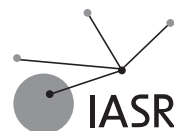




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Article

Seventy Years of Scholarship: The History of the Department of African Studies at the University of Delhi, India

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Abstract

Area studies shape knowledge, influence policies, and enhance cross-cultural understanding. Area studies programs have produced valuable knowledge and espoused radical critical thought in the past sixty-five years. Established in 1954 and inaugurated on 6th August 1955, the Department of African Studies, University of Delhi, celebrates 70 years in 2025, enhancing comparative and area studies on African politics, history, anthropology, culture, economy, languages, and religion. Many countries have African Studies centers/departments, with India hosting three major ones at Delhi University, Jawaharlal Nehru University, and Mumbai University. As the year 2025 marks 70 glorious years of the Department of African Studies at the University of Delhi, it is the best time to showcase the importance and value the department holds at the academic helm. The New Education Policy has introduced the concept of multidisciplinary studies in recent times, but the Department has had this approach for a long time. This article focuses on situating the Department's establishment within a historical framework by utilizing the University of Delhi archives, libraries of PMML, ICWA, ICHR, ICCR, Parliament Library, Academic Council, and Executive Council documents, and conversations with Professors, Alumni, and officials. The first and holistic article about the Department was written by Wayne Fredericks in 1960. In the 70th year of its inception, it is important to examine the department's evolution over time, highlighting its contributions to the academic understanding of India-Africa relations and its interdisciplinary approach to research and education.

Keywords

African studies, Area studies, India- Africa relations, University of Delhi, Research, New education policy

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On 24 April 1954, it was formally decided by the Government of India that the Department of African Studies will come into existence (Archives, University of Delhi. 1954b, April 24). In a written question (No. 974) raised in the Lok Sabha on 15th September 1954, the Minister of Education was asked whether Delhi University had decided to establish a School of African Studies “to enable Indians to study African history and culture,” to which Maulana Azad replied, “Yes, Sir... (b) As early as possible,” providing clear contemporaneous confirmation of the decision phase (Parliament proceedings, Lok Sabha, 15th Sep, 1954). The Department was inaugurated by Shri Jawaharlal Nehru, Prime Minister, on August 6th, 1955 (Archives, University of Delhi, 1955–56a), intending to raise awareness of Africa. The Department’s responsibility extends beyond its basic duty of acquiring and spreading information to promote India-Africa ties, as it serves as a venue for promoting mutual understanding, friendship, and collaboration among Indian and African peoples. This Area Studies department enhances academic discourse by organizing special lectures, seminars, and symposia that attract a diverse audience, including Indian and African diplomats, scholars from the African region, and experts from India (Department of African Studies. University of Delhi, Information Bulletin, 2023-2024). There is a commitment to practical learning by encouraging faculty and research scholars to field studies, enabling them to acquire firsthand knowledge and understanding of Africa, ultimately contributing to a more practical comprehension of the continent’s challenges and opportunities in the global context.

The Department of African Studies at the UoD was initially apprehended as a specialized training center for the Indian Foreign Service (IFS) under the Ministry of External Affairs. The objective was to provide focused training on African studies for three years. However, this initiative was discontinued after three months (T. Prasad, personal communication, February 4, 2025). From 1954, Peter Wright, a teacher and British contractor to the Kenyan Education Department, directed Asia’s first African studies centre at Delhi University at the invitation of Nehru, as the first organizer (McCann, G, 2019). The affiliation of the department with the Ministry of External Affairs was formalized on December 24, 1954, marking the beginning of an institution committed to African studies. The University Grants Commission (UGC) and the Ministry of Education were the primary funding agencies supporting its development.

Nehru envisioned the creation of a ‘Think Tank’ that would specifically concentrate on Africa, bringing together scholars, advisors, and intellectuals from diverse backgrounds to contribute to international diplomacy and scholarship. This vision played a crucial role in shaping the department’s early years. During this period, the UGC had yet to introduce an Area Studies Program in India. Responding to Nehru’s recommendation, the UGC eventually established Area Studies Departments across the country, with the Department of African Studies, UoD, being the first of its kind. This initiative was followed by the establishment of the Centre for International Studies at the Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA) in 1968. While other institutions, such as Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), focused primarily on Francophone West Africa, and the University of Mumbai specialized in East African studies earlier, the Department of African Studies at UoD distinguished itself by encompassing research on the entire African continent. African Studies as an Area Study is a multidisciplinary, region-specific field committed to understanding Africa on its own terms, historically grounded, culturally rich, and politically relevant. It challenges universal theories and foregrounds contextual specificity, field-based knowledge, and decolonial perspectives. Since its establishment, the Department of African Studies at the UoD has witnessed a significant rise in student enrollment, reflecting its growing academic appeal, and stands as the only Department in India that focuses on Area studies and strengthening India-Africa relations through academics. During the academic year 2004-2005, the University Grants Commission approved the establishment of the Centre for African

Studies under the Department of African Studies, sanctioning a grant of ₹10 lakhs to support its development and initiatives (Archives, University of Delhi, 2004–05). The 83rd Annual Report of the UoD details a ₹343.30 lakh allocation under the UGC's SAP, Area Studies, and Innovative Programme to seven Departments/Centers, including African Studies (Archives, University of Delhi, 2005–06). This highlights the broader institutional support, with African Studies being at a progressive stage during all these years. These investments reflect efforts to enhance interdisciplinary research and development in key academic areas. Established on August 6, 1955, with five faculty members, the department is now a team of six in 2025, continually advancing in academics and committed to excellence, innovation, and intellectual growth.

