

MEDIA PORTRAYAL OF AFRICAN STUDENTS EXPERIENCE IN INDIA – A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

The task of this paper is to critically and empirically appraise the experience of African students in India as reported in the media in most recent time. In this, it embarked on a historical and analytical examination of Africa-India relations. The paper observes that India has been grossly sabotaged and undermined by image crisis as a result of the unpleasant experience of the African students. The article rallied heavily on secondary data especially media reports. It argued that the perception about Indians by foreign students has not been wholly positive and has paradoxically distorted India's international image. Thus, this paper hinged on a combination of factors, the chief among them been the contradiction and dissonance between India's image projected in the Africa and the daily experience of African students in India. The paper concluded with a call to reposition India's reputation in the minds of African students through a strategic collaborative effort of the government, media, higher education institutions, host communities and the African students.

Keywords: African students, India media, media portrayal, representation, race.

I.INTRODUCTION

India – Africa relations developed since ancient times. India Ocean is what separates Africa and India. Right from the eight century C.E Africans were already in India. There are documents about contacts between Africans and India before the first century C.E. in mid-first century, the Periplus of the Erythraean sea recorded a trade relation between ancient India and the kingdom of Aksum (Casso, 1989).

During the medieval period, relations attained stronger levels as a result of the establishment of trade routes between the Mediterranean and Asia, through Arabia. Fast forward to the 20th century, Bhacker (1992) stated that:

During the British colonial rule in the Indian subcontinent and large parts of Africa, the Indian city of Mumbai was already a center of ivory trade between east Africa and Britain. pg 161

A modern day political relation was greatly enhanced by Mohandas Gandhi stay in south Africa between 1893 and 1915.

India became the fourth largest trading partner of Africa by 2013 when trade between them stood at \$72 billion USD. Meanwhile, in 2011, Africa became India's sixth largest trading partner behind European Union, China, United Arab Emirates, United States of America and ASEAN.

In further demonstrating its tie and friendship, in 2014-2015, India budgeted \$63 million in aid to African countries. The population of African in India is approximately 40,000.

In crafting a formal framework of friendship, for the first time, the India - Africa forum summit which was held from April 4 to April 8, 2008, in new Delhi, India under the South-South cooperation platform was constituted. During the third forum in 2015, Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi while addressing journalists from a number of African publications and TV channels said:

This is a relationship that is beyond strategic considerations. it is a relationship with a strong emotion link. It has been forged by our intersecting history; our countries-old ties of kinship commerce and culture; our common struggle against colonialism; our quest for equality, dignity and justice among all people, and our shared aspirations for our progress and a voice in the world. We are blessed with vast reservoir of mutual goodwill and confidence (the Wire, October 10, 2015).

In the same speech he noted that “in the past three years alone, 25,000 Africans have been trained or educated in India”

The above introduction chronicles the historical, socio-cultural, economical and political ties between the nations of Africa and India which should usually forecast a positive experience of African students in India but the empirical and ethnographical data available point to the contrary.

II. INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS MOBILITY

According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistic (UIS) the number of international mobile students globally has increased to 4 million in 2012 with a 135 percentage increment from 1.7 million in 1995. China has the largest contribution of the world’s mobile students since 1995. India become second largest contributor since 2005 (UNESCO, 2014).

International students are defined as students who have crossed national border and move to another country with the objective of studying (UNESCO-USI, 2013).

Another definition was given by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (2013) that saw it as students who are not usually residents of their country of study i.e. those who have recently moved to the destination (host) country from somewhere else.

As 2012, there were 189,472 Indian students abroad in respect to foreign students. No African country is among the top ten source of internationally mobile students worldwide. India stood at number two (AISHE, 2010-11).

India is gradually emerging as a preferred destination for foreign students, particularly from south Asian region because of the relative low tuition and quality of education in India. As recent as 2011, students from 153 countries were represented in India (AISHE, 2011-12).

Furthermore, all Indian Survey on Higher Education (2011-12) shows that Sudanese are the highest number of African students in India with most of them studying Information Communication Technology related courses. Meanwhile, 76% of foreign students came for undergraduate studies, 18% came for postgraduate and the remaining came for their PhDs. During the same period under view, Ethiopia had the highest number of PhD enrollment in India.

