

# Re-imagining the India's bilateral relations and its impact on South Asian Corporation and Global Stability

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20794606>

Published Date: 22-June-2026

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**Abstract:** India's bilateral diplomacy in the 21st century has been a revolutionary change from its traditionally non-aligned position to a sharper and pragmatic foreign policy. The study discusses how India's rebalanced bilateral engagements—especially with South Asian neighbours, major powers such as the U.S. and China, and through mechanisms such as BIMSTEC—are reshaping regional cooperation and global stability. Relying on qualitative approaches and secondary data sources, the study examines India's strategic options, economic diplomacy, and geopolitical realignments. The study confirms that bilateralism provides India more flexibility in coping with regional asymmetries, enhancing trade, and finding a balance between strategic autonomy and global cooperation. The study also assesses India's contribution to the collapse of multilateral institutions such as SAARC and the emergence of bilateral and sub-regional processes as substitutes. The results highlight India's ability to be a stabilizing influence in the multipolar world by engaging with targeted diplomatic initiatives, infrastructure investments, and security alignments. The study concludes with policy innovation recommendations and further empirical study into the changing dynamics of India's regional power.

**Keywords:** India's Foreign Policy, Bilateral Diplomacy, South Asian Cooperation, Regional Stability, BIMSTEC and SAARC.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

India's foreign policy has been dramatically transformed in the 21st century from a largely non-aligned policy of the Cold War to a more active and pragmatic policy over recent decades (Sahu 2020). This is not just a matter of a strategic realignment to the new world order but one of necessary adjustment to India's increasing economic and geopolitical ambitions. In this changing scenario, the bilateral relationships have come to the forefront, enabling India to interact more substantively with its immediate neighbours, regional allies, and world powers (Tripathi, 2020). The bilateral interactions are not unilateral but are based on the larger objectives of regional integration and world influence. The re-imagining of India's bilateral relationships — specifically with countries such as the United States, China, Russia, and its South Asian neighbours — represents a self-aware effort to reclaim its position as a regional stabilizer (Ahmad, 2021). This realignment comes from economic diplomacy, security collaboration, cultural engagement, and climate initiatives, and seeks to create mutual interdependence and shared prosperity (Buzan & Acharya. 2021). In a time of increasing multipolarity, Indian bilateral diplomacy becomes essential in the formation of a cooperative architecture that not only promotes greater regional collaboration but also serves the cause of world peace and balance (Sengupta 2024). Therefore, the analysis of the influence

**International Journal of Novel Research in Humanity and Social Sciences**Vol. 13, Issue 3, pp: (17-27), Month: May - June 2026, Available at: [www.noveltyjournals.com](http://www.noveltyjournals.com)

of these reconstituted relationships becomes significant in determining India's place in the regional as well as international order.

South Asia continues to be one of the world's least integrated regions, characterized by conventional rivalries, political suspicion, and modest economic collaboration. From this perspective, India's bilateral ties in South Asia — especially with Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, and the Maldives — have huge potential to redefine the region's narrative (Shah, & Karki 2023). The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), originally a platform for regional development, has predominantly slumbered, being frequently brought to a standstill by conflicts between Pakistan and India (NEDUMPARA, 2024). Consequently, India has turned increasingly to bilateral arrangements in pursuit of cooperation in trade, infrastructure, connectivity, health, and disaster preparedness. This has enabled more concentrated and goal-oriented collaborations that avoid institutionally induced stagnation (Strating & Wallis 2024). For example, India's investments in bilateral energy grids across the border with Nepal and Bhutan, port construction in Sri Lanka, and BIMSTEC initiatives with Bangladesh are manifestations of this new bilateral push (Singh & Teo 2020). Not only do they augment India's leverage but also possibilities for mutual growth, economic strength, and people-to-people contact. If supported with sensitivity and consistency, India's reimagined bilateral relationships can create a new South Asian cooperation era, moving away from the narratives of conflict to shared growth and peace models (Das & Sengupta 2022).

