

# The Case for Bahujan Literature



Edited by **IVAN KOSTKA**  
**PRAMOD RANJAN**

SAFARI  
BOOKS

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**Ivan Kostka** has first and last been a person of literature. He is a poet who in the Seventies co-edited the quarterly poetry journal, *KAVI*. His poems have been published in various anthologies and in the *Indian P.E.N.* journal. He started his career in journalism as the Bombay Bureau Chief of *JS*, the youth magazine published by *The Statesman*. His compassion for the Dalits and his interest in literature led him to a journalistic encounter with the Dalit Panthers when they first emerged. Beyond studying his philosophy, Kostka has had a keen interest in Jotiba Phule's literary work considering him the father of modern Bahujan literature. Through the pages of *FORWARD* Press, which he founded and edits, and together with Pramod Ranjan, he launched the discourse on Bahujan literature.

**Pramod Ranjan** (born 22 February 1980) is a critic and journalist who has written extensively on development of social democracy in the media, the concept of Bahujan literature and the creation of Bahujan culture. He was associated with *Dainik Bhaskar*, *Amar Ujala*, *Prabhat Khabhar* and many other Hindi newspapers. He has been the editor of several journals, including *Bhartendu Shikhar*, *Gram Parivesh* (Shimla), *Jan Vikalp* (Patna) and *FORWARD* Press (New Delhi). He has edited three books: *Hindi Sahityetihas Ka Bahujan Paksha*, available only in Hindi, and *Bahujan Sahitya Kee Prastavna and Mahishasur: Ek Jannayak*, which are available also in English with the titles *The Case for Bahujan Literature* and *Mahishasur: A People's Hero*. Email: [janvikalp@gmail.com](mailto:janvikalp@gmail.com)

*To Kanwal Bharti, the matchless  
researcher and critic*

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## ‘Bahujan hitay, Bahujan sukhay’

In the world of literature, the process of arriving at a conclusion is more important than the conclusion itself. When we read a novel, the narrative is more important than the climax. This is also true of other literary genres including poetry and the short story. By implication, this principle also applies to this book. You will find this anthology of select articles from the literary debates that raged in the pages of the *FORWARD Press* magazine intellectually stimulating. This book will take you through the process of preparing a blueprint for propounding the concept of Bahujan literature and will introduce you to the bitter arguments and counterarguments on its various interpretations. These discussions and debates are meant to help you reach a carefully considered conclusion. Literature and criticism also play the same role. As for the conclusions, you yourself have to arrive at them.

*FORWARD Press* was published in print from May 2009 to June 2016. From 1 June, it has metamorphosed into a website. The publication of writings, including criticisms, on the concept Bahujan literature continues on the website. The articles compiled in this book pertain to the initial period of this discourse. Since then, the journey has gone far ahead. But these introductory articles are necessary to comprehend the process in its entirety. The order of articles in the book is subject-wise, not chronological, to help you imbibe the finer nuances of the discourse.

The concept of Bahujan literature is simple – literature of the Bahujans as opposed to that of the elite. As Buddha had said 2500 years ago, “Bahujan Hitay, Bahujan Sukhay”. But some important things have to be kept in mind in this context.

Bahujan literature is the literature of the majority. But it is not a majoritarian literature. It is not founded on numerical strength. It is the representative voice of different sections of society against the collective communal consciousness built by Manuvad and in favour of those facing social and cultural deprivation. This is the literature of the last man in the last row facing any kind of deprivation. It not only raises the issues of economic deprivation and untouchability but also identifies the different forms of socio-cultural exploitation and considers them important. This difference between Bahujanism and majoritarianism should always be kept in mind. Bahujanism is about liberty, equality and fraternity; majoritarianism is an intellectual means to es-

establish the dominance of the elite. In this society riddled with varna and caste, this concept aims at ameliorating the shared pain of different social groups and at bringing about equality of opportunity in cultural and literary expressions. It promises to take all such people along who are committed to raising their voice against these inhumanities.

In today's India, the key deprived communities are women, SCs, STs, OBCs, DNTs and all Pasmada religious minorities. The concept of Bahujan literature is concerned equally about the travails of each of these communities and believes that the reasons for the exploitation of each are more or less the same. And if these reasons are to be described in one word, that has to be Manuvad. It is not only one of the cruellest concepts in the world but its capacity to mutate with changing times has lent it a rare longevity. Today, it has joined forces with capitalism. If you will attack it from one side, it will ooze out from the other. You may fight the socio-economic domination of the Brahmin-Dwij communities and you may taste success but when you see your own family in the mirror of women's discourse, you may discover that Manuvad has had the better of you. Women treat these conflicts as conflicts between men. They have no role in them.

8 Many battles are being waged in parallel and in isolation. The SCs are fighting against untouchability and social exclusion. The STs are fighting against the corporates for their right over water, forests and land. The OBCs are fighting against their social neglect and for securing their share in the means of livelihood. The DNTs are in the thick of a battle for daily bread and for a social identity. The Pasmada Muslims and other minority communities are engaged in a struggle to have the Mullahs and clerics implement the true principles of their so-called egalitarian religions. Some of those born into privileged families – whom we call savarnas in popular parlance – are caught up in an inner conflict between their intellectual commitments and the familial beliefs. The lessons, the wisdom they have gleaned from literature, social sciences and history, have become a perpetual source of disquiet for them. The thought that they may be on the wrong side has made them restless. Anyone who is socially active knows that some of them have been and are ardent supporters of the struggles of the deprived sections and are trying their best to “de-caste” themselves.

There are some basic commonalities in these struggles. To begin with, they have a common objective – that of building a socially, economically and culturally equitable and sensitive society. The basic tone and tenor of their literary expressions are the same. On the other hand,