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## IN MEMORY

### **Karl-Göran Mäler: the *Adi-Guru* of Environmental Economics**

Saudamini Das \*

Karl-Göran Mäler, one of the most loved and revered environmental economists of the century, passed away on May 20, 2020 in Stockholm. Born on March 3, 1939 in a small town in Västernorrlands County in northern Sweden, Karl-Göran grew up to be one of the most significant ecological economists in the world, contributing enormously to the discipline as well as helping to spread it across the globe. His passing leaves a permanent vacuum in the world.

Karl-Göran was a professor of economics at the Stockholm School of Economics (1975–2002), a member of the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences (1981–1994), a member of the Committee for the Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel (1982–1994) and the head of this Committee during 1986–87, director of the Beijer Institute of Ecological Economics (1991–2006), and then a professor emeritus at this institute. He co-founded Beijer Institute of Ecological Economics together with Partha Dasgupta in 1991. He was one of the founding members and then a council member of the European Association for Environmental and Resource Economists (EAERE), a recipient of the Volvo Environment Prize in 2002 (shared with Partha Dasgupta), and a recipient of the European Lifetime Achievement Award in Environmental Economics in 2005 (shared with David Pearce). However, to the ecological economics fraternity, he was a global professor of environmental and resource economics sans boundaries and nationalities.

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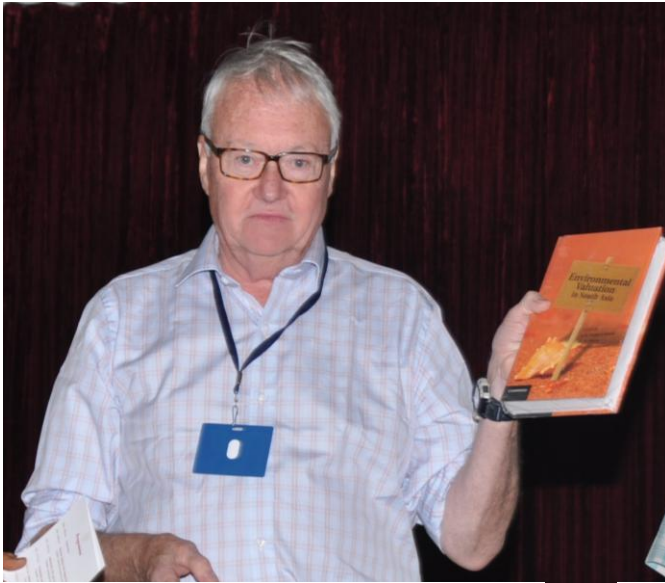
\* National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) Chair Professor, Institute of Economic Growth, University Enclave, North Campus, Delhi 110007, India; [saudamini@iegindia.org](mailto:saudamini@iegindia.org).

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Karl-Göran Mäler releasing *Environmental Valuation in South Asia* at the “Nature, Economy and Society: Understanding the Linkages” Sixth Biennial Conference of Indian Society for Ecological Economics, 20–22 October 2011, Centre for Economic and Social Studies (CESS), Hyderabad. [Image courtesy: INSEE]

Karl-Göran was an original thinker in the field of the environment; he produced seminal works on varied subjects such as pollution, environmental protection, property rights, poverty, theory of sustainable economic development, regime shifts, and irreversibility in natural systems, among others. His first book, *Environmental Economics: A Theoretical Inquiry* (1974) is a foundational volume for environmental economics. This book was published when the field was first evolving and, thus, helped its ideas grow. His books such as *Environment and Development: An Economic Approach* (with Jan Bojö and Lena Unemo), *Economic Measurement of Environmental Damage: A Technical Handbook* (with Ronald E. Wyzga), various edited volumes (with different colleagues), and many research publications in several top international journals are all significant contributions and speak volumes about his scholarship.

