



SOCIAL CONDITIONS IN HYDERABAD STATE UNDER NIZAM'S RULE (ASAF JAHI DYNASTY)-A STUDY

Dr. K. Ramreddy, Assistant Professor of History, Kakatiya Government College (Autonomous),
Hanumakonda, Telangana State

ABSTRACT

This research paper explores the circumstances that led to the establishment of the Hyderabad state by Nizam-Ul-Mulk and examines his administrative capabilities. It discusses the regions comprised within the state and analyses the feudalistic and autocratic rule of the Nizams (Asaf Jahis). The paper further explains the expansion and nature of governance under the Nizam (Asaf Jahi) dynasty and how the state was eventually merged into the Indian Union by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. It also provides insights into the feudal atrocities committed by landlords during the Nizam's rule.

This study adopts a historical and analytical research methodology to examine the social conditions in Hyderabad under the Asaf Jahi (Nizam) rule. The research paper is based on archival records from the Nizam period, including contemporary writings, letters, memoirs, and official documents related to education, land revenue, and social policies. The study is both descriptive and analytical in nature.

The paper explains the social structure of the Hyderabad State and how society functioned during that period. It highlights social evils such as the 'vetty' (bonded labour) system, child marriage, infanticide, the purdah system, enforced widowhood, and 'Adabapa' customs. It also discusses the Jogini system. Furthermore, the paper examines the religious composition of the Hyderabad State and the education system, with particular emphasis on women's education. It analyses disparities in education among different sections of society and evaluates the language policy of the Nizam. Additionally, it explains the position of women and the role of the Andhra Mahasabha in awakening the people of the Hyderabad State.

Keywords: Asaf Jahis, Vetty, Adabapa, Purdah System, Jogini, Khangi (Private) Schools, Andhra Mahasabha

Introduction

Nizam-ul-Mulk (Mir Qamruddin, Chin Qilich Khan), the Mughal Viceroy of the Deccan, declared independence in 1724 CE and founded the Hyderabad State, with Aurangabad as its capital. He was a great diplomat as well as a capable conqueror. He served as a mansabdar, Subedar of Ayodhya and the Deccan, and also as the Prime Minister in the Mughal Empire.

The establishment of the Asaf Jahi (Nizam) dynasty in the Deccan was the result of a combination of political decline, administrative weakness, and regional ambition. After the death of Aurangzeb in 1707, the Mughal Empire weakened rapidly. His successors were ineffective, and continuous wars of succession created instability, reducing central control over distant provinces like the Deccan. In 1724, Nizam-ul-Mulk defeated Mubariz Khan at the Battle of Shakar Kheda. This victory marked his assertion of independence from the Mughal Empire and the foundation of the Asaf Jahi dynasty.

The Hyderabad State comprised regions of Karnataka, Telangana, and Marathwada. At the time of its merger with the Indian Union, the state covered an area of about 130,000 square kilometres and had a population of approximately 18.5 million. It was divided into four regions: Medak, Warangal, Aurangabad, and Gulbarga. The first two regions belonged to the Telangana area, which consisted of eight districts.

There were seven Nizams who ruled the Hyderabad State from 1724 to 17 September 1948. On 17 September 1948. On that day, the seventh Nizam, Mir Osman Ali Khan, surrendered to the Indian Army. Thus, the Hyderabad State was merged into the Indian Union through Operation Polo, initiated by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. While feudalism had largely ended in Europe by the 15th century, but it continued in the Hyderabad State. The Nizams maintained an autocratic rule supported by landlords, who served as the pillars of their authority in rural areas¹.

Objectives:

1. To understand the circumstances that led to the establishment of the Nizam Dynasty.
2. To study the social structure of Hyderabad State, focusing on class divisions, caste dynamics, and the position of different communities.
3. To investigate the status of women during the Nizam period, including education, social restrictions, and gender-based inequalities.
4. To identify and critically evaluate the social evils prevalent during the Nizam's rule, such as child marriage, illiteracy, bonded labour, and feudal oppression.
5. To examine the education system under the Nizams, including language policy (especially the role of Urdu), access to education, and disparities among different sections of society.

Methodology

This study adopts a historical and analytical research methodology to examine the social conditions in Hyderabad under the Asaf Jahi (Nizam) rule. The research is descriptive and analytical in nature, aiming to describe the socio-political and cultural conditions of Hyderabad State and analyse their impact on different sections of society.

