

India- Ethiopia Cultural Relations,1963-2023

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Abstract - In the modern world, every country wants to interact with other countries to develop good relationships with each other. Cultural relations are one of the important factors in bilateral relations. Culture plays an important component of soft power in a globalized world. Culture represents a way of life and encompasses social, educational, economic, and people-to-people interactions. There has been a long-standing cultural relationship between India and Ethiopia. A significant milestone in the development of cultural relations between the two countries occurred in 1963 when Indian settlers in Ethiopia established a hospital. This hospital, named Gandhi Memorial Hospital for Obstetrics and Gynaecology was created to commemorate the 25th anniversary of Emperor Haile Selassie I's coronation. In a gesture of gratitude, the emperor dedicated the hospital to the memory of Mahatma Gandhi, who is held in high esteem by Ethiopians. This shows the strong people-to-people bondage between India and Ethiopia. Over the years, India-Ethiopian cultural relations have had their ups and down. During the Emperor's period, cultural ties were strong but they experienced a decline during the Derg period. However, relations improved again after the decline of the Derg regime. This paper primarily focuses on the cultural relations between India and Ethiopia from 1963 to 2023.

Keywords: Culture, Soft power, Gynaecology, Obstetrics.

India- Ethiopia Cultural Relations,1963-2023- The sad reality of history is that international interactions have often been characterized more by conflict than cooperation. We have frequently viewed other people as mere obstacles, rivals competing for territory and resources, and at times, perceived them as controlling and exploitative. Our focus has been primarily quantitative, where one's gain comes at the expense of another. This objective perspective has been reinforced over the past 50 years or more, as we have gained a deeper understanding of human subjectivity.

As a result, there has been significant progress in hermeneutics, the technique of interpreting foreign cultures, and fostering a synthesis of perspectives that allows for the development of shared beliefs and cooperative commitments. This progress has been facilitated by economic, political, and technological advancements, leading to a period that can be described not just as international, but truly global in scope. Considering the potential for interaction, particularly the new sense of interconnectedness that emerges when entire cultures engage with one another, it is important to examine this opening of a new dimension of human subjectivity from which global cultural interactions arise. (McLean 2004).

India and Ethiopia share deep-rooted cultural connections, and the establishment of a hospital by Indian immigrants in 1963 marked a significant milestone in these ties. The hospital named, Gandhi Memorial Hospital for Obstetrics and Gynaecology, was established to commemorate Emperor Haile Selassie I's coronation 25 years earlier (Agarwal 2021). As a gesture of gratitude, the emperor dedicated the hospital to honoring Mahatma Gandhi. Ethiopians hold Mahatma Gandhi in high regard. This demonstrates the close human connections between Ethiopia and India.

The cultural ties between India and Ethiopia have experienced fluctuations over time. While cultural ties were strong during the reign of Emperor Haile Selassie I, they deteriorated during the Derg regime and improved after its downfall. The historical trade between India and Ethiopia was quite prosperous and played a significant role in shaping their present cultural ties. Additionally, shortly after Ethiopia gained independence, Sardar Sant Singh undertook a goodwill mission to Ethiopia. Formal diplomatic ties were established between the two nations in 1948, followed by complete diplomatic ties in 1950, with Sardar Sant Singh serving as the first Ambassador. The cultural ties between Ethiopia and India have been characterized by closeness and cordiality, and India's non-hostility towards Ethiopian interests has been highly appreciated by Ethiopia (Embassy 2022).

Culture is a broad term; therefore, cultural relations are dynamic in nature and consist of several elements and agencies that promote India-Ethiopia cultural relations. VIP visits, food, dress, dance, music, games, sports, education, health, ITEC, arts, architecture, yoga, people-to-people contacts, ICCR, Ministry of Culture, Embassy, and non-governmental associations are the elements and agencies of India-Ethiopia cultural relations.

With over 10,000 Indians living in Ethiopia, the majority of them being new investors and their staff, as well as academics at regional universities, cultural links are further enhanced. The early members of Ethiopia's Indian population hailed from Gujarat and immigrated to the nation during the latter part of the 19th century. Additionally, during the imperial period, tens of thousands of Indian teachers worked in Ethiopian schools, even in the most remote regions. The increased investments by India in Ethiopia have resulted in a growing number of Indian nationals residing there, with many being employed by Ethiopian businesses. It is anticipated that the number of Indian citizens will significantly increase in the coming days as more and more Indian firms and investors venture into Ethiopia. The Indian community also has a substantial presence in Ethiopia's educational system. Currently, there are over 2,000 Indian academics working in 30 universities and other higher education institutions in Ethiopia (Agarwal, 2021).

