



CHALLENGING TRADITIONAL NARRATIVES: A POSTMODERNIST STUDY OF HANIF'S OUR LADY OF ALICE BHATTI

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Abstract

This research offers a postmodern analysis of *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti*, drawing on Jean-François Lyotard's critique of metanarratives. Using a qualitative approach, the research focuses on the novel's use of language, focusing on elements such as self-reflexivity, irony, localization, and intertextuality. It explores how the novel challenges dominant societal narratives about identity, profession, science, and faith. By examining the text's linguistic features, it reveals how the story of the novel subverts grand narratives, depicting characters who resist societal norms and reject conventional roles. It critiques the dangers of adhering to nationalist ideologies and questions the authority of traditional scientific paradigms. The characters embody fluid, evolving identities that reflect postmodern views on the malleability of human nature. The analysis emphasizes the dynamic interaction between large-scale metanarratives and smaller, personal stories, showing how characters use paralogical strategies to disrupt established conventions. Through these disruptions, new, pluralistic narratives emerge, providing alternative perspectives on identity and social structures. This research adds valuable insights to postmodern literature by highlighting how *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* subverts traditional narrative forms and challenges dominant ideological systems.

Keywords: *Identity, Irony, Lyotard, Metanarratives, Narrative Subversion, Postmodernism, Self-Reflexivity.*

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1. Introduction

In philosophical discussions, history is often split into two major periods: modernity and postmodernity. As Lyotard (1984) points out, there is no universally agreed timeline for these phases, but modernity is generally seen as the era from the Enlightenment to the mid-twentieth century, with postmodernity emerging after that. “Postmodernism - the vast interdisciplinary debate on postmodernism and postmodernity of the 1980s and early 1990s - has been a crossroads for historical descriptions of the latter half of the twentieth century” (Graham, 2024). According to Hooti and Azizpour (2010), the term “Postmodernism” covers a broad spectrum of ideas and activities across various fields, including aesthetics, culture, history, literature, and philosophy. It is commonly used to describe a range of styles, a specific historical period, and a philosophical approach. At the same time, postmodernism is often defined by its ambiguity, marked by a lack of fixed style, the idea of a timeless condition, and no clear conceptual boundaries.

“Muhammad Hanif, a Pakistan based English fiction writer, was born in Okara Pakistan in 1964. He has written novels, some of the famous plays for stage and radio, and a feature film” (Ashraf, & Farooq, 2020, p. 396). He is known for his postmodernist tendencies, particularly in his novel *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti*. While comparisons to Salman Rushdie have been made regarding his literary style, Hanif has developed a unique narrative voice. His writing blends satire, historical fiction, and innovative narrative techniques, often exploring themes of irony, multiple perspectives, metafiction, and cultural hybridity. Through these methods, he challenges traditional storytelling conventions and delves into complex socio-political issues. While his work incorporates many characteristics of postmodernism, Hanif is not strictly confined to its principles.

Hanif, (2011) critiques the metanarratives that frequently shape both literature and the societies it represents. Set in contemporary Pakistan, this postmodern novel *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* disrupts traditional narrative forms, offering a fresh lens through which to engage with complex social issues. The protagonist, Alice Bhatti, a Catholic nurse navigating a morally complex and chaotic environment, inhabits a world where distinctions between good and evil, sanity and madness, are fluid and unclear. Postmodernists reject grand theoretical approaches or “metanarratives” entirely. Smart quotes C. Wright Mills as arguing that the grand narratives of liberalism and socialism

have collapsed “as adequate explanations of the world and ourselves” (Smart, 1985, p. 449). Hanif (2011) critiques grand narratives, or metanarratives, as constructions imposed by dominant powers to shape and limit our understanding of reality. By deconstructing these narratives, the novel reveals the chaos and absurdity of contemporary Pakistan, with a particular focus on the systemic oppression faced by women and religious minorities. Through dark humor, satire, and irony, it critiques the ideologies and structures that uphold societal norms, addressing pressing issues such as gender-based violence, corruption, and entrenched religious tensions. The absurd scenarios and biting humor in the novel serve as a form of resistance to hegemonic ideologies, exposing the disconnect between appearances and reality, while urging readers to critically examine their own assumptions. “Hanif, being a writer and an ex-journalist for BBC News London, focuses on the description of the minutest details” (Ashraf & Farooq, 2020, p. 399).

