Ethnic Identity, Cultural Diversity, and Processes of Change: A Study of the Chenchus of Andhra Pradesh, India

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By

Apparao. T
08SAPH02

Department of Anthropology
School of Social Sciences
University of Hyderabad
Hyderabad – 500 046
November, 2012.

Department of Anthropology

University of Hyderabad

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the work embodied in this dissertation entitled **"*Ethnic Identity, Cultural Diversity, and Processes of Change: A Study of the Chenchus of Andhra Pradesh, India*"** is carried out by me under the supervision of Prof. P. Venkata Rao, Department of Anthropology, University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad, and has not been submitted for any degree in part or in full to this University or to any other University.

Date:

Hyderabad.   **APPARAO. T**

Department of Anthropology

University of Hyderabad

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that **Mr. Apparao. T (Reg. No. 08SAPH02)** has carried out the work embodied in the present dissertation entitled **"*Ethnic Identity, Cultural Diversity, and Processes of Change: A Study of the Chenchus of Andhra Pradesh, India*"** under the supervision of Prof. P. Venkata Rao, Department of Anthropology, University of Hyderabad. The dissertation represents his independent work and has not been submitted for any research degree of this University or any other University.

(Prof. R. Siva Prasad)   (Prof. P. Venkata Rao)

Head   Supervisor

Department of Anthropology

(Prof. Aloka Parasher Sen)

Dean

School of Social Sciences

University of Hyderabad

Hyderabad

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ABBREVIATIONS

ITDA   – Integrated Tribal Development Agency

VTDA   – Village Tribal Development Association

DTWO   – District Tribal Welfare Office

GCC   – Girijan Co-operative Corporation

PDS   – Public Distribution System

PTG   – Primitive Tribal Group/Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group

VSS   – Vana Samrakshana Samithi

EDC   – Eco Development Committee

MFP   – Minor Forest Produce

VKP   – Vanavasi Kalyana Parishad

JFM   – Joint Forest Management

AAY   – Anthyodaya Anna Yojana

IKP   – Indira Kranti Patham

GVVK   – Girijana Vidya Vikas Kendra

PO   – Project Officer

SHG   – Self Help Group

DFID   – Department for International Development

APRESS   – Andhra Pradesh Right to Eye Sight Society

LVPEI   – L V Prasad Eye Institute

MGNREGS – Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme

CHELE   – Chenchu Livelihood Enhancement

NGO   – Non Government Organization

ST   – Scheduled Tribe

VRSP   – Varada Raja Swamy Project

INTRODUCTION

The major impetus of Anthropology is to understand the individual as person. Radcliffe-Brown (1952: 10, 101) made this clear by perceiving individual as a biological organism who gets transformed as person when connected by social relations in a social system. The Anthropology's prime concern is to understand such person in the context of a society and culture. Barth (1987) outlined the spheres of Anthropological knowledge. According to him, "The Anthropology of Knowledge must encompass three spheres, each embracing the previous one, viz: native concepts and representations, the world as constituted by these concepts, and the real world of which this social and cultural constructions forms a part" (1987: 87). Studying the "other" society is often a challenging task for an anthropologist or ethnographer. An anthropologist often locates himself or herself in the midst of a strange locale, unknown people and culture for this exigent task. Becoming a part of the "other" society or at least to familiarize with it is a daunting task. The fieldworker has to immerse in a different culture, should be neutral to values of the host culture, appreciate it, and even imitate it to certain extent. A fieldworker has to internalize such attributes because his/her goal is "to grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realise his vision of his world" (Malinowski, 1922: 19). With this broad objective, this study will make an attempt to understand and conceptualize ethnic identity and cultural diversity of Chenchu community from their point of view.

The social and cultural analysis of human society can be done from different perspectives. But, the point of view of the people of a society and culture needs to be analysed carefully and articulated authentically. The point of view of the researcher may add to the subjectivity in the understanding of a culture. Although, the subjectivity is inevitable, the researcher should try to minimize that. The people are also subjective at times while expressing their ideas about the attributes of their identity and culture. Each one may adopt their own perspective in the explanation. However, these perspectives are always dynamic and accordingly stimulate people to actively interpret and reinterpret the social situation. Human beings are actively engaged in and influenced by social interaction. Different perspectives are learned through communication (interaction) with the members of the same society, or the

other; or through the institutions of systematic learning. Several factors such as interaction with the members of one's own community and neighbouring communities, appreciation, imitation, and adaptation shape the ideas of a person. With experience, an individual can reach a position to take up one of the many perspectives according to his/her choice. The majority of population of a community may adapt a single perspective to understand the social phenomena. Such perspective is more important for the researcher while understanding insider's point of view. The researcher made an effort to understand such perspective in order to minimize the subjectivity in the understanding of the Chenchu society. However, the perspective adopted in this thesis may not capture entire social reality but at least analyse the society in a meaningful way.

Group consciousness is increasingly attaining importance in the contemporary world. The reasons may vary depending on time and space. Glazer and Moynihan (1975: 3) opines "For in the welter of contemporary forms of group expression and group conflict there is both something new and something common: there has been a pronounced and sudden increase in tendencies by people in many countries and in many circumstances to insist on the significance of their group distinctiveness and identity and on new rights that derive from this group character." Such tendencies have been developing everywhere as a result of increasing awareness, development of education and political consciousness. The group, whatever kind, is in continuous competition with one or many other neighbouring groups. The competition may be for a major or an appropriate share in the resources, or social or political or religious or economic supremacy within the territory, or for a better status of any kind. The group consciousness expressed in one form or the other in particular instances, for example, at the time of interaction with neighbouring communities. The actors are more conscious of 'their' status and the status of the 'other' at the time of such interactions. The actor(s) use certain symbols, language, behavioural patterns, or any other constructs to express the specific attitude towards the specific outsider. The perceived outsider is always treated as different from the member of one's own group. The outsider or the other will not be allowed into the social space beyond certain extent depending on the relative values of the actors in the situation.

Plural societies always involve an expectation that ethnic groups will retain their traditional ethnic ways. The members of each ethnic group are often conscious of their affiliation to a certain group for the vested interests apart from a belief in common mythical or real descent. The shared culture of the members plays a key role in the group consciousness. It will be realized better at the boundary between different groups involved in continuous interaction. Group consciousness is minimized in cases of isolated groups or the groups which have minimal interaction. The intellectuals of the disadvantaged ethnic groups are among the most visible practitioners and the articulate spokesman of ethnic consciousness.

The tribal society of India is very much in contact with the groups living in plains. The government programmes and policies have a significant role in this regard. The increasing contact with outsiders has brought significant changes in the traditional life of tribal societies. They have adopted some cultural elements from neighbouring groups and retain some of their own. This has also resulted in the diversity within tribal groups. The same tribal group with same set of cultural practices encounter various groups in different territories and absorbs different cultural elements which divide the group into sub-groups based on similarities and differences. The continuous interaction with outsiders also influenced the ascribed, achieved, and asserted identities of tribal communities as well as their members. It has also led to the diversity within the group. The diversity depends upon the kind of groups in interaction. Changes in identity depend upon interaction and accompanied with the changes in cultural practices of the group.

Human beings are social animals. They can never live in isolation. Culture has given a meaning to their life. It is a learned behaviour of human beings and unique to every social group. It includes the learning of social norms, traditions, and customs of one's own society as well as similar aspects of any other society with which a person is in contact. These aspects influence the life of a person in various ways. The term 'culture' has been explicitly defined by E. B. Tylor in his seminal work '*Primitive Culture*'. According to him "Culture or civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (1920 [1871]: 1). But the concept of culture has been evolved from time to

time and transformed with the intellectual development in the arena of anthropology. The term 'culture' is meaningful only when a human being is a part of a society. The interaction among the members of a society or any of its parts/units plays a significant role in acquiring a culture. It is subjected to change depending on the interacting agents and circumstances of interaction. However, change in the conceptualization of culture or the culture of a society depends on the acceptance or rejection of certain behavioural aspects by a person as a member of society. The behavioural dimension of culture was emphasized in the definition of Kluckhohn and Kelly (1945). They have defined culture as "all those historically created designs for living, explicit and implicit, rational, irrational, and non-rational, which exist at any given time as potential guides for the behaviour of men" (1945: 97). Radcliffe-Brown (1952) has laid emphasis on interactional dimension. He defines culture as "the process by which a person acquires, from contact with other persons or such things as books or works of art, knowledge, skill, ideas, beliefs, tastes, sentiments" (1952: 4-5). Therefore, he believes that the culture is dynamic and changes depending on interacting persons or cultures. Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) made an attempt to examine the development of the concept of culture. In their extensive work on concepts and definition of culture, they have arrived at a formulation, according to which "Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e., historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as a product of action, on the other as conditioning elements of further action" (1952: 181). This can be described as a cumulative definition of culture which has included an archaeological dimension too for the understanding of culture. According to Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952), it consistently changes according to changing relations between nature and culture. The concept of culture spread its wings to almost every aspect of human behaviour. It is dynamic in nature, absorbs everything and justifies the absorption. Therefore, contextualizing the concept of culture is as easy as difficult.

Culture designates the expressive aspect of human experience, whereas society designates the relational (and often practical) aspect. Geertz (1973) idea of culture is a shift from the expressive dimension of the culture to cognitive dimension. According

to him, "culture is best seen not as complexes of concrete behaviour patterns – customs, usages, traditions, habit clusters...but as a set of control mechanisms – plans, recipes, rules, instructions – for the governing of behaviour" (1973: 44). But it may be too ambitious to understand the culture in entirety by applying cognitive method alone. However, he made an emphasis on symbolic aspects too. For him, Culture "denotes an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life" (Geertz, 1973: 89). Later, symbolic understanding of the concept of culture has taken centre stage for quite some time. For instance, according to Peterson (1979) "culture consists of four sorts of elements: norms, values, beliefs, and expressive symbols. While the culture concept has been greatly elaborated, it has not been fundamentally changed" (1979: 137). But, Harris (1983) made an emphasis on symbolic as well as cognitive dimensions in the understanding of culture. According to him "Culture is the learned, socially acquired traditions and life-styles of the members of a society, including their patterned, repetitive ways of thinking, feeling, and acting (i.e., behaving)" (1983: 5). Following Geertz and Harris and keeping in tune with the traditional definition of culture as well, Barclay (1986) defines "Culture is the learned or acquired "ideas" – beliefs, knowledge, plans for action, rules, and understandings – that are available to a people in a given society" (1986: 18). But Tzeng *et.al.,* (1986) divide culture into two components, they are, objective culture and subjective culture. According to them, "*objective culture* contains such social indicators as names (concepts) of things, ethnicity, gender, age, education, economic background, employment, and housing. These indicators are recognizable characteristics of people in a given social environment. *Subjective culture* contains such social indicators as feeling, believing, conceiving, judging, helping, intending, and meaning" (1986: 62). Similarly, Griswold (2004) emphasized on the expressive dimension of culture by adopting the idea of Kluckhohn and Kelly (1945).

An attempt to understand cultural diversity among the Chenchus is made keeping in tune with the above ideas. In fact, the culture has been understood as the system which encompasses four sub systems such as social, economic, political, and linguistic. The analysis in this thesis is depending on these four subsystems.

Review of literature:

An attempt has been made here to understand tribe as an ethnic group. The other intervening concepts like ethnic category, ethnic boundary, cultural identity, interaction, and ethnicity are helpful for the understanding of ethnic identity. The concepts of acculturation, assimilation, and tribe-caste continuum are very important in the understanding of ethnic identity, cultural diversity, and process of change among the tribal communities. The literature has been reviewed pertaining to these concepts in order to understand the case of Chenchus of Andhra Pradesh, India.

Ethnic phenomena have received explicit theoretical attention in the work of those anthropologists who are concerned with the organization of plural societies. The idea of pluralism has its roots in the work of Furnivall (1939). It was systematically developed by Smith (1965). However, it has taken a great momentum with the publication of *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference* by Barth in 1969. In fact, Barth's (1969) idea of ethnic group is a paradigm shift of understanding society and culture. There was a significant change in looking at the concept after Barth. Despres (1975: 189) describes "Reflecting more specifically upon the literature of anthropology, one is tempted to classify ethnic studies 'before Barth' and 'after Barth'." This statement reflects the remarkable influence of Barth's work on his contemporaries as well as on later researchers focused on ethnic phenomena. It has gradually developed as a very important concept in anthropology and subsequently emerged as the source for the later developments in the conceptualization of ethnic phenomena. A convergent line of development is evidenced by a glossary of concepts which includes, ethnic and/or racial diacritica, identity, and status; ethnic boundaries, populations, groups, and stratifications; and boundary maintenance and incorporation process such as accommodation, assimilation, and conflict (Despres, 1975: 191).

Tribe as an ethnic group:

The concept of 'ethnic group' has been evolved as an alternative to the stigmatized concepts like race and tribe in anthropological literature. Jenkins (1986) believes that the concept of the ethnic group developed as a conceptual replacement of the tribe which "may be attributed to a post-colonial movement in the moral or philosophical centre of gravity of social anthropology" (1986: 178). However, it could

not replace the term tribe in general usage. The reasons can be traced from its definition. The evolution of the concept 'ethnic group' is characterized by the changes from its understanding as a biological concept to a cultural concept. The definition given by Weber (1922) is a combination of biological and socio-cultural elements. According to him, ethnic groups are "those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of custom or both, or because of memories of colonization and migration; this belief must be important for the propagation of group formation; conversely, it does not matter whether or not an objective blood relationship exists" (1996[1922]: 56). The definition given by Weber was quiet popular among the early theorists. Gradually, culture has taken the central stage in understanding the ethnic group without ignoring the biological dimension. Francis (1947) made an emphasis on culture as a major criterion to understand the ethnic group. He opines "every ethnic group has a distinctive culture, but a common culture pattern does not necessarily constitute an ethnic group" (1947: 396). He believes that the similarity in cultural pattern may result out of intensive contacts among the ethnic groups with different cultures. However, he doesn't mean that the cultures entirely assimilate. He believes that "An ethnic group may also modify and change its culture without losing its identity" (1947: 396). Ethnic group can never completely lose its identity despite having intense contacts with other ethnic (culture) groups. No culture can completely erase the other regardless of its popular practices or social, economic, religious, and political dominance. However, scholars like Shibutani and Kwan (1965) have defined ethnic group again in a biological dimension. According to them, an ethnic group "consists of a people who conceive of themselves as being alike by the virtue of their common ancestry, real or fictitious, and who are so regarded by others" (1965: 19). These two scholars have emphasized on the role of "other" group or an interacting group in the recognition of a person's ethnic group. Therefore, regardless of the status claims of a person or his/her group, the other or the interacting groups needs to recognize the same.

The definition given by Barth (1969) is more comprehensive and includes all the components discussed above. He has adopted the analysis of Naroll (1964) for an inclusive definition of ethnic group. According to him, ethnic group "1) is largely biologically self-perpetuating, 2) shares fundamental cultural values, realized in overt

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unity in cultural forms, 3) makes up a field of communication and interaction, and 4) has a membership which identifies itself, and is identified by others, as constituting a category distinguishable from other categories of the same order" (1969: 10-11). This is a widely accepted idea of ethnic group and extensively used in the anthropological understanding of ethnic group. He has mentioned that "Ethnic groups are categories of ascription and identification by the actors themselves" (1969: 10). Therefore, it can be assumed that membership in an ethnic group can't be changed similar to other categories such as caste and tribe. Hence, a tribe can be conveniently called as an ethnic group which is an unprejudiced linguistic construct. This view asserted by Cohen (1974). He observes that tribes "are everywhere becoming integral parts of new state structures and are thus being transformed into ethnic groupings with varying degrees of cultural distinctiveness" (1974: ix). The concept of ethnic group is a significant development in the history of ethnic studies which has led to an ideological shift in the study of ethnic phenomena. It has also stimulated the intellectuals to study the social and cultural phenomena from a new perspective. Barth (1969: 14-15) made an emphasis on culture in defining ethnic group but he believe that the cultural features of a group may change over time due to the contact with other groups. But, the processes of self-ascription and identification need not necessarily undergo a similar change. The sense of distinctiveness continues to persist. Therefore, the overt behaviour of ethnic groups may become similar after long term intensive contacts while maintaining a strong sense of ethnic identity.

Cohen (1974) defined ethnic group in the framework of a social system. According to him, an ethnic group can be operationally defined as "a collectivity of people who (a) share some patterns of normative behaviour and (b) form a part of a larger population, interacting with people from other collectivities within the framework of a social system" (1974: ix). But this definition seems to be not very inclusive. It seems to be narrow in the scope and less accommodative for the affective dimension which operates among the members of a community as a cohesive force. De Vos (1975) has given much emphasis on "self" centred idea of ethnic group. According to him, an ethnic group is a "self-perceived group of people who hold in common a set of traditions not shared by the others with whom they are in contact" (1975: 9). However, self-perception alone cannot be a criterion for the ethnic group. There should be a concrete common attribute among its members. The definition

given by Glazer and Moynihan (1975) is very inclusive and more or less followed the idea of Barth (1969). According to them, ethnic group "refer not only to sub-groups, to minorities, but to all the groups of a society characterized by a distinct sense of difference owing to culture and descent" (Glazer and Moynihan, 1975: 4). For instance, in Indian context, minorities or any other groups are not necessarily ethnic groups because of their fluidity. Having a common culture and descent is more important in such circumstances. Eriksen (1993) adopted this view in his study on ethnicity and nationalism.

Ethnic groups are not merely or necessarily territorial groups. Therefore, different ways in which they are maintained is important. They persist as significant units only if they imply marked differences in behaviour, that is, persisting cultural differences. Van den Berghe (1975) defined ethnic group in cultural terms. According to him "Ethnic groups are defined BOTH by objective cultural modalities of their behaviour (including most importantly their linguistic behaviour) and by their subjective views of themselves and each other" (1975: 72). It seems to be a broad idea of ethnic group because of the high degree of subjectivity in the understanding of boundary. Group at large may identify the boundary but there is a greater movement of members or cultural attributes across the boundaries. In such a case, the persistence of the group may be at question. Similarly, Hicks and Leis (1977: 2) have given much emphasis on the cultural aspects of the group rather than biological aspects. This view is entirely expressed from a cultural perspective and ignored the aspect of common descent. In such cases, a religious group or even a nationalist group which is the combination of several groups of people may be termed as an ethnic group. However, such an idea seems to be very ambitious because those groups might have been stratified at multiple levels.

Few scholars understood ethnic group as an interest group or at least they have prioritized the dimension of "interest" in their analysis of ethnic phenomena. Glazer and Moynihan (1975: 7) say that certain changes have taken place in the conceptualization of ethnic group from Weber (1922) through Barth (1969) to till date (1975). According to them, the "emphasis of an ethnic group is being shifted from culture, language, religion, *as such*, to *interests* broadly defined of the members of the group" (1975: 8). However, the ethnic group is not necessarily an interest group and

all the interest groups need not be ethnic groups. For example; a group of students, a group of teachers, a group of workers, a trade union etc., are not ethnic groups. Those groups do not share a permanent relation such as culture and descent. For Greeley (1976: 39) ethnic groups are concrete realities with which we must cope. A component of "interest" plays an important role in his analysis too. According to him (1976: 47) ethnic groups provide a pool of preferred associates for the intimate areas of life. The most critical issue raised about ethnic groups is the nature of their relationship to religious groups.

Schermerhorn's (1970) sociological idea of ethnic group can be implied to a larger group which may be a nation or a religious group. He defined ethnic group as "a collectivity within a larger society having real or putative common ancestry, memories of a shared historical past, a cultural focus on one or more symbolic elements defined as the epitome of their peoplehood" (1970: 12). Feagin (1978: 10) has adopted similar approach for the understanding of ethnic groups. But this concept is too vague and the idea of putative ancestry can be applicable to the people of a nation because the people of a nation often trace their ancestry to a putative common ancestry despite lacking a real ancestral relation. Following Barthian approach, Hughes (1994) believes that ethnic group is a concrete group with fixed membership criteria. But, unlike Barth (1969), he has ignored the biological dimension of ethnic group. According to him "If it is easy to resign from the group, it is not truly an ethnic group" (Hughes, 1994: 91). Similar idea has been adopted by Farley (1995: 6) too. Certain interest groups also identify themselves as well as by others as distinct groups. They may not often share social and cultural characteristics. Although an ethnic group is self-consciously ethnic, its self-consciousness often has its source in outsiders. The identity that others assign to us can be a powerful force in shaping our own self concepts (Cornell and Hartmann, 1998: 20).

With reference to tribal communities of India, Dube (1977) considers tribal groups on par with ethnic groups. He says "they [tribal communities of India] believe that they have a common descent, consciously hold a collective self-image, and possess a distinctive cultural ethos, many elements which are shared by the collectivity. They often develop individual identities and function as the principle unit of the larger group loyalty beyond kin, clan, and residential local groups" (1977: 4).

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Therefore, there can be no doubt to describe tribal communities of India as ethnic groups. In fact, it is an unprejudiced term and can be widely used to replace the colonial construct, 'tribe'.

It is very difficult to give a precise and universally applicable definition to ethnic groups. However, an ethnic group can be understood as a group of persons distinguished largely by common culture, typically including language, religion, or other patterns of behaviour and belief. The overt expressions of an ethnic group may be called as ethnic markers. They may be visible characteristics of a physical being or human body and the expressive dimension of the traditions and customs of an ethnic group. However, ethnic group is a self-perceived as well as identified by others as distinct group. Classification of persons and local groups as members of an ethnic group depends on their particular expressive traits of culture. At the same time, ascription is the critical feature of ethnic groups. However, the conceptualization of ethnic group will be more crystallized because of migration and contact with new groups of people. The heterogeneous conditions of existence are more important actors in this regard. The functions of an ethnic group keep traditions alive, provide preferred associates, help in organizing the group, offer opportunities for mobility and success and enable men to identify themselves in the face of the threatening chaos of a large society. On the other hand they reinforce exclusiveness, suspicion and distrust, and serve as the ideological foci for conflict. However, occupational differentiation may lead to cultural diversity and stratification within an ethnic group.

From the above discussion, the tribe can also be understood as an ethnic group. However, many other social groups can also fall under the category of ethnic group. 'Tribe' exhibits all the characteristics of an ethnic group. In this context the Chenchu community can be conceptualized as an ethnic group. The cultural diversity and identity can be mapped from the point of view of their interaction with other ethnic groups because ethnic groups are not fixed cultural entities; they are product of dynamic interaction.

Identity of an ethnic group:

Tribal identity may be the feature of the social structure because of its specific reference to a certain kind of social organization. But ethnic identity is a general term

and it does not refer to a particular type of group. Nevertheless, it is an important characteristic of ethnic groups. Cohesion is possible in the ethnic group only when the members identify with it. Occupation, territorial location, and religion play an important role in defining ethnic identity of a person (Glazer and Moynihan, 1964). Erikson (1968) looked at it not only from the perspective of person but also from the community. For him, contexts play a vital role to establish the identity. The contextualization of the ethnic identity can be successfully done in multi-ethnic setting. Therefore, ethnic identification arises out of and within interaction between groups. Barth (1969: 13-16) believes that ethnic groups are formed to the extent that actors use ethnic identities to categorize themselves and others for purposes of interaction but their identity and interaction are always associated with culture specific set of value standards. At the same time, a whole system of inter-ethnic relations presupposes a structuring of interaction along the boundaries of ethnic group. Therefore, boundary is very important for the comprehensive understanding of ethnic identity. He (Barth, 1969) presented ethnic identity as an aspect of "social organization". It depends on ascription which is to be recognized by outsiders as well. For him, it is imperative, in that it cannot be disregarded and temporarily set aside. It implies a series of constraints on the kinds of roles an individual is allowed to play, and the partners he may choose for different kinds of transactions (Barth, 1969: 17). But, according to Parsons (1975: 57), ethnic identity is primarily the aspect of culture.

Isaacs (1975: 30) emphasized on primordialities, such as; blood relations, customs of the group, rituals, and attachments with territory in the understanding of basic group identity. But, ethnic identities vary according to language, dialect, and referent populations for which contrasts are being drawn. De Vos (1975) put ethnic identity as a symbolic differentiation among various ethnic groups. He says "ethnic identity of a group of people consists of their subjective symbolic or emblematic use of any aspect of culture, in order to differentiate themselves from other groups" (1975: 16). Therefore, it can be understood as the symbolic aspect of culture. However, symbolic differentiation between groups need not correspond to ethnic identity. For instance, by the virtue of symbolic differentiation, the sub-groups may not represent ethnic identity. However, the culture is fundamental for identity of an ethnic group. Despres (1975) discussed about achieved and ascribed identities. He says "Ethnic identities which are self-ascribed need not correspond to the identities

which others impose" (1975: 193). At the same time, he believes that ethnic identities need not be inclusive of all categorical identities. Devereux (1975: 42) describes "Identity is the absolute uniqueness of the individual." But, when it comes to group; the individual's identity may be subsided by the interests of the group or the individual may express different identities according to the circumstances under which he/she is engaged in social interaction. He further believes that ethnic identity influences the personality of the member of an ethnic group. He called it as ethnic personality of a person.

Greeley (1976: 15) opined that ethnic identification is persistent despite educational development, adaptation to the lifestyle of the other ethnic groups, geographical dispersion, and continuous intergroup contact. In fact, the group consciousness hastened due to same factors. He has also discussed about the resurgence of ethnic identity (Greely, 1976: 149). Therefore, regardless of the form of society and its transformation, the ethnic identity is going to survive in one form or the other. Ethnic identity will always emerge out of the "disagreement between the namer and the named" (Rose, 1976: 14). It is also very important to note that the intensity and the kind of ethnic identity differ in different social situations. According to Rose (1976: 30), persons of higher class positions within an ethnic group will tend to identify with their social class rather than with their ethnic status. Even though the person identifies himself with a social class on economic parameters, he/she cannot ignore his/her ethnic identity because of its importance in the social domain. Sahay (1977) believes that the tribal communities express their identity in the form their names, festivals, stories etc. Das (1989) also used similar parameters to study the ethnic identity with reference to the ethnic groups of North-East India. He opines that the formation of associations, hero worship, stories related to bravery, specific gods and goddesses, fairs and festivals are tools to establish ethnic identity of any community. However, Ray (1989: 30) in the study from the same region (North-East India) opines that tribal identity is a result of modernization.

Schein (1998: 281) argues ethnic identity, its meaning, and importance vary in time and space. Following Barth's arguments, Nagel (1998) also opines that ethnic identity is a dialectic process involving internal and external opinions and processes. This produces a "layering" of ethnic identities (1998: 240). Cornell and Hartmann

(1998) discussed about thick identity and thin identity. According to them, thick identity comprehensively organizes the social life, whereas, thin identity minimally organizes the social life. However, the actors may use their identities instrumentally in pursuit of their goals but they do little to shape, reinforce, or transform those identities. They simply exploit the identities available and useful in situations. This is true to larger extent in any society. However, the elites of the community do their part in shaping, reinforcing, and transforming the identity. But such an alternative identity takes a shape only after repeated attempts by the enlightened individuals.

Singh (2000) examined the identity of local communities in the context of globalization. He aptly says, "The cultural identity of local communities was based upon occupational specialization, its related rituals and belief systems and in many cases on ritual and religious symbolization of material products, e.g., work of art, animal and food products, institutions dealing with social and cultural life of the local community, especially women, children and precious community resources" (2000: 87). In a community like Chenchu, these attributes are very important in understanding the ethnic identity and processes pertaining to change.

Boundary:

Boundary maintenance is very important in Barth (1969) conceptualization of ethnic group. He says it is important to examine the "ethnic boundary that defines the group, not the culture stuff that it encloses" (1969: 16). The nature of continuity of ethnic units is clear and depends on the maintenance of boundary. The "dichotomization between members and outsiders" (1969: 14) is very important to understand the continuity and changing cultural form and the content. He opines that the boundaries persist despite flow of personnel across them. Stable, persisting, and often vitally important social relations are maintained across boundaries. Barth (2000) discussed the idea of boundary more elaborately in a later work. He has explained boundary at three levels. They are "[First level] literally boundaries divide territories "on the ground", [second level] more abstractly, they set limits that mark social groups off from each other, [third level] and finally, they provide a template for that which separates distinct categories of the mind" (2000: 17). This classification is very apt to understand the boundary of social groups in detail while keeping the culture as the core of the analysis. On the contrary to Barth, Herlinger (1972) suggests, the

boundary may be specifically cultural and inter-ethnic interaction is governed not by absolute principles of social organization but rather by orientation to the cultural symbol system which constitutes ethnic identity. Hoetink (1975) also argued in favour of cultural content. He believes that culture can be understood as a boundary maintaining mechanism.

Despres (1975: 199) emphasized on the aspect of competition while defining boundaries. He believes that ethnic boundaries weaken and the assertion of ethnic identities appears to diminish if there is no competition among interacting groups. For Hicks and Leis (1977: 18) a key figure in the process of changing and maintaining ethnic boundaries is the broker. The broker can be anything which sufficiently influences the identity of a community. For example, an incident, a conflict, and resource competition or scarcity play a crucial role in the maintenance of ethnic boundaries. But, Cohen (1985: 69) argues "People become aware of their culture when they stand at its boundaries: when they encounter other cultures, or when they become aware of other ways of doing things, or merely of contradictions to their own culture." Similarly, Nagel (1998: 237) asserted on identity and culture as fundamental to the construction of boundaries and the production of meaning.

History, mythology, rituals, genealogical content are very important in drawing the ethnic boundaries. Ethnic boundaries function to determine identity options, membership composition and size, and form of ethnic organization. The boundary as it was explained by Barth (1969) is of little use in describing the internal dynamics of the group. But, it helps in understanding the dynamics of inter-group interaction. In any case, boundary answers the question: who are we?

Ethnicity and interaction:
Ethnicity is a kind of identity which can be situated in the primordialities of an ethnic group. Several scholars emphasized on this dimension of ethnicity. For instance, Shils (1957) has given much emphasis on blood ties in the understanding of ethnicity. But, Smith (1965) emphasized on social as well as biological aspects in defining ethnicity. He uses the concept of ethnicity to denote "common province and distinctiveness as a unit of social and biological reproduction; it accordingly connotes internal uniformities and external distinctness of biological stock, perhaps of

language, kinship, culture, cult, and other institutions" (1965: 104). However, due to its importance as an influential concept to understand identity, it can be prioritized in the analysis of identity of any ethnic group. As Barth (1969) understood from Northwest Pakistan, the Pathan and Baluch populations disclosed a more inclusive system of ecologic, political, social, and cultural relationships. The structure and the organization of their respective communities could not be explained apart from the analysis of this system. This more general system of relationships enjoins ascribed statuses that were presumptively determined in reference to social origin and cultural background. Therefore, he conceptualized ethnicity as a largely subjective process of status identification. But, Cohen (1969) refers ethnicity to the strife between ethnic groups, in the course of which people stress their identity and exclusiveness. He opines that the persistence of ethnicity is "the result of intensive interaction between ethnic groupings and not the result of complete separatism" and it "involves a dynamic rearrangement of relations and of customs, and is not the outcome of cultural conservatism or continuity" (1969: 199). In a later work (1974) he puts ethnicity as a political phenomenon and a type of informal interest grouping. Similar view adopted by Bell (1975) but emotional relationship has been given much importance which can make people as a group or differentiate them. He opines "Ethnicity has become more salient because it can combine an interest with an affective tie" (1975: 169). However, ethnicity may be viewed as one form of social stratification but differs from social class which is the determinant of economic status. De Vos and Romanucci-Ross (1975) suggests that ethnicity can be defined on four levels of analysis. "First, in respect to a social structural level; second, as a pattern of social interaction; third, as a subjective experience of identity; and fourth, as expressed in relatively fixed patterns of behaviour and expressive emotional style" (1975: xi).

Ethnicity can be understood as an expressive dimension of ethnic group. In fact, ethnic identity is the part of ethnicity. Ethnicity attains much importance when there is a strong ethnic consciousness and identity. Such an ethnic consciousness is possible because it is composed of such primordialities which keep it intact. For instance, Schermerhorn (1970: *xiv*) opines "ethnicity is a composite of shared values, beliefs, norms, tastes, consciousness of kind within the group, shared in-group memories, and loyalties, certain structures relationships within the group, and a trend toward continuity by preferential endogamy." At the same time, there should be some

continuity in the shared sense of the ethnic group. De Vos (1975: 17) believes that ethnicity, "in its narrowest sense a feeling of continuity with the past, a feeling that is maintained as an essential part of one's self-definition." But its collective component is explicit and very vital in defining ethnicity. It is also an outcome of interaction of a social collectivity. Similarly, some scholars have given priority to socio-cultural factors in the understanding of ethnicity. For example, Dashefsky (1976) also emphasised on the collective experience of people in the analysis of ethnicity and ethnic identity. Gordon (1978) describes it as a shared sense of peoplehood. The interaction is not limited within the group; in fact, the ethnicity will be crystallized when there is a contact with one or many other groups. It is observed in some studies that "tribalism is often considered as another way of referring to ethnicity" (Hicks and Leis, 1977: 5). At the same time, ethnicity expressed through "tribalism" is qualitatively the same as ethnicity expressed through "nationalism" (Brien, 1998: 265). With reference to Indian tribes Dube (1977) suggests that "tribal ethnicity should be studied both in its expressive and instrumental dimensions" (1977: 4).

Greeley (1976) emphasized on the religious differences which are profoundly important because they are ethnic. He believes that such religious differences define 'us' over and against 'them' (1976: 85). However, the awareness of ethnicity depends on recognition of difference on the existence of more than one ethnic label, category, or group of people in the same social context. Such differences are sustained and often intensified by interaction across ethnic boundaries (Hicks and Leis, 1977: 11). Horowitz (1985: 2) opines that ethnicity involves the assertion of some ineffable bond among group members. The ineffable bond, for him, is kinship. He says "the language of ethnicity is the language of kinship" (1985: 59). But, Alba (1990: 17) treats ethnicity as a principle of social allocation. Similarly, Cornell and Hartmann (1998) describe ethnicity as a community centred concept. According to them, "If ethnicity does not deliver community in practice, it can do at least in the imagination" (1998: 98). But, Eriksen (2001: 262) emphasized on the relationship between groups whose members consider each other culturally distinctive. Banks (1996) after examining several definitions of ethnicity, describes it as "a collection of simplistic and obvious statements about boundaries, otherness, goals and achievements, being and identity, descent and classification" (1996: 190).

Ethnicity is constructed out of the material of language, religion, culture, appearance, ancestry, or regionality. These aspects of social life exert significant impact on interaction between different groups and subsequently influence their identity. The historical basis of ethnic conflicts and mobilization are equally important (Nagel, 1998: 238). Levine (1999: 165) defines ethnicity as "the interface between mind, society, and culture." International Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences (2008) defines ethnicity in terms of shared culture and social interaction. It refers ethnicity to the "differentiation of groups of people who have shared cultural meanings, memories, and descent produced through social interaction" (Darity, 2008: 8-9).

Ethnicity is a continuous process of identity construction in which individuals participate collectively in defining and valorising a group identity. A simple definition of ethnicity is 'cultures in contact' (Downing and Husband, 2005: 14). It must be admitted that palpable differences in the dialect and religion do not exclude sentiments of common ethnicity. The dialectic variations of language across the Chenchu community and the differences in religious affiliation may be important in this regard. Next to pronounced differences in the economic way of life, the belief in ethnic affinity has at all times been affected by outward differences in clothes, in the style of housing, food and eating habits, the division of labour between sexes. But, ethnicity prevails as a uniting factor of the group members. Yinger (1997: 325-348) argues that ethnicity can be a source strength and a source of conflict. It may be a source of strength for the members of an ethnic group to fulfil their interests but may be a source of conflict while dealing with other ethnic groups which are acting against the interests of one's own group. Frøystad (2005) examined the relations between Hindus and Muslims of India in the light of ethnicity. He has treated the religious groups as distinct ethnic groups. Therefore, ethnicity is a useful concept in several situations in the analysis of group differentiation.

The culturally distinct two groups do not create ethnicity. There must be at least a minimum of contact between their respective members. Therefore, the members of different ethnic groups must have something in common for interaction in addition to being different. The phenomenon of ethnicity occurs only when cultural differences are made relevant through interaction. Indeed, "a variety of criteria can be used as the markers of cultural differences in inter-ethnic situations – phenotype

(appearance or 'race'), language, religion or even clothes" (Eriksen, 2001: 263). However, one should be conscious while analysing ethnic phenomena.

Ethnicity is often expressed in interacting situations. Members of one group are conscious of it whenever they interact with the perceived other. But, it will be realized and asserted mostly at the time of conflict among interacting ethnic groups. Despite having a dimension of interest, it cannot be merely exhibited based on an interest but those interest groups should have common culture and descent, in other words, interacting groups should have community as a basis. Therefore, it is not merely a phenomenon resulting from every expressed difference among the ethnic groups. For that reason, the idea is applied to understand the ethnic identity of the Chenchus while examining the interaction within the Chenchu community and their interaction with other ethnic groups who share a geographical territory and have vested interests in similar issues and resources.

Ethnic dynamics:

The same group of people with unchanged values and ideas would pursue different patterns of life and institutionalize different forms of behaviour when faced with different opportunities offered in different environments. Such responses of the members of an ethnic group are resulting in the internal diversity as well as change. In the present context, the specific elements of modernization include the processes of urbanization, industrialization and technological development leading communities towards change. Rose (1976: 85-101) opines that planned changes can bring changes in the social distance and power relations (reservations in electoral politics), for example, policies, development programmes, and reservations in different avenues of public life.

Acculturation:

Acculturation is the process of culture change set in motion by the meeting of two autonomous cultural systems, resulting in an increase of similarity of each to the other. Acculturation can be reciprocal. But, in some circumstances it may be one way process. Some groups of a territory may adopt the cultural elements of the dominant group of that territory but others may resist the same. It depends upon the nature and extent of interaction. The absorption of culture traits depends on the degree of contact

with neighbouring ethnic groups (exposure), sensitivity to their own ways of living, and status of the person. Variations in ethnic acculturation are two types, they are; acculturation in the direction of the lifestyle of the dominant groups and acculturation while preserving traditional ways (Rose, 1976: 45). However, Barth (1969: 10) opines "Interaction in social system does not lead to its liquidation through change and acculturation; cultural differences can persist despite inter-ethnic contact and independence." Therefore, acculturation may not alter social distance and many other aspects of group differentiation. The groups will retain their identity and culture despite acculturation.

Assimilation:

Assimilation is the process in which dominant culture groups absorb minority culture groups and produces the single culture. A minority group may come across several phases in assimilating the dominant culture yet, it may not completely submerge into dominant culture. But, the behaviour of cultural groups can be analyzed within a context of assimilation and cultural change. Park and Burgess (1924) and Linton (1940) emphasized on the concept of assimilation. Gordon (1978: 65) explained seven dimensions of assimilation: cultural, structural, marital, identificational, attitude receptional (absence of prejudice), behaviour receptional (absence of discrimination), and civic (absence of value and power conflict). However, the complete cultural assimilation of different groups is not possible because of the relative value standards of each community. This depends on how an individual identifies himself/herself and how the other identifies him/her in a specific situation. The social distance between assimilating groups may be reduced to a greater extent but it will not totally disappear.

Tribe-caste continuum:

The concept of tribe-caste continuum has its roots in the concept of folk-urban continuum of Redfield (1941). The concept was utilized by Marriot (1955) to explain the continuities from little tradition to great tradition and by Singer (1972) to examine the continuities of folk traditions in an urban setting with reference to Madras city. The concept was later utilized by many scholars to describe the cultural continuities among different groups of the people in a complex setting. Beteille (1974) also examined the concept with reference to tribe and peasantry. The continuities between

tribal culture and peasant culture are not identical. In fact, the two way flow of traditions may blur the boundary between tribe and caste or tribe and a peasant society. The boundaries of the tribe as a society have been defined politically, linguistically, and culturally by many scholars. But the boundaries may not be very concrete where there is no linguistic and political variation between tribal communities and their non-tribal neighbours. Beteille (1974) says "at least outwardly the tribal people of one particular region often resemble more closely the non-tribal people of that region than the tribal of another region" (1974: 63). There is no clear division between tribal groups and caste groups even in the religious sphere due the mutual influence. Misra's (2007) discussion about "encysted castes" emphasized on such kind of situation. Therefore, it can be understood that the tribe-caste continuity is an inevitable phenomenon with the persistent contact of these groups. There is no exact demarcation between these groups. Consequently, their identity and culture need to be understood from their core cultural elements and peculiarities. The dynamics of culture and identity can be analyzed depending on the influences of neighbouring cultures and continuities between those culture groups.

Theoretical arguments:

Scholars have adopted various approaches in the study of ethnic phenomena, though, most often, they have not confined to any single approach. They have used a combination of approaches for the better understanding of ethnic issues. Most of the approaches have taken culture and interaction as central to the analysis of ethnic phenomena. These approaches will be constructive to understand the identity of an ethnic group. The careful examination of vital approaches can be helpful for the formulation as well as to comprehend the research problem. Therefore, a brief analysis of such approaches is done under this section.

Primordialism:

The primordial approach advocates for strong ethnic attachments on the basis of deep affective relations among the members. The affective ties might be the result of the shared past of the members which reveals a historical dimension of primordialism. Shils (1957) emphasized on primordial approach for the study of ethnicity. For him, ethnicity is a fundamental force in the society and having intractable power. Geertz (1963) emphasized on the role of primordial sentiments in

Asian and African societies. According to him "By a primordial attachment is meant one that stems from the "givens" – or, more precisely, as culture is inevitably involved in such matters, the assumed "givens" – of social existence: immediate contiguity and kin connections mainly, but beyond them the givenness that stems from being born into a particular religious community, speaking a particular language, or even a dialect of a language, and following particular social practices. These congruities of blood, speech, custom, and so on, are seen to have an ineffable, and at times overpowering, coerciveness in and of themselves" (1963: 109). The primordial approach situates ethnicity in the psyche, so deeply that society and culture are bent to its will. Following Geertz (1963) idea of primordialism, Bell (1975: 169) understood ethnicity as "the emergent expression of primordial feelings, long suppressed but now reawakened...chosen by disadvantaged persons as a new mode of seeking political redress in the society." However, "ethnic identities and hatreds naturally draw people into persistent identities and antagonisms" (Levine, 1999: 166). Primordialism asserts on the idea that ethnic identity is fixed, fundamental and rooted in unchangeable circumstances of birth. The 'primordialists' consider ethnic phenomena as a natural bond between people. Isaacs (1975: 31) says ethnic identity "consists of readymade set of endowments and identifications that every individual shares with others from the moment of birth by the chance of the family into which he is born at that given time in that given place." The primordialist approach ignored the factors other than primordial sentiments. The changing needs, occupations, increasing interaction etc., may limit the significance of primordial sentiments. However, the weaknesses of primordialism are readily apparent, but despite them, it offers an important key to the puzzle of ethnic power (Eller and Coughlan, 1993).

Circumstantialism:

Circumstantialist approach is a very popular one to understand identity of an ethnic group. This approach perceives ethnic group solidarity as a result of the context. This approach contends that certain circumstances lead to the strategic selection of ethnic identity as a means of attaining desired political, economic and other social goals. Therefore, the major aspect of circumstantialist approach is to identify economic, political, social, and historical circumstances which form or reproduce ethnic groups, crystallize their interests or the relationships, and launch them into competition or conflict with one another. Circumstantialism puts ethnicity

as a flexible phenomenon. Ethnic groups have been understood as categories of interaction in which the situations play a determining role. For instance, Glazer and Moynihan (1975: 19) say "The variety of circumstances that members of a given group can meet in different situations does lead to radically different outcomes." Similarly, Despres (1975: 193) stated that "From a social organizational point of view, ethnic identities may vary according to the variety of situations in which they may be appropriately expressed." Later, Greeley (1976: 45-46) has made emphasis on this approach to study ethnic identity. He has pointed to three sets of circumstances in which ethnic identity attains importance. They are, 1) when an ethnic group is very large and has great actual or potential political and economic power, 2) when one is a member of a small but highly visible or well organized minority, 3) when a sophisticated group suddenly becomes conscious that it has become a minority and is surrounded by many other well organized ethnic communities. However, the fundamental premise of the circumstantialist approach is that ethnic identity becomes a base of collective conception and action when distinct populations are thrown into competition with one another for relatively scarce resources (Feagin, 1978; Hannan, 1979; Banton, 1983; Olzak and Nagel, 1986; Olzak, 1992; Nagel, 1995). Common to circumstantialist approaches, regardless of the degree to which they focus on interests or instrumentality, is the idea that ethnic groups are largely the products of concrete social and historical situations for a variety of reasons. Sometimes, circumstances may create new group ties by placing previously not associated persons or groups in common situations over extended periods. Interests and utility remain central features of this approach.

Oppositional approach:

The oppositional approach advocated by Spicer (1971) seeks to synthesize two influential approaches, primordial and circumstantial, in explaining the ethnic phenomenon. Glazer and Moynihan (1975) have also taken similar stand while explaining ethnic phenomena without naming it as an oppositional approach. They observes "The two poles of analysis by which we try to explain the persistence or revival or creation of ethnic identities seem to waver between what we may call "primordialists": "Men are divided thus and so, the reasons for their division are deep in history and experience, and they must in some way be taken into account by those who govern societies"; and what we may call "circumstantialists": "We are doubtful

of any such basic division and look to specific and immediate circumstances to explain why groups maintain their identity, why ethnicity becomes a basis for mobilization, why some situations are peaceful and others filled with conflict" (1975: 19). Therefore, both the approaches are crucial to understand ethnic phenomena. In connection to this, they vividly say "We have taken our stance somewhat uneasily between these two positions [Primordialism and Circumstantialism]" (Glazer and Moynihan, 1975: 20). Kumar (2010: 465) has adopted this approach while dealing with the relation among ethnicity, famine, and state. He argues that "The greater opposition (social, political, economic, or some combination thereof) perceived by an ethnic group, the greater the degree to which its historical sense of distinctiveness will be aroused and hence the greater its solidarity or more intense its movement towards redress." This approach is quite useful while dealing with simple societies.

Constructionist approach:

The constructionist approach to ethnic identity focuses not only on the factors promoting it but also on the kinds of bonds those factors create. Identity construction involves the establishment and elaboration of very different links among persons. Ethnic identity is not only a product of circumstances but also of history, and of choices of a person. Constructing the culture involves the tracing of history of a community and changes by present time. This tracing out past and reconstructing the culture and identity act as an agent of "cultural solidarity". The mobilization of group is possible by cultural solidarity. The shared interests, shared institutions and shared culture are important in group solidarity. The construction of ethnic identity depends upon the perceived position of the individual as well as the group and meaning of the boundaries. Jenkins (1997: 13-14) model is based on similar propositions. In his model emphasis has been given to the situations which determine the interactions as well as the ethnic identity of the person. Cornell and Hartmann (1998: 96) opine that four major forces are important for the construction of ethnic identities, setting in motion their creation, maintenance, reproduction and transformation. They are interests, meaning, happenstance and inertia. Nagel (1998: 237) also adopted constructionist approach for the understanding of ethnic identity.

Symbolic approach/Symbolic Interactionist approach:

The assumption that ethnicity is composed of symbols is central to this approach. Schermerhorn (1970) asserted on the importance of symbolic construction in the understanding of ethnic groups and their identity. Pandian (1981) also presented ethnicity from a symbolic perspective while discussing caste, nationalism, and ethnicity in Tamil Nadu, India. He calls ethnicity as the "symbol of peoplehood" and the "symbol of cultural boundary" (1987: 1). The symbolic reconstruction strengthens ethnic identity. The elites of the community play an important role in this regard.

The interactionist approach emphasizes on the view point that human beings are the product of the process of social interaction. Most of the scholars adopted this approach in their understanding of ethnic phenomena. As Rose (1962) opined, there are two strands to interactionist theory, they are, the focus in social organization and social process and the focus on socialization. Many other scholars (Barth, 1969; Cohen, 1974; Dube, 1977; Olzak, 1992; Nagel, 1986; Jenkins, 1997) emphasized on the aspect of interaction in understanding ethnic phenomena. All these scholars have looked at interaction from the point of view of culture and/or social organization and tried to understand the process of change. In fact, the interaction is central to all the approaches pertaining to ethnic studies. It is because of the indispensable presence of the 'other' in relation to 'us' which is a key factor in the understanding of identity of a person as well as the group.

Few scholars applied symbolic interactionism to understand ethnic phenomena. They have explained ethnic phenomena in social psychology perspective. Blumer (1969) is the major proponent of this approach. According to him, symbolic interactionism rests in three simple premises. They are, "[First] Human beings acts towards things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them. [Second] The meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows. [Third] These meaning are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters" (1969: 2). But, Charon (1979: 31) opines that "Symbolic interactionism focuses on *interaction* rather than on personality or social structure. Both stability and change in the individual and society are understood through understanding interaction."

Utilitarianism:

The 'utilitarianists' consider the interest aspect of ethnic groupings to be more important. For some scholars, ethnic groups are interest groups. They exploit the parts of their traditional culture in order to articulate informal organizational functions that serve in the struggle of these groups for power within the formal political structure. This approach was adopted in the studies of Weber (1922), Cohen (1969), Schermerhorn (1970), Schiller (1977), and Roosens (1989). Cohen (1969) argues that the members of ethnic groups "share some common economic and political interests and who, therefore, stand together in the continuous competition for power with other groups" (1969: 192). Schiller (1977: 35) has gone to an extreme subjective level and opines that the ethnic groups are the output of mutual interests of concerned people and are supported by political groups. Glazer and Moynihan (1975: 7) also emphasized on the interest aspect of ethnic group to certain extent in the understanding of ethnic identity. Similarly, Roosens (1989: 14) opines that the ethnic groups will be strengthened due to their importance as the means for strategic advantages. Banton (1983: 10) emphasized on the utilitarian perspective of ethnic groups in his conflict and competition theory.

Competition and conflict theory:

The group consciousness might be a predominant force in ethnic relations due to the marginalization of local groups by the non-tribal settlers. The influence of power relations in acquiring assets, grabbing resources, and the assertion of authority are very important in the understanding of ethnic relations. Different groups of people follow different kinds of strategies to acquire the assets, resources and power. The strategies may often lead to conflict with the competing groups. Cohen (1974) says ethnicity in the modern world "is the result of intensive struggle between groups over new strategic positions of power…: places of employment, taxation, funds for development, education, political position and so on" (1974: 96). Despres (1975) in his studies on ethnicity and resource competition asserted on the aspect of resource competition and boundary maintenance between groups as a core aspect of ethnicity and identity. But, Hoetink (1975: 17) argues that ascriptive loyalties are predominant in ethnic identity over economic ones in certain societies. Greely (1976) understood competition as an inevitable force between different ethnic groups because ethnic groups involve in continuous competition for scarce resources. However, Banton

(1983) presented conflict as an outcome of the interaction of various groups which itself draw the boundaries between groups and leads to changes in group identity. Nagel (1986) points out political systems as the sources of inter-ethnic competition, conflict and collective action. She has also emphasized on the territorial aspect of the competition. Whereas, Olzak (1986) puts competition as the source for ethnic conflict which can simultaneously alter the ethnic identity. Usually one group of competitors takes on some essential requirements of another group of competitors. Cultural differences often make ethnic boundaries easy to establish and observe. Competition thus often leads to an emphasis on ethnic boundaries, and is thereby likely to reinforce and reproduce them. When conflicts develop in plural societies, they follow the lines of caste, status, religion etc. These categories are historically conditioned; they are shaped by inter-group competition and conflict.

Ecological approach:

It was developed as a major tool to understand ethnic issues in the works of Park (1928) and Barth (1969). This model is based on the proposition that the structured interaction between 'us' and 'them' take place across the boundary. The boundary is influenced by ecological issues. Ecological issues are particularly influential in determining ethnic identity, in as much as competition for economic niches plays an important role in the generation of ethnicity. Park's (1928) theory is based on the proposition that the individuals (particularly migrants) engage in competition while adjusting in the ecological niche in new environment. If different migrant communities come together in same environment, they may acquire different niches in unequal relations depending on their ascribed and achieved identities. Barth (1969: 19) opines that if two or more ethnic groups are in contact; they may occupy clearly distinct niches in the natural environment and be in minimal competition for resources, or they may monopolize separate territories, or they may provide important goods and services for each other, i.e. occupy reciprocal and therefore different niches but in closer interdependence. These propositions are very crucial in the understanding of present research because Chenchus are living either in minimal competition with other groups in some territories where they are depending on different niches and in more competition in other territories where different ethnic groups are depending on same resources.

In the light of above studies and arguments it is clear that ecological setting in which an ethnic group is living play a vital role in the construction of ethnic identity. If multiple groups are living in the same ecological setting and depending on same resources, their relations play an influential role in creating ethnicity and in a way lead to the assertion of ethnic identity by different interacting ethnic groups. At the same time, the identity of groups will be revealed and expressed in social interaction. The interaction between ethnic groups depends upon their interests and the circumstances in which they are in contact. The continuous interaction between groups leads to the sharing of some elements to a certain degree. But this may not affect the core aspects of the cultures of interacting groups. Therefore, it can be understand that ethnic identity and its assertion is the product of interacting culture groups. This assumption is the basis for research problem.

Statement of the problem:

Identity assertion by the person is increasingly attaining importance in a highly competitive world. The social and cultural distance between different ethnic groups is leading to the assertion of one's own identity. At the same time, there is an exchange of certain culture traits between interacting groups. The interaction of groups and the absorption of some cultural traits are leading to changes in the identity of individual and his group. Construction of ethnic identity by person himself, and by the outsider, the continuity of such identities, and their impact on the culture of their own and on the other's, the influence of achieved and asserted identities on interactions within the community and with the members of other communities, boundary maintenance, competition, conflict, co-operation and the resultant changes in the identity of Chenchu community formed the problem of study.

Objectives:

1. To examine the construction of Chenchu culture and identity from the literature.

2. To analyze the diversity and regional variation within the Chenchu community.

3. To delineate the impact of inter-group interaction on the culture and identity of Chenchu.

4. To understand the dynamics of Chenchu culture and identity.

Framework of the study:

The present study adopted following propositions for the understanding of ethnic identity, interaction and processes of change.

1. The cultural elements of an ethnic group form the core of its identity. The cultural differentiation between different ethnic groups makes it realized.

2. Identity is collective and individual. It is rooted in personal self-identification, and to a significant extent the outcome of social interaction.

3. Identity depends on the construction of a social boundary by the person that differentiates 'us' from 'them'. The fluidity at the boundary influences the identity and culture of the individual as well as the group.

4. Identity is dynamic and depends on situations encountered by the members, interests of the members as well as the group, and changes in the meaning and functions of the customs. It is produced and reproduced in different circumstances.

5. Identity asserted by the actors while they are engaged in competition for resources or for habitat. Such competition can alter or lead to the reconstruction of ethnic identity.

Methodology:

The Chenchus spread all over Andhra Pradesh. But, they are larger in number in Mahabubnagar, Guntur, Prakasam, and Kurnool districts. The field study was carried for 11 months and 24 days in these four districts by selecting one village from each district. The villages are selected based on the parameters like geographical location, extent of contact, composition of social groups, displacement and rehabilitation. One isolated (more or less) settlement from Prakasam district (Chenchugudem, Pedda Dornala mandal); one rehabilitated settlement located at the fringe of the forest from Kurnool district (Kottalacheruvu, Atmakur mandal); one multi-ethnic settlement from Mahabubnagar district (Appaipally, Lingal mandal); and a settlement close to urban area from Guntur district (BKV Palem Chenchugudem,

Macherla mandal) are studied to understand the ethnic identity, cultural diversity, and processes of change among the Chenchus. All the four villages are located at a significant geographical distance from each other, that is, 75km to 230 km. The villages are different in terms of their composition, location, population size, and contact with outsiders.

The census schedules are administered in all the four villages in order to understand the educational levels, livelihoods, resources, occupational variation, economic activities, thrift groups and their activities, indebtedness, material assets, livestock, development activities, and forest management mechanisms (VSS/EDC). The social map and resource map of each village are drawn for the understanding of the social and physical setting of the villages as well as the resource boundaries. In depth interviews are conducted for the deeper probing of the issues and processes pertaining to social, economic, political, and religious aspects of Chenchu life. Interviews are conducted with the members of Chenchu community, leaders, educated elites of the community, school teachers, local merchants, members and leaders of other communities in case of a multi-ethnic village, officials of the forest department, development agencies, and non-governmental organizations for a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of ethnic identity and culture. Group discussions are conducted to understand the diversity of opinions with regard to the cultural aspects of group life. Ample numbers of case studies are taken for the purpose of illustration of self images, issues of conflict, polygyny, and leadership. The observation of the day-to-day activities of the Chenchus and neighbouring ethnic groups found to be helpful for a comprehensive understanding of interactions, conflicts, identity assertion by different individuals as well as groups, conflict management mechanisms, and other relevant activities. The school was taken as a component of study for the understanding of ethnic differences from the childhood. The school environment, the relations among students, and children's games are observed. The researcher has participated in the rituals and festivals celebrated by the Chenchus to understand the procedures. The interviews, case studies, and group discussions are conducted among the members of all age groups as well as both the gender. The secondary data (literature, news paper reports, gazetteers, reports of development agencies, non-government organizations, and census records) has been used to understand the perspectives from literature on ethnic identity and on variations between the imposed

identities and self-asserted identities. The same is used along with primary data for the understanding of changes in ethnic identity of the Chenchus. The folk stories, folk songs and myths are collected for the same purpose.

The diversity within the community is understood by using the criterion of territorial location. Territoriality plays an important role in any kind of interaction. It is also very crucial in the self-identification as well as the identification by others. The identity may change with the change in the geographical setting of the habitat. Therefore, geographical parameter has taken as the chief source for the categorization of the Chenchus of Nallamalai forest. But, the possibility for contacts with non-Chenchus and intra-community diversity are also taken into consideration. Based on these parameters, they are divided into four categories. The groups are; *Chenchus living in core areas of the forest*, *Chenchus living at fringe areas or foothills*, *Chenchus of multi-ethnic villages*, and *Chenchus living in towns and/or villages close to towns*. But, these categories are not subgroups. They are not identified or defined by the people. Therefore, they cannot be sharply differentiated. However; social, cultural, economic, political, linguistic (dialect), and technological diversity is observed among the Chenchus of these territorial categories. The social and economic relations are maintained across different categories but less frequent when compared with such relations within a particular category. The contacts among the Chenchus living in core areas are intense when compared with any other category. The contacts within a category decreases towards towns. The enlarged social space and increasing contacts with the members of different other communities of same occupational category have contributed in this regard. The Chenchus of same category display certain differences but the degree of similarity is a parameter to group them under one category. The Chenchus living in rehabilitated settlements show certain distinctive features but they can be fit into one or the other of these four categories. However, those features are addressed in the discussion.

The sharp cultural distinction is not possible among the Chenchus of different territorial groups. The movement of people is fluid among these categories. Therefore, the diversity or cultural differentiation cannot be viewed as a large scale phenomenon. Instead, it has to be understood as a phenomenon at its inception while considering common culture at large. The identity shuffles between a common identity and a

specific identity. The specific identities are not as lucid as common identity. These categories do not represent sub-cultures and are not qualified to be called as cultural categories. They are not even political categories but represents economic differences to some extent. However, the identity of "Chenchu" prevails everywhere. The territorial identity is an issue based overt expression rather than a concretized and internalized expression of the identity. It is not a unit of endogamy. Therefore, they can be conveniently called as territorial categories with some degree of commonality and difference in cultural attributes. Similarities and differences are in the traditions and customs; the political organization and dispute resolution mechanisms; the economy, occupational distribution and division of labour; the resources, livelihoods, skills, and management of resources. Similarities contribute to the common cultural consciousness and identity, whereas; differences contribute to the degree of diversified identity of the people from different territorial categories.

Significance of the study:

The study is very important for the following reasons: a) the Chenchu is a "Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PTG)" and majority of its population is using pre-agricultural level of technology. But, they are experiencing a transition because of the interventions by various agencies. They are at different levels in the process of transformation, b) the degree of contact with outsiders is widely varied depending on the location of the Chenchus, c) their livelihoods are different and depends upon their territorial location, d) their religion, ritual celebrations, festivals are highly influenced by their respective neighbours in different districts, and e) the command area of the Chenchus is variedly influenced due to state interventions like Project Tiger, Srisailam and Nagarjunasagar hydroelectric dams, and developmental programmes. At this juncture, the impact of inter-ethnic contacts has enormous importance which has a direct influence on identity and culture of the Chenchus. This aspect has given less priority in the literature. It is also important that the Chenchus are often perceived as a homogeneous hunting-gathering society by several researchers. But the diversity within the community ignored to a larger extent. At the same time, the ethnographic and developmental aspects have been received much attention of the scholars. Therefore, this study is very important for its attempt to understand the underlined processes of culture, identity, diversity and change.

Limitations of the Study:

There are several limitations to the present study in terms of conceptual and theoretical parameters. The concepts culture and identity are often considered complex in terms of their definitions, scope, and applicability. The explanation of various dimensions of these concepts is difficult; therefore, the present research is confined to few selective dimensions to understand the ethnic identity of the Chenchus. The concepts of "us" and "they" are taken as contesting parameters instead of "self" and the "other". The community as a whole is categorized into four groups based on territorial divisions. However, the divisions are made purely at the logical discretion of the researcher and not exactly spelled or constructed by the people. The territorial categorization is made based on the cultural commonality and diversity within the community and the extent of contact with outsiders. Therefore, it can be debatable. The research has adopted cultural approach for the analysis of ethnic identity. Therefore, person to person or person to group interaction has not been emphasized but group to group interaction prioritized. An important aspect where the researcher might have taken for granted is the language of the Chenchus. Despite enormous differences between the dialect of researcher and Chenchus, there is every possibility to take certain things for granted. There is a need for a larger unit to understand diversity among the Chenchus; therefore, the intense study at one place which is the usual practice of anthropologists might not be satisfied. In a period of 11 months and 24 days of fieldwork, the researcher tried to focus on a small unit for half of the period and tried to find similarities and differences in other territories based on the data collected from a primary and intensive fieldwork. Therefore, certain conceptual limitations may be inevitable. But, an attempt is made to minimize all these limitations in order to provide an appropriate explanation of the ethnic identity, cultural diversity, and processes of change among the Chenchus of Andhra Pradesh.

Chapterization:

The present thesis has been organized into eight chapters. The chapter *Introduction* introduces various concepts useful to understand and analyse ethnic phenomena. It also discusses about the objectives, methodology, conceptual framework, and limitations of the study. The chapter *Ethnic Identity: Perspectives from Literature* attempts to explain how Chenchu community was understood by various scholars. It is mostly based on the literature pertaining to Chenchus. However,

primary data is also used wherever necessary in the analysis. The chapter *Profile of the Field* gives a detailed description of the socio-economic conditions of four villages taken for the study besides giving a brief picture of the overall situation of the Chenchus of Andhra Pradesh. The chapter *Ethnic Identity: Contemporary Scenario* made an attempt to construct the identity of the Chenchus in the present context. The emphasis is laid on social, cultural, economic, political, linguistic and technological aspects Chenchu life. The analysis is mostly based on primary data collected from the field. The chapter *Intra-ethnic Interactions and Cultural Diversity* explains the internal diversity among the Chenchus. It lays emphasis on how the people of different territorial categories interact with each other and discuss the factors that are responsible for the diversity within the community. The chapter *Impact of Inter-ethnic Interactions* describes the interaction of Chenchus with tribal as well as caste groups of Nallamalai territory. It is also focused on how different interacting ethnic groups influenced the identity and culture of the Chenchus. It also analyzes the conflicts which have influenced the relations between the Chenchus and non-Chenchus. The chapter *Ethnic Identity: Forces and Processes of Change* explain the forces and processes that led to the transition of Chenchu community. The chapter *Summary and Conclusions* discuss the major findings of the study in detail and arrive at certain generalizations that help to understand ethnic phenomena.

ETHNIC IDENTITY: PERSPECTIVES FROM LITERATURE

The major objective of this chapter is to construct the identity of the Chenchus from literature. The chapter is based on secondary data available on the Chenchus. Writings of the scholars of different times are helpful for the understanding of the identity and changes through time because they reflect the society in a particular time dimension. The chapter adopted cultural approach to understand the identity of Chenchus. It traces the identity through social, economic, political, and linguistic aspects of Chenchu life. In this context it is very apt to quote Barth (1969) who cautions "When one traces the history of a ethnic group through time, one is not simultaneously, in the same sense, tracing the history of 'a culture': the elements of the present culture of that ethnic group have not sprung from the particular set that constituted the group's culture at a previous time" (1969: 38). Therefore, it is not simply the product of history but constructed and reconstructed by the members and/or the group in the process. The meanings of the symbols, the values, norms etc., may change in course of time. However, the understanding of past is very important while examining the processes in the present context.

The Chenchu is said to be one of the most ancient races in India. Fürer-Haimendorf (1943) opines that the Chenchus "are not only racially but also culturally survivals of most ancient India" (1943: 4). He came to such conclusion because he believes that the racial characteristics of the Chenchus are the fusion of Veddid and Indo-Negrid populations. This racial type is termed as Malid. He (1943: 3) says, "[Malid] is the oldest surviving racial and cultural stratum of India." Assuming Chenchu as one of the most ancient races in India, it was often termed as a "primitive" group by various scholars. This group has also attracted the attention of travellers and the administrators of colonial regime as well as Nizam administration which has resulted in several visits and brief accounts by those visitors. Mahummedan scholar Ferishta's (1794) brief mention about this population is probably the earliest written record about the Chenchus. He has described an event which he encountered in 1694 while on an expedition in Nallamalai forests along with Prince Muhammad Masum, a son of Aurangzib. However, he did not use any name to describe the population. But, based on his description, it can be vaguely assumed that he was

referring Chenchus. It was followed by a brief account of Buchanan (1807) who used the term *Chensu Carir* or *Cat' Chensu* or *Cad' Eriliguru* or *Chensu* to refer this population. Later, more detailed description came from Newbold (1846) who served as the Assistant Commissioner of Kurnool district. He has used the name *Chenchwars* to describe present day Chenchus of Kurnool district. Later, Taylor (1862) mentioned Chenchus as *Chenju* in his Catalogue of Oriental Manuscripts. Hunter (1881) used the term *Chenchuwars* similar to the term of Newbold (1846) to describe the Chenchus of Kurnool district. Mackenzie (1883) has written a brief note about Chenchus in the Manual of Krishna District. He has used the term Chenchu. It seems he has used the term for the first time in its present form. Kurnool Manual (1886) has given a brief account of the Chenchus of Kurnool district. All these accounts described Chenchus as a separate group. But, Census of India, 1891 mentioned Chenchu as a sub-division of Yanadis. Thurston (1909) has also given a brief account of the Chenchus. Hodson (1922), Aiyappan (1948), Avadhani (1961), Chandra Sekhar (1965), Gangadhram (1996, 1999), Sastry (1994, 2005) have made significant contributions toward the understanding of the Chenchus of Kurnool district. However, all these accounts came from Madras Presidency. Very little known about the Chenchus of Nizam dominions till the publication of a brief write up by Siraj-ul-Hassan (1920). Later, Khan (1933), the then Census Commissioner of Hyderabad presented a paper on the Chenchus of Hyderabad before the Anthropological section of Indian Science Congress at Bangalore in 1932. A major contribution came from Fürer-Haimendorf (1943) toward the ethnographic understanding of the Chenchus. However, his work was confined to the Chenchus of Nizam dominions. Since then, a major ethnographic study came after a long time from Bhowmick (1992) who studied the Chenchu of Mahabubnagar, Kurnool and Prakasam districts of Andhra Pradesh for an unspecified time in the years 1977 and 1979. However, the study focused more on ethnography with the idea of perceived similarity among the Chenchus from different regions and not concentrated on the diversity within the Chenchu community. Trivedi's (1978) study on linguistic aspects of the Chenchus made a detailed analysis of their language but not arrived at a conclusion about the language of the Chenchus. Instead, it leaves in confusion about whether Chenchus were having a specific language which declined in course of time or they were not having any specific language but are Telugu speakers from the beginning. Thereafter, no major study published on the ethnographic aspects of the Chenchus of Nallamalai. However, number of studies published in various

journals on the issues pertaining to social, economic, ecological, and developmental aspects of the Chenchus. For example, Fürer-Haimendorf (1948, 1967, 1977, 1980, 1985, 1991), Chandra Sekhar (1965), Suryanarayana and Gangadharam (1982), Venkatramulu (1983), Mukhopadhyay (1984), Sirajuddin (1984), Gangadhar and Padmavathi (1989), Sastry (1991, 1993, 1996a, 1996b), Fuchs (1992), Vithal, (1992), Aneel (1993), Jesuratnam (1994), Prabhakar and Narendra (1994), Prakash Reddy (1979, 2003), Kondaiah (1998), Sahu (1998), Gangadharam (1999), Jesuratnam and Yatiraj Kumar (1999), Venkata Rao (1999), Raja Reddy and Sudhakar Reddy (2005), Subbarama Raju and Suguna Kumari (2005), Chatterjee (2006), Subramanyam (2006), Varaprasad and Gangadhram (2006), Subbarama Raju, Sudhakar, and Umamohan (2006, 2009), Naik and Rahiman (2007), and Subba Reddy (2010) have made significant contribution in this regard. Tribal Culture Research and Training Institute (2006, 2010) published informative reports on the Chenchus of various districts of Andhra Pradesh. Besides this, several unpublished reports of the students and research scholars of various University Departments, Non Government Organizations, and Newspapers made significant contribution for the understanding of the Chenchus and their problems. Against this background, an analysis is made in this chapter to understand the Chenchus.

