CHAPTER - II

THE VASIREDDI FAMILY
Origin of the family

For more than a century from 1670, the Vasireddi family occupied a prominent position in Guntur district. In that year, Vasireddi Veerappa Naidu obtained a 'Sanad' from the King of Golconda Abdullah Hussain Kutub Shah, appointing him as Deshmukh\(^1\) and conferring on him hereditary
rights over Nandigama Paragana\(^2\) (in the present Krishna district). After Veerappa Naidu's death in 1686, the Nandigama Paragana was divided among his three sons, Choudari Ramaiah, Raghavaiah and Chandra Mouli who respectively got the areas of Raghavapuram, Mogallu and Chintalapadu. Among the descendants of the three brothers, Vasireddi Chinna Padmanabhudu, the only son of Raghavaiah of Mogallu outstripped his cousins in wealth and power, as he obtained from the Golconda rulers, the Paragana of Pencaganchiprolu and Betaprolu in Kondapalli circar. The above grants were confirmed by the Mughal emperor, Aurangazeb, the suzerein power over the Golconda Sultanate.

In 1687 the Golconda Kingdom was overthrown by the Mughals and the area became a Subah or province of the Mughal empire. A Subedar or Governor was appointed to administer the new province.
In 1710, the Subedar of Deccan bestowed on the Vasireddi Padmanabhudu, hereditary right over large part of the Kondavidu Circar (present Guntur district) on the south bank of the Krishna river. This he did to counteract the power and influence of Zamindars, Manikarao and Manur. In addition, in 1725 the Vasireddi family was declared to be Mannavars³ and Deshmukhs of 225 villages in the Kondavidu Seema. By this act, the family obtained judicial and police powers over these villages. As stated earlier, China Padmanabhudu who controlled Mogallu, Panuganchiprolu and Betaprolu obtained the Kondavidu Circar. But some of the local chroniclers dispute this fact and state that the descendents of Choudari Ramaiah of Raghavapuram obtained Kondavidu. However by the year 1760, the branch of Choudari Ramaiah became extinct and its properties passed on to the other two branches of the family of Raghavaiah, father of China Padmanabhudu and Chandra Mouli of Chintalapadu.
Naganna, one of the six sons of China Padmanabhudu was dynamic and energetic among the brothers. In 1761, Shah Alam the Mughal emperor issued a Sanad through the Nizam, making the former the Mannavar of (1) Kolluru, (2) Ketavaram, (3) Bellamkonda, (4) Vinukonda, (5) Rayapudi and of Haveli, Mahal — Ravur and Kuchipudi. After the death of Naganna, Nandigama area was taken by Ramanna and Chintapalli area by Jaggaiah, his sons. Quarrels developed between Jaggaiah and descendents of Chandra موالي (third son of Veerappa Naidu). As a result, Jaggaiah was murdered in 1764. The eldest brother of Jaggaiah, Ramanna, took over the management of the entire estate.

Achamma, wife of Jaggaiah, grief striken over the tragedy immolated herself on the funeral pyre of her husband. It was the last recorded instance of 'Sati' in the Guntur district. The son of Jaggaiah and Achamma was Venkatadri Naidu, who
later became well known as Raja Vasireddi Venkatadri Naidu.

**Vasireddi Venkatadri Naidu**

There are some conflicting accounts regarding the date of birth of Vasireddi Venkatadri Naidu. According to one version, he was born in 1765, while another version states that he was born in 1767. Ramanna, the brother of Jaggaiah and elder uncle of Venkatadri Naidu besides exercising his authority over Nandigama also took over Chintapalli after the death of Jaggaiah. Ramanna incurred the displeasure of Basalat Jung, one of the six sons of the Nizam-Ul-Mulk.

The Guntur Circar was under the Control of Basalat Jung since 1761. He was supported by the French. However, in 1777, the differences between Ramanna and Basalat Jung were patched up. But in the next year, in 1778, Ramanna died when Venkatadri Naidu was only 17 years old. Thus
in 1778, Venkatadri Naidu inherited the vast estates held by the different branches of the Vasireddi family both in Nandigam and Kondavidu Paraganas (present Krishna and Guntur districts).

The area now known as the Guntur district consisted of five Paraganas, 25 Mootahas and 868 villages. The land tax was collected by the four Zamindars of Vasireddi, Manur, Manikarao and Malraju families, who exercised judicial powers also. As the jurisdiction and the powers of the Zamindars was not clearly defined, they retained private forces and posed a threat to the suzerain power, till 1788 when the district came under the control of the East India Company.

