

effectively through dialogue-based, relational logics without institutional convergence or hegemonic leadership. Pedagogically, it equips students to analyse regional organisations like the SCO beyond realism and liberal institutionalism, enabling them to apply civilisational frameworks to understand sovereignty, cooperation, and power in non-Western regional orders.

Keywords: Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), Indo-Central Asian Relations, Multipolar World Order, Mandal Theory, Sambad

INDIA–SRI LANKA RELATIONS IN THE AGE OF NEIGHBOURHOOD FIRST POLICY: LESSONS FOR SOUTH ASIAN REGIONALISM

Dr. K.T.Ganeshalingam¹

¹Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Jaffna, Sri Lanka

Email: ktganesh@univ.jfn.ac.lk

Abstract

This chapter addresses a central puzzle in South Asian regionalism: how India's *Neighbourhood First Policy* has generated cooperative outcomes with Sri Lanka despite persistent asymmetries, regional rivalries, and competing external influences, particularly China's BRI. Mainstream IR frameworks, focused on balance-of-power or dependency logics, struggle to explain why Sri Lanka has neither bandwagoned nor resisted India but pursued a calibrated, relational strategy. The chapter argues that India–Sri Lanka relations are best understood through Indian civilisational statecraft rather than Westphalian or realist templates. It advances *Dharma/Rajadharma* as the primary analytical pillar to conceptualise India's non-hegemonic, responsibility-oriented leadership, and *Samvada* (dialogue) as the secondary pillar to explain sustained engagement, restraint, and crisis diplomacy under asymmetry. Empirically, the chapter demonstrates how India's responses to Sri Lanka's civil war aftermath, Covid-19 pandemic, and 2022 economic crisis operationalise ethical leadership through assistance without coercion, embedded within regional platforms such as SAARC, BIMSTEC, IOR, SAGAR, and the Indo-Pacific framework. As a decolonial move, the chapter challenges Eurocentric assumptions that asymmetry inevitably produces domination or resistance, showing instead how civilisational norms enable cooperation without institutional convergence or strategic subordination. Conceptually, it reframes South Asian regionalism as a relational order grounded in duty, dialogue, and moral restraint rather than material hierarchy alone. Pedagogically, the chapter equips students to analyse neighbourhood diplomacy beyond alignment binaries, enabling them to evaluate leadership, vulnerability, and balance as co-constitutive features of regional order in the Global South.

Keywords: Regional Security, Economic Crisis, New Silk Road, Dharma/Rajadharma, Sambad Foreign Policy.