



HEGEMONY IN UNTOUCHABLE BY MULK RAJ ANAND

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the social hierarchy and marginalization in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* through the theory of Cultural Marxism, especially Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony. This study uses a qualitative narrative method with a descriptive approach. The method used is descriptive qualitative. Data collection was conducted through several steps, namely reading and understanding the novel thoroughly, noting relevant quotations, collecting supporting theoretical references, and classifying the data into categories. Data analysis used the Miles and Huberman framework, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The results of the study show that the social hierarchy in the novel is reflected through the caste system that places the main character, Bakha, as an "untouchable." Marginalization is seen in the restrictions on Bakha's access to education, work, health services, and places of worship. Hegemony is formed through the dominance of ideology and cultural institutions that make injustice accepted as normal, even by those who are oppressed. This study shows that *Untouchable* not only depicts social inequality, but also makes readers aware of how ideology works to maintain an unequal power structure. Through this study, readers are expected to be more critical of social injustice that is hidden in culture and social systems.

Keywords: *Hegemony, Social hierarchy, Marginalization, Cultural marxism*

I. Introduction

In everyday life, social hierarchy and marginalization are evident in systems like the caste structure and discriminatory treatment. These conditions are maintained by hegemony, where dominant groups shape societal thinking through cultural and ideological control. Social hierarchy refers to the ranking of individuals based on factors such as power, status, and wealth (Giddens, 2017). It affects access to opportunities. Marginalization pushes certain groups to the edges of society, limiting their participation and recognition (Young, 1990; Tilly, 2004). Hegemony, as introduced by Gramsci (1971), is power exercised through cultural influence. The ruling class creates consent by embedding their values through institutions, making inequality seem natural (Priscilla, 2020; Hall, 1992). In India, hegemony is seen in the caste system, where upper castes normalize marginalization through religious and cultural tools. As a result, Dalits internalize their low status, accepting discrimination as natural. In Indonesia, the New Order regime used media and education to promote Pancasila and silence dissent. This ideological control led

citizens to accept hierarchy and authority as natural values.

Gramsci's theory emphasizes the role of culture and ideology in sustaining power dynamics within society. Cultural Marxism highlights the role of culture and ideology in sustaining social power dynamics. Gramsci's theory underscores how the ruling class secures dominance not only through political and economic control but also by shaping societal norms and values via cultural institutions such as education, media, and religion (Gramsci, 1971). Through this perspective, the experiences of the untouchables in the novel reflect broader class struggles and reveal the hegemonic mechanisms that contribute to their continued marginalization (Hall, 1992).

In Indonesia, social hierarchy and marginalization are evident in multiple ways, particularly within the healthcare system. A striking example is the disparity between patients who pay for medical services out-of-pocket and those who depend on the national health insurance scheme, Badan Penyelenggara Jaminan Sosial (BPJS)



Kesehatan. Public hospitals often give preference to patients who can afford private care, resulting in longer wait times and diminished quality of service for BPJS users. This situation exacerbates a social divide, where economically disadvantaged individuals face inferior healthcare, highlighting broader patterns of inequality.

Unlike previous studies, this research aims to provide a more comprehensive analysis of social hierarchy and marginalization in *Untouchable* by incorporating the concept of hegemony to explore how cultural and ideological forces sustain caste-based oppression. Several earlier studies have discussed similar themes, such as Singh (2019), who examines the representation of the Indian social structure; Gupta (2017), who highlights the marginalization of Dalits from a gender perspective; and Pandey (2020), who analyzes the relationship between social class and marginalization. Jendato (2019) explores Bakha's experiences of humiliation and unfulfilled aspirations, while Sipayung (2019) focuses on systemic oppression through restricted access to basic rights, and Ginting (2016) emphasizes cultural and class-based abuses. These studies support the existence of systemic injustice and the role of society in maintaining a harmful hierarchical system. By observing these previous studies, this research offers a fresh perspective by examining how hegemony is represented narratively by Anand, particularly in how dominant ideologies are maintained and challenged, thus contributing to a deeper understanding of how cultural and ideological forces perpetuate social injustice.

II. Concepts And Theoretical Framework

2.1 Social Hierarchy

Social hierarchy is defined as the structured ranking of individuals or groups within a society based on various criteria, including wealth, power, education, and social

status. This hierarchical organization creates a framework that influences social relationships and interactions, often resulting in unequal access to resources and opportunities. According to Giddens (2017), social hierarchy is not only prevalent in contemporary societies but has also existed throughout history, shaping dynamics of power and privilege across cultures and eras.

