MAUSAM/ MAWSIM: MARITIME ROUTES AND CULTURAL LANDSCAPES

Concept Note

Ministry of Culture, Government of India
Introduction

‘Mausam’ or Arabic ‘Mawsim’ refers to the season when ships could sail safely. This distinctive wind-system of the Indian Ocean region follows a regular pattern: southwest from May to September; and northeast from November to March. The English term ‘Monsoon’ came from Portuguese ‘Monção’, ostensibly from Arabic ‘Mawsim’. The etymology of this word signifies the importance of this season to a variety of seafarers.

The ‘discovery’ of these annual winds is attributed to the Greeks, although Indian and Arab sailors are known to have used the monsoon winds much earlier. This regular pattern facilitated the movement of people, goods and ideas across the Indian Ocean, enabling cultural interactions and exchange until when steam-powered cargo carriers reduced reliance on sailing ships.
These ancient connections were not limited to the coastal regions; they pervaded life in the hinterland and impacted inland communities as well.

**Project ‘Mausam’** focuses on how this natural phenomenon has shaped interactions between countries and communities connected by the Indian Ocean. The knowledge and manipulation of the monsoon impacted ancient and historical trade, local economies, religion, politics and cultural identity. Centuries of trade, migration, colonialism and modern statecraft transformed these traditional interactions across the Indian Ocean, but present-day national identities and perceptions of the past are deeply interwoven with age-old ties.
Great wooden dhows, skippered by experienced sailors, traversed the oceans enabling long-distance contact and exchange.

Source: Sharjah Maritime Museum, United Arab Emirates; Image by Maggie Beeler.
Historical Background

Fishermen, sailors and merchants travelled the waters of the Indian Ocean as early as the third millennium BCE, linking the world’s earliest civilizations from Africa to East Asia in a complex web of relationships. The commodities exchanged through these networks included a wide array of objects – aromatics, medicines, dyes, spices, grain, wood, textiles, gems, stones and ornaments, metals, and plant and animal products – and were transported through voyages and sold at markets or bazaars along the Indian Ocean littoral. Many of the commodities involved had multiple meanings and diverse functions. Spices, for example, were not only used as condiments and for preservation of food, but also played a major role in materia medica and ritual practices. Additionally, while trade might have underpinned many of these cross-cultural relationships, the Ocean was also a highway for the exchange of religious cultures and specialized technologies. The expansion of Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Christianity helped define the boundaries of this Indian Ocean ‘world’, creating networks of religious travel and pilgrimage. The construction of traditional sailing craft involved trade and transportation of wood for planking and coconut coir for stitching from different regions of the Indian Ocean, enabling the transmission and preservation of ancient boat-building technologies.

How was exchange across the Indian Ocean organized? There are multiple sources that help us answer this question; ranging from archaeological evidence to inscriptions and textual references from a range of time periods. Examples of such trade, exchange and interaction abound in the Indian Ocean world, ranging from third-millennium BCE Harappan ceramics, beads, and seals found on sites across the Arabian Peninsula to accounts of European sailors travelling the seas in the nineteenth century. Another aspect of the maritime networks relates to the visual topography that provided landmarks to sailors and defined the sailing world in antiquity. This visual topography was characterized by coastal structures, many of them religious in nature that created a distinctive maritime milieu. For example, the thirteenth-century Konark Temple on the coast of Odisha in India was known as the ‘Black Pagoda’ to European sailors, as opposed to the ‘White Pagoda,’ the Jagannath Temple in Puri. Similarly, the Buddhist temple at Nagapattinam on the Tamil coast in India, erected for Chinese Buddhists, was a major landmark for ships from the seventh to the nineteenth centuries until it was demolished by French Jesuits. Forts were other important structures that dotted the Indian Ocean coastline and could be seen from a long distance. Additionally, from at least the ninth century onwards, there are references to markets in coastal areas being located in fortified settlements.
Project Goals

This project aims to explore the multi-faceted Indian Ocean ‘world’ – collating archaeological and historical research in order to document the diversity of cultural, commercial and religious interactions in the Indian Ocean – extending from East Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, the Indian subcontinent and Sri Lanka to the Southeast Asian archipelago.

UNESCO has notified 981 World Heritage Cultural and Natural sites across the world. Of these, 270 Cultural sites, 111 Natural sites and 17 Mixed Category sites are in Africa, Arab States and Asia-Pacific region. These discrete sites represent the deep history, dazzling natural beauty and Outstanding Universal Values of these regions; however a strong contextual narrative will allow celebrations of their collective value and enhance regional linkages.

UNESCO’s Cultural Conventions are gradually shifting their focus from distinct monuments and sites to Cultural Landscapes, Cultural Routes and Creative Industries. Assessing World Heritage from Cultural Landscapes and Routes perspectives enables the celebration of the intimate relationships between peoples and their natural environment as well as cultural links between people across the world. This creates avenues for renewed interpretations, portals for dialogue and exchange, and an enhancement of universal value.
The project will promote research on themes related to the study of Maritime Routes through international scientific seminars and meetings and by adopting a multidisciplinary approach. It will encourage the production of specialized works, as well as publications for the general public with an attempt at promoting a broader understanding of the concept of a common heritage and multiple identities.

- **Reviving lost linkages with nations**

Countries along the Indian Ocean have shared links with each other for millennia. Project ‘Mausam’ seeks to transcend present-day national and ethnic boundaries, documenting and celebrating the common cultural values and economic ties of the Indian Ocean ‘world’. This will not only strengthen current ties between countries across the Ocean, but also set a precedent for new bridges of co-operation and continued relations and interactions.

- **Creating links to existing World Heritage sites**

Providing a platform to connect discrete Cultural and Natural World Heritage sites across the Indian Ocean ‘world’ by providing a cross-cultural, transnational narrative.

