

## CONTRIBUTION OF TELUGUS TO MADRAS

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The contribution of the people of Telugu origin to the City of Madras in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries forms an interesting chapter in the history of Madras. The Telugus contributed a great deal to the commercial and cultural life of Madras in a remarkable way in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Since the contribution of the Telugus to Madras politics figures prominently in the first half of the nineteenth century, it cannot find a place in this paper which is confined to the eighteenth century.

In fact, it was a Telugu-speaking man who was instrumental in getting the tract of land desired by Sir Francis Day for founding the City of Madras (Venkataswamy Naidu 1994, 162). Beri Thimmappa, an ancestor of Bundla Ramaswami Naidu, acted as an intermediary in procuring the grant of territory made to Sir Francis Day, Agent of the East India Company. Francis Day wanted to build a fort in the land where there was a fisherman's village called, *Coopum* (Kuppam). Here, in the middle portion, Madarasen had a garden of plantain trees. Beri Timmappa, a *Dubashi* negotiated with Madarasen and got this land also for Francis Day for building a fort. This area was called, *Madraspatnam*. Thus, Telugus were associated with Madras right from its origin.

The Rajah of Venkatagiri and the Rajah of Pithapuram built beautiful palaces in Madras. The Rajah of Venkatagiri's *Moti Mahal* in Thousand Lights area of Madras was beautiful. The Rajah of Pithapuram owned a great portion of Teynampet in Madras. Nagabuthudu, a Telugu man was the *Karnam* of Chennapatnam in the early days. Chintadripet is a Telugu name, derived from the Telugu word *Chinta* meaning tamarind. Chintadripet had a good lot of Telugu personalities like G.R. Adhikesavulu Naidu, Bundla Venugopala Naidu and Venkata Ramanujulu Naidu. The Coral Merchant Street in Maras was originally known as *Pagadhala Varthaga Veedhi* in Telugu. The Municipal Council had two Telugu Councillors when the Madras Municipality was founded in 1687 A.D. They were Muddu Viranna and Venkatadri. The first judge in the Madras Judicial Court when it was set up in 1690 A.D. was a Telugu man – Ranganatha.

In 1670 A.D., Madras had a population of 40,000. In 1774 A.D., it became 2.5 lakhs – all were Telugus (Rapson 1922, 103). In 1891 A.D. it was 4,52,518 of whom Telugus formed the bulk and the Tamils numbered few. The influence of the Tamils gained ground in Madras with the advent of the South Indian Railway which attracted many Tamil from different parts of the Madras Province for employment. A large tract of territory was under the administration of the Vijayanagar Kingdom, including Mylapore and Triplicane. Madras, in course of time, developed into a mixed city from the original fisherman's *Coopum* to the higher classes of Naickers,

Mudaliars, Iyers and Iyengars. Telugus formed a majority in some villages surrounding the *Cingleput* District.

Konda Venkatapayya said that, if one went through the past history of Madras and the importance of Andhra merchants in it, it would become clear that the Andhras, like others, had claims over the city.<sup>4</sup> Desiring to draw the southern boundary of Andhra upto Chingleput District, the Telugus laid claims to this District on the ground that it had a Telugu speaking majority villages surrounding it and the initial grant by which it became a British settlement in the fifteenth century proceeded from a Telugu Rajah (Anon. 1913, n.k.), and that Madras was a Telugu town in the beginning and was subsequently built up by Telugu industry and patriotism. Even a book under the caption, *Madras, a Telugu City*, was brought out by Gazula Lakshminarasu Chetty in the later days.

The Telugus who settled in Madras in the early days took to textile trade. Kasi Chetty, Lingi Chetty and Tambu Chetty were leading Telugu communities who had trade links with the East India Company in Madras. Even today, the three Roads named after these three Telugu Chettys continue to be prominent trading centres in Madras. Lingi Chetty owned two mints at Mint Street in Madras and supplied the needed coins from his mints to the East India Company and for the Arcot Nawab. Gazula Lakshminarasu Chetty's father, Siddula Chetty, was an indigo merchant in Madras (Sen 1973, 397). Caku Adhikesavalu Naidu was the Hon. Secretary for Sree Bysia Madhava Chetty's Charity Fund in Madras. He was the Secretary and Trustee for the Triplicane Annadhana Samajam.

