INDIAN INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
Karnataka Regional Branch, Bengaluru

ಭಾರತೀಯ ಸಾರ್ವಜನಿಕ ಆಡಳಿತ ಸಂಸ್ಥೆ

ಕರ್ನಾಟಕ ಪ್ರಾದೇಶಿಕ ಶಾಖೆ, ಬೆಂಗಳೂರು

Virtual Newsletter
ವಿದ್ಯುನ್ಮಾನ ಸುದ್ದಿಪತ್ರ

Vol. 4, No. 36, July 2023
(For Private Circulation Only)

Views expressed by the contributors are personal and do not represent the views or position of the Editorial Board or the Executive Committee of the Branch.

- Chief Editor

Table of Contents

T.M. Vijay Bhaskar, IAS (Retd.)

Former Chief Secretary, Government of Karnataka

Chairman, Karnataka Administrative Reforms Commission-II
Chairman, Indian Institute of Public Administration –
Karnataka Regional Branch

I am happy to place before our readers the **July 2023** issue of our *Virtual Newsletter*. This is our **36th issue,** since we began this initiative.

Our *Lead Feature* is on the **Pavagada Ultra Mega Solar Park**. It is an abridged version of the article penned by **Meera Subramanian** in *The New Yorker* dated 26th April 2023.

We carry a *Review Article* by our Vice-Chairperson, **Smt. Uma Mahadevan**, IAS of Anurag Behar's book, *A Matter of the Heart – Education in India.*

In our regular section titled, *Communication Pulse*, **Dr. Annapoorna Ravichander,** Executive Director at **Public Affairs Foundation** writes on "*Communicating Sustainable Development Goals".*

In the Section on *Karnataka in the News*, we report on two matters: One, the recommendation of **KARC-2** calling for a ban on private practice by government doctors; and two, a news item which states that "*Karnataka takes Top Spot in Monitoring Lakes".*

We carry reports of two events organized by us in the recent past: (1) A Special Lecture by **Smt. Maja Daruwala on** *India Justice Report*; and (2) A Special Lecture by **Dr. Vijayendra Rao** on "*Democratizing Democracy".*

Our Secretary, **Dr. D. Jeevan Kumar** reports on his recent "*Pilgrimage to South Africa*".

We reproduce the first page of an important article that appeared in the *American Journal of Political Science* titled, "**Does Affirmative Action worsen Bureaucratic Performance?**" We also provide the link to the full article.

In the section on *IIPA-KRB Members in the News*, we carry pics of **Dr. S.S. Meenakshisundaram,** IAS (Retd.) and **Dr. D. Jeevan Kumar** speaking at a *Round Table Conference* organized at **NIAS**, Bangalore. We also reproduce **Mr. T. Sethumadhavan**, IA&AS (Retd.)'s very sensitive online article in *The Hindu* titled, '*View from the Balcony'.*

We carry a report of a **Book Discussion** which was held at BIC recently on Anurag Behar's book, '*A Matter of the Heart'*.

In the section on **Government of Karnataka** initiatives, we request our readers to fill in a short questionnaire prepared by the **Centre for E-Governance** pertaining to '*Mahiti Kaneja'.*

We end the issue with our column on *Food for Thought*.

I wish to add a disclaimer here that the views expressed by the contributors in this issue are personal and *do not represent the views or position of the Editorial Board or the Executive Committee of the Branch.* Do write in, with your responses, views and ideas for improvement of the Newsletter.

PAVAGADA ULTRA MEGA SOLAR PARK

India's Quest to Build the World's Largest Solar Farms

Meera Subramanian

Source: *The New Yorker*, April 26, 2023

Pavagada Ultra Mega Solar Park, a clean-power plant the size of Manhattan, could be a model for the world—or a cautionary tale.

Extracts

Every morning in the **Tumakuru District** of **Karnataka**, the sunlight reaches a sea of glass and silicon known as **Pavagada Ultra Mega Solar Park**. Here, within millions of photovoltaic panels, electrons vibrate with energy. The panels cover thirteen thousand acres, or about twenty square miles—only slightly smaller than the area of Manhattan. As the planet turns and the sun climbs, electricity streams from the panels to eight nearby sub-stations. In the pre-dawn hours, the solar park consumes a small amount of electricity for lights and computers. But, within twenty minutes of sunrise on a morning in late February, the park was producing 158.32 megawatts, enough to power, on average, more than a hundred thousand Indian homes. Around 1.00 p.m., the park's electricity output peaked at more than two thousand megawatts—enough for millions of homes.

Pavagada generates almost four times the power of the largest functioning solar farm in the U.S. The world's biggest solar installation, Bhadla Solar Park, is in the North Indian state of Rajasthan; the second largest is in China. Pavagada, with a capacity exceeding two thousand megawatts, is in the running for third.

Twenty-two per cent of the electricity in Karnataka is generated here. In an office in the metropolis of Bengaluru, four hours south of the solar farm, I met **N. Amaranath**, the C.E.O. and General Manager of **Karnataka Solar Power Development Corporation Limited (K.S.P.D.C.L.)**, which operates **Pavagada Solar Park**. The Pavagada model is now being replicated around the country, Amaranath told me. India has pledged to meet half of its energy needs with renewables by 2030, and to achieve net-zero emissions by 2070. "*That is a very ambitious project*," he went on. "*Without the parks, that is not possible.*"

India continues to generate most of its electricity from coal, the dirtiest fossil fuel. The success or failure of solar here will go a long way toward determining the speed of the world's clean-energy transition, and thus the severity of our collective climate emergency. Many of the worst impacts of the crisis will be felt in South Asia, but the subcontinent is sunny enough that, in theory, it could eventually supply clean electricity to a large portion of humanity. Many more ultra-mega solar parks are in the works—and, as photovoltaic panels become even cheaper and more efficient, the primary obstacle to growth may no longer be technological.

In 2010, India launched its **National Solar Mission**, a sun-powered moon shot with a staggering goal: twenty thousand megawatts of installed capacity by 2022. Six months later, in a village several hours southeast of Pavagada, the state of Karnataka opened what was then the nation's largest solar installation. Built with American solar cells on about fifteen acres of land secured by the government, the panels produced just three megawatts, or a fraction of one per cent of the country's initial goal.

By 2015, India was planning solar farms that were hundreds of times bigger. The central government formed an alliance with the Karnataka state government to create K.S.P.D.C.L.; the newly minted solar corporation went looking for a site with thousands of sunny acres and found it near the town of **Pavagada**, where drought had made growing crops difficult. In early 2016, K.S.P.D.C.L. approached landowners with an idea that, according to the corporation, had not been tried on a large scale before: it would lease land holdings for a period of twenty-eight years. Locals would become landlords and the solar company would become their tenant. K.S.P.D.C.L. would pay landowners a yearly rent of twenty-one thousand rupees for each acre leased. (After the first five years, the rent would increase by five per cent every other year.) The corporation secured nearly thirteen thousand acres from approximately nineteen hundred owners. Within two years, the company had levelled grasslands, dug up mango trees and coconut palms, and planted hundreds of electricity pylons.

According to the solar company's annual report, it built forty-seven miles of road, lined with twenty-seven hundred street lights, along with eight substations to pool the power for India's national grid. Using a strategy known as *"plug and play,"* K.S.P.D.C.L. auctioned off development rights to international corporations such as Adani, Tata, Fortum Solar, and Azure. The developers, who were offered a good rate for each kilowatt of power that they delivered, then installed the panels. By late 2019, Pavagada was lighting up the grid every time the sun shone.

