

***Casting Vote or Voting Caste?  
The Crazy Demo!!***

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Organizer: Good morning and welcome to all. Today Dr. Mathachand Chaturvedi, a philologist, writer, social critic and activist interacts with our students on *Dhasha (दशा) and Disha (दिशा) of Indian Democracy*. We specially express our gratitude to Faculty of Social sciences and Department of Political Science for organizing this Interaction series on Indian Democracy on the occasion of *Amrit Kal: 75 years of Indian Democracy*. Student representatives please join on the stage for the interaction with Dr. Chaturvedi on his newly released and contested book “*Casting Vote or Voting Caste? The Crazy Demo*”. We wish you all an intellectually provocative and transformative session ahead.... Thank you

Ms. Vidushi Sharma: The title of the book “*Casting Vote or Voting Caste*” already sounds something crazy.. (smiles). Could you please describe why this theme and how it all started?

Dr. Chaturvedi: Noble and visionary minds of our freedom fighters decided for democracy as an effective political system which can address social injustice and socio-economic backwardness experienced by the people at the time of Independence in 1947. Many of them notably Gandhiji and Dr. Ambedkar identified the core issue of social injustice perpetuated by the caste system (jati prada) and tried to mitigate its impact through a constitutional democracy. Recent elections campaigns and caste, creed identity and communal politics that we experience in Indian elections once again demanded to rethink on the same old relevant questions of caste in India.

Ms. Debjani Mukharjee: Does caste is still relevant in India. As students we do not experience any difference among our friends of any castes. We have only one caste... the student caste.. (All laughs)

Dr. Chaturvedi: (smilingly) Do you mean that there is another caste called teacher caste which is different from student caste? (All laughs).. True .. caste sounds something similar but in reality it is much deeper. Nobody is born without a caste in India. More specifically no hindu is born without a caste. Hinduism belongs to more than 80 % of the Indian population. You, Me and many of us, almost all of us are here born with a caste and all of us know which caste we belong, and if one claims that she or he is not aware about his or her caste, it is a great privilege. Even that ability to declare that one does not have a caste, itself is a statement that, he or she belongs to an upper caste. (smiles...)

Ms. Bateri Kumar: But we all belong to student caste only. The way it is presented here is that without a caste Indians are not Indians. Without the caste, India is unimaginable. That is too much sir.

Dr. Chaturvedi: Can we imagine an India without caste?. Jatimukt bharat..? Of course we can. Are we ready for it or are we not ready? That is the more concrete question/( smiles..) Many do avoidance as a strategy in dealing with Jatiprada. Avoiding a problem can never be a solution. At the same time, making caste system bigger than it deserves is also not the right direction for an effective solution. In India, there are many occasions where we adhere to avoidance strategy for critical problems. For eg. HIV infections, even after knowing that one is already infected, many pretend that nothing is happened. On the other side even if we know that HIV can transmit only through body fluids, social stigma associated with HIV is too high. The reality is that there are effective medicines available nowadays which stops the spread and growth of HIV virus inside the infected patient, though it may not be able to remove the virus as such. Time has reached that we might need a compulsory HIV test before Marriages (smiles..). Of course we do not do it because of the social stigma. The same is also true for HCV virus even though stigma associated with it is much milder because very few even know about it. At the time of corona, many experts were of a strong opinion that data regarding spread of corona in 2020-21 from many states, were not reliable. The reason for such a low reliability was the intention of the data collection. If the intention was to show there is no spread or very less spread, samples were collected from those areas where, very less corona cases were prevalent. Of course non-reliable data will lead to inefficient interventions. End result many states could not control the corona effectively and finally succumb to severe consequences. If the data were taken from the right locations and it was reliable, we could have prepared a different plan to deal the problem. Avoidance is a strategy that may work for some time, but it will hit back drastically soon. This is applicable to air pollution, plastic waste disposal, even in case of open defecation.

Ms. Vidushi Sharma: Caste system is not a health care emergency like HIV and Corona. How do you defend Sir?

