

## Full Report

### 12<sup>th</sup> IAAPS INTERNATIONAL BIENNIAL CONFERENCE, 2024

The 12<sup>th</sup> IAAPS International Biennial Conference was held on 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> of October 2024 at Gangadhar Meher University, Sambalpur, Odisha. The theme of this conference was - **History, Culture, and Commerce in the Indo-Pacific World: Past and Present**. The Conference was held in Hybrid mode and the two day conference was subdivided into 7 themes and 10 parallel sessions.

The major thematic sessions were as follows:-

- 1) Crossing the Bay of Bengal through Ages: Connectivity, Commerce and Migration
- 2) Decolonization and Nationalism in South and South-east Asia
- 3) India and her Neighbours: History, Polity and Society
- 4) Dynamics of Geo strategy, Geo economy and Geopolitics in the Indo Pacific: Role of the Stakeholders
- 5) Maritime Resources, Capacity Building and Disaster, Risk Reduction in the Indo Pacific
- 6) Gender and Society
- 7) Special Panel on Odisha

The Keynote address was delivered by Prof David Brewster and the valedictory speech was delivered by Prof Rekha Pande. Apart from this there was a special lecture by Prof Ashwini Mahapatra and a special plenary session on Orissa dealing with Orissa's relations with Indo-Pacific through ages.

#### Inaugural Session

The 12<sup>th</sup> Biennial International Conference of Indian Association for Asian and Pacific Studies 12<sup>th</sup> Biennial Conference was held on Gangadhar Meher University, Sambalpur, Odisha in collaboration with the Indian Council for Social Science Research (ICSSR) and Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA) on 23-24 October, 2024.

The conference began with the inaugural session with the lighting of the lamp and facilitation of the dignitaries and guests by the students.

Dr Sasmita Rani Shasini, the local organizing Secretary, welcomed the audience to the conference and in her address spoke about the strategic importance of the Indo-Pacific as a cross-road of civilizations, history, culture and economies of the Indo-Pacific region. She also highlighted the importance of the past and the present of the Indo-Pacific while pointing out the future implications of the major stake-holders of the Indo-Pacific region.

The Hon'ble Vice Chancellor, Prof. N. Nagaraju in his address highlighted the importance of the university for the state of Odisha while putting forward the importance of the theme of the conference. He spoke about the importance of the Indo-Pacific in terms of connectivity and interdependence of people, trade and commerce.

Prof. Lipi Ghosh, President IAAPS, welcomed the audience on behalf of IAAPS and highlighted the role of the organization in fostering an academic cultural on studies on Asia

and the Pacific world. She touched upon the various academic activities conducted by the organization. She also addressed the organization's importance to the theme of the conference and stressed the need for student's interaction across all states and beyond to foster an academic culture in the Indo-Pacific.

Dr. Anasua Basu Ray Chaudhury, Secretary of IAAPS, in her address spoke about the evolution of the concept and its importance in linking the democracies of the region. She pointed out that the Bay of Bengal constitute the core of the Indo-Pacific region with historical links and contemporary strategic significance. She also highlighted the contemporary significance of the Bay of Bengal in light of the numerous initiatives undertaken by the major stakeholders. She also spoke about the Quad as a central institutional manifestation of the Indo-Pacific.

The Chief Guest Chintamani Mahapatra, Professor of American Studies, Rector Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, Founder and Honorary Chairman, KIIPS(Kalinga Institute of Indo-Pacific Studies) in his inaugural address spoke about his four decades of academic association with the Indo Pacific. He mentioned about the close overseas commercial and maritime contact of Orissa with Java, Sumatra, Bali, and Borneo. He asserted India's role in the Indo Pacific since independence with special reference to Indonesia and Bandung Conference. He stated that Indo Pacific is a larger concept today and India has an important role to play but also cautioned that India has to craft its own policy and navigate through it.

Dr. Nilanjan Ghosh, Guest of Honour, Director CNED and Observer Research Foundation, Kolkata referred to the importance of Indo Pacific as a cultural hub where of exchange of goods and ideas take place. He considered Indo Pacific to be one of the most populous and economically dynamic regions of the world sharing sixty percent of global shipping trade. He spoke about China's growing influence and initiatives in this region and mentioned that the greatest challenge lay in combating Chinese influence.

Dr. Teshu Singh, special guest and ICWA Representative to 12<sup>th</sup> Biennial Conference, mentioned that ICWA was established in 1943 as a think tank and it became an institution of national importance in 2001. She spoke about the new shift in geopolitics in the Indo Pacific region with the rise of China and referred to India's new vision in this region.

David Brewster, Senior Research Fellow, National Security College, Australian National University & a Distinguished Research Fellow, Australia India Institute, University of Melbourne, Australia discussed the future strategic state of affairs for the Indian Ocean and mentioned and how the major powers like United States, India and China were bringing in important changes in this region. He spoke about India's emergence as the largest economy and biggest military power among the Indian Ocean states and consequent strategic competition between India and China which also harbours strategic interest in the Indian Ocean. He also discussed about the growing interest of middle powers like France, Australia, emerging economies like Indonesia and Bangladesh and fast growing East African countries like Kenya, Ethiopia in this region. Prof. Brewster feared that major powers like India, China would like to control the smaller countries leading to their political and economic instability. However, he felt that the perspective of even the smallest countries must be heeded and given due importance to maintain a balance in the Indian Ocean region.

Dr. Dona Ganguly, the Conference Secretary of IAAPS, gave the vote of thanks for the inaugural session.

## **Academic Session**

### **Panel 1-23/10/2024**

#### **Theme: Crossing the Bay of Bengal through Ages: Connectivity, Commerce and Migration.**

The session was chaired by Prof Umakant Mishra, Associate Professor, Ravenshaw College, Cuttack, Odisha. The session was held in virtual mode.

