

Department of History and Culture
Faculty of Humanities and Languages
Jamia Millia Islamia
New Delhi

Invites you to a lecture

By

Ranabir Chakravarti

On

"One who is present can see what is not seen by one who is absent"

India and the Maritime Merchants in the Documentary Geniza

(c. 1000-1300)

27 September, 2012 (Thursday), 12.15 PM

Venue: Seminar Room, Department of History and Culture, JMI

Dr. P.K. Basant, Department of History and Culture will chair the session

Contrary to the much cherished notion that the subcontinent was an essentially inward-looking insular entity, the recent historiography of the Indian Ocean asserts that the subcontinent experienced enduring linkages, commercial and cultural, with disparate areas in China, South-East Asia, West Asia and the Mediterranean regions. These contacts and communications became more visible during the 1500-1800 CE. But the period prior to 1500 also witnessed what Sanjay Subrahmanyam calls “connected histories”. The emergence of “segmented voyages” (K.N. Chaudhuri) across the Indian Ocean since 1000 CE proved beneficial to the subcontinent which occupied a central position in the Indian Ocean. The western and the eastern termini of these maritime networks were respectively Siraf and Alexandria and the ports of China.

In this broad scenario were situated the letters of Jewish merchants, for many of whom India was the preferred destination. These letters of ‘India traders’ (*Goitein*), are not merely fascinating commercial documents, they also offer us the rare voice of merchants. In these documents Jewish and Muslim merchants prominently appear along with merchants of India. Further, in these documents, social interactions among merchants of different faiths also loom large. Therefore, these letters are a significant source in History as they throw light upon the role of the ship-owners and maritime merchants of western coastal India and the Indian Ocean world.

About the Speaker

Ranabir Chakravarti, Professor of Ancient History, Centre for Historical Studies JNU, New Delhi, has been teaching in JNU since 2002. His special interest lies in Indian Ocean maritime history, particularly from the 500-1500 CE. He has also researched on the early understanding of the monsoons and hydraulic resources. He presided over the Ancient India section of the Indian History Congress, 72nd session at Punjabi University, Patiala (2011). His publications include, *A Sourcebook of Indian Civilization*, Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2000 (one of the associate editors); *Trade in Early India* (edited), New Delhi: OUP, 2005 (paperback ed); *Trade and Traders in Early Indian Society*, New Delhi: Manohar, 2007 (second ed); *Indo-Judaic Studies in the Twenty First Century: A View from the Margins* (one of the editors), New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007; *Exploring Early India up to c. AD 1300*, New Delhi, Macmillan, 2010. He has recently provided annotations to the English translation (by Giles Constable) of a Latin Crusade Treatise, *How to Beat the Saracens*, Washington DC: Dumberton Oaks Medieval Humanities Series (2012). He has authored/ edited three books in Bangla. He regularly contributes to peer reviewed academic journals and edited volumes.