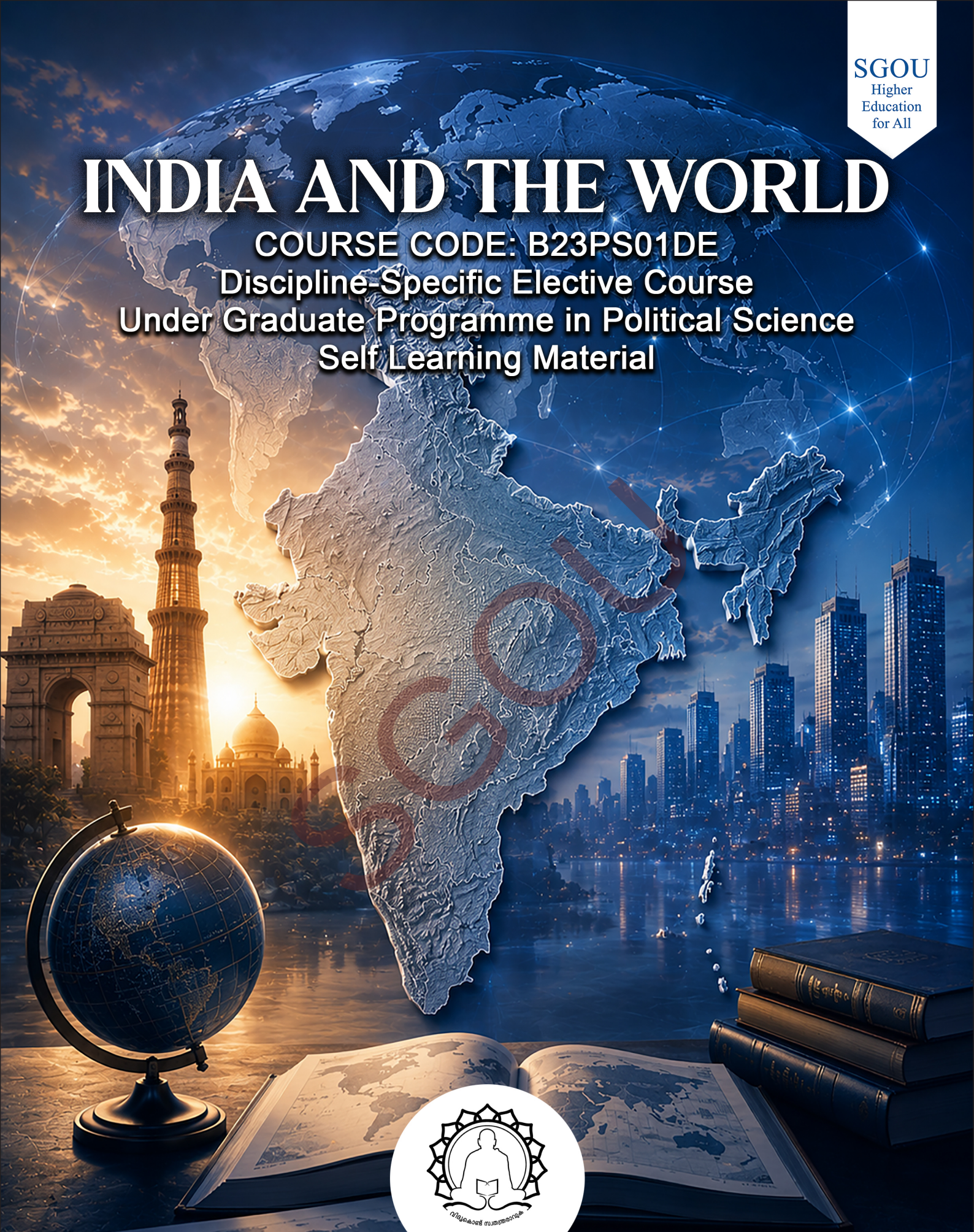


INDIA AND THE WORLD

COURSE CODE: B23PS01DE

**Discipline-Specific Elective Course
Under Graduate Programme in Political Science
Self Learning Material**



**SREENARAYANAGURU
OPEN UNIVERSITY**

SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY

The State University for Education, Training and Research in Blended Format, Kerala

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India and the World

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Discipline-Specific Elective Course
Undergraduate Programme
in Political Science
Self Learning Material
(with Model question paper sets)



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The State University for Education, Training and Research in Blended Format, Kerala



India and the World

Course Code: B23PS01DE

Semester- IV

Discipline-Specific Elective Course

Undergraduate Programme

in Political Science

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MESSAGE FROM VICE CHANCELLOR

Dear learner,

I extend my heartfelt greetings and profound enthusiasm as I warmly welcome you to Sreenarayanaguru Open University. Established in September 2020 as a state-led endeavour to promote higher education through open and distance learning modes, our institution was shaped by the guiding principle that access and quality are the cornerstones of equity. We have firmly resolved to uphold the highest standards of education, setting the benchmark and charting the course.

The courses offered by the Sreenarayanaguru Open University aim to strike a quality balance, ensuring students are equipped for both personal growth and professional excellence. The University embraces the widely acclaimed “blended format,” a practical framework that harmoniously integrates Self-Learning Materials, Classroom Counseling, and Virtual modes, fostering a dynamic and enriching experience for both learners and instructors.

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Rest assured, the university’s student support services will be at your disposal throughout your academic journey, readily available to address any concerns or grievances you may encounter. We encourage you to reach out to us freely regarding any matter about your academic programme. It is our sincere wish that you achieve the utmost success.



Regards,
Dr. Jagathy Raj V. P.

01-06-2026

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BLOCK

Historical Perspective on India's Global Relations



UNIT

Ancient and Medieval India's Interactions with the World

Learning Outcomes

After studying this Unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ explain the civilisational foundations of India's early external relations
- ◆ analyse the role of geography and resource wealth in shaping India's global interactions
- ◆ describe the major inland and maritime trade networks of ancient India
- ◆ examine India's cultural exchanges with Asia, the Islamic world, and Europe
- ◆ evaluate the significance of early globalisation and its relevance to modern diplomacy

Prerequisites

An understanding of India's ancient and medieval interactions with the wider world requires recognising that the Indian subcontinent historically functioned not as an isolated landmass but as an important crossroads of trade, migration, and cultural exchange. Caravans creaked across mountain passes, ships rode the rhythm of monsoon winds, monks carried manuscripts across deserts, and merchants stitched continents together with threads of spice and silk. To fully appreciate this interconnected landscape, learners should possess a foundational understanding of ancient Indian history and the major civilisations that shared space in the early world.

Familiarity with civilisations such as the Indus Valley, Mesopotamia, Persia, and Greece provides the historical backdrop against which India's external relations unfolded. A preliminary awareness of trade systems, religious movements, imperial

expansions, and processes of cultural diffusion will further help learners recognise how goods, beliefs, and knowledge travelled across regions. Understanding these basic historical currents enables one to see India not in isolation, but as an active participant in transregional networks of exchange.

With this conceptual grounding, learners will be better prepared to engage with the Unit's exploration of maritime trade, inland commercial routes, cultural transmission, and intellectual exchange, and to appreciate how these early interactions laid enduring foundations for India's place in the world.

Keywords

Civilisational Interactions, Maritime Trade, Monsoon Navigation, Silk Road, Cultural Diffusion, Indo-Roman Trade, Gandhara Art, Early Globalisation

Discussion

1.1.1. Introduction: Civilisational Foundations of External Relations

India's relationship with the outside world did not begin with modern diplomacy, colonial trade, or the arrival of European companies. Its external connections stretch back thousands of years, rooted in the very formation of its civilisation. From the earliest cities to the flourishing medieval ports, the Indian subcontinent remained actively linked to distant regions through trade, cultural exchange, religion, and knowledge systems. Rather than being isolated, India functioned as a meeting ground of routes. Merchants arrived with cargo, monks with scriptures, scholars with questions, and travellers with curiosity. Goods travelled outward, but so did philosophies, artistic styles, and scientific knowledge.

Three foundational forces shaped these early global connections:

- Geography
- Resource wealth
- Cultural adaptability

Together, they laid the foundation of India's foreign relations long before embassies and treaties existed.

1.1.1.1. Geographical Advantage

India's location placed it at the great crossroads of Asia, giving it both protection and pathways to the wider world. To the north rose the massive Himalayan mountain system, forming a formidable natural defensive barrier. For long periods, these mountains shielded the subcontinent from large-scale invasions and climatic extremes. Yet the Himalayan wall was not entirely sealed. Historic passes such as the Khyber Pass, Bolan Pass, and the high Karakoram routes functioned as mountain gateways. Through these corridors moved traders



carrying goods, pastoral groups seeking pastures, diplomatic envoys representing distant courts, and at times, invading armies attempting to enter the plains of India.

On the other three sides, India was embraced by vast stretches of water. The Arabian Sea lay to the west, the Bay of Bengal to the east, and the expansive Indian Ocean to the south. Far from isolating the subcontinent, these seas acted as connective highways linking India with distant regions. Seasonal monsoon winds enabled ships to travel in predictable cycles, allowing regular maritime contact. Through these oceanic routes, India maintained active connections with Arabia, East Africa, Sri Lanka, and Southeast Asia. Thus, India's geography created a rare combination of security and connectivity, protecting the land while simultaneously opening it to vibrant external interaction.

1.1.1.2. Resource Wealth

India's natural abundance and artisanal excellence generated global demand from very early times. Ancient travellers and traders often described the subcontinent as a land of luxury goods, rich in rare or unavailable resources. Among its most prized exports were spices such as pepper and cardamom, fine cotton textiles, delicate silk fabrics, precious and semi-precious stones, intricately crafted ivory objects, fragrant sandalwood, and the famed wootz steel known for its exceptional quality. These commodities travelled across land and sea, reaching distant markets and royal courts. As a result, India attracted a wide range of foreign visitors, including Roman merchants seeking spices, Arab traders navigating monsoon seas, Persian envoys fostering commercial ties, and Southeast Asian buyers engaged in regional exchange. Through the steady movement of these goods, trade emerged as India's earliest diplomatic language, building enduring connections long before formal

political relations took shape.

Cultural Adaptability

Indian civilisation displayed a remarkable degree of cultural flexibility throughout its long history. Rather than remaining in rigid isolation, it interacted openly with external influences and reshaped them within its own social and cultural frameworks. Foreign ideas/influences entered the subcontinent through trade networks, migration, diplomatic contact, and intellectual exchange. Instead of being passively adopted, these influences were interpreted, adapted, and blended with existing traditions. Such exchanges occurred across multiple domains, including religion, language and scripts, art and architecture, systems of governance, and philosophy and science. This spirit of openness not only enriched India internally but also enabled Indian cultural patterns to travel outward, influencing societies far beyond its geographical boundaries.

1.1.2. Early Civilisational Contacts

Indus–Mesopotamian Links

One of the oldest examples of India's international interaction comes from the Indus Valley Civilisation, which flourished roughly between 2600 and 1900 BCE. Archaeological discoveries and ancient texts reveal that the Indus people maintained regular contact with Mesopotamia, located in present-day Iraq. This relationship represents one of the earliest known long-distance trade networks in human history.

Mesopotamian records refer to a distant land called *Meluhha*, which most historians identify with the Indus region. These records mention merchants, ships, and goods arriving from this land, suggesting organised and repeated contact rather than occasional exchange.

Material evidence strengthens this view. Carnelian beads crafted in the Indus region have been discovered in Mesopotamian cities. Ivory objects, cotton textiles, and shell ornaments are also found at archaeological sites

there. Even more striking is the discovery of Indus seals in cities such as Ur and Lagash. These seals, used for trade identification and administration, indicate the physical presence of Indus traders or their agents.

Dockyard at Lothal	Varieties of ancient carnelian beads	Ancient pictograph from the Indus Valley civilisation
		

Figures: Archaeological evidence of Indus–Mesopotamian trade networks.

The dockyard at Lothal in present-day Gujarat further confirms maritime activity. Its carefully planned basin structure suggests that ships were loaded and unloaded in an

organised manner. This was not accidental coastal trade but a regulated commercial system. The exchange worked both ways. The Indus civilisation exported luxury goods, while Mesopotamia supplied silver, tin, wool, and agricultural products.

Table: Export-Import between the Indus and the Mesopotamia regions

Indus Exports	Mesopotamian Imports
Beads	Silver
Cotton textiles	Tin
Ivory	Wool
Shell ornaments	Grains

Much of this trade likely passed through intermediaries in the Persian Gulf, especially Dilmun, identified with modern Bahrain. This interaction shows that even in the Bronze Age, the Indian subcontinent was already integrated into wider economic networks.

1.1.3.Persian and Hellenistic Contacts

Persian (Achaemenid) Influence

In the 6th century BCE, parts of northwestern India came under the control of the Achaemenid Persian Empire, particularly during the reign of Darius I. This contact brought the region into the administrative and political framework of one of the world's

earliest large-scale empires.

The Persian rule introduced several important influences. The satrapy system of administration, in which provinces were governed by appointed officials, shaped local governance practices. Tribute-based taxation was institutionalised, linking Indian territories to Persia's imperial revenue network. The use of Aramaic script in official communication also left its imprint on regional inscriptional practices. Through these developments, north-western India became integrated into a wider transregional imperial structure, marking one of the earliest instances of the subcontinent's incorporation into a large, multinational empire.

1.1.4. Hellenistic (Greek) Contact

Alexander's invasion of north-western India in 326 BCE marked a significant

moment of contact between the Indian subcontinent and the Hellenistic world. Although his political control over the region was short-lived, the cultural and commercial linkages that followed proved far more enduring. The campaign helped open new overland routes connecting India with Central Asia and the Mediterranean, facilitating the movement of traders, envoys, and ideas.

In the aftermath, several Indo-Greek kingdoms emerged in the north-western frontier, becoming centres of sustained interaction between Greek and Indian traditions. One of the most striking outcomes of this contact was the development of artistic fusion styles. The Gandhara School of art reflected this synthesis, blending Greek artistic realism with Buddhist religious themes and producing some of the earliest anthropomorphic representations of the Buddha.

Meditating Buddha statue sculpted inside Kanheri Caves, Sanjay Gandhi National Park, Mumbai, India



Buddha statue in Gandhara style, Pakistan



The kingdom of Alexander the Great at its greatest extent



Ancient History - Map of Alexander the Great's Campaigns



Figures: Hellenistic influence in Gandhara art and Indo-Greek cultural exchange.

Greek diplomatic contact with India continued even after Alexander's departure. One of the most notable figures in this phase was Megasthenes, who served as an ambassador to the court of Chandragupta Maurya. During his stay, he closely observed various aspects of Indian life and governance. His work, *Indica*, provides valuable descriptions of the administrative structure, social organisation, economic activities, urban life, and customs of the time. Although some of his accounts contain exaggerations, the text remains one of the earliest detailed foreign narratives about India, offering important insights into Mauryan polity and society while strengthening intellectual linkages between the Hellenistic world and the Indian subcontinent.

1.1.5.1. Trade Networks in Ancient India

Trade formed the backbone of India's early global interactions. Goods moved not only across seas but also through vast inland corridors that connected production centres with ports.

1.1.5.1. Inland Trade Routes

Ancient India possessed an extensive network of inland trade routes that linked major cities with craft centres, mining areas,

and fertile agricultural regions. These land corridors enabled the steady movement of goods from production zones to market centres and eventually to coastal ports for overseas trade.

One of the most significant among them was the Uttarapatha. This great northern route connected Taxila in the northwest with Pataliputra in the Gangetic plains and extended eastward. This corridor facilitated the transport of textiles, horses, metals, and other valuable commodities across northern India.

The Dakshinapatha served as the southern counterpart. It linked the Gangetic region with peninsular India, and supported the exchange of spices, precious stones, forest products, and cotton. In addition, several trans-Deccan routes cut across the plateau, connecting interior production centres with ports on both the western and eastern coasts.

Trade moved by caravans of bullock carts, riverboats along major waterways, and pack animals such as camels and horses. Merchant guilds, known as *Shrenis*, played a crucial role. They regulated prices, ensured quality, provided credit, and even funded religious and public institutions. In many ways, they functioned like early commercial corporations.

1.1.5.2. Maritime Trade Systems

If land routes were the veins of commerce, the seas formed its vast circulatory system. Maritime trade connected India with regions far beyond its immediate neighbours.

A key factor behind this success was the monsoon wind system. Sailors learned to use seasonal wind reversals to travel efficiently. During the southwest monsoon, ships sailed from Arabia and Africa toward India. With the northeast monsoon, they returned westward. This predictable rhythm made long-distance sea travel safer and faster.

Classical sources such as the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* attribute the understanding

of monsoon wind patterns to the navigator Hippalus. However, Indian sailors had likely used these winds long before. Two major maritime circuits emerged. The western circuit linked India with Arabia, East Africa, and the Roman Empire. The eastern circuit connected Indian ports with Sri Lanka, Southeast Asia, and China.

Indian shipbuilders used a variety of vessels, from stitched wooden ships to large cargo boats capable of carrying bulk goods across oceans. Maritime trade thus transformed the Indian Ocean into a bustling commercial arena.

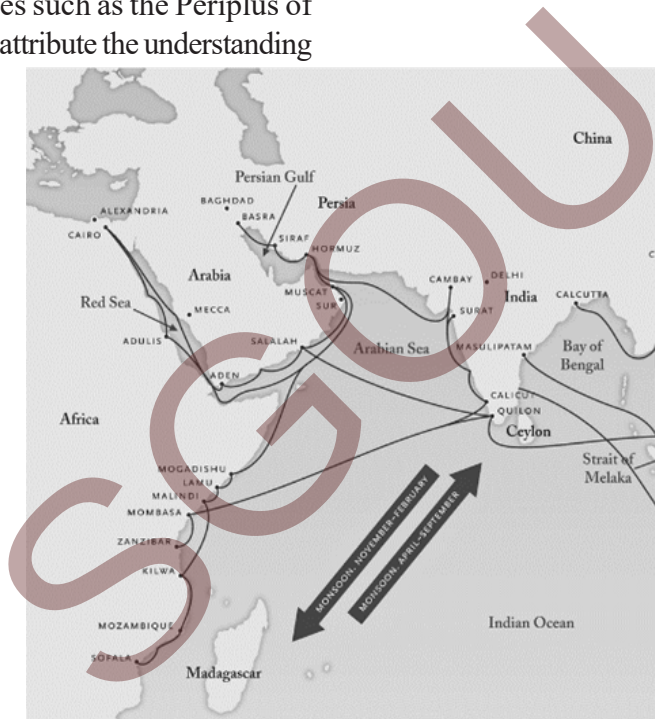


Figure: Indian Ocean trade routes and monsoon winds

1.1.6. Major Ports and Commercial Centres

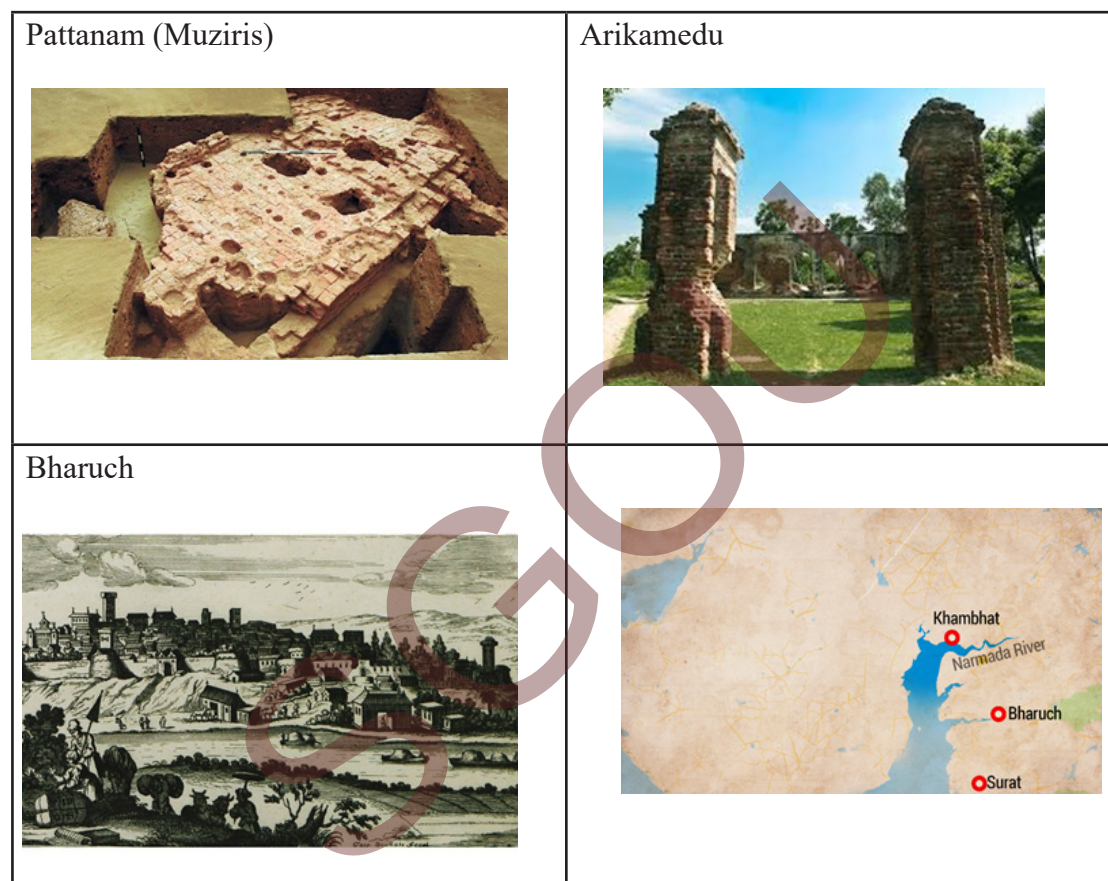
Ports were the meeting points of land and sea trade. They were cosmopolitan spaces where merchants speaking different languages negotiated, lived, and exchanged goods. On the western coast, several ports rose to prominence. Lothal served as an early Harappan dockyard town. Bharuch, known to the Greeks as Barygaza, became a

major centre of Indo-Roman trade. Muziris on the Malabar Coast gained fame as a pepper-export hub, attracting large numbers of Roman merchants. Sopara, near present-day Mumbai, functioned as another important entrepôt.

The Malabar Coast of Kerala held special significance because of its spice cultivation. Pepper, cardamom, and other aromatics made this coastline a magnet for

global traders. The eastern coast also hosted thriving ports. Tamralipti in Bengal served as a gateway to Southeast Asia. Arikamedu emerged as a Roman trade settlement, evidenced by amphorae and Roman artefacts. Kaveripattinam, also called Puhar, flourished under the Cholas, while Nagapattinam became both a commercial and Buddhist centre.

These ports had warehouses, granaries, customs offices, and designated quarters for foreign merchants. Roman gold coins found in South India testify to the scale of commerce. Ports were not just trade points. They were early laboratories of globalisation where cultures interacted daily.



Figures: Archaeological remains of major ancient Indian ports.

India and the Silk Road

The Silk Road was not a single road but a complex web of caravan paths stretching from China to the Mediterranean. India occupied a central position within this network. India linked Central Asia's land routes to the maritime routes of the Indian Ocean. Cities such as Taxila, Mathura, and Varanasi acted

as redistribution centres where goods were received, stored, and forwarded to other regions. A wide range of commodities moved along these routes. India exported spices, textiles, ivory, gemstones, and religious manuscripts. In return, it imported Chinese silk, Central Asian horses, precious metals, and glassware.

Table: Goods From and Into India via Silk Road

Goods From India	Goods Into India
• Spices • Textiles • Ivory • Precious stones • Buddhist manuscripts	• Chinese silk • Central Asian horses • Gold and silver • Glassware • Luxury goods

The Silk Road



Cultural Highways

The Silk Road carried ideas as powerfully as it carried merchandise. Buddhist monks travelled from India to Central Asia and China, carrying scriptures and philosophical traditions. Artistic styles moved with them.

Gandhara art, for instance, shows how visual motifs travelled across regions. Scripts, coin designs, and religious iconography circulated widely. Through these exchanges, the Silk Road became an intellectual highway linking distant civilisations.



Figure: Taxila, Sirkap ruins of a fortified city, Pakistan

By the early centuries of the Common Era, India was deeply woven into transcontinental systems of exchange. Trade routes carried merchants, monks, diplomats, and storytellers alike. Coastal ports shimmered with ships and markets, while inland caravan towns pulsed with movement. Commerce blended with culture and religion travelled alongside silk and spices. These early networks laid the foundation for later phases of India's external relations, in which economic exchange, cultural transmission, and political diplomacy would become even more intertwined.

1.1.7. Cultural Exchanges and Diffusion

Trade may have opened the first doors between India and the wider world, but culture was what truly filled the corridors. Wherever merchants travelled, they carried more than cargo. Alongside spices and textiles moved stories, rituals, scripts, beliefs, and ways of life. India's interaction with other civilisations was therefore never limited to commerce. It unfolded as an ongoing civilisational conversation that took place in monasteries, royal courts, port towns, caravanserais, and pilgrimage centres.

Cultural diffusion from India moved through three major human channels. The first were merchants. Traders often lived for long periods in foreign ports, forming settlements and family ties. In doing so, they introduced religious practices, social customs, and even food habits to local societies. The second channel consisted of monks and missionaries. Buddhist monks, and later Hindu religious teachers, travelled widely to teach philosophy and establish monastic institutions. The third channel involved scholars, diplomats, and envoys. Intellectual exchange was encouraged by royal patronage, curiosity about distant lands, and the desire to learn from other knowledge systems.

Unlike the cultural domination associated with later colonial expansion, India's cultural spread was rarely coercive. It was accommodative and dialogic. Local societies did not simply copy Indian practices. They selected, adapted, and blended them with their own traditions. This mutual exchange created layered cultural landscapes rather than uniform replicas.

Indian cultural influence travelled across many domains. Religion and philosophy were among the most visible, but the flow extended to language, scripts, temple architecture, and political ideas of kingship, literature, art, astronomy, and mathematics. Over time, these interconnected influences created what historians often describe as a vast "Sanskritic cosmopolis" stretching across large parts of Asia, where Sanskrit ideas, texts, and symbols circulated widely without erasing local diversity.

1.1.7.1. Spread of Buddhism

Among India's most far-reaching cultural contributions was Buddhism. What began as a regional spiritual movement in the 6th–5th century BCE gradually expanded into one of the world's great transcontinental religions. After the Buddha's lifetime, monastic communities organised themselves into missionary networks. Monks travelled, preached, debated, and established monasteries. However, the expansion of Buddhism accelerated dramatically under imperial patronage, particularly during the Mauryan period.

A central figure in this transformation was Emperor Ashoka in the 3rd century BCE. After the Kalinga war, Ashoka embraced Buddhism and reshaped it into a universal ethical project. He did not treat it merely as a personal faith but as a guiding philosophy for governance and international engagement. Ashoka sponsored missionary journeys to Sri Lanka, Central Asia,



and parts of Southeast Asia. He supported the construction of stupas and monasteries and encouraged the translation of Buddhist teachings into local languages so that they could reach wider audiences. His inscriptions, carved on pillars and rocks across his empire, emphasised moral governance, non-violence, compassion, and welfare for all beings.

Buddhism travelled through both land and sea routes. Overland, it moved from the Gandhara region into Central Asia, then into China and Korea. Maritime routes carried it from eastern Indian ports to Sri Lanka, and from there to Myanmar, Thailand, and the Indonesian archipelago. As Buddhism entered new cultural environments, it evolved. In Sri Lanka and much of Southeast Asia, the Theravāda tradition took root, emphasising early monastic teachings. In China and Korea, Mahāyāna Buddhism developed, introducing new philosophical interpretations and devotional practices. In Tibet and Mongolia, Vajrayāna Buddhism emerged, blending Buddhist doctrine with local ritual traditions.

Table: Buddhist Traditions and Associated Regions

Region	Buddhist Tradition
Sri Lanka	Theravāda
China	Mahāyāna
Tibet	Vajrayāna
Southeast Asia	Mixed Theravāda traditions

The flow of exchange was not one-sided. Monks such as Faxian and Xuanzang travelled from China to India in search of authentic scriptures and learning. Their travel accounts documented Indian society, universities like Nalanda, pilgrimage centres, and monastic

life. Through such movements, Buddhism created one of the earliest pan-Asian cultural networks, linking distant societies through shared ethical and intellectual frameworks.

1.1.8. Spread of Hindu Cultural Elements

While Buddhism spread through organised missionary structures, Hindu cultural influence moved more gradually and diffusely. It travelled along the same commercial and migratory routes but without a centralised evangelising mission. Historians often describe this process not as religious conversion but as cultural adaptation. Southeast Asian and other societies encountered Hindu ideas through trade contacts, scholarly exchange, and political alliances. They adopted selected elements that suited their social and political needs.

Several key features of Hindu civilisation travelled abroad. Sanskrit became a prestige language in many royal courts and inscriptions. Its vocabulary shaped political titles, administrative terminology, and literary expression. Indian epics such as the Ramayana and Mahabharata were transmitted across regions, where they were retold in local languages and infused with indigenous themes. Temple architecture also travelled. Indian design principles inspired monumental structures across Southeast Asia. Concepts of sacred space, temple layout, and iconography were reinterpreted in local artistic idioms.

Political ideas formed another area of transmission. The ideology of divine kingship, often expressed through the Devaraja concept, gained prominence in several Southeast Asian polities. Kings were portrayed as earthly representatives of cosmic order. Legal and social norms derived from the Dharmaśāstra traditions also influenced governance frameworks.

The spread of these elements occurred through multiple mechanisms. Southeast Asian rulers invited Brahmin priests to perform rituals and advise the court. Marriage alliances linked royal families. Trade guilds established settlements abroad. Local elites patronised temples, scholars, and Sanskrit learning. Importantly, Hindu cultural elements did not replace indigenous traditions. They merged with local cosmologies, producing hybrid civilisations that were neither fully Indian nor wholly indigenous, but creative syntheses of both.

1.1.8.1. India and Southeast Asia

India's interaction with Southeast Asia stands as one of the most remarkable examples of pre-modern transregional influence. This engagement extended across present-day Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Myanmar. It unfolded over centuries through trade, religion, diplomacy, and cultural patronage.

Earlier historians used the term "Indianisation" to describe this process. By this, they referred to the adoption of Sanskrit political vocabulary, Hindu-Buddhist religious systems, temple architecture, and Indian legal-administrative ideas. However, modern scholarship presents a more balanced

view. Southeast Asian societies were not passive recipients. They actively selected, reshaped, and localised Indian influences according to their own contexts.

Political influence was particularly visible. Several kingdoms adopted Indian models of statecraft. Rulers used Sanskrit titles. Court rituals drew from Hindu traditions. Brahmin advisors played roles in royal ceremonies and governance. Prominent examples include Srivijaya, a powerful maritime Buddhist empire controlling sea routes; Majapahit, a Hindu-Buddhist polity in Indonesia; and the Khmer Empire in Cambodia, known for its monumental architecture and temple complexes.

Cultural influence appeared in striking visual and literary forms. Temple complexes such as Angkor Wat in Cambodia and Prambanan in Indonesia reflect Indian cosmological ideas expressed through local artistry. Shadow puppetry traditions retold the Ramayana in regionally adapted narratives. Sanskrit loanwords entered Southeast Asian languages. Calendar systems, astrology, and cosmology also bore Indian imprints. Yet each region reshaped these borrowings in its own way. The result was not imitation but transformation, where Indian elements became part of new cultural worlds.

Angkor Wat Temple in Cambodia



Prambanan Temple near Yogyakarta, Indonesia



Figures: Monumental architecture reflecting Indian cultural influence in Southeast Asia.

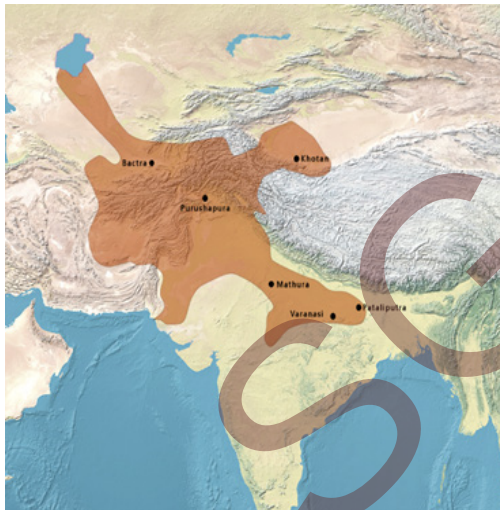
1.1.8.2. India and Central Asia

If Southeast Asia represented India's maritime cultural horizon, Central Asia formed its overland civilisational corridor. This vast region linked India with China, Persia, and the Mediterranean, functioning as a strategic and cultural bridge. Control over Central Asian routes meant access to the lucrative silk trade, supply of high-quality horses, military mobility, and sustained cultural exchange. Several Indian-linked empires recognised this importance. Among them, the Kushan Empire played a pivotal bridging role. Under rulers such as Kanishka, the empire spanned territories across both northwestern India and Central Asia. This geographic spread facilitated trade and cultural exchange along

the branches of the Silk Road.

Kanishka's patronage of Buddhism helped the religion expand northwards. Gandhara art flourished under Kushan support, blending Greek, Persian, and Indian artistic traditions. Kushan coinage and inscriptions reflect a multicultural synthesis, depicting deities and symbols from multiple civilisations. Central Asia became home to Buddhist monasteries, Sanskrit manuscripts, and Indian artistic styles. Cities such as Khotan emerged as important Buddhist centres. The colossal Bamiyan Buddhas in Afghanistan stood as powerful symbols of the fusion of Indo-Central Asian art before their destruction in modern times.

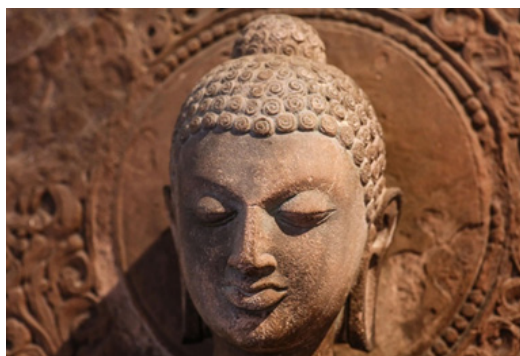
Kushana Empire



Kanishka Statue



Vintage sandstone sculpture of the head of Gautama Buddha in macro front view



Bamiyan, Buddha Statues, Afghanistan



From the early medieval period onward, shifts began to occur. Islamic expansions transformed Central Asian political landscapes. Trade routes reoriented, and many Buddhist institutions declined. Yet the earlier centuries of exchange had already left a deep cultural imprint. Together, these cultural interactions carried forward the networks described earlier. Trade routes that once moved spices and textiles now also carried scriptures, artistic styles, political ideas, and philosophical debates. India's external relations thus expanded beyond commerce into enduring civilisational linkages that shaped societies across Asia for centuries.

1.1.8.3. India and the Islamic World

From the 7th century CE onward, India's engagement with the outside world entered a new and dynamic phase with the rise and expansion of Islamic civilisation. Earlier interactions with distant regions had largely revolved around trade, cultural exchange, and religious travel. Now, these older networks began to intersect with new forces shaped by Islam's rapid spread across West Asia, Central Asia, and parts of Africa. Commerce, faith, political expansion, and intellectual collaboration became intertwined, giving India's external relations a fresh historical rhythm.

Arab Trade Networks

Well before any military expeditions reached the subcontinent, Arab merchants were already familiar visitors along India's western coastline, especially the Malabar Coast of Kerala. In fact, Arab seafarers inherited many of the maritime routes that had earlier connected India with the Roman world. Rather than creating new pathways from scratch, they expanded and revitalised existing Indian Ocean trade systems.

Trade between India and the Arab world was rich and mutually beneficial. From Indian ports flowed pepper, cardamom, cinnamon, fine textiles, indigo dye, and precious stones. In return came Arabian horses, highly valued in Indian warfare, along with dates, pearls, gold, and silver. This exchange was not occasional but continuous, supported by predictable monsoon winds that guided ships across the ocean.

The Malabar Coast emerged as a nodal hub in this network. Ports such as Calicut and Quilon grew into bustling cosmopolitan centres where Arab merchant communities settled for generations. Maritime technology also improved during this period. Vessels like the dhow (Uru), with their lateen sails, enhanced long-distance navigation and cargo capacity, strengthening Indo-Arab commercial ties.



Figure: Port of Calicut in 1572

Case Study: Uru and Its Importance in the Indian Ocean Trade

The Uru, a large traditional wooden ocean-going vessel built along the Malabar Coast of Kerala, occupies an important place in the history of Indian Ocean trade. Historical records, travel accounts, and maritime studies note that shipbuilding centres such as Beypore (near Kozhikode/Calicut) were active participants in transoceanic commerce from the medieval period onward. These vessels were constructed primarily by hereditary Muslim shipwright communities, often referred to as Khalasis and Ossans, who possessed specialised knowledge of timber selection, hull design, and ocean navigation requirements. Scholars of , such as K.N. Chaudhuri, highlight the crucial role of indigenous shipbuilding traditions of the Malabar Coast in sustaining commercial exchange between India and West Asia.

The structural strength of the Uru made it particularly suited for long-distance maritime trade. Built mainly from Malabar teak, a hardwood prized for its resistance to saltwater and shipworms, these vessels could endure the demanding conditions of monsoon navigation. Historical sources indicate that Arab merchants frequently commissioned ships from Malabar yards, recognising the durability and cargo capacity of these vessels. The Urus transported bulk commodities such as pepper, cardamom, coconut products, timber, rice, textiles, and, later, dates and horses. Their voyages connected Malabar ports with Oman, Yemen, the Persian Gulf, and East Africa, reinforcing commercial circuits that had existed since early medieval times.

The importance of the Uru extended beyond commerce. These ships functioned as cultural carriers across the Indian Ocean world. Sailors, merchants, religious scholars, and linguistic traditions travelled aboard them, strengthening Indo-Arab social and cultural ties. Maritime historians note that Kerala's long-standing Muslim trading communities evolved in part through sustained seaborne interactions. Thus, the Uru symbolised not merely a technological achievement but a floating institution of exchange linking markets, cultures, and faith networks.

Remarkably, the Uru shipbuilding tradition survives to this day in Beypore, where large wooden vessels are handcrafted using largely manual techniques. Modern builds often serve ceremonial or luxury purposes, yet the continuity of craft reflects an unbroken maritime heritage stretching back centuries. The Uru therefore stands as a living testament to India's indigenous shipbuilding excellence and its foundational role in sustaining Indian Ocean trade networks.



1.1.9. Cultural and Religious Interactions

Trade across the Indian Ocean did far more than transport commodities such as spices, textiles, and precious goods. It also facilitated the circulation of people, ideas, beliefs, and cultural practices. As Arab merchants frequently visited India's western coast, particularly the Malabar region, commercial familiarity gradually evolved into sustained cultural interaction. Many traders did not remain temporary visitors. They settled in port towns, married into local communities, adopted regional languages, and became integrated into the social fabric of coastal society.

One of the most visible markers of this interaction was the establishment of early mosques along the Kerala coast. These religious institutions emerged not through military expansion but through peaceful mercantile contact. Local traditions

associated with the Cheraman Juma Masjid in Kodungallur suggest that Muslim traders and early converts established places of worship with the support of local rulers. Over time, similar mosques appeared in several coastal towns, reflecting the growing presence of Muslim merchant communities involved in the Indian Ocean trade.

These interactions gradually gave rise to distinctive Muslim communities along the Malabar Coast. The Mappila Muslims developed a cultural identity shaped by both Islamic traditions and the social environment of Kerala. Architectural styles of mosques often incorporated local wooden structures, sloping roofs, and temple-like craftsmanship while maintaining Islamic spatial arrangements. Linguistic innovation also emerged through the development of Arabi-Malayalam, a writing system that used Arabic script to write, facilitating religious learning and communication within the community.

Cheraman Juma Masjid at Kodungallur



A multilingual advertisement with a catalogue of books and textiles available from a shop in Ponnani in 1908. Text on the left-hand side is Arabic-Tamil, text on the right-hand side, Arabi Malayalam script



Cheraman Juma Masjid replica



Figures: Early Islamic religious and cultural footprints along the Malabar Coast.

From the medieval period onward, these coastal Islamic networks also connected with broader developments in the Indian subcontinent. During the Mughal Empire, northern India witnessed significant cultural synthesis among Persian, Turkic, and Indian traditions. Administrative, literary, and courtly cultures were strongly influenced by Persian, which served as the language of governance. Within this environment, new linguistic forms gradually evolved, particularly the development of Urdu, which blended Persian and Turkish vocabulary, Arabic influences, and local Indo-Aryan linguistic structures. Urdu emerged in urban centres such as Delhi and later flourished in literary and cultural life across northern India.

Although the Mughal political influence did not extend deeply into the Malabar region, cultural and intellectual exchanges linked these different Islamic societies across the subcontinent. Scholars, traders, and religious teachers travelled between regions, transmitting ideas, texts, and traditions. As a result, Islamic culture in India developed in diverse regional forms. In coastal Kerala, it retained a strong maritime and mercantile character, while in northern India, it evolved within imperial courts and urban centres under Mughal patronage.

Islam in India therefore developed along multiple historical pathways. Along the coasts, it spread through trade networks,

intermarriage, and community formation, while in northern India, it interacted with imperial governance, literary traditions, and evolving linguistic cultures such as Urdu. Together, these processes illustrate how cultural and religious interaction in medieval India was shaped not by a single force but by the combined influence of commerce, migration, scholarship, and political power.

1.1.9.1. Knowledge Transmission

Perhaps the most far-reaching Indo-Islamic interaction unfolded not in ports or markets but in centres of learning. The Islamic world, particularly under the Abbasid Caliphate, became a great hub of translation and scholarship. Indian knowledge systems played a vital role in this intellectual awakening. In mathematics, Indian contributions, such as the decimal place-value system and the concept of zero, transformed global computation. Algebraic thinking also travelled westward through scholarly translations. In astronomy, Indian planetary models and calculation techniques informed Islamic observatories and astronomical tables.

Medical knowledge moved as well. Ayurvedic ideas, surgical practices, and herbal pharmacology were studied and adapted. Philosophical traditions dealing with logic and metaphysics entered Arabic intellectual discourse. Centres like Baghdad's Bayt al-Hikma, or House of Wisdom, became

translation workshops where Indian texts were rendered into Arabic. From the Islamic world, this knowledge later travelled into Europe, particularly through Islamic Spain. In this way, India quietly contributed to the scientific and intellectual currents that would shape global learning.

1.1.10. Medieval Maritime Trade

Between the 8th and 15th centuries, the Indian Ocean matured into the most vibrant commercial arena of the pre-modern world. If earlier land routes stitched continents together, the ocean now served as a vast woven fabric, connecting ports, cultures, and economies. Three major maritime circuits operated simultaneously. The western circuit linked India with Arabia and the East African coast. The eastern circuit connected Indian ports to Southeast Asia and China. A third network of inter-Asian coastal trade linked Sri Lanka, the Maldives, and ports along the Bay of Bengal.

Trade in this oceanic world was conducted by remarkably diverse merchant communities. Arab traders were prominent, but they were joined by Gujarati merchants, Tamil trading guilds such as the Ayyavole and Manigramam, Jewish traders, and Armenian intermediaries. These groups established diasporic colonies in foreign ports, creating multicultural commercial societies. India exported pepper, cardamom, cinnamon, cotton textiles, and high-quality wootz steel. In return came horses, silk, Chinese porcelain, and gold. Indian textiles became a form of global trade currency, widely exchanged across markets.

Coastal kingdoms recognised the value of maritime wealth. The Chola rulers of South India actively supported sea trade and even launched naval expeditions into Southeast Asia. Their campaigns reveal how commerce and imperial ambition sometimes sailed in the same fleet.

Case Study: Where Winds Became Maps: The Navigational World of Ibn Mājid

Ahmad Ibn Mājid, the celebrated 15th-century Arab navigator, often honoured as the “Lion of the Sea,” occupies a central place in the history of Indian Ocean trade and navigation. Born in the port town of Julfar on the Arabian coast, he inherited a deep maritime tradition from generations of sailors in his family. Building upon this accumulated experiential knowledge, Ibn Mājid transformed practical seafaring wisdom into a systematic body of navigational science. He earned renown across the Indian Ocean world as a master pilot (*mu'allim*), whose expertise guided merchants and ship captains sailing between East Africa, Arabia, India, and Southeast Asia.

His most enduring contribution lay in his extensive writings on marine navigation, particularly his encyclopaedic manual *Kitāb al-Fawā'id fī Uṣūl 'Ilm al-Baḥr wa'l-Qawā'id* (Book of Useful Information on the Principles and Rules of Navigation). This work compiled detailed knowledge of sea routes, harbours, coastal landmarks, monsoon wind systems, currents, and celestial navigation techniques used across the Indian Ocean. It drew upon both his personal voyages and the accumulated knowledge of earlier Arab and Indian sailors, effectively codifying the science of navigation for future generations.

Ibn Mājid's manuals enabled mariners to time voyages according to seasonal wind cycles, chart safer passages, and navigate open seas using stars and lunar constellations. His writings also documented international shipping routes, anchoring

techniques, and maritime geography, reflecting the operational infrastructure of Indian Ocean commerce. Some of his navigational manuscripts have been recognised for their global historical value, with works such as *Al-Nūniyya al-Kubrā* inscribed in UNESCO's Memory of the World Register for preserving advanced knowledge of marine science and world navigation.

Through this fusion of empirical sailing experience and scholarly documentation, Ibn Mājid strengthened the commercial arteries of the Indian Ocean. His intellectual legacy did not merely guide ships. It sustained the vast trade system linking India with Arabia, East Africa, and Southeast Asia, enabling merchants to cross the monsoon seas with confidence and precision.

1.1.11. India–Europe Pre-Colonial Trade Contacts

European engagement with India did not begin with colonisation. It began with trade curiosity, long before imperial conquest reshaped the relationship. One of the earliest phases was the Indo-Roman trade, flourishing between the 1st century BCE and the 3rd century CE. Archaeological evidence of Roman coins in South India, amphorae pottery, and classical accounts like the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* confirm intensive exchange. Roman demand for Indian pepper was so vast that it earned the title “Black Gold.”

After the decline of the Roman Empire, direct European access to India weakened. Trade did not disappear but became mediated through Arab and West Asian merchants. Italian city-states such as Venice obtained Indian spices indirectly through these intermediaries. This dependence on intermediaries later created a strong economic motivation in Europe to find direct sea routes to India. The search for spices, textiles, and luxury goods eventually led to the Age of Discovery, culminating in Vasco da Gama's arrival on Indian shores in 1498. Thus, medieval trade networks laid the economic groundwork for the coming era of European colonial expansion

Augustus Coin Pudukottai Hoard in India



Periplus



Figures: Archaeological and textual evidence of Indo-Roman commerce.

1.1.12. Knowledge and Scientific Exchanges

Alongside goods and faith, knowledge formed a powerful axis of India's global interactions. Intellectual exchange travelled through translation movements, scholarly visits, and institutional patronage. In mathematics, Indian numerals revolutionised the way the world calculated. The decimal place value system and the formal use of zero enabled more complex arithmetic and astronomy. Transmitted through Arab scholars, these numerals entered Europe as the "Hindu-Arabic" system still used globally today.

Astronomy also travelled outward. Works such as the *Aryabhatiya* influenced Islamic astronomers, whose observatories stretched from Baghdad to Samarkand. Planetary calculations and eclipse theories were refined through this cross-cultural dialogue. Medical knowledge was translated into Arabic and Persian. Ayurvedic concepts of diagnosis, surgery, and herbal medicine contributed to the development of Unani medical traditions.

Literary exchange added another layer. Sanskrit texts were translated into Persian and Arabic, while Persian works later entered Indian languages. Story literature such as the *Panchatantra* travelled widely, reappearing in West Asia as *Kalila wa Dimna* and influencing global storytelling traditions. Intellectual exchange thus flowed in multiple directions, enriching all participants.

1.1.13. Nature of Early Globalisation

Seen together, these networks reveal that, long before modern globalisation, the ancient and medieval worlds were already deeply interconnected. Trade integration links distant commodity chains across continents. Cultural mobility carried religions, artistic motifs, and philosophical ideas. Merchant

diasporas formed migration networks abroad. Technological knowledge, from shipbuilding to metallurgy, travelled across regions. Even monetary systems overlapped, with Roman, Islamic, and Indian coins circulating beyond their homelands.

