

# **An Analysis of Medieval Indian Naval Strategies and their Contemporary Relevance: The Case of Chola Expedition to the Sumatra Islands**

Varshini S

## **ABSTRACT**

The re-emergence of the maritime domain as a potential theatre for spillover of conflict between major powers has effectuated the need for countries to build their naval power. Accordingly, swift and adroit employment of naval strategies and tactics is pivotal in times of conflict. Although integral to modern warfare, naval strategies and tactics have a rich historical legacy dating back to ancient times.

Medieval Indian history, distinguished for contributions to art, religion, culture, and architecture also holds prominence for its expansive maritime trade and overseas conquest. The Chola Dynasty, renowned for their maritime trade and naval power, conducted an invasion of the Srivijaya empire located in the Sumatra Islands in 1025 CE. Despite maintaining cordial relations, as evidenced by the Chudamani Vihara in Nagapattinam, historians continue to speculate the causes of this expedition. The prevailing argument suggests that a trade war between the Cholas and Srivijaya, triggered by the establishment of trade relations with the Chinese Song Court, emerges as a warranted cause of such an expedition. By examining the naval strategies and tactics employed by the Cholas during their expedition to Sumatra Islands, the article validates the contemporary relevance of medieval Indian naval strategies and tactics. Furthermore, the article contends that despite the technological advancements that enhance modern naval approaches, these strategies represent a progressive evolution of their medieval counterparts and thereby retain their significance in modern naval warfare.

## **Introduction**

In the modern world, despite the development of air warfare, the navy has been a symbol of power, and countries expend on naval vessels and technology. Naval strategies and tactics have evolved since the medieval period when seas were the primary means of overseas conquest. Nonetheless, the significance of naval strategies and tactics to gain advantage in an offensive attack has not been diminished.

The Chola dynasty, at its zenith in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, actively pursued trade relations with both the Fatimids of Egypt and the Chinese Song court. Their strategic location in the Indian subcontinent provided them with leverage to bolster trade and thereby enhance their economy. Concurrently, the Srivijaya Empire, endowed by their location in the Sumatra Islands (present day Indonesia) filled their coffers from trade with the Song court. These two maritime hegemonic powers established cordial relations, mutually benefiting from their trade connections with China.

In 1025 CE, the Cholas, under the leadership of Rajendra I, embarked on an invasion of the Sumatra Islands. This event marked the first overseas expedition from the Indian Subcontinent. In this context, the paper endeavours to assess the causes that effectuated the Chola invasion of Srivijaya. Additionally, the study delves into the naval strategies and tactics employed during this expedition and seeks to ascertain their relevance in modern naval warfare.

## History of the Srivijaya Empire

Srivijaya, a Buddhist thalassocracy based on the Island of Sumatra in Indonesia, ascended to prominence during the 7<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> century. The Srivijayan confederacy included the states from *Kadaram* (Malaysia) to Java (Indonesia), which were situated in the crucial trade route of Malacca Strait and Sunda Strait. These maritime passages connected the Persian Gulf and Indian Subcontinent to the South China Sea. The Srivijayan Empire amassed their wealth through lucrative trade with China and leveraged its advantageous location to impose transit fees on merchants travelling to Chinese ports.

The Srivijaya dynasty, was long forgotten until its discovery on paper by George Coedes in 1918, but there has been significant debate among historians about its origin, location, and nature.<sup>1</sup> But the reference to this empire can be found in the 10<sup>th</sup> century Chinese records as *San-fo-qi*<sup>2</sup> headquartered in Palembang, evidently proving the extensive trade relations between the Chinese court and Srivijaya.

## History of the Chola Empire

Tamilakam, the Southern region of the Indian subcontinent flourished under the rule of *Moovendhar* - The Cheras, Cholas and Pandyas. The medieval Chola dynasty, founded upon the defeat of the Pallavas under Vijayala Chola in the 9<sup>th</sup> Century, established its seat of power in Thanjavur, extending its dominion over the fertile Kaveri Delta.<sup>3</sup> From the 9<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> century, the Cholas remained in power, but they were at the zenith of their power during the 11<sup>th</sup> century under the rule of Rajaraja I and his son, Rajendra I.

Famous for their maritime trade, the Cholas find reference in the 6<sup>th</sup> century book *Periplus Maris Erythraei*, a Roman guide to trade and navigation in the Indian Ocean. This reference highlights the Chola port town of Kaveripattinam, revealing the high involvement of Cholas in maritime trade.<sup>4</sup> But during the reign of Rajaraja and Rajendra, Nagapattinam emerged as the principal trading port and the seat of Governance of the Cholas.<sup>5</sup> Towards the end of his reign in 1014 CE, with his many conquests and demonstration of Chola supremacy along the Coromandel Coast, Rajaraja Chola established relations with the Chinese Song court. This move created favourable grounds for lucrative trade, which were furthered by his son and heir, Rajendra Chola.

## Causes of the Chola Invasion of Srivijaya

The conquest of the Srivijayan confederacy by the Cholas in 1025 CE has been a point of contention among historians. Inscriptions dating back to 1030-31 CE in the Thanjavur Big Temple mention the naval expedition of Rajendra Chola across the rolling seas to Srivijaya. However, little is known about the specific causes that effectuated the expedition, leaving room for speculation due to the paucity of available information.

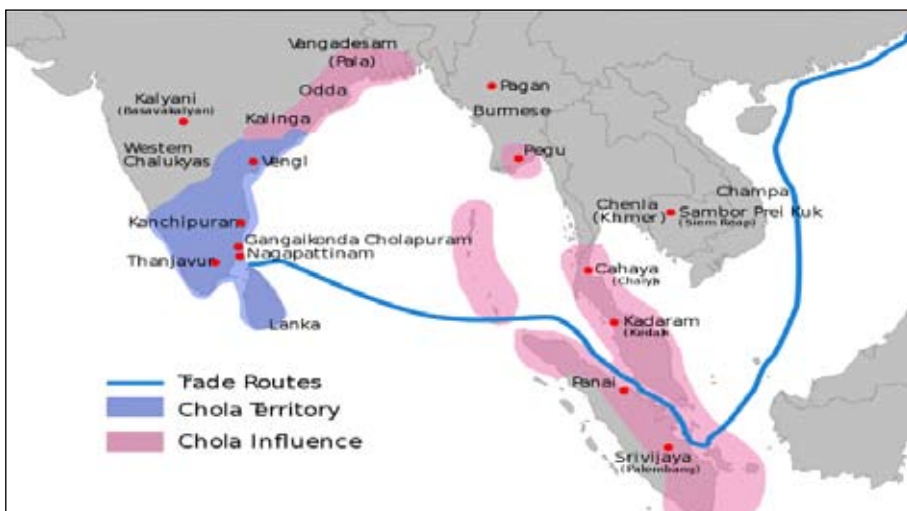
### Trade Rivalry

As prevalent in the modern world, trade wars also existed during the medieval times. The late 10<sup>th</sup> century saw the rise of various trading powerhouses in the Indian Ocean: Fatimids in Egypt, the Song in China, and the Cholas in the Indian subcontinent. China, under the Song Dynasty (960-1279), sent out missions encouraging traders to visit the Chinese ports luring them with special facilities and import licenses. However, the main attraction to the traders was the revamped traditional tributary system.

