



## JOKES, JUDGEMENT AND GENDER: A FEMINIST STYLISTICS STUDY OF OUR LADY OF ALICE BHATTI

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### **Abstract**

*This paper discusses *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* (2011) by Muhammad Hanif in view of Feminist Stylistics, especially stylistic device of Jokes and Humour as elaborated by Sara Mills (1995). Being a dark comedy and a satire, the novel provides a critical analysis of the gender power structure existing in the socio-religious and institutional system of Pakistan. With the help of the qualitative research method and the reliance on the textual analysis, this paper explores the role of humour, which at least on the surface may appear as a playful element, yet still serves as a subversive stylistic tool that reveals the oppressive nature of life as it is experienced by women, specifically, by Alice Bhatti, the marginalised Christian nurse with whom the reader is made to sympathise. In its reconstruction of the main passages of the novel, the paper unveils how Hanif partially intends to use the irony, satire, and black humour as a strategically inherited and carried vehicle to criticize the patriarchal and institutional violence, as well as echo on the resilience and resistance of the female subjectivity in a highly stratified society. In the feminist stylistic studies, the study is able to offer a contribution through deepening the discussion on how linguistic choices in literature, in particular, the aspects of humour can adopt and challenge gender ideologies in postcolonial contexts.*

**Keywords** *Muhammad Hanif Our Lady of Alice Bhatti Feminist Stylistics Sara Mills Humour Gender Textual Analysis Pakistani Literature.*

### **1. Introduction**

*Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* (2011) written by Muhammad Hanif is one such strong literary text composed with satire, black humour, and socio-political commentary to bring out the screams of the people who are excluded in Pakistan. The novel takes place in the fictional Sacred Heart Hospital that treats all ailments based in Karachi, which Alice Bhatti, a Christian nurse, struggles to find her way as this society is full of religious discrimination, gender inequality and institutional corruption. Although the story is filled with comic notes, its underlying tones reveal the large-scale violence and oppression that women, especially religious minority ones, have to endure. The stylistics and the satirical coloring of the novel make it an interesting one to focus on feminist and linguistic analysis.

In this paper we will consider *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* (2011) as the example of applying Feminist Stylistics (Mills 1995) developed by Sara Mills to the stylistic tool of jokes and humour. While Mills makes the argument that language is one of the areas where ideology is contested, she then



goes on to state that the use of style (or in her case the use of humour) can be used by the user to solidify and or destabilise the dominant gender ideologies, whether that be on purpose or absent-mindedly. In this context, humour cannot be discussed as simply one of the means of a good life as it is a powerful tool of language that can disclose the power structures, normalize the gendered violence, or challenge the patriarchal standards. The manipulative application of humour in *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* (2011) by Hanif can be seen as a revolutionary weapon which criticises the moral and strict recursion of power, religion and gender.

This paper takes an inductive qualitative research approach to examine the text through textual analysis to determine how Hanif uses humour in the story to portray feminist resistance. Based on the study of the excerpt selection, it is possible to explain that the elements apparently comic or even absurd episodes are highly charged with incisive socio-political criticism. The jokes and ironical exchanges are not merely against inefficiencies of the healthcare system or against the hypocrisy of religion, but also against the daily harassment, monitoring and controlling of the body and the choice of women. Alice Bhatti, despite being represented as a deadpan psychopath, turns out to be a subversive figure of her time, who goes against the grain of femininity, obedience, and compliance to the religion, which is expected of Bhatti.

This paper contributes a new angle to the feminist literary studies of Pakistani fiction by looking at the concepts of humour as an ideological and stylistic in 2 areas. Although *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* (2011) has already attracted a number of scholarly discussions focusing on religion, gender, and classes, the role of humour as a tool of feminist discourse remains little explored in the text. The following paper will attempt to address that gap by showing that, on the contrary, Hanif was a humorous writer whose humour is saturated with a politics of resistance that disrupts patriarchal discourses. The results of this study emphasize the significance of stylistic decisions as a condition of what a reader knows about gendered experience and demand an investigation of the question of how humour can act as a feminist means in postcolonial literary background.

### **1.1 Research Questions**

1. What do you find about the use of jokes and humour by Muhammad Hanif in *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* (2011) about understanding gender roles and patriarchal set up within Pakistani community?
2. How do the stylistic devices of humor in *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* (2011) express feminism in the literary portrayal of the hero and her rebelling?

### **1.2 Research Objectives**

1. In order to examine the role of jokes and humour is Uses/Functions of Jokes and Humour in *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* (2011) as a stylistic strategy that subverts traditional theories of gender.
2. To discuss the method of using humour to create feminist resistance and reveal the social injustice towards women in terms of postcolonial Pakistan.

