Decline of a Patrimonial Regime: The Telengana Rebellion in India, 1946–51

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RECENT studies of peasant rebellions in colonial countries have tended to focus attention on the persons who rebelled. The egregious conditions that aroused their indignation, the social and economic transformations that gave them the capacity to act, the leaders who came forward to mobilize them—these are the questions most commonly asked to explain peasant militancy and rebellion.

This perspective can yield only a partial view, for it leaves in the shadows one of the two major actors in such a confrontation, the regime. It is too easily assumed that the fate of traditional or colonial regimes is sealed, and need elicit little interest except as a source of grievances. Yet comparing regimes that have experienced rebellion with those that have not reveals that some have dealt much more successfully with modernization than others. While the attempts of some to modernize institutions only exacerbated the grievances of their restless populations, others have developed new capabilities for ruling. Indeed, the capabilities of political systems are probably more various than either the grievances or the capabilities of the groups challenging them.¹

The peasant rebellion which swept through the Telengana portion of southern India in 1946 focusses attention sharply on this problem. Questions regarding the revolutionary potential of peasants in this especially backward area tell little about how Communist cadres were able to build up a vigorous Maoist type of guerrilla war across an area of 4000 villages. There were none of the energizing changes in the agriculture of this impoverished area which have aroused peasants elsewhere to demand the abolition of feudal intermediaries.² Nor is there evidence that new economic competition had made landlords become more rapacious in order to maintain a luxurious life in the city.³ The theories that attribute rural unrest either to rising expectations or to a sudden downturn do not account for the rebellion in Telengana.

Therefore the few published works that have examined this little-studied rebellion have seen it as an anomaly. They have abandoned the usual search for

² With its low yields, negligible investment, and preponderance of subsistence farming, a general survey of Hyderabad agriculture in 1950 concluded that it was “stabilized at the lowest level.”
³ Economist Kesava Iyengar did find some signs that social ties were being strained, however, by an increase in landless tenants. Rural Economic Enquiries in the Hyderabad State 1949–51 (Hyderabad: Government Press, 1951), pp. 369–407. There is no evidence that they were being driven off the land, however, nor that the crucial middle peasantry was placed under greater pressure.

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broad-scale social roots in favor of specifically political explanations. Barrington Moore attributes it to a collapse of state authority at the time of independence, when the state’s Muslim prince lost British support for his rule over predominantly Hindu population.4 Hamza Alavi and Donald Zagoria on the other hand emphasize the rise of nationalism imported from British India.5 Finally some have traced its roots to the general crisis in colonial authority at the end of the war which brought communist-led rebellions in a number of countries in Asia. All three explanations point to exogenous political forces impinging on a situation containing little capability for internally generated change.

While there is no doubt that these forces did play a crucial role in enabling the rebellion to take place, this type of analysis leaves the most significant questions unanswered: why was Hyderabad so vulnerable to outside influences? Were there no political institutions within Hyderabad to buttress it against these winds?

These questions require an examination of the growing incapacities of the regime in Hyderabad. We shall see how its abortive attempts at institutional change left it isolated, and destroyed any chances for alternate elites to develop a viable coalition to replace it. They also made it difficult for any institution—Congress or the regime—to incorporate the peasants in any way. With no viable linkages among persons in either horizontal or vertical directions, the political system in Hyderabad became completely bankrupt, a captive of forces from outside.

*Abortive Modernization of a Patrimonial Regime*

Hyderabad in the nineteenth century was a weak patrimonial regime with little control over its territory or finances. More than one third of its land was held in feudal estates by lords who enjoyed not only tax-collecting privileges, but also police and judicial authority. At the center, court nobles enjoyed hereditary liens on government offices and deprived the ruling Nizam of effective authority over administration. With so much of its resources siphoned off into private households, the state was constantly in heavy debt.

Near financial collapse in the mid-nineteenth century prompted a series of far-reaching reforms. Had these reforms been successful, they would have transformed the administration into a modern bureaucracy and extended state authority throughout its territory. But they were not completed, and the consequences for political life in Hyderabad were dire. No single agency was able to win control over administration, the administration and the regime stagnated in factional conflict. Both the Nizam and the administration were so jealous of the other’s power that they focussed their efforts on reducing possible supporters of their opponents. In this context, neither group was willing to devolve authority to persons outside the regime who might provide a new base of support. Therefore as the regime’s clumsy efforts to extend its authority proceeded, it alienated its old supporters without replacing

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4 He specifically rejects socio-economic causes, arguing that peasants in Telengana were no worse off than peasants in many regions that did not witness rebellion. Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (Boston: Beacon, 1966), p. 381.

them. The effect of modernization in Hyderabad was to isolate the regime from its Hindu population.6

Hyderabad began to enter the modern age under the stewardship of a brilliant prime minister, Sir Salar Jung, who held office from 1853 to 1883.7 Salar Jung abolished the farming out of land revenue collection to money-lenders, placed government servants on salaries, and established a government treasury. To disengage government from the control of local money-lenders and court nobles, he brought in administrators from North India. By keeping these new recruits away from the older population in Hyderabad, isolated in a new section of town as well as in newly constituted government departments, he hoped to keep them responsible solely to the reformed government.8

While Salar Jung was alive his personal authority and diplomatic skill were able to unite the disparate elements—Nizam, old nobility, new administrators, and rural aristocracy—which were being differentiated by the reforms. But after his death, the core of the regime disintegrated into stalemated factional conflict. At first the new administrators gained ascendancy, because the nobles were not sufficiently educated to claim positions in the reformed government.9 The administrators pushed through further reforms, including changing the language of administration from Persian to Urdu which favored the North Indian recruits. But, because they too divided into factions among themselves, they were unable to consolidate power over the Nizam.

Therefore when Madras Congress leader T. Prakasham visited Hyderabad in 1923, he compared it to Tudor England.10 Politics was dominated by the personal will of the Nizam and the administration was a "jumble of varied eccentricities."11 There were formal institutions designed to limit the Nizam's personal exercise of power, but he frequently overstepped them.12 He acted as a court of last resort for petitioners, and often reversed the decisions of state officials.13 When he found that the institution of prime minister limited his power, he assumed the post

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7 For the fascinating tale of the politics of these reforms, see Karen Leonard, "The Power Struggle in Mid-Nineteenth Century Hyderabad," (unpublished manuscript).

8 Karen Leonard, "Cultural Change and Bureaucratic Modernization in Nineteenth Century Hyderabad: Mulkis, non-Mulkis, and the English" (manuscript to be published in facilitation volume for Professor J. K. Shewani).

9 Hyderabad in 1890 and 1891: Comprising All the Letters on Hyderabad Affairs written to the Madras "Hindu" by its Hyderabad Correspondent, (Bangalore, 1892) reports the factional conflicts between these groups. Karen Leonard, "Cultural Change," p. 17, for the analysis of the conflicts.


11 "Ruler's Eccentricities," Swarajya, November 13, 1923, ibid., p. 41.

12 The British tried to curb these intrigues, but they were neither consistent nor forceful. Having decided in the early nineteenth century not to take direct control over Hyderabad, they exercised supervision via a Resident in the capital who worked primarily by indirect pressure, reinforced by the presence of a British regiment stationed just outside the city. Though ultimately the British had complete authority in Hyderabad, the costs of exerting it were more than they wished to pay, so they played the patrimonial politics of Hyderabad according to its rules. See Syed Abid Hasan, Wither Hyderabad? (Madras, 1935), p. 31 and the correspondence of the British Resident with the British Viceroy, P. J. Patrick, "Summary of Barton Correspondence," Hyderabad Affairs, IOR, L/P and S/1141, 1925.

