Abstract

This study’s purpose was to focus on collective identity and its effect on approaches to natural resource management. Within development studies in general, and in studies on resource management in particular, there is a theoretical need for putting more emphasis on contextual variables. One such variable, it was argued, is “identity”. Putting emphasis on a triadic relationship between the collective identity, its relation to other collective identities, and the political environment in which these identities function, the study found that the issue of identity – when activated – plays an important role in the way a collective identity may perceive the possibility for collaboration in relation to natural resources and its management.
1. Introduction

The purpose of this study is to highlight a link between identity formations and resource management. The focus is on collective identity and common resource management respectively in the case of Kodagu district in the South Indian state of Karnataka. Although geographically a small district, Kodagu is home to different demarcated communities who all make particular uses of the natural resources of the district for livelihood- as well as cultural purposes. This study concentrates on the identity formations of the Kodava\textsuperscript{1} community, and how this process of formations affects the group’s approach to common natural resources. The guiding research question is: How do collective identity formations affect the general approach to common natural resources and its management?

Aim of the study

Through a confrontation of both conventional theories of development as well as a branch of the so-called “alternative approaches” to development, the purpose of this is to highlight a connection between identity and development, a link that I believe is very important while not in adequate focus within development studies in general. This stems from the belief that a general issue of “identity” – whether on an individual or group level – often plays a decisive role in the way processes of and needs for socio-economic development are formulated in the first place, and indeed in the way these processes are then perceived and accepted in the end. The aim is to contribute to the theories of common resource management by Elinor Ostrom\textsuperscript{2} and hereby further develop our understanding of the subject in order to adopt more fruitful approaches to the subject. According to Ostrom (2000) theories of common resource management are in need of more and clearer analyses of possible contextual variables. I argue that one such variable is the role of identity.

\textsuperscript{1}I have by now accustomed myself to using the local terms “Kodagu” and “Kodavas” instead of the anglicised (but widely used among the Kodavas, too) equivalents “Coorg” and “Coorgs”/”Coorgis”.

\textsuperscript{2}See p. 14ff
**Background and problem**

The Kodavas include the socio-economic elite of farmers and estate-owners who use the natural resources for plantations and the forest itself for the production of timber. At the same time the Kodavas place themselves historically in an environmental and geographical context of the natural resources of the area. The forest holds a number of religious sites important to both Kodavas and others – the *Devarakadus* or “sacred groves” – which have been documented to be rapidly decreasing, in sizes as well as numbers. However, this decrease is partly due to encroachments of land for plantation purposes. Further, encroachments have also been undertaken by local authorities who have granted land to scheduled groups constituting both original tribals of Kodagu and communities who have for various reasons migrated to Kodagu.

The special tenure system, which includes certain privileges, have for centuries put the Kodavas in an advantageous position in comparison to other communities in Kodagu. However, coffee cultivation – and the resulting wealth among the Kodavas – is now challenged economically while patterns of both in- and out-migration have changed the communitarian fabric of Kodagu. This combination is perceived by the Kodavas as a threat to their community.

In short, the situation is one of conflicts of interest both within the Kodava community and between it and original and in-migrating communities. These relationships are further located in a community-dominated political environment in which the Kodavas feel marginalized. This has created a situation in which the Kodavas, who have for long been socially and economically dominant, are reformulating notions of collective identity in reference to other communities. This study looks into the possible collaboration or collision between the Kodavas and other communities in Kodagu as regards resource management.

**Methodology**

This study takes the point of departure in identity formations among the Kodavas as a case to show how such formations affect possible collaborations between communities in relation to resource management. My aim is to contribute to general
theory – both by rejecting and expanding existing theories – rather than providing a general theory itself, and the case study method is suitable for this.

Selection of data

My primary data are constructed through meetings with informants and interviews with respondents. Contact to informants were obtained through the help of my local supervisor at Institute for Economic and Social Change in Bangalore, Professor R.S. Deshpande. Respondents were sought out through a process of “snowballing” starting immediately before I went to Kodagu district to conduct my fieldwork.

A disadvantage of snowballing is of course that it tends to reduce the representativeness of respondents. Thus, despite that my only requirements for picking interviewees were that they should identify themselves as Kodavas and master a certain level of English, in the end, the in-depth interviews have been conducted with only men above the age of forty-five and the total bulk of respondents – including three women - rank from lower middle-class and upwards. However, this may not be at all bad. First, I will argue that the combination of traditional land tenure favouring the Kodavas together with the high-caste status that they enjoy, has created – and still creates – a situation in which we find virtually no Kodavas living in economic poverty. Secondly, this position of status and relative economic surplus has served as a catalyst to reach generally high education standards including good levels of English. The need for a translator, therefore, has not been an urgent issue in my fieldwork. Thirdly, since my actual concern is resource management, it made sense to confine the respondents to those who are responsively and independently involved in economic matters that can be connected to this. From that perspective, the younger respondents naturally became less relevant, since people in such a position tend to be above thirty-five years of age.

---

3 I define ‘poverty’ in this case as lacking resources above meeting subsistence level – a situation that, indeed, we do find among people in most other communities in Kodagu.
4 In cases of interviewees where the father was still alive, I cannot even speak of total economic independency. Responsibility is of course what matters the most, as responsible persons will also be those most directly affected by economic circumstances and resource issues.
5 A rough judgement, of course.
The most important trade-off in using the method of snowballing is a near total lack of women’s voices in my research. I did have two appointments with women, but in the end, both were ineffective. However, I managed to make three substantial conversations with women, but due to the spontaneous situations, they were conducted without an interview guide and following had to be based on memory.

Geographically, my research took place on an almost straight line of roughly 30 kilometers as the crow flies between the Yevakapadi village in southwest Madikeri taluk and Balale village in east Virajpet taluk respectively. Total time of transport between these two is about two and a half hours by car or bus due to the hilly area of the western parts and the sorry state of the roads. The actual settings include: secluded estates in the higher hills; small-scale estates in village outskirts in the lower hills; a large estate in the rich plantation area of the plains; a town-edge house separated from the plantation; and a town house with no plantation attached.

Unstructured, open-ended interviews made space for detailed personal narrations, which were necessary for the purpose of the study. The recorded interviews were transcribed immediately after each interview by myself.

**Disposition**

Part 2 concentrates on important concepts dealt with in this thesis and reviews the relevant theorizing concerned with these. First, at general discussion on “conventional” vs. “alternative” approaches to the notion of development is given, through which the study places itself within the alternative approach. Secondly, the role of civil society in development is discussed, followed by approaches to common resource management. Fourthly, the discussion turns to the main concept of the study, identity. In that section, an emphasis is put on the relevance of a non-essentialist approach to identity, followed by an outline of a triadic framework, in which the subsequent analysis of Kodavas as a collective identity is placed.