Vasireddi Venkatadri Naidu inherited an estate consisting of 551 villages. Among them 333 were in the Guntur district and the remaining 218 villages in Krishna district. He kept a
large armed force consisting of cavalry and elephants. Venkatadri Naidu imprisoned his cousins Papaiah and Chandra Mouli at Chintapalli, as they claimed a share in the family estate. Venkatadri Naidu tried to consolidate his power by befriending the suzerain authority. As already noted Venkatadri’s father Ramanna came to terms with Basalat Jung. Under the terms of the treaty of 12th November 1766 between the Nizam and the East India Company, the Guntur Circar (Murtujanagar) was to be ceded to the East India Company after the death of Basalat Jung. Though Basalat Jung died in 1782, it is only 1788, the East India Company could get possession of Guntur Circar. During the interim period of six years following the death of Basalat Jung in 1782 to the formal transfer of Guntur to the East India Company in 1788 the affairs of Guntur was looked into by Saif Jung, the representative of the Nizam and Masulipatam Council on behalf of the East India Company. Taking advantage of the confusion following the
death of Basalat Jung, Venkatadri Naidu increased his power by encroaching on many villages around his estate. The Masulipatam council brought the activities of Venkatadri Naidu to the notice of the Madras Government and suggested to it to take immediate steps to curb the power of Venkatadri Naidu. But the Madras government could do nothing in this regard as the power of the East India Company was not yet consolidated in the district.

Change of Sovereignty over Guntur Circar from the Nizam to the East India Company was effected smoothly and without any disturbance. This important political change was intimated to the local Zamindars who were allowed to continue in their possessions and they were assured by the Company that they will be treated like the other Zamindars in the Northern districts. After taking over the control of Guntur Circar, the Company
appointed an official known as Collector to collect the revenue. Robert Hughes was appointed as the first Collector\(^{15}\). Besides salary, he was paid commission of 5% on the revenue collected subjected to the maximum of 8000 Pags\(^{16}\).

Vasireddi Venkatadri Naidu whose authority over his Zamindari ratified by the Company faced twin problems of payment of agreed 'peshcush' or revenue to the Company and disputes regarding certain villages of his Zamindari in the south and north. In the south the dispute related to a village called Pandillapalli near Ongole which was controlled by the nawab of Carnatic. The second dispute in the north was with the Zamindar of Nuzvid. As for the dispute regarding Pandillapalli concerned, it centred round the right of the people of Pandillapalli village to graze their cattle in the Nanapalli village area. The dispute arose since the boundary pillars which separated Pandillapalli
and Nanapalli were destroyed. The Faujdar of the Carnatic nawab did not allow the villagers of Nanapalli to graze their cattle in the disputed area. So Vasireddi Venkatadri Naidu brought this matter to the notice of the Board of Revenue at Madras. The Board wanted to investigate the matter by the Collector of Guntur. The nawab of Carnatic deputed one of his officials Syod Mohammad Khan to investigate the matter. But soon Khan was replaced by another official Meer Mohammad Bauker. The Collector after investigation felt that the disputed land belongs to Nanapalli.

The dispute with Nuzivid Zamindar concerned over Kollipara, a small island in the Krishna river. Venkatadri Naidu wanted to settle the dispute through arbitration. But there were legal impediments since the concerned island was attached by the Company for the settlement of revenue by the Nuzivid Zamindar.
The main interest of the suzerein power was the collection of revenue on lands cultivated. The settlement of the revenue was on the basis of standing crops before harvest. The annual settlements were known as Jumabundy. Under Nizam's management, Guntur was not regarded as revenue yielding area since the inhabitants were poor and the cultivation was not developed. After the area came under the control of the Company, the Collectors reviewed the position and suggested many measures to improve cultivation and revenue collection. Among the measures suggested were the following:

(1) The Zamindars are to be allowed to keep their estates or Jagirs.

(2) To reduce their expenditure, they were to effect economy in their establishment known as 'Sibbandi'.
(3) The ryots were to be given loans called 'takkavi' to commence the cultivation.

(4) The Collectors have to make an estimate of the revenues (Jumma) likely to be realised.

The low collection of the Jumma resulted in paving the way for the Amani management or the direct management of the Company government.19

From the above suggestions, it is evident that the Company decided to involve itself more directly in the collection of revenue overlooking the Zamindars. As the Company is interested in increasing its revenue, it had a stake in the welfare of the cultivators also. That is why it wanted to advance loans to the cultivators to enable them to commence their cultivation.

The direct involvement of the Company with the peasants, challenged not only the economic
power of the Zamindars over the cultivators, but also their social standing among the people in general. The supremacy of the Company and the subordination of the Zamindars to it is demonstrated so effectively that the Zamindars who were accustomed to rule as the local chieftains tried to reassert their power. This inevitably led to many conflicts between the company and the Zamindars.

