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Double Jeopardy of a Christian Woman in Muhammad Hanif's *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti*

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ABSTRACT

The research aims at exploring the double jeopardy of a Christian woman as presented in Muhammad Hanif's *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti*. Using the terminology of Arundhati Roy, Alice Bhatti's voice is either 'deliberately silenced', or goes 'preferably unheard' at various instances of discrimination against her in the novel. In one of his interviews, the author calls it 'the double jeopardy of Alice Bhatti' (Dutt). Alice Bhatti suffers as a woman and the suffering is doubled because of the fact that she belongs to a minority, a Christian in a dominantly Muslim society. This research furthers this idea and explores through this novel how poverty, religious discrimination and gender inequality go hand-in-hand in Pakistan. This research falls into the category of 'subaltern studies'. The framework used is conceptual, as it is composed of writings of Gayatri Spivak, Arundhati Roy and Antonio Gramsci. Alice Bhatti is jeopardized at various levels due to her gender and religion. Alice belongs to a Christian which is a minority in Pakistan. So, she dealt with a lot of troubles due to her religion beliefs. People especially men didn't like to drink or eat in the same dishes in which Alice had meal but when it comes to sexual contact, the male members of the society showed diplomacy and approached her in every possible way and tried to harass her sexually. She raises voice whenever she is discriminated against but it goes unheard. Alice is a nurse by profession. She respects her profession and is proud to be a nurse but she feels sorry for the diplomatic behavior of the society towards her sacred profession.

Key words: Alice Bhatti, Christian, gender discrimination, religious discrimination, nurse, oppressed, Spivakean theory, Arundhati Roy, voiceless, unheard.

The research aims at exploring the double jeopardy of women as presented in Muhammad Hanif's *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti*. Using the terminology of Arundhati Roy, Alice Bhatti's voice is either 'deliberately silenced', or goes 'preferably unheard' at various instances of discrimination against her in the novel. In one of his interviews, the author calls it 'the double jeopardy of Alice Bhatti' (Dutt). Alice Bhatti suffers as a woman and the suffering is doubled because of the fact that she belongs to a minority, a Christian in a dominantly Muslim society. This research furthers this idea and explores through this novel how poverty, religious discrimination and gender inequality go hand-in-hand in Pakistan. This research falls into the category of 'subaltern studies'. The 'Subaltern' status, generally accorded to the women, multiplies with other factors, and makes them extremely vulnerable to violation of the basic human rights. It is a Spivakean analysis of the novel for the various instances of 'jeopardy' of women in the Pakistani



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context and investigates various factors which contribute towards it. The framework used is conceptual, as it is composed of writings of Gayatri Spivak, Arundhati Roy and Antonio Gramsci. Women are not given equal rights and are not even allowed to speak up for themselves. The patriarchal cultures are still practiced in different parts of the world. These cultures let down the dignity and worth of a woman by limiting their roles in the society. However, a lot of writers discussed the discrimination between men and women in the society.

Education plays an important role in giving awareness to the women about their rights. Many novelists of the subcontinent such as Sara Suleri, Bapsi Sidhwa, Nadeem Aslam talked about such issues related to women in their novels. They have explained different factors which result in discrimination and destruction of women in the society (Wheeler). The first novel of Mohammad Hanif was 'A Case of Exploding Mangoes' which was also showed his concern towards feminism because in this novel; which was related to the politics in Pakistan (Zia's plane crash), he explained about the stoning death of a woman Zainab who was also blind. However in his second novel 'Our Lady of Alice Bhatti', he has explained different aspects of the society which result in the downfall of the women (Colette).

In 'Our Lady of Alice Bhatti', the writer has explained the bitter reality of the society in which the women are not given their rights and are forced to face the difficulties that they don't even deserve. He has explained the important aspects of the society which result in lowering the self-esteem of the women very boldly (Allison). He has discussed that how the patriarchal traditions, which are still practiced in Pakistan result in the discrimination of the women on the basis of their 'religion, gender and status'. The writer has used an extreme aggressive tone as he became more feminist while talking about that how women are devoid of their rights in the society. In order to explain the psychological anxieties of the women, the writer has discussed the characters like Alice Bhatti and such other female characters in the novel (Henry). The writer has discussed that how Alice takes of her dress, her manners and her gait when she goes out of the house as she knows about the greedy and cruel eyes of the society. The novel also depicts that the working women have to go through a lot of problems at their work place (Plaskow).