2.2 Marginalization

Marginalization is the process by which certain groups or individuals are pushed to the fringes of society, resulting in their exclusion from mainstream social, economic, and political life. Tilly (2004) emphasizes that marginalized groups often face systemic discrimination, which manifests itself in various forms, including limited access to education, health care, and employment opportunities. This exclusion can lead to underrepresentation in decision-making processes and reduced ability to advocate for their rights and interests.

2.3 Hegemony

Hegemony is a form of power exercised through cultural and ideological agreement, not just through economic domination or physical force. This concept highlights that control over a society does not always rely on coercion or violence but can be achieved through more subtle and persuasive means, namely by winning the consent of the governed. Antonio Gramsci introduced this concept to explain how the dominant class maintains power by shaping and directing the consciousness of society through cultural institutions such as education, media, religion, and art (Gramsci, 1971). These institutions serve as tools through which dominant ideologies are disseminated and normalized, so that subordinate classes come to accept the status quo not by force, but through internalized belief systems.



In the hegemonic process, the ruling class does not merely impose its will from above, but instead creates a condition of consent, where other social groups accept and even support the existing order. This happens because the values, norms, and worldviews propagated by the dominant class are presented as universal truths, obscuring their class-based origins. As Priscilla (2020) notes, this acceptance of dominant norms and ideologies makes resistance more difficult, as the structures of power appear to be natural and inevitable, rather than constructed and changeable.

Gramsci emphasized that true power lies not only in controlling material resources or institutions but in the ability to influence the way people think, feel, and perceive their place in society. This is why, for Gramsci, class struggle is not only carried out in the economic or political realms, but must also target the cultural and ideological spheres (Syekhnurjati, 2021). Cultural hegemony, therefore, becomes a powerful mechanism through which the dominant class secures its leadership and maintains control over time without overt oppression.

2.4 Theory and Method

This study applies the theory of Cultural Marxism developed by Antonio Gramsci within the framework of Marxist literary criticism. Marxism, as established by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, focuses on social, political, and economic analysis by arguing that the development of human history is determined by material and economic conditions and that class relations are shaped by the mode of production in society (Marx and Engels, 1848). Marxism identifies two main classes in capitalist society, the bourgeoisie consisting of the owners of capital, and the proletariat consisting of the workers. The conflict between these classes is considered to be the primary source of social change (Marx, 1867). Antonio Gramsci

expanded on this theory by shifting attention to the cultural and ideological aspects of class struggle, which gave rise to Cultural Marxism. Gramsci introduced the concept of hegemony, which refers to how the ruling class maintains power through ideological and cultural influence, not merely through economic dominance (Gramsci, 1971). Gramsci introduced the concept of hegemony, which refers to how the ruling class maintains power through ideological and cultural influence, not merely through economic dominance (Gramsci, 1971). Hegemony is a process in which the dominant group secures the consent of subordinate classes by shaping societal values, norms, and beliefs through cultural institutions such as education, media, and religion, so that their control appears natural and is accepted without force or resistance. Through this theoretical lens, this study explores how social hierarchy, marginalization, and hegemonic power are represented in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*. The analysis focuses on intrinsic elements such as characters, dialogue, setting, and theme to reveal ideological constructs, power relations, and class conflict in the text.

This study uses a narrative qualitative research method to explore the themes of social hierarchy, marginalization, and hegemony in Mulk Raj Anand's novel *Untouchable*. Qualitative research in literature is a methodological approach that seeks to understand and interpret the complexities of human experiences, emotions, and social interactions through non-numerical data. This type of research is invaluable in literary studies because it allows for detailed exploration of themes, character development, and cultural context within a literary text (Creswell, 2009). The primary data source is the novel *Untouchable* written by Mulk Raj Anand, while secondary data consist of academic journals, scholarly books, articles, and reliable websites that support the theoretical framework of Cultural Marxism and provide



context to the analysis. The data collection technique includes reading and understanding the novel thoroughly, noting relevant quotations, collecting theoretical references, and classifying the data into categories related to social hierarchy, marginalization, and hegemony. The data analysis technique follows the model by Miles and Huberman (1994), which consists of three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. This method helps to analyze how caste discrimination and ideological domination are portrayed in the novel through the lens of Gramsci's Cultural Marxism.