Yet early globalisation differed from the modern form. It moved at the pace of wind and caravan, not engines. It depended on seasonal monsoons. It was decentralised, operating through guilds and merchant communities rather than nation-states. Even so, its civilisational impact was vast and enduring, shaping societies across Afro-Eurasia.

Table: Globalisation in different periods

Early Globalisation	Modern Globalisation
Wind-powered	Engine-powered
Seasonal	Continuous
Guild-based	State-driven
Slow	Instantaneous

Historical Significance for Modern Diplomacy

India's ancient external relations are not merely subjects of historical curiosity. They continue to shape the country's diplomatic imagination today. Modern India often draws upon shared civilisational heritage in its foreign policy outreach. Engagement with Southeast Asia under the Act East Policy echoes centuries of cultural linkage. Initiatives toward Central Asia revive older Silk Road connections. Cooperation with Indian Ocean nations reflects deep maritime history.

Soft power also rests on historical foundations. Buddhism, yoga, Ayurveda,



and Sanskrit traditions serve as cultural bridges in international diplomacy. They function as instruments of dialogue, goodwill, and civilisational connection. Even maritime strategy carries historical memory. Contemporary focus on the Indo-Pacific, blue economy initiatives, and port connectivity projects resonate with India's

long legacy as a seafaring commercial civilisation. In this way, history operates like a diplomatic reservoir. The currents of ancient trade, culture, and knowledge continue to flow quietly beneath modern foreign policy, shaping how India sees the world and how the world engages with India.

Recap

- ◆ India's external relations originated in civilisational processes rather than modern diplomacy.
- ◆ Geography positioned India as both protected and globally connected.
- ◆ Himalayan passes and oceanic routes enabled mobility and exchange.
- ◆ Resource wealth, such as spices, textiles, and precious stones, attracted global traders.
- ◆ The Indus–Mesopotamian trade network was one of the earliest international economic networks.
- ◆ Persian rule influenced the administration and taxation systems.
- ◆ Hellenistic contact gave rise to the Indo-Greek kingdoms and Gandhara art.
- ◆ Inland routes like Uttarapatha and Dakshinapatha linked production zones to ports.
- ◆ Maritime trade flourished through monsoon wind systems.
- ◆ Ports such as Muziris, Bharuch, and Tamralipti became commercial hubs.
- ◆ Buddhism spread across Asia through missionary and imperial patronage.
- ◆ Hindu cultural elements influenced Southeast Asian polities.
- ◆ Knowledge in mathematics, astronomy, and medicine travelled globally.
- ◆ The medieval Indian Ocean trade linked Asia, Africa, and Europe.
- ◆ Early globalisation laid the foundations for modern diplomatic and cultural relations.

Objective Questions

1. Which three factors shaped India's early global connections?
2. What mountain system protected India's northern frontier?
3. Name one major Himalayan pass enabling interaction.
4. Which civilisation traded with Mesopotamia under the name "Meluhha"?
5. The dockyard at Lothal indicates what activity?
6. Who introduced the satrapy system in northwestern India?
7. Alexander invaded India in which year?
8. Gandhara art reflects the fusion between which cultures?
9. What was the Great Northern Trade Route called?
10. Which winds enabled Indian Ocean navigation?
11. Muziris was famous for exporting what commodity?
12. Which religion spread widely from India across Asia?
13. Who patronised Buddhist missionary expansion?
14. Which trade network linked China with the Mediterranean?
15. Which language developed in northern India during the medieval period through the interaction of Persian, Arabic, Turkish and local Indo-Aryan languages?

Answers

1. Geography, resource wealth, cultural adaptability
2. Himalayas
3. Khyber Pass
4. Indus Valley Civilisation
5. Maritime trade



6. Achaemenid Persians
7. 326 BCE
8. Greek and Buddhist
9. Uttarapatha
10. Monsoon winds
11. Pepper
12. Buddhism
13. Ashoka
14. Silk Road
15. Urdu

Assignments

1. Examine the geographical factors that shaped India's early external relations.
2. Analyse the significance of Indus–Mesopotamian trade in world history.
3. Discuss Persian and Hellenistic influences on Indian administration and culture.
4. Evaluate the structure and importance of inland trade routes in ancient India.
5. Explain the functioning of maritime trade using monsoon wind systems.
6. Trace the spread of Buddhism as an instrument of cultural exchange.
7. Assess India's cultural influence on Southeast Asian political and religious institutions.
8. Map Assignment: Mark major ports, Silk Road centres, and inland trade routes on a historical map.
9. Artefact Study: Analyse Gandhara sculptures and identify Hellenistic artistic features.
10. Comparative Exercise: Compare early globalisation with modern globalisation in terms of agents, speed, and impact.

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UNIT

Colonial Era and the Independence Movement

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ explain how colonialism restructured India's global political, economic, and strategic relations.
- ◆ analyse the economic impact of British imperial policies, including deindustrialisation and the Drain of Wealth.
- ◆ examine India's role within imperial trade, military, and administrative networks.
- ◆ evaluate the globalisation of Indian nationalism through diaspora, international advocacy, and revolutionary movements.
- ◆ assess how colonial experiences shaped India's post-independence foreign policy orientation.

Prerequisites

An examination of the colonial era in India requires an understanding of the historical context in which the subcontinent transitioned from a region engaged in diverse global exchanges to one increasingly integrated into European imperial systems. From the bustling ports of the Indian Ocean to the caravan routes linking Asia, Africa, and Europe, pre-colonial India functioned as an active civilisational interlocutor, exchanging goods, ideas, religions, and technologies across continents.

As the narrative moves forward, the arrival of European trading companies begins to alter this equilibrium. Commercial footholds gradually transformed into

political strongholds, coinciding with the weakening of indigenous powers and the steady ascent of British dominance. Understanding this transition is essential to situating colonialism not as an abrupt rupture, but as a layered historical process embedded within global economic and political change.

A conceptual grounding in imperialism, industrial capitalism, and the rise of modern nationalism will further equip learners to engage with this unit critically. These frameworks illuminate how colonial rule did more than reorder trade or governance. It reconfigured India's position in the world while simultaneously nurturing the intellectual, political, and ideological foundations of the freedom struggle that would eventually challenge the empire itself.

Keywords

Colonial Political Economy, Deindustrialisation, Drain of Wealth, Imperial Trade Networks, Indentured Labour System, Globalisation of Nationalism, Indian National Army (INA), Non-Alignment (Ideological Roots)

Discussion

1.2.1. Introduction: Colonialism and Global Reordering

The colonial era marked one of the most transformative phases in India's interaction with the wider world. In earlier centuries, India had engaged internationally through trade, cultural exchange, pilgrimage, and intellectual dialogue on relatively balanced terms. Colonialism disrupted this equilibrium by placing India within an unequal imperial hierarchy dominated by European powers, particularly Britain. Political subordination reshaped India's economic, strategic, and diplomatic ties with other regions.

With the expansion of British rule from the late eighteenth century onward, India became deeply embedded within the structures of empire. Its natural resources, labour systems, markets, and geographical position were reorganised to serve imperial priorities rather than indigenous development. Ports were

modernised for export, armies were mobilised for imperial wars, and revenues were redirected toward colonial administration. India's global presence continued, but under imperial direction.

Importantly, colonial India was not merely a passive recipient of imperial policy. It also became a site of intellectual and political contestation. Indian thinkers began reflecting on sovereignty, racial equality, and international justice. Exposure to global political developments stimulated early foreign policy thinking even before independence.

1.2.2. Colonialism thus reordered India's global position in three interlinked ways:

- Economically, India was integrated into imperial capitalism.
- Politically, it lost sovereign diplomatic agency.



- Strategically, it became a military base of the empire.

Yet paradoxically, this same colonial framework also globalised Indian nationalism, laying the foundations for international anti-colonial solidarity.

1.2.3. India in the British Imperial System

By the mid-nineteenth century, India had emerged as the most valuable possession of the British Empire, often described as its “crown jewel.” Following the Revolt of 1857, governance passed from the East India Company to the British Crown, institutionalising direct imperial control. This shift marked the formal consolidation of India’s place within Britain’s global imperial system.

India functioned simultaneously as an administrative, economic, and military hub. Major decisions concerning Indian trade, defence, taxation, and foreign engagement were taken in London rather than within the subcontinent. India lacked sovereign diplomatic representation and appeared internationally through imperial channels.

Its imperial role operated at multiple levels. It served as a revenue source for the imperial administration, a recruitment base for colonial armies, and a supplier of raw materials to British industries. Indian civil servants and soldiers were deployed across other colonies, extending imperial governance structures.

Concept Box: India as the “Empire’s Nerve Centre”

British strategists saw India as:

- Gateway to Asia
- Buffer against Russia
- Supply base for imperial wars
- Revenue engine of empire

India was both a prize and a pivot of British global strategy.

Colonial governance models tested in India were later exported to Africa and Southeast Asia. Thus, India functioned not only as a colony but also as an administrative laboratory for empire-building.

1.2.3.1. Colonial Political Economy

Colonial rule fundamentally reshaped India’s economic foundations. Before British dominance, India had been a major manufacturing and trading power, particularly in textiles, handicrafts, and

artisanal production. Colonial economic policies reoriented this diversified economy toward imperial needs.

British economic strategy in India revolved around three objectives:

- Securing raw materials for British industries
- Creating markets for British-manufactured goods
- Generating revenue for colonial governance

This restructuring led to widespread deindustrialisation. Indian handicraft industries, especially hand-woven textiles, faced a steep decline due to competition from

machine-made imports produced during Britain's Industrial Revolution.

Case Study: Bombay Textile Decline and Colonial Deindustrialisation

Before colonial dominance, Indian cotton textiles commanded global demand. Regions like Bengal and Gujarat exported fine muslin and calico across continents. However, British tariff policies favoured industrial imports while restricting Indian exports.

Machine-made textiles flooded Indian markets, undercutting artisan production. Many skilled weavers lost their livelihoods and were forced into agriculture or wage labour. Although Bombay later developed mechanised mills, traditional textile economies suffered an irreversible decline.

1.2.3.2. Cash Crop Transformation

Colonial policy also reshaped agriculture. Farmers were encouraged, and often coerced, to cultivate commercial crops for export rather than subsistence food grains. Indigo, cotton, tea, coffee, and opium became key plantation commodities.

This shift had deep social consequences. Food crop displacement increased famine vulnerability, while revenue demands pushed peasants into cycles of debt and land dispossession.

Table: Economic Transformation under Colonialism

Sector	Pre-Colonial Pattern	Colonial Shift
Textiles	Export strength	Industrial decline
Agriculture	Food crops	Cash crops
Trade	Multi-directional	Empire-centric
Industry	Handicrafts	Raw material supply



Figure: Major cash crop production regions under colonial agricultural restructuring.

1.2.4. Integration into Global Capitalism

Colonial India was systematically integrated into the expanding global capitalist economy dominated by Britain. Infrastructure development played a central role in this integration. Railways, telegraphs, canals,

and ports were constructed to facilitate trade, administration, and military mobility.

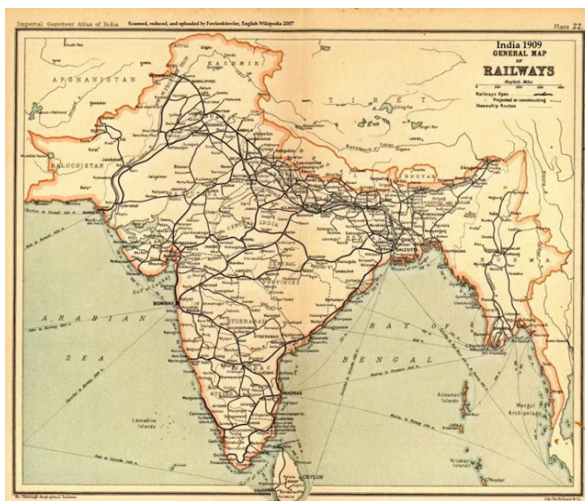


Figure: Expansion of railway networks linking resource regions to export ports.

Railways, introduced in 1853, expanded rapidly across the subcontinent. While often portrayed as developmental, their routes reveal extractive intent. Cotton belts, coal mines, and plantation zones were directly linked to major ports such as Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras. Telegraph networks connected India to London, accelerating imperial communication. Banking institutions and joint-stock companies emerged to finance trade and investment. India's economy was thus embedded in global capitalism but in a subordinate position.

1.2.4.1. India's Structural Position

- Exporter of raw materials
- Importer of manufactured goods
- Supplier of labour
- Consumer market for British industry

Infrastructure modernisation occurred, but its primary orientation served imperial commerce rather than balanced domestic growth.

Infrastructure: Development or Extraction?

Railways, introduced during colonial rule in India, served multiple functions that reflected both developmental and extractive objectives. On one hand, they facilitated the rapid movement of troops, enabled the large-scale export of raw materials to global markets, and contributed to the integration of regional markets across the subcontinent. On the other hand, the railway network largely served colonial economic interests, accelerating deindustrialisation by undermining indigenous industries, deepening rural marginalisation, and prioritising connectivity between resource-rich hinterlands and port cities rather than supporting balanced local development.

New social classes emerged within this economic order, including plantation owners, commercial intermediaries, and colonial bureaucratic elites. These groups gained influence but remained structurally dependent on imperial systems. By the early twentieth century, India was firmly embedded within global imperial capitalism. Yet this integration also exposed Indian leaders to global political ideas such as nationalism and self-determination, linking economic critique with political resistance.

1.2.5.Drain of Wealth Debate

One of the most influential critiques of British colonial rule emerged through what came to be known as the Drain of Wealth theory. Indian nationalist economists argued that colonialism did not merely exploit India internally but systematically transferred its surplus wealth to Britain without corresponding economic returns.

This critique transformed the economic dimension of colonial rule into a political issue.

The Drain theory was articulated most powerfully by Dadabhai Naoroji, R.C. Dutt, and M.G. Ranade. They observed that large portions of Indian revenue were annually remitted to Britain in the form of “Home Charges.” These included the salaries of British officials, pensions, military expenses, interest payments on debt, and the profits of British companies operating in India. These financial outflows represented unrequited transfers.

Naoroji famously described this process as a “bleeding drain,” arguing that India’s poverty was artificially created. According to him, India produced wealth but did not circulate it domestically to stimulate growth. Instead, it was extracted to support British industrial and imperial expansion. This critique marked a turning point in nationalist thought by grounding political demands in economic reasoning.

This critique marked a turning point. Economic exploitation became a political argument for self-rule. The Drain theory helped transform nationalist sentiment from moderate reformism into a sharper anti-colonial consciousness grounded in economic justice.

Key Channels of Wealth Drain

- Civil and military salaries remitted to Britain
- Pension payments to retired officials
- Profits of British trading companies
- Interest payments on colonial loans
- Trade imbalances favouring Britain

Case Study: Dadabhai Naoroji (1825–1917): Architect of Economic Nationalism

Dadabhai Naoroji was among the earliest Indian leaders to analyse colonialism through statistical and economic evidence. He became the first Indian elected to the British Parliament and used that platform to question imperial policies. His work, *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India*, provided systematic arguments against economic exploitation.

Naoroji transformed nationalist discourse from moral protest to analytical critique. By linking poverty directly to imperial policy, he laid the foundation for economic nationalism in India. His arguments influenced later leaders and strengthened demands for self-rule.

1.2.6. India’s Role in Imperial Trade Networks

Under colonial rule, India became a central node in Britain’s global trading system. Unlike earlier periods when India traded with multiple regions independently, colonial trade was reorganised to serve imperial economic priorities. Trade patterns became structured around the needs of British industry and finance.

India exported raw materials required for British manufacturing, including cotton for Lancashire textile mills, jute for packaging industries, indigo for dyes, tea and coffee from plantations, and opium for export to China. These commodities were integrated into global commodity chains controlled largely by British capital. In return, India imported manufactured goods, particularly machine-made textiles, machinery, and metal products. This trade structure created dependency. India functioned primarily as a supplier of raw materials and a consumer



of finished goods, reinforcing the industrial asymmetry between the colony and the metropole.

Table: India in Imperial Trade Circuits

Exported from India	Imported into India
Cotton	British textiles
Jute	Machinery
Tea	Industrial goods
Opium	Metal products

The following map illustrates how colonial India was embedded within the global imperial trade system.



Figure: British Imperial Trade Routes
(19th–Early 20th Century)

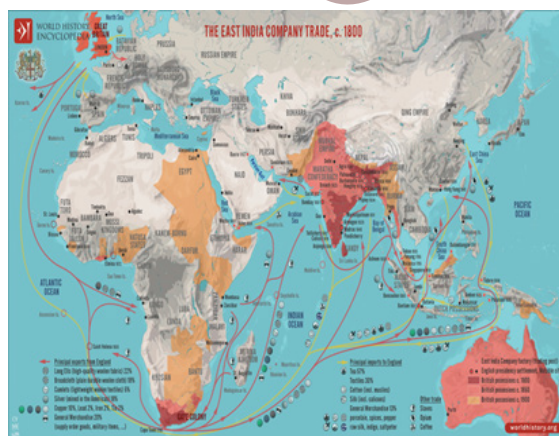


Figure: Imperial Trade Routes

The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 dramatically reduced travel time between India and Europe. This strengthened India's integration into global markets and intensified export-oriented production. Ports such as Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras became major commercial hubs within imperial networks.

Case Study: Opium Trade with China: Empire, Profit, and Conflict

Opium cultivation in Bengal and Bihar became one of the most profitable sectors of colonial agriculture. The British government maintained a monopoly over production and export. Despite resistance from the Qing state in China, opium exports continued, creating widespread addiction and social disruption.

The trade helped Britain offset its trade deficit with China, which had previously exported tea and silk in exchange for silver. When China attempted to suppress opium imports, Britain launched the Opium Wars (1839–42; 1856–60). These wars forced China to legalise trade and open treaty ports.

Indian-produced opium thus became central to imperial geopolitics. It linked Indian agriculture to global narcotics commerce and colonial warfare, illustrating the coercive nature of imperial trade networks.



1.2.7.Strategic Importance of India

India's importance to the British Empire extended far beyond economics. Its geographical position made it strategically vital within imperial defence planning. Located at the crossroads of South Asia, Central Asia, and the Indian Ocean, India became a key base for projecting imperial power. British politicians viewed India as a buffer against Russian expansion in Central Asia during the nineteenth-century "Great Game." Protecting India's northwestern frontier became a major strategic priority. Military campaigns in Afghanistan were undertaken partly to secure this frontier. India also functioned as a naval base in the Indian Ocean. Control over Indian ports enabled Britain to maintain maritime dominance along sea routes connecting Europe to Asia. Telegraph lines and railway networks supported rapid military mobilisation across regions.

India in Imperial Strategy

Under British rule, India occupied a central position in imperial strategy and functioned as a strategic base for projecting power across surrounding regions. From India, the British Empire extended its political and military influence into Afghanistan, Persia, Tibet, Southeast Asia, and East Africa. The subcontinent thus operated not only as a colony but also as a strategic hub that supported imperial expansion, defence, and regional intervention, effectively serving as the eastern fortress of the British Empire.

Strategic investment in infrastructure, therefore, served both commercial and military purposes. Railways facilitated

troop movement, while ports enabled naval deployment. India's geography amplified its geopolitical significance within the empire.

1.2.7.1. Military Contributions Abroad

Colonial India was one of the largest sources of manpower for British military campaigns. Indian soldiers, often referred to as sepoys, were deployed across continents in defence of imperial interests. Their participation made India central to Britain's global military capacity. Indian troops fought in Africa, China, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia. They participated in conflicts such as the Opium Wars, the Boxer Rebellion, and numerous African campaigns. These deployments exposed Indian soldiers to global racial hierarchies and imperial politics.

Although these military decisions were made by British authorities, Indian manpower formed the backbone of many expeditionary forces. Military service expanded Indian exposure to global politics, sometimes reinforcing nationalist awareness upon return.

1.2.7.2. Indian Diaspora under Colonialism

Colonial labour demands produced one of the largest migration systems of the modern era: the indentured labour system. After the abolition of slavery in the British Empire in 1834, plantation economies required alternative labour sources. India became a major supplier of indentured workers. Indian labourers were transported under fixed-term contracts to plantations across the empire. They travelled to the Caribbean, Mauritius, Fiji, South Africa, Malaya, and other regions. Many migrants came from impoverished rural areas, recruited under difficult circumstances.

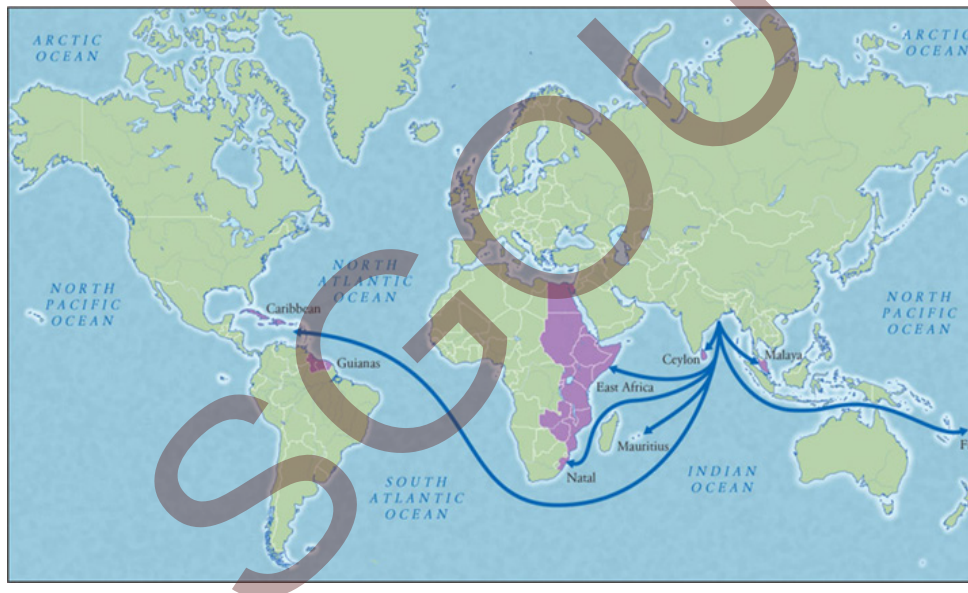


Figure: Global migration routes of Indian indentured labour under colonial plantation systems.

Indentured workers primarily laboured in sugar, rubber, and tea plantations. Conditions were harsh, wages were low, and mobility was restricted. Though contract-based, the

system often involved coercion and poor legal protections.

Concept Box: Indenture versus Slavery

Although the indentured labour system differed formally from slavery in that labourers were bound by time-limited contracts rather than permanent ownership, in practice it often reproduced conditions that closely resembled slavery. Many workers were recruited through coercive or deceptive methods, faced severe restrictions on their rights and mobility, and were subjected to harsh plantation discipline. Because of these similarities in lived experience, several historians have described the indenture system as “a new system of slavery.”

Despite hardships, indentured migrants established lasting Indian diasporic communities abroad. These communities later played significant roles in transnational political mobilisation and cultural exchange.

1.2.8. Globalisation of Indian Nationalism

Indian nationalism did not remain confined within territorial borders. As colonial networks expanded trade, labour migration, and education abroad, political consciousness also travelled beyond India. Indian students, workers, professionals, and political exiles began engaging with global political movements, absorbing ideas of liberty, socialism, anti-imperialism, and racial equality.

Diaspora communities became important centres of political mobilisation. Political meetings, pamphlet publications, and fundraising networks were organised in cities such as London, San Francisco, Paris, and Singapore. These transnational interactions helped Indian nationalism acquire a global

vocabulary rooted in universal rights and self-determination.

Exposure to other anti-colonial struggles also shaped Indian political thinking. Leaders drew inspiration from Irish nationalism, Egyptian resistance, and Asian independence movements. Indian nationalism thus evolved not as an isolated phenomenon but as part of a wider global anti-imperial wave.

1.2.8.1. International Advocacy of the Freedom Struggle

Indian leaders increasingly took their demands for self-rule to international platforms. Delegations travelled to Britain, Europe, and the United States to present India's case before political leaders, intellectuals, and civil society organisations. They sought to expose colonial exploitation and mobilise global public opinion.

Mahatma Gandhi's campaigns attracted worldwide attention, especially through non-violent resistance. Jawaharlal Nehru participated in international conferences, framing India's freedom struggle as part of a broader fight against imperial domination. Indian representatives addressed labour forums, socialist congresses, and peace conferences. This global advocacy transformed India's struggle into an international moral question. It pressured Britain diplomatically and broadened solidarity networks. India's anti-colonial movement thus became intertwined with emerging global debates on human rights and national sovereignty.

1.2.8.2. Revolutionary Movements Abroad

Not all nationalist activity followed constitutional or diplomatic pathways. Revolutionary movements operating outside India sought to overthrow British rule through armed struggle and international alliances. These movements demonstrated



the militant internationalisation of Indian nationalism.

One of the most prominent among them was the Ghadar Movement, founded by Indian expatriates in North America. Composed largely of Punjabi migrants, the movement used print propaganda, fundraising, and underground networks to incite rebellion within India, particularly during World War I.

Case Study: The Ghadar Movement: Diaspora Radicalism

The Ghadar Movement emerged as one of the earliest examples of diaspora-led revolutionary nationalism against British colonial rule in India. The Ghadar Party was established in San Francisco in 1913 by Indian immigrants, many of whom were workers and students who had experienced racial discrimination abroad and were deeply influenced by anti-colonial and radical political ideas. The movement sought to mobilise Indians globally to overthrow British rule through armed revolution. To achieve this, the organisation published and circulated revolutionary literature, most notably the newspaper Ghadar, which openly called upon Indians to rise in rebellion against colonial authority.

During the period of global instability following World War I, Ghadar activists sought to capitalise on the British Empire's weakened position. They organised efforts to smuggle arms into India and sought to incite rebellion among Indian soldiers serving in the British Indian Army. These efforts aimed to trigger a widespread uprising that could challenge colonial control. However, British colonial intelligence agencies closely monitored the movement,

infiltrated its networks, and suppressed many of its plans before they could be fully realised.

Despite these setbacks, the Ghadar Movement had enduring historical significance. It demonstrated the global reach of the Indian freedom struggle, highlighting how diaspora communities could become centres of revolutionary activism and political mobilisation. The movement created international propaganda networks that spread anti-colonial ideas across continents and inspired future generations of nationalists. In this sense, the Ghadar Movement illustrated how overseas Indian communities functioned as laboratories of anti-colonial resistance, contributing to the broader trajectory of India's struggle for independence.

1.2.9. India and International Organisations

Although India was still under colonial rule, it participated in certain international organisations through British imperial representation. One of the most significant of these was the League of Nations, established in 1919 after World War I to promote global peace and cooperation. India's membership in the League was unusual. It did not possess sovereignty, yet it held a separate seat distinct from Britain. This reflected India's importance within the empire, especially due to its military contributions during the war.

Through League participation, Indian representatives engaged in discussions on labour rights, public health, opium control, and international mandates. Although their diplomatic autonomy remained limited, participation exposed Indian administrators to international diplomacy, multilateral negotiation, and global governance frameworks.

1.2.9.1. India in World War I

World War I (1914–1918) marked India's first large-scale participation in a global conflict under British command. Over one million Indian soldiers and labourers were deployed across multiple theatres of war. Indian troops served on the Western Front

in France and Belgium, in Mesopotamia, Gallipoli, and Palestine. They fought in harsh climatic and unfamiliar terrains. Their bravery earned recognition, yet casualties were severe. India also contributed financially through war loans, raw materials and food supplies.



Figure: Map of British India 1914

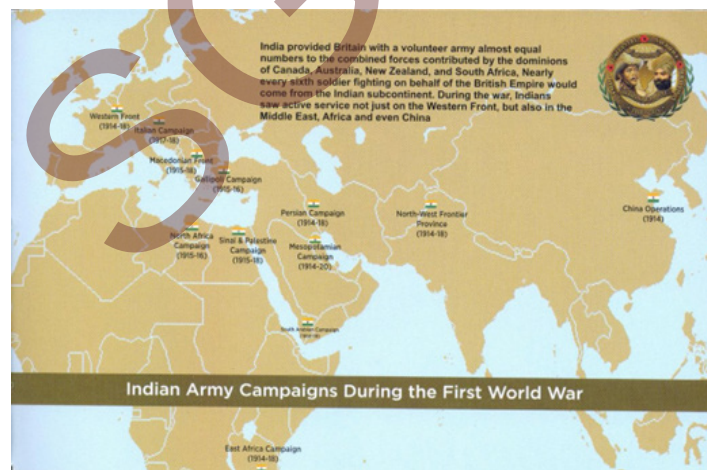




Table: India's WWI Contributions

Sector	Contribution
Soldiers and non-combatants (combined)	~1.3 million
Casualties	~74,000 dead
Economic aid	War loans, supplies

The war had significant political consequences. Indian leaders supported Britain, expecting post-war political reforms. However, limited concessions and repressive policies such as the Rowlatt Act generated disillusionment, fuelling nationalist mobilisation.

1.2.9.2. India in World War II

India's involvement in World War II was even more extensive. Without consulting the Indian political leadership, Britain declared India a belligerent power in 1939. Over 2.5 million Indian soldiers were recruited, making it the largest volunteer army in history. Indian troops fought in North Africa, Italy, Burma and Southeast Asia. Indian

industries supplied wartime materials, while ports and railways served as logistical hubs. Wartime mobilisation intensified political tensions within India.



Figure: Indian military participation across global theatres during World War II.

Simultaneously, Subhas Chandra Bose organised the Indian National Army (INA) abroad with Japanese support, seeking to overthrow British rule militarily.

Case Study: Subhas Chandra Bose (1897–1945): Militarising the Freedom Struggle

Subhas Chandra Bose represented the militant internationalisation of India's independence movement. Unlike constitutional nationalists, Bose believed armed struggle and foreign alliances were necessary to overthrow British rule. During World War II, he organised the Indian National Army (INA) with Japanese support. He mobilised Indian prisoners of war and diaspora communities in Southeast Asia to form an anti-colonial military force. Bose's efforts globalised India's freedom struggle militarily and diplomatically, demonstrating that anti-colonial resistance could extend into international war theatres.

Case Study: Jawaharlal Nehru (1889–1964): Architect of Internationalist Vision

Jawaharlal Nehru played a foundational role in shaping India's global outlook even before independence. Deeply influenced by anti-colonial struggles worldwide, socialist thought, and Asian solidarity movements, Nehru viewed India's freedom as part of a larger transformation of world order. He argued that political independence must be accompanied by international cooperation, peaceful coexistence, and resistance to imperial domination. His involvement in international conferences and leadership in the Asian Relations Conference (1947) reflected this global vision. Nehru's foreign policy thinking later crystallised into principles such as non-alignment, anti-colonial solidarity, and multilateral diplomacy.

1.2.10. Emergence of Foreign Policy Thinking

By the early twentieth century, Indian leaders began reflecting on international relations beyond colonial frameworks. Exposure to global conflicts, imperial diplomacy, and anti-colonial struggles stimulated indigenous foreign policy thought among Indian leaders. They began envisioning India's future role in world affairs beyond colonial subordination.

Key concerns included racial equality, peaceful coexistence, sovereign independence, and opposition to imperial blocs. Indian intellectuals argued that colonial domination violated emerging global norms of self-determination. Thinkers such as Jawaharlal Nehru envisioned India as an active participant in shaping the postcolonial world order rather than remaining confined to the region.

1.2.11. Asian Solidarity and Pre-Independence Diplomacy

Indian leaders increasingly viewed their struggle as part of a wider Asian resurgence. They built connections with anti-colonial movements across the continent. Jawaharlal Nehru played a central role in organising the Asian Relations Conference (1947) in New Delhi, even before independence. The conference brought together representatives from across Asia to discuss freedom, cooperation, and postcolonial reconstruction. Earlier, Indian nationalists had expressed solidarity with Chinese anti-imperial struggles, Indonesian independence movements and Egyptian nationalism. This fostered an early vision of South-South cooperation rooted in shared colonial experience.



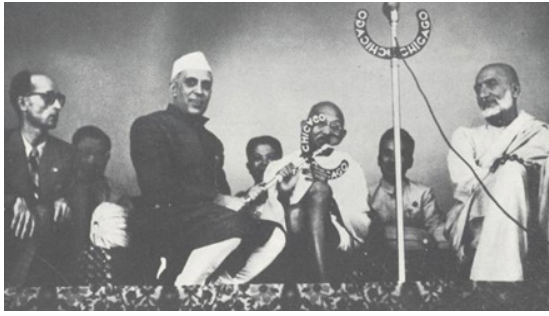


Figure: Asian Relations Conference symbolising pre-independence diplomatic outreach.

Key guiding principles included:

- **Anti-Colonialism:** India supported decolonisation movements globally.
- **Non-Alignment:** Avoidance of military blocs during the Cold War.
- **Peaceful Coexistence:** Preference for diplomacy over militarism.
- **South-South Cooperation:** Solidarity with developing nations.
- **Multilateralism:** Active engagement in international organisations like the United Nations.

1.2.12. Legacy for Post-1947 Foreign Policy

India's colonial experiences profoundly shaped its post-independence foreign policy orientation.

India's foreign policy thus emerged not suddenly in 1947 but as a culmination of intellectual, political, and diplomatic processes that matured during colonial rule.

Recap

- ◆ Colonialism integrated India into a hierarchical imperial system dominated by Britain.
- ◆ India served as a supplier of raw materials and a market for British industry.
- ◆ Traditional handicraft industries declined due to the influx of industrial imports.
- ◆ The Drain of Wealth theory exposed economic exploitation.
- ◆ India became strategically vital in imperial defence and geopolitics.
- ◆ Indian soldiers contributed extensively to global imperial wars.
- ◆ Indentured labour migration created a vast Indian diaspora.
- ◆ Nationalism globalised through diaspora activism and revolutionary networks.
- ◆ India participated in international institutions like the League of Nations.
- ◆ World War experiences intensified political consciousness.
- ◆ Leaders like Gandhi, Nehru, and Bose internationalised the freedom struggle.
- ◆ Colonial experiences shaped the principles of post-independence foreign policy.

Objective Questions

1. Which European power dominated colonial India?
2. Which uprising in 1857 led to direct British Crown rule?
3. What economic process caused the decline of Indian handicrafts under colonialism?
4. Which canal linking the Mediterranean and Red Sea opened in 1869?
5. Which Indian nationalist formulated the Drain of Wealth theory?
6. What book by Dadabhai Naoroji analysed colonial exploitation?
7. Which crops were promoted for export during colonial rule?
8. Which system integrated India into global imperial capitalism?
9. Which Indian city became a major export port under British rule?
10. What major transportation network was introduced in India in 1853?
11. Which colonial commodity from India was exported to China?
12. What term describes the transfer of India's wealth to Britain?
13. Which global conflict was partly linked to the opium trade?
14. What term describes India's demand for self-rule during colonial rule?
15. Which canal significantly reduced travel time between India and Europe?

Answers

1. Britain
2. Revolt
3. Deindustrialisation
4. Suez Canal
5. Dadabhai Naoroji
6. Poverty and Un-British Rule in India



7. Cash crops
8. Imperial capitalism
9. Bombay
10. Railways
11. Opium
12. Wealth drain
13. Opium Wars
14. Swaraj
15. Suez

Assignments

1. Examine how colonialism restructured India's global economic relations.
2. Critically analyse the Drain of Wealth theory and its nationalist implications.
3. Discuss India's strategic importance within British imperial geopolitics.
4. Evaluate the role of World Wars in transforming India's freedom struggle.
5. Analyse the contribution of the Indian diaspora to globalising nationalism.
6. "Colonial infrastructure promoted extraction more than development." Discuss.
7. Assess the international dimensions of India's revolutionary movements abroad.
8. Map Assignment: Plot major indentured labour destinations and analyse migration patterns.
9. Data Interpretation Exercise: Prepare a comparative table showing India's exports and imports under colonial trade.
10. Archival/Document Study: Review speeches or writings of Dadabhai Naoroji or Jawaharlal Nehru and summarise their views on imperialism and world affairs.

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India and Major Powers



UNIT

India-United States Relations

Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ trace the historical evolution of India–United States relations from pre-independence contacts to contemporary strategic partnership.
- ◆ analyse the causes of Cold War estrangement and explain the ideological and strategic divergence between non-alignment and alliance politics.
- ◆ evaluate the significance of the 2008 Civil Nuclear Agreement in transforming bilateral relations.
- ◆ assess contemporary pillars of cooperation, including defence, trade, technology, Indo-Pacific strategy, and diaspora diplomacy.
- ◆ critically examine areas of friction and future trajectories of Indo-US relations in a multipolar world.

Prerequisites

The study of India–United States relations require familiarity with the broader international context of the twentieth century, particularly the Cold War, the emergence of newly independent states, and the evolving dynamics of global power politics. It was in this charged atmosphere that India articulated the doctrine of non-alignment, seeking autonomy amid superpower competition.

Move forward to the architecture of alliance systems, nuclear deterrence, and strategic blocs that shaped international politics for decades. Understanding these frameworks is essential to grasping why Indo-US relations were once marked by hesitation and mistrust. Concepts such as strategic autonomy, collective security, and nuclear proliferation are not merely theoretical terms; they are the lenses through which this relationship must be viewed.

As the Cold War receded, the global system transformed. India's economic liberalisation in 1991 signalled a new outward-looking engagement with the world, while the post-Cold War international order opened space for emerging partnerships. Familiarity with globalisation, economic reforms, and the shifting balance of power will enable learners to situate Indo-US relations within this broader transition. With this intellectual groundwork, learners are prepared to explore how two democracies moved from estrangement to strategic convergence, and how their evolving partnership reflects the wider transformations of the contemporary international system.

Keywords

Non-Alignment, Strategic Autonomy, Civil Nuclear Agreement, Technology Denial Regimes, Indo-Pacific Strategy, Quad Framework, Defence Interoperability, Diaspora Diplomacy

Discussion

2.1.1. Introduction: Strategic Significance of Indo-US Relations

India–United States relations today occupy a central place in global diplomacy. The partnership connects the world's largest democracy with the world's most powerful economy and military power. Over the decades, the relationship has travelled a long distance, moving from hesitation and policy differences to strategic cooperation across multiple sectors.

In the contemporary global order, both countries see each other as indispensable partners. The United States views India as a stabilising force in Asia and as a democratic counterweight in an increasingly multipolar world. India, on the other hand, sees the United States as a critical partner for access to technology, defence modernisation, economic investment, and global influence.

The importance of this relationship extends beyond bilateral interests. It shapes maritime security in the Indo-Pacific, global trade systems, climate change negotiations, and counter-terrorism frameworks. As global power balances shift, Indo-US cooperation is increasingly viewed as one of the defining partnerships of the 21st century.

2.1.2. Early Contacts

The interaction between India and the United States began well before India achieved independence. In the nineteenth century, American traders arrived in Indian ports seeking commercial opportunities. Trade in commodities such as cotton, indigo, and textiles formed the earliest economic links between the two regions. American missionaries also played a visible role. They established schools, printing presses, and medical institutions across India. These

institutions contributed to educational growth and social reform movements, particularly in women's education and public health.

During India's freedom struggle, political sympathy for Indian aspirations emerged within sections of American society. Intellectuals, journalists, and some policymakers expressed concern about colonial rule. President Franklin D. Roosevelt is known to have informally urged Britain to consider India's political future during World War II. Yet, official US policy remained cautious. Because the United States was allied with Britain in the war, it avoided confrontation over India's independence. Thus, early relations remained indirect and limited, shaped largely by colonial mediation rather than sovereign diplomacy.

2.1.3. Cold War Phase: Estrangement and Mistrust

When India became independent in 1947, hopes for strong Indo-US cooperation existed. However, the onset of the Cold War quickly complicated the relationship. The global system was divided between the US-led Western bloc and the Soviet bloc. India chose the path of non-alignment, seeking to maintain independence from both power camps. The United States, meanwhile, was constructing a network of military alliances to contain communism. This divergence created early misunderstandings.

From Washington's viewpoint, India appeared reluctant to support Western strategic objectives. India's close defence and economic cooperation with the Soviet Union reinforced this perception. From India's perspective, US military support to Pakistan was deeply troubling. Pakistan joined US-backed alliances such as SEATO and CENTO and received arms assistance.

Several geopolitical crises deepened mistrust. During the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation

War, the United States supported Pakistan diplomatically, while India intervened militarily on humanitarian and strategic grounds. India's signing of a Treaty of Friendship with the Soviet Union during this period further widened the perception gap. Thus, the Cold War decades were marked by distance, suspicion, and limited strategic cooperation.

Table: Indian and American viewpoint comparison

Indian View	American View
The US arms Pakistan	India tilts Soviet
Alliance politics risky	Non-alignment unreliable
Regional security priority	Global containment priority



Figure: Jawaharlal Nehru on an official visit to the US

India's Non-Alignment versus US Alliances

India's policy of non-alignment formed the philosophical core of its foreign policy after independence. The policy did not imply neutrality or passivity. Instead, it represented a conscious effort to preserve decision-making autonomy in global affairs.

Indian leaders believed that joining military alliances would compromise sovereignty and draw the country into superpower conflicts. Non-alignment also aligned with India's anti-colonial worldview, which opposed power blocs and military domination.

The United States viewed global security through alliance systems. NATO in Europe and SEATO and CENTO in Asia were designed to contain communist expansion. Within this framework, India's refusal to align seemed strategically unhelpful. This contrast reflected bigger differences in strategic culture. India prioritised autonomy and post-colonial solidarity. The United States prioritised bloc security and ideological containment. Over time, however, Washington began to appreciate that India's non-alignment was rooted in historical experience rather than hostility.

Core Principles of Non-Alignment

The policy of non-alignment was guided by several foundational principles that shaped India's approach to international relations, including the pursuit of strategic autonomy, solidarity with anti-colonial and newly independent nations, commitment to peaceful coexistence among states, and the avoidance of military alliances or power blocs during the Cold War.

2.2.4. Nuclear Issue and Technology Denial Regimes

The nuclear question remained one of the most difficult issues in India–United States relations for nearly three decades. It

symbolised the deeper strategic mistrust that existed between the two countries during the Cold War. India conducted its first nuclear test in 1974, calling it a “peaceful nuclear explosion.” The United States viewed the test with concern. Washington feared that it could encourage nuclear proliferation and weaken global non-proliferation efforts. In response, the US led efforts to tighten export controls on sensitive nuclear materials and technology. International arrangements were strengthened to restrict access to dual-use technologies with both civilian and military applications.

From India's perspective, these restrictions were discriminatory. India argued that global non-proliferation rules divided the world into “nuclear haves” and “have-nots.” Indian policymakers believed that security concerns in a region marked by conflict, particularly with China and Pakistan, justified the need for credible deterrence. The tension deepened after India's nuclear tests in 1998. The United States imposed economic sanctions and temporarily froze defence and technological cooperation. However, this period also initiated an important diplomatic dialogue. Intensive discussions between Indian and American officials helped both sides better understand each other's security concerns.

Ironically, the nuclear dispute became the catalyst for transformation. Instead of permanently damaging ties, it pushed both countries toward strategic engagement. The nuclear issue moved gradually from confrontation to cooperation, preparing the ground for a breakthrough in the next decade.

Table: Nuclear Standpoint: India versus America

India's Position	US Position
Security deterrence necessary	Non-proliferation priority
NPT discriminatory	Global stability essential
Regional threat perception	Norm enforcement concern

Post-Cold War Rapprochement

The end of the Cold War fundamentally changed the global environment. With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, India lost its primary strategic partner. At the same time, India initiated major economic reforms, opening its markets to foreign investment and global trade. These reforms made India more attractive to American businesses. Economic engagement began to expand steadily. Trade volumes increased, and US companies began investing in India's technology, manufacturing, and services sectors.

For the United States, India was no longer viewed primarily through a Cold War ideological lens. Instead, it began to be seen as a rising regional power with democratic credentials and long-term strategic importance. Policymakers in Washington increasingly recognised India's potential role in maintaining stability in Asia. High-level political visits became more frequent. Dialogue mechanisms were institutionalised across defence, trade, energy, and science. The tone of the relationship shifted from suspicion to cautious cooperation. This phase marked the beginning of what many scholars

describe as a strategic convergence. Although differences remained, the relationship entered a period of gradual normalization and trust-building.

2.2.4.1. Defence Cooperation

Defence cooperation has emerged as one of the strongest pillars of contemporary India–US relations. What was once a minimal and restricted engagement has transformed into regular military exercises, defence trade, and operational coordination. Joint military exercises have expanded significantly. Naval exercises in particular have strengthened maritime coordination. These exercises improve interoperability, meaning the armed forces of both countries can operate more effectively together in humanitarian missions, maritime security operations, and disaster relief efforts.

A series of foundational agreements has deepened cooperation. These agreements facilitate logistical support, secure communication systems, and the sharing of geographical and satellite data. Such arrangements reflect growing trust and strategic alignment. Defence trade has also increased substantially. India has acquired advanced aircraft, helicopters, surveillance systems, and other military equipment from the United States. This diversification of defence procurement has reduced India's dependence on any single supplier. Importantly, defence cooperation now goes beyond arms sales. It includes joint research, defence technology collaboration, and dialogue on emerging security challenges such as cyber threats and space security. The defence partnership reflects the broader transformation of the relationship into a strategic one.

Case Study: The Malabar Naval Exercise: Maritime Trust in Motion

The Malabar naval exercise began in 1992 as a modest bilateral drill between India and the United States, initially focusing on basic maritime coordination and communication between the two navies. Over time, the exercise expanded significantly in both scope and complexity, incorporating advanced naval manoeuvres, anti-submarine warfare drills, aircraft carrier operations, and maritime surveillance simulations. Japan's participation as a permanent member and Australia's involvement have further strengthened the exercise, informally linking it to the broader strategic framework of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue. Today, the Malabar exercise plays an important role in enhancing naval interoperability, strengthening coordination among partner navies, securing vital sea lanes in the Indo-Pacific region, and signalling cooperation among major maritime democracies. It has therefore come to symbolise the growing naval dimension of India-US strategic convergence in the evolving Indo-Pacific security landscape.

Treaty (NPT). This required changes in international nuclear export guidelines. The agreement effectively recognised India as a responsible nuclear state with a strong non-proliferation record.

For India, the agreement opened access to international nuclear fuel and technology markets. It addressed concerns about energy security and symbolised global acceptance of India's nuclear status. For the United States, the agreement strengthened ties with a rising democratic power and integrated India more closely into the global nuclear framework. The civil nuclear deal had broader strategic implications. It signalled that Washington was willing to adjust long-standing policies to accommodate India's rise. It also demonstrated India's growing importance in American strategic thinking. The agreement transformed the nuclear issue from a source of friction into a foundation of partnership. Many analysts consider it the defining moment in the evolution of Indo-US strategic relations.

Why the Nuclear Deal Was Historic

The nuclear deal was historic because it effectively ended India's long-standing nuclear isolation, enabled the country to participate in global nuclear commerce, signalled international recognition of India's status as a responsible nuclear power, and marked a significant shift toward deeper strategic trust and cooperation in India's relations with major global powers.

2.1.5. Civil Nuclear Agreement

The Civil Nuclear Agreement of 2005–2008 represents a historic turning point in India–United States relations. It marked the formal transition from nuclear estrangement to strategic trust. Under the agreement, the United States supported civilian nuclear cooperation with India despite India not being a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation



Figure: US President George W Bush signs the US-India Civilian Nuclear Cooperation Legislation



Figure: Bush with Dr. Manmohan Singh

Case Study: The 2008 Civil Nuclear Agreement: From Sanctions to Strategic Trust

The India–United States Civil Nuclear Agreement represents one of the most consequential diplomatic negotiations in contemporary international relations. For several decades, nuclear issues had strained relations between India and the United States, particularly after India's nuclear tests in 1974 and the Pokhran-II Nuclear Tests in 1998, which led to sanctions, technology denial regimes, and a period of diplomatic isolation. By the early 2000s, however, shifting geopolitical dynamics encouraged the United States to view India as an important strategic partner in Asia rather than merely a proliferation concern.

