



# SAGARDHARA

January 2019

MARITIME HISTORY SOCIETY

VOL III / 18 - 19

**Containing the Proceedings of the  
Thirty Ninth Annual Seminar of  
Commemorating Golden Jubilee of  
Western Naval Command 1968-2018  
“Saga of Excellence on Western Sea Board”**



## Also Contains

- WNC @50
- Tributes to Late Vice Admiral MP Awati (Retd)
- Jewel From Past
- Contribution From MHS Team



## Thirty Ninth Annual Seminar of MHS, 2018



Chief Patron of MHS



Honorary Patron Of MHS



Session I



Session II



Group Photo with Chief Patron and Honorary Patron of MHS

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## FROM THE CURATOR'S DESK

As our maritime heritage voyage tacks to 2019, we at Maritime History Society look back at the past year with contentment and a renewed drive to sail onwards. The year marked the Golden Jubilee of the Western Naval Command, which came into existence in 1968. To celebrate this landmark, the Society held its 39th Annual Seminar on the theme, **“Saga of Excellence on Western Seaboard.”** It became the culmination of a series of outreaches, connections and initiatives by the premier Command of Indian Navy.

Relaunching an integrated compilation of MHS mini-publications through a quarterly new-magazine, **“Sagardhara”** has been a satisfying experience. Feedback from readers to the June 2018 and September 2018 editions, propel us to go further. This edition though delayed in printing is primarily covering the proceedings of the 39th Annual MHS Seminar. The Chief Patron and Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Western naval Command, Vice Admiral Girish Luthra, PVSM, AVSM, VSM, ADC set the tone of the deliberations with his inaugural address. The first Session on the theme **“Significance and Growth 1968-1993”** was chaired by Vice Admiral Vinod Pasricha (Retd). Papers presented by Commodore Srikant Kesnur (on **“Ops & Decisive Actions at Sea”**) and by Rear Admiral Sudarshan Shrikhande (Retd) (on **“Growing Influence and Significance”**) are part of these proceedings. The second session on the theme, **“Into the New Millennium 1993 – 2018”** was chaired by Vice Admiral Anil Chopra (Retd). Papers by Rear Admiral MD Suresh, (on **“Ops Vijay, Talwar, Parakram, HADR & NEO”**) and by Commodore AD Nair (on **“Decade of Mission Based Effectiveness”**) are also available in this edition. The Valedictory Address delivered by the Hon Patron of Maritime History Society Admiral Arun Prakash (Retd) sums up the Seminar Proceedings.

Maritime History Society has had significant success in highlighting the rich and not much shared heritage of Indian seafaring and shipping to a larger group of people. The zeal to do justice to the vision of the founders and of the Maritime legacy of India has never flagged despite Year 2018 being a very cruel year. MHS was reeling with the sad demise of Dr Sachin Pendse, Member Academic Council on 13 January 2018 and Founder Trustee, Admiral JG Nadkarni (Retd) on 02 July 2018. The wind was pulled out of our sails when on 03 November 2018, our Founder Chairman Vice Admiral Manohar Prahlad Awati (Retd) left for his final heavenly voyage. This edition of Sagardhara carries tributes from Rear Admiral Sudarshan Shrikhande (Retd) and Commander Yogesh Athawale to salute the Sailor, the adventurer and the living sea legend. The vacuum is vast and yet in true homage to his four-decade long efforts, we at MHS are committed to fulfilling the vision set by the pioneers. As a **“Jewel from the Past,”** please find a treasure from the MHS archives, an article by Late Vice Admiral MP Awati titled, **“India as a Maritime Power in the Twenty First Century”** from our 2001 Proceedings.

This edition commences with a commemoration titled **“WNC @50”**, summarizing the last 50 years of WNC and also has a review of the book By Anirudh Deshpande **“Hope and Despair Mutiny, Rebellion and Death in India, 1946”**.

May I once again invite our members, friends and supporters to join us in our mission to spread awareness of our maritime heritage so as to build a vibrant maritime future. Please read, contribute, partner, promote and join hands in every way possible.

Shano Varun and Jai Hind!

Commodore Odakkal Johnson  
Curator & Head of Research



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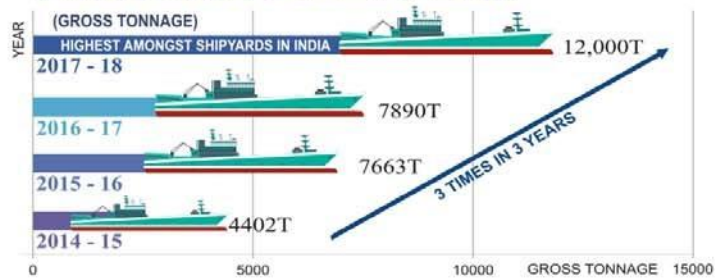


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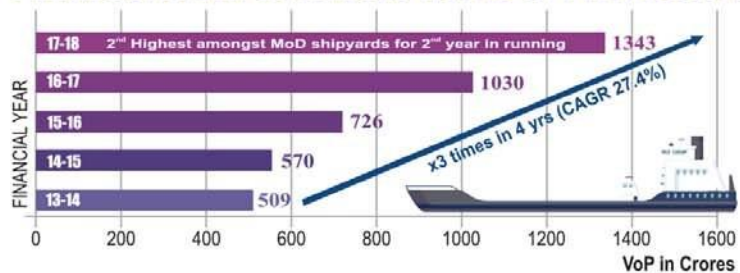


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## FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE: VALUE OF PRODUCTION



## WNC @50

### COMMODORE ODAKKAL JOHNSON

Indian sea-faring prowess has a timeline dating at least five millennia from the present day. This is revealed through historical evidence along the Kutch, Kathiawar and the Konkan coasts. For centuries, maritime activity was conducted to promote trade, exchange of people and beliefs and adhered to the tenets of freedom of the seas. It is only the turn to the dawn of the sixteenth century that unfolded militarization of the seas along with the advent of the colonialists. The colonial era witnessed a convergence of naval action on the western seaboard. Soon, Mumbai would begin a transition from seven islands to *Urbs Prima Indis* and evolve as a cosmopolitan city with a maritime core. In this journey, one constant was the growth of a marine force, that started as a small squadron at Surat in 1612. Through many changes in name and form, the Indian Navy would emerge over the next 300 plus years. With fresh experience of World War II, the stage was set for the war hardened naval warriors to be the sentinels of significance of a nascent India.

The Navy was the first Indian Armed Force to receive the President's Colors on 27 May 1951. Young naval planners worked tirelessly over the following decades to ensure the gradual and systematic growth in every dimension. Organisationally, a coming of age occurred when on 01 March 1968, the Western Naval Command (WNC) was formally constituted, with its headquarters at Mumbai. In just over three years after its formation, the Western Naval Command was in war-deployment mode. The action of the OSA-class Missile Boats of the 25th Killer Squadron would go on to set Karachi ablaze during Operation Trident and Operation Python in early December 1971. The same period also was when the Navy lost INS *Khukri* to a submarine attack. The incident is better known for the gallant response of its Commanding Officer Captain Mahendra Nath Mulla, who gave his life jacket to another sailor and chose to go down with the ship.

The submarine arm of the Indian Navy had come into existence on 08 December 1967, just a few months prior to the constitution of the Western

Naval Command. During the 1971 operations these underwater sentinels from the WNC spent countless days on combat patrol. They have continued to do so in war-like patrols through times of peace or conflict. The Western Naval Command provided the supervision and support for the newly inducted Shishumar class submarines from 1986 including the indigenous construction of Shalki and Shankul in 1992 and 1994 respectively at the Mazagon Docks Limited.

Naval Aviation had been growing since the early 1960s with both shore based and carrier borne air operations right across the western waters. The mid 1970s saw a new era of maritime reconnaissance operations from INS *Hansa* in Goa and also in the later years from INS *Rajali* at Arakonam. By the mid-1980's, the carrier borne Sea-Harrier aircraft were based at Goa. With the arrival of INS *Vikramaditya*, the MIG 29K Squadron is now the lead naval air strike element since 2013.

The full scope of operations from coastal defence to blue water deployments grew with the concurrent development of local naval operations from Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa and Karnataka. In 1988 Indian Naval units came to the aid of Maldives during Operation Cactus. Ships were also sent as part of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) as Operation Pawan. Coastal security operations were intensified in the aftermath of the Mumbai blasts of 1993. During the Kargil conflict of 1999 and Operation Parakram in 2001, the Western Naval Command Fleet units held sway over the North-Arabian sea. This effectively thwarted any adversarial intent by the classic naval deployment in support of operations on land.


Ships of the Western Naval Command were among the first international naval responders to the growth of piracy in the Gulf of Aden from mid-2008. INS *Tabar* and INS *Talwar* saw major direct action that led to a gradual decline in piracy by 2014. WNC Ships have remained deployed for over a decade for anti-piracy operations. The larger Indian diaspora spread through most of the Arabian gulf and North Africa have a sense of security due



to the history of timely response of NEO (Non-Combatant Evacuation Operations) be it Operation Sukoon from Lebanon in 2006 to Operation Safe-Homecoming in Libya in 2011. WNC has been active in benign operations as well as humanitarian assistance. An unexpected shutdown of the major freshwater generator at Male on 04 December 2014 led to a major drinking water crisis. WNC provided a prompt response with Operation Neer. INS *Deepak* was sent within 48 hours to reach Male. Using on-board stored water and from that produced by the RO plants, 2000 tonnes of water was supplied to Maldives while, concurrently, the Indian Air-Force (IAF) had brought in 150 tonnes of packaged water. Operation Raahat off Yemen in 2015 witnessed medical assistance and rescue to other nationalities also.

Beyond naval operations, associated technical and logistics support functions, the Western Naval Command is at the forefront of a vibrant community life. It reaches out, both internally and to the populace at large, especially on occasion such as setting up food stalls for stranded commuters during the flash floods in Mumbai in 2017. Indeed, the local units across the western coast reach out to connect with communities for coastal security networking and social outreach. Recent opportunities for the public at large to visit naval ships have seen enthusiastic crowds patiently line up.

The sentinels of excellence on the Western Seaboard the Western Naval Command of the Indian Navy, remains mission deployed and totally focused towards the building of a resurgent maritime India.



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# TRIBUTE TO VICE ADMIRAL MP AWATI (1927-2018)

## Manohar Awati: Sailor, War Hero, Adventurer, Leader, Chronicler...Crosses the Bar

05 November, 2018; By: Rear Admiral Sudarshan Y Shrikhande (Retd)

### Old Sea Dog!

As a first- term cadet in July 1976, Rear Admiral Manohar Prahlad Awati (MPA) was the first flag officer I saw in flesh and blood and he could have been right out of any boyhood sea story as the proverbial “Old Sea Dog.” When Vice Admiral



Awati crossed the bar during the first watch (2000-2359H in sailor-speak) on 03 November at his home in Satara, just a little over 91, he would have still looked every impressive inch the quintessential seaman. My first

impression— and the world’s last impression— is by no means unique. Admiral Arun Prakash, former CNS and a life-long admirer of his, recounted to me that he was “thunderstruck” in 1964 as a naval cadet when he saw him as his Commanding Officer of Indian Navy Ship (INS) *Tir*. He was always an imposing figure and never necessarily had to be in uniform to look so. As cadets they were surprised to find him sea- sick often, but he was always the Captain, and always in command nonetheless. Some naval officers of his time may perhaps have been derisive about this, but MPA was in good company of Horatio Nelson, to name but just one. I will return to it a little later.

### An Ordinary Start; an Extraordinary Life

Born into a very middle- class Mumbai family in September 1927, he joined the Royal Indian Navy in 1945 after passing out from the training ship *Dufferin*. He specialised in communications and as a signals officer he was always well-regarded. He commanded four ships and in the 1971 war, as the Captain of INS *Kamorta* and Squadron Senior Officer, was awarded the Vir Chakra for his gallantry and leadership during operations in the Bay of Bengal. In 1973, he was suddenly moved

to command INS *Mysore* as a consequence of some strife on board the ship.

He turned the ship around with his leadership, his ability to connect with men and the way in which he re-forged the bonds of leadership and camaraderie between officers and men. According to Admiral Bangara, who was his Fleet TAS officer (anti-submarine warfare), MPA had a remarkable attribute of never losing “the common touch” and winning anybody over with his innate empathy, humanity, and above all, self- discipline and personal example. I can recount some examples of his uncanny ability to always remember a name and never forget a face, but that is not necessary here. People interested him, and people were therefore, interested in him.



Image Courtesy:  
Padmja Parulkar

As a flag officer he was of course the Commandant of NDA and then commanded the Western Fleet in 1978-79. The fleet distinguished itself by training hard and showing the flag with pride. There are some fine anecdotal recountings by several of his contemporaries and also others who engaged with him (Admiral Suresh Bangara’s blog, Commodore Srikant Kesnur and Maritime History Society’s members and events are good sites to visit). He was very effective as a Commander-In-Chief, with a wonderful combination of leadership, ability to switch-off and let people do their jobs and be given credit for it.

His flamboyance, perhaps even a bit of showmanship, erudition, sophisticated and self-deprecating humour have all been commented upon widely over the years. He had an endless stock of

stories and equally, there is an endless stock of anecdotes about him. Unlike in some other cases, most of them are true! Some who associated with him during his service as well as in retirement did feel that at times the power of his personality, his booming voice, erect posture and steady gaze gave off a mistaken impression to some of bluster and posturing. It was anything but that! His intellect shone through because of several things. First, he was very well read at a time when quite a few officers were reasonably well-read themselves. Second, he had an elephantine memory and a “filing and recall” system that would rival electronic wizardry we have become attuned to. Third, he was so thoroughly interesting, perhaps because he was so thoroughly interested in you and in a million other people and things. I do not know if he knew of games like “name, place, animal, thing” but he would have won it hands down always while sometimes pretending to lose!

During his career, he developed interests as wide-ranging as ornithology, flora and fauna; maritime history; Maratha and other coastal forts; yachting and sail-training; improving labour relations in the dockyards and depots where civilians needed to feel a more integrated part of the Navy. As the CINC, he would walk into a machine shop in the Naval Dockyard, join the yard “matees” for a cup of tea and a vada pav or samosa. It was not a stage-managed affair, with separate crockery, sprucing-up, “Potemkin village” mode as sometimes we clumsily and foolishly tended to do in later times. Yet, I have been witness to him getting out of his flag-car (a non- AC Ambassador in those more austere times) and halting a Navy truck being driven rashly. He bellowed at the civilian driver in chaste Marathi, adding an expletive that conveyed – “was he driving a truck or herding a rather difficult to manage buffalo”. He turned around, recognized me as the officer of the guard a few months ago when he was returning my Captain’s formal call, and winked at me with a smile that perhaps said, “I think that might work for a few months of safer driving.”

He accepted his sea-sickness well and not many CINCs would embark a small sailing ship and sail from Kochi to Colombo, flying his flag. I know of a delightful story of this sortie when the solitary WC in the yacht packed up and everyone had to “go” over the side. While the precise quip ought

not be repeated here, his comment to a cadet who had inadvertently hitched himself in the morning twilight somewhat too close for comfort was an uproariously funny one about being guilty, even in omission, of sycophancy! Years later, when I myself was a flag officer at Kochi, we had a very serious discussion on the deleterious effects of yesmanship and sycophancy in our own times but also in his. His staff said he always valued a straight answer, a disagreement, and honesty. Likewise, as Admiral Arun Prakash recounted to me, he didn’t hesitate to speak up and speak out his mind or tick off a junior if and when required. He was an ethical beacon to the Navy of his time.

MPA had a naval career of about 35 years and for which alone he could be fondly remembered. Not one to rest on his oars, in his even longer “career” as a veteran, his heart continued to beat for India and the Navy in many diverse ways. He set up the Maritime History Society; helped advance conservation; edited serious volumes on forts, fortifications; travelled to educate others (and unfailingly impressed everyone in the process). Much has already been written about such forays of his; and hence there is barely the need to say recapitulate further details. That Admiral Prakash once called him a “national treasure”, is not an exaggeration.

For all his sartorial style – which he carried off naturally and unpretentiously, something a few imitators have not been able to do — and his flamboyance, MPA was very unostentatious, led a simple, disciplined life and never displayed feet of clay. At home he would be in a lungi or shorts. Those who visited the Awatis at home always had simple food, and great conversation. He was a teetotaler to boot throughout his life, never needing fuel or fortification for Dutch courage. Likewise, when he visited any member of his team, he never expected any ostentation or special effort for his sake and would chide the hosts if they did so.

Children loved him because he had so much to discuss with them, tell them and listen to them. Admiral Bangara said that as a Fleet Commander or CINC, when he needed to travel at his own expense, he would do so in third class without hesitation. It was not a pretence at common touch, but genuine simplicity and frugality. But, fellow passengers could not take their eyes off him, so

imposing and electrifying was his presence. From the time I had a brief exchange with him as a cadet, and a few times through the decades, what I noticed was that he would look me straight into the eye and welcomed the mirror-imaging. I recall a conversation when he mentioned being upset more and more at the ostentation, elaborate menus, the expenditure on entertainment and the growing divide between senior and junior officers at social events that he saw during his travels and visits.

A great sailor, a scholar, a maritime history enthusiast, an interesting as well as interested man, has himself passed on into history. We can be sure he is already regaling his companions from all walks of life with stories amidst much mirth. In December 2014, my course (56th NDA) had a

reunion in Khadakwasla when the Commandant and his Deputy were both fortuitously our course-mates, we had invited MPA, our first Commandant as a Guest of Honour. His speech was remarkable but among his opening lines he said, “So, here I am. At my age, it is remarkable to be anywhere at all...” For once, he was wrong. He will always be in many, many hearts. I end with the last lines of Tennyson’s poem: Crossing the Bar:

**“And may there be no sadness of farewell,  
Where I embark;  
For tho’ from out our bourne of Time and  
Place,  
The flood may bear me far,  
I hope to see my Pilot face to face  
When I have crost the bar.”**

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**A MAGNIFICENT MARINER SAILS OVER THE HORIZON –  
AN OBITUARY TO LATE VICE ADMIRAL MANOHAR P AWATI PVSM Vrc**

**Commander Yogesh V Athawale**

Vice Admiral Manohar Pralhad Awati, former Flag officer Commanding-in-Chief, Western Naval Command, passed away on 03 November 2018 at his retirement abode at Vinchurni, near Phaltan, Dist Satara. He was 91 and leaves behind Mrs Sandhya Awati, his life partner of 63 years, and their two sons, Kedar and Kailas, with their respective families. Manohar Awati belonged to the generation of military officers who witnessed the transition of Indian Armed Forces from pre-independence to post-independence era and had the unique opportunity to contribute to the foundational efforts, as their careers progressed in tandem with the growth of the service. Born in 1927, in a family with strong cultural and academic moorings, Manohar was a bright student who did his early schooling from various schools at Wardha, Nagpur, and later from King George’s Primary School, Mumbai. With the outbreak of the Second World War, the family moved to Pune, where he took tuitions for the prestigious *Jagannath Shankar Sheth* Sanskrit scholarship. In January 1943, he topped the Federal Public Service Commission examination and was selected for training at Training Ship *Dufferin*, based at the port of Bombay, which prepared Indian candidates for service in the Merchant Marine and the Royal

Indian Navy. After successfully completing the course at *Dufferin*, in 1945, he opted to join the Royal Indian Navy (RIN) and went to UK as a Special Entry Cadet from RIN, at Royal Naval College, Dartmouth. His training in England lasted for five years, covering Midshipman courses, technical courses, courses at Royal Naval College, Greenwich, and sea training onboard various ships. Since his early days, Awati was noted for his remarkable professional acumen and prolific, multi-talented personality and was afforded coveted opportunities. He excelled as a trainee seaman, and learnt sailing, spending time with his seniors in yachting. On his return in 1950, he was promoted to Lieutenant and was posted to *Ranjit* as the ship’s Destroyer Gunnery Officer. On 27 May 1951, the Indian Navy, being the senior service then, was the first among the Services to receive the Presidents Colours at Brabourne Stadium, Bombay and Lieutenant Manohar Awati was chosen to receive them from India’s first President, ‘Babu’ Rajendra Prasad. This first instance of public attention was to become the leitmotif of his growing popularity in later years, and he remained immensely proud of the same. In 1951-52, he shouldered key responsibilities at the Officer Training School at *Venduruthy*, Kochi, and



thereafter proceeded to England for a specialist course in Signal Communication, at HMS *Mercury*, Portsmouth. On return to India in 1954, Awati served as a Specialist Signal Communication Officer (SCO) onboard the old *Delhi*. In this period had the opportunity to accompany Marshal Tito of Yugoslavia, assigned as his ADC, during his tour of India in 1954-55. On 16 October 1955, he was married to Sandhya Karmarkar, who remained his 'better half' and a 'sheet anchor' all through his life. Later he was appointed as the Cadets Training Officer and Executive Officer of *Kistna*. Serving onboard ships in key responsibilities, he earned his spurs as a seagoing naval officer and made a mark for himself, emerging as a role model to junior officers. It was the era of '*Hindi Chini bhai bhai*', and Lieutenant Commander Manohar Awati was deputed for a visit to China in 1958. Next year, he underwent the Staff Course at Defence Services Staff College (DSSC), Wellington, in 1959-60, which he topped.

