



Research Foundation for Governance: in India

Summary of the public debate

HAS THE INDIAN CONSTITUTION FULFILLED ITS PROMISES?

25th January, 2010

5:00 pm to 6.30 pm

Hutheesing Open Theatre, Ahmedabad

On Monday 25th January 2010, Research Foundation for Governance: in India (RFGI) held an open debate at Hutheesing Open Theatre, CEPT University to discuss the topic “*Has the Indian Constitution fulfilled its promises?*” Held on the eve of the 60th Anniversary of India being a Republic, RFGI was seeking to encourage discussion on the Indian Constitution, its implementation in India, its successes and failures in the past 60 years and its significance for the future. The debate was well attended.

A concern shared by many of the participants of the debate was with the concepts of equality and freedom, which are stressed many times in the Constitution. A participant at the discussion boldly stated that equality in the Constitution is “just a jumble of fancy words, it does not exist as you see inequality everywhere and you just accept it”. The same lack of faith seemed evident for the concept of freedom too. Participants said that they objected to having to give their name and caste on official documents, as it was directly conflicting with both the concept of equality and the concept of freedom that are so important in India’s Constitution. It was also discussed whether or not the concepts of equality and freedom are rules or laws that were intended to be physically implemented by the fathers of the Constitution, or whether they are values that should be strived towards.

Another student stated that the obvious prevalence of social inequality in India is indicative of a major disconnection between reality and the Constitution. Though on paper the Constitution is ‘fine’, the people have not included the clauses in their conscience or everyday life. It was argued that this problem could be attributed to lack of education



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about the contents of the Constitution. Most people do not know exactly what the Constitution is and very few have actually read it. Though it is part of the school curriculum, a significant proportion of the common mass remains uneducated. Thus, making formal education on the Constitution compulsory is not the only solution in order to spread awareness about the rights and duties the Constitution entails.

Following on from this, the question was raised whether it is the Indian Constitution itself that has not yet been successful, or is it the people who have failed to implement it properly. The general consensus was that it is too early to assess the success of the Constitution as 60 years is not long in the scope of India's history as a Constitutional Democracy. Though the Constitution has not been implemented perfectly, as it has only been 60 years, it is too early to conclude that the Constitution has failed to fulfil its promises. Participants as a whole stressed that as a developing nation India has come far in those 60 years and if the Constitution had not been implemented 60 years ago, the developments in India may not have occurred.

Founder and Managing Director of RFGI, Kanan Dhru, concluded the discussion. She stated that India has changed so much in the last 60 years, with huge population growth and economic development. She stressed that the drafters of the Constitution were people of great calibre and did the best job that they could. However, issues today are much more complicated and realities in India are different. Thus, she believes that the people of India need to come together to amend the Constitution, as and when necessary, so that its contents can better reflect the realities of modern Indian society.

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