

# IAAPS 12<sup>th</sup> Biennial International Conference

## *History, Culture, and Commerce in the Indo-Pacific World: Past and Present*

### **Concept Note**

The Indo-Pacific region's substantial strategic traction in recent times has coherently redefined regionalism and the engagement of major powers in mutually conducive domains of interaction. Reshaping global security and the economic architecture, the region accounts for nearly 65 per cent of the global GDP and half of the world's trade passing through this zone of convergence. Since 2007, this construct gained its salience primarily through the aim of connecting the major democracies situated in the Indian and the Pacific Oceans, securing the Sea Lanes of Communication, as one contiguous zone, promoting economic prosperity therein. Since most of these countries are also the fastest growing economies of the world, along with the presence of the seven most powerful militaries, there has been the reflection of a defensive approach.

The Bay of Bengal is situated at the heart of the Indo-Pacific region. For centuries, the Bay of Bengal has been the space for commercial and cultural interactions among its littorals, especially between the eastern seaboard of India and the land of Suvarnabhumi (continental Southeast Asia) and Suvarnavipa (maritime Southeast Asia). The ancient 'Maritime Silk Routes', or the 'Spice Routes', were one of the most important sea trading passages that connected the eastern part of the Indian subcontinent with its Southeast Asian neighbours. With the influx of the European powers, competition for building colonies grew. Apart from the British Raj, the French and the Dutch masters also ruled around the Bay. Commerce expanded as the colonial rulers became large exporters of raw materials and agricultural products. As a result, the colonial period intensified inter-Bay connectivity. However, following the First World War, decolonisation and emerging nationalism immersed the Bay littorals. Consequently, the newly independent countries were interested in prioritising their own political and economic agendas, gradually making the Bay a 'strategic backwater'. However, the Bay is now gaining its importance again as part of a strategic maritime space.

Several initiatives have been launched in the Bay and in its wider maritime space- the Indo-Pacific, primarily culminating from a multilateral perspective, engaging several powers like India, USA, Japan, Australia, ASEAN, France, Germany, and the European Union, each devising their own strategic understanding of the region. For instance, much has been talked about partnerships in the Blue Pacific, to highlight the participation of the small island nations as priority. From a security perspective, several aspects have been highlighted in the recent past, especially the formation of collaborations like the AUKUS partnership, the US-Japan Consultative Security partnership; extended deterrence dialogues of USA with the Republic of Korea, Australia and Japan and enhanced Defense Cooperation (EDCA) sites with the Philippines and collaborating with likeminded allies and partners on exercises such as Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) Cobra Gold and MALABAR. The economic aspects have been Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity with 13 regional partners, the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and expanded economic-focused work in the Quad, and Just Energy Transition Partnerships. Nonetheless, among these, the Quad remains a core collaboration,

especially with the rising prominence of India along with the zeal through Quad to promote good governance and support of accountability and a rules-based order. Even though containing the revisionist progress of China has been occupying a major proportion of these collaborations, it cannot be denied that one of the primary agendas of the Indo-Pacific region is to promote and empower like-minded partnership, connecting the Middle -East, Africa and East Asia with Europe and USA, strengthening the world economic route.

Against this backdrop, the 12<sup>th</sup> IAAPS Biennial Conference will broadly focus on historical perspectives, cultural linkages and commercial and security interactions among the nations and people within the Indo-Pacific world. The conference will have the following sub-themes:

- Crossing the Bay of Bengal through Ages: Connectivity, Commerce and Migration.
- Decolonization and Nationalism in South and South-east Asia.
- India and her Neighbours: History, Polity, Society
- The Dynamics of geo strategy, geo economy and geopolitics in the Indo-Pacific: The role of Stakeholders.
- Maritime Resources, Capacity Building and Disaster Risk Reduction in Indo Pacific.
- Gender and society
- The Conference will organise **a Special Panel on** “Odisha: History and Culture in Multiple Dimensions”

### **Brief notes on the sub themes**

#### **➤ Crossing the Bay of Bengal through Ages: Connectivity Commerce and Migration**

The Bay of Bengal has been the most significant maritime highway within the larger Indian Ocean system. The history of the region speaks of continuous, seasonal and circulatory migrations through its waters across centuries. It also encouraged movements of goods, religious and cultural ideas across a substantial space. The Bay of Bengal thus has had a long history of commercial and cultural circulation across its maritime space. Multiple trading networks were forged along with diasporas. In the nineteenth century imperial powers through their force of capital reconfigured the Bay of Bengal in their quest for rice, coffee, rubber and spices. Millions of Indian migrants crossed the seas. The Bay of Bengal thus boasts of mercantile connectivity over a long span of time.

