



SHAPING THE GEOPOLITICS OF THE INDIAN OCEAN REGION: AN ANALYSIS OF INDIA'S 'LOOKING SOUTH' POLICY IN THE MODI ERA

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India's Indian Ocean Policy has undergone a noticeable change during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's administration, which is evident in a clear southward orientation. This has been clearly demonstrated in diplomatic engagements and military alliances. Concurrently, there appears to be a similar trend in the economic sector as India cultivates trade relationships, fosters economic cooperation, and seeks investment opportunities in the southern nations of the Indian Ocean rim. This southward strategic pivot reflects a nuanced interplay between India's domestic economic growth aspirations and its national strategic goals. Yet, the onslaught of the COVID-19 pandemic has posed challenges to India's domestic economic progress and could potentially disrupt this "looking south" trajectory. For example, the closure of ports and disruptions to global supply chains have impacted India's ability to maintain secure maritime trade routes. Additionally, the closure of borders and travel restrictions along the INSTC route could hinder India's efforts to expand economic connectivity with Central Asia, Russia, and Europe. The crucial question then arises: can economic cooperation and the "looking south" policy withstand the test of these trying times? The answer lies in the delicate balancing act between India's national strategic needs and domestic economic evolution. To truly understand the ramifications of this "Looking South" policy, it is vital to break down the complex economic interactions at play. In doing so, we can gain a quantitative perspective on India's strategic shift and what it means for the region's economic and strategic landscape.

Keywords: *Southward Trend, Indian Ocean Region, Geopolitical Scenario, Economic Cooperation, Modi Government.*



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1. INTRODUCTION

India has a deep-rooted history of prioritizing the Indian Ocean. Esteemed Indian scholar K.M. Panikkar once declared, "The Indian Ocean must therefore remain truly Indian", reflecting the sentiment that India ought to maintain significant influence over

this expansive maritime region. This viewpoint was also espoused by the country's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, who considered India as having a natural hegemony over the Indian Ocean region (Nehru, 1961) (Brewster 2014).

In recent decades, India's influence in the Indian Ocean region has surged, with the country

asserting itself more prominently on the geopolitical stage. This projection has been particularly marked since Narendra Modi assumed office as Prime Minister. The Modi administration has exhibited an unprecedented focus on the Indian Ocean, embarking on various strategic, economic, and diplomatic initiatives (Hall 2019).

India's growing engagement in the Indian Ocean aligns with its objective of assuming a more prominent position in regional and global affairs. The government's increased focus on Indian Ocean security can be attributed to its desire to establish a prominent role in this domain, safeguard the principle of unhindered maritime transit, and enhance economic ties with coastal states. India's foreign policy calculation places significant emphasis on the geostrategic importance of the Indian Ocean. In this regard, India's active participation is aimed at countering the growing influence of other major nations in the region.

India's strategic priorities have historically centred on the northern Indian Ocean. However, under the leadership of the Modi administration, there has been a shift towards incorporating the southern Indian Ocean into its strategic framework. The academic discourse on India's geopolitical manoeuvres reflects a discernible shift. In his book titled "Modi's World: Expanding India's Sphere of Influence," esteemed Indian academic Raja Mohan posited that the historical disregard of Delhi towards its southern border necessitates corrective measures. The speaker highlighted that the Modi government had undertaken a strategic move to give precedence to the enhancement of India's maritime infrastructure and expand its naval and maritime collaborations (Mohan 2015).

Mohan also persuasive illustrations of India's increased involvements with countries like Australia, the United States, and Japan, situated within the wider Indian Ocean vicinity. Furthermore, the author highlights India's endeavours to strengthen longstanding connections with significant island nations such as Mauritius, the Maldives, and Seychelles, located in the southern region of the Indian Ocean.

Conversely, certain academics present divergent perspectives regarding India's approach towards the Indian Ocean. According to Brewster, India's prioritisation of maritime concerns has been erratic, and its naval capacity remains relatively limited within the larger context of the Indian Ocean area. Gurpreet S. Khurana, a maritime strategy analyst and Indian naval officer, asserts that India's transition to the southern Indian Ocean is a positive development. However, it must confront significant obstacles such as resource allocation, capacity building, and maintaining consistent political dedication (Khurana 2018).

The prevailing body of literature on India's Indian Ocean Policy has primarily concentrated on military collaboration. However, it is apparent that India's strategic interests have experienced a significant transformation towards the southern Indian Ocean region in the military sphere. The Indian Ocean policy of the Modi administration is distinguished by its employment of both soft and hard power strategies.

Ever since assuming office, Prime Minister Modi has expressed his commitment to positioning India as a "net security provider" in the Indian Ocean region. The individual in question put forth the proposal of "Project Mausam," which aims to facilitate cultural interactions and cooperation among nations situated in the Indian Ocean region. The aforementioned statement depicts an endeavour to utilise soft power instruments in order to enhance India's position and foster collaborative ties with nations situated in the Indian Ocean region.

Considering the aforementioned context, it is imperative to broaden the extent of our analysis beyond the realm of military collaboration. The present article aims to conduct an analysis of the economic data pertaining to India's engagements with nations situated in the Indian Ocean region subsequent to the assumption of office by Prime Minister Modi. This economic analysis will allow us to determine if there is a discernible trend of southward shift in the economic sphere.

Experts in the field assert that economic relations constitute a crucial component of India's southward shift. According to Professor Brahma Chellaney, an esteemed scholar and writer, it is imperative to comprehend India's strategic actions in the Indian Ocean area within the framework of its economic and commercial connections. C. Raja Mohan, a distinguished fellow at the Observer Research Foundation, asserts that a thorough examination of India's Indian Ocean strategy necessitates the inclusion of its economic relations in conjunction with its military alliances.

Notwithstanding these opposing viewpoints, it is evident that the Modi government has made noteworthy advancements in the southward reorientation of India's Indian Ocean strategy. The ramifications of this transition will be contingent upon India's capacity to effectively manage intricate geopolitical circumstances, fulfil its domestic economic obligations, and adapt to worldwide events such as the aftermath of the Covid-19 outbreak.

The southward trend in India's Indian Ocean policy during the Modi administration is influenced by several intertwined factors. On the one hand, this shift aligns with India's strategic needs, particularly its ambition to project influence across the broader Indian Ocean region. On the other hand, expanded

cooperation with Indian Ocean countries is contingent on a robust domestic economy, which provides the necessary economic wherewithal to foster and maintain such relationships (Mishra and Haldar 2020).

The southward trend in India's Indian Ocean policy could also be attributed to China's increasing presence and influence in the region, prompting India to respond with its own strategic moves (Frankel 2011).

Further complicating this scenario is the role of other major powers in the Indian Ocean region. Their interests and actions invariably influence India's strategic calculations. For example, the United States shift towards a more Indo-Pacific focus has led to increased cooperation between India and the US in the region, as well as increased tensions with China. Additionally, Japan's growing involvement in infrastructure projects in the Indian Ocean has further added to the complexity of India's strategic decision-making.

