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## LIFE STYLE AMONG SIDDIS; WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO GARDOLLI-WADA IN HALIYAL TALUKA OF NORTH CANARA DISTRICT, KARNATAKA

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### Abstract:

*The vast population of the sub-continent of India is composed of different ethnic groups with diverse cultures and languages. But in spite of this diversity of cultures and languages the people of India through the vicissitudes of history have come to feel the unity of Indian nationhood. Siddis are people of African Negroes stock who settled in India from ancient times. Most of the Siddis were brought as slaves and a few came as traders. The Siddis were either brought to the island of Janjira as slaves or they had come on their own as traders by sly and devious means during 15th century. Here an attempt has been made, holistically to study lifestyle and socio-cultural organization of Siddis of Gardolli- Wada villages in Haliyal Taluka of North Canara district.*

### KEYWORDS:

Ethnic group, Culture, Texture, Kinship, Literacy, Monogamy, Custom.

### INTRODUCTION:

In the year 1489 an African disguised as a merchant obtained the permission of the chiefs of the island of Janjira on the west coast of India to land 300 boxes supposed to contain the valuable goods. But in reality each one of these boxes contained soldiers and by this ingenious trick the African took possession of Janjira Island and its part which was earlier known as Dand Rajapuri (Banaji, 1932: 418-493). The ruler of Bengal, Ruda-ud Din Barbak (1459-1474) possessed thousands of slaves who were subsequently expelled by king Ala-ud-Husain (1493-1519) and they migrated to Gujarat and the Deccan. While bringing Siddis to India, they were blind folded and dragged by horses all along till the ships in which they were carried. This is reason why, Siddis do not have any knowledge about their belonging.

They were kept in large cells inside the ships. Food was thrown on them and who ever tried to protest were taken out and were badly whipped. Ocean water was sprinkled on the injuries which gave heinous burning sensation due to salt content in water. During the journey Siddis were kept in large cells for long period of 3 to 4 months without food and proper ventilation. In this particular period those who died were thrown into sea water and remaining were brought to the coastal areas and sold to the rulers of India for slavery. The Siddis were sold for three "kurjodu" (of lower price) where as the horses were sold at 12 "kurjodu" during the trade. This shows the value of horses was more than Siddi's. Many Siddi women from North Canara district were brought as wives or concubines by the merchants. Others who migrated for the

purposes of trade or business in North Canara district were absorbed in India population.

Concentrated settlements of the Siddis are found mainly in the Western Ghats of the North Canara district and also in some parts of Belgaum and Dharwad district of Karnataka state. Siddis in Karnataka are mostly found in Ankola, Haliyal, Kalghatagi, Khanapur, Mundgod, Sirsi, Joida and Yellapur taluka. Total population of them all over Karnataka is 34,000 to 35,000. In Haliyal alone the population varies around 11,000 to 12,000 settled in small cluster of villages inside the forest. Majority of Christian and Muslim Siddis are found in 40 villages of Haliyal. Majority of Muslim Siddis are found in Sambrani of Haliyal taluka.

The total population of Siddis in Karwar district is around 30,000 and other places where Siddi settlements can be found are Dharwad, Mavinkoppa, Kalghatagi, Sulekatta, Sagmeru, Tandali, Domgolli, Bachwad, Junjurbe etc. In Mundagod and Yellapur we find all the three Siddi communities. In Sirsi and Ankola we find Hindu Siddi community.

Social differentiation among Siddis is relatively simple type, based usually upon sex, age and such occupational differences. Since men and women are kept apart from each other in domestic, agricultural, religious and political spheres of life, the difference between sexes gives rise to division of labour. Similarly children cannot participate in adults group and therefore age divisions are recognized. On the basis of age and sex there is a clear cut division of labour among Siddis. Siddis consider a man as rich or poor on the basis of land he possess. Thus a person having eight to fourteen acres of paddy field are considered rich among Siddis. Others having one to seven acres of land are considered to form middle class group. The families owning no land who are absolutely dependent on their labour form the poor section among Siddis.

## NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL STATUS

UNESCO (1978) organized a meeting of experts at HAITI where papers and reports were presented on "The African Slave Trade from 15th to 19th Century". discussion took place on the scale of slave trade in order to establish statistics about the population uprooted from Africa, effects of slave trade in Africa and also of the receiving countries on their social, political and economic development, ideological position in relation to religious and philosophical aspect, it also mentioned the abolition of slave trade particularly in Indian ocean and there after the new line of research for exchange of information, researcher and teachers.

