

## **Narrating Resistance from the Margins: Intersectionality and Dalit Womanhood in *Ants Among Elephants***

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### **Abstract**

Dalit writing has developed as a highly significant act of resistance in Indian literature, foregrounding the experiences of the repressed sections of society that are usually marginalized in the mainstream discourse. The memoir released by Gidla is examined in this study using an intersectional postcolonial feminist method. The main objective is to explore the significance of *Ants Among Elephants* in reflecting the multiple systems of marginalisation and to demonstrate that literary testimony is a counter-history. The study employs a qualitative method which requires close reading of the texts and contextual interpretation. They were categorised under themes of class, caste and gender and studied through the perspective of intersectional theory. The study also holds significance in Dalit and feminist literary criticism since it deals with the fragmented nature of intellectual writings, showing that life writing is not merely a literary genre but is a genre of political resistance in Dalit and feminist contexts.

**Keywords:** Dalit literature, caste, class, gender, intersectionality, post-colonial feminism

### **Introduction**

The epic of Indian Independence has been largely the story of upper-class individuals fighting the British Empire on the grand stage. Sujatha Gidla's *Ants Among Elephants* throws this stage up. This is not just a bio, but an act of "epistemic reclamation." It draws the history of the Mala caste in Andhra Pradesh out of the notes of Savarna (upper caste) historiography and to the center. In this paper the textbook

is critically examined as a separate feminist stance, stating that the “Ants” in the title does not mean Dalits in general but only Dalit women. The “Elephants” of the State and the Party stomp loudly but it’s the quiet, intersectional resistance of the women that keeps the community alive. This research places Gidla’s textbook at the convergence of three theoretical fabrics: Intersectionality, Subalternity and Resistance. Manjula’s subjugation as a promoter, as Kimberlé Crenshaw has put it, cannot be understood through a cumulative model (caste + gender). Her identity is a special ontological area where rape is a means of caste unsexed morals and enforcement legalize labour exploitation.

### **Literature Review**

Sujatha Gidla’s *Ants Among Elephants: An Untouchable Family and the Making of Modern India* (2017) has come to be a major piece in contemporary Dalit writing, grappling with the counter-historical narrative of modern India.

The critical response of Sujatha Gidla’s *Ants Among Elephants* (2017) represents a watershed moment in the global awareness of Dalit literature. The Triple Burden of the Dalit Woman The most sophisticated analysis deals with the text’s gender politics. Raed Nafea Farhan and Arundhati Sen read the novel with a rigorous intersectional lens, using it to expose the “triple burden” of caste, class, and gender. Farhan points out how Gidla creates a narrative where the pain of the female is qualitatively distinct from the suffering of the male, Satyam (the male revolutionary) suffers state brutality, whilst Manjula (the female provider) suffers abuse from the state, the upper castes, and her husband.

The most conclusive political critique is provided by Pankaj Mishra (2017). Mishra’s critique, “*The God That Failed*,” calls the book a eulogy for the Indian Left. He claims that Gidla’s story exposes the Naxalite movement’s tragic flaw: its “caste-blindness.” Mishra sees the memoir as a historical corrective, illustrating why the communist promise of equality was never realized for the lowest castes through a comparison between the ideological purity of Satyam and the harsh reality of caste discrimination that Satyam ignores.

The theoretical foundation of this paper lies in Kimberlé Crenshaw’s (1989) concept of “intersectionality.” Crenshaw criticizes the “single-axis framework” of anti-discrimination law, arguing that Black women are marginalized by feminist movements (which focus on white women) and anti-racist movements (which focus on Black men). This fundamental text provides the crucial terminology to analyze the situation of Gidla’s protagonist, Manjula, who is similarly marginalized by the feminist movement as well as the Naxalite conflict in Andhra Pradesh.

Reading Sujatha Gidla's *Ants Among Elephants* as a counter-historical narrative mandates an engagement with the theoretical architecture of Subaltern Studies. This part develops a framework for questioning the 'silence' of the subaltern subject, the nature of postcolonial state power and the different forms of resistance from overt insurgency to everyday survival, based on eight primary texts. Defining the Subaltern and the Problem of Voice The major theoretical problem in understanding any Dalit tale is the issue of narratorial authority Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's well-known essay, "*Can the Subaltern Speak?*" (1988) is the essential interlocutor in this analysis. In the case of Gidla's memoir, this text requires a critical reading of whether the protagonist, Manjula, is really speaking, or her voice is mediated through the diasporic privilege of the author.

