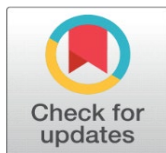


STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF ANCIENT INDIAN MARITIME POWER

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ABSTRACT

India is a peninsular country bounded by the lofty Himalayas in the north, is surrounded by oceans and seas on three sides and has a 7,517 km long coastline. The Indian Ocean engulfs the country in its South. It has recently re-emerged as a sphere of power politics in International Relations. The following slok of Vishnu Purana illustrates the Geo-Strategic importance of Bharat.

उत्तरं यत् समुद्रस्य हिमाद्रेश्चैव दक्षिणम् ।

वर्षं तद् भारतं नाम भारती यत्र सन्ततिः ॥ विष्णु पुराण २.३.१

The country that lies north of the ocean and south of the snowy mountains is called Bhāratam, there dwells the descendants of Bharat.

China is in India's backyard, an expansionist and imperialist power challenging the aspects of maritime security in the region, and Pakistan is a hostile neighbour, it is high time that a comprehensive framework of India's maritime security is developed. As an ancient civilisation, the country has a rich legacy of its naval prowess. The civilisational culture from the ancient land of Bharat spread worldwide, especially in Southeast Asian, African, Central Asian, and East Asian countries through the Indian Ocean. The Indian Ocean, therefore, is not merely a waterbody. Instead, it captures the essence of India's religion and cultural wave, transcending even to the neighbouring countries. India's history, art, mythology and literature are replete with numerous instances of the importance of the Indian Ocean in the lives of the Indian people. The cultural depth of the Indian civilisation is as deep as the Indian Ocean. Therefore, this article argues about the strategic relevance of ancient India's maritime diplomacy.

Keywords: International Relations, civilizational, peninsular country



1. INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary geo-political context, which is in flux and shaping the new realities of inter-state relations and international relations, the strategic maritime policy must understand the emerging threats challenging the tranquillity of the Ocean. In present times, the traditional threats in the maritime domain involving challenges to the country's territorial integrity have become aggravated with the emerging and more complex non-traditional threats that include terrorism, transnational crimes, climate change and piracy, among others. Ensuring safety, security and peace in the Indian Ocean is essential for India and other countries worldwide.

The ancient Indian philosophy of state and sovereignty gives a special significance to oceans and seas while relating it to the sovereign powers of the ruler of the land. Moreover, universal sovereignty holds a key place in the Hindu theory of International relations, which is drawn from ancient Indian philosophy. Benoy Kumar Sarkar highlighted the idea of Chakravarti, suggesting that the chakra or the wheel- as a symbol of sovereignty, spins across the region and is devoid of any impediment. It highlights that the Chakravarti signifies the vastly extended rule, including the far-off places (from one sea to another), a ruler of the state (Sarkar 1919, 409). The concept was also related to the cultural and spiritual

domination of Buddha across seas and oceans. Similarly, Sarkar highlights the doctrine of sarva-bhauma to denote a kind of ruler “to whom the earth with its seven islands is ever bound” (Sarkar 1919, 412). Therefore, one must be aware that the sovereignty of a state is measured by its domination across the oceans and seas.

For long, history writing around the Indian Ocean has discarded the Vedic civilisation of Bharat and its influence over the Indian Ocean. For Vedic people, oceans represent creation. The Hindu scriptures highlight at least ten names given to oceans and are also stated in Ramcharitmanas. Regarding the origin of oceans, Ramcharitmanas states that King Sagara’s sixty thousand sons had dug out the ocean and that Lord Ram is a descendant of King Sagara. In Sundarkand of the Ramcharitmanas, this is reflected in the following verse, as cited by Sikarwar (2012):

प्रभु तुम्हार कुलगुर जलधि कहिहि उपाय बिचारि ।

बिनु प्रयास सागर तरिहि सकल भालु कपि धारि॥

In the ancient Hindu scriptures, comprising Srimada Bhagvata, epics, Vedas, and Puranas, it is stated that lord Vishnu has ten incarnations to preserve and establish the Hindu Dharma. Three incarnations, including the avatar of Matsya, Kurma and Varaha, are linked with the oceans. The fourth avatar of lord Vishnu was Lord Ram, who crossed the ocean. The Bal Kaand of Ramcharitmanas states that Lord Ram and King Pratapbhanu ruled the seven continents. Sikarwar (2012) traces the importance of oceans in Hindu Mythology as he writes that “Lord Rama constructed a 100 Yojana (>1200 km) long and 10 Yojana (>120 km) wide bridge on the oceans with the help of engineer Nala and Neela and monkey’s army. The bridge was constructed in five days”. “On the first day, the 14 Yojana Bridge was constructed. On the Second day, 20 Yojana was built. On the third, fourth and fifth days, 21 Yojana, 22 Yojana and 23 Yojana bridges were constructed, respectively” (Sikarwar 2012, 173).

