

Amrita Students Debating Society (ASDS)

Newsletter

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Editor's Column



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Shaping Minds through the Art of Debating

Have you ever thought how debating is different from other intellectual discourses? Just like any intellectual discussion, debating also helps us refine our perspectives. It transcends mere verbal sparring; debating is a platform where ideas clash and perspectives collide pushing intellectual boundaries. In debates, we not only stick up for what we think but also build a shared understanding that helps us all learn more. Debate also serves as a melting pot where people of different perspectives come together and deliberate on various topics, leading to ground-breaking revelations.

Debating acts as a catalyst for sharpening our critical thinking skills. It is only when people listen to conflicting viewpoints, they learn to scrutinise, question, and re-evaluate their beliefs. While developing well-reasoned arguments to substantiate their stance debaters develop their mental agility, which is essential for dealing with the complexities of modern times. The power of debate lies not only in the persuasion of the audience but also in the self-discovery through the exchange of ideas. As we discern the different shades of meaning contained in an argument, let us recognize its importance in fostering analytical minds and broadening perspectives.

Major Events

Induction for New Members

ASDS conducted an Induction Programme at Radhakrishna Hall, CIR on 12th October 2023. Attended by all ASDS members, the event aimed to acquaint the new members with the Society's structure and functions. The session saw a significant turnout of new attendees. M S Sree Mridhula outlined the responsibilities of the Debate Wing, offering a clear understanding of its functions. Srinidhi J explained the contribution of the Logistics Team, and Harish Raju introduced the functions and operational scope of the Marketing Wing.

Ms. Mridhula elucidated the structural aspects of the debate, providing a comprehensive overview, including the significance of ARE (Argumentation, Reasoning and Evidence), logical fallacies, time limits, and speaker roles. She also provided valuable insights into effective debate strategies, emphasising content, style, and structure. New members introduced themselves. The Programme not only welcomed new members into the ASDS but also laid a solid foundation for collaboration and understanding within the Society.

ASDS & NSS Join Hands for Observing Energy Week



Amrita Students Debating Society (ASDS) in collaboration with the National Service Scheme (NSS) organised a thought-provoking debate at Anugraha Hall on 28th November 2023, as part of the "Energy Week" celebrations. The motion for the debate was **This House Believes that the Private Sector Should Be More Responsible than Government in Addressing the Electrical Energy Wastage**. Dr. D Venkataraman, Program Coordinator of NSS, and Mr. V Suresh, Faculty Advisor of ASDS graced the occasion with their presence. Coordinated by Bhavana N and Pravinkumar G, members of both ASDS and NSS, the event commenced with a ceremonial lamp lighting. It was followed by insightful speeches by Dr. Venkataraman and Mr. G Rameshkumar, Faculty Coordinator of ASDS.

The debate featured some of the finest speakers of ASDS: Ananya R, Arman Mahapatra, Sagar Bantupalli, Harish Raju, Vaishnavi Venkat, and Arya S R. The proposition speakers emphasized that as private enterprises were causing the loss of electrical energy majorly, they should be held responsible for the wastage. They also said that government intervention might not be universally effective pointing to evidence of the private sector's innovative solutions that not only reduced production costs but also enhanced energy efficiency. Whereas, the Opposition argued against granting private players the freedom to independently address energy wastage without government supervision. They contended that government oversight is crucial, offering benefits such as Special Economic Zones (SEZ) to support private sectors. The Opposition brought to light differing perspectives on the role of the government in addressing energy wastage and the potential advantages it could bring to the private sector. The panel had Pravinkumar G, Moheshwara L and M S Sree Mridhula. In a unanimous decision, the panel declared the Opposition to be the winners, marking it as one of the closest debates in ASDS history. Over 160 students from both ASDS and NSS witnessed the debate. The event underscored the importance of shared responsibility in addressing critical issues like electrical energy wastage.

ASDS Deliberations

This House Supports Paying Homemakers for their Household Work was the motion for the impromptu debate held on 12th October 2023. The Proposition comprising G Rameshkumar, Ananthasivan S and Sagar Bantupalli fought for paying the homemakers against Moheshwara L, Abhijeet Shreyas and V Suresh whose main arguments centered around the idea that homemakers formed an integral part of the family who are taken care of in every possible way by those who are occupied with paid employment. As for the Proposition, they contended that a homemaker is just like any other worker and they deserve to be paid. Though both sides argued spiritedly for their side, the judges, Srinidhi J, Pravinkumar G and Hitika Ranaparia, sided with the Proposition as they did better than the Opposition in arguments, reasoning, and evidence.