The factors that are responsible for the consciousness of the group identity need to be understood before beginning any analysis. Most probably, common culture is largely responsible for keeping people conscious of their identity. Then what about the division among the Chenchus under British administration and Nizam administration? Are they conscious of a single identity or divided depending on the geographical and political separation? How did they maintain their identity or how were they influenced by the different interacting ethnic groups? Before addressing these questions, it is very apt to quote Fürer-Haimendorf (1980: 186) who opines "All the members of that [Chenchu] tribe, which is scattered over the highlands to both sides of Kistna river, are conscious of their identity as an ethnic group even though they do not have a distinct language acting as a factor of identification." Therefore, from the above statement, it can be believed that the Chenchus are conscious of their identity as a single group despite political divisions of the geographical territory, lack of organized efforts as a group, and without a specific language. However, such a general belief cannot subside the difference among the Chenchus of different

territories. The examination of various accounts pertaining to the Chenchus of different territories may reveal the diversity of identity.

Name:

The name is the most important marker of identity. The name Chenchu seems to be taken minor alteration before attaining the present form. Chenchus are also called as *Chenchwar* or *Chenchuvaru*. Newbold (1846: 271) mentions that "They [Chenchu] are known to the neighbouring villagers by the name of Chenchucoolam, Chenchwars, and Chensuars." Hunter (1881: 552-553) described them as Chenchuwars or Korachuvandlu. *Manusmriti* (chapter X, 48) makes a mention of a tribe Chenchu and treats them on a par with Andhras; presumably they are the same as the Chenchus of today (Das, 1989: 40). There are different versions explaining the origin of the name 'Chenchu'. According to one version, the word Chenchu means 'a person living under a tree (*chettu*)'. Hence, researchers believe that the word "Chenchu" is derived from their habitat (Kurnool Manual, 1886; Thurston, 1909; Avadhani, 1972; Bhowmick, 1992). Some scholars argue that the term "Chenchu" is derived from "Chunchu" means mouse due to their habit of eating mice (Singh, 1994: 663). Aiyappan (1948: 148) has tried to trace the etymology of the term Chenchu from Tamil language. According to him, the name 'Chenchu' may be derived from 'Chunchu' meaning forelocks. He has another assumption, according to which the name may be a corruption of 'Chanchu' which is a suffix meaning 'renowned' or 'celebrated' or 'stilled in' as in Akshara Chenchu or Chara Chenchu. The name Chenchu is found in Telugu literature as well. But, it simply used to describe the population of Chenchus but no meaning has been given to the term. For example, Srinatha's popular work Sringaranaishadam has descriptions pertaining to the Chenchus of Andhra Pradesh.

Origin:

Fürer-Haimendorf (1943: 89) observes "The Chenchus appear to have no generally accepted traditions relating to the origin of their race, or of humanity in general." However, they have few stories pertaining to the origin but none are accepted by all the members of the community. These prominent stories are rooted in two different sects, they are, *Vaishnavism* and *Saivism* of Hindu religion. The popular story prevails among the inhabitants surrounding Ahobilam is about the marriage of a

Chenchu girl, *Chenchita* with the lord of Ahobilam, *Narasimha*. Therefore, the Chenchus claim *Obulesudu* (Lord *Narasimha* of Ahobilam) as their brother-in-law. Newbold (1846) recorded a legend pertaining to the origin of the Chenchus. But he clearly mentions that the description came from Brahmins but not Chenchus. According to that legend, "Previous to the incarnation of Sri Krishna Swami, in the Dwapara Yug, (the third of the four great ages,) the Chenchwars were shepherds of the Yerra Golla caste; Obal-Iswara, the Narasimha swami of Obalam, (a celebrated hill-shrine in the Nalla Mallas,) having taken away and kept, as a Chenchita, a maid of the Yerra Golla family, begat upon her children, of whom they are the descendents, and are consequently styled Chenchwars" (1846: 272). Kurnool Manual (1886: 158) sates that "As to their origin, no tradition or legend exists." But, it mentions a story which is narrated by local Brahmins; according to which, the Chenchus are the descendents of *Narasimha* of Ahobilam and *Chenchita* of *Adichenchu*. According to Mohanty (2004: 88) "they [Chenchus] have a tradition which states that their first ancestor had seven sons and one daughter. From the sons sprang seven forest tribes, one of them being the Chenchus." Mohanty (2004: 88) has also mentioned another story which traces the origin of Chenchus to the union of Lord *Narasimha Swami* and *Chenchita* and to the union of Lord *Mallikharjuna* and *Chenchita*. Both are different stories and rooted in two different traditions of Hinduism. Turin (1999: 252) observes, many Chenchus relate themselves to Lord *Mallikharjuna* (*Chenchu Mallanna*). According to this legend, they are the descendents of Lord *Mallikharjuna* and *Bhramaramba*, who in turn are the incarnation of Lord Shiva and Parvathi of the Hindu tradition. Bhramaramba is believed to be a Chenchu girl (*Chenchita*) who lived on wild leaves and fruits. In the prime of her youth she fell in love with Lord *Mallikharjuna*, the presiding deity of Srisailam temple, who ultimately married her. This tags the Chenchu religion with the great tradition of Hinduism. Though the main deity of the temple is said to be a Chenchu deity, Brahmin priest performs regular prayers. But the religious faith of the Chenchus varies depending upon the region. It is influenced by their contacts with non-Chenchus.

In the olden days, it is believed that Chenchus and Yanadis originated from the same stock. Instead of having different identities, both the communities were identified as the same group. There are several explanations about the common origin of the Chenchu and Yanadi tribes. The Brahmins call Chenchu as Yanadi Chenchu

(Kurnool Manual, 1886: 158). In the census report, 1891, Chenchu is given as the subdivision of Yanadis. Thurston (1909: 27) says "there can be little doubt that the Chenchus and Yanadis are descended from the same original stock". He has cited Mackenzie (1883) who speaks of the Chenchus as being called Yānādi Chenchus (Cited in Thurston, 1909: 27). Aiyappan (1948) describes the process by which a Chenchu becomes Yanadi. He describes, "the Chenchu of Sadasiva Kona changes into the Kappala Enadi when he first moves down into the Kalahasthi of Puttur plains; gradually he merges with the Enadis and becomes one with them" (1948: 148). It suggests conversion of Chenchus as Yanadi but not about the common origin. This argument supported by the existence of the common clan names. Two clan names, that is, *Dasari* and *Nimmala* are found to be common among Chenchu and Yanadi (Jaya Kumar, 1995: 19; Turin, 1999: 253). However, the degree of affinity between two groups still remains unresolved.

Newbold (1846: 272) and Kurnool Manual (1886: 161) drew comparison between Chenchus and Malay Jacoons. However, Thurston (1909) opines that often confusion arises pertaining to Chenchus and many other tribal groups because of certain similarities. For example, "Bonthuk Savaras…are called Chenchu vāndlu, and, like the Chenchus, believe that the god Narasimha of Ahobilam married a girl belonging to their tribe" (1909: 27). Buchanan (1807: 106) has mentioned a tribe called *Chensu Carir* or *Cat' Chensu* or *Cad' Eriliguru* or *Chensu* who lives in the jungles of Madras. This observation seems to be pertaining to the Chenchus living in the Kurnool district. There is also confusion pertaining to Chenchus and Irulas because of certain similarities. Taylor (1862: 464) opines that *Chenju*, *Yanadula*, *Coya*, and *Iralu* tribes are similar. His observations also come from the same region. In the census report, 1901; Chenchu is said to be the name by which Irulas of North Arcot and the Mysore plateau are called sometimes (Francis, 1902: 156). Yet another similarity was drawn with the Veddas of Sri Lanka by Fürer-Haimendorf (1943: 3) and Allchin (1958: 181).

The stories of origin suggest the blurring and diversified identity of the Chenchus. The similarities among the Chenchus and other tribal groups reveal the connections among these groups. Therefore, it can be assumed that the identity of the

Chenchus as it is today is the result of several transformations in the past. The cultural diversity is also the result of same or similar events.

History:

The history of Chenchu is very unclear because of lack of concrete evidences. Very less was written about Chenchus before the seminal ethnographic work of Fürer-Haimendorf (1943). However, the archaeological evidences traced the human existence in the Nallamalai forest to pre-historic period. Fürer-Haimendorf (1943: 15) observes "The stone circles, menhirs and dolmens found near Amrabad and Padra [of Mahabubnagar district] indicate that in prehistoric times a population of megalithic culture must have penetrated as far as the lower and more fertile ledge of the plateau." Later, Bhowmick (1992) identified few stone tools in the Nallamalai forest. He says, "Some of the Chenchu habitats bear evidences of early stone age civilization" (1992: 13). Some other scholars have traced evidences from Nallamalai forest to megalithic age. For example, Turin (1999: 252) mentions about the evidences of the megalithic culture in Amrabad region. Several archaeologists have studied the Nallamalai region but most of them are not very sure about the people living in Nallamalai forest during pre-historic period and no connections are established between pre-historic stone tools and the Chenchus. But Murty (1985) tried to establish connections between archaeological evidences and Chenchu material culture. He (1985: 196) opines that the antiquity of bow and arrow possibly goes to the Upper Palaeolithic times. Recently, Raju and Chandramouli (2000: 11) identified Lower Palaeolithic evidences near two Chenchu settlements, Tummalabayalu and Peddamantanala of Prakasam district of Andhra Pradesh. But, they are not very sure about the people of that period and did not establish any connections between those evidences and Chenchu.

Parabrahma Sastry (2007: 4) opines "Even today, *Mallayya* or *Chenchu Mallayya* is an alternative in Telugu for *Mallikarjuna*." However, none of the early literary works such as Mahabharata, Vayu Purana, Agni Purana, Matsya Purana, Skanda purana, Jyotirilinga Stotra, Ratnavali which described Srisaila mentioned the people of the territory. All these works are believed to be written during 3rd - 6th centuries (Parabrahma Sastry, 2007: 7). There can be a doubt whether Chenchus have occupied this territory before 6th century or any other people were living in this territory. But, it can be vaguely assumed that the people living in the territory might

be the Chenchus because of the popularity of the name Chenchu Mallanna with which Lord Mallikharjuna addressed.

Habitat:

The Chenchus live mainly in Mahabubnagar, Kurnool, Prakasam, Guntur, Rangareddy and Nalgonda districts of Andhra Pradesh, India. However, they can be seen in fewer numbers in all the districts of Andhra Pradesh which might be the result of their nomadic lifestyle. Their main abode is Nallamalai forest of Andhra Pradesh with which the Chenchus are often identified. The etymological meaning of Nallamalai is sacred hill, *Nalla* means sacred or good and *Malai* means hill. Chenchus believe that they are living in these forests from the origin of their race. Newbold (1846: 272) describes "they have always understood that their ancestors have inhabited these jungles and mountains ever since the mountains were created, and that they never emigrated from any other country." Taylor (1862: 464) describes "The *Chenju* [Chenchu] people live to the westward of *Ahobalam*, *Sri-sailam*, and other places, in the woods or wilds." But, Hunter (1881: 553) described them as the inhabitants of Yerramala hills of Karnul and Cuddapah districts of Madras Presidency. However, all other later scholars identified them as the inhabitants of the Nallamalai forest. Therefore, Nallamalai as their abode is inseparable from them.

Settlements and shelter:

The traditional settlements of the Chenchus look haphazard with the non-linear and dispersed arrangement of the huts of different types. However, from the accounts of few scholars it can be understand that they were living in the caves. For instance, Ferishta (1794) observes that they "...live in caverns, or under the shady branches of trees" (1794: 84). In a much later account, Hodson (1922: 31) also mentions that "...the Chenchus who lived in caves; even now, here and there, are those who use caves as places of temporary habitation." However, some type of hut might have become the shelter for the Chenchus in the past few centuries. Buchanan (1807: 106) says "they live in the little huts" (1807: 106). Newbold (1846: 271), Kurnool Manual (1886: 159), Thurston (1909: 38) were also mentioned the same. Newbold (1846: 274) has stated that "They [huts] are not removed from place to place." Therefore, it can be assumed that the Chenchus were not on completely nomadic even at that time.

Fürer-Haimendorf (1943) describes the transition of shelter of the Chenchus. According to him, "The Chenchus have learnt to build houses of bamboo and to thatch them with grass, but they have no means abandoned their nomadic habits and it would be erroneous to suppose that all Chenchus dwell in solidly built houses and permanent settlements throughout the year" (1943: 44). However, the settlements mentioned in the Fürer-Haimendorf's (1943) monograph are at more or less same places even now. However, the Chenchus of these settlements are going for seasonal migrations even today. But, they prefer to come back to original settlement after a brief period of migration. The situation before the intervention of either Nizam or British government might be different.

According to Suryanarayana and Gangadharam (1982: 247), "One of the important features of the traditional settlement pattern is that their huts are haphazardly scattered and are connected by a network of foot-paths." It is true even today with regard to the settlements that are in the core areas of the forest. Bhowmick (1992) observes that the *pentas* (traditional Chenchu settlements) are in some cases "a purely temporary conglomeration of a few families" (1992: 55). But the *pentas* are now almost permanent settlements in any part of Nallamalai forest. Several changes can be observed in the settlement pattern of the Chenchus in the present context. The Chenchu hut as a potential marker of identity is gradually losing its importance except in core areas of the forest.

Physical characteristics:

The physical appearance of the Chenchus was probably described for the first time in Ferishta's History of Dekkan (1794). According to him, they are "Exceedingly black, with long hair on every part of their bodies" (1794: 83). But Guha (1933: 278) and Fürer-Haimendorf (1943: 17) mention that the hair is plentiful on the head but scanty on the face and very little on the body. Thurston and Rivers (1909: 44) surveyed for cranial index among few tribes who described Chenchus as dolichocephalic type. Guha (1933: 277-279) and Fürer-Haimendorf (1943: 17-23) described in detail about the physical appearance of the Chenchus. According to them, the Chenchu is of slender, medium stature, the average height of the men being 163 cm and though there are many men under 155 cm. The colour of the skin varies from dark black-brown to a rich copper colour. The eyes are generally brown and

sometimes almost black. The strong coarse hair is wavy or curly, and there are few individuals with hair so tightly curled that from a distance it appears almost frizzy. However, the Chenchus of present day are obviously somewhat different from the above description.

Nature:

The Chenchus of forest are semi-nomadic but the Chenchus of plains are no more nomadic. In this context it is apt to quote Gangadhar (1999: 36) who says "The traditional nomadic way of life of the Chenchus seems to have become almost obsolete." They were always identified as wild people. Notwithstanding the facts of that time, the cultural insensitivity might be the reason for such kind of description. The stereotypes constructed by outsiders play a vital role in the identification of the Chenchus. Ferishta (1794: 83) describes them as wild and shy hunter-gatherers. In the same account Chenchus are described as they appeared before Prince Muhammad Masum, a son of Aurangzib, who passed through the Kurnool in 1694. According to that observation "Each man had with him unbarbed arrows and a bow for hunting. They molest no one... The Prince presented some of them with gold and silver, but they did not seem to put any value upon either, being quite unconcerned at receiving it. Upon the firing of a small gun they darted up the mountains with a surprising swiftness, uncommon to man" (1794: 83-84). This reveals the lack of need and awareness among the Chenchus about such material wealth, their innocence and their abilities. Taylor (1862: 464) and Kurnool Manual (1886: 158) describe them as a wild tribe. Taylor (1862: 464) describes, "They rob travellers; killing them if they oppose. This people afflict every living creature." Similarly, Thurston (1909: 29), Fürer-Haimendorf (1943: 68), and Aiyappan (1948: 150) describe them as a semi-wild, lazy, drinking set of brigands. But, Khan (1933) has given a different description. According to him, "The Chenchu is noted for his truthfulness and honesty. ...To visitors to their villages they are kind and hospitable" (1933: 265). However, the Chenchus of present day are not wild. They do not rob people. They do not harm any outsider. In fact, they respect other people and are afraid of strangers. They do not afflict every living creature but rational in their hunting too. However, they are not even complete hunter gatherers. They are not a drinking set of brigands. But they are shy and majority of the men are drunkards. But liquor drinking habit is on gradual decline with the shift in livelihoods and occupations.

Typology:

Typology of an ethnic group is a crucial aspect of its identity. Ethnic identity depends on the identification of sub-groups with the main group. This may be influenced by various circumstances in which the sub-groups interact with each other to create an ethnic identity. The Chenchus are categorized in various ways by researchers. However, the differences in the opinion among various scholars may be attributed to the incongruence between the idea of the people and understanding of the researchers or it may reflect the changes in time and space. Siraj-ul-Hassan (1920: 149) classified Chenchus into four exogamous groups. They are Telugu Chenchus, Adavi Chenchus, Krishna Chenchus, and Bonta Chenchus. But, Fürer-Haimendorf (1943: 299) is suspicious of such classification. In fact, he believes that Telugu Chenchus, Krishna Chenchus, and Bonta Chenchus are not really Chenchus but claim to be Chenchus for certain advantages. He observes only two types of Chenchus depending on the location of the Chenchus, they are, Jungle Chenchus and Village Chenchus (Fürer-Haimendorf, 1943: 299). Aiyappan (1948) tried to clear the confusion pertaining to the category of Bontha Chenchus. According to him, "the Bonthuk Saoras are called Chenchu or 'Bontha Chenchu' though they have no connection with the Chenchus of Nallamalas" (1948: 149). Census of India, 1961, identified four types of Chenchus slightly different from other typologies. They are; Koya Chenchu, Konda Chenchu, Chenchu Dasari, and Ura Chenchu (1961: 5). Bhowmick's (1992: 18) account seems to be a mixture of the Hassan's (1920) typology and Census of India (1961) typology. He has divided Chenchu into Konda Chenchu, Ura Chenchu, Yanadi Chenchu, Bonta or Botua Chenchu, Chenchu Dasaries, Koya Chenchu, Krishna Chenchu. Sastry (1993) emphasized on the classification of Fürer-Haimendorf (1943) and says "Konda Chenchu predominantly and exclusively inhabit the Nallamala hills while the other groups live in rural villages, often migrating to other rural and urban areas for livelihood" (1993: 85). Prakash Reddy (1993: 11) has broadly divided the Chenchus into two types. They are; Adavi Chenchu (Forest Chenchu) and Ura Chenchu (Village Chenchus). Gangadhar (1996: 179) divided Chenchus into Chenchu Dasari, Yanadi Chenchu, Ura Chenchu, Telugu Chenchu, Koya Chenchu, Krishna Chenchu, and Bonta Chenchu. However, he has asserted on the views of Fürer-Haimendorf (1943) by saying that there are no linkages between Chenchus of Nallamalai and other Chenchus.

Social Organization:

The social organization of Chenchu is perceived as the simplest form of its kind. For instance, Fürer-Haimendorf (1943: 87) opines that "the social organization of the Chenchus is still representative of those early types of human society found among races who have not yet emerged from the state of hunting and collecting." But, the social organization keeps on changing with the shift in habitat, livelihoods, segregation of the community etc. If the change is inevitable, no element of the community could really escape from it. The degree of impact may differ depending on the socio-cultural attributes. The predominant division is local grouping of these people (Fürer-Haimendorf, 1943: 87, 284; Bhowmick, 1992: 119) and the idea of development of clans depending on land allocation (Fürer-Haimendorf, 1943: 284). However, he has further stated that "...this system has suffered partial disintegration through the opening up of the forest and the disturbance of the old life by the activities of various outsiders..." (Fürer-Haimendorf, 1943: 89). But this system of integration between clan and the land is somewhat doubtful because most of the clans of the present day trace their origin to a plant or an animal but not to a piece of land. The clans are not stratified based on status differences. For instance, Bhowmick (1992: 130) observes "Among the Chenchus, practically there is no difference in the status of clans." In fact, clan is an important component in the social organization of the Chenchus. It is "a unit of corporate activity among the Chenchus" (Bhowmick, 1992: 132). Therefore, it can be assumed that the clan is the most important unit of co-operation among the Chenchus.

Chenchu community is patriarchal with patrilineal social organization. But, they might be having a matriarchal and matrilineal social organization. In this connection, Fürer-Haimendorf (1943: 282) says "we find a number of traits suggestive of a matriarchal system of society." For example, the custom of accompanying with brother-in-law for honey collection might be the survival of the old custom of matriarchal and matrilineal social organization (Fürer-Haimendorf, 1943: 282). The social organization of present day Chenchu is completely depending on the principle of patriliny. In this context, Gangadhar (1996: 179) also believe that there is a change from egalitarian social organization to patrilineal social organization.

Kulams:

The Chenchu is an endogamous group with exogamous *kulams*. The idea of *kulam* is close to the concept of clan. Although, it is not a complete synonym to clan, it carries most of the characters of a clan. Newbold (1846: 274) recorded 31 *kulams* among the Chenchus of Kurnool District. But, Khan (1933: 270) with reference to the Chenchus of Mahabubnagar district observes that "The Chenchus are divided into five septs: Thokalu, Nimalu, Erravalu, Sigilu, and Maindlu." But, the septs mentioned here are the *kulam* names and they are not inclusive of any other *kulams*. Fürer-Haimendorf (1943) observations from the same region reveals that the Chenchus of "upper plateau constitute four exogamous groups. [They are] 1. Menlur, Daserolu; 2. Sigarlu, Urtalu; 3. Tokal, Nallapoteru, Ktraj; 4. Nimal, Eravalu, Pulsaru" (1943: 88). Apart from these, many other exogamous groups are observed among the Chenchus of present day Mahabubnagar district. The Census of India, 1961 mentioned 26 clans of the Chenchus. But, Gangadharam (1996: 179) mentions that there are about 45 *kulams* of Chenchus distributed in the Nallamalai forest. However, 77 clans/*kulams* are identified among the Chenchus from the primary data and secondary sources.

There is uncertainty about the practice of totemism by the Chenchus. Khan (1933: 270) believes that "However uncertain their [*Kulam*/Clan] origin may be, it is clear that there is some form of totemism since most of them trace their clan formation to animals and trees." But, Fürer-Haimendorf (1943: 284), Rakshit (1982: 99), Jaya Kumar (1995: 19) observes that the Chenchus do not practice totemism. It is true when Chenchus are concerned. Few of their clans give an impression that they can be traced to certain totems. But there is no specific significance to these assumed totemic objects in the Chenchu social system. They neither venerate nor propitiate the totemic objects. Certain clans do not trace the totems. It shows that there is no clearly defined idea of totem among the Chenchus. They do kill the totemic animals or birds and cut the plants or trees. They do not have any restriction in this regard. They have folktales pertaining to some totems (Fürer-Haimendorf, 1943: 90-94). But such stories are not uniform for the Chenchus belongs to the same clan but living in different territories. In fact, people are not very conscious of their totemic history.

Family:

Chenchu family is a smallest unit but the most important one and the nucleus of social organization. In this regard, Fürer-Haimendorf (1943: 107) says "Among the social units of the Chenchu society the family is the smallest, but it is also most outstanding and clearly defined. It is the nucleus of the whole social structure of Chenchu life and the larger units, such as clan, local group and village-community are but congregations of individual families." Despite few special features such as polygyny, Chenchu family appears similar to the nuclear family of any other society with parents and their progeny as its members. But, the Chenchu family is distinctive in terms of its functions and the authority within the family. For instance, Fürer-Haimendorf (1943: 107) observes that the "Husband and wife are for all practical purposes partners with equal rights and their property is jointly owned; nominally, however, everything belongs to the man, except those personal belongings a wife acquired from her parents." Therefore, the identity of the Chenchus can be traced through the relationships among the members of the family. Although old people prefer to live in a separate hut, they may depend on their children for all kinds of support. The residence of Chenchu is virilocal or uxorilocal and rarely neolocal.

Kinship:

The kinship system among Chenchus is classificatory and bilateral. It plays a very important role in the ceremonial, religious, and political affairs of Chenchus. The consanguineous as well as affinal kin members have special role in lifecycle rituals of an individual. Head of the household seeks the suggestions of the elder kin members in case of marriage or any other kind of ceremonies. But it is not mandatory to accept the suggestions of the kin members. The kin members also play an important role in the celebration of the festivals because the procedures of some festivals demand the involvement of entire kin/clan group. Particularly, entire clan involves in the rituals performed to a clan deity. Kin members support each other in cases of conflicts with other members of the community. Chenchu kinship organization is influenced by their trust or mistrust on affinal and consanguineous kin. Affinal relatives are closer than consanguineous relatives in their kinship system because they are suspicious about their consanguines. The Chenchus do not trust their brother because of threat to their property and wife. The tradition of levirate marriage is responsible for the mistrust among brothers. As a result, they do not go with their brother for collecting honey or

any other hazardous activities where there is a chance of murder without evidence. They do not like to have their hut beside their brother's hut. But this notion is gradually changing with the change in levirate system as well as changing livelihoods. Their dwellings and the settlement pattern depends on the kinship relations. For instance, Fürer-Haimendorf (1943: 108) observes that the "Chenchus do not like to live where they have no blood relations." However, if all the blood relatives of a village diseased, the man prefers to move to wife's village and the woman moves to her natal village. Therefore, it can be believed that Chenchus kinship system always acted as a system of social support to its members despite maintenance of distance with brothers to a certain degree. The distance among brothers is a question of degree rather than in its entirety. The mother's brother plays most important role in the social and ritual aspects of Chenchu life. He is the key person amongst all and no ritual practice is complete without his presence. He will be absent from any rituals or ceremonies only when there is a conflict with his sister or brother-in-law. Any family tries to please him by giving gifts at rituals and ceremonies. The bride-price also goes to him but not to bride or her parents.

Kin group acts as a co-operative unit at the time of conflicts. Kin groups usually take different sides according to their affiliations at the time of conflicts (Fürer-Haimendorf, 1943: 110). The grouping during such conflicts is similar to segmentary system. However, kinship is not only limited to support the individuals at the time of conflicts but also acts as an integrating force. It is apt to quote again Fürer-Haimendorf (1943: 111) who opines that "...the cohesion of the kin-group acts as the principal integrating force of Chenchu society." Therefore, the individual often identify closely with the kin members as he/she does in case of family. In fact, it is most important unit next to family.

Life-cycle rituals:

Life cycle rituals have an important place in the social organization of a person in any community. Chenchus do not have elaborate celebration of rituals. But, they have different rituals to mark the stages of human life. Particularly, the rituals related to pregnancy, childbirth, puberty, marriage, and death are very important in this context. All these rituals are having the components of separation, transition, and reintegration as envisaged by Van Gennep (1960).

Puberty ritual:

The puberty ritual doesn't seem to be an important ritual and lacks ceremonial celebration. However, the concept of pollution attached to it from long time. Khan (1933: 272) observes "She [at the time of puberty] is secluded in a hut especially erected for her. An old woman attends upon her. Both are unclean for 3 or 4 days." However, this tradition might be in practice among the Chenchus living in plain areas because such practice could not be observed even today in the core villages of the forest. Nevertheless, he mentions that there is no ceremony except a purification bath for the girl and the assisting woman. But, Fürer-Haimendorf (1943) partly contradicts Khan (1933) and says "Puberty ceremonies and the segregation of girls during the first period are entirely absent among the Chenchus, and so are the restrictions on the activities of menstruating women" (1943: 287). Therefore, segregation of the girl during the first menstruation and ceremonies celebrating to mark this ritual seems to be a development due to the contacts with caste-Hindus. A brief ceremony at the time of puberty was recorded by Bhowmick (1992: 188-189). According to him, observance of pollution period has become a practice and strictly observed for 5 to 10 days during the puberty (Bhowmick, 1992: 190). It is true in case of multi-ethnic villages and the Chenchu settlements which are close to caste-Hindu villages. For example, the Chenchus of Appaipally of Mahabubnagar district are strictly observing pollution for a period of 11 days.

Immediately after the first bleeding the girl informs this to her mother or any other elderly woman of the family. If the girl is not at the home, she will be taken to home immediately. No ceremony marked puberty in the past. Presently, a small ceremony is conducted at the family level where they worship the deity of the family or clan. After a ceremonial bath, she will be confined to a corner of the house. She will be treated as polluted. The pollution period varies between 3-11 days depends on the village. This period reflects the extent of culture contact and the influence of outsiders. The changing livelihood options are also influencing these practices. For example, the Chenchus who are practicing agriculture do not allow their girls for the period of 11 days into the field. But the forest dependents are not practicing such a lengthy period. It is usually 1-3 days. They also consume the products collected by such girl. However, they do not allow such girl to the honey collecting location. She is not allowed to go to work or temple during pollution period. She should cover her

face with a cloth if she wants to go out of the home during this period. She has to take bath every day. The mother or elderly woman applies turmeric paste to the body. But the regularity of this practice varies depending on the family and general practice in the village. Usually, there will be no ceremony after 11 days. But it depends on the economic condition of the family. The Chenchus who are living in small towns are celebrating it by inviting their nearest relatives. A small feast is organized on such occasion. This is mainly to inform the members of the community that their girl is ready for marriage. The influence of people from the plains is significant in this regard. No gifts are exchanged on this occasion, but nearest relatives bring foodstuffs for the girl during the pollution period. The girl will resume normal life after the period of pollution.

The concept of pollution exists among the Chenchus of all territorial categories. But the rigidity or flexibility depends on the category. They do consider the menstruation period (*myla*) after attainment of puberty as pollution period. But, it does not prevent them from staying in the house or participation in regular activities. However, this will disqualifies them from participation in the rituals, going to temples and offering prayers. They take head-bath on the first day of menstruation which purifies them. But, the people living in multi-ethnic villages or in towns are observing pollution period for 1-3 days.

Marriage:

Marriage is one aspect of Chenchu life which instantly caught the attention of many scholars. It is a distinctive system when compared with the non-Chenchus living in the territories close to Chenchus. Therefore, it can be understood as an important marker of Chenchu identity. First mention about the Chenchu marriage came from Newbold (1846: 273) who observes that "The marriage [of Chenchus] consists in a simple agreement before the assembled relatives and elders of the tribe." In a study almost after a century, Fürer-Haimendorf (1943) described about the marriage ceremony of Chenchus in a similar way but in comparison with their non-Chenchu neighbours. He says, "...compared to the wedding ceremonies of even the lower castes, a Chenchu wedding is an extremely simple and informal affair..." (1943: 287). However, "The Chenchus do not follow a uniform custom in respect to marriage ceremonies" (Kurnool Manual, 1886: 163). It has mentioned three types of marriages,

they are; marriage by elopement, marriage by arrangement which is performed in a simple way by a Chenchu priest (*Kolagadu*), and marriage by arrangement which performed by a Brahmin similar to the marriage ceremony of the neighbouring non-Chenchus (Kurnool Manual, 1886: 163). But, Bhowmick (1992: 150) and Gangadhar (1996: 180) mention elopement, marriage by negotiations, and marriage by bride service as the types of marriage among the Chenchus.

The Chenchus opt for marriage at an early age. But, it seems that there were no child marriages before the contact with caste-Hindus. In this connection, Fürer-Haimendorf (1943: 287) observes "Only within this generation has the Hindu practice of child-marriage been adopted by a few of the Jungle Chenchus." However, child marriage is not a very prevalent condition even today. But, marriage in the age group of 14-20 years both for boys and girls is a usual practice. No case of marriage before puberty observed in case of girls. Marriage usually takes place at the residence of bride (Bhowmick, 1992: 194). But, in recent years, it is taking place at the house of bridegroom in tune with the similar practice of the caste-Hindus. This tradition is observed among the Chenchus of Appaipally of Mahabubnagar district and Bairlutygudem of Kurnool district.

Monogamous marriage is the most prevalent type of marriage among the Chenchus (Fürer-Haimendorf, 1943: 142; Bhowmick, 1992: 142). However, Khan (1933: 266) observes "Polygamy or plurality of wives prevalent among them..." It is a rare practice among the Chenchus of Nizam dominions but slightly more prevalent among the Chenchus of Madras Presidency (Fürer-Haimendorf, 1943: 107, 305). Nevertheless, polygyny is still an important practice and socially acceptable too. The cases of men having more than two wives are observed in Dhararam and Maddhimadugu villages of Mahabubnagar district and Bairlutygudem of Kurnool district. Polygyny is also treated as the peculiar feature of the Chenchu community by the neighbouring non-Chenchus. Cross-cousin marriages are most prevalent among the Chenchus (Fürer-Haimendorf, 1943: 134; Bhowmick, 1992: 145). The man in the cross-cousin marital relation never prefers to enter into a polygyny relation. In fact, it is believed that the partners in such alliances are more loyal to each other.

The Chenchus are not only free to choose the partner but also free to take divorce if they are not comfortable with the relation. But "There is no formal procedure for divorce..." (Fürer-Haimendorf, 1943: 141). Despite not having any formal procedure, they follow certain principles to take divorce. The procedures of divorce will be explained in a separate section of this chapter. Bhowmick (1992: 152) also mentions that "Divorce is a frequently used phenomenon among the Chenchus." Widows are also having several options if they want to remarry. They generally marry the brother of their former husband; if there is no brother, they are allowed to marry others (Kurnool Manual, 1886: 164; Thurston, 1909: 40; Bhowmick, 1992: 149). . However, Bhowmick (1992: 149) has seen a decline in levirate tradition. He has also stated that "Marriage with younger brother's widow is strictly prohibited among the Chenchus" (Bhowmick, 1992: 150). But it doesn't seem to be a rigid rule. Because one case each are identified from BKV Palem Chenchugudem of Guntur district and Pathuru of Mahabubnagar district where the men married younger brother's widow. Though clan exogamy is strictly practiced by Chenchus, some cases of same clan marriages are recorded by Fürer-Haimendorf (1943: 93) and Bhowmick (1992: 128). However, such kinds of marriages are considered as the violation of social norms by the rest of the community.

There are lot of misconceptions about the sexual life of Chenchus. These might have partly created by researchers probably with the influential talks of non-Chenchus residing close to the Chenchu territory. For instance, Fürer-Haimendorf (1943: 132) observes "Although when together in public adolescent girls and boys maintain a certain reserve, there is plenty of opportunity for clandestine meetings in the jungle and many girls have premarital sex-experience." Similarly, Siraj-ul-Hassan (1920: 150) opines "...free courtship is said to prevail among them." But, the Chenchus are not really into frequent illicit relations. In fact, the couple is very loyal to each other. Most of the pre-marital relations lead to marriage. If they have interest on another woman after marriage, they prefer to accept her as a second wife with the permission of first wife instead of maintaining an illicit relation. However, in few cases they may have the second wife even without the consent of first wife.

Pregnancy and childbirth:

Pregnancy doesn't seem to be an important identity marker among the Chenchus because no special ceremonies are celebrated to mark the pregnancy. For instance, Kurnool Manual (1886: 164) observes that there are no special ceremonies conducted during pregnancy. But the tradition is not similar among all the Chenchus. Gangadhar (1996: 180) observed that the first pregnancy among Chenchus is marked by a small ceremony in the third month followed by another in the 7th month. This is not mentioned in any other earlier writings. This might be a more recent development due to the contact with plains people. The Chenchus who are living in urban or semi-urban areas are conducting a ritual called *sreemanthamu* during 5th month of first pregnancy. No transaction of gifts takes place either at the time of *sreemanthamu* or at the time of childbirth. However, this kind of practice is restricted to urban areas and the Chenchus living in forest are unaware of it. The ceremonies associated with pregnancy and childbirth reflects the impact of contact with outsiders and the gradual transition in the society.

All the Chenchus know that the period of pregnancy as nine months. But, earlier they were having different ideas pertaining to the period of pregnancy. They believe pregnancy lasts nine months in the case of a boy and ten months if the child is a girl (Fürer-Haimendorf, 1943: 145). However, this idea changed with the influence of modern hospitals and medical systems. They confirm the pregnancy with the stoppage of menstruation. The Chenchu women report it to an elderly female of the family two or three months after the stoppage of menstruation. Initially, the husband is not usually informed (Bhowmick, 1992: 170). Husband does not shave the beard from the day when he becomes aware of his wife's pregnancy till the date of delivery. Husband and wife live apart in different huts for seven days from the day of delivery to the day of purification (Khan, 1933: 272). But this does not appear to be a universal practice among the Chenchus. In fact, this practice is nowhere observed among the Chenchus of present day.

Naming Ceremony:

Naming is not a very important ceremony for the Chenchus. It is neither characterized by specific modes of celebration. Therefore, it is not a potential marker of identity. However, simple procedures existed for naming the child. Newbold (1846:

276) and Kurnool Manual (1886: 164) mention that a name is given to the child on the fourth day by an old woman. However, in an observation from Mahabubnagar district, Khan (1933: 272) and Fürer-Haimendorf (1943: 149) mentions, name is given after ten or twelve days. They have no kind of name giving ceremony. But, naming is gradually attaining a form in terms of its celebration. Cradle ceremony is being observed on the 21st day after childbirth among the Chenchus living in towns to name the child (Bhowmick, 1992: 186). The procedures are similar to caste Hindu people.

First food:

Much importance is not attached to giving food for the first time to the child. There is no special occasion to celebrate this ceremony. As there is requirement for the woman to go for work in a very short time after the delivery, the child will be feed with some liquid or semi-solid food stuffs from the very early months. The child will be under the custody of an old woman of the family. She usually gives liquid foods. But, they do not have particular time to start first solid food. The importance attached to it seems to be the recent development. Bhowmick (1992: 185) mentions that the first rice-eating ceremony is generally observed by the Chenchus. However, they do not have a specific period to observe this ceremony. But, they may observe it when the baby is 6 months old (Kurnool Manual, 1886: 164) or 5 months or 9 months old (Bhowmick, 1992: 185). This ceremony appears to be an imitation of the similar ceremony of caste-Hindus.

Tonsure:

It is an important ceremony among the Chenchus. Therefore, it can be served as an important marker of identity of the Chenchus. Fürer-Haimendorf (1943: 192) mentions the offering of first hair to *Gangamma* (water goddess). Bhowmick (1992: 182) mentions the importance of tonsure ceremony. The time and place of tonsure ceremony varies depending on the family. The community as a whole or village as a whole does not follow a uniform tradition. It is usually takes place between 1-3 years for both boys and girls. Usually, the ceremony takes place at a *Lingamayya* (Lord Shiva) temple. But, it depends upon the influence of gods and goddesses of a particular territory. It may take place at Lingamayya temple, Hanuman temple, Maisamma shrine, Peddamma shrine, Laxmi Narasimha temple etc. There is no difference between a girl and boy child in celebrating the ceremony. The maternal

uncle plays a very important role in this ceremony (Bhowmick, 1992: 182). He cuts the first hair of the child. Sometimes, he may complete the entire procedure. But, now-a-days, the maternal uncle starts the procedure by cutting some hair and the barber completes the rest. After finishing the procedure, all of them will offer the prayers for the wellbeing of the child. The parents of the child gift money or animals such as goat to the maternal uncle of the kid. It is an obligation for the parents of the child. The importance attached to this ceremony seems to be specific for the Chenchus when compared with the non-Chenchu neighbours living in the same territories.

Death:

When a person dies, the corpse is washed and carried on a bier made of bamboos and is buried. The dead is carried to the burial place in a cloth slung on a pole. The body, after it has been laid in the grave is covered over with leafy twigs and the grave is filled. The spot is marked by a mound of earth and stones piled up (Thurston, 1909: 42). There is no uniform custom pertaining to the cremation of the dead. According to Newbold (1846: 273), few Chenchus bury and others burn their dead. But, Kurnool Manual (1886: 164) observes cremation or the burning of the dead is not practised by the Chenchus. Siraj-ul-Hassan (1920: 151) observed burying method only. But, Fürer-Haimendorf (1943: 279) observed both the methods of disposing the dead. This practice is prevailed in several villages in the present day Chenchu society. Local factors might have influenced the adoption of this practice. There are differences among the Chenchus of different places pertaining to the direction of the dead in the grave. For instance, Siraj-ul-Hassan (1920: 151) observes, the dead are buried in a lying posture with the head to the south and the face downwards. But, Fürer-Haimendorf's (1943: 154) observes that the face of the dead turned towards the rising sun. However, both the methods are in practice and having their own explanations of significance. For instance, keeping the face downwards is significant because the dead should not look towards this world which is on the earth. The dead has to move to the other world which exists in some unknown environs down the earth. On the other hand, keeping the face towards the sky is significant because they believe that the other world is located above the sky and the person has to move to that world of god. The mourning period varies among the Chenchus of different territories. It has been changing from time-to-time. Newbold (1846: 276)

mentions that Chenchus mourn for two days for the diseased and terminate it with a feast. But, According to Siraj-ul-Hassan (1920: 151), mourning is observed for 10 days. Khan (1933: 276) mentioned that "three to seven days of mourning is observed" at the time of death. The difference in the mourning period can be observed among the Chenchus of different territories even today. There is a difference in opinion about the celebration of death rituals. Kurnool Manual (1886: 164) and Thurston (1909: 42) mention lack of proper organization of death rituals whereas Fürer-Haimendorf (1943: 155) mentioned the observance of *Chinna dinal* on 3rd day and *Pedda dinal* on 10th day after the death. Gangadhar (1996: 180) mentioned a few observances after death including *Chinna dinamu* and *Pedda dinamu* on 3rd and 9th or 11th days respectively. Mohanty (2004: 94) observes the difference between different clans in the performance of obsequies.

Magic:

Magic is an important practice among most of the indigenous people. It plays a very important role in this community too. Bhowmick (1992: 259) observes that "The Chenchus practice magic, through some experts, to control some spirits suspected to cause harm." They practice benevolent as well as malevolent magic. The practitioner of benevolent magic is known as *Vejju*. Benevolent magic is a hereditary activity but it is not compulsion for the successor to practice it. However, it is difficult for others to learn this magic. Malevolent magic also plays a significant role in the social life of the Chenchus. It is locally known as *chetabadi*. It is not hereditary. Anybody can learn it as the sorcerers are often willing to spread the knowledge. Turin (1999: 255) observes that "Any Chenchu can perform black magic by praying to a relevant deity to do harm to his rival or enemy." The difference between the succession of benevolent magic and sorcery may be attributed to their nature. The magicians perform benevolent magic often have clients but the sorcerers are not having such demand. *Gadde* (fortune telling/forecasting) is another popular practice in which a person invokes the God in order to know the cause, consequence and solution of the problem or suffering of the individual or the client. The practitioners of *gadde* are known as *gadde cheppuvaru*. It can be practiced by the men as well as women. Non-Chenchus too visit these people in order to solve their problems. The practitioners of benevolent magic and *gadde* have superior social status among the Chenchus and are respected by the non-Chenchus of neighbouring villages.

Religion:

The religion is one of the most important markers of ethnic identity. However, every ethnic group need not be having a different religion. But, in most of the cases, the religious ideas of each group might be having certain specificities in practice when compare with neighbouring ethnic groups. Same is the case with Chenchus too. There are several opinions on the Chenchu religion which often creates confusion. On the one hand Chenchu religion seems to be unorganized with a set of beliefs but on the other hand, as a developed form because of their connection with the temple as well as the Lord of Srisailam. Therefore, the Chenchu religion seems to be developed from a not-so-very structured religion to a religion influenced by several faiths. One of the earliest pieces of writing that mentioned about the religion of the Chenchus of Madras presidency is by Newbold (1846). According to him, "They [Chenchus] appear to have little or no idea of religion beyond what they have picked up from surrounding Hindus" (1846: 272). But, there is a gradual transformation in their religion. This might be because of the growing contacts with neighbouring caste Hindus. It revealed in the observations of Kurnool Manual (1886: 162) which describes "their present religion resembles more or less the religion of the Hindus." However, in his write-up on the Chenchus of Nizam dominions, Siraj-ul-Hassan (1920: 151) describes that "The Chanchus firmly believe in evil spirits and ascribe every sickness or calamity to their malevolent action." But he has mentioned about the worship of deities too. According to him, "The favourite deity of the Chanchus is Ganga" (1920: 151). But, such deity name was not mentioned by any other author. In his observations from Madras Presidency, Thurston (1909) mentions that "The Chenchus are said to worship a god called Chenchu Dēvata, to whom offerings of honey and fruits are sometimes made" (1909: 42). Similarly, Khan (1933: 271) in his observations from Nizam dominions says "By religion the Chenchu is officially known to be animist; but...he has still retained his pristine paganism though apparently he is now a believer in deities which have definite names, characteristics and functions. The principle deities are Akasa Amma (Sky), Bhoomi Amma (Earth) and Amma Talli (Small-pox goddess)." It seems the Chenchus of Nizam dominions were having lesser contact with caste Hindus or any other populations when compared with the Chenchus of Madras Presidency. Therefore, the influence of other religions seems to be minimal in this region.

In his extensive work on the Chenchus of Nizam dominions, Fürer-Haimendorf (1943: 179) states that "In its present form Chenchu religion, if we may use this term for an uncoordinated mass of beliefs and ritual, is no rigid theological system, but an expansive framework that constantly embraces and assimilates new objects and forms of worship." However, in the course of time religion of the Chenchus of Nizam dominions too appear to have influenced by Hinduism. Similarly, Hiebert (1971: 135) in his work from the same region states that "Lingamayya, a god of the forest, belongs to the tribal Chenchu" (1971: 135). Lingamayya of little tradition is often referred to Lord Shiva of the great tradition of Hinduism. Therefore, it can be believed that the Lord Shiva of great tradition is very much infused into Chenchu society in the form of Lingamayya. Parabrahma Sastry (2007: 5) also believes that the Shiva temple at Srisailam is an original abode of tribal deity. But we cannot exactly trace out the time period for the influence of Hinduism on Chenchus. It might be the result of unavoidable but peaceful incidents such as adoption of Srisailam temple as the abode of principle deity by the then rulers. Similarly, textual evidences are also traced by various scholars to establish the connections between Chenchus and the temple at Srisailam. For instance, the temple is mentioned in Skanda Purana, whose origin is certainly not later than 7th century A.D. (Fürer-Haimendorf, 1943: 15) and Palakurti Somanadha's *Panditaradhya Charitra* of 12th century A.D. enumerates several services rendered by Chenchus in the temple and to its pilgrims (Sastry, 1991: 171). Till recently, the Chenchus were given importance in the rituals celebrated to the deity at this temple (Bhowmick, 1992: 15). Despite lack of concrete and adequate evidences about the ethnic group residing at this place during the pre-historic period, it can be believed that the Chenchus might be the group who inhabited these territories in the recent history from their folk stories as well as from ancient literary texts. There is another popular folk tradition connects Chenchus and the great tradition of Hinduism. It is pertaining to the relation between Lord Narasimha of Ahobilam and the Chenchus living in this territory (Newbold, 1846: 272; Kurnool Manual, 1886: 158). This folktale is popular only among the Chenchus living close to the Ahobilam of Kurnool district. The worship of the deities such as Ankalamma, Poturaju, Sunkalamma, Mallamma, and Gurappa of little tradition is also very important for the Chenchus. However, the pantheon of present day Chenchus is diverse and the fusion of different traditions such as tribal tradition, Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity. It will be further discussed in succeeding chapters.

Chenchus were having indigenous traditions before the intrusion of any religion into their social life. They were having a masculine deity, Bhagavantaru; and a feminine deity, Garelamaisamma (Fürer-Haimendorf, 1943: 279). Later, some of the attributes of old deities might have been transferred to newly introduced deities (Fürer-Haimendorf, 1943: 280). In this connection he gives an example of Lingamayya whose worship performed with similar rites that were performed to Garelamaisamma. But, nowadays, Bhagavantaru or Bhagavantudu refers to the whole set of deities regardless of gender. Garelamaisamma is still an important deity but one among many other important deities. However, only a section of Chenchus who depends on forest for livelihood are worshipping this deity.

Chenchus seems to be divided based on their affiliation to *Vaishnavism* and *Shaivism*. In this connection, Siraj-ul-Hassan (1920: 151) says, "They are divided into Tirmanidharis [Vaishnavites] and Vibhutidharis [Shaivites]." Similarly, Bhowmick (1992: 19) mentions the divisions as Namadharulu [Vashnavites] and Motollu [Shaivites]. However, he has stated that "Definite temple or sacred spot is conspicuously absent" (1992: 283). It gives an impression that the Chenchus are not having an organized form of religion till recently. But, religious division cannot easily happen without having a developed form of religion. Therefore, it is doubtful to what extent people are divided on religious lines. Whether it is a conscious effort of the people or the unconscious influence of the neighbouring communities is another important question in this regard.

The Brahmins are always considered as the agents of Hinduism. Therefore, there is a scope to believe that the Chenchus are not very much into the practice of textual tradition of Hinduism as long as they are away from the Brahmins. At the same time, it is not very clear about the time period regarding the contact between Chenchus and Brahmins. In this connection, Siraj-ul-Hassan (1920: 151) observes that the "Brahmins have not yet been introduced and all religious functions are discharged by a member of tribe." However, later Brahmins have gradually entered into the ceremonial system of the Chenchus. Bhowmick (1992: 203) while discussing the case of a marriage from Mannanur of Mahabubnagar mentioned about the Brahmin priest who officiated the marriage. Gradually, the Hindu mode of celebrating festivals might have been adopted by the Chenchus.

The Chenchus practice pollution to certain extent while dealing with the caste people, particularly, with regard to inter-dining and inter-drinking practices. However, this seems to be not an original practice of the Chenchus but borrowed from the caste-Hindus. Siraj-ul-Hassan (1920: 151) while referring to the Chenchus of Nizam dominions states that "No castes except Malas and Madigas, will eat from their hands. ...They will not accept food from the hands of Mangalas [Barbers], Chaklas [Washer men] and the lowest unclean classes." Similarly, Fürer-Haimendorf (1943) while referring to the Village Chenchus of Madras Presidency opines "Today all Chenchus are conscious of their 'high' caste and even the poorest forest-dweller will not allow a Mala or Madiga into his house or shelter" (1943: 309). In tune with the above observations, in his study on Konduru village of Mahabubnagar district, Hiebert (1971: 55) observes that "The Chenchus would not permit the Harijans to draw water from their well; hence, the Weavers [Mala caste] had to wait each morning by the well until the Chenchu women could fill their pots." It is true that the Chenchus are conscious of their superior status over Malas and Madigas even today, but they do not maintain such rigid social distance with Mangalas and Chakalas. At the same time, the idea of entering into each other's dwelling is not rigidly practiced. But, such kind of practice is not observed even today among the Chenchus of core areas of the forest. It has been observed in the ceremonies of the Chenchus of multi-ethnic villages where people from dominant caste participated and dine with them. However, the notion of hierarchy is continuing in one form or the other even today.

Economic organization:

The Chenchu economy has an indispensable relation with their environment. Man-nature relationship is very vital and the basis for their economic activities. As a "primitive hunting-gathering" community, they were not having the concept of surplus in their economy. They used to earn for the needs of the day in such an economy with limited objectives. Khan's (1933) observations reveal the nature of their activities. According to him, "The daily life of the Chenchu is an uncertain one. The man rises early in the morning and goes off to the jungle in search of roots and berries for the family. The woman sweeps the floor and cooks food, if any be available, and brings water. Young children cling to their mothers at home while the grown-up are busy in doing odd jobs" (1933: 269). Therefore, their economic organization was believed to be a simplest form of its kind. In fact, "Economically the

Chenchus belonged to the same world as Palaeolithic and Mesolithic man" (Fürer-Haimendorf, 1943: 278). As a result, they were not having systematic arrangements for the organization of their economy. Moreover, they have no such concept of economic system even like other contemporary hunter-gatherers (Fürer-Haimendorf, 1943: 57). According to him, lack of co-operation within the community might be the reason for the absence of the economic system (Fürer-Haimendorf, 1943: 58). But, there is co-operation within smaller social units such as family (Fürer-Haimendorf, 1943: 107).

Their economy is subsistence type which is also popularly known as "hand-to-mouth" type and it is not characterized by surplus. Since ages, the Chenchus have been in contact with neighbouring populations. As a result, they use to barter such jungle produce as wax, honey and resin for plains products like grain (Fürer-Haimendorf, 1948: 88). But, they "...never barter among themselves" (Fürer-Haimendorf, 1943: 59). However, he believes that "The introduction of iron must have given rise to a system of barter whereby the Chenchus obtained metal tools and weapons in exchange for forest produce" (Fürer-Haimendorf, 1943: 285). Traditionally Chenchu depend upon seasonally available forest foods for sustenance. Day-to-day sustenance, food sharing, gift exchange, simple implements, and collective consumption rights were the features of their traditional economy. Gangadhar (1999: 60-61) explains the features of the Chenchu economy as the following. They are: a) dependence on the forest produce and hunting animals till today, b) consumption on the same day and no storage for future, c) lack of inclination for surplus production, d) provision of sharing food and sociability, e) lack of foresight in terms of economic planning for future. Division of labour is not clearly defined in this society.

There is a transition in the economic organization of the Chenchus. At the same time, the traditional ways of life have also partly prevailed. It is because of the changes in their relation with natural environs. The shift in habitat led to the shift in livelihoods. Consequently, the economic activities of the Chenchus are being altered. For instance, Siraj-ul-Hassan (1920: 152) observes "The wildest of the Chanchus subsist by hunting and also lives on forest produce and roots. ...Those who are settled on the outskirts of villages earn a livelihood by guarding the crops and cattle of the

village farmers. A few only have taken to cultivation." But, Khan (1933: 268) observes that "Chenchu is devoid of that human instinct to grow his food on the soil." Therefore, it is not very clear about whether they have resorted to agriculture by that time or not. Similarly, Gangadhar (1996: 180) observes "Day-to-day subsistence, food sharing, gift exchange and simple implements (bow and arrow and digging stick), collective consumption rights were the features of their traditional economy. Presently wage labour in forestry, cultivation, selling minor forest produce (MFP), and animal husbandry are emerging as primary occupations." However, these changes might not be very intensive and incipient in nature. They might not infuse into the economic system of the Chenchus. For instance, Sastry (1991: 171) observes "Centuries of contact with outside agencies, however, did not bring about any perceptible shifts in their economy as they continued to live in gathering and hunting state of economy with a social organization of their own." Same is true even today. Few Chenchus are still depending on forest for the livelihood; therefore, their economy revolves around the forest. But most of the population either moved to wage labour or farming. Their entry into farming activities have been altered the whole structure of the economic organization. The intensive labour based system of production aimed at surplus. Therefore, the relations of production have been altered. This has changed the notion of lack of co-operation and resulted in the co-operation among the extended kin groups. Therefore, "Persons belonging to the same clan closely co-operate with one another in various activities" (Bhowmick, 1992: 131). At the same time, shift in occupation, greater dependency on regional markets, and monetary transactions have been increasingly replacing their direct dependence for sustenance for forest produce. Moreover, adoption of agriculture necessitates establishing property rights over land and other assets. Individual ownership rights to collect minor forest produce were also established by some families.

Economic relations also determine social relations. It is particularly reflected in the relations between brothers. For example, Bhowmick (1992: 140) opines "Brothers never believe each other. During honey collection...there is a danger of the elder brother being killed by the younger brother for acquiring the former's wife and property." But, there is a gradual change in this aspect of their attitude. They are now going even with their brothers for honey collection. This is because of the shift in the livelihoods as well as the decline in the importance of honey collection as an

economic activity in majority of the areas. Nevertheless, they are not carrying forward the same notion for new economic activities such as farming and wage labour.

Political organization:

The traditional Chenchu settlements such as *penta* or *gudem* or any other settlement inhabited only by the Chenchus serve as a traditional political unit. Traditional political organization partly exists in such settlements. The important power-centre in the traditional political organization is *Peddamanishi* or headman. But the status and functions of headman were very uncertain. He was projected as a person with extreme powers by some scholars. For instance, Newbold (1846: 273) observes "...in each clan there are certain heads, or elders, who decide disputes, and punish malefactors; murder is atoned for by death." Similarly, in the Kurnool manual (1886: 159), the author says, the headman is assisted by the elders of the neighbouring *gudem*. He resolves the disputes and is entitled to precedence on all occasions of marriage or other ceremonies, and to a portion of flesh of the animals killed by any member of the *gudem* (hamlet). But *peddamanishi* does not seem to be very powerful. He performs duties along with the council of elders. In this context, Khan (1993: 270) observes "Settlement of disputes is made by the headman after he has heard the case in a panchayat of elders." But, Fürer-Haimendorf (1980: 186) emphasizes on a nominal headman. He observes, "If a dispute disrupts the harmony of a group, the elder men including the *peddamanchi* may try to mediate but they have no power to impose a settlement on unwilling parties" (Fürer-Haimendorf, 1980: 186). Therefore, the status of the headman either declined through time with the influence of British administration or the position might not be powerful at any point of time in the past.

Peddamanishi is not an elected representative but an influential person from the numerically dominant *kulam* or the *kulam* which establish the village. According to Fürer-Haimendorf (1943: 305), "The dignity [of a *peddamanchi*] is generally hereditary." He is usually the son of an outgoing *peddamanishi*. However, the position is not strictly hereditary. If *peddamanishi* do not have a son or if his son is not an influential person, another person from a *kulam* with strongest representation may emerge as the successor to the position (Fürer-Haimendorf, 1943: 119). However, one has to get acceptance from the people before becoming the *peddamanishi*. It usually happens with the increasing number of people approach him

to solve the disputes. Therefore, it is very difficult to ascertain any particular process of the succession of *peddamanishi* (Fürer-Haimendorf, 1943: 121). Other members of council are usually hereditary successors. However, the *peddamanishi* may exercise the right to choose the members. But such decisions may attract conflicts. Therefore, he does not prefer to do that. But he nominates members if there are no successors to *pathani* (minister) or *kolagadu* (priest). Apart from these core members, there may be few additional members who are usually elderly people from different other clans. In fact, there can be a representative from every clan of the village in the traditional council. Women do not have any role in the traditional political council. But they can attend the meetings of the council at the time of dispute resolution. They are free to express their opinion at the meeting. But such opinions or suggestions need not be considered by the council during the verdict.

The social relations are regulated by means of village level council of elders known as *Kula Panchayati* (Gangadhar, 1996: 181). According to him, the council was headed by *raju* (king) of *Bhumani kulam* assisted by *pradhani* (minister) of *Kudumula kulam* and *Kolagadu* (whip attender) of *Uttaluri kulam* (Gangadhar, 1996: 181). But, this kind of setup might be very specific to few villages. It is lacking universality in its structure because of the presence of different *kulams* in different villages. The *Kula Panchayati* or the traditional political council seems to be glorified by some scholars with a particular reference to the aspect of dispute resolution. For example, Bhowmick (1992: 148, 150) mentions the stronger influence of this council in the issues related to marriage. In this connection, he says "A divorced woman can marry a person of her choice, but the information about her divorce should be announced and approved by the Panchayat" (Bhowmick, 1992: 148). However, even the traces of such rule are not observed among the present day Chenchus.

The traditional political council never have formal meetings. Its main function is dispute resolution. Therefore, meetings are held only when there is a dispute in the village. They take up several types of cases ranging from a dispute within the family to the issues related to property which involves larger social units such as kin groups or local units/hamlets. The traditional council do not prefer to interfere in the disputes unless at least one of the party or person involved in the dispute request for the same. However, *peddamanishi* voluntarily involve in the disputes concerning inter-village

conflicts over resources or any other issues. Minor disputes are usually solved at personal or family level. People request *Kula Panchayat's* involvement only in major disputes. The headman may ask the elders of the clans from which the dispute has come, to take part in the dispute resolution if there is no representation from such clans. It ensures impartiality in the judgement. They represent the people involved in the dispute and argue on their behalf if necessary. The council may ask for oath of the culprit in front of a village deity or imposes fine on him/her. The meeting of *Kula Panchayat* is very expensive. The person who gets the verdict in favour has to offer a feast or at least liquor to all the members of *Kula Panchayat*. In some cases, the culprit has to offer feast instead of paying fine. Bhowmick (1992: 239-242) has mentioned several punishments such as dipping the hand in boiling water, gripping the red-hot crowbar, walking on the red-hot charcoal, and touching a red-hot wire with the tongue. But these are not practiced by the Chenchus nowadays. Instead, offing a lamp in-front of god and climbing onto a temple are very much in practice. However, the traditional political system has been subjected to many changes in the contemporary Chenchu society which will be explained in the succeeding chapter.

Material culture:

Material possessions are the mirrors of the culture of any community. Therefore, they can serve as the most important identity markers of an ethnic group. A simple observation of the people and their materials may help in identifying their ethnic group. The material culture of Chenchus is the overtly expressed part of their identity. Taylor (1862: 464) mentions, Chenchus "go about, constantly carrying in their hands bows and arrows." Similarly, Kurnool Manual (1886: 160) observes "The elders carry a spear, a hatchet, or a matchlock; others a bamboo bow and an arrow of reeds, tipped with iron; sometimes poison is applied to the ends of the arrows." Among all the implements, bow and arrow are indispensable from the Chenchus of olden days (Bhowmick, 1992: 59). However, a Chenchu woman cannot own the bow and arrow. She does not even practice hunting of any kind.

The Chenchus were using different types of arrows for various. Fürer-Haimendorf (1943: 31) observes "Chenchus have five different types of arrows. Of the five...three are metal tipped. The triangular or leaf-shaped *villa ambu*, described as "female", the simple spike *guka*, described as "male", and the blunt headed *kola*,

which aimed at the trunks of trees acts as a decoy by startling small animals hiding in the foliage." But by the time of Bhowmick's (1992) work (actually carried in 1977 and 1979), the hunting-gathering seems to be further declined, consequently, the types of arrows also reduced. He mentioned, "There are 3 types of arrow used by them. 'Goraka' or 'Potambu' is an arrow which has a solid point and is used to shoot small birds, rats, squirrels etc. Another type of arrow is 'Villambu', which has slightly flattened shape tapering into a sharp end. It is specially suitable for shooting rabbits. The third type is called 'Ambu', which is fitted with a pointed flat iron blade" (1992: 60). It seems that there is further decline in the types of arrows. Murty (1985: 196) explains "They [Chenchu] use two types of arrows: *potu ammu* (male arrow) and *penti ammu* (female arrow). *Potu ammu* which has an elongated iron arrow point is used for hunting small game. *Penti ammu* with a triangular, barbed, iron point is for hunting big game." At present, the Chenchus are not using more than two types of arrows. They are *penti-ambu* and *potu-ambu*. In fact, the Chenchus of plains are not aware of these types of arrows and also incapable of making them.

Digging stick is essential for the collection of roots, tubers, and other kind of edible products which have to be dug up from earth. Fürer-Haimendorf (1943: 29) observes "The mainstay of Chenchu economic life is the digging-stick. Indeed, if we were to adopt the prehistorian's habit of naming a whole culture after one type of artefact, we would be justified in describing the Chenchu culture as a digging-stick culture, for without this he would soon be reduced to starvation." Digging-stick is a wooden implement with the iron tip. Sometimes wood is directly used by sharpening its tip. It is not only useful to dig the roots and tubers but also to sow the seeds. It is basically the material of women because they play very important role in food gathering activities. But the decline of hunting practices made it compulsion for men to go with digging sticks for food gathering (Fürer-Haimendorf, 1943: 29). A Chenchu man can own a digging stick and he can practice the collection of food. Men and women use similar digging sticks. But the traditional digging-stick has almost disappeared and is replaced by a similar iron material *Palugu*. However, collection of food products from the forest has drastically decreased.

The Chenchus were using traditional fire-making techniques in olden days. The men as well as women are capable of making the fire. Thurston (1909: 43)

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mentions, Chenchus were making fire by friction, by means of the horizontal or sawing method. But, Fürer-Haimendorf (1943: 34) and Khan (1933: 267) observes that the people did not remember any such method, instead, they make fire by striking the flint or steel. Two flint or steel pieces are used to create the fire with the help of cotton-like hair surrounding the seeds of *Bombax malabaricum*. People are no longer using this method but few are aware of it. The match-boxes are available everywhere and the Chenchus are also using the same.

Dressing practices and ornaments:

Much has written about the dressing of the Chenchus. The dressing patterns of the people at different times in the history reflect social, cultural, and economic status of the people and the changes in such attributes. Few writings mentioned that men were close to nudity with a small piece of cloth around their loins (Buchanan, 1807: 106; Newbold, 1846: 271; Kurnool Manual, 1886: 160; Siraj-ul-Hassan, 1920: 149). But the women dress more decently than men (Newbold, 1846: 272; Kurnool Manual, 1886: 160). It seems that the Chenchus were influenced by the practices of non-Chenchus by that time. There might be some interaction among these groups. They make use of the leaves for personal decoration (Taylor, 1862: 464). But there was a gradual change in the dressing practices of these people. They might have influenced by their non-Chenchu neighbours for using clothes to cover the body. Thurston (1909: 37) described that the "Leafy garments have been replaced by white loin-cloths..."Fürer-Haimendorf (1943: 286) opines "Although woven cloth must have known to the Chenchus for a long time, the universal displacement of leaf-garments is probably less than a century old." However, a change in dressing practices further hastened with their movement toward plains. Bhowmick's (1992) account reflects the changing situation. According to him, "The present dress-patterns of the Chenchus are different and have changed considerably. But the old people and many men continue to have scanty dress" (1992: 62). Describing about their ornaments, Kurnool Manual (1886: 160) states that "They do not wear any ornaments of gold or silver; they however, use some copper ornaments, and adorn their necks with rosaries of *Guruvinda ginjas* (*Abrus precatorious*)." Personal decoration might have evolved much in the later years (Thurston, 1909: 37).

Food:

The staple food of the Chenchus consists of different types of leaves, vegetables and tubers available in the forest. Taylor (1862: 464) mentions that they "live on the sago, or rice of the bamboo." Bamboo rice is a very important foodstuff for the Chenchus in olden days. Even today, the Chenchus of few core settlements collect bamboo rice but it is no more an important foodstuff. The younger generation does not prefer to use it. There are changes in the diet of the Chenchus in gradual course of time. Kurnool Manual (1886: 160) mentions that "They eat cholam, ragi and millet. ...They eat also species of wild tubers called Chenchu gadda and the flesh of all the animals killed in chase, excepting tiger, cheetah and wolf." Therefore, it can be assumed that they have started adopting other types of food stuffs. Similarly, Thurston (1909: 38) also discussed about the importance of cereals for the Chenchus. But the observations of Fürer-Haimendorf (1943) from the Nizam dominions reveals that the Chenchus "subsist almost entirely on the wild fruits, plants and roots which they collect in the forests" (1943: 61). However, in later periods the Chenchus of this territory also moved to alternate food habits similar to the neighbouring non-Chenchus. The interventions of the government also helped in this regard. But their dependency on forest for staple food has not vanished. For example, Bhowmick (1992) observes that the Chenchus collect "edible wild roots, tubers, fruits, leaves and honey, besides occasionally hunting wild games and catching fish" (1992: 66). Their shift from the dependency on the forest to other kind of sources for food seems to be resulted in the imbalance of the diet. Sastry (1993) outlined various problems faced by Chenchu community in the process of transformation, more specifically the problems related to nutrition of the Chenchus. The changes in the dietary practices reveal the changing livelihoods of the community which ultimately lead to the shift in the identity of the people.

Language:

The Chenchus do not have language of their own. They speak different dialects of Telugu which depends upon their geographical location. But there is a difference of opinion among different scholars about the original language of the Chenchus. Majority of the scholars believe that Telugu is the main language of Chenchu. But few argue that Chenchus were having a different original language which perished in due course of time with the influence of the language of dominant

non-Chenchus living in neighbouring territories. However, there are no concrete evidences in this regard. Ferishta (1794: 83) observes "[Their] language is not in the least understood by the people of the villages below." Buchanan (1807) describes that "The language of *Chensu* is a dialect of *Tamul*, with occasionally a few *Karnata* or *Telinga* words intermixed" (1807: 106). But, Newbold (1846: 272) observes "They [Chenchu] converse in Telugu, and affirm that they have no peculiar language of their own, but their pronunciation of it is harsh and peculiar; in intonation of voice and animated gesture." While discussing about the vocabularies of various tribes inhabiting in the Vizagapatam, Newill (1857) states "the Chenchu tribe, whose language is almost entirely corrupt Hindi and Urdu with a few exceptions from Bengali, affords one more example to the many forthcoming of an uncultured aboriginal race having abandoned their own tongue" (cited in Thurston, 1909: 26). In response to this, Kurnool manual (1886: 161) stated that "Newill's vocabulary seems to belong to the dialect spoken by Lambadies who sometimes wander about the hills, and it is not unlikely that he was misled as to the character of the persons from whom his list was taken." But, Thurston (1909) has a different opinion. He says "It is probable that Mr. Newill confused the Chenchu with the Bonthuk Savaras who speak corrupt Oriya, and are called as Chenchu vandlu" (1909: 26). At the same time, he believes that "The Chenchus or Chentsus are a Telugu-speaking jungle tribe inhabiting the hills of the Kurnool and Nellore districts" (Thurston, 1909: 26). Khan (1933) in his observations from Nizam dominion states that "The Chenchus speak Telugu with a peculiar intonation" (1933: 276). Similarly, Fürer-Haimendorf (1943: 5) in his study from same territory writes "The Chenchus speak today a dialect of Telugu interspersed with a number of Urdu words." He has further opined that "the adoption of Telugu by the Chenchus was only a part of the general process of linguistic unification" (1943: 285). Around the same time Aiyappan (1948: 150) also opines that "The Chenchus are said to have a dialect of their own, but it is not known whether there is any script for it. They speak Telugu, but with a peculiar accent." In tune with above observations, Urmila Pingle and Fürer-Haimendorf (1998: 9) opined that "there is no recorded history to give evidence of the existence of a separate Chenchu language." Trivedi (1978) published a very important work on the language of the Chenchus. He believes that there might be a different language for the Chenchus because "Chenchu Telugu is considerably different from the Telugu of plains, particularly in all the prosodic features and in phonology" (1978: 8). Despite

certain peculiarities from neighbouring non-Chenchus, the language cannot be a potential marker of identity in the case of Chenchus. However, the dialectic peculiarity and its importance in identifying the Chenchus will be discussed in the succeeding chapter.

