



DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS 06-12-2024

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Siddi Community

Syllabus: GS-1; Tribes of India

Context

- The Siddi community is an ethnic African group brought to India between the 7th and 17th centuries through the Arab slave trade and maritime trade routes.
- "Rhythm of Damam" (2024), a significant film that brings to light the story of the Siddi community, will be screened at the 29th International Film Festival of Kerala (IFFK). The film will be shown in the "International Competition" category during the festival in Thiruvananthapuram from December 13 to 20 2024.



About

- The Siddi community is an Afro-Indian ethnic group primarily found in **Karnataka, Gujarat, and Andhra Pradesh**, with smaller populations in **Maharashtra** and **Goa**.
- They trace their ancestry to Africa, specifically regions like **East Africa** (Ethiopia, Somalia, and Sudan).

Historical Background

- The Siddis were brought to India as slaves, soldiers, and servants by **Arab, Portuguese, and British traders** during the medieval period.
- Many Siddis integrated into Indian society over time, adopting local languages, religions, and traditions.

Cultural Aspects

- **Religion:** The Siddis primarily follow **Islam**, though some are **Hindus** and **Christians**, reflecting regional influences.
- **Language:** They speak regional languages like Kannada, Gujarati, Konkani, and Hindi, blending African and Indian cultural elements.
- **Music and Dance:** Known for their vibrant music and dance, the Siddis incorporate African rhythms and traditional Indian elements, especially during celebrations.

Livelihood and Occupation

- Historically marginalized, the Siddis primarily work in **agriculture**, **forestry**, and **labor-intensive jobs**.
- A few Siddis have achieved prominence in **sports**, especially athletics, due to their physical prowess.

Social Status

- Recognized as a **Scheduled Tribe (ST)** in Karnataka, Gujarat, Goa, and Daman and Diu, ensuring access to constitutional safeguards and affirmative action.

Challenges Faced

- **Marginalization:** Limited access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities.
- **Identity Crisis:** They face challenges in preserving their African heritage while integrating into Indian society.
- **Social Discrimination:** Often subjected to prejudice due to their physical appearance and African ancestry.

Government Initiatives

- **Scheduled Tribe Status:** Helps them access reservations in education, jobs, and political representation.
- **Development Programs:** Initiatives like skill training and community development programs to uplift their socio-economic status.
- **Sports Development:** Government and private organizations promote their participation in sports, leveraging their natural athleticism.

Caste census and its challenges

Syllabus: GS-1: Indian Society – Caste system.

Context:

- Increasing demand for a caste Census by opposition leaders, NGOs, and even the RSS.
- Objective: To determine caste-wise population sizes for proportional distribution of government jobs, land, and wealth.

Historical Background

- **Origins:**
 - First detailed caste Census conducted in **1871-72**, spanning four regions: North-Western Provinces (NWP), Central Provinces (CP), Bengal, and Madras.
 - Arbitrary classifications based on limited understanding of caste:
 - **NWP:** Brahmins, Rajputs, Banias, "Other castes of Hindus."
 - **CP:** Included groups like "servants and labourers," "mendicants and devotees."
 - **Bengal:** Categories like beggars, musicians, cooks.
 - **Madras:** Mixed castes and outcastes.
- **Challenges in Colonial Period:**
 - **1881 Census:** Castes termed "confusing" by W. Chichele Plowden.
 - **1931 Census:** Identified 4,147 castes, with inconsistent caste claims across regions.
- **Modern Attempts:**
 - **SECC 2011:** Identified 46.7 lakh castes/sub-castes, with 8.2 crore errors.
 - **Bihar Census 2022:** Controversy over inclusion of categories like 'hijra' and 'kinnar.'

Challenges in Accurate Data Collection

- **Upward Caste Mobility Claims:**
 - Respondents may claim higher-status castes for perceived prestige.

- Example: Sonar community in 1921 and 1931 reported different varna identities.

➤ **Downward Caste Mobility Claims:**

- Post-independence trend where communities seek lower-status affiliations to access reservations.
- Example: Demands for OBC or ST status by certain castes for reservation benefits.

➤ **Caste Misclassification:**

- Confusion due to similar-sounding surnames:
 - **Rajasthan:** Dhanak, Dhankia, and Dhanuk (SC) vs. Dhanka (ST).
 - **Bengal:** Sen (upper caste) vs. Sain (OBC).
- Sensitive topic leading to assumptions by enumerators.

