

## **SIDDI**

Very few people are aware about a very special and unique community that resides on the west coast of India in the state of Gujarat, Karnataka, Maharashtra and some cities of Hyderabad. These are the people from Siddi community who were brought to India from South East Africa. These are basically the Bantu tribe that were brought as slaves, initially by Arabs and then by Portuguese. They were primarily settled in the coastal areas of Gujarat and Maharashtra but later some of them also joined the armies of local kingdoms like Ahmadnagar and even Mughal armies. They have typical African features but have accepted Indian social practices and even started speaking in local languages like Gujarati and Marathi. They primarily follow sufi version of Islam. At the same time they also maintain their African traditions of drum beat dance. They had a very glorious martial history. Many of them also rose to various high positions in armies of various kingdoms like Jamal-ud-Din Yaqut, a famous slave who turned noble during the regime of Razia Sultan and Malik Ambar, the general of Ahmadnagar kingdom of Deccan. Earlier, they were famous for their sea warfare techniques and controlled Konkan coast for a long time through their forts in Murud Janjira. Later they even supported and helped Marathas in their fight against Mughals. In Gujarat especially they still maintain their all major traditional practices, although they speak Gujarati as their mother tongue but they still perform their traditional drum dance locally known as Dhamaal, which resembles with the African drum beat dance. In Gujarat they reside in villages near Gir forest, the last home of Asiatic lion.