

Unit 8

Indian Diaspora in Africa

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Learning objectives

After going through this Unit, you will be able to understand:

- situations of Indian diasporas in various parts of Africa;
- identity issues of Indian diasporas in Africa and their responses; and
- situations of Indians in Mauritius.

8.1 Introduction

There is a 2.25 million strong Indian Diaspora in Africa.¹ The People of Indian Origin (PIO) form a majority in Mauritius. Around one million PIO live in South Africa. A substantial number of PIO are present in East Africa and in the Western Indian Ocean Islands. There are significant numbers of PIO in Central African countries. Except the PIO in East Africa, most of them went as indentured plantation workers during the colonial rule in the same way as they were taken to the Caribbean islands.

In East Africa they were taken to construct railways in the interior forest areas. This region also had a significant number of free passenger Indians who had gone there as traders since colonial times and even before that. A large number of Franco-phone African countries have PIO but they form a small percentage of local population. Their identity suffered the same fate as of those in the Caribbean Franco-phone territories except in those territories, which were snatched by the Britishers from French colonisers. They were juxtaposed here with Africans. In a few places like in Kenya and South Africa they were sandwiched between Black and White populations. Their struggle to preserve their identity, seek their legitimate place in the society is also similar to that in the Caribbean. The government of India under Nehru maintained the same overt and covert policy towards PIO in Africa with the exception of South Africa where it mostly maintained an overt policy of support. The comparative understanding of PIO in the Caribbean and Africa needs an analysis of African PIOs and Indian responses.

¹ There are roughly 22,59,300 PIOs in Africa. In some countries- they are significant in number and percentage. They are 220,000 in Reunion (31%), 1 million in South Africa (2.4%), 715000 in Mauritius (68%), 100,000 in Kenya (0.35%), 81,000 in Seychelles (6.1.%) 28,000 in Madagascar, 90,000 in Tanzania (0.28%), 16000 in Zimbabwe (0.1%), 9000 in Botswana (0.66%) around 20,000 in Mozambique (0.13%).

8.2 Indian South Africans

Long before Mahatma Gandhi used his tactics of non-co-operation, civil disobedience, *satyagraha* and peaceful protests in Indian freedom struggles in 1920, he evolved and made maiden use of many of these methods in South Africa in the late nineteenth century. The personal insult heaped on him in South Africa and his strong feeling against racial discrimination against Indians in South Africa became a sentimental issue for the followers of Gandhi in the Indian freedom struggle. The racial discrimination against Indians in South Africa received constant condemnation from Indian leaders and the cause of Indians in South Africa always remained high in Indian foreign policy considerations.

The Asiatic Land Tenure Act also known as Ghetto Act became law in June 1946. It was directed against Indians, confining them to specified areas alone.² On 3 September 1946 in the United Nations General Assembly session, the Indian representative Chagla articulated Indian concerns to the United Nations sub committee. He condemned South Africa's "discriminatory treatment of Asiatics in general" as a denial of human rights and the Ghetto Act, both of which impaired friendly relations between India and Africa. The Franco-Mexican resolution - supported by India - calling for treatment of Indians in South Africa to be in conformity with international obligations and Charter of the United Nations - was passed. The Indian approach of special support to Indian settlers in South Africa lasted until the late 1950s. Till then, resolutions of Indian National Congress articulated and strongly supported the Indian settlers' cause in South Africa. They used to express support to South African non-Indian sufferers also but in general terms.³

Once India raised the issue of South African Indian settlers exclusively within the U.N. based on the human rights clause, it soon realised that it was not possible to keep the issue confined to Indian settlers alone. Because of the provisions of non-racial treatment, India had to extend support to all groups and communities subjected to racial discrimination in South Africa. Further, the policy of exclusively supporting Indian settlers was in contrast to Nehru's policy of advising Indian settlers in other parts of Africa, where he counselled the paramountcy of the African cause and advised Indian settlers to integrate themselves with African cause and aspirations and not to seek special positions or privileges. Meanwhile the Group Areas Act of 1950 had formally institutionalised the Apartheid policy affecting Indians as well as Black Africans.

The above considerations started a shift in Indian approach on South African issue. India started associating with the cause of discrimination of Black and Indians together. The Indian President Dr. Rajendra Prasad in his address to Parliament in 1952 explained the shift of the approach. He said, "The question is no longer merely one of Indians of South Africa; it had already assumed a greater and wider significance. It is question of racial domination and racial intolerance. It is a question of Africans more than that of Indians in South Africa". India mobilised twelve other countries and raised the question of racial conflict in South Africa resulting from apartheid policy and succeeded in the appointment of a U.N. commission to study the racial situation in

2 Ajay Dubey, "Identity Politics of Indian South Africans: Democratisation and governance of South Africa", paper presented at ICSSR-HSRC seminar on *The Dynamics of Social Identity in India and South Africa: Its Implications for Democratisation and Governance* held at Bungler between 20-22nd October 1998.