India's bilateral relations with China constitute perhaps one of its most challenging and significant relationships. As two ascending giants of Asia, both nations are involved in a strategic rivalry which not only defines regional security but also has implications for international power balance (Marwah 2022). Their relationship, which has been characterized by strong economic interdependence and mutual distrust, has varied between cooperation and conflict. Border tensions, including those along Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh borders, have instigated military confrontations and increased tensions (Lalrintluanga & Zomuanthanga 2025). Economic interdependence continues, however, with China still among the biggest trading partners of India. India has revisited this relationship in recent years, prioritizing strategic autonomy, improving defence preparedness, and strengthening its ties with the Indo-Pacific and the Quad partners - the US, Japan, and Australia (Kumar 2020). The re-articulation of this two-way equation hence entails not only risk management but also the seeking of a new equilibrium: one that protects sovereignty without undermining economic connections (Habib 2023). The failure or success of this rebalancing have consequence for South Asian security, particularly in light of China's increased presence in the region through projects such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). India's diplomatic options in this matter decide if South Asia is to be a theatre of geopolitical rivalry or an area of multipolar collaboration, thus shaping world stability in fundamental ways (Das 2024).

A redefined bilateral relationship opens significant opportunities not only for India, but also for its South Asian partners. For India, improved bilateral relations come with the benefits of stable borders, viable trade routes, and like-minded political support in international fora, which can enhance Indian national security, economic development, and energy sustainability (Nair 2022). Bhutan and Nepal both benefit from India's investments in infrastructure, education, and health and India benefits from guaranteed access to renewable energy and transit corridors. Bangladesh and Sri Lanka are key allies of India in trade and maritime partnerships; both benefited mutually by textile exports and development of ports and regional logistics (Cook & Singh 2020). Bilateral diplomacy allows India to establish cultural diplomacy through scholarships, media initiatives, and religious tourism, providing pathways to bolster India's soft power, cultural coherence, and national identity in the region. Strategically, India's disposition can deter regional incursions by great rival powers and enhance collective responses to regional threats. Inside the informal bilateral framework, India can deploy early warning systems, intelligence sharing, policy coordination on crisis response, and early warning systems that are rarely provided in a multilateral framework due to lack of consensus (Salter 2013).

In addition to regional implications, the re-formulation of India's bilateral relations has potential global implications for stability. South Asia is a geo-political zone that overlaps with major world powers including the United States, China, and Russia. India's recognition as a responsible and collaborative regional leader provides greater diplomatic legitimacy in organizations like the UN, G20, BRICS, and QUAD (Kumral, 2023). India and its bilateral partners have the opportunity to utilize their collectively agreements to promote regional consensus on international issues like climate change, digital governance and maritime security. The global shifts in supply chain patterns and strategic alliances in the post-pandemic day are also emphasizing India's role as a trustworthy regional partner. Furthermore, bilateral relations space offers a

heightened degree of policy agility, creativity, and cultural responsiveness that multilateral forums often do not allow for (Perera 2021). Additionally, bilateral frameworks allow India greater flexibility to project stability, predictability, and rule-based governance at the international level. Such attributes come at a premium in today's uncertain and transitional world order. As such, in addition to stabilizing the South Asian region, India's improvements in bilateral relations have the potential to establish India as a key advocate of peace, sustainability, and cooperative development agendas at the international level (Menon 2022).

The India-U.S. bilateral relationship has developed into a strategic partnership based on democratic values, economic cooperation, and shared security interests (Popovski & Malhotra 2023). What started as tentative engagement in the Cold War era has turned out to be one of the most transformative bilateral relationships of the 21st century. Incentivized by common concerns regarding China's aggressive posturing, international terrorism, and the imperatives of resilient supply chains, the India-U.S. relationship has been spread over defense cooperation, civilian nuclear energy, digital technology, and climate change (Srinivas, et al., 2020).

The main objective of the study is to analyse and assess the changing character of India's bilateral diplomatic interactions and their overall implications for regional cooperation in South Asia and international stability. Through a study of India's strategic transition from multilateral platforms such as SAARC to more pragmatic and results-driven bilateral frameworks, the study attempts to explore how such reconfigured relationships shape regional trade, investment flows, and geopolitical alignments. The study further examines India's dual-track diplomacy with other significant world powers, such as the United States and China, and analysed their implications on India's leadership role in forums like BIMSTEC and the vision for the Indo-Pacific. Based on a qualitative method using secondary data, the study aims to bring into limelight the transformative power of India's bilateral diplomacy in promoting regional integration, dealing with asymmetrical power relationships, and building a cooperative global order.