Intensive negotiations between Manmohan Singh and George W. Bush eventually produced an agreement that permitted civilian nuclear cooperation even though India remained outside the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. As part of the arrangement, international export control mechanisms were adjusted to allow nuclear commerce with India, enabling access to nuclear fuel, reactors, and advanced technology. The agreement effectively ended India's nuclear isolation, acknowledged its status as a responsible nuclear power, and marked a profound psychological shift in bilateral relations from suspicion to strategic partnership, making it a turning point in the evolution of modern Indo-US relations.

2.1.6. Trade and Economic Relations

Economic relations between India and the United States have expanded dramatically in the 21st century. Trade in goods and services has grown steadily, and both countries now rank among each other's major trading partners. Key areas of trade include information technology services, pharmaceuticals, energy products, defence equipment, and agricultural commodities. The Indian IT sector has developed strong links with American technology firms. At the same time, US companies have invested in India's digital economy, manufacturing sector, and renewable energy projects.

Investment flows have become increasingly two-way. Indian companies operate in sectors such as information technology, hospitality, and manufacturing in the United States. American companies contribute significantly to employment and innovation in India. However, economic ties are not without challenges. Trade disputes have occasionally arisen over tariffs, market access, intellectual property protection, and digital taxation. Differences in regulatory approaches sometimes create friction. Despite these tensions, economic interdependence continues to deepen. Both countries recognise that trade and investment form the material backbone of the broader strategic partnership. Economic engagement has helped stabilise the relationship even during periods of political disagreement.

Table: Major Trade Segments

Indian Exports	US Exports
IT services	Defence systems
Pharmaceuticals	Energy products
Textiles	Aircraft technology
Engineering goods	Digital hardware

2.1.7. Technology and Innovation Partnerships

Technology has become one of the most dynamic frontiers of India–United States cooperation. As the global economy shifts toward knowledge, innovation, and digital infrastructure, both countries increasingly see technological collaboration as strategically vital. India possesses a vast pool of scientific talent, a rapidly growing startup ecosystem, and globally competitive information technology firms. The United States, meanwhile, leads in advanced research, innovation financing, and high-end technological manufacturing. This complementarity has encouraged deeper partnerships.

Cooperation spans multiple sectors. Space collaboration between the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and NASA has expanded in areas such as satellite navigation, earth observation, and planetary exploration. Joint work in climate monitoring and disaster forecasting reflects how technology cooperation also serves humanitarian goals.

Emerging technologies have now taken centre stage. Artificial intelligence, quantum computing, 5G and 6G telecommunications, semiconductor manufacturing, and

biotechnology are priority areas. Strategic initiatives have been launched to build resilient supply chains, particularly in semiconductors, where global shortages exposed vulnerabilities.

Clean energy innovation is another shared focus. Joint research on green hydrogen, solar energy storage, and carbon capture technologies reflects mutual commitments to the climate transition. Thus, technology cooperation is no longer confined to commerce. It has become an essential pillar of strategic partnership and future security.

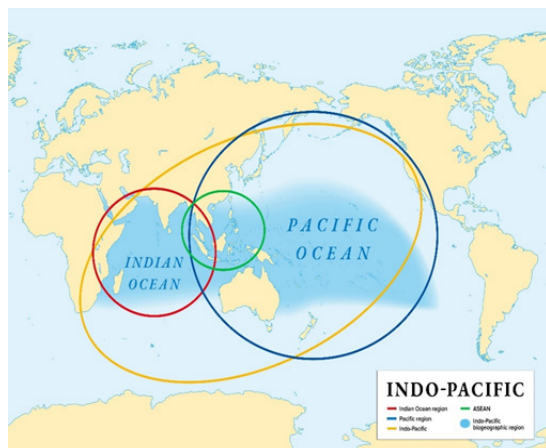
2.1.8. Indo-Pacific Strategy

The Indo-Pacific region has emerged as a central theatre in contemporary geopolitics, and India–United States cooperation has deepened significantly within this framework. The term “Indo-Pacific” itself reflects a strategic recognition that the Indian and Pacific Oceans form an interconnected maritime space.

The United States promotes the idea of a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific.” This vision emphasises freedom of navigation, respect for international law, secure sea lanes, and transparent infrastructure development. India shares many of these concerns, particularly regarding maritime security and regional stability. However, India approaches the Indo-Pacific with its own strategic vocabulary. It emphasises inclusivity, ASEAN centrality, and multipolar balance rather than bloc confrontation. India seeks cooperation without formal alliance commitments.

Maritime cooperation has expanded through naval exercises, coast guard coordination, and anti-piracy operations. Connectivity initiatives and infrastructure partnerships aim to offer alternatives to debt-driven development models in the region. The Indo-Pacific framework, therefore, represents both convergence and calibration. While strategic interests overlap, India continues

to uphold its principle of strategic autonomy even as cooperation expands.



2.1.8.1. Quad Framework

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, commonly known as the Quad, has become one of the most visible platforms of India–United States strategic engagement. The grouping includes India, the United States, Japan, and Australia. Originally proposed in the mid-2000s, the Quad began as an informal consultative mechanism. It gained renewed momentum in the late 2010s amid shifting regional power balances. Unlike traditional alliances, the Quad is not a military pact. It functions as a flexible strategic dialogue.

Its agenda has expanded beyond security. Quad cooperation now includes vaccine distribution, critical technology supply chains, climate resilience, maritime domain awareness, and disaster response coordination. For India, the Quad provides a platform to shape regional architecture without entering formal alliance structures. For the United States, it strengthens partnerships among major Indo-Pacific democracies. The Quad illustrates how modern strategic cooperation often operates through networks rather than rigid blocs. It reflects a shared desire to maintain stability, openness, and rule-based order in the region.



dimension of India–United States relations, especially since the early 21st century. Both countries have faced major terrorist attacks that reshaped their national security priorities. The September 11 attacks in the United States and repeated cross-border terrorist incidents in India created a shared threat perception. This convergence led to institutionalised cooperation.

Joint counter-terrorism working groups were established. Intelligence sharing improved significantly. Law enforcement agencies began coordinating on terror financing networks, cyber radicalisation, and transnational extremist organisations. The United States has increasingly supported India's position on cross-border terrorism in international forums. Cooperation has also extended to capacity building, forensic training, and aviation security. Counter-terrorism collaboration reflects how shared security challenges can bridge earlier political differences. It has added a strong operational dimension to the partnership.

2.1.8.3. Diaspora Diplomacy

One of the most vibrant bridges between India and the United States is the Indian diaspora. Numbering in the millions, Indian Americans are among the most successful immigrant communities in the United States. They are highly represented in technology, medicine, academia, entrepreneurship, and public policy. Leaders of Indian origin head major global corporations, research laboratories, and financial institutions.

Diaspora networks serve as informal ambassadors of India. They promote cultural exchange, facilitate business partnerships, and influence political discourse. Indian-origin lawmakers and policymakers help shape bilateral understanding. Remittances, philanthropy, and knowledge transfer further strengthen connections. Cultural festivals, language networks, and community organisations deepen social bonds. Diaspora diplomacy demonstrates that international relations are not conducted solely by governments. People-to-people linkages often provide the emotional and economic ballast that sustains strategic partnerships.

Case Study: Indian Diaspora in Silicon Valley: Informal Diplomacy Networks

Indian professionals hold influential leadership positions across major technology companies in Silicon Valley, including as CEOs, venture capitalists, engineers, and startup founders. Through their presence in these innovation ecosystems, they strengthen India–US relations in multiple ways. Their influence is visible in facilitating technology investments in India, supporting startup incubation and entrepreneurship networks, contributing to policy discussions, and promoting cultural connections between the two societies. As a result, the success of the Indian diaspora has generated significant soft power capital, enhancing India’s global image while simultaneously fostering greater trust and cooperation in bilateral relations.

2.1.8.4. Education and Knowledge Partnerships

Educational exchange forms one of the most enduring foundations of India–United States relations. Long before defence agreements and strategic dialogues gained prominence, universities and research institutions had already built intellectual bridges between the two societies. The United States remains one of the most preferred destinations for Indian students pursuing higher education. Every year, thousands of students travel to American universities to study science, engineering, business, public policy, and the humanities. These students contribute significantly to academic research, innovation ecosystems, and university life.

Institutional partnerships have also expanded. Joint research programs, faculty exchange initiatives, and collaborative laboratories operate across disciplines such as public health, climate science, artificial intelligence, and agriculture. Many Indo-US knowledge initiatives focus on solving global challenges rather than purely national ones.

Scholarship programs like Fulbright–Nehru Fellowships, innovation funds, and skill development initiatives further deepen academic cooperation. Alums of American universities often return to India, carrying professional networks and research expertise. Others remain in the United States, strengthening diaspora influence. Thus, education diplomacy functions as a long-term investment. It builds mutual understanding, knowledge capital, and leadership networks that sustain the broader strategic partnership.



Figure: Fulbright scholars

2.1.8.5. Areas of Friction

Despite expanding cooperation, India–United States relations are not without tensions. Differences arise from economic interests, geopolitical strategies, and domestic political priorities. Trade disputes have been a recurring issue. Disagreements over tariffs, agricultural access, digital taxation, and intellectual property regulations sometimes complicate economic engagement. Visa policies affecting Indian professionals in the United States have also generated concern in India.

Strategic differences occasionally surface in global crises. India’s historical defence ties with Russia, for instance, have created policy divergences, particularly during periods of geopolitical conflict. The United States has sometimes urged stronger alignment, while India has emphasised its tradition of strategic autonomy. Human rights debates, religious freedom reports, and democratic governance assessments have also entered bilateral discourse at times. While such discussions reflect ideological differences, both countries have generally managed them through diplomatic engagement rather than confrontation. The presence of friction does not weaken the relationship. Instead, it reflects its maturity. Complex partnerships often contain both cooperation and disagreement.

Table: Comparison between India and the US on trade-related concerns

Issue	Indian Concern	US Concern
Trade tariffs	Market access	Protectionism
Russia ties	Strategic autonomy	Sanctions alignment
Visas	Mobility barriers	Domestic labour politics

2.1.8.6. Recent Developments

In the 21st century, India–United States relations have accelerated across multiple sectors. Political leadership engagement has intensified, with frequent summit meetings, strategic dialogues, and ministerial frameworks. Defence cooperation has expanded beyond procurement into joint production and technology transfer. Initiatives in critical and emerging technologies now include semiconductor manufacturing, space situational awareness, and defence innovation ecosystems.

Energy cooperation has also deepened. The United States has emerged as a significant supplier of crude oil and liquefied natural gas to India. Simultaneously, both countries collaborate on renewable energy

transitions and climate commitments. Supply chain resilience has become a new priority, particularly after global disruptions highlighted overdependence on concentrated manufacturing hubs. India and the United States now work together to diversify production networks in pharmaceuticals, electronics, and clean technology components. The tone of engagement has shifted visibly. What was once cautious diplomacy now reflects a confident strategic partnership, supported by institutional mechanisms and leadership-level trust.

2.1.8.7. Future Trajectories

Looking ahead, India–United States relations are poised to deepen further, though not without complexities. The trajectory of the partnership will likely be shaped by both structural and political factors. Defence innovation and co-production are expected to grow, especially in areas such as unmanned systems, cyber defence, and space security. Technology partnerships in artificial intelligence, quantum computing,

and biotechnology will shape the next phase of cooperation.

Climate change and clean energy transitions will also become central. Joint investments in green hydrogen, battery storage, and sustainable infrastructure could redefine development partnerships. Geopolitically, the Indo-Pacific will remain a focal point. Maritime cooperation, regional connectivity, and crisis response coordination will expand. At the same time, India is likely to retain its policy of strategic autonomy, balancing partnerships without entering formal alliances.

Economic ties will deepen through digital trade, innovation ecosystems, and resilient supply chains. Education and diaspora linkages will continue to reinforce societal foundations. In essence, the future relationship will be multidimensional. It will combine strategy, economics, technology, and people-to-people engagement within an evolving global order.

Recap

- ◆ Early Indo-US contacts were commercial and missionary rather than diplomatic.
- ◆ Cold War dynamics created mistrust due to alliance politics and ideological divergence.
- ◆ Nuclear tests in 1974 and 1998 intensified tensions and sanctions.
- ◆ The 2008 Civil Nuclear Agreement marked a historic turning point.
- ◆ Defence cooperation expanded through joint exercises and foundational agreements.
- ◆ Trade and technology partnerships strengthened economic interdependence.
- ◆ The Indo-Pacific and Quad reflect strategic convergence.
- ◆ Diaspora and education ties form long-term societal bridges.
- ◆ Despite areas of friction, the relationship has matured into a multidimensional strategic partnership.

Objective Questions

1. Which US president negotiated the Civil Nuclear Agreement with India?
2. What foreign policy doctrine did India follow during the Cold War?
3. Which military alliance did Pakistan join during the Cold War?
4. What term describes the strategic improvement in Indo-US relations after the Cold War?
5. Which naval exercise symbolises Indo-US maritime cooperation?
6. Which treaty restricts nuclear weapons proliferation globally?
7. In which year did India conduct its first nuclear test?
8. Which US-led alliance system aimed to contain communism in Asia?
9. Which Indian Prime Minister signed the Civil Nuclear Agreement?
10. What concept emphasises India's independent decision-making in foreign policy?
11. Which ocean region is central to Indo-US maritime cooperation?
12. What term describes military cooperation through joint exercises and defence trade?
13. Which agreement allowed nuclear cooperation despite India not signing the NPT?
14. Which geopolitical rivalry shaped Indo-US relations during the Cold War?
15. Which region is central to Indo-US strategic cooperation today?

Answers

1. George W Bush
2. Non-alignment
3. SEATO
4. Rapprochement

5. Malabar
6. NPT
7. 1974
8. CENTO
9. Manmohan Singh
10. Strategic autonomy
11. Indo-Pacific
12. Defence cooperation
13. Nuclear deal
14. Cold War
15. Indo-Pacific

Assignments

1. Trace the evolution of Indo-US relations from Cold War estrangement to strategic partnership.
2. Analyse the ideological differences between India's non-alignment and US alliance politics.
3. Critically evaluate the significance of the 2008 Civil Nuclear Agreement.
4. Examine the role of defence cooperation in reshaping Indo-US strategic relations.
5. Discuss the importance of the Indo-Pacific framework in contemporary bilateral ties.
6. Policy Brief Exercise: Draft a 1,000-word policy note advising the Government of India on strengthening Indo-US technology cooperation.
7. Comparative Analysis Task: Prepare a comparative table analysing Indo-US relations during the Cold War and post-Cold War periods.
8. Case Study Presentation: Develop a presentation on the Malabar Naval Exercise, highlighting its evolution and strategic implications.
9. Data Mapping Assignment: Collect recent trade data (last five years) and

prepare a graphical representation showing growth trends in bilateral trade.

10. Diaspora Impact Study: Conduct a short research review on the role of the Indian diaspora in shaping US policy discourse.

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SGOU



UNIT

India-Russia Relations

Learning Outcomes

After studying this unit, the learner will be able to:

- ◆ explain the historical foundations of India–Russia relations during the Soviet era.
- ◆ analyse the evolution of defence, energy, and strategic cooperation between India and Russia.
- ◆ examine the impact of global developments such as the Ukraine conflict on bilateral relations.
- ◆ evaluate India’s policy of strategic autonomy in balancing relations with Russia and Western powers.
- ◆ assess emerging challenges and future prospects of the Indo-Russian partnership.

Prerequisites

The study of India–Russia relations requires an understanding of the historical evolution of India’s foreign policy as well as the strategic environment of the Cold War and the post-Cold War international system. The Cold War shaped global alignments, creating a world structured around two dominant poles — the United States and the Soviet Union. In this environment, newly independent India sought to define its own path, guided by the principles of the Non-Aligned Movement and the vision of strategic autonomy. Understanding this historical moment is essential to appreciating how India’s relationship with the Soviet Union, and later Russia, gradually evolved.

As the learner explores this unit, it will be helpful to recall key concepts such as bipolarity and multipolarity, which describe shifts in global power distribution.

Familiarity with India's post-independence foreign policy, particularly its efforts to balance idealism with realism, will provide important context. Awareness of major regional events such as the Indo-Pak wars, the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971, and more recent developments like the Ukraine conflict will further illuminate the strategic dimensions of India–Russia relations. With this foundational knowledge, you will be better prepared to trace how historical experiences, security concerns, and global transformations have shaped one of India's most enduring strategic partnerships.

Keywords

Non-Alignment, Strategic Partnership, Defence Cooperation, Multipolarity, Energy Security, Eurasian Geopolitics, Strategic Autonomy, Multilateralism

Discussion

2.2.1. Historical Foundations

India–Russia relations have deep historical roots that go back to the early years of India's independence. When India became independent in 1947, the world was entering the Cold War. The global order was divided between the United States and the Soviet Union. Although India officially followed a policy of non-alignment, it gradually developed close ties with the Soviet Union. This relationship was shaped by shared political understanding, economic cooperation, and mutual strategic interests. The Soviet Union supported India at crucial moments when Western powers were hesitant or critical of India's policies. Over time, trust developed, and the foundation of a long-term partnership was laid.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the Soviet Union assisted India in building its heavy industries. It helped establish major public-sector enterprises, such as steel plants in Bhilai and Bokaro, and supported India's

industrialisation strategy. At a time when India was following a mixed economy model with strong state participation, Soviet-style planning and development seemed relevant and practical. Educational and cultural exchanges also increased. Indian students went to Soviet universities, and Soviet technical experts came to India. This created not just state-to-state cooperation but also people-to-people familiarity.

The Soviet Union also supported India on sensitive political issues. On matters related to Kashmir in the United Nations, Moscow often used its veto power in India's favour. This diplomatic backing strengthened India's confidence in the relationship. For India, which faced security challenges from both Pakistan and China, having a powerful friend in the UN Security Council was strategically important. Over time, the Indo-Soviet relationship developed a special character, marked by political understanding and strategic sympathy rather than mere transactional exchanges.





Figure: Khrushchev And Nehru



Figure: Bhilai Steel Plant

Non-Alignment versus Strategic Tilt

India officially followed a policy of non-alignment during the Cold War, avoiding formal alliances with either superpower bloc. However, practical circumstances led to closer cooperation with the Soviet Union. Western hesitation in providing consistent support pushed India to rely more on Soviet diplomatic and defence assistance. As a result, non-alignment in principle coexisted with a strategic tilt in practice.

2.2.2.Cold War Strategic Convergence

During the Cold War, India and the Soviet Union moved closer together due to global and regional developments. India's conflict with China in 1962 and wars with Pakistan in 1965 and 1971 changed its security calculations. The United States and China developed closer ties in the early 1970s, and Pakistan was seen as a partner by both Washington and Beijing. In this context, India's strategic convergence with the Soviet Union became more visible and more deliberate.

Although India remained formally non-aligned, in practice it leaned toward the Soviet Union in defence and diplomatic matters. The Soviet Union supplied advanced military equipment to India when Western countries-imposed restrictions. India began to depend heavily on Soviet fighter jets, tanks, submarines, and missile systems. This defence cooperation was not limited to sales; it often included technology sharing and training. The Soviet Union became India's principal defence partner, a role it continued to play for decades.

Strategic convergence was also shaped by shared concerns about regional stability. Both countries were cautious about the expansion of Chinese influence. While their approaches were not always identical, there was broad agreement that a stable balance of power in Asia was necessary. The Indo-Soviet understanding was therefore built on common security interests, diplomatic support, and long-term defence cooperation. By the late 1970s, the relationship had matured into one of India's most important external partnerships.

2.2.2.1. Defence Cooperation Legacy

Defence cooperation forms the backbone of India–Russia relations. From the 1960s onward, the Soviet Union became India's primary supplier of military equipment. Aircraft such as the MiG series, T-series tanks,

and various naval platforms became central to India's armed forces. This cooperation was different from typical buyer-seller relationships. It involved licensed production in India, training of Indian personnel, and long-term maintenance support. As a result, India's defence structure became closely linked with Soviet systems.

One important feature of this defence legacy is interdependence. Many of India's military platforms were built with Soviet design and technical assistance. Even today, a significant portion of India's defence inventory has Russian origin. This creates long-term technical and logistical connections between the two countries. Spare parts, upgrades, and joint development projects continue to bind them together. Defence cooperation, therefore, became not just a strategic choice but also a structural reality.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, defence ties faced temporary disruptions. Russia was going through economic and political turmoil, and supply chains were affected. However, both countries worked to restore stability in defence cooperation. Over time, they moved from simple arms transfers to joint research and development projects. The BrahMos missile project is often cited as a symbol of this evolved partnership. The defence legacy, built during the Cold War, continues to shape present-day relations.



Figure: Indian Army T-90 Bheeshma Tank



Figure: Indian Army Brahmos Missile and launcher

Table: Major Defence Platforms Supplied by Russia

Category	Platform	Nature of Cooperation
Aircraft	MiG Series, Su-30MKI	Licensed Production
Tanks	T-72, T-90	Co-production
Naval	INS Vikramaditya	Refurbishment & Transfer
Missiles	BrahMos	Joint Development
Air Defence	S-400	Direct Procurement

2.2.2.3.Space and Nuclear Collaboration

India and the Soviet Union also cooperated in peaceful uses of space and nuclear energy. In the field of space, the Soviet Union played a key role in India's early space programme. In 1984, Rakesh Sharma became the first Indian to travel to space aboard a Soviet spacecraft. This event had symbolic importance and strengthened public perception of friendship between the two nations. Soviet technical assistance helped India develop confidence in advanced scientific fields.

In the area of nuclear energy, cooperation

developed gradually. The Soviet Union agreed to assist India in building nuclear power plants for civilian use. The Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant in Tamil Nadu is a major example of Indo-Russian nuclear collaboration. Russia continued to support India's civilian nuclear programme even after India faced international restrictions following its nuclear tests. This demonstrated Russia's willingness to maintain strategic trust despite global pressure.

Space and nuclear collaboration show that the India–Russia relationship extends beyond defence and politics. It includes

high-technology sectors that require deep trust and long-term commitment. These areas of cooperation reflect mutual respect and strategic confidence. They also indicate that the partnership has evolved into a comprehensive engagement covering security, science, and development.



Figure: Rakesh Sharma (in the middle)

2.2.3. Indo–Soviet Treaty (1971)

The Indo–Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation, signed in August 1971, marked a turning point in the relationship. The treaty was signed during a crisis in South Asia. Political turmoil in East Pakistan had led to a refugee crisis in India, and tensions with Pakistan were rising. India was concerned about the possibility of external intervention. In this uncertain environment, the treaty provided India with a sense of strategic assurance.

The treaty included provisions for mutual consultation and cooperation in the event of threats. Although it was not a formal military alliance, it signalled strong political alignment. During the Bangladesh Liberation War in December 1971, the Soviet Union provided diplomatic and strategic backing to India. When the United States sent the USS Enterprise into the Bay of Bengal, the Soviet naval presence acted as a balancing factor. This episode strengthened the perception

that the Soviet Union was a reliable partner in times of crisis.

The 1971 treaty had long-term consequences. It formalised the special nature of Indo-Soviet ties and deepened strategic trust. It also influenced regional power politics by reinforcing India's position in South Asia. Even after the end of the Cold War, the memory of 1971 remains an important reference point in India–Russia relations. It symbolises a period when the partnership proved its value under pressure and helped shape the region's geopolitical landscape.



Figure: The foreign ministers of both countries, Swaran Singh and Andrei Gromyko, sign the Indo-Soviet Treaty in New Delhi on August 9, 1971.

2.2.3.1. Post–Soviet Transition

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 was like an unexpected earthquake in global politics. For India, it meant that its most dependable partner had suddenly transformed into a new state called the Russian Federation. Russia was facing internal political instability, economic crisis, and institutional restructuring. Defence supplies were disrupted, payments were delayed, and long-standing agreements needed to be renegotiated. For a short period, the once-steady Indo-Soviet relationship seemed uncertain and unsettled.

However, both India and Russia realised that their strategic interests had not

disappeared with the Soviet flag. In the 1990s, the two countries worked patiently to rebuild their ties. Agreements were renewed, defence cooperation resumed, and new frameworks were negotiated. India supported Russia's integration into global institutions, while Russia reaffirmed its commitment to India's security concerns. The relationship slowly shifted from an ideological partnership to a pragmatic one based on national interests.

The 1993 Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation and the 1994 Military-Technical Cooperation Agreement helped stabilise the relationship. These agreements signalled that the partnership would continue despite systemic changes in Russia. Over time, economic links improved, and political dialogue resumed at the highest levels. The post-Soviet transition demonstrated that India–Russia relations were not dependent only on Cold War politics but were rooted in deeper strategic understanding.

2.2.3.2. Strategic Partnership Framework

In 2000, India and Russia formally declared their relationship a “Strategic Partnership.” This was more than symbolic language. It created a structured framework for cooperation across defence, energy, science, trade, and culture. Regular annual summits between the Prime Minister of India and the President of Russia became institutionalised. This ensured continuity, regardless of changes in domestic politics.

The strategic partnership framework emphasised equality and mutual respect. Both countries recognised each other as major powers with independent foreign policies. Russia supported India's aspiration for a permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council. India, in turn, acknowledged Russia's role as a key actor in Eurasian security. The relationship was no longer

framed in Cold War language but adapted to a multipolar world.

In 2010, the partnership was upgraded to a “Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership.” This phrase reflected the depth of trust and long-term cooperation between the two countries. It indicated that India–Russia ties were not temporary or tactical but part of their broader geopolitical vision. The institutionalisation of dialogue mechanisms helped ensure stability even when global politics became more complex.

2.2.3.3. Energy Cooperation

Energy cooperation has emerged as a major pillar of India–Russia relations in the 21st century. Russia is one of the world's largest producers of oil and natural gas, while India is one of the fastest-growing energy consumers. This natural complementarity has encouraged long-term collaboration. Indian companies have invested in Russian oil fields, including projects in Siberia and the Arctic region.

After the Ukraine conflict and Western sanctions on Russia, energy ties gained new significance. India began importing discounted Russian crude oil in large quantities. This decision was guided by India's energy security needs and economic considerations. Despite criticism from Western countries, India maintained that its energy purchases were based on national interest and market logic. As a result, Russia became one of India's top oil suppliers.

Apart from oil, cooperation also includes liquefied natural gas and nuclear energy. The Kudankulam nuclear project continues to expand with Russian assistance. Energy trade has helped stabilise the broader relationship amid global uncertainty. It shows that economic pragmatism can sustain strategic partnerships even amid increased international pressure.

Defence Procurement and Co-Production

Defence cooperation has evolved from simple arms purchases to joint production and technology sharing. While Russia remains a major supplier of defence equipment to India, the nature of cooperation has changed. India now seeks greater self-reliance under its “Make in India” initiative. Russia has responded by agreeing to joint manufacturing projects.

One significant example is the licensed production of Sukhoi fighter jets and T-90 tanks in India. The BrahMos supersonic cruise missile, jointly developed by India and Russia, represents a successful model of co-production. This project combines Russian technological expertise with Indian production capabilities. It has also opened up export opportunities to third countries.

At the same time, India has diversified its defence imports by purchasing equipment from the United States, France, and Israel. This has reduced Russia’s share in India’s defence market. However, Russia continues to supply critical systems such as the S-400 air defence system. Defence ties remain strong, but they now operate in a broader, more competitive global defence environment.

Multilateral Cooperation (BRICS and SCO)

India and Russia cooperate closely in multilateral forums such as BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). These platforms reflect their shared interest in promoting a multipolar world order. In BRICS, which includes Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, the two countries advocate reforms in global financial institutions and greater representation for emerging economies.

The SCO provides a platform for cooperation on security and regional stability in Eurasia. Through the SCO, India and Russia

engage with Central Asian countries and coordinate on issues such as terrorism and regional connectivity. Russia has supported India’s full membership in the SCO, recognising India’s importance in Asian security.

Multilateral cooperation strengthens the political dimension of the partnership. It allows India and Russia to coordinate positions on global governance, economic reform, and security challenges. These forums also provide space for dialogue, even when bilateral issues face difficulties. Thus, multilateral engagement adds depth and resilience to the relationship.



Arctic and Far East Engagement

In recent years, India has shown interest in Russia’s Arctic region and Far East. The Arctic is becoming strategically important due to climate change, new shipping routes, and energy resources. Russia has invited India to invest in Arctic energy projects and participate in scientific research. India’s observer status in the Arctic Council complements this engagement.

The Russian Far East is another area of cooperation. The region is resource-rich but underpopulated. India has explored opportunities in mining, energy, and infrastructure development. Special investment agreements have been signed to encourage Indian participation. This reflects an attempt to diversify economic cooperation beyond traditional sectors.

Engagement in the Arctic and Far East demonstrates that India–Russia relations are expanding geographically. They are no longer limited to South Asia or immediate neighbourhood concerns. Instead, the partnership now includes broader Eurasian and polar dimensions, reflecting changing global realities.

2.2.3.4. Economic Relations

Despite strong political and defence ties, economic relations between India and Russia have often lagged behind expectations. Bilateral trade remained modest for many years compared to India's trade with the United States, China, or the European Union. Structural issues, including a lack of connectivity, payment mechanisms, and limited private-sector engagement, hindered growth. However, recent developments have changed this pattern. Energy imports from Russia have significantly increased trade volumes. Efforts are being made to establish alternative payment systems to bypass Western financial restrictions. Discussions on a possible free trade agreement between India and the Eurasian Economic Union are ongoing.

Economic cooperation now includes pharmaceuticals, agriculture, diamonds, fertilisers, and information technology. While challenges remain, both countries have expressed commitment to raising trade targets in the coming years. Strengthening economic ties is essential for balancing the traditionally defence-heavy nature of the relationship. A more diversified economic partnership can provide long-term stability and mutual benefit.

2.2.4. Russia–China Factor

One of the most important external factors shaping India–Russia relations today is the growing closeness between Russia and China. Over the past decade, especially after tensions between Russia

and Western countries increased, Moscow has moved closer to Beijing in economic and strategic terms. Energy trade, defence cooperation, and diplomatic coordination between Russia and China have expanded significantly. For India, which has its own border tensions and strategic rivalry with China, this development naturally raises concerns.

At the same time, Russia has tried to maintain balanced relations with both India and China. Moscow has often described its ties with Beijing as strong, while also reassuring New Delhi that its partnership with India remains independent and valuable. Russia does not view its relationship with China as a substitute for its relationship with India. Instead, it sees all three countries as part of a broader Eurasian balance. Platforms like BRICS and the SCO provide space for India, Russia, and China to interact, even when bilateral tensions exist.

From India's perspective, managing the Russia–China factor requires careful diplomacy. India does not want Russia to become fully dependent on China, as that could reduce Moscow's flexibility. Therefore, India continues its high-level engagement with Russia, strengthens economic ties, and maintains active defence cooperation. In this way, India seeks to preserve strategic space and prevent its long-standing partner from drifting too close to a rival power.

2.2.5. Russia–Pakistan Dynamics

Another sensitive issue in India–Russia relations is Russia's gradual engagement with Pakistan. During the Cold War, the Soviet Union had limited interaction with Pakistan, as Islamabad was aligned with the United States. However, in recent years, Russia has improved ties with Pakistan, including limited defence cooperation and joint military exercises. This shift has attracted attention in India.

It is important to understand that Russia's outreach to Pakistan is relatively modest compared to its deep defence and strategic partnership with India. Russian arms sales to Pakistan have been limited, and Moscow continues to prioritise India as its main defence partner in South Asia. Russia's engagement with Pakistan is partly aimed at expanding its regional influence and addressing security concerns related to Afghanistan.

India has responded calmly but cautiously to these developments. Indian policymakers recognise that Russia, like any major power, will pursue a diversified foreign policy. However, India expects transparency and sensitivity regarding issues that directly affect its security. So far, Russia has avoided actions that would seriously damage its partnership with India. The relationship has shown resilience, but this area requires continued diplomatic attention.

2.2.6. Impact of the Ukraine Conflict

The conflict in Ukraine has significantly affected global politics and indirectly influenced India–Russia relations. After Russia's military action in Ukraine in 2022, Western countries imposed extensive economic sanctions on Moscow. Russia's relations with the United States and Europe deteriorated sharply. In this context, India faced a complex diplomatic challenge.

India chose not to directly condemn Russia at international forums such as the United Nations. Instead, it called for dialogue, diplomacy, and respect for sovereignty. At the same time, India increased its imports of discounted Russian oil to secure affordable energy supplies. This decision attracted criticism from Western countries, but India maintained that its actions were guided by national interest and energy security needs.

The Ukraine conflict has deepened Russia's economic dependence on non-Western partners, including India. It has also accelerated the shift toward alternative payment systems and trade mechanisms. While the conflict has complicated global alignments, India–Russia ties have remained stable. The situation highlights India's effort to balance principles, strategic autonomy, and practical economic needs in a turbulent global environment.

2.2.7. India's Strategic Balancing

India's foreign policy today is often described as one of strategic autonomy. This means that India seeks to maintain independent decision-making without aligning fully with any single power bloc. In recent years, India has strengthened ties with the United States, Japan, and Australia through platforms like the Quad. At the same time, it has preserved strong relations with Russia. This balancing act is not easy. The United States has occasionally expressed concern about India's defence purchases from Russia, including the S-400 missile system. However, India has argued that its security requirements cannot be compromised. By maintaining diversified partnerships, India reduces overdependence on any one country.

Strategic balancing allows India to maximise its options in a multipolar world. Its relationship with Russia provides defence stability and energy cooperation, while ties with Western countries offer technology, investment, and market access. Rather than choosing sides, India seeks to build multiple partnerships based on specific interests. This approach reflects both realism and flexibility in foreign policy.

2.2.7.1. Emerging Challenges

Despite strong foundations, India–Russia relations face several emerging challenges. One major issue is the declining share of

Russian defence supplies in India's total imports. India's diversification policy means that Russia now faces competition from other suppliers. This could reduce Russia's long-term influence in India's defence sector.

Economic ties, though improving, remain uneven and heavily focused on energy. Broader trade in manufacturing, services, and technology is still limited. Connectivity barriers, payment mechanisms, and logistical difficulties create obstacles. Without expanding economic engagement, the partnership risks remaining defence heavy.

Another challenge is geopolitical uncertainty. Russia's growing closeness with China, Western sanctions, and global economic instability create unpredictable conditions. Both India and Russia must adapt to a rapidly changing international environment. Sustaining trust and communication will be essential in navigating these complexities.

2.2.8. Future of the Indo-Russian Partnership

Looking ahead, the future of India–Russia relations will depend on adaptability and mutual understanding. Defence cooperation will likely continue, but with greater emphasis on joint production and technology transfer. Energy ties are expected to remain strong, especially if global markets remain unstable. There is also potential for cooperation in new areas such as digital technology, pharmaceuticals, Arctic research, and connectivity projects linking Eurasia and South Asia. Strengthening people-to-people exchanges, academic collaboration, and private-sector participation can broaden the relationship's base.

The partnership may not look exactly like it did during the Cold War, but it remains significant. As global power structures shift, India and Russia may find value in supporting a multipolar order where no single power dominates. The future will depend on how both countries manage differences while building on long-standing trust.

Recap

- ◆ India–Russia relations began during the early Cold War period.
- ◆ The Soviet Union supported India's industrialisation and defence modernisation.
- ◆ The 1971 Indo–Soviet Treaty strengthened strategic trust.
- ◆ Defence cooperation remains the backbone of bilateral relations.
- ◆ Energy cooperation has expanded significantly in recent years.
- ◆ India follows a policy of strategic autonomy while maintaining ties with Russia and Western countries.
- ◆ The Ukraine conflict reshaped global alignments but did not break Indo-Russian cooperation.
- ◆ Emerging challenges include defence diversification and geopolitical shifts.

Objective Questions

1. Which country was India's major strategic partner during the Cold War?
2. Which steel plant in India was built with Soviet assistance?
3. Which treaty strengthened Indo-Soviet cooperation in 1971?
4. Which missile project symbolises Indo-Russian joint development?
5. Which Russian air defence system was purchased by India recently?
6. Which Indian astronaut travelled to space with Soviet assistance in 1984?
7. Which Indian naval aircraft carrier was refurbished by Russia?
8. Which nuclear power plant in Tamil Nadu was built with Russian assistance?
9. What term describes the upgraded India–Russia partnership in 2010?
10. Which Soviet leader maintained friendly relations with Jawaharlal Nehru?
11. Which type of cooperation forms the backbone of India–Russia relations?
12. Which country replaced the Soviet Union after its collapse in 1991?
13. Which Cold War ideology influenced Soviet-style planning in India?
14. Which Indian fighter aircraft was produced under Russian licence?
15. Which strategic doctrine emphasises India's balanced foreign policy?

Answers

1. Soviet Union
2. Bhilai
3. Indo-Soviet Treaty
4. BrahMos
5. S-400
6. Rakesh Sharma
7. Vikramaditya
8. Kudankulam
9. Strategic partnership

10. Khrushchev
11. Defence cooperation
12. Russia
13. Socialism
14. Su-30MKI
15. Non-alignment

Assignments

1. Analyse the significance of the 1971 Indo–Soviet Treaty in shaping India’s regional security posture.
2. Discuss the evolution of India–Russia defence cooperation from the Cold War to the present.
3. Examine how the Ukraine conflict has affected India–Russia relations.
4. Evaluate India’s policy of strategic autonomy in managing relations with Russia and Western powers.
5. Critically assess the impact of Russia–China relations on India’s strategic interests.
6. Prepare a timeline chart (1947–2025) highlighting major milestones in India–Russia relations.
7. Collect data on India’s defence imports over the last 20 years and prepare a comparative graph showing Russia’s share versus other countries.
8. Conduct a short policy brief (1000 words) recommending future areas of cooperation between India and Russia.
9. Analyse recent news articles on India’s oil imports from Russia and prepare a summary explaining the economic rationale behind the decision.
10. Create a comparative table examining India–Russia relations and India–US relations in terms of defence, energy, and geopolitical alignment.

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UNIT

India-China Relations

Learning Outcomes

After studying this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ explain the historical evolution of India–China relations from civilisational contacts to contemporary strategic rivalry.
- ◆ analyse the origins and continuing implications of the border dispute, including the 1962 war and subsequent crises.
- ◆ evaluate the economic dimension of India–China relations, particularly trade growth and structural imbalance.
- ◆ assess the roles of regional and global platforms, such as BRICS and the Indo-Pacific, in shaping bilateral engagement.
- ◆ critically examine the dual nature of cooperation and competition in India–China relations.

Prerequisites

An examination of India–China relations requires familiarity with the historical interactions between the two civilisations, the geopolitical dynamics of Asia, and the strategic issues that have shaped their bilateral relationship in the modern era. The collapse of colonial empires, the onset of the Cold War, and the emergence of newly independent states reshaped global politics. India and China, both heirs to ancient civilisations yet newly sovereign republics in the mid-twentieth century, stepped onto the world stage carrying memories of imperial decline and aspirations for national rejuvenation. Understanding this wider transformation is essential for appreciating how their relationship evolved.

A foundational awareness of Cold War bipolarity, the Non-Aligned Movement, and the shifting balance of power in Asia will help situate India–China relations

within their broader geopolitical setting. Familiarity with India's foreign policy principles, such as non-alignment and strategic autonomy, alongside China's rise as a major economic and military power, provides the intellectual tools to interpret cooperation and rivalry. Awareness of key regional questions—Tibet, Kashmir, border disputes, and the Indo-Pacific strategic framework—will further enable learners to grasp why this bilateral relationship carries both civilisational memory and strategic tension. With this conceptual grounding, students can better explore how history, geography, and power intersect in shaping one of Asia's most consequential relationships.

Keywords

Line of Actual Control (LAC), Panchsheel, Tibet Factor, 1962 War, Indo-Pacific, Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Trade Imbalance, Strategic Competition

Discussion

2.3.1. Civilisational Contacts

India and China are among the world's oldest civilisations, and their relationship predates modern nation-states by many centuries. Ancient contacts were shaped more by culture and commerce than by conflict. Buddhism played a central role in linking the two societies. Indian monks travelled to China carrying religious texts, while Chinese scholars such as Xuanzang journeyed to India to study Buddhist philosophy and visit sacred sites. These exchanges created intellectual bridges and mutual curiosity. Unlike many other ancient interactions, India-China engagement during this period was largely peaceful and civilisational rather than territorial.

Trade routes also connected the two regions through Central Asia and maritime networks. Silk, spices, textiles, and precious stones moved across these routes,

fostering economic interdependence. Cultural influences flowed alongside goods, shaping art, architecture, and philosophical thought. These early interactions laid a foundation of civilisational respect. Many contemporary scholars argue that modern diplomatic language invoking "ancient friendship" draws upon this historical memory, even though present-day realities are very different.

However, civilisational contact did not translate into structured political relations. Pre-modern India and China were geographically separated by the Himalayas, which limited sustained state-to-state engagement. As a result, the modern relationship had to be constructed almost from scratch after both countries emerged from colonial and imperial decline in the mid-twentieth century. This historical distance explains why early optimism in the 1950s was not supported by deep institutional familiarity between the two new governments.

Table: Ancient Bridges between India and China

Theme	Example	Significance
Religion	Xuanzang's visit to Nalanda	Buddhist transmission
Trade	Silk Road	Economic exchange
Maritime links	South Indian ports	Cultural diffusion
Philosophy	Mahayana Buddhism	Intellectual exchange



Figure: The Great Wild Goose Pagoda and Tang Xuanzang Statue at Dacien Temple in Xi'an, Shaanxi Province, China



Figure: The archaeological ruins of the Nalanda Mahavihara, an ancient Buddhist monastery and a prominent educational institution, located in Bihar, India

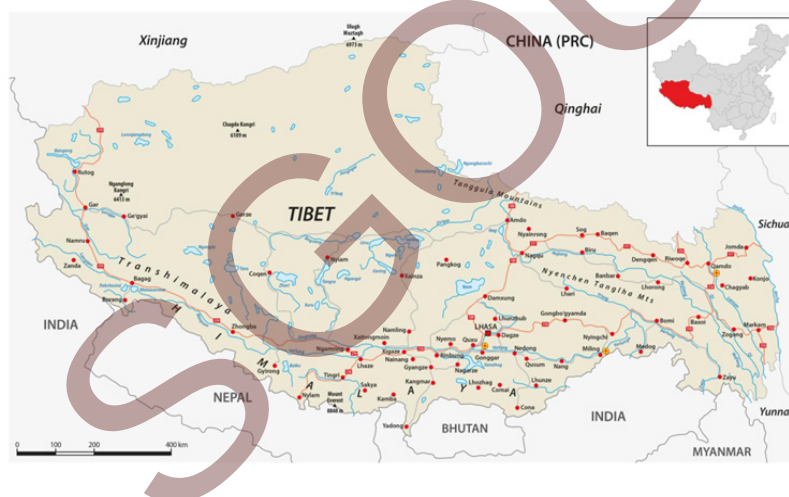
2.3.2. Tibet Factor

The Tibet issue has been central to India–China relations since the 1950s. Historically, Tibet functioned as a buffer zone between British India and Qing China. After the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, Beijing moved to assert control over Tibet. India, which had inherited certain treaty arrangements and trade rights from British India, faced a complex situation. On the one hand, India recognised Chinese sovereignty over Tibet. On the other hand, it was concerned about the implications of direct Chinese presence along its Himalayan frontier.

Tensions increased after the 1959 Tibetan uprising, when the Dalai Lama fled to India and was granted asylum. China viewed India’s

decision as interference in its internal affairs, while India defended it as a humanitarian gesture. The Tibetan refugee community continues to reside in India, making the Tibet question both a diplomatic and domestic issue. Scholars note that the Tibet factor transformed the border from a distant frontier into a sensitive strategic zone.

The incorporation of Tibet into China fundamentally altered the security landscape. It eliminated the buffer that had historically separated the two civilisations. China’s infrastructure development in Tibet further heightened Indian concerns about military mobility along the border. Thus, what began as a question of sovereignty gradually became intertwined with security calculations and mutual suspicion.



Detailed map of the Tibet Autonomous Region, China



Young Dalai Lama

2.3.3. Panchsheel Agreement

In 1954, India and China signed the Agreement on Trade and Intercourse between Tibet and India, popularly known as the Panchsheel Agreement. The agreement was based on five principles: mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, non-aggression, non-interference, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence. At the time, it symbolised optimism and cooperation. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and Premier Zhou Enlai promoted the idea of “Hindi-Chini Bhai-Bhai” to express solidarity between the two newly independent Asian powers.

The Panchsheel principles were later incorporated into broader international

diplomacy and even influenced the Non-Aligned Movement. However, critics argue that the agreement did not address underlying boundary disputes. While the language emphasised peace and cooperation, the actual border remained undefined in several sectors. This gap between rhetoric and unresolved territorial claims would later contribute to mistrust.

The Panchsheel period represents a high point of diplomatic warmth. Yet, historians observe that this warmth rested on fragile foundations. China’s consolidation in Tibet and India’s forward policy in disputed border areas gradually eroded trust. Thus, Panchsheel stands as both a symbol of idealism and a reminder of unaddressed strategic differences.

The Five Principles of Panchsheel

The Panchsheel principles, formulated in the 1950s, became an important framework guiding India’s approach to international relations and peaceful engagement with other states. These principles emphasised respect for sovereignty, non-intervention, and cooperation among nations.

1. Mutual respect for sovereignty
2. Non-aggression
3. Non-interference in internal affairs
4. Equality and mutual benefit
5. Peaceful coexistence

2.3.4. Border Dispute Origins

The origins of the border dispute lie in differing interpretations of colonial-era boundaries. In the eastern sector, India recognises the McMahon Line, drawn during the 1914 Simla Convention between British India and Tibet. China does not accept this agreement, arguing that Tibet lacked the authority to enter into independent treaties. In the western sector, particularly Aksai Chin, historical documentation is ambiguous, and

maps produced by British authorities were inconsistent.

The dispute intensified when China built a road connecting Xinjiang to Tibet through Aksai Chin in the late 1950s. India viewed this as an encroachment on its claimed territory. Diplomatic negotiations failed to resolve the differences, partly because both sides relied on historical claims that lacked clear legal clarity. The absence of a clearly demarcated boundary led patrols

from both sides to encounter each other in contested areas.

Scholars emphasise that the dispute was not inevitable. It developed gradually due to misperceptions, lack of communication, and incompatible strategic priorities. India

initially prioritised political solidarity with China, while China prioritised territorial consolidation. These differing priorities created a widening gap over time. By the early 1960s, tensions had reached a dangerous level.

Table: Disputed Sectors along the Line of Actual Control

Sector	Indian Position	Chinese Position	Strategic Importance
Western (Aksai Chin)	Part of Ladakh	Part of Xinjiang-Tibet	Road connectivity
Eastern (Arunachal Pradesh)	Integral state	“South Tibet”	Tawang monastery
Middle Sector	Minor disputes	Limited contention	Less militarised

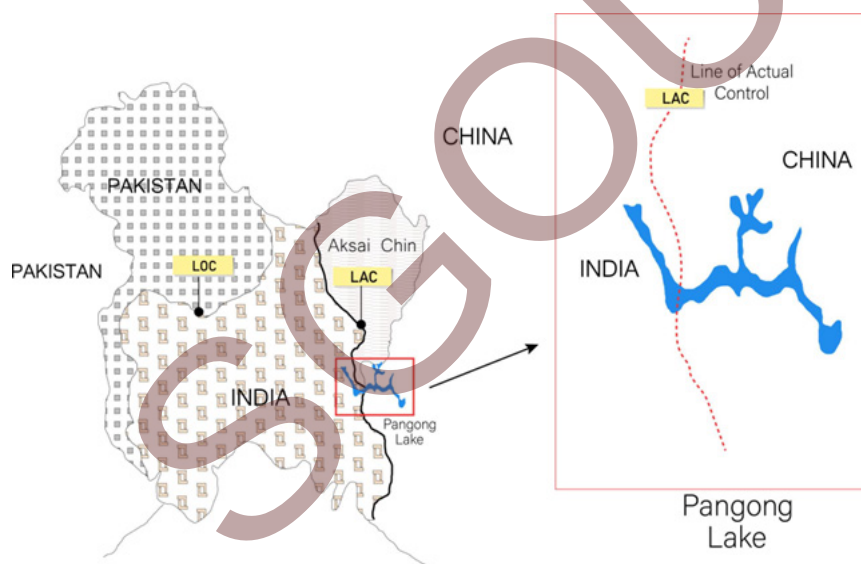
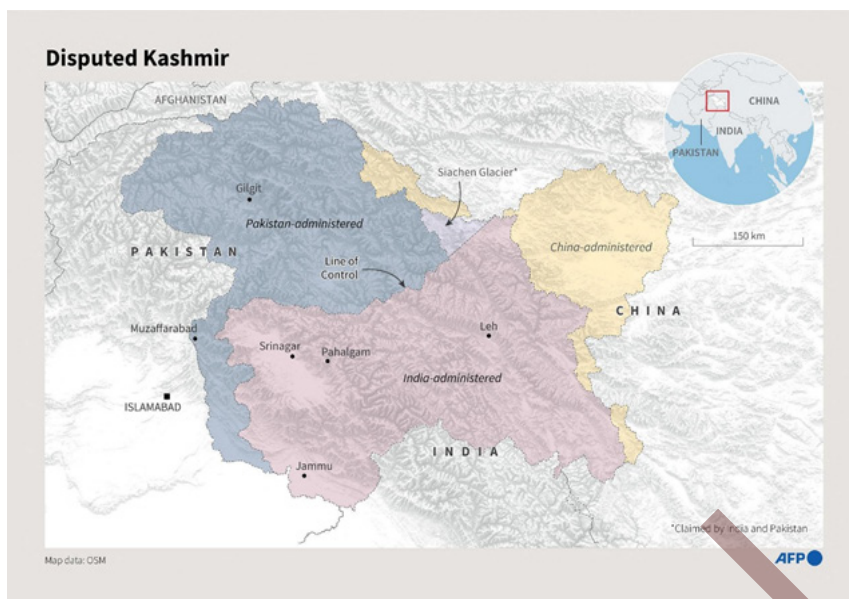
LAC, LoC, and International Boundary

It is important to clearly distinguish between the Line of Actual Control (LAC), the Line of Control (LoC), and an international boundary, as these terms are often confused.