Conclusion:

This chapter made an attempt to construct ethnic identity from the perspective of literature. According to various scholars, Chenchu is a hunting-gathering tribe; depend on hunting, honey collection, and gathering of various types of roots, tubers, creepers, and edible leaves available in the Nallamala forest. They depend on *Adavi Talli* (mother forest) for livelihood and live in perfect harmony with nature. But there are lot of changes in the social, cultural, economic, political, and technological aspects of Chenchu life. Fürer-Haimendorf (1943) described Adavi Chenchus as the people having digging stick culture. This reflects the life of a Chenchu during 1940s. But there is a transformation in the life of this tribe in the span of last 70 years. Nowadays, the 'digging stick' culture is almost disappeared. Its importance curtailed to a greater extent. The Chenchus of various territories are at different stages in the process of development. Some are practicing agriculture and others have become wage labourers. Very few of them have entered into different types of employment. This is due to contact with outsiders, development interventions, and government policies and programmes. As a result, their traditional practices are also subjected to change. Therefore, the diversity in occupation and habitat is contributing to the diversity of cultural practices and paving way for new forms of identity of the Chenchu. As a result, they have been divided into different groups depending on their proximity to non-Chenchus, contact with non-Chenchus, and development initiatives. However, they are not entirely different and are having a common identity.

PROFILE OF THE FIELD

It is crucial to understand the research in a context in order to check the validity and reliability of the findings. The research for this thesis has been carried out in a large territory to understand cultural diversity among the Chenchus of Andhra Pradesh. However, intensive fieldwork was taken up in four settlements each one from four districts. The socio-economic profiles of these villages provide a background for understanding the present research. The social and resource maps supplement the understanding of the villages. This chapter discusses the socio-economic profile of the Chenchus in general and emphasizes the same of the select villages; Chenchugudem of Prakasam district, Kottalacheruvu of Kurnool district, Appaipally of Mahabubnagar district, and BKV Palem Chenchugudem of Guntur district. Having different background, the four villages display diversity within the Chenchu community. All the four villages are located in significant geographical distance from one another, that is, 75 km to 230 km. The villages are different in terms of their location, population size, composition, and contact with outsiders.

Topography:

Nallamalai hills are the traditional habitat of the Chenchus. These are the part of Eastern Ghats rising to over 800-900 meters, spread through northeast to southwest. They are covered with thick deciduous forest which is very rich in natural resources. Nallamalai forest and hills spreads over an area of 3568.09 sq. km. out of which is 1200 sq. km. is core area and 2368.09 sq. km. identified as buffer zone. The forest and hills located between 78^0 30' to 79^0 28' East longitude, 15^0 53' to 16^0 43' North latitude and in the altitude of 100 meters to 917 meters above sea level.

Climate:

The climate is dry in the Nallamalai forest. The summer season is from March to May followed by monsoon from June to October and the winter is from November to February. The temperature varies between 17^0 to 45^0C. Early showers resultant from the south-west monsoon occurs in the month of June. Average rainfall recorded is 1000 mm per year.

Flora:

Dense Nallamalai forest is very rich in its flora. The Chenchu use different parts of trees for various purposes ranging from food needs to medicinal needs. They have immense knowledge related to flora in their vicinity. Some of the important flora are, Chinta chettu (*Tamarindus indica*), Ippa chettu (*Bassia latifolia*), Nallamaddi chettu (*Terminalia tomentosa*), Musti chettu (*Strychnos Nux-vomica*), Nemali chettu, Veduru (*Bombax indica*), Adavi aamudamu chettu (*Jatropha curcas*), Adavi Munaga chettu (*Moringa pterygosperma*), Adavi nimmakai (*Atlantia monophylla*), Aari manu (*Bahunia recimosa*), Billidi chettu (*Chloroxylon swietenia*), Buruga manu (*Bombax malabricum*), Chilla chettu (*Strychnos potatorum*), Chinaga manu (*Atylosia lineate*), Sirimanu chettu (*Anogeissus latifolia*), Elaga chettu (*Feronia elephentum*), Gurugu chettu (*Abrus precatorius*), Illinda chettu (*Diospyros chroloroxylon*), Vepa chettu (*Azadiracta indica*), Jama chettu (*Calycopteris floribunda*), Jammi chettu (*Prosopis spicigera*), Janna chettu (*Grewia poplifolia*), Kanuga chettu (*Pongamia pinnata*), Karaka chettu (*Terminalia chebula*), Musti chettu (*Strychnos nux-vomica*), Nalla maddhi chettu (*Terminalia tomentosa*), and Neredu chettu (*Eugenia heyneana*).

Fauna:

Like its flora, the Nallamalai is also known for its fauna, which ranges from carnivorous tiger to herbivorous deer. The other animals include *Chiruta puli* (leopard), *Elaggoddu* (sloth bear), *Adivi kukka* (wild dog), *Adavi Gorri* (wild Sheep) *Udumu* (pangolin), *Jinka* (deer), *Duppi* (sambar), *Manimeka* (nilgai), *Edupandi/Mulla Pandi* (wild boar), *Mosali* (crocodile), *Kundelu/Kindalu* (hare), *Adavi Pandi* (wild pig), *Kaditi*, *Nakka* (Jackal), *Jangam pilli* (wild cat), *Koti* (monkey), *Konda silava* (python), *Nagupamu* (cobra), etc., and the birds include *Adavi Kodi* (wild fowl), *Kamsulu* (quail), *Pala pitta* (Indian roller), *Pisaka, Guvva* (dove), *Konga* (crane), and *Pavuramu* (pigeon).

Demography:

Total Scheduled Tribe (ST) population of Andhra Pradesh is 50.24 lakhs. Out of which Chenchu population is 49232 (24962 male and 24270 female) which is almost equal to one percent in the total scheduled tribe population of Andhra Pradesh. The field villages are selected from Prakasam, Guntur, Mahabubnagar, and Kurnool districts which have high Chenchu population as shown in the table 1. Chenchus live

INDIA
ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISIONS 2011

AFGHANISTAN

P A K I S T A N

C H I N A

T I B E T

N E P A L

BHUTAN

BANGLADESH

MYANMAR

SRI LANKA

ARABIAN SEA

BAY OF BENGAL

INDIAN OCEAN

ANDAMAN SEA

L A K S H A D W E E P (INDIA)

LAKSHADWEEP SEA

A N D A M A N A N D N I C O B A R I S L A N D S (INDIA)

States and Union Territories:

JAMMU AND KASHMIR, HIMACHAL PRADESH, PUNJAB, UTTARAKHAND, HARYANA, RAJASTHAN, UTTAR PRADESH, ARUNACHAL PRADESH, SIKKIM, ASSAM, NAGALAND, MEGHALAYA, MANIPUR, BIHAR, JHARKHAND, TRIPURA, MIZORAM, WEST BENGAL, GUJARAT, DAMAN & DIU, DADRA & NAGAR HAVELI, MADHYA PRADESH, CHHATISGARH, ORISSA, MAHARASHTRA, ANDHRA PRADESH, GOA, KARNATAKA, DELHI, PUDUCHERRY, TAMIL NADU, KERALA

Legend:

BOUNDARY, INTERNATIONAL
BOUNDARY, STATE/U.T.
BOUNDARY, DISTRICT

KILOMETRES
100 0 100 200 300 400

NA : DATA NOT AVAILABLE

C - CHANDIGARH
P - PUDUCHERRY

K   - Kapurthala
SAS Nagar - Sahibzada Ajit Singh Nagar
SRNB - Sant Ravidas Nagar Bhadohi
GBN   - Gautam Budh Nagar
SKN   - Sant Kabir Nagar

Coco Is. (MYANMAR)
Narcondam I. (INDIA)
Barren I. (INDIA)
North and Middle Andaman
South Andaman
Nicobar
INDIRA POINT

New More I. (INDIA)

East of Greenwich

ANDHRA PRADESH
Districts Map

LEGEND
State Boundary
District Boundary
State Capital
District Headquarter

N

MAHARASHTRA
KARNATAKA
CHHATTISGARH
TAMILNADU

ADILABAD
Adilabad
NIZAMABAD
Nizamabad
KARIMNAGAR
Karimnagar
MEDAK
Medak
RANGAREDDY
Rangareddy
HYDERABAD
WARANGAL
Warangal
KHAMMAM
Khammam
MAHBUBNAGAR
Mahbubnagar
NALGONDA
Nalgonda
KRISHNA
Krishna
WEST GODAVARI
Eluru
EAST GODAVARI
Kakinada
VISHAKHAPATNAM
Vishakhapatnam
VIZIANAGARAM
Vizianagaram
SRIKAKULAM
Srikakulam
GUNTUR
Guntur
PRAKASAM
Prakasam
NELLORE
Nellore
KURNOOL
Kurnool
CUDDAPAH
Cuddapah
ANANTAPUR
Anantapur
CHITTOOR
Chittoor

BAY OF BENGAL

Map not to Scale
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PROJECT AREA, ITDA, SRISAILAM

KURNOOL
MAHABUBNAGAR
APPAPALLY
KOTTALACHERUVU
CHENCHUGUDEM
NALGONDA
BKVPALEM
CHENCHUGUDEM
GUNTUR
PRAKASHAM

in all other districts of Andhra Pradesh but in very lesser numbers. The detailed population statistics of the Chenchus of Andhra Pradesh are given below.

Table 1: Demographic statistics of the Chenchus of Andhra Pradesh

Sl. No.	District	Population
1	Srikakulam	222
2	Vizianagaram	85
3	Visakhapatnam	278
4	East Godavari	690
5	West Godavari	1452
6	Khammam	98
7	Warangal	700
8	Adilabad	892
9	Mahabubnagar	8272
10	Krishna	1575
11	Guntur	9791
12	Prakasam	10413
13	Nellore	281
14	Chittoor	64
15	Kadapa	588
16	Anantapur	103
17	Kurnool	7282
18	Rangareddy	2706
19	Hyderabad	40
20	Medak	431
21	Nizamabad	482
22	Karimnagar	1795
23	Nalgonda	992
Total		49232

Source: *TCR&TI (Annual Report – 2008-09 & 2009-10)*

Education:

British administrators made an attempt to impart formal education among the Chenchus of the then Madras Presidency. They have established few schools in the Chenchus territory. Thurston (1909: 45) mentioned about the establishment of two upper primary schools in 1904-05 by the then British government for the Chenchu children of Kurnool district. Gangadharam (1999: 25) mentioned about the appointment of an educational superintendent during the year 1917 for the development of education among the Chenchus of same district. Mohanty (2004) mentioned a school, which was established by the forest department in the year 1918 in Bairlutygudem of Kurnool district. After national independence, many schools

were established by the government in the Chenchu territory. The year 1972 is a land mark in this regard. The number of schools increased after the establishment of the Integrated Tribal Development Authority (ITDA) for the Chenchu in 1975. But most of the schools are primary and upper primary schools. There is a steady increase in the number of school going children in recent years.

The ITDA established different types of schools in Chenchu territory for the educational development among Chenchus. The type of school depends on the concentration of Chenchus in a village. Ashram Schools are upper primary schools. Girijana Vidya Vikasa Kendras (GVVK Schools) are primary schools. Kasturba Schools are established with an objective to develop education among girls. Mini Gurukalas are established in order to have better accessibility to Chenchu students in addition to Gurukulas (Residential schools). Residential schools are said to be most successful among all types of schools. There are only 3 junior colleges and one Degree college for Chenchu students. The Degree College is offering only social science courses. The Chenchu students who have completed their intermediate with biological sciences or mathematical sciences find it difficult to continue their education in the same stream. This is a grave shortcoming with regard to educational institutions for the Chenchus.

Table 2: Schools and colleges under ITDA, Srisailam

Sl. No.	Type of institute	Number
1	Ashram schools	34
2	Girijana Vidya Vikasa Kendra	118
3	Residential Schools	6
4	Mini Gurukula Schools	6
5	Kasturba Schools	11
6	Junior colleges	3
7	Degree college	1

Schools in the Chenchu territory are suffering from various problems. For example, inadequate number of teachers, irregularity of teachers because of the location of schools in inhospitable regions, liquor drinking habits of some teachers, lack of students, negligence either by student or by teacher, dropouts, lack of sufficient in-service training to teachers, and lack of awareness among parents. As a result, the performance of those schools is at stake. Apart from all these problems, the

composition of class with the students from different communities failed to promote interest among Chenchu students. For example, the Chenchu students are lesser in number than others, either tribals or non-tribals; in many of these schools. There is no special focus on Chenchu students in such cases. In fact, the attention of teachers often shifts to active students of other communities. The Chenchu students are quite often ignored with a notion that they are stubborn and less receptive. A Chenchu teacher complains that "the non-Chenchu teachers are less sensible to Chenchu students by thinking that they are unhygienic and stubborn. But, they have never tried to persuade Chenchu students to develop good habits. Instead, they focus more on the Lambada students who are active, clean and talkative." But it doesn't mean that all the Chenchu teachers are very sensible to the educational development among the Chenchus. Some teachers of the Chenchu community are also irregular to school. Teachers rarely live with the students. The interpersonal relationships are worse among the students of various communities. They live, eat, play and sit in class separately. The groups are formed depending on the community. There are no extra-curricular or co-curricular activities which can promote co-operative attitude among the students. The students are not very interested in curricular activities which are confined to class room.

Curricular activities of the Chenchu students are similar to that of non-tribal students. Chenchu students could not appreciate the curriculum. Some efforts are made by ITDA in recent years to simplify the curriculum for the Chenchu students. Text books with illustrations are circulated for tribal students. But, no efforts made to design a different curriculum for Chenchu students. The curriculum which reflects the environment and needs of Chenchus may help in creating interest among the students. ITDA is trying to introduce English medium in some of its schools. There is a need for intensive examination of ground realities before any such effort. Otherwise, it may be futile because of lack of equipped teachers. The alarming rate of dropouts is another important threat to the educational development of Chenchus. This is happening mainly with the increasing migration among the Chenchus in search of livelihood. Elders take their children along with them whenever they go for migration. They will return usually after a year. They may admit their Children in the school on their return to the village or they may choose to ignore. It depends on the interest of the children as well as the parents. Usually, the parents never ask their children to go

for school. But, they ask children to go for food. They rarely inquire about educational progress of the child. They usually have complaints only when the food is not good. The supervision of higher authorities on educational development depends on the persons in power positions and varied depending on the Project Officer, ITDA.

The literacy rate among Chenchus is very less. It is 17.88 percent according to the census of 1991. The literacy among males is 24.90 percent and female is 10.11 percent. But according to 2001 census, the literacy is 32.28 percent in which literacy among male is 40.87 percent and among the female is 23.45 percent. Despite having a history of more than a hundred years of establishment of educational institutions, literacy is far from being satisfactory. They could not perceive an incentive for the participation in education. At the same time, the awareness programmes have not been carried among them to convince the people about the need of education. It is viewed as a process that gives food for child for a very short period. The contact with non-Chenchus is helping them in recent years to understand the importance of education. It can be understood from the increasing number of students in the multi-ethnic villages. But, there is a need to promote awareness and provide incentives for the consistent increase in the enrolment of Chenchus children.

Health facilities:

The Chenchus usually depend on the traditional medical system. They have vast body of indigenous knowledge pertaining to medical practices. But the traditional medical practices are gradually declining because of the limited transmission of the knowledge. They believe that traditional medical knowledge should be kept secret in order to protect the position of the '*vejju*' (traditional medical practitioner). At the same time, the *vejju* believes that the medical knowledge will be diluted and medicines lose power if everybody learns it. Therefore, the traditional medical practitioner usually transmits the knowledge only to his son. If he does not have a son, he may occasionally teach it to his daughter or a selected person of the village or may not teach anybody. The clients are decreasing to *vejjus* due to the growing adaptation to western medical systems. As a result, the traditional medical knowledge is gradually disappearing. The Chenchus living in the core territories of the forest are still using indigenous medicines but the Chenchus living outside the forest have

almost left these practices. They have started using the medical facilities provided by the government.

The government made several efforts to provide medical facilities in the vicinity of the Chenchus. Forty three primary health centres established in six districts (Mahabubnagar, Prakasam, Guntur, Kurnool, Rangareddy, and Nalgonda). ITDA has identified 300 volunteers from the community and trained them as health workers. Their duty is to report the cases to a nearest health centre and provide first aid to the ill person. They should also try to create awareness with the help of ITDA in order to maintain personal hygiene. The Primary Health Centres (PHCs) of Kurnool district are referring Chenchu cases to different private hospitals in the district headquarters and bearing all the expenses of treatment. The ITDA is planning to extend this facility to the Chenchus of other districts. A blood bank started in Sunnipenta Project hospital by ITDA. This is accessible to Chenchu along with all other people. ITDA is planning to establish a Central Drug Store in Kurnool but it is yet to materialize.

The medical help rendered by Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) is very significant. Red Cross Society, Nice Foundation, and Department for International Development (DFID) in Collaboration with Andhra Pradesh Right to Eye Sight Society (APRESS) are playing a crucial role in providing health facilities to the Chenchus. All these organizations are organizing health camps periodically in the Chenchu territory. Red Cross society under its rural health programme conducts health camps very frequently among the Chenchus. The mobile dispensary of Indian Red Cross Society with a doctor and three paramedical staff visit the Chenchu settlements of Mahabubnagar district at least once in a month. They also maintain the health cards of the Chenchu students of Ashram schools of this region. They conduct periodical health check-up and supplying medicines to the Chenchus free of cost. The Red Cross Society and Nice foundation organize medical camps even in the core settlements of the forest. Seva Bharati organization is providing health services for the Chenchus of Kurnool district through its mobile dispensaries. DFID and APRESS are conducting cataract operations and lending other kinds of medical help pertaining to eye care in collaboration with ITDA. They have done 4378 cataract operations in the ITDA administered region which include Chenchus as well as other communities. The

medical help rendered by these organizations is very significant. LV Prasad Eye Institute (LVPEI) is organizing eye care health camps in the schools of the Chenchu territory. They are providing treatment for the minor eye problems of the children and supplying spectacles. They are offering services with 50 percent subsidy for the major problems at their institute in Hyderabad.

Drinking water:

Small water tanks are there in most of the Chenchu villages. Safe drinking water programme is sponsored by the government. But the programme is suffering due to the poor management of these water tanks. Therefore, people usually depend on hand pumps. The Chenchus of interior settlements depend on ponds and streams for drinking water. The poor quality of drinking water is a major source of diseases. They are not following the hygienic practices like using bleaching powder or chlorine tablets due to lack of awareness. Consequently, they could not protect themselves from different kinds of water born diseases.

Sanitation:

They voluntary health workers look after the sanitation of the village. But, they were not provided with bleaching powder and other required materials for the maintenance of sanitation. They do not have proper incentive for work. As a result, personal as well as community hygiene is at question. There is no awareness on personal hygiene and sanitation. In some Chenchu hamlets, the government sanctioned toilets to few households but none of them are using that facility. Open air defecation is the prevailing practice. The Chenchus living in the multi-ethnic villages have got drainage facilities, but they are not properly maintained. The *village panchayat* provides sanitation in such settlements. But, these *panchayats* are very inactive in disseminating their services due to lack of staff. Therefore, Chenchus frequently suffer with Malaria and other diseases.

Communication facilities:

Some hamlets are fully or partially connected with road and telecommunication facilities. The *pentas* located in the core areas of the forest are not connected with road and telecommunication facilities. Most of the Chenchu hamlets are not having postal service. The development of transport facilities to fringe areas of

the forest enhanced their contacts with outsiders. The Lord Shiva temple and construction of a hydro-electric dam on Krishna river at Srisailam paved way for the road transportation facilities. The development of road and telecommunication has a significant impact on the traditional practices of Chenchus.

Electricity facilities:

Many of the Chenchu hamlets do not have electrical facilities even today. Despite having a massive hydro-electric project in their vicinity, settlements in the core area of the forest do not have electricity facilities. The major obstacle to establish power supply facilities is the recognition of the forest as a tiger reserve. The government has tried to electrify such hamlets by using alternate energy resources. Andhra Pradesh Tribal Power Company (AP TRIPCO) was established in the year 2002 as an autonomous company to search the possibilities and alternatives for electrification and supply of power to tribal hamlets. This corporation is taking up the projects not only for conventional power supply but also to promote solar energy in the inaccessible Chenchu hamlets. TRIPCO installed Home Lighting Systems (Solar Energy) at 492 households in different Chenchu hamlets of Nallamalai forest. This project was implemented in Appapuram, Bourapuram, Pullaipally, Irlapenta, Rampur, and Mallapur settlements of Mahabubnagar district; Botukulapaya of Guntur district; Pechcheruvu of Kurnool district; and Peddamantanala of Prakasam District. But, success of the project is at question due to lack of awareness among the Chenchus about the maintenance of solar systems. The lack of supervision and follow-up activities by officials is also a major problem. Some efforts made very recently to connect Chenchu hamlets of interior areas of the forest with underground electric cable system. This work is under progress but not yet connected any village of Nallamalai forest.

PTG status and establishment of ITDA:

After independence, the Indian government made efforts to identify the least developed communities in order to have a special focus on their development. As part of this initiative 75 groups are identified as Primitive Tribal Groups (PTGs) in 1973. Chenchus are one among such groups. The criteria used for the identification of PTGs are: pre-agricultural level of technology, remote isolated enclaves, lesser population, stagnating or diminishing population, and low levels of literacy. Due to the derogatory

Important MFP

Honey

Ippa flower

Chenchu gaddalu

Gum collection

Gum

Chilla ginjalu

Madani Gaddalu

Kanuga ginjalu

nature of the term 'primitive', it is proposed to change as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups. The strategy for advancement of these groups emphasizes on economic development programmes along with conservation of eco-system, life styles and traditional skills of the group. An Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA) was established in 1975 for the development of Chenchu with its headquarters at Hyderabad. It was established under the centrally sponsored programme for Primitive Tribal Groups (P.T.G). But it was shifted to Srisailam during the year 1988. ITDA is working for the overall development of Chenchus. Since then the Chenchu habitat (Nallamalai region) has witnessed a series of developmental measures. This agency is implementing various development schemes in the fields of agriculture, irrigation, education, health, nutrition, horticulture, supply of drinking water, and construction of roads. All these programmes have led to changes in various aspects of Chenchu life.

Girijan Co-operative Corporation (GCC):

Girijan Co-operative Corporation (GCC) is established by the government of Andhra Pradesh in the year 1956 with its head quarters at Visakhapatnam. The main objectives of the corporation are to buy the forest produce from tribals, to supply domestic requirements, to encourage self-help, thrift, and co-operation among the members, to promote agriculture, and to encourage tribals for entrepreneurial activities by providing loans. The main functions are to setup forest based industries in scheduled areas, to undertake activities such as processing and grading, and to implement welfare schemes for economic uplift of tribals. This is actively engaged in the collection of Minor Forest Produce (MFP) from Chenchus. GCC is maintaining 22 Daily Requirement (DR) depots in Mahabubnagar district, 9 depots in Kurnool district, and 10 depots for the Chenchus of Prakasam district. GCC is playing an active role as a marketing channel as well as a supplier of minimum required food materials. The Chenchus are predominantly depending on this institution for their ration and financial needs. DR depots of the GCC also function as weakly markets for the Chenchus. It is a vital organization and the only source of food supply for the Chenchus of core settlements. This organization pays a descent amount for all the products collected by the Chenchus but the salesmen do not transfer the entire amount. They pay lesser amount for the products collected by the Chenchus and sell the food products supplied by the GCC at a higher cost than the original. However, this malpractice does not overshadow the usefulness of the GCC. In fact, GCC is the

household name among the Chenchus. This corporation introduced several new products to the Chenchus. Its weakly markets act as agents of communication among the Chenchus of different villages of the core area of the forest because the Chenchus from nearby settlements gather at one place where GCC organizes market.
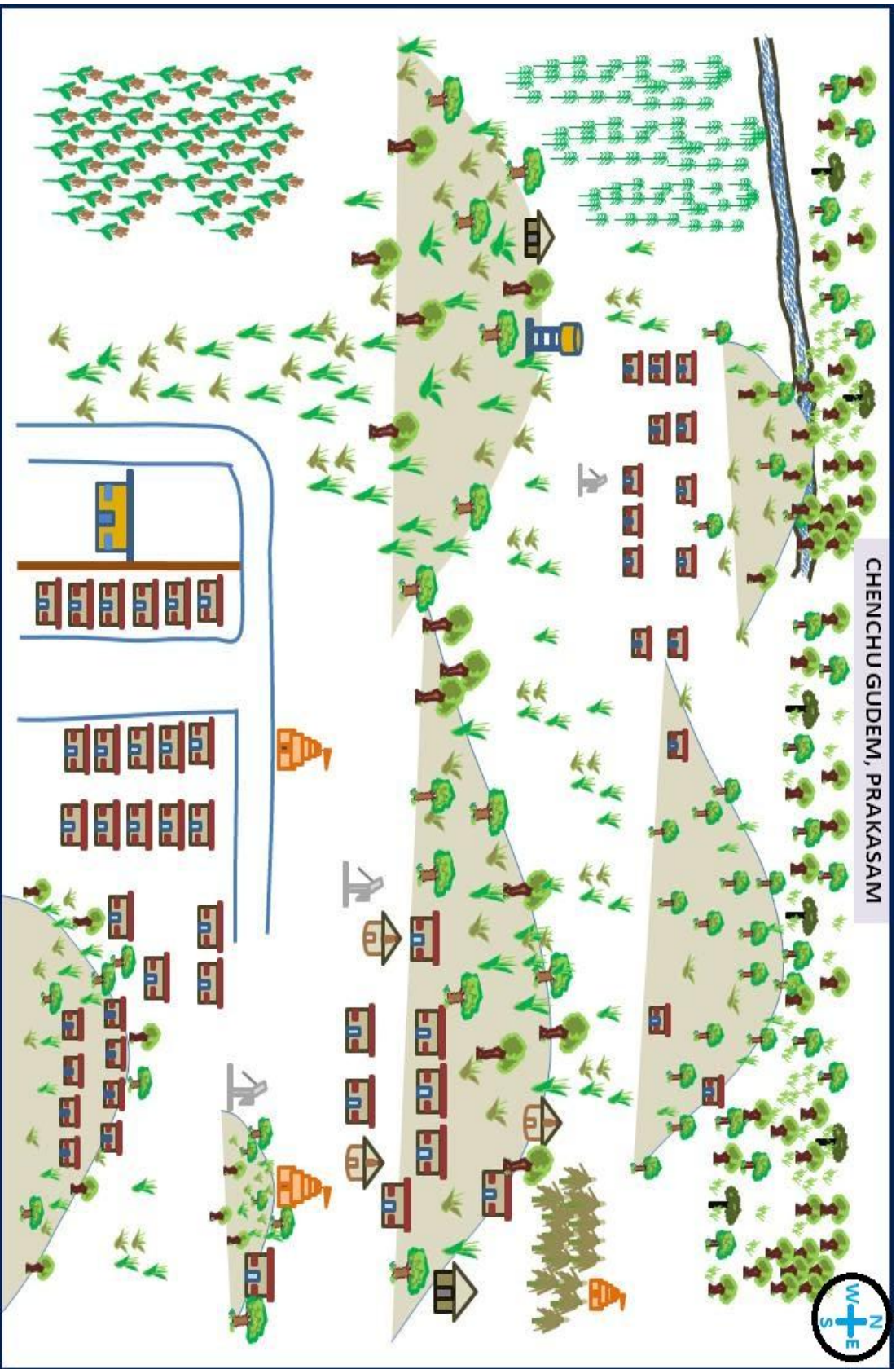
Self Help Groups (SHGs):

There are 556 SHGs in Mahabubnagar, Prakasam, Guntur, and Kurnool districts. Majority of groups are actively working as nodal agencies to implement various development programmes at village level. There are 6151 members from these four districts participating in the activities of these groups. In fact, many of the members have migrated to different cities in the state. Migration is prevalent in Mahabubnagar district. However, the groups are functioning with limited members. Even today, some of the Chenchu women do not have membership in these groups. Lack of awareness and loopholes in the administration are obstacles in such cases. Despite persistent problems, SHGs are successful intervention among Chenchu women. The women are regularly attending the group meetings and participating in the discussion. SHGs create awareness and promote co-operation among the members. There is no scope for major conflicts among various groups because each group function as a separate entity but conflicts within a group are quite common for which members often find solutions collectively.

Animal husbandry programmes and livestock:

The government has introduced animal husbandry programmes for the development of Chenchus. Particularly, the authorities have distributed buffaloes, cows, and goats. It helped Chenchus in shifting livelihood options and to better the financial condition. There is little diversity in the domesticated livestock. Goats are the major livestock in terms of the role played by them in the economy of Chenchus. The very important domesticated animals for the Chenchus are dogs. But, they continue to be important only for the Chenchus depending on forest for livelihood. Chenchus describe dogs as their 'eyes and ears'. This is because of the service rendered by dogs when they go for hunting and food gathering. The changes in the mode of subsistence led to the changes in the livestock. Therefore, diversity in livestock depends on the location and changing livelihoods of the Chenchus.

CHENCHU GUDEM, PRAKASAM

INDEX

Slab House

Tile House

Hut

School

Hospital/ PHC

Panchayat Office

Post Office

GCC Store/ PDS

Shop

Temple

Church

Dargah

Bore Well

Water Tank

Pond

Stream

Agricultural Field

Forest/ Trees

Hill

Pucca Road

Kutcha Road

Joint Forest Management (JFM):

Eco-development committees (EDCs) numbering 115 have been constituted in and around the reserve forest not only to reduce the dependency of the villagers on the forest but also to check and plug all the smuggling routes in the forest. The President and the members of these committees are made but not volunteered. Forest officials have made an influential person of the village as the President of the Eco-Development Committee (EDC). The President is aware of the committee but members are not aware of it because no activities are taken up by these EDCs. Apart from this, 85 *Vana Samrakshna Samithis* (VSS) are constituted. But, people are not aware of VSS too for similar reasons. It is ornamental to have EDCs and VSS as part of JFM. Neither the forest officials nor the Chenchus are interested in these committees. The reforestation programmes have been taken up very rarely by the forest department. In such cases, they appoint Chenchus as wage labourers regardless of their membership in the EDC or VSS.

Changing occupational structure of Chenchu:

Occupational choices are limited to the Chenchus living in core areas of the forest. Most of them depend on the collection of Minor Forest Products (MFP). They are not venturing into other occupations because of the limitations in the forest. However, occupations of the Chenchus of fringe villages of the forest and multi-ethnic villages in plains are gradually diversifying because of their continuous contact with non-Chenchus, more opportunities in plain areas, and not having access to traditional resources.

VILLAGES

Chenchugudem, Pedda Dornala Mandal, Prakasam District

This village is inhabited only by the Chenchus. It is located on 79^0 East longitude and $15^0 53^1$ North latitude in Pedda Dornala Mandal of Prakasam District. It is 3 km away from the multi-ethnic village Chilakacherla and 7 km away from village panchayat, Cherlopally. The village is surrounded by hills and looks like four pieces separated by a hillock. One cannot see the whole village at a glance because of the

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scattered arrangement of houses around hillocks. Bow and arrow culture is prevalent. Small game hunting is a common but big game hunting is rare due to restrictions of forest department and threat from police. The game is captured mostly by trapping the animal rather than hunting it with bows and arrows. The village is at a remote location and the communication systems are not properly developed. People prefer to collect the Minor Forest Products (MFP) over and above all the activities. Men are engaged in wage labour activities, particularly in cutting wood for local contractors and very few are engaged in agricultural labour to the farmers of neighbouring Chilakacherla village. Few families are involved in agriculture despite poor irrigation facilities. They cultivate one crop per year, usually; ground nut, maize, and sun flower with the help of the peasants of Chilakacherla village.

Kottalacheruvu, Atmakur Mandal, Kurnool District

This village is located on 78^0 37^1 East longitude and 15^0 57^1 North latitude. It is in Atmakur Mandal of Kurnool district. It is 12 km away from mandal headquarter and 3 km away from the multi-caste village and *panchayat*, Kurakunda. It is a resettlement colony constructed at the fringe of the forest in 1985 for the Chenchus displaced from Pechcheruvu, a village 30 km away. The village is inhabited by Chenchu, Sugali, Boya, Madiga, Mala, and Muslim communities. Chenchus of this village have bow and arrow culture but it is not prevalent as in the case of the Chenchus Chenchugudem. They have engaged in collection of MFP and small game hunting. Very few Chenchus practice agriculture too, but irrigation facilities are very poor. An irrigation project known as *Varadaraja Swamy Project* is 3km away from the village. It was built across *Munimadugulavagu*. But Chenchus of this village do not get water for irrigation from this project. It reveals the impact of the contacts with non-Chenchus of neighbouring villages on the Chenchus of this village.

Appaipally, Lingal Mandal, Mahabubnagar District

Appaipally is a multi-ethnic village of Lingal Mandal in Mahabubnagar district. It is located on a high plane surrounded by lush green forest and hills in between 78^0 34^1 East longitude and 16^0 15^1 North latitude. It is 8 km away from the Mandal headquarter, Lingal. The village is notified as agency area and included in the

5th schedule of the Indian constitution. The history of village reveals the development of habitation from a *penta* (exclusive Chenchu settlement) to a multi-ethnic village. The village was known as Appannapenta and inhabited by very few Chenchu families. Few Lambada (Sugali) families have come to the village more than 60 years ago to graze their cattle. They have gradually settled in the village. The Chenchus did not resist Lambadas because there was no competition between both communities for resources. They depend on different ecological niche. The Chenchus were collecting various forest products and hunting small game. Lambadas were interested only in grazing their cattle and not collecting forest products. In fact, they were not having knowledge required to collect forest products. There was no competition due to the structural differentiation in the economy of inhabiting groups. The peaceful co-existence prevailed as long as there was no competition from other groups of people. In the course of time many other caste groups have migrated to the village. In a very short time Appannapenta was filled with migrants from different places. They have occupied huge tracts of forest land, deforested it and made it cultivable. Increased population resulted in pressure on natural resources available in the vicinity of the village. Large scale deforestation for around 5 km circumference of the village made the Chenchus helpless. Lambadas and peasants of caste groups occupied the cultivable land. Therefore, Chenchus lost forest as well as cultivable land. Nothing is left for the Chenchus. In fact, Chenchus have been restricted from using certain resources such as huge water bodies nearby the village. The fishing by Chenchus has been strictly prohibited by powerful migrant communities. It has resulted in several conflicts among the Chenchus and non-Chenchus of the village. At present, 20 caste groups, three tribal groups, and the people from two religions are residing in the village. The name of the village is popular as Appaipally which the migrants prefer to use. The increasing competition for limited resources, restrictions on the Chenchus to enter into the core areas of the forest, and deforestation led Chenchus to search for the alternative livelihoods. Despite lack of interest in cultivation, they could not even find the land at least to keep it as an asset that can be given for lease. The Chenchus believe that their land was occupied by outsiders. Therefore, they have developed antagonism toward outsiders. But it was never turned into a major conflict because the Chenchus of the village is no more a numerically dominant group in the village. The contact with outsiders not only disturbed the economic structure of the village but also made them subservient in their original habitation.

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BKV Palem Chenchugudem, Macherla Mandal, Guntur District

This village is predominantly inhabited by the Chenchus except one family of Lambada tribe and two families of Madiga caste. The village is located on 79^0 17^1 East longitude and 16^0 30^1 North latitude. It is 6 km away from village panchayat, Nagulavaram and 18 km away from Mandal headquarter, Macherla. It is 12 km away from Nagarjuna Sagar, a popular town having a multi-purpose dam. The road connecting Macherla and Nagarjuna Sagar towns runs through this village. The *gudem* is 2 km away from the multi-ethnic village BKV Palem.

Demography:

There are 80 households in Chenchugudem, 86 in Kottalacheruvu, 78 in Appaipally, and 55 in BKV Palem Chenchugudem. The average size of the household is 3.8 members in case of Chenchugudem, Kottalacheruvu, and BKV Palem Chenchugudem villages but it is 2.9 members in case of Appaipally village. Sex ratio is varying as shown in the tables below. But, Chenchus do not have preference for boy or girl child. Majority of the population of Chenchugudem is under the age of 30 years (Table 3) which reflecting high mortality. Mortality is hight in other villages too. Liquor drinking habit is one important reason but the Chenchus of Kottalacheruvu attribute it to displacement. UV of Kottalacheruvu says "Chenchus were severely affected by an unknown disease immediately after shifting from Pechcheruvu. As a result, huge number of people died in the first five years after displacement." Probably, the problems of adjustment were also important in this case.

Table 3: Population of the study villages

Age group	Chenchugudem		Kottalacheruvu		Appaipally		BKVP Chenchugudem	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
0-5	19	22	17	17	9	11	19	14
5-10	34	25	21	18	14	9	9	16
10-20	51	41	36	44	30	25	26	27
20-30	28	29	36	33	30	26	24	21
30-40	14	14	21	31	18	12	12	20
40-50	8	8	14	20	6	10	8	4
50-60	6	5	5	9	7	11	5	2
60-70	0	0	0	0	4	3	0	0
Total	160	144	150	172	118	107	104	104
	304		322		225		207	

Marital status:

The Chenchus get married at a very early age. Average age at the time of marriage is 14-18 years for women and 17-21 years for men. Usually, girls get married immediately after attaining puberty. But, it seems to be changing in multi-ethnic villages. For example, the average age at marriage for female is 19-22 years and for male is 22-25 years in Appaipally. It is due to the influence of contacts with outsiders, educational development among the Chenchus in multi-ethnic villages, and lack of employment at an early age unlike in case of forest dependents. In some cases, man and a woman live together without marriage and have children too. Such couple go to a temple before or after having children and man tie a *taali* (marriage thread) to his woman in the temple. There is not much difference between the status of marriage and living relationship. Such couple enjoy similar privileges like any other couple in the rituals. Their relationship is considered as legitimate and the couple treated as wife and husband by rest of the community.

Divorce cases are very rare. They do not live alone even if they take divorce from the partner. They prefer to find a companion even before divorce. Otherwise, divorce is a very burdensome procedure for man because he has to search a suitable companion for wife or he has to pay fine before divorce. It is difficult for a woman to get a husband after 35 years of age. But a widow less than that age easily gets a partner at least by entering into polygyny relation. But it is not so difficult for a widower to find another woman at any age. For example, five of the twenty eight widows of Kottalacheruvu and three of the five widows of BKV Palem Chenchugudem are in a live-in relationship. But no remarriage has taken place in both the villages. Their relation is not very open. They have not entered in a formal relationship with a man. People do not recognise them as wife and husband. They can get such recognition only after disclosing their relation or by entering in a polygyny relation. But, in such cases the man has to persuade first wife to have a socially acceptable relation with the other woman. In some cases, the woman lives in her hut with children and get all kinds of support from a sister's husband or any other man but never disclose such relationship in public. However, a widow living with another man is never devalued by other members. Fellow members of the community often describe it as support by a man which a widow badly needs in some occasions.

There are four polygyny alliances in Chenchugudem and all the polygyny cases are limited to two female partners. But among three cases of polygyny from Kottalacheruvu; one man is having three wives, one man married two siblings, and one man is in a sororate relation. One levirate case is identified among three polygyny cases from BKV Palem Chenchugudem. There are no polygyny cases in Appaipally village. It is an outcome of intensive contacts with non-Chenchus but principally people of this village are not against polygyny marriages.

Cross-cousin marriage is most preferred and very prevalent in all villages. Thirty one such cases from Chenchugudem, twenty six cases from Kottalacheruvu, five cases from Appaipally, and twenty three cases from BKV Palem Chenchugudem are identified. Marriage with sister's daughter is also popular among them. Seventeen such cases from Chenchugudem, six cases from Kottalacheruvu, two cases from Appaipally, and two cases from BKV Palem Chenchugudem are identified. Cross-cousin marriages are not very prevalent in Appaipally village. The important reason behind the decrease of cross-cousin marriages is the migration of the Chenchus from various *pentas* of the forest to Appaipally. The Chenchus of a single *penta* or neighbouring *pentas* are scattered while migrating to villages in plain area. Now, they prefer to have marital relation with the Chenchus close to their village instead of searching for their relatives of a distant village.

Table 4: Marital status, Chenchugudem, Prakasam district

Age group	Male				Female			
	Married	Unmarried	Widower	Divorced	Married	Unmarried	Widow	Divorced
0-10	0	53	0	0	0	47	0	0
10-20	16	35	0	0	24	17	0	0
20-30	27	1	0	0	27	0	1	1
30-40	13	0	1	0	10	0	4	0
40-50	7	0	1	0	5	0	3	0
50-60	6	0	0	0	4	0	1	0
Total	69	8	2	0	70	64	9	1
	160				144			

Table 5: Marital status, Kottalacheruvu, Kurnool District

Age group	Male			Female			
	Married	Unmarried	Widower	Married	Unmarried	Widow	Divorced
0-10	0	38	0	0	35	0	0
10-20	1	35	0	12	32	0	0
20-30	31	4	1	27	1	3	2
30-40	21	0	0	22	0	9	0
40-50	14	0	0	11	0	9	0
50-60	5	0	0	2	0	7	0
Total	72	77	1	74	68	28	2
	150			172			

Table 6: Marital status, Appaipally, Mahabubnagar District

Age group	Male				Female			
	Married	Unmarried	Widower	Divorce	Married	Unmarried	Widow	Divorce
0-10	0	23	0	0	0	20	0	0
10-20	2	28	0	0	5	20	0	0
20-30	21	9	0	0	22	1	2	1
30-40	17	0	1	0	6	1	5	0
40-50	6	0	0	0	5	0	5	0
50-60	5	0	2	0	5	0	6	0
60-70	4	0	0	0	1	0	2	0
Total	55	60	3	0	44	42	20	1
	118				107			

Table 7: Marital status, BKV Palem Chenchugudem, Guntur District

Age group	Male			Female		
	Married	Unmarried	Widower	Married	Unmarried	Widow
0-10	0	28	0	0	30	0
10-20	3	23	0	8	19	0
20-30	23	1	0	20	0	1
30-40	12	0	0	17	0	3
40-50	8	0	0	4	0	0
50-60	2	0	3	1	0	1
Total	48	52	3	50	49	5
	104			104		

Literacy and educational levels:

The education is highly neglected by the Chenchus of Chenchugudem village. A primary school established in this village in 1972. But it hasn't brought a needful change in the educational scenario of the Chenchus of this village. Literacy rate among men is 35 percent and among women is 27 percent. Majority of the literates have only primary education and not able to read and write. Same is the situation in other Chenchu villages too. But, it is very difficult to ascertain the number of functional literates. Only one man and one woman are literates among the Chenchus

above 20 years of age. It shows that education is a recent development in this village. Number of school going children is high but it is premature to interpret them as literates because most of the children are dropping out of the school before becoming a functional literate. Many of the school going children do not know the class in which they are studying. The students are usually promoted up to 5th class but reluctant to go to high school far away from their village. The literacy rate and educational levels are poor when compared with other Chenchu villages under study.

The literacy rate is high in Kottalacheruvu village. An upper primary school established in this village in 1985 at the time of rehabilitation which was later upgraded to high school. It has a significant impact on the educational scenario of this village. Literacy rate among the male is 66 percent and among female is 51 percent out of which 39 percent male and 23 percent female have high school education or above. This is remarkable when compare with many other Chenchu villages. Location of the village close to mandal headquarters and development of road and transport facilities paved the way for educational development. In addition to that, special attention paid by the administrators to develop it as a model rehabilitation village is very helpful in this regard.

Ashram school was established in Appaipally in 1972. It has helped in promoting education among the Chenchus of this village. The literacy rate among male is 58 percent and among female is 36 percent. Multi-ethnic setting of the village and development of road and telecommunication facilities are important in the development of literacy and improvement in educational levels. But, the establishment of an upper primary residential school in BKV Palem Chenchugudem in the same year did not bring a significant change in the literacy rate. It is 31 percent among male and 18 percent among female of this village.

The Chenchus do not have any role in the decision making process with regard to their education. The decision making authority is vested in the Project Officer (PO), ITDA. The PO, ITDA has taken a decision during 2009-10 academic year to shift the Chenchu children from the school of one's own village in order to improve the rate of attendance. It is forcibly implemented even for the students of 1st class. As a result, 45 Chenchu students of 1st class from the Ashram school of Appaipally

village have left in streets as they are not willing to stay in a hostel far away from their village. This measure did not help students. In fact, this has led to increase drop-outs of Chenchu students of this village. The authorities are even failed to instil confidence among the parents about the well-being of their child in a far away school. Dropout rate is a serious problem in these schools. The pressure from higher authorities to increase enrolment leads to imbalance in the ratio of students from various communities. The school administration is enrolling non-Chenchu students to reach the target. Therefore, the priority to educate Chenchus gets diluted.

Table 8: Literacy and educational level, Chenchugudem, Prakasam district

Age group	Male			Female		
	Illiterate	I-V class	VI-IX class	Illiterate	I-V class	VI-IX class
0-5	0	0	0	0	0	0
5-10	5	29	0	1	24	0
10-20	32	13	6	33	6	2
20-30	27	1	0	28	0	1
30-40	14	0	0	14	0	0
40-50	8	0	0	8	0	0
50-60	6	0	0	5	0	0
Total	92	43	6	89	30	3
	141			122		

Note: *Literacy rate calculated against the population above 5 years of age.*

Table 9: Literacy and educational levels, Kottalacheruvu, Kurnool District

Age group	Male					Female		
	Illiterate	I-V class	VI-IX class	Inter	Graduation	Illiterate	I-V class	VI-IX class
0-5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
5-10	4	17	0	0	0	2	16	0
10-20	6	11	16	3	0	6	14	24
20-30	13	4	16	2	1	21	6	6
30-40	11	1	7	2	0	20	7	4
40-50	7	3	4	0	0	19	0	1
50-60	4	0	1	0	0	8	0	1
Total	45	36	44	7	1	76	43	36
	133					155		

Table 10: Literacy and educational levels, Appaipally, Mahabubnagar District

Age group	Male					Female				
	Illiterate	I-V class	VI-IX class	Inter	Graduation	Illiterate	I-V class	VI-IX class	Inter	Graduation
0-5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
5-10	1	13	0	0	0	0	9	0	0	0
10-20	5	11	8	6	0	7	3	10	4	1
20-30	13	5	5	6	1	21	2	3	0	0
30-40	13	1	4	0	0	10	2	0	0	0
40-50	4	0	2	0	0	10	0	0	0	0
50-60	6	1	0	0	0	11	0	0	0	0
60-70	4	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0
Total	46	31	19	12	1	61	16	13	4	1
	109					96				

Table 11: Literacy and educational levels, BKV Palem Chenchugudem, Guntur District

Age group	Male					Female			
	Illiterate	I-V class	VI-IX class	Inter	Graduation	Illiterate	I-V class	VI-IX class	Inter
0-5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
5-10	6	3	0	0	0	11	5	0	0
10-20	19	4	3	0	0	21	1	4	1
20-30	14	4	4	1	1	17	1	2	1
30-40	8	2	1	0	1	19	1	0	0
40-50	6	2	0	0	0	4	0	0	0
50-60	5	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
Total	58	15	8	1	2	74	8	6	2
	84					90			

Note: Literacy rate calculated for the population above 5 years of age.

Occupational structure:

Territorial location of the village is crucial in shaping occupational choices of the Chenchus. Occupational choices are minimal for the Chenchus living in core areas of the forest. Most of them depend on the collection of Minor Forest Products (MFP). In contrast to that, Chenchus of fringe villages of the forest and multi-ethnic villages in plains have more occupational choices. Their occupations are diversifying because of continuous contact with non-Chenchus, more opportunities in plain areas, and not having access to traditional resources. However, occupational structure of the present day Chenchus is very fluid. For instance, the Chenchus of Chenchugudem often move among various occupations such as wage labour, MFP collection, field protection and goat rearing. Cultivation is more or less stable with its practitioners. Liquor making is a business activity for few families of this village. Blacksmith is a rare occupation among Chenchus. Chenchu cultivators need wooden implements which they cannot

make. A Chenchu man of the village learned the skills of making ploughs and other implements from a blacksmith of Dornala village but it is a part time activity for him.

Table 12: Occupational structure in the study villages

Occupation	Chenchugudem		Kottalacheruvu		Appaipally		BKVP Chenchugudem	
	Male	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**
Wage labour	50	62	44	66	53	62	33	48
MFP collection	10	11	23	24	8	9	1	2
Wood cutting	0	0	0	0	0	0	11	13
Cultivation	5	4	2	2	5	6	5	4
Cattle rearing	7	3	4	0	4	1	9	0
Driving	0	0	8	0	1	0	1	0
Teaching	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	0
Forest watcher	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	0
Clerical	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	0
Watch man	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
Health volunteer	0	0	0	2	0	1	1	0
Tailoring	0	0	0	2	0	4	0	0
Home guard	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Cook	0	0	0	2	1	1	0	0
GCC dealer	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Constable	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
Attendant	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Contractor	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
Liquor making	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Field protection	11	9	0	0	0	0	5	3
Blacksmith	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	87	90	93	103	77	84	66	70

Chenchus of Kottalacheruvu and Appaipally practice wide variety of occupations such as agricultural labour, MFP collection, cultivation, cattle rearing, tailoring, teaching, forest officer, forest watcher, home guard, clerical/attendant, driving, cook, watchman, GCC dealer, and community health worker. Wage labour and collection of MFP are major occupations for the Chenchus of Kottalacheruvu, whereas; agricultural labour and construction labour are important occupations for the Chenchu of Appaipally. Construction labour is a rare occupation among the Chenchus. It is added to occupational choices of the Chenchus of Appaipally because of their migration to towns. Predominant occupations of the Chenchus of BKV Palem Chenchugudem are wage labour and wood cutting. Wood cutting is a business for the Chenchus of this village. Non-Chenchus from neighbouring villages are the customers for fuel wood. Cultivation is not regularly practiced due to lack of irrigation facilities.

Other occupations of the Chenchus of this village are goat rearing, field protection, MFP collection, community volunteer, and driving. Occupational changes have significant impact on social and economic life of Chenchus. 'Digging stick culture' or 'bow and arrow culture' has almost disappeared. The concept of savings is gradually developing. They are gradually moving from 'lack of an economic system' to 'consumer based market economy'.

Land holding:

The cultivable land in the fringe areas of the forest has occupied by the peasants of various communities. Since they have never thought about cultivation, they haven't resisted the alienation of land near their habitations. They were more keen on gum trees and *sarris* (valleys where honey is abundantly available) in the locality. A Chenchu man says, "When we were going through hills and the forest for the collection of various products, others were cultivating these lands." Therefore, it was harmonious dependency of different people on different niches in order to get livelihood. But, restrictions on the entry into forest and scarcity of MFPs increased the need of cultivable land for the Chenchus. At this juncture, the Government made efforts to promote agriculture among the Chenchus. They have distributed land either by clearing small portion of the forest and by acquiring it from non-Chenchus to the Chenchus of Chenchugudem, Kottalacheruvu, and BKV Palem Chenchugudem; whereas, the Chenchus of Appaipally cleared forest on their own to acquire a small piece of land. However, cultivable land is not a productive asset for the Chenchus in most of the cases. For example, table-13 shows that land is the most important asset of the Chenchus. But, tables-12 shows meagre number of cultivators among the Chenchus because most of the Chenchus are not equipped with skills required for cultivation and not interested in intensive labour activity. At the same time, irrigation facilities are very poor in the Chenchu territory. They have to cultivate depending on rain or bore-wells. Therefore, they require more investment with the risk of less yield and profit. These are some drawbacks to promote agriculture among the Chenchus.

Table-13 shows that 51 out of 80 families of Chenchugudem have cultivable land but table-12 shows that only five families are into cultivation. Similarly, only two families (Table-12) of Kottalacheruvu village are into cultivation out of 60 land owning families and five families of Appaipally out of 24 land owning families, and

five families of BKV Palem Chenchugudem out of 39 land owners are into cultivation. However, some families are getting income by giving the land for lease. It is possible only if the land is fertile. For example, forty two families of Kottalacheruvu and five families of Appaipally leased out the land to the peasants of other castes at a rate of 2000-3000 rupees per acre per year. The major crops are cotton, maize, ground nut, and sun-flower.

Table 13: Land holding in the study villages

Size of the land (in acres)	Number of families			
	Chenchugudem	Kottalacheruvu	Appaipally	BKVP Chenchugudem
0 – 2	11	22	3	29
2 – 4	12	36	6	6
4 – 6	24	2	12	3
6 – 8	3	0	0	1
8 – 10	0	0	0	0
10 – 12	1	0	3	0
Total	51	60	24	39

House types:

Traditional Chenchu huts are circular or square or rectangular in shape and have a single room. But, Chenchus of most of the villages in Nallamalai forest have square or rectangular shaped single room cement houses constructed with the 100 percent subsidy of the Government. Therefore, there is no diversity in the house types of Chenchus of Chenchugudem, Kottalacheruvu, Appaipally, and BKV Palem Chenchugudem villages. Seventy four households of Chenchugudem have cement houses and rest of the six have rectangular huts built with wattle walls made of bamboo and thatched roofs. All the houses of the village are electrified. They get electricity free of cost. Same is the case with all other villages. Seventy four households of Kottalacheruvu have cemented houses and twelve have huts. All the Chenchus of Appaipally have cement houses except one family. Fifty families of BKV Palem Chenchugudem have cement houses and five have huts. Huts are circular type with mud or stone walls but not bamboo walls.

Table 14: House types in the study villages

House type	Chenchugudem	Kottalacheruvu	Appaipally	BKVP Chenchugudem
Cement house	74	74	77	50
Thatched hut	6	12	1	5

Livestock:

Livestock of Chenchus reflect the economic condition as well as territorial location. Dog is most common livestock for the Chenchus of core and fringe areas of the forest. Dogs are part of their traditional life and considered as members of the family. They guide Chenchus in the forest and protect from wild animals and helpful to capture small game in the forest. But, the changing livelihoods are largely responsible for the changes in the priorities of livestock. Decrease in the dependency on the forest led to the disappearance of dogs from the livestock of the Chenchus of multi-ethnic villages in the plain areas. Dogs are no more relevant for them. Moreover, it is burden to feed dogs. For example, table-15 shows that sixty five households of Chenchugudem and fifty two households of Kottalacheruvu have dogs, whereas; only five households of Appaipally have dogs. The next important livestock is goat. It has social and economic significance. They usually sell goats whenever there is a need for money. Particularly, they sell goats at the time of festivals, rituals such as marriage, and at the time of illness to cover the expenses of treatment. Goats are frequently gifted by the bridal party in marriage exchanges. They also sacrifice goats at the time of some festivals. *Peddamma* festival is one such occasion where a goat sacrificed by most of the families. Goat rearing has become the common practice with the intervention of ITDA in order to change the livelihoods of the Chenchus. Some Chenchus are voluntarily buying goats by taking loan from SHGs. They rarely use chickens for commercial purposes but use them for consumption and to sacrifice during festivals. Oxen are not very important but they made an entry into livestock of Chenchus with the intervention of ITDA to promote agriculture. Cows are also gaining importance in the livestock of the Chenchus of Appaipally village because of the influence of Lambadas. Buffaloes are given by ITDA on subsidy. They have gained importance in the livestock of Kottalacheruvu village but not in other villages.

Table 15: Livestock in the study villages

Livestock	Chenchugudem		Kottalacheruvu		Appaipally		BKVP Chenchugudem	
	Total	HH	Total	HH	Total	HH	Total	HH
Dogs	125	65	89	52	8	5	38	28
Goats	272	33	53	7	61	7	92	9
Chickens	20	8	111	24	4	1	36	8
Cows	0	0	0	0	10	4	2	1
Oxen	6	3	0	0	1	1	6	3
Buffaloes	0	0	21	6	2	1	3	2

Self Help Groups (SHGs):

Self Help Groups (SHGs) are the most important development intervention introduced by any external agency. ITDA has initiated this movement. Regardless of their success or failure, they have played a significant role in bringing awareness among women pertaining to organization, participation in a group, and saving money. The membership in SHGs is more or less permanent. The maximum members are 15 in each group but no group has those many members in any village. Usually, members are unevenly distributed among the groups because of preferential grouping of women from the same clan or kin group into an SHG.

All SHGs of the village are coordinated by a village level organization, *Gramaikya Sangham*. The secretary of *Gramaikya Sangham* participates as a representative in the meetings organized at Mandal level by *Mandala Samakhya* (Mandal Organization). These groups have become vibrant in recent years because ITDA made *Gramaikya Sangham* as an agency to implement all the development programmes in the village. These groups are supervising the activities pertaining to house construction, water supply, health and hygiene. The members can take loans from SHGs for various purposes depending on their needs.

Women of Kottalacheruvu and Appaipally are active but women of Chenchugudem and BKV Palem Chenchugudem are not very active in terms of their participation in the activities of SHGs. Migration is a major reason for lesser number of members in SHGs of Appaipally village. The membership is highly inconsistence as it depends on the wish of each member. There are no strict parameters to control the membership. The names of SHGs often reflect the beliefs of Chenchus. However, they also consider the names of movies and politicians in naming a group. *Chenchu Lakshmi Mahila Sangham* is most popular name among all. All the active groups conduct meetings once in a week. All such groups meet together once in a month known as *Chinna Sangham* or *Gramaikhya Sangham* (Village Organization). They adopt a resolution in every meeting which is forwarded to *Mandala Samakhya*. They discuss issues like loan taken by the members, utilization of loans, and needs of the members. Sometimes the meeting runs for more than three hours. The meeting seems quite unorganized but they discuss vital issues even at the time of conflict and quarrel. The conflicts are also resolved by the end of the meeting.

Table 16: Self Help Groups, Chenchugudem, Prakasam district

Sl. No.	Name of the SHG	Total members
1	Sri Rama Mahila Sangham	7
2	Dargamma Mahila Sangham	8
3	Tagore Mahila Sangham	10
4	Indira Mahila Sangham	5
5	Bayyanna Mahila Sangham	6
6	Poturaju Mahila Sangham	5
7	Mahatma Gandhi Mahila Sangham	6
	Total	47

Table 17: Self Help Groups, Kottalacheruvu, Kurnool District

Sl. No.	Name of the SHG	Total members
1	Sai Durga Mahila Sangham	8
2	Chenchulakshmi Mahila Sangham	9
3	Chenchita Bhavani Mahila Sangham	7
4	Gurappa Swamy Mahila Sangham	10
5	Sanghamitra Mahila Sangham	7
6	Parameswari Mahila Sangham	6
7	Saraswathi Mahila Sangham	5
8	Parvathi Mahila Sangham	5
9	Jeevana Jyothi Mahila Sangham	5
10	Lingamayya Mahila Sangham	6
11	Nagamayya Mahila Sangham	5
12	Bharati Mahila Sangham	4
13	Varadaraja Swamy Mahila Sangham	5
	Total	82

Table 18: Self Help Groups, Appaipally, Mahabubnagar District

Sl. No.	Name of the SHG	Total members
1	Chenchu Lakshmi Mahila Sangham	9
2	Bhagya Lakshmi Mahila Sangham	7
3	Indira Mahila Sangham	7
4	Siva Parvati Mahila Sangham	5
5	Anjali Mahila Sangham	3
	Total	31

Table 19: Self Help Groups, BKV Palem Chenchugudem, Guntur District

Sl. No.	Name of the SHG	Total members
1	Velugu Mahila Sangham	9
2	Chenchulakshmi Mahila Sangham	8
3	Kodanda Rama Mahila Sangham	8
4	Laxmitirupatamma Mahila Sangham	6
5	Narasimhaswamy Mahila Sangham	4
6	Anjaneyaswamy Mahila Sangham	4
7	Teja Mahila Sangham	4
8	Yesu Mahila Sangham	2
	Total	45

Incentives from government programmes:

Housing and Anthyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) schemes are most important and successful schemes among the Chenchus of all the territories. Government is providing 30 kg of rice and other food materials to each family at subsidised rate under AAY scheme. Therefore, it is one of the most successful schemes among the Chenchus in the entire territory. All the families of Chenchugudem are the beneficiaries of housing and AAY schemes. But, only twelve out of eighty six households of Kottalacheruvu village are the beneficiaries of this programme. But, lesser number of beneficiaries was attributed to technical problems by the officials and the process is going on to identify all the eligible Chenchus. Seventeen families of BKV Palem could not access benefits from AAY scheme because of loopholes at ground level. Particularly, the problem surfaces while preparing a list of beneficiaries by officers with the help of local leaders. The families not available in the village at the time of such identification are removed from the list. Few families of the village go for seasonal migration as agricultural wage labourers. Such families missed from the list of beneficiaries. The land distribution scheme is another important scheme. Milch cattle are given at subsidised rates to promote alternate livelihoods. All the old age people and widows are gets pension of 200 rupees per month. This has become a chief source of their financial security. ITDA has tried to implement certain programmes which are more suitable to local needs. For example, mango plantation and bio-diesel plantations are taken up in some villages. The saplings were supplied by the ITDA. But these two programmes have failed in achieving their objectives due to the lack of training and follow-up activities.

Table 20: Programmes and beneficiaries in the study villages

Programme	Number of beneficiaries			
	Chenchugudem	Kottalacheruvu	Appaipally	BKVP Chenchugudem
House	80	74	62	50
Bore wells	6	8	9	4
Land	51	60	0	39
Milching animals	33	6	5	3
Oxen	3	0	1	3
Old age pension	12	30	16	12
Widow pension	11	28	15	8
AAY	80	25	62	38
Self employment	0	5	2	2

Material possessions:

The material possessions reflect livelihood activities and economic development of Chenchus. For example, material possessions of the Chenchus of Chenchugudem and Kottalacheruvu reflect the persistence of bow and arrow culture. Their livelihood activities revolve around *villu/dabba* (bow), *ammu* (arrow), *goddali* (axe), and *katthi* (knife). Men carry all these materials while going to the forest. Few Chenchus have *para* (spade) and *kodavali* (sickle) to use in agricultural operations. Material possessions of the Chenchus of BKV Palem Chenchugudem and Appaipally reflect the change in livelihoods and the influence of the contact with non-Chenchus and the territorial location. The bow and arrow are gradually disappearing from BKV Palem Chenchugudem and almost disappeared from Appaipally. But, the axe is still an important material possession for them.

Table 21: Material possessions in the study villages

Item	Chenchugudem		Kottalacheruvu		Appaipally		BKVP Chenchugudem	
	Number	HH[#]	Number	HH	Number	HH	Number	HH
Bow	71	70	59	56	2	2	8	8
Arrow	351	70	271	56	5	2	34	8
Axe	70	70	76	76	45	45	51	51
Knife	60	60	67	66	18	18	39	39
Sickle	22	22	28	28	52	52	37	37
Spade	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	0
Drums	4	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cot	14	14	97	76	10	10	38	38
Chair	0	0	26	13	14	9	10	5
Wrist watch	13	13	25	24	21	18	24	24
Wall clock	4	4	9	9	22	22	9	9
Almirah	0	0	2	2	2	2	0	0
Sewing machine	0	0	3	3	4	4	0	0
Radio	4	4	7	7	9	9	11	10
Television	9	9	31	31	15	15	21	21
CD player	10	10	7	7	8	8	11	11
Mobile Phone	3	3	23	21	14	12	20	19
Bicycle	5	5	19	18	4	4	5	5
Motor cycle	0	0	2	2	2	2	1	1
Auto	0	0	3	3	0	0	1	1
Jeep	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1
Tractor	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	0

#HH – Households

The Chenchus of these villages do not possess agricultural implements. The Chenchus of BKV Palem are not practicing agriculture, whereas; Chenchus of

Appaipally are depending on middlemen for agricultural operations. But, possessing large number of sickles by the Chenchus of Appaipally reflects their increasing participation in agricultural operations as wage labour. Electronic gadgets such as radio, tape recorder, television, CD player, and mobile phone are started finding a place in recent years. The growing number of electronic gadgets is the result of imitation. Bicycles are added to material possessions of the Chenchus after laying down the roads. Autos are given by ITDA on subsidy under self-employment scheme.

Conclusion:

The four villages selected for the study are having differences in the social and economic profiles. These villages are located in different territories and depending on different resources and occupations. The composition of social groups and the extent of contacts differ from village to village. Out of the four villages, Appaipally of Mahabubnagar district is from the erstwhile Nizam territory and the rest were part of Madras Presidency which was under the British rule. The administration was unified completely only after the establishment of ITDA at Srisailam during the year 1988. The Chenchus of these villages have been influenced by the contacts of various non-Chenchu communities and the changes have taken place depending on the intensity of contacts. Keeping this context in the mind, the thesis examines ethnic identity of the Chenchus of Andhra Pradesh.

ETHNIC IDENTITY: CONTEMPORARY SCENARIO

Identity is never unilateral (Jenkins, 1996: 21). It is dialectically expressed by the interacting groups. Not only is the identity expressed by the group but also the recognition of same or a different version by another group or community in interaction is very important. However, the conceptualization of identity of a specific group may differ among different interacting groups. The specificities and dynamics in the interaction with different groups are responsible for variations in the perceptions of those groups. In some cases, the group might be having internal dynamism in its identity but it may or may not reflect in the expressed or actual identity of the group. For example, a Chenchu who left hunting still possess bows and arrows. Similarly, a group can be differently identified by different interacting groups. For example, a Lambada person identifies a Chenchu person as a fellow Scheduled Tribe (ST) person as well as a lazy person with lack of interest to work, earn, and progress. People of the Lambada community often say "A Chenchu man doesn't perform any activity if food and liquor are provided for free." At the same time, caste groups identify Chenchus in a different way. For example, Uppara caste of the Appaipally village considers Chenchus as harmless people when compared to the Lambadas. The relative identities are very common and depend on the competition in economic and political spheres.

Social identity "refers to the ways in which individuals and collectivities are distinguished in their social relations with other individuals and collectivities" (Jenkins, 1996: 4). However, the similarity and difference are dynamic principles of identity. The social identity and cultural identity cannot be seen as different entities. They are interrelated and overlapped. The distinction between the cultural and the social is flexible than the distinction between the personal and cultural identity. But ethnic identity encompasses all kinds of identities a group can possesses (Sevanen, 2004: 9). Therefore, it can be understood as a combination of both and even beyond. The concept of ethnic identity and the ideas developed around it are dealt in detail in the introductory chapter. For the operational purposes, the definition of Levinson (1994) is adopted in this chapter. According to Levinson (1994: 73) "Ethnic identity refers to the reality and the process through which people identify themselves and are

identified by others as members of a specific ethnic group." This definition provides a broad canvass despite its vagueness and subjectivity. Although in a more subjective sense, we can say that ethnic identity is a combination of all kind of identities expressed by an ethnic group.

Identifying with one or the other group is necessary because human beings cannot live in isolation. Sevanen (2004: 5) aptly opines "People need security, acceptance and shelter; and partly for this reason they identify with different groups and communities. In the process, these identifications came to form a central part of their cultural identity." The cultural variation among various interacting groups initially poses certain disengagement but gradually get adopted and adjusted to each other. But such a variation extends to different subgroups within a group depending on the agents and circumstances of interaction. It leads to cultural diversity within a group that result in the development of multiplicity of identities. How identity works in the interactional space and how it operates between interacting groups is very important. Ellemers *et. al.,* (1999: 1) observes that "groups and group members derive their meaning from a particular social context [and] people use groups to define their identity in relation to other relevant groups." Therefore, identity changes according to social contexts as well as the interacting groups. As a result, there is always a scope for the diversity in the identity of an ethnic group.

Every group encounters certain other groups whose nature and identity are not clear to each other. Such contact may give rise to culture shocks to each other initially but often has significant impact on both the interacting groups in course of time. But it is possible for the whole group to adapt a specific set of cultural traits of the other group only when there is a continuous and long term interaction. However, the interacting groups need not equally influence each other; rather, one group may be more influenced than the other. It depends on the perceptions of interacting groups about the superiority or inferiority of each other's cultural traits as well as their utility and adaptability. There may be uncertainty of the identity of a group if there is a radical change. Its social landscape may be no longer static. The influence need not be limited to a specific aspect of culture but it may spread into different aspects such as language, traditions, religion, politics, economy, power relations, gender differences, division of labour, roles of different members of family, and material culture.

Social identity is a dynamic concept. It changes due to various reasons but the interacting groups have a greater bearing on this. The differences in identity may reveal the sub-divisions of a community. However, such groups may express a common identity at times required. For example, the Chenchus politically identify themselves as well as are identified by others as "Chenchus". But socially, religiously, and economically they identify themselves as different groups, however, certain differences prevail in such identification when concerned with the ideas of non-Chenchus. It depends on the economic and political status of the Chenchus. The Chenchu elite, for example; teachers, other employees, and the people working in different political and administrative offices are identified as one unit and all other Chenchus outside this category are identified as another unit by non-Chenchus. The territorial location of the Chenchus is playing a significant role in identifying themselves as different groups. For example, the Chenchus of towns and multi-ethnic villages of Mahabubnagar district refer the Chenchus of hills and forests as *Kurava Chenchus* (*Kurava* means hill). At the same time, the Chenchus of hills and forest of Mahabubnagar district describes the Chenchus of towns and multi-ethnic villages as *Kindollu* (people living down the hill). However, both the groups describe themselves as *Deva Chenchus*. In fact, the Chenchus believe that they are ancestrally related. But all of them do not subscribe to a single myth pertaining to their origin. The Chenchus of Kurnool prefer to describe them as *Konda Chenchu*. Quite often they are also describing themselves as *Deva Chenchu*. They project both the identities which are distinct in terms of their meaning. The term *Konda Chenchu* is derived from their habitat whereas; *Deva Chenchu* means the descendents of god or servants of god. However, they trace the descent to different gods and it depends on the region. The Chenchus living in the territories close to Ahobilam (popular town with a Narasimha Swami temple) of Kurnool district trace their descent to Lord Narasimha, a *Vaishnavaite* deity, whereas; the Chenchus of other territories (influenced by Lord Mallikharjuna of Srisailam) trace their descent to Lord Mallikharjuna, a *Shaivaite* deity. The identity with two different traditions of Hinduism seems to be the historical development. Folklore about the connections with different Hindu traditions seems to be the result of contact with Hindus of different territories. It can also be confirmed by the fact that Chenchus rarely worship the idols, instead; they offer prayers to a stone and name it after some deity. They are unconcerned with the shape of such stones. The Chenchus of Guntur and Prakasam districts describe themselves as *Deva*

Chenchu regardless of the location of their habitat. The Christian converts from Shivalingapuram and BKV Palem Chenchugudem of Guntur district are also describing themselves as *Deva Chenchus*.

