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CHENCHUS OF KOORNUL DISTRICT: TRADITION AND REALITY

Introduction

This article provides new information on the Chenchus from South India. It will depict two aspects of their culture as seen during two short ethnographic surveys. The first was done in November-December 2009, the second in February 2012, both in Mahabubnagar district of Andhra Pradesh––the district in which they are most numerous.

The situation at that time allowed me to meet with different groups of Chenchus, some of which subsisted on wild resources. Being a foreigner with an unblurred eye helped me to be accepted by them, I was even included into one family and used kinship terms towards its members.

While such contact did not allow me to generalize about the current situation of Chenchus, it did make it possible for me to update specifics of their subsistence strategies and their social structure, including marriage patterns.

Overview

The Chenchu are an ethnic group spread across the districts of Andhra Pradesh. It has been claimed that they have been inhabitants of Kurnool caves and tablelands of the Nallamala forest since the Upper Paleolithic, and archeologists find evidence that, together with Dabba Yerukulas and Boyas, the Chenchus may be declared to be the indigenous population of the Krishna river basin (Murty 1985: 198).

According to the Census of India (1991) the total number of the Chenchus is 40,869 people (male 20,834; female 20,035), up from 17,609 in 1961. Chenchus speak Telugu, like the people around them.

Study of this ethnic community was started in 1940 by C. von Fürer-Haimendorf, who portrayed them as hunter-and-gatherers from the Nallamala forest, where they hunted, collected honey, dug wild tubers, and gathered 'for

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trade' forest products such as gum, tamarind, and myrobalans. In Christoph von Furer Haimendorf's book, *The Chenchus: Jungle Folk of the Deccan* (1943), he listed the Chenchus' traditions, depicted their material culture, which was much more varied than it is now, and shared his ideas about their social organization that he summarized as being 'democratic.'

Since independence in 1947 the Indian government expended much effort to improve the economic and educational level of 'backward classes', which include numerous tribes of this country. Chenchu society has undergone changes that may have broken their traditional mode of life and form of subsistence. In 1975 Chenchu were declared to be a 'Primitive tribal group' and, since that time, various government departments paid careful attention to them. As a result, most Chenchus have been resettled from the forest and provided land for agriculture. In 1991 about one third of them were said to be engaged in this occupational pattern (Census of India 1991).

The second important work on them is *Chenchus of the Forest and Plateaux: A Hunting-gathering Tribe in Transition*, by P. K. Bhowmick (1992). This book was the result of complex exploration in several Chenchu villages undertaken by the Calcutta Institute of Social Research. The information was gathered in their mother tongue and it shows that Chenchus are now involved in agriculture seasonally, especially in November to January (table 4.2, pp. 94-5).

I find that Chenchus continue to use both strategies, although some of them carry over from their hunting days.

Subsistence Strategies

The Village Chenchus. The research started in late 2009. Two villages, Chenchugudem and Tirnumpalli, were surveyed.

Chenchugudem is a settlement of Chenchus who have been allotted land. They were brought down here May 1995. The village consisted of 45 households (178 people). There were two parallel roads through the village and, in the center, was an old banyan tree with a small temple. One small shop was nearby and girls' school was located 200 meters outside the community. Houses were built along the streets; some were *kacchas* with thatched roofs, but most were single floor buildings made from cement blocks and with slate roofs. They were divided into four apartments, each having two small rooms, with one family per flat. Behind the house may be a small garden with tomato and bush pumpkin, with large leafs which covered the roof. These houses were built by a government program, each having electricity. Some families owned televisions and old-fashioned music players, but there were no refrigerators.

Tirnumpalli was a mixed village composed of Chenchus, Boya caste and Muslims. There was a total of 90 households, 50 of which belong to the Boya community, 33 to Chenchus, and 7 to Muslims.

This village was located in 5 km from Chenchugudem and it was much bigger and there were a school, a bus station, two shops, and several small shrines.