When the City of Madras was formed many *desayis* or headmen were appointed each to represent one community. These headmen presided over meetings and decided family disputes. They had the privilege of special honours and receiving the first *tambulam* in social and community gatherings. They had special flags, festoons and trumpets. Their word commanded respect from the society. In 705 A.D., the leading merchants in Madras were Kalavay Chetty, Bala Chetty, Venkata Chetty, Kitty Narayan and Sunkurama Chetty. Some of them were heads of their castes. They were used to be summoned to Fort St. George to decide important civil cases arising in the town.

When the East India Company's factory at Armagon was closed down, the Company wanted to build a factory in India, and hence contacted its Agents at Calcutta, who, in turn, contacted Beri Thimmappa, an inhabitant of Palacole, near Madipollam. Beri Thimmappa came to Madras and procured permission from Damerla Venkatappa Naick to build a factory at Madras. For this, it was found necessary to have the previous sanction of the ruling prince of the dynasty of Rayalu. This was also accomplished by Beri Thimmappa by getting a *Sasanam or Grant from Sreeranga Rayalu of Chandragiri* who controlled the three villages of Egmore, Tondavadoo and Poodupauk. Damerla Venkatappa Naick at Poonamalle insisted upon building the town in the name of his father, Chennappa Naick. This is how the name of *Chennapatnam* was given to the town built with the assistance of Beri Thimmappa on the north side of the factory. With the help of a *Cowle* from the Company's Agents, Beri Thimmappa invited people from other parts of the country to come and settle down at *Chennapatnam*. He saw to it that lands were allotted to the right and left hand castes separately and a temple for Shiva and another for Vishnu were built in 1639 A.D.

Beri Thimmappa was held in such high esteem by the Company that he was given a seat in the Council and the salute of five guns whenever he paid a visit to the Agent or Governor on Pongal festival days (Venkataswamy Naidu 1994, 162). The *Mirasi* right of packing up the Company's Bales in the export warehouse in Madras was held by Beri Thimmappa. Since his son-in-law, Kittunarain, assisted the East India Company in getting investments in Masulipatnam and Maddipollam, the Governor was pleased to grant him a *Cowle* appreciating his services to the Company. Beri Thimmappa's brother, Beri Pedda Venkatadry and Beri Chinna Venkatadry secured a copper plate grant from the Prince of Poonganur (Arcot District) for erecting a tank, *Chennapatnam Cheruvoo*, in 1676 A.D. Chinna Venkadry served the Corporation of the City of Madras in 1688 when it was formally inaugurated on September 9, 1688 with Nathaniel Higginson as the first Mayor. He donated his house and garden near St. Thomas Mount to the East India Company. They now constitute a section of the Government House at Guindy in Madras. Much of the development and prosperity enjoyed by Chintadripet in the eighteenth century was due to the keen interest evinced by Beri Thimmappa's family.

The *Bundla* and *Sunkuvar* families also contributed to the development of Madras. Bundla Ramaswamy Naick as a descendant of Beri Chinna Venkatadry. He was Head Sheristadar in Tirunelveli. In recognition of his meritorious service, the East India Company granted him Palayaseevaram in the Chingleput District. He built choultries for feeding the poor at Alar, Thirunagari, Srivilliputur and Kanchipuram. He built some temples and mantapams also (Venkataswamy Naidu 1994, 164).

