

African Studies in India: Evolution and Challenges

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Introduction

African Studies in India has evolved into a multi-disciplinary field of comparative studies. This article surveys the evolution of African Studies in post-colonial India. An attempt has been made to detail the purposes behind the establishment of various centres and think tanks of African Studies in India and to emphasise the varying subtleties in the study of Africa by Indian Africanists in contemporary times.

Early Contact between Africa and India

India's relations with African countries date back to the prehistoric era. Ancient Indians were a dynamic and vigorous people who were known to have dominated the Indian Ocean and through their trade and commercial activities influenced the course of the history of the adjacent lands bordering the ocean. There is a host of material which shows that Indians and Africans shared close and friendly relations from times immemorial. Hindu Puranas mention India's trade relations with ancient Rome, Greece, Egypt, and East Africa before the birth of Christ. Other ancient Indian literature in Sanskrit and Pali, as well as archaeological finds, art, coinage, and traditional lore also point to these trade relations with distant civilisations (Basu 1998).

The picture becomes clearer at the beginning of the Christian era. The *Periplus of the Erythrean Sea*, a sailor's guidebook which is variously dated from 60 A.D. to 266 A.D., continues to remain a significant source of the study of the early history of East Africa and the Red Sea Coast. The author, a Greek pilot who had lived in India for some years in the port town of Barygaza (the present town of Broach), gives in considerable detail the account of trading voyages between the West African, Arabian, and Indian coasts. He also provided information about the nature

of commerce that was carried on from the Red Sea and the coast of Africa to the East Indies at a time when Egypt was a province of the Roman Empire.

The *Periplus* throws considerable light on ancient Indian seafaring culture and maritime activities. It mentions not only the names of dozens of Indian ports of antiquity which can still be identified along the western coast but, even more importantly, it shows the well-organised trading activities prevalent in India (Schoff 1921).

In the Red Sea region, it was the stimulus provided by centuries of trade relations with Egypt and beyond to Rome that gave India access to all the great arteries of African trade along this route. Trade relations, preceded by the migration of peoples, inevitably developed into cultural relations. At Alexandria, in Egypt, Indian scholars were a common sight: they are mentioned both by Dio Chrysostom (c. 100 A.D.) and by Clement of Alexandria (c. 200 A.D.). Peter von Bohlen (1796-1840), a German Indologist, also wrote extensively about the cultural connection between India and ancient Egypt (Bohlen 1830).

Interestingly, there are elements of folk art, language, and the rural culture of Bengal which have an affinity with their Egyptian counterparts and which have not been explained satisfactorily in terms of Aryan, Mongolian, or Dravidian influences. There are similarities between place names in Bengal and Egypt, and an Egyptian scholar, Ahmed El Mansouri, has pointed out that in both Egypt and India the worship of the sun, cow, snake, and river are common, a fact which has been mentioned in the book written by John Hanning Speke (Speke 1863). It is believed that the Dravidians went from India to Egypt and laid the foundation of its civilization there. The Egyptians themselves think that they originally came from the South, from a land called Punt, which the western historian Henry Reginald Holland Hall thought referred to some part of India (King and Hall 1907). Historians like Francis Wilford wrote that Indians had established their settlements along the river Nile and even explored the regions as far as the surroundings of Lake Victoria. The famous Arab historian, Ali ibn al-Husayn al-Masudi, visited India around the year 915 and wrote about flourishing trade between India and various countries, including those in Africa (Biswas 1992).

Although contact began long ago, the study of Africa in India started much later. During British colonial times, the narratives of Indian contacts with Africa were mainly Anglocentric. However, in 1912, a fascinating book was written by an Indian historian, Radha Kumud Mookherjee,

which sought to prove that “the ancient Indians fully utilised the opportunities presented by nature for free development of maritime activities” (Mookherjee 1957). The book mentions Indian seafaring activities and India’s dominant position of seaborne trade among the major powers. According to Mookherjee, “[...] they built ships, navigated the sea, and held in their hands all the threads of international commerce, whether carried on overland or sea.” The author, in a general summing up of India’s maritime achievements, states that “For full thirty centuries, India stood at the very heart of the old world, and maintained her position as one of the foremost maritime countries and that her colonies extended all over the east coast of Africa” (Mookherjee 1957: 60).

