

## Food and Sanitation Patterns and Social Structure in Relation with Food Customs of the Chenchus of Andhra Pradesh

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**KEYWORDS** Compulsion to Marry. Social Forces. Food Preferences. Conception of Beauty. Ecological Group. Atomistic Structure

**ABSTRACT** This paper takes a look at the three groups of the Chenchus in the basin of the Krishna River. The research considers the food habits and the social structure of the Chenchus. It was focused on their food and, reminded of Feuerbach's "Der Mensch ist, was er ißt" (man is what he eats - *germ*), this part was more important. Food preferences show themselves in how a particular culture develops in the given environment. It is related with the meaning of ecological niche and exchange among such niches. This paper also shows how the "atomistic" social structure of the Chenchus is related with the patterns of food distribution in the winter (dry) season. Regarding the social structure, this is not only a line of blood relations, but also a line of common ceremonies and the institutions of family and marriage. In this paper we observe all groups among the Chenchus and analyze what kind of the structural forces keep them together. There is the analyses of the present system of "women exchange" and, after inquires among the different groups of Chenchus, it has been found that clans, if they functioned as descent groups, rather change by kids than by women. The man also is a "unit for exchange" and compelled to marry.

### INTRODUCTION

Chenchus turned to agriculture because of the Indian Government efforts. Earlier, even in British times, they were a hunting – fishing – gathering society spread across Andhra Pradesh to Madhya Pradesh. The Chenchus inhabit areas of Kurnool caves since the Upper Paleolithic. The Chenchus together with Dabba Yerukulas and Boyas (Murty 1985) - the *Malids* (Furer-Haimendorf 1943) may be declared as an indigenous population here. When Dravidians came and settled in these areas, the Boyas got assimilated with them as well as Yerukulas (to some extent), though the Chenchus were pushed deeper into the forests and kept their identity. Perhaps it was very important for them to protect the technological level they had reached, which was how to find iron and to make arrows, *ammu*, from it. But they had no chance or reason to develop this technological level and move further, and are still at the bow and arrow stage.

The main research about the Chenchus was undertaken by Christoph von Furer-Haimendorf, Austrian anthropologist - diffusionist and Cambridge professor, from January to June, 1940. He visited several Chenchus villages several times, stayed in some of them for a while. He shared his ideas about the social organization, and called it "democratic". He depicted their material culture,

which was much more varied than now and mentioned about Chenchus' traditions and patterns of behavior.

More recent researches are accessible now but format has changed. Instead of ethnographer's huge toms, now there are monographs, devoted to any particular subject, and normally in comparison with any other tribal group in a world. Unfortunately, the papers about the Chenchus' food habits have never been found, and the other materials are also poor. The authors usually provide us with the demographic reports or common ceremonies, but not with symbolic, complex and structural features. It seems important to clarify some issues regarding these questions.

### FIELD AREA AND PEOPLE

The research was done in the Kollapur Mandal (district) in Andhra Pradesh during November-December 2009. This is a study about the three separate groups of the Chenchus:

- The "Village" Chenchus,
- The "River" Chenchus,
- The "Forest" Chenchus.

*The River Chenchus:* Their temporary camp was placed in a village named Almangiri, 7 km from Kollapur. During this time, Krishna River was overflowed and the Indian Red Cross pro-

vided the victims with stopgap tents. There were 56 families from the removed villages (7 from Almagiri, 35 from Gunla Penta and 15 from Moti Choti Kula).

They were real 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 very old people.

*The Forest Chenchus:* They are also found in the Nalamalla Forest. The woods were untrod-den. Now the authorities have decided to build a road through this huge forest body, but it seems that nobody except the Chenchus live there. We visited two Chenchus' forest villages, called *penta*.

The first *penta* was on a flat plateau, where the grove of the Sal trees gives enough shadow for the 5 thatched huts. People have left it for a while for their own reasons.

The second *penta* neighbours with the grove where bamboo grows together with huge *parashet* trees, enlaced with lianas, construct pluristratal community, going up along the hill. The Shiva cave is here and probably the grove is sacred. There again were 5 huts; there was one round house built in the traditional Chenchus' style – thatched roof supported by the central pillar. People here do not have many possessions. As was observed, almost all goods find room in a wooden chest with a lock. There was no electricity and thus no electrical goods.

*The Village Chenchus:* Main part of the research was conducted in the two villages: Tirumpalli and Chenchugudem. They are about 5 km apart.

Tirumpalli is a multi-ethnic village composed of Muslims, Chenchus and Boya communities. There were 24 Chenchus households and 105 people: 63 adults (31 male and 32 female) and 42 children (23 males and 19 females). Chenchus houses are mixed with Boyas (OBC, Other Backward Classes); Muslims reside in the village center, near the shop, which belongs to a Muslim family. Variety of commodities available is higher than in Chenchugudem, and so also the number of services available, for example in the Tirumpalli shop one can get shoes repaired.

Chenchugudem, literally means “the village of Chenchus”, is a village 5 km. from Kollapur, a small town near the Krishna River. The village is encompassed by mango gardens and fields, sowed with sunflowers and *janna*, kind of local cereal. Far away are the high hills, with the lake and river nearby.

There are around 46 households in Chenchugudem. The village was settled about 20-25 years ago when Chenchus from neighboring villages were replaced there. Now, the population of Chenchugudem is nearly 188 people and only Chenchus live here. On an average, couples marry when 25-35 years old. People are mostly literate (49 males and 25 females), although only few men speak corrupted Hindi and just one young man could understand English.

The Chenchus live in one-ground houses with four flats. In total, there are 29 houses, and each flat has one or two small rooms, where one nuclear family lives. One room is more usual, people sleep there at night, and spends all day outside.

People aren't poor. 58 families living in Chenchugudem possess around 120 acres of mango gardens and fields of rice or sunflower. Chenchus have hired out their lands to the Hindus of the neighboring villages and live as landlords now. 8 households already have TV; many houses have DVD and sound systems, but their traditional economics has not changed much. It remains a subsistence economy, so habits remain the same as they were in the forest – there are no one refrigerators in the villages, neither in Chenchugudem nor in Tirumpalli, which shows that people do not care about surplus or storage. Also, Chenchus still cook on fire and still take from nature as much as they need for their leisure hours.

The man, if he in the village, rests, and the all activities related with any good's production is carried outside the village. He sits on his haunches in traditional skirt, *lungi*, near his house and smokes *bidi* – dry tobacco leaves, while the woman cooks on a fire and the children are around. Normally, a family has three-four kids. In Chenchugudem they go to school after they are six years old.

Our entire research group lived in one such school. Authorities allowed us to stay in a separate building in the girls' school's territory. There were a lot of girls in between 6 and 12 years old. They woke up every day at about 6 in the morning and started with yoga and morning exercises. Students had a light breakfast and went into the village, 200 meters from the school along with their topics.

## METHODOLOGY

Two main methods were applied - participant observation and structured interview, or say, *emic*

and *etic* approaches. The method used was more appropriate – in the case of the fishermen, living in the temporary Red Cross camp as without daily fishing there was no time for real observation. And the groups weren't constructed, but usually random, so "random sample semi-structured interview" was used.

## RESULTS

### The Day Schedule

**The Village Chenchus:** In Chenchugudem, a woman wakes up in the morning at 6 am or earlier, depending on her chores. The man, if he doesn't engage in any work outside the village, sleeps till 8 am.

Both sexes clean their face and teeth. The Chenchus usually do not use any toothbrush and paste but use sticks of Neem tree (*Azadirachta indica*), which is common in India. *Bogu* is also used. It is a charcoal, coal from the fire place, which is mixed with water by each to his taste, and then people rub teeth with this, to make them look whiter. When the women have finished their work, then it is breakfast time. It is usually around 9 o'clock. If the man goes for any work early, he gets food which has been cooked before, the same as for the kids, who go to school.

Women make fire, boil rice, and prepare the food. There appears to be no difference between food cooked for the morning, evening, or lunch food, so all dishes are cooked from the same basic ingredients. The man eats first, and then will the others eat – the woman and the kids. When the man is eating, the woman serves him, when a woman eats, nobody serves her.