Aspects of Chenchu identity:

There are no uniform parameters to understand the identity of all the ethnic groups. The aspects of identity may differ depending on the type of ethnic group. It holds true to a larger extent when a community is more or less static. But in the age of rapid changes, at least sections of such communities may undergo a crisis of identity because the transition of an ethnic group need not be a uniform process. These sections may try for alternative identities. However, several factors affect the members in wide variety of ways. In this section, an intensive examination of such factors will be made to understand the identity of the Chenchus. Every aspect of Chenchu life is marked with certain degree of distinctive elements that are not followed or identified by others. Their habitat, housing pattern and settlement, physical setup and material culture, social organization, family structure, kinship, ceremonial practices, life cycle rituals, religious practices, economic activities, political organization, and language are having certain differences with such systems of their neighbouring caste or tribal groups. At the same time, there is diversity within the community. Territorial categories differ in the above-said aspects despite some commonalities among them. Such continuity of commonalities gives them a common identity which can be called as 'Chenchu identity'.

Habitat:

The forest is not only a habitat for the Chenchus but also a sacred space lived by gods and goddesses. Several places in the forest are popularly known with the names of gods and goddesses. They celebrate fairs and festivals in several parts of the forest. They have folk terminology to mark the boundaries in the forest. No other territory can replace the forest and can reveal the identity as affectively as the forest does. They have a deep psychological relation with the forest which is often revealed in their usage 'mother forest' while referring to forest. It is apt to quote Subbareddy (2010: 48) who says "Some Chenchus point out proudly of their habit of living in hills and forest as a distinct identity." For Chenchus, the territory is not only an important marker of identity but also acting as a cohesive force for the maintenance of a

common identity. Their social and cultural systems are interwoven with the ecosystem of Nallamalai. Therefore, they derive identity very much from this territory and prefer to describe themselves as '*Nallamala Chenchulu*' (Chenchus of Nallamalai). The non-Chenchus also identify them with the same title. The colloquial names of the plants and tubers reveal the inseparable association of the Chenchus with this forest. For example, *Chenchu teega* (creeper) and *Chenchu gadda* (tuber) are very important in this regard. The reason for such stronger bonds might be their dependency on that environment is too much or that environment is giving everything they require for the survival. Therefore, they rarely think about an alternative. Their minimal exposure to other environs is also very important in this regard. But, a transition is taking place because of their movement from forest to fringe or plains. Therefore, changes in their social and cultural systems can also be attributed to the changes in the ecosystem.

The Chenchus identify and collect wide varieties of forest products. They know their uses and the places where they are available in the forest. No outsider can identify the number of products that a Chenchu identifies and the members of other communities living in this territory are unaware of their uses. The Chenchus feel proud of having thorough knowledge over the forest. Any administrator including the officials of forest department, botanists, researchers have to take the help of Chenchus in order to work or move in the forest. In fact, any outsider should be a dependent on the Chenchu in the inhospitable environs of the forest. TM, a 65 years old man from Appapuram penta of Mahabubnagar district says "any non-Chenchu should take the help of a Chenchu to move in the forest however powerful he is." Therefore, forest is not only the habitat and a centre for their economic activities but people are also drawing pride of their knowledge which unfolds their identity interwoven with it. They are carrying forward the traces of their habitat related identity to other territories also. For example, the parts of multi-ethnic villages inhabited by the Chenchus are known as '*Chenchu giris*' (Chenchu hills). Despite the absence of a hill at the new habitat, Chenchus prefer to call their space with this name because they believe that they have descended to these places from the hills. Chenchus as well as non-Chenchus call the space of Chenchus with this name. Therefore, the space is clearly categorized among the Chenchus and non-Chenchus in the new setting too.

Kottalacheruvu, Guntur District

Chenchugudem, Prakasam District

Bairlutygudem, Kurnool District

Pullaipally, Mahabubnagar District

Appaipally, Mahabubnagar District

Sivalingapuram, Guntur District

Settlement pattern and housing:

A few decades ago Chenchus were the semi-nomadic people moving in the forest and having temporary dwellings at a temporary habitation. But, they rarely settle in the places far away from their original habitation. They prefer to come back to their original settlements after a brief period of migration. They prefer to have a permanent residence near the natural resources. If the resources become scarce, they use to move to other territories where resources are not occupied by any other groups. The pure Chenchu settlements are very small in size and they are called with a distinct name *Penta* or *Gudem*. Usually, these terms are the suffixes in the names of Chenchu settlements. The suffix *penta* is not used for any other settlements except for the one inhabited by the Chenchus but the suffix *gudem* is used for the settlements of non-Chenchus too. Therefore, the suffix *penta* reveals the identity of a Chenchu habitation. The *penta* is a small settlement with less than 30 houses, whereas; *gudem* is a larger settlement with more than 50 houses. The haphazard arrangement of houses is the characteristic of *penta* but linear arrangement of houses is the feature of *gudem*. No streets can be observed in a *penta*; instead, one can see number of foot paths among the houses. But proper arrangement of streets can be seen in *gudems*. The families belong to two or three *kulams* live in a *penta* and therefore it is a coherent unit when compared to a larger multi-*kulam* settlement *gudem*. Consequently, social distance is insignificant in a *penta* while avoidance or lack of harmonious relations can be observed in a *gudem*. In any settlement, Chenchus do not prefer to have a house with a door opposite to other's house. If the door is opposite to the other's house, at least the distance should be more between such houses where one cannot observe the activities of the other. Similarly, they do not prefer to have a brother as a neighbour. But multiethnic villages look like any other village in rural India. After independence, as one of the ameliorative measures, the government thought of settling the Chenchus in permanent colonies. These rehabilitated settlements are planned so that the housing pattern is according to the plan. But in majority of the rehabilitated settlements much care has taken to avoid facing each other's house. This is to meet the pattern of traditional Chenchu settlements. However, the Chenchus are unable to live in a compact cemented house which is very hot in summer when compared with their cool hut.

In the settlement pattern, front-yard and backyard of the house typically portray the identity of the Chenchus of different territorial categories. The Chenchus of core territory of the forest have huge front and backyards surrounded by trees but this is not the case with the Chenchus of other territorial categories. Few Chenchus use to have a small garden in front of their house in core areas which is a rare feature in other territorial categories. The Chenchus of core territory live in the thatched conical or oblong huts locally known as *Kottam/Kottem*. The huts are small in size built with the materials available in the vicinity of their habitat. The place for the hut is usually decided depending on the availability of space. They prefer to maintain good distance from the neighbour. As a result, they use to have a huge front yard. They may construct a hut at a new place than in the place of the old hut. For example, AA of Chenchugudem in Prakasam constructed a new hut more than half kilometre away from the old house at an isolated place in the settlement. He says, "My neighbours at old house are often disturbing me. Hence, I have decided to have a new hut where there are no neighbours." Such incidents happen quite often in the core settlements. Even if they do not change the location of the hut, they erect a bamboo partition around their hut. Conical huts are popular in Mahabubnagar district whereas oblong huts are popular in Kurnool and Prakasam districts. The huts are rarely seen in Guntur district. They use bamboo, few wooden logs to support the roof and the walls, and grass or leaves for the roof. The materials are freely available in the forest. The hut is usually built with the labour of the family and kin members. They do not maintain any measurements to build a hut. The huts are in different sizes depending on the wish and ability of the owner. In some cases, they make a partition inside the hut with the bamboo mat (*thadika*). The circular hut is having one central pole supported by few vertical posts along the circumference whereas more vertical poles and central poles are needed for rectangular hut. The roof is made of grass or leaves supported by bamboo and other wooden material. The bamboo mat serves as the wall of the hut. They have a single door to the hut and it is also a bamboo mat. It is usually small in size and not exceeds 4 feet length and 2 to 3 three feet width. In fringe settlements of the forest, people use to paste mud and cow dung on the bamboo mat. However, the huts are rarely seen in the plains. They have got houses constructed by the government agencies. These are also single roomed houses with tile or slab roof. These houses are arranged close to each other. Chenchus express dissatisfaction over such houses because they often lead to conflicts between neighbours.

Appapuram, Mahabubnagar District

Bourapuram, Mahabubnagar District

Chenchugudem, Prakasam District

Bairluty, Kurnool District

Pullaipally, Mahabubnagar District

Sivalingapuram, Guntur District

The setting inside the house is more or less similar in the hut and cement building. They allot one corner of the house for the symbols and photographs of deities but they do not follow any uniform rule regarding the direction. They keep clothes on a small rope inside the house. Few may have a small wooden or aluminium box to keep clothes. They do not have more than two or three dresses but they have a blanket for every individual. Few have a cot in the house. The bows and arrows can be seen hanging to the roof of the hut in the core settlements but they can be rarely seen in the settlements of plain area. Meat can be seen hanging on a stick or rope inside the hut in the core settlements but it cannot be seen in the other territories. Vessels and hearth are usually kept opposite to god's corner. However, they usually cook outside the hut except in cases of impossibility due to hostile weather. They rarely use door-locks in core settlements; instead they keep a stick across the door in order to prevent the entry of animals. But locking the door is very essential in any other territories.

Boundary:

Every *Penta* or *Gudem* has a clearly defined geographical territory around the habitation which belongs to the inhabitants of that settlement. It has clearly defined customary boundaries. Everybody of the village and people of neighbouring villages are also conscious of these boundaries. They divide the territory available for them depending on its importance or the products available in that territory. They name these parts based on the products or the important land marks or deities. For example, *Veerabhadra swami adavi, Poturaju adavi, Thene Mallamma adavi, Mallammagundam adavi, Nandyalaswami adavi, Rudrakodu adavi, Mantanala adavi, Tirumalayyakonda adavi, Chinayya peddayya adavi, Jendakonda adavi,* and *Dargakonda adavi* are named after the deities and the places where the deities stay in the forest. *Gangarasu kalava adavi, Suddhakunta adavi, Tallamadugu adavi, Isukagundamu adavi, Gaddigundamu adavi,* and *Bavi adavi* are named after the water resources. *Nemalla tippa, Burugamanu adavi, Karkadhana adavi, Chinnamurusu adavi, Peddhamurusu adavi, Gadigela adavi, Pasutlakonda adavi, Gajji banda adavi, Zoomu adavi, Booru manchala adavi,* and *Neta vanam* are named after the presence of large number of birds or plants at a place. Every Chenchu can identify these parts by the name but outsiders rarely have an idea about such names and the boundaries. Some parts of the forest are associated with popular folk tales. Some of these places

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have become the centres of religious activities. For example, Salleswaram and Loddhi of Mahabubnagar district are very important places in this regard which have attracted the attention of the non-Chenchus too.

Physical characteristics:

Physical appearance is a very important aspect of identity for the Chenchus. It is almost unchangeable. The Chenchus describe themselves "we the Chenchus are black in colour." They suspect the descent if the body colour of any member of the community is fair. At the same time, the physical appearance of the Chenchus often mentioned as the important marker of their identity by the non-Chenchus too. Despite a general notion about the appearance of the Chenchus as the people with black coloured skin, they are not really black. There is lot of diversity in the physical appearance of the Chenchus of plains. This can be attributed to intermix of the populations by marriage. Even though there are good numbers of cases of inter-tribe and tribe-caste marriages, there are no concrete evidences for the absorption of non-Chenchus into Chenchu community except Chenchu Dasaries who claim to be Chenchus but different from Chenchus in appearance and cultural practices.

Name of the group:

Isaacs (1975: 46) pointed out that "Names seem to be the simplest, most literal, and most obvious of all symbols of identity." Certainly, name is the most striking aspect of identity of any community. The insider as well as the outsider recognizes the community only by its name. The members of a community bear the implications of the name regardless of their territory, cultural practices or any other aspects of social life. In fact, it is the only aspect of common identity even when every other aspect varies within the group. It gives not only identification but also an image to a community. The stories behind the name can be traced to the cultural origins of the community. The name 'Chenchu' has a cultural and historical bearing on its development which is explained in the preceding chapter. The Chenchus are divided into different sub groups by various scholars. However, there is no such concrete division or groups among the Chenchus. It is the understanding of researchers rather than a division identified by the Chenchus because they are using different terms interchangeably to represent a single entity. For example, they use terms *Deva Chenchu, Konda Chenchu,* and *Adavi Chenchu* to refer Chenchu in general. There are

no different groups as such in terms of social regulations to prohibit intergroup marriages or any other kind of social relations.

Personal names:

The personal names of the members of a community may or may not reveal the identity of a community. But the personal names of Chenchus are very repetitive and reflect the traditions of the community. The names of the Chenchus of Chenchugudem village of Prakasam district reflect strongly rooted indigenous traditions. The most repetitive names of the village include Guravayya, Guravamma, Peddanna, Peddamma, Ankanna, Ankamma, Errayya, Erramma, Nagulayya, Nagulamma, Bayyanna, Bayyamma, Kondayya, Kondamma, Venkatayya, and Venkatamma. The personal names of Kottalacheruvu village of Kurnool district are similar to the names of Chenchugudem except few names of Islamic tradition such as Dargayya and Dargamma. However, the influence of Islam is predominant in Mahabubnagar district and the same reflects in the names of the Chenchus of that district. The personal names of the Chenchus of Appaipally village of Mahabubnagar district reflect the fusion of indigenous, Hindu and Islamic traditions. For example, most repetitive names such as Lingaswamy, Lingamma, Pochanna, Pochamma, Mallayya, Mallamma, Salleswaram, Sallemma, Ellanna, and Ellamma are derived from indigenous and Hindu traditions; whereas Saidulu, Saidamma, Hussainayya, Hussainamma, Niranjana, and Niranjanamma are derived from the little tradition of Islam. The personal names in the BKV Palem Chenchugudem of Guntur district reflect the influence of Christianity but Islamic influence cannot be seen in this district. The names such as Bayyanna, Bayyamma, Eadanna, Eadamma, Rangayya, Rangamma, Guravayya, Guravamma, Venkateswarlu, and Venkatamma reflects indigenous and Hindu traditions; whereas David Raju, Esther Rani, Prabhu Das, Yesayya, Suvarta, and Maryamma reflect the influence of Christianity.

All the personal names of the Chenchus are the names of various deities of indigenous or Hindu or Islamic or Christian traditions. The men and women have similar names with a slight variation in the suffix for gender differentiation. For example, *anna* (brother or respected elder) is the usual suffix of the names of men and *amma* (mother) is the usual suffix of the names of women. There can be no doubt about the strength of Chenchu names as the markers of ethnic identity. The names

rooted in indigenous tradition are very specific to the Chenchus and cannot be usually seen among other communities living in close contact with the Chenchus. But the names reflect Hindu or Islam or Christian traditions can be seen in any other community of this region. The changing names are gradually limiting the scope of the name as a potential marker of identity. In fact, they are not much different from the neighbouring non-Chenchus. For example, the names such as Vijay, Charan, Abhiram, Kavita, Geeta, Akamksha etc., do not reflect any specific identity. This trend is popular in multi-ethnic villages and towns.

Social organization:

The social organization of Chenchus has special features to identify the uniqueness of their culture. In particular, the *kulam* organization of Chenchus offers a potential source of their identity not only among themselves but also among the non-Chenchus. The *kulam* is a basic unit of their social organization. It is always expressed as a synonym to clan. It functions as a unit to establish marital relations or to practice pollution at the time of death of an individual. They do not have a rigid hierarchy based on *kulam*. However, *kulam* is a unit that expresses solidarity and political hierarchy. But the hierarchy is not so rigid like that of caste hierarchy and more of a notional aspect than a practical aspect. The status of *kulams* is changing from one village to other. The numerical or economic dominance of the *kulam* keeps it at the superior position in the political hierarchy. However, the notion of hierarchy has nothing to do with the social or any other kind of division. But such a construct played a significant role in allocating the positions like *Raju* (headman) and *Reddy* (Minister) by the administrators. The *kulam* is also useful as a unit to establish relation when people of the same community meet each other. It is useful to establish close relations and joking relations even if the people are not known to each other. It is also important in political as well as ritual life of the Chenchus. The *kulam* with numerical strength or the *kulam* which established the village play a key role in the political affairs of the village. The spokesperson or the headman of the community usually identified from those *kulams* in core territory of the forest. However, the influence of statutory system has brought many changes in the political organization of the Chenchus. As a result, *kulam's* influence has decreased. Even today, a *kulam* with numerical strength can dominate the political affairs of the village but it depends on many other factors.

Certain traits of Chenchu community reflect a developed system of social organization with *kulams* having specific status positions but not arranged in a rigid hierarchical system. For example, the *kulams* can be categorized into four types depending on their position in social hierarchy. They are King or *Raju* (Chenchus of numerically dominant *kulam* or the *kulam* which established the village), Minister or *Prathani* (Chenchus of *kulam* other than *Raju*, it may be either numerically dominant *kulam* or the *kulam* or the *kulam* which established the village), Priest or *Kolagadu* (officiating priest and the members of his *kulam*), and Commons (all other *kulams* of Chenchus of a village). The origin and development of this idea of status differentiation is not very clear. These positions might not be very authoritative. But they crystallized probably during the British rule with the appointment of influential members of a largest *kulam* as the in-charge to monitor the village. However, these positions cannot be attributed to specific *kulams* in the entire territory. It changes depending on the history of the settlement, numerical strength of the *kulam*, and composition of *kulams*. For example, the numerically dominant *kulam* is eligible for the position of *peddamanishi* in some settlements. The *kulam* which established the settlement is eligible for the same in some other villages. For example, Mandli *kulam* of BKV Palem Chenchugudem of Guntur district and Tokala *kulam* of Appapuram Penta of Mahabubnagar district were holding the position of *peddamanishi* in those villages because they have established those villages. But, *Raya kulam* of Billakallu village of Mahabubnagar district was holding the position of *peddamanishi* because of its numerical dominance in the village. *Peddamanishi* chooses *prathani* from the second numerically largest *kulam* of the village. If the *kulam* of *peddamanishi* is the one that established the village but a numerical minority, *prathani* must be selected from a numerically dominant *kulam*. There is uniformity to certain extent in case of the *kulam* of *kolagadu*. The member of Urthaluri *kulam* acts as *Kolagadu* (officiating priest) wherever people of this *kulam* are living. If there is no family of *Urthaluri kulam*, other *kulams* may take the role. But it is to be decided by *peddamanishi*, *prathani*, and the council of elders. More than one *kulam* is considered as officiating priests in some villages. For example, Urthaluri and Dasari *kulams* are identified as officiating priests in Appaipally village of Mahabubnagar district. The officiating priest of any of these *kulams* or one from each of these *kulams* conducts marriage celebration. There are no rigid regulations regarding the affiliation between the *kulam*

of officiating priest and the *kulam* of the person organizing the ceremony. However, these traits lack uniformity among all the territorial categories of the community.

The *kulam* of Chenchus is parallel to *intiperu* (surname) and differ from the concept of *gotra* of caste Hindus. It is an exogamous group and its major function is to identify who all can marry and who cannot. Brotherly *kulams* are not treated as inclusive of a single *kulam* in all the aspects of social life. For example, the basic unit to practice *myla* (pollution) period at the time of death is *kulam*, but, brotherly *kulams* do not observe pollution period. They do not even have a specific word to refer all brotherly *kulams* as a unit. They are not like Hindu *gotra* system where the members of different surname groups consider as one *gotra*. *Kulams* are seen as unilineal groups sharing a common mythical ancestor. It serves as a unit to understand who are 'us' and 'other'.

Certain *kulams* seem to be similar and trace their origin to the same totem. For example, the *kulams* like Urtaluri, Udatanuri, Udatala traces their origin to a common totem Uduta (squirrel). Similarly, Puli, Pulicharla, and Pulsaru *kulams* trace their origin to tiger. However, they firmly say, they are different from each other in certain places. For example, Udatala *kulam* of Maddimadugu village of Mahabubnagar district and Urtaluri *kulam* of Appaipally village of the same district claim themselves as different but believe that they are brotherly *kulams*. It is not very certain whether they are different or the same. The geographical distance between both the villages is approximately 90 km. In other places, they do not have the knowledge about the similar other *kulams*. For example, people of Udatanuri *kulam* of Rudrakodu village of Kurnool district believe that the *kulams* such as Urtaluri and Udatala are not in existence. They believe that it is the Udatanuri *kulam* which spread everywhere. Therefore, there is uncertainty about their similarity and difference. All these *kulams* might be similar or referring to one *kulam* but the regular usage of the name differs from one part of the territory to the other. However, people with similar *kulam* names are not living in one village or nearby villages.

The Chenchus are not very sure about the number of *kulams*. BR, a 45 year old man from Peddamantanala of Prakasam districts says, "Our predecessors often say that there are 77 *kulams* among the Chenchus. The *Kolagadu* (officiating priest at

marriage) of olden days use to utter all the *kulam* names while conducting the marriage. At least, he used to recite as many *kulams* as he remembers at that time." But DA, a 50 year old man from Bairlutygudem of Kurnool district says "there are 36 *kulams* among the Chenchus which were recited by our predecessors at the time of marriage. But, such practice has gradually disappeared and now we are not aware of all the *kulams*." Several Chenchus believe that the non-Chenchus have been mixed up with Chenchus and claiming the status as Chenchus. However, it is very difficult to trace such *kulams*. Some of the *kulam* names are common among few other groups living in this territory. For example; Garaboina, Mandli, Nallabotula, Pulicherla, and Yekasiri *kulams* are observed among the Chenchus and the Boyas of Nallamalai territory. Chenchus and Yanadis have two common *kulam* names, they are, Dasari and Nimmala. Therefore, these *kulams* often create confusion and the authenticity of a person's claim for the specific group identity questioned not only by the outsiders but by the members of his/her own group. For example, the Chenchus of BKV Palem Chenchugudem of Guntur district often blames that Yekasiri *kulam* of Terala village of same district is not an original Chenchu *kulam*.

The following are the Chenchu *kulams* from Kurnool, Prakasam, Guntur, and Mahabubnagar districts of Andhra Pradesh:

1. Akkem	2. Arthi	3. Avula	4. Bachchela
5. Balmoori	6. Bandrasi	7. Bangi	8. Baramulla
9. Bhumani	10. Bojja	11. Chevula	12. Chevuri
13. Chigurla	14. Damsani	15. Dasari	16. Elugulodu
17. Eluri	18. Eravalu	19. Gaddam	20. Garaboina
21. Gijjari	22. Gulla	23. Gundla	24. Gurrapodu
25. Ilindi	26. Indla	27. Irudula	28. Jalli
29. Kaniama	30. Kannimunne	31. Karsam	32. Katraju
33. Konga	34. Kudumula	35. Kukkala	36. Madapu
37. Mamidi	38. Manubotula	39. Mandla	40. Marripalli
41. Mayillu	42. Mekala	43. Menlur	44. Nagula
45. Nalla	46. Nallabotula	47. Nimmala	48. Nippu
49. Nirupula	50. Oterla	51. Pandla	52. Paramasi
53. Parvatam	54. Pasula	55. Peelam	56. Pitta
57. Pogula	58. Poola	59. Potluri	60. Puli

61. Pulicharla	62. Pulsaru	63. Rangam	64. Raya
65. Savaram	66. Saviti	67. Seelam	68. Sirraru
69. Thati	70. Thota	71. Tirugudu	72. Tokala
73. Topi	74. Udatala	75. Udatanuri	76.Urtaluri
77. Yekasiri			

The totems of some *kulams* can be traced to plants, animals, and places but the totems of some others are uncertain. Some of the *kulams* and their totemic objects are given below.

Name of the clan	*Totemic object (plant/plant product)*
Arthi/Arati	Plantain tree
Chigurla/Sigurla	Tips of branches or trees
Dasari	A kind of creeper
Eravalu	Tuber (*Eravalu gadda*)
Garaboina	Gara tree
Ilindi	Illinda tree
Mamidi	Mango tree
Mandla/Menlur	Trees
Marripalli	Banyan tree
Nimmala	Lemon tree
Pandla	Fruits
Potla/Potluri	Snake gourd
Poola	Flowers
Thati	Sugar palm
Thota	Garden

Name of the clan	*Totemic object (animal/bird/organs)*
Avula	Cows
Chevula	Ears
Elugulodu	Bear
Gurram	Horse
Jalli	Jallalu (Fish)
Konga	Crane

Kukkala	Dog
Manubotula	Buffalo
Mekala	Goat
Nagula	Cobra snake
Nallabotula	Black male goat/Nilgai
Pasula	Cattle
Pitta	Bird/Passerine birds
Puli	Tiger
Tokala	Tail
Udatala/Udatanuri/Urtaluri	Squirrel

Name of the clan	*Object/place*
Indla	House
Parvatam	Mountain
Pogula	Ornaments of ears/heap of grain or any material
Saviti/Chavidi	A hut of cattle
Topi	Hat/cap

Name of the clan	*Meaning/Character (adjective)*
Bachchela	Moles
Bojja	Stomach
Eravalu/Erravallu	Red
Gulla	Body boil
Kudumula	Sweet food stuff
Nalla	Black
Nippu	Flame
Pulicharla	Tiger marks
Raya	Stone
Seelam	Chastity
Tirugudu	Roaming

| *Name of the clan* | *Deity* |
| Katraju | A deity |

Family:

Family, although, is a unit having distinct identity but not altogether different from that of other ethnic groups residing in the locality. It cannot be a potential marker of identity with its form but functions reveal specificities. It is a very important social unit and plays a key role in the social, religious, economic, and political aspects of the life of a person than any other social unit. It is a powerful unit than loosely organized kin groups or *kulam* groups. The monogamous and nuclear type of family is very common among them. Joint families are not observed but polygyny still exists. Few cases of levirate association are also observed. The family size is quite smaller. It is usually consists of parents and their unmarried children. The person usually establishes a separate residence immediately after marriage. The couple usually stays in the natal village of the male spouse; therefore, the residence is patrilocal. The family members of the newly married couple usually help them in constructing a hut. The establishment of such residence leads to the formation of a nuclear family. In general, Chenchu family is a nuclear family with patriarchal authority and patrilineal decent. However, the family occasionally accommodates the parents of either of the spouses if they are widow or widower. Even in such cases, she/he may have a separate hut but depends on son or son-in-law's family for food. However, such elderly man or woman considers themselves as a separate family. Fellow Chenchus also treat her/him as a separate family at the time of inviting for the rituals or ceremonies. She/he will also be identified as a separate family by the government authorities for welfare measures.

Male spouse is the head of the family. The mother or an elderly woman of the family acts as the head if there is no male spouse. The head can exercise authority over his wife for a lifetime but he cannot exercise authority over the child after attainment of adolescence. Such practice may cause conflicts within the family. After marriage, an individual acts as an independent entity. Father, mother, siblings or any other members of the family cannot exercise any kind of authority. In fact, they do not like to interfere in each other's affairs. There is no specified authority to resolve the conflicts within the family. The conflicts are very frequent between the husband and wife. But neither their children nor their parents involve in such conflicts. The interference of outsiders is also very rare. Chenchus believe that these conflicts are very short term in nature. The traditional political council do not interfere in the

conflicts of the family voluntarily unless one of the parties involved in the conflict request for the same. However, this mechanism has almost disappeared.

Family also acts as a unit of economic organization. The needs of the individual members are addressed by themselves in most of the cases. However, the family addresses such problems in case of its helpless members or young members. Property and its inheritance are passed through the male line. However, all the members of the family have to contribute for the earning of livelihood. The young children also extend their help to the family. In fact, it is obligatory for them to participate in the work along with their parents. It is observed that the children below 10 years of age from Chenchugudem of Prakasam district and Kottalacheruvu and Bairlutygudem of Kurnool district are going for the collection of minor forest products along with their parents. It is also observed that the children of 8 years and above age from BKV Palem Chenchugudem and Sivalingapuram villages of Guntur district are working as wage labourers in the harvesting of red chillies. Family also acts as a religious unit. Majority of the festivals are celebrated at family level. Very few festivals are conducted at the level of *kulam* or the village. Usually all the members of the family have the same religious faith. Inviting neighbours to celebrate festivals is a rare practice.

Marriage:

Marriage ceremony is an important marker of Chenchu identity. It has lots of features and distinguishable from that of any other community. The rules of marriage, types of marriage, and the mode of its celebration give specific identity to the Chenchus. However, there are several exceptions for the common mode of celebration because of the transformation in the society. The increasing tendency to imitate the mode of celebration of the upper castes in multi-ethnic villages may not allow an outsider to differentiate the Chenchu marriage. Despite lack of uniformity among the Chenchus of different territories, the prevalent mode of celebration of the ceremony helps to identify the typical Chenchu marriage.

Rule of *kulam* exogamy is strictly practiced. Although polygyny and levirate marriages exist, they are rare in the contemporary Chenchu society. However, few cases of polygyny alliances are identified from Maddhimadugu and Dhararam villages

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of Mahabubnagar district, Bairlutygudem and Kottalacheruvu villages of Kurnool district, Chenchugudem village of Prakasam district, and BKV Palem Chenchugudem village of Guntur district. Among all kind of alliances, cross-cousin marriages (*Menarikamu*) are the most preferred. Marriage with sister's daughter is also prevalent. Widow re-marriage is socially permitted.

The marriage among Chenchus seems to be a simple process. But there are significant variations in the celebration of marriage even among the Chenchus of same geographical territory. This makes the system more complex in order to understand it in a social context. The discussion on various types of marriages and their celebration is helpful in the holistic understanding of marriage. Marriages can be classified into different types. Depending on the type of initiation, marriages can be divided into arranged marriage and marriage by elopement. The most prevalent marriage is arranged marriage. Freedom is given to the prospective bride and bridegroom in the selection of partner. The parents never decide the mate against the will of girl or boy. In fact, in most of the cases it is the boy or girl who informs their preference to parents. Sometimes, the parents take the initiation and consult the girl or boy. They will proceed only after taking the consent of prospective bride and bridegroom. However, marriage by elopement takes place because of the fear of rejection by the parents of either of the party. In such cases, male and female exercise their personal choice. They move into forest and spend three days together. The parents usually accept such kind of alliance after their return and give a feast in the village. The other typology is based on the priest who officiate the marriage ceremony. The marriage performed by the Chenchu priest (*Kolagadu*) and the marriage performed by the Brahmin priest. The marriage performed by the Chenchu priest is most prevalent. Bride price is a tradition in the marriages performed by the Chenchu priest and dowry is prevalent in the marriages performed by a Brahmin priest. The marriage performed by the Brahmin priest is similar to the practice of neighbouring caste-Hindu people. The change in the priest not only brought the change in the type of celebration but also in the economic aspects of marriage.

Initiation of marriage
Usually, the bridegroom's parents approach the bride's parents with the help of a mediator to fix the marriage. Mutual interest of bride and bridegroom, parent's

willingness, recent trends like education, location of bride's family and bridegroom's family (whether they are living in the forest or living in the plain area), and bride price or dowry play a key role in deciding the marriage. The parents of boy and girl along with one or two of their relatives or village elders participate in the marriage negotiations. It is usually the parents or the relatives of the boy initiate the negotiation with girl's parents. The girl's parents rarely initiate the process. If the negotiations are successful, the prospective bride's parents offers '*ambali'* (porridge prepared from *ragulu* or *jonnalu*) to bridegroom's parents. *Ambali* is gradually getting replaced by sweets. There is no exchange of liquor at this time. They meet again at the house of bridegroom to decide a day for marriage with few of the relatives of both the parties. The village elder or the elder in the family of bridegroom announces the marriage and the day of marriage and take liquor. All other participants at the occasion will be served with liquor.

The performance

Marriage ceremony takes place at the house of the bridegroom. The bridal party arrives at the house of bridegroom a day before the marriage. The relatives of bridegroom go to bride's home and accompany her to bridegroom's village. The bridegroom has to invite them along with his relatives at the *bodrayi* or *polimera* (border) of the village. They offer prayers at *bodrayi* and offer sugar to each other. The bridegroom arranges accommodation for the bridal party. He asks them to stay at relative's houses if he is not having an additional house. The bride and bridegroom should not stay in one hut.

The whole ceremony goes on for two days. Bride's maternal uncle plays an important role in this ceremony. The officiating priest of the marriage is known as *Kolagadu*. But, the Chenchus of plain areas of Mahabubnagar district are not using the term; instead, they use the term *Chenchu poojari* or *Chenchu bapanayya*. This term might be in use because of the participation of Brahmins as officiating priests in the marriage ceremony of the non-Chenchus. In fact, a learned Chenchu man decorates himself as a Brahmin but performs the marriage in a simple way. The *Kolagadu* carries a ceremonial stick while conducting the proceedings of the ceremony. This is a bamboo stick having a head shaped tip. In some cases, the *Peddamanishi* of the village performs the marriage. An arrow kept in upright position

in front of bride and bridegroom. They perform prayers to arrow during the marriage ceremony. *Taali* will be tied only when they cannot see the shadow of the arrow. Therefore, the auspicious time for them is 12:00 noon of the day. While describing the marriage, a Chenchu man says "it all needs a vessel (*chembu*) full of water, few mango leaves, a thread (*taali*) and a piece of turmeric." In the 'sanskritized type' of marriage, a Brahmin priest performs the ritual. It is a recent phenomenon and the outcome of the contact with caste-Hindus. Few educated Chenchus go for such kind of marriage. The process is completely in tune with the marriage of caste groups. The bridegroom has to give a feast at the time of ceremony to all the relatives.

There is no ceremony marking the union of man and woman. The union takes place in the house of the man on the day of marriage. In case of child marriage, it takes place after the attainment of puberty. Usually, the new hut will be ready by the time of marriage. The new couple will be sent into that. The elders say, go and sleep together. However, Chenchus do not prefer to have sex during night. They believe it as the time of demons. The behaviour and attitude of the children will not be good if they born out of the union that take place during the night. In olden days Chenchus avoided to have sex in the hut. Instead, they used to have it in the forest. Particularly, they prefer to have sex immediately after the successful collection of food or any other forest products. But, with the change of time, practices pertaining to the physical union of male and female too have changed to a great extent. The physical union between man and woman during night is not stigmatized as it was. In fact, it is the preferable time for the Chenchus living in multi-ethnic villages and towns.

Bride price

Bride-price is an age old tradition among the Chenchus. It is the potential marker of identity of the Chenchus because this is not practiced by any other community of this territory. Bride-price is called as *'voli'* in local language. The bride-price is usually decided at the time of marriage negotiations. It is very important as it is the symbol of pride for the women. It can be assumed that the prospective bride asserts supremacy over the bridegroom by accepting bride price. But, there is no such concept of supremacy in true sense. The institution of bride price is prevalent among the Chenchus even today. The bride has to give half of the amount in return to the bridegroom. It seems to be the sign of respect for the man whom she is going to

marry. Marriage transactions are completed before the ceremony of marriage. The amount of bride-price varied depending on the mutual consent of the families. In fact, in olden days, they used various materials as bride price. For instance, Siraj-ul-Hassan (1920: 150) observes "...hundred and one peacock feathers are delivered as the bride-price." But, money is the only form of bride price in the contemporary Chenchu society. All other things such as goats and ornaments are not included under bride-price. Therefore, they are not compulsory. The bride-price is ranging from 116 rupees to 1116 rupees. The amount is usually received by the maternal uncle. The amount of the bride-price reflects the status of both the parties involved in the alliance.

Dowry

Dowry is not a potential marker of Chenchu identity but it can be helpful to understand the diversity among Chenchus. It is a recent development and the result of contact with caste society. The negations for dowry take place after the confirmation of marriage. The implications are not very clear as it is at inception stage. This is observed among the educated Chenchus of multiethnic villages and towns. The amount of dowry varies from 2000 rupees to 30000 rupees. The amount of dowry depends upon the nature of the employment of the bridegroom. The marriage involving dowry is becoming more expensive. The feast with liquor after marriage is a continuation from traditional marriage.

Divorce:

Divorce is not an important marker of identity because it is rare among the Chenchus. However, the procedure followed during divorce is unique to certain extent. It is a simple as well as a complex process. It is simple because of the flexibility in the norms but complex in its process. For example, the woman can go with other man at any time; similarly, the man can go with any other woman. It is very simple if that happens with mutual understanding of the couple. The complexity involves in the cases where one of the party is unwilling to divorce. The man or the woman whoever is responsible for the breach in the relation has to pay fine to the other person in order to meet the expenses of another marriage. In some cases, the person who is willing to divorce his/her partner needs to search a man or woman for another marriage. But, such kinds of incidents are very rare. The man or woman cannot escape from paying the fine to their partners because of the regulation of their

elders. They may escape only when they ran away from their village to an unknown place. But they will be penalized as and when they return to the village. If divorced couple have children, their responsibility depends on the kind of divorce. For example, if the man divorces the woman without her acceptance, the woman has to take care of the children. If the woman does so, the man has to take care of the children. But it is not compulsory for either of the party. In some cases, both of them may neglect the children. In such circumstances, the relatives of one of them take care of the children. Such case is observed in Appaipally of Mahabubnagar district where an aunt is taking care of the children of a divorced couple. However, most often the mother takes care of the children. Divorce is considered as an unethical activity by Chenchus but there are no restrictions from the community. It entirely depends upon the individual's will. In olden days, community was interfering in such cases either to resolve the problem or to impose fine on one of them. But nowadays, the involvement of traditional elders has significantly reduced in multi-ethnic villages and towns.

Pregnancy and childbirth:

Chenchus identify the pregnancy after the stoppage of menstruation. They report it to mother, mother-in-law, and husband. Other members will come to know the same from one among these people. There are no taboos to attend temples or to participate in the rituals but they should not go to burial ground along with the dead body. The pregnant woman is not treated in a special way. They have to involve in physical labour to earn the livelihood. They will be given rest during 8th and 9th months. This time period is not really calculated accurately. But they asses it with the growth of abdomen or calculate from the stoppage of menstruation. They do not have any calculation over the date of delivery. They are not very concerned about it as they believe that it is God who decides the date of delivery. Celebration of childbirth is associated with naming ceremony which is observed among the Chenchus of towns and most of the multi-ethnic villages. Usually, the woman stays at her husband's house during pregnancy. Her parents visit after the delivery and take her to home along with the new born child. The woman stays at her parent's house for a month. The husband comes to his father-in-law's place to take his wife back. Some Chenchus of multi-ethnic villages are inviting their daughter for first delivery.

Chenchus expect pregnancy immediately after marriage. The delay in pregnancy raises questions on the virility of man or the fertility of woman. It is shame for a man whose wife could not conceive in a short period of time. The woman faces the threat of a polygyny relation in such cases. The man cannot tolerate the suspicion on his potency. He has to prove as potent if the wife complains on his abilities. Only way to do that is getting children. If he is unable to prove, the woman has a right to go for another marriage or living relationship. In some other cases, man goes for indigenous treatment if he believes as impotent. If he believes that the problem is with wife, he prefers to marry another woman not only to fulfil the wish to have children but also to prove as potent. His wife should obey the decision. Otherwise, she has to face criticism from fellow members of the community. She does not get compensation if she wants to divorce the husband in such cases.

Death:

Chenchus believe that death is inevitable and there is nothing to be scared about it. It is not a total disappearance of person but a movement from one world to the other. They believe human beings go straight to Godly world after death regardless of age and gender. They do not have the concept of hell. Instead, they believe that God punish people in this world if they commit sins. Therefore, the problems faced by human-beings in their life are the results of the sins committed by them during their lifetime. They have never expressed the fear over death. They attribute the death of a person to the unwillingness of God to keep him/her in the woods and/or willingness to invite the person to his world. All people will be treated equally by God once a person reaches to him. They believe that nobody needs to work or earn money in that world. God provides all comforts. They also get food and liquor free of cost. Therefore, they do not have a lengthy grief period. They do not believe in life-after-death. But, the concept of heaven and hell among the Chenchus of towns seems to be the result of the contact with Hindu caste groups.

All the family members and some *kulam* members accompany the dead body to burial ground. Any member, either male or female can walk in front of dead body while carrying it to burial ground. But, a pregnant woman should not do that. The spirit of the dead may enter into the womb and harm the baby and it may not reach God in such cases. The person who walks in front of the body should not leave for

any other village till the completion of 9th or 11th day. There are also sanctions on widow or widower to enter into other's houses for 9 or 11 days. The people who carry the dead to burial ground are known as *palegaallu*. They belong to close kin of the diseased person. The dead are buried at a corner in his/her agricultural field. The person who is not having a field will be buried at a common place which is usually close to the village. The burial ground is known as *bondala gadda*. But there is no specific burial ground in many traditional Chenchu settlements as there is no scarcity of land to bury the dead. The dead will be buried along with the clothes. But, the clothes will be torn with a knife as patches. This is to allow air to all parts of the body. They believe that the air is required even for the dead body in order to keep it fresh. Some of his/her belongings will also be buried along with the body. All the people accompanied the dead to burial ground put sand on the body. They put a lamp (*jyoti*/*deepamu*) on the top of the grave near the head immediately after burial. They place a stone on the top of the grave in order to identify the location in future.

Death is considered as polluting phenomenon. But the extent it applies to an individual, family, kin, *kulam*, and community is determined by various factors. All those people accompanied the corpse should purify by head-bath after coming from the burial ground. They have to purify the house with cow dung water. The ritual status of a person changes by touching the corpse or visiting the house of the dead or participating in a procession to burial ground. A person should not participate in any ritual activities or prayers without taking a purification bath after visiting or accompanying the dead. The period of pollution is 9 or 11 days for the family of diseased person, but it is only one day for the *kulam*. The family should not engage in any festivals and rituals during this period. They should not visit the temple during this period. The *kulams* other than the diseased person do not observe pollution period. But it is quite different in case of traditional Chenchu settlements (*Pentas*) which are relatively small and composed of two or three *kulams*. In such settlements all the *kulams* observe pollution for one day. In any case, the diseased family has to inform maximum reachable members of their *kulam* about the incident. The failure in informing *kulam* members may lead to conflict.

The Chenchus believe in ancestral spirits. They were also believing that the spirit of the dead stay in his/her home. Hence, in olden days, the diseased person's

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family use to build a new hut close to the old hut. But, nowadays majority of the Chenchus abandoned this practice. However, they believe that the anger of the ancestral spirit can cause an irreparable damage to any member of the family or the family as a whole. Therefore, they offer prayers and different food stuffs at different occasions in order to satisfy the ancestral spirits.

Unification ceremony:

They celebrate a ceremony called *peddalato kaluputa* (unification with ancestors/elders) on the day of a person's death. It is usually conducted at the home after burying the dead. The head of the household (man or woman) initiates the process of unification ceremony. The diseased person's spouse should not initiate the unification process. Usually, mother or father or elder son or maternal uncle of the diseased initiates the ceremony. The elderly woman of the family cleans the house and put round marks on the wall with cow dung and rice flour. The number of symbols depends on the number of ancestors they remember along with the one to symbolise the diseased. The symbols are usually limited to mark one preceding generation of the diseased. The diseased person identified with the last one of all the symbols. Then a man or a woman from close kin group lit the lamps in a mud lantern in front of the God and the ancestral symbols. The number of lamps should be equal to the number of ancestors including currently diseased and an additional one to represent God. The lamp symbolizes the diseased person should unify with the lamps symbolizing ancestors and finally with the lamp symbolizing God. Then all the lamps mix together to ensure that the diseased will meet his/her ancestors in the other world or God's world. The remaining procedure is left for the family members of the diseased. The procedure varies depending on the family. After unification ceremony, they offer food (*pindam*) and liquor to the dead near the symbol and close the doors to allow the spirit of the dead to have the food. They enter into the house after few minutes and keep that food outside the house which is to be eaten by birds or animals. But, in multi-ethnic villages, the elder son of the diseased accompanying with brothers carry that food and kept it at *bodrayi* (a stone symbolizes the border of the village). They observe from a distance until it is eaten by birds or animals. It means that the dead man is eating it by entering into the body of an animal or bird.

Gestures:

Gestures of the Chenchus are different when compared to the same of the non-Chenchu neighbours. They use gesticulations quite often than words in a conversation with a non-Chenchu. They use their arm, palm, and head very frequently to convey different messages. They prefer to convey 'yes' or 'no' with gestures for most of the queries of outsiders. They talk very less. The women in some parts of the Chenchu territory rarely talk face-to-face with a man from a different community. Such behaviour is very often observed among the Chenchus living in the core areas of the forest. They usually turn to an opposite direction or bent their head while talking with the man of a different community. They never respond to the queries of a stranger. A stranger can find very few women responding to the queries. The Chenchus usually sits on foot. According to RS from Billakallu of Mahabubnagar district, "We should be attentive in the forest. A swift action is needed if any wild animal threats us. Complete resting position makes it difficult to act faster. Therefore, we are habituated to sit on foot at any place for a rapid response." This sitting posture is often misunderstood by the non-Chenchus. For example, in a training session organized in Appaipally village of Mahabubnagar district, the resource person frequently asked the Chenchus to sit in proper way for which they are not responsive. He says "they always want to go." But, it is not their intention. Similarly, a non-Chenchu teacher in Upper Primary School in Chenchugudem of Prakasam district often insist students to sit in a proper way while eating and sitting in class. Proper way for him is to sit in complete resting posture by folding the legs. But, the students sit in their own way.

Religion:

Chenchus have a set of indigenous traditions but they have been influenced by various external forces. Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity are important in this regard. The Chenchus are also influenced by cult-figures such as Dattatreya and Siddhappa. As a result, Chenchu religion seems to be an admixture of different traditions. But in a broader sense, the present day religion of the Chenchus seems to be more close to mainstream Hinduism. However, it has lot of difference from the textual traditions of Hinduism. Therefore, the mainstay of religious identity comes from indigenous practices. But, the ambiguity in religious practices plays an important role in diversifying their identity. How different religions have influenced the tradition of Chenchus is very important to understand the changing religious identity.

The religious conversions are playing an important role in the creation of conflicting identities within the community. Conflicts between the converts and others in Tummalabayalu of Prakasam district and Sivalingapuram of Guntur district are examples for the assertion on different identities. The Christian converts and the non-Christians live as separate groups in separate blocks of the village. Some conflicts were reported when there was a large scale of celebration by the converts. For example, the Christian converts of Tummalabayalu village objected for the procession of Lord Ganesha in their streets during *Vinayaka Chavithi* in the year 2009. It was retaliated by the non-Christian Chenchus during Christmas of the same year. They have objected for the use of loud speakers at the Church of the village. Even though, the conflict was resolved in both the cases through mediation, the rivalry sustained and it is often leading to minor disturbances in the village. The religious organizations such as Vanavasi Kalyani Parishad and Christian missionaries are playing a key role in generating such conflicts.

Animal worship/Zoolatry

They do not worship many animals. But, few exceptions are observed. For example, the Chenchus of BKV Palem Chenchugudem of Guntur district worship snake. But, it seems to be an influence of the Hindus because they have constructed a snake temple in the village. The Chenchus are also offering prayers at this temple. In another case, the Chenchus of Bairlutygudem of Kurnool district worships tiger but others treat it as a cruel animal. But, there is no temple for tiger. They offer prayers to tiger whenever they visit *Chinnayya Peddayya Konda* during their expeditions in the forest. In this regard, they believe that tigers named *Chinnayya* and *Peddayya* protected the forest from elephants which were destroying the forest. They are able to live in the forest today because of the protection by tigers. There is no external influence on the Chenchus in this regard. There are no evidences found in favour of totemic worship. No other case of animal worship is found.

Plant worship/Naturism

They do not worship plant or tree on special occasions; instead, they offer part of the product to the same tree from which the product is collected. Even at that time, they use to keep a stone near the tree and offer prayers. The stone is treated as the symbolic representation of the supernatural force which created the universe. They

believe that the plants and their products are created by such a supernatural force known as *Devudu* (God). They do not use any plant during the time or festivals and ceremonies except bamboo. But, it predominantly seems to be the reflection of economic viability and the abundance of that plant rather than the idea of sacred.

Indigenous practices

Chenchus believe in the existence of spirit. They believe in the abstract idea of God which is omnipresent. Natural phenomenon, objects, certain localities in the forest are believed to be associated with spiritual power. There is not much change in this idea of God but there is a shift in the practice. They are very much accustomed to keep a stone as the representation of the divine force which is not the prevalent practice in olden days. They might have tried to give a concrete representation to their abstract notion of God by keeping a stone as the symbol. However, there can be no doubt to interpret it as the influence of Hinduism.

The Chenchus believe in supernatural force and see it everywhere. The rocks, trees, and specific places of the forest are very important in this regard. They find any stone as a representative of supernatural if they want to share their happiness. If they hunt a game or catch a fish in the pond or collect honey or gum or any other product, they identify a stone at the site of collection and wash it to offer prayers and part of the product. The idea of supernatural represents a human person in imagination but never represent a human idol as super natural. They never considered supernatural force as organized religion. They fear for the evil and understand evil and God as supernatural forces counter each other. They believe evil as an impersonal force and shapeless unlike personal supernatural force of God. The God is referred as *Devaru* or *Devdu* or *Demudu* or *Bhagavantudu*. They also believe that the impersonal evil force can be used by humans for malevolent purposes by sorcery or witchcraft but the God cannot be manipulated for any purpose. It is the free will of God to help or punish human being. However, *gadde veyuta* understood as an instrument to please the God/Goddess instead of using HIM/HER for benevolent purpose. The concept of sin is very much prevalent among the Chenchus. They see a sin in all the activities they perform. They believe it is the responsibility of human being to be away from sin because it may attract severe punishment from the God. They believe in the concept of two worlds, one is the world inhabited by the human beings and the other is the

world of Gods. They do not believe in a separate world of evil, instead, they believe evil has no shelter, therefore, it always looks for a shelter in the human body or the human environment. Consequently, the evil takes shelter in the external and internal space of human beings. Internal space refers to human body and external space refers to any space outside the body, that is; a living space, a tree, an animal, forest, hills, water, air, sky, or any material object of external environment. It can attack any human material. It is the duty of human being to please God in order to fight against evil spirit because man alone cannot fight.

They were not having any festivals except ancestral worship. Ancestral worship is very important in this community. Failure of performing ritual vows to ancestors considered as a major breach of traditions. The ancestors of male and female are worshipped. They utter as many names of ancestors as possible during the ancestral worship. *Potthara Amavasya* and *Toli Ekadasi* are two important occasions of ancestral worship. However, they offer prayers to ancestors at the time of every festival and ceremony. *Potthara Amavasya* (Bhadrapada Bahula Amavasya – No-moon day of Bhadrapada [August-September] month of Indian calendar) seems to be a dedicated occasion for ancestral worship. This practice is observed in Mahabubnagar, Guntur, Kurnool, and Prakasam districts. But *Toli Ekadasi* seems to be the occasion adopted from neighbouring Hindus. This practice observed only from the plain villages of Mahabubnagar and Guntur districts where Chenchus are subjected to intensive contacts with local Hindu population. They organize a festival if the entire village suffer from a disease or if there is a period of drought in the territory. Such festivals depend on the circumstances but do not have any specific time period or regularity. They can be celebrated at any time according to the convenience of people. This tradition is still in practice in some core settlements. For example, *Poleramma* festival was celebrated by the Chenchus of Marripalem of Prakasam district in 2009 with the fear of Malaria. In another case, the Chenchus of Appapuram of Mahabubnagar district celebrates *Peddamma* festival whenever there is a problem. However, Chenchus of all the territories are influenced by one or the other religion of non-Chenchus and celebrate the festivals of those faiths. But, every such festival includes the component of ancestral worship. The Chenchus of Sivalingapuram of Guntur district organizes ancestral worship on the eve of Christmas. Similarly, the Chenchus of Appaipally of Mahabubnagar district worship

ancestors not only on the days of Hindu festivals such as *Vinayaka Chaviti* and *Ugadi* but also on the day of Muharram of Islamic tradition.

Multiple influences from outside have brought the changes in the concept of God and religion. The ancient migration supposedly from one forest to the other through plains or the present movement from forest to plains has brought several changes in the belief system and the religion of the Chenchus. The concepts of heaven and hell are gradually developing among them. The deities and festivals are increasing with new additions. The deities of present day Chenchus are not only from indigenous traditions but also from religions such as Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity. They are; *Lingamayya, Mallanna, Poturaju, Bayyanna, Mallamma, Maisamma, Mukkidi Pochamma, Usamma, Poleramma, Hussinayya, Saidulu, Dargayya, Yesayya,* and *Maryamma*. Most of the traditional deities are understood as the forms of *Lord Shiva* or *Parvathi*. It is probably influenced by the earliest and longest association of Chenchus with Shaivism. However, the worship of Lord Rama and his consort Sita in Chenchugudem of Prakasam district, Lord Narasimha Swamy in Ahobilam region of Kurnool district and Lord Hanuman in Maddhimadugu of Mahabubnagar district are some examples for Vaishnavism among the Chenchus. Therefore, any relation between Chenchus and Shaivism and Chenchus and Vaishnavism is the influence of popular local shrines but not their original practice. The Chenchus use conical or rectangular stones for ever deity they worship. Even now, there is a continuity of similar symbols for the new deities too. For example, the stone symbols represent Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana in a temple at Chenchugudem of Prakasam district and Lingamayya and Maisamma temples of Appaipally of Mahabubnagar district are similar in appearance. Their religion cannot be called by a single name. It is a fusion of multiplicity of traditions. But Lord Shiva dominates their religious sphere by one or the other name. The entire length and breadth of Nallamalai is having the shrines of Lord Shiva. Lord Shiva is called as Mallayya, Lingamayya, Sivayya, Veerabhadrudu, Chennakesavudu, Salleswarudu, Umamaheswarudu, and Varadarajaswamy by the Chenchus. Goddess Durga is also popular with different names. They are; Maisamma, Ellamma, Pochamma, Usamma, Poleramma and Peddamma. In fact, feminine deities are very popular and more in number. They offer liquor or toddy and birds or animals to satisfy the Goddess.

They have retained certain beliefs of little tradition despite their adaption of other religions. The crystallization process of religion might have started few centuries ago. It is significant to have Chenchus who do not know the name of their religion or not having a concrete concept of religion even today. The assertion on a religious identity, such as, Hindu or Christian by the Chenchus is probably a phenomenon of twentieth century.

Myths and folklore:

The deities are used by the Chenchus to explain their identity. They use folklore to explain or glorify their identity to non-Chenchus. However, rarely one can identify the folk tales which are known to entire community. They are all location specific in nature. But these stories are deeply internalized by such specific section of people and most of the times all the members of a small territory are aware of such stories. For example, Chenchus of Kurnool and Mahabubnagar districts share similar stories about their body colour. They believe that they were fair in colour but turned black with the curse of Chenchita. They narrate how the beautiful Chenchita (a Chenchus woman) was deceived by her husband. But her husband's name is given differently in different territories. He is Mallikharjuna (Lord Shiva) for the Chenchus of Mahabubnagar district and parts of Kurnool district and Narasimha (Lord Vishnu) in the region close to Ahobilam of Kurnool district. According to the story, Bramaramba, the consort of Mallikharjuna; and Adi Lakshmi, the consort of Narasimha conspired to get rid of Chenchita, the lover and the second wife of the lord. They have created a situation for Chenchita to leave Mallikharjuna/Narasimha. The angry Chenchita believes that she was taken by the Lord because of her beauty. No outsider can deceive if the women are not beautiful. Therefore, she has cursed her *jati* by smearing the leaf extracts on their faces. As a result, all of them turned black. They believe that there is no possibility for a Chenchu with fair complexion. They express doubts about the descent of any fair skinned Chenchu person.

Mukkidi Pochamma tale and Salleswaram tale

The tale of Mukkidi Pochamma is popular among the Chenchus of Appaipally, Srirangapuram, Errapenta, Padmanapally, and Chennampally of Lingal mandal of Mahabubnagar district. However, rest of the Chenchus of the same mandal or the same district are not aware of this story. The idol of Mukkidi Pochamma is located on

the bank of a pond (Devu Cheruvu – Pond of God) close to Appaipally village. The Chenchus of this village take pride in telling this story because they believe that the story reveal the character and sanctity of their *jati*. At the same time, the story unfolds the significance of brother and sister relationship.

Mukkidi Pochamma is identified as the goddess of power. According to the tale, she belongs to Chenchu *jati* and fought against bad people. She was living with her brother in the forest. One day, her brother went for hunting and she went to gather tubers. While she was collecting food in the forest, a group of strangers (non-Chenchus) took all the food and tried to rape her. She had killed few of them with the digging stick. As they were more in number she ran away from them, shouting for help from her brother Salleswaram. They followed her in the forest. Upon hearing the voice, her brother started searching in the forest on a horse. She had reached a pond close to Appaipally. She was tired because of running for few kilometres. By the time the group of strangers reach her, she killed herself by cutting her stomach with a stone. She took out the intestine and tied it around the neck by looking at which the strangers got scared and ran away. Her brother saw the dying sister and she sought to take revenge on the culprits. The brother went in search of the culprits, leaving the dead body of the sister. She becomes a stone on the bank of the pond. Her brother found culprits deep in the forest near the place which became popular as Salleswaram (approximately 30 km away from the place where Pochamma committed suicide). After killing the culprits, Salleswaram was not willing to go back to his village because of deep distress. He didn't want to see human beings. He has gone into a deep valley where even the sounds of wild animals are not reachable. After many years, the Chenchus found him as a stone. They have started worshipping him. In later years, non-Chenchus have become aware of the powers of Salleswaram and started visiting the place to worship the deity. Gradually, it has become a very popular shrine in the Nallamalai forest. The Chenchus are also happy because they believe that their God is worshipped by the non-Chenchus.

Chenchus consider the shrine as a symbol of victory over the exploiters or evil. Moreover, the story reveals the notions of the Chenchu over non-Chenchus. They have treated non-Chenchus as a threat for their existence. Even now, they are suspicious of non-Chenchus. They consider Pochamma as a symbol of chastity. They

Small game hunting is in practice in Chenchugudem of Prakasam District

Display of bow and arrows as part of relay hunger strike at Appaipally of Mahabubnagar district

consider the affection for sister as a superior value. The bond between sister and brother is stronger than any other relationships. The non-Chenchus who visits this shrine are not aware of the story. In fact, they treat it as a shrine of Lord Shiva.

Material culture:

Material culture represents the basic nature of a community; gender differences pertaining to role and status, livelihood practices, division of labour; religious, economic, and political activities. It gives an identity and pride to a community. Therefore, it is an identity marker with immense importance. It attains utmost importance in simple societies because all the activities, folklore, and mythologies revolve around the material possessions of the people. The material culture of a human society or a specific community is not static but change according to the needs and aspirations of the people in time and space. The representations and meanings repeatedly change according to the changing social order.

Bows and arrows are the potential markers of Chenchu identity. They find place in every activity performed by the Chenchus. Any non-Chenchu can identify a person as Chenchu if he possesses bow and arrows. They carry bows and arrows while going to forest, during festivals, rituals, while fighting with each other, during protests etc. The arrow plays an important role in the marriage ceremony too. Axe is also equally important, in fact, it is seen with the Chenchus of all the territories except with the Chenchus living in towns. The axe is predominant even at the places where bow and arrow disappeared. For example, the axe is a household apparatus among the Chenchus of Appaipally of Mahabubnagar district where bow and arrows have almost disappeared. The Chenchus who are having bow and arrow may not carry axe to the forest. However, they do have axe at home. For example, all Chenchus of Chenchugudem of Prakasam district possesses bows, arrows, and axes. But quite often observed them carrying only bow and arrow. Chenchus of Chenchugudem often questions "How one can be a Chenchu without having bows and arrows?" Therefore, bows and arrows are very important not only for the identification by other communities but also for the identity within the community.

Honey collection is another important activity which attracts the attention of an outsider. *Moku* (rope or rope-ladder), *kheda* (bunch of wet leaves), *veduru bongu*

(bamboo stick), *jaali* (filter) or *batta* (piece of cloth), *cheda* or *pudaka* (basket), and *sarava* (earthen pot or aluminium vessel) are used for honey collection. *Moku* used to get into the valley in order to collect honey from the *sarri* (valley area). *Kheda* is a bunch of wet leaves used to generate smoke in order to disturb the bees. *Veduru bongu* is a bamboo stick used to cut the honey part of the hive. *Cheda* or *pudaka* is a basket to collect the hive. *Jaali* (filter) or *batta* (piece of cloth) used to filter the honey. *Sarava* is an earthen pot or aluminium vessel used to collect the filtered honey.

Chenchus have a small kitchen space in a single roomed hut. They have an earthen hearth at a corner of the hut and a hearth made up of stones outside the hut. They neatly maintain the hearth inside the house by pasting it with cow-dung periodically. But hearth outside the house is not properly maintained as they make it as a temporary arrangement. They possess very few materials required for cooking. These are maintained by the women and usually described as their property. Women have a right to lend the vessel to a neighbour or friend in the times of need. But man cannot give them without the consent of a woman. Men can also cook and sometimes both husband and wife cook together. They use few vessels such as *bugana*, *sarava*, *kunda*, *garita*, and *theddu* for cooking. *Bugana* is a clay or aluminium vessel used for the cooking of rice. *Sarava* is also made up of similar material but small in size useful for cooking the curry. *Kunda* is an earthen pot also used to prepare curry. *Garita* is an aluminium spoon useful for stirring the food while cooking and to serve the food after cooking. *Theddu* is a wooden spoon useful for the same purpose as *garita*. *Thallē* or *kanchamu* is a plate to eat food. *Kadava* is an earthen pot used to store the water. It is now almost replaced by *bindi*, a steel or aluminium or plastic vessel. *Chembu* or *lota* are steel vessels useful for drinking water. Bhowmick (1992: 57) has mentioned about a conical shaped earthen ware resembling tortoise, known as '*thabetikaya*'. However, this is not presently seen anywhere among the Chenchus. But the Chenchus are not responsible for the disappearance of this vessel. The pots are traded by outsiders and they might have stopped making this pot. In fact, the earthen ware is gradually disappearing and giving way to steel or aluminium vessels. Chenchus use materials like *rolu*, *rokali*, and *tiragali* to prepare certain foods. *Rolu* is a stone mortar and *rokali* is a wooden block with a convex shaped end used for pounding. *Tiragali* is a stone grinder. It is a combination of two round disc-like stones placed one over the other. A small wooden block is there at the centre of the lower stone whereas upper

stone has a hole to fit into the wooden block. The upper stone is also having a wooden handle to move it in a circular way for grinding the grain. *Rolu*, *rokali*, and *tiragali* are considered as the property of women. Only women work with these implements. Few employed Chenchus living in towns are having electric mixers and grinders.

The implements used in agriculture are not specific to Chenchus. They buy them from the non-Chenchus. *Nagali* (plough), *guntika*, *gorru*, *eddulabandi* (bullock cart), *para* (spade), and *kodavali* (sickle) are used by the Chenchus in agriculture. *Nagali* is a wooden apparatus with an iron hook at the end. *Guntika* is a quadrangular shaped wooden block used to flatten the land after ploughing. *Gorru* is a kind of plough with multiple iron hooks for tilling the land. *Eddulabandi* (bullock cart) is helpful for transportation of farm products. *Para* (spade) is used for multiple purposes, particularly, in levelling the sand and digging small water-ways in the field. *Kodavali* (sickle) is used for cutting the crop or clearing the bushes and other small plants. *Butta*, *gampa*, *cheta*, and *porakatta* are used for various purposes. *Butta* and *gampa* are different types of baskets useful to store and carry the produce. *Cheta* is a winnowing fan useful to clean the grains or separation of grains and dirt. Agricultural implements are seen with very few Chenchus because very few practice agriculture. But, sickle, winnowing fan, and baskets can be seen with many Chenchus because they are useful for many purposes other than agriculture.

Authority and religious symbols

Kola karra is a wooden stick of 4-5 feet length having a human head shaped tip. It is the symbol of power and can be held by an authoritative man; such as, the *peddamanishi* (headman) or *kolagadu* (officiating priest). Usually no other person in the settlement carries this stick. This stick can be regularly seen with a traditional headman but *kolagadu* carry it only at the time of performing a marriage. Every Chenchu house is having some photographs of deities. These photographs predominantly belong to Hindu tradition. A combination of the photographs of Hindu deities and Islamic symbols are seen in the houses of the Chenchus of Mahabubnagar district. The photographs of Jesus Christ and symbols of Christianity are observed with few Chenchus from Chenchugudem of Prakasam district and Sivalingapuram of Guntur district. Some of the Chenchus are having the materials pertaining to the deities of little tradition. For example, *Yallamma* of little tradition is very popular

among the Chenchus of Mahabubnagar district. They keep a small basket with the wooden idols of the deities, few yellow threads and coins. They usually tie this basket to the roof of the house. Some Chenchu families also have a bunch of peacock feathers tied like broomsticks. They use these peacock feathers during the celebration of *Peerlu* (Muharram) festival.

Modern gadgets

In the changing circumstances, the Chenchus are acquiring new materials which can fulfil their needs. They have acquired means of modern entertainment as a result of increasing contact with non-Chenchus. In course of time, these gadgets have become a part of their life. The Chenchus from all the territories are acquiring some of these gadgets. They include plastic chairs, cot, wrist watches, wall clock, TV, radio, tape recorder, CD/DVD player, mobile phone, cycle, motor cycle, auto etc. These material possessions are not only providing entertainment but also acting as the tools for communication. These are also helping in creating awareness about different aspects like health and education. However, this shift in material culture is reflecting the changing identity of the Chenchus. At the same time, the concept of wealth and property has been changing with the entry of these gadgets. The present generation is experiencing this change. Therefore, the concept of inheritance of these goods is not completely developed. But from the few cases observed in the field, it can be said that the rules of traditional inheritance extended to new material possessions. But, the women's access to the property is completely declined. Women do not acquire any of these gadgets. They have often termed as the property of male. The entry of these gadgets and knowledge about them made the man more powerful and his dominant position is further crystallized.

Representations of Chenchu identity:

The Chenchus were often described as a more or less egalitarian and hunting-gathering society by various scholars. But the differences in the material possessions exist from the time immemorial. Differences exist not only among the families but also within a family. Women possess a less-powerful tool, the digging stick. Men possess bows and arrows which consider more powerful than digging stick. But, men have retained their control over digging stick as they have realized its importance despite its less power. At the same time, they have denied an opportunity to women to

A representation of a huntress at ITDA office, Srisailam
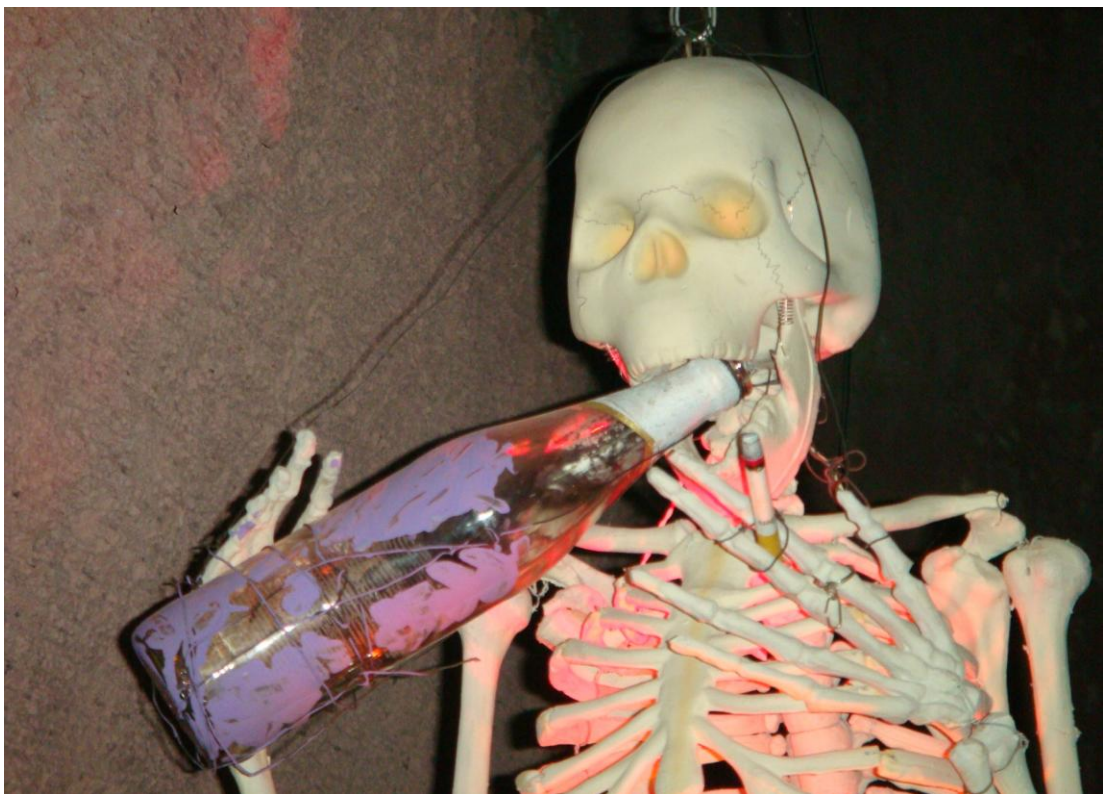
Representation of liquor drinking habit of Chenchus in Chenchu life museum

possess bow and arrow. But, the representation of woman as a huntress on temple walls creates confusion and gives scope for the speculation. For example, Murty (1985: 202) mentions "There are excellent sculptural representations at the Ahobilam temple showing the Chenchu girl, wearing a leaf skirt and aiming her bow and arrow as a huntress." But, that representation might be of a royal huntress instead of a Chenchu huntress. Similar sculptures are carved on the *Mahaprakaram* (compound wall) of Lord Shiva temple at Srisailam but represent a man with bow and arrows in a hunting position. The Chenchus say that the images and sculptures are the representations of Chenchu life. But, this can be purely an assumption as everybody agrees that these sculptures are not the work of Chenchus or any other tribal communities living in this territory. Those sculptures might be the depictions of royal rulers of those days. The Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA) installed a statue of Chenchu huntress with a leaf skirt in the premises of its office at Srisailam. A Chenchu teacher, RS questioned "Is there any such representation of Chenchu huntress in the literature?" He is doubtful about having a Chenchu huntress because it is a taboo for women to carry bows and arrows.