Prime Minister Modi's introduction of the SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) initiative demonstrates India's intention to construct a cooperative, inclusive framework for the Indian Ocean region. Overall, India's focus on the Indian Ocean region has resulted in both positive and negative outcomes, including increased cooperation with the US and tensions with China, as well as the added complexity of Japan's involvement in infrastructure projects. However, Prime Minister Modi's SAGAR initiative highlights India's commitment to creating a cooperative and inclusive framework for the region (Chaturvedy 2017).

However, the Covid-19 pandemic has dealt a blow to India's domestic economy, potentially hindering the "spillover" effect of its economic prosperity on its regional ambitions. Consequently, the future of this southward shift could be affected by how India manages the interplay between its economic recovery, strategic needs, and the actions of other major powers (Ahmed and Sharma 2022).

Moreover, the impact of Covid-19 on countries within the Indian Ocean region, many of which were affected later than India, might not yet be fully reflected in the economic cooperation data. This indicates a need for ongoing research into how the pandemic might influence economic and trade cooperation between India and other countries bordering the Indian Ocean.

Analysing these factors in the light of the current context, it's evident that India's southward shift in the Indian Ocean is not just a linear trajectory, but a complex process influenced by a constellation of domestic, regional, and global factors. Despite the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic, the

momentum of India's 'looking south' policy could continue provided it adeptly manages these dynamics. The implications of this strategic manoeuvring will undoubtedly hold significant resonance for the broader geopolitics of the Indian Ocean region.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Indian Ocean policy of India, as evidenced in academic literature, exhibits a complex amalgamation of strategic, economic, security factors, and the impact of dominant global actors. The present narrative is situated within the context of global geopolitics, internal economic progress, and local power relations, all of which have influenced the framework of India's strategic outlook.

The Indian Ocean policy of India is a multifaceted and evolving one that considers various factors. India's regional approach is influenced by a multitude of factors, ranging from strategic and economic considerations to regional power dynamics and the impact of major powers. A comprehensive comprehension of India's approach towards the Indian Ocean necessitates a nuanced understanding of the nation's historical, political, and strategic priorities. Nevertheless, the scholarly literature that delves into the economic implications of the southward shift of the Indian Ocean policy is somewhat scarce, thus presenting a promising avenue for future investigation.

2.1. Geostrategic Positioning

The strategic location of a nation holds significant importance in its foreign policy, especially for a nation like India, which is situated at the heart of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). Brewster highlights the significance of strategic positioning, particularly in relation to critical choke points such as the Strait of Malacca, which exerts a substantial impact on global shipping lanes and trade routes. The Strait holds significant importance as a vital connection between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean, thereby serving as a critical component of India's Look East (and Act East) policy (Brewster 2010).

The strategic positioning of India's geography confers upon it an inherent advantage in exerting its dominance within the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). The region under consideration exhibits a coastal stretch of roughly 7,500 kilometres, accompanied by a significantly extensive Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Moreover, the Indian subcontinent protrudes into the Indian Ocean, positioning India at the centre of the Ocean, thereby enabling it to efficiently oversee maritime operations and shipping routes (Sellström 2015). The strategic positioning of India's central location presents an opportunity for the country to exercise potential control over naval operations in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), provided that it makes sufficient investments in its naval capabilities.

According to David Scott's analysis, there is a nuanced perspective that considers the emergence of an Indo-Pacific discourse that interconnects India's 'Look South' and 'Look East' policies. The 'Look East' policy was formulated with the objective of bolstering relations with nations in Southeast Asia and East Asia. In contrast, the 'Look South' policy is a relatively recent approach that centres on augmenting India's maritime security and fostering economic and strategic collaboration with countries situated in the Indian Ocean region (Scott 2006).

India's strategic reorientation towards the Indo-Pacific region can be interpreted as a response to the growing influence of China, as well as an effort to safeguard its own interests in an area that is increasingly emerging as a hub of global power. The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) is a strategic initiative undertaken by India, the US, Japan, and Australia to advance a free, open, and rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific. This effort is implicitly aimed at counterbalancing China's assertive behaviour in the region (Wei 2022).

India's strategy towards its geographically isolated north-eastern area is also significant. India has been actively pursuing measures to improve its connectivity with the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) by leveraging its strategic and economic significance. To this end, India has been engaging in collaborative efforts with neighbouring countries such as Myanmar and Bangladesh. The India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway and the Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project are endeavours that seek to establish a connection between India's northeast and Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). This is intended to enhance India's Act East policy and its strategic influence in the IOR (De, P. 2014).

2.2. Security Considerations:

Undoubtedly, the aspect of regional security holds significant importance in India's policy towards the Indian Ocean. The area is a significant location for various security challenges, including conventional and unconventional threats such as territorial conflicts in the maritime domain, piracy, terrorist operations, and environmental issues caused by climate change. The aforementioned concerns significantly influence India's involvement with the region, which is evident through the implementation of independent as well as collaborative security measures (Goh 2007).

India's security strategy of 'looking south' primarily revolves around the development of maritime capabilities that cater to both diplomatic and defence objectives. According to Baruah's analysis, India has made noteworthy progress in enhancing its maritime capacities, which includes the establishment of naval bases in crucial locations such as the Andaman

and Nicobar Islands. The islands located in proximity to the Strait of Malacca provide India with a significant strategic advantage in regulating vital maritime routes and monitoring China's naval expansion in the Indian Ocean area (Baruah 2015).

India is interested in bolstering its autonomous capabilities while also expressing a desire for collaborative security agreements. The Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) was established in 2008 by India as a collaborative forum that facilitates the convergence of naval forces from the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) to tackle common security concerns (Mahalik and Osman, 2014).

Moreover, India has considerably escalated its maritime drills and security alliances throughout the area. Brewster provides an illustration of India's expanding security relations throughout the region, as evidenced by its rising participation in joint maritime exercises with nations such as Australia, the United States, and Japan. India's involvement in multilateral security initiatives in the region, such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (also known as the Quad), is evidenced by these activities.

India's security concerns in the Indian Ocean encompass a multifaceted approach that includes addressing non-conventional security challenges. The issue of climate change poses a significant and urgent threat to the ecological equilibrium of the region, with the potential to impact the livelihoods of a vast number of individuals. India's leadership in addressing non-traditional security issues is exemplified by its dedication to renewable energy and its implementation of initiatives such as the International Solar Alliance (ISA) (Sears 2022).

India's security concerns in the Indian Ocean are complex and constantly evolving, encompassing a range of defence strategies, collaborative efforts with multiple nations, and addressing non-conventional security threats. The aforementioned factors serve as a basis for the nation's strategic outlook and contribute to the development of its policy towards the Indian Ocean within the context of the 'looking south' paradigm.