In the race to keep the planet from overheating, this is exactly the scale and speed with which humanity needs to move toward renewable energy. India's solar program met its original twenty-thousand-megawatt goal four years early, and went on to set higher goals; by 2023, the country had more than sixty thousand megawatts of solar capacity installed.

Sunlight is the most abundant source of energy on the planet. At any given moment, billions of megawatts of solar power are hitting the Earth's surface; humans could meet all of their energy needs by harnessing just 0.01 per cent of it. According to the Carbon Tracker Initiative, such an undertaking would require an area slightly larger than the size of California—a whole lot of land, but less, it turns out, than the current footprint of fossil-fuel infrastructure. And, with help from other energy sources, such as wind and water, this area shrinks.

The **World Bank**, which invested a hundred million dollars in India's solar infrastructure, commissioned two reports on Pavagada that predicted profound changes to the region and its people. Solar leases "*would act as a source of assured income for the land owners,*" one of the reports said. *But those who didn't own land, including many working women, would lose jobs as day laborers on local farms.*

The report also noted that Dalits and Adivasis, the most marginalized groups, constituted a disproportionately larger share of landless residents. The solar company had the resources to support local villages, the authors of the report said. They estimated that five million dollars would be enough to build community toilets, equip households with small-scale solar panels, and guarantee income for out-of-work farmers as they trained for new jobs, among other things. K.S.P.D.C.L. has set aside more than that for local development. Still, villagers told me that little has been spent on these types of improvements, and, in some places, it has been slow to arrive.

I thought of Amaranath, the solar C.E.O. When we met, he had acknowledged that of the thousands of construction jobs at Pavagada, many had been given to men from other states, such as Bihar in the north. But Mongabay, an environmental-news service, reported that around eighty per cent of the roughly sixteen hundred permanent jobs at the solar farm—engineers, technicians, security guards, grass cutters—have gone to locals.

On my last day at Pavagada, I thought of the villagers' struggles; at the same time, looking around, I marvelled at how clean this form of energy production is. For too long, our energy sources have left a legacy of ills: epidemics of black lung, oil spills, radioactive waste. **Solar has the potential to change that for billions of people; with modest investments in local communities, its benefits would ripple outward.** In much of South Asia, the sky is heavy

with a layer of pollution nearly two miles thick—an amalgam of emissions from wood-burning stoves, smouldering crop stubble, and hundreds of coal-fired power plants. Could all of India have blue skies again?

Pavagada shows that clean energy is only part of the solution. Some scholars have warned that a relentless focus on cutting emissions, by scaling up renewables at any cost, could create a "**carbon autocracy**." Green technologies will need to share space with humans and ecosystems; when climate activists talk about a just transition, they are imagining people, power, and Nature working in harmony. **Is it possible for climate change to be also an opportunity multiplier?**

Other futures are possible. Large renewable-energy projects could take root in former mines or fossil-fuel installations, where the land is already too degraded for agriculture or human settlement. India could reinvigorate efforts to install rooftop solar panels, which do not interfere with agriculture. And it is possible to build literal solar farms, where the sun's rays energize crops and photovoltaic panels at the same time.

A recent study found that some crops grown under solar panels, in so-called agri-voltaic systems, help to keep the units cooler, extending their lifespans and improving efficiency. Certain plants grow better in the shade, especially as temperatures rise. If less than one per cent of cropland around the world was shared with solar panels, global energy needs would be met, according to one estimate.

In the U.S., the National Renewable Energy Laboratory is leading research into agri-voltaics, including the use of sheep—not as walking bank accounts but as lawn mowers, to reduce fire hazards. When I asked Amaranath and the farmers about agri-voltaics, they were hesitant, but others in India are trying it and finding success.

A more radical shift could redefine ownership. Beginning in the nineteen thirties, a government program financed farmer-owned coöperatives that helped to electrify rural America. Solar companies could share a percentage of their revenue with communities—or communities could own solar parks. Either model could turn locals into shareholders, invested in the success of the clean-energy transition. Surely, solar parks could power cities and countries while allowing a grandmother to enjoy homegrown food, enabling a young woman to find a high-tech job, and helping a family earn a good living that keeps up with inflation.

Through the car window, we saw a temple perched on an ancient granite monolith. We drove through a town where hundreds of elderly men were buying and selling cattle. At one point, we passed a truck that was weighed down with a massive orange-and-white wind-turbine blade. ***The present, I thought to myself, is where the past and the future intersect. It's also the only place we can ever act. Which one should we choose?*** ♦

(Emphasis and Italics added. – Ed.)

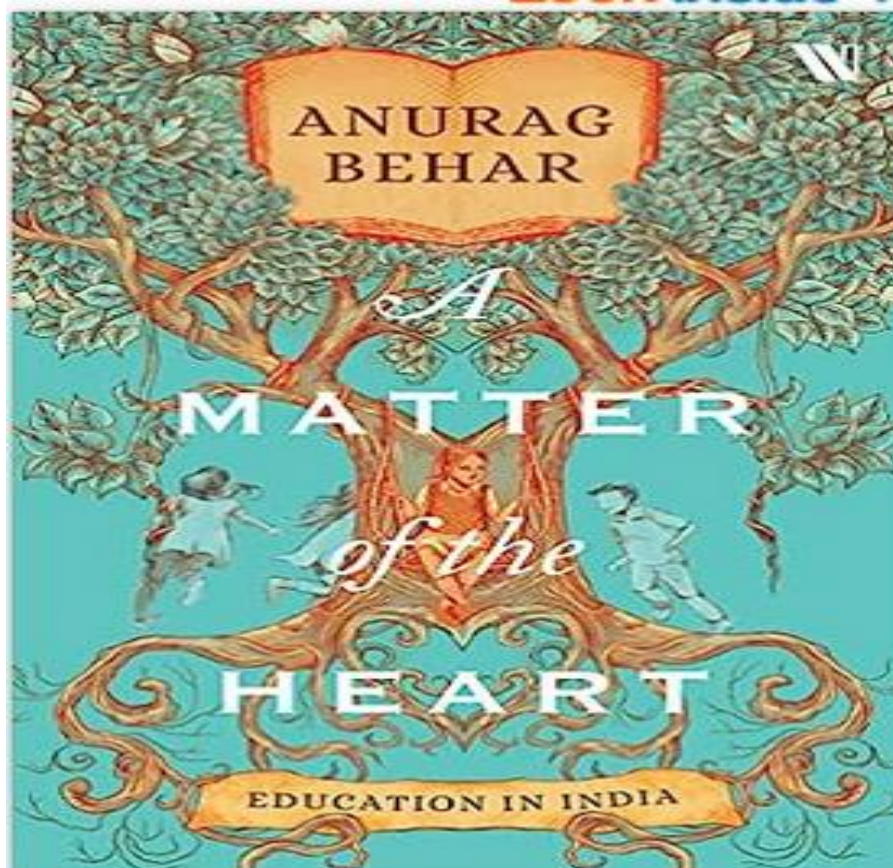## *Teachers and Schools can Change the World*

Uma Mahadevan
Dasgupta
Principal Secretary, Panchayati Raj,
Government of Karnataka

A Matter of the Heart: Education in India,

Anurag Behar, Westland Books, 2023

Price: Rs. 599, Pages: 377

The title of **Anurag Behar**'s book about school education in India comes from a remark his father had once made. Sharad Chandra Behar, a retired civil servant who had devoted the major part of his career to improving public education, had said: "***The heart of the matter in education is that education is a matter of the heart***."

