

Siddis And Their Organisations or Associations

(With reference to the North Kanara District of Karnataka State, India.)

By Dr. R. S. Hiremath

Main Road, Near Dyamavva Temple, At&Post: Kelageri, Tq.& Dist. Dharwad-580007, Karnataka State, India.

KEY WORDS:

Association, Agriculture, Budivant, Business, Concentrate, Communication, Democratically, Features, Farming, Integral, Khajandar, Kolkar Labour, Occupation, Organisation, Pancharu, Progress, Porters, Regional, Settlement, Slaves, Structure, Woodcutters.

Concentrated settlements of the Siddis are found mainly in the western Ghats of the North Kanara District and also in some part of Belgaum and Dharwad District of Karnataka State, India. The Siddis can be identified as distinct group totally different in features from the rest of the people living in the area. The Siddis have come from different countries of East Africa at different periods from 14th century to the 16th century (as shown in map no. 1). Most of them were brought as slaves and a few came as traders. Their occupations are either agricultural labour or farming. Very few do private business or are employed in service.

The African negroes in India go by several names. Commonly they are called Siddis. Different variations of this term are found in various documents and gazetteers of the British, Portuguese and Indian. The name used in Siddie with these variant: Siddy, Siddee, Siddy, Seydee, Suddee, Suddie, Moors, Khapres, Maltoos and Negroes.

**Pages 2 to 5 in the paper contain maps
(not included in this document)**

There are three religious groups viz. Hindu, Muslim and Christian Siddis. (Slide No. 1 shows three religious groups, Muslim Siddis, Slide No.2, Christian Siddis, Slide No.3, Hindu Siddis, Slide No.4) Apart from different religio-cultural practices, all Siddis show some similarities in observing of life-cycle rituals for eg. belief in heaven, hell and rebirth etc. About their political and social organisations are special features distinct from those of other people in the same region. The settlement of disputes among the Siddis and other family affairs are found. This pattern is very close to the segmentary type of organisation of a typical tribal people. Siddis in Karnataka State are mostly found in Ankola, Haliyal, Joida, Kalaghatagi, Khanapur, Mundagod, Sirasi and Yellapur taluka (As shown in the Map No. 1.)

The Hindu Siddis have names common to the Hindu castes for eg.

1. Nagappa Bimappa Siddi
2. Ganapati Narayan Siddi
3. Somappa Ganapati Siddi
4. Krishna Ganapa Siddi
5. Ramappa Tammappa Siddi

The Muslim Siddis have the usual Islamic names for eg.

1. Peersab Amansab Siddi
2. Modinsab Fatisab Siddi
3. Dadasab Fakirsab Siddi
4. Mohamadsab Fakirsab Siddi
5. Dausab Dastagirsab Siddi

The Christian Siddis names are of the biblical origin like the names of the Portuguese. Sometimes the mixed type of names have also found among them for eg.

1. Anthoni Kastus Siddi
2. Satlin Gustin Siddi

3. Steavan Jhon Siddi
4. Michel Francis Siddi
5. Siman Cacilia Siddi

Table No. 1.

RELIGION FAMILY AND SEXWISE POPULATION OF NORTH KANARA

Sl. No	Taluk	Dist.	No of family	Hindu Family	Muslim	Christian	Men	Women	Total Population
1.	Ankola	N.Kanara	124	117	004	003	375	361	736
2.	Haliyal	N.Kanara	555	007	242	306	140	1325	2765
3.	Joida	N.Kanara	016	003	004	009	0045	0042	0087
4.	Mundagod	N.Kanara	117	009	062	046	0317	0285	0602
5.	Sirasi	N.Kanara	022	0016	003	003	0085	0067	0159
6.	Yellapur	N.Kanara	478	222	083	173	1298	1202	2500
			1312	374	398	540	2260	3282	6849

Table No. 2

PARTICULARS OF SIDI HOUSING

Taluka	District	No. of families	No. of Houses	Composi te House	House roof with thatch	With Bamboo screen walls & tiles roof	Walls & tiled roof	Burnt brick walls with tiled roof	Janata House	KRI
Ankola	North Kanara	124	124	-	119	-	-	-	05	-
Haliyal	North Kanara	555	546	09	151	228	70	10	52	35
Joida	North Kanara	016	016	-	011	002	01	-	02	-
Kalghatgi	North Kanara	080	078	02	019	033	06	02	04	-
Khanapur	North Kanara	014	014	-	005	006	02	01	-	-
Mundgod	North Kanara	117	106	11	054	013	07	02	19	13
Sirsi	North Kanara	022	022	-	012	003	04	-	03	-