After the breakfast, everyone goes about their work, till 1 pm, the time for lunch. The women again lights the stove, again boils rice and cooks the vegetables – normal, casual food, which is vegetarian. On Sunday, a family usually cooks a chicken, but usually it is meant for some family worship for which the chicken is sacrificed, but the casual or profane food is from vegetables. Before any meal, people normally clean their hands and sit down on the floor in the house. The men prefer to eat inside, the women and the children eat outside in metal dishes. After lunch, people fall asleep in the shadows, it can be all family on one carpet, or sometimes the man can sleep apart. About 4 pm, might be later, people get up.

Mostly then, the women sit near the shop, waiting for the cattle to come back, the men are also nearby, waiting for *saray*, which is distilled in the hooch still under the shop's shed.

The men start to drink available alcoholic beverages at 5 pm and they know when to stop, since no one is seen drunk. Between 5 and 8 pm all the men are back home from their work. If the dinner isn't ready yet, people normally sit in groups. I observed about 5-7 such companies, based on kinship, as "*tamudu*" (Raya Niradjan) and Shankaraya (Nimala); on school mates relations, as Tirupati 1 (Katrazu) and Tirupati 2 (Balmury) and Shiva (Nimala); even on interest, as the last three had with Shrinivas (Balmuri), as they all adored fishing. Other companies were based on neighborhood.

At 8 pm people clean hands before eating their "dinner" – the same food or items as they had for breakfast or lunch. After dinner they go to sleep and by 10 pm, just a couple of lamps are lit and several dogs are walking around and the whole village is asleep.

**The River Chenchus:** The fishermen' day is a little different. In the village, the men get up together with the women at 5-6 am and they just clean their faces and without any food they go for fishing. The boat is round and about 2 meters in diameter, called *buti*. It is pretty comfortable to move in, pulled by the river along by the net's string. It is also easy to roll it in the dry land – one man can do it. A *buti* costs 3000 rupees.

Two people manage in a *buti*: wife and husband. They must take catch and fix new nets, *viola*, by plummets, *beda*, and floats, which are called *disco-tada*, although it's just empty plastic bottle or piece of foam plastic. This work takes about 3-4 hours.

At about 10 am they come back from fishing, have their breakfast and finish their tasks – the men work with nets, the woman finishes other jobs around the house or in the garden. The net, *viola*, is measured in kilograms. 6 kg is a bigger one and it costs Rs.1000. 4-6 nets for a family are mentioned as the norm.

At 1 pm is lunch. During this time people stop working. After lunch, people take a break, but by 3 pm, couples go fishing again. They change nets, take the catch. People say that in the morning they get more fish, but the time of the process remains 3-4 hours, and around 7 they come back. Men have aperitifs and women cook dinner. Between 9-10 pm, people finish with eating, drinking and watching TV and go to sleep.

We could see that daily schedules are typically the same. Even the fishermen's activities are clear and they are more dependent on nature and environment. Here, it might be said as well about the relations among nature and culture, or existence and consciousness – surviving is based on activities of two people in a family, wife and husband who fish, while the children help in the house and with livestock – therefore this can be called an “atomistic” social structure.

Common sanitation norms are not so exacting – Chenchus clean their faces and teeth only in the morning, then clean their hands before any meal and that's it. People sleep usually on the floor, covered in a blanket, or some people sleep on a bed, a wooden frame intersected by ropes.

### Sanitation and Hygiene

This section deals with how people take care of their bodies and living places. According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, Sanitation is “the equipment and systems that keep places clean, especially by removing human waste” otherwise “disease resulting from poor sanitation.”

Hygiene has been defined as “the practice of keeping yourself and your living and working areas clean in order to prevent illness and disease”, almost identical definitions. Since this is the case, we will consider hygiene and sanitation synonyms.

This topic is broad, because who can say where protection finishes and decoration starts, for example combing hair with oil – does it protect from any possible disease or is it a product of the common idea that hair would look great. Or could it be the message conveyed by the chosen hairstyle that motivated a woman's hygienic practices to reflect her symbolic intentions.

*Common Sanitation:* A look at Chenchus' Village day schedule gives an idea what Chenchus do to protect themselves from diseases and to see when and how people look after themselves.

1. Getting up in the morning, the women and the men clean their faces and teeth.
2. After breakfast, the women clean the plates, and then sweep their house and the area in front of the house.
3. Before lunch, the women and the men clean their hands without soap.

4. About 5 pm some women do some kind of make-up, like, apply oil on their hair or cream on their faces. The same is done with a baby, if there is one.
5. Coming home after completing their jobs, the men take bath near a water pump, using soap.
6. Before dinner, the women and the men clean their hands without soap.
7. Before going to sleep, people do not clean any part of the body, nor face or hands; they just fall asleep on the floor.

We can see that some hygiene activities are related with protection from hazards and diseases, while others are traditionally in reference to beauty, without overlooking their implications for health and well-being. This relation is not obvious and from some points of view, modern example of beauty is pretty far from any idea of being healthy – girls are morbidly thin, and make-up is sharp.

But since Rubens times, when an abundance of food was regarded as a sign of health and prosperity, conception has changed and after several well-fed generations in Europe and in North America, food and drink are not treated as something special. Conversely, they are considered a part of a bourgeois system of consumption. Obesity seems vulgar, and now other features stress and convey a message of health through perception of beauty.

Physical Anthropology is the study of the human body and its proportions. There are a lot of different scales and measurements that may be applied to human body. I used an anthropometer and scales to measure weight and height, looking at people's perceptions, while taking measurements. We could see that a girl's large weight is taken as a disadvantage and tall height conversely – as a big plus. Obesity is probably related with intemperance while tall height is related with physical strength.

We could see that Chenchus proceed from the modern concept of sparing consumption and the thin and tall body and it means that they reject the obvious amount and turn to the more implicit qualities, which are open to observation.

These qualities of the person's health are demonstrated by the hair, skin and teeth. All other parts of the body are more representative of a person's skills, as eyes show intelligence and are “the window to the soul”, hands – breeding in some extent, size of the mouth and form of the

limbs shows sensitivity. Hair and skin, together primarily demonstrate health – if skin has pimples and hair is weak, it means that the person has some inner problems. Teeth show the same but not so evidently, they show more of a person's life conditions.

According to their daily schedule, Chenchus' activities are divided into two: those related with protection from diseases such as cleaning hands and body with soap or without, and activities related with common conception of beauty and health such as cleaning teeth, combing hair with oil and applying cream on the skin. If a person, especially a woman, wants to look healthy, she must take care of factors such as the skin, the hair, and teeth.

The women address these hygienic needs between 4 and 5 pm. They comb their hair with oil; but the men do not. Furer-Haimendorf in 1943 said that "both sexes frequently comb their hair with small wooden combs..." (Furer-Haimendorf 1943) but I did not see the men doing it. However, both male and female hair is dense and healthy, skin is without any diseases, and there is usually no exception, not even pigmentation or teenager's acne.

Teeth were without any critiques. It is probably related with the diet and spicy food, but more probable is that it is Neem trees' (*Azadirachta indica*) work. Only India is endowed with this tree and half of the ayurvedic medicines are based on its medicinal qualities. In the morning people break 10 cm stick of this tree, remove leaves and bark from the tip, but it is not yet ready to be a tooth brush – firstly one should jaw the tip until it became soft like a real brush. The juice of the Neem tree is bitter and works as an anesthetic but also possesses many good qualities which do not work so fast, but work only if used every day. Chenchus' teeth are generally white and healthy, although in old age people lose them fast, probably a result of vegetarian diet.

Nobody goes to a dentist, although a barber is frequently visited for shaving or cutting hair. All such jobs are doing by the specialists only. As was observed, there are a number of barbers travelling between villages who offer their services to local people. Price is same for all – all the boys and the men pays Rs.20 for cutting hair and Rs.15 for shaving.

The women use a barber's services after widowhood only. They never cut their hair or shave

their bodies, and this practice seems common to all traditional India. There are thus, complex relations with hair, starting from cutting hair in mourning ceremonies and finishing by the idea of health and beauty, which lead us to believe that hair are considered as a sacred issue, probably related to life or living.

We cannot say the same about the nails, which are cut usually by a half of safety razor. The men cut the nails on their feet openly, sitting on the porch of his house – the women never do. Perhaps the nails are counted as something not so clean and need to be removed, although this mindset is not shared by everyone.

In the Red Cross camp in Almangiri, we met one lady who had a traditional tool for sanitation. It was tied around her neck, on a rope with the keys. There was needle -*sudi*, tweezers-*potakara* and small spoon to clean ears- *guilipula* – everything made from cooper. She said that it is the Old Tradition.