In Chenchugudem people have been provided with 21 acres of mango garden and the trees were big enough to yield fruits. During the harvest time all the villagers were probably busy with them but, when I was in the village, they rented out their land to neighboring Telugu people who are much more adjusted to agriculture. I saw how money was shared among the villagers on the steps of one house, and I was explained that this is the rental money; it seems nobody makes a secret of this arrangement. Perhaps the rent does much to support the Village Chenchu families and the men's activities revolve around a day-to-day job, fishing and various ritual affairs. I never participated in Chenchus' business activities outside the village, but several times I spent time wandering about in the company of young Chenchu men equipped with bows and arrows, and once I participated in fishing. A number of Chenchus in the villages had cattle, such as cows with their calves, and one young man worked as a shepherd from time to time, but that was the only kind of Chenchu agricultural activity that I saw. I would not exclude the possibility that Chenchu men can be engaged in agriculture as laborers, but after 2 pm most men in the village of Chenchugudem were sleeping in the shade; at nearly 5 o'clock they crowded round the place where a bottle of hooch was hidden in a small hut and the village slept from 10 till 6 next morning.

A few people had bows and arrows, it may be important to say that they were young people. The tips of the arrows had been made by a blacksmith from another village, but they said a master was not available who could make a bow and nobody wanted to help me with any advice[1]. It is not legal, they said, and there was a reason for them saying this — the Chenchus bow is real weapon. The stave of the bow is made of a dry bamboo section (*bada*), approximately 1 meter in length, it is slightly convex and may be decorated. The entire bow is called *katale* or *bada*, the string is called *antiperu*, and an arrow — *keta* or *amvu* — is made from a thin bamboo stick. The string is also the thin and hard bamboo stick with string meshes from both ends. The bow is kept unstrung, and one has to sit on the floor, rest one leg on the stave's center and bend it enough to fix the string's meshes in the notches at the bow's two ends. Once the bow is strung, it is gracefully curved and ready for use. Several times I walked around the village in the company of Chenchus with bows and arrows and, although I suspect they had taken them just for show, it was important that they might want to show the bow. It may mean that they are glad to possess one. Of course we shot nothing.

Common fishing is more productive. One day before fishing some people went to chop a local plant, a small tree that grows in the huge stony savanna round *Bayyanagatu* hill. The next morning all the men were grinding the

tree's bark into flour on a big flat stone until a big basket was full. Then they took it to a small river nearby.

The river was shallow and the water flowed in wide steps – from one small lake through a narrows down to the next step, then onto the next. The downstream river was temporarily dammed, and they poured the ground bark in every lake. Chenchus waited till the time when the bark had choked up the fishes' gills and the fish floated to the surface. The men beat them with sticks and threw them out to where the women picked them up[2]. The caught fish were divided in more or less equal shares among the families participating in the action. There was no common party in the village that night.

Forest Chenchus. The forest officer was my key informant's wife's father, and I asked him several times to help me with the forest people, finally he said that it is possible. In order to reach the place we rode a lorry with road workers for several hours; eventually we came to the workers' camp in a deep forest. Then we climbed by a dry stream up to a plateau where bamboo was replaced by rich trees. The first *penta* (village) was in a place where a grove of Sal trees gave enough shade for the 5 thatched huts, but the village was abandoned. Shepherds, who slept in the shade of a tree, told us that Chenchus had left this village two weeks ago and nobody could say when they would return. We went back through the worker's camp and then down the hill, to a grove where bamboo together with huge *parashet* trees, enlaced with lianas, formed a multilevel botanic community that hid the sky. There was a sacred cave (a Shiva temple, as I was told) and the second village was not far from it. There were 5 huts again; one round house was built in the traditional Chenchu style, with a thatched roof supported by the central pillar. People did not have many possessions and almost all their goods were kept in a locked wooden chest. There were no electrical goods in any house because the community lacked a source of electricity.

Two interviews were recorded, but the data are insufficient for any narrative. I basically just confirmed the existence of forest dwellers. Nallamala forest being a wildlife sanctuary, the official rule is that any game hunting is strictly prohibited; I suspect that, from time to time, Chenchus kill some monkey or lizard, but they are very shy and prefer not to talk a lot with strangers. For ages they lived in this forest protecting it from any poachers, but now they don't want any trouble with the authorities.

A report of the Center for People's Forestry complements my impression – the Forest Chenchus engaged more in gathering, than in hunting. N. L. Narasimha Reddy has written that non-timber forest produce[3] collection and wage employment have emerged as important sources of livelihood for 99% of Chenchus, while only 37% of household members were engaged in agriculture and 38% in livestock rearing activities (Narasimha Reddy 2009: 21). The average annual income earned from non-Timber Forest Produce is

Rs. 7,818 per household (including income from honey), and it may be noted that one-third of inhabitants of buffer villages have reported earning more than 10,000 per annum as compared with 19 % in core villages [4] (Narasimha Reddy 2009: 22).

