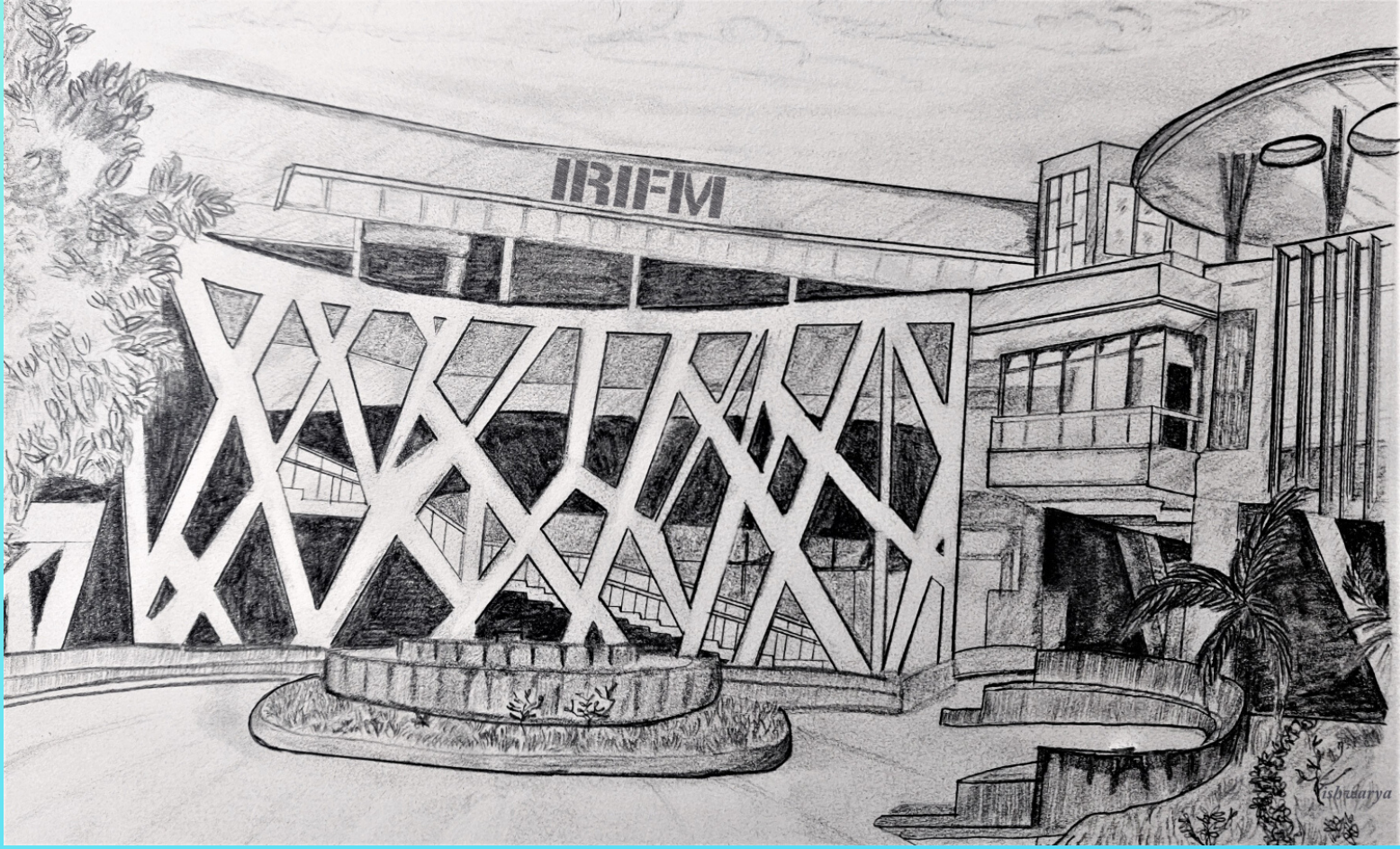




भारतीय रेलवे वित्तीय प्रबंधन संस्थान



प्रतिध्वनि
REVERBERATIONS

MAY 2020

www.irifm.org

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***“O Captain! my Captain! our fearful trip is done,
The ship has weather’d every rock, the prize we sought is won,
The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting,
While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and daring;
But O heart! heart! heart! O the bleeding drops of red,
Where on the deck my Captain lies,
Fallen cold and dead.”***

-Walt Whitman

The inaugural edition of IRIFM Journal “Reverberations” is an ode to the fallen Corona Warriors who went down trying to save the ship. Humankind is indebted to those heroes.





REVERBERATIONS

Reverberations is a sum of journal entries from IRIFM's infancy. As much as the journal is an effort to build institutional memory, its larger object is to promote relevant research papers in a format in which they may be read, enjoyed and used by railway accounts officers. Once the inaugural issue was put together, we realized many of our readers may not know the institute.

The Indian Railway Institute of Financial Management stands less than a kilometer from Moula Ali, a railway station east of Secunderabad junction. The century old Moula Ali railway station gets its name from a dargah that goes back to the late sixteenth century when the Qutbshahis ruled from Golconda. For more than four centuries, many Sultans, many Nizams walked the road from Golconda to the dargah in search of favors. Those favors have come knocking to IRAS in the form of IRIFM. When the morning azaan is called out, the institute's faithful birds come alive; plovers and herons, bulbuls and parrots, coucals and mynahs, drongos and treepies, and many more. Underneath the Shireesh tree, over the Sheesham and on the branches of the ubiquitous Peltophorum, the interfaith prayer groups congregate. An introvert kingfisher watches them from a distance, then flies away, leaving a dash of turquoise in its wake.

Serenity in IRIFM comes with a caveat. Just as one marvels at the sublime stillness all around, a probationer may be seen dragging her feet to the PT ground where her accomplices await their hour of judgment. A spectrum are these trainees. For each dawdler there is a sprinter, for each KTP, a person totally in the moment, for every early bird, a late comer. With their foot dragging, whatsapping, dog feeding, mostly nocturnal ways, they breathe life into the institute. All this leaves them a little exhausted for assignments and quizzes. Imagine figuring out station balance sheets after watching Breaking Bad through the night, WMS after Game of Thrones. Imagine learning the Earnings' Budget on VC; imagine being in a Zoom class on tenders or a Cisco webex lecture on FOIS. Imagine three months of continuous on line classes in railway accounts. The 2018 batch has done a lot of remote learning.

In the last week of February when the batch arrived at IRIFM, the place was still largely a construction site. The Director General's arrival and the probationers' coming speeded up the finishing works. Soon the gym came to be a hangout, the badminton court a mini battlefield. A book club was born at the library and a street play was performed in the amphitheatre before none other than the Financial Commissioner.

Early each evening a flock of black headed ibises flies west in magical formations above the IRIFM sky. No shadow is cast over the institute. Just like while the outside world grappled with Corona, no dark cloud flew over IRIFM.

DIRECTOR'S FOREWORD | REVERBERATIONS

Dear first batch*,

Congratulations for bringing out the first journal at IRIFM! I hope this spirit endures in the years to come and the journal evolves into such a medium of professional and intellectual authorship as may hold a mirror up to the cathedral of IRAS.

Instead of struggling to find words to describe our association of past three months, let me borrow from Dickens; it was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us...

Why so dialectical, you ask. Because more than ever I see here a Quo Vadis moment in our lives as railway accounts people, a moment, which taken at the very Flood which is threatening to drown us, should lead on to Fortune. Omitted, you should be able to guess by now, our voyage is bound in shallows.

Your brief journey in IR has been nothing short of a chapter from a Tom Clancy thriller. You arrived on board the IRAS; the service metamorphosed into the Artist formerly known as Prince. You stepped into IRIFM; Corona came to hold the Railways to ransom so that for the first time in IR's history, from Baramulla to Kanyakumari, from Bhuj to Agartala, trains ground to a halt. And in the holy month of Ramzan as our country's roads became the hapless migrants' Karbala, you learnt the brutal way why the Railways are India's lifeline. Alas! It took the worst of times to awaken us to the enormity of extent by which we matter.

Ours is not an incidental or coincidental department. The service as it exists may have taken form in 1929, but the department itself evolved in the 19th century in response to economic factors concerned with railways. Geographical expansion of the railways and separation of ownership of railways from management necessitated accurate reporting of the results of operations and on safeguarding corporate assets for which concurrent internal check and sound accounting were essential. The link between accuracy of management's financial data and providing sound financial advice to management was recognized. Soon, this role extended beyond that of merely compiling accurate account balances to include specialization in accounting methods, to advise management on improvements needed in controls and procedures, and to keep such statistics as would provide insightful decision intelligence to top management. Thus, the internal check department was created not as a result of pressure from some governmental agency or legislative body, but as a result of the economic benefits to be derived from having an independent accounts department.

DIRECTOR'S FOREWORD | REVERBERATIONS

I imagine when nearly a century ago we began our journey as IRAS, ours was a different country. It was British India, not India. The Railways would have had Sahibs who wished and commanded and natives who toiled alike at track, points, tender and ledger. At the dawn of freedom, we, as Indian Railways' accountants and internal auditors, started on our quest along the 'canons of financial propriety'. Large scale mobility of classes and masses, nostalgia for train journeys immortalized by Indian films, and temples of modern India, CLW, ICF, DLW, to name a few, bear testimony to our predecessors' diligence and responsibility. En route though, we may have lost sight of our quest or it may be that we forgot the ideals that gave us strength.

It is time to contemplate how we who started from being the conscience of the carrier to the nation must now search for our raison d'être. It is time to aspire for a central and meaningful place in the organization's goal by using our vantage position inside the railways for being an independent accountant and an insightful financial adviser to the higher management. क्षुरस्य धारा निशिता दुरत्यया, दुर्ग पथस्तत्कवयो वदन्ति, says the Kāṭha Upanishad. The razor's sharp edge is difficult to walk on, but it is time to walk that path.

Legend goes that while fleeing Rome for fear of crucifixion, Saint Peter found Christ at the crossroads outside the city. "Quo Vadis", Peter asked. "Rōmam eō iterum crucifigī", Christ responded (I am going to Rome to be crucified again). Christ's reply gave Peter the courage he needed to return to Rome. May the service be the Messiah unto itself because on a full sea are we now afloat.

