

SSEASR: A HISTORY

Religion is a term which encompasses almost every part of our life. Whether it is our culture, language & literature, history or civilisation, social behaviour or understanding of humanity, religion shapes us. It is much truer in our region of South and Southeast Asia where the word “**religion**” goes beyond and farther than its general meaning. It becomes Dharma or Dhamma, Ways of Life, Essence of Humanity. The common inherent traits shared by our various civilisations in the past three millennia make our region a role model of co-existence where the external elements get adjusted, accepted and honoured. Therefore, the SSEASR promotes the academic study of such a rich scenario through the intra regional and international collaboration of all scholars normally resident in South and Southeast Asia whose research has a bearing on the subject. It would cover subjects such as (and not confined only to) history, linguistics, political science, geography, anthropology, sociology, economics, literature, cultural studies, law, folklore, etc. Cross-cultural studies would also be promoted to encourage better understanding among scholars. The SSEASR stands to bring out the genius of the local regional scholarship which generally gets deep buried in huge international academics. It is for creating a network of scholars in the region, and for that purpose, it shall cooperate with related agencies in the region of South and Southeast Asia to develop healthy academic atmospheres. In recent times, Asian scholars have started to work “within” Asia; such trends would be further promoted by the SSEASR among young Asian scholars who need exposure to the standard of research being conducted at various competent academic institutions in the world. Thus, the SSEASR offers native scholars, writers and artists a perfect platform to stand at par with the international fraternity. The objective of the SSEASR is pursued by the usual means of scholarly activities such as the arrangement of conferences, symposia or colloquia, the encouragement of scholarly publications, the exchange of information through electronic or other means, and such other activities as the Association or its elected officers shall from time to time determine. The SSEASR would also disseminate such scholarship by the publication of a journal, books and a Newsletter. The SSEASR also plans to promote a regular academic exchange and study tour to its countries for the benefit of the members. Such tours can be specifically organised for the SSEASR members to enhance the knowledge of the culture and religion of the region. Also, the members would get a 20% rebate in the bi-annual SSEASR Conference delegate fee and publications. Membership benefits are further posted on the website. National representatives at various countries are engaged in pursuing the goal of the SSEASR. They can be contacted to learn mode of payments for the membership fee and its academic benefits. The related research articles are solicited from the academicians which would be published in the annual SSEASR Journal. The Association is legally registered at New Delhi, India where the SSEASR Secretariat is based. All details can be found from time to time at its official website www.sseasr.org

In 2000, the Executive Committee of the International Association for the History of Religions (popularly known as IAHR) which functions as an association of the ***Conseil International de la Philosophie et des Sciences Humaines (CIPSH)*** under the auspices of the UNESCO, approved a long term plan to establish an academic body of scholars on religious studies in the region of South and Southeast Asia. Initially established in 1900, the **IAHR** had under its umbrella thirty-four

national and four regional Associations. Following the passage of the unanimous resolution passed by its General Assembly at Durban, South Africa (August 2000), the IAHR established a Working Group under the chairmanship of Dr Amarjiva Lochan, India to explore such possibility of establishing a permanent academic body headquartered in New Delhi, India. During 2000-2004, under close guidance of the senior IAHR officers such as Prof Michael Pye, Prof Armin W. Geertz, Prof Peter Antes, and Prof Rosalind I. J. Hackett, the Working Group with its representatives in almost every country of South and Southeast Asia put a joint and sincere effort to hold the inaugural conference (January 27-30, 2005) attended by 342 persons from 42 countries. The General Assembly on January 30, 2005 passed a draft Constitution under the supervision of the IAHR Representatives. Thus, the SSEASR (South and Southeast Asian Association for the Study of Religion) was born on that day at 15:18:21 Indian Standard Time.

Following the recommendation of the Executive Committee and its International Committee on March 30, 2005, the IAHR General Assembly at Tokyo, Japan approved the formation of the SSEASR and it was made an affiliate body of the IAHR as its fifth regional association. An amendment was moved in the annual General Assembly at Bangkok in December 2005 by which the word "Culture" has been added into the name of the Association, (South and Southeast Asian Association for the Study of Culture and Religion). However, the initials remain the same (SSEASR). In 2007, the first SSEASR Office bearers were elected in the General Assembly of the Bangkok Conference.