Recognition of human endeavour in ameliorating the conditions of suffering masses can hardly be over emphasized. All through the ages, man both as individual and at the institutional level has made efforts to improve the surrounding environment. The improvement can be seen both in human and physical/natural settings. Improvement in the physical environment drew his attention first, and then social improvement over the years. The increasing advancement in the quality of life and further aspirations are a direct outcome and reflection of this desire.

In a country like ours, where socialist secular democracy has been the philosophy of the Government, all groups irrespective of their creed, religion and status tend to have equal opportunities in the development process of the country. As a result, the special efforts of the Government to uplift its weaker sections is a concrete step in this direction. Tribal groups and societies in terms of their spatial situation have become the major focal point in this endeavour.

Primitivism persists side by side as an adjunct to modern society in some parts of the world even now. In this age of great technological advancement in every sphere, which has enabled men to conquer outer space, harness the atomic energy sources and control many inundating rivers for
irrigation, power generation and general welfare of human beings, there also exist some fellow-men who are extremely backward, wild and are still in search of a 'Survival Technique' with bare bodies and without any comfortable shelter capable of keeping the wolf from the door. Even now they pursue a precarious livelihood with a crude technology, use a dibble or digging stick for sowing or a stone implement or a fibre-made trap to catch and kill a game for the day's food.

To measure up the gulf between them and the civilised men we have to study these tribal societies in detail and only then we can determine the extent of their backwardness, assess their needs and problems and extend to them facilities to remove their constraints and to rehabilitate them into organised and well developed human societies.

Main concentration of the Chenchus is now in Andhra Pradesh in some districts like Mahaboob Nagar, Nalgonda, Ranga Reedy, Kurnool, Prakasam and Guntur. But these districts once constituted a part of the erstwhile Hyderabad state ruled by the Nizam; the others were a part of the Madras Presidency ruled by the British Government. These areas include dense Nallamalai forest as well as the extended plateau on both sides of the Krishna. The Chenchus have dung to this ecology and environment from times
immemorial and this provides them shelter, food and a set pattern of tradition with occasional interruptions.

It is believed that the Chenchus inhabited in this area much earlier than the Dravidians themselves. Manu Smrithi mentions this tribe's name as 'Chenchus' and treats them as a part of the Andhras. Their ancestors were referred to as the Adi-Chenchus meaning that they existed from times immemorial. The name Chenchu has many alluding references to its origin.

Some believe that the name is derived from persons who lived under a Chettu (Tree). Some others believed that these people were in the habit of eating a kind of rat which is locally known as Chunchu and the same term is applied to designate the people.

There is a popular religious legend that the Man-lion incarnation of God, Narasimha (The fourth incarnation of Lord Vishnu) obtained as bride the Chenchita or Chenchu Lakshmi from damsels amongst one of the damsels of this tribe living on these hills. Connected to this an interesting story is narrated about how the Chenchu women at present have come to be dark and ugly. Chenchita who originally belonged to this tribe was a damsel of unsurpassable beauty and was loved by Lord Narasimha; but when she was let down under
pressure from his senior consort cursed Adi Lakshmi and all Chenchu maids in future should never have faces like herself so that her fate would never befall to any Chenchu women. She is then said to have plucked bilva (aegle marmelos) leaves and smeared the darkish juice of these leaves on the faces of the Chenchu women. From then onwards these are believed to have become dark and generally ugly.

Some Chenchu elders of Pecheruvu village, nine miles away from Srisailam areas, claim that the female deity Bhramarambha of Srisailam also hailed from their tribe and Lord Mallikarjuna the chief deity of Srisailam fell in love with her. The story is told that a herd of cattle belonging to a king named Chandra Gupta of the area, part of which is now known as Srisailam was looked after by a Chenchu herdsman.

