

NOSTALGIA OF THE FRENCH IN YANAM

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Abstract

Many European countries came to India for trading purpose. Among them the Portuguese were the first followed by the Dutch, the Danes, the English and the French. The French was the last of the west European power to reach the Indian shores during the second half of the seventeenth century. The French established their settlements on the western as well as on the eastern coasts of India. One such eastern coast settlement was Yanam which is the smallest enclave of the French in India. It is a part of Andhra Pradesh geographically and ethnically but politically and administratively was part of Pondicherry and Paris. As a colony of France the visible remnants of the French presence in Yanam are the St. Ann's Catholic Church built in 1846, the cemetery with tombs of French nationals, the Administrator's building, the Court building and Maniam Kankaya's palatial residence. French was taught as one of the subjects in Sri Tanguturi Prakasam Pantulu Junior College till recently. There was a lecturer from Pondicherry in this college teaching French but after his death French was not taught here. According to a natives of

Yanam, called that "Yanam is a small France". After merger it was forgotten and abandoned by France. Local people are very proud to say that they had a French past. Recently Union territory of Pondicherry in an effort to strengthen its French connection is erecting a replica of Eiffel Tower of Paris at Yanam. In this connection the present paper focuses on the visible remnants of the French presence in Yanam on the Coromandel Coast of Peninsular India considering its historical connections.

Key words: Eiffel Tower, Coromandel Coast, remnants, Portuguese, the Dutch, the Danes.

Introduction

Many European countries came to India for trading purpose. Among them the Portuguese were the first followed by the Dutch, the Danes, the English and the French. The French were the last of the west European powers to reach the Indian shores during the second half of the seventeenth century. The French established their settlements on the western and the eastern coasts of India. One

such eastern coast settlement was Yanam, the smallest enclave of the French in India. For more than two hundred years it was a French colony until it was unified with India in 1954. It is due to this long span of their regime Yanam is quite often referred as French Yanam by the people of the neighbouring Andhra Pradesh. It possesses a unique blend of French and Telugu culture owing to the proximity to the Telugu region. During the French rule the Tuesday market at Yanam was popular among Telugu people in the Madras Presidency who visited Yanam to buy foreign goods.¹ The legacy of the French in Yanam is slowly eroded. In this connection the present paper focuses on the visible remnants of the French presence in Yanam on the Coromandel Coast of Peninsular India considering its historical connections.

Physiographical condition of Yanam

Yanam is a part of Andhra Pradesh geographically and ethnically but politically and administratively was part of Pondicherry and Paris. Yanam is situated at 26 km south of Kakinada in the East Godavari District of Andhra Pradesh and 870 km north of Pondicherry. It is bounded on the east and south by river Godavari which discharges itself into the Bay of Bengal after flowing about 14 km towards south-east.² The town of Yanam is located at a spot where the river Coringa and the Godavari separate to divide the region into two parts one on the east and the other on the west. The entire region is composed of flat monotonous

terrain without any distinct topographical feature. It is situated at the confluence of the river and the sea, Yanam has never developed into a big port like Visakhapatnam in the north or Machilipatam and Pondicherry in the south. Its area is 30 square kilometres and far away from the head quarters.

Historical Review

The French man Courton was the sole founder of modern Yanam. He was the Chief of the French factory at Masulipatnam visited Yanam situated at fifty kilometers north of Masulipatnam in the region of Rajahmundry to explore the possibilities of trading there in 1723. Courton himself chose a small raised ground between the two rivers, Godavari and Coringa. According to him this place could never be flooded by the rivers. He bought a house there. It seems that Haji Hussen the faujdar of Rajamundry allowed the French to set up a factory in the place chosen by Courton. When Courton visited the area there were only some washer men and their houses and stores.³ In spite of the smallness of the land, the French built a big factory and even erected some houses below the factory after 1723. In 1727 the commercial operations proved unsuccessful in Yanam the French seem to have abandoned temporarily. But trade seems to have really picked up there from 1731. Nawab Rustum Khan granted a *firman* for the French to trade at Yanam in 1735.⁴

Yanam is a Inam to French

The French term Yanaon and its English equivalent Yanam do not give us any clue to the meaning of the name. It is a popular belief that Yanam is the corrupted form of Inam⁵, which means a free gift of land. However; this view is not acceptable because this place was mentioned as Yanaon in the French documents, implying that it was called so before the gift made. A firman was issued by the Mogul emperor on 1752, confirming all the concessions made to France then the place was gifted by the Muslim ruler Salabat Jung, the Nizam and Subedar of Deccan.⁶

