



# Rethinking Majlis' politics: Pre-1948 Muslim concerns in Hyderabad State

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*In the historiography of Hyderabad State, pre-1948 Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (Majlis) figures as a separatist, communal and fanatical political formation. For the nationalist, Hindu and left politics in this region, Majlis has long stood for the 'other', wherein concerns articulated by it get discredited. In this article, we argue that there is a need to rethink the Majlis' political perspective and its articulation of Muslim concerns by placing them in the context of the momentous political developments in the first half of the twentieth century. Caught between the imminent decline of the Asaf Jahi kingdom and the arrival of democratic politics, the Majlis saw the necessity of popular will but also the dangers of majoritarianism during such transitions and fought against the threat of imminent minoritisation of Muslims in the Hyderabad State. This article draws on the Urdu writings on the Majlis and Bahadur Yar Jung's speeches that have been rarely used in Telugu or English writings on this period.*

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**Keywords:** Muslim politics in Hyderabad State, Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen, Deccani nationalism, Bahadur Yar Jung, democratic politics in Hyderabad State

## Introduction

Writing the history or discussing the politics of Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (Majlis, hereafter) of the 1940s is beset with problems of perspective that arise out of that very history. Between 1930 and 1948, Hyderabad State underwent complex and rapid changes: a shift in the communal profile of the state, which led to the polarisation of Hindus and Muslims; the transformation of local struggles for civil liberties and political reforms into a nationalist struggle, backed by the Indian army in the border districts from 1947; the peasant revolt against the feudal hierarchy in rural Telangana and its armed struggle against the Nizam's government; and most

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importantly, the Nizam's reluctance to an immediate merger with the Indian Union. The Majlis had a complex role and layered response to these political changes in Hyderabad State from 1935 to 1948.

A broad consensus operates among diverse historical accounts of this period that the Majlis should be understood as an anti-nationalist, fascist, royalist, feudal-communal and extremist Islamic group, even though these opinions are written from different perspectives.<sup>1</sup> Mythology around the figure of Razakar in the post-merger left, nationalist and Telangana discourses has helped maintain these essentialist accounts of the Majlis in popular culture. Challenging such essentialist accounts of the Majlis, we argue that it should be seen as a formation whose politics developed in response to the complex transition of a princely state into a democratic regime and concomitant change of political discourse that threatened to render the State's Muslim population into a political minority.

Recent research on Hyderabad history has raised critical questions about the existing historical frameworks and narratives of this period, thereby complicating our understanding of the way issues of language, modernity and caste played out in Hyderabad history. Enabled by the de-centring of the nation-state from the historical narrative after subaltern, feminist and Dalit critiques in the 1990s, this work helps us to ask new questions about Muslim politics. However, we do not think that understanding Majlis' politics within the pre-determined categories of communalism, religious identity or secularism would yield new insights. If, as Shabnam Tejani argues in the early part of the twentieth century, 'secularism in India was not about "religion" as much as it was about the "dilemmas of democracy"',<sup>2</sup> we need to ask if Majlis' politics of the same period also should be seen as part of the historical emergence of Indian democracy, grounded in the shifting dynamics of power in early twentieth-century Hyderabad.

The contours of the nation-states that were emerging in the wake of the decolonisation process of the subcontinent were nothing like their European predecessors in their composition or beginnings or sense of belonging, as Chatterjee pointed out.<sup>3</sup> While the issues of institutional arrangements for housing the new democracies continued to be debated until the last moment, what was even trickier was the politics of belonging to such a nation-state—its past, its culture and its members. The discourse of nationalism that shaped the anti-colonial struggle was simultaneously

<sup>1</sup> Those who share it include Mandumula Narasinga Rao, a moderate Congress leader in his *Yabhai Samvatsarala Hyderabadu*; Ali Yawar Jung, an aristocrat-bureaucrat with a long stint in the government in *Hyderabad in Retrospect*; Khanderao Kulakarni, an Arya Samaji in his *Hyderabadu Ajnatha Charitra Putalu*; K. M. Munshi, who came to Hyderabad as the first official representative from the Indian government in 1947 in his *The End of an Era*; P. Sundariah, the Communist leader who led and later penned the history of the Telangana peasant revolt in *Veera Telangana Vipplava Poratam*; and Inukonda Thirumali, the historian who argued that the peasant revolt was taken forward by the lower caste small peasants in *Against Dora and Nizam*.

<sup>2</sup> Tejani, 'Reflections on the Category of Secularism in India', p. 47.

<sup>3</sup> Chatterjee, 'Whose Imagined Community?' pp. 3–13.

a battle ground for settling these questions. As Mufti argued powerfully, it was in these battles that the subcontinent's (elite) Muslims confronted the real possibility of becoming a 'minority', a deeply unsettling possibility with unpredictable consequences.<sup>4</sup> The Muslim response to such a possibility of imminent minoritisation, however, was not homogenous or uniform, but evocative in imagining different ways of belonging to the Indian nation and living democratically. But, as Tejani argued, such debates on possible institutional arrangements for housing Indian democracy over the first decades of the twentieth century saw the closure of some possibilities, and Muslim demand for 'fair' representation increasingly came to be seen as excessive, communal and anti-national.<sup>5</sup>

Located as they were in the midst of these debates on decolonisation, nationalism and democracy, responses to the proposed institutional arrangements and the imagination of the State's possible futures in the early decades of twentieth-century Hyderabad were equally multifaceted, open-ended and highly contested, as were categories of sovereignty, representation, minority, Hindu and Muslim. Understanding the task of writing about the politics of the Majlis as genealogical rather than empirical or factual would be useful, as the guiding questions for such an exercise would have to be inevitably set by the challenges that contemporary Muslim politics faces.

What follows is an essay on Hyderabad history that attempts to keep such concerns alive while discussing the Majlis, its politics and role. Locating its politics in the larger context of nationalist politics in undivided British India as well as within the specific conditions in Hyderabad State, we discuss the Majlis as a formation that operated and developed in response to the rapid changes that occurred in this period: (a) shifting terms of political language—from patronage politics to liberal democratic politics where mass mobilisation, communal consolidation and interest articulation became important, and the terms and dynamics of majority–minority entered the political vocabulary; (b) the impending arrival of the Indian nation-state that threatened the very existence of the princely State and along with it the 'privileged' position of Muslims in the administration; (c) the reduction of Muslims from an important section to a numerical, and therefore, political minority in divided India. We seek to understand the rationality that shaped its politics and its strategies to prepare and orient 'Muslims' to these changes. Who were the people that it sought to mobilise as Muslims and how did the Majlis articulate their interests? What was its understanding of democracy, responsible government, share of communities in the government and political power? How did it negotiate with other political players on these issues? What were its motivations behind initiating the Razakar units? How did it define its relationship with the last ruling Nizam, Mir Osman Ali Khan?

<sup>4</sup> Mufti, *Enlightenment in the Colony*, pp. 129–73 and 177–203.

<sup>5</sup> Tejani, *Indian Secularism*, pp. 18–24.

We argue that when the Majlis saw the inevitability of political reforms that would bring a representative form of government, it responded in two ways. It sought to mobilise the Muslim subjects of the State from the non-elite sections as Muslims wherein the category was articulated as a cultural, social and political entity, not a theological one. Also, through the elucidation of the principle of popular sovereignty, albeit of Muslims, it buttressed the idea that sovereignty needed to be grounded in people's support. When the discourse of democracy as majority representation gained ascendancy, it sought to articulate and preserve Muslim interests as their representative. At a certain historical moment, it identified Muslim interests with the survival of Hyderabad State, including the extension of armed support in defence of the State.