2.3. Economic Engagement:

The analysis of India's strategic engagement with the Indian Ocean region can be significantly enhanced by examining the economic dimension of its policy. Over time, India's strategy towards the Indian Ocean has progressed beyond solely prioritising security concerns, highlighting the significance of economic connections. The transition from the 'Look East' to 'Act East' policy, which was instigated during the tenure of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, serves as a prime illustration of this progression.

Singh explicates that the 'Act East' policy expands the scope beyond Southeast Asia to include East Asian countries such as Japan and South Korea. The objective of this expansion is to promote enhanced economic integration with these regions that exhibit significant economic growth. The primary focus is to augment trade volumes, promote investment, and establish strategic partnerships that result in mutually advantageous growth (Singh and Singh 2014).

The manifestation of economic engagement is discernible through various collaborative efforts and undertakings. The India-Japan Act East Forum was established with the aim of expediting the execution of initiatives such as connectivity, sustainable development, disaster management, and people-to-people exchanges in the north-eastern region of India, between India and Japan. The objective of this strategic alliance is to harmonise India's Act East Policy with Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific Vision (Panda 2019).

Concurrently, India's economic relations with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) have been reinforced through the implementation of the 'Act East' policy. As per the records of the ASEAN Secretariat, the trade volume between India and ASEAN escalated to \$80.8 billion in the year 2020, which marks a significant increase from the approximately \$42 billion recorded in 2010. Likewise, efforts such as the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC) have been reinvigorated to promote economic collaboration with the nations of the Mekong region (Sally and Sen 2005).

Experts expound upon the burgeoning economic prowess of India and underscores the significance of the Indian Ocean region in facilitating India's foreign commerce. India has been a proactive member of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), an organisation that endeavours to foster sustainable growth and equitable development in the Indian Ocean region. India has been actively engaged in enhancing maritime connectivity, trade and investment, fisheries management, and blue economy sectors among member states via the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) (Llewellyn, L. E., English, S., & Barnwell, S. 2016).

The economic aspect of India's Indian Ocean policy is a crucial element of its overall strategy. The statement denotes India's aspiration to shift its focus towards the southern region, promoting strong economic relations and guaranteeing the area's well-being amidst the interplay of security and economic dynamics.

However, it is imperative to acknowledge that despite the increasing economic involvement, there are still obstacles to be overcome. The equilibrium between economic factors and security apprehensions

is a nuanced matter. The matter of maritime security and the preservation of unrestricted navigation is of utmost importance in upholding uninterrupted trade routes and safeguarding economic interests in the Indian Ocean.

In supposition, a combination of strategic, economic, and security factors have influenced India's Indian Ocean policy over time, revealing a greater southward focus. However, more detailed exploration is required to discern the nature and implications of this economic southward shift under the Modi government, which has been relatively overlooked in current studies.

Our exploration will unravel the 'Southward Shift' under Modi's administration, delving into the economic dynamics that underpin this strategic transformation. Venturing beyond conventional security paradigms, we will decode the intricate tapestry of economic engagements that define India's renewed Indian Ocean Policy. A thrilling journey of discovery awaits, as we decipher the economic essence of India's 'Look South' drive in the enigmatic theatre of the Indian Ocean.

2.4. Steering South: Key Influences Behind India's Geopolitical Realignment

The policy shift of the Modi government towards the Indian Ocean region, known as the "Looking South" policy, has been influenced by a complex interplay of internal and external factors (Lucena Silva, A. H., & de Amorim, W. D. 2016).

The previously mentioned transition is firmly entrenched in India's ambitions for both domestic and global progress. The economic growth of India and its aspiration to position itself as a significant global player require heightened collaboration and sway in the Indian Ocean vicinity. Fostering diplomatic ties with nations in this particular geographic area not only enhances India's commercial and financial opportunities, but also enhances its geopolitical standing, expanding its sphere of influence (Cooper, A. F. 2016).

The strategic significance of the Indian Ocean region has garnered the interest of other major global powers, including the United States and Japan. The aforementioned nations are endeavouring to assert their strategic interests and compete for influence in the region. The aforementioned competition introduces an additional level of intricacy to India's strategy and serves as a catalyst for the nation to strengthen its standing within the vicinity (Rumley, D., Doyle, T., & Chaturvedi, S. 2012).

India's efforts to enhance its regional and global position have led to increased involvement in the Indian Ocean region. Historically, India has been perceived as a natural hegemon in Asia and the

Indian Ocean by leaders such as Nehru, as evidenced in his writings from 1944 (Khurana 2016).

This viewpoint has also been expressed by the current Modi government. India considers the Indian Ocean to be of significant importance to its economic and national security due to its strategic location. The economic inequalities existing between India and other nations in the Indian Ocean region have created a favourable environment for India to potentially assume a dominant position in the area (Rajagopalan, R. 2020).

The Indian Ocean region is rich in natural resources, including energy and minerals, from an external perspective. Given the projected doubling of India's energy demand by 2030, it is possible to leverage the resources available in the region to fulfil this need. Numerous Indian enterprises have made investments in African nations situated along the Indian Ocean, resulting in a mutually advantageous outcome for both parties. This is due to the fact that the progress of India and its regional sway necessitates the backing of these nations (Kohli, H. S., Sharma, A., & Sood, A. (Eds.). 2011)

Furthermore, the geopolitical landscape of the region, which includes influential nations such as the United States, Russia, Japan, Australia, and China, has played a role in shaping India's strategy of "Looking South." The Indo-Pacific strategy, which was first introduced by Japan as a means of establishing a partnership with the United States, Australia, and India, has prompted India to shift its attention towards a more southerly direction.

The escalating diplomatic, economic, and naval involvements of China in the Indian Ocean area have resulted in India's increased alertness, as noted by (Khorana, C. D. G. S. 2018). The substantial transportation of goods by China in the Indian Ocean and its investments in the Belt and Road Initiative within the same region intersect with India's interests, potentially leading to tensions.

To encapsulate, the "Looking South" strategy embodies India's practical methodology to advance its internal objectives and to manoeuvre intricate geopolitical intricacies in the Indian Ocean vicinity. The aforementioned policy is a deliberate amalgamation of economic involvement, defence collaborations, and diplomatic efforts, with the aim of strengthening India's sway while minimising probable risks posed by other dominant nations.

The Indian economy derives advantages from the abundant energy resources present in the Indian Ocean region, which cater to its significant energy demands. This results in a positive economic synergy. In addition, the growth of the Indian economy necessitates access to foreign markets, which can be facilitated by nations situated in the Indian Ocean

vicinity. The Bharatiya Janata Party (2014) has emphasised the importance of a practical approach to foreign policy, encompassing aspects such as defence, trade, and soft power (Bharatiya Janata Party 2014).

