



## Meritorious Services of Madras Native Association In The Madras Presidency

**Dr.G.Paranthaman**

Assistant Professor, Dept. of History, Alagappa University, Karaikudi, Tamil Nadu.

### ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to describe the meritorious services of Madras Native Association to the people of Madras presidency. In Madras Presidency an association called the Madras Native Association (MNA) was founded in Madras city on 26 February 1852. The immediate spur for such an organisation was the impending discussion in Parliament of the Company's rule in India before the passing of the next Charter in 1853 The man who inspired its foundation was Gajula Lakshminarasu Chetty, a Telugu speaking businessman of Madras city.

### KEYWORDS

Madras Native Association (MNA), Indian Reform Society, Charter Act of 1853.

### Introduction :

In Madras Presidency an association called the Madras Native Association (MNA) was founded in Madras city on 26 February 1852.<sup>1</sup> The immediate spur for such an organisation was the impending discussion in Parliament of the Company's rule in India before the passing of the next Charter in 1853 The man who inspired its foundation was Gajula Lakshminarasu Chetty, a Telugu speaking businessman of Madras city.<sup>2</sup> The leading members of the Committee of Management of the MNA were all mirasidars (landlords) like L. Venkateswara Naidu and G. Yogambara Mudaliar. who owned extensive landed property. The MNA was thus an association representing the landed and business classes of Madras Presidency who had specific grievances against the Company administration, particularly in the revenue, educational and judicial spheres. The MNA established branches in places like Cuddalore, Truchirappalli, Tirunelvely, Salem and Guntur to collect information about the grievances of the people in these localities.

In December 1852, the MNA submitted its first petition to Parliament focussing attention on the main grievances and wants of the people of Madras.<sup>3</sup> The petition expressed dissatisfaction with the land policies of the Madras Government, It was pointed out that the ryotwari and zamindarsj, systems had reduced "the agricultural classes to the deepest poverty and destitution".<sup>4</sup> As a remedy, the MNA urged the revival of the ancient village system under which, it claimed, the peasantry would be free from the oppressive interference of zamindars and subordinate officials. The judicial system, it complained, was "slow, complicated and imperfect."<sup>5</sup> The practice of appointing judges without assessing their judicial or linguistic competence in the local languages and their frequent and injudicious transfers affected the efficiency of the judicial service. It also took objection to the diverting of state funds to missionary schools under the grants-in-aid system on the ground that such a policy would tend to "distinctly identify" the state with missionary work. The MNA proposed a redistribution of power between the centre and the provinces to arrest the trend towards excessive centralisation of authority. It suggested that both the Central and Provincial legislatures have a few members elected so that it would impose a check on the arbitrary power of the executive.

The MNA petition was discussed in Parliament in February March 1853.<sup>6</sup> The Earl of Ellenborough, who presented it recommended that many of its demands should be considered favourably. The Duke of Argyll, however, objected to many passages in the petition and said that the demand that the revenue collected in India should be spent in India itself was "monstrous".<sup>7</sup> After discussion the petition was referred to

the Select Committee on the Government of the Indian territories.

As a sequel, H.D. Seymour, Chairman of the Indian Reform Society, a non-official body in London, visited Madras in October 1853. In undertaking this mission, Seymour's main objective was to ascertain on the spot the condition of the ryots and to examine their grievances about taxation. The MNA leaders welcomed his visit as it provided an opportunity to show that their complaints were based on facts. Gajula Lakshminarasu Chetty accompanied Seymour in his tour of the districts. They visited a number of places including Guntur, Cuddalore, Truchirappalli, Salem and Tirunelvely. From the evidence he gathered, Seymour was convinced that of the three Presidencies, Madras was in "the worst and most wretched condition" and consequently most in need of urgent reform.<sup>8</sup>

Seymour strongly urged the MNA to agitate for its rights and thereby convince its friends in England of its keenness to secure reforms. The leaders in the districts were anxious that the MNA should carry on its agitation to obtain. "a permanent redress" of their grievances. Lakshminarasu Chetty was assured of financial support by the district leaders if the MNA continued its agitation for reforms. With the material available, it is not possible to state what positive steps the MNA took to carry out the suggestions of Seymour.