Anurag Behar is one of India's leading figures in the social sector and philanthropy. As **Chief Executive Officer** of the **Azim Premji Foundation**, one of the world's leading philanthropic institutions, he leads an organisation of a thousand people, working in 100 districts across several States. He was also first **Vice-Chancellor** of the **Azim Premji University**, played a key role in drafting the National Education Policy, and has spent over two decades in efforts to improve school education in India. *A Matter of the Heart* is a collection of his essays and columns about education and the quest to build a better future for all of India's children.

The book's narrative opens in **Kanivekoppalu,** a village in Karnataka's Mandya district, where Behar interacts with a school development and monitoring committee (SDMC). As he criss-crosses the country visiting schools and talking to school communities, Behar listens carefully to the words of those he meets on his travels, be they teachers, children, or community members. In almost every chapter, we hear the voices of the people of India. Their words are wise, insightful, and deeply felt. "*Sabki apni raay hoti hai, sabko sunna chahiye,*" ("Everyone has their own opinion, we should listen to everyone's views") says a small child in a village school in Udham Singh Nagar in Uttarakhand. The alumni of another small village school take a 10-hour overnight bus ride to tell Behar about their dedicated and modest teacher: "He is the God we believe in." In another tiny school, shrugging off the story about obstacles and difficulties—"*Mushkilen ginane se kum nahin hoti*" ("Problems don't become any fewer by counting them")—a teacher urges his colleagues, gently, "*Pyaar to karke dekho"* ("Just give the kids lots of love, and see what happens)."

These are not stories but parables that Behar shares, as he tells us about the ordinary people doing extraordinary work in these schools. In one village school in Chhattisgarh, he discovers a lovely practice: any child who is absent, even if for just a day, has to write a nice letter saying what they did while they were absent and read it out at the school assembly the next day.

In a mountain village, a destitute woman, defeated by the suffering that life has thrown at her, answers all of Behar's queries with "*Kya faayda*?" ("What's the use?") Until a village boy comes to help her with her everyday needs—because he can, and because someone should. And that too, as Dewey showed us long ago, is the work of education: not just individual success, but also to build fraternity and social commitment.

The teacher's struggle, we realise from the descriptions in these pages, is a lonely one. It is all the lonelier for being almost invisible to the rest of us. And yet, Behar reminds us, these teachers are nothing if not "*ziddi*", stubborn and persistent.

Every day, teachers climb up the mountain slopes, trudge along sand dunes, visit homes to check on absent children, and ensure that infants who come with their siblings also get something to eat while they are in school. Teachers try to learn English on their own, so that they can teach their students. Finding no building or classroom, one teacher sets up a makeshift school under the shade of the largest tree in the village. Another teacher, posted in a village of snake catchers, learns to catch the reptiles himself in order to relate to the community. And, when a single parent has to travel to a faraway settlement for a few days of daily-wage labour, the teacher even takes the man's children to his own house, to keep them safe at the end of the day. When Behar asks a teacher what drives her to do what she does for the children, she replies, simply: "What else do they have?"

Tireless, matter-of-fact, these teachers embody intrinsic motivation. "*In the hot and green plains, every day, the teacher goes to his student's house. He picks him up because the child has no legs, seats him on his bike, and together they go to school. The child is a part of the school, he is not different. Everyone makes it happen, but the teacher is at the centre. When school ends, they go back together on the bike.*"

And in a "*thanda*" (hamlet) government school in Gulbarga, Asha Hegde and Shobha, one a primary schoolteacher and the other an anganwadi worker, convince the panchayat to give them land for the school building. The panchayat finally gives them a site, but it is in the water channel; undeterred, the two women make sure the school building comes up on stilts. All the while, the schoolteacher has encouraged her *anganwadi* teacher colleague to study further: from being an 8th pass, to completing her 10th, and then 12th, and then obtaining her degree. The

community refers to Shobha with respect as the anganwadi 'teacher', but Behar observes that she laughs it off: "*In the government employee hierarchy, an anganwadi worker is way below the schoolteacher, let alone the head teacher.*"

Behar points out that popular narratives about the state of public education need to be far more nuanced and informed. In a chapter titled "*The False Narrative of Teacher Absenteeism*", he writes about a study taken up by the **Azim Premji Foundation** across 619 schools in six States. Contrary to the popular narrative of 25 to 50 per cent teacher absenteeism, the study found an absenteeism rate of only 2.5 per cent. "*The kernel that has been used to feed the frenzy of teacher absenteeism is the overall number of teachers out of school. Absence from school for legitimate reasons has been conflated with absenteeism meaning rank truancy. This is done inadvertently and also deliberately…. It vilifies and demotivates teachers, who are the most important actors in education. It often leads to ineffectual policy actions, all about controlling and monitoring teachers, rather than enabling and supporting them.*"

This approach of suspicion and mistrust can lead to dysfunctional policy actions. I am reminded of a problematic randomised experiment conducted by some researchers at a set of schools run by an NGO in Rajasthan, where children were given cameras and asked to take pictures of the teacher and other students, to monitor teacher attendance. The teachers' financial incentives were then linked to the pictures taken by the children they were teaching.

In Behar's words: "***Public education and public goods matter. Teachers and schools can change the world. Good people can change the world, even if bit by bit.***" These stories are dispatches from the frontlines of the struggle for education for India's poorest children. They point to what States need to do to improve the functioning of 1.3 million government schools in our country, and to give children better futures. We must begin from a steadfast belief that all children can learn; and we must commit to letting them learn at their own pace, in a spirit of joy and inquiry. We must improve the quality of teacher education and professional development; we must trust and support teachers; and we must give them autonomy and dignity.

Communicating Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Dr. Annapoorna Ravichander
Executive Director
Public Affairs Foundation, Bengaluru

Introduction

The **United Nations** declared the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals** (SDGs) and was adopted by all the United Nations Member States in 2015. Primarily it provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. There are 17 SDGs, which are an urgent call for action by all countries - developed and developing - in a global partnership. It recognises that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality and spur economic growth-all while tackling climate change and working to preserve oceans and forests.

Communicating the SDGs and while interacting with communities, Government Officers need to consider the following:

Have a clear understanding of the SDGs and their targets. Be familiar with 17 goals and the specific targets associated with each goal. This understanding will help guide policy decisions and ensure alignment with the global agenda.

Recognise that the SDGs are a global framework, but their implementation needs to be tailored to local context. Formulate strategies and action plans keeping in mind the unique socio-economic, cultural and environmental aspects of a State.

Prioritise key aspects, since there may be resource constraints. To do this, identify the most pressing issues and prioritise actions accordingly. Determine which goals and targets are most relevant in the concerned State and focus efforts on those areas.

Encourage intersectoral collaboration across different government departments, agencies and stakeholders. Foster inter-sectoral cooperation and coordination to ensure a comprehensive approach. Engage relevant ministries, local governments, civil society organisations, academia, and the private sector to leverage their expertise, resources and networks.