The paper is structured into sections. Section 1 contains the document's introduction. Section 2 provides a literature review of the cases and prior studies. Section 3 outlines the research questions. Section 4 outlines the research methodology. Section 5 was followed by an outcome consistent with the research questions. Section 6 proceeds with the discussion. Section 7 encompasses conclusions, implications, limitations, and recommendations for future research. References have been incorporated.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to understand where the field stands at the moment, this part of the study reviews and evaluates prior study. The following section has been separated into three separate parts for the sake of clarity:

- I India's bilateral ties since independence
- II India's influence in SAARC and BIMSTEC
- III Challenges of asymmetric power dynamics in South Asia

### 2.1 India's bilateral ties since independence

S. Jaishankar (2020) examined the foreign policy path of the Maps of India from non-alignment to "strategic autonomy," and how, at different times, historical legacies and shifts in global power moulded bilateral alliances through independence, the Cold War, and post-1991. Saroj K. et al. (2023) studied and traced post-1947 bilateral policies towards neighbours during the tenures of Nehru, Indira Gandhi, and Modi. Argued that, based on Nehruvian values, "Neighbourhood First" in Modi (2014-present) signified recalibration: pragmatic, transactional, and assertive. Garima Mohan (2022) examined the transformation from post-colonial ambivalence towards Europe to strong bilateral engagement since the 1990s, focusing on trade, climate cooperation, and strategic dialogue—dramatically deepened under Modi. Ramesh Thakur (2024) analysed and situated India-Russia relations in three phases: early Cold War alignment, post-1991 recalibration toward the US, and post-2022 "multi-alignment." Emphasized New Delhi's effort to balance strategic autonomy with evolving geopolitical imperatives. Ghosh, C. (2025) surveyed and observed a "paradigm shift" after 2014: From reactive diplomacy to assertive bilateralism, which was characterized by energy security, defence exports (₹21,083 crore in 2023–24), initiatives of self-reliance, and intensified partnerships (Quad, Act East).

## 2.2 India's influence in SAARC and BIMSTEC

Prabhat Kumar (2020) argued that stagnation in SAARC and obstructionism by Pakistan created space for BIMSTEC. India's efforts at 14+ technical working groups on energy, connectivity, tourism, and counterterrorism indicated its leadership via BIMSTEC. Rao, S. S. (2020) analysed that India had spearheaded major initiatives under BIMSTEC: transport master plans, new maritime arrangements, and a blue economy focus. With India being the largest economy, its decision-making authority and investment were pivotal to the success of the bloc. Mishra, V., & Das, S. (2020) education served as a pivot in India's cooperation with BIMSTEC. Countries evaluated the study. Advocates increased educational exchanges—almost 47,000 foreign students in India—enhanced people-to-people relations. They pointed this out as a strategic instrument to cement regional identity and counterbalance Chinese hegemony in BIMSTEC. Chauhan, P. S. (2023) considered the study that noted India's disproportionate financial contribution, which provided ~32% of the BIMSTEC Secretariat budget. Warned that India needed to proactively deal with perceptions of dominance and indulge smaller members' sensitivities to keep trust intact. Wignaraja, G. (2023) scrutinized the study that highlighted India's leadership role—both political and economic—within BIMSTEC, defining it as central to regional cooperation in security (counterterrorism), disaster management, energy, connectivity, and trade. The study identified key institutional leadership such as hosting the Governing Board of the BIMSTEC Energy Centre and funding the Secretariat; chairing the Counterterrorism and Transnational Crime working group; and hosting the BIMSTEC Ports Conclave at Visakhapatnam and the Transport Connectivity Master Plan.