Following a three-year stint as the Deputy Naval Adviser in the Indian High Commission at London, from 1961-64, he returned to command the training ship *Betwa*, followed by *Tir*, in quick succession, where he nurtured future naval leaders, who earned their 'sea legs' during their training onboard as cadets. A generation of officers in the Navy imbibed their early lessons and impressions under the watchful eyes of a Captain who expected nothing but the best of them and led his officers by example. He was known for his fair and firm approach, according due indulgence to those who exhibited talent. It was during the command tenures that he gained immense popularity across the Service for his unique style of leadership, penchant for perfection and humane approach, which left lasting impression on all those who worked alongside him. He earned a formidable reputation as someone who 'walked the talk' and lived by the standards and ethics that he espoused. In January 1966, he was selected to command the Navy's Signal Communication School at Kochi, where he pioneered training in the field of Electronic Warfare. Subsequently, on promotion to Captain at the age of 39, in December 1966, he was posted as Officer-in-Charge and Chief Instructor, Navy Wing, at DSSC, Wellington, for three years, where he took up riding and regularly participated as the master of the hounds in Ottacamund Fox Hounds Sunday hunts.

The crowning glory of Awati's commands at sea was during the 1971 Indo-Pak War, when he ably led his submarine-hunter corvette *Kamorta* and other ships of the 31 Patrol Vessel Squadron, of which he was the commander. His ship undertook anti-submarine and blockade operations in the Bay of Bengal, intercepted vessels carrying contraband to ports of East Pakistan, and escorted the aircraft carrier, *Vikrant*. For his courageous actions he was decorated with *Vir Chakra*, the third highest wartime gallantry award.

Subsequently, promoted to Commodore, he commanded *Gomantak*, the Naval base at Goa and was also concurrently the Naval Officer-in-Charge (Goa), from 1972-73. This was followed by another command tenure of the old *Mysore*, a *Fiji* class cruiser, where he played a key role in recovering morale of the ships company and restored standards of leadership and professionalism. Later, after following a course at Royal College of Defence Studies, London, he was appointed as the Commandant, National Defence Academy in 1976. Hundreds of cadets and officers, who trained and served in this institution under his supervision remember him as an inspiring icon, a towering figure, always well dressed, who enjoyed a larger than life image in the Academy. He had a style that was remarkably different, he was known as a disciplinarian with a golden heart and bore an affable personality that indulged in numerous hobbies and interests. In 1977, he was appointed as the Flag officer Commanding Western Fleet. His tenure of two years is remembered for higher training standards and noteworthy achievements of the Fleet ships, including embarking the then Prime Minister, Shri Morarji Desai, for a round passage from Mumbai to Lakshadweep and Minicoy Islands. Admiral Awati also took his Fleet to foreign ports to show the flag, notably in East Africa and the Persian Gulf.

Awati was an institution builder and a mentor par excellence. He inspired officers and sailors by the sheer quality of his persona, commanding presence, commitment to the task at hand, meticulousness, respect for traditions and considerate approach. He was gifted with a booming, baritone voice, which lent weight to his words. An avid reader, writer, rider, traveller, fitness enthusiast, environmentalist and a prolific public speaker, his life touched thousands in the Navy and beyond. Promoted to

Vice Admiral in 1979, he served as Chief of Personnel, at Naval Headquarters in New Delhi, where he steered far reaching reforms such as the Cadre Review, Stabilised Operational Manning Cycle, and improvements to the Group Insurance Scheme. As the *grand finale* of his career, he was appointed the Flag Officer Commanding in Chief, Western Naval Command, from 1981-83. In this coveted appointment, he was awarded the Param Vishitha Seva Medal for his stellar contributions to the service.

After retirement, he undertook varied responsibilities, notably as the Director and on the board of the Tolani Shipping Company, as the military correspondent of *Blitz*, a reputed magazine, and held key positions at World Wildlife Fund, and Ecological Society of India. For a while, in 1992-93, he also modelled for the apparel brand, 'Digjam'! He helped the Government of Maharashtra create the Services Preparatory Institute, at Aurangabad, and served as the institution's mentor for many years. His interests went beyond the military and the Navy. He was a keen ornithologist, ecologist and a naturalist, which drove him and Mrs Awati to build their retirement home in a remote rural location near Phaltan, in natural surroundings. He took special efforts towards wildlife conservation and environmental protection. He was a recipient of the Maharashtra Rajya Gaurav Puraskar and Sivananda Eminent Citizen Award, 2010. He had founded the Maritime History Society (MHS) in 1978, when he was the Fleet Commander. After retirement, he steadily nurtured the Society as its Founder Chairman and

later Patron, making it a niche institution of repute, which continues to grow stronger. The activities of MHS helped him stay in regular touch with the Navy. He actively corresponded on email and remained in touch with many of his shipmates and admirers, till the very last.

He would easily count in the top names of not just the 'Makers of modern Indian Navy', but also among the 'Most Inspiring Modern Indians'. His most recent, and significant contribution at the national level was the conception and mentoring of the three '*Sagarparikrama*' circumnavigation ocean sailing voyages, undertaken by pioneering Indians, including the all-women '*Navika Sagarparikrama*' team. Vice Admiral Manohar Awati was a 'peoples Admiral' as it were, a legend in his own times. There would be numerous anecdotes and recollections about him which his thousands of admirers would like to narrate. He leaves a rich legacy behind, and a void, hard to fill. His last public appearance with the Navy was at Mumbai on 01 October 2018, when he consented to be the Chief Guest to flag-off the voyage of Navy's sailing vessel *Bulbul*, to commemorate the Golden Jubilee of the Western Naval Command. Turned out wearing a yacht captain's hat and a sailing T-shirt, in his usual dapper style, the crisp 'flag-off' and his boy-like desire to sail in the boat, despite his age, symbolised the *joy de vivre* of the man and his 'never-say-die' spirit. For Manohar Awati, there was always a new aspiration and a new mission in the offing. Rest in Peace Admiral, you ran a course true.

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#### About the Author:



Commander Yogesh V Athawale (04903-T) is an alumnus of the National Defence Academy, Khadakwasla and Defence Services Staff College, Wellington. He was commissioned in the Indian Navy on 01 July 1999. An ASW specialist, he has commanded INS *Astravahini* and Mauritius Coast Guard Ship *Guardian*. He was also the commissioning Executive Officer of INS *Chennai*. He is a regular contributor to professional publications and has been published in international and national journals. The officer is a recipient of several prizes in essay competitions including the USI Gold Medal Essay Competition and the IONS Open Essay Competition. He is currently appointed at Headquarters, Western Naval Command.

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# 39th Annual Seminar of Maritime History Society Commemorating the Golden Jubilee of Western Naval Command "Saga of Excellence on Western Sea Board"

## Word from Chief Patron

Vice Admiral Girish Luthra

Admiral Arun Prakash, Honorary Patron, Maritime History Society,

Former Commanders-in-Chief of the Western Naval Command Flag Officers, Commanding Officers, Officers and Sailors, Veterans, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good Morning.

It gives me immense pleasure to deliver the inaugural address of this Special MHS Annual Seminar, to commemorate the Golden Jubilee of the Western Naval Command. At the outset, let me take this opportunity to welcome the Former Commanders-in-Chief of the Command, and other distinguished guests, who have been kind enough to spare their valuable time, and be amongst us on this momentous occasion.

When we were deliberating on the possible themes of this seminar, the dominant strand that stood-out in the history of the Command, was the relentless pursuit of excellence, steered by the steady hand of stalwarts who led it, many of whom are present here today. And therefore, the seminar is focused on the theme, "*Saga of Excellence on the Western Seaboard*", which would offer the speakers a wide canvas, to trace important milestones, notable operations, and historical developments, which have amply exhibited the versatility and enduring strength of the Command, in this voyage of five decades.

In many ways, the **origins of the Western Naval Command** can be traced to Mumbai in the pre-independence era, when the Royal Indian Navy was constituted and headquartered here. Thereafter, the

Commodore-in-Charge, Bombay, later upgraded to Flag Officer, Bombay, functioned as the Administrative Authority.

Keeping pace with a rapidly growing service, **organisational changes were ushered in, during the period 1966 to 68**, which led to the formation of the Command on First March 1968. Since then there has been no looking back, and this premier Command has grown exponentially, not only in terms of geographical expanse and functional responsibility, but also in terms of its mandate.

If I were to look for the **most far-reaching and historically significant milestones** achieved by the Command, I can point out a few that have had a deep impact, not only on our fine service, but have often, led to national and international ramifications.

The **earliest in chronological order**, is the Command's association with Mazagon Docks Limited, in initially laying the building blocks, and thereafter consolidating, **indigenous shipbuilding**. From the *Nilgiri* Project in the mid-60s to the *Kolkata* Class of today, the Navy has been able to build state-of-the art ships with increasing indigenous content, thereby being amongst the pioneers of 'Make in India'. The Command's contribution to this achievement has been very significant.

**Secondly**, of course, would be the **operations undertaken during the 1971 Indo-Pak War**, in which the Command played a key role in breaking the adversary's will, by offensive action at, and from the sea. It also had the effect of choking the enemy's logistical lines on the maritime front. In



many ways, the experience of 1971, its aftermath, and dynamics of Cold War further widened the ambit of responsibility of the Command. With this War, the **missile age dawned in the Indian Navy**, and **our then newly acquired submarines saw deployment in a real war scenario**.

**Thirdly**, I would look at the **integration of the aircraft carrier and its air wing** into our operational and combat philosophy, as a major achievement, given that the Carrier has been integral to the Command from the very beginning. It will be well appreciated by the audience that operating a carrier has its unique set of challenges, in terms of training, maintenance and logistics. The growth of aviation assets and infrastructure, led by Goa, too has seen a remarkable growth.

The **fourth** major area that I would count is the **assimilation of latest, sophisticated technology; whether it is related to engineering, weapons, sensors, operational support systems or even operational infrastructure**; that our maintainers, logisticians and Dockyard personnel have handsomely coped up with. With each successive commissioning of the *Rajput*, *Shishumar*, *Delhi*, *Brahmaputra*, *Talwar* and *Kolkata* class of ships and submarines, and now *Vikramaditya*; tall demands were placed on our tacticians, engineers and logisticians, and I must say that they lived up to the expectations each and every time, thereby underscoring the Command's saga of excellence.

The realisation of the Navy's visionary **operational base at Karwar**, was a watershed development in the Command's history. Project Seabird holds the promise to absorb the growth in our asset inventory, and offer us an **exclusive, secure Naval harbour**, to undertake a diverse range of operations.

And **sixthly**, it is important to acknowledge the **deep-rooted changes that '26/11' brought upon the Command's mandate and operational philosophy**. With the C-in-C being additionally constituted as C-in-C Coastal Defence, rapid accretion of coastal security assets, infrastructure, networks and platforms, and the enhancement of inter-agency coordination and cooperation; the responsibility on the Command has grown further. The reforms that came in the wake of '26/11', also spurred us to augment our **Special Operations** and **EOD capabilities**, which too have been pioneered

at the Western Naval Command.

While these milestones are only a sampling of the vast ground that the Command has covered, they are significant in many ways, especially in highlighting how the mandate of the Command has risen, since inception. **Today, with the maritime domain gaining primacy** in geopolitics and geo-economics, and **the Indo-Pacific becoming the new arena for geopolitical contestation**, our responsibilities are rising further. Fully seized of this new reality, the Western Naval Command has transformed its operational philosophy and outlook, so as to face up to any challenge or scenario.

Today's seminar, organised under the **aegis of Maritime History Society, is the 39<sup>th</sup> such event**, that has helped us over the years to preserve and perpetuate historical knowledge among the Naval community and beyond. On this occasion, I would like to recall the unparalleled contribution of two stalwarts, whom we lost recently. **Late Vice Admiral MP Awati, the Founder Chairman of MHS, and later the Patron Emeritus**, who nurtured and mentored the Society through the past four decades. He, with close support of **late Admiral JG Nadkarni, who later took over the mantle of Patron** from Admiral Awati, steered the MHS to become a niche institution, spreading awareness about matters maritime, and underscoring the relevance of maritime history, in understanding the present and the future. We at WNC view this knowledge sharing discourse as a continuum in understanding present trends, and how these trends might play out in the future.

You would agree with me that it is the **rich legacy of the past, which serves as a compass for the future**. And therefore, while today's Seminar has been organised into two sessions, covering two distinct chronological periods in the history of the Command, I would urge all participants, whether speakers or audience, to focus on the contemporary value of the deliberations, especially in terms of lessons learnt which can be applied to the future. We all look forward to the proceedings and invigorating discussions that will ensue. Before I end, I wish to thank the former Commanders-in-Chief and other outstation participants for being here, and making this a memorable occasion.

Thank you.

# Significance and Growth of the Indian Navy (1968-1993) - Operations and Decisive Actions at Sea

Commodore Srikant Kesnur

## Geo-Strategic Overview

The time period of 1968 -1993 is not merely a 25-year period that is being studied randomly but is significant in being chosen as such for study. In understanding the significance of the time period, it is critical to understand the significance of the beginning and the end of this period. The proximate time, 1968, was a period of very significant events, not only in India and within the Indian Navy, but across the world.

Britain had started to withdraw from the Indian Ocean Region. Maldives and Mauritius had gained their independence. The retreat of UK from the IOR resulted in a vacuum in the region and it was widely considered that USA would fill this void. India was skeptical of relations with the USA knowing the latter's ambition of replacing UK as a maritime power and therefore was more inclined to form a relationship with Soviet Union. While India did not want to embrace Communism, the fundamental need to create protection against a new round of imperialism was paramount. Soviet Union, it was assumed, could provide Military aid as well a potential nuclear umbrella against hegemonic ambitions of the USA. The basis of this assumption was the fact that the USA was involved in hurrying up the de-colonisation of the region. The US was seen to be filling up the void created by the departure of Britain. US and the UK agreed to develop Diego Garcia into a US Base while the natives there were secretly transferred to Mauritius or Seychelles without any relocation assistance. The Chagos Archipelago which formed a part of Mauritius was detached from Mauritius in 1965 and was designated as British Indian Ocean Territory. This was then handed over to the Americans for building the Naval and Air Force base. Watching this, India which was keen on ensuring no further spread of 'imperialist' ideology on its own soil chose to develop a relationship with Soviet Union. The Americans also realised this and since Egypt was also leaning towards USSR, Singapore and Indonesia were gaining their freedom and demonstrating closeness with USSR,

the Americans chose to develop a close relationship with Pakistan as a counter to the Indian relationship with USSR. The geopolitical landscape around the world had more to feed the insecurities that resulted in Cold War blocs. USA was involved in the Vietnam War which was being protested to both within the US and the UK. US was also in the midst of the civil rights movement with Dr Martin Luther King leading the movement. It was in April 1968 that he was assassinated. In June 1968, Senator Robert Kennedy, the Democratic Presidential Nominee, brother of John F Kennedy was assassinated. Soviet Union invaded Czechoslovakia because the country had sought to liberalise the media which resulted in criticism of communism and USSR. USA and USSR were involved in a race to the moon. USA was successful in sending a manned crew around the moon in 1968. **In short, we could say that this was a period of intense cold war rivalry which manifolded itself in the IOR and had an impact on Indian outlook and policies.**

Towards the end of this period (1968 - 1993), the world saw another dramatic transformation. The tanker war between Iran and Iraq, the collapse of Communism in 1991, the fall of the Berlin Wall, the first Iraq War with its high technology mismatch between the participants were some of the key events. The world changed dramatically with the presumed end of Cold War. However, other fault lines emerged including radical Islam both as organic movement in some countries in IOR and as a response to Western hegemony, real or perceived in other. The rise of China was on the horizon and as the Atlantic/ European theatre because relatively quiet, the Indian and Western Pacific emerged as new arenas of contestation.

Within India, in the period 1968 - 1993, the national landscape was changing. The political landscape of the post Nehruvian era was developing. There was the politics of Coalitions, the Emergency, Tamil crisis, Khalistan agitation and many

upheavals. Our country lost two PMs to assassinations. Economy yo-yoed hitting rock bottom in 1991. The economy grew at 3.6% between 1960 - 1980 and at 5.5% from 1980 - 1990. Only after the liberalisation in 1992 did the economic growth rate increase. This slow economic growth coupled with the competing developmental priorities for budget allocations demonstrate how difficult it was for the Naval Leaders of the times to get the Government to greenlight capital intensive procurement for the Navy. The Indo-Pak Wars of 1965, 1971 and other events after that did, however, ensure that the Government continued to invest in strengthening the armed forces partly to the inimical geopolitical landscape surrounding us. And the geopolitical developments did ensure in cementing the understanding within India for the necessity of a strong and resilient Navy for National Security.

### Naval Overview

With so much happening around the world and within India, the Indian Navy, and its strategic minded leadership, were seeking to shore up the service which was often called the 'Cinderella Service'. The political leadership had considered that the Army was enough to deal with the threats to India from the North and their investment into the Navy was negligible. The 1965 War had in fact been very frustrating for the Indian Navy since the Navy was categorically asked to not get involved and to not cause any damage to Pakistani ships or shipping in International Waters. It was so severe that the CNS, Vice Admiral BS Soman, had to address the officers in Mumbai post 1965 war to assuage the morale. This spurred the naval leaders to advocate the importance of the Navy as well as bring out its Capital-intensive nature within the Indian Politico-Bureaucratic landscape. It is evident from the analysis of the budgetary allocations to the Navy, how the investment grew post 1965 war. The Navy which used to receive about 4% of the Defence budget till 1965 was getting almost 10% of the defence budget by 1974. The capital-intensive naval acquisitions resulted in the Capital Budget of the Navy rising from 7% of its own budget in 1965 to almost 49% in 1973-74. This demonstrates that the leaders, who were observing the geopolitical and strategic changes in the IOR were able to convince the political establishment of the time regarding the importance

of the Navy and its nature in terms of being a capital investment intensive force to build.

The main elements of growth in the Navy from 1965 - 1975 were in terms of Russian Acquisitions, creation of the Submarine arm in 1968 and the subsequent arrival of submarines, commencement of the Leander project and Indian warship building programme, acquisition of ASW helicopters (Seakings), acquisition of additional Seahawks (which were incidentally being disposed of by Germany) and advent of the anti-ship missile which resulted in acquisition of Russian Missile Boats, in 1971. The missile boats had demonstrated their capabilities in the 1967 Arab-Israeli War when an Israeli destroyer 'Eilat' was sunk by Egyptian Komar class boats off Sinai. By 1971, four submarines, a submarine support vessel, two landing ships, five submarine chasers and four patrol boats had also arrived in India. All this was due to the strategic outlook and understanding of the Naval Leaders of the time.

The Navy that grew in size, acquitted itself well in the 1971 Indo-Pak War and was recognised by the establishment as being capable of exerting influence in the region. In the subsequent years till 1993 the Navy proved its versatility as an instrument of warfare, policing, as well as diplomacy. In recounting the major Operations and Decisive actions undertaken by the Indian Navy at sea between 1968 - 1993, this paper will highlight the Operations undertaken *after* the well-known operations of the 1971 Indo-Pak War. The paper will not dwell at length on the operations undertaken during the 1971 war since they are well known. There were five, arguably not very well known, 'Operations and Decisive Actions' that merit closer study as they directly and indirectly influenced the understanding of the utility of Navy in war and less than war situations. These are Op Lal Dora (Mauritius, 1983), Op Flowers are Blooming (Seychelles, 1986), Op Pawan (Sri-Lanka, 1987 - 1990), Op Cactus (Maldives, 1988), the joint manoeuvres as part of Exercise Brasstacks and the Indian Navy's first and only UN mandated Naval Mission - Op Muffet (1993). The intention of discussing these lesser known operations is to establish that the growth of the Navy post 1968 and the Navy's action in the 1971 War demonstrated to the Politicians that Navy was an instrument of policy. These operations, as will be



shown, clearly indicated the growing ‘comfort’ of the politicians of the day in using the Navy and the Armed Forces at large as an instrument of policy with the aim of enhancing and consolidating India’s influence in the geo-political events in the region. The region, as can be seen quite clearly from the list of the operations above included Mauritius, Seychelles and Maldives in the Arabian Sea and the South Western Indian Ocean. The same countries, and a few more, have now assumed larger significance in the geo-political outlook of the region.

