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# From Forest to Future: Integration of Chenchu Tribe into Society

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## ABSTRACT

*The Integration of indigenous tribes into society remains not only a critical developmental concern but a test of a nation's commitment to development, cultural preservation and social cohesion. This paper examines the Case of the Chenchu tribe, indigenous to the Nallamalla Forest in Andhra Pradesh, India. Despite their rich cultural heritage and traditional knowledge systems, the Chenchu tribe has faced numerous challenges in integrating into broader society, including marginalization, economic disparities and loss of land.*

*This paper employs empirical tools to understand the integration of the Chenchu tribe into society by various parameters. Using a door-to-door approach, questionnaire is utilised to understand the realities on ground. Data has also been collected through Interview method. Secondary data from the Ministry of Tribal Affairs has been utilized. This paper studies the Modus Vivendi of the Chenchu tribe closely to understand their ways.*

*The Complexity of the matter heightens significantly because of the extremely close association of the Chenchus with the Nallamalla Forest. Furthering the challenges is the fact that Chenchus live in the presence of the endangered national animal – Tiger. The Nagarajunasagar Srisaigram Tiger Reserve (NSTR) located inside the Forest is the shared home of both Chenchus and Tigers. Here comes the dilemma of Conservation-Displacement trade-off by the Government.*

*There lies a thin line between Integration and Assimilation. While the definition stands clear, the projection of the same in reality is often unclear. This paper advocates for concerted efforts from all parties involved to realize that developmental definitions of the Chenchu tribe vary from that of the general perception. Innovative and flexible strategies need to be adopted, guaranteeing that policies and programs aid in the safeguarding and development of Chenchu culture and identity instead of undermining them.*

**Keywords:** Chenchu Tribe, Tribal Rights, Integration, Displacement, Development.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The term 'TRIBE' has not been defined by the Constitution of India. It is not possible for a single definition to encompass the complex meaning of tribes. As per Article 336(25) of the

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Constitution, “scheduled tribes are those tribes, tribal communities, or parts or groupings within such tribes or tribal communities that the Indian President may designate by means of a public notification under Article 342 (1)”.<sup>2</sup> Tribes also referred to as ‘Adivasis’ in India.

Various thinkers have nonetheless defined the term in various ways. Scheduled tribe has been defined as “a collection of families or groups of families, bearing a common name, members which occupy the same territory, speak the same language and observe certain taboos regarding marriage, profession or occupation and have developed as well as assessed system of reciprocity and mutuality of obligations” by Dr. D.N. Majumdar.<sup>3</sup> According to the Imperial Gazetteer of India, a tribe is “a collection of families bearing a common name, speaking a common dialect, occupying or professing to occupy a common territory and is not usually endogamous, though originally it might have been so.”

Kaka Kalelkar Commission (1953) which was the first backward classes commission constituted under Article 340 described Scheduled Tribes as people who lead “separate exclusive existence and are not fully assimilated in the main body of the people.” In 1960, the Chanda Committee established five criteria to identify and differentiate these communities, encompassing all clans and castes within the tribal group. These include shyness, tribal traits, backwardness, isolation due to geography, and special culture.<sup>4</sup>

8.6% of the nation’s total population, are listed as “Scheduled Tribes” (ST) according to the 2011 census, which translates to 10.42 crores.<sup>5</sup> They are geographically isolated from the rest of the population. They live in inaccessible areas such as dense forests, valleys, mountains which makes communication and travel difficult.

This paper studies the case of the Chenchu tribe, focusing on their integration into mainstream society. It provides an elaborate exploration of various aspects of their way of life, encompassing livelihood strategies, religious practices, and social customs. Through an in-depth examination of these dimensions, it aims to shed light on the process of the Chenchu tribe’s integration.

## **II. CONSTITUTIONAL SAFEGUARDS**

The Constitution has not taken upon itself to define ‘tribe’ but ‘Scheduled Tribes’ or ‘STs’ was

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<sup>2</sup> INDIA CONST. art. 15.

<sup>3</sup> C.S. RAO, *SOCIOLOGY* (S. Chand Publishing 2012).

<sup>4</sup> JAGRANJOSH, <https://www.jagranjosh.com/general-knowledge/regional-distribution-of-tribes-in-india-1521799367-1> (last visited Dec. 21, 2024).

<sup>5</sup> CENSUS INDIA, <https://censusindia.gov.in/census.website/#> (last visited Dec. 25, 2024).

included through article 342(1)<sup>6</sup>. The Constitution's Fifth Schedule calls for the creation of a 'Tribes' Advisory Council' in every state with Scheduled Areas. Article 15(4) provides for the advancement of OBCs including STs.<sup>7</sup> Article 29 guarantees that minority interests are protected.<sup>8</sup> Article 46 states that the State would safeguard the weaker segments of society from all types of exploitation while also promoting their financial and educational interests, especially those of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes<sup>9</sup>. Cultural safeguards are granted by Article 350 which gives "the Right to conserve distinct Language, Script or Culture."<sup>10</sup>

Article 330<sup>11</sup>, Article 332<sup>12</sup>, Article 243<sup>13</sup> facilitates the reservation of STs in Lok Sabha, State Legislature and Panchayats respectively, granting Political safeguards. Article 275 stipulates that the State Government would get special funding from the Union Government to support the welfare of Scheduled Tribes and give them better administrative treatment, ensuring Administrative safeguards.<sup>14</sup>

### **(A) Literature Review**

In "Development Definitions of Internally Displaced People and the Government: A Study of the Chenchu Tribe in the Nallamala Forest of Southern India," M.J. Ramamurthy<sup>15</sup> explore how development initiatives affect the Chenchu tribe's displacement and government policies. The research delves into differing perceptions of development among the displaced and government stakeholders, shedding light on the complex dynamics at play.

