

**Round Table Discussion**  
Among persons from different religious and social communities  
on  
**Current Times: Ethical Considerations**  
**Institute of Harmony and Peace Studies, New Delhi / 30 March 2019**

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Institute of Harmony and Peace Studies (IHPS), New Delhi, organized a Round Table Discussion at Conference Hall, Institute of Harmony and Peace Studies, Sector 19, Dwarka, New Delhi, on 30 March 2019, at 15.30 hours. The Theme of the discussion was 'Current Times: Ethical Considerations'. Dr M. D. Thomas, Founder Director, Institute of Harmony and Peace Studies, New Delhi, chaired and moderated the session.

Prof. Rajesh Kumar, Dr Ajay Jain, Adv. Balraj S. Malik, Mr Radhey Shiam, Mr Krishna Menon, Mr S. N. Sahu, Mr Praveen Gupta, Mr Jose Kalathil, Mr P. P. Wangchuk, Mr Amarjeet, Mr Ravi Pratap, Mr Naveen Chandra and Dr M. D. Thomas were the participants of the discussion. The discussion was very much a focused, in-depth and multi-faceted analysis of the theme in question among the selected scholars then present.

Dr M. D. Thomas, by way of opening the conversation, stated that ethics is the most basic constituent of human life. The absence of ethics renders life meaningless. Ethics requires being applied to the diverse areas of life. Ethics is the principle of life, the very way of life. Diverse aspects of life and the sections of the society can meaningfully exist and function only when the ethical fibre is strong. Ethics is the very way the humans can have a purposeful being in this world. The values of the Constitution are a great resource for all citizens in strengthening the ethical framework of life.

By way of briefing the dynamics of the discussion, Dr Thomas observed that the current times, more than before, has a major deficit of ethics in social life. Therefore, the political, religious, economic, social, cultural, environmental and other sectors of social life have to be seriously considered and assessed from the ethical point of view. Having done so, ethical standards have to be applied to the current times of our country and society, in view of a brighter and more harmonious future for the humans.

Mr Radhey Shiam, Social Activist and Convener, Society for Democratic and Constitutional Values, New Delhi, said that the present scenario poses a deep-seated crisis in ethics. Cheating is the order of the day. Half of the world does not believe in God. There is no one book that teaches students values of all religions. Science and Spirituality is still having conflicts with each other. The good sense of appreciating the contribution of all communities is yet to be developed. Caste is still a terrible basis for discrimination. People are too silly and cruel to lynch others even in the name of cow. The voice of the dalit and the marginalized is brutally ignored. In the name of the nation, there is more gimmick than genuine unity and growth. Considering these vicious elements in social life, it is high time we stop tolerating such non-sense.

Dr Ajay Jain, Spiritual Healer and Sadhna Guru, said that people, a large majority of them, do not follow moral values and ethics in life. They compromise with it, easily and without any scruple. Should social life make positive changes, it is mandatory that ethical standards be applied to life. He mentioned a few of the ethical values that are at the core of human life, such as 'adjustment, alertness, calmness, sense of equality, optimism, piety, selflessness, simplicity and thankfulness. A greater emphasis on the practice of ethical values only can duly respond to the mess of the modern day times, he asserted.

Mr Krishan Menon, Additional Director, Rajyasabha Secretariat, New Delhi, said that the current times of ethical catastrophe is aggravated by the conflicting diversity of ideologies, interests and drives. Lack of consensus as regards the Constitutional values of fraternity, equality and liberty is a critical problem with regard to principled conduct. Most people fail to use their discretion, logic and scientific temper as regards their beliefs, aspirations and practices. Ethical behaviour does not emerge from books; it has to be learnt from the way one conducts one's day-to-day life. The most crucial problem of the current times is the scarcity of role models in the society.

Adv. Balraj S. Malik, Advocate, Supreme Court of India, said that political parties divide people for the sake of accumulating power. The participation of the people is very little in democracy. We have to fight for those who are pushed to the margins and are backward. Democracy is inflicted with various forms of corruption and has gone significantly weak. Money and power is considered everything and pursuing them is the real concern of the powerful sections of the society. Besides, the current system of education, far from promoting ethics, is very much a victim of ethical vices. The belief in God has made most people silly, lazy and irresponsible and therefore, a sense of self-confidence and responsibility has to be developed, he added.

Prof. Rajesh Kumar, Professor of English, Motilal Nehru College, Delhi University, said that ethics is the way of life and the word 'ethics' comes from 'ethos'. The two pillars of ethics are 'integrity and trust'. Ethics takes care of the sense of equality and rules out the artificial systems of inequality in the name of caste, religion, ideology, and the like. Religion stands on ethical values and cannot make sense without ethics. The current times are highly confused between what is right or wrong. Only a strong sense of integrity and trust can build up a society that is sustainable.

