

INDO-SRI LANKA RELATIONS THROUGH YEARS

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Abstract

India and Sri Lanka have shared a complex and multifaceted relationship throughout history. Both countries are geographically close, with the Palk Strait separating them, which has facilitated cultural, economic, and political exchanges. However, despite these similarities, their relations have been marked by both cooperation and conflict. One of the key areas of cooperation between India and Sri Lanka has been in trade and commerce. Historically, India has been a major trading partner for Sri Lanka, with bilateral trade agreements benefiting both nations. Additionally, cultural ties between the two countries have strengthened over time through the exchange of music, dance forms like Bharatanatyam in South India and Kandyan dance in Sri Lanka. However, there have also been instances of conflict between India and Sri Lanka. The most notable example is the civil war that plagued Sri Lanka for nearly three decades. During this period, Tamil separatist groups sought support from Tamil Nadu in southern India to establish an independent state. This led to strained relations between the two countries as India intervened militarily in an attempt to resolve the conflict. In recent years, however, there has been a significant improvement in bilateral relations. Both countries have focused on enhancing economic cooperation through increased trade and investment opportunities. Additionally, there has been a greater emphasis on people-to-people contact through tourism promotion initiatives. In conclusion, while India and Sri Lanka share historical ties that have fostered cooperation in various domains such as trade and culture; they have also faced challenges due to conflicts like the civil war. Nevertheless, recent efforts towards strengthening their relationship indicate a positive trajectory for future collaboration between these neighbouring nations.

Paper Identification



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Objectives of the Study

- i. To understand the relations of India and Sri Lanka considering historical, geographical, economic, and social aspects.
- ii. To examine the history of cooperation and conflicts of the countries.
- iii. To evaluate the significance of proximity in determining the relations of two countries.
- iv. Make a better descriptive essay of the Indo-Sri Lanka's current status.
- v. Identify potential biases in the historical narratives of India and Sri Lanka history.

The Challenges & Conflicts

India and Sri Lanka have faced a number of issues in their relations, one of which is the fishing dispute between the two countries. This has resulted in a number of arrests of Indian fishermen in Sri Lanka for crossing the maritime border and fishing illegally. The other issue that has been a source of tension between the two countries is the porous maritime border, which has been linked to the issue of border security and the smuggling of drugs and immigrants. India has also expressed concern about the situation of the Tamil minority in Sri Lanka due to the ethnic conflict. India has expressed concerns about China's increasing economic and strategic influence on Sri Lanka, including Chinese investments in infrastructure projects and the development of the Hambantota Port. This has sometimes been viewed as a challenge to India's own interests in the region.

Historical Background

The roots of the Indo-Sri Lanka conflicts can be traced back to the colonial era when both countries were under British rule. Sri Lanka, then known as Ceylon, was a British colony until it gained independence in 1948. India, on the other hand, gained independence in 1947. The two countries have a shared history and cultural ties, but their relationship has been marred by various conflicts over the years.

- i. Ancient Trade and Cultural Exchange: India and Sri Lanka have a long history of trade and cultural exchange dating back to ancient times. The close proximity and maritime connections facilitated interactions between the two nations.
- ii. Cultural and Religious Influence: Buddhism, originating in India, spread to Sri Lanka in ancient times. Sri Lanka has been a significant center for Buddhist teachings, and Indian pilgrims have visited the island for centuries. Additionally, there have been influences of Hinduism and other Indian cultural elements in Sri Lanka.
- iii. Colonial Era: Both India and Sri Lanka were under colonial rule for several centuries. India was colonized by the British, while Sri Lanka was a British Crown colony known as Ceylon. The nationalist movements in both countries eventually led to their independence.
- iv. Cultural and Religious Influence: Sri Lanka has been a significant center for Buddhism, and the spread of Buddhism from India to Sri Lanka had a profound cultural and religious impact. The Buddhist teachings from India were embraced by the people of Sri Lanka, and the island became an important destination for Buddhist pilgrimage. This cultural and religious exchange between India and Sri Lanka continues to shape the religious landscape of both countries.
- v. Tamil Diaspora: Sri Lanka's Tamil community has historical ties with the Tamil-speaking population in South India. Over the years, there has been migration and movement of Tamil people between India and Sri Lanka. The presence of a significant Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora in India, particularly in the state of Tamil Nadu, has contributed to cultural, social, and familial connections between the Tamil communities in both countries.
- vi. Political Relations: The ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, particularly the issue concerning the Tamil minority, has had political implications for India. India has shown concern for the welfare of Sri Lankan Tamils, and in the past, there have been instances of Indian intervention in the Sri Lankan Civil War. These interventions, such as the deployment of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF), have had a direct impact on India's foreign policy and relations with Sri Lanka.
- vii. Economic Cooperation: Sri Lanka and India have engaged in bilateral trade and economic cooperation. Sri Lanka is one of India's major trading partners in the region, with trade between the two countries spanning various sectors

