

## BOOK REVIEW

### **PROCEEDINGS, KERALA ENVIRONMENT CONGRESS-2005.**

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During the last two decades, there has been a tremendous upsurge in the awareness and concern about the environment all over the world. India has a great tradition of environmental conservation that teaches us to respect and protect nature. But the post-independence industrial and agricultural growth the country has achieved have been at the cost of environment because of excessive focus on resource utilization. Kerala has been in the forefront spearheading many environmental movements such as the campaigns against the Silent Valley project and more recently against the Coco-Cola plant at Plachimada and mineral sand mining along Alapuzha coast, which have not only inspired many such movements all over the country but also have become synonymous with the environmental concerns of the people. It is only but natural therefore, that Kerala hosts a good number of seminars, symposia and discussions on environmental issues. In 2005, the 18<sup>th</sup> Indian Environmental Congress was held in Thiruvananthapuram and the First Kerala Environment Congress in Kochi. The book under review is the proceedings volume of the Kerala Environment Congress-2005 organised by the Centre for Environment and Development, in association with the Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India and Cochin Corporation, at Kochi on May 6 and 7, 2005.

The focal theme of the Congress was "Coastal and Marine Environment: Issues, Problems and Policies", an extremely relevant topic as far as Kerala, with a coastline of 580 km is concerned. The relevance is further enhanced in the context of the devastating tsunami that has caused havoc in several stretches of its coastal belt. Today, the administrators, decision makers, scientific community and the general public of the state are well aware of the extreme sensitivity of the coastal and marine ecosystem. This book adds to the existing knowledge with new data and new approaches in dealing with the problems in this ecosystem.

The volume contains 30 papers, of which 16 are invited papers by well known experts in various fields, 12 papers by young researchers and scientists from universities and research organizations and two papers dealing with the current topics discussed at an open session.

One of the positive results of the tsunami that struck the Indian coastal regions on December 6, 2004 is that for the first time the country woke up to the possibility of such devastating disasters along its coasts and therefore to the need for a warning system and mitigation plans. The opening paper by Harsh K. Gupta outlines the initiative taken by India in establishing such a system and in mitigation of tsunamis and storm surges. Oceans will continue to be the key determinant for the future of humanity and therefore understanding oceans in their totality and delivery of ocean information services to the government, industry and society are inevitable and challenging tasks. K. Radhakrishnan in his paper explains the significance and salient features of the Ocean Information Service that is being developed by the Department of Ocean Development through the Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS) for the country.

The paper 'Coastal Zone Regulation-New Dimensions' by M. Baba is an extremely informative one. He points out that though the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) notification of 1986 by the Union government was effective in creating widespread awareness and protecting coastal ecosystem to a great extent, in the absence of a Coastal Zone Management Policy, it has not achieved the expected results. The M.S. Swaminathan committee later constituted to revisit the CRZ has made certain concrete recommendations for CZM and the author, as a member of that committee, elaborates the guiding principles and action plans of this CZMP.

E.J. James' paper on the significance of management of river basins in relation to coastal wetlands, highlights the need for effective management of the basins of the rivers that are flowing into the coastal wetlands. He amply illustrates with case studies from India, particularly from the coastal wetlands of Kerala. Anjali Bahuguna and Shailesh Nayak in their paper highlight how remote sensing technology can be used as an effective tool in mapping and monitoring the coastal environment. There is great potential for developing an inland navigation system in Kerala and this aspect is discussed by T.Elangovan in his paper.

A.S.K. Nair in his paper proposes a new evolutionary

model of the Holocene coastline of Kerala, between the Pandalayani promontory, north of Kozhikode and Edava promontory near Varkala, and suggests that this segment of the coastline has been developed in five stages of transgressions and regressions. The paper by K T Damodaran which deals with the extremely sensitive topic of mineral sand mining along the Kerala coast and in shallow seas, stresses the need for exploiting this rare and valuable resources but recommends to avoid extremely vulnerable zones and take necessary precautions before starting any such activity.

Fisheries is the mainstay of the economy of the Kerala coast. B Madhusoodana Kurup discusses the status, sustainability issues and policies of the marine and coastal fisheries of the state. Wanton destruction of mangroves in the coastal wetlands of the state has adversely affected the biodiversity of this ecosystem. K A Khaleel discusses this problem with reference to the Valapattan wetlands of north Kerala. P O Nameer in his paper on the conservation of wetland water fowls of Kerala, with special reference to the Ramsar sites of Kol and Vembanad wetlands analyses their ecological and socio-economical significance. Various aspects of marine pollution and their impact on the Kerala coast are discussed by N Chandramohan Kumar while Biju Soman deals with the health problems along the coastal belt.

There are three papers in the volume discussing the socio-economic aspects of the coastal wetlands. C Bhaskaran et al present the results of stake-holder participatory analysis carried out for Veli wetlands, while George Chakachery discusses the role of rural women in Kuttanad and N C Narayanan on the interrelation between political economy and political ecology of Kuttanad.

In the second part of the volume, there are 13 papers by young scientists and researchers on a wide variety of topics related to coastal and marine ecology, bio-

diversity, oceanography and meteorology, most of which are with special reference to Kerala coast. One paper which deserves special mention is by Anu Gopinath et al on the presence of trace elements in the coral ecosystem of Lakshadweep Archipelago which shows increasing contents of toxic metals like cadmium, lead and zinc in the waters around the islands. The source of this pollution has been traced to the diesel and oil used for power generation in the islands. This is a warning signal since the coral reefs which are highly sensitive to such metals need to be protected.

There are two papers at the end, on the theme of disaster management that was discussed at the open forum. M K Prasad in his brief note emphasizes the need for preparing a rapid assessment of the impact of tsunami and similar disasters on the coastal ecosystems and for strictly implementing the Coastal Zone Regulations. Another important aspect discussed was the role of media in disaster management, especially in the context of last year's tsunami. G Sajan's paper discusses this aspect and also stresses on the need for an alliance between the media and research/scientific institutions and proposes a media strategy for future.

So far there are few books which deal with such a wide variety of problems and issues on coastal and marine environment of Kerala. This book can bridge that gap to a great extent. With high quality papers laden with valuable information, this volume in a compact and handy paperback edition can serve as a good reference book for students and researchers in these fields. It will definitely be a valuable addition to any library.

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## ANNOUNCEMENT

### NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON GAS HYDRATES – A POTENTIAL SOURCE OF ENERGY

The National Geophysical Research Institute (NGRI) is organising the above conference during 27-28 June, 2006 at Hyderabad. For further details, please contact Dr Kalachand Sain, Gas Hydrates Group, Cyber Building, NGRI, Hyderabad - 500 007. **Phone:** 23434700 Ext 2519, **Email:** gashyd\_06@yahoo.co.in, **Website:** www.gashydngr06.org