*Devout Monks and Their Quest To Nalanda: A Discussion On Chinese Monks And Their Pilgrimage:* Chitralkha Banerjee, Independent Researcher, Bengaluru. One of the best cultural legacies of Han dynasty (206 BCE – 220 CE) was the introduction of Buddhism to the people of China and since then manifold forms of Buddhist doctrines, literature and art forms started materializing in different parts of Asia. The rapid spread of Buddhism resulted in various doctrinal reinterpretation, which eventually led to the Buddhist monks of China to take multiple missions to India in quest of original interpretation of the Buddhist teaching. 6th and 7th century suddenly witnessed an active movement of Buddhist pilgrimage to the Indian subcontinent, especially different Buddhist sites of eastern India, as this place was the heartland of Buddhist cultural heritage. Nalanda mahāvihāra was the focal point, but there were several small-scale monastic establishments which also gained attraction. This paper provides a comprehensive examination of the interactions between Chinese monk-pilgrims and different monastic settlements. It also highlights the significance of these interactions for the transmission of Buddhist culture between India and China. This paper aims to focus on the two facets of this interaction- firstly, makes a brief sketch on the biographical profiles of these monk-pilgrims. Secondly, it analyses the nature of their interaction with those pilgrimage centers and their role as center of Buddhist learning. This paper also explores how far the small-scale establishments contributed to the circulation of knowledge and their position in the larger Buddhist world. In addition, the paper delves into the outcome of the interaction with the local culture which allowed a greater exchange of common beliefs and ideas.

*Situating the Paper Trade in the Larger Mercantile Network between the Gujarat and China (c. 600-1300 CE):* Titas Sarkar, Doctoral Research Scholar, Department of History, School of Social Science, University of Hyderabad. The paper examines the historical paper trade and its role in the maritime mercantile network between Gujarat and China from around 600 to 1300 CE. The study highlights Gujarat's strategic location along the western coast of India, which positioned it as a crucial maritime gateway for trade and cultural exchanges. It explores the region's connectivity through the Silk Road and the evolution of trade networks, particularly emphasizing the rise of Islamic influence that facilitated the exchange of commodities and knowledge. The transfer of paper manufacturing techniques from China to Gujarat acted as a catalyst for financial development, supporting trade expansion with instruments such as credits, debt records, and receipts. The inclusion of documents like Geniza records also enriches the analysis. By focusing on paper manufacturing, the research aims to offer insights into maritime trade dynamics and the historical contributions of merchant communities.

*Crime and Criminality in the Colonial Andamans: A Historical Study*: Sharmila Chanda, Assistant Professor of History, Kidderpore College, Kolkata. The paper discusses the history of penal colonization in the Andamans, initially attempted in 1789 but abandoned due to unfavourable conditions. The region was revisited as a penal colony in 1857 to exile political prisoners and mutineers, using the Cellular Jail at Port Blair for incarceration. The British introduced strict disciplinary measures, hard labour and new forms of carceral control, portraying it as moral reform. However, this approach led to severe psychological and physical consequences, including mental illness and suicides. This paper also tries to show how the penal colony, despite the well-regulated disciplinary regime and harsh penal measures became a space for ‘unnatural crimes’ like sexual perversion, prostitution and sodomy. This was an indication of contestation and resistance to the imperial agenda of securing exclusive claims to political power by regimenting the minds and bodies of the convicts in the colony.

## **Panel 2: 23/10/2024**

### **Theme:- Decolonization and Nationalism in South and Southeast Asia**

This session was chaired by Dr Susmita Mukherjee, Head Department of History, Shyamaprasad College, Kolkata. There were total three papers in this session the papers are as stated below.

*Modernity and Modesty: Clothing the Bhadramahila in Colonial Bengal* by Debasree Sarkar. The encounter between the East and the West engendered lasting changes in various spheres of Indian social life, including women’s clothes, as what one wears is often considered an important marker of one’s self-perception. The *bhadralok* society internalized the Victorian moralities, and saw its womenfolk through the puritanical lens and the idea of a sense of shame (*lajja*) or modesty was introduced as a pre-requisite for modernity. This in turn transformed the sartorial practice of the Bengali gentlewoman, the *bhadramahila*. The paper delves into the first generation of educated Bengali Hindu and Brahma women about their perspectives on modesty and their sartorial expressions to understand how the act of writing about *lajja* in prescriptive essays and the real-life practices expressed through autobiographical works could narrate different stories. While the non-fictional essays written by women suggest an appropriate decorum for the *bhadramahila*, almost imitating the “conduct literature” written in England, the autobiographical writings reveal internal conflicts and the practices of the daily personal lives of the *bhadramahila*.

*Women Health and the State: Nursing Profession in Post- Colonial India* by Aparajita Dhar, Associate Professor, Dept of History, The University of Burdwan. This paper points out that Nursing history has become increasingly popular since the 1980s enriched by the often unexplored written archives left by nurses, and the enormous potential offered by oral history work. It has been recognized by the scholars of nursing history that the study of nursing represents a unique opportunity to understand the social status of women. In recent years, a strong focus on gender and women’s role in colonial health projects in India has emerged which has formed a corpus of historical work on the role of Indian and Western women under British imperialism. However, the neglect of nursing in academic work in the colonial medical system is outstanding. The literature on health and post colonial state has also been crucial in situating the story of nurses’ neglect after Independence. The first two decades after Independence saw

much enthusiastic rhetoric voiced about the need to develop nursing but little positive action. The Indian state voiced support for better education and standardization, while in reality it adopted a pragmatic approach to its urgent need for hospital staff that gave little priority to nurses' desire for more secure and satisfying working lives. Recent decades have seen a political climate more favourable to nurses, although the theoretical recognition of nurses' concerns has not translated into substantive action.

