

The Widening Scope of Indo-African Relations and Its Challenges

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Abstract- Over the last few decades India's engagement with Africa has undergone a considerable shift. With Africa emerging as a new growing economy, various sovereign states are vying for the opportunity to partake in this developmental process. This paper aims at understanding how India has integrated herself into the African continent.

Keywords- Africa, engagement, growing economy, opportunity, developmental process, integrated, India

"There is some self-interest behind every friendship. There is no friendship without self-interests. This is the bitter truth."- Chanakya¹

I. INTRODUCTION

India and Africa have shared long and deep historical ties. The engagement between India and the African countries can be traced to their shared common colonial heritage, common developmental challenges and challenges posed to security by the shared waters of the Indian Ocean.

Over the years there has been a visible shift in India's engagement with African countries both on the bilateral and regional levels. The regional level shift can be witnessed in the increased dialogues with the regional economic communities and organizations like the Common market for Eastern and Southern Africa, the Economic community of West African States etc. The relationship with the African continent has been institutionalised with the organization of India- Africa Forum Summits. The framework of cooperation adopted at these summits gives an outline for areas of future cooperation between the continent as a whole and India. The continental approach is built on the idea that it will give rise to a commitment that is aimed at the deepening of the process of African integration and recognising the various diversities that individual countries have to offer. Further, India being a champion for alternative energy sources in order to address climate change and also to reduce the dependence on oil imports, has deepened ties with Africa. This shift in the policy is mainly to accommodate India's growing commercial and strategic interests in Africa while keeping with the traditional policy of empowering Africa.

II. ADDRESSING VARIOUS SECURITY THREATS TOGETHER

With the change in worldview, definitions accorded to various concepts have also been forced to undergo a change. The same could be said for the change to the

definition of Security. The term security has undergone a shift from the traditional definition accorded to it pre Cold War era. The traditional notion was one which was of a state centred military security. The non-traditional view that has arisen is that along with state- centred military security, there now exists non-military as well as non- traditional security concerns. These new concerns pose compounded ramifications to states which are increasingly globalized and ensuring that the ramifications are not isolated but have a ripple effect.

Africa has become a high priority in recent years with the inception of the India-Africa Summits. The Third Summit of 2015 saw the creation of two very important documents namely the Delhi Declaration and the India-Africa Framework for Strategic Cooperation. These documents have served as foundation for the development of relations with regards to political, economic, social, scientific and various spheres.

India has taken up the role of providing security and conflict resolution across the continent by being involved in the UN peace keeping missions. Further, it has enhanced skills of African officers from various countries by imparting them training at various Indian military academies. The Indian navy is also deployed in the Indian Ocean region in order to avert the threats of tsunami, piracy and various other natural disasters. This has played to India's strategic advantage, since there have always been concerns regarding security against piracy off the Horn of Africa. The Indian navy has proved to be efficient in tackling the menace of piracy and has broadened its sphere of activity. It has contributed to the security of small island states and provided patrolling to the Exclusive Economic Zones of Mauritius and Seychelles. The scope was further widened with the requests to carry out hydraulic surveys and providing assistance in the establishment of coastal radar networks. So in reality the role of providing security to the littoral states has transformed into a gradual integration into the African Maritime sector which has huge economic potential.

However, there exists a perception that India is hesitant to provide security assistance in spaces which it deems to be geopolitically unimportant. This view point arose when there was an increase in the pirate attacks on the Gulf of Guinea, which is situated on the West Coast of Africa. These attacks clearly portrayed India's inability to contribute substantively to the West African security needs. Leading to the perception that India was more interested in the security

¹Chanakya an Indian political thinker wrote this in circa 300BC

needs of countries which fell in the political influence of the Indian Ocean Rim.

In order to remove this perception there exists a need for India to portray herself in another dimension. This can be achieved by increasing awareness in the African continent that the major challenge faced by them is not piracy but a lack of proper and effective governance in the maritime commons. This lack of proper and effective governance has led to the illegal capture of various maritime natural resources of the Exclusive Economic Zones, drug smuggling and trafficking of arms and the widespread and unchecked discharge of pollutants into the oceans. India can provide apt assistance in these avenues and even help in the governance process thereby showing that the entire continent of Africa has considerable geopolitical significance to India. This approach would further reinforce that this strategy not only seeks to address various security concerns but that it also offers an opportunity to improve the lives of African people by creating a model of sustainable maritime development. Since the concept of blue economy is still evolving and there does not exist a fixed static definition, it has provided India a lot of leeway in its engagements with African countries.

III. NEED FOR A SUSTAINABLE BLUE ECONOMY

Blue economy is aimed at promoting smart, sustainable and inclusive growth and employment. This focus on blue economy was driven by the recognition that there indeed exists a large untapped potential in the maritime space. Further, this concept was fuelled by the fact that a large part of the African economic activities are reliant on the oceans. A similar reliance can be witnessed in the Indian trade scenario where almost 97% of the trade takes place over the seas.