**Children's Sanitation:** The Chenchus have a lot of children and they get special treatment till their first teeth grow. When the child becomes a little older, he runs the whole day with brothers and sisters everywhere in the village and with little care how dirty he becomes.

Usually there are 3-4 children in a family, and then the mothers can go in for sterilization. The government pays about Rs.1000 for those women who decide to do this. Lactation of the infant goes on until the next child is born. If this infant is the last in a family, the mother would feed him by her milk till she has it, sometimes till 4 years, as some people said. Children in Chenchugudem at around 7 years go to school and leave the village.

Babies get a lot of attention. There were two families with infants in arms – 5 months old Sri Ram and 3 months old Malesvari. The mothers bathe them at least twice a day – in the morning at 8 am and in the evening, at about 5.30 pm. After the bath, either talcum powder or oil is applied bought from a shop.

These procedures are not regular. They weren't observed every day; but in the case of the Chenchus, any mention about regularity seems doubtful.

**Sanitation for Elders and Sick People:** Only one case was observed, when an old lady laid on a carpet near her house all day and abstained from any food. She did not get any special treatment and nobody cared for her. Next day she

was like new, so I assumed that Chenchus rely more on the natural order of things rather than on medicine. When the time comes it is better to die in peace, rather than face torment in the government hospital.

**Sacred Sanitation:** Sacred sanitation also exists in the form of the Ritual Bath. The Ritual Bath is taken before a village festival or before a ceremony, changing a person's status. In a case of marriage, several relatives help the groom and clean him carefully, so Ritual Bath is like a regular bath. It is not good to get married with dirty legs. Probably it is related with the belief that everything starts new, from the beginning for the groom and the bride and all old sins must be thoroughly washed away from the body.

On the morning of a common village festival or in the case of somebody's death, the Ritual Bath is taken together by both sexes – the women in a dress, of course. It is done in a river or in a lake and such procedure is only a ritual and not hygienic. It expresses the idea of Purity.

But we are not able to say that degree of Purity before marriage is higher than before funeral because of the Ritual Bath. Marriage is more personal, the bride and the groom are both alive, and marriage is related more with segregation; funeral is definitely separation and people want to wash up their bodies after the contact with death.

Chenchus do not cremate dead bodies, but bury them in the ground. A special ceremony is performed to remove the deceased's sins and inauspiciousness (*Pudja*). A funeral pyre expresses it in Hinduism, confession in Christianity, but Chenchus are content with *Pudja*. They do not care much about the deceased but more about those who are still alive – and the Ritual Bath in the river cleans their bodies. It can be generalized to say that it characterizes Chenchus as rational people, who relate mentally more with the present than with the past.

## Drinks

Some ideas related with perception of the drinks seem important for a general understanding of the Chenchus' food conception. The Chenchus prefer three types of drinks: *saray* "for the men", *kalu* "for the women" and water perhaps for the children. No types of hot drinks are available in Chenchugudem, neither tea nor coffee.

## Alcoholic Beverages

**Saray:** This is an alcoholic drink. The men in the village start to drink it after 5 pm as aperitif and stop closer to nightfall. This drink is distilled in hooch still. A vessel, shaped as ancient amphora, stands on a fire, and from its upper side, where a metal bucket is attached, a tube is laid and *saray* runs through it into the canister. Everything is placed in the small building behind the village shop.

People drink *saray* from critically inconvenient cups, which are bigger than simple cup, about 0.3 liters, with a narrow neck which fans out on the cup's lip like a grunt-horn's bell. The cup is made from thin metal, and the men take the cup by the fingers of their left hand on the narrow neck, which is comfortable, and one cannot drop it due to the wide cup's lip laying on the fingers; but problems arise when one starts to drink from it since it is hard to control the quantity of the liquid going into your mouth, although *saray* is not so strong – around 20% of spirit.

**Kalu:** This combination of water, palm juice and chemicals is white in color and sweet in flavour. The men like to enjoy *kalu* at noon, sitting in a shadow of boughy tree. If all types of alcoholic beverages could be divided broadly into two categories: hard and soft, then *saray* is like a whiskey, hard, and *kalu* as a beer, soft. *Kalu* is even sold in the same bottles as beer.

Also, nobody wants to share the procedure of making these drinks. It's "the secret of Heather Ale"<sup>1</sup>. I just can say that this procedure would be cheap because final product is cheap, a bottle costs around Rs.5. One can buy *kalu* in a small hut in Tirnumpalli. One can ask anybody the way to the hut.

## Water and Non-alcoholic Drinks

People drink a lot of water and take at least two big bottles for any voyage outside the village. There is a tradition to drink water and not touch the bottle's neck by the lips, and not only the Chenchus but – everywhere in South India, people swallow the water flowing from the bottle. We can say that when the Chenchus do not drink alcoholic drinks they drink water, because there is no tea or coffee. Being well aware about the life outside their villages, Chenchus did not adopt this tradition.

When I interviewed Chenchus about their fast-

ing traditions, two or three times people said that it is allowed to drink milk during fasting, and many of them do it. But none in Chenchugudem drank milk even though there are a lot of cows in the village.

We have counted the livestock and found that there are two types of “male cows”, *buffalo* (buffalo), and *poks* (ox), and their numbers are much higher than the number of the “female cows”, called *barre* and *avvu* respectively. The “male cows” are mainly used in a job – in a field or to drag a cart; the “female cows” must have a calf, and it usually drinks only mother’s milk. Students could buy only one liter in a day.

Probably there is a kind of economic strategy behind the less availability of milk. That is, when a person is interested in the final product, as the ox or the hen, so he retains all intermediate products for the reproduction needs. Hence, people almost do not eat eggs and are content with a small amount of milk – which has remained after the calf has taken its fill, and which normally does not suck only its mother.

It leads to a kind of disadvantage since normally tea or coffee is made with milk, but since Chenchus don’t have enough milk, they do without the hot drinks. Simple combination of the tea leaves and water is not drunk.

## Food

Nowadays, all the fields around the villages are under agriculture, so gathering now can be treated as a pilfering. No more digging sticks, called *nalla gadda* or *eravala gadda* (Furer-Haimendorf 1943). Now the food habits have changed, although some interesting features remain, in general, the patterns of consumption, as well as special, like hunting for *kochamucho*.

**Tools and Equipment used in Cooking:** The Chenchus cook on fire. The fireplace is near the house, fenced by a small wall from two sides and three stones support a pan in middle.

There are three main types of pans: first is a wide and slight concave frying pan – for *rotte* (the scone); second is a pot for boiling rice and the third one is the bowl for vegetables. Also, an important tool is the stone bowl (*rolu*), shaped as billiard chalk, where stone cube has a cavity in form of bowl where hot vegetables are placed and pressed by heavy stick, *roccalo*, which is also used in rituals.

People eat from metal dishes by the right hand,

using common techniques when the food, which has been taken by the tips of the palm’s fingers, is pushed into the mouth by the thumb.

**The History of this Issue:** There are two main agriculture techniques in India – wheat comes from the west and was cultivated in the Indus River civilization, probably by proto-Dravidians from Central Asia, and rice had been brought by Munda people, who came from the east, and are associated with yellow Neolithic ceramics (Bongard-Lewin 1985). Excavations give data that in Bihar rice was cultivated about 2000 BC. Wheat passed to China through Tibet, rice remains in historical India.

In those times Chenchus lived in the jungles. The women gathered varied edible fruits, plants or roots and practiced primitive agriculture (Furer-Haimendorf 1943) with the digging stick, and the men hunted in the forest. There are “various possible alternatives for hunting meat and food procurement methods in the prehistoric past. These could be: (1) hunting game by chasing and stalking (as for example like the Dabba Yerukulas and Boyas), or felling the prey, after a chase, with bow and arrow (Chenchus); (2) ambushing the game at water holes (Chenchus); (3) net hunting of small game, use of traps for small game and use of net traps and noose traps for birds (Dabba Yerukulas and Boyas); and (5) opportunistic scavenging” (Murty 1985).

When the Chenchus met with the Dravidians and the Hindus, they were pushed deeper into the forests, but had been involved in an exchange, which still goes on – Chenchus still barter any catch from the forest for anything that can make their leisure hours merrier. In earlier times, probably, they exchanged food and cloth and adopted Hindu traditions, since now the Chenchus wear traditional Indian sari and do not eat beef. They also cook all the traditional Indian cereals, the rice and the wheat.