III. Analysis

A. social hierarchy

In *Untouchable*, social hierarchy is depicted through the caste system, which determines individuals' status, rights, and daily experiences. Bakha, the main character, is born into the Dalit caste, the lowest rung of Indian society. His status as a "sweeper" means he is considered impure and *untouchable*, regardless of his character or actions. Bakha's routine reflects his position as an untouchable. He is not allowed to walk freely on the street without announcing his presence. In one setting where Bakha and his family live and the other out castes show physical social separation. They live in an outcaste colony, separated from the rest of society as shown:

"The outcastes' colony was a group of mud-walled houses... outside their boundaries and separate from them... A brook ran near the lane... now soiled by the dirt and filth... the ugliness, the squalor and the misery which lay within it, made it an 'uncongenial' place to live in(9)."

The setting of Bakha's residence depicts extreme social segregation. The mud houses separated from the "civilized" society not only show economic differences, but also differences in social status. According to Gramsci, a form of hegemony can be seen

when an unequal social structure is considered "natural" by all parties. The upper class does not feel guilty, and the lower class like Bakha does not question it. He lives in submission inherited through culture. Bakha's environmental conditions smell bad, are full of garbage and dirt symbolically convey his "unclean" social position according to the caste system. This is a concrete example of how hegemony works: society accepts that dirty settlements are the "proper" place for outcastes.

Bakha had to endure humiliating treatment when asking for food, showing inequality and lower social status as narrated: "Bread for the sweeper, mother..." he shouted... There was no response. His legs were aching" (68)." Bakha must wait in silence and uncertainty to receive wages, often in the form of leftover food. He is treated not as a human worker, but as a beggar who is not worthy of attention. This reflects a very strong social hierarchy structure, where employers feel no need to appreciate the hard work of an outcaste. Hegemony arises when Bakha himself does not dare to demand. He waits silently, even when the treatment is inhumane. He has been shaped by the hegemonic culture to feel unworthy to demand or speak out. This hierarchy is maintained by ideology, not by physical force.

The setting of the story where a woman throws bread from the top of the house, depicts the rudeness and insults received because of the social status it is narrated:

"vay Bakhya, take this. Here's your bread coming down.'... It fell... He picked it up... too disgusted to clean the drain after this (73-74)."

The upper caste woman throws the bread from above, not by hand. This is not just about giving food, but also where the lower caste is not allowed to be touched or approached. This throwing action is an image to maintain "caste purity". According to Gramsci, symbolic



control is an important part of hegemony. By exercising power through images (such as food being thrown), the upper class maintains their dominance. Bakha, instead of being angry, just feels disgusted and walks away. His reaction shows how the subordinate consciousness has been shaped by the dominant culture.

The setting where Bakha's father, Lakha, is rejected and insulted when he tries to ask for medicine for his son because he is a "Bhangi" (low caste). This strongly depicts the caste system and discrimination based on social hierarchy. When Bakha was sick with a severe fever, Lakha, his father, went to the house of Hakim Bhagawan Das to ask for medicine. He shouted and begged, but no one paid any attention, as narrated: "Keep away, keep away," said the babu, "don't come riding on at me... You have nothing to do all day. Come another time or wait (80)." Lakha stood for an hour near the garbage pile hoping someone would convey his message to the Hakim. "For an hour I stood like that in a corner, near the heap of litter which I collected... That I couldn't buy medicine for my son when I was willing to pay my hard-earned money for it, troubled me (81)." He knew that there were many medicines in the Hakim's house and believed that one of them could cure his son: "I had seen many bottles full of medicine in the house of the Hakim ji and I knew that one of those bottles contained the medicine for you, and yet I couldn't get it (81)." In desperation, he returned home, then ran again to the Hakim's house, barged in, and pleaded: "Still there is a little breath left in my child's body, Hakim ji... The meaning of life is my child. Hakim ji, take pity. God will be kind to you (81)." But the Hakim was furious and scolded him: "Bhangi! (sweeper) Bhangi!... You have polluted hundreds of rupees worth of medicine. Will you pay for it?" "Serve me! Serve me! How can you serve me? Have you ever received medicine here that you come rushing in? (82)."

This setting shows that because of his poverty and low caste status, Lakha does not have the right to proper health care. This reflects the social reality where the poor are often marginalized, even in matters of life and death. Bakha's father, Lakha, describes his suffering at not being able to get medicine for his child just because he is a street sweeper. He was even insulted and thrown out of the hakim's house for "polluting" the place. In the concept of hegemony, institutions such as hospitals are extensions of the dominant ideology. They unconsciously or consciously practice discrimination because they have been consumed by the idea of "caste cleanliness". Social hierarchy is embedded in the minds of everyone, including doctors and medical personnel, so they refuse to provide services to lower castes not because of the law, but because of an ideology that is considered "normal".

