



## Muhammad Hanif's *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti*: A Marxist Analysis

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### ABSTRACT

#### Keywords:

Capitalism  
Marginality  
Mohammad Hanif  
Marxism  
Socioeconomic struggle.

*The present study focuses on the socioeconomic struggle of the minor class against marginality in Mohammad Hanif's 'Our Lady of Alice Bhatti' (2011). It is qualitative in nature and has taken the theoretical framework of Marxism, and its consequences; socioeconomic marginality by the hegemonic aspects. The novel has raised a voice for suppressed class of society; through the central character of Alice Bhatti, a Christian in the Muslim state who lives a hard life in the French colony of Karachi, Pakistan. The current study intends to find out the socioeconomic struggle against marginality in the backdrop of the powerful structure of society through the lens of Marxist theory to explore marginalization of social classes in the background of socioeconomic reality. Results of the present study shows the struggle of Alice Bhatti against religious fundamentalism and the bourgeoisie class in the milieu of established order of societal system. It also highlights that mentality of colonialism still exist in the form of hegemonic forces.*

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## INTRODUCTION

According to Asghar, Ahmed and Fatima (2020), Marxism focuses on the struggles between the proletariat and capitalists. He tells that societies are being separated into various classes in which one class differentiates their members from the member of other classes. Marx also assumes that society is comprised of the bourgeoisies (capitalists) and the labour class (proletariats). The capitalist class is the business owners and the proletariats are the wage earners. The bourgeoisies additionally take benefit and attempts to uphold the authority and to control by imposing law and order in the society on the common folks. The government efforts to put into effect the will of the bourgeoisies by implementing those decrees and law by subduing the lower classes to follows those rules as prescribed from the upper classes.

Mohammed Hanif, Pakistani born British writer. He is graduated from the East Anglia University. In 2008, he came back to Pakistan. At this time, he composed a piece of editorials. Hanif is the writer of the notable book *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* (2008), which has won a Booker Prize, his subsequent book: *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* (2011), won the Welcome Book Prize.

Muhammad Hanif is a writer of Post-Colonial Literature. His works are significant in the way of gaining an identity and self-esteem in such a society where marginalized community faces several problems. These problems are discussed through the lens of postcolonial terms of Marginality and socioeconomic struggle of minor class. In his novels Muhammad Hanif portrays the interconnectedness of gender and religion in the modern Pakistan through his protagonist, Alice Bhatti. He discovers that in recent times with the rise of intolerance against the minor societies and their troubles have been intensified in the backdrop of hegemonic forces. His novel *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* (2011) is presenting the picture of a gloomy state of a nation through the perspective of Marxism.

The novel's story is enfolded with wit and emotions such as love, pain and revenge. The plot rotates around the stories related to Alice; a Christian nurse, Joesph Bhatti, Teddy; the policeman and Alice's husband, Malangi; a police man, Noor; a hospital boy. It signifies diverse features of these characters' lives that are grounded on their experiences of hatred, society, political affairs, and violence. The novel begins with a scene where Alice is giving an interview for the position of a junior nurse in a hospital named Sacred Heart of All Ailments. Later in novel, the details of characters are exposed, i.e. her mother deceased when Alice was at a youthful age. Her father is a sweeper who sustains his livelihood by washing the shitholes of a specific Christian settlement in colony of Karachi. Alice chooses to become a nurse but she bears limitless problems in her education and career in the novel. She is a rebellious and blunt nature woman due to this reason that she has been to Borstal Jail for Women and Children. Though, after finishing her sentence, she accomplishes a job at Sacred Heart Hospital near French Colony. As a social human being, she is a ready to lend a hand to help Noor's ill mother nurse, she becomes a courageous girl and stood before powerful man and society. Epilogue discloses that in spite of all her efforts to endure in the society, she passes away an unfortunate death. Other character comprises Noor, Zainab, Dr Preira, Teddy, and Malangi. These characters belong to lower class, and they belong to different fields i.e. policemen, nurses, beggars, patients and doctors. Sister Hina is another important character, who is a Christian and serves in the same hospital where Alice is a nurse. She signifies a woman who is marginalized due to a Christian woman. On the other hand, Teddy who is a police man and also Alice's spouse. His identity possesses many characteristics as found during the course of the story. At one hand, he is a caring man but on other he is impolite and even tries Alice's murder in the end of the novel.