1.1. ANCIENT INDIAN MARITIME POWERS

The most extensive empire in the world at the time, Akhand Bharat, was based around the Indus Valley, spreading from present-day Afghanistan to the Indian Ocean. It had already become a highly developed civilisation before 3200 BCE. However, its impact extended well beyond its territorial occupancy. It had the world’s most advanced metalwork and witnessed a series of multistorey brick buildings, organised cities, extensive irrigation networks, and sewer and drainage systems. A robust maritime trade network that reached parts of west Asia, Mesopotamia, Africa, and other ports far beyond their borders were all features of its peak developments.

Numerous other pieces of evidence point to the Indus people’s maritime activity. An anchor was found on one of many seals found during the excavation of Harappan sites. This suggests that anchors were widely used props of maritime trade and that seafaring and deep-water ships were utilised extensively. Two ceramic seals from Lothal also highlight the nautical activities of the Indus people. Similarly, a seal with a multi-lined swastika image, like seals from Susa, Brak, and Sialk, showcases India’s influence in developing trade activities with the neighbourhood. According to renowned historian R.C. Majumdar, “there is enough evidence to show that the peoples of the Sindhu valley carried on trade not only with other parts of India but also with Sumer and the centres of culture in Western Asia, and the representation of a ship on a seal indicates maritime activity” (Amit Kumar 2012). Long before Western capitalism established its roots and the so-called first wave of globalisation of the nineteenth century started transcending the territorial borders, ancient Indian maritime activities showcased that in the East, India was far ahead in affecting the movement of people, culture, goods and knowledge.

Artefacts found at the excavation sites of ancient Indian civilisations also present a strong case of maritime trade activities. Kumar (2012) argues in the same vein, discussing another Harappan site in the Great Rann of Kachchh, Dholavira, and points to maritime activity during the Harappan era (Kumar 2012, 96). Dholavira is said to be an ‘active port’ (Gaur and Vora 1999, 3), that witnessed a cultural development at the “beginning of the third millennium B.C., when perhaps a group of people from Makran coast arrived on the island through Kori Creek”, is what excavations have uncovered. This assumption was based on pottery features similar to those of the Amerian culture (dating to 3000 BC). There have also been reports of comparable pottery from other Harappan sites in Kachchh (Gaur and Vora 1999, 3).

The ancient Indian Jataka literature mentions the names of ports at the coastal cities. Some of them were Sovira, Bharukaccha, Supparaka, Kaveripattnam, Karumbiya, Gambhira and Seriva, as highlighted by Haripada Chakraborti in her book Trade and Commerce of Ancient India (1966, 34). Chakraborti (1966) also highlights the aspect of inland trade by mentioning that local crafts were traded to Malabar in the western ports of Cholas (Haripada Chakraborty, 1966).

Similarly, trade relations were expanded with Ceylon and Java, as mentioned in the records of Fahein and Jatakas literature. Himanshu Prabha Ray (2019) also sheds light on how the Indian Ocean trade unfolded in the ancient past by conceptualising the ritual economy that developed around the Indian Ocean. Ray (2019) notes the inherent intertwining of economic activities and development across the region and the peculiar social and religious traditions and practices around it.

The Mughals paid little attention to the significance of having a strong navy in addition to the long-standing army fleet. Though the army backed the Mughal supremacy and domination, they were too heavily dependent on them to rule a vast empire. Large boats were at the Mughals' disposal; however, they never established an efficient naval fleet. This lack of foresightedness and vision of the Mughals regarding the significance of maritime security acted as a gateway to the European powers that challenged the might and control of the Mughals over the Indian subcontinent (K. Sridharan 1982). Ship Building was an essential skill for the local population dwelling in coastal places. Vice Adm Rajeshwar Nath (2021) points out that the art of shipbuilding was passed on from one generation to the other. During the era of the Mauryan empire, even a designated post named Superintendent of Ships was put in place who was in charge of the shipbuilding and its maintenance. Patrick Olivelle (2020), while discussing the ancient Indian long-distance trade activities, sheds light on maritime trade that developed to a decent scale during the Mauryan Empire. Taking insights from Kautilya's Artha Shastra, Olivelle points out the development of bureaucracy to monitor maritime trade activities. He writes: "Kautilya developed a mid-level bureaucracy devoted to shipping and maritime trade overseen by the Superintendent of Shipping (nāvādhyakṣa) to whom an entire chapter is devoted (Patrick Olivelle: 2020, AŚ, 2.28). The state maintained a fleet of boats and ships and constructed ports with fortifications along main water routes, including seaports. Trade along water routes, rivers and especially the sea, was controlled by the Superintendent of Shipping, located in a provincial city called sthānīya or ports called Pattana. He controlled shipping and the duties and charges imposed on boats and ships, ensuring that the boats were seaworthy and complied with naval regulations. He was also responsible for suppressing piracy at sea, which indicates that he controlled some naval force. The ports themselves were under the control of an official called pattanādhyakṣa (Superintendent of Ports), who enacted various statutes and rules for the port, statutes that bore the technical name cāritra" (Olivelle 2020, 45).

