

India's Blue Economy Strategy: Drivers, Evolution and Strategic Implications in the Indo-Pacific

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ABSTRACT	ARTICLE DETAILS
India's Blue Economy Strategy has evolved into a comprehensive framework for marine security, sustainable economic development and Indo-Pacific geopolitical interests. While the environmental and sectoral aspects of the Blue Economy have gained greater attention, there is less focus on the strategic drivers of India's policy evolution and the consequences for regional maritime governance. This paper investigates the strategic significance of India's Blue Economy Strategy in the new Indo-Pacific order and examines the internal and external elements shaping it. The research uses qualitative methods, such as document analysis and comparative policy analysis, to examine official policy papers, government reports and relevant academic literature. The findings reveal that India's Blue Economy has evolved from a resource-based development goal to a sophisticated marine strategy that includes technical innovation, national security, economic modernisation, and regional diplomacy. This trend is driven by geopolitical competition in the Indo-Pacific, emerging maritime security challenges, climate change, and the need for sustainable ocean governance. The study illustrates the importance of learning from India's experience in developing maritime governments as they seek to reconcile sustainable development, maritime security, and regional cooperation. It also proposes an integrated analytical framework linking Blue Economy governance with the maritime strategy.	Published On: 31 July 2026
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INTRODUCTION

In this twenty-first century, oceans have become an important arena for economic progress, environmental sustainability and geopolitical contestation. Covering more than 70% of the surface of our globe, these waterways carry around 80% of the volume of global trade, on which ships, marine animals, natural resources, weather patterns and the livelihoods of three billion people across the world depend (UNCTAD, 2023). It is the only way towards economic growth, national resilience and international security. The increasing threat of climate change, marine pollution, biodiversity loss, overfishing and challenges to maritime security make the need for sustainable ocean governance more visible. This explains the change of the Blue Economy from an environmental management framework to a strategic paradigm integrating sustainable development, marine governance, technology innovation and geopolitical concerns (OECD, 2016; World Bank, 2017).

However, the idea of the Blue Economy remains controversial despite its widespread recognition. The World Bank (2017) defines the Blue Economy as the sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods and jobs, and the health of ocean ecosystems. However, the OECD (2016) considers the ocean economy to have great potential to lead through innovation and sustain the transformation of all economic sectors, such as maritime transport, fisheries, offshore renewable energy, marine biotechnology, and ocean observation. Recent studies suggest that the Blue Economy is not only about eco-preservation but also about marine governance, inter-institutional cooperation, technical modernisation, and strategic competitiveness (Bennett et al. 2019; Voyer et al. 2018). More broadly, the Blue Economy is less about a collection of seaborne businesses and more about integrated governance, so countries can be competitive in the market, maintain a stable natural environment and expand influence in the maritime domain at the same time.

This strategic dimension is abundantly evident in the Indo-Pacific, where marine areas are quickly becoming the hubs of the world's economy and sites of geopolitical rivalries. Indeed, the Indo-Pacific region has numerous critical Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs), carries most of the world's energy shipments, and has a wealth of marine resources that are critical elements for future economic development. At the same time, rising strategic competition among major powers, in particular the US–China confrontation, has made maritime governance a significant issue in regional security (Medcalf, 2020). The growth of China's BRI and MSR, the development of China's navy, and maritime disputes have resulted in local nations having to realign their maritime plans to improve national maritime strength. Most recently (Pant and Rej, 2022), geopolitical events have influenced and modified India's attitude towards the importance of the oceans for the country's prosperity and regional leadership.

India's track record of strategic development in the Blue Economy is one of the most impressive among the growing maritime nations. It has a coastline of around 7,517 km, an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of 2 million sq. km, over 1,300 islands and a central location in the Indian Ocean. These geographical features have given it marine advantages that influence, on the one hand, India's economic development and, on the other, her national security. Maritime transport represents around 95% of India's trade by volume, and the coastal economy alone sustains millions of people working in marine industries such as fisheries, aquaculture, shipping, tourism, offshore energy and other maritime industries (Government of India, 2021). These reasons have made maritime activities a vital aspect of India's national strategy for a long time. In addition to its contribution to economic modernisation, some recent Vietnamese publications have also considered India's Blue Economy a strategic concept that links marine security, sustainable development and national resilience.

India's maritime strategy has changed markedly since Prime Minister Narendra Modi took office in 2014. Instead of fragmenting sectoral policies, the government has chosen an integrated approach to maritime development through programmes such as Sagarmala, Maritime India Vision 2030, Deep Ocean Mission, Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) and the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI). These initiatives collectively show that the Blue Economy has moved from sustainable resource management to an effective means to enhance maritime competitiveness, drive technological innovation, modernise infrastructure, boost regional connectivity, and enhance strategic influence (Government of India, 2021; Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, 2021). India's marine policy documents show the rising awareness that economic development and maritime security are no longer independent policy realms, but converging agendas.

