

#HISTORY

Lord Krishna on a Greek Coin?

“The oldest image of Krishna? Not from a temple, but from a Greek king's coin in Afghanistan.”

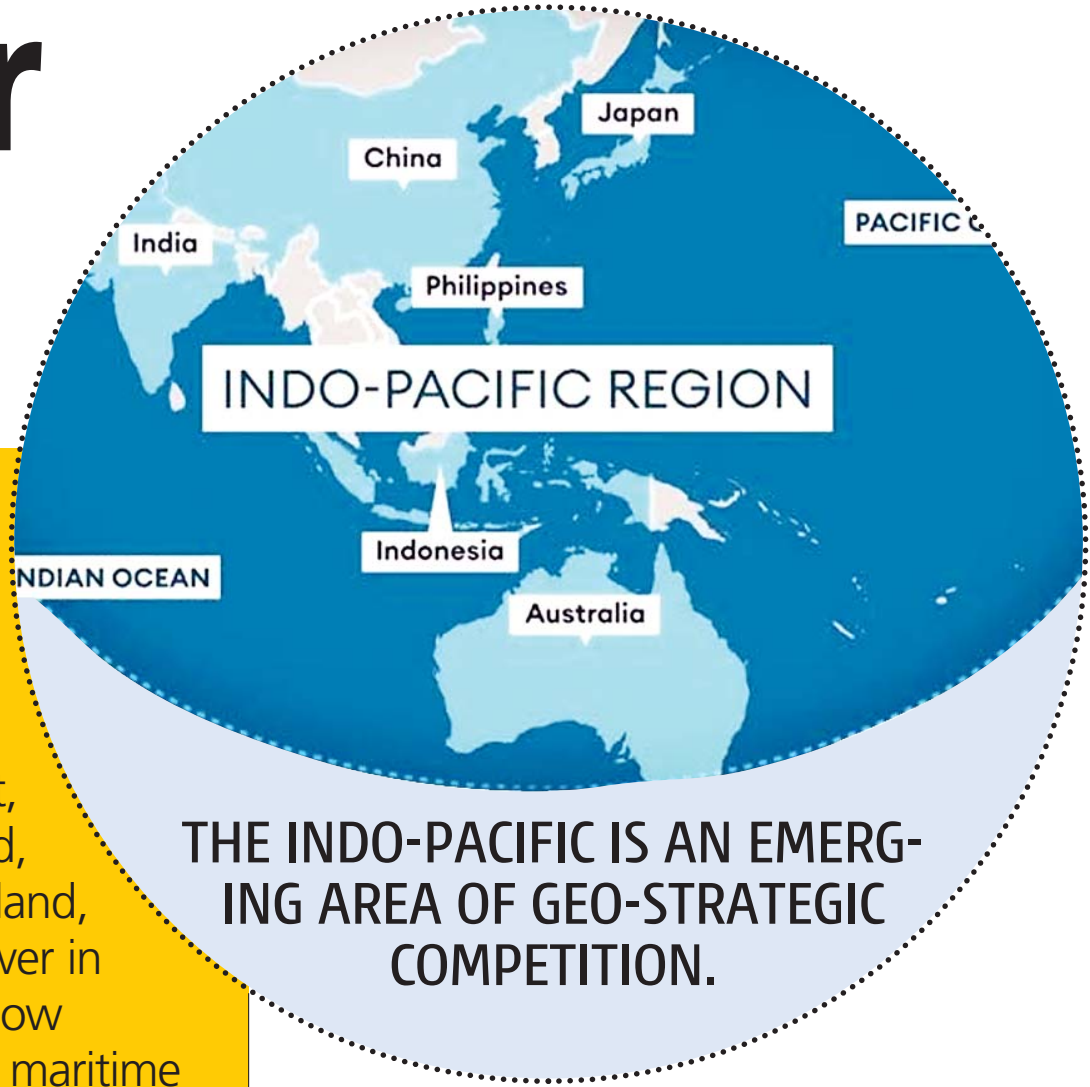


Balarama-Sankarshana with attributes consisting of the Gada mace and the plow, and Vasudeva-Krishna with the Vishnu attributes of the Shankha and the Sudarshana Chakra wheel.

