



# DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

## GAUHATI UNIVERSITY

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The Department of History, Gauhati University is organising an international seminar on *India and South East Asia: Mapping Connections on 27-28 April 2018*. In view of the Government of India's 'Act East Policy' that followed the 'Look East Policy' it is imperative that we arrive at an understanding of the age old connections that have existed between India and the nations of South East Asia. India's links with Southeast Asia has different dimensions. Historically, trade between ancient Indian kingdoms on the Bay of Bengal and countries in Southeast Asia such as Thailand, Malaysia and Cambodia are well known. Along these trade routes there developed cultural exchanges and the spread of Buddhism and Hinduism which still exert a strong influence in Southeast Asia as evidenced in World Heritage sites like Borobudur and Angkor Vat. Stories from the Epics and Puranas continue to have an abiding presence in the art and culture of South East Asia. In the pre-historic as well as historic period migration of people from South East Asia to India and from India to these lands resulted in many common cultural practices and beliefs.

Mapping these connections will help in a better understanding among nations and help India in fulfilling its goal of better trade and cultural relations with the countries of Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam and Indonesia. Delegates are invited to participate to make our seminar a success. A detailed concept note along with other details can be found below.

Yours faithfully

Dr. Paromita Das  
Coordinator &  
Professor and Head  
Department of History  
Gauhati University

### Registration Fees:

**Submission of abstracts for paper presentation and acceptance is now closed but delegates without papers can also participate by paying a registration fees Rs.1500 and will be given a certificate of participation**

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### CONCEPT NOTE

India and South East Asia have links that date back more than two thousand years. In the early centuries of the Common Era merchants from India had travelled to the lands of South East Asia both by sea and land. In course of time along these trade routes developed cultural exchanges. These can be seen today in the art and architecture of Angkor Vat and Borobudur in Cambodia and Java respectively. In the field of religion Buddhist and Brahmannical belief systems greatly influenced these far off lands. Sanskrit literature also left its mark in the forms of inscriptions and manuscripts. The stories from the two Great Epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata and the Puranas inspired literary compositions, theatre, dance forms and art in Thailand, Cambodia, Java, Sumatra and Bali. Many merchants and priests from India also founded kingdoms and acquired political authority in these far off lands. Their legacy remains to this day in the names of place names, temples, religion, art, literature and culture.

But even before Indian merchants travelled to the lands termed "Greater India" by R.C. Majumdar, India's Northeast had witnessed waves of migration from these far off lands. Anthropological studies indicate that the Brahmaputra Valley lies in one of the great

migration routes of the world. The earliest settlers of the region were the Austro-Asiatic groups who migrated from South East Asia in the pre-historic period more than 10,000 years ago. They are represented in India today by the Khasis of Meghalaya, the Kol, Ho and Munda of Central India and the Nicobarese, all of who belong to the Mon-Khmer linguistic group. In other parts of South East Asia today they are represented by the Vietnamese and the Khmer speakers of Cambodia, besides many sub-groups in Java, etc.

These early settlers were followed by the Tibeto-Burman linguistic groups that are today scattered over a wide area of both East and South East Asia, from the foothills of the Himalayas to Myanmar, and the lands beyond. In northeast India they are represented today by the Garos, Naga tribes, Mizos, Kukis, Bodo, Rabha, Kachari, Tiwa, Karbi, Dimasa etc. In the historical period, the Tai-Ahoms from Upper Burma (Myanmar) entered the Brahmaputra valley and they were followed at a later date by the Aitonyias, Turungs, Tai-Phakials, etc.

The discovery of pre-historic stone jars in northeast India in the region of Dima-Hasao that bear great similarity with the stone jars from Laos stand mute testimony to ancient migration routes. Most of these routes of migration were originally trade routes, some connected with the Silk Route, others to the regions of South East Asia. Besides silk and horses, salt was also a major item of trade.

Literary records and inscriptions refer to Brahmans of the Kaundiny gotra establishing political authority in many regions of South East Asia in the first millennium of the Common Era. Besides the port of Tamralipti in the Bay of Bengal, Kaundinya Brahmans from Kundilnagar in Northeast India may have also travelled to South East Asia and established their rule there. Hiuen-Tsang's testimony refers to the eastern sea route being under the jurisdiction of Bhaskarvarman, a seventh century ruler of Assam. These records open up fresh avenues for research.

In the thirteenth century with the coming of the Tai-Ahoms to Assam through the Patkai Hills political, cultural and commercial relations with present Myanmar received a fillip. In the colonial period in India the British by occupying Ava (Myanmar) opened up not only political but also commercial relations with the region of Southeast Asia. In the twentieth century with the onset of the Second World War the construction of the Stilwell Road to facilitate transportation of men and goods also gave a boost to trade and commerce after the end of the war.

In the recent past, the Government of India with a view to renew age-old trade and cultural links with the nations to our east had pronounced the "Look East" Policy. This was followed by the Act East Policy. This aims at improving economic, cultural and political *relations* with the *Southeast Asian* region which has had close contacts with *India* for centuries and is *linked* culturally and geographically with it.

India today has emerged as a major player in the political and economic arena of Asia, attempting to challenge the predominant role of the People's Republic of China vis-à-vis the nations that form ASEAN while continuing to pursue the policy of Non-alignment. India now seeks to engage more vigorously with the lands of South East Asia. In view of this, it is imperative to understand the different dimensions of India's relations with the countries of South East Asia. The region of South and South East Asia has a rich and diverse cultural heritage. Culture can play a major role in promoting good relations and understanding among the nations. This can become possible by finding common meeting ground among nations. It is contended that people and nations can come closer when they discover the "familiar" in "the other". India and the nations of South East Asia have many common cultural roots. Discovering these roots can make us realize that in spite of ethnic, religious, linguistic, sectarian and regional differences nations can find a common ground, a shared heritage. This in turn will facilitate trade and commerce. Hence, it is proposed to organize an international seminar to facilitate a dialogue between India and her South East Asian neighbours, namely - Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Malaysia and Indonesia. Scholars are invited to present research papers and deliberate on issues related to the following broad areas of study:

- 1 Ethnic communities and migration routes
  - 2 Trade and trade routes
  - 3 Language, literature and culture
  - 3 Religions and culture
  - 4 Art and architecture
  - 5 India and ASEAN
  - 6 Any other subject broadly related to the theme of the seminar
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