The LAC refers to the de facto military control line between India and China. It is not a mutually agreed or formally demarcated boundary, and both sides have differing perceptions of its exact alignment. This lack of clarity contributes to patrol confrontations and periodic tensions.

The LoC, in contrast, refers specifically to the military control line between India and Pakistan in Jammu and Kashmir, established after the 1971 war and formalised under the Simla Agreement. Unlike the LAC, the LoC is more clearly delineated and jointly monitored, although it remains disputed over sovereignty.

An international boundary, by comparison, is a legally recognised and mutually accepted border between two sovereign states, clearly demarcated on maps and on the ground. The India–China border is not an internationally agreed boundary, which is why the dispute persists and why the LAC functions only as a temporary line of control rather than a settled border.



2.4.4.1. The 1962 War

The border tensions culminated in the 1962 Sino-Indian War. In October 1962, Chinese forces launched coordinated offensives in both eastern and western sectors. The conflict was brief but decisive. Indian forces were unprepared for the scale and speed of the Chinese advance. By November, China declared a unilateral ceasefire and withdrew in the eastern sector, while retaining control over Aksai Chin in the west.

The war had a profound psychological and strategic impact on India. It shattered the idealism of the Panchsheel era and led to a major reassessment of defence policy. India began strengthening its military capabilities and sought external support, including from the United States and the Soviet Union. The conflict also deepened mistrust between the two countries, freezing high-level engagement for years.

For China, the war was intended to assert territorial claims and send a strategic message. However, it also limited the possibility of long-term partnership with India. The legacy of 1962 continues to influence public opinion and policy debates in both countries. Many scholars argue that the unresolved border question, rooted in this conflict, remains the core obstacle to stable bilateral relations.

2.3.4.2. Post-War Freeze

After the 1962 war, India–China relations entered a prolonged period of diplomatic freeze. Political dialogue virtually ceased, and mutual suspicion dominated official thinking. For nearly two decades, there were no ambassador-level diplomatic relations. Trade declined sharply, and people-to-people exchanges were minimal. The war had left deep emotional and strategic scars, especially in India, where public opinion viewed China with distrust.

During this period, both countries were preoccupied with other challenges. India focused on internal development and conflicts with Pakistan. China underwent dramatic domestic changes, including the Cultural Revolution. Although minor border incidents occurred, neither side sought a large-scale confrontation. The absence of active diplomacy did not mean the absence of concern. Both sides continued to monitor each other's military deployments along the Himalayan frontier.

By the late 1970s, global politics began shifting. China opened its economy under Deng Xiaoping, and India slowly reconsidered its rigid posture. In 1976, ambassador-level

relations were restored. This step marked the beginning of cautious re-engagement. The post-war freeze had lasted long enough to demonstrate that confrontation was costly and unsustainable. Both countries began exploring the possibility of a gradual normalisation.

2.3.4.3. Normalisation Phase

A breakthrough came in 1988 when Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi visited Beijing. This visit marked the formal beginning of the normalisation phase. Both sides agreed to separate the boundary dispute from other aspects of the relationship. This pragmatic decision allowed cooperation in trade, culture, and diplomacy even while the border question remained unresolved. It reflected a mutual recognition that stable relations were necessary for economic growth.

Following this visit, a Joint Working Group on the boundary issue was established. Confidence-building measures were gradually introduced to prevent accidental escalation. High-level political visits increased, and dialogue mechanisms were institutionalised. China supported India's economic reforms by expanding trade engagement, while India acknowledged China's growing role in Asia.

The normalisation phase did not eliminate differences, but it created a framework for managing them. Instead of allowing disputes to dominate the entire relationship, both sides adopted a cautious but constructive approach. This period demonstrated that competition and cooperation could coexist, a pattern that would define the relationship for decades.

Timeline Table: Normalisation
Milestones

Year	Event
1976	Diplomatic relations restored
1988	Rajiv Gandhi's visit
1993	Border Peace and Tranquillity Agreement (BPTA)
1996	Military CBMs
2005	Political Parameters Agreement

2.3.5. Border Management Agreements

To reduce the risk of conflict, India and China signed several border management agreements in the 1990s and 2000s. The 1993 Agreement on the Maintenance of Peace and Tranquillity along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) was particularly important. It committed both sides to respect the status quo and avoid the use of force. Subsequent agreements in 1996, 2005, and 2013 introduced measures such as limiting troop deployments, prior notification of military exercises, and establishing communication channels between commanders.

These agreements did not resolve the boundary dispute, but they helped prevent major armed clashes for several decades. The Line of Actual Control remained undefined in some sectors, leading to occasional patrol confrontations. However, both sides generally avoided escalation. Military hotlines and flag meetings became routine mechanisms for crisis management.

Scholars often describe these agreements as examples of conflict management rather

than conflict resolution. They allowed stability without settlement. The arrangement was fragile, as later events would show, but for nearly three decades it maintained relative peace along one of the world's longest disputed borders.

2.3.6. Trade Relations

Economic engagement became a central pillar of India–China relations after the 1990s. Bilateral trade expanded rapidly, especially after China joined the World Trade Organisation in 2001. Within two decades, China became one of India's largest trading partners. Indian imports included machinery, electronics, and intermediate goods, while exports included raw materials such as iron ore and chemicals.

Trade growth created a new layer of interdependence. Business communities in both countries benefited from expanded markets. Chinese companies invested in Indian infrastructure and technology sectors, while Indian firms explored opportunities in China's vast consumer market. Economic cooperation provided a counterweight to political tensions.

However, the rapid growth of trade also exposed structural weaknesses. The composition of trade was uneven, with India exporting mainly primary goods and importing higher-value manufactured products. This imbalance would later become a significant concern in policy debates. Nevertheless, the expansion of trade during this phase symbolised a belief that economic engagement could stabilise political relations.

2.3.7. Trade Imbalance Issues

Despite impressive growth, India's trade deficit with China widened significantly over time. Imports of electronics, telecommunications equipment, and machinery far exceeded Indian exports. This

imbalance created economic dependence in certain sectors. Indian policymakers began expressing concern about vulnerability in critical supply chains.

The trade imbalance also reflected bigger structural differences. China's manufacturing sector was highly competitive and globally integrated, while India's industrial base faced capacity and infrastructure challenges. Efforts to diversify exports and reduce dependence on Chinese imports became part of India's economic strategy, especially after border tensions resurfaced.

In recent years, India has introduced measures to screen Chinese investments in sensitive sectors such as telecommunications and digital platforms. At the same time, it recognises that complete economic disengagement is neither feasible nor desirable. The trade imbalance issue highlights the complex interdependence that defines the relationship: economic cooperation brings benefits but also strategic anxieties.

2.3.8. BRICS and Multilateral Cooperation

India and China cooperate in several multilateral platforms, most notably BRICS. Alongside Brazil, Russia, and South Africa, they advocate reforms in global financial governance and greater representation for emerging economies. BRICS summits provide regular opportunities for leaders to meet and coordinate positions on issues such as climate change and development finance.

Multilateral cooperation demonstrates that India and China share certain global interests despite bilateral tensions. Both countries support a more multipolar world order and seek to reduce Western dominance in global institutions. Cooperation within the

Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) further expands engagement on regional security and counter-terrorism.

However, multilateral cooperation does not eliminate competition. In some forums, India and China promote overlapping but not identical agendas. Still, these platforms offer space for dialogue and prevent total breakdown in communication. They illustrate the dual nature of the relationship: rivalry in some areas, collaboration in others.

2.3.9. Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)

China's Belt and Road Initiative, launched in 2013, aims to expand connectivity through infrastructure projects across Asia, Europe, and Africa. India has not joined the BRI, primarily because the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor passes through Pakistan-administered Kashmir, territory claimed by India. For New Delhi, participation would imply acceptance of Chinese infrastructure in disputed areas.

India also expresses broader concerns about transparency, debt sustainability, and strategic implications of BRI projects. Chinese investments in ports and infrastructure in South Asia and the Indian Ocean are viewed in India as expanding Beijing's strategic footprint. This has contributed to mistrust, particularly regarding projects in Sri Lanka and Pakistan.

At the same time, India recognises the importance of connectivity for regional development. It promotes alternative initiatives such as the International North-South Transport Corridor and partnerships with Japan in infrastructure development. The BRI debate reflects the broader geopolitical competition between the two countries, extending beyond borders into regional influence and connectivity strategies.

interests and partnerships in the region. For China, the standoff reinforced the importance of asserting territorial claims.

Doklam revealed that even without full-scale war, border disputes could quickly escalate into serious crises. It marked a turning point in perceptions, suggesting that earlier confidence-building measures were under strain. The incident increased calls within India for greater military preparedness along the border.



2.3.10. Galwan Crisis

The most serious confrontation since 1962 occurred in June 2020 in the Galwan Valley. A violent clash between Indian and Chinese troops resulted in casualties on both sides. Unlike previous incidents, firearms were not used, but the physical confrontation was deadly. The crisis shocked public opinion in both countries and marked a breakdown of trust built since the 1990s.

The Galwan incident led to large-scale troop deployments along the Line of Actual Control. Diplomatic and military talks followed, resulting in partial disengagement in some sectors. However, the broader relationship suffered significantly. India introduced economic and technological restrictions, including scrutiny of Chinese digital applications and investments.

Many analysts describe Galwan as a structural shift in the relationship. The assumption that economic interdependence would prevent serious conflict appeared weakened. The crisis reinforced the idea that the border

dispute remains central to bilateral stability. Even though full-scale war was avoided, strategic distrust deepened considerably.



Strategic Competition in South Asia

India and China increasingly compete for influence in South Asia. China has expanded its economic and infrastructure presence in countries such as Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Bangladesh. Large-scale infrastructure projects and financial assistance have strengthened Beijing's regional footprint. India views some of these projects as encroaching upon its traditional sphere of influence.

The China–Pakistan Economic Corridor is particularly sensitive for India because it passes through disputed territory. Additionally, Chinese investments in ports in Sri Lanka and infrastructure in Nepal are closely monitored by Indian policymakers. India has responded by increasing its own development assistance and connectivity initiatives in the region.

This regional competition does not always translate into open confrontation. Smaller South Asian states often balance their relations with India and China to maximise their benefits. However, the strategic rivalry shapes diplomatic calculations. South Asia has become another arena where India–China competition unfolds.

Technology and Supply Chain Rivalry

In recent years, competition has expanded into technology and supply chains. Telecommunications, digital infrastructure, and semiconductor supply chains have become strategic concerns. India has imposed restrictions on certain Chinese technology companies, citing national security reasons. The debate reflects broader global concerns about technological dependence.

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed vulnerabilities in global supply chains, prompting India to pursue diversification strategies. Initiatives aimed at strengthening domestic manufacturing and attracting alternative investment have become increasingly important. China, meanwhile, continues to promote its technological capabilities through digital infrastructure and innovation initiatives.

Technology rivalry adds a new dimension to India–China relations. It is less visible than border tensions but equally significant. Economic interdependence now intersects with national security considerations. This overlap makes the relationship more complex and multi-layered.

2.3.11. Conflict and Cooperation Duality

India–China relations are characterised by a dual pattern of conflict and cooperation. On one hand, there is unresolved border tension, regional competition, and strategic rivalry. On the other hand, both countries cooperate in multilateral forums and share interests in global governance reform and climate change negotiations.

This duality reflects pragmatic realism.

Neither country can afford permanent hostility, given their size and economic ambitions. At the same time, neither is willing to compromise core strategic interests. As a result, the relationship oscillates between engagement and confrontation.

Scholars describe this as a relationship defined by “managed competition.” The challenge lies in preventing rivalry from escalating into sustained conflict. Diplomatic dialogue, economic engagement, and multilateral interaction serve as stabilising mechanisms. Yet the balance remains delicate.

2.3.12. Future Scenarios

Looking ahead, several possible scenarios emerge. One scenario is controlled competition, in which border tensions persist but are managed through dialogue and military protocols. Economic ties may remain selective, with diversification reducing dependence without full decoupling. This scenario maintains stability while acknowledging rivalry.

Another possibility is renewed confrontation if border incidents escalate or geopolitical alignments harden. Increased militarisation and strategic mistrust could push the relationship toward deeper hostility. However, both countries are aware of the costs of open conflict.

A more optimistic scenario would involve gradual progress on boundary clarification and expanded economic cooperation. While a full settlement of the border dispute appears unlikely in the short term, confidence-building measures could reduce tensions. The future of India–China relations will depend not only on bilateral choices but also on global power shifts and regional developments.

Recap

- ◆ India and China share ancient civilisational connections rooted in Buddhism and trade.
- ◆ Historically, Tibet served as a buffer between the two regions.
- ◆ The Panchsheel Agreement symbolised early post-independence optimism.
- ◆ The boundary dispute emerged from differing colonial-era interpretations.
- ◆ The 1962 war fundamentally reshaped India's strategic outlook.
- ◆ Diplomatic relations froze for nearly two decades after the war.
- ◆ Rajiv Gandhi's 1988 visit initiated the normalisation phase.
- ◆ Border management agreements helped maintain peace along the LAC for decades.
- ◆ Economic engagement expanded rapidly after the 1990s.
- ◆ India faces a significant trade deficit with China.
- ◆ Both countries cooperate in BRICS and other multilateral forums.
- ◆ India has not joined the Belt and Road Initiative due to sovereignty concerns.
- ◆ Doklam (2017) and Galwan (2020) signalled renewed border tensions.
- ◆ Strategic rivalry now extends to technology, supply chains, and maritime domains.
- ◆ India–China relations are marked by simultaneous cooperation and competition.

Objective Questions

1. Which religion created early cultural links between India and China?
2. Which Chinese monk visited Nalanda to study Buddhism?
3. Which agreement between India and China emphasised peaceful coexistence?
4. What slogan symbolised early India–China friendship in the 1950s?

5. Which region acted historically as a buffer between India and China?
6. Which line marks the de facto border between India and China?
7. Which war occurred between India and China in 1962?
8. Which Indian Prime Minister visited Beijing in 1988 to normalise relations?
9. Which disputed region is controlled by China but claimed by India?
10. Which eastern boundary line does India recognise in the dispute?
11. Which Chinese leader promoted economic reforms after the 1970s?
12. Which mountain range separates India and China geographically?
13. Which refugee religious leader from Tibet lives in India?
14. Which agreement in 1993 aimed to maintain peace along the border?
15. Which strategic concept emphasises peaceful coexistence between nations?

Answers

1. Buddhism
2. Xuanzang
3. Panchsheel
4. Hindi-Chini Bhai-Bhai
5. Tibet
6. LAC
7. Sino-Indian War
8. Rajiv Gandhi
9. Aksai Chin
10. McMahon Line
11. Deng Xiaoping
12. Himalayas

13. Dalai Lama
14. Border Peace and Tranquillity Agreement (BPTA)
15. Panchsheel

Assignments

1. Discuss the historical evolution of India–China relations from civilisational contact to modern strategic rivalry.
2. Examine the causes and consequences of the 1962 Sino-Indian War.
3. Analyse the impact of the Tibet factor on bilateral relations.
4. Evaluate the effectiveness of border management agreements in maintaining peace.
5. Critically assess India's decision not to join the Belt and Road Initiative.
6. Prepare a comparative map highlighting the Western, Eastern, and Middle sectors of the India–China border dispute.
7. Create a timeline chart (1949–2024) marking major milestones in India–China relations.
8. Collect recent trade data and prepare a graph showing India's trade deficit with China over the last decade.
9. Write a short policy brief recommending measures to stabilise India–China relations.
10. Compare India–China relations with India–Russia relations in terms of trust, defence cooperation, and economic engagement.

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India and Neighbouring Countries



UNIT

India's Engagement with South Asia

Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ explain the evolution, objectives, and components of India's Neighbourhood First policy.
- ◆ analyse the geopolitical structure of South Asia and India's central position within it.
- ◆ evaluate India's bilateral relations with neighbouring countries in political, economic, and security dimensions.
- ◆ assess the impact of China's growing presence on India's regional engagement.
- ◆ critically examine regional cooperation mechanisms such as SAARC and sub-regional initiatives like BBIN.

Prerequisites

Understanding India's relations with its neighbouring countries requires awareness of the geographical, historical, and political factors that shape regional interactions in South Asia. The learners should have a foundational understanding of India's foreign policy since independence, including the principles of non-alignment, strategic autonomy, and regional diplomacy. Familiarity with the historical context of Partition (1947), the creation of Bangladesh (1971), and major India–Pakistan conflicts will help situate contemporary regional challenges. Basic awareness of international relations concepts, such as the balance of power, regionalism, and bilateral diplomacy, will also support comprehension of India's engagement with South Asia. This conceptual grounding enables learners to appreciate how geography, history, and domestic politics influence India's neighbourhood policy.

Keywords

Neighbourhood First Policy, Regional Geopolitics, SAARC, Sub-regionalism (BBIN), Strategic Competition, Water Diplomacy, Connectivity Initiatives, Humanitarian Assistance

Discussion

3.1.1. Neighbourhood First Policy

India's engagement with South Asia has evolved over decades, shaped by history, geography, and shared cultures. In recent years, this engagement has been articulated through the "Neighbourhood First" policy. The idea is simple in expression but complex in practice: India gives priority to its immediate neighbours in foreign policy, development cooperation, and security partnerships. The policy recognises that peace and prosperity in India are closely linked to stability in South Asia. Borders in this region are not merely lines on maps; they are living spaces where families, markets, rivers, and memories flow across boundaries.

The policy gained renewed emphasis after 2014, when leaders of South Asian countries were invited to the swearing-in ceremony of the Indian Prime Minister. This symbolic gesture signalled that India sought cooperative rather than distant relations with its neighbours. The policy reflects both strategic and developmental goals. It aims to deepen connectivity, expand trade, enhance security cooperation, and provide development assistance. At the same time, it responds to changing regional dynamics, especially the growing presence of China in South Asia.

The Neighbourhood First policy is built on several pillars. One pillar is the development

partnership. India has extended lines of credit, grants, and technical support for infrastructure projects, education, health, and digital connectivity in neighbouring countries. Another pillar is people-to-people contact, which includes cultural exchanges, scholarships, and easier travel arrangements. A third pillar is security cooperation, covering counterterrorism, maritime security, and intelligence sharing. These dimensions together reflect the multi-layered nature of India's neighbourhood policy.

However, the policy faces challenges. Historical mistrust, political instability in neighbouring countries, domestic opposition within India, and differing expectations often complicate relations. Few scholars question whether India's approach has always been consistent or clearly defined. Some neighbours perceive India as a dominant power that may interfere in their internal affairs. Therefore, India's neighbourhood policy must constantly balance influence with sensitivity, and leadership with respect for sovereignty.

In essence, Neighbourhood First is not a fixed doctrine but a continuing process. It reflects India's attempt to transform South Asia from a region marked by suspicion into one shaped by cooperation. The success of this policy depends not only on diplomatic statements but also on sustained trust-building and inclusive regional growth.



Figure: Asia Map: Sub-regions

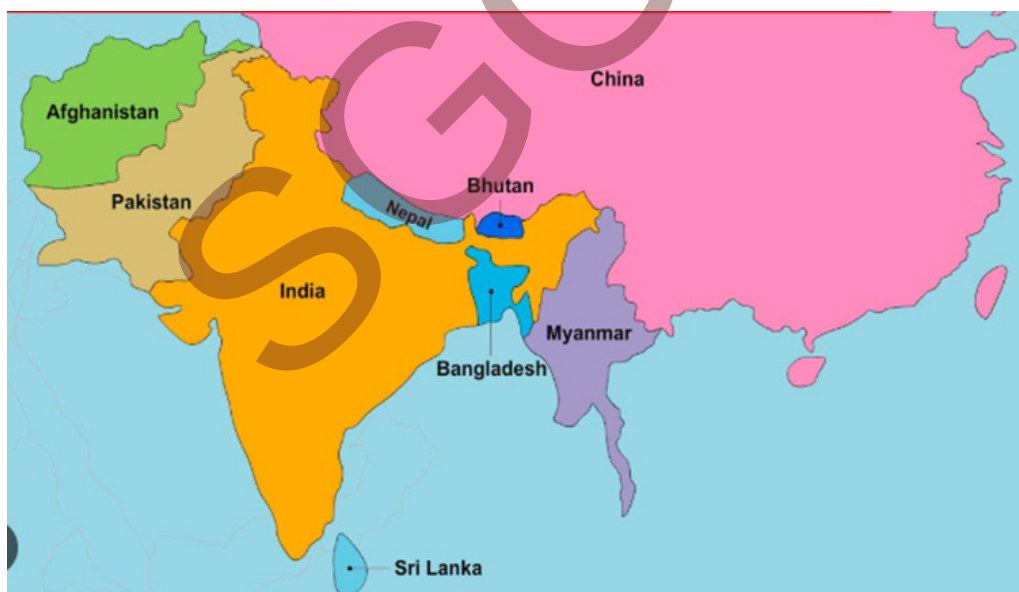


Figure: India and its neighbouring countries

3.1.2. Regional Geopolitics

South Asia is one of the most densely populated and politically complex regions in the world. It includes India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, and Afghanistan. The region is marked by shared colonial histories, contested borders, religious diversity, and economic inequalities. Geography plays a decisive role in shaping regional geopolitics. The Himalayan Mountains, the Indo-Gangetic plains, and the Indian Ocean create both natural barriers and strategic opportunities.

India occupies a central position in South Asia, sharing land borders with most of its neighbours and maritime boundaries with others. This geographical centrality confers both advantages and responsibilities on India. India's size and economic strength make it the natural pivot of the region. At the same time, this asymmetry creates anxieties among smaller states, which fear excessive dependence on India. Therefore, regional geopolitics in South Asia is shaped by both cooperation and competition.

An important dimension of regional geopolitics is the involvement of external powers. China has expanded its economic and strategic presence in South Asia through infrastructure projects, loans, and investments. The Belt and Road Initiative has led to projects in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and the Maldives. Analysts argue that China's growing role has changed the regional balance. India now operates in a more competitive environment where strategic influence must be constantly negotiated.

Another dimension is internal political change within South Asian countries. Political transitions, constitutional reforms, and domestic conflicts often affect bilateral relations with India. For example, changes in government in Nepal or Sri Lanka have

sometimes led to shifts in foreign policy orientation. The neighbourhood policy is not shaped only by external factors but also by domestic politics within each country.

Regional geopolitics in South Asia can thus be understood as a layered structure. At one level, there are bilateral relations between India and each of its neighbours. At another level, there are regional institutions such as SAARC. At a third level, global powers such as China and the United States influence the region. India's engagement must navigate all these levels simultaneously, making South Asia a dynamic and often unpredictable geopolitical space.

3.1.3. India–Pakistan Relations

India–Pakistan relations form the most sensitive and enduring challenge in South Asia. Since their independence in 1947, the two countries have fought several wars and experienced repeated crises. The relationship is shaped by partition, territorial disputes, cross-border terrorism, and deep political mistrust. Despite cultural similarities and shared histories, political tensions dominate the relationship.

The core issue between India and Pakistan has been the dispute over Jammu and Kashmir. Wars in 1947–48, 1965, and 1999 were directly linked to this dispute. Periodic ceasefire violations along the Line of Control and allegations of cross-border terrorism have further strained relations. Scholars argue that the relationship has oscillated between dialogue and confrontation, often influenced by domestic politics in both countries.

At the same time, there have been attempts at peace-building. Initiatives such as the Lahore Declaration of 1999 and various confidence-building measures sought to reduce tensions. Trade agreements, people-to-people exchanges, and cultural contacts have



in recent years.

India–Pakistan relations significantly influence the broader stability of South Asia. Persistent hostility within SAARC impedes regional cooperation and limits economic integration. Therefore, improving bilateral ties is essential to the region’s overall progress. Yet, given the historical baggage and ongoing security concerns, achieving lasting reconciliation remains a complex and long-term challenge.



3.1.4. Kashmir Issue

has involved political unrest, insurgency, and human rights concerns. The insurgency that began in the late 1980s significantly altered the security environment in Kashmir. Cross-border infiltration and militancy intensified tensions and militarisation in the area.

In August 2019, the Government of India revoked the special constitutional status of Jammu and Kashmir under Article 370 and reorganised the state into two Union Territories. The government argued that this move would promote integration, development, and better governance. Critics, however, raised concerns about political representation, federal principles, and civil



liberties. The decision also prompted diplomatic reactions from Pakistan and discussions at international forums.

The Kashmir issue is deeply emotional for all stakeholders. It involves questions of identity, sovereignty, democracy, and security. The counter-insurgency policies and regional engagement strategies are closely connected in this context. Sustainable peace requires not only security measures but also political

dialogue, economic development, and protection of rights. Ultimately, the Kashmir issue illustrates how local conflicts can shape regional geopolitics. It affects India–Pakistan relations, influences global perceptions, and impacts the lives of millions of people. Any durable solution must address both security concerns and the aspirations of the region’s people.



Figure: The territorial and political dimensions of Kashmir

3.1.5. India–Bangladesh Relations

India–Bangladesh relations are among the more positive stories in South Asia. India played a crucial role in supporting Bangladesh’s independence in 1971. Since then, relations have alternated between tension and cooperation. In recent years, the relationship has significantly improved, marked by strong political engagement and growing economic ties.

One major area of cooperation is connectivity. India and Bangladesh have worked together to restore rail links, improve road connectivity, and enhance inland waterways. These initiatives not only strengthen bilateral trade but also connect India’s north-eastern states to the rest of the country via Bangladesh. Such sub-regional

cooperation is an emerging feature of South Asian regionalism.

Another important development is the resolution of the Land Boundary Agreement in 2015. This agreement settled long-standing border disputes and exchanged enclaves between the two countries. It demonstrated that complex issues can be resolved through negotiation and mutual trust. Water sharing remains an ongoing concern, especially regarding the Teesta River, but dialogue continues.

Security cooperation between India and Bangladesh has also deepened. Bangladesh has acted against insurgent groups operating from its territory, thereby improving trust between the two countries. Economic relations have expanded, with Bangladesh becoming one of India’s major trading

partners in South Asia. India has extended lines of credit for infrastructure and energy projects.

Despite these positive trends, challenges remain. Issues related to migration, border management, and domestic political debates occasionally create tensions. However, overall, India–Bangladesh relations illustrate how sustained engagement, development cooperation, and political dialogue can transform bilateral ties in South Asia.

Recent Political Developments (2024–2025)

Recent political events in Bangladesh have introduced new uncertainty into bilateral relations. Following widespread domestic protests and political mobilisation, Sheikh Hasina was removed from office amid significant political upheaval. The

developments reflected rising internal dissatisfaction related to governance, electoral credibility, and economic pressures. Subsequent political realignments and elections held this year (2026) have reshaped Bangladesh’s internal political landscape.

For India, these developments carry both risk and opportunity. Historically, India has enjoyed relatively stable ties with governments led by Sheikh Hasina’s Awami League. A political transition raises questions about the continuity of security cooperation, border management, and connectivity projects. However, India’s official position has emphasised respect for Bangladesh’s democratic processes and sovereignty, while signalling willingness to work with whichever government is in power.



3.1.6. India–Nepal Relations

India and Nepal share one of the most unique relationships in South Asia. The two countries are connected by an open border, deep cultural ties, shared religious traditions, and extensive people-to-people movement. Citizens of both countries can travel and work across the border without

visas. Families, markets, and pilgrimage routes cross the boundary in ways that make it less a dividing line and more a living bridge. This closeness gives the relationship warmth, but it also makes disagreements more sensitive.

The 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship laid the foundation for modern bilateral ties.

It provided for mutual security cooperation and economic engagement. Over time, however, sections of Nepali society began to view the treaty as unequal, arguing that it reflected an imbalance of power. Political changes in Nepal, including the end of the monarchy and the adoption of a new constitution in 2015, reshaped internal debates about national identity and sovereignty. As some scholars note, domestic politics in Nepal often influence its foreign policy stance toward India.

Economic cooperation remains a central pillar of the relationship. India is Nepal's largest trade partner and a major source of investment. Hydropower cooperation holds significant potential, as Nepal's rivers can generate electricity for export

to India. Infrastructure projects, cross-border petroleum pipelines, and railway links have strengthened connectivity. At the same time, disruptions such as the 2015 border blockade created resentment in Nepal, showing how quickly trust can erode when political tensions rise.

China's growing engagement with Nepal has added a new dimension to the relationship. China's infrastructure projects and strategic outreach provide Nepal with alternative options. This has encouraged Nepal to pursue a more balanced foreign policy. For India, the challenge lies in maintaining close ties without appearing intrusive.



India–Nepal relations, therefore, combine intimacy and complexity. The open border is both a symbol of trust and a source of security concerns. Sustained dialogue, respect for Nepal's sovereignty, and mutually beneficial economic projects remain essential for a stable partnership.

3.1.7. India–Sri Lanka Relations

India and Sri Lanka are separated by a narrow stretch of sea, yet they are deeply connected through history, culture, and trade.

Ancient maritime routes linked Tamil Nadu with Sri Lanka long before modern states were formed. Buddhism, trade networks, and migration have shaped centuries of interaction. In modern times, however, political and ethnic issues have complicated the relationship.

The Sri Lankan civil war between the government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) significantly influenced India–Sri Lanka relations. India intervened



in 1987 through the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord and deployed the Indian Peace Keeping Force. The mission faced difficulties and was eventually withdrawn. The conflict also affected domestic politics in India, especially in Tamil Nadu. India's neighbourhood policy toward Sri Lanka has often been shaped by both strategic and humanitarian considerations.

In recent years, economic and strategic cooperation has gained prominence. India has supported infrastructure projects, housing schemes, and energy cooperation in Sri Lanka. During Sri Lanka's severe economic crisis in 2022, India extended substantial financial assistance, credit lines, and humanitarian aid. This assistance strengthened India's image as a reliable partner in times of crisis.

At the same time, China's involvement in Sri Lanka, particularly in port development projects such as Hambantota, has strategic implications. This highlights how the presence of both India and China creates a competitive environment in the Indian Ocean region. Sri Lanka, for its part, seeks to balance relations with both powers.

India–Sri Lanka relations demonstrate how geography, domestic politics, and global competition intersect. Stability in Sri Lanka is vital for India's maritime security and regional influence. The relationship requires constant engagement, sensitivity to ethnic concerns, and strategic awareness of broader regional dynamics.



3.1.8. India–Bhutan Relations

India–Bhutan relations are often described as a model of friendly cooperation in South Asia. The two countries share a long border and maintain close diplomatic and economic ties. Bhutan's foreign and security policies have historically been aligned with India, though Bhutan has steadily expanded its independent diplomatic outreach.

Hydropower cooperation forms the backbone of bilateral relations. India has supported the development of hydropower projects in Bhutan, which export electricity to India. This cooperation has been economically beneficial for Bhutan, contributing significantly to its revenue. For India, it provides clean energy and strengthens strategic ties. Such development partnerships illustrate the developmental dimension of neighbourhood policy.

Security cooperation is another key area. Bhutan has worked closely with India to address insurgent groups that previously operated from its territory. Mutual trust and coordination have contributed to stability along the border. Unlike some other relationships in the region, India–Bhutan ties have largely avoided major public disputes.

However, Bhutan also seeks to maintain balanced relations with other countries, including China. Border negotiations between Bhutan and China are closely watched by

India because of their strategic implications, especially in the Doklam region. The 2017 standoff between India and China near the Bhutan border demonstrated how closely Bhutan's security is linked to India's concerns.

Overall, India–Bhutan relations reflect sustained trust, shared strategic interests, and mutually beneficial economic cooperation. It is often cited as one of the most stable partnerships in South Asia.



3.1.9. India–Maldives Relations

The Maldives, a small island nation in the Indian Ocean, holds strategic importance far beyond its size. Located along major sea lanes, it occupies a key position in maritime security calculations. India has historically maintained close ties with the Maldives and has responded quickly during crises. In 1988, India intervened to prevent a coup attempt, demonstrating its readiness to ensure regional stability.

In recent years, India–Maldives relations have fluctuated with domestic political changes in the Maldives. Some governments have leaned closer to China, while others have reaffirmed strong ties with India.

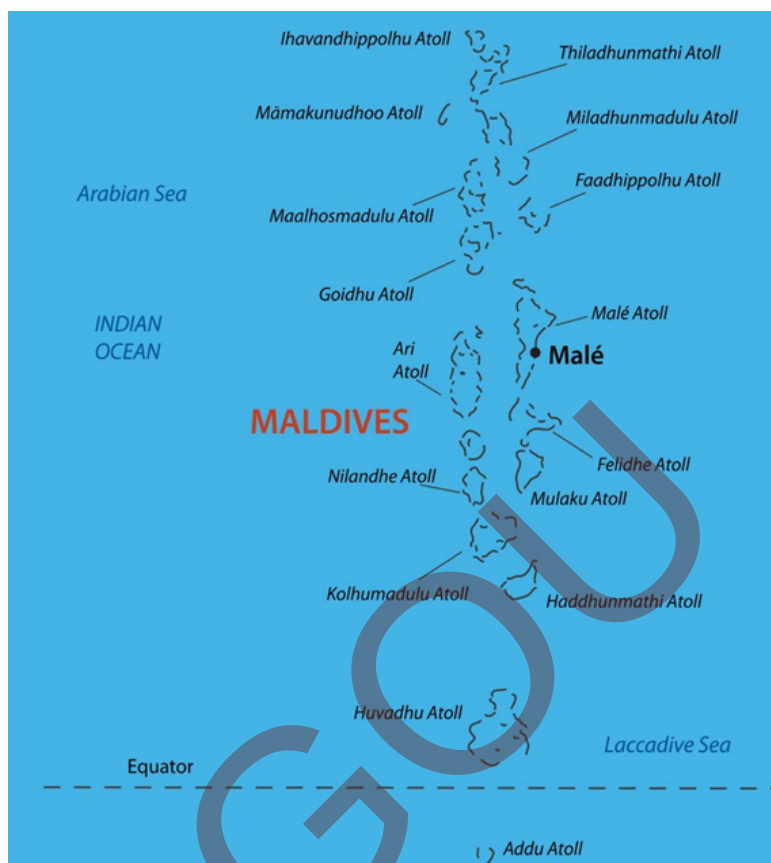
Infrastructure projects, defence cooperation, and development assistance have been central to engagement. India has provided patrol vessels, training, and coastal radar systems to strengthen maritime security.

The growing Chinese presence in the Maldives, including infrastructure investments, has added a competitive element to the relationship. India's Neighbourhood First policy must respond carefully to China's Belt and Road Initiative projects in South Asia. The Maldives often seeks to balance relations between India and China to maximise economic benefits.

India has also provided humanitarian assistance to the Maldives, including water

during a drinking water crisis and medical supplies during the COVID-19 pandemic. Such actions reinforce India's image as a first responder in the region. The relationship illustrates how even small states can play

significant strategic roles. Maritime security, economic development, and geopolitical competition converge in India–Maldives relations.



3.1.10. India–Afghanistan Relations

India's engagement with Afghanistan has been guided by developmental assistance, capacity building, and support for democratic institutions. Although Afghanistan does not share a direct land border with India due to Pakistan's geography, it remains strategically important for regional stability.

India has invested in infrastructure projects such as the Afghan Parliament building, road construction, and power transmission lines. It has provided scholarships, training programmes, and medical assistance. These initiatives reflect the normative dimension of India's international engagement, combining strategic interest with development cooperation.

Security concerns also shape the relationship. Afghanistan has long faced instability due to conflict and insurgency. India has supported efforts toward peace and stability, while remaining cautious about direct military involvement. Changes in Afghanistan's political landscape, especially after the Taliban's return to power in 2021, have created new uncertainties. India has maintained humanitarian assistance while reassessing its diplomatic engagement.

Afghanistan is also significant in the context of regional connectivity. Projects such as the Chabahar Port in Iran aim to provide India with access to Afghanistan and Central Asia, bypassing Pakistan. Such initiatives demonstrate the link between regional geopolitics and economic strategy. India–Afghanistan relations reflect a

long-term commitment to a development partnership, even amid difficult political circumstances. Stability in Afghanistan is

essential not only for that country but also for broader regional security in South Asia.



3.1.11. Water Sharing Agreements

Rivers in South Asia flow across borders, connecting countries through shared water resources. At the same time, they can become sources of tension. India shares major river systems with Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Bhutan. Effective water-sharing agreements are therefore essential for regional stability.

The Indus Waters Treaty of 1960 between India and Pakistan is often cited as a successful example of sustained cooperation, even during periods of conflict. The treaty has survived wars and diplomatic crises, demonstrating that practical arrangements can endure despite political hostility. Similarly, agreements with Bangladesh and Nepal regulate the sharing of river waters and hydropower cooperation. However, water disputes remain sensitive. The Teesta River issue between India and Bangladesh has not yet been fully resolved. Domestic political

considerations within Indian states, especially West Bengal, influence negotiations. The federal dynamics within India are also shaping neighbourhood policy outcomes.

Climate change adds another layer of complexity. Changing rainfall patterns, glacial melting, and increased demand for water intensify competition over resources. Cooperative management, data sharing, and joint infrastructure development are necessary to prevent disputes from escalating. Water-sharing arrangements show that environmental issues and foreign policy are deeply interconnected. Sustainable river management can build trust and interdependence, while unresolved disputes can strain otherwise friendly relations.

3.1.12. Connectivity Initiatives

Connectivity has become a central theme in India's engagement with South Asia. Roads, railways, ports, energy grids, and digital networks are not merely physical structures; they are instruments of integration. Improved

connectivity reduces costs, enhances trade, and strengthens social ties.

India has promoted several connectivity projects, including cross-border rail links with Bangladesh, road corridors with Nepal and Bhutan, and maritime cooperation with Sri Lanka and the Maldives. Sub-regional groupings such as the Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal (BBIN) initiative aim to facilitate the movement of goods and vehicles. This is a shift toward sub-regionalism within South Asia, where smaller groups of countries move forward even if wider regional cooperation faces obstacles.

Connectivity also has strategic implications. Infrastructure projects can shape patterns of influence. China's Belt and Road Initiative has expanded connectivity across South Asia, prompting India to strengthen its own initiatives. India's response to China's rise involves hedging strategies and diversified partnerships. Digital connectivity is an emerging dimension. India has extended digital payment systems, satellite cooperation, and technological training to neighbouring countries. Such initiatives promote economic integration and capacity building.

Connectivity initiatives, therefore, represent both economic opportunity and geopolitical strategy. By building roads, ports, and digital bridges, India seeks to weave a more integrated South Asia. The effectiveness of these efforts depends on transparency, financial sustainability, and the trust of partner countries.

3.1.13. Security Challenges

Security concerns form a constant undercurrent in India's engagement with South Asia. The region has experienced interstate wars, civil conflicts, insurgencies, terrorism, and political instability. These challenges do not remain confined within national borders. Porous boundaries, ethnic linkages, and transnational networks often

allow instability in one country to spill into another. As a result, India's neighbourhood policy cannot be separated from security considerations.

Cross-border terrorism remains one of the most serious challenges, particularly in relation to Pakistan. Militant groups operating across borders have affected not only bilateral relations but also regional trust. Internal conflicts in neighbouring countries have also created complications. The neighbouring states can become directly or indirectly involved in each other's internal conflicts. India has been cautious in recent decades, avoiding overt intervention while safeguarding its strategic interests.

Maritime security is another growing concern. The Indian Ocean is a vital trade route, and piracy, trafficking, and illegal fishing create risks. Smaller island nations such as the Maldives and Sri Lanka depend on maritime stability, and India has provided patrol vessels, training, and surveillance support. The aim is to create a secure maritime neighbourhood where economic activity can flourish without disruption.

Cybersecurity and radicalisation add newer dimensions to the security landscape. Social media and digital networks can spread extremist ideologies across borders. Intelligence sharing and coordinated law enforcement have therefore become important components of regional cooperation.

Security challenges in South Asia are layered and interconnected. Addressing them requires a mix of deterrence, diplomacy, development, and regional cooperation. Stability cannot be achieved solely through military measures; it also depends on political dialogue and economic opportunity.

3.1.14. China's Presence in South Asia

China's expanding presence in South Asia has significantly altered the regional

environment. Through large-scale infrastructure investments, trade partnerships, and diplomatic outreach, China has strengthened its engagement with countries such as Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and the Maldives. The Belt and Road Initiative has been the main framework for many of these projects.

In Pakistan, the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor has become a flagship initiative, linking infrastructure, energy, and port development. In Sri Lanka and the Maldives, Chinese-funded projects have reshaped transport and port facilities. These developments have strategic implications for India, especially in the Indian Ocean region. Ports developed under commercial frameworks may also carry geopolitical significance.

India views China's presence through a mixed lens of competition and caution. While India does not oppose development in neighbouring countries, it is concerned about debt sustainability, strategic access, and military implications. India's Neighbourhood First policy increasingly responds to what is often described as the "China factor" in South Asia. At the same time, smaller South Asian countries use China's presence to diversify their foreign partnerships. They often seek to balance India and China, leveraging competition to secure economic benefits. This balancing strategy reflects their desire for autonomy and strategic flexibility.

China's growing engagement has therefore added complexity to India's regional diplomacy. South Asia is no longer a region defined only by bilateral relations with India; it has become a theatre of broader geopolitical competition. India's challenge lies in offering credible partnerships that are transparent, sustainable, and responsive to local needs.

3.1.15. Regional Trade

Regional trade in South Asia remains below its potential. Despite geographic

proximity and shared cultural ties, intra-regional trade is limited compared to other regions of the world. Tariff barriers, non-tariff restrictions, poor connectivity, and political tensions have constrained economic integration.

India, as the largest economy in the region, plays a central role in shaping trade patterns. It has extended trade concessions and preferential access to several neighbouring countries. Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal benefit from duty-free or reduced-duty access to Indian markets. However, trade imbalances often create political sensitivities, with smaller countries concerned about being overwhelmed by Indian goods.

Economic cooperation has gradually shifted toward sub-regional initiatives when broader regional frameworks face difficulties. Sub-regionalism is a practical approach in South Asia, in which smaller groups of countries advance trade and transport agreements. For example, connectivity projects under the BBIN framework aim to reduce logistical barriers and promote commerce. Some scholars argue that economic interdependence can help build peace. Increased trade creates mutual benefits and shared stakes in stability.

However, political mistrust can still overshadow economic logic, especially in the case of India and Pakistan. Regional trade thus reflects both promise and limitation. While economic integration could transform South Asia into a dynamic growth zone, achieving this vision requires political will, infrastructure development, and regulatory harmonisation.

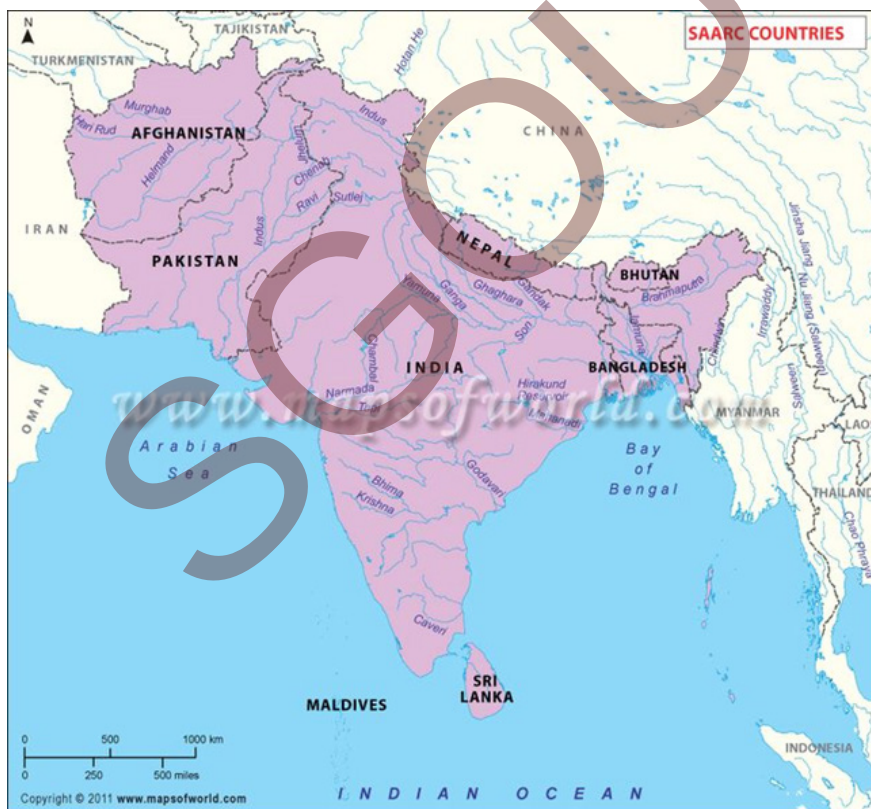
3.1.16. SAARC Dynamics

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), established in 1985, promotes regional cooperation among South Asian countries. Its goals include economic integration, social development,



view SAARC as a space where they can collectively engage with India on equal footing.

India's approach to SAARC has been pragmatic. While continuing to support the organisation, India has also promoted alternative platforms such as BIMSTEC, which includes countries from both South and Southeast Asia. This shift reflects frustration with SAARC's limited progress. SAARC dynamics reveal the challenges of regionalism in a politically divided environment. The organisation's future depends largely on improved India–Pakistan relations. Without reduced bilateral tensions, regional institutions struggle to fulfil their potential.



aspects of regional cooperation. India has often positioned itself as a first responder in the region. India has provided rapid assistance during earthquakes in Nepal, floods in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, and water crises in the Maldives. During the COVID-19 pandemic, India supplied vaccines and

19 pandemic, India supplied vaccines and

medical aid to several neighbouring countries. Singh et al. (2023) describe this vaccine diplomacy as both humanitarian and strategic, strengthening India's regional image.

Humanitarian assistance builds goodwill and trust. It demonstrates solidarity during times of crisis and reinforces the idea of shared destiny in South Asia. Unlike contentious political issues, disaster relief often unites countries around common humanitarian values. At the same time, humanitarian engagement also carries diplomatic significance. Prompt assistance can strengthen bilateral ties and counterbalance the influence of other powers. However, aid must be delivered transparently and respectfully to avoid perceptions of political leverage. Humanitarian cooperation thus represents a compassionate and strategic dimension of India's neighbourhood engagement. It highlights how soft power and solidarity contribute to regional stability.

3.1.18. Migration Issues

Migration is a longstanding feature of South Asian society. Economic opportunities, family connections, environmental pressures, and political conflicts drive people across borders. India shares open or semi-open borders with Nepal and Bhutan, and it has experienced migration flows from

Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Afghanistan. Migration creates both opportunities and challenges. On the one hand, migrant workers contribute to local economies and cultural diversity. Remittances and labour mobility strengthen economic ties between countries. On the other hand, irregular migration can generate political tensions and domestic debates.

