

*Malcolm Adiseshiah Centenary Celebration*

**Imaging Dalit Reality: Politics of Visual Representation  
Documentary Film Festival-cum-Painting Exhibition**

January 25th–27th , 2010

**Madras Institute of Development Studies  
Dalit Intellectual Collective &  
Vikas Adhyayan Kendra, Mumbai**

**Concept Note**

***“...Television [visual media] can produce an effect close to what you’d have from fifty thousand protesters in the streets.”***

*--Pierre Bourdieu, On Television: 1998.*

The selfhood and self respect of a people is closely linked to their distinctive cultural identity. It shapes the nature of the relationship amongst human beings and between human beings and the natural world. It does not exist independent of everyday material condition and life practices.

Dalit cultural practices and identity have come under attack in the past few decades. Their cultural space is increasingly squeezed out. The inherent ‘civilizing’ mission of the elite and utter disregard for Dalit worldviews has pushed Dalits into a state of cultural marginalization and crisis of identity. This is at a time when they are subject to renewed assaults by forces of economic globalism, the destruction of their lifestyles and cultural specificities under the onslaught of ‘cultural assimilation and mainstreaming’. Cultural annihilation of a people is the first step towards their annihilation as a distinct people. Thus, the question of cultural production is part and parcel of general life activities, designed to hold existence together and impart meaning to it.

Images play an important role in redefining social education, power and hierarchies as well as building up a counter –culture ‘praxis’ and space for the recovery and revitalization of the emancipatory potential for an alternative cultural hegemony. Films as a creative cultural artifact can play an immense role in the portrayal of Dalit reality. They address the subconscious world of spectators and these cultural constructs are the construction of the subconscious. Thereby, they function as a potent tool through which the notions of superiority and inferiority are restructured to exert control in the external spheres of life.

Pictures which were displayed on the calendars had played a major role in raising nationalist and social aspirations and organizing mass mobilization during the pre-independence days. We hope that the paintings created by the new generation of Dalit artists that portray the

submerged reality of Dalit lives—their experiences of pain, misery, hopes and aspirations – will awaken them for the creation of a new world which is free of oppression.

### **The Objectives**

- DIC believes that visual medium has great potential to communicate through images the everyday social existence of Dalits, Adivasis and the victims of cultural annihilation.
- The Film festival, seminar and painting exhibition seek to explore and develop cultural critique of the prevailing cultural space dominated by the brahmanical cultural hegemony and aims at creating alternative cultural subjectivity to redefine the agenda of contemporary cultural discourses as well as to revitalise the Dalit cultural consciousness for social transformation.
- To bring together Dalit documentary film makers and script writers from South India to create a platform for sharing and learning from each other's experiences .It also addresses the dilemmas and problems faced by Dalit Documentary Films makers.
- Along with the film screening, a Dalit Painting exhibition will be organised. The exhibition aims at providing space for Dalit artists in the public domain. The Dalit artists will attend the seminar and share the importance of visual representation.

This documentary film festival is a part of the ongoing Malcolm S. Adiseshiah Centenary Celebration. It is a tribute for his humanitarian vision and concern towards the marginalized sections of the society. In continuation of his legacy, this event attempts to establish the values like equity, justice and fairness through documentary films at the academic level. There is a genuine quest among the subordinated people to revitalize their cultural forms and use them as an effective tool in their struggle for social justice. Manifestation of this dynamic process assumes great significance not only in the emerging vast literature on gender and identity politics, but in the artistic forms as well.

\*\*\*\*\*

**Note:** Eminent social scientists, creative artists, film directors and scholars of different expertise across the country will participate in the event.

The programme brochure will be displayed soon.

### **Coordinator**

Dr. C. Lakshmanan, Asst. Professor, Madras Institute of Development Studies, No. 79, II Main Road Gandhi Nagar, Adyar, Chennai – 600 020.

Email: [laxman@mids.ac.in](mailto:laxman@mids.ac.in)