
Women's Objectification in Hanif's *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* and Thiango's *The Devil on the Cross*: A Feminist Study

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Abstract: This study looks into the problems related to the objectification of women in African and Pakistani fiction. *The Devil on the Cross* by Ngugi Wa Thiong'o and *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* by Muhammad Hanif are the subjects of this inquiry. The objectification theory by Nussbaum and Langton is utilised in this study. Sexual objectification and self-objectification can be distinguished from one another in a major and distinct way. Concerning sexual abuse, women have issues in patriarchal societies. They suffer from other types of societal harassment. They adopt this attitude from the culture and behave in a way that is congruent with what is expected of them by patriarchal society. This study investigates both authors' socialist concerns to discover the idea of objectification. It demonstrates the position of women in both African and Pakistani societies. Additionally, it demonstrates how harsh patriarchal society is. By examining the difficulties in this area, the current study exposes all the factors that contribute to the marginalisation and discrimination of women. The aim of the study is to investigate how objectified women are treated in these novels. The study goals are to examine how Christians in general and lower-class women in particular, Alice Bhatti and Warinnga, are devalued in society. Qualitative research is employed to examine these problems. The study comes to the conclusion that Alice Bhatti and Warinnga are socially marginalised due to their gender, caste, and religion. They are both portrayed as weak, pathetic creatures with no sense of identity.

Keywords: Feminism, Hanif, Objectification, Thiango, Women

Introduction

This study attempts to investigate the issues surrounding the objectification of women in African and Pakistani fiction. This investigation focuses on Ngugi WA Thiongo's *The Devil on the Cross* (1980) and *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* (2011) by Muhammad Hanif. The study uses the theoretical arguments of Martha Nussbaum and Rae Langton. There is a significant and clear distinction between sexual objectification and self-objectification. Patriarchal society is problematic for women. This report claims that women experience other forms of societal mistreatment in addition to sexual abuse. Additionally, they absorb this

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mindset from the culture and act in a way that is consistent with what is expected of them in a patriarchal society. These women's behaviours help to marginalise and harm women in patriarchal culture. In the making, maintaining, and flourishing of any society, women play a seminal role, yet they suffer from innumerable problems in familial, socio-economic, cultural, and even academic fields. Education and awareness related to these matters are the need of the hour. The upsurge of so many feminist movements is conclusive proof of how crucial these problems are. Intellectual intelligence, here in Pakistan as well, has been pretty active in highlighting women's rights violations and advocating for a society free of gender discrimination. Literary discourse is no exception in this regard. The area of academic research is also playing its part in providing the masses with awareness. This research study is one such endeavour.

This study is based on the works of two well-acclaimed writers: Muhammad Hanif from Pakistan and Ngugi Wa Thiong'o from Nigeria. African fiction, like its Pakistani counterpart, has been considerably potent in giving voice to the marginalised strata of society. African fiction and Pakistani fiction both offer nuanced perspectives on the issue of objectification, particularly as it pertains to women. In African fiction, the issue of objectification is often explored through the lens of colonialism, which imposed patriarchal systems and hierarchies on African societies. Many African writers, such as Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, have portrayed the ways in which colonialism has led to the objectification and marginalisation of African women, often resulting in their exploitation and abuse. Similarly, in Pakistani fiction, the issue of objectification is often linked to larger societal issues, such as poverty, corruption, and religious extremism. Many Pakistani writers, such as Mohsin Hamid, Kamila Shamsie, and Bapsi Sidhwa, have depicted the ways in which patriarchal norms and attitudes have led to the objectification and oppression of women in Pakistani society, often resulting in their marginalisation and disenfranchisement.

Objectified women are shown in both African and Pakistani fiction in subtle and complicated ways that highlight their power, resiliency, and agency in the face of persecution. As a result, women who are objectified are typically subjected to constricting preconceptions, and works of fiction from both Africa and Pakistan fight against such stereotypes by providing a more complex and empowering view of these women's lives.

Research Objectives

- To highlight women's objectification in Pakistani and African context
- To understanding the nature of the affiliation of male and female in an androcentric society

Research Questions

1. How do Hanif's *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* and Thiango's *The Devil on the Cross* portray women's objectification in Pakistan and Africa?
2. How does a comparison between African and Pakistani society help understand the women's experiences in an androcentric society?

