

## LANGUAGE, GENDER AND RELIGION: A PAKISTANI PERSPECTIVE INTO THE NARRATIVES OF 'OUR LADY OF ALICE BHATTI' BY MOHAMMAD HANIF

Adeel Khalid  
Beaconhouse National University,  
Lahore, Pakistan  
[Khalidadeel22@yahoo.com](mailto:Khalidadeel22@yahoo.com)

### Abstract

Language used in literature reveals the culture and social gestalt of any society in which it is written, constructed or consumed at social and political front. Literature is the byproduct of socio-political, religious and cultural reality. This paper carries the same rationale which aims to deconstruct certain socio-religious and gendered narratives employed against minorities especially that of Christians in an Islamic re(public) where Muslims are in a clean majority through the critical discourse analysis of text titled: "Our Lady of Alice Bhatt" by Mohammad Hanif. It highlights social inequalities practiced and penetrated deep at socio-cultural level on religious grounds. Moreover this research would also touch upon the question of gender discrimination and gender construction as a female entity in a male-chauvinistic society with the help of language in use. It would employ Fairclough's analytical framework to conduct critical discourse analysis of the text at three axiom levels namely textual analysis, discursive practices and socio-cultural analysis. Thus the results would reveal textual findings in linguistic analysis, range of embedded religious and social discourses in discursive practices, and consumption of the text into socio-cultural interpretations with the use of language and lexicalization employed in the selected excerpts from the novel.

**KEYWORDS:** Gendered Discourse, Socio-religious Disparities, Minorities Rights, Islamization Process, Fairclough's Analytical Framework

### Introduction

Literature as the artifact of culture provides significant datum about the social setup and structure, mores and morals, religious ethos and orientation, trends and traditions, values and attitudes of a society in which a protagonist exists or struggles to exist (Spair-Whorf Hypothesis Chapter 1). It is language through which process of construction embarks on

issues of identity, cultural, and ideology (Wykes and Gunter 2005:61). It aims to construct, deconstruct or reconstruct the worldview of any character in a narrative (Carroll, 2008). Language used by literary aces has manifold functions to perform; one of the functions is to entertain while using satire or irony and to communicate the social and cultural portrayal (Hymes, 1972). Quite effectively, such information can help in tracing and comprehending the writers' mindsets, ideological basis of a society, national ways, ethnicity, identity and cultural implications. It also operates effectively for slotting the members of a society into a distinct nation on religious basis. According to Annas & Rosen (1994) all the genres of literature including poems, plays, dramas, short stories, novel and essays portray a wide range of attitudes about gender, sexuality and relationships. In other words, fiction has always tried to present the men, woman, attitudes and practices of the age and society. Pakistani literature does the same by presenting repressed female gender issues and oppressed minorities at the end of political and personal goals at the name of religion. This research is also such an attempt in which the research embarks on the language used for and against in the fiction to represent the social reality portrayed at large.

## Review of Literature

Saussure as cited by Fairclough (2001: 5) introduces two terms *langue* and *parole* to describe the two aspects of language and interpret the phenomenon of language. *Langue* denotes the rules and regulations and *parole* refers to the actual and contextual use of language. Thereby language has a strong connection with its users and socio-political milieu as it impacts and influences in selecting our choice and use of specific words and not otherwise. Critical discourse analysis defines and determines the socio-political status of utterances in a given context. Van Dijk defines CDA as an approach which seeks to investigate that;

Primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance and inequality are enacted reproduced and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context. With such dissident research, critical discourse analysts take explicit position, and thus want to understand, expose and ultimately to resist social inequality

