Chapter IV

ECONOMIC CONDITION
OF
THE SIDIS
ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF THE SIDIS

Economic backwardness of the Sidis is a serious problem that is faced by this tribe. It has far reaching effects in the life of the Sidis.

All the Sidis in Karnataka State mostly live in a rural area and work as agricultural labourers or they do some other work connected with agricultural and forest product. The tropical wet evergreen forests in the valleys and ghats are the habitat of the Sidi settlements. The vegetation is of an immense variety. Teak wood is a very important product of the forests. Bamboo is found abundantly. Therefore, this trade in wood is very important for the people of this area, including the Sidis. So, the forest and forestry is an important source of subsistence and income for the Sidis. Besides there are varieties
of useful animals, insects, grasses, shrubs in these forests which are of scientific and commercial value.

This region is also known for its mineral deposits. There is a possibility of finding uranium in North Kanara District and other surrounding Sidis areas in Karnataka. There are many varieties of wild animals, birds, insects, seafish and fresh fish and animals and fowls in North Kanara District etc. There are varieties of lotus in this region. Birds, wild boar, bears, deer and pigs are also found in the forest. Snakes of various species are also abundant in these areas.

The majority of Sidis are farmers who supplement their earning through wage labour. This can be seen from the following table No.8

The breakdown for occupation is 56.4% agriculturists and 43.95% wage labourers, 1.35% businessmen and 1.06% in service.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl.No.</th>
<th>Taluka</th>
<th>No. of Families</th>
<th>Other Sources of Income</th>
<th>Wage Labour</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1)</td>
<td>Ankola</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>041</td>
<td>083</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2)</td>
<td>Haliyal</td>
<td>555</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3)</td>
<td>Kalghatgi</td>
<td>080</td>
<td>027</td>
<td>053</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4)</td>
<td>Khanapur</td>
<td>014</td>
<td>004</td>
<td>010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5)</td>
<td>Mundgod</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>057</td>
<td>060</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6)</td>
<td>Sirsi</td>
<td>022</td>
<td>019</td>
<td>013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7)</td>
<td>Joida</td>
<td>016</td>
<td>013</td>
<td>003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8)</td>
<td>Yellapur</td>
<td>478</td>
<td>372</td>
<td>086</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total 1406  768  628
The forest is a source of livelihood in many respects. The Sidis do wage-labour in the forest Department. They take up the strenuous work of clearing forests including loading and unloading trucks with timber and planting saplings for afforestation.

Collecting wild honey provides additional income to many of the families of the Sidis. The honey is sold to the local middlemen at about half the price of the market price. Usually honey season is the months of May or June and from October to November. These are the proper times to collect honey. Then, some families sell firewood, poles, bamboos and mats made of bamboo. Promoting home industries like basket-making, mat-weaving, cane-furniture and bee-keeping will help to supplement to their income and raise their standard of living. Some Sidi families love the chase. They hunt wild boar, deer, wild pigs, rabbits, jungle fowl and other
animals. These are hunted especially during the monsoon and during the harvest season. Some Sidis do (Oct./Nov.) little tisings along with the local people.

A few economically well-off farmers also keep cows and she-buffaloes. There is a good market for milk so this is an additional income. Out of 1406 families are engaged in dairying. 204 families rear cows and buffaloes. The total number of cows reared, buffaloes, bulls and chickens reared by Sidis is 1695. There are a few families in Yellapur taluka who have a herd of more than 50 she-buffaloes.

One of the great ambitions of the Sidis is to purchase a land and bullocks. This desire is not so easy to fulfil. There are some cases where Sidi formers abandoned their lands because they could not purchase new bullocks. There
was central scheme for advancing loans for farmers to purchase bulls and bullock-carts. But the scheme was abruptly ended as these farmers were cultivating encroachment-land.

a) THEIR FOREST ENVIRONMENT:

The forest and the Sidis form an ecological unit. This influences their economic life. The forest gave them shelter they were released from the bondage of slavery inflicted on them by people like Portuguese. They bravely encountered both the dangers from illness and wild beasts of the forest and went deeper into the forests in search of a comfortable and convenient place to settle, they cleared patches of land from cultivation. They continued for long as petty farmers and agriculturists. Most of them lost the land they had acquired by their own labour due to mortage on the loans taken from the Havic Brahmins, Lingayats or Marathas.
The forest is their source of livelihood in many ways. Only about 60% of the Sidis population own land and 50% of the farmers cultivate land encroached on from the forests.