Later, the noted Indian philologist, Suniti Kumar Chatterji, wrote extensively on the contact between India and Ethiopia in his book *India and Ethiopia from the 7th Century B.C* (Chatterji 1969). As far as the Kingdom of Aksum in Ethiopia is concerned, evidence of Indian contacts rests on more solid foundations. The importance of India’s trade relations with the Axumite Empire was brought to light by the discovery of 103 Kushana-era gold coins dating around 230 A.D. in Axum. Among them were coins which bore legends of the ancient Indian scripts, Prakrit and Kharosthi, as well as Greek. According to Chatterji, this was to enable the Axumites, who were already familiar with Greek, as evident by their coins, “to check and read the Kharosthi script in these bilingual coins.” A Cornelian seal also found in Adulis is said to have an inscription in Brahmi and belonged presumably to an Indian trader. In response to these findings, scholars have constructed their views that Brahmi and Kharosthi may have had an influence on the Axumite script. Chatterji says that “Indian merchants with Brahmi alphabet (as well as some cases Kharosthi) were moving about in Ethiopia, as well as Egypt from the pre-Christian centuries” (Chatterji 1969: 53). His book on “Africanism” has been appreciated as a “work which deals with ‘human values,’ and not ‘power values;” and as a document in which “the pattern of culture presented is something which grows out of the materials brought together and is not something superimposed on it” (Kunda Kumar 1970). In the backdrop of the intense contacts between India and African countries, I would like to focus on the evolution of African Studies under the Area Studies Programme of India.

Indian Independence and the Introduction of the Area Studies Programme

The initial impetus for the emergence of Area Studies in India came from the far-sighted and internationalist vision of India's first Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. After independence, Nehru stressed the need for an enlightened awareness of the world beyond Indian borders and a clear and critical understanding of the situations in foreign countries and regions, especially those of vital interest to India (Nehru 1961). It was a time when a newly independent India felt the imperative need for competent Indian academic specialists to watch developments in other areas of the world, interpret their significance, and give a studied second opinion or critical evaluation of India's own external policies, apart from the work of government bureaucracy. The strong motive behind the introduction of Area Studies was to train a group of competent experts in international matters through the establishment of the Indian School of International Studies (ISIS) in New Delhi, in 1955. From its very inception, ISIS was intended to be a centre for advanced study and research in international relations (Rajan 1994).

In April 1963, the University Grants Commission of India (UGC), a statutory body created by an act of Indian Parliament in 1956 for co-ordination, determination, and maintenance of the standards of university education in India, appointed a committee under the chairmanship of Shiva Rao. The committee recognised the need for a large number of Indian scholars who would be adequately equipped with a knowledge of the historical, cultural, social, and economic backgrounds of particular regions, and also gave priority to the study of areas like China, Japan, Africa, South- and South-East Asia, West Asia, and other countries and regions which are India's immediate neighbours. The principal objectives of the programme were: 1) To promote the holistic understanding of the area with its cultural, social, economic, and strategic specificities. 2) To provide critical input to policymakers, particularly in India's economic, strategic, and political interests. 3) The production of popular books in these areas (Sharma 2013).

Taking cognisance of the Committee's report, a Standing Advisory Committee was appointed by the UGC to develop the programme of Area Studies in Indian universities. It was acknowledged that profound knowledge of the world beyond our country's borders was not only essential for the security and prosperity of the nation but also for the im-

provement of the quality of the country's participation in world affairs. In pursuit of these objectives, the UGC undertook the task of promoting Area Studies in some universities. The government of India also established think tanks like the Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (MP-IDSA) and the Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA), to provide innovative and practical recommendations on strategic, political, economic, and foreign policies issues.

Evolution of African Studies in India

At the outset, it must be mentioned that the foremost Indian political leaders whose views, statements, and actions inspired the establishing of African Studies in India were Mohandas Karamchand (Mahatma) Gandhi and Nehru. They were Africanists by any definition and had a good grasp of problems and issues facing Africa. A close examination of several documents such as speeches of these two Indian leaders and a review of resolutions of the Indian National Congress before and after India's independence established beyond doubt that India was fully aware of and sympathetic to African liberation movements (Biswas 1992). The issues concerning the liberation of African countries and racist policies of the white regimes in Africa were among those which drew the deepest concerns of Indian national leadership.