*Negotiating the Politics of Spatiality and Gender in Reclaiming Identity: Reading Women's Fictions from India's Northeast* by Paloma Chaterji, research scholar at St Xavier's University, Kolkata and Assistant Professor, Dept of English, Chinmaya Viswa Vidyapeeth, Kochi. India's Northeast, treated as an epistemic and socio-political category than a geographical position, has witnessed perpetual conflicts over geographical space and identity. The paper investigates how fiction writing by women of this region becomes the decolonizing agent in narrating the identity crisis instigated by politics of colonialism and postcolonialism, including the triply subdued position of women, as women, tribal and Northerner. The novels of Easterine Kire from Nagaland, namely, *Bitter Wormwood* and *A Naga Village Remembered*, and Temsula Ao's *These Hills Called Home* negotiate with racial, gendered, and political contestations. It has been argued that fiction writing in Northeast-India has developed as a feminist discourse in addressing the personal and political intersections of nation, state, and the house which challenge the established parameters of nationality and independence, centre and the periphery. Finally, displacement in relation to the politics of nation-state and gender in post-colonial India has been examined, contesting the theoretical and doctrinal fixities associated with the concepts of the tribal-non tribal, rural-urban by locating their constantly changing dynamics to understand its impact on the identity of the marginalized

### **Panel 3:- 23/10/2024**

#### **Theme:- India and her Neighbours: History, Polity and Society**

This session was chaired by Prof. Suchandra Ghosh, Professor & Head, Department of History, Hyderabad University, Vice President of Indian Association for Asian and Pacific Studies. There were a total of 2 papers in this session. The papers are as stated below.

*India and Southeast Asian Relations in Historical Context* by Bhawna Pokharna, Ph D, Professor, Political Science Govt Meera Girls College Udaipur Raj India. India and Southeast Asia have shared historical, cultural, civilizational, and trade ties for centuries. Ancient Indian literature reverently referred to Southeast Asia as the "Golden Island" and "Golden Peninsula," while India was known as the "Golden Bird." Indian philosophy, culture, religion, music, and architecture have profoundly influenced Southeast Asia. Historians once described the region as an "extended part of India" or "Greater India" due to its strong cultural and political affinity with India. Archaeological excavations and iconic temples like Angkor Wat, Borobudur, and Prambanan showcase Indian art and culture's lasting impact. The sea facilitated India's cultural spread to Southeast Asia, while Islam arrived via the Indian Ocean in the 8th century, primarily through Malaysian Tamil and Gujarati Muslims. The British Empire's expansion led to Western powers vying for influence in Southeast Asia, with Britain ultimately controlling Burma, Singapore, and Hong Kong. This resulted in new labor-intensive agriculture, trading, and industrial activities. The paper aimed to explore the historical dynamics between India and Southeast Asia, examining their cultural, economic, and political interactions. The paper

argued that by delving into the past, we can better understand the complexities of their relationship and its continued relevance in shaping regional identity, cooperation, and growth.

*Exploring the Contours of Small State Diplomacy in Indo-Pacific: Case of Bangladesh* by Dr. Dona Ganguly, Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science The Bhawanipur Education Society College. Structural Realism acknowledges the coexistence of mighty powers and small states within the international system. However, small states should not be equated with weakness. Despite operating in the same political and economic environment as larger nations, small states prioritize security, prosperity, and citizen wellbeing, employing similar diplomatic means. Characteristics such as limited size, resources, openness, vulnerability to natural disasters, and climate change shape their concerns. They often champion legitimacy and the rule of law. The paper explored Bangladesh's potential game-changing role as a small state in the Indo-Pacific Region's geopolitical landscape. It examined Bangladesh's growing significance amidst emerging dynamics and delved into the 'Indo-Pacific Ruprekha' policy. This analysis aimed to provide insight into Bangladesh's strategic position and its implications for regional relations. The paper also invited several questions from the audience. Questions were raised on the impact of China's Belt and Road Initiative on Bangladesh and on the possible future of Bangladesh after the fall of Sheikh Hasina Government. The questions were satisfactorily answered.

#### **Panel 4 :-23/10/2024**

#### **Theme:- Dynamics of Geo strategy Geo economy and Geopolitics in the Indo-Pacific: Role of Stake holders**

Prof. Anil Pokharel, Department of History, Purvanchal University, Nepal was the chair in the session. Total three papers were presented in the session.

Annesha Saha, Kanai Kar, and Dibyakanta Mukherjee, Postgraduate students, Department of South and Southeast Asian Studies, University of Calcutta, in their joint paper titled 'The Potential for Nuclear Weapon Usage in the Vietnam War: Historical Context, Consequences, and Contemporary Geopolitical Implications' examined the motivations of those who considered deploying nuclear weapons, exploring the potential justifications (i.e., tracing evidence) and the chilling prospect of nuclear devastation becoming a reality for the second time in human history. The paper also explored the deterrent effect these weapons had, preventing a wider conflict, and the broader impact on warfare and international relations during the Cold War. The paper concluded with an analysis of a hypothetical scenario of the consequences of what might have happened in the region, and the dynamics of global politics, if a nuclear weapon had been used?

Biplab Debnath, Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Tripura University, in his paper titled 'Beyond the Binaries of Inclusion and Exclusion: Understanding China's Response to the Indo-Pacific Strategies' analysed the notion of Indo-pacific in the context of its inclusionary and exclusionary connotations among the nations. The paper also explained the

political connotation of the term, which underscores the dynamics between the two great powers – the USA and China. In this context, the paper examined China's evolving policy towards the proliferation of the Indo-Pacific idea. The paper argued that the dynamics between 'Indo-Pacific' strategies and China goes beyond the binaries of inclusion and exclusion, and rather reflects the complex geo-political interests of Beijing rooted on the latter's policies of rejection, criticism and accommodation.

Debabrata Sen, Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, Rabindra Bharati University, Kolkata in his paper titled 'India's Quad After AUKUS Initiatives' analysed the significance of Indo-Pacific in the context of institutional mechanisms such as the Quad and the AUKUS. The paper argued that India, one of the most important members of the US-led Quadrilateral Power Alliance (QUAD) in the Indo-Pacific region, has a broader inclusive orientation of the region as well as the Indo-Pacific and Quad mechanism that is quite different in many aspects from the other three countries. In this context, the paper sought to determine how the emergence of a declared military alliance like AUKUS in the region and its recent policy of expansion will affect the interests of India and the Quad.

#### **Panel 5:- 23/10/2024**

#### **Theme:- Maritime Resources, Capacity Building and Disaster, Risk Reduction in the Indo Pacific**

Prof. Kanopporn Wongkalasin, Professor, Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia, Mahidol University was the chair in the session. Two paper presenters presented their research papers in the panel.