Sunkurama Chetty was Company's Chief Merchant in 1705. He owned a big house in the White Town and a big garden near the Cooum River in Chintadripet. The Southern portion of Chintadripet is even now known as *Sunkuvar Agraharam*. He had his cloth godown at Gate Street in White Town. He was quite rich and wielded considerable influence in official circles in Madras. Audiappa Narain, the *Dubashi* of Governor Benyon, spent 18,000 *Pagodas* to encourage the weavers to settle in Chintadripet, as the Government was interested in improving the production of calico or cotton cloth. Thambu Chetty Street in Muthialpet was named after Thambu Chetty who was an important merchant in Madras in 1724. All these Chetty's contributed to the commercial prosperity of Madras.

The village of Egmore was farmed out by the East India Company to their Chief Merchant, Serappa, and on the expiration of the three year period, the lease granted to him was transferred in 1704 to Narayan, another merchant. When he relinquished the lease on 30<sup>th</sup> June, 1708 A.D., it was leased to Kalvay Chetty and Venkata Chetty for twelve years at an annual rent of 1,750 *Pagodas*.

The Company leased out the village of Triplicane to its Chief Merchant, Kasi Viranna and subsequently to Pedda Venkatadri. It was a Telugu man, Podili Lingappa, who as the Governor of Poonamalle, and San Thome was also under his control prior to August 1749. Vepery and Egmore were then Podili Lingappa's granary where paddy was stocked for sale.

It should not be construed that the Telugu Chettys were good in business only. When the occasion demanded they rendered military service also. It was a Telugu Chetty who occupied the highest position in the Naick's army. He was Koneri Chetty who was the General of the Army of

the Naick Kings of Vijayanagar. In the struggle between the Naick King of Vijayanagar and the Nawab of Golconda over Vepery in December 1656 A.D. the Naab's army advanced on Poonamallee and pursued the Naick's army under Koneri Chetty upto Vepery which as then full of palmyra and coconut trees (Krishnaswamy Naidu 1965, 52-3). Curiously, the General of the Nawab of Golconda's army was also a Telugu man Topa Krishnappa or Tupaki Krishnappa. Even in the siege of San Thome, Telugu officers held high command (Krishnaswamy Naidu 1965, 52-3).

It is interesting and gratifying to note that the Telugu Chettys did a good deal of philanthropic activities also. Many of them opened Charitable Trusts in Madras which contributed to educational development and public welfare in Madras. With them, philanthropy became a way of life that percolated gradually into Madras society.

Bysani Madhavaiah Sresti Charities, Pabbiseti Ragavaiah Chetty Charities, Kakamanu Adhikesavulu Chetty Charities, Vupputur Alwar Chetty Charities, Voletti Ranganayakamma Charitis, Voora Varadappa Chetty Charities and others contributed much for the educational development and publicwelfare inMadras. Even the Pachaiyapp's Charities have been augmented by Voletti Ranganayakamma garu and Vupputur Vengadam Chetty garu (Proprietor of Hoe & Co., Madras) with valuable immovable properties to the tune of twenty lakhs of rupees.

Mrs. Kalahasthi Alamelumangathayarammal, the wife of P. Krishnaswamy Naidu, who lived in Washermanpet, Madras was a fine social worker and a public spirited lady. She was Hon. Presidency Magistrate and Hon. Secretary for the Ladies Section of the Brahmo Samaj. Bhupathy Chetty was the son of Saidapet Govindasamy Chetty. He was also a public spirited man and rendered public service by joining the S.P.C.A., Madras Presidency Discharged Prisoners' Aid Society, National Indian Association and Suguna Vilas Sabha. He lived in Sambier Street in Madras. It was a Telugu man – Tallapragada Subba Rao of Kakinada, who helped Dr. (Mrs). Annie Besant in locating Adayar as the Headquarters for the Theosophical Society. Enugula Veeraswamy, who was the Chief Translator of the East India Company, was one of the founders of the Pachaiyappa's College, Madras.

