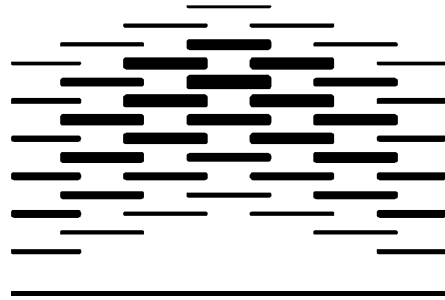Ingrid Aspelund

Recognition of indigenous knowledges and
identity construction in public primary education in Wayanad

**OSLO AND AKERSHUS
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE
OF APPLIED SCIENCES**

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree Master of Multicultural and International Education (MIE)

Spring 2014

Master in Multicultural and International Education
Faculty of Education
Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences

# Abstract

This thesis explores the recognition of indigenous knowledges in primary education in the Wayanad district in South India. India has made substantial progress in terms of providing free, compulsory education for all children, and in official rhetoric education is no longer a privilege for the wealthy minority, but should be accessible to everyone. Yet, inequality prevails. Even in the South Indian state of Kerala which is well-known for it's achievements in social development. As the nation has experiences rapid economic growth, the tribal population – *adivasis* – of India is still a politically, economic and socially marginalized minority. In Kerala they constitute the most marginalized part of the population, with low levels of educational attainment, employment and health.

In 2007 the Kerala Curriculum Framwork 2007 was launched. The curriculum is based on critical pedagogy, rejecting the historically elitist education system inherited from colonial times, and explicitly encourages educational reforms in terms of addressing low educational attainment among girls, children from marginalized communities, and children with special needs. Based on an analysis of the objectives in the KCF 2007, compared with the statements of teachers and professionals in Wayanad, this thesis explores the recognition of knowledges, culture and languages of indigenous peoples in public primary education in Kerala. Moreover, it includes a discussion of the connections between education and identity construction in marginalized communities.

Within the conceptual framework of modernity and tradition this thesis explores tensions between Western scientific knowledges and indigenous knowledges in India, and more specifically, how these tensions are played out within the educational sphere of public primary education in the Wayanad district. The discussion of the recognition of indigenous knowledges in education is further connected to the possibility of indigenous knowledges to represent an alternative to an unsustainable, exploitative approach to the world's natural resources. As India continue to grow as an economic superpower the possibility of a sustainable development seems to be quite pertinent. This is further connected to the broader subject of education as an arena for social change.

# Acknowledgements

Mahatma Gandhi said about education: "*Live as if you were to die tomorrow. Learn as if you were to live forever*"[1] Throughout the process of writing this thesis it has certainly been important to remind myself of the privilege it is to learn and have the opportunity to dig deep into an exciting field of interest. At the same time it has been equally necessary to remind myself that there is an end to everything.

I would like to thank my friends and family for supporting me throughout this process. I would especially like to thank my friends and fellow students at the Oslo and Akershus University College. Thank you for your friendship and support, both within the walls of Pilestredet 52, but also in the «real» world. I already miss our coffee breaks and hangouts in the kitchen of the master room – sometimes complaining, but mostly laughing. I cannot imagine having done this without you.

I want to give a special thanks to my supervisor Anders Breidlid, who throughout this process has given me invaluable feedback, insights and inspiration, both in seminars and supervisions. I also want to thank all the people that made my fieldwork in India possible. Berith Helene Vandsemb, who was my supervisor the first time I went to India with Development Studies and whose passion for India was quite infectious. Thank you for helping me getting in touch with people in Wayanad, in addition to essential practical information about traveling in South India during the monsoon season. Moreover, I want to thank my main informant and translator in Wayanad, who has such extensive knowledge about the area, in addition to be in the possession of a large social network, and was absolutely invaluable to my research. I also want to thank my friends in Kozhikode; the always helpful staff at CREST, the girls who took such good care of me at the hostel, and my friends from previous visits who make me come back to Kerala over and over again.

Last, but not least, I want to thank my good friend and travel buddy, Ingeborg. I cannot imagine having done my fieldwork without your support, ever optimistic attitude and adventurousness.

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1  Gandhi saying no. 2 in Alli, I. (2013): See references.

# Table of Contents

# Abbrivations

DPEP      District Primary Education Programme

ILO       International Labor Organization

KCF 2007     Kerala Curriculum Framework 2007

KLRAA     Kerala Land Reform Amendment Act

NCF 2005     Natinal Curriculum Framework 2005

OBC      Other Backward Castes

SC       Sceduled Castes

SSA      Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (Education For All)

ST       Scheduled Tribes

WB      The World Bank

# Map of Wayanad

# 1. 0 Introduction

«The organization of school knowledge, the hidden curriculum and the representation of difference in text and school practices all contain discourses which have serious implications for indigenous students as well as for other minority ethnic groups» (Smith, 1999, p. 11).

«Indigenous knowledge systems were always posited in reductionist terms, with much of the reference to indigenous knowledge in development being limited to discussions about its efficacy» (Hoppers, 2002, p. 7).

This chapter includes the rationale for choice of research topic, the research questions, and an overview of the thesis.

## 1. 1 Rationale

The *adivasis* in India are officially categorized as *Scheduled Tribes*, and according to the Census of India 2001 they constitute approximately 8,2 % of the total population in India, which accounts for about 84, 326, 240 people (Census of India , 2001). The ST's are not officially recognized as *indigenous peoples* in India. Rather they are classified as *tribes*, and consists of 698 different communities (Kennedy & King, 2013). However, as I will discuss further in the following chapters, the *adivasis* share many similarities with indigenous peoples in other parts of the world. They have historically been characterized by their isolation to other communities in India, due to their residence in remote forest areas. In addition, particular adivasi customs, traditions, and cultural and religious practices have distinguished them from other parts of the Indian population (Kennedy & King, 2013).

In both colonial and post-colonial times there has been conducted a substantial amount of research in and on adivasi communities in India. Yet, much of the critical research focuses on political and economical aspects of adivasi struggle connected to land rights and political marginalization. Moreover, most research on adivasis has been done in the

North, East and West of India[2], which are known as the «tribal belt»[3], while the South is somewhat under-represented. The research done in adivasi communities in South Indian state of Kerala evolves to a great extent around land rights and political mobilization and influence of different adivasi groups[4]. Thereby, rather to focus on political activity in adivasi communities I wanted to explore the adivasi communities in Kerala from a different point of view, namely from an educational perspective.

Statistics from the EFA Global Monotoring Report 2012 show that India has made substantial progress in providing free compulsory education to the population (EFA Global Monotoring Report, 2012, p. 73). There have been several efforts to make education as a human right a part of the legislation system in the last decades, and the number of out-of-school children has been reduced from 20 million in 2000 to 2 million in 2008 (EFA Global Monotoring Report, 2012, p. 73). In 2009 the Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act was passed, stating the right for every child to receive free compulsory education. However, not everyone have experienced this growth. According to a World Bank report published in 2011 examining poverty and education in India, students from marginalized communities have not experienced the same educational progress in both access and attainment as the rest of the population (World Bank, 2011). The report shows that educational attainment is connected to difference in poverty levels. Moreover, it shows that the poverty gap between the two historically marginalized groups in India, *adivasis* and *dalits*, and the rest of the population is persistent. In addition, the poverty gap between adivasis and dalits is expanding, leaving adivasis behind. The report refers to a number recent educational studies, which all points to an increased level of *access* to education, but simultaneously low learning levels (World Bank, 2011, p. 173).

Educational obstacles in marginalized communities varies from low income, health issues and child labor, to lack of proper educational facilities, materials and teacher

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2    See Kapoor (2007) and Sundar (2003)
3    About 80 percent of the adivasis in India live in the Central India belt, which is often referred to as the «Tribal Belt» of India.

4    See Kjosavik Shanmugaratnam (2006) and Steur (2009)

absence (Sundar, 2002). This is also seen in the South Indian state of Kerala, which is the setting for my thesis (Wayanad Initiative, 2006). Although Kerala differs from other Indian states in terms of a more equal distribution of public goods especially in the areas of health and education, many adivasi communities have not benefitted from these initiatives. According to the Wayanad Initiative report[5] the two main reasons for dropout in adivasi communities in Wayanad are "ill health" and "lack of financial support". However, the report also states that: «*Most of the respondents gave vague replies as to the reasons for their dropping out of school. These replies were classified into the category of "Other reasons"*» (Wayanad Initiative, 2006, p. 71). However, in the graph presenting reasons for dropout the column showing «other reasons» is substantially larger than the columns of «ill health» and «lack of financial support»[6]. The report does not suggest other reasons for dropout, but encourages further investigation on the issue. This is the starting point for this thesis in which I will explore other, less obvious and visible reasons for low educational attainment in adivasi communities by focusing on the recognition of adivasi knowledges, culture, history and languages in education. Because, as stated in the quote by Smith (1999) in the beginning of this chapter, the *organization of school knowledges* and *the hidden curriculum* play an important part in the educational reality of marginalized, indigenous peoples.

## 1. 1. 2 Research questions

My research questions include an exploration of power relations between different knowledge systems within primary education in Wayanad, with particular emphasis on the recognition of indigenous – *adivasi* - knowledges, traditions, culture, and history.

The questions are as following:
- What knowledges are recognized and valued in adivasi communities in Wayanad?
- What knowledges are recognized and valued in the Kerala Curriculum Framework and in public primary schools in Wayanad?
- Is the recognition of indigenous knowledges in education connected to identity construction in adivasi communities?

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5   The Wayanad Initiative: A government funded report published in Kerala in 2006. Research was conducted in Wayanad to map livelihood conditions (economy, health, labor, education) in adivasi communities in the district.
6   See appendicy A

A central part of the discussion is comparing the Kerala Curriculum Framework 2007 (which guides public primary education in Kerala) and the findings from interviews and observations conducted in the Wayanad district in the fall of 2013. I will explore how and why some knowledges are recognized and valued in primary education in Wayanad, while others are not. This is connected to why I have chosen to use the notion of knowledge*s* in plural. The intention is to emphasize the existence of several different knowledge systems and epistemologies, as opposed to knowledge as *one* form of knowledge percieved as the *truth*. Moreover, when discussing the recognition of indigenous knowledges in primary education in Wayanad, indigenous knowledges are understood as *adivasi knowledges*. I emphasize this because, as I will discuss later, in an Indian context indigenous knowledges could also mean Hindu traditional knowledge or Vedic knowledge (referring to the Hindu religious scripts).

In the context of exploring the recognition of adivasi knowledges in primary education in Wayanad, I want to emphasize that the adivasi population in Wayanad consists of many different communities, with different histories, traditions, customs and socioeconomic situation. Thereby, I have chosen to focus mainly on the Panyia adivasi community, which constitutes almost half of the adivasi population in Wayanad. They are also the most marginalized of the adivasi communities in Wayanad today (Wayanad Intiative, 2006). Thus, in the following chapters, when I use the term adivasi, I refer to the historically oppressed and marginalized adivasi communities.

## 1. 2 Overview of thesis

In the next chapter, Chapter 2, I will provide for a contextual understanding of the adivasis in India in general, and more specifically Wayanad, connected to the historical, political, social and cultural power relations between the marginalized minority adivasi population and the majority Hindu population in India. Moreover, in order for a better understanding of the discussion of findings in Chapter 5, Chapter 2 also includes a breif introduction to the educational system and situation in India and Wayanad.

In Chapter 3, the methodology chapter, I present the methodological framework of the

research and elaborate on the choice of research methods. In addition I reflect on the research process connected to doing research in marginalized communities in the South. From methodology I move on theory. Chapter 4 gives the theoretical and conceptual framework of the thesis, and I will discuss some central concepts used in the analysis of findings from Wayanad. A central part of the chapter involves a discussion of power relations between the hegemonic position of Western knowledge and science and indigenous knowledge systems, with emphasis on indigenous knowledges and education in India. In the main chapter, Chapter 5, I will answer the research questions by analyzing and discussing my findings from fieldwork in the Wayanad district. I do this by relating findings from interviews, observations and documents to theories connected to indigenous knowledges, power and critical multicultural education.

Although my research is situated in the particular social context of the South Indian district of Wayanad, the issues addressed throughout the chapters are connected to global discourses of indigenous peoples, knowledges and education as an arena for social change.

# 2. 0 Context

My focus in this thesis is on the recognition of indigenous knowledges in primary education in the Wayanad district, which is situated in the South Indian state Kerala. It is important for the discussion and analysis of my findings, to understand the historical, social, political and cultural situation of the adivasis in India, and moreover, in Wayanad. In the following sections I will explore the relationship between the minority adivasi communities and the majority Hindu population.

The first part of the chapter focuses on a general introduction of the adivasis in India, and includes an account for the official recognition of adivasis as *Scheduled Tribes* in India, followed by a brief exploration of the status of adivasis as indigenous peoples. I will move on to exploring the socioeconomic situation of adivasis in Kerala and Wayanad. In the second part I will give a brief introduction to the educational situation in India and Kerala, with emphasize on change in educational policies.

## 2. 1 The adivasis in India

> «Scheduled Tribes is an administrative term used for purposes of 'administering' certain specific constitutional privileges, protection and benefits for specific sections of peoples considered historically disadvantaged and 'backward» (Bijoy, 2003).

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the adivasis of India are officially cateogrized as Scheduled Tribes. The government of India has established certain characteristics determining the status of a community as a Scheduled Tribe community, which are: «*Primitive traits, geographical isolation, distinct culture, shy of contact with community at large and economically backward*» (Ministry of Tribal Affairs). According to The Constitution of India, the Scheduled Tribes are entitled to certain rights and benefits which are not given to other communities. One of the most important incentives is the reservation system which at first involved reserved parliamentary seats, but following the The Constitution of India in 1950 expanded into reservation of seats in the public sector, including education and jobs (Kennedy and King, 2013). However, even though

there are certain criteria categorizing some groups as Scheduled Tribes, the government of India does not give a clear definition of who belongs in the Scheduled Tribes category. The status of the Scheduled Tribes is a contested subject in India, and the categorization is by some people perceived to be solely a colonial invention (Kennedy & King, 2013).

The British colonial government recognized the "tribes" as different from the rest of the Hindu population. They did not encourage assimilation of adivasis into the wider society, and argued for their isolated status as tribes. This could explain the perception of the term "tribe", and moreover Scheduled Tribe, as a colonial invention. However, Das Gupta (2012) argues that the term «tribe» cannot be considered exclusively as an invention of the British colonizers. She points out that the British colonial state appropriated existing perceptions and categorizations already used by upper-castes in India.

While some adivasis use the term Scheduled Tribe, other have chosen the the term *adivasi*. The term was first politically articulated in the Jharkand region of eastern India in 1938. Through both ethnographic research and involvement in anti-colonial movements, the adivasis gained visibility as an ethnic and culturally distinct group in India (Rycroft & DasGupta, 2011). The word adivasi originates from Sanskrit. *Adi* meaning «beginning» or «earlier times», and *vasi* meaning «resident of» or «dweller». It shares similarities with the words «aborgine» or «indigenous» which refers to something existing from the beginning linking it to a certain geographical landscape (Kjosavik, 2011). I will continue using the term adivasi, because it is the term commonly used by adivasis themselves. Before I move on to explore adivasis as indigenous peoples I will elaborate on the positions of adivasis in Indian society connected both to the caste system and to the colonization of India.

## 2. 1. 1 Position in society

The Indian caste system is based on the Vedic (Hindu religious scripts) categorization of people into four major castes: the Brahmins (priests), Kshatriyas (warriors), Vaishyas

7

(traders) and Shudras (manual workers). At the bottom of the hierarchy are the so-called "untouchables", who today form the category of Scheduled Castes or dalits as they often call themselves. Although the adivasis are considered to be positioned outside the caste system, because of their physical isolation, they have historically been prevented from participation and recognition in society in a similar manner as dalits (Das, Hall, Kapoor, and Nikitin, 2012, p. 206).

The adivasis in India have traditionally lived in forest areas, distanced from mainstream Hindu villages, and have different social, cultural and religious practices than the mainstream society. Adivasis are often mentioned in relation to another marginalized part of the population, the Scheduled Castes (dalits, or former untouchables). They share the experience of marginalization and oppression in India, but in different ways. Where dalits lived among and where socially and ritually segregated by the upper-castes, the adivasis where isolated socially, because of the physical isolation. The adivasis usually inhabited forest areas, which lead to a relative isolation between their communities and the rest of the population (Das, Hall, Kapoor, and Nikitin, 2012, p. 206).

Although recent statistics points to extensive poverty reduction in India from the 1980s to today, there are concerns that the growth has not affected and benefitted the population equally. Particularly the widening gap between urban and rural areas has been of concern. (Das, Hall, Kapoor, and Nikitin, 2012, p. 206). According to statistics the poverty levels among adivasis in urban areas have declined, compared to adivasis in rural areas. Only 10 percent of the adivasi population lives in urban areas (Wayanad Initiative, 2006). Das, Hall, Kapoor, and Nikitin (2012) points out that one reason for the difference in poverty levels among urban and rural adivasis is perhaps that adivasis in urban areas to a greater extent have access to and benefit from the reservation system in terms of both education and employment  (p. 217). In rural areas many adivasis work in the agricultural sector which is subjected to the uncertainty of the market.

In addition to current factors explaining the low socioeconomic status of adivasis in India, it is important to acknowledge the importance of historical marginalization of

adivasi communities. In addition to their low position in the social hierarchy of the caste system, the adivasis has been affected by both colonization and post-colonization processes in India. Adivasi communities were deeply affected by the colonial rule of the British (Das Gupta, 2012). Both the creation of nature reserves, settled cultivation and migration of settlers had significant implications on adivasi culture and economy. In pre-colonial times the adivasis in the South Asian continent had vast forest areas at their disposal. However, during British colonial rule the forests became to a great extent subjected to restrictions, because of the commercial value of these areas (Paty, 2007, p. 10). In post-colonial India the state made claim to most of the previously adivasi territories, which it used for development projects such as mining, industries, dams, roads, conservation, and as a consequence over 10 million adivasis have been displaced (Bijoy, 2003). Adivasis are still being evicted from land without compensation (Sundar, 2012, p. 238).

During colonial times, adivasis in different locations in India organized rebellions against the state, resulting in a colonial image of adivasis as «savages» or «criminals», or by others as «noble savages», living a simple traditional life forgotten in the mainstream society (Das Gupta, 2012, p. 2). Thereby, colonial rule did not just lead to marginalization and exclusion from geographical areas, but also to a continued social and cultural stigmatization. Perceptions of adivasis either as backward, primitive peoples or as «noble savages» still prevail in India today. I will discuss this further in the findings and discussion chapter. In the next section I will move on to discuss the notion of indigenous when exploring the societal status of adivasis in India.

## 2. 2 Adivasis as indigenous peoples

To understand the position of the adivasis in Indian society, it is crucial to acknowledge that to the government of India, *all* citizens of India are indigenous. The Indian state rejects the term «*indigenous peoples*», because it undermines the unity of the Indian nation (Das, Hall, Kapoor, and Nikitin, 2012). The rejection of particular groups as indigenous has been a part of the nation building process after independence in 1947. The different governments have since independence emphasized the importance of

creating a sense of national identity in the population as a part of development of a well-functioning nation state (Das, Hall, Kapoor, and Nikitin, 2012).

According to Xaxa and Nathan (2012, p. 24) there have been two different discourses after the Indian independence explaining the reasons for the lack of development in adivasi communities. The arguments in the first discourse are based on a theory asserting that adivasis are originally Hindus who over time have been excluded and isolated from the rest of Hindu society. Connected to this discourse is perceptions of the term «tribe» as a colonial construction (Das Gupta, 2012). Moreover, Sundar (2012) argues that representations of adivasis and development are still based on the assumption that adivasis are backward because of internal factors in adviasi communities (p. 239). Development in adivasi communities could only happen if adivasis are re-included into the rest of society (Das Gupta, 2012). As an example of this policy, Sundar (2012) points to a Supreme Court judgment dismissing a petition of adivasis protesting against the building of a dam, which would entail displacement of several adivasi communities. The Supreme Court argued that displacement would benefit the adivasis in the area, because they would then be included in mainstream society and gain access to technology, health care, and higher quality of lifestyle (p. 239).

Where the first discourse of development in adivasi communities focuses on internal factors explaining lack of development, the second points to how external factors have contributed to the marginalized status of the adivasis. According to the second discourse, contact between adivasis and other communities has led to the loss of access to forest areas, which in turn have caused major changes in the social and cultural life of adivasis (Xaxa & Nathan 2012, p. 23). Such arguments have strong connections to global discourses of indigenous peoples, emphasizing contact with the outside world as the major cause of marginalization and oppression of indigenous peoples. From this point of view, adivasis are considered as historically and culturally different from other groups in society, including the Hindu population.

According to Sundar (2002) many educated adivasi leaders contest the perception of

10

adivasis as former Hindus, and they promote a «*distinctive indigenous religious status defined by animism and reverence for nature*» (p. 379). Nevertheless, although both the British colonial government and adivasi leaders have recognize the cultural distinctiveness of the adivasis, it is the first discourse and the understanding of the adivasis as former Hindus that has influenced the Indian government and policies directed at development in adivasi communities after independence (Xaxa, 2012, p. 23). I will continue this discussion of adivasis as indigenous peoples in Chapter 4. In the next section, however, I will elaborate on the particular social context of the Wayanad district in Kerala. Although the different adivasi communities in Kerala share many similarities with adivasi communities in other parts of India, the analysis of the social reality and history of the people in the Wayanad district is not necessarily transferable to other contexts and localities.

