



PEASANT AND PEOPLE'S MOVEMENTS IN HYDERABAD STATE- ROLE OF VARIOUS ORGANIZATIONS-A STUDY

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Introduction:

The history of the peasant and people's movements in Hyderabad State is a crucial chapter in the political, social and cultural awakening of the Deccan. In the late 19th and first half of the 20th century is inseparably tied to the struggles of its people against autocracy, *feudalism*, and social oppression in the State. Hyderabad Princely State ruled by the *Nizam*, the peasantry of Telangana and other regions endured the combined burden of political exclusion, economic exploitation, and cultural subordination. Yet, through gradual processes of cultural revival, social reform, and political mobilization, the people forged powerful movements that ultimately challenged the *Nizam's* rule and played a decisive role in the integration of Hyderabad State into the Indian Union.

These movements were not the product of a single organization but of a wide constellation of groups ranging from cultural associations, reformist bodies, religious organizations, nationalist parties, and revolutionary communists. This study examines in detail the Geo-historic context of Hyderabad State, the oppressive socio-economic conditions of the peasantry, and the vital role played by different organizations in the peoples struggle, culminating in the great Telangana peoples Armed Struggle and it's on the later development.

Geo-Historic Background of the Hyderabad State: The Telangana region was a part of the Satavahana kingdom. After the decline of the Satavahanas many dynasties including Ikshvakus, Chalukyas, Rashtrakutas, and later the Kakatiyas ruled this area. The fall of Kakatiya dynasty in 1323 the region was under the Bahamani Sultanate followed by the Qutub Shahis till the last quarter of 17th century.² In 1687 Aurangzeb occupied the Qutub Shahi Kingdom and Nizam-ul-Mulk Asaf Jah established Hyderabad State defying the *Mughal* power in 1724. The *Nizam* ruled this region till 1948.³

The erstwhile Hyderabad State was the largest among all the Princely States in India.⁴ The State can be divided into three linguistic regions; Telangana, Marthwada and Karnataka, where Telugu, Marathi and Kannada were spoken respectively. The majority of Hindus were Telugu Speaking people.⁵ They worked in the fields of *Jagirdars*, *Zamindars*, *Samsthanadhishas* and *Deshmukhs*, who owned large tract of lands. In contrast, the Muslim population lived in the cities, like Hyderabad and district headquarters, and depends mostly on government services and industries.⁶

Administration and Autocracy: Hyderabad was an absolute monarchy where the *Nizam* wielded supreme authority. The administrative structure was modelled on *Mughal* lines, divided into *subahs*, districts, *taluks*, and villages.⁷ At each level, authority rested in the hands of officials appointed by and loyal to the *Nizam*. The village headman (*Patel*) and accountant (*Patwari or Karanam*) ensured revenue collection, while the police enforced landlord and state authority.⁸

Government services were heavily skewed in favour of Muslims. 80 percent of state employees were Muslim, while only 20 percent were Hindu, many of them Maharashtrians and Kannadigas rather than Telugus. In the police and military, Muslims formed an overwhelming 95 percent.⁹ The justification offered by the regime was that Hyderabad was an Islamic state, but the effect was to exclude the majority from power. Consequently, Hindu peasants were ruled not only by landlords but also by state officials who were culturally and politically alien to them.

Economic Conditions and Agrarian Exploitation: The Hyderabad State was mainly dependent on agriculture, which was linked favourable monsoon for rain-fed crops due to limited irrigation facilities, but it was organized on highly exploitative terms. More than half of the land was *Khalsa (Diwani)* land directly administered by the state, while 10% was *Sarf-e-Khas*, the personal estate of the Nizam. Over one third of the area was held by members of nobility and these lands were under the control of *Paigahs, Maktedars, Inamdars*, and *Agraharikas* et.al. These intermediaries not only collected revenue but also wielded judicial and police powers.¹⁰

Salarjung-I, introduced the Hyderabad State Land Revenue Act (1908), this reforms by which taxes were collected directly by the government and former tax collectors were granted *Vatans* or annual pensions. After losing their jobs, the nobility started most lucrative trade of money lending and grain lending and liquor and toddy contracts by which they became rich and started domination over the rural population. Though, the landlords' power extended to every sphere of village life. They used to settle disputes between contending parties by taking huge bribes and there were none whom they did not manipulate and caused disputes. In the process they took heavy amounts of money and grabbed lands. They collected excise duty from toddy tappers, a right auctioned off by the State. This was a valuable source of cash, which was then used for money lending.

