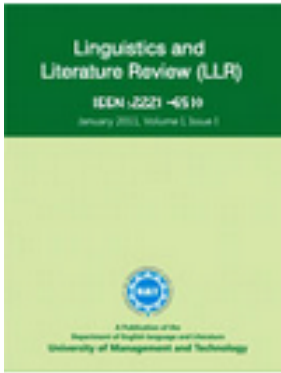


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Realism Vs Magical Realism in Mohammad Hanif's Our Lady of Alice Bhatti

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ABSTRACT

Mohammad Hanif presents feminist approach in his *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* (2011) with the empowerment of the protagonist by using the techniques of realism and magical realism. This article aims at exploring the techniques of realism and magical realism which go side by side in the narrative to turn a downtrodden Christian lady Alice Bhatti to attain the status of 'Our lady'. Using the technique of realism Hanif depicts a society which never misses a chance to dominate a lady from a poor class and minority religion. He shows multifaceted personality of Alice Bhatti and her resistance against social and religious injustices done to her. He foils the patriarchal authority by fusing magical realism in Alice's character for the restoration of her feminine pride and eminence in a male dominated society. Hanif presents Alice as a saint in the end with the help of magical realism. The maltreatment of Christian choohras is an example of Muslims' prejudiced behavior towards minorities of Pakistan.

Keywords: realism, magical realism, patriarchy, social and religious injustices

Introduction

Fiction springs out of the society in which it lives and flourishes. It ceaselessly influences the living styles of the general public. It does not reject the historical and current progressions in the society rather depicts them in a befitting way and for this, fiction writers aim to depict a perfect world which educates, pleases and improves the existing arrangements of circumstances. Accordingly, they construct an appealing and lovely world of fiction in spite of its abstract nature. Through this process, fiction writers succeed in infiltrating a message into the very soul of general society.

Hanif is a Pakistani fiction writer, journalist and a former graduate of Pakistan Air Force academy. His first novel *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* (2008) received overwhelming appreciation around the globe. His second novel *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* (2011) is an immediate satire and a true depiction of the apparently unchangeable condition of females of the lower class

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community of Pakistani society. “Laced with prejudice and rumour which color attitudes and complicates issues, this is an intriguing read.” (Kaye Brien n.pag)

The narrative is a brilliant example of author’s natural talent of narration and his sharp sense of social satire. The state of women presented in the narrative is true for all the societies particularly in Pakistan. Incidents of crime against women with domestic violence, child labor, acid attacks, infanticide, honor killing, eve teasing and rape are predominant in Pakistan. The narrative presents the caste and religion based prejudices. With a deep interest in the ever busy city of Karachi, he portrays everyday issues of Pakistani society where women are troubled, killed or burnt alive by using the technique of realism.

Realism in Literature emphasizes on objectivity along with unemotional social criticism. It describes life as it is without idealizing its occurrences whereas magical realism is paradoxical in nature; it is an oxymoron because it proposes a binary opposition between reality and imagination. In a magical realist narrative, a fight between two oppositional frameworks happens, each moving in the direction of making a different sort of fictional world from other. Since the general procedures of both are different and contrary to each other, neither of the ones can initiate complete existence and every remaining part suspended, secured a consistent logic with the other, a circumstance which makes disjunction inside of each of the different digressive frameworks, severing them with crevices, absences and silences.

In *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* (2011), Hanif achieves this impact magnificently. His formal beginning of the narrative proclaims the work to be obviously within the conventions of realism but gradually the narrative is peppered with the hints of magical realism to elevate Alice to the status of a saint. Alice Bhatti goes beyond the human limitations and attains the rank of a holy person. Her love for Christianity, her behaviour against untamed young Muslim nurses in nursing school, her valor against the immoral surgeon, her supernatural act of saving an infant in the maternity ward and so on ; all these qualities elevates her status from an ordinary girl to the status of ‘Our Lady’.

Purpose of the Study

The research aims to bring forward social issues, cultural misogyny and religious hypocrisies in Pakistan combined with the magical characteristics of an ordinary nurse which help her to attain the status of a ‘lady’. Through the instances of maltreatment of downtrodden, the research intends to examine the circumstances where realism and magical realism are juxtaposed artistically without blurring the lines and fantastic unraveling of untold neglected realities.

Research Questions

The research paper intends to explore

What roles truth and order have in current Pakistani life reflected through the Our Lady of Alice Bhatti?

Alice's story is not a piteous tale of victimhood. She does not put herself into such situations deliberately rather she tries her best to maintain her dignity and to make a better life for herself. She is 'othered' on the basis of her caste, creed and gender. The research aims to explore how magical traits of Alice's character help her to rise above the status of an ordinary lady to how Hanif has depicted resistance against the forces which compel women to feel as 'other' and crushes them.

Significance of Study

The research paper is significant as it explores how hard core realities and hard to believe magical traits of one's character shape one's life. Alice's life depicts the story of every downtrodden minority woman in Pakistan but she resists against all odds of the society and leaves no stone unturned to get a better life for herself. The study is focused on providing an understanding of Pakistani social and cultural structures and will add to the body of existing knowledge about the South Asian English fiction and will also motivate to study and debate about the existence and status of marginalized women in 21st century.

