

EDITORIAL

In the current issue, Rajeev Ranjan Kumar, Hefang Yao *et al.* from South China Normal University, Guangzhou, China have contributed a valuable review essay on “One Belt, One Road” Initiative of China. The authors conclude that the strategy of “One Belt and One Road” should be based on economic cooperation and supported by people-to-people exchanges and it ought to include the ideology of openness and containment. In carrying out this strategy to make culture go out, government should consider deeply on the macro level. Traditional cultural resources should be excavated fully.

The OBOR comprises of reviving two ancient trade routes: the Silk Route and the Spice Route. While the Silk Route is the “One Belt” that runs across the land route linking China with Europe through Central Asia; the Spice Route is the “One Road” and known as the Maritime Silk Route. The latter is a sea route linking India with Southeast Asia in the east and connecting West Asia and the coast of East Africa in the west. Two routes are meant to facilitate trade and investment in Eurasia. Authors have discussed the domestic compulsion of excess production, need for diversification of investment, geopolitical dilemmas and several other challenges that China faces which led Chinese leadership to pursue this goal of building OBOR.

India too has launched two initiatives of Project Mausam and Spice Route to revive ancient trading routes. Project Mausam initiated in 2014 is executed by the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA) as the nodal agency, with the support of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) and the National Museum as associate bodies. The term ‘Mausam’ finds its roots in the Arabic word ‘Mawsim’ which refers to the season when ships could sail safely. This wind pattern referred to as monsoon winds follows a regular pattern, which facilitated the movement of people, goods and ideas across the Indian Ocean that helped in dissemination, amalgamation and synthesis of cultures, ethnicities and religions. India and Oman launched a joint Sail Voyage from November 24 to December 3, 2015, under this Project Mausam. India has identified 39 countries, including China and Pakistan, under Project Mausam, and working to obtain nomination for World Heritage.

Nine countries have agreed to join the Spice Route project of Kerala Tourism to share knowledge, information and know-how to conserve the shared heritage of countries connected through Spices trade that existed between ancient Kerala and more than 30 countries of the world. The first phase of the Spice Route is to rebuild the Muziris, the city in Kerala which was the node of this ancient route. The Muziris project will be ready by 2020.

History of these routes is yet to be fully understood. It was the silk, lapis lazuli and jade that was the principal commodity traded along the land route. Spices like pepper, cardamom, mace, nutmeg, and clove were the most traded goods along the maritime route. The route carried the rare spices from the islands around Java, Sri Lanka and southern region of India to the Arab and European markets. Across the route, not only fragrant spices were exchanged, but also the aromatic goods like musk, camphor, agarwood, incense and amber were exchanged. Musk was highly prized in the Middle East where Muslims believed that Prophet Mohammad’s body

exuded fragrance of musk. Sometimes mosques were painted with such aromatic substances. Amber is the fragrant substance vomited by the whales in the Bay of Bengal, more particularly around Nicobar Islands. Traders believed that this was the excreta of huge mythical birds, Bherunda, that floated in the high sea.

Along these routes cultural and religious ideas spread across the region. While Islam got foothold in the Arakan coast during late 8th century through sea route, Sufism entered India through Central Asia when their persecution started after the fall of Baghdad Caliphate. The Turkish, Arabic and Persian languages, art and architecture reached Indian subcontinent and as late as during British conquest of India, nobility in Mughal court was divided on the ground of Turkish or Persian descent (Iranian vs. Turanian). Hinduism and Buddhism travelled from India to Central and East Asia via the Silk and Spice Route. In the Southeast Asia and Southwest Asia, Indian cities were imaginatively translocated. While Kamboja was in north Bengal, Cambodia had Kamboja. Campa in India also translocated onto Campa Kingdom in Vietnam. Gandhara of Northwest India was translocated as Hetuo, the capital of Dali Kingdom in Yunnan province. Mahakala worship spread across the land route into the landlocked places while the worship of Tara, spread first across the maritime route, thereafter she emerged as truly pan-Asian Goddess.