Establish robust data collection and monitoring mechanisms to track progress towards the SDGs. Develop indicators, baseline data and monitor frameworks to assess the impact of policies and interventions. Evaluate the effectiveness of programmes and make data-driven adjustments as needed regularly.

Integrate the SDGs into State policies, plans and budgets. Ensure that development plans and budgets align with the SDGs and prioritise their implementation. Mainstreaming the SDGs into existing frameworks will help institutionalise Sustainable Development practices.

Develop a communication strategy to create awareness on the SDGs among the general public,

civil society organisations and local communities. Encourage active participation and engagement of citizens in achieving the goals. Promote transparency and accountability in the implementation of SDG-related initiatives.

Explore innovative approaches and partnerships to address complex challenges. Encourage innovation in technology, governance models, financing mechanisms, and sustainable practices.

The SDGs are an ambitious agenda to be achieved by 2030. While short-term goals are important, also consider long-term sustainability and resilience of development initiatives. Strive for sustainable outcomes that will have a lasting positive impact beyond the target year.

By keeping the above in mind, government officers can effectively contribute to the implementation of the SDGs and advance Sustainable Development in the State.

Tips to ensure effective and meaningful engagement

Simplify communication/message: Break down complex concepts and goals into simple and relatable language. Avoid technical jargon and use terms that resonate with the community members. Present the information in a clear and concise manner to ensure easy understanding.

Tailor information keeping in mind the audience: Understand the specific needs, concerns and priorities of the community you are addressing. Customise communication approach accordingly. Consider factors such as literacy levels, cultural sensitivities and local languages to effectively convey the message.

Use multiple channels of communication to reach a wider audience. This can include town hall meetings, community radio, social media platforms, pamphlets, posters, and local newspapers. Employ a combination of traditional and digital media to ensure broad accessibility.

Encourage active participation and create opportunities for dialogue with community members. Listen to their perspectives, concerns and suggestions. Emphasise a participatory approach that values community input, empowering them to be partners in the SDG implementation process.

Highlight local success stories and best practices related to the SDGs. Showcase examples of how the goals have been achieved in similar communities or regions. This can inspire and motivate community members to take action and contribute to the SDGs.

Offer practical guidance and actionable steps that individuals and communities can take to contribute to the SDGs. Provide information on local resources, programmes and initiatives that support sustainable development. Make it clear how community members can actively participate and make a difference.

Encourage community members to collaborate with government agencies, civil society organisations, and other stakeholders. Highlight the importance of partnerships in achieving the SDGs. Facilitate networking opportunities and provide information on relevant organisations and initiatives that individuals can join or support.

Communicate the government's commitment to transparency and accountability in SDG implementation. Provide information on the progress made, challenges faced, and future plans. Address any concerns or criticisms raised by the community and demonstrate a willingness to listen and improve.

Maintain ongoing engagement with the community to keep them informed and involved. Regularly update them on progress, involve them in decision-making processes, and seek their feedback. Build trust and establish long-term relationships with the community.

Conclusion

Positive and continuous engagement with communities, while mobilising action towards SDGs will ensure that the path to achieving the SDGs will be smooth and easy.

OTT
A global consultancy and platform for change

In conversation with Uma Mahadevan: revitalising rural libraries in India

By Annapoorna Ravichander

Dr. Annapoorna is conducting a series of interviews of Changemakers/Influencers (Policy Makers). Her first interview was with **Ms. Uma Mahadevan.** It is published in *On Think Tanks*-https://onthinktanks.org/articles/in-conversation-with-uma-mahadevan-revitalising-rural-libraries-in-india/

Ban on private practice by govt. doctors among recommendations made by ARC-II chief

Hindu 23/6/23

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

Ban on private practice by all government doctors on the lines of Central government-run institutions, starting evening OPDs in government hospitals, appointment of special administrative officers in government hospitals, and utilising the services of MBBS doctors (who are on compulsory rural service) in urban areas too. These are some of the recommendations made by T.M. Vijay Bhaskar, head of the Administrative Reforms Commission-II.

Mr. Bhaskar, who met Health and Family Welfare Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao on Thursday, submitted a report on the recommended health reforms.

The Minister discussed the recommendations with the retired Chief Secretary and assured him that the report will be implemented in a phased manner. Some of the recommendations will be incorporated in this Budget, he said.

He said an amendment will be made to the existing law in the next legislative session to utilise the services of MBBS doctors, who are on compulsory rural service, in urban areas as well.

Directorate of nursing
The other recommendations include establishment of a Directorate of Nursing in the Health Department, allocation of additional 50 general beds in taluk hospitals with high-patient load, provision of funds to hospitals, Arogya Raksha Samitis to hire specialists on hourly basis in urban PHCs and these PHCs should also function in the evenings.

According to the commission's report, the Health Department should provide 50% subsidy to ANMs and male health workers to purchase electric two-wheelers for field work. "It is recommended that a nursing college have 20 seats of GNM or B.Sc nursing courses and paramedical courses with 10 paramedical seats in 100-bed capacity taluk hospitals. Besides, System Improvement Teams should be set up at the departmental level," it stated.

Karnataka takes top spot in monitoring lakes, waterbodies: ActionAid

Telangana, however, tops in offering relevant water quality data; most pollution control boards in India fail to maintain relevant data on lake water quality, says analysis by NGO

Mini Tejaswi
BENGALURU

Karnataka tops the country in monitoring lakes and waterbodies, but when it comes to offering fresh and relevant data of water quality, neighbouring Telangana beats the former, found a nation-wide analysis conducted by ActionAid Association.

Karnataka and Telangana monitor 172 and 160 lakes, respectively, jointly accounting for 59% of the total number of 562 lakes being monitored by various State Pollution Control Boards/ Pollution Control Committees in across 28 States, said the analysis.

Delhi, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Tripura, Rajasthan and West Bengal accounted for 161 of monitored lakes in the country, while Goa, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Haryana, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Puducherry, Meghalaya, Odisha, Nagaland, Mizoram and Chhattisgarh put together have 69 lakes under monitoring, as per ActionAid study.

State Pollution Control Boards and Pollution Control Committees are expected to monitor lakes and periodically update water quality data on their websites to help the custo-

A view of Varthur lake in Bengaluru. Karnataka monitors 172 lakes. SUDHAKARA JAIN

dians of the lakes, who are mostly the local public administrative bodies.

The best and the worst
Study found that Telangana was the only State that offered "most updated" lake water quality data in less than 30 days of testing the water samples from various lakes in the State and updated it on the websites of PCB.

Four States, including Karnataka, Chhattisgarh, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, were identified as "updated" within 30 days of water sample testing while Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Uttarakhand and Sikkim were rated under "delayed

updation" between 60-90days. Kerala, Tripura, Puducherry, Bihar, Goa, Tamil Nadu, J&K, Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Jharkhand and Nagaland reported lake water quality data that was "not useful for lake conservation" in a 6 months to 7-years period.

At the bottom
The country's worst State Pollution Control Boards/ Pollution Control Committees were from the national capital Delhi and Gujarat that maintained only "junk", unusable and 10-year-old data, according ActionAid Association data exclusively released to *The Hindu*. Meanwhile, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Maharashtra, Punjab, Anda-

man and Nicobar Islands, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Odisha and Chandigarh had "lack of data." However, Pollution Control Boards in Lakshadweep, Ladakh, and Manipur didn't even have websites.