Foundation stone, but it moves from the silence of the subaltern to their consciousness - Ranajit Guha's *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (1983). Guha questions the colonial perception of peasant uprisings as apolitical 'law and order' issues. This text is important to understand the character of Satyam in *Ants Among Elephants* portraying his participation in the Naxalite movement not as foolish violence but as a systematic "insurgency" against a feudal state.

A perspective for understanding the "Elephants" (the State) in Gidla's title is also provided by Mbembe's *On the Postcolony* (2001). He theorizes the postcolonial state as hideous and as exercising authority through "commandment" and brutality. This helps to understand police violence and state repression in the novel. The Indian state is not portrayed as the defender of its population but as a predator that the subaltern must survive.

To comprehend the narrative tactics adopted by Gidla, it is imperative to connect with the theoretical corpus of Dalit Aesthetics. While mainstream Indian literature has historically stressed *rasa* (aesthetic pleasure) and the Gandhian ideal of social harmony, Dalit writing is rooted in Ambedkarite philosophy of insurrection.

The theoretical base of all Dalit writing is B.R. Ambedkar's groundbreaking *Annihilation of Caste* (1936). It is mainly a political treatise and is the moral compass of the Dalit writing. Ambedkar believes that caste is not a division of labor but a "division of laborers," and that any meaningful cultural expression must work toward the utter elimination of this hierarchy. In this sense, literature is functional; it is a weapon against the brahminical social order.

In "*The Politics of Form in Dalit Fiction*" (2011) Pramod K. Nayar takes this further, characterizing the genre as "testimonio." Dalit writings, Nayar argues, are "narratives of trauma" that serve as public evidence against the state. The genre

itself, often a combination of biography, history and sociology, refuses to privatise grief. Gidla's writing is a prime example of this style, a public indictment of the injustices done to her family, demanding a witness rather than a passive reader.

Representation and Human Rights Lastly, the literature is concerned with the ethical dimension of writing. Sarah Beth's *Dalit Literature and the Politics of Representation* (2007) explores the tension between "authenticity" and "representation." Beth asks who has the authority to speak on behalf of the community and how the "Dalit Self" is built in juxtaposition to the "Hindu Other. This paradigm offers the key tools to understand *Ants Among Elephants* not as a story but as an aesthetic act of revolt.

The Naxalite Movement and Agrarian Conflict in Andhra Pradesh Introduction To understand the political landscape of *Ants Among Elephants*, and especially the revolutionary path of Satyam, it is crucial to examine the historiography of the Naxalite movement in Andhra Pradesh. The selected study critically interrogates the rural realities that demanded insurrection and the inherent conflicts, particularly gender and caste, that afflicted the movement.

The canvas is enlarged in Gail Omvedt's *Reinventing Revolution* (1993) and Ghanshyam Shah's *Social Movements in India* (2004). Omvedt locates the Naxalite struggle within the wider framework of "new social movements," asserting that while the Left was successful in mobilizing the class base it frequently lacked a satisfactory theory of caste as a distinct material force, a "blind spot" Gidla encounters in her narrative.

### **Conclusion**

Sujatha Gidla's *Ants Among Elephants* has been examined to indicate that the memoir serves as a potent intervention in the continuing discourse on caste, class and gender in Indian literature. The overarching aim of this analysis is to explore how the text of *Ants Among Elephants* shows the junction of multiple types of oppression and the avoidance of assimilation. Class is a truth of deprivation that cannot be escaped, a fact characterized by a lack of opportunity in both education and the economy. Caste discrimination is the oldest form of discrimination that has been favored. In the case of Dalit women, gender is an added burden, since they have to confront not only the exterior mode of patriarchal repression but also the internalized imperatives in the periphery groups. The metaphor of ants among elephants can be a good illustration of this situation: visible and invisible at the same time, but weak and strong.

To sum up, it could be claimed that *Ants Among Elephants* is not merely an autobiographical novel but rather a literary and political intervention that speaks

about silence. It might be read as an example of how Dalit women's narratives disrupt the hegemonic discourse and bring to the fore what has been hidden in most situations. This study concludes that Dalit women's life writing must lead postcolonial and feminist ideas, for it is not just a way of bearing witness to oppression but also a strength in resisting subordination and challenging knowledge.

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