The novel revolves around the life of Alice Bhatti who has to face the injustice and cruel behavior of the society because of her class, religion and gender. She is the daughter of a lower class Christian janitor, Joseph Bhatti (Roxanne). Alice has gone through a lot of difficult times in her life. When she was studying at the nursing school, she was sent to jail because she harmed a surgeon physically because he trapped her in a wrong case before. Although her life is not so easy but she finally gets a job at the Sacred hospital. She works there under the senior nurse whose name is Hina Alvi. Hina also gives Alice advice about both personal and professional matters. Alice also has an interaction with the office boy, Noor at the hospital as she has met him already when she was in the Borstal jail. Noor's mother is also admitted in the hospital for her treatment. Alice has met Teddy Butt at the hospital, who was from Faisalabad and is also her ex-junior (Joanne and Moseley). Teddy works for the G squad, who's in charge is inspector Malangi. Malangi is an anti-feminist. He is of the view that the people who keep on thinking about a woman for more than 30 seconds are not man enough and he also killed his daughter and wife because of such thinking. Teddy falls in love with Alice and they soon get married. Alice is sent to the VIP room at the hospital to take care of a woman whose son is a landlord. He forces her to give him an oral sex but she refuses and attacks his penis with the razor. An important message of feminist resistance is conveyed by the character of Alice Bhatti as she raises her voice against the cruelties of the society, which



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other women find difficulty to do so and get suppressed due to the pressure from the society (Tranberg and Philipson). Alice is of the view that the women should speak up and stand up for themselves as it is an important need of the hour. Being a lower class Christian woman, Alice has gone through a lot of troubles in her life as people do not accept the minorities whole heartedly and as the old traditions that are still practiced in Pakistan also do not let the people to expand their thinking. But Alice did not lose her self-esteem and stand by for her dignity and rights. This does not turn out to be good for her as she was attacked by her own husband Teddy Butt. Teddy threw acid on Alice because of his self-created suspicions and the discrimination between men and women that was taught to him by inspector Malangi (Jewkes R).

Women in Pakistan are not given their basic rights. The torturous aspects of their lives and abduction of their basic rights should be discussed more often and openly in order to provide them justice. In this novel Mohammad Hanif has boldly discussed about the bitter reality of the cruelties that the woman has to face in Pakistan (DuBois). He has unveiled the dark secrets of the society in a very bold manner depicting every aspect of the life of a woman in a society of a third world country. His novel 'Our Lady of Alice Bhatti' has played an important role in understanding the condition of the women in today's world. He throws light on the discrimination between men and women in the society and how they are treated inferiorly due their gender. The women are forced to follow the rules which are made by the men. It also shows that how women are oppressed in the society and not even allowed to raise voice for themselves however Alice Bhatti was different. She believed in taking stand for her dignity and rights and as a result of this she also became a victim of the cruelty of the male society (Orleck and Annelise). The Christian woman of our society also has to face the religious hatred. This novel shows the insulting behavior of the people of upper class towards the people of lower class. Being a feminist, the writer has shown the resistance of a female towards the backward thinking of the society. This novel shows the idea of Hanif which he wants to depict in order to make the world understand the worth and importance of women in the world. Although being a woman is not an easy job but the woman still has to fight for rights. This struggle of the woman has been continuing since a very long time and it still not ends (Steichen and Donna).

'Our Lady of Alice Bhatti' is the second novel of Mohammad Hanif in which he discusses the life of a lower class Christian woman Alice Bhatti who lived in Karachi, Pakistan. Alice is a nurse by profession. Alice went through a lot of problems when she was a young girl. She was terminated from college, readmitted and was warned. She was even sent to jail for accusing a man of a crime. But soon she got admission in the nursing school. She went through a lot of gender, religious and class discrimination throughout her life. She finally got the job at the Sacred hospital under the head nurse, Hina Alvi. Hina and Alice shared a strong bond. They even discussed their personal lives with each other. The life of Alice was also not easy at the hospital. She was forced by a landlord son to give him a blowjob but Alice attacked his penis with the razor. She also faced many disgusting behaviors of the male patients. Alice always stood up for herself and her dignity. She never let the society to make her feel lower than anyone else. The old traditions are still practiced in Pakistan in which the women are not given equal rights as that of men and are forced to live according to the rules made by the male members of the society. Even today the woman is used to settle the disputes among men. No matter whatever the dispute is, whether it is the case of returning loans or the water disputes at the village, all of these disputes are settled by exchanging the women as the men consider women as their sex toys. Women are treated like puppets in the male dominant



