From Gir's Soil to the Dakar Podium: The Story of the Siddi Tribe

News context: medal of 2 November 2026; community analysis and hurdles medal of 8 November 2026 | Published: 9 November 2026 | Mains: GS-I - Indian Society, Tribes and Sports



Original symbolic image: pcsmantra.com

Why in the news

On 2 November 2026, at the Youth Olympic Games under way in Dakar, Senegal (31 October-13 November 2026), 15-year-old Khushbu Rajakbhai Darjada of Surva village in Gujarat's Gir Somnath district won silver in the women's 63 kg judo category. She beat opponents from Guinea, Morocco and Algeria to reach the final, where she lost to Germany's Jolina Reinhold. This is India's second judo medal at the Youth Olympics - the first was Tababi Devi's silver (women's 44 kg) in 2018 (Buenos Aires) - and the first Olympic medal won by any member of the Siddi community.

At the same Games, on 8 November 2026, 17-year-old Shourya Ambure of Thane, Maharashtra, won bronze in the women's 100m hurdles with a time of 13.59 seconds - the first Indian woman to win a track medal at the Youth Olympics (this was her first international race after ACL surgery in December 2025).

Khushbu's success has brought India's African-origin Siddi tribe back into discussion.

INFO BOX - The chain of opportunity to sport Local talent spotted -> feeder centre in Gir Somnath -> training in Ahmedabad -> Youth Olympic stage Keep status and numbers separate: region-specific ST listing; the survey-based figure of 12,959 for the PVTG

Who are the Siddis

The Siddis (also called Habshi and Badshah - per the Gujarat Tribal Research and Training Society, GTRTS) are believed to be of African origin; studies and accounts link them to the Bantu communities of East and Southeast Africa. Records do not agree on when they arrived in India: per the GTRTS note, the 1931 Census suggests they were brought by the Portuguese towards the end of the 17th century, while Russel and Hira Lal (1916) place their arrival in the mid-15th century. The community's oral tradition links it to the nawabs of Junagadh - they are said to have been brought as 'balwans' (bodyguards) and to look after captive lions; this is a folk belief. The community is predominantly Muslim with strong Sufi influences; the Baba Gor dargah at Ratanpur (Bharuch) is their principal shrine and the dhamal dance-music their identity. Language and dress are Gujarati/Kathiawadi - the identity is only of descent; the way of life is entirely local.

Tribal status and numbers

In 1956 the Centre declared the Siddis a Scheduled Tribe - limited to specified regions of Saurashtra (Halar, Madhya Saurashtra, Zalawad, Gohilwad, Sorath). In 1982 the Siddis and Padhars were declared a 'primitive tribal group' (the Kotwalias and Kathodis in 1978) - this category is today called PVTG. An important distinction: Siddis living outside Saurashtra (for instance Bharuch) are not in the ST list; they fall under SEBC. Through a central amendment in 2003, the Siddis of Karnataka's Uttara Kannada district were included in the Scheduled Tribes list. In July 2025, the Centre told the Rajya Sabha that Gujarat's PVTG-classified Siddi population is 12,959 (survey-based); the 2001 Census recorded 8,662 Siddis as ST in Gujarat.

Where they live

Concentrated in Gujarat - 18 settlements of Talala taluka in Gir Somnath district; Jambur village is called 'Mini Africa' (about 25 km from Gir National Park). Other settlements: Talala, Sirvan, Javantri, Madhupur, Surva, Moruka, Hadmatiya. Livelihoods are linked to the Gir forest through work as guides and drivers. Siddis also live in Karnataka (Uttara Kannada), Maharashtra, Goa, Diu and Daman.

Sport and opportunity

Khushbu's elder sister Shahin Darjada is also a judoka and has represented India at junior and senior Asian championships. Both sisters train at the Vijayi Bharat Sports Centre in Ahmedabad, where coach Lal Krishan Baghel trains them. Georgian coach Lasha Kizilashvilli scouted Khushbu together with Baghel. Three international medallists from the community are linked to the centre - Shahin, Khushbu and Rohit Majgul (India

representative at the 2026 Commonwealth Games) - and more than 70 children aged 11-15 are training at a feeder centre in Gir Somnath. Sport is becoming a new doorway to both identity and livelihood for this community.

The way forward

Targeted welfare schemes for PVTG communities should reach remote settlements; district-level talent-identification camps and training infrastructure for sporting talent should expand; and reliable data on small communities like the Siddis should become available - this is the direction that will take social inclusion beyond the podium.

Mains practice question

Q. "For the sporting talent of small tribal communities to emerge, social recognition is as important as institutional support." Comment with reference to the recent example of the Siddi tribe. (150 words, 10 marks)

Answer outline:

Introduction: Khushbu Darjada's Dakar silver (2 November 2026) and a brief introduction to the Siddi tribe.

Body: The recognition dimension - PVTG classification, the ST/SEBC regional distinction, cultural distinctiveness (dhamal, the Baba Gor tradition). The institutional dimension - training centre, coaching pipeline (70+ children at the feeder centre), access to the youth stage; the limits of Gir-based livelihoods. Balance - institutions without recognition remain incomplete; recognition without institutions is not durable.

Conclusion: The Darjada sisters' example shows that with targeted welfare and sports infrastructure, even the smallest communities can reach the world stage.

Related study on tribal identity and institutions: Nicobar Tribal Council election dispute - the 2026 draft rules and traditional self-governance: https://pcsmantra.com/nicobar-tribal-council-draft-rules-jun2026/

Sources

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