Voting a great privilege for these Chenchus

Candidates shun them owing to the tough terrain, but A.P. tribals never skip voting

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
ONGOLE
A section of the people in cities and towns skip voting due to their pre-occupations while some others succumb to inducements and vitiate the democratic process in Andhra Pradesh classified by the Election Commission as “expenditure sensitive”.

Despite the hardship associated with life in forests, the Chenchu tribals, who share space with big cats and other wild animals, prefer to live a contented life collecting forest produce and compulsorily take part in the polls.

Forgoing work
Kudumala Venkateswarlu, 45, from the Pothulagudem hamlet in the thick Nallamalla forests says, “We consider it a privilege to exercise our voting right even if it means walking miles together for hours unmindful of the rugged terrain.

“It is not just long hours of travel. We have to forgo our daily work and start from our gudem at the break of dawn to reach the polling booth located at Chilakacherla by noon or so,” says Dasari Guravaiah, 40, before taking part in the Systematic Voters Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP) awareness programme organised by Society for Training and Employment (STEP) Chief Executive Officer B. Ravi at the Cheruvugudem tribal hamlet.

Dr. Ravi administered a pledge to the tribals to resort to ethical voting for a better government. “Carrying our children on shoulders and food for the day, we cross rivulets en route and climb hills before reaching the polling booth as we are very particular not to miss voting,” adds 42-year-old Kudumula Kondamma before hands-on-experience on an EVM with Voter verifiable paper audit trail (VVPAT), being introduced for the first time in the State.

Pleasant surprise
Dasari Nagamma was surprised when the VVPAT displayed the person she had voted. Except the bed-ridden, the over 100 voters from these hamlets in and around Cheruvugudem took part in the elections.

Candidates keep away from campaigning in the 80-odd sparsely-populated gudem in the district in view of the inhospitable terrain.