



## Inter-Caste Gender Performativity in Indian Hindu Culture: A Postcolonial Gender Study in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*

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### ABSTRACT

This study uses Judith Butler's concept of "gender performativity" to examine Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* in order to draw conclusions about the inter-caste gender performativity in Indian Hindu culture. Some autobiographical writings preserved evidence of voluntary and 'non-theatrical inter-caste connection' which transcends the boundary of untouchability, despite the dogmatic and historic hostility against inter-caste relationships in Indian Hindu society. In a consenting intercaste relationship, women, as the subaltern gender, never know for sure what caste they belong to. They are generally discovered to be branded off the caste of the males who touched them, rather than naturally belonging to any caste of them. Women in non-consensual inter-caste relationships are kept quiet by the strong touch of males from higher castes, yet this does not affect their social status. It's a double standard, and the higher classes control both settings. The non-dramatic setting challenges the elite rhetoric of 'impurity' and the concept that inter-caste contact would result in retribution in the next world. This connection demonstrates that the theatrical concept is nothing more than a bourgeois-political tool used by the ruling class to subjugate the lower classes. This study is qualitative in nature and was conducted using a closed-textual-reading approach. The impact of inter-caste gender performativity on both authors is discussed, and the gender performativity of Hindu castes is examined in four settings (theatrical, non-theatrical, public, and private). The study demonstrates that each author is impacted in their own unique way by gender performativity as imposed by society, and that gender performativity is conditional within the Indian Hindu castes, both onstage and off.



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## INTRODUCTION

According to Butler, gender is an act that is dramatic, a performance, that is rehearsed, according to a certain script that is written by the ancestors, and it is a historical reproduction. The body is the center of the performance, while, for Merleau-Ponty, Wittig and Foucault, the body is a historical idea (Butler 520). Merleau-Ponty, in *The Phenomenology of Perception*, claims that the body is not a natural species; rather it's a historical idea, which Beauvoir claimed on gender in *The Second Sex*. For Beauvoir too, the body is a "process of embodying cultural and historical possibilities" (Butler 521). There are two types of performative act. One is theatrical and another is non-theatrical. In this both text *Untouchable* and *The God of Small Things*, performative act has a great impact on the character's class, caste and gender. This paper would explore how much gender performativity influences both writers Mulk Raj Anand and Arundhati Roy and how much their created characters maintained or broke the gender performativity theatrically and non-theatrically.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In his article "Subaltern Studies in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*: A Critical Overview" (2015), Md. Hafijur Rahman argues that the concept of subalternity was imported to the Indian subcontinent in the form of patriarchy, casteism, gender discrimination, and the marginalization of the weak and untouchable. Because Arundhati Roy has spoken out against male chauvinism, patriarchy, social discrimination, political exploitation, sexual subordination, and religious deconstruction on behalf of their independent society, *The God of Small Things* is a depiction of protest against subalternity. The incestuous relationship between Rahel and Estha, who are twins, is also a kind of protest against social norms and rules around romantic relationships.

*The God of Small Things* depicted the notion of twofold colonization, hybridization, and colonial yearning, as Sobia Ilyas argues in her thesis titled "The Subaltern Voice in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*: A Postcolonial Approach" (2019). Ammu represents postcolonial women of the contemporary era from the subaltern perspective since she is a fiercely independent person who relentlessly challenges the dominant culture for the right to express her sexuality and independence. On the other hand, Velutha's figure is a metaphor for the dangerous influence of the outcast and the Other in a racist and religiously intolerant society. Ammu and Velutha are two examples of empowered subjects who have the subaltern voice thanks to postcolonial circumstances of double colonialism, hybridization, and colonial desire (Tufail, M et.al., 2022, Khan, S., Ali, S., & Urooge, S. 2019)..

Characters in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, writes Sedunath Dhakal in "Interface between Subalternity and Sexuality in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*" (2019), defy societal standards. Ammu's act of defiance is a direct challenge to the socio-cultural narratives established by Indian patriarchal culture.

