

The Spectrum of Dalit Women Position in India: A Critical Discourse of Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*

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Abstract:

In the era of globalization, talking about the spectrum of women position in India means that we both men and women have accepted the fact that women are inferior to men both physically and mentally. India is the land where women deities have been worshipped. In spite of that since time immemorial, with some exceptions, women are in the flow of subjugation under the patriarchal set-up from various angles, is clearly heard in the voice of feminist. Therefore, they have been facing innumerable challenges such as domination, exploitation, marginalization, discrimination in opportunities, inhuman treatment, and alienation from the mainstream of human space. Though, in recent time innumerable women have contributed in various fields in Indian government like a president speaker Prime Serve of the Lieutenant Common and bank chief etc. But, still, Dalit women have held a subordinate position in Indian society in terms of gender, sex, color, elegance, race, culture, religion, position, status, and even the voices and marginalized and extruded them from the , of society economically, socially, and geographically. Therefore, their plight is more pathetic and inhumanistic than Dalit men. From the very beginning of existence, they have been dominated and suppressed by both the patriarchy society and the upper caste women which are reflected in Mulk Raj Anand novel *Untouchable*. This present paper looks at select samples from the Mulk Raj Anand's novel *Untouchable* correlates them with the position Dalit women in India.

Keywords: Globalization, Subordinate, Marginalization, Extruded, Discrimination, Dalit Women Inhumanistic, Mulk Raj Anand, *Untouchable*, Position

The term 'Dalit' derives from the Sankrit vernacular 'dalita' which means scatter or split. In this sense it emphasizes the scatter or excluded communities who are being separated from the high class Brahmin society by ancient traditional society makers. Since then they are considered as downtrodden and untouchable not only physically but also mentally and treated them as animals by the upper class. They have been exploited by economically, marginalized by socially and hatred by culturally which have attracted the attention of the dalit writers who have authentically recorded their pangs, pains, pathos and anguishes. In this context, the position of dalit women is more pathetic than dalit men. Let illustrate it through the glimpses of Anand's novel *Untouchable*.

Mulk Raj Anand is one of the most important Indian writers in English literature. He was a writer of international repute. His works have made a mark on the international Scenario. He had written lot of novels, short stories and essays with various themes. He has been considered a pioneer of the Anglo-Indian fiction writers because his writings deal with the wretched condition of Indian people and their day to day life problems. His writings are rich with the realistic and touching portrayal of the problems of the marginalized subaltern community, often written with heart rending clarity.

Anand's novel *Untouchable* boastfully attacks the social issues of discrimination such as casteism, untouchability, classicism and so on through the eventful day in the life of Bakha a young sweeper living in the outcastes' colony of a north Indian Cantonment town who is a representative of Dalit community and the pitiful life of Sohini, sister of Bakha who represents the position of Dalit women in India.

Historically, the root of that mentioned issues of discrimination, gets found in the Ancient Hindu religion in India; though, at present, the practice of that phenomena due to the intervention of law, has reduced a lot. The essence of casteism had been begotten by Rishi Manu through his scriptural text *Manu Samhita*; and, thereafter, it had started to spread its effect throughout the whole Hindu society. At that time, Manu had divided the Hindu society into four above mentioned social castes-diagrams (Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishayas and Shudras). But, these categorizations were not hierarchical, it was on the basis of someone's inner strength and skill for performing social works; referentially, those who have knowledge on religion will be marked as the Brahmins will perform religious activities, the muscular will be called as Kashtriyas will work for social protection, the professionally skilled persons will be named as Vaishyas will act for

social economy, and the rest will be summoned as Shudras will do for all other social activities and will help the above referred three castes. Later, an amount of greedy Brahmins for the sake of their economical and political benefits in the society, have metamorphosed this concept of Manu into the genetical or hierarchical social code; and have established themselves in the superior position of the caste-diagram; and have, contrarily, declared the lowest social position for Shudras imposing on them the nausea of ‘untouchability.’