Peasants sold their lands at low prices in order to pay taxes, clear debts and to feed their children. With the introduction of new cash crops, a lot of low fertile land that previously lay fallow was brought under cultivation. Rents were increased on the basis of the potentially increased value of production. Furthermore, crises in the world market enabled the *Deshmukhs* to consolidate their land holdings even more. Marginal farmers because of their tiny holdings apparently did not take advantage of the new cash crops. The mode of production and exchange remained pro-capitalist or semi-feudal and caused discontentment among the poor peasantry.¹¹ Landlords enjoyed near-total authority in the Society. Peasants were compelled to work on landlords' fields, houses, and even for state officials without paid known as *vetti*.¹² Industrial development was negligible despite Hyderabad's rich resources in coal, iron ore, and cotton. The *Nizam's* Government deliberately neglected modernization in order to preserve feudal dominance, leaving society stagnant and exploitative.¹³

Cultural Revival and Early Awakening: when there were no civil rights under the autocratic feudal setup of the *Nizam* government, the cultural revival movements gave an opportunity to the people to organise themselves which gradually helped to awareness among the masses. The formation of the Indian National Congress in 1885 inspired the local elite,¹⁴ though the *Nizam* remained hostile. The extension of railways in 1888 connected Hyderabad with broader Indian regions.¹⁵ Societies, clubs, and literary associations sprouted, providing platforms for educated youth to discuss reform.¹⁶

The Library Movement: This movement became the only ray of hope to work for political awakening in Telangana. It was initiated by Komarraju Lakshmana Rao and Ravichetty Ranga Rao, played a transformative role. The establishment of Sri Krishna Devaraya Andhra Bhasha Nilayam in 1901 was followed by other libraries in Hanamkonda and Secunderabad. By 1925, nearly a hundred libraries existed, fostering reading habits, debates, and awareness.¹⁷ Madapati Hanumantha Rao and Suravaram Pratap Reddy were central to this

movement, which laid the cultural foundation for political mobilization.¹⁸ Through publications, journals, and series of books known as grandhamalas,¹⁹ ideas of reform and resistance spread among Telugu speakers.

Journalism also contributed. Newspapers such as the Hyderabad Record, The Hindu, The Pioneer, and local Telugu weeklies critiqued the regime despite censorship.²⁰ The year 1925, saw the birth of *Golkonda Patrika* started by Suravaram Pratap Reddy as a biweekly. Suravaram was the pioneer of the political movement and braved all storm, for which he and are well-known.²¹ Writers used poetry, songs, and stories to awaken people's consciousness and link cultural revival with political struggle.

Role of Arya Samaj: The Arya Samaj was established in Hyderabad in 1892 by Girijananda Saraswathi, began as a religious reform body but soon it acquired political slant. By promoting reconversion, Ganesh Utsavs, and resistance to conversions, it challenged the communal policies of the *Nizam*. Government banned Arya Samaj journals like Vedic Adarsh, confiscated copies of Satyarth Prakash, and prohibited public meetings.²²

Despite repression, Arya Samaj launched *satyagrahas* in the 1940s, mobilizing thousands. Leaders like Mahatma Narayan Swamy led protests, with many volunteers imprisoned and some dying in custody. Between 1943 and 1947, it held six annual conferences preparing volunteers to fight against autocracy.²³ though the Arya Samaj was sectarian in its nature as far as the Hyderabad State was concerned; its contribution was significant in creating enlightenment among the people. Along with *AMS* and *HSC*, it worked for the freedom Struggle in Hyderabad.

Andhra Jana Sangham (AJS) and Andhra Maha Sabha (AMS): The 1921 Social Reform Conference in Hyderabad revealed the neglect of Telugu culture when attempts to pass resolutions in Telugu were shouted down. It resulted in formation of *AJS* in 1922 under the leadership of Konda Venkat Ranga Reddy and Madapati Hanumantha Rao. The *AJS* decided active it aims by promoting libraries, schools, women's education, and campaigns against *vetti*. It also resisted forced levies on merchants, publishing pamphlets such as Freedom of Merchants.