**Dishes** Food eaten changes according to the change in seasons. There is the dry season’s food, during the harvest time or in the rain season, patterns change. For instance, 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.

The Chenchus, both from the River and the Village, eat a small number of fruits, only a banana and a castle-apple or *sitaphal*, which is cooked in fire's ashes. Any Chenchus' meal, breakfast, lunch or dinner, is a combination of two: 1) rice or bread + 2) any curry. All variations of curry are cooked with the chili pepper, probably for medicinal purposes. People used to call it just a *chilli* but also can say *pochi* if green chilli or *endu merchi* if the chili is red. This is a common ingredient in the Indian kitchen.

Field research took place in December and at that time any meal consisted of two "items", with few exceptions. An item is any type of cooked food, which is ready to be eaten and can be eaten along or in combination with other items.

- a) Boiled rice is the first item. Its taste depends on the rice varieties. In India, just boiled rice with leaves and oil could be very tasty. Unfortunately, not in the Chenchus' village since people used to buy rice in the Ration shop<sup>2</sup>, where prices are cheaper but variety is less. One type of rice is cooked, maximum two. Rice is called *annam* or *bua*.
- b) Second item is *rotte*, brown grain scone. Dough is cooked from *janna* or *javar* – a plant that looks like a corn, but with a disadvantage as it has no ears; farmers collect it, spread them on the road and passing cars thrash it. The women stand on the side of

the road and sift brown grains in a flat shaped scoop. Grains are small and look like seeds; the women grind them in the house between two round stones, one on other, adding grains through the hole in the center of the upper millstone. Flour is collected in the familiar scoop, then mixed with water and cooked on fire, on the slightly concave frying pan. Brown scone, or *rotte*, which is without any particular taste, is cooked and ready for use.

Curry is also an item, but very variable. Curry here is called *kura*. People in 99 cases out of 100 eat *bua* + ...*kura* or *rotte* + ...*kura*. Anything eatable, from the local grass up to a monkey can be put into this and cooked in oil with chilli pepper, in more or less dense gravy – flour might be added, some spices and this is *Kura*, and, in combination with rice or scone, it is a common Chenchus' meal.

### Types of Curry

Broadly curry (*kura*) can be divided into vegetarian and non-vegetarian. It is closely related with the Sacred and the Profane food. Normally, the casual food is vegetarian and the non-vegetarian food is related with sacrifice and ritual. In between, there are fish and chicken, consumed as a hunter's catch.

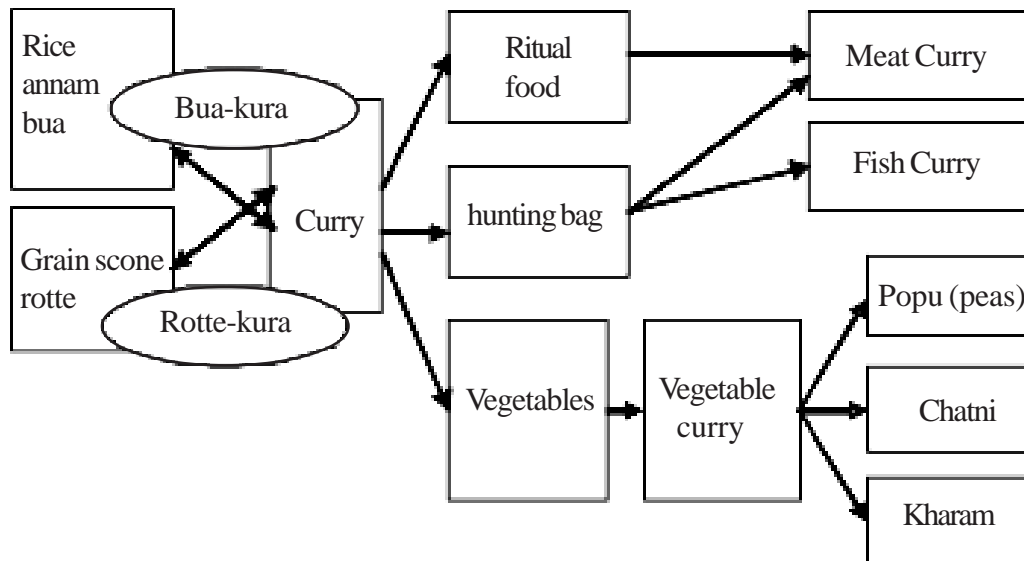


Fig.1. *Kura* (curry) types are divided in the following categories



### The Ritual Food

Theories about the Sacrifice and the reciprocal relations with the supernatural were carefully explored in Social Anthropology by the followers of the E. Durkheim school, such as M. Mauss and C. Levi-Strauss.

Among the Chenchus, an animal is sacrificed in the village festival, but it is killed by a local Muslim, who is treated as low caste. It can be understood in terms of the Hindu tradition which requires assistance in any ritual. The meat is usually mutton, since the Chenchus do not eat pork and beef. Animals are sacrificed at festivals, as *Darsana*, the yield feast, or *Bayana*, the ancestors worship, as well as in the life cycle ceremonies, like marriage or mourning.

These ceremonies are elaborate and necessarily include animal sacrifice and are always finished by the common meal, when people eat *bua*, as well as *rotte*, together with *gurepotelo*, curry from the mutton.

The curry from chicken (*kodukura*) can be sacred or not. On a Sunday, a man can kill a hen for the family to eat but without any religious implications. But *tamudu's mama* (Niradjan Raya from Chenchugudem offered me to call him *tamudu*, meaning "young brother". Hence, all his relatives became my relatives, as well as his matrilineal uncle, or *mama*), had an old hen, almost going to die, but he waited for some special day and then only he cut it. Perhaps if you believe in the ancestor's soul and have to kill a hen, then it is better to sacrifice it in the name of the ancestor. Sheep are also sacrificed and since a sheep is bigger than chicken, the person who has sacrificed it expects a bigger return from the Gods or the ancestors.

**When is the Ritual Food Cooked? Chenchus' Religion and Beliefs:** Usually in the house can be found a number of Gods or Goddesses, any number the master of the house can find. The Chenchus think that everything existing should have some form or appearance, so also in the case of God.

They say that God definitely lives in the sky; he is powerful and can be called Shiva. He is not alone. He has a spouse, and she is called Lakshmi or Parvati. Their daughter is the Mother, *Amma*, *Akamaha Devi*, *Ankamma*. With her help the ancestors' souls reach the sky and live there. *Akamaha Devi* has no dress and she is covered only by her long hair. She never cuts them, and

so don't her followers. The Chenchus call such people *abu*, the saint man. There are no *abu* in villages now, but there were two *abu* in the Red Cross camp. One of them, Naroshima Urtanuri from Gunla penta, performed a Pilgrimage to Shershell that took about 15 days, and he brought an icon from there. In this icon, *Akamaha Devi* or *Ankamma* stands under the tree in the company of different animals, such as the cow, the tiger, the dog and the rabbit with all its friends-and-relations. She is the object of the common worship. Several men collected to pray to *Ankamma* and sing songs for her glory.

There are a lot of stories in Chenchus' religion. *Ankamma* has a brother and sister, and each has their own history, and people worship them in different places under different names.

### Festivals

River Chenchus celebrate *Shiva Ratri*, *Darsana*, and *Bayana*. Village Chenchus' festivals are *Shiva Ratri*, *Darsana*, *Ugandi*, *Bayana* and *Lingamaya*. Dates of festivals are fixed according to the movement of the moon.

- 1) The first is a common Indian festival, devoted to Shiva. It is celebrated in February – with a morning Ritual Bath in the river, with fasting, but people can drink milk. Then all night till 5 am people pray in the temples. *Shiva Ratri* is not a casual festival. People pray and abstain from ritual food and alcoholic drinks.
- 2) The second is *Darsana*, celebrated in October-November. This festival is devoted to Lakshmi or Durga, people do not pay attention to the difference. It is harvest time, so people celebrate it. They fast from morning, take a Ritual Bath, perform sacrifice, *Pudja*, and feast at night. People eat meat *kura* and drink *saray* and *kalu*.
- 3) The third festival, *Ugandi* is the Telugu New Year. It is celebrated in March-April and people feast on meat and liquor at the end of it.

These three festivals definitely come from the Great Tradition, and are widely celebrated in Andhra Pradesh and across all India, like the famous *Shiva Ratri*.