Prof. Rajesh further said that an environment of trust has to be built up, in view of protecting ourselves from negative elements that vitiate social life and have to fight for justice that can really harmonize the society. Ethics integrates society; it helps one develop we-feeling; it gives us a sense of togetherness and makes harmonious living possible. Ethics is inclusive, multi-dimensional and holistic in nature. It accommodates the various dimensions of diversity. Ethicality prevents negative emotions, discrimination and domination; it promotes authenticity, transparency and relatedness; it will balance the wrong tendencies of the current times, as well.

Mr Amarjeet, Social Worker and Member, Arya Samaj, New Delhi, said that ethics is oriented to development and happy life and the present times, unfortunately so, fail to reflect this. Dr M. D. Thomas added to this insight by stating that 'Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah' (let all be happy) should be the world class motto of life. He observed the disastrous and disgraceful rank of 140 out of 156 India secured in the World Happiness Index 2019 and sharply commented that the survey of the United Nations mirrors the miserable plight of the current times of the country. Mr Jose Kalathil, Senior Journalist, New Delhi, said that the de-promotional and promotional films of the recent make on the previous and current prime ministers gravely violate ethical norms of the election times and deserve to be instantly banned.

Mr Praveen Gupta, Social Activist, New Delhi, said that being deficient in ethics is the typical picture of our country, especially of the present times. 'We the people' are responsible for this sad predicament of the country because we are slow to practice values. Ethics should start with 'I' and not with 'we'. Ethics is not for impressing others, but for living one's life meaningfully. The confusion about what is right and what is wrong has to be overcome. Ethical principles have to be applied on the grass root level of life. The courage to speak truth and live truth has to be strengthened.

Mr Ravi Pratap, Member, Society for Democratic and Constitutional Values, New Delhi, said that ethics encourages us for behaving well in the society. Mr Naveen Chandra, Member, Institute of Harmony and Peace Studies, New Delhi, said that double standard is a distinctive mark of our present

day society. The great silence of most of the people in our country when human beings are lynched in the name of cow, an animal, speaks negatively about our times. Dr Thomas commented on the divide between 'us and them' in several happenings in social life and underlined the conflicting behaviour as the collapse of the basic sense of ethics in our current times.

Mr S. N. Sahu, Former Director, Rajya Sabha Secretariat, presented another perspective of ethical considerations. He said that after economic crisis in India in the 90's, ethics became the most important concern in governmental and public sectors, world over. A lot of research is being done on ethical considerations, in view of responding to the social crisis that is becoming serious. We need to collect more information from research for the betterment of our society. Ethics has to be a part of the syllabus of every educational institution.

Mr Sahu further stated that our government preaches corrupt practices. Election expenditure itself is perhaps the most substantial corruption. There is a lot of untruth and non-sense in circulation in the social media. The misleading contents in the social media and internet require being regulated, he strongly advocated. Mr P. P. Wangchuk, Senior Journalist and Columnist, New Delhi, said that morality and kindness are sharply decreasing in our country. The spirit of living together is becoming a rare and costly affair. It is ethical values that can effectively respond to this delicate state of affairs.

The second round of the discussion highlighted several suggestions by way of a plan of action, in line with the theme under discussion. Mr P. P. Wangchuk said that we should engage in peace-processes in order to ensure harmonious living. Mr Radhey Shiam stated that we have to focus on humanity at the global level. Prof. Rajesh Kumar proposed that social media has to be made accountable in terms of ethical values. The universal religion of humanism has to be stressed, too. Dr Ajay Jain suggested that the value of 'doing to others what is expected from them' has to be promoted as the basic ethics of life. Mr Amarjeet placed a stress on abiding by the Constitutional values. 'What unites us is greater than what divides us' and this mark of unity is the basic ethics of human life, added Dr Thomas.

By way of summing up the discussion, Dr M. D. Thomas said that our country seems to be becoming more 'political and communal', in recent times in special. The massive debit of ethics in social life has to be responded to positively. Public statements by responsible people have to reflect the ethics of dignity and decorum. Zero tolerance to negativity and nonsense has to be the policy of social life. We need to foster true nationalism that is inclusive both within and outside. We need to travel towards an outlook of 'one faith to all faiths and even beyond'. Positive forces are to be encouraged and supported and corruption and negative forces to be fought against. The problems of the people on the margins, under the bridge and on the footpath are to be addressed. A collective and humane spirit of being integrated and united is the heart of ethics and only such spirit can lead India to happier ranks in the world ladder of happiness.

The discussion ended at 18.00 hours, followed by refreshments over informal interaction among the participants.

**IHPS Office**

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**Dr M.D. Thomas**  
**Founder Director**

**Institute of Harmony and Peace Studies, New Delhi**  
Floor 1, A 128, Sector 19, Dwarka, New Delhi 110075

Tel.: 09810535378 (p), 08847925378 (p), 09811506213 (o)

Email: mdthomas53@gmail.com (p), ihps2014@gmail.com (o); Website: www.mdthomas.in (p), www.ihpsindia.org (o)

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/mdthomas53>; Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/mdthomas53>

Academia.edu: <https://independent.academia.edu/MDTHOMAS>