French presence in Yanam

Due to the relative prosperity of Yanam there had been a migration from the adjoining areas to Yanam thus making Yanam like rest of Andhra Pradesh. In these conditions, it is easy to understand the exponential erosion of the traces of the French presence there. The small numbers of visible remnants of the French presence in Yanam are: the St. Ann's Catholic Church, the cemetery with tombs of French nationals, the Administrator's building, the Court building and a few other buildings. According to a native of Yanam, "Yanam is a small France". After merger it was forgotten and abandoned by France. Local people are very proud to say that they had a French past.⁷

Development of French and Telugu language

Learning the local language was very essential to the colonial masters for the missionary and administrative purpose. The French Jesuit missionaries were based in Pondicherry who seems to have first taken interest in the Telugu language for evangelical purposes. They produced three Telugu- French dictionaries in 1727, 1750 and 1800 respectively. These works are preserved in the National Library in Paris in manuscript form.⁸ Only the single handed efforts of the Telugu playwright and post-graduate French teacher Bolloju Basavalingappa restored a semblance of French in Yanam. In 1980 French language was introduced two -year foreign language course as an optional in Sri Tanguturi Prakasam Pantulu Junior College. Few students choose this option. However in 1987-88 there were only seven students in the second year class perhaps this was the last batch. The course was cancelled after his death. The pedagogic materials are truly lacking. The standard text remains G. Mauger's 1953 edition of *Cours de Langue et de Civilisation Francaises*.⁹ There is a French- Telugu dictionary written by Pierre Mottel as per the information of Andhra Sahitya Academy.¹⁰ French language education was terminated in Yanam shortly after merger. The region has no institutions, no schools and no activities serving as linkage to the legacy of French.

Manyam Kanakayya palatial residence

Manyam Kanakayya of Vaisya caste was a migrant from the province of Rajahmundry. He was

a rich trader at Yanam and had commercial ventures in Andhra Pradesh also.¹¹ Manyam Kanakayya's impressive palatial residence was built during the heydays of French presence. Still stands erect in the centre of the town. It is uninhabited and the building itself is crumbling and falling in ruins. The few rusted cannons mounted in front of the palatial building strikes the eye as the last reminder of French presence in Yanam.¹²

French Cemetery

The original French cemetery which is now the Catholic Christian cemetery of Yanam is in a very pathetic condition. The tombs of French men and women including soldiers and missionaries who had died in Yanam are in a very dilapidated state, cared by none.¹³

St. Anns' Catholic Church in Yanam

The cyclone of May 1787 had destroyed the church at nearby Coringui and killed its priest. This seems to have necessitated the construction of a new Catholic Church or rather the reconstruction of an older church built here, which was known as Eglise Sainte Anne. But later the chalice used in this church, along with a statue of Saint Anne was recovered near Yanam. This was the cause that led to the construction of the Yanam church in the name of Saint Anne and also in remembrance of the Catholic French rulers was linked with this church. This church is named *St. Ann's Catholic Church*.

The foundation stone was laid down by Father Michel Lecnam and he died on 30 April 1836 before completion of the church work. The furniture, decoration articles were all imported from France. This church was built in the European and Gothic style in 1846 by the French missionaries. The remembrance of Father Michel Lecnam a culvert was fixed in this church. The first priest of this Gothic church was Revered Jacobus Martin, who belonged to the batch of missionaries of St. Francis de Selles of Annecy in France. He died in 1846 and his tomb is still visible in the old Yanam cemetery.¹⁴ According to Dr. Colonel A. Bigot who was the Director of the Medical School of Pondicherry, this church was surely would not disgrace any country- parish in France. He said that in this church the preaching of the Gospel in French, English and Telugu.¹⁵ It is strange to note that the priest of this church was paid by the French Indian government. The Benedictine monk, Father Gangloff, who was in charge of the Yanam church since 1922, received an annual allowance of Rs. 1380 from the French India government in 1939. It became part of the Visakhapatnam's Roman Catholic Church in 20th century.¹⁶ A Latin inscription in this church seems to point out to the existence of some Christian church in Yanam as early as 1768.¹⁷

Muslim Mosque

The Indian scenario of society consisted different religious group people like Hindus, Muslims and Christians. In the same there are very few Muslim families in Yanam region almost all of them are Sunnis. They constituted 4.04 per cent and numerically bigger than Christians.¹⁸ For their ritual purpose the present situated site of Mosque, Chinta Street in Yanam was donated by the French colonial government in 1848.

