
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Van Leeuwen's Categorization of Lower Caste Christians are in *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti*

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| ABSTRACT

This study tries to explore how the lower caste Christians are represented in the text of a novel, *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti*, by *Mohammad Hanif*. Applying van Leeuwen's categorization from the SAR (Social Actor Representation) model, it deconstructs the textual representation of lower caste Christians in the text by the Muslim social actors and middle and upper-class Christians. Also, it attempts to highlight how the discursive representation of lower caste Christians as identification (what they are) and functionalization (what they do) presents them as marginalized characters. How these characters are appraised negatively owing to their caste and religion in the text is also presented. Van Leeuwen's SAR emphasizes that such discursive recontextualization of the social actors by the writers reflects discrimination against these characters. These social roles given to them show their suppression in society. The analysis reveals that the representation of lower caste Christians demonstrates the following characteristics: they are represented as Choohras shit cleaners, untouchables, which is the major cause of discrimination in Pakistan. Through such depiction of lower caste Christians, the writers want to highlight the sorry plight of lower caste Christians in Pakistan.

| KEYWORDS

Novelists, *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti*, Lower-caste Christian.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Pakistani Anglophone Novels

Pakistani English fictional writers can be divided into two groups according to the themes they have adopted in their novels (Saleem,2015). The first generation of novelists discussed the themes of migration, separation, and military rule in Pakistan. However, according to Saleem,2015, post-1988 Pakistani novelists have represented a multiplicity of themes, which include the representation of women and minorities and identity crisis in a post 9/11 world; this intentional shift from the traditional postcolonial writings was appreciated globally. According to Cilano (2013), 'The recent flowering of Pakistan Fiction has received worldwide appreciation.

Out of the myriad themes discussed by the Pakistani Fictional writers is the representation of minorities and marginalized groups. For instance, writers like Nadeem Aslam, Bina Shah, and Kamila Shamsi have tried to depict the pathetic situation of minorities in Pakistan, where they face marginalization because of their religion, caste, and economic conditions.

1.2 Lower-caste Christians

Lower-caste Christians or Dalit Christians are the people who converted to Christianity in India before and after 1947, the year when India and Pakistan became two sovereign states as a result of the decolonization of the British Empire. Many Dalits converted to Christianity in order to break the chains of caste persecution. Dalits were the lowest in the Hindu caste system and were facing inhuman treatment at the hands of high caste Hindus in India. Gorringer (2009) opines that untouchables or Dalits were those condemned to perform the most menial and degrading jobs in India.

However, the conversion to Christianity was a result of their marginalization and suppression as the lowest rank in society. The situation for the Choohra Christians has not changed even after seventy-five years of independence. They still suffer from marginalization and suppression in India as well as in Pakistan as they are living their lives as a minority in both Pakistan.

Christians consist of 2% of the total population in Pakistan. Most of them exist as sweepers and cleaners. Their poor economic condition worsens their social status in Pakistani society. The imbalance of power and the Muslim majority discrimination can be clearly seen in society. They are victimized, killed, and discriminated against because of their 'caste' and lower social status. Singha (2015) argues in her work 'Dalit Christians and class consciousness in Pakistan' that discrimination against Choohra Christians still prevails in Pakistani society even though they have changed their religion.

The connection between Choohra Christians and their suppressed and marginalized status in Pakistan is because of two things: First, they have a Dalit ancestry or untouchable origins, which categorize them as 'discriminated figures.' Second, they are continuously involved in polluting occupations, including sweeping and cleaning latrines. It means that their identification (what they are) and functionalization (what they do) are the main reasons why they face discrimination at the hands of Muslims and middle-class Christians. The above background provides a strong argument for choosing van Leeuwen's categorization: Identification and functionalization to analyze the linguistic representation of lower-caste Christians in the text, which contributes to their marginalized status, by 'linguistic representation' van Leeuwen, the selection of words and text in a discourse. The strategies or word choices used by the writer in the text to recontextualize the lower-caste Christians will reveal that there is power abuse and social inequality against that group. Our analysis will focus on the ways the minority members or lower-caste Christians are represented as the 'other' as powerless and marginalized. Even many Muslims refer to Christians as 'sweepers', which implies that the choice of language or words to even address Christians ultimately shows discrimination.

