

## The Siddis of Janjira: Navigating Power, Identity and Resistance on India's Western Coast

Dr. Dolly Purohit

*Post Doctoral Fellow, ICSSR, Centre for Historical Research, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New-Delhi.*

*India*

### Abstract

The Siddis of Janjira, an African-descended community, defied the constraints of enslavement and colonial dominance to become sovereign maritime rulers on India's western coast in the 17th and 18th centuries. Strategically navigating alliances with the Mughals, resisting Maratha expansion, and leveraging their naval power, the Siddis transformed the impregnable Janjira fort into a bastion of autonomy and resilience. This paper explores how the Siddis negotiated their identity amidst colonial power struggles, balancing their African heritage with local integration and strategic governance. By examining archival sources and indigenous narratives, it uncovers the Siddis pivotal role in shaping the Indian Ocean's socio-political landscape. The study challenges Eurocentric historiography, presenting the Siddis as agents of resistance and sovereignty rather than passive subjects of history. Their legacy speaks to the enduring themes of identity, resilience and self-determination, offering critical insights into global maritime history and the ethics of power in colonial and post-colonial contexts.

**Keywords:** Siddis; Maritime Sovereignty; African Diaspora; Colonial Power Dynamics; Indian Ocean History