



Juliana Siddi:

IMAGING AND IMAGINING AFRICA INDIA CONNECTIONS

Beheroze Shroff

This essay explores the unique activities of Juliana Siddi, an Indian of African descent who has worked as a model and casting coordinator, and who provides African models for the highly competitive advertising industry of Mumbai. Originally from Karwar District in Uttara Kannada, Southwest India, Juliana’s specialty is to provide African models for television commercials produced for African countries in Mumbai. When African models are unavailable, Siddi models are sought from Juliana’s connections in her home of Karnataka. Living in the cosmopolitan environment of Mumbai, Juliana has faced challenges and made choices to gain a foothold in the advertising business, not just for herself but for members of her community.

Part I explores Juliana’s background as a Siddi woman growing up in Karnataka. I also provide a brief history of Siddis in the region linked to the Portuguese presence in Karnataka. Part II discusses Juliana’s unique work in the Mumbai advertising scene that has brought employment opportunities for members of her village in Karnataka.

Siddis of Karnataka in Southern India have a different trajectory of migration to India from that of Siddis in Gujarat (in Western India). The presence of Siddi communities in Karnataka today is linked to the Portuguese colonial presence in India. The Portuguese “seaborne

1. Juliana on set for *Indomie* Noodles commercial.

empire” by the sixteenth century had “political and economic control over the west coast of India,” particularly the Konkan coast. Africans were brought in as slaves, mostly from Mozambique, to work as agricultural labor, domestic help and for other forms of stoop labor. Challenging the powerful Muslim rule in the Deccan region of South India, the Portuguese developed the base of their *Estado da India* territory, headquartered in Goa.¹ Portugal’s colonial enterprise stretched from Mozambique to China. To protect their possessions, the Portuguese enlisted African slaves mostly as military soldiers. African women slaves also worked as domestic help and as concubines.² African slaves who were converted forcibly to Christianity under the Portuguese³ often escaped to neighboring Muslim-ruled states and served in the military. Some among them began to practice Islam under new Muslim rulers.⁴ When Portuguese colonials banned slavery in the 1840s, many freed Africans seeking new forms of livelihood, “dispersed into the Karnataka forest areas of the Western Ghats and other parts of South India” where their descendants live even today.⁵ Scholars estimate that at present the Siddi population in Uttara Kannada is approximately thirty thousand, mostly concentrated in the sub-districts of Haliyal, Yellapur, Hubli, Mundgod and Sirsi.

JULIANA SIDDI: FROM KARNATAKA TO MUMBAI

Today, Juliana Siddi lives with her husband, Juje, and son Julius in a modest apartment in the densely developed suburb of Borivali, in North Mumbai. She has established herself as the only Siddi model coordinator in Mumbai, providing African-looking models for television commercials produced in Mumbai for African countries such as Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and South Africa.

Juliana explains that her mother, Jackien, is Goan, and her father, Cajetan, is Siddi. “So, we had western culture already in the house— one side Goan one side Siddi, we had two cultures in the house. Mostly,

1 Ali 1996 page 203.

2 Jayasuriya and Pankhurst 2003 page 11-14; Pinto 1992 page 28-29; Obeng 2008 page 239.

3 Obeng 2007a) pages 272, 274; Chauhan 1995 page 231.

4 Obeng 2007a) page 19.

5 Ali 1996 page 212; Obeng 2008 page 240.

we used to follow my Mom.”⁶ However, what is unique about Juliana is that the western influence came into her family from both mother and father. Her mother’s family, descendants of Hindu converts to Christianity under the Portuguese, spoke English and dressed in Western clothes. Her father is descended from a wealthy family of Siddis who were given land by the British for their loyal services. Thus, Juliana’s father, Cajetan, was educated and became the first Siddi to earn a BA in Arts from Shivaji College in Karnataka. Later, he entered the seminary to become a priest, during which time he became proficient in Latin and English. However, due to his mother’s intervention, Cajetan did not end up in the priestly vocation. His English language skills gained from his years in the seminary stood him in good stead. He got a government job as Manager in the Karnataka State Forest Industries Corporation (KSFIC).

Juliana remembers her childhood as one of privilege:

In my family, what kind of childhood I, my brother or sister had, I don’t think any single Siddi had at that age. Among Siddis in my generation we had a very luxurious life only because my Dad’s monthly salary as a government employee, helped to take care of his family. So, we had a luxurious life. I never thought about food, or clothes, because we used to get everything. I never thought of poverty. I never saw the other side of the coin. We never faced hardship because everything was there for us”⁷

As a result of Cajetan’s high-ranking job as Manager in the KSFIC, the family shifted to different locations. Juliana and her siblings lived in urban environments. She was born and brought up in the city of Dandeli. She shares her early childhood memories in her own words:

Dandeli was a small place and we moved to Dharwad/Hubli twin city called *Choti Mumbai* (Little Mumbai)—it has a good education system. So, from childhood, I had a convent education and special treatment. We kids had an auto rickshaw, specially hired like a taxi, to go to school— that was a luxury. Only a few could afford to go by rickshaw, other kids walked distances or took a bus

6 Interview March 13, 2016. Historian Jennette Pinto points out that with the Portuguese occupation of Goa lasting more than four and a half centuries, they left their cultural mark on “the attitudes and lifestyles of the people of Goa ... a definite identity of its own,” particularly the Catholic Christian ethos. Pinto 1992 page 79.

