

ABOUT ATA

The idea of starting a national organization of Telugu speaking people in USA was under consideration by concerned persons of people of Telugu origin for about two to three years (1988- 90). Finally, in early part of 1990 about two dozen likeminded individuals from various parts of USA gathered for an informal meeting in Chicago and discussed various aspects related to Telugu people of USA and India. After long deliberations, an idea to start a National Organization named American Telugu Association (ATA) was agreed by the participating delegates. Additional input was solicited from various individual around the country about forming an Interim Board of the organization and formally registering the organization in Illinois as a not-for-profit organization.

After getting very encouraging feed back around the community, a town hall meeting was organized in Naperville, Illinois which was attended by more than 150 Telugu speaking people from different parts USA. To facilitate the formation and functioning of the organization, Interim Executive committee was chosen from the Chicago area. This interim Executive Committee consisted of Chairman (Dr. Krishna Reddy), Vice-chairman (Dr. K.S.M. Prasad), Secretary (Madhava Reddy), Joint- Secretary (Gnaneswar Kavetti), Treasurer (Rajendar Pampati), and Joint-Treasurer (Chandrasekhar Thunga). The Interim Executive Committee was entrusted to communicate with telugu speaking people in different regions of the country who will be interested in serving as Interim Board Member. With the help of Mr. Hanmanth Reddy (IL) and Dr. Bandaru S. Reddy (NY) about 22 members were chosen to serve in the Interim Board in addition to the Executive Committee.

With the first ATA logo (designed with the help of Balarami Pammi, NY) and stationary at hand, the Interim Executive Committee got quickly into action of taking care of all formalities to incorporate the organization. American Telugu Association was formally incorporated as not-forprofit organization in Illinois in September 1990 and also received tax exempt status at the same time.

The main purpose of the organization is to assist and promote literary, cultural, educational, religious, social, economic, health and community activities of the people of Telugu origin as well as to promote exchange programs for students, scientists, and professionals of telugu origin between the United States of America, Canada and India and other countries. With this main objective, a mail campaign was initiated nationwide for membership drive. In initial attempt ATA was able to reach about three thousand families in this membership campaign. The response was very encouraging and membership reached around 500 in the first year itself. Simultaneously, the planning was also in progress to hold first ATA Telugu conference and Youth Convention in Chicago in July of 1991. A conference

committee was formed by the end of December 1990 Dr. Kasinadhuni Prasad as Convener. In early part of 1991, the conference committee meetings were held at Convener's house, and in one of these meetings, Mr. Devulapally Krishna suggested the name of America Bharathi for ATA Newsletter. The first issue of America Bharathi was published in the early part of the 1991.

A constitution committee was formed to formulate the articles and by laws for ATA under the chairmanship of Dr. Susarala Viswanatham. The draft constitution was presented in the first ATA General Body Meeting held in Chicago during the first ATA conference. This inaugural conference was very well received and about 1500 people attended this first ATA event. The General body approved the initial constitution and extended the term of Interim Executive committee up to the end of 1991 until the new Board of Trustees were elected. First batch of Board of Trustees were elected unanimously in September 1991 which elected its first Executive Committee. The members of first ATA Executive Committee were, Dr. Sadasiva Reddy (President), Dr. K.S.M. Prasad (President-elect), Mrs. Yashoda Reddy (Secretary), Charan G. Reddy (Jt. Secretary), Mr. Raghava Rao Vanguri (Treasurer), Mr. Tukaram Chavan (Jt. Treasurer).

At this stage, ATA decided to hold World Telugu Conference and Second ATA conference in New York during July 1992. Dr. Bandaru Sivarami Reddy was Convener of this conference. Second ATA conference was a great success and was attended by about 4000 people. After the 1992 ATA conference, ATA conferences are being held every two years. The third ATA conference was held in San Jose, California under the leadership of Dr. Durisala Desiah (President) and Dr. Kota Reddy (Convener). In 1995, then ATA President Mr. Charan G. Reddy convinced the Board to hold 4th ATA conference in Houston during the July 4th holiday weekend. Under the able guidance of Mr. A.V.N. Reddy as Convener, Mr. Hanmanth Reddy as ATA President, ATA conferences reached to new level and set many standards that were followed and surpassed in subsequent conferences. About 5000 people attended the Houston ATA conference from many parts of USA and India. During this conference, the General Body adopted the amended ATA constitution that extended the term of Executive Committee to two years, so that the same committee will be able to serve and make better planning for the conference and other association activities. Keeping with the ATA tradition, 5th ATA conference also set many new records and had its share of success under the leadership of Dr. Gopal Reddy Gade (President) and Mr. Davendar Reddy (Convener).

ATA activities took a major leap forward beginning with Millennia Telugu Conference (6th ATA Telugu Conference and Youth Convention) during July 4th weekend of year 2000 in Atlanta. The sixth ATA conference Core Team (Narender Reddy, convener; Shaker Reddy, coordinator; Syam Yellamraju, co-convener; Rajeshwar Rao Tekmal, member; Ramakanth Rallapalli, member) under the leadership of Srinivasa

Pinnapureddy (ATA President, 1999) and Adishesha Reddy (ATA President 2000) demonstrated a true team spirit and partnership with local telugu association (TAMA, telugu Association of Metro Atlantanta) and achieved numerous milestones, planned several new activities like all day business conference and ShATAvadhanam and many more. The use of multimedia and other standards it set during this conference along with will serve as an example for many years for other ATA conferences and other telugu conferences. Not only this conference was also financially successful but also contributed in developing elaborate conference guidelines (organizational structure and administrative plan) along with business-financial plan for future events.

