

Social and cultural life style of Chenchu tribes

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Abstract

The people living in the forest and hilly areas, far away from the civilized societies, hunting animals in the forests, and gathering the leaves and other forest products are called 'aboriginal tribals'. The Historians say that these tribals lead independent lives without any connection with the contemporary kingly estates that existed side by side. In Andhra Pradesh different tribal groups exist. They are called Chenchus, konda reddy, Kolamulu, Nayak Podulu, Gondu, Savara and Jatapu. Among these tribals, the life style of Chenchu is very distinctive and interesting.

Keywords: Different types of Chenchus, Social life style, Religious Life, Customs and Traditions, Education and Health

Introduction

The tribals living in the Nallamala forests on the banks of river Krishna are called Chenchus. They live in the Nallamala forest that extends in the districts of Kurnool, Mahaboobnagar, Ranga Reddy, Nalgonda, Guntur, Krishna and Prakasm. The anthropologists observe that these chenchus have physical features similar to the "Veddoid" race. The word 'veddoid' has come from the word "Vedda" which is the name of an ancient tribe in Srilanka. Like the "veddoids" the chenchus have curly hair, wide face, snubbed nose, long jaw and dark complexion and short stature.

Types of Chenchus

Dr. G. Sheshagiri rao, a sociologist, has classified these chenchus living in our state into four types: 1 Adavi Chenchus (Forest Chenchus) 2. Deva Chenchus 3. Bontha chenchus and 4. Krishna chenchus. Adavi chenchus and Deva Chenchus live in the nallamala forest area and the Bontha chenchu and Krishna Chenchu live in the plain areas. According to the places they live in these chenchus can be divided as chenchus living in the forest areas chenchus living in the villages near the forest areas and the chenchus living in the plain areas.

Population Details

As per the population censuses taken in 2001, the population of chenchus in our state is 49232. Among them 24962 are men and 24270 are women. The number of literates is 12670. Among these literates 8132 are men and 4545 are women. Dark complexion, medium height, capacity to bear hunger, strong teeth, not involving in farming, fond of hunting, fond of drinking are the chief traits of chenchus.

Marriage Customs

Once there were only ten to fifteen cottages in chenchu gudem. Now because of the government care and the efforts of RTD (rural Development Trust) a voluntary organization all the rural small hamlets of chenchus have transformed into small villages with pucca houses. Chenchus mostly prefer small families to the large joint families. This reflects their love for freedom. They perform their marriage simply with

low expenditure. The bridegroom selects the bride by offering new cloths to the bride and her mother in the presence of the gudem elders, something like a betrothal. On the day of marriage the bride and the groom are appropriately dressed for the occasion and they are asked whether they like this marriage. Once they give their approval, the saree fringes of the bride will be tied to the fringes of the upper cloth of the groom in a tie. They make a tiny toy pot from the red clay, keep it between the bride and the groom and put two arrows in it. One arrow is taller than the other arrow. The arrows reflect their love for hunting. Then the groom will tie the sacred thread, known as 'taali' around the neck of the bride. In ancient days the marriage was celebrated in the bride's house (this can be considered as a relic of the maternal culture). Now due to the modern civilization the marriage ceremonies are held in the groom's house. After the marriage is performed they prepare themselves by drinking alcohol before feasting. They take liquor, eat food, start dancing by beating tum tums. The rituals performed by the purohiths entered the marriage ceremonies nowadays but in old days they were not to be seen. Some educated youth have entered Christianity, and hence some marriages are performed in accordance with Christian tradition.

Lifestyle

Although there are several changes in the lifestyle of chenchus their habit of love for hunting remained. As in earlier days hunting is known by the word 'shikar'. They carry a bow, an axe and a knife when they go for hunting. They share their hunt among them equally. They cook the meat well and they enjoy drinking before they relish this meat. They take their dogs along with them for hunting. Their dogs are a good help for them in hunting. They give as much importance to their dogs as to other fellow beings. They also like hunting fish. They like eating those fish rather than selling them.

Forest Products

The chenchus wander in the forest, and they are good at gathering several things available in the forest. They collect gum, honey, tamarind, edible fruits, medicinal herbs and

bamboo. They sell them in the fairs and buy their daily provisions with the money they get. Government makes arrangements to buy these natural products through GCC by offering profitable prizes.

