

भारतीय विज्ञान शिक्षा एवं अनुसंधान संस्थान, पुणे INDIAN INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE EDUCATION AND RESEARCH (IISER), PUNE

Dr.Homi Bhabha Road Pune 411008

<u>पछताछ</u> /ENQUIRY

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Challenges in problem-driven research



Dr.Bejoy K Thomas is an Associate Professor in Humanities and Social Sciences at IISER Pune. He is a social scientist who has worked more with natural scientists than his own kind for the most part of his professional career. Contact: bejoy@ iiserpune.ac.in Compared to a decade or two earlier, we see more researchers working in interdisciplinary teams thanks to the increasing attention on issues such as climate change, poverty and water management. There has been an improvement in donor and institutional support for problem-driven research. Liberal arts programs that focus on developing cross-disciplinary skills are not uncommon anymore in India. A whole new set of graduate programs in areas such as 'climate change and development' and 'water science and policy', to name a couple, have emerged, combining physical, biological and social sciences. While these are encouraging trends, some challenges remain.

There are strong disciplinary hierarchies set between natural sciences, social sciences and humanities. Among the natural sciences, applied fields such as engineering are given prominence over fundamental branches of science namely physics, chemistry, biology and mathematics. Among the social sciences, economics and its more applied form, business studies, occupy a higher position because of the use of quantitative techniques as compared to political science, sociology or anthropology. Humanities disciplines including philosophy, literature and linguistics are accorded a lower status.

Some level of interdisciplinary engagement is crucial for problem-driven research, in the form of cross-disciplinary insights drawn from basic disciplines, or full-fledged integrative frameworks. As Popper's oft-cited quote from Conjectures and Refutations goes, "We are not students of some subject matter, but students of problems. And problems may cut right across the borders of any subject matter or discipline". Water resources research is a case in point. Water scarcity presents itself as a climatic or hydrological problem, but the underlying drivers might include land use change, food preferences, labour availability or even regional politics, requiring inputs from economics, sociology and politics in addition to hydrology and climate science. However, basic disciplines cutting across the social and natural sciences tend to fiercely guard their territories. In social sciences, cross-disciplines







I was once a bird that never flew much But managed to reach a decent height The winds had been kind And I had had (some) stamina To many, it may've seemed That I was poised for A longer, nobler, skiey journey ahead I, too, thought the sky was a nice place to be And I was, perhaps, right

Over time, some indolence took over Did I forget what my altitude was? I gradually built a cage around myself And ever so deftly trapped myself in it I suspect strongly that its bars Were invisible to all those around Except, of course, to me The cage soon became a home

This was no ordinary cage, mind you It stank of unambition, of a lack of stamina And of cigarettes, to be sure I should be glad that, at least I did not encourage any other birds around To emulate the mess that was I Didn't they all realize this? Was it known That I was not in possession of even A microdrop of Felix Felicis?

I might well leave the cage someday When, perhaps, the weather is more favorable But I had also gradually clipped my own wings Which brings me to my question Shall I fly – ever – again?



Farhan S Amin

Painkiller

Varna Shenoy

A helpless infant meekly cries, people walk by, too busy to stop. A crippled widower with sunken eyes, waiting and wishing for his next meal. The curse of polio, a permanent limp. Should he beg, or should he steal? With cracked lips and parched throat, he carried the burden left by his wife. She had it easy, a cold night, a prolonged cough and she was gone. Leaving him with this child. How he wished he was the one. He let out a cough, with specks of blood. Not long now he thought with morbid curiosity, what might take him first? His hunger? His disease? Or would it be his thirst? What of his child then? Would it die too? Perhaps someone would finally open their eyes. See this orphaned child, Give it a new life, a safe home. Something more than he could provide. The shrieking child stopped his thoughts.