The essay begins by describing the evolution of the Majlis from a socio-religious organisation to a political party in the mid-1930s. We then elaborate on its reservations about democratic governance through a discussion of its relationship with the Congress/nationalist politics before moving on to discuss its adaptation of ideas of Deccani nationalism and popular sovereignty. We conclude the essay by raising certain questions about the possible future directions it would have taken, if it had not met its untimely demise.

### **Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen: The Political Turn**

The Majlis began as a socio-religious organisation in the 1920s, taking a political turn in 1938. This section situates this development in the broader socio-political and 'religious'<sup>6</sup> developments in Hyderabad State. While many analyses of Hyderabad politics discuss communalism of this time as a polarisation that arose between the pre-existing categories of Hindus and Muslims, we emphasise that it arose as a part of the general process of politicisation and democratisation of the patrimonial society and the State. We argue that the shifting balance of power between the Muslim elite and the rising Hindu middle classes got articulated in terms of 'religious discrimination' by the latter, in response to which the non-elite Muslims mobilised under the Majlis.

The Majlis was set up in 1927 to contain the sectarian rivalry<sup>7</sup> among the Muslims of Hyderabad and its earliest proposed name was Ittehad Bain-ul-Muslimeen—unity among Muslims.<sup>8</sup> Sectarian rivalry among Muslims had reached such proportions

<sup>6</sup> We are leaving out economic developments as they are outside the scope of this article. Economic depression of 1929, increased wartime taxation on the farmers, that led to their increased indebtedness, alienation of farm land and an increase in *vetti*/bondedness; drought during the interwar period, grain levies and other taxes imposed during the Second World War played a significant role in shaping the politics in Telangana region of the Hyderabad State.

<sup>7</sup> Moid, M. A. *Nizam Government's Response to the Fourteen Demands of Arya Samaj (June 1938)*, unpublished translation from Urdu.

<sup>8</sup> The founding secretary was Nawaz Khan, and Mirza Mazhar Ali Baig and Syed Basharat Ahmed were the joint secretaries. The Majlis did not have the post of the president at this point.

that the Hyderabad government imposed several restrictions on the entry of 'outside (Muslim) preachers'. The Majlis was only one among several Muslim groups that emerged in the 1920s in Hyderabad such as Anjuman-e-Mahdavia, Majlis Tabligh-e-Islam, Hyderabad Educational Conference, Majlis Qaza-e-Qanoon, Majlis Jagirdaran, Nazm-e-Jamiat, Anjuman-e-Ilm o Amal, Anjuman-e-Tabligh-e-Islam, Majlis-e-Shoora and Anjuman-e-Islamia. The major objective was to bring unity among the Muslim sects and protect their economic, social and educational interests as 'Muslims'.<sup>9</sup> Among its 18 executive committee members there were three from Shia Isna Ashari sect, one Hanbali, five Hanafi, two Ahmadis, three Mahdavis, one Ahl-e-Hadith, one Dawoodi, and two from Ahl-e-Sunnat. Between 1929 and 1931, it was largely preoccupied with issues such as correcting the language of the ulema towards each other, reform of customs related to marriage and death, petitioning the government to re-institute theology into the curriculum and arranging speeches on Islam.

During the 1930s, it sought to function like the early Andhra Mahasabha:<sup>10</sup> instructing the local heads of units to start reading rooms, holding discussions on important events by reading the right kind of newspapers and magazines in Urdu (*Raiyat*, *Meezan*, *Waqt*, *Payam*) and English, and starting night schools to increase literacy, eradicate un-Islamic customs among women and inculcate the habits of manual work to increase their earning capacities such as embroidery and tailoring to support the family. The Majlis was seeking to cultivate the small salaried employees, newspaper readers, educated rural and urban Muslims, but the majority of subject Muslims were apathetic as they did not see any threat under a Muslim ruler.

Till the mid-1930s, Hyderabad State (like many other princely states in British India) did not see the consolidation or polarisation of the population as Hindus and Muslims. Benichou, and Copland who investigated Hyderabad politics, agree on the following: the 'balance' between the large Hindu population and the Muslim rulers was maintained, both through conscious policies of 'religious neutrality' of the Asaf Jahi dynasty as well as the 'natural' distribution of socio-economic and political power among the Hindus and the Muslims.<sup>11</sup>

Hyderabad government's policy of religious neutrality until the 1920s could not be denied by its opponents like Narsing Rao. Cohen argues that the presence of 14 *samsthanams* or local kingdoms, the majority of which were headed by Hindu

<sup>9</sup> *Tareeq Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen*, pp. 14–20. *Tareeq* hereafter.

<sup>10</sup> Andhra Mahasabha began as Andhra Jana Sangham, a sociocultural forum in 1921. It sought to work through the establishment of local libraries and to cultivate the spirit of discussion. It produced literature on the history, language and culture of Telugus in the Hyderabad State. Andhra Mahasabha began in 1930 to work more specifically on social reform issues—eradication of vetti, harijan upliftment, eradication of child marriages and problems of widowhood. By 1940, it transformed into a political forum.

<sup>11</sup> Benichou, *From Autocracy to Integration*, pp. 8–29; Copland, 'Communalism in Princely India', pp. 356–90.

kings, also necessitated the policy of religious neutrality.<sup>12</sup> From the time of Salar Jung I (1853–83), it had a ministry of religious affairs that closely monitored new religious structures, festivities and procession routes. The sixth Nizam, Mir Mahboob Ali Khan (1869–1911), took extraordinary measures to appear as a just and benevolent monarch. His son, Mir Osman Ali Khan (1911–48), continued this tradition by banning public cow slaughter in 1923 and establishing the practice of taking ceremonial offerings to a Hindu shrine in Gulbarga. This policy of neutrality was matched in the samsthanams by the local Hindu kings who did not let any conflicts escalate into or take a communal tone.<sup>13</sup>

The status quo lasted until 1930, much longer than in British India, for two reasons: one, the state was relatively insulated from the influences of British Indian provinces; and two, the elites were content with the existing balance of power. This balance of power between the Hindus and Muslims began to shift in the 1930s due to the growth of political mobilisation, agitation for civil and political liberties, and the aspirations of the small but growing middle classes for a share in employment and educational opportunities.<sup>14</sup> In Hyderabad State, which was ruled by a Muslim king, such ‘secular’ aspirations and ambitions began to be articulated in terms of ‘religious’ discrimination by the newly emergent Hindu middle classes.<sup>15</sup>

The 1932 debate between the Hindu Mahasabha and the Majlis clearly illustrates the contours and fault lines of such an articulation. When the former held a meeting against the mistreatment of Hindus at the hands of Muslims and brought out three pamphlets,<sup>16</sup> the Majlis also put out its rejoinder in the same manner.

<sup>12</sup> Cohen, ‘Death of Kings, Birth of a Nation’, pp. 136–42.

<sup>13</sup> As Copland wryly comments,

(The) Hindu case (of religious discrimination in the Hyderabad State) does insufficient justice to the Darbar’s religious policy ... the regulations (on public display of religious fervor) appear to have been enforced, in the main, evenhandedly .... Indeed, some elements of the government’s religious policy posed a direct affront to Muslim sensibilities: Christmas and other non-Muslim festivals were honoured with public holidays ... there was a total ban on cow slaughter ... (‘Communalism in Princely India’, pp. 364–65)

<sup>14</sup> Narasinga Rao attributed the growing divide between the Hindus and Muslims to the inability and unwillingness of the Muslim middle class and the elite to accommodate the urbanising Hindu middle classes as well as the deliberate attempts to sow seeds of division by the Hyderabad government. He characterised the Muslims as the entrenched and privileged class which would be naturally opposed to loss of power and prestige, *Yabhai Samvatsarala Hyderabadu*, pp. 164–65.

