

Tribal Development in India: A Case of Siddi Community

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Abstract:

The Afro-Indian community, known as Siddis, with ancestral roots tracing back to East Africa, represents a unique diasporic tribe in India. Recognized as a Scheduled Tribe in the 2011 census, the Siddis have a population ranging between 40,000-50,000, despite the census reflecting a count of 19,514. Historically integral to Indian society, the Siddis have experienced considerable social and political mobility, holding positions of significance from bodyguards to emperors. Their migration to the Western Ghats during the British Slavery Abolishment Act marked a turning point, leading to isolation and hindrance in development. The Indian government has, however, initiated several upliftment programs targeting the Siddis, recognizing them as a Scheduled Tribe for their socio-economic status and introducing schemes for their development. Efforts include training in fishing and sustainable practices, inclusion in the Special Area Games program, and recognition for political participation and contributions towards women's empowerment. Despite these advancements, challenges remain in education and societal integration, necessitating continued support and awareness.

Keywords: Siddi community, Afro-Indian diaspora, Scheduled Tribe, socio-economic development, government initiatives

Introduction:

India is home to more than 700 notified scheduled tribes that make the 8.6% of the total population of India. But there is one unique tribe of India that has an African ancestral background that came from the East African coast from different countries of the present day, such as Mozambique, and Ethiopia. The Indian Ocean narrates an ever-growing story of India and Africa relations that started with the world's oldest civilizations, that is, Indus Valley and Mesopotamia. The connotation of Meluha reflects the existence of Indian merchants on the coast aligned with the Indian Ocean in the west.

India and Africa engaged in trade since ancient times but when the Arabs in the 6th

century and later the Portuguese in the 17th century took control of the Indian Ocean Trade route, they started selling people of African origin in South Asia and East Asia. As a result, the Africans brought by Kings and landlords stayed in their households and performed different duties from domestic chores to being bodyguards. Purnima Bhatt writes that People of African descent were seen as symbols of honesty, and prestige. Ibn Battuta referred to them as 'guarantors of safety'. They visited India as merchants, travelers, and sailors, as well as dependent slaves for different works.

The Afro-India community has been living in India since the 6th century, in the states of Gujarat, Karnataka, Goa, Maharashtra, Hyderabad, etc. In India, they are known by

different names such as Sidi, Siddi, Siddi Badshah, and Habshi. It is the only diasporic tribe in India that is recognized as a Scheduled tribe with a population of 19514 as reflected in the 2011 census of India. However, the population size is much larger, between 40,000-50,000. They have been integral to Indian society in historic times, and they had political and social upward mobility they occupied essential positions ranging from general, and commander to the emperor of Janjira and Sachin kingdom.

According to Purnima Bhat, the community migrated to the dense forests of western ghats with the fear of being sent back to Africa when Britain passed the Slavery Abolishment Act. The sudden migration hampered the community's development, as they were isolated from mainstream society and the developmental process. However, the government is continuously working for the upliftment of the community. For instance, The Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute under the Indian Council of Agricultural Research has been working for the skill development of the community by training them in fishing and sustainable production of spiny lobsters using open cage technology.

The process of targeted development can be traced back to 1956 when the government of Saurashtra recognized the community as a 'Scheduled Tribe' based on its socio-economic conditions and included in the beneficiary schemes initiated for the development of other backward tribes. Later in 1982, due to a stagnant population growth rate and multidimensional poverty, Gujarat recognized them as the PVTGs in some districts.

In 1987, the government of India recognized the physical strength of the community and started the Special Area Games program and selected Siddi children from different parts of India. They were trained in different games and provided with cost-free lodging and education.

It was in 2003 when the Siddi community living in Uttara Kannada was recognized as the 50th Scheduled Tribe of Karnataka. For enhanced political participation of the Siddi community, the government has been working towards the establishment of polling booths in Siddi concentrated regions in forests, recently a booth was set up in the Garadoli village of Karnataka, in 2019.

Recently, Shantaram Buba Siddi was nominated as the MLC in Karnataka, and Hirbaiben Ibrahim Lobi (the president of Mahila Vikas Foundation) has been awarded the fourth highest civilian award Padma Shri for her work towards women empowerment. Such developments indicate a positive change that the community is being recognized in the National and international arena. Additionally, for the advocacy and awareness of Siddi culture and its folklore, the Karnataka Folklore University has been working towards the inclusion of courses that represent the Siddi culture.