Sohini, a central female character in Anand novel, is a beautiful girl. She has a sylph-like form. Anand describes her beauty by saying;

She had, a Sylph like form, not thin but full-bodied, within the limits of her graceful frame, well rounded on the hips, with an arched narrow waist from which descended the folds of her salwar and above which were her full, round, globular breasts, jerking slightly, for lack of a bodice, under her transparent muslin shirt. (Untouchable 46)

At the time, after frustrated by the humiliations when Bakha reaches to home from the of toilet cleaning work, he asks for water, there is water in the house. Sohini arrives to the well with the empty pitcher, there has been a long crowd waiting for the bounty of an upper caste man to fill their pitchers, as the outcastes are not allowed to get on the platform of well. Sohini joins the crowd. Gulabo, another middle-aged dalit woman who considers Sohini as her rival in beauty also waits. The novelist pens down;

The delicate features of her rising beauty had inflamed Gulabo’s body. The girl was a potential rival. Gulabo hated the very sight of her innocent, honest face, though she would not confess, even to herself, that she was jealous of the sweeper-girl. But she unconsciously betrayed her feeling in the mockery and light hearted abuse with which she greeted Sohini. (Untouchable 65)

That is why Sohini is scolded by Gulabo, a dalit woman when she meets her claims to a higher caste than Sohini, as there is caste hierarchy among dalits. “There are degrees of caste among the ‘low caste’ people, there being none low without one being lower” (Iyengar 337).

Anand, actually through the character of Sohini portrays the plight of India women who, from time immemorial are treated as slaves of the male chauvinistic society and that too the women from the dalit community are doubly burdened: they are enslaved in their daily life and in their family set up - they are tortured by their husbands in their family and in the society they are humiliated by the upper caste people. In this case, they undergo twofold humiliations- formerly by the patriarchal notion and upper class women and latter by their own community. Noticing the plight of women, Sylvia Plath utters, "I must get my soul back from you; I am killing my flesh without it" (The Unabridged Journals of Sylvia Plath).

Anand's narrative shows a description of the outcaste colony of mud-walled houses which is the symbol of the traditional practice of untouchability. Here Bakha becomes aware about their problem when he accidentally touches a man in the street and is punished for polluting him. In another incident Pandit Kalinath asks Sohini to come and clean the lavatories in the temple. He fondles her breast while working. The temple priest tries to sexually harass his young sister Sohini and when she repels his advances, accuses her of polluting him. They sometime are not only inhumanly treated by the Brahmin but also their own higher caste community. In this context E.M. Forster's words are rightly pointed out:

The sweepers is worse off than a slave, for the slave may change his master and his duties and may even become free, but the sweeper is bound for ever, born into a state from which he can't escape and where he is excluded from social intercourse and the consolation of his religion. Unclean himself he pollutes other when he touches them. They have to purify themselves, and to rearrange their plans for the day. This he is disgusting as well as disquieting object to the orthodox as she walks along the public roads, and it is his duty to call out and warn them that he is coming... (*Untouchable* Preface 8)

After this incident Sohini realizes that dalit women are the epitome of object for male's stomach as well as male's pleasure in home as well as unhomeliness and fingers out the hypocrisy of the caste Hindus who say that they are polluted by the mere touch to a sweeper, but the holy priests, the custodians of Hindu religion do not hesitate to molest an outcaste girl. In this context Premila Paul, a critic and writer write;

His coward attempt to molest Sohini appears all the more offensive because of his accusing her and her brother of defiling him at the temple when the attempt is foiled. This brings into sharp focus the standards and perfidy underlying the façade of purity and spirituality. It is ironic that the Brahmin, 'the custodian of culture in India' as Trinayya calls him, makes an attempt to violate one of the fundamental codes of culture. The innocent Bakha and Sohini become victims of the conventional moral codes.