<sup>15</sup> As Sundariah rightly remarked, ‘[a]gainst (the ruling Muslim elite), the growing middle class intellectuals, and the growing Hindu business and the industrial interests took up the cudgels and the Arya Samajists became the champions of the “Hindu masses” against the “Muslim oppressors”’. Sundariah, *Veera Telangana Viplava Poratam*, p. 4. See also the typical propaganda pamphlet of Waghmare, *Communalism in Hyderabad State*.

<sup>16</sup> Addressing 1,500 people, the Sabha, under its President Vaman Naik, resolved to demand removal of religious restrictions, proportionate share of Hindus in the government for overall development and non-higher education in ‘mother tongue’—report on the Conference of Hindus in Babu, *Telanganalo Chaitanyam Ragilinchina Nizam Rastrandhra Mahasabhalu Part I*, pp. 379–90.

Charging the Sabha President Vaman Naik and their pamphlets for misleading the public with 'wrong facts', it declared that 'it is forced to come out with facts' which were as follows:

...agriculture, trade, contracting, transactions, samsthanas, deshmukhs, deshpandeship, rural posts are totally occupied by the Hindus. The 63,000 strong Hindu employees in the rural areas cost the exchequer dearly due to their embezzlement but the government does not take any punitive action. 'Hindu property owners' retain their property despite the lack of heirs and deshmukhs and deshpandes retain their power despite the formal end to their services. The situation of the Hindus continues to be the same (privileged one) for 200 years without any decline. Comparatively, Muslims do not enjoy such privileges. The property of the Muslim families without an heir returns to the government and many such families declined due to the new conditions that the government imposed. Muslims are not allowed to till the land by the local Hindu officers. Many Muslim traders are also deeply indebted to Hindu moneylenders due to their trading requirements. In such conditions, the only way left for Muslims was the government services through which many families are surviving at a bare minimal level.<sup>17</sup>

The Majlis not only contested the Sabha's articulation of urban middle-class interests as Hindu but also contested the claim of the Sabha about the very constitution of the category called 'Hindu'.<sup>18</sup> Thus, 'the claim of 85% Hindus by the Hindu Mahasabha is also a fraud. When they want to attain benefit they include all those also within their ranks, whose shadow makes them unclean.'<sup>19</sup> Towards the end of the 1930s, the Sabha and the Arya Samaj upped the ante by launching a nation-wide joint campaign (despite their ideological differences) about the 'deteriorating situation of Hindus' in this Muslim kingdom. On 30 April 1938, the head office of the Arya Samaj in Delhi, Arya Sarvadeshak Sabha, submitted a memorandum with 14 demands to the Nizam government, seeking civil liberties for the Hindus: cancellation of *gashti* (circular) no. 53 (that restricted public meetings); removal of restrictions related to celebration of religious festivals, the *akhadas* (gymnasiums), *khangis* (private) schools, entry of 'religious' workers, newspapers and books from outside Hyderabad; and the freedom to fly the flag of Arya Samaj with an *Om* on the houses of the workers were prominent.

The Arya Samaj soon went on to declare a satyagraha, the first ever, alongside that of the Hyderabad State Congress' (HSC) for civil liberties and political reforms, against the Hyderabad government for the 'religious rights of the Hindus'.

<sup>17</sup> Tareeq, pp. 35–43.

<sup>18</sup> The census of 1931 was used by Bhagyareddy Varma to consolidate 'untouchables' into Adi-Hindus. Chinniah, Jangam 'Elided History: Dalits in Hyderabad Public Sphere', p. 22, unpublished paper.

<sup>19</sup> Tareeq, p. 43.



With this, the politicisation of people in the State took a definitive communal turn, in which, as Padmaja Naidu rues in her letter to the Indian National Congress (INC):

[There] is the amazing lack of political perspective ... and apathy ... of the members of the State Congress with regard to the question of the minorities ... they have earned ... the active resentment of the Muslims and the Depressed Classes .... The original founders of the State Congress consisted almost exclusively of men who had all been openly connected in some capacity or the other, either with definitely communal or else preponderantly Hindu organizations.<sup>20</sup>

Within two months of the satyagraha, the HSC withdrew from it, under pressure from the INC, leaving it totally to the Sabha and the Samaj.

In response to the campaign and satyagraha, the Nizam's administration cancelled gashti no. 53, published a detailed rejoinder to the 14 point charge sheet of the Arya Samaj<sup>21</sup> and also invited, in July 1939, a Hindu Mahasabha representative, Jagadguru Shankaracharya of Jyotirmath, Badrinath, to tour the State, who found that both the charges of defilement of temples and conversion in prisons were without basis.<sup>22</sup> But a large proportion of the Hindu populace, including jagirdars and heads of samsthanams and Depressed Classes remained indifferent to these campaigns.

However, the communal turn, satyagraha and the response of the Nizam's government shook the whole Muslim community. A few local Muslim religious groups such as Anjuman-e-Tabligh-e-Islam and the Khaksars conducted rallies denouncing the 'anti-Hyderabad' campaign. In British India, the Muslim League and other pan-Indian Muslim groups also pledged their support to Hyderabad State. The educated and politically aware Muslims could see that the resulting destabilisation would be detrimental to them. 'Politics', until then, considered to be an activity of the 'state' and the Nizam, now became the concern of the Muslim subjects as well.

Commentators felt that Muslims had fallen into a deep slumber caused by the restrictions on the freedom of press that falsely protected them from the winds of change that shook British India.<sup>23</sup> It was also thought that the uninterrupted rule of the oligarchy had led to a weakening of the government which needed to be woken up by people.<sup>24</sup> In the light of the communal turn in Hyderabad Congress politics after the Haripura convention, the need for a strong and effective

<sup>20</sup> Benichou, *From Autocracy to Integration*, pp. 66–68.

<sup>21</sup> *Arya Sarva Deshik Sabha, Delhi ke Choudah Mutalibat* (The fourteen demands of the Arya Sarva Deshik Sabha, Delhi) details the responses of the Hyderabad government to the demands in *Hyderabad me Arya Samaj ki Tehreek* (*The Arya Samaj Movement in Hyderabad*), published by the order of the Government of Hyderabad, 1939, pp. 35–46. Retrieved from [http://www.bahaduryarjung.org/PDF\\_Books/Miscellaneous/HydMeAryaSamaajKiTahreek.pdf](http://www.bahaduryarjung.org/PDF_Books/Miscellaneous/HydMeAryaSamaajKiTahreek.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> Benichou, *From Autocracy to Integration*, p. 80.

<sup>23</sup> Hussain, *Zawal-e-Hyderabad*, p. 55.

<sup>24</sup> A speech of Bahadur Yar Jung cited in Khan, *Hamara Qaid*, p. 80.



leadership for Muslims was invoked and a new role for the Majlis was conceived.<sup>25</sup> It was decided that the Majlis should change its constitution. A political clause was introduced and it became a political party.

Its changed objectives explicitly focused on political issues<sup>26</sup>—to strive for ‘privileges, interests and rights of Muslims and for political, economic, and cultural protection’, reform and general improvement of Muslims which was to be achieved through ‘majority representation of Muslims in the Legislative bodies’, ‘protection of Urdu and existing share of government jobs’ as this was the major source of livelihood for Muslims.<sup>27</sup> The Majlis galvanised politics and demanded increasing space for Muslim interests in Hyderabad politics. Within three years, the number of Majlis units grew from 58 to 354 and ‘in Hyderabad State, the Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (grew into a) stronger position than the Muslim League at the all-India level’.<sup>28</sup>

Bahadur Yar Jung, who became the joint secretary (and the president in 1940),<sup>29</sup> lobbied the INC with the help of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, that the satyagraha in Hyderabad was uncalled for and that it would not be viewed favourably by the State’s Muslims. Meeting several INC leaders personally, he pointed to the collusion of the State Congress with the Hindu organisations. With the Nizam’s administration, Bahadur Yar Jung argued against agreeing to the demands of the Hindu organisations. He began to assert that the Muslim (subjects’) opinion needed to be considered by the government, whether it was on the issue of Hindu–Muslim conflict or the issue of political reforms. He sought to convince the Muslims that the party could play a role in voicing their concerns despite the ambivalence of the Muslim bourgeoisie, that is, university teachers, lawyers, lower- and middle-level bureaucrats towards the Majlis.