When one sees an African Negro in the western chat, many questions crop up like who are these people? How did they come from their mother land Africa? And who brought them here? Jeanette Pinto (1992) has given a very readable and interesting narration about "Slavery in Portuguese India (1510-1842)" since the day the Portuguese acquired the Goa till slavery was legally abolished. She deals with slave traffic and the treatment meted to them by the Portuguese and the British. She has ably brought out the invisible human personality of the master and the slave and their sensitive interaction. Finally curtains on slavery was drawn on this drama of slave trade when the reigning monarch of Portugal and Britain signed the Anglo-Portuguese Act in 1942 abolishing and prohibiting slavery in all over their dominion.

Akhila Karnataka Siddi Vikas Sangha was established in 1982 and registered according to Bombay Act in 1984. Siddi community was considered as backward tribe (A) until then nobody knew that this tribe also existed in our state. In the year 2003 this tribe was considered as Scheduled Tribe by government. Karnataka government has recognized the service of the present president Mr. Dheeraj. Siddi and honored him with Valmiki Award recently in 2012. He is the first ever Siddi who has received Valmiki Award for his meritorious service to his community by Government of Karnataka.

In 1987 Siddi students were given opportunity to participate in sports by Karnataka government. Compared to others they were quite physically fit and good athletes due to which they established their identity in sports field. Further the Government of Karnataka introduced a sports project for the Siddis sportsmen. This project was only for the period of two years (1987 and 1988). The sports project was withdrawn by the government in 1995. The students who had taken the facilities of this project were recruited in government services such as Railways, Army and Police departments. Due to lack of education in Siddis they are unable to get recruited in government services. Government has introduced several schemes for uneducated Siddis to get settled in their life. Siddis have established four hostels in 1998 in Sambrani, Kirwatti, Mandrikere and Bulapur for children who were poor in education.

## THE STUDY:

The Siddis of Karnataka state have an interesting history because they were brought to India by Portuguese and other foreigners as Negro slaves from Africa from 14th to the 16th century. Today one finds that Siddis are divided into three endogamous groups in India, i.e.; Hindu, Muslim and Christian Siddis.

The present study aims to bring together as much information as possible from Siddis of Christian group of Gardolli-Wada villages from a socio cultural point of view. The study of Siddis will make us fully aware of the reality of the Siddis. With this purpose in mind a detailed survey was undertaken to cover Siddi families in Gardolli-Wada villages. A true and comprehensive picture of their way of life, socio economic conditions, socio cultural conditions, accommodation, religious and family life, kinship, literacy, and languages all this comes within the scope of this paper. The survey has achieved its objective by covering all the Siddi families of Gardolli-Wada. The information gained is from the various surveys supplemented by interviews and by personal observation

### **SIDDI SETTLEMENT**

Most of the Siddis in Karnataka state live in forested region. A few of them live in Dandeli and Haliyal. Among them Gardolli-Wada are the villages in forest of Haliyal situated 9 kms far from Kesarolli village (Panchayat place). They have their houses build on an elevation in the centre of their fields on or the edge of the forest where a clearing is made for rice cultivation. The total population of Gardolli is around 400 whereas Wada's population is 232 among this 100 families are settled in Gardolli and 60 in Wada. Out of the total number of Siddis (632) there are 352 males and 280 females. In forest regions of the undulating plateau we find the second type of settlements. Here houses are found in clusters. These types of settlements have great number of houses. Haliyal taluka has the best example for these types of settlements. The settlements are surrounded by paddy fields and forests. Almost all the houses of Siddis have kitchen gardens in the backyard.