According to Cheluva Nikhil in "Caste and Gender Issue Discussed in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* Novel" (2022), the author is imploring the upper-class readers via his depiction of the hardships Bakha and his family face to consider the plight of their lower-class peers.

Writing as a social critic, Mulk Raj Anand uses his book *Untouchable* to speak out against caste discrimination in Indian culture, according to Nisar Ahmed Dar in "Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*: A Voice of Subaltern" (2018). Mulk Raj Anand, in his view, accurately portrays the lives of India's lower-class citizens and the underlying character of the country's culture. The caste system causes severe damage and disorder in Indian culture.

Mulk Raj Anand, who was inspired by Marxist philosophy and Gandhiji, thinks that the viewpoint of democracy would assist to elevate the socioeconomic circumstances of subalterns, as stated by Dr. Tripti Kumari in "Glimpse of Gender Sensitization in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*" (2018). In a patriarchal culture, a woman is treated nearly like a consumer commodity. Class, caste, and patriarchal advantages gradually close in on the protagonist of this tale.

### **Research Gap**

The review of the literature clarifies that there is no work found to be done by applying gender performativity of Judith Butler in *Untouchable* by Mulk Raj Anand and *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy. There are no researches done in this criteria by incorporating the theory of performative acts by answering these problems of gender performativity in *Untouchable* and *The God of Small Things* with the effects and influences different class, caste and gender. As a result, the nontheatrical and theatrical performativity of this text remained unexplored. Therefore, this research deals with the gap of gender in *Untouchable* and *The God of Small Things*.

### **METHODOLOGY**

This study is qualitative in nature and was conducted using a closed-textual-reading approach. My main references are Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* and Michael Lewis's *The God of Small Things*. Internet archives, articles, blogs, and academic publications are my secondary sources of information. This study makes use of Judith Butler's "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory".

### **Research Objectives**

#### **General Objective:**

To bring out the social discourse of gender performativity in inter-caste relationship in the topic.

#### **Specific Objectives:**

- I. To investigate how both the writers, Mulk Raj Anand and Arundhati Roy are effected and influenced by the traditional gender performativity.
- II. To figure out the theatrical and non-theatrical gender performativity of the prominent characters to explore the gender performativity in inter-caste relationship.

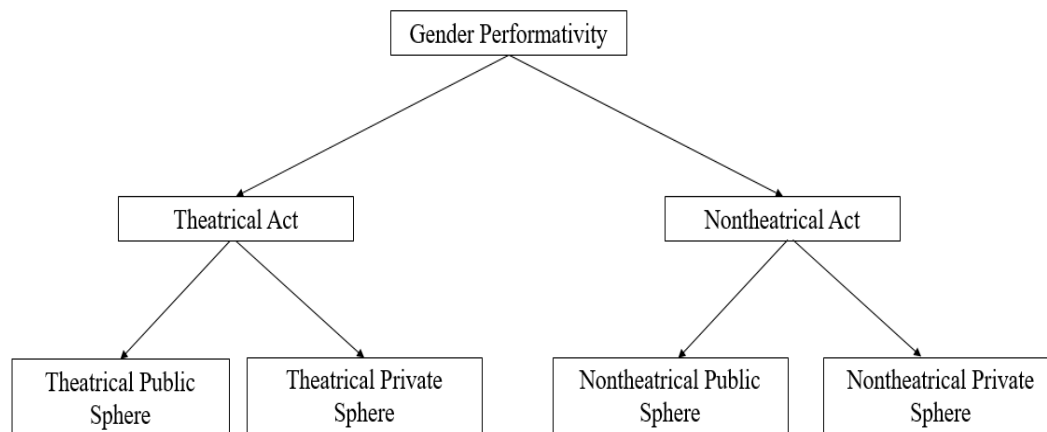
### **Research Questions**

- I. How are both the writers effected and influenced by socially accepted gender performativity Indian Hindu culture?
- II. What are the theatrical and non- theatrical contributions in prominent characters? How much they maintain or break the gender performativity theatrically and non-theatrically?

