

16th World Sanskrit Conference 2015

Organized by

**International Association for Sanskrit
Studies (IASS)**

and

Silpakorn University, Bangkok

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A Report

by

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The 16th World Sanskrit Conference (WSC) was organized by the International Association of Sanskrit Studies (IASS) in association with the Sanskrit Department of the Shilpakorn University, Bangkok at Bangkok from **28.06.2015** to **02.07.2015**. The WSC is an international academic event, organized by the IASS, every three years at different locations around the World, with a view to creating awareness about Sanskrit Studies and sharing of current trends of research. The first World Sanskrit Conference was organised in Delhi in 1972 and since then, it is being held in different countries.

The 15th edition of this prestigious Conference was organized at Delhi in which IGNCA also participated. IGNCA hosted some academic sessions and provided spaces for cultural performances and for an exhibition. An accompanying volume titled **‘Visvavara: Sanskrit for Human Survival’** comprising visuals from the exhibition as well as scholarly articles on different aspects of Sanskrit studies was also brought out on this occasion. In this conference, the in-house scholars of IGNCA also presented papers in its different sections.

16th World Sanskrit Conference, 2015, Bangkok

Inaugural session

The five-day long 16th WSC was attended by more than 600 participating Sanskrit scholars from 60 countries. The 16th WSC was inaugurated in the Hotel Renaissance Bangkok on Sunday by the External Affairs Minister, Government of India, Smt. Sushma Swaraj in presence of Princess of Thailand Her Excellency Mahachakri Sirindhon. The Union Minister of Government of India in her inaugural speech suggested that Sanskrit should be propagated so that “it purifies the minds of the people and thus sanctifies the whole world.” Addressing the inaugural session of 16th World Sanskrit Conference in

Bangkok as the Chief Guest, Ms. Swaraj spoke entirely in Sanskrit to over 600 Sanskrit experts. She called Sanskrit a “modern and universal” language and said its tradition is comparable to the river Ganga. “The Ganga remains sacred from Gomukh, its source, to Ganga sagar where it enters the ocean. It sanctifies the tributaries, which attain the very nature of Ganga. Similar is Sanskrit; sacred by itself, it sanctifies all that come into its contact.” “Therefore, Sanskrit should be propagated so that it purifies the minds of the people and thus sanctifies the whole world. You Sanskritists do bathe in the sacred Sanskrit Ganga and are blessed,” she told the gathering. “In the present days you are aware that scientists hold the view that Sanskrit can play an important role in developing software for language recognition, translations, cyber security and other fields of artificial intelligence,” Ms. Swaraj said. “Knowledge in Sanskrit will go a long way in finding solutions to the contemporary problems like global warming, unsustainable consumption, civilizational clash, poverty, terrorism etc,” she said, adding a new direction and vision is needed in the field of research in Sanskrit to accomplish this task.

This is for the first time that a Union Minister of this stature has attended the World Sanskrit conference outside the country. The Minister urged scholars to strive to improve the quality of its teaching and make it attractive. “It is not sufficient to praise Sanskrit and detail its forte. All Sanskritists should deliberate upon what is to be done for the development of the language. Teaching of Sanskrit should be attractive, its quality should improve, and research in Sanskrit should be more functional,” she said. Ms. Swaraj said the Indian Council for Cultural Relations has decided to grant International Sanskrit Award to the scholar who has made significant contribution for Sanskrit. The award would carry with it a certificate and \$20,000.

Princess of Thailand Her Excellency Mahachakri Sirindhon, herself a Sanskrit scholar, was the Royal Patron of the conference. In the evening of the

first day an official dinner was hosted by the Indian embassy, which was attended by H.E. Smt. Sushma Swaraj, Hon'ble minister of External Affairs, Govt. of India and by H.E. Princess Mahachakri Sirindhon. A Thai play along with a live band, was staged during the dinner.

In the evening of the second day, a Sanskrit play titled 'Karnabharam' was staged in the auditorium of SVU, Bangkok. The play was directed by Prof. K. D. Tripathi and was produced by Jnana Pravaha of Varanasi. It was very well received by the audience, who turned up in large numbers to witness the performance.

Presentations of IGNCA Scholars

The Academic Programme Committee of the 16th WSC accepted the abstracts of two IGNCA scholars working in its Kalakosa Division, namely, Dr. Sushma Jatoo and Dr. Sudhir Lall for presentations in Epic and Purana Section and Tantra and Agama section, respectively. The Competent Authority of the IGNCA deputed both the scholars to attend the Conference and to make their respective presentations.

