

Transitioning from Conflict: India-Sri Lanka Relations in the Aftermath of Turmoil

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Abstract

In the world of international relations, India's foreign policy toward Sri Lanka has been a contentious and significant issue. This abstract offers a succinct summary of the complex forces that have influenced and still affect India's strategy toward its southern neighbor, Sri Lanka. The development of this bilateral relationship has been significantly influenced by the historical backdrop of their connections, geopolitical considerations, economic interests, security concerns, and cultural linkages. This study examines how India-Sri Lanka ties have developed through time, highlighting significant historical turning points and the underlying forces that have influenced India's foreign policy choices. It explores the many opportunities and challenges that have emerged, such as economic cooperation, maritime disputes, ethnic conflict, and the growing influence of external powers.

Introduction

A country's strategy, guiding principles, and course of action in dealing with other nations and international players on the international stage are referred to as its foreign policy. It includes a variety of diplomatic, political, economic, and military actions and choices made to protect a nation's national interests, advance its values, and accomplish its goals abroad. International treaties, commercial agreements, defense alliances, diplomacy, negotiations, humanitarian aid, and membership in international organizations are just a few examples of the decisions that can be made in the area of foreign policy.

The objectives of a country determine its foreign policy, which may include upholding national security, advancing economic interests, fostering cultural interchange, promoting peace and stability, and solving global problems like terrorism and climate change. Careful analysis of a country's interactions with other nations is necessary for the design and implementation of foreign policy.

Over time, historical, geographical, economic, and cultural elements have influenced India's foreign policy toward Sri Lanka. India and Sri Lanka have a complicated and multidimensional relationship that has seen times of cooperation, conflict, and diplomatic engagement. Aspects of India's foreign policy regarding Sri Lanka include the following in particular:

Historical Context: The historical background of India-Sri Lanka relations is extensive and complex, encompassing centuries of diplomatic, commercial, and cultural interactions. The two countries' close proximity and similar historical, religious, and linguistic links have helped to forge a connection that is both intricate and firmly anchored.

Ancient Trade and Cultural Connections: Trade and cultural ties between India and Sri Lanka go back to the time before Christianity. Trade routes encouraged the interchange of products, concepts, and cultural influences between the southern tip of India and several ports in Sri Lanka. A network of commercial routes known as the Silk Road linked China to other nations, including India. Along these trade routes, Indian textiles, precious stones, spices, and other products were exchanged, promoting commerce between the two civilizations.

Buddhism significantly contributed to the commerce and cultural exchanges that took place between China and India. In addition to bringing religious teachings, manuscripts, and artifacts between the two nations, Buddhist pilgrims and monks also contributed to the flow of ideas and information.

The Indian Ocean's maritime trade routes made it easier to interchange items including textiles, pottery, spices, and precious metals. Chinese and Indian ports developed into thriving hubs for trade and cultural interaction. Through numerous historical eras, trade flourished, especially throughout the medieval and early modern periods. China placed a high value on Indian textiles, particularly cotton, while India appreciated Chinese silk and pottery.

Cultural connections: Buddhism was born in India and later made its way to China, where it had a profound cultural and religious impact. Buddhism's teachings, art, and architecture traveled between the two nations, influencing their civilizations in a significant way.

Language and Literature: Translations of literary works, such as Buddhist texts, between Indian and Chinese languages have advanced intercultural understanding. Chinese vocabulary and terminology are influenced by Sanskrit, an ancient language of India. Chinese art and architecture, particularly Buddhist stupas, sculptures, and paintings, were influenced

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by Indian influences. China received mathematical ideas from India, including the concept of zero. Traditional Chinese medicine was influenced by Indian medical techniques such as Ayurveda, which also made their way to China.

Travelers' Contributions to Cultural Exchange: Renowned travelers like Faxian and Xuanzang from China and I-tsing from India completed grueling travels across the two countries, recording their observations and experiences, which further expanded cultural interactions. Chinese Buddhist monk Faxian, also known as Fa Hsien, traveled to India and Sri Lanka on a pilgrimage in quest of Buddhist texts. He is also known for his thorough travel journal, "Records of Buddhist Countries," which offers details about the nations he visited.

Another Chinese Buddhist monk and scholar who traveled to India and Sri Lanka to study Buddhism was Xuanzang, also known as Hsuan-tsang. The "Great Tang Records on the Western Regions," which provide a thorough overview of the locations he visited, recorded his vast journeys. While Xuanzang's attention was centered on his experiences in India, his memoirs also include insightful details on Sri Lanka. He discussed Sri Lanka's geography, culture, political system, and Buddhist monasteries. Our knowledge of the historical, cultural, and religious environment of ancient Sri Lanka is aided by the writings of Xuanzang.

