



CONCEPT NOTE

International Conference on 'India- Laos: Inter-Cultural Linkages'

11th - 12th December, 2015

Venue:
Conference Hall,
Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts,
C.V. Mess, Janpath, New Delhi

The Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, New Delhi, in collaboration with Shri Bharatvarshiya Digambar Jain Teerth Sanrakshini Mahasabha, Connaught Place, New Delhi, proposes to hold a two-days International Conference on '**India-Laos : Inter-cultural Linkages.**' Laos is a land locked country bounded by Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, Myanmar and China. India and Laos shared a common cultural heritage over the centuries. Monsieur George Coedes, a French savant, has described Laos as an 'Out-post of Indian Culture'.

The evidence of early migration in Laos has been found since late Pleistocene to early Holocene eras, dated between as early as 46,000 and 63,000 years. Moreover, we find first recorded indigenous kingdom in Southern Laos was named as 'Funan' that existed during the early century of the Christian era. Funanese forced the 'Cham people' out of the Champasak region in the Sixth Century A.D. and by the

Seventh century, they formed a new kingdom called as 'Chen-la'. The epigraphic records mention Khmer dominance over Laos till 12th century A.D. King Fa Ngum, a mighty Lao ruler carved out an independent kingdom on upper Mekong river valley region in the 12th century A.D.

A majority of Laotian ethnic population lives in the Mekong river valley which belongs to the ethnic group. There are 80 ethnic groups distributed in the lower, middle and highlanders. Each group speaks their own dialect and practice their own customs, traditions and religion. 75 percent of the ethnic population belong to Lao Thai.

Lao people produced significant Hindu and Buddhist temples besides sculptures of both Hindu and Buddhist deities. 'Vat Phu' temple complex was a holy place of the Lao where cult of Shiva in form of *Linga* flourished. Besides Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism were also flourished. Moreover, scholars have not studied from the point of Jainism in Laos. Since trade was the most important factor for the spread of Indian culture, traders' community, who were mostly Jain, must have introduced Jainism and worshipping of *Tirthankars*. There are hardly any distinctive features seen on the Buddhist and Jain Art and Architecture in Laos. Thus, scholars have not studied Laos from the point of view Jainism. This Conference would also have a fresh look on Lao culture from the point of view of Jainism.

The textiles of Laos reveal great affinity with the Indian textiles. Some of the clothes are worn during the rituals. Thus textiles are considered sacred. The designs of Lao *ikat* have close resemblances with Indian *patola*. The Indian brocades are also used as repertoire costumes.

The people of Laos were fond of music. A number of musical instruments are depicted on the reliefs of the temples. Even today, at every religious and social ceremony, they use various musical instruments which are heavily influenced by the Indian and neighbouring musical instruments.

A large number of inscriptions have been found in Sanskrit Language. Sanskrit and Pali made deep imprint on the Laotian script, language and literature. In Lao language, there are about sixty percent of words having Sanskrit and Pali origin. Lao script was introduced by King Rama Khamheng of Sukhodaya kingdom of Thailand in 1283 C.E., which resulted into common alphabets of Thai and Lao. One type of Lao script known as Toua-Lam is considered sacred and it is used for transcribing Pali. The Lao people cultivated Sanskrit language though their Laotian mother tongue.

The *Ramayana* is the well known living tradition of Laos. A number of the *Ramayana* versions are available in Laos. The most popular the *Ramayana* story is *Brah Lak Brah Lam*. This Rama story is, even now a days, played in the Royal palace. A large number of manuscripts on palm leaves (*lontar*) dealing with art and culture is available at the National Library of Laos.

The Laotian culture has been the focus of studies and conferences in the field of history, language, religion, culture, art and architecture. However, its inner connections and its external relations have so far not been studied in depth. The International Conference on “India-Laos : Inter-cultural Linkages” has been planned to explore cultural interface which distinguishes Laotian culture. The proposed panels of the Conference are:

- I. Pre-historic and Historical Inter-cultural linkage
- II. India-Laos Ethnic Linkages.
- III. Connections of Laotian art and Architecture with Indian and South East Asian Art Styles.
- IV. Religious linkages with special reference to Jainism, Hinduism and Buddhism
- V. Influence of Jainism in Laos.
- VI. Inter-cultural Linkages in textiles.

- VII. Laotian Musical Instruments in the wider context of Indian and South East Asian Traditions.
- VIII. Studies on Sanskrit based literature and epigraphy of Laos.