A Historical Overview of Academic Developments

On 22nd April 1954, it was decided that a Diploma Course in African Studies be instituted and the necessary amendments to Ordinances be made. As per Executive Council Resolution 2nd of 22nd April 1954, the Council considered the question of the institution of scholarships for award to students of the Department of African Studies. Later on there was a substitution of a Degree Course, instead of a Diploma Course in African Studies (Archives, University of Delhi, 1954a). Subsequently, in 1955, the department started its Master of Arts (MA) program, enrolling students such as Prof. K.K. Veermani, Prof. S.M. Goel, and Prof. Ramchandani, among others. Some of the students enrolled were also affiliated with the Ministry of External Affairs. Dr. S. Hofstra, Professor of Sociology at the University of Amsterdam, Visiting Professor in the Department, rendered invaluable assistance in drafting the new course of study in addition to giving a course of lectures on Sociology. By December 1955, courses were offered in History, Geography, Economics, Political Science, Government and Society. The 1st 4 papers that were introduced in the curriculum for MA were the Economic and Social Geography of Africa, the General History of Africa, and India since 1858, and elements of Social Science, especially Sociology with special reference to Africa. 20 students were registered in the Department of African Studies for the two-year post-graduate Diploma Course in African Studies which has since been transformed into an M.A. Degree Course (Archives, University of Delhi, 1955–56b). According to the reference E.C. (3)-28-4-56, Appendix IV, the inclusion of “African Studies” as a subject for the M.A. Degree Examination marks a significant development in the academic curriculum (Archives, University of Delhi, 1955–1956c).

In an oral answer in the Rajya Sabha on 22 March 1955, Dr. K. L. Shrimali noted that the Department of African Studies at the University of Delhi was preparing to offer studies in Swahili, Hausa, and what was then termed “Hottentot,” further announcing the appointment of Mr. P. Wright as its Director. This was an indication of the School's operational readiness by early 1955 (Rajya Sabha Debates, 22nd March 1955). For African students, the curriculum may include one African language such as Swahili or Hausa that is not their mother tongue, or alternatively, an Indian language (Archives, University of Delhi, 1954a). At the beginning of the year 1956, there were 16 students in the M.A. Final year class and 10 in the Previous year class. All these students also took the Certificate Course in Swahili (Archives, University of Delhi, 1956–57b). At the end of the year 1956, there were six students in the Previous year class. Of the students, all were Indian, but two students, both women, were of East African domicile. There were two women students in the Final year and two in the Previous, one of whom subsequently withdrew (Archives, University of Delhi, 1956–57b). India also took steps to bring more and more African students to India. By 1956, about 250 Africans were studying in India, 122 of them under the Government of India Cultural Scholarships Scheme which paid a monthly stipend of 200 rupees,

sufficient for all expenses including study tours of India (Mckay, Vernon, 1963). In 1956, P. Wright explicitly acknowledged the assistance from students of the Department of African Studies, University of Delhi which indicated that the department was active with students by 1956 (Wright, P., & Varma, S. N. 1956) However, by 1956, the M.A. program was discontinued due to concerns about its viability and future prospects. Consequently, the department transitioned towards a research-focused model, offering only a Ph.D. program.

Currently, the department focuses on PhD programs having more than 150 students enrolled, an MA in African Studies with 45 students,¹ a Certificate and Diploma in Swahili (Department of African Studies, University of Delhi, Information bulletin, 2024-2025). Until 2022, the Department of African Studies offered MPhil courses, which provided students with advanced research skills and deep insight into African history, politics, geography, sociology, economics, culture, language, and literature. These courses provide students with a multidisciplinary understanding of Africa, preparing them for careers in academia, diplomacy, international development, and global business.

Prominent Faculty and Contributions to African Studies from 1954 to 2025

On the recommendation of the academic council, a meeting was held on the 4th of February 1954, and it was resolved that there would be one post each for a Professor of African Studies, a reader in Indian history and culture, African studies, Geography, Economics, African Anthropology, and Political Science, and three lecturers for African languages. The staff consisted of the Organiser, Shri Peter Wright, whose subject is African History, and three Readers. S. N. Varma, Reader in (African) Politics, Dr. P. K. Sircar, Reader in (African) Geography, and Dr. Amba Prasad, Reader in Indian History and Culture; and one Lecturer in the Swahili Language, Shri E. G. Njuguna and Dr. Daleep Singh, a Ph.D. from Bombay, specialized in Economics. The first Head of the Department was Professor Baleshwar Prasad. In August 1956, Dr. J. C. deGraft Johnson, formerly Extramural Tutor in the University College of the Gold Coast, arrived to fill the vacancy of Reader in Economics, with the designation of Professor on a three-year contract. In October, Dr. P. K. Gopala Krishnan was appointed to the vacancy of Reader in Sociology as Lecturer (Archives, University of Delhi, 1956–57b). Two Readerships in Economics and Sociology and two language Lectureships remained unfilled during the year 1956. The prominent lecturers included Prof. Ved Prakash Luthra, who specialized in Politics, while E. D. Jakeyo from Kenya taught Swahili. Krishna Behari Bajpai, holding M.A. degrees in both History and Political Science, focused on History, and Om Prakash Goel, with M.A. in African Studies, specializing in Sociology. From time to time eminent Africanists from other countries fields were are invited to the Department to deliver lectures in their special fields (Fredericks, 1960). Under the presence of such distinguished and learned faculty members, the department had a vibrant intellectual environment, enriched by continuous academic activities and accomplished scholars.

According to the archives, class 12 of the scheme for the establishment of a school for African studies at the Department of African Studies should work in close collaboration with the Department of History, Political Science, Economics, and Anthropology. Visiting Professor named Dr. T. O. Elias, Senior Lecturer of the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, Oxford, a leading Nigerian Africanist, visited the Department as Visiting Professor from July to October 1956, and gave much assistance to the staff and delivered a course of lectures which are to be published by Delhi University (Archives, University of Delhi, 1956–57a). By 1983, the department had expanded significantly, accommodating around 100 scholars in the MPhil and PhD programs.