India and the Africa continent are amongst a few sovereigns that share their shores with the Indian Ocean. The Indian Ocean faces a lot of economic as well as sustainable developmental issues since it is surrounded mainly by littoral states that are in their developmental stages. Since, almost a third of the world's population relies extensively and exclusively on the resources of the Indian ocean for both livelihood and food security, it is under a lot of stress. That is caused by unchecked pollution in the form of untreated discharge, habitation degradation and over exploitation of marine resources. These have led to compounded consequences over the years with the rising sea levels, ocean acidification and extreme weather conditions. Hence there is a need to ensure that blue economy adopted by these littoral states is aimed more towards conservation and sustainable use of the ocean.

In order to ensure that the blue economy provides a holistic and all round approach, six priority sectors were identified. These sectors are: Fisheries and Aquaculture, Renewable Ocean Energy, Seaports and Shipping, Offshore hydrocarbon and seabed minerals, Marine Biotechnology Research and Development and Tourism. Further the Indian

government has articulated this in terms of SAGAR- which is Security and Growth for All in the Region. Under this aegis the Kenyan government was invited to visit and see the expertise of the Cochin Shipyard Limited in building ships that would be utilised by the newly established coast guard of Kenya as well as deep sea fishing trawlers.

Further, the Indian government has come up with a revolutionized maritime logistics plan called Sagarmala. This is focused on port led developments and the development of coastal communities and people through a programme of skill gap analysis. Under this programme various skill development centres would be established for the sustainable use of ocean resources, improving coastal tourism and imparting modern fishing techniques to the coastal communities. Furthermore several green initiatives have been undertaken in these coastal regions, utilization of solar power to generate energy at various ports, installation of oil spill response facilities and studies to reduce pollution and reuse the water used at the ports. This idea of Sagarmala can also be implemented in littoral African countries. This would ensure proper sustainable and port led blue economy. This in turn would give rise for new avenues of interaction between India and the African continent and both countries could gain from this economically as well. Further, since India has not only expertise but also experience in these spheres it is better suited to be a champion for climate change and sustainable development of the maritime resources.

One of the biggest hurdles faced by blue economy is that it involves a very large and complex regulatory landscape which is governed by individual and divergent sovereign laws. Further in addition to the common binding international laws, there are also various diverse regional additions to these laws as well. These additional laws primarily govern fishing regulations, which lack proper standards and enforcement mechanisms, which have arisen due to limited data sharing and capacity constraints of the various sovereigns.

Moreover rapid urbanization, industrialization and migration have led to over exploitation of natural marine resources. This has been the result of the rapid geopolitical and economic rise of Africa. Therefore there is a need to ensure that there are effective policies and enforcement measures in place in order to handle not only the sudden boom but also to ensure that there is appropriate management of the marine ecosystem. This can be achieved by integrating various methods of scientific management. To this end an inclusive overreaching multilateral framework can be arrived at amongst these sovereign states. This framework could cover allocation of fishing rights, addressing pollution concerns, measures to address climate change and issues covering various other marine rights. This would help reduce the regulatory burden that arises out of multiple treaties and governance norms that exist in different overlapping areas along the same coast.

IV. THE CHINESE THREAT

Historically China's engagement with Africa commenced in the form of cultural cooperation that started in the wake of the Sino-African Development cooperation of 1955. However, the real pull of Chinese presence was witnessed only after the colonial era, with the heavy investment of China in African infrastructure. On the other hand during that period India focused on relations which were primarily focused on political engagements which aimed at promoting global peace and international cooperation. This was achieved under the aegis of the Non- Aligned Movement. India's interaction with Africa became more economic oriented post 1990's.

India and China in their aim to ensure that the world becomes multipolar have become two of the world's leading emerging economies. Both these countries have built strong economic relations with African countries in order to achieve this objective. Over the last few decades the relations of India has depended with Africa, which has become home to several of the fastest growing economies of the world. This has been possible due to the contributions of both India and China to not only the volume but also to the value of the African goods. Further there is no dispute that these two countries have become the most important economic partner of Africa and this has changed the way international relations are viewed in this area. Since, they have managed to erode the monopoly that the west had over Africa. They have managed to obtain leverage over the west by courting investments in various strategic sectors of African economies, which has allowed them to gain access to the growing markets and have unfettered access to the raw materials that Africa has to offer.

