different factors of subjugation and discrimination and claimed that they intersected at a single spot to subjugate them. The main claims of their perspective are as under;

Intersecting social categories is the major claim of this theory, which converges different identities like gender, sexuality, and religion at a single point to subjugate an individual.

This theory claims that a particular group or community is privileged over the rest.

This perspective argued that the intersection of variant social categories empowered certain groups of people and inferiorized others.

The aforementioned claims of the theory of intersectionality are employed to explore Hanif's (2012) novel, *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti*. It aimed to illustrate different factors that intersect at a single point to subjugate women at different levels and reflect their othered and alienated status in Society.

Primary and Secondary Data

The present study selected Hanif's *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* as primary data through purposive sampling. It used relevant and authentic data from scholarly articles and different sites as secondary data.

Research Type

The qualitative research type is employed. It helped to base its arguments on reasons, opinions, exploration, and ideas; it is not statistical and is not based on figures. Rather *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* is explored from the perspective of intersectionality to highlight different factors that deeply studied variant factors that intersect to subjugate and marginalize women. The researcher

did not quantify the data, rather the ideas or opinions are explored in depth interpreted the collected information, and made sense of it in the broader social context. According to (Bell, 2007), qualitative research is a type of research that helps us to interpret the meaning of social life through non-numerical data. He states that qualitative research is the relationship between research and theory and it focuses on how the theory was generated. (Sinkovics, 2018) describes qualitative analysis as a study to consider and examine individual issues, constructing such representations by language. For instance, the present study dealt with the issues of women's subjugation and oppression based on the set of different identities. Accordingly, the qualitative study guided the study to explore language and construct meaning out of it.

Research Method

The present study employed Belsey's (2013) textual analysis to explore the text from the perspective of intersectionality and sense of it. Belsey (2013) claimed that the textual analysis dealt with the closer reading of the text to highlight its patterns and ideas to construct meaning out of it. It addressed the particular structure and language of the text in a broader cultural context to interpret it and make meaning of the world. For instance, the present study explored the text in a broader patriarchal society to highlight different intersecting identities of females based on which they faced oppression and discrimination. Since an in-depth analysis of the text is conducted therefore textual analysis is used to guide the study.

ANALYSIS

Social Structure and Patriarchy

The patriarchal setup created by a society immensely influenced women. The society developed norms that are employed against women to subjugate and cover them. For instance, Alice suffered in Pakistan as she defied the social norms and followed her own heart. She was accused of conversion to religion and lived up to the criticism due to her violation of the norms. Hanif (2012) posed it as "What kind of wedding is this where the only evidence is a box of cheap sweets? They are probably living in sin. People touch their ears and sigh as they imagine the sinful things that Alice and Teddy are doing in private and hiding behind a few boxes of sweets" (p. 122).

Moreover, Hanif (2012) portrayed Muslim culture and society as a patriarchal construct that subjected less privileged, minorities and especially women to subjugation. Ashraf (2017) argued the same notion by claiming that both Alice and Joseph faced discrimination in the social, religious, and professional setups. The sufferings of Alice in the workplace and society in general posed the problems of a mediocre, less privileged, and minority woman. This paper illustrated the intersection of different factors like religion, gender, social status, and the social structure at a point that led to women's subjugation.

Pakistani society proposed a patriarchal setup that attributed certain roles to females, which certainly lacked the professional involvement of a female. If females attempted to fulfill their needs and hard-earned their bread, even then the ignorant male-dominating society tried to drag them down and toyed up with them as sex objects. The workplace did not provide them with an easy and secure environment. Rather, they are harassed and forced to have sex with the elites. Hanif (2012) put it in the text, "I still need to give them lithium sulphate" (p.23). Despite her passion and intent to perform her duty, she was not allowed to do it so. The relatives of the patients like Teddy took her into his arms without consent and were not able to free herself, which in turn illustrated the weak position of a female in society.