Under the leadership of Professors like K.K. Veermani, Krishn Vihari Bajpai, and K. Mathews, the department actively organized national and international conferences, encouraging intellectual exchanges on African studies. Renowned Africanists from different nations were occasionally asked to contribute to various fields taught here (Archives, University of Delhi, 1989–1990). Between 1959 and 2023, the Department of African Studies has been shaped by the remarkable contributions of distinguished intellectuals, including Dr. A. K. Datta, Prof. B. S. Sharma, Prof. K. K. Virmani, Prof. Harjinder Singh, Prof. K. Mathews, Dr. Dharampal, Dr. S. C. Saxena, Dr. S. C. Mehta, Dr. S. S. Deora, Dr. J. P. Sharma, Prof. Tribhuvan Prasad, and Dr. Vidhan Pathak (Department of African Studies, University of Delhi, Information bulletin, 2018-2023). During the tenureship of these eminent faculty members, the department promoted rigorous academic engagement, with regular visits from foreign professors contributing to a globally informed discourse. A notable instance of this scholarly exchange was a special lecture delivered by Prof. Parwati Kumar Sircar from the Department of Geography. Prof. Sircar, a respected academic, later transitioned to an international role at the United Nations, highlighting the caliber of intellectual contributions within the department. The early 2000s marked another milestone in the department's history when Dr. Dharampal led an initiative to establish the Centre for Advanced Studies under the aegis of UGC's Area Studies Program. Between 2013-2018, distinguished academicians and learned people from various African countries visited the department such as Prof. Ian Taylor, St. Andrew University, Scotland, Prof. Sam Maghimbi, University of Dar es Salam, Tanzania, Prof. Mawusse K.A Adotevi, Togo University, Awarded Sir CV Raman Fellowship GOI, Prof. John Njenga Karung, University of Frankfurt, Germany, Prof. Alex M Ngoma, University of Zambia, Prof. Victor L Tonchi, University of Namibia, Prof. Leonard T Kapungu, Centre for Peace Institution, Harare, Zimbabwe, Prof. Kenneth King, University of Edinburgh, Prof. Adam Habib, Vice Chancellor, Witwatersrand University, South Africa, Prof. Patricia T Santos, University of Sao Paulo, Brazil, Prof. R Mukandala, Vice Chancellor, University of Dar es Salam, Tanzania, and Dr. Davendra Rajawat, Zambia (Department of African Studies, University of Delhi, Information Bulletin, 2018). Over the years, faculty members of the department have been contributing significantly to the academic discourse on Africa.

The Department of African Studies is currently led by a distinguished team of six faculty members, each bringing unique academic expertise to the interdisciplinary field of African studies. At the helm is Prof A.S. Yaruigam, the Head of the Department, who contributes significantly to the sociological discourse, with expertise in classical sociological thinkers, the sociology of religion, African sociology, and the complex interrelations of conflict and society (Department of African Studies website, 2025). The former Head of the Department, Professor Gajendra Singh, specializes in African history and also educates scholars on Library Sciences in Research Methodology, combining historical insights with research techniques (Department of African Studies, Information bulletin, 2023-2024). Professor Suresh Kumar, a specialist in federal politics, focuses on Africa's political economy and the intricate dynamics of governance on the continent and has accomplished international projects with NIHSS South Africa, UNESCO Research Group in Brazil, SADC Hashim Mbita Project, Tanzania, and nine national projects. Dr. Rashmi Kapoor, specializing in the Swahili language, Research Methodology, diaspora studies, and the evolving India-Africa relationship, also focuses on African sociology, enriching the department's language and cultural studies offerings. Dr. Sandipani Dash brings his deep knowledge of resource politics and regional integration in Africa, as well as his focus on the historical and contemporary aspects of India-Africa relations, addressing key issues in geopolitical and economic integration. Dr. Manish Karmwar specializes in diaspora studies, Afro – Indians in India, Afrocentrism, migration, and assimilation, with a particular emphasis on African history, and his research also extends to modern Indian history, offering a unique

comparative perspective between African and Indian urban histories. The field of African Studies has undergone a remarkable transformation over the decades, shaped significantly by the evolving experiences, expertise, and contributions of professors in this academic discipline. The following is a chart representing the journey of the distinguished faculty members from 1956 to 2025:

<i>journey</i> THROUGH THE AGES			
<i>distinguished faculty members</i>			
Sir Peter Wright (Organizer) December 1959 1956	1959-2023	1959-2023	February 2023- August 2025
Prof. S.N. Verma	Dr. B. Prasad	Dr. A. K. Datta	Prof. Gajendra Singh
Dr. Amba Prasad	Prof. S.N. Verma	Prof. B. S. Sharma	Prof. Suresh Kumar
Dr. P.K.Sircar	Dr. Amba Prasad	Prof. K. K. Virmani	Prof. A. S. Yaruingam
Dr. E.D. Jakeyo	Dr. P.K.Sircar	Prof. Harjinder Singh	Dr. Rashmi Kapoor
Mr. E.G. Njuruna	Dr. E.D. Jakeyo	Prof. K. Mathews	Dr. Sandipani Dash
	Dr. Daleep Singh	Dr. Dharampal	Dr. Manish Karmwar
	Dr. Ved Prakash Luthera	Dr. S. C. Saxena	
	Mr. Krishna Behari	Dr. S.C. Mehta	
	Bajpai	Dr. S.S. Deora	
	Mr. Om Prakash Goel	Dr. J.P. Sharma	
		Prof. Tribhuwan Prasad	
		Dr. Vidhan Pathak	

Figure 1. Chart representing the journey of the distinguished faculty members from 1956 to 2025
Source: Department of African Studies, University of Delhi, Information bulletin (2024-2025).

Enriching Minds: The African Studies Knowledge Repository

The Department maintained within its premises the African section of the University library. On its establishment, a sum of Rs. 10,000/- was spent on books out of the current funds of the Department of African Studies and Rs. 1,568/- out of their non-recurring funds (Archives, University of Delhi, 1955–56c). The department has always possessed one of the richest libraries on African studies in India. Initially housed in the Central Library of the Faculty of Arts, the library had a dedicated section for Africa-related resources. In 2001, the library was relocated to the Department of African Studies within the Faculty of Social Sciences. Professors such as Prof. Tribhuwan Prasad, Dr. J.P. Sharma, and Dr. Rashmi Kapoor played an important role in selecting and transferring rare books to the department. The library's collection included rare texts dating back 150-200 years, attracting scholars from across India and further solidifying its status as a premier repository of African studies literature.

This library contained over 2,000 books, and around 60 to 70 journals and periodicals concerning Africa were received regularly when it was established. Over the past few years, the Department of African Studies has made significant steps in developing its library, ensuring that it meets the growing academic and research needs of its students and faculty. In addition to expanding its physical collection, which now includes an impressive range of books, journals, and periodicals focused on Africa and India-Africa relations, the department has embraced modern digital platforms to provide more comprehensive access to international resources. Today, the

Department maintains within its premises the African section of the University library containing 3293 books, 600 dissertations, and 200 theses, along with various journals and periodicals concerning Africa (Department of African Studies, Information bulletin, 2023-2024).