The River Chenchus. I was able to meet them with the help of one villager who knew about a temporary camp, which was located in a village named Ameragiri, 7 km from Kollapur. During that time, the Krishna River was in flood and the Indian Red Cross provided the victims with stopgap tents. There were 56 families from the remote villages (7 from Ameragiri, 35 from Gunla Penta and 15 from Moti Choti Kula) in this camp. The men were hunters from the jungle, most of the men had bows, and none of them could remember any anthropologist in these areas, although some of them were old people.

Life conditions were terrible and people felt lost: the women were sad and the men were angry. Their boats and poultry went with the river and the people hoped for compensation from the government. Some people were severely ill and at least one young woman committed suicide. I spent three days in their camp and, during that time, I recorded important interviews, did research on marriage exchange (we will come back to it below) and shot an arrow from the Chenchu bow for the first time. Also I participated in the visitation of the girl who had committed suicide and in the burial of her body I was an unwitting witness. It must be said that despite having real problems the people were full of dignity; I left them with a heavy heart.

When I came back in 2012, I found a new village in the place where the camp has been three years before. I was told that the new houses were built for Chenchus and it looked like a happy ending. Perhaps, step-by-step, they would move into their new houses because a school has been built there and Kurnool town is not far distant. But, I expect that in Ameragiri they will face a strong competition for resources from Telugu fishing communities, equipped as they are with motorboats. Chenchus will definitely lose this competition. I suspect that only staying on far river banks, protected from strangers by thick jungles, can make it possible for the River Chenchus to keep their sources and maintain their traditions as well as their unity.

The fishermen' day is organized by nature. The husband and wife get up together at 5-6 am and go fishing. The round boat, called a *buti,* is about 2 meters in diameter. Pulling it along the river by the net's cord is easy because of its shape and, as it moves, the fisherman must pick up the net (*viola*) with his catch and fix new nets by plummets (*beda*), and floats (*discotada*) made from plastic bottles. This work takes about 3 to 4 hours, and at about 10 am they come back home, have breakfast and deal with other matters. At 3 pm couples go fishing again till 7.

From time to time the men hunt in the jungle around their *penta* and I was told that they sell their catch (*vetta* or *shikari*[5]) at a price of 150 rupees

for one kilogram, although I doubt that they could sell all of what they shoot. In previous times they hunted both small and big game animals. The former included hare, monitor lizard, jungle cat, giant squirrel (*Ratufa indica*), civet cat (*Vivericula indica*), mongoose and jungle fowl (*Gallus sonneratti*); big game included *nilgai*, *chinkara* and wild boar (*pundu*) (Murty 1985: 196). Although even now Chenchus do not turn down the lucky possibility of getting a wild boar, most of the hunter's take consists of small game.

One of the main Chenchu delicacies is the monitor lizard (*uruma*)[6]. Another speciality is Grey Langur (*Semnopithecus dussumieri)*, Chenchus call it *kochamycho*. It is a graceful animal with slender limbs and a human face. In India this monkey is called Hanuman and numerous temples are devoted to the monkey God from Ramayana. But it eats only leaves, fruits, and insects, so can be used as food itself, and hunting for Grey Langur seems to be widespread among South Indian tribes. Even the largely vegetarian Todas, who never hunt other animals, hunted for the Langur and call it *koreng*[7]. C. Fürer-Haimendorf, who spent more than two months in different forest *pentas*, does not mention this tradition, but the Chenchus hunt *kochamycho* and the stave of Narashima Urtanuri' bow was decorated with *kochamycho*'s fur. It is notable that they savor[8] even this word!

Their usual take of fish averaged 6-7 kg each day, several people claimed in their interviews, but this is probably an overstatement due to the fishermen' wishful thinking. Almost all of the yield is sold to the retail center in Ameragiri for 30-40 rupees/ kg or more, for a total of around 200-300 rupees a day. But how often they fish? I don't have sufficient reliable data to answer that.

However, a *buti* costs 3000 rupees; the nets are even more expensive. The net, *viola*, is measured in kilograms; a big one weighs 6 kg and it costs Rs.1000. As 4-6 nets for a family is said to be the norm, nets on average costs around 3000 rupees. I lack information how long these tools (*buti* and *viola*) remain in good enough condition to be used, but even if the River Chenchus change them twice a year, we would see that the fishermen's economy is more productive than the forest dwellers'.

