

## African Diaspora in India: A Short History of Siddis Settlement

Dr Akhilesh Kumar Upadhyay

**Abstract:** Siddi (Badshah) community is living in some parts of Gujarat. Basically he is known to us by the name of Siddi Badshah. Most of the people are living in some major places of Gujarat like Junagarh, Gir Somnath, Rajkot and Ahmadabad. They came to India many years ago and settled in Gujarat but they do not know from where they came in Africa. This article will try to know the history and settlements of the Siddis.

It is very important to understand the cross-cultural movement of African Diaspora in India from the perspective of assimilation and migration. The movement of the African diaspora in India was forced in nature.

**Key Words-** Migration, Community, History, Settlement, African Diaspora

**Introduction:** An unknown Alexandrian sailor wrote a book 'Periplus of the Erythraean Sea' around first century CE This book mentions about slaves. Along with it, another book 'Indica' written by Megasthenes, explains about the slave trade between India and Egypt. The history of slave trade clarifies that the trade of slaves was done from the east coast of Africa to Asia through the Atlantic ocean around 1000 years ago (Jha, Shrimali, 2011). In order to move Africans from the Indian Ocean and their settlements in various parts of India during the medieval period, it is essential to analyze from the perspective of migration and diaspora studies. In this chapter, we strive to discover the Siddis establishment from the medieval to the modern period. The aspects of the social formation of Siddi Community, political-economic formulation, contribution to Indian development, and the regional matrix of Siddis have been studied in this chapter from the theoretical perspective. Various social scientists and anthropologists have studied the movement and assimilation of tribes and supported their argument from the lens of culture and migration. They have discussed the various push and pull factors, supporting the formation of the social and economic setup of tribes through various arguments. In this chapter,

researcher has used some of the compatible theories and given their implication to widen our understanding of the Siddi community in India. African Diaspora was displaced from Africa to India during the colonial period. Due to the political-administrative setup and nature of the ruling authority, Siddis were forced to move from mainstream society to forest areas like Gir Forest of Gujarat<sup>1</sup> and Western 1 Gir Forest is a National Park and Wildlife sanctuary in Gujarat. This forest is famous for Asiatic lions of Western India. Siddis took shelter and got themselves established in the areas of Gir National Forest 36 Ghats of Karnataka, etc. Soon after the arrival of the post-colonial period and occupying the land and forest by cutting down the trees, Siddis had to establish their social formation. The state-controlled not only the corporate sector but also the forest, which is normally the habitat of any tribal community in India. The displacement created space for diasporic identity and assimilation of marginalized Siddis in India. As this study is primary, analyses has done micro-analysis of the African diaspora or Siddi community and tried to understand their significant problems and challenges. The politico-social mobilization of tribal in India led to the establishment of a ministry of tribal affairs in 1999. It offered a limited political and economic mobility to the Siddis. The tribal affairs ministry focused on the issues of tribal welfare and planning. Siddis also got benefitted, and during the field study, researcher has noticed that in comparison to the early period, Siddis have well settled and assimilated into host land. Siddis have been recognized under Scheduled Tribe. They are entitled to avail of all the facilities under the umbrella of this category. The fundamental problems of Tribes have been addressed in recognition of Forest Rights Act, 2006. The issues of Identity formation and assimilation of the African diaspora in India must be understood from the point of structural penetration in the society and state, which have given them a new space. The term identity means the one's self-construal, an individual reflection of themselves as a particular member of social formation viz. ethnicity, class, nation, etc. The concept of identity keeps on changing. It reflects how a person construed himself in the past and how he aspires to become in the future (Dundes, 1984).