## 2.3 Challenges of asymmetric power dynamics in South Asia

Sukaedi, D. A., & Yogaswara, L. (2024) examined the study employing Regional Security Complex theory and Social Network Analysis; the researchers identified India as the preponderant regional actor. They mentioned small states (such as Bhutan, Maldives) as being structurally weak, thereby generating an inherent power imbalance. The Indian military and economic influence heavily shaped regional behaviour and stability. Jahangir, A., et al., (2021) discussed that Jahangir observed that military and political imbalance, compounded by nuclearization, created strategic reliance of smaller states on India or Pakistan. This imbalance produced soft balancing by weaker states but also increased strategic ambiguity and eroded collective regional security endeavours. Dar, Z. A., & Janbaz, S. (2024) analysed how India and Pakistan, in their asymmetry, strategically engaged each other within a triangular power structure with China. It demonstrated that China's increasing role provided smaller powers with greater leverage, but it also forced India to adapt its policy, leading to an increasing regional complexity in the hierarchy. Khan, F. & Saeed, K. (2020) examined India's missile defence efforts and contended that India's increasing technological advantage upset the traditional deterrence balance in South Asia. Such imbalance pushed Pakistan towards asymmetric military actions (such as tactical nukes), made stability more challenging, and cemented power imbalances.

## 3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- I How does India's bilateral diplomacy influence regional trade policies and investment flows among South Asian corporations?
- II What role do India's bilateral strategies play in shaping the structure, effectiveness, and alignment of regional cooperation frameworks like SAARC, BIMSTEC, and the Indo-Pacific vision?

## 4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The current research follows a qualitative research tradition to investigate India's bilateral relations and their significance for South Asian cooperation and international stability. The study context covers India and the rest of South Asia, which provides an in-depth regional context. A descriptive and analytical research design has been adopted to describe the changing character of India's foreign interactions systematically and analyse the overall geopolitical significance. The study relies entirely on secondary data sources, i.e., government studies, policy documents, academic journals, and reputable international publications. MS Excel and MS Word have been used as primary tools for data organization and interpretation. Content analysis is used to analyse textual data, trend analysis to determine patterns and shifts over time, and comparative analysis to evaluate India's relations with a specific South Asian country. This methodological structure allows for rich comprehension of India's regional diplomacy and its strategic position in determining cooperative structures.