City Chenchus. This is the smallest group, but it exists and should be mentioned. I met the forest officer who helped with forest Chenchus at the beginning of the survey, and then found out from him, that there were 5 prosperous Chenchu families in Kurnool. During the first period of field research they did not attract my attention, because I was looking for more natural communities. I have insufficient data to generalize about their life strategies and practical aims, but they do seem to be rather bourgeois. Bayana Balmuri, my forest officer guide was himself a Chenchu. He lived in Kurnool where his department was based, and had five grown and educated children. He was doing his best to stay in contact with the other Chenchus, as was a priest, the head of another Chenchu family from Kurnool.

Intermediate Conclusions

During my survey I found that the Chenchus at present have four different subsistence strategies:

1. Forest Chenchus who hunt and gather from Nallamala forest;
2. River Chenchus who fish from the Krishna River;
3. Village Chenchus, who have been allotted plots of land; and
4. City Chenchus, who have jobs in a city.

Looking at their subsistence strategies it might be fair to say that Chenchus today are not pure hunters-and-gatherers. The River Chenchus sell their catch rather than consuming it; the Village Chenchus possess land; the City Chenchus have been compared with bourgeois; and even the Forest Chenchus' economy, according to a Forestry report, is also interlinked with various retailers.

But let's look at this picture from a different angle. The River Chenchus life depends on fishing, and the Forest Chenchus exist by hunting and gathering, especially for tree's gum. It is true that they sell some of the products, but they do also fulfill their material needs from wild sources. The Village Chenchus rent out their land[9] and, while they are supported by their rent and day-to-day jobs that they choose themselves, it seems they also still approach life of hunters because they expect their environments to fulfill their needs. This is similar with an observation that N. Bird-David made some years ago concerning Nayaka who are employed in casual day-to-day plantation work and who follow their 'traditional mode' of activity (Bird-David 1983: 69). Yet there is a point of difference. The Village and City Chenchus don't sell the product of their job, as the River or Forest Chenchus do, but they sell their *job itself*. The strategy here is sharply different, so the patterns of behavior should be changed accordingly. In order to be employed one must have the needed cultural skills and know the required moral norms. It isn't 'hunted game' they pursue any more, it is rather 'cultural game', captured in a market.

I don't see any contradiction here, and to some extent the state of affairs among Chenchus is not greatly different – they still hunt, and still consume their food, but do it through an exchange. 'People obtain a direct and immediate return from their labour. They go out hunting or gathering and eat the food obtained the same day or casually over the days that follow. Food is neither elaborately processed nor stored. They use relatively simple, portable, utilitarian, easily acquired, replaceable tools and weapons made with real skill but not involving a great deal of labour' (Woodburn 1982: 432).

Today's Chenchus gather (forest), angle (river) and look for occasional jobs, but they obtain their daily food the same day they consume it. It was mentioned that village Chenchus possessed TV and music players, but there

were no refrigerators; this means they tend to consume whatever they need when it is available rather than storing it for future use. Their tools are 'simple, portable, and utilitarian.' Although I have no idea how great an amount of labour is involved, let me reiterate that after 2 pm most men[10] were in the village of Chenchugudem sleeping in the shade.

However, the definition above concerned 'immediate-return' systems, a very important feature of 'hunting and gathering societies, which have economies based on immediate rather than delayed return' and who 'are assertively egalitarian' (Woodburn 1982: 431). In this respect Chenchus may be compared with Paliyans. Although the latter are a better example of foragers, they tend to have a more traditional lifestyle than Chenchus do, and the 'bicultural oscillation' described by P. Gardner (1985), shows that Paliyans 'move to-and-fro' between cultural frontier (for occasional jobs) and cultural core (traditional forest life), while Chenchus, especially from the village, demonstrate less attachment to their recent past.

But it was mentioned that this type of society is egalitarian. Are Chenchus egalitarian enough to be counted as the society with immediate-return system?

Food Sharing and Some Features of Religion

Explaining which societies are egalitarian, J. Woodburn notes that 'In these societies equalities of power, equalities of wealth and equalities of prestige or rank are not merely sought but are, with certain limited exceptions, genuinely realized' (Woodburn 1982: 432). If they are realized, they may be observed. And in order to test Chenchus' equality we might look at their pattern of food sharing. 'Food is the source of some of his [Southern Bantu's] most intense emotions, provides the basis for some of his most abstract ideas, and metaphors of his religious life' (Richards 1932: 173). It is '... something that has to be shared' (ibid). Perhaps, if in a society such a valued thing is shared in equal parts, it would be an *egalitarian* society, but if it is shared according to status or to level of relations, the society would probably be *elitarian*, and each with its own degree.