Smriti Verma
Director, IRIFM

*First IRAS batch with IRIFM as its base CTI



मुख्याकर्षण

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श्री चन्दर मोहन जिंदल
के साथ वार्ता ...1

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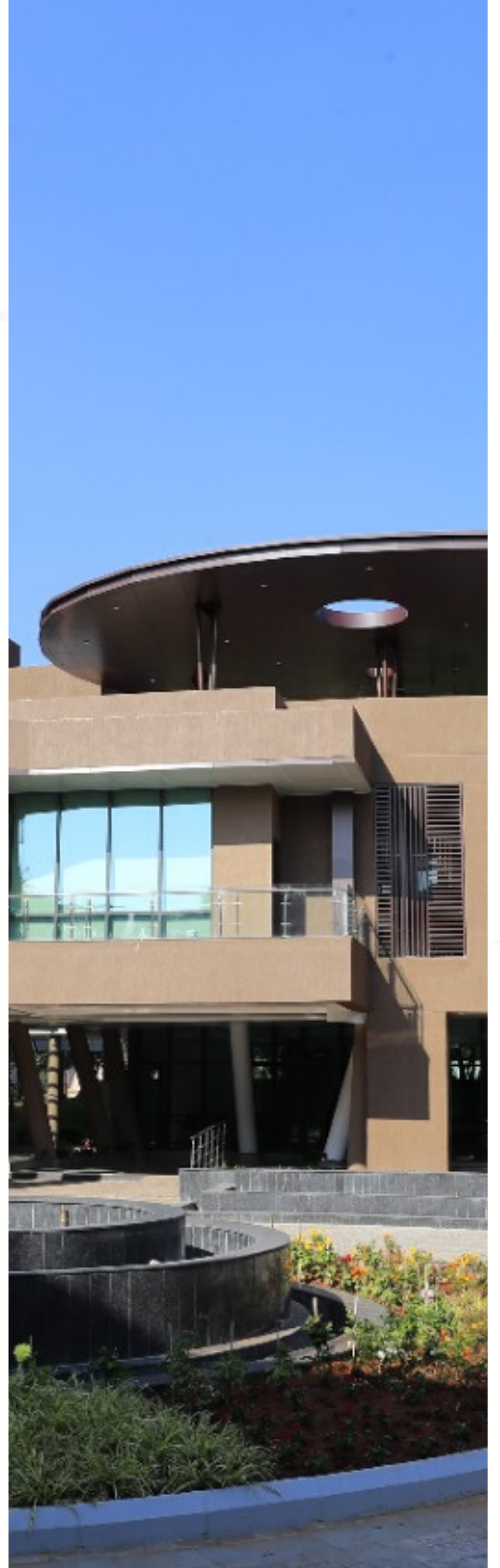
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Foundation stone laying on June 3, 2013 by FC, Ms. Vijaya Kanth



Inauguration of the institute building on November 13, 2019 by CRB, Mr. V.K. Yadav in the presence of FC, Ms. Manjula Rangarajan



Inaugurating IRIFM



CRB, FC and Member S&T, Mr. Pradeep Kumar on the day of inauguration



CRB addressing the dignitaries present during inauguration

Building IRIFM- one step at a time

AN INTERVIEW WITH SHRI CHANDER MOHAN JINDAL, DIRECTOR GENERAL, IRIFM

Sir, how would you describe the future roadmap of Indian Railways (IR)?

Railways have always been life-line of Indian economy. Railway planners have realized that heavy investment is imperative for growth of the economy. We require more and more capital investment, and various alternative sources of finance need to be found and tapped.

How has your IR experience been over three and half decades?

I have had an experience of over 35 years in the Indian Railways. It has been a very satisfying and fulfilling experience for me. Railways being the lifeline of India, it makes me proud to be of service to passengers and customers for transportation of goods at economical rates. Railways service allows for a very good social life too in the Railway colonies and interaction with a large number of people.

How have you seen probation evolve over the last four decades?

In 1980s, we enjoyed two years' probation. At the time I personally felt that the training of two years was not too long. However, I always thought that the period of training should be curtailed, since this training is quite costly. Now, I am happy to know that training course has been curtailed to one and half years. I am happy to know that now Probationers have better arrangements of accommodation in training institutes and availability of rest houses for field training. I feel course design is also better than in the 1980s.

What initiatives were taken by IROAF for renewable energy and what is its future?

My personal view is that there is not much for Indian Railways. Railways should focus on Rail transport business only.



How is IR accounting expected to change considering the need to make IR more competitive?

Rail transport is competing with road, air and pipeline sectors. Railways' share has been going down since 1951 due to technological advancements and heavy investments that flowed to other transport sectors. Investments made in the Railways were lower as compared to other transport sectors, since investment to be made by Railways was largely dependent on Gross Budgetary Support from the central government which has its very own set of constraints. Rail transport is more economical than road in terms of energy efficiency. Also, it is more environment-friendly in terms of carbon-emissions. Therefore, heavy investment in development of Railways is the need of the hour. Railways need reforms which can help it leverage various financial mechanisms like EBR from IRFC and other domestic institutions, external borrowing from IBRD,

JAICA and PPP etc. through new SPV corporations. Some of the services of Railways can be delivered better and more economical than by Private Sector which will be permitted in this sector.

How will the role of Railways transform with the coming up of DFCCIL?

The future of Indian Railways depends on the creation of dedicated freight corridors. Most of the golden quadrilateral and the two diagonals are already oversaturated. The average speed of goods trains is only 23 km per hour. Therefore, freight corridors need to be built at the earliest, so that we can reverse the declining share of rail in transport and improve the financial position of Railways. These freight corridors will help run more passenger trains at higher speeds.

HOW DO YOU THINK RAILWAYS CAN REINVENT ITSELF IN LIGHT OF CHANGING DEVELOPMENTS IN THE TRANSPORTATION SECTOR?

Indian Railways is poised to grow at 7-8% in the coming two decades and thus needs to grow freight traffic at faster rate and increase rail share from 30% to 50%. The Passenger sector of rail traffic is also required to run at higher speeds. All these things require heavy investment and more advanced technologies in Railways, which require corporatization of some of the activities of traditional railways being run by government departments. Some of the activities can be taken by private sector.

What do you think will be the role of finance officers in Indian railways in future?

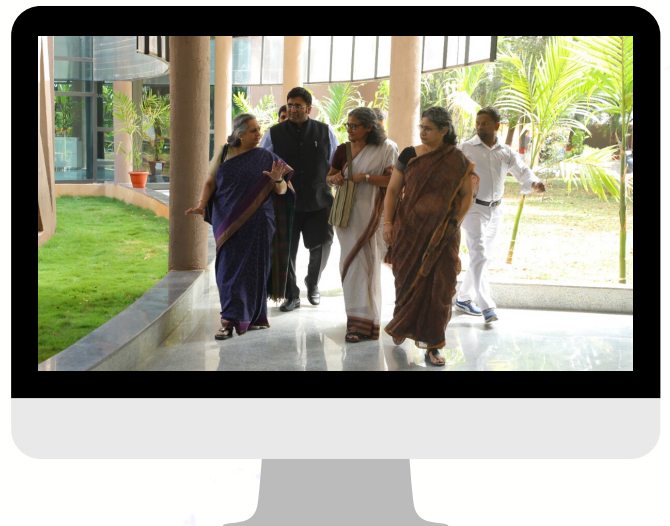
Role of finance officers will be all the more important since we have to deal with heavy investments from various alternative sources of financing, cost reduction to compete with Road and Air which is being run by private sector.

What do you feel about the role played by Indian railways during current the Corona pandemic?

Railways has always been the life line of the country, even more so during the pandemic. When the whole country was locked down due to Covid-19, essential goods like food grains, coal, medicines, fruits and vegetable etc. were provided by the Railways. Railways provided about 40000 beds for quarantine by modifying old coaches. Railways have moved about four million migrant laborers to their home towns through 3000 Shramik trains. All these things have been possible only because of Indian Railways.

Would you like to give any words of wisdom for recent entrants to the service?

The purpose of young officers who are joining government service to serve common people should be "Service with Smile" and honesty should be the best policy. One must be fair and just to their employees and railway contractors/Suppliers. If you follow these mantras, you will always be satisfied and happy in your life.



Ms. Manjula Rangarajan, FC at IRIFM in March, 2020

THE ROAD UNTO IRIFM

BY AMARTYA BANERJEE, IRAS (P) 2016

One of things that keeps people going during the preparation stage of the Civil Services is dreams. For many, it is social recognition, adulation and the like. For me, to tell you the absolute truth, it was the dream of the Academy, whatever its dreamy connotation may be. The dream was to be able to walk down a place which resonates with history and is made alive each day by those who call it home. I aspired to be a part of a vibrant campus, not of students, but of the hustle and bustle of officers who come from all the corners of this vast and myriad subcontinent. It kept me going through thick and thin, much like the fuel that keeps a vehicle moving in a direction it intends to head towards.

When standing upon the gates of NAIR, Vadodara, I could imagine this being true in many ways. The first morning walk, the classrooms, the splendid Rajabaug gardens, the majestic peacocks that call those woods their home made for a very favorable impression. It seemed to me that this was to be my alma mater for all purposes. Or was it? Fate had a different idea it seems.

All this was before I heard of the dream that was IRIFM. To be honest, the first time I heard of it, it seemed like a long haul. Given the skepticism (no pun intended) that often surrounds the pace of government work, who knew when it would open its doors to us!

NAIR was, and is like a confluence of multiple streams, of many services, each with their own unique features and styles of working fused together. It is an exhilarating place with its own uninhibited energy and enthusiasm for sure. For many years and for many batches, it was their home, their place of joyous memories of Probation. That is still true, truth be told. For many of us, it felt like the bachelor apartment that many of us share during our younger days with flat mates for company. A place of joy, of fond friendships but still a shared space. Even in the midst of it all, there was a subtle desire for a place which one could hold onto. This desire is as fundamental to human beings as a civilization itself, the need for a space which they can call their own. This was more so true, when after the Foundation Course, when each service returned to their own academies.



During our entire probation period there had been an anxious wait for IRIFM to open its doors to us. Discussions about it, planning activities to do once we got there, ideas and counter ideas became a constant feature of our mind space as a batch during the last one and a half year.

We visited the site once as a batch when doing our attachment in CTARA. It seemed quite impressive and could play host to a fresh horde of joyous memories to be made by probationers, I thought to myself. The news that finally we were about to become the historic first ever batch of IRAS Probationers to set foot inside this august institution came as a ripple of joy, like waters of a dammed river, gushing forth with abandon, spreading before one and all.

As fate would have it, or maybe even serendipity, I became the first IRAS Probationer to walk through those gates on the evening of 29th of December, 2019 (I think I am right but if wrong, forgive this mistake, is my earnest request to the reader for I could scarcely contain my excitement). The whole academy felt like a dream and I didn't want to wake up from it. It felt like I had finally landed where I intended to, My Academy, my home away from home.

The next two weeks, went in a daze of morning PT, classes, book reviews and exams. What I still yearn for and miss desperately is the sense of being part of that campus, its skywalks, its neon lit passages, the lawns, the roof above Director's cabin that offers a beautiful view of the whole campus, the sight from my balcony every night and morning, the teachers who greeted us warmly every morning and evening.