After the passing of the Charter Act of 1853, the MNA began an agitation for the transfer of the British territories in India to the direct control of the Crown. It sent to Parliament a second petition, signed by fourteen thousand people of Madras Presidency, pleading for the termination of Company rule.<sup>9</sup> As the petition dealt mostly with judicial matters, the House of Lords discussed it on 16 July 1856.<sup>10</sup> The only result was that it passed a resolution condemning the practice of torture in Madras.<sup>11</sup>

The religious riots in Tirunelvely in 1858 gave another opportunity to the MNA to ventilate its grievances. Tirunelvely, in the far south, had been the centre of intense missionary activity since the beginning of the nineteenth century. It had long been bedevilled by religious friction between the Hindus and the Christians. In December 1868 the decision of the District Magistrate of Tirunelvely sanctioning a Christian burial party to pass through a street inhabited predominantly by high caste Hindus led to a riot in which ten Hindus were killed and nineteen wounded. The Madras Government, on the basis of the report of the District Magistrate, concluded that the Hindus were "covertly incited by some of the native officials into resistance" and ordered the prosecution of those suspected of

rioting.<sup>12</sup>

The MNA convened a public meeting in April 1859 to protest against the partisan attitude of the Government. It claimed that the Magistrate, under missionary pressure, reversed the old ruling which disallowed the Christians from using the streets occupied by the high caste Hindus. The MNA was critical of the way in which the Tirunelvely investigations were carried out. It expressed anxiety over the continued official involvement in missionary activities. It opposed the introduction of the Bible in schools and pleaded for the extension of the grants-in-aid system to Hindu educational institutions. Incorporating these points it drafted a petition and sent it to the Secretary of State for India.<sup>13</sup> However, he did not appear to have taken action on the petition. After this the activities of the MNA began to wane. The death of Lakshminarasu Chetty in 1866 was a shattering blow. By 1881, the MNA completely went out of existence.<sup>14</sup>

Though short-lived, the MNA may be reckoned as the symbol of the advent of a new era in British India - an era during which the destiny of the sub-continent was increasingly shaped by organised agitation conducted along constitutional lines. But its achievements were limited, for it lacked adequate popular support. In fact, the MNA represented essentially the interests of landed aristocracy and of the mercantile community.

#### End Notes :

(Endnotes)

- 1 In 1843, two associations, i.e. 'The Land-holders Society and 'Bengal British India Society' Were founded in Calcutta. By 1851 these two associations were amalgamated into a new one called the 'British Indian Association'. In August 1852, the first political association called the 'Bombay Association' was to ascertain the want of the people of the Bombay Presidency and to represent their grievances from time to time with a view to ameliorating them. R.C. Majumdar, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol.I, 318.
- 2 G. Parameswaran Pillai, *Representative Men of Southern India*. Madras, 1896, pp.145-165. Y. Vittal Rao 'Gajula Lakshminarasu Setti - A Pioneer of the Freedom Movement' R. Subba Rao (ed.) *Journal of the Andhra Historical Research Society* Vol.XXII, 63-8.
- 3 Petition to the Imperial Parliament from the Members of the Madras Native Association for redress of the grievances in connection with the expiration of the East India Company's Charter, 10 December 1852. (MRO).
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Mansard, *Parliamentary Debates*, 1853, Vol.cxxiv February - March 1853, Cols. 631-48.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Majumdar, B.B., *Indian Political Associations and Reform of Legislature 1818-1917*, 47, Calcutta, 1965, p.47.
- 9 Ibid., 65.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 For official correspondence, see public (1860) G.O. No.712, (MRO).
- 13 The Governor, C.E. Trevelyan, in forwarding the Petition, wrote 8 minute in which he wanted that the Petition should be accepted as a "genuine expression of the native mind" and regarded it as creditable that the faithful people of the South have had recourse to the legal and constitutional mode of the Petition in airing their grievances - Minute of C.E. Trevelyan, 28 June 1859, Public (1859) G.O. No.249, (MRO).
- 14 In 1878, G. Subramanya Iyer, the founder of 'The Hindu', M. Veeraraghavachariar, T.T. Rangachariar and N. Subba Rao Pantulu revived the MNA with V. Bashyam Iyengar as its President. The revived body had the added strength of a number of Government officials as its members. But in 1881, many leading official members had to disassociate themselves from the organization on account of the pressure exerted on them by Grant Duff, Governor of Madras This weakened the revived MNA considerably, leading eventually to its dissolution - see Briton Martin, Jr. *New India 1885 British Official Policy and the Emergence of the Indian National Congress* 8 & 45.