### **PHYSICAL FEATURES**

The Siddis belong to the Negroid stock of east Africa. We can discern typical Negroid features in the majority of the Siddis. The Siddis are generally well built, sturdy, tall or short with a medium to strong physique. The average height is 165cms. Their dark black complexion of skin is very striking. Some have black brown and a few others have even brown colored hair. However a few have black brown and very occasionally brown colored hair too. The form of hair among Siddis is very characteristic. Most of them have woolly and fizzy hair which is known as helical hair. Very few have wavy hair. Some of the children born to the parents of whom one is from non Siddi community have wavy or straight hair. A majority of the Siddis have coarse texture of hair. Others have medium or fine texture of hair. Most of the Siddi men have slight beard and moustache and a majority of them have this body hair. The Siddis usually have dark brown color of the eyes. A few have black eyes or light brown eyes. Features of the nose are a typically characteristic finding. Majority of the Siddis have medium type of nasal depression and few have prominently depressed nose. Most of the Siddis have concave convex nasal bridge.

### **RELIGION AND LANGUAGE**

The people of the Gardolli-Wada belong to Christian Community. Because of the presence of Siddis the area has certain racial and ethnic importance. There are around 160 Christian families living in Gardolli-Wada. Of the three religious groups, strong religious groups, strong religious identity is observed among the Christian and Muslim Siddis. Christian Siddis belong to the Catholic Church.

The most important means for transmission of culture is language. The original language of the Siddis is "Swahili" or one of the languages spoken on eastern coast of Africa. The original language of the Siddis has died out. The Christian Siddis speak Kannada, Konkani and Marathi or all three of them. Due to education and influence of western culture they have also learnt a little bit of English. It was the practice of the Portuguese to convert the slaves captured in Africa before they loaded them on ships to be sold in the colonies.

All the Siddis are familiar with the regional language Kannada. The languages spoken in Haliyal area: the Muslim Siddis speak Urdu and Kannada while Christian Siddis speak Konkani and Kannada. In brief they have adopted the language and culture of the local dominant regional group. (Lobo C.H, 1984)

### **FAMILY**

The Siddi family constitutes a core unit of their social organization, from which other relations evolve. The household consists of husband, wife and unmarried children. Old parents are also part of the family. The elder male member is the main bread earner of the family. The head of the family works on the land owned or rented by him and other members of his family help him in the work. A majority of the

families are nuclear families which is a unique feature of Siddis. A son on getting married establishes his own household, as the Siddis feel that it is better to separate when relations are going good rather than separate after a bitter encounter. The house from where a person separates is called a 'Ghar' and the new house is called as 'Bidhar'. The Ghar is considered to be a sacred place where the family 'Hiriyaru' (elders) resides and is worshipped by the eldest agnate staying in the house; male superiority persists among the Siddis. The male head of family also known as the 'Buddhiwanta' (intelligent) makes all important decisions regarding family matters and settles disputes. The wife is consulted in economic matters within the family. Elders of the family and leaders of a settlement are called as 'Jante'. The household property is divided equally among the agnates (Lobo C.H, 1984).

#### Kinship

Various relationships among the Siddis are identified by a common kinship nomenclature known as "Sumbandha" which is used mainly amongst the local Hindu Siddis. The kinship terminologies are:

- a)Maneyavaru: indicates members of a single lineage which consists of three generations including "Hiriyaru" the dead parents of the ego, his parents, his brothers, his own and brother's children. The females are totally excluded from this lineage (which is counted along the male generation i.e. patriarchal).
- b)Bandhugalu: are all the recognized paternal kin. It is an extension of the Maneyavaru relationship. The split house arising out of death of every head of a household constitutes Bandhugalu.
- c)Balagadavaru: includes all recognized maternal kin i.e. mother's sisters and their children, mother's brothers and their children too.
- d)Nentru: are the newly contracted affinal relations. In course of time they will become Balagadavaru. (Palakshappa I.C, 1976).

#### FOOD PATTERN

The Siddis of Gardolli-Wada eat both vegetarian and non vegetarian food. The sacrificed animals, slaughtered animals and animals got from hunting give them nourishing non-vegetarian food. The vegetarian staple food – Jowar roti, chapatti, Akki roti, rice, dhal and Sambar is common to all Siddi families. Usually they consume vegetables which they cultivate in their farms or else they get them from city market. Pork is also eaten by these Christian Siddi. However, non-vegetarian food is considered festival food for certain special occasions and on Sundays. They also prepare Holige, Biscuit, Cake, fish and other non- vegetarian food during Christmas. Commonly beef, chicken, fish, mutton are their favorite non vegetarian food. They hunt rabbits and catch fish in their leisure time. They consume alcohol sometimes to release their fatigue. Usually they have Akki roti as breakfast with pulses, chutney and vegetables, for lunch and dinner they usually have rice, Sambar, Roti with some pulses.

