CHAPTER II
CMNCNU POPULATION -
A BRIEF ETHNOGRAPHY
2.1 Chenchus who still practise hunting and food gathering type of economy with incipient agriculture, are one of the 33 scheduled tribes of Andhra Pradesh found mostly in the Nallamalai forest hill ranges. There are different versions about the origin of the Chenchus. Manusmriti makes a mention of the tribe Chenchus and treat them on par with Andras. The Lord Chenchu was ascribed to a person who lived under a Chatty (tree), the interpretation derived from the ecological point of view. Some Chenchus knew about this interpretation. Chenchus relate themselves to be attached to the Lord Mallikarjuna, the presiding deity of Srisailam temple.

According to one interpretation the legend goes like this. Once, there used to be a couple living around Srisailam, the present temple town. They were wandering in forest and were sad as they were not getting any children. Once, they accidentally met Lord Mallikarjuna, whom they prayed for children. The Lord granted their wish with a condition that the child should be dedicated to Him. Later, they got the child and the grown up girl used to wander in the jungle. She was called Chenchita (the girl who lived under a Chatty) by people and one day when she came across Lord Mallikarjuna, she fell in love with Him and the descendants of this girl are called as Chenchus.
One more version says that, Chenchus used to look after the cattle of a king called Chandragupta of Srisailam area. There used to be a black milking cow in the herd which used to disappear in the jungle and not giving milk in the house. The Chenchu herdsmen got suspicious and when followed came to know that an young man who was later identified as Lord Mallikarjuna was milking the cow. When they tried to catch him, he went inside the cave and made their attempt futile. Later, the Chenchu women came forward to catch him and ultimately one Chenchu woman succeeded and the young man fell in love with her and married her as his second wife. This place later emerged as a shrine, the famous Srisailam temple of the present day where even now, some Chenchus are employed as helpers to the priests.

2.2 Geography

The plateau region like the rest of the Deccan region is a geological formation belonging to the Archaean age and is made up of sandstone quartzites. The hill ranges reach heights more than 2,800 feet and these hills are interspersed with narrow valleys which cut through the hills from north-east to south-west. Krishna river flows from east to west throughout the year. The climate is like that of Central Deccan. Hot season is from the middle of February to the end of May. The rains start from June and last with interruptions up to the end of September. Rainfall averages 20 inches. The winter lasting from October to February is cool.
2.3 **Flora**

The foot hills of the Nallamalais where rainfall is comparatively scarce bear only scrub interspersed with a few trees of poor growth. Continuous forest covers the higher slopes and the greater part of the plateau. At a height of about 1,500 feet of the forest is an inferior deciduous type in which the predominant trees are Hardwickia binata, Anogeissus latifolia, Albizia amara, Calbernia paniculate, Acacia leucophleba, Calocaroxylon swainsonia and Diospyros chlorozyylon. The trees of this type are useful for timber. In higher altitude where rainfall is heavier we find Tectonia grandis (Faku), Terminalia tomentosa, Stercorarius marsupium, Caloheria latifolia (Yerra Dara), Grewia tiliasefolia, Garuga pinnate, Bassia latifolia, Terminalia bolarica, Sterculia uvana, Sterculia villosa, Girodina rottilariformis, Alliaria velutina, Cassia fistula, Sapindus emarginatus, Albizia odoratissima, Albizia lobbek, Diospyros melanoxylon, Bombax malabaricum, Rundulis suberosa, Buchanania latifolia and Boswellia serrata, Tamarindus indica and various species of Ficus, mainly Ficus bengalensis, as well as Magnifera indica.

Profuse climbers like Bauhinia vahlii, Vitis latifolia, Combrusatium ovalifolium and Cryptolaena buchanani and grasses such as Andropogon contortus, Schima nervosum and panicum taypan. Bamboo mixed with trees are seen in abundance. The common types are Gandrocalamus strictus and Bambusa
erundinacea which are used by Chenchus for their hut construction.

2.4 Fauna

There are considerable number of bears, panthers, hyenas, wild cats and wild dogs and on the southern side of the plateau towards river Krishna tigers are constantly reported. Bear is considered as dangerous by Chenchus and panthers kill their livestock. Sambhar, spotted deer, wild goat, nilgai four horned antelope and wild pig, hare, red and gray squirrel, porcupine are consumed by Chenchus. Brown and gray monkey and several kinds of rats, mice, rats, peacocks, jungle fowl are plenty.

