

# **‘Caste/Identity/Gender’ in Mayank Austen Soofi’s *Nobody Can Love You More* and Mulk Raj Ananad’s *Untouchable***

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**Abstract:** The concept of caste-identity-gender is a trio analogy of marginalization. The hard effort of the society to continue to maintain the established ‘center’ and ‘periphery’ heredity is assisted by the above trio! Identity has always highlighted the fact and subject of the ‘I’, this ‘i’ which when is analyzed under the spectrum of marginalization, seems to be subjugated or in power in relation to the caste and gender. Spaces, created for the existence of any being results in the formation of cluster of ethical-epistemology, which can be very much centered and specific to that particular organization of bodies/beings. This set of ideas churned from the popular practice of few celebrated norms and suppression of the rest, where binarized ontological (existence of a being) representations functions vibrantly, over years of uninterrogated praxis leads to the understanding to “natural/naturality”, which is very similar to what Nivedita Menon wrote in her book *Seeing Like A Feminist* (2012) was- “The whole point of nude make-up, clearly, is to spend hours painting your face to make it look like you had not touched it at all. The maintaining of ‘social order’ is rather like that... Complex network of cultural reproduction are dedicated to this purpose solely” (Menon, vii). Gender is a complex operative device for the power to organize and categorize identities, and to veil up the continuum nature of its existence; while, caste is that dynamics of operation within the Brahminical setup of Indian society that stands as the core theorem of suppression for any ‘body’. My paper would therefore, like to examine the trilogy of ‘caste/gender/identity’ in *Nobody Can Love You More* and *Untouchable*.

**Keywords:** Identity, Caste, Gender, Culture, Bodies

## **Introduction**

Multiculturalism has not only brought into speculation the lives that are trodden within interrogations of ‘pure/impure’ binary but has nevertheless offered with the lens to perceive them to deconstruct the patriarchal cultural setting. It provides the ‘power’, the right to ‘dehumanize’ one’s existence and mold in to benefit the few recognized shelters of identities. Within the broader spectrum ‘marginalization’ is a welcoming device to mark and segregate in a convenient pattern to operate. The freedom of any soul begins from the mind, for few ‘bodies’ in our society this mind is universally fitted, established, and owned, whereas for the ‘others’ scuffles are created to reclaim the existence of their ‘own mind’. In this regard what Gopal Guru says regarding Dalits in his article- *Freedom of Expression and the Life of the Dalit Mind*, is very valuable as he questions “Under what conditions does the freedom of expression enable the dalit to live a life of the mind? Does the foregrounding of the body and the elevation of the bodily expression...dignity and emancipation” (Guru, 39). The concept of ‘subaltern’ as presented in a newspaper article “Voices and Views from the Margins” - *Times of India* by Swati

Shinde has become prominent in our present scenario of marginalized literature as 'subaltern' refers to that marginalized culture which flourished away from the mainstream literature as Antonio Gramsci regarded. Patankar and Omvedt emphasize through their article "*The Dalit Liberation Movement in Colonial Period*" (1979), on the necessity of acknowledging caste oppression and consider it as a problem and focus on the need to find a solution. The problem of Dalit identity in the so-called Brahminical culture was somewhere boxed up as pseudo-Hindus whose political, social, cultural identities was not a 'need' in acknowledgment of 'rights'! B.R Ambedkar criticizing the so-called British rule once said that-

Our wrongs have remained open and they have not been righted. Although 150 years of British rule have ruled away. Of what good is such a government to anybody? It was a government which did realize that the capitalists were denying the workers a living wage and decent condition of works and which did realize that the landlords were squeezing the masses dry and yet it did not remove social evils that blighted lives of the downtrodden class these years.

### **Methods**

The process involves a Literary Review of existing works. Generally, reviews precedes the 'methodology' and 'results' section of a paper; nevertheless, it provides a substantial connection with the current network and literary works and critical analysis, including the individual and subjective perception of the reviewer. Organizing a literary review can also mean that a basic and formal research area and question has also been prepared.

### ***Theoretical Interpretations***

Theories and Interpretations have often participated in accordance to decode numerous layers of perceptions. Eventually, theories has played a crucial role to organize ad provide rhythms to the researching plates of networking ideas. Realizing the stratified marginalization system of which the Indian culture is a vivid example, a clear depiction of the same can also be found in Indian literary works. Theories and literature have always functioned in a manner, that interpretations have become more layered and complexly interesting with portrayal of the cultural hypocritic standards within a society.

