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Social Conditions of Hyderabad and its Liberation

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Abstract

The Hyderabad State, under the rule of the Nizams from 1724 to 1948, represented a complex socio-political structure marked by cultural diversity and deep-rooted social inequalities. This paper examines the social conditions prevailing in the Hyderabad State, focusing on its feudal hierarchy, economic exploitation, and oppressive social practices. The society was characterized by a rigid class structure dominated by nobles, jagirdars, and zamindars, while peasants and marginalized communities faced heavy taxation, bonded labour, and systemic discrimination. Low literacy rates and linguistic barriers further contributed to the backwardness of the majority population.

The study also highlights various social evils such as vetti (bonded labour), child marriage, devadasi system, and gender-based exploitation, which reflected the unequal power dynamics of the time. Despite these challenges, the late Nizam period witnessed certain administrative and socio-economic reforms that gradually led to political awareness among the people. The emergence of organizations such as the Andhra Mahasabha, Hyderabad State Congress, and peasant movements played a crucial role in mobilizing resistance against feudal oppression.

The rise of the Razakar movement under the Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen intensified communal tensions and violence, leading to widespread unrest across the state. Ultimately, the Indian government's military intervention through "Operation Polo" in September 1948 resulted in the integration of Hyderabad into the Indian Union. The paper concludes that the liberation of Hyderabad was not only a political event but also a significant social transformation driven by popular struggles against feudal and authoritarian rule.

Keywords: *Hyderabad State, Nizam Rule, Feudal System, Jagirdari, Social Inequality, Vetti Chakiri, Razakars, Telangana Armed Struggle, Hyderabad Liberation, Operation Polo, Socio-economic Conditions, Peasant Movements, Andhra Mahasabha, Hyderabad State Congress, Social Reforms.*

1. Introduction

The Hyderabad State, ruled by the Nizams from 1724 to 1948, was one of the largest and most significant princely states in India. It was renowned for its cultural richness, social diversity, and composite culture, where people of different religions and communities coexisted for centuries. The social and cultural fabric of the state reflected a unique blend of traditions, languages, and lifestyles.

2. Social Structure of Hyderabad State

Hyderabad State covered approximately 82,700 square miles and had a population of about 1.8 crore according to the 1941 census. It was divided into four major subas: Medak, Warangal, Aurangabad, and Gulbarga. Telugu was the predominant language, spoken by nearly one crore people.

The society was highly hierarchical and feudal in nature. At the top stood the Nizam, followed by nobles, jagirdars, zamindars, deshmukhs, and deshpandes. Below them were government employees and the middle class, while peasants, laborers, and marginalized communities formed the lowest strata. Social inequalities were deep-rooted and difficult to overcome.

Hyderabad society was multi-religious and multi-caste, with Hindus, Muslims, Christians, and others living together. However, despite this diversity, economic exploitation, caste discrimination, and illiteracy were widespread, particularly in rural areas.

3. Economic Conditions and Taxation

Large tracts of land were controlled by jagirdars and other feudal elites. Peasants bore heavy tax burdens, while the upper classes often enjoyed tax exemptions. Various taxes were imposed on life events such as birth, death, marriage, and pilgrimages.

Illiteracy was a major issue, with an overall literacy rate of only 4.8%, and just 3.3% among Telugu-speaking people. Urdu was the medium of instruction, which further marginalized Telugu populations educationally.

4. Social Evils and Exploitative Practices

Several oppressive practices prevailed during this period:

- **Vetti Chakiri (Bonded Labour):** Lower caste communities were forced to work without wages for landlords.
- **Bagela and Begari:** Farmers who could not repay debts lost their land and were forced into labor.
- **Child Marriage:** Widely practiced, often leading to health issues and mortality.
- **Polygamy:** Considered a status symbol among the elite.
- **Dowry System:** A heavy financial burden on families, especially the poor.
- **Devadasi System:** Initially respected, later degenerated into exploitation and prostitution.
- **Adapapa System:** Women were treated as bonded servants in elite households.
- **Prostitution and Tawaif Culture:** Encouraged by elites as a symbol of status.

