



ASPEN INSTITUTE INDIA

"Ten Reasons Why India Will Not and Should Not Become a Superpower"

With Dr. Ramachandra Guha

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"India needs to be, not a powerful or dominant country, but a country which is less discontented from within". This was the essential message conveyed by writer, historian and biographer Dr. Ramachandra Guha who spoke on the topic 'Ten Reasons Why India Will Not and Should Not Become a Superpower' organized by Aspen Institute India in New Delhi today.

Dr. Guha pointed out that while in 1948, while there was a mood of despair and gloom about India's prospects, the government was seen as the only agent that could bring about change. Today however, there is a sense of optimism about India's prospects, although the government is seen as the major impediment in the country's progress. He went on to elucidate the ten points that he thought would objectively prevent India from becoming a superpower:

- (1) **Religious extremism**: long term trends indicate that liberals and moderates in every religious community in India are on the defensive
- (2) **Left wing extremism** in the form of the Naxalite movement, which is a result of geographical reasons and also social and political forces, owing to the continued dispossession and deprivation of tribal people in India

(3) **The corruption and corrosion** of the power center in India, as a result of political parties functioning as family firms rather than open, transparent political systems.

(4) **Decline of public institutions**, including universities, police, civil services, the judiciary (except for higher judiciary) etc

(5) **The increasing gap between the rich and the poor** which is particularly manifested through farmer suicides in India, a phenomenon that has become pervasive only in the last 10-15 years, perhaps because there is now the expectation of a 'good life' that did not exist before.

(6) **Environmental degradation** at a local level, which is impacting people's lives in very real ways, whether in the form of massive depletion of underground aquifers, chemical contamination of soil, death of rivers, loss of species etc.

(7) **Apathy of the media** in covering issues of rising income inequality, environmental degradation.

(8) **Political fragmentation** manifests as coalition governments at both the central and regional levels, which makes it very difficult to forge sustainable long term policies in the realm of health, education, etc.

(9) India's **unresolved border disputes**, especially in Kashmir and the North East (Nagaland and Manipur) which indicates that there are parts of India that are not comfortable with being part of India.

(10) India's increasingly **unstable neighbourhood** is another serious impediment to our superpower ambitions.

Of the 10 reasons he listed, Dr.Guha suggested that environmental degradation is likely to remain the most pressing challenge facing India. Primary education also remains a significant challenge that needs to be overcome.

The session was moderated by Mr.Tarun Das, President, Aspen Institute India who said that India needed more debates such as this to provide a more balanced view of the country's growth and development.