It is pertinent to note here that in 1893, Gandhi went to South Africa and spent 21 long years there, where he changed from a lawyer to an activist to a leader. It was there that he perfected his philosophy of Ahimsa and Satyagraha. Gandhi left an imprint on succeeding generations of African leaders. By 1919, he was described as Mahatma Gandhi the Great by the whole of Africa. The success of his passive resistance in South Africa, and later in India, immensely inspired oppressed people in Africa and all over the world. Nelson Mandela of South Africa paid rich tribute to Gandhi's philosophy of non-violence as a means of protest against subjugation (Biswas 2007b).

Besides Gandhi, another substantial link between India and Africa was Nehru, India's first Prime Minister. Under Nehru's guidance, the Indian National Congress continued to manifest a direct interest in African affairs. African leaders often sought inspiration and guidance from Gandhi and Nehru for their struggle against colonialism. Thus, in 1947, when India achieved independence after a long and protracted period of struggle, it spread a fresh wave of hope among the African people. India,

too, was eager to support the African cause – in fact, Prime Minister Nehru regarded the African liberation struggle as a part of the Afro-Asian resurgence.

Nehru took a couple of important policy decisions to enhance India-Africa relations. From the very beginning, there was an emphasis on the developmental requirements of the emerging African states. Indeed, with considerable foresight, even as early as 1949, India had established a general cultural scholarship scheme under which students from Africa and Asia were provided access to institutions of higher studies in India, even though at that time facilities in India were not adequate to meet Indian requirements (Appadorai 1987).

Educational cooperation has remained the main plank of India-Africa relations. Nehru was keen on promoting Indo-African understanding in the cultural field on a continuing basis. To achieve that, he institutionalised African Studies. It was he who first thought of inducting African Studies into the university framework. Way back in 1953, a proposal was made by government of India's Ministry of External Affairs to set up a Department of African Studies at the University of Delhi.

Accordingly, the first Department of African Studies was set up in 1955, in line with Nehru's zeal for the decolonisation of Asia and Africa. From then till today, the Department undertakes inter-disciplinary teaching and research studies, leading to MPhil and PhD degrees of the University of Delhi, along with Certificates and Diplomas in the Swahili Language. Students graduating in MPhils and PhDs from the Area Studies Programmes routinely describe themselves as having received doctoral degrees in International Studies or even, in some cases, International Relations.

It may be true that a PhD in Area Studies would have little market value in the Indian university system; indeed, the UGC itself recommends that the student should be awarded the degree in the basic discipline, which may entitle him/her to teach the basic discipline. The disquieting point is that, decades after the inception of these programmes, confusion continues partly because of strong opposition from the traditional departments of the universities, and also from the ignorance of the university administration.

The second African Studies Centre was established under a vibrant Area Studies Programme in 1960 at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU). At JNU, it functioned as an autonomous division under the larger Centre for West Asian and African Studies, until it was upgraded to a full-

fledged Centre of African Studies in 2009. The Centre has two major programmes of studies- MPhil and PhD. It also offers courses for the MA programme through the School of International Studies. The teaching and research programmes of the Centre have been designed to cover both traditional and contemporary issues related to the region. At present, the Centre's three faculty members supervise around 45 students pursuing degrees in MPhil and PhD. The current academic curriculum of the Centre focuses on the following areas: regional organisations, government and politics, state and civil societies, ideologies, governance, diaspora, bilateral relations, issues of development, and foreign policy of major African countries. Besides this, the Centre has its research focus on Asian engagement with Africa.

To facilitate the development of research, training, and interaction with scholars from abroad, the Centre holds a Nelson Mandela Chair, funded by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), through which visiting faculty from African countries are invited every semester. The visiting faculty participates in various programmes and activities of the Centre. In pursuance of its aim, the Centre is also involved in several academic outreach programmes on African affairs involving Indian educational institutions. The Centre also has a major research programme on "Diaspora in Development: Comparative Assessment of Harnessing Globalisation" funded under UPE II Scheme by JNU for 2014-2019. This Centre also hosts the Secretariat of the African Studies Association (ASA).

The University of Mumbai hosts the third Centre for African Studies in India. Initially, it was established as a programme by the UGC in 1971-72 at the University of Mumbai, as a part of its efforts to develop an Area Studies Programme at the university level outside Delhi. It acquired the status of a Centre in 1984. With a faculty strength of two at present, it offers MPhil and PhD degrees in African Studies. During the past three years, the Centre started offering a certificate course on International Trade (Africa). It has been mainly introduced to cater to the demand of industry and business people in Mumbai. The teaching and research programme of the Centre covers both traditional and contemporary African issues.