3 See Indian National Congress Resolutions on Foreign Policy. AICC New Delhi 1946-66.

South Africa. From then onward, the issue of Indians in South Africa was merged with the larger issue of apartheid policy in South Africa, which involved both Indians as well as Black African. Indian policy then worked for the establishment of majority rule in South Africa and merging of the Indian settlers cause with that of Black Africans.

During his interim Prime Ministership in March 1946, Nehru recommended termination of trade agreement and breaking up of diplomatic ties with South Africa. Lord Wavell, the Indian Viceroy did it immediately.⁴ This strong step was taken when India was free in foreign relations but not free internally. The stakes involved were high. India at the time of independence needed economic support from all quarters but this decision deprived India of 5% of its trade. Currently, there are more than 1 million PIOs in South Africa. During the post-apartheid period they merged their political future with ANC. Around 20% of ministerial/M.P. positions were given to them by ANC. However PIO did not vote for ANC in the 1994 general elections fearing the massive majority the African base ANC had. As a result they are again facing the displeasure of the government in power. Their representation as M.P.s/Ministers in ANC government has been reduced. The Historical Disadvantage Community (HDC) categorisation still clubs them with the African and coloured population. But politically and socially, the gap between the majority community and PIO is increasing.⁵

8.3 East African PIO

A good number of PIO had gone to East Africa as traders since ancient times and they were settled across the Eastern Coast of Africa. Kilwa was a very important port, which had a good number of Indian traders. In fact, the Swahili language, which is spoken in East Africa, has a substantial number of words, which are from Gujarati and other Indian languages. The bulk of PIOs who were brought to hinterlands of East Africa were railway construction workers. Most of them were from Punjab. Many were killed by lions and wild animals in the dense forests of East Africa while laying railway lines. The presence of PIO in hinterlands facilitated Gujarati businessmen, retail traders to penetrate in the interior of East African towns. They were called *Dukawallas* and they own most of the corner shops. Since they were brought in by the colonisers and became visibly rich, they were seen as exploiters by the African population.

PIOs in East Africa were a confident community since colonial times. As early as 1920 they asserted their political identity under leaders like Jeevanji and wanted PIOs to be linked to India. The assertion made the colonial government announce the policy of "paramountcy of native" thereby keeping PIO from inheriting any kind of political power sharing under decolonisation plan. This was further used by the British colonial government to increase the gap between Africans and PIOs.

During the decolonisation phase the Indian government under Nehru tried to make amends. Aba Saheb was entrusted to exhort PIO to lead the freedom

4 Indian High Commissioner did not returned to South Africa since 1946 when Ghetto Act was passed But India used to maintain a small office in Durban which was finally closed in 1954 and thereafter all direct link between Indian and South Africa ceased.

5 See Ajay Dubey - "Identity Politics of Indian South Africans (ISAs) : Democratisation and Governance of South Africa" *Indian Journal of African Studies*, vol.XII (2) pp.39-51.

struggle and accept the leadership of the Black Community without any reservation and special demand. In 1967, the government of Kenya started the Kenyanisation of its economy when all non-citizens, largely Indians, were asked to take work and residence permits. It allowed them to trade only in restricted areas and items. Though it was a purely internal policy measure of the Kenyan government, India advised them to surrender their British passports and get local citizenship. Indian diplomats mobilised PIO in favour of this move but not many responded to it. For PIOs accepting the advice to mix with Africans meant giving their daughters in marriage to local Africans. PIOs were not willing to migrate to England because of social insecurity and degeneration of their children in western culture. Going back to India and being trapped in the vicious trap of poverty, filth and unemployment was out of the question.⁶ Partly, Indian policies also did not allow them to forget their old links as it appealed to them thrice in two years, for financial help for defence funds to contain China and Pakistan. A large number of visitors from India, religious leaders, fund collectors for charity and politician kept coming and made contact with PIO. All these were strengthening the feelings of mutual dependence. When they were in crisis this time, India did not react in the same way as it used to do.⁷ The Indian Parliament discussed the issue at length. Mrs. Indira Gandhi made an intervention during debate to assure the members that government was monitoring the situation.⁸