Dressing:

Dress is a potential marker of identity of a community. It remains as a signalling device of gender, occupational and economic status. The dressing of present day Chenchus is different from their traditional dress patterns. However, the old aged Chenchu men of the core territories are still wearing a loin cloth (*gosi*) and a long shirt. The loin cloth is not a separate cloth but a strip of the *sari* (long piece of clothing) of a woman. This is usually taken from the *sari* of the wife or sister or mother. But, the dress of Chenchu women of any territory is similar. There is not much change in the dress patterns of women even from the time of Fürer-Haimendorf (1943) work. A slight variation is observed in the dressing of the men of different territories. It is similar to the neighbouring non-Chenchus of a particular territory. Some men wear knickers or *lungi* with a shirt as an upper garment. But, the educated Chenchus or the Chenchus from towns prefer to wear a shirt and a pant. The young men make a difference between the dresses of day and night. They wear a shirt and short knickers during night. The Chenchu women of interior settlements and multi-ethnic villages prefer cotton saris whereas the women of towns prefer polyester saris.

Men rarely wear ornaments. They usually wear a bracelet made of beads or copper or bronze or a thread of black or saffron colour. Its purpose is to protect them from evil eye or black magic. Some men wear bands with a magic locket very close to shoulder to serve the same purpose. Some men wear finger-rings made of gold, silver, or copper but only to decorate the finger. The women were not wearing many ornaments in olden days. But, this has changed probably because of the contacts with outsiders as well as changing economic system. They are wearing gold or silver ornaments depending on their economic condition. In recent years, most of the women are getting a pair of golden *chevi pogulu* (ear rings), a *pustē* (marriage locket), and silver *mettelu* (toe rings) at the time of marriage. Women also prefer to wear *golusu* (necklace) of gold or silver and a golden *mukkera* (nose ring). But gold ornaments are rarely seen with the women living in core settlements. Older women prefer to wear silver ornaments whereas the young women prefer gold ornaments. But acquisition of ornaments depends on affordability of the woman or the family. *Gajulu* (bangles) have become indispensable part of the hands of women. They have also developed a concept similar to caste-Hindus about bangles. A woman without bangles is considered as widow because bangles are removed at the time of the death of husband. Some Chenchus use silver bangles too, in fact, widows can keep silver bangles. They are wearing finger-rings made of gold, silver, or copper. Therefore, the ornamentation of present day Chenchus is not different from that of their caste-Hindu neighbours and it cannot really give a distinct identity to the Chenchus.

The hair dressing practices of younger generation are totally different. The men are going to saloons to cut their hair. The women either tie their hair as a knot or weave it in a proper way as *jada* (plait). The men and women apply oil to the hair. They were using vegetable oils but nowadays mostly preferring coconut oil which is available in the weekly market or at the GCC store. They use *duvvena* (comb) of wood or plastic to delouse and dress the hair. The young girls use hair clips available in the market. The women use flowers to decorate hair. Chenchu men wear *molatadu* (waist-string) which is made of thread. It is considered as the symbol of manhood. This is used to serve the purpose of holding the *gosi* (loin cloth) both the sides. The young girls can wear it but they have to remove it after attaining puberty because of its association with men. This concept was probably adopted from the neighbouring non-Chenchus. Therefore, it cannot be a parameter for distinct Chenchu identity.

Food:

The mixture of tamarind and ash is considered as an exclusive food of Chenchus by non-Chenchus too. They believe that it acts as a medicine by killing germs in the stomach. It was mentioned as their favourite food by the old people of Appapuram of Mahabubnagar district. But, younger members of this hamlet are not interested in it. Chenchus consume tubers such as *Chenchu gaddalu*, *Kala gaddalu*, *Chikasani gadda*, *Mullem gadda*, *Eruvali gadda*, and *Adavi Chema gaddalu*; flowers such as *Ippa puvvu* (Basia latifolia) and *Nemali puvvu*; wild vegetables including *Adavi Vankaya*, *Deyyala kayalu*, *Adavi munagakayalu*, *Adavi Dondakai*, *Adavi Kakarakai*, *Naga sorakai*, and *Gootimedikai*; creepers like *Chotla teega* and *Chenchu teegalu* and leafy vegetables such as *Mullu koora*, *Idukula koora*, *Timmi koora*, *Jajiri koora*, *Gurugu koora*, *Konaganti koora*, *Dusari koora*, *Makula koora*, *Gongura*, and *Sannabachchala koora*. They have been consuming meat of various animals such as monitor lizard, sambur, nilgai, deer, wild pig, wild sheep, wild cat, squirrel, hare, and monkey. There was lot of diversity in their staple food. But the restrictions of the forest department minimized their access to diverse food materials. The shift from subsistence economy to a market oriented economy has also brought several changes in their dietary practices. Therefore, they are gradually loosing the diversity in diet.

Liquor Drinking:

Liquor drinking habit is an important element in the recognition of the Chenchus by outsiders. A layman outsider, an administrator, and a researcher are often tempted to call them as drunkards. But, Chenchus have their versions of explanation about the habit. Most common saying by the Chenchus is, "It is the same thing consumed also by gods." They treat it as a ceremonial drink. No ceremony is complete if liquor is not served. At the time of birth, marriage, death; during festivals; and any other occasion which gives them immense happiness or sadness should have liquor to express it or to forget it. Another popular explanation is, "We need it but not actually we want it. We walk many kilometres a day and drink water available anywhere and eat whatever available in the forest. Therefore, our stomach gets spoiled and worms grow in it. We need to kill them with liquor. We will also give some liquor to small kids if they suffer from diarrhoea or any diseases related stomach. We won't get big belly if we drink liquor. Our belly should be flat to walk faster or to climb trees in the forest." However, liquor drinking habit is comparatively

less among the Chenchu women and children of multi-ethnic villages and towns and they do not subscribe to these statements. In fact, they say that it is harmful to their health. However, liquor drinking habit is a powerful agent of their identity. *Ippa sara* (liquor) made from the flowers of *Basia latifolia* is a special ritual drink. With the increase in the cost of liquor and influence of outsiders brought a division between men and women in consuming liquor. The cost-effective man-made toddy has become the drink of women. Men do not prefer it because it is less intoxicating and sometimes even termed as women's drink. They do not serve man-made toddy to the guest; instead, they prefer natural toddy or liquor. The toddy has become a part in the wage of the Chenchus of multi-ethnic villages of Mahabubnagar district. Every woman labourer gets four rupees or a bottle (one litre) of toddy in addition to the wage at the end of the day. Therefore, it has become an inseparable part of Chenchu identity.

Dogs and Chenchu:

Dogs are the part and parcel of Chenchu life. They give a specific identity to the Chenchus. They not only give protection for the Chenchus but help them in finding the game. They are strategic partners in hunting. Therefore, Chenchus treat dogs as friends and family members. Chenchu man carrying bows, arrows, and/or axe, followed by his wife and two to four dogs is a common scene in the core territories and even in the fringe villages. Same scene has become the museum expression in the Chenchu Lifestyle Tribal Museum at Mannanur, Mahabubnagar district and Tribal Museum, Srisailam of Kurnool district. It's a signature identity of the Chenchus among the non-Chenchus and helps anybody moving in this territory to identify Chenchus from a distance. There are many instances where a dead dog is not simply thrown in the forest; instead, they bury it as they do in the case of human beings.

Economic organization and identity:

The traditional hunting-gathering mode of existence is obviously a mark of Chenchu identity. But, in the changing scenario the identity is shifting from traditional hunting-gathering mode of existence to market oriented economic system. They have gradually moved from a situation of "lack of an economic system" (Fürer-Haimendorf, 1943: 57) to a kind of economic system which involved a plan of economic activities, their organization, and marketing to get money in order to have a 'better living'. In fact, their movement from mere dependency on forest to other kind

of activities compelled them to plan their work, earnings, and expenditure. However, it has made them dependents in a course of time on the neighbouring non-Chenchus for wage labour or for agriculture. They have also entered in a kind of exchange system to get food grains. In fact, the merchants have enticed them into such kind of system. The Chenchus were cultivating cereals (Aiyyappan, 1988: 54) but merchants made them to collect MFP because of profitability. As a result, cereal cultivation has taken a back seat. They have also made Chenchus to buy tea powder which is new for them. In fact, Chenchus were making a beverage like tea with a locally available tuber *Madani Gadda*. The restrictions on liquor making in the forest led to the dependency on merchants for liquor prepared outside of their territory by the non-Chenchus. This has further hastened their need for money and made them dependents on outsiders. Gradually, money has also become a part of their culture.

Their integration with market oriented economic system is largely the result of contact with non-Chenchus as well as the shift in livelihood options of these people. Particularly, the contacts led to significant changes in the economy of the Chenchus who are living in proximity with the non-Chenchus. In some occasions these contacts offered benefits to the Chenchus by opening wide variety of the avenues of living; but at the same time, they have served as exploitative agents too. Institutional structures and the interventions of the government have brought changes in the subsistence economy. Girijan Cooperative Corporation (GCC) has introduced new market system for them. As a result, subsistence economy of Chenchus is undergoing transformation and they are moving into a more systematically organized future oriented economy.

The changing occupational structure has lot of influence on the identity of the Chenchus. For example, a person whose primary occupation is MFP collection treated as the Chenchu who is retaining his/her traditional identity but the person who is practicing agriculture treated as a person who is moving towards a new identity. Because, agriculture was never treated as the original occupation of Chenchus; whereas, MFP collection was thought to be so. Similarly, wage labour has become an important occupation for them. In multi-ethnic villages such as Appaipally of Mahabubnagar district, few Chenchus are working as construction labour which is entirely new occupation for them. But, these are also considered as alien occupations. Those people who are practicing original occupation are treated as 'original

Chenchus'. For example, the Chenchus of BKV Palem Chenchugudem of Guntur district often say that the Chenchus of Terala village of the same district are not the original Chenchus because all of them are practicing agriculture. Similarly, the Chenchus of Chenchugudem of Prakasam district says that the Chenchus of Dornala of the same district are no more original Chenchus because most of the men are employees. Similar notions exist in other parts of the Chenchu territory too.

The occupations have been further diversifying and giving rise new dimensions to Chenchu identity. For example, occupations like police constable, attendants in schools, and teachers are not only giving new status and identity to those people but also leading to the migration of Chenchus to nearby towns. Around 20 families of the Chenchus are settled in Dornala of Prakasam district and 15 families are settled in Achempeta of Mahabubnagar district because of the employment. Same is the case with the Chenchus of Mannanur of Mahabubnagar district and Macherla of Guntur district. But, unlike previous cases, rehabilitated colonies were constructed in these two towns by the government. The Chenchu employees from nearby places have settled in these colonies. These occupational categories not only influenced the identity of Chenchus but also the nature of interaction and interacting groups. This has also given scope to interaction with wide variety of ethnic groups in a town.

Traditional economic activities are controlled through social and political institutions. Though forest is a common pool resource, some individuals or *kulams* of the community have exclusive rights over some of the resources of the forest. Honey is an individual as well as group property. *Sarrilu* (valleys having honeycombs) and *akumanu* (tree having honey combs) are considered as individual or family or *kulam* property. The ownership established based on the 'principle of first occupation' and the rights transmitted to the descendents of the owner. Similar rights are also established on gum trees. The traditional institutions play an important role in the protection of such rights of the owner by following the mutually accepted rules and procedures. The violation of boundaries may lead to severe violence. There are many incidents of mutual killings of men from different families, or *kulams*, or villages in this regard. The recent incident of killing of a Chenchu man of Pechcheruvu of Kurnool district by a fellow villager for the theft of gum is an example for such consequences (The Hindu, 27 July 2009).

The customary rights are gradually disappearing. The regulatory mechanisms to maintain such rights are also disappearing. Money has gained utmost importance for any category of Chenchus as it has become a chief medium of transaction. Therefore, the universal conceptualization of property may not be valid for the community as a whole. The criteria of the individual depend on the quality and quantity of assets one possessed. The concept of property is greatly influenced by the occupational diversification. Emerging occupational groups, for example; employees, migrant labourers, wage labourers, and cultivators are having different assets as movable and immovable property. There are also variations in the concept of property depending on the geographical location of Chenchus. For example, the Chenchus of multi-ethnic villages consider house and cultivable land as property. Cultivable land is an important asset for the Chenchus whoever accepted agriculture. Bow and arrows are continued to be important asset for the Chenchus of core areas of the forest. The property is inherited through the male line. The ornaments of a diseased woman are usually shared by her daughters. In very few cases; house, *sarri*, gum trees, land or any other materials are given to women of the family. It usually happens in the cases where brothers have only sister or where brother-in-law do not have movable or immovable assets. However, this entirely depends on the generosity of men of the family. Even if they give share in the property, there is no need to give an equal share. If the property is shared only among the brothers, it should be shared on equal basis. The failure of such sharing leads to a conflict and violence. If there is no child for the diseased, the property will be shared by his brothers. The property of a diseased widow who does not have children and staying at brother's house is usually belongs to that brother. In olden days, the *Kula Panchayati* (traditional political council) was sharing the property. Nowadays, family is playing a key role in sharing, the failure of which leads to the interference of police and other legal institutions.

Occupation:

Occupation is an important marker of identity of Chenchus. The occupation is a choice of an individual among the Chenchus but the community often influences it. Hunting and honey collection are considered by the Chenchus as well as non-Chenchus of Nallamalai region as markers of Chenchu identity. Nevertheless, Chenchus practice many other occupations. But, hunting is often claimed as their original occupation. It plays an important role in the identification of Chenchus by

every outsider. Every description about the Chenchus made use of the term hunting with reference to their way of life in the adjective sense. Moreover, hunting abilities were considered as an important quality of men in olden days. A Chenchu old man from Kottalacheruvu of Kurnool district says, "When I have gone for a bride to Rollapenta, the prospective father-in-law asked me to shoot a bird to test my hunting abilities. He has also asked me to climb a tree. He has accepted for marriage only after satisfying with my performance. But this kind of incidents does not happen very often because the prospective father-in-law is usually aware of the abilities of the prospective son-in-law. There is a chance to test the abilities if the settlements of boy and girl are distant. Usually, there will be no objection from the prospective bridegroom because denial to perform leads to suspicion over the abilities. A Chenchu man cannot tolerate the suspicion over his abilities." The Chenchus of core territories are aware of hunting techniques and all the men possess bows and arrows. Majority of them use bows and arrows for protection in the forest. They treat bows and arrows as very important assets and not having them is not only the poverty of the family but also weakens the man. AP of Chenchugudem of Prakasam district says "I have to run away from the quarrel if I am not having bows and arrows but I can stand and argue if I have them. People laugh at me if I choose to run. I should have bows and arrows in order to stand as a man. Not having bows and arrows is utter shame for a man. It is equal to impotency or inability to get a wife or equal to the husband whose wife has eloped." The bows and arrows are not only understood as the weapons of hunting and protection but are treated as a symbol of masculine power. Women rarely use bows and arrows. Very few such cases are observed from Pechcheruvu and Kottalacheruvu of Kurnool District. NG, a 14 year old girl from Pechcheruvu and PB, a 31 year old widow from Kottalacheruvu have expertise in using bow and arrows. But they never hunt or even participate in the hunting. Both of them have learnt the skills from their brothers. NG is participating in district level archery competitions with the encouragement of her teacher at Bairlutygudem School. However, a man never asks his wife to carry bows and arrows while both of them going in the forest. Woman is considered as dominant if she carries bow and arrow in the presence of husband.

Hunting is an individual as well as group activity. But group hunting is a rare practice. Hunting at individual level too is not in existence in true sense except in very few hamlets of core territory. The Chenchus of present day depend on traps to catch

the game. But this practice is very rare among the Chenchus of multi-ethnic villages except in cases of those villages which are in proximity to forest. There are several misconceptions pertaining to the hunting activity of the Chenchus. For example, Bhowmick (1992: 81) opines "The Chenchus have developed malevolent habit of hunting by burning the forest and thereby destroying the forest wealth." However, it doesn't seem to be true. In fact, burning of the forest should be seen from a different perspective. The grass which grows every year in the forest is so coarse and thick which do not allow people to move in the forest. Chenchus burn this grass but not the forest. They burn grass during the onset of summer. Sometimes, it definitely harms the forest. But, malevolent idea behind the burning activity is not really true but it can be stated as a survival strategy of these people.

Honey collection is a very important activity of the Chenchus which attracts the attention of outsiders. They are popular as honey collectors in their region and honey collection process portrayed as an important exhibit in the Chenchu Lifestyle Museum at Mannanur and Tribal Museums at Srisailam and Hyderabad. Honey collection in a *sarri* is projected as a patented method of Chenchus. Chenchus are the only people collecting honey by this method. In this method, a Chenchu man hang into valley by tying one end of a rope to his waist and other end to a rock or the tree on a hill. Therefore, he is in the air with the help of rope while collecting honey. It is considered as a most dangerous method because cutting of rope may take the life of a person. They never want a brother to safeguard the rope tied to a tree or rock on the hill, instead, prefer a brother-in-law to do that task because they believe that brother may kill by cutting the rope for property and wife. This method of honey collection gives a positive identity because of their capability and negative identity because of mistrust over the brother. This is the main reason behind the notion of non-Chenchus that "a Chenchu do not even trust his brother."

Political organization and identity:

The political identity *per se* was not very important for the Chenchus because they never considered themselves as a part of a political entity. Instead, they believe in the autonomy. This might have had roots in their social regulation and authority structure. They believe that they are independent. The headman and the council of elders of the community regulate their society through administrative as well as

judiciary functions. It was neither anarchy nor democracy; rather, it was a mutually accepted customary system in which headman of the village community was not all-powerful. His interference in the affairs of the community depends upon the acceptance of the members but neither voluntary nor forced. But, severe breach of law was strictly regulated by the headman or the council of elders as discussed earlier. Therefore, for them political entity was not something out there but their community itself. They have never included any other in their affairs till the interference of the British administrators in Madras Presidency and Nizam administrators in the Nizam dominions. Moreover, introduction of new police by the British administration in 1860 (Thurston, 1909: 28) led to the increasing interference of outsiders in the affairs of Chenchus. Apart from this, British administration started regulating Chenchus through its forest laws imposed on Chenchus since 1898 (Thurston, 1909: 31).

The traces of *Kula Panchayati* (traditional political council) observed even today in the hamlets of core territory of the forest. All the issues of the village are brought to the notice of *Kula Panchayati*. However, the verdict is not depending on thorough investigation but on the conscience or belief or oath taking or eye witness. *Peddamanishi*, *pathani* and *kolagadu* are the members in *Kula Panchayati*. In few cases, *peddamanishi* may invite one representative from every *kulam* of the village to participate in the *Kula Panchayati*. But they need not be elders in terms of age. It depends on their influence among the members of their *kulam*. Other members, if any, can be recruited on ad-hoc basis and their presence is case specific. In some cases, the old people (the knowledgeable elders); regardless of their *kulam* and economic position, are invited to take part in the deliberations of council. Non-Chenchus are very rarely invited to take part in the proceedings. However, occasionally the head of the council may invite a local merchant or an influential forest guard. A merchant is often invited by the Chenchus of Rollapenta of Kurnool district to participate in the proceedings of *Kula Panchayati*. This kind of political organization reveals the 'original identity' of Chenchus. But, the intervention of external political bodies has been gradually dismantling the traditional political organization. As a result, it is gradually replaced by statutory political system. Therefore, political organization of the contemporary Chenchus can be divided into two types; traditional and statutory. In fact, traditional political system is non-existent in terms of structure but very much existing in terms of function. A significant change has taken place in the political

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organization after the establishment of Village Tribal Development Agency (VTDA) under Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA). The appointment of President of VTDA is made by the ITDA in consultation with the people of the village. However, the early years after the establishment of VTDA did not see much change in the centre of power because the officials use to appoint traditional headman as the President of VTDA. But the preferences have changed gradually because of the increasing importance of the position. People are competing for it because of financial benefits. Therefore, the power centre gradually moved from a traditional head to an influential or wealthy or educated man or woman. The major change in this regard is that a woman can be selected or elected as a President for which there was no chance in the traditional political setup. The president is elected by consensus or by majority vote. A representative of revenue department or ITDA supervises the election. But the overwhelming interference of the officials has been often leading to the election of a person of their choice. Sometimes, they nominate a person without seeking the consensus of people or without conducting a meeting. As a result, the clashes between different aspirants are surfacing. It has also given rise to conflicts between the traditional centre of power and the new centre of power. The appointment of VTDA president by the ITDA without considering the social aspects such as dominant *kulam* or *kulam* of the soil created conflicts in several villages. Such incidents are observed in Kottalacheruvu and Bairlutygudem of Kurnool district, Chenchugudem of Prakasam district, and Appaipally of Mahabubnagar district. The functions of VTDA President are similar to the functions of a traditional headman. However, structurally he/she is an agent of ITDA and answerable to higher authorities. The similarities in the functions can be observed at the time of dispute resolution. The president of VTDA acts as headman (*pedda manishi*) of the village and the members of VTDA as the members of traditional council. The president of VTDA is becoming powerful because of his/her role in the implementation of economic development programmes. For example, construction of houses and identification of beneficiaries to various government programmes are done by VTDA. As a result, officials as well as people find interest in this position. However, this position is not permanent.

Chenchus are unaware of nation or state. The Chenchus of core settlements never identify themselves as Indians. They identify themselves only as the Chenchus. However, they are gradually becoming part of the modern state; therefore, the

Chenchus of the multi-ethnic villages and the towns are conscious of political identity. They are actively participating in the political process. Therefore, there is a possibility to disseminate any political idea into this part of community. For example, the recent movement for Telangana and the territorial rift created by it among the Chenchus is very significant in this regard.

Conflicting interests:

Conflict of interest is very common not only between Chenchus and others but also among the Chenchus. The important areas of conflict among Chenchus are pertaining to relations between men and women and ownership on resources. Few cases are pertaining to the issues where either of the spouses elopes with other person. There are eight such cases identified during fieldwork period. They are; two cases each from Kottalacheruvu and Bairlutygudem of Kurnool district, Chenchugudem of Prakasam district and one each from Appaipally of Mahabubnagar district and BKV Palem Chenchugudem of Guntur district. Illicit relations may lead to serious consequences for the people involved in such relation. The elopement of a boy and girl without the consent of parents occasionally lead to conflicts but most often resolved without any further consequences. There are incidents of murders in Indireswaram and Bairlutygudem of Kurnool district and Chenchugudem of Prakasam district caused by suspicion of illicit relations. The victims are women in all the cases. One was killed with knife in Bairlutygudem, whereas; bow and arrows were used in other two cases. The murders for property or resources are identified from Peddamantanala and Tummalabayalu of Prakasam district. In both the cases, victims are men of a different *kulam* and killed by bow and arrows. Such incidents played a key role in attributing a negative image for the Chenchus by their neighbours. In fact, the non-Chenchus of Kurnool and Prakasam districts are scared of Chenchus and do not dare to enter into conflicts with them. This is because of bows and arrows of the Chenchus and popular notion about them as short-tempered people. Therefore, the Chenchus of these districts are identified as wild and ferocious people by non-Chenchus. But such fear is less among non-Chenchus of Mahabubnagar and Guntur districts because of the absence of bows and arrows with the Chenchus of these districts. Therefore, the Chenchus of Mahabubnagar and Guntur districts are identified as mild and shy people by the non-Chenchus. However, there are certain exceptions in this kind of conceptualization of the non-Chenchus. On the whole, possession of bows

and arrows is branded as wild, ferocious, and threatening; and lack of these weapons is labelled as mild and shy. At the same time, the Chenchus possessed these materials believe that they are secure not only in the forest but also in the village but the people who have left these materials are gradually habituating to the system of plains.

Language and Identity:

Language is an important aspect of ethnic identity. Chenchus can be identified by others by their distinctive dialects. For instance, Aiyappan (1948) opines "a Chenchu cannot be distinguished by any bodily peculiarities from the plains of Andhra, if he were dressed in the plains fashion and spoke without his dialectical peculiarities." Even today, it is very easy to identify a Chenchu with his/her dialect. The Chenchus usually speak faster than their non-Chenchu neighbours. But, the pace and intonation of the language differs among the Chenchus of different territorial categories. For example, the dialects of the Chenchus of Appaipally, Appapuram, and Maddhimadugu are entirely different despite the fact that all these three villages are from the same district, Mahabubnagar. The dialect of the Chenchus of Appaipally is close to the dialect of non-Chenchus of Mahabubnagar, the dialect of the Chenchus of Appapuram is close to the dialect of the Chenchus of the interior areas of Kurnool district, and the dialect of the Chenchus of Maddhimadugu is close to the dialect of non-Chenchus of Guntur district. This is because of the geographical affinity of these people. The Chenchus of Appaipally often say that the Chenchus of Appapuram do not speak in a proper way; therefore, it is very difficult to understand their language. But, the Chenchus of Appapuram says that the Chenchus of Appaipally speak differently but they can understand such language. It might be due to the continuous contact of the Chenchus of Appapuram with the non-Chenchus of Mannanur, a small town from the same district. Some words of the Chenchus of one part are unknown to the Chenchus of other part of their territory. However, terms of use regarding the animals and plants of the forest are similar among all the Chenchus but the pronunciation differs. For example, the Chenchus Appaipally pronounces the term for rabbit as *Kundēlu* but the Chenchus of Appapuram pronounce it as *Kyindālu*. Similar differences in dialect are also observed among the Chenchus of Chenchugudem and Chenchus of Dornala of Prakasam district. One can easily identify a person from Chenchugudem as Chenchu by his language but it is difficult to identify a Chenchu from Dornala because his/her dialect is similar to the non-Chenchus of that village.

The Chenchus of core settlements use consonants at the end of many words which is not a feature of Telugu language. However, it is difficult to decide it as an influence of another language or traces of their original language, at the same time; we cannot even deny such an assumption. There is also a possibility to assume it as a different dialect. The Chenchus of the villages in core territory include '*yya*' sound as a prefix to most of the words but the Chenchus of other territories pronounce according to regional dialects. For example, the Chenchus of core territory of the forest of any district says '*pyandlu myagnay*' for ripening of fruits but the Chenchus of plain territories of Mahabubnagar district says '*pandlu maginay*', Chenchus of the plain settlements of Kurnool district says '*pandlu maginayi*', and the Chenchus of the plain settlements of Prakasam district says '*pandlu maaginaayi*'. Certain words used by the Chenchus of core territory are not familiar to the Chenchu of other territories as well as non-Chenchu Telugu speakers. Some words, for example, *Ingam*/*Innago* (keep quiet), *Maddekae* (I don't know), *Dullaguru* (a sound generated by a flute like indigenous instrument), *Guppa* (lifting water from well), *Kurva* (hill), *Sarri*/*Charri* (valley), *Bujurkuntu* (mob), *Lonka* (an unfamiliar place), *Vurku* (a sliding rock), *Geemku* (grain storage pot), *Tevurte* (request), *Porti* (along) etc., are not familiar to the Chenchus of plains as well as non-Chenchu Telugu speakers.

There are many arguments about the language of Chenchus. A section of scholars argue that a specific language of Chenchus has disappeared in course of time and others believe that the Chenchus were not having any special language in the recent history. Some of the later scholars have denounced the existence of a separate language of the Chenchus but with doubts. But Chenchus of present day speak Telugu. However, other tribal groups of this territory speak their own languages. But, this is not prohibiting Chenchus to interact with such communities because of the ability of other groups in speaking Telugu. The variations in dialect of the Chenchus of different territories make each group different. But the dialect does not vary according to the territorial categories. However, the Chenchus of many villages in the core area of the forest speak alike regardless of their belonging to various districts. But all other categories of Chenchus speak like their neighbouring communities in the respective territories. However, there is not enough evidence to conclude that the Chenchus were having a different language that was lost in course of time. The variation in dialect is believed to be preserving Chenchu culture. For instance, Trivedi

(1978: 9) observes "We see that the Chenchu speech is one of the few characteristics in Chenchu culture which seems more or less responsible in resisting the acculturation process and in maintaining the identity of the Chenchu." It is partly true but how long it can resist acculturation is a question. However, even today, a Chenchu can easily understand the territory of other Chenchu after a brief conversation. Even some non-Chenchus as well as the officials of forest department and ITDA can understand the geographical territory of a Chenchu by having a brief talk. It is also partly contributed to the division of 'Andhra Chenchus' and 'Telangana Chenchus' after the rise of Telangana movement in this region.

Ethno-medical practices and identity:

The ethno-medical practices of the Chenchus are also acting as the markers of identity. The Chenchu *vejjus* (traditional medical practitioners) have recognition among the non-Chenchus too. The *vejjus* from all the parts are popular for a medicine against impotency. Several non-Chenchus consult Chenchus for this medicine. For example, BM of Appaipally of Mahabubnagar district was consulted for this medicine by five non-Chenchus, out of which two are from his own village and three are from other villages. A person from Musti caste of the same village who got treated by BM expressed satisfaction over this medicine. Similarly, TS from Birlutygudem of Kurnool district is also a famous practitioner. He says, "I have treated several such cases from non-Chenchus but I do not remember the number." In both the cases, the *vejjus* said that they are charging 500 to 1000 rupees depending on the number of doses required. The knowledge of medicine for snake-bite is also giving special recognition to the Chenchus among the non-Chenchus. Several non-Chenchus consulted these two people in this regard. Another important aspect which is giving recognition is *gadde*. AE of Nallakaluva of Kurnool district is very popular among the non-Chenchus of the Kurnool district. She performs *gadde* twice in a week in between 9 pm to 4 am in the night. She acts as a mediator between the God and her client in this process. She asks God for the solutions to the problems of her clients. She charges 500 rupees per client. She says "people believe in my *gadde*. Therefore, they come to me from distant places." However, other kind of medicines and medical practices are popular only among the Chenchus but not among non-Chenchus. In this regard, *vejjus* have special identity in the community.

Conceptualizing the other:

Identifying the "other" is a multi-layered phenomenon among the Chenchus. A person do not recognizes another person as "other" at one level of conceptualization but consider as "other" at another level. However, the expression of "individuality" or "personal identity" is usually shadowed by the "collective identity" at any level of conceptualization. The grouping within the Chenchus is similar to the segmentary system envisaged by Evans-Pritchard (1940). At *primary level* family serves as the unit of collective for the Chenchus. The members of a family treat each other as persons belong to the same group. A person discloses and discusses many issues with the members of the family. However, he/she keeps few issues undisclosed to family members. They are usually pertaining to extra-marital relations or the issues which do not have any shared interest or importance. But a person is socially, culturally, economically, and politically almost completely attached to the family. The family, in this context, strictly means a nuclear one. At this level, the families of a brother or sister or even the families of the parents of both the spouses are treated as the "other". Certain issues are not shared with these others. However, they maintain a close relation in all the aspects of life but the degree of closeness differs. At the *second level*, all the families of kin members are considered as the members belong to the same group. They stay together when they have to deal with the members other than their kin. At the *third level, kulam* acts as a unit of identification. The members of same *kulam* are socially and culturally closer than with the members of other *kulams* but economically and sometimes politically distant. At the *fourth level,* village acts as the unit of identification. The members of same village are culturally and politically closer than with the members of other villages. At the *fifth level*, territorial location acts as the unit of identification. The Chenchus in the forest and on the hills identifies and are also identified by others including Chenchus and non-Chenchus as a separate group. They are called as *Kurava Chenchu* or *Kuravollu* or *Painollu* (the people lives on the hills) by the Chenchus of plains. These Chenchus refer the Chenchus of plains as *Kindollu* (the people lives at foot of the hills). At the *sixth level,* entire community treats itself as a single unit. The people from other communities are treated as the "other" at this level. Chenchus have similarities as well as differences in social, cultural, techno-economic, and political aspects. But these differences can never completely distance the members of different territories. Particularly, they treat all the Chenchus as one group when they deal with the member of any other

community. ITDA is also playing an important role in identifying themselves as a "single group of Chenchus". The classification given here is applicable to the Chenchus belongs to core, fringe, and multi-ethnic villages of Mahabubnagar, Kurnool, Prakasam, and Guntur districts. But the Chenchus of towns do not fit in this kind of conceptualization because they have not yet settled in towns as large groups to make it sufficient for such groupings. They usually identify with their native settlements and accordingly interact with different groups. But to define "we" and the "other", they can be divisible into two groups, they are, Chenchus and non-Chenchus. In fact, various occupational groups also identify themselves with the people of their native village than the non-Chenchus of the same occupational category. But, the concepts of "we" and the "other" are flexible in this context because of the affiliation and identity with the occupational group in the times of requirement. An important feature is the development of "individuality" or "personal identity" in this context. However, this has not yet crystallised to the extent where we can separate out a person from the collective.

Conclusion:

Ethnic identity is considered as a vital concept and a core element in the group's cohesiveness. The degeneration of an identity "we" may result in the decline of coherence and leads to the fragmentation of a group. The identity of a group such as the 'identity as Chenchu' needs consistency not for homogeneity but for cultural uniqueness and 'ethnic identity'. However, a person need not holds a single identity. He or she may possess dual or multiple identities. For example, there is a very clear division among the Chenchus along the political and geographical aspects at the time of Telangana movement. They are divided into two sections and identified with two geographical or political or administrative units. However, they exhibit a single identity as socio-cultural unit. Therefore, 'cultural uniqueness' or 'ethnic identity' does not mean the sameness. The diversity can be there as long as the people of a group can identify themselves as the members of the same ethnic group. The causes and consequences of cultural diversity among the Chenchus and its influence on ethnic identity will be discussed in the succeeding chapters.

INTRA-ETHNIC INTERACTION AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY

This chapter discusses interaction and cultural diversity within the Chenchu community. It focuses on the interaction among the Chenchus of the same geographical territory as well as the Chenchus of different geographical territories. The interaction within a group is a dynamic activity but often characterized with a degree of consistency. The consistent interaction is possible in a close group but the interaction among the members of a larger group is characterized by inconsistency. However, interaction is essential for the existence and shaping up of a society. In this context, Charon (1979: 31-32) says, "Society is ... conceptualized as individuals in interaction, communicating, developing a common, shared perspective. The individual is not seen as shaped by society but is actively involved in its development. Every interaction situation can be thought to be the beginnings of society." Therefore, the interaction is not only relevant to understand social behaviour but also important to understand the emerging diversity among the people. Consequently, it helps to understand the cultural dynamics within the community.

Interaction is necessary for socialisation and itself a part of socialisation. Berger and Luckmann (1966: 140) pointed out, "...by way of conversation individuals are integrated within a set of social practices, and a common cultural world-view is objectified and crystallized." It is the interaction which makes an individual as a social being. We cannot assume a society and culture without interaction among human beings. Society may not even progress without interaction among its members. But all the interactions may not yield results in this direction and they need not have implications on society and culture. Identifying a successful interaction is a subjective judgement (Winch, 1970: 107). At the same time, conditions of interaction are to be understood as generative rather than simply descriptive (Layder, 1981: 4). Therefore, interaction among the communities is not designed in a single way and the outcomes are unpredictable. It depends on the circumstances under which the people or communities interact with each other.

The degree of differentiation and the degree of similarity is there among all the communities. It may be expressed at a group level or at a sub-group level. As a

matter of fact, no two groups are equal. Similarly, the subgroups also exhibit considerable degree of differences. Therefore, the phenomenon of cultural diversity is universal. It can be explained based on the differences that are clearly expressed in the social behaviour of an ethnic group. As a result, the cultural diversity among Chenchus is explained under the premises of the same principle and arrived at categorisation based on the expressed and perceived differences by the community.

The cultural diversity may be self-motivated or facilitated by those circumstances and situations encountered by a society. Therefore, the self-motivation of Chenchus cannot be ignored while considering the influence of contacts as a vital agent of cultural diversity. The cultural diversity may be understood through several parameters. For instance, Otterbein (1966: 4) argues "Cultures can be viewed as systems composed of overlapping subsystems. Four subsystems are usually distinguished: economic, social, political, and belief systems." Even though it is a broad frame of reference, looking at society through these subsystems of culture may be helpful in understanding the diversity within the community.

Habitat influences interaction and diversity. Schwartz (1975: 111) argues that intra-ethnic relations are always intra-ecological. Cross-ethnic relations within the same ecological grouping tend to resemble intra-ethnic relations. Similarly, habitat is crucial to understand interaction and diversity in case of this forest dwelling community. Therefore, territorial categorization of the Chenchus facilitates the understanding of diversity in social, religious, economic, political, and linguistic aspects. However, whether these people share same resources in the entire territory or they are in continuous competition for these resources is very important in this regard.

Jenkins (1986) distinguishes between the process of group identification and the process of categorization. According to him "the first takes place inside the ethnic boundary, the second outside or across it" (1986: 177). The territorial categorization of the Chenchus doesn't seem to be the process that takes place outside the group or because of external forces but very much within the group. It is because of the identification of all the territorial categories with the same group, that is, Chenchu. However, the territorial categories are having limitations because of the flexibility of boundaries. At the same time, the categorisation proposed in this thesis is not created

by the people. It has emerged out of their historical separation under different administrations. For example, the division between 'Andhra Chenchus' and 'Telangana Chenchus' is a result of geographical separation and continuing even after the formation of Andhra Pradesh. In fact, it is the result of assumed power differences by the people. It is particularly with regard to the distribution of financial benefits by the administrative agencies as well as their establishments.

The diversity among the Chenchus is not a recent development. It has long history. According to Thurston (1909: 33-34) "a striking contrast is afforded between those who inhabit the belt of forest stretching from Venkatapuram to Bairnuti, and those who dwell in the jungle on the skirts of the great trunk road. In the former we behold the Chenchu semi-civilised and clothed. The brethren of the Bairnuti Chenchus dwelling in the forest of Pacherla present very different conditions of life." Bairnuti [Bairlutygudem] is at the fringe of the forest and Pacherla [Pechcheruvu] is 25 km away from Bairnuti and in the core of the forest. Therefore, the difference between the Chenchus of both the settlements is inevitable. The diversity among the Chenchus of different territories has been further hastened and crystallized with the increasing interaction with non-Chenchus.

The territorial categorization is the basis to understand internal diversity among the Chenchus. The community is understood as a simple, egalitarian, hunting gathering society by most of the scholars. But the political separation of the Chenchus in the history, policies of the government, colonial administration, and Nizam administration has been influential in the emerging diversity among the Chenchus. The Chenchu territory divided by the Krishna River which has served as a political boundary between the Nizam administered territory and British administered territory. The movement of the Chenchus across the Krishna River is not restricted by any administration but it was not very preferential movement for the Chenchus. However, the Chenchus living both the sides of Krishna river recognize their unity as a race distinct from the surrounding populations. But, such a vague identification hasn't translated into co-operation (Fürer-Haimendorf, 1943: 87). Such situation is gradually changing. The administrative system of modern India might be responsible for it. At least, teachers across different territories, forest watchers, leaders of SHGs and VTDAs are identifying with each other because of common problems and their

meetings at common places. This is gradually stimulating the idea of group identification among the rest of the members. But, it is doubtful with regard to its prospects because of the fissures in the community during recent struggle for Telangana statehood.

The gradual movement of the Chenchus from the core area of the forest to fringe of the forest and multi-ethnic villages in the plain areas is another important factor that facilitated cultural diversity. The education policies, displacement and rehabilitation policies, scarcity of livelihoods in the forest played a vital role in this regard. However, the Chenchus are not moving in a particular and uniform direction. They are moving in different directions from the forest and settling down in the nearest plain villages. Most often, they are moving to the plain villages of the same district. This movement is bringing them close to wide variety of ethnic groups. The Chenchus have been strongly influenced by these local groups of different cultures. As a result, they are gradually adapting cultural practices of the caste Hindu groups. In this context, Fürer-Haimendorf (1943: 308) assumes that Chenchus may take their place in Hindu social order as a caste in few generations. It was true to some extent but mostly about the security of the pilgrims and the location of the sacred temple in the midst of their habitat where they were undoubted masters. But, they have been gradually ousted by the same caste-Hindus from the sacred duties of the temples. At the same time, it is very pre-mature to assume that they can be included as a caste in the Hindu social order. Even though, they are practicing the Hindu customs, they are far away from the ideological framework of the Hindu caste system. Also, they are well aware of their ST status.

Stratification:

Stratification of *kulams* into class categories is uncertain. But, Fürer-Haimendorf (1943: 314) quotes Census of India, 1931, which mentions an exogamous sept of chieftains and priests called Bhumanas. The same note speaks of three other occupational septs, namely Kudamala (Minister), Dasari (officiating priest) and Uthaluri (village watchman). Such segregation of *kulams* is a puzzle because they are neither uniform nor very concrete categorizations across the territory. But, traces of such idea are observed in few villages even today. In contemporary scenario, the occupational categories are having no relevance because they are not having any

special role in the affairs of village community. They are neither influencing the interaction nor the identity. But, class formation may take momentum if the occupational categories such as MFP collection, wage labour, cultivation, employment in public and private sectors across bring in differences in wealth among the people. But, these occupational categories are nothing to do with the *kulams* of Chenchus. At the same time, the statutory political system replaced the traditional headman system and the priestly class is gradually disappearing with the increasing tendency to invite a Brahmin to officiate ceremonies. Therefore, the authenticity of categorization of *kulams* into classes is at question and the explanation of interaction and identity through these categories is not possible.

Categorization:

As explained earlier, the categorization depending on habitat seems to be the one that is created by the researchers or those non-Chenchus living in the habitats close to the Chenchus. In fact, non-Chenchus prefer to address the Chenchus as Village Chenchus or Jungle Chenchus according to their territorial location. But, such categories are no-where observed in the Nallamalai region and neither interactions nor the relations determined by such categories. In fact, Chenchus does not like to be identified as a Village Chenchu. They believe that there is only one type of Chenchus; that is, *Konda Chenchu/Deva Chenchu/Adivi Chenchu*. They use all these terms interchangeably. They are mostly having relations with the Chenchus living close to their territory but it is nothing to do with the categorization of Village Chenchus or Jungle Chenchus. Therefore, these categories seem to be superfluous and not influential upon the interaction among the people. It can also be said that the legitimacy of all these categorisations can be questioned because of not having roots in the community. In fact, the territorial categorization proposed in this thesis too is not created by the people but adapted for the convenience of explanation.

Interaction:

The interaction within a group operates at different levels. It depends on how a person conceptualizes "we" and the "other". Accordingly, at one point, the individual is important and interaction with the 'other' depends on his/her priorities. However, among the Chenchus; the collective is always important over the individual. The individual may usually compromise or the collective may influence the individual's

priorities of interaction with the 'other'. However, the interaction which does not affect members of the family or the community carried out by the individual according to his/her priorities. In tune with the levels of identification, at *primary level*; family is marked by close interaction among its members. The interaction between wife and husband is long lasting than between the parents and children and amongst the children. The importance of the individual is reduced when we move from a family to a kin group. For instance, at *the second level*; the interaction between families of a kin group is important rather than the interaction among individual members of those families. Most often, elders of different families of a kin group play an important role in the interaction. But, at *the third level*; *kulam* acts as a unit of interaction. Some of the Chenchu settlements are not composed of more than two *kulams*. The interaction is marked by closeness in such cases. The core settlements such as Pullaipally and Rampur of Mahabubnagar district are having this kind of setup. However, the *kulams* are more in number in multi-ethnic villages. Therefore, the interaction among different *kulams* depends upon the marital or other kind of relations among them. At *the fourth level* settlement acts as the unit for interaction. The interaction within a settlement or among the settlements depends on its territorial location, conflicts, and marital relations. If there are no conflicts among the settlements of same territorial category, it may not influence the interaction among the individuals or families except for the fact that it is the "other" settlement. However, it is significant because of its key role in conceptualizing the belongingness or otherness. At *the fifth level*, territorial location acts as the unit of interaction. It is very important unit of interaction because people establish marital relations with the people of few settlements. For example, a Chenchu from Appaipally of Mahabubnagar district never want to give their daughter to a man of Appapuram of the same district because Appapuram is in the midst of forest but Appaipally is almost out of the forest. A family of Appaipally doesn't want their daughter to depend on forest for livelihood. But, they can get a girl from Appapuram for their son despite lack of preference even for such kind of alliance. The economic and political relations are also often prevailing within the category. At *the sixth level* the entire community treated as a unit of interaction. The community consciousness is often an important aspect but comes out only in an interacting situation with other communities. Certain associations, such as, *Chenchu Seva Sangham* formed in recent years tried to represent Chenchus as a whole but they are not yet recognized by the people of all

territorial categories. This aspect of their behaviour will be discussed in the subsequent chapter.

Chenchus living in core areas of the forest

Chenchugudem of Prakasam district; Appapuram, Pullaipally, Rampuram, Bourapuram, and Irlapenta of Mahabubnagar district represent the category of core settlements. The Chenchugudem of Prakasam district is geographically fall under core area of the forest. The Chenchus of this village predominantly have the bow and arrow culture. But, they are different from the Chenchus of core settlements of Mahabubnagar district because of the better connectivity of their village with the non-tribal territory. The Chenchus living in the core area claim as the true representatives of Chenchu culture. But, the claims and counter claims are the result of competition among different groups of the community. At the same time, their culture has been represented as the culture of the Chenchus by various researchers. But, it appears to be a prejudiced idea which ignores the diversity within the community.

The hamlets are very small with very few haphazardly arranged houses. They are surrounded by lush green forest and hills. Every hamlet has a water source in its proximity. The houses are usually triangular or oblong huts with a thatched roof. They usually have a single room which sometimes divide by a partition to make it into kitchen and living room. The house of the headman is usually at the centre of the settlement. It is impossible for any outsider to identify the hut of the headman without the help of the inhabitant.

The Chenchus of this territory are very shy and the women scarcely talk with outsiders. However, these hamlets are marked by close interaction among the members because of small number of population and *kulams*. The person and community are closely connected in these small settlements. But, every Chenchu in this territory try to avoid a conversation with an outsider. Rather they suggest the outsider to communicate with the headman. The headman serves as the spokesperson of the settlement. But not all the settlements are having the similar traditional headman. Alcoholism is rampant among them when compared with the Chenchus of other territories.

Livelihood is not only an important indicator of identity but also significant in establishing interactions. Their livelihood is almost entirely uniform and comprised of the products collected from the forest. They sell these products to merchants or GCC and buy necessary products from them. No other source of livelihood is more important except the occasional works provided by the forest department or the wage labour for timber traders or encroachers. For example, the Chenchus of Appapuram of Mahabubnagar district used to collect edible products from the forest. They were almost entirely depending on forest for food. But nowadays, they are not very keen on collecting edible products from the forest; instead, they are collecting commercial products such as gum, honey, *Ippa* flowers and *Madani gadda* (tuber). They are exchanging these products for cash and buying food grains from the GCC depot or from merchants. Therefore, transactions are taking place in terms of the money but not in terms of products. Livelihoods provide rare opportunity to interact with outsiders because of almost complete dependency on forest. However, it is premature to assume that their social and cultural systems are stagnant. They are changing with slow pace and it is a long term process.

Weekly markets provide an opportunity to interact with the members of same community as well as the members of other communities. But the Chenchus of core areas rarely attend at these market places instead they go to GCC depot which opens its store once in a week at some habitat in the forest. The Chenchus of nearby places visit this depot in order to sell their products and buy needy items from the store. For example, the Wednesday market at Appapuram in Mahabubnagar district is such a locus of activities. The Chenchus from Pullaipally, Mallapur, Rampur, and Irlapenta attend this market. However, interaction among the Chenchus of different settlements is very rare except among the relatives.

The Chenchus living in these areas are encircled only by the Chenchus from all the sides except in very few multi-tribal settlements such as Palutla of Prakasam district and Pechcheruvu of Kurnool district. Their physical movement often takes place in the same territory of the forest. However, men occasionally move out of the forest but the women rarely go out of the forest. Therefore, their interaction with non-Chenchus has been often limited to the officials of Forest Department, ITDA, GCC, Health Department, NGOs, and the contactors and/or middlemen. These interactions

are politico-economic type. The social dimension is missing in such kind of interactions. These interactions take place occasionally. It is entirely need based quasi-interaction. People need not have any personal relations. They may not engage in an interaction when they meet at a foreign location. Neither of the participants will have significant social and cultural implications of such interaction.

As mentioned, Chenchus of all the settlements of this region are not living in isolated condition. For example, Chenchus of Palutla of Prakasam district are sharing the space with Lambadas; and Chenchus of Pechcheruvu have lived for generations with Boya caste till their rehabilitation at Kottalacheruvu. In both the cases, non-Chenchus are progressive in terms of technology and economic development. The Chenchus in such setting are different from the isolated Chenchus of the same region. For example, Chenchus of these two settlements can be separated from the Chenchus of Appapuram of Mahabubnagar district which is also located in the core area of the forest. Particularly, changes are observable in dressing pattern and educational development. In case of the Chenchus of Palutla village, celebration of Holi festival along with the Lambadas is another significant adaptation. Few Chenchus of Pechcheruvu are engaged in timber trade which was practiced by the Boyas before their rehabilitation. Therefore, it is observed that the cultural as well as technological adaptations are simultaneously taking place in such contexts.

Territorial location is an important parameter to establish marital relations but such relations are not confined to a territorial category. However, the incidence of marital relations is more within a territorial group than among different territorial groups. They prefer partners from a nearby settlement. In many cases the boy and the girl of the same settlement love each other and go for marriage with the acceptance of their parents. If either of the parents does not accept for such marriage, they elope to forest and stay for three days and come to the village. They start living together in the village in a hut even if the parents do not accept. But usually, the parents accept and perform the marriage. If they do not accept, the couple live together without having the ritual of marriage. Such case is observed from Chenchugudem of Prakasam district. AP and AB are from Chenchugudem of Prakasam district. AB is the daughter of AP's maternal uncle. They loved each other and expressed their willingness for marriage at their parents. But, parents rejected their proposal because of the

differences between their families. As a result, AP and AB decided to live together in a separate hut. Parents have not created any trouble but warned them. But, they kept quiet once the couple started living together. At the same time, they have not come forward to perform marriage ceremony. After four months of living together, they have decided to tie the knot in a temple because of the confirmation of pregnancy. Even then, parents have not accompanied them to the temple. Both of them have gone to Srisailam and tied the knot in the temple compound. Upon an inquiry, AP's father says, "we are not happy with their marriage. But, what can we do if they strongly decided to live together?" However, they were treated as husband and wife by the rest of the community once they started living together. But, they have got invitations for ceremonies only after tying the knot.

Traditional knowledge systems are another important aspect of the identity of the Chenchus of this region. In particular, their knowledge on hunting strategies, on escaping from wild animals, on identifying resource rich locations, on edible and medicinal plants, on making non-poisonous food from poisonous tubers, and in general on most of the flora and fauna of the forest is very significant in this regard. Almost all the men and women of this region are having basic knowledge on flora and fauna of the forest despite differences among individual members. The medicine men of this region are popular among non-Chenchus too. But, there are no officially designated medicine women from this region. It seems women have not been trained in this profession. It may be because of the association between indigenous medicines and the concept of purity and pollution. However, women are not prohibited from acquiring the knowledge of indigenous medicines. There are several women across the territory having indigenous medical knowledge but they are not practicing as medicine women. Traditional knowledge system is often considered as one of the key factors behind the claim of the Chenchus of this territory as true representatives of Chenchu community.

The interaction at different levels varies among the Chenchus of different territorial categories. For instance, the family serves as the most important unit of interaction for the Chenchus of this region or for that instance any territorial category. But, the inclination to interact with the "other" decreases at higher levels such as with a different family or with the members of a kin group, or with a different kin group or

with the village community. Chenchus of Appapuram of Mahabubnagar district and Chenchugudem of Prakasam district serve as a good example for such interactions. However, both the settlements are different to certain extent. For example, Appapuram is a settlement in which Chenchus are still leading a semi-nomadic life but the Chenchus of Chenchugudem village are almost habituating to settled life with an exception of approximately ten families. However, almost all the families of both the hamlets possess bows and arrows. Small game hunting is still in practice in both the hamlets. But, Appapuram is having forty households with a high degree of fluctuation in the number. Upon three visits to this hamlet in 2009 and 2010, it is observed at no instance more than twenty houses are occupied. It is because of their movement to Bourapuram and Irlapenta for the part of a year to collect MFP from the forest. At the same time, few families of Bourapuram and Irlapenta are also having huts in Appapuram where they stay during their trip to sell their products and to get food grains from the GCC. Obviously, the interaction is very limited among these occasional visitors. One member of a family sitting at other's house, even if it is brother's; is a rare occurrence in this village. On the other hand, it is often observed people sitting in groups engaged in conversation in Chenchugudem village. This village is divided into three groups because of its settlement setting. As a result, the interaction within a group is closer than interaction across the groups. Appapuram is not so easily accessible to outsiders unlike Chenchugudem which has got road connectivity in the year 2008. Few families of Chenchugudem are practicing agriculture which requires the co-operation of other families of at least a kin group but it is not the case with the Chenchus of Appapuram. Other aspects such as celebration of life cycle rituals and festivals are almost similar in both the settlements. All the families of Appapuram celebrate *Peddamma* festival in group while the Chenchus of Chenchugudem celebrate *Gurappa* festival in group. However, *Peddamma* festival is not necessarily celebrated every year and it is not having a fixed date in the calendar. It is usually celebrated when a contagious disease broke out or at the time of severe scarcity for livelihoods. But, *Gurappa* festival is an annual celebration on the eve of *Ugadi*. In both the cases, all the members of the village meet at the specified place (within the village in case of Chenchugudem and outside the village in case of Appapuram) to celebrate the festival. These are the only occasions in case of both the hamlets where all the people of hamlet come together. Apart from that, the Chenchus of both the hamlets practice ancestral worship which is a family activity. However,

few Chenchus of Chenchugudem are buying new clothes at the time of *Sankranti* (Harvesting festival) despite absence of any other celebrations. Similarly, three families of the Chenchus are celebrating Christmas and not participating in *Gurappa* festival. It is also observed the conversion to other religion segregated families, which is reflected in the interactions of other members with these families. Upon an inquiry about relative isolation of these families, AP, a Christian convert says, "They [non-converts of the village] are feeling displeasure over our faith on a new God and ignoring the old Gods and Goddesses." However, it is not similar to ostracism because others talk to them if there is a need. Therefore, interaction regulated by several factors which may have wide variety of influences on the culture of the community in the long term.

Branding all the men of Chenchugudem of Prakasam district as criminals might have led to close interaction amongst the Chenchus in order to counter the people branding them. It was expressed by the way of co-operating each other to protect from police whenever they raid the village to capture a suspect. The Chenchus of this hamlet are popular as "notorious people" and "thieves" among the Chenchus as well as non-Chenchus of nearby villages. They too accept the accusation with a note that they are no more engaged in such activities. BRK from Pedda Mantanala hamlet of the same district worked as a teacher for 12 years in Chenchugudem. He is identified by the Chenchus of this village as a person who reformed the people as well as the village. He says, "They were engaged in theft but they are not very dangerous as outsiders believe. In fact, their thefts are aimed at food but nothing else. It is because of the scarcity of livelihood in the forest and alienation of the cultivable land close to their village by the non-Chenchus of Chilakacherla village. Upon the repeated complaints by the non-Chenchus of Chilakacherla, police used to book cases against them if any robbery takes place in this territory. That is how they were made as notorious by the outsiders." It is true that the Chenchus of this village resorted to petty thefts few years ago. For instance, NE, VTDA President says, "Some of us committed thefts. But, nobody resorted to thefts from almost last ten years." Despite the acceptance of same by the non-Chenchus of Chilakacherla village, they are still branding the Chenchus of Chenchugudem as thieves. Such criminal nature is attributed to the Chenchus of other settlements too. For instance, Mohan Rao (1992: 413) mentions "Some of the Chenchus living in Indireswaram and Panyam villages of

Kurnool district and Chilakacherla and Allipalem villages of Prakasam district are reported to have taken to highway robbery and thefts." However, such activities might have been taken up by few Chenchu men because of their displacement from resource rich locations and the restrictions of forest department to enter into such locations. But, no Chenchu of above-mentioned villages engaged in crime in recent years.

Chenchus living at fringe areas/foothills

Kottalacheruvu, Bairluty, Indireswaram, and Sivapuram of Kurnool district; Pathuru, Errapenta, Srirangapuram, Billakallu, Molkamamidi, Maddhimadugu, and Mulachintapally of Mahabubnagar district; Tummalabayalu and Chintala of Prakasam district are some of the fringe settlements. Few settlements in the fringe of the forest are multi-ethnic in nature but have few groups. Some of these villages are having connectivity with the nearby towns or large villages but few villages such as Pathuru and Errapenta of Mahabubnagar district are not having connectivity by road with rest of the villages except through footways. However, frequent interaction is possible with the non-Chenchus because of their proximity to multi-ethnic villages of the Chenchus and non-Chenchus.

The major difference between core and the fringe is the increasing tendency for interaction at different levels in fringe settlements. Despite the role of family as an important unit, other units are also acquiring importance for interaction. The interaction is intensive among the Chenchus of entire village in case if there is a presence of another community. But, division is observed within the community depending on intensity of interaction among the members in villages like Pathuru, Errapenta, Tummalabayalu, and Chintala where Chenchus are the only inhabitants. Mulachintapally also presents a similar case despite its multi-ethnic nature. It is because of the rehabilitation of part of the Chenchus from Rasool penta of interior forest, a decade ago. They haven't even completely settled in the village. They act as a separate group and never interact with the Chenchus living in the village. They are also not having marital or any other kind of relations. They are living at different ends of the village. The parts are also having different names, such as, Sri Lakshmi Chenchu colony and Bhramaramba Chenchu colony. As a result, the interaction among the inhabitants of both the colonies is often characterised by distance. But, the interaction among the members of one colony is characterised by closeness beyond

family and kin group level too. In fact, for them, Chenchu community of the village means the people of a colony instead of all the Chenchus of village. However, non-Chenchus treat all the Chenchus of the village as a single group. It is also observed that the VTDA president is often elected only from Sri Lakshmi Chenchu colony which is comprised of the Chenchus living there from few decades. All the men of Bhramaramba Chenchu colony possess bows and arrows but they are almost absent with the Chenchus of Sri Lakshmi Chenchu colony. The Chenchus of Bhramaramba Chenchu colony are almost entirely depending on forest for livelihood, whereas; the Chenchus of other colony are working as wage labourers in agriculture. The Chenchus of Bhramaramba Chenchu colony are still practicing seasonal nomadism and spending part of the year at their original habitat in the forest. No literate is found in Bhramaramba Chenchu colony, whereas, there is at least one literate in every house of Sri Lakshmi Chenchu colony. It may be because of their long stay in multi-ethnic setting and the presence of an Upper Primary school in the village meant for the Chenchus. Therefore, the extent of interaction is proportional to the duration of settlement of the group in the village.

Another significant difference between Chenchus from the core area of forest and fringe area is the increasing interaction with non-Chenchus. The Chenchus of fringe area almost regularly interact with contractors, merchants, grazers and other non-Chenchus of the nearby villages. However, these contacts are not so potential to bring changes in the entire cultural fabric of the Chenchus. But, the increasing dependency on non-Chenchus for livelihood is a significant aspect in this regard. For example, apart from Errapenta and Pathuru of Mahabubnagar district, the Chenchus from all other villages are partly or fully practicing agriculture. As they do not have capital, equipment, and sometimes skills; they ought to depend on non-Chenchu neighbours. It has intensified contacts with the non-Chenchus in course of time. Apart from this, a section of Chenchus of this region turned to wage labour for livelihood. They are usually working in the fields of non-Chenchus and along with non-Chenchus in road and building construction. It has further intensified the contacts with the non-Chenchus of neighbouring villages.

Livelihoods are playing an important role in changing the interacting groups and diversifying the culture. For instance, as it was mentioned earlier, that the

occupational shift of the Chenchus of Kottalacheruvu towards wage labour from MFP collection. Particularly, MFP collection is a seasonal activity unlike consistent availability of work for wage labour in one activity or the other. For example; agriculture, road construction, building construction, forest works, and the recent food for work programme (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme) which provides work for hundred days in a year are ensuring the work. Therefore, there is an increasing tendency among people to work as wage labour instead of collecting MFP which is not so rewarding activity. Moreover, they have to walk long distances because Kottalacheruvu is on the periphery of the forest. As a result, their movement from village to forest is curtailed and the movement from village to multi-ethnic villages outside the forest got momentum. However, at least few families of the Chenchus of all the settlements mentioned in this section are partly or fully depending on the forest. But the incidence of dependency on forest is more in case of the Chenchus of Errapenta, Pathuru, and Mulachintapally of Mahabubnagar district; Bairlutygudem of Kurnool district; and Tummalabayalu of Prakasam district. It is because of the accessibility of resources in the forest and unavailability or lack of skills to practice other occupations. Most of these people choose to practice MFP collection and wage labour simultaneously or whichever is beneficial at a particular time. Therefore, they are neither completely alien to forest based lifestyle nor completely imbibed into plains living pattern. Bows, arrows, and dogs are not completely away from their life. Moreover, they are interacting not only with the Chenchus and non-Chenchus of the plains but also with the Chenchus of core territory. Therefore, they are not only in transition between different livelihood patterns but also a bridge between different culture groups.

The contact with different categories of people influenced the interaction within the village community as well as with the people of neighbouring villages. It is characterised by the closeness among the inhabitants of a village too. In fact, it has given rise to co-operative life than a more or less isolated one. The increasing interaction within the community reflected in the mode of celebration of festivals. For instance, celebration of *Vinayaka Chaviti* and *Sri Ramanavami* in Billakallu of Mahabubnagar district, Kottalacheruvu of Kurnool district, and Tummalabayalu of Prakasam district on a large scale with the participation of all the families of village and the co-operative effort to organize the celebration are very important in this

regard. This was almost lacking in core settlements except in the times of significant need. The major difference in this regard is the regularization of the interaction even within the community because of the influence of various external forces for a very long time instead of having a mere interaction.

Chintala of Prakasam district is characterised by intensive interactions among people despite its location inside the forest. It is because of the road connecting Dornala and Srisailam going through this village. This village is a kind of rest place for vehicles in the forest while travelling from Kurnool to Srisailam. Therefore, six families of the village have been ventured into petty business activities such as small Tiffin centres and Kirana shops which is a beneficial activity because of the flow of pilgrims and others throughout the year. The village is also having an Upper Primary school which is a source of learning for the students from Chintala, Tummalabayalu, Marripalem, Arutla, Nekkanti, and Peddachema of the same district. It is also having a GCC store which is again a centre for marketing of the products and getting food grains for the Chenchus of above-mentioned settlements. Therefore, there is a difference in the interaction within the community. But, there are few limitations for intensive interaction among different groups of this village. As a matter of fact, the village is divided into two groups based on religious divisions because of conversion of fifteen families into Christianity. All the Chenchus converted to Christianity are living at one end of the village. However, they are not forced to live there. But, they are living at that place even before their conversion. All of them have migrated from a *penta* inside the forest. The Chenchus migrated from different *pentas* of the forest are settled as separate groups in different parts of the village. However, the houses of the people from different *pentas* are not far from each other to differentiate into groups. According to BH, VTDA President; "The village has grown in size over the years because the Chenchus from different *pentas* are gradually settling in the village." The village is having approximately 160 households and a very large one when compared with any other settlement of the district. However, it appears that the Chenchus from a same *penta* act as a compact group when compared with the interaction and co-operation among the Chenchus of different original *pentas* as explained by BH. The situation in this village is similar to the interaction among the Chenchus of different *pentas* in a rehabilitated settlement which will be explained later.

The Chenchus of the settlements in fringe area of the forest are acquiring agricultural equipment such as sickle, plough, and spade. Housing pattern has changed. Huts are a rare feature of these settlements; instead, they all are having cemented slab roof or tile roof houses. These houses were constructed by the government. Unlike the Chenchus of core settlements, they have accepted these houses. The houses are systematically arranged unlike the haphazard arrangement in the hamlets of core territory. The houses are close to each other. Therefore, there is a possibility for frequent interaction among the inhabitants.

The traditional knowledge is on decline among the Chenchus of this region. As dependency over the forest decreases, people are gradually loosing traditional knowledge. The present generation of some of the villages such as Billakallu of Mahabubnagar district and Kottalacheruvu of Kurnool district is almost unaware of the traditional knowledge. Most of them are depending on wage labour. The young children are attending schools. Therefore, need to go to forest is drastically reduced. As a result, the knowledge is not transferred to the present generation.

Chenchus of multi-ethnic villages

Appaipally, Chennempally, Padmanapally, Dhararam, Macharam, and Jangireddypally of Mahabubnagar district; Terala and Sivalingapuram of Guntur district; Nallakaluva of Kurnool district represent the category of multi-ethnic settlements. The Chenchus of these villages are surrounded by several other ethnic groups; therefore, adapted several cultural elements from other ethnic groups. However, they still maintain traditions and customs although are influenced by various groups of non-Chenchus. They have neither merged into other culture nor subordinated to those cultural groups.

Appaipally of Mahabubnagar district is a good example for the interaction in a multi-ethnic settlement. More than half century of contact history with non-Chenchus and the development of the hamlet as a big village provided umpteen opportunities to the Chenchus to adopt, internalize, and move ahead with traits of other cultures. The mode of celebration of few festivals such as *Peerlu* (Muharram), *Vinayaka Chaviti*, *Sankranti*, *Ugadi*, *Shivaratri, Vijayadasami,* and *Holi* provide opportunities to interact with almost all communities of the village which subsequently influenced the

interaction within the community. All these festivals are celebrated by the village community as a whole. Entire village community joins for the celebrations at the temple of the village despite differences in the mode of celebration by each community while offering prayers to the deities.

Peerlu is considered as most important festival not only by the Chenchus but also by other communities of the Appaipally village. The people living away from the village are also coming to the village for the week-long celebration of the festival. The massive celebration of the festival ensures the participation of all the communities. Despite having lack of chances for the Madiga community to install a *Peeru* (deity), they were not denied an opportunity to participate in the festival. They too offer prayers to these deities. The Chenchus take pride in celebrating the festival because they are leaders of the festival and the leading or elderly *Peeru* is with them. They also claim themselves as pious people because of this reason. There is lot of co-operative effort put in order to celebrate the festival. The three Chenchu families that possessed *Peeru* offer a feast on the last day of the festival. The series of events from the deliberations at the time of initiation of the festival to the feast on closing day demand lot of co-operation which involve intensive interaction among the members of the community across the families, kin, and *kulam* groups of the village. This made them different from the Chenchus of fringe and core settlements because such kind of celebration of the festival was not observed among the Chenchus of these two parts. Therefore, festivals can be considered as the agents of the intensive interactions for the Chenchus of multi-ethnic settlements. Among the other villages, for example, Sivalingapuram of Guntur district offered a different picture. In this village, festivals act as the agents of interaction as well as division depending upon religious affiliations. For instance, Christmas is celebrated by the Chenchus converted to Christianity and *Sri Ramanavami* and *Vinayaka Chaviti* are important for the non-converts. Therefore, those festivals brought the people affiliated to respective faiths together and the interaction is intensive amongst a section but is not so intensive across the sections and sometimes characterised by antagonism. It can be assumed that religious interests, that is, the celebration of the festivals can build intensive interaction among the people and at the same time they can increase the social distance and reduce the interaction among the same people.

Election campaign in Appaipally, Mahabubnagar District

Election campaign in Appaipally, Mahabubnagar

Participation in Telangana movement, Appaipally, Mahabubnagar District

The influence of Islamic traditions over the culture of the Chenchus of multi-ethnic villages of Mahabubnagar district is very crucial in making this section of people different from other territorial groups. However, the impact of increasing interaction with non-Chenchus of plains is similar in all the districts. The change among Chenchus has been depending on the culture of those groups in contact. As the groups in contact differ in different districts, the culture of this territorial category also differs accordingly. Therefore, the cultural attributes of the Chenchus of multi-ethnic villages of all the districts are not uniform.

The livelihoods of Chenchus of multi-ethnic villages differentiate them from their counterparts in other territorial categories. In the total workforce of Appaipally men, 69 percent are engaged in agriculture and building construction as labour; and in the total workforce of women, 84 percent are engaged in the same activity. Only 10 percent of men and 12 percent of women are engaged in the collection of MFP. It reveals the predominant nature of occupational structure which consequently influencing the interaction pattern among the Chenchus of the village. It was also observed that more than 20 families of the village are in migration at any point of the time in a year to urban areas for work. Therefore, the interaction among the Chenchus of same occupational category is more intensive than with the Chenchus of a different occupational category. For instance, the labour working in building construction or the labour working in agriculture have greater chances to interact with each other at the work place which often extends to the village. It is because of the need to discuss the availability of work or informing each other whenever anybody consulted them for work. These occasions pave way for the intensive interactions among the people.