Over the years, the Centre for African Studies, Mumbai University, has successfully undertaken several projects on Africa with finance from governmental and non-governmental agencies and also organised international conferences, seminars, roundtables and workshops. The

Centre has developed a successful relationship with trading and business houses who in turn have supported the Centre's academic endeavours continuously through their participation and financial support.

In all these Centres of African Studies, books written by African political leaders like Jomo Kenyatta, Kwame Nkrumah, Gamal Abdel Nasser, Julius Nyerere, Kenneth Kaunda, Cheikh Anta Diop, and Léopold Sédar Senghor are recommended to students for comprehending African mindsets and the struggle for freedom over the years. (Diop 1987; Kenyatta 1978, 1964; Nkrumah 1965; Nasser 1965; Nyerere 1971, 1974; Kaunda 1966, 1988; Singh 1967).

On the other hand, to understand contemporary Africa, books of authors like Roland Oliver and Gordon Mathews, Walter Rodney, Colin Legum, Colin Leys, and Robert G. Gregory are taught. And for studying Indians or Asians in Africa, books written by, among others, Gregory and Apa Pant are part of the syllabus (Oliver and Mathew 1963; Rodney 1972; Leys 1974; Legum 1980; Gregory 1971; Pant 1974).

Beside the above departments and centres, some of the important universities in India like Jamia Milia Islamia in New Delhi, Jadavpur University in Kolkata, the University of Allahabad, and the University of Hyderabad offer smaller or optional courses on Africa. All these centres organise seminars and conferences regularly to strengthen their academic programmes by facilitating the exchange of views and interaction among scholars.

Think Tanks

In addition to formal academic institutions, some think tanks help the policymaking process by publishing reports and books, hosting seminars and conferences, etc. Among these, MP-IDSA, funded by the Ministry of Defence, ranked as one of Asia's top think tanks, has an active cluster with at least one senior research associate working exclusively on Africa (Xavier 2010). Think tanks like the ICWA, funded by the Ministry of External Affairs, and the privately funded Observer Research Foundation (ORF) and Gateway India are also active in hosting seminars and conferences on African issues.

Besides think tanks, India's two industrial and commercial chambers, the Confederation of Indian Industries (CII) and the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), have played a catalytic role in strengthening India-Africa ties, especially in the world of

business. The CII Africa Desk engages with all parts of the continent and has received a positive response from the region – both Sub-Saharan and the north. The Tata and Kirloskar groups, which have massive investments in various African countries, have presided over CII's Africa Committee, an apex body whose 34 corporate members are involved in or at least interested in getting involved in Africa (Xavier 2010). Both organisations have links with investment promotion agencies in Africa. FICCI introduced *Namaskar Africa* – a regional flagship programme in partnership with the government of India's Ministry of Commerce and Industry. It started with an India-Central Africa Regional Business Forum in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The organisation has worked relentlessly over more than two decades in creating platforms for deepening India-Africa economic cooperation on a mutually beneficial basis.

However, in reality, there is only a minimum interface between academia, industry, and the Ministry of External Affairs. Occasionally, the Ministry of External Affairs funds seminars and conferences in different African centres, but rarely attends them. Moreover, it hardly adopts any of the recommendations made at conferences where Africanists from various parts of the world and India participate. To strengthen the academy-industry interface, the Centre for African Studies in Mumbai recently started a Certificate Course on International Trade (Africa). Resource persons from various industry segments address students on different rules and regulations to do business in Africa. However, this interface is limited to a narrow range of activities. There should be a push from the university authorities for planned collaborations and interactions to build a fruitful and successful industry-academia relationship.

Major Research Work by Indian Africanists after the Independence

Between 1970 and 1990, Indian academics mainly wrote and published books and articles on topics like Ancient India and East Africa contacts. They also wrote about India's support to the African resistance movements during the colonial period, such as the *Mau Mau* movements in Kenya and the *Maji Maji* movements in Tanganyika and the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa. Academics also discussed and wrote about government and politics in African countries, South-South cooperation, India-Africa relations, and the Indian diaspora.

