An Ethnographic Note on Khondh, a Primitive Tribe and Valmiki, an Acculturizing Tribe from Andhra Pradesh, India

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Abstract
The present paper reports the ethnographic profile of a primitive tribe namely Khondh and an acculturizing tribe namely Valmiki living in Visakhapatnam district of Andhra Pradesh, a southern Indian state. Three mandals (administrative units of the district) were selected and a total of 17 villages from these mandals were selected for the study. The data were collected using a set of ethnographic techniques viz., observation, informal interviews with the villagers and in-depth interviews with the key informants in the community. Both Khondh and Valmiki occupy lower status in the tribal social hierarchy. These tribes widely vary in several aspects. The characteristics and factors that have contributed towards the relative statuses of Khondh as primitive tribe and Valmiki as acculturizing tribe are presented.

Key words: Tribes; Acculturization; Primitive; Ethnography; India

Introduction
Ethnography is the scientific study of human social phenomena and communities, through means of various anthropological research methods. Ethnography aims to answer central anthropological questions concerning the ways of life of living human beings. Ethnographic questions generally concern the link between culture and its processes over time. Ethnography is usually a description of the social life or cultural phenomena of a society or a community of researchers’ interest. Sometimes this description is made in the background of a specific context or situation. Usually, ethnographers seek to gain emic perspective, or the "native's point of view". The emic perspective may be different from the etic, or “outsider's perspective” and it is the unique feature of the ethnography. The present study is an attempt to understand and highlight the characteristics and factors that have and are being contributing to the respective primitive and acculturizing statuses to Khondh and Valmiki tribes of Andhra Pradesh, a Southern Indian state.

The Area
The state of Andhra Pradesh, the fifth largest in terms of both area and population, lies between 12°38’ and 19°55’ North latitudes and 70° 45’ and 84° 55’ East longitudes in eastern side of peninsula. The area of Andhra Pradesh is 2,75,068 sq. km of area. The population is 84.66 million (Census of India, 2011) and about 7% are tribals (Census of India, 2001). The state is divided into 23 districts and each district is again divided into several mandals (administrative units).

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agglomeration of 20-30 villages. The district of Visakhapatnam, lies between 17°15´ and 18° 32´ North latitudes and 70° 45´ and 81° 30´ East longitudes with an area of 11,161 sq. km. The district presents two distinct geographical regions – the strip of land along the coast between Bay of Bengal and Eastern ghats called the plains region and hilly area of the Eastern ghats flanking it the North and West called the agency/tribal region. The district is divided into 42 mandals, out of which 31 falls in the plain area and 11 fall in the agency/tribal area. The total population of the district is 42.88 million (Census of India, 2011) and the tribals constitute 8.2% of the district’s population (Census of India, 2001). The agency region of the district consists of the hilly terrains covered by the Eastern ghats, a series of detached hill ranges with an altitude of about 900 meters above mean sea level, dotted by several peaks exceeding over 1200 meters MSL. The agency is predominantly inhabited by tribes and is a domicile for around 13 tribes, hence also referred to as tribal area.

Methods
For the present study, the a total of 17 tribal hamlets from three mandals of Visakhapatnam district namely, Araku Valley, Dumbriguda and Hukumpet which are situated at an altitude of about 900 meters above mean sea level were selected. These villages were selected following a multistage cluster sampling strategy for carrying out an epidemiological survey (Kusuma et al., 2004). After having decided to study blood pressure variation across some cross-cultural populations including a traditional/primitive tribal group and a tribe that is under the process acculturation, the ethnographic data were collected with a focus, obviously, on trying to understand the day-to-day life of these communities. Ethnographic data were collected from the same villages. Field works were done during 1996 and data were gathered with a purpose of understanding the characteristics and factors that have contributed the tribes for still being primitive and getting acculturized. The present study ethnographic notes are based on the field observations, informal discussions with the villagers and in-depth interviews with key informants. Standard Anthropological methods were followed during field works (Pelto & Pelto, 1978; Bernard, 1988).

