

Charting the Deep

A History of the Indian Naval Hydrographic Department

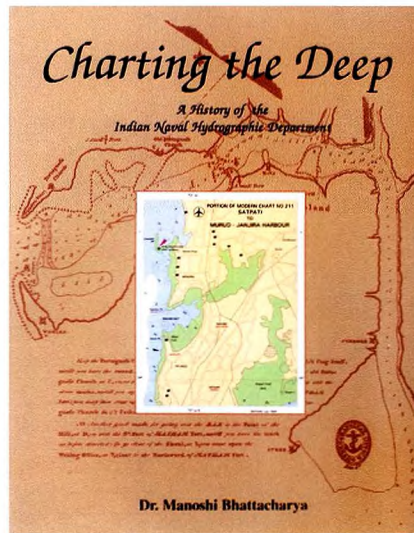
By Dr Manoshi Bhattacharya, published by the National Hydrographic Office of India in 2004, distributed by Himalayan Books, New Delhi, ISBN 81-7002-083-2, US\$ 70.

This impressive and immaculately produced book, dedicated to the 'spirit and determination of the Hydrographers and Marine Cartographers who have stood their place in the history of India', is very much more than a history of the Hydrographic Department. It begins with descriptions of the earliest known voyages across the Indian Ocean and adjacent seas from the 15th century onwards.

The story really begins when trading vessels from the newly established British East India Company began arriving on the coast of India at the beginning of the 17th century. Thomas Smith, Chairman of the Company Directors, appointed Richard Hakluyt as custodian of the Company Ships' journals, many of which contained vital exploration data. Samuel Purchas took over this task in 1616.

From 1703 to 1750 John and Samuel Thornton became hydrographers to the Company and one begins to read accounts of the surveys they directed year by year.

From 1770-1785 Captain John Ritchie was the Company's 'hydrographical surveyor' his charts being published by James Rennel, the first Surveyor General of India. Ritchie charted, among many other places, the Andaman Islands, where the naming of the town-



ship of Aberdeen makes your reviewer wonder whether he was a forebear!

In 1779 Alexander Dalrymple was appointed first Hydrographer to the E.I.C., a post he held until his death in 1808. Things now really began to happen. On pages 53 to 55 eighty eight charts published by Dalrymple are listed, each with its date and the name of the surveyor concerned of whom there are about thirty. John Walker and his family in London engraved the charts.

It is about this stage in the book that the reader will realise the value of the colour codes which appear in the heading of many of the pages indicating who

is currently the Hydrographer and to whom he is accountable etc.

In 1810 Captain James Horsburgh was appointed Company Hydrographer, to be followed in 1836 by John Walker, a son of Dalrymple's engraver. In 1873 Captain Frederick Evans, the UK Hydrographer took over the reins, and the Marine Survey of India was established with its own surveying officers and others lent from the Royal Navy, an arrangement which prevailed until India achieved Independence.

The Marine Survey had been provided with the first surveying ship *Investigator* in 1881; a second vessel *Palinrus*, built by Cammell Laird of Birkenhead arrived in Bombay in 1909.

The Marine Survey was suspended from 1914 to 1919 but got going again with renewed vigour at the War's end. We begin now to find photographs of groups of surveying officers which brings them to life. I was able to spot Lieutenant Kapoor (1950) who became my colleague for ten years on the Directing Committee at Monaco twenty years later!

Between pages 139 and 144 is set out the great reorganisation that was planned to follow India's Independence with the Surveyors looking forward to a period of rapid growth evolving towards the establishment of a National Harbour Board with its Hydrographic Committee.

In 1954 Captain S.J. Hennessey, Royal Navy, became the first Chief Hydrographer of the Indian Navy with the Marine Survey being renamed the Indian Naval Hydrographic Department. Hennessey saw the establishment of the office at Dehra Dun, close to the offices of the Survey of India.

Captain Jal Curseji, who had trained as a surveyor in HMS *White Bear* during the closing stages of World War II, took over from Hennessey in November 1955. Curseji eventually rose to be Chief of the Naval Staff to whom the Hydrographer was responsible and thus he was able to further the interests of the Department.

Nine other Senior Indian Officers followed Curseji as Chief Hydrographer, each being allotted a generous section in the book in which his achievements are chronicled including details of all the surveys carried out and charts published.

As the surveying tasks increased year by year the Service had been making do with converted vessels, but in 1964 the first vessel to be built in India for hydrographic and oceanographic work, I.N.S. *Darshak* was commissioned. From then on the reader will find magnificent photographs of new survey ships built in India, including seven vessels of the Sandhayak class being commissioned.

Reading the Preface by Admiral Srinivasa, Chief Hydrographer since 1994, one gets the feeling that this beautiful book was his brainchild. He writes lovingly of how the work had been compiled, painstakingly, by the Hydrographic Office Staff.

Although Dr Manoshi Bhattacharya, daughter of a naval officer, has done a masterly job in putting such a great assemblage of detail into a readable volume; it is not a book to be skimmed through for there is such a wealth of information within its covers. I believe it should find a place in hydrographic archives world-wide.

I have insufficient space to cover the copious details of India's contribution to international hydrographic affairs, the surveying of the Exclusive Economic Zone, the input to GEBCO, the many technical developments both at sea and in the office, hydrographic education projects and many other matters, all of which find a place in 'Charting the Deep'.

My only criticism is that many of the reproduced charts do not carry their provenance, or their present location, alongside them. The reader has to search for such details on two unnumbered pages entitled 'Maps' at the end of the book, and even then the information is somewhat scant from an historian's point of view.

Reviewed by Steve Ritchie