III. THE POSTURE OF INDIAN MEDIA

It is almost impossible to see or read about activities of the African community in India in any Indian newspaper or television except when it has to do with crime and racial problems. African students are grossly non-existing in the Indian socio-cultural, economic and political landscape as far as the media industry is concern.

This creation whether natural, accidental or artificial has robbed the nation through the media- regarded as the fourth estate of the realm, the beautiful opportunity to explore and understand the lives, experiences, diversity and culture of Africans that would aid in enriching the broader Indian debate of nationhood, racial inclusiveness and adoption into the wider global community. So it is high time that the media stepped out to take advantage of the untapped news beat that African students offer occasioned by their presence in the country

On the other side, the Indian media have largely succeeded in projecting it history, culture and taste to the rest of the world including African countries. Little wonder many African countries i.e. Gambia, Ghana, South Africa, Burundi, Nigeria, etc all have yoga clubs, Indian restaurants and Indian culture troupes. Bollywood movies have found their ways into the homes of many Africans for decades.

Additionally, branding itself as an emerging economy with advances in technology, manufacturing, media, medicine, pharmacy, textile, education, Martine and agriculture, it has been able to attract Africans in their large number who visit India either as business men and women, medical tourism or students.

For the Africans in India, it seems they are unprepared to engage the nation in meaningful dialogue through presenting their academic activities, lives in their various countries and things of interest via the instrumentality of the media that is currently the most potent voice on planet earth. They portray an attitude of waiting for the media to come to them instead of reaching out to the media. The media might not take the first step as it has a different yardstick of judging new worthiness and issues of public interest.

Until the African students and continent start creating their own stories, Indians and her media might have no better option than to keep imposing their own constructed realities on Africans

The above accounts explain the common place experience that Africans have to daily contend with while in India. Language barrier has aided in widening the chasm between Indians and Africans

IV. PERCEPTION AND ATTITUDES OF INDIANS TOWARDS AFRICANS

1. They think Africans are into fraud and prostitution
2. Assumption that Africans are rude and have too many friends
3. Believe that black people are poor
4. Africans are boisterous, move around even in the night and like to party
5. Believe that Africa is underdeveloped and Africans are uncivilized
6. Children running away, women shutting their door and people staring hard at Africans
7. Drugs addict and drug peddlers
8. Rude comments about the appearance and dressing of Africans
9. Forgery of academic certificates
10. Trafficking in stolen documents

A Tanzanian alumnus of Hyderabad's Osmania University in an interview said "someone may leave their seat on a full bus to avoid sitting next to you"

V. UGLY EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN STUDENTS IN INDIA

From a number of media reports including the Hindu, Indian express, Aljazeera:

1. In Punjab alone, African students have been victims of racial violence. At least three horrific incidents in the recent past.
2. Punjab police refers to African students as kale (blacks) in the FIRS for petty or big crimes registered against them
3. On the afternoon of July 2, 2013, Wandoh Timothy was beaten by a group of inebriated men in his neighborhood in Bengaluru till he was unconscious, leaving him, on the road. He was hospitalized afterwards.
4. African students are often denied apartment on realizing that they are blacks.
5. May 2016, a 23-year old Nigerian was assaulted with iron rod by a local resident after the two got into an argument over parking on May 22. The incident took place at Banjara Hills.
6. September 2015, a 23-year old Congolese Borguy Mavinga was tied to a pole and beaten up by some local residents in Kammanahalli. His offence was that he was playing loud music in his car.
7. In 2014, former Delhi law minister Somnath Bharti allegedly approved of and led a midnight raid in a house in Khirki extension in South Delhi, charging it residents with prostitution and drug peddling.
8. November 2013, a Nigerian national, Obado Uzoma Simeon was found stabbed to death by local residents.
9. Mansonda Ketada Oliver, was beaten to death by three youths in May 20, 2016 after a verbal altercation over the hiring of auto-rickshaw in South Delhi.
10. In 2010, the body of Imran Mtui, a Tanzanian national was found beheaded at the railway track near Bengaluru.
11. In 2014, three African students at a metro station in new Delhi chased and beaten upon a basis that they had harassed a girl
12. In 2012, Yannick Nihangaza, a Burundi national, a student at Lovely Professional University in Jalandar was beaten senselessly by a group of locals. He died after being in coma for two years. The son of a superintendent of police was one of his assailants.
13. May 2014, Goa's Art and Culture Minister Dayanand Mandrekar described Nigerians as "cancer".
14. Being charge higher rates than what locals pay by landlords and even difficulty in getting their security deposits back from the landlords.
15. January 31, 2016, witnessed the assault of a Tanzanian student who had alleged that she was stripped and beaten by a mob.

