

# **SIDDIS OF KUTCH**

**Report Written by :**

Dr. Ravindra Pancholi

**Edited by :**

Dr. Chandrakant Upadhyay

**TRIBAL RESEARCH AND TRAINING INSTITUTE**  
Gujarat Vidyapith, Ahmedabad-380 014

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## POLOGUE

The Tribal Development Department, Government of Gujarat, vide their letter no. TD/RT/3/2306/340-341 dated 22-2-2009, entrusted the investigation to the Tribal Research and Training Institute, Gujarat Vidyapith, Ahmedabad to recommend whether the Siddis residing in Kutch district could be considered as tribals at par with other Siddis residing in other districts of Gujarat and providing them with the benefits available to tribals as per request from Kutch Siddi Jamat.

Siddis in Gujarat habitate in the districts of Junagadh, Jamnagar, Amreli, Surendranagar, Bhavnagar, Porbandar and Kutch. However Siddis in Kutch district are not included in the list of Schedule tribes. Besides, Siddis habitating in districts other than in Saurashtra region are not included in the list of Schedule tribes. Presently, they are considered as socially and Educationally Backward.

The present report is prepared on the basis of information collected by researcher through intensive field work carried out among Siddi families in the talukas of Bhuj, Anjar, Mundra. Besides, some background information about history and origin of Siddis was collected from experienced old Siddi persons as well as from old literature. The report contains the realities as could be found from the field study.

We acknowledge with thanks the co-operation extended by the workers, especially the President, Shri Liyakatali Haji Kasam Jamadar and Vice President, Shri Mahmadbhai Ladha Makrani of Siddi Jamat for providing very useful information which could be helpful in preparing this report. We also acknowledge with gratitude the co-operation extended by concerned government officials of Kutch district. We are thankful to Siddi people of Kutch district for responding to our queries and questions without any reservation.

My heartfelt thanks are due to Dr. Chandrakantbhai Upadhyay, Director of the Institute for entrusting me with this assignment of investigation and for providing necessary guidance.

**Ravindra Pancholi**

## SIDDIS OF KUTCH

### **Name, Origin and Historical Background :**

Siddis have total species element of Negros. They are strong-built, tall and dark in complexion. Their hairs are curly, wool-like hairs, prominent jaw, their lips are black and stiff. Their look is distinct from others.

As per Oxford dictionary, (Vol IX p.22, 1933) Siddi word is derived from Sayyid, which means Prince or Lord. William believes that the negros of Africa, who have been habitating in Western Part of India for several generations, have been given the name 'Siddi', as a mark of honour; as they held high positions in South Indian princely States (Wilson, P. 482, 1885). According to Russel, (Vol I, P. 409, 1916), Africans are given the name of Siddi, which is derived from original word sayyid, who were successors of Paygambar. Gradually, the word itself became a mark of honour. Russel, in his writings have also used the word 'Habshi', which is supposed to have been derived from Ellhabish. The Bhagvad Gomandal, which is first Gujarati encyclopediadia edited by Maharaja Bhagvatsinhji of Gondal State, provides the meaning of Siddi as Negro and Habshi. But, the word Habshi is used for all of negro types of people; and the word Siddi has a limited connotation for only those Negro habitating in eastern coast. Another view explains that Siddi is another name for Habshi. In this part of Gujarat, Siddis call themselves 'Siddis' only. Considering their smiling face and kind nature, people also call then 'Badshah'; but that is only an adjective. Siddis also believe that they are successors of Hajrat Bilal; and therefore local Muslims refer to Siddis as Bilal.

### **When did Siddis come to India ?**

It is very difficult to scientifically prove about their actual coming in India. It is believed that they have been in India for about 400-500 years. There have been several views prevailing about their arrival in India. It transpires that they were brought to India's western coast, by Indian traders from Abisinia (Ethopea) as slaves or as household servants. Most of the scholars share this view. They could have come to India as sailors or Soldiers also. As soldiers, they could have come around 1297 alongwith Alauddin Khiljee. The Siddis in India are believed to have come from North Africa through sea route from Sudan, Algeria, Morocco, Unitia, Libiya, Tanzaniya, Uganda and Zanzibar.<sup>1</sup>

Another view indicates that those people who marched to India from Central Asia during medieval period had Siddi slaves with them; and that they brought them to India along with themselves through land route; meaning thereby, that they had not come directly from Africa, but have come through Europe and Asian Countries.<sup>2</sup>

The trade between India and Africa is in existence for many years. Some traders from India have settled in Africa. There are instances when some of them, when returned to India, have brought them with them in India. Some also hold the view that Indian traders had started business in interior parts of Africa where there was dense population of local negroes and they used to employ them in their shops for dual purpose - to avoid the difficulties of local language and local transactions.

Siddis are habitated in Maharashtra and in Mysore besides in Gujarat State. Some Siddis are also found in Telangana region of Andhra Pradesh; but they are found in more numbers in Saurashtra region of Gujarat and Northern coast of Mysore.

#### **Siddis' habitation in Gujarat :**

Siddis in Gujarat have been residing along with arrival of a famous Muslim saint Shaikh Sayadi Mubarak Hazrat 'Bawa Gor' Rafai (Reh.A.).

