

Report of Ganga Utsav 2018, IGNCA, New Delhi

Draupadi Dream Trust organised 7th Annual International Conference on the theme 'Significance of Ganga River Civilization: Its Global Spread and Impact' at Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts (IGNCA) on 5th and 6th December 2018. The conference inaugurated by Sri Jagatguru Shankaryacharya Anant Sri Vibhushit Swamy Amritanad Devtirtha ji Maharaj who is the Shankaracharya of Sharda Peetham in Kashmir. Swami ji inaugurated the conference with the formal opening of an exhibition on river Ganga. The exhibition showcased different aspect of Ganga and its impact on the lives of millions of Indians throughout its history. The exhibition emphasized on the need of restoring the river and the ways to clean it. The Ganga exhibition portrays through its posters and artefacts different historical narratives both in Indic and foreign languages in which Ganga River has been mentioned as the most sacred river of India. It also tells us that foreign travellers have special mention of Ganga in their literature since the ancient times. The Ganga exhibition is open till 15th of December 2018. In his inaugural address to the august gathering, swami ji reemphasized his commitment to clean Ganga by rethinking on the paradigm of development based on energy from hydro power projects based on dams. He wanted the scholars present in the gathering to rethink on the models of development adopted by the Indian government since Independence. The other speakers at the inaugural session were Professor B. B. Lal- the doyen of Indian Archaeology; Dr. Neera Mishra- Director, Draupadi Dream Trust and Dr. Sachidanand Joshi- Secretary, IGNCA. They put forth their perspective of Ganga and its significance in the lives of millions of Indians.

After the inaugural session was over, participants as well as the audience proceeded towards the lecture hall-the venue where the conference was

supposed to take place. After having breakfast the first session of the conference started. This session was chaired by Prof. J. N. Pal and the speakers of the session were Shri K. N. Dikshit and Dr. Come Carpentier. The session started with a keynote address of Professor B. B. Lal which was read out by his son Dr. Rajesh Lal. Through his keynote address Professor Lal emphasized on the historicity of Ganga basin and different cultures associated with it. He emphasized that both textual as well as archaeological sources should corroborated to see the historical element in the epics- Mahabharata and the Ramayana. Through archaeological findings different aspects or cultures and history reflected in the epics, he argued, can testified. The next speaker was Shri K. N. Dikshit who through his findings of the different layers of the Ganga basin argued that the horizontal excavation of the different Ganga basin cultures should be initiated at large scale so that many of the unearthed history of Indians can bring in the common narrative. Dr. Come Carpentier reflected upon the perception of Ganga River through the eyes of foreign travellers to India as well as from the accounts of foreign philosophers such as Voltaire. The Europeans were well aware of the idea of Ganga as a sacred river for the Indians since the days of Alexander. The historians of Alexander- the Great as well as scholars before and after him had fair knowledge of Ganga River. He emphasized that this perception continued even in modern times when Europe was witnessing enlightenment. He gave example of Voltaire and his work the Princess of Babylon in which the author reflects upon the Ganga River as something divine. The chair, Prof. J. N. Pal successfully moderated the session as and when required and the session ended. After the session ended, people moved to the venue where lunch arranged for them.

The second Academic session was chaired by Shri K. N. Dikshit, while the speakers of the session were Prof. K. N. P. Raju, Dr. D. K. and Hema Hari

and Prof. Rana P. B. Singh. Prof. Raju emphasizes the need for people to reconnect to the greatest companion of mankind, i.e. water. There is a need for the people at large to understand the importance of water otherwise the Human civilization would face problems beyond their reach. The Indians should look into their glorious past when there was a balance between the humans and the nature, this balance has to be re-established in the larger interest of the mankind. D. K. and Hema Hari tried to highlight the importance of Ganga River through their documentary. This documentary talks about the origin, passage as well as different twist and turns of the river. It tells us how and why Ganga is an important part of Human lives in India. Professor Singh talked about a new concept called the Gangaization of Indian Cultural space. By this he meant that Ganga and its perception in the minds of Indians is such that when we think about river, the first image which comes to our mind is Ganga, therefore we have in India the Ganga of the east, west, north and south. This respect and sacredness of Ganga has been there in the folklore as well as the narratives of the common masses. The Ganga basin has described by him as the cradle of Hindu identity.

