



Ontario Konkani Association

e-Samachar (March 2023)

www.ontariokonkanis.com

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President's Message

Dear OKA Family,

We are in March! We have moved through the Spring-forward time change and yet enjoying a good amount of snow!! It looks like we are having an over-enthusiastic winter this year!

Are you enjoying the longer evenings and extended daylight? Did you know that the Daylight-Saving Time concept was first introduced in 1915 in Germany as a way to save energy for battle during the First World War by making better use of natural daylight? However, it was first proposed by Benjamin Franklin in 1784. Later the idea was adopted in the United States and Canada. Today, it remains a tradition in most provinces of Canada, including Ontario, where clocks are set ahead by one hour in the spring and back by one hour in the fall. While there may be varying opinions on the pros and cons of Daylight-Saving Time, we can all agree that spring forward is a reminder that warmer weather and brighter days are just around the corner.

This edition of e-Samachar has a useful article on Low Back Pain by Veena Shanbhag. The April e-Samachar will provide the second part of this article. We have an interesting article from Niranjana Kamath on the Siddhis of Karnataka. In the Senior's corner, Sadanand Mankikar has shared information on upcoming SVBF/OKA Senior's Day on June 25th and other useful and relevant information for Seniors. Continuing the travel series, this edition also contains an article by Anjana Pai on her Belgium trip. In the achievements section, please read all about the accomplishment of Dr. Ajay Heble.

We do hope you enjoy this edition of e-Samachar. Please consider contributing to the e-Samachar on a regular or one-time basis. We look forward to hearing from you at OKApresidents@gmail.com.

Anjana and Pravin Pai

Siddis of Karnataka

By NIRANJAN KAMATH

Have you heard of African Tribes living in India? Now you might even be intrigued that many of these people speak Konkani.

I am referring to The **Siddis of Karnataka**, who are an ethnic group inhabiting many parts of Dakshin & Uttar Karnataka regions. These people are descended from Bantu peoples from Southeast Africa that were brought to the Indian subcontinent as slaves by the dreadful and unforgiving Portuguese merchants and Arab traders. There are about 50,000 Siddi population across India, of which more than a third live in Karnataka. In Karnataka, they are concentrated around Yellapur, Haliyal, Ankola, Joida, Mundgod and Sirsi taluks of Uttara Kannada and in Khanapur of Belgaum and Kalghatgi of Dharwad district. While some Siddis were victims of the Portuguese slave trade, most were imported by the Sultans in the 15th-16th centuries as military mercenaries. Others were sailors on the trade routes to the east.



The Siddhi's of Karnataka are evenly distributed to the various faiths. It is estimated that almost 42% follow Hinduism, 30% are Muslims and the rest Christians. The Haliyal taluk has populations of Muslims and Christians while the Hindu populations are concentrated in the ghat areas of Yellapur and Ankola. Although Siddis opt for different religions they intermarry across religions without any reservations.

All the Siddhi's are bound to each other by certain beliefs. They all have one thing in common. They all believe in *Hiriyaru* or ancestor worship. The dead are believed to be nearby, in the form of spirits. They are regarded as witnesses to be consulted by a family in all its concerns. On occasions like births, marriages and deaths, the ancestors are invoked. The home is organised around *Hiriyaru*, the spirits of departed parents. It signifies a remembrance of the parents, thanking them for their care over several years and also entreating them to keep a vigil over the family in future. It is obligatory for all relatives to attend the function, thus renewing kinship relations.

Hiriyaru worship may be performed twice a year by the 'Karthi'(head) of the family. It normally is held during the Navarathri festival in the first week of November. If this is not possible for some reason, it may also be performed in April–May during the other major festival - Holi. These obviously are not meant to coincide with the dates of the parents' deaths as the Siddhis only observe the first death anniversary. Hindu Siddhis usually have elaborate functions to mark the event, but not so the Christian and Muslim Siddhis. Siddhis mainly speak Konkani, while some speak Kannada and Marathi.

You might wonder what do they do and how do they survive. The system in India has not served them right. Unfortunately, almost all Siddhis today subsist as agricultural and casual labourers, contractual or in some cases bonded, some also work as domestic help. The earliest Siddhi settlers who fled Goa and entered the Karnataka forests of North Canara, made the forests their home and started cultivation. In some of the villages in these areas, they form the earliest settlers.