## 2. 3 Kerala

Kerala is known for its positive achievements in social development (Kjosavik & Shanmugaratnam, 2007). The development model followed in the state is based on state-led development initiatives and has been promoted by different Leftist governments in Kerala after the state was formed in 1956. The particular development model in Kerala is often referred to as "The Kerala Model". When implemented The Kerala Model contributed to an improvement of living conditions and social development in in the state, including the lower classes in society, without any significant increase in economic growth and per capita income (Veron, 2001, p. 605). Access to public health services and education have been a part of the success, and Kerala Model is appraised both nationally and internationally because it has to a great extent not been dependent on foreign aid. The combination of government led initiatives and strong popular movements, also including peasant movements, have led to a substantial improvement of social conditions in Kerala compared to other Indian states (Veron, 2001, p. 605).

However, since the 1990s there has been a shift from the previously centralized government policies to decentralization initiatives, organizing local self-government at

different levels (Veron, 2001, p. 606). There has been an increased decentralization of public services in Kerala, including the withdrawal of a historically strong state from social and economic sectors. Kjosavik & Shanmugaratnam (2007) argue that decentralization and privatization have affected marginalized groups, such as adivasis, in a negative manner, because these groups do not have the resources to compete in the market economy. They particularly point to the privatization of health care and the decrease in service quality, as especially harmful to adivasis. The political and economic changes are also seen in the North Eastern district of Wayanad, which is the social setting of this research.

## 2. 3. 1 Wayanad

«Hills everywhere, some arid, red and unfruitful, more covered in the feathery foliage of these Eastern orchards. Here and there smoke curls up in the still noon-tide air; or the glint of some mosque or temple or river pool catches the eye. As the distance grows farther, hill and field all merge into one green plain, and beyond gleams the sea, hard to be discerned from the heaven that bends down and meets it» (Gopalan Nair, 1911, p. 2).

The above quote is found in the book «*Wynad- Its peoples and traditions*» written in 1911. The quote was published in Madras Times in the beginning of the 20th century, as a part of an account of the Wayanad district in North East Kerala. From the first impression you get when entering the Wayanad District, the above narrative could very well have been written today. The district is still associated with a scarcely populated area dominated by mountains, green hills, forest and valleys. Watching the area from the top of Chembra Peak, the highest peak in Wayanad, you cannot help being struck by the vast territory of green plains and hills stretching from the north and east almost all the way to the sea in the west. However, despite the existence of green hills and forest areas, the Wayanad described in the above quote has gone through considerable change during the 20th century. The initial impression of Wayanad as consisting of mostly «untouched», green, lush forest areas is perhaps not as accurate as first perceived.

Wayanad covers approximately 5,48 % of the total land area of Kerala and almost 40 %

of the area is covered by forest. Wayanad is situated on 700-2100 meter above sea level at the Deccan plateau between Mysore-, Nilgiris-, Malappuram- and Kozhikode district (Wayanad Initiative, 2006). A significant part of the district is covered by mostly tea, pepper and cinnamon plantations, especially in the eastern area of Wayanad. With a population of 786 627 people, Wayanad is inhabited by 2.47 % of the total population of Kerala, which in 2001 census were 31 838 619 people (Wayanad Initiative, 2006). 37.36% of the adivasi population in Kerala is found in Wayanad, which makes it the district with the highest percentage of adivasis in the state. The Wayanad district is the home of many different adivasis communities, in which the major communities are Paniyan (44.77%), Kuruman (17.51%), Kurichian (17.38%), Kattunaickan ( 9.93%), Adiyan ( 7.10%) and Urali (2.69%) (Wayanad Initiative, 2006, p. 35). Although this varies between communities, the adivasis are one of the most marginalized groups in Kerala, and they have through history experienced social exclusion and discrimination from the mainstream society (Wayanad Initiative, 2006) [7] According to the Wayanad Initiative report the key issues confronted by the adivasi communities in Wayanad today are usually related to income, health and education, with connecting social issues such as substance abuse and malnutrition (Wayanad Initiative, 2006). At the heart of the marginalization of adivasis in Wayanad is matters concerning access to fertile land and forest.

## 2. 3. 2 Adivasis and land

Neoliberal land policies from the 1990s, including both privatization of land connected to forest industry and the establishing of nature reserves, through politics such as the Wild Life Protection Act, have led to eviction of adivasis from land as they are considered to be a threat to the ecology of these areas (Kapoor, 2009, p. 58). The Kerala Forest Act from 1962 states that: "*Land at the disposal of Government" includes all unoccupied land, all temporarily occupied land and all land occupied without permission, whether assessed or unassessed*» (Kerala Forest Act, 1962). Simply put, the government of Kerala controls most of the land areas, and have the possibility of selling

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7  In 2006 a government funded report, *The Wayanad Initiative*: *A Situational Study and Feasibility Report for the Comprehensive Development of Adivasi Communities of Wayanad*, was launched in Kerala. The purpose of the report was to map the livelihood-, education- and health situation of adivasis in the state.

or renting out land to private actors. In 1969 the Kerala Land Reform Amendment Act (KLRAA) was initiated by the Communist government elected in 1957 (Mannathukkaren, 2011). The purpose of the act was to abolish the feudalistic society and redistribute land previously owned by a minority of landlords. Mannathukkaren (2011) argues that the land reforms following the KLRRA were to a great extent successful in bringing the ownership of land to the marginalized peasants in Kerala, not everyone benefitted from the reforms. Most notably the reforms did to a great extent exclude the adivasis, who as a minority was ignored by the dominant groups in society. Moreover, the feudalistic society has, despite socialist distributive reforms, been replaced by a capitalistic and market oriented system, which does not fight inequality (Mannathukkaren, 2011).

According to The Wayanad Initiative Report: *"There is no conspicuous discord between the adivasi and non-adivasi populations of the district"* (Wayanad Initiative, 2006, 22). This statement is problematic due to the obvious discord between adivasis and non-adivasis concerning access to land and forest in Wayanad. In pre-colonial times, adivasis used to be the majority population in Wayanad, but during colonial and post-colonial times people from other parts of Kerala and from neighboring states settled down and occupied land in Wayanad. In addition, vast forest areas have been transformed into either nature reserves or used in both private and government led mining and forest industry. Most adivasis in Wayanad today are in some way connected to the agricultural industry in the district. However, there has been significant changes in agricultural sector in Kerala, which have effected adivasi communities in terms of income decrease (Wayanad Intiative, 2006). There are a number of reasons to why many adivasis experience economic marginalization. Some of the reasons are: *"Conversion of paddy field for alternative crops has reduced employment opportunities in agricultural sector. Reduced need for Adivasi labour owing to changes in crop patterns [...] and entry of large number of non- tribals in labour market* (Wayanad Initiative, 2006, p. 12).

Although adivasis in Wayanad have an historical connection to the geographical area of the Wayanad district, land affiliation varies between the different adivasi communities. Some adivasi communities are traditionally gatherers of forest goods, while others are

agriculturalists. This has consequences for government policies such as the reservation system and land rights, directed at improving the socioeconomic situation of adivasis in Wayanad. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the research of this thesis is to a great extent based on the Panyia community, which is the largest adivasi community in Wayanad and the most marginalized. The historical background of the Panyias as former slaves plays a central part in the community's relationship to land. According to Panyia origin myths, the first Panyias lived peacefully in a forest land. One day when they were picking fruits from the trees, they were caught in a net and held in captivity by hunting people from outside the forest (Baby, 1993)[8]. According to the myths, from that time the Panyias were slaves and they would forever be slaves. The Panyias do not have a written language, so the myths have been orally passed down from one generation to the next. It is possible that the myths have changed over time. Both Panyias and Adyias used to be gatherers who were made slaves by other peoples settling in the Wayanad area during pre-colonial and colonial times (Baby, 1993). They worked for their masters as slaves in the fields. Today, although slavery was abolished after independence, many Panyias still work as landless agricultural laborers in Wayanad (Wayanad Initiative, 2006).

## 2. 3. 3 A shared identity

Both the historical background and their socioeconomic situation today distinguishes the Panyias from other adivasi communities, such as Kurumas and Kuruchas, who usually are land-owning communities (Wayanad Initiative, 2006). This is one of the reasons why the reservation system is debated in Kerala. The classification Scheduled Tribes treats all adivasi communities as one group of people. All adivasi communities under the label Scheduled Tribes have access to, and benefits, from the reservation system's legislation, but it has been debated that some adivasi communities do not need the reservation system in order to succeed in society. The adivasi communities in Wayanad have historically differentiated in terms of internal organization, socioeconomic status in society and cultural traditions. While the reservation system is

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8   C. K. Baby is the founder of the alternative school, Kanavu, in Wayanad. The students were from the
    Panyia and Adyia communities, and the teaching was based on a practical and artistic approach to
    learning, including song, dance and martial arts. The school closed after the first batch of students
    graduated. Since 2007 it is in the ownership of former students, who plan to re-open it.

supposed to benefit all Scheduled Tribes equally, it is important to recognize the difference between the administrative classification «Scheduled Tribe» and the local reality.

The different communities have themselves usually made clear distinctions between different communities who are all categorized as one tribal population (Steur, 2009). This is also the case in Wayanad where there exist many adivasi communities, which both historically and today have had substantially different socioeconomic status, cultures, languages and traditions. Steur (2009) argues that:

> «In everyday life, most tribal people, however, distinguish other tribal communities as being different castes, and perceive themselves as endogamous groups in a hierarchy infused with connotations of purity and pollution and a fixed division of labor» (p. 29).

Hence adivasis from one community do not necessarily experience any connection or shared identity with the other people categorized under the label of Scheduled Tribes. In addition they may have more in common with people from non-adivasi communities that historically have been on a similar socioeconomic level, such as dalit communities (Steur, 2009, p. 29).

## 2. 5 Education in India

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the adivasis have historically been excluded from participation in Indian society. This also included exclusion from formal education. In ancient India it was only the three higher castes, *Brahmins*, *Kshatriyas* and *Vaisyas*, who were considered educable. Schooling for women, the lower castes and untouchables was forbidden (Singh, 2013). The educational system privileging the elites continued during colonial times through the establishing of the British education system, emphasizing "*single-point entry, sequential annual promotions and full-time instruction by full-time professional teachers*" Singh (2013, p. …). The structure of the formal and linear education system led to exclusion of most of the Indian population from formal education, including the adivasis. In this system transmission of knowledge was mainly

through textbooks, a foreign language (English) and ended in a standardized examination (Singh, 2013).

Since independence in 1947 the education system in India has gone through substantial changes. Rather than promoting education as a privilege for the elite, educational policies in India today promotes a universal education, with particular emphasis on the inclusion of girls, marginalized groups and children with special needs (National Curriculum Framework 2005). In 2000 the Indian government launched the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) – Education for all – program, with the aim of providing access to primary education for all Indian children, in addition to improving the quality of education connected to improvement of educational facilities and materials, and teacher training (Department of School Education and Literacy). According to the SSA:

> "Access, not to be confined to ensuring that a school becomes accessible to all children within specified distance but implies an understanding of the educational needs and predicament of the traditionally excluded categories – the SC, ST and others sections of the most disadvantaged groups, the Muslim minority, girls in general, and children with special needs" (SSA - Government of India).

The SSA program is the largest "Education for all" program in the world and receives financing from the World Bank. In May 2014 it was reported in Indian media that the government of India had signed an agreement loaning 1,006 million dollars to support the SSA program (Business Standard, 29.05.2014). How the SSA program is influenced by World Bank policies, which usually follows loans from the World Bank, could be interesting to investigate, but exceeds the purpose of this thesis. However, at first glance SSA's policies directed at quality education for particularly girls, combined with decentralization policies, holds resemblances to leading discourses of education in the world, promoted by the World Bank[9].

Although government initiatives in recent years have brought about educational access for most Indian children, there are still substantial challenges connected to poverty and

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9   See Klees et al. (2012) for a critical discussion of World Bank education policies in the South.

educational attainment in India (National Curriculum Framwork, 2005). The SSA quote above points to the importance of understanding the educational needs of marginalized groups, including the adivasis. However, what such an understanding entails is not necessarily easily defined. As I will discuss further in chapter 5 there are different perspectives as to how to improve educational attainment in adivasi communities, ranging from distance to school, facilities, materials, meals, and teachers training, to curriculum policies and epistemological inequality. The latter is the main topic of this thesis, exploring the recognition of indigenous knowledges in education and how this is connected to identity construction in adivasi communities in Wayanad. In order to discuss this in the following chapters I will in the next section introduce the educational situation of adivasis in the particular social context of the Wayanad district in Kerala.

## 2. 5. 1 Education in Kerala and Wayanad

In 1994 the national DPEP program was implemented in Kerala by the Department of Education. The program focused on reform in all areas of education, both teacher training, textbooks and pedagogy, towards a more inclusive education recognizing the needs of children from marginalized communities (Chandrasekhar et al., 2001). When implemented the DPEP received substantial critique in Kerala. The critics claimed that the new curriculum and pedagogical methods were exclusively meant for children struggling in school, and that the educational standards were lowered accordingly, thus hurting the learning process of the more well-off and ambitious children (Chandrasekhar et al., 2001). However, although critiqued, the pedagogical and curriculum reforms remained and in 2007 the government of Kerala launched the KCF 2007 curriculum, which also included textbook revisions. The KCF 2007 is progressive in that it promotes critical pedagogy, focuses on the marginalized parts of the population and suggests changes in medium of instruction policies.

The KCF 2007, is based on the National Curriculum Framework (NCF 2005). The NCF 2005 continues the commitment to the "three-language formula", which has been the educational policy on medium of instruction in India since the late 1950s (Joshee & Sihra, 2009, p. 432). The "three-language formula" policy entails that the language of

instruction is the regional or state language. In addition a link language, and a third language are taught. Kerala has implemented the "three-language formula", with the state language Malayalam as the language of instruction, Hindi as the link language, and English as the third language (KCF, 2007, p. 38). I will discuss the KCF 2007 in more detail in Chapter 5.

Although the government promotes the almost 100 % literacy in Kerala, it does acknowledge that the educational attainment in the adivasi population in Kerala is lower than the rest of the population. The Wayanad Initiative Report (2006) presents educational statistics of Wayanad, and one of the findings in the Wayanad Initiative Report, which also correspond with official statistics, is that the drop-out rate in the adivasi population is substantially higher than in other communities. Kjosavik & Shanmugaratnam (2007) argue that one reasons for dropouts are the decrease in government funding in the education sector, and the establishing of expensive private schools (p. 62). In India in general and in Wayanad too, there has been an increasing demand for better schools and for English medium education, which have lead to a rapid privatization of education. A consequence of privatization of schools is that powerful groups in society move their children to private schools, while socially marginalized groups stay in less expensive government schools (Dyer, 2009, p. 255). Hence, the government is often the sole provider of education for marginalized groups in India.

## 2. 6 Development in adivasi communities in Wayanad

The Wayanad Initiative report emphasizes the importance of "social preparation" to bring about development in adivasi communities in Wayanad, and the need for adivasis to adapt to the modern world:

> «*Social preparation is multidimensional. It has elements of skill development particularly in imparting of modern industrial skills as required for farm and non-farm activities. Social preparation as imperative also involves developing reflexivity within the members of the Adivasi communities so that they reflect on*

*their worldviews critically understand the changing world around them and seek new directions within*» (Wayanad Initiative, 2006, p. 15).

As mentioned earlier, Xaxa and Nathan (2012), argue that government policies directed at development of adivasi communities in India have been based on the perception of the marginalized status of the adivasis as the result of exclusion and isolation from the mainstream society. From this point of view, development in the adivasi population will entail inclusion and integration into the social, economic and political spheres of the majority population. I will continue this discussion in both Chapter 4 and 5, in relation to to perceptions of adivasis as primitive and backward society and how this is connected to the recognition of adivasi history, culture, language and knowledges within primary education in Wayanad.

# 3. 0 Methodology

In this chapter I present the methodology used in my case study research of the recognition of indigenous knowledges in primary education in the district Wayanad in South India. The chapter includes both the methodological foundation of the research and the research methods employed during the my fieldwork in August and September 2013. Doing research in marginalized communities, such as adivasi communities, presume that the researcher makes certain deferences to the social, political, economical, cultural and historical situation of the people participating in the study. Throughout this chapter I will, in addition to present choice of research methods, adress the importance of  sensitivity when doing research in indigenous, marginalized communities, in addition to ethical concerns connected to the often unequal relationship between the researcher and the researched.

Following a presentation of the methodological background of the the research, I will discuss the choice of semi-structured interviews as the main research method in this study. The chapter also includes a presentation of sampling methods, research sites, and the choice of observations and document analysis as research methods.

## 3. 1 Qualitative ethnographic research

> «*The qualitative stance involves focusing on the cultural, everyday, and situated aspects of human thinking, learning, knowing, acting, and ways of understanding ourselves as persons, and it is opposed to technified approaches to the study of human lives*»
> (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 12)

My approach to the field was through qualitative *ethnographic research*, which involves immersing into a social setting for a period of time, observing, listening, engaging in conversations and interviews, collecting documents and writing a detailed account of that particular social setting (Bryman, 2012, p. 432). Ethnography literally means "writing culture" (Fox, 1998), and is connected to the qualitative paradigm of research because it emphasizes the exploration of the nature of socially phenomena, usually by

21

working with unstructured data, and the analysis is based on the interpretations of the *meanings* of human behavior (Atkinson & Hammersley, , p. 248). During the time spent in Wayanad I observed peoples behavior, engaged in conversations, conducted interviews and asked questions, to understand the social, cultural, political and historical context of Wayanad and particularly of the adivasi communities. To get in-depth data of what kind of knowledges that are recognized in education in Wayanad, I chose to talk with and observe teachers and headmasters in educational institutions. In addition I wanted to get an understanding of the situation of the adivasi communities in Wayanad. Hence I went to settlements, villages and towns, talked with people and observed the daily life.

To answer my research questions (presented in Chapter 1) I chose a case study research approach, which is considered particularly useful when doing explanatory research (Yin, 2014). Yin (2014) discusses the choice of research strategies connected to different types of research questions. He argues that «[...] *'how' and 'why' questions are more explanatory and likely to lead to the use of case studies, histories, and experiments as the preferred research strategies»* (p. 6). However, 'what'-questions could also be explanatory (Yin, 2014). My research questions «*What knowledges are recognized and valued in adivasi communities in Wayanad?"*, "*What knowledges are recognized and valued in the Kerala Curriculum Framework and in public primary schools in Wayanad?"* and "*Is the recognition of indigenous knowledges in education connected to identity construction in adivasi communities?"*, are explanatory because the aim of the research project is exploring the meanings, interpretations and explanations of my informants, connected to the recognition of indigenous knowledges and identity construction in primary education in Wayanad.

Moreover, depending on the findings gathered in the field, the initial "what"-questions could eventually lead to "why"-questions and "how"-questions, such as: "*Why*" or "*why not*" is particular knowledges recognized in education? Or *how* does the recognition or non-recognition of these knowledges affect the identity construction of students? This is connected to an inductive research approach, which means that theory is the outcome of research (Bryman, 2012). As I will explore further in section 3.6 Analysis of data,

through an inductive approach research data collected from the ethnographic research in the field is later discussed and explained through theories and concepts.

### 3. 2. 1 Critical Qualitative Research

Denzin, Lincoln and Smith (2008) argue that "...*there is no longer an objective god's-eye view of reality*" (p. 5). This is in line with a qualitative, interpretivistic approach to research, in which the researcher is not an objective observer of the world, but is herself a part of and interprets the world she is researching. My exploration of the recognition of indigenous knowledges in primary education in Wayanad is founded on the ontological position of knowledge as *socially constructed*. From this position the objects and categories in the social world are constructed through human interpretation of reality. Hence, knowledge and social phenomena do not exist externally of human actors and is not pre-given. Knowledges are socially constructed and reconstructed. As Lincoln and Guba (2005) point out:

> «But if knowledge of the social (as opposed to the physical) world resides in meaning-making mechanisms of the social, mental, and linguistic worlds that individuals inhabit, then knowledge cannot be separated from the knower, but rather is rooted in his or her mental or linguistic designations of that world» (p. 202).

In relation to indigenous knowledges the social category of «indigenous» is not seen as a category with a built-in essence. What it means to be indigenous in terms of both people and knowledges is socially constructed by humans through interaction. The discussions in the next chapter of the recognition of different knowledges in primary education in Wayanad are concerned with the interaction between adivasi knowledges, Western knowledges and mainstream Indian knowledges. The knowledge systems do not exist within pre-determined borders and categories, but are created through human interaction. In terms of methodology, the researcher and the research are part of a critical dialog, instead of a one-way collecting of data. This approach to research can be defined as *critical qualitative research*, and represent the design for this research.

Critical qualitative research is critical in the sense that it questions taking for granted

epistemologies within research. It promotes awareness to the history of research, and how research is connected to imperialism and colonialism (Denzin, Lincoln & Smith, 2008). It is critical to relationship between the researcher and the research, and points to the power balances between the two. It promotes a qualitative approach to research, because of the need to explore the dynamic complexity of social phenomenons, and to understand how subtle social differences are produced (Denzin, Lincoln & Smith, 2008). According to scholars working within the critical qualitative framework, the quantitative research design is not as suited as the qualitative to explore these issues.

One of the characteristics of qualitative research is that it questions the possibility of "objectivity" in research (Desai and Potter, 2006). As mentioned above, the researcher is not distanced from the social reality in which she is doing research, but is herself a part of this reality. Thereby it is not possible for researcher to be objective when doing research. According to critical researchers such as Smith (1999), research conducted by western researchers in the South, is influenced by a western epistemological history of research, which is connected to the history of colonialism, imperialism and the perceptions of indigenous people in the South as "the other". As with feminist research, criticism of the research on indigenous people emphasizes the *unequal relationship* between the researcher and those who are subjected to research. From a critical point of view it is problematic both for western and indigenous scholars to do research on indigenous communities, because they are often trained within a western epistemological tradition. An epistemological tradition which is, as mentioned above, connected to imperialism and ideas of "the other". The unequal relationship manifests itself in different ways, and could be understood by asking questions such as: Whose research is it? Who owns it? Whose interests does it serve? Who will benefit from it? (Smith, 1999, p. 10).