In "Imagining the 'Tribe' in Colonial and Post-Independence India," Sanjukta Das Gupta<sup>16</sup> examines the construction and representation of indigenous tribes throughout Indian history, from colonial to post-independence periods. The study critically analyses how colonial policies and post-colonial narratives have shaped perceptions of tribal identities, shedding light on the complex interplay between power, culture, and identity in India's socio-political landscape.

"Victim of Threatened Bio-Diversity : A case study of Chenchu" by J. Devarapalli and R.Y. Kumar<sup>17</sup> explores the predicament of the Chenchus, a tribal community facing challenges to

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<sup>6</sup> INDIA CONST. art. 330. cl. 2.

<sup>7</sup> INDIA CONST. art. 15. cl. 4.

<sup>8</sup> INDIA CONST. art. 29.

<sup>9</sup> INDIA CONST. art. 46.

<sup>10</sup> INDIA CONST. art. 350.

<sup>11</sup> INDIA CONST. art. 330.

<sup>12</sup> INDIA CONST. art. 332.

<sup>13</sup> INDIA CONST. art. 243.

<sup>14</sup> INDIA CONST. art. 275.

<sup>15</sup> M.J. Ramamurthy, "Development" definitions of internally displaced people and the government: A study of the Chenchu tribe in the Nallamala forest of southern India, 4 FRONTIERS (2023).

<sup>16</sup> S. D. Gupta, *Imagining the 'Tribe' in Colonial and Post-Independence India*, 16 POLITEJA (2019).

<sup>17</sup> Devarapalli, J. & Kumar, R. Y, *Victim of Threatened Bio-Diversity : A case study of Chenchus*, 31(1) INDIAN

biodiversity. The socioeconomic and cultural effects of biodiversity loss are highlighted through an analysis of their dependence on forests and traditional knowledge systems. Nevertheless, the study is limited in its capacity to evaluate the larger ecological environment. Despite these gaps, it underscores the urgent need for conservation efforts to mitigate the vulnerabilities of indigenous communities in the face of environmental degradation.

In “Transformation of Tribal Society: Integration vs. Assimilation”, K.S. Singh<sup>18</sup> delves into the complex dynamics of tribal societies amidst modernization and state intervention. He examines contrasting approaches of integration and assimilation, exploring how these strategies impact tribal identity, culture, and socio-economic well-being. The study highlights the challenges and opportunities faced by tribal communities in navigating their relationship with mainstream society.

A literature gap exists in understanding the nuanced processes and challenges of integrating the Chenchu tribe into mainstream society. Existing research often focuses on external interventions and policies, neglecting the internal dynamics and agency within the Chenchu community itself, thus warranting further investigation into their perspectives.

### **(B) Research Questions**

1. What are the traditional and cultural practices of the Chenchu tribe?
2. How do their practices influence their integration into mainstream society?
3. What socio-economic challenges do the Chenchu tribe face during their integration into society?
4. How do environmental conservation efforts in the Project Tiger area inhabited by the Chenchu tribe impact their lives?
5. How do government policies impact the integration of the Chenchu tribe into mainstream society?
6. What are the perspectives of the Chenchu tribe regarding their own integration into society?

### **(C) Research Objectives**

- Understand the traditional practices and societal roles in the Chenchu Tribe.
- Identify the socio-economic challenges faced by the tribe in their process of

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ANTHROPOLOGIST. 71 (2001).

<sup>18</sup> Singh K. S, *Transformation of Tribal Society: Integration vs Assimilation*. 17(33) ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL WEEKLY 1318 (1982).

integration.

- Analyse the trade-off between Conservation-Displacement and its impact on the tribe.
- Navigate the gap in the 'Development definitions' between the tribe and the authorities

#### **(D) Methodology**

Empirical data has been collected from the Chenchu Tribe using a questionnaire in Telugu language for better communication. The questionnaire was exhaustive comprising of 5 section including General Information, Socio-Cultural aspects, Livelihood and Jobs, Forest and Tigers and Government and Development. The data was collected from various areas to increase reliability. Insights were gained through an interview with a senior forest official on the impact of the tribe on the forest and tigers. The study was enhanced by secondary data obtained from publications and research papers on the integration of indigenous tribes.

### **III. CHENCHU TRIBE**

The Chenchus are a tribal community residing in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Odisha and Karnataka. 64,227 Chenchus were counted during the 2011 census. This semi-nomadic tribe reside in the Nallamala forest areas.<sup>19</sup> The Chenchus were recognised as a 'Particularly Vulnerable tribal group (PVTG)' earlier known as 'Primitive Tribal Groups (PTGs)' by the government in 1975. Etymologically, 'Chenchu' translates to a person who resides under trees or 'Chetu'. They speak a dialect of Telugu and use Telugu for reading and writing. Their original way of livelihood was Hunting and gathering forest produce. Their sex ratio of 1167 is a notable improvement. According to the 2011 Census, their literacy rate is 54.55 percent (80% for men and 33.33 percent for women).

