

# COLONIAL MODERNITY AND TRIBES: A STUDY OF THE CHENCHU TRIBE IN ANDHRA REGION (1880-1947)

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Submitted By

*Chevuri Sathish Kumar*

Enrollment No. 329/19

Under the Supervision of

*Prof. V. M. Ravi Kumar*

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY  
SCHOOL OF AMBEDKAR STUDIES FOR SOCIAL SCIENCES  
BABASAHEB BHIMRAO AMBEDKAR UNIVERSITY

(A Central University) (NAAC: A++ Accredited)  
VIDYA VIHAR, RAEBARELI ROAD, LUCKNOW-226025  
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## SUMMARY

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The history of tribal communities constitutes one of the important components of Indian history. On account of persisting problems in tribal areas, tribal history still possesses refreshing relevance. Within the broad rubric of tribal history, the British colonial period emerged as an important domain as it unleashes integration of tribal communities with centralized state system. Much of tribal history of modern India deals with the problems and prospects of integration of tribal communities in to the structure of colonial modernity. This macro level history can be strengthened by the way of focusing on micro level histories such as focusing on histories of different tribal communities in different parts of India. This study seeks to pursue this premise and explores and document history of the Chenchu tribe during the period of 1880-1947. The significances of this period is that it marked with perpetration of the British rule into the domain of Chenchus and ends with Indian independence. It was during this period that the colonial modernity has been able to draw the Chenchus into the process emerging politico-administrative and economic structure.

The main objective of this study is to present a compelling case study of how a tribe in colonial India operated within the broad structure of colonial modernity. The proposed study focuses on the ‘Chenchu’ tribe which happens to be one of the primitive tribes out of the 75 Tribes declared as ‘particularly vulnerable tribal groups’ (PVTGs). The Chenchus were the Telugu-speaking primitive forest tribe of Nallamalai hills of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. They mostly resided in the districts of Kurnool, Guntur, Prakasam, Nalgonda and Mahaboobnagar. While some of these districts were once part of the erstwhile Hyderabad princely state ruled by Nizams, some districts are part of the Madras Presidency ruled by the British.

Emergence of environment history from 1980s rekindled the interest in tribal histories of modern India. As a part of this, several studies are being conducted on history of tribal communities and their relations with colonial forest policies. While resistance of tribes to forest policies received prime attention of histories, forest based labour mainly performed by tribes did not receive adequate attention. By the way of addressing this gap, this thesis attempts to document the history of Chenchu labour during the period 1880-1947. The main objective of this thesis is to explore the pattern of interaction took place between the British rule and tribes in South India with a particular reference to the Chenchus of Andhra region which is a Telugu language speaking region of the Madras Presidency. The main intention of this thesis is to capture the process of the way in which the Chenchus were transformed from forest dependent tribe to labour worked for the colonial economic process mainly driven by forest resources in tribal areas.

### **RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY**

As we are aware of the fact that, the Indian nation has been aspiring to emerge as developed country by enhancing economic productivity along human development. This is possible with careful planning for not only tapping the resources of nation but also human resources. It is this context that necessitates exploring history from below. It essentially means that focusing on histories of less visible communities which continues to live in forests with less economic development. The case study of the Chenchus represents a good example of less visible tribal community in the tribal history of South India.

Even in the contemporary times, the Chenchu tribes continued to live in vulnerable state of life. Their socio-economic conditions continued to be acutely

backward in comparison with mainstream society. In fact, they are marginalized among the marginalized in terms of economic and political backwardness. In view of this, the proposed study attempts to explore the pattern of historical process which created conditions for integration of the Chenchus with modern state apparatus evolved during the British colonial rule.

The history of the Chenchu tribes, hitherto, mainly dwelt by Anthropologists, Ethnographers, and ethno-botanists. In view of this, an exclusive study on history of the Chenchu tribe is useful to explore the complexity of tribal history of South India. History of the Chenchus offers an opportunity on complex strategies deployed by the British to tap the labour of forest based tribes at one level and strategies adopted by tribes to locate them into the colonial modernity. It is this dialectical relationship between tribes and state that constitutes an important component of this study.