Venkatadri Naidu, who was accustomed to behave as the local overlord, felt his authority and position humiliated by the Company and soon he came into clash with the Company. The final clash of Venkatadri Naidu with the Company was regarding payments of arrears of peshcush of Nandigama. The Company's Council at Masulipatam asked Venkatadri Naidu to appear in person to offer an explanation. Venkatadri Naidu tried to assert his position that he will not appear in person but through his vakeel as it was the
prevailing practice. Further his presence is needed at Chintapalli where the cultivation operations were in progress. It is thus evident that ostensible reason for Venkatadri Naidu's refusal to attend before Masulipatam Council is about his social standing among the people of his Zamindari and also to demonstrate to the Company, the extent of his authority. The Company on the advice of the Collector dispensed with the personal attendance of the Zamindar as it did not want to make an issue of a simple matter especially when its authority is not fully consolidated in its newly acquired area. The Company however decided to show to the Zamindars that they are no longer that powerful and they depended for their existence on the mercy of the Company. Hence the Collectors were instructed to investigate the extent of lands possessed by the Zamindars and various 'rusums' or collections made by them from the people. The Company decided to cut the Zamindars to size by
issuing them new 'Sanads' defining their exact position and powers and obligations to the Company. The Zamindars were made to understand that all the decisions of the Board of Revenue are final and binding. From the foregoing, it is evident that with the advent of Company's rule over Guntur, the position of the Zamindars has deteriorated to such an extent that they depended for their existence on the mercy of the Company. They dared not to defy the Company, as they used to do under the previous dispensation.

Regarding Chintapalli, Venkatadri Naidu based his claim on the Sanads granted to his ancestor by Shah Alam, the Mughal emperor. As per the Sanad, the Vasireddi family was allowed certain privileges like the collection, what was known as 'savarams' and also allowed to possess two 'jagir' villages. These rights
were known as 'Mannavari Rights'. However the Vasireddi family lost these privileges by default and the same were exercised by another Zamindari family of Manikarao. Venkatadri appealed to the Company to restore his rights on Chintapalli and agreed to pay the Company 80,000 Pagodas for renting Chintapalli. The Company referred the matter of Chintapalli to a Committee called 'Guntur Committee'. The Company realised that due to the duplicity of the village accountants known as 'Karanams' much of the revenue due to it was defrauded by the Zamindars. The Zamindar of Chintapalli realising that his estate would be confiscated agreed to make good the loss of revenue by the Company. However one of the members of the Guntur Committee, Cocarane, brought to the notice of the Board of Revenue the other activities of the Zamindar who secretly instigated bandits like Chinno Papa Naik and Amma Naik to defy the Company.
As the Company was yet to consolidate its power in the district, Venkatadri Naidu tried to reassert his power by dominating the other Zamindars in the district and by defying the Masulipatam Council, which tried to curb his power. Some members of the Council even felt that the best way to buy off Venkatadri is by putting him in-charge of the territories of Vinukonda and Bellamkonda. But the suggestion was not given any serious consideration and the Company asserted its power over Vasireddi family.

The decade 1790-1800 proved to be very disastrous due to the continuous failure of the monsoon for ten years. As a result severe famine stalked over the district resulting in unprecedented deaths and devastation. The district was almost on the brink of ruin. Venkatadri Naidu tried to exploit the situation to his advantage. When the other Zamindars of
the district were unable to pay their peshcush to the Company, he came forward to clear off two thirds of his arrears to the Company for the last seven years. In addition, he came forward to pay the Company 3.15 lakhs of Pagodas for three years, if he were to be given full charge of the district. The Masulipatam Council endorsed the proposal of Venkatadri but the Board of Revenue rejected the proposal outright. 25 From the above, it is evident that Vasireddi family amassed huge wealth in the previous years obviously by unfair means. It tried to utilise the wealth to further its influence at a time when the Company was in financial straits and its political power was in its infancy in the district. But the Board of Revenue correctly saw through the game of Vasireddi family and rejected his offer. The Company which has embarked upon expansion of its empire throughout the Country knew how to handle local chieftains who had no
comprehension of the existing political realities. The Vasireddi family, however, had no idea that it is dealing with a powerful company, whose empire spread over different parts of the country. It felt that the company is another inept local power like the Nizam of Hyderabad. The company decided to call off the bluff of Venkatadri and show him his real position. He was therefore ordered to release his cousins whom he kept under detention at Chintapalli. Further he was asked to restore to them their lands and other valuables. The Masulipatam Council decided to investigate into the affairs of Vasireddi family, but before it could proceed on its work, the Board of Revenue decided to abolish the Masulipatam Council and entrust its work to the Collectors concerned. Here it may be stated that the Masulipatam Council was a supervisory body over the Collectors of the Northern Circars. After its abolition the Collectors were directly controlled by the Board of Revenue at Madras.
Vasireddi Venkatadri Naidu now realised his true position vis-a-vis the Company. He decided not to stay at Chintapalli and shifted to Guntur. At Guntur also he was kept under surveillance. He therefore decided to withdraw to Amaravati on the banks of Krishna river, where he built a very big and beautiful palace by desecrating the great Buddhist Stupa built by the Satavahana emperors nearly 2000 years ago. Perhaps Venkatadri did not know the cultural worth of the world famous Buddhist Stupa at Amaravati. By his ignorant acts of Vandalism Venkatadri has done greatest disservice to the country. It is left to the alien British rulers to preserve the remaining relics of this wonderful Stupa in London museum.

