



Historic MoU between the NIAS and University of Exeter

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UK Minister of State for Universities and Science, David Willets, will be overseeing the signing of a historic MoU between the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore and University of Exeter, UK,



During his visit to Bangalore on 16 November, the Rt Hon UK Minister of State for Universities and Science, David Willets, will be overseeing the signing of a historic MoU between the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore and University of Exeter, UK, both recognized as centres of excellence working in exploring the interfaces between the humanities, science and society. This is the first MoU with a British university to be signed by NIAS, which was established in 1988 through the vision of JRD Tata. University of Exeter, ranked in the UK top 10, is the first UK University to launch an India office which is in Bangalore in recognition of this city's status as a leading academic and creative hub. The MoU will be signed by Sir Steve Smith, Vice-Chancellor, Exeter University and Prof VS Ramamurthy, Director, NIAS in the presence of the minister in the inaugural session of a major international seminar at NIAS from 16 -18 November.

This dissemination seminar of the collaborative project awarded to NIAS and Exeter University under the flagship Indo-UK UKIERI scheme and monitored by the British Council from 2009-2011, is entitled 'Pioneering metallurgy: Origins of iron and steel making in the Indian subcontinent'. The Indian lead investigator, Prof. Sharada Srinivasan, of NIAS is known for her work on archaeo-metallurgical and ethno archaeological studies on south Indian bronzes and ferrous metals, while Dr Gill Juleff, lead investigator from Exeter University has

brought to the project her considerable experience from surveying and excavating iron smelting sites in Sri Lanka. Prof S Ranganathan, core investigator, NIAS and emeritus professor, IISc is especially distinguished for his work on quasi-crystals, the topic of this year's Nobel Prize in chemistry, and significant contributions to India's materials heritage. The project has focused on the little known role that parts of southern India (including Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh) played as world leaders in the pre-industrial production of high grade iron and steel. It explored the Telangana region which was renowned for the production of high-grade, high carbon steel, wootz. This was also sought after to make the fine 'Damascus' steel swords exported to Persia and which attracted early European interest. In collaboration with Dr S Jaikishan from SNLSA College in Dharmapuri, the team has attempted to document this vast scientific heritage landscape of metallurgical debris which is being rapidly disturbed through construction and road building.

The Indo-British team surveyed slag heaps and sites across 120 villages using reconnaissance and geospatial techniques and interviewed blacksmiths, followed by laboratory investigations to characterize the waste and understand the processes. The minister will also be accompanied by Sally Goggin, Director, Education, British Council and the Deputy High Commissioner to Karnataka, Ian Felton. The MoU between NIAS and Exeter University is initially for co-operation in archaeology and drama and will be extended to other areas of social sciences and science and society interfaces. According to Prof Srinivasan, Convener of the NIAS-Exeter Research initiative, 'though archaeology and drama are seen as offbeat academic subjects, they strongly reflect the engagement between science and society, technology and culture, which our institutions hope to foster.'