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Ambiguous Citizenship: The Siddis of Uttara Kannada, India

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a study of the community of Siddis in Uttara Kannada district. I will describe and discuss, mostly in aspects related to the Scheduled Tribe status, the problem of reservations, the question of education, language, the work scenario and finally I will briefly analyse how religion is practised among the Siddi Christians and its influence on their lives. Issues of citizenship and national belonging, social and political agency inevitably impose themselves to my analysis. Although the Siddis share a common ethnic pool and similar economic conditions, they are subdivided by their belonging to three major religions, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity.

I hope to have helped to understand how the Siddis have been living in obscurity for nearly five centuries. In India's complex hierarchy of castes and tribes, the Siddis are classified as a tribe or *adivasis* and only in 2003 were the Siddis of Uttara Kannada granted the much-coveted Scheduled Tribe status that provides them reservations and representation to a large extent. The concession and enforcement of the Scheduled Tribe status has been contentious and fraught with controversy. While well intentioned, most of the schemes are flawed and not properly enforced which leave the Siddis in a difficult predicament. They haven't all been informed of the benefits that accrue to them owing to their new status and hence this is a cause for confusion and disappointment. This problem has also been exacerbated by the issue of corruption, lack of knowledge and information from the authorities.

What kind of citizen is the Siddi?. The Siddi is discriminated against by his non-Siddi counterpart on account of his physical appearance and is a victim of stereotyping. Siddis do not have proper access to education. In terms of jobs, Siddis are left to do menial jobs. Of course, this is a natural outcome of lack of education. Siddis are discriminated in public offices and banks and often are unable to receive social and economic benefits that are due them in spite of reservations that allow for a special status to the Siddis.

Key words: siddis; african; scheduled tribe; education; citizenship; identity

RESUMO

Esta tese é um estudo da comunidade de Siddis no distrito de Uttara Kannada. Descreverei e analisarei, nomeadamente no que diz respeito ao estatuto de Tribo Identificada, o problema da reserva territorial, a questão da educação, língua, da força de trabalho e finalmente analisarei de forma breve como é que a religião é praticada pelos cristãos Siddis e respectiva influência nas suas vidas. Questões de cidadania e de nacionalidade, de actuação social e política fazem inevitavelmente parte da minha análise. Embora os Siddis partilhem um enquadramento étnico e condições económicas semelhantes, encontram-se subdivididos pelas três maiores religiões do país, o Hinduísmo, o Islamismo e o Cristianismo.

Espero ter contribuído para que se compreenda como os Siddis têm vivido na obscuridade por cerca de cinco séculos. Na complexa hierarquia das castas e tribos da Índia, os Siddis são classificados como uma tribo ou *adivasis* e só em 2003 foi garantido aos Siddis de Uttara Kannada o já há muito desejado estatuto de Tribo Identificada que lhes providencia reservas territoriais e ampla representatividade. A concessão e implementação do estatuto de Tribo Identificada tem sido contenciosa e controversa. Embora bem intencionados, muitos dos esquemas foram tempestuosos e mal implementados deixando os Siddis numa difícil condição. Não foram de todo informados sobre os benefícios que lhes foram atribuídos pelo novo estatuto, o que foi uma causa de confusão e desapontamento. Este problema também foi exarcebado pela questão da corrupção, falta de conhecimento e de informação por parte das autoridades. Que espécie de cidadão é o Siddi? O Siddi é discriminado negativamente pela sua componente não-Siddi devido à sua aparência física sendo uma vítima da estereotipização. Os Siddis não têm acesso adequado à educação. No que se refere ao emprego, os Siddis acabam por só desempenhar trabalhos inferiores. Claro que isto é um resultado natural da ausência de educação. Os Siddis são discriminados nas repartições públicas e bancos, sendo muitas vezes impedidos de receber benefícios sociais e económicos que lhes são devidos apesar das disposições que permitem aos Siddis um estatuto especial.

Palavras chaves: siddis; africano; tribo identificada; educação; cidadania; identidade

Introduction

In the Western Ghat region of the Uttara Kannada district of Karnataka, in South India, and in some areas bordering that region in Belgaum and Dharwad districts (map n°1), we find a group of people who look different in physical features from the rest of the people living in the area. They are known as Siddis. They are people of African descent settled in India for nearly five centuries (Prasad 1984, in foreword).

This thesis is a study of the community of Siddis in Uttara Kannada district. I will describe and discuss, mostly in aspects related to the Scheduled Tribe status, the problem of reservations, the question of education, language, the work scenario and finally I will briefly analyse how religion is practised among the Siddi Christians and its influence on their lives. Issues of citizenship and national belonging, social and political agency inevitably impose themselves to my analysis. Although the Siddis share a common ethnic pool and similar economic conditions, they are subdivided by their belonging to three major religions, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity (Prasad, 1984, foreword). My study will be largely restricted to the Siddi Christian community although I shall make some brief references to the Muslim and Hindu Siddis as well.

The Siddis are spread out mainly on the West coast of India in the states of Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa, Diu and Karnataka. There are however Siddis settled in other parts of India as well. In Obeng's words:

The Siddis that live in India were not brought from one particular region in Africa but from all over the eastern coast of this continent. Also known as Habshis (Abyssinians), a great majority of them are believed to have been brought to India from Abyssinia by Arab slave traders. Not all of them were brought as slaves. Some were brought to serve in the armies of local rulers, as soldiers, as well as musicians, midwives etc. and some rose to power in certain states like Janjira, which had its own Siddi ruler and army (Obeng, 2008, p2).

The Context: a geographical and demographical overview of the Uttara Kannada district

The district of Uttara Kannada (also known as North Kanara) for the purpose of civic administration is divided into eleven *talukas*¹ and comprises 1280 villages (Charles Camara, 2012, map no. 2). For more than a century and a half this district was known as North-Kanara or simply as Kanara in the official records and the Gazetteer compiled during the 1980s. In

¹ The *taluka* is an administrative division composed of a certain number of villages. The eleven *talukas* are Haliyal, Supa, Karwar, Yellapur, Mundgod, Ankola, Sirsi, Kumta, Siddapur, Honavar and Bhatkal. Karwar serves as the administrative headquarters of Uttara Kannada.

1977, the name of the district was changed to Uttara Kannada.² The present change in name does not signify any material alteration, for Uttara Kannada is a mere Kannada translation of the term North Kanara, the former Anglicized name. It was the Portuguese who bestowed the name Kanara (also spelt as *Canara*) to this territory along with its southern counterpart.³

The Uttara Kannada district is rich in forest resources. Nearly 80% of the district is under forest, total area under forest being 8,13,595 hectares.⁴

During the course of my research, I travelled to Uttara Kannada and visited three *talukas* with a substantial Siddi population: Haliyal, Mundgod and Yellapur. While I was able to get a reasonable perception of the three *talukas*, I could focus much of my fieldwork in Haliyal, where I could interact with Siddis in various villages scattered in remote parts of this region.

The total population of Scheduled Tribes in the district is 34, 239, which constitutes 2.38 % of the total Scheduled Tribes population of India. In 2001, in Haliyal the Scheduled Tribe population was 6128, in Mundgod 5763 and in Yellapur 5486. The percentage of Scheduled Tribes population to total populations were 5.13, 5.43 and 6.97 in Haliyal, Mundgod and Yellapur talukas respectively.⁵

During my first visit to Uttara Kannada in December 2016, I was able to briefly visit the villages of Wada, Ghardoli, Gadgera, Hosur, Bopin Kop, Dodkop, Mavinkop, Dandeli, Kerwad, Nagashetikop and Tattigeri in the Haliyal district, Mainalli, Kegdal, Bilki and Gunjavatti among others in the Mundagod and Yellapur districts. Most of the villages, with the exception of a few, were located in isolated forested areas. These villages were accessible only by mud paths that cut off from the main road and were often a fair distance into the jungle. The villages were scattered all over and only a few were in close proximity to each other.

² vide the Government of Karnataka Notification No. RDF.6.TNV.76 dated 31.1.1977.

