



## Life Cycle Rituals Sudugadu Siddha

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Sudugadu Siddhas are peculiarly dressed and are aimed at entertaining the rural public in Northern Karnataka. People believe that witchcraft, evil spirits, ghost and goblins won't do anything if Sudugadu Siddhas wander in the village.

Sudugadu Siddhas perform naked-meditation at graveyards on Full moon Days and New Moon Days for three hours, then return to the village blowing conch and prevent the devil spirits from entering the village. So, Siddhas believe in the wellbeing of the public and seek rice, money, vegetables and other things from them as rewards.

The members of this tribe call themselves Telugu Jagama, The name Sudugadu Siddha means cremation ground. And Siddha means one who has obtained the object of his aspirations. These people are described now under the name of Sudugadu Siddha, as agents of Gaggadikara Okkalu caste and have become a separate caste called after their head Sudugadu Siddha. They are also supposed to have acquired some internal powers from the cremation grounds. They often prowl about the cremation grounds to collect pieces of dead body form charms and jugglery.

They are known as Sudugadu Siddha, Kadu Siddha, Kadupapa, Telugu Jangama, masanada Odeyaru, Bhikshagallu, Kati Papuli, Jogi, Jangala and others. Their traditional occupation was begging. They were receiving the contribution of a fowl, one hand and a handful of rice from people. The Sudugadu Siddhar are Saivites but they worship Vishnu also. Siddappa, Virabhadra, Basappa, Mallara, Mariyamma, Durugamm are their family deities. The women from this community fast till nightfall and

adore Shiva on Mondays. They keep small coins in a purse which they use for religious purposes. The people of this caste do not employ Brahmins for religious activities. Their religious teachers are the heads of the Gulipuja and Parvata Srisaila. One of them is the priest to initiate them in the begging pursuit. The boys of twelve years of age generally receive initiation from them. It is said that Sudugadu siddhas. Linga Siddhas and Musam Siddhas used to sit in pits neck-deep in depth on the burial ground and caused the dead to rise. They also used to roam about the city at night for such purposes.

The cross cousin marriages are preferred in this caste. Monogamy is the usual form of marriage among Sudugadu Siddhas. The marriages are settled through negotiation. The marriage rituals are performed at the groom's residence and the consummation ceremony takes place at the bride's residence. Nuclear families are predominantly found among them. Also, twenty-one exogamous units are reported to found among Sudugadu Siddhas. Marriages are both infant and adult and ceremonies connected with them are the same as in other Hindu castes. A woman may remain unmarried all through her life but she cannot become a Basavi. Customs connected with divorce and widow-re-marriage is the same as in similar castes.

Traditionally, they wear a distinct type of dress when they move out for begging. They seek alms in the guise of Lord Shiva by wearing a black cloth on the bottom half of the body, several necklaces; hair tied at the top of the head; a cloth armband with different symbols of snakes and Rudraksh tied under the right shoulder along with a bell in the right hand. They also carry a skull which is decorated with several talismans. They still wear such dresses in rural areas but the numbers are very few now. In the city where I did field work, most of the women wear saris and men wear pants and shirts. The elderly wear dhoti and kurta with muretha. They wear many rings and bangles in both hands and few men have long hair than usual. Their dresses and ornamental style is more similar to their native place e.g. Sudugadu Siddhas wear more jewelry, rings and have the practice of keeping long hair compared to Karnataka Sudugadu Siddhas. Sudugadu Siddha women from the Andhrasi community put lot of vermilion on their heads and large bindis on foreheads compared to the Karnataka Sudugadu Siddha women.

