

## Research Article

# Project Mausam: India's Cultural Strategy for the Indian Ocean

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This article explores the geopolitical relevance of the Indian Ocean region, through the decisive analysis of India's Project Mausam which stands as a cultural plan of action for counterbalancing China's growing influence in the area. The IOR has conventionally been a hub for commerce, cultural exchanges, and strategic rivalry. In recent years, particularly under the regime of Xi Jinping, the assertive expansionist maritime ambitions, epitomised by the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Maritime Silk Road Initiative, have caused concerns in New Delhi. As a part of its soft power approach, Project Mausam, seeks to bolster India's positioning in the region by promoting cultural and civilisation connections with Indian Ocean littoral states. The project highlights the complex interplay between cultural diplomacy, strategic objectives, and regional politics in the contested waters of the Ocean. However, while the Project Mausam presents an alternative saga to China's economically-driven approach, it also faces challenges including limited engagement from partner states and domestic political complexities. The study underscores the need for policymakers to take note of these nuances and transform the Project Mausam to an actually effective arm of foreign policy.

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## Introduction

During the early phases of contemporary history, maritime domains remained the hotbeds of intense geopolitical contestations, wherein most battles were fought between superpowers and nascent nation-states. These oceanic contestations significantly determined and shaped the trajectory of historical accounts and civilisations' evolution. Thus, it would not be an exaggeration to postulate that the modern historical memories of the world are, to a considerable extent, inevitably intertwined with the historical chronicles of the oceans. Maritime interactions traditionally deal in the studies

pertaining to its history and have centred on trade relationships and the exchange of goods between different regions. However, recent scholarly work has begun to shift this focus. The Indian Ocean is an ocean that has endlessly served as a cauldron of human interactions; however, it attracted global attention only in 1498 when Vasco da Gama, a Portuguese explorer anchored at Calicut (modern-day Kozhikode). This ushered in the establishment of an all-weather marine trade route between Europe and Asia. Hereafter, it became an inseparable part of the global trading system, as a growing number of European powers ventured to engage in commercial relations with India and other regions of Southeast Asia. Over the centuries, the importance of this Ocean has been growing, thereby; the nations of Asia particularly, India and China in the contemporary times have reformulated their foreign policies and patterns of interactions. Looking at the relevance of this ocean, India's political and strategic approach for nearly six centuries concentrated on exploration and securitizing the Indian Ocean. What began with the Portuguese Viceroy of India, Francisco de Almeida's, 'Blue Water Policy' in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century transformed today into Narendra Modi's *Project Mausam: Maritime Routes and Cultural Landscapes* in the twenty-first century. Similarly, China, though far off from the Indian Ocean, shows an equal interest in this region. Its 21<sup>st</sup> Century Maritime Silk Road Initiative (MSRI) (of the two components of the OBOR initiative, MSRI is one the other being the Silk Road Economic Belt) is the ambitious expansionist project currently in place in this direction. As both powerhouses continue to experience booming growth, their urge for raw materials, energy stockpiles, a thriving overseas market, and overall volume of commerce is sure to escalate.<sup>i</sup>

The recent developments observed over the past decades have contributed to the Indian Ocean's revival as a focal point of world attention, precisely owing to its swiftly burgeoning geostrategic and geo-economic relevance. The escalating chase by India and China for resources and safeguarding critical maritime trade routes is a major catalyst igniting their rivalry and tensions. This essay analyses not only the historical and present pivotal significance of the Indian Ocean region (IOR) for the two emerging economies but also the mechanisms adopted by the two to tame it. Particular emphasis is placed on China's recent assertive regional policies and actions in the Indian Ocean that have caused anxiety in New Delhi. Additionally, it looks at India's response to the Dragon's expanding maritime ambitions by evaluating the policies postulated upon collective well-being and shared prosperity for all stakeholders in the Indian Ocean.

