

# EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENTS AMONG CHENCHU TRIBE: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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## Abstract

Chenchus are one among the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) Communities of erstwhile Andhra Pradesh, confined to the Nallamalai forest. Haimendorf states that the Chenchus, in their physical make-up, conform largely to a racial Veddoid, a primitive tribe of Sri Lanka. Chenchus are unique in their culture, customs, and identity. Ignoring this fact, the government has treated them on par with other tribal communities and initiated unsuited developmental programs for their upliftment. Their education level has not exceeded 32 percent despite many provisions, recognizing the importance of this often-ignored aspect and the gaps in earlier studies, this study has made a comprehensive attempt to trace the root causes of their low literacy rate. To fulfill the study objectives, extensive and prolonged fieldwork was conducted across selected Ashram schools in Prakasam district of Andhra Pradesh. Deep interactions with primary stakeholders, including students, parents, and teachers, provided the opportunity to examine the root causes of low literacy in detail. Based on the researcher's observations and the perceptions of primary stakeholders, the study suggests some tailor-made recommendations for the improvement of education among the Chenchu tribes.

**Keywords:** Chenchus, Education, PVTGS, literacy

## Introduction

Chenchus are among the oldest and particularly vulnerable tribal groups (PVTGs) in the region that was formerly known as Andhra

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Pradesh, now scattered across six districts within the Nallamalai forest. References to Chenchus can be found in various historical writings, including “Gabbilam” by Gurram Jashua, “Vallabharayudi Kreedabhiramam,” and “Yamunudi’s Rajaneeti Sutraalu” (Ramesh 2013). The ecological significance of the term “Chenchus” is believed to be attributed to people who reside under a Chettu (tree), hence being called Chenchu (Aiyappan 1948, p148). According to another version, these people were accustomed to consuming a local variety of rat known as ‘Chunchu,’ and the same term was applied to identify the people. The Chenchu tribe is divided into numerous exogamous clans, each prefixed to their names. Among the clans found among the Chenchus are ‘Mandi,’ ‘Chigurla,’ ‘Udathala,’ ‘Tokala,’ ‘Mekala,’ ‘Bhunami,’ ‘Katraju,’ ‘Arthi,’ ‘Dasari,’ etc. (TCRTI 2004). According to V.N.V.K Sastry (2010), two additional types were introduced in addition to the existing groups among the Chenchus: ‘forest Chenchus’ and ‘village Chenchus.’ Furthermore, the village Chenchus are further classified into two subtypes: ‘Bontha Chenchus’ and ‘Krishna Chenchus.’ Village Chenchus primarily inhabit plain areas, while forest Chenchus are found in dense forests and hilly regions. The mother tongue of all Chenchus is Telugu.

Chenchus practice a diverse religious belief system, worshipping and believing in numerous deities and spirits, both malevolent and benevolent. They actively participate in Hindu festivals, with their religious pantheon including deities such as GaralaMaisamma, Yellamma, Peddamma, Sunkulamma, Mantahnalamma, Ankamma, and gods like Bagavanthulu, Lingamaiah, Pothuraju, and Mallanna. In contrast to some other tribes, Chenchus do not have a specific focus on music or dances. However, they excel in drum beating, known as ‘Thappetlu.’ Drum beating is a widely practiced skill within the community, possibly due to their frequent resettlements from one place to another. Chenchu settlements are referred to as ‘Pentas’ and ‘Gudems’ (clusters of houses). A Chenchu village is known as a “Penta.” Each penta consists of a few huts spaced apart and grouped based on kinship patterns. Close relatives tend to live in proximity, while more distant relatives reside farther away. Their homes are characterized by minimal possessions, presenting a sparse and Spartan appearance.

In Andhra Pradesh, there are 35 tribal groups, among which Bodo Gadaba, Gutob Gadaba, Bondo Poraja, Khond Poroja, Parangiperja, Chenchu, Dongaria Khonds, Kuttia Kondhs, Kolam, Kondareddis, Konda Savaras, and Thoti were officially recognized as Primitive Tribal Groups in 1975 (see MoTA). Among them, Chenchus are considered the most vulnerable (Naik and Rahiman 2007), and

their traditional way of life has historically revolved around hunting and food gathering. Chenchus primarily inhabit the dense forest areas of the Nallamalla forest near the banks of the Krishna River. Haimendorf (1982) described Chenchus in his study as possessing a physical make-up that largely aligns with a racial type called Veddoid, a term derived from the Veddas, a primitive tribe of Sri Lanka (Ceylon). Similar to the Veddas, the Chenchus are characterized by a short and slender stature, very dark skin, wavy or curly hair, broad faces, flat noses, and a slight trace of prognathism.

### Statement of the problem

Similar to other tribes in India, access to health education and other developmental opportunities for the Chenchus has remained elusive for years. Despite special developmental initiatives and the establishment of the exclusive Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA) for Chenchu welfare, development progress appears to fall short, and they continue to struggle to access basic facilities. Major challenges encompass health, education, livelihoods, migration, and child marriages, among others. According to the 2011 census, the total Chenchu population is 49,232, a relatively small percentage of the overall tribal population. The literacy rate among Chenchus stands at 25.75%, with male literacy at 32.58% and female literacy at 18.73%. In comparison to other sub-tribes, Chenchu literacy rates, both among males and females, are significantly lower (TCRTI 2004). Studies consistently report that literacy levels among Chenchus are subpar, with illiteracy serving as a primary hindrance to their social development.