"Lakes are dynamic and living bodies. It is critical for concerned authorities to offer fresh updates on the quality of lake water to understand the health of each and every water body, also life in it and around it. Our analysis revealed that in most cases, lakes are neglected or not even acknowledged as important elements of the ecosystems," said Raghavendra B. Pachhapur, Senior Lead Projects, ActionAid Association.

Report 1: Special Lecture on *'India Justice Report'*

The **Karnataka Regional Branch** of the **IIPA**, in association with **BMS College of Law**, organized a **Special Lecture** by **Ms. Maya Daruwala,** Chief Editor of *India Justice Report* (IJR) on the highlights of the 2022 edition of the IJR on 31st May 2023 in the premises of the college.

Ms. Daruwala stated that the IJR is a first of its kind national periodic reporting that ranks the capacity of States to deliver justice. Through the filters of human resources, infrastructure, budgets, workload and diversity, it assesses the capacity of 4 core pillars of the justice system - Police, Prisons, Judiciary and Legal Aid - to deliver justice. Importantly, by comparing data over a five-year period, the IJR assesses efforts governments make to improve the administration of justice.

Ms. Daruwala identified some of the major findings of the report:

- At 77 per cent, more *undertrial prisoners make up the inmate population than ever before*.
- Legal aid institutions, even with best efforts, could reach only a fraction of their potential clientele.

- Beneath the staggering figure of nearly *5 crore (50 million) total pending cases* lies the dismaying one that records the ever-increasing length of time it takes to reach resolution.

To address these and several other challenges, Ms. Daruwala suggested the designation of the justice delivery system as an *essential service* and enhance, enlarge and equip it as a *first responder,* in order to provide effective justice delivery at all times.

Dr. D. Jeevan Kumar, Secretary, IIPA-KRB presided over the lecture. **Dr. Anitha D'souza**, Principal of BMS College of Law felicitated the guests. 2nd BALLB students, **Yeashoo** and **Priyanca** introduced the Chief Guest and Chair. **Dr. Ankit Shripatwar** coordinated the event and proposed the vote of thanks. Those present on the occasion, apart from the Faculty and students of the college, included **Prof. Madhwaraj**, Treasurer of IIPA-KRB, **Dr. Priyanca Mathur** and **Dr. Rubeena** of **Jain University**, **Mr. Valay Singh,** Project Lead of IJR 2022, **Mr. Anirudh Menon** of Tata Trusts and **Ms. Manju Venkat.**

Democratizing Democracy
Bringing Public Policy Closer to People

Deepak Srinivasa

The **Karnataka Regional Branch** of the **Indian Institute of Public Administration**, (IIPA-KRB), in association with **IAS Officers Association** (IASOA), Bengaluru organized a **Special Lecture** on "***Democratizing Democracy - Bringing Public Policy Closer to People***" by **Dr. Vijayendra Rao,** Lead Economist, Development Research Group, World Bank, Washington DC, USA on 8th June 2023 at the IAS Officers Association, Infantry Road, Bengaluru.

The event was chaired by **Mr. T.M. Vijay Bhaskar**, IAS (Retd.) Chairman IIPA, KRB and **Mr. I.S.N. Prasad** IAS, President of IASOA. **Shri S. Ramanathan**, Chairman-Emeritus, IIPA-KRB, was the Guest of Honour. **Ms. Uma Mahadevan**, IAS, Additional Chief Secretary Panchayati Raj, Karnataka welcomed the dignitaries, members of IIPA, IASOA and students, among others.

According to **Dr. Vijayendra Rao**, globally, many are dissatisfied with the way democracy works and frustrated with elected officials, but still value voting. Data from Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index which studies over 167 countries shows that there is a steep decrease in democratic trends over the years 2013-2019.

The main reasons for this are 3 C's:

1. ***Clientelism***: Politics of patronage, exchange of goods and services with a sub-group for political support. This can result in an emphasis on private good over public good.
2. ***Corruption***: Using political office as a means for private gain.
3. ***Capture***: Control of the electoral and governmental process by elites and special interests.

There is overwhelming evidence around the world for each of these. There is a need to fix this at the policy-making level and make democracy more democratic through innovations at the local level, with much greater citizen involvement.

Currently some of the dominant paradigms in policy making are the following:

1) ***Liberal***: Free Markets, emphasis on growth and innovation.
2) ***Keynesian***: Active use of Policy levers to promote growth, equity, investment, location, fiscal policy etc.
3) ***Neo-Paternalist***: Social Scientists know best.

Dr. Rao proposed a new paradigm called '***Reflexive Policy Making'***, based on a scientific research study, *Panchayat Policies in South India* (2004) which covered 298 Gram Sabhas and data recorded between 2003-2004.

What is Reflexive Policy Making?
- Local control over local issues (Principle of Subsidiarity);
- Prioritize citizen control over decisions that affect their lives;
- Democracy is not just about elections but about the period in between.

Findings from the Study
- Give power to **Gram Sabhas** and strengthen them;
- Increase resources for **Gram Panchayats** (GPs) through devolution of finances and increased jurisdiction;
- Improved the link between **Self Help Groups** (SHGs) and **GPs**;

- Incentivize politicians and leaders to provide better public services;
- Democratize data and improve citizens access and use of data;
- Use digital tools like AI and UX to empower citizens rather than Elites and Central Government.

The **Reflexive Paradigm** has the potential to vastly improve the relationship between Democracy and Development, concluded Dr. Rao.

The presentation was followed by an active discussion.

In his Presidential remarks, **Mr. T. M. Vijay Bhaskar** noted the following as the *way forward*:

- There is a lot of scope for administrative decentralization which will bring citizens closer to administration.
- Today we have democratic decentralization but not administrative decentralization. There is a need to look at administrative decentralization too.

- Administrative units should be lowered from Gram Sabha to Ward Sabha/Area Sabha.
- State Finance Commission should give adequate funds to Area Sabhas/Ward Sabhas.
- Independent monitoring of Gram Sabha/Ward Sabha must be done, and they must be ranked.
- Urban areas are more important where deepening of democracy is much more required, as compared to rural areas, mainly because of the higher population in urban areas.

Mr. Vijay Bhaskar thanked Dr. Vijayendra Rao for the enlightening talk which was not just academic but also had rich experiences from the World Bank. He also specially thanked the serving and senior IAS officers present, members of IASOA, IIPA-KRB and students for making the event a successful one.

Pic below shows (from R to L) Dr. Vijayendra Rao, Mr. S. Ramanathan, Mr. Vijay Bhaskar and Mr. I.S.N. Prasad.

(Below) Among those who attended **Dr. Vijayendra Rao**'s lecture were students of Public Administration of **Universal School of Administration**, Bengaluru. They were accompanied by Faculty members, **Dr. Prabhuling** and **Dr. Keshav Neeta**.

A Gandhian Pilgrimage to South Africa

D. Jeevan Kumar

I had the good fortune of participating in the **Gandhi-Mandela King International Conference** on '*Peace and Justice for All'* which was held at the **Kwa-Zulu Natal University** at **Pietermaritzburg** from **6th to 9th June 2023**. I presented a paper on "*The Human Security Paradigm of Peace-Building*" at the conference.

