



India -UK Bilateral Relations In Changing Global Order Of 21st Century: A Thematic Analysis

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Abstract

India United Kingdom relations have undergone substantive transformation in 21st century, shifting from historically burdened post colonial association to a multidimensional partnership grounded in shared democratic values ,converging strategic interests and evolving economic interdependence.This paper takes on a thematic structure to analyse India UK ties across political ,diplomatic ,economic ,defence, security,climate, knowledge diplomacy ,people to people dimensions.The relevance of bilateral relations for both nations amid changing global order marked by multipolarity and on going reconfiguration of global governance.It argues that while both states have articulated ambitious framework such as the Roadmap 2030 and India UK Vision 2035,progress remains uneven, strained by negotiation frictions, domestic politics and divergent geopolitical imperatives .Nonetheless , the partnership possess significant structural –especially in trade, research & education, technology and climate action that can support thir emergence as mutually reinforcing middle powers.

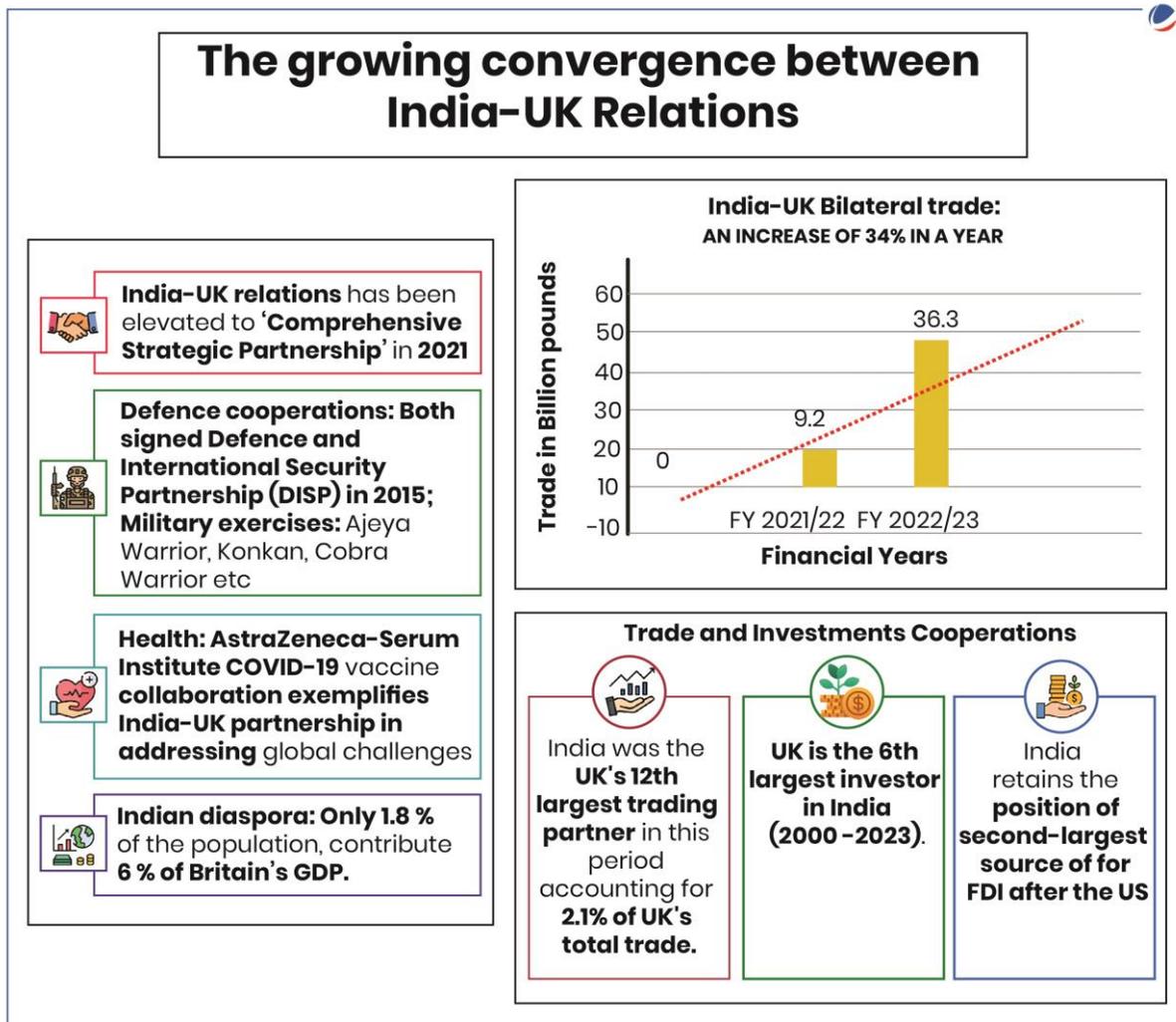
Keywords : India-UK relations , strategic partnership , economic cooperation,defence and security , people to people ties ,global governance.