There has been plenty written about the Blue Economy, but there are still major gaps in our knowledge. The existing literature is largely focused on fisheries, marine environmental protection, coastal management or specific maritime sectors with little attention to explaining the strategic drivers of India's Blue Economy transition (Saran, 2021; Vivekanandan et al., 2022). Second, the existing literature predominantly treats economic growth, marine governance, and national security as distinct analytical domains, thereby overlooking the increasing integration of India's maritime policy. Third, the defining feature of the Indo-Pacific is geopolitical competition. Yet, there is little research on how external strategic dynamics such as China's rise, competition for maritime connectivity and the evolving Indo-Pacific architecture have impacted India's Blue Economy Strategy. Hence, the strategic implications of India's Blue Economy for regional governance and the emerging maritime powers remain poorly recognised.

To address these gaps, the article discusses the evolution of India's Blue Economy Strategy and examines the linkages between the internal development imperatives and the external geopolitical considerations. The initiative will answer three research questions: What drives India's Blue Economy strategy at the national and global level? How did India's Blue Economy evolve from a sustainable development concept to a comprehensive marine strategy? What are the strategic implications of this shift for maritime governance and Indo-Pacific geopolitics?

The research focuses on qualitative document analysis and comparative policy examination. It draws on official records of the Indian government, reports from international institutions and contemporary scholarly research. Drawing on concepts from Blue Economy governance, maritime strategy and strategic studies, this essay develops an integrated analytical framework that links economic modernisation, maritime governance and geopolitical competitiveness. This paper conceptualises the Blue Economy as an instrument of marine statecraft, rather than a sustainable development programme. It contributes to the current literature on maritime governance in the Indo-Pacific. It offers policy implications for emerging maritime nations, in particular Vietnam, to improve maritime governance without compromising sustainable development, national security, or regional cooperation.

LITERATURE REVIEWS

The Blue Economy has moved from being a sustainable development agenda to a wider governance framework. Since the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Blue Economy has become increasingly linked to marine conservation, economic development, technological innovation, institutional governance, and national strategy (United Nations, 2012). According to the World Bank (2017), the Blue Economy is the sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods, and the protection of ecosystems. However, there is no single definition that is widely agreed upon. In a similar vein, the OECD (2016) recognises the growing role of marine sectors such as offshore renewable

energy, marine biotechnology, autonomous shipping, and ocean science. The European Commission (2021) stresses climate neutrality and circular maritime businesses.

The topic has been expanded much further in academic studies. According to Silver et al. (2015), the Blue Economy is a governance framework with different interpretations in different nations and includes environmental sustainability, economic competitiveness and social equality. Effective Blue Economy governance involves collaboration between governments, industries, communities and international organisations (Bennett et al., 2019). More recently, Schofield (2020) and Lee et al. (2020) have shown that marine governance is increasingly associated with geopolitical competitiveness, strategic infrastructure, supply-chain resilience, and technological innovation. Thus, the Blue Economy has grown from sustainable ocean management to a multifaceted governing paradigm that encompasses economic development, national security, diplomacy, and environmental sustainability.

In this context, the Blue Economy has become an important instrument of national policy. Allocations in ports, logistics, marine research, offshore energy and digital maritime frameworks contribute to economic sustainability and strategic advantage (OECD, 2016). In the Indo-Pacific, marine connectivity, resilient supply chains, and critical infrastructure have become key factors of geopolitical competition. Consequently, scholars increasingly consider the Blue Economy as a form of marine diplomacy, where economic power is converted into geopolitical power (Till, 2018; Medcalf, 2020).

The studies on India's Blue Economy can be broadly grouped into three types. The first discusses its contribution to economic development through fisheries, shipping, ports, offshore energy, tourism and marine biotechnology (Government of India, 2021; Ministry of Earth Sciences, 2021). The second refers to environmental sustainability, such as marine biodiversity, coastal management, marine spatial planning, climate adaptation, and ecosystem resilience (Vivekanandan et al., 2022). The third examines institutional reforms and key initiatives such as Sagarmala, Maritime India Vision 2030, SAGAR, the Deep Ocean Mission, and related governance policies.

Three main research gaps are found in the literature. Current Blue Economy research is still largely embedded in the paradigm of sustainable development and environmental governance, with relatively less focus on strategic and governance dimensions. Second, studies on India tend to be sectoral or policy-oriented, without offering an overall analytical framework that connects economic development, institutional change, environmental sustainability, and geopolitical competitiveness. Third, although the Indo-Pacific is becoming strategically important, there is a paucity of studies explaining the role of India's Blue Economy in the emerging regional maritime order.

This research aims to fill these gaps by proposing a coherent analytical framework that integrates Blue Economy governance, maritime strategy, and geopolitical rivalry. The research interprets the Blue Economy not merely as a sustainable development initiative, but also as a multifaceted tool of maritime statecraft, promoting economic modernisation, technological advancement, governance transformation, national security, and regional influence simultaneously. This governance-oriented perspective provides a more comprehensive account of India's Blue Economy strategy and its broader repercussions for developing maritime states and the rebalancing of the Indo-Pacific order.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper employs an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that combines Blue Economy governance, maritime strategy and geoeconomics to elucidate India's Blue Economy Strategy and its strategic implications for the Indo-Pacific. It conceptualises the Blue Economy as a multi-dimensional tool via which states seek economic modernisation, marine security and geopolitical influence.