### ***Re-interpreting English Language***

Since, I have opted of literary texts in English Language, a bit of its colonial hues needs to be discussed on. Otto Jespersen believed in the "reciprocal influence of language and the personality of its speakers" (Jespersen, 1983). Language and culture have an integrated and complex dynamics, a nature that has frequently sparked the desire to question the Language systems that exists. Language is composed a signifier, signified and a sign, and all of them are arbitrarily connected. When Derrida in his essay *Différance*, establishes that language is a flux of is and is not, present and absent, which differs and defers creating its existence in its trace and not its place. In my paper, I would therefore focus on few technical aspects of English Language and how it became a power of cultural oppression till now. It emerged from the Britain colonized countries- Asia, Africa, and Caribbean. Post-colonial theory is a literary device to analyse the post -colonial literature produced by the previously colonized countries. Post-colonial theory became a part of the critical tool box after Edward Said's publication of *Orientalism* in 1978. The relation of English language and colonialism is interrelated and interconnected, for English is the language of the Colonizers- the British, who ruled over many countries and established them as their 'colonies' for years. India too was a colony of British for two hundred years. The ruling of the colonizers on the people of the colonies is known as Colonialism, and post-colonial studies have tried to perceive how with both economic and political control, the cultural echoes of colonialism was eminent through the English Language, and how India's culture till present date also is impacted by the 'colonial hangover' in terms of language and culture. The growth of colonialism and its cultural dominance was reflected in what Annia Loomba in her book *Colonialism and Post Colonialism* stated- "By 1930's colonialism has exercised its way over 84.6 percent of land surface of the globe" (Loomba, 2015).

### ***Cultural Dimension and Literary Texts***

Culture as a huge section of and branch of power is enormously a tool to subjugate the rule and an excuse to continue the same. It's cultural hegemony and extension that keeps on associating and amassing oppressive rules of 'power'. Post-colonial Literature deals with works produced by authors with roots in countries which were once occupied by the European nations. Set in the north Indian cantonment town Bulandshahr, *Untouchable* is a day in the life of a young Indian sweeper named Bakha. The son of Lakha, head of all of Bulashah's sweepers, Bakha is intelligent but naïve, humble yet vain. Over Bakha's day, various major and minor tragedies occur, causing him to mature and turn his gaze inward. By the end of the novel Mulk Raj Anand, the author, has made a compelling case for the end of untouchability because it is an inhumane, unjust system of oppression. He uses Bakha and the people populating the young man's world to craft his argument.

Anand's presentation of a day in the life of a young, toilet and latrine cleaner Bakha who is an outcast, a 'subaltern' under the cultural segregation of Indian caste system has portrayed the hues of degradation, strife and misery of a 'casted body'. Bakha's search for meanings to the tragic existence he has born to leads him to an unexpectable conclusion and reveals the inner conflicts sourced out of his conscious and sub-conscious realms of mind and life, only to find a more acceptable reason to 'go-on' with the subjugated, oppressed, marked identity. Understanding the situation of Bakha's sister-Sohini who was repeatedly designated as "polluted" (39) by the priest when the temple incident took place, we can see how women and particularly their bodily identities are victims of our hypocrite, caste-based society - "A thumping crowd of worshippers rushed out of the temple and stood arrayed as in the grand finale of an opera show. The lanky priest stood with upraised hands, a few steps below him. His sister Sohini...lingered modestly in the courtyard" (Anand, 52-53). From this perspective, it can be understood that marginalization is further segregated within the outcast community, where women are not only seen as objects of pleasure but also as objects that must not have the right to raise the voice- "He-e-e just teased me...And then when I was bending down to work, he came and held me by my breasts" (Anand, 54-55). Here, within the quoted lines the 'h-e-e' term shows stammering, lack of confidence, if considered, this depicts how the voice of a 'casted-woman' is repressed so much that even to speak against crime was unavailable to her voice!

