

# A Brief Examination of India-Africa Relations in the Western Colonial Period\*

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Ancient India and Africa had thousands of years of early economic and cultural exchanges based on the basis of spontaneous equality. As the two sides gradually became colonies of Western countries, they passively changed their original communication methods and modes, and even partly changed them. The relationship between India and Africa during this period was linked to the growth and decline of Western powers in the Indian Ocean region, reflecting the internal governance methods and foreign relations concepts of the non-colonial rulers of India. It has generally experienced the Portuguese colonial period, the period of hegemony and the period of British rule. In a large period of time, the sub-stages such as the rule of the Mughal Empire and the British East India Company can also be detailed. Together, they present a relatively unique picture of historical exchanges between colonial Indo-African countries or regions.

*Keywords:* India-Africa relations, colonial period, colonialism, historical analysis

## Introduction

The mutually beneficial exchanges between ancient India and Africa based on geographical advantages and equal transactions have lasted for thousands of years (Kang & Zhong, 2019, p. 66). From the late 15th century to the middle of the 20th century, as India and African countries became colonies of Western countries one after another, they not only suffered cruel colonial rule, but their foreign exchange and relationship patterns also changed significantly. Since then, a new era of India-Africa relations has arrived. After the West carried out colonial aggression and domination against India and Africa, it brought India-Africa relations into a new stage. The original communication method and relationship structure between India and Africa were changed or even distorted, But it also injects new factors and dynamics into the development of India-Africa relations.

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\* **Acknowledgements:** This work is supported by “the Fundamental Research Funds for the Central Universities” in South China University of Technology, project No: XYMS202008.

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## **Indo-African Relations in the Portuguese Colonial Period**

### **Indo-African Relations Under Portuguese Control of the Indian Ocean**

Among Asian countries, India is one of the earliest countries that suffered colonial aggression. In 1497, by the order of the King of Portugal, Da Gama led a fleet to bypass the Cape of Good Hope and sailed to Calicut on the Cape of Malabar in southwestern India on May 22, 1497. Calicut is that “Guli” in China’s *“History of Ming Dynasty”*. When returning to Lisbon in 1498, he transported back a large number of oriental specialties such as gems, pepper, cinnamon, ginger, spices, and obtained 60 times the economic profit. At the same time, he brought back accurate information about India and Southeast Asia. Under the temptation and drive of economic interests, the African countries on the sea route to India became the first targets of plunder, aggression and even colonization.

Under Portuguese colonial control and navigational advantages, the trade patterns that existed before the Indian Ocean gradually changed. ArabSwahili traders gradually lost their status as intermediaries in trade between India and Africa, and direct trade between India and Africa was also affected. At the end of the 17th century, the Portuguese were finally expelled from the coast of Swahili in East Africa, and they could not monopolize the Indian Ocean transportation industry. Indian Kojia merchants traveled between India and Africa. By the 19th century, Kojia merchants had become one of the most powerful trading ethnic groups in East Africa. For example, in the late 18th century, Ronda in the Kazembe Kingdom has become a major hub in the long-distance trade network across Africa. Among the traded goods in this region, Items imported from the West or the East include European firearms, woolen fabrics and metal products, and Indian cotton cloth, shells and prayer beads (Shillington, 2012, p. 307). It is worth mentioning that before the 19th century, Indians were a foreign ethnic group in Portuguese East Africa, rarely settled and stuck to their own habits and languages. After the 19th century, as more Indians settled in Africa, Indian perceptions and behaviors changed and began to gradually integrate into African society.