Primary Sources: Archival records from the Nizam period, including contemporary writings, letters, and memoirs, and official documents related to education, land revenue, and social policies.

Secondary Sources: Books, research articles, and journals on Hyderabad State and the Asaf Jahi dynasty. Along with scholarly works on feudalism, social structure, and reform movements, including biographies of social reformers.

Social Structure: Hyderabad was unique among the swadeshi princely states of India. Its socio-political structure was autocratic under of the Nizams. Social reform, particularly concerning women, had to navigate religious orthodoxy, feudal patriarchy, and authoritarian rule².

The social structure was highly hierarchical. At the top was the ruler, followed by the ruling elite, including princes and large zamindars. Below them were prominent officials such as jagirdars, vatanadars, deshmukhs, deshpandes, and judges. The next level consisted of second-grade government employees, traders, and middle-class people. Beneath them were lower-level employees, commoners, and small traders, and small landholders. At the bottom were the labourers, workers, and bonded labourers. Living standards varied greatly: the upper classes led luxurious lives, while the lower classes lived modestly, often in miserable conditions.

Vetti system (Bonded Labour): During the Asaf Jahi period, social evils and inequality and exploitation were widespread. The Vetti system was a form of forced labour in which lower castes and peasants were compelled to perform unpaid for landlords and the state. "Vettichakiri", was one of the most oppressive practices of the time. Occupational groups such as washermen, barbers, potters, and other backward-class communities were forced to serve jagirdars, vatandars, and deshmukhs without payment.

Feudal Atrocities: Feudal landlords often increased their illegal exactions and evict cultivators from their lands, leasing them to others. In response, farmers waged struggles against such oppression. One notable example was the struggle of the poor Muslim farmer Bandagi against the Visunuru Deshmukh in 1920. His story later gained a recognition in the play *Maa Bhoomi*.

The Harijans who worked as tanners processed hides, made sandals, and produced leather tools for agricultural work. They also made water bags for irrigation and leather straps for ploughs. However, they were not paid by the landlords and were forced to supply these items free of charge³. 'Vetti' involved mandatory, unpaid chores such as construction work and transporting luggage, watch duty, and supplying fire wood.

The weavers were required to supply clothes to the servants working in the houses of the landlords. Carpenters and blacksmiths had to provide all agricultural implements to the landlords free of charge, and all repairs were carried out without payment. The Rajakas were expected to wash clothes and make mats in the

houses of the Deshmukhs and village officials⁴. The potters were required to supply the necessary pots to officials and landlords. The Vetti system has degraded the way of life of the people of Telangana to the lowest level. It has simply pushed them into slavery. It has completely destroyed the self-respect of a human being. The movement for the abolition of the ‘Vetti’ system has spread widely.

Social Evils: Social evils were prevailed in Telangana such as child marriage, infanticide, purdah system, forcible widowhood, ‘Adabapa’ customs, untouchability and illiteracy. Child marriages, including early and even infant marriages, were very common among girls. Child marriage was more prevalent among Hindus than among Muslims. It was widely believed that a girl should be married before she attained puberty, and many girls were subjected to various heinous atrocities at the hands of village heads.

The ‘Adabapa’ system was a cruel social practice that existed in the Telangana region during the rule of the Hyderabad Nizam, as part of the broader feudal system. The term “Adabapa” referred to young girls (mostly from Scheduled Castes and backward communities) who were kept as bonded servants or slaves. These girls were gifted by landlords (Doras) along with their daughters at the time of marriage. They were sent to serve the married daughter in her husband’s house. In many cases, they were subjected to sexual exploitation by landlords and family members⁵.

The custom of infant marriage was more widespread among the Hindus lower caste than any other community. Child marriage was also widely practiced by the other castes namely Golla, Munnur Kapu, Goundla etc.

Enforced Widowhood: Another evil that prevailed in the society among certain castes was the enforced widowhood. Remarriage was prohibited to women after the death of the husband. In Hindu society, widows were ill-treated and abused. They were doomed to a life of drudgery and constrained to live under severe restrictions which were supposed to be inviolable and incontrovertible⁶. The tonsuring of the heads of widows and imposing of an austere life on them was practiced by many upper castes.

Purdah System: Another social evil was purdah system- an old age tradition prevalent in Hyderabad State among Hindu and Muslim society. The purdah system is a traditional practice in which women maintain seclusion from public view and from men outside their immediate family. Hindu upper caste such as Deshmukhs, Deshpandas. Reddy and Velamas followed purdah in their households. As observed by Burgula Ananta Laxmi Devi, the President of fifth Andhra Mahila Sabha held at Shadnagar: 'because of the purdah system women were deprived of the just right to enjoy natural resources namely, light and air, and this is against nature⁷.