Smith (1999) argues that from a western point of view "…*objects of research do not have a voice and do not contribute to research or science*" (p. 61). This means that since indigenous people is viewed as research objects, it is impossible to imagine that indigenous people as research objects could contribute anything. At the same time indigenous knowledges is not valued as the "right" knowledge and has been

24

marginalized and excluded both in general and in the academics. During my own research this was perhaps one of the greatest challenges. How to include the voices of the adivasi population in Wayanad in the research, without treating them, their culture and knowledges, as "the other"?

## 3. 2. 2 Research and social change

According to Denzin, Lincoln and Smith (2008) critical qualitative research could contribute to social change and justice. The underlying assumption here is that research is both political and moral. The political and moral aspects of research could be argued further by Scheyvens, Nowak and Scheyvens (2003), who point out the importance of giving something back when doing research in marginalized communities (p. 155). Ethical research should not just entail not doing harm to the participants, but also the possibility for the research to benefit those who are researched or the community they live in.

Kapoor (2007) argues that adivasis in India still rely on outside researchers to represent adivasi perspectives and situation. Thereby, there is a possibility of mis-representation in research in adivasi communities. While collecting data in Wayanad I reflected on my role as a researcher. Being aware of the connections between research, colonialism and imperialism I made an effort of asking questions as to how my observations and interpretations were biased by my own background both as a scholar and as a citizen from the West. One of the greatest challenges I experienced, which also eventually lead to a change in the initial research questions, was that I found it difficult to get in touch with and talk with people in the adivasi villages. When entering villages those who lived there were most of the time occupied with work. In addition they were shy, cautious and sometimes even suspicious. I felt as an intruder. Baring in mind that critical qualitative research could or should in some way contribute to social change or justice, I could not help reflect on the unlikeliness of my research contributing to an improvement of the poor conditions in many adivasi villages or any change in their socioeconomic situation in the society. Because of the difficulties I experienced in the villages, I chose to redirect the initial research questions from data collection in adivasi

communities, to focus more on the schools and the teachers. Fortunately I was able to meet three teachers who themselves were from adivasi communities.

Before I went into the field I was aware that this research is a part of a masters degree and that it is unlikely that two months of data collection done by one student, followed by writing a master thesis, is going to change anything in the communities visited. Nevertheless, after about three weeks of research I was frustrated, due to the insignificance of my research. At the time I perceived myself as the stereotypical western researcher extracting data from the South without giving anything back. In retrospect, however, my reflections are however not as gloomy as they were after three weeks in Wayanad. I believe that if I had more time at my disposal I would have been able to become closer to the people in the villages. I argue that the time limit was a substantial challenge because, to get people to open up they would have to be comfortable with my presence in their home, school or village. By reflecting on this issues both before and during the actual fieldwork I made an effort of approaching the field in sensitive manner.

Scheyvens, Nowak & Scheyvens (2003) argue that although there is a connection between research, colonialism and imperialism, that does not mean that non-indigenous researchers should obtain from doing research in minority ethnic groups. Rather it implies that researchers should be sensitive to the history of research in these communities. The issue of the practical impact of social research and ethnography is discussed by Atkinson and Hammersley (2011) who argue that although conventional research does not necessarily change the situation of people in marginalized communities, the research could still be of value. The pursuit of knowledge can be valuable in itself.

## 3. 3 Qualitative interviews

Most of the data gathered in Wayanad was collected through qualitative semi-structured interviews. The reason for choosing qualitative interviews as a research method was that I wanted to explore the informant's own understandings of the recognition of indigenous

knowledges in education in Wayanad. According to Kvale & Brinkmann (2009) an interview is a professional conversation «*...where knowledge is constructed in the inter-action between the interviewer and the interviewee*» (p. 2). The method of qualiative interviews can be legitimated within a critical qualitative research design, because of how it promotes interaction and reflection of the personal relationship and knowledge construction between the researcher and researched. However, although qualitative semistructured interviews emphasizes interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee, the relationship between the two is not an equal one (Kvale & Brinkmann (2009). The researcher still defines and controls the themes and the questions asked during the conversation.

Another reason for chosing qualitative interviews as a research method is because they can provide information about underlying reasons and explanations for patterns of behavior or opinions (Willis, 2006). The Kerala Curriculum Framework 2007 emphasize the recognition of marginalized groups in society. However, when interviewing teachers I found that many teachers did not implement this in their teaching. By using follow-up questions I could get answers as to *why* they did or did not implement the curriculum policies.

I found the semi-structured intervew the most appropriate for my research, because I wanted themes such as «recognition of indigenous knowledges», «educational attainment» and «curriculum» to be covered during the interviews. Yet, I wanted to give the informants the opportunity to bring about their own ideas, when discussing those themes. Semi-structured interviews are flexible, yet still somewhat structured around certain themes established by the researcher (Willis, 2006). Later in this chapter I will explore some problematic issues I faced when conducting interviews in Wayanad. However, in the next sections I will present the sampling methods used when gathering informants for my research.

## 3. 4 Sampling

The total amount of informants participating in my research is 21, and this includes 11

teachers from 7 different schools, where 3 teachers were from adivasi communities. It also includes 2 headmasters, 2 former students from Paniya communities, 2 principals from teachers training colleges, and 5 social activists, including my main informant who also worked with me as a translator. The sampling for my research was conducted based on purposive sampling, which involves a strategic sampling of informants connected to the research questions (Bryman, 2012). The research questions guided who I approached and made contact with in Wayanad. The sampling of schools, teachers and principals were chosen by using the snowball technique of sampling. The snowball sampling technique is to initially sample a small group of people who again suggest other participants who could bring relevant information to the research (Bryman, 2012). From previous visits to Kerala I already had a few contacts in the costal city of Kozhikode. Kozhikode is situated approximately two hours from the Wayanad District. My contacts are connected to an organization that offers educational courses for graduate and post graduate students from marginalized communities in Kerala. Hence they have extensive knowledge about marginalized communities in Kerala, such as adivasi communities. They assisted me in contacting the headmaster at the first teacher training college I visited. Initially they also set up a meeting with several curriculum planners. However, the meeting were postponed, and eventually cancelled.

In addition to my previous contacts in Calicut, one of my former professors at the University College of Oslo and Akershus referred me to a retired English teacher from Wayanad, who became my main informant during the fieldwork period. Students from Development Studies at the University College of Oslo and Akershus had worked with him previously during fieldwork in Wayanad. As both a citizen of the Wayanad district and as a teacher he has extensive knowledge of the area. In addition as a social and environmental activist he has particular interest in the district. I made use of his social and professional network, because as a former teacher he had knowledge of different schools, teachers and settlements in the area.

The reason for interviewing teachers was that since I wanted to explore the relations between the educational documents and the implementation of the curriculum in the classroom, I found it important to hear the voices of the actual implementors of the

curriculum. In addition I visited two teacher training colleges and was given the opportunity to meet with headmasters asking them about the recognition of adivasi culture, traditions and knowledge within teacher training institutions. When choosing informants among teachers I wanted to make sure that I interviewed both teachers from adivasi communities themselves, and teachers from other communities. I wanted to explore if there were any differences or similarities in what they communicated in relation to the recognition of indigenous knowledges in education.

Initially I wanted to interview people in adivasi villages, such as village cheifs. However, given the already mentioned sceptisism and shyness of the people in the villages, I chose not to persue this further. Nevertheless, in addition to the teachers from adivasi communities, I had a conversation with two former students at the alternative school Kanavu, who both were from the Paniya adivasi community. I also interviewed four social activists, because I wanted to know if or how the issue of indigenous knowledges were on their agenda.

### 3. 4. 2 Research sites

During the fieldwork period in Wayanad I visited schools, towns, villages and settlements, both adivasi and non-adivasi. Most of the adivasi settlements I visited were situated in rural areas, close to the forest. They varied in size and population, but the settlements near or in town areas were usually situated on a smaller area of land, and were more crowded than the settlements in the rural, forest areas. The two Kattunaikka settlements visited were the most remote, only to be reached by approximately 45 minutes walk on narrow tracks through forest area. Below are two tables of the schools and settlements visited. The schools visited were either schools only for adivasi students or schools for students from different communities. In Wayanad the former are reffered to as «tribal schools», and the latter as «regular schools». As explained in the introduction chapter, I will use the term adivasi, not tribal. Hence I will refer to those schools as «adivasi schools».

| Government run primary schools | Communities |
|---|---|
| Adivasi residential school 1 | Kattunaikka |
| Adivasi residential school 2 | Paniya, adiya |
| Adivasi residential school 3 | Paniya, Adiya, Kattunaikka |
| Regular residential school (Environment school) | Multi-community |
| Regular school 1 | Multi-community |
| Regular school 2 | Multi-community |
| Adivasi single-teacher school | Kattunaikka |

Most of the interviews were conducted in schools, where I interviewed teachers and principals. The reason for choosing government schools was because I wanted to explore the recognition of indigenous knowledges in the National Curriculum Framework, and if or how adivasi culture, religion, traditions and knowledges are recognized locally in primary schools in Wayanad. Private schools in the area usually follow their own curriculum, not the state curriculum. The reason why I chose different types of government schools was to explore if there were any differences in the recognition of indigenous knowledges in the schools. Eg. if there were any difference in the teaching of adivasi culture, tradition and knowledge in the adivasi residential schools (which are exclusively for adivasi students) and the regular schools (which are open to students from all communities).

In addition to the government run primary schools I visited the alternative private school Kanavu, which was founded by social activists in the early 1990s. The reason for visiting this particular school was that the school is well-known both within, but also outside Kerala, as a successful institution in terms of having provided education for adivasis through the recognition of the social, historical and cultural bakground of the adivasis in that particualar area. My main contact knew the founders of the school, and we were invited to their home in the nearby village.

| Settlements | Communities |
|---|---|
| Settlement (rural/urban) | Paniya |

| Settlement near Karnatika border (rural) | Kattunaikka |
|---|---|
| Settlement near Pulpally (rural) | Kuruma |
| Settlement near Sultan Bathery (rural/urban) | Urali |
| Settlement near Kalpetta (rural) | Kattunaikka |
| Settlement near Kalpetta (rural) | Paniya |
| Settlement near Thirunelly (rural) | Paniya |
| Settlement near Kanavu (rural) | Paniya |
| Settlement near Sultan Bathery (rural/urban) | Paniyas, Adiya |

In addition to schools and settlements, I visited the three major towns in Wayanad –
Kalpetta, Sultan Bathery and Manathavady. I travelled by bus between the towns and
villages. These were all sites in which I made notes based on observations of the daily
life in Wayanad. The observations made during the fieldwork are an important
contribution to the understanding of the current situation of the adivasis in Wayanad.


## 3. 5 Cross-cultural challenges

In this I will present some challenges I faced doing research in the particular social and
cultural context of Wayanad. Some of the challenges I faced are connected to social
differentiations such as gender and age, others to language and recording of interviews.
When conducting interviews in a foreign cultural context, it is important to be aware of
cultural factors that affect the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee
(Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 144). In an Indian cultural context there is both openly
and hidden social differentiations connected to gender, age, class and caste. These are
important cultural factors to bare in mind when doing interviews in that particular
context. According to Scheyvens, Nowak & Storey (2003): «[...] *our outward*
*appearance can also affect the power gradient between researcher and informer. Some*
*things we cannot control, such as our size, sex, and colour*»  (p. 150).  However, they
also point out that being a woman does not necessarily enforce such a strong power
relation, because women in many cultures is seen as less threathening than men. During
my interviewa with women they seemed not to be threatened by me and we were «more
on the same level». For instance, a woman in a Kuruma village approached me by
throwing her arms around me, kissing me on the cheek. In an Indian context this is an

act she would never have done if I was a man. Men and women are not supposed to have physical contact in public.

In my interviews with male teachers in primary schools I did not experience any obvious power issues connected to gender. They seemed interested in my research and behaved towards me as an equal. However, during the interviews with the some of the headmasters I experienced a different treatment that might have been based on my age and gender. In the beginning of the interviews it seemed as they did not expect me to know much about pedagogy, educational politics or the educational situation in Kerala. This was even though they knew I was a postgraduate, and that I told them had read the curriculum frameworks and asked them questions related to child centred learning and critical pedagogy. It was not until late in the interview with one of the principals that he exclaimed surprised: «*So you have actually read the Kerala Curriculum Framework?*» After this we were able to have a fruitful conversation about the adivasis and the educational situation in Wayanad. I cannot be absolutely certain that the reason for him underestimating me was due to gender or age, but sensing his attitude at the time of the interview, this seemed likely to be the reason.

### 3. 5. 1 Losses and gains in translation
Given Indias past as a British colony, many people in Kerala are familiar with the english language. There are daily newspapers available in English, English is spoken on television and there are several English medium schools in the state. However, most people who are comfortable speaking the English language are from the educated middle or upper classes. As Bujra (2006) points out: «*In general, English-speakers, are likely to be a socially distinctive stratum of the educated, wealthy or powerful and more likely to be men than women*» (p. 174). Her general statement correlates with my experiences in Kerala and Wayanad. During my fieldwork it was necessary for me to use an interpreter, since I have no knowledge of either the state language Malayalam or the different local adivasi languages spoken in the Wayanad district. Many people from adivasi communities are either not able or comfortable expressing themself in the English language. Due to the short duration of my fieldwork, it was not possible for me

32

to learn either the state or the local languages. This presented me with the challenge of having to rely on a translator to get access to data.

My main informant and contact in Wayanad agreed to work with me as a translator, as he is fluent in both English and Malayalam. In addition he helped me get in contact with other informants in Waynad. As Bujra (2006) points out, local translators can serve as more than mere translators of language. They can also be informants and gate openers. Translation involves more than the technical aspects of translation words from one language to another and is «[...] *a social relationship involving power, status and the imperfect mediation of cultures*» (Bujra, 2006, p. 172). Thereby, the many aspects of translation are important when choosing a translator. The translator I worked with in Waynad also provided insight into social interactions and processes that were occuring in the research sites we visited and in the interviews. Eg. in on of the teacher training colleges the headmasters claimed that the adivasi students benefitted from the government, because the children would recieve some thousand rupees every month to go to school. However, after the interview the translator explained that the money is usually collected by the parents, and it often happens that they use the money for food or liquor, rather than spending it on study equiptment for their children. And although the children drop out of school, their name is still on the student list, and their parents can collect the money every month. Having a translator that also worked as a local informant I gained insight into processes that I might not otherwise had gained access to.

Before I went to Wayanad I considered getting a translator that spoke both Malayalam and preferably one of the adivasi languages. However, when I got into the field, the people I spoke with from adivasi communities had knowledge of the Malayalam language, and I did not need another translator. However, it would have been better for my research if I knew Malayalam and preferably the adivasi languages spoken in the area. Also due to issues connected to power balances in society, it might have been preferable with a translator who him or herself belonged to an adivasi community. As mentioned before, I experienced people from adivasi communities as shy and sometimes even reluctant to talk to me. By working with a translator that were from e.g

Paniya background people would perhaps have been less shy.

Although there were benefits working with a local translator, I also experienced some challenges in field. Bujra (2006) argues that a danger of using local translators is that the researcher could be limited to the translator's perspective of his or hers own society. I made an effort critically reflecting on the information given by the translator, and if possible, checking other sources. For instance, my interpreter grew up on a farm, where many of the workers were from adivasi communities. According to him, the workers were treated well by his father. However, historically the system of landowners and workers is not without complications in Wayanad.

Time is one major issue when using a translator (Bujra 2006). In some of the interviews, especially those with headmasters and teachers, who had limited time to spare, the translation into English meant that the duration of the interview would be expanded. Hence, I might have gathered less information during the time of the interview than if I knew Malayalam. It sometimes happened that before I had asked all the questions I wanted to ask, the headmaster or teacher had to end the interview. Most of the times we would continue talking while walking out of the office. Some interesting information were gathered in this way.

Before the interviews I explicitely asked my translator to translate exactly what the informants were saying. However, during the first interviews I noticed that sometimes he would explain certain issues or topics brought about by the informants, and it was not always clear when direct translation ended and when his own explanations began. I went through this with him afterwards, and asked him to remember to tell me when he would explain something that was not expressed by the informant. It also happened that the informant would speak for a while and then the interpreter would explain something in just a few sentences. According to Buja (2006) it often happens that a translator filters out what he or she consider unimportant. Yet, this could be information that the researcher finds relevant. Hence, there was a constant negotiation between the translator and me as to what were to be translated.

In some of the interviews there were other people present that would sometimes interfer in the discussions. As long as they spoke in English I did not experience this as a major problem, but sometimes they would all switch to Malayalam, forgetting my presence. They would then discuss in Malayalam until I could get the attention of my interpreter, and either turn the conversation over to English again, or make him translate. I experienced these situations were somewhat uncomfortable because as Buja (2006) expresses: «*I found myself unable to communicate. It was like being struck deaf and dumb*» (p. 173).

I have now presented some of the challenges connected to working with a translator in the field. Yet, as mentioned in the beginning of this section, by working with a translator who also did function as a main informant and gate opener, I gained access to information that I might otherwise not have accessed. In addition, during the actual interviews I found time taking notes while the interviewee answered in Malayalam.

### 3. 5. 2 Taking notes

Although the common way of recording interviews has been to use a tape recorder (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009), I chose not to use a recorder device in my interviews. According to Willis (2006) taking notes could be easier when working with a translator, because, as mentioned above, you have the time to write down the answer while the translator is asking the next question. In addition, because I was using a translator and several of my interviewees spoke either Malayalam or what is popularly referred to as "Manglish" (a combination of Malayalam and English), I am not certain if potential recordings would be useful later.

Before I went to do the fieldwork, I was not sure whether to use a recording device or not. Nevertheless, I brought with me a tape recorder. However, I chose not to use it during the interviews because of two factors, which are described by Willis (2006). According to her, one reason for not using a tape recorder is that the interviewee could feel uncomfortable and inhibited by the recording device. When arriving in Wayanad and meeting with teachers, principals and social activists I chose not to use a tape

recorder, because I wanted the interview to be more like a conversation, and hopefully reduce the power balances between me and the interviewee. I found that some of the teachers were quite shy, especially those from adivasi communities, and it seemed to me that using a tape recorder would not have been improving their shyness or sceptisism towards me.

Another reason for not using a tape recorder is that sometimes the interview environment is noisy and that makes it difficult or even impossible to record the interview (Willis, 2006). Most of my interviews were conducted in classrooms or the headmasters office in schools at daytime. While interviewing teachers and headmasters, it often happened that students would be interrupting the interview by yelling, laughing, or even banging on windows, in order to meet a foreign visitor. Also, it often happened that curious teachers would come into the room, talking with each other, to me, or the interviewee. In addition some of the schools were situated by fairly busy roads and honking from auto rickshaws, sellers shouting and the noise from cars and trucks could be heard inside the school buildings.

Due to all the factors mentioned above I made the decision of not using a recording device, but rather write notes during interviews. In addition to writing down statements from informants I wrote notes describing the setting of the interviews, including the school, teachers, interaction between them or certain events that could provide for a more comprehensive understanding of the social setting of the interview.

### 3. 5. 3 Observation
In addition to the interviews conducted, I travelled around in Wayanad, visited towns, villages, settlements, schools, buses, restaurants and shops. In all the places I went I made observations about what was going on and peoples behavior. The observations made in public places in Wayanad during my fieldwork have been a significant contribution to my understanding of the local cultural and social context in Wayanad. Sometimes observations would substantiate data collected in the interviews. E.g some of my informants pointed out that often people from adivasi communities will spend

their money in hotel restaurants rather than cooking food at home. When travelling around to different research sites I usually ate in the somewhat cheaper hotel restaurants, and I would observe that there often several people from adivasi communities having their lunch there. Although such information did not explicitly answer any of my research questions, it contributed to an understanding of the social situation of the adivasis in Wayanad.

## 3. 6 Analysis of data

The data from the interviews conducted in Wayanad together with my own fieldnotes have been the central subject of analysis. As the data analysis process is mainly about *data reduction* (Bryman, 2012), already while I was conducting interviews in Wayanad I began the process of classifying similar themes or statements brought up in the different interviews. Those themes would at the time also influence the topics brought up in the following interviews. Moreover, I did a thematic analysis of interviews, observations and document analysis in which I categorized and coded themes that, due to their frequency stood out as more important than others. Coding is a central part of analyzing data, and entails classifying and naming components that seem more relevant than others theoretically, but also based on the statements of informants (Bryman, 2012).

### 3. 6. 1 Documentary analysis

Based on the research questions I chose to do a documentary analysis of the Kerala Curriculum Framework 2007, to get an understanding of the epistemological influences of the curriculum, which I compare with data collected from interviews and observations in Wayanad. According to Prior (2003) documents must be considered «[...] *in terms of fields, frames and networks of action*» (p. 2). This means that documents are not static and pre-defined, but rather depend on features outside their boundaries, such as the creators, users and the settings surounding a given document. It is from this perspective I analysed the Kerala Curriculum Framework 2007.

A documentary analysis could involve a content analysis, in which the researcher might

explore the frequency of certain words or categorize certain topics within a document. E.g. when analyzing the KCF 2007 I searched for the frequency of words such as «Scheduled Tribes» and «marginalized» to see how much of the document that adress the educational situation of marginalized groups (particularly adivasis) in Kerala. However, following Prior's (2003) suggestions it is not necessarily only the content of the document that is relevant, but also the setting in which it was produced, who produced it and who will read it. In the case of Kerala Curriculum Framework, it is thereby interesting to acknowledge that the curriculum is based on the National Curriculum 2005, developed by Indian educationalists such as Krishna Kumar, whose work is to a great extent influenced by Freire.[10] This is highly relevant when exploring the epistemological basis of the KCF 2007 document.

Mention that I did not get the opportunity to speak with educational planners/curriculum planners, but you can still learn from the documents produced. Would they tell you anything different than what is stated in the documents?

