

Geo Ethnic And Cultural Profile Of Chenchus

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ABSTRACT: The Chenchus are a Telugu speaking food-gathering tribe living in the Nallamalla forests of Andhra Pradesh in India spread over the districts of Mahaboobnagar, Kurnool, Prakasam and Guntur. They are a conservative tribal group and have not made many changes in their lifestyle or tried to adapt to modernity. They live in the enclosed space and geography, leading a life of an unbroken continuity. The present paper discusses the geo ethnic and cultural profile of chenchus.

I. INTRODUCTION

Chenchus are the aboriginal tribe whose traditional way of life has been based on hunting and gathering. They are still dependent on forests and don't cultivate land but hunt for a living. They inhabit the Nallamalla hills which have been a part of Nagarjunasagar, the Tiger Sanctuary for centuries in Andhra Pradesh. They are mainly found in the districts of the Mahabubnagar, Nalgonda and Kurnool. The origin of Chenchu is connected to Lord Malikarjuna of the Srisailim temple.

OBJECTIVE: To study the geo ethnic and cultural profile of chenchus.

AREA OF THE STUDY: The study was primarily conducted in Bairluty village in Atmakurmandal in Kurnool District. *Bairluty Gudem*, the village chosen for the in-depth field-work for the study, is located at about 14 Kms from *Atmakuron* the State high way. This village is surrounded by forest in the East, North, and South, while in the west it is bounded by *Sanjeev Nagar Tanda*, a *Sugal* settlement. Of the other four hamlets selected for the field-work, *Nagaluty Gudem* is located at about 4kms and *Kottalacheru* is located in the interior forest at foot hills of the *Nallamalli* hill ranges at about 24kms from *Bairluty*. The distance from the *Atmakur* town from *Kottalcheru* is however, only about 10Kms. *Pecheruvu* and *Chadarampenta*, two other Chenchu hamlets representing the 'more interiorly' located settlements, are located at about 32 Kms from *Bairluty* and 46 kms. and 18 kms., respectively from the Mandal headquarters. The *Chenchu* settlements are usually situated in proximity to resources like forest and land. When situated in deep forest, they are little far from water resources as it is feared that wild animals too frequent the same water sources. Villages which have been built new with Government support are located close to water sources on the High way.

II. DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Bairlutygudem is a medium size village located in Atmakur of Kurnool district, Andhra Pradesh with total 163 families residing. The *Bairlutygudem* village has population of 647 of which 327 are males while 320 are females as per Population Census 2011.

In *Bairlutygudem* village population of children with age 0-6 is 117 which makes up 18.08 % of total population of village. Average Sex Ratio of *Bairlutygudem* village is 979 which is lower than Andhra Pradesh state average of 993. Child Sex Ratio for the *Bairlutygudem* as per census is 918, lower than Andhra Pradesh average of 939.

Bairlutygudem village has lower literacy rate compared to Andhra Pradesh. In 2011, literacy rate of *Bairlutygudem* village was 66.23 % compared to 67.02 % of Andhra Pradesh. In *Bairlutygudem* Male literacy stands at 72.18 % while female literacy rate was 60.23 %.

SETTLEMENT PATTERN AND HOUSE TYPE

The traditional settlement pattern of the Chenchu is that their huts are haphazardly scattered and are connected by a network of foot-paths. In the traditional settlement pattern and also in many of the colonies of today, the village headman's house is almost at the centre of the village. The clans which are numerically dominant and play an important role in the political and religious life of the villagers occupy the central area and the others are in the periphery of the settlement. Thus, in *Bairluty*, houses of those belonging to *Dasari*, *Urthalur* and *Arthi* are at the core of the village and the houses of other clans are towards the periphery of the village. The houses of *Dasari Chenchus* (Boya), who later migrated to the village, occupied the lowest position in the social hierarchy and their houses are built at one end of the village. The houses of *Chenchus* comprise of only one room

and are without many basic amenities. The *poyya* (hearth) usually occupies a place immediately to the left of the entrance. Hearths are not only for cooking food but also for the warmth during the night and also to keep wild animals like the bears away.

III. PHYSICAL FEATURES

While majority of the members in the study area are dark in complexion, some are also fair in complexion. The stature is medium and on the average, the men are 155 cm to 165 cm in height. However, many variants in height both under and above average were found. The hair is strongly coarse and wavy in nature. It is black in colour.

2.7 LANGUAGE

The dwellers of *Bairluty* and also other settlements selected for the study speak only *telugu* language. However, their *telugu* appears different from the language spoken by the others in the State in view of specific slang.

IV. DRESS PATTERN

Traditionally, the Chenchus were wearing a *gochi* (loin cloth) and small cloths to cover their waist. These days aged men wear a *lungi* (locally called *pancha*) and all young men in the study area wear shirts and trousers when they go out to market or marriage in the other places. Women wear *sarees* and blouses. One end of their *sarees* is taken over their shoulders to cover their breast. *sarees* are worn in front folded fashion. On account of their increasing contact with the plain people the youngsters imitate the neighbouring urban dwellers in the hair style.

