

PROJECT MAUSAM MONTHLY LECTURE ON 22<sup>ND</sup> JUNE 2016

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

**Sailing the Indian Ocean: The Seafarers of Kachchh**

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Sailors constituted a significant group in the littoral society of Kachchh, whose services were essential to the ship-owners and merchants. At the second half of the eighteenth century, when the Kachchh fleet comprised more than four hundred ocean-going ships, the demand for these seamen to man the ships plying in the western Indian Ocean waters naturally increased. Sailors' job was demanding and laborious as they not only manned the vessel but also acted as stevedores. The ironical feature of the Kachchh littoral society was the glaring economic disparity among the populace. Living standards of the people offer two extremes of haves and have not. While Mandvi, for instance, was abode of very affluent merchants, wealthy monasteries and ship-owners, there were groups of seafarers and others who struggled for their survival. The similar landscape represented the littoral societies of Muscat and Zanzibar. These littoral societies were characterised by capitalist milieu where they were being commercial terminus generated opportunities, but, with its disproportionate distribution of wealth showcased the existing gulf. Consequently, those who subsisted on the maritime trade were framed into different classes. The class of seafarers is chiefly represented in this paper.

Keeping in mind various activities these seafaring communities carried at the sea and on the land, my paper will highlight upon their crucial role in winning the maritime status to the region of the Gulf of Kachchh.