

LIFE AND LIVELIHOOD STRATEGIES AMONG THE CHENCHU: FOREST RELATED TRIBAL GROUP (FRTG) IN ANDHRA PRADESH

Appalanaidu P.

Senior Research Fellow, Department of Anthropology, Colleges of Arts & Commerce,
Andhra University, Visakhapatnam, India
Email: panaidu17@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This paper main aimed to understand the Life and Livelihood Strategies among the Chenchu: Forest Related Tribal Group in Andhra Pradesh. The Chenchu tribe depends on nature for 90 % of their food supply. They are hunters and gatherers, just as they have been for many generations. The basic aim of the study is to know the Life and Livelihood Strategies of the Chenchu tribe in Nallamalais. The study is both qualitative and quantitative in nature. Conventional Anthropological methods like observation (participant and non-participant) Schedule, Interview and Case study were employed to collect the empirical data. Many Chenchu have been forced out of their wandering, food-gathering lives by the growing number of peasant farmers. On the basis of the hunting and gathering activity, the foragers dwellings are classified into 1) Base camps 2) Work camps and 3) Transient camps. They now work as farmers or forest laborers and live in towns and settled villages. The study tries to examine the change among Chenchus in recent times due to the emergence of leadership among them.

Keywords: Chenchu, Forest Related Tribal Group, Life and Livelihood Strategies.

INTRODUCTION

The Forest Related Tribal Groups confronted with deteriorating livelihoods due to a declining resource base, population increase, and the impact of economic policies. There are nevertheless a number of contemporary Forest Related Tribal Groups who, after contact with other societies, continue their ways of life with very little external influence. Many Forest Related Tribal Groups like the Chenchus, the Jarawa, the Sentinelese, the Onge and the Shompen. They face great problems with respect to health, nutrition, control over resources and participation in decision making processes. Due to commercial logging operations, immigration and conversion of forest into agricultural land, the resource base has come under increasing pressure over the past century.

The tribal population in India is 8,43,26,240 (8.2 %) mainly concentrated in the forest and high altitude zones of Eastern Ghats, Western Ghats, Central, North-Eastern and Himalayan

mountains. Tribes or aboriginals are the most backward and vulnerable groups spread across different parts of India. India constitutes the second largest tribal population next to Africa continent. The State Andhra Pradesh represents 35 tribal groups with a population of 50.24 (6.59 %) lakhs (Census of India, 2001). The Scheduled Areas extend over 31,485.34 sq.kms which is about 11 % of total area of the State. Most of the tribal groups are marginalized and considered as deprived communities. The tribal communities in Andhra Pradesh more or less have been passing through various stages of economic evolution or development, starting with hunting, gathering, shifting to settled cultivation form and market economy. They have developed indigenous methods of exploitation of natural resources for their survival, but simultaneously ensuring the sustainability of these resources (Mohan Rao, 1999).

This paper seeks to examine the Life and Livelihood Strategies among the Chenchu: Forest Related Tribal Group in Andhra Pradesh, the Chenchu is a particularly vulnerable tribal group, inhabiting on the plateau of the Nallamalais in Andhra Pradesh. The Chenchu tribal population in Andhra Pradesh is 41,787 (Census of India, 2001) presented in Table 1. The Chenchu tribe was recognized as one of the vulnerable tribal groups in 1975 (GOI 1985-90). The Chenchus are listed as Scheduled Tribe in Andhra Pradesh under the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe list (modification) order 1956. They are mostly found in the districts of Kurnool, Mahaboobnagar, Prakasam, Rangareddy, Nalgonda and Guntur districts of Andhra Pradesh.

Table 1. Distribution of Chenchu population in Andhra Pradesh (2001 Census)

Name of the District	Mandal	Habitations	Households	Population
Prakasam	7	81	3136	13321
Kurnool	13	40	2036	7915
Guntur	6	48	1643	6376
Nalgonda	5	15	291	1069
Ranga Reddy	7	31	799	2700
Mahaboob Nagar	10	123	2766	10406
Total	47	338	10671	41787

Source: Census of India, 2001

However, by maintaining economic and residential flexibility and diversification, they succeed in continuing a hunter-gatherer way of life. When compared to the different levels of development and opportunities for the tribes, the most Vulnerable Tribal Groups are at Pre-agricultural stage of economy associated with the characteristic features of low literacy, most backward condition with diminishing or stable groups population found to live in the dense forest environment, largely depending on old method of podu (shifting) cultivation and Non-Timber Forest Produce (NTFP) collection.