- **Redefining ‘Cultural Landscapes’**

Identifying gaps in listing of sites and filling in lacuna by providing a holistic, multi-layered perspective and drawing relationships between the existing categories of ‘Natural’ and ‘Cultural’ Heritage. This would redefine the concept of ‘Cultural Landscapes,’ and allow for a fresh, multi-faceted approach to understanding past and present-day relationships.

- **Achieving transnational nomination under World Heritage**

Advocating for ‘Indian Ocean Maritime Routes’ to attain transnational nomination under World Heritage, increasing scope for visibility, research, sustainable tourism, heritage development and promoting other Cultural Conventions across the Indian Ocean region.
Initiatives within India

Kerala, a state in southern India, is making efforts to revive the two millennia-old ‘Spice Route.’ Besides re-establishing Kerala’s maritime trade relations with thirty-one countries associated with the ancient Spice Route, the project seeks to rekindle interest among modern travellers, prompting them to undertake voyages and excursions. In the process, it is believed that there would be a revival of cultural, historical and archaeological exchanges. Project ‘Mausam’ seeks to incorporate ideas proposed by Kerala Tourism; however, it aims to broaden its perspective to include a significant research component.

A three-day workshop on ‘Indian World Heritage Sites in Context’ was organized in December 2013 in New Delhi with both national and international participation. Several institutions under the Ministry of Culture hosted exhibitions as a part of the event. Papers from the workshop have been published under the title ‘Indian World Heritage Sites in Context,’ jointly by National Monuments Authority and Aryan Books International, New Delhi in 2014.
Contribution of Project ‘Mausam’ within UNESCO’s framework

As a signatory to the World Heritage Convention since 1977 and a Committee Member since 2011, India has been actively involved in redefining World Heritage documents, guidelines and policies to bring forth the Asian perspective to UNESCO.

Project ‘Mausam’ is in perfect tandem with UNESCO’s changing perspectives on protecting heritage and fostering creativity. This project will encourage States Parties associated with the Indian Ocean to interconnect various Cultural Conventions of UNESCO with new interpretations of Cultural Landscapes and World Heritage. It will provide an important platform for the promotion of UNESCO activities under each Convention such as Creative Cities, arts and artists, museums, funds for Cultural Diversity along with the Transnational Nomination for World Heritage.
Themes to be explored under the Project ‘Mausam’

1. Coastal Architecture as Cultural Landscapes: transformations from the third millennium BCE to the colonial period [Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972)].


5. The world of the sailing ship: Boat-building yards in Zanzibar, Oman, Kutch, Karnataka, south Sulawesi [Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005)].

6. Spice Route trade and cultural products linked to it [Creative Industries – Cultural Products].


Objectives

• Developing a Web Platform on UNESCO website.
• Documentation/ Research on Indian Ocean Maritime Routes (through regional, national and international resources) to create a database for various themes.
• Establishing a Research Unit in New Delhi that will work out research networks across the nations involved; coordinate with various member states to host periodic workshops, organize exhibitions and meetings in different cities; and publish research work on various aspects of the Maritime Routes Project.
• Promoting sustainable tourism initiatives along Maritime Routes.

Activities

• Establishment of documentation and research standards valid for all the component sites of the serial and trans-boundary nomination of the Maritime Routes Project.
• Capacity building on documentation standards, geophysical survey methods and Maritime Routes.
• Project nomination preparation through a series of workshops.
• On-site training in approaches to site documentation and management with UNESCO Category (2) centres in Bahrain and India.
• Digitization of archives.
• Publication of results of the project.
• Improvement of partnerships and development of networks between institutions and experts on the sub-regional and international level.
**Expected Outcomes**

Tangible outcomes for each theme are presented in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S. No.</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>World Cultural and Natural Heritage (including Cultural Landscapes)</td>
<td>Research on route and selection of tangible sites, port settlements, cultural landscapes for World Heritage</td>
<td>Transnational nomination for UNESCO World Heritage</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Movable Heritage and Artifacts</td>
<td>Cataloguing and showcasing movable heritage and artifacts</td>
<td>Special mobile exhibitions on various themes, increased linkages to museum networks</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>Maritime Museums</td>
<td>Linking museums through Maritime trade routes</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>Industrial Heritage (Maritime Technology)</td>
<td>Research on evolution of Maritime technology</td>
<td>Exhibitions and publications on Maritime technology</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>Underwater Archaeology</td>
<td>Research and mapping on the route</td>
<td>Exhibitions and publications</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>Creative Industries: Cultural Products linked to Indian Ocean trade and interactions</td>
<td>Documentation and mapping of creative industries.</td>
<td>Promotion of crafts and creating projects for sustainable tourism</td>
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<td>7.</td>
<td>Intangible Cultural Heritage: Rites, Rituals, Festivals and Cuisine</td>
<td>Recording of intangible cultural heritage</td>
<td>Listing of intangible heritage with UNESCO</td>
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<td>8.</td>
<td>Pilgrimage and Religious Travel across the Ocean</td>
<td>Promoting events on cultural diversity</td>
<td>Linking to International Fund for Cultural Diversity</td>
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<td>9.</td>
<td>Documentary/ Archival Heritage</td>
<td>Documenting and mapping of oral tradition, literary writings and all archival heritage on the route</td>
<td>Adding heritage to UNESCO’s Memory of the World Register</td>
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Project ‘Mausam’ is an exciting, multi-disciplinary project that rekindles long-lost ties across nations of the Indian Ocean ‘world’ and forges new avenues of cooperation and exchange. The project, launched by India in partnership with member states, will enable a significant step in recording and celebrating this important phase of world history from the African, Arab and Asian-world perspectives.
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Sunset at Ao Nang beach in Krabi, Thailand

Source: Somya Johri