7 Interview February 4, 2017.

and walked. In 1982, we had such comfort and also had tuitions (private coaching).⁸

With her family moving to urban locations, Juliana explained that she never experienced village life while growing up. She went to primary school in Dharwad, in the interior of Uttara Kannada and from second to seventh grade she studied in boarding school in the port town of Honavar. From eighth to tenth grade, she came back to Dandeli where her schooling was completed at St. Michael's School. Finally, her college education was in Karwar, where she earned a diploma in Civil Engineering. The only time she interacted with her extended family in the village was during summer vacation. She describes her life with the family in the village as leisurely and fun. Thus, Juliana did not experience the economic struggle and marginalization in the everyday life of rural Siddis. Significantly, she did not experience or understand her racial identity as different or as causing marginality or discrimination. She remarks, "For me, it never came to my mind that I am a Siddi. When you are a kid it doesn't make any difference. When I was in High School, and Higher Secondary, then I obviously know, I'm different from others, my skin color or my hair texture is different . . . but my friends never made me feel that 'you are a Siddi.'" It was only when she moved to Mumbai after her marriage that she encountered discrimination in her unsuccessful attempts to find jobs in her field of study. She confided how frustrating this process was in her words:

I used to go for job interviews, but I was not getting any proper response. I finally tried call-center jobs, but I would only get some few night shifts, which was not comfortable for me. I was not getting work anywhere and I feel my looks also got in the way. In Indian society, they go by color and I was not getting any job. On the phone, the interview would be fine, but when I went in person, I would get a negative response. They would ask me "Are you an African?" I used to say, "Yes, we are of African origin, but we are not African, but Indian." But they'll say, "You look African."⁹

It is most important to note here that Juliana faced the brunt of Indian racism coupled with sexism in her search for a job. Raised like any other

8 Interview March 13, 2016. During a research trip in 2014, I visited Haliyal, Yellapur and Mundgod and met Christian, Muslim and Hindu Siddis. Among them, many Siddi families are engaged in agriculture and working on the land, and often the children work on the land with the parents, but children are also sent to schools, often walking long distances to get there.

9 Interview March 13, 2016.

middle-class Indian, Juliana studied in English language schools, as well as gaining a diploma in Civil Engineering—privileges that very few in her community in Karnataka could achieve. Despite her privileged background, Juliana was denied access to jobs in the Engineering field (which remains highly male-gendered) and even denied a proper daytime job at call centers, due to her “African” looks.

In the world of advertising, however, “African” looks became a plus point for Juliana and her husband Juje, who as Siddis could perform Africanness. Both did occasional modeling stints as “Africans.” Juje, also from Karnataka, was introduced to modeling for television commercials by a friend. His full-time job in Mumbai gave him only weekends for this work. Some of Juje’s early assignments included modeling for the international clothing brand *Pepe Jeans* and performing as a West Indian cricket bowler for a *Reliance Telecom* commercial. Juliana too was brought into this television commercial (TVC) circuit and portrayed a Kenyan school Headmistress and a Nigerian mother-in-law. Ironically, Juliana’s rejected African looks by the dominant society for positions in the engineering field (among other positions she was well-qualified to hold) compelled her to become an “African” model, and then later a model coordinator specializing in providing African models.

AFRICA-INDIA CONNECTIONS

Film Producer-Director Lalit Ajgaonkar, one of the first to shoot commercials for African countries, explained the genesis of the Africa-India TVC connection. In 2000, Creative Director Inam Kazmi from Mumbai’s most prominent *Lintas Advertising Agency* was invited to Kenya to work for *Scan Ad*, a growing advertising company started by Kenyan Indian, Bharat Thakrar.¹⁰ At first, *ScanAd’s* TVCs for Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda were outsourced mainly to South Africa and Europe, since film production in Kenya was still in its infancy, with very little infrastructure.¹¹

10 Nsehe, Mfonobeng. “How This Man Built a \$70 Million Advertising Empire in Kenya,” *Forbes*, January 2, 2017. www.forbes.com/sites/mfonobongnsehe/2017/01/02/how-this-man-built-a-70-million-advertising-empire-in-kenya/ &refURL=https://www.google.co.in/&referrer=https://www.google.co.in/ Accessed on March 11, 2018.

11 Kamau, Macharia, “Losing Out On Commercial Advertising Billions,” *Standard Digital*, May 12, 2012, offers a different perspective on how Kenyans lose billions in terms of money and jobs in advertising due to Government bureaucracy and other hurdles in Kenya. www.standardmedia.co.ke/business/article/2000058057/losing-out-on-commercial-advertising-billions

By contrast, the advertising business in Mumbai had been flourishing since the 1950s. Cable television with product advertising sponsorship was introduced in 1981. A decade later, satellite television made huge inroads in India with ZEE TV and STAR (Satellite Television Asia Region). Their multiple channel programs required advertising on a large scale. Finally, the media boom starting in 1997 popularized twenty-four-hour news, talk shows and Indian soaps. Mumbai became the hub of twenty-four hour highly-competitive production studios.¹²

Fully cognizant of Mumbai's film production potential, Inam Kazmi began to send TVC scripts from Kenya for products made in Africa. His first choice for TVC director was his *Lintas Ad Agency* colleague, and prominent advertising director, Lalit Ajgaonkar to produce TVCs in Mumbai. By 2002, the volume of TVC scripts from Kenya-based Kazmi's *Scan Ad* increased to such an extent that Lalit Ajgaonkar's Assistant Director, Neeta Ratwani, was given the opportunity by Kazmi to produce *Scan Ad*'s commercials. Ratwani stated that at first, for TVCs produced in Mumbai, the cast for the major roles, for example—a family of four, mother, father and two children—would be flown from Kenya to Mumbai and African extras would be selected from Mumbai.¹³