He came to Gujarat during realm of Ahmedshah, founder of Ahmedabad, from Nigeria; and he died during tenure of Mahmud Begada. Bawagor came in Gujarat around 1411 and he died around 1465 A.D. During childhood of Bawagor, the Arabs had brought thousands of Africans men and women in the port of Khambhat, with chains in their hands. The Africans were from Abissinia, Zanzibar, Mogadisa and Kilwa of East African interior region. Bawagor, as a small child, was one of these African slaves.

How did Bawagor get free ? How did he get training in vocations, business and crafts ? This is dark zone of knowledge; and no body knew about it. However, the fact remains that

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1. 'Siddi', the Dhamal Dhurandhar', Haji Rehmtulla Alibhai Jamadar Bilibi; Kutch Mitra, Asmita, 1996.
  2. Backward castes of Saurashtra Part-I, Saurashtra Backward Class Board, P. 239.

Bawagor showed a new direction to Akik industry of Khambhat. The Akik stone is available in Nimodra and Ratanpur Hills, some 35 kms. away from Rajpipla. Even to-day, the Khambhat traders bring Akik stone from there and get it processed in Khambhat with the help of hundreds of craftsmen and sell several products made from Akik.

Bowagor got settled there. He solicited and harnessed co-operation from hundreds of Siddis (african people). They all to-gether worked in mines, collected Akik, Carnelion and Jasper. They processed them in high temperature furnaces, got them converted in their natural colours - red, green, pink, blue, white and black. They polished them; whenever necessary, got them drilled or got them made in various shapes; and got prepared ear-rings, ring, hair pin, cups, saucers, chess board, marbles etc. They highlighted items with natural black colours, to give them African identity. In this way, Bawagor trained his deprived brothers. He taught them business and trading skills and got them engaged in trade with Niegeria, Iran, Arabstan, Abisia, Alac Zandriua, Europe and made their products popular world around. He made his African brothers see new dreams. The Siddis gradually settled in Ahmedabad, Gir forest, districts of Junagadh and Panchmahal. Gujarat became a new 'house' for them. (Mehta, Makrand, Gujarat Samachar, 7-5-2006)

Hazarat Bawagor (Reh.A) died in Ratanpur on 1st Rajab Jijari month of Islamic calander year 1097. Bawagor had many followers. His elder brother Aziz Hazarat Baba Hasab and younger brother Hazartbaba Raihan and Sister Hazarat Ma-A-Misara (Re.A) also settled in Ratanpur and Siddis were in prominent position in the army of Mogul empire as soldiers. The Chief Commandar (Sar Senapati) of Ahmedshah Badshah of Gujarat was Siddi Saiyad. He got a mosque constructed in Ahmedabad near Lal Darwaja; which is known as Siddi Saiyad Mosque with artistic stone carving, which made it precious historical monument with great heritage value.

Siddis in Gujarat have been habitating in the districts of Kutch, Bharuch, Surat, Ahmedabad, Junagadh, Jamnagar, Rajkot, Amreli, Surendranagar, Pobandar and Bhavnagar. In these districts, they have been habitating more in urban areas. The Siddis in the districts of Junagadh, Amreli, Rajkot, Jamnagar, Surendranagar, Bhavnagar and Porbandar in Gujarat

State have been included in the lists of Schedule tribes. All of these districts are from Saurashtra region. But the Siddis residing in other parts / districts are not included in the lists of Schedule tribes. Of course, they are placed in category of Socially and Educationally Backward Communities (SEBC).

Among Schedule Tribe Population of Gujarat in 1981 census, those from Siddis were 5430 in number. 59 percent of them lived in rural areas; and 41 percent were in urban areas. In 1971, Siddis were 4482 in number. In 1991, there were 6336 Siddi People. In 2001, they have reached 8662 number. The Tribal Research and Training Institute conducted a survey in the year 2005 for all primitive tribe group people. Among these, Siddis were 8816 in number (4514 male and 4302 female). Districtwise their population is as follows :

Junagadh - 5230; Jamnagar 1600; Rajkot 1180; Amreli - 324; Bhavnagar 390; Porbandar 89. Besides these, the Siddis have been habitating in the districts of Ahmedabad, Bharuch and Kutch. But these Siddis are not included in the list of Schedule Tribe. However, they have been included in the list of socially and Educationally Backward Communities (SEBC).

### **When did Siddis come to Kutch ?**

- (1) In Mundra and Mandvi they had come as sailors of Bhatiya, Khoja, Lohana and Bhadala, and / or as their household servants.
- (2) The king of Kutch Khengarji 1st was placed on his throne by Sultan of Gujarat - Ahmedabad with the help of his army wherein Siddis were also among soldiers; and thus they came to Kutch. During the king Maharao Deshaljee, there was a Siddi Batalion in his army. The bodyguard of Maharao Deshaljee as well as his administrator was Siddi Masud. The Siddis of Kutch are followers of Bawagor. Their original place is Ratanpur in Bharuch district, near Jhagadiya. The Siddis of Kutch, like Siddis in other districts go for pilgrimage or Ziyarat. For all Siddis of Western India, Bawa Gor is their Saint and Guru or Pir. All Siddis in each district of Saurashtra are followers of Bawa Gor. Siddis of Kutch are faithful to the State in capacity of soldiers. They have settled in Kutch as State servants.

