

# **GOA IN THE INDIAN SUB - CONTINENT**

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# **THE GEOSTRATEGIC AND GEOPOLITICAL IMPORTANCE OF GOA IN THE INDIAN SUB-CONTINENT**

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## **Introduction:**

Goa lies on the West Coast of India between  $15^{\circ} 44'30''$  and  $14^{\circ} 53''$  north latitude, and  $73^{\circ} 45'$  and  $74^{\circ} 26'$  east longitude.

Being almost equidistant from Surat and Calicut, Goa is strategically positioned for exercising control of trade on the West coast, the Arabian Sea, and north Indian ocean.

Before severe climatic changes, sea-level fluctuations and massive man-made coastal constructions altered the topography; Goa had been known to Roman, Greek, Arab, Persian geographers as a group of Islands, carved out by once very wide, deep and free-flowing rivers. With the rocky islets off Vengurla coast and islands in Angediva group acting as landmarks; Goa had become an important sheltering place for transoceanic ships. Over the years, as settlements spread on West Coast and communication routes were established through the Western ghats the geostrategic importance of islands of Goa captured the attention of Deccan Kingdoms.

Satavahanas, a maritime trade based dynasty used the port of Goa for regulating the lucrative Roman trade voyages.

The Chalukyas of Badami established a naval command for South Konkan and Goa at Revatidvipa or Modern Reddi. Chalukya Vikramaditya (A.D. 655-681) appointed his brother Chandraditya as Commander of this area. Naval expeditions to South-east Asia were planned and launched during Chalukya Vinayaditya's (A.D. 680-696) reign. The Chalukya penetrated as far as Cambodia, ancient CHAMPA as could be seen from a bilingual inscription found in that country.

Kadambas of Goa during their 350 years of reign developed the Goan ports and encouraged intracoastal and trans-oceanic trade. Titles such as ' *Paschimasamudradhipati* ' (Lord of Western Ocean) proclaimed their command of the Arabian Sea. The geopolitical importance of Goa was highlighted in the Indian sub-continent more forcefully only during the Kadamba reign. Goa started figuring in geopolitical strategies of the Deccan Kingdoms prominently after the establishment of Muslim rule in the North. Bahamani made Goa an important centre for Haj pilgrims. The Vijayanagara emperors realised the importance of Goa and accorded it the status of Regional Capital - " **Gaobhidam Konkana - Rajadhanim**" ( The capital of Konkana is Goa).

Conquest of Goa by Mahmood Gawan and the active interest of Yusuf Adil Shah in developing it as summer capital showed its' geopolitical importance in the 15th century.

As recorded by Fonseca (1878) " Goa was indeed at this period one of the principal emporiums of trade on the western coast of India and the great centre which attracted people of various races and creeds from different parts of Asia... Goa became the natural entrepot of the Commerce of Asia".

Travel accounts of Pero Covilha, Ludovico, Varthema, Andrea Corsali, and Duarte Barboza leave no doubt about the extent of the maritime trade based glory that Goa achieved before Afonso de Albuquerque stepped in.

Albuquerque's second conquest of Goa was a calculated attempt to gain a firm foothold on the Indian sub-continent. Later on developments in the Indian Ocean proved the success of Albuquerque's policy of capturing geostrategically important places for control of the transoceanic and intracoastal commodity trade. (Mathew, 1988).

Portuguese mastery of Goa dragged it into the rough weather of sub-continental, Asian and international politics. Commenting on the geostrategic and geopolitical importance of Goa which

led to a prolonged liberation struggle, historian Sheik Ali (1986) has remarked " A tiny spot was locked in political complications of even SEATO and NATO. It was dragged into the cock-pit of power of the cold war. It rocked the mighty brains of the east and west."

In fact much before SEATO and NATO entered the scene, this tiny spot was locked in Anglo-French power struggle, as a fallout of European geopolitics.