The issue of undocumented migration from Bangladesh has been politically sensitive within India. It intersects with questions of citizenship, identity, and resource allocation. Similarly, Tamil refugees from Sri Lanka during the civil war shaped domestic politics in Tamil Nadu. These examples illustrate how migration connects foreign policy with internal governance.

Managing migration requires cooperative frameworks, data sharing, and humane policies. Strict security measures alone cannot address the social and economic factors driving migration. Regional dialogue on labour mobility, border management, and refugee protection remains essential. Migration issues show that borders in South Asia are not rigid walls but dynamic spaces of movement. Effective management can transform migration from a source of tension into a channel of cooperation.

Recap

- ♦ India's Neighbourhood First policy prioritises immediate neighbours in foreign policy.
- ♦ South Asia is marked by asymmetry, with India as the dominant regional power.
- ♦ India–Pakistan relations remain the most sensitive and conflict-prone axis.
- ♦ The Kashmir issue continues to shape regional stability and bilateral tensions.

- ◆ India–Bangladesh relations improved significantly through connectivity and the 2015 Land Boundary Agreement.
- ◆ Political developments in Bangladesh (2024–2026) may influence future bilateral dynamics.
- ◆ India–Nepal relations are shaped by an open border and hydropower cooperation.
- ◆ India–Sri Lanka relations combine maritime security concerns with economic cooperation.
- ◆ India–Bhutan ties are often viewed as a model partnership based on trust and hydropower cooperation.
- ◆ The Maldives occupies strategic importance in the Indian Ocean region.
- ◆ India’s engagement with Afghanistan focuses on development and regional connectivity.
- ◆ Water-sharing agreements, such as the Indus Waters Treaty, demonstrate durable cooperation.
- ◆ Connectivity initiatives like BBIN reflect practical regional integration efforts.
- ◆ China’s growing presence introduces strategic competition in South Asia.
- ◆ SAARC faces institutional paralysis due to India–Pakistan tensions.
- ◆ Humanitarian assistance strengthens India’s soft power.
- ◆ Migration and border management remain politically sensitive issues.

Objective Questions

1. What policy guides India’s priority engagement with neighbouring countries?
2. Which regional organisation promotes cooperation in South Asia?
3. Which country shares the longest border dispute with India in South Asia?
4. Which agreement resolved India–Bangladesh enclave disputes in 2015?
5. Which river water dispute exists between India and Bangladesh?
6. Which country shares an open border with India?
7. Which insurgent organisation fought the Sri Lankan government during

the civil war?

8. Which neighbouring country is known for hydropower cooperation with India?
9. Which neighbouring island country received Indian assistance during the 2022 crisis?
10. Which country in South Asia is often described as India's closest strategic partner?
11. Which external power has increased its presence in South Asia through BRI projects?
12. Which regional connectivity initiative links Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Nepal?
13. Which policy emphasises development cooperation with neighbouring countries?
14. Which country in South Asia experienced political change after Sheikh Hasina's removal?
15. Which regional issue remains central to India–Pakistan relations?

Answers

1. Neighbourhood First
2. SAARC
3. Pakistan
4. Land Boundary Agreement
5. Teesta
6. Nepal
7. LTTE
8. Bhutan
9. Sri Lanka
10. Bhutan
11. China



12. BBIN
13. Neighbourhood First
14. Bangladesh
15. Kashmir

Assignments

1. Critically examine the objectives and limitations of India's Neighbourhood First policy.
2. Discuss how China's presence affects India's strategic engagement in South Asia.
3. Analyse India–Bangladesh relations as a model of successful regional diplomacy.
4. Evaluate the role of SAARC in promoting regional integration.
5. Discuss the impact of domestic politics on India's neighbourhood policy.
6. Compare India's relations with Nepal and Sri Lanka in terms of security and economic cooperation.
7. Assess the differences between SAARC and BBIN as regional cooperation frameworks.
8. Prepare a policy brief (1000 words) recommending strategies for improving India–Bangladesh water-sharing negotiations.
9. Create a geopolitical map illustrating India's connectivity projects in South Asia and explain their strategic significance.
10. Conduct a case study analysis of India's humanitarian assistance in any one South Asian country and evaluate its diplomatic impact.

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SGOU



UNIT

India's Relations with Southeast Asia and the Asia-Pacific

Learning Outcomes

After studying this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ Explain the evolution of India's Look East Policy into the Act East Policy and analyse its objectives.
- ◆ Examine the strategic significance of the Indo-Pacific in India's foreign policy.
- ◆ Evaluate India–ASEAN relations in economic, security, and institutional dimensions.
- ◆ Assess India's defence, maritime, and connectivity initiatives in Southeast Asia.
- ◆ Critically analyse emerging challenges and prospects of India's Indo-Pacific strategy.

Prerequisites

The study of regional cooperation in Southeast Asia requires familiarity with the concept of regionalism, the objectives of regional organisations, and the political and economic challenges that influence cooperation among neighbouring states. Imagine tracing India's journey from the closing years of the Cold War to the dynamic geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific. Begin with the dramatic collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, a moment that reshaped global power structures and compelled India to rethink its foreign policy priorities. Alongside this transformation came India's economic reforms, which opened its markets and encouraged deeper engagement with the wider world. Understanding this shift is essential to grasping why Southeast Asia emerged as a region of renewed importance in India's external relations.

As you move forward, recall the formation and evolution of ASEAN, a regional organisation built on cooperation, consensus, and stability. Familiarity with regional trade agreements, strategic partnerships, and multilateral institutions will help illuminate the institutional framework within which India operates. Knowledge of key maritime routes such as the Strait of Malacca and awareness of how global trade flows through the Indian and Pacific Oceans will clarify why maritime security occupies a central place in contemporary strategy.

You should also be aware of the growing influence of major powers such as China, Japan, and the United States in Asia. Their interactions, competition, and cooperation shape the strategic environment in which India acts. With this background, you will be better prepared to understand how India's Look East Policy evolved into the Act East Policy, and how the Indo-Pacific concept reflects a broader reimagining of Asia's political and economic landscape. This foundation will enable you to appreciate not only policy decisions but also the deeper strategic thinking that connects India to Southeast Asia and beyond.

Keywords

Act East Policy, Indo-Pacific, ASEAN Centrality, Maritime Security, Strategic Partnership, Supply Chain Resilience, Blue Economy, Quad Cooperation

Discussion

3.2.1. Look East to Act East Policy

India's engagement with Southeast Asia began to take a clear shape in the early 1990s with the launch of the Look East Policy. This policy was introduced at a time when India was reforming its economy and opening itself to global markets. The end of the Cold War had changed world politics, and India realised that Southeast Asia was emerging as one of the most dynamic economic regions. The Look East Policy aimed to build stronger economic and political ties with countries in the region, especially ASEAN members.

It was not only about trade but also about reconnecting with a region with deep historical and cultural links to India. Scholars describe this phase as India's rediscovery of Southeast Asia after decades of limited engagement.

During its early years, the Look East Policy focused mainly on economic cooperation. India became a sectoral dialogue partner of ASEAN in 1992 and a full dialogue partner in 1996. Trade, investment, and business cooperation became key priorities. However, as India's confidence grew and regional challenges increased, the policy

gradually expanded to include strategic and security cooperation. India began to see itself not only as a South Asian power but also as an emerging Asia-Pacific player. This shift reflected India's desire to play a larger regional role and to balance China's growing influence.

In 2014, the policy was renamed the Act East Policy, signalling a move from cautious engagement to proactive action. The new approach emphasised implementation, connectivity projects, defence cooperation, and maritime security. This transition represented both continuity and change. The goals remained similar, but the pace and scope expanded significantly. Act East also aligned with India's growing interest in the Indo-Pacific concept, which views the Indian and Pacific Oceans as a single strategic space.

The Act East Policy also reflects India's identity transformation. India moved from being seen mainly as a subcontinental power to a broader Asia-Pacific actor. This identity shift is important because foreign policy is not only about interests but also about how a country sees itself. By deepening ties with Southeast Asia, India signalled that its future is closely linked with the wider Asian region.

At its core, the Act East Policy rests on three pillars: economic integration, strategic cooperation, and cultural connection. It recognises that development in India's north-eastern states depends on stronger links with Southeast Asia. It also acknowledges that regional peace and stability are essential for economic growth. Thus, the policy connects domestic development with foreign policy goals, creating a comprehensive framework for engagement.

Table 1: Evolution from Look East to Act East

Phase	Main Focus	Key Features
1991–2000	Economic outreach	Trade, ASEAN partnership, dialogue mechanisms
2000–2014	Strategic expansion	Defence ties, maritime cooperation, and regional forums
2014–present	Proactive engagement	Connectivity projects, Indo-Pacific vision, security cooperation

3.2.2. Strategic Importance of the Indo-Pacific

The term 'Indo-Pacific' has become central to India's foreign policy thinking. It refers to a broad region stretching from the eastern coast of Africa to the western shores of the Americas. This idea replaces the earlier concept of the Asia-Pacific, which

focused mainly on East Asia and the Pacific Ocean. The Indo-Pacific reflects the growing importance of the Indian Ocean in global trade and security. For India, this concept is particularly important because it places India at the centre of a vast maritime region.

The Indo-Pacific is strategically significant for several reasons. First, it contains some of

the world's busiest sea routes. A large share of global trade, including energy supplies, passes through these waters. The Strait of Malacca, for example, is a key maritime chokepoint connecting the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Ensuring free and open sea lanes is therefore essential for economic stability. India's naval modernisation is closely linked to its desire to protect these sea routes.

Second, the Indo-Pacific has become an area of intense competition among major powers. The rise of China and its growing naval presence have changed regional security dynamics. Many countries in Southeast Asia seek a balanced regional order where no single power dominates. India's role is often seen as contributing to this balance. However, India emphasises inclusiveness rather than confrontation, supporting a rules-based order that respects sovereignty and international law.

Third, the Indo-Pacific is important for economic partnerships and supply chains. The region includes some of the world's fastest-growing economies. India's engagement with ASEAN, Japan, and Australia is part of a broader effort to integrate into regional production networks. The economics and security are closely connected in this region. Stable security conditions support trade, while economic interdependence can reduce conflict.

For India, the Indo-Pacific vision is guided by principles such as openness, transparency, and respect for international law, especially the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). India's approach is not aimed at forming exclusive alliances but at building partnerships. This is giving solidarity a chance, where cooperation among like-minded countries strengthens regional stability without creating rigid blocs. Thus, the Indo-Pacific framework provides a larger strategic canvas for India's relations with Southeast Asia and beyond. It connects

India's maritime interests, economic goals, and security concerns into a single coherent vision.

3.2.3. India–ASEAN Dialogue Partnership

India's relationship with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is at the heart of its engagement with Southeast Asia. ASEAN, formed in 1967, plays a central role in shaping regional cooperation. It is the "regional conductor" because it brings together major powers through dialogue platforms such as the ASEAN Regional Forum and the East Asia Summit. For India, partnership with ASEAN is both practical and symbolic.

India became a sectoral dialogue partner of ASEAN in 1992 and a full dialogue partner in 1996. In 2002, relations were upgraded to a summit level, and in 2012, the partnership became a strategic partnership. This gradual elevation reflects growing mutual trust and shared interests. The partnership covers trade, connectivity, counterterrorism, maritime security, education, and culture.

ASEAN values autonomy and avoids aligning exclusively with any major power. The importance of the "ASEAN Way," which emphasises consensus and non-interference. India has respected these principles, which have helped build confidence. Unlike some other powers, India's engagement is generally seen as non-threatening and cooperative. This perception has strengthened India's acceptance within regional institutions.

Economic ties have grown steadily, although challenges remain. India and ASEAN have signed agreements on trade in goods, services, and investment. While trade has increased significantly, there is still potential for deeper integration. Connectivity between India's north-eastern states and mainland Southeast Asia remains limited,

affecting the full benefits of cooperation.

Security cooperation has also expanded. Joint naval exercises, capacity-building programmes, and counterterrorism initiatives have become regular features of the partnership. After the events of 9/11, cooperation against terrorism became an important area of collaboration. India and ASEAN countries share concerns about piracy, maritime security, and transnational crime. Overall, the India–ASEAN dialogue partnership is a cornerstone of India’s Act East Policy. It reflects a balanced approach that combines economic growth, cultural ties, and strategic cooperation within an inclusive regional framework.

3.2.4. Trade Agreements

Trade agreements have been an important instrument in strengthening India’s relations with Southeast Asia. The most significant agreement is the ASEAN–India Free Trade Agreement (AIFTA) in goods, signed in 2009 and implemented in 2010. Later agreements on services and investment further expanded economic cooperation. These agreements aimed to reduce tariffs, promote investment, and encourage the movement of professionals.

Trade between India and ASEAN has grown substantially over the past two decades. ASEAN has become one of India’s largest trading partners. However, trade imbalances and non-tariff barriers remain challenges. Some Indian industries have expressed concerns about competition from cheaper imports. As a result, India decided not to join the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) in 2019. This decision reflected concerns about protecting domestic industry and reducing trade deficits. Despite these challenges, trade agreements remain central to India’s Act East strategy. Enhancing mutual benefits requires addressing structural issues such as

infrastructure gaps and regulatory barriers. Improved connectivity projects, such as road and port development, can reduce trade costs and increase competitiveness.

Economic cooperation is not limited to trade in goods. Services, digital economy, and start-up collaboration are emerging areas. India’s strength in information technology and pharmaceuticals complements ASEAN’s manufacturing base. This creates opportunities for value chain integration. Economic interdependence can strengthen regional stability by creating shared interests. In summary, trade agreements have laid the foundation for economic partnership, but their full potential depends on deeper reforms, better infrastructure, and stronger private-sector engagement.

3.2.5. Maritime Cooperation

Maritime cooperation forms a central pillar of India’s engagement with Southeast Asia and the Indo-Pacific. The seas connecting India and Southeast Asia are not barriers but bridges of interaction. Historically, traders, monks, and scholars travelled across these waters, spreading culture and commerce. Today, the focus is on security, freedom of navigation, and disaster relief cooperation.

India conducts regular naval exercises with ASEAN countries, including Singapore, Indonesia, Vietnam, and Thailand. These engagements build trust and improve interoperability. They also signal India’s commitment to maintaining regional stability. Maritime cooperation includes joint patrols, training programmes, and information sharing on piracy and illegal fishing. The Indian Navy has increased its presence in the eastern Indian Ocean and the western Pacific. Naval diplomacy has become an important tool in India’s foreign policy. Port visits and humanitarian assistance missions strengthen goodwill and showcase India’s capabilities. During natural disasters, such

as tsunamis and cyclones, India has provided quick assistance to regional countries.

Maritime cooperation also includes participation in regional forums such as the Indian Ocean Rim Association and the East Asia Summit. These platforms promote dialogue on maritime safety, environmental protection, and search-and-rescue operations. Such cooperation reflects India's belief in collective security rather than unilateral action. Thus, maritime engagement connects historical ties with contemporary strategic needs. It reinforces India's image as a responsible stakeholder committed to a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific region.

3.2.6. Defence Engagements

Defence cooperation between India and Southeast Asian countries has expanded steadily over the past two decades. What began as occasional military exchanges has evolved into structured partnerships that include training, joint exercises, capacity building, and strategic dialogue. Scholars note that defence engagement reflects both India's growing capabilities and ASEAN countries' desire for diversified security partnerships. In a region shaped by major power competition, smaller states often prefer multiple partnerships rather than dependence on a single power.

India conducts bilateral and multilateral naval exercises with countries such as Singapore, Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand, and Malaysia. These exercises focus on maritime security, anti-piracy operations, and search-and-rescue coordination. Defence exchanges also include officer training in Indian military institutions, which builds long-term professional relationships. Such engagements create trust and familiarity, which are essential in times of crisis. Rather than forming military blocs, India's approach emphasises partnership and capacity enhancement.

A significant example is India's defence cooperation with Vietnam. This includes naval exchanges, training programmes, and discussions on maritime security. India's engagement with Vietnam is rooted in shared concerns about maritime stability in the South China Sea. Similarly, India's defence ties with Singapore have become highly institutionalised, with regular exercises and agreements on logistics support. Defence cooperation also reflects India's belief in maintaining a stable balance of power in the region. India sees itself as an emerging player in Pacific Asia with responsibilities beyond South Asia. However, India's strategy is careful and calibrated. It seeks to contribute to stability without provoking confrontation. This balanced approach has allowed India to expand defence ties while maintaining ASEAN's trust.

3.2.7. Connectivity Projects

Connectivity lies at the heart of India's Act East Policy. Geography has often limited India's engagement with Southeast Asia, particularly because of the relative isolation of India's northeastern states. Connectivity projects aim to turn this limitation into an opportunity by linking roads, railways, ports, and digital networks across borders. These projects are not merely infrastructure initiatives but instruments of economic and strategic integration.

One of the most important projects is the India–Myanmar–Thailand Trilateral Highway. This road network seeks to connect India's north-eastern region with mainland Southeast Asia. By improving transport routes, the project aims to boost trade, tourism, and people-to-people contact. The physical connectivity reduces transaction costs and strengthens economic integration. In addition to road projects, India has invested in port development and maritime connectivity. The Kaladan Multimodal Transport Project

links India's eastern coast with Myanmar through sea and river routes. Such initiatives enhance regional supply chains and create new commercial corridors. The improved infrastructure can unlock untapped trade potential between India and ASEAN.

Connectivity also includes digital cooperation. As economies become more technology-driven, digital links become as important as highways and ports. India's expertise in information technology provides opportunities for collaboration in e-governance and digital services. These efforts complement physical connectivity, creating a multidimensional network of engagement. Connectivity projects also have a strategic dimension. By improving links

with Southeast Asia, India strengthens its presence in the Indo-Pacific. Infrastructure thus becomes a bridge not only between markets but also between strategic interests.

3.2.8. Cultural Linkages

Long before modern diplomacy, India and Southeast Asia were connected through culture, religion, language, and trade. Temples, scripts, and epics travelled across the seas, shaping societies from Indonesia to Cambodia. The early Indian cultural influence in Southeast Asia created enduring civilisational bonds. These historical links continue to shape contemporary relations.



Figure: Architectural sites in Southeast Asia reflecting historical Indian cultural influence.

Indian epics such as the Ramayana are performed in local adaptations across Southeast Asia. Sanskrit inscriptions and temple architecture reveal centuries of exchange. However, it is important to recognise that Southeast Asian societies adapted these influences creatively, blending them with local traditions. The regional identity in Southeast Asia developed through interaction, not imitation.

In modern times, cultural diplomacy remains important. India promotes exchanges

in education, arts, and tourism. Scholarships for ASEAN students, cultural festivals, and Buddhist heritage circuits strengthen people-to-people ties. Soft power complements strategic engagement by building goodwill and mutual understanding. Cultural linkages provide a strong emotional foundation for contemporary cooperation. They remind both sides that their relationship is not new but deeply rooted in history. This sense of shared heritage supports political and economic partnerships.

3.2.9. Mekong–Ganga Cooperation

The Mekong–Ganga Cooperation (MGC) initiative was launched in 2000 as a platform for cultural and economic collaboration between India and five Southeast Asian countries: Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. The initiative symbolically connects the Mekong and Ganga rivers, representing civilisational continuity and shared heritage. The MGC focuses on tourism, culture, education, and connectivity. Unlike high-level strategic forums, it emphasises grassroots cooperation and developmental projects. By promoting cultural exchanges and capacity building, the MGC strengthens regional identity and mutual trust. Such subregional initiatives enhance India's engagement beyond formal diplomatic structures.

The initiative also supports India's outreach to mainland Southeast Asia, also known as the CLMV countries. By prioritising development cooperation, India positions itself as a supportive partner rather than a competitive rival. This approach aligns with ASEAN's preference for inclusive and non-threatening partnerships. Although the MGC has faced implementation challenges, it remains symbolically important. It reflects India's attempt to blend cultural diplomacy with developmental cooperation, reinforcing its Act East framework.

3.2.10. India–Japan Relations

India's partnership with Japan has become one of the most significant pillars of its Indo-Pacific strategy. Once limited mainly to economic assistance, the relationship has evolved into a comprehensive strategic partnership. The economic cooperation has enabled deeper strategic trust between the two countries.





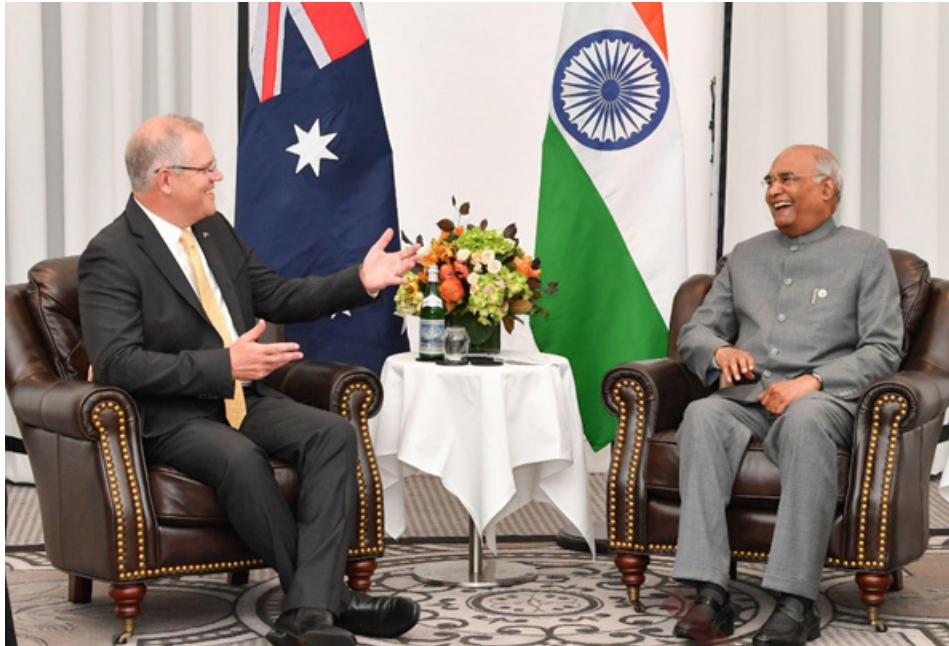
Figures: India–Japan cooperation in diplomacy, infrastructure, and maritime security.

Japan has been a major investor in India's infrastructure development, including metro rail systems and industrial corridors. The Mumbai–Ahmedabad high-speed rail project is a flagship example of this cooperation. Beyond economics, the two countries conduct joint naval exercises and share concerns about maritime security. India–Japan cooperation transcends narrow frameworks and contributes to a broader Indo-Pacific vision. Both countries support a rules-based order and freedom of navigation. Their partnership also has implications for regional stability involving the United States and other partners. India and Japan complement

each other economically and strategically. While Japan brings advanced technology and investment, India offers a large market and strategic location. Together, they help shape a stable Indo-Pacific architecture.

3.2.11. India–Australia Relations

India's ties with Australia have deepened significantly in recent years. Once constrained by differences over nuclear policy, the relationship has transformed into a comprehensive strategic partnership. This is an accelerating security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific.



Maritime security is a key area of cooperation. Both countries share an interest in maintaining open sea lanes and a stable regional balance. Joint naval exercises, including participation in multilateral drills, enhance interoperability and trust. Defence dialogues and intelligence sharing further strengthen ties. Economic cooperation is also growing, especially in critical minerals, education, and trade. Australia is a major energy producer, while India is a large consumer market. The partnership thus combines economic complementarity with shared strategic concerns. India–Australia

relations reflect the broader transformation of the Indo-Pacific landscape. As regional challenges grow, partnerships grounded in shared principles become increasingly important.

3.2.12. Quad Cooperation

The Quad, formally known as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, includes India, Japan, Australia, and the United States. It represents a flexible platform for consultation and cooperation rather than a formal alliance. The Quad embodies a shared vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific.



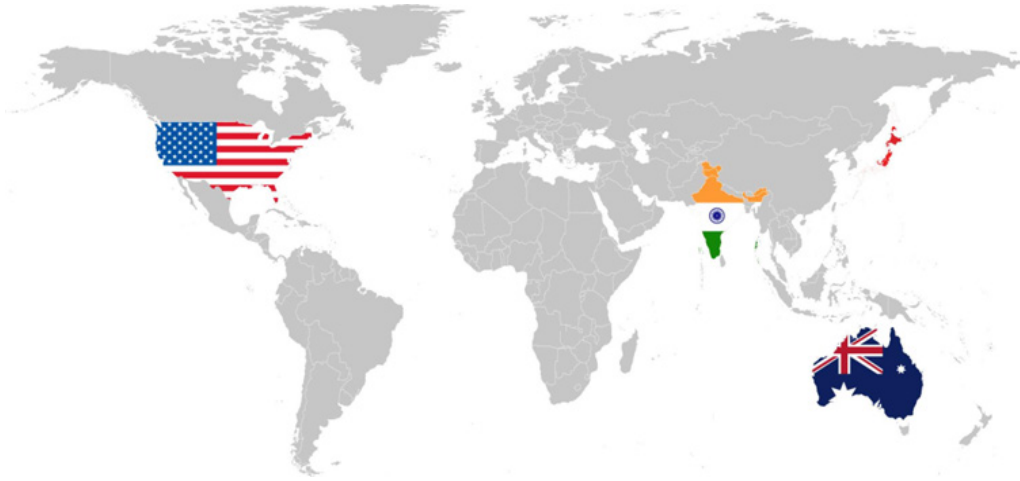


Figure: The Quad framework and its maritime cooperation activities.

The Quad focuses on maritime security, disaster relief, infrastructure development, and emerging technologies. It has also addressed issues such as vaccine distribution and supply chain resilience. Rather than targeting any specific country, the Quad emphasises principles like transparency and respect for international law. For India, participation in the Quad reflects its growing role in the Indo-Pacific. At the same time, India maintains strategic autonomy and avoids binding alliances. This careful balance allows India to cooperate closely with major powers while preserving independent decision-making. The Quad illustrates how India's Act East Policy has expanded into a broader Indo-Pacific engagement. It demonstrates India's readiness to shape regional norms and contribute to collective stability.

3.2.13. South China Sea Issue

The South China Sea has become one of the most sensitive and contested regions in the Indo-Pacific. It is not only rich in fisheries and potential energy resources, but it is also one of the busiest maritime trade routes in the world. Several Southeast Asian countries, including Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Brunei, have overlapping territorial claims with China in this region. These disputes have created tensions and

periodic confrontations. For India, the South China Sea is not a direct territorial issue, but it has important strategic and economic implications.

A large portion of India's trade with East Asia passes through these waters. Therefore, ensuring freedom of navigation and adherence to international law are major concerns. India consistently supports the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. India views stability in the South China Sea as essential for a balanced regional order. At the same time, India avoids taking sides in specific territorial disputes peaceful resolution through dialogue.

India's engagement with Vietnam in offshore energy exploration in the South China Sea has drawn attention. This cooperation reflects both economic interests and strategic signalling. However, India has been cautious not to escalate tensions. Its approach is guided by inclusiveness and respect for ASEAN centrality. Southeast Asian countries prefer engagement from major powers that do not force them into rigid alignments. Thus, India's position on the South China Sea combines principle and pragmatism. It supports a rules-based maritime order while maintaining balanced relations with all stakeholders.

over confrontation. India's diplomatic style aligns well with this approach, strengthening its acceptance within regional institutions.

At the same time, the region is witnessing the emergence of minilateral frameworks such as the Quad. These flexible groupings complement, rather than replace, ASEAN-led structures. Southeast Asian states often pursue institutional balancing, engaging multiple powers to maintain equilibrium. India's role fits within this pattern as a supportive but non-dominant partner. The regional security architecture is therefore layered and dynamic. India's participation across multiple platforms demonstrates its commitment to cooperative security rather than unilateral dominance.

3.2.17. Challenges and Opportunities

India's engagement with Southeast Asia and the Indo-Pacific presents both opportunities and challenges. On the positive side, the region offers vast economic potential. ASEAN's growing markets, technological innovation in Japan, and resource partnerships with Australia provide avenues for growth. Cultural and historical ties also create a favourable foundation for cooperation. However, several challenges remain. Infrastructure delays have slowed connectivity projects. Trade imbalances and regulatory differences complicate economic integration. Competition with China adds another layer of complexity. India and China can be both rivals and partners in Southeast Asia, depending on the issue. Managing this duality requires diplomatic skill.

Domestic constraints also affect India's capacity to engage effectively. Economic reforms, administrative coordination, and

capacity building are essential for sustaining long-term partnerships. Implementation gaps can sometimes weaken the impact of well-designed policies. Despite these challenges, opportunities outweigh risks if managed wisely. India's growing economy, demographic advantage, and strategic location provide strong foundations. By focusing on practical cooperation and inclusive engagement, India can deepen its regional presence.

3.2.18. Future of Indo-Pacific Strategy

The future of India's Indo-Pacific strategy will depend on adaptability and consistency. The region is evolving rapidly, with shifting alliances and emerging technologies reshaping power dynamics. India must balance strategic autonomy with meaningful partnerships. This requires sustained diplomatic engagement and careful policy coordination.

The Indo-Pacific vision should remain inclusive and cooperative rather than confrontational. India's emphasis on openness, transparency, and respect for international law aligns with this perspective. Future priorities may include digital connectivity, green energy collaboration, and deeper maritime cooperation.

India's north-eastern region will also play a crucial role. As connectivity improves, it can become a gateway to Southeast Asia rather than a peripheral frontier. Strengthening people-to-people ties through education and tourism will further consolidate partnerships. In essence, the Indo-Pacific strategy is not a short-term initiative but a long-term orientation. Its success will depend on sustained commitment, domestic preparedness, and regional trust.

Recap

- ◆ India launched the Look East Policy in the early 1990s after economic reforms.
- ◆ The policy initially focused on economic cooperation with ASEAN.
- ◆ In 2014, Look East evolved into the Act East Policy with proactive implementation.
- ◆ The Indo-Pacific concept connects the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean strategically.
- ◆ Maritime routes like the Strait of Malacca are vital for global trade.
- ◆ India became a full dialogue partner of ASEAN in 1996.
- ◆ India–ASEAN ties were elevated to a Strategic Partnership in 2012.
- ◆ The ASEAN–India Free Trade Agreement strengthened economic relations.
- ◆ India opted out of RCEP due to trade imbalance concerns.
- ◆ Maritime cooperation includes naval exercises and humanitarian assistance.
- ◆ Defence ties with Vietnam, Singapore, and Indonesia have expanded.
- ◆ Connectivity projects like the India–Myanmar–Thailand Highway enhance integration.
- ◆ Cultural linkages trace back to ancient civilisational exchanges.
- ◆ The Mekong–Ganga Cooperation initiative strengthens subregional ties.
- ◆ India–Japan and India–Australia partnerships support Indo-Pacific stability.
- ◆ The Quad promotes a free and open Indo-Pacific vision.
- ◆ India supports the peaceful resolution of South China Sea disputes.
- ◆ Blue Economy initiatives emphasise sustainable maritime development.
- ◆ Supply chain diversification is becoming strategically important.
- ◆ ASEAN remains central to the regional security architecture.

Objective Questions

1. In which year was the Look East Policy launched?
2. In which year did India become a full dialogue partner of ASEAN?
3. In which year was the Act East Policy announced?
4. Which two oceans are connected under the concept of the Indo-Pacific?
5. In which year did the ASEAN–India Free Trade Agreement (AIFTA) in goods come into force?
6. In which year was the Mekong–Ganga Cooperation (MGC) initiative launched?
7. Which four countries constitute the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad)?
8. Which major regional trade agreement did India decide not to join?
9. The Strait of Malacca connects the Indian Ocean with which ocean?
10. In which year was ASEAN established?
11. What is the main focus of the Blue Economy concept?
12. What is the primary emphasis of India's defence engagement in South-east Asia?
13. What does the term "ASEAN centrality" refer to?
14. Which region of India primarily benefits from connectivity projects under the Act East Policy?
15. What is the core principle emphasised in India's Indo-Pacific strategy?

Answers

1. 1991
2. 1996
3. 2014



4. The Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean
5. 2010
6. 2000
7. India, Japan, Australia, and the United States
8. Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)
9. The Pacific Ocean
10. 1967
11. Ocean-based sustainable development
12. Capacity building and joint military exercises
13. ASEAN's leadership role in shaping and coordinating regional institutions and dialogue mechanisms
14. North-eastern India
15. An inclusive and rules-based regional order

Assignments

1. Trace the evolution from Look East Policy to Act East Policy. Discuss its strategic implications.
2. Examine the significance of the Indo-Pacific in shaping India's foreign policy.
3. Critically evaluate India–ASEAN strategic partnership.
4. Analyse the role of maritime security in India's Indo-Pacific strategy.
5. Discuss ASEAN centrality in regional security architecture.
6. Prepare a policy brief (1000 words) advising the Government of India on strengthening connectivity with Southeast Asia.
7. Create a comparative chart showing India's strategic partnerships with Japan and Australia.
8. Conduct a case study analysis of India–Vietnam defence cooperation.
9. Prepare a presentation on the importance of the Strait of Malacca for India's trade.
10. Draft a short research proposal on Blue Economy cooperation between India and ASEAN countries.

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SGOU



BLOCK

India and Global Organisations



UNIT

India and the United Nations

Learning Outcomes

After studying this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ explain India's founding role in the United Nations and its early diplomatic contributions.
- ◆ analyse how UN Charter principles align with India's foreign policy philosophy.
- ◆ evaluate India's contributions to peacekeeping, development, and global governance.
- ◆ examine India's aspirations for Security Council reform and permanent membership.
- ◆ assess India's contemporary diplomacy and reform proposals within the UN system.

Prerequisites

An understanding of India's engagement with the United Nations requires familiarity with the principles of multilateralism, the structure and functions of the UN system, and India's historical role in global diplomacy. Think about the world emerging from the devastation of the Second World War, searching for a new system that could prevent conflict and promote cooperation among nations. In 1945, representatives from many countries gathered in San Francisco to establish the United Nations, an organisation designed to maintain peace, encourage dialogue, and address global challenges collectively. India, even before gaining full independence, participated in this historic moment as an original signatory to the UN Charter. This early involvement marked the beginning of India's long relationship with the organisation and reflected its commitment to multilateral cooperation and international justice.

To understand the themes of this unit, learners should have a basic understanding of international relations and global institutions. Familiarity with concepts such as multilateralism, collective security, diplomacy, and international law will help readers appreciate how countries work together through organisations like the United Nations. Knowledge of the structure and functions of the UN, including bodies such as the General Assembly, Security Council, and Economic and Social Council, will also help learners understand how decisions are made and implemented within the organisation.

A general awareness of India's foreign policy principles will further enrich the study of this unit. Since independence, India has emphasised peaceful coexistence, respect for sovereignty, and cooperation among nations. These principles align closely with the ideals embedded in the United Nations Charter. Understanding this background will help learners analyse India's contributions to peacekeeping, its advocacy for decolonisation and development, and its ongoing efforts to reform global governance institutions.

As learners proceed through this unit, they will discover how India has used the United Nations as a platform to promote peace, justice, and international cooperation. From its early role in shaping global debates to its contemporary participation in peacekeeping, climate negotiations, and institutional reform, India's engagement with the UN reflects both its national interests and its broader commitment to a fair and inclusive international order.

Keywords

Multilateralism, Sovereign Equality, Peacekeeping, Security Council Reform, Decolonisation, Global South, Norm Entrepreneurship, Sustainable Development

Discussion

4.1.1. India's Founding Role

India's association with the United Nations began even before it became an independent state. In 1945, when the UN Charter was signed in San Francisco, India was still under British colonial rule, yet it was recognised as an original signatory. This unique position reflected India's growing international presence and its active participation in global

discussions on peace and security. India's participation at the founding conference demonstrated both diplomatic maturity and a commitment to multilateral cooperation. Though not fully sovereign at the time, India's representatives articulated positions rooted in anti-colonialism and international justice.

In the immediate aftermath of World War

of the developing world. This early activism laid the foundation for India's identity as a champion of the Global South.

Another significant contribution by India during the UN's formative years was its involvement in drafting human rights principles. Indian delegates played a constructive role in shaping the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. They emphasised equality, dignity, and the rights of minorities. India's insistence on universal values reflected its belief that political freedom must be accompanied by social justice. Thus, India's founding role in the United Nations was not passive. It was active, principled, and forward-looking. Even before independence, India saw the UN as an instrument for peace, justice, and global reform. This foundational commitment continues to shape India's engagement with the organisation today.



United Nations Building in New York



UN General Assembly



UN Security Council

4.1.2. UN Charter Principles and India

The United Nations Charter is built on principles such as sovereign equality, peaceful settlement of disputes, non-use of force, and respect for human rights. These principles closely align with India's post-independence foreign policy philosophy. Nehru's vision of international relations emphasised peaceful coexistence and dialogue over confrontation. The UN Charter sought to institutionalise collective security, and India embraced this framework wholeheartedly.

India has consistently advocated respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity. At the same time, it has supported peaceful negotiation as the preferred method for resolving disputes. This approach reflects both India's historical experience and its strategic calculations. India's commitment to multilateralism is rooted in the belief that global rules protect smaller and developing states from unilateral dominance by powerful countries.

The principle of non-alignment during the Cold War also shaped India's interpretation of the UN Charter. India sought to remain independent of major power blocs while actively participating in UN deliberations. By doing so, it reinforced the Charter's emphasis on sovereign equality. India's support for decolonisation and racial justice further strengthened its alignment with Charter ideals.

India's adherence to international law is also visible in its approach to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. India has consistently supported legal frameworks governing maritime rights and responsibilities. This reflects India's broader respect for a rule-based international order. In essence, India's foreign policy principles and the UN Charter have often moved in

parallel. While differences have emerged on certain issues, India's overall engagement demonstrates a deep commitment to the Charter's foundational ideals.

4.1.3. Peacekeeping Contributions

One of India's most visible and respected contributions to the United Nations has been its role in peacekeeping operations. Since the 1950s, India has deployed thousands of troops to conflict zones across Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. Indian peacekeepers have served in missions in Congo, Lebanon, Sudan, and many other regions. Indian peacekeeping is a matter of national honour, reflecting both professional capability and moral responsibility. India's peacekeeping efforts began with the Korean War and later expanded to include significant missions in Africa. These missions often involved complex situations requiring neutrality, discipline, and cultural sensitivity. Indian contingents have earned a reputation for professionalism and humanitarian conduct. Their contributions have included not only military duties but also medical assistance and community support.

Peacekeeping aligns closely with India's belief in peaceful conflict resolution. Rather than engaging in aggressive military alliances, India has preferred to contribute to collective security through UN-mandated missions. This approach enhances India's credibility as a responsible global actor. It also strengthens its claim for greater representation in UN decision-making bodies. However, peacekeeping operations have also faced challenges. Complex mandates, insufficient resources, and political constraints often limit mission effectiveness. India has repeatedly called for clearer mandates and adequate funding to ensure peacekeepers can operate effectively. Despite these challenges, India remains one of the largest contributors to UN peacekeeping forces.

Through peacekeeping, India translates its commitment to peace into tangible action. These contributions reinforce its image as a nation that not only speaks about global responsibility but actively participates in it.



India has a long and deep tradition of contributing to peacekeeping.



4.1.4. Security Council Reform

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is the most powerful organ of the UN, responsible for maintaining international peace and security. However, its structure reflects the power realities of 1945 rather than the contemporary global order. The five permanent members with veto power continue to dominate decision-making. Many countries, including India, argue that this structure is outdated and unrepresentative. India's relationship with the Security Council is an "ambiguous tale." While India has been an active non-permanent member multiple times, it has not secured permanent membership. India believes that the current composition does not adequately reflect the voices of developing countries or emerging powers.

India's argument for reform is based on principles of representation and legitimacy. With its large population, growing economy, and significant contributions to peacekeeping, India considers itself a natural candidate for permanent membership. Without meaningful reform, the UN risks losing credibility in a changing world. India supports the expansion of both permanent and non-permanent categories of membership. It also collaborates with countries such as Germany, Japan, and Brazil under the G4 framework to advocate reform. However, reform efforts face resistance due to competing regional interests and the reluctance of existing permanent members to dilute their power. Thus, Security Council reform remains a central issue in India's engagement with the UN. It represents both a quest for fairness and a strategic effort to reshape global governance.

4.1.5. India's UNSC Aspirations

India's aspiration for permanent membership in the UN Security Council is not merely symbolic. It is rooted in its demographic size, economic strength, democratic credentials, and consistent contributions to global peace. The emerging powers, such as India, seek greater influence within global institutions proportional to their capabilities.

India has served as a non-permanent member of the Security Council several times. During these terms, it has actively participated in debates on terrorism, peacekeeping mandates, and conflict resolution. Its positions often reflect a balance between principle and pragmatism. India emphasises dialogue, sovereignty, and international law while also recognising strategic realities. Support for India's candidature has grown over the years. Countries from Africa, Latin America, and Asia have expressed support for its permanent membership. However, opposition from certain regional rivals

complicates the process. The requirement to amend the UN Charter makes reform procedurally complex.

India's UNSC aspirations are also connected to its broader global identity. India sees itself as a bridge between the developed and developing worlds. Permanent membership would strengthen its ability to influence global decision-making and advocate for the interests of the Global South. In summary, India's quest for permanent membership reflects both national ambition and systemic reform objectives. It seeks not dominance, but recognition of changing global realities.

4.1.6. Role in the General Assembly

The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) is often described as the most representative organ of the UN because every member state has one vote. For India, the General Assembly has been an important platform to articulate its views on global justice, decolonisation, development, and peace. From the early years of independence, India actively participated in debates and resolutions, particularly those concerning racial discrimination and colonial rule. India used the General Assembly to support anti-apartheid movements and the independence of African nations.

India's diplomatic strategy in the General Assembly has generally focused on coalition building. As a leader in the Non-Aligned Movement and the Group of 77, India has often coordinated with other developing countries to shape global discussions. This approach has strengthened the collective voice of the Global South. India's activism in the General Assembly was closely linked to its broader Third World solidarity.

India has also used the General Assembly

to introduce and support resolutions addressing peace, disarmament, and sustainable development. India's early resolution initiatives are examples of principled diplomacy that sought to shape international norms rather than merely react to them. By actively engaging in committee discussions and thematic debates, India has demonstrated a consistent commitment to multilateral processes. Although General Assembly resolutions are not legally binding, they carry moral and political weight. India recognises the symbolic importance of this forum in shaping global opinion. Its continued engagement reflects a belief that legitimacy in international relations emerges from inclusive dialogue rather than exclusive power arrangements.

4.1.7. ECOSOC Engagement

The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) plays a central role in coordinating the UN's work on development, poverty reduction, and social progress. For a country like India, with a large population and diverse developmental challenges, ECOSOC provides a meaningful space to influence global development policy. It functions as a bridge between policy formulation and implementation in areas such as education, health, and economic growth. India has consistently emphasised the importance of equitable development and fair global economic structures. Within ECOSOC, it has advocated policies that address poverty, inequality, and access to technology. India has engaged with rights-based approaches to development, linking economic growth with human dignity and social justice.

India's participation in ECOSOC discussions often reflects its domestic priorities. Issues such as food security, access to affordable medicine, and sustainable agriculture have featured prominently in its statements. By sharing its own development

experiences, India contributes practical insights to global policy debates. This exchange strengthens mutual learning among member states. Furthermore, India supports reforming global financial institutions to ensure greater representation of developing countries. It argues that development cannot be separated from questions of fairness in global governance. Through ECOSOC, India seeks to align economic growth with inclusive and sustainable progress.

4.1.8. Human Rights Council

India's engagement with the Human Rights Council reflects a careful balance between universal principles and national sovereignty. As a democracy with a written constitution that guarantees fundamental rights, India supports the promotion of human rights globally. Indian delegates played a role in shaping early human rights discourse within the UN framework. At the same time, India emphasises that human rights discussions must respect national contexts and cultural diversity. It advocates dialogue and cooperation rather than confrontation. India's approach to human rights diplomacy is shaped by its belief in sovereign equality and non-interference.

India has actively participated in the Universal Periodic Review and supports capacity-building initiatives to strengthen institutions in developing countries. It argues that development and human rights are interconnected. Without economic and social progress, civil and political rights may remain incomplete. While India has faced criticism on certain domestic human rights issues, it continues to engage constructively

with UN mechanisms. Its approach reflects both confidence in democratic institutions and sensitivity to sovereignty concerns. In this way, India seeks to contribute to a balanced and constructive human rights framework.

4.1.9. Climate Negotiations

Climate change has emerged as one of the most pressing issues on the UN agenda. India plays a significant role in global climate negotiations, particularly under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). As one of the world's largest developing economies, India faces the dual challenge of promoting growth while addressing environmental sustainability. India's position in climate negotiations is guided by the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities." This principle recognises that developed countries bear greater historical responsibility for greenhouse gas emissions. The debates over fairness and responsibility often shape climate discussions within the UN system.

India has committed to ambitious renewable energy targets and has promoted initiatives such as the International Solar Alliance. At the same time, it insists that climate action must not hinder poverty reduction and economic development. This balanced stance reflects India's broader diplomatic philosophy of combining environmental responsibility with developmental equity. Climate negotiations also demonstrate India's ability to bridge divides between developed and developing countries. By advocating pragmatic solutions, India contributes to consensus-building efforts in complex global negotiations.



Figure: COP28 UNFCCC Climate Conference



International Solar Alliance's Fifth Assembly, New Delhi in 2022

4.1.10. Development Agenda

The United Nations' development agenda, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), aligns closely with India's domestic priorities. With a vast population and diverse socio-economic challenges, India views development as central to its global engagement. ECOSOC discussions and General Assembly debates on development have provided platforms for India to share its experiences and learn from others.

India supports inclusive growth that addresses poverty, gender inequality, health, and education. It links development to rights-based approaches, emphasising

dignity and empowerment. Through South-South cooperation, India shares technical expertise and capacity-building support with other developing countries. India has also advocated reform of global trade and financial systems to ensure fairness. It argues that sustainable development requires equitable access to markets, technology, and finance. In UN forums, India often emphasises the need for partnership rather than dependency. The development agenda remains one of the most significant areas of India's engagement with the UN. It reflects both national priorities and global responsibilities.

4.1.11. Counter-Terrorism Initiatives

Terrorism has been a major concern for India, and it has consistently raised the issue within the United Nations. India has long advocated for a comprehensive convention on international terrorism. It argues that terrorism should be addressed through clear legal definitions and collective action rather than selective interpretation. India's experiences with cross-border terrorism have shaped its diplomatic initiatives. India has used UN forums to highlight the need for global cooperation in intelligence sharing, financing controls, and law enforcement coordination. It emphasises that terrorism undermines peace, development, and human rights.

India also supports strengthening the role of the UN Counter-Terrorism Committee. By pushing for coordinated international action, India seeks to create a rules-based framework to address emerging threats. However, differences among member states on defining terrorism have slowed progress. Despite these challenges, India continues to prioritise counterterrorism within the UN system. Its sustained advocacy demonstrates both national concern and global responsibility.

4.1.12. India's Norm Entrepreneurship

India has often acted as a "norm entrepreneur" within the United Nations. This means it does not simply respond to global norms but actively shapes them. India's early UN resolution initiatives are examples of this proactive diplomacy. One important example is India's role in promoting decolonisation and racial equality. It consistently introduced resolutions condemning apartheid and supporting independence movements. These efforts helped institutionalise anti-colonial norms within the UN framework.

India has also advocated principles such as sovereign equality, development justice, and peaceful coexistence. Through speeches, resolutions, and coalition building, it has influenced debates on disarmament, human rights, and global governance reform. Norm entrepreneurship reflects India's broader foreign policy identity. It seeks to combine moral conviction with practical diplomacy. By shaping norms, India enhances its influence beyond material power.

4.1.13. Financial Contributions

Financial contributions are an important indicator of a country's commitment to the United Nations. The UN operates through assessed contributions from member states and voluntary funding for specialised programmes and agencies. India, as a responsible member, contributes regularly to the UN's regular budget, peacekeeping operations, and specialised agencies. Although India's financial contribution is smaller than those of the largest economies, it remains significant among developing countries.