On 18th October, Proposition with Soumya M S, D Hari Kesav and Bhavana N clashed against Rohan Karthikeya, Harish Raju, and Pravinkumar G on the motion **This House Would Regret Mandatory Military Service**. While the Proposition argued that mandatory military service was a serious infringement against individual freedom of choice, the Opposition put forth the argument that the practice would go a long way in instilling discipline and patriotism in the individual and be a boon for the nation during serious security threats. Judges for this debate, Navami Govind, G Rameshkumar and V Suresh decided to give the debate to the Proposition as they had backed up their arguments and counter arguments with strong evidence.

This House Would Legalize Prostitution was the motion for the debate on 28th October. The Proposition comprising Arman Mahapatra, Abhijeet Shreyas and Arya S R underscored the need for the legal protection for sex workers in the light of their being treated as criminals at police stations and hospitals. Even as the Opposition, Hitika Ranaparia, Sagar Bantupalli and Praveen K M argued that legalizing prostitution would result in alarming increase in human trafficking, judges, Bhavana N, D Hari Kesav and Moheshwara L, decided to give the verdict favoring the Proposition as they, apart from being appreciably forceful with their own arguments, were able to refute the arguments of the Opposition with sound reasoning and evidence.



On 1st November, close to the heels of the Supreme Court's ruling on Same Sex Marriage, ASDS conducted a debate on the motion **This House Would Support Same Sex Marriage**. The Proposition side had Pravinkumar G, Saminathan R, and Goutham Vijayakumar and the Opposition comprised Vaishnavi Venkat, Adwaid Krishna, and Arya S R. While the Proposition underlined that Indian culture and tradition had recognised the existence of natural attraction between people of same sex citing evidence from ancient Indian texts, history, and sculptures in ancient temples, the Opposition won the debate as they brought up arguments that LGBTQ people feared being judged as bad parents and that children of such couples faced serious discrimination because of their parents' sexual orientation.

ASDS Deliberations



There was another debate on 1st November. The motion for this debate was **This House Believes that Oppressed Minority Groups Should Pursue Violent Resistance rather than Peaceful Protest.** The Proposition comprising Sahil, Meghana Somalaraju and Harish Raju faced a tough fight against Arjun Kumar, Amrutha Varshini K and Moheswara L While the Proposition cited a lot of evidence from history pointing that armed resistance had paved the way for the much needed reformations and upliftment for the oppressed minority groups, the Opposition tried to establish the futility of the violent protests. Eventually, it was the sound arguments backed with pointed reasoning and evidence that won the debate for the Proposition.

On 7th November, G Rameshumar, Ragav Srivatsan and Srinidhi J proposed the motion **This House Would Ban Nuclear Weapons.** They presented their arguments reinforcing the enormity of harm caused by the use of nuclear weapons. Nevertheless, the Opposition comprising Varun Narayanan, Pravinkumar G, and Soumya M S, were able to convince the judges that nuclear weapons had been the most effective deterrent against war and the loss of human lives in wars had drastically reduced after the advent of nuclear weapons. Judges—Sabarivasan N, Moheshwara L, and M S Sree Mridhula—declared the Opposition to be the winners as they strategically identified the clash points and refuted them with sound reasoning and evidence.

On the 15th of November, Sabarivasan, Vaishnavi Venkat and Nanda Kumar took on Sahil, M S Sree Mridhula, and C Lakshmi on the motion **This House Regrets the Partition of India.** The Proposition argued the partition had been a serious bolt on the secularism which India had steadfastly stood for. Further, they contended that the nation would have been economically and culturally much better off had the partition not happened. The Opposition, besides refuting the main arguments of the other side with statistical evidence, argued that violence and bloodshed had become a commonplace due to escalating civil war between Hindus and Muslims, which made the partition inevitable. Further, they reiterated the violence of Direct Action Day in 1946 which demonstrated the catastrophic effect of communal riots. Appreciating speakers of both sides, judges, Varun Narayanan, Soumya M S and Arjun Menon, gave the debate to the Opposition for their impressive focus on clash points.

This House Would Prohibit Sportspeople from Taking Part in Television Advertisements was the motion for the impromptu debate on the 18th of November. Deo Vaibhav, Adwaid Krishnan and Goutham Vijayakumar of the Proposition argued sportspeople could mislead vulnerable sections, the uneducated and children, by promoting things that are either unnecessary or potentially harmful. They underlined the situations wherein sportspeople lost focus on the game due to their participation in television advertisements. The Opposition with G Rameskumar, Abhijeet Sreyas and Sahil countered the arguments that sportspeople lost focus on the game because of their participation in TV ads by giving a list of sportsmen and sportswomen who had consistently been performing well in the game despite their participation in television ads. They added that prohibiting sportspeople from taking part in television ads amounts to infringing their freedom of choice. Judges, K Sreekar, Goutham Vijayakumar, and V Suresh declared the Proposition to be the winners as they had presented more arguments supporting their stance and refuted the arguments of their other side convincingly.