## **Aims and Objectives**

The present study tries to find:

- the factors which lead to the marginalization of the minor class in respect to social and economic position in Pakistani society
- the socio-economic struggle by the minor class against hegemonic structure and its subsequent failure

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Marginalization is the outcome of Capitalist hegemonic and nationalistic structure. The search for socioeconomic identity has been one of the key issues for all the main authors of contemporary studies in postcolonial literature. The use of a socioeconomic term of marginalization for minor class has portrayed the socio-economic worries where the underprivileged groups of ethnically isolated people drive to stand for their role in the life.

Asghar, Ahmed and Fatima (2020) examine the hegemonic power through the central character of Alice Bhatti who belongs to the minor class. Her existence seems invisible and absent because she was a girl from the marginal group (as cited in Ashraf 2014). Hanif wishes for a world where religion is practiced without any impediment. Ashraf (2014) depicts that minor class is intended to face oppression even from subordinate class. The behavior of a servant and intimidation of Alice explicitly shows that Alice is deserted in the hands of fate. The use of pistol by a servant in the hospital to satisfy his needs is a blatant example of her subjugation to subordinate class as well as to destiny. In *Silencing of Subaltern*, Nazar (2016), discovers that men/women are enticed by the society and eventually they become the silent subaltern. Gayatri Spivak (1988) clearly states that subaltern class can never be represented. Nazar (2016) realizes that Hanif himself has confirmed the marginalization of Alice Bhatti. She is side-lined on the basis of her class, and culturally downtrodden group of society. She is dealt badly now and then. Atif (2016) in *Feminist Worries in Muhammad Hanif's Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* finds that Hanif affirms the status of women in the society. They are not only unheard but they have not been given the right place in the society.

The female characters are portrayed with the neuro-psychological discomforts. Hanif depicted the story of Alice and the precautionary measures she has adopted while going outside the boundaries of her home and the way she wears proper dress and adopted good manners etc. It shows that there are innumerable problems for females with regard to their profession. Hanif has depicted marginalization of the minor class in form of socioeconomically powerless and oppressed classes, and subjected by the dominant power classes (Atif, 2016).

Terry Eagleton (2002) says that Marxism is an economic based philosophy. It explains things without assuming the reality of a world further than the world around us and the society where the people live in. It looks for systematic, rational clarifications of the world of fact. But while other philosophies only sought to realize the world, Marxism desires for a change in a capitalist structure. Marxism sees evolution is through the power struggle between different classes.

According to Engels (1848), middle classes have been confined by the proletariat class through socioeconomic policies. The proletariat must go against bourgeois of their socioeconomic power and put the ownership of all the property in the hands of the government which will then dispense public's resources. Engels (1848) predicted that the working class would overturn the capitalist source of production and it would lead towards a revolution which in the end would make the differences.

Paul, S., and Rai, S. K. (2018) examines that Hanif has tried to show the burden of sexual violence that women face in day to day life. The protagonist Alice Bhatti performs some supernatural powers throughout the novel which makes her a divine entity which is almost worshipped but regardless of her all supernatural elements and miracles she cannot save herself from becoming a victim of sexual

violence. This also shows that Alice powers are not looked at as something positive rather her powers are being looked at as powers of witches, which is why she faces so much sexual violence because she is thought to be a person who can be accessed easily at any time.

Akhtar, Sumaira, et al. (2010) explored the method of code-switching in the novel. This code-switching highlights the representation of cultural and social practices, power relations, values, norms, as well as customs in a very comprehensive manner. It also tries to reflect different social identities through the use of Urdu words in this English fictional writing. Christian community members lose their own true identity when Muslims call them Choorha (untouchable). Women also face the same identity loss because of their Muslim fellow society members (p. 364-71).

The above reviewed literature shows the silent mood of the marginalized class in the hands of patriarchy, caste, class, socioeconomic means and hegemonic structure of the society. The present study attempts to explore the subaltern not only as a silenced voice but also as a provocative and a resilient voice to attain their basic rights. There is a subaltern resistance which speaks in the backdrop of sectarianism and marginality.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The current study is qualitative in nature in order to comprehend marginality and socioeconomic struggle of the lower-class. According to Belsey (2013), “textual analysis” is employed as a research technique that concentrates words to pick out correct meaning (p.167). The present study has used textual analysis to highlight the elements of marginalization and socioeconomic struggle based on the critiques of Karl Marx in the selected text. It has also used Postcolonial terms of Marginality and socioeconomic struggle of the minor class to understand the concept of bourgeoisies and proletariat class differences in the selected novel “Our Lady of Alice Bhatti (2011) by Muhammad Hanif.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Data has been collected to search for the marginality in the backdrop of the dominant capitalist system in the novel *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* (2011) by Muhammad Hanif. Karl Marx (1848) claims that the working class has minimum access to the resources by which they may control their own representation, and very less access to cultural and social institutions.