### ***Glimpsing a Comparison***

A similar reference can be drawn to represent how gender and caste politics works in our cultural complexions. to begin with, Roy's work, *God of small Things* is about love between two "dizygotic twins", between their mother- Ammu, and Velutha, who was a Dalit. Ammu, who was an upper-caste Syrian Christian from a very patriarchal and conservative family where the male 'buying' of women into the house (without considering the caste) is of no issue but loving a lower caste man by a woman of the same house is banned, where the head of the house is a male and beating the 'wife' is completely acceptable and regarded as parameter to measure the 'masculinity'! Roy's story represents the theme of incest, love having the power to breakthrough all cultural restrictions of caste, and caste oppressions by showcasing how Velutha was treated. Here we also see how none of the single days passes without Velutha being insulted, all human rights for him denigrates and presents him in a dehumanized state, particularly the way he was killed. The deplorable situation of a woman through the model of Ammu- begins when she decides to elope and marry the person of her choice, who eventually turns out to be alcoholic and used to torture Ammu to such an extent that he sold Ammu off to his manager in return of his job.

### ***Prostitution and Literature***

In Soofi's work, a different flavour, aroma, and culture is portrayed. I am beginning like this because our society has framed and reframed the 'world where sex is just a work and profession (by choice or not)' as a separate 'universe' of its own, where the 'people from "respected" families are not expected to tread or even let their eyes visit those thresholds'. Prostitution is a profession where the alliteration of emphasizing its urgency to be recognized under the legal professional works is somewhat overturned and overlooked by our 'benevolent patriarchal' society. The concept of women's body and their identity is linked and understood as something essentially inseparable. The idea of body for women is as Judith Butler says, "Women are the sex which is not "one". Within...a phallogocentric language, women constitute the *unrepresentable*...women represent the sex that cannot be thought, a linguistic absence and opacity" (Butler, 13). This separate world of sex-workers is to be kept and operated in 'silence', during the nights, behind the veils, under the 'red and colourful lights' only! The lives of these people seem to be as much 'storied' as their shelters are. Every story of their existence and identity, every escape, each domination, every 'rape tales', each smile, each 'shared bed', all those alternative names and hidden earnings, has created 'sex workers' identity to be something that needs speculation and discussion, not silences. Soofi has beautifully portrayed the lives of these people in an autobiographical format to the readers but has also confessed that the effort to portray anything is a 'lie', a lie which will remain a lie only, no matter what it says, it will only re-present those lives with an attempt to justify their existence but can never represent and can never be the 'truth tale' for the same-

There's a lot of things that you must have discovered about the women's lives upstairs- how they came here and so on- but you will skip some aspects and highlight others. And this manipulation will shape the image you present to your readers. You have the pen, you have the power...but it will never be an accurate portrayal of your subject (Soofi, 195).

Soofi has simply presented another identity whose journey is designated to the peripheral margins. The denizens who lived in the 'Kotha No.300' of GB Road, Delhi cooked foods for their children and lovers just like any other ordinary women from any respected household would do, visited temples, celebrated festivals, listened to film songs and engage themselves in entertainment of various forms of which they have the accessibility. Soofi presented how they led lives just like we all do, just like a 'civilized' world did- "Go to any part of the world, and you will find them. GB Road is a part of our society. How can you say that they are not

civilized?” (Soofi, 194). It is few bodies that has restricted and pushed them to the marginal shelters, where their identities are inly equated in terms of their ‘flesh-sold’! As Helene Cixous notes in *Laugh of Medusa* that “men and women enter the symbolic order in a different way and the subject position open to either sex is different”, now, Cixious’s understanding that the centre of the symbolic order is ‘phallus’ and everybody surrounding it stands in the periphery makes women (without intersectionality) as the victim of this phallogentric society, the only reason for which the perils that they face is nothing beyond oppression; suppression because the body is a ‘women’s’ and hence from rape to physical abuse, this ‘body’ is a platform to showcase these ‘cultural stigmas’- “...There are burn marks on left side of her chin...She has gone home to deliver a child but the baby died. So she is being very silent” (Soofi, 132). Thus, ‘silence’ is the only operative security for their ‘storied stories’.

### Conclusion

Therefore, amidst various ‘silent operations’, identities have somewhat created and destroyed their spheres of reliance again and again, failing in their attempts to extend the lines and diameter of the ‘centre’/main/image and move beyond just reflections/servitude/night body lives! Caste and gender are actually tools produced and reproduced with time to shift the horizons of ‘identities’ that can be excluded from recognition and rights, be it the right to live freely or to survive with ‘dignity’. So, merging the targeted object- ‘identity’ with the tools which modifies, categorizes, cramps, scratches it, was only an attempt among the vast network of interpretations, to depict how limited ‘interaction’ based of caste and gender has provided the provision of the trio- caste/gender/identity to flourish in a regressively progressive format!

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