The space for the mobilisation of the Nizam’s Muslim subjects of varied persuasions into ‘Hyderabad Muslims’ was therefore created in the context of the horizontal mobilisation of an upwardly mobile Hindu urban population with specific interests, demands and aspirations into ‘Hindus’. At this point, to consolidate the newly mobilised Hyderabad Muslims, the Majlis had to contend with four important actors: first, the Arya Samaj and Hindu Mahasabha, which needed to be resisted; second, the Nizam, to whom loyalty had to be expressed, and from whom rights had to be obtained; third, the Congress, whose demands for political reforms would jeopardise the status quo and the existing position of Muslims; and fourth, the British, from whom the sovereignty of the Asaf Jahi kingdom had to be retrieved. In short, the Majlis had to begin to articulate a Muslim politics in a Muslim kingdom under colonial indirect rule that was transitioning to a liberal

<sup>25</sup> Siddiqui, *Lisan-ul-Ummat*, p. 38.

<sup>26</sup> *Tareeq*, p. 15.

<sup>27</sup> Narasinga Rao, *Yabhai Samvatsarala Hyderabadu*, pp. 118–19.

<sup>28</sup> Bawa, *The Last Nizam*, p. 240.

<sup>29</sup> Hussain, *Zawal-e-Hyderabad*, p. 65.

representative regime. And this was to be done in a communalised political atmosphere where the numerical minority of Muslims was pitted against the charged Hindu majority, vying for more rights and power.

### **The Majlis and the Question of ‘Responsible Government’ in the Hyderabad State**

‘Responsible government’ was the fulcrum on which most of the political mobilisation and the debate on democratisation rested in the State. The political mobilisation began on Hindu–Muslim lines, but soon got mapped on to democracy, that is, responsible government versus autocracy, or, to put it differently, monarchy on one hand and majority rule versus minority rule on the other. In this emerging power equation, there were two dynamics that the Majlis was involved in, the first vis-à-vis the Congress and the majority that it claimed to represent and the second with the Nizam’s administration, with which it had to establish its status as the representative of Muslims. Even as the Majlis preferred a democratic government over autocratic kingship, and representative Government over rule by the nominated oligarchy of elites, it also articulated their potential dangers for a numerical minority such as Muslims.

The 1930s saw rising demands for civil liberties and political freedoms that slowly consolidated around the issue of ‘responsible government’. However, ‘responsible government’ remained a highly contested terrain, especially between the Congress, the Majlis and the Nizam’s administration. While the Nizam’s administration moved extremely cautiously, the Congress and the Majlis, sharing the need for political reforms, democracy and responsible government differed on their content.

The Congress claimed to be the universal voice of the people, both Hindu and Muslim, and demanded the grant of fundamental rights, the speeding up of constitutional reforms and the immediate grant of ‘responsible government’. It opposed ‘reservation’ of seats on ‘religious’ basis and ‘reservations in jobs’. But, it assured ‘minorities of their religious, cultural and educational rights’.<sup>30</sup> However, the Majlis, the intended recipient of this minority position, had different views about what was at stake for Muslims, which it tried to negotiate with the Congress and the Nizam administration, with the aid of their newly amended constitution with a political clause.

<sup>30</sup> HSC was consistently denied the right to exist by the government and was riven with differences right from its inception. Four Muslim members refused to sign its submission to the Aiyangar Committee. Urdu press and the other Muslim intelligentsia questioned the need for its existence and also its politics. This section of the Urdu press was criticised by pro-reform newspapers such as *Rahbar-e-Deccan*, *Payaam*, *Saheefa*, etc. Andhra Mahasabha also expressed its displeasure at this attitude of the Urdu press for its opposition to ‘political’ activity, including demands to implement the government’s own *farman* [an imperial order], such as the abolition of *vetti*.

The Majlis began to articulate its dissatisfaction on the question of 'responsible government' when its first round of discussions with the Congress collapsed due to the incorporation of two members into the Aiyangar Committee. These talks set the agenda for political reforms in Hyderabad State. Fourteen rounds of the discussion had occurred by then, and they were about to announce their agreement. The committee's mandate was 'to investigate and report on all suitable alternatives for the more effective association of the different interests in the State with the Government, whereby the latter may be placed in continuous possession of their needs and desires'.<sup>31</sup> It had an advisory status.

The Majlis criticised this move of the government to form the Committee on strategic and political grounds. In a letter addressed to Osman Ali Khan (date unknown), Bahadur Yar Jung commented that the government's rush towards constitutional reforms in the midst of negotiations between the Congress (Hindus) and the Majlis (Muslims) have landed loyal Muslim subjects in a difficult predicament. The Hindus would think of it as a victory of their efforts that had been obtained due to Muslim indifference or incapability, which would strengthen them further. If the Majlis opposition was not being considered by the government, the government would not be able to respond to the question of why it wanted to postpone reforms in the absence of 'Muslim opposition'. If the government granted Muslims any rights, the opposition would argue that Muslims have been favoured because the King is a Muslim. The Muslim subjects could not even thank the King as it would again attract the charge that the King and the Muslims conspired to heap rights on Muslims at the cost of the Hindus.<sup>32</sup>

Opposing the setting up of an Aiyangar Committee<sup>33</sup> in the midst of the inconclusive political talks between the Congress and the Majlis, the Majlis argued that the need of the hour was 'administrative reforms' that focused on the 'everyday' issues of administrative apathy, its lack of accountability and abuse of power: problems that were leading to anger and discontent among the 'populace'. In its submission to the government, *Nizam Nama*, it sought to improve and reform the existing government rather than to make any radical changes in the power structure. Notable among these were the streamlining of administrative services and the introduction of strict norms for entry and promotion to reduce nepotism and corruption; a permanent ministry to coordinate public development works, abolition of the *watandari* system<sup>34</sup>, drafting of three- or five-year plans for reviving economic

<sup>31</sup> Terms of reference of the Aiyangar Committee cited in Sherwani, 'The Evolution of the Legislature in Hyderabad', p. 431.

<sup>32</sup> Letter to Osman Ali Khan, date unknown, cited in Ahmed, *Tasurat-e-Bahadur Yar Jung*, pp. 96–101.

<sup>33</sup> The composition of the Committee was questioned by B. S. Venkat Rao for absence of any members from the Depressed Classes. Venkataswamy, *Our Struggle for Emancipation*, p. 121.