During rainy season they grow vegetables like cucumber, Ladies finger, pumpkin, tomato, chilly and other vegetables in their garden. During other seasons they purchase from market. They have the habit of consuming betel nuts, betel leaves and tobacco.

They also use milk and butter milk in their food. They purchase fish occasionally from market. They occasionally have fruits like banana, mangoes or papaya. From October to January they use rice and from January to may they use Ragi. June to September they use Jowar. During winter they collect honey from the forests for their consumption.

#### RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES

The Siddis of all the three religions celebrate festivals which are pertaining to their own religion by their local counterparts. The special occasions which the Siddis observe are mainly of many rituals. At such functions the relatives and friends assemble and sing songs and dance as a mark of rejoice. The dance and songs are of 3 kinds Sigmu, Phoogdi and Daman.

- Sigmu: these are usually performed by the catholic Siddis. Though it was a practice to perform these dances during the Hindu festival on Holi and other beginning of the Lenten seasons i.e. late February or early march.

- Phoogdi: these are performed by Siddi women as part of religion. The dance is controlled by a woman leader who sings a verse of a song and rest of the women follow.

- Daman: these are popular dances which are performed on festivals and weekends. Daman is a drum which is long and cylindrical. The two ends are covered by deer skin and this is beaten while squatting on the ground.

## Marriage

Marriage plays a dominant role in developing the social organization of any society. Siddis consider marriage as an obligation bestowed upon them by the elders. Most of the boys marry by the age of 23 years and girls by 19 years. Early marriage has been gradually reducing now. Child marriage is not practiced among the Siddis. Monogamy is a prevalent type of marriage among Hindu and Christian Siddis. However polygamy is permitted among Muslim Siddis. In selecting a mate greater preference is given to a close relative. Marriages are preferably arranged with a sister's daughter, paternal aunt and maternal uncle's daughter. The Patrilineal family's religion is taken as the religion of the newly married. The custom of dowry is not practiced here. A day before the marriage the bridegroom and bride is smeared with turmeric paste and is given a bath. The time and date of the marriage is fixed by the Father of the church, usually they gather in the church around 10 Am on the date decided by the Father. But during the 40 days of fasting till Good Friday no marriages take place. No remarriages of widows and widower is allowed among them. There have been instances of inter caste marriages also among Siddis, between Siddis and local people.

## Funeral and Ancestor Worship:

The Christian dead are buried. No cooking is done in the house when death occurs. The grave where the dead body is to be buried is sprinkled with holy water by the priest and incense sticks are burnt. The corpse is carried to this place in a wooden coffin and buried.

The one factor which binds the Siddis, irrespective of their religion is the Hiriyaaru or ancestor worship. They are regarded as witnesses to be consulted by the family in all its concerns. On occasions like births, marriages and deaths the ancestors are invoked. The home is organized around Hiriyaaru, the spirits of departed parents. It signifies a remembrance of the parents, thanking them for their care over several years and also entreating them to keep a vigil over the family in future. It is obligatory for all relatives to attend the function, thus renewing kinship relations. A coconut is placed on a pedestal as a symbol of the ancestor. They are worshipped once a year usually during the Navaratri festival in November. If this is not possible for some reason, it may also be performed in April-May during the Holi. These obviously are not meant to coincide with the dates of parents deaths. On this fixed day all the family and relatives assemble in the ancestral house. The old coconut is replaced by a new coconut. A set of new clothes is placed below the pedestal. The new coconut is covered with flowers after the worship and old coconut is broken and its pieces are distributed to all.

## EDUCATION PATTERN

Earlier Siddis did not like to give education to their children beyond primary level. Higher education did not attract them. But nowadays scene is quite different. There are countable Siddi students who are studying Law, BBA, BCA and many professional courses. But this number is not good enough to entitle Siddis as fully literate. Poverty, age old customs, indifference and lack of school facilities are some of the main causes for their educational backwardness.

**Table 1: Showing Literacy level of Gardolli-Wada**

	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL	PERCENTAGE
<b>LITERACY</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>19.30 %</b>
<b>ILLITERACY</b>	<b>280</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>510</b>	<b>80.70 %</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>352</b>	<b>280</b>	<b>632</b>	<b>100 %</b>

Table 1 shows the literacy level of Gardolli- Wada. 72 Males and 50 Females are literate among total 632 populations i.e. only 19.30 % of the total population is literate.