Literature Review

Hanif paints Alice's character with the shades of magical traits and empowers her through those. He endeavors to enable an ordinary low caste female of French Colony to surpass the human boundaries in order to accomplish her desire of making a cosmopolitan presence. Through the narrative, he attempts to answer that 'how does an ordinary female from low caste choohra background attain the status of a holy person with perfect mystic capabilities?' For this he creates character of Alice Joseph Bhatti and turns her into 'Our Lady of Alice Bhatti'. Unlike her, other females of her origin are meant to be maids and sweeperesses in the big houses. They are destined for sweeping but Alice is different from others, her life is unusual. She rose from the rottenness and turns into the sparkling gem in Hanif's world of fiction. She rise above the stigma of caste discrimination. P. Pratap Kumar observed in *Place of Subcaste (jati) Identity in the Discourse on Caste: Examination of Caste in the Diaspora.South Asian Diaspora* that

Caste consciousness is deeply endemic in South Asian society and that is perhaps the only way they understand how social status is derived within the society. It is this consciousness that seems to tempt social groups and individuals to either display their caste name as part of their caste name as part of their last name or discretely acquire caste names if they came from a lower order caste group. (215-225)

Alice belongs to a downtrodden and stinky colony of ever busy city of Karachi, and people of her colony are sewer cleaners of the city. They have been living there since centuries, their destiny is inevitable and their predicament is same as it was centuries ago. Joseph Bhatti, her father is an untouchable among the other choohras of his colony. The family who welcomes hunger as God's plan for them, where a girl is not accountable to his father, a home without

mother in which a girl is not advised by her father. She belongs to a family where no one is there to guide her. Her upbringing lacks in various aspects. She figures out how to live without these shortcomings and is satisfied with whatever she has. Neither she blames anyone nor complains God for her plight. She always feels a divine presence around her and praises 'Yassoo'.

Caste discrimination is a result of shared past of Muslims and Hindus living together for centuries in subcontinent before partition. Islam teaches equality because everyone is equal in the eyes of God; the only difference is piety and devotion. But the influence of Hindu culture is deep rooted and caste system is a prominent feature of Hinduism; Hindu society is divided into four major castes: Brahmins are traditionally priests; Kshatriyas are the political elites and warriors; Vaisyas are the farmers, craftsmen and merchants and Shudras are servants and tenants and there are also some who are below these castes and they are called Dalits or the untouchables. Muslims in subcontinent did not make their separate society with their own political and economic systems. They lived in the same region with Hindus for centuries; that's why even after getting an independent country of their own, they are unable to get rid of the caste system and are divided into different groups. Imtiaz Ahmad describes Muslim division in his book *Caste and Social Stratification among Muslims in India (1978)* as

While there can be little doubt that the Koran recommends the egalitarian principle, actual practice among Muslim communities in different parts of the world falls short of the Koranic ideal. Particularly in India and Pakistan the Muslim society is clearly stratified. First, there is a line which divides the Ashraf from the Ajlaf: the former are high and the latter low. The Ashraf are further divided into four ranked subgroups: Sayyad, Sheikh, Mughal and Pathan. Some would regard Muslim Rajputs as a fifth subgroup of the Ashraf. The Ajlaf are similarly sub-divided into a much larger number of groups. All these groups, the Ashraf and the Ajlaf, are endogamous. Furthermore, they are hierarchically arranged in relation to one another, the Sayyads occupying the highest and the Sweepers the lowest position. (142)

The narrative doubles the effect of class discrimination because she faces discrimination both at religious and social levels and Hanif has exposed this reality through the characters in narrative. Alice and Joseph are not only snubbed by the Muslims but also by the Catholics of upper strata because of their social class background.

Utterly fearless...a novel marked by irreverence that dances on the line of what extremists could easily called blasphemy....Mr. Hanif, like Lear's fool, exposes corruption and depravity in Pakistani society through barbed gags and deceptive silliness....The scenes are frequently dazzling. Mr. Hanif depicts urban riots, police brutality, medical malpractice (we meet a surgeon who refuses to sew up his patients until he has been paid in cash), and entrenched misogyny with a frenzied sense of humor and genuine humanity – and a freewheeling dauntlessness that is exhilarating to behold. (*The Wall Street Journal Review n.pag*)

Joseph Bhatti and Alice Bhatti portray the exploitation of minority especially the Christian community. When she was twelve her mother Margret Bhatti died. She was assaulted by the rich master of the house in which she worked. But every tragedy in Alice's life makes her stronger than before which is quite a notable trait of her character since her childhood. This makes her different from ordinary people because a common man gets weaker by experiencing tragedies but for Alice, the case is reverse. Because of her mother's death she becomes mature before time. Every hardship makes her strong and strengthens her desire of getting a prominent place in the society. Her educational shift from local primary school to nursing school is also surprising as getting higher education for a girl is not a common practice in French colony. But yet again Alice Joseph Bhatti is an exception, like every other challenge, she accomplishes this challenge also triumphantly. She adores Yassoo and it also seems that she has a close connection with him. Normally, her other fellows from her colony betray their gender because of difficult and discriminated situations faced by women but she always adheres not only her gender but also her religion. Alam (2011) shows by her study that women's unequal positions contrasted with men make them weaker both out in the open and private circles. Alice knows her moral values very well. Her spiritualist nature presents her with full social knowledge. She can tell people how they will die by just looking at their faces. She talks about this talent of hers with Noor: "Ordinary people on the streets, I just know. I look at their face and then I see their dead face and I know how they will die" (Hanif 61).

