

# Feminism in Mulkraj Anand's Untouchables

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**Abstract** - In this era of globalisation, both men and women have come to grips with the fact that women are cognitively and physically inferior to men. This is something that has been brought up in conversations about the many roles that women hold in India. Indians have a long history of honouring female deities as goddesses. In spite of the fact that, with very few exceptions, women have been subjected to patriarchal tyranny from a number of angles from the beginning of time, feminists continue to make their voices known. As a consequence of this, they have been subjected to a wide range of challenges, such as being subjected to domination, exploitation, marginalisation, discrimination based on opportunities, harsh treatment, and isolation from the bulk of human existence. Over the course of the last several years, a number of women have established themselves as key contributors to the Indian government. These women have held positions such as president, prime minister, head of bank, speaker, and lieutenant general. On the other hand, women in Indian society have a long history of being repressed and excluded from all fields of power. This includes, but is not limited to, the following areas of influence: economics, social life, geography, culture, religion, and even their own voices. As a consequence of this, their predicament is far more terrible and inhumane than that of males. Ever from the dawn of time, upper caste women and patriarchal society have reigned over and subjugated them, as Mulk Raj Anand demonstrates in his essay titled "Untouchable." Mulk Raj Anand's novel Untouchable is the subject of this research, which studies passages from the novel and finds parallels to Indian feminism.

**Keywords** - Mulk Raj Anand, Untouchable, Feminism, Women, Society, Men, Discrimination.

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## INTRODUCTION

It is rather difficult to ascertain whether or not feminism has been successful in achieving its objectives due to the fact that it is such a broad concept. The terms "feminist," "female," and "feminine" have been used by feminists in a broad variety of settings during the course of the last fifteen years. During the latter half of the 1960s, a new women's movement emerged, and the terms "feminism" and "feminist" are political labels that imply support for the objectives of the movement. A separate kind of political discourse, feminist criticism is more than merely concerned with gender in literature; it is a critical and theoretical activity committed to the battle against patriarchy and sexism. Feminist critique comes from the field of feminism. [1-2]

During the course of the feminist movement, one of the primary motivating factors was the protest against the sexist representation of women by patriarchy. [3] In civilizations that are dominated by patriarchy, women are either seen as citizens of a lower social class or are considered to be of lower status than males. Whether they are at home or out in public, women are subject to the direct and indirect authority of men. This is true across the whole world. one a sexual object or

a tool for carrying offspring, a woman is seen as one of these in Indian society.[4]

Mulk Raj Anand is a prominent figure among Indian writers who have authored works for the English language publishing house. As a writer, he was exceptionally well-known all over the globe. His works have left an influence on the minds of people all around the world. [5] Although he was a prolific writer, the novels, short stories, and essays that he produced covered a broad variety of subjects. This author is considered a pioneer in the field of Anglo-Indian fiction writing due to the fact that he narrates the everyday difficulties of Indian people and the dreadful living circumstances they are forced to endure. [6] The problems that are experienced by the subaltern people who are oppressed are described in his works in a way that is both vivid and painful, and they often transmit a shattering clarity.[7]

By following the tragic story of Bakha, a young sweeper from the Dalit community in a cantonment town in north India, and Sohini, her sister and a symbol of the plight of Dalit women in India, Anand's Untouchable directs its attention to social issues of

discrimination such as casteism, untouchability, classicism, and other forms of discrimination.[8]

The historical origins of that phenomena may be traced back to the ancient Hindu religion in India, despite the fact that the practice of that phenomenon has drastically declined due to the involvement of law. The ancient document known as the Manu Samhita, which was written by Rishi Manu, was the spark that ignited the concept of casteism, which thereafter spread across every Hindu society. By the time that Manu formed his divides, the four social classes that are known as the Brahmins, the Kshatriyas, the Vaishyas, and the Shudras had already been established in Hindu society. [9]

On the other hand, these divides were not based on rank but rather on the performance of a person in carrying out their social responsibilities. The Brahmins, for instance, were assigned the responsibility of directing religious matters, the Kashtriyas were tasked with ensuring the safety of the public, the Vaishyas were tasked with managing the economy, and the Shudras were tasked with providing assistance to the other two groups. Subsequently, a number of avaricious Brahmins have transformed this idea of Manu into a genetic or hierarchical social code; they have positioned themselves at the top of the caste-diagram; and on the other hand, they have declared the lowest social position for Shudras, subjecting them to the repulsive term of "untouchability." One of the most important characters in Anand's narrative is a lovely young lady by the name of Sohini. She is reminiscent of a sylph. Anand says this about her beauty when he describes her;

*Within the confines of her graceful frame, she exhibited a Sylph-like figure—not skinny but full-bodied—with a narrow waist that arched downwards to reveal the folds of her salwar and full, round, globular breasts that protruded slightly from beneath her see-through muslin shirt due to the absence of a bodice.*