13 "Peep into Hyderabad" (Bombay: Balwant Rai Mehta, Secretary Indian States' Peoples' Conference, 1938), p. 10.
hostility. And when he wanted troops directly responsible to his wish, he removed the city police from the jurisdiction of the state's home minister and placed them under the department which administered his personal lands.

Because of this fragmentation of power within the regime, initiatives to extend control over the feudal estates were uncoordinated and often arbitrary, generating hostility and fear. The Nizam proceeded by increasing his demand for nazars, tributes traditionally presented to the ruler to signify the donor's loyalty. When a petitioner asked a favor at court, when the Nizam celebrated his birthday, or when he visited the districts—these were occasions for the presentation of nazars. The Nizam abused this system and forced the nobility to make large and frequent payments by designing ceremonial occasions on which they would have to make presentations. He also skillfully utilized rivalries among the nobles, taunting each to outdo the others in presentations in order to increase their prestige. Demands on the nobles were so great that the British reported the likelihood of an aristocratic revolt, undoubtedly an alarmist report, but an indication of the threat they felt.

The administrators also extended their controls. To force modernization and fiscal responsibility upon estate holders, they readjusted revenue unit boundaries to enable more efficient tax collection and demanded reports on internal estate administration. Where these devices failed, they resorted to bankruptcy proceedings or placed the estate in the Court of Wards, a trustee for estates with no adult heir. By disputing the heir's succession, insisting that debts be cleared, contesting the heir's competence to administer the estate, or raising revenue demands the Court frequently found reasons to resist returning estates after the heir attained his majority. No class of estates was exempt from this threat, not even estates of the leading Muslim families.

These moves need not have weakened the regime as much as they did. Many rulers in history have taken similar steps against groups with hereditary liens on government authority and succeeded in enhancing the strength of the regime. But in Hyderabad the regime was not able to develop a new base of support to replace the weakened and disaffected nobles as more successful regimes have done. Two factors prevented it from doing so: its increasing Muslim identity and its failure to incorporate Hindus in new institutions.

Before the reforms, religious differences had not been an important factor in Hyderabad politics. There had been no question that the regime was a Muslim one, but the ruling elite was mixed in composition. Arabs, North Indian Hindus and Muslims, and a few indigenous Hindus—a wide variety of families had risen into the courtly circles of Hyderabad. The culture they maintained was an eclectic mixture that was uniquely Hyderabadi.

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14 Officials were entitled to collect nazars as well, and also abused the privilege. Hyderabad in 1890.

15 Karen Leonard, in private correspondence June 20, 1972, has argued that the Nizam's increased touring was not an effort to reduce the aristocracy, but an attempt to extend traditional allegiance to a broader constituency. Whatever the motive, there is no doubt that his collections had a negative effect on his support.

16 It is reported how he used the rivalry between the Wanaparty and the Gadwal samasthans in P. J. Patrick, ibid.

17 For these manipulations in the nineteenth century, see Hyderabad in 1890. For the twentieth century, see Rao and P. J. Patrick, ibid.

18 For a general discussion of this problem in traditional monarchies, see Samuel Huntington, Political Order in Changing Societies (New Haven: 1968).

19 Leonard, "Power Struggle."
The new administrators introduced a militant Muslim consciousness from North India. Though their origin in the North does not differentiate them from the old administrators, most of whom were also immigrants, their cultural background was quite different. Many were graduates of Aligarh Muslim University, a university founded in the late nineteenth century to give Muslims the skills to compete with Hindus in modern occupations and government jobs. When they came to reform backward Hyderabad, they brought along many ties to the religious and political movements of North India, which were becoming increasingly divided along Hindu-Muslim lines.

The growing power of bureaucracy within the government increased the opportunities for the Aligarh graduates to exercise their communal preferences. As bureaucratic centralization reduced the position of the court nobles and the aristocracy, the Nizam turned increasingly to the new administrators for lack of an alternative. The preponderance of Muslims in the bureaucracy increased, and was even greater in the regime’s new undertakings. In particular the Industrial Trust Fund which was established in 1929 to foster new industry gave almost all of its patronage to a few Muslim engineers. Thus the regime failed to use its modernization investments to build a new support group of Hindu industrialists.

The regime also failed to build new political institutions which might have broadened its base of support. Under pressure from the British, the Nizam had instituted local councils, but he so deprived them of power and resources that they were politically ineffective. With the exception of the Hyderabad municipal corporation, which was allowed elections in 1934, all members of the councils were nominated by government. Zamindars, pleaders, “respectable traders,” and merchants sat on the councils as non-officials, but, unlike British India, effective control remained with a government official as chairman. Therefore, council politics revolved entirely around currying favor with the bureaucracy. There was no impetus for local elites to reach out into the population.

Nor did the councils give elites the resources to build up networks of supporters, as similar bodies did in British India. While municipalities and rural boards in Madras were receiving thirty-five percent of all government revenues in 1938, local bodies in Hyderabad received only three percent in 1944. This hardly made it worthwhile for local elites to bother with the boards, and they aroused little interest.

Finally, there were no other occasions when groups which could claim a broad alliance of persons would be rewarded. In British India there were several of these during the twentieth century—public representations before commissions studying constitutional reforms, proceedings of the legislative council, annual party conferences, etc. But in Hyderabad, consultations and decisions were made in much smaller arenas, in the corridors between the offices of the Nizam, the British resident and

\[20\text{In a state that was 88\% Hindu, Hindus held only 20\% of the top administrative posts and Muslims over 60\% of the top administrative posts.}\]

\[21\text{Census figures.}\]

\[22\text{The Hyderabad Problem: The Next Step (Hyderabad: Hyderabad Struggle Committee, The Socialist Party, 1948), Appendix II.}\]

\[23\text{Decennial report on the Administration of the Nizam’s Dominions, 1322 to 1331 (1912 to 1922) Hyderabad, 1930, p. 131.}\]

the government ministers. This encouraged a narrow politics of personal politics, not of expanding group alliances.

Had the regime been willing to decentralize control over some of its resources to locally powerful elites—the aristocracy or the Hindu middle classes—they might have mediated popular pressures and provided a more gradual transition to responsible government. But the politics of centralization so deprived them of the patronage to maintain their local positions that they were unable to provide stability when the Nizam finally turned to them later in the conflict.

Therefore, when the predominantly Hindu population began to demand popular government from the increasingly Muslim administration, political conflict took on a religious coloration. Once these lines were drawn, the Nizam's regime was imprisoned in a religious minority, making compromise with the Hindu majority increasingly difficult.

**Failures of Alliances Among Elites**

The same problems divided the elites from each other. Their two attempts to build broadly coalitional movements similar to the Congress Party in British India disintegrated into apathy and conflict. Dispirited, Hyderabad elites turned to movements based outside the state which accentuated the linguistic and religious differences among them.