How did our ancient mariners travel so far and so often?

Marco Polo started his return voyage from China to Venice in 1291 A.D. through the Indian Ocean. He was forced to spend five months in Sumatra where he waited for the monsoon winds to change direction so he could sail to Ceylon and India. He is reported to have seen the use of sea-charts by Indian seamen. Similarly, during the last decade of 15th century when Portuguese traveler Vasco da Gama was seeking sea route to India, he waited for his further travel from East African shores to the Indian coast for monsoon winds to change pattern. He made use of a Gujarati seaman, and said to have seen a map of “the whole coast of India” that the Gujarati seaman was carrying. Finally, Vasco de Gama landed in India in 1498 A.D.

One thing is certain that much before European sea farers appeared in the Indian Ocean; Indian, Chinese and Arab travellers were using the sea-charts as an aid to practical navigation and had knowledge of the Monsoon wind patterns.

The use of sky map for travel and navigation through the Silk Road is quite old in recorded history. In 1907, archaeologist Marc Aurel Stein took Dunhuang sky chart and more than 7,000 other cave manuscripts to the British Museum in London. The chart has now been dated to between 649 and 684 AD, and it is the oldest extant graphical star atlas in the world. Bonnet-Bidaud *et al.* (2009) who have studied the accuracy of the chart mentions that the star positions are drawn as observed from a latitude of 34° N, possibly from the Imperial Observatory in Chang’an (present-day Xi’an) or another site in Luoyang. The atlas shows 1,339 stars arranged in 257 groups, or asterisms, two of which resemble the constellations of the Big Dipper and Orion. It includes faint stars that are difficult to see with the naked eye, and several in the Southern Hemisphere. This clearly shows that the observers had knowledge of the sky map from present day Indonesia and further south, possibly positions in Africa. Astronomer Jean-Marc Bonnet-Bidaud of the CEA, the French Atomic Energy Commission, says that the positions of the brightest stars are surprisingly accurate to within a few degrees.

Among Arabs, mapping star was a favourite work of the Persian and Arab astronomers at the House of Wisdom in Baghdad. Persian Al-Sufi (+986) showed for the first time individual stars but distributed into separated constellations with no information on their relative positions. Arabs would sail to India using Southeast monsoon winds which blows between month of March and June. For return trip, the navigators would use northeast monsoon winds. This blows from early October to March. Similarly, the direction of wind was used to sail from Java to Kalinga and Java to Ceylon.

But the fettering of direction was done only by observing the stars. Chinese termed star-fettering as *qianxing*. It is likely that the star that helped navigators and travellers got deified as Goddess Tara. Deification of abstract concepts as well as objects was a perennial theme in Nalanda tradition.

The name “Tārā” means star, carrying across, crossing the river bank and saviouress. An image of Tārā, belonging to the 6th century has been found in Nālandā. The popularity of Tara worship appear to have picked pace with the advent of grammarian Candragomin (~600-650 AD). Candragomin was born in the Kingdom of Varendra (northern Bengal). He was married to the King’s daughter, Tara. But when he realized that it was improper to have wife with the name of his tutelary deity, he deserted his wife. The King became angry and got him sealed and thrown in the Ganges. Candragomin prayed to Goddess Tara and he was rescued. He landed upon island, which was named as Candradwipa. Candragomin thence visited Singhala (Sri Lanka) and propagated the path of devotion towards Tara. He came through Sri Parvata and Potala in Andhra to Nalanda. Once in Nalanda, his stories of miracles spread far and wide. He was also a great grammarian and composed Candra Vyakaran. Debate between Candragomin and Candrakirti, Nalanda’s Acarya went on for seven years and well documented in Buddhist intellectual history. Xuanzang mentions about Indian Candra in the list of scholars who resided in Nalanda premises. Along with Dharmapala (Hu-fa), he lists Candra (Hu-Yue). *Yue* is the name of bright shining moon in Chinese and *Hu* is a pejorative term used for the barbarians including Indians.