The tributary system was a means of establishing diplomatic and trade relations with China. Under this system, foreign rulers or their emissaries presented themselves in the court of the Chinese emperor with valuable gifts or 'tributes' as a form of subjugation and acknowledging the superiority of the Chinese civilisation. In return, they were granted permission to establish trade and contact with China.

The revamped tributary system under the Song court allowed traders from Srivijaya, Chola and the Arab Kingdoms to procure foreign commodities without payment. These traders earned substantial income from levying taxes on items sold by the tribute carriers.<sup>6</sup> This also increased the competition among foreign traders who wished to gain recognition and profits through tax rebates by presenting large tributes to the Song court.

Map 1. Representation of Chola Trade Route to China



Source: World History Encyclopedia<sup>7)</sup>

The Srivijayan confederacy, located on the trade route to China via the Malacca strait, attained prominence as a leading transit point for ships sailing from Chinese coast to Southern Asia. The strategic location of the Srivijayan empire was used to advance their economic and diplomatic standing in the Chinese court. During the period from 960-1017 CE, the Srivijayan empire sent 16 missions to the Song court.<sup>8</sup>

In Noboru Karashima's translation of Chinese text *Songshi*, a reference is made about a mission sent by King of *Zhu-nian* (the Cholas) in 1015, paying tribute to the Chinese emperor through his emissaries. In his letter, the Chola King seeks enlightenment from Chinese civilisation and, owing to his advanced age, could not present himself to the Chinese emperor. The emissary performed the native ritual of *sadian*, casting pearls towards the emperor's throne.<sup>9</sup> The tribute consisted of a robe and a cap decorated with pearls, 21,000 ounces of real pearls, 60 elephant tusks, 60 catties (half-Kilos) of frankincense, jade, glass, and cotton fabrics.<sup>10</sup>

The Cholas were considered a threat to the trans-shipment trade of the Srivijayan empire due to the favourable geographic location of the Tamil merchant guilds, which enhanced their monopoly in supplying commodities from the Middle East to China and vice versa, endangering profits earned by Srivijaya. Consequentially, the Srivijaya tricked the Chinese court in asserting the Cholas as a weaker state subjected to them, positioning themselves better in Chinese trade.<sup>11</sup>

The Cholas sent four missions to the Song court between 1014-1077, among which three missions were undertaken during the period of Rajendra Chola.<sup>12</sup> The first mission, sent in 1014 under the co-rule of Rajaraja and Rajendra, reached the Song court in 1015. The subsequent mission in 1020 would have possibly informed the deceit of Srivijaya, leading to Rajendra Chola's expedition.<sup>13</sup>

Historians like K.N. Sastri and Tansen Sen find acceptance in the theory of a trade war, with the cause being the removal of obstacles by Srivijaya in its trade with the Chinese Song court.

### ***The Chola Expansionism Policy***

The Cholas, predicated in the fertile Kaveri valley, sought out to expand their power and influence in the erstwhile Pallava heartland. They were surrounded by the Cheras to east and the Pandyas in the Southeast. After establishing control over the Pandyas and emerging as a valiant power, Rajaraja ascended the Chola throne.

The Cheras flourished in maritime trade by controlling the Malabar Coast, which had access to Arabian Sea, allowing booming trade from the Persian Gulf. Recognising the importance of the region, Rajaraja attacked the port of *Kandalur* and seized a colossal loot, demonstrating himself and the Cholas as a rising power in southern tip of the subcontinent.<sup>14</sup>

Rajaraja's conquest did not end with exerting control over the southern region of the Deccan. After the assimilation of the Pandya and Chera Kingdoms into Chola dynasty, he set his sails towards *Simhalam* (Ceylon), where he conquered and looted the northern region.

His successor, Rajendra Chola, followed his father's expansionist policy. He took the Chola *Digvijaya* to *Kalinga* (Orissa) and *Palas* (Bengal) in the north and further completed his father's conquest of Sri Lanka. Rajendra undertook many overseas conquests to Maldives, Andaman and Nicobar and Malaysia.<sup>15</sup>

Plunder, loot and expansion were the primary objectives of the Imperial Chola Dynasty, showcasing their power and valour. Therefore, the Chola expedition to Srivijaya could have been motivated on similar grounds, as Srivijaya, with its bejewelled entrance gateway, depicted itself as a wealthy maritime hegemony in the Southeast Asian region.

### ***Influence of Merchant Guilds***

The important merchant guilds in the South Indian Subcontinent were *Manigramam*, *Anjuvarnam*, *Ayyavole* and *Ainurruvar*. The *Ayyavole* merchant guild in Pudukkottai associated themselves with the Chief of *Kodambalur*, who had dynastic connections with the Cholas, thereby exerting their influence.<sup>16</sup> These merchant guilds had a direct influence on the politics of Cholas, owing to the increase in state coffers from foreign trade.

According to Meera Abraham, in her study of *Manigramam* and *Ayyavole*, the cause of the invasion of Srivijaya is believed to be the political clout of these merchant guilds.<sup>17</sup> In 1023, the trade feud between the Srivijaya and the Cholas was amplified by the Chinese emperor's dictate to the Arab envoys to use Silk Road of the Sea instead of the trade routes on land. This would have urged the merchant guilds to encourage the Cholas to become active participants in the maritime trade as the stakes rose high.<sup>18</sup>

Thus, the causes of the expedition to Srivijaya remain closely related to trade with the Chinese court and personal ambitions of Rajendra Chola. The Cholas' aim to cause major disturbance to Srivijaya was achieved through the expedition, while they looted and plundered the wealthy Srivijayan empire, filling their coffers in *Cholamandalam*.