Historically, there were schools for Chenchus in Mahabubnagar and Kurnool districts before independence (Sakti 2013). Recognizing the low literacy levels among Chenchus, the government has continually strived to improve literacy through various developmental interventions, starting with the Fifth Five-Year Plan. To enhance literacy rates, the government has established various educational institutions such as Girijan Vidhya Vikasa Kendraalu (GVVKs), ashram schools, residential schools, and hostels for boys and girls. Since 1975, the government has set up 14 ashram schools in Chenchu hamlets in Prakasam and other residential schools. Despite these efforts, the literacy rate has not exceeded 26%, and the situation has remained stagnant for an extended period. Several factors contribute to this low literacy rate, including socio-cultural factors, parental involvement, student engagement, and

teacher effectiveness. In light of this background and context, the researcher has undertaken a descriptive study to examine the issues and challenges in achieving literacy levels and improving retention rates among the Chenchus. The study explores various issues such as environmental and health factors, parental and teacher attitudes, as well as their perceptions, as reported by parents, teachers, and students.

### Chenchus education in the pre-independence era

The Chenchus were dispersed across three regions: Telangana, Rayalaseema, and Coastal Andhra, particularly in the Nallamalai forest along the banks of the Krishna river. Geographically, the Chenchus were separated and governed by the Hyderabad Nizam and the British under the Madras Presidency. Historical evidence reveals the existence of schools for the Chenchus during this period. Haimendorf, in his book “Chenchus: Jungle Folk of the Deccan,” mentions that in 1916, primary schools were established in major Chenchu settlements in the Prakasam district. He further notes the presence of a special school for girls in Pecheruvu, Atmakuru mandal, Kurnool district. These schools attracted a significant number of students who were provided with midday meals and clothing. Attendance was reported to be satisfactory. For example, in Bairlutee, 49 children were enrolled, half of whom were girls, and a similar number of children were registered in Naguluti. These schools offered only primary education, and those who performed well had the opportunity to attend the board high school in Atmakur, where boarding and lodging facilities were provided.

During a field visit, the headmaster of Bairlutee reported that their school had completed 100 years. This information was conveyed to them by officials from the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) who had visited their school in May 2013. Additionally, literature reports that in 1946, a school was established for the Chenchus in Mannanur, Mahabubnagar district of the Telangana region, under the Nizam’s government (Sakti 2013, pp. 141). Apart from the aforementioned instances, there is further evidence of schools being established for the Chenchus. The table below illustrates the number of schools, enrollment figures, and expenditure incurred on each child. Interestingly, schools were also established in Adilabad district during the Nizam’s rule. Notably, some parts of the Chenchu-inhabited areas were privileged to have schools provided by the British government.

Table 1: Chenchu schools during 1925-28

Year	Expenditure on education	Number of Chenchu schools	Number of Children on Roll			Expenditure per child per year (Rs)
			Boys	Girls	Total	
1925-26	9528	15	254	116	380	25
1926-27	12448	21	305	141	446	27
1927-28	16448	19	282	156	438	38
Total	38027	55	851	413	1264	90
Average	12676	18	283	138	421	30

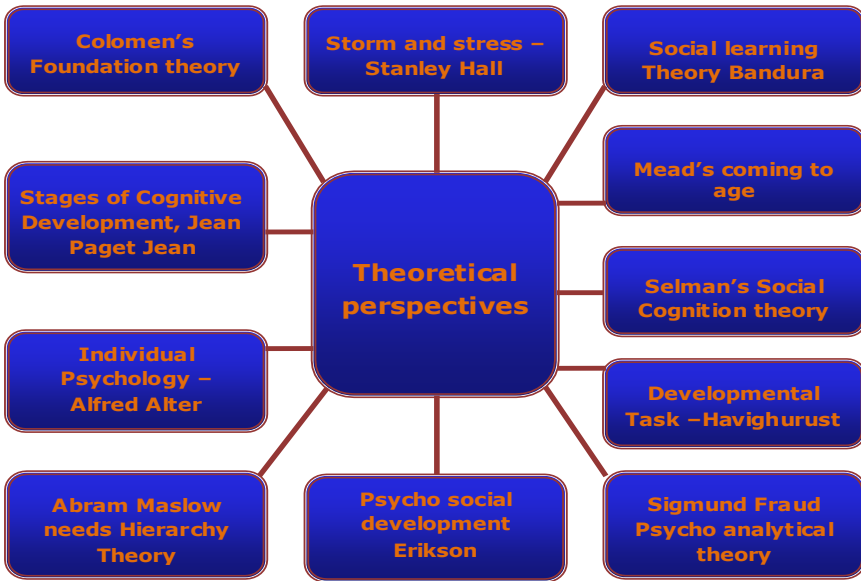
**Source:** Preceding No. 31, Press, Date 15.07.1932 of the Chief Conservator of Forest, Kurnool, accessed from ITDA Srisailam

### Theoretical framework

Theory provides concepts to name what we observe and to explain the relationships between these concepts. It allows us to understand what we see and devise strategies for effecting change. It is a tool that helps us identify problems and plan ways to alter situations (Moore 1991). Theoretical perspectives on the context of tribal students shed light on their understanding and perceptions of education, which significantly impact their development. Tribal students often grapple with various socio-psychological challenges and inferiority complexes shaped by their upbringing and environment.

In this process, a tribal student undergoes an exciting but challenging transition phase in the human life cycle. This phase marks their evolution into adults with newfound independence and heightened responsibilities. They are in a constant quest to establish their unique identities, question societal values, and assert their existence. During adolescence, they develop skills essential for their growth into compassionate and responsible adults. When adolescents receive support and encouragement from caring adults, they flourish, becoming resourceful contributors to their families and societies. Regrettably, many Chenchu children find themselves at a crossroads, leading to their disengagement from schools due to various reasons. In the following section, a comprehensive examination was made on various theoretical frameworks that provided intricate insights into the challenges confronted by tribal children across, with a particular focus on the Chenchu community.