### **Theoretical Framework**

This paper deals with the theoretical ground of Judith Butler's gender performativity. According to Judith Butler, in "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution an Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory", gender identity is a performative accomplishment, an act which one performs based on a certain script that is historically written by the ancestors and prescribed by the society. The gendered norms exist in society through the performative acts in theatrical contexts and nontheatrical context. The theatrical performative act occurs in such a context when one is in front of society and the acts are validated by the society. The society beholds, as the audience, and validates the performative acts of individuals and gives value to the performance of the performer's theatrical act. The nontheatrical act is an act which one performs without the consideration of the validation or approval of the society. For example, when one is rushing for blood collection in hospitals, he/she does not care who is watching him/her. In the same way, hurry work in office time, running for taking bus, all these acts are non-theatrical, when a person does not care about society.

In both contexts, whether one will follow the performative codes or not, is completely personal performative. The acceptance of performative act in both contexts depends on the embodiment. Through embodying the social codes, one exists as a social being with certain rank and codes of identity. That means, to exist in the society or as a validated social being, a human has to embody the social performative codes and perform according to the codes, whether he/she is elite or subaltern. For Sartre, the embodiment of socially prescribed performativity is the way of one's getting essence and way of life. Through rejecting performative acts, one can get out of socially constructed identity too. However, Beatrix Hauser in her book *Promising Rituals: Gender and Performativity in Eastern India*, shows that performativity in Indian Subcontinent is restricted by rituals, festivals, religion, public & private spheres and local customs. There are **two spheres**, which align with Butler's contexts, are public sphere and private sphere, and both are distinctive based on culture and social customs. A person can be either theatrical or nontheatrical, but he/she must have dealings in both public and private spheres.



***Figure 1: Concept Mapping***

A person who is always act theatrically thinks the conformity to the society in public sphere even in private space. In the nontheatrical public sphere, a person does not consider the social acceptance in front of society, since nontheatrical means no consideration of social acceptance. In nontheatrical ground, a person acts in her own way without any hesitation of social acceptancy. The nontheatrical privet sphere is the space of self-consciousness of social performativity.

Men and women differently deal with public and privet spheres which are much restricted. Individuals do not have access to violate the conditions of any spheres except the private sphere of nontheatrical context. There are four spheres provided below.

**Theatrical Public Sphere:** Nontheatrical act means the act with the consideration of the values, and appreciation of the society. A person in nontheatrical public space is conscious about the recommendation of the society by accepting the socially prescribed gender performativity in public space outside of the personal room.

**Theatrical Private Sphere:** It is a psychological space. In this private space, a person's thinking reveals his/she faith in social conformity. For example, Baby Kochamma and Mammachi whatever they think and plan does not go against their social conformity. Their thinking is much conservative and traditional. They also cannot think out of social context about women's right, capitalist patriarchal oppression etc. The tolerance of husband's torture is worshipping to them. Therefore, they exist in theatrical private space always.

**Nontheatrical Public Sphere:** In nontheatrical public space, a person acts in public without any consideration of the conformity of the society. It is very independent act, opposite to theatrical public. For example, a person rushing to the hospital for collecting blood is a

nontheatrical public act, because at that moment the person is hesitating on his appearance in front of the eyes of the society.