'A folk-tale current among the Chenchus of Byrluti gundem narrated by Arthi Guravadu', says that long ago there was a family belonging to the sugali, (Lambadi, Banjara) tribe community. The family did not have any children. They prayed and made vows to Gods and Goddesses. They had a female dog which also did not bear pup. One day a saint visited them. The family approached him with reverence and respect and requested him to bless them with children, pleased with their piety and hospitality, the sage gave them
two morsels of food to be taken by the wife, and four morsels of food to be given to their dog. Having boundless carving for children, the wife ate the four morsels meant for the dog and gave the two morsels to the dog mean for her self. After some months, the dog gave birth to two little beautiful girls and the woman gave birth to a puppy. The couple were surprised and distressed by the turn of events. They could not reconcile themselves to this unexpected result and turned out the dog with its pretty kids. They also left the place for food. The dog afterwards found out a nice shelter for the kids in the forest. She perpetually supplied everything needed by the kids, either by stealing from the neighbours or by scaring away the traders and grocers.

As time passed and years rolled by, the two kids grew into womanhood. They were very beautiful and attractive. One day the twin sisters were watching a water course near their home. A man who had come for hunting, saw these beautiful twin sisters and suddenly caught hold of the elder one and took her away with him. The younger one ran away into the forest in fear, to hide herself. Afterwards, the younger sister went in search of her elder sister and atlast reached her sister by following the traces of beads, flowers and personal things thrown off by her elder sister along the route to give a hint of the path by which she had been forcibly carried off. She found out that her elder
sister was living with a man and she agreed to live with her sister. After some days she was given in marriage to a man living nearby. The mother dog, having returned to her place, did not find her daughters. Getting concerned about their welfare, she went in search of them. At last, after hazardous travels she reached her elder daughter house. The elder daughter received her mother with much love and affection and treated her as best as she could. After a few days, the dog started going to her younger daughters house. The younger daughter could not recognise her mother and drove her away. But the dog persisted and began forcibly to approach her and establish her identity. At this time, the younger daughter became wild with rage and beat her so severely that the dog succumbed to the injuries. The elder daughter after waiting for sometime for the return of the mother dog started in search of her mother and to her great shock, found her lying dead. With great sorrow she brought the dead body of the dog and tied it up to the roof in her house in the upper storey. When the younger sister came to know her mistake, she begged her elder sister to pardon her. When both the sisters went up to see their mother, surprisingly enough they found that the of the dog had turned into gold. The sisters were delighted, but felt very sorry for the loss of their mother, who had always guarded them with affection and even in her death bequeathed wealth in the form of
gold to ensure a happy life for her children. The Chenchus claim that they are the descendants of such a worthy dog. Even now the Chenchus give much importance to their dogs. The dog is forced to live with them as one of the members of the family and they even share their food with it. The dog faithfully accompanies its master in the hunting expeditions and other journeys as in the case of many tribes engaged in hunting.

Leaving aside all these folk-tales found through conjectural reconstruction of their early history, we can once examine the situation with an objective mind. We find that these groups of people undoubtedly share early traditions of human society of course, infiltration of various tracts is there due to interactions through historical process.

The Chenchus, a food gathering tribe, are predominantly found living in Nallamalai hills. Nallamalai hills which are a portion of the Eastern ghats are spread over Kurnool, Prakasam and Mahaboob Nagar districts. Nallamalai and adjoining Yerramalai hills which belong to Archean age are the traditional habitats of the Chenchus. These hills are endowed with rich flora and fauna and the Chenchus have been subsisting on food gathering and hunting of wild animals. According to 1991 census, their total population is 29,100.
They are predominantly found in the forest and mountain tracts of Guntur, Prakasam, Kurnool, Mahaboob Nagar and Ranga Reddy districts.

The Chenchus and Yanadis possess identical physical and social characteristics. Both the groups are black in complexion, medium in stature with wavy or curling hair. The clans or surnames are identical among both the communities and in several places, marriages between Chenchus and Yanadis are socially permitted. But most of the Chenchus from forest area claim that they are a distinct group.

The Chenchus are divided into the following 6 endogamous sub-divisions:

1. Adavi Chenchus (forest dwellers)
2. Deva Chenchus (Temple Servants)
3. Bontha Chenchus (who prepare bamboo sticks)
4. Krishna Chenchus (Nomadic mendicants)

The divisions of caste and labour are in four categories generally, but a bit flexible and accommodative, to create and share a feeling of oneness i.e., an idea of integration and unity. Tribes, in course of imitating varnasharama sub-consciously preferred to group themselves.
into divisions under the Hindu influence. Through brahmanization, these four divisions and hierarchy concept has been slowly transplanted and understood by these groups, and thus bound them together into one unit, but with four conventional divisions. Sankaracharya, the saint and great Hindu had also established four matts or monasteries at four corners of this country, which form an invisible bond among the castes to accommodate the Hindus together against the forces of Buddhism which eroded Hindu society at that time.