Havighurst (1951) posited that developmental tasks within each stage are sequential, meaning each task is a prerequisite for the



Graph 1: Theoretical framework

**Source:** Authors work from various psychological theories

succeeding one. The optimal time for mastering these tasks is, to some extent, biologically determined. Adolescence involves nine major tasks:

- Accepting one's physical appearance and acquiring a masculine or feminine gender identity.
- Developing appropriate relationships with peers of both sexes.
- Achieving emotional independence from parents and other adults.
- Ensuring economic independence.
- Preparing for a career and entering the job market.
- Developing cognitive skills and concepts for social competence.
- Understanding and practicing socially responsible behavior.
- Preparing for marriage and family.
- Acquiring values harmonious with a scientific worldview.

Adolescents may be dealing with multiple tasks simultaneously, and the importance of specific tasks varies during the early, middle, and late stages of adolescence (Ingersoll, n.d.). The Developmental Tasks Model suggests that adolescents who successfully navigate these tasks emerge as well-adjusted and socially integrated adults.

Hall (1904) originally viewed adolescence as a period of "storm and stress" (S&S), marked by pressure from parents, peers, teachers,

and society to grow up quickly. However, Coleman (1978) clarified that the stresses of adolescence do not all occur simultaneously. Adolescents typically face one or two stressful events at a time, with varying peak ages for each. Coleman's perspective implies that adolescence is not necessarily a short, uniformly stressful period, but rather a time of smoothly evolving developmental changes.

Freud (1948) highlighted the increase in sexuality as a significant stressor during adolescence. This increase can lead to the re-emergence of the oedipal situation, requiring resolution through attraction to peers of the opposite sex. The heightened sex drive generates stress and anxiety, leading to the activation of defense mechanisms to restore equilibrium and protect against anxiety.

Erikson (1968) emphasized the acquisition of ego identity and a sense of self, influenced by cultural factors. He proposed a series of psychosocial stages, each associated with a crisis or psychosocial task. Developing a vocational identity and a personal philosophy is crucial during adolescence, providing a framework for evaluating and coping with life events. Without this, adolescents may struggle with self-doubt, role confusion, and potentially engage in self-destructive behaviors like juvenile delinquency.

Adler (1964), an "Individual Psychologist," discussed styles of life for coping with feelings of inferiority arising from individual and social development. Adolescence takes center stage in forming constructive or destructive styles of life. Given the physiological changes during this stage, it demands careful attention and care. Abraham Maslow's "self-actualization" theory (1943) organized human needs into a hierarchy, ascending from basic physiological needs to self-actualization.

Piaget (1952) argued that intelligence develops through stages influenced by both biological predispositions and cultural factors. Adolescents possess abstract thinking skills, allowing them to explore questions about their identity and make long-term plans and commitments. Selman's Social Cognition Theory (1980) expanded on Piaget's theory, emphasizing adolescents' ability to consider the perspectives of others through social cognition and social role-taking skills.

Social Learning Theory (SLT), outlined by Bandura (1969, 1973), posits that environmental factors shape behavior by reinforcing desired behaviors and providing models of appropriate behavior. Adolescents learn by observing and imitating models. Mead (1950, 1953) argued that development varies across cultures due to differences in cultural institutions, which define expected behaviors

for adolescents. Rosenberg's self-esteem theory (1965) has had a significant influence on various socio-economic, emotional, and psychological aspects of Chenchu students, particularly during their formative years, including their adolescent stage.

### Scientific background

The scientific background draws upon various psycho-social theories. These theories emphasize that a student's physical, cognitive, and emotional development occurs within social institutions, including family, friends, and school. Thus, comprehending the nature of development necessitates an understanding of the social contexts in which it takes place. For adolescent children, families, peers, and schools are the most significant cultural contexts where development unfolds. Undoubtedly, the psycho-social environment in which a child grows up significantly influences their attitude, behavior, and personality. It also impacts their anxiety levels, mood, and social and interpersonal interactions. Given these facts, this study seeks to examine the psycho-social factors that have a substantial impact on tribal education. The theories mentioned above enable us to understand various aspects of tribal students, including:

- The social dimension influenced by cultural norms and rules.
- The psychological dimension encompassing gender issues, personality development, and self-esteem.
- The affective and relational dimension involving emotions, viewpoints, and feelings.
- Specific issues like attention, conduct, and behavior problems, anxiety, mood, social and interpersonal difficulties.
- The family environment.
- The teacher-student relationship.

As such, this study aims to explore the perspectives of students, teachers, and parents within the Chenchu community, taking into account not only knowledge acquisition but also the social and cultural aspects unique to this community.

### The objectives of this study

- To identify the gaps and challenges hindering Chenchu enrollment in Ashram Schools within the Nallamalai area of Prakasam district.
- To examine the perceptions and suggestions of various



stakeholders, including students, parents, and teachers, to enhance Chenchu education.

- To provide recommendations for improving the literacy rate among the Chenchus while considering their socio-cultural settings.

## Research methodology

### *Sampling method and procedure*

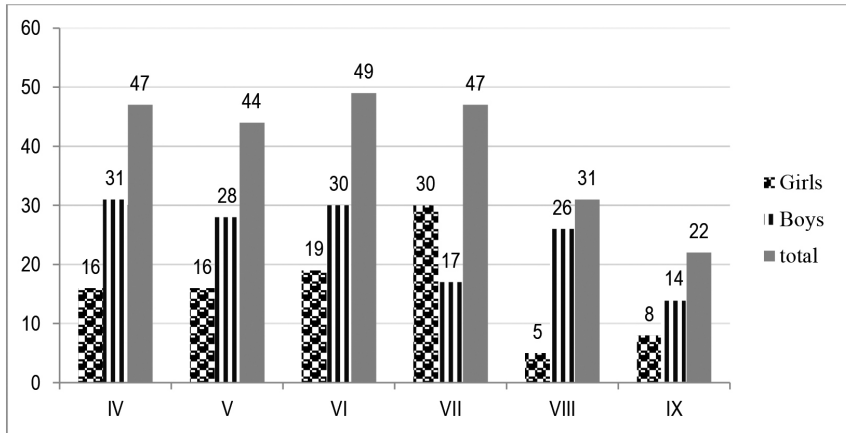
The Multistage Stratified Random Sampling Technique, which is a probability sampling method has been deployed in the present study. Arber (2001) defines probability sampling as a method where “each element in a well-defined population (universe of elements) has a known and non-zero chance of selection.” Our sampling process involved three stages. In the first step, we compiled a list of ashram schools in Prakasam district from the Department of Tribal Education, Andhra Pradesh’s website. Based on this data, we categorized the schools into primary schools, upper primary schools, co-educational schools, boys’ schools, and girls’ schools, taking into account enrollment figures and information gathered during a pilot study and from government records.