India's financial participation reflects its belief in multilateral cooperation. Beyond mandatory contributions, India also supports development initiatives, humanitarian assistance, and technical cooperation programmes. It has extended voluntary contributions to UN agencies dealing with health, education, and disaster relief. This demonstrates that India's engagement is not limited to political statements but includes tangible support.

India often argues that financial responsibility must be accompanied by equitable decision-making. While contributing steadily, it also advocates reforms that ensure fair representation in budgetary and policy processes. Financial contribution, therefore, becomes both a sign of commitment and a basis for demanding institutional reform. In

addition, India supports capacity-building efforts in least developed countries through South-South cooperation. By linking financial participation with development assistance, India reinforces its identity as a partner in global progress.

4.1.14. Challenges in the UN System

Despite its foundational ideals, the United Nations faces several structural and political challenges. One major issue is the imbalance of power within the Security Council. The veto power of the five permanent members often leads to paralysis in addressing global conflicts. This is a persistent tension between legitimacy and power within the UN system. Another challenge is bureaucratic inefficiency and slow decision-making processes. The complexity of UN procedures sometimes delays urgent action. Developing countries, including India, argue that reform is necessary to improve transparency and accountability. Without meaningful change, the organisation risks losing credibility in a rapidly changing world.

Geopolitical rivalries also affect UN effectiveness. Differences among major powers often block consensus on issues such as security, climate change, and humanitarian intervention. India, while advocating reform, also recognises the importance of maintaining unity within the institution. Financial constraints present another difficulty. Budget shortfalls can weaken peacekeeping operations and development programmes. India has emphasised the need for predictable funding mechanisms and equitable burden-sharing among member states. Despite these challenges, India continues to support the UN as the most comprehensive global forum. It believes that reform should strengthen, not weaken, the organisation.

4.1.15. India's Reform Proposals

India's reform proposals focus primarily on making the United Nations more representative and effective. The central issue remains the expansion of the Security Council. India argues that the Council's composition should reflect contemporary global realities rather than the power distribution of 1945. India's reform agenda is grounded in both principle and strategic interest. India supports expanding permanent and non-permanent membership to include countries from Asia, Africa, and Latin America. It has joined the G4 group, along with Germany, Japan, and Brazil, to advocate structural reform. The objective is to ensure that emerging economies and developing nations have a stronger voice in decision-making.

Beyond Security Council reform, India proposes strengthening the General Assembly's role and improving coordination among UN agencies. It calls for greater transparency in peacekeeping mandates and clearer accountability in financial management. India also emphasises reforming global governance institutions connected to the UN system, including financial and development bodies. These proposals reflect India's broader vision of a fair and inclusive multilateral order.

4.1.16. Contemporary Diplomacy

In recent years, India's diplomacy at the United Nations has adapted to new global challenges. Issues such as pandemics, cybersecurity, climate resilience, and sustainable development have gained prominence. India's recent terms as a non-permanent member of the Security Council have focused on maritime security, counter-terrorism, and peacekeeping reform. India often presents itself as a bridge between developed and developing nations. It seeks to balance strategic interests with global responsibilities.

India's contemporary UN diplomacy combines realism with principled multilateralism. This means acknowledging power politics while continuing to advocate fairness and cooperation.

India's emphasis on digital inclusion, vaccine equity, and sustainable energy reflects its attempt to shape emerging global agendas. By promoting initiatives such as solar

cooperation and disaster resilience, India contributes practical solutions to global problems. Contemporary diplomacy also involves coalition building. India works closely with African, Asian, and Latin American countries to strengthen the voice of the Global South. This strategy reinforces its longstanding commitment to inclusive global governance.

Recap

- ◆ India was an original signatory of the UN Charter in 1945.
- ◆ India supported decolonisation and racial equality in early UN debates.
- ◆ Indian representatives contributed to drafting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- ◆ India's foreign policy principles closely align with the values of the UN Charter.
- ◆ India has been one of the largest contributors to UN peacekeeping missions.
- ◆ Peacekeeping reflects India's commitment to collective security.
- ◆ The UN Security Council's structure reflects the power realities of 1945.
- ◆ India advocates expansion of permanent and non-permanent membership.
- ◆ India seeks permanent membership in the Security Council.
- ◆ India plays an active role in the General Assembly and ECOSOC.
- ◆ India balances universal human rights with respect for sovereignty.
- ◆ Climate diplomacy reflects India's emphasis on equity and development.
- ◆ India has promoted a Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism.
- ◆ India acts as a norm entrepreneur in areas like decolonisation and development justice.
- ◆ India supports UN reform to enhance representation and legitimacy.

Objective Questions

1. In which year was the United Nations Charter signed in San Francisco?
2. Which global organisation was founded in 1945 to maintain international peace and security?
3. Who was India's first Prime Minister who strongly supported the United Nations?
4. Which declaration on human rights was adopted by the United Nations in 1948?
5. What is the principal organ of the UN responsible for maintaining international peace and security?
6. What is the name of the UN body where each member state has one vote?
7. Which UN council focuses on global economic and social development issues?
8. What is the term used for UN military missions deployed to maintain peace in conflict zones?
9. Which UN body reviews the human rights records of member states through the Universal Periodic Review?
10. What principle in climate negotiations states that countries share responsibility but not equally?
11. Which UN convention deals with international efforts to address climate change?
12. What is the term used for countries that actively shape international norms and ideas?
13. Which UN body has five permanent members with veto power?
14. What term describes cooperation among developing countries for mutual development?
15. What term refers to the process of granting independence to colonies?

Answers

1. 1945
2. United Nations
3. Nehru
4. UDHR
5. Security Council
6. General Assembly
7. ECOSOC
8. Peacekeeping
9. Human Rights Council
10. CBDR
11. UNFCCC
12. Norm entrepreneur
13. UNSC
14. South–South
15. Decolonisation

Assignments

1. Discuss India's founding role in the United Nations and its long-term significance.
2. Analyse the relationship between UN Charter principles and India's foreign policy philosophy.
3. Evaluate India's contribution to UN peacekeeping operations with suitable examples.
4. Critically examine India's case for permanent membership in the Security Council.

5. Assess India's role in promoting development and climate justice within the UN system.
6. Prepare a comparative chart showing India's peacekeeping contributions across three regions. (*Practical Assignment*)
7. Draft a policy brief recommending how India can strengthen its claim for Security Council reform. (*Practical Assignment*)
8. Conduct a short research study (1000–1200 words) on India's role in drafting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. (*Practical Assignment*)
9. Prepare a presentation analysing India's climate diplomacy under the UNFCCC framework. (*Practical Assignment*)
10. Examine the challenges faced by the UN system and propose practical reform measures from India's perspective.

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UNIT

India and Regional Organisations

Learning Outcomes

After studying this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ explain the concept of regionalism and its significance in India's foreign policy.
- ◆ analyse India's role in SAARC, ASEAN, BRICS, SCO, BIMSTEC, and IORA.
- ◆ evaluate the achievements and limitations of regional organisations in South Asia and beyond.
- ◆ assess how India uses regional platforms for strategic balancing and development diplomacy.
- ◆ critically examine emerging trends such as minilateralism and multi-alignment in India's external engagement.

Prerequisites

The study of India's engagement with the Global South requires an understanding of the historical experience of colonialism, the emergence of postcolonial states, and the evolution of South–South cooperation in international politics. Imagine tracing the evolution of India's foreign policy from independence to the dynamic, interconnected world of today. Begin with the early decades when India championed Non-Alignment, seeking autonomy in a bipolar Cold War order. Moving forward to 1991, when economic reforms opened India's markets and gradually transformed its external engagement. These turning points are essential to understanding why regional cooperation became central to India's diplomatic strategy.

As you proceed, recall the basic ideas of multilateralism, globalisation, and

regional trade agreements. Regional organisations such as SAARC, ASEAN, and BRICS do not operate in isolation; they are shaped by economic interdependence, security cooperation, and shared developmental challenges. A familiarity with these foundational concepts will help you appreciate how regional platforms function and why states invest political capital in them.

You should also have a working awareness of South Asian geopolitics, India–China relations, and the evolving Indo-Pacific framework. These dynamics influence India’s approach to cooperation, competition, and strategic balancing. With this background, you will be better prepared to explore how India engages simultaneously in neighbourhood, regional, and global institutions, and how regionalism has become a key instrument in advancing both national interests and broader visions of global order.

Keywords

Regionalism, SAARC, ASEAN, BRICS, BIMSTEC, Strategic Balancing, Development Diplomacy, Minilateralism

Discussion

4.2.1. Regionalism in Foreign Policy

Regionalism refers to cooperation among geographically proximate countries to address shared economic, political, and security concerns. In the post–World War II era, regional organisations emerged as important pillars of international order. Regionalism developed as both a complement to global institutions and a response to local needs. For countries like India, regionalism has never been separated from foreign policy. It has been a strategic tool for managing neighbourhood relations, expanding economic linkages, and enhancing geopolitical influence.

India’s approach to regionalism has evolved. In the early decades after

independence, India focused primarily on global multilateralism through the United Nations and the Non-Aligned Movement. However, the regional cooperation in South Asia remained underdeveloped. Over time, India realised that regional engagement was essential for stability and development. India’s engagement with regional organisations reflects a balance between normative commitments and strategic interests.

Regionalism also allows middle- and emerging-power states to shape governance structures beyond their borders. The regional organisations can become laboratories of cooperation where norms and practices evolve gradually. For India, participation in SAARC, ASEAN, and BRICS reflects different layers

of regional engagement: neighbourhood regionalism, extended regionalism, and transcontinental coalition-building.

In the contemporary period, India's regional diplomacy has become more pragmatic. India's shift from idealism to pragmatism in Asian regional integration. India now views regional organisations as platforms for economic growth, connectivity, security coordination, and strategic balancing. Regionalism is not merely symbolic; it is operational and interest-driven. Thus, regionalism occupies a central place in India's foreign policy. It links domestic development with external engagement, neighbourhood stability with global ambition, and economic cooperation with strategic positioning.

4.2.2. India and SAARC

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was established in 1985 to promote economic and social cooperation among South Asian countries. India, as the largest country in the region, has always played a central role in SAARC's functioning. SAARC emerged despite

political tensions, reflecting the recognition that regional cooperation was necessary for development. India's role in SAARC has often been described as both pivotal and complex. On one hand, India provides economic weight and institutional support. On the other hand, smaller member states sometimes perceive India's dominance with caution. India's size creates expectations of leadership but also suspicions of hegemony.

SAARC has worked in areas such as agriculture, education, disaster management, and poverty alleviation. It established institutions like the South Asian University and the SAARC Development Fund. However, political tensions, particularly between India and Pakistan, have repeatedly stalled progress. SAARC summits have often been delayed or cancelled due to bilateral disputes. India has attempted to revitalise SAARC through initiatives on connectivity and trade liberalisation. Yet, frustration with slow progress has led India to explore sub-regional and alternative frameworks such as BIMSTEC and BBIN. This shift is "beyond SAARC" regionalism, reflecting adaptation to political constraints.

Table: SAARC Structure and India's Role

Area	SAARC Objective	India's Contribution
Trade	Promote regional trade	Support for SAFTA
Education	Academic cooperation	South Asian University
Disaster Management	Regional response	Technical assistance
Poverty Alleviation	Social development	Development funding

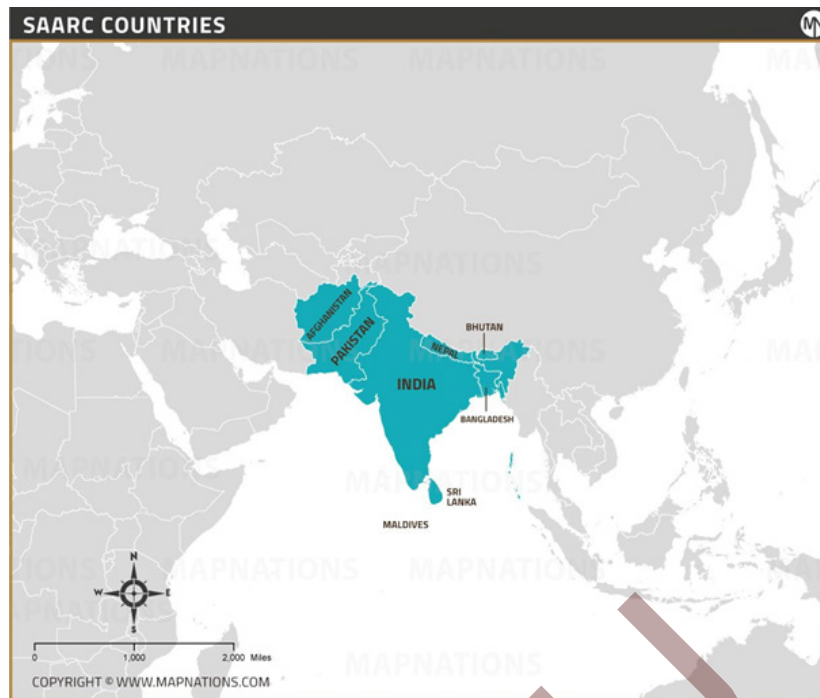


Figure: Flags of members of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation and the SAARC symbol.

4.2.3.SAARC Achievements & Limitations

SAARC's achievements include the establishment of the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA), cooperation in health and education, and frameworks for disaster management. While economic integration remains limited, SAARC has created a habit of dialogue among member states. However, SAARC faces serious structural limitations. The requirement of consensus for decision-making often results in paralysis. The political

mistrust and bilateral disputes as major obstacles. The India–Pakistan rivalry has frequently prevented meaningful progress.

Another limitation is low intra-regional trade. Compared to ASEAN or the European Union, South Asia remains one of the least economically integrated regions. The infrastructure gaps and protectionist policies hinder deeper integration. Despite these challenges, SAARC continues to symbolise South Asian regional identity. India's approach has become more pragmatic, focusing on cooperation where possible while

seeking alternatives when necessary.

4.2.4. India and ASEAN

India's engagement with ASEAN represents an expansion beyond its immediate neighbourhood. Beginning as a sectoral dialogue partner in 1992, India gradually strengthened ties with ASEAN through economic and strategic cooperation. India's shift from cautious engagement to proactive participation in Asian regional integration. ASEAN offers India access to dynamic Southeast Asian markets and maritime routes. ASEAN's role in shaping regional governance in East Asia. For India, ASEAN serves both economic and strategic purposes,

especially in balancing major powers in the Indo-Pacific.

India participates in ASEAN-led forums such as the East Asia Summit and ASEAN Regional Forum. These platforms allow India to contribute to discussions on maritime security, connectivity, and regional stability. ASEAN centrality remains important in the regional security architecture. India's partnership with ASEAN also reflects shared civilisational links. Historical trade and cultural exchanges reinforce contemporary cooperation. Thus, India-ASEAN relations combine economics, security, and history.

Table: Major milestones in India-ASEAN engagement.

Year	Milestone
1992	Sectoral dialogue partnership
1996	Full dialogue partner
2002	Annual summits begin
2010	FTA in goods
2012	Strategic partnership





Figure: ASEAN Headquarters, Jakarta, Indonesia

4.2.5. India–ASEAN FTA

The India–ASEAN Free Trade Agreement (FTA), which came into force in 2010 for goods and was later expanded to services and investment, marked a significant step in economic integration. The regional trade agreements can enhance economic efficiency when designed effectively. The FTA reduced tariffs on a wide range of products, encouraging trade flows. However, trade imbalances have emerged, with imports from ASEAN exceeding exports. The domestic industries sometimes express concerns about competition.

Despite challenges, the FTA strengthened economic linkages and supply chains. It also demonstrated India's commitment to rules-based trade cooperation. The agreement paved the way for broader economic integration in the Indo-Pacific. India continues to review and renegotiate certain aspects of the agreement to address concerns. This reflects a pragmatic approach that balances openness with domestic economic protection.

4.2.6. India and BRICS

BRICS, comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, represents a grouping of major emerging economies seeking greater influence in global governance. Unlike SAARC or ASEAN, BRICS is not geographically confined. It is a coalition built on economic weight and shared concerns about reforming global institutions. BRICS is a platform through which emerging powers attempt to shape regional and global orders simultaneously. India joined the BRICS to amplify its voice in global economic and political discussions. The grouping provides India with a forum to coordinate positions on issues such as financial reform, development financing, and multipolarity. Emerging power alliances, such as BRICS, challenge the dominance of Western-led institutions.

BRICS summits address issues such as trade, security, climate change, and development cooperation. India uses this platform to advocate reforms in the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, emphasising fair representation for developing countries. BRICS operates within a “world

of regions,” linking regional ambitions with global aspirations. However, BRICS also faces internal differences. Political tensions among members, especially between India and China, complicate cooperation. Despite this, India views BRICS as a strategic platform to promote multipolarity and reduce dependence on Western-dominated financial systems.



4.2.7. New Development Bank

One of the most concrete outcomes of BRICS cooperation is the establishment of the New Development Bank (NDB) in 2014. The NDB was created to finance infrastructure and sustainable development projects in emerging economies. The NDB reflects the BRICS countries' desire to create alternative financial mechanisms. For India, the NDB provides an additional source of development finance. It funds infrastructure projects, including renewable energy, transportation, and urban development. The bank symbolises India's commitment to strengthening South-South financial cooperation.

Unlike traditional multilateral banks, the NDB emphasises equality among founding members. Each member has equal voting power, reflecting principles of fairness. This structure aligns with India's broader vision of democratic global governance. However, the NDB still operates within global financial constraints. Its success depends on financial sustainability and project effectiveness. Nevertheless, it represents an important institutional innovation in regional and global

economic cooperation.



New Development Bank HQ, Shanghai

4.2.8. India in the SCO

The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) focuses primarily on security cooperation in Eurasia. India became a full member in 2017, joining China, Russia, and Central Asian states. It is a platform addressing terrorism, regional stability, and economic connectivity. India's membership reflects its interest in Central Asia and its desire to engage in Eurasian security discussions. Through the SCO, India participates in counter-terrorism exercises and regional dialogue mechanisms. This enhances India's security cooperation beyond South Asia.

However, the SCO also includes both India and Pakistan, creating diplomatic complexity. Furthermore, China's dominant role in the organisation requires India to balance engagement with caution. The broader competition between India and China within regional security frameworks. Despite these challenges, India values SCO membership as part of its diversified regional diplomacy. It allows India to engage in Eurasian discussions while maintaining strategic autonomy.

Table 3: Comparison of BRICS and SCO

Feature	BRICS	SCO
Focus	Economic governance	Security cooperation
Geography	Transcontinental	Eurasian
Key Initiative	New Development Bank	Counter-terrorism cooperation
India's Interest	Financial reform	Regional security

2.2.9. BIMSTEC Engagement

The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) connects South Asia and Southeast Asia. It includes India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Nepal, and Bhutan. It is a bridge between SAARC and ASEAN. India has increasingly prioritised BIMSTEC due to stagnation in SAARC. BIMSTEC focuses on trade, connectivity, energy cooperation, and maritime security. It is a part of neo-regionalism in South Asia.

BIMSTEC holds strategic importance for India's Act East Policy. It enhances connectivity between India's north-eastern states and Southeast Asia. The economic integration within BIMSTEC remains a work in progress but holds significant potential. By strengthening BIMSTEC, India aims to promote cooperation without being constrained by political tensions within SAARC. Thus, BIMSTEC represents pragmatic regionalism.



4.2.10. IORA Participation

The Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) focuses on maritime cooperation among Indian Ocean countries. The regional organisations in the Indian Ocean are gaining increasing geopolitical significance. India views the Indian Ocean as central to its strategic interests. Through IORA, India promotes maritime safety, blue economy initiatives, and disaster management. The organisation strengthens cooperation among littoral states.

IORA also supports India's vision of an open and inclusive Indo-Pacific. By participating actively, India reinforces its identity as a net security provider in the Indian Ocean region. However, diverse membership and varying priorities sometimes limit the organisation's effectiveness. Despite this, IORA remains an important maritime platform for India.

4.2.11. G20 Leadership

Although not a traditional regional organisation, the G20 is a grouping of major economies that influences global governance. India's presidency of the G20 highlighted its role as a bridge between developed and developing countries. India's increasing confidence in shaping global agendas. Through the G20, India promoted themes such as sustainable development, digital inclusion, and climate action. The G20 offers India an opportunity to integrate regional priorities with global discussions. India's leadership in the G20 reflects its broader transition from regional power to global actor. It demonstrates how regional engagement connects with multilateral influence.

4.2.12. Minilateralism

Minilateralism refers to small-group cooperation among selected countries to address specific issues. Unlike large regional organisations, minilateral arrangements are

flexible and focused. The inter-regional cooperation is increasingly shaped by such flexible coalitions. India participates in various minilateral frameworks, such as the Quad and BBIN. These arrangements allow quicker decision-making and targeted cooperation. Minilateralism complements broader regional organisations by overcoming institutional paralysis.

For India, minilateralism reflects strategic adaptability. It enables engagement across platforms without being constrained by consensus rules. This approach aligns with India's shift toward "multi-alignment." Minilateralism demonstrates how India's regional diplomacy has become layered and dynamic. It operates simultaneously in neighbourhood forums, trans-regional coalitions, and global groupings.

4.2.13. Development Partnerships

India's regional engagement is not limited to diplomacy and trade; it also includes development partnerships. Through lines of credit, technical assistance, and capacity-building programs, India supports infrastructure, energy, health, and education projects in neighbouring and partner countries. India's development diplomacy is an important component of South-South cooperation. In South Asia and the Indian Ocean region, India has funded roads, power plants, digital connectivity projects, and disaster relief programs. Unlike traditional aid donors, India frames its assistance as partnership-based rather than donor-recipient driven. This approach emphasises mutual benefit and shared growth.

Within BRICS, development cooperation is carried out through the New Development Bank, while in BIMSTEC and IORA, India supports technical training and disaster resilience initiatives. These efforts strengthen regional integration and enhance India's credibility as a responsible regional actor.

Development partnerships also serve strategic objectives. By investing in connectivity and infrastructure, India counters external influence and promotes regional stability. Thus, development cooperation serves both as economic support and as a diplomatic strategy.

Key Features of India's Development Diplomacy

India's development diplomacy reflects a partnership-oriented approach that focuses on capacity creation, shared growth, and mutually beneficial cooperation with partner countries.

- Lines of credit for infrastructure
- Capacity-building and technical training
- Disaster relief and humanitarian assistance
- Digital and energy cooperation
- Emphasis on partnership and mutual benefit

Strategic Balancing

Regional organisations often operate in environments shaped by major power rivalry. India's participation in SAARC, ASEAN, BRICS, and SCO reflects a broader strategy of strategic balancing. India and China compete and cooperate simultaneously within overlapping regional frameworks. In South Asia, India seeks to maintain influence while preventing external powers from dominating the region. In Southeast Asia, India's engagement complements its Indo-Pacific strategy, reinforcing ASEAN centrality while balancing China's growing presence. Within BRICS, India cooperates with China on financial reform while managing bilateral tensions.

Strategic balancing does not necessarily mean confrontation. Instead, it involves diversified engagement across platforms. India's foreign policy is shifting from non-alignment to "multi-alignment," meaning engagement with multiple partners without exclusive commitments. Through this balancing approach, India maximises flexibility. It participates in Western-led forums like the G20 while also engaging with the BRICS and the SCO. This layered diplomacy enhances strategic autonomy.

Table: India's strategic objectives across major regional organisations.

Organisation	Strategic Objective
SAARC	Neighbourhood stability
ASEAN	Indo-Pacific outreach
BRICS	Financial reform & multipolarity
SCO	Eurasian security engagement
BIMSTEC	Sub-regional connectivity
IORA	Maritime influence

4.2.15. Challenges in Regionalism

Despite expanding engagement, regionalism presents multiple challenges. One major obstacle is political mistrust, especially in South Asia. The unresolved bilateral disputes limit SAARC's effectiveness. India's size sometimes generates suspicion among smaller neighbours. Another challenge is overlapping regionalism. Asian regionalism often involves multiple institutions with similar mandates. This can lead to duplication and coordination difficulties. For India, managing commitments across SAARC,

BIMSTEC, IORA, SCO, and BRICS requires diplomatic resources and policy coherence.

Economic disparities also complicate integration. Differences in development levels, infrastructure capacity, and trade competitiveness hinder deeper economic integration. The trade liberalisation within BIMSTEC and SAARC faces domestic resistance. Finally, geopolitical rivalry shapes regional dynamics. China's expanding economic and security presence in South and Southeast Asia influences regional cooperation patterns. India must navigate competition without undermining cooperative frameworks. Despite these challenges, India continues to view regional organisations as essential tools for stability and growth.

4.2.16. Emerging Architectures

Regional cooperation is not static; it evolves with global changes. India's approach to regional organisations has expanded

beyond neighbouring countries toward broader Indo-Pacific and global frameworks. Emerging architectures include BRICS-Plus, expanded SCO membership, and strengthened G20 coordination. BRICS-Plus is an attempt to widen global outreach and institutional depth. These developments signal a transition from traditional regionalism to networked multilateralism.

India also promotes cross-regional cooperation. The inter-regionalism connects different regional organisations to enhance policy coordination. India's engagement across multiple platforms reflects this interconnected architecture. The future of regionalism will likely involve flexible coalitions, digital connectivity, and issue-based cooperation. Climate resilience, supply chain security, and health governance are becoming central themes. India's diversified engagement positions it to influence these evolving structures.

Recap

- ◆ Regionalism refers to cooperation among geographically proximate countries to address shared concerns.
- ◆ India uses regional organisations as tools for stability, growth, and strategic influence.
- ◆ SAARC is India's primary regional platform in the neighbourhood.
- ◆ Political tensions, especially the India-Pakistan rivalry, limit SAARC's effectiveness.
- ◆ ASEAN engagement reflects India's extended regional outreach under the Act East Policy.
- ◆ The India-ASEAN FTA deepened economic ties but raised concerns about trade imbalances.
- ◆ BRICS provides India with a platform to advocate for reform of global financial institutions.
- ◆ The New Development Bank represents institutional innovation within

BRICS.

- ◆ SCO enhances India's participation in Eurasian security cooperation.
- ◆ BIMSTEC connects South and Southeast Asia and supports connectivity initiatives.
- ◆ IORA strengthens India's maritime diplomacy in the Indian Ocean region.
- ◆ G20 leadership demonstrates India's growing role in global governance.
- ◆ Minilateralism allows flexible and issue-based cooperation.
- ◆ Development partnerships strengthen India's regional credibility.
- ◆ Strategic balancing enables India to engage multiple power centres without formal alliances.

Objective Questions

1. What term refers to cooperation among geographically proximate countries to address shared concerns?
2. Which regional organisation was established in 1985 to promote cooperation in South Asia?
3. What is the name of the free trade agreement created under SAARC to promote regional trade?
4. Which organisation connects South Asia and Southeast Asia through economic and technical cooperation?
5. India became a sectoral dialogue partner of which Southeast Asian regional organisation in 1992?
6. In which year did the India–ASEAN Free Trade Agreement on goods come into force?
7. Which grouping of emerging economies includes Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa?
8. What is the name of the development bank created by the BRICS countries in 2014?
9. Which Eurasian organisation focusing on security cooperation did India join as a full member in 2017?

10. Which regional organisation focuses on maritime cooperation among countries of the Indian Ocean region?
11. Which global forum of major economies includes both developed and developing countries and influences global economic governance?
12. What term refers to cooperation among a small group of countries to address specific issues?
13. Which sub-regional initiative includes Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Nepal?
14. Which policy guides India's strategic engagement with Southeast Asia?
15. What type of cooperation refers to collaboration among developing countries?

Answers

1. Regionalism
2. SAARC
3. SAFTA
4. BIMSTEC
5. ASEAN
6. 2010
7. BRICS
8. New Development Bank
9. Shanghai Cooperation Organisation
10. Indian Ocean Rim Association
11. G20
12. Minilateralism
13. BBIN
14. Act East
15. South-South

Assignments

1. Critically examine India's role in SAARC and explain why the organisation has faced stagnation.
2. Analyse the evolution of India–ASEAN relations and assess their strategic importance.
3. Evaluate the significance of BRICS in promoting multipolar global governance.
4. Compare SAARC and BIMSTEC in terms of structure, effectiveness, and strategic relevance.
5. Discuss India's strategic balancing approach in regional organisations.
6. Examine the role of development diplomacy in strengthening India's regional influence.
7. Practical Assignment: Prepare a comparative chart showing objectives, membership, and India's interests in SAARC, ASEAN, BRICS, and SCO.
8. Practical Assignment: Conduct a brief case study (1,000 words) on India's G20 presidency and its regional implications.
9. Practical Assignment: Analyse trade data between India and ASEAN over the last decade and present findings in graphical form.
10. Practical Assignment: Prepare a policy brief recommending reforms to improve SAARC effectiveness.

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Suggested Reading

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BLOCK

India's Global Footprint





UNIT

India's Soft Power and Cultural Diplomacy

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ explain the concept of soft power and distinguish it from hard power in international relations.
- ◆ analyse India's civilisational assets as sources of cultural diplomacy.
- ◆ examine the role of yoga, Ayurveda, cinema, cuisine, language, and education in shaping India's global image.
- ◆ evaluate the role of institutional mechanisms such as ICCR, AYUSH, and digital diplomacy in advancing India's soft power.
- ◆ assess the challenges and measurement indicators of cultural influence in contemporary global politics.

Prerequisites

An understanding of India's cultural diplomacy requires familiarity with the concept of soft power and the historical role of culture, heritage, and civilisational exchange in shaping international relations. Imagine stepping into the vast landscape of international relations, where nations interact not only through power and policy, but also through ideas, culture, and identity. Begin by recalling the fundamental concepts of power, diplomacy, foreign policy, and globalisation. These ideas form the basic vocabulary through which global interactions are understood. Just as language shapes thought, these concepts shape how we interpret the actions of states on the world stage.

Travel next through the evolution of India's foreign policy since independence. Reflect on the ideals of Non-Alignment, the assertion of strategic autonomy, and the gradual transformation brought by economic reforms and global integration.

These milestones are not isolated events. They form the backdrop against which India's cultural outreach and soft power initiatives have taken shape. Understanding this historical journey allows you to see cultural diplomacy not as decoration, but as an extension of national vision.

You should also carry with you an awareness of India's civilisational heritage. India's philosophies, spiritual traditions, artistic expressions, and pluralistic social fabric have long influenced societies beyond its borders. Familiarity with terms such as multilateralism, public diplomacy, and strategic culture will deepen your understanding of how culture interacts with politics. With this foundation, you will be better prepared to explore how India's soft power emerges from both ancient roots and contemporary global engagement, shaping its presence in an interconnected world.

Keywords

Civilisational Assets, Diaspora Diplomacy, Yoga Diplomacy, ICCR, Digital Diplomacy, Smart Power

Discussion

5.1.1. Concept of Soft Power

In international relations, power is not only about armies, weapons, or economic pressure. There is another kind of influence that works quietly, like fragrance spreading through the air. This is called soft power. The idea became popular among scholars of diplomacy, such as Joseph Nye, who argued that nations can shape global opinion through attraction rather than force. Soft power grows from culture, values, education, arts, and moral credibility. When people admire a country's traditions or respect its democratic institutions, they are more willing to cooperate with it. This type of influence does not command, it convinces. It does not threaten, it inspires.

For India, soft power is deeply rooted in

its long civilisational journey. Unlike some nations whose global presence is recent, India has a centuries-old tradition of philosophical thought, artistic creativity, and spiritual traditions. Scholars argue that culture is not just decoration for diplomacy but a living instrument of engagement. India's approach to diplomacy often highlights pluralism, peaceful coexistence, and dialogue. This reflects India's aspiration for moral leadership in world affairs. Soft power, therefore, becomes a bridge between India's historical identity and its modern foreign policy goals.

Soft power operates through various channels. Cultural exchanges, student scholarships, art exhibitions, yoga events, films, literature festivals, and diaspora networks all contribute to shaping perceptions. Unlike hard power, which is measurable in military



spending, soft power is subtle and difficult to quantify. Yet its effects can be long-lasting. In an information age where communication flows rapidly, cultural influence travels faster than ships or missiles. In such a world, reputation becomes a strategic asset.

India's soft power is not accidental. It is consciously nurtured through institutions, policies, and global outreach programs.

Public diplomacy in India has expanded significantly in the twenty-first century. Social media, cultural missions, and educational initiatives are now integrated into foreign policy planning. This shift shows that India recognises attraction as a source of strength. The world today listens not only to the powerful but also to the respected.

Table: Key Differences between Soft Power and Hard Power

Feature	Soft Power	Hard Power
Basis	Culture, values, ideas	Military strength, economic pressure
Method	Attraction and persuasion	Coercion or inducement
Example (India)	Yoga, Bollywood, diaspora	Defence agreements, trade sanctions
Long-term effect	Builds goodwill and trust	Creates compliance or deterrence

5.1.2. Civilisational Assets

India's soft power rests on what may be called its civilisational assets. These are the accumulated treasures of philosophy, spirituality, literature, science, and social thought developed over thousands of years. India has been home to Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Islam and Sikhism. It has produced epics such as the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, mathematical concepts like zero, and philosophical traditions that explore ethics and consciousness. These are not relics in museums; they continue to shape global conversations about spirituality and wellbeing.



India's ancient universities, such as Nalanda, attracted scholars from across Asia. Buddhist teachings travelled from India to East and Southeast Asia, creating deep cultural links that continue to this day. The temple diplomacy in Southeast Asia revives these historical connections. When Indian leaders visit Angkor Wat or Bodh Gaya, they

are not merely touring monuments. They are reaffirming centuries of shared heritage.

Civilisational assets also include India's pluralistic social fabric. The country's diversity of languages, cuisines, festivals, and artistic forms demonstrates coexistence amid difference. The Indian state has historically supported arts and culture as part of its efforts to build national identity. This pluralism strengthens India's global image as a society that values dialogue and tolerance. In a world facing cultural conflicts, this image becomes attractive.

The Indian diaspora forms another major civilisational asset. Millions of people of Indian origin live across Africa, Europe, the Americas, and Southeast Asia. The diaspora serves as a cultural bridge, preserving traditions while adapting to new environments. Festivals like Diwali, celebrated in London or New York, create emotional connections between India and host societies. The diaspora thus becomes both a cultural ambassador and an economic partner.

India's civilisational narrative also challenges Eurocentric interpretations of diplomacy. Indian diplomatic traditions existed long before modern European systems emerged. Concepts such as peaceful coexistence and ethical statecraft are evident in ancient texts. By highlighting these traditions, India presents itself not as a newcomer but as an experienced civilisational actor returning to global prominence.

5.1.3. Yoga Diplomacy

Few symbols represent India's soft power more clearly than yoga. Once practised in ashrams and homes, yoga has now become a global wellness movement. From New York parks to Paris studios, millions practice yoga as part of daily life. This transformation did not happen automatically. It involved sustained

cultural outreach and strategic diplomacy. In 2014, India proposed the International Day of Yoga at the United Nations. The proposal received wide support, and June 21 was declared the International Day of Yoga. This moment marked a significant achievement in cultural diplomacy. It showed how a traditional practice could become a global celebration. The yoga diplomacy under recent governments has strengthened India's cultural visibility.

Yoga diplomacy is effective because it connects with universal concerns such as health, stress reduction, and inner balance. It avoids political controversy and instead promotes harmony. The media coverage of yoga events enhances India's image as a peaceful and holistic society. Through embassies and cultural centres, India organizes workshops, teacher training programs, and public demonstrations. These activities create goodwill that often extends beyond cultural appreciation to political cooperation. However, yoga diplomacy also raises questions. Some critics argue about commercialization or cultural ownership. Yet, overall, yoga has expanded India's cultural footprint. It demonstrates how ancient wisdom can find new life in modern global contexts. Yoga becomes both a physical practice and a diplomatic language.

5.1.4. Ayurveda and Wellness

Alongside yoga, Ayurveda forms another pillar of India's wellness diplomacy. Ayurveda is a traditional system of medicine based on balance between body, mind, and environment. In recent years, global interest in natural and holistic treatments has grown. India has responded by promoting Ayurveda through research collaborations, wellness tourism, and international conferences.





Kerala has become a global destination for Ayurvedic therapies. Visitors from Europe, the Middle East, and Asia travel for treatments and retreats. This not only generates revenue but also strengthens India's cultural image. India's soft power evolved from being latent to more assertive through such initiatives.

The Government of India established the Ministry of AYUSH to promote traditional systems of medicine, including Ayurveda, Yoga, Unani, Siddha, and Homoeopathy. Through bilateral agreements, India supports Ayurvedic education and certification abroad.

These initiatives reflect the practical role of cultural diplomacy in building long-term relationships. Wellness diplomacy also intersects with sustainable development. Ayurveda emphasises harmony with nature and preventive healthcare. In a world concerned about climate change and lifestyle diseases, such philosophies resonate widely. Thus, Ayurveda becomes not just a medical system but a cultural narrative about balanced living.

5.1.5. Bollywood and Media Influence

Cinema has carried India's stories across continents. Bollywood, based in Mumbai, produces hundreds of films annually. Its colourful music, dramatic storytelling, and emotional themes have captivated audiences from Central Asia to Africa. The media industries play a central role in projecting national identity. Bollywood films often portray family values, romance, and social struggles in ways that are culturally specific yet emotionally universal.



Actors such as Shah Rukh Khan and Aamir Khan have large international fan bases. Indian films are screened at global festivals and streamed on digital platforms. This media presence shapes perceptions of India as vibrant, diverse, and creative. The media diplomacy strengthens soft power by combining entertainment with subtle cultural messaging.

Television serials and digital streaming platforms have further expanded India's cultural reach. Indian music, fashion, and dance styles are imitated and adapted worldwide. Such influence does not require formal agreements; it spreads through audience enthusiasm. In many regions, Bollywood has become a cultural reference point for India. At the same time, media influence must be managed carefully. Representation of social issues, gender roles, and cultural diversity can affect global perceptions. Cultural diplomacy through cinema, therefore, requires sensitivity and inclusiveness. When handled thoughtfully,

Bollywood becomes more than entertainment. It becomes a window through which the world sees India's aspirations and complexities.

5.1.6. Cuisine Diplomacy

Food travels faster than ambassadors. Before political agreements are signed, spices often arrive quietly on ships and settle into kitchens. Indian cuisine has become one of the most visible carriers of India's soft power. From London to Lagos, from Kuala Lumpur to New York, Indian restaurants are not rare curiosities. They are neighbourhood landmarks. The aroma of cumin, cardamom, and curry leaves becomes a sensory introduction to India's cultural depth.



Cuisine diplomacy works because food creates emotional memory. When people share a meal, barriers soften. Dishes like biryani, dosa, butter chicken, beef and samosa have been adapted to local tastes while retaining their Indian identity. This balance between authenticity and adaptation reflects the cultural flexibility of the Indian diaspora. Indian communities abroad often introduce local populations to festivals and culinary traditions, turning private kitchens into cultural classrooms.

Government initiatives also support

cuisine diplomacy. Indian embassies host food festivals, invite chefs for demonstrations, and celebrate regional culinary diversity. These events showcase India's pluralism. The cuisine of Kerala differs from that of Punjab or Bengal, yet all belong to the same cultural mosaic. Such diversity counters stereotypes and presents India as a land of richness rather than uniformity.

Cuisine diplomacy also has economic dimensions. Food exports, spice trade, and culinary tourism generate revenue. Kerala's Ayurveda resorts often combine wellness with traditional vegetarian meals, creating a complete cultural experience. In this way, taste becomes strategy. A plate of food becomes a quiet envoy carrying stories of geography, history, and community.

Case Study: Spices as Historical and Cultural Connectors

For centuries, India has been celebrated as the “Land of Spices,” a reputation that shaped the course of global trade and cultural interaction. Spices such as pepper, cardamom, cinnamon, and turmeric were among the most sought-after commodities in the ancient and medieval world. Their demand connected India with markets in West Asia, Europe, and Southeast Asia, leading to the establishment of extensive maritime trade routes across the Indian Ocean. These exchanges not only facilitated commerce but also promoted the movement of ideas, technologies, and cultural practices between civilisations.

In the contemporary period, spices continue to serve as powerful instruments of India's cultural diplomacy. Indian cuisine, rich in diverse spice traditions, has become a global cultural ambassador, introducing international audiences to India's culinary heritage. Through food festivals, cultural exchanges, and diaspora networks, Indian spices symbolise both historical connectivity and modern soft power, strengthening cultural ties between India and the rest of the world.

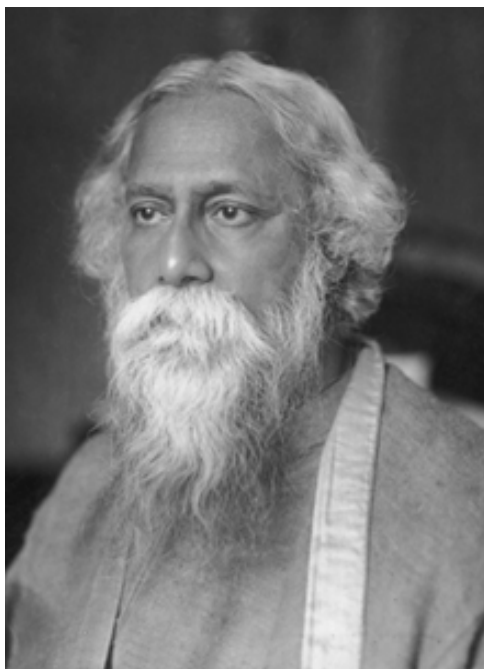
5.1.7. Language and Literature

Language is more than a tool of communication. It carries memory, imagination, and worldview. India's linguistic diversity is remarkable, with hundreds of languages and dialects. Among them, Hindi, Bengali, Tamil, Malayalam, Urdu, and many others possess rich literary traditions. Through translations, literary festivals, and academic exchanges, Indian literature reaches global audiences. Writers such as Rabindranath Tagore, who won the Nobel Prize, introduced global readers to Indian philosophical and poetic traditions. Contemporary English-language authors have also shaped perceptions of India's social realities. Literature becomes a

mirror reflecting both tradition and change. Globalisation creates both dilemmas and opportunities for cultural expression.

The global spread of Hindi cinema has indirectly promoted familiarity with the Hindi language. Similarly, yoga terminology such as “asana” and “pranayama” has entered everyday vocabulary worldwide. Language thus becomes embedded in cultural practices. Cultural diplomacy through language does not impose learning but encourages curiosity. Institutions like the Indian Council for Cultural Relations promote language courses abroad. Scholarships for Sanskrit and Hindi studies strengthen academic ties. Through literature, India tells complex, emotional,

layered stories. These stories build empathy, which is a powerful diplomatic resource.



5.1.8. ICCR and Cultural Institutions

Cultural diplomacy requires institutions that sustain long-term engagement. The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) plays a central role in promoting India's culture globally. Established in 1950, ICCR organises cultural exchanges, exhibitions, artist residencies, and scholarship programs. It functions as a bridge between India and foreign societies.



host dance performances, music recitals, and art workshops. Classical forms such as Bharatanatyam, Kathak, and Hindustani music are presented alongside contemporary art. This combination shows continuity and innovation. The heritage representation must balance authenticity with inclusiveness. ICCR attempts to reflect India's diversity rather than a single narrative.

Scholarships offered by ICCR bring international students to Indian universities. These students often become informal ambassadors of India when they return home. Education thus becomes part of cultural diplomacy. Over time, alum networks strengthen diplomatic ties. Cultural institutions, therefore, create sustained relationships rather than one-time events. Other institutions, including the cultural wings of embassies and ministries such as AYUSH, complement ICCR's work. Together, they form an ecosystem of soft power projection. Institutions provide structure to what might otherwise remain symbolic gestures.

5.1.9. Religious Tourism Circuits

Religion has long connected India with neighbouring regions. Buddhism spread from India to East and Southeast Asia. Hindu temples share architectural similarities across borders. Sikh pilgrimage sites attract visitors from multiple countries. Recognising this shared heritage, India has developed religious tourism circuits to strengthen cultural bonds.

ICCR cultural centres across continents





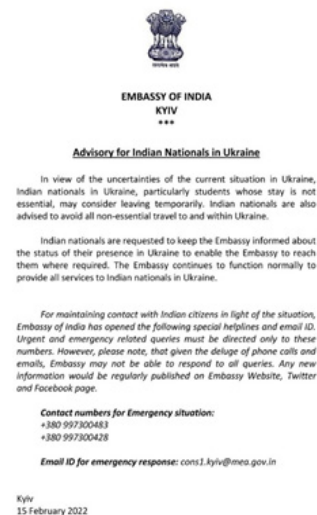
The Buddhist circuit includes sites such as Bodh Gaya, Sarnath, and Kushinagar. Pilgrims from Thailand, Sri Lanka, Japan, and Vietnam visit these locations. These journeys are not only spiritual but diplomatic. Southeast Asian perspectives on India are often shaped by shared religious heritage. When leaders participate in temple restoration or pilgrimage events, symbolic diplomacy unfolds.

Similarly, the Ramayana circuit connects India with countries like Indonesia and Cambodia, where the epic remains culturally significant. Temple diplomacy strengthens emotional ties beyond economic agreements. Religious tourism, therefore, becomes both cultural exchange and strategic engagement. Such initiatives also promote local development. Infrastructure, hospitality services, and heritage conservation create employment. Thus, religious tourism circuits combine diplomacy with domestic growth. Spiritual pathways become channels of cooperation.

5.1.10. Digital Diplomacy

In the twenty-first century, diplomacy has entered the digital sphere. Governments communicate through social media platforms,

virtual conferences, and online campaigns. India has actively adopted digital diplomacy to enhance its soft power. The Ministry of External Affairs maintains a strong online presence, sharing updates on cultural events, diaspora achievements, and policy developments.



Digital diplomacy allows direct communication with global audiences. It reduces dependence on traditional media filters. Through hashtags, live streams, and digital storytelling, India reaches younger populations worldwide. During crises such as

the COVID-19 pandemic, digital platforms were used to coordinate assistance and share information.

Digital diplomacy also supports cultural campaigns. Online yoga sessions, virtual film festivals, and web-based exhibitions extend participation beyond physical boundaries. Technology, therefore, multiplies the reach of soft power. However, digital spaces also require careful management to avoid misinformation or negative narratives. India's strong IT sector adds credibility to its digital diplomacy. The country is seen as a technology hub, which enhances its image as an innovative, forward-looking nation.

Digital engagement thus combines culture and technology into a modern diplomatic instrument.

5.1.11. Education Exchanges

Education is one of the most durable forms of soft power. When students study abroad, they form personal bonds that often last a lifetime. India hosts thousands of international students each year, especially from Africa, South Asia, and Southeast Asia. Scholarships under programs like ICCR and ITEC support this exchange.



Lee (2015) argues that education hubs in Asia use soft power strategically. India's universities, IITs, and management institutes attract international interest. Students exposed to Indian society often gain appreciation for its diversity and democratic culture. When they return home, they carry these impressions into professional and political spheres.

alumni networks, India maintains long-term relationships that extend beyond formal diplomacy. Education diplomacy is not one-sided. Indian students studying abroad also become informal ambassadors. They share Indian culture while learning global perspectives. This two-way flow enriches India's global footprint.

Educational exchanges also promote research collaboration. Joint conferences, faculty mobility, and academic partnerships deepen intellectual ties. Communication and media play key roles in shaping educational diplomacy narratives. Through

5.1.12. International Day of Yoga

The declaration of June 21 as the International Day of Yoga by the United Nations marked a milestone in India's cultural diplomacy. Supported by an overwhelming number of member states, the resolution

reflected global recognition of yoga's universal appeal. This event demonstrated how a cultural practice can achieve institutional legitimacy at the highest international level.



Every year, millions participate in yoga sessions organised by Indian missions abroad. Public spaces such as parks, beaches, and historic landmarks transform into collective wellness arenas. The symbolism is powerful. Nations with diverse political systems gather for a shared practice rooted in Indian tradition. This is an example of assertive soft power. It does not demand alignment with India's policies. Instead, it builds positive associations. The International Day of Yoga also supports tourism, wellness industries, and cultural education. It shows how sustained effort can transform cultural heritage into a global celebration. The success of this initiative reflects careful coordination between diplomacy, media, and civil society. It stands as a vivid example of how soft power operates in practice.

5.1.13. Heritage Restoration Abroad

Cultural diplomacy does not only celebrate heritage within national borders. Sometimes it travels outward to protect shared history in other lands. India has increasingly participated in the restoration of temples, monuments, and historical structures abroad, especially in Southeast Asia. This practice is often described as heritage diplomacy. It reflects a sense of responsibility toward civilisational connections that cross modern

political boundaries.