Raja Lohar PhD Research Scholar, Tripura University, presented a paper titled 'India's evolving maritime vision from 'Net Security Provider' to 'Preferred Security Partner': Analysing India's maritime cooperation and Capacity Building Engagements in the neighbourhood'. He explored the dynamics of India's evolving vision towards a 'Preferred Security Partnership' from a net security provider and response from littoral countries of the Indian Ocean. He followed this with an analysis of whether India, through maritime cooperation and engagement with a special emphasis on capacity-building roles with the neighbourhood countries, can strengthen its influence and position. His focussed on three specific aspects of capacity-building, strategic bridge and China's presence in analysing India's role.

Vishnugayathre S Student of Political Science, Kumaraguru College of Arts and Science, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu presented his paper titled 'Between Peace and Conflict: China's Gray Zone Coercion and its influence in India's Indo-Pacific interests.' She delved into China's Gray zone coercion tactics, exploring its motivations and strategies, and examined India's efforts to uphold its national interests, focusing on countering China's tactics and fostering stability in collaboration with ASEAN nations, through the lens of game theory.

## **Panel 6:- 23/10/2024**

### **Theme:- Gender and Society**

This session was chaired by Dr. Aparajita Dhar, Associate Professor in the Department of History at the University of Burdwan. Five papers were presented during this session, with details as follows:

#### *Beyond Borders: A Comparative Study of Gender Equality Efforts in India and Bangladesh*

The paper was presented by Dr. Disari Roy, Assistant Professor and Coordinator, Department of Women's Studies at Diamond Harbour Women's University. Gender equality encompasses the equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities afforded to all individuals, regardless of gender. It emphasizes providing everyone with equitable access to resources, services, and participation in decision-making processes. This commitment involves actively combating gender-based discrimination and stereotypes, promoting balanced representation across various sectors and leadership roles, and fostering environments where individuals can thrive irrespective of their gender identity or expression. In India and Bangladesh, progress toward gender equality has been made, but significant challenges remain. Both nations have taken steps to empower women through advancements in education, employment opportunities, and legal reforms. However, disparities persist, particularly in access to education, healthcare, and political representation. India and Bangladesh have enacted various laws and gender responsive policies aimed at safeguarding and uplifting women. Through an analysis of policies and legal frameworks in both countries, an attempt was made to uncover insights into the intricate dynamics of gender equality and highlight areas that would benefit from further advancement.

#### *Understanding Citizenship and Gender in the changing Context: Scenario of India and Indonesia*

The paper was presented by Madhurima Chowdhury, Assistant Professor and Head of the Department of South and Southeast Asian Studies in the University of Calcutta. Citizenship is about class of a group or community that confers rights and liabilities as a result of similar class. It's both a status or an identity and a practice or process of relating to the social world through the exercise of rights protections and the fulfilment of scores. Citizenship proposition has its roots in western political study and is grounded on the "universal citizen". Still the forms of citizenship change according to literary and artistic environment. One important way in which citizenship has been reframed is the preface of a gender perspective by sexists and gender equivalency activists. In recent times, numerous actors have used citizenship rights and liabilities in order to address development pretensions similar as poverty eradication, demarcation and democratisation. This paper therefore compared the conditions of India and Indonesia as both of the countries have different government systems. The paper has also analysed the situation of concepts and practices as well as its relation to the fulfilment of women's citizenship rights in India and in Indonesia.



*The Trafficking - Prostitution Syndrome in Colonial and Contemporary Bengal.* The paper was presented by Dr. Aparna Bandyopadhyay, Associate Professor, Department of History at Diamond Harbour Women's University. The trafficking of women, including minor girls, remains one of the most grievous afflictions of modern society. Women are especially vulnerable to trafficking due to their unequal status in a patriarchal society, with most being trafficked for purposes of prostitution and other forms of sexual exploitation. In India, trafficking is among the most severe forms of violence against women, with West Bengal notably leading in reported cases. This paper examined the trafficking-prostitution nexus in Bengal through a historical lens, highlighting the significant role that emotional factors have played in this process. Drawing on archival evidence, it argues that, both in colonial Bengal and in contemporary times, traffickers have exploited women's emotional vulnerabilities. Through an analysis of Bengal's literature and cinema set during the colonial era, this study divulged how these cultural works align with archival records regarding the emotional dimensions of this societal scourge. The paper also highlighted both legal measures and non-punitive strategies adopted by the state to combat this criminal practice.

*The Missing Gender Lens in India's Indo-Pacific Strategy.* The paper was presented by Mohor Chakraborty, Assistant Professor of Political Science, Chitta Mahato Memorial College, Purulia, West Bengal. Indo-Pacific being a vital strategic construct is home to nearly 65% of the world's population. This integrated theatre has evolved as an important zone of strategic contestation amongst major powers. India, owing to its unique geo-strategic location in the South Asian subcontinent naturally views the Indian Ocean as its own sphere of influence. Contrary to the general understanding of the area from a purely strategic outlook, challenges to human security in the region have always remained in the backseat. In this context, gender mainstreaming by the Indian government in the Indo-Pacific arena has not gained much credence, let alone India's claims of an inclusive Indo-Pacific approach. The paper has examined how gender mainstreaming in the Indo-Pacific can possibly help India to foster a well knitted and cohesive approach in the region. Other vital stakeholders in the region do have a notable gender approach vis-à-vis India. If India can plug in with the gender momentum of its key partners in the Indo-Pacific, then it can definitely send ripples of regional security and stability across the Indo-Pacific in the coming decades. The gender card has the power to push across traditional security issues and act as a soft power bastion in the region. This paper therefore examined how this remains a serious gap for India which it should hopefully try to fulfil in the future.

*Educated Women and Ideal Womanhood: Perspectives from Bengali Periodicals.* The paper was presented by Mandira Sarkar, Associate Professor in History, Magrahat College, West Bengal. She is also a Ph.D Research Scholar, department of History at Diamond Harbour Women's University. Periodicals played a pivotal role in shaping the social and cultural landscape of the Bengali people. In the 19th and 20th centuries, these publications served as platforms for engaging in debates on pressing contemporary issues. Central to the reformist agenda of the 19th century was the "woman question," a theme that prominently featured in Bengali periodicals and continued to resonate well into the 20th century. Among the most debated topics was women's education and its implications for their roles within family and society. This societal concern was vividly reflected in periodicals, ranging from critiques and negative portrayals of educated women to prescriptive writings on their expected roles. Alongside a surge in prescriptive manuals, Bengali periodicals were saturated with exhortations on the ideals of womanhood. This paper explored the prescriptive literature published in these periodicals, revealing how Bengali print media undertook the dual task of "enfranchisement and limitation of women," at once appealing to tradition and veiling restrictions under the guise of progress.

