

Language, Religion, Ideology and Power : Competing interests in Hyderabad !

Lest one gather the impression that Hyderabad was all about the Nizam and his Firmans, it must be placed on record that the nationalist, linguistic, ethnic and communal ferment that was brewing in the rest of the country was impacting this princely state as well. Mahatma Gandhi had returned from South Africa to India in 1915, - and starting with the Champaran Satyagraha in 1917, he transformed the Congress from a Debating Society to a mass movement, which took up issues which affected the everyday lives of people – from the Champaran Satyagraha to support for Khalifat. Satyagraha emerged as a popular technique: ‘weapon of the weak against the mighty state’. From 1921, the Congress decided that its own internal organization will be based on the ‘linguistic principle’, and the Sindh, Maratha, Gujarat, Oriya and Karnataka circles were formed, and pride in one’s own language became a badge of honor. In this context, the refusal to allow a resolution in Telugu at the Nizam's Social Reforms Conference in [Hyderabad](#) in November 1921 led to the formation of Andhra Jana Sangham with twelve members, but they organized the first conference with over a hundred delegates in February 1922 with KVR Reddy as the Chairman and Hanumantha Rao as the secretary. Within two years, fifty branches had been established in the Telengana region. It started having regular conferences, but in 1930 it morphed into the Andhra Mahasabha. The focus shifted to economic and social reforms, abolition of untouchability, security of tenure, but in the subsequent decade, ideological differences within the Andhra Mahasabha led to one faction merging with the Congress and the other with the Communist party of India.

If the Andhra Mahasabha was focused on Telugu language and social reform, the Arya Samaj movement took on the ‘Ittehad -ul Muslimeen’ and its attempts at ‘proselytization’, allegedly with implicit support from the Nizam. The Arya Samaj pointed to *Mafusa* and *Gayar Mafusa*, the two Firmans issued in the Fasli year 1339 (corresponding to 1929) These related to ‘protection against eviction of Muslim landowners’, and ‘permission to Muslims to take over the mortgaged lands of the Hindus’.

Founded in Gujarat by Dayanand Saraswati, the Arya Samaj was most active and influential in Punjab and Hyderabad – regions where the Hindus were in a minority - and facing the intellectual, scriptural and cultural onslaught of the Muslims, including conversions of the peasantry and artisan classes. Before the establishment of the Samaj, there was hardly any resistance to conversion, and once converted there was no way of getting re-acceptance into the Hindu fold. Swami Dayanand Saraswati introduced the concept of Shudhi – or purification for return to the fold of Hinduism.

Arya Samaj had major ideological difference with the Hindu Mahasabha, which followed the Sanatana Dharma and not as vigorously opposed to the caste system as the Arya Samaj. But when it came to opposing proselytization, they came together. Of course, the Arya Samaj had the upper edge, for it actively sought out recent converts, and got them back to the larger Hindi pantheon. The Arya Samaj received a fillip with the election of Chief Justice Pandit Keshav Rao Koratkar as the President of Hyderabad state Arya Samaj in 1905. over the next three decades, the Arya Samaj had 250 branches in the state, twenty of which were located in the twin cities of Hyderabad and Secunderabad.

The elections held under the GoI Act 1935, (albeit on a limited mandate) saw the Congress emerging as the Ruling party in the all the three provinces surrounding Hyderabad. In February 1938, the Indian National Congress passed the [Haripura resolution](#) declaring that the princely states are "an integral part of India," and that it stood for "the same political, social and economic freedom in the States as in the rest of India." This announcement spurred the formation of the Hyderabad State Congress, and an enthusiastic drive to enrol members was begun. By July 1938, the committee claimed to have enrolled 1200 primary members and called upon both Hindus and Muslims of the state to "shed mutual distrust"

and join the "cause of responsible government under the aegis of the Asaf Jahi dynasty." However, despite their protestations of loyalty, the Nizam felt threatened, promulgated a new Public Safety Act in 1938, and declared the Hyderabad State Congress as unlawful. Meanwhile the communal situation remained tense, and hoping to capitalise on the communal tensions that had been on the boil since early 1938 the Arya Samaj announced a Satyagraha on 24 October, 1938. Perhaps in a bid not to be outdone, the activists of the Hyderabad State Congress formed a 'Committee of Action' and also announced their satyagraha for the same day. In effect, it became a common call against the Nizam by all the three organizations: the Arya Samaj, the Hindu Mahasabha and the Congress. But the Congress high command did not appreciate this local arrangement, and relied on the report of [Padmaja Naidu](#) to Gandhi where she castigated the State Congress for lacking unity and cohesion and for being 'communal'. On 24 December, the State Congress suspended the agitation after 300 activists had courted arrest, but the Arya Samaj and the Mahasabha continued their agitation well into the forties. The leaders of the Hyderabad Congress did launch a non-violent campaign of [civil disobedience](#), a [satyagraha](#), for civil rights, representative democracy alongside the [Quit India movement](#) led by the Indian National Congress in 1942, but the political mobilization among the Hindus in the state centred around the Arya Samaj and the Andhra Mahasabha.

However, it would not be correct to portray this struggle in the context of Hindu – Muslim binary alone for there were many other contestations – within Hindus, among the Telugu, Kananga and Maratha speakers, as well as between the Brahmins and the rest as well as between the Arya Samaj, the Hindu Mahasabha and the Congress. The Muslims too were divided between the Mulkis and the non Mulkis, and the Rizvi and anti Rizvi factions. With the announcement of the Indian Independence Act, the Congress and the Arya Samaj started the 'Join Indian Union' movement, which was of course resisted by the Ittehad and the Razakars. The Nizam's writ no longer ran beyond Hyderabad city and the surrounding villages and the stage was set for Operation Polo to which a reference was made in the previous column.