

FOUR DECADES OF PEDIATRIC NEUROLOGY IN INDIA.

A JOURNEY OF PASSION, PERSEVERANCE & PROGRESS

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***PARIJMA NEURODIAGNOSTIC AND REHABILITATION CENTERS - BANGALORE AND
MANGALORE***

The history of Pediatric Neurology in India is a story of dedication, perseverance, collegiality and shared vision. What is now a well-established and rapidly advancing specialty beginning, only a few decades ago, on a modest scale. Its development was initiated by a small group of neurologists who recognized that children with neurological disorders required specialized care distinct from that provided within adult neurology.

As we look back in 2026, it is appropriate to document the important milestones that shaped the development of Pediatric Neurology in India and to acknowledge the pioneers who laid its foundations.

The Beginning of a New Specialty

Pediatric Neurology as a distinct specialty in India is approximately four decades old. In its early years, only a small number of neurologists had a specific interest in neurological disorders of childhood. Most had completed DM training in Neurology and, recognizing the substantial unmet need among children, chose to dedicate their professional lives to Pediatric Neurology.

At that time, the concept of a full-time pediatric neurologist was still unfamiliar in India. Children with epilepsy, developmental disorders, neuromuscular diseases, cerebral palsy, metabolic disorders and other neurological conditions were generally managed within general pediatric or adult neurology services.

A major turning point came in 1981, when we had the privilege of establishing a dedicated Pediatric Neurology Unit at the National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences (NIMHANS), Bengaluru. This was the first dedicated Pediatric Neurology unit in the country.

The establishment of this unit represented more than the creation of a clinical service. It marked the beginning of a new discipline in India and provided a platform for systematic clinical care, teaching, training and research in neurological disorders of childhood, & i was given the responsibility to organize this unit.

At that time, the number of qualified pediatric neurologists in the country could literally be counted on one's fingers. In Tamil Nadu, Dr.G Kumaresan, Dr D Kamala., Dr Jaykumar and in Kerala, Dr Anandam and in Mumbai Dr Bernard.J.D'souza ,

followed by Dr Udani were faster establishing themselves as a stalwart in pediatric neurology and in Mumbai Dr. P.M Udani was already advocating for a full-time pediatric neurology set-up. While all this was happening my good friend Dr. Veena Kalra, who was equally enthusiastic about starting pediatric neurology as a separate field was starting the dept in Delhi around this time. I still vividly remember the numerous discussions that this small group and a few others like Dr A.T.Dabke, Dr Suraj Gupte. , Dr G.P.Mathur , used to have on various aspects of Pediatric neurology. Although we were a very small group, there was considerable enthusiasm and a strong conviction that Pediatric Neurology had a significant future in India.

Formation of the Child Neurology Chapter of IAP – 1983

The next major milestone came in 1983, with the formation of the Child Neurology Chapter of the Indian Academy of Pediatrics (IAP).

(now named as AOPN)

The number of pediatric neurologists remained very small. Nevertheless, there were sufficient colleagues with a shared interest and commitment to establish a professional platform devoted specifically to neurological disorders in children.

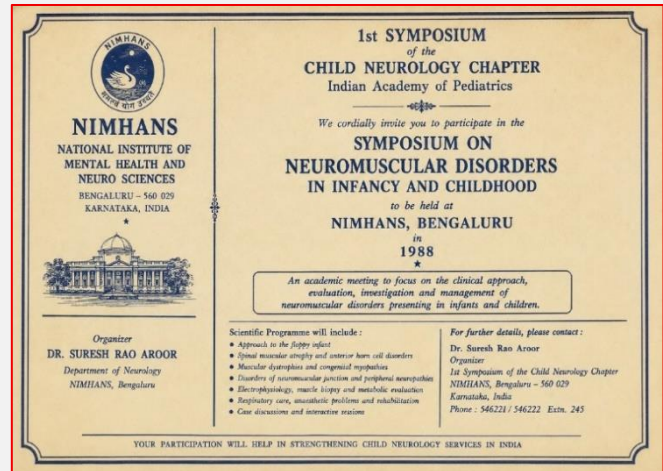
The Child Neurology Chapter provided an important forum for interaction among pediatricians and neurologists with an interest in child neurology. It brought together professionals from different parts of the country and encouraged discussion of clinical challenges, teaching, research and the development of specialized services.