### **'BRITISH' ANXIETY ABOUT 'FRENCH' ATTACK ON 'PORTUGUESE' CONTROLLED GOA.**

Lord Mornington, Marques of Wellesly, Governor General of Bengal, expressed his anxiety about a possible French attack on Goa in a letter written to General Stuart of Bombay on July 14, 1798.

On September 6, 1799, Commander William Clark stationed himself in Goa with three batallions and artillery. In December 1802, the British troops camped at Cabo and Fort Aguada. In November 1810, they started withdrawing from Goa as a result of Portuguese protest. An analysis of these events show how Goa became a centre of counter-offensive on the background of European power politics. Although it would have been possible for the French to launch an attack from the east the British feared it from the west since Tipu Sultan had allied with the French. It was a calculated move on the part of Tipu having known the geostrategic importance of Goa. ( Shirodkar 1979).

### **Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean: power politics.**

The geostrategic importance of Goa is distinctly related to the geostrategic and geopolitical importance of Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean. Naval historian John R. Seeley has remarked " the nation that had controlled the sea, or important parts thereof, had controlled history. " This was very much true in the case of Indian Ocean power politics. Another famous maritime historian Alfred Mahan has said - " Historians opine that if

medieval India had adequate sea-power and ocean-going capability the history of the East would have been different...." (Bhattacharya 1991).

The Portuguese, the British, the French and the Dutch had seapower and ocean-going capability which brought them to the Indian sub-continent and South east Asia. The Portuguese fully exploited the strategic position of Goa to project their sea-power at least for two centuries.

The power equation changed radically with the opening of the Suez canal. Now from the Arabian Sea vessels could sail upto the Black Sea, and the Sea of Azov in Russia through the Red Sea, the Suez canal, the Mediterranean Sea, the Aegean Sea, the strait of Dardanells, the Sea of Marmara and the strait of Bosphorous and again upto the Atlantic Ocean through the Mediterranean Sea and the Gibraltar strait.

Geostrategic dimensions of Goa changed drastically after the opening of the canal, the growing prominence of Mormugao port and the dominance of British naval power in the Indian Ocean.

The British empire depended upon maritime trade and services and heavy traffic from the colonies had developed a naval strategy for the Indian sub-continent without taking into account the neutral role of Portugal during the Second World War. The threat emanating to their merchant vessels due to the espionage activities of German spies in Goa was removed by sinking of the Italian and German ships in 1943 and assassination of the Koch Couple (Shirodkar 1979, 1988). It has been speculated that the German ships and spies had been monitoring British sea-borne commodity and military traffic from Goa as it offered them neutral umbrella and operational flexibility. This means a pre-conceived plan by Nazi Germany to exploit Goa's geostrategic position for military advantage.

## **Post-Second World War situation:**

Emergence of Pakistan on the sub-continental geopolitical horizon was an important development for Goa, India and Portugal. Pakistan was secretly engaged in talks with the Prince of Junagadh and the Nizam of Hyderabad. The latter was interested in seceding from India by establishing a Pakistan-Portugal-Hyderabad axis.

Gaitonde (1987) has thrown ample light on this interesting nexus which highlights geostrategic importance of Goa as understood by the Deccan princely states.

## **The Lisbon-Hyderabad Connection:**

In 1947 some Indian princes launched a conspiracy to counter free India's presence for dissolution of their states. The lead was taken by the Nizam of Hyderabad. The Nizam opened talks with Portugal to explore the possibility of the use of Mormugao port. Nehru was informed that the Nizam was expanding his army, buying arms in Europe and a secret treaty was believed to have been signed by Portugal granting Hyderabad the use of Goa in return for its development of the port and the harbour facilities of Mormugao.

The Nizam was evidently seeking an outlet to the sea from Goa for importing arms plied at Alexandria. His plan consisted of setting a dummy shipping company registered under Panamanian flag. This company would acquire 3-4 ocean liners and transport the war material from Alexandria to Hyderabad via Mormugao. Accordingly ships were purchased at a European port by an emissary of the Nizam. The war material was bought and stored in Alexandria's warehouse.