The first pillar is the governance of the Blue Economy. A previous study has shown that the Blue Economy is a governance concept that encourages sustainable marine resource use and economic development (World Bank, 2017; OECD, 2016). Recent studies stress that successful Blue Economy governance goes beyond resource use and relies on ecosystem-based management, scientific innovation, institutional coordination, and stakeholder participation (Silver et al., 2015; Bennett et al., 2019). The Blue Economy must be considered as a framework for flexible governance, applied differently depending on national goals (Voyer et al., 2018). This view is particularly relevant for India, where ports, logistics, marine science, renewable energy, maritime security, and regional cooperation are all part of a comprehensive national maritime strategy, including programs such as Sagarmala, Maritime India Vision 2030, the Deep Ocean Mission, and SAGAR (Government of India, 2021).

The second pillar is the theory of maritime strategy. Classical thinkers like Mahan (1890) and Corbett (1911) regarded sea power as a result of geography, maritime trade, naval capabilities, and national economic strength. Modern studies develop this perspective further by highlighting governance, technical innovation, connectivity, institutional efficiency and resilience as the key elements of maritime power (Till, 2018). Maritime strategy has also broadened from military rivalry to non-traditional concerns such as piracy, illegal fishing, marine pollution, cybersecurity, climate change, and supply-chain disruption (Bateman, 2017). This broader understanding provides an appropriate lens for reading India's Blue Economy as a strategic instrument rather than a marine development programme alone.

The third pillar is geo-economics and geopolitics. Economic tools in infrastructure, logistics, technology, energy security and resilient supply chains are becoming primary sources of geopolitical power (Blackwill & Harris, 2016). The strategic struggle in the Indo-Pacific among the major powers, especially the US-China rivalry, China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and Maritime Silk Road (MSR), and the growing competition in the Indian Ocean, have changed the maritime environment of India (Medcalf, 2020; Pant & Rej, 2022). Thus, India's Blue Economy strategy is not only a response to the internal developmental requirements but also to the external geopolitical challenges. Recent studies show that it has developed into a complete approach connecting economic growth, governance, maritime security and regional leadership.

In view of these three theoretical foundations, the present study presents an integrated analytical framework that explicates India's Blue Economy Strategy in terms of the interplay between internal development dynamics and foreign geopolitical factors. This framework, unlike earlier sector-specific studies, brings together governance, maritime strategy and geoeconomics to explain how the Blue Economy functions as a comprehensive instrument of maritime statecraft in the Indo-Pacific.

METHODOLOGY

This work adopts a qualitative research design, integrating document analysis and comparative policy analysis. Such approaches are often used in the study of international relations and public policy, as they offer a clear and organised perspective on policy development, institutional change, and the determinants of strategic decisions in different government contexts, especially those dealing with complex governance systems (Bowen, 2009). The major source of data was official policy documents issued by the Indian government, such as Maritime India Vision 2030, Draft Blue Economy Policy for India, Sagarmala Programme, Deep Ocean Mission, National Fisheries Policy, and SAGAR initiative. Also included in the work are publications from international organisations such as the UN, the World Bank, the OECD and the Indian Ocean Rim Association. The research is additionally supported by peer-reviewed academic articles on Blue Economy governance, maritime strategy, geopolitical position in the Indo-Pacific, and ocean governance to underpin its analytical approach.

The process will be based on three consecutive steps. An analysis of the official policy papers will identify the key economic, institutional, environmental, and strategic factors determining the development of India's Blue Economy. Second, a comparative policy study will be carried out to explore the evolution of India's Blue Economy throughout several policy phases, highlighting transformations in its strategic concerns and governance approach. Finally, the results of the analysis will be discussed in the context of the theoretical framework developed earlier. This allows us to understand how a sectoral development policy was translated into a holistic strategy for the development of the Indian Blue Economy, integrating document and policy analysis with a theoretical viewpoint.

DRIVERS OF INDIA'S BLUE ECONOMY STRATEGY

India's Blue Economy strategy has evolved in tandem with internal economic upheaval, marine security concerns, and geopolitical shifts in the Indo-Pacific. It is not just an environmental programme but an integrated policy involving economic modernisation, national security, technical advancement and regional influence.

Economic Transformation

India's Blue Economy Strategy was driven primarily by economic transformation as a domestic driver. Economic liberalisation in India since 1991 has seen a rising dependency on maritime transport, coastal infrastructure, and global value chains. This has transformed maritime development from a sectoral policy to a national development plan (Government of India, 2021). India's economic competitiveness has become heavily reliant on maritime sectors, given its 7,517 km coastline, more than 2 million km² of Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), and over 95% of India's trade by volume being transported by sea. It also gives millions of livelihoods through fisheries, shipping, tourism, offshore energy and coastal businesses (Government of India, 2021).

Consistent with the worldwide trends described by the OECD (2016), India too is increasingly recognising the Blue Economy as a new source of productivity, which is port-centric and includes logistics, offshore renewable energy, marine biotechnology, and digital maritime services. Such transformation is also evident in flagship programmes such as Sagarmala that integrate port modernisation with industrial corridors, logistics networks, and coastal economic zones to enhance global competitiveness and supply-chain efficiency (Ministry of Ports, Shipping, and Waterways, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic has further strengthened this plan; it has also demonstrated the importance of resilient maritime infrastructure and logistical systems.