### **Socioeconomic Marginality**

Marginality is to analyse the state of the marginalized class of the society. The novel is being investigated from the concept of socioeconomic marginalization through the critiques of Marxism. It is pertinent here to have a glimpse of various viewpoints about this theory and the way it is interpreted by other critics and theorists to comprehend the notion of marginalization.

In 3rd version of his *Literary Theory: An introduction* (Eagleton, T.2002) is of the view:

Marxism is a socioeconomic philosophy. It explains things without supposing the actuality of a world outside the natural world around us and the world we live in. It looks for scientific explanations of the world of noticeable fact. Although other viewpoints only seek to realize

the world, Marxism pursues to alter it. Furthermore, Marxism observes a struggle for power between social classes (pp.156- 57).

The experience of marginal is an outcome of a clash between bourgeoisies and proletariat classes, which suggest that bourgeoisies has an upper hand over the working class so far socioeconomic means are concerned. Marginalization means to downgrade a class to helpless position within a society. It also depicts that to be marginalized is to put minor class in the margins and thus barred from the opportunity and power found at the centre. In resultant, the marginal strata subsequently point toward a positionality that is explained as restrictions of a subject's access to control and power. Although, marginality offers a mock for those who are taking part in a struggle and clear them about their positionality that power is a role of only centrality. The structure of power, at centre, leaves specific races on the margin. Consequently, various forms of exclusiveness and use of oppression, put minor classes in marginality. In their edition, Marx and Engels (1848) advance their philosophies where they state that the hegemonic structure has enslaved the proletariat class people over socioeconomic policies. The lower working class must rebel against the middle-class for their socioeconomic rights and may voice in support of all the possessions should be in the control of the government and then it is to be distributed among the people fairly.

As in the novel, Alice Bhatti is deprived of their basic rights and has been subdued to the desires of existing hegemonic structure. The novel *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* (2011) by Mohammad Hanif is set in present-day Karachi and a story is about a Catholic Nurse, who lives in the French colony, which has an impoverished settlement. Hanif discovers how a human being self-negotiates with institutions of the state religion in contemporary Pakistani society. Alice Bhatti, the protagonist of the novel -“*Our lady Of Alice Bhatti* (2011) is a Catholic woman from this underclass who works at the Sacred Hospital for All Ailments, The novel start off with a story of Alice's interview for a Grade 4 Additional Junior Nurse, in the Sacred Heart Hospital of all Ailments where her interview is scheduled and in fact she is trying to satisfy the panel that she is worthy of success as a respectable person of the society. She is in front of a panel of doctors and Senior Sister Hina Alvi and is unsure about the outcome of this interview. But the patients of the Sacred Heart Hospital for All Ailments need a miracle. Alice Bhatti may be the same they're looking for. She's the daughter of a casual healer in the French Colony, Karachi's Christian slum, and it looks like that she has inherited his part-time gift. Alice kicks off to bring support to the hospital's innumerable patients. But all is not incredible. Alice is a Christian in an Islamic world, grappled in the strict discipline of hospital bureaucracy, stuck by the class/caste system, and hinge over between her patients, her father and her husband—who is almost to bring Alice into a condition so perilous that perhaps not even a miracle will be capable to protect them and the same happened to her in the last stage of the novel and thence fell prey to the social structure of system.

## **TEXTUAL ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

Pakistan being a secular state, considered as a home for people from different caste and religions, is divided in sectarianism and marginalization. Alice Bhatti (central character) and her family were pushed against the wall on the basis of the sect as they are Christians and belong to minority even after partition. “Alice looks towards the ceiling and sees a wet spot that resemble like a map of a country in transition” (p. 76). These events and notes draw attention towards the country situation, and it turns sarcastic at the

fact that the country still impending in such a situation.