Botanical Garden of Yanam

Usually garden is a lesson of calmness, peace and patience. Father A. Gangloff said that gardening is a training school of character and which reflects the image of its founder. There was no garden when he was appointed this parish priest of Yanam, only in the entrance some banana, coconut trees and the two *Latania licurbonica* palms elegance to the church. He worked alone and developed a botanical garden with rare species of plants and trees beside the St. Ann's Catholic Church compound at age of 33 years probably in 1871. It had only about 1866 square yards and it was the only one of its kind in the entire Godavari region.¹⁹ The flora of the garden includes 57 families and representing a total of 195 species, among which the Leguminosae are the most numerous. Some kind of other plants were such as *Pentunia*, *Zinnia*, *Canna*, *Dhalia*, *Chrysanthemum*, *Nasturtium*, *Carnation*, and *Sunflower* etc.²⁰ The garden was not only a compendium of the Indian

flora, for besides some indigenous plants but also the others were colourful acclaiming from Africa, America, Australia, and Far East. This garden was well known to the botany students of Kakinada and elsewhere, who now and then came to Yanam with their professors, to make acquaintance with all the rare plants they never saw before. Very often he supplied seedlings to garden- amateurs and public institutions so that the garden was renowned as of public utility. He occasionally received a small grant from French Government for its maintenance.²¹

Court House (Palais de Justice)

Yanam Judicial Magistrate court is a very ancient court formed prior to the French domain while Yanam was a Dutch colony. The Judicial Magistrate court existed then, subsequently this area came under the French the same court has been converted as French court under French Law as a judicial court. The Court building is situated in a very ancient white monument building of French architecture. It is called as *Palais de justice* (Court House) and located at Thiagaraja Street, Yanam to the next of Municipality building. The building consists of two floors. The ground floor is the court and the first floor is the residential quarters of the Judge. The building was renovated in the year 1967 and inaugurated by Thiru S.L. Silam, the then Lieutenant Governor of Puducherry. In this court both civil and criminal cases were tried.

La Marie (The Town Hall) or Municipality Building

The responsibilities of Municipality are providing civic and civil amenities for people within their location. For this Yanam Municipality was created by a French Metropolitan Decree dated March 12, 1880. The office of the Municipality started in La Marie (Town Hall) in Yanam is now called as Municipality Building which is situated next to court house in the Thiagaraja Street in Yanam town. During French colonial rule Yanam Municipality had 12 sieges (seats). Then they were called previously as sieges, instead of wards. Each ward is represented by a Municipal councilor. Each commune possessed a Mayor and a Municipal council. The tenure of Municipal council was 6 years. The introduction of the Pondicherry Municipal Decree (amendment) Act, 1966 the Municipality of Yanam was designated as Grade-III headed by Commissioner grade –III.²²

Ferries Service

Before construction of the bridge natives are used commuter boats for travel and transport of goods. Two ferry services fulfill the needs of people one was the Yadurlanka- Yanam Ferry service which is the most important service in this region. According to an agreement between the French administration and the Government of the then Madras Presidency in 1920, the Yanam Municipality was allowed to acquire fifty per cent

of the annual earnings. From this service Yanam acquire several thousand rupees of income per annum. Another was the Coringa Ferry Service across river Coringa also provided income to the Yanam municipality.²³

Old Yanam Bridge

All most all rivers and streams running across roads in the territory are connected with bridges and culverts. One such monument was the old Yanam Bridge was constructed by French across the river Coringa connecting Yanam with Indian Territory in 1932. It is reinforced concrete cement type consisting of eight spans and the length in 73.5 meters. The centre of the bridge marks the territorial limit of Andhra Pradesh and Yanam.²⁴ Now a bigger and modern bridge built by the side of old one had taken its place²⁵ and named it as G.M.C. Balayogi varadhi (bridge) who was the former speaker of Lok Sabha.

Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes- a hill temple

The marble slab a special attraction in the premises of the church was built by the French rulers for commemorating the death of a citizen of French Madeleine Barbe le Bonde Beausang. The Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes²⁶ a hill temple behind a church built by the English engineers. According to the Father Gangloff, the creator of the Botanic Garden of Yanam and Father of St. Ann's Church narrated the history behind this hill was that

in 1943 a ship named William B. Ogden, a large vessel of 10,000 tons belonging to the U.S. Merchant Navy under the temporary contract of U.S. Shipping Administration ran aground near the Sacramento Light- house, not far from Yanam. Though the ship's crew tried hard to rescue the ship using all the manpower, it was in vain. The ship stayed stuck for one year in the same place as rock. At that time, an engineer named E. H. Sweeney was deputed from America for this purpose. He also tried and came to a conclusion that this task would not be possible with manpower alone. He worshipped Blessed Virgin Mary and gave an order to the crew of a small tug the mighty ship moved from the sandy island. In tribute of the Heavenly Mother, the engineer and his wife constructed the grotto of Lourdes in the garden of the Church of St. Ann's and finished in by the end of 1945. As stone was not available, it was built with brick and mortar in the shape of a rock, and is covered with a layer of cement, over which flowering creepers have spread for embellish of nature's brightest jewels. The statue of Mary was made at Manglore and is erected five feet high.²⁷ This inscription is mentioned in the hill temple behind this church.²⁸ On the grotto, the following creepers have been made to climb up: *Combretum marcophyllum*, *Vallaris Heynei*, *Porana paniculata*, *Tristellateia castralensis*, *Crypostegia grandiflora*, *Bougainvillea spectabilis*.