Part 3 begins with a brief historical contextualization of the Kodavas. Secondly, an outline of a common narrative of Kodava cultural identity is made, which plays an important part in a general understanding of the Kodavas and their identity. This
common narrative is thirdly deconstructed with references to the empirical data that was constructed during fieldwork in Kodagu, and with references to the historical context. Fourthly, it is argued that Kodava identity must be viewed as in the making rather than fixed and easily identified. Fifthly and sixthly, an alternative narrative of Kodava identity is pointed to, which becomes evident when Kodavas are relating themselves to other communities and to management of the natural resources in particular. Part 4 concludes the thesis.

2. Theory and Concepts

As stated above, in most analyses of processes of – or scopes for – development, the issue of identity is largely overlooked. Interestingly, this is so, not only in macro perspectives with a focus on state and market, but also within many so-called “alternative approaches” with a focus on civil society and micro perspectives that allow for contextual analyses.

In order to proceed to a more detailed discussion on why the issue of identity is important, this part will conceptualize, firstly, the notions of civil society, followed by resource management, and, secondly, identity. Through this, the theoretical foundations of the study related to these concepts should become clear. However, preceding this, I will briefly outline the overall paradigm in which I place the three concepts.

**Conventional vs. alternative approaches to development**

Following John Martinussen (1999), I find it useful to differentiate between “conventional” and “alternative” approaches to development. The dividing line is between those approaches that ‘focus on the social life of the individual citizens and civil society, the so-called alternative approaches and theories’, and those that do not (ibid. 289). This does not imply an idea of consensus on either side of the dividing line, since, ‘[e]vidently, the [conventional] theories and strategies /…/ constitute a very complex intellectual framework with several competing and to some extent mutually exclusive propositions’ (ibid.). The same applies to the alternative
approaches, with the important exception of their shared acknowledgement of the important role of civil society in development processes.

Within an overall paradigm of alternative development, we can further identify two general approaches: *a redefinition of the development goals and theories of civil society* (Martinussen 1997: 291). The latter adheres to a total rejection of a common development process and focuses solely on civil society. A relevant example here is a statement aimed particularly at Jürgen Habermas by Arturo Escobar: ‘In the Third World, modernity is not “an unfinished project of Enlightenment”. Development is the last and failed attempt to complete the Enlightenment in Asia, Africa and Latin America’ (quoted in Hoogvelt 2001: 255). This ‘antidevelopmentalist’ line of argument is in favour of ‘ethnodevelopment’ that is perceived as totally context-bound. Such an approach implies the essentialist assumption that each local society – and only that – possesses inherent capability to define, and carry out the most suitable and sustainable organisation of that society in all spheres of development, that is social, economic, environmental, political – even scientific. It follows that if most small-scale societies seem to be incapable of this, it is because of the obstructive role of the state and the global, capitalist economy, and, ultimately, this approach thus becomes a criticism of general notions ascribed to a process and state of modernity.

In a more holistic and, to my mind, constructive way, *a redefinition of the development goals*, on the other hand, emphasises a strengthening of civil society as a crucial element in a *general* development process. The main line of argument here is that while it makes no sense to dismiss the important role of state and market, the analysis of – and ultimately the outcome of – development projects can only be flawed if these factors are not strongly connected to civil society. An important element is the argument that development, when only defined and implemented by the state and related institutions, tends to have a narrow focus on economic growth as the ultimate goal. This is problematic in two ways. First, economic growth in itself will have far better possibilities of materializing if it is acknowledged that more forces are needed than just relying on free market forces and competitive production. But more importantly, development should be perceived as covering much more than just economic growth which, in this approach, is treated as a *means* rather than a *goal* in a process of development that includes social and gender equality, democracy, human
rights, education and health care (see for example Sen 1999). And, to return to the point on civil society, for such a scenario to materialize, listening to and cooperating with organisations and societies outside the realm of the state is crucial.

**The role of civil society**

But how do we actually perceive the concept of ‘civil society’? Such a clarification is necessary if we are to define the role that civil society should play. In the following I will draw mostly on Tandon and Mohanty’s (2003) account of the development of notions of civil society in the last two to three decades during which ‘[t]he critical and uncritical subscription of a large number of actors /…/ influenced by the historical shifts towards the idea of civil society, has made the concept complex, ambiguous and, to a large extent, fluid’ (ibid: 11).

The twin development of democratisation and liberalisation of economies that escalated on a global scale from the 1980s onwards has put a focus on civil society. This stems from the belief that civil society is an important and necessary player in democratic processes, while it has also been targeted to ‘channel aid for development to poor countries, so that the gap opened by the rolling back of the state is filled through the delivery of development directly to the poor’ (ibid: 13). From this twin development has spread three conceptualisations of civil society: a) ‘The revolutionary imagery of civil society [which] makes it a site for contestation, where people counterpose themselves against state power and in the process either replace or reform it’; b) ‘[T]he Tocquevillian interpretation of civic associations performing the role of watchdogs in a democracy’; and c) ‘A conceptualisation that completely divorces civil society from the state’ and perceives it ‘as a separate “sector”, different from the state and the market’ (ibid: 11). Whereas the first two operate within a framework of a dialectic relationship between state and society, the latter includes a disbelief in the constructive role of state and market. It thus correlates with the antidevelopmentalist wing of the alternative approaches to development mentioned above. The most obvious criticism of this conceptualisation is that it ignores that any organization will always operate within a legal and political framework set out by the state, thus rendering the concept of a third and independent sphere deeply problematic.
What lies behind all three, however, is the perception of civil society as a homogenous entity with common goals. Whether we link civil society to state and market or reject any such relationship, there is a danger in romanticising the image of civil society, and ‘more often than not such romanticisation only blurs our understanding of actual civil societies’ (ibid: 20). What is needed is an acknowledgement of the dynamics both within state and market structures as well as within civil society, and, indeed, in the dialectical relationship between the two. While there has been an important shift from a top-down concept of ‘government’ to a more dialogue-oriented concept of ‘governance’ within development theories in general (ibid: 12), it is still easy to fall into the trap of dichotomising between a homogenous state and a homogenous civil society. If the realm of politics is preoccupied with fights over power and for legitimising a right to define the way processes and progresses should proceed, so is the reality outside this realm. Moreover, to relate this to the main argument of the present thesis, one such issue of controversy and fighting is often related to identity.