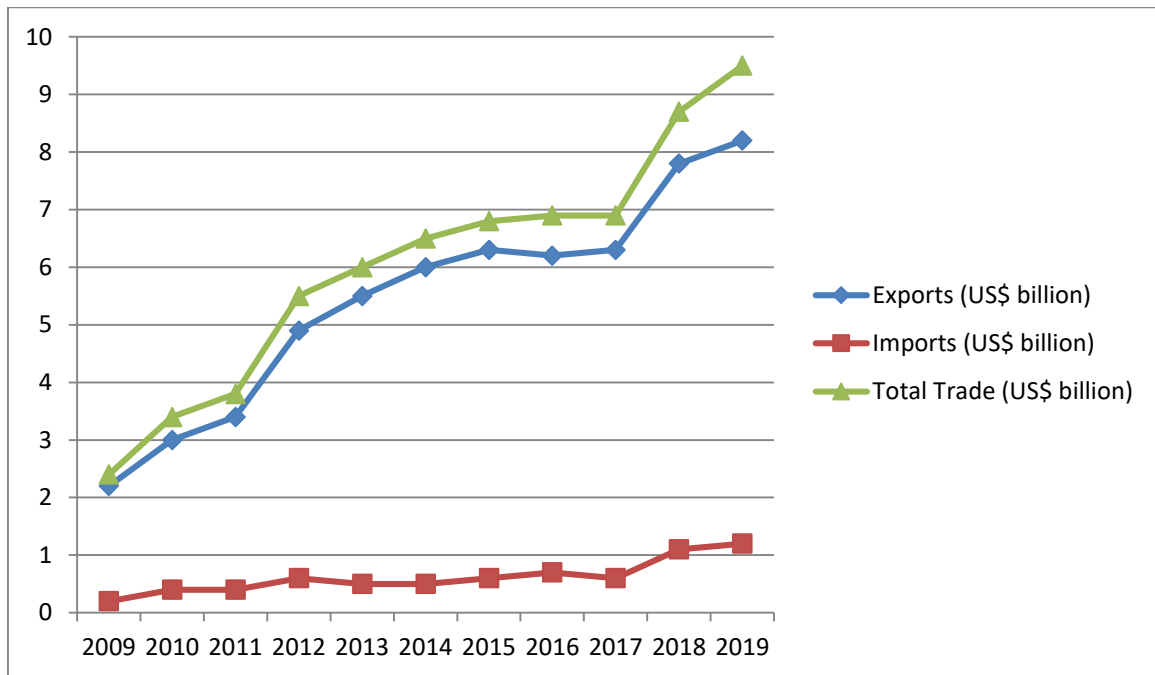
**5. RESULTS BASED ON QUESTION**

**Question no. 1. How does India’s bilateral diplomacy influence regional trade policies and investment flows among South Asian corporations?**

Economic diplomacy denoted the strategic use of diplomatic acumen and economic tools to advance a nation's economic, political, and strategic goals. Diplomats globally endeavoured to advance their nation's interests, including enhancing economic development, ensuring market access, and helping enterprises (Kumar 2020). Consequently, economic diplomacy refers to the use of international policy by nations to augment their economic might and promote home prosperity. Economic diplomacy is a significant element of India's foreign policy. India has a swiftly expanding economy and an ascending geopolitical importance that significantly influences its foreign policy on the international arena (Manocha 2023). India participates in global markets via commerce, investments, and alliances that have evolved significantly during recent decades. These alterations offer the nation both obstacles and prospects. India's economic diplomacy is shaped by its interactions with several economic partners, including the European Union, the United States, and rising economies in Africa, Latin America, and Asia (Tiwari 2022). The nation's trade ties and investment strategies demonstrate a holistic strategy aimed at achieving economic equilibrium. The study seeks to analyse the significance of economic diplomacy within India's foreign policy, emphasizing the nation's trading contacts and investments in global markets (Gunawardhana, & Damayanthi, 2020).

In past centuries, geopolitical considerations have shaped the geographical orientation of nations towards either land or maritime supremacy. Political scientists such as Alfred Thayer assert that empires that expanded overseas wielded significant power due to their access to strategic coastlines, favourable geographical locations, abundant human capital and natural resources, and, crucially, trade routes to other regions (Nandy, 2024). A strong nation seeking affluence and economic progress would need access to endless resources, making resource-rich areas appealing to such governments. This country may get them via two means: annexing other nations to serve its mother country (the invading power) or engaging in trade under the favourable conditions of the mother country (Kaushal, 2022). This resembles the situation when the British conquered India, thereafter, serving its 'mother nation' by supplying resources. Trade occurs within a context; it involves actions and reactions among nations interconnected by land or water, hence forming geopolitical ties. India and China possess a strategic nexus in Asian geopolitics (Paul 2020). India is a prominent emerging nation in global politics, while China represents a powerful communist dictatorship within the current hierarchy of major powers. Both nations possess a stockpile of nuclear weapons, and China's status as a member of the UNSC makes India a de facto nuclear power. Both nations have common boundaries, some of which are contested territories, historically significant enough to be classified as territorial disputes (Kumar 2021).

Year	Exports (US\$ billion)	Imports (US\$ billion)	Total Trade (US\$ billion)
2009	2.2	0.2	2.4
2010	3	0.4	3.4
2011	3.4	0.4	3.8
2012	4.9	0.6	5.5
2013	5.5	0.5	6
2014	6	0.5	6.5
2015	6.3	0.6	6.8
2016	6.2	0.7	6.9
2017	6.3	0.6	6.9
2018	7.8	1.1	8.7
2019	8.2	1.2	9.5



**Question no. 2. What role do India’s bilateral strategies play in shaping the structure, effectiveness, and alignment of regional cooperation frameworks like SAARC, BIMSTEC, and the Indo-Pacific vision?**