Introduction

The twenty first century has witnessed a redistribution of global power, marked by the rise of emerging economies , the recalibration of western strategic priorities ,and growing contestation over institutional norms. The post cold war unipolar moment has gradually given way to multipolar configuration in which economic capability, technological innovation, and regional influence determine strategic leverage.Within this transformed landscape, India and the United Kingdom have redefined their bilateral relationship in ways that reflect both systemic pressure and domestic imperatives.

Indias ascent as a major economic and geopolitical actor has enhanced its place in global governance and regional security affairs.Also, the United kingdom's withdrawal from the European union necessitated a comprehensive assessment of its external partnerships.The confluence of India's rise and Britains post brexit aspirations has generated renewed diplomatic momentum.Contemporary India UK

relations are thus neither historically residual nor symbolically diplomatic, they are structurally embedded in the logic of economic diversification, institutional pragmatism and strategic hedging.

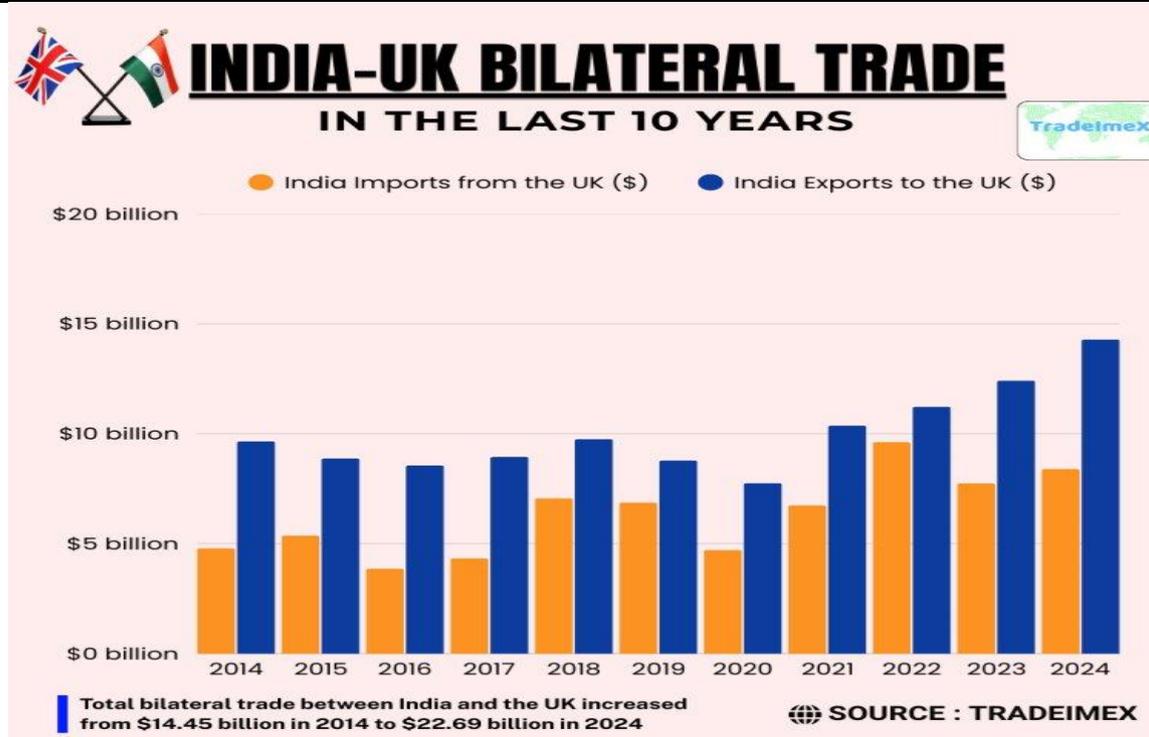


Economic Cooperation and Trade Institutionalization

