

## **No Excellence No Award**

### Press Statement

With a heavy heart I relinquish my three national awards. I am very sad that I have to do it, for these are honours bestowed on me by the nation and adjudged by fellow filmmakers. The National Film Awards of India is a great institution that has acknowledged diverse film practices across genres, languages and scales. I am truly humbled to have received these awards.

The National Award, named after the nation and not the government of the day, has nothing to do with the ideology or control exercised by ruling political parties. It is an award of excellence in the field of creativity and hence it cannot be, even by manipulation, linked with the short-sighted concerns of players in the field of electoral politics and their short-term berths of five years. The National Award is far more durable and perennial. Hence I am not returning my National Award, there is nobody to whom I can return it. I am only relinquishing my claim on it.

I believe I have lost the right to hold such an award. When my fellow citizens do not have the right to food of their choice, when artists of the next generation are denied their right to a decent education, when rational thinking is declared a life-threatening activity, when parochialism and coercion become an alibi for upholding cultural traditions, I believe that I too have lost the right to an award of excellence.

The National Award is not only an honour but also a responsibility – to work towards upholding the conscience of the country; to fight the dominant forms of social amnesia; to foreground the stories that are being strategically and systematically erased; to enhance the ethos of democracy in order to let creativity bloom; to toil to make this country a little healthier and richer with each film, each poem, each cuisine and each debate. In recent months we have witnessed an erosion of the space from which such initiatives can stem. I believe that the murder of Muhammed Aqlaq, M.M. Kalburgi, Govind Pansare, Narendra Dabholkar and others has substantially tarnished the meaning of such awards that celebrate excellence and critical thought.

Yet, I also believe if we who belong to the community of artists and intellectuals continue to “keep the faith” and work hard, we shall be able to restore the honour of the National Award. We shall be able to bring about a time when all Indians can eat, love, think, debate, campaign and make films the way they want to; and then, the nation will be ready once again to honour excellence among its citizens. Resistance to intolerance is the both crucial and fundamental to bringing about that time of abundant creativity. I hope I shall receive some National Award ‘then’.

**Madhusree Dutta**

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