

Kerala: In a collective fight for rights, SC/ST students form theatre movement

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└ The Adivasi Dalit Students Theatre Movement performing in Kochi
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KOCHI: After years of oppression and lack of opportunity, a group of youngsters from the Thrissur School of Drama started a new movement to share their experiences with the world. The Adivasi Dalit Students Theatre Movement, a first of its kind initiative in India, was launched as a result of the collective efforts of a few students to make their lives better.

"Growing up, we struggled a lot. After realising how unfairly scheduled caste and tribe members are treated in society and how we are discriminated against, we decided to form a group to collectively fight for our rights. The Adivasi Dalit Students Theatre Movement is a result of that," said Jishnu, a founding member.

Though there are several Dalit/Adivasi theatre groups across the country, this could be the first students' initiative, the members said.

On how the idea became a reality, Kallu Kalyani, a theatre artist, said she and Jishnu, along with a few friends, formed the troupe Plaphy in 2018.

"Plaphy used to write and perform street plays... taking up the Madhu murder case, the Kathua rape case, etc. However, we couldn't continue with it as the members joined new courses or left for higher studies. The idea of a theatre movement again came to our minds when Jishnu and I were studying at the Thrissur School of Drama," said Kallu, who is now an active member of the movement.

Started with three persons, the theatre group now has around 30 members from across the state.

"Several orientation sessions, in collaboration with the Adishakti Summer School, helped create awareness among the community members about the situation and in mobilising them," Jishnu pointed out.

On Sunday, a team of 10 from the movement performed 'Engale Oche', a dramatic adaptation of C Ayyappan's short story 'Ente Kathayile Ningal'.

"We have included the recent political developments and issues faced by the scheduled caste communities in the play," Kallu said.

At a time when the Constitution and the Ambedkarite ideologies are being questioned, the group felt it was important to tell society about the lives of scheduled caste and tribe people and their lives and struggles.

"The movement is to educate the youngsters in our community about our rights," Kallu said.

Through the play, the movement is attempting to express everything from their political point of view.

"Around 300 SC or ST students drop out of colleges every year. The E-grant for the students is not distributed properly. At some point, we felt we should fight. All we want is to fight for our rights," Jishnu said. The movement aims to perform the play across the country in tribal hamlets and college campuses to create awareness, he added.