In retrospect, the formation of this chapter was a landmark event. It provided an

organizational identity to a specialty that was still in its formative stages.

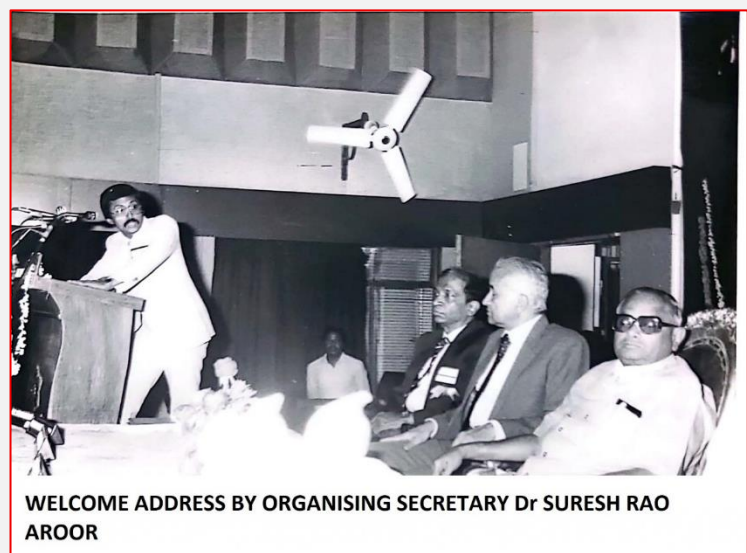
The First International Symposium on Neuromuscular Disorders – 1988

Another significant milestone in the history of Pediatric Neurology in India was the organization of the First International Symposium on Neuromuscular Disorders in Infancy and Childhood, held at NIMHANS, Bengaluru, in 1988.



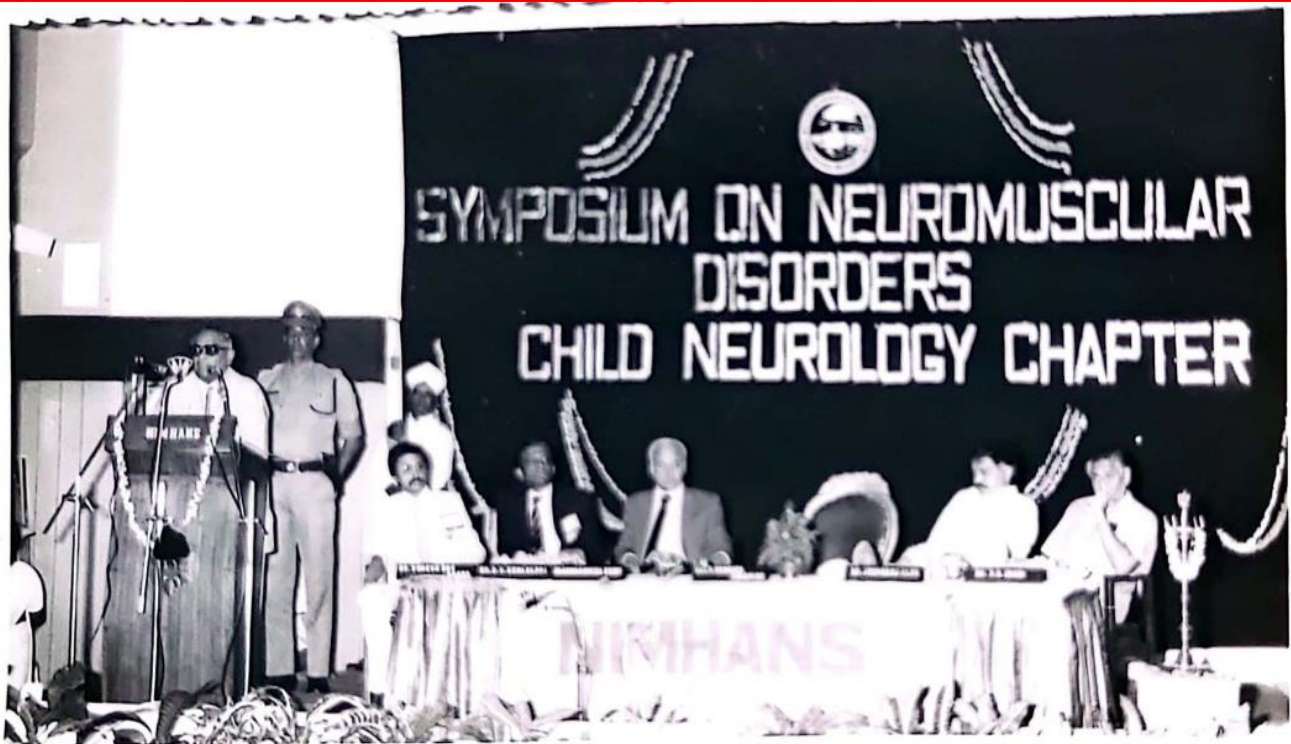
This meeting was particularly important because neuromuscular disorders represented a major area of unmet need in childhood neurological practice. At a time when diagnostic facilities were limited and many disorders were poorly recognized, bringing together specialists with an interest in pediatric neuromuscular diseases was a substantial undertaking.