In the meantime in June, 1947, the British Foreign Office was approached by Nizam's agents in London. At the end of June, the Portuguese government was warned that any proposal for the establishment of diplomatic relations would be refused because of India's annoyance at the secret talks Portugal was having with Hyderabad which it considered unfriendly.

A secret communication of Portuguese Foreign minister to the Ambassador in London in June 1948, referred to relations between Lisbon and Nizam of Hyderabad and stated that the Portuguese government had decided not to deal with Hyderabad so as not to displease India, although they recognised the importance of the subject to the economic development of Goa.

Krishna Menon the then Indian foreign minister raised the question of Hyderabad-Lisbon contacts with his Portuguese counterparts. Krishna Menon wanted to ensure that Goa was not being used by Hyderabad as an outlet to the sea or as a corridor through which arms could be freely imported.

The Pakistan factor also engaged Krishna Menon's mind. In his talks with Caeiro da Marta he expressed grave concern about alleged clandestine traffic in arms including those sent to Pakistan through Goa. He expressed need of Portuguese co-operation to monitor the arrival of Portuguese foreign ships in Mormugao with arms and ammunition. Caeiro da Marta assured him that instruction would be sent to Goa to be vigilant and co-operative.

Nizam's plan could not succeed as his emissary was killed in an air crash in the Middle East, and the Portuguese government turned down his offer due to Indian and British pressure. The war material which was supposed to be landed in Goa rotted in Alexandria's warehouse.

### **Portugal Joins NATO:**

Portugal joined NATO in April 1949 and thus Goa was launched in the Cold war politics.

Nehru expressed his apprehensions in March 1953 about the possibility of the Portuguese territories in India being used as a base for military operations in association with NATO. Portugal issued a denial stating that Goa was outside the geographical framework of NATO's defensive system.



However subsequent development in the Indian Ocean especially the naval exercises of SEATO and CENTO countries confirmed India's apprehensions.

Although NATO powers did not use Goa as a support base, their naval power projection was used in SEATO and CENTO exercises to enforce their renewed interest in the Indian Ocean region with tacit support from the Portuguese.

G. K. Handoo (Ali, 1986) has recounted the drama behind 'Operation Vijay' which was preceded by CENTO naval exercises 200 miles from the Indian coast from 20th-28th November 1961.

The provocation by Portuguese frigate 'Albuquerque' according to him was a calculated move by the Portuguese to test Indian response and invite CENTO naval force for intervention. The Indian army chief had already drawn up a plan to take over Anjediv Island, which was dropped at the last minute because of the possibility of confrontation with CENTO fleet on the Arabian Sea.

'Operation Vijay' to liberate Goa was a considered move to keep the cold-war politics away from the Indian soil and to liberate the strategic hot-spot before any further geopolitical complications took place.

### **Geostrategic role of Goa in India's security doctrine:**

After liberation, Goa came to occupy a prominent place on India's defence map due to all-weather Mormugao port, the airport and communication facilities.

Bombay, Goa and Cochin formed an important strategic axis for western naval command in the light of growing presence of extra-regional navies in the Indian Ocean.

*The development of Goa as a strategic naval base has to be studied on the background of Indian Ocean power politics.*

## **Geostrategic importance of the Indian Ocean :**

**(See reference B. 1-24).**

The geostrategic importance of Indian Ocean emerged during 2nd World War.

Including its bays, seas and gulfs, the Indian Ocean is 45 million sq. Kms larger than either half of the Atlantic Ocean. It encompasses 21% of world's sea area and 14% of earth's surface. The area consists of 36 littoral and 11 hinterland states making a total of 47 independent nations including 30% of world's population. Indian Ocean states account for 65% of world's uranium and oil, 31% of natural gas, 40% of oil production besides vast reserves of strategic minerals and natural resources.