### **1.3 Significance of the Study**

The works are important to the discard of feminist literary criticism, stylistics, and postcolonial literature. Using the pattern of joke and humour part of the Feminist Stylistics by Sara Mills the research seeks to bring out the point that the linguistic decisions do not only have aesthetic roles to play but also ideological roles. *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* (2011) by Muhammad Hanif presents a good ground to carry out such an analysis as the novel, using satire, criticizes the socio-religious



and patriarchal standards existing in the Pakistani society. The study will help build the knowledge of how humour could come to serve as a serious form of feminist resistance where marginalized voices notably women within the minority groups could rise up and resist the oppression in very modest but strong ways. Moreover, the study contributes to the scholarly discussion of the South Asian literature through studying the mediating role of the stylistics resources in works of fiction in relation to the overall cultural issues of gender, power, and resistance.

#### **1.4 Delimitation of the Study**

This paper is focused and sums up to the analysis of jokes and humour as a stylistic device in *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* (2011) by Muhammad Hanif. The other stylistic features mentioned by Sara Mills like Lexical choice, fragmentation and transitivity are left out in this analysis. Also, the research only dwells on a single novel and does not apply the analysis to the rest of the books by Hanif or any other of his contemporaries in the South Asian literature. The study is also restricted in its stylistic analysis of a feminist character and that it does not employ other critical cultures like the postcolonialist or psychoanalysis, though they can be applicable. The objective will be to continue a concise and profound analysis of the manner in which humour, specifically, is a feminist tool in the text.

### **2. Literature Review**

In her *Feminist Stylistics* (written in 1995), Sara Mills establishes the thesis that language is not neutral, and the style frequently supports or opposes the ideology of patriarchy. She presents the devices of lexical choice, naming, fragmentation, jokes and humour to explore textual representation of women and gender relations. Mills asserts that specifically humour may be not always harmless and may indicate the assumptions which are made in society in regard to the role of women in the society and may also discriminate and alter the view on women by joking about them or stereotyping them. But she says that humour may also be subverted in order to go against these norms. This theoretical approach will form the basis of the discussion on how *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* (2011) by Muhammad Hanif makes use of jokes and humour in order to satirize social hierarchies and reveal gendered oppression.

Researchers such as Ranu Samantrai, (2002) and Julie Cairnie, (2011), have been able to investigate the relation between satire and humour as instruments of resistance by postcolonial writers against oppressive political and cultural regimes. Humour as a postcolonial text has been proven to serve the purpose of challenging trauma, authority, and regaining empowerment. The Indian literature has seen more of humour not only in its recreational aspects but also in its radical sympathies these days. In his *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* (2011), Muhammad Hanif does the same and uses a dark humour in exerting the story to point out the political critique of gender, religions, and power institutions. The studies give us a wider picture on how humour in literature can work as coping ground as well as rebellion ground in postcolonial writings.

Various researchers have discussed the topics of gender and marginality in *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* (2011). Saeed (2018) claims that the novel reveals the problem of intersectionality of gender, religion, and social status based on the character of a Christian woman, Alice, who is a victim of various discrimination issues. Likewise, Khan and Arshad (2021) underline the institutional violence toward Alice in both the social and intimate context, such as work, marriage, and religious group. Although such analyses point to the socio-political commentary within the novel, they tend to concentrate on the mechanisms of the said commentary delivery, especially



humour. Such a gap justifies the necessity of a stylistic study of jokes and humour as feminist subversive tools.

Stylistic modes of feminist literary criticism have become fashionable especially in South Asians when it comes to literary studies. Other researchers have used feminist stylistics on Urdu and English fiction to explore the constructs of narrative voice, naming and humour Hillary makes on gender identities (Ali and Shah, 2020). These analyses give us an insight on how stylistics does not only improve interpretation of texts but gives a better insight on how language creates social realities. Nevertheless, not many articles have been devoted to the humour as the stylistic attribute of the feminist perspective in Pakistani English fiction in particular. This paper aims to bring a new angle of research into feminist stylistics in the region by focussing on this understudied aspect of *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* (2011).

### 3. Methodology

The study is qualitative in nature and a textual analysis remains the main instrument of analyzing the linguistic and stylistic peculiarities of the novel *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* (2011) by Muhammad Hanif. Qualitative researches especially make this field of study to literary researches because it is able to have an in-depth and interpretation approach to derive meaning, ideologies, and discourses in a literary text. This paper seeks to investigate the nature of jokes and humour as form of feminist resistance usually ignored or misunderstood to serve a comic relief purpose in the story.

#### 3.1 Data Collection Instruments

Close reading of the primary text, *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* (2011), is used as the primary instrument of collecting the data. Some of the key passages were identified and then selected on the basis of the application of jokes, irony, satire, or some other kind of humour contributing to the gender roles representation, to the issue of power relations, and to resistance. These picked out fragments were then put under the prism of feminist stylistics. Other secondary sources, namely academic articles, critical essays and theoretical texts, were also used to aid interpretation and give a conservative academic background.

