

The “Double Burden” Of Patriarchy and Caste: Intersecting Oppressions in Arundhati Roy and Mulk Raj Anand’s Works

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Abstract

The intersection of caste and patriarchy in India is a well-entrenched structure that exercises domination over dignity, mobility, desire, relationships, punishment, and belonging. The paper discusses caste and patriarchy not as parallel oppressions but as an interconnected ideological mechanism that dictates both public existence and personal emotion, thereby developing gendered and caste-based hierarchies that configure lived realities. This study engages with the way in which such systems traverse spaces-through the literary analysis of Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and probes how such systems operate across spaces: where Anand foregrounds public caste violence through occupation, humiliation, and social exclusion, Roy reveals the intimacy of violence enforced through love, family, morality, sexuality, and memory.

The paper further contends that caste is not just a ranking of communities but one which dictates spatial access, emotional freedom, labor, speech, and selfhood. Similarly, patriarchy does not only subordinate women; it is the guardian of caste continuity through the restriction of female autonomy, desire, and choice. Their intersection produces layered outcomes: Dalit men are denied dignity and selfhood, women's agency and mobility are policed, Dalit women suffer compounded caste-gender brutality, and upper-caste women are put under patriarchal control to preserve caste purity.

In *Untouchable*, caste oppression is more visible, through segregation and ritual pollution, spatial policing, and occupational degradation. Bakha epitomizes an organized dehumanization wherein identity is pre-written at birth and desire is forbidden by society. Roy places the site of violence within intimacy and institutional betrayal, where love and desire across caste lines are considered crimes punishable with social erasure and death. It is not for any wrongdoing that Ammu and Velutha are penalized but for their agency over their emotions and bodies to resist caste order.

The paper concludes that caste humiliates the body, while patriarchy disciplines desire; caste dictates touchability, whereas patriarchy forbids emotional transgression. Together, they constitute a coherent political structure which maintains hierarchy through normalization, silence, punishment, and psychic

conditioning. For this reason, one cannot imagine liberation without taking on both together, recognizing their inseparability as instruments of power and control.

Keywords: Caste, Patriarchy, Intersectionality, Dalit Literature, Social Exclusion, Gendered Violence, Body Politics, Structural Oppression

1. Introduction

The social architecture of India has been defined and regulated not just through power, but through inherited power; not just through identity, but through given identity; and not just through exclusion, but exclusion sanctified as divine, cultural, natural, and inevitable. Two structures have given form, coherence, and perpetuation to this hierarchy over millennia: caste and patriarchy. Neither of these is an abstract, ideological construct but a deeply institutionalized system that elaborates who is granted dignity and who is condemned to toil; who is given space and who is denied it; who desires and whose desire is legitimate; who is protected and whose voice counts; whose love is legitimized and whose death is mourned or rendered invisible.

Caste is often understood as a system of division-occupation, purity, pollution, and social rank-but its more dangerous function lies in normalization. Caste does not merely separate; it conditions individuals, communities, and even victims to internalize hierarchy as natural order rather than an imposed violence. Patriarchy, when operating within this structure, does not function as a universal system of gender discrimination; it acquires caste-defined contours. It codes female bodies as vessels of lineage, reproductive continuity, and caste preservation, and hence enforces obedience not merely as a gendered expectation but more so as a caste imperative. Thus, patriarchy protects caste, and caste validates patriarchy-an indivisible nexus of domination.

While caste emasculates Dalit men, denying them both social masculinity and human dignity, patriarchy subjugates upper-caste women to maintain caste sanctity. Dalit women bear compound oppression that is afforded neither by caste privilege nor by patriarchal protection. In each of these intersections, it is the individual body that becomes the main site on which caste hierarchy and patriarchal power are implemented, measured, disciplined, and punished.

Indian English literature has played a vital role in exposing the emotional, psychological, and experiential realities that political history, academic discourse, and policy frameworks fall short of articulating. Mulk Raj Anand and Arundhati Roy represent two different generations of writers, but their narratives share a deep political impulse-to contest the mythology of caste neutrality, dismantle the patriarchal moral sanctity, and expose how both systems operate not as monuments of tradition but as living and breathing forms of governance. They show that caste is not only systemic; it is embodied. It is not only historic; it is inherited. It is not only public; it is intimate. It is not only physical; it is psychic. It is not only social; it is private and emotional.

Anand's *Untouchable* is saturated with the realism of caste segregation, public humiliation, and labor bondage along with institutional degradation. His protagonist Bakha experiences caste not as philosophy but as a physical environment-one that determines movement, gestures, speech, education, desire, cleanliness, punishment, and aspiration. Bakha's suffering is not extraordinary but ordinary. In making

humiliation routine and systemic, Anand reveals that caste oppression is not only practiced but socially sanctioned, collectively normalized, and culturally ritualized.