### **History of Siddis in India**

History and Migration of Siddis in India As per historical records, the Siddi Tribe who were supposed to be the descendants of the Bantu tribe of Africa came to India in large number during the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Their arrival was marked at the Konkani coast in the first-century. The displacement of Siddis was never talked about in general; it was lost in a maze of legends, folk tales and historical calculations. Today, most Siddi live predominantly in Gujarat, Daman and Diu, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and other states and union territories (Shah, 2011). Approximately 250,000 of Siddi tribe are residing in India bordering Pakistan and, in the different

states of the country like- Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Kerala, and Karnataka and in Union Territory of Daman & Diu (Lodhi, 37 1992). As our study is limited to Gujarat, researcher has gathered the distribution of Siddis in Gujarat. The districts of Ahmadabad, Amreli, Jamnagar, Gir Somnath and Kutch hold a sound population of Siddi community. These immigrant communities here got settled and worked as nurses, horse-keepers, domestic servants, agricultural workers and apprentices to blacksmiths and carpenters at the ports which they came into India. Jeanette Pinto observes that the existence of “Black Slavery” in India. The author talks about the Negroes, a native tribe of Africa who were uprooted from their homeland and was transplanted in India, a subcontinent of Asia. The author gives an account of the Portuguese voyagers and Arab merchants who were the chief suppliers of “Africans” whom they use to call slaves. These voyagers used to sell these slaves to local Nawabs and wealthy men after they had completed their business. Goa even had a slave market in one of its streets called Rua Direita (Pinto, 1992). The 19th Century has seen the slave tradition not only in Africa but also among other parts of the world. Similarly, from India Indenture migration started in which labourers went to other parts of the world to earn money. But the situation of Siddis or African Negroes was worst as they were considered as slaves and were not treated well or paid for the labour. As per historical records, the first slave ship started supplying labour to the cotton plantations of the American-south, and many centuries before that Africans were brought ashore to the sugar estates of Brazil and the Caribbean. Muslim Arab traders sold these Africans were being sold as slaves from the Eastern seaboard of Africa to Hindu Indian princes on the West Coast and Central India. A significant portion of this African Siddi slave trade took place centuries before the arrival of Portuguese, British, French and Dutch into the Indian subcontinent. It is believed that people from Western India possessed the knowledge of navigation as they maintained trade relations with different parts of Western Asia. The route of the western Indian Ocean was connected as far as Periplus of the Erythraean Sea (1st Century AD). Archaeological evidence from ancient period depicts events of significant seaborne trade from the Harappa Civilization of the Indus Valley to the Gulf of Mesopotamia (2600-1760 BC). It suggests the possibility of even greater antiquity for indirect trade relations that connects with Northeast Africa through the gulf following the sea route., which was certainly the case during the time of Darius the Great (521-485 BC), ruler of the Achaemenid Empire of the Persians (Edward edi. 38 Cathlin & Adward, 2004). It is believed that the highest number of Africans slaves was brought to India during the time of European invasion beginning with the Portuguese, the Dutch, French and finally with the British rule. It all began with the slave factories established in the east as well as the west coast of Africa. But most of the African slaves that were brought to India were from eastern Africa. According to Shirodkar, The

Portuguese started importing the slaves from Africa and the first African slaves were transported to Portugal in 1444 by the captains of Prince Henry the Navigator, after procuring them as ransom in exchange for Moorish captives. Subsequently, the Portuguese were involved in the slave trade with vigour and they founded the factories for the slave trade in the coastal region of Guinea. (Shirodkar, 1998) The first Englishman who engaged in the trafficking of African slaves was Sir John Hawkins (The Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1911). Edwards mentions that in 1791 the number of European factories on the coasts of Africa was around 40 out of which 14 of them were English, 3 were French, 15 were Dutch, 4 were Portuguese and 4 were Danish. From the same place, 74,000 Siddi slaves were transported. As per records 10,000 by Portuguese alone, and 38,000 by the British (The Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1911). The slave factories increased their number of transporting Siddi to many colonies held by these powers until a ban was placed on the slave trade in the 19th century. Trafficking of Siddi slaves included both men and women, who were sold in market places. Their bidding was held by the traders, these slave men or women were sold by their physical attributes. Strong men were purchased for serving. As a matter of fact, having African slaves was considered as a symbol of being royal. All those who were captured in Africa were loaded into different vessels to be transported to diverse directions. Some Siddi people committed suicide by jumping into the sea and others died of asphyxiation in the cramped cabins in the vessels where they could neither breathe fresh air nor get food to survive. Many of them got sick as they were not adaptive with the conditions of the sea journey. Some of the Siddis migrated via land; in the opposite direction of the Spice trail and settled in Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and 39 Gujarat. It then appears that there were five sets of Siddi transfers or migrations from East Africa to India.