## Whose Ocean: The Historical Footprints

The Indian Ocean has performed a decisive role in expediting cultural diffusion, economic exchange, and power dynamics among diverse civilisations. Its history has witnessed several attempts made by outsiders to conquer its waters; however, this oceanic expanse proved that it isn't an exclusive dominion of any singular entity. Nevertheless, the region continues to have a prosperous history of maritime trade and colonialism, strategic positioning and resource distribution stirring economic interdependencies, shared cultural heritage across varied identities, a distinct environmental story, and regional security architecture. Thus, making the conceptualization of the IOR as a homogeneous or integrated entity highly problematic.<sup>ii</sup> Geographically the Indian Ocean littoral stretches over Australasia, South and South-east Asia, Middle East/ West Asia, along with Eastern and Southern parts of Africa. Its geostrategic location has made it a crucial trade route and an aqueduct for the exchange of goods, ideas, and technology. The littoral, comprising the coastal and inland enclosing regions in the Indian Ocean, is tremendously rich in natural resources, including energy reserves, spices, precious stones, biodiversity, metals, textiles, and agricultural goods. A significant number; exceeding 50 percent of the planet's identified oil and gas resources, are in the IOR itself<sup>iii</sup>, and many are still to be explored. This wealth of resources has repeatedly drawn the interest of varied civilisations, urging them to undertake voyages for explorations in the Far East, establish colonies, and undertake the economic exploitation of these regions. Despite the vast distances, the prospect of reaping substantial wealth from the littoral regions strongly directed historical maritime voyages. It is to be noted here that, past notions have portrayed the Indian Ocean as a tranquil maritime expanse that facilitated economic and cultural interactions among traders of the Arab world and Asia, depicting a “well-integrated interregional arena of economic and cultural interaction and exchange”.<sup>iv</sup> However, contradictory depictions have materialised with time transforming the region of peaceful coexistence into a region of conflict and competition with European colonisers fighting with each other to establish their dominance. For several ages the dominant powers of the Indian Ocean were the former colonial powers – England, Portugal, France, Holland, and Italy. To put it in the words of Panikkar, the Indian Ocean stood as a ‘British Lake’ before the Second World War<sup>v</sup>, which later on was replaced by the United States’ political and economic influence.<sup>vi</sup> The decade after the World Wars, witnessed the rapid demise of European empires, consequently, the sphere of world politics altered beyond all recognition, as did the Indian Ocean in its appearance as well as in its role,

both implicitly and explicitly owing to the metamorphoses of the world. The geopolitics of the Indian Ocean took a new turn as the region significantly lost Western domination but not their interest; simultaneously it also saw the rise of new Asiatic, particularly South Asiatic players. In the words of Kaplan, the twenty first century Asian geopolitical landscape is undergoing extensive transformation. Simultaneously, the neighbouring giants of China and India are emerging as fierce maritime powers, both acknowledging vital interests in the resource-laden region of South Asia. This region is marked by the presence of the 'narrow seas' that provide access to the Ocean, prominently the Strait of Malacca and the Strait of Hormuz<sup>vii</sup>, the globally most significant maritime choke points. Thus, Beijing's and New Delhi's eyes are aimed towards these lifelines of sea communications. Before delving into the areas of disagreements between the two nations, it is important to understand how old are the relations of these the giants with this Ocean.

China has burgeoning interests in the Indian Ocean. Although considered a new player in the region, Beijing has had lasting political and diplomatic associations with many littorals across the Ocean. It has traced these associations to their foundations in the ancient Maritime Silk Road which ran across three continents; originating from the south-eastern coast of China, Fuzhou (a coastal city in Fujian, China), traversing through the South-east Asia's Indochina Peninsula and the areas surrounding the South China Sea, crossing the Indian Ocean through the Strait of Malacca, extending to Eastern Africa and finally reaching Europe via the Mediterranean; evolving into a vast maritime corridor for trade and cultural exchange between China and other countries, amidst promoting collective development.<sup>viii</sup>

Further, during the medieval period of the 13<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, Chinese naval vessels routinely voyaged across the Indian Ocean for commerce as well as for political and diplomatic engagements. These recurring expeditions advocated an era of robust maritime transportation and interactions between the waters of China Sea (South China Sea and the East China Sea) and the regions of the Indian Ocean.<sup>ix</sup> Precisely, the period from 1405 to 1433 under the Ming dynasty, marks an exceptional moment in the history of China's naval power when it took the responsibility of the Indian Ocean basin with its gigantic, advanced fleets, which remained unmatched until the arrival of powerful and superior European destructive fleets of World War I.<sup>x</sup> Thus, Chinese history shapes the present and supports its stand for establishing itself as a gigantic voyager and trader of the Blue Waters.