### **Indo-African Relations Under the Mughal Empire**

Although Akbar and Jahangir had no ambitions to control maritime trade routes, they were both interested in overseas trade. During the rule of the Mughal Empire, Emperor Akbar exported textiles, sundries, pepper, indigo and opium to Africa, and imported gold and silver bars, metals, horses, coral, ivory, amber, gems, medicines and African slaves (Edwardes & Garrett, 1956, p. 211). Because the Mughal Empire used slaves more commonly, most of the foreign slaves came from the Habshi and Mozambican indigenous peoples of Abyssinia (Ethiopia) who imported Indian luxury goods. The Habshi and the Sdis were the most famous. India mainly acted as sailors, dock workers, domestic servants and soldiers. According to data, Lucen-Ude-Din-Babak (1459-1474), king of the South Indian Muslim Gol Kingdom (now part of the Republic of Bangladesh), once had 8,000 African slaves. African slaves in India not only contributed to local material production, but also contributed to the development of spiritual civilization in India, especially in religious and cultural innovation, cultural exchanges and mutual learning, and national character shaping. For example, the Drum King in the temples of Babakir and Champur was a Nigro saint who belonged to Ethiopia today.

During the Mughal Empire, although India and Africa still maintained the traditional commodity trade, the trade of gold, ivory products and even slaves and opium continued as usual. However, the slave trade as a luxury

trade violated humanity and modern civilization, and was a sinful trade. Different from the criminal Atlantic slave trade, after being sold to India, African slaves can maintain their personality independence and may have opportunities for promotion. This was a more favorable situation than the Atlantic slave trade. In addition, the trade in opium and other drugs between India and Africa during this period was also continuing. Although the volume and purpose of the trade were unknown, its high profits had been going on for a long time, and the harm should not be underestimated.

### **Indo-African Engagement During the European Hegemony in the Indian Ocean in the Indian Ocean**

The Indian Ocean route opened by Portugal and the proceeds from subsequent colonial activities attracted other European powers to expand into the Indian Ocean region. As early as the Jahangir period, "The outstanding feature of imperial trade is the commercial activities of the Dutch and the British. They determined the trend of commercial trade between India and the African coast and established direct trade between the East and the West on the basis of unlimited expansion routes" (Edwardes & Garrett, 1956, p. 211). Indeed, after Portugal, the colonial expansion of the Indian Ocean area also included the Netherlands, France, and the United Kingdom.

In the mid and late 19th century, European powers set off a frenzy to carve up the world, and vast areas of Asia, Africa, and Latin America were all included in the Western colonial system. With the Battle of Plassey as the boundary, before the Battle of Plassey, Portugal, the Netherlands, France, and Britain jointly contended for India. After the Battle of Plassey, the British monopolized India. Coupled with the fact that Britain was a world industrial power and "the sun never sets" at that time, it not only dominated the Indian Ocean, but also owned large colonies in North Africa, East Africa and South Africa, and the relationship between British India and Africa became more active. Beginning with frequent exchanges between the United Kingdom and British India and British Africa, the exchanges between India and Africa had been expanded to all aspects of economy, culture and society.

### **Indo-African Relations During British Colonial India**

#### **Indo-African Relations During the British East India Company's Control of India**

The British colonial rule of India experienced the period of the British East India Company and the period of British India. Because of their different governance philosophies and strategies, the impact on India-Africa relations was similar and there were some differences. From the establishment of the British East India Company in 1600 to the abolition of the company's monopoly power in 1813, The characteristic of this issue of the India-Africa relationship was the "triangular" trade relationship that serves the company, that was, the British East India Company bought slaves from Africa and traded in the Americas to obtain gold and silver, and then went to India to buy silk, spices, and jewellery to European sovereign countries for trading. In the early stage of this trade model, because Indians controlled their own customs, they made more profits, gold and silver continued to flow into India, and India often presented a surplus in the entire trade. In the later period of the "triangular trade", as the British colonists defeated India and controlled India's customs and tariff-setting powers, the trade pattern changed significantly. India had a large trade deficit, and a large amount of gold and silver began to flow to the British colonists or British mainland. During the 100 years from 1757-1857, the East India Company plundered 1 billion pounds from India (Shi, 1985, p. 67).

