



ASPEN INSTITUTE INDIA

**Discussion on the Book
“The Emperor of All Maladies: A Biography of Cancer”
With
Siddhartha Mukherjee,**

**1600hrs: January 24, 2011
WWF Auditorium, 172-B, Lodi Estate, New Delhi**

Aspen Institute India organized a talk by Siddhartha Mukherjee on his new book “The Emperor of All Maladies: A Biography of Cancer” on January 24, 2011. The talk was moderated by Syeda Imam, Member, Minorities Commission, Government of India. In her introductory remarks, Syeda Imam said that Dr. Mukherjee by writing this book has actually given us a whole new genre. It is a literary genre which did not exist before. He is one of the first few doctors turned author, attempting to write on a topic as malicious as cancer. Ms Imam also describes this book as a book of science or a book of medical history. It is a reference book of perhaps of a fairly definitive kind.



Dr. Mukherjee draws the inspiration to write the book from a patient who wanted him to tell her what she was fighting against. He has therefore, tried to capture the history of cancer in this book. This book tries to trace the earliest known history of cancer their treatments as far back as 500 BC to the treatments that there are today. He understands that it is the smallest that conveys the largest. Therefore, he could only begin the book once he had known the small details of knowing the first person that received the treatment. In his attempt therefore, he is trying to rediscover history.

He was of the view that to treat a disease it is important to understand what you are up against and try and look through the eyes of the patient. Dr. Mukherjee emphasizes that a story must be told. It is also important to find the answers to the questions. The story should be told in a way that people should be able to connect with it. In his book he mentions several cases for the general public to understand and connect.

He finally concludes by saying that even a detailed knowledge of cancer will not eradicate cancer but only help in solving the riddle and help in increasing the life span of patients suffering from it. It is important not to get overwhelmed by the feeling of having cancer but to fight it. He finally states that, there is a definite advancement in the medical research. The incidences of cancer have increased but on the other hand it can also be detected early and more accurately.