Yellapur	North Kanara	478	473	05	354	032	13	04	55	13
	Total	1406	1379	27	725	317	103	19	140	6
	% Percentage			1.95	52.57	22.99	7.46	1.38	10.15	4.4

The Hindu Siddis work mainly in the fields of Havik Brahmins who act as their priests during marriage ceremonies and some other life cycle rituals. They are mostly agriculturists, agricultural labourers, porters and woodcutters in the forest. The Siddis of North Kanara take both vegetarian and nonvegetarian food. They pray animals give them nourishing nonvegetarian food. Jawar, rice and dhal all form the staple food of the Siddis. Chicken, fish, deer and many other pray animal are eaten by all on special occasions.

As for as rituals are concerned the Havik Brahmins of North Kanara District officiate as their priests for the marriage ceremony and for some other life cycle rituals. For Muslim Siddis, the Mullas are the rituals priests during marriage and for some rites. The Christian Siddis observe their rituals at home. Thus they depend upon the church administration for marriage. Sometimes they go to church to solemnize the marriage after the birth of a child.

The structure of the house is concerned the factory tiled houses are very few among them. Most of them live in locally made tiled houses and even thatched huts may still be found among them (As shown in the slide No. 5 and Table No. 2 – shows particulars of Siddi Housing).

The Siddis have organised themselves into Tribal Panchayats called “Siddis Sabha” in their communities. They have got their own Patel or a Headman of their locality and Budivanta. The wise-man have to advise people in the matters of quarrels, marriages and someother socio-religious matters. This reveals very interesting details about the Scheduled Tribes.

The Siddi State Association was formed in 1984. State level association is special only in Karnataka State. The Association is democratically structured. It consists of 7 executive members and 14 ordinary members. Regional councils have been established for the development of the Siddis and the necessary funds are raised from the Siddis communities.

The association put forth the demand that the Siddis should be considered as Backward Class. A memorandum was prepared for Siddi development in Karnataka. The Association furnishes the detailed of the Siddis. By its statistics there are 115 villages in Karnataka State with the population of 7223 and about 1406 families. This statistical data was obtained in 1988-89. The Siddis today lead a normal independent life although about 75% of them are poor and about 90% are illiterate of 10% persons 1% are working in the Government offices (as shown in the Table No. 3). The main occupation of the people is agricultural labour and heavy manual labour in the forest.

In the year 1958 Dr. Dinkar Desai of Ankola wanted to bring unity among the Siddis of North Kanara. The venue chosen was a place near Ankola. However, this did not bring any fruitful result nor unity among the Siddis. But credit must be accorded to Dinkar Desai who was a poet, writer and social worker in North Kanara. This association was named "Kanara Welfare Trust" under the auspices of this trust, help was extended to the Siddis who are an integral part of the population of North Kanara District.

Political Organisation: Each settlement has a few hereditary or elected leaders. In some areas there may be five, called pancharu, literally the five or in others, there may not be fixed number of leaders who are simply called Jante. The important leaders are Budivant or the headman and the Khajandar or the treasurer. The term Budivant is hereditary. He represents the settlement to the outsiders and has a prominent role inside the settlement. The Kolkar or the orderly his main task is to take a leading role

in the settlement of disputes, mostly concerning marriages. These disputes may be between the members of his own settlements or between a member of his settlement and that of another. If Budivant has a decisive role in deciding common issues and settling disputes, Kolkar acts as an orderly. He has to send messages to families within the settlement for community meetings. Khajandar has to collect fines and utilise for the common fund. The fines collected while settling disputes are used for the expenses of parties of the leaders or for the common cause. The offices do not carry any monetary rewards, especially the office of Budivant carry a lot of prestige. The period of the Budivant is for two years except in certain cases where the Budivant wants to change his settlement.

Table No.3

LITERACY FIGURES FOR THE SIDDIS

Sl. No	Taluk	Population	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
			I Std		II Std		III Std.		IV Std.		V Std.		VI Std.	
1.	Ankola	0736	07	02	15	-	04	01	07	02	11	3	10	1
2.	Haliyal	2765	56	17	72	19	39	04	12	06	32	2	25	2
3.	Joida	0087	13	01	09	-	03	-	02	-	04	-	-	-
4.	Kalghatgi	0316	08	01	09	02	04	01	-	-	01	-	-	-
5.	Khanapur	0058	-	-	-	-	02	-	01	-	-	1	-	1
6.	Mundgod	0602	16	05	23	03	13	01	11	01	12	1	06	-
7.	Sirsi	0159	05	01	04	-	05	-	03	-	01	-	-	-
8.	Yellapur	2500	17	11	43	03	27	05	32	03	12	-	05	-
	Total	7223	122	38	175	27	97	12	68	12	73	7	46	4