That said more recently due to the work of many NGO's , the Siddhis of Karnataka have gone back to their unique style of quilting called kawandi. Siddhis go through a complicated process of quilting that makes their style distinct from surrounding groups. The process involves taking recycled fabric scraps and arranging them in stylistic geometric patterns, sometimes embedded with religious symbols. Quilts are usually made for family members by older women who can no longer work in the fields. The quilts are used as mattresses, crib covers, or covers for cold monsoon nights. The non-profit organization Siddhis Women Quilting Cooperative (SWQC) was created in 2004 in an effort to provide a source of income to the community and quilt makers. In 2011 an exhibition titled "Soulful Stitching: Patchwork Quilts by Africans (Siddhis) in India" was shown in the Museum of the African Diaspora, helping these quilt makers and the community to gain recognition.

A very unique feature common to the Siddis of Karnataka, as also of those of Maharashtra and Goa, is that they exhibit a remarkable level of assimilation with local culture. This, in the absence of any form of force. Even the uniquely Siddi custom of *Hiriyaru* has adopted symbols from the local Hindu religion. Except for the racial characteristics of the tribe, there is little else that can set them apart from other native populations. Almost all the Siddis in present-day India are mixed indo-African. There are very few pure Siddi populations in Karnataka today, most of the pure Siddi population living in Gujarat. Many of them have lost their original African names and culture however they have retained some forms of African traditions in the form of dance and music.

Like Siddi populations across the sub-continent, Siddhis in Karnataka also have remained isolated, and economically and socially neglected. In 1984, at the instance of the Secretary of the Rural Welfare Trust, Dandeli and few others, an "All-Karnataka Siddi Development Association" was formed to bring Siddhis together and work for their integrated development. K. V. Subbanna, the Magsaysay awardee also made some efforts in this direction with his *Ninasam*.

Today the Union government has brought the Siddis under the list of Scheduled Tribes with a view to empowering them constitutionally. Further, policies to provide homes for homeless Siddis, water facilities, education, employment opportunities, roads, electricity, mobile hospitals 2 acres of land to each Siddi family and the right to collect forest products were also endorsed by Parliament. It is hoped that proper implementation of these policies would go a long way in helping the Siddhi community enhance their social and economic status.

Did you know?

- According to B. G. L. Swamy, a renowned botanist, seeds of a huge tree, the *Adansonia digitata* Linn., which is native to Africa, were probably brought by the Siddhis.
- A popular Kannada film of the 70s, *Bhootayyana Maga Ayyu*, has a Siddi playing the role of Siddi Byra in the movie.
- It has been reported that Siddis from Karnataka believe that Barack Obama shares their genepool and that they wanted to gift a bottle of honey to him on his visit to India in 2010.

I like to end this insightful essay by attaching a link to know more about Siddi's. Do open the link to know more about these amazing people who are very down to earth and unassuming. In addition, you can do a quick search on You Tube and you will see many interesting stories about Siddi's and the world they live today.

<https://youtu.be/FHn3-cSY4lA>



Seniors Forum

By Sadanand Mankikar

UPCOMING EVENT

SVBF/OKA Senior's Day 2023: SVBF in collaboration with OKA Senior's Forum is planning to organize a "Senior's Day" on Sunday, June 25, 2023 from 10 AM to 3 PM at the SVBF Community Centre. The activities planned may include Displays/Booths, Simultaneous Presentations (Retirement Residences, Estate/Will, Diabetes etc.), Demos (Exercise etc.), Musical Interludes, Karaoke, BINGO etc. It is expected that there will be a few organizations which will share information on free services and programs available for seniors and diabetics.

We are looking for sponsors, supporters and volunteers. If you have any suggestions or need any additional information about this event, please contact Sadanand Mankikar.

USEFUL INFORMATION

At the SVBF/OKA virtual seminar "**ARTHRITIS & OSTEOPOROSIS: Diagnosis, Prevention and Management**" held on Sunday, March 5, 2023, Dr. Sahil Koppikar and Dr. Natasha Kaur Gakhal of Women's College Hospital spoke about these two debilitating diseases and gave some very useful tips for preventing and managing them.