It's not the stone edifice that makes a place a home, it's the people who reside in it that give it that status. The entire batch and the people at IRIFM gave the academy that life, that zest. Albeit for two weeks, it gave us unforgettable recollections. Now, that this global pandemic has made life come to a standstill, the sense of missing out on further days at IRIFM, is a constant reminder and a sore point.

IRIFM is a young institution no doubt, but it is a dream that has been seen by many, for years and decades. Thus, it falls upon us and our

succeeding batches to see that its glory remains undimmed and new history and path-breaking events take place here all the time. Indian Railways needs all the zest and ideas that can be generated by young minds at IRIFM to flourish in this rapidly evolving age and time.

At the end, it would seem befitting that I speak through the words of the Pied Piper of Hamelin when he recalls his home far beyond the sylvan hills-
“Wandering oh wandering through mountains and valleys, here I have spent so many beautiful times with my flute”



BEING A MOTHER... AT IRIFM

BY ANALA KAMALA PRIYA, IRAS(P) 2017

“A woman is the full circle. Within her is the power to create, nurture and transform.” Women are blessed with the gift of life which determines the future of us homo sapiens. Being a woman is not easy, yes, it's true. The expectations that spring from being a daughter, a wife, a mother, a caregiver, juggling a gazillion roles every moment is no doubt daunting and this kind of responsibility weighs everyone down. We have seen our mothers effortlessly manage the house, manage children, manage chores with such ease that comes naturally. It was only much later I realized the kind of effort it takes to make such magic happen.

Six months ago, I was staring at the blinding surgical operation lights in the hospital, wondering how life is going to change within the next few moments, tried to be calm and composed but noticed the anxiety and slight shiver when the doctor started asking me if everything was alright. I told her yes, but I was clearly lying; I was trying to be brave in face of a storm building inside me. Then the most piercing cry filled the room, which became the sweetest music to my ears and for the first time I experienced ecstasy, pure, unhindered, limitless joy. I looked at the most innocent eyes and held the tiniest little hands all the while wondering if this was all even real! Having children just puts the whole world into perspective. Everything else just disappears

Before beginning my journey at IRIFM, being new at motherhood, I was anxious, apprehensive, scared. I even entertained thoughts about not leaving the comfort of my home as my responsibility was so crucial that I couldn't delegate to anyone. However, with a heavy heart and facing an uncertain future, I took a leap of faith, and visited IRIFM for the first time.

I was pleasantly surprised at the sight of this stately, modern, well-maintained, shiny new institute. Sitting at the reception, I waited. My mind already began to visualize the different selfie angles, and vantage points I could leverage to make everyone I know go mad with envy!

As the training began and the days passed by, I found myself slowly coming out of my shell, making friends, playing sports I had missed all these years (courtesy - UPSC), all the while spending quality time with my child. I ventured bravely into a completely uncharted territory for me- Finance and Accounts!

With every passing day, I felt I was reverting back to my old vibrant self, after a very long time. I owe immense gratitude to the amazing set of people that so graciously surround me. I started waking up early just to breathe in the fresh air that the beautiful large campus so effortlessly provides. Serendipitously, I cross paths with the Director a number of times.

Classes have turned into pure joy, thanks to the healthy competition between like-minded colleagues who are highly curious and inquisitive especially Anusha, Svatantra. Sometimes we indulge in playing our favorite songs during breaks to lighten the mood (Vrushank and Butta Bomma). From Sedhu's killer sense of humour and memes, to Arun's endless logical doubts, there is no dearth of things to keep us awake during classes.

I have even learnt some life-hacks from Alok- just the best class representative (and a rapper too) who takes all the blame and responsibility with a smile. Aditya and Prashant taught me to chill and have fun every once in a while. I am also inspired by our daredevils Jayasharadha and Surabhi. My discussions with Pranshu (our Lord Byron) pushed me into pursuing the art of creative writing that I had shut out for quite some time. Also, Ashish and Ankita- our in-house doctors are always at our service, offering a helping hand before we even ask for it.

The campus has one of the best sports facilities, thanks to Vanya, Ashish, Shashank (Badminton Pros), Shivashish and Hemant (Tennis). It brings out the passionate sportsperson in me. Our own version of BPL (Badminton Player League) had been a high-point, creating memories and bonds that shall stand the test of time.

Many of the other interesting personalities do require a special mention: Akshay (re-incarnation of Salman Khan as a Chartered Accountant); Chitraa, she even quizzed the FC; Lakshman (the coolest guy who has the most clarity on life); Sunil (our Kumar Sanu), Sofia my dear long-time friend (who is just too good at everything); Ishwarya, the kid on the block, is just the sweetest.

Coming to the most crucial part of a probationer's life - food: Svatantra's handling of the mess (and consequential frustrations), Surabhi's nimbu-paani inclusion, Babita and Vanya's never-ending meat cravings, have successfully made the mess hall a very lively place to enjoy our meals.

When it mattered, I realised that I was lucky in every way to have such diverse, hyperactive and helping colleagues who have made life on campus a breeze.

A final shout out to the best and the brightest leader leading this wolf pack - our Course Director, Mr. Sithamaraju (PAM-IRIFM) who has been more accommodating to us than we could ask for. We are also fond of ever-smiling Director-General, and our protective, witty, simple yet sophisticated Mother-on-campus, the Director. A special mention has to be made for Mrs. Sithamaraju, who is the reason we survived Corona lockdown. She also took special care of the ever-expanding nutritional requirements of my child with unmatched hospitality.

Now a little about the apple pie of IRIFM - Nahyan. I entered IRIFM with a 4-month-old baby who was cradled in my arms. Today, he has, along with us, grown as an inquisitive, naughty and very active child who has been loved and cared for by my mother-in-law with utmost patience and diligence. He is constantly showered with love and blessings from everyone and frankly I couldn't have asked for anything better.



I am constantly asked how do you manage? So many activities - gym, badminton, class, assignments, project, books, etc.? Want to know the secret? Keep running! Don't ever stop living, keep running, keep running... In all the chaos and confusion, in the eye of all the storms, will you find peace and reason. It's true. I am exhausted all the time. However, at the same time it is totally satisfying and worth it as you only live once. "The only person you are destined to become is the person you decide to be."

So, the choice is ours to be who we want to be, with sky as the limit. At IRIFM you are in the safest hands that nurture and help build the best version of yourself with utmost care and affection.

It's truly a miracle, at IRIFM I found the best of both worlds, the way I was engulfed in its warm embrace has truly made it a home away from home. For me, IRIFM stands for so many things. Finance, but also, family. Management, but also magic.

JUST ANOTHER BOOK CLUB?

BY PRANSHU SHARMA, IRAS(P) 2017



Of late are you able to detect subtle Athenian notes in the air wafting through the IRIFM library? Yes? It must be the IRIFM Book Club! Though conceptualised only in the past few weeks, it has been pulsating with activity like in a busy Athenian street. The club seeks to transplant saplings of oratory, democratic debate and public speaking in the core of the academy's blessed soil.

In the film 'Dead Poets' Society', Robin Williams poignantly remarked, "And medicine, law, business, engineering, these are noble pursuits and necessary to sustain life. But poetry, beauty, romance, love, these are what we stay alive for..." Recognizing the truth in the remark, every alternate day, the academy's aspiring bibliophiles gather round in the library to pay homage to mankind's common heritage- literature. From George Orwell to Mahashweta Devi, from Dr Ambedkar to Oscar Wilde and Samuel Beckett, the Book Club has witnessed eloquent monologues and thunderous debates. The library invariably reverberates with symphonies of ideas and medleys of opinions. The mosaic of novel and nuanced ideas continuously recreates itself, replacing the drab uniformity of beliefs within the closing walls of our minds and the organization at large.

“In IRIFM, learning is the culture and literature, the new lingua franca. This new culture has spilled over onto every nook and corner of the academy. Frequent sightings can be made of probationers discussing issues as diverse as security, gender, terrorism, caste, free-markets, existentialism, etc. often giving the mess hall vague resemblance of a Parisian salon! This culture of learning brings with it a unique opportunity, one of creating the ultimate crucible out of the IRIFM Book Club; a crucible for the new entrants to the service; a crucible in which their abundant intelligence can be forged into wholesome Wisdom. The initiative has the potential to shape up the probationers as not only well-rounded and well-read civil servants but also morally and intellectually autonomous beings who are well-equipped to sail through the vicissitudes of public life in Indian Railways.

Be it the Dickensian narrative of inequality or Tagore’s reflections on imperialism, literature has its own way of holding up a mirror to the society. Caution needs to be exercised that the Book Club may not degenerate into an end unto itself. Our readings and discussions should catapult us towards action and change. From readers, we ought to graduate into reformers.

As H.W. Longfellow says,

Neither happiness, and not sorrow
Is our destined end or way,
But to Act that each tomorrow,
Finds us farther than today.

We must remember that Goddess Athena straddles not only the domain of wisdom, but also of courage and war. Thus, the Athenian air that wafts through the campus, though may be loaded with wisdom, has the capacity to unshackle the courageous warrior dormant in each one of us. It is imperative that we supplement intellectual acumen with incessant action to affect positive change in the Railways and the society at large. It is imperative that we, as intellectual warriors strive to uphold Dharma in our respective Kurukshetras.

IRIFM WALI CHAI!

BY NISHANT SHARMA, IRAS(P) 2017

IRIFM! The very word (even though it is not a word but an emotion) brings a sense of pride and joy to all IRAS officers. I am personally attracted by the small but beautiful campus, the unique architecture, the swanky rooms and the brand new library with wonderful books hand-picked by the Director. However, there is another thing that pulls me like a magnet, not within IRIFM, but nearby – Blue Sea Tea and Snacks.

The most crowded place in all Secunderabad is the railway station. But a close second would be this small tea shop in Regimental Bazaar, walking distance from the station. It is called 'Blue Sea' but can easily be renamed 'Sea of Humanity' which would be more apt because it is always crowded with people sitting, standing and also waiting in cars, being served tea with snacks. I'm not a tea drinker in my daily life, but when I took my first sip of Irani Chai or Dum ki Chai at Blue Sea, I realised it was something different and I instantly became a fan. It is different from the normal chai as the milk and tea leaves are boiled separately for long periods and then poured together in the cup which gives it an especially creamy texture.

Apart from tea, the other big attraction for me are the Osmania biscuits – golden ghee biscuits which have solved one of the big problems of humanity. Normally, after having a sweet biscuit we are unable to taste the sweetness in tea but Osmania biscuits solve this problem by having a salty after-taste. Named after the seventh Nizam of Hyderabad who was very fond of these, they are extremely soft with a balanced taste of butter. The prices of this place seem like they are of the Nizam's era even though the shop is not that old. If one goes there in a big group, I would recommend trying the entire menu because it is so cheap and everything is so good! Some unique items that deserve special mention are Lukmi (square shaped samosa), Dilkhush and Dilpasand (poetically named stuffed sweet breads with Tutti-Frutti or coconut filling), all types of puffs and buns.