The symposium was organized under the leadership of Dr. Suresh Rao Aroor as Organizing Secretary. It brought an international perspective



to pediatric neuromuscular disorders and provided an opportunity for Indian neurologists and pediatricians to interact with experts from outside the country.

The meeting also demonstrated that Indian Pediatric Neurology was prepared to engage with the international community.



**INAGURATION OF SYMPOSIUM BY HIS EXELLENCY SRI P.VENKATASUBBAIAH,
GOVERNOR OF KARNATAKA.**

CHILD NEUROLOGY CHAPTER OF I A P



Symposium On Neuromuscular Disorders in Infancy and Childhood

25th - 26th June 1988
NIMHANS, Bangalore



SCIENTIFIC PROGRAMME

Symposium Supported & Financed by :
Council for Scientific & Industrial Research,
Department of Science and Technology,
National Academy of Medical Sciences.

INVITED FACULTY

Dr. (Mrs.) R. Anandam,
Paediatrician & Neurologist,
S. A. T. Hospital,
Medical College,
Trivandrum.

Dr. Y. K. Amdekar,
Hon. Paediatrician,
J. J. Hospital and Jaslok Hospital,
Bombay.

Dr. Suresh Rao Aroor,
Asst. Professor of Paediatric Neurology,
NIMHANS,
Bangalore.

Prof. D. G. Benakappa,
Vanivilas Hospital,
Bangalore.

Dr. Usha Bhat,
Doha,
Quatar.

Prof. Roberto Casale,
Department of Clinical Neurophysiology,
Rehabilitation Medical Centre of Montescano,
University of Pavia,
Italy.

Prof. R. K. Chandra,
St. John's Newfoundland,
Canada.

Prof. D. K. Dastur,
Director,
Department of Neurophysiology & Applied Biology,
Bombay Hospital,
Bombay.

Dr. Sarala Das,
Prof. & Head, Department of Neuropathology,
NIMHANS,
Bangalore

Prof. Anil D. Desai,
Senior Consultant Neurologist,
Jaslok Hospital & Research Centre,
Bombay.

Dr. M. Gourie - Devi,
Prof. & Head Department of Neurology,
NIMHANS,
Bangalore.

Prof. Bernard J. D'Souza,
Chief, Division of Paediatric Neurology,
Duke University Medical Centre,
Durham, N. C.,
U. S. A.

Dr. (Mrs.) Veena Kalra,
Associate Professor of Paediatrics,
A. I. I. M. S.,
New Dehli.

Dr. D. Kamala,
Reader in Paediatric Neurology,
Institute of Child Health,
Madras.

Dr. Nirmala Kesari,
Prof. & Head, Department of Paediatrics,
J. J. M Medical College,
Davangere.

Dr. G. Kumaresan,
Additional Professor of Neurology,
Institute of Neurology,
Government General Hospital,
Madras.

Prof. M. S. Mahadevaiah,
Department of Paediatrics,
Kempe Gowda Medical College,
Bangalore.

Dr. G. P. Mathur,
Prof. & Head, Department of Paediatrics,
G. S. V. M. Medical College,
Kanpur.

Dr. R. D. Potdar,
Department of Paediatrics,
BYL Nair Hospital
Bombay.

Dr. Arun B. Taly,
Lecturer in Neurology,
NIMHANS,
Bangalore.

Prof. P. M. Udani,
Professor Emeritus,
Institute of Child Health &
J J Group of Hospitals,
Bombay.

Prof. N. H. Wadia,
Director,
Department of Neurology,
Jaslok Hospital & Research Centre,
Bombay.

