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Tribal leader Diego Bastav Siddhi passes away



He fought for the welfare of the Siddhi community and rights of forest dwelling communities

Diego Bastav Siddhi, a leader of the Siddhi tribal community, died in Halyal in Uttara Kannada district on Friday. He was around 75.

He was instrumental in pushing forward the demand that the community in all districts should be treated equally as a member of the Scheduled Tribe. He organised the Siddhi community in Belagavi district where it was listed under backward classes. He was a part of the national Siddhi federation and led delegation to the central government about the welfare of the Siddhi community and rights of forest dwelling communities in the past.

The Siddi community gets its first lawmaker in Karnataka. They are included as the Scheduled Tribes in Karnataka.

Siddi Tribe

- The Siddi also known as Sidi, Siddhi, Sheedi or Habshi, are an ethnic group inhabiting India and Pakistan.
- They are sometimes referred to as Afro-Indians. They are descended from the Bantu peoples of the East African region.
- Similarly, another term for Siddis, habshi, is held to be derived from the common name for the captains of the Abyssinian ships that also first delivered Siddi slaves to the subcontinent.
- They are primarily Muslims, although some are Hindus and others belong to the Catholic Church.

How they came to India?

- The first Siddis are thought to have arrived in India in 628 AD at the Bharuch port. Several others followed with the first Arab conquest of the subcontinent in 712 AD.
- The latter groups are believed to have been soldiers with Muhammad bin Qasim's Arab army and were called Zanjis.
- In the Delhi Sultanate period prior to the rise of the Mughals in India, Jamal-ud-Din Yaqut was a prominent Siddi slave-turned-nobleman who was a close confidant of Razia Sultana.
- Siddis were also brought as slaves by the Deccan Sultanates. They also served in the Navy of Shivaji Maharaj.
- Several former slaves rose to high ranks in the military and administration, the most prominent of which was Malik Ambar.
- Later the Siddi population was added to via Bantu peoples from Southeast Africa that had been brought to the Indian subcontinent as slaves by the Portuguese.