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society. However, Alice Bhatti did not believe in getting humiliated by the male dominant society. She always stood up for her dignity. The profession of a woman is considered to be limited as a teacher, nurse etc. and the nurses are not given the respect what they deserve so, Alice was also harassed because of her profession but this never made her weak. Instead, she always stood up for the right. Finally she got married to Teddy Butt who worked under the inspector Malangi. Malangi was an anti-feminist. According to him, the men who think about a woman more than thirty seconds, are weak. Malangi also abused his daughter and wife because of his sick thinking. Although Alice stood up for her rights and dignity but at the end, she was attacked by her own husband, Teddy Butt who threw acid on her because of his self-created honor. This novel shows that the struggle of women for their rights is still a very sensitive issue even in today's world. Women suffer a lot in a male dominant society.

For this research, the novel 'Our Lady of Alice Bhatti' is read carefully and the text showing the double jeopardy of women in today's world is marked. The marked text is later explained in the light of Spivakean theory (according to which the subalterns are not allowed to speak) and Arundhati Roy's quotation which states that: 'There's no such thing as voiceless. There are only the deliberately silenced, or preferably unheard'. Text explaining the gender discrimination between the men and the women is selected from the novel. In the selected text, the condition of women is explained that the women are not given their rights and they have been struggling since a very long time. According to the author, the females of our society seem to be in a battle zone of our society. Since centuries, they have been considered subordinate to men in conventional social placement. Men are given superiority in every significant aspect of life in a patriarchal system, as a result of which female gender feels suppressed and weak. The patriarchal system which is still practiced in Pakistan, keeps the women like Alice Bhatti at inferior or secondary positions in such a way that shows they are badly beaten by life and exploiting them more is all in vain. Though their further disrespect is waste of time still society is on the verge of reinforcing it. The author, has portrayed the gender distinction scenario in Pakistani society in an extraordinary way as, a female is extremely conscious while crossing the road, unlike a male who does not even bother about riding the motorbike on the wrong side of the road in high speed and expects the traffic warden to pardon him. The writer has tried to explain that how women are choked, killed, physically harassed in Pakistan. They are considered as the solution of every dispute. The text explaining the confined conduct of a woman in the society is also selected which shows that how the mental and physical violence disturbs the life of the females and makes them suffer badly. It brings changes in the behavior and personality of a woman like she adapts sideways glances, avoids eating in public, becomes too much reserved, etc. This agonizing reality of our society has confined the behavior of the females like Alice Bhatti. They could not breathe freely in the suffocating environment of such orthodox society. Being independent is not less than a curse for her. Alice is also judged for her profession as the women are considered to be confined to few professions in Pakistan. Our society has set our mind in such a way that the word sister is presumed as a nurse. If Fatima Jinnah was given the title of 'sister of nation' instead of 'mother of nation', she would surely be presumed as a nurse rather than an enigmatic leader of Pakistan. This shows how nursing profession is considered inferior and wrongly attributed to the females in our society. The double jeopardy is once again highlighted here in terms of gender discrimination multiplied with class and economic differences. The inferiority of women is also explained in this novel. Women have historically been considered inferior to men in various cultures. As a result of this prejudice they could not



