

International Conference on Majuli



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Ashim Dutta 17 July 2012 8582 views

The international conference on Majuli organized by Society for Srimanta Sankaradeva, at Bishnu Nirmala Bhavan, Guwahati on 8th July, 2012, started with the inauguration of a photo exhibition by Narayan Chandra Goswami, Sattradhikar of Natun Kamalabari Sattr, Majuli. The guests went around the exhibition, which exhibited photos of Majuli taken by Bijit Dutta, GSV Suryanarayana Murthy, Nafisa Hussain, Mitu Khataniar, Subrat Dutta, Youngja Kim, Bhabananda Barbayan, Dharitri Boro, Somiron Goswami, Swapan Das and Rimjhim Mahanta. Next, Chayanika Goswami from Dibrugarh rendered a Bargeet. Thereafter Dr. Sanjib Kumar Borkakoti, President of Society for Srimanta Sankaradeva took the chair. Other dignitaries also were seated and felicitated. It was followed by welcome speech by Pradip Hazarika, co-ordinator of Society for Srimanta Sankaradeva. He also gave an account of the past activities of Society for Srimanta Sankaradeva in his address. He introduced the collaborators of this event – Assamese Society of America Foundation, Friends of Assam and Seven Sisters, Core Professional Group – Brahmaputra and Majuli Cultural Landscape Management Authority.

The background note on Majuli and the endeavour to get it listed it as a World Heritage Site was presented by GSV Suryanarayana Murthy. He described the geo-cultural features of Majuli and explained the salient points of the dossier prepared by him. He revealed the discriminatory attitude by the Govt. of India, which had listed Majuli in the third position in submission of three sites to UNESCO for inscription as World Heritage Site. He appreciated the role played by Society for Srimanta Sankaradeva and Friends of Majuli in this process. He suggested a proactive role by MCLMA and for that matter Govt. of Assam.

Eminent Gandhian Natwar Thakkar from Nagaland Gandhi Ashram released the news-letter MITRO, published by Friends of Assam and Seven Sisters (FASS). He was assisted by Nabajit Roy of FASS. Releasing the special issue of the news-letter on Majuli, Thakkar said

that it was every one's duty to keep alive the contributions of Srimanta Sankaradeva, who was one of the leading religious preachers in India. He reminisced his journey to Majuli and lauded the present effort to create awareness about this culturally rich river island.

Narayan Chandra Goswami spoke briefly about the significance of Majuli. He said that it was the centre of Assamese culture and Vaishnavite movement launched by Srimanta Sankaradeva. He expressed concern over irresponsible news items by electronic as well as print media over the extent of flood damage, since it might affect the prospect of Majuli's inscription as WHS. He said that flood was normal for Majuli and people there co-habitated with flood.

Jayanta Barman, Vice President of FASS made a presentation about FASS. He also dwelt upon the future plans of the organization in Majuli. Prof. Chandan Mahanta of I.I.T., Guwahati spoke briefly about Core Professional Group-Brahmaputra and its activities. He highlighted the need for serious academic discussion as well as setting up of a research centre to solve the problems of Brahmaputra River and valley.

Prof. Arvind Phukan, the Chief Resource Person of the conference made an elaborate presentation about the nature and changes in the Brahmaputra river over time. He highlighted the braided nature of the river and talked about the need to channelise the river. He showed the dimension of erosion in Majuli and other parts of the river. He said that erosion could be checked if one proceeded with proper mathematical model, if concrete lining was done, if the embankments were designed scientifically and repaired regularly. He said that rats dug up the embankments making them weak from inside. He said that embankment should be made with soil dug from river-bed. Such soil could be deposited in the Majuli island too, thereby helping in land reclamation. He lamented the non-cooperation of bureaucrats in anti-erosion

planning. He showed video footage of erosion.