Roy's *The God of Small Things*, written more than six decades later, shifts the narrative terrain from occupation to intimacy, from segregation to desire, from public atrocity to private tragedy. Her concern is not only who is oppressed, but how oppression is inherited through memory, silence, fear, love, longing, punishment, and childhood trauma. If Anand reveals the violence of being seen as untouchable, Roy reveals the violence of loving across touchability. In her novel, the real transgression is not rebellion—it is choice. Desire becomes dissent. Love becomes defiance. And intimacy becomes revolution. The paper therefore investigates how caste and patriarchy converge to regulate three core domains: the body, space, and desire. Through critical comparison of both works, the study illustrates how caste controls physical dignity while patriarchy controls emotional autonomy; caste dictates social access while patriarchy polices sexual and marital legitimacy; caste punishes assertion while patriarchy punishes imagination. Together, they form a political structure that does not allow freedom to anyone who defies their inherited position.

2. Objectives of the study

1. The primary aim of the study is to explore the interconnectedness of caste and patriarchy and how they together determine social hierarchy, identity, and the reality of life in India.
2. Another aim is to examine the similarities in the way literary works of *Untouchable* and *The God of Small Things* represent public and private spheres of oppression through structural means.
3. The third aim is to analyze the impact of caste systems on gender, particularly focusing on Dalit males, Dalit females, and females from the upper caste group.
4. The researchers intend to study the regulations of emotions, space, and the human body that are forced by caste and patriarchal norms and their effects on labor, mobility, and desire particularly concerning women.
5. Finally, literature will be interpreted as a tool for social and political resistance that not only reveals and criticizes but also challenges the prevailing systems of power that are taken for granted.

Caste, Masculinity, and Structural Humiliation in *Untouchable*

A pioneering text, Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* maps the cartography of caste violence through the everyday life of Bakha, a Dalit sanitation worker. Unlike nationalist or reformist narratives that discuss caste in theoretical terms, Anand makes the reader inhabit the micro-realities of bodily humiliation, sensory disgust, spatial exclusion, and normalized contempt. Realism here is a political act: no distance is allowed; one does not study caste but witnesses it.

Bakha has to announce his movement in voice (“Posh, posh, sweeper coming!”) not as a warning but as a ritual of enforced self-effacement. The voice is used merely as a cautionary signal to keep the caste bodies from being defiled, thereby degrading human speech into a device for social segregation. His work brings him physically nearest to dirt and socially furthest from dignity, which is the paradox of caste: the very community that relies on his work denies him his humanity.

Caste determines not only Bakha's occupation but also robs him of emotional autonomy. The awe in which he regards British uniforms, education, and Western modernity speaks of a wish not for colonization but personhood. Colonial modernity promises him an identity not inscribed from birth, and is thus more symbolically liberatory than caste Hindu society.

Bakha's masculinity is deconstructed piece by piece. While the dominant caste man's masculinity is affirmed through social authority, public mobility, and patriarchal entitlement, Bakha's masculinity is conditioned into apology, submission, endurance, and invisibility. He can't rebel without inviting violence; can't desire without contamination stigma; can't stand tall without offense; can't assert without punishment.

Although women do not lie at the centre of *Untouchable*, their vulnerability is gestured towards with weighty portent. Dalit women in Anand's world experience caste without masculine buffers and gender without patriarchal protection. Their bodies exist at the most unprotected intersection of labor, caste, sexuality, and violence—available to be exploited, yet denied dignity, justice, or even sympathy.

Thus, Anand's central political thesis is that caste does not just segregate—it unmakes the self, administering psychological inferiority as an inborn truth, not a social effect.

Patriarchy, Caste Love, and Intimate Punishment in *The God of Small Things*

While *Untouchable* represents caste as public violence, *The God of Small Things* discloses caste as private governance. Roy demonstrates that caste does not only constrain social access—it dictates emotional possibility. If Anand questions who can walk where, Roy questions who can love whom.

The relationship between Ammu and Velutha is not transgressive because it is immoral; rather, it is transgressive because it disobeys caste entitlement. Love becomes a political crime. Touch becomes a social violation. Desire becomes punishable dissent. By doing this, Roy shifts caste discourse from hierarchy to intimacy, proving that caste endures most powerfully not through public law but through private feeling.

Ammu is not physically killed but socially executed—disinherited, silenced, exiled from emotional legitimacy, and erased from remembrance. Velutha was not sentenced by court; he was executed by consensus. His death is not an aberration of the system; it is the system working with efficiency, social authorization, police complicity, and moral approval.

While Anand's depiction of humiliation is in daylight, Roy focuses on oppression in silence. Gossip replaces law, family replaces state, shame replaces imprisonment, memory replaces testimony, and grief replaces justice.

Roy also reveals that patriarchal caste ideology survives not only through male power but female enforcers; Baby Kochamma became the ideological custodian of caste morality and proved that oppressive systems endure not merely by force but from within.