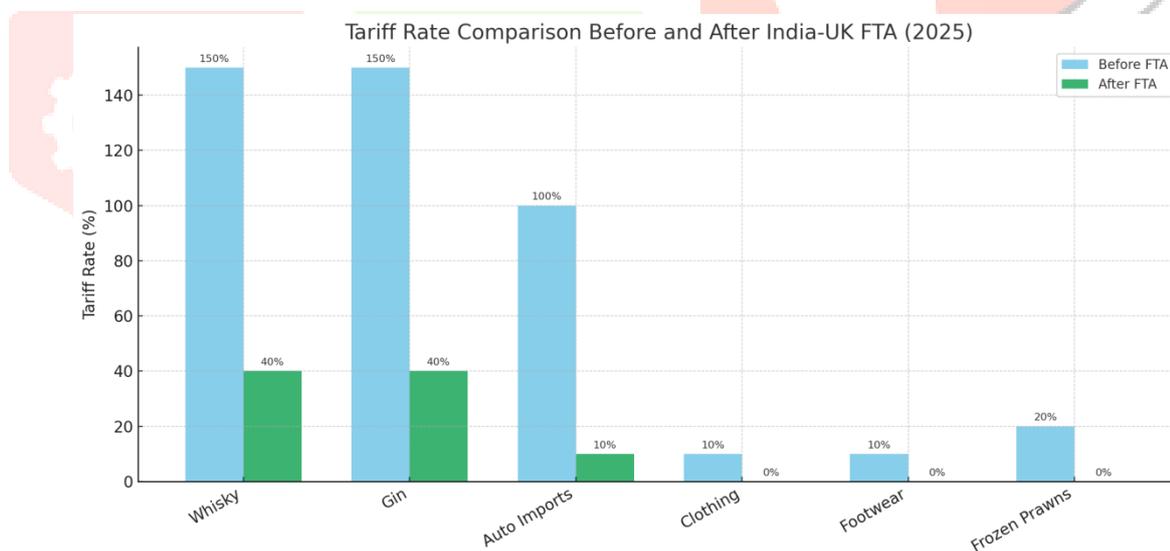
Economic engagement constitutes the structural foundation of contemporary India UK relations. Bilateral trade in goods and services has expanded steadily over the past decade reflecting both countries recognition of mutual beneficial interests.

For the United Kingdom, India represents one of the worlds fastest growing major economies and acritical market for financial services, higher education, pharmaceuticals and green technologies. For India, the UK offers access to capital markets, advance research ecosystems and agateway to global financial networks. .

For India, the UK offers access to high-value markets and technology; for the UK, India represents a large, growing economy critical to its "Global Britain" strategy post-Brexit.



The negotiation and conclusion of a comprehensive free trade agreement(FTA) in 2025 marked a significant milestone in institutionalising economic cooperation. The agreement reflects broader global efforts to secure reliable supply chains and diversifying trade partnerships in the wake of pandemic disruptions and geopolitical tensions. By reducing tariffs, enhancing regulatory transparency, and facilitating digital trade frameworks, the FTA seeks to embed predictability to bilateral commerce..