But food is not shared without reason. The Chenchus' traditions are very interesting to consider, and although I have depicted them in detail in another paper (Ivanov 2011), I will repeat the main ideas below.

Chenchus' food itself is very simple and normally consists of only two items: first rice or bread (two to a serving) and second *kura*, a curry[11]. Rice is boiled without salt; bread (*rotte*) is an Indian flat bread; and *kura* can be vegetarian or non-vegetarian — depending on whether it is Profane or Sacred food.

Profane Food, with one exception that we will consider below, is vegetarian. The names are generated from product: *tomato-chatni, choraka-*

kura, chenchu-kura, etc. This curry, together with rice or bread, is consumed with close relatives or with a guest.

Sacred Food is meat. During religious festivals and life cycle ceremonies a domestic animal is sacrificed and its meat is distributed among all participants. We have described the religion of Chenchus (Battini and Ivanov 2011), but I should repeat what I wrote about animal sacrifice and its meat distribution.

1. Chenchus have 6 life-cycle ceremonies: birth (on 9th day – *nillakeeladiyadam*); name giving (3 month – *totella*); tonsure (1-3 years – *puttentukalu*); puberty (12-14 years – *peddamashi kavadam* or *ediginadi* or *paduchu samurthainadi*); wedding (*pellu*) and death Rituals (*dinalu*). Each time an animal is sacrificed on a particular day of the ceremony.

2. Chenchus believe in and worship many deities, both malevolent and benevolent, such as *Lakshmi Narasimhaswami*, *Bayyanna*, *Maisammaellama*, *Edamma*, *Peddama*, etc. Annual festivals to them are called *jatara*. The first day in *jatara* is called *uduku panduga* and the next days – *saddi panduga*. On the first day Chenchus worship in the pattern similar to Hindu – they clean pictures of the gods and goddesses, offer them coconuts, etc. The Chenchus called this *kayashekkeri*. They cook *prasad* and offer it to god, light incense and pray. On the next day (*saddi panduga)*, they sacrifice an animal to *Bayyanna* or *Maisamma.* The meat of this animal is counted as Sacred Food and it is shared among participants.

If it is small family celebration, a chicken sacrificed, but in the life-cycle festivals it is usually mutton, since Chenchus do not eat pork and beef. A local Muslim commonly kills an animal; this can be understood in terms of the Hindu tradition, which requires assistance in a ritual, but a Chenchu would rather kill a chicken himself.

Meat is cut into small pieces and the Sacred *kura* is cooked; *gurepotelo* is a curry from mutton and *kodukura* is a chicken curry. This curry, together with boiled rice and scones (*rotte*), is distributed in equal shares (as also alcoholic *saray,* but that mostly among the men). Chenchus don't have any rank either during festivals or during rites of passage, they just cook curry in a pot and enjoy it together with their ancestors, with whom they share by throwing a smaller[12] portion of the food into the bushes.

The life-circle ceremonies were one of my main interests in the field and many interviews about them were recorded. They were varied in their details, but some parts were common – namely that animal is sacrificed and its meat is shared.

I saw two village festivals: the first was a festival simply for village members; the second was bigger, with guests coming from outside, but with no food distributed. In interviews, people said that an animal is sacrificed,

and even mentioned when, but if we recall how many people reside in a village we could see that such a festival is very expensive now. Probably, in traditional *pentas* during the religious festival to honor the ancestors', an animal was sacrificed. But, in a new and larger village, it is more of a legend than a reality[13].

Hunted game provides an interesting, casual exception to the usual vegetarian food. I once saw a lucky hunter return home with monitor lizard and I once participated in a group fishing expedition. But there were no subsequent parties or food distributions in the village. The lizard was cooked in a pot at the hunter's home; the caught fish were shared among participants (I didn't ask for my share). I realize that this may be insufficient to state a rule but, even if in earlier times when big game had been shared, nowadays a hunter's take is so small that there is no sharing.

But I have seen how Chenchus share food, and we noted that they cook meat curry and distribute it among participants in a ceremony or a festival. No one gets a special, larger serving of this food, than others. The rules of food sharing 'reflect, and also specify, the structure of the familial and social group' (Levi-Strauss 1969: 33). We have seen that sacred food is shared in equal proportions, from this it should follow that theirs is the society of equals.