## 3. 7 Trustworthiness

Some researchers have argued that it is necessary for qualitative research to employ its own ways of establishing the quality of qualitative research, and not to transfer criterias of measurement from quantititative research. The concept of *trustworthiness*, which includes the criterias of credibility, transferability, dependability and confermability, has been suggested as a concept of evaluation more suited for qualitative research (Lincoln and Guba, in Bryman, 2012, p. 390). Credibility is connected to the accounts and understandings of social reality. As mentioned earlier, the researcher is not an objective observer of the social world. Hence, the analysis of findings collected during a research period is influenced by the researcher's interpretations and understanding of a particular social phenomena. Others might have a different understanding of this social phenomena. There are, however, ways to acheive a certain confidence in the credibility of your understandings, eg. through *respondent validation* and *triangulation*.

Respondent validation involves the researcher giving informants with an account of his

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10 See Kumar (1989).

or hers findings, in order to see if there are correspondence between the findings and the experiences of the research participants (Bryman, 2012, p. 391). During the interviews I would ask questions such as *«have I understood you right, when you say that...»* or *«when you say that, do you mean...»*. In other interviews some of the questions I asked were based on findings I had already collected. E.g I would say that some informants at another school claimed that that a reason for drop outs among adivasi students, were the distance to school. Then I would ask if they agreed with that statement, and if they could think of other reasons for drop out.

I would also ask questions in interviews and conversations that were related to my observations in the field. I would especially ask my main informant if I had understood a certain behavior or situation right. Then in turn I would ask the same question in a later interview. In this way I would use more than one method in the study of the recognition of adivasi knowledge in education. The use of several methods in the study of a social phenomona is called triangulaton, and it could be a way to ensure the credibility of a study (Bryman, 2012, p. 392).

Another critieria connected to the concept of thrustworthiness is *transferability*, which entails whether the findings can be transferred and applied in other contexts or in the same context at a different time (Bryman, 2012, p. 392). However, the transferability of empirical data from qualitative research is questionable, because the research usually involve in depth research in a particular social context, which is not easily transferable to other contexts at other times. Within qualitative research it is perhaps preferable to rather provide a rich and detailed account of the social and cultural context, to make it easier for other researchers to consider whether or not the findings are transferrable in a certain context (Bryman, 2012). Thereby, my findings from Wayanad is not necessarily transferrable to other social contexts, because they relfect the particular cultural, historical, political and social context of the research sites and informants at the time I was there. However, by giving a detailed account of Wayanad, the educational system, the state curriculum and the social context of the adivasis in the area, some of the findings from my research might be resemblant to findings from similar research that explore eg. the social-economic situation of indigenous people and marginalized groups,

or the recognition of different knowledges in education in other locatons, or in the same area at a future research project.

The third criteria for evaluating the thrustworthiness of research is dependability, which involves keeping complete records of the entire research process, in order for peers to establish wheather the research procedures have been executed properly. However, this is not a common approah by qualitative researchers, mostly because it would be a demanding task to go through the often large amount of data collected in qualitative research (Bryman, 2012). I have not used this approach in my research. I have, however, reflected about the forth criteria which is confirmability. Confirmability refers to research objectivity, and how it is impossible for a researcher to be completely objective. This relates to the previous discussion about *critical qualitative research*, where it is argued that a researcher can not be objective, because he or she is a part of and interpreting the social world he or she is studying. Yet, the researcher should be careful not let personal values or theoretical dispositions manifestly affect the conduct of the research and findings (Bryman, 2012). This could mean that my personal views and opinions about the recognition of indigenous knowledge in education should not affect the conduct of my research in Wayanad, and should not either be relfected in the findings. The findings are first and foremost an outcome of the informants views and opinions.

## 3. 8 Ethics

Earlier in this chapter I explored issues and challenges in need for consideration when doing research among indigenous peoples. Ethical considerations connected to the history, culture and socioeconomic position of the researched are important when doing research in marginalized communities. Ethical considerations in research have in general become gradually more important over the years of development research, and top-down research without considering the voices of local people have been subjected to criticizm (Brydon, 2006). Some research behavior is openly unethical such as fabricating data or plagiarism. However, other behavior is not that obvious. One such issue, as discussed earlier, is the power balance between the researcher and the

researched. A related problematic issue is the possibility of the research to cause harm to those involved. Hence, social researcher should make ethical consideration that does not threathen the dignity, privacy and safety of participants (Scheyvens, Nowak & Scheyvens, 2003).

A way to ensure that participants are not harmed by the research is through informed consent. Informed consent involves informing participants of why the research is done and what should be the outcome of the research, both for them and for the researcher. In addition to inform the participants of the reasons for doing research and how it might affect them, a way to ensure the privacy, safety and dignity of participants is to promise anonymity (Brydon, 2006). I chose to keep my informants anonymous, and informed all of the participants of this. Before I went to Wayanad I wrote a short letter explaining my research project, questions and aims. I gave the letter to my main informant, and I also brought copies with me all the time. However, in most interviews I explained orally, with help from my translator, my reasons for doing research and how I would ensure the anonymity of the participants. In addition to keeping participants anonymous I also chose not to name villages or schools, because the people I talked with in these places could be traceable by someone with knowledge of the Wayanad district.

Although I experienced some difficulties getting in touch with people in the villages, I did not expererience any explicit hostility. However, in one of the adivasi residental schools I was in the headmaster's office speaking with the headmaster and teachers, after explaining my research and purpose in Wayanad. After some time another teacher came in, and she was very curious as to why I was in their school. I gave her the information letter, and both my translator and I explained to her my purpose and I also informed about the anonymity. Yet, she seemed to be convinced that our purpose was to evaluate her teaching, and she remained sceptical throughout our visit. This episode was, as already mentioned, fortunatly not characteristic of my encounters with people in Wayanad. Most of the people I met, both for interviews and elsewhere, expressed curiosity and positive attitude towards me and the research I was doing.

## 3. 9 Final remarks on methodology

In this chapter I have discussed the methodological framework of the thesis and the methods chosen accordingly. The choice of research methods from semi-structured interviews and observations, to sampling and reflections connected to the use of translator, are all within the framework of the ontological and epistemological positions of social constructuvism and interpretivism. This is also connected to the discussions of power balances between different knowledge systems within education in Chapter 4 and 5. As dicussed earlier, by choosing the research design of critical qualitative research the researcher acknowledges that research is not objective and value free, and neither are knowledges recognized and valued within education systems. I will discuss this further in the next chapter, Chapter 4, in which I explore theoretical concepts related to knowledges, power and education in India.

# 4. 0 Theoretical and conceptual framework

"In this critical multilogical context, the purpose of indigenous education and the production of indigenous knowledge does not involve "saving" indigenous people but helping construct conditions that allow for indigenous self-sufficiency while learning from the vast storehouse of indigenous knowledges that provide compelling insights into all domains of human behavior" (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2008, p. 135)

In this chapter I present theories and concepts to frame the presentation and discussion of findings from Wayanad in the next chapter. First I will explore the dichotomy of modernity and tradition which frames the other concepts presented in the chapter. Indigenous knowledges are often perceived and defined as *traditional* knowledges, as opposed to *modern,* Western, scientific knowledge. The term indigenous is itself a contested concept and not without difficulties to define. Hence, from the overarching dichotomy of modernity and tradition, I will move on to explore the terms indigenous and indigenous knowledges in an Indian context. To understand the position of adivasis in Indian society I use the concepts of hegemony and discourse, and how this is connected to the perception of adivasis as "the other".

In the last sections of this chapter I will explore theories useful to understand the relations between recognition of indigenous knowledges, educational attainment and identity construction in marginalized, indigenous communities. Based on the exploration of different theoretical concepts in the chapter I will discuss the role of critical pedagogy in providing cultural recognition and change in consciousness in students from marginalized, indigenous communities, which together with political and economic recognition could bring about social change from below.

## 4. 1 Modernity and tradition

Gyekye (1997) defines tradition as "[…] *rural, agrarian, prescientific, resistant to change and innovation, and bound by the perceptions of its past*" (p. 207). Modernity, however, is defined as "[…] *scientific, innovative, future oriented, culturally dynamic, and industrial and urbanized*" (Gyekye, 1997, p. 217). The concept of modernity is

connected to a specific geographical location and time period, namely the social changes emerging in Europe in the seventeenth century, which since then have spread across the world (Giddens, 1990, p. 1). Moreover, modernity is linked to cultural codes such as individualism, rationality and progress. Giddens (1990) argues that modernity, as rooted in European society, are fundamentally different than the preceding areas. Yet, the perception of modernity and tradition as polar opposites and of modernity as a fundamental Western or European phenomenon is problematic, because it neglects the exchange of knowledges between societies across the world (Breidlid, 2013, p. 16).

In addition it is not necessarily obvious whether a social phenomenon could be placed within a strict dichotomy between modernity and tradition. For instance, in India modernity and tradition often overlap, which can be exemplified with the importance of Western science and technology in Indian society, while at the same time Vedic astrology has been established as a university course at several universities. Likewise, both "modern" Western and "traditional" Ayurvedic medicine are widely recognized in India. Still, modernity and tradition are often perceived as opposites. Moreover, the concept of modernity is to a great extent connected to the notion of development, and as Tucker (1999) points out "development" is essentially based on a Western way of perceiving the world.

### 4. 1. 1 Modernization and development

Tucker (1999) argues that development has gained the status of « [...] *natural law, objective reality, and evolutionary necessity*» (p. 1). In an Indian context, the perception of development as something given and pre-determent has consequences for development policies directed at adivasi communities in India. Development approaches established by official bodies are based on the assumption of social *exclusion* as the main cause of poverty and marginalization in adivasi communities (Xaxa, 2012). This is line with what Tucker (1999) criticizes as the «myth of development», where development is perceived to be a natural linear process connected to modernization (p. 2). From this point of view, development has to come from the outside, rather from within societies. This is connected to discourses of modernity and tradition, in which so

44

called «traditional societies» are believed to be static and, as mentioned in Gyeke's (1997) definition above: resistant to change and innovation. From this point of view, development could only happen if indigenous communities are included in the mainstream society.

Nathan and Xaxa (2012) argue that the concept «adverse inclusion» is more useful than exclusion to understand the relationship between adivasi communities and the wider society in India (p. 3). They argue that marginalization in adivasi communities are not necessarily caused by isolation and social exclusion, but rather «adverse inclusion». This means that adivasis are included in mainstream society, but without any improvement of their social, political, economic and cultural status in society. I will continue this discussion in the findings and discussion chapter, by looking at perceptions of adivasi knowledges and culture as «backward» and as obstacles for development in these communities.

## 4. 1. 2 Science

Related to the concepts of exclusion and adverse inclusion is the belief in Western science and technology as the sole catalyst of development and progress. The perceptions of "traditional societies" as static also count for the perceptions of knowledges found in these societies as stagnated in a different time, with little relevance in today's modern society. Western scientific knowledge holds a global hegemonic position as "the truth", and it seems difficult to imagine alternatives (Breidlid, 2013). Science, or particularly Western science, is closely connected to the concept of modernity. Moreover, it is connected to colonialism. As Sahasrabudhey (2002), points out:

> «Modern science constitutes the epistemic foundations of the civilization based on the European ideals of freedom and reason. It is the source of wealth and power in modern societies. The story of its ascent is also the story of wars, subjugation and colonization» (Sahasrabudhey, 2002, p. 2)

Although Western epistemology and science have for many people led to social and economic improvement in their livelihood, Tucker (1999) points to how Western

colonialism and domination of other peoples were legitimated in rationality and science. The colonial powers believed it was both their right and duty to conquer other peoples and liberate them from superstitions.

Several scholars[11] have critically questioned the hegemonic position of Western epistemology in the South. Sahasrabudhey (2002) continues the discussion from an Indian perspective, by critically examining Western, modern science, comparing it to Gandhi's philosophical ideas in terms of social development. He points to the relationship between modern science and dehumanization, exploitation and destruction of both natural and human resources, and argues: "*The peasant, the artisan, the tribals and women across the length and breadth of nations possess more knowledge and are more scientific in their work, yet not related to the machine*" (Sahasrabudhey, 2002, p. 44). Yet, those knowledges are not recognized as valuable in the "modern" society, where the only logic is that of the market and capital. Breidlid (2013) argues that there within Western epistemology is a perception of humans as master of nature, which are connected to the dualism between humans and nature found in Christianity (p. 23). The nature, as well as other peoples, needs to be dominated, controlled and tamed.

In the dominating capitalist system in the world these perceptions have severe ecological consequences, because connected to the perception of man as the master of nature is the unsustainable exploitation of natural resources (Breidlid, 2013). Although the economic hegemony of the West is now challenged by economic growth in the South (such as India), the epistemological foundation of that growth is still based on Western, capitalistic approach to nature. Moreover, due to the hegemony of Western epistemology, solutions to the world's ecological problems are believed to be found within the very same epistemological system that initially created those problems (Breidlid, 2013). It is thereby important to question the possibility of Western science and technology to change the unsustainable effects of the world's political and economic system, when the epistemological foundation of Western science legitimizes human exploitation of natural resources. This is related to indigenous knowledges, because as

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11 See Denzin, Lincoln and Smith (2008), Smith (1999), Ngugi (1986), Tucker (1999) and Breidlid (2013)

Kincheloe and Steinberg (2008) point out, within indigenous epistemologies there are generally not a clear separation between humans and nature. Rather they are «multidimensionally entwined», which have consequences for the way people approach their natural surroundings. I will continue the discussion of indigenous knowledges in relation to sustainability in chapter five, in relation to my findings from Wayanad. In the next section, however, I will provide a more thorough exploration of the concepts of indigenous and indigenous knowledges.

## 4. 2 Indigenous peoples and knowledges

A leading term in the following discussion is «indigenous knowledges». The use of the term knowledge*s* in plural form stresses the existence of more than one knowledge system or epistemology. This is connected to the concept of *multilogicality,* which means: «*A multilogical epistemology and ontology promotes a spatial distancing from reality that allows an observer diverse frames of reference*» (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2008, p. 138). The emphasis here is on different perspectives and ways of understanding the social reality. Thereby, it questions assumptions about one form of knowledge as the truth, such as Western knowledges as the truth or the only way of perceiving the world. Kincheloe & Steinberg (2008) encourage such a multilogical approach when dealing with indigenous knowledges and education, and this is the reason for why I use the term knowledges in plural form also in relation to Western knowledges. While the use of Western knowledge in singular form could be legitimized due to the dominating hegemonic position of Western epistomologies in the world (Breidlid, 2013), I argue that the concept of multilogicality could be applicable to all types of knowledge systems.

Indigenous knowledges could be defined as: « [...] *knowledges produced in specific historical and cultural contexts and are typically not generated by a set of pre-specified procedures and are orally passed down from one generation to the next*» (Breidlid, 2013, p. 31). However, it could be somewhat problematic to provide a clear definition of what constitute indigenous knowledges within a particular society, because knowledges are not distributed equally across societies, in terms of for instance gender

or age. By focusing on particular areas of indigenous knowledges, the dynamic nature of knowledges could be ignored (Sundar, 2000, p. 83). Nevertheless, there are some common features associated with indigenous knowledge systems. Indigenous knowledges are in general holistic and the relationship between man, nature and the supernatural is an important part of the knowledge systems (Breidlid, 2013, p. 34). Thereby, religion and spirituality are usually central within indigenous knowledges. Moreover, the holistic relationship between humans, nature and the supernatural is connected to the importance of land and specific geographical areas. Kincheloe and Steinberg (2008) argue that many indigenous peoples perceive people and nature, the «living» and the «non-living», not as separated, but rather as entwined (p. 151).

Indigenous knowledges are often defined as *local knowledges*, and thereby linked to particular peoples in particular geographical areas. The local context connected to indigenous knowledges are emphasized by Ellen & Harris (2000) who argue for a recognition of indigenous knowledges as local knowledges connected to particular peoples and particular *local cultural practices*. In a discussion of indigenous environmental knowledges, they point to the dangers of generalizing indigenous knowledges as knowledges that can be extracted from a particular social context and easily transferred into other social contexts (p. 20). They argue that the social and cultural contexts in which knowledges are generated are essential to an understanding of indigenous knowledges (p. 19). Thereby, to understand what the concept of indigenous knowledges entail, there is need for a more thorough exploration of the term indigenous, and how it is connected to peoples.

### 4. 2. 1 Who are indigenous?

The term «indigenous» is often defined with terms such as «native», «origin» or «natural». The UN does not have a clear definition of indigenous peoples, but states that indigenous peoples are the original inhabitants of a country, and that they were the inhabitants of a geographical region before other people of different cultural or ethnic origins arrived and settled (UN Permanent Forum of Indigenous Issues). According to the UN there are more than 370 million indigenous peoples in the world, spread across 70 countries (UN Permanent Forum of Indigenous Issues). Although the UN does not

have an official definition of indigenous peoples they do operate with a list of criteria to identify indigenous peoples. The criteria used by the UN point to certain characteristics that distinguishes indigenous peoples from the dominant societies and state systems in which they live in. In addition the origins of indigenous peoples are important in determining their indigenous status. The criteria established by the UN are similar to the definition used by the International Labor Organization (ILO). In the ILO Convention 169: «Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention» tribal peoples and indigenous peoples are defined as following, with the adivasis being placed in the first definition of tribal peoples:

> a) tribal peoples in independent countries whose social, cultural and economic conditions distinguish them from other sections of the national community, and whose status is wholly or partially by their own customs or traditions or by special laws or regulations;

> b) peoples in independent countries who are regarded as indigenous on account of their descent from the populations which inhabited the country, or a geographical region to which the country belongs, at the time of conquest or colonization or the establishment of present state boundaries and who, irrespective of their legal status, retain some or all of their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions. »

However, both the UN criteria and the ILO Convention 169 definition could be criticized as being too restrictive, because they mainly apply to people from indigenous minorities (Breidlid, 2013, p. 30). Indigenous minorities are usually associated with peoples such as the Indians in the Americas or the Aborigines in Australia, but indigenous peoples are not necessarily minority populations. Rather, the majority population in a country could be defined as indigenous peoples. According to Breidlid (2013) the factor determining people's indigenous status is their «*shared experience of domination*», and more specifically a shared experience of domination by a Western hegemonic epistemology (p. 31). This definition includes the majority population in several African countries, whose ancestors inhabited the African continent at the time of

Western colonization.

Moreover, I argue that in an Indian context both of the above definitions of indigenous peoples are problematic. The UN and ILO Convention 196 definition is problematic because of the emphasize on indigenous peoples as original inhabitants, which the adivasis officially are not. In India the majority Hindu population is perceived to be the original inhabitants of India, since their history on the continent go back more than four thousand years (Pati & Dash, 2002, p. 32). Most of the population on the South Asian continent could thereby be defined as indigenous. The definition used by Breidlid (2013) does to an extent apply for adivasis in India because it emphasizes the shared experience of domination. However, both the majority Hindu population in India and the adivasis have experienced Western domination through colonization. Yet, the adivasis have additionally been subjected to domination and colonization from the mainstream Hindu population. Hence, I argue that the focus on Western domination in Breidlid's definition makes it somewhat restrictive in an Indian context.

The concept of indigenity is also problematic in an Indian context, not just because the adivasis are not recognized as indigenous peoples, but also because in real life politics indigenous discourse overlaps with class discourse in India; which take place between Marxist or Maoist movements and exclusively indigenous movements (Sundar, 2012, p. 242). To understand adivasi political positions and resistance it is important to acknowledge the issue of class vs indigeniety or ethnicity. Sundar (2012) argues that: «*Ideologically, the difference between indigenist organizations and the Maoists is best represented in terms of their differences over whether and how to retain the 'traditional' political structure in adivasi areas*» (p. 243). She argues that the indigenist movements have historically been organized based on traditional structures of kinship and leadership. Maoist movements (naxalites), however, focus on class affiliation, and have displaced the traditional village structures, replacing them with their own forms of political organization (Sundar, 2012, p. 244). It is however important to acknowledge that while some political organizations are based on a political ideology of ingeniety and others emphasize class, the Indian state recognizes neither of the claims.

Some scholars (Sundar, 2002, Kjosavik, 2011) who explore the discourse of indigeniety and adivasi political resistance emphasize the political importance of the term indigenous. Sundar (2002) argues:

> "The issue is not so much what or how authentic «indigenous knowledge» is, but the political and social agenda in which particular knowledges are imbricated. Ultimately then, «indigenous knowledge» is a political and contextual category rather than one with substantive content» (p. 381).

According to this point of view, recognition of adivasi knowledges is not as important as how the concept of indigenous is useful in obtaining political power in adivasi communities. However, in contrast to this argument, in global discourses of indigenous peoples and knowledges, the actual *content* of indigenous knowledges are promoted, particularly in connection to sustainable development where indigenous knowledges are perceives as an alternative to the Western consumerist and contaminating epistemology[12]. Global discourses of indigenous peoples and indigenous knowledges are concerned about exactly the *content* of indigenous knowledges, not just the political impact of the claim to indigeniety. I will continue the discussion on content vs political category in the discussion chapter, in relation to my findings from Wayanad.

Based on the discussion above, the use of the terms indigenous and indigenous knowledges, in a discussion of the recognition of adivasis and adivasi knowledges in India, is not without difficulties. I will however not conclude as to whether or not the position of adivasis in India should be theoretically situated within an indigenous or class framework. My focus in this thesis is the recognition of indigenous knowledges in education, and a deeper investigation of political organizations in adivasi communities would transcend the aim of this study. However, in an Indian context it is important to acknowledge the political dimension of the term indigenous, and be aware of the possible conflicts and tensions between class and indigeniety. The political dimension of indigeniety could also be connected to the concept of hegemony, which is grounded in class theory, but could be useful in the exploration of knowledges and power in an

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12  See Breidlid (2013) and Ellen & Harris (2003)

Indian context. In the next sections I will explore the concept of hegemony in relation to knowledges and power in India, and further discuss the usefulness of the concept of discourse to explain the position of adivasis in Indian society.