- 4) The fourth one, *Bayyana*, what literally means "man", belongs to the "Little Tradition" and is devoted to the Chenchus' ancestors.

To celebrate this, in the morning all villagers go to the big hill, where there is the stone temple. There is a stone altar and on the stone, anthropomorphic figures are painted. These are “ancestors”, the man with his sisters, and one sister is *Ankamma*. Before worshipping them, people have a Ritual Bath, then an animal is sacrificed and *pudja* is performed. At last, meat is cooked and distributed. People enjoy it with drinks, *kalu* and *saray*.

5) The village festival in Chenchugudem is called *Lingamaya*. It is also devoted to ancestors, and worship goes on under the old banyan tree in the village’s central place.

The last two village festivals, *Darsana* and *Lingamaya*, apparently belong to the “Little Tradition”; they are related with harvest time and ancestors cult, which, in its turn, is related with the rain, so the *Bayana* is in June.

There are also a number of family festivals. They are worshipped in the small *mashima* temples. Sometimes the temple is just a stone with three color lines: orange, red and white, such as *Ganga Maheshwar* or *mashima*, which may be found on a river bank. It was placed there for the glory of *Ganga* (river) spirits who then protect new boats that have recently been launched. In villages, *mashimas* are usually under the sheds or, more commonly, in a trees’ roots. Two stones from the sides, one above, as a roof, and one lined stone inside, like in a house. Chenchus perform *pudja* here, break coconut, read mantras for their ancestors’ glory. An animal can be sacrificed near the *mashima*.

These village festivals give an idea about the tradition of food distribution. The Chenchus believe that “food is something that has to be shared” and in the evenings, people eat together. Chenchus regard food as something which should not be procured, owned and saved.

In the village ceremonies, food is distributed within the village, and no one particular person tries to take a bigger share. Chenchus just cook *kura*. All meat is cut and cooked with spices, and everyone can eat as much as he wants.

**The Life Cycle Ceremonies** When the distribution of food is made within the limits of the kinship group, these are the family ceremonies, apparently represented in the life cycles ceremonies, when people eat meat food. Chenchus never celebrate birthdays, so nobody knows exactly how old he is, and tell it as an average, plus-minus five years.

1. When a child is born, the first lifecycle ceremony takes place – a new member of the Chenchus tribe is to be included in the society and has to get a name. This is the *name-giving ceremony*.

Women have no relief during pregnancy. She has to perform her household tasks in the house and garden. When the child is born, the woman rests for 9 days and during that time her mother comes and cooks. When these days pass, the woman returns to her tasks and her mother goes back to her village and everything goes on as before, although with the small baby now.

In the shadow between two trees near the house, a color shawl is tied, the baby sleeps there with breaks for food, when the mother breast-feeds him. The name-giving ceremony takes place when the baby is between one to three months old. For this day father has to do cradle from a bamboo.

In the morning, the child is first cleaned in the ritual water, then called by its new name and put in the new bed, which is hung in the house. This ceremony is called *totela*. The elders are happy, sheep is cut, and in evening people eat meat curry and drink liquor.

2. The Chenchus celebrate tonsure as *puttentukalu*. Within one year or within three years, usually maternal uncle cuts the first three locks of the child. Then remaining hair is removed by a barber. Some people may organize the ritual at the temples like Srisailam, Nainonipally Maisamma. However, the people in Tirnumpalli and Chenchugudem majority conduct the ritual at the local temple (Bayyanna) only. The family offers feast to their *gotra* members and close relatives and some other people. The feast includes meat and liquor. In this ceremony the people who are invited to feast offer gifts, clothes and money to the child’s parents. These offerings are called as *chadivimpulu*.

3. *The Marriage Ceremony*: This is how my key informant, Shankaraya Nirmala got married.

At first, it was “compulsion to marry”. The elders called Shankaraya and told him that it was time for him to marry. On an average, the men marry just after they turn 20; Shankaraya was about this age at that time. Fortunately, he had

liked Laksmi from Chenchugudem for a long time, and she was from a different *gotra*. His parents went to her house to ask her parents' for her hand in marriage. Laksmi was asked for her opinion and she agreed. Shankaraya was a nice guy and she also liked him. Shankaraya during this time sat at home and just waited.

Among the Chenchus, it is the groom's family who has to ensure where the new couple will live. Here, when a boy gets married, his parents have to make provision for him to start a new life, like give him a piece of land, at least. All costs and expenses for the marriage ceremony are borne by the groom's side. Dowry is something that sometimes the groom side gets in the form of money, or its equivalent. River Chenchus do not have dowry at all. Shankaraya didn't get a dowry also.

Then, the elders go to a Brahmin, who fixes an auspicious day – *mutra*, and so the people start preparing for the ceremony. They build two sheds, a 12 pillar shed near the groom's house and 8 pillar one near the bride's place. In both the sheds, rice is strewed; there is an enclosed square ground, where stools, called *pita*, are placed. On these stools the bride and the groom sit before the wedding day, in front of their houses. People move around joking, friends sit and joke with the groom, who sits sadly. Then guests move to the grooms' house, where they eat and sleep all night.

On the wedding day, the groom takes the Ritual bath, and a couple of relatives help him. He is cleaned with soap; his hair and mustache and nails are cleaned carefully. Then he is wears a new cloth – this is a common tradition among the “Village” and the “River” Chenchus. According to the tradition, the bride and groom present new clothes to each other –for instance, Shankaraya got white pants, *panchi* and long shirt, *angi*; Laksmi got a white sari with purple line, *tire*. In these new clothes they sit together under his shed, and all the relatives, draw around, come one by one inside the symbolic couple's place and apply *puntu*<sup>2</sup> oil on the bride and groom's bodies.

After the long marriage ceremony, in which a Brahmin reads the mantras, burns aromatics, strews rice and this process takes time. Shankaraya said that they did without the Brahmin, an elder man in his *kutambar* performed everything in accordance with the tradition and this ceremony continues for three hours.

Then the culmination – the groom ties the

sacred thread, *mangalasutra*, on the bride's neck, she does the same. The word *sutra* has come from Sanskrit and it means thread. There are three knots on this *mangala sutra*. Naroshima, a fisherman, who lost his wife two years back, said that after her death he just took off this thread and threw it away, however he kept the marriage clothes.

After the tying of the *mangalasutra* the ceremonial part is finished and the relatives give a lot of gifts, which include things a family needs.

Then is the time for the marriage feast. People eat *gurepotelo* and *kodakuru*, drink *saray* and *kalu*, but the bride and the groom normally abstain from drinking, although they can eat some food.

Then the bride and the groom go to sleep in the bride's house where they sleep all night in different rooms. Such “consummation of the marriage” is common in Africa. “In the African context, marriage is not a discrete, well-defined event, but rather a process. African marriages are usually marked by four steps: payment of bride wealth, ceremony, cohabitation of spouses and consummation of the marriage” (Harwood-Lejeune 2001). But there consummation is a consequence of the age-sets, when a woman must wait for some particular age to start sexual life. It happens in Nepal also (Coltabiano and Castiglioni 2008).

But amongst the Bedouins, for example, marriage is not consummated on the wedding night and for several nights the bride hides in the hills. The same practice is found among the Nufoers in New Guinea and among the Warramunga in Australia (Crawley 1989). The same tradition also exists among the Hindus (Gnanambal 1947) of Tamil Nadu.

4. The last life-circle ceremony, when people eat sacrificed meat, is a *mourning ceremony*. When a person dies, the relatives try to bury the dead body on that day itself since the weather is usually hot<sup>3</sup>. All the people, who come on this day, belong to deceased's *gotra* and together they bury the dead.

To carry the body from the house, or, from the front of the house, where it has been placed under the shed, to the place where it must be buried, the youngest *gotra* member goes ahead, then the men carry the dead body on a stretcher, four men carry him if deceased was married, but only two if he was a bachelor.

The last feature unites the Chenchus tradi-

tion with many cultures cross the globe, where bachelors are treated as abnormal. This behavior is observed among the Pygmy (Schebesta 1933), the Chukchee (Bogoras 1997), the Kachin of Burma (Leach 1954) and many others.

Before the burial, *mantras* are read, and then the body is put into the ground. After this, all participants take the Ritual bath to reduce the pollution caused after the contact with death. Unfortunately the pollution of death is stronger than Holy water, so a special cleaning ceremony is also required. It is a part of the funeral ceremony, which is held on a special day. It might be 5, 9, or 11th day from the day when the death occurred. This funeral ceremony is fixed by a Brahmin and the day should be auspicious.

