

1 **India–Mauritius Relations in the 21st Century: Strategic** 2 **Convergence, Maritime Security, and Diaspora Diplomacy** 3 **in the Indian Oceans**

4 **Abstract**

5 India-Mauritius relationship is one of India's longest-standing and multi-dimensional
6 partnerships in the Indian Ocean Region. The bilateral relationship is built on the
7 foundations of historical migration, shared culture, heritage and post-colonial
8 solidarity. With the passage of time, it has not only been confined to close ties but
9 has evolved into a full-fledged strategic partnership. The presence of a large number
10 of people of Indian origin in Mauritius has contributed to the deep social and cultural
11 links between the two countries. It has played an important role in maintaining
12 diplomatic trust and consistency over the decades. However, in the twenty-first
13 century, the identity of this relationship has expanded significantly, and now
14 cooperation between the two countries has increased in the areas of defence
15 cooperation, overall security, coordination, economic integration and framework, and
16 central development assistance. This study analyses India and Mauritius through an
17 integrated theoretical framework where both realism and constructivism data are
18 used together. From a realist point of view, the geographical location of Mauritius is
19 very important as it is located close to the important Sea Lane of Communication.
20 However, Mauritius has increased the importance of India's maritime security
21 strategy in the context of growing political competition in the Indian Ocean. On the
22 other hand, the constructivist view emphasizes that the identity of the Indian
23 diaspora, shared democratic values, and historical memories play an important role
24 in shaping the country's policy and diplomatic closeness. The study argues that while
25 identity-based relationships provide moral depth and stability to these partisan
26 relationships, the dynamics of relationships in contemporary times are increasingly
27 being influenced by strategic maritime interests, especially in the context of China's
28 growing presence in the Indian Ocean region. After all, India-Mauritius relationship is
29 an example of a hybrid diplomatic model where cultural closeness and strong
30 security interests do not conflict but strengthen each other. This has helped shape a
31 stable and adaptive partnership in the emerging Indo-Pacific region.

32 **Keywords:** Indian Ocean, diaspora diplomacy, maritime security, SAGAR, Indo-Pacific

33 **Introduction**

34 India-Mauritius relations occupy a distinct and long-lasting place in India's
35 foreign policy framework. Located in the southwestern Indian Ocean, Mauritius is
36 strategically important because it is located close to the vital communication links
37 that connect Africa, the Middle East and Asia. In the case of India, whose trade and
38 energy supplies are heavily dependent on sea routes, the stability of the Indian
39 Ocean region is a fundamental national interest. Mauritius has emerged not only as
40 a culturally close partner but also as an important maritime and strategic partner in
41 the twenty-first century. The historic migration trend deepens these bilateral ties, with
42 nearly 70 per cent of Mauritius's population of ancestors from India, most of whom

43 were taken there as migrant labourers during the colonial era. This common
44 heritage, language, religion, education and political symbols have created lasting
45 social and cultural bonds (Bunwaree, 2007). Mauritius's presence of a large Indian
46 diaspora maintains diplomatic warmth between the two countries as a result, regular
47 high-level visits and multi-national forums have increased cooperation, and the India-
48 Mauritius relationship has been strengthened by identity-based intimacy that ensures
49 mutual trust and continuity, rather than just interest-based partnerships. However, in
50 recent times, this relationship has expanded beyond the boundaries of expatriate
51 community-centric diplomacy, with maritime security, cooperation, infrastructure
52 development, capacity building, and economic engagement becoming important
53 pillars of bilateral relations (Pant, 2019). There is a turning point through the SAGAR
54 policy announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2015 that emphasizes
55 cooperative maritime security and inclusive regional development in the Indian
56 Ocean Region. Under this framework, Mauritius is considered an important partner in
57 India's island diplomacy and wider Indo-Pacific Vision. Thus, the India-Mauritius
58 relationship is reflective of a multi-faceted partnership in the twenty-first century.

59 **Theoretical Framework:**

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61 From a realistic point of view, India's engagement with Mauritius is driven by
62 strategic and security imperatives in the Indian Ocean Region. According to the realism
63 theory, states prefer to increase their survival capabilities and establish control over important
64 geostrategic areas. Mauritius is located near the important Sea Lanes of Communication,
65 which is the main sea route for energy transport and trade between Asia, Africa and Europe
66 Ensuring the security of these sea lanes is a central part of India's national interest as India's
67 trade and energy supplies are heavily dependent on maritime trade (Brewster, 2014).
68 Therefore, the partnership with Mauritius strengthens India's maritime surveillance
69 capabilities and its strategic presence in the southwestern Indian Ocean. Also, what is India's
70 strategic calculation of China's growing presence in the region, such as port development,
71 infrastructure financing and maritime diplomacy? Adding to this, according to many analysts,
72 Beijing's activities in the Indian Ocean have made it necessary for India to adopt a balancing
73 strategy to maintain its regional influence (Pant & Saha, 2016). In this context, projects such
74 as infrastructure development at Agalega Island and the installation of coastal surveillance
75 radar systems in Mauritius reflect India's efforts to enhance security cooperation and maintain
76 strategic depth. Therefore, according to the realist analysis, the India-Mauritius relationship is
77 seen as part of a larger energy balance strategy in an increasingly competitive maritime
78 environment.