### **The Chola Invasion of Srivijaya**

The Chola inscription in the Big Temple in Thanjavur enumerates Rajendra Chola's expedition to Srivijaya as he dispatched:

*"Many ships in the midst of the rolling sea and having caught Sangrama-vijayottungavarman, the king of Kadaram, together with the elephants in his glorious army, (took) the large heap of treasures, which (that king) had rightfully accumulated; (captured) with noise the (arch called) Vidhyadhara-torana at the 'war gate' of his extensive city, Srivijaya with the 'jeweled wicket-gate' adorned with great splendour and the 'gate of large jewels'".*<sup>19</sup>

With the causes being speculated due to the paucity of information available to historians, this inscription brings forth further intrigue into finding the sequence of attack, the 'Many ships' used and the navigational package employed by the Cholas.

### **The Chola Naval Vessels**

The Cholas did not have a naval fleet of specialised ships for their overseas conquests. The merchant ships of the time served as the primary carriers of the army overseas. Three distinct ships were used by the Cholas: *Sangara*, *Kolandia* and *Kattu-Maran*.

*Sangara*, a type of boat made of single logs of wood bound together and used as a ferryboat along the coast.<sup>20</sup> It was a medium-sized ship with iron/steel ship attachments on its sides for protection.<sup>21</sup> The *Kolandia* are larger seafaring ships with pointed double masts.<sup>22</sup> They were capable of distant voyages, reaching as far as the Ganges, Malaya, and Sumatra. Both *Sangara* and *Kolandia* were outriggers.<sup>23</sup>

The *Kattu-maran* is a smaller vessel that was used for transporting goods from ship anchored in the harbour. During overseas conquests, it served as a basic floatation unit, allowing the transportation of soldiers ashore.<sup>24</sup>

### **Port of Embarkment**

While Nagapattinam, being the major port of the Cholas, could be postulated as the point of departure for the invasion, technicalities regarding the Nagapattinam port contradict this notion. The port at Nagapattinam could only provide limited anchorage during the cyclonic months of November-December. Anchoring a large naval fleet in open sea anchorage during the cyclonic months could lead to wrecks due to huge surge waves and heavy breakers.

Shipbuilding in the Nagapattinam beach site is “*not even remotely possible*” for constructing sturdy, moderately sized sea faring vessels. Resources like timber, skilled carpenters or the finesse of vessel construction were inaccessible.<sup>25</sup> Even if such infrastructure was made available, building a large fleet would attract attention.

Thus, it can be assumed that the ships were built in a remote port south of Nagapattinam, around *Vedaranyam* or *Topputurai*,<sup>26</sup> in stealth to avoid revealing the impending attack on Srivijaya. The grand departure of the invasion from Nagapattinam port would prove futile and alert the Srivijayan king. It is best to assume that only the Commander ship embarked from the Nagapattinam port, and the rest of the armada was set to meet at a specified place and time at sea with the flagship.<sup>27</sup>

This can be substantiated by the fact that there is no mention or record of a large departure of ships from the port of Nagapattinam. Assuming that the departure happened at this port, it would not have gone unnoticed by the countless travellers who frequented the port city for trade, and they would have inevitably informed the Srivijayan court.

### **Naval Strategies and Tactics Employed by the Cholas**

In the contemporary context, limited war is explained through the prism of Korean War or the Vietnam War, where the operation is limited with finite mobility of troops constrained to a particular area to achieve a specific objective, and one in which the use of nuclear weapons is avoided.<sup>28</sup> Limited war can also be interpreted as a war with the potential for considerable violence in terms of scope and intensity, but restrictions are exercised as an act of state policy.<sup>29</sup>

With the causes of Chola invasion determined, the expedition to Srivijaya can be classified as a Limited War due to the confinement of the war to a specific region, the Sumatra Islands and the general objective was to cause a disruption in the Srivijayan confederacy for the reasons thus speculated.

Thus, the Limited War waged by the Cholas on the Srivijayan empire, with a well-coordinated strategy and adroit tactics, helped in the achievement of their goal.

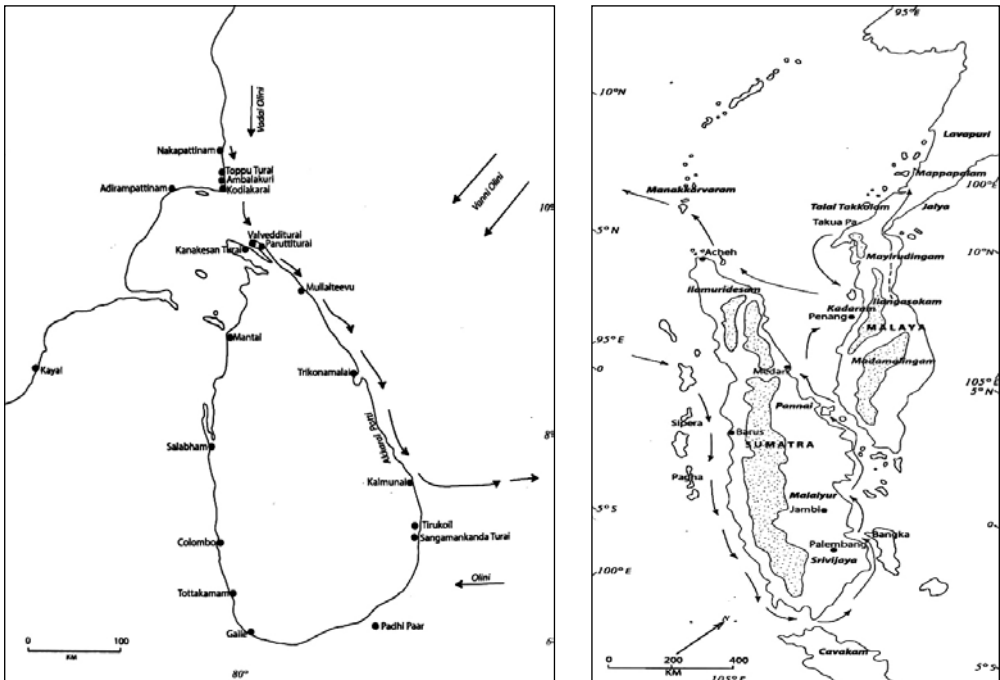
**Strategy**

Strategy in war essentially means the overall plan for the achievement of political objectives using military means.<sup>30</sup> In essence, Military strategy involves usage of military resources to gain dominance over an opponent through careful planning, coordination, and direction of military operations.