Faxian wrote of his travels to Sri Lanka, where he spent years studying the local monastic practices and the Buddhist scriptures. He went into detail about Sri Lanka's Buddhist relics, monastic groups, and religious customs. Faxian's findings provide important details regarding the current state of Buddhism as well as the customs and beliefs of ancient Sri Lanka. Cultural exchanges between the Chinese and Indian kingdoms were facilitated by royal and diplomatic exchanges. Deeper ties between the ruling elites were facilitated via gifts, envoys, and matrimonial arrangements. Faxian and Xuanzang both made significant contributions to the preservation and dissemination of knowledge about the nations they traveled to, including Sri Lanka. Their publications offer insightful historical accounts of the societies,

The historical economic and cultural ties between India and China have left a lasting legacy despite times of strife and political unrest. Although geopolitical reasons have occasionally hampered relations, the two nations continue to value their common past and the opportunity for future cooperation.

Role of Buddhism: Buddhism has significantly contributed to the cultural, religious, and intellectual links that have united Sri Lanka and India. The expansion of Buddhism from India to Sri Lanka helped to forge a close relationship between the two nations and led to interactions that had a lasting effect on their respective histories. The Buddha's teachings, which had their beginnings in India, helped to spread Buddhism. Through the efforts of Indian missionaries and monks who crossed the Indian Ocean, Buddhism was brought to Sri Lanka. Through these interactions, Buddhist teachings, scriptures, and practices spread, creating a common religious heritage.

Buddhism was spread alongside a cultural interaction that aided the trade of artistic movements, building strategies, and thought between India and Sri Lanka. Stupas, statues, and monastic complexes were built in both nations, exhibiting a similar ideal in Buddhist art and architecture. Buddhist pilgrims and monks from Sri Lanka and India traveled to each other's nations to see important temples and monasteries. These journeys not only strengthened spiritual bonds but also promoted intercultural dialogue and understanding. As Buddhism gained popularity, Buddhist texts were translated into Pali, the language of Theravada Buddhism, from Sanskrit, one of the Indian languages. The dissemination of knowledge, religious texts, and philosophical concepts was made easier by this linguistic interaction.

Religious Holidays and Customs: The shared Buddhist holidays, rites, and customs continue to deepen the cultural ties between Sri Lanka and India. Both nations enthusiastically celebrate occasions like Vesak (Buddha Purnima), which fosters a sense of common religious history. The establishment of monastic societies in Sri Lanka that were based on Indian monastic traditions helped people feel connected and in the know. Monastic communities developed into places for education and discussion. Buddhism in Sri Lanka had its own changes over time, according to regional conditions and cultural influences. Through the process of syncretism, a distinct Sri Lankan Buddhist tradition was developed while still being connected to its Indian origins.

Economic ties: Economic ties between India and Sri Lanka span commerce, investment, co-operation in development, and regional integration. Both nations have cooperated over time to strengthen their economic relations and foster growth on both sides of the border. The following are some significant elements of the economic ties between India and Sri Lanka:

Investment and trade: Sri Lanka's top trading partner is India. The two nations conduct bilateral trade in a wide range of products, including textiles, machinery, petroleum, and agricultural supplies. In order to encourage commerce and remove obstacles, India and Sri Lanka have signed a number of bilateral trade agreements. These agreements cover topics including tariff reductions, trade liberalization, and privileged access to one another's market. Indian businesses have invested in Sri Lankan industries like telecommunications, real estate, and hotels through foreign direct investment (FDI). Foreign direct investment (FDI) from India helps Sri Lanka's economy grow and create jobs. In a number of industries, such as manufacturing, joint ventures between Sri Lankan and Indian enterprises have been established. In Sri Lanka, India has contributed to a number of development initiatives, including housing, healthcare, and infrastructure building. These initiatives are meant to further Sri Lanka's socioeconomic growth and raise the standard of living for its people.

Both nations are members of regional groups that offer venues for regional economic cooperation and integration, such as the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) and the South Asian

Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). A Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between India and Sri Lanka seeks to increase bilateral trade by lowering tariffs and streamlining the movement of goods. Wide-ranging products are included under the FTA, which has helped to boost trade between the two nations. Challenges including trade imbalances and non-tariff obstacles affect both nations. These issues are being addressed in an effort to improve the environment for commerce and investment.

Key Phases of India Sri Lanka Relations

Phase 1: Non Alignment period:

The non-alignment phase of India-Sri Lankan foreign policy is the time when both nations stressed their independence from the Cold War superpower blocs and pushed for a neutral approach in world affairs. This period was distinguished by a dedication to upholding sovereignty, fostering peaceful coexistence, and seeking out mutually advantageous partnerships with diverse nations. An summary of India-Sri Lankan foreign policy during the non-alignment period is given below:

Disagreement and Common Principles: Both India and Sri Lanka used non-alignment as a guiding principle after gaining their respective freedoms from colonial domination. They were a part of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), which was founded in 1961. In order to promote a middle ground in international politics, non-alignment promoted self-determination, opposed colonialism, and global disarmament. It aimed to keep away the third world countries from joining with either of the blocs western or soviet bloc.

