

AWARD FOR MAMATA IRKS WRITERS

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Two Bengali literary figures have taken action in protest over West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee being feted recently for her contribution to Bengali literature.

On May 9, on the 161st birth anniversary of poet Rabindranath Tagore, the West Bengal government announced it was instituting a new award, to be given once in three years, to honour those enriching Bengali literature, and that Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, as the author of a poetry collection titled *Kobita Bitan*, would be its first recipient.

While the announcement — made by the State's Education Minister and Bangla Academy president Bratya Basu at a public event — came as a surprise to many, no prominent figure reacted publicly. Soon afterwards, writer-researcher Ratna Rashid Bandopadhyay said, in Bengali, that she was returning the Annada Shankar Ray Memorial Award that she had received from the Bangla Academy in 2019.

“The Bangla Academy, by giving the award to the Chief Minister, has not only set a dangerous precedent but also insulted all those who are actively involved in enriching Bengali literature. In this context, the award conferred on me in 2019 is now akin to a crown of thorns and I am returning it,” said the Burdwan-based writer who has authored over 30 books.

Editor-publisher Anadiranjan Biswas, a member of the Bengali advisory board of the Sahitya Akademi, also announced that he was quitting the body, though he did not name the Chief Minister. “I always hold the poems of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore in high esteem since [they sustain me]. But on his 161st birth anniversary, sheer insult was caused to Bengali poetry in Kolkata,” he said in a statement.

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