I try to go there alone and have a couple of cups of tea with biscuits and snacks at least twice a week when I'm in IRIFM. The atmosphere is chaotic with so many tea cups and food items moving around. The tea comes in a cup and saucer with some tea always spilled onto the saucer. I sometimes feel they do it deliberately, but I invariably drink the tea from the saucer as well. I love the fact that so many people have stopped here pausing their lives, for slowly savoring a cup of tea. Going as groups with batch-mates has its own charm, with selfies and conversation adding to the experience. Never has there been an instance of someone not loving the tea (even coffee) here. Once a batch-mate who was on a keto diet agreed to come along but won't eat or drink anything. Long story short, she ended up preponing her cheat day and not only had two cups of tea, samosa and biscuits but also got biscuits packed for later.

Like everything, Covid-19 has impacted this place too and I hope they open soon with social distancing because even queuing up for this will be worth it. No matter what I say, the proof of the pudding is in the eating. So, go there and try it for yourself, as your IRIFM experience won't be complete without it.

IRIFM PROBATIONERS WHILE IN TRAINING



1 YEAR AFTER GETTING INTO THE POSTING



DATA ANALYTICS

BY SHIVASHISH KUMAR, IRAS(P) 2018

Data is the new oil: Talk of E-commerce and you have names like Amazon, Flipkart, even emerging players like PayTM. Is it not surprising that nobody talks of IRCTC, Indian Railways' (IR) ticket booking agency? With an average daily traffic of five to six lakh visitors and a peak transaction volume of thirteen lakh tickets being booked in a single day, imagine the heap of data IRCTC sits on. Then add to it offline tickets, customer feedback forms and other data collection mechanisms and you are bound to talk about smart data analytics.

Although IR is often lamented as monolithic or lethargic but it is an agency of such epic proportions that it makes terms like 'gigantic' and 'enormous' seem small. As the fourth largest rail network and eighth largest employer of the world, IR carries more than twenty-three million passengers and over three billion tonnes of freight on a daily basis. What this means from an operational point of view is a plethora of data. Unfortunately, data carries no mean on its own. Smart data analytics, on the other hand, can help by extracting and combining information from multiple data sources to generate highly accurate, contextual and actionable insights for every use case, from organizational overview to granular specifics. This can help IR drive innovation and optimize its operations. It is time to rope in technology to revive and reinvent the way IR has been functioning.

How can smart data analytics aid IR?

Route planning and efficient operation: Railways in India are commonly blamed for not running on time, a two to four-hour delay being the 'new normal'. Few are able to see that with a setup of more than twenty thousand trains and the complex routes which those trains must traverse, it is easy for things to go out of hand. The sheer volume of operations over IR makes the operational chart just a compilation of calculated guesswork, or age-old methodology at best. Compare this with real-time train and route data presented as an interactive visualization for users (NTES has taken steps in this direction) as well as providing real-time updates about on-route delays/detours and unexpected contingencies that might disrupt the schedule. This holistic view of countrywide train operations can allow for more efficient and accurate route/schedule planning, enabling Indian Railways to optimize operations significantly.

Insights based on operational data can also help identify in-demand routes during different seasons through historical trend analysis which could further assist in managing maximum footfall with minimum strain.

Resource optimization: Resource allocation can be improvised by incorporating smart data analytics into the fold. Easy and interactive formats enabled through data visualization assist decision-makers in determining resource availability and demand through predictive analysis, substantially improving resource management. Data analysis can also help anticipate essential recruitment and training requirements well in advance for ensuring smooth day-to-day as well as long-term operations. Within IR, incidents of touts exploiting the system to unethically book tickets on in-demand trains, wholesale ticketing, and cancellation frauds are not unheard of, nor financial irregularities related to railway contracts and tender. These serve to undermine consumer trust and erode overall profitability. This dynamic can change once smart data analytics platforms are brought into the fold. By enabling access to relevant data combinations extracted from disparate sources in real-time, data analytics platforms can help decision-makers in drawing correlations between different data sets to identify potential irregularities.

Revenue maximization: The quantum of data Indian train passengers generate on a daily basis is enormous, including but not limited to their ticketing details, meal preferences, frequently visited destinations, probable travel periods, etc. This data can be combined with other consumer data to create highly customized packages for frequent travellers. Customer experience can be enhanced through service personalization which in turn may lead to more monetization opportunities and profitability for IR, specially through exploration of collaboration opportunities with other service providers. This will augment the railways' revenue streams.

Efficient maintenance: Employing data analytics into maintenance can help relevant business users keep a track of maintenance schedules real-time and spot any discrepancies or gaps as and when they occur. By accounting for varying wear and tear for various equipment and resources, data analytics can also help in creating more efficient maintenance schedules, thus reducing the workload on maintenance teams and freeing them up for more urgent deployments. Moreover, analytics can – in conjunction with IoT technology – aid in the creation of an accurate and effective disaster avoidance and management framework. This can help minimize the incident rate for train accidents and in enabling much better emergency response in case of a mishap.

Addressing privacy concerns: No talk on data analysis and monetization can be completed without addressing privacy concerns of end users. Railways using their customers' data for whatsoever reason is bound to create fear of surveillance among the customers. With privacy being a fundamental right and customer satisfaction as the ultimate virtue, a two-way trust mechanism has to be inculcated in the process itself. Users must have the right to give consent for data usage and right to forget as well. Roles and responsibilities must be clearly defined and access should be strictly on need basis. Processing of personal data must be done with utmost transparency maintaining a clear log of the workflow. Anonymization of data and generation of metadata must be of priority in any such data usage policy.

Technology has always been a harbinger of change. At a time when Indian Railways are in need of innovation and reinvention, emerging technology of smart data analytics is not just a ray of hope but the writing on the wall. It will help IR achieve the vision of modernization. It will also help the broader goal of a self-reliant and vibrant India catering to the needs of its citizens in the most effective and efficient way possible



GENERAL DIBBA!

BY ABHISEK OSWAL, IRAS(P) 2018

Hello, everyone. My name is General Dibba a.k.a Unreserved Class in railway parlance. Without a doubt each one of you would have seen me jam-packed some time or the other. I stick close to the locomotive and I am also right at the back. Crowded in between are my fellow coaches. My carrying capacity is astronomical for I can accommodate each one who dares to enter in. I may be the most ignored one by the operators, starting from the stage of coupling, but I am certainly the most sought after by all the hundreds of thousands of travelers who do not have reservation.

I may not have ACs, fancy lights, flooring, washrooms or curtains; but what I do have are stories of all flavors and seasons, many with strong emotions. I am a never-ending film in diverse colours. The characters and storyline change but the set remains the same. I have seen Karim chacha catching a quick nap on my floor to ensure that when he alights in his village by a wayside station, he is fresh enough to work on his fields. I have also seen Shanta tai and her mandali boarding me at midnight for their weekend getaway. I have heard Chintu aspire to become a nuclear scientist. I have seen Pramod making business strategies through a noisy journey.



But what is most precious to me is how each journey in my arena results in the thick social barriers of caste and religion getting diluted. Simply put, there is a pure, innocent, hardworking, aspiring, united, and “Jugaadu” Bharat in me.

I understand it is my duty to not just follow my colleague locomotive but also walk a step beyond that. I give life lessons to my occupant-travelers; lessons like life is not a bed of roses and that one has to struggle to get anywhere; sharing is caring; life is a journey and we are all travelers, and so adjust and help each other to reach one’s destination. I strive to connect my country and my countrymen with my limited resources and a simple outlook.

All this may sound general to you. I may even look general. But I guarantee you that your experience with me will be panoramic like our country itself. So, when will you board the General Dibba?

THE OLD ORDER CHANGETH

BY ANUSHA G., IRAS(P) 2018

Hello, everyone!

It is I, the service IRAS. Do not be surprised. I have a voice of my own; and wrinkled skin, wobbly knees, and a toothless smile too. Yes, my end is close at hand. But at ninety years of age I am not complaining.

I was born in the wards where the Acworth Committee met. Apparently the committee found a pressing need to bring me to life, to bring life to the Indian Railways. I took my first breath in 1929 with two parents officers on board. With time I gained weight and size. And just as I started preparing for centennial celebrations, I am to be reincarnated as IRMS(F). I have to be a baby again, go through growing pains, and find my place under the sun.

Is this goodbye time? Or shall we meet again? And suppose we do, would you recognize me? Well, let me just say my final words in peace. This old soul has a few considerations on how things should be after I depart, so lend me your ears.

First, I want the new officers to come from Finance and Accounts background. Like we have technical qualifications in tenders, we should have educational qualification to be eligible to take up the service. Such a step will not only bring more expertise but also have other benefits. For example, people will come to the service by choice and not by coincidence. They will take more interest in their work. There will be little attrition and more certainty among officers in the initial levels. The duration of training could be reduced in the new regime because training would now be more focused on orienting the new entrants to Railways and the multiple railway operations. Specialization in finance and accounts will give a special place to the officers in the service. It will boost their morale, create a sense of belonging to the organization, and open up opportunities for them in their career path.

Secondly, the systems in place should get reformed and transformed. All old practices need a change. The nomenclature and terminologies we use should be renamed. For example, coaching/goods balance sheet should be called Earnings and Remittances statement as debit side indicates earnings of the station and credit side indicates remittances of such earnings to headquarters in various forms. Why should we not use the accounting language that is

understood globally?

We need to have a robust accounting system which is in line with accepted, simplified corporate accounting practices and which can bring transparency to the system. In my receding years I have often wondered why accounting staff of Indian Railways cannot declare quarterly results, why we cannot put forward information for managerial decisions on real time basis, why we have to wait till the end of September or December to know the consolidated actual expenditure for variance analysis and come out with revised estimates and why we cannot do that exercise every month, or why we cannot know the operating ratio of IR on any given day of the year. I think we need supporting accounting software with end to end digitization. Cash generated at every point across India should be known on real time basis. With use of integrated systems, all stations of all Railways should be linked to the core system to produce un-audited results and data to answer my questions.

Thirdly, the training of IRMS(F) professionals needs a change too. As the officers progress in career, management courses from reputed institutions should become more a norm than an exception. At the end, accounting is all about number crunching and analysis which needs to be sharpened with courses like big data analytics and data science. Railways produce enough data which can be monetized without compromising privacy for data led policy making in Government, for social research institutions and for project appraisal within Railways. We should build brand IRIFM with its professionals as project appraisers and reduce dependence on RITES.