Parrots, doves and pigeons, crows, wood peckers, wagtails, and number of small birds, kite, hawk, eagle and snakes of several species are seen. The Indian monitor, a large arboreal lizard is hunted by Chenchus. Other smaller lizards and crocodiles are also said to live in this vicinity.

There are megalithic sites in this territory. On the southern side of river Krishna, stands the famous Siva temple at Srisailam. This is mentioned in the Snda Purana, which is not later than 7th century A.D. Pilgrims used to come to this temple from the steps constructed through heirluty, Nagaluty and Peddacheruvu. Chenchus used to levy a small amount on these pilgrims for ensuring their safety and transport.
2.5 Physical appearance

Chonchus are slender and medium in stature. The colour of the skin is dark black brown to a rich copper colour. The eyes are brown and sometimes black. The hair is wavy to curly. No true woolly or frizzy hair occurs. They have a low face with steep forehead, a deep depression at the root of the nose, a strong supra orbital ridges and flat nose with wide nostrils. The chin is small and pointed.

2.6 Dress

Chonchu man's dress consists of a waist-string (moletadu) made of twisted fibre and a small piece of loin cloth (gosh batte); five or six inches wide, passing between the legs and covering the genitals. During winter season, Chonchu wraps the body in a cotton cloth, which he uses sometimes as a head gear (turban). Some men possess two pieces of clothes; for body and a turban. Young men wrap around their waist a length of cloth when they go out or visit places. Of late, some Chonchu men are seen wearing shirts like the plain people, particularly the settlements which are nearer to the towns.

    Chonchu women have adopted the clothes of the plains. They wear a choli or bodice covering the upper part of the body, a sari and under the sari a short ragged piece of cloth. Old women do not wear choli but cover the body with the folds of sari. All women possess bangles. Most women have their ears pierced and wear small ring or studs of various metals.
in the lobes and some have the nostrils perforated and wear nose studs. Matte or toe ring, Tali (marriage locket) and a string of blackbeads are the symbols of married status. Of late, the plastic and silver ornaments are popular among the younger generation.

2.7 Hair style

The women comb their hair, tie into a knot called koonu. Some Chenchu women use coconut oil, whereas, the men get their hair dressed with the help of a neighbour or a barber. Otherwise, they leave their hair in natural style and men are also seen tying the hair into a knot.

2.8 Dwelling

Earlier, Chenchus used to migrate from place to place in the forest according to the changing seasons. Now we find this migratory movements only among the interior settlers of the forest. The availability of water, fruit bearing trees, particularly Mahua and edible roots and tubers influence the selection of sites for settlements. At present, some of the Chenchu settlements are nearer the edges of the jungle nearing to plains.

Chenchu huts are conical and oblong type. The hut is small and compact. They make their own huts with the help of their relatives and with the material acquired from the forest. The huts are simple with a centre post and in the periphery there are small posts and these are connected by bamboo pieces
and covered with leaves and grass. The door consists of a separate piece of bamboo wattle more closely woven than the wall. It is simply closed and tied with a string. The huts of the Chenchus living in villages are mud walled or stone/concrete walled. Some houses were constructed by the forest department at Mannancoor, Darluty and Nagaluty but Chenchus after staying for a while deserted them. There is no definite pattern in the internal arrangement of the huts.

2.9 Material culture

The household goods are minimal due to their seminomadic habit. Chenchu men use digging sticks, bow and arrows. The arrows are metal tipped sometimes. For honey collection, they use various types of ropes and cord, honey baskets, sword like batons for removing honey comb.

Chenchu women use numerous earthen pots, which are brought from plains. Wooden implements for cooking in the form of spoons, dishes, storing articles and bamboo baskets of various kinds are seen. These articles are mostly prepared by Chenchus themselves. Of late, some aluminium and plastic vessels are also seen in some households. The common musical instruments are flutes and drums.

2.10 Food and drinks

Chenchus eat rice, ragi, millets which they get by bartering with forest produce and sometimes by purchasing the grain with the money obtained by the sale of the jungle produce.
They eat wild tubers called Chanchu pedda and the flesh of various animals killed in chase. They do not boil the meat but heat it over the fire and eat. Now a days, the roots and tubers are very scarce even in forest and to satisfy their hunger sometimes they eat different leaves of plants like Devadaru, Loddaku, Chenchaleku, Pandlineaddakura and others. They supplement their food by taking fruits such as Konda ethe pandlu, Konderseredu pandlu, Valaga pandlu and Seetha phalem.