Maritime Security

The second important driver of India's Blue Economy Strategy is maritime security. Maritime security nowadays is not only about naval defence but also secure trade routes, energy security, resilient infrastructure, marine resource management and freedom of navigation (Till, 2018). India's important position in the northern Indian Ocean, through which a large part of the world's trade and energy flows (Kaplan, 2010), has made marine security crucial to its long-term development.

While classical maritime philosophers like Mahan (1890) and Corbett (1911) stressed naval power and control of the sea, recent scholarship emphasises maritime governance, logistics, technology, and institutional capacity as equally vital sources of maritime power (Till, 2018; Bateman, 2017). In this context, India has enhanced its maritime capacity through investments in ports, satellite navigation, ocean surveillance, marine scientific research and digital governance. The SAGAR project combines marine security, sustainable development, regional collaboration, humanitarian assistance, and capacity building, reflecting India's holistic approach to maritime governance (Government of India, 2021).

Geopolitical Competition in the Indo-Pacific

Geopolitical competition has expedited the evolution of India's Blue Economy Strategy. The emergence of China, the extension of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Maritime Silk Road (MSR), and the rising Indo-Pacific competition have substantially transformed India's strategic environment (Rolland, 2017; Kaplan, 2010). In response, India has increasingly employed geoeconomic tools – such as port development, maritime connectivity, logistics and Blue Economy governance – to boost strategic autonomy while keeping regional influence.

This strategy is further reinforced by the Indo-Pacific idea that links economic connectivity with maritime security (Medcalf, 2020). India links economic modernisation with regional diplomacy, humanitarian assistance, marine science, and sustainable ocean governance through projects like SAGAR, IPOI and Maritime India Vision 2030 (Government of India, 2021). Thus, the Blue Economy has developed from sustainable development to a holistic tool of marine statecraft that strengthens economic resilience, strategic autonomy and India's growing salience in the Indo-Pacific.

Sustainability, Climate Change and Ocean Governance

Environmental sustainability is a key driver of India's Blue Economy Strategy, marking a change from resource exploitation to sustainable ocean governance. Climate change, biodiversity loss, marine pollution, coastline erosion and overexploitation of marine resources are progressively threatening India's economic development and coastal livelihoods. As a result, environmental protection is not seen as an impediment to expansion but as an essential precondition for long-term marine competitiveness.

India has steadily mainstreamed sustainability in the Blue Economy through ecosystem-based management, marine spatial planning, climate resilience and scientific research. The Draft Blue Economy Policy Framework and projects like Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) and the Deep Ocean Mission provide for integrated governance across ports, fisheries, shipping, renewable energy and marine science (Government of India, 2021). These policies are closely connected with SDG 14, the Paris Agreement and other international environmental commitments and reinforce India's position in regional ocean governance. However, as the OECD (2016) notes, the future ocean economy will increasingly depend on technological innovation and sustainable resource management rather than on resource extraction alone. Sustainability has therefore emerged both as an environmental objective and as a strategic element in India's maritime security and regional leadership.

Technological Innovation and Institutional Modernisation

Technological innovation and institutional reform are the main facilitators of India's Blue Economy Strategy. Advances in Artificial Intelligence (AI), Big Data, satellite navigation, autonomous ships, remote sensing, marine biotechnology and ocean observation systems have changed the way we regulate and compete in the maritime space (Outa et al., 2018; Tides of Change for a Sustainable Blue Economy, 2024). India has recognised this trend and has invested extensively in marine science, digital infrastructure and indigenous technological competence.

Flagship efforts like Deep Ocean Mission, O-SMART, and NavIC promote deep-sea exploration, ocean observation, disaster forecasting, fisheries management, maritime surveillance, and digital navigation while improving India's strategic autonomy (Ministry of Earth Sciences, 2021). Recent policy evaluations also point out that marine science and digital infrastructure have become the primary pillars of India's maritime modernisation.

Technical development increases institutional advancement. India's marine administration was formerly divided across multiple ministries dealing with ports, fisheries, environment, shipping, earth sciences and the military. Recent changes seek to enhance policy consistency, collaboration among ministries, stakeholder engagement and collective ocean governance through initiatives such as the Maritime India Vision 2030 (Government of India, 2021). These advances show that successfully implementing the Blue Economy is not only about technological competence but also about flexible, evidence-based governance that can respond to climate change, technological disruption, and geopolitical volatility.

EVOLUTION OF INDIA'S BLUE ECONOMY STRATEGY

From Maritime Development to the Blue Economy (1991–2013)

India's Blue Economy Strategy should be understood not as a separate policy action but as a process of evolution. Even before the Blue Economy became part of India's policy rhetoric, maritime progress was a major part of the country's economic modernisation after the liberalisation reforms of 1991. The liberalisation of the economy accelerated India's integration into global trade, dependence on maritime transit and the strategic importance of ports, coastal facilities, shipping, fisheries and offshore energy.