For the very first commercials from Kenya, Ajgaonkar's casting directors had to work hard to find background extras. They sought out Kenyan students from college hostels in Mumbai. However, the number of students decreased as studying in Mumbai became expensive, and African students moved away to cities like Ahmedabad or Bengaluru. This is when Juliana's sources were tapped.¹⁴

Juliana became a model coordinator by happenstance. She and her husband, Juje, were serving as extras on a shoot for a soft drink. As it turned out, the contracted model coordinator brought the wrong gender models and totally disrupted the day's tight production schedule. In the advertising industry, the daily filming cost for a television commercial includes location fees, film and lighting equipment, crew and model charges, dress rentals, and food for fifty or more people, among other expenses. Juliana and Juje witnessed the angry arguments and offered

12 History of Advertising in India since Eighteenth Century. www.yourarticlelibrary.com/advertising/history-of-advertising-in-india-since-18th-century/22252;
<https://advertisinginindia.wordpress.com/tag/first-ad-agency-in-india/>

13 Ratwani interview August 4, 2017.

14 Ajgaonkar interview September 19, 2017.

to rectify the situation. Juliana reached out to her contacts in Mumbai and provided the appropriate models the next day. This prompt action established Juliana’s credentials as a coordinator of African models. Her reputation quickly spread in the industry as the only coordinator who could provide a large selection of models; moreover, she would personally bring the models to the filming location.

Juliana had to make a major shift from her expertise as a civil engineer to an impromptu model coordinator. Suresh Shetty, a colleague of Juje’s who had introduced him and Juliana to advertising agencies, encouraged Juliana to start a business as a professional model coordinator. He insisted that Juliana not waste her most important resource—her own extended Siddi family and community in her village in Haliyal, Uttara Kannada.

Juliana decided to put behind her the painful experience of her job searches and seize a new opportunity that would reward her for her African looks and acknowledge her African-descended community. Her privileged background and education gave her a head start. She learned new skills in coaching from Suresh. First, she acquired computer literacy—an important requirement in an industry that demands speed in communication. She learned that she had to swiftly provide numerous photos of models, even when Production Houses ultimately just used few. Finally, she had to equip herself with a camera and mobile phone. She says with some amusement, “In those days [the early 2000s], mobile phone was a big deal. Now I have a smart phone and all apps and email at my fingertips, but I had to learn everything from scratch then.”¹⁵

Utilizing contacts from previous modeling assignments, Juliana expanded her existing network of African artists, mainly family members of staff from Mumbai Embassies and Consulates of Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Nigeria and South Africa. Since most commercials were for Kenya, Juliana sub-contracted a Kenyan student, Nathan, who was based in Pune (a city about four hours away from Mumbai in the western Ghats.) Nathan had contacts with Kenyan college students in Pune and sometimes provided Mumbai directors like Ajgaonkar and Ratwani with Kenyan artists. Juliana and Nathan made an agreement to assist each other to find appropriate models and pay each other a fee. However, when large numbers of “African” extras were required, it was only Juliana who could pull together numbers from her Siddi village and her Mumbai contacts.

15 Interview March 13, 2016.



Director Ajgaonkar praises Juliana's work:

Juliana went to work like a pro. She knew it was her responsibility to ensure that the entire day's shooting schedule flowed smoothly. She is very professional as compared to other model coordinators who deliver background artists. Some of them are very rude to their artists, who are like cattle, very frankly. For Juliana, this is her family. She is not bringing random people. She's bringing cousins aunts, nephews, nieces—a kind of large extended family. You got a sense that though there was money to be made, she cared about them. I can see that she is an organizer within that space (village), someone who is respected, looked up to and they are very gentle people, who come on the shoot, they are nice, no tantrums.¹⁶

2. Juliana on set for Power Pasta commercial with artists.

¹⁶ Ajgaonkar interview September 19, 2017.

Juliana has gained success in this work, as she notes:

Actually, Production Houses now approach me directly for their needs. Most of the Producers who are doing work for African countries know me. Today the standard we have was not there before.¹⁷

RESPONSIBILITIES OF A MODEL COORDINATOR

Juliana has been the model coordinator for more than a hundred commercials in the last thirteen years. “I have lost count,” she says laughing, making light of her significant contribution to the Mumbai Advertising industry—an industry in which one false move can result in the loss of lakhs of rupees in a single day. She is extremely aware that the directors rely on her for providing the most appropriate artists for their commercials. Siddi elders, teens and children from the village merge into various scenes for Kenyan or Nigerian TVCs. Once in a while a director takes the liberty of selecting an artist from Kenya for a commercial made for Nigeria. For example, for the product *Indomie* Instant Noodles made for Nigeria, the mother was an artist flown in from Nigeria, while in another *Indomie* commercial, the mother was a Kenyan woman living in Mumbai and the child selected was from a Nigerian family residing in Mumbai. In yet another commercial for *Power Pasta* (manufactured by the same company as *Indomie*), for Nigeria, the role of the mother-in-law was played by Juliana herself, in 2013. Juliana explains that if a creative director for a certain commercial approves an artist who is from Kenya for a commercial made for Nigeria, then it’s their decision and responsibility.

