Can The Problem Of Pollution Ever Be Solved In India?

PRE-DISCUSSION TALKS

Gone are the days when passing the written test was the only requirement to get a rewarding job. Employers and educational institutions are now putting the candidates through a large number of strėnuous rounds and examinations in order to choose the best person for the job. In this long series of tests that the employers are resorting to, group discussions also find a very prominent place. Group discussions are preferred by the employers since they bring about a diverse range of reactions from the participants while putting them under challenging circumstances where they would be required to be quick on their feet and come up with instant responses. That is why the group discussions are cherished by some and dreaded by others. If given a choice, most of the candidates usually prefer giving it a miss since they are averse to the idea of being interrupted and cross-questioned by others. This can be either due to lack of knowledge or lack of confidence. This disliking by the candidates is a part of the reason why these group discussions have, of late, become an integral part of most of the job recruitments and admissions into educational

A usual group comprises people of all kinds experienced as well as inexperienced. Irrespective of this, they are evaluated in the same manner and are treated the same by the invigilator. The candidates are told about all the necessary rules and regulations which are to be maintained during the discussion. The role of the invigilator ends once the candidates are given the topic and the supporting instructions. The initiation and the conclusion of the discussion within the stipulated time limit is the responsibility of the candidates only, without any guidance from the invigilator. Though he may or may not be present in the same room as the other candidates, the invigilator constantly keeps a close eye on the candidates, noting down the points made by the candidates along with their behaviour in the group. It is difficult to find a discussion without any ruckus since almost all the candidates want to make a lasting impression, which they think can be made only if they speak more than the others. Some candidates raise their voice a bit too much while the others start to behave rudely with their fellow candidates, often interrupting them even when it is not needed. All these mannerisms are duly noted by the invigilator and thus it is extremely important to learn how to conduct oneself in a group discussion and what not to do in such situations. The following transcript of a group discussion would thus be very helpful for you to understand how candidates usually behave in a discussion and how are they perceived by the invigilator.

No. 1: I was expecting a topic of this kind to be true after all that has been covered in the news. I think it is high time we had a discussion on this problem that has been killing us silently over the years.

No. 4: Hello friends, since No. 1 didn't have the courtesy, let me be the one to welcome you all into this group discussion today and

No. 1: Well, No. 4, I'am not the host of this discussion and thus I am no one to welcome people here. It would be much better if you mind your own business from now onwards please.

No. 7: Well I knew that there would be some fights in the discussion but didn't expect the fights to start so early. It seems like we are in for a very stormy discussion today!

No. 4: Well, to me, everyone here is a friend and thus I would request all of you to maintain the decorum of the discussion as much as possible since it would give us the best chance of getting our valuable points across to the invigilator and making the cut.

No. 5: I would have to agree with No. 4 here. There is no point in making this a fish market like most other discussions. Unlike those prime time debates every night on the television, let us try to maintain some decorum in this room and hear out each other because the nation wants to know! Hahaha!

No. 4: Thanks for being on my side No. 5

No. 3: I see that formation of groups has already begun inside this group. That is not a good sign!

No. 5: If agreeing to someone who is saying the right thing is 'groupism' in our little dictionary, then I don't mind that, No. 3.

No. 2: I agree with No. 3 here. I have seen many discussions where members of the so called 'one group' do not interrupt one another and don't allow the other people to speak ever. We won't allow this to happen here for sure.

No. 6: Hold your horses No. 2, this is not a freedom struggle! Calm down everyone. This is just a group discussion and we should treat it like that only.

No. 2: Well don't tell me later that I didn't warn vou earlier.

No. 7: Can we all now stop this nonsense and act like adults that we all are. I hope you all realise that we are running out of time here.

No. 8: Thank god there is someone sensible in this group! Thanks No. 7. Now can we please stop all this useless discussion and get on to the real topic and the real discussion for which we have assembled here? If no one is interested, I volunteer to go first and begin the discussion.

No. 3: Wait a minute. It is not so easy No. 8, there are others also who would like to go

first in the discussion. It is a race.