French Canal

The constructions of channels are very important for distributing water from rivers and tanks respectively for the purpose of irrigation. Irrigation facilities are less in Yanam. Yanam receives irrigation water via the Bank Canal which begins at Sir Arthur Cotton's barrage on the river Godavari downstream from Rajahmundry. This canal runs towards east to Pillanka, a small village near Yanam, and is popularly known as *French Kaluva*, in Telugu language or French Canal built under a 1949 agreement between the then French Government and the Government of India. Under this canal initially irrigation facilities were provided for 222 ha. for the first crop and about 80 ha. for the second crop²⁹ and it also provides drinking water to Yanam.

French Nationality in Yanam

There are two motives to prefer French nationality one is for financial benefit and another upward mobility for downtrodden. Earlier Yanam had great number of French national families. A high relative proportion of French Indian volunteer soldiers came from the downtrodden class and they felt recruitment in the army was virtually the only way for their upward mobility in society. Their long years of overseas service in French military most likely to opt French citizenship. Only nineteen families took the option by 1962 in Yanam.³⁰ The

number of Yanamites has been registered as French nationals at consulate in Pondicherry in 1988, according to Chiccam Satyanarayana Murthy, the president of the Union des Francais de Yanaon was forty seven. According to M. Krishna Rao, M.L.A. of Yanam approximately 200 French nationality families is there at present.

Replica of Eiffel tower in Yanam

Even though French left their enclaves in India, but the people in Yanam is memorizing nostalgia of French still now. To correlate this Union territory of Pondicherry made an effort to strengthen its French connection is erecting a replica of Paris, Eiffel Tower at Yanam, and its enclave in Andhra Pradesh which will stand 333 feet (100.6 metres). If things go on as per plans we could dine at the multi-cuisine restaurant on the desi Eiffel Tower. From that height we can see a panoramic view of Godavari, Bay of Bengal, the ruined Dutch port, the sea side town of Kakinada, high tech as plants established by Reliance Industries Limited (RIL) and lush green coconut groves of Konaseema belt. The Rs. 25 crore replicas will include a restaurant, a view gallery with four telescopes and an elevator going up to a height of 50 m to give visitors an aerial view of the surrounding landscape. The telescopes will face four directions: Kakinada town, Yanam town, RIL plants and Bay of Bengal.

RIL is sponsoring the project as part of its corporate social responsibility. Hyderabad based architectural firm Team One India is designing the project while Nagarjuna construction will execute the work. The soil in this part of the country is loose and major constructions require pile foundations. They designed a 67 metre pile foundation for the project, which is the deepest of the country. RIL site engineer told that approximately 700 tonnes of structural steel, reinforced cement and other rust-resistant material will be used to erect the tower. While the base is rectangular in the original structure, the base of the replica will be spherical to accommodate the restaurant, gallery and other infrastructure facilities. The tourism department will beautify the 20 acre site at an estimated cost of Rs 21 crore to establish attractive landscapes that will include rock gardens, musical fountains and granite cobbles.³¹

Conclusion

The nostalgia of French and their structural remains are still reflecting the colonial outlook of French in Yanam. Few roads still bear French names like the Bussy Street. The surviving traces of French presence in the form St. Ann's Catholic Church a visible standing monument. It was constructed in European and Gothic style by the French missionaries. The furniture and decoration material were imported from France. Besides the church Father Gangloff created a Botanical Garden

which was designed as to combine the gardening features of British, French and Moughal. It is only this kind of Garden in entire Godavari region. Another specialty in church hill temple was known as the grotto of our Lady of Lourdes constructed in rock shape, over it some climbing creepers embellish of nature's brightest jewels. The cemetery of French was in dilapidated condition which shows the French past in Yanam. The French Government provided water facility for irrigation of lands as well as drinking water through the French canal, for this reason the future generations of Yanam remember forever. According to a native of Yanam, "Yanam is a small France." After merger it was forgotten and abandoned by France. Local people are proud to say that they had French past. To memorize its French connection they erected a sitting pose French Lady statue in Yanam main road. Union territory of Pondicherry made an effort and erecting a replica of Paris Eiffel Tower at Yanam which is known as Desi or Yanam Eiffel Tower. Three hundred years French colonial rule brought uniqueness to Yanam and made it stands in a distinctive position in Andhra Pradesh.

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