

# The Voice of the Indigenous Community in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*

## OPEN ACCESS

Volume: 12

Special Issue: 1

Month: April

Year: 2025

E-ISSN: 2582-0397

P-ISSN: 2321-788X

Citation:

Rashyapriya, VG. "The Voice of the Indigenous Community in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*." *Shanlax International Journal of Arts, Science and Humanities*, vol. 12, no. S1, 2025, pp. 111–14

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.34293/sijash.v12iS1-Apr.8954>

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## Abstract

*One of the most debated issues in India from early times to date is the subalterns and their discrimination. This paper focuses on the work of Mulk Raj Anand, which shows the problems of India, and his work is considered a literary masterpiece that speaks for justice, equality, and recognition of every individual's dignity. Further, it concentrates on the issue of oppressed classes, untouchables, and so on. It discusses the lenses, various people used to examine the subaltern and the segregation towards upper-class supremacy. To detach the Indian identity, which is structured by the caste system, and investigate the social status of Indigenous people who are not recognized as equal. It sheds light on their struggles and their unspoken words and also advocates for the dismantling of hierarchical caste frameworks that perpetuate inequality. This novel evokes the horrifying social malady that exists till it decays and deeply critiques the entrenched structures that deny equality to Indigenous people, questioning the foundation of an identity shaped by caste. This study also examines the multi-faceted subjugation of marginalized communities and their rigid social hierarchy enforced by the caste system. This paper aims to represent the untouchable people to raise consciousness among them by removing the hierarchical caste system from Indian culture.*

**Keywords:** Subaltern, Segregation, Upper Class, Untouchable

## Introduction

Mulk Raj Anand is a prominent English writer in his era. He was born on December 12, 1905, in Peshawar, now in Pakistan, and educated at London and Cambridge. He belongs to the literary spectrum of the "Big Three- Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, and Raja Rao "of Indo-Anglican fiction. He is a novelist who puts all his effort into his writing to represent the people who are struggling for their existence. He is also known to shed light on the lives of lower caste people. Many of the novels touch on the problems of political structure, oppression of class, and so on. *Untouchable* is a novel written in 1935, which concentrates on the subaltern who tries to come out of their existing life, but then faces reality. A strange capacity of history depicts the sad and miserable plight of the lower-class people. His novels are a faithful document that relates to the contemporary social picture of India.

The term "subaltern" means "bottommost rank," where history should be written from the bottommost rank of the people in the

society. By focusing on the cultural values, beliefs, and customs of a group or a community that influence the lives of the subaltern people, the tribes and the Indigenous people are humans without any human agency, only defined by their social status. This attempts to depict the untold pain of the untouchables and the inhuman treatment of upper-class people towards the subaltern in the novel. He include caste system in his writing, many authors and people ignored it, and there was no rise of the untouchables. He shows a clear picture of the subalterns who were forced to stay as sweepers and scavengers for the upper-class people. This shows the hierarchy of human society.

### **The Class System**

According to Indian culture, the class and caste system played a prominent role that made the great destruction of the people in India. The class system is deep-rooted in the people's souls as well as in the country, where, till now, we are trying to destroy it. Four main classes are divided among the people in the Hindu society. This division of the caste system was originally based on the division of labor in the society. Ambedkar says, "Untouchability shuts all doors of opportunities for betterment in life for untouchables" (Ambedkar). The Sudras are a group of people who become sweepers, the people who take the human dung with their own hands.

According to the belief of some people, God is very pure and he is present, but not in untouchables, only because they are not pure souls. For the writer, literature is not only a way to entertain it is also a way to bring social reform to society. The upper-class people forced them to shut their mouths and not let them gain their freedom, even after gaining independence from the British. Still, in many places, the untouchables are not allowed inside the temple where the upper-class people worship God. They separate them from others because the god would get polluted when the untouchables worship. No outcaste is allowed to fetch water from the well, and it can be acquired only through the mercy of a high-caste person. Class and caste diversification are always controversial topics in India. Many people think that the birth of upper-class people is only to dominate the lower class. The lower-class prohibition has continued for centuries, and even now, India is suffering from these problems.