On the contrary, India visualises itself as the leading historical propeller of global political, economic, and cultural interactions in the Indian Ocean spanning millions of years. Before Columbus crossed the

Atlantic and Magellan sailed the massive Pacific, the Indian Ocean had emerged as a bustling channel facilitating a vibrant conduit for trade and cultural exchanges among myriad civilisations. The inextricable connection between the ancient civilisations of Nineveh and Babylon and the Western coast of India can be identified by incontrovertible historical and archaeological evidence. This interconnectivity was facilitated by the navigation of the Arabian Sea, fostering cross-cultural exchanges and commerce. Furthermore, endorsing the hypothesis of a thriving trade network spread across these geographically discordant regions during that era; the Old Testament consists of numerous allusions that strongly establish the existence of a prosperous commercial link between the Levant region and the Western coastal regions of India.<sup>xi</sup> Further, the examination of the various products discovered at Mahenjo-daro as well as other sites of the Indus Valley Civilisation demonstrate the existence of commercial exchanges that could only be facilitated by the sea. This evidence not only included gold that originated in South India but also material remains that could be traced to places outside India and came through the Red Sea.<sup>xii</sup> Perhaps, it may not be wrong to conclude that the Arabian Sea, which forms the western part of the Indian Ocean, was used mainly for trade and commerce purposes, while, the Bay of Bengal, which forms the eastern part stood different. Bay of Bengal throughout ancient and medieval periods showed the supremacy of the naval forces and delved into political relations rather than trade, which was evident by the extensive domination over the littorals. The supremacy over the Seas was demonstrated by the Cholas, which terminated only with the collapse of the Chola power in the thirteenth century.<sup>xiii</sup> This supremacy was visible under the rule of King Rajendra Chola I, who in 1017 CE successfully invaded an indefinite number of cities belonging to the Srivijaya confederacy in Sumatran Island.<sup>xiv</sup> This period, was also marked by a number of naval incursions on the Burmese kingdom of Pegu and conquered the kingdom of Tambralinga, present in southern Thailand. His legacy was carried forward by Virarajendra Chola, who in the eleventh century CE, expanded the dynasty's empire up to Kedah in the Malaya peninsula.<sup>xv</sup> Thus, the maritime histories reveal that along with exchange of commodities and expansion of empires, an intermingling of cultures was also present. Hence, the ambition and aspiration of dominating the Indian Ocean isn't new for either of the two Asiatic giants.

The geostrategic importance of the region, combined with its monumental natural resources and strategic maritime chokepoints, has exaggerated geopolitical competitions and rivalries among these major players, particularly between India and China. The USA continues to place itself in the Indian Ocean, but as a vigilant observer, striving to maintain the status quo. The region is becoming a theatre

of intensive diplomatic manoeuvring and prospective flashpoints for tension as a result of the intricate interplay of economic interests with aspirations of regional hegemony and spheres of dominance, and for these purposes marine policies of both the nations have reclaimed its historic realm of domination in the Indian Ocean.

## **Securitizing the Ocean: The 21st Century Maritime Silk Route Initiative and Project Mausam**

The Indian Ocean is a highly dynamic and vital body of water, visualised by many as the looming centre of gravity in recent years as Asiatic emerging giants focus on the expanse ocean for its major international sea lines of communication, vast energy reserves, fisheries resources and fast developing economies in the IOR.<sup>xvi</sup> Thereby, the words credited to the maritime strategist Alfred Mahan stand relevant: “Whoever controls the Indian Ocean will dominate Asia, and the destiny of the world will be decided on its waters”.<sup>xvii</sup> While India views the Indian Ocean as a zone of tranquillity and stability<sup>xviii</sup>, tensions are erupting because of China’s expanding foreign policy, economic, and strategic determinations in the region. As Chinese interests aggressively expand oriented towards resolving the *Malacca Dilemma* and augmenting the *String of Pearls*, they are directly clashing with Indian interests, causing anxiety and, to a lesser extent even to the Washington D.C.