Sudugadu Siddhas traditionally enjoy non-vegetarian food like pork, rat, fox, fish and lamb meat. Earlier they used to eat beef but now they have started abstaining from it, probably due to a gradual process of 'hinduisation'. Rice and jowari are their staple food. Other than this, they eat vegetable, fruits and pulses. They enjoy fermented palu sap and distilled local liquor

purchased from the market. They smoke bidis and cheroots besides taking betel nut, powdered weed and tobacco orally. Though there is no taboo of liquor drinking among their women, the prevalence of consuming liquor is more common among the male members of the community. Tobacco and powdered weed is consumed by most women but they do not consider it as a form of intoxication or addiction. Marrying relatives within three generations is forbidden; however, they practice cross- cousin marriage with the mother's brother's daughter/son and also between maternal uncle- nieces, but they do not practice marriage with mother sister's daughter/son. The marital age for grooms is between 16 to 18 years where as for brides, it is 12 to 14 years. In most of the cases, the marriage of girls is finalized immediately after their birth. When a girl has her first menstrual cycle they celebrate a feast with chicken and wine after the twelfth day. They practice bride price in cash or kind which is paid to the girl's parents. Married women put vermilion on the forehead and they wear mangalsutra and toe ring. Marriage has different important stages from 'seeing a girl' to finalization of the marriage. They celebrate marriages on Mondays. They do not consult a Brahmin priest for fixing up an auspicious time for marriage. In the marriage ceremony, an elderly person instructs the groom and the bride to sit in the middle of the mat, and all the elders bless them by uttering the name of Lord Hare Hare Shiva. The relatives throw akshatas when the groom ties the mangalsutra or turmeric to the neck of the bride, known as kasula. The marriage ceremony held in the evening. After the marriage, the couple goes to Lord Hanuman temple to pray for a happy and healthy married life. Silver toe rings, green bangles and new clothes are worn by bride at the time of marriage. Marriage is celebrated in girl's house. All the guests are served liquor along with food as part of the function. Either the husband or the wife can seek divorce from the jat panchyat. It can be sought on the grounds of sexual immorality, impotence, disease, etc. Compensation in cash is given to the aggrieved party. They can remarry in the case of both widowhood and divorce. They practice several taboos from the fifth month of pregnancy in diet and movement. They are forbidden to eat papaya and carry heavy weight. Birth of the child is carried out with the help of women from the community and the mother eats herbs, cooked or raw, after the birth of the child. When they travel from one place to another, they consume an herb which prohibits pregnancy. They worship their God after the fifth day of the birth of the girl child and seventh day after the birth of a male child. They celebrate the first hair removal ceremony of the child (both boys and girls) in the third or fifth year of their birth. Masan Jogis keep the dead body on a mat for the last visit by

relatives. The eldest son in the case of the father and the youngest son in the case of mother lights the pyre. They serve liquor to the relatives after returning from the cremation ground. They perform death rituals on the third day; they offer food to the grave and to relatives. They live in hutments made of plastic on the pavements. Their life is very mobile. Everyone has a bucket in which they keep small things and they fold their plastic tents very systematically with ropes and hang them from sticks during the day time. In the night, they unfold the plastic sheets and sleep in these makeshift tents. They have very unique method to put up their tents with ropes and three sticks which remains stable even in heavy winds. They have thin beds to sleep on made from old clothes. They have very few utensils of aluminum and plastic which they use for several purposes. They cook food on the kerosene oil stoves and with dry wood on brick ovens. They have very few clothes. They make cradles for their young ones from saris. One family can sleep easily inside the tent. Elderly people and male youth sleep outside in the open. Women are the home makers where as both sexes are engaged in paid work outside the home.

The educational status of children is very low and begging among them is very prevalent. At times, children earn more than the adults. Another reason given by the adults for sending their children to beg is that the earnings of the family are not sufficient to sustain their expenses. They use ration facilities from homeless ration card. Other than this they hardly use any government schemes. They use allopathic medicines only in case of prolonged or serious illness; otherwise they rely on herbal medicines. They have good knowledge of herbs for all types of illnesses. It emerged from the discussion with the community members of locality that everyone has a dream to own a house and land to cultivate in the village. But they feel that they will have to live in this city with all harsh conditions till the end. Because they are seeing the same condition form generations without any government support or hope for better life. Nevertheless, they still migrate from the city to the village according to agricultural seasons as agricultural laborer with the hope to stay connected with the native place. In spite of living in city, they make all decisions relating to their civic and social life-in their panchyat. People who do not abide by the decisions of the panchyat are expelled or out casted from the community.