79 Constructivism emphasizes the role of shared identity, social values, and historical
80 experience in determining the behaviour of the state. In the context of India-Mauritius
81 relations, the large Indian diaspora serves as a strong social and cultural bridge, strengthening
82 diplomatic engagement through language, religious education and cultural exchanges
83 (Bunwaree, 2007). This identity-based linkage creates a sense of welcome continuity and
84 symbolic closeness between the two countries, as well as mutual trust and strategic alignment
85 in the foreign policies of the two countries based on shared democratic values and shared
86 post-colonial historical experiences (Alden & Vieira, 2005). Therefore, not only material or
87 strategic interests, but also conceptual and social elements play an important role in
88 maintaining the depth and stability of India-Mauritius bilateral relations.

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90 **Historical Evolution:**

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92 The historical development of India-Mauritius relations reflects a multidimensional
93 trend, which is shaped by migration, colonial structures, post-colonial integration, economic
94 institutionalization, and emerging maritime geopolitics. The relationship began in the
95 nineteenth century when indentured labourers were taken from India to Mauritius after the
96 abolition of slavery by the British Empire. From 1834 until the first half of the twentieth
97 century, a large number of Indians settled there, which gradually changed the demographic
98 structure of the island. With the passage of time, the community became socially and
99 politically influential and deeply embedded Indian culture, language and religious traditions
100 in the society of Mauritius, forming an ideological basis for post-independence diplomatic
101 relations (Bunwaree, 2007). After gaining Mauritius independence in 1968, India quickly
102 established diplomatic relations and focused on anti-colonial experience and South-South
103 cooperation. Mauritius pursued a neutral foreign policy during the Cold War, but maintained
104 close ties with India in the fields of education, civil service training and institutional
105 development (Brewster, 2014). India's assistance to the development of governance and
106 governance capacities has been instrumental in strengthening democratic institutions and
107 modernizing governance in Mauritius. The main features of the relationship at this stage were
108 development cooperation and diplomacy based on shared identities and historical ties. An
109 important change occurred in the 1980s and 1990s, when the Double Taxation Avoidance
110 Agreement was signed in 1983. The agreement established Mauritius as an important
111 financial centre. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) started flowing into India. After India's
112 economic liberalization in 1991, Mauritius became one of the largest sources of FDI in India
113 (Reserve Bank of India [RBI], 2018). This increased economic interdependence between the
114 two countries and strengthened regulatory cooperation. As a result, bilateral relations
115 transcend the boundaries of mere cultural diplomacy and evolve into a structured economic
116 engagement. In the twenty-first century, this relationship acquired a more explicit strategic
117 dimension. The growing political importance of the Indian Ocean and concerns over piracy,
118 and in particular the growing presence of external powers such as China, reshape India's
119 regional priorities (Pant, 2019).

120 Mauritius becomes important in India's maritime security strategy due to its proximity
121 to important sea lanes of communication. The bilateral cooperation extends to coastal
122 surveillance, radar systems, hydrographic support, defence training, and infrastructure and
123 development projects. The high-level visit and announcement of the SAGAR Policy reinforce
124 India's importance to Mauritius in the Indian Ocean Strategic Partnership.

125 The signing of the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Partnership Agreement
126 in 2021 is another important milestone in this regard, which has institutionalized trade
127 liberalization and economic diversification (Government of India, 2021). Thus, the historical
128 evolution of India-Mauritius relations has been sustained by the diaspora communities and
129 distinct identities on the one hand, and on the other hand, it has adapted itself to the
130 prevailing economic and strategic environment. As a result, the relationship has gradually
131 evolved from post-colonial integration to an integrated partnership where development,
132 economics and maritime security are all intertwined.