Geopolitical Tensions & Territorial Disputes

One of the main sources of conflict between India and Sri Lanka is the issue of territorial disputes. The most significant dispute is over the island of Kachchatheevu, located in the Palk Strait between the two countries. Both India and Sri Lanka claim sovereignty over the island, which has led to tensions and occasional clashes between fishermen from both countries.

The geopolitical landscape of the Indian Ocean has also played a role in the Indo-Sri Lanka conflicts. India sees itself as a dominant power in the region and has been wary of any external influence, especially from China. Sri Lanka, on the other hand, has maintained close ties with China, which has caused concerns for India. This has led to a power struggle between the two countries, with India trying to assert its dominance and Sri Lanka seeking to maintain its sovereignty.

Ethnic Tensions

Sri Lanka has a complex ethnic makeup, with the majority Sinhalese population and a significant Tamil minority. The Tamil minority has long-standing grievances against the Sinhalese-dominated government, which has led to a civil war that lasted for over 25 years. India has been involved in this conflict, supporting the Tamil rebels, which has strained its relationship with Sri Lanka.

- i. **Sri Lankan Tamil Issue:** The ethnic tensions between Sri Lanka and India are largely rooted in the Sri Lankan Tamil issue. The Tamil community in Sri Lanka, primarily concentrated in the northern and eastern parts of the country, has faced discrimination and marginalization. The Sri Lankan Civil War, which lasted from 1983 to 2009, was fought between the Sri Lankan government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), a militant group seeking an independent Tamil state. India has historically had a significant Tamil population and has shown concern for the welfare of Sri Lankan Tamils.
- ii. **Indian Intervention:** In the 1980s, during the peak of the Sri Lankan Civil War, India intervened in the conflict with the aim of protecting the Tamil minority. In 1987, India deployed the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) in Sri Lanka to mediate and enforce a peace accord between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE. However, this intervention was met with resistance and resulted in clashes between the IPKF and the LTTE, leading to strained relations between Sri Lanka and India.
- iii. **Rajiv Gandhi Assassination:** In 1991, former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated by a suicide bomber from the LTTE. This event further heightened tensions

between Sri Lanka and India, as it was perceived as an attack on the Indian state and a retaliation against Indian involvement in Sri Lanka.

- iv. **Fishermen Disputes:** Another recurring issue that contributes to tensions between the two countries is the conflict between Indian and Sri Lankan fishermen over fishing rights in the waters of the Palk Strait and the Bay of Bengal. There have been frequent incidents of arrests, detentions, and clashes between the fishermen from both countries, leading to diplomatic strains.

Implications

The Indo-Sri Lanka conflicts have had significant implications for both countries. The territorial disputes have led to strained relations and occasional clashes between the two countries. The geopolitical tensions have also affected their relationship, with India trying to assert its dominance and Sri Lanka seeking to maintain its sovereignty. The ethnic tensions have resulted in a long and bloody civil war, causing immense human suffering and economic damage.

Post-Independence Relations

After gaining independence, India and Sri Lanka established diplomatic relations and have maintained bilateral ties through various agreements and partnerships. Post-independence, India and Sri Lanka have maintained diplomatic relations and engaged in various areas of cooperation.

