



Modern tools, age-old wisdom

Context:

- India – Sri Lanka relationship.

What are the noticeable aspects of the relationship?

Religious and cultural relations:

- **Religious, cultural and social affinities** of the two nations have been a noticeable aspect of the relationship.
- The **advent of Buddhism in Sri Lanka** during the time of Emperor Ashoka has been a major aspect of the cultural link between India and Sri Lanka.
- There has been a continuous movement of Buddhist monks between India and Sri Lanka.
- The many Buddhist sites in India and the Hindu places of worship in Sri Lanka have attracted people from both countries.

Economic relations:

- The ancient capital city of Anuradhapura in Sri Lanka had housed an international community which included traders from India.
- Colonialism by the European powers reshaped the Sri Lankan economy. **Labour from south India was brought to Sri Lanka to work in plantations.**
- Currently, **India is a major trading partner of Sri Lanka** and is one of the major export destinations for Sri Lankan products. Sri Lanka continues to remain a major tourist attraction among Indian tourists. Sri Lanka also receives a substantial amount of foreign investment from India.





Proximity:

- Being the closest country to each other, distance or connectivity has never been an issue for the bilateral relationship.
- There has always been a **free exchange of ideas, trade and intellectual discourse between the two nations.**

What is the significance of the relationship?

- **Sri Lanka's strategic location** makes it an important player in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). This would have an impact on not only the economic dimension but also on the security aspect of both countries.
- The **socio-economic development of Sri Lanka has remained linked to India** given the proximity of India to Sri Lanka.
- India being the closest nation can and has always been the first responder to any urgent needs of Sri Lanka. India being the major naval power in the region played an important role in humanitarian and disaster response post the Indian Ocean Tsunami which devastated Sri Lanka.
- Unlike the Chinese model of capital led investment, India has always emphasized on people owned development in Sri Lanka. This would offer Sri Lanka a sustainable development model as against the debt trap diplomacy of China.
- India can help Sri Lanka with the peaceful settlement of its **Tamil issue.**
- Sri Lanka which has been witness to terrorist attacks recently can gain from **India's counter-terrorism capability and intelligence networks in the region.**

What are the major concerns?

- The **asymmetry** in terms of geographic size, population, military and economic power has had an adverse impact on the relationship with political parties in Sri Lanka using this to accuse India of Big Brotherly behaviour.
- The Tamil issue in Sri Lanka has been a challenging aspect of the bilateral relationship.

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- Recently, Sri Lanka seems to be tilting towards the Chinese. The **growing Chinese influence in Sri Lanka** seems to be coming at the cost of India – Sri Lanka relations.

Way forward:

- **Common values and interests:** Partnerships with other countries must be sought by each country keeping in mind the **non-alliance foreign policies** of the countries. Both countries must seek to harmonise strategic and other interests in line with common values and interests.
- **Deepening economic relations:** There is scope for deepening economic relations between the two countries with Indian capital expertise making use of Sri Lankan resources and location to **build business hubs and modern value chains in the region.**
- The partnerships across the economic and social spectrum can **promote people-to-people bonhomie.**