³ *Census of India 2011*, Karnataka: District Census Handbook, UTTARA KANADA, 2011

⁴ *Census of India 2011*, Karnataka: District Census Handbook, UTTARA KANADA, 2011

⁵ The total area of these *talukas* is respectively 1313,00 sq km with 125 villages and 1 town and the total population of the *taluka* is 78,662 676,00 sq km with 90 villages and two towns., for the former; and the total population of the *taluka* is 1,06, 174 for the latter. *Census of India 2011*, Karnataka: District Census Handbook, Uttara Kanada, 2011

KARNATAKA



Map 1



Map 2

Methodology: from the field to the archives

This study is based on an ethnographic observation that I carried out between December 2016 and January 2017 in Uttara Kannada district. I visited various Siddi villages and conducted interviews with local Siddis, with the help of a local Ugandan scholar. The interviews were mostly in English with the younger Siddis, and with the help of a translator to communicate with the older ones who didn't speak English.

I visited a Siddi school in the village of Gadgera, where I met Siddi teachers, to gather information about the school and education in general for the Siddis.

My ethnographic observation was complemented by the pioneering studies on the Siddis by Kiran Kamal Prasad and Pashington Obeng, whose works provided me much of the groundwork and the basis for my research on the Siddis of Uttara Kannada.

Essays on citizenship, identity, education and human rights have helped me in broadening the theoretical framework of my study, as I will try to show below.

Structure of the thesis

As the Siddis are a Scheduled Tribe (ST), according to the terminology of the Indian administration, I have analysed in depth aspects related to the Scheduled Tribe status.

The term "Scheduled Tribe" along with "Scheduled Caste" appeared for the first time after the constitution came into force in 1950. The Siddis are not a caste nor can their social structure be understood according to the stratification of the caste system. They are a tribe, one of the many tribes of India, traditionally called *adivasi*, which means "indigenous people". It is estimated that 70 to 90 million people, approximately 8% of the population, are classified as tribal.

I will dedicate this analysis to the first chapter of my thesis, which also includes the question of reservations. The reality is that in India there are certain sections of the society that often have no voice and are discriminated against in various forms. Hence, reservations are required, to give these sections political representation at the different levels of Indian administration, and protection in education, health and other civic rights.

In chapter 2, I will focus briefly on issues of language (a mixture of Konkani, Marathi and Urdu) and above all on education as this is where the Siddis lag behind their non-Siddi counterparts. Siddis themselves give education a lot of importance and they believe that it is the only way forward for them. I will discuss briefly the origins of the term “Siddi”. Historical references impose themselves to the study at this point. I will therefore analyse how the Siddis are believed to have reached the forests of Uttara Kannada and then further will describe their settlements and how they administer them. While most of the Siddis that I interacted with in Haliyal were Christians, I also met Hindus and Muslims⁶. Religion was the field where I faced more obstacles, which prevented me from collecting comprehensive data

Finally, in Chapter 3, I will debate issues of identity and citizenship, and I will try to understand where the Siddis’ sense of belonging lies. This chapter is relevant as it is difficult to put in clear boxes topics related to identity. It is significant to observe how their self-identification differs from their identification by non-Siddis.

⁶ The Christian and Hindu Siddis are assumed to be of the same stock or group that lived together and some point in time in the past in Goa. It is assumed they were all Catholic and after moving to Uttara Kannada and living in Hindu dominated areas and working for Havyak Brahmins, that some of them began calling themselves Hindu Siddis.

CHAPTER 1

The Siddis, the status of Scheduled Tribe and the policy of reservations

To understand the better the predicament of a tribal community in India, it is important first to understand the model of social stratification that exists in the country i.e the system of castes.

The Indian population is officially and unofficially classified into numerous ethnic and religious groups, tribes and castes. Although the caste system was officially outlawed by the Constitution of India in 1950, it still lingers in the everyday life of Indians, particularly in rural areas. Caste in India is a socially stratified system and it comprises four *varna* (a category that works as a tool for classification of a multiplicity of castes): brahmans, kshatriyas, vaishyas and shudras, plus a category referred nowadays as Dalits (Scheduled Castes), coined by Gandhi as *Harijans*, “children of God”. People belonging to the four *varnas* look down upon Dalits, and in past times referred to them with the derogatory epithet “untouchables”.

The Status of Scheduled Tribe

Whilst “tribal” is a more common English word than “indigenous”, it is difficult to arrive at any definition of it which is remotely water-tight. A definition of tribal peoples by Stephen Corry, states that Tribal peoples are those which have followed ways of life for many generations that are largely self-sufficient, and are clearly different from the mainstream and dominant society (Corry, 2011)

There can be no fixed criteria to distinguish a group of people as a tribe. There may be certain tribes with distinct features which set them off from other people in the region, in terms of language, religious traits of animism, social and political organisation. But there are many groups which are recognised as tribes but, at the same time, share with the members of the larger society many characteristics like language, religious and cultural practices, economic conditions and standard of life (Prasad, 1984:94) This seems the case of many tribes in India and more so of the Siddis as their most important distinguishing factor is their ethnic origin. Language, religion and cultural practices are shared with the mainstream society, even if not in its entirety.

The designation “Scheduled Tribe” along with “Scheduled Caste” appeared for the first time after the Constitution came into force in 1950. Articles 341 and 342 of the Constitution of India

empowered the President to notify certain tribes in the list of Scheduled Tribes. In that list, primitiveness and backwardness were the tests applied for specifying a Scheduled Tribe. The main characteristics which are common to all Scheduled Tribes are (a) tribal origin (b) primitive way of life (c) habitation in remote and less easily accessible areas and (d) general backwardness in all respects. (Prasad, 1984, supra note 8, p89)

The Siddis were recognised as Scheduled Tribes in Gujarat in 1956 in one region and in the whole state in 1976, and in Goa, Diu and Daman in 1967. The Siddis of Uttar Kanadda were not incorporated as a Scheduled Tribe until 2003.

Before they were granted ST status, African Indians, with the help of AKSDA (Akhila Karnataka Siddi Vikasa, or All Karnataka Siddi Development Association), Jesuit priests, especially Cyprian Lobo (a.k.a Kiran Prasad), Robert Cutinha, Francis Guntipilly, and Lawrence Pinto, have championed efforts to improve African Indians' living conditions (Obeng, 2008:30).

Kiran Prasad (a.k.a Cyprian Lobo) in his book and recently updated volume *In search of an Identity: An Ethnographic Study of the Siddis in Karnataka* (2005) began making appeals in the mid-1980s on behalf of the African Indians to be included in the ST people in India (Obeng,2008:31).

On June 6, 1989, a memorandum was submitted to the Governor of Karnataka, asking that African Indians be given the rights of "citizens of Free India", according to writer Kavipriya, July 17, 1994 in the Udayavani Newspaper Magazine Section (published in Mangalore) (Obeng, 2008:31) What is intriguing and interesting is that African Indians or Siddis were not yet considered as citizens of India despite living in India for over five centuries at least as this memorandum claims.

Putting this into context, it seems rather absurd that a community that existed in the Indian subcontinent for centuries before what is today the Republic of India (as their existence predated the Independence of India) did not possess rights due to a citizen of India and only came to claim such rights after the covenant of the Scheduled Tribe Status.

In 2003, the Siddis in one district of Karnataka were allocated the legal status of "Scheduled Tribe", a promotion from their previous grading as "backward tribe", labels that sound obnoxious to politically correct ears but are regarded as highly coveted in the Indian context.

This legal status provides access to reserved quotas of government jobs, political representation, educational advantages and housing subsidies (Ineke van Kessel, 2006, p 462)

Implementation of the status of Scheduled Tribe

Since 2003, the government of the state of Karnataka has initiated awareness programs to explain the benefits that castes and tribes that have been given the new status would receive. Although the aims and objectives of these programs are remarkable, there is a disjunction between the intention and the implementation of the goals (Obeng,2008:36). This was reiterated to me by many of the Siddis that I interviewed, who see flaws in the schemes introduced for them. Before addressing these flaws, it would be pertinent to point out that most Siddis are unaware of the benefits that they can claim under their new status.

In fact, all Siddis have a ST card but none of them knows what benefits it can bring to them as there hasn't been any kind of proper education about the benefits of having the ST status (Bosco Kaweesi, personal communication, December 2016). Most Siddis aren't aware of their rights as ST and even if they are, they are not capable of demanding them. There is a lack of leadership in this regard. (Francis Harnodkar Siddi, personal communication, January 2017)

Since African Indians were reclassified as ST, the Siddi Development Society - the umbrella organization for African Indians in Karnataka - is making an effort to work with local political organizations to explain this new status to the African Indian communities. This is where their local groups require leaders who have the time and ability to understand the complex information that they in turn will pass on to their people (Obeng, 2008:36).