CDA is as method employed to conduct research on any instance of language use to highlight certain implicit inequality or biased of a writer, group or an individual. Some discourse genres, such as those of party rallies, indoctrination and political propaganda indeed have the explicit aim of 'teaching' ideologies to group members and newcomers (Van Dijk, 2004). Various discourses have been dissected e.g. speeches, narratives, and ELT pedagogical texts, radio and telephonic conversations and national and international policies of war and conflict. Anthonissen and Bloommant (2007), Bloommant (2005), de cilia and Wodak (2008), Ensinh and Saucer (2003, Heer et al (2006)), Martin and Wodak (2003), Reisigl (2007), Wodak and

de cilia (2007), studied and analyzed papers, policies, scandals, political discourse, short-narratives, war and conflicts and social dynamism. Hence, CDA a multidisciplinary method affianced to carry out research on any instance of language use to highlight certain implicit inequality or biased of a writer, group or an individual (Fairclough, 1992). It critiques the language in use as a powerful medium that can be used a challenge; subvert power, and ideological basis of in a text (Ruth Wodak, 1982).

## The Selected Text

The researcher has selected the first chapter from the novel *“Our Lady of Alice Bhatti”* which is written by Muhammad Hanif, a Pakistani-Punjabi author settled in Karachi. The chosen excerpt consists of 10 pages, 415 lines, and 3362 words as a whole. The novel primarily focuses on the lives of Christian community in a metropolitan city like Karachi. The main protagonist Alice is a Catholic Christian, an only daughter of Joseph Bhatti. The narrative starts with the disposition in which she is struggling hard to secure a job at a hospital as junior nurse after an imprisonment of fourteen months from Borstal jail. The selected chapter is mainly dealt with the description of her experience with interview penal consisting high slot of hospital administration.

## Statement of the problem

The problem statement this papers looks into is the critical role of language employed in the narrative interplay with representation of religious minorities in a Re(public) and construction female gender in a male dominated society portrayed in the narrative of contemporary Pakistani literature. Though it has prime objective to uncover the ideological assumptions that are underneath in the written narratives about Pakistani society. The aim of this research is to find out socio-religious disparities against Christians as minority with the help of analysis of language in use. It would also highlight certain other social inequalities practiced in our scenario; a Pakistani perspective where Muslims are in a clean majority. Secondly this research would also touch upon the question of gender discrimination and construction of a woman’s identity as a weak social entity as portrayed in the novel. Thus the research would uncover the hidden agenda of the author which is to show, the process of Islamization is contributing towards oppression and harassment for the minorities especially in Zia era of Pakistan history.

## Methodical Framework

Fairclough’s analytical framework as a tool to conduct CDA at three levels involves in-depth analysis of the text. Firstly textual analysis requires an analysis of the text at linguistic front. It would encounter different linguistic tools to incorporate it such as ethos,

metaphor, lexicalization and grammar (Transitivity, Mood and modality, thematic structure, Ellipsis, Reiteration, Collocation, Substitution, Parallelism, Reference, and Conjunction). Secondly discursive practices which helps to understand the nature of the process of text production, interpretation and consumption in a particular context. It is done with the help of intertextuality both manifested and constituted. Finally, Fairclough CDA framework includes socio-cultural practices in order to understand the societal and organizational circumstances of the discursive event.



## ***GRAPICAL REPESENTATION OF FAIRCLOUGH'S ANALYTICAL MODEL***

This research employs the analytical devices selected from Fairclough's (2003) framework such as implication, negation, assumption, representation, comparison, presupposition, difference, and evaluation and will be defined side by side. The excerpt also follows the pattern of Labov's description of narratives while conducting CDA.

### **Theoretical Framework**

According to Labov *abstract* consists of the title of the narrative and a clause or two at the beginning of a narrative summarizing the story to come. The abstract announces that the narrator has a story to tell and makes a claim to the right to tell it that it will be a good story, worth the audience's time. The novel has a title "Our Lady of Alice Bhatti". The very first line of the chapter announces that the narrator has a story to tell about Alice Bhatti who is "Our Lady" paradoxically as we are not ready to own her. This makes the writer's claim to the right to tell that it would be an unusual story and would be pertinent to our times.