Dr. Chaturvedi: Exactly ... caste system in India is not a health care emergency. It is more like air pollution. It is everywhere but no data.. if data is made, no more reliable. AQI data speaks about the quality of the air only. The rise in the asthma patients, breathing issues for kids of less than 9 years age and above 60, cardiac pain and other data has to be seen in relation to AQI, that will give direct health impact of AQI. Caste system has at least two dimensions which are to be confronted differently. One is well known. It is socio-economic sphere. Second is the religious- cultural deep rootedness of the caste system. Mostly we take caste system in its socio-economic dimensions only. Indian constitution and legal system, based on social justice and equality basically confronting this dimension only. Based on constitutional and legal framework, one can very well understand previous statements like “we are just students caste only”( smiles..). All most all political parties, even formed under caste identities also work in this area only. But socio-economic dimension of caste system is just the tip of the ice berg only. The real ice mass is in the religious cultural dimension. There constitution and legal system can not be effective at all. If we take this argument further, one can stretch it that even Gandhiji and initially Ambedkar too were strongly believing that constitutional and legal interventions in the socio-economic dimension might cause gradual and speedy removal of negative impacts of caste in the religious cultural dimension too. With due respect to them, the problem of caste became the part of general awareness and interventions like reservation, equal vote, access to education etc came into being. But religious cultural deep rootedness of

caste remain untouched. Against that Ambedkar could find only one solution...to accept Bhuddism. Therefore it becomes easy to identify that confident remark earlier, “we are just student caste only” is an expression of that improvements we achieved in socio-economic sphere of caste system.

Ms. Vidushi Sharma: Sir, Why is it not possible to make corrective measures against caste system through constitution and legal system in the religious cultural sphere of caste system ?

Dr. Chaturvedi: First of all Indian constitutional secularism promotes all religions. All religions have equal rights irrespective of whether it is a majority or minority, old or new, native or foreign. A citizen of India is free to follow any religion or many religions of his or her choice. In India, you can be a Hindu but a practicing Christian, Islam by birth but Buddhist by choice. Left all faiths for some years and later die as Jew, no problem. Indian constitution allows it. From the lens of constitution your religion and faith is a choice that you make. So you can make as many choices as you want. The greatness of Indian constitution is that the unit of the nation and society is the individual citizen, not the family. A citizen is an individual who can make choices of his or her own. A family becomes a group of citizens who are capable of making different or similar choices. Before, the dawn of democracy in India, that there were no individual citizen but praja and mostly family was the unit of kingdom, the Raj. The family's traditions, say... the choices and preferences of previous members of the family dictate the choices of the later members or supersedes. Just think about Indian family values and seniority worship than the merit. (smiles) The traditionalists, religious gurus and teachers, also the patriarchal social structures predominantly prefer family as a unit and constantly attacking Indian constitution and demand amending it. The violent reactions against individual choices for religious conversion, against inter caste or interreligious marriages, or even about food preferences ... one can easily see those attempts, an the effort to push majority religious identities under the pretext of culture, all hit on the same goal, individual liberty of a citizen... the constitutional guarantee that every Indian you, me , we all have. The freedom to choose that that one finds good for him/her fearlessly. So one must be beware of the cultural propagandists, communal majoritarians of any nation whether it is India or any other, because primarily it is an attack on your individual liberty. Secondly, only when there are some illegal incidents or complaints are filed as a case and reach to court, constitutional provisions and legal system can intervene. If there are no registered or filed cases, then there cannot be any judicial interventions too. It is something like this. There is an Indian wife beaten by her husband every evening. The entire village knows about it. Many of them witnessed it. But if there is no complaint registered by the wife or by somebody else on her behalf , the case does not exist. ( smiles..). Opposite is also true. There is a wife never beaten by the husband, it was always other way around. Entire village knows it. But if the wife complains and register the case of domestic violence, of course the legal procedure starts ( All laugh..). More interestingly such a beaten Indian husband will never register a case too. He understands ...anyhow I am already beaten at home, why shall I offer myself to be beaten by the court too. ( All laugh..)

