

**Inaugural Address by CNS at International Seminar On ‘The Sea
And Knowledge’– 09 December 2016**

1. Shri Hasmukh Shah, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of Darshak Itihas Nidhi, honourable members of the board, renowned historians and scholars, the students of history in the audience, ladies and gentlemen.

2. It is indeed a very humbling experience for me today to stand on this podium to deliver an inaugural address for this International Seminar on ‘The Sea and Knowledge’. It is also heartening that this seminar is being conducted in Gujarat, which had played the pivotal role in shaping India’s maritime heritage beginning more than 5,000 years ago.

3. The tidal dock at Lothal, believed to be the world’s first tidal dock, is situated merely a few hours distance from where we have assembled today. Just a few hundred kilometers to the North of present day Mangrol, across the Gulf of Kutch, Mundra is home to the largest commercial port of India. A reflection on this connection between Lothal and Mundra, makes one wonder how deeply the state of Gujarat is enmeshed in past, present and future of our nation’s maritime culture.

4. I would also like to invoke the memory of late Shri Manubhai Pancholi, fondly remembered as Darshak. He has been a source of inspiration not only for this organisation, but for many generations of students of history and literature. I am sure that today’s event will auger well for the objectives set by Darshak to this foundation.

5. Having spent literally all my life in the Navy, first as a naval child and then in uniform, I am a proud inheritor of maritime lineage. Maritime history, therefore, has always been an area of interest, sometimes as a matter of formal education and sometimes out of sheer curiosity.

6. I am sure, this august gathering is much more learned than I am, in so far as history, as a subject of academic research is concerned. However, as a student of history, I am certainly delighted to share my thoughts with you.

7. I must confess that once one gets initiated into the mysteries of our glorious past, it is very difficult to quench your thirst for more knowledge. It is this thirst that has kept my interest in maritime history alive.

8. Once, I came across a piece of information about the 'Baan Stambh', meaning the 'Arrow Pillar' in plain English. You would all be aware that this historical structure of great significance is located on the Veraval coast along South Gujarat at the famous Somnath Temple. The pillar bears an earth shaped stone sphere at its apex. Most intriguing part of this structure is an arrow piercing through the stone sphere pointing directly at the South Pole.

9. The Sanskrit inscription on the pillar describes that the point on earth where the pillar stands is the first point of any landmass on that longitude from the South Pole. With the latest gadgets at hand these days, one can easily verify that this is indeed the truth.

10. This one piece of our history reveals a plethora of information of the scientific prowess of our civilisation. It is a clear indication that they

had complete wherewithal of geography, cartography, dimensional facts of the Earth, accurate measurement systems. The facts symbolised by this structure also have an intrinsic relation with the knowledge of the seas. The inscriptions on the pillar stating that the site is the first landmass to the North of the South Pole along that longitude, amply demonstrates that the makers of this pillar had complete knowledge of what lies between that spot and the South Pole. It is also a clear indication that they had explored and charted the waters that span between Gujarat and the present day Antarctica on paper.

11. As I stand here today at Bharuch, just a few miles from where that Pillar stands across the Gulf of Khambatt, I am captivated by the depth of knowledge that our maritime heritage offers. I must express my gratitude to the community of historians to have made this knowledge available to the laymen and made us aware of our glorious heritage.

12. I would like to emphasise that the maritime medium is intrinsic to the very identity of our nation. With the sea on three sides and high mountains on the fourth, it has been said that our country lies in the very lap of the Indian Ocean.

13. Our history, our geography, our economy, our interactions in a globalised world, our development and security, are all intimately and intricately connected to the maritime domain. Looking back on our maritime heritage, the one fact that stands out is that India was and will always remain a maritime nation.

14. Ancient Indian texts such as the Vedas, Buddhist Jatak as and even the Sanskrit and Pali literature bear testimony to the fact that as far

back as the era of the Indus Valley Civilisation, there was substantial maritime interaction between India, as it existed then, and trading communities in Africa, Southern Europe, Western Asia and the Far East. The studies of Manusmriti (MANU/ SMRITI), Kautilya's Arthashastra (Artha/ Shastra), Yukti Kalpatarru (Kalp/ Tarru), Tamil Sangam have revealed abundant references to maritime activities of ancient Indians.

15. Prominent rulers of ancient India attached high value to maritime affairs. The war office of the Mauryan Emperor Chandragupta had, as one of its six boards, a Nav Parishad or the 'Board of Admiralty' which controlled national shipping. The cultural and political expeditions of the Guptas, Kalingas, Mauryas, Pallavas, Chalukyas, Cholas and Sri Vijayas took them to far flung areas such as Sumatra, Burma, the Malayan Peninsula, Java, Thailand and other countries in South East Asia.