After the abolition of Masulipatam Council George Andrew was appointed as the Collector of Guntur in March 1794. The Board of Revenue depends on the Collector for the collection of
revenue from the district. Further he provides information of the district relating to its population, resources, and irrigational works.

The annual reports of the Collectors are transmitted by the Board of Revenue to the Court of Directors at London. Thus through its local agent 'Collector', the Company's Directors have overview of the entire area under the occupation of the Company. The Collector is the kingpin of the administration of the district.27

After the abolition of the Masulipatam Council, the Collector of Guntur began to exercise control over the Zamindars under his jurisdiction. Naturally the affairs of Vasireddi family also came under the scrutiny of the Collector. In 1801, Venkatadri was forced to return to his cousin, Chandra Mouli, the estate known as Muktyala on the left bank of the river Krishna. Chandra Mouli, one of the descendents of Veerappa
Naidu, the founder of the Vasireddi Zamindari got in addition of Muktyala, the estate of Chintalapadu also, through a decree of the law court. Chandra Mouli was succeeded by his son Bhavani Mukteswara Prasad. From the foregoing, it is evident that the company could reduce the power of Venkatadri and succeeded in creating another centre of power at Muktyala. Naturally, the Muktyala Zamindar who owed his position to the Company remained loyal to it.

But Venkatadri was not a man to give away his position and power so easily. So he tried to extend his power southwards by purchasing the estates of the other Zamindars who failed to pay to the Company their peshcush. Venkatadri acquired areas like Vangipuram, Kollur, Vinukonda which were auctioned by the Company when the Zamindars of Repalle, Vinukonda could not pay their arrears of revenue to the Company. Further he purchased the estates near
Masulipatam and Rajahmundry also. He was prompt in payment of peshcush due to the Company and gave no chance to the Company to attach the villages, for the non-payment of peshcush.

On one occasion, when he set out on pilgrimage to Benaras, Venkatadri Naidu paid the peshcush in advance and deposited with the Bankers rupees two lakhs for this purpose. However, there was an instance, when Vangipuram was attached by the Collector with the approval of the Board as Venkatadri failed to pay the peshcush.29

Venkatadri Naidu became a local legend unlike other Zamindars of the district. He lived in style in his palaces built at places like Amaravati and Chebrole. Though he desecrated the Amaravati Stupa for its marble, not knowing its historical and cultural worth, Venkatadri Naidu renovated ancient temples at
Mangalagiri and built its 'Gali Gopuram'. Further in later years he became very pious and religious. He was smitten with remorse for murdering in his youth about 150 people belonging to Chenchu tribe. His pious nature and gifts to the poor and needy are remembered even today.  

While on pilgrimages to Tirupati and Rameswaram, Venkatadri Naidu visited Madras and called on the Governor General Moira, without taking the permission from the Governor of Madras. For this breach of protocol, Venkatadri Naidu was censured by the Madras Government.  

Venkatadri Naidu went on pilgrimage to Benaras and the Company showed him the necessary courtesy by honouring his bills at Benaras and other places. He was also honoured by Lord Clive at Calcutta. Besides, the Nizam of Hyderabad conferred on Venkatadri the
Venkatadri Naidu had no child of his own. So he adopted two boys namely Jagannadha Babu, son of Chandra Mouli and Ramanadha Babu son of Naganna alias Papaiah in 1798 and 1806 respectively. Venkatadri divided the properties between the two adopted sons with their mutual consent and the same was intimated to the Collector of Guntur in April 1816. In July the Government ratified the adoptions and division of properties. Venkatadri Naidu died on 17 August 1816.

