

Prejudice,  
Discrimination  
and Racism against  
Africans and Siddhis  
in India



# Prejudice, Discrimination and Racism against Africans and Siddhis in India

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To all Black people who have suffered racial prejudice,  
discrimination and racism; yesterday, today or tomorrow.

What! When it was I who had every reason to hate, to despise, I was rejected? When I should have been begged, implored, I was denied the slightest recognition? I resolved, since it was impossible for me to get away from an *inborn complex*, to assert myself as a BLACKMAN. Since the other hesitated to recognise me, there remained only one solution: to make myself known<sup>1</sup>.

Shame. Shame and self-contempt. Nausea. When people like me, they tell me it is in spite of my color. When they dislike me, they point out that it is not because of my color. Either way, I am locked into the infernal circle<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann., First ed. (London: Pluto Press, 1952), 115.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements .....	ix
Foreword .....	xi
<i>Souleymane Bachir Diagne</i>	
Chapter One.....	1
Caste System and the Racialization of Blackness: An Introduction	
<i>Ibrahima Diallo</i>	
Chapter Two .....	15
Meet the Africans in India	
<i>Mahesh Shantaram</i>	
Chapter Three .....	25
Racism towards Africans in India: Focus on Congolese Students in New Delhi	
<i>Rolf Ondon</i>	
Chapter Four.....	43
Siddhis and Africans in India: Embattled Dignity within Classificatory Systems	
<i>Pashington Obeng and Fiona Jamal Almeida</i>	
Chapter Five .....	57
Beyond the Language of Colour, through the Lens of “Race”	
<i>Rohini Rai</i>	
Chapter Six.....	79
Slavery—An African-Indian Conceptualisation	
<i>Shobana Shankar</i>	
Chapter Seven.....	99
Affinities between West Africa and India: Evidence from Cultural and Linguistic Similarities	
<i>Ibrahima Diallo and Mamadou Ndiaye</i>	

Chapter Eight.....	113
Indian and African Women in Leadership: Indira Gandhi, Wangari Maathai and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, 1947-2012 <i>Mutiat Titilope Oladejo</i>	
Afterword .....	129
<i>Aparajita Biswas</i>	
Notes on Contributors.....	133

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My gratitude goes to the contributors to this book for submitting their articles and to all the reviewers for taking time to methodically and comprehensively review the contributions.



## FOREWORD

### SOULEYMANE BACHIR DIAGNE

Given that my own academic endeavour also explores a great deal the concept of “horizontal universality” as the ethical aim of translation, I was delighted to accept the invitation to preface this edited book, which I see as an illustration of the spirit of Bandung.

When Leopold Sédar Senghor, one of the key figures of the *négritude* movement, was president of Senegal between 1960 and 2001, he encouraged Senegalese scholars to travel to India to do research on the cultural traits, belief systems, and language similarities and affinities of Africa and Dravidian India, in short, the cultural and people-to-people relationships between Africa and India. Further, in the lecture he delivered at the International Institute of Tamil Studies in Madras on May 23, 1974, Senghor called for scholars from a range of backgrounds, including geologists, archaeologists, marine biologists, linguists, historians and anthropologists, to marshal their research efforts to research the links (a word to be understood literally) between Africa and India. He also reminded his audience that before the separation of the different regions of the world, what is known as the Indian subcontinent was attached to East Africa. The seventh chapter in this volume by Ibrahima Diallo and Mamadou Ndiaye, “Affinities between West Africa and India: evidence from cultural and linguistic similarities”, is an answer to Senghor’s call.

In addition, Senghor’s project regarding convergences between India and Africa was not limited to the (pre)historical and linguistic study of affinities between these two important regions of the world but was also an expression of what we can call the spirit of Bandung, which occupied a central place in Senghor’s projects. The spirit of Bandung emanates from the 1955 conference in Bandung in Indonesia, which was attended by twenty-nine African and Asian countries and during which both colonialism and South African apartheid were unanimously condemned. Following this influential conference, Senghor wrote that the Bandung Conference marked a turning point in the twentieth century because it was the proclamation of the fundamental principle that there can be no justification for colonising other people. Beyond the fact that 1955 symbolically marked the end of

colonialism, the simple fact that Asia and Africa met without Europe was another proclamation and also an important endeavour in the anticolonial struggle and black redemption project. These are major aspects of Senghor's expression "the spirit of Bandung".

