



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

Tasnim Jarin^{1*}, Aftab Ur Rahaman Zahin²

^{1*2}MA, Department of English, Bangladesh University of Professionals, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Email: ²aftabjahin3@gmail.com

Corresponding Email: ^{1*}jarinbup36@gmail.com

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Abstract: *This paper evaluates the inter-caste gender performativity in Indian Hindu Culture by analyzing the texts, Mulk Raj Anand's Untouchable and Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things through Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity. In Indian Hindu culture, inter-caste relationship is dogmatically and traditionally antagonistic whereas some autobiographical documents kept evidences of consensual and 'non-theatrical inter-caste relationship' crossing the margin of untouchability. Women, the gender subalterns in inter-caste consensual relationship, never inherently belong to any caste of them; rather, they are tagged off the caste of the men whoever touch them. The non-consensual inter-caste physical relationship does not determine women's rank whereas consensual inter-caste relationship determines or modifies women's rank. It is a double standard and both contexts are dominated by upper caste elites. The most theatrically maintained doctrine of 'untouchability' is the after-life punishment through reincarnation of upper caste people due to the impure touch of the lower caste. Both discourses of 'untouchability' and 'impurity' are nothing but elitist constructions and practices led by upper caste elites, that is proved in this paper. Such inter-caste relationship reveals that the theatrical notion is nothing but a bourgeois-political weapon of the upper caste to oppress the lowers. It is a qualitative research done by closed textual reading method. This paper brings out the conditions of fluidity and stability of the position of men and women among castes, and the influence of traditional gender performativity on both the writers.*

Keywords: *Caste, Elitism, Gender Performativity, Theatrical, Non-Theatrical.*



1. INTRODUCTION

This research deals with the gender performativity of the society in which the restrictions and ideologies of Hindu caste systems are maintained. The Hindu caste system follows distinctive margins and opportunities in terms of social performativity. The castes are Brahmins (priests), the Kshatriyas (rulers & administrators), the Vaishyas (merchants), Shudras (labouring classes) and Dalits (Untouchables). There is unimaginable hierarchy among the castes as separate classes practiced in Hindu societies and the Shaudras and Dalits are considered as the least facilitated and the most degraded and unfortunate lower classes. They are interpellated to be the lowest and least respected. Even their gender performativity is marginalized by the dominant elitist discursive practices. The upper caste elites always create newer discourses for their self-advantage that may alienate the lowers. Untouchability is one of such elitist discourses which successfully alienates the lower castes by declaring them impure threats for the uppers. The elitist practice of untouchability is even different in men and women. Though all the restrictions are theatrically imposed on both genders of lower caste, women do not inherently possess any caste or rank of their own; rather they achieve the tag of the caste of the men they have relationship with. However, the touch of the lowers is considered as a big sin for the uppers, mostly Brahmins, since lowers are regarded the sinners by born as if they were unforgivable sinners in their previous life. As a result, they are essentialized as disregarded and they believe to stay unfortunate degraded as well.

Gender performativity stands for the social acceptance of the pattern of gender. It is not fixed in the world; rather it varies in different society. Judith Butler first introduced the term, gender performativity in her book *Gender Trouble (1990)*. According to Butler, gender is an act that is dramatic; it is a performance, that is rehearsed, based a certain script that is written by the ancestors, and it is a historical reproduction. Humans do not get the social lesson of gender from their biological entity of male or female. Being male or female does not determine gendered behavior rather it is determined by the gender norms which is prescribed by the society a human grows in. For Merleau-Ponty, Wittig and Foucault, “the body is the center of the performance, but the body itself is a historical idea” because it essentially does not have any natural pattern rather accepts the social performance (Butler 520). 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. Both have separate contexts, social obligations and restrictions which are to be explored in both text *Untouchable* and *The God of Small Things*, the two autobiographical literary pieces conveying the core of Indian Hindu culture. This paper explores inter-caste gender performativity in Hindu culture evident in this two novels and how much gender performativity successfully influenced both writers, Mulk Raj Anand and Arundhati Roy.

Research Questions

- I. Who are the gender subalterns? What are the position and identity of gender subalterns in inter-caste relationship?
- II. How are the writers, Mulk Raj Anand and Arundhati Roy influenced by traditional gender performativity?