#### 3.2 Sample

The articles to be examined in this research sample are taken as a select combination of passages in *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* (2011), which are prominent in terms of humour, irony, or satire, in particular, applied to the female protagonist, Alice Bhatti. These consist of splendid dialogues, descriptive texts and exchanges between characters that reproduce or contest gendered power relations. It is also purposive and thematic with reference to only those cases that fall into the line of study goals, as well as theoretical focus on feministic stylistics.

#### 3.3 Theoretical Framework

It is based on the work of Sara Mills in *Feminist Stylistics* (1995), and takes a closer look to the stylistic category of jokes and humour. Mills says that even stylistic aspects like humour may not be neutral, they are typically ideologically sensitive. Humour, in patriarchal literature, may be employed to further alienate women, or enforce stereotypes, but in feminist/subversive literature, humour can as well be the one used to resist mainstream ideology, and attempt alternative interpretations of the female identity and women in power. This structure will enable the research to explore how the stylistic choices of Muhammad Hanif are used to fulfill a feminist agenda of questioning patriarchal values through a witty approach, satire and irony. The framework also has



its mechanisms of explaining the ways in which references to linguistic structures create a perceptual response in the reader about gendered experiences in the text.

#### **4 Jokes and Humour**

Jokes and humor may be presented as a form said or an action taken in an attempt to make someone amused, criticized, discriminated against and to place him below or a weak person in a given narrative pattern. Since it is an ordinary belief in our society that females are called as chatterers and ignorant beings without insight; women as life partners are presented as oppressing and frightening doctrines and the presentation of women is shown in advancing the stereotypes that are propagated by the patriarchy discourse. Men have no definite jokes when they are depicted by the women in our own society by means of abusive jokes and delivery.

The risk of use and the force of jokes and humor is the significant aspect of language usage analyzed to articulate power conditions or support gender roles as suggested by Sara Mills in her theory of Feminist Stylistics (1995). Humor is a way of articulating the attitude and the power groups which that established in the society especially in literature. Humor and an example of jokes may be regarded in terms of female stylistics as a very insidious manner of continuing the treatment of females or criticizing this treatment.

The inclusion of the role of jokes and humor by the researcher would allow comprehension not only of the tone of the story but also of the implicit feelings towards gender and how language shapes and expresses social rules. The examination of these excerpts of humor that are present in the novel allows the researcher to examine whether jokes in this case are supportive of patriarchal values or present an analysis of gender inequality which is the most important aspect regarding the issue of feminism and gender roles in the novel.

Jokes, therefore, appear to be a method of justification of sexist opinions in society without giving a chance of putting a challenge to them, women. Comediennes like Jo Brand have, in the past few years started to come up with very cynical gags concerning the treatment of women, but these female comics are still few and figures on the jokes where women act as the object of ridicule remain in excess (Mills, 1995, p.108).

This is quite easy. Alice Bhatti understands the reply. She has practised it before the mirror. Now, however, she wants water. Her throat goes dry with every beat. Out of her mouth there is a weird croak, her voice startles her and that is a voice of a baby frog eagerly giving out his complaints that he is too small in the world". The solution offered in this case is the perceived solutions which are the solutions that are perceived by the individuals who are poor (Hanif, 2011, p.06).

In the above text, the female protagonist Alice has been presented with the following question why we should assign you this job. He has created a character of female protagonist as a weaker and lower creature through the text because the writer says that she has practised in front of the mirror and this shows that females are not much smart and they lack in confidence as compared to the males of our society.

They cannot be empowered to deal with situations in name of critical situation and they are made powerless by male who can and the image of female in our stereotypical society is inferior to that of male. The author has been highly sexist in the use of language as far as women are concerned in relation to men in the text.





The words such as one rehearsed before a mirror, cursed throat, a strange crock and baby frog voiced comes under the category of jokes and humor and is a form of negative language applied to a female in the eastern society.

The author also said that female is not as quick witted to deal with an unpleasant situation as well as seeing an ordinary thing when being asked something ordinary compared to male and becomes awed in an awkward spot which is a sort of demeaning the feminine gender in the patriarchal society.

The phrase notices and lizard has four feet is of the type of joke and humour. The writer mentions that the character sees the lizard has four feet, which to her is the first time in her life. (Hanif, 2011, p.07)

The author has made the same light joke about the female main character Alice Bhatti and says that women in vital cases disintegrate and lose consciousness. The author has drawn a comparison of her with a pedestrian, a man who shuts his eyes when remaining in the middle of fast lane and believes that he will go on doing so he will land himself safely on the other side. The resemblance with pedestrian is a form of discriminative language that puts them under the feet of the male dominated stereotypical society. Use of words such as forgotten, caught, pedestrian and close their eyes brings out a negative depiction of female using jokes and humor in the eastern society.