Several books and research articles have been published on these topics and issues. In fact, narratives on the socio-economic and political issues of developing countries, which were suppressed and interpreted by imperialistic perspectives, were given different assessments by Indian authors. For instance, Vijay Gupta (1981) discussed at length the violent, grassroots resistance movement launched by the Kikuyu and related ethnic groups against the British colonial government in Kenya in the 1950s. The book highlights the heroic activities of Makhan Singh, an India-born trade union leader in Kenya who played a vital role in the development of trade unions in Kenya. In 1970, an article was written by Surendra Pal Singh about how India supported the liberation struggles of southern African countries substantially. Similar work was produced by Aniruddha Gupta, who edited the report of the seminar proceedings held in New Delhi in April 1971. Some contributions were devoted to an overall reflection of the populations of Indian origin in Mauritius, Sri Lanka, Trinidad, and some East African countries. These highlighted the status of Indians in the host countries. Gupta (1988) also published a book which analysed at length the problems of independence and the nation-building process in African countries. He argues that in spite of the genuine attempts by some African leaders to create a sense of national unity and identity among their citizens, ethno-regional loyalties remained a strong and intractable problem in most African countries. The book discusses the major issues that new African nations faced in their early days of independence, regardless of the optimism the leaders and the people felt for their future free from colonial rule (Gupta, A. 1971, 1988; Gupta, V. 1981; Singh 1970).

On ancient Indian contacts with Africa, pioneering work was undertaken by Shanti Sadiq Ali (1987) in her book which presents a survey of the commercial, cultural, and political contacts between India and the African continent. She traces the links from antiquity through the colonial period, to the partnership of the newly-freed countries in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). Sadiq Ali also worked extensively on Africans in India and published a well-researched book which brings into focus the immigration of Africans into the Deccan (including modern Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh). It emphasises various aspects of their assimilation and integration with the South Indian communities as well as their contributions in the history of the Deccan (Ali 1987, 1996).

Another remarkable book was written by Ram R. Ramchandani in 1976 which gives a vivid account of the Asian enterprise in Uganda since early times until the expulsion of Asians by President Idi Amin. In 1990, Ramchandani brought out two volumes on India-Africa relations in the context of economic cooperation of developing countries. The project was funded by the Indian Council for Research on Indian Economic Relations (ICRIER). The focus of this project was South-South cooperation. The main focus of these two volumes is to throw light on relevant policy options related to critical socio-political and economic issues with a view to further strengthen India-Africa ties on a mutually beneficial basis. In the first volume, distinguished Indian Africanists such as Rama S. Melkote, Rajen Harshe, Daleep Singh, V. S. Seth, A. Gupta, and Ankush B. Sawant contribute on numerous critical themes covering India-Africa relations. Another notable work published by Ramchandani in 2000 deserves special mention. It was funded by the UGC. The study was undertaken to critically examine aspects of the NAM, third world state formation, and underdevelopment problems in a comparative frame of the Sub-Saharan state and India and to revisit the ups and downs of 50 years of India-Africa relations (Ramchandani 1990, 2000).

Another important book based on seminar proceedings was published around this time by Sadiq Ali and Gupta in 1987. Contributors to this book discuss various dimensions of the economic crisis in Africa such as stagnating or negative economic growth, asymmetrical balance of payments, fiscal problems, and sluggish agricultural performances which lead to economic disaster in most of the African countries (Ali and Gupta 1987).

Research done by Indian Africanists from the 1990s onwards

Since the 1990s, Africanists in India have placed emphasis on various subjects like South Africa, India-Africa relations, and Francophone Africa. In 1989, Ajay Dubey analysed India's economic diplomacy towards Africa, and the changing nature and content of economic relations between the two countries in the post-Nehru era. Later, Aparajita Biswas (1992) systematically examined both the internal and international variables that have influenced India's Africa policy and bilateral aspects of India-Kenya relations. The findings suggest that India's policy since its freedom struggle has significantly moved from narrow national con-

siderations to broad humanitarian principles. These principles are fully reflected in its Africa policy with respect to their liberation struggle, anti-imperialist and anti-racist commitments, and development strategy (Dubey 1990; Biswas 1992).