The ships were magnificent and had sturdy structures. About seven hundred people could be accommodated in the large ships. One of the rulers of Sindh, Pushyadeva, challenged the attacks by the Arab Navy in 756 CE, highlighting the kind of naval supremacy in ancient Indian times. The major ports where ships were built were Masulipatnam, Calcutta, Kaveripatnam, Cochin and Calicut. During medieval times, ships and vessels were created for dominance and fighting sea wars. The Maratha's naval fleet stood out, establishing yards comprising shipbuilding at Kolaba, Swarnadurg and Vijaydurg. In his book Foreign Trade and Commerce in Ancient India, Prakash Charan Prasad also highlights the feat that ancient India achieved in shipbuilding. It showcases that India was ahead of its time and proactive in establishing linkages through trade that also led to the spread of Indian culture, philosophy, and knowledge, among other exchanges beyond its territorial land through the waters of the Indian Ocean. Indian culture has dramatically influenced Persia, Japan, China, Central Asia, and South East Asia. Ancient India's wisdom, richness and spiritual advancement catapulted India's image as a historic civilisation.

The diverse lands bounded by the waters of the Indian Ocean were swayed by India's literature, art, resources, traditions and culture. Ancient India neither waged wars to control or alter the cultures of foreign lands nor engaged in conversions. It was ancient India's subtle yet powerful influence through its cultural and spiritual prowess. Philip Rawson also argues on similar lines and sheds light on India's gift of civilising influence on all other cultures in *The Art of Southeast Asia* (Philip Rawson, 1993, 7). He calls India the 'land of enterprise' (Philip Rawson 1993, 162). Significantly, India's rich culture is termed the driving force of the Indian civilisation, impacting numerous practices in the Far East, such as Mongolia, China, Tibet, Korea, and Japan, among others. The mystic influence of ancient Indian civilisation over the neighbouring countries created extensive growth in forming relations starting from religion, trade and cultural practices to unravelling the spiritual secrets of humanity's overarching goal and purpose. Such connectedness predates the establishment of global relationships under the influence of Western waves of globalisation in recent times. It highlights the shallowness of materialistic transactions that revolve primarily around trade. Therefore, drawing on the ancient Indian past and historical ties with such countries is crucial for India to assure long-term security in the region.

The ancient Indian trade and flow of socio-cultural traditions were built on the solid foundation of shipbuilding establishments. The ancient Indian scriptures highlight that sailing to far-off places was natural and an inherent trait people learned. The facts regarding sailing and Rig Veda, Shatapatha Brahmana, and other ancient Vedic scriptures

mention sailing on naval missions and visiting far-off regions using then-known seaways. Also, according to the Rig Veda, Varuna was aware of the maritime routes. The ancient scriptures like Markandeya Purana have stories about ship crafts that surged in the ocean. Similarly, Mahabharata also mentions sailing in the ocean in ships. Matsya Purana, Varaha Purana, and Markandeya Purana also comprise numerous stories about journeys that people undertook to learn about the unknown waters of the ocean. There are also stories about the might and dangers of the ocean, as discussed in the Rigveda about Rishi Tugra and his son Bhujya, who goes on an oceanic expedition to challenge adversaries. The ancient Indian Vedic civilisation text Ramayana's Ayodhya Kand, written by Valmiki, discusses an incident mentioning that around five hundred ships were carrying certain warriors. Undoubtedly, the people of the Indian civilisation were aware of oceans and built ships to go on voyages since Vedic times.