He dragged himself to his little alley, to his plastic tent "home sweet home". The little milk left, he fed his son. Another cough, he wasn't a coward. He would not wait for death like this, he was just vermin in this cruel world. Living each day, craving the sweet release of death. As he looked at his son, the only reminder of his loving wife, his confusions vanished. He knew what was to be done. A glint of metal and eyes closed, it was done so quickly. He could not bear to see, preferring his happy memories of his only son. All he could here were cries that faded with the wind. Now it was his turn, with breath held and racing heart and with all the courage he could muster, he plunged the knife. An electrifying pain, but he plunged again Repeatedly till his hands gave way. His mind went numb, only picturing his lovely family And everything was black and gone.

Tummy trouble

Megha Dinesh Bhat

Recently, I skipped a period. My belly began to swell overnight. I fear that I will soon be the mother of a gas giant fathered by aloo, chana and rajma. I have become a balloon leaking at both ends. Flatulence has gone from occasional visitor to way of life. All this because of some fetish for foods that are the cycle pumps of the human tummy. My digestive tract and what goes through it controls every aspect of my waking hours, and some of my sleeping ones too. This is an ode to that divine mistress (mister? master?) that has my tongue enslaved and my stomach growling, and that dictates my physical, mental and emotional well-being. To say that I am a foodie is to say almost nothing. I don't just live to eat; I love, laugh, think, walk, talk, sing - even wake up in the morning, all because I know I will be get to eat. While food sustains my body, the thought of eating sustains my very existence.

I plan my day around food. I select three points of time that are uniformly distributed in my waking hours and assign a meal to each. This is to ensure that I am sufficiently hungry to enjoy all the food I consume, without ever being ravenous enough to push anything I deem non-poisonous down my throat. The finest pleasure in my life is to approach a table of wellprepared food, suitably famished, and rise from it with a full stomach, and not a morsel too many. This is the ideal I strive towards for all my meals. This the way I hope to live my life. If I exercise, it is to build this ideal hunger. If I immerse myself in any form of entertainment, it is to pass the time till that golden moment when my stomach is growling just the right amount. If I want to earn a living, it is to buy that amount of food that will just satiate me, without stretching out my stomach. This ideal influences every decision I make in my life. My mother taught me that love can be expressed through food. I was fortunate enough to grow up without want, so I have never known what it is to starve. My mother always made sure to make me feel the abundance of food. Eating as slowly as possible, she

always made sure I was full and proceeded to scrape the bottom of the vessel herself. She would never deny me any quantity of food, even if it was food she planned to eat herself. Of course she could eat it and make more for me; but her selfless behaviour in the matter of food was inspired purely by love for her child and not by any pragmatism. Therefore I tend to trust anybody who gives away their own food freely, for they can surely mean no harm. My reaction to anyone who takes from my plate is a big indicator of what I feel for them – if I am annoyed it means that I hardly care for them, and if I am benign I feel very warmly for them.

Cooking is my hobby. I do not enjoy making fried, extremely spicy or junk food of any kind, because heavy-handedness with a popular ingredient is cooking's version of capitalism - lazy cooking that aims to sell. It needs no skill and rarely has much nutritional value. I enjoy knowing that I can feed myself healthy food and hence need no one to take care of me. It is the truest form of independence. Cooking for others has an altruistic feeling associated with it, and if they cannot cook, it feels like charity. All this is not to say that I do not enjoy cooking for the sake of it – I do. I love working with flavours and finding that perfect balance of savoury, sweet and tangy that defines every dish. I love getting the texture just right, so that the mouth can feel the goodness of the food as much as the tongue can taste it. I enjoy the whole process, even if a lot of it is monotonous labour. The thought of the finished product spurs me on.

Of course, what happens during and after digestion is also very important to me, and I always pray that everything go smoothly. But to return to my gas issue: living off a mess has really taken its toll. Alas, the sacrifices one has to make for education's sake. The mess capitalizes on people's masochistic love for gassy ingredients and fiery masalas in oils. The blatantly unsubtle food upsets my gentle soul, and also my poor stomach, and now I walk around leaving a little bit of my gas wherever I go.