The paramount message of Bandung, its very spirit, was that the model of a world with Europe at its centre and the rest of the world forming its periphery was dead, and the model was inevitably going to be replaced by a network with no centre or periphery: horizontal relationships would be developed between regions of the world that would not need to go through Europe, which would become a province just like any other on earth. According to Maurice Merleau-Ponty, a French philosopher, post-Bandung history was the time for "horizontal or lateral universality": a universality through the encounter of cultures and languages, all equivalent, and not one that Europe would claim to represent.

This volume is a perfect illustration of what it means to aim for a universal message to be produced by the convergence between India and Africa. Most importantly, the contributions warn us that such a convergence is not a given and is not to be idealised or romanticised either. Rather, it is to be constructed despite considerable obstacles: the remnants of slavery, the caste system and racism in India. The fact that India was one of the destinations of the slave trade that uprooted so many Africans from the continent needs to be acknowledged. The fact that today's racism towards Africans in India is deeply connected to the structural colourism and caste racism rampant in India is also examined in this volume, which calls for study and action. Even though it is not the focus of this volume, a chapter examining the lived experience of Indians in Africa would have shown the reverse racism, and would have acknowledged that Indians have also been/are victims of racism on the African continent. The best-known case took place in Uganda, where Idi Amin stripped many South Asians (mostly Indians) of their Ugandan citizenship and most were forced into exile.

Maybe the unfortunate attitude of the young Gandhi vis-à-vis black Africans, while living in South Africa before he later adopted his universal embrace of all races and castes, is the best metaphor for what the construction of convergence between India and Africa should mean. In other words, the task is to create this horizontal universality as a response to the worshippers of what Muhammad Iqbal, a great Indian philosopher and poet, labelled "the idols of race and tribes". In the present context, marked by the rise of populisms everywhere in the world and the hardening of ethno-nationalisms, thus creating divisions and erecting

walls around reactive and self-enclosed identities, this book contributes to the combat against those idols. In the spirit of Bandung.

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## CHAPTER ONE

# CASTE SYSTEM AND THE RACIALIZATION OF BLACKNESS: AN INTRODUCTION

IBRAHIMA DIALLO

### **On racial prejudice, discrimination and racism**

People generally use racial prejudice, discrimination and racism interchangeably to mean the same thing in different contexts or different things in different contexts, because the definition of these concepts is elusive and problematic. In this book, we use Jones' definition, which refers to prejudice as applying "a faulty generalisation from a group characterisation (stereotype) to an individual member of the group irrespective of either a) the accuracy of the group stereotype in the first place, or b) the applicability of the group characterisation to the individual in question"<sup>1</sup>. The type of attitude mentioned in this definition, when applied to race, becomes the framework for racial prejudice. Other definitions of racial prejudice are available, including that it is "an attitude of hostility and hatred toward persons and peoples based on negative assumptions about biology and culture"<sup>2</sup>. As shown in these two definitions, racial prejudice expresses an attitude (negative or positive) and a belief (assumption or over-generalisation) based on the colour of the skin. In short, "racial prejudice has three major components: it is negative in nature (hatred, fear or dislike),

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<sup>1</sup> James M. Jones, "Racism: A Cultural Analysis of the Problem," in *Prejudice, Discrimination, and Racism*, ed. John F. Dovidio and Samuel L. Gaertner (San Diego, CA, US: Academic Press, 1986), 288.

<sup>2</sup> Sdonline, "Du Bois and the Question of the Color Line: Race and Class in the Age of Globalization," *Journal of the Research Group Socialism and Democracy* 17, no. 1 (2011), <http://sdonline.org/33/du-bois-and-the-question-of-the-color-line-race-and-class-in-the-age-of-globalization/>.

based on faulty or unsubstantiated data, and rooted in an inflexible generalisation”<sup>3</sup>.

As for racial discrimination, it refers to “selectively unjustified negative behaviour toward members of the target group”<sup>4</sup>. In racial discrimination, skin colour is also the basis of the negative behaviour and occurs when the negative behaviour is expressed or leads to action: “racial discrimination is any action that differently treats individuals or groups of color based on prejudice”<sup>5</sup>.