Hanif (2011) introduces a diverse array of characters, from the resilient Alice to the morally ambiguous figures she encounters, each representing a fragmented and multifaceted society. These flawed, complex individuals reflect a nuanced critique of Pakistan’s socio-political landscape, challenging simplistic, reductionist portrayals of the country. Through his blending of humor, absurdity, and sharp social critique, Hanif (2011) not only disrupts conventional storytelling but also invites readers to engage with the complexities of contemporary Pakistan, reconsidering the dominant narratives that shape their worldview. He showcases postmodern characteristics through its fragmented narrative structure, presenting the story in a non-linear, multi-perspective way. This approach challenges traditional storytelling conventions, a key feature of postmodern literature.

1.1. Research Questions

- How does Hanif employ postmodernist narrative techniques in *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* to challenge traditional metanarratives?
- What insights does the deconstruction of metanarratives in the novel provide into the complex social and political realities of contemporary Pakistan?

1.2. Research Objectives

- To examine the postmodernist narrative techniques employed by Hanif in *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* and their role in disrupting conventional storytelling and traditional metanarratives.
- To assess the impact of deconstructing metanarratives in the novel on the reader’s understanding of complex social and political issues in contemporary Pakistan.

2. Review of Literature

Postmodern theory marks a significant shift from the foundational principles of modernist thought, offering a critical reassessment of traditional ideas about reality, knowledge, and culture. By challenging and deconstructing established beliefs, postmodernism questions the assumptions that have long shaped modernist ideologies. The prefix “post” in postmodernism signifies not just a temporal shift but a transformation of the core principles that defined modernist thinking. A central aspect of postmodernism is its skepticism toward grand narratives and universal truths, especially those derived from Enlightenment rationality. In place of these grand truths, postmodernism embraces plurality, diversity, and the celebration of differences as essential to cultural redefinition. In literature and art, postmodernism is characterized by innovative techniques such as parody, irony, self-reflexivity, and the incorporation of multiple narratives and perspectives.

Postmodern literature is marked both stylistically and ideologically through the random use of fragmentation, paradox, unreliable narrators, often unrealistic and downright impossible plots, sports, parody, paranoia, dark humor and literary conventions such as authorial self-dependence to promote this idea. (Gee, 2016, p. 1)

Hooti and Omrani (2011) provide an in-depth analysis of Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse-Five* through the lens of postmodernist theory. They describe how Vonnegut employs narrative techniques that align with the postmodernist diegetic process. They focus on key postmodernist elements, including ontological exploration, narrative structure, fragmentation, parody, and irony, as they are presented in the text. By grounding abstract postmodernist concepts, the authors effectively demonstrate their practical application within the novel. Additionally, they assess the broader presence and relevance of postmodernist narrative elements in fictional storytelling. They note, “metanarratives traditionally serve to give cultural practices some form of legitimation or authority” (Hooti & Omrani, 2011, p. 816).

Hooti and Torkamaneh (2011) illustrate how *Waiting for Godot* encapsulates the essence of postmodernist literature, resisting straightforward classification and interpretation. They highlight the play’s incorporation of postmodern elements such as intertextuality, seen in its references to diverse sources, cultural allusions, and philosophical concepts, all of which contribute to the creation of a complex and layered tapestry of meaning. Furthermore, the authors examine the fragmentation and absurdity that permeate the narrative, key characteristics of postmodernist aesthetics. They argue that Beckett’s work exemplifies the postmodern critique of linguistic stability and the

limitations of language in conveying absolute truths. As they note, “Although postmodernism has influenced all the literary forms, usually it focuses on one kind of writing which mostly is narrative fiction. The narrative advances in flashbacks, flash-forwards and is frequently interrupted; it is like cinema and movie techniques” (Hooti & Torkamaneh, 2011, p. 14).

Al-Shalabi (2015) offers a postmodernist reading of Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening*, contesting traditional interpretations that label the novel as predominantly realistic, feminist, or naturalistic. Through a detailed analysis of Edna’s character and her interactions with seemingly ordinary individuals, the researcher highlights the existential sense of meaninglessness that permeates her life. Al-Shalabi (2015) identifies several aspects that contribute to the novel’s postmodernist dimensions, including the disintegration of the Pontellier family, the strategic use of irony, and the blending of literary traditions such as realism and romanticism. *The Awakening* epitomizes postmodernist traits, particularly through its open-ended conclusion, which embodies the uncertainty central to postmodernism. Moreover, Chopin’s depiction of women who defy traditional roles without moral judgment aligns with postmodernism’s embrace of ambiguity and its rejection of fixed interpretations, reflecting a society in flux and open to redefinition. “Chopin’s novel is postmodern on account of its simple narrative style, its theme that centers on Edna’s independence which is an inner problem, and its characters that are life-like” (Al-Shalabi, 2015, p. 276).