One of the most well-known leaders, Basthao Siddi, with whom I had the opportunity to speak with time and again, lamented the lack of leadership among the Siddis. He feels that even today they are in a way "slaves" to the non-Siddis, be it in religion, politics or social life. Basthao has been a vibrant leader but nowadays we can observe a certain exhaustion on his face as he speaks of the trials and tribulations of the community. He had been an elected member of the *panchayat*⁷ and it was during his tenure that the first roads and drains were built in Ghardoli and other Siddi villages. It was also his efforts that resulted in the first brick and concrete houses with tiled roofs built for the Siddis

Since the Siddis have been included as ST some arrangements have been introduced, as Basthao told me. However, the real benefits are not felt by the them, which is due to the lack

⁷ The *panchayat* is the council of the village.

of information of the benefits available. Yet, the situation is better in Haliyal *taluka* than in other *talukas* of Uttara Kannada owing to a representative of the Siddi community now being in the *panchayat*.

Many of the schemes are deeply flawed and seem to be implemented half-heartedly. Then again, there is a lack of knowledge from the authorities of the benefits that apply to the Siddis, so much so that even if the Siddis are aware of the benefits available to them, they may still be denied them by uninformed officials. Obeng speaks of the ignorance on the part of the officials who sometimes misinform the Siddis and in other instances asked to be paid bribes (Obeng 2008:36-37)

There are some African Indians who have often applied for financial assistance, which is available for people of ST, but so far they have received none. Furthermore, they do not know where to go and whom to ask (Obeng, 2008:37).

The criteria of right for giving of government subsidies and grants to the people who have been reclassified as ST seem to exclude some African Indians. Indeed, an African Indian man who marries a non-African Indian woman qualify as family for government benefits, whereas their women who marry non-African Indians are considered as having lost their ethnicity, as they bear the names of their husbands. Such names do not end with “Siddi” (Obeng, 2008:37)

I asked this very question to a Siddi woman called Ramita Prakash Christian, who incidentally didn't have “Siddi” in her name, if adding “Siddi” was an issue. She told me that it does constitute an administrative and bureaucratic problem in education and work-related spheres. (Ramita Prakash Christian, personal communication, January 2017).

Some years ago, mixed marriages were unheard of, but nowadays, owing to mobility for work and education, there are more cases of mixed marriages and hence the issue of qualifying for ST benefits does become quite complex.

As mentioned above, leadership for the Siddis becomes crucial if they are to feel the real benefits of their new status. A powerful, well informed leader, with the ability to champion the cause of the Siddis would in turn help them receive the benefits that they are meant to obtain.

Basthao lamented that the government's help came through organizations that in turn deceived the Siddis. However, it is worth noting that the sponsorship played by the Catholic sisters for the African Indians in Mainalli has fostered the release of funds for the African Indian Christian community (Obeng, 2008:37).

Some of the views by the Siddis on the new ST status are in the examples below.

With the ST status, there have been a few monetary benefits and other schemes that have helped the Siddis. However, it has not made any difference in the sphere of education for us. Education for Siddis is more important than monetary benefits as it is only through education that we can progress as a community and be more independent (Ramita Prakash Christian, personal communication, January 2017)

There are a few schemes that have been introduced that have helped Siddis but apart from a handful, most Siddis aren't aware of the benefits available to them as ST. Besides, it hasn't made much difference to the education that Siddis receive (Premnath Androj Christian, personal communication, January 2017)

It is quite clear that Siddis do believe that hand in hand with monetary benefits and arrangements being introduced there is a need for a larger implementation of education and that the status of ST could have been and can still be a platform for this educational assistance.

The policy of reservations

While many scholars hold the opinion that reservations are in a way a form of positive discrimination, in a country like India with an extreme diversity of people, religions and languages socially downgraded, reservations are a form of guaranteeing and safeguarding the prospects of the so called "backward" sections of society that normally would be ignored by the mainstream population. The reality in India is that there are certain sections of the society that are often isolated and have no voice and are discriminated against in various forms. Indeed, the worst form of discrimination is isolation. Hence, reservations are required, in to give these communities an opportunity for representation.

Reservation is the means of setting aside a certain percentage of seats, vacancies in educational, government and legislative institutions for members of the weaker sections of the social structure. Scholars and activists have strongly advocated the need for protective discrimination as well as affirmative action.⁸

⁸ Dr. BP Mahesh Chandra Guru, Mr B Rajendra, Mr Gowtham Devanoor, Rajeej,K, Constitutional Provisions for Inclusive Development of SCs, STs and OBCs in India: An Assessment, International Journal of Multidisciplinary Approach and Studies, ISSN NO: 2348-537X

According to Marion Young, the exclusion of the under-represented communities from the decision-making process contributes to perpetuate political and social inequalities. The practice of exclusion of weaker sections from the debates and discussions and perpetuation of social inequalities is against the normative democratic ideals of political and social equality. Furthermore, the inclusion of the marginalized groups not only in legislatures but also in commissions, boards, task forces, media coverage, and other decision-making bodies will help them to confront and find remedies for structural inequalities. (Young, 2000:53-54)

With a view to involve them in the mainstream population, the Indian constitution framers have provided certain special safeguards and protective provisions for the improvement of indigenous people. Important among such provisions are the following (Karunakar, 2011):

- Article 46 provides for promotion of educational and economic interests of SCs and STs- The State shall promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, and in particular, of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes, and shall protect them from social injustice and other forms of exploitation.
- Article 330 provides for reservation of seats for SCs and STs in the House of the People
- Article 332 provides for reservation of seats for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the Legislative Assemblies of the States
- Article 335 aims at recognition of the claims of SCs and STs to service and posts

The Indian Constitution gives therefore the Scheduled Tribes benefits and reservations. However, such is the predicament of the Siddis that reservations, safeguards and benefits available to them notwithstanding they are unable to receive these benefits on account of lack of aspiration, misinformed officials and a general apathy to their plight from the authorities. The absence of leadership from the Siddis exacerbates this problem further as they are unable to claim benefits that are legally due to them.

With regards to the implementation of constitutional safeguards and provisions, the rulers have not promptly implemented the constitutional provisions in education, social, economic and political sectors of national life. They have made the lives of SCs, STs, OBCs, minorities, women, children and other marginalized sections of society quite wretched in the post-independence era.⁹

⁹ See BP Mahesh Chandra Guru, Mr B Rajendra, Mr Gowtham Devanoor, Rajeej,K, Constitutional Provisions for Inclusive Development of SCs, STs and OBCs in India: An Assessment, International Journal of Multidisciplinary Approach and Studies, ISSN NO: 2348-537X

Most of the Siddis that I spoke to were aware that there were certain monetary benefits available to them and mentioned the schemes introduced as a result of being included as a Scheduled Tribe. However, barring one or two, there were no Siddis who were aware of any reservations available to them in public, educational and political institutions. Those Siddis who have a basic knowledge of their new rights, do not know whom to approach to receive their benefits.

From the data above, we can draw a first conclusion that I will try to develop in the next chapters: an ambiguous citizenship. Indeed, in theory the Siddis are full-fledged Indian citizens. However, they are discriminated against in their association with Africa (a distant and, in many cases, mythological association), and their integration into the national citizenship is made through a compensatory discrimination, which distinguishes them from other citizens of India.

CHAPTER 2

What's in a name? Language, education, organization

“Siddis”: What's in a name?