Racism, which is certainly the most frequently used of these three concepts, denotes “the imposition of this attitude [racial prejudice] as social policy and social practice. In other words, racism is a system of denial, deformation and destruction of a people’s history, humanity and right to freedom based exclusively or primarily on the specious concept of race”<sup>6</sup>. There are other definitions of racism that inform the framing of racism in this book, especially a definition in which racism is “the belief that some races are inherently superior (physically, intellectually, or culturally) to others and therefore have a right to dominate them”<sup>7</sup>. From these two definitions it appears that “racism is any attitude, action, or institutional structure or any social policy that subordinates persons or groups because of their color”<sup>8</sup>. Racism or colour racism is expressed and maintained in terms of power and privilege. In this book, the examination of racial prejudice, discrimination and racism faced by sub-Saharan Africans and Siddhis is limited to colour racism which is socially, culturally and politically constructed.

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<sup>3</sup> Derald Wing Sue, *Overcoming Our Racism: The Journey to Liberation* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2003), 25.

<sup>4</sup> John F. Dovidio and Samuel L. Gaertner, "Prejudice, Discrimination, and Racism: Historical Trends and Contemporary Approaches," in *Prejudice, Discrimination, and Racism*, ed. John F. Dovidio and Samuel L. Gaertner (San Diego: Academic Press 1986), 3.

<sup>5</sup> Sue, *Overcoming Our Racism: The Journey to Liberation*, 29.

<sup>6</sup> Maulana Karenga, *Introduction to Black Studies* (Los Angeles: University of Sankore Press, 2002; repr., 3), 305.

<sup>7</sup> "Racism," in *The New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know*, ed. E. D. Hirsch, Jr., Joseph F. Kett, and James Trefil (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 2002).

<sup>8</sup> Sue, *Overcoming Our Racism: The Journey to Liberation*, 31.

## **Focus of the book**

This book explores racial prejudice, discrimination and racism towards sub-Saharan Africans and Siddhis in India. The book also discusses certain affinities between India and sub-Saharan Africa evidenced by similarities in language, culture and belief systems as well as by shared ideas across these areas prompted by both colonial and post-colonial conditions. Specifically, the book focuses on the ways in which the caste system has contributed to the racialisation of Blackness in Indian society. Blackness refers to Black people in general, but in this book, I use it to refer to sub-Saharan Africans and Siddhis, who are Indians of African descent.

The book is a powerful and poignant account of the lived experiences of sub-Saharan Africans and Siddhis in India. It shows facets of what it means to be a sub-Saharan African or a Siddhi in today's India. It thus offers a perspective on how to contextually understand racial prejudice, discrimination and racism towards Blackness in India. In this sense, this book is unique: on the one hand, it investigates racial prejudice, discrimination and racism towards Blackness with rich contributions from different perspectives, and on the other hand, it explores sites of affinities between India and Africa based on similarities in languages and cultures as well as shared colonial and post-colonial experiences.

The book is also timely because it is an important contribution to the understanding of racial prejudice, discrimination and racism towards sub-Saharan Africans and Siddhis in this racially, culturally and religiously complex and hierarchical Indian society.

## **Caste system and the racialisation of Blackness**

Broadly speaking, the caste system divides Hindu society into four distinct hierarchical categories; called *varnas*. These categories were originally determined mainly by social function and occupation. The first group, at the top of the *varna* ranking, are the Brahmans, or priests and advisers; the second group are the Kshatriyas, or warriors and rulers; the third group are the Vaisyas, or traders and landowners; and the fourth group of the ranking are the Shudras, who are serfs and labourers. Membership of each of these four categories is permanent and hereditary. However, outside these four categories or *varnas*, there is a fifth category called Dalits or "Untouchables" who are at the bottom of the social ranking. The Dalits are outside the *varna* categorisation as they are considered "impure", "polluted" and "polluting" unlike the *varnas* who are pure. Therefore, any physical or social contact between *varnas* and Dalits must be avoided. In addition to

these categories (*varnas* and Dalits), the caste system includes also the *jatis*, who are “a group which is endogamous, speaking one language, living in one area of India and with accepted traditions and customs”<sup>9</sup>. According to Waughray, there are approximately three thousand *jatis*. However, unlike the *varna*'s immutability in ranking, social mobility, under certain exceptional circumstances, is possible, as “contestation of *jati* ranking has always occurred”<sup>10</sup>.