They generally do not store any food except Mahua and Ippe flowers. Their favourite drink is country liquor. They prepare liquor from their own distillery, out of Mahua flowers. But of late, liquor from Thummachekka and jaggery is also being prepared. Majority of the Chenchus including women consume liquor.

2.11 Personal Hygiene and Health

Due to the scarcity of water they generally do not take bath regularly. The surroundings of Chenchu villages are clear. Use of soap is not common. But Chenchu boys who reside in Govt. run hostels use it and of late it has entered into some houses also.

Earlier, Chenchus used to depend on herbal and indigenous cures. But of late after the starting of mobile medical unit at Mannanoor and Kondanesul for the Mahaboobnagar district and the dispensary at Saigutty in Kurnool district, Chenchus are taking slowly to allopathic medicines. They do not show
any aversion to modern medicine. The rampant diseases are malaria, scabies, rheumatic pains and venereal diseases.

2.12 Social Organisation

According to the Chenchus themselves they can be broadly divided into four groups. They are: (1) Koya Chenchus inhabiting the regions of Shadruchal in Khamen district, (2) Konda Chenchus found in the Nellamalai forest hill ranges of Kurnool, Machaboobnagar and Guntur district, (3) Chanchu Desaris of Kurnool district, and (4) Ura Chenchus who are found in towns.

The term Koya Chenchus refers to the Chenchus of the Shadruchal. Konda, in Telugu means hill. Those who made hill as their abode in Kurnool, Machaboobnagar and Guntur districts are referred as Konda Chenchus. Chanchu Desaris are considered to be priests and mendicants in Kurnool district. Though this group is not seen as a separate entity, Chenchus refer them as Chanchu Desaris and there is no prohibition for inter-marriages with them. Those who are settled in urban and plain areas of Kurnool and Guntur districts are referred as Ura Chenchus. These breed divisions as recognised by the Chenchus are purely based on geography and there is no restriction for inter-marriages between them.

Among the Chenchus, social organisation has undergone least change and it represents the olden days human society who were practising hunting and food gathering economy. There is no particular tribal organisation among Chenchus. The
principal units of the Chenchu society are clans and the family. A Chenchu identifies himself with a particular clan when he utters his name.


Clan exogamy is considered as a main function of clan. Default is severely punished and it is rarely broken. There is no indication of the origin of different clans from a particular clan. Clans might have been the territorial units first and this tendency is still noticed to a certain extent now. Chenchus give some explanations about the origin of the clan names, but there is no indication of clan system being totemic.

Chenchus do not consider groupings of particular clans into a single unit (or larger exogamous division) though they have some particular liking for a particular clan in marriage.

Kinship system among Chenchus is classificatory and bilateral. The kins of both mother's and father's side have important social and ritual roles to play. It is a patrilineal society.
Family is the smallest and fundamental unit of the Chenchus social structure and the larger versions are clan and village community. It is the basic unit for social and biological needs caring the children and forming part of the larger social units. Most of the marriages are monogamous and families are nuclear type. A Chenchu family prefers to live with its relatives. It is common to find kin groups staying nearby.

2.13 Marriage

There are two types of marriage among Chenchus. Marriage by negotiation called *nallu* and marriage by elopement termed as *raji* (marriage by love). Marriage within the clan is prohibited. Uncle-niece and cross cousin marriages are practised. Village endogamy is practised to a large extent. Widow remarriage is observed.

When the boy attains adulthood the parents of the boy approach the parents of the suitable girl with some friends for negotiations. If the negotiation is successful, the bride groom's father offers liquor to the bride's relatives and elders to mark the deal. The opinion of the boy is invariably taken and in most of the cases, the boy chooses his partner and asks the parents to settle the deal.

Marriage by elopement was also observed. When a Chenchu boy and girl falls in love and decides to marry and if their parents do not approve this, they simply elope into the jungle
For some days and join another village until their parents reconcile. In the meantime, the sympathetic relatives mediate with the parents to accept them as husband and wife.

There is no formal divorce. When a married woman goes with another man, her husband moves the tribal elders and gets compensation from the new husband.

Abortion is practised by the Chenchu women if they indulge in illicit sexual contact. The methods practised are by using asafoetida and papai fruits in the first month of pregnancy. Sometimes, the leaves of a particular tree called addu nutru chattu is used for termination of pregnancy. There are some herbs for removing barrenness also. But, most of the Chenchus are not aware of this.

2.14 Economy

The Chenchus were mainly dependent upon jungle products for their livelihood. They used to collect wild tubers, fruits, honey and occasionally hunt wild animals. For this purpose, they used to migrate temporarily from place to place in the jungle establishing camps. In addition, some Chenchus rear goat, sheep and buffaloes. During the rainy season some Chenchus near the river banks carry on fishing.

