

'Look beyond India,' Manmohan Singh's daughter tells historians

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TAKING a dig at the "myopic view" of Indian historians, who refuse to look beyond the Indian subcontinent to explore connected histories with other nations, former PM Manmohan Singh's eldest daughter and noted historian Upinder Singh took on the "Indianisation theory" and suggested India loosen up the "big brother attitude of cultural colonisation" in its renewed interactions with South East Asian countries, at IIT-Gandhinagar on Friday.

Singh spoke on the "Dissatisfaction and the Writing of History" while giving the inaugural lecture to young researchers gathered at the three-day long "History and Archaeology of Ancient India", organised by the Archaeological Sciences Centre at the IIT-GN. "My major, perhaps greatest, dissatisfaction stems from the fact we rarely looked beyond the Indian subcontinent. There is a very myopic,



UPINDER SINGH

overwhelming preoccupation, obsession with the subcontinent. This makes them miss out on the connectedness of the histories of the different nations," she said.

Giving examples on long-standing relationship between ancient India and south-east Asia, she added, "The ancient worlds were connected with each other. In many ways, they moved in and out of different geographical and cultural spheres with greater ease than we seemed to have. Southeast Asian relations were of great interest to nationalistic historians, but the framework which they used was the framework

of Indianisation. They talked about 'Hindu colonisation of Southeast Asia', they talked of 'Greater India'. I must add that it is not only Indian scholars who talked about 'Greater India'. There are many scholars... who questioned the Indianisation hypothesis."

Referring to her new book, *Asian Encounters*, Singh spoke about many decades of the Southeast Asian history being clouded by Indian influence or Chinese influence also due to the work of many scholars who supported the "Indianisation theory". Singh also suggested a "massive", "multidisciplinary" small group of specialists to conduct a "sober", "rigorous" analysis of India's relations with Southeast Asian countries in the current context.

Over 20 students and researchers from universities across the country presented their research papers at the workshop on various topics, including Buddhism, Himalaya, material, landscapes and culture, among others.