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actively participate in the society, and a large number of females have even been killed or buried alive. This is easily observed from the character of Malangi who is an anti-feminist and he got rid of his wife and three daughters because he considered them a burden on himself. The author wants to explain that our society is full of anti-feminists like Malangi (a character in the novel as a police inspector) who never misses a chance to disgrace or mock the females, have fixed ambiguous assumptions about the women folk and considers making a female happy as a laborious task. According to these anti-feminists, it is impossible to make females happy. These anti-feminists do not hesitate to commit the awful crime of throwing acid on females too. They consider females their private property so they harass them and treat them as worthless beings. And because of these mind sets women are treated like a toy in the hands of men. They quench their thirst of pleasure in sacrificing their female members. Female of our society is vulnerable to the suspicion of father, bother, husband and son, their honor and pride. Female members are killed or harassed as a revenge of conflicts between two men. She becomes a victim of weakness of men. Thus, males of our society feel free to do whatever they like without any hesitation. These non-feminists treat females as slaves and consider thinking about a female as their insult. Females of our society are treated so worthlessly as if they have been bought at a loot sale by men. Men seem to be cruel majesty who rules over these females. Being a feminist, the author is of the view that the female has a strong mind and she can stand for herself without fearing anyone and this is what the people are afraid of and that's why they keep on suppressing woman. However, if a woman speaks for herself, it can make a man insecure. The author asserts that female obsession is the standard of being 'manliness' in our society. A man is considered nothing without females. His mind must be preoccupied with the thoughts of women. A man should act as a hungry predator that is in the desperate pursuit of its prey (females). Thus, women are prey to the disgusting greed of males in our society. The woman is treated like a victim in the male dominant society. Alice Bhatti reinforces it by telling about females who become the victim of their brutality and are then brought to the hospital. Daily she used to see a female in distress and miserable condition; either poisoned, beaten, burnt, killed or sexually harassed by father, husband, brother or son in regard to their so called reputation. Torturing female members is considered the solution for even trivial conflicts like water issues, property issues, etc. According to the author, every woman should take a step against the torture that she is suffering. For this she has to raise her voice instead of tolerating all the miserable things of the man that she is facing. Women are considered as an exchange of honor for father, brother, husband or son. Women are considered pawn or security for debts and bets. The criticizing tone of the writer is quite evident highlighting the pity condition of females of nomads as well, who are sold for seeking pleasure. Domestic violence is common mental and physical abuse that a female experiences every day. The terrible treatment with females is heard in the form of a leaky oven, bursting gas cylinder, falling of cupboard and other haphazard from the side of female. The society becomes blind to find possible reasons for such haphazard instead merely focus. The females in our society are facing a lot of problems including the physical abuse as well as the mental torture. There is a need that the women now speak up for themselves and take a stand in order to protect their dignity as a whole. On the other hand, if a female member, like Alice Bhatti lives independently, she is supposed to face a number of problems like disgusting comments, greedy eyes and wrong attractions of men. Discriminatory laws to prevent discrimination on the basis of gender exist without their proper implementation in unjust societies; where dominating personalities enjoy protection from laws for their mischiefs while proletariats are put to



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altar. Due to this injustice, proletariat women of our society are more susceptible to mental and physical abuse. Men being dominant and influential in our society could easily avoid punishments unlike women as it is apparent from the case of Alice's mother who was declared fallen from marble staircase, though in real she was murdered after being raped by landlord. Hanif shows the disgusting look of the police department (as a premise full of men faces) when Alice Bhatti decided to file a case against sexual harassment she faced once on duty. Alice Bhatti was strong, who could stand against cruelty, fight for her rights and refuses to be a toy in the hands of men. She and her friend Hina Alvi were more likely to take stand against injustice, savage and suppression of any kind. The evidence of this could be taken from the event when Alice Bhatti kicked an old man for his attempt of sexually harassing her. Alice Bhatti and other females face several professional hurdles in Pakistani society. They have to be excessively conscious about their apparel to avoid the vulgar looks of people at the job. It is awful for the author, that certain professions (including nursing) are associated with conventional negative beliefs and the people connected to these professions feel disgrace and humiliation leading to lack of confidence and mental torture. The proof of this is the indirect sexual attempt with Alice Bhatti by a stately grandfather while she was performing her nursing duty. Alice Bhatti faces such sexual abuse frequently while her visit to VIP room. Along with professional hurdles, females face marital problems as well, like Hina Alvi who got married several times to the same person but failed to keep up because men couldn't perceive the problems of females. Men consider it surfing a tide or a huge wave. Women are not less than puppets in their hands. Women are compelled to oblige by the orders of their men in the patriarchal society of Pakistan. It is commonly witnessed that women regardless of their religion in Pakistani society are not treated less than handmaidens of men who have no right to disobey them. Being a woman appears to be a curse. All this depicts that the roots of patriarchal ideology are this much strongly imbedded in Pakistani society that it leads to the dominance of males over females. The imminent fears of females reside beside her after getting married to a male in discriminatory Pakistani society. Gender discrimination is not enough to dishonor the females in our society so religious and social class distinction fulfill this purpose. Minorities and females belonging to a lower class are treated worse than slaves. A Christian woman has to submit herself wholly to her Muslim husband after marriage. The idea that being a female minority belonging to a lower social class is a great curse in the orthodox Pakistani society. The conservative ideology regarding females has spread like a virus in Pakistani society with no abrupt prevention. The disease of gender and religious discrimination has rooted itself so strongly that avoidance seems to be the only solution to females than eradicating it from the minds of people.