The third session of the first day was chaired by Dr. Come Carpentier and the Speakers for this session were Shri D. N. Dimri and Shri Bhuvan Vikram. Shri Dimri gave an archaeological perspective to the Central Himalayas from where the Ganga originates. He discussed about various tools and artefacts discovered from this landscape. He also discussed that how the central Himalayan region contributes immensely to the proto-historic copper age culture of the Ganga valley. He presented a perspective of upper Ganga Archaeology. Shri Bhuvan Vikram attempted to present his study of the upper Ganga plain wherein he presented an analysis of the different artefacts merged from the excavation of these regions. The cultures of the upper Ganga plain he argues points to the late phase of Harappa and

many of the artefacts have no similarity with it. He proposed to index these artefacts of local culture as different from the Harappa culture. He proposed to call it a Ganga culture.

The second day of the conference started with its first session, in which the chairperson was Prof. D.P. Tewari. The speakers of this session were Prof. J. N. Pal, Dr. S. K. Manjul, Dr. Durga Basu and Dr. T. S. Ravishankar. Professor Pal gave a detailed description of the excavation and its findings of the site named Jhusi (Pratishthanpur). He argued that the first human culture at Jhusi belongs to the Neolithic period, which is the earliest farming and pastoral culture of the Ganga plain. He presented the process of the development of Human culture in the Ganga plain. Dr. S. K. Manjul is known for his recent excavation at Sanauli, which he considers as the turning point of the Indian archaeology. Total eight burials of the site were excavated by him. He named these burials as the royal burials where he found two chariots and 8ft coffin. The skeletal remains of a female was also found which was placed in a wooden coffin. The material remains of the burials points to the fact that prominent warrior class existed at Sanauli. Dr. Basu has presented an analysis of the archaeological findings of the Bengal basin which point towards early settlements and different cultural phases of the region. Basu emphasized primarily on the 24 parganas with an intense focus on early medieval culture. After the session, participants of the conference had high tea. Dr. Ravishankar reflected upon the inscriptions to analyse the perception of Ganga River. He showed through different inscriptions that how in almost every inscription from different parts of India the sacredness of Ganga remains a common idea.

The second session of the day was chaired by Dr. Durga Basu and the speakers for this session were Dr. Prithvish Nag, Dr. Anand Burdhan, Prof. D. P. Tiwari, Dr. B. R. Mani and Prof. Anura Manatunga. Dr. Nag focuses on

the relation between the geography and culture of a region to understand the spatial dimensions of human civilization and culture. He has also argued about the Gangaization of Indian culture in the narratives of the local populace who have settled along the Ganga basin. Dr. Burdhan has tried to link the festivals associated with the river Ganga with the importance assigned to it by the Indians. He mentions about the celebration of Chhath Puja to relate human existence and water, especially river Ganga. After this session the participants as well as the audience assembled outside the conference hall for lunch and had it. Prof. Tiwari places Ganga above anything else which finds its mention in different sources, both Indic and foreign. He discussed about the reference of Ganga particularly in the Puranas. In Puranas the river Ganga is mentioned and the goddess Ganga which has been a source of life for human existence in India. Dr. Mani presented archaeological data with the literary review of ancient Kashi and also highlighted the importance of Kashi in the Ganga valley from the *Mahajanpadas* period. Prof. Manatunga tried to establish that Sri Lanka is the most prolific recipient of Ganga valley civilization as the impact of Ganga valley on the different aspects of Sri Lankans are immense which has a history of more than two millennium.

The last session of the second day chaired by Dr. R. K. Shukla and the speakers for this session were Swami Jeetendra, Prof. Deen Bandhu Pandey, Dr. D P Dubey, Abhay Mishra and Dr. Rachna Sharma. Swami Jeetendra argued Ganga as the cradle of Bharata culture, which has supported the life system of Indians from time immemorial. The uniting feature of Ganga and people placed across it is a central theme of Swami Jeetendra's discussion. Prof. Pandey has also enumerated the reference of Ganga in different texts, particularly the Indian text. He has argued that the River Ganga is integral to the Indian history and culture. Dr. Dubey through his presentation tried

to argue that the Ganga is the archetype of sacred waters, to which other water bodies are compared in sanctity. It was this perception that led to the establishment of the process of Gangaization of Indian culture. Abhay Mishra shared his experience of travelling along the stretch of Ganga River and tried to analyse the two-way influence between Ganga and the people around it. His experience is significant to tell us the actual state of affairs in the Ganga valley. Dr. Sharma analysis of popular perception of Ganga in the minds of Indians is very intriguing as it tells us the real bond people feel about the river. Dr. Sharma concludes that the reference of Ganga in texts since Vedic age proves that the Ganga River has been a source of life for the Indians throughout its own history.