Locating African artists is an elaborate process. Despite the widespread use of cell phones in her village, calling from Mumbai can be problematic. In the village, people are usually outside, working in the fields, or out of the cell phone coverage. Thus, Juliana’s first preference is to find artists in Mumbai. She describes the process of her work:

I contact Nigerian and Kenyan kids in Mumbai, like Embassy kids or children of business people—whoever is available from my contacts here. I do this first, since this is close by, before I go further. For example, if I have to give

¹⁷ Juliana interview March 11, 2017.

one main artist, I still have to give at least four options—the agency has a specific character in mind and they decide. I don't think anyone has as many options as I provide.¹⁸

However, the pool of artists in the village is much larger; auditions are required. For this purpose, Juliana sets up a *liaison* person in the village, generally a family member, who contacts children as specified by the production company. Next, they book a room, a conference hall in a local hotel, and keep everything ready for the casting director from Mumbai. Siddi parents in the village eagerly bring their children for TVC auditions in Haliyal. Juliana comments on the monetary gain for the child and family:

They know if a child is getting eight to ten thousand per day, that is more than most people's monthly income. Besides, the children are happy to come to Mumbai. The shoot gives them a change. It's like a picnic. In fact, I see to it that they get good food, treats. I know the money they earn helps towards their education. When I go to the village teenage girls come up to me and say, "I got this gold ring from my money" or "I got a TV for my parents." I know that some are keeping aside the money or that their parents are keeping money in their accounts; so, it's creating a source of income.¹⁹

Juliana's artists were recruited in large numbers during the huge advertising campaign for the 2007 World Cup Cricket championship to be played in the West Indies. This is when Juliana got her big break with the SONY Entertainment Company. They produced promotional ads for their SONY MAX television channel, in India. The overall concept of the ads was to recreate the Caribbean using Mumbai's expansive beaches in Alibaugh and Karjat, both located a few miles South of Mumbai city. The casting directors at SONY had heard of Juliana, so she bagged the contract as casting coordinator for SONY Entertainment, which included print media such as calendars, billboards, and posters on local buses. Juliana proudly claims her success:

On that project, for three days, I handled a crowd of fifty people, ten kids and forty adults. That was my biggest shoot. The World Cup Promo Ads were on billboards all over Bombay. Advertising agencies were surprised—all of

18 Juliana interview February 26, 2017.

19 Juliana interview February 26, 2017.

the ads were glamorous; the models were in swimwear in a Caribbean setting. People started asking ‘who provided the artists?’ So, by word of mouth, news spreads and people started approaching me for African artists. I never looked back after that.²⁰

Indomie Noodles was another big break for Juliana. This product, manufactured in Indonesia and later in Nigeria, has used the power of advertising to secure seventy-four percent of the Nigerian market, replacing bread and rice as a staple food.²¹ Similarly, *Maggi* noodles in India too gained a foothold with their popular advertising jingles, especially targeting working mothers and their children.²² At one point, for the series of TVCs, Juliana provided forty children from her village for five continuous days of filming.

Indomie Noodles was filmed in different Nigerian languages—Yoruba, Ibo, Hausa and English. Almost all of the *Indomie* Ads feature Siddi children from Karnataka. The *Indomie Mama Yara*, and *Mama Do Good* commercials became very popular in Nigeria. Juliana and I watched one of the *Indomie* commercials with Siddi children. The scene begins with the mother returning home from the market with her daughter. The daughter asks her mother “Mama, why do all the kids always come here?” The instant response is “Because they love the taste of *Indomie* and they know I always cook *Indomie*.” The scene cuts to children emerging from hiding, and quickly slurping down the mother’s *Indomie* Noodles. The shot cuts to all the children singing and dancing in a circle, praising the mother’s food. Siddi children merge seamlessly into each frame performing as Nigerian neighborhood children. Juliana points out that the Nigerian mother is portrayed by a Kenyan woman and the child playing the daughter is from Nigeria, but as far as possible Juliana provides models that match the country for which the product is being made. The narrator of *The Indomie Story*, a promotional video for *Indomie* Noodles on *Youtube*, claims that kids are its most loyal audience and therefore kids are the main focus of their commercials. The mother is regarded as “the gatekeeper of the brand.”²³



3a-b. Siddi children on set for *Indomie* commercial.

20 Juliana interview March 11, 2017.

21 Wargadiredja, Arzia Tivany. “How Indomie Became Insanely Popular in Nigeria” *Vice.Com*, April 24, 2017. https://www.vice.com/en_id/article/3d9p5y/how-indomie-became-insanely-popular-in-nigeria

22 *How Maggi Noodles became an iconic Indian snack*, June 4, 2015 BBC News Asia. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-33002261>

23 *The Indomie Story* on *Youtube* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kJdEfl0ZL4>

As a model coordinator for African models, Juliana is aware that Africa is misrepresented in India:

West Africans and East Africans don't look alike you know. There is a lot of difference, but in India, if you are Black you are either West Indian or Nigerian. They don't know Africa is a continent, they think Africa is a country. That's the problem. Africa is vast, it is a continent with different countries. So, when they call me for a shoot, I ask 'which country are you shooting for?' If you are shooting for Nigeria and you bring Kenyan models in the shoot, you can clearly make out that they are not Nigerians. It matters, but normally in India they don't understand this—Blacks are the same—Chinese are the same.²⁴

CASTING DIRECTOR'S CHALLENGES

After the children are selected, Juliana contacts a family member in her village and gives them contact information for all the children. She pays for travel because the village families cannot afford bus fare. She books seats on a long-distance luxury sleeper bus from Karnataka to Mumbai, and brings over the children a couple of days in advance.

More than once, Juliana has provided shoes and clothes for her Siddi children artists from the village, spending her own money. Additionally, to make the children feel comfortable, Juliana houses them in her apartment. For the *Indomie* Noodles TVC series, on a three-day shoot, ten children ages five and above from Haliyal stayed in her apartment.