#### **➤ Decolonization and nationalism of South and South-East Asia**

Decolonization and nationalism of South and South-East Asia is an integral part of the regions’ study. It is associated with varied approaches and related with the local circumstances. The modern research in this area also aims to explore the interrelations that the South Asian and South-East Asian countries evolved during their fight against the European powers though having their own specific trends. There is another significant aspect of ‘Asianism’ which provided a strong background for the growth of a united feeling among the suppressed Asian countries to resist the colonial control. The pioneer role of the freedom fighters should be

mentioned. Apart from the nationalism and independence movements which played a significant role in the Indian subcontinent, other key factors leading to the gradual retreat of imperialism and growth of nation states across South-East Asia were the second world war, role of Japan and the later political developments. Violence became an important aspect of such movements, even the guerilla warfare practiced by the indigenous population. The panel will try to cover such pertinent issues related with the decolonizing phases of the South and South-East Asian countries.

➤ **India And Her Neighbours: History, Polity and Society**

India's neighbourhood, consisting of the member countries of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)- Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Maldives, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, represents a world of historical links, shared legacies, commonalities as well as diversities deeply entrenched in their ethnic, linguistic, religious and political fabric. China and Myanmar, the other two neighbours are also equally important. Further the geographical location of India is indeed unique as it shares borders with all other South Asian nations whereas no other South Asian nation (except Afghanistan and Pakistan) shares borders with any other South Asian nation. Therefore, intricacies of India's relations with her neighbours design the political, social, economic and security architecture of the entire South Asian region. It is against this backdrop the panel proposes- (i) to analyse the impact of colonial legacy of partition and independence on the dynamics of India's relations with its neighbours with special emphasis on the shared heritage and historical trade routes; (ii) to discuss the current state of diplomatic relations between India and its neighbors, the collaborative efforts among them in addressing common security challenges, such as border disputes, terrorism and transnational crimes and their implications for the regional stability; (iii) to explore the cultural exchanges and influences between India and its neighbors, emphasizing shared traditions, languages, and festivals; (iv) to explain the impact of migration of people between India and neighboring countries, as well as the contributions of diaspora communities; (v) to address humanitarian issues affecting the region, such as natural disasters, refugee crises, and poverty, and discuss collaborative efforts for the solution of the same; (vi) to examine common social challenges faced by the region, such as healthcare, education, social discrimination, and discuss potential collaborative solutions.

➤ **The Dynamics of geo strategy, geo economy and geopolitics in the Indo- Pacific: The role of Stakeholders**

The Indo Pacific has become a contested region, with many stakeholders positioning themselves in the region, especially in the South China Sea. With regional and extra-regional actors exerting their influence in the region, focusing on multilateral collaborations become inevitable. Starting off with China under the leadership of Xi Jinping, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) gained ground, including Japan and South Korea with almost all the nations of the globe. Initiated in 2011, it came into being in 2020 and is formed keeping in mind the economic integration with countries belonging to Indo-Pacific, mainly to showcasing China's prowess in the region. Similarly, then masterminded by late Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and ably supported by Australian Prime Minister John

Howard the establishment of in 2017 and initiated in 2021, the Quadrilateral security Dialogue (QUAD) is another such institution, established with a view to counter China's aggression in South China Sea crisis and Taiwan issue. Additionally, with QUAD plus further engaging New Zealand, South Korea and Vietnam is viewed that the alliance will be even stronger to counter China's competition in Indo-Pacific region. Australia, UK and USA security dialogue of (AUKUS) in 2021 was framed by USA, China vehemently opposed it and held USA for stating "Cold War mentality" in the region and also warned USA for its actions and face the tune if problems arise in near future. Lastly, USA President Joe Biden formulated in 2022 "Indo – Pacific Economic Framework" on four main pillars a) Fair and resilient trade, b) Supply chain resilience, c) Infrastructure, clean energy, and decarbonisation and d) Tax and anti-corruption. With 14 countries India, Japan, South Korea, Australia, USA, New Zealand and ASEAN members. This proves that the major stakeholders of the region have already started covering their bases in Indo-Pacific region to counter China's aggressive policy in Indo-Pacific and also preparedness of to combat any rising tension or conflict in the region. This panel focuses on such multilateral collaborations and the impact of such associations on the Indo-Pacific region.