This acceptance and tolerance are manifested in the temple at Srisailam, not only to accommodate forest dwelling community called Adavi Chenchulu, but elsewhere too. In the Jagannatha temple of Puri, some such savara group of people are there in temple service. Even most of the temples located in tribal or semi tribal areas bear such testimonies. Some regional appellations can also be noticed among the Chenchus like Konda (mountain) Chenchu i.e., those who live in the hills or mountains or jungles. Another is uru (village) Chenchus who have now settled down in the villages in plains for the sake of livelihood. The Uru Chenchus are found living specially in towns and well settled villages.

The Yanadi Chenchus are those who live under the hills of Ahobilam of Kurnool district and in some villages of Cuddapah and Nellore districts.
The Bontha or Botva Chenchus are also semi-nomadic in nature who live on selling bamboo mats and baskets. They often visit coastal towns and places of religious fairs, strictly they have no permanent residence and do not encourage inter marriage system.

The Chenchu Dasaries are a mendicant group of Kurnool district who eke out their existence by singing songs in praise of lord Narasimha of Ahobilam. These are generally a nomadic village-folk going on their begging itinerary in a particular seasons of the year. These Chenchu Dasaries are different from forest Chenchus and represent a heterogenous group which comprises several castes also. These Chenchus are also known as Krishna Chenchus. The men-folk wear a tuft of peacock feathers on their head and produce sound by beating a round shaped a bronze metal disc. The women folk prepare mats and collect trees leaves and sell them in the rural areas.

The Chenchu habitat is significant not only from a religious point of view, but also from an archaeological and historical perspective. Mannanur appears on the main road leading to Srisailam from Hyderabad and it is a focal point for Chenchu development activities. Earlier this Manuluru village was known as Manuluru which means a habitat of
saint. In the course of time this Manuluru became 'Mannanur'. In the western parts of Mannanur village some of the paleolithic stone axes have been found.

As the Chenchus are not civilized to improve their conditions, government has included the Chenchus under primitive tribal groups. The government since 1930 has been making efforts to bring these Chenchus nearer to normal stream of society. In order to develop the primitive tribal group (Chenchus), the Government of India has established ITDA.

There is variation in the growth of Chenchus population from district to district and from decade to decade. The variation and abnormal increase of Chenchu population may be due to inter-district migration or errors in enumeration. By and large the family size of Chenchus is small. A Chenchu family with five to six children is a rare feature. The Chenchus are distributed in all the districts of Andhra Pradesh. But primitive Chenchus are found in large numbers only in Nallamalai and Yerramalai hills.
2.1 DEMOGRAPHIC ASPECTS OF CHENCHUS

The Chenchus live in small settlements. A Chenchu settlement is locally termed as 'Gudem' or 'Penta'. Earlier they used to roam about in the forest in search of food and returned to a familiar spot in the evening for the night rest. These familiar places might have had a name and it might have continued for quite some time. Some Chenchus mention that particular groups of Chenchus had been identified to vegetate in particular areas for food gathering and were called 'Gumpu' which literally means crowd. But in reality it is kin-group or band of families moving in a particular area, in search of food. 'The place of habitation of these groups was given a name relating to the locality or person who was prominent in that particular group. Each group contained on biological proximity and lived in separate places in that locality.

According to the Census of India 1961, the Chenchus' habitation fixed at one place, bearing a proper name of the place, must have been a later development. In early days they lived in small conical thatched huts or oblong low huts. These habitation came to be known as 'Pentas'.

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Chenchus are still at a pre-agriculture stage of economy. Their settlements are usually found in the forest on which they heavily depend. They have symbiotic relationship with forest and subsist largely on flora and fauna available in forest. Each settlement of the Chenchus may consist of 3 to 30 huts in the forests depending on the availability of forest resources for their livelihood. We can find bigger settlements with more houses where they have taken cultivation as their main occupation.