Ms. Bhateri Kumar: Sir.. that means that there is no chance for imagining a caste free India at all. That is a dangerous future at least for many those who belong to dalit communities. So changing one's religion from Hinduism to another say Bhudhism , as Ambedkar did... is it the only solution to curb the negative impacts of caste system in its religious cultural dimension?

Dr. Chaturvedi: That is where Gandhiji and Ambedkar differs. Gandhiji was trying to offer more acceptance to Dalit communities inside Hinduism by naming them as Harijans and visiting and sharing food with them. Ambedkar tried and waited for the same but later

accepted Buddhism. Gandhiji, by birth belonged to an upper caste and Ambedkar by birth to a Dalit caste. Of course birth and life experiences could have influenced Ambedkar to have a different solution than Gandhiji to the caste problem..

Ms. Debjani Mukharjee: Sir , but as per Hindu belief system dalits are born as dalits because of their past karmas. This life born as a dalit offers them better chances to expediate the negative effects of past karma and assist them to fasten the process of Mukti in this and next lives. So changing religion cannot be the real option for a Hindu.

Dr. Chaturvedi: Yes ... you see , this remark really hits at the root of the caste system, the religious dimension. To have an experience of caste discrimination in its milder form,... let us get a response from audience.. Is there anybody who are with Mangaldosh .. Manglik?

Ms. Vidushi Sharma: Sir this is really unwanted.. why the caste is mixed up with Manglik here. For example I am manglik too, but a Bhrahmin.

Dr. Chaturvedi: Thank you Vidushi. Let us see the nature of manglik dosh. Manglik is a birth right. It says that Dosh is your right. It is not the right of your parents from whom you are born. Neither your father nor your mother had any Dosh. You are manglik, you are born with a dosh and have to live with that Dosh and you will emnate that dosh to close people around you. All other siblings had graceful birth and free to live the way they want. You will spend your life on unnecessary prohibitions, prayers and fastings to please the mangalgrah (Mars) to avoid bad luck . Anybody who wanted to live a long life will not marry you at all. Every elder women around your close community will speak ill of you.. to that extent anything happens unwanted at home, there is only one natural cause, you.. Now Vidushi, do you want to be a manglik or non manglik? Will you try to find out a solution to come out of the Mangaldosh or happily live accepting mangaldosh as a blessing to reduce the past karmas of previous lives or look for amicable solutions in this life? One more question ... with whom you would prefer to enter into a relationship, the one accepts you with your mangaldosh or one asks you to come out of your mangaldosh as a prerequisite for relationship ?

Ms. Vidushi Sharma : I feel little bit cornerd here. But of course there are solutions to the Manglikdosh. Of course everyone , including me will look for a solution to come out of such a Dosh and live happily .. ( laughs). Second question , regarding relationship choice , I can not answer. ( smiles). Moreover I do not want to.

Dr. Chaturvedi: Interesting.. thank you Vidushi. The moment one starts discussing about Mangaldosh, those who experienced it starts feeling like cornered. And those who do not experience it, it is nothing.. just another discussion only. Very interestingly .. as we heard and we know that Mangaldosh has many solutions depends upon in which house Mangal is on the birthchart and what is the degree of dosh. But what if there is no solution to mangaldosh, how it would have affected those who are manglik? A Life long scapegoat, bali ki bakra for anything unwanted happens at home or to close people? In case of Mangaldosh most of you do not experience the socio-economic backwardness as in case of jatiprada for dalits. Mangaldosh impact all jatis. Out of 12 houses in your birth chart, position of Mangal, in five houses can have dosh with varying degrees. Means almost more than 40% people are affected with this Dosh. If you are a family of 5, two is manglik. So mangliks can be feel some relief that we are in sufficient number, But to find out a partner of the same degree of dosh, becomes a great difficulty and you know the grapevine, gossips, rumours around it. One of my manglik friend once commented , if there were no mangaldosh, many pundits and jyothishis would have become bikharis (beggars). The contribution of manglikdosh to Indian GDP is not yet calculated, because I am not sure whether astrology consulting come under consulting business.

The more my friend tried to come out of mangaldosh, the more the money he lost, and the more the dosh indentified by the pundit. ( all laughs..)