Finally, let me come to performance evaluation. Since, IRMS is a product of departmental conflicts, I suggest having a parameter that evaluates inter-departmental coordination at railways level. There should be a mechanism to recognize a star railway and the person who contributed for such coordination should be appreciated. To be specific to IRMS(F), performance evaluation should not be based on clearance of suspense balances alone, but also for bringing in propriety, economy and efficiency in operations.

Enough said, I am tired now. It is time for me to take rest. Do not miss me much; you would see my stride in every step the baby called IRMS(F) takes. I am optimistic about the baby who will certainly grow strong and contribute to the nation in general and the railways in particular. In fact, I have already started adoring the baby that is getting ready to follow in my footsteps. I am certain it will get Indian Railways back on track as the one true lifeline of nation.

A PRIVILEGED QUARANTINE

BY VRUSHANK N.Y., IRAS(P) 2017

As we take a gentle walk across the serene campus replete with greenery, we can have a glimpse of a number of birds of varied colours and sizes. To make things better, IRIFM boasts of a state-of-the-art sports complex, be it the badminton courts, the gymnasium, tennis courts etc., which offer much needed physical and mental rejuvenation. The mess too, was one institution which tried its best to cater to all our needs. However, given our diverse needs, I can't fully say it was a success. Nonetheless, it refused to fail the cravings of our appetite with dishes like the most sought after "Hyderabadi Chicken Biryani". A beautiful campus, world class facilities, support staff eager to fulfill all our demands brings about just one question in our minds which is, what more can we expect from life?

However, a glance through the news shows how the world around us is not all copacetic. The plight of migrant laborers, their dependents suffering a life of penury with no guarantee of a future for their families, cramped up in shelter homes, with many of them lacking even basic amenities, depict the harsh reality of life outside our four walls. Chilling stories like Jamlo Makdam, a 12-year-old girl, who walked 150 kilometers from Telangana to her village in Chhattisgarh but succumbed 14kms short of her village due to exhaustion and dehydration, send shivers down our spine. The pandemic has indirectly hit the poorest strata of society the hardest, putting a question mark on their very survival.

These global events show the fragility of our lives. No matter how scientifically advanced we may claim to be, nature has shown us our place, with its wrath in the form of a microscopic virus. While it was initially believed that it affected the rich and the powerful, given that even world leaders were not spared, the contemporary scenario points to the contrary. The virus has only aggravated the gap between the haves and the have-nots. The unavoidable lockdown measures aimed at containing the spread of the virus have only made things worse for the underprivileged, not to mention the added economic devastation.

And for those fortunate few of us who are blessed enough not to worry about our future in such uncertain times, it becomes pertinent that we spend some time introspecting. It helps open the doors to various queries bothering our minds. Should we people, who had nothing to do with the spread of the virus, be in any ways worried at all? The answer is "Yes". The long term solution to such problems lies in molding and changing our lifestyles and habits. As Mahatma Gandhi had

once famously remarked, "The earth has enough for every man's need, but not enough for any man's greed"

It is time we realize that sustainable consumption habits that this virus has forced upon us need to be continued, because there is a need to overcome the lone islands of prosperity that exist in the midst of a vast ocean of poverty. The bane of inequality needs to be cured through solidarity, frugality, responsibility and most importantly, empathy. History is filled with examples of civilizations coming to their doom when man's greed overpowers his conscience, destroying the delicate balance in nature. The social distancing that we are forced to follow now should transform into mental distancing- a distancing from all the negative emotions like greed, hatred, egoism, anger etc., that are the ultimate cause of all worldly problems.

Nature has taught us a lesson in its own way. Humanity can only survive and remain exuberant if all of whom constitute it, become more conscious beings. Understanding and appreciating the limits of our existence will help us broaden and expand the many possibilities of our lives. Such an existence would not just unite humanity as a whole, but even nudge us closer and closer to Nature itself. The Indian belief of "आत्मवत् सर्वभूतेषु" eulogises the above principle. It is time we took this idea forward by vigorously practicing it in letter and spirit.

We at IRIFM are amongst the fortunate few who get to spend such hard times in the midst of comfort and security. Such a "Privileged Quarantine" gives us ample time for self-introspection and prayer. We would like to offer a deep sense of gratitude to all those frontline workers risking their lives in battling this epidemic. And for all those millions of people suffering either as a direct or indirect consequence of this virus, we pray that their suffering soon comes to an end. I strongly believe that these emotions can greatly enhance the other tangible donations that some of us are undertaking. It is in such challenging times that we can really appreciate and thank for all the things blessed in our lives, all those things that we had previously chosen to overlook.

WILL THE POST-COVID WORLD BE THE SAME?

BY LAKSHMAN KUMAR, IRAS(P) 2018

Abandoned streets, deserted markets, people hesitant to meet other people, hapless migrant workers walking hundreds of miles to their homes, overflowing health centers, people imprisoned in their own homes, economy in the doldrums, factories remaining silent; are the onslaughts of Covid only temporary? It does not seem so. These are mere markers of the larger impending churn in the way the world behaves.

According to the United Nations, 81% of the world's 3.3 billion strong workforce had their places of work fully or partly closed because of the outbreak. The result is the worst economic crisis since 1930s. The aftermath of Covid-19 will be significant, be it human, economic or social. To start with, let us look at the social effects. Already Covid-19 is adversely affecting all strata of society, more so the vulnerable sections like the poor, the disabled and the old. If it not tackled through proper policy interventions, the social crisis created by it may lead to furthering penury, inequality, exclusion, neglect and discrimination. Public expenditure will have to be enhanced significantly for developing comprehensive social protection systems and a large chunk of public money will get diverted to developing a capable and efficient public health infrastructure. All of this may eat into the funds earmarked for other infrastructure development for at least a decade or so. These global events show the fragility of our lives. No matter how scientifically advanced we may claim to be, nature has shown us our place, with its wrath in the form of a microscopic virus. While it was initially believed that it affected the rich and the powerful, given that even world leaders were not spared, the contemporary scenario points to the contrary. The virus has only aggravated the gap between the haves and the have-nots. The unavoidable lockdown measures aimed at containing the spread of the virus have only made things worse for the underprivileged, not to mention the added economic devastation.

The economic costs of the Covid-19 are humongous. According to IMF, the world economy is expected to shrink by 3% in 2020-21. Already, India's \$5 trillion economy dream stands pushed many years forward. Many companies are struggling to stay afloat. To cut costs and to insulate firms from the vulnerabilities of a future epidemic, employers would try to avoid human-workers as far as possible. Robots may replace humans in many labour intensive sectors. Although automation and robotics had already been picking up pace in recent years, Covid-19 has given the drive sudden acceleration. The drive is made easier by the logic that industrial space crunch and social distancing are difficult to go hand in hand. Thus, recession is round the corner which

would naturally result in a sharp spike in crime rates across the globe. The opportunity cost for taking to crime will dip too low. This may make India's demographic dividend prone to turning into demographic disaster

Another casualty will be commercial realty. Several corporations across the world had already assessed how cost-effective and productive 'Work from home (WFH)' was. Post-Covid, WFH may become the norm rather than exception. This will no doubt result in depression in the demand for commercial real estate.

"Stay Home" are the two words that have battered the Travel and Tourism industry. It is the most affected sector due to Covid. Many airlines viz. Thai Airways, Virgin Australia and South African Airways have filed for bankruptcy. Post-Covid too, people are most likely to remain hesitant to undertake international travel for a long time to come. Recovery of the aviation sector looks uncertain in near future given the thin margin on which the airlines operate. In turn, the revival of the tourism industry would take the longest time amongst all sectors. Women are likely to be hit the most by this disruption, the tourism and hospitality sector being highly women-intensive in nature.

We might see a larger sovereign role in the economy post-Covid because that is the only way of pump-priming the economy. Due to disruption in the economy and huge job losses, most countries are likely to turn protectionist so as to provide markets for domestic manufactures and create jobs. A wave of de-globalization and economic-decoupling would sweep the world over. An Indian reflection of this can be seen in "Atmanirbhar Bharat" and "Vocal for Local" calls made by the PM. Let us not forget that the unprecedented pace at which Covid spread around the world was primarily due to the inter-connectedness of the global economies and supply chains. Post-covid, inter-connectedness would be severely curtailed to avoid any future epidemic to turn into a pandemic in a short span of time.

If we talk about the recovery from the Covid slump, it may be overly optimistic to assume that we can have a V-shaped recovery of economy like all other after-slump recoveries in the past. Howsoever stringent the lockdown might have been, we have already seen that it has only slowed down the rate of infection and not stopped it. The moment there are relaxations, the numbers may shoot in the next few days. In these times of uncertainty, the only thing that is certain is that the Covid pandemic is not going to stop anytime soon. A V-shaped recovery of the economy is not possible unless a Covid-vaccine is freely available in the markets

The post-Covid world will see a significant threat to the existing world order. When we talk of covid-19 and world order in conjunction, it is imperative to start the discussion with China. China has been as opaque as possible about the Covid data right since November 2019. It is widely reported in the print media that China was aware of the highly contagious nature of the Coronavirus and still it made every attempt to suppress information related to it. It even locked down internally to such a level that average domestic traffic fell below 5% in Beijing in February, 2020. But it allowed the virus to spread across the globe via international flights. The World Health Organization (WHO) is being pressured for investigation whether it was hand in glove with China for its opaqueness in the early Covid days. Because of such irresponsible behaviour, China will pay a heavy price in the form of its political capital and it would be isolated in the global community. Moreover, with WHO's credibility at stake, we can expect a change in the governance model of WHO to make it more responsible, representative and transparent in the future.

Clearly we shall see a shift in the world as we know it, from a bipolar one to multipolar one. China's demand for concessions in exchange for urgently needed equipment- often of inferior quality- and its continuing refusal to permit a full investigation into the coronavirus' origin make China not so appealing an option for nations caught between the superpowers; the same way as President Trump's call for "America First" in the fight with the Covid will make many countries too wary to depend on Washington. That the world's largest economy, a place to many top universities and researchers, was unable to secure sufficient number of testing kits and medical equipment to tackle the virus, resulting in a death toll of around a lakh, will surely undermine the confidence which the world had in the US during pre-Covid times

"Interestingly, at a time when US and China were losing ground, India was gaining traction as one of the poles of this multipolar world. India spent close to \$16 million (half of that in the African continent) on medicines and testing equipment targeting about ninety nations fighting the Coronavirus. It became the "Pharmacy of the world" by supplying HydroxyChloroquine(HCQ) tablets to more than a hundred countries across globe out of which 67 countries were given HCQ as grant. While doing so India ensured that its domestic supplies were not interrupted. Having played the role of a true leader in these testing times, India is now set to carve a niche as one of the most reliable players in post-Covid geopolitics. India would also enjoy greater bargaining leeway with both the US and China post-Covid.