Awais, Salman, and Khalid (2017) analyze David Mamet’s play *Romance* through a postmodern minimalist lens, utilizing Warren Motte’s minimalism theory as their conceptual framework to examine the play’s contextual elements. They demonstrate how Mamet’s distinctive narrative techniques portray ordinary characters as symbols of disunity, reflecting the fractured state of the American socio-political and religious landscape. Through this approach, the authors highlight how minimalism shapes the play’s thematic concerns and its exploration of societal fragmentation. Through themes of entropy and fragmentation, Mamet critiques perceived corruption within the American judicial system. “Mamet presents unexceptional characters who exchange their fragmented ideas through random dialogues that present the prevailing socio-political American system” (Awais et al., 2017, p. 22). The research aims to illuminate the minimalist narrative strategies in the play, thereby offering a more nuanced understanding of Mamet’s theatrical craft. His use of clear, concise language enables readers to grasp the complex interactions between characters and the broader societal systems they navigate.

The existing scholarship on *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* suggests that the novel can be analyzed from a postmodernist perspective, particularly to explore its subversion of metanarratives.

This research will employ a qualitative analysis of *Our Lady* of Alice Bhatti, focusing on the novel's subversion of grand metanarratives in favor of postmodern mini-narratives. It will explore how the text challenges overarching ideologies through localized, subjective stories, reflecting postmodern skepticism towards universal truths.

3. Theoretical Framework

Modernism seeks to redefine literature as an individual's quest to transcend traditional and orthodox thinking. This literary movement disrupts the earlier focus on myths, fantasies, and the gradual evolution of society by adopting principles rooted in science, reason, and personal detachment. As noted by Childs (2007), modernism is characterized by its effort to place "humanity and in particular human reason at the center of everything," encompassing domains such as religion, nature, finance, and science (p. 16). Conversely, Butler (2002) highlights the shift from absolute truth to relativity, suggesting that the reader's interpretation of truth mirrors and imitates art. This perspective aligns with the postmodernist stance, as Butler argues that "universal truth is impossible" (p. 27), and relativism constitutes humanity's fundamental condition. Butler (2002) further elaborates that postmodernism adopts a critical stance towards knowledge, rejecting any overarching "philosophical or political doctrine" and vehemently opposing the 'dominant ideologies' that perpetuate the existing societal order (p. 40). In a similar vein, Al-Shalabi (2015) asserts, "It was first coined, Nicol contends, in the 1940s to describe a reaction against modernism in architecture" (p. 277). Regarding its usage, Nicol adds that it began to be widely employed in the 1960s by American cultural critics and commentators, particularly Susan Sontag and Leslie Fiedler, who sought to describe a new trend in literature that either rejected modernist techniques or adapted or extended them (Al-Shalabi, 2015).

Lodge (1992) asserts that a postmodern novel is "fiction that revolves around fiction," describing works that intentionally draw attention to their fictional nature and the methods by which they are composed (p. 206). McGowan (2019) contends that postmodern theory is characterized by a duality: it reflects both a fear that a monolithic social order dominates contemporary life and a hope that strategies to preserve pluralism and difference can be found (p. x). McGowan (2019) further suggests that "postmodernism can best be defined as a particular, if admittedly diminished, version of romantic dreams of transformation—hardly the middle age that poets in their youth would have chosen, but a despondency that is fitting all the same" (p. 1). He also notes that "artists and intellectuals often find themselves in the position of coming close to claiming the absolute constitutive power of signification while also bemoaning the fact that modern society marginalizes the cultural" (p. 3). McGowan (2019) highlights Peter Burger's distinction between two

groups within modernism: the elitist modernists, who engaged in a more esoteric, hermetic form of art, and the various avant-garde movements, which took a more openly confrontational stance. The key difference, according to McGowan (2019), is that modernist elites, including figures like Eliot, Mondrian, Matisse, Le Corbusier, and Schönberg, viewed art as the secular world's closest connection to the sacred. McGowan (2019) also notes that scholars like Rosalind Krauss and Andreas Huyssen regard the avant-garde as either a precursor to postmodernism or its first manifestation.