ASDS Deliberations

As India was celebrating its Chandrayaan III success, there were voices here and there “Shouldn’t the world not be focusing on pressing social problems such as poverty alleviation, illiteracy and unemployment?”. In the way of giving those voices an opportunity ASDS had a debate on the motion **This House Believes Money Spent on Space Exploration Can be Used for Reducing World Poverty** on 29th November. As the Proposition comprising Praveen K M, Moheshwara L and Arul Aaron Kingsley argued poverty causes a vicious cycle—from poverty to illiteracy to unemployment from where it is back to poverty— besides pushing people to commit crimes. The Opposition, Meghana Somalaraju, Arman Mahapatra and Arya S R while acknowledging poverty was a serious problem facing humankind, argued with well-researched reasons and evidence that space missions of, among others, NASA and ISRO have contributed significantly to ways of increasing agricultural production. Judges, Pravinkumar G, M Sundara Kamalam and S Nithya Kalyani declared the Opposition to be the winners citing the team had done better justice to content, strategy and style.

HAVE YOUR SAY!

Together for a Better Tomorrow!

I was very much interested in debating when I was in school, but I did not get the right opportunities to learn and develop that skill. Thanks to ASDS, I have been able to fulfil a wish I had had in me for a long time. I see debate as an opportunity to present arguments that logically oppose those from the other side. The purpose of debate is to provide an opportunity to speakers to present arguments that are backed with reasons and evidence that support their claim. The side that performs better in this wins the debate.

ASDS, which began with a small group discussion in the second week of May 2023 by a faculty member and a few students has evolved into a vibrant platform for aspiring debaters today. We have had twenty debates between August and November on various topics. On 28th November, ASDS and Amrita NSS jointly held a debate on the motion **This House Believes that the Private Sector Should Be More Responsible than Government in Addressing the Electrical Energy Wastage.**

As the Vice President of ASDS, I have enjoyed working with all the members of ASDS. I will ever remain grateful to ASDS for helping me hone my debating skills that I believe has a profound effect on every sphere of my life.



Pravinkumar G

(III Year Mechanical Engineering)

HAVE YOUR SAY!

ASDS SPOTLIGHT

Amrita Students Debating Society is truly one of the best forums in which I have been in Amrita. It is a warm and welcoming place, whether you are a debater or just there to enjoy a session as a spectator.

The Society is nurturing me- helping me develop my critical thinking skill. Starting from the time we are informed of the motion, we dive into understanding it, research, and note down the points. It is an opportunity to select the best points that will pave the way for the team's success, and by sharing and discussing various topics, I acquire a lot of knowledge and develop team-working skills. During the debate, careful listening and quick note taking are some of the things I feel are worth the time and effort. Raising Points of Information (POIs) before our speeches involves spontaneous and logical thinking skills that surprisingly help me in everyday- life situations.

What makes ASDS special is the spirit of community-people with beautiful minds and encouraging spirit. Win or lose, the focus is always on learning and growing. Personally, being part of ASDS has not only improved my debating skills but also given me a welcome break from the academic routine. I have had opportunities to learn from every small thing through interactions with fellow members- whether it is about debating or discovering new perspectives.



Vaishnavi Venkat
(II Year Artificial Intelligence Engineering)

Engaging Minds and Sharpening Arguments

"It is better to debate a question without settling it than to settle a question without debating it". This is the motto of the Amrita Students Debating Society (ASDS). My experience with the Society so far has been overwhelmingly positive. At ASDS, I witness truly engaging and exciting debates and I have even participated in a few. The astonishing thing about the entire experience is that there is no winner or loser (although every debate is judged) because at the end of the day it is about developing our thinking skills and not winning or defeating others.

Arguments are made by proposition and opposition after hours of research and team work. Both teams concentrate not only on the points they should present but also on those the other side will present. This gives them a wider perspective of the motion they are going to debate.

I believe open-minded people who are willing to question existing views, ideas, and provide alternatives are vital for our society to progress, and such people develop their critical thinking skills and feel intellectually stronger after every debate.