The churn in world order may not be limited to it becoming multipolar. The Covid aftermath is likely to be multifarious. The White House's rhetoric of calling Corona as Chinese virus and America's direct threat to China to pay the price for damaging the US economy has raised the temperature of global geopolitics. US-China tensions is set to attain new highs post-Covid. The cut in public spending would fuel civil unrest in many parts of the globe. Weaker governments and battered economies will pave way for emboldened extremists and rebels trying to capture the seat of power.

If all this was not bad enough, post-Covid, autocracy is poised to resurge in a big way. According to the UN's Centre for Civil and Political Rights, 84 countries have declared a state of emergency since the pandemic began. For example, Hungary and Serbia have announced indefinite emergency to tackle covid-19. In many countries these emergency powers are being misused to suppress dissent. The gravest concern therefore is: will the emergency powers be ever relinquished by "the powers that be"?

"Still, there are silver-linings. Public healthcare infrastructure would see significant investments to make it more inclusive, modern and efficient. Significant increase is expected in R&D expenditure for vaccines for diseases that routinely devastate the third world even if the aim behind the vaccines is to save the developed world.

Use of automation and robotics will reduce the costs for businesses helping in the economic recovery sooner. 'Work from home' and virtual meetings would help ease road traffic in metropolises and reduce Greenhouse gas emissions. Telemedicine and tele-education will see a huge surge addressing the accessibility and affordability issues for the marginalized communities.

India would be opportune to attract companies planning to shift their base out of China due to China's repeated history of epidemics and the resultant global isolation. In fact, the process has already started. German footwear brand, Von Wellx, is shifting its complete production from china to Agra in India and Apple has planned to shift 20% of its production capacity to India from China. Many more companies are in talks with the Indian government. This will be a huge boost to 'Make in India' and job creation in our country.

Covid sufferings will come to an end without an iota of doubt. But we may have to live with it for the foreseeable future until a vaccine is developed. Social distancing and adequate sanitation will become a norm. We will be distant but we shall stand together. We should also be prepared to fight fear and ignorance as tactfully and aggressively as we are fighting the coronavirus. Many pandemics which ravaged the world earlier have seen humanity emerge triumphant. So will it be post-Covid. The undeniable truth is that the world will be a lot different from its pre-Covid avatar.



The staff that made the lock-down seem easy

LOVE IN THE TIME OF CORONA

BY PRANSHU SHARMA, IRAS(P) 2017

He struts about the mighty globe unseen,
Unheard, unknown, this Stranger unclean.
Crim and pompous as the medieval guillotine,
Sucks out man's breath but like a modern machine.
Soon the world's stamina starts away to wean,
In a frantic search for a sound vaccine.
While He smites His victims as an affair routine,
In numbers far too vulgar and obscene!

Billions socially distanced, day and night,
Bourgeoisie, proletariat, and all alike.
With men stranded, their livelihoods take a hike,
Much like in the ghettos of the Third Reich?
Succumbing to Him and all His might,
How many more heads shall see the spike?
Lonesome, dejected and much weary of dislike,
Even the city streets decide to go on a strike.

Doom and gloom, with their loudest shout,
Synchronise man's inside with his out.
Caged and fettered by this Stranger lout,
We brim with existential angst and doubt.
Yet, pray We for a Dawn, with hearts so devout,
A Dawn when up green shoots would sprout.
When able we would be to snatch back our clout,
And walk out in dignity again, up and about.

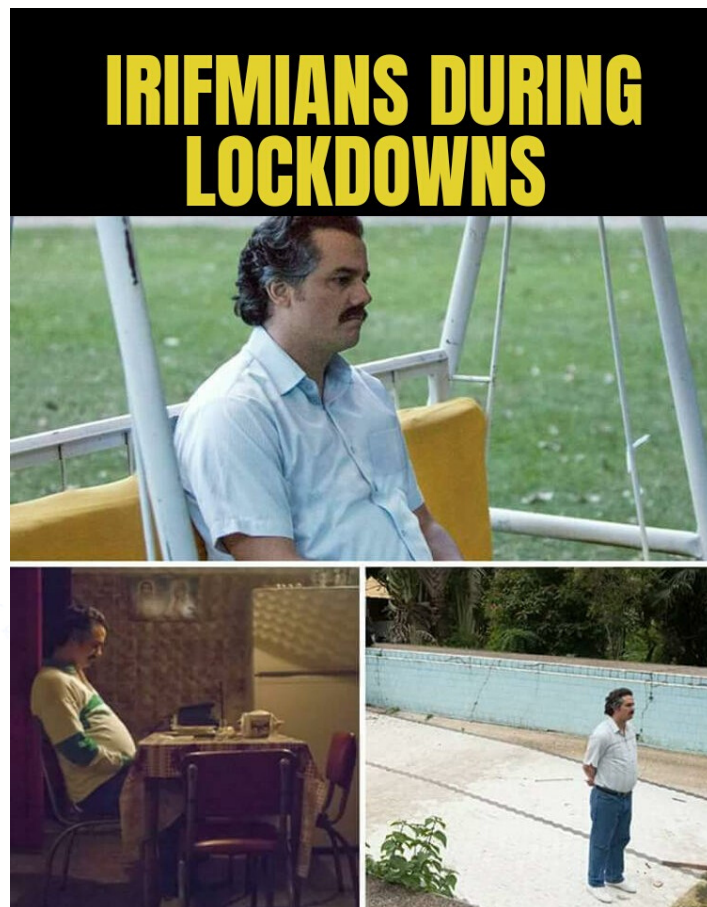
All but me, for if my luck even slightly cared,
And of the Stranger's grace, my body is spared,
This rabid kid named Cupid, I am scared,
Has my virgin soul locked-down, ensnared.
With a broken bow, a crooked arrow he aired,
And where it landed, this kid scarcely cared.
The arrow is shot and cold air apart it rips,
Alas! But in the dark of a total eclipse!

Think this kid has his brains in his hips?
But often the sadist deliberately slips.
Pierced the arrow my soul callously bared,
Leaving behind all my judgement impaired.
The bloodless arrow pointed straight to your lips,
Lips, that now hold my heart in their grips.
A heart arrhythmic, that flips and trips,
Now beats lesser, than the beats it skips.

The Stranger as white as death age-old,
And this kid is darker than any chunk of coal.
The perfect co-conspirators now on a roll,
Keenly fixated on a notorious end-goal.
This Stranger that spells danger as a whole,
While causes an exorbitantly high death toll,
And this rabid kid named Cupid, this troll,
Has practically mangled this poor Man's soul.

The two are, but parts of a single rhyme,
Synthesised by the same wretched enzyme.
One takes away thousands of lives sublime,
Without demanding even a solitary dime.
While the other only made me his target prime,
And served me death for the thousandth time.
So, now alone I marinate here in quarantine.
Praises be upon these partners in crime!

Pray! That Dawn comes sooner than late,
With joy when all Men shall congregate.
To celebrate a freedom newfound and great,
As the Stranger shall be compelled to hibernate.
Not me, I'd still be quarantined at any rate,
In Your kingdom Love, in Your towers desolate.
Oh! Curses be upon this kid, this ingrate,
Condemned I am to bide an eternity in Your wait.



दस्तूर-ए-जहां

BY ARUN BALGOTRA, IRAS(P) 2017

तौर-तरीके वाले मुलाज़िम को कैसे बताएँ,
जिसका पेट भूखा हो उसे निगलना माफ़ होता है।

अक्सर वही माफ़ी माँगता नज़र आता है,
जिस शख्स का दामन एकदम साफ़ होता है।

मेरा आज उसे समझाने में नाकाम होता है,
जिस शख्स का अतीत मेरे खिलाफ़ होता है।

मुंसिफ़ नहीं इन्सान होना काफी है समझने के लिये,
कि कातिल को छोड़ना भी कई बार इन्साफ़ होता है।

फर्श पे किसी को सोता देख उसे नींद नहीं आती,
जिसने एक उम्र के बाद पाया लिहाफ़ होता है।

गोरे चेहरे के उस मुरीद को कौन बताए,
मैली रज़ाई का भी अक्सर सफ़ेद ग़िलाफ़ होता है।

आ नो भद्राः क्रतवो यन्तु विश्वतः

Let noble thoughts come to us from all
directions.

Rig Veda 1.89. 1

FREE MARKET: A FRIEND OF THE POOR?

BY AKSHAY SHARMA, IRAS(P) 2017

There is an old debate in economics, which is still relevant today. It is about the manner and approach to economic development in a country. Both the approaches, capitalism and socialism appear to be divergent models of economic planning. Today, after seventy years of planned development, Indian economy has become world's fifth largest economy. Now, India stands at the crossroads. What future path should India take? Which path is best for its poor in people in general, and poor in particular? What can India learn from the economic growth trajectory of world's major economies? Are both the approaches of economic development reconcilable or exist as parallel roads that never meet?

The capitalist approach, based on free market lays emphasis on 'growth'. It is considered as the most appropriate method to raise the level of efficiency and productivity in an economy. The second approach of socialism is based on idea of 'development from below'. It lays emphasis on the role of state in meeting the needs of the population. It argues for equitable distribution of income and wealth. So far, India has adopted a mixed economy model. However, over the past few years, India has witnessed an increasing tilt in the favour of a free market economy. This essay seeks to examine whether there lies a trade-off between 'growth' and 'equity'.

In a free market economy, the factors of production are owned and controlled by private entrepreneurs. People are free to set up their own businesses as per their choice. It provides freedom to invest or divest the capital. It enables the flexibility to produce any kind of goods or services. It also provides the freedom to enter or exit the market any time one wants. It results in greater competition and optimum utilization of resources. It thereby fulfils the objective of efficiency and productivity.

Various studies led by World Bank and IMF provide conclusive evidence that increasing role of private sector in an economy results in higher levels of growth, employment, exports and improvement in the standards of living of population. The advocates of free market also explain the 'trickle down mechanism', wherein the fruits of growth reach the lowest socio-economic strata of population. This happens in form of rise in jobs due to greater economic activity, higher per-capita income, and rise in start-ups, innovations, higher tax collections

and thus greater fiscal capacity to Government to carry out poverty eradication measures. Thus, they say market is friend of the poor.

A classic comparative study of the virtues of capitalism and socialism can be the undertaken in the choice of economic model adopted by the two Koreas. While North Korea adopted the model of state-controlled socialism, its southern counterpart showed faith in the free market economy. Today, the average income of bottom twenty-five percent population in South Korea is higher than the average income of top twenty-five percent population in North Korea (ADB Report, 2015). Similarly, the economic development of various major economies of the region such as Japan, Singapore, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and later China, is attributable to early adoption of market economy reforms. India adopted its first set of LPG reforms in 1991. Since then, India has broken the range of Hindu rate of growth.