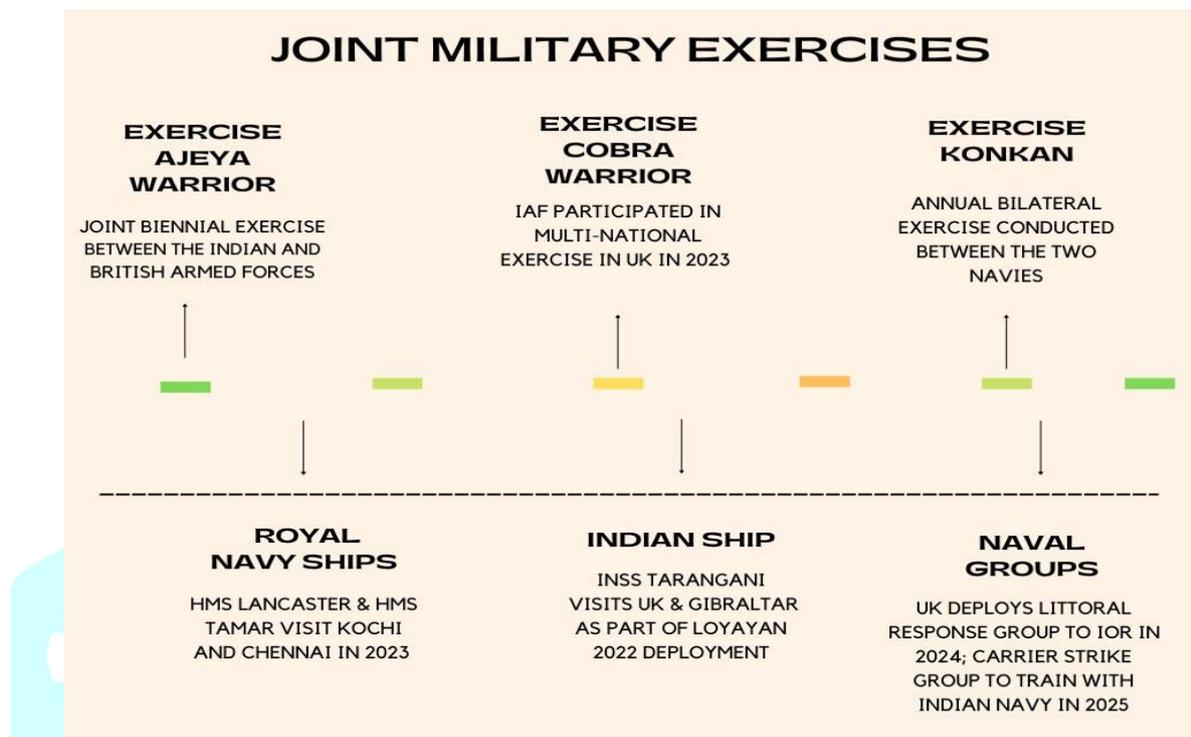


Yet the economic integration is neither frictionless nor symmetrical . India has emphasised the importance of mobility for skilled professionals and recognition of qualifications, viewing human capital flows as equitable trade relations. The UK however faces domestic political challenges regarding immigration and labor market regulation. Furthermore ,global debates over sustainability standards and carbon border mechanisms introduce additional layers of complexity.

Thus, economic cooperation illustrates the tension between liberal institutionalism and domestic political constraints, revealing the limits of globalization in an era of rising economic nationalism.

Defence Cooperation and Strategic Convergence

In recent years, strategic and defence cooperation has emerged as a defining dimension of India-UK relations. The shift from symbolic defence dialogue to structured industrial collaboration signals a deepening partnership grounded in pragmatic security interests. Both countries recognise the growing strategic volatility of the Indo-Pacific region, particularly in relation to maritime security, assertion of regional powers and the technological competition.



Naval exercises in the Indian ocean and adjacent waters highlight shared maritime interests, especially in securing freedom of navigation and sea lines of communication. As the above diagram shows in recent years joint military exercises have further strengthened this defence partnership between both the nations.

Both nations are deepening cooperation on counterterrorism, cybersecurity and emerging domains like space and critical infrastructure protection.

Policy documents emphasize co development and coproduction of defence technologies which align with India's Atmanirbhar Bharat (self reliance) initiative and the UK's need for partners beyond its traditional transatlantic ties. Growing convergence in the Indo-Pacific—through UK carrier strike group deployments as in October 2025, the UK carrier strike group led by HMS Prince Of Wales, conducted the joint historic drills with India's INS Vikrant carrier battle group off India's west coast. 'Exercise Konkan – 2025' featured a never before dual carrier operations to enhance interoperability, strengthening the bilateral defence partnership and security in the Indo-Pacific region.

For India such collaborations aligns with its broader objective of strengthening indigenous defence manufacturing under policies promoting self reliance. For the United Kingdom, partnership with India supports defence export diversification and reinforces its aspiration to remain a consequential actor in Indo-Pacific.

Also, this cooperation does not amount to alliance formation. India maintains a long standing commitment to strategic autonomy preferring diversified partnerships over formal alignment. The United Kingdom, similarly, seeks flexible engagement rather than binding commitments. The resulting security architecture reflects contemporary trends towards functional and issue based collaboration rather than rigid alliance blocs.

In this sense, realism explains the strategic convergence underpinning defence cooperation, while the absence of formal alliance structures underscores the continued importance of sovereign flexibility.

