

NATION, NATIONALISM AND LITERATURE

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The Voice of a Dalit – ‘Anti’- Nationalism in Sujata Gidla’s 'Ants Among Elephants'

Jyoti Kiran Pisipati

Abstract :

There have been several instances in the history of the world when the spirit of Nationalism has compelled and unified people to rise against another nation to secure and achieve independence and freedom. Post India's independence, the heroic tales of freedom struggle have been romanticised, and devotion and respect for one's country have come to be regarded as the foremost duty of every Indian.

In a country like India, with its multiple religions, castes, languages, the definition and scope of 'Nationalism' is often blurred. Thus in the last few decades, importance for individual freedom and personal space is gaining more significance than the unified interests of one's nation. For us to base nationalism on a single sentiment is a challenging endeavour. Hence the term 'nationalism' has to be redefined to the contemporary ethos.

SujataGidla's 'Ants Among Elephants' is a memoir that traces the history of her family right from her great-grandfather to the present times. Born into a family of 'untouchables', she talks about the status of the 'low castes' which is below the traditional caste hierarchy in Indian society. Her book exposes the generations of atrocities committed by the privileged classes and the indifference shown by the ruling authorities towards these downtrodden sections of society. She narrates the story of 'untouchables' in India with specific focus on her family, right from her grandfather's generation. My paper focuses on the idea and relevance of nationalism in the lives of these marginalised communities.

Key words: Nation; Nationalism; Marginalisation; National Memory; Dalits; Untouchables