Although precise numbers of the Indian diaspora in Ethiopia are unavailable due to many individuals living and working there not registering with the Mission, it is believed that there are more than 6,000 members of

the Indian Diaspora in Ethiopia. Annually, the Embassy typically issues between 5,000 and 6,000 visas. Additionally, tourists and businesspeople from countries other than India can obtain visas at the Addis Ababa Bole International Airport. Ethiopian Airlines also offers twice-daily service to Mumbai and daily service to Delhi, with freight flights available to Chennai as well. These factors have made it convenient for individuals to travel and move around easily.

The Indian embassy in Ethiopia has made significant efforts to promote Indian culture. One notable event was the observation of the third International Day of Yoga on June 17, 2017, in Addis Ababa. The event witnessed the participation of over 1000 people, including local and international yoga enthusiasts, experts, children, women, ministers, senior government officials, and others. The Missions have consistently observed the International Day of Yoga. It is worth mentioning that Haile Gebrselassie, a renowned Ethiopian runner and a role model for young people, actively participated in the International Yoga Day celebration hosted by the Embassy.

From November 14 to November 16, 2016, the Indian embassy in Ethiopia actively participated in the 11th Ethiopian International Film Festival (ETHIOIFF). They screened three Hindi films with Amharic subtitles and also scheduled performances of Rajasthani folk dance and Kathak. As part of the ICCR's "Distinguished Visitor's Programme," Dr. Negeri Lencho, the Minister of Government Communication Affairs Office of Ethiopia, visited India from March 19 to 27, 2017. Similarly, Ms. Meskerem Assegued, the director of the Zoma Contemporary Art Centre in Addis Ababa and a well-known art critic in Ethiopia, was sent to India from February 21 to March 3, 2015, as part of the ICCR's Academic Visitor's Programme. For her outstanding contribution to bilateral relations between India and Ethiopia, particularly in promoting the welfare of women, children, and youth in Ethiopia, Ms. Zenebu Tadesse Woldetsadik, Ethiopia's Minister of Women, Child & Youth Welfare, was chosen by the ICCR in 2015 for the Distinguished Alumni Award. In December 2015, Ms. Shelly Jyothi organized the textile exhibition "Vastram - Splendid World of Indian Textile" in Addis Ababa. Additionally, YeTemesgenLijoch, an Ethiopian traditional dance company, was sent to India in October 2015 to give a performance.

During the Africa Day celebrations held on May 25–26, 2017, in New Delhi, a second Ethiopian cultural group gave a performance. The Indian Embassy in Addis Ababa also honored Mahatma Gandhi's 150th birthday by organizing a heritage walk on the anniversary. In 2018, the Mission published a book commemorating 70 years of diplomatic ties between Ethiopia and India. Another noteworthy event was the organization of a picture exhibition showcasing unique and historic images documenting 70 years of connections between Ethiopia and India.

The Foreign Office Consultations provided an opportunity for both delegations to assess the entire spectrum of bilateral relations. Various topics were highlighted during the consultations including political engagements, trade and economic concerns, development partnership initiatives, cultural and consular matters, collaboration in higher education, and interpersonal interactions. The discussions also focused on increasing involvement in areas such as civil aviation, science and technology, education, agriculture, and other related industries. To add further, topics pertaining to the African Union (AU) and subjects of mutual interest on regional and international levels were discussed as well.