The strategies employed by the Cholas in their invasion of Srivijaya can be derived from their plan to attack the Srivijaya during the December-January season when the conditions favoured the Chola army for voyage. The coordination of attack by entering through the Sunda strait instead of the Malacca strait and the navigational methods used to direct the operation were crucial.

**Course of the Invasion.** The Chola flagship set out from the port of Nagapattinam, steering along the east coast of India to the northern region of Sri Lanka, specifically Jaffna. Departure from Sri Lanka to Sumatra can be evidenced by the existence of substantial number of ports on the east coast of Sri Lanka.<sup>31</sup>

**Map 2 & 3.** Voyage Route of the Cholas to the Sumatra Islands (Source: B Arunachalam<sup>32</sup>)



The journey to Southeast Asia from the Coromandel coast was preferred in the period after the cyclonic season in December due to north-easterlies set up in the Southern Bay. This favourable monsoon winds and current system facilitated a quick eastward passage to Sumatra in 12-15 days.<sup>33</sup>

The ships coasted along the west coast of Sumatra, entering the Srivijaya kingdom through the Sunda Strait.<sup>34</sup> The prominence of the north-northeasterly winds is amplified, as the ships used by the Cholas had square and rectangular sails, which could not be turned close to the wind.<sup>35</sup> Thus, the ships were dependent on the drifts of the wind and water currents.

The places mentioned in the Thanjavur inscription of Rajendra's conquest direct towards the conclusion that the Chola convoy entered through the Sunda strait and raided along the coast of Sumatra, taking a return route through the Malacca strait.<sup>36</sup>

The sequence of attack by the Cholas indicates their strategy of using the winds and currents in the sea to their advantage. While navigating through the Sunda strait, they coasted along the west coast of the Sumatra Islands, thus taking the Srivijayan forces by surprise and putting them in a vulnerable position.

**Navigation Methods.** The existence of the inscription in the Big Temple has emphasised the existence of consistent Chola Naval Policy, which has been practiced by Rajendra and his predecessors.<sup>37</sup> The navigation methods employed by the Cholas passed through the consistent naval policy also form part of the strategy employed by the Cholas in their invasion of the Srivijaya.

The Cholas employed celestial navigation which aided them in employing various forms of sailing. They mainly depended on heavenly bodies for navigating the vast oceans during their west-east voyage to the Sumatra Islands. The Cholas used *Ardra* and *Mrigasirish* in the Orion constellation, which are closer to the equator as pathfinders for sailing east as the pole star was 2 to 4 virals (fingers) away from the true North in 1000-1500 AD.<sup>38</sup> The dominant forms of sailing employed by the Cholas are parallel sailing<sup>39</sup>, rhumb line sailing<sup>40</sup> and great circle sailing<sup>41</sup>.

The Chola sailors employed parallel sailing as they used the position of the stars to travel west to east.<sup>42</sup> The Cholas are presumed to have used Rhumb line sailing. Due to their extensive celestial knowledge, the identification of stars in specific regions enabled the Chola navigators to sail along the fixed stellar bearing distinct by the rise or setting azimuth.<sup>43,44</sup> The Great circle sailing was employed by the Cholas as their navigation route was the "*shortest and most direct*" because their sailing latitudes were close to the equator.<sup>45</sup>

**Manoeuvre Warfare Strategy.** According to the Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 1, "*Manoeuvre warfare ... seeks to shatter the enemy's cohesion through a variety of rapid, focused, and unexpected actions which create a turbulent and rapidly deteriorating situation with which the enemy cannot cope*".<sup>46</sup> The manoeuvre warfare aims to render the adversary incapacitated to resist in an efficient manner by affecting their moral, mental, and physical coherence. The main objective of this attack is to cause panic and paralysis, where the enemy's capacity to resist is disoriented. The main focus of this military strategy is to affect the enemy's decisiveness in battle through shock and disruption.

Rajendra Chola used the element of surprise to shock and disrupt the Srivijaya forces. The Chola fleet used the Southeast Asian monsoon to attack the Srivijayan ports, swiftly moving from one port to another. This restricted the Srivijayan forces from launching an effective counterattack.<sup>47</sup> The Cholas launched a swift offensive attack on the capital Palembang and other Srivijayan ports, catching the Srivijaya King off guard and incapacitating the federacy's ability to defend itself. By attacking Palembang and capturing the King, Rajendra Chola had established his power and shattered the morale of the soldiers of the Srivijayan empire.

## Tactics

Military tactics involve short-term decisions undertaken during battle to implement strategy. They include the deployment of troops and the use of weapons to achieve immediate results.<sup>48</sup>

The tactics used in Rajendra Chola's expedition to Sumatra Islands to weaken the Srivijayan forces and achieve a decisive attainment of their goal to disrupt the functioning of Srivijaya are:

**Surprise.** The element of surprise in warfare, indicates unexpected operations against adversary, aimed to create favourable conditions of victory.<sup>49</sup> It is not an end but a means for realising opportunities that should be continuously exploited to gain tactical advantage.<sup>50</sup> An auxiliary principle of warfare is an attempt to take the enemy by surprise and use deception against the enemy in regards to the battle plan, method and point of attack.<sup>51</sup>

The Cholas, by taking the Sunda Strait instead of entering through the Malacca strait, caught the Srivijayan forces by surprise. The arrival of Cholas on the shores of Sumatra Island were kept confidential, avoiding detection by the enemy and resulting in the Srivijaya empire's inability to defend itself.

**Stealth and Deception.** In a military context, stealth refers to a technique in which one's own forces go unnoticed by the opponent. By evading the enemy's notice, troops can induce an element of surprise that undermines the enemy's position in battle.<sup>52</sup>

In an offensive capacity, deception requires tightening security or maintenance of confidentiality to ensure that the preparations for the attack, movements and material indicators do not alert the opponent to the impending attack. It aids in the achievement of the surprise element, aiding the offensive side a tactical advantage in battle.<sup>53</sup>

The Cholas employed stealth and deception as part of their naval tactics in their invasion of Srivijaya.<sup>54</sup> They used a port south of Nagapattinam to build their naval armada for the expedition. The preparation for the invasion was kept far from the eyes of the traders who frequented the Nagapattinam port, thus deceiving the enemy of their plan. The departure of the ships was also done in a manner that did not draw attention from the merchants, as the armada rendezvoused with the commanding ship at sea, stealthily maintaining the element of surprise.