A key component of postmodernist theory is its skeptical approach, particularly as articulated by philosopher Jean-François Lyotard. Lyotard (1984) critically engages with grand narratives such as those of humanity's continuous liberation—ranging from Christian salvation to Marxist utopianism—and the narrative of scientific progress. He argues that these grand narratives have “lost their credibility” in the aftermath of the Second World War. In his 1984 work, Lyotard defines the postmodern condition as one marked by profound skepticism and disbelief in overarching metanarratives. He contends that postmodernism, as an intellectual stance, involves a critical interpretation of culture, extending to science, literature, and art. Lyotard (1984) famously characterizes postmodernism as a state of “incredulity towards metanarrative” (p. xxiv), asserting that major philosophical systems like Kantianism, Hegelianism, and Marxism, which promote the belief in progressive history, the liberating potential of knowledge, and the hidden unity of all knowledge, are no longer credible.

Joy (2019) cites Klages, who emphasizes that postmodernism, by rejecting grand narratives, advocates for “mininarratives”—local, context-specific stories that emphasize small-scale actions rather than grand universal truths. These narratives, according to Klages, are inherently tentative, dependent on circumstances, and inherently opposed to the universality embodied by grand narratives (p. 34). Harvey (2020) defines postmodernism as a movement that places significant value on “heterogeneity and difference as emancipatory elements in the reshaping of cultural dialogue” (p. 9). This stands in direct opposition to the assertions of truth found within the grand narratives of Enlightenment philosophy, which postmodernism critiques.

Barry (2010) clarifies that Lyotard challenges the naturalization of dual oppositions, arguing that so-called “metanarratives,” which claim to provide universal explanations, are merely illusions designed to suppress diversity and multiplicity (p. 83). Postmodernism marks the discrediting of universally accepted truths, such as technological advancement, political liberation, logocentrism, Eurocentrism, historical consensus, patriarchy, and colonization (Lyotard, 1984). He sees science, particularly, as a significant metanarrative that ultimately failed to substantiate its promises of progress and liberation. Lyotard (1984) contends that postmodern skepticism, or “incredulity,” is

deeply rooted in the advancements of science (p. xxvi). He argues that, in the modern era, institutions like religion, corporations, education, and the legal system collaborated to promote the idea of universal liberation, effecting transformative changes in modernized societies. He notes that the nature of knowledge itself evolves as societies transition into the postindustrial era, which he characterizes as the onset of the postmodern age (Lyotard, 1984). Lyotard (1984) uses the term “modern” to describe any science that legitimizes itself by referencing a metanarrative, such as the dialectics of Spirit, the emancipation of the rational or working subject, or the creation of wealth (p. xxiii). However, he argues that grand narratives, whether speculative or emancipatory, have lost their credibility (Lyotard, 1984). Thus, postmodern theory serves as a critical and transformative framework for analyzing the complexities of contemporary life.

4. Textual Analysis

Hanif, a renowned Anglo-Pakistani author, is celebrated for his acute observations of various facets of life. His works are rich with multiple layers of meaning and interpretation. In *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti*, Hanif (2011) adopts a postmodernist approach by rejecting grand metanarratives in favor of smaller, more localized narratives. He critiques overarching ideologies and embraces “petit récit,” or small narratives, which prioritize paralogy, heterogeneity, and diversity over the dominant societal consensus. Through his diverse characters, Hanif (2011) subverts totalizing ideologies, highlighting the dismantling of grand narratives and advocating for alternative, albeit unconventional, truths. The novel addresses the religious dynamics in Pakistan, particularly the discrimination faced by minority communities, even in a society where Islam’s teachings promote tolerance. Hanif (2011) critiques the failure of attempts to unify the nation under a singular faith-based ideology, exposing the inherent conflicts within existing social and religious hierarchies. His narrative challenges the mainstream religious narrative, emphasizing that the true essence of Islam lies in values such as unconditional love, humanity, and mutual respect, rather than simply adhering to faith by birthright.