### **PERIOD OF STUDY**

The proposed study, which delves into the history of Chenchus in the Andhra region, focuses on the period of 1880-1947. This period is of utmost significance as it marks the entry of the colonial state into the Nallamala forests in 1880, and termination of the British rule in 1947. During this period, the British rule penetrated into tribal areas of Andhra region through forest policies and other administrative apparatus. In a way, this chronological period, which the proposed study intends to explore and documents, constitutes an important period in which the Chenchu tribes were brought under economic and political system dominated by non-tribal agencies. It was this process that situated the Chenchu tribes in a political economy that was controlled by non-tribal forces.

## **OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY**

The proposed study seeks to design the research structure taking the following objectives into consideration:

- To document chronological history of the Chenchus in Colonial Andhra.
- To explore the livelihood pattern of the Chenchus in pre-colonial Andhra
- To examine the reasons for entry of the British into tribal areas of Andhra region with a particular focus on the Chenchus.
- To capture the administrative strategies of the British this devised to regulate the life of Chenchus.
- To explore the strategies of the British to convert the forest based livelihood of the Chenchus to labour employed in works undertaken by the British.
- To analyze how forest department used the labour of the Chenchus in its various conservation operations.
- To document various measures such as education, ameliorative measures of the British to change the livelihood patterns of the Chenchus.
- To capture the forms of resistance exhibited by Chenchus to British rule in general and forest policies in particular.

## **HYPOTHESIS OF THE STUDY**

The proposed study designed to pursue the following hypothetical questions while exploring history of the Chenchus:

- Colonial Modernity has significantly transformed the jungle based livelihoods of the Chenchus to labor to be employed by the British. This transformation has both positive and negative effects for livelihood of the Chenchus.

- British colonial rule destroyed the forest based traditional livelihood pattern of the Chenchu tribe and exposed them to exploitation by British as well as Indian forces.
- The process of modernity in the form of education, employment and others initiated by the British in the Chenchu tribal areas created initial condition for development.
- But colonial welfarism does not intends for emancipation of the Chenchus from primitive state to modern, rather mainly amid at seeking acceptance to the entry of the British into tribal areas. It was this halfhearted welfarism that the post-colonial state inherited and unfortunately continues with of course with a difference.
- Colonial modernity remained to be a system of change determined by paternalistic framework of the British, certainly not the participatory process.

#### **METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY**

In order to narrate the history of Chenchus in Andhra region, the proposed study uses both primary and secondary sources. So far as secondary source which constitutes published material is concern, books, articles and other printed sources are being consulted. These sources played a vital role in shaping the narrative that this thesis put forwarded.

With regard to primary sources, the proposed thesis gleaned sources from different agencies such as Andhra Pradesh State Archives, Tamil Nadu State archives, forest departments, tribal welfare research centers etc. This study predominantly deepened upon the Board of Land Revenue (Forest Series) Department and other department's records. The primary sources for the study are therefore as follows:

- 1) District gazetteers
- 2) Board of Land Revenue (forest series) department
- 3) Development department
- 4) Revenue department
- 5) Government reports on tribes
- 6) Annual Administrative reports
- 7) Population census

Subscribing the classical historical method, the study follows the steps of collecting both primary and secondary sources. Emphasis, of course laid out on collection of primary sources that are generated by the British rule and preserved in archives. After collecting sources meticulous care has been taken to locate the sources into historical context by adopting both internal and external criticism. Care has also been taken to structure the interpretative argument to test hypothesis. Of course, generalization this study suggests is that colonial modernity in tribal area remained to be a fractured modernity which designed not for empowerment rather for tapping resources and labour of tribal communities.

## **CHAPTERISATION OF STUDY**

For narration of the history of Chenchu tribe, the proposed study has broadly been organized into six following chapters. This section documents a brief note of chapterisation of the study.

