



## Research Article

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## 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 paper attempts to evaluate the inter caste gender performativity in Indian Hindu Culture through Judith Butler's gender performativity by analyzing the texts, *Untouchable* by Mulk Raj Anand and *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy. This paper brings out criticism on both writers' perspective that how they are influenced by gender performativity, how performative act hampers facilities for women, how women's respect based on theatrical act and how the prominent characters try to break the theatrical and non-theatrical act. It is a qualitative research which has been done by closed textual reading method. This paper explores how both the writers are affected by inter caste gender performativity in Indian Hindu culture and analyses the gender performativity of Hindu castes from four separate contexts: theatrical nontheatrical, public and private. The research proves that both the writers are separately affected by socially prescribed gender performativity with distinctive stand points; and the Indian Hindu castes have both theatrical and nontheatrical gender performativity.

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

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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

Md. Hafijur Rahman claims in his paper, "Subaltern Studies in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things: A Critical Overview*"(2015), the idea of subalternity has arrived in Indian sub-continent through the image of patriarchy, casteism, gender discrimination

and through the marginalization of the weak and untouchables. *The God of Small Things* is the portrayal of protest against subalternity because Arundhati Roy has raised her voice by opposing male chauvinism, patriarchy, social discrimination, political exploitation, sexual subjugation, religious demolition, with the support of their autonomous society. Also the twins, Rahel and Estha's incestuous love, bears the trait of protest against tradition, custom and love-laws.

Sobia Ilyas states in her paper, "The Subaltern Voice in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things: A Postcolonial Approach*"(2019), *The God of Small Things* portrayed the concept of double colonization, hybridization and colonial desire. Through the character of Ammu we figure out that she is the representation of modern women of the post-colonial period from the subaltern because she is a rebellious character who always fights to achieve freedom and sexuality against the hegemonic society in postcolonial period. On the other hand, through the character of Velutha we find the symbolism of the perilous power of the marginalised and Other within a racially and religiously biased community. Ammu and Velutha both advocate to achieve their rights and there is no doubt the post-colonial conditions of double colonization, hybridization and colonial desire is responsible to make them empowered subjects who possess the subaltern voice.

According to Sedunath Dhakal in "Interface between Subalternity and Sexuality in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*"(2019), the author makes her characters violate the so called norms of the society. Ammu's rebellious act against the social values is a direct resistance over the socio- cultural discourses set by the Indian patriarchal society.

Cheluva Nikhil states in "Caste and Gender Issue Discussed in Mulk Raj Anand *Untouchable* Novel"(2022), the writer beseeching the high rank perusers through his portrayal of Bakha and his family are enduring, to think about the situation of their low-station comrades.

Nisar Ahmed Dar claims in "Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable: A Voice of Subaltern*"(2018), the writer as social critic conveys a strong message through his novel *Untouchable* and raise the voice against caste segregation in the Indian society. According to him, Mulk Raj Anand figures out the actual situation of subalterns, their mentality and the real image of the Indian society. The caste system creates a great devastation and chaos to the Indian society.

According to Dr.Tripti Kumari in "Glimpse of Gender Sensitization in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*" (2018), so being influenced by Marx ideology and Gandhiji, Mulk Raj Anand believes that the outlook of democracy will be helpful to lift the social conditions of subalterns. A woman is almost a product of a good possession in a patriarchal society. In this novel the writer portrays a woman who is steadily cornered in the social system by class, caste and patriarchal privileges.

### 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 performativity in both theatrical and nontheatrical contexts in *Untouchable* and *The God of Small Things*.

## METHODOLOGY

It is a qualitative research which has been done by closed textual reading method. The texts *Untouchable* by Mulk Raj Anand and *The God of Small Things* are my primary sources. My secondary sources are internet archives, articles, blogs, scholarly journals. This researchers use the essay "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory" by Judith Butler as a tool.

### 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: To investigate how much the both writer Mulk Raj Anand and Arundhati Roy are effected and influenced with gender performativity in *Untouchable* and *The God of Small Things*. To figure out the theatrical and non-theatrical gender performativity of the prominent characters to see how much they maintain and break their gender roles.

### Research Questions

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

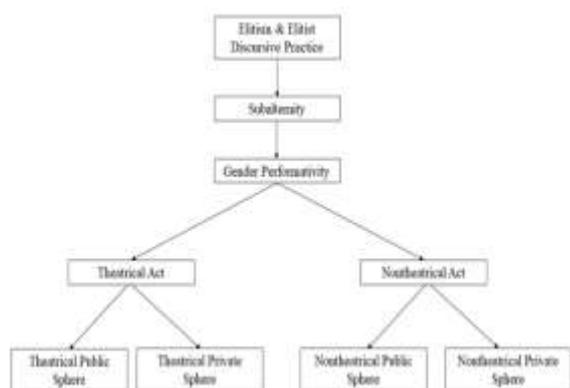
## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 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. Objectification is not a sexist expression by an individual, but a crucial part of the "performance of the gender" and the heteronormative assumptions which underlined the construction of 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 constituted, not from an "essence" of "woman-ness" or "man-ness" but from a series of stylized acts that the actors come to see as natural and inevitable, 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). 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 construction 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 intimidated with his boss, she divorced him after beating him up in response of her revenge. Arundhati Roy says, "Ammu took down heaviest book she could find in the bookshelf- *The Reader's Digest World Atlas*- and hit him with as hard she could. On his head. His legs. His back and shoulders." 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 bury her for not following the gender performativity. That's why she says ironically, "Thanks to our wonderful male chauvinistic society!". Though Arundhati 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**

To maintain the gender performativity, Sohini has to always do the household chores, 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. 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." She is also mistreated by the people of Ayemenem 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.

### **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.

**Table 1.** 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 Performative Binary of Castes in both Theatrical and Nontheatrical Contexts	Sohini breaks the binary in 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.

## RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION

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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