Oceans and seas have had a special place in India's culture, tradition, and belief systems since immemorial times. The Varaha Purana mentions people who sailed far into the ocean searching for pearls and oysters (Kumar 2012, 97). The story of Samudra Manthan in Mahabharata and Vishnu Purana is of particular importance to the people of Sanatan Dharma. Even European writers like Sir William Jones highlight the ancient Indian maritime supremacy by suggesting that the Hindus "must have been navigators in the age of Manu because bottomry (money lender for marine insurance) is mentioned in it. In the Ramayana, the practice of bottomry is distinctly noticed" (Shah 2006). Similarly, Lord Mountstuart Elphinstone has famously noted that: "The Hindus navigated the ocean as early as the sage of Manu's Code because we read in it of men well acquainted with sea voyages" (Amit Kumar 2012, 99) (Knapp 2012). Various texts also discussed the ancient mariners' maritime, including classical Sanskrit writings such as Rajatarangini, Panchatantra, Dashakumaracharita, Raghuvarsha, and Ratnavali.

The Sangam literature also mentions the maritime adventures and trade of goods. Shilappadikaram Manimekalai, Pattinappalai, Maduraikhanji, Ahananuru, Purananuru, and others were among these texts. Trade through the seas and across oceans was an essential aspect of the ancient society in South India. The state acted as a facilitator of trading activities to establish an amiable trade network across the region. The Vedic impact was such that relations developed in trade and religious, cultural and social domains. For example, Kaundinya, a young Brahmin boy, defended the attack by pirates whom Princess Soma steered while travelling across oceans towards the Southeast Asia region. The bravery of Kaundinya left an impact on the princess, which led to the marriage of Princess Soma and Kaundinya. That is how the first Bhartiya kingdom was established in the Mekong Delta (Sanyal 2016, 83).

The above case showcases that the Vedic civilisation of Bharat heavily influenced the region across the Indian Ocean. Sanjeev Sanyal, in his book *The Ocean of Churn: How the Indian Ocean Shaped Human History*, published in 2016, argues that: "Trade links with South East Asia unsurprisingly led to cultural exchange. Within a few centuries, we see the strong impact of Indic civilisation on the region-the Buddhist and Hindu religions, the epics Mahabharata and Ramayana, the Sanskrit language, scripts, temple architecture and so on. Despite the later impact of Islam, European colonial rule and postcolonial modernity, the influence of ancient India remains alive in place and personal names, commonly used words, and in the arts and crafts. Buddhism remains the dominant religion from Myanmar to Vietnam, while Hinduism survives in pockets like Bali" (Sanyal 2016, 86). The excavations at Lothal, Gujarat, show that trade with countries such as Egypt was conducted. The Chola monarchs launched massive naval expeditions between 984 and 1042 CE, taking over portions of Burma, Malaya, and Sumatra, which also involved overcoming the challenge of piracy, especially at Sumatra.

Indians were adept at building ships, so the English thought Indian ship designs were worth embracing as they were superior to their designs. Indian vessels exemplified outstanding manufacturing, utility, and majestic grace. The shipping and trading from the land and oceans of Bharat was a national practice. Ancient India contributed significantly to building international commercial relations with populations such as the Egyptians, Romans, Turks, Portuguese, Dutch, and English, alongside the Phoenicians, Jews, Assyrians, Greeks, and Romans. Stephen Knapp (2012) rightly encapsulates the fact that the history of maritime India predates the development of Western civilisation.

The port cities like Nagapattinam, Arikamedu (near Pondicherry), Udupi, Kollam, Tuticorin, Mamallapuram, Mangalore, Kannur, Thane, and others, which facilitated trade with many foreign areas, such as Indonesia, China, Arabia, Rome, and countries in Africa. Many other inland towns and cities contributed to this trade, such as Madurai, Thanjavur, Tiruchirappalli, Ellora, Melkote, Nasik, and so on, which became large trade centres. Silk, cotton, sandalwood, woodwork, and various types of produce were the main trade items.

The Indian maritime trade depended on the scientific progress made by Aryabhatta and Varahamihira, who had rightly propounded the navigation system based on the positioning of the celestial bodies. The ancient Indian maritime trade activities, therefore, were intertwined with the ancient Indian Knowledge System. It was only through knowledge

and scientific progress that trade activities were possible. There is also evidence of the development of Matsyayantra, which was used around the fourth or fifth century CE and is an ancient form of the modern-day compass. From the fifth century until the tenth century CE, southern and eastern India's Vijayanagara and Kalinga kingdoms accomplished power over Malaya, Sumatra, and Western Java. The Andaman and Nicobar Islands then operated as an essential conduit for trade between the Indian peninsula, these kingdoms, and China. Every day, revenue from the western provinces in 844-848 CE was estimated to be 200 maunds (eight tons) of gold.