One of the novel’s central characters, Alice, questions the narrative of faith, exposing its use as a performative language game that lacks genuine personal conviction. She astutely observes that religious identity often becomes more pronounced during times of personal hardship, a phenomenon vividly illustrated by a Muslim Shia woman in labor. In her intense pain, the woman alternates between desperate screams and fervent religious slogans like “Ya Ali,” a chant that echoes the zeal typically seen in new converts at a Shia procession, thereby highlighting the performative nature of religious expressions (p. 239). This portrayal critiques the superficial adoption of religious identity, revealing how it is often exploited to categorize individuals, amplify divisions, and fuel societal conflicts.

Hanif intricately demonstrates that these religious narratives are not limited to the public domain but deeply affect the personal and familial lives of his characters. A poignant example is Alice's marriage to Teddy, which becomes a microcosm of larger societal tensions as they grapple with choosing a name for their unborn child that could bridge the divide between their Muslim and Christian identities. Alice reflects on the need for neutrality, envisioning a name that transcends these divisions: "She would have settled easily on some neutral name, no Joseph or Judith obviously" (p. 265). Her contemplation underscores the challenge of finding common ground in a world shaped by rigid identities, illustrating how deeply ingrained narratives of faith dictate even the most intimate aspects of life. This dual-layered critique of performative religiosity and its invasive influence on personal identity is central to Hanif's narrative.

The gardener's silence in the face of the powerful reverend stems from his fear that his testimony would be disregarded, despite the clear physical evidence on Margaret's lifeless body, which reveals her resistance against her rapist. The presence of such undeniable evidence underscores the brutality of her ordeal, yet no one dares to confront or accuse the reverend of murder. This silence reflects a broader theme of oppression, where voices challenging merciless authority are systematically suppressed. The novel portrays this suppression vividly, as one character swears on the Bible during a post-funeral prayer to dismiss the stranger's accusations as mere "rumors" (p. 177). This moment highlights the manipulation of religious oaths for personal advantage, exposing how sacred practices are exploited to serve worldly interests. Joseph Bhatti, deeply respectful of Islam, also grapples with the contradictions within faith and identity. He questions the legitimacy of being considered a true Muslim solely based on belief, warning his daughter, Alice, against marrying a Muslim by stating, "just because they became Muslas" does not inherently make them superior (p. 179). His reverence is evident in his practice of reciting Islamic verses to treat ulcers, surprising a Muslim patient who remarks on "a Christian choohra reciting the Holy Quran" (p. 66).

Hanif (2011) emphasizes the commonalities across religious teachings, underscoring a universal message of peace, respect, and unity. A poignant example of this is seen when Teddy, a policeman, comforts a Bangladeshi prisoner, highlighting the shared word "Allah" amidst her distress. The novelist critiques those who conceal their religious identities to avoid discrimination, as demonstrated by Sister Hina and Alice's Christian friends at college, who hide their faith. In contrast, Alice and her father, Joseph Bhatti, remain openly steadfast in their religious identity. Alice satirizes the commercialization of religious symbols, remarking, "Crosses are everywhere now, you can buy them" (p. 179), and questions whether this abundance would symbolize eternal suffering for Jesus if he were to return. Both Alice and Joseph Bhatti face discrimination in various aspects of their

lives. Alice experiences a violent assault by Muslim girls at her nursing school, motivated by religious animosity, but her faith empowers her to confront her attackers. This incident reflects a segment of Pakistani society where religion is conflated with nationalism, contrary to the founder's vision of religious tolerance and coexistence. Dr. Pariera, the college in charge, notes Alice's actions by stating, "Nurses might be doing God's work" (p. 254). Despite his community service, Joseph Bhatti remains unrecognized and critiques those who feign religious devotion. The novel also satirizes superficial displays of religious fervor, such as a driver playing a "Musla anthem," exposing a lack of genuine understanding of religion's core message of peace (p. 87). Sister Hina also questions the world's shift toward literal interpretations of faith, contrasting it with the broader understanding that God is present in everything (p. 276). Alice's pregnancy further unveils societal double standards when her lover refuses to marry her due to religious differences, revealing the hypocrisy behind their relationship. He justifies his refusal by stating, "For generations, there has never been a single marriage outside our Shia clan" (p. 263). This subversion of the grand faith narrative intersects with nationalistic and patriotic rhetoric, reflecting the historical legacies of the Indian subcontinent's partition.