Venkatadri Naidu is unique among the Zamin-dars of Guntur. Instead of squandering away the properties inherited, he increased his estates by purchasing those of the fellow Zamin-dars whose lands were auctioned by the Company
for the default of the payment of peshcush. Further, realising the authority and the power of the Company, he was prompt in the payment of peshcush, lest the latter may find an excuse to sequestrate his estates. His estate consisted of 551 villages, several palaces and other valuables whose total value was about 55 lakhs of rupees. Of the villages, Jagannadha Babu was given 314 in an area known as 'Umamaheswara Puram or Palem' while Ramanadha Babu was given 237 villages of 'Chaturmukha Palem' in the Chebrolu portion of the estate.

Post Venkatadri Naidu period

The two adopted sons of Venkatadri Naidu Jagannadha Babu alias Peda Babu and Ramanadha Babu, alias China Babu agreed to abide by the division of the estate made by their father. The provisions of the division were incorporated
in a deed of agreement known as 'Vibhaga Patrikalu'. As noted earlier, the deed was executed by Venkatadri with the consent of his sons. He allowed his sons to take part in the affairs of the Zamindari to gain experience in revenue transactions with the Company. The two dawns of Venkatadri, Sabnavis Anantaraao and Potturi Kalidas were allowed to continue in service, the former looked after the affairs of Jagannadha Babu and the latter that of Ramanadha Babu. These Desastha34 Dewans after the death of Venkatadri exploiting the inexperience of their new masters, involved them in endless litigation and thereby enriched themselves and ruined the Vairreddi family in the course of next thirty years.

Uma Mahesvara Palem and Chaturmukha Palem contained one hundred villages known as 'Dharmavahi'. As the term denotes, these villages are earmarked for the purposes of charity. As
noted earlier the late Zamindar was religiously inclined and made gifts to temples and learned Brahmins. Of the hundred ‘Dharmavahi Villages’, 64 were situated in Uma Mahesvara Puram and the rest in Chaturmukha palem. The Board of Revenue clarified that it is upto the new Zamindars to treat the villages as such and fulfil the intentions of the late Zamindar Venkatadri. As far as the Company is concerned, it makes no distinction between these villages and others for the purpose of assessment and collection of revenue.

Soon after the death of Venkatadri, his first adopted son Jagannadha Babu challenged the validity of the second adoption by his late father and felt that Ramanadha Babu, the second adopted son being a minor has no claim over the Zamindari and also questioned the legality of the Will executed by his late father dividing the Zamindari between his two adopted sons. He made a representation to the Collector of Guntur Thackeray to
recognise him (Jagannadha Babu) as the only legal heir of late Venkatadri Naidu and set aside the Will of his father giving a share of the estate to Ramanadha Babu. The Collector advised Jagannadha Babu to get the matter settled in the Court of Law. It is evident that the Collector is keen on getting the dispute resolved soon, so that the revenue due to the government may not be locked up till the case is settled. 35

In matters of disputed succession to the Zamindaris, the Collector is empowered under Regulation III of 1802 to appoint a manager to look after the affairs of the Zamindari, with the consent of all the claimants to the Zamindari. If any claimant refuses to give his consent, the Collector is empowered under Clause V of the Regulation to move to the Court to appoint an administrator for the Zamindari till the dispute is settled. The Collector of Guntur, after obtaining the consent of the Board of Revenue,
decided to invoke the Provisions of Regulation III and bring the Zamindari under the Court of Wards till the issue of adoption is legally settled.

Jagannadha Babu in his petition to the Collector questioned the authority of the Board of Revenue to bring the Zamindari under the Court of Wards and threatened to sue the Collector if he acts on the instructions of the Board. The other party, namely Ramanadha Babu, also made a representation to the government to recognise his claims. The government however felt that there is no need to act on that petition.36

Thus it is evident that the affairs of the Vasireddi Zamindari were embroiled in legal wrangles due to the lack of foresight on the part of Venkatadri’s machinations of the Desastha Dewans, who were notorious for involving their masters in litigation. As far as the Company is concerned it is not bothered about any of the
claimants. Its sole interest is to safeguard its revenue.

As Jagannadha Babu moved to the Court in January 1817 to set aside the order of the Board of Revenue to bring the Zamindari under Court of Wards, the government authorised the Collector to defend the action of the Board as public interest litigation.