(3) The kings of Kutch have brought some Siddis from Junagadh, Jamnagar and Bhavnagar as soldiers or as slaves.

(4) Siddis have come here for occupation from various parts of Gujarat and settled there.

Special efforts were made to know the exact time of their arrival in Kutch, but the precise information is not available. Various views were available from different field areas during the study. Abdul Razakbhai Siddi from Anjar deposed that his great grand father had come there either as a slave or as a soldier from South Africa brought by Navab of Junagadh. Likewise, the retired Agriculture Assistant Mahmad Ladhu Makrani (\*Age 65 years) from Bhuj observed that Siddis were brought as a slave or soldier by Maharao of Kutch.

Thus there have been different views put forward about arrival of Siddis in Kutch. But one thing is certain, that they were considered as servants of the State of Kutch. In Kutch, Siddis are addressed as Siddi Badshah, Siddi Jamadar etc. Since, most of them were in State service as Bodyguards or Soldiers or watchman etc., they were addressed as Siddi Jamadar. In Saurashtra however, they were addressed as 'Badshah'. As on to-day, some Siddis are found working with ex-royal families in villages. It could be concluded that by and large, they were in State Service as slaves or soldiers / watchman / Bodyguard. They could have been brought here through sea route from Africa to Kutch as sailors in ship; who gradually settled. Some Siddis, who came as sailors in Mandvi had constructed Bawa Gor Mosque near present Bus stand of Mandvi (Kutch).

Among many views prevailing about Siddis coming to Kutch, it could safely be said that mostly they were in State service and were considered to be most faithful servants. This view is supported by all. The names given to them as Badshah or Jamadar have been adopted by them as their suranes. Nevertheless, the exact or precise time of their arrival in Kutch and their reason for coming to Kutch cannot be proved by any reliable evidence.

### **Population :**

The Siddis of Kutch resemble Negros of Africa in their outward apparent Characteristics. Due to inter-caste marriages / cross-breeding, new generation is found with some

characteristics of species other than Negros. But this is exception rather than a rule. They are well-built and durll in complexion. Their hairs are wool-like curly. The jaws are prominent, lips are stiff and black. They look distinct and different unlike Indian-origin species. Siddis of Kutch are like Siddis in all other parts of Gujarat. As regards the area occupied by them in Kutch, they have been spreaded over all parts of Kutch, but mostly in urban areas due to their jobs and occupations.

As an estimate, their population in Kutch is distributed as under taluka wise and town-wise :

Taluka/Town/Village		Total No.of Families
Bhuj	Bhuj	150
Mundra	Tita	4
Lokhpat	Matanu Madh Pimper	2
Abdasa	Kothara/Vinzana	4
Nakhtranu	Nakhtrana Dasodi	3
Gandhidham	Gandhidham	4
Mandvi	Mandvi (including Salaya Godhra)	2
Bhachau	bhachau	20
Rapar	Rapar	42
Anjar	Anjar	25
	<b>Total</b>	<b>268</b>

Thus, totally there are 268 families in Kutch district, spreaded over 10 districts. (The information could be availed from their leaders and their associatias. The total census figures are not available; but as per record of their Jamat (Panch) it is almost 2500 persons.

Earlier, they concentrated in Bhuj only; but gradually they shifted to other parts for occupation / job and consequently settled there. As on to-day more than 55 percent of families are in Bhuj town; which is the largest number.

## **Social Structure :**

Siddis live in a group both in towns and villages. Their habitation is near muslim area or around labour class families. The area is usually called Siddi Falia. Besides, they habitate around Baba Gor Dargah. Earlier in Bhuj, they were in a single locality; but the elderly people of Siddi families are prominent in the Jamat. As such Kutch Siddi Jamat is representative of all Kutch Siddis; but Siddis of Bhachau, Rapar and Anjar call themselves Vagadia Siddis (because those talukas belong to Vagad region of Kutch). They constitute one third of Siddi families in Kutch; and they are more under local influence in terms of some marriage rituals such as marriage-tie (Chheda-Chhedi), drum-beating and Ganpati Pujan etc. Vagadia Siddis are not different from other Siddis of Kutch; but only regional difference are found due to local influence. One more evidence of their being a part of total is that the Vagodia Siddis are also associated with Kutch Siddi Jamat.

With the awareness among Siddis, such Siddi Youth Forum also try to contribute towards upliftment of their community.