## Decisive Actions and Events

### Indo - Pak War - 1971

The Indo-Pak war of 1971 was a golden chapter for the Indian Navy. Navy saw operations on both fronts and carried out the entire gamut of Naval operations. Most were successful and some not so much. On the very second day of the war, the Missile Boats from the Western Naval Command were able to strike a body blow to the Pakistani War effort. Experts have suggested that the Pakistani Navy was bottled up inside the harbour due to the impact of Op Trident and Op Python (the two missile attacks on Karachi). On the Eastern Front the aircraft carrier *Vikrant* with its embarked complement Sea Hawks and Alizes was undertaking shore strikes by the sea hawks and ASW missions by Alizes. Surface units saw ASW action on both fronts with the sinking of the Ghazi in the East to sinking of *Khukri* in the West. The Navy also undertook an amphibious operation off Bangladesh which was not successful. The naval special forces saw action on both fronts as well. **In retrospect, the 1971 War clearly demonstrated the coming of age of the Indian Navy, its place in the military construct of the country and action by the Navy facilitated the final outcome of the war, viz creation of Bangladesh and surrender of more than 90,000 Pakistani troops.**

### Op Lal Dora (1983)

Mauritius was considered as ‘Little India’ based on the large Hindu population mostly from Bihar. PM Indira Gandhi realised early that Indian influence on Mauritius should be maintained as the major powers of the time, UK (withdrawing from the IOR) and US and USSR (seeking new influence

in the region) jostled for a say in the IOR post withdrawal of the UK from Singapore. India assumed responsibility for the security of Mauritius in 1974 under a defence agreement. In 1980-81, Indira Gandhi, demonstrated astute *real politik* and switched Indian support for the opposition in Mauritius and the opposition won the election in 1982. Post elections an agreement on Double Tax Avoidance was signed which resulted in the blossoming of the Mauritian economy. The elected government of Mauritius of the Movement Militant Maurecien (MMM) was nominally headed by Anerood Jugnauth of Indian descent but its ideological leader was a socialist of French descent, Paul Berenger. While Jugnauth as the PM was favourably disposed towards India Berenger was seeking to shift the power more firmly to the Franco-Mauritians. Berenger aimed to exclude high caste Hindus from power and there was fear that he would execute a coup against the PM Jugnauth. The Mauritian political crisis deepened in Mar 1983 and Mrs Indira Gandhi directed the Indian Army and the Navy to plan to intervene against a coup. The plan involved landing troops at Port Louis. The operation was planned by the Western Naval Command. However, there was a disagreement between the Army and the Navy with regards to the Command and Control of the operation. The Navy wanted the Command and Control while the Army was not ok with that. PM Indira Gandhi decided that till the time the troops reached Port Louis the Navy would be in control and thereafter the Army. In this uncertainty due to the issues of Command and Control, Mrs Gandhi’s security advisor Mr Kao (former Chief of R&AW) advised her that it may be better to send the R&AW Chief Mr Santook to tackle this issue politically. Mr Santook was able to influence the political protagonists enough to ensure that Jugnauth was not overthrown and that the Hindus and the Muslims came together to form an independent party called the Militant Socialist Movement (MSM), which won the elections in August 1983. Thereafter, Jugnauth and all major political party leaders publicly acknowledged India’s role in the security and stability of Mauritius.

While Op Lal Dora was actually a non-event, it demonstrated that the political leadership was willing to use the military to seek kinetic options for geo-political situations. Mrs Indira Gandhi did consider the military option to prevent a coup. It

also highlighted that the internecine disagreements between the armed forces did not augur well for India and there was a need for an institutional process to joint operational planning and execution.

The lessons learnt by the Politicians, the Navy and the Army from this non-event ensured that in the coming years, when called upon to plan in a joint manner, the armed forces were better prepared. In the next few dramatic years, the country intervened militarily to prevent a coup in Maldives and Seychelles and for peace keeping operations in Sri Lanka.

### **Op Flowers are Blooming (1986)**

In 1986, in Seychelles, then President Rene, was facing domestic political concerns and the Defence Minister Ogilvy Berlouis was looking to take over power by executing a coup. When Rene reached out to Rajiv Gandhi, he contacted then CNS, Admiral Tahlilani for options. CNS indicated that one ship *INS Vindhyagiri* was already on the way to Seychelles for participating in the Seychelles Independence Day celebrations and could be directed to stay in port to provide deterrence against a coup. Accordingly, *Vindhyagiri* was directed to report a boiler defect and extend her stay in port. A team from Delhi, under a Technical Rear Admiral was dispatched to address the said defect. The team leader was briefed regarding the activities to be undertaken by the ship as she extended her stay in port. The ship stayed for twelve days and undertook flying with the *Sea King* embarked as well as demonstrations of slithering operations with the *MARCOS* embarked, ostensibly for training while subtly sending the message of restraint to the likely perpetrators of the coup. It has been chronicled by some intelligence officers that the presence of the Indian Naval Ship did the trick and deterred the coup. The operation was code named 'Op Flowers are Blooming'. This was not to be the last military intervention by Rajiv Gandhi who was seen to be amenable to utilisation of military for addressing geo-political stabilisation in the region as could be seen again in Sri Lanka during *Op Pawan* which started the very next year in 1987 and continued up to 1991 as well as in Maldives in 1988.

### **Ex Brasstacks (1986/87)**

December 1986 saw the involvement of the Navy

in large scale manoeuvres by the Indian Armed Forces as a part of the national level exercise *Brasstacks*. This exercise sought to execute the directive by PM Rajiv Gandhi to the then Service Chiefs to undertake full scale exercise involving all echelons of national power in mobilising for war. General Sundarji, the COAS, decided to undertake *Ex Brasstacks* on an unprecedented scale. The magnitude of exercise included the mobilisation of not only Army but Naval and IAF units as well. Naval units undertook aggressive manoeuvres at sea off the coast of Gujarat while the Army was undertaking mobilisation in Rajasthan sector. The Naval exercise was to end in an amphibious assault just south of the International Border in Kutch. The exercise was so realistic that Pakistan assumed that India was preparing for war. While the exercise attracted fair share of attention among strategic analysts and the media, the point of emphasis is that it was the first large scale tri service exercise of this kind and brought home several lessons connected to joint operations. It was also the high noon of Political-Military relations with PM Rajiv Gandhi, De facto Defence Minister Mr Arun Singh and all Service Chiefs enjoying excellent relations and one on one connect. The exercise thus provided several valuable strategic and operational lessons.

### **Op Pawan (1987-1990)**

*Op Pawan* was an operation which has been studied extensively and while it has revealed large lacunae in the strategic direction of the operation, the joint operations by the forces at short notice in a joint and three-dimensional scenario have significant lessons for the Armed Forces. For the uninitiated, in 1987, the LTTE issue was at the forefront of the domestic and regional politics in South Asia. When the Sri Lankan President Jayawardene sought assistance from Indian PM Rajiv Gandhi for dealing with the LTTE, Rajiv Gandhi, with experience of recent events in Seychelles and Mauritius consented. The Army was asked to deploy at rather short notice. It was transhipped using the IAF strategic airlift capability as well as Naval ships from Chennai. The operation witnessed Chennai being transformed into a launch pad at short notice. The ships deployed and operated off Jaffna peninsula and Trincomalee/ Batticaloa as well. While at the strategic level, there was much confusion about whether the IPKF was assisting

the Sri Lankans against the LTTE or reigning in the LTTE or brokering a deal between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE, at the operational and tactical level there were significant lessons for the Indian Armed Forces, especially the Navy. Small ships, commanded by young officers were involved in action off the Jaffna Peninsula. The larger capital warships were involved on the Western Front of Colombo. *Viraat* was utilised as a commando carrier and undertook significant deterrent posturing off Colombo when at one stage President Premadasa (who succeeded JR Jayawardhane) had changed his stance and was seeking an alliance with the LTTE while the IPKF was involved in action against the LTTE. The three years of Op Pawan saw the entire gamut Naval Operations in a LICO/LIMO scenario, Amphibious ops, Special forces Ops, Cordon Militaire, Extensive flying, small ship ops, Naval Gunfire support, Troop transportation, Interception of hostile craft and so on. All of them offered most valuable lessons, especially within the joint Manish construct. Naval logistics also was exercised at several levels and offered several points for the future.

#### **Op Cactus (1988)**

While the IPKF was involved in an uncertain and prolonged intervention in Sri Lanka, there was another emergency in the region in Maldives in 1988. The President of Maldives Mr Abdul Gayoom reached out to Rajiv Gandhi to prevent a coup against him. Rajiv Gandhi directed the Army to respond. Special Forces were moved from Agra to Maldives in an IAF IL 76 and undertook a smooth intervention ensuring that the planned coup using mercenaries hired from Sri Lanka by a Maldivian businessman was neutralized just in time. The Operation code named Op Cactus was a very swift response to such a demand from the political leadership. In merely 16 hrs after receiving an SOS from the Maldivian President, Indian Special Forces were able to land in Male and intervene. The Navy was also involved when the perpetrators of the coup including the Maldivian businessman Mr Lutheefi escaped on a vessel out to sea. INS *Betwa* and INS *Godavari*, (which was returning from a visit to Australia) were diverted at high speed and directed to intercept the vessel and capture the perpetrators. The ships intercepted the vessel MV Progress Light and after forcing it

to stop, boarded the vessel and arrested the perpetrators of the coup. The intervention was so swift that Margaret Thatcher, the British PM famously remarked, “[t]hank god for India, President Gayoom’s government has been saved. We could not have despatched a force from here in good time to help him.” This relatively small operation saw several aspects of Naval Operations - interception, ‘marking’, negotiations for hostage release at sea, helicopter operations involving Depth Charge (DC) drop, firing by low and medium caliber gun, opposed boarding, internment and interrogation of coup plotters, hostage relief and so on.

#### **Op Muffet (1993)**

In December 1992, Indian Navy participated in its first ever overseas deployment in support of United Nations Humanitarian Relief Operations. The civil war in Somalia from 1991 had led to widespread destruction of agriculture in the country. This had resulted to starvation in large parts of the nation. In January 1992, the UN Security Council (UNSC) imposed an arms embargo on Somalia. US troops were deployed to ensure warring factions adhered to the ceasefire. These troops were inadequate to ensure that food packages were not looted and reached the deserving. In view of the need to safeguard the food supplies for the starving, a UN Mandated Op Restore Hope was launched and India joined the operation. Three Naval ships were deployed as part of Op Muffet in support of Op Restore Hope. These ships were mandated to ensure the safety of the food supplies being brought to Mogadishu and Kismayo from sea. In addition, Naval Officers were deployed to Somalia as Liaison Officers to facilitate the deployment of these ships. These were the first Indian Naval officers to don the Blue Beret of UN Support Operations. These officers also formed a part of the initial headquarters of the United Nations Operations Somalia (UNOSOM) as it transitioned from the United Nations Integrated Task Force (UNITAF). In December 1994, deployed ships were also part of Op Bolster and Op Shield which were operations for de-induction of the Indian Brigade deployed as part of the UNOSOM. While Op Muffet saw coordinated operations with other Navies under UN umbrella, escort of World Food Programme (WFP) ships and other constabulary akin operations, the subsequent operations, ‘Shield’



and 'Bolster', involved deinduction in hostile conditions. Indian Navy acquitted itself very well in both these operations and earned the admiration of other Navies just as the world was opening upto a post-cold war era.

### Other Operations

Some other operations and events not covered due to constraints of space are briefly entered below:-

- (a) Op Pawan in 1990 was followed by Op Tasha until the mid-nineties a prolonged period of policing operations on water and water front with many concomitant effects - the establishment of Naval detachments, operationalisation of disused air fields, use of small craft, interlocation with police, fisher folk and other civil authorities in the South Tamil Nadu coast resulting in a unique experience for Indian Navy.
- (b) The landing of RDX on Konkan coast in end 1992/ early 1993 and subsequent bomb blasts in Mumbai in March 1993, resulted in 'Op Swan', a prolonged maritime policing operation in Gujarat and Maharashtra coasts similar to Op Tasha. This too resulted in some lessons and experiences for the Navy akin to those at Tasha but with unique dynamics.
- (c) By early nineties Indian Navy had slowly started opening up to cooperation with other Navies after a long period of isolation. This was manifest in joint exercises at sea that began in 1992 with the French Navy and later developed into exercises with US Navy (Malabar series) and other nations following suit.
- (d) Other operations like Op Rajdoot, which saw *IN* ships being dispatched to Aden as a stabilizing force. However, the situation was controlled and did not require active *IN* intervention.

### Conclusion

The above operations make it evident that the Indian Navy had a fairly 'busy' calendar and was involved in several operations at varying nature and magnitude which tested it across a broad maritime canvas, in the period 1968 to 1993.

The lessons learnt from these operations have resulted in the current 'joint' outlook within the Armed Forces and while we have a long way to become seamlessly joint in operating in the three dimensions, we are better prepared today. While some of these operations may not have been tactical successes, the strategic foundations for use of military in addressing geo-political situations in the region were underscored and the Navy today is better prepared to meet the demands of the political leadership due to these past experiences. In the contemporary world, the appetite for military intervention in domestic political issues within regional states may not always be evident, however, the use of the Navy in stabilising the region is well established in the political understanding. In recent years the Navy has actively deployed often to various parts of the Indian Ocean Region to establish and safe guard good order in the global commons. The Navy is now considered as a dependable instrument of policy for the government of the day and the Indian Navy's articulation of its purpose in the Indian Ocean, that of being the 'Net Security Provider in the IOR' is accepted and supported by the political and bureaucratic establishment. PM Modi's aim of SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) is unequivocally based on his faith in the Indian Navy's ability to support such a geo-political outlook. A few points that need reemphasis are as follows:-

- (a) The navy has learnt valuable operational and tactical lessons from all these events in the period '1968-93', which we have incorporated in our doctrines and SOPs.
- (b) Our experiences of this period provided the template for the resounding growth and acclaim in the second half (1993-2018) Phase I was the launch pad for Phase 2.
- (c) The lessons of having a ship deployed at or close to theatre of operation was amply poured in several events (Cactus, Seychelles etc) and in some way brings out the efficacy of Mission based deployments.

To sum up this augur well for the Navy as we continue to grow in the future keeping a weather eye on our history and the achievements made by the young service which was blessed to have tall and visionary leaders. We stand strong and well recognised today because of the farsightedness and

abilities of our past leaders and as we celebrate the Golden Jubilee of the Western Naval Command, it is our privilege to pay our respects to these leaders by re-visiting their actions in the past and re-learning lessons from them.

**“Commodore Srikant Kesnur, greatly acknowledges the contribution of Commander Digvijaysinh Sodha, as the coauthor of the paper and co researcher on this project.”**

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#### About the Author:



Commodore Srikant Kesnur, is an Indian Navy Officer with more than 31 years' experience in the field of operations, training, leadership, HR management and diplomacy. He has commanded two frontline warships and held several other important assignments in the Indian Navy. He holds four master's degrees in sciences and social sciences, a PG diploma in mass communications and is currently pursuing a doctorate in International Relations. He is Presently the Director of the Maritime Warfare Centre Visakhapatnam, Deputy Commandant Naval war college at Goa and as India's Defence Adviser in Nairobi (Kenya) with East Africa as his area of responsibility. He has attended all important courses in the Navy and is a recipient of the Lentaigne medal from the Madras University for the best thesis while undergoing his Staff

Course.

A frequent contributor to several in-house journals and magazines, he has also edited several of these journals. He has also been the Editor of eight photo essay books for the Navy. He has also attended many seminars and presented many professional papers at various forums in India and East Africa. With several training assignments in his career, he is currently visiting faculty at the Naval War College (Goa), at the Indian Naval Academy (Ezhimala), and the southern Naval Command Training institutions. That apart, he has also lectured in public forums and educational institutions in Goa, Visakhapatnam, Mumbai, Pune and Kolkata. His other passions are History, Politics, Cricket, Cinema, Ecological Housekeeping and Trekking.

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## From Dawn To High Noon : The First 25 Years Of Western Naval Command

Rear Admiral Sudarshan Shrikhande (Retd)

#### Author's Note

The paper submitted here is a slightly expanded and moderated version of the 15-minute address given during the MHS Annual Seminar. As such, it follows the format of the address but with references added.

#### Introduction

The task set by WNC and the MHS is to speak on the “Significance and Growth:1968-1993” i.e. the first twenty- five years. So, where was I in 1968? In fourth standard as a nine-year-old, set on joining the Navy but with no idea if my childhood dream would come true! In 1993, I was a young, raring to go commanding officer of INS *Nishank*, when then Rear Admiral Vinod Pasricha, was FOMA and

on whose team I served as Commander War room when he was DCNS and again both when he was CINC East and West. It is, therefore, a privilege to have him chair this session.

My own initiation into the WNC started from joining the venerable first INS *Mysore* in July 1979 and we mainly sailed in the old Krishna that belonged to the SNC and with the Western Fleet. My watch-keeping, longish non-specialist tenures and much of four years as TAS officer of Ranvir were in the WNC. But the Navy was kind enough to appoint me to ships in Visakhapatnam (“Vizag” as the Navy colloquially continues to refer to this nice city) and tenures in Kochi. Finally, my adieu to a great life in our great Service was also from

the WNC when at Sunset on 10 July 2016, my final act in uniform was to be present on the quarter-deck of the same *Nishank* and salute the ensign to the poignant and unforgettable notes of the trumpets.

### **Learning from History as Strategists & Simply as Seamen**

The first twenty- five years of the command span three official histories of our Navy, all written by Vice Admiral Gulab M Hiranandani: *Transition to Triumph 1965-75; Transition to Eminence: 1976-1990; Transition to Guardianship: 1991-2000*. Although one had the electronic versions with which to begin preparing this paper, it was more comforting to refer to the hard copies which Admiral Arun Prakash generously loaned me. In the next 12- 13 minutes, I will try and draw some lessons from history which cover the good as well as the not so good so that we may have something to think about as we look at the challenges of the next 50 years. In fact, in a seminar hosted by the Maritime History Society, it may be useful, to quote what the British naval historian Andrew Lambert has said:

*“Strategy is a practical subject: it produces results that have a practical utility. It also fits into the category of social science, an attempt to develop theories of human behavior from the evidence, but the distinction between history and strategy is a matter not of evidence but of intention. If we try to understand what happened in a particular war or campaign, we operate as historians. If we want to know how those events may inform choices, we act as strategists. The evidence is the same, the questions are different and the ultimate aim is quite distinct. Yet as Aristotle doubtless understood, intellectual activity cannot be confined within specific intellectual categories.*

*While history is concerned with the past it only exists in the present, and is dominated by the age and context in which it has been written. History is a critical intellectual tool, it helps us to organize and render coherent what would otherwise be a mass of undigested experience. Useable strategy*

*can only be derived from the reliable evidence of all contributory factors, not least history, and if the evidence is flawed the strategy is vitiated”*

Lambert has highlighted the essence of what naval and other researchers of the MHS and otherwise ought to be doing. What can we learn from history? What is the contextual relationship of the past with the present? Finally, because strategy is essentially future planning, how can our yesterdays profitably inform our tomorrows?

### **Damp Squibs and Baptism by Fire**

The formation of the Command on 01 March 1968 is briefly mentioned in Chapter 34 (p 374) of the first book. The re-designation of Flag Officer Commanding Indian Fleet (FOCIF) as the Flag Officer Commanding Western Fleet (FOCWF) and the Flag Officer Bombay (FOB) as the FOCINC West (who now was the senior unlike in the previous arrangement) was less important than the good things that happened over the years as the Command grew and had its baptism by fire in 1971.

I have begun to think that the IN could have, under the previous arrangements, had this baptism in the 1965 Indo- Pak war. We could have done much, much more in terms of tactical aggressiveness and sound operational execution in that war. The answers are not clear; the explanations for inaction or deployments for the defence of the A&N islands are issues that today’s historians and strategists need to revisit. From the official histories, the rationale and circumstances for inaction almost bordering on the irrelevance of the Navy are not very convincing. As Arjun Subramaniam points out, skirmishes on a scale larger than Kargil had taken place from early summer. There was time to advance refits, get ready and set the Indian fleet on a more ready and aggressive war- footing. It is also difficult to say why the 1965 naval leadership could not adequately explain the utility of force inherent in the naval instrument for a better political victory.