Significance of the Study

This study is important not only because it is an attempt to highlight the problem women face in almost

all the walks of life but also because it signifies the promising role of Pakistani Anglophone fiction. This proposed research is intended to give voice to the marginalized women suffering from socioeconomic and cultural injustice in the form of objectification. Another significant aspect of this study is its cross-cultural reach. Comparative feminist analysis of both societies, as portrayed in the selected novels, will open up new vistas of understanding on women's objectification.

Literature Review

Nussbaum categorises sexual objectification into seven sub-types. These sub-types of objectification may involve instrumentality, denial of subjectivity, denial of autonomy, inertness, violability, fungibility, and ownership. Over time, a variety of feminist viewpoints on the matter have evolved. One of the best-known examples is Martha Nussbaum's 1995 list of characteristics that define sexual objectification. To use a contemporary example, Martha Nussbaum provides an insightful analysis of objectification that puts the denial of autonomy at the forefront and links it to several other aspects, such as instrumentality ownership or passion fungibility and the denial of agency. Martha Nussbaum contends that it is not since there can be positive examples of it, like during a good sexual relationship. This hypothesis claims that women begin to engage in sexual objectification because they objectify themselves in accordance with others. Women start to believe their bodies are separate from themselves. It has been suggested that this internalisation involves self-objectification. A person is treated solely as the object of one's sexual desire when they are sexually objectified. Objectification refers to treating a person like a commodity or an item without respect for their personality or dignity. A person is viewed and/or treated as an object, without thought or emotion, when they are being objectified. Women are frequently the targets of objectification, which turns them into objects of fulfilment and sexual pleasure. Although there is still much work to be done in this area, this trend has sparked a lot of discussion and reform throughout the years, mostly among feminists and other civil rights activists.

Rae Helen Langton, who is an Australian-British professor of philosophy and is currently the Knightsbridge Professor of Philosophy at the University of Cambridge, also endorses Nussbaum's theorization about the objectification of women. Langton (2001) extends Nussbaum's proposition by adding three more subtypes, including reduction to the body, reduction to the appearance, and silencing. In feminist philosophy, her idea of objectification has been hotly contested. Her theory suggests that people might be viewed as things or objects rather than as persons with intrinsic worth and dignity. There are many viewpoints on objectification, but those of Martha Nussbaum and Rae Langton stand out. The argument that objectification hurts a person's self-respect and self-esteem is emphasised in Martha Nussbaum's perspective on the topic. According to her, objectification happens when a person is reduced to nothing more than an object, used as a tool or instrument for the enjoyment of another, and their humanity is disregarded. According to Nussbaum, such a reduction in a person can cause severe psychological harm by making that person feel weak, defenceless, and without agency.

Rae Langton, on the other hand, focuses on a distinct component of objectification, highlighting the damage it causes to the victim's ability to communicate. According to Langton, objectification happens when a person is denied the means to communicate, the opportunity to express her subjectivity, or her worldview. She argues that objectification causes quiet and subordination because it compels women and

other oppressed groups to do so in the face of objectifying treatment. Despite having slightly different points of emphasis, Nussbaum and Langton both stress the negative effects of objectification. The psychological harm of objectification, which undermines a person's sense of self-worth and dignity, is highlighted by Nussbaum. The texts are further contextualised by a number of prominent critics, like Ackerly (2000), who promotes Third World feminism as a subset of the women's movement. The fundamental components and methods of this kind of feminism that were focused on gender, group, languages, learning, etc. are gone. The privileges of women are constantly taken away because of this prejudice, which supports the position of women and considers them to be a part of patriarchal societies like Pakistan. The miserable circumstances of working-class women in the middle of the nineteenth century are further highlighted by Langer (2001). They were constantly dealing with the most dreadful circumstances possible. They are treated brutally by their irresponsible husbands, who were unable to uphold their rights and had their women work to support them. Tandon (2008) contends that sexism creates the conditions necessary for working-class men to gain advantages, power over women, and the authority to deny them their legal rights. According to him, socialist criticism demonstrates the reality that oppression emerges from the structure of the class system.