The Siddis found in different regions of India do not have a single origin. They have come from different countries in East Africa and at different periods at least from the 14th century till the middle of the 19th century. Though a few may have come as traders, a majority of them were brought to India as slaves (Prasad 1984:73). The Arabs were the masters of the Indian Ocean from the 6th century till the advent of the Portuguese in the 16th century. During this period, they were the chief promoters of African slave trade in India (idem, supra note 37). The African slaves sold by the Arabs were usually from Abyssinia as it was not far from India.¹⁰

The African slaves brought to India go by various names. The most common of them is Siddi, taken to be a corruption of Syed (Prasad 1984, supra note 15). They are also called Habshis. The term *habshis* is derived from the Arabic El-Habish, suggesting that the Siddis or the Habshis were brought from Abyssinia. However, one is led to believe that the Habshis from this part of Africa were not the same Africans that are found in Uttara Kannada. In fact, the Siddis with whom I have carried my research are believed to have been brought to Goa, Daman and Diu by the Portuguese. There is also evidence that some were taken to the east coast of India by the Portuguese as Kiran Kamal Prasad mentions: “The Portuguese carried on the slave trade on the eastern coast of India too, in Pili and Balasor in Orissa and Hoogly in Bengal. In Bengal, the Portuguese settlers maintained several slaves who were given Portuguese name (Prasad 1984 supra note 46 p 75). In Goa, they were also called mulattos or Kaphris, a Portuguese term denoting the descendants of Negroes and non-negroes (Prasad 1984, supra note 30).¹¹

The slave trade carried on by the European natives in coastal India was a fraction compared to the slave trade they carried on between the West Coast of Africa and their colonies in West Indies and the Americas. The reason was that in India, the slaves were required mainly for

¹⁰ Prasad, Kiran Kamal, supra note 41, pg 74

¹¹ The Portuguese in India held a number of slaves of both sexes (Prasad 1984, supra note 46, p 75.) The main source of slaves for the Portuguese seem to have been Mozambique. Hamilton notes that between 1680 and 1720, a good store of Mozambique Negroes was brought to India. (Prasad 1984, supra note 48, p75) Another place in East Africa where the Portuguese brought slaves from was Sofala.

domestic work whereas in the American and West Indian colonies, they were required to supply labour for the plantations (Prasad 1984:76)¹²

A number of the Siddis that I met in Haliyal had names of Portuguese origin like Caitan (Caetano) Santan (Santana) Juje (José), Agnel (Agnelo), Rosa, Minguel (Miguel). It was common practice for the Portuguese slave traders to baptise the slaves before they boarded the ships to be carried to India. These names are common in Goa, although spelt a bit differently, suggesting the Goan connection to the Siddis of Uttara Kannada.

Apart from the periodic running away of slaves from the coastal territories of the Portuguese to the interior forest regions of the neighbouring kings, another factor must have played an important role in the freeing of Africans of Negroid descent as also of all other slaves. The Portuguese, as also the British, gradually abolished slave trade in their territories. (Prasad 198:82) After some other partial attempts to free slaves, slavery was abolished throughout the Portuguese Empire in 25 February 1869 (Prasad, 1984, supra note 72, p83).

The slaves that were freed after the abolition of slavery must have either continued in Goa or sought shelter in the forested regions of Uttara Kannada where they now form a fairly large community. There is a community of Siddis that live in Goa till today some of whom I have met personally. Many Siddis from Uttara Kannara still seek work in Goa where they work as domestic labour or in construction. On the bus, back to Goa from Haliyal, I noticed a number of Siddi youth also travelling to Goa.

The young Siddis have no knowledge of the terrible past their ancestors faced under slavery in Goa and they readily leave their settlements to seek work in Goa. Besides, they speak Konkani and this helps them in the job market in Goa.

¹² To escape from the inhuman conditions, many slaves are believed to have run away and taken refuge in territories of neighbouring kings. It is believed that those that escaped and converted to Islam, could be officially sold and the money obtained given to their original masters. Those who did not convert were to be returned to their original masters. Such was an agreement signed in 1548 between Governor Garcia de Sá and Ibrahim Adil Shah I (Prasad 1984, supra note 69, p82).

The language of the Siddis of Uttara Kannada

The original language of the Siddis is said to be Swahili or other language spoken on the eastern coast of Africa.¹³ But nowadays they exclusively speak local languages.

The Siddis of Haliyal speak a mixture of Konkani and Marathi, with a few Kannada and Urdu words thrown in. However, they refer to this language as Konkani. I was able to talk, with them to some extent in the little Konkani that I spoke but I found it rather hard to follow most of the conversation as it was a completely different variety of Konkani that I was dealing with. All settlements of the Siddis, irrespective of the *taluka*, used the same language to communicate and understand each other perfectly. Some of the settlements are situated at large distances from each other and hence I found this rather interesting.

The Christian and the Hindu Siddis speak the same version or dialect of Konkani. Most of the Muslim Siddis speak Urdu (Prasad 1984:15). The Konkani spoken by the Siddis, as pointed out by Kiran Kamal Prasad is different from the Konkani of other local Christians of Mundgod, Haliyal and Yellapur. The main language spoken by the mainstream society in Uttara Kannada is Kannada. Why then do the Siddis speak Konkani and this variant of the language?

Konkani is the language of Goa and therefore this points out firmly in the direction that the Siddis of Karnataka were originally inhabitants of Goa under Portuguese rule, maybe as slaves. Their eventual migration to Uttara Kannada brought with it several local influences into the Konkani spoken in Goa leading to the contemporary variant spoken in Uttara Kannada.

The Hindu and the Christian Siddis speak the same variant of Konkani, which suggests that both groups were together in the past or must have had a common past (Prasad,1984:16). The Hindu Siddis may have been Christian at one point in time and later converted to Hinduism under the Havyak Brahmins for whom they worked. The Muslim Siddis are assumed to have picked up the Urdu language from their co-religionists (idem:17). Besides Konkani, all Siddis, especially the men folk, are very familiar with Kannada, the regional language (idem 1984:18).

Education for the Siddis

The educational system of the state of Karnataka consists of the following sectors: pre-primary education (*balwadi*), primary education, secondary education, pre-university, college

¹³ Prasad, Kiran Kamal, supra note 22

education, medical education, technical education, legal education, teachers' training and graduate teachers' training (Obeng 2008:44)

Pre-primary classes include Nursery, K.G, Pre-basic, Play School etc. Schools providing education from Standard 1 (Grade 1) and upward up to and inclusive of Standard V are classified as Primary Schools. Schools providing education from standard VI and upward upto and inclusive of Standard VIII are classified as Middle Schools. Secondary schools are those providing education from Standard IX and upwards up to and inclusive of standard X. Schools and colleges that provide education for standards XII and XII and first and second year of the Pre-University Course fall under the category of Senior Secondary Schools. Beyond these, educational institutions that provided post-PUC level education leading to University degree/diploma come under the bracket of degree colleges.¹⁴

According to the 2011 Census, there are 232 villages in Uttara Kannada that do not have primary schools within the village, but these are available within the radius of 10km, and 615 villages do not have a middle school.¹⁵

In Pashington Obeng's study he concedes that

“Most of the African Indian villagers (perhaps 60 percent or more) do not have lower primary schools in their locality. Lack of transport facilities and bad roads to the villages have added hurdles to their access to education” (Obeng 2008:44)

Education is the means by which Siddis can overcome the obstacles they face in society and improve their economic livelihoods. This opinion is held by many Siddis, both literate and illiterate. The younger, literate and educated Siddis were convinced that it was the way forward for the Siddi community. Let us listen to the following statements:

“Education for Siddis is more important than monetary benefits and it is only through education that Siddis can progress as a community and be more independent.” (Ramita Prakash Christian, Siddi, Gadgera School Teacher, personal communication, January 2017)

¹⁴ Census of India 2011, Karnataka: District Census Handbook, UTTARA KANADA, 2011

¹⁵ In the *taluka* of Haliyal, there are 12 pre-primary schools, 93 primary schools, 45 middle schools, 15 secondary schools, 2 senior secondary schools and 1 degree college of arts, science and commerce. In Yellapur, there are no pre-primary schools 85 primary schools, 58 middle schools, 12 secondary schools and 3 senior secondary schools. In Mundgod, there are 6 pre-primary schools, 68 primary schools, 41 middle schools, 10 secondary schools and 2 senior secondary schools. Census of India 2011, Karnataka: District Census Handbook, UTTARA KANADA, 2011

“The problem that Siddis are facing is the lack of education. Until very recently, there were very few educated Siddis and hence there were none with the necessary qualifications to engage in jobs other than farming or menial jobs” (Premnath Androj Christian, Siddi, Gadgera School Caretaker, personal communication, January 2017)

The Gadgera School for Siddis

The Gadgera School, built in 2006, was the brainchild of Bosco Kaweesi, a Ugandan scholar, residing in Haliyal for the past twenty years. The school was taken over by the organisation Springs of Hope, operating from Austria and Norway, which is basically a Seventh Day Adventist. I was told that there were some Siddi youth who went to study at Spicer Memorial School in Pune, a Seventh Day Adventist School. Education and religion go therefore hand in hand, which has unquestionable consequences, which analysis does not fit into the scope of my research.

Although the school admits a small quota of non-Siddis, priority is given to Siddi students. The students can study up till the 4th grade, after which they continue in public and private schools. Plans are underway to extend studies at the Gadgera school till the 5th grade.