The second stage involved further classification of schools. All ashram schools in Prakasam district into two categories: Category-I (primary schools with classes 1-5) and Category-II (high schools with classes 7-10). Within each category, further categorized schools based on their enrollment figures, distinguishing between high-enrollment schools, moderate-enrollment schools, and low-enrollment schools.

Table 2: Sample size

Sl. No	Type of School	Name of the School	Level of Enrolment	Strength	Students Sample Size
1	Upper Primary	Marripalem	High	209	40
2		Peda Mantanala	Moderate	118	40
3		Billagondipenta	Low	43	40
4	High	Murikimalla	High	265	40
5		Garapenta	Moderate	182	40
6		Chintala	Low	127	40
Total 25%				944	240

The final stage involves the selection of sample respondents. Employed systematic sampling to draw a sample of 40 students from each school. The selected students come from Primary schools (grades IV and V) and High schools (grades IV, V, VI, VII, VIII, and IX) for data collection. This results in a total sample size of 240 students (6 schools x 40 students), representing 25% of the universe. Efforts made to ensure equal gender representation, though, due to limited availability, a slightly higher percentage of male respondents were included. Additionally, 10 backup samples of students kept in spare in case some were unavailable for participation. In addition to the student sample, conducted interviews and gathered qualitative information from teachers, headmasters, and parents through focus group discussions and personal interactions.



Graph 2: Distribution of the students by gender and class

### Data collection

The study employed meticulously designed instruments, comprising interview schedules featuring both structured and semi-structured inquiries, for the purpose of data collection. The interview schedules, initially formulated in English, underwent translation into the vernacular language (Telugu) to optimize clarity during the data collection phase. Preceding the initiation of data collection, a comprehensive elucidation of the study’s objectives occurred, coupled with a facilitation of an ice-breaking session. Subsequent interviews were conducted individually with educators and the school headmaster. Data collection transpired between December 2021 and April 2022.

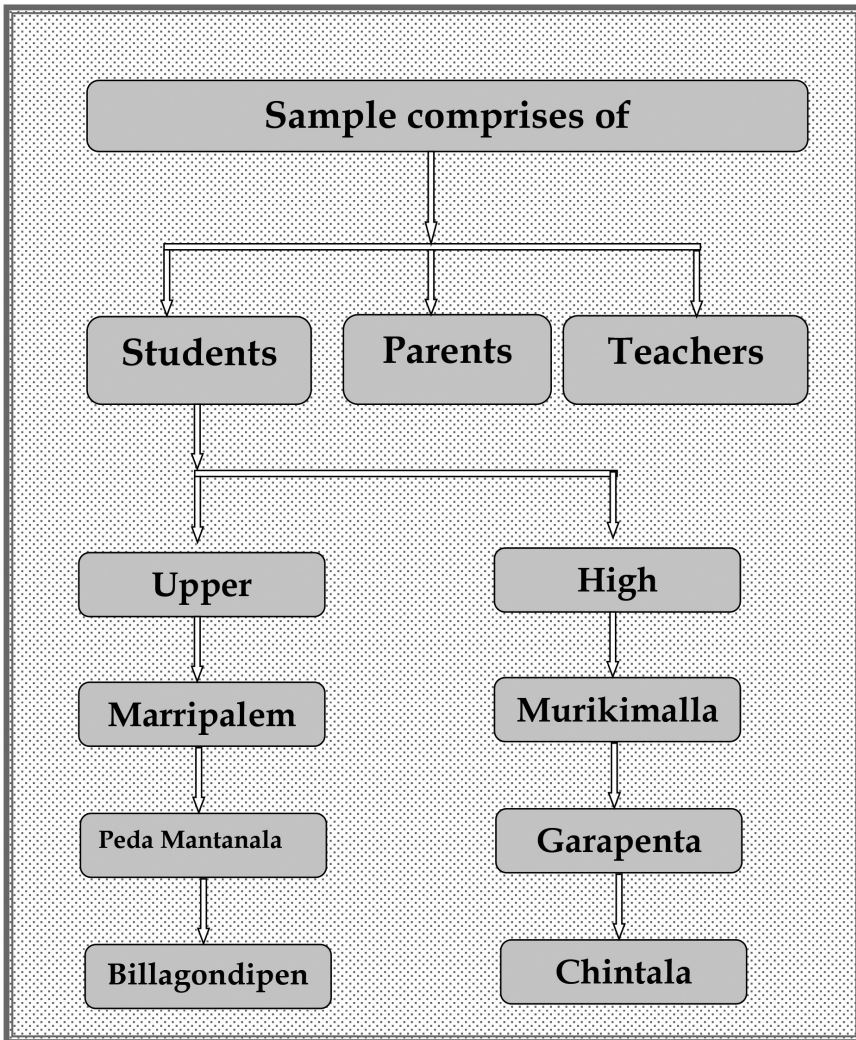


Chart 1: Sample design including schools and sample

### Ethical considerations

Prior authorization was sought and obtained from pertinent authorities to undertake research within tribal ashram schools. The researcher secured approval from higher authorities, facilitating the commencement of the study. In adherence to the Helsinki Declaration, the acquisition of informed consent from individuals enlisted for research endeavors was deemed imperative, with results maintained in a de-identified state until final reporting.