## **Physical Property :**

### **House :**

In rural areas, in a Siddi Mohalla there are 3-4 or 5-10 houses of Siddis. Siddis donot stay scattered. The houses of Siddis as found in Kutch district were much like those of labour class people in poor areas. In Bhuj town, they stay in Sanjognagar slum area. Siddis are found staying with Palkhi, Pathan, Shaikh, Bhatiya and Baniyas in the same locality. Earlier, those Siddis, who were in State-Service as watchman, Soldier or carrier - driver have their own houses; but rest of them were tenants of Bania, Shaikh, Bhatiya or Pathan. The older house-rent was around Rs. 100/- 200/- per month; but those who have recently hired a house, pay rent as much as Rs. 300/- to Rs. 500/- p.m. Usually, houses in Kutch are with a Deli with an open chowk inside, a couple of rooms. Walls were both cement plaster or mud plaster. The tiles are usually mangaloree tiles on roof. In rural areas houses are more open with a room, kitchen and small verandah. There is also an open space for cattle. Those in Government Service, hire a pucca house, with a room, kitchen, verandah, bathroom, toilet and a

store. Only those in better off job, can afford such houses. In rural areas, the houses are with Kutcha with clay-plastered walls and indigenous tiles on roof.

### **Household Kit :**

Since Siddis are having poor economic conditions, their household kit are minimum. There is either a steel cot or a wooden cot and rack for keeping utensils. The utensils are brass ones or aluminium ones. Some of them have a bi-cycle, scooter, Tape-recorder, radio, clock, T.V. etc.

### **Food- Drink :**

Siddis have lunch with a loaf and vegetables. The loaf is made from wheat or millet. But millet is largely used. They, being non-vegetarian, they consume meat also. On festival days, they consume meat as well as Sweets. Their dinner is with loaf, vegetables, khichdi. They consume fish and eggs too. They entertain guests with tea.

### **Dress and Ornaments :**

Kutchi Siddis put on usually Kurta and Pyjamas. The household dress is a lungi. Youngsters put on shirt and pant. Children put on half-pant and shirt. Women use Salwar, Khamij and Chunni. In some parts, women wear sarees also. Young/Small girls put on Chaniya-Choli or a frock or punjabi dress. Men prefer less ornaments, usually a silver ring. Women are also not fond of ornaments. In fact, they cannot afford to buy. Usually with plastic bangles in their hand; they wear silver ornaments alike rural women-zanzar in foot, chain in neck, ear-rings or even nathani in nose. Both young men and women use hair pins to straiten their curly hairs. The ornaments are less found in urban areas. But some women do have golden ear-rings or a chain. The possession of ornaments always depend of their economic conditions.

### **Language / Dialact :**

The original language of Siddis was Swahili or any other African language or even dialects. However their original language alongwith their original culture is washed away in stream of times. None of them can speak or understand Swahili language. They, under the local

impact, have adopted many socio-cultural characteristics. In Kutch, they speak both Kutchi and Gujarati language. Even in their homes, they use these two languages/dialects very naturally. Often they are found trying to speak Urdu, under muslim influence. But their mother tongue is Kutchi in Kutch.

The Siddi children get religious lessons in Madrasa both in Urdu and Arabi language. During field work some children in Khorai village were found attending Madrasa for religious learning. Such learning particularly for Quran-Majid and Namaz is provided in Arabi; but in a family and outside they use Gujarati and understand Gujarati language with good confidence.

### **Economic Life :**

There is no specific occupation followed by Siddis in general. During princely States (i.e. before 1947) all the Siddis were serving in States service - Army, or in the houses of their sub-ordinates (Jagirdars etc.). They were honest and faithful; and therefore, they were known as Jamadar or Badshah. But after the princely rule, they were unemployed. Only those who could get a piece of land, could cultivate it for their livelihood; but most of them were unemployed and hence they had resorted to labour work. As on to-day, they are poor and as usual; poverty has led them to illiteracy. That is why, some of the Siddis had to satisfy with the employment such as a driver, conductor or a clerk at most.

In urban areas, they pull hand-cart, engaged as casual labourers, driver's & cleaner's job in private trucks, wireman, masonry work, washerman, waiter, compounder in private clinic etc. In the town of Bhuj, the Siddi women have been doing household work; and their daughters also get engaged in some kind of household work. Some of the women are engaged in working as casual labourers in masonry work. Some of them were found working in Bandhani work, famous local textile industry. In Vagad region-talukas of Anjar, Bhachau and Rapar - the women donot go for household work; but they go for unfolding of cotton seed pod or get engaged in labour work in cotton gin factory, labour work in masonry, or in salt farms.

In rural areas, they live around agricultural activities - cultivation on partnership basis, casual labour work in farm. Women also join their male counterpart in such work. An occupa-

tion of Animal Husbandry is also practiced, mainly managed by women. However, the poor economic conditions cannot allow them to have more than one or two milch animals. Very few of them have small holdings of land. In summer, they migrate to other places in search of labour work, when agricultural activities are at minimum level. The migration to other places means places not very far from 40-50 kms. Since agriculture does not provide them enough; the new generation looks forward for urban alternatives.

Young children, to supplement family income, work on Lari-Galla-Dhaba as Hotel boys. Young girls also go for household work or Bandhani work. Some young boys work while they go to schools also.

More expenditure is on livelihood. Besides, they spend in religious festivals, marriage, death, birth celebrations etc. Except those in good jobs, people can hardly save money. Instead, they have to incur debt. They do not waste money on liquor or any other addictions. The Siddi Jamat President said that very few members have availed of loans from bank etc. Siddis are either not aware of the schemes of loan/subsidy for self employment; or they depend on the easy source of their own employers.