In 1971 a much better job was done, and yet, one could observe that some aspects of ROE for the submarine arm were self- inflicted wounds. (Hirandani, Book I, p 211-213). Escalation dynamics need to be understood and explained to

political leadership. In most cases, aggressive use of assets yields advantage. Rear Admiral James Goldrick, the Australian naval historian and strategist has said it well about the transition in leadership from some diffidence and excessive caution from the First to the Second World War:

***“The Battle of the River Plate, the Altmark incident, and the first and second battles of Narvik were only the start of a record of calculated aggression, and a sustained demonstration that strategic defence requires tactical offensiveness to be truly effective, and which warmed the hearts of the most discontented from the previous conflict.”*** (Dreadnought to Daring, p 17)

In most ways, the WNC redeemed itself very well but it may be fitting to say that much more could have been achieved in the Arabian Sea through better planning, coordination and simply greater aggressiveness. The official histories do not adequately bring out the strong difference of opinion between the Fleet Commander and his CINC with the former wanting to be much more aggressive and the latter restraining him from pressing home more attacks. Someday, a fuller and more critical appraisal may possibly be done on 1965 and 1971 as more archives become available for posterity and the thrust of historical analyses in India moves from laudatory and hagiographical to utilitarian approaches and so that we may learn lessons as a strategist would.

In a different section, we will hear more about the WNC's many operations but I would like to add here that the readiness and aggressiveness of the WNC seen in 1999 during the Kargil “mini- war” and again during Op Parakram did have indirect political effects that turned out in the nation's favour. During Kargil, I was the Executive Officer (XO) of INS *Delhi* and our ship's company was very gung-ho and we not only participated in the planning of fleet- operations, but were deployed aggressively to strike hard and get the blows in quickly. During Parakram, I was privileged to quietly work on war planning late at night in the Maritime Operations Room (MOC) while attending the Naval Higher Command Course (NHCC) during the day and then as Director INTEG. For both cases, the CINCs are present here (Vice Admiral Pasricha) as is Vice Admiral Sangram

Singh Byce, who was COS during the Parakram stand-off and later CINC. We would have fought robustly, but unfortunately, it didn't come to that!

Let me rewind to early 1983, very within the task of examining the first 25 years. As a young officer in *Rajput*, we were ready for a very distant operation. While we strangely shy away from using the word expeditionary, that was what it was. About 8-9 ships, all with troops and supplies embarked, fully war- outfitted waited for instructions in Goa. With the troops and some part of our ship's companies, led by us YOs, we trained in the hills around Vasco da Gama for any eventuality. Curiously, the Western fleet was without a fleet commander for about six weeks just at that time and my Captain, as SOPA was the OTC. Commodore Kesnur has, in his presentation, talked about operation Lal Dora.

In later years, we showed similar toughness and pro-active readiness during some particular phases of anti- piracy operations. I mention this because these could be a sign that our forefathers had slowly succeeded in educating political levels of the utility of the maritime instrument not only in securing India and in advancing India's interests in the IOR, but laying the foundations for measures like IONS and SAGAR that followed. The Navy came of age!

### **Expanding Interests, Growing Capabilities**

In the very limited time available, I cannot even list out the capacities we acquired and the capabilities we developed from them but the official histories have that information documented. There was much that happened and especially in the 1980s. While talking about these things, it goes beyond this Command to the vision and planning of our forefathers especially what they achieved while serving in Delhi. Their efforts directly and indirectly benefited the WNC and all those who have served and serve now. Their efforts were at once feasible and difficult due to the influence of the British way of building, manning, and operating a Navy and the changes that came in due to the growing induction of Soviet origin equipment. No steps were without challenges but we managed to synthesis them reasonably well. If anything, the negatives were that we began to dilute them as we went along and rotating more people through command of ships and fleets seemed to



gradually put career planning to the fore rather than mission- effectiveness.

Let me, therefore, flag a few points for you to consider as we draw some broad lessons and observations:

**First**, when the WNC was formed in 1968, the Western Fleet was to consist of only operational ships. All ships under refit were to be directly administered by the CINC. I do not know when this changed, the histories are silent on this but it perhaps was not a good step. In any case, this was neither the British practice nor the Soviet way. An operational commander ought not have the responsibility for running ships under refits. Further, from a small fleet staff of those times, today we see a mimicking of Headquarters organization which cannot really be a good thing.

**Second**, we really did well in having longish tenures with a combination of British and Russian manning cycles which were applied, strangely, only to Russian origin ships for some reason! I remember serving in *Rajput* for 25 months in which the CO had a tenure of 23 months. In the minimum 18 months Stabilised Operational Manning Cycle (SOMC), a mass of officers and sailors would join and leave the ship on the same day.

**Third**, of course, this was married to a rigorous type- training system called pre- commission training (PCT) where thorough system and ship knowledge was imparted and acquired. I would make two points here that I think are important.

- (a) The PCTs were thorough partially because they were longish and because instructors had practical experience and were well trained themselves; On-job-training (OJT) was serious business and there were exams and vivas during PCT and OJT. Crew bonding that began in “*Chimadan*” (Russian for briefcase!) rooms continued in wardrooms and mess decks and lasts to this day for some of us and I don’t think I am guilty of wearing rose- tinted glasses.
- (b) The advantages from this gradually eroded with dilution of PCTs, an end to SOMCs, the creeping in of catchy but fundamentally vague slogans for training like “Just in time and just enough”. In some ways, **have we and are we**

trading depth in the false reassurance that width seems to provide? Something to think about?

**Fourth**, our forefathers did well in putting up a sustained fight and arguments for acquiring, owning and operating MPAs. Given that in the UK this was RAF’s part- of –ship and in the USSR, shore- based naval aviation was a quasi-independent subset of the Red Fleet, this was some achievement.

**Fifth**, in acquiring shore- based missile batteries, our forefathers showed a farsightedness in maritime effectiveness instruments that we should have upgraded to longer, faster and more lethal indigenous super-sonic and cruise missiles. Some years ago, we lost time in debating whether a navy should be involved in the business of shore- based missiles. One hopes something is happening about this.

**Sixth**, we were slow in mimicking the Pak Navy’s example of equipping their MPAs with anti-ship missiles way back in 1975. We made efforts at mating them from the mid-1990s but did not persist with the good proposal to fruition. They beat us on ASMs in submarines as well by several years.

**Seventh**, a small step with big results was the setting up of what was then correctly termed Tactical Trainer (Bombay) TACT (B). From the time I was a Sub Lieutenant, when our Captain, later CINC, Vice Admiral Heathwood Johnson used to take us along into the new set up. It was a great way to sharpen procedures and make them second nature. We were the only subs there those days and were not necessarily welcome to some of the directing staff! But they got used to us eventually. Over the years simulators for various activities have come up and one only hopes that COs and others give them due importance and usage. I mention this because elsewhere in the armed forces, there was a somewhat higher level of resistance to inducting simulators including for flying training with a culture of it not being “the real stuff”. The younger officers and sailors present here today have benefited because we have had progressive naval forefathers.

**Eighth**, some criticism seems justified on a pan-Navy framework of analysis that in effect, the Eastern Naval Command (ENC) became a hand-

me- down command with older ships being transferred and almost all new inductions finding berths in Mumbai harbour. Fortunately, it has now been several years since this error has been rectified and it has been both, for the greater good of the Navy and our larger national interests. Navies are about mobility and yet, the “Dondra Head” dividing line syndrome, if I may be permitted to call it that, seemed to have been an impediment for too long.

**Ninth**, and a final point as I have almost run out of time, I remember the period in the fleet and flotillas between 1981 to 1993 as one in which combat proficiency was given deep importance, effort, resources and support of most seniors. We may have sailed lesser those days than what became feasible later on, but the Navy did not lack consorts, targets, ordnance and thinking caps for tactical proficiency. And, once again, this is not rose-tinted nostalgia talking. Good things happened even then!

And, therefore, I will try and leave those still wearing the uniform with a pride we all share in the presence of so many distinguished CINCs, many of whom have had a great influence on me, with three thoughts from history long- past, contemporary thinking in some navies and the “history” of the future as it may unfold.

**The first** is about a shift in maritime warfare wherein platforms and high speed, high precision and ever longer-range ordnance that originate on land will create new opportunities and new challenges. History shows us that change is often discomfiting and disconcerting. But the discomfort of someone else and circumstances besting us will always be worse. Navies ultimately ought to impact on land, but land will increasingly impact on navies at the tactical and operational levels of warfare in ways not envisaged before.

**The second** is about the ever-present challenges and contradictions between deployment and combat readiness. It was becoming clear at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries that the RN’s readiness to take on peer and near peer rivals like

Germany but also, conceivably America, and Russia was low because they were a dispersed, highly deployed Navy policing distant water, in mainly benign and constabulary functions as we now tend to call them. Exercises had become set-piece, convenient and were mainly confined to the Mediterranean fleet. Admiral Jackie Fisher was the one who changed this as 2SL, CINC Med and finally as 1SL. Although quite a few flag officers shared his worries, many opposed him. In our own times, the US Navy is drawing down on deployments and presence as is the Royal Australian Navy about to have its last uninterrupted deployment in the Persian Gulf over 17 years. What navies are trying to once again understand is that fleets maintained in high readiness can be deployed dispersed if the need arises. Networks and surveillance using space- based and other sharing mechanisms enable both, fewer physical deployments as well as the ability to execute actions and take advantage of distributed lethality if needed. However, a deployed and dispersed Navy cannot necessarily lay a claim to combat readiness. ‘We Train as We Fight Because We Fight as We Train’ is much more than a slogan on the wall or a bulkhead.

**The third** thought I would like to leave for today’s Navy is by reminding what Colonel John Boyd said: “What matters most is **People, Ideas, Things**, in that order.” As the environment becomes more complex, people and ideas would matter ever more and we need to develop people accordingly. Among other things, it would need the navy to keep focused on the warps and wefts of our fighting sails. “The long, calm lee of Trafalgar” tends to drive navies towards shoals whereas the changing winds require us to beat to windward.

So, as the Navy’s Commands, all of which went through some “As & As” from 01 March 1968, enter the next fifty years, it would always be of note and benefit to celebrate our past, continue the fine work your and my forefathers in the Service began, learn from everyone’s history and keep our fighting sails in fighting trim.

### About the Author:



Rear Admiral Sudarshan Shrikhande, commissioned July 1980; served in several ships before specialising in ASW & Sonar Weapon Engg from the Soviet Naval War College (1985-88). There upon, he was ASWO & Operations Officer in INS *Ranvir* for four years. He has commanded IN ships *Nishank*, *Kora* and *Rajput*. Appointments ashore include ASW School, War Room Delhi, Director INTEG (Navy's tactical evaluation group) and as Defence Adviser (2005-08) in Australia, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, NZ and Tonga). A 1995 graduate of the Staff College, winning the Scudder Medal; Naval Higher Command Course in Mumbai (2002); the US Naval War College (2003) graduating with highest distinction while winning the Robert Bateman & Jerome E Levy individual prizes and James Forrestal seminar prize.

As a Flag Officer, he has been ACNS (Intel & Foreign Cooperation (2009-10); Chief of Staff/ SNC (2010-2012); ACIDS (Fin Plg) / HQIDS 2012-14); CSO / Strategic Forces Command (2014-15). As Flag Officer Doctrines & Concepts for the IN since November 2015, he requested and retired early on 10 July 2016. He has an MSC (Weapon & Sonar Engg); Msc (Def Studies); MPHIL (Mumbai Univ) and is pursuing a PHD (Mumbai University).

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### Audience Interaction : Session - 1

**Vice Admiral JS Bedi (Retd):** I would like to make two points. The first issue is period 1968-1993, probably signifies the greatest induction period of our great Indian Navy. If we really look at 1968 starting induction of the Kamorta Class, the first five went to Vizag and subsequently we are bringing in ship, submarine, aircraft faster than what the Indian Navy could even mandate. You know, the Kamorta were followed by the ten missile boats, followed by the three Durgs, followed by the five SNF and whole lot of submarines coming in. On the aviation side, we were JL38, we got the TU, we got the Kamov 25 and 28. I think that period probably resulted in Indian Navy forming it's plans of all it would like to grow in future, of course we were labeled as the Russian Navy. And lot of people take a dig at us that the planning of the Indian Navy was done in the Kremlin. The second issue which has not been touched upon by either of the speakers, but it is very very important it's on the human side. 1968 and 1993, unfortunately also resulted into two events in western Naval Command, which people don't like to talk about. We had two uprisings you can may like to call them mutinies, but which also put house in order to how to look at officer-man relationship. And today if our divisional system is what it is today or we look after our men or we interact with them, I think these two events really taught us a lot of things. Thank You.

**Admiral Arun Prakash (Retd):** I like to draw attention to two aspect of the 1965 war specially for the younger people present here that, the Navy did not take any significant role in the 1965 for two reasons I think and that something we need to remember and make sure we don't repeat. One was that the government did not have that time any clear-cut strategy of what they would do if hostilities broke out and what would be the role of each service. Secondly between three services, there was inadequate co-ordination. The Army knew what's happening both Kutch and perhaps in J&K, but the Air Force was informed very late as Air Chief Marshal Arjan Singh says in his book and of course the Navy was quite ignorant of what was going to be happen. The third thing the Government of India issued written order to Naval Headquarters with Navy is no go beyond the 200 miles of Bombay to the North of the latitude of Porbandar. So, these are the things we need to remember who were in Kargil something similar happened, Army went to war, the Air Force was not well informed and little reluctant to participate and of course the Navy had little to do. That time we were well prepared. These are the things younger generation needs remember so that we improve on these things, and then only inter service integration. these are factors that we need to make sure that it will not happen again.

Thank You.

# Western Naval Command into The New Millennium 1993-2018

Rear Admiral MD Suresh

Admiral Arun Prakash, former Cs-in-C, FOC-in-C WNC, Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, thank you for the opportunity at this historic occasion.

Commodore Johnson, on almost every occasion, asked for an hour to present his extensively researched papers at the annual Dilli seminar at the INA, and I was always forced to offer him only 20-25 min. The shoe is now on the other foot. I have just 15 min to cover five significant operations on the western seaboard. So, let me get to it straightaway.

Op Vijay and Parakram were operations conducted in near-war conditions and had desired end states at a strategic level, and the other three, Op Sukhoon, Blossom and Rahat, while having a global impact, were largely tactical in their conduct. I wish we had also covered Op Muffet which dealt with evacuation of combatants under fire from Somalia, which was a unique experience for the WNC. Maybe next time.

With the time available and this being a largely naval audience in a History Society platform, I intend to cover only the common thread that binds, and the principles that governed, the two war like operations, and the three NEOs.

The common thread that winds through Op Vijay and Parakram is the state of play in the Indo-Pak relationship. Successive Pak regimes did not reconcile to the accession of the state of J and K with India. They have repeatedly used the same strategy of pushing in trained, equipped and acclimatized regular army troops in the garb of 'militants fighting for Kashmir', and claim "Pakistan state has nothing to do with it".

Right after partition, in 1948, they pushed army regulars dressed to look like Kabali Lashkars, in to the Valley. The Hindu King was still undecided on the accession. Pakistan hoped that majority Muslims in the Valley would opt for Pakistan. The opposite happened. Indian army intervened effectively when assistance was sought, defended the valley and J & K acceded to India.

In 1965, Pak again pushed army troops dressed as irregulars to create chaos in the Valley. India responded by opening a new front across the IB in Sialkot and the largely undefended Lahore sectors. The war ended in stalemate. Tashkent resulted. But Kashmir remained with India.

Poor staff work during the framing of the Karachi Agreement of 1949 that initially delineated the Indo-Pak boundary was repeated again during framing the Suchetgarh Agreement of 11 December 1972, after the Simla Agreement. The northern extremity of the LoC stopped at NJ 9842 merely stating 'and thence northward'. Pak insisted that the LoC must extend NE ward towards Karokoram Tri Junction. Siachen was critical for India to retain the higher grounds along the Saltoro ridge to dominate the bowl and Karakoram highway below. But both agreements left status of Siachen glacier unresolved.

When int inputs pointing to a failed mission by Pakistan to capture Siachen in October 1983 was obtained, Indian army launched Op Meghdoot in April 1984 and took control of the Saltoro Ridge and adjoining posts. Pakistan's repeated attempts to recapture Siachen thereafter failed every time.

The nuclearization of the subcontinent in May 1998 provided Pakistan the space to implement its strategy of using non-state actors to create instability within India and annexing Kashmir with greater impunity.

Musharraf the army chief, General Aziz Shahid, the Chief of General Staff, Major General Ishaan 10 Corps Commander and Brig Hassan commander of FCNA, were the only four in whole of Pakistan who executed an old 1984 plan of Pak army of occupying 10 odd Indian posts in Kargil that were vacated during winters. As the Northern Light Infantry troops withdrew from their posts in and around Siachen in November and December 1998, they were diverted to occupy the planned 10 posts in Kargil that had been vacated by the Indian army, as per winter norms. When they encountered no opposition, they kept pushing more troops and



finally, this occupation by 3-5000 NLI troops, supported by other arms, including artillery and engineers, grew to 147 posts covering an area of about 170 x 75 kms. As you know, a ratio of 1:10 is required to overcome defences in mountains. They now could threaten NH 1A a vital artery connecting Ladakh to Kashmir. It also supported India's deployment in Siachen. The gang of four expected that this interdiction of NH 1A would force India to negotiate Siachen and maybe Kashmir too.

Convinced that the nuclearization of the subcontinent had eliminated war as a possible instrument of the state, PM Vajpayee was keen to negotiate everlasting peace and the process in end 1998 culminated in the PMs bus ride to Lahore, his visit to Minar-e-Pakistan and the Lahore Declaration on 20 February 1999.

The initial inputs of the presence of Mujhaideens in Mushkows valley on 03 May 1999 was dealt with as a minor, local issue. But as army patrols began to establish contact with the enemy, the severity of the situation dawned. All attempts to retake Pak held positions throughout May was beaten back with severe casualties. The national security establishment finally realised that the intrusion was well-planned, coordinated and the intent was to "change the LoC alignment, to hold territory". The famous telephone intercept between General Aziz and Musharraf was released to the media and Pakistani stand, like on the earlier occasions that the intruders were Kashmiri freedom fighters, collapsed.

The strategic intent of the govt at this stage was to "Limit mil operations to the affected areas, no expansion of the conflict". The govt never used the term 'War', it was called 'War like situation', "intrusion" and such like. Consequently, UWB provisions were never operationalised.

Despite introduction of the IAF, efforts to retake posts in June remained unsuccessful and casualties mounted. By end June, the govt finally agreed to expand the operation beyond Kargil. Op Vajra Shakti for movement of IA strike corps and partial mobilisation of Western and SW Air Commands was launched. The army suddenly achieved a string of successes and several prominent occupied posts were recaptured in end June-early July. The sudden

reverses and likely escalation of the conflict by India, caused Nawaz Sharif to seek US intervention on 04 July 2009. Pak had again used Pak regular troops as Mujhaideens but failed miserably once more.

Kargil Ops was a tactical success for Pak army but a strategic blunder for Pakistan. The spirit of the Lahore Declaration lay shattered. India won the Kargil war, comprehensively, because its war aims were modest, which was "Revert LoC to status quo". However, Pakistan's support for militancy continued unabated.

## **Op Parakram**

Even as the world was recovering from the shock of the September 2001 attack on the US, on 13 December 2001, LeT and JeM terrorists attacked the Indian Parliament. The govt of Pakistan once again blamed Jihadis and the Kashmir problem. The CCS ordered full mobilisation of the Indian armed forces for three months commencing 25 December 2001. This was the first such mobilisation since the 1971 war.

Mutual interference was the biggest concern for WNC and the MNF as Op Enduring Freedom had 90 MNF ships including 4 x aircraft carriers and 10 x SSNs in North Arabian Sea. After mobilisation, the USN was informed "IN would deploy as necessary to progress ops".

There were 2-3 occasions during the Parakram period when it looked like the govt was going to order commencement of ops. But each time, it soon eased off.

Wars are meant to achieve political ends. The same for Parakram was never indicated by the GoI. However, the armed forces gained operational experience in being in a state closest to war and a lot of realistic training at the tactical level was achieved. Commands and units also made up to a great extent, deficiencies and spares that had been outstanding for many years.

The Principle of employment of the Navy during Kargil and Parakram was similar and difficult. WNC was the primary theatre. The Command was required to: -

Deter and prevent any Pak navy action that could

be construed as 'success' akin to the bombardment of Dwarka in the 1965 war that is even today celebrated as Pak Navy Day.