Nontheatrical Private Sphere: This space is the complete rejection of the social thinking in one's private space. Its independent thinking or planning. In this act one can have the sense against colonialism or any kind of oppression.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### ***Criticism on Anand's and Roy's treatment of Gender Performativity***

The narrative of *Untouchable* proves that Mulk Raj Anand cannot get out of the gender performativity prescribed by the society. Because in his book we have figured out the theory of gender performativity where gender and gender roles are explained in detail through social performances of their everyday life, as the writer portrays a hegemonic version through his linguistic binary making subaltern characters objectified. He portrays Bakha's character as "masculine"/" man" and Sohini's character as "woman"/ "feminine". In *Untouchable* the writer depicts Sohini's character as alluring as much as he can. The writer says, "She had a delicate slim body, not lean bodied like other native untouchable girls. She had a very graceful physique with well-rounded hips and curved waist as just as like as the arch of the hunter. Her globular breast jerked slightly because of the lack of bodice. And that lacking made her physical appearance more alluring than other girls with her transparent muslin shirt" (Anand 2014). Anand objectifies Sohini's physical appearance through his sexist expression. No brother thinks his sister in such a chauvinistic objectifying gaze. Here Anand has treated Sohini like an object rather than an agentive being. Even she is not provided any voice of questioning and exploring her roles. The writer's portrayal shows how a woman assumed in everyone's eyes in India during the colonial period. In Indian subcontinental cultural context, a beautiful woman would be appealing, she should have a curvy body, her physical structure should be attractive like Sohini. On the other hand, the writer portrays Bakha's character as a strong masculine man who have worked hard, what society exactly expects from a man. Therefore, Mulk Raj Anand maintains the traditional gender performativity prescribed by Indian society and cannot save himself out of it.

Unlike Anand, Arundhati Roy deconstructs tradition of the writer's conformity to the socially prescribed gender performativity through her narrative approach and cobstruction of the characters like, Ammu and Velutha. In *God of Small Things* Ammu is a strong, independent and emotionally volatile person. She is willful and rebellious. She breaks gender performativity through her character. She has left her family in order to marry Babu but when Babu starts to oppress her, beats her and forces her to be intimated with his boss, she divorced him after beating him up in response of her revenge. For an Indian woman it is quite impossible to cross their gender performativity. Ammu crosses the boundary by protesting the patriarchal discursive practices of her society.

In Indian Hindu society, the discursive practice of inter-religious and inter-caste pollution is a weapon of patriarchal bourgeois hand to dominate women so that the male dominant position of patriarchal economy remains unharmed. Both Ammu and Chacko are divorcee, back to their home but face separate rules in terms of gender. Ammu is considered as a polluted figure by inter-religious (Hindu-Christian) marriage and her children as polluted production. Chacko declares "locust Stand I" to mention that she does not have any place in this house. It is a less social norm but more a constructed code to reduce the social opportunities of a women because, we find, the code of pollution and touch-ability shifts according to the need of the dominant patriarchal figures. Ammu does not believe in the pollution of the inter-religious, inter-class and inter-caste relationship non-theatrically. Being a member of a bourgeois family, her theatrical context in front of the society is not confident enough to challenge the borders of class, race, religion and caste. But when she was free in her life out of the village of Ayemenem, she was confident enough to broaden her theatrical sense to challenge her family code of upper caste by the marriage with a Christian. The Non-Hindu and the lower caste are the same untouchable to the upper caste. As a result, the twins are regarded as inter-religious polluted and neglected by Mammachi's family.

For Butler "Discrete genders are part of what "humanizes" individuals within contemporary culture; indeed, those who fail to do their gender right are regularly punished" (Butler 2020). When Ammu tries to break the socially constructed gender rules for women and for this reason she is humiliated and punished by the policeman Thomas Mathew, Baby Kochamma and the society. After her divorce she fell in love with Velutha (an untouchable). She makes a first attempt to make love with Velutha. That time Indian society wanted women as submissive characters; they shouldn't be expressive about their desire. But Ammu breaks the norms. That's why inspector Thomas Mathew addresses her "veshyas" and sexually harasses her by tapping her breast. Also, Baby Kochamma locks Ammu in her bedroom in order to detach her from Velutha. Even the society refuses to burry her for not following the gender performativity. That's why she says ironically, "Thanks to our wonderful male chauvinistic society!". Though Arudhati Roy's writing we have found that, she tries to give some power to Ammu's character as a female protagonist to break the gender performativity still she keeps the main focus on the male protagonist Velutha. He is a member of the Paravan, or untouchable like Bakha. The writer depicts that he is a man with exceptional skills that's why he employed by Mammachi to do additional chores around the Ayemenem house along with his works in pickle factory. Therefore, both the writers have distinctive stand on gender performativity. Anand accepts the socially prescribed gender performativity, whereas, Roy subverts the socially constructed performativity that oppresses in the name of gender ideology.