Khondh
Khondh is one of the primitive tribes of Andhra Pradesh. The Government of India has identified eight tribal groups namely, Chenchu, Kondareddi, Kolam, Poraja, Kondasavara, Gadaba, Khondh and Thoti of Andhra Pradesh as primitive tribes based on the primitive, indigenous technology adopted in operations and primitive agricultural practices. Of these eight tribal groups, Khondh is the most primitive tribe, predominantly distributed in the district of Visakhapatnam. Khondh comes under Dravidian group of tribes. The social status of the Khondhs is low. In tribal social hierarchy, Khondhs occupy a position just above to that of Valmiki, whose social status is ranked to be the lowest. Khondh is an endogamous tribal group with several patrilineal clans. Each clan bears a distinct name and exogamy is observed at clan level. Khondhs have their own dialect known as Kui. Majority of men and a few women can also converse in Telugu, the regional language of Andhra Pradesh. Khondhs inherit or restricted themselves to the densely wooded hill tops, practicing shifting cultivation (podu). Shifting cultivation is associated with low level of technology, and it is widely believed that podu is not profitable from the economic point of view. Earlier, the tribes used to cultivate a podu patch for a period of two or three years, abandon it permanently and then shift for a new patch of land. But, gradually, due to restrictions imposed by the Government, they have to confine to a limited number of podu patches. This scarcity of land has led Khondhs to cultivate continuously in the limited available podu patches without leaving it fallow. It is believed that the podu fields become unsuitable for cultivation due to loss of fertility after raising crops successively for three years (Mohan Rao, 1990). Verrier Elwin stated that shifting cultivation is a stage of the evolution of human culture and almost all the races have resorted to this practice at some stage or the other (Elwin, 1964). They raise crops such as ragi (Cynosurus coracanus), korra (Panicum italicum), red gram (Cajanus cajan), etc. in podu fields. Shifting cultivation (podu) is still continues to be main stay of economy of the Khondhs. The collection of non timber forest
produce and forest labour provides subsidiary economy. Their inhabitation in the interior and relative isolation from the other tribes does not facilitate the Khondhs to avail the benefits and infrastructural facilities that have been provided under podu rehabilitation scheme. Shifting cultivation essentially provides the bare requirement for survival rather than generating surplus profit, nevertheless, it plays a vital role in the economy of the Khondhs and over the ages it has become an inalienable part of their life and culture with a number of ceremonies built around it.

Khondh hamlets are relatively small and usually homogenous with 10-25 households (Fig. 1). Even in multi tribal village, Khondh families live as a cluster at one end of the village (separately). The houses are typical for their construction. Generally, the houses are thatched with straw, and the walls and floor are daubed with mud (Fig. 2). A few houses are roofed with tiles, which were provided by the Government. However, these tiles are just laid above the already thatched roof. Cattle sheds are constructed either besides or behind the house. Except the household utensils, wooden cots and technologically primitive agricultural tools, any of the Khondh families included in the present study possessed modern furniture, indicating the absence of modern material culture. Khondhs fetch drinking water from nearby streams, and a few hamlets have the facility of dug wells. None of the sampled Khondh villages had electricity facility. The modern transportation and communication facilities are not in reach of the Khondhs due to their inhabitation in the interior. The accessibility to health services and education are very meagre. The literacy rate among the Khondh is reported to be only 1.26% (Census of India, 1981).

Khondhs are distinct and can be easily identified by their physical appearance as well as by their dressing pattern. Men wear a loin cloth, however a few men are observed to wear shirts, older men tie their head hair as a knot at the back of the head while younger men are not following this tradition. Women wear sari in a traditional pattern as the other tribal women of the area do. Khondh women are not used to wear blouses, a practice acquainted from the plains people. Women tie their hair towards the right side of the head as a knot known as koppu. Women's ornaments include nose rings, ear rings, toe rings, anklets, bangles, beaded necklaces, etc. Nose rings were worn on both the nasal wings as well as on the nasal septum. The ear lobes as well as pinnae are adorned by ear rings. A few women wear string of rupee (Indian currency) coins to indicate their wealth.