By 1930, the *AJS* evolved into the *Andhra Maha Sabha*, which became the principal socio-political platform of Telugus in Hyderabad.²⁴ Initially reformist, *AMS* turned increasingly political, especially after its 1937 Nizamabad conference demanded responsible government.²⁵ Its annual conferences debated women's uplift, abolition of untouchability, spread of cooperatives, and promotion of Telugu language.

Though *AMS* attracted many people participation but also faced repression from *Nizam*. The government issued orders requiring prior permission for public meetings, attempting to stifle the *Sabha*.²⁵ Ideological differences came to the forefront in the 9th session. Moderates favoured gradual reforms, while radicals, influenced by Communism, sought revolutionary change. Leaders like Raavi Narayana Reddy and Baddam Yella Reddy pushed *AMS* closer to the peasantry, transforming it into a mass movement.²⁶

Anjuman-e-Ittehad-ul-Muslimeen and the Razakars: On the opposite side, the *Ittehad-ul-Muslimeen (IUM)* was formed in 1927 under Nawab Sadar Yar Jung to defend Muslim political dominance. Under Bahadur Yar Jung's leadership in the late 1930s, it proclaimed the *Nizam* as the symbol of Muslim sovereignty and demanded exclusive rights. In 1940, the idea of creating volunteer corps was mooted, giving birth to the *Razakars*.²⁷

When Kasim Razvi assumed leadership in 1946, the *IUM* turned militant. The landlords helped the *Razakars*, they unleashed terror on villages by burning the houses, looting crops and molesting women. Their aim was to crush Congress *satyagraha* and communist-led peasant struggles.²⁸ Landlords, Hindu and Muslim alike, often collaborated with *Razakars* to protect their estates. This created an unprecedented unity of interest among feudal classes against the common people. Yet the terror only deepened popular resistance and prepared the ground for armed revolt.

Hyderabad State Congress (HSC): Swami Ramananda Tirtha a Nationalist lunched the Hyderabad State Congress in 1938 but the government banned its activities.²⁹ The Congress adopted non-violent *satyagraha*, with leaders courting arrest. Students, workers, and peasants responded enthusiastically defying laws, and organizing protests. In 1938 the *Vadmatharam* Movement sparked by prohibition of the national song in Osmania University, galvanized youth.

After lifting of the ban, on HSC in 1946, Ramananda Tirtha became its president.³⁰ Differences emerged within the Congress between moderates, who insisted on peaceful *satyagraha*, and younger radicals like Govind Das Shroff, K.V.Narsinga Rao who advocated armed struggle. They established Border Camps with the coordination of Indian National Congress. The HSC played a central role in articulating the demand for Hyderabad's Join Indian Union Movement.³¹

Communist Party and the Telangana Peasant's Armed Struggle: The Communist Party became the most dynamic force of mass mobilization. Formed through the Comrades Association of 1939 led by Raavi Narayana Reddy,³² it gained strength after the ban on political activity was relaxed in 1942.³³ Communists built ryot (peasant) associations, fought *vetti*, opposed illegal levies, and distributed seized lands. *Burrakathas* and folk songs played a crucial role in spreading awareness and linking daily oppression to larger struggles.³⁴

The Jangaon *Deshmukh* tried to loot crops and lands of Chakali Ilamma but volunteers faced the *goondas* and drove them away. This incident motivated the peasants to fight against feudalism. In 1946 during a protest against a *Deshmukh* Doddikomuraiah was shot dead it became the spark for the Telangana Peasants' Armed Struggle.³⁵ From 1946 to 1951, Communists organized armed squads that defended villages against *Razakars* and redistributed nearly 10 lakh acres of land to the landless.³⁶

The Peasants' Armed struggle encompassed nearly 3,000 villages across Nalgonda, Warangal, Karimnagar, and Khammam, participating lakhs of peasants. Landlords fled to cities, *vetti* was curtailed, and parallel administrations emerged in liberated villages.³⁷ Though the Indian Army's Operation in September 1948 ended the Nizam's rule.