Because of the strict ranking and categorisation of the caste system, the Dalits are victims of the caste system, which marginalises and exploits them. According to Waughray, “the Dalits in contemporary India experience stigmatisation, disadvantage, discrimination and violence on the grounds of their ascribed hereditary status as ‘Untouchable’” [...] <sup>11</sup>. Further, the Dalits are also victims of atrocious attacks in India. According to Zelliott, “violence against Dalits is most often found in the villages. There are slights, humiliations and at times restrictions in housing and jobs in the cities of India”<sup>12</sup>. The plight of the Dalits is echoed by Ghanshyam, who highlighted that:

the official statistics for the decade 1990–2000 indicate that a total of 285,871 cases of various crimes against Dalits were registered ... under the Anti-Untouchability Act [or] the Prevention of Atrocities Act. These include 553 cases of murder, 2,990 cases of grievous hurt, 919 rapes, 184 kidnappings/abductions, 127 robberies, 456 cases of arson, 1,403 cases of caste discrimination and 8,179 cases of atrocities ... These official figures only capture the tip of the iceberg<sup>13</sup>.

Based on the discussion above, the plight of the Dalits is comparable to the lived experiences of sub-Saharan Africans and Siddhis in contemporary India. Like the Dalits, the sub-Saharan Africans and the Siddhis face discrimination, violence, marginalisation and racism in India. For example, the Indian as well as international media have recently reported extensively on atrocities towards the sub-Saharan Africans in India, including the murder of a Nigerian national in Passa in Goa in broad daylight on 2 November 2013. This horrible event was followed by other violent

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<sup>9</sup> Eleanor Zelliott, "India's Dalits: Racism and Contemporary Change," *Global Dialogue* 12, no. 2 (2010): 3.

<sup>10</sup> Annapurna Waughray, "Caste Discrimination and Minority Rights: The Case of India's Dalits," *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights* 17, no. 2 (2010): 328.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 329.

<sup>12</sup> Zelliott, "India's Dalits: Racism and Contemporary Change," 1.

<sup>13</sup> Ghanshyam Shah et al., eds., *Untouchability in Rural India* (New Delhi, Thousand Oaks and London: Sage Publications, 2006), 134-5.

incidents: in July 2013, a Chadian national was assaulted in broad daylight by a mob in Bangalore. In 2016, a young Congolese student was brutally murdered in New Delhi and a Tanzanian woman was assaulted and stripped in Bangalore. Prior to these violent attacks, in January 2014 in New Delhi, the then law minister, Somnath Bharti (of the Aam Aadmi Party), with a group of his supporters led a midnight raid on the apartment of some Nigerian and Ugandan women in Khirki (Delhi) on the grounds that they were running a drug and prostitution racket. The African women were forcibly taken to hospital to be given urine tests. Further, the various contributions in this book provide detailed accounts of racial prejudice, discrimination and racism towards sub-Saharan Africans and Siddhis. For example, Chapter Two focuses on the atrocious experiences of Congolese students and their fears in Delhi. Chapter Four examines how the lives of both Siddhis and sub-Saharan Africans in India are marked by discrimination, marginalisation and racism. The remaining chapters, except for Chapters Seven and Eight, also address racial prejudice, discrimination and racism towards sub-Saharan Africans in India.

These atrocious acts of violence and the undignified behaviours towards sub-Saharan Africans and Siddhis in many parts of India reported in the media and discussed in this book do not only expose racial issues in India but they also bring to the foreground India's deep-rooted caste system and the ways in which it has impacted on the racialisation of Blackness in India. The impact of the caste system on the Dalits is so similar to the impact of racial prejudice, discrimination and racism on sub-Saharan Africans and Siddhis that many people believe that the caste system fosters and makes inevitable racial prejudice, discrimination and racism against Blackness in India. In short, the argument is that the caste-based system is extended to become a race-based system and applied to Blackness, meaning sub-Saharan Africans and Siddhis. Theoretically, race is not central to the ways in which the caste system is structured and the ways it operates. Nonetheless, it occupies an important place. The dominant *varna* class is primarily of Indo-Aryan phenotype, while the oppressed Dalits are primarily of non-Indo-Aryan phenotype, essentially dark-skinned, thereby suggesting a symbolic differentiation constructed on race because the same causes seem to produce the same results. The quote below supports this point on race in the caste system:

Dalit activists suggest that the colour bias is largely on account of the fact that India has had the caste system in place for about 2,000 years and the Dalits and tribals who were placed at the bottom of the hierarchy are for the most dark-skinned.