Khondhs are non-vegetarians. The consumption of pork and beef are not forbidden, which has assigned lower status in the tribal hierarchy. Millets (ragi, korra) form the staple diet. The morning diet consists of gruel made up of millets. The lunch consists of rice along with either dhal (made up of pulses) or a vegetable /non-vegetarian curry. Several wild tubers and seasonal fruits supplement their diet. Consumption of oil and spices are low. Pickling the vegetables, such as mango, lemon, etc. is not known to the Khondhs. The consumption of milk and milk derivatives is unknown to them; Khondhs were not used to drink beverages like coffee and tea. Both men and women consume locally made rice beer known as pindam. While men consume mostly on weekly market days, women have reported to consume only on festive occasions. Toddy (jeeluga kallu) extracted from a palm tree (Aeschymone indica) forms an important constituent of their diet particularly during summer. Smoking tobacco and chewing gudaku (a locally made herbal intoxicant paste which also contains tobacco) is noticed both among men and women.

Khondhs are physically hard working people as they are engaged in strenuous podu cultivation on hilly terrains. Also, their inhabitation on the hill tops necessitates strenuous walking either to reach to other hamlets or to reach out for weekly markets.

Valmiki

Valmiki are chiefly concentrated tribe in Visakhapatnam district and are sparsely distributed in neighbouring districts. Valmiki is considered as an acculturizing tribe. Hoebel (1966) stated that “Acculturation occurs when a culture undergoes drastic alterations in the direction of conformity to another culture from which it borrows numerous traits or principles. The acculturating society, although drastically modified, retains its discrete identity. It becomes adjusted to, but not assimilated in,
the dominant society”. Literacy wise, Valmiki is an advanced tribe with the highest total literacy rate (19.37%), with a female literacy rate of 10.03%, among all the tribes of coastal Andhra Pradesh (Census of India, 1981). Valmiki are agriculturists and forest labourers. Some of them became traders and petty money lenders and a few are able to get employment in several government organizations. It is noticed that Valmikis have larger land holdings. They also practice shifting cultivation but by following modern methods of agricultural operations. The knowledge of availing benefits, schemes/subsidiary loans to buy mechanized tools, fertilizers, pesticides, etc. has facilitated them to follow certain modern methods in agriculture, which in turn has brought about a reduction in human physical labour to an extent. McGarvey et al. (1989) defined modernization as the “transformation of relatively less complex socioeconomic systems of industrial technology and minimal human physical labour”. Introduction of modern means of transportation and communication facilitated the inflow of large number of non-tribals and accelerated integration among diverse groups which in turn has led to the process of modernization in Valmiki society. Valmikis hold an economically higher position among the tribal groups. They are well known to avail the facilities and benefits extended by the government through various schemes such as podu rehabilitation programme, social forestry, housing scheme, reservation facilities in education and employment, etc. Worsley (1981) wrote that some individuals are better able to take opportunities that accompany modernization and hence are better able to amass economic resources. The modernization of Valmiki is also evident from the modern technology, they adopt in agricultural operations as Gordon Childe believed that change occurs first in technology and then in non-material objects (Childe, 1951). Leslei White explicitly says that technology is the basic determinant of cultural evolution (White, 1959).

The social organization of the Valmiki is as usual as in the other tribes. It is an endogamous tribal group with several partriclan. Exogamy is observed at surname level. Valmiki is said to have their own dialect but men as well as women can converse in Telugu. Von Furer-Haimendorf (1982) mentioned that Valmiki a community believed to have originated in the lowlands but settled in the hills for several generations. Valmiki is a Dravidian tribal group. Social status of the Valmiki is the lowest in tribal social hierarchy. Valmikis generally reside in large multiethnic villages that are in the vicinity of modern transportation, communication, etc. (Fig. 3). These villages are also booned with educational facilities, health services and other public utilities. Valmikis construct independent houses unlike those of Khondhs. The houses are not typical for their construction. Generally, the house is of rectangle shape consisting two or three rooms and a front verandah (Fig. 4). The houses are thatched as well as tiled. Some people can also afford for concrete slabbed houses. The walls and the floor of the house are generally plastered with mud while a few houses have cemented walls and floor. Cattle sheds are constructed nearer to the house. A few houses have electricity facility. Several Valmiki families possess modern material culture in terms of stylish wooden cots, wooden and iron chairs, electrical and electronic gadgets, modern agricultural tools and transportation vehicles such as cycle, motor cycle, tractor, etc. and modern household utensils. The radio and cinema are found to be the entertainment channels which in turn enhance the process of modernization.