Every Chenchu gudem consists of several clusters of conical huts dispersed hither and thither in a larger area. Some time we find that the distance between one hut and another is more than fifty yards. The grouping of huts is invariably based on kinship pattern. Close kinsmen like brothers-in-law or brothers build their huts very near to one other.

Generally Chenchus live in circular shape huts pitched on a slightly elevated area measuring 10 to 12 feet in diameter. During nights, they share their dwelling with their livestock (goats, sheep, poultry etc). Due to this practice their houses are generally unhygienic. Several persons especially children suffer from scabies and other skin diseases. Mulnutrition related diseases are very
common among chenchu children. The most common disease among Chenchus are enlargement of liver, angular stomatitis, ophthalmic diseases, hair discolouration, moon face, dental caries, and iron deficiency diseases. Protein calorie malnutrition is very conspicuous in all the age groups. Vitamin-'A' deficiency diseases and prevalence of high rates of malaria may be responsible for enlarged liver and spleen. A massive nutrition programme for pregnant and lactating mothers along with 0 to 6 age group children must receive highest priority.

2.2 SOCIAL SYSTEM

The social organisation is perhaps that part of Chenchu culture which has undergone least change despite the developments of recent years. There is no substantial change in their social customs and traditions, as is evident from early marriage. Apart from arranged marriage, marriage by elopement is also in practice. Bride price and dowry system are also prevalent in the Chenchu society as gifts in modern times. The expenditure on marriage among Chenchus is from Rs.5,000 to Rs. 6,000. The Chenchus bride grooms are now demanding bicycle, wrist watch etc., as gifts from bride’s parents. Widow remarriage is acceptable.
Polygamy is also allowed in exceptional cases. While sororate is encouraged levitate is totally discouraged.

By religion, Chenchus are Hindus. They offer sacrifice, (Bhog) to the village deities on Makara Sankranthi and during Dasara and Diwali festivals. The flesh of sacrificial cock is distributed as 'Prasad' among Chenchu families on the festival days. They accord much importance to birth and death rituals. The 21st day of child birth and 11th day of death of any family member are specially celebrated. On these two occasions, the community members are invited for a lavish feast. The system of 'Illarikam' is prevalent in Chenchu families. According to which a boy leaves his parental home to stay at the house of the would-be father-in-law. He becomes a potential and ultimate choice to marriage of his daughter. The boy shall have to stay and serve the family even after his marriage is much in practice. With the introduction of educational institutions and other incentives, the Chenchu parents are evincing interest in the education of their children. This is revealed from the fact that some of the Chenchu boys are admitted to the village residential school.
ECONOMIC LIFE

The socio-economic life of tribal communities is markedly different from that of the non-tribal or advanced group of people. They have a very simple technology which fits well with their ecological and conservative outlook. Moreover, their economy can be said to be of the subsistence type. That means it gives the assurance of subsistence livelihood to persons through the social determination of labour and land allocation and social right to receive emergency material at times of need and has pervasive social control of production and distribution.

The economic system of the Chenchus is essential that of a tribe of hunters and food gatherers. Most of the Chenchus depend for their food supply on that which nature provides. There are a few families who, by owning a few domestic animals, are emerging from this lowest and primitive stage of human development. Cultivation is generally meant for the planting of small millets and Indian corn and raising of tomato and chilies in the vicinity of houses.

As the history reveals and also as it can be seen at present, the Chenchus collect a variety of tubers, roots, leaves and fruits that are grown in the forest for
their daily livelihood. This practice is gradually declining with the increasing availability of domestic requirements by way of public distribution system. Chenchu gadda, the most common tuber found throughout the year (except in summer) is the most important forest food for the Chenchus. Apart from that they also dig out and eat a variety of tubers, such as varra gadda, 'Javara gadda', pulsa gadda, Nula gadda, Yeravala gadda, (Diascorea oppositifolia), Githa gadda, Boda gadda, Cheda gadda, (Amorphophallus paeonifolia), puli dumpa (Dioscorea daemona), Bhuckapulasa gadda and a host of others. Chenchus collect some of the edible leaves like Kalabonda (Aslove veera), Devadari leaves (Oxalis, Erythroxylum monogy-num) etc., boil them in water with salt and chilly powder if available and consume in combination with tubers or rice. The forest fruits which the Chenchus collect for consumption are 'Jana' (Grewio rotundifolia), Nela eetha (Phoenix louen-nil), Chitimiti pandlu (Garadeni agummitera), Maredu (Aeagle marmelos), Konda nekkara (Xemenia americana), custard apple, Morli (Bhuchanania lanzan and B.Latifolia), sycamore, thorn apple and a number of others.