As part of the conference, a commemoration of the 130th anniversary eviction of Gandhi's eviction from a First Class railway compartment on 7th June 1893 was held at the Pietermaritzburg Railway Station.

Me and spouse Melanie were part of a 30-plus Indian delegation which went to **South Africa**. Our **Gandhian Pilgrimage** included visits to the places where Gandhi spent 20 years of his life from 1893 to 1914. The places we visited, apart from **Pietermaritzburg**, included **Johannesburg, Durban** and **Cape Town**. We were able to meet and interact with **Dr. Ela Gandhi**, one of Gandhi's grand-daughters who continues to stay in South Africa and is engaged with serious development work there. We visited the **Phoenix Settlement** and **Tolstoy Farm** and the vast "living museum" at **Constitution Hill** in **Johannesburg**, as well as the **International Printing Press** established by Gandhi in 1903. Gandhi acknowledges his debt to **South Africa** in the following words: "*Truly speaking, it was after I went to South Africa that I became what I am now.*" And **Nelson Mandela**'s words too are worth recollecting: "*You gave us Mohandas Gandhi; We returned him to you as Mahatma Gandhi!*"

Poster of Conference at Kwa-Zulu Natal
University, Pietermaritzburg

Author presenting paper at conference

Author and spouse Melanie at conference

With Dr. Ela Gandhi

Plaque on Platform at Railway Station in
Pietermaritzburg

Statue of Gandhi in Barrister's Garb in Johannesburg

Does Affirmative Action Worsen Bureaucratic Performance? Evidence from the Indian Administrative Service

Rikhil R. Bhavnani   University of Wisconsin-Madison
Alexander Lee   University of Rochester

Abstract: *Although many countries recruit bureaucrats using affirmative action, the effect of affirmative action recruits on bureaucratic performance has rarely been examined. Some worry that affirmative action worsens bureaucratic performance by diminishing the quality of recruits, whereas others posit that it improves performance by making recruits more representative of and responsive to the population. We test for these possibilities using unusually detailed data on the recruitment, background, and careers of India's elite bureaucracy. We examine the effect of affirmative action hires on district-level implementation of MGNREGA, the world's largest anti-poverty program. The data suggest that disadvantaged group members recruited via affirmative action perform no worse than others.*

In many countries, some ethnic groups have lower levels of education, wealth, social connections, and political power than other groups due to discrimination or historical legacies of marginalization. To reverse these inequalities, many countries have implemented some form of affirmative action for marginalized groups, using quotas or more subtle positive discrimination mechanisms. A large literature has examined the effects of affirmative action in education (Arcidiacono 2005; Bertrand, Hanna, and Mullainathan 2010), politics (Besley et al. 2004; Bhavnani 2009, 2017; Chauchard 2014; Dunning and Nilekani 2013; Jensenius 2017; Karekurve-Ramachandra and Lee forthcoming; Pande 2003) and the private sector (Carter, Simkins, and Simpson 2003; Griffin 1992; Holzer and Neumark 1999). However, these literatures have not examined the effects of affirmative action in government bureaucracies, despite the importance of bureaucracies in shaping welfare. Similarly, the flourishing literature on the role of bureaucrats in public service delivery in poor countries has not directly examined the effects of affirmative action policies, despite the commonness of these policies and the fierceness with which they are contested.

Although affirmative action policies are intended to change the socioeconomic status of beneficiaries, they may also alter—and are frequently intended to alter—institutional performance. A prominent concern in the literature is that affirmative action might hurt bureaucratic efficacy by lowering the *quality* of personnel (Griffin 1992; Johnson 2015; Lewis 1997; Lott 2000). This concern is particularly relevant in bureaucracies with recruitment procedures that are thought to be meritocratic, since in these cases affirmative action recruits are by definition of lower formal quality than others. If correct, this would be a strong argument against affirmative action policies, showing that any gains to the target group are balanced by social losses. However, this claim has not gone uncontested, with some scholars holding that affirmative action may improve bureaucratic performance by making bureaucracies more *representative* of citizens (Krislov 2012; Meier and Nigro 1976). More representative bureaucracies might be more willing and able to serve underprivileged citizens, or simply more able to avoid the type of discrimination found in unrepresentative bureaucracies.

Rikhil R. Bhavnani is Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 110 North Hall, 1050 Bascom Mall, Madison, WI 53706 (bhavnani@wisc.edu). Alexander Lee is Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Rochester, 333 Harkness Hall, Rochester, NY 14627 (alexander.mark.lee@rochester.edu).

Link to the paper in *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 65, No. 1, January 2021:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1yxLHObEyvfudlSKjl8Kg3udKk17bqRCW/view?usp=sharing

Dr. S.S. Meenakshisundaram, IAS (Retd.) and **Dr. D. Jeevan Kumar** participated in the **Round Table Conference** on "*Cooperative Federalism and Local Governance in India*", organized by the **Conflict Resolution and Peace Research Programme** of the **National Institute of Advanced Studies** (NIAS), on 28th June 2023 at **NIAS,** Bengaluru. **Dr. Meenakshisundaram** presented a paper on "*Fiscal Federalism and Local Governance*". **Dr. Jeevan Kumar** presented a paper on "*Federalism and Local Governance: Some Theoretical and Conceptual Reflections*" at the Round Table Conference.

Seen from above, the contrast in living standards was obvious in the way each community faced their days

T. Sethumadhavan, IA&AS (Rtd.)
Formerly Principal Accountant-General
Madhya Pradesh

The baseline for the luxury apartments and the slums was the quotient of happiness.

After retirement, when we moved into our own apartment in a newly built residential complex in a busy suburb of the city, with the surrounding land devoid of any constructions, we were thrilled that we had an unhindered view of the skyline and a free flow of air which would cool our interiors, figuratively. But we knew that the land was in a development zone and that sooner than later, we will be dwarfed by new tall buildings. The landscape of the building complex encompassed ornamental plants which would provide, when they grow, magnificent shade below them and turn into a green curtain to guard from inquisitive eyes.

From the balcony of our apartment, we would watch three young saplings, close to our tennis court, on the periphery, growing tall in a hurry. In just a couple of years, they grew into healthy young adults with a crop of green foliage blocking our view of the world below. We enjoyed the way the young trees would sway in the winds, their green leaves dancing in harmony.

The ornamental trees were a delight to watch. For the children of the complex, who would play merrily in the courtyard, the trees generously lent cool comfort from the evening sun. But all that ended abruptly when the residents' association decided to cut the trees because their roots were said to be invading and damaging the paved court.

The woodcutters took less than an hour to trim the leaves of our trees and bring down the trunks in small pieces and cart them away. With the trees gone, we could clearly see from our balcony a new world that was existing just below them, in the small vacant area outside our compound, shielded till now from our wandering eyes.

Hidden from our view, there existed three small thatched huts, made of waste materials and covered with blue plastic sheets, close to each other; with life flourishing in a different mode than ours, but basically similar, in each of them.

As the sun rises slowly in the mornings, showering light and warmth to the rich and the poor alike, the people staying in the huts would already be up and about. While we, the apartment-dwellers, would wait for our house helps to stroll in one by one, start cleaning our flats and light the fireplaces to make our breakfast, the energetic hut-dwellers would have already started their day with gusto. The man of the house would stand near his hut sipping tea, while womenfolk would be busy cooking meals on improvised *chulhas* made of bricks placed diagonally, and lighted with twigs and refuse collected meticulously. By the time we would get ready for breakfast or lunch turned out by our helps, our neighbours would have finished their meals and would be on their way to worksites nearby where they, men and women, would sweat out to build luxury homes for those who could afford them. The daytime would be mostly quiet across the compound wall, but evenings would be a different story altogether, busy as they would be!