Globalization and regionalism are influencing the globe, resulting in several new integration projects at various levels. Consequently, international relations are progressively emphasizing regionalism. This transition is propelled by a collective objective among states to attain peace and economic success via collaboration (Kim 2024). The study also demonstrates an acknowledgment that bilateral agreements alone are unable to address the intricate difficulties of the contemporary world. The determinants of regional cooperation, as delineated by regional integration theories, include the existence of hegemonic nations, mutual security threats, and collective economic interests (Shishir & Sakib, 2023). Empirical evaluations have illuminated the motivations for regional cooperation, emphasizing factors such as economic incentives, power relations, and domestic politics. These studies are very instrumental in shedding light on complex dynamics affecting regional integration processes. The contemporary geopolitical and economic setup has witnessed a lot of transformations, resulting in a vivid transformation of regional cooperation patterns (Pandey, R., & Pandey, (2024). Recurring global economic downturns, geopolitical tensions resulting from wars like the Russia-Ukraine crisis, and the rising dominance of emerging countries like China and India have reflected the necessity of regional cooperation to tackle global challenges. India's rising status in the world's political economy has put it in a position to assert a leadership position globally. Increased economic crises and geopolitical tensions have underscored the necessity of forming alliances to address overarching economic and strategic goals. India has recognized the necessity of collaborative efforts to meet the challenges of an increasingly complex global landscape (Roy, B. Modi's 2024).

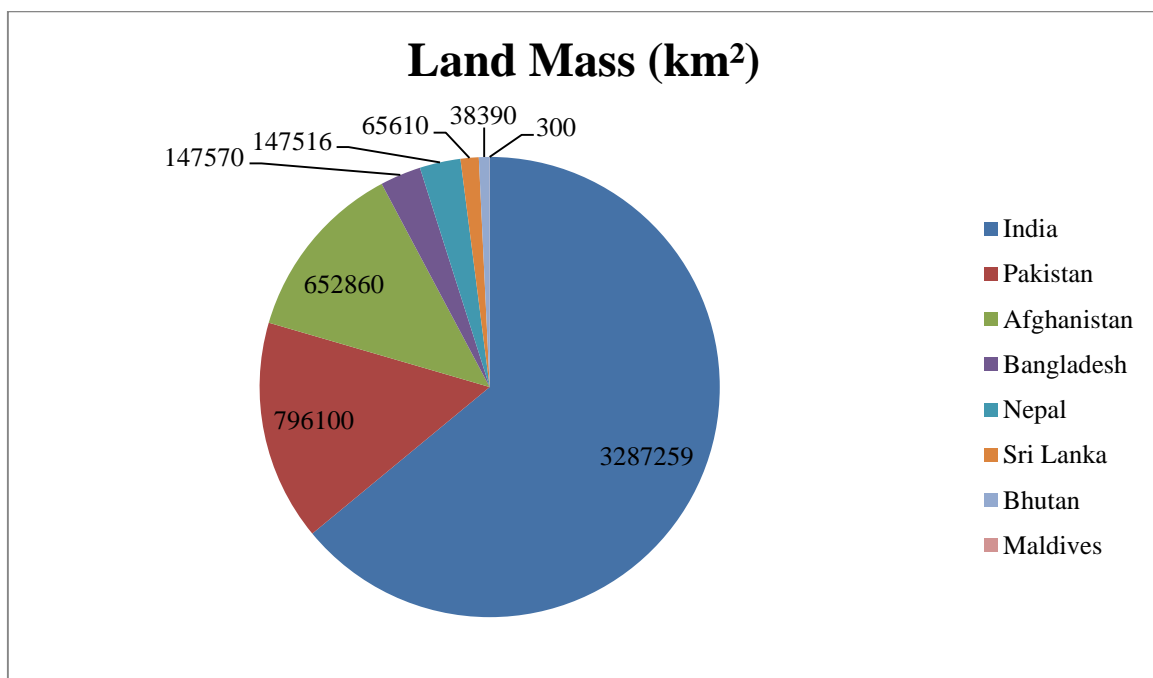
SAARC was established in 1985, consisting of eight member nations, with the objective of promoting regional integration for cooperation and development in South Asia. Since its inception, SAARC has struggled to achieve significant progress, mostly due to political rivalries both between and within member states, exacerbated by India-Pakistan hostilities and other bilateral concerns (Mahaseth, 2024). This enmity has resulted in both paralysis of some decision-making processes and the inability to execute financial plans, hence causing inefficiencies. This contrasts sharply with BIMSTEC, formed in 1997 as a more efficient and pragmatic cooperation forum consisting of seven South and Southeast Asian nations: Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Thailand (Bhowmick, & Ghosh, 2024). BIMSTEC's exclusion of Pakistan, in contrast to SAARC, has enabled the organization to circumvent many of the political issues confronting SAARC. BIMSTEC emphasizes operational collaboration and engagement, with potential areas including commerce, connectivity, energy, security, and disaster management, stemming from the importance of the Bay of Bengal region. The division of labor into sectors that concentrate on specialized concerns, such as transportation, technology, and climate change, diminishes political power while fostering targeted collaboration (Ghosh 2025). Furthermore, BIMSTEC enhances the