“When I see a black person, I see my own image — in him. I see a Dalit. Caste is not race but the impact is similar,” says Dalit activist Chandra Bhan Prasad<sup>14</sup>.

Indeed, there are calls for the caste system to be treated on a par with racism. For example, Mr. H. Suresh, a former High Court judge in Bombay, argued that “caste, as an institution itself, is a source of violation of human rights. Therefore, it must be treated on par with the existence of racism and apartheid”<sup>15</sup>.

Based on the discussion above, it could be argued that the role, influence and framework provided by the caste system are instrumental in the racialisation of Blackness in India. However, accounting for racial prejudice, discrimination and racism towards sub-Saharan Africans and Siddhis by the caste system alone is simplistic and incomplete. Racial prejudice, discrimination and racism towards Black people in India are very complex. To examine and understand these practices in India, it is critical to examine the historical, sociocultural and religious context within which they operate. For example, in the US, several approaches are proposed to help us understand racial prejudice, racism and, to a certain extent, discrimination. According to Dovidio and Gaertner, Apport identifies five approaches to understanding racism in America: the historical approach, sociocultural approach, situational approach, phenomenological approach and stimulus-object approach<sup>16</sup>. Ashmore and Del Boca offer a focus on both societal level and individual level explanations to understand racial prejudice, racism and discrimination, while Chesler uses the concepts of victim-system control and embeddedness to analyse prejudice and racism<sup>17</sup>. In short, what can be learnt from these studies conducted in the US is that to examine and understand prejudice, discrimination and racism in India requires a multi-perspective approach in which the sociological, historical and political contexts as well as individual and group factors, among others, should play a significant explanatory role. Therefore, we maintain that the caste system alone cannot fully account for the racial prejudice, discrimination and racism faced by sub-Saharan Africans and Siddhis in India. Other social, cultural and political factors specific to India are also critical in the racialisation of Blackness and therefore are essential to a full

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<sup>14</sup> K. P. Narayana Kumar, "Racial Prejudice in India May Be a Legacy of the Caste System " in *The Economic Times* (New Delhi: The Economic Times, 2016).

<sup>15</sup> Our Staff Reporter, "India: Treat Caste on a Par with Racism," in *The Hindu*, ed. The Hindu (The Hindu, 2000).

<sup>16</sup> Dovidio and Gaertner, "Prejudice, Discrimination, and Racism: Historical Trends and Contemporary Approaches," 15.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 17-18.

understanding of racial prejudice, discrimination and racism in India. This book examines the Indianness of the racial prejudice, discrimination and racism experienced by sub-Saharan Africans and the Siddhis in India.

### **Context of the economic surge and friendship**

Interestingly, in India, racial prejudice, discrimination and racism towards sub-Saharan Africans is taking place in a particular context marked by renewed efforts by both India and Africa to reinvigorate their economic, financial and diplomatic ties as well as people-to-people relationships. For example, since 2008, when the first India-Africa Forum was held in New Delhi, the ties between Africa and India have significantly increased, especially in the areas of trade, investment and capacity building as well as in soft diplomacy. Thus, in 2011, at the second India-Africa Summit held in 2011 at Addis Ababa attended by fifteen African countries,

India committed itself to raising the credit line for Indian businesses to (US)\$5.4 billion, providing \$500 million in grants for development cooperation, improved market access to African exports, training for over 1500 Africans in Indian universities and improvement in defence cooperation<sup>18</sup>.

According to Biswas, statistics show that India's trade and investment in several African countries reached more than US\$68 billion in 2014 and was projected to reach more than US\$75 billion in 2015<sup>19</sup>. She also found that "Africa occupies 10.60 per cent of India's total export value trade in 2015. This upward trend is partly the consequence of India's duty-free tariff preferential scheme for 49 LDCs, which was announced in April 2008 and has benefited 33 African countries"<sup>20</sup>. In return, Africa contributes significantly to India's economy. According to Biswas, for example, Africa's export trade to India:

has risen from a mere US\$4.456 billion in 2001 to US\$67.852 billion in 2014, a figure that would keep increasing assuming that India's demand for African minerals and fuels remains unabated, and the price for these minerals remains relatively stable... As of 2014, Africa supplied around a

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<sup>18</sup> Aparajita Biswas, "Changing Dynamics of India-Africa Relations in the Twenty-First Century," *Indian Foreign Affairs Journal* 7, no. 1 (2012): 24.