Political mobilisation is another important factor that paves the way for wide range of situations to interact with each other. Multi-ethnic villages are very important in this regard because interests of different contesting groups play a significant role in such setting. Particularly, the Scheduled Tribal (ST) communities are having special privileges in a village like Appaipally which fall under the agency area. Only STs are eligible to contest for political offices of the village. The need for close ties among the Chenchus hastened because of the close competition between Chenchu and Lambada communities for the post of Panchayat Sarpanch of this village. The political scenario in the village during the elections for Legislative Assembly of Andhra Pradesh state

reveals the unity within the community and distance from other communities. Chenchus worked as a group to campaign during the election. However, differences cannot be denied among them depending on their allegiance to various political parties. But, majority of Chenchus of the village are the supporters of Congress party. Therefore, they are campaigning for the same party in the village. Few Chenchu men of the village have gone to neighbouring villages such as Srirangapuram and Ambagiri to campaign for the same party. Therefore, it can be assumed that there are avenues for the people of multi-ethnic villages to interact with the fellow Chenchus outside their village occasionally.

As a result of wide variety of interactions, the Chenchus of multi-ethnic villages are not shy like their counterparts of core and to some extent fringe areas. The women too engage in conversation not only with fellow Chenchus but also with non-Chenchus. They are active not only in home but also outside the home unlike their counterparts in other territories. The active participation of women in social interactions can be attributed to two major aspects. One is livelihood diversity and resultant participation in the occupations such as wage labour and the second is the active participation in development programmes through SHGs. Wage labour provides an opportunity to all those women to interact not only with the women of the same community but also with the women of other communities. This kind of continuous interaction enhances cooperation among the women. SHGs are an important source to communicate with the women of the same community. For example, there are weekly meeting for all the SHGs. Approximately; ten to fifteen women attend these meetings in Appaipally of Mahabubnagar district. There is also a meeting of Gramaikya Sangham (Village Association) once in a month. Two members from each SHG attend this meeting. However, more members also can attend this meeting if they are willing to do so. Therefore, ten to fifteen members attend these meetings too. It is understood from the observations at five such meetings in Appaipally village; the duration of the meeting is usually one to three hours. Almost every member of the committee interacts with every other member during their deliberations. They sing songs and crack jokes on each other depending on the social relation between the members. Similar situation is also observed from Macharam and Jangireddipally villages of Mahabubnagar district and Terala of Guntur district. It might be one of the important factors in changing group behaviour

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of the Chenchu women of these settlements. Training programmes conducted by ITDA, Forest Department, and NGOs are also an important source of interaction. However, these training programmes are also conducted by taking SHG or *Gramaikya Sangham* as a unit. For example, Tailoring Training Programme conducted in Appaipally in several phases for almost one year is important in this regard. Twenty five women of the village were enrolled for this programme. They used to gather at a house meant for the training at least three days in a week but not all the members on a single day. However, around ten women use to attend at any given day. The trainer is also a Chenchu woman who received her training at Achempeta with the help ITDA and an NGO; Child Care Organization which have jointly taken up this programme. Other development initiatives of the Government too are paving the way for intensive interaction among the women because ITDA selected SHGs as nodal agencies to implement the programmes. For example, SHGs were given responsibility of the implementation of housing scheme in Appaipally in 2010. Therefore, women are taking active part in development initiatives which consequently leading to intensive interactions with the women as well as men of their community.

Marital relations are very important in providing increased opportunities for interaction with the Chenchus of other villages too. For example, the marital relations of Appaipally village are spread to a large part of the territory in the plain area of the Mahabubnagar district. For instance, they are having marital relations with the people of Tirnampally, Narlapur, Maddimadugu villages which are 50-70 km away from their village; apart from the relations with the people of nearby villages. But, this situation does not exist in the core and fringe areas. The spread of marital relations is a reflection of changing patterns and trends of interaction. Another important aspect that needs a mention in case of Appaipally is the migration of Chenchus from various other settlements to this village which is an important aspect in establishing marital relations with the people of far away villages.

Chenchus living in towns and/or villages close to towns

BKV Palem and Pedda Anupu of Guntur district; Achempeta of Mahabubnagar district; and Dornala of Prakasam district represent the category of towns or the settlements in proximity to towns. There is wide range of external influences in a town or a village close to town. For example, improved

communication and transportation systems play a significant role in this regard and the availability of opportunities adds to that.

The Chenchus living in towns offers a mixed picture based on the nature of residential setting in a town and composition of the population. They have migrated to a town from different hamlets. Therefore, they are not really living as a group or as a community in places like Achempet of Mahabubnagar district; whereas, they are living in proximity in Dornala of Prakasam district and Macherla of Guntur district. They are not completely separated from other communities because most of them are having non-Chenchus as neighbours. Their affiliations with the members back in their native villages are very important in social life instead of affiliations with the people of a town. The history of settling in these towns is too short, therefore, it may be premature to assume about the fate of social relation among the members of a town in future. For instance, no Chenchu family is having more than 20 years of stay in Achempet of Mahabubnagar district. Most of the heads of the families settled in this village are teachers and wardens in schools. They have come from Billakallu, Balmoor, Kondanagula, Appaipally, Ambagiri, Chenchugudem, Gudibanda, Vadrayavaram, Dhararam, Appapuram, and Siddapur villages of the same district. These villages are 8 to 50 km away from Achempet. They are spread out in different colonies of the town. Three families are having own houses among approximately 20 families. All others are living in rented houses of the non-Chenchus. In this backdrop, it can be understood that the physical setting is not providing opportunities for the Chenchus to interact with fellow members in the town. However, men get opportunities to interact with each other as they all belong to the same occupational category. They meet either in the school complex meetings or in the town. A gathering of teachers of the community was very often observed in Achempet. They have also formed *Chenchu Upadyaya Sangham*, an unregistered association of Chenchu teachers. The major thrust of this association is to promote savings of money. However, the members of this association visited Appapuram, Pullaipally, Kudichintalabayalu, and Vatvarlapally hamlets in the core of the forest when forest department proposed a plan for displacement. They did not advocate either in support or against the displacement but tried to understand the views of fellow Chenchus living in these settlements in order to submit a memorandum on the same to the forest Department. But, in their interactions with the Chenchus of these settlements,

majority of the members tried to convince Chenchus to move out of the forest. In personal interviews with the members of this group, eight of them believe that the displacement will be beneficial to the Chenchus in long run but four of them believe that it is the matter which should be decided by the concerned people because we cannot really forecast the results of displacement of these people. The important issue in this context is the active participation of the educated Chenchus in the matters pertaining to the community. However, they are not having regular meetings and constant touch with the issues like other associations such as the one organized by the fellow Lambada teachers. But, whatever minimal are the activities; it can be assumed that the interaction is very frequent and intensive among this section of the Chenchus. However, it is important to note that the interaction among the women living in town is very minimal. The families rarely visit the house of each other's as they do not prefer this which may be said to be the feature of the Chenchus back in their villages. Upon an inquiry, two teachers living in this town said that they have never visited any family of the Chenchus living in this town along with their family. However, they visit occasionally as individuals. The women are having close interaction with the non-Chenchu neighbours instead of the Chenchus living away from their house. But, they are also having close interaction with the women from their natal village. Therefore, town as a habitat is not much helpful in intensifying the intra-community interaction in case of Achempet, instead, occupation is playing a significant role. The preference to establish marital relations is the natal village of the male head or a village close to his village but not the town. No marital relation observed among the Chenchus living in the town. But, Dornala of Prakasam district and Macherla of Guntur district display a different picture in terms of physical setting. Both of these towns are having separate colonies of the Chenchus despite dispersed distribution of some of the families in the town. Therefore, there are umpteen chances to interact with each other at different levels even though they have come from different villages and settled in these towns. However, kin and *kulam* are not very important in this context, instead; the natal villages of the spouses are very important to establish close interaction. The occupational category too is important like in the case of Achempet. Marital relations are observed among the Chenchus of Dornala and Machelra towns despite the linkages with the natal village of the male head in this regard. The major reason behind the establishment of marital reasons can be attributed to the settlement history of the Chenchus living in these towns. There is approximately four decades of

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settlement history in case of these towns which is not the case with Achempet. It can be assumed that long settlement history can pave the way for better interaction in towns and physical setting too helps in this regard. Therefore, town being a settlement cannot simply enhance the interaction. Other interlinked factors such as education, occupation, physical setting, and natal villages of wife and husband are significant in establishing the interaction and consequently in diversifying the Chenchus of these habitations from those of other territories.

The scenario in BKV Palem Chenchugudem and Pedda Anupu villages of Guntur districts is completely different to the situation in town. Both of these settlements are one kilometre away from each other and located on a busy road connecting Nagarjunasagar and Macherla towns of the same district. The Chenchus and Lambadas live together in Pedda Anupu but almost all the inhabitants of BKV Palem Chenchugudem are Chenchus except three families. Many men have chosen wood cutting as the location of the village makes it an important business activity. It is primary occupation for the 18 percent of the total workforce and huge number of the Chenchus of the village including men and women are practicing it as a secondary occupation. But, it is an individual activity and not facilitating interaction among the people. The multi-ethnic villages close to this settlement provide opportunities to the people to work as wage labour in agriculture. Few people are occasionally practicing agriculture. Though it has initiated some amount of co-operation from the members of kin group, it has not yet developed as a collective activity because of occasional practice of this occupation. Other economic activities too are not much of help in this direction. The occupational structure of the village hasn't seen much change due to the influence of towns. It might be because the exposure to urban setting is a recent one. However, few Chenchus of these villages claim that they are the original inhabitants. These villages are rehabilitated colonies but the Chenchus have been living in temporary dwellings close to this place even before the construction of rehabilitation colony. Rehabilitation has been initiated over 30 years ago. The proximity to urban setting hasn't brought significant change in the literacy levels of the people. Despite displacement from the original habitat and rehabilitation measures the Chenchus kept contact with forest for these long years. The proximity of the village to Krishna River and the vegetation available in the vicinity might be the reasons for easier access and dependence on forest. The lack of familiar and attractive

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opportunities in the new setting too kept their interest on forest for livelihood. These could be the reasons for not having significant influence on intra-community interactions despite its proximity to town in this particular case.

Traces of bow and arrow culture still exist in this village. Eight families of the village possessed bows and arrows which is very significant for a village like this. Few men carry bows and arrows but axe can also be seen with every Chenchu while going to the forest. Even, the women carry an axe while going for wood cutting. In fact, their movement to forest is quite frequent than to a town because of this reason. Therefore, it can be assumed that their inclination is often towards the traditional life and there are possibilities to continue as opportunity exists.

The Chenchus of these villages are trapped in-between tradition and modernity. The proximity to the town is not of help because it hasn't altered the economic system of the Chenchus of this village except for the fact that they are selling wood. In no other field, the proximity to town is an added advantage. The opportunities for wage labour are similar to that of multiethnic village which are far away from towns. At the same time, proximity to the town neither established nor facilitated the social relations. The town has not created new opportunities for interaction but created facilities for communication.

The religious conflicts are dividing the Chenchus of these villages too. A Church is there in BKV Palem Chenchugudem. Ten Chenchus families are converted to Christianity. The conflicts are also reported from this village during the procession of the idols of Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana on the eve of *Sri Ramanavami* festival in 2009. It is because of the objection of the Christian converts for the procession near the Church. Despite lack of influence of religion on the day to day interactions of the people, they are conscious of religious identities during the celebration of festivals. The situation is almost similar to the case of Sivalingapuram of the same district which is already described. Sri Ramanavami is the only festival celebrated at large scale by the non-converts. However, it is a recent inclusion by a pro-Hindu organization; *Vanavasi Kalyani Parishad*. Therefore, politically influential members of the community lead the celebration. Therefore, it is not very inclusive compared to such kind of celebrations in a village like Appaipally of Mahabubnagar district.

Marital relations of these villages are widening to places like Veldurti, Sirigiripadu, Durgi, Rajanagaram, Sivalingapuram, Terala, and Macherla of same district. All these places are towns or villages close to towns. In fact, all the Chenchu settlements of this district are in plain areas except Botukulapaya which is in the interior forest. Therefore, there is no selective pattern in establishing marital relations with the people of a specific village. However, the marital relations with the Chenchus of Botukulapaya are not observed in any of the above-mentioned habitations. Despite lack of primary data from Botukulapaya, it was understood from the interviews with the people of other villages that they establish marital relations with the Chenchus of same territory but administratively under Prakasam district. Therefore, it can be assumed that the interaction is not extended to the villages of same district, but extended to the villages of same territorial category. However, the movement of Chenchus is usually from the core area to fringe areas of the same district. Therefore, it is not very clear at this instance where the people of Botukulapaya move if they need to move out of the forest.

Marital celebrations have been modified in tune with the practices of the non-Chenchus. They are approaching a Brahmin priest to decide auspicious time for marriage. The arrow which is used to identify auspicious time has disappeared. The ceremony is more organized than a traditional marriage. Musical troop and loud speakers have become part of celebration. The gradual shift from the practice of bride-price to dowry is another important development. However, only five such cases are observed, but rest of the Chenchus are still practicing the tradition of bride-price. In one case, a man has taken 25000 rupees as dowry which is a huge amount in Chenchu community. He has studied intermediate and working as the volunteer in *Indira Kranti Patham* (IKP) and also working as field assistant for MGNREGS. But in other cases, men have received 1000 rupees to 5000 rupees as dowry. These are all educated and among them two have invited a Brahmin to officiate the ceremony.

Women are actively participating in the SHGs like their counterparts in multi-ethnic villages. Almost all the women of the village are having membership in SHGs. Therefore, the interaction among the women is almost similar to the interaction among the women of multi-ethnic villages. Women do not travel often to towns like men. Therefore, town does not influence intra-community interaction of the women.

They work as wage labourers in the fields of nearby village BKV Palem. Therefore, their interaction is almost similar to that of the women of multi-ethnic villages except in case of migrant workers who often interacts with the people of those villages.

The proximity to towns stimulated the acquisition of modern gadgets such as mobile phones, television sets, CD players, and radios. 38 percent of families possess television sets, 35 percent of families possess mobile phones, 20 percent of families posses CD players, and 18 percent of families are having radio sets. It appears that the gadgets are curtailing interaction to some extent. In particular, television sets are playing an important role in this regard. At the same time, they are acting as the agents in diversifying the culture. In fact, imitation is very important in this regard. However, elites of the community are active in promoting interaction among the people by organizing the festivals at village level. But, this seems to be because of their interests in the political aspects. Elements of the traditional political system are non-existent and they are completely drawn into statutory political system. Therefore, there are chances for everybody to become an influential person. It might be the motive behind organizing festivals.

Division and interaction among the Chenchus of rehabilitated settlements
The Chenchus of rehabilitated settlements face several adjustment problems because they are usually from different original settlements. This kind of forced settlement has been often leading to conflicts among the people from different original habitations. Most often they are encountering problems of uneven allocation or distribution resources in a new settlement. Kottalacheruvu of Kurnool district and Mulachintapally of Mahabubnagar district are good examples for these kinds of problems. Kottalacheruvu is a rehabilitated settlement. But there were few families of the Chenchus staying there much before the rehabilitation of the Chenchus from Pechcheruvu in 1985. In fact, the old village was known as Balamma Kottalu. But, the name was changed after the rehabilitation of Chenchus from Pechcheruvu. Few Chenchu families from Indireswaram of Kurnool district have migrated to this village in later years. Therefore, the Chenchus of the village are divided into three groups. They are original inhabitants, rehabilitated Chenchus of Pechcheruvu, and the migrant Chenchus of Indireswaram. There is competition among these three groups not only for resources but also for recognition. The government has given a house and allotted

2.5 acres of cultivable land to each rehabilitated family but the original inhabitants and migrants have been given only one acre of land to each family and were not given cemented houses. This has created the differences among these three groups. These groups live in different blocks of the village. They rarely invite each other for rituals. The Chenchus from Pechcheruvu is a numerically dominant group; therefore, the VTDA president is often elected from this group. The other two groups are not even considered for that position. This division has contributed to the conflict over commercial fishing in the Varada Raja Swamy Project (VRSP) described later.

Same is the case with Chenchus of Mulachintapally village of Mahabubnagar district. The original inhabitants and the rehabilitated Chenchus live in different colonies of the village. The rehabilitated Chenchus are not yet completely settled. They are leading a semi-nomadic life. They go for the collection of MFP for their respective *pentas* or to resourceful territories of the forest. They bring all the products to sell at the GCC store in Mulachintapally village. They stay for few days in the village and go back to the forest. The cultivable land was distributed only to the original inhabitants; whereas, the houses were constructed only for the rehabilitated Chenchus. Minor conflicts are very common among the Chenchus rehabilitated from different *pentas* but no major incident of conflict taken place among the Chenchus of both the colonies. The Chenchus of two colonies or the Chenchus from different *pentas* do not share social space. The relations and interaction most often are restricted to the people of same original hamlet. This kind of rift is also observed among the Chenchus of few other rehabilitated settlements such as Gudibanda of Mahabubnagar district, Terala of Guntur district, and Nallakaluva of Kurnool district.

Both the cases of rehabilitated settlements are reflecting the diversified identities of the Chenchus. The interaction among the Chenchus of different settlements is very less. This behaviour extended even to rehabilitated settlements which are the combination of the people from different displaced hamlets. People displaced from various settlements treat themselves as separate entities at the rehabilitation colony. This is influenced by the traditional resource boundaries of the forest. But, this doesn't prevent them to establish marital relations with the Chenchus from different displaced settlement in rehabilitation colony. However, such relations are depending on the existing affinal networks. It is very rare to establish a marital

relation with the Chenchus of an entirely new village even if they settled in a same rehabilitation colony.

Intra-community conflicts:

Conflict is an important aspect to understand the identities of the contesting people. In fact, conflict not only reveals the identity but also influences the interaction to a larger extent. The conflicts may bring some groups together and keep some groups away. Conflicts always lead to assertion of identities by various groups involved in it. Minor conflicts are very common among Chenchus and most of such conflicts are pertaining to economic and religious aspects. But, the conflicts based on economic interests most often confined to individuals or few families but the conflicts based on religious interests involve larger groups. Therefore, an analysis of conflicts pertaining to religious aspects reveals significant dimensions of Chenchu identity and intra-group interaction.

Salleswaram Conflict

This conflict is between the Chenchus of different settlements located in different ecological settings of Lingal Mandal of Mahabubnagar district over the ownership on the Lingamayya Shrine at Salleswaram. There is a cluster of five *Pentas* within 5-10 km distance from Salleswaram. They are Appapuram, Rampuram, Pullaipally, Bourapuram, and Mallapuram. Appapuram is an undisputed leader for all these settlements. It is not only a larger settlement in the core area of the forest but also having relations with all other hamlets of this territory because of the movement of few Chenchu families of Appapuram to these settlements to establish residence in order to have a better access to resources. This was made possible with the establishment of marital relations with the inhabitants of different settlements. The *peddhamanishi* of Appapuram, Tokala Mallayya is a most influential leader among the Chenchus of this territory. His kin members have taken the responsibility of the organization of *Salleswaram jatara* and also the protection of the jewellery and other belongings of the shrine. Some non-Chenchus from Achempeta town of the same district help them in organizing the *jatara*. The Chenchus of all other settlements of this territory have accepted for the same.

Appaipally is a multi-ethnic village at the foot of hills, 25 km away from Salleswaram. This village is a gateway for the pilgrims to reach *Salleswaram jatara* by foot. Any outsider can visit the shrine only during the five days of the *jatara*. People reach Appaipally by vehicle but walk from here for 25 km to reach the shrine. However, Andhra Pradesh State Road Transport Corporation (APSRTC) operates its bus services from Achempeta to Salleswaram during the *jatara*. But they cannot reach the shrine. One has to walk approximately 3 km from the bus stop to shrine. But, at least 40 percent of the devotees prefers foot route through Appaipally because there are many other shrines in this route where devotees can offer prayers and fulfil their vows on their way to Salleswaram. At the same time, it is exciting to walk through the forest. Appaipally is a village panchayat and all the hamlets near the shrine as well as the shrine are part of this panchayat. Therefore, the Chenchus of Appaipally believe that the shrine should belong to them. Moreover, approximately one lakh devotees visit the shrine during the *jatara* which yield more than five lakh rupees of income. The income generated from the *jatara* is untouched by the government. The increasing number of pilgrims, income, and large number of Chenchu population of the village are motivating factors for the Chenchus of Appaipally to claim ownership over the shrine. Apart from that, the Chenchus of Appaipally believe that the Chenchus of *pentas* are not capable of organizing a *jatara* of that scale. Also, the Chenchus of Appaipally call the Chenchus of these interior settlements as *Kurava Chenchus* but describe themselves as *Deva Chenchu*. Similarly, the Chenchus of interior settlements describe themselves as *Deva Chenchu* and call the Chenchus of Appaipally as *Kindollu*. Both the groups compete for the leadership by claiming themselves as *Deva Chenchus*. Another important claim of the Chenchus of interior settlements is that the Chenchus of Appaipally are no more real Chenchus because they are neither living in forest nor depending on it for livelihood. By citing all above reasons, each of them disqualifies the other to organize the *jatara* at Lingamayya shrine of Salleswaram. However, the above claims and the financial benefits from the shrine made the Chenchus of Appaipally to occupy the Salleswaram shrine.

A group of Chenchu young men from Appaipally have gone to Salleswaram, a day prior to the *jatara* in 2007 to occupy the shrine for the organization of *jatara*. To their surprise, a group of Chenchus from different *penta*s surrounded them with bows and arrows. The Chenchus of Appaipally have expected some opposition but were

shocked to see all of them with bows and arrows. The Chenchus of Appaipally do not have bows and arrows and they do not know how to use them because their parental generation abandoned bow and arrows. Around 20 young Chenchu men of Appaipally were beaten by the Chenchus of interior settlements. They were also threatened for life. Some of them ran away and escaped from the place without much damage and some others escaped with minor injuries but the rest were caught. The Chenchus of interior settlements released them after a compromise with the Chenchus of Appaipally on the promise not to repeat it. The Chenchus of Appaipally say, "The naxalites were behind the Chenchus of Appapuram. They have threatened us not to interfere again in the *jatara*." But the Chenchus of Appapuram says "The shrine is in the close vicinity of our settlement. We are the true representatives of the Chenchus with age-old traditions. The Chenchus of Appaipally do not even know how to use bows and arrows. They cannot be the representatives of the Chenchus. Therefore, they are not entitled to have any right over the shrine." However, the Chenchus of Appaipally believe that the naxalites are getting a major share in the income of *Salleswaram jatara* which they may not get if authority is shifted to the Chenchus of Appaipally. They also believe that it is dangerous to fight with naxalites. They were also scared of the bows and arrows of the Chenchus of interior hamlets. BM, an 18 years old Chenchu man from Appaipally who was caught by the Chenchus of Appapuram says "Those Chenchus looks dangerous with bows and arrows. They can easily kill us." Thereafter, the Chenchus of Appaipally have not interfered in the *jatara*. Consequently, the movement of Chenchus between Appapuram and Appaipally had curtailed to a larger extent. It has not led to any further consequences. No conflicts are observed during the *jatara* in the years 2009 and 2010.

The conflict has not only raised the questions on the changing perceptions of Chenchus on money but also exposed the conflicts of the Chenchus of different territorial identities. The ownership claims have also revealed the development of notional hierarchy among various sections of the Chenchus and also helps in understanding the changing perceptions towards each other. They are not simply claiming the rights on a shrine but claiming true identity, representation and leadership. For them; traditional values, customs, practices, occupation are the representatives of the original culture. Therefore, the people carrying those traits of the original culture are believed to be the true representatives of the community.

Conclusion:

The intra-community interaction is different in various territorial categories because it depends on the territorial location and external influences on the members of community. The difference in interaction reveals the diversity within the community as it was influenced by diverse ethnic groups. However, it is difficult to divide these territorial categories as cultural categories because there is no such clear cultural division among these categories. They differ to certain extent but the cultural factors overlap quite often. Therefore, the categorical identities do not overrule common identity.

IMPACT OF INTER-ETHNIC INTERACTIONS

Social interaction often leads to assertion of the identity by ethnic groups. Such interactions partly stimulate group acculturation and partly differentiation. The rigorous social interaction may either lead to the assimilation of groups or strengthen ethnic differences. It may also depend upon the similarity and dissimilarity of the cultural aspects of ethnic groups in interaction. However, as Barth (1969: 10) pointed out "Ethnic distinctions do not depend on an absence of social interaction." Such distinctions might have developed depending upon the environment, the needs and aspirations of the people, and the circumstances they encountered in the process of their emergence as a social group. The process of social life consists of "an immense multitude of actions and interactions of human beings, acting as individuals or in combinations or groups" (Radcliffe-Brown, 1952: 4). Acting and interacting within the group and with other groups is very important in this regard. The determinants of interaction between ethnic groups may vary from group to group and depends on circumstances. For instance, Barth (1969: 18) opines complementarity of the groups is essential to establish a successful interaction. Consequently, persistent interaction among ethnic groups implies not only criteria for identification but also structures the interaction which may allow the persistence of cultural differences.

From time immemorial human beings are living in a group. In the course of time, they came into contact with many other groups. The other cultures are always having a significant impact on every society. Some of the culture traits have been adapted from those groups in contact and some others of their own disappear in the course of time. This will lead to changes in the social, religious, economic and political aspects of human society. Similarly, tribes and castes of India co-exist in the same geographical space, each having its own ethno-history of origin and migration. However, most often the resource richness of tribal territories attracted the powerful outsiders. It has given rise to intensive resource competition among the interacting ethnic groups. In this connection, Despres (1975: 4) argues that "by definition ethnic groups are competitive for the strategic resources of their respective societies." Therefore, resource competition is very vital to understand intergroup interaction. It is also a powerful tool to understand ethnic identity.

The interaction with the members of same group or other groups contributes to social and cultural dynamics. The Chenchus who are part of multi-ethnic villages have been in continuous contact with the non-Chenchus of those villages. There are umpteen numbers of examples in the entire Nallamalai region for such kind of contacts. In fact, the formation of new multi-ethnic settlements with Chenchus as one ethnic group is an ongoing phenomenon. The increasing contacts with non-Chenchus have not only led to the changes in the ethnic identity but also resulted in the internal diversity. The Chenchus influenced are by the traditions of Lambada or Banjara or Sugali, Boya, and Yanadi communities because of common habitation for many decades or even more than a century. The relation among these groups may be friendly or hostile depending upon the composition of a settlement or region and resource competition between interacting groups.

The Chenchu was understood as a distinct ethnic group living in and around the Nallamalai forest. Therefore, interaction with other communities in such ecological setting has significant mutual impact. The Chenchus have come into contact with diverse culture groups which include tribal communities, caste-Hindu communities, Islamic community, and caste-Christians. As a result, they have adopted several cultural attributes of those communities in close contact. Chenchus living in different parts of Nallamalai have been influenced by various groups of outsiders. This has given rise to the diversity within the Chenchu community.

The contact history of Chenchus is unknown. But, it can be assumed that they might be having some kind of contacts with the neighbouring populations from a very long time. But, how far these contacts influenced the Chenchus is a question. For instance, Fürer-Haimendorf (1943: 4) observes "Generations of casual contact with outsiders have done little to alter the fundamental structure of their [Chenchu's] culture." However, the impact of contacts might not be so neutral in the entire history. Therefore, he has presented a different situation with regard to the Village Chenchus of Madras Presidency. In this context, he opines, "The village Chenchus have been greatly influenced by the local Hindu population, and it is only those of the forests [Jungle Chenchus] who still retain their own mode of life, their economic independence and among whom we still find old Chenchu customs in comparatively pure form" (Fürer-Haimendorf, 1943: 9). He (1943: 304) believes that the Chenchu

have not undergone any radical changes. Similar situation prevailed even today. But, very small proportion of population living in core areas of the forest are having the "old Chenchu customs" if not in "pure form" because no part of the population is completely untouched by the non-Chenchus. The difference is only in intensity of contacts but it cannot be quantified. With this background, an analysis is made to understand the influence of outsiders on the culture and social structure of the Chenchus.

The Chenchus might be consistently migrating because of the semi-nomadic nature of the community. They might have come into contact with many groups of the people in the course of time. They might have divided into different communities in course of time or the people might have settled throughout the migratory route and later became popular under different names. However, these speculations are not having enough evidences. But, Fürer-Haimendorf (1943) has drawn racial and cultural similarities between Chenchus and some other communities of south India. For instance, he opines that "there can be little doubt that originally the Irulas and the Chenchus belonged to the same racial and cultural stratum" (Fürer-Haimendorf, 1943: 290). Further, he (1943: 290-291, 295-296) has drawn cultural and racial similarities among Chenchus and other jungle tribes, such as; Irulas, Kadars, Paliyans and, Hill Pantarams of South India and Veddas of Ceylon. These assumptions may tempt to draw a migratory route of Chenchus because of their nomadic nature but mere racial similarity may be insufficient to do so. There are no archaeological evidences through out to establish a migratory route. However, one cannot deny the interaction of Chenchus with wide variety of groups from a very long time in the history.

The confusion over their original language added to the uncertainty over their contact history. Their contact with Telugus has become significant after the construction of a temple at Srisailam. However, there is no concrete evidence for the time of construction of this temple. Fürer-Haimendorf (1943: 15) opines "Shiva temple of Srisailam mentioned in Skanda Purana, whose origin is certainly not later than 7th century A.D. and perhaps earlier." Therefore, the contacts might have been established around that period. The contacts with non-Chenchus might not have intensified all of a sudden after the construction of this temple. But, it might have acted as a catalyst in establishing contacts with outsiders over a period of time. As a

result, the Chenchus have been gradually enveloped by the Hindu caste groups. The contacts with outsiders seem to be intensified only after the British rule because of interventions of the government.

Fürer-Haimendorf (1943: 286) listed Komati, Kapu, Golla, Mala, and Madiga castes with whom Chenchus were often having contacts. While describing the Village Chenchus of Madras Presidency, he (1943: 309) observes their houses never stand inside the villages but are situated in hamlets on the outskirts. However, this kind of exclusion seems to be self-imposed rather than practised by those outsiders or the caste-Hindus. More or less similar situation prevail even today in the multi-ethnic settlements. For example, the houses of Chenchus of Appaipally of Mahabubnagar district appear in similar way with regard to their residential arrangement but they participate in festivals along with others. Therefore, it can be believed that the idea of social purity or impurity is not very clear in relation to the contacts with outsiders. But, they refuse the entrance of Mala and Madiga into the house and do not eat beef which are important practices of caste-Hindus. It can be assumed that they might have adapted few features of Hinduism in the initial period of contacts. The contacts further hastened in the last half century because of the development of road transportation facilities to the Shiva temple at Srisailam. Therefore, the contacts with the non-Chenchus can be understood as the key factor apart from several other factors which facilitated the process of transition among the Chenchus.

The pressure on resources often leads to the competition among the groups living in the same geographical territory. In this context, it is often believed that the dominant communities exploit the resources. Therefore, the exploitation of tribal people by the non-tribal neighbours is an age old phenomenon. Srivastava (2008: 537) pointed out that the "Tribal world all over has witnessed its funding by greedy and rapacious outsiders; the genesis of tribal problem lies in asymmetrical cultural contacts." These asymmetrical contacts not only affected the economic system but also their identity is at stake because of habitat encroachment. Therefore, "Tribes are becoming more conscious of their identity – it is a process whereby a 'tribe *in* itself' is being transformed to a 'tribe *for* itself'. Not only are the tribes busy in creating a self-image, consolidating their culture, but also in many parts of India they have started their own movements and founded their own organizations to combat

injustice" (Srivastava, 2008: 542). The exploitation of Chenchus by outsiders too is not a new phenomenon. For instance, Thurston (1909) cited the account of an anonymous forest officer who mentions in his report "They are constantly in debt to the Kōmatis, and are practically their slaves as regards the supply of timber and other forest produce" (1909: 30). Similar situation prevails with greater intensity even after more than a century. But, the exploitative system has taken alternative forms and extended to multiple sectors. For example, land alienation has been a major problem for the Chenchus in recent decades. Even though, it was a problem having a long history; it was not felt by them. When Chenchus were highly depending on food gathering and hunting activities, they were not having the idea of settled agriculture. In fact, agricultural land was having no value for them. Therefore, they have ignored it and it was occupied by the migrant outsiders. But, they have gradually realized the consequences of such kind of alienation. Furthermore, the Chenchus who have acquired land are facing the problem of indebtedness due to lack of investment.

The Chenchu mythologies have also undergone change because of the continuous contact with outsiders. The little tradition has been gradually absorbed into the great tradition of Hinduism and the Chenchus have become the part of temple tradition. For example, it is often said that the word Mallanna is derived from the word *Malai* means hill and *Anna* means brother or respected elder. The Chenchus worship the lord with this name which has later become Mallikharjuna with the influence of outsiders. The temple of Lord Mallikharjuna has become very popular with the increasing inflow of pilgrims. The Chenchus have begun to safeguard the properties of the temple, take care of the pilgrims and were entrusted with temple services in the course of time. The safeguarding of non-Chenchu pilgrims has become a source of income for them. Prakash Reddy (1979) mentions "Pilgrims going to the shrine walked all this distance. Chenchus were acting as guides. In return, Chenchus collected 'metta' fee (protection fee) of one anna from each pilgrim" (1979: 89). This kind of transactions between pilgrims and Chenchus has not only given income but also influenced the religious ideas of the Chenchus as explained later.

The contact of Chenchus with non-tribal outsiders resulted in significant consequences. One early example for serious implications of contact with non-Chenchus came from the Zamindari of Raja Venkatadri Naidu. Their contact with the

non-Chenchus of this Zamindari led to the unforgettable incidents in the history of Chenchus. The Chenchus were said to be notorious during those days. The famine of 1864 led to the increasing robbery in the Zamindari of Raja Venkatadri Naidu (Lakshminarayana, 1967: 108). The Chenchus were identified as culprits in the robberies across the Zamindari. It was said to be the period of restlessness. Raja Venkatadri Naidu killed 150 Chenchus in the name of restoration of peace in his Zamindari. In this connection, Mackenzie (1883: 312) states "It is said that during his energetic days, he had determined to get rid of a tribe of Chenchus who pillaged his Zamindari and so, inviting 150 of the men of the tribe to a feast, he had them all beheaded." Lakshminarayana (1967: 112) opines that the brutal killings by Raja Venkatadri Naidu took place in the year 1790. It is also believed that the village 'Narukullapadu' (killings place) in Guntur district is named after brutal killing of Chenchus. This incidence resulted in fear among the Chenchus and hatred over the non-Chenchus. The incident also reflects the scarcity of resources for Chenchus during that period. It can also be said that the Zamindar failed to understand the problems of Chenchus. He had not tried to provide alternatives to stop the robberies in his territory. Instead, he had killed those suspected Chenchus. It seems that the Chenchus were not treated as equal citizens like any others of the Zamindari. The Chenchus were treated in the similar way by all the outsiders in the course of history. The degree of severity of consequences might be different along with changing times.

Chenchus do not have a uniform affinity or interaction with various non-Chenchu groups. But, there is always a possibility for significant power imbalance among various ethnic groups in interaction. However, they do not indulge in major conflicts with any neighbouring groups of Nallamalai region. There are very few overtly conflicting situations among the Chenchus and non-Chenchus. Any distancing with a particular community depends purely on local factors. For example, the Chenchus of multi-ethnic villages such as Appaipally of Mahabubnagar district express dissatisfaction over Lambada, another Scheduled Tribe (ST) in the village. In another case, the Chenchus of Kottalacheruvu of Kurnool district expressed dissatisfaction over the Boyas, a Backward Caste (BC) of the village. At the same time, they do not favour any other group of the village in both the cases. In such cases, the distance can be attributed to resource competition among Chenchus and other groups. The reservations for STs in statutory political system have a bearing on

the relations between Chenchus and Lambadas in Mahabubnagar district. In all the regions of Nallamalai, the Chenchus refers ST groups on the name of the community but refer as SC in case of Scheduled Caste and BC in case of Backward Castes. But the forward castes or the locally dominant castes are called as *Doras* by the Chenchus of Mahabubnagar district whereas they are called as *Reddys* in Kurnool, Prakasam, and Guntur districts. The Chenchus from the settlements which are inhabited only by the Chenchus have a very less scope to interact with the non-Chenchus other than forest guards, ITDA officials, GCC dealers or salesmen, merchants, and the representatives of NGOs because most of such hamlets are in the core area of the forest. These agents or agencies do not share any social and cultural space with the Chenchus. Therefore, interaction with such people is not very significant in terms of its influence over cultural attributes. It is also a very short-term interaction and does not have any long-lasting impact. For example, the Chenchus of core villages of the forest are having fewer opportunities to interact with outsiders. They do not have transportation to any villages or towns and walk down to nearest market places once in a week. The women have rare opportunities to interact with outsiders. Therefore, the imitation or the transmission of the traits of another culture is very negligible and it can rarely influence the identity of the Chenchus in such cases.

The outsiders seem to be imposed on Chenchus by the then British administration. Fürer-Haimendorf (1943: 313) mentions that non-Chenchus were appointed as headmen for Chenchus in Madras Presidency. Obviously, such kind of imposition of outsiders must have made Chenchu more vulnerable as there were umpteen chances for those outsiders to exploit not only the resource rich areas but also the labour of the Chenchus. Apart from that, this system seems to have generated interest among Chenchus over these authoritative positions. Such kind of attitude is visible in the increasing competition among Chenchus for positions in VTDA, Village panchayat, JFM programmes and SHGs.

Chenchus and other tribes:

As it was mentioned earlier, the contact history of the Chenchus is uncertain. However, it was understood from the historical data that they have been in contact with the people of many other communities in the entire length and breadth of Nallamalai forest. But, they were not having close or special relation with any of the

community living in their vicinity. Consequently, their interaction with other communities is scarce. Therefore, the categories 'tribe' and 'caste' were not having any relevance to them in terms of their interaction with the other. But, they have a long association with few tribal groups which certainly might be resulted in nearness or distance with those communities. At this juncture, their co-existence with Yanadi Yerukala, and Lambada tribal groups needs special attention in terms of their interaction and relations with those communities in contemporary scenario. They were in contact with Yanadi and Yerukala communities from a very long time but contact with Lambada is more recent in nature. But, the resource competition among Chenchus and Lambadas added a significant dimension to their relation.

Chenchu and Yanadi

The arguments pertaining to the common origin of Chenchus and Yanadis were discussed earlier. The separation of one group into two groups has no definite evidences. There are also no evidences for who originated from whom. However, it may be assumed in this context that the Yanadis might have separated from Chenchus as a distinct group in the course of history. It is because of the popular belief that the Chenchus who came down the hill and settled in the plains have become Yanadis. Dasari and Nimmala clan names are common for both the groups, but, the people of these clans of both the communities are not having any relation. The Chenchus of present day are not concerned about the issue of common origin. Both the groups believe that they are different from one another. Upon a query over this issue, the Chenchus of Mahabubnagar district revealed their ignorance but the Chenchus of Prakasam district believe that they are different people. But, YM, a 66 years old man from Terala village of Guntur district opines "there might be some relation between Chenchus and Yanadis because we all pray the same god." However, YM has firmly denied of having marital relations with Yanadis. There is confusion pertaining to inter-community marriages because Aiyappan (1948: 151) mentions "The Yenadis and Chenchus intermarry." But, by examining the present context, it can be said that there might be few elopement cases but they might not be having socially acceptable marital relations with Yanadis. There are some commonalities between both the communities in the religious sphere. For instance, Chenchus and Yanadis worship Chenchulakshmi and Narasimhaswamy of Ahobilam. But, there are several differences among them in social sphere (Raghaviah, 1962: 106). Particularly, they

differ in celebrating the life cycle rituals. The Hindu elements are more pronounced in the culture of Yanadis (Fürer-Haimendorf, 1943: 290). It might be because of their contact with Hindu populations from a very long time.

The power relations between Chenchus and Yanadis are not very clear. They are living in close contact with each other in very few places of Guntur and Prakasam districts. Therefore, there is less scope to enter into any conflict where there may be a possibility to assert on power relations. They are not subjected to exploitation by each other in any of the territories. They do not even have significant interaction because of not sharing the habitat.

Chenchu and Yerukala

Chenchus and Yerukalas are in close contact in some parts of Mahabubnagar district. Their presence is predominant in Lingal mandal of Mahabubnagar district. There is significant number of Chenchus residing in this Mandal. Both the communities are living in neighbouring households in some villages of this Mandal. There is also scope for widespread contacts at the market place in Lingal. There is no hatred observed between Chenchu and Yerukala of this territory. This can be attributed to the racial similarity and lack of economic development in both the communities. At the same time, they do not have significant competition for resources. Another important factor is having a common enemy in their vicinity, the Lambada. The enmity might not be expressed overtly. Interaction is highly minimal between Lambada and Yerukala too. Few marriages are observed among Chenchu and Yerukala. For example, two cases are observed in Appaipally of Mahabubnagar district where a Chenchu man got married to a Yerukala woman and in the second a Yerukala man got married to a Chenchu woman. But, the Yerukala man got married to another woman from Komati caste woman after eight years of his marriage with Chenchu woman. One such case is observed from Dhararam village of the same district where a Chenchu man got married to a Yerukala woman but as part of a polygyny relation. But, higher status has not been claimed in any of theese cases. All the cases are love marriages. All of them faced rejection from their own family in the beginning but later got acceptance. The members of village community are also inviting them to rituals and ceremonies.

The Chenchus and Yerukalas of these villages are at same level in the process of economic development but the Yerukalas are placed better in the semi-urban context. Conflicts are rare between both the communities because of their dependency on different resources in the rural as well as urban context. There is no participation in each other's ceremonies. The intermarriages could not help much as they are confined to very few cases. The Yerukalas inhabiting in the villages close to forest prefer go to forest along with their Chenchu neighbours for small game hunting. This is observed quite often in Appaipally village of Mahabubnagar district. However, Yerukalas are not having bows and arrows. They are not even experts in using these materials. The small game captured by trap with the help offered by their expert friends (Chenchus) which is significant in this regard. The Yerukalas usually cut the bamboo from forest and use it for making of baskets and other articles but the Chenchus of Lingal mandal of Mahabubnagar district are not depending on such activity. Therefore, they are peaceful co-existing in the same villages. But, they are not mutually influenced in terms of their culture.

Chenchu and Lambada

The relations between Chenchu and Lambada are totally different from that of the relations of Chenchus with any other community of this territory. They co-exist in Mahabubnagar and Kurnool districts. They are living in different pockets of same villages. Language, racial differences, assertion of domination by Lambada, and the predominant role played by Lambada in statutory political system are contributing to differences between Chenchu and Lambada communities. As a whole, power relations are crucial in the emergence of differences between these two communities.

There was a significant increase in the migration of Lambada community into Nallamalai forest after their inclusion in the list of Scheduled Tribes of Andhra Pradesh in the 1977. The rich grazing fields attracted them to Nallamalai. The Chenchus have been severely affected by their migration. They occupied huge tracts of forest lands. The Lambada have made very systematic efforts by migrating as a whole clan or group of clans to a particular village. The entire clan used to occupy certain plot of land. As the Chenchus are not very organized in this regard, they have failed to resist the organized efforts of this community.

The interaction between Chenchu and Lambada is minimal because of the authority asserted by Lambada and the differences in language. For example, the political authority in majority of the villages in Mahabubnagar district has been vested in the hands of the people from Lambada community. The benefits of the government are usually enjoyed by the ruling section. Same is the case in Appaipally village of Mahabubnagar district. The educational development and awareness among Lambada is another factor that helps in the effective utilization of different resources by using various means. They have authority over means and clarity over ends. It is not the case with Chenchus. The other major aspect of antagonism is the competition for the resources available in their vicinity. The difference lies in the utilization of cultivable land. Despite lack of interest in cultivation, Chenchus of Appaipally village want to own land for the purpose of giving it to lease. But it was occupied by Lambada by the time Chenchus realized the use of land as an important asset. The acquisition of a major share of land by Lambada enhanced the rivalry between two groups. Another significant factor contributed to the hatred is the status of Lambadas as a migrant community, but accumulated assets in a short course of time because of the adaption of agriculture. Moreover, Chenchus describes themselves as the original inhabitants of Nallamalai; therefore, they often feel that their land has been occupied by migrant communities and the benefits are also usurped by Lambadas.

There are limited or no chances for contacts between Chenchu and Lambada in social sphere. This is because of lack of commonality in any of their traditions. Both the communities disapprove the procedures of life-cycle rituals of each other. This contempt is extended to other aspects of life too. They never invite each other to their celebrations. However, they gather at a common place while celebrating festivals at village level. *Peerlu*, *Vinayaka Chaviti*, *Sankranti, Shivaratri, Ugadi, Vijayadasami*, and *Holi* festivals celebrated by the people of Appaipally village of Mahabubnagar district are very important in this regard. But, separation between different ethnic groups can be easily observed during the celebration. They sing, dance, and offer prayers as different groups but at a common place of the village.

The conscious treatment of Chenchus as inferior is another major obstacle in their relation with Lambadas. They often feel that Lambadas treat them as second rate community. This kind of feeling is expressed everywhere, even at the school by

children. The children of both the communities rarely sit, play, eat, and talk together. They rarely sit in the same row in a class room. Even if the teachers force them to do so, they depart after few minutes. Lambada children rarely speak Telugu language except in class room. The usage of their mother tongue is most prevalent, sometimes even in the class room because of the presence of Lambada teachers in many schools in this territory. Chenchu children are also described as very shy by their own teachers. He/she rarely talks to their teachers. However, they interact better with a Chenchu teacher than with a non-Chenchu teacher. Therefore, it can be assumed that the differences are rooted in the socialization of the child. Even in public sphere, outside the school, Chenchu child gets a rare opportunity to interact with Lambada child because they live in separate colonies even in the same village.

The administrative procedures are also influencing the relations between Chenchu and Lambada. For instance, the establishment of ITDA for Chenchus led to differentiation in the administrative setup. Therefore, Lambadas often believe that the Chenchus are getting everything from the government. They feel that Chenchus do not deserve such help because they do not utilize it in proper way as they are drunkards. They need not do any work because government is there to rescue them under any circumstances. At the same time Chenchus believe that the Lambada are occupying all the fields of employment which actually deserved to be occupied by the Chenchus. These kinds of notions have led to the development of mutual contempt and strained relations. The Chenchus often assert on racial differences and the most important is colour. The Lambada who has 'fair complexion' always treats the Chenchus who are said to have 'black complexion' as ugly people. The 'beauty' of Lambada is not only asserted by them but also accepted by the Chenchus.

Chenchus and castes:

The Chenchus have been in contact with Hindu caste groups living in their vicinity. These contacts might be very significant when compared with the contacts with other groups because of their long association. But, the degree of contact might have been changing from time to time. Among all, their contact with Boya caste people in Kurnool district is significant because of common habitation even in the core of the forest. For example; Boyas and Chenchus are living together in Pechcheruvu, Kottalacheruvu, and Bairlutygudem hamlets. Boyas are known as

Chenchu Dasari in Bairlutygudem of Kurnool district. They are a small group of people living together with the Chenchus of this hamlet and claiming the identity as the Chenchus. But, it is identified as Boya community by the revenue authorities. However, some of the members have got the community certificates as Chenchu. Das (1989) has mentioned about the confusion in the identification of this group. According to him, "There is some confusion among the Chenchus themselves, regarding the position and identity of Chenchu Dasaris. While the Chenchus of Kurnool and Guntur districts claim that Chenchu Dasari is a separate sub-division among the Chenchus whose profession is begging and who have neither commensal nor connubial relations with other Chenchus" (1989: 46-47). There are possibilities for an outsider to get confused over the claims and counter claims of people because of the common *kulam* names such as Garaboina, Mandli, Nallabotula, and Pulicherla of both the communities. But, there is no such confusion among the Chenchus of Bairlutygudem. They do not identify this group as Chenchus and address these people as *Dasarollu*. At the same time, they do not even identify them as a caste. They are not having social or economic relations with these people. They are not participating together in festivals. No interaction is observed between these two groups except a scarce interaction among few individuals.

The Chenchus of Guntur district claim that they are having a special relation with the Yadava community. For example, the Chenchus of Terala village and BKV Palem Chenchugudem says, they are having *Kanchapu Potthu* (inter-dining) but not having *Manchapu Potthu* (inter-marriage) with Yadavas. The reason behind this might be their long association because Yadavas are shepherds who have been depending on Nallamalai forest for grazing land. Their regular movement in the forest might have helped in establishing such relation. However, such relationship is not having specific significance for the present day Chenchus of this region. It might be because of increasing interaction with many other caste groups and at the same time there is no basis for maintaining their relation. There are no inter-marriages and they are not even celebrating festivals together. No case is observed where a Chenchu invited a Yadava for festivals or ceremonies. Therefore, the impact of Yadavas seems to be insignificant on ethnic identity and cultural diversity of the Chenchus.

Social distance is an important outcome of intensive interactions with caste-Hindu people. This is an ongoing change among them and not the entire community is practicing the same. It determines the interaction and relations with caste-Hindus wherever the concept is adapted by the Chenchus. The social distance from Mala and Madiga (both are scheduled castes) may be interpreted as a conscious attempt to move up in the social order or at least not to be considered as inferior by the Hindus. It can also be understood from their avoidance of beef. Therefore, it can be said that the Chenchus have made a deliberate attempt to be absorbed into Hindu social order. However, the concept has not been adapted by the Chenchus living in core areas of the forest. They are treating all others as equals. For instance, TM of Appapuram hamlet says, "All the human beings are equal. We can invite anybody into our house and serve food." But at the same time, the Chenchus of multi-ethnic villages have a different opinion. For example, BM of Appaipally village says, "We do not invite a Madiga person into the house. We will offer food for them outside the house but we never accept food from them." Therefore, it can be assumed that the movement from forest to plains resulted in the adaption of the ideas of dominant social categories.

Appaipally village, Mahabubnagar district:

Appaipally is a multi-ethnic settlement. The history of this village is explained already. The caste groups of the village are; Reddy, Velama, Kapu, Komati, Uppara, Musti, Periki, Kuruva, Eadiga, Golla, Kamsali, Vadla, Goud, Padmasali, Telaga, Katika, Mangali, Chakali, Mala, and Madiga. There was huge inflow of non-Chenchus to this village in last five decades. This has resulted in the pressure over the resources; at the same time, restrictions to enter into the resource rich areas of the forest and deforestation led Chenchus to search for the alternative livelihoods. In course of time, they have realized that their land was occupied by outsiders. Therefore, an uneasy relation has been developed among the Chenchus and non-Chenchus of the village. But it has never turned into a major conflict. However, such kind of inflow of non-Chenchus into Chenchu territory made them minorities in their own habitat. This might be an important factor behind not having a major conflict but minor disturbances have been often taking place. The contact with outsiders not only disturbed the economic structure of the village but also made them subservient in their original habitation.

The Chenchus of this village do not have any special relation with any other caste or tribe of the village. But, the massive celebration of festivals is an important source of interaction among people. For example; *Peerlu*, *Vinayaka Chaviti*, *Sankranti*, *Sivaratri*, *Ugadi*, *Vijayadasami*, and *Holi* festivals are celebrated at village level. People gather at the centre of the village to celebrate all these festivals and there is no restriction on any community to participate in the celebrations. Chenchus participate in all these festivals along with the people of other communities. They are main organizers for *Vinayaka Chaviti*, *Sivaratri*, and *Peerlu* festivals but they but sing and dance as participants in other festivals. The Muslim priest officiate *Peerlu* festival. The festival organized according to his prescriptions. The prayers conducted by a person from Padmasali or Komati or Telaga or Uppara caste during *Sankranthi*, *Ugadi*, *Vinayaka Chaviti*, and *Vijayadasami* festivals. A Chenchu man organizes prayers at a Shiva shrine on the occasion of Sivaratri. Chenchus also organizes celebration for *Vinayaka Chaviti* as a separate group and a Chenchu man take the role of priest. But people from various communities participate in the celebration even though there are many idols of Lord Vinayaka installed by other communities. Lambada community takes the initiative to celebrate *Holi* festival and a man from that community conducts prayers in the temple on this occasion. There are no Brahmin families in this village. People never call a Brahmin priest during these festivals.

The Chenchus of this village have relations not with the people of specific castes but with the merchants and contractors of the village. The merchants are from Komati, Padmasali, Periki, and Goud castes and the contractors are from Velama, Uppara, and Kapu castes. The merchants from Komati and Padmasali are engaged in the business of food grains and other daily requirements. They also give loans for cultivation. The merchants from Periki and Goud castes are engaged in liquor business. The Chenchus can often be seen at these liquor shops. The contractors from Velama, Uppara, and Kapu castes are engaging Chenchus in building construction labour. The Chenchus are having continuous relation and interaction and they can never break such relation because of continuous indebtedness to all these people. All these relations are having impact on the economy and polity of the Chenchus but not on their culture. But, they have an impact on the mode of celebration of festivals and ceremonies because majority of the Chenchus of this village depend on these merchants for financial support during such occasions. Therefore, the Chenchus of

this village try to maintain cordial relations with these merchants despite their dissatisfaction regarding the procedures followed by them while giving money. The participation of merchants in the ceremonies of the Chenchus is quite often observed in this village.

The Chenchus of this village maintain social distance from Mala and Madiga castes. They never invite each other to ceremonies and festivals. No case is observed regarding the entrance in each other's houses. However, it is quite often observed that the Chenchus eat along with Malas and Madigas in village level feasts organized during festivals. The notion of 'pure' or 'impure' in this regard seems to be a partial imitation of the caste-Hindu practices of the non-Chenchus of the village. It is also observed that the Chenchus supported a man of Madiga caste as ward member during the elections for village panchayat. Therefore, the interaction among the Chenchus and the members of Mala and Madiga castes is not completely debarred.

The occupational structure of the Chenchus of the village is another important source of interaction with the non-Chenchus of the village. For example, 69 percent of men and 84 percent of the women are engaged in agriculture and building construction as wage labourers. They participate in these activities along with the non-Chenchus of the village. The Chenchus engage in wage labour in the fields of non-Chenchus in case of agriculture. Therefore, they interact with the non-Chenchus almost every day. It might be a reason for the successful celebration festivals at village level and it is undoubtedly a mark of successful interaction. It is further extended to participation of the Chenchus in the political activities. For example, the Chenchus of this village actively participated in the election campaigns along with the non-Chenchus during the elections.

Linguistic differences with few communities of the village are very influential on the interaction of Chenchus with the members of those communities. For instance, they have linguistic difference with Lambada, Yerukala, and Muslim communities of the village. Lambada and Yerukala speak in indigenous languages and Muslims speak in Urdu. Although, all these groups know Telugu language, they never prefer to use it while interacting with the members of their own community. However, they speak in Telugu while speaking to the Chenchus. But the Chenchus are suspicious of these

groups in certain circumstances. An example of a conflict resolution meeting can better explain this kind of attitude.

Conflict resolution meeting

Peerlu (Muharram) festival is considered as a very important festival by all the communities of Appaipally village of Mahabubnagar district. Chenchus and Muslims play a vital role in the celebration of the festival but all other communities participate in the festival. A conflict has cropped up in December 2008 among the Chenchus, Lambadas, Muslims, and Madigas regarding the decision over musicians and priests for the festival celebration. The representatives of all these communities gathered at the centre of the village to discuss the matter. They have tried for a consensus without any mediator for the resolution of the issue. But the issue gradually turned out as a conflict because of the firm stand of various communities. In the course of discussion, a person from the Lambada community emerged as the head of the meeting. He is ex-sarpanch of the village panchayat. This might be the reason for the instant acceptance of his leadership by all the parties involved in the conflict. However, the present Sarpanch (Lambada community) and the Deputy Sarpanch (Padmasali caste) of the village are also present at the location. But it is the initiation of the ex-sarpanch made him the leader. As a first step, he asked everybody to be calm and sit on the floor. Somebody has got a chair for him. He sat in the centre and all others sat in front of him in curvy fashion. Chenchus, Lambadas, Madigas, and Muslims sat in different groups. He has asked the Chenchus to explain the problem and a solution which they are willing to have. He has asked the same question to all those groups. Chenchus, Madigas, and Muslims explained the problem in Telugu but Lambadas have tried to explain the problem in their own language. But the Chenchus have objected to use of the Lambada language. They have also expressed displeasure towards Lambadas and Muslims when they have discussed the issue amongst themselves in their own language because they want to have transparency in the motives of the people. The head of the conflict resolution meeting asked those communities to discuss the issue in Telugu. Finally, they have come up with a solution after an hour-long meeting.

The most important aspect in this case is not actually the contents but the interactions operated among different members and communities who attend the

meeting. First, an influential person has become a leader with initiative. No one at the meeting has objected for his leadership regardless of his social background. He has treated all the communities in similar way by providing equal opportunity to all those to express their opinions. People are confident of arriving at an amicable solution from this meeting. The Chenchus have strongly opposed the usage of any language which they cannot understand, but did not resist the opinion of other people. They are interested to find out a solution with flexibility by compromising on some of their arguments. Finally, they have arrived at a solution. The importance of language as the facilitator of interaction among different ethnic groups in a multi-ethnic setting revealed in this case. It plays a significant role in social differentiation in multi-ethnic villages. However, all other factors are also important and influence the interaction of different ethnic groups.

Cults:

Cult forms are very popular in the great tradition of Hinduism. But such organized cult forms are relatively new for the Chenchus. In fact the cult and its organization is the imitation of other's practices. Despite their participation along with non-Chenchus in such cults, they are gradually developing their own groups. They are organizing such cults during certain period of the year which is similar to the practice of non-Chenchus. The procedure of organizing a cult is also similar to such practice of non-Chenchus. The social, economic, and political relations are also extended to the activities and organization of these cults. The religious organization of Chenchus has been influenced by the practice of these cults. The Hanuman cult and Siva cult are popular among the Chenchus of Mahabubnagar district, whereas, Siva cult is popular in Prakasam district. This practice further extended to Christianity where the Christian Chenchus of Guntur district are practicing *Yesu* cult.

Hanuman cult

Hanuman cult or *Hanuman Deeksha* or *Hanuman Mala* is very recent in origin yet the most popular among the Chenchus of Mahabubnagar district. This might be because of the location of popular Hanuman shrine at Maddhimadugu village of Mahabubnagar district. The Chenchus have been offering prayers to the deity from centuries but it has not taken a cult form. The origin of this practice is not very clear but Chenchus accept that they have learnt the procedures of organizing the cult from

the non-Chenchus. Therefore, the practice is no way different from that of non-Chenchus. At the same time, this practice is similar to any other cults such as Ayyappa cult, Bhavani cult, and Siva cult.

The stories pertaining to the origin of Hanuman cult are almost similar for all the communities. Chenchus have their own explanation for the emergence of Hanuman cult. BM of Appaipally says "A Chenchu man lost few cattle in the forest at the time of grazing. The Chenchu man was in deep sorrow and searched for cattle in the dense Nallamalai forest and hills. He was tired and was taking rest under a tree. Lord Hanuman appeared in his dream and asked him to perform *puja* (prayer) with pristine lifestyle for 42 days and to visit the temple at Maddhimadugu on 42nd day to get rid of all problems. The Chenchu man followed the suggestion and got back all his cattle. He has become prosperous. The news about the wonder spread among the fellow Chenchus. They have come to know the entire story and gradually became the devotees of Lord Hanuman. It has gradually developed into a popular practice among the Chenchus. The Chenchus have been practicing it every year during the months of November and December." They have started calling this practice as *Hanuman Deeksha*. The stories related to the origin of this cult are explained in similar ways by different people. But, the Chenchu man in the story replaced by the man from other community depending upon the caste or tribe of the person who explain the story.

The practices of devotees from all the communities are similar across the territory. The learned people of the village or of a particular caste lead the cult. The individuals whoever practice the cult live with similar group of persons. Women are not entitled to participate in this cult. But, girls before the attainment of puberty and women who have reached the menopause stage can participate. However, no such case was identified among the Chenchus. The individuals should lead a very strict life which is prescribed by the rules of the cult. The violation of the rules may lead to the punishment by the God. The person should withdraw from the practice in the case of pollution caused by the members of the family. Birth, puberty, and death of a person in the family considered as pollution. The individual who joins the cult is treated as a pristine being for the period of 42 days. He should be called as *swami* (Lord) during this period, addressing by their name treated as disrespect to the Lord.

This practice of Chenchus was observed in Appaipally village of Mahabubnagar district in the years 2008, 2009, and 2010. Only 12 members of Chenchu community participated in it during 2008 but it increased to 16 in 2009 and 22 in 2010. They were living in an *Ashram* (place where all the devotees stay together and participate in prayers for 42 days) along with the members of other communities. There were 48 members in that *ashram* in 2008 for which a learned man from Padmasali caste acting as leader for all 42 days. But, Chenchus started their own *ashram* in 2009 and continued the same in 2010 also. The reason they have cited for this is the inconvenience in a small place at the old *ashram*. But, a man of Uppara caste who is a senior member in the non-Chenchu *ashram* says "The Chenchus do not co-operate in cooking and other works of the ashram but prefer to eat at the right time. This kind of attitude of Chenchus resulted in minor conflicts. We should be after them while performing prayers; otherwise, they miss quite often. We should be strict in order to protect the piousness of the *ashram*." This might have led to separation of devotees. However, even after the separation, all of them meet quite often because few elite people of the village invite all the devotees to home and offer food. Therefore, all of them participate in the prayers organized at the home of such person. This activity usually takes place once in a week. Apart from this, all the devotees of the village visit the Hanuman temple at Maddhimadugu on the same day to end *deeksha*. Therefore, Chenchus cannot avoid the influence of non-Chenchus. They continue to interact with non-Chenchus in the entire process. For instance, the leader (*Guru Swamy*) of non-Chenchu ashram led the procession of all the devotees on the last day and organized the prayers in the Hanuman temple of the village from where they go as a group to Maddhimadugu. Therefore, the non-Chenchus not only influenced the Chenchus to participate in *deeksha* but are also influencing the procedures. At the same time, it is assumed that the right procedures are those practiced by non-Chenchus, therefore, the Chenchus should follow such procedures. This notion prevails not only among non-Chenchus but also among the Chenchus. For instance, the Chenchus do not identify birth as pollution but the concept imposed on Chenchus during *deeksha*. Therefore, it can be said that the *deeksha* is not only influenced the interaction of Chenchus with non-Chenchus but also their customs.

Lord Shiva cult

From the time immemorial, Chenchus are known for their devotion to Lord Shiva. The Nallamalai forest, the natural habitat of Chenchus is having innumerable shrines of Lord Shiva. The Lord Shiva worshipped with different names across the territory. The deity is popularly known as *Chenchu Mallanna* among the Chenchus, at the same time he is also worshipped with the names *Lingamayya, Chennakesavudu, Veerabhadrudu, Salleswarudu, Mallikharjunudu, Umamaheswarudu,* etc. The deity is part and parcel of their lives. All important occasions start with the prayer to Lord Shiva. However, *Shivaratri* of great tradition of Hinduism has become popular even among the Chenchus as a special occasion to worship Lord Shiva. Apart from the devotees from several parts of the country, the people from Karnataka have a regular contact with Chenchus because of their association with the shrine of Lord Shiva at Srisailam and many other shrines, such as; *Kadali Vanam, Bourapuram Mallikharjuna temple, and Umamaheswaram temple* of Nallamalai forest. Even now few people are using foot routes of the forest to reach some shrines and Chenchus are assisting them. Large number of pilgrims from Karnataka walks through the forest during *Ugadi* festival. Lord Shiva cult is the outcome of the contact with these pilgrims.

The practice of Lord Shiva cult is known as *Shiva Deeksha* or *Shiva Mala*. This has been in practice by the pilgrims of Karnataka from long time. The Chenchus were visiting all the shrines along with *swamulu* (devotees who practice *Shiva Deeksha*) of Karnataka. They were impressed by the practices of these devotees. At present, few Chenchus are practicing this cult. They are calling themselves as *Shiva Swamulu* (Siva Gods). The person who accepts *deeksha* should be called by others as *Swami* as in the case of Hanuman deeksha. The *deeksha* will be carried out for 42 days. All these days the group of people who are practicing this cult live together at one place and perform *pujas* (prayers). The prayers, performance and rules of the cult are similar to Hanuman cult. The only difference can be seen in the colour of the dress and materials offered to the deity (which are said to be favourite to the deity). The Chenchus are practicing this cult for 42 days without drinking liquor. Chenchus of Prakasam district are increasingly participating in this cult despite incoherence between their life style and practices of the cult. This is providing opportunities to interact with the members of other communities at the gathering of devotees.

Chenchus and Christianity:

The impact of Christianity is minimal on the Chenchus of Nallamalai. Its influence can be observed on the Chenchus living outside the forest. There are few Churches in Amarabad region where Chenchus are predominant in number. It is observed that four families of Padara of Amarabad mandal of Mahabubnagar district are attending the local Church. But, most of the Chenchus of Komman penta of some district are converted to Christianity. Apart from this, influence of Christianity on the Chenchus of Mahabubnagar district is insignificant. However, its influence is predominant among the Chenchus of Guntur and Prakasam districts. The festivals of Christianity are not having any impact on the Chenchu tradition. There is no fusion of religious performances as it is observed in the case of Islam. It may be attributed to the participation of the Chenchus in the elementary forms of religion which involve mass participation. The propagation of Christianity is a recent phenomenon in this region. This might be the main reason for having a limited impact on Chenchus.

Chenchus and Islam:

The Islamic ruling class has a very prominent influence on the religion of the Chenchus of Mahabubnagar district. It is because of the Nizam's rule for many centuries in the district. Chenchus of Kurnool district are also partly influenced by Islam. There are lots of evidences in the forest which reveal the contact of Islamic rulers with the Chenchus. The guest houses, stone walls, routes in the forest, bridges, tanks, Mosques in fringe areas etc., reveals the age-old contacts between Chenchus and Islamic rulers not only in the fringe areas but also in the deep forest. There are some places of Islamic pilgrimage in the forest area. For example, a *Dargah* at Nagaluty of Kurnool district is popular among the Chenchus and non-Chenchus of surrounding areas. Devotees of Muslim and non-Muslim communities visit this shrine. Such visits act as occasions of interaction between Chenchus and non-Chenchus. Therefore, the significance of all these Islamic shrines is remarkable on the culture of the Chenchus. The Islamic influence on personal names and the religious traditions of the Chenchus was explained already.

The Chenchus of Mahabubnagar district visit *Dargahs* (Islamic worship places) in and around their territory. This has further enhanced their contact with not only Muslims but also many others living in those territories. Therefore, majority of

the Chenchus of Mahabubnagar district represents a kind of religious fusion. However, the Chenchus do not go to mosques but they visit *Dargahs*. They do not utter Quran prayers but are having Islamic symbols in their houses. The Chenchus whoever visits *Dargah* are having a tradition of eating the mutton or chicken of an animal or a bird only when it is killed by cutting the throat. It is also known as *halal*. As a result, they are not eating the meat of game which is killed by trap.

The Islamic tradition has a significant impact on the religious organization of the Chenchus of Mahabubnagar district. They visit some of the Islamic centres of pilgrimages. A *Darga* at Zeenugupally of the same district is very popular in this regard. The Chenchus of Appaipally visit this. The rituals which require mass participation have been accepted by Chenchus. For example, Muharram, an important occasion for Muslims is a most popular Islamic festival among the Chenchus. It is locally known as *Peerlu* festival. The deity to which they offer prayers is known as *Peerlu Swamy*. The Muslims participates in the ritual as priests but they do not celebrate the festival in the way Chenchus celebrate it. This is a week-long festival in which men and women sing and dance during every night. The Chenchus are not alone in celebrating this festival. They celebrate it along with many other caste groups in multi-ethnic villages such as Appaipally of Mahabubnagar district. But, this kind of practice is not observed in the isolated Chenchu hamlets. This celebration further enhanced their contacts with many other caste groups in their vicinity.

Impact of Naxalite movement:

Naxalite movement has a significant impact in terms of increasing contacts with non-tribals. The movement is very much influential in Nallamalai region for a period of 20 years. It has brought many non-tribals into Chenchu habitat who fought against the government in the name of "social justice". The Chenchus were made part of this struggle. They were not aware of the causes and consequences of the movement. However, the non-tribals have played a major role in the struggle. The Chenchus played a subsidiary role. But, their relation with the movement as well as with non-tribal participants was inseparable. The regular contact with naxalites (Maoists) and participation in their activities led to change in the world view of the Chenchus. The naxal movement has also led to the regular contact with police. The contact with these two extreme groups of outsiders led to the drastic changes in the

life of the Chenchus. The increasing harassment by police led to the development of annoyance towards police at the same time sympathy towards Maoists. They have started working against police in the course of time.

The Chenchus participated in the activities of naxalites across the territory. Some Chenchus have gone into villages along with naxal troops. They have participated in the meetings organized by naxalites. As a result, they have come into contact with many outsiders apart from naxals. Those Chenchus have started questioning the authorities concerned with Chenchu development. This has led to the protests at the ITDA office in the late 1990s. This period can be identified with the active participation of the Chenchus, yet in limited sense of number, in a kind of political struggle. The participation of the Chenchus of core areas of the forest was more predominant than the Chenchus of plain areas. This might be resulted not only from the enforcement from naxals but also because of the harassment by the police and the obstacles created by the forest officials in getting a livelihood. The forcible displacement is another important factor that led to the increasing participation of the Chenchus in the activities of Maoists.