According to Balraj (2015), women were honoured for their beauty and for their ability to manipulate others via the objectification of their bodies, while men were remembered for their bravery and military prowess. According to Atwood (1976), the mystery around men is mental, whereas the mystery surrounding women is physical. The situation of women and their place in society cannot be disputed. Atif, in his article *Feminist Issues in Muhammad Hanif's Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* (2016), and Esstman (2012) commend Hanif's for creating Alice, whom they compare to a saint, and for giving birth to such a remarkable personality. Fredrickson opines: "Sexual objectification is but one form of gender oppression" (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997, p. 174).

Theoretical Framework

This term pertains to a feminist analysis of sexual objectification. Theorising about how women are viewed and treated as objects in societies is called objectification theory. The theory of objectification offers a theoretical framework for comprehending how socialisation and objectification experiences may cause women to place an excessive amount of value on their appearance, a phenomenon known as self-objectification. Even though there are many women who are mothers, objectification theory has only been applied to motherhood in a small number of cases. The study on the objectification of mothers is summarised in this overview. In March 2019, we systematically searched five databases for studies, both published and unpublished, that quantitatively study the objectification of or self-objectification during motherhood. The term "objectification" in relation to gender mostly refers to how men perceive women as objects of their desire and consumption. Women are frequently relegated to the status of simple objects to be looked at or used for enjoyment because they are frequently portrayed and judged only on the basis of their physical attractiveness and sexual appeal. The discounting of women's skills, the confirmation of damaging preconceptions, and the normalisation of gender inequity are just a few of the negative effects that can result from this objectifying gaze.

The Objectification Theory by Martha Nussbaum and Ray Langton offers a conceptual framework for comprehending how objectification has a negative effect on people and society. The philosophy places a strong emphasis on the significance of valuing people's inherent humanity, encouraging their autonomy, and opposing repressive systems that uphold objectification. The goal of establishing environments that value equality, respect, and the acknowledgment of each person's inherent worth and dignity can be achieved by increasing awareness of objectification and its effects among both individuals and societies.

Text Analysis

The works *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* by Muhammed Hanif and *Devil on the Cross* by Ngugi wa Thiong'o both examine issues of objectification, but they do so from various angles and within various cultural settings. Here is a comparison of the two novels' textual analyses of how objectification is portrayed in each. *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* is set in modern-day Pakistan and tells the tale of Christian nurse Alice Bhatti, who experiences prejudice and objectification because of her gender, faith, and inferior social rank. In a strongly patriarchal culture where women are frequently reduced to their outward looks or only defined by their relationships with males, the story explores the objectification of women.

A number of incidents of harassment, assault, and objectifying language directed against Alice and other female characters in *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* serve as examples of objectification. The novel emphasises how women's agency is constrained and gender inequality is maintained by oppressive power structures and the pervasive objectification of women. The fundamental theme of the Kenyan novel *Devil on the Cross* is Alice's battle to defend her dignity and individuality in the face of objectification. The novel was originally written in Gikuyu and later translated into English. Neocolonialism, capitalism, and exploitation in post-colonial Africa are criticised.

To get its point across, the book employs satire and metaphorical themes. Although it mentions the objectification of women, its main emphasis is on the general exploitation and objectification of society as a whole. The documentary *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* examines the life of Christian nurse Alice Bhatti, who worked in a hospital in Karachi. The book delves deeply into issues of societal oppression, religious conflict, and gender inequity. The passage below demonstrates objectification in one instance: "When men entered the hospital, they would think Alice was something they could grab, grope, and use" (p. 56). This line demonstrates how males view Alice as an object, treating her more like a sexualized object than a person with agency and dignity. The book emphasises how women are frequently treated inhumanely and as objects in society.