Tribal Institutions:

1. **Premada Nakshatra Ashrama:** This institution is affiliated to St. Joseph's Educational and Medical Relief Society, Bombay. It has 18 institutions in Maharashtra State and 2 in Karnataka State. This Premada Nakshtrada Ashram is an Educational Institution situated in Yellapur Taluka of North Kanara District (As shown in silde No. 3). This is meant for a girls boarding and lodging hostel at Yellapur for education purpose. There are 60 children studying there, among them 35 are Siddis remaining nonsiddis. This institution is only meant girls who undergo primary school education including kindergarten class. These girls come from Haliyal and Yellapur, Mundgod, Kalghatgi talukas etc. It was observed that recently even female children were enrolled in the Kindergarten class or even in primary school by the Siddi parents. The social worker has to help them to admit the child into school. They do not come forward of their own accord. However it has been observed that Siddi boys and girls are very good in sports and cultural activities. In this institution there are 8 men employed in looking after the girls. The head of the institution is designed as superior sister incharge. The cultural activities are under supervision of a sister. The Siddi girls are taught with modern educational techniques.

This is a very good institution for the welfare of the Siddi community. Due to financial crises, outside aid has been stopped for such institution. Therefore, the organisations are facing lot of problems in running this institution.

2. **Home Science Training School (Sirasi)** (as shown in the Slide No 6): Siddi usually live the life of the savage or that of the tribe. However some of the social organisations in North Kanara District have tried to train Siddi women. It is situated near Chipki about 8km. From Sirsi on the Hubli-Sirsi road. There, science education is given to the girls. The duration of course is six months. The course commences in the month of September. The trainees got free food and accommodation.

A nominal sum of Rs. 20=00 is charged for registration. Thus the poor children are given free education. The trainees are allowed to go home only twice during the training period and that too only for Siddi girls, (As shown in the slide No. 7) irrespective of their religion. There are four teachers on the staff of Christian service House, sewing, literary, religions knowledge, social interaction, cooking, gardening etc. are taught in the school. Only those who are willing to pursue the training were brought by the social workers. The following is the time table of the school (as shown in slide No. 8).

6.00 a.m.	Rising
6.20 a.m.	Private prayer
7.30 a.m.	Household duties
8.00 a.m.	Community prayer
8.30 a.m.	Breakfast
9.00 a.m. to 11 a.m	Stitching
11.30 a.m. to 1 p.m.	Literacy
1.00 p.m. to 2 p.m.	Lunch
2.00 p.m to 2.30 p.m.	Singing
2.30 p.m. to 3.30 p.m.	Literary class
3.30 p.m. to 5 p.m.	Gardening
5 p.m. to 6 p.m.	Cleaning
6 p.m. to 7 p.m.	Teaching Religion
7 p.m. to 7.30 p.m.	Cleaning room
7.30 p.m. to 8 p.m.	Evening prayer
8 p.m.	Supper
9.30 p.m.	Recreation

3. **Sneha Sadan** (Boys Boarding) (As shown in the Slide No.9). “Sneha Sadan” is a free boarding run by Rosary Church of the Catholics who live in Yellapur, North Kanara District of Karnataka State. This church community is playing an important role in uplifting and promoting

overall development in the lives of the Siddis. Sneha Sadan has various programme for Siddis advancement.

They are as follows:

- 1) Education
- 2) Religious Education
- 3) Health progress
- 4) House Building
- 5) Catholic Relief Service Food Programmes
- 6) Education for family living

There were about eighty Siddi boys and forty nonsiddi boys in this free boarding during the year 1989, Rupees 10=00 has to be paid. But most of the time even this amount is beyond the means of the Siddi parents. Among the 80 boys, 60 boys study in primary schools which includes kindergarten. The students are from different Talukas. The boarding provides clothes books, and medicines etc. All the requirements of the students are met here. Generally Siddi boys do not join the school at the proper age for the class.

Giving religious education is part and parcel of church and missionary work. It has been noticed that some of the Siddis go to church by force of habit. As regards to the health programme this mission has maintained well trained nurses who go to the villages and distribute medicines to the Siddis and other people as well. Nurses attend delivery cases of Siddi women as well as others. They discharge their duties very well. Most Siddis will not make use of the medical facilities offered by the church. Usually they depend upon the herbal medicines and traditional midwives during the delivery. The Christian mission also provides loans for construction of houses. Loans are given to some selected Siddis. Few Siddis have made use of this offer. The loan is refundable on a longterm basis. This type of financial assistance is very useful for them (As shown in the slide No. 10).