<sup>34</sup> *Watandari* system was introduced by Sir Salar Jung I in 1853 as a measure of land reform. It was a mechanism of village administration where certain rent-free, tax-free land was given to a person or to an entire village community in return for performance of service to government officials. It also

growth; technical education to the artisans; and abolition of agricultural debt. The issue of reform and development of the Depressed Classes, particularly their educational development and protection of social rights, was also raised.<sup>35</sup> Arguing that the Executive Council had become a monopoly of certain families, it recommended a fixed tenure of five years for the members of the Executive Council.<sup>36</sup>

At this juncture, the Congress and the Majlis resumed their talks between Bahadur Yar Jung and Narsing Rao (popularly known as the Sing–Jung talks), taking the lead to arrive at a political solution on the issue of constitutional reforms. Taking note of the emerging political realities, the Majlis agreed with the Congress on the need for immediate administrative reforms, but, like the Muslim members of the earlier Hyderabad State Congress' Working Committee, could not agree to the absence of reservations in the administration and legislature. The talks focused on the issues of employment guarantees to Muslims, the status of Urdu, the number of Muslim representatives in the Legislative Assembly and the method of elections of these members. But the talks failed as the increasingly resilient HSC was not willing to make any major concessions. The changed power dynamics were evident during these talks. Bahadur Yar Jung commented that '[p]roblems around education and religious affairs were solved with ease', which included education in other languages and measures for peace between communities, but 'regarding the form of government, our differences became intense. He wanted responsible government and I was not ready to accept.' Narsing Rao agrees,

I believe that the Hindu leaders who were greater in number did not make enough attempts. The problem was exacerbated by the lack of generosity on the part of the majority towards minority Muslims. At least during the period of transition (to responsible government), we could have made stronger proposals for safeguards about jobs, representation for the Muslims in the assembly, Urdu language. But we ... failed.<sup>37</sup>

Their proposals and the demands of the Majlis, however, went on to influence the final shape of reforms announced by the Hyderabad government<sup>38</sup> in its Farman-

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referred to a hereditary right to perform a service that is distributed among heirs of the holder. *Watan* is a Urdu word that means homeland or native place, though in this context it refers to landholding.

<sup>35</sup> Khan, *Hamara Qaid*, pp. 90–94.

<sup>36</sup> Hussain, *Zawal-e-Hyderabad*, p. 82.

<sup>37</sup> Narasinga Rao, *Yabhai Samvatsarala Hyderabadu*, pp. 66–7. While Bahadur Yar Jung simply says that talks ceased after Narasinga Rao's trip to Wardha, Narsing Rao clearly states that Gandhi asked him not to continue the talks.

<sup>38</sup> Depressed Classes associations demanded the following: proportionate representation without clubbing them with the caste—Hindus; guarantees in employment and representation in various organs of the state; reservations of fixed number in the case of joint electorates and separate electorates for Depressed Classes in case they were considered; one third membership of district committees and

e-Mubarak in 1939 which did not follow the recommendations of the Aiyangar Committee in toto.<sup>39</sup> The major components of legislative reforms were: the Legislative Assembly would consist of 85 members (raised from the recommended 77), in which 42 were to be elected, while the remaining 39 were to be nominated and 7 were ex-officio members; the public representative was to be elected not on the basis of territorial constituencies but on the basis of 'professions and interests'; the election procedure would be joint, but the winning candidate should obtain 40 per cent of the vote share (to assuage the Majlis whose demand for separate electorates was rejected) from the community that he belonged to. Hindu, Muslims and other minorities would together elect their representatives and the body will consist of equal number of Muslims and Hindus. For a contemporary observer like H. K. Sherwani, the reforms were most welcome because 'by bringing in functional representation', unicameral legislature and increase in the number of elected representatives and parity in communal representation, these reforms formed 'a bold, unique and definite departure from the principles which were supposed to have been the last word in the application of democracy to India'.<sup>40</sup> However, it did not please the main participants. Congress did not want 'parity' of representation but wanted a proportionate number of Hindu representatives on the basis of territorial constituencies. Depressed Classes also objected to the measly number of nominated seats that they were given as it denied them the right to elect their own representatives and was disproportionately low.

The constitutional reforms were unacceptable to the Majlis due to several reasons. It was clear that joint electorates would not favour the genuine candidates chosen by Muslims.<sup>41</sup> Muslims being

(o)nly 11% of the population in Hyderabad which will mean that in the legislature, the domination will be of Hindus. The majority will be of such level that our opinions will be simply crushed. The necessary result of this will be that the Hindus will form the ministries, that too of such a variety which ... will be accountable to their own *awaam*.<sup>42</sup>

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proportionate number of representatives in the panchayats. See Chinnaiah, 'Elided History: Dalits in Hyderabad Public Sphere', unpublished paper, p. 22.

<sup>39</sup> Khan, *Hamara Qaid*, p. 51.

<sup>40</sup> Sherwani, 'The Evolution of the Legislature in Hyderabad', pp. 424–38.

<sup>41</sup> The debate on joint electorates vs separate electorates is too big to be summarised here, but Dr B. R. Ambedkar's writings, especially 'Communal Deadlock and the Way to Solve It' effectively captures the perilous pitfalls for community representation within the joint electorate system. Moon, *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Speeches and Writings*, 1989.

<sup>42</sup> Bahadur Yar Jung argued that the government showed undue haste under the threats of Hindu groups. While some Hindu groups presented some demands regarding civil and religious freedom, the government announced Constitutional reforms that were neither asked for and were wrongly timed. What was required was the reform in the government machinery, not a new Constitution. Bahadur Yar Jung said that the government was trying to appease a group whose loyalties cannot be guaranteed.

Moreover, the election of members on the basis of ‘interest/profession’ also did not suit the Muslims as Muslims were absent from every category except that of the jagirdar, making their representative numbers small.

The apprehensions of the Majlis about the kind of government that such constitutional reforms would result in went deeper as well. Responding to the constitutional reform proposals, Bahadur Yar Jung welcomed the ideas of responsible government and democracy that were sweeping the world, but queried if democracy did not require right conditions for flourishing.

The most important condition in democracy is that the people should have consensus—or have the same thought. And we are seeing that in India, especially Hyderabad, there are so many perspectives and modes of thought that it is difficult to call it a single nation/*qaum* .... A place where living together for one thousand years has not made them come close enough to sit together and eat together. Expecting from them that they will run the government respecting each others’ opinions is to cheat the world and ourselves.<sup>43</sup>

The Second World War and the developments leading to it in Europe made Bahadur Yar Jung critical of liberal forms of representative democracy and their capacity to take care of the minorities. Pointing to the accumulation of majoritarian power in European countries, he stated: ‘The end of Kaiser in Germany resulted in the emergence of democracy there. But, hasn’t the Kaiserism come back in a different and in a much more grotesque form of Hitler?’ The idea of representation based on numbers was found wanting and unsuitable.

(If they) fix the rights by counting the numbers (of Muslims), then they have done injustice to the other communities ... (b)ut, if they adopt another measure ... then the government would need to say that the rights of Muslims will be always prior—*ghalib* and *haakim*. The problem is that ... (they) have no standards of fixing the rights.<sup>44</sup>

He wanted to search for alternative and safer forms of government through gradual changes.

When the Majlis threatened direct action demanding numerical superiority in the Legislative Assembly and safeguards in employment, the government invited

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It was ignoring a group which was interested in safeguarding the Nizam government and its prestige. Khan, *Hamara Qaid*, pp. 48–50.

<sup>43</sup> *Tashreeh Islahath-e-Dasturi* (Explanation of Constitutional Reforms)—three speeches were delivered to the Majlis members and the general public in response to the recommendations of the Aiyangar Committee by Bahadur Yar Jung from 23 to 25 August 1940. The first speech discussed international politics, the second discussed the Indian situation and the third focused on Hyderabad. This was taken from the second speech. Ahmed, *Bahadur Yar Jung ki Siyaasee Taqareer*, p. 102.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 102–04.