Ms. Debjani Mukharjee: Sir, I can answer the second question.. I prefer to marry that person who is willing to accept me even with the mangal dosh.

Dr. Chaturvedi: That is very spontaneous... excellent.. that simply says that you are not manglick Debjani. (all laughs..) Let me narrate a story that happened in a women university german language class. Obviously all students were females. In order to teach usage of 'he' in German, teacher asks the class to write the name of a boy who is also a friend, with a request, not to share with each others. Initially every female student looks each other and smilingly started to write the name. One student looks very seriously at the teacher and do not write at all. Teacher goes to nearby student and repeat the request.. Now with a giggling everyone writes. The student remains the same and continues to look at the teacher rudely. Teacher noticed it but neglected the student behavior and the class continued. After many days at a free discussion about omens, handwriting analysis etc... student shared that she is manglick and confessed that she could not write the name because she was afraid that something unwanted might happen to that person. (smiles...)

Ms. Vidushi Sharma: No sir... nothing of that kind sir ... you are reading too much sir... I was simply not ready for that question.. so that I could not answer it.. nothing more.

Dr. Chaturvedi: True .. We believe you Vidushi. It was not about you.. Just an another incident. But that incident shows how dosh is getting internalized by the person. How it has affected the psyche of the person. Even to that extent, how it controlled her learning behavior otherwise very safe, cosy classroom. All others were giggling, enjoying and curious to know the name written by their close friends, but this student could not enjoy it at all. Jatiprada is much more severe. It does not provide any solutions to come out and not only you but all your family members , are made to suffer under the dosh by the soeity. It is a life long dosh without any escape. If mangaldosh has such an influence on the confidence of the individual student , how horrific it will be the dosh felt by the jati specifically for dalits and lower caste citizens.

Ms. Bateri Kumar: Sir... in that case, do you suggest that whatever interventions we do, but jatiprada will continue.?

Dr. Chaturvedi: Not completely. But the point I want to make is even after the very effective interventions like reservation, access to education, equal voting rights etc, castesystem continues to influence the socio- cultural aspects of Indian life and it reemerges every now and then. On the surface it might look peaceful, but the undercurrent is very dynamic. Let us consider this case. A new university formed in 2006, around Delhi, was organizing UGC expert committee visit as part of its 12B recognition process. University internal committee constituted for executing the visit of UGC experts from across India, decides that a faculty member of university shall go with the taxi to airport or central universities, where those experts reside and accompany the expert back to university. One of the UGC expert was from dalit community, a renowned professor at JNU,Delhi. The committee convener could not find a faculty member who is willing to go and accompany the dalit professor. Neither she herself wanted to go. Solution was also interesting, she finds a christian junior teaching faculty to do the job. (smiles..)

Ms.Vidushi Sharma: No sir.. this is too much. We can not believe it. Sounds like a story. We do not experience any caste issues among teachers too.

Dr. Chaturvedi: Ya... I know ..it is not that easy to digest. Because it did happen not in some remote Indian illiterate village. It happens at the highly educated echelons of the Indian higher

education system. But why should I lie? Because I myself was the Christian faculty member who went to JNU and accompanied the Professor. I reached his residence around 8.30 in the morning, he insisted to have a breakfast with him, I tried to give excuse of having time constraints, but finally had to agree to have some. I took a tea with snacks and he commented .. it seems that you are not a sanatani hindu. That was an eye opener. I smiled at him and spoke about the time constraints to reach university. ( smiles..)

Ms. Vidushi Sharma: Sir... you are unbelievable. You are Chaturvedi. Now you say you are a Christian.. No sir .. You are making absurd stories..

Ms. Bateri Kumar: Ya ...Vidushi is right. Sir.. you have lost all of your logic.. a Christian chaturvedi ?

Dr. Chaturvedi: I understand... because the cases and the events that are narrated, slightly does not fit into your understanding of the world, it seems. It has challenged you. That challenging effect, that provoking of the intellect is very important to look differently the world again. Initially I do not want to give you hints where things actually happened. But now, I have no other option. As I accepted myself as the person on the scene, it is very easily traceable ( smiles..) Even if you trace it, you will not see any casteism there. You can trace the record of UGC expert Visit and the list of experts and faculty members accompanied those experts etc. You can even match my name along with dalit professor's name. Interestingly there was only one professor from JNU in the expert list (smiles..). But you won't be able to trace anything of casteism as such ( smiles..)