Indomie Noodles provided a steady stream of work. For forty children brought from the village as artists, Juliana planned meticulously to ensure that her junior artists, some of them five years old, do not miss their families or get homesick, since for many children the trip to Mumbai is their first travel away from their village. Juliana comments:

For forty kids I have five guardians to help take care of the *chhotoos*, little ones—mostly kids between five and eight years. Among them, if anyone is fourteen or fifteen years old, they have to help the guardians to take care of the little ones. Guardians are elders who are known to me. For example, my niece is one. And she is also known to the

²⁴ Juliana interview March 13, 2016.

kids. Sometimes, I ask the parents also to pick their own guardians. If five kids come from one locality, I ask for a guardian from that locality—so the kids won't feel lost. Sometimes we have to put them up in a guesthouse or hotel or even vacant flats here, in my building. I buy beddings for them, I buy food and the Production House pays for everything.²⁵

Juliana works extremely hard, beginning her work behind the scenes at 4am, since most film shoots begin at 8am. Often, she has to pick up her models from their homes in distant suburbs and shepherd them to the sets, on time, in appropriate clothing and then see to their needs throughout the day.

To manage a large number of children, Juliana has to be strict like a school mistress and maintain a timetable. After the long night's bus journey, she puts the children to bed. The next morning, she has to go through the clothes they have brought to wear on the shoot.

They get so excited, they rush up to me to show their clothes. It is so much noise. Then this has to become like a school, like a classroom. I say, 'one person at time, in one single line' and they all listen. On the shoot I have to watch them closely, so they don't dirty their clothes. If they are performing as school kids, they wear school uniforms provided by the Production House, and you understand how in the camera, every single patch can be seen, so I have to maintain some discipline with them on the shoot also.²⁶



Only once the kids who came from the village were small and totally unprepared to face the camera, so they started crying nonstop. Juliana “was scared, wondering if this will work.” She continues:

But the magic of it all was that the Director wanted the kids to cry (she laughs). Imagine the director got great shots. This was a still photography shoot for UNICEF's Hunger Campaign and the Director won an award for the campaign.²⁷

25 Juliana interview February 26, 2017.

26 Juliana interview February 26, 2017.

27 Juliana interview March 13, 2016.

4. Siddi children prepare for a Kellogg cereal commercial.

Having experienced the pain of being seen as *other*, Juliana is protective of her Siddi child artists. She feels that an important part of her job is to present the Siddi children as professional artists:

You know they are raw kids. I can't take them in their wrinkled clothes or worn out clothes—If buttons are missing, or clothes are slightly worn, I give them my son, Julius's clothes. I have many hand-me-downs also. Sometimes we go shopping for shoes. I have to spend the money, but for me it is an investment. I see all details of appearance. I have to moisturize their skin. The weather is so dry in Karnataka, the skin becomes very rough. After all this is a commercial and I have to present my artists as the best. Some of them are poor and I don't want them insulted or ridiculed.²⁸

I asked if the children have experienced insult or ridicule on the shoot. She tells me that at the level of the *spot boy* (errand boy), there is sometimes an attitude towards the children who are possibly perceived as poor *tribals* and from rural areas. What irks Juliana is that the spot boys assert authority and power by denying the children small treats like chocolates or potato chips. Additionally, she discovered that the children were given water from the faucet even when bottled water was available. Juliana emphasizes that she is responsible entirely for the children's health. If the children fall ill, the shoot would be disrupted and the parents in Karnataka would not trust her with their children again. She is extremely vigilant and instructs the children never to drink water from an open bottle. On some occasions, she has had to intervene and assert authority with the *spot boys* to regard her children as professional artists at work and provide them with their needs.

Juliana goes on to explain that caste and color discrimination exists not just at the level of the spot boys, but even in the higher ranks. Line Producers look at the Siddi artists and lower the fees, with the excuse that their commercial has a low budget. Juliana realizes the double standard at work and she outright refuses to shortchange her artists, knowing that they are in heavy demand elsewhere.

One incident of flagrant racism stands out for Juliana and Juje, when the latter brought a casting director to Haliyal in Karnataka to select artists. The casting director looked at the Siddis and commented: "I

²⁸ Juliana interview February 26, 2017.

have not come here to do charity work. I want to make commercials *yaar* (friend), I don't want to work with these people."²⁹ Such remarks addressed to Juje and Juliana's family and community hurt Juje, but he was too stunned to respond and instead kept wondering what warranted such comments about his people. Despite the overt racism of the casting director, Juliana's village community was in heavy demand. The fields and forests of Haliyal could provide a vast range of African-looking artists from children, to young adults, to elderly "Africans."

Siddis are considered a valuable commodity in the world of advertising, but at the same time Siddis continue to confront racism.³⁰ Juje still has people staring at him on the local train when he goes to work, or some people want to touch his hair. Juliana's recent experience on the local train says a lot about racism in India today. Juliana boarded a local train and sat next to a woman. The man seated across from the woman, supposedly her husband, addressed the woman in the Marathi language: "*Teeja color, tula utrel*" translated as "Her color will come on to your body." Angered by the insult, Juliana immediately confronted the man in Marathi. The startled man quickly turned his statement around claiming that he was talking about something else. Juliana pointed out that she had been mistaken for an African, and that there is vast ignorance about Siddis as Indians, "with a deep history in India."³¹

I asked Juliana how she feels about representing her community as African. Her response was thoughtful and insightful:

Here [in the advertising world] people don't know Siddis or Africans. It doesn't make a difference. Most are not aware of our Siddi community. So, I feel that Siddi community is getting exposure, yes, in a small way and importantly they have been earning money also. I feel that Siddis are shown in a positive light. In India, stereotype image of Africans is they are criminals. Men are seen as drug dealers or dollar and black money converters—cheaters and frauds. The women are prostitutes. They think women are easily available into the flesh trade. They won't see a Black person