China is massively dependent on energy reserves from the West and Central Asia to meet more than half, around 60 percent, of its oil and natural gas needs. Significantly, more than three-quarters, precisely, 80 percent of its oil and gas imports involve extensive sea transportation, occasionally involving prolonged transit durations.<sup>xix</sup> Apart from this, the IOR is also defined in terms of the existence of political instability, piracy, terrorism, and transnational crime. Though, highly dependent, China is a power with a relatively disadvantageous marine geography, and it has no formal military partner around the Indian Ocean. Thus, in the presence of such insecurities, energy imports traversing the Indian Ocean along with the South China Sea, make the securitization of maritime routes crucial for China’s energy security. Further, after three decades of economic growth, China situates itself in a position that America faced in the late nineteenth century, with massive surplus production in a saturated domestic market. In his analysis, Xin Zhang holds that Chinese capitalism is in a state of crisis and thereby requires a “spatial fix”.<sup>xx</sup> Ergo, China is compelled to enhance its footprint in Indian Ocean along with the IOR, some of the efforts in this direction include establishing

and maintaining a robust naval presence along with the development of maritime infrastructure in adjoining states (String of Pearls); increasing of cordial diplomatic and trade relations and launching of the 21<sup>st</sup> century Maritime Silk Road Initiative (MSRI) in 2013 among others.

China's leaders have charted out an ambitious plan; the MSRI which desires to establish three 'blue economic passages' connecting Beijing with the economic hubs across the globe.<sup>xxi</sup> Currently, there are two parallel projects ongoing, the first being the MSRI while the other is its cousin project, the Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB), which was announced separately in 2013 by President Xi Jinping. Often scholars examine the SREB and MSRI concurrently, however, Blanchard and Flint have cautioned that a close reading of both the projects reveals differences in political, social, and economic aspects, hence both are distinct projects and must be analysed separately.<sup>xxii</sup> Beijing promotes the MSRI as a part of its soft power diplomacy, intending to promote shared development and prosperity, harmony, and friendship, by ameliorating mutual understanding, trust, and exchanges.<sup>xxiii</sup> Having two maritime routes intending to link China's coastal regions with Europe and the South Pacific via the Indian Ocean and South China Sea respectively, thereby facilitating maritime transportation and commerce between China and these regions<sup>xxiv</sup>, MSRI stands to expand global integration and boost growth. Thus, for China, turning to the blue waters is no longer a choice but a matter of survival whereby it attempts to bring together not only security but also manufacturing, shipping, and markets, inferred by Mehan as the "three links" of sea power<sup>xxv</sup> which today has become a major mechanism of China's economic and regional diplomacy. While the objective of the MSRI *prima facie* appears to pose no threat to India's national interest, however, efforts of revisiting its imperial ties with its neighbouring and distant territories to assert itself as a world power has made Indian strategists sceptical of China's motivations. These include China's active involvement in building strategic ports at Port Sudan in Sudan, Bagamoyo in Tanzania, Sittwe and Cocos in Myanmar, Hambantota in Sri Lanka, Chittagong in Bangladesh, Karachi and Gwadar in Pakistan, and using them for commerce as well as naval purposes.<sup>xxvi</sup>

For other nations, this body of vast waters is only one of the momentous oceanic arenas, but its value for India is much more than just a vital sea, but is an Ocean of opportunities and aspirations. Her lifelines are concentrated in this area; her independence is built on the freedom of this blue surface. No industrialisation or commercial growth or a politically stable structure is imaginable or conceivable for her unless her coasts are secured.<sup>xxvii</sup> Consequently, China's burgeoning ascendancy and intensifying emulous posture in the Indian Ocean necessitated a revisit of its security strategies,

culminating in the launching the Project Mausam in 2014 as a cardinal part of the foreign policy. Project Mausam/Mawsim, an initiative under the aegis of the Ministry of Culture, Government of India, promoting historical research and archaeological excavations on cultural, commercial, and religious exchanges<sup>xxviii</sup> symbolises a conscious effort to harness India's soft power by promoting the nation's cultural and civilisation linkages across the IOR through knowledge exchanges, networking, and publications. It seeks to fill in the lacunas in understanding history from African, Arab, and Asian perspectives while aiming towards inscribing the trans-national heritage marine route into UNESCO's World Heritage List.<sup>xxix</sup> By emphasising its timeless cultural and economic interactions, India strives to develop a favourable positioning of itself as a benevolent maritime power over 'its' ocean by enhancing the trade, diplomatic, and security ties with these littorals<sup>xxx</sup>; thereby counterbalancing the growing influence of extra-regional powers like China.<sup>xxxi</sup>

Project Mausam aims to reaffix the cultural routes and maritime vistas spanning across the labyrinthine Indian Ocean 'world' - stretching from the Eastern part of the African continent to the Southeast Asian group of coral and volcanic islands and their inland regions, covering the Arabian Peninsula, India, and the Lankan Island.<sup>xxxii</sup> Perhaps, this project would not only enhance and engender the movement of people, ideas, and goods along with culture across the Indian Ocean facilitating multi-cultural and multiethnic exchanges and interactions, but would also attempt to counterbalance China's MSRI by capitalising India's ancient connections with the region. Though both the soft power based diplomatic approaches align themselves with the view that "Foreign Policy is too serious a matter to be left only to Diplomats'", unlike MSRI, which is purely strategic, Project Mausam is primarily cultural.