His highly influential research “The Acid Rain Game” (1989) was probably the first paper to provide an economic rationale (through a compensatory payment mechanism) to encourage international cooperation to resolve critical transboundary environmental problems. His seminal paper “National Accounts and Environmental Resources”, published in *Environment and Resource Economics* (1991), made a compelling case for incorporating nature in national income accounting. Equally revolutionary

were his lectures on intermediate ecosystem services and the problem of double counting if the value of supporting services is separately accounted for in the total economic value measures of ecosystem services.

Karl-Göran has initiated several pioneering activities; the two worth mentioning are the Askö meetings and capacity-building work in the Global South. He envisioned that a combination of the two disciplines, economics and ecology, would be necessary to find a sustainable solution to the catastrophic environmental problems in the world. He strengthened this interdisciplinary approach by bringing the world's leading ecologists and economists under one roof in the famous Askö meetings of Beijer Institute, the deliberations of which are published as the Askö Series and also in some of the top journals of the world.

Karl-Göran, along with Partha Dasgupta, initiated network programmes in environmental economics research and teaching in the Global South that resulted in the formation of these regional networks: South Asian Network for Environment and Developmental Economics (SANDEE), Centre for Environmental Economics and Policy in Africa (CEEPA, previously RANESA), and Latin American and Caribbean Environmental Economics Program (LACEEP). These networks provided training through research and training workshops (R&T), mentoring of early-career researchers by globally renowned professors, guidance in proposal and manuscript writing, and so on. They revolutionized environmental economics research and teaching, helped the careers of hundreds of early-career researchers, and transformed perceptions and attitudes towards the environment and environmental policymaking in the Global South.

In India, SANDEE was and still is a lifeline for environmental research. Karl-Göran was attached to SANDEE and enjoyed great camaraderie with leading Indian environmental economists and SANDEE associates such as Kanchan Chopra, Gopal Kadekodi, M. N. Murthy, and the late Narpat Singh Jodha, to name a few. He never missed his SANDEE research and training workshops and summer schools (for as long as he was able to travel), a bond he never shared with others. We, the SANDEE researchers, would look forward to the opportunity to present our work to him at the R&T workshops, be reprimanded by him, and then work further, day and night, for the next presentation. The R&Ts, our real *gurukul*, have provided us with a strong foundation for our careers and helped us integrate with global research. Karl-Göran will always remain the father of the environmental economics capacity-building programmes in South Asia.

As with SANDEE, Karl-Göran's association with the Indian Society for Ecological Economics (INSEE) was equally strong and dear. He delivered a

keynote address during the Sixth INSEE Biennial Conference in Hyderabad. Initially, he was supposed to come to New Delhi for a meeting on the Government of India's invitation and then travel to Hyderabad. The Delhi meeting was eventually cancelled, but Karl-Göran still travelled to India so that he could keep his promise with INSEE and meet his Indian colleagues at the conference. We will always remember this gracious gesture.

On a personal note, two people had a profound impact on his life—his father, Karl Mäler, and his wife, Sara Aniyar. His father, born in the Nordic forests of Sweden, rose to become an elected member of the Swedish Parliament. Karl-Göran was a proud son and always kept his father's lessons close to his heart; even when he was at the care home, he kept his father's statue with him. Karl-Göran met Sara at a workshop in Jamaica and their beautiful life together started then. Sara complemented him perfectly and was always by his side; she spent two months in quarantine in the care home with him and Karl-Göran left for his heavenly abode still holding her hand.

I was fortunate to be mentored by Karl-Göran and to have enjoyed a personal friendship with him and Sara while I was a Mäler scholar at the Beijer Institute. I loved visiting museums, exhibitions, historical sites, and eateries with them in Stockholm. I was always amazed at the way Karl-Göran could stand at the corner of a street and narrate interesting stories about the street, the histories of the main buildings, the chronologies of architectural innovations, the evolutions of the famous eating joints in the area, and the exact spot from which he got the best view of the Northern Lights during his childhood. He was as madly in love with his country, people, and dear city of Stockholm as he was with his discipline. His energy, ideas, persistence, and gentle chiding will inspire us for years.

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