#### **(A) Livelihood & Habitat**

The wild animals that live in Nallamala forest areas where the Chenchu people live are numerous including bears, tigers, spotted dears, panthers, peacocks, snakes, and a variety of birds. The Chenchu tribe's traditional means of subsistence has always been hunting and collecting food. They hunt these animals for consumption with bows and arrows. They collect forest produce like medicinal leaves, honey, roots and fruits to satisfy their needs. The excess is then sold for money in the local markets. The Chenchus are gradually distancing themselves from Traditional ways and opting for small scale agriculture of millets. They also being

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<sup>19</sup> Government of India, Ministry of Tribal Affairs, *Integration of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups* (2017), <https://tribal.nic.in/repository/ViewDoc.aspx?RepositoryNo=TRI28-08-2017121442&file=Docs/TRI28-08-2017121442.pdf>.

employed by the Government, especially the Forest Department because of their intricate knowledge of the forest.

Earlier, Chenchus did not settle down anywhere and always roamed in the forests. Their entire existence was completely dependent on the forest. There has been a paradigm shift in their habitat. They now live in huts at the borders of the forest and some live in the midst of the forest too. The Chenchus reside in tiny, widely spaced communities known as 'gudem' set up in cleared patches of forest. Each 'gudem' consists of multiple conical huts made of bamboo, generally located near a water body.

### **(B) Social Life**

The 'Kulam', the 'Gumpu', and the family are the main social units of Chenchu society.<sup>20</sup> Within a Kulam, exogamy is practiced because members of the same kulam are seen as descended from a single ancestor. The family is the most fundamental and significant institution in Chenchu society. With a man, his wife, and their unmarried offspring, Chenchu families are often nuclear in nature. Upon marriage, the child build his/her own house close by. Marriage within the 'kulam' is considered to be incestuous and completely forbidden. The Chenchus get married between the ages of 15-18 years.

Panchayats are the traditional village-level political institution of the Chenchus. This autonomous body is made up of a number of senior men from every kulam. The administration of justice, resolution of conflicts within and between villages, and advancement of communal welfare are the panchayat's primary responsibilities. Along with imposing fines and penalties, the panchayat also punishes criminals. It is governed by the village head man, also known as Raju, a traditional secular leader.

For recreation, the Chenchus engage in dance and music using a drum of their own making. Songs are collectively sung for amusement, worship and work.

### **(C) Religion & Beliefs**

The Chenchus are worshippers of Hinduism along with their own forest deities. They worship gods like Shiva, Durga, Venkateshwaraswami. More specifically they also pray to Goddess of Ishtakameshwari, Bayanna, Ankamma, etc. The stone carved idols are placed under a tree and worshipped. Sacrificing of animals is a common practice to appease the gods. The Chenchu are also believers of spirits and witchcraft.

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<sup>20</sup> Dr. P. Kalyan Kumar, *Ethnohistory, Ethnography and Cultural aspects of the Chenchu Tribe of Andhra Pradesh*, 2(2) INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF INNOVATIVE RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT (2013).

### (D) Progressive ways

The husband and wife enjoy an equal status in the family. They make their decisions collectively and cooperate with each other. In this tribal society, divorce is allowed should any disputes arise in marriage. A widow is also allowed to marry any man of her choice. Gender equality is a key feature of the tribe.

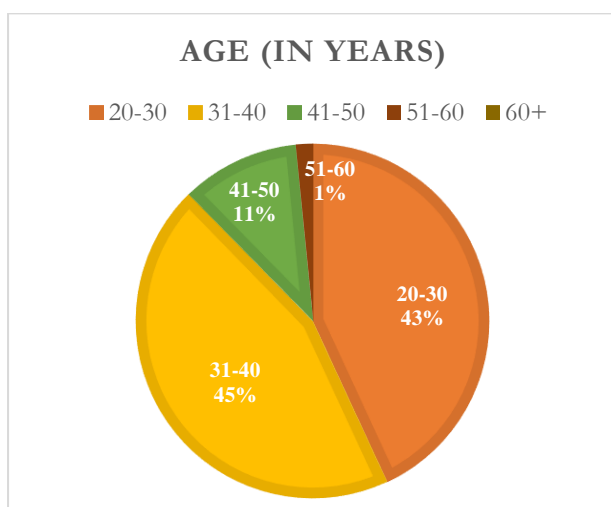
It is a forbidden practice to kill female animals while hunting for the preservation of the forest. While gathering forest produce, they ensure that the survival of the species is not threatened. They only pluck fully matured plants and not the growing ones. It is deeply engrained in their culture to not harm the environment in the process of satisfying their needs. For firewood, they pick up dead and dried logs of certain species of trees only.<sup>21</sup> They also do not touch parts of roots to aid in regeneration. They also make sure that the seeds of various species are spread out for germination.

## IV. DATA COLLECTION

Empirical data has been collected using a Questionnaire which was divided into 5 sections – General Information, Socio-Cultural aspects, Livelihood and Jobs, Forest and Tigers, Government and Development. Door-to-door approach was employed to collect data from multiple ‘gudem’ in the Nallamala Forest areas of Andhra Pradesh, India like Nekkanti, Ishtakameshwari, Pedda Cheruvu, Thummalabailu, Chinthala, Maripallem.