Honey collection is a very predominant activity among Chenchus. Generally honey combs are found over the clefts or in deep valley. Particular clan members are generally own the honey combs, among the clan members. The traditional rights in this particular activities are strictly
observed among Chenchus. They extract honey from the honey combs during night by lighting a big fire at the place of extraction. A big rope is tied to a nearby tree and one person reaches the comb and collects in a basket normally made of goat skin. In this tedious task, Chenchus prefer to go with their brothers-in-law rather than with their own brother. The brothers-in-law are kept at pivotal position especially where the rope is tied to a tree. A chenchu believes that his brother-in-law takes more care of his life compared to his own brother. His thinking is perhaps influenced by levitate system of marriage. He thinks that in the event of his death his own younger brother may not only take away his life, but also grab his property according to their customs. Hence they give more importance to affinities than to consanguineous bonds. In all economic endeavours one prefers joint ventures with relatives from his wife's side rather than from his own brothers.

All the forest products are mentioned for direct consumption of Chenchus but, of course, honey can be used as a commercial product. The minor forest products that are collected for commercial utility include, gums, such as thapsi (sterculea urenes), Konda gogu (cochlospermum religion) and thiruman (Anogeissus SPS), soap nuts (sapindus emerggentus), cleaning nuts (Strychnos potatorum), Maredi
gadda (Dicaliphis hamiltani), myrobalans (Terminalia Chebu-
la), Madupaku/Addaku (Bauhinea vaheli), Beedi Leaves
(Dispyros meanlnoxylon), Sugandhi (Hemidesums indicus), Monga
fruit (Andia spinosa), Adavi amudam (Jatropha curcas) etc.,
the collection and disposal of the MFP has become a major
economic activity among Chenchus which surpasses traditional
food gathering and hunting. The beginning of the exploita-
tion of the forest resources for trade and commerce has
resulted in a drift in the living conditions of Chenchus and
has considerable impact on the local ecosystem.

DEVELOPMENTAL PROGRAMMES

The general feeling is that Chenchus can be
developed economically and educationally only when they
settle permanently at a particular place. The erstwhile
British government in Andhra region and erstwhile Nizam
government in Telangana laid the foundation for the
development of Chenchus in forest areas by creating exclu-
sive enclosures in the forest areas. The former Madras
government has allotted 6141 acres of land to the Chenchus
for their house sites, cultivation and rearing of their
goats and sheep. Similarly, in Mahaboob Nagar district
nearly one lakh acres of land were notified as 'Chenchu
12 Reserves' as per the recommendation of Haimendrof.
In early 1950 the forest department attempted the land colonization schemes to settle the Chenchus permanently on land cultivation. But these schemes also failed as they leased out land freely to others for cultivation purposes. Chenchus never understood the concept of ownership of land and no systematic effort was made to impart to them skills connected with agriculture. There was no improvement in the situation even during plan period, as Chenchu villages located in reserve forest did not get the benefit of agricultural programmes. Even the Chenchus living outside the forest area at Parigi, Devarakonda, Machentra etc., have not derived the benefit of agricultural development programmes as they are mostly landless and their habitations are situated inaccessible and sparsely distributed in interior areas.

Earlier the forest department was incharge of the implementation of welfare programmes for the Chenchus living in the forest villages. The forest department used to engage them in bamboo cutting and afforestation schemes on daily wage basis. The forest department also started schools and hostels for the benefit of tribal children. With the creation of tribal welfare department, the responsibility of the upliftment of the Chenchus was passed on to tribal welfare department. The tribal welfare department has
augmented infrastructure facilities and welfare programmes.

In pursuance of tribal development policy adopted during the Fifth Five Year Plan period, an Integrated Tribal Development Agency for Chenchus (primitive tribes) was established during 1975-76 for implementing intensive and systematic developmental programmes for the benefit of Chenchus.