According to the Ministry of External Affairs of the Government of India (2015), the Indian Ocean holds significant importance in India's diplomatic efforts, with a focus on enhancing economic and military relations and ensuring mutual prosperity and security (Ministry of External Affairs 2015).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Our research covers the Indian Ocean region, utilizing economic cooperation maps and visual aids highlighting the 'Look South' trend. Using ArcGIS 10.7 with the wgs-1984 Coordinate System, we ensure accurate spatial projections. Our primary data comes from official documents and speeches by Prime Minister Modi and other key officials during his term. We extensively analyze trade, investment, and foreign aid between India and the Indian Ocean nations to evaluate the Modi administration's economic approach in this region.

The Modi government's strategy in the Indian Ocean combines multilateral and bilateral economic cooperation. An increasing emphasis has been placed on bilateral ties, particularly with South Asian nations and strategically important island states. Our study covers 25 countries, spanning South Asia, Southeast Asia, the Gulf, Africa, and Australia. Data sources include major financial institutions like the Reserve Bank of India and the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. By comparing India's economic statistics under Modi with previous administrations, we aim to identify significant shifts in economic priorities within the Indian Ocean region.

4. DATA ANALYSES

4.1. Examination of Direct Investment Patterns

India's direct investments in the Indian Ocean region focus primarily on Southeast Asia and the Gulf, especially Singapore and the UAE. South Asia and the southwestern Indian Ocean received less. Figure 1a shows a decline in India's overall direct investment from 2014-2019. However, there's a discernible shift toward the southern region, notably in island nations like the Maldives and African countries adjacent to the Indian Ocean, such as Tanzania and Zambia. This increase under the Modi administration contrasts with the patterns observed during the Singh administration, as shown in Figure 1b.

In 2014, India's peak investment was in Mozambique at US\$2648.8 million. After a dip in 2015, investments rebounded. This trend, although subtle, signals India's increasing interest in the southern Indian Ocean. Comprehensive analysis requires

understanding socio-political and economic drivers behind these investments. Factors like global economic shifts, regional stability, and changes in India's foreign policy across administrations must be considered. Our findings derive from data sourced from the Reserve Bank of India and reports from India's Ministry of Finance.

4.2. Import and Export Trade Analysis

Comparing India's trade during the Modi era with data from 1996-2013, the post-Cold War era and Singh administration period, reveals strategic shifts. Under Modi, India's aggregate import-export trade with the Indian Ocean region showed a moderate increase (Figure 2a). However, this growth rate is less than that seen after the Cold War and before the Singh era (Figure 2b). Factors like global economic shifts or India's cautious global trade stance could explain this.

While the overall trade growth during Modi's term hasn't skyrocketed, a change in preferred trade partners is evident. South Asia and Southeast Asia remain central, but nations like Madagascar, Zambia, and Mozambique, despite an overall trade dip with Africa, saw increased focus due to strategic importance (Figure 3). From 2014-2019, India's trade with Indian Ocean-bordering nations generally decreased, except with select nations like Seychelles, Maldives, Mozambique, and Tanzania, which saw substantial growth.

Although earlier trade volumes with southern Indian Ocean nations were limited, Modi's term marked a significant uptick. This reinforces the 'Looking South' trend, implying not just a southern focus but also a nuanced approach to India's trade relations in the Indian Ocean region.

4.3. Analysis of Foreign Aid

India's foreign aid policy, historically rooted in Gandhi's humanitarian principles, has seen a strategic shift under Modi's leadership (Nemova 2016; Ministry of External Affairs 2020). Historically, aid predominantly went to northern Indian Ocean nations like Bhutan and Nepal. However, under Modi, there's a significant increase in aid to southern Indian Ocean countries, notably Mauritius, Seychelles, and Maldives (Figure 4). Data from the Indian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2013-2018) reveals that while previously, grants and loans to Bhutan and Nepal exceeded 70% in some years, this dropped to 44.4% for Bhutan in 2019. Instead, aid to Mauritius and Seychelles saw a considerable boost (Figure 5a and 5b). Before Modi's tenure, aid to Mauritius and Seychelles was minimal, but under Modi, Mauritius experienced an average 11% increase (Gupta et al. 2019).

This redistribution underscores a "southward" shift in India's foreign policy. Furthermore, India's foreign aid now includes capacity-building and

training, focusing on infrastructure sectors like transport, power, and education through programs like IDEAS and LOCs (Ministry of External Affairs 2021). These efforts further indicate a strategic pivot towards the southern Indian Ocean nations. The present study examines the post-COVID trends in India's economic cooperation within the Indian Ocean Region. Upon analysing the presented data, one can glean insights regarding the economic strategies and shifts implemented by the Modi administration in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Impact of COVID-19 on Economic Cooperation with Indian Ocean region

4.4. Trends in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, India has persisted in directing a noteworthy portion of its direct investment towards nations situated in the Indian Ocean region. In the period spanning 2020 to 2021, the cumulative amount of direct investment in the region was recorded at US\$8902.6295 million. Notwithstanding the obstacles presented by the global health crisis, the pattern of augmenting direct investment persisted through 2021, culminating in a sum of US\$10063.0881 million during the initial three quarters. The augmentation in investment, notwithstanding a difficult year, highlights the tactical significance of the Indian Ocean region in India's foreign investment approach during the Modi regime.

(A statistical overview of India's economic cooperation trends in the Indian Ocean region in the table 1, 2, 3)

Table-1: Direct Investment Trends (in million US\$) 2020-2021

	2020-2021	First Three Quarters of 2021
Total	8902.6295	10063.0881

Year-on-year growth rate: Approx. 13%

4.5. The trends in import and export trade

The region experienced an increase in trade relations, as evidenced by a total trade value of US\$183289.3 million during the 2020-2021 period. As of the first eight months of 2021, the total trade volume has amounted to US\$167090.58 million, indicating a favourable trajectory and implying that the overall trade for the current year is poised to exceed the figures from the preceding year. The robustness of India's trade connections within the Indian Ocean region has persisted, notwithstanding the worldwide disturbances brought about by the pandemic, indicating a noteworthy level of trade resilience.

Table-2: Import and Export Trade Trends (in million US\$)

	2020-2021	First Eight Months of 2021	Estimated Total for 2021
Total	183289.3	167090.58	250635.87

Year-on-year growth rate: Approx. 37%

4.6. The trends in grants and loans

The analysis of grants and loans trends presents a multifaceted depiction. In 2020, there was a significant decrease of 37.79% in the aggregate amount of foreign grants and loans received from India, which can be attributed to the adverse effects of the pandemic on the domestic economy. Upon closer examination of the data, it is evident that there has been a persistent emphasis on strategically significant nations in the Indian Ocean region, such as Mauritius, Maldives, and Seychelles. Despite minor decreases in the percentages of grants and loans allocated to said nations, the declines were not deemed statistically significant. This implies that the Indian government's shift towards the southern Indian Ocean region under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi continues to be a strategic priority.