Valmikis imitate the plains people in dressing pattern as well as in hair style. Men wear pants/half pants and shirts. Women wear sari in the traditional pattern of the tribals, however, while going out for cinema or other areas they, particularly the younger women, style themselves as plains women. Women wear blouses. Their ornaments include ear studs, nose studs (instead of ear rings and nose rings), bangles, beaded chains, etc. Several women are observed to wear bottu (vermillion applied as a dot on the forehead), an unusual symbol among tribes and a cultural practice among caste women. While older women knot their hair as koppu, younger women plait their hair. Valmikis are non-vegetarians. Consumption of pork and beef is allowed. Generally, they drink either black tea or tea with milk in the morning. The left over rice of earlier night’s dinner along with congee or millet gruel forms morning’s diet. The lunch consists of millet gruel along with a vegetable or non-vegetarian curry. The supper consists of rice along with dhal made up of pulses, or a vegetable/non-vegetarian curry. Consumption of milk and milk products is low. Toddy (jeeluga kallu) extracted from a
palm tree (*Aeschymone indica*), forms an important constituent of their diet, especially during summer period. Both men and women consume locally made rice beer (*Pindami*). While men consume usually on weekly market days, women have reported to consume mostly on festive occasions. Smoking and chewing tobacco is observed among men and women. Drinking water is fetched from the dug wells, unlike many other tribal groups. Valmikis are also physically active, however, introduction of modern technology in agriculture, adoption of various other occupations and modern means of transportation has brought about relative reduction in physical labour to a considerable extent.

**Conclusion**

Both Khondh and Valmiki occupy low status in the tribal social hierarchy. These tribes widely vary in several aspects. Khondh hamlets are relatively small and usually homogeneous, and are mainly located the densely wooded hill tops. Khondhs practice shifting cultivation (*podu*), often using technologically primitive agricultural tools, and are distinct in their physical appearance as well as for their dressing pattern. They are physically hardworking people and dietary habits didn’t undergo much change and new foods/habits like consumption of milk, coffee, tea, etc. in not known to them. Contacts with the government officials are very limited, and not much change is observed either in the dressing pattern or dietary habits even in a Khondh village that is adopted under *podu* rehabilitation scheme. The literacy level of the Khondh is quite low and only a few people converse in Telugu, the regional language of Andhra Pradesh. On the contrary, Valmikis usually live in relatively bigger, multi-ethnic villages that are situated nearer to the road and are in the vicinity of other facilities like transportation, communication, education, and healthcare. Valmikis are relatively better able to use modern agricultural techniques, and several of them are engaged in small business like money lending. Their housing and dressing pattern have undergone a considerable change as compared to the other tribes living in the area, and they try to imitate plains people. Literacy wise, Valmikis occupy a better position amongst the tribes of Andhra Pradesh with highest literacy rate. Their ability speak Telugu definitely facilitated the process of acculturation and change among the members of this tribe. Thus, geographical location, along with other factors such as literacy, contacts and communications with other people such as plains people, traders and government authorities play a vital role and contribute towards either remaining primitive or towards getting acculturized. The present ethnographic account of these two tribes may be useful in understanding the changes that have occurred since then for those who are interested in studying the social and cultural change in the life of these tribal communities.
References

Fig. 1: A Khondh village

Fig. 2: A Khondh house
Fig. 3: A multi-ethnic village inhabited mostly by Valmiki

Fig. 4: A Valmiki house