## **Panel 1:- 24/10/2024**

### **Theme:- India and her neighbours: History, Polity and Society**

This session was chaired by Prof Emeritus Dr Sutiphand Chirativat, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand. There were total 4 papers in this session the paper are as stated below.

*Spoken word art: A catalyst for social and political changes in West Bengal and Bangladesh* by Srabanti Basu, Professor of Biotechnology, Heritage Institute of Technology, West Bengal. Spoken word art is a form of poetry that is composed for performance. However, in Bengali culture, the term refers to all types of performance that needs oratory skill. The paper uses the word with the second meaning. She discussed the uses of lectures and oral rendition of poems and prose in the social and political movements in pre and post independent period of West Bengal and Bangladesh. She demonstrated how the oratory skill was used in Freedom Movement, in the cultural movement of IPTA, Language Movement and Liberation War of Bangladesh. She also discussed the role of spoken word art to address the contemporary social and political issues like economic crises, refugee problems, unemployment and under-employment, gender equality and so on. She also shared the views of the poetry performers to use the art to catalyse the social changes through their performances.

*Indians in Southeast Asia: A Case Study of Indian Community in Thailand from Historical to contemporary times* by Shiladitya Basu, Independent scholar, India Foundation, New Delhi. The author focuses on the present day context of Indian communities in Southeast Asia. He started with stating from ancient times that how Hindus exerted their control over Southeast Asia which strong testimony of Borobudur and Angkor Wat temples in Southeast Asia. Then in the colonial period the presence of indentured labour in Southeast Asia especially the business community in Thailand specifically in Pahurat and Sukhumvit area in Bangkok. How they established their enterprise in this area. Lastly the fourth generation of Indian community residing in Thailand how they accepted the Thai culture and even willingly want to give up the Indian culture but is succumbed to the pressure of ancestors. So it is evident from the fact that a hybridization of culture is been witnessed among the Indians in Thailand but with more inclination of Thai culture.

*Changing political scenario: Sheik Hasina's Two Terms* by Samra Hossian, PhD Scholar, Department of South and Southeast Asia, University of Calcutta. Sheikh Hasina's Awami league became the longest-serving administration of Bangladesh even outlasting even the military regime of 1980s. The author focuses on the last two terms of Hasina's period and showed how the legislature took its turn to authoritarianism from democracy. She discussed the changes, including several amendment of the constitution by the government to demonstrate the transition from democracy to authoritarianism. The paper argues that the legislature has increasingly enabled the executive branch to amass power serving as a tool for the ruling party. The paper compares the two terms of Hasina and traces how the policies

changed over time. It also documents the restrictions imposed upon the freedom of speech by the Bangladesh government.

The paper entitled *The Military coup and its aftermath in Myanmar: ASEAN's Limitation and Imperatives for Collaborative Engagement with Regional Power* by Sachoiba Inkah, Ph.D, scholar, Centre for Indo-Pacific Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University (New Delhi), highlights military coup in Myanmar which took place on February 2021 has jolted not only the region but sent shockwaves to ASEAN. The paper focuses how ASEAN's non-intervention stance has deepened the crisis in Myanmar. The author emphasizes that it's high time for ASEAN to act proactively by collaborative engagement with regional powers. Both China and India have more or less made a balancing approach towards the Myanmar junta regime. The author stresses that even though ASEAN has limitations with its complex geopolitical framework still a cohesive framework through collective influence will facilitate peaceful resolution and sustainable democratic transition in Myanmar. Lastly author feels positive that it is through this framework only regional stability and prosperity can be maintained in the Southeast Asian region.

#### **Panel 2:- 24/10/2024**

**Theme:- The Dynamics of Geo Strategy, Geo economy and Geopolitics in the Indo Pacific; Role of Stakeholders**

The Chair of the Session Dr. Anasua Basu Ray Chaudhury commenced the panel discussion by drawing the attention of the audience on the relevance of the Indo-Pacific region. She pointed out that since antiquity, the region has been an epicenter of trade, connectivity, people to people interactions and more recently a hub of geopolitical pivot of cooperation and competition. There were total 4 papers in this session as stated below-

*Mobility Across the Bay of Bengal: View from the Kalinga Andhra Coast* by Debankita Das, PhD Research Scholar, Department of History, School of Social Sciences, University of Hyderabad, Telangana. Taking up the thread from this introduction, presented her paper on coastal histories. Grounded in Pierre Yves Manguin's "Bay of Bengal Interaction Sphere" (BBIS) concept, she examined historical mobility and cultural exchange between South Asia and Southeast Asia, focusing on the Kalinga-Andhra coastal region. Das highlights how ancient trade routes connected South Asian littorals, citing the spread of cultural artefacts like ceramics and the influence of Buddhism, evident from archaeological sites like Śālihuṇḍam and Kalingapaṭṭanam. These sites reveal early Buddhist monastic settlements, ports, and material evidence like Rouletted Ware, which suggests extensive trade and inter-regional and trans-regional cultural links. The paper concluded by analyzing interconnected coastal sites that sheds light on the socio-cultural dynamics of the ancient Bay of Bengal, with future research potentially enhancing understanding of port networks and regional interactions along India's eastern seaboard.

*The Evolving Role of Island-Nations in Taking Forward the Objectives of the Indo-Pacific Construct* by Sohini Nayak, PhD Research Scholar, Department of International Relations, Jadavpur University, presented her paper on the relevance of small-island nations in the Indo-

Pacific construct, amidst the geostrategic powerplay of the major powers present in the region like US, India, Australia, Japan, China, the European Union, and other relevant stakeholders. Observing the Island nations play a pivotal role in shaping regional stability and security, the crux of her paper lay in accentuating the Pacific priorities of strengthening maritime resources and the further facilitation of regional connectivity, in turn developing stability in the region. Points like multilateral cooperation in issues like resource management, climate change, disaster risk resilience, digitization and infrastructural developments came to the forefront, ideating the increasing role of local agencies of the islands along with the major powers, working in collaboration and partnership.