Widows are allowed to marry again, but they are not expected to marry their deceased husband's younger brother. On a dark night, the bridegroom's party goes to the widow's house, present her with a white sari, and bangles and escort her to the bridegroom's house. There the couple is bathed, and the bridegroom ties a thread around the widow's neck. Next morning the

pair conceals themselves in a forest grove, and at night return to their house. After her marriage, a widow cannot claim the custody of her children by her late husband. Divorce: Divorce is permitted, generally, on the ground of the wife's adultery, and is effected by driving her out of the house before the caste Panchayat. Divorced women are allowed to marry again by the same rites as widows. The morality of the Sudugadu Siddha women is, however, very lax; adultery among them is not looked upon with abhorrence and is usually punished only with a nominal fine. Among the Sindollus, the devolution of property is governed by the Hindu law of inheritance. A Jogini, or dedicated girl, shares her father's property equally with her brothers, with succession to her children. Wills are unknown. A childless man usually adopts his brother's son, failing whom, any boy of his own section, but in any case the adopted boy must be younger than the adopter.

The Sudugadu Siddhas are still animistic in their belief, and pay more reverence to the deities of diseases and ghosts and spirits of deceased persons, than to the great gods of the Hindu pantheon. Besides these greater animistic deities, the Sudugadu Siddhas propitiate a number of ghostly powers, with a variety of sacrifices, women being engaged to identify and lay the troubling ghost. Honour is also done by the members of the caste to the standard Hindu gods, among whom may be especially mentioned Hanuman and Mahadeva.

**Disposal of the Dead:** The dead are usually buried, except in the case of women in pregnancy and lepers, who are burnt. Married agnates are mourned for ten days, and unmarried for three days. No Shradha is performed, but birds are fed with cooked flesh on the 3rd day after death. During the period of mourning, the chief mourner may not eat flesh, molasses, oil or turmeric nor may he sleep on a bed. On the 10th day after death, a feast is given to the caste people and purification is obtained. It is said that the Namdharis burn their dead in a lying posture, with the head pointing to the south, collect the ashes and bones on the 3rd day after death, and either throw them into a sacred stream or bury them underground.

The social rank of the Sudugadu Siddha is the lowest in the Hindu social system. They eat the leavings of any caste except the Erakalas, Domars, Pichakuntalas, Buruds, Jingars and Panchadayis, while no caste except the Dakalwads, their own sub-division, will eat food cooked by them. They live on the outskirts of villages, in thatched one-storied houses, with only one entrance door. Their habits are very dirty, and their quarters extremely filthy. The village barber will not shave their heads nor will the village washerman wash their clothes and they have to

employ barbers and washermen from among their own community. Their touch is regarded as unclean by all respectable classes, and a Brahman touched by a Sindollu is required to obtain purification by bathing himself, washing his clothes and changing his sacred thread for a new one. The diet of a iVladiga is in keeping with his degraded position and he eats beef, horse flesh, pork, fowls, mutton, and the flesh of animals which have died a natural death. The bear, as a representative of their ancestor Jambavant, is held in special respect, and no Sudugadu Siddha will injure or kill the animal.

**Occupation** — The original occupation of the caste is believed to be the skinning of dead animals, leather dressing and the making of leather ropes, leather buckets for hauling water from wells and other leather articles used in husbandry. Like the Malas they are field servants, and supply the farmers with the above articles, for which they get, as their perquisite, a fixed quantity of grain for each plough. They make shoes of various kinds, but especially chapals (sandals) of which they produce the best varieties. They are engaged as scavengers, village watchmen, guides, executioners and begaris, or forced coolies. They also serve as musicians at the marriage and other ceremonies of high caste' Hindus. Their right to carcasses is often disputed by the others and tedious litigations result. At some places they hold Inam lands, in lieu of services rendered by them to the village community as messengers and carriers. They also work as village criers, announcing by beat of drum any public orders. Many serve as menials in the houses of landlords. A few only have taken to agriculture Soliga.

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