The school is located away from the Gadgera Siddi village in a clearing and is about 500 meters from the main road. The access is a bumpy mud road through the forest. It has two buildings: the school building and the cafeteria. Students reside at the school itself. The Siddi students come from villages across *talukas* in Uttara Kanada: Haliyal, Mundagod and Yellapur. They only go home for the holidays or for special family functions, occasions on which parents come to pick up their children.

The teachers are both Siddis and non-Siddis. The caretaker of the school is a Siddi by the name of Premnath Androj Christian who incidentally belongs to the Seventh Day Adventist Church. Two female Siddi teachers that I interviewed at the school also belong to the Seventh Day Adventist Church, though they were formerly Roman Catholic. I noticed that of the three Siddi teachers that I interviewed and who belonged to the Seventh Day Adventist Church, two had a Christian surname, which they possibly adopted after adhering to the new faith. A reason for changing their faith was that the Catholic Church was very strict, something they did not agree

with¹⁶. Also, many Siddis lament that they have become slaves to the church and to the church's decisions. They lamented as well, the lack of Siddis in the church hierarchy and hence they have to take orders from non-Siddi priests, who often are not understanding of the peculiar circumstances of the Siddi Catholics.

However, with the introduction of the Seventh Day Adventist Church, the new converts are more zealous and take religion more seriously. Every Christian Siddi household, whether Catholic or Seventh Day Adventist has a cross constructed into the front wall of their house, so that to the passer-by it is evident that this is a Christian household.

*

It is not surprising that the Gadgera school is a resident one, where students stay for the entire duration of the term. If it hadn't been that way, it would have been a long and arduous task for students to walk to the school every day. Such are the obstacles that Siddis face in access to education.



The Siddi Gadgera School

¹⁶ I heard several times from the Siddis themselves that the Catholic Church was too strict with its rules regarding marriage especially mixed marriages and hence Catholic Siddis were beginning to turn to the Seventh Day Adventist faith.

The Siddi teachers Ramita Prakash Christian and Jacinta Naik as well as the caretaker Premnath were from different Siddi villages, and none of them were from Gadgera. This serves as an indicator for the reach of the Siddi Gadgera school in attracting students and teachers from across *talukas* despite its isolated location and difficult access.

Siddis from various villages came to Gadgera to help in building the foundation of the school during the initial phase when Bosco Kaweesi was in charge. However, due to interference from other organisations, Bosco was side-lined in the project and eventually quit the committee. According to him, the school was destined for great things and he intended it to be a grand project. Now however, I could see a certain disenchantment on his face when we visited the school. Students were sitting on the floor and studying, no different to other backward schools and this was not what Bosco had planned.



Siddi and non-Siddi students in the classrooms

Educational patterns

At the village level, the government and religious organizations run most of the schools that go up only to the fifth and seventh standard, while the headquarters of the *talukas* house the schools that go up to the twelfth standard. Therefore, the majority of the people in the rural areas have limited levels of available education (Obeng 2008:45) In addition, the quality of

educational facilities and teaching that the African children in these villages receive cannot be compared to what other children receive, as the former live in economically and socially depressed areas. In Bailandur, for instance, school closes down during the ploughing and planting seasons (Obeng, 2008:45).

A rotation system for seating was introduced in government schools in Uttara Kannada wherein each student eventually gets a chance to sit in the front desks. However, as Bosco Kaweesi narrated to me, the Siddis are made to sit at the back at all times. In addition, absenteeism from Siddi students goes unnoticed in these schools and they receive the least of the teachers' attention. This lack of attention from teachers contributes to the lack of motivation and high drop-out rates of Siddi students. Pashington Obeng speaks of the high dropout rate and adds that "while parents need motivation to send their children to schools, the children too need support from the teachers in the process of making education an attractive activity" (Obeng,1984:44).

Such is the predicament of the Siddis that most of the Siddi adults, though themselves not educated, choose to send their children to school. Yet, they worry about the distance to the schools and the high cost of the fees. In addition to the lack of transport facilities and bad roads in the villages, which have only added hurdles to education, the parents have difficulty helping children with problems in schoolwork (Obeng 1984:44).

In a survey conducted by the Siddi Jana Vikas Sangh, a society with members of a Siddi Community, registered under the Karnataka Societies Registration Act since December 2010, it is stated that

"of the 58 educated youth identified in the survey expressed that they are still interested in continuing studies if opportunities are provided. It is disheartening to note that these youth, after completion of their education, remain in their villages and work as coolies in agriculture fields, construction workers, forest nursery and bamboo cutting, loading and unloading, processing of areca nut, road formation under contractors and in case they do not have any work they go to the forest to collect forest produce. Because of the non-availability of jobs, the parents are discouraging their children from pursuing education"¹⁷.

¹⁷ Siddi Jana Vikas Sangh, blog

Siddis and English

There is a positive trend however among the Siddi youth that have received some education. Most of the Siddi children who go to school or have received education are able to speak English very well. In fact, this made my task of conducting interviews with young Siddis much easier. During a visit to Yellapur with Bosco Kaweesi, while we were at the Yellapur Bus Depot, a few youngsters going to school who recognised Bosco, came up to him to wish him and speak to him. Their conversation was in English.

It is interesting that a few years ago, a survey conducted by Siddi Jana Vikas Sangh found that the Siddis were very weak in English themes and many students failed in English. The society intervened and organized a spoken English class with the help of the Holy Cross Church, Mainalli.¹⁸ The finding of the survey is in stark contrast to what I observed when I visited the Siddi villages in 2016 and early 2017. This suggests a marked improvement in the performance of the Siddis in English. All Siddi youth that I interviewed spoke fluent English. The elders didn't speak any English, therefore suggesting that education has had a positive impact on the Siddis.

This trend to learning English and being able to speak it fluently is a powerful tool for the Siddis in their struggle for fitting in the mainstream society and achieving success. Knowledge of English will go a long way in helping Siddis get jobs in a wide variety of industries and will make their mobility easier. The tourism industry will become accessible to the Siddis in the bigger cities and might give them a distinct advantage over their non-English speaking non-Siddi counterparts.

Siddi Settlements

During the time I was in Uttara Kannada I was able to visit the Siddi settlements of Wada, Ghardoli, Gadgera, Hosur, Bopin Kop, Dodkop, Mavinkop, Dandeli, Kerwad, Nagashetikop and Tattigeri in the Haliyal district, Mainalli, Kegdal, Bilki and Gunjavatti among others in the Mundagod and Yellapur districts.

Lacking an overall organisation, each Siddi settlement forms the ultimate unit of authority. Every settlement has its leaders to manage its internal affairs. The Siddis of Karnataka are also

¹⁸ Siddi Jana Vikas sangh, blog

segmented by their affiliation to three different religions-Hinduism, Islam and Christianity (Prasad 1984:95). Most settlements were of a similar nature though I noticed that the Christian Siddi settlements were more orderly and appeared to be better administrated.

The settlements were made up of houses on either side of a newly constructed concrete road, in an isolated area. The houses were of concrete, with tiled roofs and faced the road. There were about 10-15 houses in each settlement. Most of the settlements that I visited were Siddi Christian. Each house had a crucifix constructed into the front wall facing the road and hence it was clear to a visitor that this was a Christian household. Inside the houses there were often other holy pictures of the sacred heart and the virgin Mary. Some of the houses were recently renovated inside and were very modern looking, even though they were rather small. Other houses were of a simpler nature. Almost each household possessed a family member (a male member) who had a motorcycle. There was one household in Wada that had a car as well. The road often ended in a field.

Kiran Kamal Prasad goes on to describe the organisation of these settlements in terms of its affairs:

“Each settlement has a few hereditary or elected leaders. The important leaders are budvont or headman, kolkar or orderly and khajandar or treasurer. The term office of budvont is hereditary. He represents the settlement to the outsiders and has a prominent role inside the settlement. His main task is to take a leading role in the settlement of disputes, mostly concerning marriages. These disputes may be between member of his own settlement and that of another. In Haliyal area, especially, the settlement forms a cohesive unit displaying unity between different families within the settlement and also the smooth functioning of the leadership. The offices do not carry monetary rewards. But they, especially the office of budvont, carry a lot of prestige (Prasad, 1984).

I was able to meet the *budvont*¹⁹ of one Siddi settlement, Ghardoli in the Haliyal *taluka*. The leader's name was Basthao Siddi. Basthao's house was a sort of a headquarters for the settlement. The two times I visited his house, there were several Siddi youth sitting on his front doorstep, and in the space between his house and the concrete road confirming their reverence of him as a leader. Basthao Siddi was previously elected to the local *panchayat* (a 5-member local governing unit) and hence was undoubtedly an important member of this Siddi settlement. He once spoke at a gathering of the Governor of the time (2014) and lamented that the

¹⁹ The *budvont* is the headman of the village or the main village elder who administers the settlement and represents it.