It sounds almost unbelievable, but it's true. Long before Indian artists chiseled Krishna's form into temple walls or painted his stories in miniature art, a Greek king, ruling parts of present-day Afghanistan and Pakistan, minted coins bearing the image of Lord Krishna. This isn't mythology. It's history, and it proves something incredible: our gods were going global before the world even knew who they were.



From a security perspective, some notions give rise to an impression that the Indo-Pacific is a maritime dimension and the prevailing security imperative dictates focussing on the maritime space and that the land dimension is less relevant. Landforms are important. The fact that, humans live on land, governments act from land, and wars are predominantly fought on and for land, suggests that the land factor is an important driver in the maritime dimension. The question then is, how does the land factor impact our thinking on the maritime dimension and a State's policy choices on security.



THE INDO-PACIFIC IS AN EMERGING AREA OF GEO-STRATEGIC COMPETITION.

India's Balancing Act

In India's case, it can be argued that its maritime security is rooted in the continental context. Therefore, India's maritime security agenda will have to balance out the competing interests on land and at sea. Balancing the two is important and the policy challenge is that they should not come at the cost of each other. More so when, China's belligerency towards India along its land borders and in the Indian ocean region is likely to manifest in different time windows.

As of now, India spends 14-17 per cent of its defence budget on its navy, while there is a strong case to build a capable navy, at least for the IOR, if not for the whole of the Indo-Pacific region. The question of patrolling the near or far seas, or our and their oceans, arises out of these policy and budgeting dilemmas. In any case, the Indo-Pacific is 'Pacific-heavy' where the possibility of India being prodded into a confrontation with China is high and best avoided.

Three aspects are pertinent. First, it is important to ascertain as to how large and wide India's oceanic identity and interests are in the region. Do they weigh more westwards towards the Gulf region, or eastwards towards the Malacca, and to what extent into the Pacific Ocean? This will help us frame our maritime security agenda more precisely, rather than trying to be all over the Indo-Pacific region.

Next, how does the Indian State break away from its continental outlook to a maritime context? Would that be feasible in the near future? How can we create the policy environment to prioritise the maritime contexts in the future? This might well not be possible until China and India find a satisfactory mechanism to settle the border. And finally, India will have to tailor its strengths and vulnerabilities at sea, without over-polarising the oceanic space it aspires to secure. The acute congestion of military actors in the Western Pacific, resulting in frequent skirmishes at sea, is an instructive case in point.

Suffice to say that getting swayed by extra-regional partners is tempting but not prudent, given our tight military capacities and associated economics. With just consolidating what is our primary area of influence/interest in the Indian ocean region, it might make more sense.

Lieutenant General Harinder Singh, PVSM, AVSM, YSM, SM, VSM (Retd) commanded 14 Corps during the Galwan stand off and retired as the Commandant of the Indian Military Academy. He has also been the Director General of Military Intelligence. He commanded a Division in North Kashmir and has led the UN Multi-National Brigade in Eastern Congo. He is a prolific and deeply respected writer on matters of defence and security strategy.

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Next, how does the Indian State break away from its continental



180 BCE: When Cultures Collided

During the 2nd century BCE, the region of Gandhara (modern-day Afghanistan and northern Pakistan) was a melting pot of cultures. Greek, Persian, Indian, Central Asian, fused through centuries of migration and conquest.

After Alexander the Great's campaigns into the Indian subcontinent, many Greek settlers remained and

formed what historians now call the Indo-Greek kingdoms. One of the most famous rulers of this era was King Agathocles of Bactria, who reigned around 180 BCE. And it was this king, a foreigner by blood but immersed in the cultures of the land he ruled, who struck the world's oldest known images of Krishna and Balarama onto silver coins.