Deities and their Faiths

The minds of chenchus are full of reverence for their deities. They pray to god for children. They give the name of the deity to their new born baby when they are blessed with a child. They offer well-cooked bajra as 'naivedyam'. Whether the child is either male or female they feel equally happy. They are happy to beget a large number of children. But now because of the family planning programmes taken up by the government, chenchus are having family planning operations. These chenchus are worshippers of Nature. They worship their local deities Maisamma, Ankamma, Pothu Raju along with the regular deities Chenchu Lakshmi, Ahobilam Narasimhaswamy, Mangalagiri Narasimhaswamy (Panakala Swamy), Srisailam Bhramaramba Mallikarjuna Swamy etc. The History of the Srisailam Temple explains that the chenchus took part in the worship of God in Srisailam and they extended their cooperation in managing this temple in ancient days. Later, when the management of the temple is taken over by the Endowment Department these chenchus gradually lost their prominence and have moved away from the temple activities. Among all these deities they give importance to two deities: one the deity who give them their hunt, and fruit in the forest; the other the deity, the god of the sky, who they believe commands the lives and deaths. Some chenchus also go to churches to worship Christ.

Health Conditions

The chenchus live under most unhygienic conditions, and live without proper food and without water for drinking. They become victims to several diseases, suffer from skin diseases like scabies ring worm and the deadly diseases like anaemia and tuberculosis. They use the plant leaves from the forests to cure their diseases and believe in the superstitious rituals. So they lose their lives in their early years. Now some voluntary organizations like RTD came forward to provide them good medical care and the services of the doctors are available to them. The chenchus are now moving away from their bad habits and unhealthy conditions.

Customs and Traditions

By custom, the chenchus bury their dead people; but they burn the bodies of those who are attacked and killed by the wild animals. They do not know about the other life, but believe in sins and goodness. They believe that they who do sin will go to hell and they who do good will go to heaven. They strongly believe that god gives them food and stands as their support.

In chenchu gudem an elder will be the chief. He takes the responsibility of looking after the welfare of the whole gudem. He conducts the clan meetings, maintains and manages relations with the other gudems. They do not like to approach the police for solving their quarrels. But now-a-days they have to go to the police stations because of the laws. Through the ITDA (Integrated Tribal Development Agency) the government is trying to improve their lives by providing good education facilities, health facilities, good food and cultural development. But because of their inferiority complex the chenchus are still backward. GVK s are helping these

chenchus by establishing Ashram Schools and Residential schools as they think only education can bring change in their lives.

Education – The Government Responsibility

There are reasons for lack of education among chenchus. They are leading nomadic lives and cannot send their children regularly to school. They take their children as a help in their work. The English medium schools and the inexperienced teachers cannot attract the children to the schools. The chenchus think that it is not profitable for their children to attend a school. The school children are becoming drop-outs because of the unscientific methods of teaching. If their own language is made the medium of instruction in the schools, there will be more benefit to them. The educated chenchus can work for the upliftment of their tribe and the education can become a revolution in their lives.

Government Encouragement

Most of the government programmes are becoming ineffectual as the chenchus love Nature and their nomadic life. Although the implements for agriculture-like plough, seeds, fertilisers and oxen –are provided to them, they cannot do their farming as they do not have necessary skills. They even do not think that they can replace these implements when they are lost or broken. And they are also not aware of selling their produce at profitable prices. They are financially not in a good position. The government is also spending only a meagre amount on their education and on their health.

Conclusion

By the combined efforts of the educated people, voluntary organizations, and the concerned officials a notable change can be brought into the lives of the people of chenchu tribes. The social and cultural life of the chenchus can be developed. When chenchus will be given the freedom over the forest areas they move, and when they are given the rights responsibility of forest conservation, a lot of change can be brought. A feeling that "the forest is ours" should be created in them. They should not be alienated from their surroundings. If they are treated as labour to work for the big contractors, or as coolies to cut trees for the government, they cannot develop. Because of the globalization most of the precious birds, plants and animals are on the verge of extinction. Some have already been extinct. These chenchus can save these rare species if they are given responsibility. As the children of chenchus are given education through establishment of schools, so the grown-ups are also to be provided shelter-homes, where they learn some craft and are kept away from bad habits. Then only the lives of the chenchus can be improved.

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