In 1990, South Africa's political developments and the establishment of India-South Africa diplomatic relations were of intense interest to Indian scholars. The concept of an 'African renaissance' was frequently discussed and hotly debated by Indian intellectuals. In 1992, the Centre for African Studies Mumbai organised a two-day national seminar on *India and South Africa: Retrospect and Prospects*, sponsored by India's Ministry of External Affairs. The articles presented focus on four topics: South Africa's political transition; socio-economic dimensions of South Africa; India and South Africa; and people of Indian origin in South Africa. Later, the seminar proceedings were edited and published by Sawant in a book titled *India and South Africa – A Fresh Start* (1994). Over ten years later, Biswas (2007a) would undertake a detailed study on South Africa and its neighbourhood. The study was sponsored by the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR). In 1997, the Ministry of External Affairs sponsored an international conference in Delhi on *Africa, India, and South-South Cooperation*. The findings of the conference were edited and published by K. Mathews and Narinder Nath Vohra in 1997 (Sawant 1994; Mathews and Vohra 1997).

Since 2000, plenty of books and articles have been published by Indian Africanists, following the changing dynamics of India-Africa relations. Around this time, the scope of India-Africa cooperation increased rapidly, especially with India's emergence as an important player in the world economy and India's own significant need for oil and other natural resources. Coupled with this, the economic scenario of African countries also changed significantly, with six of the world's fastest-growing economies located in Africa. Additionally, several African nations started providing incentives to attract foreign investors and partners in growth while the Indian government was actively lobbying for support for its bid for a United Nations Security Council (UNSC) seat. Additionally, the increasing influence of other powers in the continent, especially China's hyperactive engagement, nudged India to adopt a proactive Africa policy. India began to extend its relations with various other regions of African countries, besides Eastern and Southern African countries. In a bid to expand its economic reach, the government of India launched the 'Focus Africa Programme' in 2003 and 'Team 9' initiatives in 2004.

The Ministry of External Affairs and other government agencies like the ICSSR, the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR), the Indian Council of Philosophical Research, and the Indian Council of World Affairs encouraged and provided generous grants to the centres, departments, and think tanks of African Studies. These supports are to help organise national and international conferences, workshops, seminars, and symposiums on India-Africa relations to make major stakeholders interested in understanding and analysing India's relations with African countries in the era of new dispensation.

Going by the impetus, the JNU's Centre for African Studies organised three international conferences on India-Africa relations and Indian diaspora. Conference proceedings were edited and published by Dubey. In the book on diaspora, Dubey proposes a framework of analysis of the Indian diaspora as a heritage of resource, noting that they are not only key drivers in development efforts but also help in strengthening bilateral relations between host and home countries. Contributors also argue that the new Indian diaspora contributes significantly to promote bilateral relations (Dubey 2010).

The University of Mumbai's Centre for African Studies organised three international seminars and conferences with the support of the Ministry of External Affairs. One was *India-Africa Relations: Emerging Policy and Development Perspectives* in 2006, the second was *India Africa Relations: Africa on the Centre Stage* in 2010, and the third was *India Africa Enduring Partnership: Emerging Areas of Cooperation* in 2012. The proceedings of the three conferences were edited and published by Seth (2008), Renu Modi (2011), and Biswas (2013) respectively. In 2014, the Ministry of Defence also sponsored its think tank, the MP-IDSA to organise an international conference on India-Africa security challenges. The proceedings of the conference were published by Ruchita Beri (2016). In all these books, scholars and researchers from India and African countries seek answers to a wide spectrum of issues: What are the parameters of the emerging relationships? What is the maritime threat to India's security? What are the emerging areas of cooperation? Do the development methods of Africa and India complement each other? (Seth 2008; Modi 2011; Biswas 2013; Beri 2016).

Not only the government of India, but some international institutes and stakeholders also showed interest in funding projects and conferences to learn about the status and progression of India-Africa relations. An important symposium was held in Nairobi, Kenya, jointly funded

by the University of Nairobi and the Peace Support Training Centre on East Africa-India Security Concerns. The University of Nairobi invited Indian Africanists to initiate dialogue on the subject. Based on the symposium proceedings, a book was published by Biswas and Makumi Mwangiri of the University of Nairobi in 2012. Although the focus of the book was security relations between the two countries, it also captured broad dimensions of security and went beyond traditional understanding to capture contemporary aspects of security. Indian Africanists like Nivedita Roy, Vidhan Pathak, Manendra Sahu, along with Africanists in Nairobi like Anita Kiamba, Musambayi Katumanga, and Patrick Kamanda were contributors to the book (Biswas and Mwangiri, 2012). Similarly, Indian Africanists were invited to the conferences and seminars at KwaZulu-Natal University in Durban, South Africa in 2013 and Wolkite University in Ethiopia.