Notably, in 2024, the acquisition of Africa Commons and Policy Commons has been a major milestone. These platforms offer students an abundance of materials and publications, vastly increasing the range of available resources. Africa Commons provides access to a wealth of scholarly works, archives, and databases related to African history, politics, and culture, while Policy Commons delivers extensive resources on policy research, reports, and data from think tanks and research institutions around the world. The access to online resources that is provided by the Delhi University E-library is helpful for the academic and research needs of its students and faculty. This repository includes a rich collection of African Studies-related e-books, e-journals, and e-databases, providing access to the latest knowledge. Additionally, e-theses and dissertations offer valuable insights into cutting-edge research, while video lectures enhance the learning experience through engaging multimedia content.

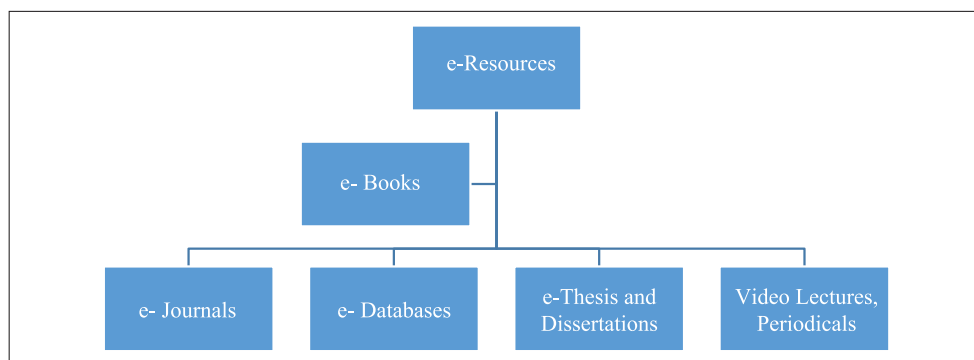


Figure 2. e- Resources accessed by the Department of African Studies, University of Delhi

The department provides access to various e-databases, supporting academic and research needs across disciplines. Key resources include Adam Mathews, GALE, SAGE, and SAGE Research Methods for social sciences and humanities, alongside multidisciplinary platforms like Taylor & Francis, Bloomsbury, Wiley, Emerald, and Pearson. Specialized databases such as Project Muse, Cambridge University Press, Oxford University Press, IEEE Xplore, and JSTOR. Together, these databases enrich learning and enhance high-quality research within the department. The Delhi University e-library has an extensive collection of bibliographic databases on African Studies, including Scopus, Web of Science WOS, PubMed, Archive.org, and Dimensions.ai, providing a comprehensive range of resources for scholarly research and reference. Additionally, e-theses and dissertations are accessible through platforms like Shodhganga, Krishikosh, and the Open Access Theses and Dissertations (OATD), aggregating theses from around the world onto a single platform. The e-library is a comprehensive digital resource hub, offering video lectures, periodicals, and statistical data. Additionally, the provision of remote accessibility enhances convenience, enabling students and researchers to seamlessly access these resources anytime and anywhere, even beyond the University of Delhi's campus. This feature proves particularly beneficial for off-campus students, promoting equitable access to quality educational materials. These developments have transformed the department's library into a well-rounded resource center, supporting innovative research and providing a firm foundation

for academic excellence in African studies.

Reputable institutions such as the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), and the Prime Ministers Museum and Library (PMML) provide the Department with funding and institutional support, along with funding from digital research platforms like Coherent. The Department's active participation in academic research is demonstrated by the numerous research grants it has received from the ICSSR. One project was granted ₹5,00,000 in 2016, and another was funded with ₹4,00,000 in 2019. ₹16,00,000 was given to a significant research project in 2020, and ₹15,00,000 was given to a joint project in 2023. The department also takes pride in its diverse group of international students, hailing from regions including Africa, who join either through the ICCR or independently, with a predominant focus on Indian and African cultures and arts. Govt. of India has enhanced opportunities for students of African Countries to avail of 900 scholarships at undergraduate/postgraduate and higher studies under the 'Africa Scholarship Scheme of Ministry of External Affairs (Indian Council for Cultural Relations, 2025). The Department's dedication to furthering academic research and advancing the field of African Studies in India is demonstrated by these grants. Additionally, on August 28, 2023, the University of Delhi entered into an agreement with the National Council for Handloom and Handicraft Development, Delhi. The Department is also set to have a partnership with the University of Uganda, whose representatives visited the department on 16th May 2025. This partnership seeks to promote collaborative research in the domains of trade, commerce, textiles, and the cotton industries across African nations, strengthening academic and economic ties between India and Africa.

Scholars and Alumni

Alumni play an important role in the continued development of their alma mater. The Departmental Africa Society arranged several meetings, which were addressed by distinguished visitors from Africa and persons acquainted with Africa. The Society also organized a useful study circle which met periodically and stimulated the study of African affairs (Archives, University of Delhi, 1955–56). Among the distinguished visitors invited by the Department and the Africa Society were Mr. Chester Bowles, the Rt. Hon. Aneurin Bevan, Lady Mountbatten of Burma, the Sudanese Ambassador, Mr. de Bunsen, Principal of Makere College, Uganda, Dr. Geoffry Parrinder of the University College, Ibadan, Nigeria, Dr. Rita Hinden, Professor Firth of the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, Mr. C. O. Mate, leader of the Gold Coast UNESCO delegation and other UNESCO delegates.

In the past years, alumni from the Department of African Studies have established themselves in a diverse range of academic and governmental roles across India. They have secured positions at prominent institutions such as J.P. University and Himachal Pradesh Central University, as well as in various government bodies, including the Uttar Pradesh Government, the Chhattisgarh Government, the Gujarat Government, and the Delhi Subordinate Services Selection Board. Within the University of Delhi, department alumni have been appointed to faculty positions across multiple prestigious colleges, including Laxmibai College, Hansraj College, Ram Lal Anand College, Indraprastha College for Women, Motilal Nehru College, P.G.D.A.V. College, and Dayal Singh College. This wide range of placements highlights the department's role in producing skilled professionals who advance African Studies, public service, and academia, reflecting scholars' importance in academic success. Recent appointments of 2024 include positions as Guest Faculty in Deshbandhu College, Deen Dayal Upadhyay College, Shri Ram College of Commerce, Satyawati College, and Hansraj College, UoD.