Issues with Proportional Representation

➤ **Theoretical Framework:**

- Reservation quotas distributed based on population percentage of each category.
- Examples:
 - **OBC:** 27% reservation → every 4th position.
 - **SC:** 15% → every 7th position.
 - **ST:** 7.5% → every 14th position.

➤ **Practical Challenges:**

- **Disparity in Caste Population:**
 - Average population per caste: ~2.3 lakh.
 - Smallest caste (~10,000 people) would require 1,40,845 vacancies to secure one reserved position.

- **Illustration with UPSC:**

- Annual vacancies: ~1,000.
 - For the least populous caste, it would take **141 years** to secure a single vacancy.

- If 46.7 lakh castes (SECC 2011) are considered, it would take **7,000+ years** for equitable representation.

Key Takeaways

- **Accuracy Concerns:**
 - Historical and modern data collection efforts reveal inaccuracies and contradictions.
- **Impracticality of Proportional Representation:**
 - Benefits skewed towards larger caste groups, excluding smaller castes.
- **Policy Implications:**
 - Caste-based proportional reservations are regressive and fail to address systemic inequities.

Pardoning Power

Syllabus: GS-2: Power of President to Pardon & Comparison of Indian Constitution with that of USA constitution.

Context:

- **U.S. President Joe Biden** has granted an **unconditional pardon** to his son, Hunter Biden, for federal tax and gun convictions.
- The pardon also covers potential federal crimes committed between 2014 and 2024.
- Justification: Claims of **selective and unfair prosecution** against Hunter Biden.

Can the President Pardon Anyone?

- **Historical Background:**
 - Derived from the "**royal prerogative of mercy**" in Britain.
 - Initially used to grant clemency, particularly as an alternative to death sentences.
- **U.S. Constitution:**
 - Grants the **President absolute pardoning power** for **federal criminal offences**, except in impeachment cases.

- Pardons can be issued **before legal proceedings, during trials, or after conviction.**
- **Effect of a Pardon:**
 - Provides **relief from punishment** and disqualifications.
 - Does **not erase the conviction record.**

The Current Controversy:

- **Historical Examples:**
 - George Washington's pardon of 'whiskey rebellion' leaders (1795).
 - Bill Clinton's pardon of his half-brother Roger (2001).
 - Donald Trump's pardon of his son-in-law's father (2020).
- **Hunter Biden Case:**
 - Convictions: **Illegal gun purchase** as a drug user and **tax evasion**.
 - Contrasts Joe Biden's earlier **public promises not to pardon his son.**

Indian System of Pardoning Power:

- **Articles 72 and 161:**
 - President and Governor can grant **pardon, commutation, remission, respite, or reprieve.**
 - Based on the **advice of the council of ministers.**
- **Scope of Pardons:**
 - Absolves the offender of **conviction, punishment, and associated disqualifications.**
- **Judicial Review:**
 - Supreme Court ruling in the **Epuru Sudhakar case (2006):**
 - Pardoning power subject to judicial review for **arbitrariness, mala fides, or extraneous considerations.**
- **Political Controversies:**
 - Delays, rejections, or acceptance of mercy petitions often linked to **political motives.**

Way Forward:

- Pardoning power originated during **absolute monarchy** with no separation of powers.
- **Criticism:**
 - Often used for **political considerations** rather than correcting judicial errors.
- **Lessons from the U.K.:**
 - Introduction of the **Criminal Cases Review Commission** to investigate miscarriages of justice.
 - Has reduced reliance on the **royal prerogative of mercy**.
- **Suggestions:**
 - Ensure the **pardoning process is free from nepotism and arbitrariness**.
 - Maintain public trust in constitutional offices by **ensuring transparency and fairness**.

Election Party Symbols in India

Syllabus: GS-2; Indian Polity

Context

- Recently, **The Election Commission of India (ECI)** informed the Madras High Court that it shall take a decision within four weeks on a plea made by an individual not to allot the 'Two Leaves' symbol to candidates proposed by All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) general secretary Edappadi K. Palaniswami.

About

- Election symbols play a crucial role in the Indian electoral system, helping voters, especially those who are illiterate, to easily identify the political parties or independent candidates contesting elections.



Legal Framework:

- **Representation of the People Act, 1951:**
 - Governs the allocation and regulation of party symbols.
- **Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) Order, 1968:**
 - Issued by the Election Commission of India (ECI) under Article 324 of the Constitution.
 - Regulates the reservation and allotment of symbols to political parties and candidates.