Indian government had started economic initiatives at the bilateral level to bring Indian settlers in Kenya within the policy framework of India. It proposed to establish Africa-India Development Corporation with Kenyan 'PIO' and Indian capital, its aim being to seek integration of the Indian community in the economic life of Kenya, thus fortifying the foundation of a multiracial society.⁹ Though finally it could not materialise, due to reasons other than disinterest of India, but it did show the shift which was coming in Indian policy for PIOs in Africa. Uganda was another country in East Africa where India's policy on Indian settlers demonstrated the shift. When Idi Amin came to power in January 1971 in Uganda, he wanted to put the entire Ugandan economy in the hands of Ugandans of African origin. He said that 80,000 Asians in Uganda were sabotaging the economy and encouraging corruption and therefore there was no room for them in Uganda.¹⁰ All PIOs who were Kenyan citizens or British and Indian passport holders had to leave in 90 days before November 8, 1972. Amin called the expulsion of PIO "as part of the war of liberation". Indian Deputy Minister of External Affairs said in Parliament, "We are in touch with the Ugandan authorities and I can assure the House that we shall do everything we can to protect the interest of Indians there". The Indian President while in Lusaka denounced the expulsion and stated "The happenings in Uganda have cast heavy clouds of doubt and uncertainty over the minds of many people of Indian origin in several countries of Africa.... The pernicious doctrine of racialism may permeate even free Africa."¹¹

6 For a detailed discussion see Anirudha Gupta, "India and the Asians" *opp. cit.* p.130.

7 Nehru used to say that if they are not ready to become citizen and not welcomed there they should come back to India.

8 Indian parliament was told that there were 186,000 people of Indian origin in Kenya. Out of this 130,000 were British citizen, 44,000 Kenyan and only 4,000 were Indian nationals.

9 *AICC Economic Review* (New Delhi) October 1966.

10 *Africa Digest* Vol. 19, No.57, October 1972, p.96

11 Quoted in A Gupta "Uganda Asian, Britain, India and Commonwealth" *African Affairs* (1974), p. 322

Though public opinion was aroused in India it refuted strongly and ridiculed Amin's allegation that India was planning to invade Uganda along with Tanzania and Zambia. However, India made it clear that it was going to support any international move, which would persuade Amin for extending the expulsion deadline. India did not take the tougher line because Indian move against a purely racial issue would have been interpreted as Indian interference and design in Africa. Indian support for Afro-Asian solidarity was another constraint. But the main consideration of India in not taking a tougher line on the issue seemed since "there is nothing to be gained by using strong words, if they can not be backed by meaningful action in Uganda, any show of strong sentiment may trigger off an anti-Asian wave."¹² Years later India faced the same constraints when Bavadra government was dismissed in Fiji and anti-PIO moves started there.

The Ugandan crisis made India realise that the leadership and political system of African states vary considerably from country to country and Indian support to Afro-Asian solidarity had to be qualified by long-term national interests. These expulsions brought home another point to India. Despite Indians, consistent support to African decolonisation and Afro-Asian solidarity none of the African countries howsoever friendly to India and opposed to Idi Amin's action, offered to accommodate expelled Indians even in small numbers as a gesture to sympathise with India.¹³ As far as India was concerned, it was never its policy to debar entry of PIO if they wanted to resettle in India with their saving and assets. The Government of India made special provisions and gave inducement for Asians to resettle in India with their saving and assets. Despite such offer, almost none opted to return to India. The restrained approach of India, however, succeeded in getting Amin agree to pay compensation for business and properties of Indian passport holders, which was not given to Indians of holding passports of other nationalities.

8.4 PIO in Francophone Africa

There are around one million PIOs in Francophone Africa. The bulk of them are in Mauritius, Reunion, Madagascar and Seychelles. Other countries in Francophone Africa having smaller number of PIOs are Benin, Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Chad, Senegal, Mali, Djibouti and Algeria. Reunion Island, which is a French *Department*, not an independent country, also has a good number of PIO. Most of the PIO of the region except in Mauritius have lost their identity because of the assimilation policy followed by the French colonial master. Under this policy the subject population was to be fully acculturated in mainstream French culture in terms of language, religion, dress, manners etc. The original cultural identity of PIO, Africans or Chinese was lost. Only racial features remained the main distinguishing factor, though one finds a small sprinkling of well-off Gujarati trader population, which maintained some kind of links with India and retained some resemblance of Indian culture. Because of the language barrier and lesser interaction of Indian government and socio-cultural organisations they remained largely out of Indian policy supports or responses.

Madagascar has around 25,000 PIOs. They are mostly Gujaratis who came as traders around 1900. A majority of them run merchant shops. This merchant community maintains its Indianness. They maintain a very low social profile,

12 *The Times of India* (Delhi) 6 October 1972.