Thus, the link between maritime development and national economic competitiveness, beyond resource exploitation, was underscored (Government of India, 2021).

But India's marine administration was fragmented in this period. Fragmented responsibilities for ports, fisheries, coastal management, marine scientific research, offshore energy and environmental protection among several ministries and agencies resulted in inadequate policy coordination. Most initiatives focused on sectoral goals such as port growth, fisheries development, hydrocarbon exploration, and coastal industrialisation without an integrated ocean governance framework (Ministry of Earth Sciences, 2021).

At the global level, the Indian marine outlook has been considerably affected by the formation of a universal policy structure of sustainable development. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in 1992 and the subsequent Rio+20 Conference in 2012 called for the exploitation of marine resources to promote economic development, environmental conservation and social progress (United Nations, 2012). The OECD (2016) issued the report *The Ocean Economy in 2030*, further reinforcing the view that the ocean-based sectors, including maritime transport, marine biotechnology, offshore renewable energy and ocean research, will be significant drivers of future economic growth.

This time also saw changes in the domestic strategic factors. The government identified oceans as important resources for national growth and energy security, given India's strategic location in the Indian Ocean and increasing dependence on marine trade. Simultaneously, the buildup of Chinese naval capabilities in the Indian Ocean and expanding regional connectivity projects have sharpened India's perception of the geopolitical significance of maritime infrastructure and sea lanes (Kaplan, 2010). Although the term "Blue Economy" was not formally adopted in the national policy, many of its core elements, such as sustainable fisheries, maritime infrastructure, economic development of the coast and marine scientific research, have already become essential elements of India's strategic maritime planning. These developments are detailed in recent studies on India's marine development strategy. The period 1991–2013 laid the institutional and economic foundations for India's future Blue Economy Strategy. Maritime sectors were increasingly viewed as an integral part of national modernisation, but policy execution remained mostly piecemeal and sector-specific.

Integrating Maritime Development into National Strategy (2014–2019)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's inauguration was a significant change in 2014. Unlike former regimes, the Modi government identified and started to address maritime development as a national strategic priority, combining economic modernisation, maritime security, environmental sustainability and regional diplomacy in an integrated Blue Economy framework. This stage is characterised by the formal adoption of India's Blue Economy Strategy.

The Sagarmala programme was a sharp change from the previous maritime policies. Sagarmala was not just about port expansion but a port-centric development model that combined port modernisation with industrial corridors, multimodal logistics, coastal economic zones and manufacturing centres. The project aims to match transport infrastructure with regional economic growth to reduce logistics costs, improve export competitiveness, attract private investment, and strengthen India's position in global value chains (Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, 2021). The change marked a broader move away from a sectoral marine policy to integrated maritime economic governance.

Another major accomplishment was the launch of Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) in 2015. SAGAR enhanced understanding of maritime progress in India by explicitly linking economic development with maritime security, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR), marine environmental protection, and regional capacity building. Rather than seeing security and development as two different policy areas, SAGAR considered them as two mutually reinforcing pillars of India's maritime strategy (Government of India, 2021). SAGAR became the strategic pillar of India's Blue Economy, integrating its Blue Economy aspirations with its wider Indo-Pacific vision and ambitions for regional leadership.

During this period, institutional changes increased policy coherence. They also boosted funding for ocean observation systems, marine biodiversity, and coastal resilience. They launched new programmes like O-SMART (Ocean Services, Modelling, Applications, Resources and Technology) to foster marine scientific inquiry and improve maritime navigation via satellite through NavIC. Such efforts reflect a growing appreciation of the importance of technological competence and scientific understanding for maritime competitiveness and effective ocean governance (Ministry of Earth Sciences, 2021).

India's marine diplomacy has evolved significantly at the regional level. Active engagement in the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), ASEAN, Japan, Australia and France shows that maritime cooperation has become a significant aspect of India's foreign policy. Rather than mainly depending on naval upgradation, India has sought to enhance its regional influence through sustainable development, connectivity, capacity-building and institutional collaborations.

These developments have moved India's Blue Economy from a disparate set of initiatives to a coherent national agenda. By the end of the 2014–2019 period, the development of the Blue Economy had been fully integrated into India's broader goals of economic modernisation, strategic autonomy and Indo-Pacific engagement, paving the way for the next phase, in which the Blue Economy emerged as a comprehensive tool of maritime policy.

From Blue Economy to Maritime Statecraft (2020–Present)

Since 2020, India's Blue Economy has entered a new phase in which economic growth, marine security, technical progress and Indo-Pacific diplomacy are merged into one national aim. This transformation reflects changes in not only domestic policy but also in the geopolitics of the Indian Ocean, including the rise of great power competition, supply chain disruptions in the post-COVID-19 era, and increasing global interest in climate resilience and sustainable ocean governance (Medcalf, 2020; UNCTAD, 2023). India's Blue Economy has thus moved from being a developmental programme to a strategic tool of maritime diplomacy.