To sum up, most of the Siddis of Kutch are economically poor and lead BPL life. Their life is full of struggles for living.

### **Education :**

The level of literacy among Siddis of Kutch is very low. Young kids do attend schools, and they take education up to std. VII in Government-run primary schools as reported by the President/Vice President of the Siddi Jamat. Thereafter, there is wastage element in education. In villages, usually girls do not attend schools. The Islamic Schools also charge higher fees, which is not affordable by the Siddis. In urban areas, however, boys do go to schools. In Bhuj, at least 4 youth (boys) were found taking higher education; from among nearly 100 families. Overall, level of education is lower; but the present generation seems to have been committed to cause of literacy.

### **Social organization :**

The family system is patriarchic i.e. male dominated. Usually, a man is head of the family and it is his duty to take responsibility of the family. He is honoured and respected in the family. He plays major role during marriage, child birth etc. He is succeeded by his elder son.

The marriages, usually, are among Siddis only. However there are examples of marriages among other muslims - Arab, Pathan and Muslims. After marriage, a woman gets her husband's surname. Usually the marriages are between near acquaintances. There are following surnames found among Siddis :

Makwa,	Bana	Lombi	Badshah
Rukhadiya	Kathiri	Nombi	Bilali
Swali	Shirmani	(NObil)	Majgul
Makrani		Vajgura,	Mugindo
Micanu		Habshi	Makwana
			Jamnadar

There are some of the Surnames (Gotras/Nukho) found among Siddis. However pronunciations may differ from place to place.

Besides, it was found that Surnames donot have much weightage among Siddis. Some of them didnot know their surnames at all. In certificates and other documents their caste/sub castes are mentioned as Siddis. They marry both inter-gotra and intra-gotra.

After marriage, a woman respects her in laws. She keeps distant respect with mother-in-law; father-in-law, elder brother in laws with her face covered with saree. However, among younger brother-in-laws and sisters-in-laws, or such other relations, they mix freely, cut jokes and have fun.

### **Social Customs :**

Usually the Siddi Woman, when she gets menstruation (m.c.), it is said that she is not clean. Such women keep away from cooking, bringing water, visiting religious place (dargah),

cleaning of food grain, etc. After 4-5 days, after taking bath, she returns to normal duties.

**Pregnancy :**

After 6 months of first pregnancy, in the seventh month of pregnancy, the pre-birth celebration takes place. Usually such celebration is done on Sunday or Tuesday. Her relatives from parents' place come and participate. She is given a coconut and sugar cubes. She is made to sit and a tilak is done on her forehead. Other nearby relatives are also invited; and a sweet dish is served. The woman is taken to her parents' place till her delivery.

**Birth and giving name :**

Mostly first delivery is at her parents' place only. A child birth takes place at home (and not in a hospital). But in a town, the delivery is conducted in the hospital. Upto 11 days of delivery, she is not allowed to touch a holy place. On 6th day of the birth of a child; 'Chhatthi' celebration takes place. The sister of a father gives name to the child. The muslim name is given to the child like Mustak, Sale Mahmad etc.

**Mundan (Zanda) :**

When the child becomes 1 to 3 years old, he is brought to the Dargah of BabaGor in their native place and his hairs are removed from the head. Persons who can afford, also invite the relatives on such occasion and sweet dish is served. Sometimes, 2 or 3 persons jointly conduct the ceremony to save the expenditure. The sweet dish also contains meat.

**Circumstising (Sunhat) :**

Circumsticin is compulsory among Siddis. This is done either by doctor or by a hair-remover. All relatives are invited. Other people from the village are also invited. They are entertained.

**Marriage :**

The initiative is taken by a bridegroom's party. Usually marriages are done at the will of parents. There are no child marriages among Siddis. The age at the time of marriage is 16 to 21 years for girls and 20 to 25 years for boys. This information was confirmed during field work.

Four to Five adults from boy's side go to bride's parents, giving a rupee as a token of engagements. This is confirmed by boy's side when 4-5 elderly people go to girl's place again with a piece of cloth, 5 packets of suger-cubes, jaggery and a coconut. On acceptance of this by girl's side, the engagement is confirmed. Usually, once engagement is confirmed, it is final.

At the time of marriage, the boy's side go in a procession to girl's place. In Vagad area, the ceremony lasts for a week. The celebration includes 'Pithi', Ganesh Puja programmes. But in other areas, the celebration is not so long. Marriages are performed according to Muslim customs. Such 'Nikah' are performed according to rules of Siddi Jamat with 'Mehtar' of 1.25 tolas of silver. When the 'Nikah' is confirmed by the girl; all present are served with sweets. The boy's procession takes one meal at girl's place wherein sweets and meat are served. Both Muslim and Hindu acquaintances join the party.

The marriages among Siddis is all over Gujarat, but the marriages with Muslims, Pathans, Arabs and Mughals are very few. It was learnt during field work that, with increase in transport communication system. Siddis of Kutch, get the marriages performed with Siddis of other areas of Gujarat including districts of Junagadh, Jamnagar and Bhavnagar.