### ***Gender Performativity of Women, the Gender Subalterns***

Women are the most silenced subalterns in all the castes. A woman inherently does not belong to any caste rather she belongs to the caste of the man whoever touched her. Their rank depends on the rank of man and so the caste too. In *Untouchable*, Gulabo is a higher rank

powerful women among the Harijan women because she used to be a mistress of an upper caste man once upon a time. In *The God of Small Things*, Ammu is considered impure fallen women by the society when her relationship with Velutha spreaded out. The inspector Methew Thomas even did not hesitate to molest her when he is assured of the inter-caste relationship of Ammu. With the touch of Velutha. Ammu became impure, a women equal to the lower caste who can be touched easily out of her consent. Inspector calls her Veshya. Though Ammu is disdained by the society, she subverts the elitist notion of the theatrical margin of untouchability. Her inter-caste relationship was in nontheatrical private sphere. The mutual inter-caste conduct proves that women's rank depends on the rank of the man whom she has relationship with.

However, Sohini, to maintain the gender performativity, has always to perform the household chores, and she never gets the facilities and independence like Bakha to explore various person from different class, caste and gender. She is humiliated all the time by her father when she is subconsciously being ignorant to maintain her household chores. She is molested by the upper caste pundit which proves that the upper caste notion of impurity by the touch of the untouchables is nothing but theatrical hypocrisy of the upper castes. If the pundit had the belief of impurity inherently, he would never touch Sohini. However, In *The God of Small Things*, Ammu doesn't get the facilities to be educated like Chacko. Chacko has married an English woman Margaret (who is obviously out of his caste) and ends up with divorce but nobody in his family and society utters a single word against him but when Ammu does the same thing she is being unwelcomed from her family. Because according to Baby Kochamma, "A married daughter has no position in her parents" (Roy 2001). She is also mistreated by the people of Ayemenen because a society trusts that women who lived with their husband. On the other hand, she is not treated equally in her family because of the gender performativity that's why her brother Chacko says, "What's yours is mine and what's mine is also mine" (Roy 2001). So both of the characters Sohini and Ammu don't get equal rights because of the gender performativity. Therefore, women in Hindu culture, never possessed the certainty of their caste, rather, they were traditionally found to be tagged off the caste of the men whoever touched them consensually.

### ***Breaking the Binary Theatrically and Non-Theatrically***

In both text we have figured out that when violation occurs to the both women, Sohini and Ammu break their binary. In Sohini's case she can't break the binary theatrically, she is muted like other subjugated women, she doesn't protest against Kalinath's sexual harassment. But in non-theatrically when her brother has asked her about that incident, she expresses her horrible experience with that Pandit. She says, 'He-e-e just teased me,' she at last yielded. Then she says, 'And then when I was bending down to work, he came and held me by my breasts'. So here non- theatrically she is not muted like other subjugated women.

On the other hand, Ammu breaks the binary both in theatrically and non- theatrically. Because when she is forced by her husband to have sexual relationship with his boss Mr. Hollick to secure his job she protests immediately by beating her husband, it is a non- theatrical protest



as because it is not in front of the society. Then she divorces her oppressor husband, it is a theatrical protest. After the separation she is both father and mother to Rahel. Then her love relationship with Velutha is immoral act in that Indian society because, "If a man married many women it is acceptable but if a woman have affair with another man, she is called prostitute". She breaks this female discourse and she takes a first attempt to make love with Velutha.