The Catholic Relief Service Programme is also carried out by Sisters in the church. Wheat flour are distributed to the poor people irrespective of caste and religion from this programme which is for the poor people. These facilities are provided to the nursing mother and her child up to the age of three years. We are told that there are more than 300 beneficiaries of MCH (mother child health) programmes in Yellapur Taluka.

As far as cultural values, norms and meanings are concerned. The Siddis were grouped into one group not only on the basis of their physical appearance but also on the basis of the cultural traits. It has undergone changes through style and composition. The group dances were performed during festivals, marriage ceremonies and during harvesting. Damam is the musical drum used for night dances. This drum is beaten on one side and the other side the air is controlled by the hand.

Mr. Chidambar Jambe of Heggodu in Sagar Taluka Shimoga District organised a drama group consisting of 30 Siddis men and women. The title of the drama is "Kappu Janaru Kempu Neralu" which is based on the famous novel "Things fall apart" by Chinna Achebe of Africa. The drama was taught in a High School of North Kanara District and was enacted in different places like Hubli, Dharwad, Mysore, Karwar and Shivamoga etc. The drama troupe consisted of Siddis from all the three religions. They enacted kannada drama like "Sangya Balya".

The Christian Siddis of North Kanara exhibit the Portuguese culture, distinct from the other Christians in the area. Some of the distinct culture habits are mentioned here showing the Portuguese influence on them. The leg is bent in order to kneel down for a blessing. This is a Portuguese custom at the time of the festival called 'Carnival'. They go singing along the streets and in the houses. They fast during the 40 days of Lent during the month of February-March. The Siddis of all the three groups have been influenced by Indian culture. The Hindu Siddis worship their ancestors. They also worship the deities like Hanuman, Rama, Shiva,

Parwati and Ganapati etc. The deity installed for protecting the crop in the field is worshipped by Siddis (As shown in slide No.11).

The Siddis lack proper social organization. The settlement factor has significance in terms of maintaining harmony and settling disputes within the limited community, which is within a territory.

The forest and the Siddis form an ecological unit. This influences their economic life. The forest gave them shelter, they were released from the bondage of slavery inflicted on them by Portuguese. They bravely encountered both the dangers from illness and wild beasts of the forests and went deeper into the forests in search of a comfortable and convenient place to settle. They cleared patches of land from cultivation. They continued for long as petty farmers and agriculturist. Most of them lost the land they had acquired by their own labourer due to mortgage on the loans taken from the Havic Brahmins, Lingayats or Marathas. The forest is their source of livelihood in many ways. Siddis usually work as labourers for the forest Department where they are required to clear the forest, stock wood, to load timber on trucks and plant saplings. Extraction of honey forms an extra source of income for many families. After running away from the kingdoms of the masters, they settled in dense forests and settled and cleared areas of land for cultivation. The forest provides wood for fuel and bamboos for building houses. The forest provides wood scope also for hunting and fishing, wild boar, deer, ghorped, rabbit and other animals are hunted especially during the monsoon season. They have accepted the system of caste in their daily life. They obey the rules of hierarchy of castes that are existing in Indian Society. The Siddis have been influenced by the Hindus institution of untouchability. For them it is their daily bread which is very important. Whenever they get money they become idle and spendthrift. The scientific attitude of mind has not grown to a great extent among them. The percentage of literacy is very low, therefore they have to depend upon their employers and thus there is hardly any socio-cultural change between them.

Thus mere provision of opportunities offered by the government to the weaker sections in general cannot be availed by the Siddis. At present, they are not in a position to profit from those privileges due to very many reasons. In order to raise percapita income, small scale industries, cottage industries, wearing, bee keeping industries may be introduced in Siddis areas.

The main objective of the present study of Siddis in North Kanara is to make fully aware of the reality of Siddi, in North Kanara that they are a district group with an ethnic identity are tried to show new horizon of culture values, norms, gender aspect, social change, property, role of institution and interrelation between local communities, resources and technological development.

References

1. Kannada English Dictionary : Kittel, Madras University, 1971
2. Karnataka Backward Class Commission Report : Havanur L. G.,
3. Life Living And Language Among Siddis : Dr. Hiremath R. S.
of North Kanara KUD, 1994
4. The Siddis of North Kannara : Palakshappa T. C.,
Sterling Publisher, 1976
5. The Tribal Culture of India : Vidyarthi C. P., Concept
Publishing
Company, 1977