Conclusion:

This research was done in order to explain the double jeopardy of women in Pakistan. For this purpose, the novel, 'Our Lady of Alice Bhatti' by Mohammad Hanif was carefully read and the text explaining the double jeopardy was marked and explained in the light of Spivakean theory and Arundhati Roy's quotation which states that; 'There's no such thing as voiceless. There are only the deliberately silenced, or preferably unheard'. It was concluded from the above analysis that the women are not given equal rights as that of men in the third world country and they have to go through a lot of troubles. The male members of the society consider them as their puppets and even the women are used by the men to settle their disputes. Alice Bhatti is jeopardized at various levels due to her gender and religion. Alice belongs is a Christian which is a minority in



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Pakistan. So, she dealt with a lot of troubles due to her religion beliefs. People especially men didn't like to drink or eat in the same dishes in which Alice had meal but when it comes to sexual contact, the male members of the society showed diplomacy and approached her in every possible way and tried to harass her sexually. She raises voice whenever she is discriminated against but it goes unheard. Alice is a nurse by profession. She respects her profession and is proud to be a nurse but she feels sorry for the diplomatic behavior of the society towards her sacred profession. According to her, Fatima Jinnah is known as the mother of Pakistan despite of being the sister of Muhammad Ali Jinnah. The people of Pakistan do not like to address Fatima Jinnah as the sister of Pakistan because when they hear the word 'sister', the first profession that comes to their mind is a nurse which they do not consider as a sacred profession. The fact that she is a woman multiplies with the fact that she belongs to a minority section in this country, and creates the worst circumstances for her. Pakistan is male dominant society; so, the women are treated like minorities however, the ratio of the women is higher in Pakistan than that of men. They are forced to follow the so called rules made by men for them. They have to satisfy their men in every possible way. According to Arundhati Roy's quotation, 'There's no such thing as voiceless. There are only the deliberately silenced, or preferably unheard'. But the male dominant society of Pakistan has oppressed the women to such a point, where they are no longer able to raise their voice for themselves. The same thing happened to Alice and she is eventually silenced forever due to these factors. The females in the third world country are treated like subalterns who are not given the freedom of speech and to raise their voices for themselves. These issues are very common in our society which contribute towards increasing national poverty since half the population is disadvantaged this way, and women belonging to minority suffer the worst consequences because minorities in the third world countries are considered as outsiders and are not given the equal rights as that of the people in majority whether it is their personal life or professional life. The life of a woman is way too difficult. They become a victim of eve teasing, sexual harassment and such other gruesome incidents. Due to gender discrimination in Pakistan, the women are not given equal rights as that of men even in the professional field and this led to decrease in financial betterment of any country. This led to increasing poverty and a decreasing number of jobs for the women. The poverty once again hits these sections of the society the hardest (Poverty is sexist), and the vicious cycle continues. Due to the discrimination of women in the society, they remain unemployed and are treated as a burden. The feminization of poverty leads to poor education and health care of women especially in the third world countries. The woman of a third world country has to go through a lot of gender and religious discrimination. Belonging to a lower class minority Christian family, Alice Bhatti has gone through a lot of troubles. Even if a woman tries to speak up for herself, she is oppressed by the cruel society like Alice Bhatti was attacked by her own husband Teddy Butt (who threw acid on her and ruined her life) in the name of his self-created honor.

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