Middlemen (merchants) and contractors:

The middleman or *shavukaru* or *shet* is having an inseparable role in the day-to-day affairs of the Chenchus of Nallamalai. He is not only the provider of goods but also an important person in social and economic life of Chenchus. His participation is ensured in the ceremonies of the Chenchus. Marriage ritual is one of the best examples for the participation of these middlemen. In fact, he is the very important outsider for the Chenchus. The middlemen or local merchants have been acting as moneylenders. Chenchus have been experiencing the exploitative practices of the middlemen but they never ignore them. They express anger against middlemen but continue to approach them for all their needs because the middlemen provide immediate needs even without asking for immediate payment. There were some obstacles created by the naxalites against the exploitation by the middlemen. As a result, the middlemen experienced the decline of business when naxalite movement was at its peak in Nallamalai forest. But, they have revived activities after the decline of naxalite movement. As all the needs of the Chenchus are not fulfilled by government authorities, they continue to have a relation with these middlemen.

The middlemen system gradually extended to other avenues of Chenchus life. They are acting as bridges between Chenchus and ITDA. They are the suppliers of goods and buyers of the products collected by Chenchus. They also supply liquor. They decide the rate for products collected by Chenchus as well as the goods supplied by them. They are also participating in conflict resolution. They are now playing an active role as mediators between banks and Chenchus in the activities pertaining to SHGs. They collect commission for every work. In some cases, they use to appropriate the benefits of Chenchus. They use the names of Chenchus by taking their photographs and signatures but the benefit reaches the non-Chenchus. Such cases were reported from Appaipally of Mahabubnagar district. In some respects, the contacts with middlemen have been beneficial because they are getting daily requirements which are not in their reach. But it is more destructive because of the exploitative role played by these middlemen. It has done more harm than benefit to the Chenchus. Some contractors are actively engaged in motivating Chenchus for migration by giving huge advance of money. The innocent Chenchus are in the trap and unable to come back to their village whenever they want. The middlemen system paved the way for contacts with external forces and altered the life of Chenchus to a significant extent.

Displacement:

From the time immemorial, Nallamalai is the traditional habitat of Chenchus. But, the announcement of Nallamalai as the tiger reserve made the life of Chenchus a miserable one. It has also led to the forced displacement of Chenchus from their natural environs. In the course of last 30 years, the Chenchus have been gradually moving from the core areas of the forest to the fringe areas. This has led to increasing contacts with outsiders. The increasing contact with non-Chenchus led to their subjugation in a different habitat. The change from food gathering and collection of forest products to wage labour led to the significant changes in the relations with outsiders. It has drastically increased their dependency on non-Chenchus. The process of displacement and its impact on Chenchus is discussed later.

Administrative authorities:

The officials concerned with tribal administration and development have been in regular contact with the Chenchus. But most of them have failed to maintain a

friendly relation with the Chenchus. This may be due to lack of community-centred approach while implementing the policies and programmes. The top-down approach was given priority rather the down-top approach or people-centred approach. The Chenchus have never developed a positive opinion towards officials. They have been treating officials as major threat for their habitat and survival. They treat officials as thieves who steal their resources. They call officials as '*saru donga*' (sir thief). There is widespread mutual mistrust. This makes their relation always a hostile one. The stereotyped and generalized notions of officials; for example, Chenchus are unhygienic, illiterate, irrational, drunkards etc., deteriorated the relations between them. The lack of sensitivity to the practices of Chenchus might be the reason for not having friendly relations. Apart from all above factors, the officials concerned with the administration and development of Chenchus are not the Chenchus. They are from different cultural backgrounds. The Chenchus who are from more or less an egalitarian society could not tolerate the hierarchical and authoritative attitude of the officials. They also believe that the development programmes have often been subverted by the officials. At the same time, they are developing a notion that government and its agents are there to provide all the required needs for the Chenchus. They could never understand the limitations of the officials. In fact, they are not aware of the complexities in administration. Officials also face threats from wild animals in the forest. Naxal movement for a brief period of time added to their misery. Therefore, they have also failed to discharge the duties.

The forest officials are also in regular contact with the Chenchus but they never had good relations. As the agents of the government, they have been very stringent about the implementation of forest laws. But, forest is the only source of livelihood for this food gathering community. At the same time, Chenchus believe that they have never destroyed the forest. Therefore, they were always in conflict with the officials of forest department. Their economy with limited objectives never demands to grab surplus resources from the forest. But, this might not be properly understood by the officials. Moreover, the announcement of Nallamalai as a reserve forest strengthens forest officials. The harassment by forest officials is a major consequence of this development. This makes their relation with the Chenchus more strained. The communication facilities have not developed in the forest because of the objections of the forest department. Their movement has been restricted in the forest.

They were also forced to leave the forest. There is no programme which can improve relations between Chenchus and the forest officials. At the same time, the objective of the notifying Nallamalai as a reserve forest has not fully achieved. The statistics of tiger population from 1989 to 1997 shows a drastic decrease in number. Neither the Chenchu nor the tiger find appropriate place in the forest. But, the hostility between Chenchus and forest officials continue to be an important issue till today.

Pilgrimage centres:

There are many pilgrimage centres in Nallamalai forest. Srisailam of Kurnool district is the most popular among them. The other pilgrimage centres of prominence are Umamaheswaram and Maddhimadugu of Mahabubnagar district; and Ahobilam of Kurnool district. Apart from these pilgrimage centres, the fairs conducted once in a year have been attracting huge number of non-Chenchu devotees. For example, *Salleswaram Jatara* at Salleswarm of Mahabubnagar district is an important occasion for interaction between Chenchus and non-Chenchus. The Chenchus of core, fringe, and multi-ethnic villages interacts with the non-Chenchus because of the pilgrimage route which runs for 30km as a footway from all these parts. *Loddhi Jatara* of Mahabubnagar district during Sivaratri festival is another important occasion for interaction with the non-Chenchus. The Chenchus as well as the non-Chenchus from several villages attends this fair. Another important fair but of a different kind is *Rangapur Jatara* which is also known as *Rangapur Ursu*. It is organized at Rangapur village of Mahabubnagar district. It is not organized by the Chenchus but they participate in it. It is organized by Muslims and Hindus together, usually a day after *Sankranthi*. The interaction is possible among the Chenchus of multi-ethnic villages and towns as well as with the non-Chenchus of the same territory. Festivals such as *Sivaratri* and *Ugadi* are important occasions of interaction with different outsiders in Prakasam and Kurnool districts because the pilgrimage footway of the devotees of Lord Mallikharjuna and his consort Bhramaramba runs through these districts. The devotees from Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Maharashtra flood this place at the time of *Shivaratri* and *Ugadi*. The Chenchus set up temporary stalls all along the footway to provide water and eatables to the pilgrims. However, it is not only restricted to business but they extend help by providing protection and other kind of services to pilgrims all through the route. The Chenchus of core and fringe villages of Kurnool and Prakasam districts interact with pilgrims at the time of these festivals.

The pilgrimage centres provide year-long contact with outsiders, whereas, the fairs provide contacts once in a year. The interacting members are rarely concerned with the social status of each other in these occasions. The pilgrimage centres are also attracting non-tribal businessmen into this territory. They are establishing shops at these pilgrimage centres. As a result, they are having continuous contacts with the Chenchus. They act as financiers in majority of the cases and continuing relations beyond their business outfit. The pilgrimage centres are not only influencing the religious practices of the Chenchus but also their social and economic practices.

Eco-tourism:

The eco-tourism project taken up by the government of Andhra Pradesh in association with forest department played its role in increasing contacts with non-Chenchus. The waterfalls in the Nallamalai forest are major attractions for outsiders. For example, Farahabad view point and Mallelatheertham waterfalls are major attractions in the Nallamalai forest of Mahabubnagar district. Kadali vanam, Srisailam dam, and boating in the backwaters of the dam are major tourist attractions in Kurnool district and Nagarjuna Sagar dam, boating in the backwaters, and Nagarjuna Konda are major tourist attractions in Guntur district. Apart from this, private agencies such as Eco India and Travel India are organizing eco-tours, wildlife tours, and tribal tours. The Chenchus are living very close to such water bodies. Therefore, they have been in regular contact with these tourists. In some cases, they are involving in animal poaching which is ultimately affecting the Chenchus because of the suspicion of forest officials. The Chenchus have never got benefited from these contacts because the income of the eco-tourism project anyway goes to the government and outsiders.

Conflicts and changing trajectories of Chenchu identity:

Inter-community conflicts are also very important in the understanding of identity and interaction as in the case of intra-community conflicts explained earlier. The conflicts among the Chenchus and the non-Chenchus are often the outcome of resource competition. These conflicts lead to the overt expression of identity of Chenchus because all of them come together if they need to fight with a non-Chenchu. This can be understood from following cases.

Water resources – conflicting interests among Chenchus and non-Chenchus

The establishment of ownership rights by non-Chenchu over water resources located in the midst of the Chenchu territory have led to conflicts. The Chenchus have been denied access not only to the products but also to the water of these water bodies to use for agricultural purposes. For example, *Rasool Cheruvu* at Billakallu village and *Sri Rangapuram Cheruvu* at Srirangapuram village of Mahabubnagar district, *Munimadugula vagu* at Kottalacheruvu village and *Siddhapuram Cheruvu* at Bairlutygudem of Kurnool district have resulted in conflicts among Chenchus and non-Chenchus of respective territories. *Rasool Cheruvu*, *Srirangapuram Cheruvu*, and *Siddhapuram Cheruvu* are huge ponds; whereas, *Munimadugula vagu* is a stream. *Rasool Cheruvu*, *Srirangapuram Cheruvu*, and *Munimadugula vagu* are in the midst of Chenchu land and fall under the reserve forest. They are also important sources of water for the wild animals. *Siddhapuram Cheruvu* is at the edge of the reserve forest and also not an important source of water for wild animals. With this background, it is very important to understand how these water bodies have influenced the identity of Chenchus and their interaction with the non-Chenchus.

The conflicts pertaining to all these water bodies are similar in nature. The major issues are prohibiting the Chenchus from fishing and denying water to their crops. *Rasool Cheruvu* is very close to Billakallu, a multi-ethnic village but predominantly inhabiting by the Chenchus. The Chenchus were denied the right to catch fish in this pond by the forest department because this is a major water source for wild animals in this region. This is a very big pond and yield more than five lakh rupees of income per year on fishing. The Besta, a traditional fishermen caste of Kondanagaula village, fought with the forest department for the right to fish for the commercial purpose. At the same time, the Chenchus of the village were motivated by the naxalites to fight for the right over fishing in the pond. The Chenchus wanted to register a co-operative society to organize fishing and to share the profit among the members. They have also gone to the court for the rights over fishing. The verdict came in the favour of Chenchus. But the court has given permission to catch fish only for the purpose of consumption and declined the proposal for commercial fishing. However, only the Chenchus are entitled to catch fish according to the verdict. The people of other castes were angry about the verdict. As a result, they have approached the forest department either to give permission to the people of all the castes of the

village or to deny permission to all. At the same time, the Chenchu man who has filed the case was harassed in the name of having links with the naxalites. But the Chenchus were allowed to catch fish with some restrictions because of the verdict of the court. After the ignition of conflict for the second time, the forest department is not allowing any community for the fishing in pond. In fact, it is suspecting the possibility of eruption of a clash if permission is given to any community.

The case of *Munimadugula vagu* of Kottalacheruvu village of Kurnool district is similar to *Rasool Cheruvu*. *Munimadugula vagu* is 2 km away from Kottalacheruvu, a predominantly Chenchu settlement. A dam was constructed across the stream known as Varada Raja Swamy Project (VRSP). The Chenchu wanted to catch fish in the backwaters of the project for commercial purpose with the encouragement of an NGO, Nallamalai Foundation. They have also made efforts to register a co-operative society for fishing. CL, a 44 years old woman, has made several efforts in this regard when she was working as the VTDA president. Most of the Chenchus thought it is not a beneficial work and only 20 members came forward to be the members in co-operative society. Each member paid 1000 rupees towards deposit to buy nets and a boat. Nallamalai Foundation promised them to offer help in this regard. She has also met with the Commissioner of Fisheries of Kurnool district. The commissioner accepted the proposal and gave permission but on a condition to get clearance from the forest department. She has also approached the Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) of Atmakur forest division. He has also accepted the proposal and asked her to register the society. She had prepared everything to register the society. But she has faced an unexpected development in the village. The Chenchus who were not willing to take membership in the society have filed the case against her in the Atmakur police station by saying naxalites are involved in the entire proposal. She says "There was no involvement of naxalites in the proposal. Nallamalai Foundation helped me in this regard. I am not the only person to get benefit from this proposal. All the members of the co-operative society get equal share in the benefits. The complaint given by the Chenchus of my village was not their idea. But the non-Chenchus of Kurakunda village were behind the complaint. They have initially tried for the rights over fishing. But the Commissioner of Fisheries preferred Chenchus as we have gone with a proper proposal with the help of Nallamalai Foundation. As a result of the complaint, police have harassed me and the forest department cancelled

the permission." It is understood from this case that the non-Chenchus of Kurakunda, a multi-ethnic village 5 km away from the project involved in the whole issue as they have vested interests on commercial fishing. They were successful in creating a conflict among the Chenchus. But the Chenchus of the village lately realized the conspiracy motive of the non-Chenchus of Kurakunda village. This was realized when they have got lands from the government for cultivation. The Chenchus have requested the government to construct a canal from the project for the purpose of irrigation. The non-Chenchus of Kurakunda village fought against the canal because of the threat to lose their land. At the same time, they are getting water without the canal. This has given rise to another conflict between the Chenchus of Kottalacheruvu and non-Chenchus of Kurakunda village, a year after the conflict over fishing. However, the Chenchus of Kottalacheruvu have been continuing their efforts for irrigation facilities. They are unable to do agriculture because of the non-availability of water. This conflict has not only disturbed the relations between Chenchus and non-Chenchus but also among different groups of the Chenchus.

The conflict about of *Srirangapuram Cheruvu* is also about the right for fishing. But, in this case Chenchus have not fought for commercial fishing but for consumption. There are three Chenchu settlements very close to the pond but they are not having right for fishing in the pond. Instead, the people from Telaga caste of Appaipally are having rights for commercial fishing. Telaga caste people are living in the village only from last 20 years but Chenchus have been living from centuries. Therefore, they believe that they are having a natural right for fishing in the pond. As a result, the Chenchus of Appaipally have violated the contract rules and went to catch fish apparently for consumption only in the pond in 2010. But, the members of Telaga caste have caught five Chenchu men of Appaipally village while they are fishing in the pond. They have beaten these five young men and filed a case against them in Lingal police station. The police took them to custody and beaten them before arranging a compromise between two parties. The Chenchus have gone to meet Project Officer, ITDA to report the incident. The project officer asked the members of Telaga caste to allow Chenchus to catch fish for consumption. He has also warned the Telaga caste about a possible cancellation of the contract by giving complaint to concerned officers if they do not allow Chenchus. But, later the project officer

ignored the issue and the Chenchus were not allowed for fishing. This conflict has brought a division between Chenchus and Telagas of the village.

The Chenchus of Bairlutygudem of Kurnool district were also subjected to similar treatment by the non-Chenchus of Siddhapuram village when they have gone for fishing to *Siddhapuram Cheruvu*. They have gone for fishing only for consumption. The non-Chenchus of Siddhapuram have taken the fishing nets and beaten the Chenchus. But they haven't filed case against the Chenchus and the Chenchus also didn't file a case. The access has been denied to a pond which is just 1.5 km away from the settlement. However, it has not led to any further conflicts. The Chenchus are even scared to display their nets in front of any outsider under the fear that the non-Chenchus of Siddhapuram village will get the information. No outside agents were involved in motivating either of the group in this case.

The Chenchus are the victims in most of the cases and non-Chenchus are acting as exploitative agents. Non-Chenchu agents or agencies are sometimes involved in generating or resolving conflicts among Chenchus and non-Chenchus. In all the cases, authority is asserted by the non-Chenchus over the Chenchus and the benefits are also enjoyed by the non-Chenchus. Non-Chenchus are sometimes responsible for the conflicts among the Chenchus. The relations between different parties involved in the conflict have been spoiled in all the cases. The Chenchus are at dismay because of the alienation from their resources due to the intervention of non-Chenchu immigrants. In majority of the cases, non-Chenchus migrated to Chenchu territories and created obstacles for the Chenchus. However, in all the above cases, Chenchus have tried to assert their identity as the original inhabitants of Nallamalai forest and the undisputed owners of the land. But, they have failed in all the cases to retain rights over the resources.

Conflict during Holi festival

There is a tradition of breaking pots outside the houses a day prior to *Holi* festival in the Appaipally village of Mahabubnagar district. Nobody cares about whose pots they are breaking. This is a practice of Lambadas of the village but Chenchus are also habituated to follow it because of the fun. All the inhabitants of the village try to keep their pots inside the home on that day under the fear of damage. In

2010, the Chenchus have broken the pots of a family of the Velama caste during a night before the festival. They were caught and beaten up. The Chenchus have retaliated and broken all the pots in the house of Velama man due to anger but did not beat anybody. The parents of Chenchu victims have gone to Velama man's house and scolded him and his family. Later, the Velama man has filed a complaint against the Chenchus in police station at Lingal. The police have taken the Chenchus into custody and beaten them. The Sarpanch of the village, who is from Lambada community, compromised the Chenchus and Velamas. Finally, the Velama man has withdrawn the case on the promise of Chenchus not to repeat such incidents. The police inspector warned the Chenchus for severe punishment if similar action repeated. This incident not only led to friction in the relations between Chenchus and Velamas but also created hostile environment between Chenchus and non-Chenchus of the village.

Identity – misconceptions:

The increasing culture contact led to the creation of several misconceptions by outsiders about the Chenchu culture. It is because of the superficial observation of Chenchu culture by the non-Chenchus from the perspective of the culture of their own. Therefore, Chenchu identity has been quite often misinterpreted. The most repeated saying about the Chenchus is that "the Chenchu is always ready to move with you as much distance as you want if provided with liquor and food." Certain other misconceptions are pertaining to the customs of the Chenchu. For example, the institution of marriage by elopement was interpreted as abduction. But it is not abduction in strict sense. It is a culturally accepted method of marriage and the couple usually get acceptance not only from the family but also from the community. Other popular misconceptions are regarding their sexual life. For example, most of the non-Chenchu neighbours believe that "Chenchus men can have sex with any woman of their community as and when they want even without having a legally acceptable relation." Another misconception on the same issue is "Chenchus always have sex only in the forest." It was also told that "they do not know civilized way of sex." Some people believe that the "Chenchus have an easy access to as many number of women as possible." Another misconception is that "the Chenchus can kill their brother for physical access to his wife." Some people explicitly say "Chenchus are stupid. They can simply spend whole day to find a rat but don't work for something which give enough money for survival." NGO representatives have different

misconceptions. According to them, "A Chenchu man never listens and speaks. In any meeting, he/she sits on his/her foot in order to quit as soon as possible without much labour." Few administrators and officials say "Only problem with them is liquor drinking. We cannot pursue them to stop drinking." But, the forest guards and few of the forest officials are having a different opinion on the behaviour of the Chenchus. According to them, "Chenchus are innocent. There is no harm to forest from the Chenchus. They never collect anything beyond their need. Only problem is that they do not know sustainable techniques to collect gum and other MFP collection. The outsiders (non-Chenchus) and some of us are responsible for deforestation or any other threat to forest." More or less similar opinions were expressed not only by forest guards but also Divisional Forest Officers (DFO) and Forest Range Officers (FRO) from Achempeta of Mahabubnagar district, Atmakur of Kurnool district, and Yerragondapalem of Prakasam district.

There is often a danger from such misconceptions because they may mask the original identity and attribute a negative dimension. They may further have an impact on the psyche of the community and its members. The popularization of such misinterpretation may lead to the crystallization of stigmatized identity. However, these misconceptions have generated from a superficial understanding of the culture of Chenchus. Regarding the first misconception mentioned in the above paragraph, Chenchus never move with anybody just to get food and liquor. They do not go with anybody even if they are provided. They are ready to help even without food and liquor if the outsider respects them. The other popular misconception about the sexual relations among the Chenchus is not true. This misconception emerged out of a narrow and superficial understanding of the Chenchu culture by their non-Chenchu neighbours because the Chenchu society is very much controlled by the norms. They do not have uncontrolled access to sex as it was conceived by the outsiders. A couple has to go for marriage if they enter into a pre-marital sexual relation. Such relation is considered as illicit if the couple do not get married. Their sitting posture is not an attempt to run away from the meeting but a result of their natural attentive attitude while they move in the forest. But, liquor drinking is a problem among the Chenchus even today. It is very important for them because no ceremony or ritual is complete without having liquor. However, it is not a serious problem as it is assumed except in core settlements of the forest. This habit is not so serious among the Chenchus who

are practicing agriculture. Therefore, a constructive and long term effort may help in persuading Chenchus to move away from this habit. Moreover, the stigma needs to be erased. The officers of government and non-government organizations as well as the researchers are not empathetic to the concerns of the people who are striving to move out of such stigmatized identity.

An overview of contacts:

The non-Chenchus have entered into the vicinity of the Chenchus under various circumstances. Their entry into the habitats of the Chenchus influenced the life of Chenchus in various ways. They have not only influenced the livelihoods but also influenced the cultural practices of the Chenchus. The major pilgrimage centres, fairs, and festivals have contributed a lot in this regard. The practice of Hanuman cult and Siva cult are very important examples for increasing religious impact because of the contact with outsiders. It can be said that they are very much influenced by dominant traditions of outsiders. The changes are also observed in the life-cycle rituals of Chenchus because of the contact with non-Chenchus. The concept of purity and pollution is getting elaborated in the Chenchu social system. The marital practices of the Chenchus are also changing because of their contact with outsiders. The ploygyny marriages are declining. The pregnancy and childbirth are also associated with some rituals in plain areas. The rituals are very similar to the practices of non-Chenchus. The death rituals are also changing because of such contacts. Traditionally, Chenchus bury the dead but the Chenchus of some regions; for example, Maddhimadugu of Mahabubnagar district, are cremating the dead.

The concept of *bodrayi* (village border) and its relevance imbibed into the cultural practices of the Chenchus of multi-ethnic villages. Even though, the Chenchus of isolated Chenchus settlements too having the concept of boundary, they maintain these boundaries for the identification and protection of resources. But, the concept of *bodrayi* and its cultural significance is the influence of non-Chenchus. It plays a key role while celebrating the marriage and death ceremonies. For example, at the time of marriage; bridegroom's party invite bride's party to their village at *bodrayi* by giving sugar or sweets. Offering sugar or sweets is also an adaption from the non-Chenchus. The food is being offered to the dead on the 11th day at *bodrayi* of the village by the Chenchus as well as non-Chenchus of the multi-ethnic villages.

Appaipally, Mahabubnagar District

Kottalacheruvu, Kurnool district

Chintala, Prakasam District

The traditional economy of Chenchus has been influenced by the contacts with outsiders. It is also associated with changes in livelihood patterns of the Chenchus. The changing occupational structure is a sign of such kind of influence. The occupational diversity is a result of displacement from forest as well as the contact with outsiders. The educational development has been stimulated by the contact with outsiders. The food gathering practices of the Chenchus are in decline. Dependency on forest and forest resources is drastically reduced. The need of surplus and money are increasingly becoming the centre for the economic organization of the Chenchus. It is observed among the cultivators as well as educated and employed cream of the community. The Chenchus who are living in close contact with non-Chenchus are developing the concept of savings. They are investing money in purchasing goats, cows, buffaloes, and on land and agriculture. They are also saving the money in the bank. The Chenchus who are involving in wage labour are investing some money on the education of their children. However, there are variations in the organization of economic system among the Chenchus of various parts of the territory.

The noteworthy changes are also taken place in the political organization of the Chenchus. The traditional political organization is almost at the verge of extinction. Participation in statutory political system is gaining importance. They are contesting for various positions in local bodies, for example, *Zilla Parishad*, *Mandal Parishad*, and *Village Panchayat*. The increasing political awareness and participation in electoral process can be attributed to the influence of non-Chenchu contacts.

Conclusion:

The general presumptions of ethnic phenomena may not be equally applicable to all the ethnic groups. Therefore, the groups in interaction play a vital role in determining the processes of ethnic phenomena. For example, the character of the boundary between two tribal groups, tribe and caste, and tribe and a religious group differs from each other. The fluidity and/or the rigidity and interactions at the boundary depend on ecological setting, resource competition, occupational diversity, linguistic differences, political affiliations and economic disparities. In a poly-ethnic society such as India, the relations at the boundary of various groups are influenced by social, religious, linguistic, techno-economic, and political factors. Particularly, non-tribal contacts led to changes in the various social customs of tribal communities

(Venkata Rao, 2004: 48). Same is true in case of Chenchu community. It has been influenced by the cultures of their neighbouring communities across the territory. However, the interaction of Chenchus with those others depends upon local factors.

The innate tendency of the members of an ethnic group may always motivate them to carry forward their traditions which express their identity. Therefore, people celebrate festivals and rituals in their own way which act as tools to understand their identity. But, the isolated setting may often leaves the observer in ambiguity in understanding such identity. It may not be as effective as multi-ethnic setting in unravelling of the ideas of people regarding identity because they never assert their identity in isolated setting. Increasing contacts with other ethnic groups intensified ethnic awareness among Chenchus. The conflicting situations often reveal such tendency among them. Therefore, this phenomenon often surfaces in a multi-ethnic setting. The interacting groups and the nature of interactions in such setting play a significant role in the phenomenon of ethnic identity. Such intensive interaction with various ethnic groups exerted significant influence on the culture of Chenchus. It has led to diversity within the community depending on the degree of contacts with other ethnic groups in different parts of their territory. At the same time, all the four territorial categories of Chenchus mentioned earlier are having contacts either with one or other tribal group or caste group but the degree of contact is determined by their location. The Chenchus living in the core area of the forest are having less interaction and the Chenchus living in semi-urban setting having more interaction; other categories fall in-between. Accordingly, their culture influenced by the outsiders. Therefore, the assertion on ethnic identity is more in a town where interactions with non-Chenchus are regular and intensive and such assertion is less in an isolated settlement; therefore, change is more significant in a town and less significant in an isolated core hamlet.

Another important dimension of increasing inter-community interactions is the penetration of commercial economy into Chenchu territories in the form of contractors who have started purchasing minor forest produce from Chenchus. In course of time, they have moved from food gathering to gathering of commercially important items and also turned to wage labour. Thus, they have been drawn into monetized economy. They have become vulnerable in the new market system. They

could not adjust in a new hierarchical system where they have become powerless. They have been isolated amidst the alien population because of the mismatch between social, religious, economic, and political systems of non-Chenchus and their own. In fact, Fürer-Haimendorf (1943: 378) opines, "…they seem to be also in danger of extinction as a race by close contact with others." However, it appears to be slight exaggeration because they are not driving towards extinction; instead, developing coping mechanisms by venturing into alternate livelihood activities.

The movement of people from one territory to the other brings various new groups together. It may lead to culture shock for the new arrivals or for all the newly interacting ethnic groups. But they gradually adjust and accommodate to each other. Same has happened in the case of Chenchus of Nallamalai forest. In this case, the out-migration of Chenchus and the in-migration of non-Chenchus have led to continuous interaction among different ethnic groups which subsequently led to acculturation. But, how the entire community reorient itself because of the contacts with the non-Chenchus is unclear despite visibility of the impact on the part of the community. The diversity emerged as a result of contacts may continue to survive or the entire community may reorganize if every section of it subjected to intensive contacts with non-Chenchus. There are possibilities for continuation of the process of diversity of culture and identity of the Chenchus because of the diverse nature of interacting groups in different parts of the Chenchu land.

ETHNIC IDENTITY: FORCES AND PROCESSES OF CHANGE

Change is the phenomenon that happens to any ethnic group of the world. In fact, "they [ethnic groups] may be *forms* of social life that are capable of renewing and transforming themselves" (Glazer and Moynihan, 1975: 4). Therefore, an ethnic group is always marked with dynamism which may reflect upon all aspects of the ethnic group including its identity. Identity, thus may keep on changing depending upon various influences. Change in the identity of an ethnic group is not a very flexible process, at the same time; it is not very rigid too. In fact, "social change is always accompanied by rhetoric about identity under threat" (Jenkins, 1996: 6). However, change in the identity is a long term process. Some elements of change may be deliberately chosen by the people but certain others may happen without the conscious effort of the members of an ethnic group. Chenchu community is also undergoing change. Such acceptance of change is leading to the shift in the identity. An attempt is made in this chapter to delineate those forces and processes that are affecting their identity.

Migration:

Migration is an important force and process of culture change. It has made a significant contribution to the change among the Chenchus. Migration in the Nallamalai region can be divided into two types, they are; inside to outside and outside to inside. The *inside to outside* migration means the movement of people from the core parts of the Nallamalai forest to fringe, foothills or nearby multi-ethnic settlements. The *outside to inside* migration is the movement of the non-Chenchus from nearby villages of Nallamalai forest to fringe, foothills, and multi-ethnic settlements closer to forest terrain or even movement into core settlements of the forest. The pattern of migration among the Chenchus can be called as inside to outside migration. But this kind migration is a very gradual process among the Chenchus. The Chenchus have migrated from core territories to fringe, from fringe to multi-ethnic villages, and from multi-ethnic villages to towns and cities which has brought certain changes. For example, the Chenchus of core settlements such as Appapuram, Bourapuram, and Rampuram of Mahabubnagar district have migrated to fringe and multi-ethnic settlements near foot hills such as Billakallu and Appaipally of the same

district. Few families are even migrated to Achempeta, a town close to forest vicinity. Similarly, four Chenchu families from Peddamantanala and six families from Garapenta of Prakasam district are migrated to Dornala, a small town in the same district. The Chenchus have migrated voluntarily in all these cases. Multiple factors including the establishment of marital relations with the people from other territories, frequent conflicts in the original settlements, search of new opportunities and the resources, employment in government or private sector establishments, and/or naxalite activities in the forest are believed to be responsible for their migration. For example, the Chenchus who have migrated to nearby towns are to seek employment opportunities and economic well-being. But those who have migrated from core settlements to Billakallu village of Mahabubnagar district cited resource scarcity in the old settlements, opportunities at Billakallu, and marital relations are the reasons for their migration. Two families migrated from Appapuram to Appaipally cited naxalism as the main reason for migration, one family cited marital relations as the main reason and rest of the families migrated because of resource scarcity at the old settlement.

The consistent migration of the Chenchus of Appaipally to towns and cities for work is a new phenomenon that began almost 20 years ago. The place of migration depends on the contractor. Even though it is voluntary, they are compelled for that because of their continuous debt to contractors. Most of the contractors are non-Chenchus, but a very few Chenchu contractors are also there. It is a trap in the name of better livelihood. The contractor offers an attractive amount of 15,000 – 20,000 rupees at the time of some festival (particularly at the time of Vijaya Dasami). After fifteen days, he will ask the concerned family to join him for the work. He can take them to any city. A family has to spend a year with the same contractor and should go to the work assigned by him. He provides food and shelter at the work place. He also gives 20-30 rupees per day to each member. He deducts major portion of the wage towards the advance which was already given to Chenchu family. It is like bonded labour for Chenchus.

The tradition of migration is called as *gumpu kattuta* (grouping). Many *Gumpu mestrilu* (contractors) are actively working in this regard. Majority of these contractors are mediators (agents) to main contractors. They usually select the villages

that are going through a drought period and where illiteracy is high. They entice Chenchus of those villages by offering advance. These contractors are also opening an account in a liquor shop in the village for the benefit of their clients. The Chenchu man can go to the liquor shop at any time and consume liquor without paying money. But this will be deducted from his wages.

The place of migration is popularly known as *desam* (country). Many of the migrant Chenchus do not know where they are going. The contractors will take them to different cities across the country including Hyderabad, Visakhapatnam, Vijayawada, Chennai, Bangalore, Mumbai, Cuttack, Bhubaneswar, and Bhopal. The Chenchus cannot go back on their own to their native place. They wait for the year end when the contractor sends them back to their villages for a period of 15 days with the help of village level recruiter. The Chenchus can stay back in the village if they are not willing to join for the next year. But they often have to go back for work because of the debts. The contractor cannot enforce them in case if they pay the money. But as most of the Chenchus complain, the contractor always maintains some debt at least in the form of liquor account. Therefore, it is compulsion to most of them to go back in the next season. A continuous cycle of indebtedness operates between a Chenchu man or the family and the contractor.

The contractor system is operating at three levels. The main contractor or the primary contractor stays in the city and workers do not have any relation with him. Neither the contractor nor the worker is responsible or accountable to each other. He is not aware of the community of the worker. He maintains a relation with a sub-contractor. The sub-contractor maintains a direct relation with the worker. He knows the community of the worker. But he does not directly recruit the worker. He assigns the duty to an influential person of the village by providing commission based on the number of workers he/she recruits. The workers are more familiar with village level recruiter. He/she remains the most influential person till their contract terminates as he/she has to provide liquor or any other financial help at the time of requirement. Once the worker moves from the village, nothing will be in his/her control. The village level recruiter does not maintain any communication with the worker. Everything will be decided by the secondary contractor till the end of their contract. According to ML, a Chenchu *Gumpu Mestri* from Appaipally, "The Chenchus of this

village and nearby villages are always ready to go for construction work wherever they get more money. It is an attractive option for them because they are not getting anything in the nearby forest tract and they are not interested in cultivation. I am not forcing anybody but I am helping them to get some work. I help them for safe passage to workplace and back to village. I will maintain their work accounts and disburse money when they ask for it. I will get some commission from the main contractor in the town." He took Chenchus to Hyderabad and Guntur on the request of the major contactors as well as Chenchus. However, this kind of migration has not led to establishing permanent settlement at the work place because a person may be given work at different places every year. This is a temporary migration but influenced certain behavioural aspects of the Chenchus.

The inside to outside migration is not observed among the non-Chenchus because they have never lived in the interior forest except in very few cases such as Palutla of Prakasam district and Pechcheruvu of Kurnool district. Apart from this, there are no evidences for non-Chenchus habitations in the core territories of the forest. The non-Chenchus have migrated to Nallamalai region not only from nearby but also from far reaching villages. The Lambada tribe and Boya caste are the only communities which have reached even to core territories of the forest. For example, the Lambadas are living along with Chenchus in Palutla of Prakasam district which is in the core region of the forest. The Boyas lived with the Chenchus in Pechcheruvu of Kurnool district till their displacement to Kottalacheruvu along with their Chenchu neighbours of Pechcheruvu in 1985. All other non-Chenchu communities have settled in the fringe or foothills or outside the forest but in close vicinity. The presence of non-Chenchus at foot hills seems to be rapidly increasing in the last half century. Appaipally, Sri Rangapuram of Lingal mandal; Vatverlapally, Sarlapalli of Amarabad mandal from Mahabubnagar district and Rollapenta of Dornala mandal from Prakasam district are good examples for the migration of non-Chenchus into Chenchu territories. Many settlements close to forest have experienced the inflow of non-Chenchus. The process of migration has led to the contact not only with the Chenchus of different territorial groups but also with different groups of non-Chenchus. Therefore, migration has a deep influence all aspects of Chenchu life and extensively contributed to cultural diversity and change among the Chenchus.

Change is predominant among the Chenchus migrated to multi-ethnic villages and towns. In fact, the formation of few multi-ethnic villages explains the pattern of migration and resultant change. For example, Appaipally of Mahabubnagar district was a small Chenchu settlement with 5-10 Chenchu families, which developed into a multi-ethnic village of 20 castes and 3 tribal groups in last 60 years. Lack of resistance from the forest department as well as the Chenchus for deforestation and cultivation led to the flow of non-Chenchus in the course of time. The village is still attracting non-Chenchus for business activities because it is the locus for five settlements with huge population. However, all these developments made Chenchus part of a multi-ethnic village. Such developments brought changes in the cultural practices of the Chenchus of this cluster. This cluster includes Appaipally, Sri Rangapuram, Errapenta, Devu Cheruvu, and Mullem Cheruvu. Out of these settlements, Appaipally is a typical multi-ethnic settlement, Errapenta is entirely a Chenchu settlement, Sri Rangapuram is a multi-ethnic settlement but predominantly inhabited by Chenchus and Lambadas, very few families of caste groups are present. Devu Cheruvu and Mullem Cheruvu are entirely Lambada settlements. All the settlements are in 2-3 km distance from Appaipally except Errapenta which is approximately 5 km away from it. Errapenta is said to be the oldest settlement among all which falls under the fringe area because of its geographical placement. The Chenchus of Errapenta are carrying forward the traditional practices such as using the arrow in the marriage ceremony to identify auspicious time to tie the *taali*. But such tradition disappeared in Appaipally with the disappearance of bow and arrow culture.

In other cases, the Chenchus of one settlement moved as a whole from an interior place to fringe area. For example, the Chenchus of Pathuru of Lingal mandal of Mahabubnagar district belongs to only two *kulams*. They have migrated four decades ago from an interior hill settlement Gattu penta to a fringe place. But they haven't merged in any other settlement, instead; they have found a new settlement. However, they have never tried to name the settlement. The government has implemented a rehabilitation plan for these people during the years 1999-2000. Few families have moved to Dhararam, a village approximately 3 km away. Since then, they have started calling the old settlement as Pathuru (old village). There are many such cases as they were practicing seasonal nomadism. Many settlements in the interior areas have changed their locations in a course of time. Some are continuing in

the close vicinity of the old settlements but others have moved for few kilometres. Similar case identified in Prakasam district. The *Gandhinagar penta* of Yerragondapalem mandal has changed its location many times in last 30 years and recently stabilized with the construction of the houses for them by the ITDA.

Migration has brought the permutations and combinations of different social groups in multi-ethnic setting. It has facilitated the contact with wide variety of social and cultural groups. The migrant Chenchus gradually adapted to the practices of the Chenchus at migrated places and also certain practices of non-Chenchus of their respective villages. *Peerlu* (Muharram) festival is an example in this regard. The Chenchu families migrated from Appapuram to Appaipally are either celebrating or participating in the festival. The festival of an entirely different tradition adopted in a course of 30 years. They are following the rules and prescriptions of the festival. They have adopted the concept of '*halal*' too and consumed only meat of animals killed by cutting its throat by a Muslim man. For example, MS, a 48 years old man was migrated from Appapuram to Appaipally 25 years ago. He has never participated in the Peerlu festival while he was living in Appapuram. He was aware of the festival but not its procedures and Islamic symbols. But, now he is celebrating the festival and his house is adorned with Islamic symbols such as green flags, half-moon, and photographs of saints of Islamic tradition. He is an active participant in the festival along with his kin members. The migrants have also adapted certain other practices of the Chenchus of the village. For example, they never offer prayers to the Goddess Maisamma in Appapuram which is worshipped by the Chenchus of Appaipally. In fact, the Chenchus of Appapuram were worshipping Goddess Peddamma. But the family of MS offer prayers to Maisamma. They visit a popular shrine of Maisamma at Nayanapally at least once in a year, which is 30 km away from Appaipally. They are also worshipping Mukkidi Pochamma which is popular in Appaipally.

Migration has brought changes in the mode of celebration of rituals of childbirth, puberty, marriage, and death. The period of pollution enhanced in the case of puberty, menstruation, and death. The bride-price is gradually replaced by dowry in case of Chenchus living in towns and multi-ethnic villages. The bride-price is being taken by the parents of the bride instead of maternal uncle. Migration has brought changes in the dress patterns. They are celebrating birthdays of children. New Year

day has become an important occasion and they prefer to wear new dresses on that day. They are celebrating festivals in a large scale. The *Peerlu* festival and *Vinayaka Chaviti* are better examples for that.

Migration to towns and cities helped them to acquire skills pertaining to building construction. There are many experts in building construction from the Appaipally village. This is a rare occupation among the Chenchus. Such migration also led to the introduction of English medium education to few Children. There are around 30 percent of the Chenchu families of the village regularly migrating to urban centres for wage labour. But none of these families are settled in an urban centre. They usually come to the village once or twice in a year. Everybody used to come back at the time of *Dasara* festival and also prefers to attend *Peerlu* festival. The Chenchus who have migrated from the core territory to fringe or multi-ethnic villages are becoming wage labourers and occasionally cultivators. For example, the Chenchu families who have shifted from Appapuram to Appaipally became wage labourers and few members of these families are going on migration to cities for work. But two of the families migrated from Bourapuram to Billakallu are doing cultivation.

Displacement and Rehabilitation:

The process of displacement started in the early decades of the 20th century in the British administered regions of Nallamalai forest, particularly in the then Kurnool district of Madras presidency. According to the chief conservator of the forests of Madras, an enclosure was identified in 1932 for the Chenchus ear-marking 85 acres for dwelling sites and 332 acres for cultivation. Fürer-Haimendorf (1943: 312-314) discussed the formation of large settlements known as "gudems" out of many small settlements known as "pentas" in Madras Presidency. Therefore, it can be stated that the displacement of Chenchus started early in the twentieth century in the Madras Presidency by the then British government. The outcomes of such displacement were mentioned by Fürer-Haimendorf (1943). He (1943: 313) observes that lack of social cohesion is a major outcome. It is true even today with regard to the social relations among the inhabitants of a displaced village. Insufficiency of the resources is an immediate outcome of the establishment of large villages. Similar displacement has continued either grouped by force or by pursuance despite all the disadvantages. But this displacement confined to the Chenchus of Madras Presidency, that is, the

Chenchus of Kurnool, Guntur, and Prakasam districts of present day. The Chenchus of Nizam territory, that is, the Chenchus of Mahabubnagar, Nalgonda, and Rangareddy districts were largely unaffected. There is a *status quo* till the announcement for the establishment of Nagarjunasagar-Srisailam sanctuary in 1978. Chenchus were also affected by Srisailam and Nagarjunasagar dams.

Project Tiger

The Nagarjunasagar-Srisailam Sanctuary was notified in 1978. It was declared as a Tiger Reserve in 1983. The sanctuary was renamed as Rajiv Gandhi Wildlife Sanctuary in 1992. The Nallamalai was made into a reserve forest for the purpose of sanctuary. This has led to the displacement of many habitations of the Chenchu community. About 200 villages are situated in and around the reserve forest, out of which 120 villages are within the sanctuary limits. There are 24 villages, comprising 557 families with a population of 2285 in the core area of the sanctuary. The overall population density is 0.2 persons per square km. There are 8432 families with a population of 43978 are residing in the non-core area within the sanctuary limits. The remaining 80 villages with 24531 families consisting of 122751 people are in the fringe. The population statistics includes non-Chenchus too. The core and buffer zones are mostly inhabited by the Chenchus. The people living in core area were severely affected by the project which is no way useful for them. This has been directly affected the livelihoods of Chenchus. Prakash Reddy (2003: 163) opines "after it was established, the tiger population increased, and the movement of Chenchus in the core area was restricted because of tiger attacks." Similarly, Gangadharam and Padmavathi (1989) described the disastrous effects of the tiger project on the life and livelihoods of Chenchus. Tribal welfare department compensated their loss by giving goats. But, they are not habituated for cattle rearing. At the same time, these goats became pray for the tigers in the forest. The insurance schemes devised for goats also failed due to the difficulty in the identification of the dead body or its remains. The whole livelihood system of Chenchus is in danger because of tiger project and the resultant displacement.

Hydro-electric projects

There are two major dams on Krishna river in Nallamalai forest. The dam at Nagarjunasagar is a multi-purpose project; whereas, Srisailam is a hydro-electric

project. Both the dams have severely affected the livelihoods of Chenchus. The effects of Srisailam dam are very severe because of its location in the midst of Chenchu territory. Many of the traditional settlements displaced and rich forest resources were drowned due to these projects. Apart from the threat for the resources, they have also faced another threat with the inflow of outsiders who came in huge number as workers for the construction of the dam. Residential colonies have come up at Sunnipenta for non-tribals who are working in hydro-electric project. Gradually many other people too settled at this place for business and other purposes because it is just 9 km away from the popular pilgrimage centre Srisailam. As a result, it has grown as a town in a very short period of time. The typical Chenchu *penta* has developed as a new non-tribal habitation in the midst of Chenchu land because of the construction of a colony for the employees working in the hydro-electric project. At the same time, it has given more scope for a direct exploitation by outsiders. The ITDA which is meant for the development of Chenchus established at Sunnipenta. But Chenchus could not find place in this settlement as it became an alien place for them. In fact, they have voluntarily migrated to nearby Chenchu hamlets because of their inability to cope up with the developments. The construction of dam also led to the development of roads to Srisailam. It has done more damage for the Chenchus because of the feasibility for others to reach the forest. As a result, the contact with outsiders has become a regular affair. They have also started settling in the Chenchu territory because of the availability of large tracts of land for cultivation. This has led to the development hostile relations between Chenchus and outsiders.

The efforts for the displacement of Chenchus gained momentum after the establishment of these projects. The displacement is a force as well as a process that influenced the identity of the Chenchus. It always appears that Chenchus have never been interested in displacement. In fact, village community as a whole has never volunteered for long distance displacement. They were strongly resisting displacement plans of the government not simply because of the fear of a different environment, but; they are afraid of losing ownership on the homeland. The most important threat is loss of social networks because displacement creates a vacuum in the heart of their homeland. It is because of the creation of 1200 sq.km space for tigers. This environment and resources cannot be created at a new location. As a result, the most vital part of their identity (identifying with the habitat) is at stake.

The displacement of Chenchus is often imposed by the government agencies. The Chenchus of few interior settlements were displaced and rehabilitated in the districts to which the older settlement belongs. Few attempts to displace the Chenchus have failed to yield the positive result with the persistent resistance and repeated going back of the Chenchus. But the rehabilitation programme is partly successful in case of Kottalacheruvu of Kurnool district and Mulachintapally of Mahabubnagar district because some of the people from older hamlets settle at the new habitation but others have gone back. Rehabilitation programme is successful in case of Chenchugudem and Gudibanda of Mahabubnagar district because people are permanently settled in these villages. The constant effort of the government, continuous follow-up activities, and the incentives provided by the government helped people to settle in these villages. However, Chenchus never volunteered for any kind of rehabilitation programme.

The rehabilitation colonies have brought the Chenchus very close to the non-Chenchus. Therefore, resource competition and clash of interests are very prevalent in the rehabilitated settlements. The conflict of interests is not only between the Chenchus and non-Chenchus but also among the Chenchus from different original settlements. The displacement and rehabilitation have not only brought changes in the ecological setting but also created different combinations of human grouping which subsequently has influenced the ethnic identity of the Chenchu community.

The displacement of Chenchus is a multi-layered phenomenon. It involves change in habitat, its ecological and physical setting, adjustment at a new place, search for livelihoods, acquiring skills for alternate livelihoods if the new place failed to provide conventional livelihoods, and devising coping mechanisms. Therefore, one generation is often subjected to struggle in the process of displacement. The children of the community have been seriously affected by the displacement. For instance, Srivastava (2008: 542) mentions "...as a consequence of the building of the... Nagarjunasagar dam, their [Chenchu] children started working as bonded labourers in stone quarries and mines. [They] fall prey to ill health, alcoholism and other vices." It is true because the parents always force the children to take up some work as there is a need for more working hands for the survival in a new setting.

The scope for cohesion among the Chenchus of different territories is getting deteriorated and the Chenchus displaced to new locations divided like leaflets of a compound leaf. They are living together in a village but the division is very clear among the Chenchus from different mother settlements. The vacuum in social relations is a dangerous and irreparable outcome and a major threat to the identity of Chenchus. For example, the Chenchus living in core area were having marital relations and other kind of social ties with the people living close to their hamlet regardless of the administrative boundaries. After dislocation, the people of the core moved towards the fringe or plain area of their respective districts. This has increased physical distance among the people once lived in proximity and decreased physical distance with the people with whom once they were not having significant marital or economic relations. Moreover, displacement in this context is often a pooling process in terms of establishing a single new settlement for the people living in different hamlets. This resulted in the lack of cohesion even among the inhabitants of rehabilitated villages such as Kottalacheruvu of Kurnool district and Mulachintapally of Mahabubnagar district. In few cases, people have tried to revive relations with their old friends of core area but rehabilitated in new territories. But, it is so painful to travel long distances to reach the relatives. There are two such cases observed. In one case, the Chenchu man of Sivapuram of Kurnool district secured a bride from Appapuram of Mahabubnagar district. In another case, a Chenchu man of Appaipally of Mahabubnagar district secured a bride from Yerragondapalem of Prakasam district. In the first case, the Chenchu family of Sivapuram moved from an interior *penta* which was once close to Appapuram. In the second case, the Chenchu family of Appaipally as well as Yerragodapalem moved in different directions towards the fringe and the town of their respective districts. It is almost 150 km distance by the road in between two villages in the first case and 180 km in the second case. In the first case, people prefer to walk through the forest which is approximately 40 km but there is no other option in the second case. In the recent years, an intensive attempt is made by the government to move the people of Appapuram and the cluster of settlements from the interior of the forest. This can obviously lead to the further decline of social relations among the dislocated people of core territories. It will also take significant time to adjust to the new habitat. They have to learn the skills required for new occupations. They should habituate to new means of livelihood. At the least, one generation has to spend the life under utterly dissatisfied social, economic, and

political conditions. They should be under the severe crisis of identity like any other set of rehabilitated people. This can be understood from the experiences of certain old rehabilitated settlements such as Bairlutygudem of Kurnool district.

The differences in dialect of the language have created problems pertaining to identity and adjustment. The phonemes and usage of words are very different in case of the Chenchus of the forest and plains of Mahabubnagar district. In fact, the Chenchus of interior settlements of this district use few terms which are unknown to the Chenchus of the plains of the same district. They always comment on each other about their dialects. In fact, this is a most significant marker that distinguishes the Chenchus of both the territories of this district. In such cases, the displacement of the people of core areas obviously results in maladjustment not only with non-Chenchus but also with the members of their own community.

The Chenchus rehabilitated in multi-ethnic villages of non-Chenchus are more conscious and assertive of their identity as "the Chenchu" because there is a need to exhibit their identity in the form of unity. For example; Chenchugudem, Gudibanda, and Macharam of Mahabubnagar district and Kottalacheruvu, Bairlutygudem, and Nallakaluva of Kurnool district are either part of a multi-ethnic setting or very close to such villages. However, the assertion on identity may lead to its glorification by the bearers in the light of degradation of the same by others.

The process of displacement faced severe resistance from the Chenchus of interior forest. There are so many examples for such failures but the most prominent is the displacement of a group of settlements in the core area of the forest of Mahabubnagar district. They are; Appapuram, Bourapuram, Rampuram, Pullaipally, Mallapuram, Irlapenta, and Medimankal. The first displacement effort of these villages dates back to 1957 which is the part of integration plan of the Government of India (Prakash Reddy, 1979: 82). But it has miserably failed for many reasons but the immediate reason is an entirely different environment at the rehabilitation colony. All the Chenchus have moved back to their original settlements and government also kept quiet till the announcement of sanctuary. The displacement efforts of the government failed even after the announcement of the tiger reserve. However, few Chenchus have settled in Mannanur which is located close to plains because of the offer of jobs in the

forest department. After this attempt, the government has tried to establish a single larger settlement in the forest. As part of this, Appapuram Penta identified as the centre to settle all the Chenchus at one place. A school was established in the village. A *kutcha* road was developed for 18 km to connect the settlement with the road connecting Srisailam and Hyderabad. A GCC store opened to supply daily requirements for the Chenchus. Some cemented houses were also constructed for them. However, this also ended in failure as the Chenchus of different settlements are not willing to stay together because of the insufficient resources at a new place. The customary rights over the resources near the village are with the original inhabitants of the village and the newcomers can hardly get any share in such resources. At the same time, the Chenchus of other hamlets of this cluster are not willing to lose rights over the resources close to their hamlets. The government has brought the Chenchus of other hamlets to Appapuram but they have gone back to old settlements within weeks. The government has recently (in 2010) started persuading the Chenchus of this cluster for displacement. It has announced a package of 10 lakh rupees for each family to settle at a new place. The forest authorities have undertaken a series of meetings with the Chenchus of these hamlets. They have convinced more than 50 per cent of the Chenchus in favour of new rehabilitation plan. Among them, majority are less than 30 years of age. The most influential person of this cluster, TM, a 65 years old man of Appapuram village did not accept for displacement. The local forest officials believe that it is very easy to displace the Chenchus of these settlements if TM accepts for the proposal. But, TM denied such proposal. He says, "I am no more an influential person. If I am such an influential man, how it is possible for officials to convince more than half of the people of my settlement for displacement. I am not opposing the decision of the young people but the old people want to end lives in the forest. We cannot survive either in Mannanur or in Achempeta which are proposed by the forest department." But, he believes "the displacement is inevitable because officers are firm this time with the failure of last two attempts. They are asking us to move from the forest from last 40 years. But, they were quiet during the last 15 years because of the presence of naxalites in the forest. They have started it again because of the disappearance of naxalites. Now no one is ready to argue on our behalf." In 2010, the Chenchus of these settlements have seen a number of NGOs and other interest groups, some of them supporting the claim of people to stay in the forest and others trying to convince them in favour of displacement. Interestingly, a group of

Chenchu teachers from the multi-ethnic villages and towns of Mahabubnagar district organized a campaign in the forest to convince their fellow Chenchus in favour of displacement. This group is promising them to negotiate with the government for rehabilitation very close to forest with a better rehabilitation package. However, the Chenchus who are resisting the rehabilitation plan are unwilling to accept such proposal too. Finally, the group of teachers of Chenchu community promised them to support their view to stay back in the forest. The head of the group of teachers, KV, opines "the Chenchus living in the interiors of the forest need to come out from the forest for better educational, health, and other kind of facilities. They can adjust in course of time if they are rehabilitated in the settlements very close to forest. They can gradually reduce the dependency on forest if they habituate for cultivation. However, we are not willing to force them but we want to motivate them by explaining benefits of living outside the forest." It is observed that the effort of the teachers of Chenchu community is voluntary, neither motivated nor funded by any government or non-government agency.

Few examples of rehabilitated settlements explain the pattern of displacement and rehabilitation and its impact on the identity of the Chenchus.

Kottalacheruvu, Kurnool district:

The Chenchus of Pechcheruvu, an interior settlement of Kurnool district are rehabilitated at Kottalacheruvu, a settlement 30 km away and located at the fringe of the forest in the same district. Despite the shortfalls, it was the only rehabilitation programme involved Chenchus in its planning and implementation. In the first stage, the consultations were made by the officials of forest department and District Tribal Welfare Office (DTWO) of Kurnool district with the Chenchus of Pechcheruvu village of the same district. They have convinced Peddamanushulu (elders and representatives of different *kulams*) of the village. The officials of DTWO explained them on a package and the forest officials warned about the possibility of a forcible eviction. The elders of the community have accepted for the package after prolonged deliberations with the officials. In the second stage, the opportunity for the selection of a suitable place for a new habitation was also given to the representatives of the village. But this opportunity was given with five options keeping in the view of availability of land for a new habitation, availability of cultivable land, and the

proximity to forest. The options are Indireswaram, Edavali, Poturaju Penta, Lalabaikunta, and Balamma Kottalu. All the settlements are from Atmakur mandal of Kurnool district. The Chenchus elders have preferred Balamma Kottalu over other settlements. All other settlements are either having good number of Chenchu families or having Chenchu settlements at a very nearest place. The ownership over resources such as *sarris* and gum trees in those territories was established by those Chenchus. Balamma Kottalu was having only eight Chenchu households and close to the forest. The resources close to Balamma Kottalu were not completely occupied by the Chenchus of this hamlet because other Chenchu settlements are at a distance of more than 5 kilometres. The government has announced a rehabilitation package which includes a house and five acres of land to each family; a hospital, school, and a daily requirements depot of GCC in the village; 5000 rupees and 50 kg of rice to serve the immediate needs; and transportation from the old settlement to new at the time of shift. In the third stage, the government started constructing the houses at the new settlement. Later, all the Chenchus were shifted from Pechcheruvu to Balamma Kottalu which is later named as Kottalacheruvu with the arrival of new people. The government provided a house to every family but did not give land on their arrival. It has given only 1000 rupees and 20 kg of rice on their arrival to Kottalacheruvu. In the later years, it has given 2.5 acres of land to each family which is half in the assured land. Irrigation facilities were not provided. The hospital and school are established in the later years. Few of them have moved back to their original settlement within a year with the dissatisfaction over new village. The government is again making efforts to completely shift the Chenchus from Pechcheruvu.

Gudibanda, Mahabubnagar district:

Gudibanda is a rehabilitated settlement in Balmoor Mandal, Mahabubnagar district. It is 10 km away from mandal headquarters. This hamlet was created by the authorities for the Chenchus who were displaced due to sanctuary. There have been 45 families living in the village since 1998. The Chenchus of Ramagiri were shifted to Gudibanda. Ramagiri was located in the forest approximately 20 km away from the present settlement. People were not interested in shifting from their original habitation. In fact, they have resisted the efforts of the government. The officials visited Ramagiri several times to convince Chenchus in favour of displacement. They have also threatened the villagers by denying food grains and other needs. The

salesman of GCC stopped visiting their settlement to purchase forest products. This posed a major threat to them. The Chenchus survived for sometime even after the non-cooperation by the authorities. But, gradually they have felt it difficult to survive without the help of the government because of the high prices of grains and low prices for their products at the middlemen. As a result, six families have come from the forest in the first phase. The ITDA had allotted houses for them in the new settlement. Gradually, all the people vacated from the forest and occupied the houses at the new settlement. The new settlement invited them with lots of problems. It has failed to fulfil their aspirations. The houses are arranged in rows without any space in between them. This is totally different from the setting of their original habitation. The Chenchus were not impressed by cemented houses. There are only houses in the new settlement but not the sources of livelihood. They are not habituated for cultivation or wage labour. As a result, many of them left Gudibanda and went back to forest in search of livelihood. But, forest officials prevented them in many ways from collecting the forest products. At the same time officials from ITDA promised them to provide two acres of arable land and necessary equipment for cultivation. As a result, they have come back to Gudibanda. The authorities provided land only for 25 families. In the course of time many of them have left the land due to lack of knowledge in cultivation as well as necessary support from the officials. They have given the land on lease to the peasants of Kondanagula village. Some of them turned into wage labourers and others went on migration with local contractors. Some others are still going to forest for seasonal migration to collect Minor Forest Products (MFP).

MN is a 25 years young man living in Gudibanda. He has completed intermediate but is unemployed. He is practicing agriculture. He says "there is always a quarrel between Chenchus and the officers concerned with Chenchus. The officers never tried to understand the situation from the point of view of Chenchus. For them Chenchus are illiterate objects. They want us to obey whatever they say. But our people are not in a position to listen others. Our mother forest can provide everything required for our livelihood. Keeping us away from the forest means denying the access to our own livelihood base. Therefore, there is always a feeling of alienation from our own resources and depending on others. The Chenchus will continue to struggle till they adjust to the present life. The officials have to understand this aspect before the implementation of any policies and programmes."

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The case of Gudibanda reflects the problems of adjustment of Chenchus in the new environment. The new settlement is not only failed in providing a natural setting but also failed in providing livelihood to the people. There may not be a physical unrest in this case. But the disturbance in livelihoods led to psychological unrest among the displaced people. They have displayed it time and again at the officials in a limited way. They will simply leave the village if they fail to fulfil their quest for a descent and undisturbed access to livelihood.

Crystallization of religion:

It is an important phenomenon in the process of change among the Chenchus. They were having a set of belief systems which were never considered as religion by them. Therefore, one can argue that they have adapted religion instead of moving to a higher order in a defined religious practice. They have often termed as "Hindus" by the non-Chenchus and other external agencies which is hardly true. The Hinduisation has begun by 5th century AD. It can be attributed to the growing importance of Srisailam as a Shaivite shrine. The inscriptions of rulers clearly mentions about the Srisaila Parvata and the presiding deity of the place. The evidences match with the present location of the Shiva shrine. The Hindu *Puranas* have also mentioned about the Shaivite shrine at Srisailam. In fact, there is no description about the people of this region either in *Puranas* or in inscriptions. Therefore, the pattern of Hindu influence is not very clear. However, we can assume that the Chenchus might have influenced by the non-Chenchus in the migratory route during their migration from other territories to Nallamalai forest or they might have been influenced by the royal pilgrimages to Srisailam shrine.

The impact of Islam on the Chenchus of Nizam territories is largely influenced by the ruling class. But the Chenchus were never converted into Islam. In fact, the Chenchus of the erstwhile Nizam territories follow a fusion of belief systems. This is observed in the fringe and multi-ethnic villages. The Chenchus have adapted little tradition of the Islam. It might be the reason for the continuation of the traditional as well as Hindu belief system while adopting Islamic traditions. The Chenchus neither recite Quran nor visit the Mosque. They are not even aware of Quran. It reveals that the Chenchus are still unconcerned with the religion. Instead, they are concerned with the concept of God regardless of the name.

At Salleswaram fair, Mahabubnagar District

Religious symbols in a Chenchu house in Appapuram of Mahabubnagar

Church in BKV Palem Chenchugudem of Guntur District

During Peerlu festival in Appaipally of Mahabubngar district

The Chenchus are influenced by Christianity because of an attempt by external forces. The Hinduism and Islam have a royal patronage and influenced Chenchus. But the agents of Christianity are not from a ruling class and it is a phenomenon of late 20th century unlike age-old influence of Hinduism and Islam. Hinduism and Islam are adapted by Chenchus from the neighbouring groups but not enforced by external agents, but in quite contrast; Christianity is propagated by external agents. Therefore, the Chenchus did not volunteer for the conversion into Christianity and offered resistance to the agents propagating Christianity. Unlike Hinduism and Islam, Christianity has debarred all the traditional practices of the Chenchus as irrelevant and superstitious which is not acceptable to Chenchus. However, the Chenchus from few settlements of Guntur and Prakasam districts are influenced by Christianity. This is possible because of the special efforts made by the agents of religious promotion.

The process of crystallization of religion of the Chenchus has brought changes not only in the belief systems but also values and norms of the community. The concept of God has changed. The concepts of good, bad and sin have drastically changed. The rites, rituals, ceremonial practices, and festivals are being altered with the influence of different religions. The relations among the people are also influenced after the adaption of Christianity. The consolidation of religion has also contributed to the internal diversity of Chenchu community. The man and nature relationship is changing in the context of Chenchu with the adoption of new religions and livelihoods. The conflicts are also observed among the agents of Hinduism and Christianity in some Chenchu settlements. As a result, the religious identity is getting momentum. Therefore, it can be assumed that the ethnic identity of Chenchu may include the assertion on a religious identity in near future.

Hinduism

Chenchus have a profound impact of Hinduism on their traditions because of the centuries of contact with caste Hindus. In fact, the present day Chenchus believe that they are Hindus. They are not separating their traditions from Hinduism. The sculptures and art on Mahaprakaram (compound wall) of Srisailam temple represent a man with bow and arrows and some are in hunting position. The Chenchus undoubtedly says the images and sculptures represent the Chenchus. However, the stone carvings and sculptures are not their work and they accept it. But, they claim

that the subjects in such carvings are definitely Chenchus as they are the only hunter-gatherers in the territory. They also claim that the Vruddha Mallikharjuna (Old Mallikharjuna/Shiva) which is in the temple of Srisailam was installed by them. But it was replaced by the young one by outsiders. There are stories pertaining to the replacement of the old God with the young one. Later, there were many Shiva temples constructed in the midst of the Chenchu territory along the way of foot-routes leading to Srisailam. A Shiva temple near Bourapuram penta of Mahabubnagar district and temples in Kurnool district are popular in these foot-routes. These temples are believed to be constructed during 15th and 16th centuries.

The religious practices of Chenchus have been significantly influenced by these temples. It can be strongly believed that the Shaivaite and Vaishnavaite stories pertaining to the origin of Chenchus were strongly influenced by local factors. The development of different traditions of Hinduism at different places of this region contributed in this regard. This argument can be supported by the major places of worship and the stories of origin of Chenchus in that locality. For example, the Chenchus near Ahobilam of Kurnool district traces their origin to Lord Narasimha Swamy and Lakshmi, whereas; the Chenchus close to Srisailam of the same district traces their origin to Lord Mallikharjuna and Bhramaramba.

It is interesting to note that the researcher has never come across such stories of origin among the Chenchus of multi-ethnic villages and towns of Mahabubnagar district. The Chenchus of these territories are not aware and uninterested about such stories of origin. But the stories were narrated by the Chenchus from the core settlements such as Appapuram, Pullaipally, Bourapur, Irlapenta of the same district. However, all the Chenchus of these settlements are also not aware of these stories except few elders. Therefore, the strength of oral tradition among the Chenchus is at question. However, the Chenchus of these villages have traced their origin to Lord Mallikharjuna and Bhramaramba. The stories of origin were also narrated by the Chenchus of Maddhimadugu village of the same district which is 100 km away from Appapuram or any other above-mentioned Pentas. They have traced origin from Lord Narasimha and Chenchu Lakshmi. Many of them have quoted a popular Telugu movie Chenchu Laksmi while narrating the story. They have also referred to Anjaneya Swamy or Lord Hunuman. There are many Chenchus in the village with the

name Anji and Hanumayya. According to UA, "the Chenchus are as stronger as Lord Hanuman who is popular for his unbelievable strength." However, such references can be attributed to the location of a popular Hanuman temple in the village.

The great tradition of Hinduism has been significantly developed in the Chenchu territory. But Chenchus rarely visits big temples. Even today, they have local shrines of worship. They install a stone anywhere in the forest, apply turmeric and saffron and offer prayers. They offer a small part of any product they have collected from the forest or a small piece of meat of their hunt. Sometimes, they leave a part of the product wherever they have got it. For example, they offer part of the product at the same tree in case of plant products and they offer meat to the place where they have killed the animal. They believe that everything they get is with the mercy of God. They usually name the stones as Lingamayya, Mallayya, and Maisamma. There is a big Hanuman temple in Appaipally village of Mahabubnagar. It was constructed by non-Chenchus with the funds collected from non-Chenchus of the village as well as from political leaders. The Chenchus of the village rarely visit this temple. Instead, they go to Lord Mallayya shrine installed by the Chenchus on the top of the hill called Mallayya Gutta close to the village or they worship any God installed by them in the agricultural fields. However, the deity of a temple is not important in this regard, instead; importance goes to the fact that who have installed it. Similar behaviour is observed among the Chenchus of Kottalacheruvu of Kurnool district and BKV Palem Chenchugudem of Guntur district. However, their occasional visits to these temples are undeniable.

There is a small temple in Chilakacherla Chenchugudem of Prakasam district. It is said to be Lord Rama temple constructed by the contractor who has got contract from ITDA for the construction of houses in the village. It is actually a small room. There are no idols inside it. Instead, the Chenchus have kept three flat stones of conical shape. The middle one is longer, symbolizes Lord Rama, the left one is shorter symbolizes Goddess Sita, and the right one is in-between in size and symbolizes Laxmana, the brother of Rama. The Chenchus have applied turmeric and saffron to these symbols. No outsider visits this place. In fact, it is a very rare feature of having a Rama temple in a Chenchu settlement. They do not hold any special prayers at the temple except on the day of *Sri Rama Navami* and *Ugadi* festivals. All

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the Chenchus of the village gather at the temple to offer prayers and to dance together on those days.

As it was mentioned earlier, fairs and festivals of Hindu tradition have become an integral part of the religious life and have a greater influence on the identity of Chenchus. Most prominent among them is Salleswaram fair in Mahabubnagar district. It is organized for five days during *Chaitra Pournami* (full-moon in the first month of Indian calendar). The place is popular among outsiders not only as a place of worship but also for its scenic beauty with trees, hills, and waterfalls. The youth at the fair who came from Hyderabad say, "it is adventurous trip in this forest, hills, and particularly getting down into this valley". The fair has attracted approximately one lakh devotees in 2009 as well as in 2010 despite difficulties in reaching the valley shrine. The presiding deity is known as Salleswara Lingamayya. A story pertaining to the shrine is very popular among the Chenchus of this region. The story is about the movement of the God from a hill near Appaipally to Salleswaram in search of the murderers of his sister and finally finding and killing them near Salleswaram. He has never returned back from the valley with the grief of his sister's death. The place was identified by a Chenchu man of Appapuram who requested Lingamayya to come out of the cave. But he has denied. After few years Chenchus have found a Lingam at the place where Lingamayya stayed. Since then, they have started worshipping that place.

The Hindu installations such as temples in the forest led to the exposure of the Chenchus to the non-Chenchu outsiders. At the same time, the importance of Chenchus as the protectors of pilgrims in the forest declined with the development of roads, means of transport, and the basic amenities to reach these temples. But, such developments have further enhanced the interaction with the non-Chenchus. Therefore, the Hindu pilgrims not only influenced the religious behaviour of the Chenchus but also many other aspects of their life. The Chenchus are gradually habituated to participate in the rituals, festivals, and cults of Hinduism. If an outsider inquire Chenchus about their religion, either they keep quiet or say that they are Hindu. It shows that some of the Chenchus are not very conscious of religion. In fact, for them, there was no such idea as religion except a set of belief systems. The answer 'Hindu' is because of the influences in the recent history. They have been gradually absorbed into Hindu religion. They are more receptive to Hinduism because they

believe that their practices are similar to caste-Hindus and part of Hinduism. The religious consciousness or an emerging religious identity is an outcome of the interventions of different agencies that are promoting religion. The festivals like *Vinayaka Chaviti* are being celebrated by the Chenchus by installing huge idols with external support. A Hindu religious organization, *Vanavasi Kalyani Parishad* (VKP) is active in this region and promoting religious interests among the Chenchus.