The following link covers the event: <https://youtube.com/live/7NlKT7Golxs>

OKA EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS PROGRAM: Estate, Will and Power of Attorney and End of Life Planning are two major elements of this OKA Seniors Forum Program.

For **preparing Wills and Powers of Attorney** you may contact Marvin Talksby (905) 405-0199 ext. 257 or Mary Bojkovski (905) 405-0199 ext. 276 of Nanda & Associate

Lawyers. For additional information or assistance, you may also contact Raghunath Kamath or Ashok Bhatt.

For **End of Life Planning** one may contact Harjinder Bilku of Chapel Ridge Funeral Home at (905) 305-8128 or (647) 966-0093.

OKA AADHAR CHAT: This interactive web-based chat was established in 2017 as a part of the OKA Seniors Forum to facilitate communication amongst seniors and soon to be seniors. Since then, we have started posting upcoming events and relevant information on this chat. Members can post any questions and we will attempt to get answers. We invite everyone, young and old, seniors or not, to join this chat and share information including their experiences and expertise. To join this chat group, please send an email to shraddhapai.home@gmail.com

Additional information about OKA Seniors' Forum is posted on www.ontariokonkanis.com

OTHER USEFUL INFORMATION

INDUS COMMUNITY SERVICES: This organization provides very helpful service to South Asian seniors.

- Leadership program for newcomer youth (Ages 12-16) every Monday from January 30 to February 27 from 4:00 to 5:00 PM.
- Boost wellness for South Asian youth (Ages 16-18) virtual and in-person sessions in Mississauga and Brampton.
- Toy library and Parenting. Every Tuesday and Thursday 1:00 to 3:00 PM.

For the presentations, please visit <https://www.induscs.ca/seniorstownhall/> If you want to stay connected with Indus, you may sign up for their newsletter.

C.A.R.P. Are you a member of C.A.R.P. – previously known as Canadian Association of Retired Persons? If you are over 45, you may want to consider becoming a

member of C.A.R.P. It is a national organization with chapters all over the country. Its mission is to “Promote and protect the interests, rights and quality of life of Canadians as we age”

C.A.R.P. is an advocacy group and from time to time they arrange interesting and informative seminars and workshops. Their monthly magazine Zoomer consists of useful articles and provide information on topics related to insurance, travel, health, entertainment and lifestyle.

Some interesting articles RECENTLY PUBLISHED:

- The rise of centenarian: Why more of us are living to 100?
- Six tips to prevent winter slips – Avoid injuries from unnecessary falls
- Building connection through Transformational Tech
- Enjoy your healthy eating and supercharge your smoothie with a fun, Interactive virtual blender.
- The puzzle of brain health
- A new Canadian program helps people living with Alzheimer’s Disease
- Alzheimer’s Awareness month: How much memory loss is normal with aging?
- Mental health boosters
- 5 ways to age well when living alone
- Body, mind & spirit: easy wellness advice for health and happiness
- Sleep 101: Improve your sleep quality and your health

For additional information, you may contact them by email: support@carp.ca
Phone: 1-833-211-2277 Website: www.carp.ca

ONTARIO GUIDE TO PROGRAMS AND SERVICES FOR SENIORS: Please click on the following link for the latest upgraded guide. [A guide to programs and services for seniors.](#)

SENIORS HOUSING AND HOME CARE DIRECTORY: Help for Mom has developed this very helpful publication which is about 130 pages, softcover and

Readers Digest size. To get a copy send an email to helpformom.com or call Mary (647) 967-9821.

The following organizations disseminate very useful information either through regular news release and/or seminars, webinars and workshops:

Canada India Foundation www.canadaindiafoundation.com

C.A.R.P. Canadian Association of Retired People) www.carp.ca

Diabetes Canada www.diabetes.ca

Indus Community Services www.induscs.ca

UHNH (University Network Foundation) www.uhnfoundatiom.ca

(ARTICLES BY AND FOR SENIORS FOR THIS SECTION ARE ALWAYS WELCOME)

Belgium: Waffles, Beer, and Chocolates - A Delicious Solo Adventure!