Life and Livelihood Strategies of the Chenchu (Forest Related Tribal Group)

Life and livelihood are linked to the biological and physical world in a complex way. Humans are bound by their physical and biological environment in terms of provision of food, water, shelter and other environmentally related services. However, links to the environment are more than a rational and positivistic issue. They also encompass values and

symbols, ranging from identity and solidarity to property control and power relations. This includes values and systems of norms as significant parts of the management of resources, influencing human health and other viable of life and livelihood. More to the point, cultural systems influence the way in which resource utilization and environmental impact accrue to various groups in the society. The conference will have as its main consideration the significance of values and ethics in livelihood strategies in social and environmental negotiations as part of governance over human resources.

The focus was on forest-related tribals in South India, groups living within the four southern states of India; for example, the Chenchu, Valmiki and Yavadi of Andhra Pradesh, the Malayali, Muduvan and Paliyan of Tamil Nadu, the Jenu Kuruba and Kunbi of Karnataka and the Kurichia and Paniyan of Kerala. While the notion of tribe to a certain extent corresponds to the administrative term Scheduled Tribe, at this conference it was treated in a wider sense. Several communities in South India with a similar situation and history as Scheduled Tribes. The Chenchu habitats are mostly found in the Nallamalai forest area, covering the districts like Prakasam, Kurnool, Guntur, Mahaboobnagar, Ranga Reddy and Nalgonda. Livelihoods refer to those things namely material and social that allow a person to live well, or present a person doing so. It includes clean water, shelter, access to health care, access to education, freedom from abuse, access to credit facilities, virtually anything that would contribute to 'quality of life'.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

To study the Life and Livelihood Strategies among the Chenchu: Forest Related Tribal Group in Andhra Pradesh.

METHODOLOGY

The present paper is based on the data gathered from the Chenchus of eight (8) villages at four (4) mandals in Kurnool and Prakasam districts of Andhra Pradesh during the 11 months fieldwork. The study is both qualitative and quantitative in nature. Conventional Anthropological methods like observation (participant and non-participant) Schedule, Interview and Case study were employed to collect the empirical data. It tries to explore the challenges and remedial measures while addressing the question of sustainability. The paper prepared on the basis of empirical data collected from 174 Chenchu respondents from Kurnool and Prakasam districts (Nallamalai forest area). The method of ecology and ethnographic methodology were employed to collect the primary data. The examination of multiple factors which are exhilarating or prohibiting the participation of people in the development initiative is important not only in devising a policy but also in its implementation.

RESULTS

The present paper is the outcome of the study taken from the Chenchu tribal villages. It was observed that the depletion of resources was taken place in spite of all of the efforts of the study population due to the intervention of the many external factors. The Chenchus in Nallamalai forest area are still considered as foragers and they, directly interact with the physical environment forest for their subsistence and survival. Results reveal that the Chenchus are facing the problems of food insecurity and poverty due to the depletion of

forest resources in their habitats. In the field villages, even today around 45 % of traditional thatched huts are found, even though government has initiated housing scheme in the rural and tribal areas. Housing type is also considered as one of the indicators to assets the economic status of the people. Nuclear types of families are predominant in Chenchu society. The average family size is not more than four (4) members and in recent times Chenchus also adopted family planning and following the small family norm. Food gathering, agriculture and livestock are the major sources of livelihood to Chenchus.

Socio-demographic profile of the Chenchus

Regarding the housing status of sample households from experiment group, about 36 % were residing in pakka houses and 15 % in semi-pakka houses. While 45 % were residing in thatched houses. The worst scenario was observed in the case of 4 % households who are residing temporary houses. The percentage of households residing in thatched houses is higher in core villages (45 %) shows in the Table 2. The demographic profile of the sample households (from the study group) shows that there are number of males (52 %) than females (48 %). The average household size worked out to be 4.3. The age composition of the sample household members indicates low life expectancy- only less than 10% of the household members were above 40 years. The proportion of illiterates was very high. Among the literates their education levels could be termed low, as most of them did not cross high school.

Table 2. Type of house distribution of the Chenchu population

Type of the house	No	Per cent
Pukka	63	36
Semi-pakka	26	15
Thatched house	78	45
Temporary house	7	04
Total	174	100

The study also reveals that the attainment of literacy levels between the age group of 6-14 years is significant. (Of the 214 members in this group only 12 are illiterate or non-school going.) Further it is observed that Tribal Ashram schools have contributed a lot to attaining literacy levels among Chenchus. More than a third of households were residing in thatched or temporary houses. Of the 174 households, 92 % had possessed BPL cards which include 85 % of AAY cards. It is a matter of concern that 8 % of the households do not have access to PDS. About 15 % of households have accessed the social security programmes (i.e., old age pensions) from the government.

