

Mangalore in Kowloon

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A ship named 'Mangalore' had played a crucial role in the Battle of Kowloon, which was fought between British and Chinese ships off Kowloon, China, on 4 September 1839 (often called "the first shot of the First Opium War"). Hence it would be most befitting that a warship of the Indian Navy be named 'Mangalore' in memory of that ship, argues the author.

A peep into the pages of history gives valuable insights about past conflicts that erupted between nations, their causes and how if they can be reignited can provide solutions to present disputes! A trenchant remark by George Orwell states "Who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past." India has been having a continuous problem with the Chinese on its borders. An expansionist China is aggressively inciting repeated incursions in the North East of India. The China–Pakistan axis is constantly engaged in keeping the international land border adjoining India in a state of deep turbulence. The constantly simmering borders keep us anxious and tense. But, just over a century back the story was different.



Kowloon encompasses the northern part of Hong Kong, on the mainland across Victoria Harbour. Once a separate city, it was acquired by Britain in 1860 and returned to China with the rest of the colony in 1997

The Battle of Kowloon was fought between British and Chinese ships off Kowloon, China, on 4 September 1839. It has been called "the first shot of the First Opium War". Subsequent events, led to the First Opium War, a defeat which began an era known in China as the "century of humiliation." It was only when Chairman Mao Zedong stood atop Beijing's Gate of Heavenly Peace on October 1, 1949 and proclaimed the founding of the People's Republic of China did this 'century'—which actually lasted 109 years—come to an end.

"The British seizure of Hongkong was an aspect of one of the ugliest crimes of the British Empire: the takeover and destruction of India, and the use of India to flood China with opium" so opined Robert Trout. Indian flooding of China with Opium resulted in "Ten million Opium addicts in China, prompted the Governor Lin to recommend to the Emperor in Peking to promulgate rules to "rehabilitate those desirous of quitting Opium consumption habit, eighteen months time was given to surrender the Opium, foreigners engaged in the trade would be beheaded, and Chinese dealers would be strangled. Corrupt officials who looked the other way in return for bribes would also

suffer the death penalty.”(Opium Wars: The Addiction of One Empire and the Corruption of Another by W. Travis Hanes and Frank Sanello)

Chinese traders were paying in silver for the prized Opium. Thus the traders were not only poisoning the Chinese citizens but also draining the Emperor’s Treasury. But the merchants could not be deterred; they had no intention of surrendering the goods and abandoning the lucrative business. They had a convincing excuse; the contraband did not belong to them, but to merchants far away in India. Ships from India were headed towards China bringing in huge quantities of Opium. One of the most prominent British traders of the time was Matthew Jardine. His company Jardine, Matheson & Co owned two ships, named, ‘Mangalore’ and ‘Carnatic’. Yes, the ship sported the great name ‘Mangalore’, which even now no warship or cargo ship is sporting. On July 7th 1839, these two ships landed in Kowloon loaded with Opium. The Boatswain of the ship ‘Mangalore’ was one Thomas Tidder. A group of sailors consumed a local rice liquor known as samshu, and thereafter in a drunken brawl killed a local named Lin Weixi in the village of TsimSha Tsui. This event culminated in The Battle of Kowloon (which was fought between British and Chinese ships off Kowloon, China, on 4 September 1839, and as mentioned earlier, has been called "the first shot of the First Opium War.”)



British opium from East India was pumped into China in huge amounts from the early 19th century. In the 1830s, concern about the drug’s effects on the population and economy led the Qing dynasty to ban it, and they ordered a senior official, Lin Zexu, to blockade British opium ships in Canton harbor until they agreed to hand over their cargo. In Britain, this was seen as an insult to the Crown, and a fleet under Admiral Charles Elliot was sent out to teach the Chinese a lesson. British military technology soon destroyed the Chinese defenses, and after three years of coastal fighting, the war ended with the Nanjing treaty of 1842 which handed over Hong Kong Island and opened up the interior to trade and Christian missionaries. For the next century, China was subjected to further invasions and humiliations, which ended only with the termination of special western rights in China in 1943 under Chiang Kai-shek.

Little is known about the fate of the ship ‘Mangalore’; it is all lost in the mists of Time. Except for a brief mention that many Indian sailors were injured, there are no records available. Anyway it is a matter of pride that in the Battle of Kowloon, a ship named ‘Mangalore’ had played a crucial role. It would be most befitting that a warship of the Indian Navy be named ‘Mangalore’ in memory of that ship which also played a role making the Chinese to live in humiliation for over a century. Let those who periodically rattle our borders not forget that we had once made them to tremble.