In this connection, I will point to the viewpoint of Manuel Castells (2004). Castells perceives civil society in a strict Gramscian sense, ‘that is, a set of organizations and institutions, as well as a series of structured and organized social actors, which reproduce, albeit sometimes in a conflictive manner, the identity that rationalizes the sources of structural domination’ (ibid: 8). However, he operates with three different ‘origins of identity building’, only one of which ‘generates a civil society’ (ibid: 7-8). In his analysis then, civil societies ‘shrink and disarticulate because there is no longer continuity between the logic of power-making in the global network and the logic of association and representation in specific societies and cultures’ (ibid: 11), which then brings other forms of identity (formations) to the forefront. However, he still maintains that even those communities and movements that do not belong to civil society must be analytically placed ‘in a context marked by power relationships’ (ibid: 7), and thus his analysis should not be confused with the view on civil society as a “separate sector”. While I do not disagree on Castells’s differentiation on “origins of identity building”, I still believe that we need a technical term for the collective of institutions, organizations, communities, and individuals that stand outside the realm of official political bodies.
Hence, to the relevant question of whether we then can, at all, talk about the role of the civil society, I will answer positively. And I will argue that it is necessary to use the image of the two entities of state and civil society exactly in order to pinpoint the roles of the two respectively. However, this is possible without perceiving the two as homogenous. Civil society, however little consensus we can detect there, is still the realm of civic institutions, organizations, communities and individuals whose role, then, is precisely to keep debating with themselves and with the state apparatuses, thus creating space for reforms and changes in both political and social institutions, or, following Castells, articulating entirely new ways of social organization. On the other hand, this ‘does not manifest in undermining the existence of the state; rather, it proposes to make the state respond to people’s demands’ (Tandon/Mohanty 2003: 20).

**Common resource management**

The notion of resource management, like that of civil society, must be clarified in order to grasp and analyse the concept. That is, we have to specify what resources and whose management we are actually trying to portray. In this connection, “resources” refers to natural resources. The common resources are then those that are shared by a range of individual actors and communities as well as state institutions and private companies, as for example – as in the present focus – forest. Obviously, then, the management of the common resources, the access to and use of these resources, is a matter of contestation. The importance of this relationship between resources and their management is the interplay between economic and environmental factors. In short, economic incentives tend to run counter to environmental concern, while depletion of resources may in turn cause economic constraints in the longer run. In between fall various social factors related to both. When looked at closely, resource management will in praxis mean a variety of things to both theorists and the people and institutions directly involved. At the same time, however – as with the concept of civil society – there is a tendency to use the term without further clarifications and without contextualizing it.
I argue that, largely, this is because nuances are often blurred – if not ignored – in an all-pervading theoretical fight between conventional and alternative approaches to the concept. On the one hand, conventional approaches, with an economic focus and the implied assumption that market forces work unambiguously and in connection with actors who are assumed to be generally non-collaborative by nature, argue that control and management of resources can only be a matter for the state in connection with related, local institutions. On the other hand, with a focus on the environment and operating within a ‘sustainability paradigm’, an alternative school of thought\(^6\) argues that environmental deterioration is a direct outcome of modern state industrialisation and capitalist market forces. It is further implied here that making local communities work outside these forces is the only solution to creating a sustainable relationship between the environment and human development.

The conventional approach is highly influenced by the notion of the _tragedy of the commons_. Garrett Hardin’s article by this name from 1968 tries to ‘show how degradation of the environment can be expected whenever many individuals use a scarce resource in common’ (Martinussen 1999: 159). There is a strong similarity here with the neo-classical theory that ‘economic actors, under all circumstances, [will] aim at profit maximisation’ (Martinussen 1999: 261). However, where the latter implies the idea that in the end these self-seeking actions will benefit the common good (the force of the ‘invisible hand’), Hardin’s view was reversely negative – hence the “tragedy”. This has led to a top-down approach to resource management in the sense that structures of management have to be defined and implemented by state authorities. Although it is increasingly acknowledged that local communities should play a role in this process, the definition of this role is still perceived to be the job of the state in this approach.

The alternative approach is dominated by what may be termed as “environmental narratives”. In an Indian context such a narrative tells us that

\(^6\) In fact, environmentalist approaches as a collective – at least in an Indian context – have become so prominent that we may call them “mainstream”. For matters of clarity, though, I keep the distinction between “conventional” and “alternative”.
in the days of yore vibrant local communities lived largely in balance with nature, prudently managing their common property resources to satisfy a variety of needs of the community. After Independence, the state and its main agent, the Forest Department, have been increasingly corrupted [and] this has caused the contemporary environmental crisis. Consequently, the forest-dwellers and tribals must reassert their control over the commons to manage it on the basis of their indigenous knowledge (Madsen 1999: 2-3).

Its critics have labelled this line of primordial argument the Standard Environmental Narrative (SEN). Madsen (1999) sums up the SEN as ‘an easily understood, yet profound and meaningful set of propositions spun into a story suitable for narration in a variety of fora’ (p. 3). This mode of analysis has had a profound impact even on more conventional lines of analysis due to, I believe, the general appeal of the narrative as well as the broad mass of contributors from various fields within both the natural and the social sciences. What is shared on a general level is a primordial point of departure in culture and “indigenous knowledge”, and the pessimistic view on the present state of the environment in practically all spheres. One focus of the SEN, central to the present study, is the idea of the so-called common property resources. This notion refers to ‘resources that are not individually owned, but individually used in accordance with rules agreed to by one or more local communities’ (Madsen 1999: 4).

However, supported by substantial empirical studies, a growing criticism of the SEN mode of analysis points to the problems in the essentialist approach of the SEN. While the focus on local modes and articulations of development, and the possibility of arguing on the basis of history, is a necessary and revealing element in the resource management analysis, the generalizing primordial point of departure paradoxically leads us into analyses that exclude contextualities. The problem with empirical and historical facts aside, an essentialist approach thus ultimately fails to empower the marginalized and local voices (even if such an empowerment is in fact part of the project), since such an approach looks for continuity instead of change, at the same time it seeks to place the local communities outside the reality of a an inescapable relationship between state, society and market.

Likewise, the conventional top-down approach largely fails when it comes to an analysis of the ways local societies can collaborate; how this may vary according to
context; and how this should be connected to the functioning of the larger society and institutions. To repeat, the theoretical debates evolving from the conflicting points of departure in the two approaches consequently overshadow a more constructive approach within a ‘state-society-market paradigm’ that ‘attempts to explain why outcomes vary in different countries or societies’ (Madsen 1999: 6). Within this paradigm, I will point to the theories of common resource management as put forth by Elinor Ostrom. Ostrom criticises Hardin’s negative view by stating that if there has indeed been a tragedy in common resource management, this should not lead us to conclude that this outcome is inevitable, thus obscuring a possible scope for collective action.

In brief, what is evident in Ostrom’s work is an empirically founded belief that, while we can identify a list of external and internal conditions that obstruct collective action, we should now begin to focus on conditions and factors that facilitate it. Furthermore, by ‘adopting an evolutionary approach’ the idea of an inherent non-collaborative human nature is rejected and instead the door leading to theories on the ‘evolution of social norms’ (Ostrom 2000) is left wide open. However, since we are still in the initial stage of theorizing on this, we need to begin by further expanding our understanding of the possible contextual variables. One such variable, as I will argue below, is the role of identity. To repeat what was stated in the introduction, the present study may thus be seen as an attempt to contribute to the theories of common resource management spearheaded by Elinor Ostrom.