134 **Strategic and Maritime Cooperation:**

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136 Strategic and maritime cooperation has been one of the most dynamic and rapidly
137 developing aspects of India-Mauritius relations in the twenty-first century. This partnership is
138 no longer limited to traditional development assistance but includes a deeper security
139 cooperation, effective coordination, and joint response to emerging political challenges in the

140 Indian Ocean region. Mauritius's proximity to the vital Sea-Lance of Communications still
141 plays a central role in India's regional strategy, especially as competition from major powers
142 grows and China's presence expands in the Indian Ocean coastline (Brewster, 2014). In
143 March 2025, India and Mauritius upgraded their relationship to an Enhanced Strategic
144 Partnership. During this period, the two leaders signed agreements on joint maritime
145 surveillance, hydrographic Zarif and exchange of information on white shipping traffic
146 (Times of India, 2025). These initiatives were aimed at enhancing maritime domain
147 awareness and strengthening maritime security coordination. These arguments include the
148 Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Indian Navy and the Mauritius Police
149 Force that facilitates real-time exchange of information on commercial and strategic shipping
150 (Times of India, 2025; India Seatrade News, 2025). In line with India's largest SAGAR
151 policy, New Delhi is assisting in the development of infrastructure such as the establishment
152 of coastal surveillance radar systems in Mauritius, defence equipment such as helicopters and
153 patrol vessels, and the construction of airfields and jetties on Agalega Island, significantly
154 enhancing Mauritius's surveillance and response capabilities (The Diplomat, 2025). In
155 addition, the participation of Indian Naval Ship INS Sarvekshak in several hydrographic
156 missions further highlights the effective maritime cooperation between the two countries
157 (Economic Times, 2025). An important strategic initiative is vision MAHASAGAR, which
158 was unveiled during high-level meetings and broadened the SAGAR policy. The concept
159 provides an integrated framework for maritime security, economic cooperation, and
160 enhancing regional connectivity across the Global South, where Mauritius is considered an
161 important partner. India's recent USD 680 million aid package has further strengthened this
162 strategic partnership. The package includes port infrastructure development, maritime
163 security measures and surveillance capabilities in the vicinity of the Chagas Marine Protected
164 Area, which is geopolitically significant because it is located close to the Diego Garcia
165 military base in the United States and the United Kingdom supporting Mauritius' territorial
166 claims and cooperating in the Chagos region is part of safeguarding important maritime
167 strategic interests for India (Reuters, 2025).

168 Collectively, these initiatives demonstrate that strategic and maritime cooperation has
169 now become a central pillar of India-Mauritius relations, where security infrastructure and
170 multilateral political cooperation are intertwined, the two countries have enhanced their
171 maritime stability through joint exercises, coordination of surveillance networks and common
172 strategic concepts such as oceans, and contribute to building a secure and stable regional
173 architecture in the Indian Ocean Region.

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175 **Economic Engagement and Development Partnership:**

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177 In the twenty-first century, India has emerged as a key pillar of Mauritius's economic
178 engagement and development cooperation. These relations are no longer confined to
179 historical cultural bonds but have been strengthened by a deep economic interdependence and
180 joint development initiatives. An important institutional milestone in this process is the
181 Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and Agreement signed in 2021. Which has officially
182 ensured trade liberalization, tariff reductions and expansion of market access between the two
183 countries. Trade and investment flows under the CECPA have increased significantly. In
184 early 2026, the two countries organized multi-sectoral investment promotion missions in
185 various Indian cities with the aim of encouraging Indian investors to invest in Mauritius and
186 use Mauritius as a gateway to access African markets (Economic Development Board
187 Mauritius, 2026).

188 Another important development in bilateral trade policy in recent years is the
189 initiative to settle trade in local currencies. Through this, efforts are being made to reduce

190 trade risks and transaction costs by reducing dependence on third country currencies. The two
191 leaders agreed to facilitate trade settlements in Indian Rupees and Mauritian Rupees under
192 the CECPA framework, marking a strategic shift in economic cooperation and financial
193 integration (DD India, 2025). Another important aspect of contemporary economic
194 cooperation is India's special economic assistance package of US\$ 680 million announced in
195 September 2025. The package was approved during the visit of Prime Minister of Mauritius
196 Naveen Chandra Ram Goolam to India. This includes \$215 million in grants and \$440
197 million in loan facilities. Which is said to be spent on the development of infrastructure,
198 healthcare, transportation and logistics (Indian Defence News, 2025). Transportation and
199 logistics. Major projects include the construction of Sir Seewoosagar Ramgoolam National
200 Hospital, the establishment of an Ayush centre of excellence, the construction of a new air
201 traffic control tower at Sir Seewoosagar Ramgoolam National Airport, the expansion of the
202 motorway M4 and Ring Road Phase 2, and the development of port equipment. This will
203 make Mauritius more competitive as a maritime and logistics hub (Indian Defence News,
204 2025; Blue Azurite, 2025).

