

1st Dalit Literature Festival 2019

3-4 February, 2019 | Kirori Mal College, University of Delhi, Delhi

Why a Dalit Literature Festival?

This initiative is founded primarily on Ambedkarite Thoughts and on other positive, change oriented groups of philosophies. Any People-Groups-Associations and/or friends who believe in a vision of Social Justice and positive change can collaborate as mission partners of this concept. We have observed that literature is being appropriated by various forces that are governed by caste and capitalist formations and a trend has been created of organising **Literature-Culture Fest** in regional languages at the State level in different parts of the country. These groups are deeply entrenched into a caste and Capital entitlement and oppression. Their tendency for appropriation is driven by the understanding that literature, culture, and Art have continued to play a significant role in making people-community-society more creative, alert, sensitive and thought-oriented. Therefore, these groups want to establish control over the domain of literature, culture and art.

We observe that these groups have infiltrated our media, socio-cultural groups, political parties, and other change-oriented associations and begun to control and diminish their values of social justice and inclusivity.

Initially, they did not find literature-culture-art profitable and maybe prudential, perhaps that was the reason that these areas were spared. However, the caste and capital centric forces have realised the great potential and power in literature, culture and art and they have intensified their attack on the artistic spaces through promotion of a culture of opportunism and materialism. It is then, a natural consequence that a large number of celebrations of 'literary cultural' festivals are being sponsored which promote the caste capital values. Visibly so, we find that these so-called festivals do not provide any platform for a dialogue on the social concerns of literature instead they project the identity driven Literary Cultural movements as a threat to social Unity. They also try to brand these as products of colonial conspiracy and wish to fabricate literature as a thing or product for the purpose of entertainment.

Amidst such a situation, it is the collective responsibility of all those who believe in the idea of Social Justice and an Egalitarian Society that we protect values of justice and equality embodied by our literature-culture-art. Also, it is our responsibility to bring together various cultural and artistic minds who believe in social change and justice, to

strengthen the people oriented and change centric positive stream of Dalit. Only this positive and change centric vision can bring about momentum towards the foundation of a better society and community in future.

Dalit as a symbol of Pain-Struggle-Resistance

We strongly believe that the word 'Dalit' is a carrier of the values of struggle and resistance and this word has taken the shape of struggle and resistance against injustice and equally acts as a flag for all the marginalised who face injustice, pain, deprivation on a regular basis. It has also constructed an umbrella under which all kinds of marginalised groups, classes assemble and will continue to do so in the future as well. We look at the word Dalit in its natural and larger comprehensive understanding and declare to include dalits-tribals-women-eunuch groups, minorities (including Pasmada and dalit christians) and all other deprived communities and marginalised identities. We also propose our understanding that we would use the term 'Dalit' prospectively to struggle for deprived communities, marginalised identities and labour class. Needless to say, that the proletariat or labour class in India is Dalit, which has been defined above. This society is exploited by capitalism and equally by brahmanism. Dr Ambedkar also marked brahminism and capitalism as india's two enemies.

Some mission partners suggested the word Bahujan or Ambedkarite in place of Dalit and we do not entirely disagree with them. We would just like to share that this word has always been a part of the struggle for human identity, dignity and social justice and has now become a general symbol. It is also fact that it has been accepted in education and literary institutions and equally by the thinkers and the Philosophers. A whole generation of our ancestors' struggle and sacrifice has gone into institutionalising it. Therefore, it is required that we make efforts to define and underline its intensity and comprehensive dimensions in a new environment instead of replacing this with another word. If required, we can always work with an alternative political vocabulary with the help of our friends who are active in social movements and are free to use any parallel word.

We are beginning this inaugural Dalit Literature Festival 2019 with Dalit as its basic theme, the definition of this word, its depth and expansion will reflect in a more concretised form in our future initiatives and programmes.