The best thing was to watch the children play. The children from our complex, some accompanied by nannies, would be playing with expensive toys and gadgets, or swinging in the comfortable swings erected in the sandpit. The children just across will have their own way to keep themselves amused, with improvised toys and playthings such as a broken cycle, a piece of lumber converted into a bat and bits of cloth rolled into a mock ball. The smaller ones will oscillate in their make-do swings hung from the branch of a nearby tree, while the older ones would busy themselves playing with an adopted stray dog which seemed to be very happy in their company.

The contrast in living standards was obvious from the manner in which each community faced their days; but the baseline was the *quotient of*

happiness. The removal of trees reminded us that life is the same whether one stays in a comfortable apartment complex or in thatched huts. What matters is the way we take on our life: the way we face our days.

Indeed, democracy and a growing economy have offered infinite opportunities for all to grow and develop into successful individuals and become useful members of our community. Hopefully, the children from our poor neighbourhood will grow into successful adults over time, and rise in society and in the economic hierarchy challenging the environment they are unfortunately placed. The view from our balcony, however, constantly reminds us that while we are blessed with comfortable apartments to live, the basic needs of a comfortable roof above one's head and minimum community facilities are still a dream for many.

While we listen to our politicians and economists unabashedly claiming that we are the fifth largest economy in the world, somehow, the true "world" revealed by the absence of tree cover makes it, somehow, sound hollow.

Book Discussion

A conversation between **Anurag Behar**, author of '*A Matter of the Heart:Education in India*' and **Uma Mahadevan**, IAS took place at the **Bangalore International Centre** Auditorium on 21 May 2023. The event was titled "*The Essence of Education: Beyond the Main Cities in India.*"

Anurag Behar is one of India's leading educationists and social-sector leaders. For over twenty years, he has led efforts to improve education in India, from the grassroots level to national policies. He has played a key role in drafting India's **National Education Policy 2020**. He is the **Chief Executive Officer** of the **Azim Premji Foundation**, one of the world's biggest philanthropic institutions, and founding Vice-Chancellor of **Azim Premji University.**

Uma Mahadevan is a civil servant currently posted as **Additional Chief Secretary, Panchayat Raj** in the **Government of Karnataka**. She has worked in diverse sectors, most recently in women and child development. She has served as a member of the Taskforce on Early Childhood Care and Education set up by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India. She was a member of the working group that produced Karnataka's first **Human Development Report**. She has written extensively on culture and development issues.

The discussion began by stating that education is the possibility of building something better—a better future, a better community, a better society, and a better world. However, it is important to ask what this really means: what it means to build a better future, and how one can build this future beyond the metropolitan cities and the schools for the elite.

Through readings from the book, the audience was given glimpses of schools in remote villages of India. The conversation provided an insight into where our nation stands on education and, through that lens, into the nation itself. What emerges is the heart-warming and life-affirming story of how people and communities, energised from within, are changing lives—of individuals and the nation. This book is testimony to the essence of education: "*The heart of the matter is that education is a matter of the heart."*

A Simple Narration of Bangalore's History over the last 2000 years

https://vak1969.com/2020/12/13/a-simple-narration-of-bangalores-history-over-the-last-2000-years/

GOVERNMENT OF KARNATAKA

Mahiti Kanaja: Know your Government

(ನಿಮ್ಮ ಸರ್ಕಾರದ ಬಗ್ಗೆ ತಿಳಿದುಕೊಳ್ಳಿ)

The **Government of Karnataka** is in the process of building and strengthening '*Mahiti Kanaja'* (https://mahitikanaja.karnataka.gov.in/) - a single web portal for accessing information related to all public services and schemes. This also is a platform that Government can use to disclose information related to the functioning of public institutions across the stages of planning, budgeting, implementation, and evaluation, thereby being a landmark step in bringing more transparency and accountability in governance. Through this progressive step, the Government of Karnataka also wishes to move towards a "**Janta Information System"** from a "Management Information System".

Here is a note/request for readers from the Centre for E-Governance, DPAR, Govt. of Karnataka:

*As part of our new digital design initiative at the Center for e-Governance, Department of Personnel and Administrative Reforms, Government of Karnataka, we have developed an open-unified information portal called, **'Mahiti Kanaja'** to provide all required information to the public suo moto as part of the RTI Act (Section 4).*

*We are working on user experience and feedback to improve our service delivery. **We request you kindly take a few minutes to answer this questionnaire** so that you will have the required information about the government services/ schemes for your day-to-day usage.*

ನಮಸ್ಕಾರ, ಇ-ಆಡಳಿತ ಕೇಂದ್ರದಲ್ಲಿ ನಮ್ಮ ಹೊಸ ಡಿಜಿಟಲ್ ವಿನ್ಯಾಸ ಉಪಕ್ರಮದ ಭಾಗವಾಗಿ, ಸಿಬ್ಬಂದಿ ಮತ್ತು ಆಡಳಿತ ಸುಧಾರಣೆ ಇಲಾಖೆ, ಕರ್ನಾಟಕ ಸರ್ಕಾರ. ಆರ್‌ಟಿಐ ಕಾಯಿದೆಯ (ವಿಭಾಗ 4) ಭಾಗವಾಗಿ ಸಾರ್ವಜನಿಕ ಸುಪ್ರೊ ಧ್ಯೇಯವಾಕ್ಯಕ್ಕೆ ಅಗತ್ಯವಿರುವ ಎಲ್ಲಾ ಮಾಹಿತಿಯನ್ನು ಒದಗಿಸಲು ನಾವು 'ಮಹಿತಿ ಕಣಜ' ಎಂಬ ಮುಕ್ತ-ಏಕೀಕೃತ ಮಾಹಿತಿ ಪೋರ್ಟಲ್ ಅನ್ನು ಅಭಿವೃದ್ಧಿಪಡಿಸಿದ್ದೇವೆ.

ನಮ್ಮ ಸೇವೆಯ ವಿತರಣೆಯನ್ನು ಸುಧಾರಿಸಲು ನಾವು ಬಳಕೆದಾರರ ಅನುಭವ ಮತ್ತು ಪ್ರತಿಕ್ರಿಯೆಯ ಮೇಲೆ ಕಾರ್ಯನಿರ್ವಹಿಸುತ್ತಿದ್ದೇವೆ. **ಈ ಪ್ರಶ್ನಾವಳಿಗೆ ಉತ್ತರಿಸಲು ಕೆಲವು ನಿಮಿಷಗಳನ್ನು ತೆಗೆದುಕೊಳ್ಳುವಂತೆ ನಾವು ವಿನಂತಿಸುತ್ತೇವೆ**, ಇದರಿಂದ ನಿಮ್ಮ ದಿನನಿತ್ಯದ ಬಳಕೆಗಾಗಿ ಸರ್ಕಾರಿ ಸೇವೆಗಳು/ ಯೋಜನೆಗಳ ಬಗ್ಗೆ ಅಗತ್ಯವಿರುವ ಮಾಹಿತಿಯನ್ನು ನೀವು ಹೊಂದಿರುತ್ತೀರಿ.