**International Journal of Novel Research in Humanity and Social Sciences**

Vol. 13, Issue 3, pp: (17-27), Month: May - June 2026, Available at: [www.noveltyjournals.com](http://www.noveltyjournals.com)

significance of India’s “Act East” strategy and Thailand’s “Look West” policy, hence augmenting its relevance in contemporary geopolitics. Despite the political issues confronting SAARC, there is an increasing consensus that BIMSTEC offers more potential for regional collaboration, especially due to its relatively youthful composition.

Country	Land Mass (km <sup>2</sup> )
India	3287259
Pakistan	796100
Afghanistan	652860
Bangladesh	147570
Nepal	147516
Sri Lanka	65610
Bhutan	38390
Maldives	300



**6. DISCUSSION**

Overall, the findings of the study show the increased strategic sophistication of Indian foreign policy and the evolution of bilateralism to become the preferred form of diplomacy in India. This repositioning was a tactical change than something greater, but it also reflects India's gradual shift in identity as a regional leader and emerging world power. The study has recognized, despite India's power, that India's bilateral relationships have focused more on the importance of connectivity, commerce, strategic collaboration, and regional stability—within the South Asia region and larger geographies such as the Indo-Pacific. One of the major conclusions is that India's bilateral relationships have transitioned away from multilateral arrangements, such as SAARC which has a functional purpose, to more adaptive and nimbler sub-regional and bilateral relationships, such as BIMSTEC and Indo-Pacific formations. For the singular reason that, in many regards, SAARC is operationally inept—largely due to the structural problems of Indo-Pakistani rivalry that have hindered functioning meaningfully—India's bilateralism has allowed it to pursue region-specific agendas that are not bound by institutional paralysis. For example, India's cross-border energy projects with Nepal and Bhutan, port hubs in Sri Lanka, and transport connectivity with Bangladesh exemplify India's attempts at infrastructure diplomacy and soft power to integrate South Asia.

Also, India's growing ties with China raise the modern-day issue of a bilateral relationship between two rising powers with contradictory interests in a region. The study indicates how India has been navigating the difficult situation of economic interdependence and strategic rivalry by pursuing more assertive defence postures and alignments with the Quad powers while simultaneously maintaining trade ties with China. These precarious decisions reveal India's aim to secure autonomy by not compromising national security. India's relationship with the United States, on the other hand, is described with stronger terms of complementarity and strategic notion. India-U.S. relations have been a Pillar of India's foreign policy in their similar democratic values and in their mutual concerns about regional security. Defence cooperation, nuclear cooperation, cyber technology, and climate change have been milestones that show the multifaceted nature of the relationship and its reflective nature with India's ambitions to become a global leader. A second thematic concern of the analysis is dealing with power asymmetry in South Asia. India's economic, military, and geographical power has created a fear of dependence and marginalization among its smaller neighbours. Asymmetry tends to force India to walk a tight rope between regional leadership.

The study depicts how India's bilateral diplomacy is a 'revolutionary engine' that elicits trade patterns, investment patterns, and regional configurations. It indicates that, as was evident in the patterns of bilateral trade analysis, India's bilateral trade with regional countries began a trend of steady growth, fuelled by market access and regional integration, and thus it can encourage shared economic development. As noted, India's applied efforts to leverage and integrate BIMSTEC into their overall "Act East" policy plan, along with their Indo-Pacific vision is demonstrating their attempt to create a new geopolitical narrative where the importance of regional connectivity, and multipolar stability rolls out beyond confrontation.