Changed Political Conditions and Integration: As India gained independence in 1947, the *Nizam* sought to remain independent, emboldened by *IUM* and *Razakars*. This intransigence created near-civil war conditions in Telangana. The Indian government, concerned about instability in the Deccan, finally intervened. On 13 September 1948, the Indian Army launched Operation Polo, defeating the *Nizam*'s forces within five days. On 17 September, the Nizam surrendered, and Hyderabad merged with India.³⁸

Though autocracy ended, the Communist armed struggle persisted for three more years. Guerrilla squads defended villages, redistributed land, and resisted attempts to restore landlord control. Eventually, by November 1951, under pressure from the Indian state and directives from the Communist Party of India, the struggle was withdrawn. By then, it had left an indelible mark on Telangana's history, inspiring future demands for land reform and social justice.³⁹

Legacy and Impact: The peasant and people's movements of Hyderabad transformed society in profound ways. They curtailed the power of landlords, abolished *vetti*, and gave peasants a sense of dignity. The redistribution of land during the armed struggle altered agrarian relations, even if later diluted by state policies. The participation of women and marginalized castes broadened social horizons, challenging entrenched hierarchies.

Politically, the movements prepared the ground for democracy. Organizations like *AMS*, Arya Samaj, HSC, and the Communist Party educated people about rights, self-rule, and collective action. They linked Hyderabad's struggles with the broader Indian National Movement, ensuring the state's integration into the Indian Union.

Historically, the Telangana Armed struggle has been celebrated as one of the largest peasant revolts in modern India. Scholars interpret it as both a class struggle against feudalism and part of the anti-colonial movement. Its memory continued to inspire Telangana's identity politics, culminating in the separate statehood movement decades later.

Conclusion:

The saga of Hyderabad's peasant and people's movements is one of resilience against tyranny. From the cultural revival sparked by libraries and journals, to the reformist initiatives of *Andhra Jana Sangh*, *Andhra Maha Sabha*, to the militant struggles of communists, each organization contributed uniquely. The Arya Samaj mobilized through religion, the Congress through nationalism, and the Communists through class struggle. The *Razakars*, representing feudal reaction, were decisively defeated by the combined strength of people's resistance and Indian intervention.

Ultimately, these struggles ended centuries of autocracy and ushered in democratic governance. They redistributed land, ended *vetti*, and awakened the masses. Most importantly, they left behind a legacy of courage and consciousness that continues to define Telangana's political culture. The peasant movements of Hyderabad stand as a powerful reminder that even the most oppressed can rise, organize, and reshape history when guided by vision and determination.

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 - (i) Mir Qamruddin Chin Khan, Asaf Jah I (1724–1748)
 - (ii) Mir Nizam Ali Khan, Asaf Jah II (1762–1803)
 - (iii) Mir Akbar Ali Khan Sikandar Jah, Asaf Jah III (1803–1829)
 - (iv) Mir Farqunda Ali Khan Nasir-ud-Daula, Asaf Jah IV (1829–1857)
 - (v) Mir Tahniat Ali Khan Afzal-ud-Daula, Asaf Jah V (1857–1869)
 - (vi) Mir Mahboob Ali Khan, Asaf Jah VI (1869–1911)
 - (vii) Mir Osman Ali Khan, Asaf Jah VII (1911–1948)
 (Note: Nasir Jung, Muzaffer Jung, and Salabat Jung are not recognized as legitimate rulers.)
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15. Desai, V.H., and Sudarshan, C. *The Saga of Hyderabad Liberation Struggle in India's Freedom Movement*. Hyderabad, 2000, p. 43.
16. Societies and clubs active during this period include:

- Young Men's Improvement Society (1879)
 - Theosophical Society (1882)
 - Albert Reading Room (Secunderabad)
 - Hindu Social Club (Chaderghat)
 - Malwala Sabha (Hyderabad)
 - Asafia Library (established by Syed Hussain Bilgrami, 1886; later State Central Library)
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18. Meeneshwar Rao, G. *Cultural Revival and Freedom Movement in Warangal Suba (1900–1948)*. Ph.D Thesis, Kakatiya University, Warangal, 1998, p. 124.
19. Objectives of “Ana Grandhamala”:
- (a) Promotion of mother tongue
 - (b) Dissemination of Telugu literature
 - (c) Enhancement of knowledge among Andhras
 - (d) Affordable publication of books
20. Desai, V.H., and Sudarshan, C. *The Saga of Hyderabad Liberation Struggle*, p. 58.
21. Ramesan, N. *The Freedom Struggle in Hyderabad*, Vol. IV. Hyderabad: A.P. State Archives, 1966, pp. 78–79.
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