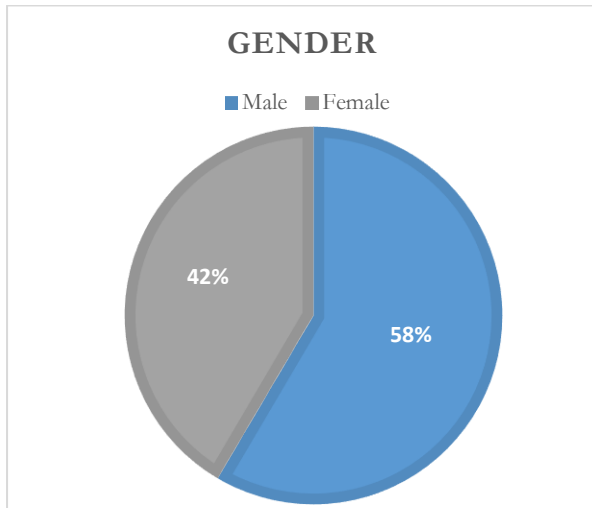
The sample size is 65, comprising of 38 men and 27 women from various age groups.

### (A) General Information –

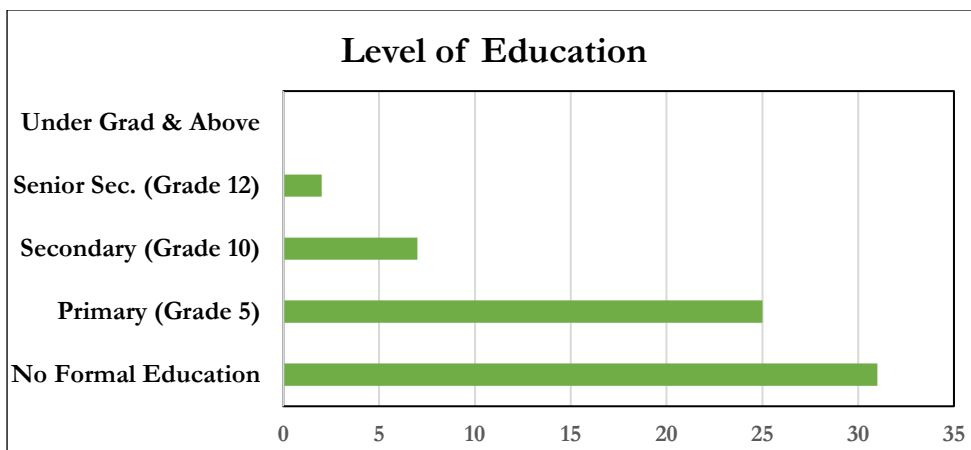


<sup>21</sup> Devarapalli, J. & Kumar, R. Y, *Victim of Threatened Bio-Diversity : A case study of Chenchus*, 31(1) INDIAN ANTHROPOLOGIST. 71 (2001).

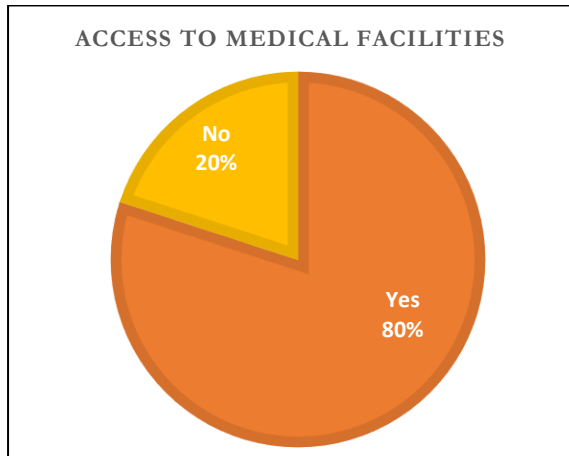




Almost half of the sample size taken is from the age group of 31-40 years, 20-30 year old account for 43% of the data, followed by 41-50 and 51-60 years group. Data has been collected from 38 men and 27 women as a whole.



More than half of the people (31) have never received formal education. 38.5% or 25 people have received formal school level education till Grade 5 while 7 people received secondary education till Grade 10. The data suggests that only two have passed Grade 12. Further, there are no graduates. This clearly delineates the need for a better educational outreach to the Chenchu people. More access and incentive must be given for these people to pursue higher education.

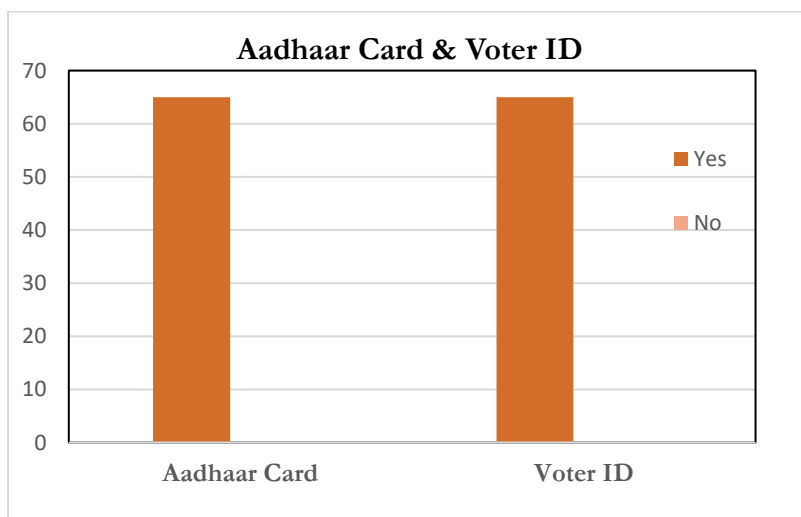


The access to Medical facilities has significantly increased. The data suggest that 80% or 52 people have affirmed their access to modern medicine. Many still rely on NGO aid, allopathy and traditional medicines. Health Care is still an area that needs work despite the progress.