**Orientation** in a narrative introduces characters, temporal and physical setting and situation. Characters are introduced like the main protagonist Alice Bhatti, her father Joseph Bhatti, the interview panel like Sir Ortho, Dr. James Pereira, and Senior Sister Hina Alvi. The physical setting is that of a hospital and temporal setting is around Zia era in which process of Islamization is on the rise but we are not exactly told by author any timeframe. Place is that of Karachi and Alice Bhatti belong to a slump which is called French Colony. **Complicated action** clauses are narrative clauses that recapitulate a sequence of events leading up to their climax, the point of maximum suspense. Line190 to line200 holds climax in it where interview panel start bombarding questions over her furiously and she gets nervous instantly. **Evaluation** clauses are something unusual and interesting about the story, why audience should keep listening and allow the teller to keep talking. In the excerpt there are many evaluating clauses. Evaluation is of different forms in a narrative according to Labov such as intensifiers, correlatives, quantifiers, explicative, etc. Evaluation clauses are in the passage like in line54, 55, 86,117,179, 197, and 415. The **resolution** releases the tension and tells what finally happened. Line286 releases the tension when senior sister Hina Alvi declares; they need experienced girls in hospital. The teller may announce via a **coda** that the story is over. The last paragraph from line409 to 415 refers to coda (end of the story/chapter) in which it is referred that her interview is over now.

Line409 As she walks out of the room at the end of the interview,
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## Textual Analysis

Textual analysis of the text according to Fairclough's analytical model encompasses the detailed linguistic analysis of the text which involves the micro aspects of discourse practices. It involves linguistic analysis in terms of corpus, lexicalization, grammar (transitivity, theme, modality), semantic, the sound system and cohesion-organization above the sentence structure. Fairclough (1995b, p.57)

### I. Metaphor

Metaphor is a way of representing something in terms of something else (Baker and Ellece 2011). The identification and analysis of metaphors are often used in the description stage of CDA as a way of revealing ideologies. This chosen excerpt has many metaphorical implications. Line11 "**Muslims**" is a metaphor used for Muslims who consider themselves as emblem of cleanliness and other religions as untouchables. Similarly line260 "**peacocks**" are metaphors used for Muslims who walk proudly regardless of the fact that they too are living beings like other creatures. Line39, 57, 129, 135 "**Dubai and Toronto**" used metaphorical places; refer to places for prosperity and development and a home for all South Asian

(Pakistanis) immigrants. Line59 “**Sacred Heart Hospital**” is metaphor for the poor who die there due to negligence of corrupted doctors. Line286 “**work-experience girls**” is a metaphor used for nurses as a whore. Line141, “**Meecca**” is a metaphor of spiritually sacred place for Muslims where they go to perform their hajj.

The use of lexicatization in this chapter is of apartheid in nature against Christians. Ideologically heavily loaded vocabulary is used which reflects the socio-cultural and economic inequalities against minorities. As such;

(Line4-6) “A **sharp tingling** in the back of her neck **warns** her that **not getting** the job not even be the **worst** thing that could happen here”

(Line14-15) “These **Muslas** will make you **clean** their **shit** and then **complain** that you **stink**”

(Line252) “He is **too polite** to **point out** that not all **Christians** are **sweepers**. He also **fears** the **retort**: “But **all sweepers** are **Christian**”

There are a lot of sexual images which shows harassment at work places in our society and woman as a genital sexual entity which is suggestive and exploitative for any female to work in such physically insecure and sexually harassed environment. Here goes example of it.

(Line276) this hospital has been around for 107 years and its main purpose is to save lives, not **suck cocks** in VIP rooms.

(Line286) ‘Dears, we have to use **work-experience girls** sometimes. Otherwise how would we manage?’

(Line293) ‘**Postnatal care?**’ His eyes are level with Alice Bhatti’s **breasts**.