29 Juliana and Juje interview March 13, 2016.

30 www.hindustantimes.com/mumbai/invisible-indians/story-SHA1BAtr99UPmgJwPJ8fjP.html

Also see Dhasarathy, Srikanth. Dark shadow of Discrimination. New Indian Express. December 4, 2016. www.newindianexpress.com/states/karnataka/2016/dec/04/dark-shadow-of-discrimination-still-haunts-these-villagers-1545518.html

31 Juliana interview February 3, 2018.

with dignity. India is very color conscious—don't see degree, qualifications, call Black people *kalloo*, don't show respect, or talk to them. *My* children and the young African college students who work with me are ordinary people, with families and lives of dignity.³²

Juliana is aware that even as she talks of giving exposure to her Siddi community, racism against Black people is a brutal reality. In September 2014, three African students from Gabon and Burkina Faso were badly beaten with sticks and fists by a mob yelling “Bharat Mata Ki Jai” (Victory to Mother India) inside a metro station in New Delhi. In March 2017, an attack on African students in Greater Noida on the outskirts of Delhi marked one more vicious aggression in a series of assaults on Africans in India.³³ Opinion Writer for *The New York Times*, Nilanjana Roy, bemoaned the shameful behavior of Indians. She noted that starting with the murder of a Nigerian man in Goa on October 31, 2013, a wave of attacks was unleashed on Africans. When Nigerian nationals residing in Goa protested the murder of their countryman as a racist act, the response from the State was to place Billboards in different locations loudly declaring, “We want peace in Goa. Say no to Nigerians. Say no to drugs.”³⁴

Roy goes on to describe the rapid spread of this anti-African attitude in Goa, all the way to the capital New Delhi, where a string of racist acts against Africans erupted. Delhi's Law Minister, Somnath Bharti took the lead with his avowed campaign to *clean up* the city of Delhi. Without a legal warrant he broke into a peaceful African residence, with vigilante supporters, under the pretext of controlling “lawlessness” i.e. drugs and prostitution in the capital city. The resulting mob fury targeted an innocent Ugandan woman on the street, from whom a urine sample was demanded on the spot. Roy laments Indians' historical amnesia and obsession with the Western world:

Despite our close ties and the shared history of colonialism,

32 Juliana interview March 31, 2018.

33 *Beating of African Students by Mob in India Prompts Soul Searching on Race*. www.nytimes.com/2014/10/01/world/asia/beating-of-african-students-by-mob-in-india-prompts-soul-searching-on-race.html?action=click&contentCollection=Asia%20Pacific&module=RelatedCoverage®ion=Marginalia&pgtype=article downloaded April 26, 2018.

34 Roy, Nilanjana. www.nytimes.com/2014/01/25/opinion/roy-the-wrong-kind-of-foreigner.html?action=click&contentCollection=Asia%20Pacific&module=RelatedCoverage®ion=Marginalia&pgtype=article

Africa doesn't figure on the Indian map of curiosity and desire. Our admiration of China's economic prowess is commonplace and unabashed; we are obsessed with the West, in terms of education, ideals of beauty and economic might. But Africa is invisible. Racist views can be spouted without consequence. Africa simply doesn't matter.

Director Neeta Ratwani, who has worked with Juliana on TVCs for Kenya, links racism to casteism in India.

Casteism is so ingrained in Indians, except for a minute one percent of us who don't believe it and never practice it. I see it everywhere. Even on my set I would not allow anyone to call my artists *kalloo* or negro. I would correct my team members all the time and say— 'call them African.' When I grew up I saw how my mother treated maids. Now I realize that it is not done. But see, I struggled with it and turned my parents around to think like me.³⁵

Ratwani also commented on how many Indians living in Africa behaved badly with Africans and in turn were not very well liked. She noted: "I don't want to make generalizations, but many Indians in Africa behave badly with Africans. I saw this in Kenya ... I lived there for twelve years."³⁶

Commenting on the racist attacks against Africans in India, Juliana expresses concern. On the one hand, Juliana and her models perform as Africans in an imagined world of advertising, but in the real world, she feels vulnerable:

You never know, we can be targeted. We look African. It is scary sometimes, since here is so much ignorance about the diversity of African countries, their history and culture. Different African languages when heard are ridiculed by Indians. To add to the confusion, many Africans don't know English too well or even know any of the languages of India, so there is also a communication gap.³⁷

I ask Juliana if her own commercials make a difference in how Africans



35 Ratwani interview August 4, 2017.

36 Ratwani *ibid*.

37 Juliana interview March 31, 2018 .

and Siddis are perceived. Juliana retorts “Who sees these commercials here? Most of these commercials go back to Africa.” She adds that in television commercials produced for corporates like McDonalds and Airtel, Juliana has provided Siddi artists, but she wonders what impact a few seconds of images can have especially when the focus is a food product or a cell phone? She adds that at least in these commercials, Africans and Siddis are not seen as ignorant savages.

HISTORICAL DISCRIMINATION AGAINST SIDDIS AND THE FOREST RIGHTS ACT

Juliana knows only too well that caste and racial discrimination have always been part of the history of Siddis in Karnataka.³⁸ However, through sustained efforts, activism and continued initiatives from within the Siddi community, the state finally granted Siddis in Uttara Kannada, Schedule Tribe (ST) status in 2003.³⁹ Juliana notes that her father, Cajetan, was one of the pioneering activists who played a significant role in the early initiatives by which Siddis of Uttara Kannada pushed State officials to acknowledge them as legitimate citizen subjects with rights to the land, which they and their ancestors had nurtured through generations of hard labor. In 2006, Karnataka passed the Recognition of Forest Rights Act, (FRA), by which the State sought to implement community forest rights and community forest resource rights. The FRA was intended to benefit one hundred and fifty million forest dwelling people in more than one hundred and seventy thousand villages in India.⁴⁰ However, Siddis and other ST forest dwellers continue to be harassed as encroachers on forest land.

