Chapter 5

Conclusion

The issues of identity and assimilation of African diaspora in Indian ocean assumed new dimensions in the early medieval India. Although, the history of Indo-African goes back to ancient period and the ‘Periplus Maris Erythraei’ has noted trade relations of Alexandria and Indian Ocean first century A.D. The African presence in India becomes gradually intensified after the establishment of Delhi Sultanate in twelfth century. The internal elements of Indian ocean reconfigured leading to intense formulation of diasporism in the African community. Over a period of time, the African community asserted in the politico-economic formation of India. Although, the majority of Africans were used for menial works. The colonial formulation in Indian ocean led to forceful migration of Africans in India. Unlike Atlantic ocean, the African community in Indian ocean did not witness brutal victimisation and exploitation.

The Indian subcontinent witnessed clear cut documentation of arrival of African community with the bands of Muhammad Ghazni in the post-Muhammad Qasim period. The period had witnessed cultural transformation with reference to the concept of ruler as Sultan rather than Raja and imposition of Persian as official language by removing Sanskrit as official language. Over a period of time, the central, eastern, western and later on southern part of India witnessed continuous establishment of various African settlements in the Indian subcontinent. The contemporary Sindh, Srilanka and the coastal regions of Indian subcontinent provided social-cultural matrix for the evolution of trading diasporas. Thus, the plantation and growth of African diaspora was structured in the context of Arabian trading diaspora and new political formation in medieval India.

The medieval Indian society provided separate pockets of evolution to the trading diaspora communities. The African community was recognised as Habshi. The Habshi social formations and cultural patterns were gradually transformed from slavery to dominant politico-economic entity. The Habshi cultural profile was elevated by the emergence of various powerful icons such as Jamal-ud-din Yakut, Malik Ambar, Malik Andil, Siddi Maula etc. It clearly shows that the political leadership of Habshi icons succeeded in carving out separate and independent African type settlement structure. It does not imply that the entire community was delinked from slave profile. Even then, the
community got a new negatively loaded stereotype image of criminal tribe during colonial period.

The colonial state in India had identified the tribal groups who protested against colonialism as the criminal tribes and the number of criminal tribes increased day by day due to inability or forceful exclusion of indigenous people from politico-economic system. Dadabhai Nauruji described the process of de-industrialisation as one of the important causes for exploitation of Indian people. The Habshi community was forced to move into forest zones. In the southern part of India, the dense forest zones of Western ghat became the hub for Habshi people.

Over a period of time, the colonial state was replaced by independent Indian state and the forest based Habshi community also witnessed evolution as Siddi community. In the contemporary India, the Siddi community is very well located in the Gujarat and Karnataka. Although, the different zones of India do have some isolated pockets of Siddi settlements. In the case of Gujarat and Karnataka, the Siddi community has successfully maintained and reproduced the diasporic artifacts whereas the process also led to removal of many essential elements of diasporism such as African language and African leadership.

In spite of getting positively assimilated in certain areas, the community has been negatively assimilated in the politico-economic arena. The African diaspora of Gujarat and Karnataka have organised various programmes since independence to make the state aware about their problem. The overall result has got transformed into the implementation of JFM, JFPM, recognition of Siddis in main forest areas of Gujarat and Karnataka as Scheduled Tribes. The ST status opens a dynamic channel of positive assimilation.

In the cultural and social field, the African community has maintained and reproduced diasporic structure. The process of diasporism in the African community continuously resisted all the attempts to wash away diasporic components. As a result, the patterns of settlements, social organisations and religious organisations, family structure, day to day ritual patterns represents the DNA of African diaspora. The African diaspora has been survived primarily on the basis of patterns of tribal settlements.
The Siddis of Karnataka have evolved in the politico-judicial nature of settlements. The head of settlements is referred as Buddhivanta. The Buddhivanta used to decide the legislative, executive and judicial authority in the African diaspora in India during pre-2000 A.D. period. The African based Buddhivanta leadership structure has been replaced by the Largescale Adivasi Multipurpose Societies (LAMPS). Even then, the local LAMPS based institutions of political assimilation have reproduced the diasporism beyond local religious incorporation. The efforts of local religious assimilation largely failed to incorporate African based value structure in the dignified way. Although, the African diaspora was largely able to carve out space at the local level due to acceptance by Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. But, the emergence of Siddi as an identity is located in diaspora formulation. The family structure primarily observes African based religious practices which are historically located in the tribal based belief system rather than any public religious institutions. This becomes clear from the fact that the African diaspora unanimously observes ancestor worship in the Indian ocean.

In the case of Gujarat, the African variety of Sufism largely maintains ancestor worship whereas the Siddis of Karnataka follows ancestor worship irrespective of any religion. The ancestor worship of Africa is quite essentially diasporic and is very different from local spirit worship. The African ancestor worship is largely rooted as an essential element of African religion and the ancestor worship collectivise the family structure by determining the kinship network. On the contrary, the non-African spirit worship are largely part of peripheral part of religious structure and it does not largely replace religion for the operation of kinship network.

Further, the cultural tools such as dhammal dance, African music structure, African psychological outlook, African narratives is creating diasporism in a new formulation. The era of globalisation is providing unlimited opportunities to the African communities to come out from hibernation and assert the diasporic identity. They have diasporic formulation, but could not get chance to assert and display to the world. The Siddi community have innumerable African elements such as African sacrifices and offerings, celebration of black cultures, images of Africans as universal navigation, pains of slavery, African dance, phenotypical features, African music etc.
The African diaspora is intensifying the process of diasporism and the diasporic elements of Siddi community are transforming the modern institutions of assimilation into a space for the emergence and assertion of diasporic identity in India. The emergence and assertion of diasporic identity in the Siddi community must also be understood from the perspective of oral instruments of social-cultural formulations. The African diaspora in India in general and Karnataka in particular, have got modern instruments for the production of African social-cultural fabric. In this context, the issues of identity and assimilation of African diaspora have been planted from oral to institutional system.