I am qualified... that is her realization that she failed to recall the rest of her statement. She makes to herself the decision to continue running, as a pedestrian in the middle of a fast lane whereby out of desperation decides that when she closes her eyes and dashes towards the other side, then she will be on the safety side of the road” (Hanif, 2011, p.07)

The female protagonist is shown as a stupid creature because people commonly think in our stereotyped society that female are without any brains in their head and empty inside whereas male are with brains and strong understanding in any discipline of life. Females in our society are expected to be too talkative and brainless in certain critical moments. The general assumption that we all have is that female is making and taking decisions in crucial moments based on emotional not rational judgement. Upon being asked a question of why they would entrust such type of job as junior nurse replacement to her, Alice Bhatti gets nervous and responds with a note of qualification and broken the remaining part of the answer.

What is touched upon in the passage of the novel is quite a serious statement regarding gender obligations and the social standing in the patriarchal society. With the rhetorical question asked by Ortho Sir to Dr. Pereira Sahib the problematic quality of the society to place a premium upon a role and qualification, particularly in the case of gender, and class and power aspect instead of merit as the sole premise is pointedly raised.

The Feminist Stylistics (1995) analyzing the exchange would reveal how humor can be used to create focus on gender inequality. This joke is not a simple remark made just to sound harmless but a thought-provoking comment on a system where the role of women is frequently undermined or delegated to positions that are viewed as less valuable although the women may be qualified or capable to do more. It is the example of how comedy and gender roles play together in the novel, focusing on the inequality in the treatment of men and women in both professional and social sphere.

Word choice in the passage above gives the female main character a bad image and brings to fore the fact that all the Christians are inferior people and they cannot be offered any position since



they are not in a state of reaching great heights but instead they are commoners just like those who went before them. The word Christian, and Sweepers falls under the category of joke and humour and is an abuser of the female gender in the so called Islamic society.

Dr. Pereira, a third-Would-be physician shakes his head, but not in denial but despair. It would be too polite to remind that not all Christians are sweepers, but he is afraid to hear in response: "But all sweepers are Christians". (Hanif, 2011, p.08). The term sweeper in the extract is very important in bringing out the issue of classes and gender in the milieu of the discussion. With a reference to the concept of sweeper, Ortho Sir emphasizes how demeaning and subordinate is the role traditionally linked to the job consisting of low-status and manual labor. One can see that, when this word is applied in the framework of a rhetorical question, it demonstrates that the structure of the society influences it by creating some gender and status based expectations. In the opinion of a Feminist Stylistics (1995)) point of view, such use of words could be considered an attack on the gendered perception women receive in a working environment. Although the phrase asked by Ortho Sir is about himself, the word sweeper gives a picture of an inferior, unskilled work, which is normally assigned to females, especially homemakers.

Hence the sweeper as an epithet is not only made as a joke but a criticism on how the two classes class, gender and profession are dealt with in real life. What is humorous here is that these social divisions are captured and serve indirectly to criticize the gendered roles that women tend to play in and outside of the home.

It is a general myth in our stereotypical society, that all the Christians are sweepers and are still in the zoo of the most civilized classes of our society. Since we are familiar with the fact the main character of the book Alice Bhatti is the daughter of a Christian called Joseph Bhatti choora, it is also a some form of a joke on her as she too is the one of the same community.

The novelist focuses our attention on another joke, that is on the elder sister Hina Alvi, her native name is Henna, a Christian, but has been given a Muslim name Hina so that no one can exploit her. The author says, Sister Hina Alvi is being called in the novel, the queen of the sacred Heart hospitals, the so called Charya ward. Even in the above excerpt, Inspector Malangi said to Teddy Butt after this change in this shift at midnight you will have to handle Auntie Hina Alvi who is more principles than I have public hair which is a very abusive joke and included very derogatory wordings.

Then there is Auntie Hina Alvi and believe me that lady has principles more than I have body hair. She is likely to have a cock as well. She frightens me now that woman." Teddy Butt does not know whether he should be laughing or not so he coughs pretending to clear his throat." (Hanif, 2011, p.13).

The male dominant community seems to be of the thought that their male counterpart members can have rules and principals whilst the female ones will have to abide by everything as is set out to them by male.

The other thing is that, in our society the woman has been given the image of a talkative and frightening creature by the male. According to Inspector Malangi she says trust me she even has a cock and that sister Hina Alvi feels that she is a man and feels that she does not even need a man to support her.

Even the word Auntie itself is a form of making jokes and is abusive to a female and to them we also think in a negative way like in our society anything who are females whether it is a teenage



girl or a young lady who have big breasts and have a round belly fall into the bracket of Auntie and we do not have such words to use male in the same negative level as we use females. The words in the excerpt provided above are extremely abusive and treat the female gender in a very bad manner in the stereotypical male dominant society.

The citizens here take it to be a courageous act when somebody does something wrong and is thrown to jail and as they are brought out of jail on bail; their supporters drop flowers upon them and they never viewed them as the evil personalities but commend them before other people. However, when a woman ends up in jail this could be in misunderstanding the male dominant layers of our society begin to fix own accusations and charges to that female character and then regard her more than a prostitute and after that women are lacking respect and character. It is thus obvious that the term jailbird is a form of joke on female protagonist, which degrades the image of women in our society and the negative aspect of women in our jokes and humour.