## 4. 3 Knowledges and power

An old Marxist soundbite claims that «the ruler's thoughts become the ruling thoughts». From a Marxist point of view Gramsci uses the concept of hegemony in order to understand the power relations between different classes in society (Cox, 2005, p. 36). He points at institutions such as the media, the church and education as institutions that connect the civil society to the state. The perceptions and world views of the ruling class could be adopted by the ruled population through such institutions. Hence the position of power by the ruling class is legitimated. Gramsci uses the notion of hegemony in relation to the state and power of the ruling class. Education could be an institution where the epistemologies of the ruling class within a nation are legitimated. However, the concept of hegemony could also be useful when exploring the influence of *Western* epistemologies on education in other parts of the world, and in this context: India. This could be connected to what Breidlid (2013) terms "the global architecture of education", which refer to the internationalization of Western education through institutions such as the World Bank. The analyzing of findings from the Wayanad in the next chapter is based on the concept of hegemony, in relation to the hegemonic positions of *both* Western epistemology and Hindu epistemology in education in India.

Connected to the concept of hegemony is the notion of "organic intellectuals". According to Gramsci "organic intellectuals" are intellectuals who express the interests of a certain class, eg. the working class. However, there is a possibility that intellectuals will, instead of speaking the interests of the marginalized classes, be subsumed by system of the ruling class. Rather than changing an oppressive system from the inside, they will themselves become part of the system. In the next chapter, I will explore the concept of organic intellectuals in relation to adivasis and education in Wayanad, mainly in connection to the role of educated adivasis in contributing to development and empowerment in adivasi communities.

## 4. 3. 1 Knowledges and discourse

According to Foucault (1980), in many societies there has been a shift in expressions of power, from the explicit use of physical force, to a more subtle production of power structures which are: «[...] *continuous, uninterrupted, adapted and individualized throughout the entire social body*» (Foucault, 1980, p. 119). What legitimates power is that it is not experienced as a strict force. Rather, power is a less tangible force that produces knowledge and discourse, and hence it is accepted as something given (Foucault, 1980, p. 119). The concept of discourse could explain power relations between different knowledge systems recognized in education, in terms of how some knowledges are recognized, while others are not.

The concept of *subjectivation* could explain the social position of adivasis in education. When exploring the concept of subjectivation Gillborn and Youdell (2009) argue that: «[...] *through the productive force of circulating discourses people are made as social subjects and subjected to relations of power*» (p. 181). This means that through the force of discourse, adivasis are made as a certain kind of social subjects that are linked to power relations in Indian society. This could be connected to Tucker's (1999) arguments about the importance of the social and cultural sphere in development. As mentioned in relation to the concept of hegemony, in a socially stratified society such as India, the education system could be an arena where existing power relations and privileges are defended. A self-evident truth of what knowledges are valuable is constructed. The self-evident truths about what knowledges are valuable and recognized, are connected to the power relations in society. Although they operate with different concepts of power in society, both Gramsci and Foucault agree that hegemony is established not only by force, but through the more subtle implementation of power in people's perceptions of social reality. As the educational institutions are not isolated from the rest of society, mainstream perceptions of the causes for poverty in marginalized communities could be legitimated in the education system.

Although the theoretical concepts from both Gramsci and Foucault are useful to explain

social phenomenon connected to marginalized groups in India, it is important to acknowledge that the employment of theories developed in specific historical contexts in Western societies to explain social phenomenon in specific historical contexts in the South can be problematic. Theories and concepts developed in the West are not necessarily transferable to other localities. For instance, Gramsci developed his theories about hegemony from the viewpoint of a Western state with an emphasis on class. The Marxist (Western) perception of class is perhaps not easily transferable to India, and could collide with other forms of social differentiation, such as caste.

However, Gramsci developed the concept and understanding of hegemony within the framework of the nation state and the relationship between state and civil society, and the marginalization of adivasis in India is connected to the relationship between adivasis and the Indian state. In other words, the relationship between those who rule and those who are ruled. The Indian state is to a great extent developed based on Western ideas of the nation state. When elaborating on discourse and power in society Foucault (1980) argues that power relations produced by discourse are found in all societies. Thereby, these theories and concepts are not necessarily restricted to Western societies, but could explain social phenomenon in other locations as well. I will attempt to be sensitive to social context when I in the next sections offer theoretical explanations of possible reasons for low educational attainment in indigenous, adivasi communities in India.

## 4. 4 Othering and identity construction

Cummins (2000) argues that subordinated groups that experience academic difficulties have generally been subjected to discrimination over several generations (p. 40). He further points out that such discrimination might on the one hand cause a feeling of insecurity towards one's identity, or on the other hand, resistance to dominant group values. In both cases, a consequence could be alienation from schooling. By referring to Wagner (1991) Cummins argues that illiteracy among subordinated groups is qualitatively different than among the general population. The difference in illiteracy can be understood by the use of the two terms «*illiteracy of oppression*» and «*illiteracy of resistance*» (Cummins, 2000, p. 41). The latter refers to subordinate groups who

resist assimilation and reject imposition by the majority group, including the rejection of formal education. However, the former term, «*illiteracy of oppression*», involves the slow destruction of identity through assimilation and oppression from the majority society.

In adivasi communities in India both terms of illiteracy could occur. Sundar (2002) argues that some adivasi parents are reluctant to send their children to school, because they lose connection with the agricultural life in the villages. Hence they resist the influence of the mainstream population on the adivasi lifestyle. However, although "*illiteracy of resistance*" could occur in adivasi communities, "*literacy of oppression*" is perhaps more useful when discussing educational attainment in the adivasi population in Wayanad, because of the assimilation processes undergone in the district. As I will discuss further in Chapter 5, the adivasis in Wayanad has been subjected to discrimination and assimilation from the majority population both outside and within the education system.

Both resistance to and oppression within education affect identity construction in marginalized communities (Cummins, 2002). Adivasi communities in India have historically been perceived as «the other» by the mainstream Hindu population. In the methodology chapter the othering of indigenous people was discussed when problematizing research in marginalized communities in the South. However, in this chapter I will look at the concept of «othering» in terms of theoretically explaining the relationship between adivasis and the mainstream society in India. Central in the concept of othering is the dichotomy of «the self» and «the other». There cannot be an «other» without a «self», and the perception of «the other» produces perceptions about «the self». Said (1978, p. 7) points out the link between hegemony and orientalism. According to Said, hegemony explains the strength and durability of the Western perception of «the other». There are certain cultural forms, perceptions and ideas that dominate others in a society, which are perceived as «the truth» or «common sense». This could be connected to Foucault's notion of "*regime of truth*", which means that in all societies some forms of political discourses are recognized and accepted as true. There is also someone that is in the position to decide and define the content of

discourses (Foucault, 1980, p. 131). In an Indian context the Hindu majority epistemologies are perceived as the truth.

I argue that adivasi customs, religion, and traditions are in Indian society perceived as, what Douglas (1966) describes as a "*matter out of place*" (p. 36). Douglas's concept of "dirt" as a social symbol of an *anomaly* is perhaps particularly interesting in an Indian context, because of the hygienic underpinnings of the caste system connected to purity and impurity. Placed at the bottom, or even outside, the caste system adivasis are perceived as impure. Moreover, they become the traditional, primitive other to the modern self, and adivasi knowledges are not recognized and valued in society as equal to Hindu majority knowledges and Western knowledge.

The modern, Western logic is a foreign, alien system of thought in many communities in the South (Sahasrabudhey (2002, p. 45), and as I will discuss further in the next chapter, adivasi students encounter *two* foreign epistemologies when they enter the education system. As mentioned, according to Cummins (2002) discrimination could cause a feeling of insecurity towards one's identity. Similarly the encounter with a foreign epistemology in education could cause an alienating feeling in students from indigenous communities, because they experience epistemological border-crossing between home and school (Breidlid, 2013).

## 4. 5 Critical pedagogy and social change

Borg, Buttigieg & Mayo (2002) argue that according to Gramsci: "(...) *historically, people gained independence from the laws and social hierarchies imposed upon them by ruling minorities only after they attained a greater level of awareness, a higher consciousness*" (p. 6). Given the close relationship between the state and civil society in modern nation states Gramsci suggests a "*war of position*" to bring about social and political change. Contrary to a war of maneuvre, which involves overthrowing the ruling class by force, a war of position is played out in the ideological, cultural and intellectual spheres of society. Social change happens by changing people's consciousness. As I will discuss in relation to my findings in the next chapter, the

emphasis on the cultural and ideological sphere as an arena for social transformation deviates from the classic socialist approach to social change, in which social change is perceived to happen in the base – the means of production – not the superstructure – ideology (Gillborn & Youdell, 2009, p. 176).

Gramsci's concept of war of position is in line with what Freire (1972) terms «*conscientizacao*» (conscientization), which he defines as: « *(...) learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality*» (p. 17). This is connected to the perception of the reality as socially constructed. If students learn that knowledges are socially constructed, they will be able to question established truths about knowledges and power, and eventually change oppressive power structures in the society. Gillborn and Youdell (2009) point out that "(...) *this is were critical theory informs critical pedagogy*" (p. 176), which from a Freirian point of view entails an alternative, critical pedagogy *with*, not *for* the oppressed. The belief in freedom cannot simply be implanted in the oppressed from the outside, but have to come from within through their own conscientization. The belief in freedom and liberation need to be based on dialog between the oppressed and the oppressors, between students and teachers (Freire 1972: 49).

Critical pedagogy aiming at recognizing difference is connected to the wider concept of *multicultural education*, which in recent years has been highly debated both in educational spheres and in society in general (May, 2009). Supporters of multicultural education has been criticized for being naïve and for reifing culture, neglecting underlying structural issues, such as race and class, affecting the learning situation of vulnerable groups. As I will discuss in Chapter 5, a multicultural education recognizing only certain aspects of adivasi culture such as external cultural expressions (dance and song), is not sufficient in order to enable students from adivasi communities to improve their educational attainment, critical reflect upon their position in Indian society and to bring about social change. Rather, a critical multicultural education should hold the possibility of challenging unequal power relations in society, which means not simply recognizing and promoting cultural differences between social groups in society (May, 2009).

### 4. 5. 1 Humanizing science

In addition to combat the alienation of indigenous students in public education, recognition of indigenous knowledges could encourage a more holistic approach to science and knowledges, because according to Hoppers (2002) indigenous knowledges have the ability "humanize" science (p. 10). This is connected to the relationship between humans and nature that was mentioned earlier. Kincheloe and Steinberg (2008) argue that the within the Western notions of modernity, science and rationality there are a perception of the individual as separated from the forces of culture and history (p. 147). However, recognizing the existence of different knowledge systems within education opens up for different ways of understanding the world.

Moreover, the recognition of indigenous knowledges in education could provide for a critical review of the authorian position of Western knowledge, science and technology, by the recognition of the connection between knowledges, culture and local context. This is line with Gyekye's (1997) specific-aspect approach to development, where he suggests critically reviewing aspects of traditions to establish whether or not they have any value in today's society. In relation to education this would entail students critically examining not just Western knowledges, but also indigenous knowledges. I will continue this discussion in the next chapter by exploring the recognition of indigenous knowledges, culture, and languages in the particular, local context of primary education in Wayanad district in South India.

# 5. 0 Findings and discussion

This chapter includes both findings from my fieldwork in Wayanad and the analysis of findings. The analysis is based on theories related to indigenous knowledges, critical pedagogy and education for change. I will discuss my findings categorized into different themes connected to the research questions presented earlier. The findings derive from interviews and observations done in the Wayanad district in the fall of 2013, and from a document analysis of the Kerala Curriculum Framework 2007, which guides the teaching in formal education in Wayanad. Additional findings come from The Wayanad Initiative Report, newspaper articles, textbooks and teachers guides.

According to the government of Kerala the literacy rate in the state was 93, 93%, which is the highest number of all the 28 states in India. The almost 100 % literacy is promoted and emphasized by both the government and by the growing tourist industry in the region. However, according to my findings, the official statistics on literacy do not necessarily reflect the educational reality in Kerala, whether in the adivasi or non-adivasi population. In the context chapter I discussed the socioeconomic situation in adivasi communities in Wayanad, and how factors such as health, economy, distance and quality of teachers and education could affect student's achievement. However, based on my findings from Wayanad I argue that to understand the high dropout rates and low educational achievement in adivasi communities, there is a need to go beyond visible and obvious explanations for students' performance: A need to explore the recognition of adivasi knowledges, traditions, culture and history in primary education.

The first section of the chapter is connected to my first research question: What knowledges are produced in adivasi communities in Wayanad? My second research question is: What knowledges are recognized and valued in Kerala Curriculum Framework 2007 and public primary schools in Wayanad? Thereby, the chapter includes a presentation and analysis of the Kerala Curriculum Framework 2007, in relation to multicultural education and recognition of difference. Further I will discuss if or how indigenous knowledges are recognized in primary education in Wayanad, with emphasize on culture and language. An important part of the discussion is not just *if* indigenous knowledges are recognized, but also *what* knowledges are recognized?

Related to my third research question about the school as an identity marker, I will in the fourth section explore how the recognition of indigenous knowledges in education is connected to identity construction in adivasi communities. I will discuss how the lack of recognition of indigenous knowedges could affect adivasi students negatively in terms of border-crossing between home and school and alienating experiences in school.

During my fieldwork in Wayanad some informants argued that recognition of indigenous knowedges in education is less important than political power and access to land in adivasi communities. These statements by informants could be supported by some scholars who argue that the *content* of indigenous knowledges is not as important as indigenous as a *political category*. Hence, in the fifth section I will discuss the political significance of the term indigenous in relation to knowledges. The overall questions are: Is it important to recognize indigenous knowledges in education? Could indigenous knowledges represent an alternative to the globalized Western consumerist epistemology? Based on the Kerala Curriculum Framework 2007 I will in the last section explore the possibility of recognition of indigenous knowledges in primary education, and how education might lead to social change in adivasi communities in the Wayanad district.

## 5.1 Adivasi knowledges

> "The traditional wealth of knowledge of the tribal and dalit children should be valued. Their language, dress, customs, vocations, beliefs, health care, art and literature are important elements of their tradition.»
> (KCF 2007, p. 21).

The KCF 2007 acknowledges Kerala as a pluralistic society, and promotes diversity in education. Adivasis are mentioned in the curriculum in the section about marginalized groups, where the emphasize is both on poverty issues hindering educational attainment, but also on recognition of the knowledges children from marginalized communities already possess. As discussed in the theory chapter, the term indigenous knowledges is a

contested concept, and it is not necessarily easy to define. I will now discuss the concept of indigenous knowledges related to my findings from Wayanad.

Sundar (2000) points out that a definition of indigenous knowledge is perhaps particularly difficult in an Indian context and in relation to the adivasis (p. 84). It is difficult both because the adivasis are not officially recognized as indigenous peoples, there are considerable social, political, historical and cultural variation within and between adivasi communities, and because they share many similarities with other marginalized groups in rural India, particularly dalits. Adivasi languages in Wayanad are not written languages. Hence, customs, rituals and practices have been *orally* transmitted from one generation to the next, which make claims of indigeniety to the Wayanad area difficult. In addition, culture is not static, and cultural practices and beliefs change over time both due to internal processes and external influences from other communities (Ellen & Harris, 2003). In the context of recognition of adivasi knowledges in education it is thereby important to reflect critically on the possibility of extracting certain knowledges supposedly found in adivasi communities and present them in the classroom as characteristic of a whole group of people.

However, although acknowledging the danger of generalizing, there are some common features found across different adivasi communities. As with indigenous peoples in other parts of the world, adivasi culture, traditions, religion and customs have historically been closely connected to land and forest. To adivasis the nature is considered sacred and they believe that specific places, such as rivers, forests or hills are inhabited by gods and spirits (Paty, 2007). Moreover, Breidlid (2013) points out that land is important in indigenous communities because of the attachment to ancestors and sacred burial places (p. 37). In addition to the attachment to land in terms of ancestors, in adivasi communities in Wayanad there have traditionally existed indigenous knowledges about the functions and usage of different plants and speices from local forest areas. A teacher in an adivasi residential school pointed to konwledges found in the nearby Kattunaikka community, and stated:

61

«For instance, if you have a tooth ache, you can use an elephant tooth to make a paste, and mix it with some herbs. Then you should rub it on your tooth, and after two days the ache is gone. Many of these children will not know about this. But some will. Also if you have a sprain in your arm, there are certain leaves you could wrap it in. This will heal the arm. After some days the pain is gone.»
(Teacher in adivasi school, 07.09.13)

According to my findings, medical knowledges about local species have traditionally been a part of knowledge systems in adivasi communities in Wayanad. The knowledges are, however, often kept within the particular community or family. A social activist argued that different forms of medical knowledges within an adivasi community are often kept within the community. He used the example of a grandmother who transmits knowledges about how to utilize particular plants for medical purposes to her granddaughter. Some of the teachers interviewed in Wayanad pointed to knowledges found in adivasi communities connected to sustainability. A teacher in a regular residential school stated:

«There is also different kinds of seeds used in the tribal villages. They are natural and ecofriendly. Humans have not done anything to these seeds»
(Teacher in regular residential school, 27.08.13)

A natural science teacher in an adivasi residential school expressed that:

"I will use the local plants and nature in my teaching. These students often know so much about nature. Often I learn things from them. They are teaching me".
(Teacher in adivasi residential school, 26.08.13)

The teacher mentioned particularly a certain type of rice, that were used in the local villages, and that were locally adapted to the Wayanad climate. As mentioned in the theory chapter, indigenous knowledges are often referred to as "local knowledges", which could entail knowledges developed through experiences of generations of people of how to survive in a particular local environment. In this context it is important to acknowledge that the adivasi population in Wayanad is not homogenous. The traditional

agriculturalist communities (Kurumas) have had a different attachment to land than those who lived as gatherers in the forest (Paniyas). The different adivasi communities have different histories, traditions, socioeconomic status, languages, and cultural practices. Thereby, a recognition of adivasi knowledges in education also involves a recognition of the heterogenous reality in and between adivasi communities. Nevertheless, adivasi communities in Wayanad do share a connection to nature, whether as agriculturalist or as gatherers in the forest, and many different adivasi communities have been affected by the reduction of available land. Geographical areas previously accessible to adivasis have been subjected to privatization, government restrictions, or used in forest industry.

According to Kennedy and King (2013) conflicts over access to local forest areas and natural resources are "[...] *the defining feature of the adivasis' relationship with state and non-adivasi society*" (p. 26). Moreover, the struggle for land is not exclusively about access to resources, but is connected to adivasi culture and knowledges. Breidlid (2013) argues that because of the relationship between culture, knowledges and land, "(...) *the physical colonization is closely linked with epistemological colonization*" ( p. 38). Through the occupation of forest land by people from other parts of South India and by the British, adivasis in Wayanad have been gradually removed from the home of their ancestors, which affect adivasi knowledges, including world views, cultural practices, traditions and customs which are connected to land. A social activist in Wayanad pointed to the connection between adivasi culture, traditions and land, and stated that:

> «When I hear a tribal song or watch a dance I wont just see a song or a dance, but this is connected to the tribal lifestyle».
> (Social activist, 01.09.13)

Adivasi knowledges of practical usefulness of local flora and fauna are clearly connected to the Wayanad nature and landscape. However, so are cultural elements, such as dance and song. The social activist quoted above, stated that the content of adivasi song and dance are closely connected to nature and often to different seasons,

63

linked to e.g. harvesting. Adivasi history, culture and epistemology are connected to the particular geographical area of Wayanad. Hence, the colonization of land, resulting in excluding adivasis from previously available areas, also affect cultural belonging in adivasi communities.


## 5. 2 Kerala Curriculum Framework

«There is a general tendency to portray certain knowledge as noble and certain others as of less value in our textbooks. Culture, language and situations in life are pictured from a hegemonic point of view. The negative impact that such treatment of knowledge makes on the learners from disadvantaged background is immeasurable. Therefore, the content, language and presentation of knowledge in a textbook should be organized from a critical point of view.»
(KCF, 2007, p. 25).

The above quote is from the Kerala Curriculum Framework 2007 (KCF 2007). The curriculum guides the teaching in formal education in Kerala, and is based on the National Curriculum Framework 2005 (NCF, 2005), which applies to all of India. The NCF 2005 was developed by well-known Indian educationalists, such as Krishna Kumar. In his book "Social Character of Learning" (1989), Kumar argues from a social constructivist perspective that "*What kind of knowledge become available at schools for distribution has to do with the overall classification of knowledge and power in society*" (p. 69). He encourages critical pedagogy and supports the Gandhian suggestion of contextualizing the school curriculum, with emphasize on the inclusion of local crafts and skills in education. Further, he uses Gandhi's vision for an inclusive education, in terms of recognizing difference and making education available for oppressed groups in society (Kumar, 1989).

As mentioned in the theory chapter, both the NCF 2005 and KCF 2007 are to a great extent founded on critical pedagogy, child-centered and activity-based learning and issue-based teaching. The content of both curricula is progressive and differs from the

traditional colonial education system, which entailed what Freire (1970) defines as "*banking education*", where the students are perceived simply as empty containers which the teacher fills with already established knowledge. The KCF 2007, however, moves away from the traditional "*banking education*", which entails a teacher centered education.

It is interesting to notice, to illustrate the progressiveness of the new curriculum, that the word "*change*", in connection with education in Kerala, is mentioned 54 times within the space of the 85 pages in the document, while "*radical change*" is mentioned three times. The curriculum framework explicitly express a change from the previous elitist education system. The new curriculum points to increasing unemployment rates and low socioeconomic status of marginalized groups in society, and emphasizes the importance of change in all stages of formal education in Kerala to meet these challenges. According to the introduction in the document, a progressive curriculum ought to recognize the social, economic and social differences in society, and the importance of educational inclusion of all citizens in Kerala, regardless of social status in society (KCF, 2007, p. 10).