Materially, logistically and technically prepare formations to conduct operations in 'come as you are' state which meant, keeping units honed for battle over a prolonged period, almost indefinitely waiting for the green signal to commence ops. This required units and personnel to be just ready but so calibrated that they do not overstretch. This is easier said than done.

Finetuning maintenance and repair cycles, supporting logistics including ready availability of precious spares, all had to happen under a possibility of immediate outbreak of hostilities.

Governments will remain hesitant to 'declare war'. They hope that the calamitous event may be evaded even at the last minute. This effectively means provisions of the WB that provides for war accounting, speedier financial processes etc are not available. In Op Vijay, the term 'war' was never used but in Parakram, limited provisions of the UWB were operationalised. This is likely to remain unchanged even in the future.

The NHQ directives to the Command was largely the same in both ops which were broadly about assuming highest state of alert, deploying submarines and missile vessels ready for war, operational formations to be brought to appropriate defensive posture, to plan operationalising submarines and select ships under refit, arming of WF and K22 ships, cross deployment of EF ships to WNC, sealift of 108 Mtn Bde for further deployment, etc. Unlike Kargil operations, the CCS during Parakram had also approved grant of field area status and field service concessions for all armed forces units, wherever they were deployed, placed CPOs/PMFs along the land borders and rear areas under Army control, placed CG under IN op control, etc. Admin issues like leave, pensionary and ex gratia awards were liberalised and War System of accounting was adopted.

The operational formations of the WNC remained in fully ready condition and the Western Fleet manoeuvred across the Arabian sea for months, fully loaded and primed for battle. Submarines and missile platforms were sustained wherever

deployed. It demonstrated the ability of the WNC to keep and support its operational units in all three dimensions, poised and ready. This will remain the main challenge for the WNC, to maintain and provide forces battle ready in 'come as you are' mode, for indefinite periods.

The threat posed to Pakistani surface forces and their oil and product movement from the Gulf, were potent and real, to cause serious concerns in Pak govt. This will remain relevant.

The contours of MEZ and draft ordinances to be signed by the President including the notification of the MEZ and Declaration of Contraband, Activation of War Watching Orgn, Enforcement of Examination services and control of fishing, were all drafted for both operations and only the signing by the President remained. In the end, they never got signed in both cases.

The modus operandi adopted in the three NEO by elements of the WNC were also quite similar, honed and refined after every experience. An inter-governmental apex committee comprising govt ministries incl MEA and MOD coordinated events at the national level, IN was required to identify most suitable evacuation and disembarkation ports and establish a sea-bridge between the two evacuating the stricken to a safe airport located close. IAF and Air India were to establish air bridges to India from the safe airport. The affected Indian embassies abroad and the Indian Defence Attaches tied up necessary arrangements with the host countries, their port and airport management authorities, their armed forces and their concerned Ministries. We learnt as we went along but every involved ship put their heart and soul to the effort, which reaped us rich dividends. The challenges were many but similar in the all the three ops. Violent conditions had caused the evacuation. All the three ops required strong force protection measures, weapon arming and loading policies, RsOE, admin and security instructions for coordinating embarkation, transit and disembarkation, medical assistance, logistics including provisions onboard for the large numbers to be embarked etc.

### **Sukhoon**

Hezbollah kidnapped two Israeli soldiers on 12 July

and Israel launched waves of air strikes targeting Hezbollah in South Lebanon. This disproportionate use of force by the Israelis necessitated evacuation of foreign nationals from Lebanon. Mumbai (FOCWF then Rear Admiral Anup Singh embarked), BPutra, Betwa and Tanker Shakti, on OSD to Mediterranean Sea ports, were directed to evacuate Indians from Lebanon. Provisioning was the first action. Sea-bridge was to be established from war torn Beirut, Lebanon to Larnaca, Cyprus, from 19 July to 01 August 2006. The embassies in Beirut (Lebanon), Tel Aviv (Israel) and Cairo (Egypt) were involved. Indian DA in Tel Aviv obtained the necessary clearances from Israeli Defence Forces as Israel had blockaded the port. A controlled evacuation that included all processes covered earlier, resulted. At sunset, the ships proceeded at best speed to arrive Larnaca before dawn the next day, disembarked the evacuees who then embarked the two special Air India planes that formed the air bridge from Cyprus to India.

This process was repeated by each ship four times over a period of 11 days. 2280 persons were evacuated. Sukhoon was terminated on 01 August 2006, when, in the words of the Fleet Commander Rear Admiral Anup Singh, "Every evacuee who wanted to come out, was taken to safety."

### **Op Blossom- Evacuation from Libya Feb 2011**

The Libyan crisis began with a series of peaceful protests which blew up into a full-scale civil war when forces loyal to and anti- Muammar Gaddafi clashed. Libyan govt forces resorted to extreme violence to subdue the rebels. There were about 8000 Indians that required to be evacuated in February 2011. The Navy established the Seabridge for 'Op Blossom' from Tripoli to Valetta harbour in Malta for their air move to India. IN Ships *Mysore*, *Jalashwa* and tanker *Adithya* under the Command of Capt Atul Jain, then CO *Mysore* did the needful. However, only a mere 150 Indians

required repatriation on 10 February and were transported to Valetta for onward air move to India.

### **Op Rahat- Evacuation from Yemen: 31 March - 15 April 2015**

The war between the Sunni government forces of Hadi supported by Saudi alliance and the Shia Houthi rebels supported by Iran caused the GoI to direct the evacuation of Indians from Yemen under Op 'Rahat' on 31 March 2015.

The sea bridge was established between Djibouti and three ports viz Aden, Al Hodeidah and Ash Shihr, on the west coast of Yemen. Air bridge was established to India from Sanaa and Djibouti airports. Evacuation from Sanaa was by Air India planes. C-17s, Air India planes and two passenger liners were to evacuate from Djibouti. Sumitra, Tarkash and Mumbai established the seabridge and escorted the merchant vessels Kavarratti and Corral across piracy-stricken waters to and from Djibouti. Sumitra was the first responder being on PoG. Tarkash and Mumbai joined up with the merchant ships. The operation evacuated more than 3000 people including foreigners. The mission was terminated on 15 April 2015, bringing the curtain down on yet another feather in the cap of the WNC, as a messiah for the hopeless!!

### **Conclusion**

In the golden jubilee of the WNC, the sword-arm of the navy can justifiably look back at its wake with satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment. While the past has been golden, the emergence of China in the IOR with Pakistan remaining as difficult as ever, the period ahead appears even more challenging. With the past as precedence, I am certain the future will only be brighter, courtesy all of you here...and those who will follow you. Keep your edge sharp...Good luck

### About the Author:



Rear Admiral MD Suresh, AVSM, NM joined National Defence Academy in January 1980 and was commissioned into Indian Navy on 01 January 1984. He's Specialized in Navigation and direction and served as ND & Ops Officer onboard INS *Rajput* and INS *Rana*. HE underwent Staff Course at DSSC in 1997-98 He completed NHCC at Mumbai. He commanded INS *Nirbhik*, INS *Vinash* and INS *Shivalik*. He served as Director of Naval operations and Defense advisor to the Embassies of India in Oman, UAE, Qatar and Bahrain. In addition, he also served in Various staff appointments.

On attaining Flag Rank h, he served as FODC, Deputy commandant and CI of Indian Naval Academy Presently he serving as Assistant Chief of Integrated Defence Staff (Int-A) at HQIDS. He was Awarded Nao Sena Medal (D) as Commander War Room At DNO, NHQ. He was also awarded AVSM In January 2018. As Deputy Commandant Indian Naval Academy. He was a member of the first Tri-Services "Around the World Sailing Expedition" on sailing vessel Samudra in 1988-89. The Admiral loves sailing, golf and is a voracious reader of geopolitics, strategy and military technology and enjoys Music and Films.

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## Reflections On A Decade Of Anti-piracy Operations & Mission Based Effectiveness 2008-2018

Commodore Arjun Dev Nair, VSM

### BACKGROUND

#### **Somalia in 2005-06**

Somalia in 2005-06 was the archetypical failed state. Civil war had raged since 1991 and an attempted UN Peacekeeping mission had failed. The Northern province of Somaliland had unilaterally announced independence in 1991 and central region of Puntland proclaimed itself autonomous in 1998. The Islamist group Al Shabaab battled clan-based militias for control of the south around the capital Mogadishu, and declared allegiance to Al Qaeda. Protracted internal conflict had led to widespread famine, human displacement, economic decline and poverty. An extremely young population with 60% of the population under the age of 25 created a large uneducated youth bulge, vulnerable to extremism and crime.

#### **Growth of Piracy**

The absence of a credible Coast Guard and

maritime law enforcement off the coasts of Somalia had seen Illegal, Unreported & Unregulated fishing climb to all-time highs. Local vigilantes started to chase away and ransom foreign fishing vessels with support of coastal communities. The illegal trawlers responded by arming themselves and the Somalis began to look for other more vulnerable vessels, leading to hijacking of merchant vessels plying off the Somali coast.

#### **2008 – The Breakout Year**

2008 saw a spike in piracy attacks with 217 reported attacks as against 51 in the preceding year. On 25 September, Somali pirates hijacked the MV Faina in the GoA, which was a Ukrainian freighter loaded with tanks, grenade launchers, AA guns and assorted explosives. The brazenness of the attack and the nature of the ship's cargo raised the spectre of sophisticated weaponry ending up in the hands of Somalia's Al Shabaab Islamic group. Thereafter, in November 2018, the pirates captured their biggest prize yet – the MV Sirius Star, a Saudi flagged supertanker 300m long and carrying 200



million barrels of Crude oil. In a series of Security Council Resolutions in end 2008, the UN authorised action against piracy in Somalia, including operations within territorial waters of Somalia and on land.

### **India enters the fray**

90% of India's trade by volume and 70% by value is transported by sea, with a large proportion transiting the Gulf of Aden. India also has the second largest seafaring community with close to 100,000 Indians constituting 7% of the world's seafarers. Therefore, the IN had commenced lobbying the government in early 2008 itself to permit patrolling of the GoA, but had met with lukewarm response. It was only in September 2008 when a Hong Kong registered chemical tanker, MV Stolt Valor, with 12 Indian seamen onboard was hijacked that matters came to the fore. After intense media pressure, the government announced permanent deployment of a warship to the Gulf of Aden in October 2008 and INS *Tabar* commenced patrol soon thereafter. The IN has been on station in the GoA continuously ever since over the past decade.

### **Aim**

The aim of this paper is to study and examine the decade of mission-based effectiveness of Indian Navy whilst undertaking anti-piracy operations and highlight the history of the same. The paper covers the period in three distinct phases and takes stock of the benefits accrued and way ahead.

### **THE FIRST PHASE – 2008-11** **IN THE THICK OF ACTION** **2008-10 – Early Skirmishes**

#### **Tabar Sets the Stage**

At 0805h on 11 November 2008, whilst in the GoA, INS *Tabar* monitored a distress call from MV Jag Arnav, an Indian flagged vessel with all-Indian crew, under attack by pirates. The ship's helicopter reported overhead Jag Arnav at 0825h and was in the nick of time to chase away the pirate skiffs that were closing in for the kill on the Indian merchant vessel. This first skirmish with the pirates in defence of an Indian vessel caught the imagination of the Indian media back home and fixed the

spotlight on the IN's new anti-piracy mission. This iconic photo of MV Jag Arnav being escorted by *Tabar* became the defining image of anti-piracy for years to come.

### **Tabar Ignites the GoA**

*Tabar* was not done yet. At 1615h on 18 November, the ship detected a suspicious vessel whose description matched that of a pirate mother vessel reported by the Piracy Reporting Centre at Kuala Lumpur. Pirates were spotted roaming on the upper decks with guns and Rocket propelled grenade launchers. The suspect vessel repeatedly threatened to attack *Tabar* and at 1847h, flashes of gunfire were observed from the pirate vessel. *Tabar* immediately retaliated with overwhelming force at 1853h and set the mother ship ablaze. Interdiction of the mother ship by *Tabar* created waves back home and the media hailed this demonstration of aggressive intent by the IN. However, the initial euphoria was dampened somewhat when it emerged that the mother ship was actually a Thai fishing trawler that had been hijacked by pirates and fourteen innocent crew members were missing after the ship had been sunk. Although *Tabar* was well within its rights to retaliate in self defence to being attacked, the proportionality of its response was open to debate. However, the few negative reports that appeared in the Indian media were soon overshadowed by the much bigger tragedy of 26/11.

### **Mysore Hosts Unwanted Guests**

INS *Mysore*, which had relieved *Tabar* on task, was soon in the midst of action. On 13 December 2008, whilst escorting ships in the GoA, MV Gibe, an Ethiopian flagged vessel, reported pirate skiffs closing in on her. On sighting the helicopter, the boats broke off attacks and attempted to escape. However, *Mysore* had closed within visual range by this time and Commandos from the ship soon stormed the skiffs using the ship's boats and discovered a substantial cache of arms and ammunition onboard. All 24 crew members, including 12 Yemenis and 12 Somalis, were taken into custody.

*Mysore* soon discovered that incarcerating the pirates onboard had created a new set of problems. Warships being severely limited in accommodation

by design, the captives could only be accommodated at the expense of the ship's company. Absence of a legal specialist constrained the vetting of legal documentation and follow up actions. Security issues associated with detaining the pirates onboard were also a cause for concern. Lastly, the Indian government soon discovered that whilst many applauded India's strong actions against piracy, no government was willing to take the pirates into custody. The ship was forced to abandon its escort schedule pending disposal of the apprehended personnel, and it was only after intense diplomatic efforts at all levels that the Yemeni government accepted custody of the pirates. This incident highlighted to the IN the problem of legal finish for apprehended pirates.

### **World Navies Organise for Action**

By the beginning of 2009, the world's navies had also organised themselves for action. The US, EU and NATO stood up three new naval task forces dedicated to combating piracy off the Horn of Africa. A new International Recommended Transit Corridor or IRTC was established in the Gulf of Aden in February 2009, 490nm long and 20nm wide, which was subsequently endorsed by the IMO with all MVs encouraged to transit along this corridor for collective protection. China, Japan, South Korea and Russia followed the lead of India and announced deployment of their warships within the GoA as independent deployers, offering close escort to merchant vessels. In order to coordinate and deconflict actions of the 14 navies operating warships in the GoA, as well as liaise with the merchant shipping community, quarterly Shared Awareness & Deconfliction or SHADE meetings were commenced in early 2009 at Bahrain, with India being an early participant. An online secure chat group codenamed MERCURY soon gained prominence as the Facebook of anti-piracy. Similarly, all multinational aircraft on anti-piracy patrol netted in on a common air coordination net, appropriately termed Baywatch in true aviator glamour speak. This interoperability, which would pay rich dividends in the years ahead, was a direct result of years of exercising together at sea both bilaterally and multilaterally.

### ***Beas & Talwar Blaze a Trail***

Even as the world was adapting to deal with the

new piracy threat, the Indian Navy continued to blaze a trail in the IRTC. In the first two months of 2009, INS *Beas* conducted a particularly aggressive patrol in the GoA, in the course of which she apprehended several dhows and seized substantial quantities of arms and ammunition. In another notable incident in May 2009, an escort group led by INS *Talwar* was transiting the GoA when MV *Maud*, which was the lead ship of the formation, reported pirate skiffs closing at high speed. Visibility was poor at about 2 nm, and *Talwar* scrambled her helo in record time. *Maud* reported that pirates had placed a ladder on her port bow. The IN *Chetak* arrived on the scene in the nick of time and directed strafing fire at the ladder. The ladder was dislodged and both pirates fell off into the sea. This close shave was the nearest that the pirates came to capturing a MV under IN escort, an unbroken record that continues to this day.

### **IN Refines its SOPs**

Based on the lessons of the first few patrol cycles, the IN established a well-set deployment pattern. Whereas most of the multinational forces were deployed in fixed patrol areas across the length of the IRTC, the IN consciously stuck to close escort of merchant ships across the GoA. Promulgation of the IN's Escort timelines, which had been broadcast on MMB in the beginning, was soon migrated to the DG Shipping website for information of the shipping community. The ports of Djibouti and Salalah became well established as the OTR ports. VBSS procedures both by day and night were streamlined and the IN's Rules of Engagement also formalised and made more explicit.

### **IN Extends its Reach**

By the end of 2010, the combination of naval patrolling and best management practices had begun to show results and piracy in the IOR had flattened off. However, Pirate Action Groups were seen to modify their tactics and foray deep into the Indian Ocean in search of targets, utilising mother ships. As the pirates' operational radius increased, the IN deployed assets for EEZ surveillance of Maldives, Seychelles and Mauritius. The IN also increased aerial surveillance of the waters east of 65 deg E, with every reported pirate sighting being

investigated. Ships and aircraft of the IN also commenced surveillance off the coast of the Lakshadweep Islands under a new mandate termed Op Island Watch.

### **2011 – Turning of the Tide**

#### **Hit First – Sinking of Prantalay 14**

On 28 January 2011, a CG Dornier on patrol west of Lakshadweep received a Mayday call from MV CGM Verdi, a Bahama flagged container ship, which reported two skiffs closing in for attack. When the Dornier called overhead, the skiffs broke off attacks and dashed towards the mother vessel Prantalay 14, a Thai fishing trawler that had been hijacked some months previously off the Somali coast. INS *Cankarso*, a newly commissioned Water Jet FAC built at GRSE, on patrol west of Lakshadweep as part of Op Island Watch, was called in to respond. By the next evening, *Cankarso* tracked down the Thai mother ship and fired warning shots across her bows. However, instead of stopping, the trawler returned small arms fire, so *Cankarso* returned limited fire in self defence. Soon thereafter, a direct hit on one of the oil drums onboard set the Prantalay ablaze and personnel were observed jumping overboard. 15 pirates were recovered from the water and taken into custody whilst the original crew of 20 fishermen were also saved.

#### **Hit Hard – Seizure of Prantalay -11**

On 05/06 February 2011, the IN and ICG achieved another success in the vicinity of the shipping lanes close to the Lakshadweep Islands. A Greek flagged merchant ship, MV Chios, reported a concerted attack by several high-speed skiffs 100 nm west of Kavaratti Island, which she successfully evaded through manoeuvring and speed changes. INS *Tir* and CGS Samar, both of which were already on anti-piracy deployment in the area, were diverted to seek and intercept the skiffs. The skiffs were sighted the next morning but sped away whilst opening fire at the Indian ships. The Indian ships tracked the skiffs back to the mother vessel, Prantalay 11, another Thai trawler hijacked earlier off Somalia. When asked to stop, Prantalay 11 responded with gunfire. The resultant firefight was brief and decisive with the pirates soon hoisting the white flag of surrender. 28 pirates were captured in this well coordinated action.

#### **Knockout Punch – Interdiction of Vega -5**

On 11 March 2011, a naval Dornier responded to a mayday call from MV Vancouver Bridge, and located Vega 5, a pirate mother vessel operating in the area. Whilst IN maritime patrol aircraft continuously tracked Vega 5, IN Ships *Khukri* and WJFAC Kalpeni on Island Watch mission were diverted to intercept. On the night of 12 March, about 700nm off Kochi, Kalpeni detected Vega 5 and there was an exchange of gunfire in which Vega 5 was set on fire. The pirates jumped into the water and were subsequently picked up by IN ships. 61 pirates and 13 crew members were transferred onboard INS *Tabar* for passage to Yellowgate Police Station in Mumbai, whilst 80-90 rifles and RPGs were recovered in the most high-profile anti-piracy operation off the Indian coast.

#### **Sweeping Up – Morteza Meets Its End**

On 26 March 2011, an IN TU 142 aircraft on patrol west of Lakshadweep received a distress call from MV Maersk Kensington about a pirate attack in progress. The skiffs were successfully evaded by the MV and the TU 142 reported sighting of pirate mother vessel *Morteza*, an Iranian dhow commandeered by the pirates five months previously. INS *Suvarna*, then on patrol for Island Watch, was diverted to the scene and events panned out along familiar lines, with the mother vessel engaging *Suvarna* with small arms fire and thereafter being subjected to calibrated return fire that resulted in multiple explosions onboard. The crew of the vessel jumped overboard and were subsequently recovered. 16 pirates were captured and 16 crew members including 12 Iranians and 04 Pakistanis were rescued in this operation.