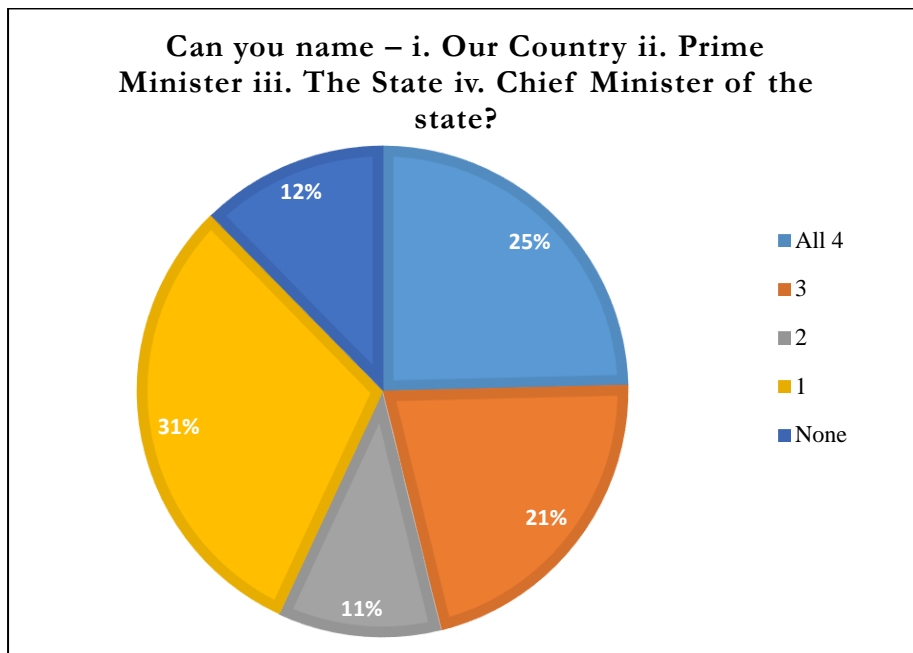
**(B) Socio-Cultural aspects –**

When asked if they consider themselves to be a part of the mainstream society, 80% which translates to 52 people replied that they do consider themselves to be a part of the larger society. The remaining 20% however answered in negative. These trends clearly indicate a shift from the original perception of the Chenchus about themselves and the society.

Hinduism is the only religion followed by them along with some traditional deities like Potharaju, Bayanna, Ankamma etc. Lord Shiva finds a special mention among the responses.



All 65 people have been granted Aadhaar Card and Voter ID. Every person has a proof of identity and a Voter ID which implies their eligibility to vote and participate in the electoral process.

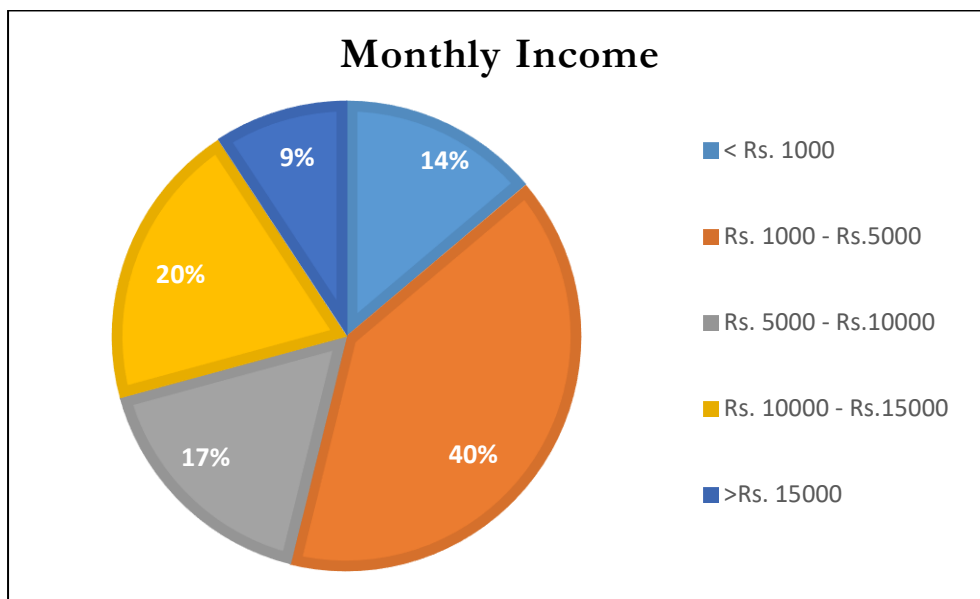


As a test of awareness, on being asked to name our Country, Prime Minister, the State and the Chief Minister, 1/5<sup>th</sup> of them were able to answer all 4 whereas over 12 % were unable to name even one. This data suggests that there is a great need for awareness among the Chenchu people.

**(C) Livelihood & Jobs –**



Hunting as a means of Livelihood as was traditionally the case has been completely abandoned now, in accordance with the NSTR mandate. The main source of livelihood has become Agriculture (30%), Selling forest produce (23%) and Labour (20%). The shift from hunting has been welcomed by the government and forest department.