Gender and Sexual Discrimination

Gender turned out to be a social construct, which decided the roles of both the males and females in a society. Gender is a social construct influenced by the customs and norms of a society. The same idea has been explored by Beauvoir (1953) who found out that becoming a woman is a social construct varying from society to society. Gender is somehow used against females to control their lives and differentiate them from males. Similar notions can be explored in the novel, as Alice has become a victim of gender discrimination. Alice was marginalized and controlled because of her gender and inferior status. Alice claimed that being a woman, she faced humiliation and troubles, which is visible in her discourse like, the "ritual of humiliation" and "little happiness asks for a down payment (Hanif, 2010, p.47). She turned out to be a source of pleasure and comfort for the elites. Her low status and gender identity made her a figure of sex satisfaction, who should serve the privileged class for pleasure and entertainment.

She suffered immensely at the hands of the powerful while performing her duty. The relatives of the patients in the ward misbehaved with her and harassed her. She came to know that men used to think about sex all the time despite their age. As she was a woman from a low social class therefore the men from a higher class forced her into sexual acts. It is uttered in the novel, "It never ceases to amaze her that men, even those on death watch, all think the same thing." The wealthy people to get pleasure and satisfaction used her body against her will.

Her gender and ethnic identity caused her to suffer everywhere in society while earning life for herself. Due to gender identity, women have the role of managing household jobs and are considered easy prey if they step out to work. Alice realized that those women who worked to earn their lives were supposed to please particular people. Alice uttered a similar idea, "You think that woman, any woman who wears uniform, is just waiting for you to show up, she'll take it off" (p.58). Being a woman, unprivileged and fragile, she was supposed to serve the privileged people. Those instances clarified the fact that the gender and sexual identity of Alice marked her as inferior and marginal, who is at the mercy of those in power.

While performing duty in the ward, she repeatedly faced sexual abuse, and men tried to toy up with her by showing her penis and forcing her into sexual affairs. Although, she was an independent woman who tried to cope with the odds of society even then, she was marginalized and subjugated by men.

Ethnic Identity

The ethnic identity of Alice made her suffer immensely even for the crimes that she had never committed. For instance, Alice was called to a police station to record her complaint as a witness, but she was abused and beaten by the cops. The low status, gender identity, and male-dominated society made her suffer for other's sins. Hanif reflected on her miseries as "fate is permanently in red" and subjected her to the fate and alienated image in Pakistan based on her ethnic identity. In other places, it is said that "Alice Bhatti looks at a lizard on the walls desperately willing to move as if its movement will affect the movement of her stories" (Hanif, p.6). The text addresses the helpless and lost status of Alice in a patriarchal society. The protagonist did not enjoy similar rights and privileges because of the marginal status in society.

Social Stratification and Class System

Class difference is one of the major factors behind the marginalization of a particular individual or group. It is the case where one privileged and dominant group is marginalized and oppressed by the less privileged group. According to Dirlik (1991) studies, class oppression is meant to deprive one class of its humanity. The novel *Alice* portrays the miserable and poor condition of women, who belong to the working class. She belonged to a family who worked hard to earn their lives, which subjected her to unequal and biased treatment. Alice's low social status caused her to be abused and tortured even at the workplace. While doing her job she was asked, "Have you cleaned the floor, Alice? Why have you not cleaned the floor? Who do you think will clean that blood on the floor, Alice "Your father?" (Hanif, 2011,p.2). The aforementioned lines reflected the abuse and harsh treatment received by Alice due to her middle class.

Alice failed in a job interview despite her passion and potential she was judged for her impoverished and low social status. Her character reflected the problems of women from minority and an impoverished group of society. Because of her inferiority, low life, and religion, she was considered untouchable and was supposed to please people from elite groups.

Alice was accused of a murder committed by an influential surgeon because of his ignorant practices. It showed that people from low social status are easy victims of the powerful bodies who work to favor and serve the privileged group. Instances from the text clarify the fact that an individual's class might be the reason for his/her inferior and low social status. As Alice is a woman who belongs to a low social class, therefore she faced ill-treatment, abuse, and torture despite hard work and dedication.

Women being a part of the lower class were objectified and harassed. Their low social status and feminine gender made them easy prey for sexual harassment, abuse, and degradation. As Hanif (2012) addressed it as "garbage bins in uniform" (p. 175). The lower status, Christian, and feminine identity subjected them to easy subjugation and inferiorization in society. Although, she wore a uniform and was on duty but she was exploited and used by the surgeons and the patient's relatives for self-pleasure. It showed that different factors like social stratification, religious and gender identity, and patriarchal social construct Alice was subjugated, degraded, and belittled for her existence.

