



Research Foundation for Governance: in India

Summary of the public debate

Values in Governance

13th May, 2010

5:30 pm to 7.00 pm

CEPT University, Ahmedabad

Special invitees:

1. Shri Narhari G. Mavlankar : Noted thinker
2. Shri Arun Jagatramka, Managing Director, Gujarat NRE Coke
3. Shri Purani: Director, C.N. Vidyalaya
4. Shri Mukesh Bavishi: Well-known doctor and Author
5. Rtd. Justice Madhukar Dhruva

On Thursday 13th May 2010, Research Foundation for Governance: in India (RFGI) held an open debate at the CEPT University to discuss the topic “*Values in governance*”. Values could be an answer to the challenge of curbing corruption in our government and its institutions. However, a debate brings up the problems of defining values and ethics and how to instill a system of values if it does not already exist.

After the brief introduction of the participants the topic was introduced by Kanan Dhru, Founder and Managing Director of RFGI. Talking about the need for values in every walk of life, Kanan mentioned how the group stumbled upon the topic and decided to organize a public debate on the same. However, a normative discussion on values can be



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very vague and therefore, sample case-studies were created by the team RFGI to get the debate rolling and to understand different perspectives.

Joshua Rennie, an intern from Scotland, UK, introduced the first case and the reaction was enthusiastic. Prakash Iyengar, a Research Associate of RFGI then moderated the debate. The question was that whether an aspiring politician who follows the ethical way should give up his values in order to establish an ideal, ethical government. This case study focused on the classic ends and means debate. The quick reply from one of the young participants was that one should be flexible with their approach in order to achieve the desired goal! The participant felt that for a larger good, small compromises have to be made in the society. However, this view was countered by another participant who felt that one cannot be *'flexible'* when one is talking about ethics and values, since compromising with ethics would mean having no ethics at all - ethics are ethics. It was also expressed that once one started compromising, one will be tempted to do so again and again. One should stick to their 'moral right' in any given situation. Some participants also felt that ethics are subjective norms and that what is right at one point of time, may not be so at another. On this point, Shri Purani said that "to uphold the values, we *must* have to sacrifice something – a tempting offer/a material gain or a short-term benefit. However, doing so will result in satisfaction and will instill confidence in one's integrity and conscience.

The question which was then raised was how to enforce morality in governance? Many felt that to achieve that, the general standard of morality in the society has to improve. For this, we as a society must create positive role-models. Most participants agreed that the media can play a vital role in empowering the public opinion and must make it a point to influence public opinion positively. One of the participants said that it may not be possible to enforce 100% ethicality at one go but we have to take smaller and surer steps



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to achieve the bigger objective. This case study drew arguments on both the sides and it was not possible to reach consensus on the first case study.

The second case was whether the Director of a University should take a bribe to save his dying wife (assuming he has no other avenues of collecting money)? Some felt that he might be tempted in this case, as this is a life and death situation. However, according to one participant, this can lead to a 'butterfly effect', namely that small differences may produce large variations in the long term behaviour/nature of the system. Here, Shri Bavishi commented that while discussing such issues, we tend to focus only on the extreme situations, which happen rarely in the real life. One more point that came up in the debate was that we so often give bribes and then blame the person taking the bribe of being corrupt.

In conclusion, when the question was raised as to whether one could remain ethical in today's day and age, many youngsters echoed that it was almost impossible. Only 10% of the participants believed that it was still possible. However, the invitees encouraged the organizers that such public debates are extremely crucial in changing the mindset of people, especially in the youngsters, about the way we look at 'values' and that such debates must be organized more often, especially in schools and colleges. According to them, it is only initiatives like these that restore hope in the future and in a better governed India.

RFGI would like to thank those who took part in the debate, and CEPT University for providing us with the venue.