Her days in nursing school, her fight with bigoted young Muslim nurses, her imprisonment in Borstal Jail and her hearing in the court are radiant episodes of her life which make her fearless as well as revolutionary. Through all such occurrences, Hanif has outlined the biased behaviour of men and also of Muslims towards the people of minority religion and low caste origin. Alice fights against this system where low caste Christians are dealt as useless creatures.

The young girls of nursing school labeled her and her other two Christian fellows as 'The kafir den' (Hanif 172). They dissented against her with hockeys and a copy of Holy book. Only Alice confronted the angry mob against them. Being Yassoo's preacher and soldieress, she fought against those girls. When the conflict between them intensified, DrPriera, the dean of nursing school, has to take its notice and he remarked: "Nurses might be doing God's work but they are not supposed to bring God into their work" (Hanif 173).

In any case Alice stays determined and to preach Yassoo's love among the people of French colony is motto of her life, for which she has confronted a great deal of physical torments which are present on her body; Hanif comments on her tormented physical state in the narrative in a precise manner "Her twenty seven years old body is a compact little war zone where competing warriors have trampled and left their marks" (Hanif 174). But none of these sufferings make her feel low but rather make her more determined, energetic and expanded her stamina to endure and surpass the hindrances and go beyond the set human boundaries. Throughout the story, the author attempts well to glorify her character and to elevate her stature by depicting ambitious, quiet and spiritual side of her character. Her spiritual side becomes clearly visible

towards the end of the narrative. Except God, she is not afraid of anyone and because of this she confronts each set back with full valor. The unique traits of her character make her exceptional in the world of fiction.

Methodology

The research paper makes use of qualitative research methodology, followed by critical, analytical and evaluative techniques to thematically highlight the various aspects of the primary source *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* (2011) by Mohammad Hanif within the framework of realism and magical realism. The selected text based references are given as a confirmation for reinforcing contention of this examination. The research methodology is based on textual analysis and content analysis of the selected text. Textual analysis is centered on the representation of woman and the key concept of realism and magical realism. Alice is put under a microscope to get a thorough understanding of the developmental phases of her character.

Analysis and Discussion

Hanif has empowered his female characters in the narrative in one way or the other. Alice was sent to jail because of her stand against the famous surgeon. She was investigated in the police station about a patient's death during the operation of which she was a witness and she spoke against the negligence of the surgeon but this went against her and she was blamed for the death and punished for that but when she was freed on bail, she decided to take the matter in her hands and to punish the real culprit. She went to his clinic, Hanif has described this brave act of soldieress of Yassoo as "Before the famous surgeon could shout or press buzzer, she took a marble flower pot from the windows mill and aimed at his head" (Hanif 177).

This is her religious power which encourages her to stand against the defaulters and wrong doers. The narrative is full of instances which depict her association with God. After causing enough damage to the corrupt doctor, she was imprisoned for twelve months and for this reason, she had to appear for her final year nursing exams from jail. Even the imprisonment, messy atmosphere of jail couldn't hurt her because of her spiritual armor. She is brimmed with head strong qualities and possesses masculine powers and bravery. It is not easy to find a character like her in the Pakistani fiction written in English who despite of every deficiency associated with her whether it is of belonging to a religious minority or a lady striving to attain a visible status in a rigid patriarchal society; achieves her goal of not relying on others particularly males and determined not only to safe guard herself but also ready to serve the humanity without any discrimination.

Hanif has equipped Alice with all essential manly qualities like bravery, magnificent consciousness and maturity to level both genders. She is not vulnerable and weak like so many other Pakistani females who are assaulted, burned, hacked or poisoned. Raman Seldon (2005) cites comments of Robin Lakoff about manly characteristics present in the females in her book *A Reader Guide to Contemporary Literary Theoryas*

Robin Lakoff is of belief that women's language actuality is inferior, since it contains the patterns of weakness and uncertainty, focuses on the trivial, the frivolous, the unserious, and stresses personal emotions. Male utterances, she argues is stronger and should be adopted if they wish to achieve social equality with men. (121)