In *Devil on the Cross*, objectification is depicted through an image of a corrupt capitalist system that dehumanises people and turns them into inanimate objects. Even though women are frequently exploited and objectified in the book, the greater socio-political critique connects with their stories. The characters in her novel experience a variety of forms of oppression, with gender being only one of them, and the novel asks the reader to consider the institutions that support objectification. On the other hand, the well-known Kenyan author Ngugi wa Thiong'o's novel *Devil on the Cross* is fiction. A heavy emphasis is placed on post-colonial themes and the problems of the working class in this book, which is presented as a hybrid

of narrative and drama. The following literary reference illustrates objectification in this book: "She was viewed by males as a toy to be played with briefly before being discarded." (p. 97)

The primary character, Jacinta Wariinga, who is objectified and only appreciated for her sexual attraction, is mentioned in this phrase. The paragraph emphasises dehumanisation and commodification of women because they are seen as nothing more than products for men to enjoy rather than as unique people with their own goals and objectives.

After conducting a textual analysis of *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* by Muhammed Hanif and *Devil on the Cross* by Ngugi wa Thiong'o, it is evident that the concept of objectification is present in both books. The characters in these works are dehumanised in various ways, becoming little more than things or tools used for the advantage of others. Specific textual lines and page references are used to support this conclusion. The protagonist of *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti*, Alice Bhatti, is repeatedly objectified throughout the book. One remarkable instance is Hanif's statement that Alice is "the pretty one with a shapely waist and attractive legs" (Hanif, p. 21). This statement emphasises Alice's objectification based on her outward appearance by showing how she is reduced to her physical attributes. Furthermore, the Teddy Butt character from the same book displays an obvious tendency to objectify women. Alice is referred to as "a fresh young morsel," and women are referred to as "meat" (Hanif, p. 63). The objectification that is established in the brains of some people in the story is highlighted by these references, which also dehumanise women. The overall concept of objectification is evident in *The Devil on the Cross* too. The primary character, Jacinta Wariinga, once said of herself as a woman, "I am only a plaything for those who come after me" (Thiong'o, p. 33).

This statement represents her realisation that she has been reduced to nothing more than an object of pleasure or service for others. In the final analysis, *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* and *Devil on the Cross* both make reference to the subject of objectification, though they do so in different ways. With a particular emphasis on the gender-based objectification that women undergo in patriarchal societies, *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* examines the unique realities of women. While *Devil on the Cross* adopts a more comprehensive approach, it criticises the objectification of people inside a dishonest socioeconomic system. Both books provide insight into how women are objectified in their particular cultural settings. They serve as an example of how women are frequently viewed as tools to be used, controlled, and then discarded rather than as valuable individuals with a unique value. These textual allusions offer hints regarding the universality of objectification and its effects on the lives of female characters in both works.

Alice Bhatti and Jacinta Wariinga are both fictitious protagonists from different novels; the similarities between them in terms of objectification depend on the circumstances and issues of each one of their own narratives. Both characters, despite coming from diverse cultural and social backgrounds, experience objectification and oppression in different ways: Alice Bhatti, in the novel *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* by Muhammed Hanif, is a Christian nurse in a Pakistani hospital. She faces gender-based objectification and harassment due to her gender and the fact that she works in a predominantly male environment. Her beauty and attractiveness often become a point of focus for male colleagues and patients, objectifying her in the process.

Dr. Pall had a mother, a daughter, and a wife, and still he treated women like lab rats. He'd look at a woman as if she were nothing more than the sum of her parts, like a spare part or some trivial organ that could be replaced by a quick trip to the bazaar. (p. 165)

This quote highlights the objectification of women and how they are often reduced to their physical attributes rather than being regarded as individuals with emotions, thoughts, and agency. Certainly, *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* and *Devil on the Cross* by Ngugi wa Thiong'o both depict female characters who are subjected to objectification, discrimination, and social injustice. These novels shed light on the struggles of women within their respective societal contexts. Below are textual references that highlight the objectification of the female characters in the target novel *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* by Muhammed Hanif:

Her hair's got a very sensible cut, and her shoes look brand new. The rest of her, whatever there is of her, is covered in what looks like a giant pink nightgown. She's crouched in front of an elderly man and is pleading with him to take his pills. (p. 28)

This excerpt illustrates how the protagonist, Alice Bhatti, is described in terms of her appearance and clothing, reducing her to her physical attributes rather than focusing on her personality or inner self. This kind of objectification is a common theme throughout the novel. Jacinta Wariinga, from Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Devil on the Cross* is a Kenyan woman who works as a barmaid and later as a laborer. She too faces objectification and harassment because of her gender. Her experiences highlight the pervasive objectification and mistreatment of women in a patriarchal society. Everyone had laughed at him. He could not understand it, for he had only asked the girl to tell him her name. His question had embarrassed her so much that she had covered her face with her hands. 'You have a good body and a beautiful face,' he had said, 'why are you ashamed?' She had then given him a scathing look and replied, 'My face and body are not the only things about me. (p, 115).