- i. **Trade and Economic Cooperation:** India is one of Sri Lanka's major trading partners. Both countries have engaged in bilateral trade, with a focus on sectors such as textiles, machinery, petroleum products, and agricultural commodities. India has also provided financial assistance and development projects in Sri Lanka, supporting infrastructure development, housing, healthcare, and education.
- ii. **Cultural Exchanges:** There is a strong cultural bond between India and Sri Lanka. Cultural exchanges between the two countries encompass a wide range of activities, including music, dance, art, literature, and film. Artists, musicians, and performers frequently visit each other's countries, fostering cultural understanding and collaboration.
- iii. **Education and Scholarships:** India has offered scholarships and educational opportunities for Sri Lankan students to pursue higher education in Indian universities and institutions. This has promoted academic collaboration and people-to-people connections.
- iv. **Defense Cooperation:** India and Sri Lanka have engaged in defense cooperation, including military training programs, joint exercises, and intelligence-sharing. This cooperation aims to strengthen the defense capabilities of both countries and ensure regional security.

- v. **Infrastructure Development:** India has provided financial assistance and expertise for infrastructure development projects in Sri Lanka. This includes the construction of highways, railways, airports, and ports. Projects such as the Colombo Port Expansion and the development of Trincomalee Port are examples of infrastructure initiatives supported by India.
- vi. **Development Assistance:** India has extended development assistance to Sri Lanka in various sectors, including education, healthcare, agriculture, and technology. This assistance aims to support Sri Lanka's socio-economic development and improve the lives of its citizens.
- vii. **Tourism:** India is a significant source market for tourism in Sri Lanka. Many Indian tourists visit Sri Lanka for leisure, pilgrimage, and business purposes. Similarly, Sri Lankan tourists also travel to India to explore its cultural and historical attractions. Both governments have taken steps to enhance tourism infrastructure and connectivity.
- viii. **Maritime Security and Cooperation:** Given the geographical proximity and shared maritime boundaries, India and Sri Lanka collaborate on maritime security, piracy prevention, and search and rescue operations. This cooperation aims to ensure the safety and security of maritime trade and navigation in the region.
- ix. **People-to-People Relations:** The presence of a significant Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora in India, particularly in the state of Tamil Nadu, has led to cultural, social, and familial connections between the Tamil communities in both countries. People-to-people interactions, including visits, cultural events, and family ties, contribute to the overall bilateral relationship.
- x. **Regional Cooperation:** India and Sri Lanka have collaborated in regional forums such as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). These platforms enable them to address common challenges, promote regional integration, and enhance economic cooperation within the region.

The expected relations of India & Sri Lanka

Based on their present status, the future predictions for Indo-Sri Lankan relations can be shaped by various factors. It is important to note that future predictions are subject to geopolitical dynamics, domestic developments, and individual leadership priorities. As the relationship between India and Sri Lanka continues to evolve, proactive efforts to address challenges, build trust, and promote mutual interests will be key in shaping the future trajectory of their bilateral relations. Sri Lanka and India have a long history of friendly and cooperative relations. Both

countries have shown a commitment to maintaining regional stability and promoting bilateral cooperation across various sectors. It is in the interest of both nations to foster a peaceful and constructive relationship. While it is generally beneficial to focus on strengthening peace, dialogue, and cooperation between nations, it is essential to monitor and address any potential conflicts or sources of tension. Diplomatic channels, dialogue, and confidence-building measures are vital for maintaining positive relations and preventing conflicts. Some elements within Sri Lanka, particularly during times of political tension or domestic issues, have shown anti-India sentiments. These sentiments, while not reflective of the broader population, have occasionally raised concerns in India regarding the overall state of relations between the two countries.

Conclusion

Efforts can be made to reduce trade imbalances and increase economic cooperation across the two countries. Mutual benefits can be derived from the identification of sectors with complementarity interests and investment promotion. Maintaining friendly relations with other countries is of great importance, but both India and Sri Lanka need to keep their bilateral relationships strong without being unduly influenced by foreign powers. Strengthening cooperation in the field of security: It is possible to combat common threats and strengthen mutual trust among these two countries through cooperating on security matters and intelligence sharing. India can continue to engage with Sri Lanka to ensure that the welfare and rights of the Tamil community are respected and protected. In order to promote stability and inclusiveness in Sri Lanka, it may be crucial to contribute to efforts for reconciliation between peoples and the transfer of power. It is possible to improve the relationship and understanding among citizens of these two countries through promoting intercultural exchanges, tourism and education.

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