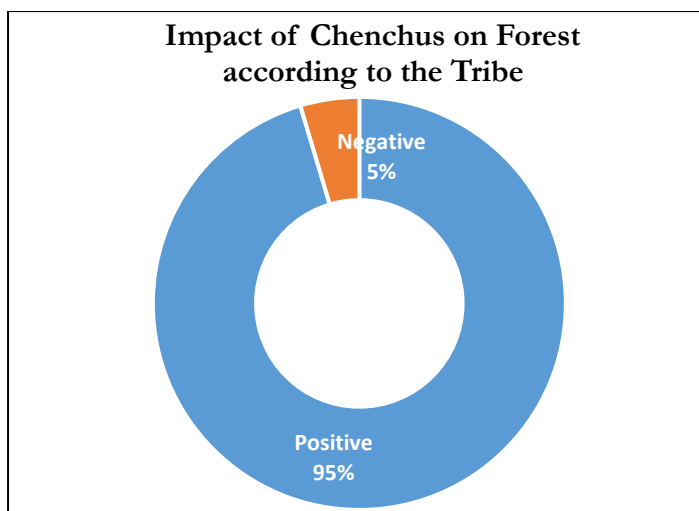


The data present above indicates that the income of the Chenchus is way below the minimum wage rate. The sources of their income must be strengthened. Salaried jobs should be made available to the tribe for raising their standards of living and for their economic empowerment.

**(D) Forests & Tigers –**

**a. Forest & Chenchus**

There exists a very intricate and profound relationship between the Chenchus and the Nallamala Forest. The forest is their source of life and they strongly accord the position of a ‘Mother’ to the forest. The relationship between the Chenchu and the Nallamala also finds a mention in the ancient text of ‘Manusmriti’ as the original dwellers of the forest. Biodiversity Conservation has been gaining increasing importance in the Country. The widespread consumption of natural resources is restricted when preservation of biodiversity becomes a state priority, leading to a convoluted scenario of trade-offs between conservation and displacement.



An overwhelming majority i.e., 95% believe that they have a positive impact on the Nallamala Forest whereas a minimal 5% believe the opposite.

b. Tigers & Chenchus

The Nallamala forest accommodates the Largest tiger reserve in India which is the Nagarjunasagar - Srisailem Tiger Reserve or NSTR spread over a total area of 5937 square kilometres.<sup>22</sup> It became a part of Project Tiger in 1983.<sup>23</sup> This once shared home of chechus and tigers on becoming a biodiversity hub was imposed with a ban on hunting, settlement and gathering of forest produce. The consequence of the same was the gradual displacement of the tribe from the deep forest to its peripheries. This displacement was to serve the twin goals of conservation of biodiversity and betterment of the lives of the tribe.

According to the Former Field Director of NSTR, “The Chenchus have a positive impact on the tiger conservation efforts. As they are native to the Nallamala, they know the forest better than anyone. This trait of them is extremely useful as they can aid in information gathering. Over 500 Chenchu youth have been appointed by the Forest Department to serve as Anti-poaching parties, Mobile parties, River patrollers, check post duty and most importantly as informers. There is definitely a negative impact on the forest because of their settlement in the reserved areas but their expertise and help in the conservation efforts cannot be denied.”

The tigers hold a special place in the values and beliefs of the Chenchus. To them the tiger is not just the Apex predator of Nallamala, tiger is their protector and it is given the status of a ‘pedda koduku’ or elder son in the tribe. The tigers and Chenchus are indeed interdependent on each other for survival.

## **V. GOVERNMENT & DEVELOPMENT**

The Chenchu tribe’s poor economic status and remote, forest-dwelling lifestyle led to its designation as a PVTG by the government in 1975. The 2008 Conservation-Development Plan was created by the Indian government to give the PVTGs all-encompassing socioeconomic growth. Guidelines to execute the plan were released by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs in 2015 to the different Tribal Welfare Departments under the control of the state governments of India.

The primary goals were the preservation of the cultures of the PVTG, as well as the documentation of their customs, traditional remedies, music, dance, agriculture, and diets. The plan also prioritized providing the PVTGs with means of subsistence, jobs, and educational

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<sup>22</sup> National Tiger Conservation Authority, *Nagarjunasagar Srisailem Tiger Reserve* <https://ntca.gov.in/assets/uploads/briefnote/nstr.pdf>.

<sup>23</sup> *Id.*

opportunities, as well as land distribution and development amenities. The provisions directly benefited the Chenchu people as well. The Indian government established Integrated Tribal Development Agencies (ITDAs) to oversee developmental initiatives for the PVTGs in each state during the country's Fifth Five Year Plan (1974–1979), which was adopted by Andhra Pradesh.<sup>24</sup> The Central and State governments created developmental projects for the PVTGs, which were carried out and their success monitored by the ITDAs. Local NGOs occasionally worked with the ITDA to fund and carry out initiatives. The development programs of the ITDA are intended to give the Chenchus work possibilities, agricultural guidance and subsidies, health and education advantages and economic aid.

### **(A) Government Schemes**

**Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA)** - They were established as supplementary institutions in the 1970s and 1980s to provide Scheduled Tribes with public goods and services. There are 8 ITDAs in Andhra Pradesh.<sup>25</sup>

**Pradhan Mantri Van Dhan Yojana (PMVDY)** - The VDVY program was introduced with the intention of enhancing the standard of living for India's tribal populations.<sup>26</sup> The program's main objectives are to create value chains for forest-based goods and increase tribal communities; revenue through skill development and capacity building. Approximately 10 lakh tribal entrepreneurs will profit from the program, which aims to build 50,000 Van Dhan Vikas Kendras nationwide.