Hanif (2011) critiques the dominant narratives of nationalism, highlighting the discrepancies and discrimination faced by certain groups under the banner of nationalistic ideologies. The novel exposes corruption and the failures of various national institutions, particularly critiquing laws such as Islamization, Martial law, and the Hudood ordinances introduced during Zia's regime in the 1970s. These laws marginalized minority communities, including Alice and Joseph Bhatti. The characters in the novel bring attention to seemingly trivial yet genuinely troublesome issues. For instance, Hina shares her frustration over being unable to change her name on her ID card after a divorce due to bureaucratic barriers, humorously remarking that attempting the process might take "more than one lifetime" (p. 297).

Hanif (2011) delves into the consequences of rigidly adhering to the grand narrative of nationalism, exposing how it constrains citizens' freedoms by imposing exclusionary identities. The novel critiques slogans like "Pakistan ka Matlab kya...La Ilaha Illala," which, while aiming to foster national unity, ultimately marginalize non-Muslim nationals and undermine the diversity envisioned during the country's creation (p. 128). This critique sheds light on the paradox of a state founded on principles of equality yet perpetuating systemic discrimination. Hanif (2011) reflects on the enduring struggles of the post-Partition state, lamenting its inability to address pressing issues such as marginalization and inequality, despite the promises of independence. Drawing from Ayesha Jalal's perspective, the novel suggests that discrimination against Christian communities was deeply entrenched even before Partition, illustrating how systemic biases

transcend political milestones. By subverting the nationalistic narrative, Hanif (2011) reveals the distorted criteria used to measure resilience and strength in post-Partition Pakistan. This is poignantly captured in the line, “no, electricity didn’t count; you were still a sissy puss,” which critiques the flawed priorities that ignore real progress and justice in favor of shallow displays of toughness (p. 199). The novel challenges the exclusionary practices underpinning nationalist discourse, urging for a reimagined, inclusive identity.

Hanif (2011) challenges the legitimacy of the Partition by depicting horrifying incidents that reveal the futility of achieving justice through mass violence and atrocities. The novel critiques the simplistic present/past binary by demonstrating how the trauma of Partition remains an enduring presence in the lives of its characters. Figures like the medical surgeon and Sister Hina embody this persistence of pain, haunted by the violent history that shaped their present, with the surgeon’s scars and Sister Hina’s memories serving as poignant reminders of unresolved anguish (p. 263). Hanif underscores that the trauma of Partition transcends temporal boundaries, suggesting its repercussions continue to influence contemporary society. Sister Hina, in particular, deconstructs the ideology of Partition by exposing its absurdities and human cost. She recounts the harrowing history of mentally challenged individuals being exchanged between Pakistan and India, an act that symbolizes the dehumanization embedded in nationalist narratives. Her critique extends to the titles assigned to historical figures, mocking the grandiose yet hollow notions of “mother of the nation” and “father of the nation.” With biting cynicism, she remarks, “They could have called her sister of the nation, but no. Because then people might have mistaken her for a nurse, one of us. It’s a nation of perverts, I tell you” (p. 81). This line encapsulates the novel’s broader critique of nationalist rhetoric, exposing the misogyny and perversion that underpin historical and cultural narratives.

Hanif (2011) critiques the master narrative of science through characters like Alice and Joseph, undermining the authority of formally educated medical professionals and emphasizing the power of spirituality in healing. Joseph’s unconventional treatment of ulcers through spiritual practices directly challenges the dominance of scientific medicine, as he asserts that there is “nothing in that fat book that he hasn’t seen strewn on the floor of A & E” (p. 38). Similarly, Alice’s ability to predict the future and miraculously heal patients deconstructs the idea of fixed reality and rationality. Her statement, “Ordinary people on the streets” (p. 61), highlights her mystical powers and challenges conventional scientific perspectives. Her recognition as a miracle worker emphasizes the role of spirituality in a postmodern world, culminating in her sainthood and eventual ascension. Alice’s tragic death in an acid attack is depicted as a mystical event, further blurring the line between the supernatural and the real. These fantastical elements, including the miraculous actions of inanimate objects such as cars

and machines, contribute to the novel's surreal atmosphere, blending reality and fantasy to create a sense of mystique and symbolism.

