



SA/37/PR/2018

18.7.2018

Dalit Indian English Poets' Meet
17th July 2018

In a first of its kind programme, a **Dalit Indian English Poets' Meet**, was organized by the Sahitya Akademi. The participating poets were Aruna Gogulamanda, Aparna Lanjewar Bose, Cynthia Stephen, Yogesh Maitreya Wanjari and Chandramohan S.

Welcoming the participants and the audience, Dr. K. Sreenivasa Rao, Secretary, Sahitya Akademi said: "Today we are gathered here to listen to poetry written by dalits in English. English being one of the languages that links the various cultural spaces of the country in a major way, and the kind of national character it has achieved in representing, mainly the lived experiences in our metropolises, cities and towns, poetry written in this language automatically achieves a national, and at times, universal character, while retaining the local features. The dalit experience written in English is no exception. Poems written in English by our dalit brothers and sisters are noted for their national character, as well as for the common features they share with dalit poetry in the Indian languages. Elements of protest, resistance, pride, assertion of identity, excitement in coining new phrases and expressions creating a new language of poetry in the process, to best represent their unique experiences—all these can be discerned in the poetry of the dalit Indian English poets."

Dr. Rao then traced the history of *Indian Literature's* role under the editorship of Prof. K. Satchidanandan, Prof. H. S. Shivaprakash, Shri Nirmal Kanti Bhattacharjee and Dr. A. J. Thomas in bringing out focused dalit literature Sections in the journal over the years. He also dwelt on the several national seminars organized by the Sahitya Akademi in which entire segments were devoted to dalit literature and actual readings of works by dalit writers over the years. He pointedly mentioned the annual celebration of Ambedkar Jayanti from 2015 onwards with seminars, writer's meets, symposia, etc., featuring almost all the prominent dalit writers of the country. Dr. Rao also spoke about Gramalok — a rural literary outreach programme — which seeks to tap the talented voices from the villages of the nation, providing them with opportunities of national-level exposure.

Some of the poets read are as follows:

Aruna Gogulamanda

1. She was told
2. Beasts
3. Solitude
4. Arifa
5. Venomous smiles, vicious rulers
6. This is my country

Aparna Lanjewar Bose

1. A Truth (This is for Real)
2. Dalit Power
3. Words
4. One evening
5. In this deep, dark maze
6. In response to a known poet speaking to the unknown poet.

Cynthia Stephen

1. Nowhere to hide
2. Washerwoman
3. Dalit Ghost?
4. 2016 Space Odyssey
5. Red (For Lal Dil)
6. Girl cry

Chandramohan S.

1. Portrait of the Artist as a Young Woman
2. Caste is a local train
3. 13 ways of looking at a Burkini
4. Love After Babel

Yogesh Maitreya Wanjari

1. Poem About Empowerment through English.
2. Two more poems on the dalit experience.

During the question-answer session that followed, renowned Indian English poet C.P.Surendran, who was present in the audience, raised the question as to why dalit poets' poems, which were studded with stunning images and metaphors, turn out to be mostly rhetoric, than poetry springing from the experience itself. The poets in their separate replies rebutted the argument, saying that the dalit experience, expressed through words, expressions, images and metaphors peculiar to their lives, formed the rhetoric, if at all, and that was the soul of their poetry. Another question that came up from the audience was about the difficulties that arose while a regional language dalit poet translating his/her poems into English.

Dr. A. J. Thomas, in his Vote of Thanks, stressed the role Sahitya Akademi played in highlighting the literature, especially poetry, of the alternative cultures of the country. He said: "...Sahitya Akademi is always striving to give all kinds of discourses equal importance, be it minority languages, tribal literature, dalit literature, women's writing, literature of the LGBT community, considering all these as alternative discourses, or creative expressions of all groups of people, ... who are aware of their different identities. The age of grand narratives has obviously ended long ago."

A full audience enjoyed the programme.



(K. Sreenivasarao)