*It has been said that " Whoever controls the Indian Ocean dominates Asia. The Ocean is the key to the seven seas. In the 21st century the destiny of the world will be decided on its waters. "*

There are several strategic choke points in the Indian Ocean such as Mozambique channel, Suez canal, the strait of Bab-el-Mandeb, the strait of Hormuz, Palk-strait etc. Every year 30,000 ships and 1,500 large oil tankers traverse its waters. On an average 2 tankers per hour pass through the straits of Hormuz while 40 ships per day pass through the Mozambique channel.

Strategically India occupies a unique position in the Indian Ocean. On the maritime plane, India is endowed with a 7,600 kms, long coastline with 2.5 million sq.km of exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and over 500 islands on both sides of the peninsula.

The big powers are interested in the Indian Ocean because of several reasons. Firstly, the countries around Indian Ocean possess vast raw material and could serve as easy markets, being politically young. Secondly, Indian Ocean floor has vast reserves of strategic minerals, and rich deposits of oil, gas, heavy minerals occur along the coast. Fishery resources are

underexploited. Thirdly, the big powers intend to protect the navigation, trade, goods, military hardware and oil.

India's response to big power's interest has been well planned. The classical role of the Indian Navy is purely defensive—the protection of the nation and its' assets/interest from any sea-based threat. This includes the gamut of sea lanes, sea borne trade, offshore assets, EEZ, island territories and above all to maintain a " presence" in the water around the peninsula so that Indian national interest are not threatened.

### **Role of Goa in the Post-Diego Garcia Scenario:**

Geostrategically Goa is well placed between the Pakistani air-bases and the US Command centre at Diego Garcia in Chagos archipelago.

Pakistan's naval base on the Makran coast of Baluchistan, the Karachi harbour facilities, the US CENTCOM strategic communication centre at Gwadar port have been cause of great alarm among Indian defence planners. The economic targets on west-coast are vulnerable to the attack from these bases.

The Diego-Garcia base which is hardly 1,500 kms from India is another factor in India's perception of threat.

The naval base in Goa was strengthened after lessons of 1971 war, the Falkland conflict of 1982 and the Gulf - crises of 1991-92. In 1986 India acquired another aircraft carrier I.N.S. 'VIRAT'. 24 Sea-Harriers FRS-MK 1 fighters were acquired from British aerospace. These are equipped with AIM-9L sidewinder missiles. Since Sea-Harriers cannot take on modern fighters like F-16 or Mirage -2000, these are probably based in Goa.

The Goa-based naval infrastructure has a complex task to perform. The Laccadive, Minicoy and Amindivi island group in the Arabian sea, 200-300 kms off Kerala coast straddles international maritime routes to and from the Red sea, Persian gulf and Arabian seaports. Naval surveillance is necessary for moni-

toring foreign trawlers, warships and hostile aircraft. Vigilance needs to be kept on the US multipurpose logistic base on Diego Garcia, about 1,250 kms south which supports US CENTCOM operations in the Arabian Sea, Persian gulf-region.

Over 570 oil bearing structures of which 176 have been confirmed are tapped from 70 offshore platforms in Bombay high region and yield 29 million tonnes of crude oil per year. New satellite fields Heera and Panna have been developed near Bassein. These artificial installations are potential economic targets close to Pakistan and not far from Diego Garcia.

The Diego Garcia factor contributed to Indian response of planning Asia's largest naval base at Karwar. Geostrategically Karwar including Anjedivi island was a sound choice against a possible air or submarine strike.

Diego Garcia has been a focal point of American military strategy. The multipurpose logistic base has a highly classified intelligence and communication facility, satellite tracking station, a 4 Km long runway, a natural harbour which can accommodate an aircraft carrier-led force, fuel storage capacity for 30 days besides 17 floating warehouses. It has nuclear weapons and deep-space surveillance system. B-52 strategic bombers with nuclear warheads pose a threat to India's security. The ground based Electro-Optical Deep Space Surveillance (GEODSS) system can spot any object as small as one foot diameter at a distance of 40,000 Kms. or even higher.