Has your convict put on the job?' Malick yells at Noor, unable to contain the yawn. Noor yells, I have it. A temporary one. You never heard it through me. And don't forget my pal Teddy. He cut himself once more." This had led to the formation of a different kind of friendship that Hanif describes as; A different kind of friendship (Hanif, 2011, p.27)

The above passage continues grabbing our attention by focusing on another joke which is a label provided to the main character Alice Bhatti as a jailbird. Since we are aware that she stayed in Borstal Jail of women and Children. It is a general attitude in our society that jails are male institutions not female. It has a joke about the female character on Hina Alvi that she feels that I am the one who can do everything by myself.

The second segment of the above passage is a sort of another joke on women because it is considered that women are too talkative and women can talk, talk, talk one thing only in their life. Noor says that she can manage this country better than Bhuttos since she can close her mouth when to do so and this ability makes her smarter than anyone. The words used in the passage given above are very abusive to women and depict them negatively in the stereotypical male dominant society. "Sister Hina Alvi thinks she can run this country better than the Bhuttos. And who knows, she probably can. At least she knows when to keep her mouth shut. (Hanif, 2011, p.41)

The aforementioned excerpt draws our attention to another joke on the female character Sister Hina Alvi. In Our Society, women are addressed as talkative and uninformed creatures, without insight; having nothing in their mind but only the foolish thoughts. In our society it is believed that only men have the power and techniques how to run a country and how to make it more and more strong while the women are only supposed to produce their offspring's and to take care of their households.

The writer has criticized the female protagonist for the thing that she is considering her handcuffs as glass bangles which highlights that women do not have anything to do with what is happening around but there looks are very much important for them and the only thing that matter for them is to look better and fashionable. It also portrays women as too much talkative and hollow minded as she is the court and is talking to herself about the personality of judge no matter what is the purpose of her to be there at the session court. The aforementioned passage portrays female in a negative way and highlights their mental position as weak and inferior.





“When Joseph Bhatti sees Alice at her bail hearing in the session court, he recognizes something of himself in her. Alice Bhatti wears her handcuffs with ease, as though they were delicate glass bangles. (Hanif, 2011, p.47)

The author has depicted women as gossipers, empty headed and desire fashion since our stereotypical society has developed an idea that women do not think beyond their appearance and are completely uninvolved with what is happening around them. Because we know that she has dedicated her entire life towards improvement of our nation. The piece of language spinster puts a light on discriminative language applied to females of our society that belongs to the type of joke and humour. The second point is that sister Hina Alvi states that Fatima was a dentist; we referred to her as the mother of the nation, therefore, we refer to the mother of the nation rather than sister of the nation is such a joke on the females.

Since we are aware, the work of a nurse is regarded as a bad profession in our male dominated society, therefore, because of referring to her as being a sister of the nation, the people will think of her as the nurse, which is not good to her. The joke and humour are indicated in the term, nurse and sister of the nation, which directs towards the women in the stereotyped Pakistan society.

Have you heard that Fatima was a qualified dentist? However, she sacrificed her whole life to this country. and how dost thou remember her? She is an old maid. One person gives his entire life, how do you call that person? The mother of the country. Also, on page 54 of the same book, the author describes the difference opposed to equality, formulated in saying; equality is opposed to difference! Like saying there are two different kinds of apples! (Hanif, 2011, p.54/55).

The term spinster in the novel is in a very sarcastic case that reflects the patriarchy prejudice against women who do not conform to the norm of a woman, like getting married. Fatima Jinnah, in spite of her enormous contribution as a dentist and a political figurehead is diminished to this derogatory term which can be said as a projection of the prevailing trend in the society of undervaluing the women who do not subscribe to the stereotypical role of wives and mothers. The term the word spinster is usually used to mean an incomplete female version, but in context of Fatima Jinnah, the term cannot refer to the fact that she was independent or smart and well-educated woman who made a sacrifice to her country.

Moreover, this image underlines the fact that there exist double standards in society when speaking about functions of men and women. When a man remains unmarried people may ignore it or even look at it with favor but when a woman remains unmarried who is more so an older woman she will be stigmatized and pathologized. Applying this word to such a national symbol as Fatima Jinnah, the author does not only criticize the conventional view of female gender, but also shows how Bangladesh women as a part of their culture are not considered through their own successes or accomplishments but their connections to men (as wives or daughters).

The term ‘spinster’ as suggested by Fatima Jinnah in this context is more of a social remark on the devaluation of women in case they do not follow the ideal of patriarchy, especially in a society where the effort of women has been generally ignored or just being referred to a widow or otherwise. This word turns into an instrument of social suppression and gender inequality, and by pointing out in the novel, the author emphasizes the endurance of gendered stereotypes and disempowerment of women both in the society and at home. The author has used a form of pejorative words when she says that it seems as though the health of the nation is resting on the proper number of the syringes that depicts the women of our society are allowing themselves to



be entertained in time consuming activities other than engaging in something beneficial. These are the lines that bring out joke and humour on the female layers of our society which is not acceptable. Alice smiles at him a moment. There is a bandage on your thumb, I think you would like to change. I hope you did not stab it in a dream.' Then she turns and turns back to counting her syringes. This is done with such calculated intent that one gets the impression that it is a matter of national health whether this count is accurate or not (Hanif, 2011, p.63).

