

Move to hold Marathi literary meet in US draws flak

Many in Marathi literary circles are livid over the decision of the Akhil Bharatiya Marathi Sahitya Mahamandal, the apex body of Marathi literary organisations in the country, to hold its next literary congregation in San Francisco.

Among those criticizing the 'outlandish' decision, taken by the Mahamandal at its meeting in Pune Sunday, are eminent litterateurs, the incumbent president of the all India Marathi literary convention, M.D. Hatkanangalekar, and his predecessor Arun Sadhu, besides lovers of literature.

The proposed 82nd 'All India' Marathi Sahitya Sammelan, scheduled for February next year, will be the first to be held outside India, in 'blatant disregard' of offers by Marathi literary bodies in Ratnagiri, Thane and Parbhani in Maharashtra to host it.

While Marathi literary stalwarts and past sammelan presidents like Ram Shewalkar, K.J. Purohit, Madhu Mangesh Karnik and Vinda Karandikar have questioned the propriety of holding the All-India meet outside the country, Mahamandal president Kaoutikrao Thale-Patil has stoutly defended the move.

'The decision doesn't appeal to my intellect,' Shewalkar, who was president of Vidarbha Sahitya Sangh (VSS) besides having presided over an all India convention, told IANS.

'I can understand individual fascination for foreign jaunts but 'literature' will be conspicuously absent from the proposed meet,' he added.

The opponents of the idea of holding the Marathi meet in San Francisco argue that it will deprive thousands of literature buffs of the opportunity to attend it, given the costs the trip would involve.

San Francisco's Bay Area Marathi Sahitya Mahamandal, the proposed host of the meet, has offered to bear the entire travel and other cost of 12 Indian Mahamandal members and 50 litterateurs besides 50 percent cost of delegates.

'But even considering this, the delegates will have to spend at least Rs.70,000 per head on the five-day affair which will be a free junket for the Mahamandal members,' quipped Ratnagiri Marathi Vachanalaya (library) president Deepak Patwardhan.

Patwardhan is particularly sore over the Mahamandal move as the apex body ignored an offer to hold the literary meet in Ratnagiri in Konkan he made in his capacity as president of the 185-year old library.

'It's a hijack of Marathi literature lovers' prerogative to host and attend the event in their state,' Patwardhan told IANS.

Thale-Patil, however said that while he respected the sentiments of past presidents and others opposed to the idea, the apex body had valid reasons to defend its decision, taken by 'an overwhelming majority' after weighing all pros and cons of the issue.

'While Ratnagiri and Thane have hosted a Marathi literary meet twice in the past and Parbhani has

done it once, the San Francisco meet will be the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for the sizeable Marathi-loving population in the US to attend such an event,' he told IANS, appealing to the critics to show some magnanimity.

Former Mahamandal president Suresh Dwadashiwar also supported the decision, saying it was a good gesture reciprocating the invitation sent by the Marathi literature lovers in the US.

'Having accepted the invitation, the Mahamandal should now find ways to subsidize the costs and ensure maximum participation, he said.

Immediate past Sahitya Sammelan president Arun Sadhu asked whether the meet was being held for the Mahamandal members and a few litterateurs or for common connoisseurs.

'I am not opposed to the move; who am I to do so?' he said cryptically, adding however that these questions must be asked.

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