The diversity of the population would have made coalition-building difficult in any case. Religiously, the state was divided into two major groups, linguistically into four. Ten percent of its population were Muslims, who spoke Urdu. Most of them lived in cities and towns where they were divided between extremes of rich and poor. The rich tended to be associated with the court of administration, while the poor were artisans or peons in government service.24

The eighty-five percent of the population that was Hindu, on the other hand, lived predominantly in the rural areas, which were divided into three regions by language. Telugu speakers, who lived in the northern and eastern districts formed the majority. Marathi speakers, who lived in the western districts bordering Bombay province, and Kannada speakers, who lived to the southwest, were the remainder.25 These Hindus occupied all levels of the social hierarchy, including the ranks of village leadership, a matter of great importance in the rebellion.26 But they were not only a rural community. Fifty-seven percent of Hyderabad City was Hindu, some long-time residents in commerce or government, others recent immigrants from the villages seeking education and professional careers.27

Such differences need not determine the shape of politics, however, for creative entrepreneurial politicians are often able to build linkages among different groups. But in Hyderabad both historical tradition and modern decisions militated against

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24 Muslims had a much higher proportion than Hindus in the "public force" (13.6%), as rentier landowners (12.2%), living off their own income (3%), and as artisans (12.7%). The remainder were traders (15.3%) or cultivators (53.5%). Census of India, Hyderabad 1931, Vol. 23, Part II, p. 182-5. For an argument that Muslims should retain their predominance in administration because they had no other economic base, see Mir Zahid Ali Kamil, "Communal Problem in Hyderabad (Hyderabad: Hyderabad Printing Works, c. 1936)."

25 48% of the state population spoke Telugu, 26%, Marathi and 11% Kannada. Census of India, Hyderabad 1931, Vol. 23, Part II, pp. 266-7.

26 Of 99,184 village officers, 96,670 were Hindus. Kamil, *ibid.*

27 Census of India, Hyderabad 1931, *ibid.*
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them. The separation of the Hindu notables from the court culture and the isolation of the old administrators in an Urdu culture provided little historical basis for a broad alliance. Decisions to orient educational institutions toward Urdu updated the differences between these groups and made educated Hindus turn elsewhere. Finally the political decisions made by the Nizam and the Indian National Congress to suppress incipient politics in Hyderabad made an alliance too costly for any group to depend on it.

The fragmentation of traditional culture disrupted the first of the attempts to build an inter-communal alliance, a movement by Hyderabad natives (called mulkis) who had been displaced from administrative positions. Ideological justifications of their cause showed signs of an incipient cultural nationalism. They elevated the Nizam as a cultural hero who had saved the state from foreign domination, and called on him to preserve its blend of Hindu and Muslim cultures from the intrusion of religious divisiveness from North India. But the mulkis' view of this culture was a narrow one. Though predominantly Hindu, most were from families who had migrated from North India in the early days of the regime, and had remained isolated in the old quarters of the city treasuring the Persian traditions of the old court.28 When the mulkis began to modernize, they failed to expand their limited base. They continued to use Urdu and advocated as a medium of instruction, a program which could not engage the rural Hindus. Therefore mulkis ideology remained a thinly veiled argument for government jobs, and did not persuade others to join them.29

Most significantly, the mulkis did not secure the support of the other major group suffering from the administrative reforms, the indigenous landed aristocracy.30 When the Nizam threatened to resume the wealthy Hindu estate of Gadwal in 1931, the Reddy lords did not turn to the mulkis, but to their caste members in Madras. Madras Justice Party leader C. R. Reddy held public meetings of Reddys in the district adjacent to the family's lands, Kurnool District, and then gathered legislators in Madras City to petition the Nizam. This case became a symbol of the Nizam's threat to all the Hindu aristocracy for, as the memorial argued, the Gadwal estate had been well known as a patron of Hindu culture.31 There was such consternation among the Hindus that the Nizam had to send in troops to insure order.32 Yet, the mulkis did not take up the movement, nor were other alliances formed within Hyderabad among aristocrats feeling preyed upon—there was no Hyderabad counterpart to the alliance of landowners and bureaucrats in the Justice Party in Madras.33

Because of the divisions within traditional Hyderabad, there was little cultural

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28 For a study of these families, see Karen Leonard, "The Kayasths of Hyderabad City," Ph.D. dissertation (Department of History, University of Wisconsin, 1969).

29 For a history of the mulkis, see Leonard, "Cultural Change," ibid.

30 There is some suggestion that the urban mulkis did not want an alliance with the rural notables, probably because they feared this economic competition or disliked their feudal methods. The secretary of the mulkis' Nizam's Subjects' League argued that the feudal class be maintained to protect the integrity of Hyderabad, but that the peoples' interest would be better served if the feudals stayed out of state administration and worked on their estates. Hasan, p. 24.


32 Times of India, March 14, 1928.

basis for such an alliance. The Reddi aristocrats were from local military families who had won their holdings from earlier rulers, and had essentially tributary relationship with the Nizam’s government. They kept their own courts in the districts, adhered to local traditions and maintained no relations with the nobles of the city. Even those who did maintain houses in the city remained apart. With a few notable exceptions they had little representation in the state administration, compared either to other Hindus in Hyderabad or to similar landed elites in Madras.  

Educational policy in Hyderabad made political coalition-building more difficult. Since educational facilities in Hyderabad were minimal, and provided few opportunities for education in Hindu languages or in English, many ambitious young Hindus from the districts went to colleges in British India. When they returned to join the professions and the more modern sections of the state administration, they brought with them connections to Presidency politics similar to the North Indian connections of their Muslim counterparts. Eventually these linkages put them in touch with the growing movements of linguistic nationalism in Andhra and Maharasthra.

Therefore the mulkis were not able to gather in those suffering from the collection of nasars, a possible basis for a Congress-type of party in Hyderabad. As the following petition from the subjects of one district reveals, the collections were imposed on a wide segment of the population.

We subjects Nanded District being squeezed beyond means to pay Nazrana for Highness’s forthcoming visit by taluqdar, Tahsildar and other District Officers against Highness’s firman saying Highness has privately asked them to collect six lakhs from each district. Every agriculturist forced to pay sixth of his assessment; shopkeeper, even vegetable sellers and clerks to pay sixteen rupees each: Deshmukh one year income, Sahukar much more.

Merchants, who were particularly vulnerable, did begin to protest. But, instead of joining the mulkis, as merchants in British India had joined Congress, they joined cultural-political association of Telugus, the Andhra Mahasabha, which put them also in touch with linguistic nationalists outside the state.

Similarly, in the Maharashtrian districts, the merchants turned to Hindu com-

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34 In 1931 the number of Kapus (Reddis) in high government offices was only 26, while the much smaller Brahan Caste had 138. *Census of India, Hyderabad 1931*, Vol. 23, Part II, p. 184. Nor did they seek public recognition in the city. A listing of forty-eight prominent personalities in Hyderabad listed only eight Telugus, among them only three Reddis, the caste of most of the indigenious aristocracy. Since these were paid listings, the few Reddi listings provides an indication of how few sought inclusion among the elite of the city. Hari Sharan Chhabra, *Hyderabad Personalities* (Delhi: New Publishers, 1954).

35 There were stringent rules restricting the establishing of private schools and gymnasiums with controls over the courses of study, qualifications of teachers, and methods of teaching. These caused the number of schools to diminish from 4053 in 1925 to 1082 a few years later. Sarojini Regani, “The Movement for the Social and Cultural Revival of Telengana in the Erstwhile Hyderabad State (1921 to 46),” paper presented to Seminar on the Socio-Economic and Cultural History of the Deccan, Hyderabad, Dec. 22-24, 1964, p. 7 referring to Report of the Third Hyderabad Peoples Educational Conference. There was one college in Hyderabad which was affiliated with Madras University and taught in English, but many district youths chose to attend colleges in neighboring British districts rather than make the move to the city. I am indebted to the J.A.S. referee for suggesting this analysis.