One of the key achievements during this phase was the launch of the Maritime India Vision 2030, which provides a clear roadmap for the country to emerge as a leading global maritime economy. Previous initiatives were limited to port infrastructure or coastal sectors. The Vision provides a holistic government perspective in integrating port modernisation, multimodal logistics, green shipping, inland waterways, digital transformation, cruise tourism, maritime manufacturing and coastal community development under one governance framework (Government of India, 2021). This history points to India's move from sectoral maritime plans to a single maritime government.

This history indicates India's transition from sectoral maritime programmes to a single maritime government. DOM, or the Deep Ocean Mission, is an ideal example of India's strategic development of the Blue Economy. It aims to strengthen indigenous capability for deep-sea exploration, marine biodiversity research, ocean monitoring, underwater robots, and the appraisal of critical seabed minerals. Such objectives indicate an expanding perception of marine science as a strategic resource that supports economic competitiveness, technological independence, and sustainable resource security (Ministry of Earth Sciences, 2021), rather than a mere research initiative. Also, recent studies from Vietnam indicate the growing importance of science, technology and innovation for India's marine modernisation programme.

At the same time, India's Blue Economy has been brought into greater alignment with its Indo-Pacific policy. Through the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) and Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR), India promotes cooperation in marine scientific research, advances maritime connectivity, enhances the region's resilience to disasters, supports sustainable fishing, and develops capacity for regional allies. This development suggests that India's maritime policy is becoming increasingly aligned with economic advancement and diplomatic interests, strengthening its presence as an international provider of regional public goods while preserving its strategic independence in an environment of increasing geopolitical tensions (Pant & Rej, 2022).

One new and prominent element of this period has been environmental sustainability. Recent policies have increasingly focused on eco-friendly ports, offshore renewable energy sources, blue carbon ecosystems, circular maritime economies, marine pollution management and climate resilience. As part of Sustainable Development Goal 14 (Life Below Water) and global climate commitments (United Nations, 2015; World Bank, 2017), India is gradually adopting ecological sustainability as an integral part of long-term economic competitiveness and maritime resilience, rather than as an environmental compliance burden.

Evolution toward Integrated Maritime Governance

The Indian Blue Economy has seen a sea change in India's outlook towards marine development. In the first phase (1991-2013), the maritime strategy focused mainly on trade enhancement, coastal development, and the exploitation of marine resources through uncoordinated sectoral initiatives. The second phase (2014-2019) was characterised by the formalisation of the Blue Economy through the consolidation of ports, logistics, marine security, and regional collaboration within a more unified regulatory framework. Since 2020, the Blue Economy has evolved into a multifaceted concept that includes economic development, technical progress, environmental conservation, marine security and geopolitical impact.

Significant structural changes characterise this stage. The first is the shift from policies of resource extraction to sustainable ocean management. Secondly, the maritime industry has expanded to include digital technologies, deep-sea exploration, marine biotech, renewable energy, and innovation-based companies in addition to traditional businesses. Third, the connection between economic progress and national security has become more intertwined, recognising that safe sea lanes, robust supply chains, and technological strength are fundamental to comprehensive national power. India's Blue Economy has finally taken on a more explicit external orientation, as it interacts more with Indo-Pacific stakeholders and regional maritime governance mechanisms.

STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS IN THE INDO-PACIFIC

Strengthening India's Maritime Power and Regional Leadership

India's Blue Economy Strategy has aligned economic progress with strategic objectives, strengthening its maritime capabilities and regional leadership. Recent scholarship has identified that maritime power involves naval prowess, as well as institutional capacity, economic competitiveness, technical innovation, governance, and diplomatic influence (Till, 2018; Bateman, 2017). This broader perspective is reflected in initiatives such as Sagarmala, Maritime India Vision 2030, the Deep Ocean Mission, and SAGAR, which have expanded port facilities, maritime logistics, scientific research, coastal industrialisation, and digital governance. This has enhanced India's commerce capacity and strategic projection in the Indian Ocean Region (Government of India, 2021).

India's Blue Economy Strategy has enhanced its marine dominance and regional leadership by combining economic development with geopolitical aims. Recent literature points out that maritime power is not limited to the naval dimension but also involves

economic competitiveness, technological innovation, institutional capacity, governance, and diplomatic impact. This wider outlook is reflected in initiatives such as Sagarmala, Maritime India Vision 2030, the Deep Ocean Mission, and SAGAR, which have enhanced port infrastructure, maritime logistics, scientific research, coastal industrialisation, and digital governance, expanding India's trade capacity and strategic reach in the Indian Ocean Region.

Shaping a Rules-Based Maritime Order in the Indo-Pacific

India's Blue Economy Strategy contributes to developing a rules-based marine order through the promotion of regional cooperation, international law and sustainable ocean governance. As competition at sea grows, governance is needed to protect freedom of navigation, marine resources and regional stability. Contemporary literature also recognises that maritime power is not limited to naval capability but extends to economic competitiveness, technical innovation, institutional capacity, governance, and diplomatic impact (Till, 2018; Bateman, 2017).