13 See Ajay Dubey, *Indo- African Relations in the Post Nehru Era* (Delhi, Kalinga Publication, 1990)

though in a country of 15 million, this small number of 25000, controls more than 50% of economy. On the other hand Seychelles has a large population, around 307,000 PIOs. It has a large number of indentured PIOs who came from South India. Most of them have been subsumed into French culture. Reunion received some families from French territories in India like Pondicherry who came at the time of Indian independence. This group despite being from French Indian territories had good influence of Indian culture. There are around 220,000 PIO in the island. A large number of them came as slaves or artisans or indentured workers during colonial times. In recent times, one notices a revival of Hindu religion among Tamil communities, which forms the bulk of PIO. A large number of temples and Ashrams are visible and *double practice of religion* i.e., simultaneous observation of Hindu and catholic rites by the same family. There are a number of associations of PIOs who promote Indian dance, music, painting, literature and food etc but language remains major barrier.

8.5 Indians in Mauritius

Mauritius is also a Francophone country. It is the only country in the world where PIOs are in a majority (68% of population). It had PIO led government since its independence. If India is the mother country of PIO, Mauritius is treated as its capital. It was earlier a French territory but in 19th century it was captured by the British. Under the Treaty of Capitulation, Britain was to maintain French custom and law even during British colonial rule. A large number of indentured workers from India went to Mauritius since 1834 to replace the African slave labour in sugarcane field. There were Indian merchants as well who went in the 19th century and maintained their links with India. Today there are around 700,000 PIO in a population of 1.2 million. Despite being under French culture for more than one and half century, they maintained the major traits of Indian culture and still retain a strong sense of Indian cultural identity. Though the Bhojpuri language, dress, cuisine is getting diluted very fast in the younger generation, Mauritius remain one of the few countries where Indianness and its manifestations are celebrated with pride and confidence. Though PIOs are not a monolithic lot, they are divided on linguistic (Bhojpuri and Non-Bhojpuri) religious (Hindu-Muslims) and caste lines they have been able to retain political control since 1948 when adult suffrage was introduced.¹⁴

Mauritius was the first country where Nehru, under his interim Prime Ministership, appointed the first ever High Commissioner in 1946. Mahatma Gandhi had visited Mauritius in 1902 while coming back from South Africa to India. He met PIO community leaders and advised them to educate their children and to take active part in politics. He had deputed Manilal Doctor to organise and politically prepare the PIOs. After independence of Mauritius, successive Indian governments, maintained very close relations with Mauritius. It received huge financial and HRD support from India. India also kept a close watch on the democratic set up of Mauritius because in the past attempts had been made to usurp the political power from the PIOs by non-democratic means.

8.6 PIOs in Central Africa

In this part of Africa, Indians are very small in number and unlike the PIOs

¹⁴ For details on political aspects of PIO in Mauritius see, Ajay Dubey, *Government and Politics in Mauritius* (Delhi, Kalinga, 1996)

in East Africa, they did not strive for a special position in these countries. They were exhorted from very beginning by Apa B Pant and his successor Indian High Commissioner Nirmaljit Singh to fight along with black African nationalist. In Zimbabwe the fight against the White ruler, Indian settlers fought along with Africans in demolishing the racist regime. Their relation with Africans was one of trust. There had been inter African riots but hardly any Indian settlers were ever the target or issue. However, the same is not true in case of Zambia. Military and police under Kaunda administration time and again intimidated the Indian business community.

Mozambique has over 20,000 PIOs. The Portuguese rulers took Catholic PIOs from Goa as petty officials, soldiers, and ecclesiastics. Many Hindus from Goa had also gone as traders. They were persecuted by the colonial Portuguese government. When India liberated its territories like Goa from Portuguese rule, many PIOs in Mozambique were imprisoned for six months and their bank accounts were frozen. Despite their marginalisation, they have maintained their distinct culture, dress and traditions. They celebrate Indian festivals with great pomp and show.

8.7 Identity Issues of the PIOs in Africa: Indian Responses

Both domestic and international changes have altered the priority and agenda of India's policy towards PIOs in Africa. The major concern of India during colonial rule in Africa was to see to it that the colonial government gave equal privileges to PIOs compared to European settlers. It advised PIOs to join black Africans in the freedom struggle and to become one with them without seeking special privileges or status. With the abolition of colonialism, both internal and external, such imperatives do not exist. Second, in the post colonial phase of Africa, India by its experience, realised that expectation of 'dual loyalty' and inclusion of PIO in policy framework neither wins them over for Indian investment or other economic needs nor does it please African governments who have to deal firmly with PIOs according to domestic imperatives and pressures. Even the PIOs after their experience in Zanzibar, Uganda, Zambia and other countries have realised that Indian support for their protection is going to be limited because India's own capacity to intervene is limited. Even during their crisis, the PIOs themselves did not respond to the Indian offer to come and invest in India and get Indian citizenship. Thirdly, PIOs have historically and politically become a part of African states and the issue of PIO has receded as a major concern. Therefore, it is not surprising that in aggressive diplomatic and economic initiatives of Indian government during the 1970s and 80s the issue of PIO hardly got an important place. Perhaps India learnt through its East African experience that it is unrealistic and counter-productive to expect extra care for South African Indian settlers from South African government as a reciprocal gesture for the Indian contribution to struggle against apartheid. The real test of this policy will come when Indian settlers may have to share the burden of economic and social restructuring programmes in South Africa. Such pressures and demands from black groups have already started surfacing openly. However, because of the long isolation of South Africa from India they will not have, unlike East African Indian a 'dependency' attitude towards India. Therefore, India does not have to respond to a non-existent expectation of PIO. But this does not mean that PIOs have no place in Indian policy.