### **Tracing the History and Settlement of Gujarat**

This chapter primarily deals with the establishment of the Siddi community in the parts of Gujarat, India. The history of the Siddis is itself a saga of untold stories of the migration, which is neither documented neither anywhere nor being given due prominence. Few studies have been conducted that focus on the aspects of their roots, origins, establishment, and problems. In this chapter, researcher has tried to analyze the issues of migration and identity of Siddi. Researcher has tried to analyze the possible factors that caused the Siddis to leave their homeland and settle into various parts of the world. Moving away from one place to another is a kind of rootlessness in the context of migration. This chapter, however, highlights the migration of Siddis and their settlement in the state of Gujarat. The process of migration of the Siddis tribe is quite interesting. Over several decades Siddis have been residing in India, and the reason behind their displacement

has been forced migration and pressure of colonialism and imperial societies. Siddis are an 45 ancient indigenous tribal group that has been residing among different parts of Africa. They possess tribal culture, traditions, rituals, and distinct folklore. The descendants of the Siddi community in Gujarat were the Bantus, tribal groups from Southeast Africa. South Africans with black complexion were recognized as “Bantu” during the apartheid. The term Bantu in common terms, indicates a group of people. These Bantus have developed their common language known as the Bantu language. The Bantu-speaking people from southern Africa were believed to have migrated into India roughly around 2,000 years ago from the parts of western and central Africa. This tribal group was highly skilled in the process of weapon-making, and their way of living life was pastoral, which enabled them to dominate and assimilate among the original inhabitants of the host land. Siddis were well sound forging stone into the weapon. The process they implemented was collectively known as the Khoisan (Bhatt, 2018). However, the use of term Bantu is considered to be obscene word and inappropriate as it is related to racial context and is considered offensive because of its strong association with white minority rule and the apartheid system. However, “Bantu” is used without pejorative connotations in other parts of Africa. The term Bantu is considered to be the cultural marker as it gives the identity of these tribal group African a new image to associate with their descendants. This tribal community is known through their native language when displaced into the migrated area as a tradition. The remarkable characteristic of the Siddis is their preservation of cultural heritage and the establishment of linkages with their original home as they continue to practice the oral tradition, the songs, and dance from their ancestors. Siddis tend to preserve their civilization throughout their entire life. One of the first major civilizations in Southern Africa, Siddis history, dates back to the 12th and 15th centuries. Their kingdom lay amidst Great Zimbabwe and it was considered too be vast and mysterious. The Anthropologists have discovered the impressive ruins of a once-thriving city (an important World Heritage Site), representing the largest stone structure in Africa south of Egypt’s pyramids. These archaeological remains astound visitors and tourists with their sheer scale and grandeur. Although this was a great African civilization, researchers have limited knowledge about the origins and decline of civilization (Bhatt, 2018).

### **Conclusion:**

The significance of this paper throws light on the role of Siddis in all regions without gender biases. It also mentioned the beginning of the migration of slaves in the Indian Ocean in the ancient era through Arab traders as Slaves. Apart from that, this chapter has mentioned of the slave trade in the Indian Ocean. The book is mentioning all about customs and traditions in the

Indian subcontinent. Despite that, this paper has mentioned the role of Siddis in the revolt of 1857 against the British. Despite that, it includes the settlement of Siddis in various parts of India. Moreover, it also discusses the formation of culture, identity in Siddis. This paper aims to investigate the impact of how to working on as an Indian society of Siddis. Indian culture on the informant's identity. This paper demonstrates the social formation and physiography appearance about Siddis community in India. Despite that, this chapter discusses the theoretical points of view. Apart from that, it also includes of current situation about Siddis, especially Gujarat. This paper also explains how Siddis survived in India due to many differences.

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**Dr Akhilesh Kumar Upadhyay**

Asst. Professor,

Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University,

Ahmedabad- Gujarat- 382481