This governance-oriented approach has found expression in India's active engagement in the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI), IORA, BIMSTEC and ASEAN-led frameworks that deepen cooperation in marine scientific research, disaster resilience, sustainable fisheries, maritime safety and environmental protection. These initiatives strengthen regional governance and address shared challenges such as climate change, illegal fishing, marine pollution and maritime disasters. India's Blue Economy also promotes Sustainable Development Goal 14 (Life Below Water) through ecosystem-based management, biodiversity conservation and sustainable resource use (United Nations, 2015). India is pushing the Blue Economy as a governance-led model characterised by transparency, capacity-building, and cooperative institutions that build regional resilience and strengthen a cooperative, rules-based Indo-Pacific order rather than strategic confrontation.

Goeconomic Competition and India's Strategic Autonomy

India's Blue Economy Strategy has emerged as a key tool to enhance strategic autonomy despite expanding goeconomic competition in the Indo-Pacific. As infrastructure, technology, logistics, energy security, and resilient supply chains have become increasingly important in international relations as sources of geopolitical influence (Blackwill & Harris, 2016), India has embraced the Blue Economy as a means to improve both economic competitiveness and strategic resilience.

Rolland (2017) points out that China's growth of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and Maritime Silk Road (MSR) has changed the strategic environment of the Indian Ocean, prompting India to reinforce its maritime presence through goeconomic means, not only military. Initiatives such as Sagarmala, coastal economic zones, modern ports, digital logistics and investments in marine research, satellite navigation and maritime technology add to supply-chain resilience and technical independence (Ministry of Earth Sciences, 2021). Vietnamese studies also find that these strategies enhance India's strategic autonomy while growing its regional economic footprint.

COVID-19 has also underlined the critical relevance of robust maritime infrastructure and diversified supply chains. By building domestic capacities and working with ASEAN, Japan, Australia, France, the European Union and the United States, India has made the Blue Economy a goeconomic construct that strengthens the country's resilience and protects its autonomous foreign policy.

Maritime Security, Climate Resilience and Sustainable Ocean Governance

India's Blue Economy Strategy is a comprehensive approach that covers maritime security, climate resilience and sustainable ocean governance. Contemporary security studies recognise that maritime security is broader than naval defence and includes climate change, marine pollution, loss of biodiversity, illicit, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, piracy, cyber threats and supply-chain disruptions (Bateman, 2017; Till, 2018). Solutions to these difficulties will require governance models that integrate environmental sustainability with regional security cooperation.

India has taken up such a vision through initiatives like the Deep Ocean Mission, Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM), SAGAR and Maritime India Vision 2030, enhancing coastal resilience, ocean observation, early-warning systems and protection of the marine ecosystem (Government of India, 2021; Ministry of Earth Sciences, 2021). Climate change increases the strategic importance of sustainable fisheries, blue carbon ecosystems, offshore renewable energy, biodiversity conservation and pollution management. Vietnamese research has also indicated that India's Blue Economy is increasingly being linked to environmental sustainability, national resilience, and long-term marine stability. India promotes sustainable ocean governance at the regional level through IORA, IONS and the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI), supporting marine scientific cooperation, disaster preparedness, environmental protection and capacity building, thereby reinforcing its role as a provider of regional public goods.

DISCUSSION

According to the study's findings, India's Blue Economy Strategy represents a significant advancement in maritime governance, going beyond traditional frameworks of sustainable development and serving as a multi-dimensional tool for economic modernisation, geopolitical strategy, and holistic maritime governance. This study contends that the Indian case demonstrates the Blue Economy's increasing incorporation into national security, foreign policy, technological progress, and regional governance, in contrast to the dominant literature, which views the Blue Economy primarily as an environmental or sectoral development model

(OECD, 2016; World Bank, 2017; Voyer et al., 2018). This change has significant theoretical and policy consequences for Blue Economy research and Indo-Pacific strategic studies.

The findings undermine the dominant discourse that the Blue Economy is a developmental paradigm primarily geared towards sustainability. Most available literature has focused on fisheries management, marine conservation, offshore renewable energy, or coastal economic development (Bennett et al., 2019; Silver et al., 2015). These reasons matter, but they are not sufficient to explain India's maritime strategy today. The study explores the transformation of India's Blue Economy over the years into an integrated governance framework in which economic growth, maritime security, technological capabilities, environmental sustainability, and geopolitical competition are mutually reinforcing. India's Blue Economy should not be viewed just as a maritime economic framework, but as an overall plan to enhance the national maritime strength. This conclusion lends credibility to existing allegations that governance at sea is becoming increasingly related to broader questions of strategic competitiveness and state power (Till, 2018; Medcalf, 2020).

Second, this article adds to a burgeoning literature on marine statecraft by demonstrating how economic instruments are increasingly being used as instruments of strategic leverage. In traditional naval thought, as represented by Mahan (1890) and Corbett (1911), naval superiority was based on naval power and maritime commerce. But this conception has been enormously expanded by global competition in the modern sense. National power is underpinned by marine infrastructure, logistical links, digital innovation, maritime science, offshore renewable energy and robust supply chains (Blackwill & Harris, 2016). This shift is evident in India's Blue Economy, which employs geoeconomic tools such as Sagarmala, Maritime India Vision 2030, the Deep Ocean Mission, and SAGAR to increase economic competitiveness and strategic autonomy. A recent Vietnamese study has highlighted that these approaches are not a collection of sector-specific initiatives but collectively reframe marine development as a crucial component of India's ongoing national plan.