Over the past five years, student enrollment in the PhD program has shown positive trends. In 2018-2019, there were 8 students, which increased to 16 in 2019-2020. The numbers remained strong with 10 students in 2020-2021, followed by a peak of 18 in 2021-2022, 13 students in 2022-2023, 56 in 2024-2-25, and 63 in 2024-2025 (University of Delhi, Department of African Studies Website, 2025). The diverse range of proposed Ph.D. topics reflects a deep engagement with the complex dynamics of India-Africa relations and broader historical, geographical, economic, and socio-political issues. The studies cover a wide range of countries, focusing on both India and various African nations. Key African countries highlighted include Tanzania, South Africa, Mozambique, Kenya, Mauritius, and Egypt, with specific case studies addressing their historical, cultural, and economic ties with India. The Swahili Coast, encompassing parts of East Africa, also features prominently in historical studies. Additionally, comparative analyses include countries like Portugal in the context of the African diaspora, while broader regional themes explore India-Africa relationships and global connections.

The researchers currently working on countries like Tanzania, Mauritius, Egypt, South Africa, Kenya, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Uganda, Ghana, Seychelles, Namibia, Nigeria, Mali, Niger, Sudan, Zambia, etc. are exploring the multifaceted relationships between these nations and India. These studies examine a wide array of subjects, such as cultural engagement, economic relations, political transformations, climate change, healthcare, and local governance. A group of researchers is currently examining the contemporary Afro-Indian Siddi community in India, particularly those residing in Gujarat, Karnataka, Awadh, and Bengal. This research is crucial in understanding the dynamics of African diaspora communities in India and their role in the broader context of India-Africa relations. The students enrolled in 2024-2025 are focusing on themes such as Diplomacy and Geopolitics, Energy and Sustainability, Diaspora and Migration, Decolonization and Indigenous Knowledge, Gender and Social Transformation, Conflict and

Table 1. A list of a few PhDs that have been submitted to the Department over the years

Title of the Thesis	Awarded Year
Tanganyika: A Study in Multi-Racial Society	1966
The Role of the People of Indian Origin in the Economic Development of Uganda, 1960-62	1970
Nationalist Movement in Zambia	1988
Revolutionary Strategy in Southern Africa: Case Study of Mozambique	1992
Federalism in South Africa and India- A Comparative Study	2001
Social Mobility and the caste System of Indo- Mauritius	2005
Ancient Civilization of South Africa: A Case Study in Historical Perspective	2011
African Diaspora in India: A Historical Study	2011
Climate Change, Vulnerability and Adaptation in the Livestock Sector: A Case Study of Ethiopia	2014
Regional Cooperation and Development: A Comparative Study of SADC and ASEAN	2022
Geostrategic Engagement of India and France with the African Island States in the Western Indian Ocean Region(2000-2020)	2024
Impact of Culture on Strategic Planning and Operations of Indian Multinational Corporations(MNCs) in South Africa	2025

Source: Department of African Studies, University of Delhi (2014-15), Department of African Studies, University of Delhi. Information Bulletin (2024-2025).

Security, Health and Traditional Medicine, and Cultural Studies and Historical Connections (Karmwar, 2025). Below is the list of a few PhDs that have been submitted to the Department over the years, illustrating the academic vitality, rigor, and impact.

A Legacy of Academic and Diplomatic Exchanges

The 7th Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Summit, held in March 1983 in New Delhi, marked a significant moment in the history of global diplomacy and solidarity among developing nations. Following this, NAMYFEST 85 took place from 6th -10th November 1985 at Sir Shankar Lal Hall, within the Faculty of Music and Fine Arts, UoD. Then Prime Minister Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe, the Chair-designate, delivered an impactful address emphasizing the collective aspirations of the Global South. The event saw participation from numerous African nations, including Algeria, Libya, Madagascar, Tanzania, Mauritius, Tunisia, Uganda, Burundi, Egypt, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Seychelles, Somalia, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, among others (Archives, University of Delhi. 1983. *Photograph of the Non-Aligned Summit, New Delhi*). This extensive representation underscored the enduring ties between India and African nations, reflecting a shared history of collaboration and mutual support.

The National Seminar on Nehru and Africa was organized by the Department of African Studies, UoD, on the 27th and 28th of September 1989. The Seminar was in commensuration with the Nehru Birth celebrations in the country (Prime Ministers Museum and Library, 1991a). The National Seminar commenced with a Welcome Address delivered by Dr. K.K. Virmani, Head of the Department. The Inaugural Speech was presented by Prof. D.N. Panigrahi, former Director of the Prime Ministers Museum and Library. The seminar featured a diverse range of scholarly presentations examining Jawaharlal Nehru's engagement with Africa and his influence on India-Africa relations. Dr. S.C. Saxena provided a broad analysis of Nehru and Africa, while Dr. K.K. Virmani specifically explored Nehru on Africa. Dr. R.R. Raichandani examined Some Aspects of India's Africa Policy during the Nehru Years, and Dr. A. Basu offered An Overview of India-Africa Relations and Nehru's Impact. Shri T.G. Ramamurthi presented insights into Jawaharlal Nehru's Africa Policy, while Dr. Susama Mohanty addressed the Problems of Nationalism in Africa and how Nehru's ideas could be applied to these challenges. Shri Ajay Kumar Dubey discussed Nehru and India's Role in African Liberation Struggles (1947-64), while Dr. Padma Srivastava analyzed Jawaharlal Nehru's Perception of Africa. Concluding the session, Dr. K. Mathews explored into Nehru, Non-Alignment, and Africa, highlighting Nehru's strategic role in shaping the Non-Aligned Movement. These presentations collectively provided a comprehensive examination of Nehru's diplomatic vision, his policies toward Africa, and his legacy in nurturing Indo-African solidarity.