The Chenchus social structure – clans, local groups and village community, Family and Kin group, the relationship system, Peddamanchi (Big man or Head man) The phases of life – childhood, marriage and sex, pregnancy, child birth, and name giving, illness, death and burial, Law-Property and inheritance, breaches of law and custom, Beliefs and Traditions – deities and spirits, the soil and the cult of the dead magic divination and dreams, traditions and stories. The Chenchus observe the rituals like birth, puberty, marriage and death. They do not observe birth and death pollution. In Andhra Pradesh, the Chenchus have adopted the style of dress current among the peasant peoples of the plains. It is important to analyse the

way this community respond to these social and environmental changes and the process of social change that result from gaining new cultural information, particularly technology. The greater the amount of technological information a society has, the more it can manipulate the physical environment and the faster it can change. The Chenchus now work as farmers or forest laborers and live in towns and settled villages.

Struggle for survival and Sustainability of the Chenchus

In the past, they had no problems, especially food security. Currently, due to the forest and environmental degradation which resulting in depletion of forest resources, in turn they are facing the problems of food insecurity and poverty. At present, their environment is not facilitating for good nourishment, otherwise referred it as ecology of malnutrition. A large majority of population among the vulnerable are struggling hard to eke out their livelihood. The ecology in which those groups inhabit is not supporting at least their basic needs. As these groups completely depend on forest and natural resources, with the depletion of these life supporting systems, they have severe crisis in regard to the food. Food crisis very much prevails especially among the interior Chenchus. Forest and forest products are an important resource for the Chenchus to sustainability their life. Many Chenchus have been forced out of their wandering, food-gathering lives by the growing number of peasant farmers. On the basis of the hunting and gathering activity, the foragers dwellings are classified into 1) Base camps 2) Work camps and 3) Transient camps. They had a complete control over the resource and maintained the resources to be used in an appropriate way. The resources was regulated by imposing restrictions on cutting of important fruit bearing trees, and on overexploitation of wood, fuel, and even on irrational cutting of leaves of different trees, etc. At present both men and women wear cloths and ornaments bout from weekly markets or cloth vendors, and with the growing inter course between jungle and plains folk stimulating the demand, these new commodities constitute a continual drain on an economy which is ill suited to any but the smallest cash expenditure. Still band organization and semi-nomadic characteristics are found among the Chenchus of Nallamalai forest area. At present, the Chenchu are in transitional stage from food gathering to food production due to government intervention. Moreover, degradation of forest in Nallmalai also has much reflection on the livelihood of the Chenchu.

The important Economic activities of Chenchus

The Chenchus being traditionally food gatherers, of late pursuing more than one economic activity. The working status household members' from study group shows that NTFP collection is the single largest occupation in which 61.7 % of members were engaged, the percentage being higher in core villages. The next important occupation is agriculture, which accounted for 12.0 % of the members, followed by non-agriculture labour (7.3 %) and agriculture labour (19 %). There were a few salaried employees in the sample households, but mostly in low-paid occupations. While 1% of members cannot work, 0.5 % was engaged in household work. Students constituted 28.7 % of the members while 10.6 % were under aged to go to school shows in the Table 3. One of the important livelihood activities of Chenchus is collection of 'wild honey'. Some of the Chenchu families living in Srisailam Tiger Reserve Area earn a substantial portion of their income from honey harvesting. However, the traditional honey collection methods being followed by the Chenchus are considered to be unsafe, adversely affect the bees, forest and the general ecosystem. Owing

to risks involved in honey collection, the youth in particular are not very enthusiastic about getting involved in this activity. Furthermore, there is a decline in the availability of colonies and yields from existing colonies due to unsustainable practices in vague. If the present state of affairs continues, in the long run, it would lead to decline in the natural regeneration of forest in general and forest ecosystem in particular. This is because the contribution of honey bees to natural regeneration by serving as pollinators for cross-pollinating species would be adversely affected. There is not much support from the government in addressing livelihood concerns of the Chenchus in general and honey harvesters in particular.

