


'Slaves rose as generals during Aurangzeb's rule'

Says Nawab Siddi M Reza Khan at GNLU's exhibition on Siddis

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A travelling exhibition called 'Africans in India: A Rediscovery' displays the rich history of East Africans who held high positions in India as generals, commanders and nominal rulers. The event was inaugurated by Dr SK Nanda, chairman and managing director of the Gujarat State Fertilizer and Chemicals Limited on August 10. The exhibition is slated to be on display till September 10. It is being hosted at the Indian Legal History Museum at Gujarat National Law University (GNLU).

The Africans called 'Habshi' or 'Siddi' were brought to India from Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia and other nations by way of slave trade. Photographic reproductions of paintings, written documents and portraits have been put on display. The exhibition has been put together by Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, New Delhi, and the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York.

HH Siddi Mohammed Reza Khan, the Nawab of Sachin in Surat, who was the guest of honour for the occasion, is the ninth generation of Siddi rulers of Sachin. "My ancestors were brought to India as soldiers during the reign of Babar and served as guards or cavalrymen for many generations. It was only during Aurangzeb's rule that Africans were raised to the status of generals or rulers. I am preserving the Dutch furniture, vintage cars, palaces and several written documents of royalties that I have inherited," said the Nawab. He further added that African community in India is not highly educated and are mostly employed as unskilled labour. The community remains neglected and the government has not taken enough efforts to uplift them."

Professor (Dr) Bimal N Patel, director of GNLU said, "We want to create a firsthand experience of artefacts rather than just digital experience. We are looking forward to individuals and institutions for collecting artefacts in the form of newspaper cuttings, paintings, documents, badges, costumes etc."

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