*Signs from the Future: Lessons for Asia-Pacific from the Red Sea Crisis* by Rajdeep Sarkar, PhD Research Scholar, University of Hyderabad and Lecturer, Political Science, NTR Degree College for Women, Hyderabad. Drawing from the blockade imposed by the Houthis of Yemen on the Bab el Mandab Strait on the Red Sea, the paper examined the strategic value of maritime chokepoints in the Asia-Pacific region. The paper discussed the Red Sea blockade in terms of its economic, political, and military implications. It then examined a number of critical potential chokepoints on either side of the Pacific Ocean, including the Malacca and Hormuz Straits, the Panama Canal and the Strait of Magellan. During the presentation, it was critically argued that these potential chokepoints have become sites of great power contestation, which in turn indicates structural flux in international relations. The paper concluded by highlighting the discussion on geo-strategy, geo-economic, and geo-politics in the context of calculating nations' threats, risk, and foreign policies as interlinked dynamics of today's world.

*Redoing the foreign policy from proactive to super active: Modern India's tryst with counterbalancing expansionist China* by Surajit Mahalanobis, (Ph.D.) Academic Counsellor, Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi emphasised on counterbalancing Chinese expansionist tendencies. He focussed on the transformation of the Indian Navy that led to the modernization of maritime and military diplomacy of India. Mention was also made of the 'Neighbourhood First' policy in this regard, premised on cooperative development and newer strategic capabilities of India along with the building of the Coastal Radar network and naval based at Mauritius, Sri Lanka, Madagascar, Oman, Seychelles, Tajikistan and now near Maldives and Lakshadweep. Synonymously, PM Modi's SAGAR initiative and its evolution were also touched upon with ground breaking exercises like the 'Milan'. The presentation concluded with the idea of 'Bharatiyata' and how the neighbours conceive Indian response, where he focused Indian religious platforms as a form of Indian-ness of the country's character of diversity.

### **Panel 3:- 24/10/2024**

#### **Theme: Gender and Society**

The session was chaired by Dr Susmita Mukherji, Head, Department of History, Syamaprasad College, Kolkata

*India in South Pacific: A reading of Selected literary works of Fiji* by Sumit Kumar Bar, Assistant Professor, Department of English, Prabhu Jagatbandhu College West Bengal. Fiji is

a small island nation of the South Pacific. It is an archipelago and a distant neighbour of India. India's links with Fiji commenced in 1879 when Indian labourers were brought here under indenture system to work on sugar-cane plantations as a form of disguised slavery. Today among the total population of Fiji, there are people of Indian origin especially a large Hindu community. At present there are more than two lakh people whose forefathers had been taken to Fiji Island by the colonial masters. The trailing of Indian labourers into the peasantry and gimit coolies started from the mid nineteenth century. As a result of this migration, Fiji now speaks both in Hindi and English. Generations after, the Indo-Fijians represent the Indian diaspora in their literary practices. The theme of Indian cultural heritage is found in the modern Fijian literature pertaining to both the genres of poetry and fiction. Reading of Indo-Fijian literature informs about the strengthening of India's presence in the distant Pacific both in physical presence and through the soft power of language and literature. The paper attempts to unearth the deep-rooted legacy of Indian impacts on modern Fijian literature especially through the selected works of Vivekananda Sharma, Sudesh Mishra, Sangeeta Singh et al whose works shed light on the life of the Indian labourers under the indenture system. The so called *Jahajis* and *Girmitiyas* lived in pathetic conditions. Especially the women were subject to frequent sexual violence. Further the paper maps the interconnection between history and society for India and her neighbours.

*Struggle for Existence: Transgender Activism in Post-Colonial South Asia* by Rajarshi Chakrabarty Assistant professor, Department of History University of Burdwan. The transgender community is one of the most marginalized communities in South Asia at present. Their existence has attested since times immemorial by literature, sculpture and other sources of history. In pre-colonial South Asia they were accorded specific roles and responsibilities in society and polity. After the establishment of colonial rule in South Asia, the colonial rulers tried to totally obliterate the transgenders from South Asia. Part II of Criminal Tribes Act passed by the colonial administrators in 1871 clearly reflects this mentality of the colonial rulers. Even after independence the transgenders have struggled hard to achieve their individual and collective rights. Due to their prolonged struggle the Supreme Court of India gave the NALSA judgement in 2014 and the Indian Parliament passed the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2019 which came into effect from 10 January 2020. Similarly, the National Assembly of Pakistan enacted the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act on 8 May 2018. This paper documents and analyses the struggles of transgenders that has led to increase of awareness about their condition and the passing of the acts that mandate that transgenders have equal rights. The paper further agrees with the Supreme Court that has recently sought explanation from some states as to why they are not treating transgenders as 'Socially and Educationally Backward Classes' and according them reservations in educational institutions and for public appointments.

*Gender and Trade: Importance of Trade Facilitation Measures for Women in BIMSTEC* by Sanjana Joshi, Senior Fellow, Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations, New Delhi. Since its establishment in 1997, trade and investment cooperation has been a key focus for the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC). The paper notes that while in recent years BIMSTEC countries have

increasingly come to recognize the importance of empowering women and promoting gender equality in their growth story. However, the multitude of schemes and initiatives supporting entrepreneurship among women are primarily focussed on handholding early-stage development. The focus is on capacity building, mentoring and small value collateral free starting loans. Support for internationalization of women-owned enterprises through targeted measures to boost women's participation in international trade has lagged. Using the results of the Women and Trade Facilitation component of the UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation the paper highlights the current status of gender responsive trade facilitation policy measures and initiatives in the BIMSTEC countries. The paper recommends that gender should be included in the BIMSTEC free trade agreement that is currently under negotiation. It also suggests that the forthcoming BIMSTEC Summit in Thailand is an opportunity for the members to collectively endorse a commitment to “*inclusive trade*”.