Van Leeuwen's inventory of social actor networks (the way social actors are recontextualized in English discourse is related and inspired by the Critical Discourse Analysis approach, which aims to analyze the unequal power relationship in a society. CDA proposes that the imbalance of power is constructed and exercised through discourse in a society. Hence, the way social actors are given roles (names, addressed, identified, functionalized) in a discourse benefits one group and deprives the other. However, this study contains itself to the representation of lower caste Christians in the text of *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti*.

2. Literature Review

Dalit or lower caste Christians have been the subjects of fiction since Rohan Mistry's (1935) *A Fine Balance* and Mulk Raj's *Untouchables*. Both the writers of India represent the world's Dalit Christians' perspective and focus on their economic impoverishment of them. The writers conclude that religion, nationalism, and poverty contribute to the unfortunate condition of Dalit Christians. Dwivedi (2010) explores the sorry plight of untouchables in India after Independence. The study discusses *The God of Small Things*, written by Arundhati Roy, which explores the physical and mental exploitation of untouchables in India. The untouchables in the novels are Christians who were low-caste Hindus and converted to Christianity in order to get some benefits and change their status, but even the conversion could not alter their sorry plight in society.

Slum-dwellers have been a victim of social discrimination, especially in the third-world countries. They have also been represented as subalterns by Kavery Nambisan. *Story must not be told* (2018) by Kavery Nambisan describes the appalling condition of slums, which have become a part of the urban community, especially in third-world countries. Termed 'slum fiction' by the critics, the writer displays how the 'socio-psychological situation of the lower class remains unchanged.' The people in the slums are humiliated by the elites owing to their 'demeaning existence.' The marginalized people in the 'Sitara' suffer because of their poverty and lower caste, i.e., 'a group politically and socially encircled in hegemonic power structures' (Khan, 2019). Das and Tungesh's (2013) study of the novel *Sangati* discusses the vulnerable condition of *Paraiya' Dalit Christian community*.

The representation of minorities and marginalized castes as main characters in Pakistani Anglophone fiction started with Bapsi Sidwa's novel *The Crow Eaters* (1978). Sidwa represents the Parsee community and its problems, such as marginalization and suppression in Pakistani society. However, the younger generation of novelists (Mohsin Hamid, Kamila Shamsi, Nadeem Aslam, and Mohammad Hanif) in Pakistan have given much space to minorities, marginalized caste, women's positions, and identity crises in their writings.

Our Lady of Alice Bhatti (2011) is a novel highlighting the abuse of women and Choohra caste Christians. Many studies (Siddiqui et al., 2020)(Aneela Azhar, 2015) (Sourav Paul, 2018) from various perspectives have been done to analyze the themes in *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* by Nadeem Aslam. After analyzing *OLAB* (2011), Saddiqui et al. (2020) establish that there are instances of marginalization experienced by lower-caste Christians owing to their religion, caste, and impoverished economic conditions in Pakistani society. Moreover, the struggle by lower caste Christians to resist the status quo is a response that shows their anger and frustration. Nonetheless, they are unable to free themselves from the shackles of casteism. *OLAB* is a story of a lower caste Christian woman who struggles to live as a woman and a citizen of Pakistan. Sourav Paul (2020) explores the theme of female victimization and prejudice against Christian minorities in his study of this novel. As Alice is titled 'The All-terrain Fighter (p.175), Paul (2020) considers him a soldier of humanism by combining the themes of sexual violence and sainthood in his novel.

However, not all the works related to *OLAB* show discrimination and power abuse as main themes in the text. For example, Aneela Azhar (2015) uses 'intertextuality' and 'social identity' to discover the interfaith dialogue in the novel. By citing the social and economic exploitation of Christians in Pakistan, she opines that inter-faith communication will create an environment for religious harmony and a peaceful, heterogenous society.

