

**INDIA'S MARITIME STRATEGY AND COMMERCE IN THE INDIAN
OCEAN REGION IN THE POST-LIBERALISATION ERA:
A STUDY IN CONTINUITY AND CHANGE**

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By

PRATNASHREE BASU

Supervised by:

Dr. Imankalyan Lahiri

Professor

Department of International Relations

Jadavpur University

Kolkata- 700032

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Abstract

The strategic and geopolitical importance of the Indian Ocean Region is increasingly recognized, turning it into a prominent maritime area where the ambitions, interests, and strategic priorities of multiple actors converge. This complex landscape involves multiple stakeholders, heightening the risks of competition. Consequently, India's role and its aspirations have undergone a significant transformation in response to these evolving dynamics. We have observed that beginning in the early 2000s, India's approach to the Indian Ocean has shifted from a stance of isolationism to one characterized by active engagement. This new approach seeks to ensure that the Indian Ocean remains free from military expansion by both coastal states and major global powers. Simultaneously, India aims to leverage the strategic advantages offered by the ocean to benefit its own interests. A key aspect of this transformation has been the development of naval capabilities capable of projecting power into the critical choke points within the Indian Ocean.

This study aims to analyze the factors, both domestic and global/regional, that have influenced India's transition in foreign policy from a predominantly continental orientation to one that prioritizes maritime engagements and the enhancement of domestic maritime capabilities. To investigate this shift comprehensively, the study concentrates on India's foreign policy outreach and naval capabilities in the Indian Ocean Region, starting from the post-economic liberalization era. Additionally, it delves into the reciprocal effects of this foreign policy adjustment on commercial interactions within this maritime sphere. Due to the emergence of aspiring economies with growing political influence in the eastern Indian Ocean Region, the study confines its scope to this specific area. Although various commentaries and articles exist on this subject, there is a noticeable absence of in-depth, organized research, particularly from the perspective of India. Against this backdrop, this

study seeks to explore how India's role and aspirations concerning its maritime domain have evolved from a continental approach to a maritime-focused one, and how these shifts have influenced the region's geopolitical landscape in the context of maritime commerce dynamics.