With the huge demand for labor in the socialized production brought about by the industrial revolution in the British asset stage, and the end of the slave trade movement, the United Kingdom turned its attention to obtaining labor to India. Indians went to Africa as labor or free immigration and were encouraged by the United Kingdom. Indians began to appear in the colonies of British Africa, and even throughout Africa. For example, in 1834, many Indians emigrated to Mauritius; in 1840, there were more than 1,000 Indians living in Muscat; for the convenience of its geographical location, Zanzibar was favored by Indians. Despite being discriminated against or even excluded by Arabs for a long time, there were about 300 Indian residents on the island. After the Sultan of Oman Said moved his capital to Zanzibar in 1840, he not only implemented a policy of religious tolerance, but also encouraged Indian businessmen to settle in Muscat and Zanzibar. And allowing Indians to serve as government administrators, manage finances or collect taxes, and Indians began to flock to Zanzibar. In 1844, there were more than 1,000 Indians on San Island, and in 1856 it reached more than 2,000 (Du, 2011, p. 33). In Zanzibar, a slavery society attached to the capitalist economy, Arab plantation owners and merchants were dominant. The Indians who maintained close contact with them were the Indians engaged in import and export trade and the financial industry (Wang, 1995, p. 281). The Natal Indians arrived in South Africa around 1850 and worked as indentured laborers in planting for a long time. Although most Indian businessmen live in the east coast of Africa such as Zanzibar, some Indians bravely marched into the interior of Africa. For example, Isa Bin Hussein, a Baluchi, was the first person to arrive in Uganda; an Indian agent Juma Bin Mwana arrived on the west bank of Lake Tanganyika in 1852. During this period, most Indians in Africa were small shop owners, traders, etc.

During the same period, Africans also emigrated to India. Sir Barry Freer believed that there were about eight or nine million African slaves in British India (Chauhan, 1995, p. 237). The Siddhis settled in and around Gujarat are known to be from Northeast Africa by their language. Most of Diu's African descent were Swahili, and they had maintained some of their own religious, dance and artistic elements. After the independence of India, most of the Stis people were poor people listed as backward castes and farmers without land. They were mostly engaged in logging, falconers, small merchants, and drivers, and only a few were engaged in business. They are basically on the fringe of politics, with only a few individuals participating in the elections of the Indian Rural Administrative Council or the political parties and labor unions (Jha, 2001, pp. 59-62).

### **India-Africa Relations During the British-Indian Government's Rule in India**

During the Anglo-Indian government ruled India, India-Africa relations developed tortuously within the colonial system. Under the conditions of transportation and technology at the time, coupled with the threat of diseases in the interior of Africa, it was ideal to travel between the British colonies in the Indian Ocean region. Although Zanzibar and Kilwa changed hands between Portugal, the Sultanate of Oman and others, and were independent, they were eventually colonized by the British. In order to achieve effective control, with the encouragement of the British policy, the convenient Indian Ocean shipping route between India and Africa had greatly increased the number of personnel exchanges and economic trade. It is difficult to accurately count the economic and trade data between India and Africa, but the personnel exchanges show the general situation of India's relations during this period. In terms of the number of Indians in Zanzibar, there were more than 2,000 in 1856, 3,710 in 1870, and 5,466 in 1879. This does not include the Goan. In 1887, about 3,086 Indians moved to

the British colonies in East Africa. After the 1880s, Indians moved not only to Zanzibar, but also to the African continent (Gregory, 1971, p. 19).

The investment and economic trade between British India and Zanzibar are also active. It is estimated that in 1873, British India invested more than 1.6 million rupees in Zanzibar, stimulating business and making the Indian rupee a common currency in East Africa during this period (Ali & Ramehandani, 1981, p. 36). Zanzibar's export to India are mainly slaves, ivory and yellow wax, and the main imports are cloth, pottery, ironware, rice, Bombay sugar and dates. The significant increase in trade between British India and Zanzibar was not only because Indians love Zanzibar, but mainly because of security factors. While the Portuguese, the German East African Company, plundered the eastern part of Africa, the local Indian settlers in Zanzibar were able to receive some protection. When the British government ruled Zanzibar, it not only focused on protecting the interests of Indians in East Africa, but also encouraged Indians to engage in industry, commerce and finance. Zanzibar's port advantage and the Sultanate's dependence on Indian merchant ships contributed to the prosperity of Zanzibar's Indian merchant trade.

