

Panel Discussion on Revisiting 20th century Hyderabad History

The mid-20th century historiography of the Hyderabad state, especially between 1935-1950, is a terrain that is mostly visited through the following well-trodden paths: integration versus independence; communist versus feudal aristocracy; communal rajakars versus the Hindu public being the most prominent ones. Such histories seek to document and thereby foreground - the transfer of power among the elites, the actions of the state, emergence of the spirit of republican-citizenship and the triumph of secular nationalism in this part of the world. As Justice A.G.Noorani described it in his recent work, this historiography has been dominated by the 'court historians of Indian nationalism', which conceals much more than it seeks to describe. Even as what is concealed is being approached and unearthed, the questions of perspective are yet to be approached with required caution and rigour. It is in this context that this panel discussion is being organized with the persons who are deeply invested with the issues of this period. The following questions gather together some of the concerns that have emerged as a part of our work as well as in the public domain.

a) Issues of memory: This period has been memorized and memorialized in diverse, contradictory ways, each serving particular political purposes. Memories of Nizam's oppressive rule, razakar atrocities, arrogance of the Muslim aristocracy etc. conceal the voices of the speaker who is articulating these issues and the politics of such articulation. Can we take these memories as actual and real - reflecting the truth of the period, without investigating the politics of such memories?

b) Research on this period remains scattered and sketchy, even though it has picked up momentum in the last decade. Continuing nationalist stakes in this period also led to suppression of documents such as Sunderal Report till very recently. How does one explain the lack of research interest in this period of history from the national and regional academia? Is it related to the political stakes of the national and regional elite that assumed power after Hyderabad became part of India?

c) Operation Polo, known as Police Action is yet to enter the records of national or regional histories, except as a brief armed action intended to take over the recalcitrant Hyderabad into the benevolent Indian union. The dispossession, violence and abuse of Muslims after this action is predominantly seen as a retaliation or rightful response of the Hindus against the rajakar atrocities. That this dispossession may have shaped the lives and status of Muslims in the long-run is still an unexplored proposition. Isn't it high time that Police Action and its impact on the Muslims of Hyderabad and this region are acknowledged?