Sayed Iftikar Hussain, CEO of Majuli Cultural Landscape Management Authority gave a presentation on the perspective of Govt. of Assam on Majuli. He said that the Majuli Cultural Landscape Management Act passed by the Legislatures in Assam was unique in the world and hoped that it would help in getting Majuli inscribed as WHS. He said that six international firms had been shortlisted for preparing the Comprehensive Development Plan for Majuli, but the initiative of Govt. of Assam was not adequately supplemented by Govt. of India, who went about the entire nomination process in a disinterested manner. He also revealed that Archaeological Survey of India did not invite any official or expert from Assam to offer suggestions while preparing the present dossier on Majuli. He hinted at forces working against the interest of Majuli in the entire process. He showed power point presentation depicting the details about Majuli. He said that while some chaporis had been lost in erosion, new chaporis had been created amidst Brahmaputra. Bhakat chapori was one such sand bar, he said.

Prof. Dilip Medhi, head of Anthropology Deptt., Gauhati University spoke about the massive cultural wealth of Majuli. He said that what was the most important thing for Majuli was its preservation and protection. He stressed on creating greater awareness about these issues in different fora. He said that a long-term vision was necessary for Majuli. The role of Brahmaputra Board was crucial for the island, he said. He also opined that the dams being constructed in upstream would affect Majuli badly.

A paper sent by Gili Navon, research scholar of Hibr University, Jerusalem was taken as read since she was not physically present. The paper suggested setting up a cultural centre in Majuli.

Prasujya Gogoi, research scholar of Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi presented a paper on 'Eco restoration of Majuli island'. She described the wide variety of flora and fauna available in Majuli. She said that increase in human population in the island had created problem for nature. She suggested zonation of critical areas of the island. Tourism also should be planned properly so that it does not hurt the ecology. Guides should be qualified. Resorts should be made with locally available materials like bamboo, thatch etc. A traffic management also was necessary.

Dr. Arun Kumar Sarma, President of Majuli Island Protection and Development Council (MIPADC) gave an account of their initiative for inscription of Majuli as WHS. He suggested GVS Suryanarayam Murthy to involve more people, especially those having exposure to the life in Majuli, in the revision of the dossier.

Bharat Saikia, retired Engineer and Secretary of MIPADC, who had prepared the first dossier on Majuli, spoke about the faulty embankments on Brahmaputra. He said that the embankments had led to rise in the river-bed and braided nature of the river. He suggested installation of good quality hard plastic pipes of one foot diameter in the embankment, at intervals of say one Km. in order to inject flood water inside the island and release of the same later to the river. This would prevent breaches in the embankment, bring in fertile sediments and wash away stale water inside.

An interaction session took place with Prof. Arvind Phukan in afternoon. M.N. Dutta Bordoloi, former G.M. of Brahmaputra Valley Fertilizer Corporation Ltd. and Putul Mahanta, General Secretary of Asom Sattra Mahasabha, Majuli branch took part in the interaction. Mahanta submitted that Prof. Phukan's data about erosion was old and new found data had proved that erosion had been checked in Majuli, leading to

increase in land mass marginally.

In his presidential comment, Dr. Sanjib Kr. Borkakoti said that the Society for Srimanta Sankaradeva would remain associated with the Comprehensive Development Plan of Majuli initiated by MC LMA. He lamented the lack of interest by Indian representative in UNESCO on Majuli's nomination for WHS. He also pointed out that the dossier needs greater emphasis on Sattriya Culture. He stressed the need of more academic analysis of Majuli's problems. He thanked Dr. Sanjib Bhuyan of ASAF for mooted the idea of such a conference in the first place.

Several dignitaries like Ripu Mahanta, Vice President of Asom Sattra Mahasabha, A.K. Mitra, Chairman of Technical Advisory Committee, Water Resource Department, Anjana Chaliha, Retired Principal of J.B. College, Manoj Kr. Das, DGM of NEDFI, Sankar Das, prominent social activist, Satyajit Mahanta, Deka Sattradhikar of Natun Kamalabari Sattra were present in the conference. Representatives of several NGOs and Sattras attended the conference. President Dr. Sanjib Kumar Borkakoti thanked all of them as well as the members of Facebook groups 'Followers of Srimanta Sankaradeva' and 'Friends of Majuli' for their support.

Neilh M. Gautam, General Secretary of the Society offered vote of thanks to all participants and collaborators. With that, the conference came to an end.

Ashim Dutta

ON THIS DAY

When Justice-for-Zubeen campaign gains momentum

Assam Women Clinch National Tchoukball Championship

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Buffy to distribute sanitary napkins in Nagaland.

Heart awareness rally in the city