The position of adivasis in Indian society is connected to the hierarchical structure of the caste system. In the introduction the KCF 2007 does not specifically mention the caste system as an obstacle to educational progress. Yet, it does states that: "*The liberation from the grip of superstitions and malpractices prevalent in the society that putrefied the entire system is another point of action*» (KCF, 2007, p. 10). And further: "*Education liberates man from the state of inaction that is imposed by the prevailing malpractices and superstitions*» (KCF, 2007, p. 10). Although the caste system is not explicitly mentioned, in an Indian context it is likely that the «*superstitions and malpractices*» mentioned in the curriculum points to the social stratifications of the caste system, which in many ways still exist in Kerala today.


## 5. 2. 1 Multicultural education
As mentioned above, one of the objectives of the KCF 2007 is the curriculum's need to

recognize social differences in society and provide for educational inclusion of all communities. Educational inclusion and increased attainment of students from marginalized communities could, according to the KCF 2007, come about if teaching is based on critical pedagogy, child-centered teaching, and activity-based and issue-based learning. Knowledges are perceived as constructed by both students and teachers, and where the students are active participants in their own learning process. The KCF 2007 states that:

«The marginalized sections of the society should be given education that helps them conserve their cultural identity and linguistic originality. Curriculum should be flexible enough to accommodate these aspects» (KCF, 2007, p. 29).

The curriculum promotes a multicultural education that encourage the recognition of different cultural groups within the classroom. According to Bank's (2009) multicultural education: «(...) *tries to provide students with educational experiences that enable them to maintain commitments to their community cultures as well as acquire the knowledge, skills, and cultural capital needed to function in the national civic culture and community*» (p. 14). Hence, students from different background should come together and learn about each other cultures and world views (Banks, 2009, p. 29). Thereby, within the framework of KCF 2007 there should be possible to recognize marginalized groups in Kerala, including adivasis, in education. The curriculum considers knowledges as socially constructed and recognizes the connections between knowledge and power. However, the purpose of this thesis is not just to present the vision and guidelines of the KCF 2007 in terms of recognition of adivasi knowledges, but more importantly to compare it with the experiences and understandings in primary schools "on the ground" in the Wayanad district. This is the topic for the next section, in which I will also problematize the recognition of indigenous *Hindu* (majority) knowledges, in comparison to recognition of *adivasi* (minority) knowledges.

## 5. 3 Indigenous knowledges in primary education

"Regional and traditional forms of knowledge (related to agriculture, irrigation, resource management, art and handicraft) can be utilised for the development of the society. The process of education we envision should help the learners to identify such sources and preserve what is useful and relevant.»
(KCF, 2007, p. 18)

According to the quote from the KCF 2007, one of the aims of the new curriculum in Kerala is for the education system to recognize different cultural identities in society. Students should learn about local traditions and knowledge, and critically decide what is useful and relevant to preserve. In this context Gyekye's (1997) specific-aspect approach to the preservation of traditions could be helpful. The specific-aspect approach implies that by examining specific aspects of cultural traditions and the way they are practiced, it is possible to decide whether or not those cultural practices are worth defending in terms of development (Gyekye, 1997, p. 241). Hence, both practices and customs in the mainstream society and adivasi cultural traditions could be assessed in terms of their viability in the present society in connection with development. As the quote above from the KCF 2007 suggests, students could reflect upon traditions, customs and knowledges in their communities, and decide whether or not those cultural aspects should have a place in society today.

However, a possible inclusion of an aspect-specific approach to adivasi knowledges and culture in education brings about a crucial question: Who decides whether or not indigenous  knowledges are relevant today? A further, who decides whether or not adivasi knowledges are viable today? Sundar (2002) connects recognition of indigenous knowledges to power, by exploring the Hindutva movement's claim of indigeniety in India. The Hindu Right movement, including the Hindu Right group RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh) and Hindu Right party BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party), usually referred to as the Sangh Parivar, has made claims of possessing a certain kind of indigenous knowledge that, in their view, should be recognized as a part of the educational discourse in India. To the Sangh Parivar, indigenous means those who

belong to religions that originated from the Indian territory, and hence indigenous knowledges are understood as "Hindu knowledge" or "Vedic knowledge" (vedic refers to the religious texts in Hinduism) (Sundar, 2002, p. 374). An example of vedic knowledge is the well known *ayurvedic* medical knowledge, which is widely recognized both in India and internationally. According to a social activist in Wayanad:

> «Ayurveda is recognized because it has commercial value. It is big business. Actually, many people can not afford to buy this type of traditional medicine anymore.» (Social activist, 01.09.13)

I argue that the medical knowledges of ayurveda are recognized both because of its commercial value in the growing market for alternatives to Western medicine and due to the the hegemonic position of Hindu or vedic knowledge in India. In one of the residential schools I visited in Wayanad, they incorporated agriculture and knowledge of local plants in the teaching. The school was situated in a valley surounded by hills, in which students and teachers cultivated different types of plants and trees. Several plants were so-called ayurvedic plants. Informants in Wayanad also argued that in recent years there has been increased interest in adivasi medical knowledges as well as ayurveda, for commercial purposes. The issue of patents on indigenous knowledges of plants and their medical functions is, according to informants, a growing problem in Kerala. In relation to the question of recognition of indigenous knowledges in education my findings point to some recognition of indigenous knowledges in primary education in Wayanad. However, the knowledges recognized are mainly Vedic or Hindu indingeous knowledges, not adivasi knowledges. In addition, indigenous knowledges are valued, when they are economically profitable (Ellen & Harris, 2003).

An example of recognition of indigenous knowledges in education is the establishing of "vedic astrology" as a university course at several universities in India (Sundar, 2002, p. 378). Sundar (2002) argues that the reasons for accepting and implementing astrology as a university course, are connected both to the power of the Hindu right wing movements and the growing interest in and commodification of indigenous knowledges,

such as alternative medicine (p. 378). In addition, in modern Western science, astrology is not viewed as a science, but for many people in India astrology is a part of everyday life and viewed as common sense (Sundar, 2002, p. 378).

In this context it is important to recognize the political dimension in the struggle for the recognition of indigenous knowledges. The power structures in India benefit the Sangh Parivar. Thereby, they have the power to influence the educational discourse of indigenous knowledges in India. The adivasis, however, do not have the same influence, because of their marginalized position. In addition, Indian astrology emphasizes individual fate as determined by stars and planets, which can be connected to for instance marriage horoscopes which determine who you should or should not marry (Sundar, 2002, p. 378). Thereby it is connected to the purity rules of the caste system, and supports the hierarchical structures in a socially stratified society. From the earlier mentioned specific-aspect approach, the recognition of indigenous knowledges of astrology in education is problematic because it could encourage social inequality. This means a continued marginalization of certain parts of the Indian population, such as adivasis. Further, it becomes clear that some indigenous knowledges are recognized in education, while others are not. Hindu or Vedic indigenous knowledges are officially valued, while adivasi indigenous knowledges usually are not.

According to my teacher informants from Wayanad, the education system and the curriculum are founded on epistemologies in the mainstream Hindu society in Kerala. They argued that the curriculum is standardized and developed based on the world views and experiences of the mainstream population, and adivasis are not represented in the curriculum. The epistemological foundation of public education in Wayanad is the topic for the following discussion. When asked about recognition of indigenous knowledges in education, a teacher in an adivasi residential school in Wayanad argued:

> «Because we have to use the state curriculum this (indigenous knowledge) is not there. The curriculum is not very flexible. There is not anything about tribals or local history. There will be nothing about Wayanad.»
> (Teacher in adivasi residential school, 29.08.13).

A teacher in another adivasi residential school argued that students from adivasi communities face challenges in school related to distance and home environment. The students in this particular school were from Kattuniakka communities in Wayanad. The Kattunaikkas often live close to or in forest areas, quite far from other villages. In relation to distance and home environment the teacher argued that:

> «Another problem is that they are not able to think properly when they get a task. The curriculum is made for the upper class. The children cannot relate to this.»
> (Teacher in adivasi residential school, 26.08.13)

The teacher in the adivasi residential school explained that what she meant by «*think properly*» is that students from adivasi communities often have a different way of approaching tasks than students from the mainstream population. Her statement is supported by other teacher informants. Several teachers in Wayanad pointed out that the curriculum was made for either the mainstream population, or for the upper class. The teachers argued that because of their marginalized and to a certain extent, isolated, background, adivasi students often find it difficult to relate to what is taught at school. The relevance of curriculum could be connected to Bourdieu's (1978) concept of *cultural capital.* The concept of cultural capital connects difference in educational achievement of students to the unequal distribution of cultural capital between the different classes in society (Bourdieu, 1978). Because the teaching is based on particular forms of cultural capital, that of the mainstream population or upper classes, students from marginalized communities struggle. Adivasi students lack relevant cultural capital to succeed in the current education system.

## 5. 3. 1 Adivasi residential schools

A government incentive to accommodate education to marginalized adivasi communities has been the establishing of schools exclusively for students from adivasi communities. Still, Carnoy (2009) argues that:

70

"[...] in highly unequal societies, ethnic/racial minorites tend to get fewer resources, and that […] separating them into their "own" schools almost guarantees that their (lower-quality) education will provide them less access to upper secondary and tertiary education and hence "good" jobs" (p. 513).

Although Carnoy makes this statement based on the social context of Latin America, the argument could be relevant in a highly stratified Indian society. In Wayanad many adivasi children attend residential schools, and statistics points to a sharp decline in educational attainment levels in adivasi communities at high school level (Wayanad Initiative, 2006, p. 71). Sundar (2002) critically points out that for the Indian government, residential schools are perceived as particularly advantageous for adivasi children, because they "[...] *ensure food, clothing, and books and prevent corruption by "culturally degenerate" parents*» (p. 380).

My informants disagree as to whether or not adivasis should have their "own" schools. Some of my informants argued that the exclusively adivasi schools were favorable to adivasi students, because of the more equal student base, which would prevent discrimination. Other informants argued for multicultural schools, where students from different communities interact, which would benefit the acquisition of social capital for adivasi students useful in society in general. I will continue this discussion later in this chapter, in a discussion of how adivasi students experience border-crossing between home and school, or more specfically between different epistemological systems. This is related to the topic of the next section, which is the influence of Western epistemology on education in Wayanad.


## 5. 3. 1 Western influence on education

My findings from Wayanad point to an education based on mainstream Hindu epistemology, but also of what Breidlid (2013) terms "*the global architecture of education*", which refers to the global domination of Westernized education (p. ). In this section I will discuss the influence of Western epistemology in education in Wayanad, connected to perceptions of modernity and development.

A headmaster in a teacher training college in Wayanad expressed concern about the lack of recognition of adivasi culture and history in education. He stated that although the curriculum mentions marginalized groups as an issue to be recognized, it is not very specific as to what should be discussed in class. He pointed out that there were not much about adivasi history and culture in the textbooks either, and argued:

> "In one of the textbooks there is a story about a boy from a tribal community. This is a success story. He became a movie star, and acted in many mainstream Malayalam movies. In the story the boy is from a poor tribal community and is told to be very intelligent. But the problem with this story is that it does not look at the reasons for why the boy was poor, or why many tribals in Kerala are poor.»
> (Headmaster in teacher training institution, 03.09.13)

The intention of the story is perhaps to encourage students to reflect on common perceptions and myths about adivasis as "backward" and less intelligent, and to emphasize how people from marginalized, poor communities can be successful in India today. However, the headmaster argued that it is problematic that the underlying causes of poverty in Kerala are not addressed in the story. Furthermore, the boy in the story escapes from the poor conditions of his adivasi background, and succeeds only by entering the mainstream society, becoming a movie star. The boy thus overcomes the lack of social and cultural capital in his community, an succeed in the mainstream society. The underlying perception communicated through the story is problematic because it implies that the way to success for the "traditional" adivasis is through incorporation into the mainstream, "modern" society.

The KCF 2007 also promotes "modern" or Western viewpoints. According to the KCF 2007:

> "There is a need to differentiate between science and pseudo-science. Learners should approach a problem based on cause and effect relationship. An education that develops

logical  reasoning in children is crucial in this context. They should play a key role in freeing the society from superstitions and prejudices and should propagate the need for a scientific outlook in life» (KCF, 2007, p. 18)

According to the KCF 2007 there is a need for students to "(...) *freeing the society from superstitions and prejudices (...)* (p. 18). As mentioned earlier, the superstitions and prejudices could refer to the caste system in which people are believed to be born into a relatively fixed social status in society, which has negative consequences for some parts of the population. However, the quote does not explicitly mention the caste system, and could be interpreted to count for all types of "*pseudo-science*", which from a Western epistemological point view include practices not recognized or valued within the Western scientific tradition.

The KCF 2007 further states that: "*While formulating the aims of education of the state, we must envision a society that is capable of nurturing and strengthening the democratic and secular nature of India*» (KCF 2007, p. 17). Given the history of communal and religious violence in India, it is understandable that the authors of the curriculum framework promote democracy and secularism. However, claiming that India has a secular nature is problematic because of the importance of religion and spirituality in the Indian society. Ideas that have been brought about in a particular Western historical and social context, are not necessarily adaptable or relevant in an Indian context. This is problematic in a curriculum which at the same time emphasizes the importance of social context and regional knowledge in education. As mentioned earlier, the KCF 2007 recognizes the importance of using local knowledge in teaching. However, local knowledges as indigenous knowledges are often connected to the spiritual or super-natural (Breidlid, 2013, p. 34), and do not necessarily fit under the paradigm of the Western scientific and secular knowledge system. Western secular knowledges have separated humans from nature and spirituality (Breidlid, 2013, p. 35). I will discuss this later in this chapter in relation to indigenous knowledges and sustainability.

As mentioned, adivasi knowledges are to a great extent not recognized in education in primary education in Wayanad. If indigenous knowledges are recognized they seem to be dominated by Hindu knowledges, not adivasi knowledges. Informants argue that public education, even in schools exclusively for adivasi students, is based on the mainstream population in Kerala, not the minority adivasi population. As I will discuss in the next section, this is also the case with the medium of instruction in primary education in Wayanad. Language is connected culture, but also to power. Several informants in Wayanad, both teachers, headmasters and social activists, argued that language is one of the most important obstacles and reasons for low educational achievement among adivasis.

## 5. 4 Medium of instruction

> "The greatest threat to the languages, cultures, and identities of minority communities is the notion of the nation-state with its official standard language"
> (Romaine, 2009, p. 374)

The majority of threatened languages in the world today are found in marginalized national and ethnic minority groups. Romaine (2009) argues that this is not coincidental since most nation states have pursued assimilating policies penetrating, transforming and also undermining minority languages (p. 375). In India there are more than 1600 different languages. However, only 80 of these languages are used as medium of instruction in formal education (Joshee & Sihra, 2009, p. 432). Although the use of 80 different languages in education within a nation state is impressive, it still means that most Indian languages are not used as language of instruction, and thereby many students are not taught in their mother tongue.

According to the Indian Constitution, the medium of instruction in primary education should be the student's mother tongue (Dyer, 2009, p. 251). The KCF 2007 also points out that the mother tongue should be the medium of instruction in primary schools in Kerala (p. 43). As mentioned in Chapter 2, Kerala follows the three-language formula

approach to medium of instruction. Most students in formal primary education in Wayanad are taught in Malayalam, together with Hindi and English. The "three-language formula" excludes local languages as medium of instruction. Linguistic minorities, such as different adivasi communities, are not taught in their local language. Instead the language of instruction is the regional or state language. Hence adivasi students are not taught in their mother tongue in school (Sundar, 2002, p. 379).

The KFC 2007 points to substantial changes in educational language policies in Kerala, which involve changes in both content, methodology and evaluation. These changes are based on the critical approach encouraged by the new curriculum policies. However, the authors of the curriculum recognize some considerable challenges connected to the implementation of new language policies. They point to "(...) *inadequate teacher empowerment programs, absence of monitoring, limitations of awareness programs and insufficient supporting system* (...) » as obstacles to the implementation of new policies (KCF, 2007, p. 39).

When exploring language in adivasi communities the Wayanad Initiative report states that: «*Most of the community members are well conversant with Malayalam. Even in the households, Malayalam is increasingly becoming common replacing local dialects*» (Wayanad Initiative, 2006, p. 41). However, according to statements made during my interviews with teachers in primary education in Wayanad, students from adivasi communities often experience a language barrier when introduced to formal education. The language barrier experienced by adivasis were emphasized by a headmaster at a teacher training institute:

> "Because of for instance the language problems tribal children often keep to themselves in the classroom. Especially in the 1th. and 2th standard. They have writing and reading problems" (Headmaster at teacher training institute, 26.08.13)

According to Joshee & Sihra (2009), teachers in adivasi communities do not necessarily have the knowledge of adivasi languages and the curriculum is not appropriate to teach adivasi children in their first language (p. 432). My findings from Wayanad support the

statement by Joshee & Sihra. According to my informants, in primary school most teachers are not from adivasi communities. Hence, they do not usually have knowledge of adivasi languages. In addition, although many students have some knowledge of the Malayalam language, their rural dialect is different than the standardized Malayalam taught in school. Many of my informants in Wayanad claimed that the most important reason for low educational attainment in adivasi communities is language.

A math teacher argued that:

> "(...) some teachers might know some few words in tribal languages, but most do not. Their language is not written. They will have a different word for frog. This make it difficult.» (Teacher at adivasi residential school, 26.08.13)

The headmaster at the same school argued:

> "Language is a major problem. The teaching is in Malayalam, but it is usually a standardized Malayalam. When the children go home they will speak their language. And also when they interact with each other in the school and at the hostel."
> (Headmaster in adivasi residential school, 26.08.13)

A teacher in an adivasi residential school exclusively for students from the Kattunaikka community pointed out:

> "One teacher knows a little (adivasi language), because he knows the language spoken in Mysore. This language is somewhat similar to the Kattunaikkan language."
> (Teacher in adivasi residential school, 28.08.13).

According to the teachers, the students from adivasi communities often speak their own local language at home, and they experience difficulties adapting to the medium of instruction in school. In the adivasi residential schools the students live in hostels at campus, and usually speak their mother tongue when they are interacting after school.

## 5. 4. 1 Language and power

A former student from the Paniya community argued that one of the reasons for her dropping out of the local regular school were the language barrier. She was one of the first students at the alternative school Kanavu, and is currently working on an alternative curriculum for adivasi drop outs, based on Kanavu philosophy of teaching. Kanavu was founded by local activists from non-adivasi communities in the 1990s, and the teaching focused around practical skills and different forms of dance and art. The former student I spoke with told me that her experience in the regular school were frightening, and the language was a part of that experience.

According to Brock-Utne and Garbo (2009), language is power. Language is connected to power in the sense that someone has power to define concepts and the reality (Brock-Utne & Garbo, 2009, p. 1). Semali (2009) points to the language-power tensions in schools which historically have characterized the struggle between those who speak the language and those enunciate political power (p. 196). As mentioned before, according to Foucault, power is not something one person possesses over another. Rather power is a form of domination that is exercised within a society, between different social subjects (Foucault, 1980). Semali (2009) refers to Vygotsky and argues that "(...) *language constitutes one of the most powerful media for transmitting out personal histories and social realities, as well for thinking and shaping the world*" (p. 201). The language of instruction in education is important because, as ethnicity or religion, language is a determinant of social identity. The mother tongue is an important part of someone's identity, and if not recognized and valued in the wider society, it can cause a feeling of shame of that part of one's identity that is not valued. In Wayanad there are cultural and religious differences between different groups in society, and language is connected to different cultural meanings. This can be exemplified with a quote by one of my informants:

> «The tribal children will have different words for ordinary things. And the things will have different meanings. For instance elephant have a great symbolic meaning for many people in India. But for tribals elephant could mean something bad.»
> (Social activist, 01.09.13)

In the dominant Hindu society in India the elephant is worshipped in different forms. One of the most popular and important Hindu gods is Ganesha, son of Shiva, who is depicted as a human with an elephant head. Ganesha is worshiped all over India and is believed to be the remover of obstacles and the god of wisdom and intellect. However, these symbolic meanings attached to the elephant are perhaps not found in adivasi communities. The adivasis in Wayanad have traditionally lived in or close to the forest, where the elephants are wild animals who often destroy crops and sometimes can be dangerous to humans. The above quote illustrates how language is connected to people's social and cultural context. If the dominant perception of the elephant as something favorable is presented in the classroom as common sense or the truth, adivasi students do not necessarily relate to this, and it might enhance the perception of adivasis as "the other".

In Kerala the Malayalam language are spoken by the dominant groups in society. The symbolic power of the dominant population is important in this context, and could be connected to the hegemonic position of certain languages. The hegemonic position of Malayalam in the wider society in Kerala, affects the position of the language of instruction in education. Semali (2009) argues that

> "(...) language must be recognized as one of the most significant human resources; it functions in a multitude of ways to affirm, contradict, negotiate, challenge, transform, and empower particular cultural and ideological beliefs and practices."
> (Semali, 2009, p. 200)

Not to recognize certain languages in school suggests that some languages are not suitable for public institutions and only for the home domain, which affect the status of the language (Dyer, 2009, p. 255). Hence, adivasi languages do not possess the same status as Malayalam, Hindi or English, because it is only associated with the village or home. Further, given the connection between language and knowledge, it suggests that knowledges articulated in a low-status language, such as adivasi languages, are not suitable for education.

Related to the social status of different languages in India is the particular history of the state language Malayalam in Kerala. In his book Nadugamkkdhika (1993) social activist and actor K.J. Baby argues that for many adivasis, particularly Paniyas and Adiyas, the Malayalam language is a foreign language, which historically is associated with slavery, as the language of the masters. Secondly Malayalam is associated with people from other communities who arrived and settled in Wayanad from the 1940s. Further the language is linked to the official language used by government institutions, for instance the Tribal Development Offices. In this way, to adivasis, the Malayalam language hold some loaded components and associations, connected to the marginalized position of the adivasi population in relation to the wider society. According to one of the former students at Kanavu, the encounter with the Malayalam language in school could to many adivasis be experienced as frightening. Malayalam is associated with the language of the dominant majority society.