## Instruments for data collection

Instruments constitute a pivotal facet of the data collection process, and for this study, an array of tools was employed, encompassing both primary and secondary data sources.

### *Primary data*

**Interview schedule:** The study employed interview schedules to elicit data from students. Additionally, focus group discussions were conducted with parents, educators, and the warden or headmaster, delving into various facets of tribal education, such as awareness, government initiatives, dropout rates, retention strategies, and issues specific to tribal education. These interview schedules comprised a blend of structured and open-ended questions. As highlighted by Simmons (2001), interview schedules involve predetermined sets of questions conducive to effective data collection.

**Focus group discussions:** Facilitating focus group discussions with diverse stakeholders served to discern the underlying causes of diminished literacy levels within the Chenchu tribe. Participation from parents and educators in group discussions provided valuable insights into the identified research problem.

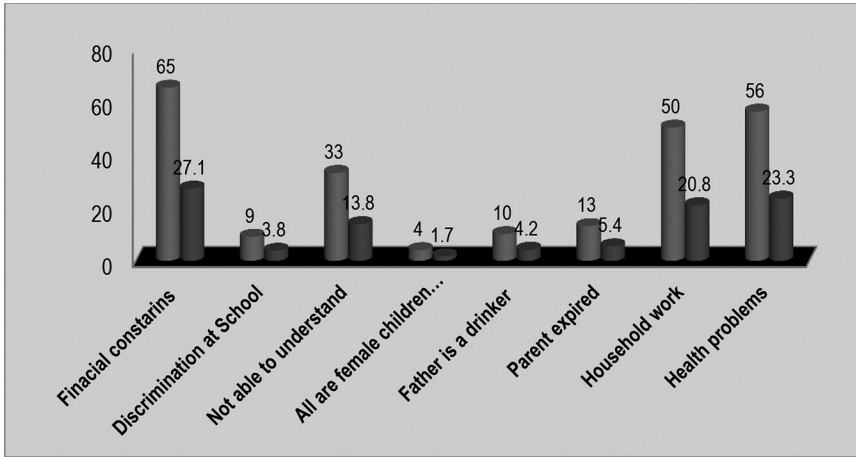
**Field notes & photographs:** The role of field notes in procuring qualitative information was paramount. Aligned with Emerson's (1995) emphasis on field notes as the observer's "raison d'être," the researcher diligently maintained observational notes by scrutinizing and assessing field conditions. Verbal and non-verbal dialogues were meticulously documented. Photographs, functioning as substantiating evidence in data collection, captured pertinent contextual elements and events.

### *Secondary data*

Secondary data sources encompassed a variety of authoritative documents, including government reports, census reports, annual reports from the Department of Education, diverse publications from the Tribal Welfare Department (comprising annual reports, census reports, Sarvashiksha Abhiyan reports, DISE Reports, Tribal Welfare Departmental notes, and ITDA Srisailam Reports), journal articles related to tribal education, theses from Shodhganga, published and unpublished reports, newspaper articles, reports from the Education department, and electronic versions of reports obtained from websites, among others.

### Analysis of content & results

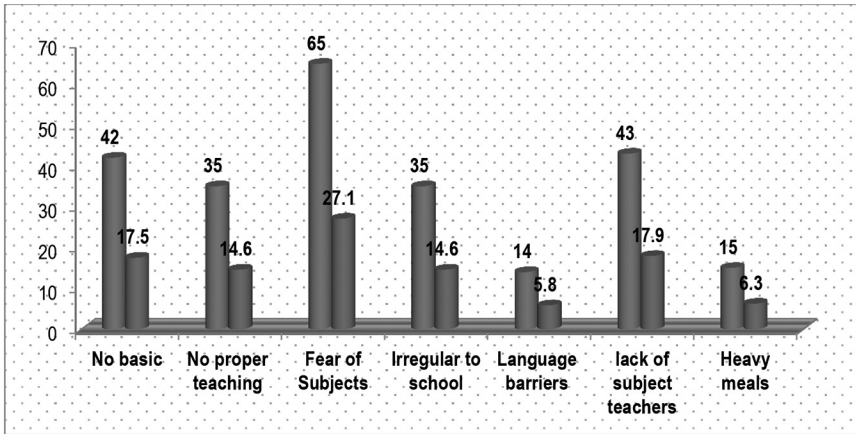
In this study, data were collected from three pivotal primary stakeholders entrusted with exclusive responsibilities for educational development and literacy improvement.



Graph 3: Distribution of constraints in education as reported by students

The above graph delineates the impediments encountered by students in their pursuit of education. A comprehensive enumeration reveals the identification of nearly eight distinct factors acting as deterrents to educational attainment. Predominantly, financial constraints emerge as the foremost hindrance, as indicated by 27.1 percent of the total respondents. Subsequently, health issues are acknowledged by 23.3 percent of participants as a substantial barrier, while 20.8 percent attribute impediments to the exigencies of household chores. Additionally, 13.8 percent of respondents cite difficulties in comprehending academic subjects, and 5.4 percent contend with the absence of caregiving support at home. A noteworthy 4.2 percent highlight the influence of parental, specifically paternal, alcoholism as a factor detracting from their school attendance. Correspondingly, 1.7 percent articulate the challenges associated with being a female member within the family context, posing impediments to educational excellence. In summation, this analysis underscores a spectrum of issues serving as impediments to the educational pursuits of the Chenchu community.