Dr. Ergogie Tesfaye, Minister for Women and Social Affairs, was honored with the ICCR Distinguished Alumni Award - 2021 in New Delhi in August 2022. During her visit, she held meetings with the ministers of women's and child development, social justice, and external affairs in India. In February 2021, the Ethiopian foreign minister and deputy prime minister traveled to New Delhi, where they engaged in discussions with the Indian Minister of External Affairs on various topics, including bilateral, regional, and global matters. The two ministers also jointly inaugurated the newly constructed Ethiopian Embassy chancery building and residence. During the Indian-Ethiopian Business Forum meeting, which was attended by Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Mekonnen as well as the Minister of State for External Affairs, fruitful discussions were held regarding business and economic cooperation. Ethiopia's Minister of Planning and Development participated in the Environment Minister's Session of the Voice of Global South Summit on January 2012. The Minister of Trade of Ethiopia attended the CII-Exim Bank conference on tourism and hospitality in July 2021. Likewise, Ethiopia's Minister of Agriculture served as the Guest of Honour at the CII India Africa Agriculture & Food Processing Summit in September 2021. Furthermore, in December 2021, the Minister of Trade and Regional Integration of Ethiopia attended the CII Partnership Summit, further strengthening the bilateral ties and collaboration between the two countries.

During his state visit to Ethiopia in October 2017, President Shri Ram Nath Kovind met with the Prime Minister and President of Ethiopia. Several other high-level visitors from India have also visited Ethiopia in the past. These include President S. Radhakrishnan in 1965, Vice President Zakir Hussain in 1967, President V.V. Giri in 1972, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in 2011, and Vice President Hamid Ali Ansari in May 2013.

Ethiopia has also witnessed visits from prominent Ethiopian leaders to India. Emperor Haile Selassie visited India in 1956 and 1968, Col. Hailemariam Mengistu in 1983 and 1985, Prime Minister Meles Zenawi in 1997, 2007, 2008, and 2011, and Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn in 2015.

Moreover, there have been ministerial visits from India to Ethiopia. These include visits by the External Affairs Minister in 2007 and 2011, the commerce minister in 2011, the Minister of State for External Affairs in 2011 and 2012, the Minister of State for Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution in 2011, the Minister of State for Finance in 2015, and the Health Minister in December 2017. In addition, the Minister of State for Agriculture and Farmers Welfare visited Ethiopia in 2018. Recent ministerial visits from India to Ethiopia also include State Ministers for Labour and Skills in October 2022, the state minister for Innovation and Technology in August 2022, and the Special Envoy of the Prime Minister and Former President Dr. Mulatu Teshome in November 2019. Furthermore, the Minister of Water, Irrigation, and Electricity and the Minister of Innovation and Technology visited Ethiopia for the International Conference on Water, Irrigation, and Electricity.

Bilateral Agreements: Air Services Agreement (1967), MoUs signed subsequently in 1972, 1993, 2004, and 2008, Agreement on Technical, Economic, and Scientific Cooperation (1969), Cultural Agreement (1983), Trade Agreement (1997), Agreement on Cooperation in Micro Dams and Small Scale Irrigation Schemes (2002), Agreement on Establishment of Joint Ministerial Commission (2007), Agreement on Cooperation in the field of Science and Technology (2007), Educational Exchange Programme (2007), Agreement for Cooperation in the field of Information, Communication and Media (2017), MoU between the Council of

Scientific and Industrial Research – Central Research Institute, India and Wollo University, Ethiopia (2021), Cultural Cooperation, 2023 (Embassy 2023).

Ms. Gauri Mishra and Mr. Sudeep Bhola, two Indian poets, attended the Kavi Sammelan in Addis Ababa on January 21 January. The Embassy hosted a National Day Reception on January 27. The event was attended by the state minister for Foreign Affairs, the state minister for Industry, MPs, members of the diplomatic community, friends of India, and Indian nationals (approximately 400 persons).

The Embassy also hosted a kite festival on February 12th, which was attended by around 100 individuals. In addition, the embassy organized millet meals in four Addis Ababa restaurants from February 24th to 25th.

To commemorate International Women's Day on March 8th, the Indian Women's Association and Embassy provided food and medicines to Mary Joy Ethiopia, a non-profit that works to empower vulnerable community groups through integrated development programs. Holi celebrations were organized by the Embassy in Addis Ababa on March 12th, with more than 800 people in attendance. The Embassy also organized India's invitational cricket tournament in Addis Ababa on March 19th, with five teams from India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and the United Kingdom participating in the tournament. The India Cricket Cup tournament was held in Addis Ababa in February/March and the India Badminton Cup was held in Addis Ababa on April 23rd. Furthermore, the embassy organized the screening of the 100th episode of Mann Ki Baat on April 30th.

From January to May 2023, the Mission visited colleges and engaged in discussions about potential areas of collaboration with India in Bahir Dar (January), Harambee (February), Dambi Dollo (February), Samara (February), Dire Dawa (February), Bule Hora (February), Bonga (February), and Gambella (April).