The government wanted the Court to appoint an administrator for the Zamindari since a large amount of revenue due to the government from the Zamindari was held up due to the litigation. Before moving to the Court for the appointment of administrator for the Zamindari, the Collector attached 81 villages in Uma Mahesvara Puram and 127 villages in Chaturmukha Puram for the arrear dues to the government. The case of Jagannadha Babu against the government was dismissed on 10 May 1817.37
While Jagannadha Babu was busy in sending representations and filing suits in the Courts to get control of the entire estate, Ramanadha Babu was not silent. He too followed the same line of action. He and his mother and guardian Parvatamma filed in the Provincial Court of Appeal, Masulipatam, a miscellaneous petition stating that the division of the estate along with other valuables between him and his brother was made on 26th February 1816 on the occasion of Sivaratri festival, in the presence of learned Pandits at Amareswara temple of Amaravati. They rebutted the contention of Jagannadha Babu that the second adoption is not valid by quoting from the civil code then in vogue which allowed the Zamindars to adopt as many sons as they like. Further he claimed that he was adopted as per the law and the Will executed by his adopted father before his death has been accepted by his brother (Jagannadha Babu) also. This was evident from the
letters written by Jagannadha Babu to Venkatadri Naidu on 16 September 1812. The letter was sent to the Collector, Guntur by Venkatadri Naidu on 30 September 1812 and the same was acknowledged on 10 October 1812. He also pointed out that on 26 February, 1814, Jagannadha Babu sent another letter to Venkatadri Naidu stating that as he became a major he may be allowed to manage his share of the estate and also promised that if he fails to manage his share of the estate successfully, he will forfeit his claim. Ramanadha Babu also made a similar request to his father. Both the letters were sent by Venkatadri to the Collector in March 1814. Ramanadha Babu further claimed that all the deeds were registered in the Zillah Court of Guntur on 7 May 1816. Ramanadha Babu brought to the notice of the Court that the Collector had attached 208 villages (127 of Ramanadha Babu and 81 of Jagannadha Babu) as they failed to pay the peshcush.
Ramanadha Babu tried to strengthen his claim by bringing to the notice of the Court, the fact that Jagannadha Babu came forward to purchase 127 villages in Chaturmukha Palem portion of the Zamindari which were attached by the government for the default of revenue payment by the petitioner. He further pointed out that the offer of Jagannadha Babu was turned down by the Board of Revenue on 12 October 1816.39 Stating these facts, Ramanadha Babu and his mother Parvatamma prayed the Court to declare Ramanadha Babu and Jagannadha Babu as the two legal adopted sons of Venkatadri and divide his estate according to his Will.

The Court however rejected the case of Ramanadha Babu on technical grounds, stating that the original case was between Jagannadha Babu and the government and hence Ramanadha Babu has no locus standi in the matter.40
Undaunted by this reverse, Ramanadha Babu and his mother Parvathamma sent representations to the Board of Revenue reiterating Ramanadha Babu's claims to the Zamindari.41

The Board received the petitions of Ramanadha Babu and Parvathamma but it did not send any orders to the Collector for staying the decree of the Provincial Court. The Board was more interested in the collections of arrears from the Vasireddi Zamindari than in the succession disputes. Company's reluctance to embroil itself in the succession disputes had an adverse effect on the economy of the district. The claimants to the estates found no time or money to improve their lands in dispute.42 As a result most of the lands remained fallow and no improvements were made to irrigational works. No wonder one of the great famines of the 19th century took place in Guntur district and it resulted in the deaths and migration of more than 50 percent of its population.
Jagannadh Babu too made representation to the Board of Revenue stating that the position of the ryots would be better if the entire estate is placed under his management. He promised to pay the peshcush dues as soon as he was given the possession of his division.43

The appeal of Ramanadha Babu to the Provincial Court of Appeal dragged on for several years. On 16 June, 1824 the court dismissed the appeal, Ramanadha Babu then appealed to the Sadar Court at Madras.44 On 28 February 1825, Jagannadh Babu died leaving behind two widows and an adopted child. His estates of Nandigama, Inagoodroo and Ackalamand were taken over by the Collector for satisfaction of the revenue due to the Company.45

After the death of Jagannadh Babu, his two widows Achamma and Rangamma and the adopted son Lakshmipathi involved themselves in litigation over the properties. Ramanadha Babu, the old claimant
fished in the troubled waters of Jagannadha Babu's family.46

Two conflicting Wills, supposed to have been executed by Jagannadha Babu few days before his death were brought to light. The first Will was in favour of his second wife Rangamma and Ramanadha Babu and the second was in favour of his first wife Achamma. In the first Will Pasupathi Seshiah, Potturi Nagesvararao and Gollapudi Pedda Papaiah affixed their signatures as witnesses. The Will dated 26 February 1825 stated that Jagannadha Babu was sick for the last two months and as he had little hope of survival, he out of his free will gave to his second wife Rangamma, Rayapudi and Nutakki of Chintapalli.

Another interesting fact of the Will was the bequest to Ramanadha Babu, his houses, gardens and other properties. This bequest was intriguing
since the two brothers were involved in litigation ever since the death of Venkatadri and several cases involving the brothers were pending in Courts of Law.