M. A. Jinnah to negotiate for a settlement in 1939, who recommended preserving the numerical superiority of Muslims in the Legislative Council and protection of Muslim interests through separate electorates. The Nizam accepted these suggestions but the government indefinitely postponed the reforms on account of the Second World War.<sup>45</sup>

Towards the end of the War, the Congress–Majlis talks (1944) resumed for the last time against the background of the Cripps Mission and the Quit India Movement. Between 1944 and 1946, after the sudden death of Bahadur Yar Jung, differences emerged within the Majlis. Due to the intense internal differences, the party lost its focus and underwent a crisis. Abul Hasan Syed Ali, who became the president, changed his earlier stance and invited the Congress representatives for a new dialogue—popularly known as ‘unity talks’—resulting in the following agreement in 1945: territorial constituencies in place of functional constituencies; equal number of Muslim and Hindu members in the Legislative Council elected from joint electorates; inclusion of three ministers each from Hindus and Muslims from among the elected Council members; and ensuring that the budget must be passed by the Legislative Council.<sup>46</sup>

However, this agreement between the Congress and the Majlis hit a roadblock when Abul Hasan Syed Ali was forced to resign from the presidency of the Majlis on the charge that the agreement was reached without internal consensus in the party.<sup>47</sup> Under the changed political conditions, with the certainty of British withdrawal in the near future, the HSC too lost interest in continuing this dialogue.

It was clear to the Majlis that the demand for ‘responsible government’ meant the imminent arrival of majority rule, which would mean not only dominance by the upwardly mobile Hindu castes but also the absence of space for the just-emerging Muslim non-elite. It is this awareness of change in power equations that informs the Majlis–Congress discussions on ‘responsible government’, belied by the inviting tone of the Congress (and its associates) and the resisting tone of the Majlis. The dominant political atmosphere and the vocabulary had changed this time, bringing to the fore the notions of democracy based on majority vote, proportionate representation of communities, representation based on one man–one vote and responsible government based on such elected representatives. Within this changing discourse, even though the Majlis changed its stance towards reforms and made several concessions about constituencies, electorates and parity in the legislatures, its articulation of Muslim concerns became a ‘minor’ one.

<sup>45</sup> Hussain, *Zawale Hyderabad*, pp. 76–80.

<sup>46</sup> Rama Rao, *History of Freedom Struggle in Indian Princely States of India*, pp. 347–49.

<sup>47</sup> Benichou (2000: 340) and Hussain (2010: 121) argue that the resignation of Syed Ali under attack from the extremists such as Abdur Rahman Rais and others led to the failure of this agreement, while Rama Rao (2008: 348–49) attributes the attack itself to the machinations of the Nizam and his administration.



### The Majlis and Deccani Nationalism

The Majlis had recognised that the status of the ‘minority’ for Muslims in Hyderabad would have a greater negative impact without the efforts to oppose this eventuality. Even as the negotiations over the employment and political safeguards occupied a central place in the ongoing talks between the Majlis and the Congress, it saw the prospect of rejuvenated sovereignty for the Hyderabad State after the departure of the British as an opportunity to carve a significant place for Muslims. In its search for a safer alternative to representative democracy which may bring in majoritarian government in its wake, the Majlis chose ‘popular monarchy’ (on the model of the British monarchy) as more suitable for Muslims in the Deccan. It redefined the idea of popular sovereignty in Hyderabad as specifically Deccani and Muslim, even taking on the responsibility of defending the kingdom at huge cost.

Deccani nationalism took birth in the 1920s through Mulki organisations such as Osmania Graduates Association and Society of Union and Progress and its successor, Nizam’s Subjects League in 1935. Proclaiming its unflinching loyalty to the Asaf Jahi House, it argued for the equal progress of all in the spirit of Deccani nationalism and by eliminating communalism. More importantly, it argued that the relationship between the Nizam and the British government was contractual, and therefore saw both as legal equals. The Majlis continued this Mulki inheritance in the articulation of ‘popular sovereignty’.

Popular politics, as we saw earlier, had arrived in Hyderabad State at the turn of the century,<sup>48</sup> but different streams of nationalism began to flourish in Hyderabad from the mid-1930s to mid-1940s, along with language-specific regional nationalisms—Urdu, Telugu, Marathi and Kannada, an instance of which was the movement around Osmania University, commonly known as the Vande Mataram movement.<sup>49</sup> In the context of these popular agitations, especially for political reforms, Bahadur Yar Jung’s proximity with Osman Ali Khan grew. While Osman Ali Khan’s interest lay in garnering some popular support for his rule in the face of this agitation, the Majlis’ interest lay in making the Nizam’s administration take them seriously in discussions on political reform. The 1939 announcement about the constitutional reforms (the Aiyangar Committee) marked Hyderabad State’s move away from pure autocracy by declaring that ‘the King was the representative of people’s sovereignty’.<sup>50</sup>

The Majlis critiqued this notion of popular sovereignty for ignoring Muslims and argued that

<sup>48</sup> The stirrings of Swadeshi movement in 1905 could be noticed to have resulted in some public meetings in the *akhadas*, which were eventually stopped. The public anger was also fuelled by the shock at the ceding of Berar in 1902 to the British. Rameshan, *The Freedom Struggle in Hyderabad*, pp. 216–35.

<sup>49</sup> For the complex interplay of the politics of language with issues of political reform around Vande Mataram movement in Osmania University, see Datla, *The Language of Secular Islam*, pp. 138–64.

<sup>50</sup> Narasinga Rao, *Yabhai Samvatsarala Hyderabadadu*, p. 166.

If it is necessary for the president of the country to have compatibility of thought and confidence with his people, then Majlis thinks that the meaning of the *awaam*/public is that group with whom the king has common race, nation or religion and so represents their popular or collective will ... that which the king represents is the Muslim *awaam*.<sup>51</sup>

By arguing that for the continuation of the Muslim rule in the Deccan, it should be subject to the will of the people and that the powers of the ruler should be transferred to the people, the Majlis affected the politics of Hyderabad State in two ways. One, it proclaimed that the sovereignty of the Nizam did not stand alone but needed to be buttressed through support of the Muslim subjects. Two, such support from the Muslim subjects could not be mobilised, unless there was a party such as the Majlis, an explicitly Muslim political party with Muslim interests as its focus. In this manner, the Majlis inserted itself and the Muslim interests that it was creating into the predominantly elite-feudal politics of the State.<sup>52</sup>

What Bahadur Yar Jung did was that (he) took over the concept of sovereignty from the Mulki League and applied it to the Muslims. 'The ... ruler's person and throne are the very symbols of their party's political and cultural domination.' As with the Mulki League,<sup>53</sup> this identification with the ruler as a symbol of one's own greatness could in an initial phase lead to an intensified emphasis on loyalty.<sup>54</sup>

With such 'loyalty', it began to take strong positions on the crucial legal and political questions about the status and future of Hyderabad in the event of the end of British paramountcy, such as the status of the Nizam and the nature of the government and its powers, apart from the issue of the share of power among the Hindus and Muslims. Not only did it take on the demand for the resumption of Berar to Hyderabad and the resumption of the Nizam's political sovereignty, it also sought the establishment of an armaments factory to strengthen Hyderabad's defence. After Bahadur Yar Jung's death in June 1944, when the changes in British India became fast-paced, the Majlis focused on protecting the state from

<sup>51</sup> Third speech of Bahadur Yar Jung, delivered on 25 August 1940 in Ahmed, *Bahadur Yar Jung ki Siyaasee Taqareer*, p. 111.

<sup>52</sup> Ali Yawar Jung, who was the secretary of the Constitutional Secretariat, reports a private conversation with Bahadur Yar Jung in which the latter agreed with him on the need for joint struggles of Hindus and Muslims for political reforms but with one reservation, 'He said he believed that the Muslims should first organize themselves politically in order to be able to exact the best terms. Then, he said, they could join hands.' *Hyderabad in Retrospect*, p. 2.