The government of India has recognized and extended the scheduled tribe status to the Afro-Indian community living in different parts of Karnataka and Gujarat so that they can avail the welfarist schemes initiated by the government of India. The Eklavya Model residential schools (EMRS) for the tribal children are now accessible to Siddi children, but due to the far-distanced schools, children usually drop out. The community understands the necessity of education, yet the girl child is still confined to domestic chores, for which community awareness is required.

Table: 01 Chronology of Constitutional Affirmative Actions for the Siddi community.

Sr. no.	Initiative	Year of implementation	Consequence
1.	The Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes Orders (Amendment) Act, 1956	Act no. 63 of 1956 25 th September 1956	Act was to constitutionalize the inclusion of different SC/ST groups, and the Siddi was one of the tribes to be recognized as the Scheduled Tribe in the State of Saurashtra.
2.	The Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes Orders (Amendment) Act, 1956	29 th October 1956	After state reorganization, the Siddi community was recognized as ST in the Districts of Bombay: Halar, Madhya Saurashtra, Zalawad, Gohilwad, and Sorath.
3.	The Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes Orders (Amendment) Act, 1976	No. 108 of 1976 20 th September 1976	Siddi community is recognized as STs in districts of Gujarat, that is, Amreli, Bhavnagar, Jamnagar, Junagadh, Rajkot, and Surendranagar.
4.	Primitive and Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs)	1982	Gujarat recognized the socio-economic and educational background of the community and recognized it as one of its PVTGs in the districts of Amreli, Bhavnagar, Junagadh, Porbandar, and Rajkot.
5.	The Goa, Daman, and Diu Reorganization Act, 1987	9 th July 1987	Goa, Daman, and Diu recognized the Siddi community as a Scheduled Tribe, under entry five as Siddi (Nayaka)
6.	Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Resolution.	6 th December 1999	Added Siddi community in OBC central list of Karnataka.
7.	The Scheduled Caste & Scheduled Tribe Orders (Amendment) Act, 2002	No. of 10 of 2003 8 th January 2003	Addition of the term 'Badshah' to entry 26 of the Gujarat Scheduled tribe list and making it Siddi Badshah. On the other hand, Karnataka made a step forward to give initial recognition to the community as a Scheduled Tribe

			in the District of Uttara Kannada, under entry 50.
8.	Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Resolution.	28 th July 2017	An amendment was made in the Central list for OBC of Karnataka state which recognized Siddi community as OBC except Siddi community domiciled in Uttara Kanada district.
9.	The Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order Amendment, 2020	No. 4 of 2020 20 th March 2020	The recognition of the Siddi community was extended to the districts of Belagavi and Dharwad with Uttara Kannada.

NGOs working for the Siddi community.

NGOs are the part of civil society that looks for the solution to resolve problems faced by people. NGOs work for community upliftment. NGOs are working for the Afro-Indian community in Gujarat and Karnataka with common objectives and goals to achieve. Such as education of children, skill development and vocational training with active collaboration with educational institutions, cultural preservation and awareness, women empowerment, and employment generation, etc. According to NGO Darpan, about 20751 non-governmental organizations are working in Gujarat (9374) and Karnataka (11377). Below I have tried to enlist some NGOs working for Siddi in Gujarat and Karnataka, but most of them are not enlisted in the NGO Darpan Portal. In Gujarat, NGOs like **Mahila Vikas Foundation, Bhartiya Adim Juth Matsyodhyog Mandali, Gir Pachhat Jat Vikas Seva Samiti, etc.** are functioning for skill development, employment generation, and women empowerment.

Similarly, In Karnataka different organizations came into existence such as the

Kanara Welfare Trust, All-Karnataka Siddi Development Association (1984), and Siddi Jana Vikas Sangh (2013) focused on the common goal of integrated development and uniting the members of the Siddi community in Karnataka (Jairazbhoy & Alpers, 2004). They worked for the education of children and talked about the importance of sports for the development of the community.

Citizens' Committee for Social Justice and Alternative Law Forum (ALF) is an organization that is working for the advocacy of land rights of the Siddi people through legal routes. This organization has been working for falsely accused people, one of the important cases was Benet Siddi, a leader of Siddi Jana Vikas Sanga. The person was falsely accused of a loan non-payment by the manager of Syndicate Bank (Shaikh & Kazi, 2014). The organization filed and fought the case against the bank and Benet Siddi was released after a week of jail. Both organizations are working in collaboration to fight for land rights, harassment, and atrocities.