36 “Telegram from the ‘Nanded’ District people” to the Hon’ble the Resident at Hyderabad, dated the 20 October, 1925. IOR.1/PS/10 1141, 1925, p. 906, Part 2.

munal organizations emanating from Bombay Province. They conducted the politically militant Ganapati celebrations promoted by the Hindu nationalists of Maharashtra, Lokmanya Tilak, and joined the Arya Samaj, a Hindu reformist movement seeking to prevent alleged forced conversion of Hindus to Islam in Hyderabad. This became the vehicle for Hindu communalism in the state.

There was a brief moment in 1938 when all these groups—the longstanding urban Hindu mulkis, the urban professionals, and a few of the landed elite—did come together to form the Hyderabad State Congress.\(^\text{38}\) Liberals active in the cultural movements had become alarmed at the spreading enthusiasm for religious politics among young men frustrated by political inactivity. Just as they were deciding to risk the Nizam's restrictions on political organizations and form an explicitly non-communal party to counteract these trends, the Nizam announced the formation of a committee to consider constitutional reforms in Hyderabad.\(^\text{39}\) Prompted by this new opening, the liberals called a Hyderabad People's Conference to urge responsible government.\(^\text{40}\) Out of that meeting came the decision to form the Hyderabad State Congress.

But the party was not even able to hold its first general meeting before the Nizam banned it.\(^\text{41}\) Resting on the fact that all but six of the founding conference were Hindus, he labelled it a Hindu communal organization and refused it permission to meet. Policies of the All-India Congress exacerbated the party's weakness. Since the national leadership had decided in 1935 not to support popular movements in the princely states, to avoid alienating the large number of Indian princes, Congress leaders had no place to turn. This made it possible for the Nizam to keep them silent. His restrictions made sustaining a multi-lingual coalition so difficult that Congress leaders could not manage it. The underground organization of Congressmen became increasingly identified with Maharashtrians, sending frustrated Telugu youths to find support from the communist dominated Andhra Mahasabha in the Telugu districts of Madras Province.

**Rise of Religious Communalism**

Meanwhile, the success of communal movements—those restricted to persons pushing the interests of one religious or linguistic group—altered the axis of political conflict in the state. A nationalist conflict which might have united most people against the administration was replaced by a communal one which divided the population into two groups, Muslims supporting the regime and Hindus opposing it. This conflict destroyed the integrity of Hyderabad as a political arena and made its dismemberment inevitable.

\(^{38}\) Individuals from Hyderabad had been going to Congress sessions in British India for some time, and in 1930 many youths had crossed the borders to participate in Gandhi's satyagraha. But except for a small group organizing spinning in the city, there was no Congress organization in Hyderabad until this late date. *Hyderabad Problems*, p. 34.


\(^{40}\) By this they meant having a ministry responsible to an elected legislature, as was instituted in British India under the 1935 reforms.

\(^{41}\) Following a large gathering of both Hindus and Muslims in favor of the Khilafat movement of the Indian National Congress in 1921, the Nizam forbade all public meetings and prohibited British Indian political leaders from entering the state. Subsequently the full ban was lifted, but organizations planning meetings were required to submit their agendas to government in advance, and discussions on such items as land revenue and free labor were disallowed. Political organizations, suspected of pressing the rights of Hindus, were completely banned. *Peep*, p. 26.
The early arguments between Hindus and Muslims were similar to those raised by the *mulkis*—favoritism in jobs and education. Later Hindus began to develop structural arguments to explain their disabilities. Still focussing on education, they argued that the use of a Muslim language in secondary education prevented Hindus from becoming qualified.

With the founding of Muslim and Hindu popular movements, the conflict became more public and ideological. The Muslim movement, the Ittehad-ul-Muslimim, was founded in 1927, by a devout Muslim nobleman, Bahadur Yar Jung, as a religious and cultural body. Though himself a traditional Hyderabadi with no knowledge of English, he attracted a large number of the non-*mulki* administrators and advocates educated at Aligarh. With their sensitivity to Hindu domination in the nationalist politics of North India, they transformed the Ittehad into a political body to convert Untouchables and build a Muslim majority in the state.

The Hindu counterpart was the Arya Samaj, a reformist movement which, contrary to traditional Hinduism, encouraged proselytization and conversion. Hindus of Bombay province organized an extensive propagation effort in the Maharashtrian districts of Hyderabad. They sent in preachers, issued large amounts of propaganda, and organized local units, many of them in schools. Almost inevitably, the Arya Samaj turned against the Muslim government of Hyderabad and was suppressed. In protest, it joined with two other Hindu organizations active in the Maharashtrian districts to mount a civil disobedience movement in 1938 which landed 8,000 Hindus in jail.

Though neither movement reached deeply into the population at that time, they raised issues which undercut the very basis of patrimonial politics in Hyderabad. Both groups pushed the regime toward popular government and espousal of its Muslim identity as a basis of legitimacy. As a popular leader the Ittehad president Bahadur Yar Jung was critical of the autocratic politics of the Nizam, and pressed for representative government. He argued that the sovereignty of Hyderabad rested not with the Muslim ruler alone, but with the entire Muslim community which should share in its rule. To safeguard Muslim interests he proposed that Muslim representatives be elected only by their own community, rather than by a territorial constituency, an electoral formula which in India has come to be known as communal electorates. Adoption of this proposal would have been

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42 From the beginning, however, there were many who saw discrimination along religious rather than nativist lines, and raised basic questions of the legitimacy of the Muslim ruler. A group argued as early as 1850, for example, that a Hindu judge should be appointed to the High Court because only a Hindu could "interpret law in the light of the customs and manners of vast majority of His Highness's Subjects." *Hyderabad in 1890*, p. 86.

43 "The Why of Hyderabad Agitation," reprints from "Civil and Military Gazette, Lahore" (Delhi, c. 1938), p. 17. For the alliance between Muslim and untouchable leaders in Hyderabad, see P. Venkatswamy, *Our Struggle for Freedom* (Secunderabad, 1955).

44 This was the second and stronger wave of Arya Samaj activity in the state. The organization entered Hyderabad City in the late nineteenth century but remained small and was seen as quite innocuous. *Freedom Struggle*, p. 61.


46 The organizers of the Arya Samaj *sathyagraha* complained bitterly that no amount of money from British India would convince the Hyderabad Hindus to rise and help themselves. "Fortnightly Report on the Political Situation in Hyderabad," IOR, File 26 P (6)/37 Coll. R/1/29/1531.
an admission that the population was divided into religious camps, and, by destroying any pretense that a man of one faith could represent one of another, force the Nizam to side with his coreligionists.

The effect of the Hindu organizations was to push the Nizam in the same direction. Though Hindus argued against the division of the population into communal electorates, their politics contributed to it. In a series of pamphlets published in the thirties, they listed forced conversions in schools and jails, prejudicial police atrocities, and disabilities placed on Hindu worship to demonstrate that the regime was already identified with the Muslim cause. And in their arguments for representative government, they defined the conflict as between a Muslim ruler and a Hindu population.