Dr. K.K. Virmani in his welcome address gave a brief account of the activities of the Department of African Studies where he quoted Nehru who was "glad to know that it is proposed to start an Institute of African Studies in Delhi University and hoped that it will be possible, through that Institute to know more about the people of Africa, their culture and their background." Prof. Virmani expressed that the original two-year post-graduate Diploma course was changed in the very first year of its existence to a two-year M.A. course. It provided for 'general studies on Africa in the first year and specialisation on a region in one of the social science disciplines in the second year (Prime Ministers Museum and Library, 1991a). It is a matter of satisfaction that in response to the general guidelines from the University, the Department. started an additional course in Master of Philosophy (M.Phil. in short) since 1978; and it has become very popular for the students of M.A. in various social science disciplines. A

degree of M.Phil. in African Studies is now a pre-requisite for accession to the Ph.D. course in this Department. On the average, about 15 to 20 students are admitted each year to the M.Phil. course; and till to day 119 students have been awarded the Degree of Master of Philosophy in African Studies. As for the Doctorate degree, the Department has so far produced 21 Ph.Ds. till, this year. At present 36 Students are registered as Ph. D. Scholars on the rolls but only about half of them are actively engaged in the research work (Prime Ministers Museum and Library, 1991b). We are producing on a regular basis research information in various series such as documents, articles, book-review and bibliography on Africa. It is in line with this that the Department has started a Journal of its own, called Ind-Africana. It is a bi-annual publication, started only in April 1988. Research papers, written by faculty members, research Scholars and even from those who are casually associated with the Department, are published in the Journal Ind-Africana.

The seminar organized by the Department of African Studies at the University of Delhi was a momentous event. The seminar gathered widespread recognition and appreciation, as evidenced by the numerous messages of goodwill addressed in letters to Professor K.K. Virmani. Among the notable acknowledgments, the then Prime Minister of India, Rajiv Gandhi, expressed his pleasure in learning about the seminar's organization, while P.V. Narasimha Rao extended his best wishes for its success. Distinguished international figures also conveyed their commendations. Shridath Ramphal, the Commonwealth Secretary-General, sent his greetings, and Ambassador Brownson Dede, Secretary-General of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, praised the initiative. The Most Reverend Desmond M. Tutu, Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town, extended his best wishes, expressing hope that the seminar would strengthen engagement with Nehru's ideas. Similarly, Federico Mayor Menéndez, Director-General of UNESCO, praised the Department of African Studies for organizing this scholarly gathering. Additionally, Kenneth David Kaunda, President of the Republic of Zambia, conveyed his heartfelt congratulations to all participants, recognizing the significance of the seminar in promoting academic and diplomatic engagements (The Prime Ministers Museum and Library, 1991a).

Since its establishment, the Department of African Studies has welcomed 378+ Ambassadors, Professors, and academicians from Africa and other countries between 1955 and 2025, establishing academic exchange and cultural dialogue and strengthening international relations (Department of African Studies, University of Delhi, *Visitors Book*). The first official visit occurred on March 13, 1955, when L.N. Palar from the Indonesian Embassy visited the department, coinciding with India's role in organizing the 1955 Bandung Conference (Department of African Studies, University of Delhi, *Visitors Book*). Such early engagements laid the foundation for the department's ongoing efforts in strengthening Asia-Africa relations. In December 1957, U. Delahaeyo from the French Embassy and F.E. Boaten from the Ghana High Commission visited the department, highlighting India's dual focus on African solidarity and navigating post-colonial relationships with European nations. Between 1958 and 1960, delegates from Nairobi, Ghana, and New York further expanded these connections. Between 1958 and 1960, India and Africa promoted solidarity rooted in shared colonial experiences and a mutual pursuit of independence and self-determination. Wayne Fredericks, who authored the 1960 article '*The Department of African Studies, University of Delhi*', recognized the department's contributions to African studies and visited in 1968, emphasizing its growing global reputation.

The 1960s saw visits from prominent figures such as Thomas Rudolphe Kanza and J. Nathanael Ilunga, Congolese diplomats, as well as Professor Ruth Black from the University of Witwatersrand in 1962. Other notable visitors during this period included officials from Tanganyika, Cameroon, and Cairo, reflecting the department's commitment to intellectual exchanges with emerging African nations. By the mid-1960s, the department hosted scholars and officials from Nigeria, Kenya, and France, as well as representatives from Japan, emphasizing a

broadened international scope. From the 1970s to the 1980s, the department further solidified its global presence with visits from distinguished academics and diplomats such as Samir Amin and Emmanuel Hansen, representing countries like Algeria, Ghana, and Poland. The year 1983 was marked by the visits by Balogh Andres, Budapest University, Emmanuel Hansen, Secretary to PNDC, Ghana, E.W.A. Bogalska Czajkowska, Poland, and Bernard Charles from the University of Montreal. The visitor's book contains 378 recorded entries, but many more visits have occurred that were not documented.

In the 21st century, the tradition of hosting dignitaries continued with visits from Senegalese Ambassador Ahmed El Mansour Diop in 2002 and Sudanese Minister Dr. Ghazi Salahuddin Atabani. In 2003, Sudan's Ambassador Abdalmahmood Abdalhaleem Mohammed further strengthened ties with the department. The African Studies Department showcased significant development with key initiatives like the National Seminar on India-Africa Relations held on 30th March 2003. Additionally, seminars under the India-Nigeria Cultural Exchange Programme, in collaboration with the Centre for Developing Studies, featured eminent speakers, including Dr. Hakan Wiberg, Dr. Rotini Timothy Suberu, Dr. Antonia Sumbine, and Dr. Daud Mohammad (Archives, University of Delhi. 1989–90). High-level visits, forums like the India-Africa Summit, and cultural exchanges have further strengthened India-Africa strategic and people-to-people ties. In 2009, an international conference saw the participation of 16-17 heads of Embassies, further enhancing the department's reputation as a center of African studies in India. In 2010, the department welcomed A.M.R. Mwamanenge from the Tanzania High Commission, Eric Rubayita from the Rwanda High Commission, Sylvane M. Chongwony, Kenya's High Commissioner, and Mehreteab Mulugeta from the Ethiopian Embassy, among others. Representatives from Tunisia, Egypt, Eritrea, Malawi, and Rwanda also visited, highlighting the department's growing engagement with African diplomatic missions. In 2013, the department continued this tradition by hosting Ian Taylor from Scotland, along with high-ranking officials such as Kenya's High Commissioner Yabesh O. Monari, Dr. Arye Kumar Jagessur, the High Commissioner of Mauritius, and representatives from the Nigerian and Mauritian embassies. The academic collaboration extended in 2014, with visits from Dr. Alex M. Ngoma of the University of Zambia and Victor L. Tonchi from the University of Namibia.

