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India's Maritime Diplomacy: S.A.G.A.R Policy as the Focal Point

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ABSTRACT :

India is becoming a maritime power because of its strategic location, economic goals, and shifting geopolitical interests in the Indo-Pacific. In 2015, Prime Minister Narendra Modi started the Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) program. The Indian-built offshore patrol vessel Barracuda was launched in Mauritius, where SAGAR was first shown. It shows how India sees maritime cooperation, regional stability, and long-term development. The main focus of this research project is India's maritime diplomacy with SAGAR. It talks about SAGAR's vision, its strategic parts, how it is being put into action, the problems it has, and the new chances that are coming up.

Keywords: Maritime Diplomacy, Strategic Autonomy, SAGAR, MAHA-SAGAR

1. Introduction

India's foreign policy has changed a lot in the last few years, especially when it comes to diplomacy at sea. India is in the middle of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and has a coastline that is more than 11,000 kilometers long. India knows that a strong navy is important for the safety of its people and the strength of its economy. India's trade and energy imports depend on the sea. More than 90% of its trade by volume and most of its energy imports go through the sea. Because of this, the SAGAR project is now a key part of India's maritime strategy. India wants to take the lead in the IOR by promoting security, cooperation, and long-term growth. The SAGAR project, which started in Mauritius in 2015, is an example of this. This paper analyzes the conceptual underpinnings, operational structure, and strategic execution of SAGAR, while also investigating the overarching dimensions of India's maritime diplomacy. .

Conceptualizing Maritime Diplomacy

Maritime diplomacy is when you use naval power, visits to ports, joint exercises, building capacity, and humanitarian aid to reach your foreign policy goals. It can also involve more forceful actions and even threats. It is a strategic tool for deterrence, reassurance, and regional engagement that lets countries change the way things work in the region without having to fight.

India's maritime diplomacy is more than just sending ships to other countries. It involves working with a lot of different countries, doing good things for people, building up maritime infrastructure, and making sure that there is a rules-based maritime order. India's foreign relations have gained significance due to the increasing geopolitical rivalry in the Indo-Pacific, particularly from China.

S.A.G.A.R – The Vision and Principles

In March 2015, Prime Minister Modi went to Mauritius and announced SAGAR, which stands for "Security and Growth for All in the Region." It wants to promote growth and cooperation that includes everyone in the Indian Ocean Region. This is in line with India's national interests and the region's stability and prosperity. SAGAR's plan to get India more involved in maritime activities had five parts. First, Security Cooperation worked to make the seas safer by focusing on both one-on-one and group relationships. Second, Trade and Economic Integration, which is meant to help the blue economy do better with partners in the area. Third, Capacity Building and Disaster Management, which meant improving maritime infrastructure and giving humanitarian aid. Fourth, Sustainable Development encourages the smart use of ocean resources. Finally, there is Connectivity and Infrastructure, which includes building ports, naval bases, and digital services in the area.

These rules are meant to help India become a more active maritime player that cares about the safety and health of everyone in the Indo-Pacific. Through SAGAR, India wanted to be seen as a net security provider in the IOR by giving naval aid, intelligence, and other services to less developed countries like Sri Lanka, the Maldives, Seychelles, and Mauritius. SAGAR is a good idea, but it's also a way for the navy to show off how strong it is. Ironically, it also means that a strong navy can only do its job by working together with other littoral states because of the nature of the maritime environment.

Strategic Initiatives Under S.A.G.A.R

India's work under SAGAR covers a lot of ground, including security, building capacity, working together, sustainable development, and connecting the region. Since the Mumbai attacks in 2008, India's coastal security has gotten a lot better. It has built a Coastal Surveillance Network (CSN) with radar stations and an Information Management and Analysis Center (IMAC) at its center. In December 2018, the Information Fusion Centre—IOR (IFC-IOR) opened. It works with more than 18 countries and 15 international maritime security agencies to share information about the seas and find threats. India is working hard to improve its economic and security ties with its island nations and maritime neighbors. This helps them make their economy and maritime security stronger. India has done a lot of things to help Seychelles and build the Barracuda patrol ship for Mauritius. The Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) are two groups in the region that India is a leader in. They work to make the seas safer and more cooperative. India is committed to solving problems that affect the whole world, like climate change and natural disasters. It supports the goals of the COP 21 Paris Climate Conference and is at the forefront of forming the International Solar Alliance (ISA). India also made the Indian Tsunami Early Warning System (ITEWS) and the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure.

India's "Neighbourhood First" policy puts meeting the needs of neighboring countries first. Some important projects are the Sagarmala project, port development projects in Sittwe, Chabahar, Sabang, Colombo East, and Aga Lega, and efforts to make direct shipping routes between India and Bangladesh, Myanmar, and Vietnam.

From SAGAR to MAHA-SAGAR

India is worried about what China might do, so it is trying to strengthen its economic and security ties with not just its main partners in East and Southeast Asia, but also with smaller countries. India's strategic ties with its partners in the Asia-Pacific region show how it competes with China and how it wants to have a bigger role in the region and the world.