However, proponents of the socialist model advocate that capitalism gives rise to its own new set of problems. It includes income inequality, concentration of wealth in the hands of few, profiteering, greed, money-minting, and others. They deny the efficacy of 'Trickle-down effect' and instead argue that capitalism takes the shape of 'crony capitalism'. Thus, they treat capitalism as an enemy of the poor. They support that state should take care of the various needs of people such as provision of affordable healthcare, education, subsidised food, fuel, fertilizers, houses, means of transport and communication.

However, all this requires two prerequisites. Firstly, it requires huge financial resources with the state. Without fiscal capacity, a state cannot carry out all these functions. Excessive public expenditure and subsidy burden may result in higher fiscal deficit, rising interest and inflation rates, poor currency exchange rate, crowding-out effect of private investments, thus adversely affecting savings, investments and business in the country. Secondly, unless and until the leadership and bureaucracy are very ethical, higher public expenditure and government intervention in market results in huge amount of corruption, leakages, inefficiencies, politicisation of commercial enterprises and poor organisational culture. It also results in unsustainable populist economic policy measures for running government enterprises, such as irrational overtime pays to staff. Other failures include, canalisation of urea imports through government designated agencies (Source: Economic Survey 2015-16), inadequate public health infrastructure, operational inefficiency of state owned electricity companies (CAG Report 2012), mounting losses of various central and state PSUs.

Let us now discuss some specific cases of excessive government intervention in the markets and how it has unfavourably affected the economy. The APMC laws have created distortions in the agri-markets and deprived the farmers of the country of remunerative prices. APMC system is also responsible for driving up the food inflation in the country. Similarly, the complexity created by archaic and multiple labour laws have hampered the development of the manufacturing sector of the economy. Firstly, it creates difficulties in setting up new manufacturing businesses. Secondly, it prevents enterprises to increase their size and create new jobs, as more draconian provisions are applicable for large-scale enterprises. Lastly, and most importantly, it has been counter-productive to the welfare motive of workforce as it has led to higher levels of unemployment and informalisation in economy. Thus, over-regulation of market has proven to be an enemy of the poor in India.

Economic Survey 2019-20 provides a comparative analysis of the performance of Public sector Banks vis-à-vis Private sector Banks. It states that even though Priority sector lending (PSL) norms laid down by RBI are equally applicable to both the types of banks, the NPA levels of Public sector banks are much higher than their private counterparts. It points out that excessive government intervention and poor credit appraisal mechanisms in Public sector banks have resulted in high NPA burden upon public sector banks. Similarly, in another chapter on privatisation of PSUs, the Economic Survey points that privatised CPSEs perform better post-privatisation than their peers in terms of net worth, net profit, return on assets and return on equity. NITI Aayog in its various reports has also pushed in favour of aggressive disinvestment of CPSEs, in order to unlock their hidden potential.

Ideally, the most successful economic system would be the one which maximizes the benefits of both capitalism and socialism. This can preferably be done on the lines of Keynesian economic model. This model has advocated a 'managed market economy' approach, wherein predominantly private sector runs the market, but with an active role of government intervention in difficult times. It lays emphasis on sound government regulatory frameworks and independent regulatory institutions. Keynes also advocated the use of fiscal and monetary policies by government to mitigate the adverse effects of economic recession and depression.

Apart from the regulatory function, government may use its fiscal space in running a few strategic sector enterprises, provision of basic healthcare and education facilities to the poor. International best practices such as UK's model of public health care and German model of free quality public education may be adopted for the welfare of vulnerable sections of society.

Other than these basic functions, markets should be allowed to operate in a free manner.

In his Independence Day, 2019 speech, our Prime Minister highlighted that only when wealth is created, will the wealth be distributed. Therefore, a feeling of suspicion towards wealth creators is not right. India's aspiration to become a \$5 trillion economy depends upon strengthening the invisible hands of markets together with the hand of trust that can support markets. It will enable India to avail the opportunity of demographic dividend and bring the people out of poverty. Time is ripe to break the curse of 'stigmatised capitalism' and enable the market to act as the friend of the poor.

Meanwhile...



ANNIHILATION OF CASTE

BY ALOK SINGH, IRAS(P) 2018

When a sip of water was taken by Bhimrao Ambedkar on 20th March 1927 from Mahad's Chavadar Tank in what was then the Bombay State, the abiding thirst for dignity among millions of India's subjugated masses may not have been quenched. But surely on that day the parched moral earth of our country was moistened to its core. After all, with the seemingly peaceable gesture Ambedkar had broken a unique Bastille of inhumanity that we know as untouchability. This event would go on to lay the foundation of his 'Annihilation of Caste'.

Annihilation of Caste was a speech prepared by Ambedkar to deliver it in a session by Jat-Pat Todak Mandal (Forum for breakup of Caste) in 1936 at Lahore. However, this speech was never delivered owing to the objections of the Reception committee who found the content of the speech "unbearable". The Mandal realized that Ambedkar intended to use its forum not only to criticize caste but to denounce Hinduism itself. Undefeated, Ambedkar printed and sold copies of the speech which to many in India is more thought provoking, chain unshackling than the Communist Manifesto would be to the workers of the world; more unifying too.

The speech, when published, started a vigorous debate on the issues of Caste and untouchability. Ambedkar compared Hindu society with a multi-storeyed building having no staircase and no entrance. Everyone has to die in the same storey that they were born in. He differentiated between the subjugation felt by masses in a capitalist system from the one faced by masses in the Hindu society. According to him, in a capitalist system, there is a mere division of labour but in a Hindu society, there is not only a division of labour but also of labourers. This graded inequality has converted Hindu Society into silos with no intermingling and absence of any meaningful point of contact.

In his writings, Ambedkar showcases as to how Caste system is not unique to India. In order to highlight this, he quotes an example from Ancient Rome. When Kingship was abolished, the kingly power or imperium was divided and transferred to the institutions of Consul (Secular power of King) and Pontifex Maximus (Religious Power of King). These were ruled by Patricians, Descendants of Romulus (mythical founder of Rome) and thus, considered upper class. Rest of the masses constituted Plebeians and Slaves, the lower class. This distribution was strictly on the basis of birth. It was seen that Patricians used to give

occasional concessions to Plebeians but retained final authority on almost every important aspect of the masses' lives. Ambedkar also compared the 'Tribunes', which were exclusively held by Patricians, to the Khap Panchayats having Caste Hindus as their members and looking over the protection of rights of Plebeians. This marred off the representation of the oppressed sections in both the cases.

Nearer home, Ambedkar observed that the institution of caste has seeped in to other religions like Sikhism and Islam. However, he differentiated between the caste system in Hinduism with others. According to him, caste in Hinduism flows out of religion and has scriptural sanction whereas caste in other religions is merely a way of survival. Also, if a Hindu breaks caste he is excommunicated from the caste which is not true for other religions.

Ambedkar blamed the Chaturvarnashrama and the caste system for turning a blind eye towards tribals. He said that the narrow view taken by caste Hindus has not allowed the tribals to reform themselves in to good citizens, they have not got medical aid, their children have not got education and most of it is because the feeling of kith and kin has not developed among them due to the caste system.

With the suppression of masses socially, politically and economically, Ambedkar wonders as to why a social revolution in India has never taken place. He comes to a conclusion that lower castes of Hindus were never allowed to bear arms. They had no education to analyze the true nature of this subjugation. They were divided amongst themselves. The idea of Brahminism was fixated in the minds of lower castes too, who took a certain degree of pride and solace in the fact that they are above some other castes in social hierarchy.

Can all the castes not be brought on the same pedestal, discarding hierarchy and thus, eradicating the ill effects of caste? Would that not maintain the social order of the society while at the same time ensuring that no one is discriminated against? The answer is NO according to Ambedkar. He was of the view that caste system in the Hindu society has been perpetuating slavery. Castes have created a state of society in which some men are forced to accept from others the purpose in their lives, thus, subjugating people to slavery, although not in legal sense. The artificial differentiation of the masses on the lines of caste system has disallowed any ties to develop amongst various castes and hence, undermined the sense of fraternity in the country. Ambedkar calls India a "collection of castes".

Additionally, according to Ambedkar, democracy is an associated living of conjoint communicated experience. It requires the natural flow and exchange of ideas, values, practices, knowledge and energies between and across the groups. He calls this phenomenon as "Social Endosmosis". The continued presence of caste is a hindrance to the development of such social endosmotic relationship, resulting in development of democracy in the country just as a top dressing. As a result of this, Ambedkar calls for annihilation of caste system.

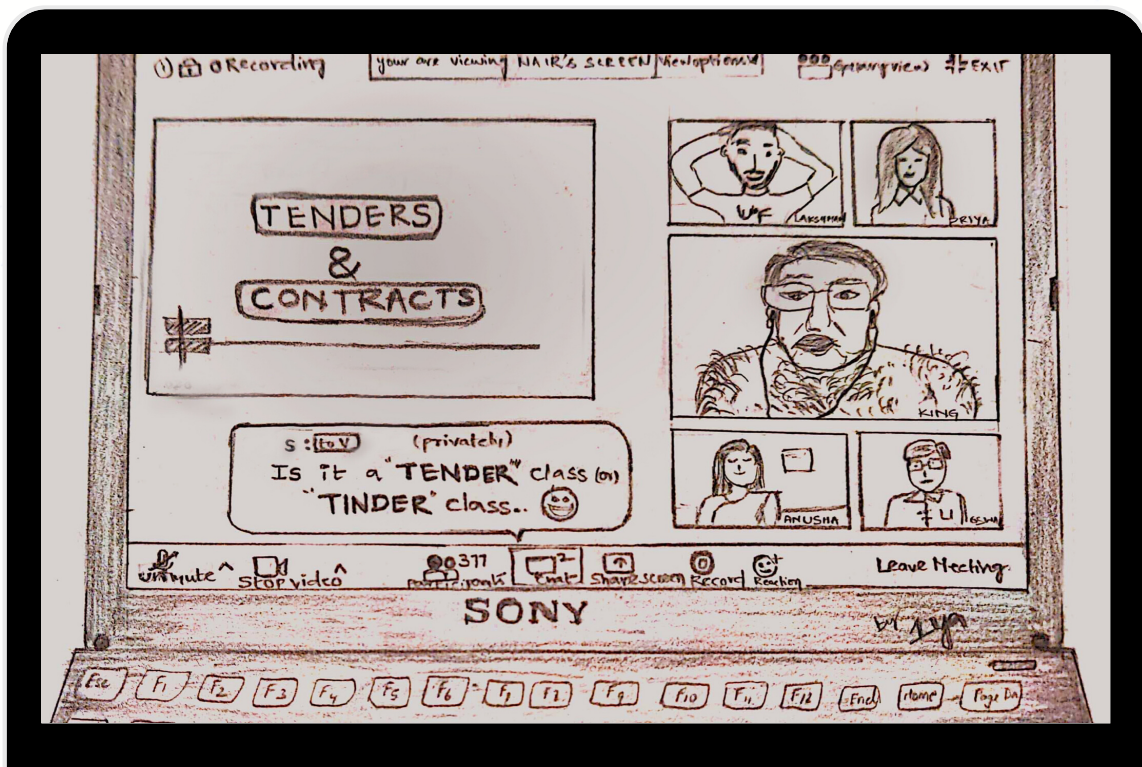
How was a centuries old practice to go? According to Ambedkar, if untouchability and caste system have to be eradicated, the root cause, their religious sanctity has to be attacked. He, thus, was of the view that the belief in shastras needs to be destroyed. He said –"Make every man and woman free from the thralldom of the shastras, cleanse their minds of the pernicious notions founded on the shastras, and he or she will inter-dine and intermarry, without your telling him or her to do so." He backed this view by quoting the examples of Buddha and Guru Nanak, who worked in the same direction.