Table 3. Economic activities of the Chenchu population

Economic activity	No	percentage
Agriculture labour	33	19
Agriculture	21	12
NTFP collection	107	61.7
Non-agriculture labour	13	7.3
Total	174	100

Income generation activities and Developmental programmes of Chenchus

The government has been trying to provide alternative employment opportunities through the Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA) by distributing agriculture land to the landless people, providing financial assistance for livestock rearing, income generation activities and other items of developmental programmes. The interaction with officials as well as with neighbouring villages, and development interventions led to a transition process, though slow, from folk society to peasant society life practices.

Sale of minor forest produce: The most important change in the economic position of Chenchus is the transition from gathering roots, tubers and wild fruits for consumption to the collection of minor forest produce on a large scale for sale. The entry of Chenchus into a cash economy has come out mainly by the activities of Girijan Cooperative Marketing Society.

Wage labour: Chenchus started engaging in wage labour as Forest Department used them as forest labour.

Cultivator: The first efforts to turn food gathering Chenchu into plough-cultivator were made. Attempts to develop permanent cultivation have yielded only patchy results. Nonetheless, this gave way to growing grain crops on small plots near the huts, shifting cultivation and farm based agriculture.

Livestock rearing: Traditionally, Chenchus were not involved in rearing of livestock. Very few chenchus reported to have owned buffaloes. Over a period, cultivation and livestock rearing have gained importance in the livelihoods of Chenchus.

DISCUSSION

The paper comprises of both semantic and scientific explanation with more of descriptive in nature. Many studies on tribal development reveal that economic progress among tribes is taking place in a slow pace manner. A considerable number of studies were carried out on

various problems of Chenchu tribe in Andhra Pradesh. Some of the note worth to mention studies are “The Chenchus: Jungle Folk of the Deccan” by christoph Von Furer- Hainendorf, (1943). This book presents the material background of Chenchu life-environment of Chenchus, dress and ornament, weapons, instruments and household goods, settlements dwellings, Economics-food collecting, hunting and fishing, domestic animals and agriculture, trade, Barter and occasional Labour.

The Chenchus are continued to be vulnerable despite of several development measures taken up by the government. The Constitution of India has devised safeguards for their development; consequently, national and state governments have taken several measures for the development of tribal communities. But the desired qualitative change has not been observed among them. The misconceptions of policy makers and the agencies of implementation, considering one tribal group as a single unit without addressing the diversity, lack of priority to the cultural factors, authoritarian approach of the officials, lack of follow-up etc., are contributing to the failure of any programme.

The other important studies on Chenchus are a monograph on Byrlutigudem (Chandra Sekhar, A.1965); The Dietary Habits and Nutrition Status of the Chenchus (Pratap, D.R.1973). The Chenchus: a scheduled Tribe of Andhra Pradesh (Reddy, G.P 1972); Evaluation of the Chenchu development programme (TCR & T.I, 1980); subsistence systems and limitations of ethno-ecology - Ecology and culture of Chenchus (Devarapalli, Jesu rathnam.1994); Human biology of the Chenchus of Andhra Pradesh: a demo-morpho-genetic study (Sirajuddin, S.M. 1993). Another significant research work on Chenchus is “The Chenchus: of the Forests and plateau – A Hunting- Gathering tribe in transition” (Bhowmick, P.K. 1992). This book provides the, information pertaining to villages and demographic aspects, material culture, social organization, life cycle, political organization, world by the super naturals, manifestation and celebration, welfare programmes: approach and impact on Chenchus. It gives ethnographic details of Chenchus and their transition from food gathering to food production.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It has been observed that need of employment by the sustainable livelihood and development of the Chenchus through locally available resources which may be utilized for the livelihoods of the study population. Employment opportunities can be categorized in three segments namely (1) Self – Employment (2) Regular Employment (3) Daily Waged. Employment efforts shall be made to engage the un-employed tribal youth for providing them Self-Employment through various development schemes on priority basis.

CONCLUSION

The Chenchus in Nallamalai forest area are still considered as foragers and they, directly interact with the physical environment forest for their subsistence and survival. A large majority of population among the vulnerable are struggling hard to eke out their livelihood. The ecology in which those groups inhabit is not supporting at least their basic needs. As these groups completely depend on forest and natural resources, with the depletion of these life supporting systems, they have severe crisis in regard to the food. In this context it would be vital task at least to preserve the indigenous knowledge of the tribal communities and their efforts in safeguarding the resources. These would be useful lessons to learn by the

present generations as well as the present policy makers in order to go in tune with the past 'cultural property' to conserve the resources.

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