## 7. CONCLUSION

India's bilateral relations in the 21st century showcase a clear shift from the historical non-alignment of the country toward a more outspoken and outcome-driven foreign policy. This change is driven largely by an increasingly economic powerful India seeking regional recognition and changing security interests within a multipolar world. The study identifies that bilateralism has become the foundation of India's foreign outreach, especially on the Indian South Asian region, where large regional isolation platforms, like SAARC, have failed to deliver tangible cooperation; largely due to national political limitations and border conflicts—most dramatically, with the border issue with Pakistan. By building bilateral relations, India has been able to also develop strategic and infrastructural interconnections with; Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, and Sri Lanka. These interconnections span energy interconnections, trade facilitation, and cultural diplomacy. Even in terms of developments to being an adjacent development partner and regional leader of stability. In the past few years, India's growing focus and work on initiatives such as BIMSTEC and Indo-Pacific plans change the notion of India beyond developer to regional goals or objectives in which India's leadership notion is unquestioned and begrudgingly accepted.

The study has highlighted that South Asia's power dynamic is an asymmetrical challenge to manage, which must be done with care and diplomacy on India's part. While India's economic and military predominance places it in a position of potential, it also requires leadership that respects the sovereignty and agency of other smaller countries, requiring a need to balance bilateral partnerships with regional leadership. It acknowledges India needs to balance influence with cooperation, to balance leadership with partnership, in its bilateral partnerships.

India's bilateral relationships with superpowers such as America and China represent a two-track strategy, with India pivoting towards its democratic friends, while negotiating the competitive coexistence it has with its strategic rivals. This nuanced diplomacy, if carefully managed, enhances India's reputation, not only as a regional balancer, but as an essential contributor to global peace, commerce and governance endeavors. India's re-conceptualized bilateral diplomacy is not only reprising the new avenues for cooperation in South Asia but also assisting in shaping the discussed potential future features of global stability. The degree of its success depends on its sustained strategic vision, outreach that is far-reaching in its inclusion of all South Asian nations, and responsive leadership in an increasingly interdependent and contested world.

### 7.1 Implications, Limitations, and Recommendations for Further Studies

The outcomes of the study have far-reaching implications for scholarly discourse and policy-making practice. Policy-wise, India's reoriented bilateral diplomacy reaffirms its leadership of regional cooperation, especially through pragmatic options like BIMSTEC. These bilateral interactions are strategic instruments for infrastructure building, trade integration, and peace construction in a region that has traditionally been fragmented. For policymakers in South Asia, the study emphasizes the

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Vol. 13, Issue 3, pp: (17-27), Month: May - June 2026, Available at: [www.noveltyjournals.com](http://www.noveltyjournals.com)

need to utilize bilateral relations in pursuit of economic and political advancement in mutual reciprocity, particularly when there is no effective multilateral mechanism such as SAARC. In addition, the international implications are reflected in how India navigates relationships with great powers such as the U.S. and China while building its own interests in the Indo-Pacific, indicating a more assertive and independent foreign policy trajectory.

Although the study presents a thorough description of India's bilateral relations, it is narrow due to its secondary data sources and qualitative study. The lack of primary interviews, field observations, or quantitative indicators limits the level of empirical evidence. Additionally, the focus is mainly concentrated on state-level diplomacy and does not capture adequately the sub-national or people-to-people aspects like migration, people-to-people exchanges, or economic partnerships at the grassroots level. Moreover, the dynamic nature of geopolitics, particularly with recent events such as the Russia-Ukraine war, post-pandemic economic shifts, and rising Chinese assertiveness, implies that the findings presented here could require constant updating to stay pertinent.

Subsequent studies may advance on this work by integrating mixed-method methods, such as quantitative analysis of trade patterns, investment statistics, and public opinion surveys to present more solid conclusions. Primary data collection via diplomatic interviews, policy brief reviews, or cross-national case studies may yield better insight into the process of bilateral engagement. There is also room for comparative studies that compare India's bilateral relationships with South Asian neighbours to China's Belt and Road Initiative or U.S. Indo-Pacific initiatives. Also, the study could be undertaken to explore the contribution of non-state actors, civil society, and regional private sectors to framing bilateral dynamics. Longitudinal study monitoring policy changes over time and their real on-ground effects would also increase the academic worth of this subject.

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