British India is also closely related to Tanganyika. During the British colonization, the British moved to Tanganyika in large numbers. Due to the special relationship between Britain and India, among Asian immigrants, Indians were "second-class citizens" (first-class citizens are Europeans) second only to British and other European immigrants. By the 1950s, there were about 60,000 Indians in Tanganyika (Pei, 2008, pp. 105-106). Because the Indians had long controlled small businesses in Tanganyika, they bought land at a low price from the defeated Germans, and began to operate cash crops such as sisal, sugarcane and tea. They also participated in the import and export trade of the British colonizer Tanganyika. And occupies a large amount of real estate in Dar es Salaam and other towns. In economic life, Indians had a very superior position. India and Tanzania were both British colonies, and the common historical encounters, the common experience of modern system reference and creation, had created a foundation of identity for the development of the relationship between the two parties. In other parts of East Africa, Indian businessmen were also active. In the 1880s, Indians established trading settlements near Mikindani (now a tourist destination in Tanzania), with an annual trade volume of 100,000 pounds. The importance of Indians in the East African economy was irreplaceable. Europeans, Arabs, and Swahili were only small-scale participants.

With South Africa becoming a British colony, the historical trading system between India and South Africa tended to end. However, the fact that they belonged to the British colony created conditions for the exchanges between India and South Africa. In fact, after the 18th century, more and more Indians began to immigrate to South Africa, and the people-to-people exchanges between the two sides became more active. Mahatma Gandhi was the most representative figure. From 1893 to 1914, Gandhi, who was born in India, lived in South Africa for a long time. Here, in order to oppose the racial discrimination policy of the British authorities at the time, Gandhi actively led the movement of Indians in South Africa to fight for civil rights, and created the famous "non-violence and non-cooperation" ideology and movement, which promoted India's struggle for independence. It also had deeply influenced many outstanding national liberation leaders in Africa, such as Kwami Nkrumah in Ghana, Kaunda in Zambia, and Avolovo in Nigeria. "Mahatma" Gandhi's 21 years of work and fighting experience in South Africa had become a story in India-Africa relations. South Africa was one of the countries with the most immigrants from India. There were more than 1 million immigrants from India, accounting for

about 2.7% of the total population of South Africa, 80% of whom live in Natal Province (Zhu, 2005, p. 22). Due to the important role played by Indian immigrants, India and South Africa have special emotions and have maintained a close and seamless cooperative relationship until now.

### Conclusion

“Geography is like the womb where history is, nurturing and regulating history. Its rivers, lakes, oases and oceans attract immigrants to settle on the coast and provide cheap waterways for transportation and trade. Throughout history, human evolution has been social rather than biological, primarily because of economic, political, intellectual, and ethical innovations that have been passed on individually or from generation to generation through the forces of imitation, custom, and education” (Will & Durant, 2010, pp. 43-47). The geographical characteristics of the same Indian Ocean region have enabled the economic, trade, commercial, cultural, political or civilized exchanges between India and Africa for thousands of years, even for long periods of time due to geography, navigation technology, the special environment of inland Africa, and Western colonists. Due to the influence of man-made disasters and other reasons, the exchanges between the two sides have long been confined to India and the east coast African countries. In the course of this interaction, they gradually cultivated their common personality, behavior, cultural preferences and values, etc., thus forming a common cultural gene and spiritual temperament, which became an emotional bond that is difficult to cut between India and Africa. Even in the bloody years of colonization that lasted for hundreds of years, India and Africa, in the process of limited exchanges and joint response to foreign aggression, also shaped the common historical psychology and value of the colonial era, loaded it into the common memory of India and Africa. These have become the deep motivation for India and Africa to cherish each other and easily reach a consensus. Even today in the 21st century, the two sides can still find the historical spiritual power of lasting cooperation in the recollection of history and look forward to the future together.

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