**Conceptualizing identity**

Analysing “identity” is in the central of this study. It should be clear that although this study is basically an attempt to contribute to on-going theory-building covering common resource management, it is only secondarily concerned with economic and environmental issues generally connected with the subject. Although these issues are central, the present purpose is to stress a dialectical relationship between them on the one hand, and forces of identity and its formations on the other. The main argument here is that analysing resource management in terms of economic, environmental, and political relations – in which identities are shaped – will give us only half the picture. The missing but important other half is then the analysis of how such identity
formations in turn shape local level perceptions of and approaches to environmental issues, to scopes for collaboration, to power relations, etc. However, this cannot be firmly argued without first clarifying my perception of identity in both general terms and with reference to the present study.

Identity as non-essential

As I have tried to argue in the preceding sections, the problem with the place of identity in most analyses of civil society or resource management is not a total absence of the concept, but rather that it is either not in adequate focus or it is inadequately dealt with through an essentialist approach. The essentialist approach ‘implies a perception of identities as either a result of biological qualities or as built on other “truths”, such as kinship or a shared history. It also would see identity as fixed and transhistorical’ (Lindberg 2001: 45). A non-essentialist view, on the other hand, stresses the fluidity of identity, its different operations at various levels and contexts. The present approach is in line with a non-essentialist perception of identity. This, however, needs further clarification. For within this overall approach there is far from consensus regarding the fluidity of identity.

The “fluidity approach” is often equated with a postmodern approach. However, with Dipankar Gupta who, like Castells, is also concerned with the “collective”, I will argue that

the view that identities are not permanently inscribed on our stony psyches but undergo context related changes, must not be confused with postmodernism, which also denies identities a fixed and stable character. /----/ [P]ostmodernists believe identities to be inherently indeterminate and not inherently dynamic. Because they stress indeterminancy and unknowability over dynamism, they can afford to be unconcerned with the context in which identities are cast (Gupta 1996: 171-2).\(^7\)

This is an important distinction. For in the ultimate postmodern analysis we fall short of empirically explaining the individual and its identity since all things said are expressions of meaning, and meaning is open to unending interpretation and

\(^7\) There is a continuing debate on how to actually define “postmodernism” both among critics and self-acclaimed postmodernists. This leads to some confusing readings and uses of the term. Thus, e.g. Anna Lindberg (2001) subscribes to a postmodern approach to identity even if she does look for collective explanations and and roles of identity, an approach which does not match with the more “orthodox” postmodernism criticized here by Dipankar Gupta.
deconstruction. Far less, therefore, can there be a collective expression of identity. ‘According to postmodernists, collective bondings are incapable of inspiring emotions that can go beyond the format of a text and its multiple interpretations. This formulation quite plainly denies meaning altogether to any form of collective identity’ (ibid: 176). I agree with a focus on a possible multitude of interpretations of meaning – especially in the case of identity – but we must be cautious not to take this too far. First,

[t]heories should be able to enrich our self-understanding and affect the way we act. If we were to fully accept, for example, PS’s⁸ subject and language theories, start seeing ourselves as ‘merely’ linguistic appendices and abstain from all referential statements, the consequences for our existence would be absurd (Alvesson/Skjöldberg 2000: 195-6).

Secondly, ‘[t]he consequences of this postmodernist intervention are quite staggering. Its effects are felt not only in the study of identities, but elsewhere too /…/ Indeed the big question is: Can there be a society?’ (Gupta 1996: 178). I perceive this question to be (and I believe Gupta would, too), if not unacceptable, at least absurd. A related but much more acceptable question would be: How can we understand society? If not at all new, this question seems to be as valid as ever. There is an important difference between maintaining that there exists no reality to which people can refer and that reality may be perceived and interpreted differently by individuals. The former not only renders our existence absurd, it also questions the relevance of the study of humankind. The latter acknowledges an equivocal expression and explanations of, for example, identity, and ‘helps one to see the ephemerality of identity constructions, and yet allows them meaning and enough empirical material for their formation’ (ibid: 176).

**Formations of identity**

Having grounded the approach to collective identity as non-essentialist, yet in opposition to a postmodernist version, I need a proper framework for analysing formations of identity. Dipankar Gupta’s (1996) notion of the “triadic framework” will serve as a main referent in this regard.

---

⁸ PS is an abbreviation of poststructuralism – understood here as the branch of postmodernism that focuses on “language”.

The triadic framework denotes a three-fold relationship between a given collective identity and “the other”, its competitor or enemy, and their mutual relationship in relation to a third party – the triad. The triad constitutes the larger society in general and the state and/or government in particular. The point is to contextualize the different movements properly. And contextualising, Gupta argues, is not only to look at the way a collective identity relates to an apparent “other”, but also how it relates to political institutions – or to the larger socio-political setting in which the different collectives function.

Because society has the collective at its core it contextualizes and gives specific valencies to identity formation, transformation and conflict. In which case if the issue of identities is to be understood sociologically it cannot be viewed monadically, or dyadically (i.e. self and its other), but triadically. This triadic conceptualization is a minimal requirement, for identities not only need an ‘other’ for self-elaboration but do so in a symbolic and collective world whose regnant meanings and attributes are available to both parties. It is this triadic node that inspires commitment and contest among warring dyads. It is true that the dominant motifs, symbols and legitimizers that emerge from this triadic node also change and get out of date. But this does not happen to them of their own accord, or due to their internal movement, but because of their place in the densely interactive triadic setting. (ibid: 175-6).

3. THE ISSUE OF IDENTITY

Part 3. forms the analysis of “Kodava identity” and the link between identity and resource management. Firstly, I analyse the apparent “making of Kodava identity”, through its historical context and how this history is used in essentialist terms to form a “common narrative” of Kodava identity. Secondly, I modify this narrative by arguing that Kodava identity is – like any other collective identity – not made but “in the making”. This is argued with reference to my own data in connection with recent and long term changes in Kodagu, which have resulted in increasing gaps between the Kodavas and other communities. This development is especially connected to natural resource issues. Lastly, I argue that this situation in turn has initiated an identity formation among the Kodavas, which plays an important role in their approach to the management of the resources. The theories of Manuel Castells and Dipankar Gupta concerning collective identity formations will serve as important frameworks in that last section.
The making of Kodava identity

As has been stated in the preceding part 2, identity is understood here as contextually determined. This includes changeability of the given constituents or markers of an apparent collective identity. The immediate context is the contemporary triadic situation between a collective identity, its defined “other(s)”, and the socio-political environment defined by the state and/or local government that these identities are situated in. However, in order to grasp this contemporary situation and the fluidity of the identity in question fully, the contemporary context must be understood as the outcome of certain events and developments, i.e. in a historical context.

Therefore, as a precondition to the analysis of the contemporary situation of the Kodavas and their relations to other collective identities, in this section I will firstly identify key factors in such a historical context of the Kodavas. Secondly, I will sketch out what I call the “common narrative” of Kodava identity, which comes close to an official version of a collective Kodava identity. These two steps serve to reach a vantage point from which a thorough analysis of the notion of Kodava collective identity on the one hand, and its possible effect on the Kodavas’ approach to resource management on the other, is possible.