According to Butler's performativity we assume that when a person is in his or her childhood, there is no man- woman binary. Gender rules are constituted through the person's upbringing. That's why Simon de Beauvoir says, "One is not born but rather becomes a woman". That's why Chota's sister has given permission to play with Bakha and other boys when they all were little kid. But eventually when she grows up her mother Gulabo detach her from the boys group and assures her to be married to follow the gender performativity.

In Indian subcontinental society, women's respect and disrespect intertwined with male's position in society. In Sohini's case, she is given water after so much struggle and humiliation because of the interruption of the Pandit. Everybody is bound to give Sohini space when the Pandit says, "Get away you noisy curs, get out of the way". In Ammu's case everybody demeans her when she gets attached with an untouchable like Velutha. So men's position according to class, caste and gender use to define women's position in the patriarchal society.

***Comparison Between Untouchable and The God of Small Things in Terms of Inter-Caste Gender Performativity***

Contexts	Untouchable	The God of Small Things
The Authors	Anand conforms the traditional gender performativity that is prescribed by patriarchal culture.	Roy subverts the socially constructed oppressive gender performativity that is regulated by dominant elitism.
Inter-caste Untouchability	Sohini is touched by Pundit. The upper caste Pundit does not believe in the afterlife punishment of the touch. It proves that the untouchability is an upper caste hypocrisy.	Ammu is touched by Velutha. Ammu breaks the hypocrite pretention of upper (her) caste.
Inter-caste Gender Performativity	The untouchability of the upper Caste is a theatrical act of public sphere. It has no existence in nontheatrical private sphere.	Ammu and Velutha inter-caste relationship is the exposition of Nontheatrical Private act of untouchability where there is no untouchability.
The Subversion of	Sohini breaks the binary in	Ammu breaks binary in both

Performative Binary of Castes in both Theatrical and Nontheatrical Contexts	theatrical ground by telling the truth of her molested self.	theatrical and nontheatrical grounds. She had relationship with Velutha and she clarifies it indirectly too in police Station.
The Condition of Women, the gender subalterns in inter-caste relationship	Women, in Hindu culture and inter-caste consensual relationship, never possess the certainty of their caste. They never belong inherently to any caste of them, rather, they were traditionally found to be tagged off the caste of the men whoever touched them.	

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The researchers have figured it out that Mulk Raj Anand is a believer of gender performativity. He assumes women and men's role according to society's constructed constitution. That's why he objectifies male and female body through his writing. Also he portrays women based on the society's preferences muted, shy and submissive. In Arundhati Roy's perspective she tries to break performativity through Ammu and Velutha's character. In *Untouchable*, Gender performativity hampers facilities for women because in Sohini's life she is pressurized to do all household chores. She never gets the independence like Bakha. In Ammu's case she is also a divorcee like her brother but her brother is accepted by the family and society, she is not. Also her family deprived her from education for being a girl. So both Sohini and Ammu are being discriminated because of the gender performativity. Sohini is touched by Pundit. The upper caste Pundit does not believe in the afterlife punishment of the touch. It proves that the untouchability is an upper caste hypocrisy. Ammu is touched by Velutha but breaks the hypocrite pretention of upper caste. The untouchability of the upper Caste is a theatrical act of public sphere. It has no existence in nontheatrical private sphere. Ammu and Velutha inter-caste relationship is the exposition of Nontheatrical Private act of untouchability where there is no untouchability. Sometimes men's position in society is used as a parameter to define women's position. At last we can say that gender performativity is a pressure for women. So if we want to become a liberal person we should remind in mind that gender performativity is social constructed and it is marginalized a person's potentiality whether she is a man or a woman. For women gender performativity shackled them in a chain. So every woman should break the binary theatrically and non-theatrically; and they should follow what they exactly want to do, not the social rules of gender performativity want them to do.

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