Table-3: Grants and Loans Trends (Percentages of total foreign grants and loans)

	2019	2020
Mauritius	16.0	14.0
Maldives	4.5	1.9
Seychelles	0.4	0.3

Overall decrease in foreign grants and loans: 37.79%

However, the decrease in grants and loans was consistent across the key countries in the region and proportionate to the overall decrease in foreign grants and loans. Despite the formidable challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the strategic objective of the Modi administration to augment bilateral economic collaboration with nations in the Indian Ocean region has remained largely unchanged. The Modi government's persistent investment, trade resilience, and unwavering aid strategy are indicative of its dedication to strengthening economic relations within the region.

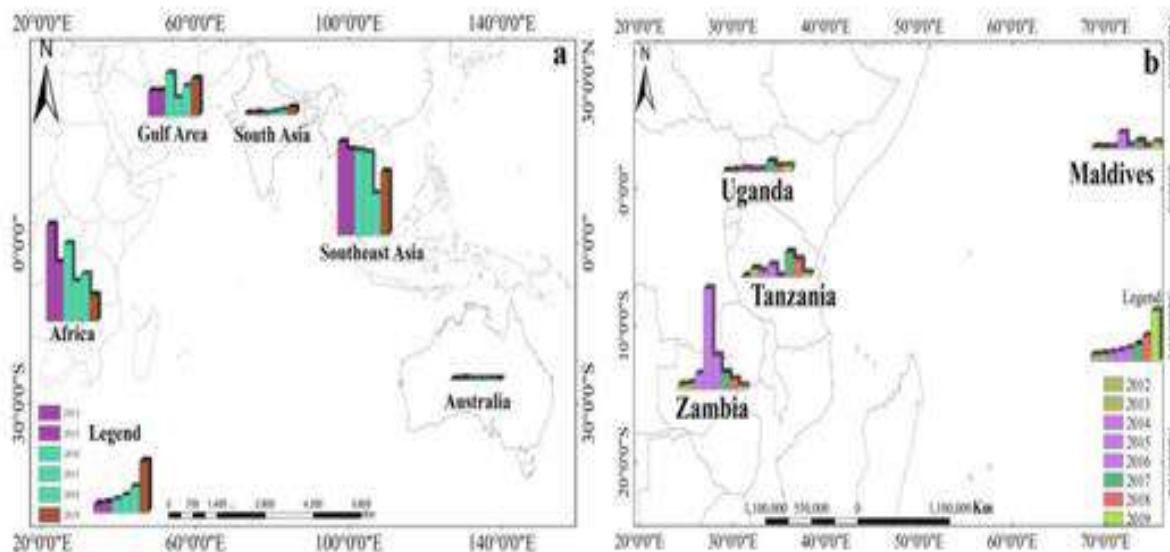


Fig-1: Caption: (a) India's direct investment in countries in the Indian Ocean region from 2014 to 2019 (see Table S1 for specific values); (b) India's direct investment in some African and South Asian countries in the Indian Ocean region from 2012 to 2019.

(a) India's direct investments in the Indian Ocean fell from 2014 to 2019. Despite the fall, these investments remained heavily concentrated in the north. (b) The graphic also shows a striking increase in India's direct investments in certain nations under Modi. The Maldives

and other Indian Ocean nations, such as Uganda, Tanzania, and Zambia, saw major investment growth. This suggests a subtle "southward glance" in India's Indian Ocean investment strategy.

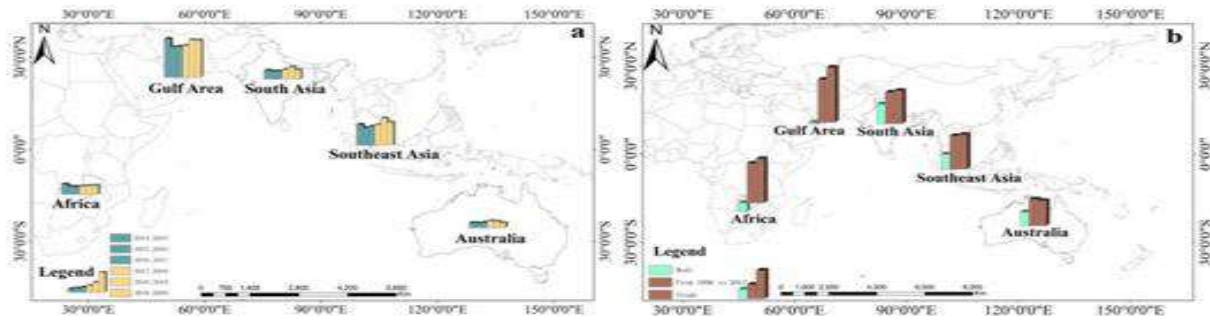


Fig-2: Caption: (a) Statistics of import and export trade between India and Indian Ocean countries from 2014 to 2019 (see Table S3 for specific values); (b) The growth rate of import and export trade between India and Indian Ocean countries in different periods.

(a) The figure shows that India's total import and export trade with countries in the Indian Ocean region has been going in a generally good direction since Prime Minister Modi took office. Even though the growth hasn't been very big, the steady rise shows that trade between countries in the area is strong. (b) The second part of the figure compares the growth rates of

India's import-export trade with countries in the Indian Ocean region over time. Notably, the rate of growth since Modi took office is much lower than the rate of growth from the end of the Cold War to the end of the Singh Administration. This comparison shows how India's trade policies have changed over time and how its foreign ties have changed as well.

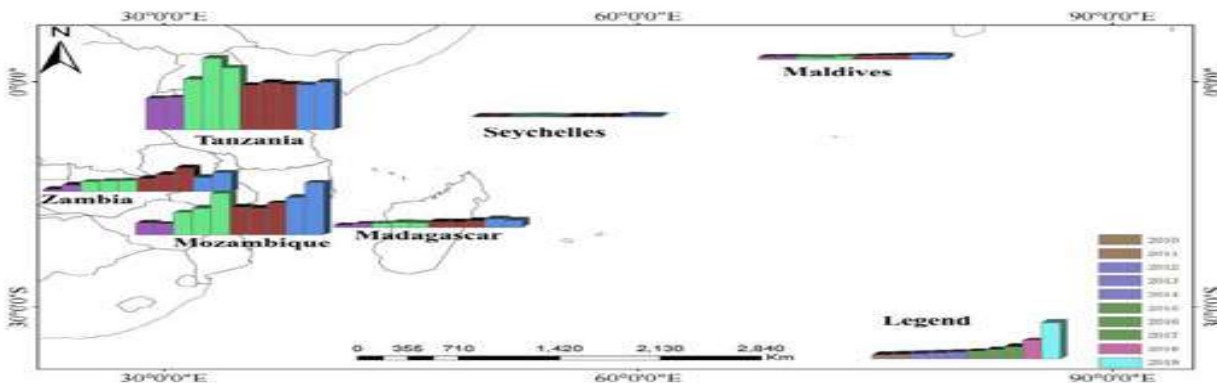


Fig-3: Caption: Statistics of import and export trade between India and some Indian Ocean countries from 2010 to 2019.