**Ramming.** Two major ways of destroying ships in ancient times included ramming and boarding. Ramming an important component of galley warfare, was used during

battles at sea. Ship's galleys were fitted with bronze rams, and the offensive ship rammed itself into the rear or side of the enemy ship.<sup>55</sup> Ramming allowed the ship to be used as a weapon against adversaries.<sup>56</sup>

The references regarding the first battle of *Kandalur Salai* mention Rajaraja Chola I's prowess in killing the Chera warriors by splitting the naval vessel of their King into two and destroying the ships.<sup>57</sup> It can be deduced from this reference and the available technology for naval battle that Rajaraja Chola would have employed ramming. Furthermore, with consistent naval policy passed down on to generations in the Chola dynasty, it can be assumed that Rajendra would have employed the only prevalent naval tactic to his offensive advantage. It could have been used for boarding the ships at port to loot the merchants.

### **Contemporary Relevance of Military Tactics and Strategies Employed by Cholas**

The military strategies and tactics employed by the Chola army in their expedition to Sumatra Islands were critical to the achievement of their objective. The success of these strategies and tactics is discerned in incapacitating the Srivijayan military troops' ability to enact an efficient counterattack. After the invasion, no Southeast Asian country sent an envoy to the Chinese Song court for three years, which could also be interpreted as the significant impact of the Chola invasion.<sup>58</sup>

These tactics and strategies find resonance with the naval operations in the contemporary world despite the development of technology. Surprise, stealth and deception are integral parts of offensive attacks even in modern warfare. With the invention of steamships, submarines, and other modern vessels, the dependence on winds and water currents in long sea voyages and battles have diminished significantly. The navigation methods of the Cholas are key concepts of contemporary maritime navigation, albeit they have evolved with changes and access to modern technology. However, Celestial Navigation does not find relevance in the modern context due to technology like un-hackable GPS. Additionally, although oar-propelled vessels are not used in modern times, the application of galley tactics, specifically ramming of ships, is still evidenced. During the Atlantic War in 1944, German U-boats were rammed by US naval ships like the *USS Thomas* during World War II.<sup>59</sup> Notably, in 2023, the Chinese and Philippine coast guards accused each other of intentionally ramming ships in the contested waters of the South China Sea.<sup>60</sup>

The 1971 Indo-Pak War highlights the significance of employing adroit naval tactics to implement offensive strategy and achieve decisive victories over the enemy in open seas. The attack on Karachi harbour was crucial, as it hosted the Pakistani Naval Command. The Indian Navy Admiral Nanda aimed to neutralise Pakistan's air-attack capability before launching a naval attack. His plan to attack Pakistan's air bases – Masroor (Karachi) and Badin – was executed on December 4. The Pakistan navy assumed it to be a routine firing, but the Indian navy used deception as a tactic to neutralise a potential threat. On the night of December 4, the Indian army stealthily attacked Karachi harbour and Pakistan's naval vessels, launching a surprise missile attack on *PNS Khaibar*. These naval tactics

helped the Indian Navy to gain momentum.<sup>61</sup> This surprise attack is also highlighted in the Indian Maritime Doctrine to emphasise the significance of the element of surprise in a naval war. The doctrine further enunciates the principle of surprise as a force multiplier, providing “strong initial advantage” in a battle highlighting its contemporary relevance.<sup>62</sup> Similarly, stealth and deception is also significant in modern naval warfare. While stealth is achieved through deployment of submarines<sup>63</sup>, deception is sought by employing maritime manoeuvre to amphibious operations due to the transparent nature of modern battle-space.<sup>64</sup>

The Battle of Normandy (Op Overlord) during the World War II is a prime example of manoeuvre warfare in contemporary naval battles. The Atlantic Wall, built in anticipation of the Allied forces invading continental Europe, was heavily defended by the Germans at Pas de Calais. However, the Allies strategically chose the Normandy beaches. With insufficient German armour forces defending the Normandy beaches and an invasion timed during stormy weather, the element of surprise rendered the German forces unable to mount an effective counterattack. The capture of strategic locations like Caen, the Pegasus beach, the port city of Cherbourg facilitated the Allies’ victory by cutting off supply channels, communication hubs, and reinforcements.<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, the manoeuvre strategy is highlighted in the Indian Maritime Security Strategy as a operational actions of a naval strategy in times of conflict and form of force projection.<sup>66</sup> The usage of maritime manoeuvre to shock and disrupt the adversary’s Information-Decision-Action (IDA) cycle and enable gaining the initiative and achieving “decisive results” is also delineated.<sup>67</sup>

With the Battle of Normandy, the manoeuvre strategy of attacking the enemy’s weakness with an element of surprise and thereby rendering them ineffective can be correlated to the Cholas’ strategy in Sumatra. The Indo-Pak War of 1971 signifies the applicability and relevance of the Chola naval tactics in modern naval warfare. Additionally, the Indian Maritime Doctrine and Indian Maritime Security Strategy identifies the naval strategies and tactics employed by the Cholas as significant elements of modern naval warfare establishing their contemporary relevance.

## **Conclusion**

Naval strategies and tactics play a pivotal role in shaping the course of battles and achieving victories at sea. The legacy of medieval Indian naval wisdom and their relevance is often questioned. The Chola expedition to the Sumatra Islands, as the first such endeavour from the Indian subcontinent, sheds light on the Indian naval approaches during the medieval era. By examining naval approaches, one can recognise the pivotal role of offensive strategies to gaining tactical advantage – a principle that resonates across both medieval and modern naval battles. The Cholas, through their offensive attack on Srivijaya, controlled factors that contributed to the achievement of their objectives, akin to the Normandy invasion. Notably, surprise, both as a principle of war and a naval tactic, plays an immense role in shaping the outcome of battles. The identification of the naval strategies and tactics

employed by the Cholas in the Indian Maritime Doctrine and Security Strategy highlights their employment and significance in modern naval practices.

