CHAPTER 2

AREA AND PEOPLE
The present chapter primarily describes the general features of the area of the study and gives a brief ethnographic account of the population studied.

2.1 THE AREA

2.1.1 The state of Andhra Pradesh

The state of Andhra Pradesh, where the field area of the present study in Bapatla taluk of Guntur district is situated, is the largest of the South Indian states. It is the fourth most populous state of India with a geographical area of 27,67,540 sq km and a population of 5,35,49,673 according to 1981 Census. The state lies between the latitudes 12°4' N and 19°54' N and the longitudes 76°50' E and 84°54' E. The states of Orissa and Madhya Pradesh in the north, Maharashtra on the north-west, Karnataka on the west, Tamil Nadu on the south bound the state. A long coastal line of Bay of Bengal running nearly 600 miles, limits its boundary on the eastern side.

The state is divisible into three regions based on geographical, political and cultural characteristics:
(1) Coastal Andhra Pradesh, (2) Rayalaseema, and (3) Telengana. A gradation of differences between each of these regions can be perceived in dialect, life ways and cultural factors. Politically these regions were under the rule
three different dynasties in the past and the cultural heritage signifies the historical patronage of the past.

Water resources are rich in the state. Most of the rivers are rainfed and they flow eastward from the western Ghats to Bay of Bengal. The Godavari and Krishna are the largest rivers flowing through the heart of the state. They are perennial and responsible for the formation of fertile tracts in the deltas of the districts of Krishna and Godavari. Apart from these, there are many medium-sized rivers like the Vamsadhara, the Nagavalli, the Penna, the Kadam, the Musi, the Manjira and a large number of minor rivers.

There is a regional variation in soil fertility. The fertile delta areas in the coastal districts are the result of alluvial soil and silt deposited by the rivers of Godavari, Krishna and Pennar. The rich black cotton soil, which has a high moisture retaining capacity covers a major portion of many districts including the non-deltaic areas, and Coastal and Rayalaseema regions. Superior and inferior red soils are also found in other parts of Rayalaseema region. The Telengana region has mostly rugged and heavy undulating topography.
2.1.2 The study area

The present investigation among the Pooja Gollas was conducted in the district of Guntur situated in the Coastal region of Andhra Pradesh. The Guntur district comprises twenty four taluks including Bapatla where the Pooja Golla population of our study is highly concentrated. It was due to this reason that the Bapatla taluk was chosen as a field area for the present investigation. The coastal district of Guntur lies in the eastern part of state between the north latitudes of 15°18' and 16°50' and east longitudes of 79°10' and 80°55'. It is bounded on the north by the districts of Nalgonda and Krishna, on the east by Bay of Bengal and Krishna district, on the south by Prakasam district and on the west by the districts of Prakasam, Kurnool and Mahaboobnagar. The district roughly resembles the shape of an open umbrella spread out with the handle pointing on southwards.

The district has an area of 11,777 sq km, and population of 3,434,124 over 60 per cent of which constitutes the rural population. Its literacy rate is 45.23 per cent. Almost 60 per cent of the land in the district is utilised for agriculture. The Bapatla taluk covers an area of 298 sq km with a population of 89,881 of which over 50 per cent comprises the rural population. The geographic, climatic, and economic background of the taluk
is almost similar to that of the other taluks of the district.

The district suffers from hot climate, the summer especially being extremely trying. The summer season starts by about the middle of February and continues till the first week of June. The heat in April and May is oppressive but after the northeast monsoon breaks, the weather becomes more bearable. The southwest monsoon season follows thereafter and extends upto the end of September. October and November constitute the post-monsoon or retreating monsoon season. The period from December to the middle of February is generally marked by fine weather. The mean daily maximum temperature is 41.7°C whereas the minimum daily temperature is 38.7°C. The average annual rainfall is 831 mm. The air is humid throughout the year except during the southwest monsoon when the skies are heavily clouded.