Islam

The influence of Islam is predominant on the Chenchus of Mahabubnagar district, whereas; it is partly observed among the Chenchus of few settlements of Kurnool and Prakasam districts. The Chenchus of Mahabubnagar district pray deities such as Saidulu, Hussainayya, Peerlu, and Dargayya of Islamic tradition along with the deities of indigenous tradition as well as Hinduism. Therefore, it is impossible to separate the Chenchus of Mahabubnagar district under the tag of a specific religion. It is a fusion of local tradition, Hindu tradition, and Islamic tradition. Islamic influence is observed in Bairlutygudem and Nagalutygudem of Kurnool district.. Few Chenchus of these settlements are having the personal names Dargayya, Dargamma, Hussainayya, and Hussainamma, Saidulu, and Saidamma. But, they are neither keeping the symbols in their houses nor celebrating any festivals of Islamic tradition. The Chenchus of Chenchugudem of Prakasam district attends to watch *Peerlu* festival celebrated by non-Chenchus in the Chilakacherla village of the same district. But they have never participated in the celebration.

Chenchus are the key participants in the celebrations of Muharram festival in the Appaipally village of Mahabubnagar district. The main *Peeru; Pedda Khasim* (which is considered as elder brother among all) possessed by a Chenchu whose grandfather has started the tradition in the village. MS, who is also believed to be the founder of the village, invited a Muslim man (AN) to the village 40 years ago. He is still living with family in Appaipally. He is 70 years old. MS came to know about his skills in healing the diseases and asked him to stay with his family in Appaipally. He has given a huge plot of land for the family of AN. He has also requested AN to help in organizing the Peerlu festival which was popular by that time in the nearby Lingal village. AN has accepted to serve as a medicine man as well as the priest for Peerlu festival. In later years few other Muslim families came to the village with the

encouragement of AN. All of those families are the kin of AN. At present there are 12 Muslim families in the village. They have influenced the Chenchus of the village. The fellow Chenchus have joined MS in the celebration of the festival. His successors are continuing the tradition. In course of the time, non-Chenchus of the village also joined the Chenchus to celebrate the festival. The mode of celebration of the festival might have attracted the Chenchus. This festival involves rhythmic dances, songs and music. There are no restrictions on any community of the village to dance and sing at the celebration. People can also participate in all such kind of activities after taking the liquor. But the persons who lift the *Peeru* should follow a pious lifestyle for 10 days. Coconut and banana which are rarely offered by the Chenchus even for Hindu deities are offered during the celebration.

The families of Katraju *kulam* of Appaipally visit a *Dargah* at Jeenugupally once in every year. The *Dargah* is 25 km from the village. The village is an ancestral habitat for some families of this *kulam*. Their predecessors had moved to Appannapenta (Appaipally) which was a resource-rich settlement. They are visiting the *Dargah* even now because of the association of their forefathers with the *Dargah*. They sacrifice goats and fowls at the *Dargah*. They stay a day and night at *Dargah* along with all the members of family. But all these families are having symbols of Hindu as well as Islamic traditions in their houses. They are also celebrating festivals of Hindu tradition such as Shivaratri, Ugadi, Sri Ramanavami etc. The mode of celebration of festivals of different traditions reflects the fusion of different traditions. They offer coconut at *Peerlu* festival and also at *Dargah* which is a practice of Hindus and they keep the ash of incense sticks near both the eyes while participating in Hindu festivals which is a practice of the Islamic tradition.

The Chenchus never go to a Mosque and no one declare himself or herself as a Muslim. Therefore, it can be assumed that the influence of Islam on Chenchus is limited to certain religious practices. In fact, it can be said that they have adopted little tradition of Islam. In addition to that, they believe Islam as polytheistic religion. They believe in Saidulu, Hussainayya, Dargayya, and Peerlu as deities but not very much aware of the concept of Allah. Therefore, *Dargahs* of saints treated as places of worship instead of Mosque.

Christianity

The religious conversion is a long term process in which circumstances play a significant role. For example, health, education, shelter, and livelihood problems are prime factors in this process and helpful to religious preachers to intervene among the Chenchus. Initially they help the people to come out of their problems and gradually convince them about their ideology. Circumstances make the whole family or few members of the family to attend a Church. The discussion on their problems and how God will help them to come out of such problems gives psychological relief to the devotees. They make it as a habit to go to Church. No family or the person gets detached from their traditional belief systems as soon as he/she start going to a temple or a church or a *dargah*. However, traditional beliefs are gradually disappearing with the systematic efforts by the religious preachers or organizations. Christian organizations are using women as tools of change. The heavy drinking habit of men is a factor behind the increasing acceptance of Christianity among the women. The religious preachers or organizations of Christianity are preaching them abandoning the alcohol help those people to get salvation and God will help only those people to come out of their problems. At the same time, these organizations are lending their helping hand to Chenchus by extending various kinds of assistance ranging from emotional to financial help. They are in consistent contact with the people to make them feel belongingness. This gives rise to the success of their attempts to convert the Chenchus. In this context, it can be said that the five stage model formulated by Sahay (1992: 77) is apt to understand the Christianization process among the Chenchus. According to him, oscillation, scrutinization, combination, indigenization, retroversion are the stages in this process through which the indigenous groups are Christianized.

There is a profound impact of Christianity on the Chenchus of Prakasam and Guntur districts but only minimal impact observed in Mahabubnagar and Kurnool districts. Unlike Hinduism and Islam, the Christianity has wiped out most of the indigenous practices of the Chenchus wherever it is strongly rooted. But, the indigenous practices are observed among the converted Chenchus wherever Christianity is in its inception. In such settlements, indigenous practices, Hindu traditions, Islamic traditions, and Christian practices go hand-in-hand. However, the religious identity is getting crystallized with the intervention of Christianity in this

region. In Sivalingapuram village of Guntur district, the Christian Chenchus firmly answer as Christian when asked about their religion. They have also changed their old names of Chenchu tradition such as Lingaswamy, Lingamma, Mallayya, Mallamma etc., with the Biblical names such as Yesayya, Immanuel, Joseph, Bestamma, Mary etc. They call among themselves with these names. However, the non-converts and rest of the villagers address them with old names. The Chenchus of this village trace the influence of Christianity for approximately 20 years. They do not worship the deities of any other tradition. They do not have the symbols of any other tradition in the house. They do not visit any ancient Chenchu shrines in the forest. YV, a 42 years man who was converted to Christianity says "It is sin to keep the symbols of any other religion. Yesu Prabhuvu (Jesus) does not come to our protection if we do so. I have thrown all the Hindu symbols in the pond after the recovery of my sick son with the blessings of Yesu Prabhuvu eight years ago." The converts of this village do not participate in any festivals of other traditions even if they are celebrated by the entire village. For example, *Poleramma* festival celebrated by all the people of the village whenever any calamity or disease affect entire village. But the converts do not participate in it. They do not even take the *Prasadam* (sacred food which is offered to God) offered to any God except Jesus even if the non-converts accept the same from the converts. The ardent opposition to participate in the rituals celebrated by all the inhabitants and rejecting the *Prasadam* led to some conflicts among Christian Chenchus and other inhabitants of the village. The antagonism between the Chenchu converts and non-converts intensified with the opposition of converts to allow the procession of Lord Rama in front of Church on the eve of Sri Rama Navami. This has led to a quarrel between both the groups of Chenchus. Finally, the *Kamma* caste people of the village have interfered and resolved the conflict. But this conflict has roots in the objection of non-converts on use of loud speakers in the Church. These conflicts contributed to a divide among the Chenchus and the intensification of religious identity. The converts and non-converts are not inviting each other for ceremonies and other celebrations. In fact, the non-converts opine that the converts are "impure Chenchus" and not entitled to be identified as Chenchus.

Some Chenchu men of the Sivalingapuram village practice *Shiva Māla* or *Shiva Deeksha* which is the practice by Shiva cult. The Christian Chenchus of the village have also started a practice called *Yesu Māla* or *Yesu Deeksha* which is not

observed among the Chenchus of any other settlement. The rules, procedures, and the number of days in this *Māla* or *Deeksha* (cult) are similar to any other *Māla* in Hindu tradition. But the place of its practice and the colour of the dress are different. The practitioners of *Yesu Mala* wear white dress and practice it in Church. But they also wear a chain of 108 beads and chant a mantra "*Oh Yesu Prabhuva*" for 108 times by using the chain. The symbol of cross is there in the middle of the chain. The Chenchus end the *Māla* on 42nd day at Sagarmatha Church at Nagarjuna Sagar and take a ritual bath in the Krishna River. A fusion of Christian and Hindu traditions is observed in this cult. They are also celebrating Christmas by displaying huge symbols of 'star' in front of house with the support of local church. The Chenchus who have adopted Christianity explicitly say "we believe Yesu Prabhuvu".

Implications of shift in the religious ideas:

Giving up the traditional belief systems and destroying the traditional symbols may be a serious blow to the identity. For instance, *Vanavasi Kalyani Parishad* (VKP) has distributed pamphlets carrying the message about the possible loss of the benefits and Chenchu status of the Christian converts. The representatives of this organization have also conducted few meetings among the Chenchus to explain the same. However, this kind of campaign is having a negligible impact on the converted Chenchus but influenced the people who are having an inclination to accept the Christianity. Two such cases are observed among the Chenchus of Tummalabayalu of Prakasam district. BV of this village says, "There are certain good things in that religion (Christianity). Some men have abandoned the consumption of liquor. But we came to know that we are going to lose the benefits if we accept Christianity. We are not ready to lose the benefits. Therefore, we are not ready to convert to Christianity." This kind of the situation may lead to decline in the self-confidence of the people. They may not believe in themselves because of loss of faith on the time-immemorial belief systems. Above everything, the loss of identity may not be easily compensated. However, the long term impact of religious conversions cannot be easily predicted as the conversion phenomenon is very new to the Chenchus. At the same time, it can be stated that religious identities might not supersede ethnic identity.

A sharp division is maintained by the non-Christian Chenchus and Christian Chenchus in Sivalingapuram of Guntur district. The non-Christian Chenchus and

Christian Chenchus of Kurnool and Prakasam districts do not maintain any sharp division despite certain conflicts among them. The Christian converts in these districts did not completely move away from indigenous traditions. They participate in the festivals organized by fellow non-Christian Chenchus. They accept *Prasadam* at those festivals. All of them mutually invite others for ceremonies. For example, the Christian Chenchus of BKV Palem Chenchugudem of Guntur district and Shivapuram of Kurnool district visit the shrines of local tradition. However, few cases of strict opposition to other kinds of practices are also observed in few settlements of these districts. Minor conflict has taken place among the Christian and non-Christian Chenchus of Thummalabayalu of Prakasam district pertaining to the use of loud speakers in a Church while the members of other group practicing *Shiva Mala*. Two families of Christian converts of this village moved from old house to a new one to stay along with other Christian Chenchus. Similarly, one family shifted the house in Chenchugudem of Prakasam district. But no major conflicts are identified in any other Chenchu settlements.

There are few demands from some of the non-converted Chenchus to disqualify the Christian converts from Chenchu status as well as the status of Scheduled Tribe (ST). They have also threatened the converted Chenchus to cut the benefits from ITDA. BV, a 49 year old Chenchu from Thummalabayalu says, "The converted Chenchus do not have a moral right to claim the benefits from the government. They should not call themselves as Chenchus. They should be the Chenchus in practice. They have ignored our great father *Mallanna* and spoiled our tradition. What qualifies them to claim the status of Chenchu?" However, BV and many others are influenced by *Vanavasi Kalyani Parishad* (VKP) to raise their voice against Christian converts. But a Christian Chenchu from Chenchugudem of Prakasam district, AP says "We have stopped drinking the liquor after believing *Yesu Prabhuvu* (Jesus). Yesu do not protect us if we drink liquor." His wife AA says "This is the best change happened with this new God." Chenchus are not serving as Pastors in the Church. A non-Chenchu from a nearest town or a village conducts Sunday prayers and gives a message. But in Sivalingapuram of Guntur district, an educated Chenchu man delivers the message in the absence of a Pastor from other village.

The religious conversion and anti-conversion programmes by non-Chenchus leading to conflicts in the Chenchu settlements. The conflicts based on religious aspects are very new to Chenchus. These are instigated by different groups of outsiders. Few NGOs are also playing key role in the religious promotion activity; therefore, they are also responsible for the conflicts over religious issues. Some organizations are even practicing malicious methods of religious promotion. The Chenchus term some organizations as 'deceiving'. BA, a 55 years old man from Thummalabayalu of Prakasam district says "All these religious organizations are spoiling our peaceful life. Do they have a right to disturb our lives?" The Chenchus are not participating in the promotion of Christianity but it is promoted by non-Chenchus among Chenchus. But, the Chenchus of Mahabubnagar district are actively participating in the promotion of Hinduism. However, they do not accept the concept 'promotion of Hinduism'. KV of Kondanagula village of Mahabubnagar district is a Chenchu teacher and an active participant in the promotion of Hinduism. He says, "We are not promoting Hinduism among our people because they are already practicing it. We are asking them to protect their tradition. The government has to ban Christian Missionaries because they are ruining Chenchu tradition." He believes that the Christianity is a threat to the identity of Chenchus. A Christian representative from Kurnool district says, "We are not deceiving Chenchus. In fact, we are reforming them by promoting healthy and hygienic habits. You can see a difference between Christian and non-Christian Chenchus in this regard. We are providing medical help and other kinds of assistance whenever Chenchus need it. We are not encouraging conflicts among them. Conflicts might have generated out of local issues. We are preaching brotherhood. We are serving the Chenchus. We do not get anything out of this." Every organization claiming that their motive is to help and reform Chenchus. But their activities are leading to conflicts and division among the Chenchus.

The Chenchus have never strongly adhered to any religion till recently. But the interference of different religious organizations has brought a change in their religious ideology. In fact, these organizations are making them 'religious'. As it was discussed above, the changing trajectory of religious tradition has wide variety of implications on the identity of Chenchus. The Chenchus who hardly mention their religion are becoming conscious of it. The fissure and conflicts within the community is a common phenomenon. The further development of religious identity may divide

Chenchus into different religious groups. The non-Christian Chenchus do not know anything pertaining to sacred texts of Hindu or Islamic religions. Most of them do not even know the names of religious texts. They never utter mantras or verses from religious texts of Hinduism or Islam. However, the Christian Chenchus carry a Bible even if they are illiterate.

Deforestation and shift in livelihoods:

Deforestation is an important agent of change among the Chenchus. It has forced the Chenchus to leave some of the settlements in search of alternative livelihoods. In few cases, the deforestation has exposed the Chenchus to external forces. For example, Appaipally of Mahabubnagar district was once covered by the forest and now scarcely has forest cover. Such an extensive deforestation has taken place only in last five decades. Deforestation has also forced the Chenchus for migration. However, deforestation has not been done by the Chenchus but by non-Chenchus. It was done either for commercial purposes or to prepare a cultivable land by the immigrants. Therefore, the deforestation is a catalyst of change in the ethnic identity of the Chenchus.

Forest Department and its policies:

Forest department is an important agent of change in many ways. It acts as a force in the process of change which manipulated the life of the people who have been depending on the forest for livelihood. Chenchu is one such community which was influenced by the administration of forest department. Fürer-Haimendorf (1943: 16) opines "An essential change in the environment of the Chenchus, and consequently in their living conditions came only some years ago when the plateau was taken under the control of the forest department." In fact, these people are still struggling to cope up with the new environment. A very small part of the population is successful in adapting to new conditions. The Chenchus who were rehabilitated to an entirely new environment are struggling to adjust, whereas, those who were rehabilitated near the periphery of the forest are gradually adjusting to new conditions because of the equal chances to acquire livelihood in a conventional way as well as the access to alternatives. For example, the Chenchus of Rudrakodu of interior forest were rehabilitated at Nalakaluva of Kurnool district which is away from forest terrain. They have failed to adjust in a new setting but forced to live there. As a result, they

have resorted to crime. AS, a 56 years old man of this village admits that "I have joined hands with the thieves of Siddhapuram [A rehabilitated colony of "ex-criminals"] and engaged in highway robbery because of the scarcity for food after displacement." However, it was the scenario during the early years after rehabilitation. They are no more engaging in criminal activities. But, the Chenchus of Kottalacheruvu of the same district were not involved in such activities after rehabilitation because of having good access to forest which paved a smooth way for transition and adaptation. Therefore, forced displacements have often resulted in negative impact on the community.

The forest policies have significant impact on the Chenchus. In olden days, the princes and local chiefs had the ownership on forests, but local communities enjoyed unrestricted access to the forests. But, the British rulers started considering forests as a treasure and passed different acts to establish authority over forests. The Forest Act of 1878 is a major step towards institutionalization of the rights of British Government over forests. The Chenchus were not severely affected because of their small size of population in a huge forest. But this act was a step towards taking away the natural rights of original inhabitants and led to the alienation of such people. This policy led to the creation of reserve forests (complete alienation), protected forests (rights were recorded but not settled, and which were gradually converted to reserve forests) and village forests (these were to meet the needs of local communities). The National Forest Policy 1892 is an extension of earlier act and further strengthened the state ownership on forests.

The idea of creation of a Chenchu reserve is not only to protect the forest but also to give legitimate rights to the people depending on it. For instance, Fürer-Haimendorf who played a key role behind the creation a "Chenchu Reserve" in the Nizam administered region states "Chenchus living within the Reserve will be free to follow their habits and inclinations and will be allowed to extract from anywhere within the Reserve all minor products…, without payment, for their own bona fide domestic purposes" (1943: 378). However, the concept of Chenchu reserve was not implemented after national independence. The spirit of that idea has not been taken into consideration while framing subsequent policies by the forest department. The coercive nature of the policy has become a burden to the people in the later years.

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After independence, the government of India carried forward with the ideas of colonial administration. It has also considered forest as national property and did not try to identify the natural rights of original inhabitants. The Forest Policies of 1952 and 1988 could not live up to the aspirations of tribal communities including Chenchu. The Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 also known as PESA Act was a paradigm shift in the recognition of the rights of tribal communities. But the theme of the Act was not properly realized and implemented. In particular, people are not aware of these Acts. The Forest Rights Act, 2006 is also a positive move in accepting the rights of forest dwellers. NGOs and interest groups are organizing awareness campaigns about this Act. But the Wildlife Act, 1972 restricted all the activities of Chenchu because of the identification of Nallamalai as a reserve forest.

The attitude of officers of the forest department is a major obstacle for the implementation of any Act. They have been treating Chenchus as animal poachers. They have been harassing Chenchus even for trespassing into the sanctuary. But it is compulsion for the Chenchus to enter into forest for the collection of Minor Forest Produce (MFP). The harassments resulted in the development of a negative relationship between Chenchus and the officers of forest department. The interference of forest guards in the political affairs of the village worsened the situation. Another important issue is that many of the villages in the core area of the forest are not enumerated in the forest surveys. As a result, the villages were not given revenue status. Even today, their lands were not registered. They are facing constant harassment from local forest officials due to lack of land records. It is also proposed to give identity cards to Chenchus in order to make their entry into forest possible. But, the Chenchus who believes that the forest is their own property may not consider the need to carry identity cards. However, they are forced to change their life course according to the policies of the government.

Impact of agriculture:

The Chenchus were practicing incipient agriculture. However, they have never completely ventured into it. It was never a sole livelihood for them. The British authorities made several unsuccessful attempts to introduce agriculture. It was introduced on a large scale by the Indian government after independence in 1957

Agricultural implements

Chenchu men working in the field

Chenchu women working in the field

(Prakash Reddy, 1979: 82). But, so far it is not well accepted by the Chenchus. Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA) has been encouraging Chenchus in farming. Its persistent attempts to introduce cultivation are partially successful in multi-ethnic villages but almost failed in the interior hamlets. However, it has become an important occupation for majority of the Chenchus of Guntur district. But it is still developing as an occupation among the Chenchus of the multi-ethnic villages of Mahabubnagar, Prakasam, and Kurnool districts. The cultivable field has replaced the forest as a source of livelihood for the Chenchus who have accepted agriculture. The deities represent the forest were converted as the representations of field, crop, and harvest. Rice has become a part in all offerings to deities. The scale of celebration of the festivals has changed. The harvesting festival *Sankranti* has become an important festival. Dressing patterns have changed and liquor drinking habit is getting reduced. Money is attaining importance; therefore, they are saving it for the investment in future which was not the practice in traditional economy. However, the farmers are very small part in the total population. It may take long time and intensive efforts are needed to make them cultivators. But it can be assumed that further development of agriculture will have significant implications on the identity of Chenchu community.

Administration:

Administration is a catalyst of change for the Chenchus. The abode of Chenchus is divided by the Krishna river and is also politically separated for long time in the history. This might not be having a great impact on the movement of the people either side of the river but they are influenced differently by different administrative systems. The documented history of administration among Chenchus is available from 1860 (Thurston, 1909: 28), the year of introduction of new police system by British colonizers. But, the administrative activities have taken momentum in this region in the early years of 20th century. It can be vaguely assumed that the role of administration among the Chenchus prior to British might be insignificant. The British administration tried to move them to the fringe area from the core of the forest. It is not very important at this instance to discuss the motives of the colonizers. But it is an undeniable fact that British have taken this decision to serve the best interests of the empire. The Chenchus were politically divided and living in two territories under two administrations, Nizam and British. However, there are no evidences for any strict regulations on the Chenchus to cross the borders of these two territories. The

British colonizers have established Forest Department; consequently, they have looked into the avenues to regulate the life of the communities living in the forest. The forest regulations implemented by the British administrators since 1898 (Thurston, 1909: 31) was very important in this regard. They have established large settlements known as *Gudems* by grouping small *Pentas* in the areas under their administration. They have also introduced modern education in these areas in the year 1904-05 (Thurston, 1909: 45). The Nizam government had also intervened among the Chenchus of Hyderabad. Efforts were made by them to specifically locate Chenchus by establishing a reserve for them in 1942 under the guidance of Fürer-Haimendorf (1943: 376). They had later appointed Fürer-Haimendorf as the advisor for the welfare of Tribal and Backward Classes in 1945. Chenchus were allowed to clear the forest for cultivation and were provided with house sites and grazing lands. They had also planned to establish Chenchu enclosures but not implemented with the unification of Hyderabad in Indian Union.

The Chenchus are listed in the 5th schedule of the constitution as a Scheduled Tribe (ST) after the independence to India. Later, the community is recognized as PTG in the year 1975. Some of the Chenchu habitats are identified as "Scheduled Areas" in the 5th schedule of Indian constitution by which they enjoy special privileges in their habitat. Particularly, the Chenchu habitats of Mahabubnagar district are identified as "scheduled areas". However, they were under different agencies of administration. But all the Chenchus have come under single agency of administration only after the establishment of ITDA in 1989. It has served as an important agent not only to administer but also to develop a sense of belongingness among the Chenchus and is continued to be influential in constructing their identity. Chenchus of all the territories believe that ITDA is an institution concerned with the development of Chenchus. They also believe it as the duty of ITDA to support and if necessary to feed the Chenchus. The Chenchus of different districts come to ITDA to meet the project officer in order to list out their problems. ITDA conducts meetings periodically in the Chenchu settlements. The meetings are also conducted at its office at Srisailam which are attended by the representatives of different settlements from all the districts. These meetings help the Chenchus of different districts to know the problems of each other. These meetings play an important role in understanding and sympathizing for other Chenchus even if they do not have specific interaction.

Elites of the community:

The teachers, employees in the forest department, and employees of other government and non-government agencies, people active in politics or leaders of political parties, and the representatives of constitutional bodies are the most influential agents of change. This group has emerged with the development of education and other policy interventions of the government. This group is very much inclined for the migration to nearby towns. But, they are the most influential people in their natal villages. The leaders of political parties or the representatives of constitutional bodies usually stay in the village and are in a position to influence the affairs of the Chenchus of that village.

Impact of middlemen/Merchants (*shets/doras/shavukars*):

The merchants have played a key role in the process of change. They have shared an important relation with the Chenchus in all the territories. They are also introducing new materials to the Chenchus which include eatables, cooking vessels, dress materials etc. In fact, they have introduced a preliminary market system among the Chenchus. Some merchants of this territory are having more than four decades of the relation with the Chenchus. There are incidents where such merchants have been participating as external members in the traditional political council of the Chenchus and took part in dispute resolution. Such case was identified from Rollapenta of Kurnool district. The merchant system has gradually evolved and developed as a system of exploitation. The preventive methods against illicit distillation of liquor have further worsened the situation. The Chenchus were making liquor on their own. But, the ban on making the liquor made them dependents on merchants. It also enhanced the need for money. This aspect gave more scope for middlemen to intrude into the lives of Chenchus. They were giving money on credit. Few of them have turned into liquor vendors. It was observed that one or few middlemen are operating in every Chenchu settlement in Mahabubnagar district. They were locally called as *shēt*. At least one runs a Kirana store and the other runs a liquor shop. The Chenchus continue to be indebted to these middlemen. There are often conflicts between the Chenchu and the middlemen over the amount of debt. But, ultimately the middlemen will succeed. The Chenchu will not get the liquor if he goes against the merchant. The Chenchus believe that they were often cheated by these merchants. They never get a proper value for their products. In fact, they get only half of the amount. At the same

Health camp at Appapuram of Mahabubnagar district

Teachers of Chenchu community are interacting with Chenchus of Appapuram of Mahabubnagar district

A woman merchant selling clothes to Chenchus of Kottalacheruvu of Kurnool District

time, the merchant charges double to his products. There is always an imbalance in these transactions. But they continue to depend on merchants for the instant supply of food grains and liquor.

Case study of a village merchant:

KN is a merchant in Appaipally village of Mahabubnagar district. He belongs to *Komati* (Vaisya) caste. He is popularly known as KN *Dora*. *Dora* is a suffix used to address big merchants and landlords in Mahabubnagar district. Most of the Chenchus of this village and neighbouring Srirangapuram village visit his shop every day. He sells food grains and other materials that are required daily. The Chenchus of both the villages have been depending on him for last 25 years. In olden days Chenchus were selling their products to him at a very cheaper rate. But the merchant used to charge more for the goods sold by him. No Chenchu can dare to question him due to the threat of not getting food grains. They have no other way to get an attractive rate for their products. They were also not having any other source that can ensure continuous supply of food grains. They have to walk 8 km to reach the nearest GCC store at mandal head quarter, Lingal. They are not sure about the rate decided by the salesman because of the understanding between the merchant and salesman. The Public Distribution System (PDS) was also ineffective. Therefore, there was no alternative left with the Chenchus. They have continued to depend on KN who has become an important source for all their needs. The Chenchus of Appaipally believe that the merchant is a better agent because of his availability in the village despite lack of trustworthiness. He accepts their products at anytime. He will give food grains or money according to their will. It is very convenient for them. But they are conscious about the deception by the merchant. Even then, they cannot ignore him because of their continuous indebtedness. He has become a necessary evil for them.

The same system continues to exist even after the change in their livelihoods. For example, he is the source of investment for the Chenchus who have ventured into agriculture. He controls every activity pertaining to agriculture if he invests money. The activities like selection of crop, seeds, fertilizer, and time of harvesting are decided by him. They should sell the yield only to him. He keeps his investment including interest and gives if there is any profit to the farmer. If there is loss, the client has to pay it in the subsequent year. In the whole process, the land owner has

become a mere wage labourer and the merchant has become a virtual owner. Therefore, it can be said that dependency of Chenchus is continuing even in the new conditions and not going to vanish.

This case reveals the situation created by merchants across the territory of Chenchus. The merchants trap Chenchus in a system from where they cannot escape. They get profits only by keeping their relations alive with the Chenchus. Their relation was never resulted in any serious conflicts because of mutual interests.

Impact of Naxalite movement:

Naxalite movement is not only the most influential but the only movement that influenced the identity of large proportion of the Chenchus of Nallamalai. It has also put the identity of the Chenchus at question. The Chenchus suffered in between different agencies and groups for almost twenty years approximately from 1985 to 2005. They have distanced themselves at times from all the parties involved in the movement, supported in certain instances, and later; few participated in the movement. Initially, they did not have any awareness about the movement. It was started by outsiders who used Nallamalai forest as a shelter. They have initially failed to convince Chenchus but gradually motivated them to participate or at least to help the movement. But the fight between naxalites and police confused the Chenchus over their position in the forest. They have got scared with the gradual alienation from the forest with the actions of police and officials of forest department in the name of naxalites. The displacement efforts of the forest department and ITDA added to their dismay. Naxalites have taken the advantage of such situation to pursue the Chenchus.

The intervention of the naxalites was not limited to the territory of Chenchu but extended into their lives too. It has led to significant changes in the social, political and economic life of the Chenchus. The naxalites tried to preach the Chenchus about the importance of education. They have motivated the Chenchus against the exploitation by middlemen, forest officers, ITDA officers, and GCC representatives. They have tried to teach the need of good health and hygiene for a better life. The Chenchus have supported naxalites during initial stages of the movement by believing that there will be some benefit. The Chenchus have got rid of forest officials because of the presence of naxalites in the forest. However, the

situation has got worsened after the entry of police into Nallamalai forest in the name of law and order control. They have conducted several combing operations to filter out naxalites from Nallamalai forest. In this process, they have started harassing Chenchus by suspecting them as naxalites or helping naxalites. They were also harassing Chenchus for the information about naxalites. At the same time, the harassment by the naxalites too increased with demands like joining them, supplying food, providing information regarding the movements of police and other unfavourable people.

The Chenchus have gradually realized the worst consequences because of the presence of naxalites in their territory. The traditional political systems were interrupted due to the interference of naxalites in the process of dispute resolution. It was an unfavourable development for the Chenchus. The naxalites have started conducting meetings in the Chenchu villages late in the night. Every dispute, whether it is social or economic or political is to be resolved in a meeting conducted by naxalites at that time. In some cases, naxalites interfered in the religious affairs of the Chenchus. For example, they have interfered to resolve the dispute between the Chenchus of Appapuram and Appaipally villages of Mahabubnagar district over the organization of the *Salleswaram jatara*.

The naxalites were punishing the Chenchus if they do not support them. In the course of time, Chenchus were unable to tolerate them. Chenchus neither trust the naxalites nor the police. They have stopped supporting both the groups. The existence of naxalites in their territory made it difficult to access government services. The government officers were threatened by naxalites; therefore, they have stopped supplying the food grains to the Chenchus who are living in the interior forest. The Chenchus failed to access healthcare facilities. No doctor dares to enter into the forest to serve the Chenchus even once in a weak. Few contractors and merchants were killed by the naxalites. As a result, they have stopped supplying food grains to Chenchus. This also served as a reason for treating naxalites as enemies. In course of time Chenchus have experienced more loss rather than benefit due to the presence of naxalites in their territory. They have gradually tried to move away from the naxalites as well as from the forest. But, majority of them were not in a position to take a decision according to their choice. Their life has become more complicated in the

forest. The naxalites as well as police have used Chenchus for various purposes and made them ultimate victims.

Case study 1:

RS is a teacher hailing from Billakallu village, Balmoor Mandal, Mahabubnagar district. He is 27 years old married person living in Achempeta, a town 15 Kms away from Billakallu. He is working as a teacher in an Ashram school. He has spent his childhood in Bourapuram Penta which is located in the core area of the forest. His family was living there because of the accessibility to rich natural resources. His schooling was at Ashram School of Appapuram Penta which is 6 km away from Bourapuram. Attending school was a rare event for him till 5th class. He was spending most of the time in Bourapuram. The naxalite movement has become vibrant in the Nallamalai forest while he was in schooling. Bourapuram is one of the key places for naxalites in the forest because of the location of a big pond. It is also inaccessible to outsiders without the help of Chenchus. During those days, naxalites were using children as human shield in the forest. A committee was formed by the naxalites in which children below 14 years are the members. The committee is known as *Balala Hakkula Sangham* (Children Rights Committee). RS was appointed as the president of the committee when he was 11 years of age. He was trained in using hand grenades in order to prevent the entry of police in their territory. The children were fascinated to use such weapons. He was also trained in using the gun. They were taught about how to remove different parts and how to rejoin them. It was curious to children and hence they were actively participating in the activities of naxalites. The parents were not resisting the participation of children due to the fear of naxalites. In fact, there is no option for the parents except leaving the forest along with their children to avoid naxalites.

He was actively participating in the activities of naxalite group in that area. He became familiar with all the top naxalites leaders in Nallamalai forest. But, he has never involved in direct fight with police force. He was supplying food to naxalites by collecting it in *Penta*. After two years of such involvement, he happened to leave the forest because of the attack of bear on his father. His father was partially paralyzed after that attack. He has joined for 6th class in the Government Tribal Welfare High School (PTG, Chenchu) at Mannanur of Mahabubnagar district. He also becomes

studious after joining that school. He has passed 10th class with first division. After that, ITDA has given Teacher Training as part of the special drive to select the Chenchus as teachers. He was successful in that training and appointed as teacher in Appapuram Ashram School where he has received his primary education. He has served there as a teacher for five years. During his tenure in Appapuram, a naxalite came to the School where he was the only teacher. The naxalite demanded for food grains and other edible things that are meant for children. RS denied the demand of that naxalite. The aggravated naxalite threatened him. Then RS told the naxalite about his experience with the group and warned that man for his foolishness in revealing the identity as a naxalite without knowing with whom he is talking. The naxalite left the place after having lunch in the school without any further demands. In another incident, a young naxalite (around 15 years of age) came to the school with similar demand. He too left the place because of similar warning.

RS has explained two reasons for the acceptance of naxalites by Chenchus. The first reason is that the livelihoods of the Chenchus have been drastically affected by the construction of hydro-electric dam at Srisailam and the announcement of Nallamalai as reserve forest. The second reason is the behaviour of forest officials. The restrictions laid by them curbed the freedom of Chenchus to collect the forest products or to hunt even the small game. RS says "many of the Chenchus were influenced by the naxalites. They have either participated voluntarily or forcibly in the activities of naxalites. Mainly, the Chenchus living in the core areas of the forest were compelled to help the naxalites. They have faced problems from naxalites as well as police either directly or indirectly. But I have sympathy to naxalites as they were fighting for the cause of people. If I was not appointed as a teacher, I might have become a naxalite." This case reveals the influence of naxalites on the Chenchus.

Case study 2:

KA is a 35 years old man. He is a former president of VTDA. He is from Appaipally village of Mahabubnagar district. He is educated up to 7th class. He was working as a member in the naxalite group. He was influenced because of the power exercised by naxalites in that region. He has believed that the power can be exercised if there is a gun in the hand. As a result, he was attracted to the group's activities. Initially he was working as an informer and supplying food. Later, he was trained in

using gun. But he has never fought with police. He could not work longer in the naxalite group as they were imposing strict rules. He was unable to live without liquor because of his habit from childhood. He was also warned by the police for his involvement in the activities of naxalite group. They have warned him for life if he continues to participate in such activities. As a result, he was looking for an opportunity to leave the group. It was not very simple to leave the group. But he got an opportunity at the time of the death his wife. ITDA has offered a tractor to him as a reward for abandoning the activities of naxalite group. He was threatened by naxalites as well as police many times. Both the groups were suspecting him as an informer of other party. As a result, he has moved out of the village to escape from naxalites as well as police. He has come back to village only after one year when the naxalite movement was on decline in their territory.

Case study 3:

MP explains the fate of her husband because of the fight between Naxalites and police. Her husband ML served as the Sarpanch of the village for 14 years. He was also the president of VTDA for long period. The Chenchu community enjoyed political superiority in Appaipally of Mahabubnagar district under his leadership. At the same time, they were having better access to the schemes implemented by the government. The situation has been drastically affected due to the involvement of naxalites in the political affairs of the village. Naxalites were approaching him whenever they need some help locally. They used to beat him, if he denies the help. It was a compulsion for him to provide money, food, and other needs for the naxalites to protect his life. This kind of association made his life miserable. Despite his unwillingness, he was helping naxalites out of fear. His political rivals in the village made use of the situation to trap him in the net of police. The police continued to keep an eye on him. In a course of time, he has become an important target for the police.

The development programmes were affected because of the continuous interference of naxalites and police in the affairs of the village. Naxalites and police have been visiting the village regularly. Both the parties used to threaten ML for various purposes. They used to demand for secret information. Consequently, his family life was also totally disturbed. At the same time, naxalites have recruited some of the young Chenchus and the members of the other communities into their group.

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Police were suspicious of ML by assuming that he was helping naxalites in their recruitment. The situation continued for three years. He had lost peace of life. He could not concentrate on the developmental activities. Once in 2006, a party of the naxalites came to his house in the midnight. They have brought some pamphlets for circulation. They have ordered ML to circulate these pamphlets in and around the village. They left his home early in the morning. The information was passed to police by his political rivals. After an hour of their departure, police have come to his home. They have seized the pamphlets and arrested him for further interrogation. They left him after a day. After a weak, three men have come to the village on motor cycles to kill him. At 10-30 am in the morning, ML sat near a tea shop on the road. They had come very close to him on their bikes and shot him. He was dead on the spot. They have left some papers in the name of 'Cobra' by stating that anybody who helps naxalites will face similar consequences. MP suspects them as police.

The case of ML reflects the situation of Chenchus in the struggle between naxalites and police. They were trapped in the grave situation. It is not only the problem for ML alone but a problem to entire community. Many of the Chenchu leaders suffered from similar problems. It has created terror among the Chenchus. But they were not in a position to fight against naxalites or police. Therefore, unrest among the Chenchus was not just because of naxalites but also because of police.

Case study 4:

The Sarpanch of Macharam village, Amarabad Mandal, Mahabubnagar district is an influential Chenchu leader in that Mandal. He has been serving as a Sarpanch of the village from last 12 years. He belongs to Telugu Desam Party (TDP). He was subjected to the severe threats by the naxalites. The then TDP government had imposed many restrictions on the activities of naxalites and banned the group. The village and Mandal level leaders have been worst affected by such decision. The threats by naxalites have become regular to the local leaders of the party. He says "the top leaders of the party might not be affected by the decision of the government. They have a good security cover. The leaders who are living very close to forest are not having any security. They have faced the consequences of government's decision. I was one among the victims. Even though we do not have any role in the decisions of the party and the government we were threatened by naxalites. The naxalites have

targeted us for our affiliation with TDP." The naxalites used to seek the help of the influential people at the level of village and Mandal. Some voluntarily helped them and others unwillingly. No one can deny help to naxalites out of fear. We cannot ignore naxalites as they have become the part of our life. He says, "I cannot do some favour which is beyond my limits. Naxalites do not understand this. They have beaten me twice in the forest for the denial of help. But, I haven't complained to police because they cannot protect me every day. Also, naxalites have threatened me not to complain to police. They might have killed me had I complained against them. We were not in a position to talk against them. I am fortunate to be alive now."

The case of the Sarpanch reflects the adverse circumstances faced by the Chenchu leaders of Nallamalai forest. They were the primary victims of the struggle between government and the naxalites. They have made several adjustments in order to protect their lives from all those groups.

*Case study 5***:**

NP is a 55 years old woman living with her husband and two children. She was living in *Rampur Penta* which is located in the core area of forest of Mahabubnagar district. She was also having a house in Appaipally village. But she was living most of the year in *Rampur Penta* because of the accessibility to forest products. Occasionally, they were coming to Appaipally village in order to sell their products. Their life was very peaceful before the entry of naxalites into their territory. But in course of time they were trapped in the struggle between naxalites and police. Most often, naxalites demand NP and others of the *Penta* to supply food for them. They used to come to the hut whenever they feel hungry or whenever they pass via that settlement. As the settlements are very small, one or the other family has to supply food for them. Sometimes, they used to order a group of families to cook the food. Occasionally, they need to supply cooked food to a specified location in the forest far away from their village. This problem was often faced by NP along with many others of the village. They could not go for the collection of forest products because of such services. The police were always suspicious of Chenchus when they meet in the forest. Every Chenchu man is a victim of police or naxalites. Her husband was beaten up once by police on the suspicion of supplying food to naxalites.

Once, a group of naxalites came to NP's house for food. At that time, she was not having food in the house. They have asked her to cook food for seven members which was a burdensome activity for NP. But, she was aware of the consequences if she denies doing so. She knows that they will beat her husband. Therefore, she has cooked food for all of them. They have offered some biscuit packets to NP after having the food. NP and her husband had the biscuits and left the wrapper of the packet in the hut itself. They were not aware of the consequences of such wrapper. On the next day, police observed the wrapper of biscuits near NP's hut. They have enquired NP and her husband about biscuit packets. They have forced NP's husband to give the information about whereabouts of naxalites. But he was not aware of such information. The police did not believe him. They have suspected that NP and her husband are supplying food to naxalites. They did not accept the explanation of NP and her husband. They have beaten NP's husband. He could not recover for a month. After few days, NP and her husband came back to Appaipally village. They have never gone back to Rampur. NP opted for wage labour in the agricultural fields. Her husband resumed his work only after the end of the struggle between naxalites and police. Now, he is going along with the cattle of some non-Chenchus for which he gets some money. He also collects some products like mohua flower, castor seeds, Amla, and Chilla seeds. NP says "we have lost our livelihood for sometime due to the disturbance created by naxalites and police in Nallamalai forest. Neither naxalites nor police are concerned with our problems. We have lost peace, place of living, and treasure of the forest. We have never struggled for survival before the intervention of naxalites and police. But our condition has become pathetic after this problem. Now, we are very much insecure because our livelihood depends on other people rather than our own resources. We failed to resume normal life despite the end of the problem."

The case of NP reflects the problems of innocent Chenchus in the struggle between naxalites and police. They have neither benefited by the naxalites nor by the police. In fact, they have departed from their livelihood base. They will continue to struggle for livelihood even after the end of naxalite movement in their territory.

Case study 6:

KS is a 27 years old man whose family is badly affected because of the actions of police. He was having parents and a younger brother. His family was living in

Mallapur of Mahabubnagar district which was in the core area of the forest. They have been depending on forest for livelihood. His father was also having cattle. His mother has been gathering food for the family. His brother was educated up to 10th class but unemployed. As his family is living in the heart of the forest, his brother was attracted by the naxalite group. He joined the group in the year 1999. His parents failed to pursue him to keep away from the naxalite activities. KS's parents wanted to keep him away from naxalite activities. They have sent him to Hyderabad for work on the suggestion of a contactor to avoid further damage to the family. KS was working as a construction labourer for two years in the Hyderabad. He was never interested to continue in the work, but because of the pressure of his parents he stayed in Hyderabad. His brother killed in a police encounter in 2002. Then his family was shifted to Appaipally because of the increasing pressure from the police. After the encounter of his brother, police continued to harass his parents. They have directed his father to attend the police station in Lingal mandal as and when they called him. The police started harassing his father to reveal the information about Sudhakar, the elder son. At the same time, they were also interrogating him to know the possible places of stay for naxalites in the forest. Attending police station is a new and harassing experience to his father. He was psychologically depressed and finally committed suicide by hanging at the home. His mother was shocked by this incidence. She also expired within few weeks after the death of his father.

The incidents of his father's suicide and the mother's death did not lead KS to join in the naxalite group. Naxalites were suffering with grave losses in Nallamalai at that time. At the same time, Sudhakar was moving in different villages of his relatives because of the fear of police. By 2005, the impact of naxalites has significantly declined in the Nallamalai forest. At the same time, police attacks on the villages were also reduced. As a result, KS had come back to Appaipally in 2005. Now, he is living with his uncle's family. He is depending on cattle rearing for livelihood. He says "We were neither happy with naxals nor with police. We were accepting whatever both the parties said. We were not sure who are thinking for our well-being. We were also in confusion whether they are working for us or for their own motives. But we were the worst sufferers in this whole struggle." The case of KS reflects the severe loss to a family because of the interference of police and naxalites in their lives. Many of the Chenchus were the victims of similar circumstances.

The Chenchus have lost their peace, livelihood, and natural home. They have migrated to plain areas because of the continuous struggle. The impact of naxalites decreased from 2006. Subsequently, the harassment by the police too got lesser. But the Chenchus could not resume their natural livelihoods. Many of them are turned into wage labourers and were struggling to survive in alien occupations.

Telangana movement for statehood and dynamics of identity:

The administrative unification brought out after the formation of Andhra Pradesh is affected by the Telangana movement. It seems they have never territorially united even after the formation of Andhra Pradesh. But, the Chenchus living at the borders of two territories are having marital relations. They are not keen about this issue like their counterparts in fringe and/or multi-ethnic villages. The Chenchus of Appaipally of Mahabubnagar district are part of every protest of pro-Telangana activists. The Chenchus from interior parts of the forest have also demonstrated with their bows and arrows in support of Telangana in Achempeta town of Mahabubnagar district. The young Chenchus have actively participated in the movement all over the Mahabubnagar district. TM, a Chenchu headman from Appapuram penta of Mahabubnagar district says "kids are saying that they will get jobs and we will not be displaced from the forest if we get a separate state." UD, a 21 years young man from Appaipally of Mahabubnagar district says "The Chenchus of Mahabubnagar are deprived of all the opportunities with the establishment of ITDA in Srisailam. An intermediate college and degree college are established at the same place. There are no colleges for higher education for the Chenchus of Mahabubnagar. They have also not established any regional centre for administration in Mahabubnagar district. We have to go to Srisailam for every small work by spending lot of money. We have to travel four hours to reach the office. We are not sure whether our grievances addressed in one day or not. They do not arrange any accommodation in such cases. The complaints of the Andhra Chenchus are given priority over Telangana Chenchus. We have many incidents where the students from Mahabubnagar failed to get scholarship from ITDA. All the problems can be addressed in a separate state because we will get a separate ITDA for Mahabubnagar district." However, the Chenchus of Coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema are not very interested on the issue of a separate state. They have not participated in protests either in support of united Andhra Pradesh or in support of their respective regions. BH, a VTDA president of Chintala

village of Prakasam district opines, "Chenchus need a movement for food but not for a place or state. What can be the difference in a new state or country if we do not get food?" But, DA, an elderly man and former VTDA president of Bairlutygudem says, "The Chenchus will always locate at an edge (territorial boundary) irrespective of the formation of two or three states. We will further become smaller group in population size in two or three new states. At least the government is aware of our presence in a united state. But, we will definitely be ignored by the administration in a new state." Similarly, SV, a 35 year old graduate from BKV Palem Chenchugudem of Guntur district says "I am in favour of a united state because the Chenchus may be ignored in a new state. However, if there is a bifurcation, the Chenchus of Mahabubnagar will suffer because of a small population. They may be administered by District Tribal Welfare Organization (DTWO) which looks after the development of all the tribal groups of the district. Therefore, Chenchus may not get any special attention in a new state. They have to stay with Andhra even if the state gets bifurcated." The Chenchu women of any region did not prefer to speak on this issue.

The bifurcation issue revealed the dimensions of identity which has the influence on different issues like ongoing displacement of the Chenchus of Telangana region. The displacement is increasing the physical distance among the Chenchus; therefore, they may be gradually separated in terms of their social and cultural attributes. They were also influenced by the active participation of other communities of the multi-ethnic villages in Telangana movement. They have understood that staying quiet at the time of movement may lead to the ignorance of the Chenchus in the aftermath of the movement. For example, the representatives of each community of Appaipally village of Mahabubnagar district participated in the relay hunger strike based on the principle that each community of the village need to participate in the movement on a given day. The hunger strike continued for 25 days. All the communities have participated in the fast. KA, a 40 years old Chenchu man of this village says "We will be looked down upon by others if we skip from the fast. We are the original people of this village and we will be benefited in a new state. Therefore, we have participated in the fast." They have participated in the fast under the name "*Komaram Bheem Chenchu Yuvajana Sangham*". The name was coined only in the morning of that day to serve the purpose of participation in the fast. The educated young Chenchus have coined the name and they have started using the banner in the

celebration of festivals in the later period. They have also understood the importance of widespread coverage in local news papers about their participation in the relay fast. The local editions of many news papers carried the photographs of Chenchus with bows and arrows. The Chenchu youth are the ardent supporters of separate Telangana. They are hopeful for a better future in a new state but not very clear about how it happens. It is a primordial sentiment rather than a realistic analysis. It has influenced all the communities equally and they believe in getting benefits in the respective areas of their interest. However, the movement has brought out division among the Chenchus of different territories and their attempts for a different identity.

Acculturation:

Acculturation is a key process which can encompass all other processes with regard to change among the Chenchus. The territorial categorisation used in this thesis depends not only on ecological setting or geographical location but equally on the extent of culture contact. The phenomenon of change explained through several aspects; such as; migration, displacement and rehabilitation, crystallization of religion, administration and administrative agencies, naxalite movement, merchants etc., have a common thread, that is, acculturation. However, it can be said that acculturation is a gradual process among the Chenchus. It might be because of the value orientation of the society. In this context, it is apt to quote Redfield (1941: 369) who says "...in the absence of money economy, isolated, homogeneous societies tend to have well-organized cultures and to be sacred and collectivistic." The idea of "well-organized" seems to be relative but "to be sacred and collectivistic" seems to be apt in the context of Chenchu community. Belief in the idea of 'superiority of culture' and its 'sacredness' might be hurdles in the process of acculturation and its protection is the 'collective responsibility' of the people. This can be understood from their stories of origin. However, continuous and intensive contacts in various spheres are paving the way for acculturation of the Chenchus. It happens in several phases. For instance, the acculturation of elite happens in the first phase followed by the acculturation of commoners close to multi-ethnic setting. It proceeds further into other territories either because of occasional contacts with the people of other cultures or with the people of their own community who are carrying elements of other cultures.

Conclusion:

As a whole, the transition of Chenchus has been influenced by two major factors; they are, contact with other ethnic groups and change in the ecological setting. The major process operated through all these forces is acculturation of Chenchus which has given rise to diversity and creating ethnic sub-identities or categorical identities within the community but not significantly altered the ethnic identity as a whole. But, it is difficult to forecast the consequences of an intensive acculturation if the entire community comes into contact with other ethnic groups. The categorical identities may crystallize; consequently, ethnic group may further stratify or the entire group may reorient itself for an alternate identity. However, it is difficult to assume the development of "caste like hierarchy" (Venkata Rao, 2004: 48) in case of Chenchus as observed among few other tribal communities of India.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The fundamental paradox of ethnic identity lies in the combination of persistent and dynamic elements of culture. But, ethnic identity need not be the homogeneity in all aspects of the culture of an ethnic group. Diversity is always a part of every ethnic group and there is always a possibility to classify an ethnic group into several categories or sub-groups depending on similarities and differences. This may lead to the diversification of identity within the ethnic group. Alternate identities may emerge based on its categories or sub-groups. But, all categorical identities need not to be ethnic identities and the ethnic group may subscribe for a common identity despite the emergence of alternate identities. However, ethnic identity is a dynamic phenomenon and its manifestations may vary according to the variety of social situations in which it is expressed.

In this thesis, the culture and identity of Chenchus has been understood using a combination of primary data and secondary sources. The literature pertaining to Chenchus projected them as one of the most primitive tribes of India. Chenchus were described as not only racially but also culturally survivals of most ancient India and their culture was described as digging stick culture (Fürer-Haimendorf, 1943). Their community has been depicted as a hunting gathering community with more or less egalitarian social structure by various researchers. Their social organization is projected as the representation of early types of human society. Several other descriptions in literature reveal the life of Chenchus during that time. For example; descriptions such as; wild, lazy, and drinking set of brigands (Kurnool Manual, 1886; Thurston, 1909; Fürer-Haimendorf, 1943; Aiyappan, 1948); criminal in nature (Taylor, 1862); exceedingly black in colour (Ferishta, 1794, Fürer-Haimendorf, 1943, Bhowmick, 1992); nude and semi-nude people (Buchanan, 1807; Newbold, 1846; Kurnool Manual, 1886; Siraj-ul-Hassan, 1920); and live in caverns (Ferishta, 1794; Hodson, 1922) reveals the identity of the Chenchus of those days. The Chenchus were also described as the people with "hand to mouth" existence, less sociable, and people with no "tribal feeling" or a sense of common well-being. They never believe each other (Bhowmick, 1992). But, such descriptions appear invalid and not apt to describe the Chenchus in contemporary scenario. Their community has been moving

away from hunting-gathering mode of existence and the egalitarian social structure. As a result, the cultural linkages among members of the community are becoming flexible and paving way for intra-community diversity. Even though diversity is not very crystallized, it is vital to understand Chenchu community in the present context. At the same time, a common ethnic identity transcends in the Chenchu region regardless of the territorial boundaries.

Ethnic identity need not be a conscious process. It is the character of every ethnic group and members of the group socialize in such a way that they will be subconscious of it throughout their life. But conscious expression of identity or constructing it in a particular way occurs in situations of conflict or while losing opportunities to other ethnic groups in competition. Therefore, interests of the group may evoke ethnic consciousness and lead to the assertion of identity. But this assertion may be a short term process and temporary, or a long-term process and long-lasting depending on the interests of people or conflicts among them. For instance, the protective discrimination policy adopted by the Indian constitution sustains the consciousness of Scheduled Tribe (ST) identity. This may also give rise to identity shift and formation of multiple identities in course of time. For example, Chenchus who are utilising the incentives of this policy in education and employment are gradually diversifying from rest of the community and advancing financially. They are also migrating to towns. Therefore, implications of policy such as educational development, occupational diversification, and change in the habitat have significant influence on the ethnic identity of Chenchus.

Chenchus appear to be less conscious of their ethnic identity. For example, ethnic consciousness seems to be in hibernation in social and cultural aspects of the Chenchus of core areas of the forest because of lack of non-Chenchus and differences within the community. However, they act as collective whenever non-Chenchus interfere in their lives. For example, displacement efforts of the Government served as catalyst in creating ethnic consciousness among the Chenchus of the settlements in core area of the forest. In such cases, people strongly express resentment by saying "We have a natural right over forest because it is our original abode." Therefore, ethnic consciousness never disappears but appears to be in hibernation under normal

circumstances. But, it does not hibernate in multi-ethnic villages because of continuous competition and conflict among various groups for resources.

Chenchus came into contact with non-Chenchus as their habitat has been encircled by number of socially and culturally different castes and tribal groups. However, extent of their contact varies depending on their territorial location. Therefore, for the convenience of this study, their habitat is divided into four categories depending on their territorial location and contact with non-Chenchus. They are; Chenchus living in core areas of the forest, Chenchus living at fringe areas or foothills, Chenchus of multi-ethnic villages, and Chenchus living in towns and/or villages close to towns. This categorisation is helpful to understand interaction, diversity and changes in the identity of Chenchus. However, no category is completely isolated, but the degree of contact within the community and with other communities is different in various territorial groups. Villages in the core area of Nallamalai forest are predominantly occupied by the Chenchus who are said to be the original inhabitants. However, non-Chenchus have been entering into these territories as merchants, contactors, cattle herders, animal poachers, smugglers of wood, officials, and health care professionals. Such contacts have long history since the era of kings and *nawabs* who were visiting the forest for recreational hunting expeditions. Any attempt to trace the roots of interaction might be a futile effort since it has been there at some degree or the other from time immemorial. At the same time, there are no evidences to trace the time period for the existence of Chenchus in the Nallamalai forest. In fact, it is argued that Nallamalai forest is not an original habitat of the Chenchus (Bhowmick, 1992). If it is true, the Chenchus might have had contact with several groups on their way to Nallamalai forest. The comparisons drawn by Fürer-Haimendorf (1943) with the *Veddas* of Srilanka and the illustrations given by Thurston (1909) regarding the similarities between Chenchus of Andhra Pradesh, Irulas of Karnataka, Chentsu of Tamil Nadu gave scope to assume a migratory route from Srilanka via Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Karnataka to Andhra Pradesh. The similarities between Yanadis and Chenchus (Thurston, 1909; Aiyappan, 1948; Turin, 1997) gives scope to assume the continuation of such migratory route in Andhra Pradesh via Chittoor, Nellore, Prakasam, and Guntur districts to Nallamalai ranges. Some of the migrants might have ascended to Nallamalai ranges and others might have settled in the plains throughout the migratory route. However, this assumption is

premature and lack concrete evidences to support it. But, it may be believed that they might have migrated in search of livelihoods and resources. However, it might have taken hundreds of years for this group to settle down under different names. Therefore, tracing the pattern of interactions of the Chenchus in time and space is futile and ends with uncertainties.

Chenchus have rare interaction with outsiders in their day-to-day affairs. In fact, Chenchus and non-Chenchus live as separate entities in multi-ethnic villages. They have separate places of worship. But, the participation of either of the parties in each other's celebrations is not denied. In fact, they celebrate few festivals together with non-Chenchus of these villages. But, they differ in social norms, religious beliefs, ritual specialists, political institutions and economic organization. Marital relations are very rare with other communities except few cases by elopement. But such marriages have never been accepted like intra-community marriages. Such partners have to bear a life time social burden even if their parents and community accept such alliance.

The bond between habitat and people is very strong in core areas of the forest. Assertion on habitat based identity by the Chenchu of core and fringe territory of the forest reveals the relation between habitat and people as well as the importance of forest as a major resource. The Chenchus of these territories are not in competition for resources with other ethnic groups. But, the relation between habitat and people is weak in case of the Chenchus of multi-ethnic villages in plains because the habitat is not providing whatever they require for livelihood. Therefore, habitat based identity as *Nallamala Chenchulu* is getting weak in this case, instead; resource competition and resultant conflicts with other ethnic groups reveals their identity.

Chenchus have never been into a major conflict with non-Chenchus because of their dependency on different resources. But, the shift of dependency of Chenchus from one kind of resource to other has given rise to heterogeneity of resource use, skills, and manpower requirements. The Chenchus of multi-ethnic villages are competing with other ethnic groups for the cultivable land. But, monopoly has been established by non-Chenchus over the cultivable land in these villages. In such instances, they depend on non-Chenchus for training to utilize and maximize the

output from new resources. Acquisition of skills required for cultivation by the Chenchus of multi-ethnic villages increased the competition for cultivable land among contesting groups of the village because of their claims and counter claims. It has given rise to minor conflicts with non Chenchus which often reveal the ethnic identity of Chenchus. Such conflicts got prominence after the establishment of ITDA because of its focus on the development of Chenchus, particularly; distribution of cultivable land and promotion of agriculture. Despite all these, Chenchus claim entire territory as their own and started looking at non-Chenchus as intruders. The population composition of these villages is not stable and keeps on changing which is injecting new dynamics into resource competition.

The places, opportunities, and the intensity of interaction vary among the Chenchus of different territorial categories. The Chenchus of core areas of the forest interact in the forest. They are shy and do not prefer to interact with outsiders. But the inclination of Chenchus to interact with non-Chenchus increases while moving from core area of the forest through fringe area of the forest and multi-ethnic villages to town. The physical movement of persons from fringe settlements to multi-ethnic villages in plains is a regular activity. It paves the way for regular interaction between the Chenchus of these two territorial categories. The Chenchus of multi-ethnic villages rarely interact with the Chenchus of core areas but often interact with the Chenchus of fringe of the forest and towns. They interact at home, at work, at a liquor shop, at a meeting place or centre of the village, at a temple, and at a market place. Education, occupation, changing life style and values, composition of social groups in a town, and attitude of the people of other communities influences the interaction of Chenchus in a town. The Chenchus of towns may be divided into two categories, they are; settled migrants and non-settled migrants. Influences of interaction internalized and expressed in the behavioural patterns of settled migrants but not in the case of non-settled migrants. The Chenchus settled in towns are not facing much difficulty to interact because, at least, men are not new to towns. They have been visiting these towns for educational needs, health needs, and for market. In this context, it may be understood that the groups in interaction, the scope for interaction, the environment of interaction, the nature of work, and the interacting places have a profound impact on interacting groups.

Women of core areas of the forest hardly interact with any non-Chenchu. The behaviour of women is always regulated either by themselves or because of the attitude of men. Men suspect their women if they interact with outsiders. But it is not the case with the Chenchus of the villages in fringe of the forest, multi-ethnic villages, and towns. They easily start a conversation with an outsider and men do not restrict their women. Their exposure to other communities of these territories is important in this regard.

Dynamics of Interaction among members of the family are significant. The dependency of children on parents is increasing with those who are attending the school or college. As a result, the authority of male head of the family is being crystallized in multi-ethnic villages and towns. The authoritative structure in relationships is gradually spreading into other social institutions and influencing all sorts of interactions. As a result, the society is gradually moving from an egalitarian social structure to a hierarchical structure but it is at an incipient stage because the division in the community has not yet crystallized to exercise authority on each other. Multi-ethnic villages are big in size with large number of families and *kulams*, therefore; their social ties spread to vast territory. Interacting groups are very large, therefore; wide varieties of issues have been influencing their interaction even within the community. At the same time, multi-ethnic villages and towns are characterised by complex social grouping where Chenchus live with other tribal groups, Hindu caste groups, Muslims, and Christians. Interaction with these groups depends on circumstances under which they encounter each other. It also depends on the composition of ethnic groups, numerical strength, interdependency, resource allocation, and competition.

The Chenchus of multi-ethnic villages and towns are divided into various groups depending on their political affiliations. They are very much influenced by statutory political system and political parties which resulted in the increasing interaction with non-Chenchu. Traditional conflict resolution mechanisms are gradually disappearing. Conflicts among the Chenchus in these villages are no more confined to them but also drag others to resolve the conflict. Elders have lost their superior position and respect which is enjoyed by their counterparts in the core areas of the forest. Younger generation is taking up roles in decision making. In fact, they

are active in all issues pertaining to development of the village, conflict resolution, participation in administration, and political activities. The concept of dominant *kulam* is disappearing in these villages. *Raju* (king), *Pathani* (minister), and *Kolagadu* (priest) are no more having a predominant role in the affairs of the village. In fact, such designations are disappeared. Wealth and education are virtues than being the elder in the changing scenario. The locus of authority shifted from a traditional headman to the nominee of ITDA or an elected representative. Power relations have been playing a vital role in the place of conventional relations among members of the community. Forest is no more a meeting place and it is replaced by an agricultural field. They are more co-operative at the new work than the activities in the forest. They are not very shy like their counterparts in the core areas of the forest and interact with ease. The interaction with larger groups is leading to the formation of associations in multi-ethnic villages and towns. Youth associations are very popular. Change in the nature of interaction paved way for the success of some institutions and activities. SHGs of women and massive celebration of festivals are good examples for successful interactions not only among the Chenchus but also with non-Chenchus. The change in the nature and extent of interactions is giving rise to shift in the identity of people. It will be shaped depending upon the influential people of the community who are the spearheads of change. With the change in generation and elite stratum of the ethnic group, the focal themes of identity are changing. Therefore, there is diversification in the ethnic identity of the Chenchus.

Religion is an important marker of identity of the Chenchus of multi-ethnic villages and towns. Their religious life is influenced by the practices of neighbouring non-Chenchus. For example, the Chenchus of multi-ethnic villages and towns of Mahabubnagar district are influenced by the Islam because of long rule of the Islamic administrators of the erstwhile Nizam dominion, whereas; Chenchus of multi-ethnic villages of Kurnool, Prakasam, and Guntur districts are influenced by fairs, festivals, cults, pilgrimage centres of Hindu tradition. Chenchus of few multi-ethnic villages of Prakasam and Guntur districts are influenced by Christianity. As a result, the religious identities are being crystallized. The contestation of religious identities amongst the Chenchus is an example for the diversification in religious identity. Religious conversions are important events in creating conflicts which subsequently results in creating threat to ethnic identity. Religious organizations are also responsible in

invoking conflicts within the community which subsequently leading to the assertion of ethnic identity by non-converts of the ethnic group and indicating over the possible elimination of the converted Chenchus from such identification as the Chenchu. Fairs and festivals are creating ethnic consciousness among the Chenchus of multi-ethnic villages because of their participation along with other ethnic groups during these occasions. In such context, every ethnic group of the village tries to display their symbols. It is often understood as an issue of pride and status of an ethnic group which need to be asserted in order to make their presence more visible. The display of symbols by an ethnic group reflects its collective response which persists and strengthens the ethnic identity. Therefore, religious occasions act as vibrant tools of maintaining ethnic identity of the Chenchus.

The interaction with non-Chenchus during economic operations is very important for the Chenchus of multi-ethnic villages. These interactions influence diversification of the identity of the Chenchus in this context. Chenchus of these villages engaged in agriculture as cultivators and wage labourers. Cultivators depend on merchants for various needs. As a result; merchant, cultivators from Chenchu and non-Chenchu communities, labourers from Chenchu and non-Chenchu communities, and family and kin group of the cultivator acts as an interacting group. They influence each other but Chenchus are most influenced among the members of interacting group because of the movement of Chenchu from one kind of production and technological system to the other.

Chenchus living in multi-ethnic villages and towns are carrying forward their traditional identity by describing themselves as hunter-gatherers. They display bows and arrows among non-Chenchus if there is an occasion. Assertion on traditional identity is very important as an identity marker in this context. At the same time, Chenchus of multi-ethnic villages and towns understood the need of the status as Scheduled Tribe (ST) to gain economic benefits despite social unwillingness on such identity because of its connotation as low status.

Change and diversification of the ethnic identity of the Chenchus has been influenced by several forces. The major impetus has come from movement of Chenchus from core area of the forest to fringe of the forest and villages in plains and

migration of non-Chenchus towards the fringe of the forest for resources. These migrations of people intensified contacts among several ethnic groups. Displacement and rehabilitation programmes of government agencies added to the voluntary migrations of people. Particularly, construction of two large multi-purpose dams at Srisailam and Nagarjunasagar on Krishna river and notifying Nallamalai forest as the tiger reserve intensified displacement of Chenchus from core area of the forest. At the same time, Forest Department and its policies forced the Chenchus to move from their environs which subsequently resulted in the diversification of livelihoods. The resultant occupational diversification has significant impact on the identity of the Chenchus. Other administrative agencies of the then British and Nizam governments, Government of India and Government of Andhra Pradesh also have significant impact on the Chenchus. In particular, ITDA is the most influential among all the administrative agencies. It has unified the Chenchus under one administration after centuries of their separation under different administrative systems. Naxalite movement is very influential on the identity of the Chenchus for almost two decades. In fact, it has blurred their identity as forest dwellers. It has created such a situation where the Chenchus have to carry identity cards in order to prove their identity while moving in the forest for minor forest products. Telangana movement has created fissures among the Chenchus in recent years. The Chenchus of Telangana region are asserting on regional identity. However, it is not yet crystallized as an alternate identity. Chenchus underwent the process of acculturation due to all these forces. As a result, they are facing multiplicity of ideological, normative, and value oriented cultural dilemmas.

Members of every ethnic group have permissible limits to obey or disobey the norms. Such an opportunity inserts dynamism into the community and acts as a catalyst for change. The person rarely moves away from the framework of his/her social norms and practices because he/she is conscious of opportunities and identity within the community. The dissident persons find it difficult to grab opportunities even in a different system. A Chenchu can slightly disagree with norms of his/her community by adapting few behavioural attributes of a non-Chenchu. The community rarely resist such practice unless it affects the larger interests of the community. For example; celebration of marriage by a Brahmin priest, or prolonged period of pollution, or eating in the house of a scheduled caste family, or cremation instead of

burial of the dead, or taking dowry instead of bride-price are not considered as violation of social norms. As a result, many people have been adapting such practices of non-Chenchus. At the same time; theft, conflict, divorce, elopement, illicit relations, murder, and witchcraft are considered as serious violations of social norms. In such cases, individuals involved in the incident have to face trial from the community. These actions may attract punishment from the traditional political council in core areas of the forest or from police in the plain settlements. Therefore, such behavioural practices are avoided by members of the community.

There are changes in structural aspects of social institutions and their cultural attributes but the social and emotional identity of the Chenchu and being the Chenchu continue to persist. The Chenchus identify themselves as well as identified by others as a single *jati*. All the members of the ethnic group share significant cultural markers. But the Chenchus of present day are diversified in several ways. They are territorially and occupationally diversified but not characterized by hierarchy. The categorical identities emerged out of the intra-community diversity may be called as ethnic sub-identities because their identity often shuffles between common identity and territorial identity. However, common identity emerges as superior in the times of need. At the same time, ethnic identity is not determined by the achieved status of individuals and it will not alter with such status. Therefore, ascribed status of the person as well as the ethnic group continues to be the most important aspect of ethnic identity and going to persist along with such primordialities including name of the group, kin relations or blood ties, and sentiments. However, some Chenchus believe that there will be a threat to their status and identity if they move out of the forest. Therefore, most of the educated Chenchus of the plain areas are supporting the claims of the forest dwellers and advocating on their behalf to protect their right to live in the forest and campaigning against displacement efforts of the government.

Every member of an ethnic group may interact as a person with the members of many other ethnic groups under several circumstances. They are guided by the identity of his/her ethnic group, its culture, and language in the process of interaction. Therefore, their interactions may often reflect their ethnic background. However, consistent interaction leads to transmission of cultural elements among various interacting ethnic groups in course of time but may not result in the assimilation of

cultures. In fact, complete cultural assimilation is impossible in the context of Indian tribes. The present case of the Chenchus amply demonstrates this.

Tribal society of India has never been in complete isolation. But, they might be having lesser contacts with non-tribal population when compared with rest of the society. However, the intensity of contacts steadily increased after national independence. This has been happening because of the movement of people from both the sides, that is, tribals to non-tribal areas and non-tribals to forest areas. The movement of non-tribals towards the forest area is more intense because of the need for resources. In a very short span of time, the habitats lived by the tribal people have reached to a level of explosion in terms of the pressure on natural resources which subsequently resulted in conflicts among populations as well as further migration of populations from such areas. At the same time, these contacts led to the transition of cultural aspects which subsequently resulted in diversifying the identity of tribal communities. Therefore, several tribal communities are fragmented in terms of culture and identity. The identity as a homogeneous group and the identity as the inhabitants of forests are gradually disappearing. At the same time, alternate identity has not yet crystallized. Multiplicity of identities not only diversifies the community but also divide it. Tribal communities of India are unwinding in an unprecedented way which is giving less scope and time for them to devise alternate mechanisms for the new natural and cultural setting which results in ambiguity of identity.

<p align="center">**REFERENCES**</p>

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