



CAN INDIA CLAIM MADAGASCAR ISLAND?

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A brief information about Madagascar –

Madagascar (587,041 km²), the fourth biggest island in the world and roughly between a fifth and a sixth the size of India, is strategically situated in the south western Indian Ocean and along the Mozambique Channel. Graphite, chrome, hydrocarbons, ilmenite, nickel, gold, oil, tar sands, uranium, precious and semiprecious stones, and hardwoods are among the abundant mineral resources of Madagascar. Despite having enormous untapped agricultural potential, Madagascar is nevertheless one of the world's poorest nations, with over three-quarters of its population living in poverty. In Madagascar, there are over 20,000 people of Indian descent, including about 2,500 people with Indian passports. According to research, Indonesian seamen travelled to India and landed in the first century AD.

Can India claim Madagascar?

According to the author "Yes!" When it comes to claiming property or anything else, nothing is impossible!!! We can assert ownership of Madagascar Island in the same way that the USA and China assert ownership of the entire ocean. The question of whether the claim will be honored or not is very different.

India has three grounds for claiming Madagascar Island:

1. Geological
2. Historical
3. UNCLOS' continental shelf hypothesis

1. On the basis of geological theory

India (along with Madagascar, Sri Lanka, Australia and Antarctica together called eastern Gondwana) broke off from Africa and South America (western Gondwana). After the continents in eastern Gondwana separated and drifted to different parts, the Indian landmass rifted from Madagascar about 90 million years ago and floated across the Indian Ocean to join the Asian landmass.

Clearly, there are evidences that Madagascar was part of Indian continent million years ago. We can understand concept for understanding supercontinent geography is 'suture zones'. The term is borrowed from medicine where sutures are used to join two parts of skin, bone etc, leaving a line of stitches.

The Mercara suture zone in the western peninsular India (that's in Karnataka) joins the Dharwad and Coorg blocks of lands. **More evidence for the India-Madagascar correlation has been put forward by linking the Mercara suture zone in southern India with the Betsimisaraka suture zone in Madagascar.**

Also, **radioactive dating of minerals like zircon, monazite within the suture revealed that the time of suturing is an indication of the amalgamation of the landmasses and it falls in line with the proposed hypothesis of the Dharwad block joining with the Coorg block.**



Also, **the plate tectonic conditions** also indicate that the areas around the sutures were subjected to tectonic movements akin to two landmasses coming together and then being sutured together. Therefore giving more evidence of India and Madagascar been closely related.

India may thus claim that Madagascar was a part of it based on geography and history. But, if this is the case then by this basis India can even claim Australia as its part, as Australia was also once a part of the same continent and vice versa, Australia can claim Madagascar and India too.

2. Historical basis –

In south there exists a theory of **Kumari Kandam theory**. According to this theory, refers to a lost continent with an ancient Tamil civilization, located south of present-day India in the Indian Ocean.

In the 19th century, a section of the European and American scholars speculated the existence of a submerged continent called Lemuria, to explain geological and other similarities between Africa, Australia, India and Madagascar.

A section of Tamil revivalists adapted this theory, connecting Lemuria to the Pandyan legends of lands lost to the ocean, as described in ancient Tamil and Sanskrit literature.

According to these writers, an ancient Tamil civilization existed on Lemuria, before it was lost to the sea in a catastrophe. In the 20th century, the Tamil writers started using the name "Kumari Kandam" to describe this

submerged continent. Although the Lemuria theory was later rendered obsolete by the continental drift (plate tectonics) theory, the concept remained popular among the Tamil revivalists of the 20th century. According to them, Kumari Kandam was the place where the first two Tamil literary academies (sangams) were organized during the Pandyan reign. They claimed Kumari Kandam as the cradle of civilization to prove the antiquity of Tamil language and culture.

As a result, there are historical evidences in our culture that Madagascar was a part of India through Kumari kadamba (Lemuria)

Now, the reason the author is concentrating so heavily on geological and historical justifications is because whenever there is a border dispute between any countries or when we see examples where two countries are arguing over establishing their sovereignty over any island, they always try to provide historical evidence of how the island or the territory belongs to them. They offer examples of situations in which they have attempted to claim that because one of their citizens visited the island centuries ago, it is theirs.

Here are some of the examples where the countries have given geological and historical arguments to assert their sovereignty in an island or other territories.