And, if Chenchus are egalitarian, this together with the modes of their subsistence and pattern of storage, may be enough to suppose that the 'immediate-return' system, which is an important feature of foragers' societies, is a feature of Chenchu society too. We have no reason to hold back from calling Chenchu society hunting-and-gathering, although it is undergoing a rapid transition. We could see that changes in adoption of Hindu gods and in new forms of husbandry, if they are deep, should possibly to be reflected in the social structure of Chenchu society.

Social Structure and Marriage Patterns[14]

C. Fürer-Haimendorf found the Chenchus' society 'democratic'[15], he called the Chenchus' leader a *primus inter pares* (1943: 119) as it was before; but it is clear that they retain a rather egalitarian society. Let us look at groups within this society.

Family (nuclear and extended), and Lineage. The Chenchus are patrilineal, with descent traced and property inherited in the male[16] line. And the wife normally comes to live in the husband's place (Bhomwick 1992: 135)[17]. The group based on descent is called a *kutumbam*. The nuclear family is called *chinna* (small) *kutumbam*[18]; the extended family is called *pedda* (big) *kutumbam*. There were only nuclear families in Chenchugudem and in Tirnampaly, although people didn't reject the possibility of extended family.

The whole lineage, which includes fathers and father's father, plus brothers with their wives, children and unmarried sisters, is also called *pedda*

kutumbam. It is a territorial unit and all *kutumbams* possess some land and property. Families and patrilineages are known by the same name because their members trace their common descent from a known ancestor.

Clan[19]. This yet larger group is called *gotra* or *intepery*. All *gotra* members bear the same surname[20]; P. K. Bhowmick gave the origins of these surnames and inferred that some of them 'are related to plants, animals etc.' (1992: 127). One *gotra* consists of a number of *kutumbams*. All members being considered blood relatives, marriage within a *gotra* is strictly prohibited. And members should come and participate, at least as eyewitnesses, in every passage rite, from birth to funeral.

Marriage. There are three types of marriage prohibitions all together among the Chenchus. These are:

1. the rule of tribal endogamy - marriage outside the tribe is impossible;
2. the rule of clan exogamy - marriage within *gotra* is impossible;
3. the rule of village exogamy - marriage within one village is impossible (but see the love-marriages, below).

This was confirmed by all the people I asked about it. These rules are what every Chenchu has to know, but there are 'mechanical models'[21]. I started to inquire about the exceptions using the method, which was very easy: while the weight gauge was being taken, I had time to ask the woman her name, *gotra* and current locality, and while measuring her height I asked about her mother's name, *gotra* and locality. It was enough – mother's locality shows definitely where the woman has come from. About 50 married women were interviewed. I found two things:

1. Monogamy is the most prevalent form of marriage[22].
2. There were no marriages between the fishermen and those Chenchus, who live far from river. The whole tribe seems to be divided into two: the River and the City-Village-Forest Chenchus. As there is no one rule, which forbids such marriages, probably it depends on needed skills, and, in turn, on one's ecological niche. Village or forest girls are not ready for angler's life and vice versa. I called these two groups 'ecological groups' because their unity is based on ecological reasons and available sources, hence their experience and skills. The River Chenchus do not gravitate towards the 'frontier zone', and there were no marriages outside their 'ecological group' (around 20 marriages have been taken in account). Moreover, half of these marriages were love-marriages (*marji*) within one village. It shows a high level of person's individualism and his independence from a kin-group.
3. The Village Chenchus generally were in marriage exchange between three villages: Chenchugudem, Tirnampaly and Narlapure (the

village from which a lot of people were resettled in Chenchugudem around 20 years back), but here were 4 women (out of 37) who came by marriage from the forest. They were apparently ready for village life; moreover, it seems all these marriages were arranged (love marriages normally take place within *one* village), so it was kin-group interest that underlay such unions.

The movement within this 'ecological group' — the people who move from forest to the frontier zone, where they have get contact with more complex culture (Hindu rituals) — gain access to technology, including TV and cell-phones, to education (school) and healthcare (hospital). This seems to be a reasonable change for them.

Conclusions

We had a brief look at Chenchu society. Except for some specifics, like beliefs and patterns of food consumption, we have examined their forms of subsistence, social structure and dynamics of marriage exchange.

We could see that Chenchu still live in the Nallamala forest, although 70 years ago C. Fürer-Haimendorf forecast 'rapid changes' in their society (1943: 312); supposedly the hunting-and-gathering way of thinking still exist among Chenchus. They expect their environments to fulfill their needs – they choose their daily job themselves, track them down like those in pursuit of wild game, and they either manage to get it or else accept its escape. They exchange their game using immediate-return system, and according to J. Woodburn this feature may even indicate the special type of hunter's economic strategy.