Hanif delineates the character of Alice in such a way that she is easily distinguished from the other female characters in the narrative "She tries to maintain a nondescript exterior. She learns the sideways glance instead of looking at people directly. She speaks in practiced, precise sentences so that she is not misunderstood" (Hanif 98). Our courageous lady is equipped with manly language throughout the text. Her use of language is flawless; it is free of vulnerability, frivolousness and non-seriousness. Hanif engages her by utilizing a variety of linguistic expressions in the novel which upholds his feminist approach. Noor uncovers her psyche many times in the narrative. For instance when he says "Alice is the kind of person who will return a favor by saying fuck you too. Her fatal flaw is not her family background, but her total inability to say simple things like 'excuse me' and 'thank you' (Hanif 32). The words like 'excuse me' and 'thank you' are considered as expressions of weakness and also they depict pointlessness of language, because of such reasons Alice avoids such expressions in her conversation. It is quite evident that these values have been taught to her by Yassoo's guidance because there was no one at her home to teach about the moral and ethical values, she is under Yassoo's kind consideration since her childhood. Feminist theorists have also investigated the centrality of the visual domain in shaping the philosophical and experimental considerations. As Rosi Bradotti has said, "to see is the primary act of knowledge and the gaze the basis of all epistemic awareness" (80). Braidotti's concept of female body conflates woman with the outlandish, as something which originates from outside and threatens that which is inside the standardized order. Feminist theorists have given a great deal of attention to Lacan's prioritizing of the act of seeing. According to Lacan, the infant's misrecognition of himself in the mirror is the means by which he becomes an "I" and is imbued with meaning in relation to the visible world (1-2). Therefore the mirror stage becomes the representation of the "threshold to the visible world" (ibid, 3). For Lacan, the act of seeing is related to the acquisition of language and cognitive development, and also defines how others should be perceived and valued. Therefore, those who are physically different or unacceptable internalize the cultural codes assumed by others who define them according to the standards of normativity established in the symbolic order. As feminists have noted, for Lacan the eye is the means by which the subject comes to know; but the female "has nothing you can see" (4). According to Elizabeth Grosz, the female subject is prevented from the recognition of and identification with the image that makes possible the translation of a "fragmented body" into a "total, unified, 'completed' image" (42). For Luce Irigaray, when she sees herself through "man's signifying system woman is threatened with invisibility or even disappearance" (71, 50).

At one point in the narrative when she is brought to court to appear before judge, she holds her head high and is equipped with Jesus love. She considers police men as her guards.

Even her behavior with the judge is surprising instead of being afraid of the decision, she spends her time thinking that how could someone be so fat. Christians have limited access to justice both for moving from the claws of land owners and also for the victims of blasphemy law. The way Joseph Bhatti has to struggle to get a lawyer for her daughter is not surprising because many Muslim lawyers hesitate to take up cases of Christians and especially when they are accused of religious disrespect and in many cases the accused won't even come to the judicial proceedings because his fate is decided by the mob justice. Recent examples of Salman Taseer and Shahbaz Bhatti's assassinations have further decreased the idea of legal justice.

Right after her release from jail, she enters into her practical life and starts working as a junior nurse in the hospital, and there her life is brimmed with eye opening and miraculous incidents. Incident in the VIP ward and saving a dead child through her prayers to God are such examples. She strives to meet expectations during her working hours.

When she is assigned the night duty of looking after a rich lady 'Mrs. Qazalbash' in the VIP room by senior Sister HinaAlvi. In the room she yet again has to face the hypocrisy and cruelty of man when one of the attendants of the old lady, who most probably is her son, holds her at gun point and made sexual advances but Alice who is not at all a weak woman, instead of fulfilling his order, resists and reacts same as she did in the incident with the surgeon and punishes the culprit and leaves him crying in the room. She has an excess of potential to return back the violent acts of men and this is the most prominent trait of her personality. She advocates Hanif's feminist agenda.

Her straight forwardness is an indication of her beautiful character and because of this she becomes a powerful and adorable character in the narrative. Her development as a holy figure in the narrative is proved with various miracles happening in the story. The most enchanting example is when a dead infant got life by her prayers. Sister HinaAlvi had declared him dead but the miracle happens, as Hanif states the miracle in the following words in the narrative:

She holds the baby's palm in both her hands and starts to pray. She prays like she never prayed before, like nobody prayed before. She just conjures up her Lord Yassoo and gives it to him. She holds him by his throat till he can't breathe, she hangs from his robe...she accuses him of being a deadbeat lord leaving poor wretched girls to bring dead babies into this world. (Hanif 166)

And then the ultimate moment of surprise arrives;her meeting with the Holy Spirit "she hears a door creak behind her and she opens her teary eyes slowly. Before she can turn around she sees a little blood bubble pop out of the dead baby's left nostril, then the toes on his right foot start twitching as he is trying to walk in his death sleep"(Hanif 166).

The sound of door creaking is an indication of presence of the Holy Spirit and also it indicates that God has listened not only her prayers but also granted them. Her prayers in Punjabi and Latin become the reason of infant's life. These special powers of her confirm her as a saint like figure. She herself is aware of the fact that she has done something which is not common. She is violating the basic rule of nature through this miracle of giving life to a dead child and in

this way she is going beyond the human boundaries and shifting from the status of a common woman to 'our Lady of Alice Bhatti.' Chapter 22 presents the birth of a new Alice. Hanif empowers her by attributing the prophetic qualities and mystic powers to her. A ward sweeper was the witness of this special occurrence and Hanif talks about this also "the sweeper will tell everyone that he felt the presence of the Holy Spirit. In reality he is down on his knees, he realizes that the dead baby came alive is a miracle" (Hanif 167).