Ancient Indian Maritime trade witnessed trading commodities from India to other countries and vice versa. It is reported that marine archaeologists have found a stone anchor in the Gulf of Khambhat with a design similar to the ones used by Chinese and Japanese ships in the 12th-14th century CE, giving the first offshore evidence indicating India's trade relations with the two Asian countries (Gaur and Bhatt 2008, 102). The stone anchor was found during an exploration by A. S. Gaur and B. K. Bhatt (marine archaeologists) from the National Institute of Oceanography (NIO). Many coastal areas, particularly in the South, had a well-established navy. The vast coastline and numerous trading ports required a navy to safeguard the ships and ports from attackers. According to archives, the Pallavas, Cholas, Pandyas, and Cheras had sizable naval fleets of ocean-bound ships since their monarchs undertook campaigns against Malaysia, Bali, and Ceylon. Calicut's Zamorins battled Portuguese piracy when Vasco da Gama refused to pay the customs duty after getting trade permission. Two major battles were fought during this time. First, the Battle of Cochin in 1503 exposed the weakness of Indian navies, enabling the Europeans to carve out their dominance. The second encounter at Diu in 1509 developed the Portuguese authority over the Indian seas and laid the framework for European domination across Indian waters for over four hundred years.

India's maritime ambitions had an incredible turnaround in the latter part of the seventeenth century when the Siddhis of Janjira allied with the Moghuls to establish a significant force on the West Coast. This prompted Maratha King Shivaji to establish his fleet, led by capable admirals such as Sidhoji Gujar and Kanhoji Angre. The Maratha Fleet and the renowned Kanhoji Angre dominated the Konkan Coast, holding the English, Dutch, and Portuguese at bay. Angre's death in 1729 created a vacuum, resulting in the decline of Maratha's sea power. Notwithstanding the decline of Indian monarchies with the rise of Western dominance, Indian shipbuilders retained control well into the nineteenth century. The Bombay Dock, built in July 1735, remains in operation today. Teak vessels weighing 800 to 1000 tons were constructed in Daman and were far more resilient and designed effectively than their British rivals. This infuriated British shipbuilders on the River Thames, who opposed employing Indian-built ships to transport trade from England. As a result, deliberate measures were taken to damage India's naval industry. Nevertheless, many Indian ships joined the Royal Navy, notably the HMS Hindostan in 1795, the frigate Cornwallis in 1800, the HMS Camel in 1801, and the HMS Ceylon in 1808.

Waltzer Salvins, a French traveller, said in his book *Le Hindu* in 1811 that "Hindus were in the forefront of ship-building, and even today they can teach a lesson or two to Europeans." "The British, who excelled at studying the arts, learned much about shipbuilding from the Hindus. Indian ships are an excellent combination of elegance and usefulness, portraying the best ability of Indian craftsmanship and patience." Between 1736 and 1863, Mumbai manufacturers produced 300 ships. Many of them were part of the Royal Fleet. The Asia ship had 84 cannons and weighed 2,289 tons. Shipbuilding factories were established in Hoogly, Sihhat, Chittagong, and Dacca, among other locations (Waltzer Salvins, 1811).

In his book *India's Glorious Scientific Tradition*, Suresh Soni explains how India was deprived of its marine industry and any notation of its ship-building ability in its ancient history. He writes: "The shipping magnates of Britain could not tolerate the Indian art of ship manufacturing, and they started compelling the East India Company not to use Indian ships. Investigations were frequently carried out in this regard. In 1811, Col. Walker gave statistics to prove that it was much cheaper to make Indian ships and that they were very sturdy. If only Indian ships were included in the British fleet, it would lead to great savings. This pinched the British shipbuilders and the traders. Dr Taylor writes, 'When the Indian ships laden with Indian goods reached the port of London, it created such a panic amongst the British traders as would not have been created, had they seen the enemy fleet of ships on the river Thames, ready for attack.' Workers at the London Port were among the first to express concern, claiming that they would be deprived of their occupation and would starve as they would no longer have the source to earn their livelihood. The British Parliament established a committee chaired by Sir Robert Peel. Despite disagreement among committee members based on this assessment, a law was approved in 1814 that eliminated the Indians' eligibility to become British sailors and made it mandatory to employ

at least three-fourths of British sailors on British ships. No ship without a British master was allowed to enter London Port, and only ships built in England by British citizens were permitted to transport commodities to England.