On December 16, 2011, twenty-four Siddis were arrested and jailed as illegal squatters on forest land. Siddis gathered in protest outside the office of the *Tahsildar* or Collector, in Haliyal, but did not draw any attention from state officials. The only comment came from Mr.

38 Vyas Mohan. *Huffinton Post*, July 15, 2016. www.huffingtonpost.in/2016/06/04/india-racism-africans_n_10294376.html

39 Camara 2004; Obeng 2007 (a), (b); Prasad 2005, Shroff 2015.

40 “Potential for Recognition of Community Forest Resource Rights Under India’s Forest Rights Act.” Report published by Rights and Resources Initiative: (Washington D.C.); Vasundhara: (Bhubaneswar) and Natural Resources Management Consultants (New Delhi). http://rightsandresources.org/wp-content/uploads/CommunityForest_RR_A4Final_web1.pdf

R.V. Deshpande, former president of Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee, who labeled the arrest of Siddis an atrocity.⁴¹

According to sociologist Ritambhara Hebbar, Siddis originally were given *patta* or deed of ownership to the forest land that they themselves cultivated, but the upper caste landowners appropriated the land and attempted to transfer it in their names. With impunity the upper castes filed complaints with the local police against the vulnerable Siddis with the claim that Siddis were encroachers, since the land was purchased from Siddis earlier. Without any investigation, the police picked up Siddi men from their homes, often in the middle of night on unrelated charges, and detained them for interrogation.⁴² Hebbar comments that “Forests are now, more than ever before, sites of competition between various interest groups such as environmentalists, tribal forest dwellers, tourist industry and other commercial and private interests.”⁴³

Barun Mitra claims that the tribal population of India is about one hundred and four million or about twenty million families. Of the total number of approximately four million claims filed for land, only about 1.6 million claims have been being approved (as of Feb 28, 2015).⁴⁴

Despite the focus on her job in Mumbai, Juliana remains sensitive, thanks to the formative influence of her father Cajetan, to the plight of the Siddi community’s ongoing struggle to claim the land they cultivate, under the Forest Rights Act. Cognizant of the developments in favor of forest dwellers, Juliana points out that in 2016, the state of Karnataka began to reconsider its policy towards forest dwellers and began to allocate forest land to tribals (Siddis as Scheduled Tribe fall

41 24 people from Siddi tribe arrested. *The Hindu* Dec 16, 2011 www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-karnataka/24-people-from-siddi-tribe-arrested/article2719677.ece_

42 Ritambhara Hebbar www.nird.org.in/nird_docs/srsc/srsc230217-14.pdf

Also see Shroff 2009.

Also see: Mander, Harsh. India: Reviving Land Reforms? Centre For Equity Studies August 29, 2013. www.cetri.be/India-Reviving-Land-Reforms?lang=fr

43 Hebbar *ibid* Page 5.

44 Mitra, Barun. Implementation of Forest Rights Act 2006: Lessons from the Ground. From Talk given at the Centre For Policy Research. July 23, 2015. www.cprindia.org/events/4508

under this category).⁴⁵ Juliana avers that the government will sanction legal ownership of a maximum of one and a half to two acres of land, even if a family is cultivating seven or eight acres. Only a portion of land would be legally allocated according to the state's assessment of a family's necessity. Juliana states that this move on the part of the state can be considered an improvement because today there is no land documented in the name of Siddis. She recognizes that "legal land documents are important for Siddis, if they want to build a house, or apply for a loan or any state subsidy. Land documents establish your identity."⁴⁶

Juliana's family will also be given about two acres of land. She explains that her father Cajetan did not directly work on the land, but he financially supported his brothers who cultivated the land for the family. Additionally, Juliana's father, Cajetan has stepped forward to assist other Siddis in Haliyal, in filling out lengthy forms and in directing these documents to the appropriate local authority. As one of the founders of AKSDA (All Karnataka Siddi Development Association), initiated in the 1980s, Cajetan is conversant with government bureaucracy. Also, his English language skills are an asset when it comes to interpreting legal language.

In conclusion, Juliana, having overcome racism and discrimination, is today a successful model coordinator. Her work in Mumbai has brought her closer to her community and to the lives of the Siddis in the village—a life from which she had been cut off due to her urban upbringing. Her close bonds to her community have even inspired her to assist her father, Cajetan, to set up a new organization to assist semi-literate Siddi farmers with various agricultural needs. She purchased a scooter to enable Cajetan to move around different villages easily, since public transportation in the forest areas is very unpredictable. Cajetan has set up a small office and additional work is underway.⁴⁷

A major contradiction remains for Juliana, namely that Siddis can perform as Africans in television commercials and be financially rewarded, so much so that they can help family members, develop

45 "Karnataka to gift forest land to encroachers. Loss 6L hectares" *Times of India*, July 22, 2016. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/bengaluru/Karnataka-to-gift-forest-land-to-encroachers-Loss-6L-hectares/articleshowprint/53329845.cms>

46 Juliana interview March 13, 2016.

47 In the past she had helped her husband, Juje, to develop various projects in Haliyal (Shroff 2015).

their agricultural land, and build *pucca* (brick and mortar) houses. However, when it comes to confronting state bureaucracy and obtaining documents for claiming land, Juliana and her Siddi village community by default fall into the “indigenous communities” of India. They can gain legitimacy for their position and their land demands only under the designation of “Scheduled Tribe.” Their position continues to be vulnerable in a highly caste-dominated India of the twenty-first century.



