India and Arctic: Building an Arctic Culture

The tales of risk, adventure and enterprise from the Arctic/North Pole has always captured the imagination of the public. Arctic is an interesting ground for popular imaginaries and textual interpretations. English literature in the 19th century with its popular writers like the Brontes, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Arthur Conan Doyle, Jules Vernes, Edgar Allan Poe, Wilkie Collins and even Charles Dickens often described the Arctic as a backdrop in their works. The most popular has been Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein which actually begins and ends in the Arctic. Unlike the European experience where a collective idea of the Pole came through, the detailed notes and diaries of the explorers inspired many Polar prose and verses.

In India, the Vedas (oldest scriptures of Hinduism written in Sanskrit)were the fountain head of knowledge of the Arctic. Bal Gangadhar Tilak was the pioneer in relooking at the Vedas and 2020 will mark 100 years of his death. Tilak’s research remains the most striking interpretation of Indo-Aryan history and through his valuable works, Orion or the Antiquity of the Vedas (1892) and The Arctic Home of Vedas (1903) refuted the argument that the European culture developed earlier than the Indian culture and used the Vedic texts to assert the superiority of the Indo-Aryan culture.

What should be India’s dominant frames in representing its Arctic interests? And how are these frames being (re)interpreted and received and to what affective consequences? Answering this, the paper will investigate the need for India to build an ‘Arctic culture’ involving civilizational and cultural connect as well as commerce and business, education, training and media coverage.