As part of the Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav and the celebration of 75 years of diplomatic relations between India and Ethiopia, several ICCR-sponsored cultural groups visited Ethiopia. A Qawwali group performed in Bishoftu, Addis Ababa, and Hawassa in September 2022. In October, a Kathak group visited Addis Ababa and Bole Lemi. In November, an A-Z Dance group performed in Addis Ababa, Bishoftu, Adami Tulu, and Zway, while a Lavani group entertained audiences in Addis Ababa, Adama, and Ambo.

The Embassy organized 214 activities to celebrate the International Day of Yoga in Ethiopia from May to June 2022. These activities included yoga sessions conducted in factories (100), universities (35), and schools (24). Throughout the year, numerous cultural events were held, such as India Culture Day and Unity Day in October, the India Cup for volleyball in October, Sporting Day Out at the Embassy in July, Bachcha's Got Talent in May, the India Cup for badminton in May, Nowruz celebrations in March, the India Cup for golf in March, the India Cup for cricket in March, and the Addis Ababa and Bishoftu kite flying festival in January.

In addition to the mentioned events, several other occasions were celebrated and planned. These include Ayurveda Day, Constitution Day, Gandhi Jayanti, a free medical clinic, and eyeglasses distribution in October. Hindi Diwas was observed in September, National Handloom Day in August, and Swami Vivekananda's birth anniversary in January.

Additionally, celebrations were held in Bishoftu (area of Oromia) and Debre Birhan (region of Amhara). ITEC Day was observed in various locations including Adama, Ambo, Addis Ababa, Arbaminch, and Wolaita Sodo. Indian film screenings were hosted by Wollega University in March, Gambella University in March, St. Mary Convent School in Babichin March, Kidane Mehret School in Nekemte in March, Don Bosco School in

AdamiTulluin April, Mary Help School in Zwayin April, Wolaita Sodo University in May, and Don Bosco School in Gambellain May. Tree planting drives were undertaken by Arbaminch University in February, Gambella University in March, Don Bosco School in AdamiTulluin April, and Don Bosco School in Gambellain May.

During the Surajkund International Crafts Mela, which took place from February 3rd to 19th, 2023, five Ethiopian craftsmen and a 10-member cultural ensemble visited India. This tour was sponsored by the Government of India and the State Government of Haryana. Similarly, in the Suraj Kund Mela held in March-April 2022, an Ethiopian cultural ensemble was featured, with sponsorship from the Government of India and the State Government of Haryana.

MeskeremAssegued, a renowned Ethiopian art critic and the Director of the Zoma Contemporary Art Centre in Addis Ababa, has previously visited India as part of the ICCR Academic Visitors Programme in February and March 2015. In May 2018, the Ethiopian National Theatre Band performed in New Delhi, Bhubaneswar, and Goa. Dr. Kannan Ambalam was honored with the PravasiBharatiya Samman Award on January 10, 2023, for his commendable community service activities in Ethiopia. Dr. Ambalam has accomplished numerous projects including the construction of 93 low-cost bridges, the revitalization of 55 water sources, the installation of bathrooms in one school, the erection of two check dams, and assistance with electrifying one hamlet in Ethiopia. These projects have had a significant positive impact on the livelihoods of rural populations in Ethiopia (Embassy 2023).

The Ethiopian Embassy in New Delhi opened a cultural centre on March 19th, 2013, which serves as another notable effort to enhance people-to-people ties between India and Ethiopia. The main objective of the cultural centre is to promote greater cooperation and strengthen the longstanding connections between the two nations. It aims to create a positive impression of Ethiopian culture and traditions among Indians and other foreign visitors.

The cultural exchanges between Ethiopia and India have had an impact on the modern painting trend. A recent study conducted by Stanislaw Chojnacki suggests that Ethiopian painting has been influenced by Indian textiles. The scholar emphasizes that Indian textiles along with Indian food, clothing, dance, music, and cultural activities, have significantly influenced Ethiopian life. Therefore, moving forward, it is important for both India and Ethiopia to continue enhancing their cultural ties, which will eventually create a win-win situation for both countries. It will be interesting to see what new activities and programs will be carried out by the two nations to strengthen their cultural relationship.

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