PROGRAMME

SATURDAY, 25th June, 1988

0800 to 1000 hrs.
0930 to 1030 hrs.
1030 to 1100 hrs.
1100 to 1140 hrs.

Registration
Inauguration
COFFEE
Key Note Address
D.K. Dastur, Bombay

SESSION I

Bernard J. D ' Souza (USA), D. Kamala (Madras)

Developmental aspects of muscle

G.Kumaresan, Madras

DISCUSSION

Development of muscle function

Usha Bhat, Doha

DISCUSSION

LUNCH

SESSION II

M. Gourle-Devi (Bangalore), G. Kumaresan (Madras)

An approach to the diagnosis of neuromuscular disorders in Infancy

and Childhood with special reference to floppy infant

Suresh Rao Aroor, Bangalore

DISCUSSION

Electromyography

Roberto Casale, Italy

DISCUSSION

Myopathology in Neuromuscular disorders

Sarala Das, Bangalore

DISCUSSION

Muscle disorders of infective etiology with

special reference to diagnosis.

G.P.Mathur, Kanpur

DISCUSSION

TEA

SESSION III

Anil D. Desai (Bombay), R. Anandam (Trivandrum)

Spinal muscular atrophy

M.Gourle-Devi, Bangalore

DISCUSSION

Peripheral neuropathy

Veena Kalra, New Delhi

DISCUSSION

SUNDAY, 26th June, 1988

SESSION IV

R. D. Potdar (Bombay), Suresh Rao Aroor (Bangalore)

Neuromuscular changes in malnutrition

P.M.Udani, Bombay

DISCUSSION

Myasthenia and Myasthenic syndromes

A. B. Taly, Bangalore

DISCUSSION

Muscular dystrophy in children

Anil D. Desai, Bombay.

DISCUSSION

COFFEE

SESSION V

N. H. Wadia (Bombay), Nirmala Kesari (Davangere)

Congenital myopathy

M. Gourle-Devi, Bangalore

DISCUSSION

Metabolic myopathy

Bernard J. D'Souza, U.S.A.

DISCUSSION

LUNCH

SESSION VI

D. G. Benakappa (Bangalore), Y. K. Amdekar (Bombay)

Immune responses in malnutrition

R.K. Chandra, Canada

Inflammatory myopathy

D. Kamala, Madras

DISCUSSION

Myotonias in children

R. Anandam, Trivandrum

DISCUSSION

TEA

Role of physician in the management and rehabilitation of a child with neuromuscular disorder.

M. S. Mahadevalah, Bangalore

DISCUSSION

CONCLUDING SESSION

Neuromuscular disorder in a child - Panorama

N. H. Wadia, Bombay

CONCLUDING REMARKS

P. M. Udani



Dr P .M .Udani



Dr VEENA KALRA



Dr BERNAD .J .D'SOUZA



Dr SURESH RAO AR00R



Dr. D. KAMALA



Dr G . KUMARESHAN



Dr ANANDAM



Dr D.K.DASTUR

The Early Years – Learning and Building Together

The early years were challenging. Diagnostic facilities were limited. Neuroimaging was in its infancy, molecular genetics was not yet available, electrophysiological services were restricted to a few centers, and many metabolic and genetic disorders could be diagnosed only on clinical grounds.

Established treatment pathways were unavailable for many of the disorders we encountered.

Nevertheless, these limitations also created an exceptional opportunity for learning. Early pediatric neurologists were often required to serve simultaneously as clinicians, teachers, researchers and advocates.

We learned from our patients, from one another and from colleagues around the world. Professional meetings became important opportunities not only to present scientific work, but also to discuss challenging cases, exchange clinical approaches and develop professional relationships and friendships that endured for decades.

The small number of specialists was, in many respects, an advantage. We knew one another well, communicated frequently and shared a common purpose: The development of Pediatric Neurology in India.

1990 – Bringing Pediatric Neurology to the Mainstream of Pediatrics

Another event that had a significant impact on the growth and visibility of Pediatric Neurology in India occurred in 1990, when Bengaluru hosted the 27th National Conference of the Indian Academy of Pediatrics.

I had the privilege of serving as the Organizing Secretary of this conference.

At that time, Pediatric Neurology was still a relatively young and small specialty. Although we had begun establishing dedicated services and had created the Child Neurology Chapter, our interaction with the larger pediatric community was still limited.

I felt strongly that if Pediatric Neurology was to grow, we needed to take the subject to pediatricians across the country.