For example, Indian experts have assisted in restoration projects at Angkor Wat in Cambodia and the My Son temple complex in Vietnam. These sites carry strong historical links with Indian religious and cultural traditions. By supporting conservation work, India demonstrates respect for shared heritage rather than claiming ownership over it. Heritage conservation through diplomacy must be sensitive and collaborative. The goal is partnership, not projection of dominance.

Such initiatives strengthen trust between governments. Cultural cooperation agreements often include training local archaeologists, sharing technical knowledge, and funding restoration efforts. These partnerships create goodwill that extends into political and economic domains. Temple diplomacy in Southeast Asia has enhanced India's image as a cultural ally rather than a strategic rival. Heritage restoration abroad also aligns with India's broader civilisational narrative. It reminds the world that cultural exchange has long been part of Asian history. By preserving monuments together, countries symbolically preserve shared memory. In this way, stones and sculptures become silent ambassadors.

5.1.14. Soft Power versus Hard Power

In international politics, soft power and hard power are often discussed as contrasting approaches. Hard power relies

on military strength, economic sanctions, or strategic pressure. Soft power works through attraction and persuasion. India's foreign policy combines both, but its cultural diplomacy highlights the softer dimension. India's strategic culture has always balanced moral ideals with practical interests. While defence agreements and security partnerships are necessary, cultural engagement builds deeper foundations of trust. Hard power can secure borders. Soft power shapes perceptions. Together they form what some scholars describe as smart power.

The distinction becomes clearer when examining outcomes. Military alliances may ensure security cooperation, but they do not automatically generate public goodwill. Cultural initiatives such as yoga events, educational exchanges, and film festivals reach ordinary citizens. Cultural diplomacy cannot replace hard security measures. However, it can reduce misunderstandings and create a favourable environment for dialogue. India's approach often emphasises moral leadership, peaceful coexistence, and respect for diversity. This is an aspiration rooted in post-colonial identity. Soft power, therefore, complements India's political voice on global issues such as climate change, sustainable development, and multilateral cooperation. The two forms of power are not rivals. They are different instruments in the same orchestra.

5.1.15. Measurement of Cultural Influence

One challenge of soft power is measurement. Military expenditure can be calculated precisely. Cultural attraction cannot. Yet governments and scholars attempt to assess influence through indicators such as global rankings, tourism flows, foreign student enrolment, media presence, and diaspora engagement. Indices like the Global Soft Power Index consider cultural heritage, education systems, global reputation, and

diplomatic networks. India's strong diaspora presence and global popularity of yoga and Bollywood contribute positively to such rankings. However, perception can change quickly due to political developments or media narratives.

Public diplomacy requires consistent communication to sustain credibility. Cultural influence depends on authenticity. If cultural projection appears forced or politicised, its attractiveness may decline. The future of cultural diplomacy lies in transparency, partnership, and community engagement rather than state-controlled messaging. Measurement also involves qualitative assessment. How do foreign publics feel about India? Do they associate it with democracy, spirituality, innovation, or economic opportunity? Surveys, academic exchanges, and media analysis help answer these questions. Although imperfect, such tools help policymakers refine cultural strategies.

5.1.16. Contemporary Strategies

India's cultural diplomacy continues to evolve in response to global changes. In the twenty-first century, cultural engagement is closely linked with technology, diaspora outreach, and strategic partnerships. The government increasingly coordinates cultural initiatives with economic and security policies to present a coherent global identity. India's soft power potential is strongest when it highlights pluralism and democratic values. The art, education, and youth exchanges are emphasised as pillars of bridge-building. Contemporary strategies include promoting Buddhist circuits in Southeast Asia, strengthening ties with the Indian diaspora, expanding digital diplomacy, and supporting creative industries.

Diaspora diplomacy has become particularly significant. Overseas Indians contribute to technology, medicine, business, and



academia. The diaspora networks create transnational identities that connect home and host countries. By engaging these

communities, India enhances both economic and cultural influence.



Contemporary strategy also involves collaboration rather than one-sided projection. India works with European Union partners, African nations, and Southeast Asian countries on cultural projects. India–EU cooperation in public diplomacy as an example of cultural synergy. Such partnerships move beyond symbolic gestures and encourage mutual learning. At the same

time, challenges remain. Global politics is increasingly polarised. Cultural narratives can be contested or misunderstood. Therefore, India’s strategy emphasises inclusiveness, dialogue, and authenticity. Cultural diplomacy succeeds when it reflects lived reality rather than an idealised image.

Recap

- ◆ Soft power refers to influence through attraction rather than coercion.
- ◆ Hard power relies on military and economic pressure.
- ◆ India's soft power is rooted in its civilisational depth and pluralism.
- ◆ Ancient universities like Nalanda symbolised early intellectual diplomacy.
- ◆ The Indian diaspora acts as a cultural bridge across continents.
- ◆ Yoga diplomacy gained global legitimacy through the International Day of Yoga.
- ◆ Ayurveda contributes to wellness diplomacy and medical tourism.
- ◆ Bollywood shapes global perceptions of India's culture and society.
- ◆ Indian cuisine serves as a form of everyday cultural diplomacy.
- ◆ Language and literature transmit India's worldview globally.
- ◆ ICCR institutionalises India's cultural outreach efforts.
- ◆ Religious tourism circuits strengthen ties with Southeast Asia.
- ◆ Heritage restoration abroad reinforces shared civilisational memory.
- ◆ Digital diplomacy expands India's outreach through technology.
- ◆ Education exchanges build long-term diplomatic goodwill.
- ◆ Soft power complements rather than replaces hard power.
- ◆ Measurement of soft power includes tourism, media reach, and student mobility.
- ◆ Contemporary strategies emphasise inclusiveness, partnership, and innovation.

Objective Questions

1. Who popularised the concept of soft power in international relations?
2. Soft power operates primarily through attraction or coercion?
3. Which ministry promotes Ayurveda and Yoga internationally?



4. June 21 is observed globally as which international day?
5. Which institution was established in 1950 to promote India's cultural diplomacy?
6. Name one ancient Indian university known for international scholarship.
7. What type of power combines hard and soft power strategies?
8. Which Indian film industry is a major source of cultural influence?
9. What is the term used for diplomacy conducted through online platforms?
10. Which region is strongly connected with India through Buddhist heritage circuits?
11. Which concept emphasises moral leadership in Indian diplomacy?
12. Which indicator measures cultural influence through international students?
13. Temple restoration abroad is an example of what type of diplomacy?
14. Diaspora networks contribute mainly to which type of power?
15. Yoga diplomacy became globally recognised through which international organisation?

Answers

1. Joseph Nye
2. Attraction
3. AYUSH
4. Yoga
5. ICCR
6. Nalanda
7. Smart
8. Bollywood
9. Digital
10. Southeast Asia
11. Exceptionalism

12. Enrolment
13. Heritage
14. Soft
15. United Nations

Assignments

1. Critically analyse the concept of soft power in the context of India's foreign policy.
2. Discuss the role of civilisational assets in shaping India's diplomatic identity.
3. Examine yoga diplomacy as a case study of successful cultural projection.
4. Evaluate the contribution of Bollywood to India's global cultural footprint.
5. Analyse the role of the Indian diaspora in strengthening India's soft power.
6. Conduct a field study of an International Day of Yoga event and prepare a short report on participation and public perception.
7. Prepare a presentation comparing the soft power strategies of India and another Asian country.
8. Design a hypothetical cultural diplomacy initiative aimed at strengthening India–Africa relations.
9. Analyse how digital diplomacy enhances India's global engagement.
10. Prepare a brief policy note suggesting ways to measure India's soft power more effectively.

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UNIT

Indian Diaspora and Its Influence

Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ explain the historical evolution of the Indian diaspora and its global spread.
- ◆ distinguish between colonial and modern patterns of Indian migration.
- ◆ analyse the economic contributions of the diaspora through remittances, investments, and knowledge networks.
- ◆ examine the political, diplomatic, and cultural influence of the Indian diaspora in global affairs.
- ◆ evaluate contemporary challenges and emerging trends shaping diaspora engagement with India.

Prerequisites

The study of India's diaspora relations requires awareness of the historical patterns of migration and how overseas Indian communities contribute to economic, cultural, and diplomatic connections. Imagine the long journey of people from the Indian subcontinent across oceans and continents. For centuries, traders, scholars, labourers, and professionals have travelled beyond India's shores, carrying with them languages, traditions, skills, and cultural practices. These movements created vibrant communities in distant lands while maintaining enduring connections with their homeland. Understanding this journey requires a basic familiarity with the ideas of migration, globalization, and international relations.

Learners approaching this unit should therefore possess a general awareness of how countries interact in an interconnected world. Concepts such as foreign policy, global trade, and cultural exchange provide useful foundations for understanding

the experiences of migrant communities. Similarly, knowledge of India's economic reforms and expanding global engagement helps explain why Indian migration increased significantly in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

It is also helpful to be familiar with terms such as remittances, transnational networks, and soft power. These concepts explain how migrant communities influence economic development, diplomacy, and cultural relations between countries. As learners engage with this unit, they will see how the Indian diaspora has evolved from early trading networks and colonial labour migration into one of the world's most influential global communities, shaping both India's development and its relationships with the wider world.

Keywords

Migration, Remittances, Diaspora Diplomacy, Soft Power, Brain Drain, Brain Gain, Transnational Networks

Discussion

5.2.1. Evolution of the Indian Diaspora

The Indian diaspora refers to people of Indian origin living outside India who maintain cultural, social, or emotional connections with their homeland. The history of the Indian diaspora spans several centuries and reflects the broader story of migration, trade, colonialism, and globalisation. Indian communities can today be found across Asia, Africa, Europe, North America, the Caribbean, and Oceania. These communities differ widely in language, religion, economic status, and migration experiences, yet they share a common heritage linked to the Indian subcontinent. Scholars note that the Indian diaspora is among the largest and most diverse in the world.

The earliest forms of Indian migration

occurred through trade and cultural exchanges across the Indian Ocean. Merchants, scholars, and religious teachers travelled from India to Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and East Africa long before the colonial period. These interactions created enduring cultural connections, visible in architecture, language, and religious traditions in many regions. Historical records show that Indian traders established settlements in ports such as Malacca, Zanzibar, and Aden. These early movements were voluntary and often driven by economic opportunities and cultural interaction rather than political pressures.

The modern concept of the Indian diaspora began to take shape during the nineteenth century under British colonial rule. During this period, large numbers of Indians were transported as indentured labourers to colonies such as Mauritius, Fiji, Trinidad,

Guyana, and South Africa. These migrants worked primarily in plantations producing sugar, rubber, and other commodities. Although the indenture system ended in the early twentieth century, these communities remained in their new countries and gradually built stable societies while preserving many elements of Indian culture.

After India's independence in 1947, patterns of migration changed significantly. New waves of migrants moved to Europe, North America, and the Middle East in search of education and employment. Highly skilled professionals such as doctors, engineers, and academics became prominent in Western countries, while labour migrants moved in

large numbers to the Gulf region. These migrations transformed the Indian diaspora from a largely labour based community into a diverse global network of professionals, entrepreneurs, and workers.

Today, the Indian diaspora is estimated to include more than 30 million people worldwide. This large and diverse community plays an important role in shaping India's global connections through economic investments, cultural exchanges, and diplomatic engagement. Indian diaspora is not simply a group of migrants but a dynamic transnational community that influences both the host countries and India itself.

What is diaspora?

A diaspora is a community of people who live outside their ancestral homeland while maintaining strong emotional, cultural, or economic connections to it. These communities often preserve elements of their language, traditions, and identity even as they integrate into the societies in which they reside. As a result, diasporas become important carriers of cultural heritage across national borders.

In many cases, diaspora communities play a significant role in strengthening international relations. They contribute to trade and investment flows, facilitate cultural exchange, and help build political and diplomatic connections between countries. For India, the large Indian diaspora, spread across regions of the world, serves as an important link that promotes economic cooperation, cultural influence, and people-to-people relations globally.

5.2.2. Colonial versus Modern Migration

The history of Indian migration can broadly be divided into two major phases: colonial migration and modern migration. These phases differ significantly in their causes, destinations, and socioeconomic outcomes. Colonial migration mainly occurred between the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when the British Empire transported Indian labourers to different parts of

the world. Modern migration, on the other hand, emerged after independence and is largely driven by globalization, education, and economic opportunities.

During the colonial period, Indian migrants were often recruited under the indenture system. After the abolition of slavery in the British Empire in 1834, plantation owners required new sources of labour. Millions of Indians were transported to colonies such as Mauritius, Trinidad, Suriname, Fiji, and South Africa to work on plantations. These

workers usually signed contracts for several years, after which they could either return to India or settle permanently in the host country. However, many migrants faced harsh working conditions and social discrimination during this period.

Despite these difficulties, colonial-era migrants gradually built stable communities in their host societies. They preserved languages, religious practices, and cultural traditions, which later became important elements of multicultural societies in those countries. For example, Indian festivals such as Diwali and Holi are now celebrated widely in countries like Mauritius and Trinidad. The descendants of these migrants often occupy important positions in politics, business, and education in their respective countries.

Modern migration patterns differ significantly from colonial migration. Since the late twentieth century, many Indians have

migrated voluntarily for education, professional opportunities, or entrepreneurship. Large numbers of Indian professionals work in sectors such as information technology, medicine, engineering, and finance. Countries such as the United States, Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom have become major destinations for these skilled migrants.

Another important feature of modern migration is the movement of labour to the Gulf countries. Millions of Indian workers are employed in construction, service industries, and other sectors in countries such as the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar. These workers play a crucial role in supporting both the host countries' economies and their families in India through remittances. Modern migration has created a complex network of economic and social ties that connect India with the global economy.

Table: Differences between Colonial and Modern Indian Migration

Feature	Colonial Migration	Modern Migration
Period	19th–early 20th century	Post-independence to present
Main cause	Indentured labour system	Education, employment, globalization
Migrant profile	Plantation labourers	Skilled professionals and workers
Major destinations	Caribbean, Africa, Fiji	USA, UK, Canada, Gulf countries
Nature of migration	Often forced or contract-based	Mostly voluntary

5.2.3. Demographic Spread

The Indian diaspora today has a truly global presence. Indian origin communities live in almost every region of the world, creating one of the most widely distributed

diasporas in modern history. These communities differ in size, economic role, and migration history depending on the region. However, together they form a network that connects India to multiple parts of the global economy and society.

One of the largest concentrations of the Indian diaspora is found in the Gulf region. Countries such as the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Qatar host millions of Indian workers. These migrants are mainly employed in construction, transportation, healthcare, and service sectors. The Gulf migration is particularly important because it generates large remittance flows that contribute significantly to India's economy.

Another major centre of the Indian diaspora is North America. The United States and Canada host large communities of Indian professionals working in fields such as technology, medicine, research, and business. Indian Americans have achieved notable success in sectors like Silicon Valley's technology industry. Many global technology companies have leaders of Indian origin, highlighting the influence of the diaspora in knowledge based economies.

In Europe, the United Kingdom has one of the largest Indian origin populations outside India. Indian communities in the UK have a long history dating back to the colonial period. Today, they contribute significantly to the country's business, healthcare, and public life. Similarly, large Indian communities exist in Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Caribbean, reflecting earlier colonial-era migration.

The demographic spread of the Indian diaspora demonstrates how migration patterns have evolved. Some communities trace their origins to nineteenth-century labour migration, while others are products of modern globalisation and skilled migration. This diversity makes the Indian diaspora a complex and dynamic global community rather than a single homogeneous group.

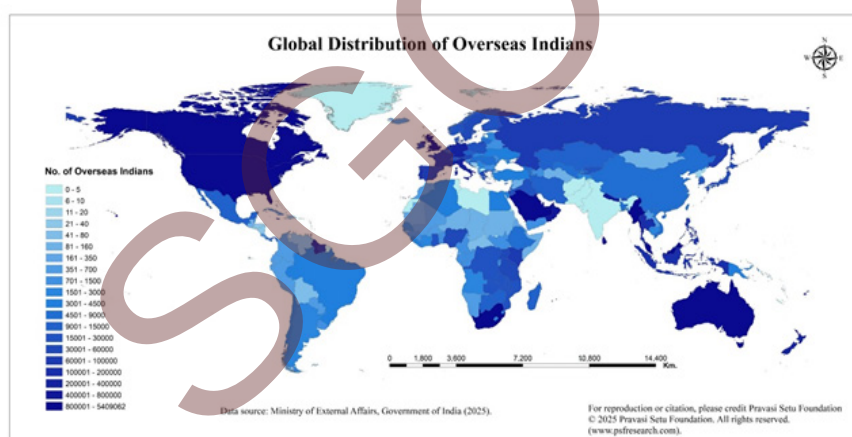


Figure: Global spread of the Indian diaspora showing major concentrations in North America, the Gulf region, Europe, Africa, and Southeast Asia.

5.3.4. Economic Contributions

The Indian diaspora plays an important role in the economic development of both India and the countries where diaspora communities reside. These contributions occur through various channels such as investments, trade networks, business entrepreneurship, and knowledge exchange. Diaspora communities often serve as economic bridges linking

India with international markets.

One of the most visible contributions of the diaspora is its involvement in business and entrepreneurship. Many Indian migrants have established successful businesses abroad, particularly in sectors such as information technology, retail trade, hospitality, and finance. These businesses not only create employment in host countries but also

strengthen economic ties with India. Diaspora entrepreneurs frequently invest in Indian industries or collaborate with Indian companies, thereby supporting economic growth.

Another important contribution of the diaspora is the transfer of knowledge and technology. Highly skilled Indian professionals working in global research institutions and technology firms contribute to innovation and knowledge sharing. Their expertise often flows back to India through research collaboration, start-up investments, and mentorship networks. International migration has played a key role in the growth of India's information technology sector.

Diaspora networks also facilitate international trade and investment. Migrants often maintain business ties with their homelands, fostering bilateral trade between India and their host countries. These connections create opportunities for Indian exports and promote economic partnerships. For instance, Indian origin business leaders in North America and Europe have played important roles in strengthening trade relations with India.

The economic influence of the diaspora extends beyond direct investments. Cultural familiarity and trust within diaspora networks can reduce barriers in international business transactions. These informal networks help companies navigate new markets and regulatory environments. Diaspora communities act as intermediaries, connecting global markets with local economies.

5.2.5. Remittances

Remittances are one of the most significant economic contributions of the Indian diaspora. Remittances are funds migrants

send to their families and communities in their home countries. These financial transfers support household consumption, education, healthcare, and small business investments in India. India has consistently been the world's largest recipient of remittances, receiving billions of dollars each year from its overseas population.

A large portion of these remittances originates from Indian workers in the Gulf countries. Many migrant labourers send a significant share of their income back to India to support their families. These remittances play an important role in improving living standards in states such as Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Uttar Pradesh. In some regions, remittances have become a major source of household income and a driver of local economic development.

Remittances also contribute to national economic stability. They increase foreign exchange reserves and help maintain balance-of-payments stability. Unlike foreign investments, which can fluctuate with global economic conditions, remittances tend to remain relatively stable even during economic downturns. This stability makes them an important component of India's economic resilience.

Beyond financial transfers, remittances also create social and developmental impacts. Families receiving remittances often invest in education and health, improving long-term human development outcomes. Remittances can also support local entrepreneurship when migrants finance small businesses in their hometowns. Diaspora engagement can be a powerful tool for development when combined with supportive government policies.

Table 2: Major Sources of Remittances to India

Region	Major Destination Countries
Gulf Region	UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar
North America	United States, Canada
Europe	United Kingdom, Germany
Asia-Pacific	Singapore, Australia

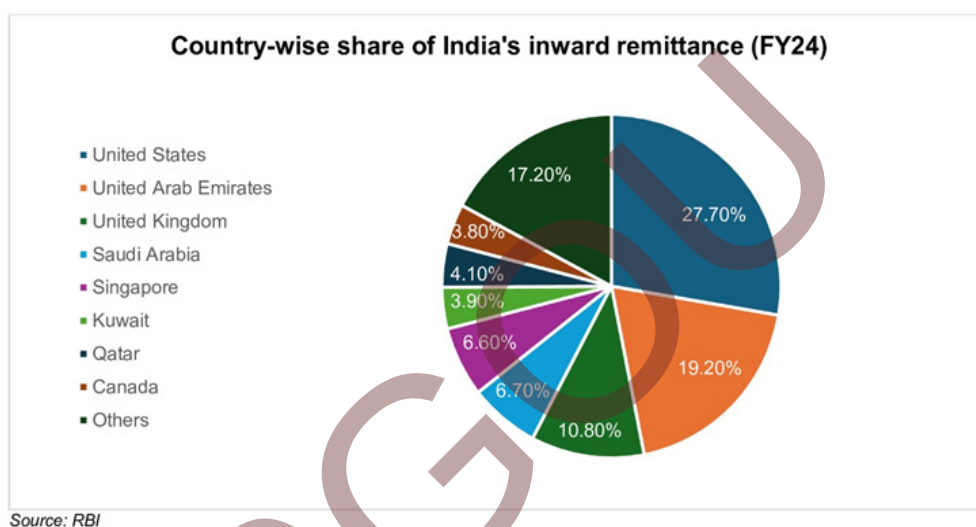


Figure: Major regions from which remittances are sent to India by the diaspora.

5.2.6. Diaspora Lobbying

One of the most visible forms of diaspora influence is lobbying in host countries' political systems. Diaspora lobbying refers to the efforts by migrant communities to influence public policy, government decisions, or diplomatic relations in favour of their homeland or community interests. The Indian diaspora has increasingly become active in lobbying activities, particularly in democratic countries where civic participation and advocacy are encouraged.

In countries such as the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom, Indian

diaspora organisations actively engage with political leaders, lawmakers, and policy institutions. These organisations often work to strengthen bilateral relations between India and their host countries. For example, Indian American groups have played a role in shaping public discussions on trade relations, defence cooperation, and immigration policies involving India. The Indian diaspora in the United States has emerged as an influential political community capable of shaping policy debates.

Lobbying efforts also focus on promoting India's strategic and economic interests. Diaspora organisations often organise

conferences, policy forums, and cultural events that highlight India's achievements and encourage stronger diplomatic partnerships. These initiatives create networks between policymakers, business leaders, and academics from both countries.

However, diaspora lobbying does not always operate in a unified manner. The Indian diaspora is highly diverse, with different linguistic, religious, and regional identities. These internal differences sometimes shape diaspora organisations' priorities. Nevertheless, the growing political awareness and professional success of Indian communities abroad have increased their ability to participate in policy advocacy.

5.2.7. Political Influence Abroad

Beyond lobbying activities, the Indian diaspora has achieved significant political representation in several countries. Members of the diaspora have been elected to important public offices, including national parliaments, local governments, and ministerial positions. This growing representation demonstrates the integration and influence of Indian origin communities in their host societies.

In countries such as the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States, several political leaders of Indian origin have risen to prominent positions. Their presence in political institutions strengthens cultural and diplomatic connections between India and these countries. Diaspora political participation reflects both migrants' integration into host societies and their continued connection to India.

Political influence is also visible in countries where Indian migrants settled during the colonial period. In Mauritius, for example, people of Indian origin constitute a large portion of the population and have played a dominant role in national politics. Similar examples exist in Fiji and Trinidad and Tobago, where Indian origin leaders

have served as prime ministers or senior government officials.

The political success of diaspora communities often strengthens bilateral relations with India. Leaders of Indian origin may promote economic cooperation, educational exchanges, and cultural initiatives between their countries and India. However, their political roles primarily represent the interests of their host nations, highlighting the complex identity of diaspora communities.

5.2.8. Knowledge Networks

Another important dimension of diaspora influence is the creation of knowledge networks. Knowledge networks refer to professional, academic, and technological connections maintained by diaspora communities with institutions in their homeland. These networks facilitate the exchange of ideas, research collaboration, and technological innovation.

Highly skilled Indian professionals working in global institutions often maintain strong links with universities, research centres, and technology firms in India. Through conferences, mentoring programs, and collaborative projects, diaspora professionals contribute to knowledge transfer and capacity building in India. Indian professionals in Silicon Valley played a key role in supporting the growth of India's information technology sector.

Many Indian origin scientists and engineers participate in research partnerships with Indian universities. These collaborations help strengthen India's innovation ecosystem and promote technological development. In fields such as biotechnology, artificial intelligence, and space research, diaspora networks have helped connect Indian researchers with international expertise.

Knowledge networks also operate through informal channels. Alum associations, professional organisations, and online communities



often facilitate collaboration between diaspora professionals and institutions in India. These connections demonstrate how migration can create global knowledge flows that benefit both the homeland and host countries

Table: Examples of sectors where diaspora knowledge networks contribute to India's development.

Sector	Example Contribution
Information Technology	Collaboration with Indian tech startups
Academic Research	Joint research projects and conferences
Healthcare	Medical training and hospital partnerships
Entrepreneurship	Mentoring and venture capital investment

Diaspora diplomacy refers to the use of diaspora communities as partners in advancing a country's foreign policy objectives. Governments increasingly recognise that migrant communities can act as cultural ambassadors, economic partners, and political bridges between countries. India has actively incorporated diaspora engagement into its diplomatic strategy. Indian diplomatic missions abroad frequently collaborate with diaspora organisations to promote cultural events, trade opportunities, and educational exchanges. These interactions strengthen people-to-people ties between India and other countries. The diaspora diplomacy allows India to extend its influence beyond formal diplomatic channels.

Diaspora communities also play an important role in promoting India's image

abroad. Cultural festivals, language schools, and community organisations often introduce local populations to Indian traditions, cuisine, and art. These activities enhance India's soft power and strengthen cultural connections. In addition, diaspora networks can facilitate economic diplomacy. Business leaders of Indian origin often support investment partnerships, trade agreements, and technological collaboration between India and their host countries. Through these activities, diaspora diplomacy becomes a valuable component of India's global engagement.

Case Study: Indian American Influence in Technology

The Indian American community has emerged as a significant force in the global technology ecosystem, particularly in Silicon Valley, an innovation hub. Indian-origin professionals occupy influential positions as entrepreneurs, engineers, venture capitalists, and corporate leaders in major technology firms. Their presence has contributed to shaping global innovation networks while also strengthening professional and economic ties between India and the United States.

These professionals have also played an important role in fostering India-US technological collaboration. Through investment networks, mentorship, and start-up partnerships, Indian American technology leaders have supported the growth of India's digital and innovation sectors. Their cross-border connections facilitate knowledge exchange, venture capital flows, and research collaborations, thereby reinforcing the technological partnership between the two countries and demonstrating the broader influence of diaspora networks in international economic relations.

5.2.9.Pravasi Bharatiya Divas

Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) is an important initiative through which the Government of India engages with its diaspora community. The event is celebrated every year on January 9 to honour the contributions of overseas Indians and strengthen their relationship with the homeland. The date commemorates the return of Mahatma Gandhi from South Africa to India in 1915, symbolizing the historical connection between migration and national development.

The Pravasi Bharatiya Divas convention brings together members of the Indian diaspora, policymakers, scholars, and business leaders from around the world. Participants discuss issues related to migration, investment

opportunities, cultural exchange, and global cooperation. The convention also provides a platform for diaspora entrepreneurs and professionals to connect with Indian institutions. During the event, the Government of India presents the Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award to distinguished members of the diaspora who have made significant contributions in their fields. These awards recognise achievements in science, business, public service, and culture.

Pravasi Bharatiya Divas also serves an important symbolic function. It reinforces the emotional connection between overseas Indians and their ancestral homeland. By celebrating diaspora achievements, the event strengthens the sense of shared identity between India and its global community.





Figures: Annual Pravasi Bharatiya Divas convention bringing together members of the Indian diaspora and policymakers.

5.2.10. OCI and PIO Policies

To strengthen its relationship with overseas Indians, the Government of India has introduced several policies to facilitate engagement with diaspora communities. Two of the most significant initiatives are the Person of Indian Origin (PIO) card and the Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) card. The PIO card was introduced to provide certain privileges to individuals of Indian origin who held foreign citizenship. These privileges included visa-free entry to India, property ownership rights, and easier access to educational opportunities. However, the PIO scheme was later merged with the OCI scheme to simplify administrative procedures.

The OCI card provides long-term benefits to overseas Indians. Holders of OCI status receive lifelong visa-free travel to India and enjoy many rights similar to those of Indian citizens, except voting and holding constitutional offices. This policy has strengthened the connection between India and its diaspora by making travel, business, and cultural exchange easier. These policies demonstrate how governments can use institutional mechanisms to maintain ties

with migrant communities. By recognising overseas Indians as partners in development, India has created a framework that encourages diaspora engagement in economic and cultural activities.

Key Features of OCI Status

The Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) status provides several important privileges to persons of Indian origin living abroad. It allows lifelong visa-free travel to India and grants the right to live, work, and study in the country without the need for separate permits. OCI cardholders are also permitted to own property in India, except agricultural and plantation land. Additionally, the status offers simplified entry, residency, and registration procedures, enabling members of the Indian diaspora to maintain stronger economic, cultural, and familial connections with India.

5.2.11.Crisis Evacuation Operations

One of the most important responsibilities of a government toward its diaspora is ensuring their safety during emergencies. India has conducted several large-scale evacuation operations to rescue its citizens and members of the diaspora from conflict zones, natural disasters, and political crises abroad. These operations demonstrate the Indian state's strong commitment to protecting its overseas population. One of the most notable examples is Operation Rahat conducted in 2015 during the conflict in Yemen. The Indian government evacuated thousands of Indian nationals as well as citizens of other countries from the conflict

zone. This humanitarian mission received international recognition for its efficiency and coordination.

Another example is Operation Vande Bharat during the COVID-19 pandemic, which facilitated the return of thousands of stranded Indians from across the world. These evacuation efforts involved coordination between diplomatic missions, airlines, and military forces. Such operations strengthen the trust between the diaspora and the Indian government. They also enhance India's international reputation as a responsible state that cares for its citizens abroad. The diaspora protection policies are an important element of India's evolving foreign policy strategy.

Table: Major Indian Evacuation Operations

Operation	Year	Location
Operation Sukoon	2006	Lebanon
Operation Rahat	2015	Yemen
Operation Devi Shakti	2021	Afghanistan
Vande Bharat Mission	2020	Global evacuation during COVID-19



Figure: Selected evacuation missions conducted by India to protect its diaspora.

5.2.12. Diaspora and Soft Power

The Indian diaspora plays a significant role in strengthening India's soft power worldwide. Soft power refers to a country's ability to influence others through cultural attraction, shared values, and a positive global perception rather than through coercion or military force. Diaspora communities often serve as informal ambassadors of their homeland, introducing local communities to Indian culture, traditions, and values.

Indian communities abroad frequently organise cultural festivals, language classes, and social gatherings that showcase India's cultural diversity. Celebrations of Diwali, Holi, Eid, and other festivals have become common in many countries, attracting not only Indian communities but also local populations. These events create awareness about Indian traditions and help build cultural connections between India and other societies. Cultural diplomacy through diaspora networks, therefore, strengthens India's international image.

The diaspora also promotes India's soft power through media, entertainment, and academic engagement. Indian films, music, literature, and cuisine have gained popularity worldwide, largely through diaspora communities. Indian restaurants, cultural centres, and yoga studios have become common features in many cities. The Indian diaspora in the United States has significantly contributed to projecting India's cultural identity and democratic values in global discussions.

Another important dimension of diaspora soft power is the role of diaspora professionals in shaping global perceptions of India. When individuals of Indian origin succeed in fields such as science, technology, business, and politics, they enhance India's reputation as a country of talent and innovation. These

achievements contribute to India's global visibility and strengthen its cultural influence.

5.2.13. Challenges Faced by the Diaspora

Despite their achievements, diaspora communities often face various challenges in their host countries. These challenges may include social discrimination, difficulties with cultural adjustment, labour exploitation, and identity conflicts. Migrants frequently need to balance their attachment to their homeland with the demands of integration into their host societies.

One of the major challenges faced by diaspora communities is cultural identity. Many migrants experience a sense of dual belonging, feeling connected to both their homeland and their host country. This situation can create identity dilemmas, especially among younger generations born abroad. The diaspora identity often involves negotiating between cultural heritage and the realities of living in a multicultural society.

Economic challenges are also significant, particularly for low-skilled migrant workers. Indian labour migrants in the Gulf region sometimes face difficult working conditions, limited labour rights, and social isolation. Governments and international organisations have increasingly recognised the need to protect migrant workers through legal frameworks and bilateral agreements.

Another challenge is the risk that political tensions will affect diaspora communities. Diplomatic disagreements between countries may sometimes create pressure on diaspora populations. Additionally, internal divisions within diaspora communities along religious, regional, or linguistic lines can complicate collective representation. These challenges highlight the complex nature of diaspora experiences in a globalised world.

5.2.14. Brain Drain versus Brain Gain

The migration of skilled professionals has long been debated in terms of “brain drain” and “brain gain.” Brain drain refers to the loss of highly skilled individuals from a country when they migrate abroad in search of better opportunities. For many developing countries, including India in the past, this phenomenon raised concerns about the loss of talent and expertise.

During the late twentieth century, many highly educated Indians migrated to countries such as the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom in search of advanced research opportunities and better salaries. Critics argued that this migration reduced the availability of skilled professionals within India. However, over time, scholars began to recognise that migration can also generate positive outcomes.

The concept of brain gain highlights the benefits that migration can bring to the home country. Many diaspora professionals maintain strong ties with India and contribute through investments, research collaboration, and entrepreneurial initiatives. The rise of India’s information technology sector, for example, has been partly supported by diaspora professionals who returned to India or invested in Indian technology companies.

The idea of “brain circulation” has also gained attention in recent years. Instead of a one-way movement of talent, skilled professionals increasingly move between countries, creating networks of knowledge and innovation. Such transnational mobility allows countries like India to benefit from global expertise while maintaining connections with their diaspora communities.



Figure: Successful Indian CEOs in the USA: Sundar Pichai (Alphabet), Shantanu Narayen (Adobe), Laxman Narasimhan (Starbucks), and Satya Nadella (Microsoft)

5.2.15. Emerging Trends in the Indian Diaspora

The nature of the Indian diaspora continues to evolve in response to global economic and technological changes. One important trend is the increasing mobility of skilled professionals in fields such as information technology, finance, healthcare, and research. These professionals often pursue transnational careers that span multiple countries and institutions. Another emerging trend is the growing role of diaspora entrepreneurship. Many Indian origin entrepreneurs have established successful global companies and start-ups. Their businesses often maintain strong links with India through outsourcing, research partnerships, and investment. These economic connections contribute to India's integration into the global economy.

Digital communication has also transformed diaspora engagement. Social media platforms and digital networks allow diaspora communities to remain connected with India in real time. Online forums, virtual conferences, and diaspora platforms have created new opportunities for collaboration between diaspora professionals and institutions in India. Additionally, the Indian government has increasingly adopted proactive diaspora engagement policies. Programs such as Pravasi Bharatiya Divas, diaspora investment initiatives, and cultural exchange programs demonstrate the growing importance of diaspora diplomacy in India's foreign policy. The Indian state now recognises diaspora communities as strategic partners in development and international engagement.

Recap

- ◆ The Indian diaspora is one of the largest migrant communities in the world.
- ◆ Early migration from India occurred through trade networks across the Indian Ocean.
- ◆ The colonial period saw large-scale migration of indentured labourers to plantations in different colonies.
- ◆ After independence, migration patterns shifted toward skilled professionals and labour migrants.
- ◆ Today, Indian diaspora communities are spread across North America, Europe, Africa, the Gulf region, and Southeast Asia.
- ◆ Diaspora communities contribute to economic development through entrepreneurship and investments.
- ◆ Remittances sent by migrants are a major source of income for many families in India.
- ◆ Diaspora organisations participate in lobbying and advocacy in host countries.

- ◆ Political leaders of Indian origin hold influential positions in several countries.
- ◆ Knowledge networks link diaspora professionals with Indian institutions and industries.
- ◆ Diaspora diplomacy strengthens cultural and economic ties between India and other countries.
- ◆ Government initiatives such as Pravasi Bharatiya Divas promote engagement with overseas Indians.
- ◆ Policies such as OCI status facilitate long-term connections with India.
- ◆ Crisis evacuation operations demonstrate the government's responsibility toward diaspora safety.
- ◆ The diaspora enhances India's soft power through cultural exchange and global achievements.

Objective Questions

1. What is meant by the term diaspora?
2. During which historical period did indentured labour migration from India begin?
3. Name the system under which Indian labourers were transported to colonial plantations.
4. Which region hosts the largest number of Indian migrant workers?
5. What term refers to money sent by migrants to their home country?
6. What event is organized annually to celebrate the contributions of overseas Indians?
7. Which policy grants lifelong visa-free travel to India for persons of Indian origin?
8. What concept refers to the loss of skilled professionals from a country due to migration?
9. What term describes the benefits gained by a country through diaspora knowledge and investments?
10. What concept describes the ability of a country to influence others through

culture and attraction rather than force?

11. Which evacuation operation rescued Indians from Yemen in 2015?
12. Which sector benefited greatly from diaspora professionals returning to India?
13. What term describes networks connecting diaspora professionals with institutions in their homeland?
14. What term refers to organized diaspora efforts to influence policies in host countries?
15. What annual award recognises distinguished members of the Indian diaspora?

Answers

1. Migration
2. Colonial
3. Indenture
4. Gulf
5. Remittances
6. PBD
7. OCI
8. Brain drain
9. Brain gain
10. Soft power
11. Rahat
12. IT
13. Knowledge networks
14. Lobbying
15. Pravasi Bharatiya Samman

Assignments

1. Explain the historical evolution of the Indian diaspora from early trade migration to modern globalisation.
2. Compare colonial and modern migration patterns of Indians and explain their different socio-economic impacts.
3. Analyse the economic contributions of the Indian diaspora to India's development.
4. Examine the role of remittances in improving the livelihoods of families in India.
5. Discuss the concept of diaspora diplomacy and its significance in India's foreign policy.
6. Evaluate the influence of diaspora communities in shaping political and economic relations between India and other countries.
7. Collect data on Indian diaspora populations in five countries and present the information using a table or map.
8. Conduct a short interview with a migrant worker or overseas Indian (or use a secondary source) and analyse their experiences of migration and identity.
9. Prepare a brief case study on a global leader or entrepreneur of Indian origin and explain how their achievements contribute to India's global image.
10. Critically discuss the debate between brain drain and brain gain in the context of India's development.

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BLOCK

India and Global Issues

SGOU



UNIT

India's Approach to Climate Change and Environmental Challenges

Learning Outcomes

After studying this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ understand the foundations of India's climate diplomacy and its principles in global environmental governance.
- ◆ explain India's role in international climate agreements such as the UNFCCC, Kyoto Protocol, and the Paris Agreement.
- ◆ analyse India's domestic climate policies, including the National Action Plan on Climate Change and renewable energy initiatives.
- ◆ examine the concept of climate justice and the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR).
- ◆ evaluate India's evolving climate strategy and its cooperation with global partners in addressing environmental challenges.

Prerequisites

An understanding of India's approach to climate change and environmental challenges requires familiarity with the global discourse on sustainable development, international climate negotiations, and the environmental responsibilities of developing countries. Imagine a journey through one of the most urgent issues confronting humanity today. Across the world, rising temperatures, melting glaciers, extreme weather events, and environmental degradation are reshaping economies, societies, and international relations. Climate change is not merely an environmental problem; it is also a global political challenge that requires cooperation among nations, international institutions, and local communities. Understanding how countries respond to these challenges forms an important part of contemporary political and environmental studies.

To fully appreciate the themes discussed in this unit, learners should have a basic understanding of environmental issues and of how countries collaborate to address global challenges. Concepts such as sustainable development, globalisation, and the role of international organisations help explain how climate policies are negotiated and implemented worldwide. Climate change discussions often take place through international agreements and global conferences, where countries attempt to balance environmental protection with economic development.

Learners should also have a general awareness of India's foreign policy priorities and development goals. India's approach to climate change reflects its unique position as a rapidly developing country with a large population and significant developmental needs. At the same time, India participates actively in global climate negotiations and promotes international cooperation to address environmental challenges.

As you explore this unit, you will discover how India navigates these complex issues through diplomacy, domestic policies, and international partnerships. Understanding these foundations will help learners appreciate India's strategies in climate negotiations, its emphasis on equity and climate justice, and its broader vision of achieving sustainable development while protecting the environment.

Keywords

Climate Diplomacy, UNFCCC, Kyoto Protocol, Paris Agreement, CBDR Principle, Renewable Energy, Climate Justice, International Solar Alliance

Discussion

6.1.1.Climate Diplomacy Foundations

Climate change has emerged as one of the most pressing global challenges of the twenty-first century. Rising temperatures, extreme weather events, melting glaciers, and sea-level rise affect societies worldwide. Because climate change is a global problem that crosses national boundaries, no single

country can address it alone. It requires collective action, international cooperation, and shared responsibility among countries. In this context, climate diplomacy has become an important aspect of global governance.

India's climate diplomacy is rooted in a balance between environmental responsibility and developmental needs. As a large developing country with a growing

population and expanding economy, India faces the challenge of reducing emissions while ensuring economic growth and poverty reduction. India has consistently argued that climate policies should not restrict the developmental aspirations of poorer countries. Instead, solutions must recognise the different historical responsibilities of developed and developing countries.

Another key foundation of India's climate diplomacy is the principle of equity. India emphasises that industrialised nations have historically contributed the most to greenhouse gas emissions over the past two centuries of industrialisation. Therefore, these countries should take the lead in reducing emissions and providing financial and technological support to developing countries. This perspective has shaped India's negotiating positions in global climate agreements and forums.

India's climate diplomacy is also influenced by its long tradition of environmental ethics and sustainable living. Ancient Indian philosophies emphasized harmony between humans and nature. Cultural traditions such as respect for forests, rivers, and biodiversity reflect this environmental consciousness. In modern times, India seeks to combine these cultural values with scientific and technological approaches to address climate challenges.

Finally, India's climate diplomacy aims to build partnerships and collaborative initiatives. Rather than adopting a confrontational approach, India promotes cooperation through global alliances, technology sharing, and capacity building. Initiatives such as the International Solar Alliance demonstrate India's commitment to leading collective efforts in climate action.

6.1.2. India in the UNFCCC

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)

is the primary international treaty dealing with climate change. Adopted in 1992 at the Rio Earth Summit, the convention aims to stabilise atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases to prevent dangerous climate change. India is one of the founding signatories of the UNFCCC and has actively participated in its negotiations since its inception.

India's engagement in the UNFCCC reflects its broader foreign policy approach, which emphasizes multilateral cooperation and equitable global governance. From the early stages of negotiations, India argued that climate change should be addressed in a way that protects the development prospects of poorer nations. This stance led to the inclusion of the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities" in the convention.

Within the UNFCCC framework, India has consistently advocated for fairness in climate policies. Indian representatives have emphasised that developed countries must take stronger action to reduce emissions, as they have historically contributed the most to global warming. At the same time, India has supported sustainable development strategies that combine environmental protection with economic progress.

India also participates actively in the Conference of the Parties (COP) meetings held annually under the UNFCCC. These meetings serve as global platforms for negotiating climate agreements, reviewing progress, and discussing future strategies. Through these forums, India has contributed to shaping major climate agreements such as the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement.

Furthermore, India uses the UNFCCC platform to highlight the vulnerability of developing countries to climate impacts. Issues such as food security, water scarcity, and climate-induced migration are particularly relevant to many countries in the Global



South. By raising these concerns, India seeks to ensure that global climate policies address both environmental protection and human development.

Table: Major Milestones in Global Climate Governance

Year	Event	Significance
1992	UNFCCC adopted	First global climate treaty
1997	Kyoto Protocol	Binding emission targets for developed countries
2015	Paris Agreement	Global commitment to limit warming below 2°C
2021	COP26 Glasgow	Renewed climate pledges and carbon reduction targets

6.1.3. Kyoto Protocol Position

The Kyoto Protocol, adopted in 1997, was the first international treaty to set legally binding emission-reduction targets for developed countries. The agreement required industrialized nations to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions relative to 1990 levels. However, developing countries like India were not required to undertake mandatory emission reductions under the protocol.

India strongly supported the Kyoto Protocol because it reflected the principle of historical responsibility. According to India's position, developed countries accounted for the majority of emissions during their industrialisation. Therefore, they should bear the primary burden of reducing emissions. By assigning binding targets to developed countries, the Kyoto Protocol attempted to operationalize this principle.

At the same time, India recognised that climate change required global participation. Although India was not obligated to reduce emissions under the Kyoto Protocol, it adopted

several domestic initiatives to improve energy efficiency and promote renewable energy. These measures demonstrated that developing countries could contribute to climate mitigation while continuing to pursue development.

India also supported mechanisms under the Kyoto Protocol, such as the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM). The CDM allowed developed countries to invest in emission-reduction projects in developing countries and receive carbon credits in return. India became one of the largest beneficiaries of CDM projects, attracting investments in renewable energy, waste management, and energy efficiency.

Despite its contributions, the Kyoto Protocol faced several challenges. Some major emitters either withdrew from the agreement or did not meet their targets. Over time, the limitations of the protocol became evident, leading to discussions about creating a more inclusive global climate framework. These debates eventually paved the way for the Paris Agreement.

6.1.4. Paris Agreement Commitments

The Paris Agreement, adopted in 2015, represents a major milestone in global climate governance. Unlike the Kyoto Protocol, which focused mainly on developed countries, the Paris Agreement requires all countries to take climate action through nationally determined contributions (NDCs). These commitments outline each country's plans to reduce emissions and adapt to climate change.

India played a constructive role in the negotiations leading to the Paris Agreement. Indian negotiators worked to ensure that the agreement recognised the development needs of poorer countries while still encouraging global cooperation. India supported a flexible framework that allowed countries to determine their own climate commitments based on national circumstances. Under the Paris Agreement, India submitted ambitious climate targets. These include reducing the emissions intensity of its GDP, increasing the share of non-fossil fuel energy sources, and expanding forest cover. India also pledged to create additional carbon sinks through afforestation and sustainable land management.

One of the most significant aspects of India's Paris commitments is its focus on renewable energy. India aims to dramatically expand solar, wind, and other renewable energy sources to reduce dependence on fossil fuels. This transition is expected to play a crucial role in achieving both environmental sustainability and energy security. India has also emphasized the importance of climate finance and technology transfer under the Paris framework. Developing countries require financial support and advanced technologies to implement climate solutions effectively. India continues to advocate for stronger commitments from developed nations in these areas.



Figure: Global leaders at the Paris Climate Conference (COP21) in 2015, where the Paris Agreement on climate change was adopted.

6.1.5. CBDR Principle

One of the most important concepts guiding India's climate diplomacy is the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR). This principle recognises that while all countries share responsibility for addressing climate change, they do not share the same level of responsibility or capacity to act. The idea behind CBDR is rooted in the historical reality of industrialization. Developed countries have emitted greenhouse gases for over two centuries as they built their economies through industrial growth. These emissions accumulated in the atmosphere, contributing significantly to global warming. Developing countries, by contrast, have only recently begun industrializing and therefore have contributed less to the problem.

India strongly supports the CBDR principle because it ensures fairness in global climate negotiations. According to this

perspective, developed countries should take the lead in reducing emissions and provide financial assistance to developing nations. This support is essential for enabling poorer countries to adopt cleaner technologies and pursue sustainable development. The CBDR principle also reflects differences in national capacities. Developed countries generally have greater technological capabilities and financial resources to address climate challenges. Developing countries often face constraints such as poverty, infrastructure gaps, and limited access to technology.

Climate policies must therefore account for these differences.

In recent years, debates around CBDR have intensified as emerging economies such as India and China have increased their global economic influence. Some developed countries argue that large developing nations should also assume greater responsibility for emissions reductions. India acknowledges the need for greater participation but insists that the core principles of equity and historical responsibility must remain central to global climate governance.

Concept Box: Key Climate Governance Principles

- **CBDR (Common but Differentiated Responsibilities):** Recognises that all countries must address climate change, but developed nations have greater responsibility due to historical emissions.
- **Equity:** Ensures a fair distribution of climate responsibilities among countries based on their capacities and development levels.
- **Sustainable Development:** Promotes economic growth while protecting the environment for present and future generations.
- **Climate Justice:** Emphasises protecting vulnerable communities and countries that are most affected by climate change.