The above account gives a summative picture of the psychological and physiological tumors that African students frequently experience in India. The irony of it all is that Africans and their governments appear to be powerless in the whole episode.

VI. REACTIONS OF AFRICANS TO THEIR EXPERIENCE

In May 2016, the dean of the African Diplomatic Corps in Delhi, Alem Tsehage Woldermariam, ambassador of Eritrea said:

That all the heads of mission had met and deliberated extensively on the latest incident in the series of attacks which members of the African community have been subjected to in the last several years in India” (Mitra, 2016)

Woldermariam added that the foreign envoys noted “deep concern that several attacks and harassments of Africans in India have gone unresolved without diligent prosecution and conviction of perpetrators” (Mitra, 2016).

Similarly, Jacob Nwadiibia an administrative attaché of the Nigerian High Commission in Delhi was reported by Aljazeera in 2013 as saying there are over a million Indians living in Nigeria and if the Indian government do not address the racism issues then the Indians in Nigeria might face the same uncharitable treatments (Soumya, 2013).

In another occasion, reacting to the statement made in June 2016 by Ravi Naik, a former Indian Goa chief minister on Nigerians who said Nigerians should be banned from entering India while those already in should be asked to leave, Abike Dabiri-Erewa, Senior Special Assistant (SSA) to president Buhari on foreign affairs and Diaspora describe the statement as “condescending and unacceptable” (Odunsi, 2016).

Going beyond words, as a response to this racism and killing of Africans, a few hundreds of Africans in February 2016 protested at India’s Silicon Valley holding posters and shouting slogans but there was also a strange air of amusement and bewilderment at the protest site. The policemen sniggered, speaking among themselves. Some passersby openly laughed, entertained by the sight of a group of agitating African students. Others simply walked by unperturbed (Quartz India, 2016)

VII. REASONS FOR AFRICAN STUDENTS INFLUX INTO INDIA

1. Underfunding and mismanagement has stripped African universities of their reputation
2. India’s relatively quality education that is also inexpensive compared to Europe and North America
3. Indian’s Higher education system which is now one of the largest in the world, with over 26 million enrolled at the post-secondary level.
4. Improper verification system of credentials and low admission requirement by Indian universities have prompted or encouraged Africans who would ordinarily be unqualified or illegible for enrollment into African universities to patronize Indian universities

VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. High-profile conviction of perpetrators in case involving attacks on citizens of African countries.
2. Media campaign to prevent the creation of an image problem for Indians so that the rest of the world will not believe that India is still saddled with 19th century prejudices.
3. The media should actively monitor actions taken in each case and report accordingly.
4. Indian media should report on Africa and her developmental activities in order to educate Indians on the beauty and uniqueness of the African people and continent.

5. Government agencies, media and school authorities should collaborate in conducting sensitization exercises for locals to know the rich culture experience and other benefits of hosting foreigners in their communities.
6. Law enforcement authorities should be proactive towards case involving African students and remain impartial when handling same. Some kind of training might be necessary for this to be made possible.
7. Recognition of the economic benefits inherent in having foreign students in India as most of them are not employed within India but rather serve as a source of foreign exchange earnings for the country.
8. African students on their part should be law abiding and avoid all forms of provocative behavior while residing in India.
9. African students ought to deliberately seek to understand and appreciate the culture of their host country. This endeavor is part of holistic education.
10. African students and their governments should purposely start telling their own stories in the Indian media

IX. CONCLUSION

African-India relations has come a long way in all strategic areas - military, commerce, technology, medicine and education. The two have mutually benefited greatly from each other and are bound to gain much more in the present millennium if their relationship become more practical, supportive and appreciative of their socio-cultural diversity and less theoretical. Accordingly, image-building forms an essential element in the strategy for foreign policy formulation and implementation, so India should create a welcoming environment for foreign students especially those of African origins.

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