In the following years, the department continued to strengthen its international ties. In 2016, dignitaries such as Loego Ethel Motsumi from Botswana, Mr. Mohammed B. Alolaimy from the Egyptian Embassy, and representatives from Nigeria, Libya, Senegal, and Morocco reinforced the department's strong connections with African nations. The visit of Dr. Lubinda Haabazoka from the University of Zambia in 2019 further underscored the academic collaborations between India and African institutions. In 2022, the department welcomed Sibyssio Ndebele, the then High Commissioner of South Africa, and Professor Brij Maharaj from the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, reaffirming its commitment to promoting educational and diplomatic partnerships with the African continent. H.E. Anisa Kapufi Mbega, Tanzania High Commissioner, Tahina Rasamoelina from Madagascar Embassy, and Col Simon Peter Oyoo from Uganda High Commissioner visited in the year 2023.

Under the University Diplomatic Dialogue (UDD) initiative of the Department of African Studies, African diplomats engage with students, faculty, and scholars, promoting cross-cultural dialogue and academic knowledge. Some of the notable presence have been made by Ghana's First Secretary Nana Kojo Aseidu at the Department's lecture series on 20th March 2023 which is also celebrated as Ghana's Independence, H.E. Mr. Cedrick C Crowley, Acting High Commissioner, South African Embassy in India on the occasion of the Africa Day celebration on 30th May 2024, and the first secretary of the Algerian embassy, Mr. Abdelali Bouillouta, who marked his presence on the screening of the movie 'The Battle of Algiers' on 22nd July

2024 organized by the African Studies Film Club of the department. The Department recently on 17th January 2025 had the honor of hosting H.E. Anisa K. Mbega, High Commissioner of Tanzania to India, at the International Guest House, the UoD, who is currently engaged in an insightful research project exploring the Indian diaspora experience in Tanzania from 1961 to 2024 (University of Delhi. Department of African Studies, LinkedIn page, 2025). To mark the celebration of the Bandung Conference and South Africa's National Day, H.E. Prof Anil Sooklal, the High Commissioner of South Africa to India, and in celebration of Africa Day, H.E. Clemente Camenha, Ambassador of Angola, visited and engaged with the academic community of the Department of African Studies on 25th April and 27th May, 2025, respectively.

With over 300 attendees, including senior diplomats from 10 African countries and H.E. Mr. Ermindo Augusto Ferreira, High Commissioner of Mozambique to India as the Chief Guest, the Department of African Studies celebrated its Platinum Jubilee on August 6, 2025, marking 70 years of academic excellence. The historic occasion emphasized the department's ongoing contribution to promoting better ties between India and Africa through cooperation, education, and culture (Karmwar, 2025).

The table below shows the total number of visits to the Department by Ambassadors, Professors, and academicians from different countries as recorded in the Visitor's book:

Table 2. Several visits to the Department by Ambassadors, Professors, and academicians from different countries, as recorded in the Visitor's book

Year	Number Of Visits to the Department
1955-1965	78
1966-1975	88
1976-1985	27
1986-1995	33
1996-2005	90
2006-2015	45
2016-2025	44
*6 th August, 2025	19

* 6th August, 2025: High Commissioners, Ambassadors and Senior diplomats from 19 African countries visited the celebration of Department's Platinum Jubilee on August 6, 2025.

Timeline of Visits by Ambassadors and Professors to the Department of African Studies (1955–2025)

Source: Department of African Studies, University of Delhi. *Visitors Book, 20th January, 2025.*

The Department Today

The Department of African Studies publishes its esteemed academic journal, the *Indian Journal of African Studies (IJAS)*, which has now been included in SEBINET, a biannual, peer-reviewed publication dedicated exclusively to the study of Africa (Department of African Studies, Information Bulletin, 2018-2023), addressing a wide range of interdisciplinary issues that influence various dimensions of human life on the continent. The IJAS, being published since 1992, aims at critical analysis and a wider understanding of the issues, goals, and aspirations of the African people and countries (University of Delhi. Department of African Studies Website, 2025). It is a blind, peer-reviewed, multidisciplinary Journal that publishes original work that contributes towards understanding African issues and India-Africa relations. Some of the

papers in the journal include The Changing Faces of Nigerian Federalism, The Dynamics of War and Peace in Liberia, Globalisation and Emerging Trends in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Critical Observation, African Union: A Path Towards Socio-Economic Integration, Ethiopian City Culture, Pattern of Teacher's Education in Eritrea, Nigeria in Transition, Religious Beliefs and Practices of People of Indian Origin in Mauritius, Regionalization in Southern Africa and the Impact of the Global Financial Crisis, India's Trade and Investment in North Africa, African Indigenous Knowledge, Cosmology And Spirituality, Africa And Its Diaspora in Asia: An Indian Perspective, Oil as a Factor in India's Foreign Policy towards Africa in the Twenty-First Century, Revisiting U-shaped linkage of Economic Development with Female Workforce Participation: An Empirical Comparison between India and South Africa, India-Africa Cultural Linkages: A Study of Siddi Tribe in Gujarat, and many more.

The Department has also been organizing conferences and seminars on India- Africa relations where scholars participate from around the world. To mention a few, National Seminar on 'Development Cooperation: Past, Present and Future Vision', 'India's Foreign Policy in Africa: A Critical Analysis', National Conference on 'India and Africa: Past, Present and Future Vision', organized by Centre for African Studies (February 2010), and more recently in 2024, the Department hosted an International Conference on Viksit Bharat and Collective Self- Reliant Africa: A Journey Together, where we saw presentations on diverse topics such as Tracing the Roots of Viksit Bharat Since 1947 & Cooperation Between Bharat & Africa, Viksit Bharat and Collective Self-Reliant Africa: A Shared Journey through the lens of World Literature, Indo-African Relations through the Lens of Diaspora Diplomacy: A Soft Power Analysis- Forging New Horizons: India-Africa Synergies Towards Viksit Bharat 2047 and Agenda, Nexus 2063: India-Somalia Relations and the Strategic Vision 2063, Revisiting Ubuntu and Swaraj: A Comparative Study of Sustainable Governance in Africa and India, Viksit Bharat 2047 and Agenda 2063: India-Africa Relations and Recent Developments - Africa's Partnership in India's Journey towards Viksit Bharat @2047, etc.