By : Anjana Pai

Belgium is one of the underrated European destinations. It was my first stop on a memorable European trip. Brussels formed the perfect base camp for four nights while I traveled solo through the top three must-visit cities of Belgium, Bruges, Ghent, Brussels itself, as well as Luxembourg.

Belgium is world-famous for its waffles, beer and chocolates. I would add Fries to this list! These are not your usual McD fries, these are fries for grownups with numerous sauce choices. It is not an exaggeration to say that I had the BEST fries of my life in Brussels on my very first day at Friterie Tabora!

Day 1 Brussels:

Some of the highlights of Brussels were the Grand-Place, Manekken Pis (the little boy peeing - Belgians have their own sense of humor), the Cathedral of St. Michael and St. Gudula, the opulent Royal Saint-Hubert Galleries and of course, the Best Fries Ever and waffles with tempting toppings!!

The Grand-Place is indeed GRAND as the name says! It is the central square of Brussels. I couldn't get enough of the Grand-Place de Bruxelles during my stay. It is known for its decorative and aesthetic buildings including guild houses, the City Hall and the Maison du Roi. For Tintin fans, there's also a Tintin Comic Mural!

The Manneken Pis (little pee man in Flemish) or the peeing boy is a small bronze fountain statue from the 17th century that has many stories about him and his 900 or so outfits to take part in all celebrations with an outfit to match. Recently, they have also added Jeanneke Pis, the little girl equivalent in Dutch for 'Little Pissing Joan' as well as Zinneke Pis, a little dog to complete the funny little trio.

Day 2 - Bruges Or Brugge (pronounced BROOZH):

Bruges must be added to the top of any Belgium itinerary; it is straight out of a fairytale! I hear it's even more beautiful near Christmas because of The Christmas markets. It is easily managed as a day trip with a train ride from Brussels accompanied with a croissant and cappuccino as befitting a European sojourn.

Brugge is a true tourist's delight with canals, cobbled streets (which are murder on your feet if you don't have good footwear) and medieval buildings!! Some of the highlights:

1. The UNESCO listed city centre is absolutely stunning! The marketplace or Markt is a treat to the senses and one could just sit here and people watch all day over endless cups of cappuccino. It is surrounded by former guildhalls and colorful houses with interestingly mismatched rooflines.

From the market square, you can also access the 13th century Bruges Belfry and opt to climb its 366 steps for views over the city.

2. Canal cruise - in my opinion this is a must, especially if you only have a day here as you can enjoy seeing most parts of the city from the boat and from a different point of view. There are a handful of companies offering cruises.

3. Church of Our Lady, the tallest building in the city, which is home to Michelangelo's sculpture, Madonna and Child. This is the only one of Michelangelo's sculptures to leave Italy in his lifetime. It's truly divine and must be seen.

The Church is gorgeous inside with a cross-vaulted nave, black-and-white-tiled flooring and a heavily ornamented interior.

I had the most luxurious hot chocolate at The Old Chocolate House; they are on point when they advertise "The place to be to drink hot chocolate." Later in the day, I also enjoyed a liege waffle with classic 🍓 and cream topping 😊.

Day 3 - Ghent:

Ghent is an absolutely enchanting and beautiful medieval city with unique historical buildings and picturesque views. This was also a day trip by train from Brussels. Both Bruges and Ghent can be toured in a day if you are crunched for time, as they are along the same train line; but, they deserve at least one day each! There's so much to see and do.

My Highlights of Ghent were:

1. Gravensteen - Castle of the Counts Ghent, Belgium - this medieval castle built in 1180 is a must see. The history, life in the medieval times as well as the museum that holds the weapons and other items used in warfare etc. are all very interesting to see and hear about. The audio tour was funny and informative. The view from the

rooftop of the castle of the surrounding area is absolutely beautiful and worth seeing.

2. Picturesque St. Michael's bridge:

This bridge is a great place to take in the beautiful architecture of Ghent as well as gaze down on the river. It is also the only place from where you can see the three main medieval architecture wonders of Ghent, St Bavo's Cathedral, Ghent, Belgium, St. Nicholas Church and the belfry of Ghent.