The percentage rate of literacy among the Siddis in Karnataka state reveals the backwardness of Siddis. The low level of literacy reveals that they have not been able to get into pursuits other than agriculture. There is a tendency nowadays of more and more sending their children to school. A voluntary organization called Karnataka rural development corporation is offering some service in this direction by opening up kindergarten schools in remote villages. Educational backwardness is due to their spread of settlements which are found in remote villages in the forest. Balwadi and Anganwadi are also established by the government and the churches. The schools provide food and clothes and tuition for the children attending them. Some of the children attend primary schools which are free, but as the standards go on increasing the number of dropouts also goes on increasing. By the time they reach 10th standard only a very few Siddi children remain in school. About four or five students attend college. The importance of education is not realized by the Siddis as they value the extra hands available for agricultural work, as the children of age 8 or 9 can add significantly to the income of the family.

We confronted the School teacher of Wada and 19 kids as well. They were co-operative and provided all the information. The school teacher Mr. Gopal H.R.A provided me all the information regarding their syllabus, teaching method etc. The school starts at 9.30am to 4.30 pm and we can find classes till 5th standard only. After the completion of 5th standard they go to Kesarolli and Haliyal for further study. Teacher says that the strength of the students is always full because they don't have any other option other than going to school like the other kids of cities. We interacted with kids and they were very sweet to talk to. They were frank and answered the questions without hesitation.

### CONCLUDING SUGGESTIONS

Thus we have a backward tribe in Karnataka state that migrated to India with a different racial background and settled here since ancient times. Many questions, regarding the Siddis about their origin, migration, religion, socio economic condition etc have been discussed in this paper. We have tried to depict their origin, religion, migration, social life of the Siddis in Karnataka. The term applied to this racial group goes by several names commonly they are called as Siddis. The different variations of this term found in various documents of the British and Portuguese Government and in Gazetteers are Siddis, Siddee, Siddy, Suddee, and Suddie. This group is also known as Habsis, Kaphris, Mulator, Bilas, Moors, Negroes and Siddique.

In this way the original African racial group living in Karnataka state can be very easily differentiated from the rest of the groups on the basis of their physical appearance. The contacts between India and Africa are from ancient times. Along with the Negroes animals, plants and materials have been brought to India.

The present day Siddis of Karnataka are concentrated in North Canara district. However, they are also found in Dharwad and Belgaum district of Karnataka. The total population of Siddis is Thirty Five Thousand distributed in eight taluka. Among them there are Hindu families, Muslim and Christian families. The State and Central Government has recognized the Siddis as a backward tribe and must take the necessary steps to uplift them. Following are some of the suggestions which we have come across during the study.

- Mere provision of opportunities offered by the government to the weaker sections in general cannot be availed of by the Siddis. At present they are not in a position to profit from those privileges due to very many reasons. The government should make special provision for this community.
- Electricity and Water facility are the need of every human being so the government has to take major steps on these issues.
- Roads, Bridges, Postal Services, and Telecommunication should be provided at least for the main villages to bring about effective means of communication.
- After providing Blocks, Communication, Roads and Postal facilities, they should be provided with educational and health facilities.
- In connection with regularizing land tenure (i.e. encroachment land) the agriculture laborer should be provided with lands for cultivation.
- In order to raise per capita income small-scale industries, cottage industries i.e. weaving, bee-keeping cane industries, etc. must be introduced in the Siddis areas of Karnataka.
- Boys and girls passing out primary school must be encouraged and given incentives to pursue further study. Hostels, clothes, books and monetary help should be provided to them

Thus in this study of Siddis we have tried to show that Siddis are a Negroid tribe living in Karnataka state. They should be helped to develop with the other tribes, since they are also nationals just like Nagas are Indian migrant races which lead a tribal life having recognized as Scheduled tribes in India. It is true that anthropologically we know that Indians since ancient times are a Dravidian race, and according



to India's constitution no person or a group can be discriminated on the basis of race, caste, creed, color and religion. The Siddis are not only a backward Negroid tribe in India but they are a minority. Therefore they need a great help from the Welfare agencies and Government for their advancement.

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