Sidis usually work as labourers for the forest Department where they are required to clear the forest, stock wood, load timber on trucks and plant saplings.

Extraction of honey forms an extra source of income for many families. The economic condition of Sidis in Karnataka is bound up with the forests. It is the main source of livelihood. All the Sidis moved into the forest and made their homeland. After running away from the kingdoms of the masters, they settled in dense forests and settled and cleared areas of land for cultivation. The Sidis by and large continue to be small farmers and agricultural labourers.
The forest provides wood for fuel and bamboos for building houses. They use bamboos for making baskets and with the leaves of a shrub they make mats. Although there is abundant cane available in the forest, the Sidis have not taken to making cane-ware and moreover, the forest department has evolved a policy that benefits the owners of factories and industries rather than forest dwellers.

The forest provides scope also for hunting and fishing. Wild boar, deer, ghorpad (a variety of big lizard) rabbit and other animals are hunted especially during the monsoon and the harvest seasons when they come to raid the fields. Fishing is not taken up by the Sidis as a main source of livelihood. But at the beginning of rainy season and in summer when lakes and streams run dry, some fish is caught for the home or the market.
b) DOMESTIC ANIMALS:

Some ambitious Sidis also rear domestic animals like cattle, buffaloes, sheep, goats, rabbits etc. This provides them with an extra source of income. The fodder for the animals is easily obtained from the forest. In Ankola taluka, with its 124 families, 43 animals were counted; in Haliyal taluka 546 families had 193 animals; in Mundagod taluka, among 106 families, 34 animals; in Sirsi taluka, 22 families and 7 animals; in Joida taluka, 16 families and 3 animals; in Yellapur taluka 473 families with 175 animals; in Kalghatgi taluka 78 families with 20 animals; and Khanapur taluka 14 families have only 3 animals. Rarely do we find cases of Sidis owning big herds of cattle or buffaloes.

c) GEOGRAPHICAL CONDITIONS:

1) Soil:

It is said that the crystalline and gneiss are the oldest rocks found all over North Kanara
District. They are also found in the south of Belgaum District. Crystalline consists of Grantoid Gneiss. Crystalline limestone is found around Sambrani village. The general colour of the soil is deep red. Red soil normally occurs in an elevated areas and black soil at lower level in plains or in valleys. According soil tests the contents are as follows: lime 8%, silt 22.42%, clay 31.75%, carbon 10.14% and nitrogen 0.06%.

2. RED LOAM:

The colour of the soil is redish-brown. It is available at shallow to medium-deep levels. It has a good water retaining capacity. It is useful for paddy and sugar-cane and banana.

3. BLACK SOIL:

It is black to light gray in colour. It has also a good water-retaining capacity and is found to be very good for paddy, fruit-crops, chillies, jawar, pulses and groundnuts. Besides this soil is used for pottery.
4. CLIMATE:

The altitude of plateau reduces the temperature to an appreciable degree, so the climate is pleasant. Generally this area is temperate and humid. The average winter temperature is between 50° and 55° Fahrenheit. A year is divided into six periods:-

**d) AGRICULTURAL MILIEU:**

Mid-August to mid-October is the rainy season.

Mid-October to mid-December is the cool season.

Mid-December to mid-February is the cold season.

Mid-February to mid-April is spring.

Mid-April to June is the hot season.

Mid-June to July is the season of wind and rain.

The paddy field is left fallow after the first ploughing. In the month of May they plough the fields. They collect the dry leaves
from the forest floor and spread them in the field. Cowdung manure is also collected and heaped in the field. During the 3rd and 4th week of May they start the sowing operations. In the month of June the paddy seedlings are transplanted. In the month of July weeding is done frequently. In the month of August no particular work is done except weeding.

In the month of September final removal of whatever weeds remain.

From the month of October onwards the cutting of organs and budding is done carefully. Thus helps to destroy weeds which are then burnt in order to make manure. As soon as the paddy crops is harvested, they plough the fields and allow to dry up.