These restrictions were not strictly enforced for various reasons but were firmly followed in 1863. These laws, which would end the traditional shipbuilding skill, were also developed in India. A tax on items taken on Indian ships was imposed, and efforts were made to isolate them from trade. Sir William Digby accurately stated, "This way, the Queen of the Western World killed the Queen of the Eastern Oceans." In a nutshell, this encapsulates the story behind the demise of the Indian shipbuilding heritage.

A deeper analysis of India's ancient past showcases that ancient Vedic civilisation was deeply connected to the sea and possessed maritime abilities. Even in their language, Vedic Sanskrit, words like Samudra, Salil, Sagar, and Sindhu refer to the sea or big rivers. Sindhuka also means sailor, which is why the sailor in Arabian Nights is named Sindbad. Also, the English word navigation is derived from the Sanskrit word Navagati. Additional evidence has been presented, notably during a 1994 maritime conference in Delhi, when talks demonstrated how Indian cotton was shipped to South and Central America about 2500 BCE. Another study indicated that Indian cotton entered Mexico as early as 4000 BCE, during the Rig Vedic period. According to Sean McGrail, a marine archaeologist at Oxford University, seagoing ships known as 'clinkers' believed to be Viking in origin were known in the Indian subcontinent quite early. Thus, India's marine trade flourished long ago, as were many other developments that are rarely or considered often.

The era of Nandas and the Mauryan empire showcases that a significant level of relations was established with the Greek Kingdom, and the coasts of Konkan, Gujarat, and Kathiawar were instrumental in the cordial development of these relations. Even the XIII rock edict also shed light on the ties established with the empires of Ceylon, Burma, South East Asia, Syria, Egypt and Macedonia. The Buddhist missionaries also travelled to far-off lands across the Indian Ocean, which helped spread Buddhism from its birthplace in Bharat. Similarly, the Satavahana kingdom of South India and Kushanas in northern India also led to significant developments in the maritime domain. At this stage, the commercial ties and trade with Rome were at their zenith. This showcases the maritime trade ties between Rome and India alongside the Indian Ocean and Mediterranean Sea, significantly impacting the commercial exchanges in this era. The Indian Ocean also played a crucial role in the exchange of cultural practices, as observed during the period of Kushans, who acquired some aspects of the Hellenistic culture originating in Bactria. Furthermore, the Hindu rulers of the North, notably the Gupta Empire, also stressed the importance of maritime trade and conducted various expeditions to further the same. Samudragupta built a strong navy, showcasing formidable strength along the coasts. Chandragupta II, famously known as Vikramaditya, conquered the region of Saurashtra and Malwa through a military expedition along the waters of the Arabian Sea. It led to the opening up of the Western coasts, including Cambay, Veraval, Dwarka and Porbandar, among others, with the rest of the world, especially infusing the trade with African and European counterparts. The Gupta Empire is popularly noted as the golden age of ancient India, and the maritime trade played a significant role in this golden era. Harshvardhana had a vast army comprising war vessels, as the inscriptions from the era of Jivitagupta II also highlight the same. The Saka Kingdom of Gujarat extended its control over Java, and a large-scale trade network was established between Gujarat and the kingdom of Java. Likewise, the Saindhavas of the Saurashtra region established domination in maritime and naval expeditions across the sea. In eastern India, the culture and literature of Bengal also point out the rich interrelationship between humans and the seas. One of the Chinese travelogues noted the importance of Tamalpiti port, part of Bengal and the rich traditions associated with the region.

The numerous Hindu dynasties of South India also highlight the importance of maritime in ancient times. K. Sridharan points out that south Indian kingdoms had very close relations with the empires across seas, such as Mesopotamia, Palestine, and Egypt. Pallavas, an influential dynasty of rulers, had established close ties with the Hindu kingdoms of the far eastern region. The spiritual and cultural traditions, including spreading the language of Sanskrit and Saivism across the ocean shores to the lands of Kambuja, were also made possible during the age of Pallavas. The Srivijaya Empire that emerged around the seventh century greatly influenced the domain of religion, politics, trade and culture in the islands of Indonesia. By the dawn of the tenth century, naval expeditions grew manifold under the regime of the Chola dynasty. The mighty Rajendra Chola conquered the widespread region of southern India and further lay his domination over Maldives and Sri Lanka. He also won the conquest over the Srivijaya empire, which led to maintaining amity between the tremendous south Indian empire of Cholas and the surrounding islands in the Indian Ocean. The Ancient Indian kings also won several wars in the sea. One of the most prominent examples is that of the Chera King Senguttuvan, who won the war against the Yavanas and lay control over Kadambu. Muziris, the port of ancient India

situated at the Periyar River, as mentioned in Periplus - an ancient and archaic Tamil text. Similarly, the empires of Vijayanagara and Pandyas also maintained extensive maritime linkages.