When Bakha accidentally touches an upper caste person on the street, he is insulted, cursed and considered to have polluted the person. This shows the very rigid and cruel caste rules in society are shown:

"Dirty dog!... This dirty dog bumped right into me!... The swine!" (47)."

This moment shows the rigid enforcement of the boundaries between castes. Bakha's physical existence is viewed as a polluting presence, emphasizing how the hierarchy is maintained not only socially but also symbolically through notions of purity and impurity. According to Giddens (2017), social hierarchy controls access to resources and power, and in the novel, this is clearly seen in Bakha's exclusion from education, religious spaces, and economic opportunity.

Setting Bakha is forbidden to enter the temple to pray because he is out-caste. Even his courage to approach the temple is considered as "pollution" and he is almost attacked. This shows how places of worship are also used as an illustration of caste differences, as shown:



“The temple... seemed to advance towards him... he rushed headlong to the top step” (59).”

When Bakhaa wanted to enter it with his courage, he was almost killed by people in the temple saying: “‘Polluted, polluted, polluted,’ a shout rang through the air. He was completely unnerved. His eyes were covered with darkness. He couldn't see anything. His tongue and throat were parched. He wanted to utter a cry, a cry of fear, but his voice failed him (60).”

In this setting, Bakha approaches the temple to see the inside. He only intended to peek out of curiosity and admiration, but his reaction was very violent. People immediately shouted hysterically and accused him of desecrating the holy place. He was driven away with anger and disgust, as if his presence as an outcaste had polluted the entire sanctity of the temple. Even though he did not go inside, only standing at the doorway, his presence was enough to be considered a spiritual threat. In Gramsci's perspective, this incident shows how religious institutions become ideological tools to maintain social order. The rejection of Bakha was not carried out with legal force, but through deep-rooted cultural norms. Even Bakha himself did not fight or defend himself because he had internalized the view that he did not deserve to be there. This is a form of cultural hegemony that makes inequality accepted as something normal.

Setting where at the time Sohini was harassed in the temple, this setting is related to the previous setting where when bakha heard 'Polluted, polluted, polluted where the shout was for Sohini. The figure of Pundit Kali Nath (a Brahmin) uses his status as a religious leader to sexually harass Sohini, who is a woman from the lowest caste, it is narrated: “‘He just teased me... he came and held me by my breasts (63).”

This illustrates how a hierarchical social structure enables individual from a high caste to abuse power without fear of punishment,

while a victim from a low caste has no protection. The author has created the image of the temple in such a way as to depict the exploitation and abusive ways of the institution towards the poor, outcasts, like Bakha and Sohini. From this it can also be seen as a form of gender and caste marginalization. Sohini, as a woman from a lower caste, is a victim of sexual violence and cannot fight for justice. Her rights and voice are completely marginalized because of her social identity. From the perspective of Gramsci's hegemony, this is a form of dual power: the religious figure has ideological and social power. He is associated with purity, morality, and divine authority. So when he commits sexual violence, society does not sue him. On the contrary, victims like Sohini are the ones who are blamed and ostracized. This incident shows how the hierarchical social structure based on caste gives moral immunity to the dominant group. This is a very dangerous hegemony, because it not only perpetuates power, but also silences the voice of the victim. Sohini cannot speak up because it is ingrained in her mind that she will not be believed or even blamed.

The social hierarchy in *Untouchable* is depicted through the intrinsic structure in the novel and culture that confines the main character to the lowest social position. Through the lens of Antonio Gramsci's hegemony, we can see that this system persists not because of coercion, but because of ideological domination that has succeeded in making individuals like Bakha accept their inferior position as something natural. This is the strongest domination: when the oppressed no longer fights, but longs to be accepted by the oppressor.

B. Marginalization

In *Untouchable*, marginalization is depicted through the systemic exclusion and oppression experienced by the Dalit caste, particularly through the life of Bakha. Marginalization is the process by which



certain groups or individuals are pushed to the fringes of society, resulting in their exclusion from mainstream social, economic, and political life. The untouchables being denied access to their basic rights and space is seen in the living conditions of the marginalized caste colonies. The author then shows that even though Bakha helps a child, he is still insulted because his touch is considered polluting. This shows how good intentions do not erase the social stigma of how dangerous the touch of an outcast is. Even though the touch is very much needed to save people, it is shown:

“You eater of your masters! What have you done to my son?... You have defiled my house!’... ‘Get away! May you die!’... Bakha handed over the child... silent as a ghost, withdrew (116).”