## II. Modality

Modality can be expressed via a set of verbs known as modal verbs. Modal verbs like “**May**” in line43, “**would**” in lines98, 287, “**can**” in lines86, 112, 114, 127, 154, 165, 188, 231, “**will**” in lines12, 14, 125, 259, 270, 273-79, “**might**” in lines157, 169, 296, 304, “**could**” in lines5, 257, **must** in line133 and **should** in lines149, 190, 268, 269, 271, 294. ‘Semi-modals’ such as “**want to**” in line35, “**meant to**” in line43, are used in lines. It shows power

inequality at large practiced in our society at all fronts. There is a life which is full of uncertainties especially referring to gender insecurities and harassment.

### III. Repetition

According to Winter (2001:46), reiteration is the repetition of certain lexical items used either for the confirmation of the discussed idea or because they relate to the same lexical set of the discussed topic. It can be carried out using the identical item in many sentences or implicitly using synonym, near-synonym or antonym of the original items. There are several examples of reiteration.

**Table 1: Examples from the Excerpt of Reiteration**

No	Reiteration	Type	No	Reiteration	Type
1	Warns, worst	Near-synonym	11	Battles, massacres	Synonymy
2	Deceased, death	Synonymy	12	Vulgar, contempt	Near-synonym
3	Shit, stink	Near-synonym	13	Miraculous, surprised	Synonym
4	Brazen, rude	Synonym	14	Jazz beat, drums	Near-synonym
5	Superiors, little gods	Near-synonym	15	Politeness, good manners	Synonym
6	Alien, foreign	Synonym	16	Silly, reckless	Synonym
7	Only, lonely	Synonym	17	Intimacy, acceptance	Near-synonym
8	Vacancy, candidate	Near-synonym	18	Swells up, anguish	Synonym
9	Hostage, riot	Near-synonym	19	Compensation, cure	Near-synonym
10	Hope, optimistic	Synonym	20	Slashing, pulling up	Synonym

There are examples of other sort of reiteration as well. Super-ordinate and hyponyms, the relationship between a general class and its sub-classes is described as hyponymy. The item referring to the general class is called super- ordinate: those referring to the sub-classes are known as its hyponym.



**Table 2: Examples from the Excerpt of Super-ordinate and Hyponyms**

No.	Super-ordinate (general-class)	Hyponyms (sub-classes)
1.	Money	Dirhams, Dollars
2.	This Planet (Earth)	Macca, China, Canada, Toronto, Dubai, Punjab,
3.	Religion	Christian, Muslas
4.	Hospital	Ambulance, Nurse, Patients, Orthopedic Unit, Maternity Ward, TB Ward, First-aid course, Pediatric management.

Repetition is there in the text like “**Dubai and Toronto**” are repeated thrice in the text, similarly words like “**professionalism**” “**sweepers**” “**wok-experience**” “**deceased**” “**prayers**” are also repeated time and again in the excerpt. Repetition in words suggests the repetition of the actions and orthodox mentality of the people.

## Discursive Analysis

The analysis will focus on the *intertextuality* aspects of the narrative. This analysis will also bring forth a range of manifested discourses embedded in it, such as historical, cultural, patriarchal, feminist, religious and racial discourses. Fairclough (1992, p. 84) defines intertextuality as, "basically the property texts have of being full of snatches of other texts, which may be explicitly demarcated or merged in, and which the text may assimilate, contradict, ironically echo, and so forth." Manifested Intertextuality refers to the heterogeneous constitution of texts by which “specific other texts are overtly drawn upon within a text.” This kind of intertextuality is marked by explicit signs such as quotation marks, indicating the presence of other texts. The excerpt has many manifested intertextual references. For example in line 132 “**Holy Mother**” refers to the mother of Jesus Marry. Similarly, inline 65, “**Catholic establishments**” refers to those institutions which were established by Christians during colonial rule. These include hospitals, schools and colleges. Line 87 refers to “**bible**” which is the holy Book of Christians. Line 249 mentions another



example of manifested intertextuality of **FRCS degree** which is abbreviation for Fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons (FRCS). It is a professional qualification to practice as a surgeon in the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland.