of Indian Origin in Africa (PIO). In the last fifty years, Indian policies showed a remarkable change though there is continuity as well. The advancement of PIO cause no more seems to be a concern of Indian Government, until the formation of BJP government in 1998. Indian settlers who represented 'mini India' or were 'ambassadors of India' promoting goodwill for India in Africa, turned for India a non-issue or a sensitive issue if not a liability. South African Indians, for whom Mahatma Gandhi struggled in South Africa, whose cause India took to the UN even before becoming independent and sacrificed its substantial trade relations with South Africa was a very special issue for India. For this, even Nehru made deviations from his strongly held policy on Indian settlers abroad but now it became a better-to-avoid issue between Indo-South African interactions. At the same time, cultural identification of PIO, the informal interaction of Indian visitors, holy men, fund collectors and religious activists from Swayam Sewak Sangh still goes on intensely. In other words, India's policy on issue of PIO in Africa has demonstrated both changes and continuities. The following sections would attempt to analyse and highlight the experience of interaction between Indian policies and PIO issues in Africa during the fifty years after Indian independence.

Discriminatory treatment in racially structured society of South Africa had drawn Mahatma Gandhi into active politics when he had gone to South Africa in late 19th century. Later Indian nationalists of all shades had demanded improvement in working and living conditions of Indians settled abroad. Indian settlers protest began to be articulated in East Africa also. The East African Indian National Congress, based on the model of Indian National Congress was founded in 1914. A.M. Jeevanjee had started voicing the grievances of Indian settlers in East Africa. He had gone to the extent of advocating "the annexation of African territory (Tangyanika) to the Indian Empire" arguing that it had been an Asiatic kingdom in ancient times."¹⁵ Indians in Africa formed the middle section in its three-tier society, whites at top and blacks at the bottom. However, their presence was more apparent to Africans as they came directly in contact with them through their retail shops and business. At the same time, they were aggressive in the commercial sector. Elspeth Huxley once observed, "In all countries the backbone of the country is the small man, the White colonialist with small means, but there is no place for him in the country when once the Asiatic is there.... It means if open competition is allowed, the small White colonialist must go to the wall."¹⁶

Jawaharlal Nehru had long ago visualised the clash of interests of Indians and Africans. Though he was more involved with Indians who had migrated to Burma, Malaya and Sri Lanka,¹⁷ it was he who was responsible for evolving Indian's policy towards Indians settled abroad including in Africa. In 1927, when he was appointed secretary of the All India Congress Committee (AICC), an organisation of the Indian National Congress (INC), he prepared a paper 'A Foreign Policy of India' for AICC. In this paper for the first time he categorically outlined the policy of INC regarding Indian settlers in other colonial countries, the role India wanted them to play in their country of adoption and the kind of support they could expect from India. He asked in the paper, "What is the position of Indians of foreign countries to-day?" He said that the Indian overseas went as "a hireling of an exploiter", i.e.,

15 AM Jeevanjee, *An Appeal on behalf of Indians in East Africa* (Bombay 1912)

16 *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol. 2, (Delhi, 1992) pp. 353-62.

17 The cause of Indians settled in Africa and other places was taken up by Sapru, Shastri, Kunjuru, Maharaj Singh and others.

British government and he wanted this position to be changed. He suggested at another place, that, "an Indian who goes to other countries must co-operate with people of that country and win for himself a position by friendship and service... The Indians should co-operate with Africans and help them, as far as possible and not claim a special position for themselves."¹⁸

However, this was not the consensus view of INC. Another stream of Congress comprising of C.F. Andrew, Srinivas Shastri and HN Kunzru, M.M. Malaviya, B.G. Gokhale were mainly concerned with discrimination of Indians in Africa and other places and wanted for them parity with White settlers. Many of these leaders visited worker recruitment centres and talked to the recruits about their problems.