### **Death :**

At the time of Death, Ayats from Quran are spoken. The deadbody is incensed with fragrant substances and taken to cemetery. All relatives join this final procession and in their presence, the dead body is buried. On third day of death, a 'Jalas' is arranged and alms (Kherat) are given. Quran is read. Post-death ceremonies are organised on 10th and 40th day of death. All relatives come on the occasion; and give consolation to the families. The cemetery is common for Muslims and Siddis. Other ceremonies are equal among Muslims and Siddis.

### **Religious life :**

All Siddis in Kutch are Sunni Muslims. They follow Islam. They are followers of Hazrat Bawa Gor, whose main 'Dargah' is in Ratanpur (Tal. Jhagadiya, District Bharuch). Wherever Siddis habitate, they make there, Bawa Gor Dargah.

Siddis of Kutch celebrate the Islam festivals like Mohram, Id-e-Milad, Ramzan Id, Bakri-Id etc. They have deep faith on Islamic pavements like Haj, Namaj, Roja, Jakat, Kalma, Kherat, Jihad etc. Due to proximity with Hindus, they also perform Ganesh Poojan', 'Shitala Satam' etc.

### **Dhamal :**

'Dhamal' is a dance distinctly performed by Siddis. It is a holy dance. During this dance, they remember holy 'pir'. Both men and women join this dance. They use various musical instruments like Musido (big drum), Mugarmano (Selani), Nobat, Small drums, Nafir (Shankh'), Mai Mishra etc. during Dhamal dance and they are kept at the 'dargah of Bawa Gor.' They also use a brush made from peacock-wings.

Dhamal dance of Siddis in Anjar is organised at Bawagor Dargah every Thursday. In Kutch, the main Bawagor Durgah is situated at Shikharpur (between Bhachau and Rapar) Urs is organized on 15th day of Hindu month Kartik; where the Siddis from Kutch as well as from Bhavnagar, Jamnagar, Junagadh and other places come to-gether to offer their respect. At that time, Dhamal dances are performed. This dance, in a way, memorises Siddis' roots in Africa.

During Dhamal Dance, they sing songs addressed to Bawagor as under :

‘ધમામા પર સલામા ઓ ધમામા પર સલામા

ધોરી બાદશાહ યાહો યાહો યાલે

ધમામા પર સલામા

Salutations with the beating of Drunrs, 'O' Badsha Ghor' Accept our saluations.

નીચેની પંક્તિઓ ધમાલ નૃત્ય પૂરું થાય છે ત્યારે ગાય છે અને પછી બધા વિખેરાઈ જાય છે.

‘ના મિલે, ના મિલે, સીદીકા બચ્યા શેર બરાબર

લાઈ લાહા ઈલ્લલાહ, કલંદર સારો મેલો

એ હિલ્લો હિલ્લો હિલ્લો, કલંદર સારો મેલો’

He is not easily met, a Siddi child is like lion Lailaha Illillah 10 sage, Anice fair (the assembly is over.

Hillo, Hillo, Hillo, etc.

The musical instruments used in Dhamal dance are unique and specially designed. (Please refer to the illustrations of such instruments in later part of the report)

### **Religious Philosophy :**

Indian Siddis follow three different religious viz. Islam, Hindu and Christianity. But mostly, they are followers of Islam. In Maharashtra and Mysore, there are some Siddis following Hinduism and Christianity. But Siddis of Gujarat follow Islam. Likewise in Kutch too, Siddis follow Islam. Siddis are Sunni muslims. They believe in 'Oliya' and 'Pir'. Bawa Gor is also their favourite 'Pir'. They take vows of 'Pir' during difficult times. Mostly, wherever Siddis habitate, they make a 'Bawa Gor Dargah'. Such Bawapir dargahs are in Bhuj, Mandvi and other places in Kutch. Siddis celebrate all festivals of Muslims. They go to Mosque and perform 'Namaj', not all, but few Siddis do perform 'Namaj'. They also go for 'Haj Pilgrimage'. Thus, they have deep traditions of Islam.

### **Structure of Social Controls :**

Siddis have come here and settled from Africa. They have been in touch with various people with different cultures. The contacts are for many generations and hence they get affected by these cultural impacts. There is hardly any thing like 'traditionalism' in their social structure. It is an intermix of some cultural traits usually from nearby surrounding.

Siddis have their 'Panch' in each village / area of their residence, which is known as 'Jammat'. There is also a central 'Jammat' for all Siddis of Kutch. It is headed by Patel; who presides over a meeting. The Patel of 'Jammat' is usually honest, efficient and helping type of person who wants to serve his people. It is a good institution for solving their day-to-day problems. It is a socio-religious body. It also employs a Kotwal, who conveys people about Jammat's meetings. The tenure for Patel of Jammat is not a fixed period. He continues to serve people till the people want him.

Jammat is a social welfare body of Siddis. It brings solution to most of their conflicts. It also examines cases of theft and beatings; and prescribes appropriate punishment after Inquiry. The decision of Jammat is acceptable to all Siddis.

Besides Jamat even Muzavir of Dargah; i.e. the religious leader of dargah holds higher position among Siddis; and he enjoys their respect.