The news about the infant's miraculous survival spread like fire in the corridors of hospital. People visit her, kiss her hands and patients felt her presence around them even in her absence. The letter sent by Joseph Bhatti to the congregation also gives the proclamation about sainthood of Alice. Instead of depicting the suffering conditions of Pakistani females, Hanif opts to describe surprising outcomes of sufferings which are amplifying the female characters in the narrative. By applying the tool of magical realism in his narrative, he presents Alice as a courageous character who is encapsulation of the Christian sainthood. Her aggravated marital life and brutal murder is presented diversely to show the common plight of females in Pakistani society. The problematic married life ends abruptly and brutally by acid attack but this agonizing incident ascends her to heaven. She goes towards heaven with Holy Mother and does not feel the pain of acid and because of this her death even does not disempower her rather becomes a reason for empowering the daughter of a sewer cleaner. Normally mostly authors portray such savagery or exploitation as the predicament of females but Hanif endeavors to give Alice the status of a superhuman being rather than the position of subhuman. Her father praises her as a saint in his letter to congregation "my daughter did not suffer the pain that her estranged husband meant to cause her by pouring half a liter of sulphuric acid on her angelic face. Instead she ascended to heaven with our Holy Mother" (Hanif 223).

The novel revolves around small, disappointed Christian community of Pakistan which has constantly been pushed towards the edges of the mainstream Muslim majority and particularly the problems faced by females in a society which is ruled by men. There is a long history of prejudices, subjugation and injustice against this substratum that is actually large in number but still treated as a minority because of their gender. Through the narrative, Hanif mocks and satirizes the social and religious divisions which are prevalent in today's Pakistani society. He presents dark realities of social fabric of Pakistan through his wit and humour. He presents the dynamics of interfaith love and reduces the complexities of a strained relationship to the solaces of simple and natural generalizations. He probes deep into the minds of his characters and he makes and sparkles a light on their inspirations, inner clashes and moral issues in subtle way.

His characters and story are surrounded by Pakistani establishment: the armed forces and police. He breathed new life into this world significantly in his first novel *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* (2008) and also in *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* (2011) however in the latter in this familiar universe of pain and the gaps of Kalashnikovs and Mausers is the Pakistani missionary hospital clasp under the jaws of bureaucracy and masses. His exploration and learning of these is very impressive. *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* (2011) presents feminist agenda by not only empowering

Alice but also empowers other female characters from the narrative in one way or the other. The other female characters are Zainab, Begum Qazalbash, Sister HinaAlvi and Alice's dead mother. Zainab, a poor old lady is mother of ward boy Noor. She is admitted in the hospital. She is empowered in the way that she is not burnt or hacked like many other females rather than she lays in the quiet death bed of the hospital. She is offered with the finesse of being a mother of an obedient son who takes care of her more than anything else. Her life is described in two stages, the first stage characterizes her life in the Borstal jail and second stage presents the details of her illness and her life in hospital. Her empowerment comes with the idea of parenthood. Noor is always ready to make her feel comfortable. The affection of a child for his feeble mother is evoked with excellence and pathos. On the other hand, Begum Qaz holds a place in a completely different category. She is a rich lady and enjoys the power of high status. She is a fat, grey haired old lady with rosy cheeks. Because of ailment, she is given the VIP room of The Sacred Heart Hospital Karachi, the same room where once Fatima Jinnah was admitted. She enjoys her status even in her ailment; a large number of body guards stand outside her room. She is an example how social class and wealth empowers a woman. The ladies with high social rank and property are empowered in our society. Money brings freedom and every kind of luxury for them.

In Pakistani society gender discrimination is common norm. Women are deprived of their basic rights and are subjected to exploitation and abuse. Pakistani culture is deeply embedded in patriarchy which demands devotion, perservance, loyalty and sacrifice from females. Patriarchy creates men's dominance and women's otherliness on the basis of socio-cultural observations. It defines women's role in everyday life. The life of a common woman is linked with her family and she plays a vital role in keeping up the family by bearing and raising children and looking after the elder members of the family. They are discriminated in every field.

Cast and class identity helps in understanding socio-cultural and economic changes happening around an individual or around a family. In *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* (2011) Hanif focuses on Pakistani society, the way females, minorities and anyone without money and influence are treated in it. Alice in some way or another tries to arrange a destiny between a victim and a saviour. She is equipped with a unique combination of tough spirit and soft heart. Her onlookers watch her suffering but cannot intervene because they are weak against a society in which women are endangered species and are insecure if they don't obey the orders. Alice courageously fights against her triple minority hood of being a women, a low caste and minority in an unjust society. Murder of Alice's mother is an example of threats to low class females, who are taken as an easy target. Officially she was slipped from marble staircase but as Hanif points out "but it is not very likely that when you slip on that staircase you'll also accidentally scratch yourself with such violence that those who wash your body will see four parallel sharp gashes drawn with human nails"(Hanif 119). This is one of the many evidences of Hanif's sympathy with what women experiences in a society where brutality is common and life is cheap.