Ms. Debjani Mukharjee: Ok, but what about Christian Chaturvedi? That is also another challenge for many here?

Dr. Chaturvedi: I agree... such challenges are very important in changing the world view or perspectives. That is also one of the objectives of these kinds of events. Such challenges I have experienced many times too. For eg. after participating an Interview for a post of teaching faculty, I was sharing my experiences to south Indian colleagues. As they asked I said that the name of the university is Bhagat phool singh university. But the comment from one of my listener was surprising. Did they make Bhagat singh also a fool? Of course we considered it as a joke. But that question comes from three situations: the closeness of the name with the revolutionary Bhagat singh who is a well known freedom fighter across India, the closeness to English word fool than hindi word phool(फूल) which means flower and they were not able to see the fact that Bhagat singh is a very common name in Haryana and Punjab region. Once they are willing to come out of these situations, they start to understand that this Bhagat Singh was a women educationist from Haryana. Another incident is more recent. I was sharing to some of my south Indian friends, that in Haryana and UP, there are small scale entrepreneurs who design religious art products out of gober (cow dung). And when I explained them that, there are Gober Ganesh, Gober Shiva, Gober Shiv parvati, on the display. They got irritated and turned against me and reacted ... this is too much... it can not be true. Murthi out of gober? No way. I had to really display the recorded video of the products to them. Still their south Indian minds were not ready to believe, and jokingly commented we won't believe until and unless gober Krishna and gober Ram is also there. I agreed, to buy and bring to them. Here what was the issue? In their perspectives they could imagine murthis made out of either in stone, wood, metal or clay. Gober as a medium for religious art was too challenging for them. I took the mobile and ordered from Amazon online 'Om and swastika' made of gober and asked to pay 500/- rs per piece. They refused... typical south Indians.( laughs) Then somehow... they were ready to accept the information but of course with a gaali ( swear word) against amazon for

discrediting Hindu Gods. I did not argue anymore. Whole truth was very different. The man and his wife, with thilak and sindhoor on their foreheads, who stood at the gober art stall, were filled with gober vibes. As he understood that I am very eager to know more about their art, they gave me many reasons why I shall buy gober art from them only. He said.. Sir gober, as gober as we know, are of many types. Easily available gober like of buffalos and bulls, one can also make gober art. The best gober comes from gomatha only. Even in case of gomatha too, if the gober is collected immediately after Brahma muhoorth, like we do in our gaushala, such gober has not only natural cleansing qualities but also spiritual cleansing qualities. I suggested him, to brand the products differently with different names like Brahmamuhoorth gober, suprabat gober and shyamgober or simply Brahmagober, Suryagober, and Chandragober and also to rate the religious products accordingly. By doing so one can charge 3 times more for Brahmagober Ganesh than Chandragober Ganesh. He took these suggestions very keenly on his pocket book. On the contrary, it was also true that when I shared about 'Mhara Haryana' out of gober to a colleague from western UP he gladly exclaimed..Sir, I would have bought it. See... there was no problem at all. (all laughs)

Ms. Vidushi Sharma: Sir .. though it is funny, the way you put it, it was too sweet to spit out or too bitter to swallow..what to do! It was not merely an intellectual provocation, but a hammer hit on our heads! north south gober.( smiles.). Anyhow still you have not answered about the Christian chaturvedi?

Dr. Chaturvedi: Yes, of course... our discussions was about the caste .. ya Christian chaturvedi. Chaturvedi is the name that I accepted later. I had a Christian name before and because of some reasons I changed to chaturvedi. Anybody can change their names. It is also the part of free choice guaranteed by the Indian democracy. (smiles)

Ms. Debjani Mukharjee: Sir. Still . you are not answering the question. The question was not whether one can change his/her name. You have changed the name to chaturvedi being a Christian by birth. Sir please this time ... no more beating around the bush.. (all laughs).