Historical context of the Kodavas

The following historical contextualization of the Kodavas as a collective identity will not take the shape of a detailed reading of the history of the Kodavas. That would beyond the scope of this thesis. Rather, I will pinpoint what I believe to be the most important factors in the formation(s) of perceptions of Kodava identity: a) the implementation of the jamma land tenure system and the introduction of sanscritized Hinduism during the rule of the Lingayat rajas; b) the process of “westernization” and the introduction of coffee during British rule; and c) post-Independence expansion of and current crisis of the plantation economy, patterns of migration, and the role of

---

9 As I will argue below, it is problematic to talk about Kodava identity in the singular.
education. The selection is based on my constructed data with reference to historiography of the area\textsuperscript{10}.

The socio-economic position of the Kodavas in Kodagu is deeply rooted in the developments and changes of the society, which took place during the rule of the Lingayat rajas over Kodagu. The origins of the Lingayats are disputed. This is not our concern here, however. What is important is the fact that these rulers came to Kodagu around 1600 and during the following two centuries made a significant impact on the cultural and political landscape in the area.

The \textit{jamma} tenure system was introduced as a kind of contract between the landholders and the rajas. The rajas needed reliable and steady recruitment for military purposes and the Kodavas apparently possessed the needed skills in this regard. They were “made” reliable by granting them extensive privileges connected to their land holdings. The \textit{jamma} denoted new terms and conditions in favour of the landholders which stated (and still does) that the land was family property, jointly held – and jointly inherited – by the male members of the given patrilineage, and that the ‘immovable ancestral property is neither divisible nor alienable’ (AnSI 2003: 755). In exchange, the rajas could rely on the Kodavas for military recruitments. The Kodavas were already the dominating land owners in the rice cultivating areas with the adjoining \textit{bane} lands used for grazing and collection of fuel and fodder and they therefore became the dominating \textit{jamma} land owners too. In addition, the rajas also changed the administrative landscape of Kodagu by spreading a system of village and district administration with appointed headmen. Kodavas also dominated these appointments. Obviously, these factors together worked as strong forces in an important anchoring of a privileged socio-economic position of the Kodavas who thus to a large extend became the aristocratic elite with strong ties to the ruling rajas in comparison with other communities.

The Lingayats also brought sanscrititized Hinduism to the area. The Kodavas who were originally ancestor and nature worshippers used to observe rituals without the use of

\textsuperscript{10}(c.f. Cariappa & Cariappa (1981); Ganapathy (1980); Richter (1995) [1870]; and Srinivas (1965) [1952]).
Brahmin priests. Places of worship were ancestral burial grounds as well as sacred spots in the so-called *devarakadus* – sacred groves – in forest areas. While both ancestor worship and local, unique rituals performed at local festivals and family occasions as well as in *devarakadus* are still observed, what was initiated during the rajas was a slow transition of the religious practices of the Kodavas in which they gradually were enrolled into the fold of mainstream Hinduism. This includes, for example, a sanscritization of local deities and the use of Brahmin priests in temples now erected in many *devarakadus*. This development, as I will point out below, is important to both perceptions of collective identity among Kodavas as well as to perceptions of other communities.

The British annexed Kodagu in 1834 and came, like their predecessors, to play an important role in changing the socio-economic landscape. That is, as regards the Kodavas, the effect of the British was a further cementing of the privileged position of the Kodavas. What was new was a change in the economy in general and in the lifestyle of the Kodavas in particular.

In general, the ties between the British and the Kodavas may be seen as a continuum of the relationship between the Kodavas and the Lingayat rajas, in the sense that the binding forces were a certain degree of loyalty and service responded by granting privileges. The Kodavas were important allies in the fight between the British and the Muslim ruler in Mysore, Tipu Sultan, even before 1834, and in the months of the so-called “Mutiny” by the Indian soldiers of the British army in 1857 the Kodavas remained passive. The Kodavas were therefore exempted from The “Disarmament Act” following the “Mutiny”. To this day, *jamma* holders simultaneously bear the right to possess guns and rifles without further license. The close relationship also became apparent through the gradual adoption of the lifestyle of the colonizers by the Kodavas. Modern education, introduced by the British, mainly benefited the Kodavas who started entering the fields of natural and medical sciences and teaching besides careers in the army.

Coffee, which dominate much of the natural landscape in Kodagu today, was introduced to the region as far back as the 1600s but was only systematically grown since the turn of the 19th century by the British. By the 1820s, it became...
commercialised on a small scale and production grew slowly through the rest of the period of British rule. It is important to understand the gradual favouring of coffee at the expense of paddy by Kodavas initiated before Independence. Coffee was grown for export as a cash crop and the revenue was comparatively high. At the same time the changing social habits of the Kodavas were not matching the traditional agricultural life. Thus, gradually the jamma holders in Kodagu started using the bane lands for coffee cultivation since the perception of paddy cultivation as being less attractive than the position as plantation owners, together with the higher revenue, made coffee cultivation an economically important and socially attractive alternative.

Since Independence, the Kodavas have further distinguished themselves from other communities in Kodagu by reaching a high level of education and economic prosperity. Coffee cultivation brought wealth to the community followed by rising consumption and, importantly, a diminishing dependency on the joint families resulting in an atomising of the family structure. Nuclear families are the rule now. Young Kodavas increasingly get their degrees in the major cities outside Kodagu and are attracted to the urban life, which is absent in Kodagu. In this sense, Coffee cultivation has influenced on changing patterns of migration. This is not, however, only among the Kodavas. Coffee cultivation – in connection with the diminishing role of traditional paddy cultivation – has resulted in changes in the communitarian fabric of Kodagu due to new patterns of migration among other communities too. The traditional paddy cultivation relied (and still does) on skilled and intensive labour. This labour used to be bonded to the landowners but due to the introduction of wages rather than payments in kind, labour has become increasingly expensive. Workers in the estates and smaller plantations are seasonally employed and the coffee cultivation in general is less labour intensive. This has of course furthered the economic incentive of taking up coffee cultivation among landowners, which in turn has meant an increasing reliance on imported labour.

Economically the last approximately five years have been marked by instability and falling demand on the international coffee market. The most important economic activity among the Kodavas in Kodagu has, in post-Independence Kodagu, become coffee cultivation. The situation on the international market is therefore extremely important in understanding current socio-economic developments among the Kodavas.
– including perceptions of identity and community barrier formations. The five-year period has been long enough to initiate new processes of selling and buying land, illegal encroachments of reserved land, disputes of rights to uncultivated land and cutting of trees, in- and out-migrations, the introduction of new crops, and a generally tense political and communitarian situation.