**TRIFED** – In 1987, “Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India” was established.<sup>27</sup> It is an apex body at the national level that is managed by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs. It aims to enhance the socioeconomic growth of the indigenous population through the sale and development of indigenous goods, such as paintings, textiles and pottery.

**Eklavya Model Residential Schools** - In order to provide Schedule Tribe children living in rural places with a high-quality education, EMRS was founded in 1997–1998. The goal of EMRS is to give ST students in remote areas access to high-quality middle and upper-level education. This will not only help them to get reservations for professional courses, as well as jobs in the public and private sectors of government, and other sectors. Currently, there are 690

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<sup>24</sup> Government of India, Ministry of Tribal Affairs, *ITDA for Welfare of Tribals* <https://pib.gov.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=116589> (last visited Dec. 27, 2024).

<sup>25</sup> MINISTRY OF TRIBAL AFFAIRS, <https://pib.gov.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=116589> (last visited Jan. 5, 2025).

<sup>26</sup> NATIONAL PORTAL OF INDIA, <https://www.india.gov.in/spotlight/pradhan-mantri-van-dhan-yojana>, (last visited Jan. 5, 2025).

<sup>27</sup> TRIFED, <https://trifed.tribal.gov.in/home> (last visited Jan. 6, 2025).

schools throughout the country and 28 in Andhra Pradesh.

The Prime Minister (PM) has announced the following major initiatives to guarantee protection for PVTGs on the occasion of “Janjatiya Gaurav Diwas” on 15th November 2023.

- **PM JANMAN – PM Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan aims to** safeguard and sustain indigenous communities, particularly those that are in danger of going extinct, by giving them the assistance, growth, and access to opportunities and mainstream services they require.<sup>28</sup>
- **PM PVTG Mission-** The goal of this mission is to raise PVTGs’ socioeconomic standing.  
The Union Budget has allocated Rs. 24000 Crore for Scheduled Tribes in order to help with this.<sup>29</sup>
- **Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra -** Reaching out to people, raising awareness, providing benefits such as access to LPG cylinders, electricity connections, basic banking, housing for the impoverished, food security, proper nutrition, dependable healthcare, clean drinking water, etc., will be the main goals of the Yatra.<sup>30</sup>

## **(B) The Law**

### **PESA, 1996**

The Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA) is a crucial legislative framework aimed at empowering tribal communities in India.<sup>31</sup> PESA recognizes the traditional decision-making processes of tribes, granting them control over natural resources, land rights, and cultural preservation. By mandating community participation in development projects and protecting against land alienation, PESA seeks to rectify historical injustices faced by tribal populations and promote sustainable development aligned with their socio-cultural practices.

### **Biological Diversity Act, 2002**

The Biological Diversity Act, 2002 was enacted in India to conserve biological diversity, promote sustainable use of its components and ensure equitable sharing of benefits derived from

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<sup>28</sup> NATIONAL PORTAL OF INDIA, <https://www.india.gov.in/spotlight/pradhan-mantri-janjati-advasi-nyaya-maha-abhiyan-pm-janman> (last visited Jan. 5, 2025).

<sup>29</sup> MINISTRY OF TRIBAL AFFAIRS, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1947246> (last visited Jan. 5, 2025).

<sup>30</sup> MINISTRY OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT, <https://rural.gov.in/en/viksit-bharat-sankalp-yatra> (last visited Jan. 5, 2025).

<sup>31</sup> MINISTRY OF TRIBAL AFFAIRS, [https://www.mha.gov.in/sites/default/files/PESAAct1996\\_0.pdf](https://www.mha.gov.in/sites/default/files/PESAAct1996_0.pdf) (last visited Jan. 3, 2025).

biological resources.<sup>32</sup> This legislation aligns with India's commitment to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity from 1992. Despite its potential, the impact of the act has been limited, and full enforcement is necessary to support indigenous populations, particularly Adivasis, in benefiting from their rich biodiversity while ensuring its conservation.

### **Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006**

Scheduled Tribes And Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition Of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 or rather commonly known as the Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006 is a landmark legislation in India that recognizes the rights of Scheduled Tribes and other traditional forest dwellers over forest resources essential for their livelihoods, habitation and cultural practices.<sup>33</sup> Prior to the FRA, these communities were often treated as encroachers, with their historical ties to the land overlooked. The Act grants individual rights for self-cultivation and habitation, as well as community rights for grazing, fishing, and accessing water bodies. It empowers local governance through the Gram Sabha, enabling communities to manage and protect their resources sustainably. The FRA aims to rectify historical injustices, ensure land tenure and food security, and strengthen conservation efforts by involving rights holders in ecological stewardship. Despite its potential, challenges remain in implementation, including awareness and bureaucratic hurdles.

### **Development definitions**

Progress is the general way forward for people of all circumstance irrespective of their differences. The complexity of the question of development arises when the definition of the government and tribes are not in sync.

Mismatched definitions of development will render the plans ineffective and both parties dissatisfied. Consensus-ad-idem is essential in such matters of development.

It was found that there is great consensus between the government and the Chenchus regarding Roads, Education, Jobs and House. There is a moderate level of agreement regarding Freedom and Health. The matter with low consensus between the authorities and the tribe is well-being as the definition drastically differs for each party.<sup>34</sup>

From the data collected, 82% of the respondents were for the displacement efforts of the Government while 18% was against the same. This data indicates that many now wish to adopt

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<sup>32</sup> INDIA CODE, <https://www.indiacode.nic.in/bitstream/123456789/2046/4/a2003-18.pdf> (last visited Jan. 4, 2025).