6.1.6. National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC)

India's domestic climate policy framework took a significant step forward in 2008 with the launch of the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC). The plan was introduced by the Government of India to integrate climate change considerations into the country's development planning. Rather than viewing climate action as separate from development, the NAPCC aims to promote sustainable growth while addressing environmental challenges.

The NAPCC consists of several "National Missions" that focus on key areas such as renewable energy, water conservation, sustainable agriculture, and energy efficiency. These missions provide a structured framework for the government to coordinate climate-related initiatives across sectors. By linking climate policies with economic and social goals, the plan reflects India's broader philosophy of sustainable development. One of the central objectives of the NAPCC is to promote clean energy technologies and reduce dependence on fossil fuels. The plan encourages the adoption of

solar energy, improved energy efficiency in industries, and environmentally friendly infrastructure. These measures are intended to reduce greenhouse gas emissions while supporting economic growth.

The NAPCC also emphasizes adaptation strategies to address the impacts of climate change. India faces significant risks from rising temperatures, erratic monsoons, and water scarcity. Therefore, the plan includes programs to strengthen water management,

protect ecosystems, and improve climate resilience in agriculture. Over time, the NAPCC has evolved with the addition of new missions and policies. State governments have also developed their own State Action Plans on Climate Change (SAPCC) to address local environmental challenges. These initiatives demonstrate India's effort to translate international climate commitments into concrete domestic policies.

Table: National Missions under the NAPCC

Mission	Objective
National Solar Mission	Promote solar energy development
National Water Mission	Improve water conservation and efficiency
National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture	Enhance climate-resilient farming
National Mission for Enhanced Energy Efficiency	Reduce energy consumption in industries
National Mission on Sustainable Habitat	Promote sustainable urban development
National Mission for Green India	Increase forest cover and carbon sinks

6.1.7. Renewable Energy Leadership

Renewable energy has become a cornerstone of India's climate strategy. As one of the world's fastest-growing economies, India's energy demand is rising rapidly. To meet this demand while reducing emissions, India has invested heavily in renewable energy sources, including solar, wind, and hydroelectric power. Over the past decade, India has emerged as one of the global leaders in renewable energy expansion.

Government policies have encouraged large-scale investments in solar parks, wind farms, and other clean energy projects. These initiatives aim to reduce reliance on coal and other fossil fuels while improving energy security.

India has also set ambitious renewable energy targets. The country aims to significantly increase the share of non-fossil fuel sources in its electricity generation. These targets are aligned with India's commitments under the Paris Agreement and demonstrate

the country's willingness to contribute to global climate mitigation efforts. Another important aspect of India's renewable energy strategy is the promotion of decentralized energy systems. Solar panels installed in rural areas, for example, help provide electricity to communities that previously lacked a reliable power supply. This approach supports both environmental sustainability and social development. Despite these

achievements, challenges remain. Renewable energy projects require significant investment, infrastructure, and technological innovation. Grid integration, energy storage, and land availability are among the issues policymakers must address to sustain the momentum of renewable energy growth.



Figures: Renewable energy projects such as solar parks and wind farms are central to India's climate strategy.

6.1.8. International Solar Alliance

The International Solar Alliance (ISA) is one of India's most significant contributions to global climate governance. The initiative was launched in 2015 by India and France during the Paris Climate Conference. Its primary objective is to promote the use of solar energy in countries between the Tropics

of Cancer and Capricorn, where sunlight is abundant. The ISA aims to mobilize financial resources, facilitate technology transfer, and promote collaboration among member countries. By encouraging solar energy adoption, the alliance seeks to reduce dependence on fossil fuels and accelerate the global transition toward clean energy.

India's leadership in the ISA reflects its broader strategy of combining climate action with international cooperation. Through this initiative, India positions itself as a key player in promoting sustainable development across the Global South. Many developing countries lack the resources and expertise required to implement large-scale renewable energy projects. The ISA helps bridge this gap by supporting capacity building and investment.

Another important feature of the ISA is its emphasis on affordable solar technology. By promoting large-scale solar deployment, the alliance aims to reduce the cost of solar power and make it accessible to developing nations. This approach aligns with India's vision of climate justice and equitable energy access. The ISA has gradually expanded its membership, attracting countries from across the world. Its headquarters in Gurugram, India, symbolizes India's commitment to leading global efforts in renewable energy cooperation.

6.1.9. Climate Justice Narrative

One distinctive feature of India's climate diplomacy is its emphasis on climate justice. The concept of climate justice highlights the unequal impacts of climate change on different countries and communities. While developed nations have historically contributed the most to greenhouse gas emissions, the most severe consequences of climate change are often experienced by poorer countries.

India argues that climate policies must recognise these inequalities and ensure fairness in the distribution of responsibilities. For example, strict emission reduction requirements for developing countries could limit their ability to achieve economic growth and poverty reduction. Therefore, climate agreements must balance environmental protection with developmental needs.

The climate justice narrative also emphasizes the rights of vulnerable communities. Farmers, coastal populations, and indigenous groups often face the greatest risks from climate change. Rising sea levels, droughts, and extreme weather events threaten their livelihoods and food security. India advocates policies that protect these communities while promoting sustainable development.

India's climate justice approach has gained international attention in recent years. Indian leaders frequently highlight the moral dimension of climate change in global forums, arguing that climate action should be guided not only by scientific considerations but also by ethical principles. At the same time, India recognises that all countries must contribute to climate solutions. By investing in renewable energy, promoting sustainable lifestyles, and participating in global climate agreements, India seeks to demonstrate that climate justice can coexist with environmental responsibility.

Concept Box: Climate Justice

Climate justice emphasises fairness and equity in addressing climate change by recognising that countries and communities have contributed differently to the problem and are affected unequally. It highlights the importance of acknowledging historical responsibility for greenhouse gas emissions, protecting vulnerable populations, promoting the equitable distribution of climate resources, such as finance and technology, and supporting sustainable development pathways for developing nations.



6.1.10. Adaptation versus Mitigation

Climate policies generally focus on two major strategies: mitigation and adaptation. Mitigation refers to efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to slow global warming. Adaptation, on the other hand, involves adjusting to the impacts of climate change and reducing vulnerability to environmental risks. For many developing countries, including India, adaptation is particularly important. Climate change already affects agriculture, water resources, and public health in many parts of the country. Farmers face unpredictable monsoon patterns, while coastal communities are increasingly vulnerable to storms and sea-level rise.

India's climate policies therefore combine mitigation and adaptation strategies.

Mitigation efforts include expanding renewable energy, improving energy efficiency, and increasing forest cover. These measures help reduce carbon emissions and contribute to global climate goals. At the same time, India invests in adaptation initiatives such as drought-resistant crops, improved irrigation systems, and disaster preparedness programs. These efforts aim to protect vulnerable communities and ensure long-term resilience against climate impacts. Balancing mitigation and adaptation is a major challenge for policymakers. While emission reductions are essential for addressing the root causes of climate change, adaptation measures are necessary to cope with its immediate effects. India's approach reflects the need to pursue both strategies simultaneously in order to achieve sustainable development.

Table: Mitigation versus Adaptation

Strategy	Purpose	Examples
Mitigation	Reduce greenhouse gas emissions	Renewable energy, energy efficiency
Adaptation	Adjust to climate impacts	Flood protection, climate-resilient crops

6.1.11. Financing and Technology Transfer

One of the central debates in global climate negotiations concerns financing and technology transfer. Developing countries often lack the financial resources and technological capacity needed to adopt advanced climate mitigation and adaptation strategies. For this reason, India and many other developing nations argue that developed countries must provide financial support and share clean technologies to address climate change effectively.

Climate finance refers to funds provided by developed countries, international institutions, and multilateral development banks to support climate-related initiatives in developing nations. These funds are used for projects such as renewable energy development, climate-resilient infrastructure, and sustainable agriculture. India supports the establishment of global financial mechanisms such as the Green Climate Fund (GCF) to help developing countries implement climate policies.

Technology transfer is another important element of climate cooperation. Advanced

technologies related to renewable energy, carbon capture, energy efficiency, and sustainable agriculture can significantly reduce emissions. However, these technologies are often expensive and protected by intellectual property rights. India has argued that flexible intellectual property rules and international partnerships are necessary to make such technologies accessible to developing countries.

India also encourages collaborative research and innovation through partnerships with international institutions and private companies. These collaborations help improve local technical capacity and accelerate the development of sustainable technologies. By emphasizing financing and technology transfer, India seeks to ensure that climate action does not become a burden on developing countries but rather an opportunity for sustainable growth.

Concept Box: Climate Finance

Climate finance refers to financial resources mobilised to support climate-related initiatives that help mitigate greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to climate change impacts. Such funding is directed towards activities including renewable energy development, building climate-resilient infrastructure, disaster risk reduction measures, promoting sustainable agriculture, and improving energy efficiency.

4.1.12. Domestic Policy Measures

India's climate policy is not limited to international negotiations. The government has also introduced several domestic measures to address environmental challenges and reduce emissions. These policies reflect India's commitment to integrating climate action into national development strategies.

One of the most significant domestic initiatives is the promotion of renewable energy through government programs and incentives. The government has launched large-scale solar and wind power projects and policies that encourage private investment in clean energy. These initiatives aim to reduce dependence on fossil fuels and create a sustainable energy system.

Another important policy measure is promoting energy efficiency. Programs such as the Perform, Achieve, and Trade (PAT) scheme encourage industries to improve energy efficiency and reduce emissions. Similarly, the Ujala scheme promotes the use of energy-efficient LED lighting nationwide. India has also taken steps to protect forests and biodiversity. Forest conservation programs and afforestation initiatives help increase carbon sinks and improve ecological sustainability. At the same time, environmental regulations seek to reduce pollution and promote sustainable industrial development.

Urban sustainability is another key focus of domestic climate policy. Rapid urbanization has increased energy consumption, waste generation, and pollution levels in cities. Government programs such as the Smart Cities Mission promote environmentally friendly urban infrastructure, including efficient transportation systems and waste management practices.

4.1.13. India–EU Climate Cooperation

India and the European Union have developed strong cooperation in climate change and environmental sustainability. Both sides recognise that global climate challenges require collaborative solutions. As a result, India–EU climate cooperation has expanded in areas such as renewable energy, research collaboration, and sustainable development. One major area of cooperation involves clean



energy technologies. European countries possess advanced expertise in renewable energy technologies, including offshore wind, energy storage, and smart grids. By partnering with the European Union, India gains access to technological expertise and investment opportunities.

India and the EU also collaborate through research initiatives and knowledge-sharing platforms. Joint research projects help scientists and policymakers exchange ideas and develop innovative solutions to climate challenges. These partnerships strengthen the global effort to combat climate change. Another important dimension of India-EU

cooperation is sustainable urban development. European institutions support projects that improve energy efficiency, waste management, and transportation systems in Indian cities. Such initiatives contribute to reducing emissions while improving the quality of life for urban populations. Despite occasional differences in climate negotiations, India and the European Union share common goals of promoting sustainable development and environmental protection. Their partnership illustrates how international cooperation can help address complex global challenges.

Case Study: “Mother of All Deals”: India-EU Free Trade Agreement

In January 2026, India and the European Union (EU) concluded negotiations on a landmark Free Trade Agreement (FTA) that political leaders on both sides have dubbed the “mother of all deals.” This pact, concluded after nearly two decades of talks, aims to create one of the world’s largest free trade zones by linking India’s economy with the EU’s single market of 27 countries, covering roughly 25 % of global gross domestic product and up to a third of global trade.

The agreement envisages deep tariff liberalisation, with India set to cut or eliminate duties on most EU exports, and the EU offering preferential access to Indian goods and services, thereby unlocking unprecedented market access for Indian exporters and boosting sectors such as textiles, apparel, IT services, and engineering. Alongside tariff reductions, the pact includes commitments on regulatory cooperation, services liberalisation, and professional mobility, making it a comprehensive economic partnership that could significantly enhance India’s global trade footprint.

The “mother of all deals” is not just an economic milestone but also a strategic realignment that strengthens India-EU ties amid a fragmented global trade environment, positioning India as a key partner in rules-based trade and sustainable development, while deepening cooperation on issues such as digital trade and high-standard market access.



Figure: PM Modi with EU Leaders Ursula Von Der Leyen and António Costa in Delhi

6.1.14. Loss and Damage Debate

In recent years, the concept of loss and damage has emerged as an important issue in global climate negotiations. Loss and damage refer to the economic and social impacts caused by climate change that cannot be prevented through mitigation or adaptation measures. These impacts include destruction caused by extreme weather events, loss of livelihoods, and displacement of communities. Developing countries have argued that they require financial assistance to cope with these unavoidable climate impacts. Many of these countries contribute relatively little to global emissions but suffer disproportionately from climate-related disasters. India has supported calls for international

mechanisms that provide financial support to vulnerable nations.

The debate over loss and damage has been complex and sometimes controversial. Developed countries have expressed concerns about potential legal liabilities and financial obligations. Nevertheless, discussions in global climate forums have gradually moved toward recognizing the need for dedicated support mechanisms. India's position emphasizes solidarity among developing countries and fairness in global climate governance. By advocating support for vulnerable nations, India seeks to strengthen the principle of climate justice and promote equitable solutions to climate challenges.

What is Loss and Damage?

Loss and damage refers to the irreversible impacts of climate change that occur when communities are unable to prevent or fully adapt to environmental changes. These impacts include destruction caused by extreme weather events such as floods, storms, and heatwaves, loss of agricultural productivity due to changing climate conditions, damage to coastal communities from rising sea levels, and climate-induced displacement and migration that forces people to leave their homes and livelihoods.

and wind energy generation in the coming decades. This transition will help reduce emissions while strengthening energy security. Another area of focus is sustainable infrastructure development. Investments in green transportation, energy-efficient buildings, and climate-resilient infrastructure are expected to play a major role in future climate strategies. These initiatives will help reduce environmental impact while supporting economic growth.

India is also expected to strengthen its international climate partnerships. Cooperation with countries in the Global South, as well as with developed nations, will remain essential for addressing global climate challenges. Initiatives such as the International Solar Alliance and other multilateral platforms will continue to shape India's climate diplomacy. Ultimately, India's climate strategy reflects a long-term vision of sustainable development. By combining domestic policy measures with international cooperation, India seeks to contribute to global climate solutions while protecting its population's interests.

6.1.15. Future Climate Strategy

As climate change intensifies, India's climate strategy is expected to evolve further. The country aims to balance economic development with environmental sustainability by adopting innovative technologies and sustainable policies. One important aspect of India's future strategy is the expansion of renewable energy capacity. The government plans to significantly increase solar

Recap

- ◆ Climate change has become one of the most important global challenges of the modern era.
- ◆ India's climate diplomacy balances environmental responsibility with developmental needs.
- ◆ The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) forms the foundation of global climate governance.
- ◆ India actively participates in international climate negotiations through the Conference of Parties (COP) meetings.
- ◆ The Kyoto Protocol introduced legally binding emission reduction targets

for developed countries.

- ◆ India supported the Kyoto Protocol while continuing domestic climate initiatives.
- ◆ The Paris Agreement requires all countries to submit nationally determined contributions (NDCs).
- ◆ India is committed to reducing emissions intensity and expanding renewable energy under the Paris framework.
- ◆ The principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR) emphasizes fairness in climate negotiations.
- ◆ India launched the National Action Plan on Climate Change to integrate climate concerns into development planning.
- ◆ Renewable energy expansion has become a key component of India's climate strategy.
- ◆ The International Solar Alliance promotes solar energy cooperation among sun-rich countries.
- ◆ Climate justice highlights the unequal impact of climate change on developing countries.
- ◆ Adaptation and mitigation are two major strategies used to address climate change.
- ◆ India's future climate strategy focuses on sustainable development and global cooperation.

Objective Questions

1. What is meant by climate diplomacy?
2. What international convention forms the basis of global climate governance?
3. In which year was the UNFCCC adopted?
4. Which international agreement established binding emission targets for developed countries?
5. Which climate agreement introduced nationally determined contributions (NDCs)?
6. What principle emphasizes fairness in global climate responsibility?



7. What national policy framework guides India's climate action?
8. Which renewable energy initiative was launched by India and France in 2015?
9. What concept highlights fairness in addressing climate change impacts on developing countries?
10. What two strategies form the core of climate policy responses to climate change?
11. What financial mechanism supports climate projects in developing countries?
12. Which domestic programme promotes energy-efficient LED lighting in India?
13. What international organisation hosts annual COP climate negotiations?
14. Which principle emphasizes historical responsibility for emissions?
15. What is the main goal of India's renewable energy policy?

Answers

1. Negotiation
2. UNFCCC
3. 1992
4. Kyoto
5. Paris
6. CBDR
7. NAPCC
8. ISA
9. Justice
10. Adaptation
11. GCF
12. UJALA
13. UNFCCC
14. Equity
15. Sustainability

Assignments

1. Explain the foundations of India's climate diplomacy and its relevance in global environmental governance.
2. Analyse India's role in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and its contributions to international climate negotiations.
3. Discuss the significance of the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement in shaping India's climate policy.
4. Examine the importance of the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR) in global climate governance.
5. Evaluate the role of the National Action Plan on Climate Change in addressing environmental challenges in India.
6. Analyse the importance of renewable energy in India's climate strategy with suitable examples.
7. Discuss the objectives and significance of the International Solar Alliance in promoting global climate cooperation.
8. Prepare a short report analysing India's renewable energy initiatives in your state or region.
9. Conduct a small field survey or online research on public awareness of climate change and prepare a brief analytical report.
10. Examine a recent international climate summit and summarise India's position and commitments presented during the meeting.

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UNIT

India's Perspective on Human Rights and Global Governance

Learning Outcomes

After studying this unit, learners will be able to:

- ◆ explain the conceptual relationship between human rights and global governance in international relations.
- ◆ describe the constitutional foundations of human rights protection in India and the role of democratic institutions.
- ◆ analyse India's participation in global human rights institutions such as the United Nations Human Rights Council and the Universal Periodic Review.
- ◆ evaluate India's approach to development, security, digital governance, and refugee policies within the broader framework of human rights.
- ◆ assess India's emerging role in shaping global governance debates and advocating reforms in international institutions.

Prerequisites

The study of India's perspective on human rights and global governance requires an awareness of the evolution of international human rights norms, the institutional framework of global governance, and India's constitutional commitment to the protection of fundamental rights. Imagine stepping into the evolving landscape of international cooperation, where nations come together to address shared challenges and uphold universal values. The idea of protecting human dignity did not emerge suddenly; it gradually developed through historical struggles for justice, equality, and freedom across different societies. In the modern world, these ideas are reflected in global institutions, international laws, and democratic systems that aim to safeguard the rights of individuals and promote collective well-being.

To understand this unit effectively, learners should have a basic familiarity with key concepts in international relations, particularly democracy, multilateral cooperation, and global governance. These ideas help explain how countries interact through international organisations and agreements to address issues that transcend national borders. Knowledge of how institutions such as the United Nations and other global bodies operate will help learners appreciate the mechanisms by which human rights norms are discussed, monitored, and implemented at the international level.

Equally important is a general awareness of India's constitutional framework and foreign policy orientation. India's democratic system places strong emphasis on fundamental rights, social justice, and inclusive development. Understanding these principles will help learners examine how India engages in global debates on human rights while considering issues such as sovereignty, development priorities, and national security.

As learners move through this unit, they will explore how India participates in global governance discussions, engages with international institutions, and contributes to shaping debates on human rights, development, and international cooperation. This background knowledge will make it easier to understand the complex relationship between national policies, global norms, and the evolving architecture of international governance.

Keywords

Universal Periodic Review (UPR), United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC), Development and Rights, Global South, Digital Governance, Multilateral Reform

Discussion

6.2.1. Conceptual Foundations

Human rights and global governance are closely connected ideas in contemporary international relations. Human rights refer to the basic freedoms and entitlements that every individual should enjoy simply because they are human. These include civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights such as freedom of expression, the right to education, the right to work, and protection from discrimination. Global governance refers to the systems, institutions, and rules

through which the international community manages shared challenges and promotes cooperation among states. These two ideas intersect because many global institutions aim to promote human rights as part of a stable and just international order.

India's perspective on human rights is shaped by its historical experiences, philosophical traditions, and constitutional framework. Long before modern international human rights laws emerged, Indian philosophical traditions emphasized values such



as justice, dignity, tolerance, and coexistence. Concepts found in ancient texts, including dharma and ahimsa, promoted the protection of human dignity and ethical conduct in society. These traditions influenced India's modern political thinking and helped shape its commitment to human rights in domestic governance and international diplomacy.

After gaining independence in 1947, India sought to build a democratic state that respected fundamental rights and freedoms. The country's leaders believed that democracy, social justice, and human dignity were essential components of national development. As a result, India's engagement with global governance has often emphasized the importance of inclusive development, equality among nations, and the protection

of human rights within international institutions. Scholars have noted that emerging powers like India increasingly shape global governance debates by linking human rights concerns with development priorities.

India's approach to global governance is also influenced by its identity as a developing country and a member of the Global South. While supporting universal human rights norms, India has often argued that these norms must be implemented in ways that respect national sovereignty and cultural diversity. This perspective reflects a broader belief that global governance systems should be fair, inclusive, and representative of the interests of all nations, not only powerful states.

Concept Box: Human Rights and Global Governance

Human rights refer to the fundamental freedoms and protections that belong to every individual regardless of nationality, race, religion, or gender. Global governance refers to the system of international institutions, agreements, and norms that facilitate cooperation among countries in addressing global issues. These two concepts intersect because international organisations and multilateral frameworks often promote the protection of human rights as an essential foundation for global stability, justice, and sustainable development. Upim permilicae nosulum non Etrae noverniciora nesimis sicaeque et, publicum,



Figure: The United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva is the main global body responsible for reviewing and promoting human rights across countries.

6.2.2. Constitutional Commitment

India's commitment to human rights is strongly reflected in its Constitution, which came into force in 1950. The Constitution provides a comprehensive framework for protecting individual freedoms and promoting social justice. Fundamental Rights, listed in Part III of the Constitution, guarantee essential freedoms such as equality before the law, freedom of speech and expression, freedom of religion, and protection against discrimination. These rights form the foundation of India's democratic system and demonstrate the country's dedication to protecting human dignity.

In addition to Fundamental Rights, the Constitution also includes Directive Principles of State Policy. These principles guide the government in creating policies that promote social and economic justice. They encourage the state to ensure equitable distribution of resources, provide education and healthcare, and protect the welfare of vulnerable groups. Although these principles are not legally enforceable, they play an important role in shaping India's development policies and governance strategies.

India's judiciary has played a crucial role in expanding the interpretation of human rights. Through landmark judgments, the Supreme Court has broadly interpreted the right to life under Article 21 of the Constitution, including rights related to environmental protection, health, and dignity. This judicial activism has strengthened India's human rights framework and contributed to the development of rights-based governance.

India has also established institutions to monitor and protect human rights. The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), established in 1993, investigates human rights violations and promotes awareness of human rights issues. Similar

state-level commissions also function across the country. These institutions demonstrate India's commitment to aligning domestic governance with international human rights norms.

Table: Key Human Rights Provisions in the Indian Constitution

Constitutional Provision	Key Focus
Fundamental Rights	Protection of civil and political freedoms
Directive Principles	Promotion of social and economic justice
Independent Judiciary	Protection and interpretation of rights
National Human Rights Commission	Monitoring and protection of human rights

6.2.3. India in the UN Human Rights System

India has been an active participant in the United Nations human rights system since the organisation's establishment in 1945. As one of the founding members of the United Nations, India played a significant role in shaping early debates on human rights and international cooperation. Indian representatives contributed to discussions surrounding the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948, emphasizing equality, dignity, and non-discrimination.

Within the United Nations system, India participates in several institutions that monitor and promote human rights. The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) serves as the primary global body responsible

for addressing human rights concerns. India has served multiple terms on the council and actively participates in its discussions and decision-making.

India's approach within the UN human rights system reflects its broader foreign policy principles. On the one hand, India supports the promotion of universal human rights norms. On the other hand, it emphasizes respect for national sovereignty and non-interference in domestic affairs. This balanced approach aims to prevent the

politicization of human rights issues while ensuring that international cooperation remains constructive and inclusive.

India also participates in various UN human rights treaties and conventions. These include agreements addressing discrimination, women's rights, children's rights, and the elimination of racial discrimination. By engaging with these international frameworks, India contributes to shaping global standards while adapting them to its domestic context.



Figure: The United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva serves as a key international platform where countries discuss and review human rights issues worldwide.

6.2.4. Universal Periodic Review

The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) is a unique mechanism within the UN Human Rights Council that reviews the human rights performance of all UN member states. Established in 2006, the UPR process aims to ensure that every country undergoes regular evaluation of its human rights record. Unlike other mechanisms that focus on specific countries or issues, the UPR applies equally to all states, making it an important tool for promoting transparency and accountability.

India participates actively in the UPR process and has undergone several review cycles since the mechanism was introduced. During these reviews, other countries examine India's human rights policies, achievements, and challenges. They may

provide recommendations on gender equality, minority rights, and judicial reforms. India responds to these recommendations and outlines the steps it has taken to improve its human rights framework.

The UPR process also allows India to highlight its achievements in democratic governance and social development. Indian representatives often emphasise poverty-reduction, education, and healthcare initiatives as part of the country's broader human rights strategy. These efforts demonstrate India's view that economic and social development are essential components of human rights protection.

At the same time, the UPR process encourages constructive dialogue between governments, civil society organisations, and

international institutions. By participating in this mechanism, India contributes to strengthening global accountability and reinforcing the importance of human rights within international governance systems.

6.2.5. Democracy Promotion

Democracy is a central element of India's identity and its engagement with global governance. As the world's largest democracy, India often emphasises democratic values such as political participation, the rule of law, and the protection of individual freedoms. These principles shape India's international engagements and influence its approach to promoting democratic governance worldwide.

India supports democracy promotion primarily through diplomatic engagement, development assistance, and institutional cooperation. Rather than imposing political systems on other countries, India promotes democratic governance through capacity building and knowledge sharing. For example, India has assisted several developing countries in conducting elections, training election officials, and strengthening democratic institutions.

The Election Commission of India has played a particularly important role in sharing expertise with other countries. Through international cooperation programs, the commission provides technical assistance on election management, voter registration, and electoral transparency. These initiatives contribute to strengthening democratic institutions in emerging democracies.

India's democratic model also influences its foreign policy narrative. Indian leaders frequently highlight the compatibility of democracy with economic development and social diversity. By demonstrating how democratic institutions function within a large and diverse society, India presents itself as an example of democratic governance for other developing countries.

6.2.6. Development versus Rights Debate

One of the most important debates in global governance concerns the relationship between economic development and human rights. Some policymakers argue that rapid economic growth should take priority, especially in developing countries where poverty and inequality remain major challenges. Others emphasize that economic progress should not come at the expense of civil liberties, social justice, and individual freedoms. This tension between development and rights has been a recurring issue in international discussions about governance.

India's perspective on this debate is shaped by its historical experiences and developmental priorities. After independence, India faced widespread poverty, illiteracy, and economic underdevelopment. As a result, policymakers believed that economic development was essential for improving people's living standards and ensuring social stability. India therefore often emphasises that development itself is a fundamental human right. Access to education, healthcare, employment, and social welfare is viewed as essential to human dignity.

At the same time, India's democratic political system ensures that civil and political rights remain central to governance. India's Constitution guarantees freedoms such as speech, association, and religion. These rights allow citizens to participate in public life and hold the government accountable. Therefore, India generally promotes a balanced approach that combines economic development with democratic governance and human rights protections.

In international forums, India frequently advocates for a rights-based approach to development. This perspective argues that sustainable development and human rights are mutually reinforcing rather than

contradictory. Policies that promote education, gender equality, and economic opportunity can strengthen democratic institutions and improve overall well-being. India's engagement with global governance institutions reflects this belief that development and human rights must advance together.

Development as a Human Right

The Right to Development, recognised by the United Nations in 1986, affirms that development is a fundamental human right and that every individual and community should benefit from economic, social, cultural, and political progress. It emphasises that economic growth should contribute to social welfare and human well-being, and that states have the responsibility to ensure equitable access to development opportunities and resources. India has consistently supported this principle in global governance debates, arguing that inclusive development is essential for achieving justice and equality at the international level.

situations has often been guided by humanitarian considerations and regional stability.

Unlike many countries, India is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention or its 1967 Protocol. However, India has continued to provide refuge and assistance to displaced populations through administrative policies and humanitarian programs. Refugees in India are often allowed to live in designated settlements, access education and healthcare services, and engage in economic activities. India's refugee policy reflects a pragmatic approach that balances humanitarian concerns with national security considerations. While the country has demonstrated generosity toward many refugee communities, it also emphasizes the importance of maintaining social stability and managing migration responsibly. This approach highlights the complexities of refugee governance in a region affected by political instability and economic disparities.



Figure: India has hosted several refugee communities, including Tibetan refugees who settled in Dharamshala after 1959.

6.2.7. Refugee Policy

Refugee protection is another important issue in the context of human rights and global governance. Refugees are individuals who are forced to leave their home countries due to persecution, conflict, violence, or environmental disasters. International law provides certain protections for refugees, including the right to seek asylum and protection from forced return to dangerous conditions. India has historically hosted large refugee populations from neighbouring countries. These include Tibetan refugees who arrived after 1959, Sri Lankan Tamil refugees during the civil war in Sri Lanka, and refugees from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Myanmar. India's response to refugee



Figure: Bir Tibetan Colony, Himachal Pradesh

6.2.8. Peacekeeping and Humanitarianism

India has played an important role in international peacekeeping and humanitarian operations. Since the establishment of the United Nations, India has been one of the largest contributors of troops to UN peacekeeping missions. Indian soldiers, police personnel, and medical teams have served in conflict zones across Africa, Asia, and the Middle East.

Peacekeeping missions aim to maintain stability in conflict-affected regions by monitoring ceasefires, protecting civilians, and supporting political reconciliation processes. India's participation in these missions reflects its commitment to promoting international peace and human security. Indian

peacekeepers have earned global recognition for their professionalism and dedication in challenging environments.

India's humanitarian contributions extend beyond peacekeeping operations. The country has assisted in natural disasters, humanitarian crises, and health emergencies around the world. Indian humanitarian missions often include medical aid, disaster relief supplies, and reconstruction assistance for affected communities.

These activities demonstrate India's belief that global governance should promote both peace and human welfare. By contributing to international peacekeeping and humanitarian efforts, India seeks to strengthen multilateral cooperation and support vulnerable populations affected by conflict and disasters.

Case Study: Indian Peacekeepers in Africa

India has been one of the largest contributors of troops to United Nations peacekeeping missions. Indian peacekeepers have been actively deployed in several African conflict zones, including South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Liberia. Through these missions, Indian contingents have played a crucial role in protecting civilians, maintaining ceasefires, and supporting humanitarian assistance in regions affected by conflict.

Beyond security operations, Indian peacekeepers have also contributed to rebuilding local infrastructure, providing medical assistance, and facilitating peace negotiations among conflicting groups. Their participation reflects India's long-standing commitment to international peace and collective security, while also strengthening its role as a responsible actor in global governance and humanitarian diplomacy.



6.2.9. Global South Advocacy

India often presents itself as a voice for the Global South in international governance discussions. The Global South refers to developing countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and other regions that face similar challenges related to poverty, inequality, and development. These countries often seek greater representation and influence within global institutions.

India's advocacy for the Global South is rooted in its own historical experience as a developing nation. During the Cold War era, India played a leading role in the Non-Aligned Movement, which aimed to promote cooperation among newly independent countries. This tradition of South-South cooperation continues to influence India's foreign policy.

Through forums such as BRICS, the G20, and the United Nations, India highlights issues affecting developing countries. These include climate justice, access to technology, equitable trade policies, and development financing. By advocating for these issues, India seeks to ensure that global governance systems reflect the interests of all countries rather than a small group of powerful states.

India's leadership in initiatives such as the International Solar Alliance and development partnerships with African countries demonstrates its commitment to supporting sustainable development across the Global South. These efforts strengthen India's role as an emerging leader in global governance.



6.2.10. Digital Rights and Data Governance

In recent years, digital technologies have become central to discussions about human rights and global governance. The rapid expansion of the internet, artificial intelligence, and digital platforms has created new opportunities for communication and

economic growth. At the same time, it has raised concerns about privacy, data protection, cybersecurity, and digital inequality.

India has emerged as one of the largest digital societies in the world, with hundreds of millions of internet users and a rapidly expanding digital infrastructure. As a result, the country has become an important

participant in global discussions on digital governance. India supports the idea that digital technologies should be accessible, secure, and beneficial for all societies.

One key issue in digital governance is the protection of personal data. Governments and international organisations are increasingly developing policies to regulate how companies collect, store, and use personal information. India has introduced legislation to strengthen data protection and ensure that digital platforms operate responsibly.

India also promotes the concept of digital sovereignty, which emphasizes the right of countries to regulate digital platforms within their jurisdictions. This perspective seeks to balance the benefits of global connectivity with the need to protect national security and individual privacy. As digital technologies continue to evolve, India is expected to play a significant role in shaping global norms for internet governance.

Table: Key Issues in Digital Governance

Issue	Description
Data Protection	Safeguarding personal information
Cyber security	Protecting digital infrastructure
Digital Inclusion	Ensuring equal access to technology
Internet Governance	Managing global digital networks

6.2.11. Counter-Terrorism versus Civil Liberties

Another complex challenge in global governance is balancing counter-terrorism

measures with the protection of civil liberties. Governments around the world face the responsibility of protecting citizens from terrorism and violent extremism. At the same time, security policies must respect fundamental rights and freedoms. India has experienced several terrorist attacks over the past decades, which have made national security a major priority. The government has introduced laws and policies to prevent terrorism, strengthen intelligence systems, and enhance law enforcement capabilities. These measures are intended to ensure the safety and stability of society.

However, debates often arise about the potential impact of security laws on civil liberties. Critics argue that certain counter-terrorism measures may restrict freedoms such as speech, privacy, or due process. These debates highlight the difficulty of balancing security concerns with democratic principles. India's democratic system allows these debates to take place within political institutions, courts, and civil society organisations. The judiciary plays an important role in reviewing laws and ensuring that security policies remain consistent with constitutional protections. This process reflects the broader challenge many countries face in maintaining both security and freedom.



6.2.12. Multilateral Reform Advocacy

India has consistently advocated reforms in global governance institutions to make them more representative and effective. Many international organisations were created after

the Second World War, when the global political landscape was very different. Today, emerging powers such as India argue that these institutions should better reflect contemporary geopolitical realities. One of India's most prominent reform proposals concerns the United Nations Security Council. India has long argued that the council's permanent membership structure does not adequately represent developing countries. Along with countries such as Brazil, Germany, and Japan, India seeks permanent membership in the Security Council to ensure more inclusive global decision-making.

India also promotes reforms in institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. These institutions play crucial roles in global economic governance, but their leadership structures and voting systems are often criticized for favouring developed countries. India advocates greater representation for emerging economies and developing nations. By supporting institutional reforms, India aims to strengthen the legitimacy and effectiveness of global governance systems. More inclusive institutions can better address global challenges such as climate change, economic inequality, and security threats.



Figure: UN Headquarters, New York

governance experiences with other countries, particularly in the developing world. Through development partnerships, technical cooperation, and capacity-building programs, India promotes governance practices that combine democratic values with socio-economic development. These initiatives are especially visible in India's partnerships with countries in Africa, Asia, and the Pacific.

One important aspect of India's governance outreach is the sharing of institutional expertise. India has supported the development of parliamentary institutions, election management systems, and administrative training programs in several countries. Institutions such as the Election Commission of India and the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme have played key roles in providing training for public officials and election administrators from other nations.

India also promotes governance models related to digital public infrastructure. Initiatives such as digital identity systems, digital payment platforms, and e-governance tools have attracted international attention. Countries in the Global South increasingly look to India's experiences in building digital governance frameworks that improve public service delivery and financial inclusion. In addition, India's development partnerships emphasize principles such as mutual respect, non-interference, and local ownership of projects. Unlike some traditional aid models that impose strict policy conditions, India's approach generally focuses on collaborative partnerships. This strategy reflects India's broader belief that sustainable development should be driven by local priorities and supported through international cooperation.

6.2.13. India's Governance Models Abroad

India's engagement with global governance increasingly includes sharing its

Case Study: Digital Public Infrastructure in India

India's digital public infrastructure has emerged as an influential model for technology-driven governance and inclusive development. Key initiatives such as Aadhaar, which provides a unique digital identity to residents, and the Unified Payments Interface (UPI), which enables instant and secure digital transactions, have transformed the delivery of public services and the financial system in the country. These platforms support efficient welfare distribution, reduce administrative barriers, and expand access to financial services.



6.2.14.Criticisms and Debates

Despite its active engagement in human rights and global governance discussions, India's policies are sometimes subject to criticism and debate. Like many large democracies, India faces challenges in balancing security, development, and civil liberties. These debates often arise in domestic politics as well as in international forums.

One area of criticism concerns the implementation of human rights protections. International organisations and civil society groups sometimes raise concerns about issues such as freedom of expression, minority

rights, and the treatment of vulnerable populations. These debates highlight the complexity of governing a diverse and populous country with multiple social, economic, and cultural differences.

Another issue relates to India's stance on sovereignty and non-interference in international affairs. India generally opposes external intervention in domestic political matters, emphasizing the importance of national sovereignty. While this position aligns with the principles of international law, critics sometimes argue that it may limit international responses to severe human rights violations in certain contexts.

At the same time, supporters of India's approach argue that the country's democratic institutions provide mechanisms for addressing these concerns internally. Independent courts, free media, and active civil society organisations contribute to public debate and accountability. These institutions allow human rights issues to be discussed openly within India's democratic framework. The debates surrounding India's policies illustrate the broader challenges faced by all countries participating in global governance. Balancing national interests, democratic principles, and international responsibilities is a complex task that often generates differing perspectives.

6.2.15.Future Role in Global Governance

India's influence in global governance is expected to grow significantly in the coming decades. As one of the world's largest economies and the most populous country, India is increasingly shaping international policies and institutions. Its participation in forums such as the United Nations, G20, BRICS, and other multilateral organisations reflects this expanding global presence.

One key area where India is likely to play a greater role is in addressing global

challenges such as climate change, digital governance, public health, and sustainable development. These issues require collective international action, and India's experience as a developing democracy gives it a unique perspective in these discussions.

India is also expected to strengthen its leadership among developing countries. By advocating for fair representation, equitable economic policies, and technology sharing, India seeks to ensure that the voices of the Global South are heard in global decision-making processes. Initiatives such as development partnerships and South-South cooperation will continue to support this objective.

Another important aspect of India's future role involves institutional reform. India continues to advocate for reforms in international organisations to make them more inclusive and representative. Expanding the United Nations Security Council and improving governance structures in global financial institutions remain key priorities. Overall, India's future engagement in global governance will likely combine diplomatic leadership, development cooperation, and technological innovation. These elements together position India as an important contributor to shaping the international order of the twenty-first century.

Recap

- ◆ Human rights refer to the fundamental freedoms and protections that belong to all individuals.
- ◆ Global governance refers to international institutions, rules, and mechanisms that manage global challenges.
- ◆ India's perspective on human rights is influenced by its constitutional framework, democratic traditions, and historical experiences.
- ◆ The Indian Constitution guarantees fundamental rights and promotes social justice through Directive Principles.
- ◆ India actively participates in the United Nations human rights system, including the UN Human Rights Council.
- ◆ The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) reviews the human rights performance of all UN member states.
- ◆ India promotes democracy internationally through capacity building, electoral cooperation, and institutional training.
- ◆ The debate between economic development and human rights remains a key issue in global governance discussions.
- ◆ India has historically hosted refugee populations and often balances humanitarian concerns with security considerations.

- ◆ India is one of the largest contributors to United Nations peacekeeping operations.
- ◆ The country often advocates the interests of the Global South in international governance forums.
- ◆ Digital governance issues such as data protection, cybersecurity, and digital inclusion are increasingly important in global policy debates.
- ◆ India supports strong counter-terrorism measures while attempting to maintain constitutional protections for civil liberties.
- ◆ India continues to advocate reforms in global institutions such as the United Nations Security Council.
- ◆ As a rising global power, India is expected to play an increasingly influential role in shaping future global governance structures.

Objective Questions

1. What are human rights?
2. What is meant by global governance?
3. Which constitutional provisions in India guarantee civil liberties?
4. What is the Universal Periodic Review mechanism?
5. Which international body monitors human rights at the global level?
6. What role does India play in United Nations peacekeeping operations?
7. What is meant by the “Right to Development”?
8. Which institution in India monitors human rights violations?
9. What is the concept of the Global South in international relations?
10. What is digital governance?
11. What is meant by multilateral reform in global governance?
12. Which organisation conducts the Universal Periodic Review?
13. What is the main objective of India’s advocacy for global governance reforms?
14. What is meant by counter-terrorism policies?
15. Which international organisation serves as the main platform for global human rights discussions?

Answers

1. Freedoms
2. Cooperation
3. Constitution
4. Review
5. UNHRC
6. Peacekeeping
7. Development
8. NHRC
9. Developing
10. Regulation
11. Reform
12. UNHRC
13. Representation
14. Security
15. United Nations

Assignments

1. Explain the relationship between human rights and global governance with suitable examples.
2. Discuss how the Indian Constitution protects human rights and promotes social justice.
3. Analyse India's participation in the United Nations human rights system and its significance for global governance.
4. Evaluate the importance of the Universal Periodic Review mechanism in promoting international accountability.

5. Examine the debate between economic development and human rights in the context of developing countries.
6. Write a short report on India's role in United Nations peacekeeping missions.
7. Conduct a case study on India's digital governance initiatives and their implications for global governance.
8. Analyse India's position on reforming global institutions such as the United Nations Security Council.
9. Prepare a brief research note on India's advocacy for the Global South in global governance forums.
10. Compare India's approach to counter-terrorism and civil liberties with the approach adopted by another democratic country.

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MODEL QUESTION PAPER SETS



SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY

QP CODE:

Reg. No:

Name:

Fourth Semester - BA Political Science Examination
Discipline-Specific Elective Course – B23PS01DE
(CBCS - UG)
SET-1

Time: 3 Hours

Max Marks: 70

Section A

Objective Type Questions

Answer any ten of the following Each Question carries one mark

(10 × 1 = 10 Marks)

1. Who is regarded as the chief architect of India's policy of Non-Alignment?
2. Which country signed the Panchsheel Agreement with India in 1954?
3. In which year was SAARC established?
4. Which international organization regulates global trade rules among member states?
5. Which Prime Minister of India launched the Look East Policy?
6. How many countries originally constituted BRICS?
7. Which ancient Indian ruler is credited with promoting Buddhism through overseas missions?
8. In which year did India hold the Presidency of the G20?
9. In which city is the headquarters of ASEAN located?
10. Which principal organ of the United Nations is responsible for maintaining international peace and security?



11. On which date is Pravasi Bharatiya Divas celebrated every year?
12. Which neighbouring country shares the longest land border with India?
13. Which country partnered with India in launching the International Solar Alliance?
14. Which principle of international relations emphasizes peaceful coexistence in Indian foreign policy?
15. Which regional organization serves as the principal forum for South Asian regional cooperation?

Section B

Very Short Answers Answer any ten of the following Each Question carries two Marks

(10 × 2 = 10 Marks)

16. Define Non-Alignment.
17. What is meant by cultural diplomacy?
18. Mention two features of India–United States relations.
19. What was the significance of the Bandung Conference?
20. State any two objectives of SAARC.
21. What is diaspora diplomacy?
22. Mention two areas of cooperation between India and Russia.
23. What is India's Act East Policy?
24. State any two functions of the United Nations.
25. What is the World Trade Organization?
26. Mention any two contributions of India to UN peacekeeping operations.
27. What is meant by sustainable development?
28. Mention any two major issues affecting India–Pakistan relations.
29. What is climate justice?
30. State any two features of India's engagement with ASEAN.

Section C

Short Answers Answer any five of the following. Each Question carries four Marks

(5 × 4 = 20 Marks)

31. Explain the nature of India's interactions with the outside world during the ancient and medieval periods.
32. Discuss the impact of colonial rule on India's external relations.
33. Examine the significance of the Non-Aligned Movement in India's foreign policy.
34. Explain the major dimensions of India–United States relations.
35. Discuss the evolution of India–China relations since independence.
36. Describe India's role in SAARC and its significance for regional cooperation.
37. Examine India's participation and contributions in BRICS.
38. Discuss the role of the Indian diaspora in enhancing India's global influence.
39. Explain India's contributions towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.
40. Discuss India's perspective on human rights in international relations.

Section – D

Long Answer/Essay Answer any two of the following. Each Question carries ten marks

(2 × 10 = 20 Marks)

41. Analyse the evolution of India's global relations from the colonial period to the era of Cold War diplomacy.
42. Critically evaluate India's relations with its neighbouring countries in South Asia.
43. Examine India's role in global economic governance with special reference to the WTO and G20.
44. Assess India's global footprint through soft power, cultural diplomacy, peacekeeping, and humanitarian missions.





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QP CODE:

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Name:

Fourth Semester - BA Political Science Examination

Discipline-Specific Elective Course – B23PS01DE

(CBCS - UG)

SET-2

Time: 3 Hours

Max Marks: 70

Section A

Objective Type Questions

Answer any ten of the following Each Question carries one mark

(10 × 1 = 10 Marks)

1. Which foreign policy doctrine emphasized strategic autonomy during the Cold War period?
2. Which two countries signed the Shimla Agreement in 1972?
3. In which year was ASEAN established?
4. Which country is often described as India's oldest strategic partner?
5. In which city is the headquarters of SAARC situated?
6. Which Indian Prime Minister played a leading role in promoting Non-Alignment internationally?
7. What is the primary objective of the BRICS grouping?
8. Which international framework adopted the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015?
9. Which country received India's humanitarian assistance under Operation Dost in 2023?
10. Under which international organization does the International Court of Justice function?
11. Which neighbouring country signed the Treaty of Peace and Friendship with India in 1950?



12. Who introduced the concept of soft power in international relations?
13. Which Southeast Asian country is India's largest trading partner within ASEAN?
14. Under which international convention are global climate negotiations primarily conducted?
15. Which forum brings together major developed and developing economies to discuss global economic issues?

Section B

Very Short Answers

**Answer any ten of the following Each Question carries two Marks
(10 × 2 = 20 Marks)**

16. What is meant by strategic autonomy?
17. Mention two influences of the Indian national movement on foreign policy.
18. Define soft power.
19. What is BRICS?
20. Mention two features of India–Russia defence cooperation.
21. What is the significance of the Line of Actual Control (LAC)?
22. State any two objectives of ASEAN.
23. Mention any two achievements of India in the United Nations.
24. What is the G20?
25. Define humanitarian assistance.
26. Mention two examples of India's cultural diplomacy.
27. What is the significance of remittances sent by the Indian diaspora?
28. Mention two initiatives undertaken by India to address climate change.
29. What is meant by global governance?
30. State any two principles that guide India's position on human rights.

Section C

Short Answers

Answer any five of the following. Each Question carries four Marks

(5 × 4 = 20 Marks)

31. Discuss the role of trade and cultural exchanges in ancient India's relations with the world.
32. Explain the major features of India's Cold War diplomacy.
33. Examine the importance of India–Russia relations in contemporary international politics.
34. Discuss the major issues affecting India–Pakistan relations.
35. Explain India's engagement with Southeast Asia and the Asia-Pacific region.
36. Discuss India's role in United Nations peacekeeping operations.
37. Examine India's contribution to the functioning of the G20.
38. Discuss the significance of the Indian diaspora in India's foreign relations.
39. Explain India's approach towards climate change and environmental sustainability.
40. Examine India's role in promoting reforms in global governance institutions.

Section – D

Long Answer/Essay

Answer any two of the following. Each Question carries ten marks

(2 × 10 = 20 Marks)

41. Critically evaluate the changing dynamics of India–China relations in the twenty-first century.
42. Analyse India's engagement with regional organizations such as SAARC, ASEAN, and BRICS.
43. Discuss the role of cultural diplomacy and the Indian diaspora in enhancing India's global influence.
44. Evaluate India's contributions to sustainable development, environmental governance, and the promotion of human rights at the global level.

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