<sup>19</sup> "India-Africa Relations: Evolving Past to a Promising Future," *Indian Foreign Affairs Journal* 10, no. 3 (2015): 290.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

fifth of India's total crude oil imports – a figure that has risen from close to zero in 2005<sup>21</sup>.

In addition to fast-growing economic and financial relations, diplomatic and education ties between India and Africa have also become closer in recent years. India, as part of its “charm offensive” in Africa, has granted a considerable number of humanitarian visas to sub-Saharan Africans. In the area of education, for many sub-Saharan Africans, through government schemes (exchange programs and scholarships) or self-funded, India has become a destination for further studies. According to Suleymanov, there were 40,000 African students in India in 2016<sup>22</sup>. As a result, the African diaspora in India, which used to be invisible because of its small number, has become one of the most noticeable foreign communities in the country. Conversely, in Africa, there are large numbers of Africans of Indian heritage, established mostly in eastern and southern Africa as well as in Nigeria.

As can be seen, in this context, the surge of racial prejudice and racism against sub-Saharan Africans in India has come totally out of left field and puts to the test the rapidly evolving and strengthening India-Africa relations. According to Suleymanov, racism is an important issue for African students in India. He argues that:

an issue many [African students] face from the local population is racism, due to their darker complexion, with such slurs as *kalu* “blackie”. In recent years. There have been questions on human rights of Africans in India due to the murders of young African nationals<sup>23</sup>.

The atrocious attacks against sub-Saharan Africans have had serious consequences: they have practically derailed the growing India-Africa economic, financial and diplomatic ties, jeopardised the long-standing friendship and alliance between India and Africa framed both on the non-Alignment ideology of the 1950s and the South-South cooperation, and severed the people-to-people relationship built by Indians and Africans established on both sides. The overall situation has been compounded by some Indian authorities' refusal, on the one hand, to acknowledge the racial nature of the atrocious acts against sub-Saharan Africans and, on the other hand, to promptly address the issue and provide safety for the Africans. The Vice-President of India epitomises this attitude of the Indian authorities. Not

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 291.

<sup>22</sup> Alim Vidadievich Suleymanov, "India-Africa: Trade, Investments and Humanitarian Projects," *International Relations* 16, no. 4 (2016): 661.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

only did he play down the racially motivated acts against sub-Saharan Africans in 2017, but he also described them as “rare and sporadic attacks by anti-social elements”<sup>24</sup>. The African authorities were silent at the start of the violence against Africans because they were more concerned about upholding their economic and financial ties with India than with the safety of their citizens. However, given the magnitude and the global scale of the issue, they had no other option than to react. They used the diplomatic channels available to them to pressure the Indian government to do more to ramp up the security of Africans.

### **Overview of contents**

As highlighted before, the aim of this book is to contribute to the understanding of the nature of racial prejudice, discrimination and racism towards Africans and Siddhis in India. It contains eight chapters that can be grouped into four parts of two chapters each. The first two chapters introduce the main focus of the book and the context of sub-Saharan Africans living in India. Then two chapters examine racial prejudice and racism towards Africans and Siddhis, and two chapters theorise and contextualise racial prejudice and racism in India and the ways they are experienced by sub-Saharan Africans and Siddhis. The final two chapters explore the historical linguistic affinities as well as post-independence ideas shared between India and Africa.

The introductory chapter, Chapter One, foreshadows the themes of the book and discusses racial prejudice, discrimination and racism towards sub-Saharan Africans and Siddhis in India. In this chapter, Ibrahima Diallo reviews the caste system in India and the ways in which the plight of the Dalits, the main victims of the caste system, is similar to the lived experienced of sub-Saharan Africans and the Siddhis. However, Diallo argues that the caste system alone cannot account for the racialisation of sub-Saharan Africans and Siddhis in India. In Chapter Two, Mahesh Santaram offers an enlightening introduction to the African communities in India. In his chapter, Shantaram also discusses his personal encounter with sub-Saharan Africans. Most interestingly, Shantaram examines how sub-Saharan Africans are understood in the minds of Indians. In this chapter, Shantaram argues that lack of knowledge and exposure to Africans is the root of clichés, stereotypes and prejudices against sub-Saharan Africans in India. Furthermore, Shantaram believes Indian society and politicians fail

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<sup>24</sup> MENA report, "India: There Is a Renewed and More Focused Effort to Give a Dynamic Impetus to Our Relations with African Nations," news release, 2017, <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=158557>.

to recognise, acknowledge and thoughtfully address the racial prejudice and racism that sub-Saharan Africans experience because of the politics and the politicisation of race in India.