The MAHASAGAR project, which is an extension of SAGAR, wants to change India's focus from maritime security to economic and geopolitical issues. "MAHASAGAR" means "Great Ocean" in Hindi, and it shows how far India wants to go in the world of shipping. The goal of the initiative is to strategically limit China's power and improve maritime security by holding naval exercises, sharing information, working together on defense, and keeping an eye on the Indian Ocean.

MAHASAGAR is also based on the growth of the Blue Economy and the integration of economies. These goals help make trade and business around the sea more sustainable and make the seas safer by giving India a stronger regional security presence in strategically important waters. India is trying to make supply chains in the area better and depend less on economic models that China leads. It is also working to become a leader in the developing world and improve its ties with the Global South.

Capacity building and sustainable development are great for India and its neighbors, like Mauritius, which gets more money for maritime infrastructure and training people to work on it. India's knowledge of renewable energy, climate change, and disasters can help other countries make their economies stronger. India's next step in its maritime vision is MAHASAGAR. It builds on what SAGAR has done well and adds more strategic and economic depth to the project.

Strategic Autonomy – Challenges and Opportunities

Since the end of the Cold War, the idea of strategic autonomy has become an important part of India's foreign policy. It shows how important it is for the country to keep its ability to make its own choices in order to protect its most important national interests. Prime Minister Narendra Modi made this point very clear at the Shangri-La Dialogue in 2018. He pointed to India's strategic ties with major world powers like the US, Russia, and China as evidence of its independent and balanced foreign policy.

India's strategic independence now is based on its own interests, not on not being aligned with any one ideology like it was during the Cold War. It lets India keep a lot of partnerships without relying too much on one group of countries. India's purchase of the Russian S-400 missile defense system, even though it could face U.S. sanctions under CAATSA, and its continued energy trade with Iran, even though the West is putting pressure on it, are examples of this flexibility. These decisions show that India is serious about protecting its right to make its own choices about security and foreign affairs. At the same time, it is working to strengthen its strategic ties with the US and other countries.

India's maritime diplomacy, which is based on the SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) initiative, has a lot of problems when it comes to geopolitics. China's growing assertiveness in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) is the most important of these. India sees Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which includes the strategically important China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), as a way to surround the area. China's aggressive actions in the South China Sea and its growing economic power among India's smaller neighbors, such as Sri Lanka and the Maldives, are also direct threats to India's strategic space and make it harder for India to carry out its "Neighborhood First" policy.

India has a lot of structural and strategic advantages that give it big chances, even with these problems from outside. It can easily get to important sea

lanes of communication because it is in the middle of the Indian Ocean. This makes it easier for them to work with other countries in the area. India is also very good at diplomacy, oceanographic research, building naval ships, and keeping the seas safe. All of these can help the area stay stable and grow. The Indian government is working hard to get involved with maritime issues, especially when it comes to disaster relief, climate change mitigation, and humanitarian aid. This makes India seem like a responsible and helpful player in the region.

India's partnerships with countries that share its values, like Japan and France, also give the two countries new ways to work together on security and infrastructure in the Indo-Pacific. India's possible role in shaping the new regional security architecture is even stronger now that more and more people around the world see the "Indo-Pacific" as a strategic idea that fits well with India's vision.

But there are a number of internal problems that make it hard for India to fully achieve its maritime goals. One of the biggest problems is that there isn't an official SAGAR policy document that makes everything clear. This has led to a fragmented approach to implementation, which often means that government agencies don't work together very well. India still has trouble carrying out plans, and the SAGAR framework needs to do a better job of bringing together military diplomacy and private sector involvement.

In short, strategic autonomy gives India the freedom to deal with complicated geopolitical situations. However, the success of its maritime diplomacy under SAGAR will depend on how well it can handle problems from both inside and outside the country. India needs to use its location, good relations with other countries, and growing partnerships to become a strong and stabilizing force in the Indo-Pacific region.

Conclusion

India's maritime diplomacy, which is based on the SAGAR policy, is a flexible and practical way to protect its own interests and help the region grow and stay stable. India is a responsible and important country in the Indo-Pacific region, even though it has to deal with problems like China's growing presence in the Indian Ocean. It does this by taking advantage of its location, improving its skills, and being very active in diplomacy. India will need to keep working on cooperation, capacity building, and sustainable development within the SAGAR framework if it wants to strengthen its position and deal with the complicated geopolitical situation of the 21st century. India's maritime diplomacy will only work if its economy keeps growing and it can turn its goals into real actions that make everyone in its maritime neighborhood safer, more prosperous, and more peaceful. SAGAR is still an important way to show that India is a responsible maritime power that wants to make the area safe, stable, and prosperous for everyone. SAGAR shows how working together on the sea, keeping the sea safe, and growing the economy are all related..

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