Dr. Sushma Jatoo presented an illustrated research paper titled **Mapping the Sacred Trajectory: The Devī Mahātmyas of Bhṛṅgīśa Samitā** in the Epic and Purana section on 1st July, 2015 at 8:30 a.m. In her paper, she presented a study of the three main Devī-s of Kashmir, namely, Mahārājñī, Jyeṣṭhā and Śārikā along with their sacred shrines on the basis of three Mahātmyas, viz., Śrī Rājñī Prādurbhāva, Jyeṣṭhā Mahātmya and Śārikā Mahātmya. She stated that these Mahātmyas belong to the *Bhṛṅgīśa Samhitā* (or the *Śrī Samhitā*) a *sthalapurāṇa* of Kashmir, reckoned amongst the traditional sources for describing the *tīrthas* of Kashmir in the form of Mahātmyas; a peculiarity associated with this genre of Puranic literature. The *Samhitā* is replete with vivid descriptions of numerous *tīrthas* such as sacred shrines, ponds, rivers and

other religio-geographical phenomena. The aforementioned Mahātmyas of the *Samhitā* comprise extensive dialogue between Bhairavī and Bhairava, where Bhairavī enquires the significance of these sacred spaces for the welfare of people (*lokānugrahakāmyayā*), and Bhairava answers her queries by narrating the associated stories regarding legendary origin, mapping, significance and observances like bathing, worship, charity, meditation, oblations to manes, *homa*, *japa* and *svādhyāya* etc.; practiced at these sacred geographies.

Dr. Sushma Jatoo spoke at length about the sacred spaces of goddesses Jyeṣṭhā and Śārikā, which are located on the hillocks of Srinagar city, and also about the shrine dedicated to Goddess Mahārājñī, which is nestled in a foothill in the outskirts of the city, thus forming a sacred trajectory in the map of Kashmir. She gave a first-hand account of these spaces on the basis of the above-mentioned Mahātmyas, relevant textual and historical sources along with the personal accounts of Indian and foreign travellers. She also lucidly presented the oral history regarding the transformation of these goddesses into *Kula-Devī-s* (family deities) and dealt with their *utsavas* (festivals) being celebrated on specific *tithis* (days) by the local devotees every year. This presentation was highly illustrated with visuals from all the three sacred shrines. It was very well received by scholars and was followed by a very interesting and thought provoking question and answer session.

Dr. Sudhir Lall made an illustrated research presentation titled *Divyakṣetra in Divyāsūtra: Pervasive Viṣṇu in Yādavācalamahātmya* on 1st of July, 2015 at 10:45 a.m. In his presentation, Dr. Lall first gave a detailed introduction about the Vaiṣṇava Āgamas which are generally classified in two broad categories viz., the Vaikhānasa and the Pāñcarātras. He stated that while both the schools adhere to, propagate and are the bedrock of the ritualistic and philosophical perspectives of Viṣṇuism, there have been schisms in the outlook and observances of Vaikhānasas and Pāñcarātras. The *Īsvarasamhitā* (IS) is a

Pāñcarātra Vaiṣṇava Āgama and traditionally held to be the (southern) commentary of the Sāttvata Samhitā, the foremost amongst the three gems (*triratna*) of the Pāñcarātra canon. Conventionally it is believed that the IS was composed in about eighth century A.D. in Karnataka and the Cheluva Narayana Svami temple in Melukote, near Mysore, is still governed by the precepts laid out in the IS. The 20th chapter of the IS titled the *Yādavācalamahātmya* is dedicated to the glory of the Yādava mountain, which first enumerates a detailed list of numerous Viṣṇuite *tīrthas* and then describes the legendary origin and significance of the Kalyāṇatīrtha, glory of Cheluva Narayana and Shri Yoganṛsimha temples, which continue to be ‘living’ temples at Melukote. A detailed commentary titled ‘*Sāttvatārthaprakāśikā*’ on the IS has been written by Pandit Alasinga Bhatta in the eighteenth century at Melukote.

Through his paper, Dr. Sudhir Lall presented an extensive study of the legends as well as the Āgamic ritualistic practices related to this ‘living’ sacred space on the basis of the *Yādavācalamahātmya* chapter of the IS with the help of scenic slides and visuals of Melukote temple complex. His presentation was very well received by the scholarly fraternity and was followed by lively interaction with audience.

Interaction with Scholars

The IGNCA team of scholars also interacted with several participants from India and abroad establishing new contacts and reviving older ones. Some scholars who were identified for collaborative work are as follows:

Prof. Mc Comas Taylor, Australia University

Prof. Elizabeth, University of British Columbia, Canada

Prof. Marcena, Cracow University, Poland

Prof. Deven Patel, University of Pennsylvania, USA

Prof. Dominic Gudall, French Institute, Pondicherry

Prof. S. A. S. Sarma, French Institute, Pondicherry

Prof. R. Sathyanarayana, French Institute, Pondicherry

Dr. P. Ajithan, Kerala

Prof. Madhu Khanna, Delhi

Prof. RadhaVallabhTripathi, Delhi

Prof. Rana P.B. Singh, Varanasi

Prof. Srinivasa, IIT-Mumbai

Dr. Rama Kant Pandey, Delhi

Prof. Hare Ram Mishra, Delhi

Dr. Manju Nath Bhatt, Bengaluru

Dr. Jayraman, Bengaluru

Dr. Rani Dadhich, Delhi

Dr. R. Nagaswamy, Chennai

Dr. Manoj Mishra, Delhi

Dr. Karuna Shukla, Thailand

The scholars returned on 03.07.2015 to HQ, after successfully attending the 16th
World Sanskrit Conference 2015.