Similarly, some characters replicate the gloominess over the present situation of Pakistan. For example, Alice shows her concern for Teddy's police job as it is dangerous and perilous. Teddy replied that "We live in dangerous time. We live in a dangerous area. It is to better to know the danger, to work with it, to tame it" (Hanif, 2011, p.131).

Here, it shows how they are socioeconomically marginalized and discarded but still they are looking for betterment which clearly exemplifies their optimism and commitment not to give up in facing a precarious situation. The novel, in a delicate way, narrates past time with the present, and it discloses the sectarian prejudices dominant in the country which was made in the name of harmony.

Alice as a junior nurse is marginalized in the medical career and has faced the unfair behavior by male surgeons, who consider nurses as mere "garbage bins in uniforms" (Hanif, 2011, p.175). This sarcastic reference shows her low professional status that becomes the biggest daily challenge for her. Alice Bhatti is from underclass caste whose existence in the novel seems to be absent. It shows that a girl from socioeconomically marginalized community has a destiny to face harassment and persecution even in the hands of the lower-class. The assistant's behavior and intimidation of Alice shows that she is helpless but actually she is not and stood against them as she has decided to work- outside Choora community – as a junior nurse to attain her identity.

Alice Joseph Bhatti has numerous disadvantages; she is Christian in Pakistan, where she is not judged on her devotion to work but with her caste system. The long way for her socioeconomic struggle and honour through the analysis of this novel is depicted. Her struggle to social inequalities is countable. She stands against the dishonest doctors; she has a bold outlook towards males. She is bread earner for her family for which she borne all sort of people. As you know Marx highlights that all cultures work for the capitalist class that sets the rules which are the superstructure of the society. Rukan Uddin and Mohib Ullah (2011) states the notions of the elite class. The upper class which has the ruling resources power of the society is at the same time are the ruling think tanks. They control the mean of production through intellectual production. It shows the pitiable state of the lower-class, exemplified by Alice and her father Joseph, who's self in this nation that was created on the slogan of liberty. Altaf and Shehzad (2019) states that:

She is resilient who endures Muslim girl at nursing school and she faces justice system of the society as a revolutionary character. Hanif highlighted the prejudiced and biased attitude of the social order against the Christian minority. She is reflected a valueless species in this system (p. 69).

The attendant forces her from the trigger of a pistol to get his carnal desired satisfied. "Alice is slapped again with the cask of a pistol and thinks she hasn't done anything yet but till she is ready to face anything" (p. 89). This clearly exemplifies that she is persecuted in the novel - being an outcast and underclass girl- on account of her religion.

Alice Bhatti the important character of the novel has all these attributes i.e., a person of under class and a female and it is because of this fact that she faces marginalization. At the Sacred hospital where Alice Bhatti was training of a nurse, Alice Bhatti and other Christians girls instead of feeling safe felt

endangered by the presence of what she calls as “Musla girls, who belongs to Pakistan, Musalman, Musalman” (p. 172).

According to Terry Eagleton (1975) that the business class tries to defend illegal wealth and to subdue the labour class voice by using weapons which makes a clear instance to scene where a patient died from a surgeon negligence when dare to speak against, she was silenced and put behind the lock up. It clearly illustrates that how bourgeoisie has kept the labour/minor class silenced and subdued them.

Hanif has portrayed a very exploitative relation of the bourgeoisie and proletariats in his novel. The very first page of the novel clearly depicts it. “These Muslas will make you clean their shit and then complain that you stink, and our own brothers at the sacred? They will educate you and then ask you why you stink” (p. 1). These lines clearly show the relations between the proletariats and the bourgeoisie class. The bourgeoisies always try to exploit the proletariats and keeps trying to keep them in low position and to not let them grow financially as a stable class. The above lines show how the minority class is being treated by the upper class. They consider the lower class to be something that is untouchable and if they touch them by chance it is juxtapose to lose their class. The Communist Manifesto (1848), which became a powerful political text. Much of it discussion is about the bourgeoisie (the ruling class, who possess the resources of production) and the proletariat (the working class) and has deprived the minor group from all sort of basic need as Hanif’s recall Karachi where a minority class has no choice but to live and to earn their bread — they fix telephone and electricity wires, police to avoid a schizophrenic city in an effort to survive its oppression and violence. It’s a city where there are shootings, ethnic violence, riots, body-parts in gunny bags and hospitals that receive the injured and the dead.