There are a lot of advertisements mentioned in the text which makes this passage loaded with commercial discourse. It also shows that people are very professionally oriented rather than preserving values and norms. A doctor's room is an emblem of showcasing top brands all in all instead of being true to their profession and serving mankind.

(Line21) the room is a **monument** to **pharmaceutical merchandising**: the orange wall clock from **GlaxoSmithKline**, the calendar with blonde models in various stages of migraine from **Pfizer Pain Management Systems**, the box of pink tissues promising Dry Days, Dry Nights. (Line55) Put Your Faith in **Philips**, (Line 272)**Gillette razor**

These reflections of commercialism of society suggest that superfluous nature of social values and religious ethos where these values are lost and exist for namesake solely. Here goes one of its examples;

Line 11 '**wasted investment**' halal money down the haram drain,  
Line32 the interview panel is too busy debating the **cost-benefit ration** for patients on pacemakers

The narrative reflects racial discourse in its disposition against minorities. The excerpt is full of questions and uncertainties which reflect racism embedded in Pakistani society. Muslims are biased against other religious followers; they themselves distinguish each other on the basis of caste and creed.

(Line18-20)***Have** you cleaned the floor, Alice? Why have you not cleaned the floor?*

***Who** do you think will clean that blood on the floor, Alice? Your father?*

(Line109) '**How** many candidates have we got?'

(Line121) 'Then **why** do we have to go through this?'

(line164) 'So **are** you Alice or are you bhatti?'

(Line)**Why** should anybody have a problem hiring a nurse who happens to be catholic?

(Line190)**Why** should we give you this job?

(Line231-233)**What** was she doing in the ambulance? Why was her face covered in ice cubes? **Why** was the ambulance rushing away from the hospital?

(Line236) **Did** you say you worked in Accidents?  
(Line238-39) **Didn't** we have a little accident there? **How** I could forget?  
(Line294-95) **How** do you deal with them? **Should** you deal with them?  
(Line) '**Is** your mother dead yet?'

There is an interview panel which sounds biased and they lay great emphasis on the caste, color, and creed of a particular person before preceding the final interview.

(Line173) now **Bhatti** is a respectable clan from Punjab.....  
(Line188) **Bhattis** are pretty much everywhere, in every religion,

Although, it has nothing to do with the nature of the job and it is not ethically and constitutionally allowed to distinguish one another on the basis of any clan or creed. It makes this discourse racial in its essence.

The passage has a lot of religious connotations. For example, Halal, haram, sacred, verse from Quran exhorting the virtues of cleanliness, kafir fantasy, grey diamond-shaped mark on his forehead is a testament to his five-times-a-day prayer routine, church, catholic, muslas, Christians, faith, holy mother, family bible, little gods, Mecca, Lord Yassoo and Hadith.

## Implications of Socio-religious and gendered discourse in the Re(public)

Socio-religious analysis of the text refers to the interpretation and description of the text. For Fairclough (1995b, p. 62), analysis in this dimension pertains to three aspects of the socio-cultural context of a communicative event: religious autocracy and gender discrimination. The social and cultural practices of phallocentrism, patriarchy, gender inequality and social biases against women might have given rise to the communicative event in this narrative.

The quest for identity of the women remains a question even after 65 years of independence of Pakistan. The question of the identity of Pakistan as an Islamic state or liberal republic is not yet concluded. This also is a reason for providing a confused identity to the women of Pakistan who are natural inhabitants and legal citizens of the state of Pakistan. Women who make 57 % population of the Pakistan have no true cultural identity. The question of being Islamic or liberal state hood is unsolved in the matter of naming and identity of Pakistan as a nation and woman as an individual.

The clash between Islamization and liberal modernity is the stumbling block in the way of declaring identity for the mother land, and for the mothers of the land where the phallocentric

man is dwindling between Islamic Shariat and western ideas of modernity. If the Islamic law is accepted, the liberty which the women of an Islamic state are provided with, and the respect with which Islam attends to women is tremendously great. The custodians of Islamic Shariat do not want to give the stature set by Islam to the women, because it would result in hindrances in their personal interests. The men of the phallogocentric society are reluctant to accept woman as an independent individual to rival them in all walks of life.