The aforementioned graph elucidates the factors contributing to students' challenges in comprehending specific academic subjects. Students were surveyed to identify the obstacles they encounter

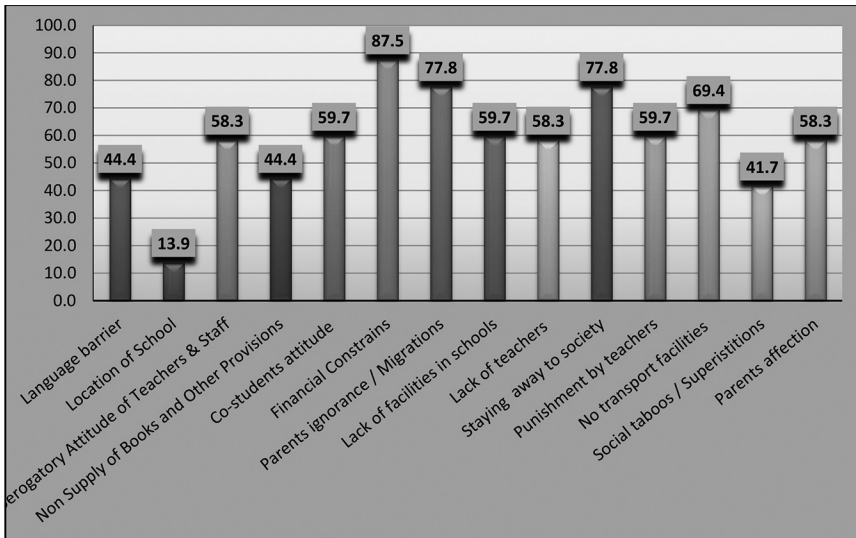


Graph 4: Reasons for not understanding the subject

in understanding subjects, resulting in the identification of seven distinct reasons perceived as arduous by the student cohort. Predominantly, a substantial proportion of students, constituting 27.1 percent, articulated a fear of certain subjects, impeding their concentration. This apprehension is notably linked to Hindi and English, with a lesser extent associated with Mathematics and Science disciplines.

Another cohort, comprising 17.9 percent of students, expressed concern arising from the absence of specific subjects in their school curriculum, contributing to their apprehension regarding those subjects. An additional 17.5 percent attributed their academic struggles to a lack of foundational knowledge in the respective subjects. Similarly, 14.6 percent of students cited inadequate teaching as a contributing factor to their difficulties, while some faced challenges due to absenteeism, adversely affecting their performance in specific subjects.

Furthermore, 5.8 percent of students identified language as a significant barrier. They encountered difficulty in comprehending subjects due to the unfamiliarity of the language used by teachers and in textbooks in comparison to their native language. Intriguingly, a marginal percentage reported that heavy meals adversely impacted their ability to grasp subjects. In summation, it is evident that Chenchu students confront challenges within the curriculum, encompassing teaching-related issues and comprehension hurdles in specific subjects.



Graph 5: Distribution of problems expressed by parents as barriers to education  
**Source:** primary data.

The depicted multiple bar diagram delineates the perceived barriers to education as reported by parents within the Chenchu community. The study aimed to ascertain diverse perspectives to gauge the gaps in the delivery of tribal education, identifying a total of 14 distinct aspects as significant impediments to Chenchu education. Parents were solicited to enumerate reasons considered relevant as barriers to education, and each aspect in the presented graph is treated independently, with corresponding percentages calculated accordingly.

Out of a total of 72 respondents, a noteworthy 44.4 percent of parents emphasized language problems as a primary concern for their children. This challenge arises due to disparities between the Chenchu dialect used locally and the language employed in textbooks, rendering it difficult for children to comprehend. A smaller yet substantial percentage (11.2%) identified the location of schools as a major hindrance to education. Significantly, 58.3 percent of parents perceived the derogatory attitude of teachers and other staff as a substantial impediment to their children's education. Another 44.4 percent highlighted the non-supply of primers and notebooks as a pervasive issue. Additionally, 59.7 percent of parents expressed concern over the detrimental influence of the attitudes of co-students on their children's educational experience.

A predominant majority (87.5%) of parents underscored financial constraints as the foremost impediment to educational

attainment. Similarly, 77.8 percent cited migration and a lack of awareness regarding the importance of education as noteworthy drawbacks among Chenchu communities. Equal proportions of 59.7 percent of respondents identified the lack of facilities and teacher-initiated punishment in Ashram Schools as issues during the fieldwork. Observations revealed that several schools lacked proper facilities. Furthermore, 58.3 percent of parents reported that the shortage of teachers in schools dissuaded Chenchus from pursuing education, with prolonged absenteeism of teachers on deputation being a significant concern. Moreover, 77.8 percent expressed that isolation from mainstream society had become a detriment to their development.

Transportation to Chenchu habitations emerged as a major concern, reported by 69.4 percent of parents, as these habitations