Please take the survey and help us build inclusive governance.

ದಯವಿಟ್ಟು ಸಮೀಕ್ಷೆಯನ್ನು ತೆಗೆದುಕೊಳ್ಳಿ ಮತ್ತು ಅಂತರ್ಗತ ಆಡಳಿತವನ್ನು ನಿರ್ಮಿಸಲು ನಮಗೆ ಸಹಾಯ ಮಾಡಿ.

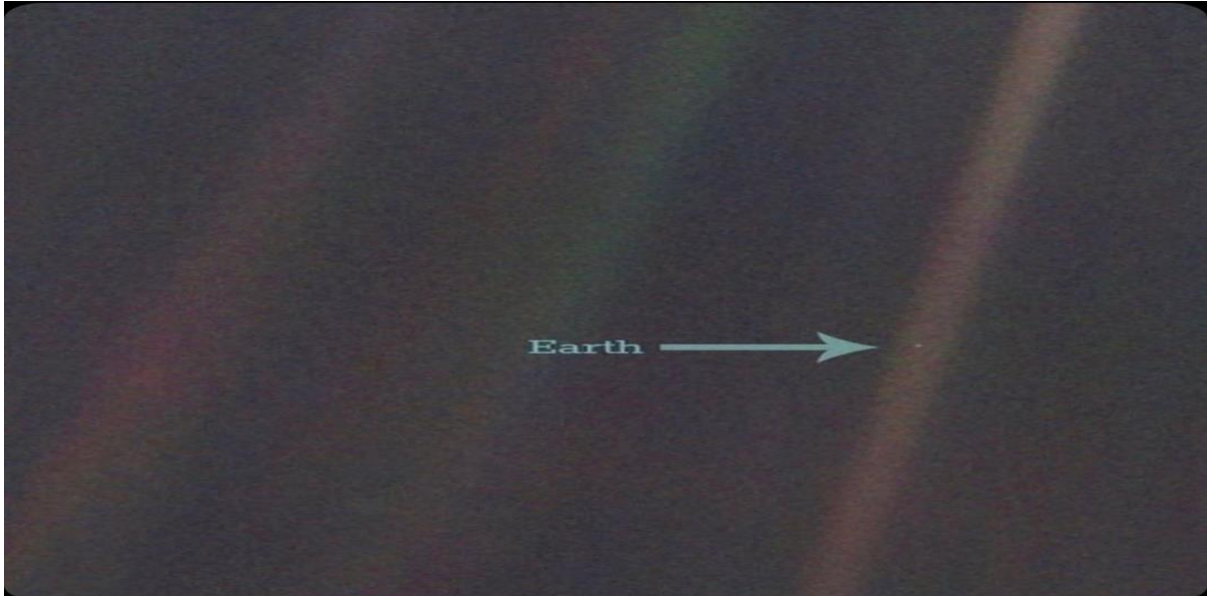*Click on the link below to participate in the survey:*

ಸಮೀಕ್ಷೆಯಲ್ಲಿ ಭಾಗವಹಿಸಲು ಕೆಳಗಿನ ಲಿಂಕ್ ಅನ್ನು ಕ್ಲಿಕ್ ಮಾಡಿ:

https://forms.gle/AgDjdhxqLBRf4AJg7

RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE
Reliving the wonder years

Nothing can bring back the hour, but children help us relive the moments

SUDHA DEVI NAYAK

I saw the room lived-in for a month, the rumpled bed sheets, the awry pillows, and toys and books in total disarray. My daughter and granddaughter came to see the family after a gap of three years and my one-year-old grandson in turn came visiting from the flat upstairs. The room was mayhem, to say the least, with lights on late into the night, laughter and conversation preserved over the years of the pandemic. Even with calls and video calls, there was so much to catch up on in person; those shades and nuances of emotions, the joy and excitement, the gifts to be exchanged and even the sadness of unshared moments with limitations of time and circumstance.

After they left, as I set about righting the place, I thought about how fast time had flown on soundless wings. I could feel my loneliness crawling back, my years laying siege to my joints and limbs. When my grandson came the next day, there were questions in his eyes. He couldn't comprehend the change in his baby mind that engulfed his little life for a short while and then disappeared as suddenly as it had come. Where were all the extra kisses, the extra love he received, the delicious extra bites he got from their dinner plates, the pictures shown and books read to him? I saw his searching looks all over the place and I heard him call his six-year-old cousin's name gently, "Laya," and waiting for her to appear from behind the curtain.

For me, the mornings lost their lustre, the "spacious" afternoons their charm and the evenings brought on the night too quickly.

I saw the tell-tale marks of mud from flower pots strewn everywhere and the brown and black birds that sat in a row on the branch opposite cooing with gusto while the year-old toddler and his older cousin stood rapt clutching the railings with awe. They looked at the sky opening up in red and gold and they wanted to stretch out their hands and touch it. The older child, looking wise, tells the younger cousin, "The trees are scraping the skies, you and I can't. Let us grow up, we will go flying into the sky and we can touch it."

I don't know if the little one grasped any of this wisdom, but he smiled. For me, watching my grandchildren, reopened the wonderment I had traversed long ago, worlds inhabited, where every turn of the leaf, every whiff of the breeze, every tint of the sky held infinite possibilities. Lines from Wordsworth's *Intimations of immortality*, that grand meditation on childhood and the gradual loss of it with all its innocent joys, came to me: *Nothing can bring back the hour / of splendour in the grass, glory in the flower.*

Pale Blue Dot is a photo of Earth that was taken by the Voyager 1 space probe in 1990 from a distance of about 6 billion kilometers (3.7 billion miles) as it was leaving our solar system. This is what **Carl Sagan** said about the photo:

"*Look again at that dot. That's here. That's home. That's us. On it, everyone you love, everyone you know, everyone you ever heard of, every human being who ever was, lived out their lives. The aggregate of our joy and suffering, thousands of confident religions, ideologies, and economic doctrines, every hunter and forager, every hero and coward, every creator and destroyer of civilization, every king and peasant, every young couple in love, every mother and father, hopeful child, inventor, and explorer, every teacher of morals, every corrupt politician, every 'superstar,' every 'supreme leader,' every saint and sinner in the history of our species lived there — on a mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam.*

The Earth is the only world known so far to harbour life. There is nowhere else, at least in the near future, to which our species could migrate. Visit, yes. Settle, not yet. Like it or not, for the moment, the Earth is where we make our stand. It has been said that astronomy is a humbling and character-building experience. There is perhaps no better demonstration of the folly of human conceits than this distant image of our tiny world. To me, it underscores our responsibility to deal more kindly with one another, and to preserve and cherish the pale blue dot, the only home we've ever known."

IIPA-KRB Virtual Newsletter

ವಿದ್ಯುನ್ಮಾನ ಸುದ್ದಿಪತ್ರ

Editorial Board

Chief Editor

Shri T.M. Vijay Bhaskar, IAS (Retd.)

Feedback/Contributions/Ideas/Book Reviews /Report Summaries may kindly be mailed to

iipakrb.bangalore@gmail.com   with a copy to   jeeves0607@yahoo.com

PUBLIC AFFAIRS FOUNDATION
Partnership for Better Governance

Designed by Public Affairs Foundation (PAF)

https://pafglobal.org