Interestingly, though Ambedkar criticized Hinduism on the grounds of caste, he was not against Hinduism or for that matter, religion as an idea. In fact, he was of the view that religion is an important foundation of the society and the legitimacy of a civil government flows out of it. However, he attached a caveat that the religion should be based on ideals and principles rather than mere rules and rituals. Hence, Ambedkar envisioned a religion which is democratized while at the same time regulated. A religion which is not sacrosanct and decadent. A religion which is acceptable of change and egalitarian for all.

Eighty-four years after the publication of 'Annihilation of caste', have things changed? Has the idea of caste vanished from the mind of a Hindu? The answer to these questions can be found in the latest NCRB report. According to this report, crime against Dalits have risen by 25% in the last decade. The rate of pending police investigation has risen by 99% and the cases pending in the judicial system have increased by 50%. If this does not paint a picture gloomy enough, then the fact that only 5% of the marriages in India are inter caste marriages, that too mostly within the same caste hierarchal level, will make things clearer. The fact that caste hierarchy still remains is an open secret. Occasionally, it may be glossed over in the limelight of urbanization, but soon it emerges from the insignificant columns of dailies as news of killings of hapless young men and women who dared to dream beyond the cocoon of caste.

Is there a way out of this quagmire? The answer may not be simple. Who knows if a day might come when by creating awareness amongst the upcoming generation on the nature of caste, its inhumane, anti-democratic, anti-growth way, by calling out elements, books or people that stand up for caste hierarchy, public administration may actually create a new India. For that to happen, though, the administration should take upon itself to ensure that any overt or covert act of casteism should not go unpunished and that speedy trials in cases of practice of untouchability and violence against Dalits should be taken up in a prompt manner. Equally, the youth of this great nation will have to adopt Ambedkar's slogan of 'Educate, agitate and organize' in order to fulfill the ultimate dream for India, 'One man. One value. One vote'.

Training in the times of Corona..



I CHOOSE TO BE INDIA

BY HEMANT SINGH, IRAS(P) 2018

For every decision we make in life there is a cause or a reason that prompts our action. To understand my own reason and motive behind joining the Government, I analyzed the meaning of "State/Government". At the same time, I wanted to know myself. "Who am I?" famously asked by the existentialist philosopher, leads to Sartre answering: "You are not what you are, but you are what you can be". This quote intrigued me, as it emphasizes that to know who I am, I need to focus on who or what I can be.

I have come to see that if I figure out what I want to be, I can also decide what kind of a job I should choose to do in life. Whatever I choose, I need to keep in mind that I will be giving more than half of my life to this job. Therefore, it is imperative to understand the motive behind this major choice in life. This search for my motive led to me to search for the meaning of "State or Government".

I believe that ideally, the State/Government is the most inclusive entity. It belongs to every citizen. It is the fountainhead of ideals like equality, liberty, fraternity. It never discriminates but only pursues, relentlessly, the welfare of all its citizens. I also realize that the current state of affairs in my country is far from these lofty ideals. Still, the very fact that the state/government is not a static entity, rather a dynamic one, fills me with hope. Like any individual, the state too evolves, improves, and progresses. This dynamic characteristic interests me. To realize that I can become an inclusive individual, treating everyone with equality, enjoying my liberty and respecting those around me to enjoy theirs, is exhilarating. Just like the State/Government, I too can evolve and progress. This is the biggest reason for me to join the Government, so that both of us can advance and evolve into the best versions of ourselves. I have always wanted to blend my identity with the most inclusive and progressive identity I can imagine, that of the State. Devoting my time here to be a part of something bigger than myself, I can proudly say, I am what I am because I choose to be this. I choose to be the State. I choose to be India!

SAVE THE LAST DANCE FOR ME!

BY SOFIA GUPTA, IRAS(P) 2017

Dance has been an integral part of all cultures across time and space, beginning with pre-history, when dance was depicted on the rock walls. It is enfolded in the DNA of every infant who invents movements in the joyful response to rhythm and music. There were many efforts made by Christian, European and American colonists over 500 years to eradicate indigenous dance traditions, but still dancing continues wherever humans reside.

Dance is everywhere. Everything living has rhythm in it, for us, it is the blood that dances in our veins. Babies respond to music with dance. Our brain records each neuromuscular coordination that it executes and remembers it as pain or pleasure and then decides to execute that movement again or not. Each repetition of a movement defines the avenues along which future attention and energy flow. Every movement made or remembered shapes how an organism grows. An arm develops into an arm by virtue of the movements it makes. Dancing is thus a means of participating in this rhythm of bodily-becoming.

How can we explain this omnipresence of dance? Dance provides some advantages of entertainment, exercise, artistic expression, etc. which may be desirable. But they are not absolutely essential for human survival. Also, they can be provided by other activities as well. Another explanation can be that Dance helps in strengthening social bonds beyond familial ties but this was also eventually replaced by other forms of social bonding like language, religion, etc. Dance and music could practically be removed from our lives without affecting it in any way unlike language. So, why does it continue to exist?

Research says that we have survived as a species because of our ability to adapt to internal and external rhythmic movements. Our ability to synchronize and imitate helped in the mobilization of large groups which provided us the ability to deal with tough external dangers like predators. This might have led to the development of dance, because dance in its most basic form is the ability to synchronize your bodily movement with a beat or even with other people. This realization will also help us understand the next topic.

How did humans develop the ability to dance? Humans have the ability to notice bodily movements, recreate them, remember and share them. We do this by using mirror neurons.

Mirror neurons get fired when they notice a movement. Then they recreate the pattern of neuromuscular coordination needed to make that movement. Thus, we are capable of recreating the movement of others. The mirror neurons are the reason why we are able to fathom others' points of views and empathize with them. That's how we have attained a full-fledged culture. This is the origin of "kinesthetic empathy", the idea that shared movement provides the neural basis for empathy and compassion between people.

Also, not just shared movement but producing music together is also an integral part of human culture everywhere. Let's dwell upon the relation between dance and music. The response of babies to music with movement is the best example of the relation between music and dance. We read emotion in music the same way we read emotion in human movement. This is probably because both developed together. We move to music because it has been hard-wired into us through many, many years. Originally, there wouldn't have been any music without movement. Movement provided the basis for music and music provided the basis for movement. When we play music, the auditory cortex gets activated. But along with this, the motor areas are also activated which make us respond to sound with movement. In fact, in many cultures, music, singing and dance have no clear divisions.

However, can dance still exist without music? Let us explore what new forms dance has taken in contemporary times. Today people have started dancing to poetry as well. There are some ballets which have a silent part to them. This is generally used to prove a point, convey a particular feeling and sometimes to draw attention. Sometimes, dancers also create their own music, e.g. tap dancers, tarantella where dancers use tambourines while dancing. Another example is of dancers with impaired hearing. They dance to beats rather than wholesome music. They also learn to memorize the beats and then dance through memory. Humans also express their feelings through dance without music. Hopping and jumping when feeling happy is a common sight.

Why do I like to dance? I like to dance because it leads to immense self-confidence, and gives me the hope that everything is possible. When your movement coordinates with the music perfectly in terms of beat, intensity and emotion, it creates a whole another level of happiness which can only be experienced and not explained verbally. It helps one to feel comfortable in their own skin. Dance improves spatial awareness, helps people learn to share their space with others and makes people more accommodative. In the words of a great Canadian dancer "It is a realm of self-acceptance and acceptance of others. It is a world of kindness. Rather than thinking and categorizing, it is a place where one can be governed by feeling". So, dance like nobody's watching. Even if you trip, just pull yourself together and turn it into dance.

HILARITY BY SEDHU AND ANUSHA

An IRAS probationer walks into ICAI...

CA: Bhai, tumne debit, credit seekha kya?

IRAS: Sirf debit, credit nahin, Minus debit aur Minus credit bhi.

IRAS: Bhai, I finally made a balance sheet.

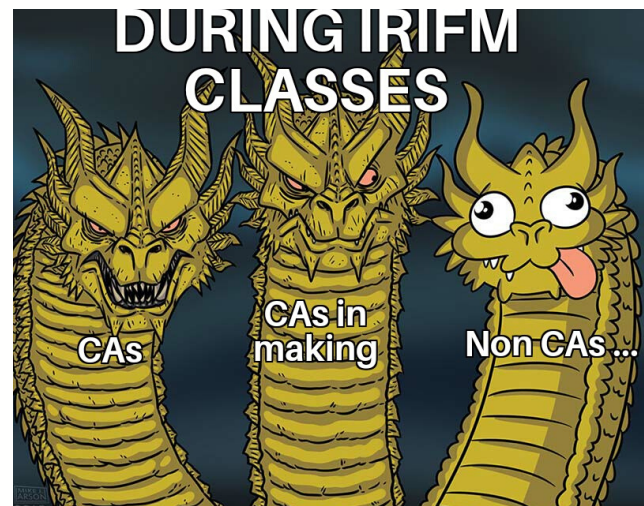
CA: Arey wah! Balance sheet tally ho gayi kya?

IRAS: Kaiku tally? Agar debit aur credit mein difference hai toh balance mein dikha ke close kar dene ka.

CA: Balance in Balance Sheet? Ouch.

CA: Bhai, train ka depreciation rate kitna hai? SLM ya WDV?

IRAS: Kaiku SLM, WDV? Surplus hai toh depreciation, nahin toh nahin.



REVERBERATIONS



IRAS 2017 probationers at IRIFM in January 2020



International Women's Day at IRIFM in March 2020 in the presence of FC, Ms. Manjula Rangarajan



IRIFM- a long cherished dream

REVERBERATIONS



IRAS 2018 probationers after performing a street play on Women's Day



Candles lit at the institute in solidarity with Corona Warriors



Probationers' Holi



Zoom classes under the lockdown



Video Conference in progress

IRIFM- a long cherished dream