The Indian defence response is based on development of an integrated missile programme and submarine base. It is speculated that Anjediva island will be developed as a submarine base and the Kaiga nuclear complex may turn out to be a nuclear weapons factory. In that case Goa may become a potential target for pre-emptive nuclear attack.

China transferred several CSS-2 IRBM to Saudi Arabia. These are positioned 25 kms south of Riyadh and would hit Greece, Southern Russia and Western India.

Another threat perceived by western naval command is from the submarines with nuclear warheads in the Arabian Sea. Chinese Xia-class submarines, each with 12 launch tubes for CSS-N-3 SLBM, with 3300 Km. range and 200 KT-1Mt explosive power may be targetted on West Coast of India.

Geostrategically Goa is the ideal place for planning a counter strategy.

### **Goa's Role in Sri Lanka and Maldives Operation:**

Goa provided an ideal training terrain for the three wings of Indian army before the deployment of IPKF in Sri Lanka in 1987. Logistic support was provided during 'Operation Cactus' at Maldives from November 3, 1988, when Indian paratroops and warships successfully foiled an attempt by 150 mercenaries led by Abdullah Lutafi to overthrow the Maldivian government.

### **West Coast development and the importance of Goa:**

The construction of West Coast railway is the single most important strategic exercise which will strengthen rapid deployment capability of India's defence forces. This was thought essential considering past history of aggressions launched from West Coast.

An economic investment of Rs. 50,000 crores is going to be pumped in on the west coast by end of 2000 A.D. Minor ports like Ratnagiri, Jaigadh, Karwar will be developed. New Mangalore port will contribute significantly to commodity trade.

Goa will play a pivotal role in defence of these investments.

### **Narcoterrorism and Goa:**

Since late 70's Goa became a haven for international drug traffickers. Goa figures on Interpol map as a linking point between world's two notorious narcotics supply regions, the Mid-east 'Golden crescent' and the Thai 'Golden triangle'.

The security environment on west coast has become vulnerable due to the drug and contraband traffic. Goa was suspected to be a landing point for arms and explosives smuggled from South east Asia.

Sheltering of international terrorists under bogus identity among the large horde of foreign tourists has been known to be a complex problem for national security agencies hampering their detection, identification and arrest.

The case of Charles Sobhraj's arrest in Goa is well known and needs no detailing.

### **Geostrategic importance of Goa in post cold-war developments:**

Operation desert storm, (Jan 16-20. 1991) brought to the fore the rapidity of regional conflicts and their fallouts. During this periods 17 countries deployed more than 200 naval ships in the Indian Ocean. Deployment of Japanese minesweepers invited hostile Chinese reaction.

Regional conflicts are sought to be engineered over bilateral issues such as Kashmir. In the light of the sensational exposures by Burrows and Windrem in 'critical mass', reaction time for such conflicts has become unpredictable. In case of air and naval (sûbmarine) strikes Goa will have to prepare a matching response by consolidating the naval and air defence capabilities.

India's plans to exploit EEZ and mine the sea-bed minerals will put additional burden on defence infrastructure in Goa.

The tremendous opportunities for a phenomenal growth in commodity traffic with democratic, majority ruled South Africa will open novel avenues for expansion of Mormugao Port.

The concept of a common trade block of Indian Ocean rim countries, first proposed by the deposed Shah of Iran and

recently by the foreign minister of South Africa, if realised will add a new dimension to Goa's geopolitical role.

The proposal of a free port presently shelved, though financially appealing leaves many questions unanswered about its geostrategic, security and defence implications. These are complex policy issues which will need careful attention in future.

### **Conclusions:**

Geostrategic and geopolitical importance of Goa was realised by the Deccan dynasties in the past, the colonial powers in the medieval period, the big powers after Second World War and Indian defence planners after liberation.

Goa is an important factor in the equation of complex post cold war politics of the Indian Ocean. Its geostrategic and geopolitical importance is vital for India's security and will remain so in future.

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