The author has judged the female lead and embarrassed her because of her preoccupation on the counting of syringes attentively. We have the belief in our society that when a woman is concentrating and paying attention to her piece of work, the male members in the society consider such an act as being so much acted or egotistical and that a man can do the given job more spontaneously with less work to do.

Women are also depicted as wayward or not being able to do several things at the same time, which shows a severe gender stereotype that we see that women are in some way inferior to or less able to multi task than men. This stereotype has taken many forms over history to deny women their competence and intelligence even in their home and at the work place. When applied to the context of the novel, it turns into an insidious method of humiliation that condenses to the same systematic sexism, in which the capacity of a woman is marginalized or denounced.

The second is that the author indicates that women are never tired of going off to divert, and this implies that they are over talkative and they start talking about everything that is indirectly relevant to the original topic of discussion that is why they are good in nursing and politics but not a good chefs and truck drivers. It is a form of a joke and demeans the position of a woman in the male dominated stereotypical society.

Teddy takes the decision to tell Alice Bhatti everything but first he must have her full attention. According to what Teddy sees, women happen to be distracted, are trying to do several different things at the same time and like to digress. He thinks this renders them decent nurses and politicians, but not good chefs and truck drivers. (Hanif, 2011, 67).

Another joke on the female seems to appear when Teddy butt reveals that he is going to tell Alice everything but he must first have her full attention. It entails that women are seekers after attention. They relate nothing to love but require money and material gains. It is still another joke about women which shows that women will lie when you asked them about their true age and the writer gives the idea that women are too much conscious to tell their actual age to anybody and they would not reject your face before they tell the truth about their age. It is a sort of a derogatory and discriminative language which speaks against the female echelons of our society and falls into the category of joke and humour.

He has not been lover of women, but costumer at times, even tormentor. According to him being a lover comes between paying them and beating them up. On two occasions he has been at the verge of confessing love. He once tipped a prostitute with fifty rupees and she was about twenty-two years old, but she was saying that she is 14 years old" (Hanif, 2011, p.65).

The author has depicted the woman as a source of entertainment to the male in our society. The author has shifted character of women in a bad light by making fun of them. People in our society believe that all women are money-minded and they are golden diggers. The author directs our interest to the episode in which Teddy Butt goes to meet a Bangladeshi call girl to get a sexual pleasure and all he did was just play with her hair because she was of thirty two years of age and



when he comes out of her room after a minor police confrontation, he walks out by adjusting his fly and using a very humiliating and sort of an abusive word to the female sex it was like fucking an oil spill meaning that he has had a very tireless experience with that call girl and it is like fucking an oil spill. The author has employed the mean and cheap words against the females and falls in the bold type of joke and makes us aware of the extremely offensive and disrespectful language used against the females in the male dominated society we are living.

In another instance he simply feigned that he was going to share a thirty-two year old Bangladeshi detainee when an unknown group of police officers had bailed out of the room. He simply sat with her and toyed with her hair and she cried and swore in Bengali. The word, which he could know, was the word ALLAH. He had come out straightening the fly, playing dead and satisfied, even cracking a joke with the policemen: it was like fucking an oil slick.” (Hanif, 2011, p.65)

In the above extract of the novel what we encounter is another joke on female which depict them in low picture in front of the male echelons of our society and fall in the category of discriminative language used about women. In this case these are very paltry words the author has applied to the lead female character and she had jested with her most intimate body parts and likened it with milk jugs which is quite improper in the macho society. It can be observed in our society that it is a typical opinion about male that when they converse to female they will stare at their private body parts such as chest and boobs and when the female has flat chest, they will label her as a boy and when a female has big and round boobs, then they will be called milk jugs or many other words. No such language is found applied to men as it is applied to women. The phrase milk jugs falls at the level of joke and humour.

The writer has disparaged the female protagonist Alice Bhatti in the novel and has used very cheap language to outline her before the readers. When Teddy but is on the point of revealing his admiration of Alice, he says that what do tha think that when I think about thee. By saying that women are the ones to always ask questions about things that are not important and are not necessary the writer has criticized the female levels of our society. It depicts women to be mindless and talkative individuals which fall under the category of joke and humour.

Sister Hina Alvi shakes her head in frustration and tells Alice Bhatti that she is that stupid little girl who always wants to know why, why, why in the case that the earth is round then the people on the other side should fall into the space (Hanif, 2011, p.77).

The author has also passed judgments on the woman protagonist by creating a female character Hina Alvi. The author has presented the female lead as useless brainless beings of some intelligence without a single thought in her head hence, she just poses questions that do not make sense.