As a part of this process, it is no surprise that there has been a search for stability and cohesion within the Kodava community. References to tradition and cultural values serve this purpose when gatherings in the samajas and at cultural festivals are accompanied – if not dominated – by speeches on the “true essence of Kodava culture” and calls for immediate action like “exhorting Kodava mothers to infuse Kodavaism in their children” (The Hindu, May 18th 2004). Interestingly, many apparent elements of the typical Kodava lifestyle of today contradict such ideals of cultural values. Therefore, “Kodava identity” is in this regard expressed through what I call a “common narrative” to which I will now turn.

The common narrative
My first encounters with written and oral descriptions of “Kodava culture” through both non-Kodava academicians, Kodavas, and people in general, were dominated by strong notions of a commonality of the Kodavas ranging from cultural habits and practices to the “nature of the Kodava”. This led both professors and laypersons to tell me to look forward to meet Kodavas since they are known to be very “hospitable” and “friendly” people. Or as the Anthropological Survey of India tells us: ‘Being an economically dominant community, as well as kind and understanding masters, the Kodava hospitality is well known and even strangers feel at ease with the Kodava’ (AnSI 2003: 758). The Survey also gives us a rather generalizing description of some of the habits of the Kodavas: ‘They eat a variety of pulses, vegetables, fruits, roots and tubers, bamboo shoots and mushroom. Men drink liquor regularly /.../ they smoke cigarettes, chew betel and use snuff’ (ibid: 753). Recalling my non-essentialist approach to identity, I will point to the problem of validity of this essentialist approach in relation to the attempt to create an objective understanding of Kodava identity. Notions of neither difference nor change are possible in such descriptions
and, as we have seen, this is not in correlation either with my reading of the Kodava history. Importantly, it also correlates badly with the personal narratives of the interviewees.

The common narrative presents a picture of Kodavas as a martial race of Hindus, non-discriminating against low-casts, fun loving, nature loving and tolerant towards other beliefs, customs and traditions. The interviewees themselves explained – at first hand – “Kodava identity” with references to tradition rather than contemporary life. History obviously plays an important role in the common narrative. Or rather, a version of history in which we learn that “Coorgs fought repeatedly for their king and country against the invaders, paying a heavy price for heir loyalty” (Srinivas 1965: 13, my italics). The term “Coorgs” is to a large extent equated with “Kodavas”, and in the literature on Kodagu in general (see note 10, page 19) the history is explained with the point of departure in the life and existence of the Kodavas, next to whom other communities become secondary – even if it is generally acknowledged too in this literature that the Kodavas are not the only “original” inhabitants of Kodagu.

The common narrative, to which my respondents themselves referred at the initial meetings, is thus almost totally lacking any notions of a contemporary lifestyle. What is depicted as “truly Kodavan” is firmly grounded in cultural practices that once were (or, at least, used to play a very different role) as well as based on imaginations about the past. It was therefore striking how, as I will show below, this narrative was substantially modified when the Kodavas were questioned closely.

**Kodava identity in the making**

In the following section, I analyse the constructed data in terms of how we can perceive the notion of Kodava identity. I will argue that while Kodavas have varying definitions of what constitutes such an identity, the recent developments of economic crisis and the long term developments of migration in the area, together with the increasingly communitarian local politics, have ignited controversies which are understood by the Kodavas as culturally embedded. These controversies are mainly
related to natural resources, which brings the analysis to the link between resource management and identity.

**Identities vs. identity**

A first point to be made is that since identity is looked at here in relation to a possible collaboration or collision in resource management between communities, the focus is naturally on *collective* identity, or, what Anna Lindberg calls ‘*social identity*’, which ‘refers to how people locate themselves in society in relation to other perceived groups and institutions’ (Lindberg 2001: 44-5). However, by saying that ‘[p]eople have always simultaneously been workers, husbands, or wives; women or men; Indians, Westerners; gays, lesbians, or heterosexuals; neighbors, friends, or parents’ (ibid: 45), she confuses an important distinction between identities and “roles”. This distinction and its importance is defined by Castells in the following:

> By identity, as it refers to social actors, I understand the process of construction of meaning on the basis of a cultural attribute, or a related set of cultural attributes, that is given priority over other sources of meaning. For a given individual, or for a collective actor, there may be a plurality of identities. Yet, such a plurality is a source of stress and contradiction in both self-representation and social action. This is because identity must be distinguished from what, traditionally, sociologists have called roles, and role-sets. Roles (for example, to be a mother, a neighbor, a socialist militant, a union member, a basketball player, or a churchgoer, and a smoker, at the same time) are defined by norms structured by the institutions and organizations of society. /…/ Identities are sources of meaning for the actors themselves, and by themselves, constructed through a process of individuation (Castells 2004: 6-7).

‘Identities’, then, ‘are stronger sources of meaning than roles because of the process of self-construction and individuation that they involve. In simple terms, identities organize the meaning, while roles organize the functions’ (ibid: 7). What I read in Castells here – with reference to collective identity – is that while identity is ultimately a matter of the individual, this matter only becomes relevant in the context of belonging to a given group or society and especially in defining those who do not belong. However, I argue that it is important to acknowledge that in the analysis of such a group, we cannot fully grasp the experienced reality of the group without taking note of the reality as experienced by the individual.

People have come from different parts. From Somvarpet [North Kodagu] they have come down south, then Kerala. There has been a close relationship, so there has been a mixture of people in
different parts. So, the purity of race, and purity of our language, both have disappeared. There is no language which is pure, there is no race which is pure. Nobody can say that he is pure Kodava. – It’s out of question! (Chengappa, 86, retired doctor)\textsuperscript{11}

These are words of a man who have in fact been actively agitating for a cultural revival of traditional customs and practices of the Kodavas. It thus serves as an illustration of the contradicting approach to what is, and what should be, constituting the identity of the Kodavas, which was apparent with my respondents. Perceptions of community, the role of traditions, religious issues, and whether Kodavas are facing a crisis – and indeed what then constitutes this crisis – were all expressed with different weight and focus leaving little common understanding among the respondents.

Even the Kodava language is not easily understood as a prime constituent. Given the high levels of education, English at a relatively high level is widely used (as in other middleclass groups in India) in working relations and even occasionally in the households. In addition, there are several other communities in Kodagu who are Kodava speaking, which makes the language as a prime indicator of Kodava identity problematic.

It is evident, that practises that are objectively perceived as forming the backbone of Kodava culture – the joint family system, the role of the \textit{Ain mane} (ancestral house), maintenance of the \textit{jamma} land and the use of \textit{devarakadus}, etc. – are not at all vanished but have lost their function as main constituents of Kodava culture.

With the British [came] more and more of this Western influence. Our people took up to it very easily. Our style of living, our style of eating, everything. The traditions are all done only significantly – only as symbols. We all go to our family homes, eat and drink, play cards. The dances and all are practically given up now (ibid).