Gradually the regime became more identified with the Muslim side. Positive support was given to conversion movement through the agency of the Ecclesiastical Department which was headed by the Ittehad president. According to Hindu sources, the department made a few forced conversions in schools and jails, but its more important activity was funding Muslim propaganda institutions. At the same time, restrictions on the Arya Samaj prevented it from countering Ittehad activities. Its literature was proscribed, preachers forbidden to enter the state from Bombay, and ceremonies made subject to government proscription.

It appears that the Nizam was not entirely in control of these policies. As an autocrat opposed to any form of popular government, even that of Muslims, he was not as friendly to the rise of the Ittehad as Hindus have portrayed. Consequently, he resisted the Ittehad's scheme for communal electorates. But the reforms of 1935 which brought provincial autonomy in British India made it necessary for Hyderabad to make some beginnings in representative government. Therefore the Nizam turned toward the aristocracy for a buttress against popular pressures, and gave them a prominent place in the proposed new legislature. But this move toward the aristocracy was several decades too late. The Ittehad threatened direct action, and communal electorates were conceded. Though this did not actually affect the governance of Hyderabad, for the reforms were shelved during the war, the incident demonstrated the increasing influence of the Ittehad over government, and foreshadowed events after the war.

Congressmen's Failure to Make Linkages Downward

Building ties within their own communities proved as troublesome to Hyderabad leaders as making alliances across communities. Not only was Gandhian nationalism difficult to pursue. Even the cultural linguistic organizations to which Congressmen retreated after the banning of Congress were not able to develop roots in the population.


50 Hyderabad in Retrospect, pp. 6–7.

51 Hyderabad Problem, p. 80.

52 The Ittehad also prevented government from raising the ban on Congress in 1940 by threatening direct action. Freedom Struggle, 1966, p. 196.
The founders of the Andhra Mahasabha, like the founders of the other linguistic organizations, were educated professional men, most of them living in Hyderabad City. Drawn together by a concern for the neglect of Telugu language and literature under the Muslim regime, they started libraries, published books, and even hired a propagandist for Telugu culture. Nor did they neglect issues of social and economic reform. To bring them to the attention of villagers, they moved their annual conferences out of district towns to smaller centers. There in a festive atmosphere, with Arya Samaj ceremonies, school children’s physical drills, and agricultural demonstrations they sought to interest people in Harijan uplift, primary education, and cooperatives.

The social conditions of Telengana made this an uphill task. Hyderabad City stood aloof from both its rural hinterland and its feeder towns. It was a preeminent example of a consumer city, very large, but with little commerce or industry. The tribute and taxes collected from the villages were spent on administration and public splendor, little of which reached the villages. A geographer who surveyed the city described it as having a “concentration of autocracy and wealth, economic privilege and top-heavy administration.”

The district towns were almost as removed from their hinterland, for they had grown up as administrative centers and had little economic exchange with the villages. In Nalgonda, head of the district where the rebellion began, over half of the population was engaged in services, while less than a quarter did either industry or commerce. Warangal, capital of the other main area of activity, was a very industrial city, but its industry had little relation to its agriculture. Because it contained a major railroad junction, Warangal had attracted several large-scale textile factories, but Warangal district produced none of the raw materials for them. Therefore these towns did not have the vigorous Hindu middle classes that carried political organization out of the capitals elsewhere in India.

The educational policies of the regime accentuated rural-urban distances. The language of higher education was Urdu, which was associated with urban culture in Hyderabad. Therefore the youths who won the few places available to Hindus in Osmania University became more literate in that culture than in the Telugu culture of their kinsmen. Since most stayed on in the city, for professional opportunities were very limited in the districts, they lost their ties with the villages.

Nor could the landed elite mediate for them, for they too were removed from other villagers. Landholding in Telengana was exceptionally concentrated, and the large owners set themselves apart even from members of their own caste. The major caste of landowners in eastern Telengana, the Reddis were sharply divided into hierarchically ordered sub-castes, and only the top one was allowed to use the caste name as a surname. The largest of these landowners were distinguished also by the title of deshmukh, given by the state in recognition of their formal feudal status. Though they had lost their powers as tax farmers during bureaucratic re-

53 Hanumanth Rao, Part I, passim.
56 Alam, p. 86.
58 Ibid. Furthermore, it had very few commercial or transport personnel for its size, compared to growing industrial centers of British India.
60 Census of India, Hyderabad 1931, p. 94.
forms in the late nineteenth century, they had retained the hereditary right to appoint village officers in the villages they once held. Through them the deshmukhs were able to maintain a strong system of local dominance in the isolated villages of Telengana, making them widely hated and feared among Telengana villagers.

But the moderates' caution contributed to their isolation. Only in 1937, after government had announced its own intention of considering responsible government did they take up explicitly political questions. Furthermore, under threat of government reprisal they did not press the hard questions of economic reform, such as land reform and abolition of free labor. Rather than endure the restrictions government placed on the agenda for their conferences, they simply cancelled them. As a result there were several three year gaps between meetings, during which no efforts except the library movement were made to reach villagers. Unfortunately there was no Congress or other secular organization doing so either.

There were some more militant Congressmen who were anxious for direct action, but, ironically, their strategies isolated them as well. By participating in a satyagraha in 1942, which both moderate Congressmen and Communists opposed, they landed in jail during the period when the Communists were spreading their rural organization. Later they went to the state borders to conduct armed raids that would arouse the central Indian government to take over Hyderabad. These actions also removed them from the central villages of Telengana where the Muslim and Communist activities were going on. Therefore they were not around when the villagers needed help in organizing defenses against roving terrorists.

Essentially, neither group tried seriously to build mass support. The moderates refused to participate in an all-India satyagraha in 1942, which even Gandhi urged them to do, because they wished to rely on negotiation. Even after Muslim militants had taken over government, they were willing to negotiate for formation of an interim government, a strategy the militants considered betrayal. Since the militants, on the other hand, were relying on the Indian government they did not develop the programs for land reform and cancellation of hereditary debts that the Communist workers were already enacting in the villages they had won. Like the moderates, they placed highest priority on political goals, and postponed the economic reforms which would have enabled mobilization of peasants.

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61 This library movement was the first institutional link between Telengana and Andhra, and its significance should not be neglected, as John Leonard argued in a private communication, June 20, 1972.

62 A government list of all associations in Hyderabad State in 1938 which were thought to have any possible political significance (societies for spinning Gandhian yarn, cultural associations, Hindu revival and reform associations) revealed only one society in Warangal, a town panchayat. 151 were in Hyderabad City while all the districts had only 35. Government of Hyderabad, Report of the Reforms Committee, 1938, Appendix I, p. 65.

63 Leader of the militants was Swami Ramanand Thirtha. Most of his followers were Maharashtrians, but there were many also in Telengana among the lower middle classes and party workers. See Thirth's Memoirs of the Hyderabad Freedom Struggle (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1966), p. 127.

64 As a long-time follower of Gandhi, Thirth felt some anguish over this strategy and consulted Gandhi. He recalls the conversation as follows: "I told him (Gandhi) frankly that people now had been allowed to act in self-defence in whatever manner they could do. Obviously, this hinted at the use of weapons also. At this frank admission of mine, he seemed to be appreciative and said in firm but kind tones, 'Yes, it is good that they did not run away from the situation like cowards. They have acted like brave men though in a manner of violence. This is understandable.'" Thirth, p. 191.