Because of the language problems experienced by the adivasi students in Wayanad, many teachers pointed out the importance of mother tongue as medium of instruction. A headmaster at a teacher training college argued that:

> «In my opinion the language is the main issue. They should be learning in their tribal language until the 4th standard» (Principal at teacher training institution, 03.09.13).

The language issue is also mentioned in the KCF 2007. According to the KCF 2007 an important incentive for improving educational attainment in the adivasi population is to "*...providing learning environment in tribal areas to use their local dialects in standards 1st and 2nd and then shift to formal language*" (p. 76). However, to implement local adivasi dialects as language of instruction in primary education in Wayanad will be a challenge, because of most teachers are not from adivasi communities. Further, my informants pointed out that many teachers from adivasi communities prefer to work in regular schools after finishing their teacher training.

As mentioned earlier, education in Kerala is influenced by majority Hindu culture and

world views, but also by Western epistemologies. Based on my findings this also applies for language in education. Dyer (2009) points out that the focus on the pedagogical implications of literacy in Indian languages is rare. Rather than studying the relationship between Indian languages and literacy, the focus has been on literacy in the English language (p. 251). As a former British colony, English has an important place in Indian society.

## 5. 5 The adivasis as "the other"

As we have seen in the previous sections, Hindu and Western knowledges are hegemonic at the expense of adivasi knowledges in education in Wayanad. Said (1978) points to the link between hegemony and orientalism or "othering" (p. 7). He emphasizes how the Western perception of "the other" (orient) has prevailed because of Western hegemony. However, in an Indian context the hegemony of the majority Hindu population can explain the prevalence of the perception of adivasis as "the other". As explored in the theoretical and conceptual chapter, with reference to Gramsci, education could be an institution were the world views and perceptions of the ruling classes are promoted and adopted by the rest of the population. Mainstream perceptions about adivasis as backward and primitive peoples living in the forest prevail in education, because of the hegemony of *both* Hindu and Western epistemologies and languages.

The adivasi communities are in mainstream society often perceived either as backward communities lagging behind in modernization and development, or somewhat romanticized as primitive people living a traditional, sustainable lifestyle closely connected to nature (Sundar, 2002). In the growing tourist industry in Wayanad, the latter perceptions are emphasized and the adivasis are used as a tourist attraction. Adivasi culture and customs are portrayed as "primitive", "fascinating", and "exotic". From a mainstream Hindu point of view, adivasi customs and beliefs, can be perceived as what Mary Douglas (1966) describes as "a matter out of place". In an Indian context, traditionally liberal gender roles and practice of divorce in adivasi communities could be perceived as a matter out of place in mainstream Hindu society, which is highly gender divided and in which divorce is not considered socially acceptable. Through

perceptions of adivasi culture and traditions as strange and different, the adivasis are subjected to "othering" in mainstream society. Meanings and classification of "uncommon things" usually obtain objective validity only after the classifications has been made (Said, 1978, p. 54). The majority has the power to classify the adivasis as backward and primitive, and this is perceived as the truth. In Hindu communities adivasis have been and still is often referred to as "vanavasi", which translates into "forest people" or "forest dweller" (Sundar, 2002). Thus, the adivasis are perceived as primitive people in the forest, as opposed to civilized people in urban areas. The Adivasis have been classified by the mainstream population as the primitive other to the modern self, and this is accepted as an objective truth. Gandhi described the "untouchables" as "Harijans", meaning "the children of God" (Mahar, 1960). Although Gandhi fought for the rights of the subaltern, the choice of the term "children" is problematic in a context of mobilization for change, as children are usually depended on adult supervision and guidance. The othering of adivasis could be exemplified by the statement of an adivasi teacher in Wayanad, who argued that discrimination based on caste still occur in schools. She stated:

> "Some parents do not like that there are tribal children in the classroom. […] and they claim that the tribal children obstruct the progress of their children, because the tribal children are backward and unintelligent" (Adivasi teacher, 06.09.13).

The teacher had experienced that some parents from non-adivasi communities expressed concern and disapproval of the presence of students from either adivasi or dalit communities in the classroom, and teacher argued that the parent's perceptions about caste eventually would influence their children.

Although there are many observable external factors causing poverty and marginalization of adivasis in Wayanad, perceptions about internal cultural elements and characteristics as the reasons for their low socioeconomic status prevail in the mainstream society. The perceptions of adivasis as lazy, primitive and backward are connected to discourses of "the other", which are also a part of the education system. Breidlid (2013) argues that elements from indigenous culture that are promoted in

81

school are often perceived as different and exotic, and the "exotification" of indigenous beliefs and practices may in turn contribute to the already existing view of the indigenous people as «the other». Kumar (1989) argues that when adivasis are recognized in textbooks in Indian schools, it is usually through a short introduction to adivasi customs and habits, and are to a great extent oriented towards forming stereotypes (p. 71).

The recognition of dance and song in schools in Wayanad could illustrate the discussion above. When asked about the recognition of adivasis knowledge, culture and traditions in education, several teachers pointed to the recognition of cultural elements such as dance and song. A teacher in an adivasi residential school with students from Paniya, Kattunaikka and Adiya communities emphasized that the students were participating in local "festivals" or talent shows arranged by the schools in the district. I visited one of these festivals, and watched the students from different schools perform traditional adivasi dance and song. The same day, in an interview with a headmaster in a teacher training college, he asked:

> «Did you see the dance where they move around in a circle? Actually they use earth as a drum. They move around just like the earth move around. They have three types of drums – a big, a middle, and a small. The drums will play over 100 different rhythms. We from the outside can only hear two or three rhythms or sounds, but there will be so many more. In the tribal communities all will participate in the dance. Children, adults, everyone." (Headmaster in teacher training institute, 03.09.13)

The headmaster emphasized how adivasi culture and traditions could be recognized in education by introducing the students to adivasi song and dance. However, the presentation of only song and dance could be somewhat superficial. According to Breidlid (2013) indigenous cultures are often introduced in school in a narrow and incomplete manner (p. 107). The underlying epistemological foundations of adivasi culture are thereby not necessarily addressed when focusing only on external cultural expressions such as dance and song.

## 5. 4. 1 A phenomenon of the past

Based on my findings from Wayanad I argue that common perceptions of adivasis could represent hidden tensions between the mainstream population and adivasis. As discussed earlier, the perceptions of adivasis as traditional and «backward» are connected to perceptions of adivasis as «the other», both in terms of their traditional lifestyle as the counterpart to the modern lifestyle of the mainstream society, and their culture and customs as strange and exotic. In a 6th standard textbook in Wayanad, there is a chapter about adivasis. Although current issues such as poverty and struggle in marginalized communities are addressed in the chapter, it is interesting to notice how the traditional forest and agricultural lifestyle of the adivasis is presented in past tense:

> "In ancient times agriculture must have been a collective effort; that is, all were involved in cultivation and yield were shared by all. As they constantly shifted their farm lands, they did not have the need to own any forest land. Their mode of cultivation were not harmful to the flora and fauna of the area either. More over, they did not have the habit of producing anything more than what was needed"
> (6th standard textbook, 2008, p. 26)

Further, the textbook describes adivasi building teqniques, and then suggests that the students reflect on different ways of constructing houses:

> «These huts were weather friendly; extreme heat or extreme cold were not felt inside. Since the raw material were locally available, repair and construction was easy. All the elders were experts in house construction».
> (6th standard textbook, 2008, p. 26)

> «You have read about the house construction methods of the tribals. Now, compare it with the modern methods of constructing houses».
> (6th standard textbook, 2008, p. 26)

It is encouraging that the chapter includes adivasi agricultural and building techniques, and the sustainability of such techniques. The local adaption of the adivasi huts could perhaps lead to a classroom discussion about adivasi connection to the local area, and

the relationship between people in Wayanad and nature. However, the adivasi huts are described as a phenomenon of the past, although many adivasis still live in huts similar to the description above. The text encourages students to compare adivasi house construction to modern methods of constructing houses, and implicitly states that the adivasi construction methods is passé.

Based on my findings from Wayanad my argument is that that the development discourse of adivasis as traditional people who need to adapt to the modern world is well founded in common perceptions in the mainstream society. A social activist I interviewed pointed to the adivasi traditional lifestyle as hunters and gatherers as the first form of social human organization, and that they eventually will move on to become agriculturalists.

> «You see, take the paniyas, they are on a different stage in human evolution. They have not reach the stage of agriculture. The paniyas are still in the stage of collecting food directly from the forest. Today, however, this lifestyle is difficult, if not impossible.'' (Social activist, 01.09.13)

According to her, this is the "natural" way of progression for the human race. (Use Rostow. One sentence) I argue that this view is based on a Western linear perception of history and development. Tucker (1999) argues that the notion of "development" is a specifically Western myth that globally is accepted as something natural (p. 2). A myth that is based on the ideas of modernization theory of so called "traditional cultures" as static and fixed. Perceptions of traditional adivasi culture and traditions as stagnated in a different time present themselves both in government policies, in the media, statements by non-adivasis in Wayanad, and in education.

According to informants, adivasis are sometimes perceived as lazy in the mainstream society. The perceptions of laziness in adivasi communities are not only connected to labor, but also to educational attainment in adivasi communities. Sundar (2012) argues that the lack of educational development in adivasi communities are often understood as a consequence of adivasi reluctance to learn (p. 240). A teacher in an adivasi residential

84

school argued that many adivasi students drop out of school because they would rather stay at home and play. She stated:

> «They live in the forrest. They like to climb the trees and to swim in the river. So they want to be home. At home they can do what they want.»
> (Teacher in adivasi residential school, 26.08.13)

When adivasi communities are described either as "backward" and "primitive" in school, or adivasi culture and customs are presented as strange and exotic, it could cause a feeling of inferiority and shame towards one's identity. The disparity between home and school is the topic for the next section, in which I will explore how the educational neglect of adivasi history, traditions and culture affect the process of identity construction in adivasi communities. I will discuss the effects of not recognizing indigenous knowledges, culture and history in education, and how othering of indigenous peoples could cause alienation of students from adivasi communities in education.

## 5. 6 Identity construction in adivasi communities

> «Economic and political control can never be complete or effective without mental control. To control a people's culture is to control their tools of self-definition in relationship to others» (Ngugi, 1986, p. 16).

In this section I will explore the connection between the recognition of indigenous knowledges and identity construction of adivasi students. What is the possible effects of neglect of indigenous knowledges in education? How does the perceptions of adivasis as "the other" affect identity construction in adivasi communities? The official approach to development in adivasi communities is founded on the perception of adivasis as socially, economically and politically excluded from the rest of society. However, as Xaxa and Nathan (2012) point out, the marginalization of adivasi communities in India could be explained not necessarily by exclusion, but rather by a form of adverse inclusion. An adverse inclusion that entails the inclusion of the minority adivasi

85

population into the majority, mainstream society, but without benefit from the inclusion in terms of social, cultural, linguistic, or political recognition. In this section I argue that inclusion of adivasis into public primary education does not necessarily benefit adivasi communities in Wayanad, because their knowledges, history, culture and languages are not recognized.

As mentioned in the Chapter 4, Cummins (2000) explains academic difficulties in marginalized groups using the terms "*illiteracy of resistance*" and "*illiteracy of oppression*". Based on my findings, I argue that «*illiteracy of oppression*» is most useful in the context of adivasis in Wayanad, because of the assimilation processes undergone in the district aimed at integrating the adivasi population into mainstream society. In the past, children from adivasi or Dalit communities were not allowed in the classroom, and later, when they did get access to the classroom, they were expected to sit in the back. During a visit to a primary school in Wayanad, one of the teachers argued that it often still occurs that students from marginalized communities sit together in the back of the classroom, hiding from the teacher and the other students. The statement was supported by other teachers in Wayanad. The children do not necessarily experience educational difficulties because their communities distance themselves from formal education. Rather they have been subjected to discrimination and oppression, which affect the learning process. Moreover, the curriculum is based on hegemonic foreign epistemologies in the majority population, which affect identity construction in adivasi communities.

Breidlid (2013) points to how students from indigenous communities often bring with them knowledges into the classroom which are epistemologically different than the knowledges valued and taught in the curriculum (p. 55). Similarily, Ngugi (1986) points to the lack of relationship between the indigenous student's written world in school, and the world and language of his or her's home and community (p. 17). Hence, students from indigenous communities experience not just physical, but also epistemological border-crossing between home and school. A social activist and former teacher in Wayanad stated:

«They come home and have this one experience, and they go to school and experience something different. This is difficult for them”
(Social activist, 25.08.13).

Culture can be defined as *«...a historically created system of meaning and significance...»* (Parekh 2006: 143). Hence, the cultural knowledge adivasi students have attained from their communities offers them meaning and significance. However, those meanings are not necessarily valued and recognized in education. According to Breidlid (2013) the lack of recognition of indigenous knowledges in education could cause an experience of alienation in students from indigenous communities (p. 55). The argument is supported by findings from Wayanad. As discussed above, adivasi knowledges, culture and languages are hardly recognized in public primary education in Wayanad, and when it is recognized it is through mainstream perceptions about adivasis as primitive, backward people in need for development and inclusion into modern society.

According to findings from interviews in Wayanad, many students from adivasi communities express a desire for a modern way of life. A headmaster in a teacher training institute argued:

«I am very interested in these things (adivasi knowledge and culture). But sometimes tribal students will ask me: Why do you always talk about tribal language and culture. We just want to learn English. Because of this the tribals are actually extinct. Paniyas are extinct»
(Headmaster in teacher training institute, 03.09.13)

The headmaster argued that adivasi students today often want to distance themselves from their adivasi identity. His statement were supported by other informants who claimed that the adivasis will probably be extinct in the future. A teacher in a primary school situated in a Kattunaikka village argued:

"Actually, these children do not see any value in their traditions. This I have observed in

87

the last few years. I have been working here for 13 years and I can see a difference. Also, today many tribal children do not have traditional tribal names, but Hindu names."

(Teacher in adivasi school, 07.09.13)

Ngugi (1986) argues that the most important area of domination during colonialism was: "(...) *the mental universe of the colonized, the control, through culture, of how people perceived themselves and their relationship to the world*" (p. 16). This could be connected to Gramsci's concept of hegemony, and how hegemony is maintained by establishing the epistemologies of the ruling class as "the truth", which are perceived as "natural". Adivasi students are subjected to an educational reality where adivasi culture and knowledges are presented as primitive, backward and subordinated to mainstream epistemologies. This might cause a feeling of shame towards one's identity as adivasi. Taylor (1994) argues from a liberal and identity-centered point of view that because our identity to an extent is shaped by the recognition of others, when people are exposed to mis-recognition from others it can cause real damage (p. 25).

A headmaster in a teacher training college in Wayanad mentioned that a few years back the institution arranged a special teacher training course exclusively for teachers from adivasi communities. He argued that the purpose of the course was to educate adivasi teachers to work in schools where the majority of students come from adivasi communities. However, after completing the program, almost all of the 40 adivasi teachers chose employment in regular schools with a student base mostly from other communities. A possible explanation for why the teachers chose to work in regular schools were given by a social activist, who argued that if someone from an adivasi community has gone through the stages of formal education, he or she has lost the connection to the adivasi community, and does not want to be associated with his or hers adivasi background. At one occasion I was told that one of the teachers participating in my research project had expressed a wish to marry a woman from a non-adivasi community. He was from the Paniya community, but preferred not to marry someone from within an adivasi community. According to the informant who told me about this, the teacher wanted to distance himself from his adivasi background by

88

marrying outside of his community. A social activist explained that it happens that educated adivasis are alienated from their communities. She stated:

> «It also happens that when people from tribal communities do get educated they feel alienated in their own communities."
> (Social activist, 01.09.13)

As Ngugi (1986) argues in an African context, the colonial child was made to see both the world and him- or herself through the eyes of the colonizers (p. 17). The assimilation of adivasis into mainstream society is connected to development discourses of exclusion and inclusion. Sundar (2002) argues that when adivasi children are sent to school, especially when they attend residential schools, they lose the connection to their home communities and the practices and knowledges found in these communities (p. 380). Her argument is supported by a social activist in Wayanad who stated that:

> "When they come back to their own communities it sometimes happens that people will not talk to them. Maybe because of respect, or maybe because of inferiority complexes.»
> (Social activist, 01.09.13)

Moreover, instead of articulating the interests of the marginalized, many educated adivasis reject their adivasi past, and promote the hegemonic world views of the majority population. This could be linked to Gramsci's concept of hegemony and *organic intellectuals* in terms of the role of educated adivasis in contributing to development in adivasi communities. Organic intellectuals are intellectuals who have emerged from and could have the ability to speak on behalf of a social group, assumed they still are closely tied to this particular social group (Fontanta, 2002, p. 27). However, in India adivasis are made to see the world and themselves from the perspective of the mainstream Hindu population, who in turn is influenced by Western ideas of modernization. If the adivasis are percieved and presented in education as traditional, primitive and backward, as opposed to the modern, Hindu population, it affects the identity construction of the students. Thereby, teachers from adivasi

89

communities are more likely to serve as intellectuals for the mainstream, hegemonic epistemology.

Whether or not adivasi knowledges are recognized in primary education in Wayanad affect the identity construction of adivasi students. Hence, the actual *content* of indigenous knowledges, such as particular rituals, stories, and world views, is important, because it is recognizable to students and does not create the alienating feeling experienced in the encounter with a foreign epistemology. However, since the term "indigenous" is itself a contested and problematic concept, some scholars argue that it is not necessarily what indigenous knowledges *contain* that is important, but rather emphasize the *political* significance of indigenous recognition ot bring about social change in adivasi communities. This is important in relation to education, because if "indigenous" is merely a political category, why should adivasi knowledges, history, culture and languages be recognized in education?

## 5. 7 Indigenous knowledges: Substantial content?

Some scholars who have done extensive research in adivasi communities in India, argue that the actual content of indigenous knowledges is not necessarily important (Steur, 2011, Sundar, 2002). They are critical as to whether different adivasi communities experience a shared identity with other adivasi communities. As mentioned in the context chapter, there are many different communities defined as adviasi, with different histories, traditions and customs. Thereby, it could be problematic to place these communities under the label of adivasi. Instead these scholars argue for an understanding of adivasi not as a term of actual content, but rather as a political category. As mentioned in Chapter 4, Sundar (2002) argues that the actual content of indigenous knowledges is not as important as the political and social agenda in which particular knowledges are a part of (p. 381). From this perspective, the term adivasi is a beneficial political category in India, because it has the possibility of mobilizing and unifying many different groups of people. This could be supported by my findings from Wayanad, the Kurumas and the Paniyas are both under the adivasi label, but the Kurumas do not necessarily experience any connection to Panyias although they are

both identified as adivasis.

Steur (2011) is critical to what she describes as the "culturalist turn" that activists has followed when encouraging cultural recognition and sovereignty of indigenous peoples (p. 92). She also points to how the global discourse of the recognition of indigenous peoples is hegemonic in the sense that it defines and encourages what is allowed to say or not within the discourse. Further, she is critical to how the adivasis in India have been subsumed into the same rhetoric as the Hindu nationalist movement, in terms of claims of indigenous status and cultural recognition as the original inhabitants of the South Asian continent.

> "As the general frame of indigenism undoubtedly has a tendency towards reinforcing cultural stereotypes and pushing forward legally exclusivist solutions, it is all the more important to consider the contradictions and tensions within the global field of indigenism and to pay due attention to the more subaltern interpretations of indigenist politics» (Steur, 2011, p. 107).

When discussing indigenous knowledges, it is often from a minority-majority perspective where the hegemony of either a globalized Western knowledge or hegemonic epistemologies in the majority society within a nation state, is emphasized. However, as Steur (2011) points out, the global indigenist discourse might it self be hegemonic, deciding what is and what is not articulated about indigenous peoples and knowledges. When asked about the recognition of indigenous knowledges in education, a social activist in Wayanad criticized what Steur (2011) terms the "culturalist turn" of activists, and argued:

> «Yes, it [indigenous knowledges] is important, but what is the point of value their culture and traditions if they don't have land or political power? This would only be very cosmetic, right?»
> (Social activist, 30.08.13)

The argument was supported by a teacher informant who stated that:

> «I think access to land is more important than to include adivasi culture in education.»
> (Paniya teacher in regular school, 05.09.13)

Both the social activist and the teacher pointed to the situation of many adivasis living in poverty in villages, without proper access to basic resources such as water and food. As mentioned in the context chapter, Kerala has a strong socialist history, and the arguments expressed by the informants are most likely influenced by socialism. From a classic socialist perspective, change in society are caused by change in the base, which would entail change in property relations. Although the superstructure influence the base, the base predominates the superstructure (Gillborn & Youdell, 2009). Hence, a change of the social situation in adivasi communities could only happen if adivasis there were a change in property relations (base) and adivasis gained access to land. From this perspective, substantial change in adivasi communities does not happen by change in educational institutions (superstructure). Rather, according to my informants, social change will be brought about if adivasis get access to land (base). The arguments made by both Sundar (2002) and Steur (2011) are interesting and bring about reflections on the meaning of the concepts of indigenous and indigenous knowledges. From this perspective, the content of indigenous knowledges is not important. What is important is the *political value* of the term indigenous or adivasi. This perspective questions the importance of recognition of indigenous knowledges in education. If indigenous is "only" a political category without any real substance, is it then important to recognize indigenous knowledges in education?

Based on my findings from Wayanad, I argue that the somewhat one-sided focus on indigenous as a political category without important content, is problematic in an educational context for at least three reasons: The importance identity construction in education, the role of education in development and change in marginalized communities, and the possible contribution of indigenous knowledges to sustainable development. In previous sections I have addressed the importance of recognition of indigenous knowledges in relation to identity construction and to prevent alienation of

adivasi students in school, and how this affect educational attainment in adivasi communities. In the next sections I will discuss the two other objections I have to the perspectives presented by Steur (2011), Kjosavik () and Sundar (2002), namely the importance of education in social change, and the connection between indigenous knowledges and sustainability.