1. **Ashmore and Cartier islands** – Both Australia and Indonesia have claims over these islands. But if we closely follow the arguments of Indonesia, they try to claim the island by asserting that in Indonesia



these island were historically known as Kepulavan Pasir and it was inhabited by local fisherman.

2. **Paracel islands** – both China and Vietnam try giving historical and geographical evidences oh how the Paracel islands belong to them. Even in a statement released on 13 July 1999 by the foreign ministry of Taiwan, under President **Lee Teng-hui** stated that "legally, historically, geographically, or in reality", all of the South China Sea and the islands were Taiwan's territory and under Taiwanese sovereignty.
3. **Spratty Islands** - Even while claiming Spratty islands, Vietnam claims that it has occupied the Spratly and the Paracel islands at least since the 17th century, when they were not under the sovereignty of any state, and that they exercised sovereignty over the two archipelagos continuously and peacefully until they were invaded by Chinese armed forces.
4. **South – Kuril Islands** - Some individuals of the **Ainu** also claim the Kuril Islands, on the basis that their ethnic group inhabited the archipelago and Sakhalin prior to the arrival of Japanese and Russian settlers in the 19th century. Thus, giving historical evidence of Kuril islands been theirs.

Thus, the author can more convincingly make the assertion that, in the vast majority of situations, all countries rely on their historical, geological, and physical ties to the territory or island they are claiming. India can thus also do that. But the extent of that success is up for debate.

3) Continental Shelf theory (UNCLOS)

The continental shelf theory is the third hypothesis. Since Madagascar was a part of the same continent, it is likely that the continental shelf of the two nations would converge somewhere. So, in accordance with this view, India may engage in some resource extraction in Madagascar's EEZ or sea bottom.

And as far as definition of continental shelf is concerned, according to **Article 76 of UNCLOS** which defines continental shelf as that which comprises

1. **the seabed and subsoil of the submarine areas that extend beyond its territorial sea throughout the natural prolongation of its land territory to the outer edge of the continental margin, or**
2. To a distance of 200 nautical miles from the baselines from which the breadth of the territorial sea is measured where the outer edge of the continental margin does not extend up to that distance.

Therefore, by reading article 76 in India's favour, we may show that, in accordance with part 1 of the clause, the Madagascar continental shelf is also ours. Additionally, we may utilise it for infrastructure construction, pipeline construction, natural resource exploitation, exploration, and other purposes. And if certain nations disagree and claim that the continental shelf may only extend 200 nautical miles from the baseline, we can take this as an objection and say that the word "baseline" is inherently contested.



Second, even if the international community continues to reject this definition, India may pursue its legal options under UNCLOS Article 82. Payments and contributions with regard to the exploitation of the continental shelf beyond 200 nautical miles are outlined in UNCLOS Article 82. India will thus make the required contributions, in accordance with this provision, and can subsequently utilise Madagascar's continental shelf. However, there is one more caveat, and that is subparagraph (3) of Article 82, which specifies that a developing State is excluded from paying such payments or contributions in respect of a mineral resource if it is a net importer of a mineral resource generated from its continental shelf.

If India is given the opportunity to utilise minerals, it will turn into a net importer of the mineral resources extracted from its continental shelf and won't be required to make any payments since it complies with Article 82's clause (3) as a consequence.

The rational course of action India can adopt!

India and Madagascar have long-standing nautical ties, and as least as early as the late 18th century, Indian merchants began to travel and settle there. The number of people of Indian descent in Madagascar steadily increased in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and they started to play a considerable role in business. India's reputation in Madagascar has improved thanks to the concessional credit of US\$25 million from the Indian government to Madagascar for increasing rice output and establishing a fertiliser factory. Even at the highest level, the Indian community's

contribution to Madagascar's economic growth is highly valued.

The international community, including India, does not recognise the current government of Madagascar, hence all forms of help (apart from humanitarian) are still suspended. The two-way cooperation is still on hold. Consequently, there haven't been any high-level visits to this nation since 2009.

India should modify its position. India should assist Madagascar in capacity building programmes and may also sign numerous contracts to explore and utilise the natural and mineral resources with Madagascar because India is technologically advanced and developed. India, which has made several ground-breaking agricultural breakthroughs, can assist Madagascar in realising its untapped agricultural potential. We can have a symbiotic relationship with Madagascar since it has a wealth of resources, including uranium. Additionally, we may attempt using Madagascar as our naval base to help stop piracy and other maritime crimes that travel from Africa via the Indian Ocean to India.