In the month of December there is threshing of the ears the winnowing work and finally
transporting the grain and strew home then the fields are kept in readiness for the next sowing operation.

e) OCCUPATION OF THE SIDIS:

All the Sidis in Karnataka live in rural areas or in the forests so the only occupation is agriculture. A few Sidis only 40 families have non-agricultural pursuits. Their income is less than Rs.4800/-00 per year. So they are considered to be economically poor as per Govt. categories. According to our data it gives the idea that most of the Sidis come under the annual income of Rs.4800/- which is considered to be economically poor. One third of the total Sidi population is below the poverty-line. A few families have an income above Rs.10,000/- per annum. This indicates that the Sidis are generally economically very poor.

Apart from agricultural wage-labour, they go to search for wage-labour in some other
Govt. Departments; usually after the harvest season. The Sidis migrate individually or in groups to nearby villages and forests for various jobs. The kinds of jobs they are employed in are loading and unloading trucks, feeling trees stocking wood and raising nurseries. They earn more through those jobs than what they get by agricultural wages. In some jobs the agricultural wage labour is highly remunerative. There are three types of wage-labour in this region, viz. daily wages, contract wages and bonded labour wage. For the daily-wage labour the wage is calculated on a daily-work basis. The payment is made weekly, usually on the market-day. In North Karnataka villages Monday is an off-day for farmers. The employer for whom they work agrees to this Monday off. Certain jobs in agriculture are done on contract-basis. This kind of work is called "GUTAGI" in the local dialect. A group of Sidis accept to work for a farmer for certain amount of money. An advance is taken
before they start the job. Usually they are happy when they get cash in a lump sum. Only a few people get such employment. The Sidis by and large are not good bargainers.

The Sidis are also employed as bonded labourers. The term for this type of labour in the local dialect "JIITA". Young boys ranging from the age of seven years to twenty years work on yearly basis. This contract is renewable. The agreement is made between the parents of the boy and the landlords or farmers. An advance amount of money is taken by the parents. There is no fixed price for such a kind of labour. It depends upon the nature of the work and the size of the family of the landlord, and on the age and capacity of the boy.

There is another type of bonded labour where the entire family has to work for an employer for the whole year or a period of time agreed
upon. Sometimes Sidi families are granted a piece of land by the landlord in remuneration for any work they have done. In this way the family seems to be constantly in debt to the landlord. As a result the whole family suffers from perpetual bondage. Such bonded labour is found in very few cases.

The total cultivated land is 2873.36 acres. The Sidi farmers can be classified into four groups (1) Having his own land 2) Having land taken on lease 3) Having land given on lease and 4) Having encroachment land. Out of the 2873.36 acres 1558.42 are also owned by the Sidi farmers.

f) AGRICULTURAL OCCUPATION:

There are four types of tenancy found in this region. They are : 1) Kor 2) Khande 3) Lavani and 4) Hangami (Lavani).
1. **KOR:**

It means equal share-cropping. All costs of manure and seeds are shared equally. The other expenses for weeding, chopping, harvesting, threshing are also borne equally by the landlord and the farmers. Here the advantage is that there is no labour problem for cultivation of the land, since this is done by the farmer. The advantage for the farmer is that he can borrow grain from the landlord without having to pay back to the landlord.

2) **LAVANI:**

In this system the farmers have to give an agreed amount to the landlord for using the land for certain period of time. It is the responsibility of the farmer to cultivate the land as profitably as possible.

3. **KHANDA:**

In this system the farmers have to make
yearly payment, the amount being agreed upon before the contract is signed.

4. HANGAMI (LAVANI):

The forest Department earmarks certain unwanted open patches of land for cultivation on yearly payment. After a stipulated period the farmer can buy the land from the Department according to certain Government regulations.

In Haliyal taluka all the 555 families are economically poor. In Mundgod taluka out of 117 families 116 families are economically poor. In Sirsi taluka all 22 families in Joida taluka and all the 478 families and 16 families in Yellapur and Khanapur talukas respectively.

As regarding the amount of land owned by the Sidi family. In Ankola taluka out of 124 families 40 families own 121 acres of land and
there are 12 families who cultivate 123.64 acres of encroachment land while 72 families are landless. In Haliyal taluka out of 555 families 250 families have 1000 acres of own land; 101 families cultivate 595.9 acres of encroachment land; and 27 families cultivate 62.000 acres of land on lease, and 177 families are landless. In Mundgod taluka, out of 117 families 26 families cultivated 150.22 acres of own land, 25 families cultivate 87.20 acres of encroachment-land, and 7 families cultivate 30 acres of land on lease, and 59 families are landless. In Sirsi taluka out of 22 families 2 families cultivate 3 acres of own land, 5 families cultivate leased land 5 families cultivate 8 acres of own land, and 6 families cultivate 21 acres of encroachment land, and 4 families are landless. In Khanapur taluka, out of 14 families 2 families cultivate 4 acres of own land, 1 family cultivates 3 acres of land on lease, and 11 families are landless.