<sup>53</sup> It is the Nizam's Subjects League that is being referred to here. To the immediate and strong reaction from the Congress and Arya Samaj to the Majlis' new creed, Bahadur Yar Jung issued a clarification on 12 May 1941, that the two elements in the statement attributed to him in the newspapers—the Nizam as the symbol of Muslim sovereignty and Muslims as carriers of the Nizam's sovereignty—were never to be taken in a literal sense, but according to the intellectual level of the people. Ahmed, *Tasurat-e-Bahadur Yar Jung*, p. 38.

<sup>54</sup> Pernau, *Passing of Patrimonialism*, p. 265.

both internal and external threats, that is, opposing unconditional accession and defending its 'independence'.<sup>55</sup> Its new president Qasim Razvi was known for his honesty, integrity and straightforward nature without a streak of dishonesty.<sup>56</sup> He passionately and strongly supported Hyderabad government's case for independence during the negotiations with Lord Mountbatten.<sup>57</sup> The Majlis also played a key role in the Standstill Agreement between the Indian government and the Hyderabad government, which included a provision to decide on the mode of Hyderabad's accession to the Indian Union.<sup>58</sup>

However, what often gets ignored in the accounts of this period is the working together of the Majlis and the Depressed Classes Association during this tumultuous period, both inside and outside the government. In 1946, when the limited elections took place to the Legislative Assembly in the State, the Majlis won the majority, also obtaining ministerial berths in the Cabinet for the first time,<sup>59</sup> thereby gaining access to the highest levels of decision-making. Even though the two Hindu representatives, Joshi and Ramachar, resigned in no time, representatives of the Depressed Classes, Venkat Rao (Education Minister) and Shyamsunder (Head of the Council) stayed on to work for the educational improvement and land rights of the Depressed Classes. Despite differences, they agreed with the Majlis that the dominance of the Hindus in the government would be detrimental to the minorities in the Hyderabad State and threw their weight behind the demand for Hyderabad's continuing independence.

<sup>55</sup> Between 1944 and 1946, after the death of Bahadur Yar Jung, the extremists gained the upper hand within the Majlis, defeating the moderates in their attempts to negotiate with the administration and reach a compromise between the communities. Benichou, *From Autocracy to Integration*, pp. 138–39.

<sup>56</sup> Hussain, quoting Ibrahim Jalees, describes his politics as passionate and destructive, and argues that he did not possess any inherently evil character, *Zawal-e-Hyderabad*, p. 188.

<sup>57</sup> The unexpected announcement of British withdrawal threw the princely states and the different political actors into a frenzy of activity. The fringe elements of all political formations in the Hyderabad State, including the Majlis, became feverishly active. They tried to influence and even force the political events in the direction that they wanted. Some used the chaos to loot and commit inordinate violence. The HSC and the Arya Samaj set up camps on the borders of the state to train activists in armed action and attacked the border areas. The Majlis was no exception to this trend. Its razakar units in the Telangana and Marathwada districts took to arms and violence to defend the Hyderabad State. Mohammad Hyder's *October Coup* captures this turmoil of 1947–48 very well.

<sup>58</sup> See Noorani, *The Destruction of Hyderabad*, pp. 152–59.

<sup>59</sup> The debate on political reforms continued in the mid-1940s. Depressed Classes became more vocal and made the government accept recommendations from their own registered associations to nominate the members. Elections took place on the basis of 10 functional constituencies from which Hindu and Muslim representatives were elected in equal number. Four of the Hindu representatives—Ramachar, Joshi, B. S. Venkat Rao and B. Shyamsunder were incorporated into the Cabinet. However, we could access the record of legislative activity only until 1942. The record of Depressed Classes activity is available through Venkataswamy's *Our Struggle for Emancipation*.

At the Aurangabad Depressed Classes Conference, while Venkat Rao declared that the Depressed Classes were prepared 'to make any kind of sacrifice with them for the achievement of their goal', Shyamsunder declared that

the time has now come when they should declare an open revolt against Caste Hindus and join hands with Muslims for the betterment of their conditions. The Muslims are the only nation who can deliver their goods because they profess a religion which teaches them equality, liberty and fraternity among human beings... (they) should carry the message of the Ittehadul Muslimeen individually to every home in their villages.<sup>60</sup>

The quality of the alliance can be gauged by the speech of Qasim Razvi during the celebration of Hyderabad independence at B. S. Venkat Rao's house where he said, 'There is no diplomacy in our befriending the Depressed Classes. I do not believe in counting heads. It is not the number of heads that matters but the inherent strength of the people that really matters.'<sup>61</sup> Shyamasunder believed that the Hyderabad State offered better chances for the Depressed Classes with increased political consciousness to demand their own rights and to fight the caste Hindu domination, as the Nizam was 'the fountainhead of justice and the interests of the Depressed Classes are safe as much as the interests of either Muslims or Hindus'.<sup>62</sup>

Depressed Classes representatives were not alone in visualising a different future for their people in an independent Hyderabad. Unlike the Indian nationalists, for whom the future of Hyderabad lay in the Indian Union, for the moderate Congressmen, Communist Party, the Majlis, the Nizam and the others in the Hyderabad administration, the answer was not so clear. Narsing Rao's comment in this regard is telling,

[i]n this manner—the Congress, Communists, Ittehad, people and Nizam—everyone desired to be free from the British authority. There was no difference of opinion among them about independence for India. They also believed that Hyderabad would also be free of British authority once India became independent. But the ideals that guided this belief were different. Congress struggled for democratic government. Communists wanted a proletarian democracy. Ittehad, while supporting the demand for Pakistan, wanted Hyderabad to be an independent Muslim State with sovereignty vested in them.<sup>63</sup>

When placed amidst the responses of the contemporary actors, who were as yet undecided about accession to India, Deccani/Hyderabad nationalism—its timing,

<sup>60</sup> Venkataswamy, *Our Struggle for Emancipation*, pp. 386–87.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 406.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 420.

<sup>63</sup> Narasinga Rao, *Yabhai Samvatsarala Hyderabadu*, p. 248.

methods, process and conditions—espoused by the Majlis, did not stand out as peculiar.<sup>64</sup>

By 1947, the law and order machinery in the state was stretched to the extreme. The Congress, the Arya Samajis<sup>65</sup> and the Communists waged armed battles, the first two in the border areas and the latter in rural Telangana. Financially, the state was reeling under the unofficial economic blockade imposed by the Indian Union, and militarily its resources were stretched. It was in this context in 1947 that the Majlis decided to convert the existing volunteers of the party into a paramilitary wing, popularly called Razakars.<sup>66</sup> Laik Ali notes that people from all religions signed up as the mandate was simple enough—to protect women and children as well as to protect the population against the ‘disturbing elements’.<sup>67</sup> The Razakars helped the Nizam’s police and the army in resisting the attacks from the border camps and putting down the peasant rebellion in Telangana.<sup>68</sup> But Razvi clarified that it was self-defence that the Razakars were interested in:

[I]f the Razakars attack the Indian territories they will not help the cause of the Hyderabad State nor its Muslims. Why should the Muslims of Hyderabad unnecessarily want to destroy themselves and others? For what purpose will Hyderabad indulge in such useless actions? It is the Indian Union, in contrast, which has every reason to attack Hyderabad.<sup>69</sup>

The heavily radicalised Majlis did not shy away from advocating violence against anyone who opposed Hyderabad State and advocated accession to the Indian Union.

While such a radical espousal of Hyderabad nationalism made the Majlis immensely popular among the state’s Muslims,<sup>70</sup> it gave the Indian government the

<sup>64</sup> See Kavita Datla ‘Sovereignty and End of Empire: The Transition to Independence in Colonial Hyderabad’, unpublished essay.