Dr. Chaturvedi: Means .. you are ready for another intellectual provocation? (all laughs).

Ms. Bateri Kumar: Sir you have already stretched our brains too long. It can not be any more in its original form. Its elasticity has gone. Nothing can provoke us anymore..( All laughs).

Dr. Chaturvedi: Are you sure Bateri? ( smiles..) Any how... I had very conventional Syrian Christian name. Conventional Christian names in Malayalam has two parts, a linguistic part, a suffix and a religious part, biblical name. Linguistic part was the suffix 'achan' stand for male and "amma" stands for female. For eg.. if the name is maria from Bible, the Malayalam name is Mariamma. You can hear many name like ponnamma, thankamma, thresyamma, rosamma etc.. all female names. Coming to male names, say biblical name is Mathaiah and suffix is achan, so you have a malayalam name Mathachan. But this naming conventions began to change even in 1975 onwards, and when I complained about my name to my mother after coming from school, because none of my classmates has such odd names, she convinced me by saying that my great uncle, who was unmarried and was already 70 years old and insisted that I shall carry his name and he named me as Mathachan because for us, you are a "gift of God". "Gift of god" is also the actual meaning of biblical word Mathaiah. (smiles).

Ms Vidushi Sharma: Sir, we just understood that your name was Mathachan. It is a traditional Malayalam Syrian Christian name. But chaturvedi part is still missing (all laughs)

Dr. Chaturvedi: My acceptance of Chaturvedi as part of my name is related to an incident happened in a very prestigious central university in eastern UP 2019. Incident is already well known. There were enough news reports on it both in newspapers and digital media. The

University notifies the post of a Sanskrit teacher ( regular) and appoints the teacher through due process. As the teacher joined the university and started the classes, the students demanded to change the teacher because he belongs to a different cast or creed. A due process appointment is lengthy process. It is all based on quality measures, and one who scores highest both in research and in interview only selected for the post. For a university general category post, religion or cast shall have no relevance at all. Competence and research based merit is the only consideration. But then eventually teacher had to resign from the post. Considering that if a surname can make a better access to university posts, then why not? I added a “d” to my original name ,it became ‘Mathachand’, then Chaturvedi too, by publishing in the newspapers and gazette notification. So now officially I am Mathachand Chaturvedi.( smiles..)

Ms. Vidushi Sharma: Sir .. you say it so natural and easy. But was there no resistance from your family and close relatives on such a move?

Dr. Chaturvedi: In Christian circles, your baptismal name is the only thing that is valid. What all other names you choose generally won’t bother. So it has made you to call me a Christian chaturvedi. ( laughs).

Ms. Bateri Kumar: Sir.. it is very clear that religious cultural deep rootedness of caste is a major concern but how to reduce its impact? Nil possibilities or some possibilities ? what is your view ?

Dr. Chaturvedi: For an effective solution, one has to understand the problem well. To understand that one has to see the core religious part, I mean what it is said about it in srutis, core texts of Hinduism, Vedas, Upanishads and Gita. How those teachings have evolved in culture. If the original concepts in core texts differs from later evolved cultural practices then theoretically we are in a better position though practically still it appears very difficult. At least a reform is possible inside the hindu traditions to reclaim the original teachings. If core texts srutis and cultural practices agrees each other in favour of casteism, then a reform inside Hinduism is almost impossible, one has to look for other options outside Hinduism. If one consider Rig veda, the oldest of Vedas, there Purushsooktha claims : (The Purusha Sukta (Rigveda 10.90).

*brahmano asya mukhamaseet | bahoo rajanya: krta: |*

*ooru tadasya yad vaishya | padbhyam shoodro ajayata ||*

the translation sounds so.. “The Brahmana was his mouth, (of Adi Purush) the Rajanya was made his arms; the being called the Vaishya, he was his thighs; the Shudra sprang from his feet”. Dr. Ambedkar identifies the same and accuses Rig veda for Jati prada and for hierarchical superiority for Brahmins in Hinduism. Many others argue that there is no hierarchy in purush sooktha. Here varna is a differentiating term to distinguish between say that apples are not oranges.. but it does not say apples are superior to oranges. Instead, it says that all parts are equally important and constitutes the one body of Adipurush. One can see very similar teaching from christian bible too. “The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!” On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unrepresentable are treated with special modesty, while our representable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts

should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. (I Corinthians, 12<sup>th</sup> chapter verses 21-27) From this perspective if we understand Rig Vedic position of varna, it simply says that Brahmins are not Kshatriyas, Shuddras are not Brahmins. All are equally important parts but different in functions they fulfill.

