

20 JAN 1995

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# JOURNAL OF INDIAN OCEAN STUDIES

Volume 2 Number 1  
November 1994



Society for Indian Ocean Studies

## THE JOURNAL OF INDIAN OCEAN STUDIES

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Abroad US \$ 10 per issue or 25 annual

Mail subscription to be sent to Editor. Correspondence and Books for Review should be sent to the Editor, 'Advertisement Enquiries' to the Society's office.

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Published by Professor Satish Chandra on behalf of the Society for Indian Ocean Studies (Established 1987), an Autonomous Registered Society under the Societies Registration Act.

Address: Nehru Memorial Museum and Library  
Teen Murti House, New Delhi -110 011, India.

## EDITORIAL

In an era of growing liberalisation and globalisation, it is necessary to examine the causes of the deep-seated inward looking ethos of India which is not to be confused with pride in India and its culture. Thus, there were periods in our history when we were more outward looking. Indian trading with Southeast Asia, Central Asia and China, and Indian settlements there in the early centuries of the Christian era are examples of this. But the period from the 7th to the 12th century is generally regarded as a period of growing isolationism and looking inwards. Such changes in the stance of a civilization as old as India's are not exceptional. This attitude of narrowness led to the Turkish invasions. But this did lead to efforts to reintegrate India in the Asian and the wider Islamic world. The Mughals built upon it. However, the almost total isolation of India from its neighbours was the contribution of the British about which Jawaharlal Nehru commented at the Asian Relations Conference at New Delhi in 1947, saying:

".... One of the notable consequences of European domination has been the isolation of the countries of Asia from one another. The old land routes almost ceased to function and our chief window to the outer world looked out on the sea route which led to England."

Despite some opening up after 1947 on account of economic constraints, and a narrow view of self-reliance which Nehru did not really share, India continued to be relatively isolated from the outside, especially the Asian world. In a new era, while India has expressed a desire to join ASEAN, and talks of an Indian Ocean Community are in the air, it may be timely to recall the nature of the Indian diaspora which took place in the latter half of the 19th century under very adverse circumstances and which was resumed after 1947, and to examine its implications in the new era of globalisation. Dr. Anirudha Gupta's article on the Indian diaspora, and the review by the Editor of S. Arasaratnam's book *Maritime India in the Seventeenth Century* which deals extensively with the diaspora of the Indian trading community before the British conquest are relevant in this context.

Four years after the end of the Cold War, the outlines of a new world order for the 21st century seem dimly to be emerging. According to

Frank Wisner, the former U.S. Under-Secretary for Defence and presently Ambassador to India, "global security will depend on the cooperation of the great powers — the U.S., Europe, Russia, China, Japan and India." The inclusion of India in the list of great powers may, to many, appear a projection — perhaps an optimistic projection of its status in the coming decades is India can keep its house in order by containing internal discord and drawing upon the talent, energies and resourcefulness of the Indian people to hasten the process of internal growth.

A second aspect is the emergence of trade blocs — EC, NAFTA, APEC, etc. These blocs are likely to grow and multiply, encompassing more and more countries. The relationship between these and the new emerging trade blocs between them, and between them and the 'great powers' is still a matter of uncertainty and speculation. However, India will have to delineate its attitude towards such emerging blocs, especially if a Middle Eastern or Islamic bloc is put on the agenda. The emerging New World Order implies a definite shift of power away from Europe and the West. In this context, India's efforts to improve its relations with China, maintain close links with Russia, and embark on a policy of positive engagement with the U.S.A. are pointers to a new strategic perception. The impact of the growing links with the U.S.A. and missile programmes will, however, be keenly watched. However, in this situation of a growing detente — with or without improvement of Indo-Pakistan relations, it would be a folly to neglect the arm which has the greatest potential for a constructive engagement with the neighbours, viz. a viable navy and a strong commercial fleet. Prime Minister, Shri P.V. Narasimha Rao's statement made in the context of his launching the first Indian built submarine promising more funds to the navy in the context of safeguarding the country's seas has not come a day too early.

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## EDITORIAL

Although the word 'globalisation' has become acceptable to the Indian middle classes by now, the ground reality is the growing outreach of regional blocs. With more and more regional blocs in the offing, and with SAPTA yet to take off, India is understandably anxious to break out of its self-imposed isolation. Prime Minister P. V. Naraismha Rao's visit to Malaysia has underlined once again India's interest in ASEAN. So far India is only a dialogue partner of ASEAN. But this may change sooner than we realise. The induction into ASEAN of Viet Nam with which India has had close economic and political relations, and of Myanmar, our immediate neighbour, are steps in the right direction. Growing unease in Southeast Asian countries about the rising military and naval clout of China have forced ASEAN countries to solicit the U.S. presence for safeguarding their interests. But in the long run, it is the countries of the region, from which India cannot be excluded, which have to bear the responsibility of their own security. Henry Kissinger, in his own brash way, has postulated India as a regional power which may try to take on the British Imperialist role of dominating the area from Singapore to Aden! As a Professor, Kissinger should have known that history does not repeat itself or if it does so, as Marx had pointed out, it is first a tragedy, then a farce! The British domination of the entire Indian Ocean area was an accident of history which can hardly be repeated. But Kissinger does have a point. With India's growing economic and military strength, and bearing in mind its geographical position, what role would India as a regional power play in the Indian Ocean region? Perhaps, this is an issue which needs to be debated much more in India than has been done so far.

It is in this context that there has been widespread interest regarding the proposal of an Indian Ocean Rim Community. A series of international seminars on the subject have either been held or are in the offing. As might have been expected, there are widely different concepts regarding the IORC. In this connection, we are publishing the statement of Shri V.K. Grover, Leader of the Indian Delegation to the first official



conference on IORC in Mauritius. While India has emphasised the economic aspect as also the scientific and cultural aspects, some countries, such as Australia, are keen that problems of regional security should also be tackled by the IORC. Such an approach, it is feared, would derail the IORC by involving it with various contentious issues much before a ground work of mutual trust and cooperation has been laid. India has, therefore, disagreed with the Australian approach. The IORC includes within its ambit developed countries such as Australia, a developing country such as South Africa, and small but rich countries like Singapore and Oman. As far as Africa is concerned, India's trade with the continent is negligible at present - less than 3 percent. The idea of an IORC even as an economic group has, thus, far to go. We in India are generally more tuned to short hauls. If the IORC is to take off, it will need much greater effort and commitment from our side, both governmental and non-governmental, than seems to be forthcoming.

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It is a good augury that along with a hundred other countries, India has signed a United Nations Agreement to protect the world fishing grounds from trading malpractices. As is well-known, Japan, South Korea and a number of other countries in the region have fishing vessels and equipment which are far more advanced than India and which enables them to carry on their fishing operations in the Indian Ocean area, even within India's EEZ. India's relatively undeveloped fishing industry is confined to small fisheries, in the coastal areas. At present no agency is equipped to safeguard India's EEZ from encroachment from other scientifically better endowed countries. Nor is the Central Government in a position to take any steps in the matter since coastal fishing is a State subject. The U.N. agreement, it is hoped, would act as a spur to the Government of India to take the necessary steps in the matter.