No. 1: Well count me out of this race No. 3. I hardly care about who starts as long as we start sooner rather than later and not waste time

Because you know what you want, instinctively you try to get on the right track and head on to the right direction.

in engaging in this mindless bickering. Let some sense prevail in your minds.

No. 4: I concur with that. In fact, let us vote to decide who begins the discussion rather than fighting over it. Let me vote for No. 8 here. I would request others also to follow suit and choose any member apart from themselves and vote so that we can begin soon.

The members of the group soon vote and it is decided that No. 8 would get the discussion

under way>

Comments: Due to the cut-throat competition in the job market, employers are looking for a wide number of methods to eliminate job aspirants, while making scope for only the best candidates to join them. Thus, group discussions help them by doing this elimination job. However, despite their increasing popularity in the job circuit, there are not many candidates that have been able to master the art of group discussion. It is still one of those stages of recruitment process which catches the candidates off guard. There are multiple reasons behind it. Some are underprepared for the group discussion while others are guilty of being overtly confident and thus lose track of the discussion. Both kinds of candidates can be seen here in this group discussion. You would be able to make out clear differences in the approach taken by each of the candidates and how these approaches did or did not work for the candidate in question. One of the most important things to understand here is that keeping calm in this situation is as important as possessing the right knowledge. As can be seen here, the candidates have a different point of view on who would begin the discussion, which path to take for the process and other matters. Amidst all this confusion and the fear of missing out, it is extremely important to maintain calm and listen to others as much as you want others to listen to you. The candidates fail to realise that listening is as important, if not more, as speaking and can severely impact the overall outcome of the discussion.

DISCUSSION

No. 8: Hello friends, thank you for giving me the opportunity to kick-start a discussion that can change our lives. And how fitting it is that the topic given to us has no lesser impact on our lives! For the sake of formality, let me reiterate our topic for the discussion, "Can the problem of pollution ever be solved in India?" I think there couldn't have been a better time to discuss this topic, considering the ever-deteriorating condition of our towns and cities in India. I sincerely hope that we can have some important takeaways from this discussion today and implement them in our lives to make our environment better.

As far as my point of view is concerned, the political parties and the governments in power have the capacity to control this menace if they are determined enough to tackle this problem. Not only this, they also have a constitutional duty to do the same.

SUCCESS IN GROUP DISCUSSION

It is only those who keep cool and composed and bold under the most trying circumstances can lead the group. They must have an enormous amount of confidence in themselves so that they can bring together a mixed group of people dissipating their energy in fruitless discussions and asides and take the lead in creating order in the debate and bring the discussion to a successful conclusion within the time allotted by the examiner. When such leaders lead, at least a few intelligent in the group, sitting on the fence, dilly-dallying to take any kind of initiative, will also join the leader marginalising the few who are not serious about the business at hand.

Article 21 of the Constitution makes it the responsibility of the State to ensure that people are given a safe and healthy environment since it is an important component of an individual's

fundamental right to life.

I am not saying that it is going to be easy for the government. People, by default, would be against the stringent measures taken by the government but it is the government's responsibility to ensure that it isn't bowing down to the moods of the people. This is where having a populist government can hurt the prospects of the country. China was considered to be a hopeless scenario in terms of pollution. But it has shown the world how to take decisions that may not be very popular with the people. For example, the country has been able to control its population growth to such an extent that India would soon take over China as the most populous nation in the world. That could be possible only because the government of China wasn't willing to bow down to the demands of the people and continued to operate in the larger interest of the society.

No. 1: (interrupting No. 8) Hold on for one second, No. 8. So you want India to turn into a Communist state where the people have absolutely no choice in electing their government? I hope you realise that India follows a democratic mode of government while

the People's Republic of China is a communist country with a single-party rule. And who decides what is in the best interest of the society if the government is given unlimited powers?