<sup>33</sup> MINISTRY OF TRIBAL AFFAIRS, <https://tribal.nic.in/FRA.aspx> (last visited Jan. 4, 2025).

<sup>34</sup> Ramamurthy, M. J., & Hoffman, D. (2023). "Development" definitions of internally displaced people and the government: A study of the Chenchu tribe in the Nallamala forest of southern India. *Frontiers in Conservation Science*, 4. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fcosc.2023.1126168>



the practices of the mainstream society.

### **Tribal Policy**

The management of tribal issues has been guided by the Nehruvian Panchsheel,<sup>35</sup> a set of five principles that were outlined in 1952.

“(1) People should develop along the lines of their own genius, and the imposition of alien values should be avoided.

(2) Tribal rights in land and forest should be respected.

(3) Teams of tribals should be trained in the work of administration and development.

(4) Tribal areas should not be over administered or overwhelmed with a multiplicity of schemes.

(5) Results should be judged not by statistics or the amount of money spent, but by the human character that is evolved.”

Preserving tribal culture aligns seamlessly with Nehruvian Panchsheel, the five principles of peaceful coexistence advocated by India’s first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. Tribal cultures embody principles such as mutual respect, non-interference, and peaceful coexistence with nature – all central tenets of Panchsheel. Tribal communities have unique knowledge systems about sustainable living, biodiversity conservation, and traditional medicine, which are invaluable in today’s world grappling with environmental degradation and climate change. Respecting tribal autonomy and their way of life fosters harmony and inclusivity, echoing Panchsheel’s emphasis on mutual respect and non-interference in each other’s internal affairs. Moreover, preserving tribal cultures ensures the preservation of diverse cultural heritage, enriching the fabric of national identity while promoting cultural pluralism. Upholding tribal culture not only honors the spirit of Panchsheel but also contributes to a more equitable, harmonious, and culturally rich society.

### **Prevailing Concerns :**

- The monthly income of the Chenchu tribe remains to be abysmal despite the adoption of agriculture as livelihood. There is a need for more economic and job opportunities to enhance financial autonomy.
- There is huge scope to increase access to Graduation and Post-Graduation level courses and incentives to pursue the same.

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<sup>35</sup> Indian Tribal Heritage, *Jawaharlal Nehru’s “Five Principles” for the policy to be pursued vis-a-vis the tribals – Tribal Cultural Heritage in India*, <https://indiantribalheritage.org/?p=17554#gsc.tab=0> (last visited Dec. 28, 2024).

- Although there is accessibility to formal medical institutions, availability of health care needs improvement.
- The policies made for the development of the Chenchu tribe must be in line with the 5<sup>th</sup> Nehruvian Panchsheel which calls for the development of human character as the true measure of development and not statistics.

### **Integration v. Assimilation –**

Although the terms ‘assimilation’ and ‘integration’ are sometimes used synonymously, they have different meanings when discussing societal cohesiveness. The process of integrating various social, cultural, and ethnic groups while preserving their own identities and contributions is known as integration<sup>36</sup>. It promotes equality, tolerance, and respect for one another, allowing many cultures to coexist within larger social frameworks. Assimilation, on the other hand, refers to a minority group’s absorption into the majority culture, frequently leading to the loss of that group’s unique identity. Assimilation can result in cultural homogeneity and the marginalization of minority voices, whereas integration fosters variety and pluralism. Thus, the balance between unity and variety within a culture is central to the argument between assimilation and integration. Good integration fosters a sense of shared citizenship and belonging while celebrating diversity. The Nehruvian Panchsheel also pushes for Integration rather than Assimilation. All government policies must be in line with this principle.

## **VI. CONCLUSION**

Modernization and development are indeed inexorable forces shaping societies worldwide, and the Chenchu Tribe acknowledges this reality. They are not opposed to progress; in fact, they aspire for it. However, their perspective on development differs from conventional notions embraced by the government and mainstream society. For the Chenchu Tribe, development isn’t solely measured by economic growth or infrastructural advancements; it encompasses the preservation of their cultural heritage, the protection of their ancestral lands, and the sustenance of their traditional way of life.

To ensure that the concept of development aligns with the aspirations of the Chenchu Tribe, effective dialogue and communication channels between the tribe and the government are imperative. This dialogue should involve mutual respect, active listening, and a genuine willingness to understand each other’s perspectives. By bridging the gap through meaningful

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<sup>36</sup> Singh K. S, *Transformation of Tribal Society: Integration vs Assimilation*. 17(33) ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL WEEKLY 1318 (1982).

engagement, both parties can work together to formulate development policies and initiatives that are inclusive, sustainable, and respectful of the Chenchu Tribe's values, needs, and aspirations. This collaborative approach can lead to holistic development that benefits not only the tribe but also the broader society.

### **(A) Way Forward**

The Forest and the Chenchus share a vital interdependence. While concerns arise over the tribe's presence in protected areas, their deep understanding of the ecosystem offers invaluable conservation benefits. Balancing development with conservation doesn't necessitate divergence; it requires alignment. Empowering the Chenchus economically while preserving their cultural heritage can harmonize these goals. Through collaboration and respect for traditional wisdom, a sustainable path forward can be charted, benefiting both the tribe, the forest ecosystem and the society as a whole.

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