It is considered in our society that women are very easy to mislead cajole by putting on few drops of flattery or compliment in their name. Here the author has described their love as blind and deaf and adds that women are not supposed to do anything with the dignity and honor but what they are most concerned about is compliments. This is why Alice is holding on to the finger of teddy and walking with her eyes closed since women could easily be deceived with the weapon of flattery and admissions.

Noor watches the scene where Alice and Teddy are walking toward the Sacred hand in hand and begins to imagine that love is undoubtedly blind but also deaf and dumb and most likely afflicted with an advanced form of Alzheimer; unhinged. See them walking hand in hand, saying something



to each and smiling as they come out of the hospital as though they have left this world of pain behind forever. Alice is making out that she has lost her eyes, and she is hanging on the finger of Teddy, and she is walking while holding her eyes closed (Hanif, 2011, p.78).

The author has condemned the female lead, because of her affection towards Teddy Butt. Since we are aware that Teddy is a cretin of a mob and not a good man whereas Alice is a nurse by practice and educated too. Makes a funny comment on her and says, she resembles a cross with tits and this is the use of cheap abusive language to women and shows how humiliated a female is by another female using abusing language of same gender.

As a fourteen year old girl, she was acting in an Easter play, and after that at school she had to stand in front of the cross so that her picture could be taken. Austrian-born old nun would comment that she looked like a cross with tits (Hanif, 2011, p.93)

Through the above passage, the author has accused the female lead and has employed some sort of discriminating language against female lead Alice Bhatti. Malangi states that I freed myself of wife and her three daughters but get another women which depicts the idea that all the women are playing liars and cheaters and no one can trust a woman since they are inclined and are the same and there is no fidelity and truth in them. Whenever they feel like, they can betray you. The language that portrays women is a form of abuse and degrading one and falls in the genre of joke and humour.

The first reason is so I can get out of one wife and three daughters, that makes four women total, to be with my friends. Nevertheless, I am left with yet another woman who like all the other women, lies and cheats." (Hanif, 2011, p.101-102)

Inspector Malangi awakens with his memories and speaks out in the story of a Christian girl who is actually a Hindu girl of Nepal and pretended to be a Christian and after two beers she confessed to be a Hindu-Nepal girl. In this passage discussed above, the author has depicted female in wrong manner as he criticized women as always quarrelsome and talkative. The author has given an abuse to the females stating that they squeeze all the juices in your body with their unwanted questions and bickering. They end up being talkative too much and created issues without any reasons other than to be in control of their husbands. The task of their husbands is the entire day long and they provide food and house to them and when they come back home in the night, their wives do suck their minds and brains with stupid queries such as where were you all day, why did you come late and many more. Using such kind of language on females falls under the use of joke and humour and it portrays the women in an adverse manner to our male dominated society.

And, indeed an afterthought, there was some marital advice to him. But it came out with zeal and with the sense of urgency.' (Hanif, 2011, p.102)

The author has been critical of the lead woman in the novel as she has voiced her opinion in the above passage.

Alice Bhatti and joking around her by the members of G Squad. Mushkis falls under the section of joke and humour which implies that, Choorah is. We know, Alice is of the Choorah family and it is a general perception in our society that the girls who belong to Christian families are very hot and sexy. In this case the author has attacked the female layers of the society, women are too sensitive to their appearance that they can even grant you dispensation to sleep with them, to take away their under wear but never with their hair, so they are of such hell kind of sensitivity that their hair cannot be touched in their being scared to appear at their ugly features. The author has



represented the lower level of our society at the female level in a bad picture that falls in the category of joke and humour.

Or, hey, you may do anything you like, but do not ruin my hair (Hanif, 2011, p.105)

We encounter yet another pun whereby the females are portrayed as overly conscious about their beauty and style. They even compel their husbands to work all through the day and night so that they can feed them. The author has condemned the female half of our society of making their husbands work hard so that they can earn slush to get the monetary benefits but yet they become morose, they should be glad instead of becoming sad that they are having their mates work and arrange everything to them. According to the writer, once their husbands die they attempt to go out looking to find another man who is also a widower since their life does not end. The author has criticized the female element in our society that emphasizes ill representation of women in the Eastern society and that falls in the category of joke and humour.

Hunger I know, you see because a man has to work hard at nights, sometimes he has to work hard twice in the night, but why are women sad after they are married? I suppose they are happy, right? They have got their husband, the future father to their offsprings, the man they are going to make pull his ear, the man they will make work so hard that upon death, they will be coveted widows (Hanif, 2011, p.125).