Gender inequality is very important aspect of the text. A woman in Pakistani society is deprived of her basic rights. Alice Bhatti is an epitomizer of such lower class Pakistani woman who is socially, economically and religiously deprived. She belongs to a slum. She has also been imprisoned for fourteen months in **Borstal jail** because she strongly resisted a sexual harassment on her work place. Moreover it is told that she is well aware of the hospital environment in which it is considered nurses as whores. Furthermore she also used to keep a “Gillette razor” in her uniform pocket to cope with bitter situations like this. It also shows that being sexually harassed at work place is a routine work. She is economically weak as she is struggling hard to get a job as a junior nurse despite the fact that exploitation is on the rise. It is also a great turmoil that despite having laws for women harassment bills passed by our parliament, there is no implementation of these laws. It is more pathetic to learn that Alice’s mother, who worked as a maid, was raped and killed with impunity by one of her employers.

Poignant situation of the metropolitan city like Karachi even hospital is not secure for anyone where it is mentioned at the gate “*enter at your own peril*”. There is also mentioning of police and Borstal jail in terms of fear and anguish. Even the protagonist too is a criminal. It shows that criminal life style is part of their routine work. Nobody bothers about it especially those who are in power. Even the police also seem like culprits in its own because police system is not there to ensure law and order situation rather it is a sign of intimidation.

Line 414 ‘there is a <b>police van</b> outside. I hope they are not here for you’
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Corruption and hypocrisy is all pervasive in the text that reflects in characters’ practices as well as in actions. The characters off and on refer to other places like “**Dubai and Toronto**” and currencies such as “**Dollars and Dirhams**” as sign of their bright future. It represents hypocrisy which is deeply penetrated into Pakistani society. Here people prefer to go to other countries and serve them instead of working honestly for their own. It seems that they have no respect for their soil. Inefficient infra-structure and poor administration of hospital refers to corruption all in all. Similarly recruitment is done by not adopting a reliable process also shows that there is not any transparency and meritocracy in our systems.

Process of Islamization is contributing its own large measure of madness and oppression in a society already deformed by corruption and religious strife. There is no religious plurality in the society. People have no patience for other religions.

Line285 'a crowd that is headed for pre-planned lynching.'
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Christian as minority is suffering in Pakistan in which it was promised that minorities will enjoy equal rights because the state has nothing to do with religion. The state will be responsible for their welfare but the situation is averse to it. Christian as minorities are suffering and none cares about their rights at all. Slumps have been denoted to them. They are only considered for petty jobs. They are used by the Muslim to clean their shit. On the other hand Muslim administrations at a Catholic Christian Hospital that Christians' institutions have been sabotaged by Muslims. There is a whole process of nationalization in which Muslims took all the educational institutes and hospitals from Christians in order to establish their monopoly. Strong religious biasedness is evident against other religions. Low cadre jobs are given to them. Joseph bhatti who 'excels in pinpointing tough-to-find sewer blockages' satirically portrayed in the text. They hail to a Christian slump called "French Colony" which is often the target of violence. This is colony for the homes of untouchables.

## Conclusion

Thus critical discourse analysis by Fairclough is used to conduct qualitative research that aims to highlight the gender disparity and religious discrimination at the hands of Muslim majority state which is deeply embedded into their day to day practices and state level policies. This paper also explores the dynamics of the writer's perspective of unveiling the hidden agenda of the state and its people alike with the help of language in use in the perspective of religious minorities, gender discrimination and inactive policies and practices that encourage a tyrannical and suppressive outcome and discourage equality, religious freedom and provision of essential human rights. 'Our Lady of Alice Bhatti' is the epitome of such marginalized cohort representing the repressed segments of an Islamist re(public)

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