Categories of Symbols:

- **Reserved Symbols:**
 - Exclusively allotted to recognized political parties.
 - Example: BJP (Lotus), Congress (Hand), CPI(M) (Hammer, Sickle, and Star).
- **Free Symbols:**
 - Allotted to independent candidates or unrecognized political parties for a specific election.
 - Example: Farmer Driving Tractor, Candle, Chair, etc.

Recognition of Political Parties:

- **National Party:**

- A party recognized in four or more states.
- Entitled to a common symbol across India.
- Example: BJP (Lotus), INC (Hand), AAP (Broom).

➤ **State Party:**

- A party recognized in one state.
- Entitled to a reserved symbol in that state only.
- Example: Shiv Sena (Bow and Arrow) in Maharashtra, DMK (Rising Sun) in Tamil Nadu.

Criteria for Allotment:

➤ **National Party Status:**

- Secures 6% of valid votes in at least 4 states in Lok Sabha or Assembly elections **and** wins at least 4 Lok Sabha seats.
- Alternatively, wins 2% of Lok Sabha seats from at least 3 different states.

➤ **State Party Status:**

- Secures 6% of valid votes in a state in Lok Sabha or Assembly elections **and** wins at least 2 seats in the assembly.
- Alternatively, wins 3% of assembly seats or 1 seat in the Lok Sabha from the state.

Independent Candidates:

- Must choose from the list of free symbols.
- Symbols are allocated on a first-come, first-served basis.

Significance of Symbols:

➤ **Ease of Voting:**

- Helps in identification, especially for illiterate voters.

➤ **Branding for Parties:**

- A symbol becomes synonymous with a party's ideology and identity.
- Example: Lotus for BJP symbolizes growth and development.

➤ **Campaigning:**

- Simplifies communication and rallying support.

Disputes over Symbols:

- Disputes arise when factions of a party claim the same symbol.
- **Role of the Election Commission:**

 - Acts as a quasi-judicial body to settle disputes.

- Considers factors like party constitution, majority support within the organization, and previous election performance.
- Example: Shiv Sena symbol dispute (Bow and Arrow) between factions.

Ratapani Tiger Reserve

Syllabus: GS-3; Biodiversity

Context

Recently, India got its 57th tiger reserve in Madhya Pradesh's Ratapani Wildlife Sanctuary, after receiving in-principle approval from the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change.

About

Location:

- Situated in Madhya Pradesh, Ratapani lies in the Raisen district and covers portions of Sehore, Vidisha, and Hoshangabad districts.
- It is located near the state capital, Bhopal, and forms part of the Vindhyan ranges.

Significance:

- Ratapani is home to diverse flora and fauna, including a significant tiger population.
- Declared as a tiger reserve under the Project Tiger framework, its status emphasizes tiger conservation efforts.
- The region has a dense forest cover with teak, sal, and mixed forest types.

Ecological Importance:

- **Fauna:** Apart from tigers, it harbors leopards, hyenas, wild boars, chitals, and several species of birds.
- **Flora:** The area is rich in medicinal plants and biodiversity.
- It plays a crucial role in maintaining the ecological balance in the Vindhyan ranges.

Cultural Importance:

- Ratapani is home to the UNESCO-recognized Bhimbetka Rock Shelters, showcasing prehistoric art and archaeology.

- These rock shelters highlight the coexistence of nature and human civilization over millennia.

Conservation Efforts:

- Madhya Pradesh, often called the "Tiger State of India," leads in tiger conservation with multiple reserves, including Kanha, Bandhavgarh, and Panna.
- The declaration of Ratapani as a tiger reserve strengthens India's commitment to the Global Tiger Recovery Program.

Challenges:

- **Human-Wildlife Conflict:** The presence of human settlements near the reserve poses challenges to tiger conservation.
- **Encroachments:** Agricultural expansion and infrastructure development around the area threaten habitat preservation.
- **Poaching:** Increased vigilance is required to curb poaching and illegal activities.

Formation of New National Parks in India

1. **Identification:** Ecologically important areas with unique flora and fauna are identified through scientific surveys.
2. **Proposal:** The state government proposes the area for national park status.
3. **Declaration:** The area is notified as a protected area under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.
4. **Approval:** Wildlife boards and, if necessary, the central government approve the proposal after consultations and Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA).
5. **Settlement of Rights:** Rights of local communities are resolved, and rehabilitation is provided if relocation is needed.
6. **Notification:** The state government declares it a national park via a Gazette Notification.
7. **Management Plan:** A conservation and management plan is implemented to ensure protection.

National parks are stricter than wildlife sanctuaries, prohibiting all human activity like logging or hunting.