We could see how Chenchus share food, and although the observed data are insufficient for generalization, it is possible to depict the main specialties. During rites of passage and tradition religion ceremonies sacred food is shared in equal parts among the participants, which is evidence that Chenchus have an egalitarian society.

Social structure helped to identify groups that collected and interacted in the ceremonies when food is shared. Thus three types of groups are possible: the first is a family, a group of blood relatives (chicken is usually sacrificed for the glory of real (i.e., known but deceased) ancestors; then there is a clan, a group of people related through their mystical ancestor, known by their surname (mutton is sacrificed during life-circle ceremony); and finally there is a village — but this statement refers rather to the small traditional village *penta*, than new village for Chenchus, resettled from the forest due the government programs.

From all we have seen, one conclusion is definitely clear: the Chenchu could not be called 'agriculturalists', just as agricultural laborers should not

be called 'farmers'. I do not believe it is appropriate to call people 'agricultural' if, in actual fact, they are not doing the cultivation. This would be as inappropriate as calling a passenger in a taxi a 'driver' — the only one who may be called that is the one doing the work.

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NOTES

1. During the second visit I found this master in a river *penta* and he presented me with his own old bow with two or three arrows; it was given to the museum in Sankt-Petersburg.

2. They caught *rauta* and *maya*, middle sized fish belong to *Cypriniformes* family; eels calls *mata*; several unnamed fish—among them was one cichlid with blue lines and some fishes belonging to *Perciformes* order and having a double spine fin. All fish are called *chapala.*

3. Such as Adda leaf, Amla, Tamarind and soap nut (Narasimha Reddy 2010: 6).

4. The Wildlife (Protection) Amendment Act, 2006 in the Section 38 V (4) defined the Tiger Reserve which includes the core or critical tiger habitat and the buffer or the peripheral area (Narasimha Reddy 2009: 8).

5. This is a North Indian name for the kind of recreational big game hunting that rulers used to do, so it may have been given in an interview in order to show that the informant is very educated and knows Sanskrit; not being good in ancient languages I disregarded it.

6. In Chenchugudem I saw how a fat lizard about 40 cm long had been caught. The hunter cut off only its head and hands with the long fingers; all the rest was cooked in a pot and smelled well. Chenchus call the dish *urum-kura*. It was hunted game so it was consumed by the family of the hunter. The man cooked it himself.

7. This information was given by Toda men from the village (*mond*) in the Ooti Botanical garden. I showed my photographs to two cousins, both about sixty, and when they saw a couple of langur photos they started to laugh and exchange glances, When I asked about this they said that their parents hunted this monkey.

8. The raw brain is eaten directly from the skull, people said; all the remaining parts of the *kochamucho* go into curry (*kura*).

9. This resembles B. Morris' (1976) observations. In his paper the British anthropologist described efforts to settle Malapandarams from Kerala (about 3000 people). Thus, in 1911 the Travancore government established 'Rules for the Treatment and Management of Hillmen' in which land was allotted to an entire settlement (Morris 1976: 136). In 1966-7 the welfare authorities established a resettlement program in which land was allocated to specific families (pp. 141-2). In both instances, the Malapandarams leased their land to outsiders and returned to life based on the forest (pp. 137-8, 142).

10. I do not reject the possibility that they wish for more work for themselves, but I didn't hear any mention that anyone in the village was looking for a wage. Even when I offered one young villager payment to go to the River Chenchus with me, he kept me waiting for an answer until the next day.

11. Food eaten changes according to the season, during the harvest time or in the rain season, patterns change. For instance, during the rain season instead of scones Chenchus make *gadda*, a sort of a pie, and people call it by different names according to what is inside. If it's *molagadda* – then the stuffing is from the forest, if *kaluvagadda* –from the river. Instead of boiled rice in rain season, people cook the *jowar* – liquid food from a sort of wheat. But I didn't witness this and I don't know whether this information is correct.

12. For me this feature is very important. In this unconsciousness act of sharing in equal parts with contemporaries, but depriving the ancestors of an equal share, the human nature of Chenchus becomes visible; they are surely very practical.