*Symbiotic Forces: State Authority and Buddhist Clergy in the Polity of Sri Lanka* by Shraya Saha, PhD Scholar at the Department of South and Southeast Asian Studies, University of Calcutta. The presentation examined the deep-rooted intersection of Theravada Buddhism with political power and ethnic identity in Sri Lanka, particularly during the 2024 Presidential Election. Key themes included the dual role of Buddhism, both as a doctrine of peace and a tool in political agendas that drive ethnic exclusion. Through historical analysis, the speaker traced the politicization of Buddhism from the Sinhala Only Movement (1956) to the modern-day influence of Buddhist nationalist groups, such as the Bodu Bala Sena (BBS) and the Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU). Buddhist monks' evolving roles, from spiritual guides to political influencers, highlight this transformation. In the 2024 election, prominent monks endorsed candidates, with some even running for office, emphasizing Buddhism as a cornerstone of national identity. Their endorsements significantly impacted rural voters who increasingly turned to social media, further amplifying messages of religious nationalism. “Social Aporias,” addressed the contradictions in using Buddhism's principles of non-violence to justify exclusion and violence against minorities, framing it as a significant factor in Sri Lankan ethnic conflicts. They also presented theories, such as ethno-symbolism and conflict theory, to contextualize the use of religious and economic nationalism in shaping a Sinhalese-Buddhist state identity. Conclusion advocated constitutional reforms, judicial independence, and educational initiatives as essential steps toward fostering interfaith harmony and reducing religious nationalism's influence on governance. This framework offers a pathway to a more inclusive, equitable Sri Lankan society.

*Mental health issues in elderly patients: a psychological study in the Indo Pacific region* by Sumana Bagchi, Mental Health Professional and Academic Mentor, Writer, Legal Aid Services WB, Freelancer. The paper discussed escalating mental health challenges among the elderly in the Indo-Pacific, worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic. Conditions like dementia and Alzheimer's were highlighted as common, with social factors such as domestic violence, isolation, financial stress, and loneliness contributing to mental health deterioration. The presentation emphasized the persistent stigma around mental health, once termed “sino-insanity,” and advocated for a foundational understanding of depression and trauma in older

adults. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Freudian theory were referenced to illustrate how social experiences and aging intersect to shape mental well-being. The presentation drew attention to the elderly's digital vulnerability, with low digital literacy exposing them to scams, exemplified by a case of an elderly woman who lost her savings. The presentation advocated for promoting digital literacy to protect older adults from online exploitation. In patriarchal contexts, elderly women face added challenges, including sexual harassment and post-menopausal marginalization. There is urgent need for strong support systems and practices like listening to the elderly, encouraging intergenerational interactions, pet therapy, and proper nutrition to support mental resilience. Concluding remarks urged for both societal and familial roles in promoting mental well-being for the elderly, emphasizing that maintaining a healthy mind is key to a dignified and fulfilling old age.

#### **Panel 4:- 24/10/2024**

##### **Theme:- Odisha: History and Culture in Multiple Dimensions**

This session was chaired by Prof. Patita Paban Mishra, Former Professor, Sambalpur University, Sambalpur, Odisha & Northern University of Malaysia. There were a total of 5 papers in this session. The papers presented are as follows:

The paper on, *Danda Nata-A Folk Performing Art of Western Odisha* was presented by Dibya Ranjan Tripathy, Ph.D. Research Scholar, School of History, Gangadhar Meher University, Sambalpur. In this paper he described about *Danda Nata*, an annual folk festival in Western Odisha celebrated by rural agricultural and tribal communities. This ceremonial worship is specifically dedicated to Lord Shiva and Goddess Kali, and contain elements of both tribal and Hindu religious traditions. The ritual may span 13 to 21 days and includes dance, music, drama, and ritual worship. It is carried out in four phases namely- *Dhuli Danda* (sand-based activities), *Pani Danda* (water rituals), *Agni Danda* (fire rituals), and *Suanga Danda* (a finale with dance, music, and humor). The devotees called *Danduas* perform these rituals led by a chief called *Pata Dandua*. Traditional local musical instruments were used to create an immersive environment. This festival encourages togetherness and inclusion, breaking down caste barriers and strengthening community bonds while maintaining Odisha's rich cultural legacy.

Sasmita Rani Shasini (Ph.D.), Assistant Professor, Gangadhar Meher University, Sambalpur; presented a paper on *The Maratha Rule in Sambalpur: Disorder, Dissension, and Disturbance*. In her paper she has described about the Maratha reign over Sambalpur from 1800-1804 and 1808-1817 as a period filled in turbulence leaving lasting effect. The Bhonsle Rajas of Nagpur subjugated the throne after the Chauhanas of Sambalpur. Sambalpur's strategic position and riches enticed the Marathas, who appointed local administrators to collect taxes, keep order, and administer on Nagpur's behalf. This time saw economic and sociopolitical changes in Sambalpur, impacted by Maratha policy and competition with the British. The essay examines these factors, emphasizing the Marathas' motivations.

*The Rise of Odia Women: The Journey from Domesticity to Public Sphere* presented by Pooja Sahoo, a PhD research scholar at the School of History, Gangadhar Meher University, Sambalpur, Odisha. This paper explores the transition of Odia women beyond traditional domestic roles to public and societal spheres. As defined by Jürgen Habermas, the public sphere is where a person engages in discourse on common issues, thus generating public opinion. The Gandhian movement prepared the base for this transition. This growth aided by early journalism and literature on women's rights. Women like Parbati Giri, Nirmala Bala

Nayak and Sarala Devi are recognized for their bravery. This study investigates Odia women's crucial position in public life and their effect on national development, emphasizing their rise from traditional status to social and political prominence.

The paper on, *'Busting the Myth': A Critical Study on the Gender and Class of the 1866 Famine of Odisha* was presented by Swagatika Dash, Lecturer in History, Tara Tarini Degree College, Purushottampur. The 1866 Odisha famine was a disastrous occurrence that devastated almost one-third of the region's population, particularly the poor, day labourers, and farmers. Vulnerable populations, notably women and girls, endured significant challenges, yet gendered effects are frequently overlooked in famine research. This research investigates the famine's influence on mortality, fertility, migration, nutrition, and specific deprivations experienced by women and girls. Female mortality rates were disproportionately high, particularly among lower-caste women. The famine resulted in higher death rates, crimes against women, distress-driven land sales, forced migration, and other serious consequences.