#### ➤ **Maritime Resources, Capacity Building and Disaster Risk Reduction in Indo-Pacific**

Encompassing a vast area, the maritime resources in the Indo-Pacific region are abundant and diverse. The Indo-Pacific is rich in productive fisheries and mineral deposits, including oil and natural gas reserves - natural assets essential for energy production and economic development - making the region a crucial geo-political and geo-economic hub. The region's strategic location facilitates maritime trade routes that connect major economies, making it a critical hub for global commerce. Given the region's diverse geographical and socio-economic characteristics, adequate handling of maritime resources through capacity-building and disaster risk reduction efforts is essential to mitigate the impact of natural disasters and build community resilience. By strengthening institutional capacity and governance frameworks using innovation and technological advancements, countries can better regulate maritime activities, promote sustainable resource management, and improve maritime safety and security. Institutions also have a role to play as organizations such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), and the Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre (ADPC) can facilitate dialogue and collaboration among member states to strengthen disaster resilience. By sharing best practices, expertise, and resources, countries in the region can collectively enhance their capacity to prepare for and respond to natural disasters.

#### ➤ **Gender and society**

Gender constitutes an essential entity of every aspect of the economic, social, political and private lives of individuals and societies. Histories of women's everyday lives and their contribution in various fields have increased manifold and generated substantial academic interest. Gender history remains an expanding field of study and is now being integrated into the mainstream history. Gender could be applied to different areas of history namely history of

war, on politics and kingship on revolutions, trade, commerce health and others. Indo pacific region has several countries and the degree of greater empowerment or participation of women in political, financial or cultural arena depend on the specific identities or cultural trajectories of those countries. Against this backdrop, this panel intends to highlight the significance of gender in all aspects of economic, social, political, and private life. It emphasises the growing academic interest in the histories of women's everyday lives and their contributions across various fields. It illustrates the expanding scope of gender history and its integration into mainstream historical studies.

### **Special panel on “Cultural Transformations in Odisha: Administration, Dance, and Art”**

Odisha, a land rich in cultural heritage, has witnessed significant transformations in its traditional practices, administrative history, and artistic expressions. This panel explores the cultural heritage of Odisha, focusing on the evolution of the folk-dance Danda Nata or Danda Nrutya, the impact of the Maratha invasion on Western Odisha, and the influence of the Jagannath cult on the paintings of Puri. Danda Nata, a dance rooted in the Saiva cult and tribal traditions, has transformed significantly under modern influences. The Maratha invasion in the 18th century brought administrative exploitation and instability, setting the stage for resistance and British intervention. Meanwhile, the Jagannath cult, a blend of diverse faiths centered in Puri, has profoundly shaped local art and social life. This panel aims to provide insights into the dynamic interplay of tradition, historical events, and cultural influences that have shaped Odisha's identity over the centuries.

#### **➤ Brief note on plenary session on “Odisha: History and Culture in Multiple Dimensions”**

The state of Odisha earlier known as Orissa became a separate province on 1<sup>st</sup> April, 1936. A culturally rich land, it has its own rich deposits of prehistoric sites, promoting and embracing multiple religions such as Jainism, Buddhism, Shaivism, Vaishnavism and a unique temple architecture i.e. Kalinga style of architecture. The rich maritime trade of Odisha is evident from the literary works like Periplus of the Erythrean Sea and accounts of Ptolemy, Pliny, Chinese travelers and Arab and Persian Geographers talks about the trade and commerce and the eminent ports of Odisha such as Tamralipti, Che-Li-Ta-Lo, Manikpatna, Palur, Pithunda, Kalingapatnam, Khalkattapatna, etc. There are also evidences of strong trade links with Southeast Asia and Africa in the wall carvings of Konark Sun Temple. In the modern period, Odisha served as a strategic point of entry for both the inland, coastal and the maritime trade of the British. With the entry of Islam in Medieval period, the socio-cultural life of Odisha underwent significant changes. The harmony and interaction between the Hindu and Islamic communities resulted in some syncretic religious rituals like Satyapir cult in 18<sup>th</sup> century and poets like Salabaig and Uzir Baig.

Colonized in the year 1803, Odisha under British witnessed substantial changes not only in the administrative sphere but also the socio-cultural life of the people was confronted and negotiated. The most significant contribution was the first systematic attempt of writing the history of Odisha by Andrew Stirling, the entry of modern English education, the modern legal system, the economic policy, encroachments into tribal areas, attack on indigenous institutions

and practices unfolding many facets of the interaction between the colonial state and the Oriya subjects, ultimately leading to the freedom movement.

Another aspect unique to Orissa's culture and history is the presence of more than 62 indigenous tribes who are adding richness to Odisha's culture. Despite belonging to different linguistic divisions, the tribes of Odisha have many socio-cultural similarities. Particularly the investigation into their socio-cultural life during the colonial period and the multiple colonial interventions made in their socio-cultural and legal existence has not yet been explored. The proposed panel will endeavor to throw light on all these dimensions of Odisha's history and culture with fresh insights and unravel the many hidden facets and historical facts.