The Department of African Studies is instrumental in enlarging the scope and spearheading African studies in India by helping to design courses on Africa in different colleges or universities and training them. Acting as a resource center, the department advises organizations on African issues and directs the incorporation of African viewpoints into the broader area studies and international relations curricula. Through the introduction of the *History of Africa* course in several of the colleges in UoD, the Department has been influential in advancing African Studies. These courses are currently being taught at institutions such as Dayal Singh College (Evening), Kalindi College, and Indraprastha College for Women. Hansraj College, Rajdhani College, and Ramjas College are among the institutions that have offered a course on Africa for several years and continue to do so. This demonstrates the Department's ongoing efforts to broaden its academic reach and mainstream African Studies into the undergraduate curriculum.

Under the mentorship of committed faculty, the Department of African Studies has evolved into an inclusive environment that embraces students from varied backgrounds, each contributing unique narratives and viewpoints. This diversity of experiences enhances our intellectual exchanges, establishing a deeper understanding of the intricate dynamics between India and Africa. It is within these engagements that friendships are nurtured, ideas are cultivated, and enduring connections are established. In today's constantly changing global landscape, regional knowledge and indigenous traditions are increasingly at risk of being neglected. Area studies departments, such as the African Studies of the UoD, play a critical role in conserving and spreading these important aspects of human development. The Department also has initiatives named University Diplomatic Dialogue (UDD), Scholars on Africa, International Lecture Series, and Afriscope, with the primary goal of engaging scholars and faculty members in creating a

better understanding and interaction between India and Africa.

India-Africa relations have a very long history. In the modern era, these relations have been shaped in multiple ways, particularly during the late centuries, involving political figures, businesses, and various cultural groups, contributing to significant historical narratives. The Professors and scholars at the Department have continuously worked on different aspects of these relations, covering topics concerning different African countries. These studies analyze India's multidimensional relations with Africa and the efforts made by successive Indian governments in recent decades to improve and strengthen these ties. The interdisciplinary approach adopted by the department, coupled with its engagement with international collaborations, has enabled scholars to develop a good understanding of Afrocentrism in both historical and modern contexts. It is a moment of great significance to share this article, as 2025 marks the 70th anniversary of the department's distinguished legacy a those aspiring to study at this prestigious institution will find it to be a gem that enriches their academic journey, offering good training, access to valuable resources, and a dynamic intellectual environment that adds feathers to their scholarly pursuits.

Conclusion

The Department of African Studies at the UoD stands as a testament to the enduring legacy of India's commitment to promoting academic excellence and diplomatic engagement with Africa. From its commencement in 1955 to its 70 years of present-day achievements, the department has consistently showcased interdisciplinary research, cultural exchange, and mutual understanding between India and Africa. Through the establishment of specialized courses, collaborations with the UGC, academic exchanges through scholars' interaction, and the development of a comprehensive library, the department has solidified its position as a leading institution for African Studies. Its ability to attract global scholars, diplomats, and policymakers highlights its role as a way for intellectual and cultural dialogue. In the contemporary academic landscape, the department continues to flourish, promoting innovative research and enriching India-Africa relations, while shaping a better understanding of Africa's dynamic history, politics, and culture as well as India-Africa relations.

The genesis, the historical development, and the formation of various area studies programs during and after World War II have led to a blurring of the university borders and state interests (Khosrowjah, H. 2011). The legacy of the Department of African Studies at the UoD is defined by its pioneering role as one of the earliest and most comprehensive departments dedicated to interdisciplinary study and an Afrocentric approach. Today, the department is at the forefront of African studies in India, actively collaborating with international experts, engaging the students with intellectual experts on Africa-related issues, and hosting seminars and conferences. It continues to promote India-Africa connections through education. The Department of African Studies has witnessed a significant enhancement in student engagement, facilitated by an increasing number of academic initiatives. A key development in this regard is the department's organization of numerous online interactions, promoting intellectual exchanges between scholars, faculty members, and esteemed academics from African universities. This digital engagement enables direct interaction with subject experts and professionals, thereby enriching the academic discourse and broadening research perspectives. There has been a noticeable shift in the nature of research projects over the years, reflecting an increasing focus on diverse and intellectually emerging topics. This evolution highlights the department's commitment to expanding the scope of inquiry and addressing contemporary issues pertinent to Africa and its relations with India. The Department of African Studies continues to uphold its multidisciplinary approach, serving as an

essential space for the critical examination of India-Africa relations through historical, political, economic, and sociocultural lenses. Today's world is characterized by academic advancements, enhanced global connectivity, and an emphasis on lifelong learning, diverse knowledge, and inclusivity in education. As Nelson Mandela so profoundly stated, "*Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.*" The Department of African Studies is not simply researching Africa and India-Africa relations, but building connections, acting as a vibrant hub of academic excellence, and building the foundation for a shared, enlightened future for India and Africa.

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Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

This study does not involve any experiments on human participants or animals. As it is a historical and institutional account based on archival sources and publicly available information, ethical approval and participant consent are not applicable.

Competing Interests

The author(s) declare that there are no conflicts of interest—financial or otherwise—that may have influenced the research or its presentation.

List of Abbreviations

E.C.: Executive Council
H.E.: His/ Her Excellency
ICCR: Indian Council for Cultural Relations
ICHR: Indian Council for Historical Research
ICSSR: Indian Council for Social Science Research
ICWA: Indian Council of World Affairs
IFS: Indian Foreign Service
IJAS: Indian Journal of African Studies
JNU: Jawaharlal Nehru University
MA: Master of Arts
M.Phil.: Master of Philosophy
OATD: Open Access Theses and Dissertations
OAU: Organization of African Unity
Ph.D.: Doctor of Philosophy

PMML: Prime Ministers Museum and Library

UDD: University Diplomatic Dialogue

UGC: University Grants Commission

UNESCO: United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization

UoD: University of Delhi

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Notes

1. 45 students*: As of 10th September 2025, 37 students are currently enrolled following the recent withdrawal.

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