16. Even today, Indian cultural influences can be seen on many a foreign shore, across the seas, in languages, architecture and culture. Just to give an example, the motto of the Indonesian Navy, 'Jalesveva Jayamahe', is in Sanskrit and means 'Victorious on the Sea'.

17. It was the seas, and their benign and cooperative use by Indian seafarers that facilitated our historical cultural outreach and civilisational links with faraway lands.

18. The story of India's economic rise during the early period also provides irrefutable evidence that India's economic fortunes are linked to the seas. Analysts have estimated that India, along with China, commanded 57% of the world's GDP in 1st century AD. This figure

remained close to 50% for the next 1,500 years, a period coincidental with flourishing maritime trade.

19. Let me now touch upon a rather sensitive aspect of the steady decline of contemporary Indian civilisation from a commanding position to our subjugation to foreign powers. If our civilisation was indeed what it was as we glean from historical research, it is worth examining where we went wrong and fell prey to foreign rule. It would be equally apt for us to examine where we stand today in comparison to that era.

20. It may be appreciated that the maritime ascendancy gained by India in the early period may have fallen to complacency during the medieval period.

21. Apart from a few honourable exceptions, such as the Maratha king Shivaji and the Zamorin of Calicut, most continental rulers of India displayed a rueful 'sea-blindness' that ultimately led to their downfall at the hands of extra-regional powers.

22. The neglect of seapower by various Indian kingdoms during the medieval era facilitated the economic and political conquest of the Indian sub-continent by the colonial powers.

23. In the years that followed, seafaring capabilities of India experienced a slow revival. First as an employment avenue, both in the mercantile marine and in the Royal Navy. In the ensuing years, the Indian coastal community regained expertise in ship building as well as seafaring.

24. Though under the foreign rule, Indian Ship Builders have many a significant ships to their credit which had the 'Made in India' stamp. In fact the last sailing ship to serve as a Flagship of the Royal Navy was HMS Ganges, which was an 84 gun ship constructed at the then Bombay Dockyard.

25. HMS Asia which was commanded by the famous Admiral Edward Codrington during the Battle of Navarino, HMS Cornwallis on which the Treaty of Nanking was signed, were all constructed in India by Indian shipbuilders.

26. Thankfully, Indians could build upon this critical feature of maritime strength. Today we can certainly boast of a thriving in-house ship building industry which is capable of designing and constructing virtually all forms of vessels from commercial to high end warships.

27. It is amply clear that, if one neglects the study of history, it would be at one's own peril. Without history, there would be no future. It is this realisation and the experience of a steep downfall from a commanding position, that keeps bringing us back to study history, especially in the maritime domain.

28. In Indian mythology, the ocean is considered as the source for creation of the universe, as illustrated in the famous "Samudra-Manthan", the churning of oceans in search of "Amrit", the divine nectar of immortality. I do not know whether this mythological story is to be construed as myth alone. What I am, however, sure of, is that we have a lot to gain from Sagar Manthan of its own kind and that is KNOWLEDGE!

29. Today, if there is one thing that can provide some semblance of immortality, it is knowledge. I am, therefore, deeply appreciative of the role played by Darshak Itihas Nidhi in promoting this Sagar Manthan and lead us to the knowledge that we all aspire for, irrespective of our individual professions.

30. Today, the country is witnessing a maritime ascendancy, in more ways than one. Our national discourse has long overcome the earlier phase of seablindedness. We have turned to the seas again, ushering in a new dawn of seamindedness.

31. There is enhanced maritime consciousness and orientation. The importance of the seas and elements of maritime power are being increasingly recognised. This also manifests in the articulation of intent at the highest levels of national leadership.

32. The proposed setting up of a National Maritime Authority, as enunciated in the Hon'ble President's address to the Parliament in 2014, is a welcome and timely step in this regard.

33. Ladies and Gentlemen, in conclusion, let me state that the wheels of time have turned and are firmly raising India to her rightful place in history. As we look forward to redeem our position in the 21st Century, India is on the right course to regain her maritime strength.

34. The path, of course, may be full of challenges. However, our study of history coupled with modern scientific developments will eventually help us overcome these challenges and keep us on the desired track.

35. It is said that history repeats itself when one fails to learn from it. Therefore, I would once again place on record, my sincere appreciation of the contribution of Darshak Itihas Nidhi in promoting the study of history, especially our maritime heritage. It is credit to the likes of you, that India can keep learning from her own rich maritime heritage and draw lessons for the future.

36. I am hopeful that the interactions during this seminar would take us further on the path of knowledge and development.

Jai Hind.