On the 3rd day after a person's death, his family cooks the food he preferred and put some of it in a bowl and places this bowl near the grave. If in the morning it is found that nobody ate it, that means that something has gone wrong and this is considered a bad sign. Although there are so many mouths in India, if an animal doesn't eat it a crow will or some ants certainly will – the food will be eaten when the morning comes. This is taken to be a good sign because apparently the spirits ate it at night. However, people do realize that animals have eaten the food.

On the fixed day, the men belonging to the deceased's *gotra* collect near the water and the first step of the mourning ceremony occurs which is that the men shave their hair. This ritual is called *Boda gundu*, and it symbolizes separation. This is symbolic, that is, these have gone but will grow again. Then people have the Ritual bath in a river – the women in their sari, of course. After the bath, those people who carried the dead body, including the youngest one, who went ahead, require some separation or cleaning rituals and for this, oil is applied on their shoulders. Then a special stick, *roccalo*, which is normally used as a cooking tool, is moved around the body, from the shoulders till the legs three times. When this river part of the ceremony is over, people come back to the village. Anybody who passes is treated to *kalu* – if one doesn't want to drink, he can spit it out.

Then in the village a sheep is sacrificed, *gurepotelo* cooked and the mourning meal organized. Before consuming the food, they worship *Pudja*, when food is gifted to the God or to the powerful spirit and then this is taken as sacred food, *Prasad*. It is common among the Hindus

and does not depend on the God's name or status – with local variation the idea remains the same and is based on the concept of reciprocity, a common rule in India. Reciprocity has been the main principle of a village economy for ages and Independence has changed the *jajmani* system, when caste members exchanged by services, into monetary relations.

The mourning ceremony gets over with the common meal, when the deceased's *gotra* members as well as the neighbours eat sacrificed meat in the form of *kura* and drink *saray* and *kalu*.

**The Hunting Game** If meat has been got in a game hunt it can be used as sacred or usual food, depending on the hunter's mood or situation.

The Chenchus were hunters since the Pleistocene, so they normally hunt a lot of animals in the forest. Their territories were restricted in history by the invaders, but Chenchus hold technologies including digging sticks, bow and arrows used in hunting. They also have coped with new devices, like the fishing net.

The stave of the bow is made of a dry bamboo section (*bada*), approximately around 1 meter in length, although I have seen smaller. The *bada* is slightly convex and may be decorated. The entire bow is called *katale* or *bada*. String is called *antiperu*. It is made from the thin, hard bamboo stick that is fixed freely by string meshes from both sides. The bow is kept unstrung. For preparing it to use it, the shooter has to sit on the floor, rest on one leg on the stave's center and bend it enough to fix string's meshes in the notches at the bow's edge. After the string is fixed, the bow is curved gracefully and ready for use.

Last is an arrow, it is called *keta* or *amvu* and it is made from a thin bamboo stick. From the history: "... However, for the Chenchus and Chenchu Dasaris inhabiting the Nandyal forest where big game is available (though forest laws now forbid hunting), bow with an iron tipped arrow is a very important hunting tool. They use two types of arrows: *potu ammu* (male arrow) and *penti ammu* (female arrow). *Potu ammu* has an elongated iron arrow point used for hunting small game like hare, monitor lizard, jungle cat, immature barking deer, giant squirrel (*Ratufa indica*), civet cat (*Vivericula indica*), mongoose (*Herpestes edwardsi*), jungle fowl (*Gallus sonneratti*), pea fowl (*Pavo cristatus*), etc. *Penti ammu* with a triangular, barbed, iron point is for hunting big game like *nilgai*, *chinkara*, wild bo-

ar, and also for small game, like porcupine and mouse deer. Both types of arrows are used for hunting the langur (*Presbytis entellus*)” (Murty 1985) – wrote the famous Indian archeologist about the Mesolithic times. C. von Furer-Haimendorf informed us about five types of arrow’s heads (Furer-Haimendorf 1943).

Even in Chenchugudem, Tirrupati has a bow and arrows – tips of the arrows were sharp, although made by simple smith’s technology, without long quench. When Tirrupati shot in a wall, boasting of his bow, the tip of his arrow was hardly curved.

But now the “village” Chenchus is far from any idea about hunt, the forest police ensures that they do not hunt and the poachers have to pay a high fine.

One of the main Chenchus delicacies is the monitor lizard. In Chenchugudem a fat lizard about 40 cm long with the tail was been caught. The cook cut off only its head and hands with the long fingers; all the rest was cooked in a pot and smelled well. Chenchus call it *urum* and the dish, hence, *urum-kura*.

Another delicacy is that made from the Grey Langur. The Forest and the River Chenchus hunt for the Grey Langur, or *kochamycho*, and shoot it by their bamboo arrows. The langur eats only leaves, fruits, and insects, so can be used as food itself. Chenchus eat the brain raw directly from the skull, it’s never been observed, but people said so. All the remaining parts of the *kochamycho* go into *kura*.

C. Furer-Haimendorf, who spent more than two months in different forest *pentas*, does not mention this tradition, though hunting for the *kochamycho* seems to be widely spread among South Indian tribes, even the vegetarian Todas, who never hunt other animals, hunted for the Langur and call it *koreng*<sup>4</sup>. The Chenchus, have had this tradition for the last 12 000 years.

The forest is as an important resource for people of Gunla Penta and the Nalamalla forest’s *pentas* – a hunters take, or *shikari* or *vetta*, can be sold out for 150 Rs/kg, and *gada* or *sigura*, gum from the special tree, for 50 Rs/kg. The hunting techniques vary – for *adavi pandi* (a wild pig) and *kundelu* (rabbit), they use hunting net. Fowl are caught by net also.

**Fishing** Fish can also be taken to be a hunter’s bag. Once the fishing has been observed in the river near Chenchugudem.

One day before fishing some of us, guided by

several men from the village, went to chop one local plant – a small tree or a big bush. When the tractor’s trailer was full we went back to the village and spread these plants on a big flat stone and left them to dry. The next morning all the men were engaged in the grinding of the trees’ bark into flour until the big basket was full. Then they took this basket and went to a small river nearby.

The river was shallow and the water flowed in wide steps – from one small lake through a narrow place that drains to the next small lake one step down, then onto the next. The downstream river was temporarily dammed, and in every lake the grained bark was poured. Everybody then waited for nearly two hours. The bark poisoned the water and the fish started to float to the surface.

The men had been waiting across these lakes with sticks, when the fish appeared; the men beat them with their sticks and threw these fish to the bank, where the women picked them up. For two hours they fished, but Chenchus were not satisfied with the fish caught. They caught: *rauta* and *maya*, middle size fishes belong to *Cypriniformes* family; couple of eels calls *mata*; several fishes without any names, among them there was one cichlid, with blue lines; some fishes belonging to *Perciformes* order – they had double spine fin. All fish are called *chapala*, so as a food it becomes *chapalakura*, and it is cooked as a hunter’s take – without any special ceremony, as a casual food.

**The Vegetarian Food** It was said that the casual food is mostly vegetarian, only with one exception and that is the hunter’s take. All other daily food is cooked from vegetables. As was mentioned earlier, the Chenchus do not gather food anymore, may be seasonally, but approximately every Chenchus’ house has a small garden. A fence supports a bindweed, usually a marrow, or *choraka*. The vegetables themselves ripen on a roof, where they easily become birds’ spoil. People mostly cook the vegetables which are available in their gardens. Usually it is an onion or *uli*, tomatoes (*tomato*) and Indian aubergine, *dundaka* or *unkai*. The *Leguminosae* are also there – *chkuria* and *burishka* – small and big sorts of peas, they are usually cooked with the husk.

In a market is available tamarind *puntu*, in a field, local grass *chenculla*, everything is suited to *kura*, and this may be the feature of subsistence economy – people take from nature or available resources what they need without extra ef-

forts and as much as they need at any one time. It gives them some guarantee that they would find something to eat tomorrow – may be somebody will shoot a *kochamucho*, may be not – people do not look for delicacies but are happy for any meal and enjoy it. No food is wasted or thrown out. People feed the leftovers to the animals and hens.

There are different ways of cooking different vegetables.