The era of globalisation have offered unlimited institutionalised mechanisms to the Siddi community for the diasporism at world level. The new phase of diasporism in the African community of Indian ocean is shaping the new trends of identity and assimilation in the respective zones of Indian ocean. In the past, the Siddis of Gujarat and Karnataka have witnessed marginalised politico-economic assimilation and hibernated diasporic identity. The contemporary period have witnessed the shift with reference to assimilation and sharpening in the arena of diasporic identity. The issues of assimilation have been transformed from negative to positive politico-economic assimilation spearheading the process of diasporism.

The Siddi community represents positive assimilation with reference to issues such as ST status, JFPM, village forest committees, LAMPS, Forest dwelling Act etc whereas the issues of African identity are located in the arena of patterns of settlement, family structure, social practices-kinship network, festivals, marriages, religious practices, Hiriyaaru worship, African dance, African navigation centric music, social narratives involving forest as an integral part world formulation. The phenotypical features reflects dominant African features such as curly hairs, organisation of hairs in African patterns, body color and face structure put the Siddi community in African trajectory.

The celebration of African sufis tombs- Gori Pir, Mai Misra and articulation of African cosmoloyg, which is not only sensitive to gender configuration but also plants divine authority at the settlement level, reflects diasporic entity. Similarly, the organisation of music and dance represents African lines of functioning. The formation is entirely rooted in the African rhythmic movement keeping polycentricity as key hallmark.
and this patterns of dance-music organisation totally differentiate them from local music-dance formations.

The Indian ocean is always present in the religious, social, political and cultural narratives of the Siddi community. It has been articulated as an epicentre in the narrative formation. Due to this reason, Baba Gori Pir, Mai Misra as sufi saints are every time referred in backdrop of Indian ocean. Similarly, Malik Ambar and various glorious heroes of Africans of Deccan have been referred great warriors in the context of Indian ocean, unlike India where the greatest of great ancient and medievalian warrior formation have been articulated in the concept of land.

Unlike Indian ocean, the African community needed cultural formulation to create a dignified identity in Atlantic ocean. The colonial formulation of negro identity had already justified their exploitation from sixteenth century. Edward Blyden created the concept of African personality in the independent parameter of African origin. Similarly, the Africans witnessed the formulation of Negro Empire and Africa for Africans in the ideas of Marcus Aurelius Garvey in the nineteenth century. The new independent formulation of African identity led to the emergence of Pan-Africanism. As a result, the African community witnessed intense diasporism in Atlantic ocean. The fifth Pan-African Congress demanded black Africa autonomy and independence. The migrated community of Africans formulated not only new philosophy of 'I belong therefore I am', but also the world witnessed new parameters of beauty leading to formulation of black is beautiful.

The African diaspora as an important international political institution grew parallel to the growth of African unity. The evolution of African Union from OAU reflected the crucial incorporation of African diaspora in the overall policy of African union. African diaspora is recognised as the sixth region of Africa by African Union. The African Union emblem outrightly reflects the intense desire for diasporism in the migrated community in the world by defining them as sons and daughters of Africa. The African Union defines African diaspora as a people of African origin living outside the continent, irrespective of their citizenship and nationality.

The formation of first African Union Western Hemisphere Diaspora Forum in December, 2002 clearly marked the new role of African diaspora as an international
African element to contribute for the development of Africa. The general recommendations of African Union clearly outlined the collaboration of African diaspora in the field of economics, education, gender empowerment, politics etc. It aimed to formulate a permanent structure of African diaspora in the form of steering committee. Obviously, the African Union have evolved active policy in the case of African diaspora in Atlantic ocean.

In the case of African diaspora in Indian ocean, the policy of African Union largely remains undecided. The undecided nature of African Union’s policy is primarily due to two reasons, first absence of detailed study on the presence of African diaspora in Indian Ocean. Secondly, the lack of articulation and politicisation of diasporism in the African community in the Indian Ocean. Although, the African community is very well located in the northwestern Indian ocean regions. But, the northwestern Indian Ocean has not witnessed any collective efforts by the nation states and civil society to understand historically settled African communities as diaspora. The contemporary period of globalisation is opening a new chapter in the evolution of diaspora studies with reference to African communities.

The new waves of diasporism in African diaspora across the world erupted from various elements such as globalisation, African Union, States of Africa and Indian state etc. The African Union and African diaspora in Atlantic ocean have created multiple waves to push forward the assertive mode of diaspora formulation in Indian Ocean. The foreign policy of Indian state has also witnessed remarkable formulation for diaspora under the leadership of former Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vaypayee. Over a period of time, the Indian state, irrespective of political party or coalition formations in state, has continuously shown positive support for African diaspora. The position of African Union, in the context of Constitutive Act 3(q), will definitely use diaspora as a tool to enhance relations between Africa and India.

Thus, the issues of identity and assimilation are situated around social, cultural, religious and political organisations of Siddi community. The Siddi community is located in various parts of states of India in general and Blegaum, dharwad, North Kannara regions of Karnataka in particular. It represents African social, cultural, religious organisational structure and practices. The cultural tools of the community represents the
direct linkages to African connection. On the politico-economic field, the Siddi community has been marginally assimilated due to lack of articulation and politicisation of their problems whereas the community has reflected presence of institutionally unbrushed African legacies which is pushing it for diasporism leading to creation of assertive and dynamic African diaspora in Indian ocean.