No. 8: (looks surprised as a result of this unexpected interruption) Yes, I do know what I am saying. I am just giving an example as to how a strong government can and must understand what is in the best interest of the nation rather than yielding to the demands of the people. I don't know if you people have noticed that the Chinese government has installed humungous air purifiers in the middle of highly polluted areas at the same time when our government is busy building statues. China has constructed a 350-foot high air purifier in one of its most polluted cities-Xian, with technology to absorb the dangerous smog in the range of 10-12 km. The cost of this structure is 1/200th of the Patel statue. Imagine if Patel's statue had an air purifier built inside it. The statue wouldn't have faced any criticism and would have had a wonderful impact on the nation's air.

No. 5: Alright No. 8, don't spend all your time in explaining your stand here. Those who want to oppose it would oppose it no matter what explanation you offer to them. My stand here on this matter is slightly different from No. 8's....

No. 8: Thanks but no thanks for the

unnecessary support No. 5!

No. 5: (ignoring No. 8) According to me, the problem is definitely solvable, provided that the efforts are made by both the government and the people. However, no political party in this preelection manifesto or speeches talks about the environment. All that these parties promise are temples to be built, bank loan waivers and food, water and electricity. Pollution has never been a top agenda for discussion in the political sphere of the nation and we are paying for it now. On the other hand, the people are also to be held equally responsible. This is because the manifestos of these political parties and the promises made by them are a reflection of what the people of the country demand from them. If the people of India really cared for the environment, there would be no reason for the political parties or the government not to work towards or introduce reforms for the environment of the country. Thus, both the parties need to take the responsibility since if either one of them had been more sensitive towards pollution, we wouldn't have entered such a deep gorge of smog, smoke and dust.

However, we must not lose hope. There have been multiple examples of nations doing the impossible. London's Thames River is an example. In 1957,

the Natural History Museum declared the Thames biologically dead. News reports from that era describe it as a vast, foul-smelling drain. Post World War II, Britain did not have the resources or the energy to fix the problem quickly. In 1959, a member of the House of Lords was reported as saying that purifying the river was unnecessary, since the rivers were natural channels for the disposal of waste. The situation started to change in the 1970s and 1980s. As a part of a general increase in environmental awareness, concerns grew over the pesticides and fertilisers that were washed into Britain's rivers with every rainfall. This was followed by tighter regulations and today Thames is one of the cleanest rivers in the entire world, which goes to show that there is still hope for India.

No. 4: Have you read the manifestos of all political parties in India or this is just an assumption that you are making that no political party has made any promises related to pollution and the

environment at large?

No. 5: Even if not all, I have been through enough election manifestos to make this statement with a certain authority and unless you have actually read all the election manifestos that you are talking about, I don't think you have the right to question me either here.

No. 2: Well I have a long argument to make here so I would really appreciate if you guys are patient enough to listen to all

the points I am going to make.

No. 7: So what do you want? A signed document saying that we won't interrupt your presidential speech, Mr. President? < chuckles>

No. 2: I never said that. Anyway, according to me, the saddest thing about the worsening condition is that it is a direct result of the government's policies and measures. The very air we breathe, the water we drink, the toxic and adulterated food we eat, the dying soil we walk on, the glaring sounds we are forced to hear, and everything else we encounter that is against nature is all political.

I would like to counter No. 5 here when he says that the people have never demanded environment reforms from the government. This isn't the case in my humble view. Recently, 13 people in Tuticorin died when the police fired on the crowd who had been protesting against Vedanta's Sterlite copper unit for its adverse impact on the environment. The protest had been going on for a very long time but it got the national and international attention only after it turned deadly. The NDA government had passed some orders in December 2014 which favoured companies like Vedanta, which later in 2016 was struck down by the National Green Tribunal (NGT). Before the NDA came to

WINNING THE FIRST IMPRESSION

Clarity and precision are the hallmarks of a Group Discussion. You must place your views clearly without contradictions and ambiguity. Candidates who lack an analytical bent of mind and rational thinking have no place in GD.

power, Vedanta was even supported by the UPA government in 2009 when it gave clearance to Vedanta without any public hearing. In 2016, The World Culture Festival was organised by Sri Sri Ravi Shankar to celebrate 35 years' service of his Art of Living foundation. The Indian army was made to build bridges across the river by the Union Government. It was attended by many prominent leaders including Mr. Rajnath Singh, Ms. Sushma Swaraj, Mr. Shivraj Singh Chauhan, Mr. Arvind Kejriwal besides the Environmental activists like Dr. Vandana Shiva. The event was organised on the floodplains of the Yamuna in the outskirts of Delhi.