During the organization of the conference, we therefore made a special effort to introduce a dedicated concurrent scientific session on Pediatric Neurology. We were able to persuade the organizers to allocate half a day of the scientific programme specifically to Pediatric Neurology.

This was, to the best of my recollection, the first time in the history of the National IAP Conference that a substantial dedicated scientific session on Pediatric Neurology was included in the main programme.

For us, it was an important achievement.

It may appear a relatively small step today, when Pediatric Neurology occupies a prominent place in pediatric conferences. But in 1990, it was a significant development. It gave us an opportunity to introduce the broader pediatric community to the scope of neurological disorders in children and to demonstrate how specialized neurological assessment could change the diagnosis and management of these children.

The session generated considerable interest among pediatricians. It helped many colleagues appreciate that neurological problems in children were not simply an extension of adult neurology, nor were they always problems that could be managed within general pediatrics.

It also helped create awareness about the emerging role of the pediatric neurologist.

Looking back, I believe this meeting had an impact beyond the half-day scientific programme itself. It helped bring Pediatric Neurology from the periphery into the mainstream of pediatric academic practice.

It also reinforced an important principle that has remained relevant throughout my professional life: a specialty grows not only by training specialists, but also by educating the larger medical community about when and why those specialists are needed.

The 1990 IAP National Conference in Bengaluru was therefore another important step in the journey of Pediatric Neurology in India.

For me personally, it remains a particularly memorable milestone because I had the opportunity, as Organizing Secretary, to help create that space for Pediatric Neurology within the country's largest pediatric academic forum.

What began as a small half-day session eventually became part of a much larger transformation—one in which Pediatric Neurology increasingly became recognized, respected and integrated into mainstream pediatric care.





Growth of Training and Services

Over the subsequent decades, Pediatric Neurology gradually expanded beyond the pioneering centres.

Increasing numbers of neurologists developed a special interest in childhood neurological disorders, and dedicated pediatric neurology clinics and units were established in several academic and teaching institutions.

The development of formal training programmes represented a major advance. Growing numbers of young neurologists began receiving structured exposure to Pediatric Neurology, thereby contributing to the emergence of a new generation of specialists.

The specialty also became increasingly multidisciplinary. Pediatricians, neurologists, neurosurgeons, geneticists, radiologists, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, speech and language specialists, psychologists, nutritionists and rehabilitation professionals began working collaboratively.

This multidisciplinary approach became particularly important in the care of children with developmental disabilities, epilepsy, cerebral palsy, neuromuscular disorders and neurogenetic conditions.

Transformation in Diagnosis and Treatment

The transformation of Pediatric Neurology over the past four decades has been remarkable.

In the early years, diagnosis depended largely on history, clinical examination and a limited range of investigations. Today, we have access to sophisticated neuroimaging,

video EEG, advanced electrophysiology, metabolic investigations, genetic testing, next-generation sequencing and an expanding range of biomarkers.

The treatment landscape has also changed substantially.

Epilepsy care has advanced through the introduction of newer antiseizure medications, ketogenic therapy, epilepsy surgery and neurostimulation.

Neuromuscular medicine has undergone revolutionary developments, particularly in spinal muscular atrophy and other inherited disorders. Many genetic and metabolic conditions once considered untreatable can now be diagnosed early and, in selected cases, managed with disease-modifying therapies.

The emphasis on early diagnosis and early intervention has transformed developmental neurology and rehabilitation.

Consequently, the Pediatric Neurology of today bears little resemblance to the specialty that existed in the early 1980s.

Expansion of the Professional Community

Perhaps the most visible indicator of progress is the growth in the number of trained pediatric neurologists.

From a small handful of specialists in its early years, India now has a large and expanding community of pediatric neurologists working across the country.

Academic centres, children's hospitals and private institutions have established dedicated services. National and regional meetings are now held regularly, and young pediatric neurologists are increasingly engaged in research and international collaborations.

The specialty has also become more subspecialized, with physicians developing expertise in areas such as:

- Pediatric epilepsy and epilepsy surgery
- Neurodevelopmental disorders
- Pediatric neuromuscular disorders
- Neurogenetics
- Neurometabolic disorders
- Pediatric stroke
- Neuroimmunology
- Movement disorders
- Neurorehabilitation
- Sleep disorders
- Neurocritical care

This diversification reflects the increasing maturity of the specialty.

From Pioneers to the Next Generation

Looking back, one of the most gratifying aspects of this journey is witnessing how the

foundations laid by a small group of pioneers have developed into a strong national specialty.

The early generation worked at a time when resources were scarce and formal structures were limited. They had to create awareness, establish services, organise meetings and demonstrate to the medical community that Pediatric Neurology deserved recognition as a specialised discipline.

The younger generation now enters the field in a markedly different environment. They have access to sophisticated technology, molecular diagnostics, international literature, advanced therapeutic options and structured training.

However, the fundamental principles remain unchanged: careful clinical observation, compassion for the child and family, scientific curiosity, teamwork and a commitment to lifelong learning.

Remembering the Early Milestones

As we prepare this archive for the Annual Conference of the Academy at Lucknow in October 2026, it is important to record these early milestones—not merely as historical dates, but as reminders of how the specialty evolved.

The establishment of the dedicated Pediatric Neurology Unit at NIMHANS in 1981, the formation of the Child Neurology Chapter of IAP in 1983, and the First International Symposium on Neuromuscular Disorders in Infancy and Childhood at NIMHANS in 1988 represent important landmarks in this journey.

Behind each milestone were individuals who contributed their time, energy, ideas and commitment. Many worked quietly, without realising that they were laying the foundations of a specialty that would eventually serve millions of Indian children.

Looking Ahead

The story of Pediatric Neurology in India is therefore not merely a history of institutions and organisations. It is a story of people: pioneers who had the courage to establish something new, colleagues who worked together when their numbers were very small, and successive generations who expanded and strengthened the specialty. From a single dedicated unit and a handful of specialists, Pediatric Neurology has evolved into a vibrant national discipline.

As we enter its next phase, the challenges are different. We must improve access to specialist care beyond major cities, develop affordable diagnostic and therapeutic facilities, strengthen research into disorders of particular relevance to Indian children, and ensure that advances in genetic and molecular medicine reach the children who need them.

The archive of Pediatric Neurology in India is ultimately both a tribute to the past and a responsibility for the future.

We began with very little—but with considerable enthusiasm, collegiality and determination.

The journey from those early days to the present has been remarkable. The responsibility of the next generation is to carry this legacy forward and make Pediatric Neurology accessible to every child in India who requires it.

We were all deeply passionate about pediatric neurology, and that passion has never diminished. Even after four decades, we continue to practice, teach and, in our own small ways, preach the importance of pediatric neurology. It is immensely gratifying to see how this once-nascent specialty has grown and flourished, as is so clearly evident from the large and ever-growing number of trained pediatric neurologists across the country today.

But, for me, the greatest reward has never been merely the growth in numbers or the recognition that the specialty has received. The real satisfaction—and indeed, the sheer joy—comes from seeing a child who had lost, or perhaps never had, the ability to walk or talk, gradually take those first steps or begin to vocalize again.

There is something truly priceless about seeing the joy on a parent's face when a child with autism, who previously may never have recognized, smiled at, or interacted with them, suddenly begins to respond, make eye contact, smile and communicate. These moments are difficult to describe in words. They are deeply moving and remain among the most rewarding experiences of a pediatric neurologist.

When we see such transformations happening, sometimes almost like miracles, on a regular basis, it strengthens our passion and, in a very personal way, vindicates the faith we had when we embarked on the journey of establishing pediatric neurology as

a separate specialty more than four decades ago.

As I come to the end of this reflection, I would like to reiterate that, although we have travelled a long way in pediatric neurology in India, I personally feel that we have only scratched the surface. There is so much more to understand, so much more to discover, and so much more that we can do for children with neurological disorders. We must continue to grow, continue to learn, and continue to strive to take the specialty to much greater heights.

And finally, a little bit of déjà vu.

I am transported back to 1981–82, when, as part of the outreach programmes of NIMHANS, I used to travel and give lectures on pediatric neurology. On those occasions, I would at best be looking out at ten or twenty faces in the audience.

Today, when I stand before this sea of faces, I cannot help but pause and reflect. The contrast speaks for itself. Those ten or twenty faces have become hundreds; those early beginnings have grown into a vibrant and expanding specialty.

For me, that sea of faces is perhaps the most eloquent testimony to how far pediatric neurology has come in India.

And, in a deeply personal way, it is also a vindication of the faith, passion and courage with which we chose to start this specialty more than four decades ago.