

BOOK REVIEW

Rajeev Bhatia, *‘India-Africa Relations: Changing Horizons’*, (New Delhi, Routledge, 2022), Pages: 219, Price: Rs. 995.00 (HB).

India and Africa share ancient linkages. India has made bigger footprints in Africa, and the over three million strong Indian Diasporas in Africa prove to be a crucial strategic asset for India to further its relations with African countries. As far as studies and research is concerned, India-Africa relations seem to be least explored and researched—despite their relationship offering huge potential and opportunities. Africa in recent decades has shed its image of a hopeless continent and emerged as the continent to be watched in coming years.

The book *India-Africa Relations: Changing Horizon*, has come as an elixir when a dearth of good literature on Indo-Africa issues was being felt. Ambassador Rajiv Bhatia, the author of the book has served as the High Commissioner to Kenya, South Africa and Lesotho for seven years. Serving in these countries has allowed him to see the continent in its original shade and bring to the audience his first-hand experience. He has also served as the Director General (DG) of the Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA), where during his interactions with various scholars, politicians and serving diplomats, he had been able to consolidate and validate his perceptions about the continent. Rather than concising it in an article, the author has come up with this book which will be a useful study and act as a source for future scholarly deliberations.

The author of the book has focussed on the past 30 years from 1990 to 2020, the period which saw multiple transitions taking place in the African continent. The author admits that once again surfing, collecting and presenting data is not going to serve any purpose. The approach is to study and bring to the table the latest developments, positive steps taken and the way forward to consolidate and take all the positive engagements in the right direction. The author starts by giving a realistic picture of the continent’s capability in the form of youthful energy, abundant resources and fast-growing economies. He also cites the optimism with which the whole continent looks at the outside world and the responsibility of the world to assist the continent achieve its potential.

The structure of the book begins with a deep dive into Africa as a continent in transition. From there, we see a shift toward glimpses of the past, when

the author looks at the Indo-Africa relationship in the previous century. The book discusses the relationship of Africa as a continent with Europe, the U.S and Japan primarily. It also discusses relationships with Russia, Turkey, UAE, Indonesia, Republic of Korea, Australia, Brazil and G-20 nations. A whole chapter has been dedicated to China's relationship with African nations, where the author concludes that China's-Africa policy and its implementation should not be demonised, instead the competing nations must devise an enticing policy model to differentiate themselves. It is from chapter number five, that the book sees a transition from a discussion on the past and global engagement and veers towards the Indo-African engagements in the first two decades of the current century. Again, the chapter moves chronologically, and covers various time frames, visits, programmes and state actors which form the crux of positive and productive progress between India and Africa.

The writer has clearly brought out and showcased how India and Africa came even closer from 2000 to 2007, and then under the regime of two consecutive Prime Ministers of India, Manmohan Singh and Narendra Modi. The author has also emphasized the fact that after the third India-Africa Forum Summit (IAFS) 2015, instead of any reduction in the focus on Africa, there has been a growing appetite to put Africa at the centre of International Relations—as evident from multiple high-level bilateral visits and engagements.

From here on in the next three chapters, the author deftly captures vital aspects of Africa—Continental, Regional, and finally, Bilateral. The chapter titled “Continental Dimension” brings out some key aspects, which enthrall the reader by showcasing the size, diversity and vastness of Africa as a continent. It is here the reader comes face-to-face with the key issues surrounding cooperation within Africa, using the establishment of the African Union (AU). It is also here that the writer turns the narrative to depict the multi-layered relationship between India and Africa. The author successfully navigates this multi-layered setup by first focussing on the continental level relationship, followed by a very successful manoeuvre into the regional or sub-regional dimension. Finally, he moves to showcase the bilateral relationship between India and Africa. The author, at the outset of discussing the bilateral engagement, makes it clear that, out of the fifty-four African countries, focus can only be given to fifteen of these nations. By discussing these fifteen nations' relationships with India, the author has tried to paint the breadth and depth of India's relationships with these nations as the centre point of India and Africa's bilateral ties. The author also brings out the fact that China's expanding inroads in the continent have proved to be a major challenge faced by Indian Diplomacy in deepening the Indo-African relationship.

To round off the various aspects of India-Africa ties, the author moves beyond the traditional state and formal facets to the socio-cultural and people-related aspect. Thus, we come across a beautiful and oft-ignored aspect of Diaspora, Education, Culture and Tourism, Media, and intellectual class come to prominence as discussion points to highlight the India-Africa relationship. Sensing an opportunity and in-depth knowledge, in this book the author presents a prismatic view of India in Africa. The author has discussed in detail the Government to Government (G2G), Business to Business (B2B) and People to People (P2P) relationship. Although the writer has called this the “Third Space”, it is worthwhile noting that this: “Third Space” could prove to be the cornerstone on which the Indo-African ties in the upcoming time will be deepened. The author feels that rather than the governmental sector, it is the non-governmental sector and players who have a huge potential to contribute to synergizing the Indo-Africa relationship.

Credit is due to the author for discussing, delving and describing, although in a limited manner, how India and Africa can move beyond the traditional realms of diplomacy and join forces together to overcome common challenges in the time ahead. Despite the book’s agenda being India- African relationship, the author could not stay away from discussing China sensing China’s influence in Africa. The author has covered these issues through different approaches and has been plain-spoken in expressing the late entry of India into Africa; and the gap that used to exist between dialogue and delivery.

The current volume of the book is well-rounded and not only includes a discussion of the past but also provides a guide towards deepening India-Africa relationship in years ahead. However, it would be worthwhile for the author to consider covering the remaining African nations in possibly the next volume of the book. Africa itself is a vast continent, and no treatise can cover the vastness in a single attempt. Secondly, while this book goes into the required depth and breaks vital engagements, groupings and actors into a coherent structure, there should be higher emphasis and further depth into the conversation around China, common challenges and finally, combined aspirations. It is high time for India and Africa, to come together and jointly work for the progress and welfare of all.

Dr. Neha Sinha
Assistant Professor
Amity Institute of International Studies (AIIS)