V. FOOD HABITS

The villagers eat different kinds of cooked foods and raw foods from forest. The *buvva* or "*annam*" which is consumed every day as the morning meal (called *udaya kudu*) and as the evening meal (called *mapati kudu*) by all members comprises rice. They take '*buvva*' in combination with *karam*, made of grinding of chilly, one or two tomatoes, and sufficient onions. This is common in all the households and in addition to that *pappu* and other vegetable curries are also there. Almost on every evening men and women will indulge in consumption of liquor locally called as *thummachakasaara*, and *vippasaara*.

VI. FAMILY

The family is characterized by sharing common hearth by all its members and it is a basic unit of *gudem* social structure. Moreover, each family functions as a single economic unit for production as well as consumption. Family among Chenchus is nuclear.

VII. MARRIAGE

Marriage is the vital social initiation among the Chenchus. In *Bairluty*, three modes of acquiring mates are noticed: 1. Marriage by negotiation of parents; 2. Marriage by mutual consent and elopement of mates and 3. Marriage by capture. After marriage the bride gets affiliated to her husband's lineage. Cross-cousin marriage is the most prevalent form among the Chenchus. Marriage by negotiation is regarded as an ideal mode of acquiring mate. However, as marriage by negotiation is an expensive affair, some resort to marriage by mutual consent and elopement. Though dowry is not a traditional practice, we do see few cases of this practice when the groom is educated and holding a job. In the case of elopement, social acceptance is obtained through the traditional political body (*panchayat*) in the presence of all people.

VIII. RELIGION

Chenchus worship a number of Gods and Goddess, like *Poturaju*, *Bayyanna*, *Veerabhadra swami*, *Eedamma*, *Lingamayya*, *Mysamma*, *Ankalamma*, *Mallikarjuna swami* etc., and we also see Hindu Gods like *Sri Ramudu*, *Venkateswara swami*, *Lord Shiva*, *Anjaneeya swami*, *Narasimhaswami*, *Lakshmi Devi* etc.,. Here we can observe the clear fusion of both little and great traditions in case of Chenchus. For example, on the one hand they offer prayers to "Lord Shiva" and celebrate *Shivaratri*, *Sriramanavami*, *Vinayaka Chavithi*, *Dessara*, *'Ugadi'*, *Deepavali* etc. on a large scale with all devotion and on the other hand they celebrate the rituals for "*Thene Mallamma*" with utmost devotion before the honey collecting season. Their *Jataras* include '*Veerabhadra Swami Jataru*', and '*Thene Mallamma pooja*', '*Sunkalamma Jataru*', '*Lingamayya Jataru*', etc.

IX. ECONOMIC ORGANIZATION

The economy of the Chenchus can be categorized as subsistence type based primarily on food gathering, rearing of animals, hunting and trapping of different animals and birds, and 'primitive' agriculture. The collection of different roots, fruits and leaves for consumption is the primary occupation of the Chenchus. They collect tubers like *chenchugaddalu*, *venabilagaddalu*, and *noolagadda*; fruits like *chintakayalu*, *mamidikayalu*, *velamkayalu*, *sitapalam*, etc.; the green leaves like *devadarukura*, *bodhakukura*, *chenchukura* for every day consumption. In view of the presence of GCC and other agencies of tribal development, today, Chenchus consider collection of gum (*banka*) as important source of income. Collection and sale of honey is also considered as one other important source of income for the Chenchus. Though forest is a common pool resource, some individuals or clan

groups of the community have exclusive rights to some of the resources in the forest (honey combs in the valleys called, *Sarrelu*). The traditional institutions play an important role in the collection and sharing of honey.

X. POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

Political organization of the village can be divided into two types. 1. Traditional, and 2. Statutory. In this village, like any other tribal village, traditional political system still enjoys supremacy over statutory political authority and there is also a kind of fusion between these two systems. Headman (*peddamanishi*) of the village and the members of the Traditional Council involve in dispute resolution. The present headman is also serving as the president of VTDA and also coordinates with the village *Sarpanch* for the development of the village.

XI. CONCLUSION

The Chenchu live in the hills of southern India, primarily in the state of Andhra Pradesh. The higher ranges of the Amrabad Plateau are pure, dense forests and are almost exclusively inhabited by the Chenchu. Life for the Chenchu revolves around the struggle to survive. The Chenchu depend on nature for nearly all of their food supply. They are hunters and gatherers, just as they have been for many generations. In former times, they hunted as a unified tribe. Today, they still hunt with spears or bows and arrows, but it is no longer a cooperative effort. Instead, each individual is responsible to provide for his own family, and their efforts are not very productive. The men are known as expert bamboo cutters and honey collectors. Very few crops are cultivated: tobacco, corn, and some millet.

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