The study of networks serves as an organising principle for the multiple levels of material and intellectual connections across the ocean. Again, the role of long-distance trade as the facilitator of communication and exchange is affirmed. Commercial networks were interwoven with kinship, religious, and scholarly networks: Buddhist temples were situated on trade routes; scholarly prestige was established through association with a teacher on the other end of the ocean; pilgrimage was inseparable from economic activity; religious specialists often had an eye for profitable business; and intermarriage created ever more layers of complexity.

2. MARITIME POWER AND IMPORTANCE OF THE INDIAN OCEAN

Prime Minister Narendra Modi outlined the significance of the Indian Ocean with these words:

“The vast Indian Ocean Region hosts over 40 states and nearly 40% of the world's population. It touches Australia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, West Asia and the eastern seaboard of Africa. It sparkles with the gems of island states. Think of the civilisational links, yet great diversity in this vast region! Consider the vast opportunities that it holds! Today, the world speaks of the 21st century, driven by the dynamism and the energy of Asia and the Pacific. However, its course will be determined by the tides of the Indian Ocean. This is why the Indian Ocean is at the centre of global attention more than ever. We also see growing global stakes and presence in the Ocean. Even in this changing world, the oceans hold the key to its fortunes. Moreover, we will all prosper when the seas are safe, secure and free for all.” (Government of India, PMO, March 12, 2015) He also stated “To me, the blue chakra or wheel in India's national flag represents the potential of the Blue Revolution or the Ocean Economy. That is how central the Ocean Economy is to us.” -(Excerpts from PM's Remarks on Commissioning of Coast Ship Barracuda on March 12, 2015).

India's maritime activities in the ancient past are a prism for understanding, unravelling and expanding its potential in the present. Therefore, having a deeper understanding of India's maritime power since ancient times essentialises the importance of maritime security in the present context. India is not only an economic power and a responsible actor in the arena of world politics. The history of India shows that it has been a maritime power for ages. The archaeological evidence since the times of the Indus Valley civilisation points towards the same. The ancient Indian rulers and dynasties, including the Mauryas, Pallavas, Cholas, Cheras, Kulashékaras, Chalukyas and Palas, have all tamed the tides of the Indian Ocean by developing a sound maritime policy in their times. K.M. Panikkar rightly stated that “until India had secured its command and domination in the Indian Ocean, it enjoyed its independence” (K.M. Panikkar, 1945). Shivaji Maharaj also understood the significance of having a robust naval strategy and naval fleet to defend the kingdom's independence at the hands of alien rulers.

The rich historiography on the theme captures the vastness of the Indian Ocean. Bharat, a vast land, is guarded by the Himalayas in the north and the Indian Ocean in the south, which adds to the country's profile as a resource hub. The study of large-scale historical processes has its roots in the marine areas that Fernand Braudel envisioned as a “Mediterranean world” (Gabriel Piterberg, Teofilo F. Ruiz, and Geoffrey Symcox, eds., 2010). Seas and oceans provide access to the territorial land but also play a crucial role in understanding how society, states, and civilisations have taken shape around the oceans. Though not easy to cross, the littoral boundaries around oceans and seas, as history showcases, act as a nodal point for various powers, cultures, and civilisations to interact. The Indian Ocean had a paramount significance in the emergence of Bharat as a civilisation and the shaping of the Indian subcontinent. Therefore, seas are helpful analytical tools for examining how history has evolved and transcended national boundaries. They are also a zone of varied factors that reshaped the history of the land. In an essay, Sebastian Prange (2008) explores the challenges and potential of utilising maritime space as a framework for world history by reviewing the historiography of the Indian Ocean (Sebastian R. Prange, 2008).