ASDS has provided me an opportunity to meet articulate speakers who now have become my friends. One can feel "the fresh air of equality" once they enter the Society.

Overall, I am grateful to be part of ASDS and I am excited about honing my debating skills with every debate.



Goutham Vijayakumar
(II Year Integrated M.Sc. Data Science)

A Refuge of Growth and Connections

In the “intricate dance” of life, sometimes unexpected turns lead us to remarkable discoveries. As I was overwhelmed by the aftermath of a personal challenge a few months ago, I stumbled upon the world of debating. Little did I know that this intellectual pursuit would not only serve as a distraction but also become a catalyst for personal growth and connections that transcended the confines of the debate floor.

In this narrative, I would like to share with you how debating has been my refuge, offering a journey of self-discovery and camaraderie.

Engaging in the art of discourse provided me with an outlet to channel my thoughts and emotions into something constructive. The effort I made for researching and formulating arguments allowed me to redirect my focus, slowly healing the bruises of the wounded heart. Amid debates and discussions, I found a community of diverse individuals who shared my passion for intellectual exploration. These connections became a source of inspiration and support, helping me rebuild a sense of community—a place that not only pledges mental exercise but also offers warm companionship.

As I delved into the world of debating, I discovered an unexpected by-product—enhanced communication skills. The need to express my thoughts persuasively in debates helped me in my everyday life. By articulating ideas with clarity and conviction, I not only improved my debating prowess but also found a new-born confidence in expressing myself in various social and professional settings.

Debating is more than just a skill; it is a journey of personal evolution. Critical thinking and problem solving that form the bedrock of debates have not only refined my analytical abilities but also become integral to my approach to life's challenges. It is a journey that has transformed me, moulding my perspectives and empowering me to navigate the complexities of life with resilience and adaptability.

By being a member of ASDS, I have discovered a sanctuary of growth and camaraderie. Debating, with its unexpected entry into my life, has proven to be a source of healing, a bridge to meaningful connections, and a catalyst for personal evolution. As I continue this journey, I look forward to the continued transformation that debating brings, not only in sharpening my intellect but also in moulding me into a resilient and confident person.



Chekuri Rohan Karthikeya

(IV Year Electrical and Computer Engineering)

My Journey with ASDS Debates

Seven debates under my belt and I am feeling all reflective about this journey. I thought I could share some of my thoughts on how being a member of ASDS has been a game-changer for both my personal and professional self.

The Society is cool, you know. We dive into all sorts of topics and that is what sets us apart. We do not think twice dwelling into topics even if it takes challenging our core beliefs. We sense the real spirit of debate coming alive as we present arguments and refutations confidently.

Now, do not get me wrong; it is not about keeping score of each side but how debates refine our understanding of things. ASDS is like a beacon of open-mindedness where different perspectives are not just accepted but celebrated. Regardless of who “wins,” we all come out with a broader view and sometimes even a change in our own beliefs. I have had moments where I had to defend ideas that were in conflict with my belief system. Uncomfortable? Yeah. Challenging? Totally. Nevertheless, looking back, those moments were like a crash course in growth. Stepping out of what is comfortable and diving into ideas that seemed alien at first. Yeah, that is where the real magic happens.

And, you know what is cool? This whole debate thing is not just about personal beliefs. It is about understanding what the other side thinks and coming up with arguments that refute them convincingly. Moreover, sometimes it is accepting the reasoning of the other side and making them see the bigger picture where our arguments take precedence over theirs. Anyways, all of these add to the richness of our discussions.

As I navigate this ASDS journey, I feel it is all about embracing the craziness each new topic brings. Going into debates with an open mind lets me dive into ideas that shake things up and maybe even refine what I thought I knew. It is not just about winning or losing; it is about soaking up knowledge, figuring out my own beliefs, and celebrating the awesome ideas that make the Society what it is.



Srinidhi J

(II Year Computer Science Engineering)

ASDS - A Journey of discovery

I have fairly been a very kept-to person, often not willing to take up tasks that I found might add to my workload. I guess the right term for it would be that I am just lazy. However, this opportunity came to me in an unexpected manner from one of my closest professors and thus I felt obliged that it was a right thing to do- to say "yes". I would always be thankful to destiny for bringing me to ASDS.

I was a good orator, but I thought I had left behind my competing days. There were judges who were partial and intramural competitions were not organized in an efficient manner. This made me lose interest, and maybe my workload as I progressed in the B. Tech program was also to blame. I had lost motivation to go on stage and express myself. There was something different about Suresh sir. He saw in me what I myself had failed. He recognised my talent and asked me to join ASDS. I would forever be grateful to him. I did once express my weakness in debates but failed to consider that all the debates I had been until that moment were very unprofessional and casual. Today, At ASDS, six months in, I hold one of the most impressive records of back-to-back wins. ASDS bought back the 'me' that I had thought was lost to time.