### **Problems :**

Siddis live in poverty. They do not have any traditional, occupation after independence and they follow petty occupations for their livelihood. They cannot overcome the problems of poverty through such occupations. They are often exploited by other sections of society, and they face many more problems. Problems sometimes create their distinct identity; and people start believing that Siddi Badshah are idle and easy-go-lucky; that their houses are like those of labourers and that they do not value education etc. etc.

Most Siddis of Kutch (over 55 percent) live in town of Bhuj. Those in rural areas have kutcha houses with a room and verandaoh. The houses get often destructed during heavy rains in monsoon. As such, the Siddis in urban areas have more difficult problems, as regards housing. Mostly their houses are rented ones, where facilities are least and rents are unaffordable. Thus, housing is a major problem for Siddis both in urban and rural areas.

Some Siddis in rural areas have small piece of land holding. But they do not have adequate equipments; and therefore they cannot get enough crop from the land. There is no irrigation also; and therefore they produce very little from land. Both in urban and rural areas, they depend more on casual labour work, which is not constant and continuous. Siddis in urban areas find labour work in nearby factories or market. The women go for household work. Summerilly, almost all Siddis live life of BPL.

The level of literacy among Siddis is very low. They do not give much significance to education; and hold the view that, education or no education, one will get food to eat. They argue that education is a waste; because if a person goes to school, who will do some work and earn to supplement family income ? Such philosophy and such thinking make them remain illiterate. Parents themselves, being illiterate, do not understand the value of education. Boys attend schools upto primary level, but girls hardly reach upto Std II or III. The negligence for education is not only a rural problems, it is there in urban areas too; the difference being therein is only in terms of degree.

Thus, the socio-economic- education conditions of Siddis in urban and rural areas of Kutch is backward and most of the families live BPL life.

### **Characteristics for Schedule Tribe Status :**

In 1965, a Committee was constituted under the Chairmanship of Shri B.N. Lokur to study the problems of tribals. The committee prescribed following characteristics for tribals :

1. those possessing primitive elements
2. those possessing distinct culture
3. sense of reservation in public contacts
4. geographical alienation
5. social and economic backwardness

In the present study, an effort is made to examine the characteristics of Siddis of Kutch in the light of above list, so that conclusive recommendation could be made in respect of granting them schedule tribe status :

#### **(1) Those possessing Primitive Elements :**

Siddis of Kutch hold the species of negroes of Africa. Physically, they look different from others at first sight. However, some of them have entered into marital relations with local Muslim families and consequently, the new generation, to some extent, differ from such species characteristics. Siddis in Gujarat mostly reside in Saurashtra region. Their stay in India is considered to be as old as 400-500 years. The primitive elements could be enumerated as distinct dialect, undeveloped form of economic system, totem, taboos, few garments, prominence of spiritual elements, conviction in unseen elements, supreme authority of primitive tribe panch etc. etc. (Desai Urmiben, 1975). We can see the elements like conviction, belief and customs in rural Sunni Muslim families; but the Siddis of Kutch do not seem to reflect such significance of primitive tribes.

#### **(2) Those possessing distinct culture :**

The Siddis in Gujarat seem to have been brought by traders from Abisinia (Ethiopia) and other countries of East Africa, as slaves or as household servants. They

follow Islamic religion, and follow Islamic customs in marriage, birth; death etc. However, in some respect, they differ from Muslims and follow their own customs. Siddis believe that their origin place in Gujarat could be Ratanpur in Jhagadiya taluka of Bharuch district. Their place of pilgrim is the Durgah of Bawa Gor at Ratanpur. Bawa Gor Pir is considered to be their family Pir. In all the places inhabited by Siddis, there are Bawa Gor Dargah. The Ratanpur Dargah of Bawagor is considered to be a holy place for Siddis. Such Bawa Gor Durgah are also located at Bhuj, Mandvi, Shirarpur etc. On the death anniversary (Urs) of Nagarchi Bawa, Siddis perform Dhamal dance. Besides it is performed on every Thursday. It is considered as a holy dance which is a distinct characteristic of their culture; which establishes their close connection with African culture. Though they follow Islamic religious; they have deeper conviction in their own 'Oliya Pir' viz. Bawa Gor. Thus, their culture is distinct.

Siddis have maintained their distinct and beautiful tradition of Rafai Goma (Dhamal) dance which is a folk dance. They pronounce 'Jakkari' musical sound. They use their special musical instruments. (See Appendix 3). The dancers get lost in their musical sound and dance with great force. Men use music which is responded by women. Siddi youth participate in State level cultural programmes. They have intermixed with Sunni Muslim Community, so much that even Sunni Muslims consider them to be their own part. They have social relationship including marriages. In Siddis of Kutch, one does not find any element of distinct culture except their Dhamal dance.

**(3) Sense of reservation in Public Contacts :**

The field work observations indicate that Siddis have intermixed with local communities to the greater extent. They have developed good relationships with the local people. They participate in each others' social celebrations; and also invite the people of other communities in their social celebrations. The people from other communities also respond to such invitations. Since most of the Siddis in Kutch district being inhabited in urban areas; they do not keep any sense of reservation in mixing with people. Geographically also, they do not seem different. In rural areas they, like

other muslim communities, mix freely with other people and keep cordial relations with them. In short, one doesnot find any distinct characteristics of primitive tribes in Siddis of Kutch. They freely mix with people of all communities.