The Marxists elements are seen quite clearly in the lines:

“This is not kind of gate where anybody leaves anything; this is not the kind of place where people forget where you come from” (Hanif, 2011, p. 3).

These lines show that how much the background and financial stability of the people matters in the society but no one may forget your background. Everyone looks for the background and financial stability that you offer. The class difference matters a lot in today’s world too. If you are born in lower class you will always struggle to even get your rights because only those people get their rights who has money and who belongs to the high and elite class. You cannot even get a proper medical care if you don’t have the money. You are considered untouchable if you do not get to the standards that society has created.

“When inspector Malangi puts an arm around your shoulder this early in the morning and declares you a family member, you have to feel and behave like a loyal family member” (Hanif, 2011, p. 144).

In the lens of Marxism, the above lines show that when a person of an elite class tries to make an acquaintance with you it does not make a tangible sense that he is good with you or either they have considered you member of their class. But they only try to exploit you through their actions and make you do things according to their wish. This clearly shows the misuse that the lower class bears from the upper class in shape of friendliness as well. They are being exploited in so many ways and one of them is the friendliness of the members of upper class which can be sensed from these lines.

Marx and Engels (1848) are of view that the creation of the class-based system made them into battle with the elites of society and so overall opposition from proletariat is certain. The capitalist system has shaped a new labouring class with another kind of power - the power to suppress its labour class off from the mean of wealth -and the nature to use that power collectively. Karl Marx (1848) collectively says that the industrialization has brought mass number of working class together and their power has increased manifold. Thereupon, they stand against bourgeois' exploitation and revolted against them. In nutshell, the labourer got success but for a short time. Their actual victory is not as abrupt as look like, it has achieved after a long struggle and if it is to keep in a long run they need to be in union. As in the novel, when Alice Bhatti came into the room of Hina Alvi she saw some Christian religion-based picture on the wall after that Alice realized that Hina Alvi has disguised her original identity of their religion and scolded her for masking it. It foretells that Alice Bhatti wants her to be original in order to create a union/strong their foothold in hospital to resist the elitist as seen in other scenes where Alice Bhatti alone made resistance all alone against Surgeons and especially when Hina Alive, an elder nurse, gives her night shift duty at VIP ward. The VIP room is marvellously assisted for Bourgeoisie woman Qazalbash and there men sit at the room, they look Alice an easy trap and the way sexual advancement is made by them by viewing their pistol in order to fulfil their desires but somehow she has displayed courage and rips off their tissue and let the man crying in pain (pp. 86- 87). In nutshell, she got success while struggling alone but for a short time. She is utterly failed to hold up a union—what Marx suggested—to revolt against capitalist system.

At the end of the novel where Alice is killed through acid is allegorically presenting the ending of her struggle which symbolizes minor class socioeconomic struggle by the agent of hegemonic social structure Teddy Butt. Her demise leaves many questions on the structure of the system. The novel advances questions for improvement and reformation of society.

## **CONCLUSION**

The class discrepancy is depicted through socioeconomic stratification which is the key problem; to degrade the people belonging to the lower strata of society. In this novel, Muhammad Hanif clearly shows how the lower-class has been socioeconomically marginalized; this marginalization issue is supported with the critiques of Karl Marx. This present study tries to evaluate the problems of minorities in Pakistani context and their subsequent effort to resist and have an access to their basic rights. They tolerate socioeconomic injustice due to the capitalist structure of society: where there is a clear distinction between bourgeoisie and proletariat class of society as shown in the novel *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* (2011). The central character, Alice Bhatti showed somehow struggles to uplift her socioeconomic position in particular and for her community in general. She failed—in order to revolt as a union against capitalist system, though she resisted against elitist individually as discussed in analysis — to have a union to show full fledged revolt in order to have basic rights. In the light of above assumption, Alice Bhatti succumbed to the hegemonic capitalist system; the powerful intellectual that had engulfed the mean of production which shows the forces of colonialism still exists in the form of hegemonic forces.

## **FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS**

The present study focuses on the factors of marginalization in respect to Alice Bhatti, the central character in the novel. However, there is a room for the psychoanalytic approach on the selected

character in order to find out the personality disorder this marginalization creates in individuals. This potential area for future research may consider the present and future literary development, style, and thematic content of recent psychological disorder that has affected the Alice Bhatti, especially in the postmodern era (Self- Reflexivity).

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