Bridges of Sports is an organization that believes sports is an alternative way for the

socio-economic development of the Siddi community and focuses on sports training of Siddi children with the sole ambition of developing a hyperlocal sports ecosystem that produces the fastest athletes in India to perform in the Olympic games and winning medals for the country (Bridges of Sports, 2023). The organization selects children from the Afro-Indian community and gives them the opportunity to develop through a residential training camp-cum-school for Siddi children in Karnataka. This organization believes that the revival of the Special Area Games scheme can help in the socio-economic upliftment of the community.

The Premada Nakshatra Ashram and the Sneha Sadan are the organizations that provide scholarships to Siddi children and provide residential schools with food and lodging at minimum cost (Shaikh & Kazi, 2014).

Anitha R. Reddy is an art historian who has been working for the revival of the Kavandis and the employment of Siddi women in Karnataka. The quilting technique involves the sewing of multi-colored patchwork, regionally the blankets are called Kavands or Kawandis. This art of Kawandi is unique and essential as it promotes zero-waste sustainable manufacturing of quilts by using old clothes and promoting women to sell their masterpieces.

Juje Jackie Siddi was one of the candidates selected under the Special Action Games scheme of the Sports Authority of India in 1987, he represented India on the National platform, but the sudden scraping of the scheme affected the children, as they were left in between their training and education, they returned to their villages. But Juje Jackie

Siddi got training and played for years. Later he took a government job under sports quota and has been working for the development of his community without any external funding but spending his salary. He developed the ‘Siddi Organic Honey’ brand has employed community members in apiculture and has been selling the produce throughout India. He has been working with Kamala Babu Siddi, Anthony Philip Siddi, and others in the training of Siddi children in football.

The governmental and non-governmental organizations are working for the upliftment of the community. However, much needs to be done as the community still lives in the forest region, although the Forest Rights Act 2006 has been extended to the region granting some rights to the tribal population. Yet the restrictions affect their lives, and they are unable to have sustainable lives. As the forests are now part of reserves, the cultivation, wood cutting and selling, and animal husbandry have been hampered widely. In such conditions, we need to develop employment opportunities for the community. The need to understand and efficiently tackle the push and pull factors becomes essential. The lack of basic amenities such as educational institutions, healthcare infrastructures like hospitals and dispensaries, and limited economic opportunities act as push factors for any community, and the Afro-Indian community has also been affected by these push factors. For which they tend to migrate to different cities and towns. The towns have imbibed what is known for a better life, such as economic opportunities, political stability, freedom, and quality life, which acts as a magnet and attracts the youth. To tackle such imbalanced village-to-town migration, we need infrastructural development in the pockets, so that the community can get

quality education and healthcare. Because social political and economic freedom and equality are interrelated and interlinked.

The Special Area Games should be re-initiated for the training of Afro-Indian children, they are already trained by different NGOs presently, but they require to be recognized and supported by the government as well. The government should form committees for regular monitoring of the program necessary to make an assessment and evaluate the impact and changes made by the policy in the life of people, and rectify the policy based on evaluation. For democratic policymaking, accountability, and transparency members from both private and public sectors and researchers should be appointed for tenure, duties, and powers pre-defined in the charter.

Conclusion:

The governmental and non-governmental organizations have been working for their upliftment and there have been significant improvements in their condition. Yet it is crucial to acknowledge that the community is still facing traits of underdevelopment that need to be resolved, which requires expansion of the collaborative venture of the governmental and non-governmental organizations for better opportunities. It is essential to understand that the community's living standards are not up to the mark. It is still suffering from multi-dimensional poverty, which requires to be tackled collectively by the government, nongovernmental organizations, and individual efforts. Thus, there is a dire need for collective efforts with a functional and effective collaboration between the public and private enterprises to work for the upliftment of the community.

The Siddi community also referred to as the 'Afro-Indian' community is the diasporic community of India living scattered in pockets but highly concentrated in Gujarat and Karnataka. The community has descendent roots in Africa, yet their aspirations and identity are Indian. They have emerged as integral parts of the diverse Indian culture and society, which integrates each with its diversity of culture. The existence and survival of the Afro-Indian community represent their resilience and bravery and also define the age-old idea of Vasudhev Kutumbkam and the inclusivity of India. Additionally, the community having ancestral links to Africa becomes more important in bridging cordial relationships between India and Africa especially when the PM of India paved the way to include the African Union in the Ambitious Group of 20, making it G21.

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