

Salakamcheruvu - A Village on the Plateau

In the previous lesson we saw a village on the coastal plains which had plenty of water and rich soils. Can you imagine life in a very different kind of place with very little rain and poor soils? Discuss in the class.

Deccan Plateau

Observe the Andhra Pradesh sketch map 1 showing major Land forms in chapter 4. The plateaus of Andhra Pradesh are mostly a part of Deccan plateau. Plateaus are lands situated at a height. If you start from Nellore and follow the Pennar upstream, you will cross the coastal plain and reach the Velikonda hills. You will have to climb the hills to reach the plateau region of Kadapa and Anantapur districts. The Velikonda hills form the escarpment of the plateau.

Unlike the plains which are flat, plateaus are marked by several small hills, hill ranges and hillocks interspersed with flat areas between them. As a result cultivation and settlement is possible only in small pockets. They are also more rocky, with thin layers of soil.

An important aspect of this region of Andhra Pradesh is that it receives very low rainfall. We wanted to see how people live in such difficult terrains and therefore visited a



Fig. 5.1. Dry bed of Salakam Cheruvu tank

village which is situated in Anantapur district.

Salakamcheruvu

After crossing several hills and rocky stretches we finally reached Salakamcheruvu, 30km North-East of Anantapur in Singanamala mandal. It is named after a tank called Salakamcheruvu. The tank is so located that rain water from the high hills to its West, North and South flow into it. This tank today is dry. The villagers told us that it has been dry for the last twenty years.



Fig. 5.2. Sketch of Salakamcheruvu village

- Look at the diagram of the location of Salakamcheruvu. Can you see the hills on the three sides of the village and the tank?
- Can you think of reasons why the tank has been dry for so long?

have little humus or nutrients, have little capacity to hold water, and lack sufficient depth for roots to grow and spread. As a result, many fields need to be left fallow or uncultivated for some years after a crop.

Only small stretches of flat lands have deeper and finer soils. However such lands have got degraded and become uncultivable 'soudu' or saline soils. Saline soils have high content of lime and salts and will not absorb water. These soils are not suitable for all the crops.

- Compare the soil of the plateau village with the soils of the plains. Can you explain which of these is better for agriculture?

Soils

The fields are located on both low slopes of the hills and on the flat ground below. As a result a lot of stones roll down into the fields. The soils are red and only about two to three feet deep. These soils



Fig. 5.3. Red soils with stones near the hills

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Climate and rainfall

The rainy season is from June to November. However it rains very little in these parts. This rainfall is also very unreliable as it may or may not rain properly in a particular year. Drought is a recurring phenomena. Consequently, there will be years when there is not enough water to grow any crop or even for drinking. Thus when farmers sow a crop, it may not rain at all and the crop may dry up. In view of its low and erratic rainfall, this part of the state is called 'drought-prone'.

- Can you compare the rainfall situation in the coastal plains village and the interior plateau village?
- Find out from your elders if the rainfall in your area too is unreliable and erratic.

Water resources

With the rains being so less and unreliable the people of this region have to store rainwater and use groundwater. There are no streams or canals near Salakamcheruvu.

a. Tanks

From the early days the people of this region have excavated tanks to store the rain water and the water flowing down the seasonal streams. Plateaus are particularly suited for building such tanks because of natural depressions in the landscape



Fig. 5.4. Singanamala Cheruvu on the road to Salakamcheruvu

and the existence of small hills. You can see at Salakamcheruvu how the water from the surrounding hills come down and how a small wall built across a small stream by joining two hills can create a large water reservoir. There are thousands of such tanks in Anantapur district itself. Besides large tanks, there are also a few small ponds (*kuntas*) built to provide drinking water to animals of the village.

In earlier times the village people together took care to repair the tanks, keep the area from where the water came to the tank clean and proper, and regulate the use of the tank water. This has declined rapidly in the last thirty years. As a result the tanks like Salakamcheruvu have become dry.

- Discuss in the class how the *cheruvus* help in improving the soils, in storing rain water, in preventing floods in rivers, in recharging groundwater, etc.
- Visit a nearby tank and find out if it is used for irrigation and what crops are grown under them.

b. Wells and Borewells

While tanks store the rain water that flow on the surface of the land, wells help us to use the water that seeps down beneath the soil. It is very difficult to dig wells in the plateau because of rocks underneath. Even after the rocks are broken, and the well is dug, there may be little or no water. Due to low rainfall, the underground water level is very deep. Once the water in the well is used for irrigation in the fields, it takes at least two days for the water to be replenished in the well.