Government's help to the Siddis came through organizations that in turn misled the Siddis. It was under the leadership of Basthao that the Siddis cleared forests to create land to farm for themselves. It was also when he was a member of the *panchayat* that the first concrete roads and drains were built in Ghardoli and other Siddi settlements. It was also his efforts that resulted in the first brick and concrete houses with tiled roofs built for the Siddis.

The leaders of a settlement do not carry out their offices by issuing commands. Their roles are accepted as those who coordinate and safeguard the interests of the community. But the members of the settlement are expected to obey them. Otherwise they may be deprived of the privileges of belonging to that community (Prasad 1984:33).





Siddi settlements



Basthao Siddi (Budvont)

CHAPTER 3

Identity, social belonging and citizenship

Identity: a different kind of Indian?

The Siddis are an endogamous community. This is largely how the community has survived the centuries and maintained their physical features. In fact, a Siddi is clearly discernible from a non-Siddi by his physical features – although I am not taking at all phenotypical criteria to distinguish them from other social groups. However, it is interesting to observe that their dress code follows the Indian²⁰ one at large. They speak the local language (s) and follow the local religions. Therefore, we may note a nexus of identities with regard to the Siddis of Uttara Kannada.

The term “identity” has been lately absorbed by the media and the common sense, hence losing its analytical efficiency. At this stage, and for lack of time to take this discussion further, I will adopt Ross’ conceptualization. According to this author, identity has two distinctive connotations: one of ‘being the same as the others’ and having a continuity with them, and the other being an identity that brings with it the sense of being different from the other (Alistair Ross, 2007:286-303)

Several scholars suggested that individuals do not have singular identities, but are a repertoire of different identities. The individual will use each of these, or a combination of them contingently on where they are, whom they are with, and the particular social setting in which they find themselves (eg Hall, 1992, 1996, 1997). Amartya Sen has criticised ‘the fallacy of singular identity’. He argued that “forcing people into boxes of singular identity try (s)...to understand human beings not as persons with diverse identities but predominantly as members of one particular social group or community” (Sen, 2006:176). The Siddis use their Siddi, religious and Indian multiple identities based upon the social setting in which they find themselves in. In the Siddi settlement, with their Siddi acquaintances, they are Siddis, African, different from the rest. When in the larger society, aware of their difference, their Indian side comes to the fore. The Siddis of Uttara Kannada are multilingual speaking Konkani, Marathi, Kannada and Urdu. They use Marathi, Kannada and Urdu when in the larger non-Siddi society

²⁰ I use the term “Indian” out of simplification. Indeed, an “Indian” is a too complex category with regard to language, religion, social structure..

and Konkani among themselves. As mentioned earlier, considering the dressing code, they resemble any Indian.

Implicit in social constructivism is the idea that we can only develop our sense of self-identity through social processes: all of our identities are socially determined as we define ourselves in relationship to others, in a direct relationship. Others will also be simultaneously defining our identity in their terms, based on their perceptions and constructions of who they think or assume our identity to be, and this will not always correspond- indeed, it may sometimes be in direct opposition- to the identities we wish to assume. (Ross 2007:288) This becomes clear when although a Siddi may consider himself Indian, he will always be identified as African by his non-Siddi counterpart and consequently, a Siddi will always consider a non-Siddi as different to himself, mainly by physical features but not only just.

Brubaker and Cooper (2000) argue that identity used to be- and still should be- held in its “strong” meaning, representing and underlying, unchanging and long-lasting notion of the self. This was often linked to a strong sense of national identity. They criticise writers such as Stuart Hall for arguing that identities are used as resources that are employed by the individuals to meet their contingent needs, rather than permanent characteristics (Ross 2007: 286-303). But Hall is not arguing that all identities are constantly in flux: people generally maintain a fairly constant repertoire of identities, each more or less to the fore in a particular set of social contexts. The individual has but one self, but this is expressed in relationship to others: they are constructed in social contexts and indeed would be meaningless if they were divorced from social settings (Ross, 2007).

Jamieson (2002, 2005) uses a social constructionist position to argue that some of these identities are more likely to be “primary” identities than others, and there are conditions in which some supra-national identities (such as European) are more likely to be primary than local identities.

Who then is a Siddi? How do they identify themselves and what is the identity they wish to assume? Do they identify themselves with the political notion of national identity or do they consider themselves Siddis, and different from the rest? Or still, do they consider themselves African? Are “Siddis” and “African” synonymous for the Siddis”? The answer is complex and based on my field study, often contradictory. However, trying to put it into perspective, I observed largely that the self-identification among the Siddis differed based on the age. While older Siddis considered themselves Siddis first, Siddis above all else, and then Christian,

Hindu, Muslim and Indian, younger Siddis chose to align with a more national identity, at the same time, aware that they possessed distinct physical features. Africa, on the other hand, is an imagined space to where they belong. There is no memory of Africa, passed on to the current generation of Siddis. It continues to be an imagined space, a distant homeland.

Following Jamieson's position, it seems that the Siddis do have a strong or primary identity and that is their Siddiness or Africanness. While they are completely integrated into the Indian way of life and customs, their Siddiness or Africanness is what they hold identitarian valued to themselves. As some of the Siddis told me "First we are Siddi. Then we are Indian". I asked Premnath Androj Christian, the Siddi caretaker of the Gadgera school, if he considered himself different from non-Siddis and he said: "definitely" (Premnath Androj Christian, personal communication 05.01.2017).

I enquired Ramita Prakash Christian if "Siddiness" was important in marriage as the Siddis are an endogamous community and if marriages out of the Siddi community were common. She told me: "some years ago, mixed marriages (a marriage between a Siddi and a non-Siddi) were unheard of but nowadays, with the spread of education and increased mobility, there have been marriages between a Siddi and a non-Siddi. (Ramita Prakash Christian, personal communication 05.01.2017) Besides, Ramita told me that a Siddi often first identifies himself or herself as Siddi and only after that as belonging to a particular religious faith.

The strong primary identity among the Siddis is visible in the following examples: as Francis Siddi mentioned to me, in the Olympic games the Siddis always support any African athlete over Indian athletes, as they consider them one of their own and representatives of their people. Besides, the Olympics, the West Indies cricket team is very popular among the Siddis. Although the Siddis support India in cricket, when it comes to matches versus the West Indies, the Siddis choose to support the West Indies over India as once again it is "their team". The same happens when Kenya plays India in cricket.

From the above two examples, it becomes clear that "Africanness" is very important to the Siddis and they support the African cause, Africanness being their primary and strong identity above all else. However, besides the situations above and other similar ones, the Siddis call themselves Indian (at least the young Siddis) and believe that India is their country. Francis went on to say that even though the notion of Africanness exists among the Siddis and they hold it very dear to themselves, they feel that their sense of belonging is to India.

The duality or multiplicity of the identities among the Siddis of Uttara Kannada is clearly discernible when observed from a close a distance, thus reinforcing the theories of Hall and Sen and the Jamieson's primary identity theory. The terms Siddi and African appear to be synonymous if we put the above examples into context.

In terms of a diasporic identity, Campbell saw no evidence of a diasporic identity, no notion of displacement from a common homeland, no longing to return to Africa. Unlike the Atlantic, the Indian Ocean world does not have a "victim diaspora". Several Siddi participants at the Goa Conference on the African Diaspora in Asia made statements to the extent that 'we are Indians now, but we have African blood'²¹

Strong or primary identities have often been associated with national identity (Ross, 2007). In the case of the Siddis however, this is not exactly the case. For the Siddis, Siddiness or Africanness is their primary identity. Anthony Smith holds that there is

"a straightforward understanding of the concept of 'identity' as 'sameness'. The members of a particular group are alike in just those respects in which they differ from non-members outside the group" (Smith 1991:75)

The Siddis are a community, a deep, horizontal commonality, limited to their physical appearance and that is their primary identity, which proves that they are different from those that do not share their physical appearance. They are Indian, because that is the land in which they were born in, but Indianness is their secondary identity, which they all accept.