The second Will authorised Achamma to adopt a boy of her choice as son. Further she was directed to pay 100 Pags to Rangamma as allowance. 47

While the two widows of Jagannadha Babu stalking their claims, based on Wills, Ramanadha Babu made a representation to the Collector of Guntur, Whish on 1 March 1825, stating that, if he were to be made the heir to the whole Vasireddi estate, he is prepared to pay all the amounts due to the government from the estates.

Achamma also made a representation to the Board of Revenue about her right to the entire estate. She stated that the Will, favouring
Ramanadha Babu and Rangamma was not genuine.

The succession of disputes of Vasireddi family were so complicated that the various subordinate courts gave conflicting judgements. It was only in 1832, the Provincial Court (the Predecessor of High Court) gave its verdict. The Court rejected the adoption of Lakshmipathi by Jagannadha Babu while that of Ramanadha Babu by Venkatadri was upheld. The widows of Jagannadha Babu, Achamma and Rangamma were allowed monthly maintenance allowance. Though the claim of Ramanadha Babu as one of the adopted sons of Venkatadri was vindicated, still there were many other cases connected with Zamindari pending in different courts. It is only in 1842, Ramanadha Babu was given the charge of his estates. After taking possession of the estate, Ramanadha Babu did not evince any interest to improve his lands and the condition of his tenants. He squandered his wealth in ostentatious living. Meanwhile,
the two widows of Jagannadha Babu appealed to the Privy Council against the decision of the Provincial Court upholding the adoption of Ramanadha Babu. The Privy Council set aside the decision of the Provincial Court and declared that the adoption of Lakshmipathi by Jagannadha Babu was valid. Thereupon, Lakshmipathi appealed to the government to make over to him the possession of the estate. But the government declined his request and allowed him an allowance of Rs. 1000/- a month. Ramanadha Babu was given a compassionate allowance of Rs. 300/- a month. After the death of Lakshmipathi, his allowance was continued to his adopted son Vasireddi Venkata Narasimha Naidu.

Ramanadha Babu died in 1859, leaving a widow and two sons. An allowance of Rs. 150/- a month was paid for some period to the widow and an allowance of Rs. 300/- a month, was paid to the two sons Dasaradha Naidu and Siva Prasada Naidu.
Thus for nearly one hundred years the Vasireddi family exerted its influence in Guntur district. Besides Vasireddi family, there were other Zamindaris like Manur, and Manikarao, which were more ancient than the Vasireddi family which was inducted into the district as a counterpoise to the Manikarao and Manur families. From its humble origin, the Vasireddi family acquired such power and popularity during the time of Venkatadri Naidu that it tried to defy the Nizam and the East India Company. Venkatadri Naidu had good grasp of the political realities of the time. He knew that the Company tolerated the Zamindars as long as they paid peshcush to the government. That is why, he took care not to default the payment of peshcush due to the Company. He also earned the goodwill of the people by his acts of charity. The only error he committed was the adoption of two sons and his who resided at Amaravati.
faith in the allegiance of his Desastha Dewans towards the family. By adopting two sons, he involved his family in endless litigation which finally brought ruin and disgrace to the illustrious family. His faith in the Desastha Brahmin Dewans is inexplicable. These Desasthas who migrated from Maharashtra have no stake in the wellbeing of the families they served. They exploited the gullibility of their masters to further their economic prospects. By their intrigues, the Desastha Dewans succeeded in ruining the Vasireddi family.

Jagannadha Babu borrowed money from the bankers (Sahukars) at high interest to fight his many cases in the Court of Law. Gold, silver and copper used in the coverings of the pillars and roof of the palace at Amaravati was sold to pay off the debts. With in two years of inheritance, a huge fortune of 50 lakhs of rupees from his father was lost and Jagannadha Babu became
Poor. Munro on his visit to Guntur in December 1822 as the Governor of Madras noticed the sorry state of Vasireddi family. But he could do nothing as members of family were involved not in one but many cases of litigation. The East India Company as noted earlier hoodwinked at these litigations as it suited its purpose eminently. Firstly by involving themselves in litigation, the family could offer no challenge to the authority of the Company as it did to the authority of the Nizam few decades ago. Secondly, the Company got an opportunity to confiscate the lands of the family on the ground of default of peshcush.

From the above, it is evident that the decline of the Vasireddi family due to the dissensions among its members removed the last impediment to the Company to consolidate its authority in Guntur district.
REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. DESHMUKH: Hereditary Officer exercising supreme
   Police and Revenue authority over a district.