This figure highlights the increase in import and export commerce between India and numerous strategically important countries, including Madagascar, Zambia, and Mozambique, since Prime Minister Modi took office. These ties have not only

been preserved, but have grown significantly, as seen by a significant rise in trade volumes. This increased commerce demonstrates the Modi administration's significant interest in strengthening India's strategic partnerships in the Indian Ocean area.

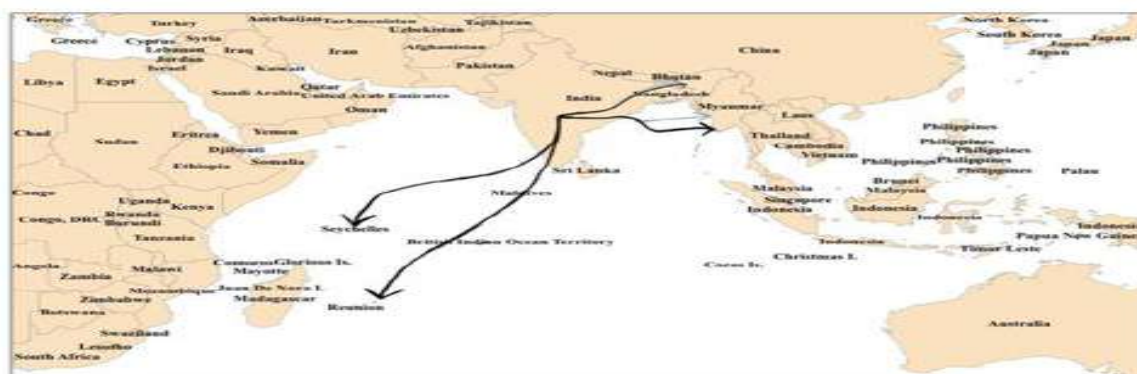


Fig-4: The “looking south” trend of India’s grants and loans to the Indian Ocean region. (The blue arrows represent Singh government, and the black arrows represent Modi Government)

In terms of the allocation of financial help, the info graphic compares the policy stances of the Singh and Modi governments effectively. Grants and loans made during Singh's administration, shown by the blue arrows, were mostly centred in the northern Indian Ocean area. The regional distribution of financial help

has been considerably expanded during the Modi administration, symbolised by the black arrows. Modi's government has shifted its attention southward, highlighting the growing relevance of nations like Mauritius, Seychelles, and Maldives in India's Indian Ocean strategy.

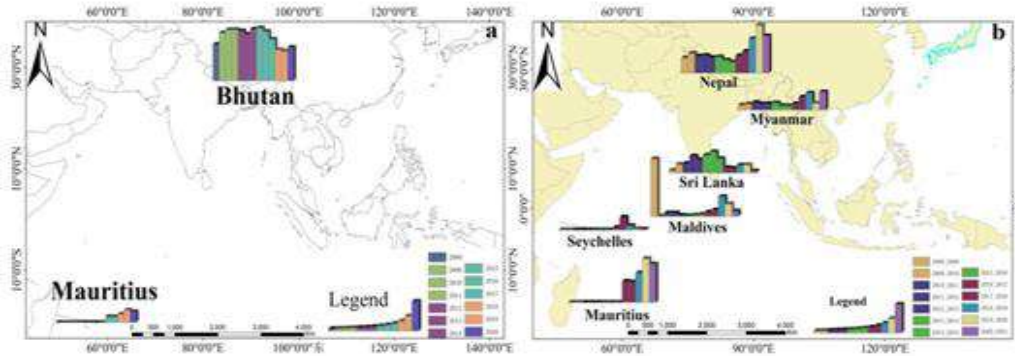


Fig-5: (a) Variations in the proportion of India's grants and loans to Bhutan and Mauritius from 2008 to 2020 (see Table S6 for specific values); (b) Variations in the proportion of India's grants and loans to some Indian Ocean countries from 2008 to 2020.

Since the inception of Modi's government, there has been a discernible reallocation of India's financial aid and credit facilities among the nations situated in the Indian Ocean vicinity. Bhutan, a country that has historically been a notable beneficiary of India's monetary assistance, has experienced a marked reduction in the allocation of such grants and loans. In contrast, Mauritius has observed a noteworthy increase in its allocation of grants and loans from India. The aforementioned transition indicates a reconfiguration of India's economic backing, with a

heightened focus on specific countries situated in the Southern Indian Ocean area. Furthermore, there has been a significant surge in the disbursement of grants and loans by India to the Southern Indian Ocean region, with a particular focus on extending benefits to nations such as Mauritius and Seychelles. Notwithstanding the southward shift, India's financial assistance continues to be primarily concentrated in the Northern Indian Ocean region, underscoring the persistent strategic significance of this region in India's foreign policy.

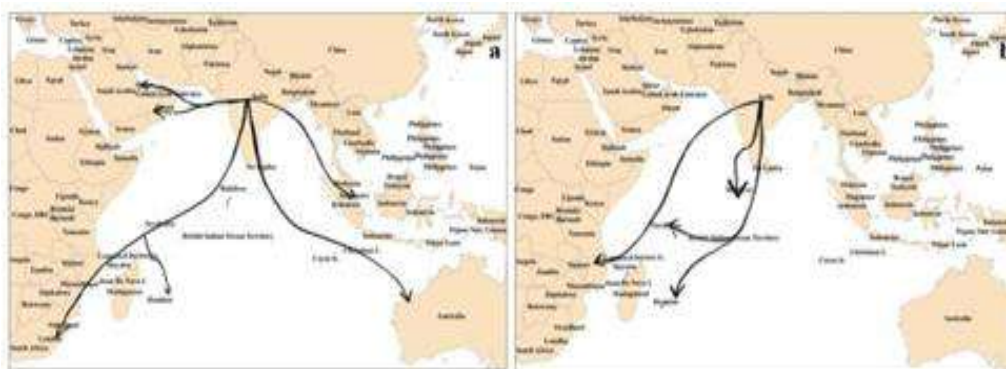


Fig-6: (a) The main target countries of India's overseas economic cooperation in the Indian Ocean region; (b) The general "looking south" trend of Modi's Indian Ocean Policy.

The nations that primarily reap the advantages of India's direct investment, import and export trade are Oman, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Mauritius, Australia, Singapore, and Malaysia. It is noteworthy that a significant proportion of these nations are situated in the northern vicinity of the Indian Ocean, indicating

India's inclination towards economic collaboration in the northward direction. The aforementioned burgeoning emphasis signifies a widening scope of India's economic collaboration and strategic concerns, encompassing countries beyond the customary northern focal zone.