Alice suffers multiple subaltern ties in her life; she faces religious subaltrenity of being a low caste catholic in a predominant Islamic state, gendered subaltrenity of being a woman in a patriarchal society and professional subaltrenity of being a junior nurse where she has to face

hypocrisies of senior doctors. Ranajit Guha has defined the term subaltern as “a name for the general attribute of subordination in South Asian society, whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender or any other way”(np). Alice is ‘subordinated’ by her religion. As Hanif talks about increasing religious intolerance and observes that free speech is constrained in our society; Asia Bibi, a Christian poor woman who was on death penalty because she was accused of disrespecting Muslims’ religious beliefs. The narrative paints a striking picture of notions of untouchability which are alive in Pakistan. In fact untouchability becomes a curse for subalterns and especially for females because of their low status they are considered easily approachable for physical violence and representation of Alice as a subaltern shows that Hanif gives a realistic picture of subaltern status of choohras and the difficulties faced by them, particularly the problems faced by females.

Hanif highlights not only Alice’s awareness of her subaltern status in a patriarchal society. She also acknowledges the fact that in a patriarchal society the idea of man’s superiority and honor is associated with female’s body who is being commodified and defenseless against physical violence ; “A woman was something you could get as loose change in a deal made on a street corner”(Hanif 96). Alice devises a doctrine to counter her vulnerability and to abstain from dangers of becoming a victim in a city which is full of dangers for women. She does not want to be a victim of male violence. She is not only conscious of her gait and gestures but also about use of language: “She chooses her words carefully, and if someone addresses her in Punjabi, she answers in Urdu, because an exchange in her mother tongue might be considered a promise of intimacy”(Hanif 98).

These safety measures show that she sees violence against females as a result of their own behavior or may be because of victim’s failure to maintain her public persona and as a result of that failure they become responsible for sexual harassment and she does not like to become one of those “who attracts wrong kind of attention” (Hanif 97). It shows that she wants to gain some control over her life. She endeavors to guarantee her safety and a strict monitoring of herself is a way to abstain from the dangers of physical violence. Moreover, it seems that she is convinced that the acts of misogyny are not completely irrational and forced, they are also somehow provoked and accordingly, in some way or the other, they can be anticipated and prevented. It is also an indication of her refusal of becoming a victim, which would block resistance against the systems of a male dominated society. She is aware of the fact that her safety measures are not enough and ultimately violence will be the only method for only kind of physical harassment. The narrative rejects violence as masculine characteristic. If Alice is an embodiment of femininity, she is also a warrior: “she has never accepted a wound without trying to give one back” (Hanif 175).

The razor which she always keeps with her indicates her awareness of her guarded behavior. Indeed her safety measures are preventive as well as defensive. Her actions against the visitor of VIP ward and against the surgeon show that she can be dangerous and turn to use violence in order to keep herself protected. While the narrative presents a constant risk of physical harassment which the females generally have to face in a patriarchal society. Hanif also

shows that how in a world of oppression; females can turn on one another. The nursing school incident is such an example where she is attacked for her religious beliefs by her Muslim class fellows and her behavior towards them “Alice Bhatti kicked the attackers in their shins, and bit a small chunk of flesh from a hand that tried to grab her throat” (Hanif 172).

Hanif’s subaltern not only shows an unpredictable courage and resistance against her attackers but also care and sympathy towards her patients. Her ability to fall back on viciousness serves as a proof of her determination to ensure her survival at any cost. She always finds ways for surpassing her social and religious subalternity. She knows the importance of one’s career to rise financially and unlike her father she tries to escape her social class and neighborhood, that’s why even in her imprisonment, she does not forget her aim of having a notable profession and appears in her final year exam from jail. In spite of the fact that Joseph Bhatti knows the hypocrisy of respectable castes and also he does not like the idea of social mobility and questions rich Christians who have endeavor to escape choohra background “ he said, ‘ and our own brothers at Sacred? They will educate you and then ask you why you stink?’” (Hanif 1) because of this hypocrite behaviour, he never tries to improve his social position and he is proud of his profession and social position “ choohras were before everything- choohras were here before the sacred was built, before Yassoo was resurrected, before muslas came on their horses, even before Hindus decided they were too exalted to clean their own shit. And when this is finished, choohras will still be there” (Hanif 52). But Alice is not happy with with his father’s romantic notions of subalternity as she says “yes when everything is finished, choohras will still be here. And cockroaches too” (Hanif 52). Unlike her father who willingly embraces his social marginality, she battles against it in various ways to improve her social position. Her decision of marrying a Muslim man is also one of her survival methods, although she knows the fact that being a police tout, teddy is not a suitable catch, as sister Hina Alvi remarks when she comes to know about her marriage with Teddy “You got hitched to the first piece of trash you came across” (Hanif 132) but Alice wishes to set in a conjugal domesticity “a hand pump, a stove, a charpoy or a little courtyard with a jasmine plant” (Hanif 92).