Jogins: Jogins was seen in significant numbers in Karimnagar, Medak and Nizamabad districts of Telangana region. These girls who were usually from the lower castes were drawn to become jogins under the pretext of pleasing the local deities into safeguarding the welfare of village and preventing natural calamities and epidemics. This belief forced the women to marry the local deity.

Religious Composition: Regarding the Muslims, Iranians, Turanians, Turks and Arabs are distinct groups hailing from foreign countries. Muslims from North India were Rohillas, and Pathans also settled at Hyderabad. Despite the meagre differences, Muslims were broadly divided into two sects, Shia and Sunni. Muslims of foreign origin are called as Afakies and the local Muslims as Deccani's.

Education: In Hyderabad, the Nizam neglected the people's mother tongues and major regional languages, and imposed Urdu as the medium of instruction. This reflects the feudalistic approach of the Nizam. The Nizam's government began slowly expanding female education by establishing Zenana schools. In 1921, only 1.6% of women in Hyderabad State were literate⁸.

Lack of Access to Education: During the Nizam's rule, social conditions were not favourable for the welfare of the people. Educational opportunities were limited, as the medium of instruction in schools throughout the Nizam's territories was Urdu. Until the beginning of the second half of the 19th century, the level of education remained very low. Except in Hyderabad, the capital of the state, literacy rates in the other districts of Telangana were far below the state average.

Khangi (Private) School Education: Government schools were not there in small villages during the days of the Nizam. Only big villages used to have Government schools up to Classes III or IV. Even those were in Urdu medium. But the village elders somehow used to manage to impart some form of education to their children. They used to establish private schools for this purpose⁹. Each child used to pay nominal amount to the teacher, or pay in kind like vegetables, tubers or offering millets at the time of harvest. Overall, the teacher's family used to be treated as an extended family of the village.

Ban on Khanghi (Private) schools: The Department of Education passed orders then banning private (Khanghi) schools without permission of the Government. Following such an order, the number of private schools came down to 776 within nine years. Similarly, the number of students also dwindled from 76,654 to 27,506. People made several appeals to the authorities and also protested against such orders. But all these exercises turned out to be futile. Thus, measures for spreading education were stalled by the Government of the day. Suravaram Pratap Reddy tried to highlight such injustices against spreading education¹⁰.

Women Education in Hyderabad state:

In Hyderabad state women Education given least importance. Female literacy was very low. Reformers both men and women raised concerns about child marriage, widow remarriage, purdah, and female illiteracy, particularly within elite Hindu and Muslim households. Inspired by national currents of the Indian reformist movements led by figures like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, and Syed Ahmad Khan, the Hyderabad intelligentsia started forming localized reformist associations such as the Arya Samaj (established in Hyderabad in 1892).

Position of Women: The position of women across the Nizam State was deplorable at the beginning of the 20th century. There were hardly any educational facilities for women, and illiteracy and ignorance prevailed widely. Women like Mallamma Narasimha and Chakali Ailamma demonstrated an awareness of gender-based oppression, not just class exploitation¹¹.

Role of Andhra Mahasabha in Awakening: By the 1930s, organisations like the Andhra Mahasabha began mobilising peasants against feudal atrocities, and women were gradually drawn into these struggles—initially as supporters, but later as active participants. The Andhra Mahila Sabha, though initially a cultural organisation, evolved into a more radical platform under the influence of leftist and Communist ideology¹². The first two meetings of Andhra Mahasabha held at Jogipeta in 1930 and Devarakonda in 1931, resolved to prevent child marriages and encourage widow marriages, and recommended the same to the Government for implementation. Resolutions were passed in these sessions to introduce certain reforms in the administrative machinery, to open more schools, to provide some facilities to big landowners, and to ensure limited civil rights.

The social conditions in Hyderabad under the Nizams were characterized by feudal hierarchy, religious diversity, limited literacy, and gradual modernization. While the state witnessed progress in education and infrastructure, social inequalities and rural backwardness remained significant issues until Hyderabad's integration into the Indian Union in 1948. The Andhra Mahasabha and the Communist Party awakened the people and stood up for the rights of peasants, workers, women, and weaker sections of society. The Communist Party fought against the landlords and distributed land to the landless people of the Hyderabad State.

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