That being said, this identity just as other primary identities, as suggested by Habermas has a subpolitical character i.e it operates below the level of political decision processes, but it indirectly influences the political system because it changes the normative framework of political decisions. (Habermas 1976:116)

²¹ Van Kessel, Ineke, Goan Conference on the African Diaspora in Asia, pg 463

Indianization: "We are Indian now, with African blood"

East African slaves were randomly caught, or were recruited from different tribal lands; they usually spoke related languages and several individuals came from the same area or were members of the same ethnic group. For these reasons, they could communicate in an Eastern African language in the beginning, but as mixed groups, small in numbers and spread over wide areas surrounded by large Indian languages with a long tradition, they could not maintain nor transmit their original languages and cultures to future generations. Instead they became indianized, leaving few African linguistic traces in their speech and cultural registers of terminology. Another factor was Islam, the religion of the politically dominant section of Indian society with whom the Siddis were initially allied, which became a common denominator of their cultural identification and also facilitated their social and linguistic integration, and economic, political and military success in many areas before the advent of the British colonial rule (Abdulaziz Lodhi 2008). Lodhi also goes as far as to state that the Siddis are *de facto* Indians, as they speak Indian languages as their mother tongues and practice mostly the variant of Sunni Islam with the Indian Sufi cult of *pir* ("saint", roughly translated) with rituals and celebrations performed at a *dargah* (mausoleum, shrine). At these shrines, they worship also ancestors and founders of settlements (*idem*). Islam comes into the picture more in Gujarat than in Uttara Kannada, as Uttara Kannada is home to the Siddis who were runaway slaves from the Portuguese territory of Goa and those who settled later, after slavery was abolished. Those Siddis who practice Islam in Uttara Kannada, were probably also slaves from Goa, who escaped to lands of the surrounding Muslim rulers and eventually converted to Islam.

The first part of the above explanation for the gradual loss of African influence or the Indianization of the Siddis seems to be the case with the Siddis of Uttara Kannada. They are aware that they are of African origin, however, they believe they have no link with Africa through social customs, language or way of life, in what they appear to be completely Indianized. I asked some of the Siddis that I interviewed at the Gadgera school if there was any African influence in their language or their lives and they believed there was none.

On if she felt African or Indian or if she thought there was any African influence in her way of life, Ramita Prakash Christian, a Siddi teacher at the Gadgera school told me:

"There is no connection with Africa besides our physical appearance. I know that Siddis are originally from Africa, however, the language that must have been uniquely African has been lost and we have assimilated to Indian culture and customs and here is where we belong."
(Ramita Prakash Christian, personal communication 05.01.2017)

Premnath too doesn't feel the African connection and says that the language and the customs were lost by their ancestors as they adopted and adapted to Indian customs. (Premnath Androj Christian, personal communication 05.01.2017). Jacinta Naik, another Siddi teacher at the Gadgera school said that she considers herself Indian, even though she feels that at the same time, she is different. She does not feel any connection with Africa:

“I was born here and all I knew and know is India and Indians and hence I have no connection with Africa.” She too says that she doesn't believe that there is any African influence that lingers on in the Siddi lifestyle and believes that it has all been forgotten. (Jacinta Naik, personal communication, 05.01.2017).

At this point, I return as well to the statements made at the Goa Conference on African Diaspora in Asia, by Siddi participants “We are Indian now, with African blood” (Ineke van Kessel, Goa Conference).

Citizenship: what kind of citizen?

There has been a flood of literature on citizenship over the past decade, as the field of citizenship studies has established itself. There are a number of explanations for this intense interest in citizenship, reflecting developments in both the political and academic arenas. One reason perhaps why the concept continues to fascinate scholars from diverse disciplines stems from the fact that it constitutes a “momentum concept”. Momentum concepts, John Hoffman explains, “‘unfold’ so that we must continuously rework them in a way that realizes more and more of their egalitarian and anti-hierarchical potential” (Hoffman 2004, p.138). As such, they provide tools for marginalized groups struggling for social justice (Lister,2007).

From the perspective of citizenship, this struggle can be articulated in terms of the tension between citizenship's inclusionary and exclusionary sides—a tension which is inherent to the concept and which has led, for instance, Engin Isin to problematize “the idea of inclusion [which] relentlessly produces exclusion” (Isin 2005, p. 381). Is the Siddi thus excluded from real citizenship of the country on account of his identity? It is said that only after the inclusion as ST did the Siddi have access to resources that are due to citizens of India. Does this mean

therefore, that before the ST status, the Siddi was excluded from citizenship of the country despite living in the region for five centuries?

Citizenship and civil identity can be constructed in terms that do not necessarily relate to national identity (Ross, 2007). Heater and Oliver suggested that individuals become citizens when they practice civil virtue and good citizenship, enjoy but do not exploit their civil and political rights, contribute to and receive social and economic benefits, do not allow any sense of national identity to justify discrimination or stereotyping of others, experience senses of non-exclusive multiple citizenship and by their example, teach citizenship to others (Heater and Oliver, 1994, p 6).

By this definition of being a citizen, can a Siddi consider himself a citizen? What kind of citizen is he or she? The Siddi is discriminated against by his non-Siddi counterpart on account of his physical appearance and is a victim of stereotyping. Siddis do not have proper access to education and when they do, there isn't much attention paid to them or they face subsequent obstacles. In terms of jobs, Siddis are left to do menial jobs. Of course, this is a natural outcome of lack of education. Siddis are discriminated in public offices and banks and often are unable to receive social and economic benefits that are due to them in spite of reservations that allow for a special status to the community.

The reason for the lack of respect and concern for the Siddi and the subsequent discrimination is indeed the lack of education of the larger society and speaks volumes of its ignorance of the diversity and history of the region. Sadly, racism (as told to me by many Siddis) is an issue in Uttara Kannada and the Siddis face the brunt of it, not just through direct racism, but indirectly too, through isolation. Indeed, the worst form of discrimination is isolation.

Citizenship thus requires the collaboration of all. Citizenship, in this sense, can be seen as a duty, a necessary part of being a member of a community. For a community to work, the members must participate (Ross, 2007). How do the members participate if not given the opportunity though? The Siddis have been shunned and isolated for a century at least. Only since their recognition as a Scheduled Tribe in 2003 have things begun to change for the better for them. However, this is a slow and intermittent progress, with loopholes and lack of interest on the part of the powers that may be. Given the opportunity, Siddis would want to participate actively in the larger society. There are signs of that already. In the last few years, more Siddis have achieved an education and are working better jobs rather than being stuck as farmers and menial labourers in their villages.

Inclusive Citizenship

An inspiring attempt at articulating such “an image of an ideal citizenship”, framed in terms of the values underpinning “inclusive citizenship” and the meanings of citizenship expressed “from below”, derives from a series of case studies, mainly in the global South (Lister 2007). In bringing together the case studies, Naila Kabeer suggests that they “help to shed light on what inclusive citizenship might mean when it is viewed from the standpoint of the excluded” (Kabeer 2005, p. 1, emphasis in original).

The four values of inclusive citizenship that emerged from these accounts “from below” are:

- justice, articulated in terms of “when it is fair for people to be treated the same and when it is fair that they should be treated differently” (Kabeer, 2005, p. 3);
- recognition “of the intrinsic worth of all human beings, but also recognition of and respect for their differences” (p. 4); .
- self-determination or “people’s ability to exercise some degree of control over their lives” (p. 5). This value also emerges particularly strongly in disability theorists’ accounts of citizenship, which detail the very specific barriers to self-determination and also participation faced by disabled people (Morris, 2005); and
- solidarity, that is, “the capacity to identify with others and to act in unity with them in their claims for justice and recognition”(Kabeer,2005,p.7)

Putting into context the above four values or criteria for inclusive citizenship, we find that in the case of the Siddis, they are subjected to a secondary form of citizenship, a non-inclusive one. While citizenship can be defined as a membership of a polity, besides officially being citizens of India, the Siddis do not face the full benefits of citizenship. They are often discriminated against and deceived by moneylenders and the authorities, and often have to pay bribes for benefits that should be available to them free of cost. They are not recognised as proper citizens of India and are often treated as foreigners when approaching banks and public institutions. They are able to exercise some control over their lives and that is due to their organized settlement set-up, but with a lack of proper leadership they are often at the mercy of the money lenders and the authorities. In terms of solidarity, they are not equal to the non-Siddi and are discriminated against and are the target of prejudices and stereotypes. This points to a form of citizenship that is beset with pitfalls and is not a true inclusive citizenship. First and foremost, Siddis need to be recognised. Once they are recognised they will receive better access to formal rights.