### **The Untold Pain of Untouchables**

By making society a victim, Anand wrote this novel. He portrays the upper-class people's supremacy over the lower class through the character Bakha. They are not allowed to go to school, in case they went to acquire knowledge, they were given a separate eye to look after them and teach them, because they would get polluted. This is a tragedy for him when both Bakha and Sadhu go to houses to beg for food, where Sadhu is a holy man and Bakha remains untouchable. A lady who gave food to Sadhu only because she would get any blessings from God, but looking at Bakha, she considers him a non-human, though they give value to the nonliving thing compared to the subaltern. "It is only through the character of Bakha that the novelist can succeed in arousing the sympathetic comprehension instead of aesthetic function in our readers." (Allen, 17)

All human creatures are created by the god of the Earth, but the upper-class people think that they are the holy spirit. The supreme power beyond us doesn't have any comment about these in human behavior, but those people think that God wouldn't accept when they worship, wear good dresses, acquire knowledge, and be treated equally. In the Manu Smriti, the authentic law book of the Hindu social and domestic code and conduct, the Shudras, the lowest caste or the subaltern, have no right to go inside the temple, and they are not allowed to acquire knowledge about the religious scriptures. No liberty was given to people, even to listen to the mantras, or the right to study Sanskrit books. This raises the question, "Is caste a barrier for a person to acquire knowledge?". When upper-class people touch them accidentally while giving something to them, they consider

themselves as polluted. All the people living together were the upper-class people, segregating them from the lower class. In this modern society, many people treat them differently by providing them with a separate plate and jug to drink and eat, and this inhuman activity has still existed for decades. Treating them differently makes them feel awkward and reminds them that they are untouchable. Earlier, the subalterns were not allowed to walk in front of the upper class and enter their houses, temples, or any functions.

### **In the Human Act of Upper-Class People**

When the untouchables enter the house, they think that it is an inhuman act; the subalterns are not allowed to work. The upper-class people think that they should be in a position of ordering, where there should be many scavengers to work for them. These kinds of activities portray them as a king who sits on the throne and others who are born to work for them. Dividing the people from society, canceling all their needs for them, and instilling the thought in the little soul that they are fit for nothing and their lives will be spoiled by the upper-class supremacy, though they got freedom from the British. They don't have proper dresses, their dress was provided by the upper-class people after they tore them. The subalterns shouldn't walk in front of them and shouldn't put on slippers because they should show respect to the upper-class people by that act. E. M. Forster reacts as

*"The sweeper 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 forever..." (Forster 1935: 7-10)*

There is no rule or law for a person to rule another person. A person who is born into a wealthy family should not be wealthy; similarly, when a person who lives the life of a subaltern is not, they should not remain that and serve the upper-class people. "You, of course, only half opened your eyes and you were too delirious to recognize me. They told me they would soon bring you down on the floor." (Untouchable, 72). This shows that the Hindus do not allow the person to die in bed but rather bring them to the Earth because they think that we come from the Earth and we return to the Earth itself. They knew that every human would die one day, but they treated the untouchables differently. The upper-class people think that if they touched them, they would get polluted, but in the case of Sohini, the priest Pandit Kali Nath was a man who kept an eye on her while filling water in the well with the help of upper-class people because if she would touch it the water would get polluted. But he called her to clean his house, and tried to molest her. This activity shows that a girl who belongs to the untouchables is polluted, but in the eyes of lust, she is not polluted, and he doesn't think that she is a subaltern or untouchable. In whatever way they avoid them, a man can't be able to control himself in that inhuman act. They are not the people who live to worship the higher-class people and fulfill the needs of the devil's desire of lust. Some of the upper-class people are wealthy, and some of their money is from the bootlegging of their ancestors; with that money they show off in front of the lower-class people. But in the case of the lower class or the subaltern, they gain every penny from their hard work by ignoring all the humiliation from the common people.

### **Conclusion**

In *Untouchable*, Mulk Raj Anand presents a realistic portrayal of Indian society and the plight of lower-caste people, and he raises his voice against the segregation that plagues Indian society. This novel evokes the horrifying social malady that exists. This presents the picture of pre-independence India and post-independence India. The class system played a destructive role in India, although the government abolished the law and the rule; however, the mental state of the people remains the same. India is also not free from the caste system. Change in oneself will change society, and those

changes will create you as a new person. Getting freedom from the British and the colonized people isn't real freedom, whereas treating the common people equally with their freedom means it. Every single human deserves basic respect, and due to these cultural changes and segregation, people treat common people as slaves.

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