Hanif (2011) presents characters who challenge fixed identities, with Alice embodying multiple, evolving roles. Her character is not developed through a linear progression but rather constructed through fragmented mini-narratives. From childhood to adulthood, Alice resists societal expectations, such as attending nursing school when marriage was anticipated. Despite enduring discrimination from her peers, staff, and society, she successfully completes her degree. As a junior nurse, she navigates marginalization, with her beauty being perceived as a 'curse' that exposes her to harassment—illustrating the patriarchal language games at play. In police custody, Alice maintains a brave façade under the protection of the police, and despite facing wrongful imprisonment, the appalling conditions fail to undermine her spiritual resilience. Although Alice's dreams are shattered by a corrupt society, her hopes remain intact, symbolizing the potential for a new generation to break free from oppressive constraints (p. 136). Alice's character emerges as a strong and unconventional woman within a patriarchal, conservative society, defying traditional expectations imposed on her as a Christian woman. She exemplifies a unique individuality and inner strength, transcending societal norms and even embodying certain masculine qualities. Throughout the novel, Alice vocally objects to the inhumane treatment of women and their limited access to essential services during childbirth. Her marriage to Teddy, though met with disapproval, becomes an expression of her personal power. Even within the marriage, she challenges conventions, celebrating it in an unconventional manner and initiating physical intimacy with her husband. In contemplating her actions, she recognizes that marriage "is a liberation army on the march" (p. 209), emphasizing her sense of empowerment and autonomy within her marital relationship.

Hanif (2011) critiques the stereotypical portrayals of ideal love, particularly through the failed marriage of Alice and Teddy, which results in Alice's depression and anxiety, and Teddy's abnormal behavior. Malangi, a colleague of Teddy, represents the patriarchal power structure that dismisses independent, intellectual, and strong women as wives. During a conversation with Teddy, Malangi reveals his own marital struggles, underscoring the societal pressure on men to excel outside their homes while often feeling undermined within their marriages. This dynamic highlights the tension between the public and private spheres for men in a patriarchal society, and underscores Alice's exceptional resistance to these norms. The novel presents Alice as a woman who defies societal expectations, embodying qualities such as maturity, boldness, courage, and a fearless attitude towards threats. She possesses a strong individuality that challenges traditional gender roles and resists the stereotypical portrayal of women. Her experiences and

actions—such as confronting sexual harassment in the VIP room with calm and unflinching resolve—distinguish her from conventional female characters. Alice is depicted with a masculine tone and direct language, described as “an ambitious, adventurous, and talented person” (p. 145). This characterization places her in stark contrast to societal expectations of women, positioning her as a powerful and unconventional figure. Similarly, Noor, another character in the novel, embodies multiple identities, further complicating the text’s exploration of gender and societal norms. In conclusion, the novel beautifully negates metanarratives, reflecting the postmodern rejection of fixed narratives and embracing the plurality and uncertainty inherent in human experience.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* offers a profound critique of the grand metanarratives that have long shaped literature and society. Through its postmodern approach, the novel challenges dominant paradigms of faith, science, nationalism, and identity, offering a nuanced exploration of these themes through its multifaceted characters. By embracing “petit recit,” or smaller, personal narratives, Hanif (2011) promotes diversity, paralogy, and heterogeneity, effectively counteracting the homogenizing forces of dominant societal consensus. The novel highlights the power of language in deconstructing established norms and showcases characters like Alice, who transcend societal expectations, defy traditional gender roles, and challenge faith-based and patriarchal metanarratives. *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* also focuses on religious issues in Pakistan, emphasizing the marginalization of minority communities and critiquing the failure of nationalist ideologies to unify the country’s diverse population.

Hanif (2011) questions the legitimacy of Partition, pointing to the continuing influence of past traumas and injustices. He critiques the glorification of nationalism by exposing the discrepancies and manipulations faced by citizens in a post-Partition Pakistan. In terms of science, the novel juxtaposes conventional medical authority with spiritual practices, with characters like Alice challenging scientific norms and highlighting the efficacy of spirituality in healing. Alice’s mystical abilities disrupt traditional scientific paradigms, underscoring the relevance of spiritual dimensions in a postmodern context. Furthermore, the novel deconstructs fixed identities, particularly through characters like Alice and Noor, who embody fluid and multifaceted identities. Their development challenges the idea of linear, static character arcs and reflects the complex nature of human identity. These characters epitomize the shift from traditional representations of identity, showcasing its fluidity and the multifaceted nature of human experience.

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