INTRODUCTION

Indian Ocean is the third largest Ocean in the world after Pacific and Atlantic Oceans. Indian Ocean resembles an inverted 'W'. At its apex is the Indian sub-continent comprising of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Its eastern leg is represented by Burma, Malaysian peninsula, Thailand, Singapore, Indonesian archipelago and the Australian continent, while its western leg includes Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and the African continent. In its south, there is the continent of Antartica. All these features of the Indian Ocean make it a 'landlocked sea'. The major constituents of the Indian Ocean are Red Sea, Persian Gulf, Arabian Sea, Bay of Bengal, Andaman Sea, Java Sea, Timor Sea and the great Australian Bight.

Indian Ocean, ever since the beginning of maritime activities, has been an area of attraction for both regional as well as extra-regional powers but it acquired more importance and significance after the Admiral Alfred T. Mohan's prophecy: "Whoever controls the Indian Ocean dominates Asia. The Ocean is the key to the seven seas. In the twenty first century the destiny of the world will be decided on its waters."

The geography of the Indian Ocean enables it to acquire the importance of an integral link between the eastern and western parts of the earth. It fulfills the function of the main
connecting link between the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans. The routes passing through it connects, for instance, Europe East, Africa, South and South-East 'Asia, Far East Australia and Oceania, the Sea routes passing through the Indian Ocean have an extraordinary significance for their navigability throughout the year. This increases the importance of various gateways to the Ocean: in the West via the Cape of Good Hope, in the north-west through the Suez canal, the Red Sea and Bab-el-Mandeb Strait in the east via the Malacca Strait and further South-east via, the Indonesian islands as well as post Australia to both the north and the south.

The history of seafaring in the Indian Ocean dates back to early times. This is especially true of north-western area between Egypt, the Horn of Africa, Persia and the West Coast of India. This is supposed to be the area in which international interest is particularly concentrated today. Today more than 90 per cent trade of the world is carried by the Oceanic routes and the Indian Ocean located between world's two largest Oceans governs rather dictates the international trade. Every year about 30,000 ships, some 1,500 of them tankers passes through the Sea routes: through the Indian Ocean, around the Cape of Good Hope and through Malacca Strait. On average two tankers an hour, pass through the Strait of Haronuz forty ships a day through the channel between Mozambique and Madagascar and almost as many through the Malacca Strait. About one-third of all
international air routes also cross the Indian Ocean. Other than oil, there are other products of the area: minerals, some of them are essential for military purposes, which are transported by way of Indian Ocean principally to the United States, Europe and Japan.

The environment of the Indian Ocean is best suited for navigation throughout the year with the exception of its Southern part than other Oceans of the World Indian Ocean is open only from one side its winds unlike of others Oceans are predictable. From the outside world, the Indian Ocean is open at various places which make it approachable from the Atlantic Ocean either through the Cape of Good Hope route or through the Straits, Mediterranean Sea, the Suez Canal, the Red Sea and then through the Strait of Beg-al-Mandeb. The most outstanding feature of the Indian Ocean is Indian peninsula. The Location of India, in this context holds out two complementary options: the Indian sub-continent being the central axis in strategic pattern of Asia can serve as a stupendous base and arsenal in the oceanic region, while Indian Ocean itself can act as a vital factor in determining India's future security. India's security lies, to a larger extent, on the Indian Ocean and the freedom at the Mercy of whichever country controls this Ocean.
From the political point of view, Indian Ocean may be divided into four quadrants having different problems, functions and potentialities. The north-west quadrant comprises of the Persian Gulf and the sea-lanes fanning out from the straits of Harnuz and the Gulf of Oman. The north-east comprises of South-east Asia, Malacca and Sunda Straits and Indonesia. In the South-Western quadrant is an unavoidable conflict between the white and the black in the Southern of African continent. In the east-world Australia appears to be seeking role in itself in relation to the island people and the Asian mainland to the north while retaining a connection with the United States.

Indian Ocean other than being an area of international trade and commerce offers vast sources of minerals including strategic ores both to the developed as well as developing countries. Concentrated in Littoral and hinterland states are more than half Western world's prospected deposit of oil, two third of its uranium, half its gold and almost all its diamond deposits. From these countries United States alone imports about 40 different raw materials, including such ores as Uranium, lithium, beryllium, zirconium, etc.

The Indian Ocean assumes tremendous importance against the background of the fact that it has large oil-bearing regions on its coasts. The coastal shelves and other areas of its bottom
acquire because of the concentration of Iron, manganese, phosphorites metal containing silts, brine and alumina etc. Besides, there are possibilities of discovering other minerals as well.

The natural resources of the Indian Ocean region allure the nations particularly super powers. Their efforts to explore and exploit mere resources not only create tensions among the big powers but also lead to provocations to the regional states, culminating into conflicts of regional and intra-regional character.

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