

RESEARCH ARTICLE



MULK RAJ ANAND'S SOHINI – HER PLACE IN PATRIARCHAL SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

Mulk Raj Anand is one among the big three in Indian English Literature. All his works are about the underdog. Though he was born in high caste and studied in London. He knows the problems of the underdog. He portrays his characters as memorable one, on the canvass of Indian English Literature. What he practiced in his life that he preached. He spent some time with M.K. Gandhi for taking his advice in writing his first novel Untouchable. On his advice he modified the novel. Sohini is one of the important characters in the novel. Anand used Sohini character to project the evil nature of some bad people in the society. And the women position in the society. Actually we give women great respect in words and deeds but really we are not doing that. Anand succeeded in highlighting the negligence of society towards the low caste people and women in this novel.

**Key words:** underdog, literature, memorable, untouchable.

Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao, these three are known to Indian English scholars, and students of English literature as the "Big Three" or the Indian Trio". But a recent critic described these writers as "Indian English Fiction's Grand Troika". Interestingly 'Troika' is a Russian word for three horses pulling a vehicle abreast.

Among the three Mulk Raj Anand was the elder and started his literary career first. His first novel Untouchable came out in 1935. His peculiar themes had given him a special brand of the novel Untouchable is a classic of 20<sup>th</sup> century. E.M. Forster said:

'It recalled to me very vividly the occasions I have walked "the wrong way" in an Indian city,  
And it is a way down which no novelist has yet taken me.'

It tells about an eighteen year old boy Bakha and his bitter encounters with other characters in the novel.

Sohini is a meek and hardworking girl. She has a sylph – like form not thin but full – bodied within the limits of her graceful frame, well – rounded on the hips with an arched narrow waist. Sohini is the protagonist's sister, a responsible daughter and sister.

The aim of my paper is to show Sohini's place in patriarchal society. Sohini's role in the novel is very brief that it covers the first part of the novel. Anand uses Sohini to show the mean nature of a few men of those days. In this aspect he succeeded to a great extent. Pandit Kali Nath, a upper caste man forgets the basic morals and tries to enjoy the beauty of Sohini with his lustful eyes. At the well, Pandit Kali Nath wants to help Sohini by keeping wait all the other people who are in advance to Sohini. He takes the help of scriptures to avoid the attention of others who are waiting for water.

'Oh, you Lakha's daughter,

Come here, he said, you have been patient  
and the reward of patience,  
Say the holy books, is supreme.

Get away, you noisy curs get out of the  
way!’

By this way Pandit Kali Nath shouts at others  
and calls Sohini towards the well to give water.  
Sohini not only plays a role of sister, daughter but  
also plays a mother role to entire family. She can  
guess the hunger of father and brother and in the  
early morning she tries to prepare tea for them.  
When there is no water in pitchers to prepare tea  
she asks her brother to get water from the well. But  
she goes to well. When she looks at the crowd at the  
well. She loses her heart.

Gulabo the washer woman abuses Sohini  
very badly. She asks Sohini to go back home because  
there are number of people waiting for the water.  
When Sohini can’t respond the words of Gulabo, She  
irritates and scolds Sohini as:

“Think of it! Think of it! You bitch! You  
prostitute! Wanton! And your mother hardly dead.  
Think of laughing in my face, laughing at me who am  
old enough to be your mother. Bitch!”

Sohini laughs at Gulabo’s ridiculous  
abruptness of abuse. And the way she is explaining  
the things to the Waziro, weaver’s wife, makes  
Sohini to laugh. Again Gulabo starts abusing Sohini  
as:

‘You annoy me with your silence, you illegally  
begotten! You eater of dung and drinker of urine!  
You bitch of a sweeper women! I will show you how  
to insult one old enough to be your mother.’

By this way she is scolding Sohini and goes  
towards her to beat her but Waziro stops her. And  
they all forget and try for some one’s help to get  
water from the well because they are all out caste  
people. These people can’t take water from the well  
by their own. They are begging the upper caste  
people to help them in getting water.

“Oh Maharaj! Maharaj!

Won’t you draw us some water, please?

We beg you.

We have been waiting here for a long time,

We will be grateful, shouted the chorus of  
voices.’

When Pandit Kali Nath is going on that way  
they beg him to help to get water. When he comes  
to help them there is a stampede and quarrel among

themselves. When he shouts at them and asks  
Sohini to come to the well when she is eagerly  
waiting for the water in silence. At first she can’t  
dare to go to the well because she is the last one  
who comes to the well. When Pandit Kali Nath  
forces her, then she goes to him. Then his lust full  
eyes move on Sohini’s body bit by bit.

“The fresh young form whose full breasts  
With their dark beads of nipples stood out  
So conspicuously under her muslin shirt.”

Then the sleeping beast in him gets awake. Then he  
asks Sohini to come to the courtyard to clean. After  
she goes back to home, she is trying to arrange tea  
for her father and brother. Her father shouts from  
his bed angrily as:

“I thought you were dead or something  
You daughter of a pig!

No tea, no piece of bread, and I am dying of  
hunger!

Put the tea on, and call those sons of pig,  
Bakha and Rakha to me!”

Actually Lakha has lots of love on his children but he  
wants to show some authority on them. Sohini acts  
according to her father’s advice. After serving tea to  
her father and two brothers, she tells about Pandit  
Kali Nath’s wish to come to the courtyard and clean  
it. Then Sohini asks her father to go to the temple  
courtyard to clean it. In the beginning he simply  
shouts at her and sends her to work.

When Sohini is cleaning the temple courtyard,  
Pandit Kli Nath tries to molest her. When she refuses  
him, he immediately changes his plan and shouts  
as.. Polluted, polluted, polluted.

Bakha forces Sohini to know about the pathetic  
situation. In the beginning she doesn’t show interest  
to tell about the incident. Finally she reveals the  
incident to her brother

“Tell me Sohini, he said, turning fiercely to  
his sister, how far did he go?

She sobbed and didn’t reply.

Tell me! Tell me! I will kill him ...he shouted  
He ..just teased me, she at last yielded.

And then, when I was bending down to  
work,

He came and held me by my breasts.”

Sohini shows lots of patience here, when her  
brother is shouting at Pandit Kali Nath, She simply  
takes him away from that place. After knowing the  
incident Bakha’s eyes become red. He grinds his

teeth and clenches his fist. Baka wants to kill Pandit. But it is a miserable situation that he is helpless.

All patriarchal societies are exploitive. Indian society, a predominantly patriarchal one is no exception. The exploitation is extreme when it is directed towards low – caste women. Even though venerated in scriptures and held in high esteem, women are treated in a most humiliating manner in India. This kind of hypocrisy exists in India and in many respects quite characteristic of Indian society as whole, Mulk Raj Anand in his characteristic way lays bare all the sordidness, ugliness of hypocrisy of upper castes toward lower – caste women.

By this way Mulk Raj Anand shows various bitter encounters faced by Sohini with the patriarchal society in this novel *Untouchable*. Anand skilfully designed this novel and got international fame with this novel.

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