When it comes to budget allocation and its usage, the government doesn't seem to put the fragile environment as a priority. In the fiscal year 2018-19, the budget of close to Rs. 2,600 crore was allocated to the Environment Ministry which, although saw a slight increase from the previous year, was far less than 2012-13, the year in which a budget of over Rs 3,000 crore was allocated. India's solid management is also a big concern. India produces over 62 million tonnes of solid waste annually, while only 12 million tonnes is treated. To make the matters worse, India also acts as a dumping yard for "the first world" countries. According to reports, a lot of waste from the developed countries including metals, textiles and tyres end up in India. Alang shipyards in Gujarat salvage around half of all the ships in the world meant for recycling. Various ports in India regularly receive illegal wastes from the United States, Europe and the Middle East most of which go unchecked by the custom. Apart from local e-waste generation, India also imports a large number of e-wastes from the United States, China, Europe and other parts.

Thus, I do not think that the situation can be brought under control by any measures possible due to the simple reason that the government doesn't intend to control this problem.

No. 6: Well, there is another view on it. I think it is the government that has the upper hand and can actually make a difference. For instance, what China has achieved is a stand-alone example. Beijing's air quality has seen an amazing improvement over the past decade or so. This has been a result of what China has done through its pollution-countering measures. In 2013, China came up with a national working strategy to fight pollution by placing restrictions on the usage of coal. Thermal power plants were shut down and burning of coal even for household consumption was banned. Although Beijing still remains one of the most polluted cities in the world, its progress has been noted by one and all. If the Chinese government can do this much why the Indian government can't? Thus while the individuals may be blamed for the pollution problem, government is to be blamed for its continuation.

No.4: Well, at the risk of being termed as an outsider, I would disagree with the people here. And before you people freak out on my choice of argument, I would urge you guys to hear me out first and then speak your mind.

No. 6: I am very eager to hear you

now!

No. 4: Well I believe that India's pollution problem is neither due to the people of India, nor due to the government policies. It is a worldwide phenomenon. Global warming is an international concept and it is unfair to blame only India for this. I have read many reports which claim that crop burning in Pakistan is a major reason behind India's deteriorating environment. Also, there are views that the climate change problem is not really man-made. There are a number of nations that are facing severe cold waves, proving that pollution isn't really harming the world. So how do you blame our government or our people for this menace?

(everyone giggles)

No. 6: So there is a foreign hand in this also? Hahaha!

No. 4 : Why is it not possible? There are many things that you didn't believe in the past but believe today completely. Then why not this?

No. 6 : Well no point arguing here. Everyone has their point of view and who am I to disregard it?

No. 4: Thank you, appreciated.

No. 3: I would like to take forward the arguments made by No. 6 here. I agree that it is a problem that has been made by both government and the individual, but controlling it is in the hands of the government more than the people. For instance, we have proved that rains play a major role in bringing down the severe pollution levels in the country. Now, introducing artificial rains

is something that the government can do and not the individuals. While the individuals have no lesser role to play in getting rid of this problem, their efforts would only have a long-term impact while the steps taken by the government can have an immediate impact on the environment at large.

Keeping the same in mind, the Modi government has finalised a Rs. 637-crore National Clean Air Programme to improve the air quality in India. The 20-point programme shifts the onus of fighting air pollution to the State governments, emphasises the collection of authentic data on pollution sources, introduces monitoring of rural air pollution and a new institutional framework at the Central and State levels to monitor air quality and take preventive steps. There are other efforts made by the government too.

