

Our culture

Homes in Chembakolli

To the people of Chembakolli, the forest is their home. It is where they belong.

- The Adivasis believe that they are as much a part of the forest as its trees and plants, animals and birds, rivers and streams. Their name, Adivasi, means 'first inhabitants', and throughout their history they have never tried to change or destroy the forest in which they live. Instead, their whole culture has been based on blending in with, and respecting, their natural environment.
- Their houses show how the Adivasis live in harmony with their surroundings. From ancient times, their houses have been built with materials collected from the forest – wood, bamboo, vines and straw. The floor and walls are made with mud, and can be decorated with white or red patterns. These days, plastic sheets are often used to cover the roof during the rainy season.
- The Adivasis like to spend a lot of time out of doors, and their houses are designed to make good use of both inside and outside space. There is a verandah where the family can relax with a cup of tea, sit and chat, or meet friends and neighbours. When it gets dark, the families light a fire in front of their house and hang kerosene lamps on the verandah and in the surrounding trees.
- Inside, the houses are small and dark, with just two or three rooms and few windows. There is a main room with an open fire at one end, where all the meals are cooked. The smaller rooms are kept cool and are used only for sleeping. In many homes, there is also a light and airy room with part of the front wall cut away, which looks out directly onto the verandah.



- Building a new house is an important family event in the Adivasi culture. For members of one of Chembakolli's main tribes, the Bettakurumba, it forms part of a special ceremony that has been handed down from ancient times. The building materials must be collected on the day of the full moon, with everyone then joining in to help build the house as quickly as possible.

Talking points

- The 'Our culture' section of the poster focuses on homes. What does the word 'culture' mean?
- What other parts of the Adivasi saying shown on the front of the poster do homes link to?
- Why does their culture tie the people of Chembakolli so closely to the forest? Why do they feel it is their home?
- How do you think they would feel if they had to live in the middle of a town or city?