Caste-Patriarchal Power: A Comparative Understanding

What both novels reveal is that caste and patriarchy are not parallel oppressions but cooperative systems of control. In *Untouchable*, caste power works outwardly-through public humiliation, spatial restriction, labor exploitation, and imposed impurity-effectively refusing the Dalit male subject any legitimate expression of dignity or masculinity. In *The God of Small Things*, caste power works inwardly-through the gaze of family surveillance, emotional restriction, the policing of sex, the erasure of memory, and moral vigilantism-that targets not labor or mobility but desire, intimacy, and agency. Patriarchy collaborates with caste in decreeing who women can love, where desire is allowed, and how disobedience must be punished to secure caste continuity. The violence in Anand's world is physical and confrontational; in Roy's world, it is psychological, intimate, and inheritable. Yet both secure the same end: dehumanization, disposability, silence. Caste shames the body, while patriarchy imprisons the heart. Caste denies dignity, patriarchy denies autonomy. Caste restricts space, patriarchy restricts choice. Together, they create a self-reinforcing circuit in which oppression need not be constantly implemented but becomes self-perpetuating, intergenerational, socially legitimized, and culturally defended.

Literary Methods as Political Intervention

While Mulk Raj Anand and Arundhati Roy do tell stories, they weaponize the very form of narration into a mode of resistance. Their literary practices thus function as political interventions that expose, document, and dismantle structures of caste and patriarchal power. Where public discourse often masks oppression behind such euphemisms as "tradition," "morality," or "culture," literature now becomes a tool for uncovering structural violence through human experience.

Anand uses realism with ethnographic precision. The narrative structure of *Untouchable* is deliberately circumscribed to a single day in order to symbolize the repetitive and impossible-to-escape banality of caste oppression. Such temporality indicates that for these marginalized communities, suffering is not episodic but iterative, everyday, and routinized. By narrating humiliation as banal rather than as an exception, Anand refuses the spectacularization of caste violence-he emphasizes, instead, its everyday, institutionalized, and socially sanctioned character. His portrayal becomes political not through sloganeering but through witness-bearing, presenting the reader with a stark social fact that cannot be denied on grounds of exaggeration. His prose uses the body and physical space-the latrine, the outcaste colony, the temple steps-as signs that transform social exclusion into living geography, ensuring that caste is read not as idea but embodiment.

By contrast, Roy deploys lyricism, memory loops, and temporal fragmentation to reveal the psychological residue of forbidden love, inherited trauma, and socially sanctioned punishment. Her narrative dislocates any linear form of storytelling, which is precisely how trauma dislocates cognition, time, and language. Roy also draws heavily on sensory narration-touch, sound, and silence-making this novel an archive of what caste society refuses to record: the interiority of those whom history has erased. The political power of her method lies in its intimacy; inviting readers into the emotional and experiential worlds rather than those of public spectacle, she places caste not as some faraway social issue, but as a violence that resides within homes, families, bodies, and childhoods.

Literature serves as a source of counter-history for both authors. The state, religion, family, and community stand as moral gatekeepers in complicity with the continuity of oppression. Their narratives contest the abstraction of caste and patriarchy into some historical or abstract plane; rather, they are lived, inherited, and reproduced through everyday practices, language, segregation, desire, and shame. By locating the marginal body not as icon but as fully emotional subject, both authors break the literary convention that has historically rendered the oppressed group invisible or monolithic. Ultimately, their writing makes literature evidence, emotion argument, storytelling resistance—exposing that caste oppression operates not only through law and violence but through storytelling itself. Reclaiming narrative, Anand and Roy reshape political consciousness, making literature a tool that does not merely reflect society but confronts, indicts, and seeks to transform it.

Contemporary Relevance and Political Urgency

The relevance of Anand and Roy's narratives exceeds their literary merit; these works remain, importantly, politically urgent documents that chart the scaffolding of caste-patriarchal power as it mutates across time, institutions, and cultural discourse. Over seven decades since the publication of *Untouchable* and more than two decades since the appearance of *The God of Small Things*, the mechanisms of humiliation, social segregation, moral policing, and punishment for transgression remain structurally intact, though often cloaked in modernized forms like digital casteism, honor vigilantism, institutional discrimination, and endogamous nationalism. The violence represented by Anand and Roy has not disappeared—it has transformed, assuming new languages, technologies, and bureaucratic justifications while retaining the same logic: containment of bodies, restriction of mobility, and punishment for crossing the demarcated social borders.