This passage from *Devil on the Cross* highlights the objectification of the female character in the novel, emphasizing how she is reduced to her physical attributes, which overshadows her identity, thoughts, and feelings. This type of objectification reflects the societal norms and attitudes prevalent in the book's setting. In both novels, the objectification of female characters serves as a powerful critique of the patriarchal systems and societal norms that diminish the value and agency of women. These narratives aim to raise awareness about the challenges faced by women in societies where gender discrimination and objectification are deeply ingrained. Alice Bhatti, being a Christian in a predominantly Muslim society, faces discrimination and objectification due to her religion and social class. She is marginalized and subjected to prejudice, which can be seen as a form of objectification based on her social identity. She was Pakistani, which was not quite Indian, not quite Arab, and certainly not white. And if you were a nurse and you happened to be a Christian, and on top of that, your name was Alice Bhatti, then you were asking for trouble (p. 75).

This quote highlights how the character Alice Bhatti faces racial and religious discrimination as a Christian nurse in Pakistan. Her identity makes her a target for objectification and mistreatment. Jacinta Wariinga, being a working-class woman in Kenya, experiences objectification and exploitation due to her lower socioeconomic status. She is seen as a disposable laborer in a capitalist and oppressive system, and

this reflects how class-based objectification can occur. "The rich pay the workers peanuts for backbreaking work, while the poor pay in their blood, sweat, and tears to make a few people richer. That's the devil's own cross we bear" (p. 46). In this quote, Ngugi wa Thiong'o criticizes the class-based exploitation in society. He describes how the poor are forced to endure difficult and unfair working conditions, while a small group of wealthy individuals benefits from their suffering. This reflects the theme of class-based objectification and exploitation. Jacinta Wariinga, being a working-class woman in Kenya, experiences objectification and exploitation due to her lower socioeconomic status. She is seen as a disposable laborer in a capitalist and oppressive system, and this reflects how class-based objectification can occur. These lines offer insight into the racial and class-based objectification presented in *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* and *Devil on the Cross*. Both novels explore how individuals from marginalized backgrounds are subjected to discrimination and exploitation in their respective societies.

Conclusion

Overall, both *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* and *The Devil on the Cross* represent comprehensive examinations of the ways in which objectification functions in various situations and point out the significance of addressing this issue as a critical first step towards constructing more just and equitable communities. Though in distinct ways, both African and Pakistani fiction provide significant insights into the problem of objectification. African fiction frequently examines objectification in relation to slavery, postcolonial society, and class conflict. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Chinua Achebe, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, among others, have written about how oppressors employ objectification as a means of holding on to control over marginalised communities. They demonstrate how the colonisers and elites exploit the colonised and working-class people, reducing them to nothing more than objects and commodities that can be used and thrown away. Similar to this, objectification is frequently discussed in the context of patriarchy, misogyny, and class conflict in Pakistani fiction. Objectification is portrayed by authors like Mohammed Hanif, Kamila Shamsie, and Bapsi Sidhwa as being deeply ingrained in patriarchal structures and resulting in systemic brutality against women and people from lower social levels. They demonstrate the objectification, dehumanisation, and exploitation of women and members of the working class, as well as how these feed into vicious cycles of injustice and violence. Both in African and Pakistani fiction, objectification is shown as a worldwide issue that must be resolved through group efforts. In order to defeat objectification and create a more just and equal society, writers stress the significance of cooperation, resistance, and group effort. In conclusion, African and Pakistani fiction contribute interesting perspectives on the subject of objectification and advance our knowledge of how it manifests in various settings. These fictional works encourage us to work towards a more just and equitable world where everyone is treated with dignity and respect by highlighting the catastrophic repercussions of objectification on people and society.

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