2. PARAGANA: A Sub-division of a District.

3. MANNAVAR: Hereditary Officer having Police authority
   over a district.

4. NIZAM: In 1724, the Subedar of the Deccan, Nizam-
   Ul-Mulk for all practical purposes became independent
   of the control of the Mughul Emperor at Delhi. He
   ruled over the Hyderabad Subah under the title
   Nizam and his dynasty was known as Asaf Jah.

5. HAVELI: House hold lands, Khas lands (select or
   private). Lands under direct government management
   for government needs.

6. MAHAL: A division of a Taluk or District yielding
   revenue.
7. Jaggalah was beheaded by Basalat Jung's Officers, when Jaggalah attended a conference.


9. *Sons of Asaf Jah-I*

1. Gazi-Ud-Dim-Khan Firoze Jung,
2. Nizam-Ud-Doulah Nasir Jung,
3. Salabat Jung,
4. Nizam Alikhan Bahadur,
5. Basalat Jung, and
6. Mughal Alikhan.


11. **Mootahs** : A division of a large Zamindari.

13. MASULIPATAM COUNCIL: It was a Provincial Council responsible to the Government of Madras. Guntur district was put under its charge. Later it exercised too much independence, became indifferent and subjected to severe criticism and deficient revenue. Finally it was abolished in 1794.

14. Letters from the Collector to the Government of Madras:

13 September 1788, M.D.R. (2934 : 33-47)
25 September 1788, Ibid. (" : " )
30 September 1788, Ibid. (" : " )
18 January 1789, M.D.R. (2995 : 9-38).

16. PAGS: (PAGODAS) PAGODA denotes Hindu Temple.

Also the gold coin formerly coined at Madras ... from its having the device of a temple on its face. Therefore the Madras Pagodas originated like this. The Madras Pagodas were valued at 45 fanams or roughly three and half rupees.

17. Letters from Collector to BOR, Madras, regarding border disputes:

20 July 1789, M.D.R. (2997 : 7-8)
23 July 1789, Ibid. (" : 11-18)
25 July 1789, Ibid. (" : 24-31)
31 July 1789, Ibid. (" : 44-45)
13 August 1789, Ibid. (" : 97)
17 August 1789, Ibid. (" : 114-15)
13 October 1789, Ibid. (" : 216)
19 October 1789, Ibid. (" : 232)
20 October 1789, Ibid. (" : 236-37)
18. Letters from Collector to B.O.R., Madras:

5 October 1789, M.D.R. (2997 : 94-96)
12 October 1789, Ibid. (" : 206-15)
16 October 1789, Ibid. (" : 226-27)
18 October 1789, Ibid. (" : 228-30)

19. Letters from Collector to B.O.R., Madras:

18 January 1789, M.D.R. (2995 : 9-38)
17 May 1789, Ibid. (2996 : 188-93)
27 May 1789, Ibid. (" : 196-202)
26 June 1789, Ibid. (" : 221-30)
25 July 1789, Ibid. (2997 : 19-24)
9 August 1789, Ibid. (" : 76-81)
29 September 1789, Ibid. (" : 179-82)

20. Letters from Collector to B.O.R., Madras:

29 August 1789, M.D.R. (2997 : 142-44)
2 September 1789, Ibid. (" : 149-51)
16 October 1789, Ibid. (" : 224-26)
20 October 1789, Ibid. (" : 233-34).
21. Letters from Collector to BOR, Madras:

16 November 1789, M.D.R. (2997 : 256-60)
31 December 1789, Ibid. ( " : 339-61)

22. GUNTUR COMMITTEE: Appointed in 1790 to investigate the affairs of Guntur circar and the causes of the apparent defalcation of revenue. It consisted of Messrs. Basil Cocharane, Andrew Scott and William Jones. By October 1791, dissensions among the members cropped up and led to the abolition of the Committee on 31 of that month.

23. Letters from the Members of Guntur Committee to BOR, Madras.

20 September 1790, M.D.R. (3005 : 275-81)
14 January 1791, Ibid. ( " : 541 )
19 March 1791, Ibid. ( " : 636-37)
5 September 1791, Ibid. (3006 : 157-61)
12 October 1791, Ibid. ( " : 389-91)
31 October 1791, Ibid. ( " : 506-07)


27. Letters from BOR, Madras to Guntur Collector George Andrew Ram:


29. Letter from the Secretary, Fort St. George, Madras to the Collector of Guntur, 4 May 1815, G.D.R. (970 : 7-9).


34. **DESASTHA** : A term applied to the Marathi speaking Brahmins belonging to the denomination of Mathwas.


37. Letters from the Secretary to the Collector, Guntur:
   3 February 1817, G.D.R. (973 : 71-84)
   16 June 1817, Ibid. (974 : 34-42)
   23 June 1817, Ibid. (" : 47-51)