65 Thirth, ibid., p. 127.
Yet it is difficult to criticize Telengana Congressmen for either caution or poor strategy, for there was so little that could have been gained in the Hyderabad arena. They didn’t have the motivation of elections to send them out to districts, nor did they have the patronage with which to win support. And, unlike Congressmen looking forward to filling ministries in Madras, they could not make credible promises of large-scale reform because they had no openings into the regime. Short of extraordinary efforts, such as armed struggle, there was little urban political organizers could do in Hyderabad.66

Young Militants and the Communist Party

Much more successful in reaching the villagers were persons on the other side of the rural-urban gap. These were the Reddi youths who came from the villages to study at the university in the late thirties and stayed in the Reddi hostel.67 They were sons of rich and middle peasants who had sufficient resources to send their sons to the city but not enough to maintain a separate residence for them. When the Reddi aristocrats founded a hostel for such youths, they inadvertently brought into politics the class which was most capable of acting on their grievances against them.68 These youths had active kinship ties with landowning Reddi peasants throughout Telengana, and were much more immersed in village politics than the aloof deshmukhs. Throughout the subsequent movement the Reddi hostel acted as a center of their activities.

The hostel students first demonstrated their energy and commitment to mobilizing the rural population when 12 of them walked 110 miles through Telengana villages to spread the word of the second Andhra Mahasabha conference in 1928. Their leader was Ravi Narayan Reddy, who was later to lead the Telengana rebellion. At the conference, they pushed Mahasabha leaders to commit themselves on questions of social and economic reform, urging resolutions on such matters as banning child marriage and lowering tax rates for farmers. In these concerns they were not opposed in substance by the older urban leadership, but on matters of priority and style.69 The students’ march, which was undertaken against the orders of the Hyderabad police chief, was the first demonstration of their desire for more direct action on rural problems than the older generation contemplated.

The differences generated conflict during the 1938 satyagraha. When Gandhi refused permission for Congressmen to participate, the young militants refused to give up the plan.70 Therefore, after much heated discussion the moderates withdrew, leaving the field to the younger militants under Ravi Narayan Reddy’s leadership. Eventually about 125 Telugus offered satyagraha, most of them from this younger group.71

66 Furthermore, the Congress militants received no support from Congress in British areas, for party leaders were reluctant to support any form of guerrilla activity. Interview, Hyderabad, October, 1963. Hyderabad Problem, pp. 62–3.
67 Though never restricted to Reddi students, the hostel was given the caste name in an explicit attempt to arouse the interest of wealthy Reddis in their own community and contribute funds.
68 Osmania University hostel provided another important discussion center and recruiting ground for the same reasons.
69 For instance, moderate Congressmen proposed a quite radical measure, the abolition of jagirdari, in the state assembly in 1937.
70 He feared the Hindu communal groups associated would give the movement a communal coloration.
71 Achyut Khodwe, The People’s Movement in Hyderabad (Poona: Chanda Prakasan, 1947), p. 93. The movement was more active in the Maharashtrian areas, where the more left-oriented Congress gave it fuller support. In all, 449 persons in Hyderabad offered satyagraha.
Having failed to get support from the older moderates, the militants began to turn outside. In the jails following the satyagraha they made contact with the active Communist Party of Andhra, and by 1942 were receiving directives and cadre. The new ideology of communism helped them to articulate their developing differences with the older leaders, and the change was dramatic. As the Andhra Mahasabha's venerable founder later wrote in amazement: "After he came from jail Ravi Narayan Reddy had new ideas, modern views. Others said they were Marxist ideas. He spoke about world war, international influence, capitalism and the new order. It was all a wonder to the older leaders."

From this point on the arguments between moderates and militants shifted ground. Their differences over emphasis and strategies were subsumed in ideological controversy which eventually split the organization. Communists and their sympathizers raised demands for minimum agricultural wages, abolition of forced labor, protection of tenants, and abolition of landlords. When the moderates would not press agitation on these issues, the Communists branded them as conservatives tied to the interest of the oppressing feudal class. The debates became increasingly bitter and the membership of the Mahasabha polarized. When Communists captured the presidency in 1944, the Congress-minded members left to form a parallel Andhra Mahasabha. Their conferences were listless and poorly attended affairs, however, while the communists drew a crowd of 30,000 for their annual conference in 1945.

At the same time, the communists began to work more actively in the villages of Telengana. They launched an intensive propaganda program against landlords, attacking such issues as tenancy and food hoarding, which had a broad appeal among all classes in the village. In many areas they were the first political organizers who came to locate and express the grievances which Congress moderates dealt with only abstractly. Therefore, villagers wishing to make any protest against the obviously oppressive system gravitated toward the Communist Party.

The Collapse of Authority: The Rise of the Razakars

At the end of the war, the weakness of Hyderabad's political system became clear. A gradually accelerating panic swept through the state which no political leader could stem. The results of the previous decade—the regime's alienation from the Hindu community, the deep divisions between Hyderabad elites, and the isolation of Congress from the villages—left the state with no leaders who could command the confidence of even their own communities. Most alarmed were the Muslims. When they lost confidence in their leader, the Nizam, the last semblance of state authority disappeared and the regime collapsed into partisan conflict.

The main cause of uncertainty was the impending British withdrawal from

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72 Mohan Ram dates initial Communist organizing in Telengana to 1933, but states that the first illegal cell was founded in 1941. "The Communist Movement in Andhra Pradesh," Radical Politics in South Asia, Paul R. Brass and Marcus F. Franda (eds.) (Cambridge: M.I.T., 1973), p. 10. Another source of communist recruitment was the organization of left-wing urban Muslims, the Comrade's Association, which was active among urban workers. It was formed in 1938 and joined in 1940 according to Gulam Hyder, "Anti-Nizam Struggle: Participation of Muslims," in Raj Bahadur Gour, et al., "Glorious Telengana Armed Struggle" (CPI Publication, March 1973).

73 Rao, op. cit.

India. Muslim leaders feared they would be at the mercy of a hostile Hindu government in Delhi when the British army left Hyderabad, as it did in August 1947. They drafted numbers of schemes to stave off annihilation which ranged from the possible to the ridiculous—securing Churchill’s intervention to guarantee Hyderabad as an independent state was one of the less likely. The very bravado with which some of these were carried to Delhi shows how little sense of reality prevailed in Hyderabad. As tension mounted, so also did the accusations of weakness among members of the regime. Prime ministers changed three times in two years, as the Nizam and his ministers struggled for control over the negotiations with Delhi.

These problems were exacerbated by the increasing alienation of the Hindu community. When the Nizam instituted constitutional reforms along the lines conceded before the war, Congress launched a large-scale propaganda campaign against them and boycotted the elections. Then when the Nizam refused accession to the Indian Union on the eve of independence, Congress leaders united in their criticism, and launched a satyagraha.

Perceiving himself surrounded by a hostile Hindu population, the Nizam turned increasingly toward the Ittehad for support. Meanwhile, it had become a very different organization. Following the death of its founder in 1945, leadership had passed to a small-town lawyer, Kasim Razvi, who was a graduate of the militantly Muslim Aligarh school that had supported the movement for religious division of India. As independence approached, he had become increasingly committed to the notion of maintaining a haven for Muslims within India, and pressed a reluctant Nizam to take extreme stands in the negotiations with India. The Nizam had little choice, for the suppression, as much as the alienation, of other political movements over the last decades had left none available as a counterweight to the demands of the Ittehad. Under the weight of the regime’s policies, they had not been allowed to develop.