Ms. Bateri Kumar: Sir that was an eye opener to many of us... So sir, do you mean that Rig Veda does not teach Jati Prada and Dr Ambedkar was interpreted the same incorrectly?

Dr. Chaturvedi: That is a very interesting observation. I do not want to answer it either yes or no. Let us see it and let each of us make our own conclusions... (smiles). The same can be interpreted differently too. If apples are not oranges, they are different because they fulfill different functions. It is the function that makes an apple, apple and Orange an orange. So if an orange wants to be an apple it has to fulfill the functions of an apple. Here the difficulty arises. If you are born to fulfill the function of feet, how can you function as mouth? (smiles.). Even if you are capable of and willing to function as Mouth, as long as Mouth functions are already performed by mouth elements, interference of feet element with the mouth elements creates confusions for both. Feet losing elements to mouth and mouth is challenged by the feet. So mouth functions will be restricted to mouth elements only and gradually feet elements will be restricted to function as feet only. This is a very sound argument but a very tricky position when applied to society. A reel posted on Instagram claims this argument. A reporter is asking to a Hindu ... do you believe in Jati Prada? Do you consider caste as essential for a Sanatani? He counters ... Are Bhai ... Where would you keep your chappals? (slippers) on head or on your feet? (smiles...)

Ms. Bateri Kumar: Sir that is so strange. It is really tricky? So Jati Prada is almost a hopeless condition?..

Dr. Chaturvedi: It is tricky ... You can see podcasts or reels with the same questions asked to Sankaracharyas of different Peetams. They all stand with the second view. The reason is that if you want to be a Hindu, you have to be born as a Hindu. One cannot join Hinduism by choice. One has to take birth as a Hindu. So technically no conversion to Hinduism is possible. As per Hinduism this birth is a consequence of your previous birth and karmas. Your karmas in the previous birth, destines your current birth and so on till you achieve your Mukti. Only by accepting the conditions of this life and knowingly fulfill the functions and duties allotted to your Jati becomes the only path for your liberation. Fulfilling of those duties only can liberate one from the bondage of poorva karma, (karmafal) and expediate the process of Mukti. It is cyclical.. some say a vicious cycle too. (smiles..).

Ms. Bateri Kumar: Then Dr. Ambedkar was correct. What do you think sir?

Dr. Chaturvedi: For those who are born as Dalits in this life Ambedkar's solution sounds great. And those who are born in higher castes may feel Ambedkar's option a cheating because they earned this life by their past good karmas. (Smiles..) So if one is keen to come out of Jati Prada, then he has to free himself from this combination of Karmafal and Punarjanma teaching and

when one does it then it is a blow on the head of the sanatan dharma, Hinduism. Ambedkar's solution to accept Bhuddhism is a middle path to avoid the negative impacts of Jatiprada at the same time to keep the belief system of Karmafal and Punarjanama.

Ms Debjani Mukharjee: It is very tricky... but in this context I have another question.. it is about the SC( Scheduled caste) status and reservation. Recent supreme court observation, that those dalits who are converted to Christianity and Islam are not eligible for SC status anymore, whereas those who converts to Sikhism, Bhuddhism and Hinduism continue to enjoy the benefits of SC status and reservation? What is your view on this sir?

Dr . Chaturvedi: This question is also very tricky and its about SC status and reservation. (All laughs). I could not read that court judgment completely so I can express only what I think on this issue. By keeping SC status for dalit converts of Sikhism , Bhuddhism and Hinduism, on the ground that these are the religions where dalits suffer social discrimination from other groups, Supreme court emphasizes that these religions are custodians and perpetuators of caste system in India. Supreme Court makes it clear that dalit converts to Islam and Christianity do not experience any caste discrimination. For supreme court, these religions are against caste discrimination therefore it is unnecessary to have SC status to dalit converts of these religions. At first instance it sounds right, but in a close look it becomes an error Judgement.