Cooperation between parties and bilateral ties: The non-alignment idea served as a foundation for improving relations between India and Sri Lanka. On a number of fronts, including trade, cultural exchanges, and regional integration, both nations tried to collaborate with each other. During this phase, economic growth, reducing poverty, and regional cooperation were priorities for India and Sri Lanka. They wanted to improve ties with other non-aligned countries in Latin America, Asia, and Africa.

Within the non-alignment framework, Sri Lanka and India frequently adopted the same positions on international problems. They advocated for the rights of emerging nations, backed decolonization initiatives, and fought apartheid. Despite the fact that India and Sri Lanka both pursued their own national interests, non-alignment remained a crucial principle. Their foreign policy strategies had to change as a result of the shifting geopolitical environment and global dynamics.

It's vital to remember that the non-alignment phase of India-Sri Lanka relations and foreign policy was only one facet of those relations. Although the adherence to non-alignment created a foundation for collaboration and common values, changes in foreign policy priorities and difficulties throughout the years had an impact on the bilateral ties between the two nations.

Phase 2: Ethnic conflict and peace keeping phase 1980s

The ethnic conflict and peacekeeping phase between India and Sri Lanka is the time period characterized by tensions resulting from the ethnic war in Sri Lanka, which mostly affects the Tamil minority, and India's participation in peacekeeping attempts to address the issue. Complex political dynamics, humanitarian issues, and efforts to end the conflict peacefully were the defining features of this phase. An summary of this stage in India-Sri Lankan ties is given below:

Tamil Problem and Ethnic Conflict: Tensions between the minority Tamil population and the majority Sinhalese community, who demanded greater autonomy and acknowledgement of their rights, were at the heart of Sri Lanka's ethnic strife. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), a militant organization, were at the forefront of the Tamil separatist movement when the war descended into violence.

2. Indian Contribution to Peacekeeping Activities: India grew more concerned as the fighting grew worse about the situation of the Tamil people and its effects on the surrounding area. The Indo-Sri Lanka Accord, which was signed in 1987 by India and Sri Lanka, called for the devolution of power to areas with a Tamil majority in exchange for Sri Lanka's commitment to diplomatic dispute resolution.

Difficulties and Challenges: There were many obstacles in the way of the IPKF's objective, including opposition from the LTTE and other Tamil organizations. Conflicts and tensions between the IPKF and regional players were caused by the operation. Internal political dynamics in Sri Lanka, such as opposition to foreign forces stationed there, made the situation even more problematic.

Withdrawal and Consequences: In 1990, the IPKF's role in Sri Lanka came to an end as a result of ongoing disputes and tense ties between the two nations. Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict persisted, fueling additional violence and unrest. The LTTE's defeat by Sri Lankan forces in 2009 marked the end of the conflict.

Phase 3: post conflict reconstruction phase

The time following the end of the Sri Lankan civil war in 2009, when efforts were made to promote stability, reconciliation, and development in Sri Lanka, is referred to as the peace and post-conflict reconstruction phase of India-Sri Lanka ties. India participated in this period by aiding post-conflict activities and cooperating with Sri Lanka to handle the difficulties and opportunities brought on by the conflict's end. Here is a summary of this stage.

When the Civil War ended: The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) were defeated in 2009, putting an end to the nearly 30-year-long civil conflict in Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka has the chance to move from a state of war to a period of peace and reconstruction thanks to the end of the conflict.

Development and Humanitarian Assistance: India helped internally displaced people (IDPs) in the early aftermath of the conflict and took part in development initiatives to meet the needs of impacted communities. India funded programs that helped persons affected by the violence with livelihood assistance, infrastructural development, and relocation. India engaged Sri Lanka diplomatically to promote peace after conflicts and the creation of

Reconciliation efforts: India underlined the significance of a political outcome that took into account the aspirations of all Sri Lankan people, notably the minority Tamil population. During this period, India-Sri Lanka ties frequently came back to the value of post-conflict reconciliation, resolving human rights issues, and supporting an inclusive democratic process.

Economic Development and Cooperation: India kept working on economic cooperation and development initiatives in Sri Lanka, concentrating on things like housing, education, and infrastructure. The post-conflict period wasn't without its difficulties. Reconciliation, dealing with war-related traumas, and reestablishing community trust proved difficult and required persistent work. India kept working on economic cooperation and development initiatives in Sri Lanka, concentrating on things like housing, education, and infrastructure. The objective was to support socioeconomic growth and aid in Sri Lanka's post-conflict reconstruction.