#### **MV Suez Imbroglio**

Just as the IN was basking in well-deserved glory, later in the year came a more sobering incident. MV Suez was an Egyptian freighter that was hijacked by Somali pirates in August 2010, with 22 crew members including six Indians, four Pakistanis and 11 Egyptians. The pirates released the ship in June 2011 and whilst enroute to Salalah in Oman, the ship reportedly came under attack by another group of pirates. At this time INS *Godavari* was on patrol in the GoA, and the crew appealed to her for help, but since the ship could not leave

its escort group, other navies in the region were informed. This created a huge media brouhaha in India as families of the Indian crew alleged that the Indian Navy had abandoned its citizens. To add further spice to the mix, a Pakistani warship *Babur* was the first to reach the Suez and provide her escort. By this time, *Godavari* was ordered by Naval Headquarters to close MV Suez and provide assistance, but once the Indian and Pakistani warships met each other sparks flew. PNS *Babur* manoeuvred dangerously close to *Godavari* warning her to leave the area, and in the process both ships brushed each other. Both countries lodged diplomatic protests, and the Indian Navy was left rueing the absence of a second ship on POG patrol, which could have been spared to provide support in such emergent situations. This had been a demand long voiced by the Commanding Officers during debriefs, but the IN felt unable to comply because of insufficient force levels.

### **Armed Guards Enter the Fray**

It was also in 2011, in an important development affecting the anti-piracy fight, that the International Chamber of Shipping in London, representing almost 80% of the world's merchant fleet, reversed its policy and permitted shipping companies to deploy armed guards onboard merchant ships. This was to have both positive and negative impacts in the years ahead.

### **Indian Government Gears Up**

The capture of 120 pirates off the Indian coast and the MV Suez imbroglio served to focus national attention on the scourge of piracy. A draft anti-piracy bill was tabled in Parliament. Comprehensive SOPs and contingency plans for piracy situations were sanctioned by the CCS, and regularly exercised. Guidelines on deployment of Armed Guards onboard Indian flagged merchant vessels were issued. An Inter-Ministerial group of officers headed by the Cabinet Secretary was created to address hostage incidents arising from hijacking of merchant vessels with Indian crew onboard. Indian Sailing vessels were banned from plying in waters south or west of line joining Male and Salalah. Intelligence mechanisms were streamlined through creation of JOCs. White shipping information exchange agreements with IOR countries were actively pursued. Diplomatic

outreach to negotiate the release of Indians in pirate custody was intensified. At the administrative level, the government approved the Navy's long-standing demand to permit expatriation & repatriation of up to 10 personnel per month to and from the ship deployed in the Gulf of Aden.

## **PHASE TWO – 2012-15** **TUSSLE OVER RISK AREA**

### **Steep Decline in Piracy Attacks**

Piracy Trends in the period 2012-15 showed steep decline in piracy. Pirate attacks were restricted to within 500nm of Somalia and the numbers of attacks had reduced from 237 in 2011 to just 75 in 2012. By 2015, annual piracy attack figures off Somalia were in single digits. MT Smyrni, which was seized by pirates in May 2012, was to be the last large merchant ship seized by the pirates for the next five years. A combination of Best Management Practices by merchant vessels, improvement in security conditions ashore in Somalia, armed guards onboard ships and strong Naval disruption began to show decisive results.

### **BMP4 & High-Risk Area**

The piracy High Risk Area (HRA) was extended in 2010 from 65 degrees East (65°E) to 78 degrees East (78°E) in response to the then rising incidents of piracy off the coast of Somalia. This revision was reiterated in the Best Management Practices Version 4, published in August 2011.

### **Implications of HRA on India**

The excessively large HRA extending within our EEZ had adverse implications for India. The large HRA saw rerouting of merchant vessels closer to the coasts of India, with resultant risk to coastal fishing and marine communities due to permissive ROEs for armed guards. The MV Enrica Lexie incident off Kochi was an unfortunate example, wherein Italian armed guards shot and killed innocent fishermen. The artificially large HRA also saw excessive false alarms causing dilution of military effort. The presence of 'floating armouries' and armed guards without proper regulation in India's maritime zones and adjacent waters was also a cause for concern. The HRA extending upto our coasts also saw increased costs of coastal



shipping due to higher insurance and related charges.

### **India Lobbies for Reduction in HRA**

Commencing 2012, the IN lobbied at the CGPCS plenary and IMO Maritime Security Committee meetings for reduction of the HRA. However, it was in the common interest of the cartel of 15-16 Western European-controlled shipping consortia to keep the HRA artificially large, in order to inflate insurance premiums and war risk allowances to benefit their members. They claimed the lack of credible maritime threat assessment as the reason for maintaining status quo. Accordingly, at the insistence of India, the CGPCS directed SHADE in Bahrain to undertake such a threat assessment.

### **SHADE Creates New Working Group**

Based on the recommendation of the CGPCS, SHADE set up a new Counter-Piracy threat Assessment Working Group in 2013. However, only vaguely worded and general threat assessments ensued. Although the IN engaged in good faith at first, it was soon apparent that the three co-chairs of SHADE (CMF, EUNAVFOR & NATO) were intent on stonewalling and were unwilling to adjudicate against the global shipping industry.

### **IN Presents its Own Threat Assessment**

In 2014, the IN reversed its tack and commenced presenting independent threat assessment of waters east of 65 deg E. The IN began contesting SHADE and Industry assessments and by roping in the MEA, was able to gain the support of littoral countries through aggressive backroom diplomacy at the UN and EU. By 2015, Egypt, Oman and Pakistan also called for redrawing of the HRA, culminating in a special meeting of the CGPCS at New York in July 2015. Finally, after concerted efforts over three years, the shipping industry reduced the HRA in December 2015 back to pre-2010 levels.

### **PHASE THREE – 2016-18**

### **TRANSITION TO MISSION BASED DEPLOYMENT**

#### **Decline in Military Presence**

Decline in piracy levels were accompanied by cutbacks in military presence off Somalia. NATO terminated Op Ocean Shield in December 2016 and EUNAVFOR reported that its deployment would be reconsidered in December this year. AMISOM presence inside Somalia was also under strain due to budget cuts, with the troops likely to withdraw in 2019.

### **Revival in Piracy Attacks**

Piracy attacks, which had almost ceased in 2016, began to show a slight upward trend in 2017. In March 2017, Somali pirates hijacked a Comoros flagged oil tanker, marking the first such seizure of a large commercial vessel since 2012. They later released the vessel without conditions when it emerged that there was a Somali charterer. On 01 April 2017, the Indian dhow *Al Kausar* with 11 crew members was hijacked off the island of Socotra. The vessel was taken to the port of Hobyo and *INS Sharda*, on POG deployment at the time, was diverted to the east coast of Somalia to monitor the situation. Negotiations between the owner and the hijackers resulted in the dhow being released 11 days later.

### **Coordinated Rescue of MV OS 35**

On 09 April 2017, pirates stormed the OS 35, a Tuvalu registered vessel sailing in the Gulf of Aden. The crew locked themselves in the strong room and issued a distress call that was picked up by an Indian Task Force transiting to the Mediterranean on an Overseas deployment. IN ships *Mumbai* and *Tarkash* immediately closed the vessel and launched helicopters to scan the upper decks. Meanwhile, the PLA Navy frigate *Yulin* had also reached the scene and inserted a team of heliborne commandos to clear the vessel, but it emerged that the pirates had already made good their escape on sighting the IN helicopters. Whilst the IN was quick to term this operation a show of international maritime cooperation, China's foreign ministry spokesperson made no mention of India's role in the rescue effort.

### **Mission Based Deployments**

Commencing August 2017, the IN transitioned to a new philosophy of mission-based deployments across the IOR. Drawing on the lessons learnt from

the anti-piracy experience, the IN chose to maintain a near-permanent presence in chosen geographical areas and chokepoints across our primary areas of interest. The IN ships deployed in these areas are fully prepared and poised to respond to all contingencies whilst being perfectly placed to monitor all extra regional forces operating in the IOR. These mission-based deployments have already paid rich dividends in the last twelve months with IN ships being quickest to respond to all manner of operational contingencies.

### **IN Shifts to Free Patrols**

With the transition to mission-based deployments, the Operating Instructions for the anti-piracy patrol in the Gulf of Aden were also amended. The POG deployment now also included PSM off Socotra and a foray into the Red Sea where the ongoing civil war in Yemen had seen stray attacks on merchant ships. Another major change to the IN-POG deployment was initiated in October this year, with the IN ships being tasked for a free patrol in the Gulf of Aden instead of the traditional concept of close escort. This was necessitated by the steep decline in the numbers of MVs joining the escort groups and also to provide greater flexibility to ships to respond to developing situations. In a major shift in operating philosophy, the IN ships were also mandated to undertake anti-drug trafficking operations since the Hashish and Smack drug routes transit the GoA. PSMs off the East coast of Somalia were also included, with the IN ships also planned for escort of World Food Programme ships whenever called upon.

### **POG TEN YEARS ON – TAKING STOCK**

#### **Benefits Accrued**

#### **Exposure to Multinational Operations**

The Anti-Piracy operations that the IN commenced in the GoA in 2008 afforded the first prolonged operational exposure in a multilateral environment to IN ships. This also provided exposure to Best Practices being adopted by the World's Leading Navies as well as those being adopted and refined by the Merchant Marine world. This exposure has significantly enhanced standard operating procedures in actual operational scenarios.

#### **Demonstration of Operational Reach & Sustenance**

Over the years, the IN has witnessed a steady increase in patrol durations to four months. The PoG has afforded the IN ships right avenues to test Op Logistics capabilities and ability to respond to unforeseen Op Log challenges. It is to our credit that the IN is the only Navy to maintain continuous escort cycle throughout the IRTC even in midst of monsoon. Another aspect which has seen substantial gains is the impetus to culture of innovative repairs at sea which has been imbibed by ships deployed for long patrols. This has led to higher self-reliance by ships and the ability to tackle complex defects at sea.

### **Tactical Benefits**

Deployment in the GoA has offered the IN priceless experience of LIMO. The requirement to undertake VBSS operations at short notice has brought in greater focus on Boat Maintenance, Training & Operations. The mission challenges in POG have further led to induction and focus on night vision devices and their operational exploitation. There has also been a marked improvement in small arms handling and training, which is a necessary skill set for such missions. The versatility of the timeless Chetak helicopter in cabin gunning role has been demonstrated time and again. The PoG has also provided exposure to our Marine Commandos on counter piracy tactics in a 'live' theatre thereby streamlining SOPs for the same.

### **Intelligence Gathering**

Regular deployment in the GoA has enhanced our knowledge about Patterns of Life in the West Arabian Sea. Substantial information and vital intelligence has also been gathered about other navies' capabilities, emission parameters and limitations. Units deployed for GoA patrol have also been able to undertake mapping of coastal radars across the region which has further enhanced our knowledge of the regional players. The IN units on GoA patrol have had excellent exposure to PLAN deployment patterns and electronic emission characteristics. The intelligence so gathered has allowed a deeper understanding of the PLA(N) CONOPS.

### **Recognition as Navy of Substance**

The PoG deployment provided great visibility to IN both within India and across the IOR. The early

robust actions by IN in 2008-10 enhanced our image as an aggressive, professional force and subsequent body blows dealt to pirates in 2011 in east Arabian Sea invited widespread admiration. This has resulted in the creation of a favourable impression about the IN amongst the international merchant shipping community. The proactive measures taken to assist island nations in the IOR with EEZ patrolling generated considerable goodwill and as a result the IN has emerged as the partner of choice for IOR littoral states.

### Increased National Multi-Agency Synergy

The Piracy threat forced a whole of government approach to be adopted. Inter-ministerial working groups and multi-agency coordination have now emerged as the new normal. It was notable that the HRA reduction and negotiations for release of Indians in captivity were achieved only through commendable cooperation at all levels. SOPs and Contingency Plans for all piracy and hijacking eventualities have been formulated and exercised as a direct fallout.

### Enhanced Focus on Maritime Law

A generation of young officers have now been

exposed to the intricacies of maritime law and UNCLOS in actual operations. There have also been accretions in JAG appointments at the Fleet level. The Archaic anti-piracy laws at national level were exposed, leading to tabling of new anti-piracy legislation, even though the progress through Parliament has been slower than hoped for.

### Conclusion

The anti-piracy campaign over the last decade has seen the Indian Navy gain increasing recognition across the region as a maritime player of significance. The unbroken patrol by 70 IN ships in the Gulf of Aden over the last ten years has been by all counts an unqualified success. A total of 3840 ships have been escorted and 44 piracy attempts have been thwarted. A merchant ship under IN escort has never been captured by pirates and the IN as well as ICG dealt a decisive body blow to piracy in the region when 120 pirates were captured in four closely coordinated operations in early 2011. The Indian Navy is committed to remaining forward deployed and ready for action across the IOR.

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### About the Author:



Commodore Arjun Dev Nair, VSM is an alumnus of the first batch of 10+2 (X) scheme of the Naval Academy, Goa and was commissioned into the IN on 01 July 1991. A Long ASW specialist, he has commanded IN ships TRV A-72, *Nashak*, *Kirpan* and *Trikand* and was the commissioning crew of IN ships *Nashak* and *Tabar*. Besides doing one anti-piracy tour of duty onboard *Tabar*, he coordinated logistics support for the IN's anti-piracy mission from 2012-15 as the Defence Advisor at the Embassy of India, Muscat. He was also the lead presenter of the IN's threat assessment on the HRA issue at the special CGPCS meetings in Brussels and New York in 2014-15. He is currently the Fleet Operations Officer of the Western Fleet.

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### Audience Interaction : Session - 2

**Vice Admiral AR Tandon (Retd):** C-in-C and Colleagues. Thank you very much, that is a very is delightful presentation but the main thing that is come out to me is nostalgia; and it is important for us to remember what the Navy has gone through from its inception. I will talk of one thing which is 1992, Admiral Chopra Mentioned that 2008 was a

very important year, 1992 was also a very important year for Indian Navy and particularly for the Western Fleet. We have been in isolation because we have been termed as a Russian Navy. So, it was in 1992, that we changed, and there were a series of events which should be noted. First time ever an exercise with the French warship in March, then

an exercise with British warship in April and then we had a visit by Admiral MJ Singh, myself, commanding *Viraat*, Admiral Sinha was a flyer and we were picked up from Goa and taken to land onboard USS Independence operating at that time about 350 nautical miles away. So, we were welcomed onboard a US Ship for the first time, fleet commander and CO of *Viraat* and many who could not know this Admiral Frank B. Kelso II (Retd) who was the Former chief of Naval Operations of the US Navy actually spent a day onboard the *Viraat*. That became first and finally being at Malabar.

Why I'm bringing this out is, that we've got to understand there is lot of history, and many of us very fortunate, who are sitting here, have gone through the mill of Western naval Command, not just as cadets, it's not just as C-In-Cs, but people like me and others here, very fortunate that day we did all three appointments, in the Western Naval Command fleet, Chief Of Staff and C-in-C. So, Western Naval Command is in us and thank you very much for bringing out all those events which happened before our time, before your time, and then after our time. Thank you.



# FROM THE HONOURARY PATRON

## Admiral Arun Prakash (Retd)

I am privileged to be here, this morning, and to have the opportunity of addressing such a distinguished gathering of former C-in-Cs, old ship-mates and the young men & women of the serving naval fraternity. Having served on many units of this Command, and also occupied the 'hot chair' in HQ WNC, albeit briefly, I share your joy and pride at the Golden Jubilee of the navy's 'sword arm'.

However, I stand at the podium, right now, wearing a different hat; that of the Patron, Maritime History Society, which has organized and curated this seminar on behalf of WNC. A few months ago, when I was kindly invited by CinC West to assume this position, I was rather doubtful about my credentials to do so. But then I received a request from Vice Admiral Manohar Awati, the Founder Chairman of the MHS. For me, his request was almost like a command, because my association with him went back to my very earliest days in the navy – he happened to be the Captain of INS *Tir*, which I joined as a Cadet, in mid-1964.

As we deeply mourn Admiral Awati's passing, we also miss his presence; because nothing would have given him greater pleasure, than to be present at this; the 39th Annual Seminar of the MHS and to hear the ***"Saga of Excellence on the Western Seaboard"***, so well narrated, by the five speakers this morning.

We all know of Admiral Awati's 'many-splendoured' personality and his wide and varied interests that included sailing, horse-riding, ornithology and much else. Extremely well-read, he delighted in sharing his wisdom with the younger generation; and his writing skills as well as eloquence were legendary. But all these took a back-seat compared to his two, all-consuming and overriding passions: the resurrection and reconstruction of India's rich maritime past and the revival of seafaring skills amongst India's youth.

By founding the Maritime History Society, he initiated a major step towards attainment of his first ambition. In his own words, "It was a coincidence and a miracle." The 'coincidence' was a rather

disparaging article in the columns of the Times of India of 08 May 1978 that bemoaned the lack of attention to preservation of our maritime heritage. The article read as follows:

*"Here is this great metropolis of India, right by the sea, which has enriched itself by its huge trade across this same sea and yet today there is not a single institution, academic or otherwise which celebrates the city's connection with the sea which enriched it and its citizens...."*

These lines served to plant the seeds of a notion in Admiral Awati's head. He approached the CinC West, Admiral Russi Gandhi with a proposal to start a Maritime History Society in Mumbai. The 'miracle', according to him, was that a skeptical Russi Gandhi accepted his proposal, and sanctioned the princely sum of Rs. 1000 as seed money. Admiral Gandhi was fairly certain that the society would not survive more than a year and stipulated that Admiral Awati would be the Society's first Chairman and his COS, Commodore JG Nadkarni, would be a founder trustee.

The 'miracle', however, continues. The MHS has not just survived, but is a thriving tribute to Admiral Awati's vision, resolve and perseverance; with today's event marking entry into its forth decade. Backed by the dedicated support of WNC, the Society has been resolute in pursuing its founder's aims and objectives. It has organized hundreds of lectures, in and out of Mumbai, published a great deal of literature on maritime related topics, including papers, articles and 21 excellent books. It continues to fund and sustain research on topics related to India's maritime history and nautical heritage. The Command is seriously contemplating the setting-up of a proper maritime museum that can house valuable artifacts and documents scattered in different locations.

The morning's speakers brought out the manner in which the Western Naval Command has consistently played a central role in the maritime affairs of the western seaboard since its creation in 1968. While the 'look east' policy and shift of emphasis to our eastern seaboard were necessary

for India to assume a balanced geo-economic posture, there is no doubt that WNC will retain its key position in the nation's maritime strategy for all time to come.

While my own expertise on maritime history is limited, I would like to share a few historical 'nuggets' that I picked up, from a recent reading of 'In the Wake', the autobiography of Commander Streatfeild-James of the Royal Indian Navy. I do so, mainly for the benefit of younger members of the audience, because they have a link to WNC that goes into 'pre-history' – the period not covered by our speakers.

Some of you may have seen the iconic photograph of young Lieutenant Awati receiving the President's colours, on bended knee. But you may not be aware that the navy was the first service to be so honoured, because at independence, it was the senior service in India. I believe that General Cariappa insisted on having this protocol changed, because it was claimed that not only was the army much bigger, but that, it was also the older service. To bolster this claim, the Army HQ cited its oldest unit; the Madras Regiment raised by the EIC in 1758.

However, if we go back another 150 years, we know that Captain Thomas Best, also of the East India Company, having sailed his squadron of three ships into Surat, presented his credentials to Emperor Jahangir. According to Streatfeild-James, Captain Best was granted the "position of Admiral to the Moghul Emperor", by a royal 'firman', with an annual salary of 5600 pounds and a licence to trade. The Company created a special broad-pennant, displaying two Turkish scimitars, which the 'Admiral to the Moghul Emperor' flew from 1612 to 1857 (when the British crown took possession of India).

Captain Best's squadron, consisting of a few small English warships and a large number of native 'ghurabs' and 'gallibats', manned by Konkani sailors, was perhaps the first organized naval force in Indian waters. Charged with protection of seaborne commerce, the squadron chased away the Portuguese as well as Arab pirates from the Gulf of Cambay.

On 5th September 1612, the squadron was named the EIC's 'Indian Marine', with its base in Surat.

Since this date is accepted as the founding day of the RIN, it would, technically, make the Indian navy 406 years old; i.e. 146 years older than the Indian army.

Streatfeild-James goes on to mention that the area of operations of the Indian Marine and its successors was from the Cape of Good Hope in the West, to Cape Horn on the East. These are waters of what now constitutes the Indo-Pacific region. In 1661, the island of Bombay was gifted by the Portuguese to the British, as part of the dowry brought by Catherine of Braganza on her marriage to King Charles II of England. The King, then, leased it to the East India Company for an annual rent of 10 pounds.