## 5. 8 Education and social change

It is well established in the global discourse of education that education is closely linked with development. The World Bank has stated that:

> "Education is fundamental to development and growth [...] The human mind makes possible all other development achievements, from health advances and agricultural innovation to infrastructure construction and private sector growth development and education is connected."
> (World Bank – Learning for All, 2011)

The second Millennium Development Goal is to ensure primary education for all children in the world. Hence, it is international agreement about the importance of education in development. In the context of adivasis in Wayanad, education could be an important arena for social change. In the previous section I presented arguments from both scholars and informants who emphasize land rights and political and economic power as the most significant arena for change, which is in line with a classical socialist outlook. Tucker (1999) is critical to the undermining of the cultural sphere in development discourses and argues that: "*In development studies, culture has tended to be regarded as something of an epiphenomenon, secondary in importance to the all-important economic and political domains* (p. 2). He rather points to the relationship between political, economic, and cultural spheres in society (p. 24). As Breidlid (2013) points out, securing basic property rights for indigenous people is inadequate without the protection of the knowledge base of these communities[13]. From a Gramscian point

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13 Breidlid's (2013) statement is based on the context of indigenous peoples in South America. However, the statement could be transferable to an Indian context, in which adivasis have experienced a similar treatment from the government and mainstream society as many indigenous peoples in South America.

of view, societal change could happen not just in the base, but also in the superstructure (Fontana, 2002). This means that social change could be brought about through change in ideas, perceptions and epistemologies. This could be further linked to the concept of discourse, and how discourses are dynamic and just as hegemony, hold the possibility of change. Hegemony is not absolute, but holds the possibility of counter hegemony (Fontana, 2002).

Moreover, to make students from marginalized, indigenous communities conscious of power structures in society and question established truths, could lead to comprehensive social change through the process of *"conscientization"* (Freire, 1972, p. 49). Through critical reflection and dialog the students will be able to uncover and recognize oppressing power structures in society. Once they have reflected on their situation they can take action to change the existing order. I argue that it should be possible to recognize marginalized groups, such as the adivasis, within KCF 2007 and primary education in Wayanad. KCF 2007 to a great extent promotes diversity and critical pedagogy, and suggests that students should be encouraged to engage critically in questioning established truths. According to the curriculum:

> «The education we envision should have the space for learners to engage in critical dialogue. The practice of passive listening has to be discarded and in its place learners need to become active participants in the process of constructing knowledge. They should view their experiences in a critical manner and should question all social evils." (KCF, 2007, p. 20)

The role of education as an arena for counter hegemonic activity could be connected to identity construction through recognition of indigenous knowledges and developing a sense of pride and confidence in adivasi students. According to Sundar (2002), although public education in India does to a great extent not recognize adivasi knowledges as valuable, education could be a space for people from marginalized communities to develop political networks. She points out that many adivasi political leaders met and established social and political networks during their stay in residential schools. However, based on the discussion so far in this chapter, I argue that as long as adivasi

94

history, language and knowledges are not recognized within education, maintaining or developing an adivasi identity are difficult. Moreover, the recognition of indigenous and adivasi knowledges in education could expand the area of identity construction within adivasi communities to involve the entire population and possibilities of a more sustainable future.

## 5. 8. 2 Sustainability

In the last two sections I have explored the importance of recognition of indigenous knowledges in education based on the arguments that education could contribute to development and social change, through critical pedagogy and teacher awareness. My third argument in connection with the status of the term indigenous is that the *actual content* of indigenous knowledges could be of interest, not just due to the importance of identity construction, but because within indigenous epistemologies there could exist knowledges connected to sustainability. This is mainly because of the epistemological connection to nature in indigenous communities. Although is is important not to romanticize the relationship between indigenous peoples and nature, in adivasi communities in Wayanad there have traditionally existed a more sustainable approach to agricultural activity, than that of the Western neoliberal, capitalistic epistemology. Thereby, the importance of recognition of indigenous knowledges in education is not just connected to identity construction and empowerment in marginalized communities, but also to the possibility of a more sustainable approach development.

The KCF 2007 points to the importance of an education that: "(...) *stands against the tendencies of a consumerist culture*» (p. 17). Although the vast majority of the Indian population could be placed within low income groups, the Indian middle class has experienced a notable growth since the early 1990s (Shridharan (2004). Varma (1999) argues that the Gandhian ideology of modesty and austerity and the socialism promoted by Nehru, have lost their former influence in the Indian population, and have been replaced by consumerism (p. 6). An informant and social activist in Wayanad pointed out that in recent years the portraying of Hindu Gods in India has developed from images of strong, well-buildt Gods, to chubby, smiling idols. He used the king celebrated in one of the most important markings in Kerala, the Onam harvest festival,

95

as an example of this change in imagery. According to him, the king Mahabali used to be portrayed as a strong warrior, but is today portrayed as a chubby, well fed man. The social activist argued that the change in religious imagery illustrates the changing attitudes towards consumption and what is perceived as a successful life in Kerala.

The consumerist tendencies are seen all over India, and the KCF 2007 acknowledges that environmental issues experienced in Kerala exeed the state borders:

> «Certainly, the problems that are faced by the Kerala society are not confined to Kerala alone. The causes and range of implications of these problems could be national or international. For instance, when there is a reference to an environmental issue in the state, there is every chance to widen the prospect of study to environmental issues at the global level.»
> (KCF 2007, p. 24)

Based on the curriculum framework, indigenous and local knowledges could be applied in education in connection with e.g. environmental issues. As Kincheloe and Steinberg (2008) points out: *"Indigenous knowledge is a rich social resource for any justice-related attempt to bring about social change"* (p. 136). This is in line with arguments made by what Sahasrabudhey (2002) terms "the alternative science movement", which is present both in the West and the South today (p. 10). The alternative science movement argues for the relationship between modern science and imperialism, and reject the notion of modern, Western science as "the only science". Rather it promotes alternatives to the Western hegemonic science to bring about social development (Sahasrabudhey, 2002, p. 10). Indigenous knowledges could represent such an alternative, because in contrast to the Western epistemology they do not perceive the relationship between human and nature as dualistic in that the human being is the ruler of nature (Breidlid, 2013, p. 23).

## 5. 9 Critical Multicultural Education

> "A major problem facing nation-states throughout the world is how to recognize and legitimize difference and yet constructing an overarching national identity that incorporates the voices, experiences, and hopes of the diverse groups that compose it" (Banks, 2009, p. 310).

As mentioned, the KCF 2007 is based on a multiculturalist approach to education, emphasizing the importance of recognition of diversity, while simultaneously establishing a sense of national identity in students. A society that "*values nationalism*" is the first point in KFC 2007's vision of the future society (p. 16). However, the balance between recognizing diversity while at the same time promoting unity is a continuing challenge for nation-states (Banks, 2009). In India this is particularly visible in states such as Odisha, in which some adivasi communities express hostility against the Indian government and have made claims of political autonomy in certain geographical areas (Kapoor, 2007). In Wayanad too, some adivasis, particularly within the Adiya community, wish to separate themselves from the Keralean state by occupying government land North East in the district. Thereby, to promote unity within the education system is not a straight-forward task. Neither is recognition of difference.

KFC 2007's predecessor, the DPEP (implemented in the late 1990s) was somewhat radical in terms of proposing a critical multicultural education aiming at empowering the marginalized sections of Keralean society. In Chapter 2 I mentioned the critique directed at the DPEP education policies in Kerala at the time of implementation. The critics did to a great extent concentrate on DPEP's promotion of so-called traditional practical skills, and their arguments could be summarized by the statement of one of my non-adivasi informants, who argued:

> "The DPEP was not meant for everyone. Why should my daughter learn how to make bowls of clay in school? How is this useful for her later in life? […] but for the tribal children it was good" (Social activist, 21.08.13).

As noted by my informant, the introduction of traditional skills in primary schools was well received among adivasi students. Both he and other informants argued that adivasi students in general possessed great practical skills and performed well in subjects such as art and physical education. However, to my informant, the inclusion of activities such as "bowl making" in education, meant that time spent on traditional practical skills associated with rural life in Kerala, would entail less time spent on learning "modern" theoretical and technical skills highly valued in society today. This could be connected to the critique of multicultural education as encouraging an essentialist approach to culture and diversity (May, 2009). Simply implementing traditional handicraft as a mandatory school subject does not in itself provide for an understanding and validation of traditional skills associated with marginalized communities. Moreover, it does not necessarily challenge social inequality and perceptions about some knowledges as more valuable than others.

Kincheloe & Steinberg (2008) point out that: "*Like reality itself, schools and classrooms are complex matrices of interactions, codes and signifiers in which both students and teachers are interlaced*" (p. 139). They encourage teachers to recognize and communicate that there is no one single way of perceiving the world. Hence, the Western way of teaching science, of making art, or writing history, is not the only way of conduct. When teachers value different perspectives and frames of reference in their teaching, they recognize the viewpoints of the marginalized (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2008, p. 139).

### 5. 9. 1 Teacher education

Because of the progressiveness of the KCF 2007 encouraging critical pedagogy, recognition of marginalized groups in society, and promoting diversity there should be possible to include recognition of indigenous knowledges in primary education in Wayanad. However, as a headmaster at a teacher training institution pointed out in relation to the implementation of the DPEP:

"This type of curriculum depends on resourceful teachers. However, many teachers were not prepared. They tried to teach what was in the textbooks, but the problem was that the textbooks did not have much content, and were just to be used as an inspiration for teachers and students to think outside the curriculum"
(Headmaster in teacher training college, 26.08.13).

According to statements from informants in Wayanad, the argument above could to a certain extent also apply for the KCF 2007. The recognition of adivasi knowledges in education depends not just on educational policies or the curriculum framework, but on the actual teaching in classrooms. Hence, the role of teacher training is crucial. As already discussed, most teachers in primary education in Wayanad are from non-adivasi communities. They do not necessarily have knowledges of adivasi languages, culture and epistemologies. In this context Freire's (1972) concept of dialog between teachers and students, or more accurate the notion of student-teachers and teacher-students, is useful.

According to Joshee & Sihra (2009), progress in the classrooms in terms of recognizing cultural diversity, depends on reform in the areas of assessment and teacher education (p. 433). The KCF 2007 too states that the role of the teacher is important in the implementation of the new curriculum. Dyer (2009) argues that there is a crisis in teacher education in India, due to low entry qualifications, and too much focus on learning subjects at the expense of pedagogic skills (p. 255). The KFC supports this statement by claiming that: "*Teachers are not equipped well to cope with the changes envisaged in the revised curriculum»* (p. 14). The curriculum emphasizes the importance of a total reform in teacher training, and that teacher education ought to be responsive to change (KCF 2007, p. 82). Some of my informants in Wayanad pointed to the role of teachers in connection to the recognition of indigenous knowledge in education. One of the headmasters argued:

«If the teacher is resourceful and creative this (indigenous knowledge) could be included. It could be included by using for instance tribal songs, literature or history.»

99

In a textbook used in social science in the 6<sup>th</sup> standard in government primary schools in Wayanad, there is a chapter about adivasis in Kerala. The chapter explores traditional forest and agricultural life of adivasis in Kerala, and points at the changes in their traditional lifestyle by the entering of settlers from the outside. The chapter also problematizes how forest areas have been transformed into reservations or used in the mining industry, and how this has affected the adivasis. However, my informants emphasized the importance of the particular teacher when teaching about adivasi history, culture and traditions. Not all teachers have knowledge about adivasi communities.

Earlier I argued against the understanding of the term indigenous as merely a political category in relation to land rights and political power. However, my intention is not to undermine the importance of access to land and political and economic power in adivasi communities. Rather, I argue for the importance of recognition of adivasi history, culture, traditions and knowledges, which to a great extent are connected to land rights. The issues addressed in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade textbook mentioned above, have the possibility of encouraging critical discussion in the classroom. One of the teachers I interviewed was from the Paniya community and had been teaching in an adivasi residential school. She argued:

> "When I was working at the residential school I would also teach about land issues, because of what happened at Muthunga."
> (Teacher in adivasi residential school, 06.09.13)

According to the teacher, the students at the time knew about the incident at Muthunga[14], and she chose to include adivasis and land issues when teaching about history in Wayanad. Thereby, current issues concerning adivasis could be recognized and included in education. Through an educational recognition of adivasi knowledges

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14 In 2003 political activists mobilized and occupied land in Muthunga Wildlife Sanctuary in Wayanad, as a protest against government land policies. The protest ended violently with the police killing one of the adivasi activists.

and history, students could develop an understanding both of adivasi cultural traits such as stories, dance and song, and how this is connected to land, and more specifically the local Wayanad area. Moreover, several teachers in Wayanad argued that teachers, especially in adivasi residential schools, made dictionaries in Malayalam and one of the local adivasi languages. One teacher stated that:

> «When teaching the alphabet it is important to teach it slow and steady. I have also made a dictionary for myself. I will use those words I know to explain things to them." (Teacher in single teacher school, 07.09.13)

Dyer (2009) points out that although the medium of instruction in government primary schools in India usually is in a regional language, and not the local adivasi language, many teachers are pragmatic (Dyer, 2009, p. 256). In Wayanad this means that although the medium of instruction in both regular and exclusively adivasi government schools is Malayalam, some teachers learn and uses some words in adivasi languages. According to the statements of teachers in Wayanad, indigenous knowledges in terms of *adivasi knowledges* are not recognized in primary education in Wayanad. Yet, several teachers were pragmatic in terms of both the content and language of teaching. As mentioned, some teachers pointed out the importance of recognizing the knowledges students already possesses. They particularly pointed out knowledges connected to natural resources and art. However, to provide a non-assimilating education that recognizes knowledges found in adivasi communities as equally valuable as knowledges found the majority mainstream society, depends on educational reform in all instances. However, to end this discussion on a positive note, the development of the KCF 2007 could be starting point for change.

# 6. 0 Final remarks

> "[...] adivasis have not been able to assert themselves politically as distinctly indigenous people, and therefore their languages and systems of knowledge remain marginal and in danger of obliteration from the formal education system" (Sundar, 2002, p. 381).

All over the world, indigenous ways of living have from a Western point of view been perceived to be primitive, irrational and superstitious. As discussed in the previous chapters, during colonial rule in India, *both* the Hindu population and the adivasis were considered to be primitive compared to the Western colonial masters. However, the mainstream Hindu population has simultaneously projected similar ideas about backwardness towards the minority adivasi population. As mentioned earlier, the perceptions of adivasis as "the other" are also found within the education system, in which adivasi knowledges are rarely recognized or superficially presented as exotic and strange. Based on my findings from Wayanad I have discussed how the lack of recognition of adivasi knowledges by the, both Hindu and Western influenced, education system, affects the educational attainment of adivasi students.

The KCF 2007 expresses a turn towards a more inclusive education; an educational system that recognizes and empowers marginalized groups in Kerala, including the adivasis. However, from the statements of informants, both teachers, headmasters, and social activists in Wayanad, it appears that indigenous knowledges are not recognized neither in the curriculum or in primary education in general, and if indigenous knowledges are recognized it is rather Hindu (Vedic) indigenous knowledges rather than adivasi knowledges. Moreover, there seem to be a disparity between the curriculum framework and the teachers; a disparity between the policy documents and the situation "on the ground". Yet, as discussed in the last section in the previous chapter, several teachers in Wayanad pointed out that they adjust the teaching in the classroom to meet the needs of adivasi students, by for instance learning some adivasi language or discussing social and political issues connected to land rights in the Wayanad area. If critical pedagogy promoted by the KCF 2007 are to be implemented in schools in Wayanad, teacher training seem to be one of the most important areas for reform. I have

touched upon the issue in this thesis, but a more thorough investigation of the relationship between the critical pedagogy in the curriculum framework and teacher education in Wayanad could be interesting for further research.

In the discussion of recognition of indigenous knowledges in education presented in this thesis, are to a great extent influenced by the tensions between modernity and tradition. I have argued that indigenous knowledges found in adivasi communities could contribute to a more holistic, sustainable approach to natural resources. However, my intention has not been to simply present indigenous knowledges as a solely sustainable alternative to a destructive Western knowledge system. Rather, I wanted to critically explore if or how the (lack of) recognition of adivasi knowledges in education are connected both to learning and identity construction in adivasis communities and moreover, to a more sustainable future for both humans and nature. I have wanted to go beyond common explanations for low educational attainment in adivasi communities, and explore the connections between the curriculum framework, language, culture and identity construction.

Education could be an arena for social change. The key formulation in the quote above is that the "[…] *adivasis have not been able to assert themselves*[...]". As discussed in the previous chapters, to change oppressive structures in society, manifested in education systems, there is a need for a change in consciousness; in the ideas. The role of education is thus to encourage students to critically unveil and challenge power structures in society; to recognize the existence of more than one way of knowing the world.

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# Appendices

## A. Reasons for dropout

Reasons for droping out of schools
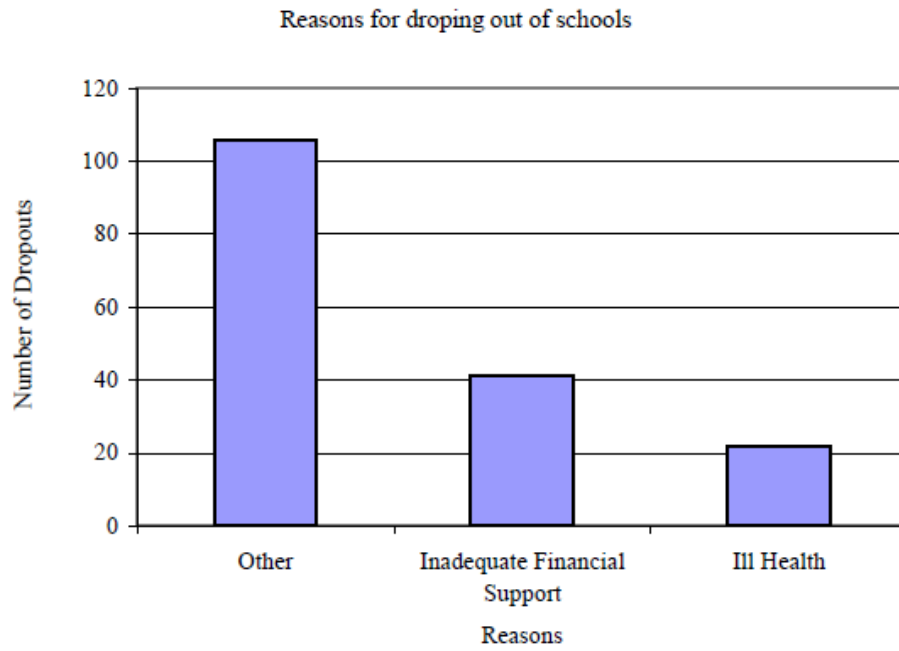


(Wayanad Initiative, 2006, p. 72)

## B. List of informants

Main informant and translator (male)

Adivasi teacher in regular school (1) (male)
Adivasi teacher in regular school (2) (female)
Non-adivasi teacher in regular school (male)

Adivasi teacher in adivasi school (female)
Non-adivasi teacher in adivasi school (1) (female)
Non-adivasi teacher in adivasi school (2) (female)
Non-adivasi teacher in adivasi school (3) (male)

Non-adivasi teacher in single teacher adivasi school (male)

Non-adivasi headmaster in adivasi school (1) (male)
Non-adivasi headmaster in adivasi school (2) (male)

Headmaster teacher training college (1) (male)
Headmaster teacher training college: (2) (male)

Non-adivasi teacher in regular (environmental) residential school (1) (male)
Non-adivasi teacher  in regular (environmental) residential school (2) (male)

Non-adivasi social activist (1) (female)
Non-adivasi social activist (2) (male)
Non-adivasi social activist (3) (male)

Founder of alternative adivasi school (1) (male)
Founder of alternative adivasi school (2) (female)
Former student in alternative adivasi school (1) (female)
Former student in alternative adivasi school (2) (male)

# C. Interview guides

**Interview guide teachers (adivasi)**
Age
Male/female
Education
Job: Where he/she have worked before, and how long has he/she been working at present school.

Are indigenous knowledges included in primary education in Wayanad?

Are adivasi culture, traditions and history included in primary education in Wayanad?

What do you think about the role of education to promote social change in poor communities?

Do you believe it is important to recognize indigenous knowledge and culture in public education?
Why/why not?

How was adivasi culture/traditions/knowledge/religion treated in school during your own education?

Did you experience any difficulties in school because of your adivasi background?

Have you learned about adivasi culture and religion from your parents/grandparents?

Will you teach your own children about adivasi traditions?

How do you think the curriculum used in public education recognizes adivasi knowledge, culture, traditions and religion?

Do you teach about adivasi knowledge and culture?


**Interview guide teachers (non-adivasi)**
Age
Male/female
Education
Job: Where he/she have worked before, and how long has he/she been working at present school.

Are indigenous knowledges included in primary education in Wayanad? (How?)

Are adivasi culture, traditions and history included in primary education in Wayanad? (How?)

116

What do you think about the role of education to promote social change in poor communities?

Do you believe it is important to recognize indigenous knowledge and culture in public education?
Why/why not?

Do you teach about adivasi knowledge and culture?

How was adivasi culture/traditions/knowledge/religion treated in school during your own education?

How do you think the curriculum used in public education recognizes adivasi knowledge, culture, traditions and religion?

Do you teach about adivasi knowledge and culture?


**Interview guide: Former students (adivasi)**
Age
Male/female
Education
Job

How was adivasi culture/traditions/knowledge/religion treated in school during your own education?

How was it to be adivasi in school?

Have you learned about adivasi culture and religion from your parents/grandparents?


**Interview guide social activists (non-adivasi)**
Age
Male/female
Education
Job

What do you think about the role of education to promote social change in poor communities?

Do you believe it is important to recognize indigenous knowledge and culture in public education?
Why/why not?

How was adivasi culture/traditions/knowledge/religion treated in school during your own education?

117