

24 JAN 2016

DR B R Ambedkar called an 'Idiot' at a Caste Debate held In Leicester

Following the debate organized by Manthan Vichaar yesterday in Leicester, I am writing this short note to make everyone aware of what took place and of the challenges faced by our campaign to outlaw Caste Based Discrimination from UK. We have clearly rattled the opposition and there is now an urgent need for every to come together.

It was a revealing exercise to engage with the other side. I was set-up against Dr Prakash Shah, Reader in Culture and Law at Queen Mary, University of London. I am aware that the invite was sent to DSN and ACDA who for various reasons could not attend.

The Chair, Anuja Prashar was biased and Dr Shah spoke a lot of nonsense in defence of and in the interest of his class and argued against implementation of the legislation. His speech was full of untruths and he tried to instil a fear of the impact which the legislation is going to have, even saying that Gujarati Navratri festivals would be impacted upon.

I had researched Dr Shah's work in preparation for the debate and in order to confront his arguments. I was invited to open the debate and was told by the organisers that I would be allowed 15 minutes, but, in fact, the chair allowed only 10 minutes and cut short the address in mid-stream. Then Dr Shah presented his statement. After each statement, the Chair interrogated and questioned each presenter exploring flaws in their arguments.

Dr Shah's presentation and arguments, briefly, were as follows:

He covered what the legislation does. He said that campaigners have a conversion agenda. He instilled fear of the impact on Hindu people. He accused EHRC, British Parliament, Government, Judiciary and said they were all flawed and unfit bodies to legislate and adjudicate on Caste. He said the National Institute for Economic and Social Research (NIESR) Report published in 2010 and EHRC reports were flawed, lacking evidence, thoroughness and that they were partial and biased. He claimed caste was being wrongly interpreted as an aspect of race and there was a lack of Caste Definition. UK was a proxy for Christianity to have a go at India. He said he was afraid that similar legislation would extend to Europe and USA, that the legislation was anti-Brahmin and should be thrown out.

Chair did not interrogate Dr Shah's contentious points and, deliberately, gave insufficient time for rebuttals.

During interval, I protested to the organiser that the Chair was biased that I should be given time to interject and counter-argue. This was passed on to the Chair.

It was the first event of its kind where the majority (though biased) was from the opposing side and availed the opportunity to take the fight to their turf ! In summary, there was a lot of fear and paranoia as they saw the legislation as a threat to their esteemed position and status. In the feverish atmosphere, all appeals to Human Rights were totally lost. The intensity of the hostility was really felt across the podium and amongst the audience. This shows, our campaign has unnerved the opposition who, therefore, are reacting wildly, shutting their minds to any reasoned argument.

I was constantly barraged with questions about evidence but refused to be drawn into that particular discussion. I briefly mentioned the Begraj case and the Chandok V Tirkey case.

Mr Gautam Sen was invited to sum up on behalf of Dr Prakash Shah. He wrapped up the event, to audience applause, saying that Brahmins will defend their position to the last drop of their blood!

Finally, an interesting event occurred when the meeting had closed and people were networking when Dr Shah was surrounded by some of his supporters. One or two of our people confronted Dr Shah to rubbish his claims. Some of our folks also accused the Chair of bias. I went over to request the organisers (and also hinted to the Chair) that a follow-up debate on this issue be held. I was referred to Dr Shah to float the idea. He refused the invite point blank and retorted that our campaign was immoral. "Did I hear 'Immoral'?", I said. "Yes", he replied. There was a bit of commotion. He then accused me of using the language of Dr Ambedkar when I mentioned destruction of Caste in my address. Shah said Dr Ambedkar was an 'idiot'. My temper was slightly raised. I said to Dr Shah that he was guilty of intellectual hypocrisy and intellectual prostitution. I repeated this twice to his face. At this stage organisers intervened and took Dr Shah away.

The debate was recorded.

Report brief prepared by Sat Pal Muman, Chair CasteWatchUK who was invited to debate with Dr Shah by Vichar Manthan, New Walk Museum and Art Gallery, 53 New Walk, Leicester, LE1 7EA on 23rd January 2016. (www.castewatchuk.org)