REFERENCES

- Ali, Shanti Sadiq. 1996. *The African Dispersal in the Deccan. From Medieval to Modern Times*. Delhi: Orient Longman.
- Ansari, Humaira. 2013. “The Invisible Indians.” *Hindustan Times*, March 24: 13.
- Camara, Charles. 2004. The Siddis of Uttara Kannada: History, Identity and Change among African Descendants in Contemporary Karnataka. In Amy Catlin-Jairazbhoy and Edward A. Alpers. *Sidis and Scholars: Essays on African Indians*. New Delhi: Rainbow Publishers, Pages 100-114.
- Chauhan, R.R.S. 1995. *Africans in India: From Slavery to Royalty*. New Delhi: Asian Publication Services.
- Dhasarathy, Srikanth. December 4, 2016. *Dark shadow of discrimination still haunts these villagers*, Express News Service. <http://www.newindianexpress.com/states/karnataka/2016/dec/04/dark-shadow-of-discrimination-still-haunts-these-villagers-1545518.html>
- Hebbar, Ritambhara. *Forest Rights Act: Lessons from the Field*. Centre for Study of Developing Societies. Tata Institute of Social Sciences. Mumbai. http://www.nird.org.in/nird_docs/srsc/srsc230217-14.pdf
- Jayasuriya, Shihan de Silva and Richard Pankhurst. 2003. *The African Diaspora in the Indian Ocean*. Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press.
- Macharia, Kamau. “Losing Out On Commercial Advertising Billions” May 13, 2012. <https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/business/article/2000058057/losing-out-on-commercial-advertising-billions>
- Mackey, Robert. September 30, 2014. “Beating of African Students In India Prompts Soul Searching On Race,” *The New York Times* (downloaded April 27, 2018). <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/01/world/asia/beating-of-african-students-by-mob-in-india-prompts-soul-searching-on-race.html?action=click&contentCollection=Asia%20Pacific&module=RelatedCoverage®ion=Marginalia&pgtype=article>
- Mahaprashasta, Ajoy Ashirwad “For Siddis of Karnataka, Livelihood Issues Trump Communal Politics.” *The Wire*, May 5, 2018. <https://thewire.in/rights/siddis-karnataka-livelihood-issues-communal-electoral-politics>

- Mander, Harsh. 2013. "India: Reviving Land Reforms?" Centre For Equity Studies August 29, 2013. <https://www.cetri.be/India-Reviving-Land-Reforms?lang=fr>
- O'Barr, William M. Advertising in India <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/249785>
- Obeng, Pashington. 2007a. "Service to God, Service to Master/Client: African Indian Military Contribution in Karnataka," *African and Asian Studies*, 6: 3, pp. 271-288.
- . 2007b. *Shaping Membership, Defining Nation: The Cultural Politics of African Indians in South Asia*. Maryland: Lexington Books.
- . 2008. Religion and Empire: Belief and Identity among African Indians of Karnataka, South India. In John C. Hawley. *India in Africa, Africa in India: Indian Ocean Cosmopolitanisms*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 2008.
- Pinto, Jeanette. 1992. *Slavery in Portuguese India, 1510-1842*. Bombay: Himalaya Publishing House.
- Roy, Nilanjana. "A Racist Turn in India." *The New York Times*, January 24, 2014. www.nytimes.com/2014/01/25/opinion/roy-the-wrong-kind-of-foreigner.html?action=click&contentCollection=Asia%20Pacific&module=RelatedCoverage®ion=Marginalia&pgtype=article
- Rodeghier, Katherine. "Portuguese culture blends with Hindu India in Goa" *Times -Colonist* (Tribune New Service) April 2, 2016. <http://www.timescolonist.com/life/travel/portuguese-culture-blends-with-hindu-india-in-go-1.2222455>
- Roy, Sandip. "Dove Apologized for a Skin Tone-Deaf Ad, But India's Fairness Industry Has No Such Compulsion" *HuffPost India*, Sept 10, 2017. https://www.huffingtonpost.in/2017/10/09/dove-apologized-for-a-skin-tone-deaf-ad-but-indias-fairness-industry-has-no-such-compulsion_a_23236888/
- Vyas, Mohan. Don't Think Indians Can Be Racists? Here's How They Treat Their Own People. *Huffington Post*, 15/7/2016. https://www.huffingtonpost.in/2016/06/04/india-racism-africans_n_10294376.html
- History of *ScanAD* Kenya. <https://www.forbes.com/forbes/welcome/?toURL=https://www.forbes.com/sites/mfonobongsehe/2017/01/02/how-this-man-built-a-70-million-advertising-empire-in-kenya/&refURL=https://www.google.co.in/&referrer=https://www.google.co.in/> Accessed on March 11, 2018.
- "Satellite and Cable Television in India" November 6, 2016 Amit Kumar <http://www.indianmediastudies.com/satellite-and-cable-television-in-india/>
- History of Advertising in India Since 18th Century. <http://www.yourarticlelibrary.com/advertising/history-of-advertising-in-india-since-18th-century/22252>
- <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/29/world/asia/african-students-india-mob-attacks.html>
- Ratwani, Neeta. Interview (August 4, 2017 Mumbai) with Neeta Ratwani Director of Production House Kaleidoscope.