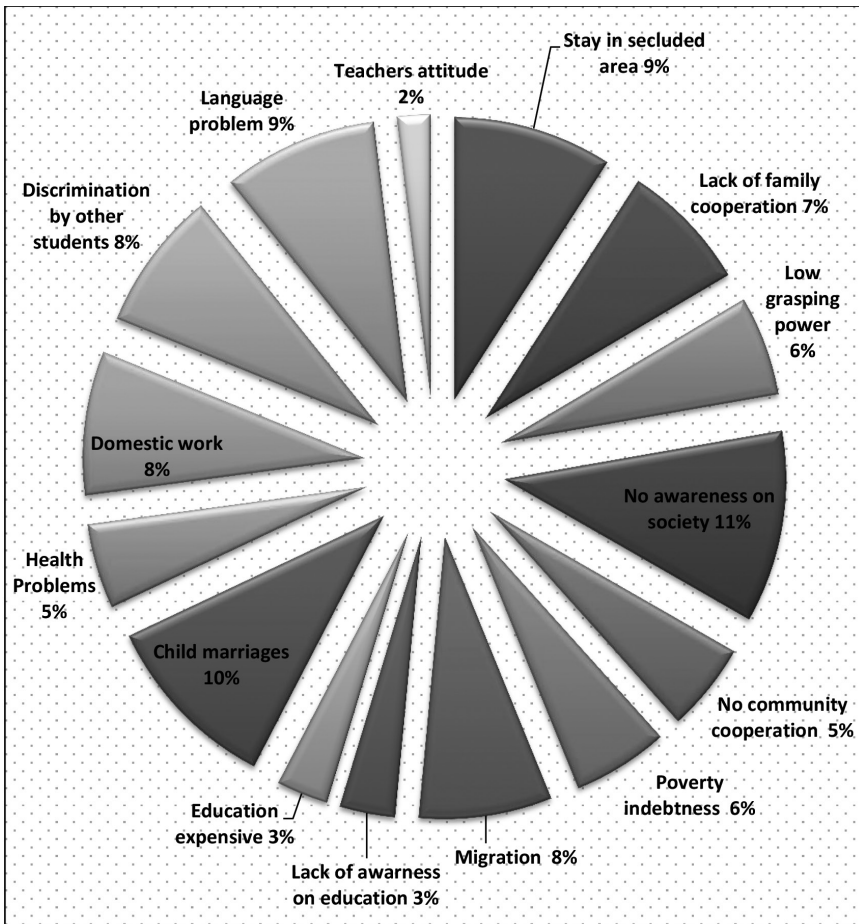


Chart 2: Distribution of teachers' opinions for Chenchu dropout rate



are often situated in remote areas with insufficient transport facilities. Social taboos and superstitions were identified as barriers to educational attainment among Chenchus by 41.7 percent of respondents. Lastly, 58.3 percent of parents asserted that parental affection inhibits their children from residing away from home, a consistent observation during fieldwork corroborated by teacher interactions. In conclusion, it is evident that a multitude of factors collectively hinder educational progress among Chenchus. Simultaneously, remedies proposed by the respondents to address these issues will be presented in subsequent sections.

The above pie chart delineates the perspectives and insights of teachers pertaining to the factors influencing the elevated dropout rates among Chenchu students. Teachers were specifically prompted to articulate the reasons behind the prevalent dropout phenomenon among Chenchus, resulting in the identification of approximately 15 key factors perceived as significant barriers. A noteworthy majority of teachers (11%) underscored a lack of societal awareness among Chenchus as a pivotal deterrent to their engagement in education. Concurrently, 10% of teachers emphasized child marriages as a prevalent impediment compelling Chenchu students to discontinue their education during their adolescent years. An equivalent proportion of teachers (9%) identified language barriers and geographical factors, particularly the seclusion of habitations, as causative elements for the dropout rate. Similarly, another equal proportion (8%) highlighted domestic responsibilities (household chores), migration patterns, and discrimination experienced from non-Chenchu students as contributing factors to the dropout rate.

Another identical proportion (6%) of respondents accentuated low cognitive aptitude, financial impoverishment, and indebtedness as educational hindrances culminating in elevated dropout rates. Meanwhile, another equal proportion (5%) of teachers specified that a lack of familial cooperation (institutional support), absence of community collaboration, and health-related issues were acknowledged as reasons for the increased dropout rates. Similarly, equivalent proportions of teachers reported that limited awareness about education and the escalating cost of education in contemporary society conduce to the dropout rate among the Chenchu community.

Beyond socioeconomic factors, teachers underscored the impact of superstitions in deterring Chenchus from pursuing education. Teachers and headmasters uniformly communicated that Chenchus harbor fears of two distinct entities: the police force and superstitions, particularly entities associated with sorcery and supernatural beings.

The prevalent belief among Chenchus that malevolent entities inhabit Ashram Schools, posing harm to Chenchu students, was highlighted. Instances were reported wherein Chenchu students, upon falling ill for an extended duration, developed notions of malevolent forces within the school, leading to prolonged absenteeism that detrimentally impacts their academic pursuits. In conclusion, it can be inferred that alongside socioeconomic rationales, undisclosed factors contribute to Chenchu students

Table: 3 Suggestions offered by parents for betterment education (N=72)

SI. No.	Suggestions offered	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1	Parents involvement	45	(62.5)
2	Work with dedication	51	(70.8)
3	Teachers must reside in the Ashram school quarters.	49	(68.1)
4	Appointment of non-Chenchu teachers	04	(5.6)
5	Provide higher education up to intermediate in Ashram Schools	21	(29.2)
6	Timing to be followed	26	(36.1)
7	Set the achievement targets for the teachers in terms of results and retention of students	36	(50.0)
8	All facilities to be provided	46	(63.9)
9	Proper monitoring	52	(72.2)
10	Provide digital (Computer) education	09	(12.5)
11	Conduct special classes for backlog students.	04	(5.6)
12	Involve parents in the school management.	08	(11.1)
13	Provide bank loans for higher education.	05	(6.9)
14	Change in teachers' attitude	37	(51.4)
15	Organize exposure visits, study tours	16	(22.2)
16	Appoint lady teachers	16	(22.2)
17	Appoint local area teachers	17	(23.6)
18	Adequate teachers	29	(40.3)
19	Sports encouragement	16	(22.2)
20	Parents must be educated	09	(12.5)

**Source:** Primary data (responses are individual)

discontinuing their education. Consequently, Ashram Schools are perceived not only as educational institutions but also as vital food and provision centers within tribal habitations.

Parents were interviewed to elicit their recommendations for the enhancement of Ashram Schools, and a total of 20 suggestions were garnered. These suggestions, presented in Table 2, are reported in counts rather than percentages, given the open-ended nature of the inquiry. A majority of respondents (72.2%) underscored the indispensability of proper monitoring for ameliorating the educational landscape. Following closely, another significant majority (70.8%) asserted the pivotal role of teacher dedication in effecting positive changes. Subsequently, a substantial portion of parents (68.1%) advocated for teachers to reside in staff quarters to augment the educational environment of Ashram Schools.