2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

General Objective:

To bring out the social discourse of gender performativity in inter-caste relationship in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*.

Specific Objectives:

- I. To figure out the position and identity of gender subalterns in inter-caste relationship.
- II. To investigate the influence of traditional gender performativity on both the writers, Mulk Raj Anand and Arundhati Roy.

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. There are **two spheres**, which align with Butler's contexts in Indian culture, 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.

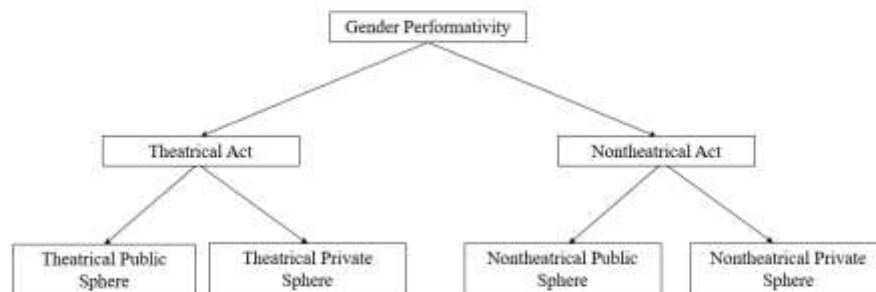


Figure 1: Concept Mapping

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.

There are four different spheres men and women in Indian culture differently deal with 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.



3. 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" and Sohini's character as "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. Objectification is not a sexist expression by an individual, but a crucial part of the "performance of the gender" and the heteronormative assumptions which promotes the construction of traditional gender roles. 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. As Butler says, Gender is not constructed by a "essence" of "woman-ness" or "man-ness," but rather by a variety of stylized behaviors that players grow to accept as inevitable and normal. In such aspect, objectification serves to codify this division and validates it. 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. "The blood in Bakha's veins tingled with the heat as he stood before it. His dark face, round and solid and exquisitely well defined, lit with a queer sort of beauty. The toil of the body had built up for him a very fine physique. It seemed to suit him, to give him a homogeneity, a wonderful wholeness of a body" (Anand). Several times Bakha's bodily features are described as different from others of his age. Anand makes his protagonist the best conformist of the traditional demand of gender performativity. Therefore, Mulk Raj Anand maintains the traditional gender performativity in his writing 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 construction of the characters like, Ammu and Velutha. In *The 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 Baba but when Baba starts to oppress her, beats her and forces her to be intimidated with his boss, she divorced him after beating him up in response of her revenge. Ammu took "the heaviest book she found in the bookshelf- The Reader's Digest World Atlas- and hit on his (her husband) head, legs, back and shoulders as hard she could" as the protest of her physical oppression. 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 power to dominate women so that the male dominant position of patriarchal economy and family inheritance remain 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-Cristian) 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 roles, 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 bury 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 he 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 touches her. Women’s rank depends on the rank of men 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 in the eyes of the society, a woman, equal to the lower caste who can be touched easily without 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 physical relationship with Velutha 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.

On Butler's point, it is social assumption that, when a person is in his or her childhood, there is no man-woman binary because of the immaturity of gender consciousness. Gender rules are constituted throughout the person's upbringing. That's why Simon de Beauvoir says, "One is not born but rather becomes a woman". Similarly, Ram Charan's sister has been given permission to play with Bakha and other boys when they all were children. The children used to play marriage party where Ram Charan's little sister was used to acting as wife wearing a skirt (Anand: 77). But eventually when she grows up, her mother Gulabo detaches her from the boys group and assures her to be married soon following the gender performativity of her society. Both the game of children and the restriction of Gulabo to her adolescent child conform the gender performativity of the lower caste. The social condition and restriction of women in marriage start before their marriage. They get no opportunity to be independent ever. Children's drama of 'marriage play' is a slighter version of the theatrical activity of the real marriage they see in the society. Girls reaching the age of adolescence are married off. On the other side, they are restricted from playing when they are nearly to get married in such a playing age. The marriage play is the theatrical public sphere and the family restriction to play with boys is a theatrical private sphere. In both theatrical spheres, lower caste women are marginalized from childhood by conforming socially prescribed gender performativity. It proves that lower caste women are the most oppressed subalterns in Hindu society. Therefore, Indian women, of lower caste, lack the freedom of theatrical activities, especially when, the practice of marriage restricts them in the name of protecting them.