Punduru Seetharama Sastry authored the first Telugu Premier *Peddabala Siksha*. P.Gopaldaswamy Naidu was a diamond merchant at St. Thomas Mount in Madras, but he had a taste for Telugu journalism. He was the publisher of the three Telugu journals – *Vinodhan*, *Vinodhini* and *Kaliyugam*. Vedam Venkataraya Sastry's cousin, Venkatachalaya (better known as *Nallayya*) was a leading make-up man in Old Madras. He was a leading member of the Madras Suguna Vilas Sabha, which was a famous dramatic society in Madras. He was very good in putting make-up for artists. Even today, his life-size oil portrait can be seen on the walls of this dramatic society on Mount Road in Madras. Many senior make-up artists of Madras today were trained by him in the olden days (Venkataraya Sastry 1932, 32).

Raghupathy Venkaiah, a Telugu man was responsible for starting cinema in Madras in the early days. He first started a photo studio in Madras and then moved on to the exhibition of cinema. He set up a tent cinema house first and then built a permanent Cinema Hall, which came to be known as the Gaiety Theatre on Mount Road, Madras. It was his son, Prakash, who supported Directors like C. Pullaiah, Y.V. Rao and P.V. Rao in the Madras Film Industry later.

Y.V. Rao introduced the famous actor, Thiyagaraja Bhagavatar, to Tamil audiences. The Rajah of Vizianagaram who had a place at Mandavelli in Madras, was a great patron of music and a lover books. He donated two lakhs of rupees for erecting the Victoria Hall.

When Madras witnessed famines during 1771 to 1782 the famine-stricken crowd from other areas of Madras started pouring into the Black Town. East India Company and the public donated liberally. The list of subscriptions was headed by a Telugu man who was a descendant of the original Venkatappa who granted the Madras territory to the East India Company (Krishnaswami Nayudu 1965, 15).

Dr. Swamy Nayak was an important figure in the Medical circles of Madras. He was well-known to the officials of the East India Company. He was an ancestor to W.S. Krishnaswami Nayudu, Judge in the High Court of Madras. He lived in the same street – Pagoda Street, where the famous Pachaiyappa Mudaliar lived. Swami Nayak was a great physician in Madras and was a great healer of human suffering (Krishnaswami Nayudu 1965, 24-5). Pagoda Street is now called Harris Raod.

The Telugus in Madras were distinguished not only in commercial activity, but in temple-building activity also. Beri Thimmappa, Chief Merchant of the East India Company, constructed the Perumal Temple north of Fort St. George, corresponding to the site of the present High Court of Madras. This temple is mentioned in the Pitt's Map of 1710 A.D. as the Great Pagoda. This temple lasted till 1757 when it was demolished by the French soldiers who invaded Madras (Krishnaswami Nayudu 1965, 8). Beri Thimmappa's son, Kitti Narayan, who was responsible for the construction of the Bairagimatam Temple, which is situated between Mint Street and Chinnai Bazaar Road in Madras. It is mentioned by mistake as Lorrain's Pagoda, instead of Narayan's Pagoda, in Pitt's Map (Krishnaswami Nayudu 1965, 10).

Audiappa Narain built the Vaishnavite Temple called, Audikesava Perumal Temple, which was used as a Powder Magazine when Madras was besieged during 1758 to 1759. Later, it was also used as a hospital in 1785 A.D (Krishnaswami Nayudu 1965, 28). The Telugu Chettys left their mark even in providing street lights to Madras City. C.V. Krishnaswamy Chetty was the Electrical Engineer to the Madras Corporation. He was responsible for providing street lights to Madras City. He was later given the title of *Rao Bahadur* for his public service.

Thus, the contribution of the Telugus to the City of Madras was considerable in the fields of commerce, public welfare and culture. In course of time, Madras became a mixed city and the Telugus joined hands with the Tamils in building Madras into a great city of pride and joy and a centre of political, commercial and cultural activities in the South in the later days. The economic base secured by the Telugu Chettys in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries provided a fine opportunity for the Telugus and others in Madras to give a new orientation to Madras politics in a big way in the nineteenth century.

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