This would be a controversial view. But quite often you see that people who stay in the \textit{Ain} house – they are a bit lethargic...people who are more dynamic they have their own property, they have their own house. In that way, there will be more freedom (Chengappa, 55, planter).\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{11} Interview 8 October 2004.
\textsuperscript{12} Interview 25 October 2004.
In short, I found that the Kodavas have highly deviating notions of the contents of a collective identity, except that everybody agrees that practically all traditions have changed or have become irrelevant. Some lament about this while others would ascribe the development to “human nature”

Cultural things are decreasing – very fast it is decreasing. Now, India jumped into this It-sector so all the children would like to jump into that itself. And they get fat sallary and they buy lot of things. The facilities are much better in so many ways. I think it is all part of the growth of human nature itself. Because people just can’t live with just love and fresh air (Subaiah, 65, planter).13

However, it is important to emphasise an ambivalent perception of collective identity among the Kodavas. The point so far has been to deconstruct the common narrative. On the other hand, this should not obscure an existence of alternative narratives, which are also shared to a certain degree. In relation and reference to other communities in Kodagu, the Kodavas are more explicitly viewing themselves as a collective with a shared cultural identity.

Community crisis and the making of the “other”

Among the Kodavas, we can detect the belief that an issue of demography has ruled out the influence of the community. While there is a clear tendency towards consensus on the issues, such views are not expressed unequivocally14.

While a certain degree of out-migration in the search of better education and increasing numbers of Kodava women marrying out of Kodagu and a consequential settlement outside Kodagu is a fact, what is interesting here is the way the individuals perceive such migrations and how they explain this. The ambivalence here is clear. First, there is no agreement on the degree of this. Some respondents perceive an apparent substantial out-migration of Kodavas as a cause of both loss of culture and the outnumbering of Kodavas in Kodagu. Others are less worried and maintain that out-migration has not been a serious issue. The picture is the same concerning in-

13 interview 10 October 2004
14 When I asked the respondents about the actual numbers of Kodavas in Kodagu, estimates ranged from 80,000 to 300,000! As per Census of India, 1991, there were 97,011 Kodava speakers in Kodagu. (Malikarjun 2004: 3). However, this includes a list of Kodava speaking communities other than Kodavas.
migration of non-Kodavas. There is agreement that outsiders who buy land are not conforming to the way agriculture has traditionally been carried out in Kodagu. In addition, this is perceived as a problematic development. However, whether such exchanges of land is in fact a big issue varies with the respondents. Some understand this as the main cause of problems faced by the Kodavas, yet others state that as for now, the outsiders coming and settling in Coorg is not a big problem. Coorgs are also capable of buying the land, whether he’s a Kodava or Gowda or whoever. And since they have hands-on experience – actually, they are more interested in buying the land (Chengappa, 55, planter).

On the other hand, as I stated, demographic changes are an issue that concerns all. Whether the conception is a more realistic one, as in the quote above, or if it reaches apocalyptic heights, they all express a shared, albeit varying, concern.

The Kodavas find themselves in a political environment of populist politics, which, like in so many instances in India in general, is dominated by communitarian issues. The system of affirmative actions (the reservation system) is a crucial element in this political environment, and in Kodagu this is no less true. There is a general agreement among the Kodavas that a decreased political influence has meant that they are now politically dominated by “others”.

Manuel Castells proposes ‘a distinction between three forms and origins of identity building’: Legitimating identity; Resistance identity; and Project identities (Castells 2004: 7-8). When analysing the Kodavas, the notion of “resistance identity” may serve as a point of departure. “Resistance identity” is ‘generated by those actors who are in positions/conditions devalued and/or stigmatised by the logic of domination’ (ibid: 8). According to Castells, then, each process of identity building produces different outcomes, and “resistance identity” leads to the formation of communes, or communities /…/ This may be the most important type of identity-building in our society. It constructs forms of collective resistance against otherwise unbearable oppression, usually in the basis of identities that were, apparently, clearly defined by

---

15 See below.
history, geography, or biology, making it easier to essentialize the boundaries of resistance
(ibid: 9).

The political environment in Kodagu seems to ignite such a “resistance” among the
Kodavas. The sense of being dominated is essential in this process.

We have become minority. Gonikoppal Town is now managed by non-Kodavas – people of all
works of life. From Kerala, Tamil Nadu, from Mangalore. One or two Kodavas are also there.
Our community is slowly, gradually decreasing. We call ourselves Kodavas, origins of this place,
but nothing is in our hand /.../ It’s all the outsiders who have come. Politically and economically
they are slowly growing...not slowly – they have grown already. Now they’re controlling us.
(Muthanna, 45, planter).\(^{17}\)

Such notions are expressed in no correlation with the economic position of the
respondent. In fact, at the biggest and richest estate I visited, the planter expressed her
economic concerns most strongly compared to the other respondents. Except from the
coffee prices, there was a clear connecting of her concerns to the changed
demographic patterns in Kodagu.\(^{18}\)

As mentioned previously, Castells maintains that identity constructions are always an
outcome of power relations. He stresses how identities in all three different constructs
are the outcome of the individuals’ – and ultimately the groups’ – relation to state
apparatuses and organizations, and/or dominating social structures. This, I will agree,
is an important understanding of the relationship between the state and hegemonic
social discourses on the one hand, and what I refer to as civil society on the other.
However, Castells is surprisingly unconcerned with the *internal* relationship between
the institutions and organizations of the different communities “produced” by the
resistance identity. I argue that downplaying these relationships cripples our
understanding of the dynamics within the different identity formations. This is
because the formation of boundaries between these collective identities – the process
of defining who belongs to the group, which always includes defining who does *not*
belong – is more often than not targeted at other civil society groups (in whatever
shape) outside the realm of the state and its institutions. This is *not* to say that the
relationship between state and civil society is only secondary in this regard, for the

\(^{17}\) Interview 20 October, 2004.

interplay between different collective identities always takes place in a larger socio-political context. In short, while Castells’s framework is an important tool to understand the origins of different identity formations in a contemporary world, it falls short of analysing the way these formations in turn proceed through a constant reformulation in terms of apparently opposed groups.

This is where the triadic framework becomes necessary in the analysis. This framework helps me in analysing the Kodavas as a community despite the ambivalences expressed by the respondents. Regarding the specificity of “community” as an analytical entity, Gupta points out that

\[\text{[t]}\text{hough ethnic and communal movements are variants of ascriptive mobilizations, they are not synonymous with each other. In an ethnic situation the attention is on nation-state level thematics such as those of sovereignty and territory. In this case not only are the ‘self’ and ‘other’ ascriptively defined, but in addition the ‘other’ is invariably portrayed as being anti-national }\ldots\text{ / In communal movements the partisans do not cast their antagonists as anti-nationals, but, typically, as having received an unjustifiably better deal from the government in power. The issues that come to the forefront in communal movements are }\ldots\text{ / those of government and administrative handling of the distribution of resources. (ibid: 6).}\]

Analysing the Kodavas as a community in this regard, I believe, makes a strong case in the argument of the important role of identity in resource management.