The main sources of irrigation are canals, rivers, tanks, channel and wells. There are also schemes and projects such as Appapuram channel, Guntur channel, Romperu drainage, Emileri pumping schemes and Nagarjuna-sagar Project. The food and commercial crops cultivated in this region are paddy, jowar, bajra, varagu, korra, tobacco, chillies, groundnut, coriander, cotton and turmeric.
2.2 **THE PEOPLE**

The study area is inhabited by several endogamous groups such as Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vysyas, Reddis, Telagars, Kammas, Gollas, Malsas, Madigas, Muslims, Christians etc. However the present study is confined to Pooja Gollas, a sub-caste of Gollas. In the following paras is given a brief ethnographic account of this population.

2.2.1 **The caste Golla**

The Gollas are a pastoral people. The name Golla is generally supposed to be a shortened form of Sanskrit Gopala (protector of cows) who is also known as Lord Krishna, from whom the Gollas trace their descent. The Gollas are one of the largest castes found not only in Andhra Pradesh but also throughout India by different names. The Gollas of Andhra Pradesh speak Telugu and identify themselves as Hindus.

In the traditional four-tier varna system of Hindus, the Gollas come under the sudra varna which comprises a large number of castes. Among the sudras, Gollas occupy a rank next to the agricultural castes like the Kapu, the Kamma etc., but a rank above the artisan and service castes like Kummaras (potters), the Chakalis (washerman), the Mangalis (barbers) etc.
Like in other castes of the State, there are many subcastes in the caste Golla. They are Erra, Ala, Pooja, Gangeddu, Gauda, Karma, Pakanati, Racha, Peddati. Each subcaste is strictly an endogamous unit. Each of these subcastes is found to be concentrated in specific regions of Andhra Pradesh. The present study has been carried out on Pooja Gollas, who constitute an important and predominant subcaste in Bapatla taluk of Guntur district.

2.2.2 Pooja Gollas

Pooja Gollas trace their origin to Simhadri Raja, who is supposed to have been a descendant of Yayathi Raja of Mahabharata, the great epic of Hindu (Thurston, 1908). They are of medium stature. They have well built bodies with light brown to dark brown and even light black skin colour. They have generally mesorrhine nose and mesocephalic face. Majority of the males are of medium stature with narrow chest.

2.2.3 Settlement pattern

The Pooja Gollas are found in multicafe villages as well as in villages of their own caste members only. The latter type of villages are usually named after the name of the caste, as for instance, Gollapalem. The Pooja Gollas living in multicafe villages tend to build their houses close to each other as a cluster separated
from the houses of other castes. Houses are raised over wooden poles with a thatched roof and mud walls and floors. However, rich people have pucca houses. Generally, the Pooja Collas are economically backward.

2.2.4 Social structure

There are a number of further exogamous groups identified by the Intiperlu (surnames) among the Pooja Collas. These play an important role in the selection of spouses. Surname groups live on a strong patrilineal basis by which the female after marriage assumes the surname of her husband. Each surname group is identified by a specific name. The members of each surname group consider themselves as agnates and believe that they have descended from a common ancestor, though the tracing of the actual relation is not possible.

Each surname group consists of an unknown number of vamsam groups which can be equated with the lineage. The people of vamsam groups can trace out the exact relationship with a common known ancestor. The vamsam groups do not have any names as such but referred to by the names of the most recent ancestors. The lineages break over a period of time and are to be referred by the name of the most recent ancestor. Each vamsam group is made up of a number of families. Family is the basic unit among the
Pooja Gollas. Though nuclear families are common, close kinsmen tend to flock together and maintain kin relations.

Thus the structure of Golla society can be shown as follows:

Caste

subcaste

surname

lineage

Endogamous

Exogamous

2.2.5 Marriage

The institution of marriage plays an important role in the life of Pooja Gollas with which they maintain, revive and strengthen kin connections. It is practised almost universally among them. Adult marriages are common, but prepuberty marriages are permitted in exceptional cases. Regarding the selection of spouses, the rules of endogamy, exogamy, preferential mating and prohibited degrees simultaneously operate and thereby considerably restrict the freedom of choice among them. Most of the marriages are arranged by the parents. Monogamy is the most prevalent form of marriage. Uncle-niece and first cross cousin marriages are found to be common. Dowry is paid in the form of cash, land and gold ornaments at the time of marriage and the amount of dowry varies according to the economic
position of the concerned families. Patrilocal type of residence after marriage is the rule. Widow remarriages are strictly prohibited. Divorce is resented and generally not permitted.