Gradually Razvi and the Ittehad took over the government. But, ironically, the methods he used to gain control eventually undercut what he was trying to protect, the authority of a Muslim government in Hyderabad. On two crucial occasions he unleashed gangs of Muslim youths to enforce a change in government. Police morale was seriously shaken by the first, when the Executive Council president resigned rather than prosecute a group of arsonists who had burned down the houses of the British Police Minister and himself. A year later it virtually collapsed when the police chief acquiesced to a mob which prevented the Nizam’s delegation from leaving for negotiations in Delhi until the Nizam agreed to a change in its membership. This showed that, “the will of the Nizam counted for nothing and that the Police and Government were theirs.”

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75 In the cities a serious fall of prices for goods produced by Muslim industry after the war added to the community’s sense of malaise. In the countryside, large-scale evictions of tenants following last minute government attempts to bring about tenancy legislation started sporadic unrest in 1946. Bedford, p. 165.
76 Another was a massive population transfer of Hindus in Hyderabad for Muslims in British India. Gour, p. 42.
78 Hyderabad in Retrospect, p. 10.
Decline of a Patrimonial Regime

Ittehad was sending out a volunteer corps of men known as Razakars to aid the police in maintaining law and order.

From this point on, public authority spiralled downward. The very existence of the militia called into question the capability of the regime to maintain law and order. And the difficulties of controlling it as it grew to an enormous size, 150,000 men, doubled the size of the police force, added to public disorder. Bands of Razakars roamed through the city and districts, looting, terrorizing residents and intimidating local administrators. Their ranks were swelled after Indian independence by more than 200,000 panicked Muslim refugees from British India who came to Hyderabad at the Ittehad's invitation. By then control of the police as well had passed to the Ittehad, so police no longer provided protection against the roving bands. As one villager recalled, "Every police station became a station for the Razakars, so we had nowhere to turn."

Order in the city was maintained, but just barely. In the districts, however, government authority collapsed into partisan warfare between Muslims and Communists. When the Indian army attacked in 1948 to force the recalcitrant Nizam to join the Indian Union, Muslim administrators fled their posts for the capital and the last semblance of government disappeared.

Communist Rebellion

Communist leaders date the beginning of the rebellion to the murder of a peasant in Nalgonda in July, 1946, a year before the precipitous decline in the capital. The incident provided a rallying point for a wave of protest that had been spreading through Nalgonda and Warangal districts since early 1945. Scattered villages had already begun to resist illegal evictions and forced labor. Violence escalated when police attacked the village where the murder occurred, and Communists counter-attacked against police stations and government offices. By late 1946, 4,000 army troops were in Nalgonda and martial law was declared. Within a few weeks 300-400 villages had joined the movement.

At this point, however, there was little to differentiate this rebellion from previous local uprisings against landlords. The peasants sought relief from feudal exactions, but were not directly attacking the system of landholding itself. Communist workers were active in some of the villages, but the party was not organizing for, nor expecting, rebellion. Furthermore, the military was still very strong, and in

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80 Gour, p. 66
81 Interview, Warangal District, January, 1964.
82 Most of the Hindu residents remained indoors because of fear of the gangs, while 30,000 of the middle and upper classes sought the protection of the British regiment in the army headquarters outside the city. Gour, p. 71.
83 P. Sundarayya, Telengana People's Struggle and Its Lessons (Calcutta: Communist Party of India [Marxist], 1972), pp. 36 ff.
84 Sundarayya's narrative shows the local nature of the struggle. Fighting was done largely with sticks, slings, stones, boiling water and chili powder, for most villagers had no arms and the party instructed its volunteers not to use those which were available for fear of all-India implications if the struggle were transformed to a rebellion against the government. Ibid., p. 40.
85 Sundarayya, who was the coordinator of the rebellion for the Andhra Communist Party, reports that, "One patent fact that emerges from the events of 1945 and 1946 is that our Party had not understood the depth of the revolutionary upsurge of the masses in the immediate postwar period." It was only with considerable reluctance that the central party agreed to seizure and re-distribution of landlord-held lands, and many Telengana communists did not support this policy. Ibid., pp. 52, 63.
late 1946 was able to reestablish the presence of landlords and government officers in the villages. It was only after the British withdrawal, when the Nizam unleashed the Razakars and the upper classes left en masse that it became a mass struggle.

Gradually the party found itself at the head of a spreading multisided rebellion. Peasants turned to them for help in organizing village defense corps against landlords, while landlords asked them for protection against the roving bands of Muslim Razakars. With guns supplied by landlords as a price of protection, these defense units took the offensive, terrorizing recalcitrant landlords and attacking symbols of government authority—customs outposts, post offices, railroads, etc. To aid its operations the party in the nearby Andhra districts of Madras, where it was more tightly organized than Telengana, began sending in more organizers. This leadership was crucial to the transformation of the initial peasant uprising into an organized rebellion against the Nizam and the entire feudal system.

How did the party win such support in this very isolated and backward region of India? Clearly, its land policy appealed to a large section of the population. It won the poor by confiscating landlord properties and redistributing them through village committees. But by keeping the permissible holding as high as 50 acres, it retained the support of even the middle stratum landholders, capitalizing on their resentment of deshmukhs and very large owners. That almost half of the guerrillas captured by government were Reddis is an indication of how much support this landowning caste gave to the rebellion. A Maoist type of four class alliance against landlords was well suited to the very elongated hierarchy in Telengana villages.

The party capitalized also on widespread grievances against the arbitrariness of the Nizam’s government and his local officials. By abolishing payment of land revenues to Hyderabad and attacking government offices, the party demonstrated its opposition to his regime. There is some evidence of more positive sentiments toward the new Indian government which benefitted the party as well. A Congress-inspired movement to hoist the Indian national flag in September, 1947, aroused substantial support in both towns and villages. Since the Communist Party then supported accession to the Indian Union, it gained the allegiance of many nationalists.

Above all, the party brought safety and order to villages which had been terrorized by both Communist and Muslim bands. When government authority collapsed, most landlords fled for safety. The social distances between landlord and peasant, and between city and countryside, were so great that exploitation was

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86 Ibid., p. 49.
87 The party claims to have redistributed more than a million acres, though government sources claim only 12,000 acres changed hands. Hugh Gray, in Myron Weiner (ed.), State Politics in India (Princeton: 1968), p. 497.
88 Many village officers also joined the movement out of sympathy or fear. Gour, p. 59.
89 Of 45 captives whose names were listed, 28 were Reddis; of the 12 leaders killed, 4 were Reddis; of the 29 leaders still at large, 14 were Reddis. Binod U. Rao, “Hyderabad Today” (Hyderabad: Government of Hyderabad, 1949), p. 115. In Nalgonda district, the party stronghold, 5 of the 6 top leaders were Reddis.
90 Sections among the rebellion’s leadership explicitly compared it to the Chinese revolution in a May 1948 document. P. Sundarayya, p. 394.
91 Gour, p. 16 ff.
92 V. P. Menon reports the villages were “ruled by Razakars by day and Communists by night.” The Story of the Integration of the Indian States (Bombay: Orient Longmans Ltd., 1956), p. 342.
barely rationalized by authority. Once this meager cloak of authority was removed, there was little to keep peasants integrated into the repressive social structure. The Communists provided them with a new parallel government which combined a “fluid and intelligible devolution of command with the appearance—and not a little—of the substance of village democracy.”