The agitation of Mahatma Gandhi in South Africa was also confined to the betterment of the Indian settlers' cause. In the succeeding years, the issue of discrimination of Indians in South Africa became a sentimental issue for Indian nationalists, as Mahatma Gandhi was very closely associated with it. Nehru represented the left wing of the Congress. He differed with the conservative wing whose demand was confined only for betterment of Indian overseas. Nehru believed in co-operation between Indians and Africans, however until the late 1940s, his sympathy and worry were also confined only for Indians in South Africa. This contrasted with his general policy of Indian support to combined struggle of Indian settlers and Africans in which African cause was paramount. Nehru's special support to Indian settlers in South Africa was very obvious. In a message to INC of South Africa, Nehru wrote in 1939, "India is weak today and can not do much for her children abroad but she does not forget them and every insult to them is a humiliation and sorrow for her. And a day will come when her long arm will shelter and protect them and *her strength will compel justice for them.*"¹⁹ Those days still appear distant! It is this duality between Nehru's policy and the presence of two wings (conservative and left) in Congress, which help us to understand the change and continuities in Indian support to Indian settlers in Africa. However, by the early 1950's it was Nehru's policy towards East African Indians that ultimately prevailed even in South Africa and other countries.

The Congress had set up an overseas department in 1929 and a slender contact was established with local Congress organisations in South and East Africa. Nehru took over foreign relations when an interim nationalist government was formed under him on 2 September 1946. He took the issue of Indian discrimination in South Africa beyond the Commonwealth to the United Nations. After independence, Nehru expressed his views on the position of Indians in Africa and other places in free India. Speaking in the Constituent Assembly on 8th March 1948 he said, "Now these Indians abroad what are they? Are they Indian citizens - are they going to be citizens of India or not? If they are not, then our interest in them becomes cultural, humanitarian and not political... Either they get the franchise of the nationals of the other country or treat them as Indian minus franchise and ask for them the most favourable treatment given to an alien". He advised Indian immigrants, "If you can not be, and if you are not friendly to the people of that country, come back to India and do not spoil the fair name of India."²⁰

18 See, *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru* (New Delhi, 1972), pp.353-68.

19 *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru* (Orient Longman, Delhi, 1976), p.618.

20 *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru* (New Delhi, Orient Longman, 1976) Vol. 9, p.618.

Nehru made it clear in 1950, "In many parts of Africa-East, West, South - there are considerable number of Indians, mostly business people. Our definite instructions to them and to our agent in Africa are that they must always put the interest of indigenous populations first. We want to have no vested interests at the expense of the population of those countries."²¹ He emphasised the same view repeatedly. He said about Indians abroad, "if they adopt the nationality of that country we have no concern with them. Sentimental concern there is, but politically they cease to be Indian nationals."²² Nehru asserted in 1953, "About Africa and Indians there, I may tell you, the policy we have pursued for many years.... We have told them very definitely and precisely that we as government do not encourage or support them in anything they might want and which goes against the interests of the Africans. We have made that perfectly clear."²³ Nehru was very clear any overt move by Indian government for PIO would do more harm than good to them. He was not against people-to-people contacts or non-governmental association. Nevertheless, Nehru also talked about double loyalty of Indians overseas. During the Indo-Chinese war India welcomed contributions from Asians of East Africa to help boost its defence efforts. When questioned on this Nehru told a foreign journalist that - "Indians overseas have dual loyalty, one to their country of adoption and other to their country of origin."²⁴ Further India deplored it as an act of disloyalty when it found that Asians were selling and promoting Chinese made goods at the cost of Indian goods.

Nehru stood for primacy of Africans if their interest was to clash with Indian settlers'. However, when the Asian Relation Conference was organised, two South African Indian leaders - Y.M. Dadoo and GM Naicker were invited but there were no black participants from South Africa. Even during Nehru's prime-ministership when the question of racism in South Africa was taken up in U.N., it was only the case of Indians discrimination in South Africa that was India's concern, though soon India had to change its policy to include black Africans also. This caused great misgiving among Africans.²⁵ Between 1960-66 the gulf between India and Indian settlers abroad widened as India came to believe that Indians were more of an obstacle than an asset in its diplomatic relations with Africa. In the urgency after Chinese attack, it seemed a matter of smaller consequence if PIOs were to face some degree of discrimination.

When Nehru formulated India's position on Indians overseas, most of the countries in Africa were under colonial rule and most of the Indians in Africa were in British colonies. Before independence the Indian concern about the treatment of Indian settlers abroad was with the intention of making British rulers of our country responsible for the welfare of overseas Indians and securing for them fair treatment and justice in relation to White settlers. The assumption that such responsibility continued was occasionally expressed in parliament and press. Immediately after India's independence, Government of India was not in a position to insist on full justice to India settlers in

21 H.S.Chhabra *India & Africa* (New Delhi), p.15.

22 *India's Foreign Policy 1946-61*, p. 130 (Nehru's reply to debate on foreign policy in Lok Sabha, 2 September 1957).