For instance, New Delhi has become the first city in India to deploy Bharat Stage 6 Fuel for both petrol and diesel. The good news as far as these new cleaner fuels are concerned is the fact that they have been introduced at a cost price in India. The idea behind this implementation two years ahead of the previously scheduled date of April 1, 2020, is to help battle Delhi's longstanding terminal pollution problem. The move from BS-IV to BS-VI intends to remove the high sulphur content from the fuel, the sulphur content in BS-IV petrol and diesel is 50 parts per million (ppm). BS-6 grade fuels have a sulphur content of 10 ppm—significantly less than what you would expect. The sulphur content in fuel acts as an oxidising agent and a lubricant, allowing free motion of the car's gears and moving parts. Elimination of this will increase the resistance of your engine in the car. This might negatively affect the fuel efficiency of your car over time.

No.1: I doubt if your argument of artificial rains being helpful in containing pollution is actually useful since there have been a large number of studies to suggest that the artificial rains are not really dependable and do not have a 100% success rate wherever implemented. In fact, you can't even predict when exactly it would rain, let alone the amount of rain and its impact. So I believe that.....

No. 3: (cutting short No. 1) You are missing the point here No. 1. My argument isn't about whether or not the artificial rains are the best way to deal with the problem of pollution. My argument is that it is in the hands of the government to take steps that would cut down on the pollution, much more than the people of the nation.

No. 5: If I am to decide here, I think both of you are missing the point here by a big margin. The topic of discussion is can this problem ever be

solved? So unless you guys want to waste your time and do nothing else, I do not see any reason as to why you would make such dumb arguments.

No. 1: I would say this at the cost of being pessimistic here but I certainly believe that the time to fight pollution is far beyond us. The situation has deteriorated to such a large extent that there is absolutely no turning back from here. I am actually a follower of the Charvaka philosophy which says live as you want, because it won't last long. All these measures by the individual or the government won't do any good since the things are way beyond our control now and rather than opting for a change, we should just live the way we want since our actions can't have a defining impact on the world so humungous.

Although there are examples of nations bringing this problem under control, the way the Indian political system works, I doubt if the government can take such strong steps. For instance, the EU has created many regulations for limiting the amount of pollution in the air. EU pollution regulations set strict limits on the number of pollutants put into the air. The advantage of regulations is that they create clearly defined goals and can make sure that pollution levels are actually reduced rather than relying on the market-based incentives, which may or may not work. In the 1950s, the Clean Air Act was very effective in reducing the visible smog from cities, such as London. The Act banned the burning of coal for domestic purposes in major cities.

No. 5: Wow! Where did that come from No. 1? You are going all philosophical on this scientific topic. Hahaha! The next thing you would say is that in the afterlife, we would be given a better place if we clean our environment. Com'on No. 1, I expected better from you!

No. 3: How many of you have been to Europe? Or even South East Asia? Can you give me a show of hands if you have been to these places?

No. 5, No. 7, No. 8 raise their hands. No. 3: Good, you guys would agree with the fact that the environment in these nations is much better than in India although their industrial base is much broader than India's. Not just the developed nations, but developing nations also, many of which are much lesser developed than India, have managed to keep a better environment as compared to that of our country. All this has been made possible because the governments have been serious enough in fighting the problem of pollution. They haven't just announced high-sounding schemes but have also taken steps to ensure that they actually do something about the environment. Many of these have taken

stringent steps which were disliked by the public but the government still went ahead with it. Take the example of Singapore where the kind of development that has taken place in the past 50 years is unparalleled. From being a small island in the middle of nowhere, it has turned out to be the financial capital of the world. They take their environment extremely seriously. I don't know if you guys are aware or not but it is extremely costly and difficult to buy a car in Singapore since the government has decided to bring down the rate of growth in car buying to 0%. Such steps can be unthinkable in India and hence there is a good chance that India shall always remain engulfed in this problem of pollution. A strong political will is what you need to come out of this blunder and we seem to be lacking it significantly.