The other joke that we arrive at in the excerpt given above is on the female side of our society. When Teddy tells Not Abu Zar, that why the females become sad after marriage when they have the husbands to work and the fathers of their future children to worry about the wages, then why should the wives become sad? Actually, these lines depict that women are completely in able condition of their husbands who provide their livings and women are not to be sad after the marriage. When she reveals the secret how she married the same person the second time but she was bored not depressed as it was the first time. This implies that she will never be amused or contented irrespective of what man does to her. In our society, it is perceived that a woman who has been married once and did not maintain her relation is not a good woman and no one will be willing to settle down with such a woman but come as a man you can remarry as many times as you want. Such a language does not exist in our society to describe the widower in the same way that we oversell the female gender by using abusive language. The author has then depicted a type of abusive language that depicts the female segment of our society that falls under the genre of jokes and humour.

Concisely, a dog is unable to train. Nevertheless, you are able to do this. Or, you are not able to think but your brain resembles the brain of a woman: she always worries what will come next (Hanif, 2011, p.136)

In the above quote of the novel, Teddy Butt narrates his memories about a situation where dogs had attacked Teddy and the PT teacher had put the blame of this attack on him. PT teacher explains to him that a dog can not prepare but you can. You are able to think but regrettably at that your brain is that of a woman and this is a discrimination and criticism against female gender and falls under the heading of joke and humour. Man can turn into a comedian or clown in circus to make them glad but he can not make their face smile. In this case the author describes women as the most wretched things which lead to the destruction and trouble of a life. The way the language is used on females is wrong and portrays women as some sort of ailment to the happy life. The degrading use of the language about woman falls in the category of joke and humour.





To keep her happy--any woman,--think of it--and it does not matter whether she is your mother or daughter or your Friday whore--is simply impossible. You may be a clown in a circus and know how to swallow real swords but she won't be smiling (Hanif, 2011, p.145)

In the above excerpt of the novel, Teddy Butt flashes back to his past, when, Inspector Malangi treated him to one of his lectures that there is no way that you can make a woman happy. Here we get to meet one more of the jokes of the female side of our society. The story is told by Inspector Malangi and according to him no one can please a woman, no matter whether they are your mother or daughter or a Friday whore (a female who indulges in sexual intercourse in exchange of money). They will turn traitors when they later get opportunity to do so. Women are hypocrites and will never expose themselves to any person. These lines indicate that women cannot be trusted and never should anyone reveal anything kind of secret to them. The words given by the writer are some form of demeaning words and give a bad reflection of women in the male dominated society; it brings out a joke and humour on the female sections of our society which is not good.

Even after they die they are still fakes. This is why these women, I tell you, keep on selling their fantasies in their graves. They cannot be trusted even when their hearts stop beating. The above case displays another joke. Inspector Malangi is a tragedy of love and thus he tells it before Teddy Butt. He takes a bed sheet out of a wooden casket and Teddy can see a mummy of a woman. Even when they are dead Inspector Malangi tells him that the women are fake. When they stop beating their hearts you cannot trust them. Mostly in our society it is believed that, that women are not trustworthy and have fake tears in their eyes in order to show that they are in great grief and cannot live without their loving husbands, but the fake tears of women could never be trusted and it is a kind of humiliating language used against women in the novel.

## **5 Findings and Conclusion**

The results of this research have shown that *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* (2011) by Muhammad Hanif uses jokes and humour not as mere decorations of the plot, but as carefully calculated stylistic devices to criticise and rebel against oppressive patriarchal, religious and institutional power. By using feminist framework of style by Sara Mills, one can point out that there is a political undertone behind the sense of humour by Hanif. The satirical lines, ironical relations between the characters, ridiculous absurdities observed in the novel help to reveal misogyny, religious discrimination, violence which directs the life of such an outcast as Alice Bhatti. Among the principal discoveries is the fact that Hanif employs dark humour to emphasize the absurdities of male rule without diminishing the plight of his protagonist who is a woman. As an example, the image of hospital managers, retells the story of religious leaders, and even the police force through the comedic hyperbolicism brings light to their incompetence and inhumanity. These representations do not invite just laughter but the thoughts of insight that assess the role of institutions towards gendered marginalization. The humour is in a way a two-pronged weapon in the sense that it mocks the oppressor and empowers the oppressed via minor progressive acts of linguistic resistance.

The second valuable conclusion that can be made is how humour can help to present Alice Bhatti as a complicated and stubborn woman. Nevertheless, Alice is a dry-witted and self-aware person despite her social and religious helplessness encapsulating the forces around her. As we can see through her internal monologues and sarcastic interactions, the language can turn out to be the space of agency that distorts the gender norms and challenges authority figures. Such comical



remarks overrule prevalent ideologies of submission and passivity that are naturally assigned to women in the Pakistani literature because they belong to a minority group.

To sum up, this paper confirms the arguments that jokes and humour in *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* (2011) represent a potent feminist stylistic tool that criticizes the existing norms and presents female resistance as a leading concept. Using a feminist approach to style by Sara Mills, the study brings to fore the manner in which patriarchal ideologies can be reflected and resisted through use of linguistic strategies particularly leaning towards humour. This investigation would be useful to feminist literary studies in highlighting a political role of style and further discussing the humour as a deadly serious form of resistance in the postcolonial discourse.

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