23 H.S.Chhabra *India & Africa* (New Delhi), p.15.

24 See Anirudha Gupta, "India and Asians in East Africa" in Michael Twaddle, ed. *Expulsions of Minority: Essay on Ugandan Asians* (Univ. of London, 1975),.134.

25 See, Ajay Dubey, "Nehru and Indian role in African liberation struggles (1947-64)", *Africa: Journal of African Studies Society of India*. July 1989, P. 27.

Africa. Moreover, the leaders of white settlers in Kenya and South Africa had seen Indian independence as a threat to British rule in Africa. They called Nehru as a Hindu communist who wanted to replace European rule by Indians.²⁶ Their propaganda about India's sinister design on African colonies where Indians were in substantial number, and the image of Indian settlers in Africa as an exclusive community whose only interest in Africa was economic exploitation, made Indian leaders very sensitive on question of Indians overseas. Nehru had other priorities like mobilisation of Afro Asian countries to keep them away from cold war rivalries.²⁷ For such mobilisation, the issue of PIO was not to be emphasised in Africa.

Nehru's policy of exhorting Indians to identify themselves with Africans in East Africa was not based only on his ideological commitment. In Kenya, the presence of Indian settlers was larger than the European community and Kenyan Europeans wanted to keep Kenya as Whiteman's country. A strong anti-Indian campaign was pursued by whites in Africa and several riots broke out in Kenya, Uganda, and South Africa involving Indians and Africans during 1944-49.²⁸ If African's struggle was to be weakened and divided there was the likelihood that white Kenyan settlers could have extended the South African model in East Africa. Therefore, it was necessary that Indian settlers joined hands with blacks in opposing white settlers, even sacrificing their short-term gains.

The fears of British settlers in Africa and the close watch of British government on free India's relations with Indian settlers in Africa became clear in the appointment of Apa B. Pant as Indian High Commissioner to East Africa. The British government received a cable from Sir Philip Mitchell of Kenya that he had been informed by a retired ICS officer, now resident in Kenya, that Pant was "far from being desirable... and is most likely to cause trouble if he comes to East Africa. Indeed I am told that it is not beyond the realm of possibility that he is being sent here for that purpose"²⁹. However, Pant was given clear instructions by Nehru to exhort East African Indians to identify themselves with the Black African cause and not to seek special privileges. Pant's appointment was not welcomed by the British government or colonial governments in East Africa. It was obvious from the very beginning that his pronouncements would be closely watched and scrutinised.

It was to remove these sort of fears that Nehru said in the Constituent Assembly on 9th August 1948, "The Indian Commissioner will not be entitled to discharge consular function in respect of Indians who may not be considered to be (Indian) national, that is permanent resident in those territories or to act as spokesman of such Indians". When the Mau Mau rebellion (1952-53) broke out in Kenya very few Indian settlers in Kenya sided with the Britishers. So they were accused of being with the rebels.

26 Group Captain IR Brigg, the conservative White settler leader in Kenya asserted about India that they want to squeeze us out and make it an Indian colony (*The Times*, London, 4 August 1954). Again South African High Commissioner in London had stated in 1954 "If Nehru could weaken European influence in Africa, then it will mean Africa for Indians." V. Mc Kay *Africa in World Politics* (New York, 1963), p.170.

27 See, Ajay Dubey, "Nehru and Africa in Afro-Asian Solidarity", *Ind-Africana* (Delhi University), vol.2, no.2, pp.38-46.

28 Sadiqu Ali, Shanti, *India and Africa*, pp.32-33 and pp. 51-52.

29 Tinker has given a documented account as how Pant appointment had to face hurdles and delays, for his alleged subversive intentions. Hugh Tinker, *The Banyan Tree: Overseas Empire from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh* (London, 1977), p.318.

“There were few Europeans in Kenya who do not insist that New Delhi through its official and non-official representatives in Africa has encouraged and added the rebellion of Mau-Mau.”³⁰ Apa B Pant was charged in British Parliament for fomenting the Mau-Mau trouble.³¹ Unlike what it did in South Africa, India took a softer stand and recalled Pant under pressure.