When these conditions changed, communist fortunes reversed. In early 1948, the party changed its policy from cooperation with the new Indian government and rejected the support of the middle peasants. It began to confiscate their lands and terrorize those who resisted, alienating the very class which had the most capability of sustaining Communist rule in the villages. Furthermore, by taking lands from people who had not been seen as oppressors they aroused fear among even small holders that their lands were in danger.

The revolutionaries lost more ground when the Indian army entered Hyderabad in September, 1948. As soon as the Nizam surrendered, after a half-hearted and relatively bloodless delaying action, the army began to restore civil administration. When a new police force from Delhi arrived to establish a presence and prevent looting, the mood of the districts visibly changed. Many communist dalams returned to their villages, for the establishment of a strong non-Muslim government in Hyderabad had removed the basis of their opposition. After this, the party’s continuation of the struggle against a government to which many were inclined to grant legitimacy left it increasingly isolated. Three years later, having lost mass participation in Nalgonda and Warangal and failed to arouse support elsewhere in India, the Communist Party withdrew the struggle unconditionally.

The rebels were not defeated easily, however. Despite its high morale and vastly superior equipment, the Indian army still required almost three years and 50,000 men to bring the party to surrender. Eventually army pressure drove the rebels to terror tactics, alienating those who had once looked to them for security and order. In the environment and despair that ended the movement, army occupation and subsequent return of landlords provided a certain relief to battle-weary villagers.

Conclusion

At one level the failure of political institutions in Hyderabad may be easily summarized: when pressures for popular government arose, the position of a Muslim

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93 Bedford, pp. 258–259. At the height of the rebellion in 1948, the party controlled more than 1,000 villages in Warangal and Nalgonda districts. (Sundarayya claims 3000, Gour claims 2000, even the socialist opponents acknowledge 1000. Sundarayya, p. 29, Gour, p. 102, Hyderabad Problem, p. 71). Where their control was stabilized, communist dalams (squads to ten volunteers) set up peoples’ courts to unite the village against allies of the landlords and expel offenders. They also settled internal village disputes, collected taxes, and even began to organize work teams for small development projects.

94 The Andhra communists opposed this strategy, however, and it is unclear how much the central decisions affected the local party. See Mohan Ram, pp. 22–23, for party debates on the strategy.

95 Hamza Alavi argues that the alienation of the middle peasants was one of the most important reasons for the failure of the revolution. Alavi, p. 270.

96 Hyderabad Reborn (Hyderabad: Department of Information, Government of Hyderabad, 1949), passim.

97 The Communist Party of the Soviet Union, which the Indian party consulted in 1951 regarding the ending of the struggle, made a distinction between a partial struggle to defend peasant lands, which it would approve, and a liberation struggle against the Indian government, which it did not. For a discussion of the intra-party conflicts over calling off the struggle, see Sundarayya, pp. 391–435.

98 Sundarayya, p. 4.
ruler in a Hindu population became increasingly untenable. Fearful of losing control, he repressed all political activity and drove his opponents into rebellion. Embedded in this brief scenario, however, are several important complexities. It was not inevitable that mass politics would divide the population along religious lines and isolate the ruler in a minority group. If other political linkages had been strong, they might have mitigated religious antagonisms. Therefore the rise of religious communalism shows as much about the failure of other forms of politics to develop as it shows about the strength of religious identities in Hyderabad.

But other forms of politics did not flourish. Developing linkages among the many different linguistic and religious groups in Hyderabad would have been difficult in any case, as the Congress found in British India. But the linguistic and educational policies of the regime exacerbated the problem in Hyderabad. They isolated educated elites, Hindu as well as Muslim, in the urban culture of the regime, making it difficult for them to develop linkages with rural elites and easier for the Nizam to ignore them as unrepresentative.

The Nizam’s reluctance to share power with these elites made secular politics even more difficult. The strategy of the British, whose position in an age of rising nationalism was even less tenable than the Nizam’s, shows how he might have preserved his regime, if not his personal rule. By gradually devolving power to moderate nationalist leaders throughout the twentieth century, the British helped them build a secular political party which maintained peace and continuity after they left. In contrast, the Nizam’s repression denied all possibilities to moderates willing to negotiate a gradual transformation of Hyderabad politics.

Why then was the Nizam so repressive? Though personal character may have given some animus to his policies, structural considerations are more important. Because he was protected in his position as a puppet of the British, he did not have to develop new support for his regime when it was challenged. He could afford the more expeditious if politically unwise solution of preventing protest by disallowing open political organization.

**Lessons**

Though this rebellion ended more than twenty years ago, it is a subject of renewed interest to scholars and activists concerned with India. For new scholarly emphasis on continuities in the last phase of colonialism, Hyderabad provides an important counterexample.\(^9\) It shows how the failure to devolve power to the middle class elites demanding inclusion in political arenas led to isolation and political impoverishment of the regime. The regime’s centralizing reforms, the Nizam’s personal stinginess, and the repressive actions taken against incipient political organizations made frustrated popular leaders challenge the regime itself. Thus in contrast to British India, where the elites who were to run government after independence were already in place and sharing governing responsibilities with the British by 1937, there was no such continuity in Hyderabad.\(^10\)

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10. This may explain why its successor state, Andhra Pradesh, has been subject to a much more fundamental challenge—an often violent movement for dismemberment of the state—than states which more directly inherited the power structure of British colonialism. On this movement see Hugh Gray, “The Demand for a Separate
DECLINE OF A PATRIMONIAL REGIME

If the Hyderabad government was weak, however, the new Indian government was not. Because of the continuities from the colonial period to the present, and the opportunities for coalition-building across India's diverse communal groups, the political institutions of independent India proved to be firm and able to win support from most of its population. The Telengana rebels had little chance against the powerful army and sophisticated administration which the central Indian government could bring to bear on Hyderabad. This made the Indian situation very different from that in pre-revolutionary China. In a series of recently published memoirs, Telengana veterans are urging present day activists to build a fuller assessment of government into their strategies for change in contemporary India.

Telengana State in India,” Asian Survey, Vol. II (May 1971), pp. 463-473. To my knowledge, however, there are no direct continuities between the current Telengana movement for separation from Andhra Pradesh and the Telengana rebellion. The class and leadership bases of the movements are very different, and most Communist leaders have denounced the current movement as a reactionary one. On the Srikakulam movement, see Ram, op. cit., and Biplap Dasgupta, “Naxalite Armed Struggles and the Annihilation Campaign in Rural Areas,” Economic and Political Weekly, Annual Number, February 1973, pp. 172-188.

101 In its decision to call off the Telengana rebellion in 1951, the All India Conference of the Communist Party of India made the same argument. “Telengana Peoples' Armed Struggle III,” Social Scientist, May, 1973, p. 30.

102 In an effort to discredit what they see to be adventurist tactics of recent Maoist activity in India, the Russian-oriented CPI now emphasizes the nationalist aspects of the struggle, even to the point of playing down the class basis of the rebellion and the land redistribution that was carried out. See Gour for this view. Sundarayya of the more radical Communist Party of India (Marxist) emphasizes the correlation of forces, and argues that the growth of a new rich stratum in the countryside has strengthened the ruling Congress, making it impractical for the party to engage in land seizures or immediate armed struggle, contrary to the sectarian policies of the Naxalites. Sundarayya, p. 439-442.