Table-4: India's direct investment in countries in the Indian Ocean region from 2014 to 2019

Years	SouthAsia	SoutheastAsia	Gulf Area	Africa	Australia
2014	67.28	6332.75	1701.63	6570.03	56.45
2015	138.24	5803.18	1704.04	3991.29	104.53
2016	71.47	5739.39	2902.89	5253.48	51.09
2017	189.19	5605.95	1217.34	2712.3	59.57
2018	309.64	2817.9	2027.63	3188.97	61.5
2019	490.24	4314.85	2534.39	1784.47	50.23

If we evaluate the data using the Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) to analyze the growth trends of India's direct investment in each region from 2014 to 2019. The data analysis reveals a substantial increase in India's direct investment in South Asia, with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 48.53%. In contrast, the Gulf Area experienced a moderate growth rate of 8.29% in India's direct investment. On the other hand, a discernible reduction in investment can be observed in Southeast Asia (-7.2% CAGR), Africa (-19.32% CAGR), and Australia (-2.27% CAGR) throughout this timeframe.

This implies that there has been a significant rise in investment towards South Asia during the Modi administration. In contrast, notwithstanding the prevailing inclination towards directing attention towards the southern hemisphere, there has been a decline in investments made in Southeast Asia and Africa, thereby suggesting a multifaceted nature to the strategic transition. The aforementioned subtleties may stem from economic variables, tactical choices, or geopolitical intricacies, thereby requiring a thorough examination that transcends mere quantitative data.

Table-5: India's direct investment in some African and South Asian countries in the Indian Ocean region from 2012 to 2019.

Years	Tanzania	Uganda	Zambia	Maldives
2012	0.68	0.36	4.07	1.44
2013	7.19	1.01	5.2	1.14
2014	4.78	2.34	13.61	1.24
2015	10.53	1.37	88.15	13.65
2016	0.75	1.89	29.31	2.81
2017	21.603	8.59	14.55	6.58
2018	15.27	4.56	8.62	1.85
2019	3.34	4.99	3.06	5.69

If we analyse the Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) for each country to understand the growth trends of India's direct investment from 2012 to 2019. For the Maldives, there's a solid growth rate of 20.14%, indicative of increasing strategic interest. Conversely, Zambia has experienced a negative compound annual growth rate of -3.49% in

investments, potentially indicating a decrease in economic appeal or the influence of geopolitical factors. The data demonstrates a prevailing trend of heightened investment in select African nations and the Maldives, located within the Indian Ocean region. This phenomenon could potentially be attributed to India's wider "Look South" strategy during the Modi

government's tenure. Nevertheless, the decrease in investments made in Zambia suggests that India's investment choices are being influenced by additional factors. Possible academic rewrite: These factors may

encompass the strategic importance, economic viability, and geopolitical interplay of the respective nations.

Table-6: Statistics of import and export trade between India and Indian Ocean countries from 2014 to 2019

Countries	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020
South Asia	22726.41	20734.7	21236.28	25160.06	32081.4	24249.54
Southeast Asia	54920.86	45825.19	49900.85	54391.35	71625.22	60528.72
Gulf Area	102568.66	80330.65	81786.81	84069.64	98958.3	98135.61
Africa	26539.41	20573.17	19905.15	21815.91	22443.57	23210.3
Australia	13029.37	12161.76	14112.27	18006.07	16651.65	12634.36

If we analyze the Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) for each region to understand the growth trends of India's import and export trade from 2014-2015 to 2019-2020. From this analysis, we can deduce the following trends: India's commerce with both South Asia (1.30% CAGR) and Southeast Asia (1.97% CAGR) is growing at a modest pace between 2014 and 2020. There is a minor decline in trade with the Gulf Area (-0.84% CAGR) and Australia (-0.61% CAGR), showing steady commercial ties. Declining trade with Africa (-

2.64% CAGR) may be indicative of thinning economic links or a reordering of trading priorities. According to the statistics, although India's commerce with South and Southeast Asia has expanded, it has decreased with Africa. The volume of trade between the Gulf region and Australia has been quite consistent. This trend indicates that India's trade and commercial interests in the Indian Ocean area are changing rapidly in response to a wide range of geopolitical and economic influences.

Table-7: The growth rate of import and export trade between India and Indian Ocean countries in different periods (by region).

Periods	South Asia	South-east Asia	Gulf Area	Africa	Australia
ModiAdministration	9.00%	6.86%	-0.89%	-4.10%	6.32%
From1996to2013	14.46%	15.27%	19.74%	18.17%	12.24%
SinghAdministration	15.22%	15.84%	25.28%	20.26%	11.52%

This table represents the growth rates of import and export trade between India and Indian Ocean countries during different periods, by region. The data here shows that the rate of growth in trade between India and these areas has slowed under the Modi Administration (since 2014), compared to both the time from 1996 to 2013 as a whole and the Singh Administration (2004-2014). If we look at this information in terms of how trade growth has slowed under the Modi Administration compared to the Singh Administration, we can say the following: South Asia:

The rate at which trade is growing has slowed by about 6.2% $[(15.22-9.00)/15.22]$. Southeast Asia: The rate of trade growth has slowed by about 5.67 percent $[(15.84-6.86)/15.84]$. In the Gulf Area, the rate of trade growth has slowed by about 3.52% $[(25.28-(-0.89))/25.28]$. Africa's trade growth rate has slowed by about 20.22 percent $[(20.26-(-4.10))/20.26]$. Australia's trade growth rate has dropped by about -6.96% $[(11.52-6.32)/11.52]$, which shows that trade growth rate has gone up slightly. So, under the Modi administration, the rate of trade growth has slowed

down overall, but the amount this has happened in each area is different. In the meantime, trade with Australia has grown slightly. Changes in growth rates

could be caused by a number of things, such as changes in governmental priorities, changes in geopolitics, and changes in the global and regional economies.

Table-8: Statistics of import and export trade between India and some Indian Ocean Countries from 2010 to 2019.

Years	Maldives	Seychelles	Tanzania	Zambia	Mozambique	Madagascar
2010	131.52	36.31	1801.38	150.54	708.62	111.41
2011	143.49	37.29	1854.42	379.72	634.84	206.38
2012	128.65	41.27	2905.13	567.95	1292.67	227.30
2013	110.04	53.71	4125.21	620.45	1550.22	291.55
2014	156.7	33.73	3573.64	649.94	2396.58	262.48
2015	183.36	34.81	2579.43	773.49	1604.82	338.79
2016	206.96	36.89	2732.06	981.11	1556.26	333.52
2017	222.68	43.43	2648.51	1389.27	1832.33	395.78
2018	243.43	89.76	2607.51	829.55	2170.74	489.49
2019	232.57	71.35	2763.55	1090.96	3009.38	420.97

This table provides data on import and export trade between India and several countries in the Indian Ocean from 2010 to 2019. To analyze this information, let's calculate the year-on-year growth rate for each country for the final two years presented (2018-2019). The formula to compute the growth rate is:

$$\text{Growth Rate} = \left[\left(\frac{\text{New Value}}{\text{Old Value}} \right) - 1 \right] * 100$$

From this analysis, it is clear that the trade growth rate has varied significantly among these countries from 2018 to 2019. The most noticeable growth was seen in trade with Mozambique and Zambia, while the most significant decrease was observed in trade with Seychelles. These changes could be due to various factors, including changes in trade policies, economic conditions, and geopolitical relationships.