There is water in the house, and Bakha requests for it when he gets home after cleaning the toilet, after being humiliated. As Sohini brings the empty pitcher to the well, she finds a large queue of people waiting for an upper-caste man's reward to fill their pitchers; the outcasts are not permitted to use the well platform. Sohini gets in on the action. Also waiting is Gulabo, a middle-aged dalit lady who views Sohini as a physical attractiveness competition. The author writes;

*Her delicate features had irritated Gulabo's flesh as she rose to fame. Someone may see the girl as a competitor. Even Gulabo would not admit to herself that she was envious of the sweeper-girl, but she despised seeing the sweeper-girl's pure, honest face. However, her mocking and playful abuse when she welcomed Sohini exposed her true feelings.*

Anand brings to light, via the character of Sohini, the struggles that women in India have to endure since they have been subjected to a male-dominated culture all the way back to the beginning of time. The women who belong to the dalit group are subjected to a twofold kind of enslavement: first, they are humiliated by members of higher castes in public, and then they are tormented by their husbands at home. In this situation, they are subjected to two distinct forms of shame: first, from the patriarchal concept and the women of the upper class, and secondly, from inside their own group. This is what Sylvia Plath says when she sees the anguish that women are going through: "I must get my soul back from you; I am killing my flesh without it." [10]

Anand's narrative shows a dwelling colony of outcasts that is surrounded by mud walls. This colony is meant to be a depiction of the old practice of untouchability. Bakha finds out about their plight in this scene, which takes place when he is getting in trouble for accidentally infecting a man on the street by touching him. Therefore, on another occasion, Pandit Kalinath calls upon Sohini to clean the bathrooms that are located inside the temple. [11] While he is working, he gently strokes her breast. In the event that Sohini, the younger sister of the temple priest, rejects his sexual advances, he accuses her of polluting him. It is possible that members of their own higher caste, in addition to the Brahmin, may abuse them in a harsh manner at certain periods. It is essential to take notice of the fact that the observations made by E.M. Forster are emphasised in this context:

*The sweeper has it worse than a slave because, unlike the slave, the sweeper is born into a situation of servitude from which he cannot break free; he is also unable to find solace in religious or social interactions. Because he is unclean, he spreads germs to everyone he touches. First things first: they need to change their schedules and become clean. It is his responsibility to alert the orthodox that this repulsive and unsettling figure is approaching as she strolls down public roadways.*

Sohini draws attention to the hypocrisy of the caste Hindus after this incident, who claim to be polluted by touching a sweeper, but the holy priests, who are entrusted with the care of Hindu religion, are not afraid to molest an outcast girl. [12] She concludes that dalit women are the ultimate object for male pleasure at home and in public. Here, critic and writer Premila Paul writes;

*His accusation that Sohini and her brother defiled him in the temple, made his cowardly effort to molest her look much more terrible. This highlights the hypocrisy and standards that lie behind the surface of what seems to be spirituality and purity. Ironically, Trinayya refers to the Brahmin as "the custodian of*

*culture in India," yet he tries to break one of the most basic cultural rules. Traditional moral standards trap the helpless Bakha and Sohini.*

Starting from the beginning of recorded history and continuing right up to the present day, women, especially those who are on the periphery of society, have had a difficult time for themselves. Since that time, their appeal has been devouring the appetites of men like a hot cake. [13] There are several examples of Dalit women labouring in various capacities in ancient epics and Puranas. These include acting as Dasi (maid), sweeps, cleaners, and even massagers of male bodies. They reasoned that God must have created them specifically for the purpose of performing these jobs. That meant they were unable to express themselves. In the Hindu epic Mahabharata, for instance, Draupadi's views on the subject of female rights are mostly ignored and do not elicit any replies from the characters. [14]

India has a turbulent history that is marked by superstitions and the practice of untouchability, despite the fact that it possesses a very rich spiritual legacy. The country is still in the process of growing, and its history is marked by a number of problems, including as widespread poverty, high unemployment rates, and the marginalisation of minority populations. This may be seen as a metaphor for the caste system that exists in India, which illustrates how women are subjugated to men in the patriarchal culture that exists today, both in the household and in society as a whole. [15]

## CONCLUSION

The conclusion that castism is a crime against humanity may be stated as follows: women, particularly those who are marginalised, have been victimised and dehumanised twice by the majority of humanity. This is the case in the book Untouchable by Anand, which highlights the important themes via the characters of women. The sorrows, anguishes, and tragedy that they bring to India are brought to light by this. On the other hand, their condition has improved to the point that it is satisfactory in India. They have been suffocated as a result, and as a result, they want to be freed from the confines of the caste system and seek to incorporate themselves into the common bondage of mankind. In light of the current circumstances, it is now time to extend the boundaries of their space. In light of equality, liberty, and fraternity, the moment has come to collapse the caste system and deconstruct the core of life. It is only at that point that the feminism that brings about peace, wealth, and joy in our global world will ultimately be realised.

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