Regarding their sources of loans 41
No.13. A group of Marathi Sidis.
TABLE NO. - 9

THE PURPOSE OF LOANS TAKEN BY THE SIDIS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. Taluk No.</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>No. of Families</th>
<th>For Marriage</th>
<th>For Festivals</th>
<th>For Sickness</th>
<th>For Purchase of Animals</th>
<th>For Domst.</th>
<th>For Crop House</th>
<th>For Land Development</th>
<th>Loan Taken</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Ankola</td>
<td>North Kanara</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>09</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>043</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>06</td>
<td>07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Haliyal</td>
<td>North Kanara</td>
<td>555</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Mundgod</td>
<td>North Kanara</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>034</td>
<td>07</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Sirsi</td>
<td>North Kanara</td>
<td>022</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>007</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Joida</td>
<td>North Kanara</td>
<td>016</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>003</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Yellapur</td>
<td>North Kanara</td>
<td>478</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>09</td>
<td>06</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Kalghtagi</td>
<td>Dharwed</td>
<td>080</td>
<td>08</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>020</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>09</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Khanapur</td>
<td>Belgaum</td>
<td>014</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>003</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total 1406 75 50 85 478 132 96 129 54 279
families out of 124 families in Ankola taluka have taken loans from banks or co-operative societies. The reasons for taking loans were mainly for purchasing animals, building houses, celebrating marriages, procuring equipment etc. There were 4 families of bonded labourers. Most of the bonded labourers are in debt-slavery. As they cannot approach the banks and co-operative societies for their loans, the money-lenders in the village advances the loans, and charge them heavily by way of interest. They have no alternative except to become bonded-laboured. Landed-labour is another name of debt-slavery.

The loans taken by the Sidis in Ankola, Haliyal, Kalghatgi, Khanapur, Mundgod, Joida, Yellapur, and Sirsi talukas (Cfr. Table No. 4 which shows that the details of the purposes of loans made by the Sidis).
ASSOCIATION FOR SIDI PROGRESS AND DEVELOPMENT IN KARNATAKA:

The Sidi State Association was formed in 1984. This is surprising as most of the Sidis are found in the dense jungles of Haliyal, Yellapur, Ankola, Karwar and Mundgod talukas of North Kanara District. They are also found in Khanapur taluka of Belgaum and Kalghatgi taluka of Dharwad District. State level association is special only in Karnataka State. The Association is democratically structured. It consists of 7 executive members and 14 ordinary members. Regional councils have been established for the development of the Sidis and the necessary funds are raised from the Sidis communities.

The association put forth the demand that the Sidis should be considered as Backward Class. A memorandum was prepared for Sidi development in Karnataka. The Sidis have been allotted the status of Scheduled Tribe by the Commission after verifying the conditions and demands of the Sidis. Many unfortunate elements dogged the efforts of this Association e.g. tradition bound
No. 14. A meal is set out for the deity on wooden stand in front of the house during ancestor worship.
Sidis the exploiters of the Sidis etc. The Association is active even today.

The Association furnishes the details of the Sidis. By its statistics there are 115 villages in Karnataka with a population of 7223, and about 1406 families. This statistical data was obtained in 1988-89. The Sidis today lead a normal independent life, although about 75% of them are poor and about 90% are illiterate. Of 10% literate persons 1% are working in the Government offices. The main occupation of the rest is agricultural labour and heavy manual labour in the forests.

In the year 1958 Dr. Dinakar Desai of Ankola wanted to bring unity among the Sidis. An attempt was made to assemble the Sidis of North Kanara. The venue chosen was a place near Ankola. Finally however this more did not bring any fruitful result, nor unity among the Sidis. But credit must be accorded to Dinakar Desai who was a
poet, writer and social worker in North Kanara District. He has also written a number of articles on the Sidis. This Association was named "Kanara Welfare Trust". Under the auspices of this trust help was extended to the Sidis who are an integral part of the population of North Kanara District.