

Report on Symposium held on 28-01-2017 in the IGNCA on Project 'Mausam'

1. The stage was set and a sense of expectation filled the air, earth and water as scholars and stalwarts in the field of Maritime History, Communications, Archaeology, Maritime Trade and Social Anthropology joined together in a Symposium on Project 'Mausam' held at the Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts(IGNCA) on 28-01-2017 under the Chairmanship of Dr. Sachchidanand Joshi, Member Secretary, IGNCA. The theme of the Symposium had been 'Maritime heritage of Indian coastline and its potential'. A large number of academicians, Government officials, maritime practitioners and students from various disciplines participated in the programme.
2. After ceremonial functions like felicitations of dignitaries and lighting of the lamp, Shri Joy Kuriakose, Project Director gave welcome address and briefly introduced the project. In the introductory speech, Shri Kuriakose outlined the objectives of the project, scope of the project, the institutions and countries involved in the project, works done so far, and the expected contribution of the project both at micro level and macro level and about enhancement of cultural cooperation between India and other maritime countries.
3. In the first session, Prof. Himanshu Prabha Ray who was the Chairperson of the National Monuments Authority and former Professor of Archaeology & Maritime History at Jawaharlal Nehru University made a power point presentation on 'Coastal shrines in Gujarat: providing anchorage and linking routes'. She explained the relevance of monsoons and argued that Monsoons are much more than a natural phenomenon because of predictability. She made a cursory look at commerce, culture and religion in the context of Indian Ocean littoral. Referring to the coastal shrines in Gujarat, she has tried to explain the historiography of how temples came in and overlapped with the fishing villages and how nautical traditions overlapped with architectural sites. She has linked specificity of routes with visibility of stone anchorages and their relationship with knowledge systems. Conceptualization of maritime space has been yet another area covered by her, by explaining the transformation which happened in the 19th & 20th centuries. She has argued that the past should be drawn into, to know its role in the knowledge systems. She concluded her talk by stating that while looking into the shared maritime heritage of Indian ocean, there is a need to revive intellectual traditions of subcontinent and also to focus on the knowledge systems of ocean world.

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4. Shri Shekhar Dutt, formerly Defence Secretary and Governor of Chhattisgarh spoke about 'Maritime heritage and coastal shipping'. Being a person connected with national defence and national security, from his practical experience, he had highlighted the relevance of heritage of India's glorious past. He glimpsed through his experiences in Rajasthan during the Indo- Pakistani War of 1971 while serving in the Indian Army and in Goa while he was Chairman of the Goa Shipyard. He stressed importance of past ship building activities and also about the need to deepen the knowledge about Indian ocean by engaging larger number of personnel into Marine Economics/ Trade. Shri Dutt wound up his talk by suggesting that National Maritime Foundation, National Maritime University and other institutions of marine technology or oceanic study may also be linked with the Project 'Mausam'.

5. In the second session, Vice Admiral (Retd.) Shri Pradeep Kaushiva who was Director of National Maritime Foundation deliberated on 'India's maritime engagement: ancient to future'. Starting from Harappan and Rigvedic times to modern times, he made an elaborate talk on Indian maritime history. He argued that to re-construct our heritage, we have to rely on some of the early western writings, our oral history, archaeological evidences, traditions, folklore, mythology and other interlinking evidentiary materials. For meaningful research, he has pointed out two pre-conditions, viz., regional participants must feel the need for cooperation and, the political will & resolve to take it forward. He is of the opinion that with political and economic stability, India is now in a position to do constructive work in this endeavour. Admiral Kaushiva has concluded by saying that the contours of India's future maritime engagements lie in purposeful and resolute participation through own contribution as well as persuading other stakeholders towards this cause.

6. Prof. Makkhanlal, Head of Department at Delhi Institute of Heritage Research & Management spoke about practical aspects of project 'Mausam', pointing out the need for cooperation from all stakeholders. He reiterated that it is a transnational cultural project and therefore it is very important to involve all the 39 countries to make it a success. He opined that instead of remaining in isolation, concerted efforts need to be made to obtain tangible results. Inviting a reference to China's silk route project, he has pointed that India has more stronger cultural roots than a country like China with silk route and therefore, we can do better, if we make an attempt.

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Prof. Makkhanlal has said that the project is multi-disciplinary in character which can rekindle long lost ties across nations of Ocean world and forges new avenues of cooperation and exchange.

7. After taking care of Questions and Answers from audience by the speakers in the Symposium, Dr. Sachchidanand Joshi made the concluding remarks. He commented that although it is the Ocean that connects our world, Ocean is not respected by the way it should have been. He has stated that the project has immense potential in view of the range of subjects it covers. He said that the launch of the project 'Mausam' by India and future partnerships with other countries on this project will enable us to look at the important phase of World history from Austranesian, South, South East, East & West Asian and African perspectives. He has also pointed out the need of incorporating views of Ministries of External Affairs, Tourism, Textiles, Shipping, Commerce & Industry, Overseas Indian Affairs, Earth Sciences, Defence and Departments like Lighthouse Directorate, Rubber Board, Coffee Board, Spice Board etc. He has said that the landlocked States like Chhattisgarh and metropolitan cities like Delhi often do not realize what kind of culture flourishes in coast lines. He concluded his talk by lining up a strategy to take forward the project by linking scholars, practitioners, institutions and Countries.