1. The first is *popu* or *dal* peas, casual addition for rice dishes in the Indian kitchen. To cook *popu*, one puts dry yellow peas in water for a while and then pound them by the *roccalo*. Then the cut chilli pepper is added; this is tasty with boiled rice.

*Popu* is a one example of the vegetarian curry which is widely eaten. It is called by one word since the name of the dish includes name of the vegetable.

The name of the food is generated from the name of the product and the way it is cooked and become: *tomato-chatni*, *choraka-kura*, *chenchu-kura* etc., the same as we saw with the meat food. Vegetable *kura* is cooked with oil, some amount of green or red chilli and is eaten hot; vegetable *chatni* is cooked with a large amount of chilli and is eaten cold. The hot *kura* and *chatni* which is pounded by the *roccalo* is eaten with rice or with a *rotte*. *Kura* is eaten fresh and is eatable for only one day. *Chatni* remains fresh longer, almost for a whole week, probably because of the chili's preservation ability.

In Chenchu cooking, vegetables are never mixed in the process of cooking. Any type of food is cooked along in oil with chilli. Absence of any combination of vegetables can be explained in a rationalized way. Chenchus probably realize that no other taste can compete with the taste of chilli, and it does not matter how many different products are put in a pot, the flavor of chilli dominates the taste of food. Rational mind and common sense are intrinsic Chenchus features.

*Kharam* is the last and a simple addition for rice – it is chilli-powder. If a person gets up early and wants an early breakfast and it could be a child going to school, or the man is leaving for daily job – he eats *rotte* or *bua* with *kharam*.

### The Social Structure

It was observed that Chenchus live in nuclear families. After marriage, the new family sets up a

new house. The groom's side generally provides the new family with everything, but, as is the norm in India, this rule has a lot of exceptions, such as matrilineal residence in a case of one daughter in a family, or polygamy or anything else.

As the prescribed rule states, patrilocal marriage residence is in a separate building. How it is in reality depends on a lot of reasons, and economic factors are central to this, and so we have a nuclear family as a base for society. But this is not to say that these families aren't united. They are, and they are linked by several different ways, that can be defined as "structural forces" or SF.

Structural forces unite people according to rules, which have been invented by people for their own sake.

### Structural Forces that Keep the Chenchus Together

*Group United by the SF of Blood Descent:* The group based on descent is called *kutumbar*<sup>5</sup>. Chenchus are patrilineal, so descent trace and property succeed by the male line and the wife normally comes to live in the husband's place. All people, as father's brothers with wives and children and their unmarried sisters, as well as the elder generation, as father's fathers, are realized as a group, bounded by descent.

It is a territorial unit where all small families possess some land and property, and are united by the rule of economic support. Real ancestors are also here – we can say that it is lineage. People used to feel their unity in opposition for others, not consanguinities, and this SF works through prescribed relations (joke or avoidance relations) and through economic cooperation.

*Group United by the SF of Common Descent:* This group is a clan, *gotra*. Marriage with a girl from one's own *gotra* is strictly prohibited. Also, *gotra* is mentioned in the *rites de passage*, from the birth till the funeral – every time *gotra* members should come and participate, at least as eye-witnesses. There are features of consanguinities' group, but *gotra members* aren't bounded by the force of blood descent. Even in one village, all *gotra* members do not count themselves as blood relatives. In the neighboring villages, they are related through regular ceremonies, common ancestors, origin stories and myths, they are supposed to shave their hair in case of any

*gotra* member dies and they must celebrate altogether a member's birthday or marriage. All these things unite the people. Through common ancestors and sacred stories and through common ceremonies and festivals, the concept of *gotra* is engrained in their minds, and that is how it works in life. And it is the force uniting people into groups, so it is Structural Forces.

Perhaps long ago, there were *gotra*'s or *inteperu*'s names, but now they have become surnames. There are a number of surnames among the Village Chenchus, for example *Katrazu*, *Nirmalla*, *Tugurla*, *Iraya* etc; there are also several surnames among the River Chenchus, as *Shigurla*, *Ailena*, *Katrazu*, *Nirmalla* etc. We can see that some of them are common. Of course there are many more *gotras* in the Chenchu Tribe.

*Group United by the SF of Affinity*: It is not easy to say here, that the whole Chenchu Tribe is this group, and members of different *gotras* are bounded in its limits by the SF of Affinity, or, in other words, by the strict rule of the tribe's endogamy. It would be too broad. Chenchus are grouped more interestingly and it shows us how social structure depends on the environment.

The method how to inquire about the order of woman exchange between the Chenchus' villages was invented – only the anthropometer and the scales were needed. While the weight gauge was being taken I had time to ask the woman her name, *gotra* and locality, and while measuring her height I asked about her mother's name, *gotra* and locality. It was enough - procedure of measurement took people's attention and they gave answers and didn't care about the questions' meaning.

Meanwhile it was there –mother's locality shows definitely where the girl has come from. There were 43 women in the village who were interviewed in such a way, and 17 in the river camp; approximately the same numbers of interviews were given by the men. In total I got interviewed around 100 people belonging to the Chenchu Tribe.

It was found that there are three types of marriage prohibitions existing among the Chenchus. These are:

1. No marriages outside tribe – the rule of tribal endogamy – not one case;
2. No marriage within *gotra* – the rule of clan exogamy – not one case;
3. No marriage within *penta* – the rule of village exogamy – a lot of cases.

Two of them are strict rules and the third one is more or less followed among the Village Chenchus and is not strict among the River Chenchus at all. Marriage within a village is called "love-marriage".

The Forest and the Village Chenchus are into "women exchange". There are several women in Chenchugudem who have come from various forests *pentas* (how the Chenchus call their small villages), but this is only a one way exchange – nobody moved from the village to the forest.

But the River Chenchus are separated - as was found, there was no case of marriage between the River and the Village Chenchus, neither love nor arranged. This can be explained in ecological terms. It can be explained by the uselessness of a farmer's skills in a river as well as fishermen's skills in agriculture. The woman from a village is not ready for *penta*'s life; she does not know how to manage the nets and boat. She has different experiences, unpractical in river *penta*, and this seems as the main reason.

The whole tribe is divided into two – the River and the Forest Chenchus, and the latter have become the Village Chenchus now, although they carry forward their main habits from the forest. Meanwhile, the social structure is the same, common for the whole Chenchu tribe, and we can say that the SF of Affinity holds people, belonging to different *gotras*, in these two groups according with their preoccupation, the "ecological group", together.

This "SF of Affinity" holds people belonging to different *gotras* through the "compulsion to marry", and features such as women exchange, group status and bride price are its visible parts.

The invisible part is how parents compel their sons to marry, and all women exchange occurs through this mechanism. I proceed here from the assumption that the man is unit for exchange as well as the girl and both of them are to marry by their parents' choice.

It is now fair to ask how one can find out if a person has been compelled to marry or not. If one asks an Indian man this question, he would definitely say "No, I didn't", or, if he is not married, he would say, "If I don't like the girl I would never marry her". But ask him next, "Did you decide the time to marry or did your parents decide for you?" and he would say, "Yes, my parents decided".

This is "compelled to marry". If parents say you must marry now, regardless of whether you

have a girlfriend or not, this is “compelled to marry”. Chenchus do this, and try to find a worthy bride, but without status relations between *gotras*<sup>6</sup>.

In India, generally, if parents have decided that it is the time for marriage, they inform their son about it and offer options for a bride. Marriage is the parents’ business; the boy has little or no say in the matter. But if the parents from both sides do not come to the conclusion there will be no marriage. This is the system and this system works, but with exceptions – “love-marriages”, have already become frequent in the Indians cities.

The frequency of these exceptions is the degree of “compulsion to marry” and can characterize also the degree of the SF of Blood Descent existing in a particular society. The more love-marriages the society has, the weaker the blood relations, at least with far-off relatives<sup>7</sup>.

As we have seen, the Chenchus have a lot of love-marriages, especially the River Chenchus. The authority of the *kutumbar*’s head is not enough to compel the single member for alliance, fruitful for the whole family. Or the *kutumbar*’s head does not see any reason to form a relation with the any particular *gotra*. A new family is an independent unit and its economic relations to *kutumbar* are not so intimate.

Figure 2 shows small triangles and circles symbolizing the men and the women, belonging to the Chenchus tribe. They are united in Small Squares by the biological force of the common responsibility for their offspring into small nuclear families.