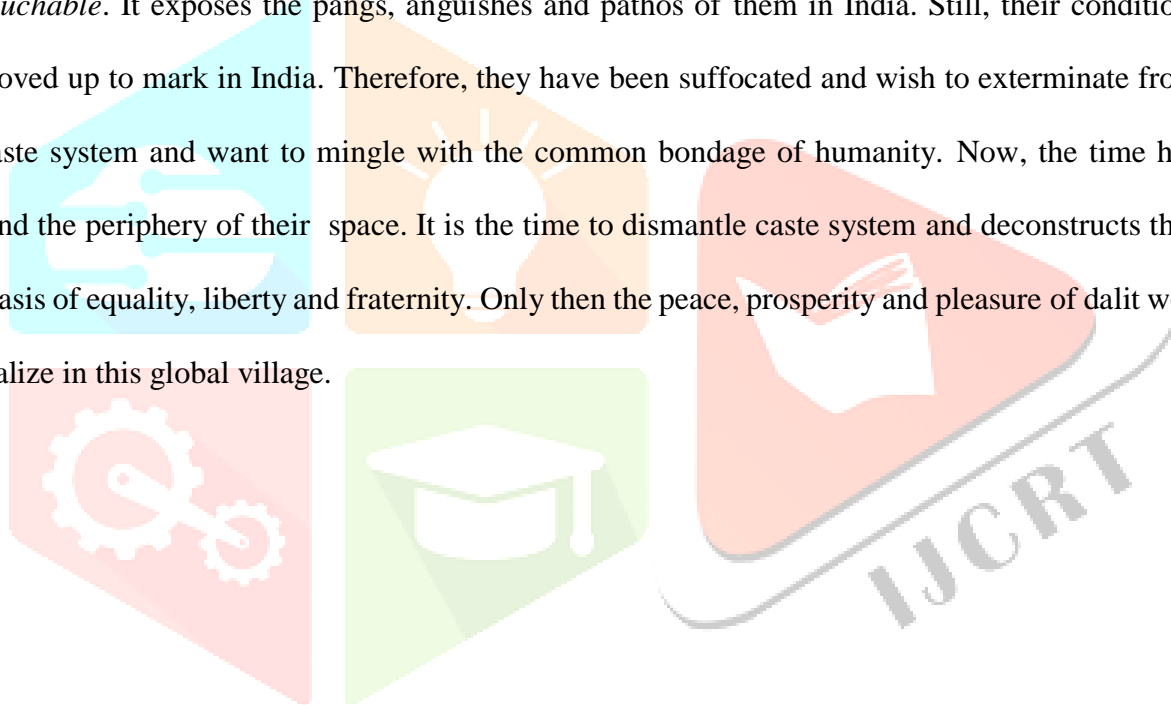
If we look back at the prehistoric time, we come to realize that the plight of women, especially the marginal women, from this time to the present time is quite miserable. Since then, their beauty has been used as hot cake for male hunger. One might come across various examples in Ancient epics and Puranas where Dalit women were used as Dasi (maid), sweeper, cleaner, and well massager of male body. They had to be believed that God has made them for these purposes. So they had no rights to raise their voice. Thus for instance Draupadi's utterances about her rights in Hindu epic *Mahabharata* are technically ignored and provided her no answer.

India is a land of long tradition and spirituality which has a dark history of untouchability and superstitions. It is still a developing country which has a long history of impoverishment, poverty striking, unemployment, and voicelessness of the marginalized subaltern community. In this context, caste system plays India a metaphorical role which reminds the readers that a woman has no space in the male dominated society in which she first becomes a slave to her family and later to the patriarchal mind set.

The dalit women have no right to live with the higher caste colony or even marry with them. They have to live mud walled houses that clustered together in outside colony in two rows, under the shadow both of the town and the cantonment, but outside their boundaries and separate from them. There lived the scavengers, the leather-workers, the washer men the barbers, the water carriers, and the grass-cutters and other outcastes from Hindu society. A brook ran near the lane once with crystal clear water now sullied by the dirt and fifth of the public latrines situated about it.

Therefore, dalit women are disproportionately affected by the caste system and socioeconomic consequences in male centric society. Existing disparities are the underlying cause of dalit women's susceptibility of disasters in India. their rights, both monetary and political, have seen a massive, truly unprecedented expansion since the very beginning of human existence. Hence, they are adversely affected by global factors and social developments that put more people at risk of disaster.

After the above survey, it can be uttered in conclusion that castism is a crime against humanity in which women; especially the marginalized dalits have been victimized and dehumanized twice from the mainstream of humanity which draws the key points through the women characters in Anand's novel *Untouchable*. It exposes the pangs, anguishes and pathos of them in India. Still, their condition has been improved up to mark in India. Therefore, they have been suffocated and wish to exterminate from the cage of caste system and want to mingle with the common bondage of humanity. Now, the time has come to expand the periphery of their space. It is the time to dismantle caste system and deconstructs the centre on the basis of equality, liberty and fraternity. Only then the peace, prosperity and pleasure of dalit women come to realize in this global village.



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