

OUT OF AFRICA: That India is an anthropological melting pot is well-documented. But did you know some Indians are from Africa? Mumbai-based photographer Ketaki Sheth came across an almost forgotten community in the forests of Gujarat in 2005 — the Sidis. Directly descended from Africa, the Sidis today are as Indian as we are.

Little is known about this community of some 70,000 people located mostly in Gujarat and Karnataka. A closed, endogamous and private community, studies suggest that their predecessors came into India as African slaves, soldiers, traders and even Muslim pilgrims since the 9th century. Today some members of the Sidi community, who have been categorised as a Scheduled Tribe, also live in Mumbai and Hyderabad. The only connection with their roots is through dance and music (known as Goma). The rest is essentially Indian.

Sheth, a graduate in photography from New York University, delved deep into their lives over five years, resulting in a photo-book titled *A Certain Grace: The Sidi-Indians of African Descent* [Photoink, Rs 1,500]. It's a collection of 88 black-and-white photographs. Sheth's works include two other photobooks, one on twins with the surname Patel located in India and Britain, the other on Mumbai.