The East African coast, the Arabian Peninsula, the South Asian continental plate, and the Southeast Asian archipelagos constitute an almost continuous landmass surrounding the Indian Ocean on three sides. The Indian Ocean is sometimes compared to a landlocked sea and labelled an “embayed ocean” (Alan Villiers, 1952) because of its shape, as pointed out in the works of Alan Villiers. The Indian subcontinent, which extends for about a thousand miles and splits the ocean into the Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal, is its most notable geological feature. The literature, which has frequently seen Indian Ocean history as revolving around the Indian peninsula, reflects the geographic significance of India. K. M. Panikkar (1945) emphasised the significance of the Indian Ocean to India's past (K. M. Panikkar, 1945) Since

antiquity, India has had and continues to influence significantly the activities in and around the Indian Ocean, and the ocean is, therefore, likely named after the Indian subcontinent. Sugata Bose (2006) uses the term “interregional arena” to point out that the Indian Ocean is such a space that has cultural, social and economic connotations yet is not as rigid as being able to be called a ‘system’ (Bose 2006, 6). Bose points out that the Indian Ocean and the coastal cities served as crucial spaces, forming the Bazaar nexus, which refers to the wholesale commerce and indigenous market system that co-existed with the hegemonic market of European capitalists. The decline of the Roman empire led to Arabs and Persians also showcasing greater interest in the Indian Ocean. Sara Keller (2019) argues that Gujarat and Mumbai are part of the inherent Indian imaginaries as the trade across the Indian Ocean and nodal commercial centres was also complementary to the exchange of cultures. Sara Keller in the book titled *Knowledge and the Indian Ocean*, highlights the intangible exchange of eclectic knowledge across western India throughout the spatial and temporal dimensions of the Indian Ocean (Sara Keller, 2019).

The sharing of knowledge, culture, trade and development of social milieu across the Indian Ocean occurred due to the distinct monsoon and wind systems. The ability of sailors to accurately foresee the time and circumstances of their return from the journey became possible by the regularity of the seasonal reversal between north-easterly and south-westerly winds. Sebastian Prange (2008) highlights the importance of the monsoon winds developing in the Indian Ocean as the Graeco-Roman expeditions into the Indian Ocean depended on their understanding of the Indian monsoon winds. In addition to serving as a route between places, the Indian Ocean also served as an essential hub for trade in products, ideas, and people across cultural boundaries. It signified the supremacy of maritime power throughout the land masses of Asia, representing the apex of the Indian Ocean’s historical significance. The Portuguese had a minimal overall impact on the Indian Ocean region, defined more by interaction and cooperation than by dominance. The Indian Ocean’s significance is emphasised because it is the earliest realm of trade, having a trans-oceanic character. Therefore, the Indian Ocean is called the ‘cradle of globalisation’ (Isabel Hofmeys and Charne Lavery, 2020).

The Portuguese arrived, and Europeans acknowledged the commercial relations of the Indian Ocean region and acquired it gradually. The British took control in the second half of the eighteenth century. One of the most persuasive voices for this viewpoint, Ashin Das Gupta, has proposed an “Age of Partnership” to demonstrate the determination of the maritime trade networks between 1500 and 1800 (Ashin Das Gupta, 481-99). The study of networks has underpinned new attempts at defining the Indian Ocean world system. The Indian Ocean is thus conceptualised as a zone of cultural negotiation and economic exchange” (Prange 2008, 1387-1388).

The history of the Indian Ocean maritime arena highlights the churning of new dynamics that continue to impact regional politics and give rise to contemporary insecurities. Any discussion about maritime security in the Indian Ocean demands tracing the rich historical legacy that the Indian Ocean bestows upon us. The invigorative process of unravelling India’s ancient past as a maritime power will help us identify, understand, and address the issue of maritime security and how India can re-emerge as the defender of peace and security in the Indian Ocean.

3. CONCLUSION

Ancient Hindu rulers laying control over the Indian subcontinent had maintained a functional and robust naval army. The power and control to dominate the land were significantly dependent upon the naval supremacy established in the waters of the Indian Ocean and surrounding seas. India’s marine trade developed much earlier than many believe. This was one of the ways that Vedic traditions spread around the world. The qualities and capabilities of ancient India’s Vedic civilisation have frequently remained unnoticed and rarely given due space in history writing and theorisation of maritime security of India. The Vedic people from historically ancient India’s rich past and heritage were considerably more advanced in culture and development than many appear to acknowledge.

Maritime power especially the Indian Ocean is one of the world’s most strategic points, in which more than 75 per cent of the world’s maritime trade and 50 per cent of daily global oil transfers pass through the region. So, India’s primary aim will be to strengthen its maritime power, with a focus on economic and military alterations obviating the menacing Chinese threat. Even after seventy-five years of Independence, India has yet to acknowledge, claim, and recognise itself as not merely a territorial valiance but also as one of the most ancient maritime prowess globally. India, aiming to achieve the dream of *Viksit Bharat @2047*, must realise that it is high time that the nation’s sovereignty remains intact not just on the territorial bounds of the country but also extended to a dominant role in the sphere of the Ocean.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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