Krishna and Balarama on Ancient Coins

These rare coins feature two distinctive figures: Balarama (Baladeva), holding his classic attributes: a plough and a mace. Krishna (Vasudeva), holding a chakra (discus) and a shankha (conch shell), symbols still central to his worship today.

The coins are inscribed in

This was not just political savvy; it was spiritual synthesis. Greek kings were adopting and honouring Indian deities, not just as foreign gods, but as part of their ruling identity.

Before the Temples, There Were Coins

What's astonishing is that these coins predate the earliest known Krishna temples by centuries. While textual worship of Krishna as Vasudeva appears in the Mahabharata and Bhagavad Gita, visual depictions of Krishna are surprisingly rare

in ancient Indian art until the Gupta period (circa 4th century CE). This means the oldest surviving image of Krishna isn't carved in stone at a palace wall, it's etched into silver, commissioned by a Greek king in ancient Afghanistan.

What Does This Mean for Indian History?

This discovery challenges simplistic narratives of Indian religious history. It shows us:

- Hindu deities had cross-cultural influence far earlier than previously believed.
- Krishna and Balarama were not only revered as mythological figures but

were seen as divine heroes worthy of worship and royal recognition, even beyond India.

- Ancient India wasn't isolated. It was deeply connected to a broader, more global world, rich with exchange in ideas, beliefs, and iconography.

Why This Still Matters

In a world that often treats ancient India and its spiritual traditions as isolated or mystical, stories like this reclaim our place in global history. They show that Indian culture wasn't just

regional, it was resonant, even in a time when globalism, as we know it, didn't exist. And perhaps, most importantly, it tells us that when you dig deeper, history hits different.

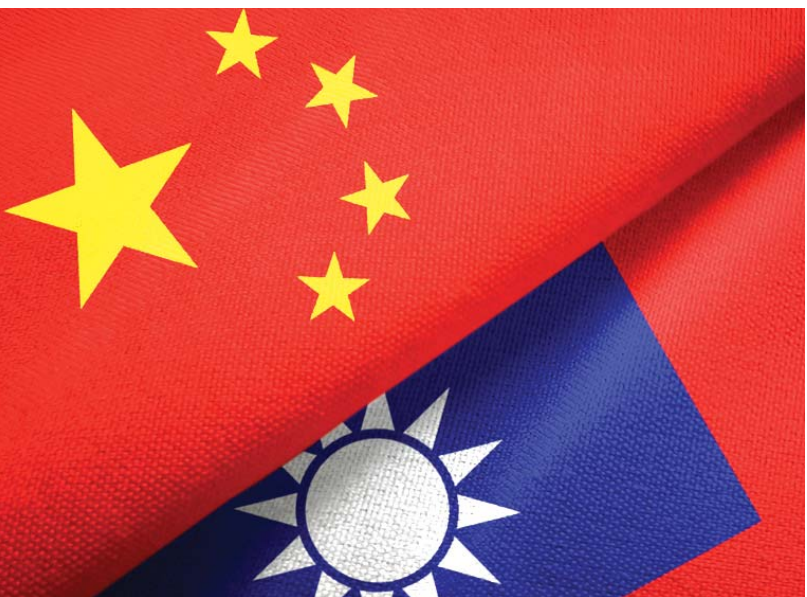


Believed to be the oldest Hindu temple ever found archaeologically.



Lt Gen Harinder Singh  
PVSM, AVSM, YSM, SM, VSM (Retd)

The Indo-Pacific is an emerging area of geo-strategic competition. Characterised by the rise of China, it is forcing countries in the region to choose sides. With a few States aligning with China, and a good number hedging their bets, there are others seeking to counter its rise in the region. This has given rise to competing impulses of rivalry in the Indo-Pacific, with each actor trying to maximize its position in the region. Strategically speaking, what matters most in the region is the maritime space, spanning the West coast of the Americas to the East coast of Africa. Approximately, 8000×8000 km in geographic spread, this region is home to about 36 countries encompassing two-thirds of the world economy. With recurring skirmishes in the Western Pacific, a repeated show of force to capitulate Taiwan, and aggression in the high Himalayas, the region is witnessing a rapidly changing security environment with increased risks of escalation.



