



# ASPEN INSTITUTE INDIA

**“The Difficulty of Being Good: The Subtle Art of Dharma”**

**By Gurcharan Das**

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Mr. Gurcharan Das, noted author (Left) and Mr. Arun Maira, Member, Planning Commission (Right)

“The definition of being good is *balance*”. This clear and concise answer to the essential question of ‘why be good?’ was delivered by Mr. Gurcharan Das noted author and management guru, at an event organized by Aspen Institute India, on his new book “The Difficulty of Being Good: The Subtle Art of Dharma”

The concept of being “good” in society was illustrated beautifully by Mr. Das, drawing on inspiration from the texts of the Mahabharata, which in his opinion is the most unique epic among the epics of the world as it is consistently engaged in politics. He pointed out, that in this epic, no character ever appeals to god or the divine but rather questions morality. While the Ramayana portrays the utopian view on life, the Mahabharata is the grim reality of life and morality.

In his book, Mr. Das uses different themes set within the Mahabharata to extract the answer to the central question of 'why be good?' and then relate them to current affairs. His examples included:

1. **Power of Words:** the power of words enhances both the civic and personal idea of Dharma.
2. **Envy of Dhuryodan:** The idea that someone's success is always someone else's decline. Where in envy is the primary driver for destruction and yet can also be used to mobilize the masses. His example of Hitler using envy against the Jewish people in pre World War II, shows how the simple concept of envy can drive not only one man but a nation as well.
3. **The Morality of Silence:** In this Mr. Das questions the morality of the masses remaining silent. He draws upon the disrobing of Draupadi in the Kaurav court to illustrate how the silence of the elders was exactly like the silence amongst our leaders on various issues including the election of the current President of India. In this effect, he states, that silence is the key in understanding some of the major injustices in the world today.
4. **Clash of Dharma:** This theme embodies the difference in perspectives. His example of Yudhishtira's dilemma of whether to follow the dharma of the warrior he was or the dharma of the promise he had made portrays how there are always two sides to a coin and there are always different ways to judge what is right and what is wrong. Mr. Das quite uniquely drew upon the relation of the clash of dharma and the current Maoists dilemma brewing the country.

Through such examples and themes Mr. Das painted a clear image of the evolving nature of goodness ultimately saying that the act of goodness might the only worthy thing to do and the purpose of the Mahabharata will always continue the dialogue on ethics and morality.

The session was chaired by Mr. Arun Maira, Member, Planning Commission, who noted that questions and books such as the one written by Mr. Das are exactly what are needed to provoke minds and leaders of this country.