To identify and implement the developmental programmes in six districts where the Chenchu population is predominant, a state level committee with the Director of tribal welfare as chair person, representatives of state level department as members and project officer as member secretary has been constituted.

For effective implementation of various schemes and to have closer supervision of various programmes which are meant for the upliftment of Chenchus, the ITDA for primitive tribe (Chenchu) has been shifted from state head quarters to Srisailam, the central place of Chenchu habitat. This agency has been implementing poverty alleviation schemes for Chenchus in all six districts viz. Kurnool, Mahaboob Nagar, Prakasam, Guntur Nalgonda and Ranga Reddy with 80 per cent subsidy (both central assistance and state
plan funds) and 20 per cent margin money from Andhra Pradesh Scheduled Tribes Co-operative Finance Corporation (TRICOR).

Some of the important schemes with a wide range of programmes implemented for the development of Chenchus are as follows:

A) AGRICULTURE

i) Land based programmes:

1) Assignment of Government lands,
2) Purchase of private land for cultivation to landless Chenchus,
3) Horticultural programmes,
4) Cultivation of lands in earmarked chenchu enclosures, and
5) Supply of agricultural implements, plough bullocks, bullock carts and supply of seeds, fertilizers and pesticides.

B) MINOR IRRIGATION

Provision of borewells and open wells, energisation of irrigation wells and supply of electric motors and oil engines.
C) ANIMAL HUSBANDRY

1) Supply of milch animals and sheep and goat units.
2) Pig rearing.
3) Calf rearing.

D) FISHERIES

1) Farmer training programmes to Chenchus,
2) Training in tailoring, plastic wire baskets, toys, embroidery and leaf-plate making,
3) Training in typewriting and computer operation, and
4) Training programme in light motor vehicle driving.

E) SCHEMES UNDER I.S.B SECTOR

The Chenchu entrepreneurs are sanctioned the following schemes for their benefits:

1) Kirana Stores
2) Beedi and cigarette bunks
3) Tea stalls
4) Soda shops
5) Cycle rickshaws
6) Cycle shops
7) Vegetable vending
8) Coconut selling shops at temples
9) Small cloth shops
10) Carpentry
11) Fancy shop etc.

F) MEDICAL AND HEALTH SERVICE

1) Conducting periodical camps in Chenchus settlements.
2) Immunization programme
3) Malaria treatment
4) T.B. Screening and treatment
5) Chlorination of drinking water wells in Chenchu gudems.
6) Drinking water supply
7) Digging of bore wells
8) Digging of open wells

The Chenchus who are gatherers and hunters are now taking up cultivation and domestication of cattle due to the incentives offered through special schemes for their development.

EDUCATION

Literacy levels and educational attainments of Chenchus are as follows:
The first Chenchus primary school was started in 1916 at Bairlutigudem, Kurnool district by the forest department. The forest department later extended its activities to 21 more villages to impart education to the Chenchus in particular. Some of these schools were provided with boarding facilities for boys and girls separately. In the beginning Bairluti school was started with 21 students and one teacher. From 1935 it became a four teacher school. Later it was converted into an upper primary school. These pupils were taught crafts like weaving and bamboo article-making apart from primary education. The Chenchu boarders are provided free boarding and lodging and each student is supplied with three pairs of clothing, one mat and one bed-sheet every year. In order to educate the Chenchu children and improve their knowledge about the outside world they are being taken on excursions every year to important historical and academic centres.

After the establishment of tribal welfare department in 1947, 22 Chenchus schools were regrouped into seven centrally located, Ashram Schools which are kept under the closer supervision of the social welfare officer of the district concerned.
The first school for the Chenchus in Telangana area was started during 1942 at Mannanur. Later schools were started in other villages viz., Wataverlapalli, Appapur, Pulichelama, Padra etc., At present Mannanur upper primary school is converted into a high school. There are two upper primary schools at Amrabad and Lingal. The panchayat samithi started two schools during 1980. One Ashram school at Farhabad and a primary school at Wataverlapalli with hostel facilities for Chenchu students are functioning.

Even though the government has been formulating and changing the strategies from time to time for tribal development there is a general impression that they are not yielding the expected result because of the flaws in the planning and implementation.
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2. Chapter X of Manucharitra, p.46.


4. Ibid., p.1.