Third, the study shows that India's Blue Economy has evolved through policy amalgamation, rather than policy substitution. Earlier maritime policies were largely fragmented across ports, fisheries, shipping, marine science, coastal management and environmental conservation. Since 2014, successive administrations have increasingly integrated these sectors into a governance structure, prioritising institutional collaboration, technology advancement, climate resilience and regional participation. This is consistent with governance literature that implies that the success of Blue Economy implementation relies on intersectoral collaboration and flexible institutions, rather than single policy initiatives (Bennett et al., 2019; Voyer et al., 2018). India's experience, therefore, contributes to the empirical evidence that institutional integration is a fundamental part of good Blue Economy governance.

Another key contribution is about the nexus between the Blue Economy and Indo-Pacific geopolitics. Several lines of study investigate maritime governance and geopolitical rivalry. This essay explains how these distinct dimensions have become increasingly interwoven. The spread of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and Maritime Silk Road (MSR), the growing strategic rivalry between China and the United States, and the growing fears about the resilience of maritime supply chains have shaped the maritime policy choices of India (Rolland, 2017; Pant & Rej, 2022). India has chosen a holistic geoeconomic approach rather than just military modernisation. This includes infrastructure development, scientific advancement, sustainable maritime governance, and regional diplomacy. The finding shows that the Blue Economy has become a significant tool for middle powers to enhance strategic autonomy without resorting to hard balancing.

The data also reveals an increasing convergence between climate governance and maritime security. The loss of biodiversity, climate change, marine pollution and the vulnerability of coastal communities are no longer viewed as ecological challenges but rather as strategic threats to economic resilience, food security and regional stability (United Nations, 2015; World Bank, 2017). India's focus on integrated coastal zone management, catastrophe risk reduction, blue carbon ecosystems, offshore renewable energy, and marine research indicates that environmental sustainability has become an essential consideration in its national maritime strategy. This reinforces previous assertions that climate resilience should be subsumed into wider frameworks of marine security, rather than existing as a policy issue in its own right (Bateman, 2017).

India's example offers useful lessons for other developing maritime nations, particularly Vietnam. Both have lengthy coastlines, vibrant marine economies, and significant roles in the Indo-Pacific. The data suggest that the emphasis in policy transfer is on principles of governance rather than the replication of institutions. India's experience illustrates that a successful Blue Economy requires a single government, sustained investment in marine science and technology, cross-sectoral institutional collaboration and active participation in regional maritime bodies. The lessons are valuable for Vietnam in implementing Resolution No. 36-NQ/TW on the Strategy for Sustainable Development of Marine Economy by 2030 with a view to 2045, notably in coordinating economic growth with maritime security and ecological sustainability.

But the research still has certain flaws despite these advances. At first, it is mostly based on qualitative document and policy analysis. The methodology is appropriate for evaluating strategic development, but future research might include quantitative techniques to measure the economic feasibility, governance efficiency and ecological impacts of India's Blue Economy projects. Secondly, the study is limited to India. More comparative studies with other maritime nations in the Indo-Pacific, such as Indonesia, Australia, Japan, and Vietnam, would help clarify how different governance structures affect Blue Economy development. Third, while this

article focuses on strategic and institutional development, future research might explore the role of private-sector engagement, technological innovation networks, and blue finance in enabling a sustainable marine transition.

This research makes it clear that the Blue Economy in India is much more than a maritime economic strategy. It is a flexible model of governance that enables India to pursue economic modernisation, technical progress, environmental sustainability, marine security, and geopolitical influence simultaneously. India has woven several threads into a coherent national plan to make the Blue Economy a potent tool of maritime diplomacy, providing both conceptual clarity and practical advice for maritime governance in the growing Indo-Pacific.

CONCLUSION

The research discusses how the Blue Economy in India has evolved from being a sectoral objective of marine development to a comprehensive national plan, integrating economic modernisation, maritime security, technical innovation, environmental sustainability and regional diplomacy. Programmes like Sagarmala, Maritime India Vision 2030, Deep Ocean Mission, and SAGAR are not stand-alone policy efforts but part of an integrated maritime strategy, driven by economic change, geopolitical competition, climate resilience, and institutional modernisation. This paper contributes to the Blue Economy literature by moving the focus from sustainable development to maritime statecraft. It shows how governance, technological capability, maritime infrastructure and geoeconomic competition contribute to national power and strategic autonomy in the Indo-Pacific. It links Blue Economy research to wider debates on maritime governance and Indo-Pacific strategy.

India's experience offers policy lessons for successful Blue Economy implementation, including integrated governance, investment in marine science and digital technology, institutional coordination and active regional cooperation. For Vietnam and other growing marine economies, these governance concepts, not specific programmes, offer useful lessons. Further research should test these findings with comparative and quantitative studies, particularly on blue finance, artificial intelligence, public-private partnerships, and digital maritime governance, to further explain the evolving relationship between the Blue Economy, national resilience, and regional maritime order.

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