Dalit literature as an alternative discourse

The pain and anguish of Dalits has never been registered in the history of literature. There was no mention of the injustice imposed on them. Dalit was not a human being in our society nor in literature or history. Dalit was registered as poor hardworking labour class

member but no one came forward to document the injustice meted out on them, such as the tremendous discrimination of being treated like untouchables. There have been voices from time to time against class and caste-based discrimination but those were always ignored as they were the voices of the poor and hardworking people. Dalit community could not express itself as it was kept away from the world of letters through a systemic and structured propaganda. They were praised as servants and tireless slaves. They were termed as untouchables on the basis of some evil deeds in their past life. Dalit community was given the task of keeping the society clean but emotions of human dignity, justice, grace and humanity were never meant for them. They could not go to a temple. They could not take water from ponds and wells. They could not settle in the village or the city. They could not share their pain and difficulty with anyone. Fundamentally, dalit was never a human being in society and country. This was an outcome of the mindset of society based on casteist and feudal mentality. Brahmanical scriptures played a pivotal role in the construction of this mindset.

Through words, it was communicated that 'everyone is equal before God' however one could not be equal in the society made by God. One was dominant and the other was untouchables. Hard working person who grow crops was termed as slave and untouchable and those who lived through donation became honorable and the custodians of the system. All of this was based on a fuzzy logic which was heavily contested by the Dalit bhakti literary movement. Subsequently, Jyotiba and Savitribai Phule challenged the monopoly of brahmins over education through their writings and by opening a school. Afterwards, Dr. Ambedkar framed a complete philosophy of the Dalit liberation movement. He exposed the caste capital domination centric intellectuals and also took to heavy task the so-called heroes of free India Movement who claimed to be humanitarian and guardians of dalits. The writings and the movement led by Dr. Ambedkar initiated the process of dalit liberation in India. They shed light on the caste domination and its injustice through literature. Birsa Munda, Babu Mangu Ram in Punjab, Swami Achuttanand in UP, Sant Gadgeji Maharaj in Maharashtra and the one who ignited the flame of education among nomadic tribes Guru Ghasidas and Gobindji. Periyar created a revolution on his own in South India. That is also the reason that he is called the Socrates of Modern India. After that we see that Mahatma Jyotiba Phule and Savitribai Phule challenged the monopoly of dominant castes through their writing and opening schools for untouchables. There were many other saints, activists and philosophers who played a decisive role in ensuring justice, respect and dignity to the Dalit Community.

All this can be read as a precursor to Dalit Literature. Maharashtrian Dalit Literature and Dalit Panthers have a significant role in giving this literature the shape of a powerful social movement. Though many writers started writing in north india as well but the Ambedkarite philosophy was somewhat missing.

The prime achievement of dalit literature is that it established Dalit as a human being for the first time. It recognised the pain and the humiliation that was meted out to them. Subsequently, Dalit Literature successfully proved that all literature-culture-art and language before was simply a history of perpetuating caste-capital centric value system and it rejects that. Also, Dalit literature attempted to bring all other marginalised identities suppressed and subjugated through casteist domination under its umbrella. This includes Tribals, women, pasmanda dalits, nomadic tribes, minorities and other marginalised groups.

Dalit literature in the contemporary

Dalit literature presently is being translated into all the languages of India. It has captured the exploitation of the dalit community, represents an epic story on which no Epic has ever been written. Casteist values and mind sets are still consistent in all communities and classes across Indian society. Despite that institutions of literature art and culture embedded in caste capital and culture deliberately ignore dalit literature art and culture. They continue to dominate all such institutions. They are using these institutions to promote the literature based on caste and capital values at the cost of literary discourse outcome of labour and sensitivity.

We believe that this dalit literature festival will initiate a parallel change-oriented literary discourse in which Dalits, tribals, denotified tribes, women, minorities and pasmanda communities and the literature festival will establish a solid platform. This constitutes our objective and our purpose. Dalit Literature Festival is a step in the direction of that grand vision. we believe that this step would achieve its Vision and Mission and support of all like minded and Justice loving individuals and Groups.

Jai Bheem!

for more details:

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