India’s Maritime Consciousness: Influence of Maritime Identity on National Character

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“Shano Varuna” (Be auspicious unto us, O Varuna)—Rig VedaIndia's maritime identity serves as a fundamental catalyst in shaping the nation's core values, deeply rooted in its rich cultural heritage and historical legacy. As a civilizational power, India's connection to maritime identity traces back to ancient times, with a profound oceanic heritage and legacy. This heritage is evident in the maritime tradition deeply ingrained within India's coastal communities, profoundly influencing their customs and practices. From ancient hymns venerating Varuna, the Lord of the Oceans, to the invocation of blessings from Aditi for safe sea voyages, India's spiritual connection to the seas dates back millennia, solidifying the maritime consciousness in the lives of its people. India maintains strong cultural connections with the sea, seamlessly integrating it into daily life, cuisine, and culture. The Indian Ocean monsoon's influence on lifestyle further underscores the indelible impact of maritime factors on India’s national character.Within Indian tradition, the ocean holds symbolic importance as the primordial source of the universe's creation, emphasising the sacred relationship between India and the seas. Additionally, sophisticated shipbuilding techniques outlined in ancient texts like the Yuktiukalpataru highlight India's maritime expertise and innovation in antiquity. Throughout history, the Indian coastline has been a bustling centre of peaceful maritime endeavours, primarily driven by trade. References in ancient Indian texts, Buddhist Jatakas, and folklore consistently highlight the pivotal role of oceanic activity in the prosperity of ancient civilisations such as the Indus Valley Civilisation, with sites like Mohenjo-Daro, Lothal, and Harappa serving as testaments to this legacy. These interactions extended to various regions, including Africa, Arabia, Mesopotamia, and the Mediterranean, showcasing the enduring significance of India's maritime heritage on a global scale.India's maritime heritage serves as a cornerstone in shaping its national character and historical trajectory. Etymologically, the origin of the word 'navigation' from the Sanskrit term 'Navagati' underscores the deep-rooted connection between Indian culture and maritime activities. From the first migrations to Southeast Asia in the 1st century AD, evidenced by the discovery of a Ganesha statue in Java, Indonesia, to the flourishing of cultural and religious expressions fostered by Buddhist and Hindu philosophers, India's maritime identity has left an indelible mark on the region. Rooted in its longstanding maritime connections, this expansion represents a significant historical legacy.Moving forward, India's efforts to rejuvenate its maritime consciousness are crucial for instilling a profound sense of maritime identity that transcends geographical boundaries and connects lives across the vast Indian Ocean region. Leveraging its unique geostrategic and cultural position, India has the opportunity to reaffirm its stature as a maritime power. Initiatives such as the "SAGARMALA" project and the "MAUSAM" initiative are indicative of renewed efforts to revive interest in India's maritime prowess. Integrating oceanic awareness into national development strategies will help harness India's maritime potential while steering towards a prosperous future rooted in its maritime prowess. Thus, as the nation strides into the twenty-first century, a comprehensive and targeted

approach across various dimensions of the maritime domain is indispensable for reigniting and sustaining India's maritime consciousness,thereby bolstering national strength through a resilient maritime identity.

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