A prominent narrative in the theory and practice of citizenship over the past decade has thus been that inclusive citizenship is as much about recognition as about access to formal rights. (Lister, 2007)

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It is the prerogative of the government authorities to recognize that the Siddis are being left behind as the country moves forward and more needs to be done to bring them into mainstream society. Siddis all recognise the power of education. This was reiterated to me several times by many Siddis that I interviewed, young and old. Education is the tool that is required to help Siddis to rise from their obscurity. However, this alone will not help the Siddis. The larger non-Siddi society also requires to be educated about history and diversity of the country and taught to practice proper citizenship as proper citizenship shuns stereotyping and abuse of rights and promotes a more inclusive community and helps progress as a whole.

Conclusions

In the Western Ghat region of the Uttara Kannada district of Karnataka and in some areas bordering that region in Belgaum and Dharwad districts, we find a section of people who can be identified as a distinct group, different in physical features from the rest of the people living in the area. They are known as Siddis and are of African descent settled in India for nearly five centuries.

Though they share a common ethnic stock and similar economic conditions, they are subdivided by their adherence to three major religions; Hinduism, Christianity and Islam. I was able to focus much of my research in Haliyal where a majority of the Siddi population is Christian and hence much of my research pertains to the Christian Siddis.

This thesis has studied the community of the Siddis of Uttara Kannada district. I have discussed and described what it means to be Siddi living in India, briefly exploring their origin, the origin of the term Siddi, the Scheduled Tribe status and reservations, religion and culture, language and education, prejudices, social stigma and finally identity and citizenship.

I hope to have helped to understand how the Siddis have been living in obscurity for nearly five centuries. In India's complex hierarchy of castes and tribes, the Siddis are classified as a tribe or *adivasis* and only in 2003 were the Siddis of Uttara Kannada granted the much-coveted Scheduled Tribe status that provides them reservations and representation to a large extent. A definition of tribal peoples by Stephen Corry, states that "Tribal peoples are those which have followed ways of life for many generations that are largely self-sufficient, and are clearly different from mainstream and dominant society." The concession and enforcement of the Scheduled Tribe status has been contentious and fraught with controversy. While well intentioned, most of the schemes are flawed and not properly enforced which leave the Siddis in a difficult predicament. They haven't all been informed of the benefits that accrue to them owing to their new status and hence this is a cause for confusion and disappointment. This problem has also been exacerbated by the issue of corruption, lack of knowledge and information from the authorities. For the Siddis, education is of ultimate importance, as conveyed to me in the interviews that I carried out. However, Siddis lament that the Scheduled Tribe status hasn't made much difference to education for them. They acknowledge that some of the monetary schemes are well intentioned and have come to fruition. However, the question of education lingers on.

Reservations is a complex and controversial issue. While it is a form of positive discrimination, for backward and isolated communities like the Siddis it is perhaps necessary to escape their current predicament. In a country like India, with an extreme diversity of religions and languages, reservations are a form of guaranteeing and safeguarding the prospects of the so called “backward” sections of society that normally would be ignored by the mainstream population. The reality in India is that there are certain sections of society that are often isolated and have no voice and are discriminated against in various forms. Hence reservations are required, so as to give these communities an opportunity for representation.

A local headman, Basthao Siddi, wishes for a Siddi complex, where only Siddis live, where they have their own schools, banks and institutions. While this idea is a form of protection against discrimination of the Siddis and a form of asserting themselves and looking after their lives, it runs the risk of isolating the Siddis further. An exclusive Siddi settlement will exacerbate the problem of isolation and racism and that is something the Siddis can ill afford.

Lack of transport facilities and bad roads have added hurdles to their access to education. Education is the means by which they can overcome the obstacles they face in society and improve their economic livelihoods. This opinion is held by many Siddis, both literate and illiterate. Some well-intentioned social workers have put their heart and soul in building a school for the Siddis at Gadgera village. The school goes up till the 4th grade after which students have to rely on public government schools, where the Siddis are given secondary treatment and are often ignored in class, which leads to a lot of drop outs. The high percentage of drop outs doesn't augur well for the future of the Siddis as they themselves realise that education is the way forward for them.

There are Siddis, however, who have excelled at school and hold good positions in government and other private institutions. However, these are a few and far between. A positive trend among the Siddis however is their ability to speak English. The younger school going Siddis are able to converse in nearly fluent English which provided them a distinct advantage professionally over their non-Siddi counterparts. Their ability to speak English has enabled them to get jobs in government and other public institutions.

Siddis speak a mixture of Konkani, Marathi and Urdu. They call this language Konkani and the Christian and the Hindu Siddis speak this language pointing to the fact that despite belonging to different religious faiths, they are of a common ethnic stock and had a shared past in Goa. The Hindu Siddis are Siddis that probably converted to Hinduism after working for

Hindu Brahmin masters and hence adopted their religion. Some of them still have Christian names with Portuguese roots reinforcing their Goan connection. The Muslim Siddis speak Urdu and probably adopted this language from the Muslim rulers who they served. It is still unclear if the Muslim Siddis also were originally from Goa. The religious practices of the Muslim Siddis are similar to the religious practices of the Muslim Siddis from Gujarat thus casting a doubt over their actual origins. In terms of cultural practices, religious differences notwithstanding, the Siddis practice Dhamaal, Fugdi and Sigo dances. Fugdi and Sigo are of Goa origin and are dances and festivals very popular in Goa, once again pointing to the Goan connection of the Siddis of Uttara Kannada.

Siddis live in isolated locations in the various *talukas*. Their settlements are located deep into the jungle away from the main road and often there is no proper road, other than a mud path, leading to the villages. Indeed, as told to me, the worst form of racism is isolation and this is what the Siddis suffer from. Many of them live in hopeless poverty with most working as farmers. Some migrate to nearby towns in search of work as domestic servants and labourers. Many migrate to Goa and Udipi. Others, work in brick-making, honey collecting and in the sugarcane fields of Haliyal. However, in the last few years the situation has improved with the Scheduled Tribe status, which has enabled the Siddis to receive some monetary benefits.

Siddi settlements are all very similar in appearance. A concrete road runs through the middle of the village and small brick houses lie on either side of the road. The road ends in a field where the Siddis work. In the Christian Siddi villages, crucifixes are constructed into the front walls of the houses so that for the visitor it is clearly noticeable that this is a Christian household. It is only recently that concrete roads, drains and brick houses have been built in the Siddi settlements owing much to the efforts of some leaders of the community. However, leadership on the whole is practically non-existent for the Siddis. The settlements have a hierarchy with village headmen, but other than the influence over the settlement, they have little influence with the authorities. Recently, in one of the villages, a local Siddi woman was elected to the local *panchayat* and unsurprisingly, the situation in the *taluka* that the woman represents in the *panchayat* has received more benefits.

Several recent writers have suggested that individuals do not have singular identities, but are a repertoire of different identities. The Siddis use their Siddi, religious and Indian multiple identities based upon the social setting in which they find themselves. Is the Siddi excluded from real citizenship of the country on account of his identity? It is said that only after the

inclusion as ST did the Siddi have access to resources that are due citizens of India. Does this mean therefore, that before the ST status, the Siddi was excluded from citizenship of the country despite living in the region for five centuries?

What kind of citizen is the Siddi?. The Siddi is discriminated against by his non-Siddi counterpart on account of his physical appearance and is a victim of stereotyping. Siddis do not have proper access to education and when they do, there isn't much attention paid to them or they face subsequent obstacles. In terms of jobs, Siddis are left to do menial jobs. Of course, this is a natural outcome of lack of education. Siddis are discriminated in public offices and banks and often are unable to receive social and economic benefits that are due them in spite of reservations that allow for a special status to the Siddis.

Citizenship requires a collective effort; from the authorities, from the larger society as well as the Siddis. Citizenship cannot function properly if all of the parts do not play their role. The sum effect of a collective citizenship is an inclusive citizenship, one in which all are accepted, respected, treated as citizens and receive the benefits of citizenship. The Siddis are subjected to a secondary form of citizenship, a non-inclusive citizenship. While citizenship can be defined as a membership of a polity, besides officially being citizens of India, the Siddis do not face the full benefits of citizenship.

Education is the tool that is required to help Siddis rise from their obscurity. However, this alone will not help the Siddis. The larger non-Siddi society also requires to be educated about history and diversity of the country and taught to practice proper citizenship as proper citizenship shuns stereotyping and abuse of rights and promotes a more inclusive community and helps progress as a whole.

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