In recent years open wells are not used for irrigation and the farmers instead depend upon borewells. You have read about such wells in the plains village. However, it is very expensive to dig borewells in the plateau. In Salakamcheruvu water is found below 250 feet. Farmers have been spending huge amounts of money in the hope of finding good source of water. They dig deeper and deeper every year upto a thousand feet or more. Farmers dig several bores to see who is lucky. Very few farmers can afford to invest so much money. Only 5-10 farmers who have more land have borewells. The rest of the farmers depend on rainfall only. While the bore wells are on the increase, the *cheruvus* and tanks have been getting dry due to poor maintenance. The tanks are used by all people and animals of the village while the bores are used by one or two farmers only.

- What are the sources of water in Salakamcheruvu?

Declining ground water levels – a widespread problem

Farmers all over the plateau region of Andhra Pradesh have been digging more and more borewells in order to grow cash crops. This has caused an over use of the groundwater - more water is being pumped out than is being recharged by rains. As a result every year the water level in the wells is going down and the bores go dry after a very short use.

Do people in your region face similar problems? Find out and discuss the causes and possible solutions.

Agriculture and crops

The farmers of Salkamcheruvu grow only one crop in the Kharif or monsoon season. Earlier farmers mainly grew food crops - millets (like ragi, *sama*, *varagu*, *korra*, Sorghum, etc.), pulses and a little paddy. Millets need very little water and can also grow on poor soils. The paddy crop is cultivated using the water from the village tank. Besides these food crops the farmers also grew some cotton and groundnut which they sold in the market.

During the last twenty or thirty years there has been a significant change in the crops – farmers have reduced the sowing of millets and other food crops and instead are cultivating mainly groundnuts or chillies. Sometimes crops like sorghum, red gram and maize are sown between the groundnut fields.

Generally it rains in the months of June and July for 10 days ('*Tolakari Vanatu*'). Then they sow seeds for groundnut. If the onset of rains is late, that is in August they



Fig: 5.5. Groundnut crop damaged by drought

crop from the field will cost him more than the income he will get by selling them. So he thinks it is better to leave the crop as fodder for animals. When we went to the village, most farmers had lost their crop. The government has declared the mandal as 'drought hit'. Adi Narayana Reddy said that they were waiting for the Government relief. Some farmers who have borewells managed to save their crop and were selling them in the market.

grow maize and redgram. If it rains again in October and November the groundnut crop will be healthy. Otherwise the groundnut harvest will suffer.

Adi Narayana Reddy cultivated groundnut in his 5 acres of land. With no irrigation facility and lack of rainfall his groundnut crop has dried up. He is worried as the harvest of the groundnut



Fig: 5.6. A farmer transporting his groundnut harvest

A Different kind of farming

We saw that the soils of the area are poor and that the rainfall was less and uncertain. This means that the farmers have to resort to the use of chemical fertilisers and borewells to grow crops like groundnut every year. There is a third problem – that of disease and insect-pests. In order to tackle them the farmers use expensive pesticides. Some farmers have recently been thinking of changing these practices. They felt that it is important to improve soil quality by contour bunding and use of organic manure; they grow diverse food crops rather than only one cash crop like groundnut; they tried to repair and restore the old tanks and spring channels to irrigate the lands; they use organic pest control methods like neem solution. What do you and your parents feel about these suggestions? Discuss them at home and in the class room.

Orchards

Looking at the water problem some farmers are planting orchards of sapota, sweet lime etc. These orchards require water only during some seasons and give regular returns every year.



Fig: 5.7. Sapota and sweet lime orchards

- ♦ What have been the major changes in the cropping pattern of Salakamcheruvu?
- ♦ What will the farmers do if the groundnut crop fails?
- ♦ Why do you think it may not be possible to grow much paddy in this village?

Market

Where do the farmers sell their produce? Adinarayana Reddy told us that the entire market is controlled by the buyers. Usually there are agents who come to the field and buy the produce from the farmers.