The small squares are grouped by three or four by the structural force of descent. Groups called *kutumbar* are an economical and political unit with a common ancestor, or can be called a lineage. *Kutumbars* are united by three or four into the big squares by the structural force of Common Descent, which works through the common ceremonies - such group is called *gotra* or can be called the clan. *Gotras* are related with each other by the structural force of Affinity, and arrows show women exchange between them.

Dotted line divides the tribe into the “ecological” groups, the Village, Forest and the River Chenchus, according with tradition preoccupations. Arrows show how women exchange is going on inside these groups. There is no special dual organization here, people just avoid marriages on account of ecological and economi-

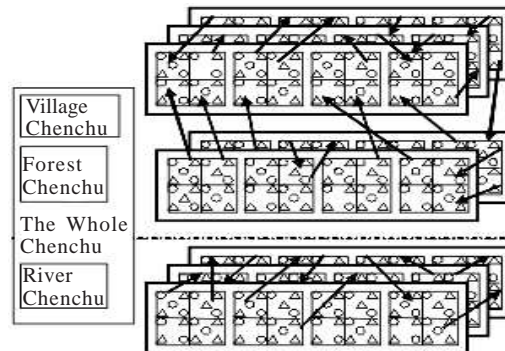


Fig.2. Structure of the Chenchu tribe

cal reasons, the village girls are not ready for the fishermen’ life and *vice versa*. The social force of affinity works through the “compulsion to marry”.

But the last question remains: what keeps together these “ecological” groups? Throughout their history, the Chenchus had to stand against the influence and claims of society around them and now, when they have got facilities from the Government, they are interested to keep them on, so they could feel themselves together. And the most probable answer would be that despite their opposition for all others, the Chenchus are encapsulated in their tribe as many of the Australian aborigines (Artemova 2009).

## CONCLUSION

1. *Sanitation*: C.Furer-Haimendorf wrote in his book: “In the matter of the personal cleanliness the Chenchus are locally much belied, for when water is plentiful they are by no means averse to washing” (Furer-Haimendorf 1943). It is true and now, when water in the village is available for almost the whole day; people clean their bodies whenever required.
2. *Drinks*: Milk is used mostly for the purpose of herd reproduction, and this has led to the absence of any hot drinks amongst the



Chenchus. Cattle are kept primarily as draught animals; their milk forms a small part of the Chenchus diet, therefore they do not drink tea or coffee. Instead of harmless hot drinks, Chenchus drink alcoholic beverages, such as *saray* and *kalu*.

3. *Food*: Food can broadly be divided into two: the Sacred food, which is sacrificed to God, and the Profane, the casual food. The former is the meat curry and the latter is the vegetable curry. The hunter's game is the only exception because it is eaten on the day when it has been caught, but, looking back at Chenchus' history we can see that this part of the food is decreasing every year, though Chenchus still hunt the monkey and the lizard. At the same time, the consumption of vegetable-based food has increased. L. Binford's write in his book: "It is my impression that the Andamanese are miscoded while the Chenchu are demonstrably in the process of adopting agriculture" (Binford 1980).
4. *Social Structure*. The Chenchus, compared in this field with the Ojibwa tribe from the Great lakes in North America, have "atomistic"<sup>10</sup> type of society, when small nuclear families are the base and the essence of the society. These families are related to each other and three types of social groups exist among the Chenchus: *kutumbar*, *gotra* and the "ecological" group.

Three Structural Forces among the Chenchus have been defined, such as:

- a) The SF of Blood Descent – works as prescribed relations among relatives by blood;
- b) The SF of Common Descent – works through common rituals and ceremonies;
- c) The SF of Affinity – works through women exchange and "compulsion to marry".

C. von Furer-Haimendorf has found their social system as "democratic", other scholars, such as John J. Honigmann or V. Barnouw characterized it as individualistic and atomistic, and stressed that the nuclear family is independent and the clan or the village authority is weak, and that corresponds with this research. Chenchus were compared in the field of their social structure with the Eskimo and the Fuegian Ona, as well as with the Ojibwa and the Kaingang (Honigmann 1947).

The principal point concerning "atomism" is:

in an atomistic society it is not difficult for the component units to break away and exist apart from the larger society of which they are a part. There is little social integration or centralization; political authority is weak, and there are not many mechanisms for reinforcing larger-group social solidarity (Barnouw 1961).

The other mind: "In fact social atomism is understood as a social order which recognizes no collective allegiance and lacks instruments of collective action, is more often combined with a normative pattern that reduces the chance of internal conflict, either by separating the interests of its "atoms" or by establishing a network of "selective reciprocity" between individuals. An example of the latter is seen in the community of Tristan da Cunha, where overlapping and interlocking individual allegiances create a type of social cohesion which is here labeled "atomistic social integration" (Munch and Marske 1981).

5. *The Patterns of Food Distribution*: Food sharing symbolizes social relationships and can therefore express both intimacy and distance (Douglas 1972), so how is food shared? "Researchers ... have focused primarily on two forms of food sharing: communal eating and broadly based systems of food distribution" (Mirsky 1985) and to this, reciprocal food or "rich food" (Levi-Stauss 1969) can be added.

All these actions relate with the unity of the tribe, binding people together. Chenchus, as we have seen, have an "atomistic" social structure, when people try to "reduce the chance of internal conflict" establishing "a network of "selective reciprocity" between individuals" (Malinowski 1922).

As was observed in the Chenchus' villages, communal meals are not held often, and they occur mostly among the closest relatives or friends. The men first share the *saray*, definitely "rich food", and then eat together; so communal eating and drinking exist among Chenchus, but normally people prefer to eat with their families, and that turns us back to the atomistic structure.

Food distribution does not exist in a form as was depicted by B. Malinowski or C. Levi-Strauss, when any particular relative has to get a certain part of the sacrificed animal. Chenchus are equal and do not share the God's gift as a business gain. They just cook the meat for a common party and share the meat and have fun.

It is also an interesting point which shows us how egalitarian Chenchus are. They do not share

sacred meat by rank which does not really exist among them, but it is divided into small equal units. In other words, the *kura* is cooked, and the small units, such as the nuclear and separate families consume it in a more or less equal proportion. Equality is in Chenchus' mind.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would say that this material could not appear without help of my friends from Central University of Hyderabad, who helped me with translations. They are namely, Govindra Raju and Nagaradgy Battini; for all my friends among the Chenchus, namely, Tirrupati, *tamudy* (Niradjan Raya) and Shankaraya Nimalla and for Ramaswamy Balmury especially. I also want to thank Pr. Sudhakar Rao, who did not work in the field with me, but who helped me a lot by his wise and friendly advices.

### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> From R.L.Stevenson's poem *Heather Ale* as an example of the Great Secret should be kept forever.
- <sup>2</sup> Ration shop – local name for the shops of some M.R.O. office
- <sup>3</sup> Such places are called *mashima*, (the name of the Goddess) it is small shrine with a stone altar, decorated by colors.
- <sup>4</sup> Tamarind - *Tamarindus indica*
- <sup>5</sup> It one more time prove that the Chenchus are rational and logical people – for instance the Todas, living in the same climate conditions, make the funeral fire only at Monday
- <sup>6</sup> This information was given by the Todas men from the village (*mond*) in the Ooti Botanical garden
- <sup>7</sup> The family in Telugu, seems as an ancient Dravidian word. In Tamil it is *kutumbur*, and in Malayalam also *kukutembar*.
- <sup>8</sup> In the field, talking with the men, especially with the married ones, I used to ask them how and from where have they got their wives. If the man was friendly and opened up to talk, I asked him whether he made a declaration of love for his wife or not? Usually people understood me immediately and sorrowfully shake their heads – no, it was an arranged marriage. Or, conversely, acknowledged it as being a love marriage. I guess people are generally proud of such win – it needs courage
- <sup>9</sup> Hence, probably, this society is going to bilinear reckon of descent to avoid incest, and people start to count both the mother's and the father's sides as consanguinities; although, I based here only in this logic – if relatives counted only by one line,

the father's for instance, how can one be sure that his belle love-bride is not his sister from his mother's line?

- <sup>10</sup> Landes (1937) and Hallowell (1955) characterized Ojibwa' structure by this term, in analogy Barnouw (1950) and Honigmann (1947) applied it to the Chenchus and to the Northern Athapaskan's social structure; also the Ulichy and the Niphy from the Russian Far East might be added, they are also fishing in a rivers and hunting in a forests.

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