In this picture, Bakha shows care and courage by saving a child from danger. However, instead of receiving gratitude, she was cursed by the child's father who felt that his child had been contaminated by the touch of an outcaste. Bakha's good deed was not enough to erase the social stigma attached to her. Gramsci's hegemonic analysis is clearly visible here. Even in emergency and humanitarian situations, cultural norms that regulate caste purity remain stronger than universal moral values such as gratitude or justice. The maid's reaction was not the result of personal hatred, but rather a reflection of the dominant ideology that had been deeply ingrained. Bakha was not given space to be recognized as a full human being because her social status had defined her entire identity. This is a form of symbolic marginalization, where even heroic actions cannot lift someone from the social position that has been determined by the hegemonic system.

Marginalization in the novel is also shown by the author through the setting of a well where the untouchables cannot access it and only the upper caste can access it. This describes Bakha's sister, Sohini, who wants to

get water from a public well, but is forbidden to touch the well tools because she is an outcaste. He can only stand and hope that there are upper caste people who are willing to help him, shown:

“The outcastes were not allowed to mount the platform... they had to wait... joining their hands with servile humility... praying, beseeching... (22,23).”

Here, the well becomes a social representation of caste boundaries. The source of life water is only accessible to the upper caste. Sohini has to wait for hours for the upper caste to kindly fetch water for her. Sohini stands near a public well, wanting to fetch water, but is not allowed to touch the rope or bucket because she is from the lowest caste. She has to wait patiently, hoping that the upper caste will help her. In fact, water is a basic need that should be accessible to everyone. In Gramsci's theory of hegemony, this incident shows a very subtle but powerful form of marginalization. The prohibition on touching well equipment does not come from written law, but from social norms that have been instilled for generations. Society believes that maintaining "caste purity" is more important than guaranteeing access to water. Even Sohini herself accepts the rule without resistance, because she has been shaped by the system to feel that her position is outside the rights to public facilities. This is where hegemonic power works when oppression is softened into an undeniable norm.

Marginalization in *Untouchable* is not only limited to poverty and discrimination. It extends to all aspects of life: living space, work, education, health, religion, even self-awareness. Through Antonio Gramsci's lens of hegemony, the oppression of Bakha and his community is shown to be not only carried out by the state or individuals but also reinforced by a cultural system that makes the oppression appear normal. This is considered the most effective form of marginalization when the



oppressed are unaware that they are being oppressed.

C. Hegemony

In the novel *Untouchable* by Mulk Raj Anand, the existence of social hierarchy and marginalization of the Dalit/untouchable caste not only depicts the reality of social inequality in India, but also becomes the ideological basis for the formation of hegemony as explained by Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci stated that hegemony is a form of domination that is not carried out by force, but through the creation of awareness that accepts and considers an unequal social order as something normal and natural. In *Untouchable*, the social structure of caste and the exclusion of Dalits are no longer considered injustice, but have been institutionalized culturally so that they are accepted without resistance, even by those who are victims of the system.

Bakha, the main character in *Untouchable*, lives in a very oppressive social reality. He was born as a street sweeper from the lowest caste, and from the beginning he realized that his existence was seen as "untouchable" by society. He was not allowed to walk on public roads without announcing himself, was not allowed to touch upper caste people, and was not even allowed to enter places of worship. All these prohibitions and discriminations take place without resistance because Bakha himself has been convinced by the hegemonic social structure that his position at the bottom of the social pyramid is natural. In this case, as Gramsci explains, upper-class domination occurs subtly because the lower class has internalized the values that support this domination.

One clear evidence of how hegemony works through social hierarchy and marginalization can be seen from how Bakha received rough treatment when he accidentally touched a Brahmin on the street. The public's reaction was very strong towards Bakha being

insulted, cursed, and considered to have "polluted" the person. However, what is even sadder is how Bakha did not dare to defend himself. He only felt ashamed and guilty, as if the mistake was his. This is where hegemony works very effectively. In Gramsci's view, domination that is voluntarily accepted by the oppressed is the most effective form of power because it does not require coercive power, but rather sufficient cultural and ideological control embedded in social consciousness.