3. St. Bavo's Cathedral - this is an absolutely fantastic and majestic cathedral to visit. It holds the famous Adoration of the Mystic Lamb, a masterpiece of European art. I unfortunately missed seeing this art but the general area of the cathedral itself was totally worth the visit.

Now for the food highlights! I hunted down the delicacy that Ghent is famous for, cuberdon, a cone-shaped Belgian candy. In Dutch it is also known by many names as a neus (nose), or neuzeke (little nose) for its likeness to a human nose. In French, cuberdons are also called chapeau-de-curé, a priest's hat. Traditionally they are purple with a gum arabic candy crust and raspberry flavoured soft filling. I brought some home and the family enjoyed them very much.

I also tried the famous Julientje - it's apparently the king of fries and a favourite of Belgian students. It is a massive stack of fries, BBQ spices, stewed meat, mayonnaise, deep fried onions, and a sausage that's been cut into pieces and fried. It was tasty but was too rich.

Of course, waffles had to be on the menu, this time a lighter, airy and crisp Brussels waffle with a light dusting of powdered sugar.







Low Back Pain

By Veena Shanbhag
Pharmacist
Certified Yoga instructor

Common causes of low back pain -

- Injury that may lead to pulled muscles and muscle spasm.
- Improper excess lifting.
- Improper or sudden twisting that may strain or sprain muscles in the low back.
- Sciatica- pressure on a nerve which can then lead to inflammation and pain.
- Osteoarthritis- which is caused by wear and tear of cartilage around joints in the low back.

Low back pain is very common and, in most cases, it resolves in a few days to weeks.

What to do for mild/moderate low back pain?

- Apply ice intermittently for the first 3-4 days.
- Maintain regular activity when possible.
- Avoid too much rest as this slows down recovery.
- Avoid heavy lifting or strenuous activities for a few days.
- Take over the counter pain medications. Consult your doctor or pharmacist for recommendations.
- Your doctor may refer you to a physiotherapist for specific exercises to help with the recovery.

What are some of the red flags that low back pain may be more serious?

- Pain in persons younger than 18 years or older than 50 years

- Fever
- Unexplained weight loss
- Prolonged use of steroids in the past
- Previous history of back injury
- Severe pain or pain that worsens significantly over time
- History of cancer
- Weakness in legs, bowel or bladder dysfunction

What can one do to prevent low back pain?

- Maintain good posture, especially if your work requires you to be seated for long hours daily. Keep your back straight when sitting or standing.
- Regular exercise to build strong back and abdominal muscles.
- Maintain a healthy body weight to prevent strain on back muscles.
- If you need to lift something heavy, avoid bending forward to do so. Bend knees and use leg and core muscles.
- Find ways to reduce stress. Personal or professional stress is known to slow down healing/worsen low back pain

Next month- some simple yogasanas to manage low back pain and to build strength.

Accomplishment Corner



Dr. Ajay Heble

University of Guelph professor Dr. Ajay Heble has been awarded a 2023 Killam Prize, among the most distinguished research awards in Canada.

A professor in the School of English and Theatre Studies and founding director of U of G's International Institute for Critical Studies in Improvisation (IICSI), Heble has received the \$100,000 award in the humanities category. He is one of five winners of this year's prize, which recognizes Canadian scholars with sustained excellence and impact in the humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, health sciences and engineering.

"It's an honour to receive such a prestigious award," said Heble. Referring to colleagues at U of G and their national and international collaborators, he said, "This award is a testament to a great team of people I get to work with." Calling him a globally renowned scholar, visionary arts leader and innovative community builder, the Killam citation said Heble "has made fundamental contributions to our understanding of musical and other forms of improvisation as vital models for social change.

"Particularly noteworthy is the way in which this new field has addressed pressing issues of social and cultural transformation, human rights, trans culturalism, pedagogy, the civic cooperation of aggrieved populations – issues central to the challenges of diversity and social cooperation in Canada."

Dr. Ajay Heble's parents – Mrs. Sushila and Late Prof. Madhav Heble are/were OKA members since its inception.