Let me share some examples which show that it is possible to change the status quo. In Bangladesh, the World Bank is helping to modernise brick kilns to reduce air pollution, mitigate greenhouse gas emissions and increase productivity. Carbon emission reduction credits generated by the project are helping to improve working conditions, protect people's health and provide better pay for workers. Peru is improving the air quality in some of its largest cities by reducing the content of sulphur in diesel, converting vehicles so they can run on natural gas instead of other polluting fuels, and setting up a system to ensure that emissions from vehicles are within permissible limits. Both these nations have their own set of challenges but they have set their priorities right and are on the right track to handle pollution problems.

No. 5: Although I do agree with you here, I won't support you when you say that it is only the government that can do something about this problem. After all, the government is a reflection of the people in the country and a poor government is a result of the nature of people that form the society. No matter how much the government can encourage the people to use public transport or to give a miss to private vehicles or not to burn crackers, it is ultimately upon the people of the country to behave in a manner that is best for them. If we are giving examples of the governments in Singapore or in China, we should also compare our citizens with those of these nations and then take a call. It is easy to blame the political class for all our ills and they may be responsible for the major part. But it is unfair to expect that they would use their magic wand and get rid of the pollution problem in India. While government's efforts may be visible immediately, it is only with the efforts of

in the long run.

the people that the problem can be solved

No. 7: I guess if all of you have made your points now, let me have the opportunity to tell you all what I feel about this issue. According to me, Government is an elected body by the people of our country. It is the prime responsibility of every citizen to protect Mother Nature by not polluting it. We obviously require strict laws to punish the defaulters when it comes to cases of pollution. The selfishness in us is constantly increasing and for our self gains we are ignoring the environment. Many industries are discharging their untreated waste water into the water bodies which is a real threat to our existence.

Municipal authorities are throwing the garbage here and there without creating proper dump yards. Industries are openly disposing the solid wastes in the open area and on the roadside, which is causing serious pollution. Although there are a number of laws in our country to restrict pollution, their implementation is very poor. I believe that the commitment to contain pollution has to come from both the public and the lawmakers. Without this, pollution will never stop. Let us work together for creating a better world for our next generation.

No. 6: Well No. 7, it sounded more like a sermon than an argument that

you wanted to make! Anyway, I am just glad you could find something to speak on this topic!

No. 8: No. 8: I believe that we are almost out of time. Should we wrap it up here or someone has more points to make on this topic?

No. 6: I would like to say one more thing. Irrespective of the decision taken by the government in order to reform the environment, it is important that it is arrived at only after due consultations from all sections of the society and not just the ruling party since that can be dangerous for the country and its future.

No. 1: Great. So let me conclude this wonderful and enlightening discussion by thanking each and every one of you, including myself for putting forward your views and for maintaining the decorum of the discussion.

Comments & Outcomes for the Candidates

Comments for No. 1: No. 1 made arguments which were in no way in line with the topic given for discussion. The candidate lacked knowledge and thus resorted to speaking unconnected things. Not selected.

Comments for No. 2: Candidate No. 2 described the problem and gave the supported facts as well as numbers. Thus, he successfully made a good impression on the invigilator. He

got lucky since he had an almost uninterrupted speech time which the others didn't get. Selected.

Comments for No. 3: The candidate brought forward some good points which were missed by the other candidates in the discussion. His arguments were sensible and were backed with good facts that were hard to refute. Selected.

Comments for No. 4: He was out of sync in the entire discussion and gave points that were unconnected to the entire topic. He lacked preparation. Rejected.

Comments for No. 5: No. 5 was convincing in his arguments and managed to make a good impression on the invigilator. His clarity of thought was impressive to say the least. Selected.

Comments for No. 6: No. 6 didn't speak much and only tried to compare the situation in India to other nations. He could have used the opportunity to put forward more interesting points but he missed the chance. He can be considered but not a sure selection.

Comments for No. 7: Didn't make any complete argument throughout the discussion. He spoke the least in the discussion and never gave the invigilator a chance to get to know him and his thoughts on the issue. Rejected.

Comments for No. 8: No. 8 made an impressive beginning after being given the chance to initiate the discussion. However, he could have gone deeper into the issue rather than pointing out what other nations are doing in this matter. Can be considered, not a sure selection.

JUST RELEASED