Marginalization in *Untouchables* also occurs in various aspects of social life, such as the economy, education, and health. Bakha and his family live in a squalid and isolated settlement outside the city limits, illustrating the physical separation that reinforces their social exclusion. When Bakha's father tries to get medicine for his son, he is not only ignored but also insulted as a "Bhangi" who has dirtied the healer's house. Despite his money and good intentions, he is still rejected simply because of his caste identity. In Gramsci's perspective, institutions such as health care or places of worship are unjust; they are extensions of ideological structures that work to perpetuate upper-class domination under the guise of morality and caste purity. Hegemony in this case occurs when the wider community, including those working in health and religious fields, believe that what they are doing is right, when in fact they are perpetuating structural injustice.

The situation is further exacerbated by Bakha's lack of access to education. He sees how wonderful it is to be able to read and write, but that dream is beyond him because he knows that schools will not accept children from his caste. When he tries to learn privately from a servant's daughter, his efforts are commercialized and ultimately fail. Bakha did not get any knowledge, but was instead exploited. This shows that it is not only the economic structure that marginalizes, but also the cultural and educational structures that should be tools of liberation, are actually



involved in strengthening the hegemonic hierarchical structure. In Gramsci's framework, education is not just the transmission of knowledge, but also an arena for ideological struggle. When the education system only serves the upper class and ignores the lower class, it has become a very powerful hegemonic tool.

The power of ideology in the caste system even reaches the most private and emotional areas. When Bakha saves a child from an accident, he is still spat on, cursed, and considered to have contaminated the child. Even heroic and empathetic actions cannot erase the stigma of caste. This is evidence that in a hegemonic society, universal values such as humanity are subject to the dominant ideology. Everything done by the oppressed is always read through the lens of unnaturalness, because they are considered to have no place in a "clean" and "pure" social system. The reaction of the child's mother is not merely out of anger, but because she has absorbed caste ideology as an unquestionable truth. She is angry not because of malicious intent, but because she has been "educated" by culture to feel disgusted with the untouchables.

Thus, *Untouchable* illustrates how social hierarchy and marginalization not only give rise to material injustice, but also become the main foundation for the formation of hegemony. Through the dominance of culturally inherited ideology, the upper class does not need to maintain their power through physical violence. Instead, they succeeded in forming a social consciousness that accepts the unequal order as something natural. In Gramsci's view, this is the most perfect form of domination: when the oppressed are not only forced to remain silent, but cannot imagine any other world than the one that oppresses them.

Ultimately, the impact of social hierarchy and marginalization in *Untouchable* is the creation of a hegemony so profound that domination no longer appears as oppression, but as part of a sacred, natural, and

unchangeable social order. *Untouchable* is a reflection of how culture and ideology can be very effective tools in maintaining social inequality forever, and how critical consciousness is the only path to liberation.

Another rule identified in the novel is humility. In Confucianism, women are taught to embody humility. However, this humility can make women appear less like slaves. A woman must be good at housework, but they do not need to tell everybody what they have done. Women are expected to always show respect to others, consistently concede, and prioritize others over themselves. This woman's humility includes doing every household chore perfectly, and not saying what she has done.

IV. Conclusion

Based on the analysis of *Untouchable* by Mulk Raj Anand through the lens of Antonio Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony, this research concludes that: Social hierarchy in *Untouchable* is vividly represented through the caste system, particularly through the life of Bakha, the protagonist. His identity as a Dalit, or untouchable, confines him to the lowest social stratum. This hierarchy is not maintained through violence but through culturally ingrained beliefs that position certain groups as superior. *Untouchable* shows how this system is accepted by both the oppressor and the oppressed, making it a clear manifestation of Gramsci's hegemony.

Marginalization is illustrated in every aspect of Bakha's life from his exclusion from education, access to water, and religious spaces to the inhumane treatment he receives despite his hard work and dignity. This marginalization is not just structural but also symbolic, as seen in how society responds to his touch, his voice, and even his efforts to help others. *Untouchable* reveals that marginalization is deeply normalized, forming a social consciousness that views injustice as



destiny rather than a system that must be challenged.

The impact of this social structure and marginalization is the creation of a deep hegemonic system, where the dominant ideology has succeeded in forming a social consciousness that accepts inequality as something “natural”. Individuals like Bakha do not resist because they have been culturally educated to accept their social position without protest. This hegemony is deeply embedded in institutions such as religion, education, and the economy, which indirectly perpetuate the dominance of the upper class. Through the narrative of *Untouchable*, Anand exposes how ideology becomes a powerful tool in maintaining caste-based domination without overt coercion.

Ultimately, *Untouchable* demonstrates that the real danger of hegemony lies not in its visible oppression but in its invisibility how it shapes thought, limits imagination, and naturalizes injustice.

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