It shows that she knows the cultural importance of a ‘home’ in a woman’s life and she is also conscious of her caste and social position which is a constraint for getting proposals from respectable families, so she accepting Teddy’s proposal is a calculated step towards getting a home and a better social position in the society. She admits in front of her colleague that marriage will shield her from the dangers which she has to face as a woman. Hanif does not provide any details of Alice’s religious conversion and their wedding serves as a source of gossips among the friends of both of them. Laws of marriage and family are dictated by Islamic principles in Pakistan, which allows a muslim male to marry a non-muslim female of revealed religions (Christianity and Judaism); they do not require the female to convert to Islam; Salma Sardar (2002) observes that Islamic laws do not facilitate them with share in inheritance in that case and in case of divorce, they are not allowed to have the custody of children also. That’s why in case of inter faith marriages women tend towards embracing Islam. Teddy wants Alice to change her name to ‘Aliya’ but Alice never confesses to change it and recites half kalimah which

creates jokes about her becoming “half a muslim” (Hanif 89). She takes a picture of Yassoo with her to Teddy’s house. The incidents of her marriage shows her inner discomfort about her marriage and its impact on herself and identity .This uneasiness soon reveals with the news of her pregnancy which makes her anxious about unavoidable adjustments that she has to make in her marriage to a Muslim man of an Islamic country where she and other members of her religion are minority. Though she wants to be a mother but “the thought of naming the baby, bringing it up in Teddy’s world, fills her with a nameless dread” (Hanif181).Initially she tries to be intimate with him and shares a genuine bond with him, feeling at liberty from social restrictions that denounce sincerity in a relation between male and female “Marriage, she suddenly realises, is a liberation army on the march”(Hanif142) however soon this feeling flees and her pregnancy and its implications on her life coincides with her decision of leaving Teddy. But the questions like “where will the money come from” and “who will take care of the baby when she is at work” (Hanif 183) compel her to rethink about her decision and she decides to resolve the conflicts between them and to tell Teddy about pregnancy and this shows that a subaltern is also equipped with analytical reasoning and he thinks before taking final decisions rather than acting emotionally. But Alice does not get a chance to resolve because of her husband who thinks that she is leaving him for another man. The incident of acid attack on Alice by her husband indicates that love is not an escape from subalternity. While Teddy approaches Alice to throw acid on her, he keeps on claiming his “eternal love” (Hanif 224) for her.

Although the narrative does not reject the delights of love but it also accentuates a definitive incapability of love in battling against patriarchal oppression. The narrative depicts the obvious violence that love may bring with it and Teddy’s violent behavior is proof of this logic. Teddy perhaps does not want to kill her, but surely he wants to destroy her beauty. Acid attacks are common in Pakistan and it is used as a tool for punishing disloyal women and the purpose of attack is to destroy the beauty of a woman so she is normally attacked on face. In *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* (2011) acid attack does not only destroy Alice’s face but also becomes a reason of her death and such cases are very common in today’s Pakistani society and people normally does not pay attention to such issues that’s why Joseph Bhatti also does not make any attempt to get justice in court for the murder of her daughter.

South Asian fiction writers show the death of subaltern as a fair end of their narratives. The death can be social or physical or sometime both. For instance in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy-Man* (1988) the future of ayah after the gang rape becomes a reason for her departure from Pakistan and another example can be taken from Moni Mohsin's *The End of innocence* (2006)in which the young working woman Rani is brutally killed by her stepfather when he comes to know about her illicit pregnancy. Sidhwa in her *Ice- Candy- Man* shows that after the Partition of sub-continent Lahore turned into the site of a fierce killing of Sikhs and Hindus. When a Muslim mob raided Lenny’s home and demanded to hand over the Hindu servants to them, Lenny’s mother told them that Ayah has already left their home. When Ice Candy Man assured Lenny that he will protect Ayah, she told him about the place where she was hidden. But he deceived her trust by giving ayah to the fierce crowd, which dragged her away. Following her kidnapping

and rape, she was forced into prostitution by Ice Candy Man and later he forced her to marry him. When she was rescued by Lenny's mother and sent to India to her parents who did not welcome her warmly, their behaviour shows the naked reality that women who were raped or kidnapped during partition were rejected by their families because they considered them polluted.