The Sky's Soliloquy

Meghamala Sarkar

There was solace in his presence- an unfathomable depth. Sea had a profound calmness; I underestimated his strength. Him wasn't toxic but neither was he warm-Colder than the arctic; no tinge of a storm. When the wilderness took over & all charms had obliterate-The solitude germinated on me, with words left unsaid. Oh! How the cry of silence has now bestowed upon me-The yearn of a long-lost dream, where the sky touched the sea!

Far away I hear, rippling of the waves, My verses plod their way all along the shore-For all we know the sky was once a phoenix-Concealing beneath all the black she wore.



After a host of orientations in the first two weeks at IISER, the dates for the much-awaited Fresher's party were finally made known to us. Our seniors had planned a wonderful program for us which would keep us overwhelmed for three weekends in a row! The first weekend was named 'Soirbee', but it was not at all a "second-rate party" as the name suggests. We were divided into 25 groups of 5-9 people each and a Treasure Hunt was organized. We were given clues that point to particular places in IISER, where more clues awaited being found by us. We were so enthusiastic and the teamwork among a bunch of people, who hardly knew each other, was quite surprising!





The second weekend, 'Zabava', was a beautiful evening of food and dance. We swayed to the tunes of all kinds of party songs ranging from "Senorita" to "Lungi Dance" and whatnot.

We were then told to prepare some performances on the basis of the groups formed at Soirbee. It was a busy week – all of us put our heart and soul in organizing our group events for the final day and nevertheless it was a grand success. The performances ranged from mimicking the professors to song and dance performances to "IISER's got talent"! All in all, it was a highly entertaining morning. Those days have been the best days in IISER for me till now, and I know deep inside that I will cherish these memories forever.



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arch: a beginning

Pride has been in our collective consciousness since 1969. Ever since a group f butch lesbians and transgender sex workers decided to brick the police back in the day, we've had the idea of "Pride." Right now, in India, pride parades are regular, and more cities participate every day, and most metropolitan cities have colleges holding their version too. Except for IISER Pune, here it is different. Since Pride as a form of protest is such a huge sign, it's challenging to start a movement directly with that. Traditional art colleges that teach queer theory have had a lot more experience with pushing through the veil and having a concrete support system behind them before having an event of this scale. Here, we had two months. In academic terms, this translates to joining a new lab and present-ing a poster on your work in the third week of the assignment.

However, I think IISER has always had a queer community. We are, after all, significant minorities in this day and age, and even if we don't reveal ourselves at first, we exist. Plus, queer is not only about who you are but, also about what you believe. You can't ride in the coattails of people who have rejected citizenship offers from Hitler, who've coded to break the World War 2 code, who have given

their lives in service to people and refused monetary gain and not become a little queer itself. 1st anniversary of the scrapping of 377. The 1st year wherein whichever pride march I went to, I did not chant the number in the streets, and that's where we started. The discussion was afoot, and all the organizers came about discussing the nitty-gritty of the protest. You see, it was IISER, we were talking of long term goals, about a Queer Club, about bringing together everyone, about uniting. There were days of despair, of course, because you see the "Pride" experiment had a success rate that was so very low. I remember days when these kids would call up agency after agency to look for speakers, and no one would respond. Till the last hour, we debated about speakers. And I can't even imagine the sheer stamina of the people who were managing Karavaan and this without missing a

beat.

The poster making activity was a joyous occasion, a few people just sitting there building their narratives and expressing. And then there was the beautiful coming together of it all. Look, we did Pride in IISER; we had trans women, asexuals, lesbians singing out slogans in Marathi, Gujrati, Hindi, and everything else. We had kids who just joined for the heck of it, and kids who were

in it from the beginning. And no matter how many times I wondered if it was right, it was. Our protest was by no means perfect, and several times I've been asked by people from my community about the caveats we had, and it leaves me heartbroken. The truth is, often, Pride starts from the corner of a specific five-star hotel and includes people who wish for a party. This started from a small discussion room, and it was filled with kids. And I know that the flamboyant queens who wear their hearts on the sleeves joined in, but, it was something made by the kids, and that's the proudest any pride has made me.