*Female Leadership and Cultural Influence: Reassessing Women's Role in Medieval Odisha* presented by Suchismita Naik, Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of History, G.M. University, Sambalpur. The research investigates the role of female leaders in medieval Odisha, with an emphasis on their sociopolitical and cultural effect. It investigates the Bhauma-Kara queens, who had a profound impact on governance, culture, and religious rituals. These queens influenced policies, financed religious institutions, and spread the Shakti religion. The study employs feminist historiography to offer a comprehensive picture of women's status and impact throughout the Bhauma-Kara era. By filling gaps in historical narratives, the project hopes to reclaim women's voices and provide light on gender and power relations in medieval society.

### **Special Lecture by Prof Ashwini Mahapatra**

Prof. Mahapatra started his lecture by saying that history is essential in the study of International Relations (IR) because it provides context for understanding global politics, conflicts, alliances, and shifts in power. By examining past events, treaties, and wars, IR scholars can identify patterns that influence current international dynamics, predict potential conflicts, and assess the consequences of policy choices. According to Prof. Mahapatra historical knowledge also helps in understanding the roots of cultural, economic, and ideological differences among nations, contributing to more effective diplomacy and conflict resolution. Furthermore, history informs the evolution of international institutions, like the United Nations, by highlighting lessons from previous attempts at global governance. As a result, IR studies grounded in history allow for a nuanced approach to international cooperation, aligning present actions with past experiences to foster stability, prevent conflicts, and promote peace in an increasingly interconnected world.

### **Special Plenary on Orissa**

The Plenary session on Orissa was chaired by Prof. Ashwini Mahapatra and has four plenary speakers.

Dr Alivia Mishra in her address titled "SAARC: A failed project" spoke how the India-Pakistan rift has been a significant obstacle to SAARC's progress. The South Asian Association for



Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was launched in 1985 with lofty ambitions to promote economic cooperation, social progress, and cultural development among its eight member states (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Afghanistan). However, nearly four decades later, SAARC remains a fledgling organization, crippled by regional rivalries, political tensions, and bureaucratic inefficiencies. The organization's inability to address pressing regional issues, such as terrorism, poverty, and climate change, has raised questions about its relevance. SAARC's summits have become infrequent and inconsequential, with the last summit held in 2014. The organization's secretariat lacks teeth, and decision-making is often hamstrung by consensus requirements. The paper has mainly tried to explore how the India-Pakistan rift has been a significant obstacle to SAARC's progress, with Pakistan's refusal to cooperate on key initiatives. Other members have also failed to demonstrate commitment, prioritizing bilateral relationships over regional cooperation. The South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) agreement, aimed at promoting regional trade, remains ineffective due to protective trade policies. In contrast, ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) has successfully fostered economic integration and cooperation among its member states. SAARC's failures have led to the emergence of alternative regional initiatives, such as the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). As SAARC's irrelevance becomes increasingly apparent, its member states must reassess their commitment to regional cooperation and consider revitalizing the organization to address South Asia's pressing challenges.

On 'Placing Women into the History Representation of Women in 18<sup>th</sup> Century Palm Leaf Painting of Orissa', Dr Sankarsan Mallik, Assistant Professor, Behrampur University, Ganjam attempts to locate women in history particularly 18<sup>th</sup> Century women of Orissa as represented in palm leaf painting. It is very difficult to reconstruct the history of women during the medieval period of Orissa due to paucity of sources. Women were represented as objects than subjects of history. Hence different kind of sources have to be explored particularly painting and a new methodology needs to be developed. The palm leaf painting vividly depicted how women in medieval Orissa contributed to the society at large.

Alex Thomas, Associate Professor of Economics, Azim Premji University, Bengaluru, in his address titled 'On Economic History: A Critical Perspective', Alex Thomas, looked at the debates on how to achieve economic growth and it has been pointed out that economic theorists mostly believe in mainstream growth theory which is usually the supply side growth theory. The latter emphasizes that labour and technology lead to economic growth with minimal government intervention. But there is also an alternative paradigm that is the demand side of growth. However, to calculate GDP and policy making needs pluralism and a critical pedagogy.

Lalatendu Das Mohapatra in his address titled "Situating Odisha and Sri-Lanka in the Bay of Bengal – A Revisit" spoke about the strategic significance of Bay of Bengal in terms of network and cultural interactions. He pointed out that though the commercial and cultural contact between these two regions may be perhaps dated back to the birth of Buddhism in India it has not drawn adequate attention among the scholars in both the countries as it should have. Though Odisha's cultural contact with Lanka declined with the banishment of Buddhism in Odisha, a fact of life which tied together both the regions for few more centuries was economic dependency with each other which was indispensable for both.

## **Valedictory Session**

The speaker of Valedictory session was Prof Rekha Pande, Professor Emeritus, Hyderabad University and the session was chaired by Prof Dr Lipi Ghosh, Former Centenary Professor of International Relations, Calcutta University and Former VC of SDU, Jharkhand.

Prof Rekha Pande gave an intrinsic details of the papers which was presented in the two days of conference. She praised all the presenters and the papers which were related to the theme. She also laid emphasis of the special panel paper which was based on Odisha theme. She pointed out certain gaps in the theme especially laid focus on environmental and migration studies, and hoped that these papers would be included in the subsequent biennial conferences. She again praised the organiser G.M University and Indian Association for Asian and Pacific Studies for successfully conducting this prestigious conference and also thanked all the students and support staff for being associated with this mega conference.

Prof Dr Lipi Ghosh agreed with the speaker point of view and on behalf of IAAPS she thanked her for being a constant support throughout the conference and her insights which would pave the path for future conference. She also said in subsequent conference theme related to Artificial Intelligence and its impact on social science would be considered. Lastly she thanked and praised G.M University, Sambalpur for being the perfect host in organizing this conference on a grand scale.