Chapter Three focuses on racial prejudices and racism faced by Congolese students in New Delhi. In this chapter, Rolf Ondon argues that the caste system practised in India and the racial ideology inherited from India's former colonial masters are the foundations of racial prejudice and racism toward sub-Saharan Africans in today's India. According to Ondon, racial prejudice and racism against sub-Saharan Africans is so prevalent and multi-layered that it is expressed in everyday clichés, stereotyping and violence against sub-Saharan Africans in India. The author argues that prejudice and racism towards sub-Saharan Africans is worsened by communication barriers, as well as by cultural and religious differences between Indians and Africans. Nevertheless, the article highlights that there are limited sites where affinities are forged between Africans and Indians. Ondon gives the example of religious sites (e.g. churches) and night clubs where Africans and Indians meet and socialise. In the same line of thought, Chapter Four explores the racial prejudice, discrimination and racism faced by Siddhis. According to Pashington Obeng and Fiona Jamal Almeida, this community, despite having been in the country for many generations, experiences marginalisation, discrimination and racism. For Siddhi women, their ethnicity is not the main factor in their socio-economic marginalisation; their religion and gender are other layers that add to the racial prejudice and the racism they face. The authors also argue that the prejudice and discrimination faced by sub-Saharan Africans and Siddhis epitomise the fear of the "other" in Indian society.

The next two chapters focus on the analysis and conceptualisation of caste, race, and racism in India. Chapter Five discusses the centrality of race in Indian and how it is used to frame, racialise, and caste Blackness. Rohini Rai's article also shows how race and racism are used to target sub-Saharan Africans in India, leading to discrimination, attacks and even deaths. The article also examines the ways racist terminology has emerged in Indian languages to refer to and denigrate sub-Saharan Africans in general and Nigerians in particular. However, she demonstrates that denial of racism is a major issue in India. Chapter Six explores the convergence between the United States, India and Africa in the 1930s. The convergences were mainly inspired by the ideas propounded by the Ahmadiyya Muslim movement. According to Shobana Shankar, slavery and bondage in the hands of the West were critical in creating contacts between Asians and sub-Saharan Africans. This inspired them to revisit their histories and past to counter Western domination/narratives, and to demand freedom. She also argues

that both sacred texts and religion (Islam and Hinduism) have been critical in shaping political rights in India.

The remaining two chapters discuss the affinities and circulation of ideas between India and Africa. Chapter Seven shows that India and Africa are closer than they appear. Ibrahima Diallo and Mamadou Ndiaye's article demonstrates long-standing historical affinities between India and Africa based on linguistic and cultural similarities. Chapter Eight, the last chapter, addresses the affinities of ideas between Africa and India that were created by the circulation of the ideas and experiences of three high-profile women in India (Indira Gandhi) and Africa (Wangari Maathai and Ellen John Sirleaf). Examining their roles and involvement in leadership to address development issues in their respective countries, Mutiat Titilope Oladejo shows that these women adopted similar strategies to confront their post-colonial challenges, namely social and cultural constraints on women, male chauvinism and patriarchy in both India and Africa. Oladejo's chapter shows that circulation of ideas and inspiration from each other helped these women to make a global impact in their respective fields. The chapters are preceded by a foreword written by Souleymane Bachir Diagne and an afterword that concludes the book by Aparajita Biswas.