Table-9: Variations in the proportion of India's grants and loans to Bhutan and Mauritius from 2008 to 2020.

Years	Buhtan	Mauritius
2008	47.90%	0
2009	63.00%	0
2010	67.10%	0
2011	67.20%	0
2012	65.70%	0
2013	61.10%	0
2014	67.90%	0
2015	69.50%	0

2016	64.90%	7.70%
2017	54.60%	7.40%
2018	40.70%	10.80%
2019	38.70%	16.00%
2020	44.00%	14.00%

This table provides information on the proportion of India's grants and loans to Bhutan and Mauritius from 2008 to 2020. From this data, we can see a clear trend. Until 2015, all grants and loans were directed towards Bhutan. However, starting in 2016, a portion of these funds began to be diverted to Mauritius.

To further analyse these trends, we can calculate the rate of change in the proportions from year to year using the following formula:

$$\text{Rate of Change} = \left[\frac{\text{New Value}}{\text{Old Value}} - 1 \right] * 100\%$$

Upon comparing the years 2008 and 2020, it is observed that Bhutan has experienced a decline in the disbursement of grants and loans. The percentage decrease is calculated as $\left[\frac{44 - 47.90}{47.90} \right] * 100\% = -8.15\%$, signifying a reduction of approximately 8.15%.

Upon comparing the years 2016 and 2020 in the context of Mauritius, it is evident that there has been a surge in the observed metric. Specifically, the increase can be calculated as $\left[\frac{14 - 7.7}{7.7} \right] * 100\% = 81.82\%$, signifying a rise of approximately 81.82%.

Since 2016, there has been a noticeable shift towards Mauritius in terms of the proportion of grants and loans received by Bhutan, despite the country continuing to receive a substantial amount of such aid from India. This statement suggests the possibility of a strategic reorientation or expansion of India's investment in the aforementioned regions.

It is crucial to bear in mind that these percentages are interdependent. The increment in the percentage for Mauritius is contingent upon the aggregate sum of grants and loans disbursed within a specific fiscal year. Hence, a more comprehensive comprehension of the data necessitates the inclusion of the actual figures pertaining to the grants and loans disbursed annually.

Table-10: Variations in the proportion of India's grants and loans to some Indian Ocean Countries from 2008 to 2020.

Years	Nepal	Myanmar	Maldives	SriLanka	Mauritius	Seychelles
2008	5.50%	1.80%	21.00%	0.90%	0	0
2009	7.20%	2.20%	0	3.10%	0	0
2010	6.20%	2.70%	1.20%	3.40%	0	0
2011	6.40%	2.20%	1.20%	6.10%	0	0
2012	5.60%	2.30%	0.30%	4.80%	0	0
2013	5.90%	2.60%	0.20%	6.50%	0	0
2014	4.70%	1.60%	0.40%	7.70%	0	0
2015	4.00%	1.50%	0.70%	5.20%	0	0
2016	6.30%	2.30%	1.50%	1.90%	7.70%	0.90%
2017	7.90%	4.70%	2.30%	1.60%	7.40%	4.70%
2018	12.50%	6.20%	7.20%	2.80%	10.80%	1.60%

2019	17.40%	2.40%	4.50%	2.90%	16.00%	0.40%
2020	13.60%	6.60%	1.90%	0.70%	14%	0.30%

Table 10 shows the variations in the proportion of India's grants and loans to several countries in the Indian Ocean region from 2008 to 2020. The countries included are Nepal, Myanmar, Maldives, Sri Lanka, Mauritius, and Seychelles. To analyse this, we can calculate the change in percentage points for each country between 2008 and 2020. The data indicates that India has experienced a rise in the percentage of grants and loans allocated to Nepal, Myanmar, Mauritius, and Seychelles during the period spanning from 2008 to 2020. The data reveals a significant surge in the allocation of resources towards Mauritius, suggesting a deliberate shift in strategic priorities

5. CONCLUSION

Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership, India's foreign policy has pivoted notably towards the southern Indian Ocean, a reflection of strategic recalibrations to changing global dynamics. This 'Looking South' approach is both a political and economic initiative, with India showing resilience by registering approximately 13% growth in direct investments during 2020-2021 amidst the pandemic. This strategic alignment signifies the increasing importance of the Indian Ocean nations in India's economic and geopolitical ambitions. While nations like Oman, Saudi Arabia, and Singapore in the Northern Indian Ocean region remain significant partners, there's an intensified focus on the southern hemisphere. Countries such as Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and especially strategic island nations like Maldives, have seen increased Indian investments, pointing towards a deliberate move to establish a prominent presence there. Furthermore, Modi's tenure has witnessed a transformation in India's grant and loan disbursement strategy. Historically, nations like Bhutan and Nepal, located in the Northern Indian Ocean, were primary recipients. Now, Southern Indian Ocean nations like Mauritius, Seychelles, and Maldives are witnessing an uptick in India's financial aid, emphasizing a strategic shift.

This repositioning resonates with India's adaptability to global geopolitical shifts, regional dynamics, and domestic growth aspirations. While the Northern Indian Ocean remains significant, the evident shift underscores the southern region's escalating importance. Factors driving this shift range from geopolitical considerations to India's ambitions for robust economic growth. Prime Minister Modi's administration has emphasized strategic repositioning,

towards this nation. Conversely, there has been a decline in the allocation of financial resources towards the Maldives and Sri Lanka during the aforementioned timeframe. The aforementioned alteration may be attributed to a multitude of factors, such as alterations in geopolitical priorities, transformations in economic development approaches, or the progression of diplomatic ties. It is noteworthy that the percentages allocated to Mauritius and Seychelles commenced from zero in 2008, however, they have progressively received an increasing proportion since 2016 and 2017, respectively.

with a focus on the Indian Ocean region of Africa and South Asia, marked by targeted investments, robust trade partnerships, and a realigned aid approach. This cohesive strategy highlights the Indian Ocean's centrality in India's diplomatic and economic plans. Understanding the trajectory of this southward inclination requires in-depth research, especially considering the Indian Ocean's rising significance in global geopolitics and its potential to reshape regional alliances. This region emerges as a critical juncture in international relations, with India's evolving policy set to play a decisive role.

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