On the subject of India-Africa relations, international agencies like the African Development Bank (ADB), the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, and Oxfam India funded three important projects. (Erikson et.al. 2011; Biswas and Dubey 2014; Dubey and Biswas 2016). These studies demonstrate the changing scenarios of India-Africa relations against the backdrop of rapid transformation in international contours.

The findings of the most recent study were published in the book *India and Africa's Partnership: A Vision for a New Future* (Dubey and Biswas 2016), funded by the ADB. It provides a critical analysis of India's investments, official development assistance, and capacity-building activities in Africa. Moreover, the book claims the Indian diaspora as a heritage and strategic resource in Indo-African relations (Biswas 2013). The earlier studies provide a contemporary analysis and assistance of India-Africa relations, bringing together contributions from the Global South and the Global North that explore whether the relationship is truly 'mutually beneficial'. The project, funded by Oxfam India, studied the controversial issue of India's private agro-investment in Zambia's agricultural sector (Biswas and Dubey 2014).

Indian Africanists also concentrated a great deal on the themes of democratisation, refugees and human rights issues, and foreign policies, agricultural cooperation, and economic and social issues between India and Francophone African countries (Mathews K. 2017; Malakar 2006; Moosa 2007, 2013; Pratihari 2010; Suresh and Faisal 2013; Suresh 2016; Yaruangam and Kapoor 2013; Saji 2013). Singh also wrote a book on the

relations between India and Francophone countries that is both comprehensive and exhaustive. The book detailed the evolution and growth of the economies and the economic institutions of the 18 states of Francophone Africa since the beginning of the 20th century. He focused on key drivers of India's enhanced engagement with Francophone African countries and mapped out future directions and challenges (Singh 2008).

The year 2004 saw the African Studies Association of India (ASA), a nation-wide organisation, come into being. The ASA is a non-profit, non-governmental organisation of scholars whose mandate is to 'foster the study, knowledge, and understanding of African affairs in India and Indian affairs in Africa' through research and studies. It organises seminars, conferences, symposiums, and workshops on various issues concerning Africa, both nationally and internationally. It has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with different African Studies institutes all over the world. MOUs set out opportunities for collaboration and positive academic engagement like joint collaborative projects and joint seminars and conferences for mutual benefit. African Studies in India have made great progress because of the ASA's activities, with membership open to everyone in this field. It has two refereed biannual journals – *Africa Review* and *Insight on Africa*. Both the journals have been published by international publishers.

Challenges for African Studies in India

If one looks back at the performance of African Studies in India, their achievements are laudable in terms of both quality and quantity. It has produced a large number of books and research materials on Africa. However, this does not mean that all is well with African Studies. Although African Studies in India was established as an inter-disciplinary field of study, the disciplinary profiles of the area specialists betray the marked presence of political scientists. A survey showed that disciplines like political science and international relations overshadowed others in African Studies. Issues like anthropology have been ignored (Prasad and Phadnis 1988). The other problem confronting African Studies centres along with other Area Studies departments is lack of funds. African Studies in India need a regular flow of funds to meet various expenses, like staff training, regular field trips, acquiring library resources, visiting foreign scholars' programmes, etc. However, what is frustrating is that unlike in western countries and the USA, promotion of Area Studies has

never been a priority of the government of India, UGC, or research agencies like ICSSR and ICHR. There is hardly any interaction between the government policy makers and area specialists. The policy of the government has often become faulty because of lack of interaction (Biswas, 2007b). There are other problems, too. As of this writing, there are only three African Studies centres in India, with a handful of faculty members studying 54 African countries. Although there are many vacant faculty positions, the government of India is reluctant to fill the posts.

Conclusion

African Studies in India have progressed quite steadily since the 1950s. Interactions between Indian and African academics have increased significantly. PhD dissertations too have been increasing steadily since the late 1990s. Many dissertations have focussed on India's and China's engagements in Africa. Students are attracted to the topics of Brazil, Russia, India, and China (BRICs) and Africa, the role of Indian diaspora in different African countries, India agricultural reforms, etc. In all the international conferences organised by the ASA, there are special sessions for students to express their critical views on the theme of the conferences. Moreover, academic exchanges between Indian Africanists and Africanists around the world persist. Therefore, African Studies in India is progressing well with the dedicated efforts of teachers, students, and other stakeholders.

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