### **Mainstreaming plurality in order to combatting racism**

Sadly, racial prejudice, discrimination and racism persist and violent racial acts, especially against Blackness, continue to be a dominant global issue: a white police officer shoots and kills an unarmed Black male in the US; a 28-year-old Italian, in a drive-by shooting, seriously wounds Black Africans; an Indian mob lynches a Black African; and a white nationalist enters a mosque in Christchurch and kills fifty people. These are the most recent global testimonies of the depth of racial prejudice, discrimination and racism and the lasting consequences of the 'racialisation of the globe'<sup>25</sup>. In our increasingly interconnected world characterised by unprecedented global mobility, racial prejudice, discrimination and racism must be combatted and eradicated. Difference and plurality must be established as the norms and the yardstick against which society is measured. Mainstreaming difference and plurality as the norm/rule rather than the exception is crucial to our existence, as this underlies considerations about what it means to be human. In the context of the spread and strengthening of racist beliefs around the globe facilitated by easy access to sophisticated mass propaganda tools, the future of humanity depends on countering these

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<sup>25</sup> Frank Dikötter, "The Racialization of the Globe: An Interactive Interpretation," *Ethnic and racial studies* 31, no. 8 (2008).

race-based narratives. The whole world needs to take responsibility for this pedagogic mission.

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## CHAPTER TWO

### MEET THE AFRICANS IN INDIA

#### MAHESH SHANTARAM

##### **In the beginning, there was darkness**

On the night of January 31, 2016, a horrific mob attack on a Tanzanian woman in Bangalore sent shockwaves across India's conscience. When the incident<sup>1</sup> made it to the news four days later, it brought to the fore the ugly truth about racism and xenophobia in India and the country's pitiful inability to confront it. I remember going through a flush of emotions while trying to make sense of this tense and discomforting relationship between Indians and Africans that has increasingly been on the boil in recent years. Since I did not want to trust condensed versions reported in the media, I visited the remote neighbourhoods of Bangalore where the Africans lived to discover the many layered stories that awaited me and draw my own conclusions.

What began as a self-motivated fact-finding mission about one incident went on to become a year-long nationwide study of the Black African diaspora in India. As I made friends along the way, I also made photographic portraits to preserve the encounters. After all, a portrait can have the power to make one stop and stare (which is anyway something of a national pastime) and evoke the viewer's curiosity about the life and condition of the portrayed subject.

Most of the Africans I met were students who had come to India for higher studies. I sought out my subjects because they were quoted in the news; some because they *were* the news. Others I met through personal introductions or social media. With one incident or another setting the tone, we would have extensive conversations on the everyday struggles of

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<sup>1</sup> A group of African students was attacked by a mob that was enraged by another unrelated accident involving a Sudanese man. A Tanzanian woman in the group was disrobed in some versions of the story. She climbed aboard a passing bus to escape the scene. However, she was pushed back into the mob.

being a Black person in India. I came back with anecdotes that often defeated the spirit but were also empowering at times.

The general idea was to photograph my subjects as they were and where I found them. Not only their skin, but their clothes, wall hangings, and even the choice of lighting in their personal spaces provided rich visual clues to convey their presence and their reality. However, the resulting project, titled *The African Portraits*, was more about “us” than it was about “them”. It unravelled disturbing aspects of Indian society seen through the prism of the Africans’ experience in India. This research into *Indianness* forms the basis of much of my work as a photographer.

### **Africans in the minds of Indians**

Is Africa a country? Or a continent in dire need of a better PR strategy? In Bangalore, I met a Cameroonian student of project management who told me a story that illustrated the problem of identity management in the minds of Indians. One day, he went to buy a mobile phone in the local electronics market. One of the shopkeepers called out to him and said, “You can trust me. I have many customers from your country...” To prove it, he thumbed through the contacts list on his phone. Sure enough, they were all there— “Negro1... Negro2... Negro3...”

To understand the ambivalence towards African identity in India today, consider the numbers. One is a continent comprised of 54 sovereign countries with a population of 1.2 billion people. The other is a single country with 1.3 billion people. Africa’s 50,000 or so students vanish in India’s dark pockets like a few drops of water scattered into an ocean. The Ghanaian does not identify with the Tanzanian; the Congolese may not have anything in common with the Zimbabwean. And yet, for the average Indian, they may all just as well be South Africans or Nigerians! As Africa’s only major cricketing country, South Africa is the most recognised face of the continent in India, while Nigeria is the most notorious and most misunderstood. One trick that I often used to quickly break the ice with people I met as part of my project was to ask them where they were from and I would immediately name their capital city. The bar was set so low that this was all it took to establish trust between us.

How is it possible to share a city with a community and not have ever heard of or read about them?