Religious Inequality

The religion of an individual deals with a set of beliefs that structure his/her life. Often, the religion of a man is used to subjugate and marginalize another group of people having different religions. The major character of the novel, Alice, portrays that Christian woman are subjected to religious inequality in Pakistan. She belonged to the religion of a minority in Pakistan, based on which she faced marginalization. She was considered untouchable, and even utensils used by her were not used by Muslims. She saw hypocrisy at its best as people entitled her untouchable but was when it came to sexual pleasure. She once uttered that she could live a life of an untouchable, but it must privilege her with a right to reject their touch for pleasure without her permission.

Alice's identity being a Christian minority subjected her to oppression and marginalization. She was considered untouchable and performed the job of a sweeper at the hospitals to clean the mess created by the Muslims. Hanif (2012) posed it in the text, as "These mullahs will make you clean their shit and then complain that you stink" (p.1). Joseph Bhatti uttered those words to his daughter to address the miserable and low-ranked job of Alice. Their conversation illustrated the distrust and hatred in the religious minorities against Muslims who dominated them.

Discussion

The above-detailed analysis of the textual analysis reflected the subjugation of women like Alice. The subjugation of a protagonist did not emerge from the intersection of gender and sex only. Rather it is illustrated that a diverse set of other factors come into play to subjugate and oppress the woman in Pakistan. Through the lens of intersectionality, it is highlighted that different identities overlap into a novel order theorizing identity and oppression of women.

The overlapping identities created a fragile and alienated image of Alice, which made her suffer in the society of the privileged. The relevant instances from the text exemplified the fact that these different identities attributed a low rank to Alice, while others from the higher class were respected and enjoyed the privileges. She suffered in most of the fields due to the multiple marginalization she faced being a woman, poor, and Christian.

Alice being a woman lived in a world full of lustful men, who considered her as a sex object that could be used for getting sexual pleasure. She was sexually abused in the hospital ward while performing her duty and was always objectified due to her gender, low social status, and

Christian identity. According to Nash (2008), intersectionality played a role in reflecting the identity construction and oppression of women in society.

The textual lines clarified that Alice was stereotyped as untouchable because of her religious identity, which evoked feelings of hatred and envy in their hearts. She faced the hypocrisy of the masses as she was labelled as untouchable for her religion but in terms of objectification and sexual desires, she was sexually abused without her consent. Valentine (2007) claimed that intersectionality could be used to highlight the prevailing inequalities in society. Similarly, the present study explored the inequalities faced by the protagonist at different levels and communicated them to voice the issues of the marginalized group.

Moreover, the low social status and ethnicity of Alice as a Christian subjected her to extreme oppression and disparities in every aspect of life. During her job interview, she was stared at oddly, experienced sexual abuse at the workplace, and was accused of the murder of a patient. The previously mentioned prejudices on the part of Alice exemplified the different overlapping identities of a woman that led her to suffer.

The analysis of the text highlighted different categories of subjugation due to which they suffer oppression. The present study highlighted the oppressive and subjugated status of Alice to raise the voice of a marginalized woman, which is an attempt to highlight the evils in society.

Conclusion

The aforementioned discussion unveiled different factors that intersect to subjugate women. The present study analyzed through Alice's character that gender and sex are not the only causes behind women's discrimination and victimization. Rather, a set of diverse identities like ethnicity, religion, and class caused Alice to suffer a miserable and alienated life. The in-depth analysis of Alice's character illustrated that she was subjugated because of her low class, Christianity, femininity, and fragile body. Despite being a working person, she was abused, belittled, and forced into sexual acts. Through the analysis of her character voice of the marginalized group I:e women are raised to reflect the miseries of the subaltern. Moreover, it reflects that women suffer in the Pakistani context because of different intersecting identities, which give them low social status and miserable life experiences. In the future, a comparative

study can be conducted between an Asian and Western woman to reflect the different experiences of each based on the set of diverse intersecting axes of inequality.

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