Phase 4: current dynamics of India and Sri Lanka

In the years following 2000, there has been a combination of collaboration, difficulties, and changing dynamics in India-Sri Lanka relations. While both nations have worked to deepen their bonds through political, economic, and cultural interactions, other factors, such as those relating to racial harmony, regional geopolitics, and business alliances, have also had an impact on the bilateral relationship. Since 2000, the following significant events and facets of India-Sri Lankan relations have occurred:

Financial Coordination: The relationship has remained fundamentally based on trade and economic cooperation. Trade between the two nations has been facilitated by bilateral trade agreements, such as the India-Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement (ISLFTA).

Assistance for Development: With a focus on areas like housing, infrastructure development, and education, India has been involved in a number of development initiatives in Sri Lanka. The economic development and progress of Sri Lanka are supported by these initiatives.

Intercultural and interpersonal exchanges: The mutual understanding and relationship-building benefits of cultural and educational exchanges between India and Sri Lanka have persisted. People-to-people interactions and tourism are essential for promoting goodwill between the two countries.

Peace building after Conflict: India underlined the significance of post-conflict reconciliation and an inclusive democratic process after the Sri Lankan civil war came to an end in 2009. Both nations have taken part in efforts and dialogues aimed at resolving the complaints of the Tamil minority.

Geopolitical factors and maritime security: India's security interests are impacted by Sri Lanka's strategic location in the Indian Ocean. Both nations have worked together to keep the region stable and cooperate on marine security.

Chinese Power and Regional Dynamics : The relationship between India and Sri Lanka has been impacted by China's expanding presence and influence in Sri Lanka, especially infrastructure development projects. India has worked to manage outside influence in the region while balancing its own objectives.

Territorial Issues and Fisheries Conflict: Relations between India and Sri Lanka have occasionally been strained by disagreements over fishing rights and territorial waters in the Palk Strait. Through bilateral talks, efforts have been made to address these problems.

Diplomatic Activities: The Presidents of India and Sri Lanka have frequently interacted diplomatically, including high-level trips and meetings, which reflects the two nations' continued involvement.

Regional and international interactions: Both India and Sri Lanka participate in multilateral forums to advance regional cooperation and handle shared issues. They are both members of regional organizations like SAARC and BIMSTEC.

Changing Priorities: The two-way interaction has changed in response to shifting international, political, and economic forces. Both nations have proven they are eager to work together on a variety of projects while overcoming obstacles. The relationship between India and Sri Lanka after 2000 is a reflection of a number of factors, including mutual interests, historical links, and the complexity of regional geopolitics. The two nations are still negotiating their ties to in order to solidify the relations and to create a resilient, peaceful and sustainable South Asia .

Conclusion

In summary, historical, cultural, economic, and geopolitical considerations have molded the complicated and multidimensional connection between India and Sri Lanka. Both nations have successfully navigated a variety of opportunities and difficulties over the years while trying to promote collaboration, mutual understanding, and regional stability. The historical and cultural ties between Sri Lanka and India have given their relationship a solid foundation. A feeling of kinship and understanding has developed between the two countries as a result of their shared language, religious, and trade ties. Economic cooperation has been the driving force behind relations between India and Sri Lanka. Projects for development, trade, and investment have improved and contributed to the growth of peaceful neighbourhood. In essence Relationships between India and Sri Lanka are essentially characterized by a synthesis of shared historical ties, regional stability goals, and the pursuit of mutual progress. Despite ongoing difficulties, a strong commitment to collaboration, cultural exchanges, and diplomatic involvement is maintained. There is potential for more cooperation between the two countries as they look to the future in a variety of industries, helping to foster a prosperous and peaceful relationship that benefits the two nations as well as the larger region.

As the two nations continue to negotiate their bilateral ties, regional dynamics, and global trends, the future of India-Sri Lanka relations holds both opportunities and challenges. It's reasonable to anticipate continued attempts to improve trade relations and foster economic collaboration as well as ongoing economic cooperation. In order to promote greater economic integration between the two nations, infrastructure development, notably the improvement of maritime connectivity and transportation systems, may be crucial. Tourism, cultural exchanges, and people-to-people contacts are projected to grow, strengthening linkages between Indian societies and encouraging greater understanding.

Given their shared goal in preserving stability in the Indian Ocean region, both nations will probably continue working together on regional security issues, such as maritime security and counter terrorism initiatives. India will probably continue to play a significant role in Sri Lanka's development efforts, and there may be opportunities for collaboration on projects in the infrastructure, energy, and technological sectors. India will continue to face difficulties in its efforts to promote a peaceful and inclusive solution to the issue of ethnic harmony and political stability in Sri Lanka. Both nations will continue to handle their interactions with foreign powers, including significant actors like China, in a manner that protects their own national interests.

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