205 In addition, a number of MOU's have been signed to enhance cooperation in various
206 fields such as science and technology, oceanography education, renewable energy and
207 hydrographic surveying, which are contributing to capacity building and long-term
208 sustainable development (IBEF, 2025). For example, India's support for a 17.5 MW floating
209 solar power project at Tamarind Falls and 100 electrification projects highlight joint
210 cooperation in energy transition and green infrastructure development (IBEF, 2025).
211 Collectively, these initiatives demonstrate that the India-Mauritius economic relationship is
212 steadily expanding, intertwined with bilateral trade facilitation, infrastructure, modernization,
213 innovation and skill development, and sustainable economic growth.

214 **Mauritius in India's Indo-Pacific Strategy:**

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217 Mauritius is an important partner in India's Indo Pacific strategy, particularly in the
218 context of India's island diplomacy and Indian Ocean regional engagement. India has
219 gradually deepened its strategic partnership with the Indian Ocean Island States on the basis
220 of the SAGAR policy announced in 2015 (Pant, 2019). And within this framework, Mauritius
221 has emerged as an important focal point. The SAGAR policy underscores the importance of
222 inclusive maritime security capacity building and economic cooperation as a key pillar of a
223 stable regional order. Over the last five years, India and Mauritius have implemented this
224 strategy on ground, in line with the larger Indo-Pacific Vision. In 2025, the two countries
225 elevated their bilateral relationship to an enhanced strategic partnership, which further
226 strengthens their shared commitment to maritime security, maritime information surveillance,
227 and combating non-traditional security threats such as piracy, trafficking and illegal fishing
228 (Times of India, 2025). This trend is a reflection of India's efforts to build an 'India Ocean
229 First' pillar of Indo Pacific Policy. Mauritius also plays an active role in regional
230 multilateralism, which strengthens regional cooperation, economic integration and maritime
231 policy. Among the Indian Ocean Rim Association, Mauritius has taken a lead in initiatives
232 related to maritime security, blue economy, disaster management and digital connectivity
233 (IORA, 2024). At the 2024 IORA Summit, India and Mauritius jointly proposed the Blue
234 Partnership Initiative, which aims to promote sustainable ocean governance, climate
235 resilience and oceanographic collaborative research development aligned with the priorities
236 of the region (IORA, 2024).

237 Another recent development is the Quad Plus dialogue and increased participation in
238 trilateral initiatives, including India, Mauritius and other Indian Ocean countries such as
239 Seychelles and Madagascar. These platforms emphasize integrated naval intelligence sharing

240 and joint simulation exercises to build an integrated maritime security architecture across the
241 western Indian Ocean (The Diplomat, 2025). Collectively, these recent initiatives
242 demonstrate that Mauritius is playing an important role in implementing India's Indo-Pacific
243 Vision. It is a strategic partner in defence cooperation on the one hand, and the voice of small
244 island states in regional forums on the other, and advocates for sustainable and rules-based
245 maritime governance. In this context, the role of Mauritius demonstrates that bilateral
246 strategic cooperation and multilateral engagement are strengthening each other and
247 contributing to building a stable regional order in the Indian Ocean region.
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249 **Conclusion:**

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251 India-Mauritius relations in the twenty-first century reflect the multifaceted strategic
252 transformation of a historically established partnership, shaped by the convergence of
253 political, economic and policy interests. The relationship that began on the basis of the
254 migration of indentured labourers and shared colonial experiences has gradually grown into
255 an integrated cooperation, which includes maritime security, defence cooperation, trade
256 liberalization, infrastructure development, and multilateral diplomacy. Diaspora linkages and
257 shared democratic values have provided an enduring moral foundation to this relationship,
258 while the changing political realities of the Indian Ocean region have given this partnership a
259 new strategic importance. From a theoretical point of view, this relationship is a consolidated
260 reflection of the three streams of realism, liberalism and constructivism. From a realist point
261 of view, the security of sea lanes of communication, balancing the influence of external
262 forces, and enhancing maritime surveillance capabilities are increasingly influencing India's
263 security cooperation. At the same time, liberal institutional mechanisms such as the CECPA,
264 the investment framework and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) have
265 institutionalized multilateral cooperation. On the other hand, constructive elements such as
266 identity-based intimacy and historical memory have perpetuated diplomatic trust and
267 symbolic legitimacy. These three dimensions of interaction highlight a hybrid character of
268 India and Mauritius. Recent developments such as elevating the relationship to an Enhanced
269 Strategic Partnership, the announcement of the MAHASAGAR concept, expansion of
270 maritime surveillance cooperation, and significant development financing indicate that
271 Mauritius has become an important strategic partner in India's Indo-Pacific Vision. Mauritius
272 is playing an important role not only in security cooperation but also as a gateway to access
273 to African markets, a voice representing small island states, and a partner in the Blue
274 Economy and Climate Initiative.
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