### **CHAPTER I- Introduction**

The first chapter of this study spells out the schematic introduction to the proposed study. In addition to this, it consists of a story line of the topic, chronology,

objectives, hypothesis, and methodology and a brief review of existing literature. At the same time, a detailed description of chapters has also been offered in this chapter.

## **CHAPER II- The Forests and People of Madras Presidency (Chenchus of Andhra Region)**

This chapter proposes a brief account on geographical and ecological conditions of Andhra region in which the Chenchu tribes situated. We are of the strongly opinion that geo-ecological conditions if not determine, but significantly influence the life pattern of human society. Keeping this proposition into consideration, this chapter sketches the geographical and climatic conditions with a particular focus on distribution of forests in Andhra region. In addition to this, the chapter proposes a brief narrative on ethnographic profile of tribes in Andhra region with a particular reference to the Chenchu tribe. Along with this, detailed narrative has also been proposed on the origin and history of Chenchu tribe.

## **CHAPTER III- Colonial modernity and the Chenchu tribe**

This chapter documents the process of the British intervention into tribal areas of Andhra region with a piratical reference to the Chenchu tribe. While so doing, attention has been devoted to strategies of the British to tame the Chenchus and various welfare measures introduced to achieve their objective of extracting labour. This chapter attempts to capture with structural process that was put into operation by the British to extract forest resources in Nallamala region by the way of taping the labour of the Chenchus. The argument that this chapter built is that the British has been able to craft a coherent policy structure that aimed at maximizing forest resources extraction with minimum hostility with local tribal communities.

#### **CHAPTER IV- Forest policy and Chenchus**

This chapter aims at documenting the history of the interaction between the Chenchu tribes and colonial forest policies in Andhra region. The chronological period of 1880-1947 has been the focal point of analysis. The main objective of this chapter is to make a case study of how forest policies impacted upon tribal population in Andhra region with a particular reference to the Chenchu tribe. It is done with an analysis of history of interaction between the British colonial rule and the Chenchus who lived in Nallamala forest region of Madras Presidency. The main purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate the way the Chenchus were transformed from forest dependent tribe to labour worked for the British economic process.

#### **CHAPTER V- Impact of British Rule and Response of Chenchus**

This chapter examines the impact of forest policies on Chenchu tribe in Andhra region. The Chapter shows that forest policies were contested and resisted by Chenchu community. It focuses on how the British administration intervened in tribal areas and how the tribes resisted to such an intervention. The chapter provides a brief survey on tribal studies, which have been done by various scholars in the Andhra region focusing on history of resistance.

#### **CHAPTER VI- Conclusion**

This chapter presents a board summary of findings and a conclusion of the study. It carries certain general observations, and remarks on the colonial modernity that has significantly transformed the Jungle based livelihoods into labour. It has been proposed by the study that British colonial rule destroyed the forest based traditional livelihood pattern of the Chenchu tribe and exposed them to exploitation by British as well as Indian forces. The process of labourisation of tribal communities initiated by

the British, which means in south India they were drawn into exploitation of forest resources. This process took place all over India. The history of the Chenchus conforms how tribal communities were converted into forest based labour.

### **Important findings of study**

This study demonstrates that colonial modernity has transformed the forest based tribal livelihoods to labour dependent upon works provided by Forest Department. This transformation brought about by the discourse and strategies of civilizing mission which this study names colonial welfarism. The main objective of colonial modernity this study proposes is that tapping the potential labour in forest related work. This proposition has been proved with the case study of history of Chenchus.

This study also argues that modern state apparatus with programs and strategies was penetrated into tribal areas with a mission to revenue and resources to be extracted from tribal areas. It was done efficiently by tapping cheap labour extracted from tribal communities. The case study of Chenchus attests this fact.

The major argument this study proposes is that the inadequate welfarism adopted by the British was directed at making tribes a well-disciplined labour rather than empowerment with modernity. Unfortunately the colonial welfarism model exercised a significant impact upon the policies and strategies of the state in independent India. It is this process that is mainly responsible for lopsided development that could be seen in tribal areas in several parts of India. This study suggests the decolonization of tribal policies is needed to achieve healthy tribal development in India.