During the late 1950s, Indians of East Africa were considered as hurdles in consolidating Indo-African relations. ‘But after Indo-Chinese war of 1962 when Indian isolation was exposed in Africa, Mrs. Indira Gandhi in her capacity as official delegate toured African countries in 1964. She continued to emphasise that Indians settled in Africa must identify themselves completely with the African people and make their fullest contribution to the societies in which they lived. However, as seen by her tour programme in Africa, besides her official engagements, she made it a point not to miss Indian settlers, leaders and members of the community though in certain small locations their numbers did not exceed even fifty.’³² She also called Indian settlers “Ambassadors of India” in Africa. It shows a subtle departure from Nehru policy, as Indian settlers became now a useful instrument for generating goodwill for India. Their position as ambassadors of India implied that they were no more excluded from policy considerations of India. These shifts became more noticeable in many areas when Mrs. Gandhi became the Prime Minister of India. By the second half of the 1960s there was increasing realisation that Indians in Africa whatever passport they may hold should not be put outside India’s Africa policy. This also suited the Indian move of economic diplomacy in Africa and other developing countries as Indian settlers in East Africa had requisite capital and will to share it with Indian economic initiatives in African countries.

Since the early 1990s, there is again a proactive interest of the Indian government towards Indians overseas. This started with appreciation of foreign remittance from NRIs in Gulf region and from North Africa. This provided a meaningful addition to India’s foreign reserve requirements. Further when liberalisation started in the early 1990s, the Government of India tried to rope in first NRIs and then Indian settlers abroad to attract foreign direct investment. It organised meetings for NRIs and promised many incentives to attract their investment. PIOs were an equally relevant overseas segment to rope in the India’s new drive for globalisation. But the Congress government’s move of India was cautious and slow towards this segment. Because of its historical position, it was over-cautious in including PIOs under overt policy framework. When the Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) came to power, Indian policy changed very fast for this segment. Historically the Rastriya Swayam Sewak Sangh (RSS), a support base for BJP, had maintained very close people-to-people contact through its branches among Hindu overseas settlers. In contrast to Nehru’s policy of active dissociation of PIOs from Indian foreign policy objectives, the BJP stood for active and overt association of PIOs for foreign policy objectives of India. It helped to organise the first ever

30 Michael Blundell, *New York Times*, 19 July 1953.

31 Lord Alport raised the question concerning “the contribution made to prevailing conditions of transition and unrest in Kenya during Mau-Mau rebellion by the staff of Indian High Commission office”. Alport demanded that government of India should be asked to withdraw its staff from Kenya. *Britain: House of Commons Debates*, Vol.518, and 29 July 1953.

32 See Ajit S.Gopal, “The Indian Journalist who covered her entire safari”, *World Focus* (No.53, October 1984), p.15.

conference of Parliamentarians of Indian Origin in New Delhi.³³ It issued the PIO card, which provided very substantial advantages to PIOs, compared to other foreign nationals.³⁴ On the side of PIOs also things changed which enabled them to look towards India from a different footing. By the mid 1990s, except in South Africa, PIOs got a long enough time to prove their loyalty to the country of their adoption. They emerged from isolation at home and emerged as a confident identity group. By the 1990s they see no contradiction, after proving their loyalty to their countries, between their citizenship and getting a favourable commercial deal from their countries of origin. After all it is not peculiar to the Indian Diaspora. Many countries have successfully used the presence of different Diaspora community to mobilise economic and diplomatic support for the country.³⁵ In fact by the 1990s, diasporas - Black, Jewish, European, Chinese or Indian are not a centrifugal, sectarian force which needs to be contained or crushed. Rather it has emerged as secular, acceptable identity force at international level. In such a changed scenario the proactive interest of India in the 1990s does not have any element of imperialist design or racist preference as was likely to be construed during Nehru period.

8.8 Conclusion

The Indian Diaspora in Africa has a prominent place in the global Indian diaspora with a population of over 2 millions. They are found mainly in South Africa, East Africa, Central Africa, Western Indian Ocean Islands, and Mauritius. With the exception of the people of Indian Origin in East Africa, most of the Indian diaspora in the continent were indentured plantation workers, which happened during British colonial rule. There are varied experiences of the Indian diaspora in these regions. However, there was a general trend in terms of the kind of transition the Indian diasporas had to undergo. Initially they encountered difficult moments in their struggle for establishing their social position and preserve identity in the host countries. Gradually, due to various factors, significant transformations were brought about in the last fifty years.

8.9 Further Reading

Dubey, Ajay. 2000. "India and experience of Indian Diaspora in Africa." *African Quarterly*.

Tinker, Hugh. 1977. *The Banyan Tree: Overseas Empire from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh*. London: Oxford University Press.

33 This conference was organised by Indian Council of International Co-operation, New Delhi.

34 By paying a one time fee of US\$ one thousand, they can get Multiple entry visas for 20 years. PIO cardholders will have almost all commercial rights as Indian citizens except in case of purchase of agricultural property.

35 Mauritius used the presence of Indians, Europeans, Africans and Chinese for economic and diplomatic gain.