



ASPEN INSTITUTE INDIA

Session on
“China and India: New Global Players, New Leadership Models?”
With Dr. Vishakha Desai, President, The Asia Society
3:30 pm, Monday, July 27, 2009
WWF Auditorium, 172 B Lodi Estate, New Delhi 110003

“India Needs to Listen More and React Less”: Vishakha Desai



During an interactive session with Aspen Institute India on the topic “China and India: New Global Players, New Leadership Models?” Dr. Vishakha Desai, President of Asia Society pointed out the inevitability of the rise of India and China on the global stage means that the leadership models of each country would inform geo-political and geo-economic shifts in the world.

Dr. Desai pointed out that one of the biggest difference between western countries and India and China is the notion of the ‘self’, which in the former is individualistic and in the latter, is very relational. In China however, Confucian philosophy dictates that a leader does not have to do anything, but simply lead by example. The ruler’s activities are expressions of his moral value systems. In India on the other hand, leadership is seen as a duty or ‘*dharma*’ or obligation towards the people.

Because of India’s colonial past, our tendency is to stand up for ourselves and defend ourselves. China’s revolutionary history on the contrary dictates that reactions are practical, with the focus that what needs to be done must be done.

In terms of leadership in the corporate world, Dr.Desai said that speeches of Indian corporate leaders have traces of nationalism as well as community responsibility, which is not discernible amongst American business leaders. The Chinese business leaders again prefer to lead by example. The three leadership models are hence very different.

Dr.Desai pointed out that as notions of inter-dependency and the drive for sustainability become important, leadership models would require a more relational framework. Thus, there is much in Asian values as embodied in Indian and Chinese leadership styles that will be important in the 21st century.

During the interactive session that followed, many questions were raised about the debate on climate change in particular and the ways in which leadership presented by India, US and China informs the same. Dr.Desai said that there is a need for leadership models to be flexible, and for the various styles to come together so that common problems can be addressed more effectively.

The session was moderated by Mr.Ravi Bhoothalingam,Chairman and CEO of Manas Advisory who spoke about Aspen Institute India's focus on leadership development.