The agents fix the price for the produce when the crop is in the field itself. Some farmers take their produce to town by tractors or by bullock carts. They get better price than those who sell at their fields.



Fig: 5.9. Paddy field irrigated by borewell

Other sources of livelihood

As we saw above, agriculture is quite unpredictable in this village. Some times small farmers and agricultural workers go to other villages which have better irrigation facilities in search of work. Farmers also resort to some other means of livelihood.

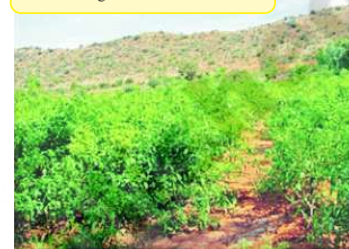


Fig: 5.8. Chilly fields irrigated by borewell

Animal herding

In Salakamcheruvu, some people rear buffaloes and cows for milk.



Fig: 5.10. Sheep herding

5 to 6 families in the village depend on sheep for livelihood. Narayana Swamy has seventy sheep. Sheep give birth to lambs twice a year which are sold after a few months. Sheep are taken to the hills for grazing. Sheep eat leaves of Chigara tree which grow beside the roads.



Fig: 5.11. Forming of Coal Batties

Charcoal

Jayaram and his two friends earn some money by 'Coal Batties (kilns)'. First they collect wood from the trees like *sarkaru tumma* from the common land, fields and hills and place them in a heap. They cover the logs with grass and mud and then lit the pile. The logs will turn into charcoal. They sell this coal to factories. The total work takes nearly two months.



Fig: 5.12. Coal Batties

Cement bricks

Nagaraju has a small cement brick factory. About 10 people are employed for 4 months in a year. Nearly ten thousand bricks are made at one time. It takes two months to make the bricks and about four months to sell them.

Is Land use in Salakamcheruvu 'sustainable'?

Environmentalists believe that we need to plan the use of our lands in such a way that they remain productive for generations to come. For this we need to practice sustainable land use. This requires that the soil fertility be maintained, the groundwater remains recharged, there be a proper balance between forests, pastures and agricultural land etc. Do you think the land use of Salakamcheruvu is sustainable? What changes need to be brought in to make it sustainable?

Village settlement

The village is just below the small hills. There are two settlements close to each other.

There are about 300 families in this village with about 1200 people. Of these about 200 families are of various Castes who own most of the land in the village. There are two or three large farmers with about 20 acres of land, but most of the farmers have only about half to five acres.

The remaining 100 families depend entirely upon doing wage labour in this village and nearby villages.



Fig: 5.13. Village settlement beneath the hills

The earlier houses used more wood while the new houses use steel, brick and concrete. Most of the houses are built of stone and mud as stone is easily available from the local quarries. The houses of the poor are thatched or have tin sheet roofs. The village is electrified.

In the olden days the people of Salakamcheruvu depended on the wells for drinking water. Now-a-days drinking water is supplied through an over head tank which draws its water from a bore pump. Water is supplied through taps once in every two days.



Fig: 5.14. Old and new houses on a street

Roads and Markets

There is a small village market selling local vegetables, general items, etc. The village is connected by kutchra road with the main road from Anantapur to Tadipatri. People go to these towns for buying necessary items.



Fig: 5.15 Shops in the village

Key words

Plateau Deccan Plateau Drought Tanks
 Groundwater Contour Bunding Soudu Soils Animal Herding

Improve your learning

- 1) Compare the borewells of the plains with those of plateaus.
- 2) Compare the changes in cropping pattern of Salakamcheruvu and Penamakuru. What are the similarities and differences?
- 3) Do you think agriculture can be a profitable profession in places like Salakamcheruvu?
- 4) What difference would it make to the village if the rainfall in the region increases?
- 5) Can you think of some ways to improve the soils of this village?
- 6) What non-agricultural occupations are there in your village? Find out in detail about one such occupation.
- 7) Write a one line description for the words given below:

S.No.	Item	In Salakamcheruvu
1.	Soil	
2.	Water	
3.	Crops	
4.	Markets	
5.	Occupations	

- 8) Locate the following places in Andhra Pradesh Map
 - (a) Anantapur
 - (b) National Highway of Anantapur to Tadipatri

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