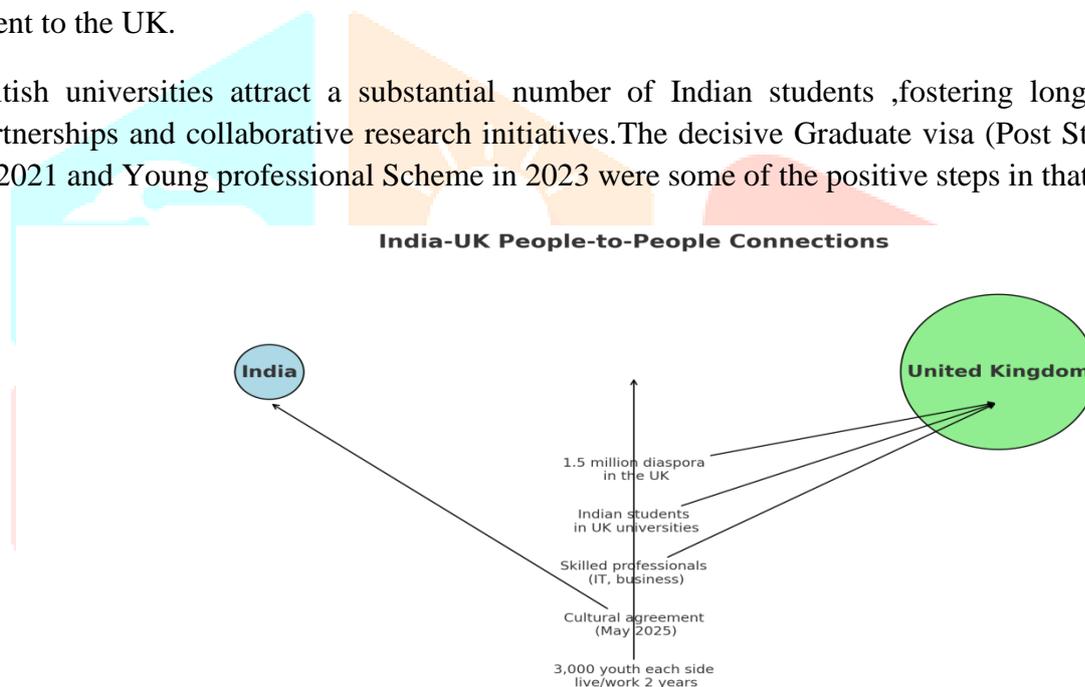
Diaspora, Education, and People to People ties

The Indian diaspora in the United Kingdom constitutes one of the most economically successful and politically visible communities in British public life. Its presence influences not only commercial investment patterns but also diplomatic atmospheres and cultural exchange. Cultural Exchange through film, literature, sports, festival celebrations help maintain people to people connections which become large part of cultural diplomacy too between both the nations.

Diaspora networks facilitate business connectivity, entrepreneurial ventures and philanthropic initiatives that extend beyond government frameworks. Moreover the symbolic representation of Indian origin leaders in British politics reinforces the perception of shared democratic values and inclusive governance.

Educational exchanges further strengthen the normative dimension and have been the most visible and dynamic element of the relationship, driven by the policy shifts that incentivized the flow of Indian talent to the UK.

British universities attract a substantial number of Indian students, fostering long term academic partnerships and collaborative research initiatives. The decisive Graduate visa (Post Study Work Visa) in 2021 and Young Professional Scheme in 2023 were some of the positive steps in that direction.



These exchanges represent soft power and knowledge diplomacy dimensions of the comprehensive strategic partnership, transitioning from a relationship burdened by post colonial history to forward looking mutually beneficial 'living bridge'. From a constructivist perspective such societal and institutional linkages generate shared understandings and reinforce relational continuity even when geopolitical tensions emerge.

Multilateral Engagement and Global Governance

India and the United Kingdom cooperate within multilateral frameworks addressing climate change, renewable energy, public health and maritime governance. Joint initiatives in offshore wind development and climate finance demonstrate how bilateral engagement can complement global sustainability commitments. By co-leading initiatives like GGI-OSOWOG (Green grids initiative-one sun, one world, one world, one grid) being a global project to develop interconnected, transnational electricity grid for sharing renewable energy mainly solar across different continents and CDRI (coalition for disaster resilient infrastructure) India and UK amplify their influence. Their joint success

in mobilizing green finance and setting standards for clean technology places them at the forefront of defining rules and structure of a new sustainable world order.

However, differences occasionally appear in their broader versions of global governance. The United Kingdom traditionally supports established institutional frameworks and regulatory harmonization, whereas India advocates reform of global institutions to better reflect interests of emerging economies and the global south.

Nevertheless, pragmatic cooperation dominates. Both states share an interest in maintaining a rules-based international order capable of managing transnational challenges. Their collaboration in multilateral forums reflects an understanding that bilateral relations are embedded within and shaped by the broader architecture of global governance.

Conclusion

India-United Kingdom relations in the twenty-first century exemplify adaptive bilateralism within an evolving global order. The Partnership is anchored in economic interdependence, reinforced by strategic convergence and sustained through societal connectivity. At the same time, it remains shaped by asymmetry, domestic political considerations and divergent global governance preferences.

Thematically, the relationship between both nations demonstrates how trade institutionalization, defence collaboration, diaspora engagement, and multilateral cooperation collectively structure modern bilateral diplomacy. Theoretically, realist logic explains security cooperation, liberal institutionalism accounts for economic agreements and constructivist insights illuminate the enduring relevance of identity, normative linkages and people-to-people connections.

As global power transitions continue, India-UK relations are likely to remain pragmatic, flexible and sector-driven. Their long-term durability will depend not only on shared interests but on the ability of both states to institutionalize cooperation in ways that withstand geopolitical turbulences and domestic political challenges.

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