2.2.6 Family

Nuclear family is common among the Pooja Gollas. However, the other types like extended, and broken families also occur in lower frequencies. The family of Gollas is of patrilocal, patriarchal, patrilineal and patronymic in nature.

2.2.7 Kinship

The kinship terminology of the Pooja Gollas is of classificatory type and reflects the Dravidian kinship pattern. The Dravidian kinship pattern is characterized by the system of kinship ties which are strengthened by marriage alliances arranged between the descendants of closely related people. For instance the offspring of brother and sister are united in marriage. This pattern of alliance takes the shape of preferential marriage of cross-cousins, which is common in most parts of south India. In North India, on the contrary, marriages are arranged between people who are previously not related or removed by seven generations, either bilaterally or unilaterally.
Cross cousin system of marriage also, by implication, divides the people into potential mates and prohibited categories of people. According to the kinship system, the parallel cousins are distinctively differentiated from the cross cousins.

Kinship behaviour (respect, joking, avoidance, etc.) is dependent upon such factors as age, sex, relationship and generation. Generally elders are respected by the younger people. Joking relations exist between an individual and his wife's sister, sister's daughter, mother's brother's daughter, father's sister's daughter etc. Avoidance relationship exists between an individual and his elder-brother's wife, wife's mother etc. Now-a-days the avoidance relations are relaxed. The relatives who are supposed to observe avoidance behaviour now-a-days resort to frequent social interactions.

2.2.8 Dress and ornaments

The women wear dark coloured sarees and blouses. Bead necklaces, glass bangles, ear-rings and nose-rings besides gold ornaments, adorn them. Like all Hindu women, the Golla women also wear invariably Bottu of kumkum (vermilion dot) on their forehead. The men wear only a dhoti (a piece of cotton cloth) to cover their lower parts
and a shirt. While at work they may wear only a loin cloth. On the whole, it is difficult to distinguish the dress pattern of Gollas from that of other caste members of the state. However, the Golla women wear elaborate ornaments decorating faces and arms which characterise the caste itself.

2.2.9 Food

Pooja Gollas who used to depend earlier to a large extent, on milk products have now taken to agriculture and eat rice as the staple food, besides jowar and bajra. They take sea-fish frequently as their settlements are in close proximity to the coast.

2.2.10 Economic activities

The Pooja Gollas like other subcastes of Gollas are traditional sheep and cattle herders and dairy men. Most of them now depend on agriculture as the main occupation, while some of them are still sheep breeders, government servants, business men etc. The main reason for change in the traditional occupation particularly to agriculture is the availability of irrigation facility after the construction of the mighty Nagarjunasagar dam in the study area. As a result, most of the grazing lands have come under cultivation. People found irrigated agriculture as
economically more paying than herding and dairying.

2.2.11 Social control

The caste council of the Pooja Gollas is the body that exercises control over the social behaviour of caste members. The caste council consists of a headman who is assisted by a flexible body of elders. The council passes judgment over disputes and quarrels of various kinds pertaining to marriage, property disputes, adultery, wife beating, drunkenness, etc. The punishment is generally in the form of collecting fines. Those who decline to abide over the decision of the council have to face serious threat of ostracism and social boycott. However, now a days the people approach the courts for seeking justice.

2.2.12 Life cycle rituals

The people observe several rituals at different stages during one’s life such as greemantham (ritual for the expectant mother for successful delivery), purudu (purification ceremony following the incidence of birth), first feeding ceremony, tonsuring and ear and nose piercing, puberty, betrothal, marriage ritual, nuptial, and obsequies.

2.2.13 Religion

The Pooja Gollas are Hindus by religion. They
worship all Hindu gods. Of all the Hindu festivals, Gokulashtami, a festival commemorating the birth day of Lord Krishna, is celebrated with great pomp. They also worship little tradition deities like Poleramma and Ankamma. The Pooja Gollas celebrate various local rituals in the name of little tradition deities.