Given the inconvenient tidal range in the Bay of Cambay, the Company decided to move its naval base from Surat to Bombay in 1686. With this, the Indian Marine was re-designated Bombay Marine. It soon became apparent that ship-repair and docking facilities were badly required in Bombay, and the Parsi entrepreneur Lavji Nusserwanji Wadia was called from Surat to establish a dockyard. For the next two centuries, the Wadias built ships, not only for the Company but also for the RN. They ranged from brigs of 20 guns to ships-of-the line of 84 guns.

Another anecdote in Streatfeild-James' book, dated 1937, has a familiar ring to it. According to him, the navy in Bombay was squeezed into the geographical confines of the dockyard and there was a feeling of frustration, not just because of the lack of adequate space, but because a huge adjacent walled enclosure was under control of the army. This was Bombay Castle, the ancient Portuguese fortress, then occupied by the Master General of Ordnance who claimed it to be a vital armament storage depot. Investigation by the navy having revealed that it contained WW I cavalry equipment, possession was handed over to the RIN in 1939.

In 1940, the Castle was commissioned as HMIS *Dalhousie*, and the last nugget I will quote from Streatfeild-James is his poignant reference to the RIN mutiny. Lamenting the shortage of trained officers in the service, he says, "*Many hopes were dashed and more hearts were broken by the treatment received afloat at the hands of makee-learnnee British officers, many of whom could not*

*Speak a word of Hindustani.*" The opening of Castle Barracks was to mark the first real signs of disharmony in the RIN that eventually led to the mutiny; an event that, apart from its historic significance, also has many leadership lessons.

Coming back to Admiral Awati; he, too, like most of us, was dismayed by the failure of our countrymen to acknowledge India's intimate linkage and dependence on the oceans - due to the malady termed as 'sea-blindness'. He realized that the roots of sea-blindness lie in the indifference of Indians to the reading as well as writing of our own history.

Most accounts by Western historians insist that the world's earliest seafaring activity was undertaken in the Mediterranean basin by ancient Greeks, Phoenicians and Romans, and rarely mention Arabs or Indians. Indian historian, Sardar KM Panikkar, however, takes issue and asserts that, because of the steady monsoon winds, the earliest oceanic activity took place in the Indian Ocean, not in the Mediterranean. He provides tangible evidence that ancient Indians not only build sturdy ships but also possessed outstanding seafaring and navigation skills that enabled them to undertake long ocean voyages. From 3000 BCE onwards, Indians were sailing to Africa and Mediterranean ports in the west and right across SE Asia (dubbed 'Suvarnabhumi') to the East.

By the early 11th century CE, however, Indian maritime power went into rapid decline, due to a prolonged naval conflict between the Sumatra based Sri Vijaya Empire and the Chola rulers of South India. So, in 1498, when the Portuguese adventurer Vasco da Gama dropped anchor off Calicut, there was no Indian ruler with either a navy or a strategic vision for defending India's shores against foreign interlopers.

If a leadership-deficit was the primary cause of India losing its independence to Europeans, neglect of technology was a crucial contributory factor. 15th and 16th century Europe had seen spectacular breakthroughs in the fields of shipbuilding and navigation. However, it was the European superiority in weapon technology that tilted the balance in their favour. A few European warships carrying a battery of bronze cannon could repulse massed attacks by ill-armed native *ghurabs* and

*gallivats* in our waters.

Today, the IN has provided a maritime vision through its Doctrine and Strategy documents and attempted to bridge the technology gap through its shipbuilding endeavours. However, there continues to be a distressing lack of maritime consciousness amongst our ruling elite as well as common people. It was this serious disconnect with the seas that drove Manohar Awati to mount a campaign for revival of India's lost maritime tradition.

Having read about the American sailor, Joshua Slocum's epic solo circumnavigation of the globe, in 1895, he cherished a dream of seeing an Indian sailor emulate this feat. He felt that not only did we owe this to our seafaring ancestors but also, that such a dramatic achievement would also re-awaken India's lost maritime spirit.

Having set his mind on 'Mission Sagar Parikrama', Admiral Awati not only raised funds, he selected the right man in Dilip Donde, identified the boat design and found a builder in Goa. The rest, as they say, is history.

By launching young persons like Dilip Donde, Abhilash Tomy and Vartika Joshi, with her crew of six gallant women, on voyages of global circumnavigation, Vice Admiral Awati demonstrated that Indian youth, inspired, motivated and properly trained, are the equals of the best sailors worldwide. It is from the ranks of bold men and women such as these, that India's new navy is being created; soon to become a significant force in the Indo-Pacific.

Before I conclude, I must mention the passing of Admiral JG Nadkarni, former CNS, in July 2018. The sad demise of this stalwart was the first blow dealt to MHS this year, to be followed by Admiral Awati's demise last month. A founder trustee, Admiral Nadkarni took over as Chief Patron from Admiral Awati in 2002 and remained a staunch pillar of the Society for 14 long years, till indifferent health led him to resign.

As we mourn their passing, I end with a solemn tribute and expression of deep gratitude to both, Admiral JG Nadkarni and Vice Admiral MP Awati, for their invaluable contributions to the cause of India's maritime history and the creation of MHS.



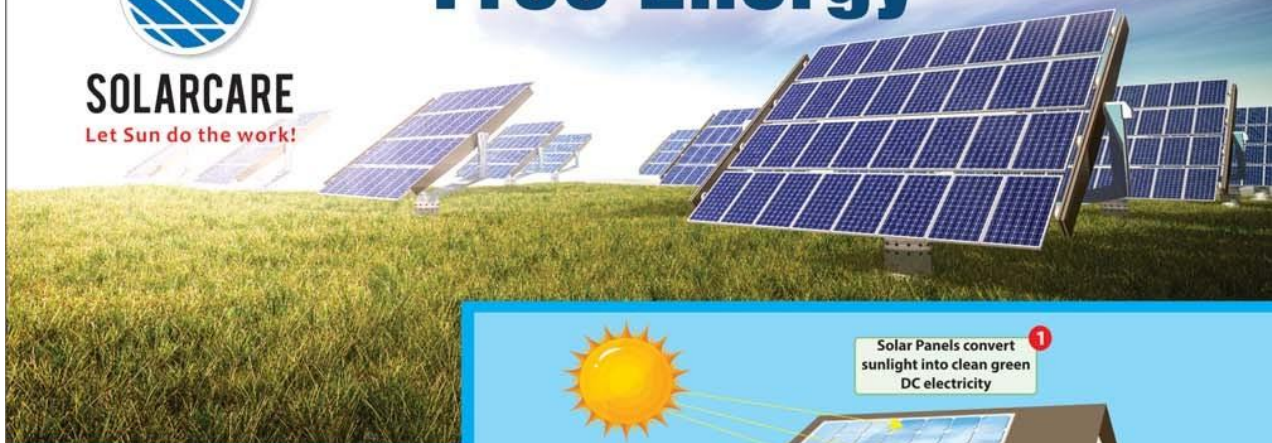
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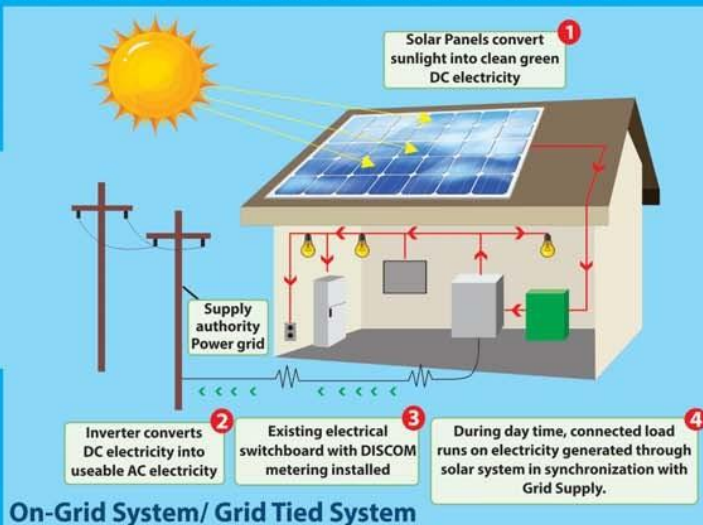
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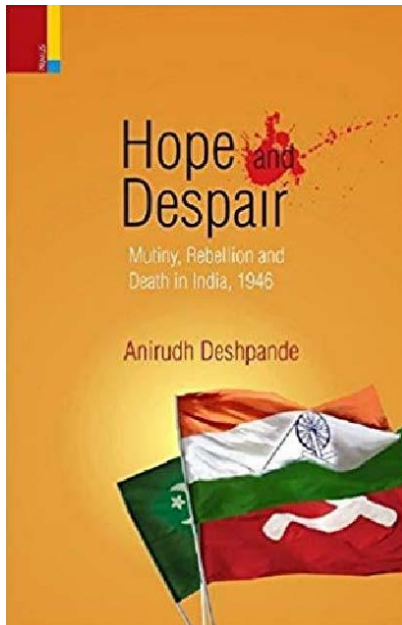
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# BOOK REVIEW

## WAVES OF ASPIRATION CRASH ON THE SHORE OF NATIONAL AMNESIA NAVAL UPRISING 1946

Commodore (Dr) Odakkal Johnson



*"Hope and Despair Mutiny,  
Rebellion and Death in India, 1946"*  
By **Anirudh Deshpande**, 2016,  
Delhi, Rs 950/-, ISBN 978-93-84082-87-1

Anirudh Deshpande is an Associate Professor of History at the University of Delhi. A former Fellow of the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, he has undertaken many studies in Colonial and period history. The book **Hope and Despair: Mutiny, Rebellion and Death in India, 1946**, is presented by him in the genre of a well-researched thesis. The introduction itself reveals, a long-standing period of academic enquiry of this multi-faceted account. The event lasted less than a week and was set across Bombay, Karachi, Calcutta and a few other locations, over a year prior independence. Apart from recent nostalgia and few rare poetic and cinematic references, Insurrection 1946 is a classically forgotten page in Indian History.

The preceding neglect renders this book its

importance. Pure researchers would be delighted to lap up, a comprehensive political, demographic and environmental study of the mutiny. Previous and recent narratives, of this naval mutiny, have titled the incident, as an uprising, or even an insurrection (Arvind Rajadhyaksha and Vivan Sundaram, February 2017). This work refers to reams of archives, including those from the National Archives of India and long period of research (starting from BA History studies by the author). The story does get influenced by Marxist scholarship, ranging from Sumit Sarkar to Sekhar Bandyopadhyay. In many places, young naval ratings have been given an extrapolated revolutionary zeal, similar to the cadres of Indian National Army. The author states, *"It was evident that the Marxist interpretation of the Naval Revolt was radically different from the official one to which conservatives like my father subscribed."* (*Preface pg xviii*)

On a personal note, as a reviewer, I have tried to avoid excessive influence of what my father, a participant of the uprising shared over a lifetime. Encouragement arrives from recent efforts to restore the place and significance of the Naval Uprising 1946 by quite a few authors, publishers, artists and classic historians. Anirudh Deshpande's book therefore becomes a fitting read, as a piece of evidence for students of Indian History, to sketch a part of the canvas of the very origin of Constitutional India.

There is a fair amount of human angle interest, as related from the saga of BC Dutt, based on his work, "Mutiny of the Innocents". This raises the disdain of bureaucratic process, contrasted with personal dilemma, faced by participants like BC Dutt, before and after 1947. The author painfully describes this : *"After independence, Vallabhbhai Patel, obviously in deference to the popular opinion on the Naval Mutiny, stated in Lok Sabha that the*

*accused and discharged ratings from the RIN would be re-instated in the Indian Navy if they so desired. However, ground realities were different and this was soon realized by optimistic men like BC Dutt who took Patel's assurances at face value. .... Dutt applied officially to the Navy for reinstatement but received no acknowledgement. Then, in an act of frustration and desperation, he wrote to Nehru only to receive a reply from his private secretary that his 'letter had been forwarded to the Defence Minister for appropriate action.'*” (**Introduction pg 6**)

The author presents the story of Royal Indian Navy in terms of lack of its organised growth in the run up to World War – II. The failure to Indianise and priority given to RNVN, left much angst, among Indian ratings, towards the completion of the war. This echoes with reviewer's own research (Timeless Wake: The Legacy of the Royal Indian Navy during World War II, 2013, Mumbai, Maritime History Society). Indian sailors gave heroic and professional account of themselves in World War II in many theaters. Yet, their maritime zeal and military pride declined after the war. There was attitudinal conflict between British Officers and Sailors of the Colony!

To trace the thinking and motivation of the participants of the naval mutiny 1946, the author examines in depth, the recruitment process followed by the Indian Armed Forces, before and during World War II. He highlights, the existing misconceptions, of those who heard about the Lashkars and Sepoys of World War I. *“Between the two World Wars, the colonial state neither had the money, nor the inclination, to improve the Indian Soldier's working conditions. The Jawan was essentially a traditional peasant in a modern uniform drawn from the professional 'martial' classes of India who served for a limited number of years in single-class companies and mixed-class battalions.”* (**Chapter 1, pg 14**) Terming the process as obsolete, the author goes into elaborate details, of recruitment and motivation to join the military. Through this he brings up the painful reality faced during the subsequent demobilization.

Anirudh Deshpande devotes only around forty pages (out of 122) in two chapters (out of three) to the actual insurrection story of 18-23 February 1946. This is primarily anchored in Bombay and

Karachi. An empirical narrative, it is interspersed with ideology and poetic zeal. In the origins of the discontent captured by the author, there is repeated stress on influence of 'Quit India' as catchwords towards a wave of mass nationalism! *“This mutiny, which became a mass revolt involving thousands of Indian civilians in Bombay, Karachi and other Indian cities, expressed the surging popular nationalism in India during the anxiety ridden spring of 1946.”* (**Chapter 2, pg 55**)

The actual events in Bombay, recounted from pages 56 through 62, are then related to the many political and economic developments that were happening in the same period. What is commendable, is the original narration of events at Karachi, presented in a holistic account. That component tends to be neglected in other similar renditions of the Uprising. Those accounts give a lesser or greater importance that the event had on our Independence struggle. At one place, the author shares, *“The news of the mutiny on HMIS Talwar in Bombay, reached the ratings in the shore establishments of Karachi through newspapers on 19 February. Given the atmosphere prevailing in the naval establishments of Karachi, this news was received with 'tremendous excitement' and suppressed jubilation' by the Indian ratings.”* (**Chapter 3, pg 74**) What is also reiterated in the book is that for more than 100 years there were a string of sporadic mutinies and rebellions in portions of the colonial military. Naval Uprising 1946 may well have been the proverbial last straw that hastened the otherwise planned transfer of power in 1948. Was this so? The author leaves the query as an unstated possibility.

The book does not examine naval custom or tradition and the expected apolitical thought of naval ratings. There are however, references to influence of the times including revolutionary zeal from INA as also Marxist leanings. The story does not still lead the reader to conclude that the participants of the Naval Uprising were political or that they had any post-event aspirations of revolutionary leadership.

Fuelled by discontentment, triggered by genuine grievances and frustrated by lack of empathy, the actions of the naval ratings described in the book show a professional resolve to achieve what they considered to be their genuine mission. Journalists

who visited HMIS Talwar did report a charter of demands given to Rear Admiral Arthur Rullion Rattray on his visit to the establishment. The mutineers by 21 February 1946 had taken over HMIS Narbada among other ships and manned the guns even as British Army contingents poured into Bombay to quell the rebellion with brute force. *"The next day the Royal Air Force threatened the rebel led ships by flying a squadron of bombers low over Bombay harbor."* (**Chapter 2, pg 61**) The book captures a key extract of the Flag Officer Commanding Royal Indian Navy (FOCRIN), Vice Admiral JH Godfrey's threat, *"...To continue the struggle is the height of folly when you take into account the overwhelming forces at the disposal of the Government at this time, and which will be used to their uttermost even if it means the destruction of the Navy of which we have been proud."* (**Chapter 2, pg 61**)

The story goes on to focus that through the night of 22-23 February 1946, it became clear to the mutineers that the national political leadership across the spectrum had already shifted the narrative to justice and fair treatment after the expected surrender. The saga of the final surrender and the visible despair of the participants of the insurrection is a must read.

The uprising rose and fell with the protagonists subsequently lost in the waves of time. The existing degree of its imprint is perhaps due to some resonance that the ratings found among the civil populace in Bombay and Karachi. *"The inquisitive Karachi crowd was drawn to the Mutiny when the ratings in Manora rebelled. On 22 February, the firing between the British troops and Hindustan transformed the crowd into an active force."* (**Chapter 3, pg 80**) A very pointed observation by the author is, *"significance of urban crowds in modern India, and the political lessons drawn from*

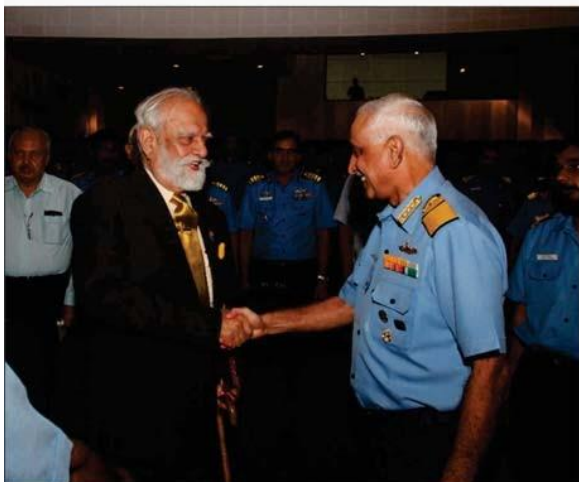
*their volition, will be lost to historiography and posterity if the year 1945-46 is treated as just another year in the 'transfer of power' in India..."* (**Chapter 2, pg 72**) If the book inspires further examination and enquiry, as being done by a couple of researchers that I am aware of, it will succeed in its purpose. It certainly is a good scope of study and removed from the oft repeated hagiographic narrations.

Memory loss was certainly observed among the rulership of the period and seemed to continue post-independence. *"The exact number of naval mutineers killed in Karachi and Bombay remains unknown but at least more than a dozen may have been killed in the battles fought between the naval establishments, Hindustan and the British Army. It was only in 2002 that a memorial to those who died in February 1946 was erected in Colaba, central Bombay. (... ..) The point is ... to interrogate the silence which shrouds that event seventy years after it occurred."* (**Conclusion, pg 107**)

In summation, "Hope and Despair", is actually what title suggests. The monograph is an academic presentation to the readers about an up and down experience of a number of aspirational people who were knitted together by their choice to join the Royal Indian Navy. The hope was of employment, finding an identity and well-being in a military atmosphere, as a dream by thousands of ordinary working-class people, from Indian villages and the hinterland. The recruits found themselves fighting a war for their colonial masters in distant lands. When the job was done, they crashed headlong into a wall of despair, in the rude and ruthless form of demobilization. This disillusionment, in a nation at the tiring end of struggle for independence, left more questions and answers even while on the political side, a new nation was being birthed.



## Sail goes on.....





# Jewel from the Past

## INDIA AS A MARITIME POWER IN THE TWENTY FIRST CENTURIES

LATE VICE ADMIRAL MP AWATI (RETD)

Taken from the paper presented by Patron Emeritus of  
Maritime History Society at Annual Seminar of 2001

Not so long ago an essayist in the British weekly 'The Economist' wrote, "Geopolitics is a puffed-up word, one of those polysyllables that actually means something basic the maneuverings and counter-maneuvering of the world's big powers... nobody can foresee what is going to happen to Big Power politics in the next 30 to 40 years". Most Indians would like to see their country not merely as a pawn in the big power game but as a player in the game. Can India come up to the expectations of her citizens in the new century? I will attempt an answer to that question.