Ms. Vidushi Sharma: How does it becomes incorrect. That is a provocation against Court order.( laughs..)

Dr. Chaturvedi: Here the objective is to provoke all of us intellectually, not the court. SC status of dalit converts to Buddhism, Sikhism judgement does not add anything new . It reiterates a practice which was there for almost 40 or more years. Intellectual provocation comes when we try to understand the nature of SC Status. SC status is a constitutional guarantee given to certain citizen of India who are born to certain Jatis. It is positive discrimination to reduce the social discrimination and economic deprivation they suffer having born into certain Jatis. That clearly declares that Jati is a birth right . One can not choose a Jati in Hinduism. Instead all are born with a Jati. If Jati is a birth right, then SC status given to a jati is also a birth right. A birth right shall valid at least for this life time. And a birth right neither can be cancelled nor it can depend upon the individual choices that a dalit person makes to improve his socio-economic conditions. SC status and reservation, guaranteed by the constitution share the same intention, to reduce social discrimination for dalits . In that case how a dalit becomes ineligible for his SC status and reservation because of his free choices that he has taken to improve his social integration, economic and educational prospectus, including his free choice to accept Christianity or Islam? From that perspective Supreme court judgement stands with oppressors of Dalit community and encourages the Dalit to accept the oppression happily from other Hindus , Sikhs and Bhuddhists for the benefit of SC status. If jati is a birth right then SC staus is a birth right irrespective individual choices one make in this life time.

Ms. Debjani Mukharjee: Very interesting ... Sir a student from audience want to ask a question. Ms. Tanu Punia, the president of Bharaitiya Vidyarthi Samkhadan. Tanu.. please..

Ms. Tanu Punia: We are grateful for such an intellectually provocative session on Caste. Sir, My concern is... how do you react to the remark that your viewpoints are biased by the modern education and with a leftist ideological orientation to find fault with Indian tradition, culture and Hindu religion?

Dr. Chaturvedi: It is very remarkable but highly value loaded observation. The questioner is benevolent in using term the modern education than Christian education. ( laughs..) So the underlying tone is Christian educated ideologue , who is obsessed with criticizing and finding fault with Indian traditions, culture and Hindu religion, is of course will take stand against Hinduism. The posture that he shows to liberate dalits from the life long yoke of Jati, is nothing but a trap to convert dalit to Christianity.( laughs..) Ms. Tanu .. I neither reject your observation nor accept it . Let each of us shall make our own independent perspectives on it. At the same time I take this chance to guide all of us to something more important. I hope that most of you have heard the debate and discussion that Indian constitution designed by Dr. Ambedkar is not Indian, so it needs to be amended. That it needs to be indianized and so on.. What is in current Indian constitution that irritates traditionalists, culturalists? It is our individual freedom to make our free choices. Free choice that empower you to choose your husband, career, religion, studies irrespective what your significant others wish for you. That irritates them. Constitution call it individual liberty. You are a citizen in Indian democracy, not a praja in a kingdom. Here all are equals. Traditionalists can not accept this.. because it challenges the traditional superiority of the caste based society. It challenges jati prada, it liberates everyone from the clutches of religion, tradition, and gender based discrimination and empower all to choose his or her own rights and wrongs. As modern educated Indian , I shall always stand with the Indian constitution and shall work for equal justice and individual liberty. Because I know If we lose it, then we are in another slavery for 1000 years. This is the biggest achievement of Indian freedom struggle. Gandhiji knew it . Ambedkar knew it. And the constitution asks to everyone of us ? Where do you stand? With the constitution or agaist ? ( smiles ) let us make our stand freely ... ( smiles..) Satya meva Jayate...

Organizer: Dear All, due to time constrains we shall wind our discussions here. Let us join for a tea break. We are grateful to Dr. Chaturvedi for such an intellectually provocative session. Thank you .