#WAR-N-STRIFE

Competing Notions

Two notions dominate the Indo-Pacific debate. First that the Indo-Pacific region is one geo-strategic space, where like-minded countries collaborate to deal with China's rise and its assertive behaviour. Led by the US, it calls for strong alliances and partnerships to build regional capacity on matters of trade, technology and interoperability. This has led to strengthening of old and new frameworks, including the QUAD and the AUKUS. While some mechanisms have gained some traction, they do not evoke sufficient mutual trust to allow full acceptance of the idea of the Indo-Pacific region as a cogent and coherent security construct.

Consequently, there are those who question this trans-oceanic identity. They argue that, the two oceans, while contiguous to each other, are distinct in their strategic orientation. Whether it is their maritime geographies, past histories of conflict, or security contexts, they are different. For instance, the Western Pacific is



hidden with military competition, while the Indian Ocean is more pacific. The Pacific Ocean has developed a distinct identity, while the IOR is yet to find an enduring identity for itself. Therefore, the two oceans are distinct strategic spaces and should be dealt with as such.

From a security perspective, these notions give rise to an impression that the Indo-Pacific is a maritime dimension and the prevailing security imperative dictates focussing on the maritime space and that the land dimension is less relevant. Landforms are important. The fact that, humans live on land, governments act from land, and wars are predominantly fought on and for land, suggests that the land factor is an important driver in the maritime dimension. The question then is, how does the land factor impact our thinking on the maritime dimension and a State's policy choices on security.

The Continental Context



While this debate is unending, it might be useful to analyse how the land contexts shape the maritime orientation of the States, their political leaders, policy-makers and military practitioners. As a case in point, the history of the maritime security is rooted in countering piracy illicit fishing, migration, smuggling and blue crimes, whose origins are as a consequence to social dynamics on land. Breakdown in the rules of the sea, like the Nord-stream attack, is an incisive example of land wars spilling over to the maritime domain.

Two factors explain this context. First, the shape and size of the countries dictate their strategic orientation. Whether these States are peninsular, coastal, or landlocked, these contexts demand a 360-degree orientation in terms of security of their land borders, festering internal security issues and the maritime dimension, in that order. The larger the land context, the stronger the propensity to de-prioritise its maritime concerns. For instance, India, Thailand, Vietnam and South Korea, with contested land borders, have little choice but to prioritise their land forces over building their naval capacity.

Secondly, in the case of island territories, while they also demand a 360-degree orientation, their priorities are somewhat different. For countries like Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines, Australia and Japan faced with sea-based threats, securing their territorial waters, internal water-

ways, port and allied infrastructure and coastal defence are the key priorities. Such States are likely to prioritise maritime security over the land components. Taiwan is a peculiar case, where its proximity to the Chinese mainland, forces it to adopt a strong coastal and air defence posture over traditional platforms of maritime security.

There is yet another aspect. The land-based military components provide the foundational capabilities of scope and scale much larger than the air or maritime components. The sheer nature of their organising and operating principles enables conduct of large-scale operations to counter the aggression by a powerful adversary like China and be in a position to consolidate gains made by the naval and air forces. Suffice to say that land war-fighting components are central to a State's capability to deter and defend its vital interests on land and at sea.

It is therefore no surprise that land armies make up nearly 68 per cent of the military forces in the Indo-Pacific. For instance, 85 per cent of India's armed forces are committed towards its land borders. Indonesia is pegged at 75 per cent, Philippines at 70 per cent and Japan has committed approximately 68 per cent to land war-fighting requirements. Any continental drawdown of land forces can come at a huge cost. As a case in point, India cannot afford to be weak in the Himalayas at the cost of being strong at sea.