There is a saying in Marathi which could freely translate into English, "A child shows its future in the cradle, with its feet". It is synonymous with the English proverb, "The child is father to the man". In the last fifty years India has shown little inclination to joining the Big League despite the opportunities which have come her way, in a show of false humility and in mouthing Gandhian principles in conducting her international relations. I would, therefore, be stretching my neck a bit if I were to give India the benefit of the doubt and predict that India may be poised to play in the Big League in this century, not least because of her size, geography, potential for economic and military power. Her present fractious politics may give way to a more orderly political regime because the system remains intact and strong. In my view Indian politicians remain the single most intractable obstacle in India's way to the status of a global player in the coming years. They have more than fulfilled the dire prediction which Winston Churchill had made for them in the British Parliament in 1946 during the debate on Indian Independence Bill. Without an iota of doubt, they have put the country in her present parlous state. They have not stopped her in her tracks thanks,

mainly, to the sensibilities and the eclecticism of her intellectuals and of the common Indian and her incomparable military. Unfortunately, like the poor, the politician will always be with us because the system by which we have chosen to be governed, and I do believe it is the best system in the circumstances, cannot do without them. Hopefully, they will change with the learning process, become less corrupt and more conscious of their duty to the country and her people. It is a hope. Of the intellectuals and the common man, I do not know enough. But I do know the Indian military, having been a part of it for close on forty years, during its difficult formative years and the years of its victories in the field. Let me, then, come to the second factor which could prevent India playing her appointed role in world affairs in the coming century. She has to be accepted as a power, both economic and military, by the five or six members of the Big League. That acceptance will surely depend on the perception of India by the Big Powers as a country with the ability and the will to project her power beyond her shores, her ability to use sea power in support of land battles if necessary, across the sea, should her national interests so demand. On the question of projection of power, India's history is not at all reassuring. Projection of power abroad, in this century, will depend, mainly, on the country's maritime capabilities, the capacity of those elements which go to the formulation of maritime power, the navy and the coast guard, the mercantile marine and its fitness-to carry a reasonable volume of the country's overseas and coastal trades, the health of her shipbuilding industries, the ports and the quality of the infrastructure which serves them, her involvement in oceanographic exploration and research with growing reference to 'Inner Space', her ability to exploit the resources of the ocean for

her own benefit and for the benefit of mankind, the credentials of her scientific community in research and developmental work and its results relevant to ship construction, ship propulsion and weapon packages which must be contemporary in design and performance. Therefore, before assessing India's status as a maritime power in this century it may be useful to take a close look at India's maritime past to see if it has any sign posts in it to the future.

Since 1947 India's maritime record can best be described as halting. The intentions of the political leadership and the efforts of the maritime establishment notwithstanding, Indian maritime power is still only in the making, with large areas in her maritime activities stalled or becoming non-starters because of a lack of both awareness of maritime affairs and an absence of political will for developing the nation's strength at sea. The excuse of a lack of funds so often claimed by those in power, has little basis to it.

It is no longer in dispute that man put out to sea along the shores of the North Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean, almost concurrently. About how and why the event came about, when it did, is still in the realms of conjecture. The first venture would have been upon a log or a reed contraption over open beach for food gathering. The pressure on people to put to sea for food could not have been too great along the Indian littoral given the relatively prosperous agricultural hinterland. The situation was radically different along the barren and inhospitable coast of the Hadramaut backed by an almost treeless desert where almost nothing grew. The littoral people had perforce to turn to the sea, often tumultuous and occasionally malevolent, for their sustenance. Here, on this coast, a frail dugout or a bundle of reed rudely fashioned into a boat would hardly do. Fishermen had to become seamen and they had to craft seaworthy boats if they were to survive. Thus, the Omani and the Yemeni Arabs of the Hadramaut, who fished along the coast became true seamen of the Indian Ocean and built stout fishing craft with good sea keeping qualities. In time these crafts developed into the matchless 'Dhow' which has scarcely changed its shape or its sailing rig over two millennia. These Arabs in their dhows learnt the art of ocean navigation and the haven finding art in due course, roamed the North Indian Ocean

and further afield in search of trade as livelihood. By the tenth century they had become the intermediaries between India and Europe buying cheap on the west coast of India and selling dear in the West, along the Red Sea and the Gulf of Suez. Here the fabulous goods of India would be shipped by Venetian hands to satiate European palate and to meet the huge demand for fine Indian cloth. By now the Arab had embraced the desert religion, Islam. The strange Indian social stigma attached to crossing the sea surfaced about this time. This aided the Arabs in his ventures, enriching him, even as the Indian seagoing tradition declined. Indian built ships were too flimsy with their stitched hulls built to strange specifications enjoined by the treatise, 'Yuktikalpatarut'. Iron fastenings were prohibited by this bible of shipbuilders. It classified shipbuilding timbers according to their castes, based on their alleged quality, borrowing the concept from the prevailing 'Varnashram Dharma' espoused by the sage Manu. Rather than promote good shipbuilding practices, this treatise helped to strengthen superstitious and ritualistic practices among shipbuilders and ship owners. By the tenth century Indian trade was completely in the hands of the Arabs. Even so, it cannot be denied that Indian ships of considerable size and seaworthiness were built along both our coasts. But Indian maritime enterprise had been hobbled by irrational social customs. On the other side of Asia, in China, great strides were being taken in shipbuilding ocean navigation. The junk was being built to higher specifications to withstand heavy punishment, with its water tight transverse bulkheads. The balanced rudder had been invented and the slatted bamboo four sided sails on four stout masts gave the junk great maneuverability with its easy to operate, balanced rudder. The magnetic compass and the shipboard cannon, too, had come into general use by the twelfth century, making the junk a formidable opponent at sea. Meanwhile, India's maritime technology had remained moribund under supine littoral rulers and complacent merchants. The Arab was there to do their bidding. He became the welcome and indispensable intermediary between India and the west and, eventually the very rudder which steered the ship of Indian maritime history along a course which brought India into contact with Christian Europe. It was the arch enemy of Islam. It had mounted a titanic effort to outflank Islam in an effort to reach the lucrative markets of India. The

Portuguese arrival in India on Sunday, 20 May, 1498 pushed Indian history along a strange and an unexpected path.

As a pointer, perhaps, to what may await us in the future it would be useful to take a look at these intrepid Portuguese explorers who had braved incredible hardships with courage and persistence to reach India in what can only be called flimsiest vessels by today's standards. In a spin off from this truly gigantic effort they discovered Brazil. When one realises that at the end of the fifteenth century Portugal was a small, impoverished nation of less than a million souls, tucked away in the southwestern corner of Europe along the rocky and stormy Biscayne coast, with nothing going for her except her intrepid seamen and a determined king, the scale of her achievement becomes truly astonishing. What kind of people were these Portuguese?

There is a revealing description of the Portuguese at the turn of the fifteenth century by Lloyd Brown in his book 'Story of Maps'. He writes, "Several factors combined to make Portugal the greatest maritime and colonising power in Europe during the period of discoveries, 1414-1499, Its people comprised a mixture of Moors and Mazarabs in the south, Galicians in the north, Jews and foreign Crusaders everywhere. The Portuguese had fallen heir to the best and the worst qualities of mankind; the most highly developed culture was combined with the most primitive barbarity. The result was a people of unusual courage, ingenuity and greed". They became superlative seamen and navigators out of stark necessity and technical accomplishment. The crusading spirit was still strong in Portugal. In Prince Henry the Navigator with his powerful and rich Order of Christ they found a leader who combined in him the foresight and the determination to find a sea route to India and consecrate the maritime expansion of Christianity.

These, then, were the Europeans who burst upon India at the close of the fifteenth century. With their superior maritime technology, they quickly established their hegemony in the ocean by capturing the key exit and entry points from Malacca in the east to the Cape in the west, Hormuz at the entrance to the Persian Gulf with their capital in Goa. A regime of passes called 'Cartazas' was

enforced without which no Indian vessel could trade in certain specified goods in which the Portuguese desired a monopoly. Soon the Indian Ocean became a highway closed to everyone other than those of whom the Portuguese approved. It became a 'Mare Clausum' against the accepted tenet of freedom of the high seas, 'Mare Liberum' in vogue in Europe and so long the tradition Indian Ocean. The littoral kingdoms and principalities could only watch helplessly. There was, for almost a century, spirited opposition from a family of hereditary admirals of the Zamorin of Calicut, the Kunjali Marakkars. In the end they lost out to a more efficient maritime technology. The Portuguese had succeeded so completely in their strategy to control the Ocean and its trade that the Europeans who followed them into the Ocean in the following centuries used the same strategy of controlling the 'choke' points into and out of the Ocean. The English, in addition, captured Aden which had eluded the Portuguese and the Dutch. Today, the Americans apply the self-same strategy, only they do it from distant Diego Garcia in what is still known as the British Indian Ocean Territory. The extremely long reach of their reconnaissance capability and their maritime and air forces make this possible. Even so, they need the support of 'friendly' countries to let them the use of their territory in the event of a crisis developing anywhere in the Indian Ocean. The pressure which can be applied by extra Indian Ocean powers to obtain a conclusion was all too apparent during the recent crisis in Iraq. The crisis had little to do with the UN resolution on weapon inspection. It had everything to do with the US perception of its role as the lone super power. Its word and wishes, like those of the Portuguese five centuries ago, must prevail simply because it has the power and the will to enforce them.

European ship technology and shipboard armament were far superior to those the Indians could field. Efforts by some littoral kingdoms to acquire these technologies were unsuccessful. The English chose to part with these technologies for their own purpose in the eighteenth century in Bombay and later on, the Hooghly, into the hands of Indian master shipwrights. They built some fine ships for the British Royal Navy and for the East India Company. But with the coming of steam and iron hulls, the British withdrew their technologies from these Indian yards. Not until the British were forced

by the demands of war production in the 1940's, was modern shipbuilding technology available in India, to a limited extent. A farseeing Indian entrepreneur, Walchand Hirachand laid the foundations of a truly national shipbuilding industry in 1944 when he established the Hindustan Shipyard in Visakhapatnam long before the Asian Tigers were even heard of. Today, they and Japan lead the world in shipbuilding while India anguishes, despite the head start it had received, in one of the prime attributes of maritime power.

By the turn of the nineteenth century the English had expanded the bridgeheads they had secured on the coasts to conquests inland, as first Moghul and then the Maratha power crumbled. During the buildup phase, the strategy employed by the English on the west coast is well explained by the historian Edwardes in his book, 'The Rise of Bombay'. He tells us, "While the Angrias and the Marathas were at the zenith of power, the secret of our power lay in the fact of our unity, of our being a united community....the keynote of the Company's policy was the necessity for holding aloof from the hostilities until they should be prepared to stand alone, to temporise, in fact, until the blighting effects of the past years had been eradicated... but having decided which of their enemies were likely to prove the most troublesome, the representatives of the Company endeavored to, as far as possible, keep on good terms with them and whenever it became necessary to side with one party or the other to give such assistance to the weaker so as to prevent their being too speedily overwhelmed". It was a shrewd and clever policy which is reflected today in the USA's policy towards India and Pakistan, which has changed little ever after the 9-11 attacks by Al-Qaida terrorists on New York and Washington.

With the exception of the great Shivaji, no ruler along the west coast, not excluding the Zamorin of Calicut, really understood the importance of sea power to their realms, in pre-modern India, when the country was already in contact with the Europeans who had come to India by sea and were busy enriching themselves by the dint of their sea power. The Angres, both father and son did their best to promote Maratha control of the coast between Kulaba and Goa. They had little backing from the central authority in Pune. Indeed, the Third Peshwa, Balaji Bajirao (Nanasaheb) joined forces

with the English to destroy his own admiral Tulaji Angre at Gheria in 1756. Gheria casts its long shadow on the Confederacy whose armies were rooted at Panipat a mere four years later, in 1761. It never recovered from these setbacks at sea and on land. Verily did the Maratha Minister and Statesman, Ramchandrapant Amatya say:

``Deejceej SkeÀ mjeleb\$e jep'eebie®e Deens

p³ee®es Deejceej p³ee®ee meceg7, p³ee®ee meceg7 l³ee®es jep³e"

Militarily Hindus (Indians) have always been weak at sea despite the proximity of the sea to them, at least to those who ruled along and in proximity of the coasts. This is a paradox which does not seem to yield to a rational explanation. Perhaps they did not need to cultivate the sea because they had everything going for them on land, their God-given, fertile country. Perhaps too, the religious fiat against crossing the sea, certainly after the eighth or ninth century, made them sea unfriendly. None of the littoral states developed a truly sea going fleet as, for example, the Chinese did. A fear of the sea seems to haunt the Hindu mind which was why the Arab established himself so firmly in the trade of the west coast, in the first place. Our backwardness in the maritime environment is a fact of history. In remedying these defects, it does not help to deny it with nebulous proofs from legends and stories which are not history.

The signposts of the past, then, do not appear to be supportive of India developing into a fully-fledged maritime power in the near future. In the fifty-four years since 1947 our progress at sea has, at best, been halting. There has been no recognisable national security policy, leave alone a policy for maritime security. Our politicians have shown small inclination to understand the 'Concept of National Security'. "Security in its most elementary form is to be understood as the well being and prosperity of the individual, the smallest building block of society, and then move up the societal ladder to encompass the collective, be it tribe/ clan, a city state or a modern nation state". Security is a factor of power, the power to ensure security. In today's world this has meant military power. The inability of our political establishment to understand the basics of power is patent. It is the very basis of an honourable national existence. This is not anything new. It has existed since the birth of the nation state in medieval Europe. Today, the currency of power, in the post Cold War world, is



military strength allied to economic prosperity. One without the other has little meaning. It is sad but true that the possession of nuclear capability is the backbone of credible military power. The inability or the refusal of the Indian political establishment to understand this is not surprising; it has a long historical legacy. The Hindu ethos has, by and large shunned military power. I will not go too far in history. Fifty years ago, Pandit Nehru had underplayed the need for a strong military for India. Evidently India had no enemies (except, perhaps, Pakistan which did not count) and, in any case, we needed all the money there was for developmental activities. In the circumstances we could not afford large and powerful armed force. As a historian, Nehru certainly understood the importance of the sea to India. But he had, perforce, to stop short there. There were not the resources to spend on building up a strong navy. For fifteen long years Indian military budgets were minimal and went mostly into maintaining the share of the forces we had inherited at independence. It took that long for the Prime Minister to be disabused of his judgement of a utopian world. The Chinese shook him out of a long military stupor. By then, of course it was too late to catch up with them. We resigned ourselves to seeking and maintaining a slight edge over Pakistan. This has completely distorted the military balance in the subcontinent to the delight of the Great Powers. There is little understanding of the realities of power in our political establishment. Our politicians are clever people certainly, but their politics are one of self aggrandisement, much as they were for their illustrious predecessors, the Mughals and the Marathas, albeit with some very rare exceptions. They are almost totally illiterate about military affairs, the terminologies, the linkage between defence and foreign policies and other matters. Of the sea they know nothing at all. Worse, they have made no efforts to educate themselves in these matters vital to national security, over the years. A maritime ethos has been alien to us, not surprisingly, as we still look upon the sea as the dreaded 'Kala Pani', to be shunned and avoided and embarked upon only when absolutely unavoidable. The makers of our national policies have never heard of Mahan, McKinder and Gorshkov, let alone read them. I have grave doubts if they have heard or read our own Panikkar on the Indian Ocean and its relevance to India over the centuries. As evidence of our continued unconcern

for defence, maritime affairs, national security, one has to only look at the successive defence debates in the Lok Sabha. The Chamber is almost invariably empty. There is never any debate over policies and appropriations, little concern for the continuously deteriorating national security environment. The principal obstacle to the growth and progress of India as a maritime (or military power, for that matter) power in the coming years, remains our selfish and venal politician, our elected representative, who has made little effort to rise above himself and understand his duty to the electorate and the nation. This is a grave charge to make and may be considered gratuitous and undeserving. It is true for being that! Power still grows out of the barrel of the gun. Only the powerful have a place under the sun in this hard headed, competitive world of fiercely independent nation states.

The lack of understanding of the military, its role in national security, its commitment to the indigenisation of military hardware, its commitment to India by remaining apolitical, by our political masters some extent by a bureaucracy wedded to rules and red tape and occasionally to sycophancy to bowing and scraping and to maintaining its ill advised ascendancy over the armed forces, will be a very major stumbling block to the nation's progress as a maritime and a military power in the coming century. The bureaucracy has long and consistently resisted the amalgamation of the defence headquarters with the ministry of defence. The dichotomy suits the bureaucracy. The one ray of hope in this otherwise dismal scene is our military leadership helped by the growing ranks of naval, military and strategic thinkers spawned by the Institute of Defence Studies and Analysis and a few other private think tanks around the country. There is a fairly wide-ranging debate on maritime affairs in the journals of these bodies. This literature needs to be read widely and discussed. The recent reorganisation of Defence Services HQ with the Ministry of Defence, in a limited way may help to bring about better co-operation between the military and bureaucracy.

There is much lip service paid to modernisation but little to show on the ground to fight tomorrow's war, not yesterdays. The standard excuse is, 'There is no money'. There is money enough for irrelevancies. The lessons of the Gulf war have

been learnt in the armed services. I am not sure they have been learnt by the political establishment. The future conflicts will rely on C<sup>5</sup>I<sup>2</sup>; command, control, communications, computers and cooperation, intelligence, information.

In the other areas of maritime activities there is little cheer. The Indian shipping industry is in doldrums. The tonnage has hovered around six and seven million for well nigh fifteen years even as Chinese and Japanese tonnages have grown by leaps and bounds. Indian ships carry a paltry 27% of Indian overseas trade when the figure ought to be near 50%. Indian shipowners have not shown the enterprise which was expected of them. They are satisfied with merely making money, for themselves. The Indian National Shipowners Association remains a talking shop. In any case the Government rarely listens to it. The Ministry of Surface Transport knows all the rules and regulations. It uses them to stymie the growth of the merchant fleet and the modernisation of the ports through the privatisation of their management. The navy and the coast guard drift along in the absence of a credible maritime policy. Without a strategy there can be no policy. Without a policy, the acquisition of ships and weapons is inevitably ad hoc and training for war fighting similarly flawed. We acquire ships and weapons from wherever possible and whenever money is made available. Even within the navy the quite unnecessary controversy over embarked aviation saps the energies and morale of the service. Surely a balanced and combat-worthy fleet needs

embarked aviation as much as it needs surface and under surface elements. In exploiting the resources of the ocean, we have yet to open our innings despite the fact that we are among the handful of nations awarded a pioneer status in this prestigious arena by the UN as far back as 1982. The list of our defaults in maritime affairs is a Long one.

For a country as big and as diverse as India with a considerable maritime tradition behind her, her unrealised potential, there has to be a well thought out strategic concept which must be arrived at through steady and consistent discussion, argument and public debate on what this country is all about, her strengths and her weaknesses, her historical experiences spanning five millennia, her cultural ethos and many other inputs. Such discussion is conspicuous by its absence. Because there is no discussion either in Parliament or out of it, there has never been any White Paper on defence. On maritime affairs there is a deafening silence. As the new century opens those of us who wish to see a strong maritime India in the next century can only whistle in the dark, we pray for a miracle.

The instruments of maritime power are expensive to produce and to maintain. Whether we would show the necessary will to obtain them or produce them within India is not something I would wish to put my money on, given the historical evidence. Of one thing I am sure, though. If we do turn to the sea for security and fortune in this century it would be due to force of circumstances. and not as an act of will. Prophetic words? Perhaps...

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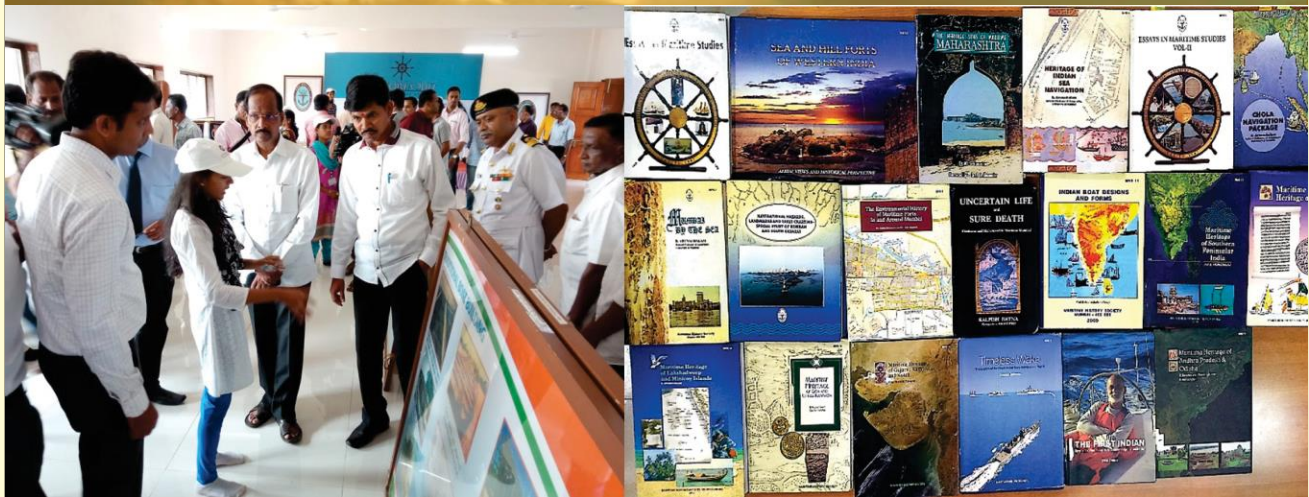


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