Contemporary naval strategies and tactics are a progressive evolution of the Chola's naval approaches. Technological advancements have enabled modern strategies and tactics to stand on their own merits, making it difficult for an average person to correlate them with those of the medieval era. However, the presumption that naval strategies and tactics from the past don't hold relevance in the contemporary context can only be articulated as a fallacy. A closer examination of contemporary naval strategies and tactics reveals that the naval approaches used in the Chola invasion of Srivijaya nearly 1000 years ago prove this common belief wrong, establishing their significance in modern naval warfare.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Books

- Anderson, James A. "Pearls and Power: Chola's Tribute Mission to the Northern Song Court within the Maritime Silk Road Trade Network." In *Silk Roads: From Local Realities to Global Narratives*, by Jeffrey D Lerner and Yaohua Shi, 223-235. Oxbow Books, 2020.
- Arunachalam, B. *Chola Navigation Package*. Mumbai: Maritime History Society, 2004.
- Clausewitz, Carl Von. *On War*. Princeton University Press, 1984.
- Freedman, Lawrence. "The Theory of Limited War." In *International Perspectives on the Gulf Conflict 1990-91*, by Alex Danchev and Dan Keohane, 201-223. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1994.
- Kanisetti, Anirudh. *Lords of the Deccan: Southern India from the Chalukyas to the Cholas*. New Delhi: Juggernaut Books, 2022.
- Kapur, Vivek. *Stealth Technology and its effect on Aerial Warfare*. New Delhi: Institute of Defence Studies and Analyses, 2014.
- Karashima, Noboru. "Medieval Commercial Activities in the Indian Ocean as Revealed from Chinese Ceramic-sherds and South Indian and Sri Lankan Inscriptions." In *Nagapattinam to Suvarnadwipa : reflections on the Chola naval expeditions to Southeast Asia*, by Hermann Kulke, K. Kesavapany and Vijay Sakhujia, 20-60. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2009.
- Karashima, Noboru, and Tansen Sen. "APPENDIX II Chinese Texts Describing or Referring to the Chola Kingdom as Zhu-nian." In *Nagapattinam to Suvarnadwipa Reflections on the Chola Naval Expeditions to Southeast Asia*, by Hermann Kulke, K. Kesavapany and Vijay Sakhujia, 292-316. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2009.
- Kulke, Hermann. "The Naval expeditions of the cholas in the context of the Asian history." In *Nagapattinam to Suvarnadwipa: Reflections on Chola naval expeditions to Southeast Asia*, by Hermann Kulke, K. Kesavapany and Vijay Sakhujia, 1-19. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2009.

- Nagaswamy, R. "Gangaikondacholapuram." *Government of India - Department of Archaeology: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts*. The State Department of Archaeology, Government of Tamilnadu. 1970. [https://ignca.gov.in/Asi\\_data/57366.pdf](https://ignca.gov.in/Asi_data/57366.pdf).
- Parry, John Horace. *The Age of Reconnaissance*. University of California Press, 1981.
- Sakhuja, Vijay, and Sangeeta Sakhuja. "Rajendra Chola I's Naval Expedition to Southeast Asia: A Nautical Perspective." In *Nagapattinam to Suvarnadwipa: Reflections on the Chola Naval Expeditions to Southeast Asia*, by Hermann Kulke, K. Kesavapany and Vijay Sakhuja, 76-90. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2009.
- Sastri, K. A. Nilakanta. *The Colas*. Madras: University of Madras, 1955.
- Sen, Tansen. "The Military Campaigns of Rajendra Chola and the Chola-Srivijaya-China Triangle." In *Nagapattinam to Suvarnadwipa : reflections on the Chola naval expeditions to Southeast Asia*, by Hermann Kulke, K. Kesavapany and Vijay Sakhuja, 61-75. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2009.

## Theses and Dissertation

- Glenn, SGM Clyde, SGM Keith McMillan, SGM Allison Smith, SGM Samuel Stewart, SGM Keith Brown, and SGM Moore. 2005. "The Normandy Campaign." *Defence Technical Information Center (.mil)*. 18 March. <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/AD1111696.pdf>.
- Llewellyn, M. R. H. 1970. "Rhumb-line and Great-circle Sailings." *Cambridge University Press & Assessment*. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/services/aop-cambridge-core/content/view/51633B7D364FA0DF91B72368CD60F6FA/S0373463300030630a.pdf/div-class-title-rhumb-line-and-great-circle-sailings-div.pdf>.

## Journal Articles

- Kalistratov, A. I. 2008. "The element of surprise in warfare." *Military Thought* 17 (4): 51-58.
- Lazenby, J. F. 1987. "Naval Warfare in the Ancient World: Myths and Realities." *The International History Review*, Vol. 9, No.3 438-455.
- Manguin, Pierre-Yves. 2021. "Srivijaya: Trade and Connectivity in the Pre-modern." *Journal of Urban Archaeology* 87-100.
- Meiser, Jeffrey, Temmo Cramer, and Ryan Turner-Brady. 2021. "What Good Is Military Strategy? An Analysis of Strategy and Effectiveness in the First Arab-Israeli War." *Scandinavian Journal of Military Studies* 37-49.
- Nimitz, Chester W. 1982. "Naval Tactics." *Naval War College Review* 8-13.
- Singh, Balraj. 2020. "Chola Invasion of Southeast Asia." *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 25 (12): 72-76.