Upon its inception, the project received praise from the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) Director-General, while captivating the interest of various nations, both coastal and extra-regional, within this massive oceanic theatre.<sup>xxxiii</sup> The initiative has both internal along with external objectives. As per the website, at the macro level, it would revitalise, reconnect and re-establish maritime communications and commercial linkages between the identified 39 littoral countries of the Indian Ocean while at the micro level; the primary objective would be to understand national cultures in their distinct geographical maritime environments.<sup>xxxiv</sup> Thus, efforts are being made to re-establish long-lost relationships between Indian Ocean countries and to open up new channels and bridges of collaboration and interactions. Thus the project goes beyond the cultural institutions to which the initiative was relinquished (Archaeological Survey of



India (ASI), as the nodal body and Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA) and National Museum as its Research Units) to be primarily viewed as a policy of soft power, which is about appealing the hearts and minds of the community/ies in addition to it being a strategic policy. Conceivably, Project Mausam is a part of India's cultural diplomacy with a real strategic purpose. The guiding light behind this project is to emblazon a 'Transnational Mixed Route' (consisting of both Natural and Cultural Heritage) on UNESCO's World Heritage List. While as a multidisciplinary programme, Project Mausam rekindles the sentimental yearning for the ancient grandeur of trade and humanistic encounters across the IOR; on the strategic front, it reflects a determined effort by India to reclaim responsibility and begin a mission to restore this bygone maritime glory or predominance. In short, Project Mausam goes beyond exploring historical linkages, aiming towards strengthening commercial linkages, diplomatic relationships, and security engagements in the region with India as the central hub, while encompassing a cultural aspect to complement its economic and diplomatic focus.<sup>xxxv</sup> On similar lines, Padmaja, in a paper titled *The Significance of Civilizational Nautical Narratives in India's Maritime Diplomacy* asserts that initiatives like Project Mausam seek to project a harmless and alternative standpoint on the strategic leadership that India can offer in the IOR.<sup>xxxvi</sup> It presents a narrative of Indian exceptionalism, built in a romanticised picture of India's past, formed by its anti-imperialist and non-aligned posture.<sup>xxxvii</sup> Simply put, India does not aspire to be a hegemonic in the region, rather it does want its 'special' relationship with the Indian Ocean to be globally realised<sup>xxxviii</sup> and Project Mausam gives her that position.

A thorough examination of Project Mausam, reveals its potential to foster growth, boost infrastructure, and to a great extent develop cosmopolitanism, while simultaneously positioning India on an equal footing to China's maritime dominance. While offering manifold prospects for development and integration, the project posing itself as providing an alternative to MSRI has proven to be a non-starter. Largely, the efforts aimed towards making the Ocean prove as the natural maritime expression of the nation's national interest faces logistical hurdles, resource constraints, lack of political motivations, and geopolitical complexities which is visible as it continues to extend its deadline from 2017 to 2020<sup>xxxix</sup> and now up to 31 March 2023.<sup>xl</sup> The examination of the last nine years reflects a few critical observations. The initiative identified 39 countries as prospective collaborators in the trans-national nominations for UNESCO's World Heritage List.<sup>xli</sup> However, support for Mausam around the IOR has remained restricted, as of March 2021, only 14 countries of Asia and the Arabian Peninsula; Bangladesh, Cambodia, Myanmar, Thailand, Indonesia, Philippines, Singapore, Malaysia,

Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, Jordan, The Islamic Republic of Iran, and UAE, have nominated their resource persons.<sup>xlii</sup> Hence, the approach towards the Project needs to be re-examined to understand why there has been a lacklustre response so far. Apart from the limitations on the active participation side, India's overarching strategic and political orientation has also been subject to scrutiny and has attracted its share of critics. Kumar and Chacko's arguments emphasise the existence of an intricate relationship between a country's domestic politics and ideologies and its capability to wield soft power effectively on the world stage. Perhaps, the success of India's soft power initiatives relies upon the robustness of its democratic institutions or its mechanisms for establishing an inclusive democracy<sup>xliii</sup> and the ability to uphold an inclusive national identity. The role of Governments must be confined to that of a facilitator. Chacko further elaborates that such cultural initiatives tend to be challenged by the principles and nationalist narratives that guide and legitimise India's foreign policy.<sup>xliv</sup> Hence, soft power diplomacy which is based on cultural linkages can only thrive if it stands to be a people centric approach.