But by presenting Alice as constantly fighting against the social stigmas, Hanif rejects the notion of unavoidable social death of the subaltern. We see Alice continually battling against the ghost of societal shame, once in a while utilizing physical power. When she is impregnated by a professor in nursing school, and when he rejects to marry her, she has to go for abortion. Nonetheless, she does not want to be ashamed or to be a victim of self-hatred but to move ahead. Her dazzling beauty is seen through male gaze and it becomes a reason for complicating her subaltern status. Alice belongs to the bottom of various social stratifications, her beauty separates her from the offensiveness which is around her and evokes admiration from the readers instead of pity and in the end her mutilated face caused by the acid attack which also kills her provokes feelings of sympathy in readers for Alice. And the miracle associated with death of Alice, which leads Joseph Bhatti to send a letter to Congregation for the Causes of Saints at the Vatican, and to canonize her. Joseph also mentions the baby to whom Alice is believed to give a new life: she was pronounced dead in the labour room by senior nurse yet abruptly, taking after a furious, harsh tirade of a supplication to God offered by Alice, the infant began breathing once more. Joseph also mentions a drip which have turned into milk and the skewed wooden cross at the entrance of hospital and most important is the assumed appearance of the Virgin Mary which totally spell bounds Alice when she is attacked. It is not easy to deny that in his plea to accept Alice as a saint; he romanticizes her death but the narrative rejects to idealize her death, by not only complementing her desire to make her presence acknowledged and also in its rejection of living subaltern from the dead and most importantly in its dismissal of miracles to battle subalternity because Alice also might have rejected those miracles which her father has mentioned in his letter to congregation. Earlier in the narrative, when the "dead" child gets life because of her prayers, she becomes famous as a miracle worker among patients but she reasons that the incident was most probably as case of "a trapped bubble in a blood vessel, a lung slow to start, a heart still in shock" (Hanif170).

She rejects the idea of miracles rather she longs for solid solution. Undoubtedly, the magical realist incidents in the narrative; Joseph's ability of curing stomach illnesses with the help of verses of Holy Quran, Alice's ability to foresee how one will die, and obviously the strange apparition in the sky at the end of narrative, all these suggest the narrative intends to present faith and miracles as a counterpoint to hegemonic frameworks of knowledge. *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* (2011) presents numerous explanations and multiple versions of the same incident. In the narrative the protagonist often questions the fabulous miracles. As mentioned above how Alice refuses to be acknowledged as a miracle worker on account of saving a dead baby, in light of the fact that there may be a scientific clarification for it, additionally in light of the fact that while the baby gets a new life, his mother did not: "What kind of miracle is this

anyway? He has raised the baby and taken the baby's mother. What kind of universe does He run? An exchange mart?" (Hanif 170).

The narrative also presents the limitations of miracles; Joseph is only capable of curing ulcer and Alice's ability of knowing how someone will die does not help her to avoid her death. Hanif satirizes the rising religiosity in Pakistan through magical realism. He emphasizes his dismissal of magic and religion (both collapses into each other in the narrative), as a form of opposing subaltern mistreatment. In this way realism presents the harsh realities of life and magical realism in the narrative holds its radical power as it satirizes the role of magic and religion, the way they are interpreted to play their role in understanding and countering social prejudices and injustices.

Joseph's petition for her daughter's sainthood serves to highlight the appalling disappointments of Pakistani society and its justice system, to highlight the gendered brutality. His mentioning of miracles in his letter and his attempts to accept Alice as a saint have the staggering impact of showing the alarming ordinariness of acid attacks; and the fact that he does not seek legal justice for her daughter is a reminder of the fact that how vulnerable a poor woman is in Pakistani society. His open letter to the Congregation for the Causes of saints in the epilogue of the narrative and his petition of Alice's sainthood in the end of the letter takes the readers back to the first page of the novel in which the scene of Alice's interview for the job of junior nurse in The Sacred Heart Hospital for All Ailments is described. This shift of taking and reminding the readers the first chapter of the narrative emphasizes her life, her journey and her struggle to attain a respectable place in the society rather than simply her death: "And since Sister Alice Bhatti's story can't be told without telling the story of her time at the Sacred, why not start the story when Alice Bhatti came to the Sacred, looking for a job" (Hanif 231).

Conclusion

The descriptive analysis of *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* (2011) shows that Hanif has artistically applied the techniques of realism and magical realism to present that how the life of a woman belonging to a noble profession but from a minority religion is always at the verge of chaos in a male dominated society. He has employed numerous resistance techniques which Alice uses and battles to make her acknowledged. He consciously makes use of magical traits to condemn the social prejudices and injustices practiced upon the people of low caste and especially upon the females in a male dominated society. The narrative rejects martyrdom as a desirable ideal both in terms of religion and text. Alice is a complicated character, the wreckage of whose murder is entwined from the turmoil that denoted her everyday struggle against the hypocrisy and biasness towards the people of minority religion. Hanif presents Alice as embodiment of subaltern resistance. She overcomes her subalternity through strengths of her character and rises above the ordinary females of minority religions.

The culled textual analysis shows the Latin American trend of magical realism in the narrative. Magical realism has been utilized to bring out the women empowerment in the narrative. It is evident from the analysis of narrative that society and culture construct gender

roles and in a patriarchal society like Pakistan, females are always expected to be the subordinate of the male members of the family, their services and sacrifices for the family are always taken for granted. The textual references are proof of the amazing world created by the author. Alice's profound journey of self-revelation is brimming with extraordinary and unfathomable incidents which empower the female characters in the narrative. Alice surpasses her religious identity and French Colony Background and achieves her goal of making her cosmopolitan presence acknowledged through her honesty and dedication to her work. *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* (2011) counters patriarchal discourses by becoming voice of the voiceless and presenting a brilliant blend of realism and magical realism.

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