## Newspapers, News Sites, Magazines, Blogs, etc.

- FAS. 1988. "Deception in Operations." *Federation of American Scientists: Intelligence Resource Program*. 3 October. <https://irp.fas.org/doddir/army/fm90-2/90-2ch6.htm>.
- Horwath, Rich. 2020. "The Origin of Strategy." *Strategic Thinking Institute*. 1 July. <https://www.strategyskills.com/the-origin-of-strategy/>.
- Indian Navy. 2015. *Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy*. New Delhi: Ministry of Defence.
- Lal, Avantika. 2018. "Naval Warfare in Ancient India." *World History Encyclopedia*. 15 August. <https://www.worldhistory.org/article/1259/naval-warfare-in-ancient-india/>.
- Maru, Hitarth. 2014. "Operation Trident: Remembering a Historic Naval Victory." *Swarajya Magazine*. 4 December. <https://swarajyamag.com/politics/operation-trident-a-historic-naval-victory>.
- Ministry of Defence (Navy), India. 2009. *Indian Maritime Doctrine*. New Delhi: Ministry of Defence (Navy), India.
- National Geographic Society. n.d. "Three Crowned Kings of Tamilakam." *National Geographic*. Accessed October 12, 2023. <https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/three-crowned-kings-tamilakam>.
2020. "Parallel Sailing." *Maritime Studies South Africa*. Accessed 2023. <https://maritimesa.org/nautical-science-grade-11/category/11-1-navigation/11-1-1-sailings/11-1-1-1-parallel-sailing/>.
- Raghunathan, Nithya. 2022. "Chola merchant guilds and ancient trade wars." *India Chapter.in*. <https://indiachapter.in/index.php?/user/article/1/2,8,19/53>.
- Reuters. 2023. "Philippines, China trade accusations over South China Sea collision." *Reuters*, 10 December.
- Shankar, Praful. 2020. "The Wars that Were Won: Rajendra Chola's Naval Conquest of South-East Asia." *Swarajya Magazine*, 19 July.
- Sharda. 2019. "How Celestial Navigation Helps in Ship Navigation?" *Marine Insight*. 29 May. <https://www.marineinsight.com/marine-navigation/how-celestial-navigation-helps-in-ship-navigation/>.
- Skeffington, Captain James. 2017. "The Corps Must Refine Warfighting." *U.S. Naval Institute*. November. <https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2017/november/corps-must-refine-warfighting>.
- U.S Navy. n.d. "Sinking of U-233." *National Museum of the United States Navy*. Accessed December 18, 2023. <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/museums/nmusn/explore/photography/wwii/wwii-atlantic/battle-of-the-atlantic/engagements-german-uboats/1944-attacks-german/1944-jul-5-u-233.html>.
- Vandeppeer, Charles B., James L. Regens, and Matthew R.H. Uttey. 2020. "Surprise and Shock in Warfare: An Enduring Challenge." *Strategy Bridge*. 27 October. <https://thestrategybridge.org/the-bridge/2020/10/27/surprise-and-shock-in-warfare-an-enduring-challenge>.
- World History Foundation. 2018. "Chola Naval Expeditions." *World History Encyclopedia*. <https://www.worldhistory.org/image/9106/chola-naval-expeditions/>.

## Notes

- 1 Pierre-Yves Manguin, “Srivijaya: Trade and Connectivity in the Pre-modern”, *Journal of Urban Archaeology*, (2021): 87.
- 2 Noboru Karashima and Tansen Sen, “APPENDIX II Chinese Texts Describing or Referring to the Chola Kingdom as Zhu-nian”, in *Nagapattinam to Suvarnadwipa Reflections on the Chola Naval Expeditions to Southeast Asia*, eds Hermann Kulke, K. Kesavapany and Vijay Sakhuja, (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2009), 311.
- 3 “Three Crowned Kings of Tamilakam”, National Geographic, accessed October 12, 2023, <https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/three-crowned-kings-tamilakam>
- 4 KA Nilakanta Sastri, *The Colas* (Madras: University of Madras, 1955), 21.
- 5 Vijay Sakhuja and Sangeeta Sakhuja, “Rajendra Chola I’s Naval Expedition to Southeast Asia: A Nautical Perspective”, in *Nagapattinam to Suvarnadwipa: Reflections on the Chola Naval Expeditions to Southeast Asia*, eds Hermann Kulke, K. Kesavapany and Vijay Sakhuja, (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2009), 82.
- 6 Tansen Sen, “The Military Campaigns of Rajendra Chola and the Chola-Srivijaya-China Triangle,” in *Nagapattinam to Suvarnadwipa : reflections on the Chola naval expeditions to Southeast Asia*, eds Hermann Kulke, K. Kesavapany and Vijay Sakhuja, (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2009), 64.
- 7 *Chola Naval Expeditions*, “World History Encyclopedia”, 2018, <https://www.worldhistory.org/image/9106/chola-naval-expeditions/>
- 8 Sen, “The Military Campaigns of Rajendra Chola and the Chola-Srivijaya-China Triangle”, 65-66.
- 9 James A Anderson, “Pearls and Power: Chola’s Tribute Mission to the Northern Song Court within the Maritime Silk Road Trade Network,” in *Silk Roads: From Local Realities to Global Narratives*, eds Jeffrey D Lerner and Yaohua Shi, (Oxbow Books, 2020), 223-235.
- 10 Kanisetti, *Lords of the Deccan: Southern India from the Chalukyas to the Cholas*, 285.
- 11 Karishma and Sen, “APPENDIX II Chinese Texts Describing or Referring to the Chola Kingdom as Zhu-nian”, 306.
- 12 Kanisetti, *Lords of the Deccan: Southern India from the Chalukyas to the Cholas*, 262.
- 13 Hermann Kulke, “The Naval expeditions of the cholas in the context of the Asian history”, in *Nagapattinam to Suvarnadwipa: Reflections on Chola naval expeditions to Southeast Asia*, eds Hermann Kulke, K. Kesavapany and Vijay Sakhuja, (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2009), 8-9.
- 14 Kanisetti, *Lords of the Deccan: Southern India from the Chalukyas to the Cholas*, 264.
- 15 Praful Shankar, “The Wars that Were Won: Rajendra Chola’s Naval Conquest of South-East Asia.” *Swarajya Magazine*, 19 July 2020. <https://swarajyamag.com/ideas/the-wars-that-were-won-rajendra-cholas-naval-conquest-of-south-east-asia>
- 16 Nithya Raghunathan, “Chola merchant guilds and ancient trade wars”, *India Chapter.in*, 2022 <https://indiachapter.in/index.php?/user/article/1/2,8,19/53>.
- 17 Kulke, “The Naval expeditions of the cholas in the context of the Asian history”, 2.
- 18 Kulke, “The Naval expeditions of the cholas in the context of the Asian history”, 9.
- 19 R. Nagaswamy, *Gangaikondacholapuram*, (Tamilnadu: The State Department of Archaeology, Government of Tamilnadu, 1970), 7.
- 20 B Arunachalam, *Chola Navigation Package* (Mumbai: Maritime History Society, 2004), 33.
- 21 Sakhuja and Sakhuja, “Rajendra Chola I’s Naval Expedition to Southeast Asia: A Nautical