<sup>65</sup> Kulkarni describes them as freedom fighters in his *Hyderabadu Ajnata Charitra Putalu* and gives a detailed account of their activities in various chapters of the book, pp. 1–50; Hyder, who served as the collector of Osmanabad at this time describes them as attackers from across the border in his memoir’s Mohammad Hyder, *October Coup: A Memoir of the Struggle for Hyderabad*, pp. 29–37.

<sup>66</sup> ‘Razakar’, whether in popular memory or in contemporary writings, connotes these units and wings, started in 1947, and not the earlier voluntary corps that the Majlis possessed along with other sociopolitical forums of that period. Andhra Mahasabha, for instance, raised a disciplined voluntary corps from the late 1930s.

<sup>67</sup> Laik Ali qualified this narrative by adding that in the later period, ‘anti-social elements’ joined the razakars, but Qasim Razvi could not control them and rued that the unwieldy expansion of the razakars limited any scope for intervention at this stage. Babu, *Mir Laik Ali*, p. 73.

<sup>68</sup> See Sundariah’s *Veera Telangana Viplava Poratam* for the description of violence by the razakars and heroic accounts of peasant resistance to this violence.

<sup>69</sup> Clarification issued by Qasim Razvi on 20 March 1948 cited in Md. Mazheruddin, *Zawal-e-Hyderabad Aur Police Action*, p. 4.

<sup>70</sup> In Laik Ali’s words,

Nevertheless the movement (razakar) had an amazing psychological effect on the masses. The people in the outlying areas who had been scared and afraid for some time past, now felt more

raison d'être to march its armies into the Hyderabad State to merge Hyderabad into the Indian Union, popularly known as the Police Action. It was followed by a massacre of Muslims, especially in the Marathwada districts of Osmanabad, Gulbarga and Bidar, which is an issue that requires a separate treatment.<sup>71</sup>

The nationalist narrative strongly argues that the Hyderabad/Deccani nationalism advocated by the Majlis, including its volunteer corps of Razakars, led to Hyderabad State's illogical refusal to join the Indian Union, and invited Police Action and backlash against the Muslims afterwards.<sup>72</sup> But, as pointed out earlier, the Majlis' espousal of Deccani nationalism or its advocacy of Hyderabad's independence was not spectacularly different from the prevailing understanding. The disproportionate blame placed at the door of the Majlis could perhaps be traced to a logic which, as Mohammad Hyder's recent memoir notes, 'identifies the outcome with the victorious cause' wherein Hyderabad's concern with being hustled into accession has been judged as irrational but India's overriding drive towards a merger was taken as somehow predestined.

### Conclusion

While arguing that the Majlis played a complex and multi-layered role in the politics of the Hyderabad State prior to accession, we also sought to raise questions about issues, events and the framework in which the Majlis' politics has been predominantly understood. The Majlis tried to mobilise Muslims as a community, but such a community was neither pre-given nor a simple religious one. It was, as an aspiring political community, a secular Muslim one, oriented towards modern forms of politics. Its politics was formed in response to the sociopolitical specificities of the Hyderabad context, but also formed part of the larger story of Muslim and minority politics unfolding at the national level. While its advocacy of Hyderabad nationalism has been intense and aggressive, we note that it was only quantitatively different from other modes of Hyderabad nationalism during that period.

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confident of themselves and at least, psychologically were better prepared to face any trouble. Their determination, in its turn, put a considerable check on the number of raids that had previously been mounting up. (Babu, *Mir Laik Ali*, p. 74)

General Edroos rejected the possibility of Hyderabad government offering any support to the razakars (Edroos, *Hyderabad of 'The Seven Loaves'*, p. 116).

<sup>71</sup> Muslims were killed, their properties looted and the women raped. Estimates of the number of such Muslims killed range from 40,000 to 200,000. See 'A Report on the Post-Operation Polo Massacres, Rape and destruction or Seizure of Property in Hyderabad State', by Pandit Sunderlal and Qazi Abdulghaffar, in Omar Khalidi, ed., *Hyderabad after the Fall*, pp. 95–115 and A. G. Noorani's chapter titled 'Massacre of Muslims' in *The Destruction of Hyderabad*, pp. 221–46. This violence functioned as a mode of physical incorporation of Muslims into the Indian nation-state as a religious minority, reducing them from the position of a national political community, Sunil Purushottam argues in his essay, 'Internal Violence: The "Police Action" in Hyderabad', pp. 1–31.

<sup>72</sup> Ali Yawar Jung, *Hyderabad in Retrospect*, pp. 1–40.

The Majlis' main project was to create an effective Muslim representation in the changing political culture of Hyderabad State. Through its mobilisation and consolidation of the non-elite Muslim subjects, their political interests and breaking into the elite-dominated darbari culture through its adaptation of the idea of popular sovereignty, it was able to emerge as a decisive power centre in the Hyderabad of the 1940s. As Pernau rightly notes, 'the revolution that the Ittehad brought about (struck) at the roots of the patrimonial state and culture to no lesser extent than the communist insurrection against which it had been called to help'.<sup>73</sup>

What are the implications of this encounter between the Majlis and the other political actors for understanding the Muslim question and minority politics in this region? More importantly, how has it shaped the understanding of what it means to be 'secular'? Let us try to offer a speculative answer. A possible direction that the Majlis would have taken if Hyderabad State did not meet its untimely destruction was the development of an alliance with the Depressed Classes. Untouchability and the social rights of the Depressed Classes was a theme that consistently figured in their political articulation in the 1930s and got consolidated during the brief sharing of power and political vision between 1946 and 1948. The strength of the bond could be gauged by the fact that K. M. Munshi characterised B. S. Venkat Rao and B. Shyamsunder as 'Ittehad Harijans'.<sup>74</sup> The later writings of Shyamasunder, who represented Hyderabad's case at the United Nations, powerfully articulate such a political possibility by speaking of Dalits and Muslims in South India as political minorities who jointly suffered due to the denial of separate electorates in the 1940s. Secularism for him only masked the Hindu majoritarianism which resulted from this denial. Charging him with inciting rebellion against the Hindus during his trial for articulating such a position in the Muslim-run anti-corruption journal of Hyderabad in the late 1960s only serves to underscore the fear that the possibilities of such an alliance invoked in later-day Hyderabad.<sup>75</sup>

It is obvious that the story of the Majlis offered here is a limited one. The purpose of this article is not to justify the communalism of that period but is rather an attempt to look at the broader context and nature of how Muslim politics evolved in Hyderabad State. We have tried to argue that the politics of the Majlis needs to be seen in the broader political context in which Hyderabad State itself was placed wherein it tried to counter the possibility of the imminent minoritisation of Muslims it foresaw in the upcoming political changes. The article also does not place the Majlis in the perspective of the larger Islamicate world from which it would have drawn on notions of government, kingship, democracy and representation, and articulated them in the Hyderabad context. Similarly, a question which this article suggests but cannot hope to answer is that of the relation between

<sup>73</sup> Pernau, *Passing of Patrimonialism*, p. 321.

<sup>74</sup> Munshi, *The End of an Era*, p. 95.

<sup>75</sup> Shyamasunder, *Sajeewa Dahanam*, p. 57.



linguistic nationalisms and the Muslim question in this region. Such an inquiry may enable us to explore the politics of the Majlis in a richer manner. In what ways did Hyderabad State and the Majlis shape the contours of the Muslim question in the subsequent four linguistic states among which the state got distributed? And what would be the role of language nationalisms in shaping them? Genealogical accounts from each of the politico-linguistic contexts would give us a fascinating story of the Majlis as it developed as well as its afterlife.

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