Biannual Conferences are not only the few main activities that ATA undertakes every year. Through various committees, ATA reaches its objectives and goals. For example, through ATA foundation committee, ATA provides financial assistance to various developmental activities/projects in India. ATA raises and distributes funds for various charitable activities and provides financial aid to the victims of natural and other emergencies. America Bharathi, a literary and communication mouth piece of ATA reaches over 6,000 thousand Telugu families every other month and it is emerging as one of the premier Telugu literary publication outside of the Andhra Pradesh, India.

Marching forward in the second decade:

Successful hosting of ATA 2000, the Millennia Telugu Conference set correct upbeat tone for the organization for its mission and future activities. American Telugu Association started a series of new conferences in Andhra Pradesh, India to share the experiences and expertise of nonresident Telugu people with the Telugu speaking people of their motherland. ATA first Medical and First Business conferences were successfully held in Hyderabad during the month of December 2000 and 2001 respectively.

ATA activities in second decade of also took a major step forward with the establishment of regular office at Naperville, IL (the official registered place) under the leadership of 2002 executive committee. All the financial and other routine operations are coordinated from this place with the help of office staff and Executive Director.

The organizing team of 7th ATA conference (Subhashini Boyareddigari, convener; Srinivasa R. Pinnapureddy, coordinator; Krishna Bapatla, coconvener; Bheem Shenkar Penta, local coordinator) under the leadership of Sandhya R. Gavva, ATA President (a local resident) demonstrated a true team spirit and partnership with local telugu association (TANTEX) achieved numerous milestones. As promised, the Organizing Team delivered a Texas-size event without any glitches. The Magnificent

beauty of the banquet hall and the banquet set the right tone from the beginning. Like in other conferences, this conference also had many "firsts" such as it was the first time that Telugus could register on-line, Spiritual and Youth Committees published separate souvenirs, Business Seminars Committee published a "How To" handbook, and Panel Discussions and Women's Forum conducted discussions of "hot topics of the day" on the main stage. One of the highlights of the inaugural program was Samatha-Mamatha- Yuvatha theme ballet by local talent and the lyrics, melody and music were hauntingly beautiful. Overall the conference was well attended and it was very successful one.

Along with the rapid growth more new people are showing interest in the organization's governing affairs and its activities. ATA not only a progressive and rapidly growing organization but it also catering the needs of diversified representation of Telugu people across the USA as well as upholds all the democratic principles which are the corner stones of this organization. Every two years fourteen (or thirteen alternately) new trustees are elected for American Telugu Association Board for a term of four years by respective category or membership (3 from Grand patron, 3 from Patron and seven/eight from Life membership category). In the quest for new candidates to fill open governing positions in the ATA, we must remind ourselves of the fact that the selected candidates will be a major source for supporting activities that facilitate the advancement of our Telugu community. For the first time during 2002 several members in life membership category showed interest to serve as trustees than the number of openings available on the board that resulted in the election. Even though there were eight open trustee positions in this category ATA opted to call for elections for only seven positions and assumed the remaining one position as deemed elected because it will be filled by the President-Elect, since the president elect was already a trustee when he was elected and becomes president when the new board meets. This decision was based on the ATA Constitution and Robert's Rules of Order (which is the source for all detailed explanations and procedures). In view of law suit and to avoid further unhealthy gossip, the Board considered the Life Member position at issue (8th position), and decided to subject this position to a special election and to the vote of eligible members of the ATA. The main reason for the current state of affairs is the lack of clarity within the Constitution and Bylaws. This ambiguity has resulted in an unhealthy gossip that undermines the enthusiasm of the hard working volunteers.

After lengthy discussions and exchange of information by the members of bylaws and constitution committee and extensive deliberations by the board of trustees of ATA as well as several informal discussions with members at large, ATA board has proposed a number of changes in the Bylaws and Constitution to clarify election issues and other ambiguities. The revised constitution and bylaws was ratified by the membership at large in November 2003. Keeping with previous traditions the new executive committee (2003-2004) started several new projects in mother land

through ATA foundation. Adopt a child to educate, asthma medical camp, polio vaccination are some of the projects that merits special recognition.

Celebration of "ATA-Roju"--Mothruboomilo Mahotsavam during the December 2003 in Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh, India, full filled the long cherished desire of ATA board of trustees to show case the talents of American Telugu Youth side by side with talent of our mother land. During the ATA Roju, ATA organized literary and culture programs along with the hosting of second medical and business conferences in Andhra Pradesh and recognized prominent Telugu Persons in Sangeetham (Padmavibhusan Dr. Mangalampalli Balamurali Krishna), Saithyam (Padmabushan Dr. C. Narayana Reddy), and Nruthyam (Padmasri Dr. NATara Ramakrishna).

As this article went into press the arrangements to host 8th ATA Telugu Conference and Youth Convention at Chicago are in full swing and by all indications they are going very well under the leadership of A.V.N. Reddy (ATA President), Murthy ChimATA (Convener), Ramesh Tummuru (Co-convener) Chandra R. Gavva (Coordinator) and Ramanamurthy Yedavalli (Local Coordinator) and host of enthusiastic volunteers serving in different committees. I am very optimistic this conference would also be setting several new milestones like many previous ATA conferences. The commitment of ATA to work with local organizations is once again quite evident this time also. Telugu Association of Greater Chicago (TAGC) is Cohosting ATA 2004.

Original Article was compiled by B. Madhava Reddy, Hanmanth D. Reddy and Rajeshwar Rao Tekmal Updated by: Rajeshwar Rao Tekmal