2.1 Van Leeuwen's Social Actor Representation in Discourse

Van Leeuwen's Social Actor Representation (SAR) model has been applied as an analytical model to analyze the social actors in English discourse. Van Leeuwen gives precedence to social roles (the role an actor plays in society) over linguistic attributions (can be represented using different linguistic structures; It is important to note that the social roles can be realized in various linguistic ways in a text. For example, activation (one of the roles of the actors) can be linguistically realized in many ways. Grammatical participant roles (for example, actor in the material process), "circumstantialization," that is, by prepositional circumstantial with *by* or *from*, Pre-modification and post-modification of nominalization or process nouns. Another way of realizing activation is through possessivation by using possessive pronouns.

He highlights the way social actors are placed or recontextualized in a discourse using various strategies, which ultimately lead to power imbalance in society (van Leeuwen, 2008). Moreover, as his theory of socio-semantic categories (representing social actors) is ingrained in Critical Discourse Analysis, he opines that such representation is not without any ideological. Thus, he highlights the way social actors are placed or recontextualized in a discourse using various strategies, which ultimately lead to power imbalance in society (van Leeuwen, 2008).

Van Leeuwen's Social Actor Representation (SAR) has been applied to non-fictional prose more often than fictional prose. One example is the analysis of social actors in Indonesian online news channels. Amelia et al. (2019) apply van Leeuwen's categories, such as inclusion (categorization/nomination, assimilation, and individualization) and exclusion (passivation and nomination), to analyze the Indonesian online news channel *Liputan6.com*. The study

concludes that writers' choice of words to represent the social actors in the news is intentional and contributes to highlighting or excluding them. Van Leeuwen defines functionalization (a sub-category of categorization) as a recontextualization of social actors in terms of what they do. For example, the 'criminal is represented as 'a dangerous predator' in the factual report _____. Also, the study demonstrates that a social actor can be represented in different ways in a discourse. For example, the 'criminal' is represented as a 'dangerous predator' and 'a nasty piece of work' by the presenter, while the police use different representational strategies (they represent him as 'the offender,' which is more functionalized and personalized).

In some cases, social actor groups are represented differently because of gender, caste, religion, or age. The male-dominated characters are represented as having powerful roles or jobs, unlike the female characters in American movies. This study was done by Montasseri et al. (2020) and employs even categories of van Leeuwen's SAR. i.e., *role allocation, genericization vs specification, assimilation, association and disassociation, indetermination and differentiation, nomination and categorization, functionalization, and identification*. The study concludes that women characters are passivized and given less authoritative roles as compared to their male counterparts. Similarly, Caradeux and Salom (2013) investigated 50 short films to analyze the textual representation of genders in the short films. The study maintains that the construction of gender through media highlights gender inequalities. Also, the analysis of characters in the discourse informs the readers about their relationships of domination and resistance in society. Sadeghi (2016) also analyzes the representation of males and females in the ILI English series. This study discusses how male and female social actors are represented differently using linguistic choices.

The application of van Leeuwen's SAR to literary and fictional is pertinent to be mentioned here since this study deals with the fictional text. This will also strengthen our argument for using Van Leeuwen's SAR model to analyze the literary text. The *Corpse Washer* (2021), a novel by an Iraqi novelist, Sinan Antoon, has been investigated by Kareem (2021). The study highlights inclusion and exclusion as the main categories to study the utterance of characters in the text. As a linguistic analysis of the text, the study explores how actors can be activated or passivated. The role of activation can be linguistically realized when characters are preceded by a prepositional phrase such as 'by' and 'from,' possessivation (possessive pronouns), post-modification, and pre-modification. Similarly, Oda et al. (2018) studied *Shaw's Man and Superman* using appraisal as the sub-category of categorization. The study concludes that text is ideologically charged, and that is reflected in how social actors are linguistically realized in the text, such as the use of 'nouns' and 'adjectives'.

However, the study done by Mesiam and Negar (2015) is important as it works as a supportive argument to use van Leeuwen's activation/passivation, personalization/impersonalization to unravel the hidden ideologies and socio-political situation in Iranian society. Characters who work as social actors can also be impersonalized, i.e., they are attributed qualities that do not involve human characteristics. The two Persian translations of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* have also been analyzed using van Leeuwen's role allocation, collectivation, and individualization. The study highlights the difference in the representation of colonized and colonizers using lexico-grammatical items, which are prone to be ideologically biased.