In this context, Project Mausam aims to recognise and celebrate the cultural interconnectedness amongst Asian, Arabian, and African cultures, which tend to face challenges from the fraught domestic politics of Hindu nationalism which threatens to inflame religious animosity outside its borders, thereby resulting in far-reaching implications, complicating relationships and disturbing social harmony.<sup>xlv</sup> He also contends that the India's considerable size and economic might in comparison to the rest of its neighbours naturally engenders insecurity. This imbalance has made the littoral states welcome and accept the 'unconditional' defence assistance from the outside powers.<sup>xlvi</sup> It is apparent that although soft power may be essential, it is not a sufficient prerequisite to fulfill national ambitions. This is because the decisions made in foreign policy are not made by an individual. Its success depends on other nations, in this case, the littoral states play a crucial role on in determining the success of India's foreign policy. If the aspired goals are divergent to the national interests of others, they would not align even if they appreciate and share their histories with Indian culture and civilisation. That is where soft power loses its purpose; accomplishment requires the utilisation of some facets of hard power.<sup>xlvii</sup>

However, Kumar's suggestions stand contrary to India's aspirations, which has already been stated, "India looks to establish itself as a strategic and harmless leader and not as a hegemon". Perhaps, the presentation of hard power for making the Cultural Project a success runs contrary to Indian values which according to Brewster is based on 'moral and spiritual leadership'.<sup>xlviii</sup> Thus, the growing

tensions and competition in the IOR and the interest in keeping the waters of the Indian Ocean ‘its’ domain of influence underscores the Indian discernment of having a special responsibility and an international leadership part to play in the Indian Ocean.<sup>xlix</sup>

## Conclusion

Within this scaffolding of ‘mythologising’ the past, it is not only China’s MSRI, based on the Ancient Silk Route; but also India’s project MAUSAM which traces its foundations upon the ancient transnational maritime routes<sup>1</sup> and cultural linkages based on seasonal winds. Project Mausam is a step in the right direction by India to establish peace and harmony in the region. The growing interests of the two giants in the IOR have brought them into loggerheads, as the partner countries of Mausam are also a party to the MSRI, however re-developing the lost pre-colonial cultural linkages of the trans-national marine route would not only enhance India’s position in the IOR but also address the breaks in connectivity and eventually would also diffuse national rivalries and regional tensions. Though MSRI has been expanding swiftly, however the financial burdens created by it has made the states sceptical about the potential transgression of their Sovereignty as China continues to create naval and commercial hubs. Perhaps, Mausam presents India with a chance to re-establish itself as the most reliant neighbour in the region situation as it concentrates on documenting and delineating the map of historical networks of the IOR’s commercial, religious, and cultural exchanges across communities bound together by the shared maritime historical ties, thereby, creating a sense of ‘Indian Oceanness’.

Indeed, we began with the idea that ‘whoever controls the Indian Ocean, controls the world trade’ stands in the dark today as we look up to developing a multi-polar world order in a globalised era. Thus, if we wish to seek a stable peaceful multi-polar world order, the right way to begin is to create a multi-polar Asia, for which the existing antagonisms must be done away with. Nothing could foster this vision more than an open-minded consultation about collaborative development and cooperative approach and Project Mausam instead of the MSRI provides one such initiative.

## About the Authors

- Having a 32 year experience of teaching, Dr. Pandey is a staunch feminist scholar having keen interest and specialisation in Gender Studies and International Relations. Some of the publications

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- Mitalee Mahapatra, is a Doctoral research scholar at the University of Delhi having keen interest in geopolitics, nationalist thoughts and domains of non-traditional security. Her current research focuses on the intersection of soft power initiatives and strategic interests in the Indian Ocean Region.

## Footnotes

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