Both the countries have utilised various strategies in order to gain influence. The Chinese have relied on utilizing state owned enterprises in order to dominate the investments while Indian investments are mainly driven by private actors. Since, the Chinese model is state driven it has adopted a more aggressive approach. These state owned enterprises of China enjoy both political and financial support which helps them undercut other competition in the African market. India's private sector is struggling to catch up with the Chinese but the lack of financial and political support of the Indian state has made the playing field uneven for the Indian Private sector in Africa. This trend has been witnessed as early as 2006 with the Angola bid and the large Ethiopian Rail Project. Further on the political front also India is striving hard to outdo China by trying to attract more African countries to participate in the India- African summits. It is true that China has more clout than India which has given it an incontestable economic and trading advantage. These advantages range from trade volume and preferential tariffs to scope of diplomatic influences. Hence, there arose a need for India to identify various attributes that could distinguish India from China in such a way that they offer a strategic advantage to India in the long run.

India has succeeded in carving out a niche in the information and telecommunication sector as well as the education and health service sector. These are projects that require sizeable investment from India. In the long run African countries will recognize that what India has to offer is not only quantity but also enhanced quality of their countries economic growth. Further, India has been successful in protecting African countries from the "Dutch Disease"- wherein dependence on the export of natural resources coupled with a high exchange rate tends to curb the productivity and international competitiveness of the domestic economies. The Indian strategy is focused on stimulating local productivity with more emphasis on the private sectors growth.

India has stepped up to the plate by utilizing its advantage in the East African coast as a potential security provider. The treats of piracy along the coasts of Somalia and other East African countries had provided the Indian Navy with an opportunity to develop Maritime security in the area. This in the long term would help counter the growing treat of Chinese military bases across Africa and the dreaded "String of Pearls Theory".

V. THE ASIA- AFRICA GROWTH CORRIDOR: PARTNERSHIP FOR SUSTAINABLE AND INNOVATIVE DEVELOPMENT

The Asia Africa Corridor is one of the newest initiatives of India in Africa. It is interesting to note that this initiative is not a bilateral one but a trilateral one which involves a partnership with Japan as well. This partnership is very significant since it not only highlights the importance that Africa has in Indian foreign policy but also showcases India's willingness to align with other countries which have similar interests. Further one could say that this Asia Africa Corridor is an amalgamation of India's "Act East" policy and Japan's "Free and Open Indo Pacific" aspirations.

The common past struggles faced by both these continents offers them a large scope for cooperation. It is a well-known fact that the East Asian economies have been on an upward growth. On the other hand African economies are slowly prospering as well. They have come together on many occasions over the last few decades and this is visible in bilateral forms which have become a global force to reckon with. Since, these two continents now represent the single voice of the developing world. This ensures that both continents have enormous gains to achieve from the successful implementation of the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor.

The vision document of the Asia- Africa Growth Corridor was presented at the Africa Development Bank's Annual Meeting on 25th may, 2017 in Ahmedabad. Four pillars were created in order to enhance the linkage of the economies. These four pillars are development and cooperation projects, quality infrastructure and institutional connectivity, enhancing capacities and skills and people to

people partnership. The main focus of this growth corridor is to ensure capacity building as well as expansion of the manufacturing base and trade relations between Africa and Asia. This in the long term would ensure that this region would emerge as a region of economic geopolitical importance.

Viewing the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor a mere developmental and cooperation plan between two continents would be reducing its significance considerably. In reality it promotes the freedom of movement of people, goods, services and capital across the various regional as well as international borders. This is facilitated since the main importance of the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor is accorded to growth of Africa which is driven by trade, investment and cooperation. This is structured in such a manner so as to improve the socioeconomic and human developmental indicators in areas where industrialization is undertaken under this corridor.

India has played a vital role in the capacity building, infrastructural sector and the energy sector of Africa. Having provided Africa with not only affordable but also appropriate technology it has helped the various states execute numerous projects over the year. Further, India has ensured that all her engagements with Africa have followed the model of cooperation that is in response to the needs of the sovereign states. Japan has played a very strong role in the Official Development Assistance programme across the continent. This has made low cost of capital and high savings possible with regards to the funding for various developmental activities. Japan brings to the table great expertise in the field of designing, planning and hardware infrastructure especially in the manufacturing sector.

The Asia-Africa Growth Corridor can also be viewed as a counter to the reservations that both India and Japan have with regards to China's Belt and Road Initiative. Also, India

has officially expressed strong decent against the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor stating that it affects India's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Similarly, Japan has been reluctant to demonstrate overt support to the Belt Road Initiative and has only given conditional support. This is mainly because Japan feels that it is necessary for infrastructure to be open to the use of all and that all developmental activities should take place through procedures which should be transparent and fair. So, one could argue that the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor was set up to counter balance the growing influence of China in the region.

VI. CONCLUSION

India has managed to create a niche for itself in the heart of the emerging economies of Africa. It has not only managed to ensure that all its interactions cater to the needs of the African continents. This has led to India becoming an indispensable ally of Africa. Further, it has managed to thwart China's String of Pearls Theory by having a very strong naval presence in the region. Moreover the partnership with Japan has shown that India is willing to collaborate with other state to enhance the overall prosperity of Africa. Thus, showing that India is transparent in all dealing with regards to Africa.

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