The Chinese monk Xuanzang (602-664 AD), who visited Nalanda after the period of Candras noticed that the worship of Tārā had been widespread at Nālandā and its adjoining area in the first half of 7th century. Xuanzang visited India from 630-646 AD. He arrived in Nalanda in 636 AD and stayed for two years and again returned for second time in 642 AD before leaving India in 643 AD. Xuanzang mentions how a tall statue of Tara (Ta-Lo) Bodhisattva was offered perfume and flowers during the festival by the royalty at Nalanda premise (Book IX). Similarly, in Book VIII, he mentions about a Tara statue along with Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara in Tiladaka monastery (Telahara), west of Nalanda.

The cult of Tara spread far and wide from the centre of Nalanda across Asia. Newarese carried it to Nepal, and through the sea route, it spread to East Asia. It also spread towards the western coast of India, particularly Konkana and the great paintings of Ajanta, Ellora, Kanheri devoted to Goddess Tara were sanctioned by the believers.

Tara of Candradwipa to Tara of Kalasan

Candradwipa is modern day Sandwip island in Bakarganj in southern Bangladesh. This

is a vast crescent shaped island facing the Chittagong coast. Candragomin is believed to have lived on this island. There was a famous Tara temple on the island which finds mention in the *Sadhnamala* composed during 1165 AD. The method of worshipping the Candradwipa Tara has been described in this compendium of worship of Vajrayana deities. In Taranath's account on origin of Tara worship, Candragomin's devotion has been highly extolled. Candragomin is believed to have composed his hymns for Tara while living here. Candradwipa finds mention in copper plates of Sricandra and the chroniclers write that Tailokyacandra became the King of Candradwipa. Some Chinese chronicles mention about the temple of Tara in the south sea during 1015 AD. The Tara Temple of Candradwipa is no more. But, there are still Vajrayogini temples in the Sandwip islands. There is likelihood that when the island was Islamized, the statue was moved to the adjacent Chatargram(Chittagong) and from where the same was taken by the Candra Kings(Dhanya Manika Candra) to Udaipur in present day Tripura which is now popularly known as the Tripura Sundari temple. The statue is known as the *Magadheswari*, the goddess of Magadha. Tara has been described as the ruler of eastern region in the *Sri Manjushri Mula Kalpa* and Nalanda Mahavihara in Magadha being the centre of dissemination of the cult of Tara.

Manjushri Mula Kalpa further mentions about Tara worship in Kalasa. Kalasa is the old Sanskrit name of Kalasan in Central Java. The Tara Temple at Kalasan is a remarkable structure in Yogyakarta Special Region of Central Java. Its height is 34 metre(72 hasta) and has a square base of 45 metre(96 hasta). Kalasan inscription of 778A.D. (D-147, National Library of Indonesia) mentions about its construction.

The inscription in Sanskrit language mention how the temple of Tara was ordered to be built by the teachers of the Shailendra King as an ornament of the Shailendra dynasty. The approval for the construction was granted by the Sanjaya King, Pancapana Panamkarna. The Kalasa village was given to the Sangha.

The homage in the inscription describes Tara as one who looks down at the world and is the only guiding star for direction in this world(Naraloka) and the divine realm(Indra loka). She is the Jagad Eka Tara .. single star of the world.

It was at this temple that Dipamkara Srijna Atisha meditated over Goddess Tara during his 12 year sojourn to Java to receive teachings from Dharmapala(Serelingpa in Tibetan accounts).

Tara temple at Candradwipa and Tara temple at Kalsan reveals how closely Tara was associated with the sea farers and how it was known as the Goddess belonging to the oceanic lineage (samudra-kula) in the *Manjusri- Mula-Kalpa*.

When routes are being revisited, it would be an interesting work to fathom how certain ideas spread across Asia and shaped the history of the region. Study of spread of worship of Goddess Tara, as the pan-Asian Goddess can inject passionate yearning in the academic quest.

Wishing the readers an engrossing read!

Niraj Kumar
Honorary Editor