Collection of honey is from March to June. The main forest produce in the Nellamelai forest is tamarind, Mahua flower, myrobalan, bidi leaf, honey and soap nuts.
They hunt rabbits, birds and other small animals with their bow and arrows. They are also employed as forest labourers in cutting bamboo and wood by the contractors. Earlier they used to have income from the pilgrims visiting Srisailam temple as Mirasis by collecting Matka fees as charges for guides and safety travel. After the roads were laid, pilgrims started moving by buses and the temple authorities used to compensate for some time and now they stopped it. The forest administration and state government gave some lands to the Chenchus in the forest and in the foot hills for cultivation by providing them bullocks, carts and milching animals. But it is observed that most of the Chenchus have leased out their lands to others for cultivation or managing it as share croppers. Agriculture is yet to make a serious dent among them.

They also make liquor for domestic consumption. When there is demand from the plains, Chenchus are sought for liquor and some of the houses in the interior jungle prepare liquor for selling besides house consumption.

2.15 Literacy

Chenchus speak Telugu language with an intonation (slang) which looks as though it is a separate language of their own. About 96 per cent of Chenchus speak Telugu language and the rest were recorded as Oriya and Tamil speakers. Chenchus are very backward in education. There
are special schools being run by the state government for the Chenchus with boarding and lodging facilities. At present about 10 schools in Mahaboobnagar district and 6 schools in Kurnool district are being run for Chenchus by the Social Welfare Department. Interest in education is by and large confined to the Chenchus of the contact areas.

As per 1971 census, about 6.5 per cent of the Chenchus are literate and the proportion among males is 4.7 per cent and whereas among females it is 1.8 per cent. Though the level of literacy among Chenchus is less but it is comparatively little better to the Andhra Pradesh tribals which is about 5.3 per cent.

2.16 Population Distribution

Chenchus are distributed in almost all the districts of Andhra Pradesh but they are mostly concentrated in the districts of Mahaboobnagar, Kurnool and Guntur. The earlier census figures shows the distribution of Chenchus in Madras Presidency and Nizam's territory separately, and from 1961 census onwards only we get the combined figures.

Table 1. Growth of Chenchu population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Madras Presidency</th>
<th>Percentage of variation</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Nizam Territory</th>
<th>Percentage of variation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>7,164</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>6,954</td>
<td>-2.94</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>1921</td>
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<td>1921</td>
<td>6,121</td>
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<td>2,254</td>
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<td>1941</td>
<td>12,863</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* Madras + Nizam territory
From the earlier census reports, it is clear that there was a decline in population in every census due to epidemics and movement to interior jungles except in 1931, wherein, the increase in the Madras Presidency may be due to the large scale migration from Mahaboobnagar district to Kurnool district. In 1961, they were recorded as 17,509 (9,042 males + 8,567 females) whereas, in the 1971 census, they were recorded as 24,178. The growth rate of Chenchus in Telangana region was comparatively high than in the Andhra region. The earlier census reports show sex ratios in favour of males.

The distribution of Chenchus as per 1971 census in different districts of Andhra Pradesh is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Distribution of Chenchus in different districts of Andhra Pradesh

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.No.</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Chenchu population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Mahaboobnagar</td>
<td>5,353</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Kurnool</td>
<td>2,832</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Guntur</td>
<td>8,031</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ongole</td>
<td>4,465</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Srikakulam</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Visakhapatnam</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>East Godavari</td>
<td>286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>West Godavari</td>
<td>465</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Krishna</td>
<td>571</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Nallora</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Chittoor</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Cuddapah</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Anantapur</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Hyderabad</td>
<td>907</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Madak</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
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<td>Khammam</td>
<td>103</td>
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<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Nalgonda</td>
<td>362</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>24,178 (Males = 12,780)</td>
</tr>
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</table>
The four districts in the Nallamalai forest hill ranges accommodate about 73 per cent of the state Chenchu population. The present work was carried out in the Acharapat taluq of Meheboobnagar district and Atmakur and Nandyal taluqs of Kurnool district where the strength of the Chenchu population is 3,439; 1,561 and 456 respectively. The two districts Chanchus were chosen because though they are in close proximity with each other, they are separated by natural barriers; a river and a vast forest land thus exhibiting as the near isolates of a larger population. Earlier works which were carried out in these two districts can be compared, besides this, the population of this area is a true representative in nature.

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