3. Data

The data used in this study has been selected from Mohammad Hanif's novel *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* (2012). Hanif has highlighted the injustice and discrimination against Christian minorities in Pakistan. The protagonist, Alice, a junior nurse, is a lower-caste Christian in an Islamic world who faces discrimination and prejudice owing to her lower caste and religion. The note-taking skill technique was to select the text from the novel, which shows how lower caste Christians were represented in the text.

In order to explore the representation of lower-caste Christians, the text is analyzed using van Leeuwen's (2008) categorization, which is further divided into identification and functionalization. The reason to choose these two sub-categories of social actor representation is supported by the idea that lower caste Christians and occupation are the two because of which these social actors are discriminated against and suppressed by the Muslim majority and middle-class Christians.

4. Analysis and Results

4.1 Choohras

Lower-caste Christians are differentiated from Muslims and other Christians based on their caste and physical appearance. They are classified as 'Choohras' throughout the text of the novel. The classification based on caste reflects the marginalization of lower caste Christians and leads to exclusionary discrimination. Such classification also results in prejudices against the lower caste Christians, which categorize them as infidels and outsiders in the text.

Although Alice, the protagonist, is a dedicated junior nurse who is seen miraculously saving patients at the hospital, she is fully aware of her status as a 'Choohra Christian' in society.

'Lewd gestures, whispered suggestions, uninvited hands on her bottom are all part of Alice Bhatti's daily existence.' (p.9)

She not only faces marginalization in society but also at her work, where she is sent to Psyche Ward to face the lunatics. Moreover, she faces harassment and sexual violence while performing her duty, even though she has to be very careful not to make wrong gestures to someone because of being a Choohra Christian nurse.

Alice's father, Joseph Bhatti, a janitor by profession, often complains about the way they are classified as 'Choohras' not only by the Muslims but by their own brothers in religion. They converted to Christianity to avoid discrimination, but they are still identified as Choohras.

Joseph Bhatti, because of this discriminated attitude, considers himself 'a Choorah' because he knows that he is not accepted by his own brother Christians as Choorah as Joseph Bhatti is sometimes proud of being Choohra because he is sure that he is doomed to be Choohra.

'Because he always maintained the swagger of a Choohra, an untouchable with an attitude.' (p.50)

Despite the fact that Joseph Bhatti takes pride in his strong relationship with the land, he considers himself indigenous as compared to Muslims, Hindus, and Christians.

'This kind of man, Joseph Bhatti Choohra. We were here before the Christians came and before the Muslims came, even before the Hindus came. I am not just the son of this soil. I am the soil. Yes, I am Joseph Bhatti Choohra. (p.49)

'Choohras were here before everything. Choohras were here before the sacred was built before the Yassoo was resurrected, before Muslas came on their horses, even before Hindus decided they were too exalted to clean up their own shit.'

This refers to the arrivals of Aryans in India and, who suppressed the local Dravidians and later marginalized them in every sector of life.

4.2 Untouchables/Impure

The concept of purity and pollution, in the form of high-caste Hindus and Dalits in India, manifests in Pakistan in the form of Pak(clean) and napak(unclean). The very word 'Pakistan' suggests a place for '(pure)Pak people.' Thus, Choohra Christians have been going through adverse living conditions since they are considered untouchables(napak) by most Muslims. They are discriminated against due to their physical appearance, as the very word 'Choorah' refers to someone that is 'dirty, filthy and impure. Although Alice Bhatti is a junior nurse, she is living her life as an 'untouchable.'

'She can live with being an untouchable, but she desperately hopes for the only privilege that comes with being one.

Alice, the protagonist, is well cognizant of the fact she and Choohra Christian are treated as marginalized and discriminated against because they are considered impure, and people do not want to touch them or make physical contact with them. As Alice complains, people will not take a banana from the same bunch that she has taken a banana from.

'Yes, when everything is finished, Choohras will still be here, and cockroaches too.' (p.52)

Alice's father, Joseph Bhatti, complains about the discriminatory attitude of Muslims and Christians towards the lower caste Christians as they are considered dirty and filthy. Joseph and Alice both know that people do not want to use the dishes after they use the dishes. 'And they fed me in their Choohra dishes and then washed their hands as if I was spreading leprosy.' (p.51) They hovered me around at a distance, thinking that if I touched something, it would get contaminated. (p.51).