ASDS has not only revived a new "me" but also given a new life to the way I viewed everything around me. It has taught me that there is no right or wrong- just different perspectives. I debated on topics I did not quite relate to, but while researching about them I learnt there are more sides to a conflict than we ever get to see. We feel surprised thinking how we are blinded by our narrow minds and fail to see the world in a broader light. ASDS taught me that. It taught me to respect people's opinions; it taught me to never jump to conclusions and think smarter. This will have a significant impact on my career.

Besides the excitement that debates bring in, an amazing feature of ASDS is the people. I have met people of deep thoughts yet very humble. From partners to friends and from friends to besties, I owe it all to ASDS. I will be able to cherish an unforgettable experience in my life. ASDS will flash vivid and vibrant "colours" in my mind, as I reminisce of my young adulthood.



Arman Mahapatra

(III Year Electrical and Computer Science Engineering)

My Tryst with ASDS

The Amrita Students Debating Society. The name itself sounds good, doesn't it? That was my initial thought when I joined it. After some weeks, I was able to understand why it was called a "society" rather than a "club." There was no hierarchy here; everyone came to express their opinions on the subject. The first debate I witnessed was on the motion **This House Regrets Brain Drain in India** and that is when I realized there was a difference between what I thought was a debate and what it actually is. The way the speakers broke up the issue ensured that there was no repetition of ideas. I heard a new term, POI (point of information), which requires the speaker to clarify something or provide evidence. This means that you cannot make unfounded claims. Then, during the next debate, I found the motion to be fascinating-**This House Opposes Free Travel Scheme for Women in Government Buses**. At first glance, you might think that the person opposing the idea would easily win, but the debate again changed my perception; in less than 40 minutes, three speakers successfully persuaded the majority of us, including the judges, that women should not be permitted free travel in government buses. They were skilled wordsmiths, making it impossible for the opposition to refute many of their points. Additionally, I noticed that the opposition team made a politically significant point, which was brought up by their third speaker.

During the feedback, the Chair (Chief Judge) referred to it and added that it ought to have been brought up by the first or the second speaker so that there was an opportunity to refute. This sounded counter-intuitive to me as, in competitions, we ensure that we do not give any opportunity to the opponent to take advantage of the situation. When I asked Mr. Suresh about it, he said, yes, in any contest we should strive to win but there should not be any form of small-minded thoughts or acts in the process. Debate is like a sport where you establish your victory by refuting the arguments of the other side with convincing refutations and evidence.

In the first week of December, our seniors gave a presentation wherein each speaker's role was explained and the importance of ARE (argument, reasoning and evidence) was highlighted. Further, we were given a more comprehensive understanding of how ASDS functions. The presentation. I feel immensely happy that I have learned that at the core of debating lies values such as developing a broader outlook on everything around us, listening to others however difficult it is and coming up with more relevant rather pointed arguments to substantiate our claim.



Arul Aron Kingsley

(II Year Integrated M.Sc. Data Science)

Emotional Journey of ASDS

It was a chance encounter in the CIR Verbal Skills class during my 4th semester. After the class, I remember Suresh sir telling me "Arya, we are planning to start a debate club and would you like to join?" Without a second thought, I agreed. There was a hope that this club would help me get back to the times when I enjoyed taking part in speech competitions. However, within a month, I understood that it was an opportunity I had never had.

The Society is not merely about winning debates; rather it is about the progress that we make as speakers. It is about networking, meeting new speakers, observing them, and learning from them.

No wine of success was served here!

As a team, we worked together. From the time we are informed of the motion to the finish, we are on our toes, thinking, brainstorming, gathering arguments not only for our side but also for refuting those of the other side.

Starting from "Would you like to have a cup of tea?" Or, "Let's eat something in the MBA." I got the opportunity to talk to some of the kindest people in ASDS. From speakers, we became friends and from friends we became people who share the vision of the Society.

On the round table, with a sheet of paper or sometimes, just ideas, we think how we can contribute to ASDS's growth. The members are not just skillful but also honest and sincere.

I wish that ASDS started at least a year ago for I could have met these beautiful people much earlier. Nevertheless, now, when I look back, I understand that I was not ready.

I am left with one year and six months in Amrita. Before leaving, I would like to see ASDS scale new heights.



Arya SR

(III Year Chemical Engineering)



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