13. Chenchus have adopted general ideas of Hinduism in festivals such as *Ekadashi, Vinayak Chavithi, Shivaratri, Ugadhi, Holi, Dassara, Divali,* etc; but, during these ceremonies, no animal is sacrificed. Chenchus also worship Muslim saints, thus they celebrate *peerilapandugu* (*Moharram*) with their participation in playing *alai* with singing folk songs; I have no information on whether Chenchus sacrifice an animal; at least Muslims do.

14. In this paragraph I will make reference to C. Fürer-Haimendorf's and P. Bhowmick' s findings in order to achieve a diachronic approach.

15. 'Democratic' is developing other meanings today, but both times C. Fürer-Haimendorf used the word (1943: 91) he makes it clear that he means only that the people are egalitarian and no one is privileged.

16. C. Fürer-Haimendorf says that land belongs to the whole group and other property is divided among all children (1943: 161), but I haven't got any data supporting this statement.

17. C. Fürer-Haimendorf pointed that 35% of them (28 from 80 marriages) live in the wife's village (1943: 107) and 'optional residence seems firmly established' (1943: 283). P. Bhowmick wrote in one place that 'in 6 cases, the sons-in-law were found to be living with their respective fathers-in-law after marriage...as part of marriage by service agreement' (1992: 135), elsewhere he wrote that 'marriage by service (*illiatam*)...practiced long time ago, no case was found during the field survey' (1992: 149), it is obvious that one of these statements is mistaken, although it isn't clear which. According to my information almost all wives came by marriage to their husbands' villages (although I obtained information from only about small sample of the Chenchus). There were a few uxorilocal marriage residences as well (for instance the informant, whose step was used for sharing of the rental money lived in his wife's house. His wife was a teacher in the school nearby and the house has been bought by her father). In sum, note that P. Bhowmick said that residence is changing from bilocal (based on Fürer-Haimendorf's data), to patrilocal or neolocal, based on his own work (1992: 168).

18. C. Fürer-Haimendorf said that the husband-wife households are 'self-sustained' and 'so independent', they live away from others for part of the year (1943: 108). Most of my inquiries were among the Village Chenchus – they have their pieces of land as a property. If I understand a meaning of a property right, it should pass down to the next generation and may be divided among successors, therefore generations are

economically related and it might be said that they are support each other. At the same time considering the River or the Forest Chenchus it may be an overstatement, but I don't have enough of data to say it definitely.

19. C. Fürer-Haimendorf said that the clan system is 'borrowed' and it is 'not very deeply rooted' (1943: 283) and pointed out that many men do not remember their grandfathers' names (1943: 108). But elsewhere he wrote that 'the principal units of Chenchu society are the clans, the local group, and the family' (1943:87), and the clan name precedes the personal name (ibid). He also found four exogamous groups. P. Bhowmick divided all the clans into three categories (1992: 129) and offered a table (table 5:3), but if one puts all the clans from this table in pairs it is be found that there is no intermarriages only between two *gotras*: Arthi and Chigurla; all other *gotras* intermarry. P.Subbarama Raju (2009) has divided all 26 *gotras* into three groups (he called them moiety), although it isn't clear why did he did so – his fieldwork was done in Kurnool district (AP) but not all the Chenchu *gotras* are present there, and Subbarama Raju confirmed this himself (2009: 169). Based on my own investigations I should confess that I didn't find any mention of marriage prohibitions between particular *gotras*.

20. (1) Marrepalle, (2) Mandla, (3) Eravala, (4) Nimmala, (5) Chigurla, (6) Thokala, (7) Pulicherla, (8) Udutaluri, (9) Dasari, (10) Mayillu, (11) Kotrayu, (12) Balmuri, (13) Kiannimunne, (14) Blumani, (15) Kudumula, (16) Garaboina, (17) Gulla, (18) Topi, (19) Arthi, (20), Bojja, (21) Mamidi, (22) Gaddamollu, (23) Pittollu, (24) Falli, (25) Chavadi, (26) Nallapathulu (Bhowmick 1992: 121).

21. This term, offered by C. Levi-Strauss, is used here in the sense of a theoretical rule that adequately describes a situation.

22. There were 2 cases of polygyny as well (from 45 marriages – it is around 4%), but in both cases a man has married the second time because his first wife wasn't able to have a child (in one case the suspicion was wrong and the first wife started to bear children just after her husband has married the second time – when I interviewed them there were 5 children in this family, two were from the first wife and three from the second, all of whom lived in a one room). P. Bhowmick also mentioned a few polygynous marriages – 16 out of 412 (1992: 142).

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