Other examples from the text are the words such as 'Mushkis' and 'Bhangis,' which are used to refer to lower caste Christians, and they are considered someone whose bodies smell because of their dirty and filthy professions.

These 'Mushkis' are very hot, so save yourself.

4.3 Functionalization: Sweepers/shit cleaners

Choorah Christians' occupation in the sanitation industry since the birth of Pakistan has made them vulnerable to social discrimination. 'Social Discrimination against Choohras based on occupation and Dalit ancestry is still a common occurrence in Pakistan. (Sara Singha, 2015) in her work 'Dalit Christians and class consciousness in Pakistan,'

Choohra Christians or lower caste Christians are represented as sweepers in the text. Even the very word 'Choohras' gives the sense of someone who is a shit-cleaner, and the job has been specifically related to the lower-caste Christians in Pakistan. As a result, they are marginalized because of their degrading occupations. As Dr. Preira, a middle-class Christian, says in the novel 'He is too polite to point out that not all Christians are sweepers. He also fears the report: 'But all sweepers are Christians.' (p.8) It seems that this is the only job left for the lower caste Christians. Alice Bhatti is fully cognizant of the fact that people consider all lower-caste Christians as sweepers or janitors. (p.76)

Philip Jenkins writes in *Notes from the Global Church, 2016*, that *most of the Christians are forced to do the dirtiest jobs for their survival in Pakistani society.*

They are the street sweepers and the menial workers on graveyard shifts. Their dirty jobs reduce them to the lowest caste—Choohras (Churas, or Bhangis), which has become the pejorative name for all Christians. (Philip Jenkins, 2016)

Consequently, Alice's father, Joseph Bhatti, feels that owing to their jobs as sweepers, people consider Yasoo (the Christ) as the janitor who went around cleaning their streets, which is similar to thinking about all the Christians as 'shit cleaners'. 'He feels that finally, they have pulled Yasoo down to their level as if Yasoo was not the saviour of all mankind but a janitor who went around cleaning their streets, (p, 123). So, the job of sweepers has become a part of their existence in Pakistan. Whatever else they perform as jobs, they are doomed to live and die as sweepers. Although Joseph Bhatti is retired, he still performs jobs to clean the gutter.

'He is retired now, but they still call him when they can't figure out what is stuck in the bowels of a gutter.' (P.46)

Lower-caste Christians not only face discrimination at the hands of the majority of Muslims but also other middle-class Christians (from high-caste Hindus) consider them shit cleaners which worsens their status in society. These middle class Christians deny the fact that Choohra (Dalit ancestors) have any relationship with the Protestant Church in Pakistan.

'They think we are shit cleaners. Yes, we are shit cleaners. (p.50)

4.4 Appraisalment

Lower-caste Christians are constantly represented in a negative way whenever they are referred to or talked about in the text. There are enough examples in the text that show that they belong to the lowest rank in society and that they are the reason for all the social discrimination. First of all, they are impure citizens who have no place or no right to live in a country of pure people, which means that they are outsiders.

Morally, they are considered corrupt and have no moral values, and everyone considers them as their property and has the right to abuse them. Alice's mother was maltreated and killed while working as a sweeper.

In workplaces, they are also considered to be someone who has no value, as Alice is sent to a psyche ward. Alice also faces sexual violence as people welcomingly try to touch her without her permission.

The place where they live also shows that they are considered the worst place to live. A French colony is a place that is dirty and filthy, and most of the lower-caste Christians live in such areas, which are separated from rest places in the country.

5. Conclusion

As the study explores the way lower Christians are represented in the text of *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti*, it uses van Leeuwen's categories of social actor representation. It can be concluded that van Leeuwen's SAR can be used to analyze the social actors in the text. However, van Leeuwen uses a set of categories to study the recontextualization of social actors in a discourse.

To conclude, lower caste Christians are marginalized social actors in the text, which reflects the reality these people face discrimination in Pakistan. Their strings attached to the lower caste of Dalits and their poor economic condition show that they belong to the lower strata of society.

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