Many parents (63.9%) opined that improved facilities within the school premises could yield positive transformations. Given the Chenchus' proficiency in archery and other sports, 63.9% of parents advocated for the promotion of sports and games in schools to enhance retention rates. Moreover, 62.5% of parents emphasized the importance of parental involvement in fostering success in tribal school education. Concerning the role of teachers, 51.4% of parents perceived that a shift in teachers' attitudes could lead to positive outcomes. Additionally, 50% of parents suggested the establishment of targets for teachers, encompassing academic results and retention rates, as a measure with significant impact. Another 40.3% believed that appointing an adequate number of teachers could augment literacy rates among Chenchus. To substantially improve literacy rates, 29.2% of parents proposed elevating Ashram Schools to at least an intermediate level of education. A suggestion from 23.6% of parents was to appoint local teachers in Ashram Schools, while 22.2% advocated for hiring female teachers, organizing exposure visits and study tours, and integrating sports and games into the daily curriculum.

A smaller proportion of parents (12.5%) recommended the introduction of computer education in Ashram Schools and raising awareness among parents about the importance of education. The involvement of parents in school committees was suggested by 11.1% of respondents. Additionally, 6.9% of parents expressed the opinion that providing bank loans for higher education would positively impact literacy among Chenchus. Finally, a minor percentage of respondents (5.6%) believed that appointing Chenchu teachers and focusing on weaker students could yield positive results. In summary,

the overarching analysis indicates that parental involvement, teacher dedication, and meticulous monitoring are pivotal for ensuring the effective delivery of education and effecting significant improvements. These factors, coupled with the aforementioned suggestions, stand to contribute substantially to the enhancement of tribal education.

### Findings suggestions and conclusion

This section delves deeply into insights and provides suggestions for the enhancement of Chenchu education. Drawing from data and insights gathered from various stakeholders through focus group discussions with teachers and parents, the following issues were identified. The decline of traditional leadership structures and practices in Chenchu villages has adversely affected the educational landscape. The weakening of traditional authority figures has led to a loss of community support and guidance, impacting the overall educational experience for Chenchu students. The advent of modern technologies, such as televisions and cell phones, has significantly influenced the Chenchu community. These technological advancements pose both opportunities and challenges, altering the community's traditional values and affecting its approach to education. Integrating technology into education may require careful consideration of its impact on Chenchu students. Widespread instances of child marriages within the Chenchu community pose a significant obstacle to students' continuous education. Early marriages can lead to premature dropout rates, hindering the educational progress of Chenchu youth.

Many Chenchu students exhibit a sensitive mentality, which can influence their educational experiences. Addressing the emotional and psychological well-being of students becomes crucial in creating a conducive learning environment. Deep-rooted superstitions, particularly those related to schools being built in burial grounds, have contributed to educational challenges. Dispelling these superstitions through community engagement and awareness campaigns is essential to overcoming these obstacles. The absence of viable livelihood opportunities and frequent migrations impact students' educational continuity. Economic instability and the need for migration often lead to disruptions in students' academic pursuits, emphasizing the need for sustainable livelihood options within Chenchu habitations. A lack of foundational education contributes to a high dropout rate as students' progress to higher

classes. Strengthening foundational education programs and addressing early learning gaps are crucial in preventing premature dropout.

Chenchu students face challenges in adjusting to mainstream society, impacting their educational journeys. Fostering cultural sensitivity and inclusive educational practices can facilitate smoother transitions for Chenchu students. The promotion system in schools is a significant factor contributing to the high dropout rate. Reassessing the promotion criteria and implementing support mechanisms for struggling students can contribute to a more equitable educational system. The level of seriousness and care exhibited by parents towards their children plays a pivotal role in dropout rates. Promoting parental involvement through awareness programs and community initiatives can positively impact students' educational outcomes.

Mismanagement of logistics and maleficence, abuse of power and misuse of funds at Ashram Schools hinders the quality of education provided to Chenchu students. Addressing corruption issues and ensuring transparency in educational institutions is crucial for providing equitable educational opportunities. Higher officials' mistreatment of teachers in front of their students can negatively impact the educational environment. Fostering a supportive and respectful work environment for teachers is essential for maintaining a positive learning atmosphere. Non-Chenchu teachers' reluctance to work in Chenchu habitations or under Chenchu teachers, affecting the availability of quality education. Initiatives to promote diversity and cultural understanding among educators can contribute to a more inclusive and effective educational system.

## Conclusion

Despite concerted government efforts, a substantial need for community intervention and participation persists in the improvement of Chenchu education. Engaging various stakeholders in society is crucial for fostering positive change. The implementation of diverse education programs has proven insufficient in yielding significant results. Even if another seven decades were to pass, the commitment of teachers towards Chenchus remains a linchpin that can drive greater success. In moving forward, it is imperative to consider the following additional points.

Initiatives promoting cultural sensitivity among educators and stakeholders can bridge gaps and foster a more inclusive learning environment for Chenchu students. Empowering the Chenchu

community through participatory educational programs tailored to their unique needs can enhance the effectiveness of interventions.

Investing in specialized training for teachers working with Chenchu students can address the unique challenges they face and equip educators with the necessary skills for impactful teaching. Collaborating with advocacy groups to influence policy reforms that address systemic issues hindering Chenchu education is essential for sustained improvement. Establishing a robust monitoring and evaluation framework for education programs ensures continuous assessment and adaptation to evolving challenges. By incorporating these elements into the broader strategy, there is a greater likelihood of creating lasting positive change in the educational landscape for the Chenchu community.

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