**Identity as context**

The fact that Kodavas express strongest aversions towards “outsiders” – non-Kodavas migrating to Kodagu – and thus touches upon an issue of territory in the sense of “our land – not theirs”, should not be confused with a thematic of sovereignty and territory in the sense that Gupta points to in the quote above. For, as is evident from my data, the issue of territory becomes relevant mainly as a question of “resources”.

Whether this property is bought by the Coorgi [Kodava] or the non-Coorg, that’s also very important. See, jamma lands – we think it is our own. It is a gift for us. And with a lot of privilege. But even jamma land can now be sold. If an outsider comes, he will not maintain according to how we maintain. He’ll have a different style of maintaining. Our old traditional way, nobody will...(Muthanna, 45, planter)\textsuperscript{19}.

\textsuperscript{19} Interview 20 October, 2004
This quote contains clear evidence of the triadic relationship: 1) Here is an example of how the idea of the “outsider” stirs up affection for tradition and thus the respondent creates a consciousness of his cultural background; 2) A barrier between Kodava practises and non-Kodava practises is also clearly build up, which displays an apparent gap between communities; 3) There is a reference to changes in the rights pertaining to *jamma* land which means that *jamma* can now be sold out of the family. This relates to the role of the government. The respondent later states that ‘slowly every right has been taken away by the government. Slowly. They say now, “*jamma* is government land, you are just a tenant. You are not the owner of the land.”’ So you feel hurt’ (Ibid). Again, I will thus emphasize the importance of the political environment in which the Kodavas and other communities are located. The communitarian barriers become relevant only in connection with the sense of marginalization, which must be understood in the context of local politics. Another quote is illustrative here:

> In Indian politics, they play too much to the communities. We have *forward community*, *backward community*, *most backward community*, etc. etc. Our fellows cannot get jobs because we are *forward community*; our children cannot get into the right school, because we are *forward community*; our people cannot get jobs *anywhere* because we are *forward community* /.../ So this is the backwardness; if you want come up in life, you’ll have to struggle hard at your estate or whatever jobs we get - because of the reservation factor. The fellow [non-Kodava] who is really not educated, who has joined as an ordinary guard or watcher – because of reservation – he keeps on getting promotions and finally becomes a ranger. Actually he won’t be knowing anything about the forest wealth and forest value. So that’s how some of these outsiders come and create problems for our community (Subaiah, 65, planter)\(^{20}\)

Putting a strong emphasis on a necessary relationship between local communities and state institutions, Elinor Ostrom maintains that

> [c]ontextual variables are thus essential for understanding the initial growth and sustainability of collective action as well as the challenges that long-surviving, self-organized regimes must try to overcome. Simply saying that context matters is not, however, a satisfactory theoretical approach. Adopting an evolutionary approach is the first step toward a more general theoretical synthesis that addresses the question of *how* context matters (Ostrom 2000: 22).

It is beyond the scope of this study to go further into the notion of an “evolutionary approach”. However, as was stated earlier, and what Ostrom also proposes here, we

---

\(^{20}\) interview 21 October, 2004
need to contextualize the scopes for collective action. In the preceding sections I have tried to show how the Kodavas are concerned with an apparent non-collaboration by non-Kodavas as opposed to a “hands-on” experience and understanding of the proper management of the resources. The explanations to this difference is largely sought in essentialized notions of a Kodava culture opposed others’ cultures. Thus, while “identity” as such is not in the forefront of the mind of the Kodava, a formation of common notions of identity does happen especially in connection with resource management issues.

4. Conclusion

I have argued that there is a need of going beyond theoretical trench fighting in order to further develop our understanding of possible scopes for and processes of development in general and in the field of common resource management in particular. A focus on contextual issues is important, if not crucial, for such an understanding. However, keeping such a focus is difficult when debates and fights force the academic communities to stress the larger main lines in order to distance themselves from each other.

With reference to common resource management, I have argued that one such contextual variable is an issue of “identity”. Using the Kodavas as a case, I have stressed the importance of the change and continuity of Kodava collective identity in relation to other collectives. My analysis firstly points to how Kodava identity as a collective is an apparent problematic entity. Despite widely accepted notions of cultural tradition and identity to which both Kodavas and non-Kodavas refer, when examined closely, such notions are not only historically disputable but also not correlating with the Kodavas’ actual - and highly deviating – perceptions of their cultural identity.

Secondly, however, the analysis strongly suggests that the way Kodavas perceive themselves as a collective is dependent on specific contexts. Thus, while the Kodavas do not share a view of what constitutes their possible collective identity in general, when they relate themselves to other communities, stronger notions of a “we” against
“the others” are emerging. Furthermore, when connected to matters of the use and management of natural resources, these notions then find their basis in primordial references to culture and identity.

In effect, the analysis suggests that the scopes for collaboration on resource management are blurred since the perceptions of both the Kodavas themselves and of other communities tend to become essentialized. The approach to resource management by the Kodavas is one of willingness, but it is accompanied by the idea of a lack of understanding and willingness among non-Kodavas. Consequentially, collaborative achievements would have to be connected with a breaking down of community barriers. These barriers, however, are being hardened by local politics, and the obvious next step of analysis is therefore a closer look at the relationship between local politics and collaboration and collision between the communities of Kodagu.
APPENDIX: Subjects Interviewed, and Places of Special Relevance Visited

1. Respondents (All Kodavas and men, except where indicated)

1.1. In-depth interviews, recorded

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chengappa</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>Retired doctor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nanjappa</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>Planter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muthanna</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Planter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subaiah</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>Planter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuthappa</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>Planter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chengappa</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Planter</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.2. Interviews, memory based

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appaiah</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>Retired professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nagaraja (Lingayat)</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>Retired professor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.3. Unstructured conversations, memory based

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subash (woman)</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Planter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chengappa (woman)</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>housewife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muthanna (woman)</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>College Teacher</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Informants

- Chengappa, A.S., (Kodava) planter, Honey Valley Estate, Yavakapadi, Kodagu.
- Gayatri Devi, K.G., Decentralization and Development Unit, ISEC, Bangalore.
- Kadekodi, Gopal K., Director, ISEC, Bangalore.
- Karanth, G.K., professor and head, Sociology Unit Institute, ISEC, Bangalore.
- Rajasekhar, D., professor, Decentralization and Development Unit, ISEC, Bangalore.
- Ravi, P.C., professor and head, Dept. of Agric. Marketing and Co-operation, UAS, Bangalore.
3. Places of special relevance, date of visit
- “Kodava Samaja”, Bangalore, September 17th, 2004
- Tala Kaveri (Source of River Kaveri) and Bhagamandala on festival day of “Tula Sankramana”, October 17th, 2004.
References


Srinivas, M.N. (1965) [1952], *Religion and Society Among the Coorgs of South India*. Bombay: Asia.


COLLABORATION OR COLLISION?
IDENTITY FORMATIONS AND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

- The Case of Kodagu, Karnataka