- Perspective”, 83.
- 22 Arunachalam, *Chola Navigation Package*, 33.
  - 23 Noboru Karashima, “Medieval Commercial Activities in the Indian Ocean as Revealed from Chinese Ceramic-sherds and South Indian and Sri Lankan Inscriptions”, in *Nagapattinam to Suvarnadwipa : reflections on the Chola naval expeditions to Southeast Asia*, eds Hermann Kulke, K. Kesavapany and Vijay Sakhuj, (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2009), 33.
  - 24 Sakhuj and Sakhuj, “Rajendra Chola I’s Naval Expedition to Southeast Asia: A Nautical Perspective”, 83.
  - 25 Arunachalam, *Chola Navigation Package*, 32.
  - 26 Sakhuj and Sakhuj, “Rajendra Chola I’s Naval Expedition to Southeast Asia: A Nautical Perspective”, 82.
  - 27 Arunachalam, *Chola Navigation Package*, 31-33.
  - 28 *Oxford Reference*, s.v. “Overview: Limited War”, accessed 2023, <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100106253?rkey=3y5E2I&result=5>.
  - 29 Lawrence Freedman, “The Theory of Limited War”, in *International Perspectives on the Gulf Conflict 1990-91*, eds Alex Danchev and Dan Keohane, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1994), 201-202.
  - 30 Jeffrey Meiser, Temmo Cramer, and Ryan Turner-Brady, “What Good Is Military Strategy? An Analysis of Strategy and Effectiveness in the First Arab-Israeli War”, *Scandinavian Journal of Military Studies*, (2021)
  - 31 Arunachalam, *Chola Navigation Package*, 37.
  - 32 B Arunachalam, “Voyage route to Sumatra from the Coromandel Coast”, “The Chola conquest areas as per inscriptions”, in *Chola Navigation Package*, (Mumbai: Maritime History Society, 2004), 38, 27.
  - 33 Arunachalam, *Chola Navigation Package*, 39.
  - 34 Balraj Singh, “Chola Invasion of Southeast Asia” *IOSR Journal of Humanities And Social Science* 25, No 12 (December 2020): 74.
  - 35 Arunachalam, *Chola Navigation Package*, 40.
  - 36 Arunachalam, *Chola Navigation Package*, 42.
  - 37 Arunachalam, *Chola Navigation Package*, 29.
  - 38 Arunachalam, *Chola Navigation Package*, 82.
  - 39 Parallel Sailing means navigating the waters along the same parallel of latitude. The course of the sail is either eastwards or westwards.
  - 40 Rhumb lines are curves that cut each meridian at the same angle. This method of sailing is preferred, as the line of the course remains constant due to the rhumbs crossing all meridians at the same angle.
  - 41 Great circle sailing is a navigational method that helps the course of a ship to navigate the shortest distance from the departure point to the destination.
  - 42 Arunachalam, *Chola Navigation Package*, 41.
  - 43 Azimuth is an angle measured clockwise which is used to determine the direction of a celestial body.

- 44 Arunachalam, *Chola Navigation Package*, 41.
- 45 Arunachalam, *Chola Navigation Package*, 41.
- 46 Captain James Skeffington, “The Corps Must Refine Warfighting”, U.S. Naval Institute, November 2017, <https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2017/november/corps-must-refine-warfighting>
- 47 Praful Shankar, “The Wars that Were Won: Rajendra Chola’s Naval Conquest of South-East Asia.” *Swarajya Magazine*, 19 July 2020. <https://swarajyamag.com/ideas/the-wars-that-were-won-rajendra-cholas-naval-conquest-of-south-east-asia>
- 48 Rich Horwath, “The Origin of Strategy”, Strategic Thinking Institute, 1 July 2020, <https://www.strategyskills.com/the-origin-of-strategy/>
- 49 A. I. Kalistratov, “The element of surprise in warfare”, *Military Thought* 17, No 4 (December 2008): 51
- 50 Charles B Vandeeper, James L Regens, and Matthew RH Uttey, “Surprise and Shock in Warfare: An Enduring Challenge”, *Strategy Bridge*, 27 October 2020, <https://thestrategybridge.org/the-bridge/2020/10/27/surprise-and-shock-in-warfare-an-enduring-challenge>
- 51 Chester W Nimitz, “Naval Tactics”, *Naval War College Review*, (1982): 9.
- 52 Vivek Kapur, *Stealth Technology and its effect on Aerial Warfare*, (New Delhi: Institute of Defence Studies and Analyses, 2014)
- 53 “Deception in Operations”, Federation of American Scientists: Intelligence Resource Program, 3 October 1988, <https://irp.fas.org/doddir/army/fm90-2/90-2ch6.htm>.
- 54 Sakhuja and Sakhuja, “Rajendra Chola I’s Naval Expedition to Southeast Asia: A Nautical Perspective”, 82.
- 55 John Horace Parry, *The Age of Reconnaissance* (University of California Press, 1981), 116.
- 56 JF Lazenby, “Naval Warfare in the Ancient World: Myths and Realities”, *The International History Review*, Vol. 9, No.3, (1987).
- 57 World History Encyclopedia, Avantika Lal, “Naval Warfare in Ancient India”, 15 August 2018, <https://www.worldhistory.org/article/1259/naval-warfare-in-ancient-india/>
- 58 Kulke, “The Naval expeditions of the cholas in the context of the Asian history”, 9.
- 59 “Sinking of U-233,” National Museum of the United States Navy, accessed December 18, 2023, <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/museums/nmusn/explore/photography/wwii/wwii-atlantic/battle-of-the-atlantic/engagements-german-uboats/1944-attacks-german/1944-jul-5-u-233.html>.
- 60 “Philippines, China trade accusations over South China Sea collision”, *Reuters*, 10 December, 2023. <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/philippines-says-china-rammed-water-cannoned-resupply-vessels-2023-12-10/>
- 61 Hitarth Maru, “Operation Trident: Remembering a Historic Naval Victory”, *Swarajya Magazine*, 4 December, 2014. <https://swarajyamag.com/politics/operation-trident-a-historic-naval-victory>
- 62 Ministry of Defence (Navy), India, “Indian Maritime Doctrine”, (New Delhi: Ministry of Defence(Navy), India), August 2009: 42.
- 63 Indian Navy, “Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy”, (New Delhi: Ministry of Defence, India), 2015: 48.
- 64 Ministry of Defence (Navy), India, “Indian Maritime Doctrine”, (New Delhi: Ministry of Defence(Navy), India), August 2009: 82.
- 65 SGM Clyde Glenn, SGM Keith McMillan, SGM Allison Smith, SGM Samuel Stewart,

SGM Keith Brown, and SGM Moore, "The Normandy Campaign" (Defence Technical Information Center (.mil), 18 March, 2005), 1-14.

66 Indian Navy, "Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy", (New Delhi: Ministry of Defence, India), 2015: 11.

67 Indian Navy, "Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy", (New Delhi: Ministry of Defence, India), 2015: 69.

### **Note on Contributor**

**Varshini S** holds a master's in Geopolitics and International Relations from the Manipal Academy of Higher Education (Institute of Eminence), Manipal, India.

ORCID: 0009-0004-1025-6445