One of the most striking continuities between fiction and contemporary reality is the policing of intimacy across caste lines. If Anand shows how caste forbids dignity in public space and Roy reveals how caste criminalizes love in private space, modern India bears witness to an appalling synthesis of both. Inter-caste relationships continue to receive responses of family excommunication, social ostracism, legal weaponization, and organized violence. What Roy painted as personal tragedy has today become visible as a mass social symptom, with institutional surveillance, community courts, and honor-based violence that punish love as a crime when it upsets caste hierarchy. That such practices survive speaks volumes to an unvarnished fact: caste patriarchy is not invested merely in commanding marriage—it is invested in commanding emotional autonomy, reproductive choice, lineage production, and the circulation of desire itself.

Similarly, the humiliation of the Dalit body that Anand dramatized through the figure of Bakha persists in new forms of structural dehumanization—manual scavenging despite legal prohibition, caste-based residential segregation in urban spaces, discrimination in educational institutions, and occupational immobility masquerading as "informal labor markets." The broom in Anand's narrative has not disappeared; it has only been relocated into sanitized policy language that obscures exploitation while preserving it. His argument that caste violence functions through normalization rather than exception is validated daily by the bureaucratic, medical, digital, and infrastructural systems that continue to treat marginalized bodies as disposable, polluting, surveillable, or criminalizable.

In contemporary discourse, caste and patriarchy also intersect powerfully in the control of narrative itself. Both systems feed on silencing-of testimony, of representation, of memory, of mourning, of historical agency. Roy illustrates how punishment is enforced not only through killing, but through erasure of grief and denial of narrative legitimacy; this dynamic is evident today in who receives public empathy, whose deaths become national outrage, and whose suffering remains statistically noted but emotionally unacknowledged. Violence is not only physical; it is interpretive. To control a community's story is to control its political existence. Thus, caste–patriarchal power today operates as much through narrative dominance as through material force.

The political urgency of revisiting Anand and Roy lies also in how their works counter the mythology of caste as a declining or residual problem. Their narratives affirm that caste oppression is not static but adaptive, using institutions such as family, religion, police, media, schooling, marriage, digital platforms, and neighborhood geographies to reproduce hierarchy. It is precisely its resilience that makes caste appear ordinary, cultural, invisible, or democratic while it continues to organize privilege and suffering along inherited lines. Operating in tandem, patriarchy does not merely impose gender roles—it fortifies caste boundaries by scripting women's sexuality, reproduction, mobility, and silence as instruments of social order. Perhaps the most pressing political insight both texts offer is that caste and patriarchy punish not just resistance but imagination. To dream of a world beyond hierarchy, to desire across boundaries, to refuse assigned humiliation, or to reach for dignity without permission is rebellion itself. Both texts illustrate that what presents the most fundamental threat to caste–patriarchal power is not policy or protest in and of themselves but the refusal of individuals to internalize inferiority, fear intimacy, or obey inherited scripts of submission. It follows that liberation is not only structural; it is psychological, emotional, imaginative, and narrative. By foregrounding the inner lives of the oppressed rather than merely their oppression, Anand and Roy transform literature into a living counter-archive against caste impunity. Their works insist that freedom must include not only the redistribution of rights but the restoration of dignity, desire, memory, love, and voice—elements that oppressive systems seek first to confiscate. In this sense, their relevance is not historical but prophetic: they warn that a society which fails to dismantle its inherited hierarchies will continue to reenact them, regardless of modernization, legislation, or economic progress.

3. Conclusion

This paper establishes that caste and patriarchy do not work as parallel systems but as interlinked mechanisms of control that distribute dignity and punishment along inherited lines. While caste decides whose body is worthy of space, patriarchy decides whose heart is worthy of choice. Caste enforces hierarchy; patriarchy enforces obedience. Caste humiliates; patriarchy regulates. Caste disciplines masculinity; patriarchy disciplines femininity. Together, they punish both assertion and imagination.

Anand documents the denial of human dignity, while Roy reveals the criminalization of human desire. Both prove that caste violence is not accidental and patriarchy is not protective, but both are structural, intended, political, and cyclically reproduced.

Liberace therefore need not stop at demanding inclusion but must dismantle the ideological underpinning that normalizes humiliation, policing intimacy, and criminalizes love.

4. Major Finding:

1. Caste and patriarchy are inextricably linked, with caste determining one's place in society and patriarchy controlling one's personal decisions, particularly in the areas of love, movement, and expression.
2. The oppression of women is manifested in two ways—Anand's public humiliation and forced labor of the workers, while Roy's private surveillance and emotional punishment.
3. Masculinity, femininity, and dignity are defined according to the caste system—Dalit men lose their manhood, Dalit women are the most vulnerable of all, and upper-caste women are quelled in order to maintain the purity of the caste.
4. Love and desire are seen as political threats, and the act of crossing their respective caste lines incurs social erasure, punishment, and systemic violence.
5. Normalization is even more effective than force in terms of sustaining oppression, as family, custom, silence, memory, and morality are all factors that help reproduce discrimination which is then beyond the reach of law.

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