**(4) Geographical alleanation :**

The Siddis of Kutch are not geographically distinct either. Usually they habitate with other communities in Kutch. The area is plain and neither hilly nor forest area. They speak regional language, namely, kutchi and Gujarati. Being followers of Bawa Gor, they speak 'Jukuriyo' of Gomi (Rafai) Dhamal in coloquiel Urdu; but both in house and outside, they speak Gujarati and Kutchi and consider Gujarti as their mother tongue. Being Islami by religion, the children learn Quran in Arabic language in Madrasa. They know Urdu as well. Some Siddis, who had come as sailors of the ship, do know Swahili words of kenya - Tanzaniya; but by and large, they use regional language in all local transactions.

Their ancestral language could be Swahili or some other African language / dialacts; but they have totally lost their original culture and have adopted local culture and local language; viz. Kutchi and Gujarati. Most of the Siddis in Kutch like their counter part in Saurashtra, state Gujarati as their mother tongue in census. Thus, Siddis of Kutch, donot seem to be found geographically alleanated.

**(5) Socio-economic backwardness :**

From view point of backwardness, the Siddies of Kutch are very backward socially, economically and educationally. Most of them in cities / urban areas depend on casual or petty Labour work. In rural areas, some siddis are holding a small piece of land and thus try to live on it. But the land being in small piece and that too without irrigation facility; they too have to supplement their income through labour work. They donot have better skills hence, they donot get skilled job. Some of them are drivers and some are cleaners or compounders, or rikshaw driver. Both in rural and urban areas, the labour work is not available throughout the year. Most of Siddi people live BPL life. Very

few people are in service sector. The Siddis in rural areas have small piece of land which is not fertile, resulting in inadequate earning from it. Overall, they have very few employment opportunities. Most of Siddis in kutch both in urban and rural areas live BPL life. Thus, they could be considered as backward minorities and such benefits could be extended to them; as those in Minority.

A discussion was held with President Shri Liyakat Ali Haji Kasam Jamadar and Vice President Shri Mahmadbhai Ladha Makrani of Siddi Jamat of Kutchh as to what is their concept of Tribals and whether the Siddis of Kutch according to their opinion, meet the criteria. Both of them responded that they donot have any conceptual idea; but that the Siddis should get benefit of schedule tribes at par with those availed by Siddis of Saurashtra region.

In this study, an effort has been made to examine the characteristics of Siddis in Kutch district in light of frame of reference provided by Lokur Samiti in its report. From a close and intensive examination, it transpires that Siddis of Kutch district donot meet the criteria or donot represent the characteristics of tribal communities. It was clearly revealed that besides some negroid elements and their famous Dhamal dance; they donot have any cultural traits of distinct culture. Their original culture is almost lost. They, by no standard, are primitive. Instead, they can easily be categorised as backwark muslims. They are socially and educationally backward. Largely being concentrated in urban society, they can mix with people of general categories. They are not geographically alleanted. They have been staying only in some parts of Kutch. They follow islamic religion and therefore follow islamic customs in marriage and death. Both their dress and dialacts are like Kutchi muslims. They use kutchi dialacts and Gujarati language.

Barring a couple of characteristics, the Siddis of Kutch resemble characteristics of Sunni Muslim Community. They are backward economically and educationally. Therefore the rationaile that the benefits availed of by Siddis of Saurashtra as schedule tribe communities should also be made available to Siddis of Kutch doesnt sound logical.

Considering all above facts, the Siddis of Kutch can be provided with special

benefits, in capacity of backward minorities in order to improve their educational and economic conditions. However, it is not recommended to include the Siddis of Kutch, in the list of Scheduled tribes. The Siddis of Kutch, by and large, habitate in urban areas; and they have been included in the list of socially and educationally backward communities (SEBC). However, it is recommended that if they are also provided with special benefits as more backward minorities, so as to bring about all-round development in Kutchi Siddis. As per conclusion of the study, they are not recommended to be included in the list of Schedule Tribes; because they do not reflect the characteristics as should be present in tribals; but it is strongly recommended, on the basis of finding of this study that for their overall social, educational, economic development, they should be considered as backward class minorities and such benefits should be extended to them.

There have been several evidences that the Siddi Community of Kutch have close ties with Siddi Community of Saurashtra region. There is no reason to deny their social connections. (The copies of the certificates of birth and marriages as shown in appendix are clear evidence of such connections); but this fact is not an adequate reason to include them in schedule tribes, at par with Siddis in Saurashtra region. Besides, for placing any community in the list of Primitive Tribes, following characteristics as prescribed by Government of India, needs to be examined and established : viz;

- (1) Use of pre-agricultural level technology
- (2) Diminishing rate of population or Stagnation in population.
- (3) Lowest level of literacy (alongwith severe poverty)

On the basis of these characteristics, Siddis of Kutch cannot be included in schedule tribe or primitive tribal group. This is our recommendation based on the present study.

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