October Coup: A Memoir of the struggle for Hyderabad, Mohammed Hyder, Roli Books, New Delhi.

- Gita Ramaswamy

An extraordinary book has hit the market. Mohammed Hyder was Collector of Osmanabad (in Hyderabad State) in the difficult times of 1948. Within a year, the Collector was to be jailed in his own prison, but used the time productively, writing his memoirs in jail between July and August 1949. He was also suspended from service later. He lived the rest of his days quietly in Hyderabad, working elsewhere and raising his children. He reviewed this account in 1972, and died the next year. Forty years later, his son, Masood Hyder edited the account and had it published.

Hyder narrates the story of the six months from January to September 1948. While his base was Osmanabad, he had access to the highest political and executive levels of the state. Son-in-law of the Nizam's Inspector General of Police, he also had a ringside view of Hyderabad politics. In June 1947, Mountbatten announced the British plan for transfer of power. What we know as history today is a linear, and sad to say, Hindu account. It goes somewhat like this. The Muslim ruler of a predominantly Hindu country did not want to accede to the Indian Union. He wanted to remain independent and encouraged the razakars as an independent and communal fighting force to subdue recalcitrant Congressmen, patriotic Hindus and armed Communist peasantry. Vexed with the Nizam's obduracy, the Indian Army marched into Hyderabad on September 18, 1948 and the next day, General Edroos of the Hyderabad Army surrendered. Qasim Rizvi, Prime Minister Laik Ali and most of the Muslim elite fled to Pakistan, the armed Communists gradually surrendered. Cut to 2000, Andhra Pradesh is pretty much like any other southern state in India. This account would not have been challenged if not for two issues - the meteoric rise of the MIM in Hyderabad and Telangana, and the separate Telangana demand. The Muslims of Telangana are no longer willing to accept a linear history and the Telangana issue is layered by the demands of SCs, STs, BCs and Muslims.
Hyder's account speaks of more than an attempt by Hyderabad's administration to be even-handed with Muslims and Hindus alike. It raises the issue of the justness of the attacks by Hindu Congressmen on border areas of Hyderabad state, while the Standstill Agreement of the Nizam with GOI was still in force. Hyder's Qasim Rizvi is not the communal demon we would have. Hyder shows that the military administration post Police Action, was clearly partisan - pro-Congress and anti-Muslim. During the height of the disturbances, Hyder had had the properties of a Congress leader and rabblerouser, Phool Chand Gandhi confiscated in Osmanabad. Gandhi later became the minister of education in the new Hyderabad government, and arranged to have Hyder arrested in 1949 in seven cases, most to do with murder. The appendices to the book which consist of a selection of documents from Hyder's High Court appeal and allied cases, while being certainly legalistic, bear witness to the trumped up charges.

Hyder's sensitive and nuanced account left me shaken. I read the book in one straight sitting, barely able to put it down. When I shut the book finally, I had the queer feeling that I was reading a very very different account of a shared life, as written by a friend, a neighbour, someone with whom I had lived for long, but never known the depths of his anguish and passion. The linear account no longer seemed real. My neighbour's account was not only plausible, it was based on a lived reality. He says, 'The relationship between the two sides had deteriorated to the point where it was no longer possible to entertain the Hyderabad point of view or to obtain a fair hearing for those identified with it. What should have been a simple matter of setting the record straight could not be accomplished, because the basis of common values, mutual regard, and ways of communicating that normally sustain notions of fair play and justice had, for the time being, ceased to exist. In its place there had risen a structure of derogatory attitudes, reminiscent of British or French colonial rule. The same systematic bias of separation and contempt that was applied by the West towards colonial India was applied by free India to an intractable Hyderabad.'

One can certainly have differences with Hyder's account. He views the Communist peasant movement as an 'incursion from Madras Presidency,' but one can excuse him for this, for except for Osmanabad, this city bred elite Muslim gentleman had no first hand knowledge of any other area of Telangana. This is no rabble rouser's account. It is the story of a sensitive and imaginative human being who saw a different reality. A must for every
resident of Hyderabad, for every proponent of Telangana, for every Muslim and Leftist - for whom these issues are vital.

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