National Wildlife Day - Celebrating Nature's Rich Heritage



bserved on September 4, National Wildlife Day is a reminder of the planet's incredible biodiversity and the urgent need to protect it. The day honours conservationists and organisations working to safeguard endangered species, preserve habitats, and restore ecological balance. It also encourages individuals to reconnect with nature, whether by visiting sanctuaries, supporting wildlife charities, or learning about species at risk. In a world facing deforestation, climate change, and habitat loss, National Wildlife Day is both a celebration and a call to action. By valuing and protecting wildlife, we ensure that future generations inherit a planet as rich, diverse, and alive as the one we enjoy today.

#RAGA BHAIRAV

The Roar of Divinity and Discipline

Bhairav is deeply Indian in origin, interestingly, its scale structure closely resembles that of certain *maqams* in Arabic and Persian music

In the sacred corridors of Indian classical music, there are ragas that soothe, others that celebrate, and a few that command reverence. Among them stands Raga Bhairav, stoic, commanding, and profoundly spiritual. It is not merely a melodic entity; it is an invocation, an act of surrender, and a mirror to the divine. Rooted deeply in both mythology and discipline, Raga Bhairav occupies a central place in the spiritual soundscape of India, and its echoes continue to travel through time, space, and even genre.



Born of Shiva, Forged in Silence

The origins of Raga Bhairav are as mythical as they are musical. Named after Bhairava, a fierce and ascetic form of Lord Shiva, this raga is believed by many to have originated from Shiva himself, the cosmic dancer, destroyer of ignorance, and guardian of sacred time. In Hindu tradition, Bhairava is the form of Shiva who annihilates ego and clears the path to truth. Fittingly, Raga Bhairav is imbued with that

same energy, disciplined, intense, and piercingly introspective.

It is traditionally performed during the Brahma Muhurta, the hour and a half before sunrise, when the air is still, the mind is quiet, and the world is closest to the divine. In this moment, Raga Bhairav doesn't just fill the air, it transforms it. The listener, if attentive, doesn't merely hear Bhairav, they enter it.

From Temples to Tech: Bhairav in Modern Culture

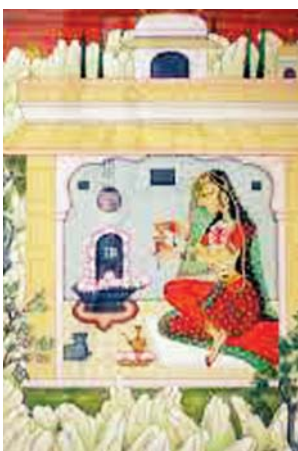
In the late 20th century, something remarkable happened. As Indian classical musicians began collaborating globally, the unique soundscape of Raga Bhairav started creeping into genres like jazz, ambient, film scores, and even video games.

Moreover, Indian film composers like R.D. Burman, Ilaiyaraaja, and A.R. Rahman have subtly woven Bhairav into background scores and songs, blending classical gravity with cinematic emotion.

Musically, Bhairav is built upon a scale that uses two flattened notes, komal Rishabh (Re) and komal Dhaivat (Dha), which give it a sense of solemnity and gravitas. Unlike romantic or playful ragas, Bhairav is austere. The way these notes are approached, with slow, deliberate oscillations, creates an atmosphere that feels both meditative and stern.

Yet, within that discipline lies majesty. When performed with mastery, Raga Bhairav is neither sad nor angry; it is wise. It doesn't pull at emotions but elevates consciousness. It is not a cry of the heart; it is the stillness of the soul.

This overlap is not coincidence. It speaks to the shared emotional language of ancient cultures, how music is served as a spiritual conduit in temples, mosques, and courts alike. Over centuries, these cross-cultural echoes have kept Bhairav alive in unexpected places, from Sufi qawwalis to Middle Eastern oud improvisations.



A Test of the Artist

For the performer, Bhairav is not just a raga, it's a test. It demands more than technical skill; it requires spiritual depth and inner stillness. The artist must internalize the raga's weight and then channel it through voice or instrument with devotion. Many greats, from Pandit Bhimsen Joshi and Ustad Amir Khan to Ustad Vilayat Khan and Pandit Ravi Shankar, have explored Bhairav with reverence, each interpretation like a unique prayer.

BABY BLUES



By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott

ZITS



By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman