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INNOVATION AT THE CROSSROADS: CONTESTED IMAGINARIES OF PROGRESS IN BANGALORE



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Innovation figures today as a panacea for all social ills in the minds of policymakers around the world. The idea of Silicon Valley, in particular, has taken hold globally to the extent that every nation, region, and city dreams of emulating, and replicating, that Californian miracle. Drawing on comparative research on innovation policy and fieldwork in Bangalore, India, this talk shows how the imported imaginary of a future transformed by digital technology fares when confronted by grounded, local imaginaries of progress and emancipation. Using methods from science and technology studies (STS), I show how a controversy over road-building reveals fundamentally incompatible visions of good human futures enabled by science and technology. This research confirms that the contemporary discourse of innovation, resting on aggregate economic models of progress, lacks power to overcome deep-seated problems of inequality, social injustice, and lack of democratic accountability.

Sheila Jasanoff is Pforzheimer Professor of Science and Technology Studies at Harvard Kennedy School of Government since 1998. Born in India in 1944, she studied Mathematics (Harvard), holds an MA (University of Bonn) and a PhD (Harvard University) in Linguistics, a J.D. (Harvard Law School) and an honorary doctorate from the University of Twente. Her work explores the role of science and technology in the law, politics, and policy of modern democracies, with particular attention to the nature of public reason. Sheila Jasanoff's contributions have become staples in the social sciences and humanities. In over a hundred publications with leading journals and book publishers, she has advanced and inspired groundbreaking research in STS and other disciplines, most notably around concepts such as co-production (*States of Knowledge*, 2004), civic epistemologies (*Designs on Nature*, 2005), bioconstitutionalism (*Reframing Rights*, 2011), and sociotechnical imaginaries (*Dreamscapes of Modernity*, 2015).