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 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 the relationship with divorce. Nobody of his family and society utters a single word against Chacko but when Ammu does the same thing she is being unwelcomed and disdained from her family. Because, according to Baby Kochamma, "A married daughter has no position in her parents' home" (Roy 2001). She is mistreated by the people of Ayemenen, since the society trusts loyal women to live under their husbands. 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). Chacko takes the authority over his sister so that his dominant position of the patriarchal economy and family inheritance remain unharmed. Therefore, women in Hindu culture, never possessed the certainty of their caste, identity and inheritance, rather, they were traditionally found to be tagged off the caste of the men whoever touch them consensually. On the contrary, the non-consensual oppressive inter-caste relationship does not determine women’s rank whereas consensual relationship determine or modify women’s rank. The double standard is regulated by upper caste elites in the pursuit of their advancement.

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' (Anand). 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 as a nontheatrical protest. After the separation, she is both father and mother of the twins. Then her relationship with Velutha becomes an immoral act in that society. If a man (like Chacko, an upper caste elite) has physical relationship with many women, it is acceptable but if a woman of any caste or class has affair out of marriage, she is called prostitute. She breaks this elitist discourse and takes the first attempt to make love with Velutha going against the constructed 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 Pundit. 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. Therefore, men's position based on class and caste defines 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	Ammu is touched by Velutha. Ammu breaks the



	not believe in the afterlife punishment of the touch. It proves that the untouchability is an upper caste hypocrisy.	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-Velutha inter-caste relationship is the exposition of nontheatrical private act of untouchability where there is no untouchability.
The Subversion of Performativity of Gender Binary in the Castes in both Theatrical and Nontheatrical Contexts	Sohini expresses the true incident happened in the temple to her brother. Thus, she breaks the binary in non-theatrical ground by telling the truth of her molested self.	Ammu breaks binary in both 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	Indian women, of lower caste, lack the freedom of theatrical activities, especially when, the practice of marriage restricts them from childhood in the name of protecting them.	
	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 are traditionally found to be tagged off the caste of the men whoever touch them.	
	Men does not permit women to have equal authority so that the male dominant position of patriarchal economy and family inheritance remain unharmed.	

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

In Indian Hindu Caste System, the discursive practice of ‘untouchability’ is nothing but a theatrical act that is practiced in front of the eyes of the society by the upper caste elites to dominate the lower castes. Women are the most oppressed subalterns whose theatrical acts are restricted by their marriage, since their adolescence. They never inherently belong to any caste of them, rather, accept the caste of the men whoever touch them. The relationship with the men determines the caste of women. Besides, men do not permit women to have equal authority so that the male dominant position of patriarchal economy and family inheritance remain unharmed. Thus, Ammu is primarily unaccepted in her own family as divorcee and degraded down after the touch of Velutha. Gulabo’s is promoted to upper rank by the touch of an upper caste man. And Sohini’s rank remained unchanged because of the non-consensual touch of the pundit. That means the rank of women depends on the wish of the upper caste elites in the pursuit of their advantage.

The researchers have figured out that Mulk Raj Anand is a believer of socially prescribed gender performativity. He assumes women’s and men’s role according to the social constitution of gender. That’s why he objectifies male and female body through his writing. He also portrays



women based on the society's preferences muted, shy and submissive. Unlike Anand, Arundhati Roy subverts the socially prescribed gender performativity. In Roy's perspective, she tries to break performativity through Ammu's and Velutha's character. In both novels, socially prescribed gender performativity hampers the opportunities of women. Marriage is the social union which subjugates and restricts lower caste women from their theatrical independence in the name of protecting them.

Gender performativity becomes the weapon of the elitist oppression when lower classes accept it. The upper caste elites regulate the discursive practices in their pursuit. If a human wants to achieve a liberal life, he/she must get out of the socially prescribed gender performativity and utilize opportunities in both theatrical and nontheatrical contexts.

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