5. Role of Gadis and Feudal Administration

Gadis (fortified residences or administrative centers of landlords) symbolized feudal authority. Every village typically had a gadi, from which landlords exercised control. These centers often became symbols of oppression.

Several prominent jagirs, such as Metupalli and Bandalingapuram, were governed by jagirdars who exercised administrative and economic control. While some developments like water supply and transport were introduced, overall governance remained exploitative.

6. Socio-Economic Changes under the Last Nizams

During the reigns of Mir Mahbub Ali Khan and Mir Osman Ali Khan, certain reforms were introduced:

- Establishment of legislative and administrative councils
- Development of irrigation, industries, and healthcare
- Expansion of educational institutions

- Growth of political and social organizations like Arya Samaj, Andhra Mahasabha, and Hyderabad State Congress

These reforms gradually created political awareness among the people.

7. Rise of Political Movements

By the 1940s, tensions between landlords and peasants intensified, leading to the Telangana armed struggle. Leaders like Chakali Ailamma and Doddi Komuraiah resisted feudal oppression. Despite communal harmony initially, the situation worsened with the rise of extremist forces.

8. Razakar Movement and Atrocities

The Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen, under Qasim Razvi, organized the Razakars, a militant force aiming to establish Hyderabad as an independent Muslim state.

The Razakars committed severe atrocities, including:

- Looting villages
- Destroying crops
- Killing dissenters
- Mass violence, notably in Bairanpally (1948)

These actions created widespread fear and resistance among the people.

9. Integration of Hyderabad into the Indian Union

The Hyderabad State Congress demanded responsible governance and integration with India.

Key events:

- **August 7, 1947:** “Join India Day” observed
- **August 15, 1947:** National flag hoisted despite opposition
- Nizam declared independence, increasing tensions
- Indian government decided on military intervention

Finally, on **September 13, 1948**, “Police Action” (Operation Polo) was launched under Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. Within five days, Hyderabad surrendered on September 17, 1948, and became part of the Indian Union.

10. Conclusion

The integration of Hyderabad into the Indian Union in September 1948 marked a decisive turning point not only in the history of the region but also in the broader process of nation-building in post-independence India. It represented the culmination of multiple forces—political negotiation, grassroots resistance, and strategic state intervention—that collectively dismantled a deeply entrenched feudal order. The end of the Nizam’s autocratic rule and the suppression of the Razakar militia brought relief to a population that had long endured economic exploitation, social inequality, and political exclusion.

The Telangana peasant struggle played a crucial role in shaping this transformation. It exposed the structural injustices embedded in the jagirdari and vetti systems and demonstrated the power of organized rural resistance. While Operation Polo provided the immediate political resolution, it was the sustained efforts of peasants, reformers, and political activists that had already weakened the foundations of feudal authority. Thus, the liberation of Hyderabad cannot be understood solely as a military success; it was equally a product of social movements that challenged oppression from within.

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's leadership remains central to this historic transition. His pragmatic approach, combining diplomacy with decisive action, ensured that the integration was swift and effective. Patel recognized that allowing Hyderabad to remain independent would pose a serious threat to India's unity and security. His ability to balance political foresight with administrative efficiency set a precedent for handling similar challenges in other princely states.

The aftermath of integration brought significant socio-economic and political changes. Feudal structures gradually declined, and reforms aimed at land redistribution, tenancy rights, and abolition of forced labour began to reshape rural society. The introduction of democratic governance enabled greater political participation and representation, allowing previously marginalized communities to engage in public life. Educational expansion, administrative reorganization, and infrastructural development further contributed to the modernization of the region.

At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that the transition was not entirely free of conflict or complexity. The period following Operation Polo witnessed instances of communal tension and violence, highlighting the challenges of managing a large-scale political transformation. Nevertheless, the long-term trajectory points toward integration, stability, and development.

In a broader perspective, the Hyderabad episode illustrates how the making of modern India was not a linear or peaceful process, but one shaped by negotiation, resistance, and decisive intervention. It underscores the importance of strong leadership, popular movements, and institutional frameworks in achieving national integration.

Ultimately, the liberation of Hyderabad stands as a powerful example of how political unification can lead to profound social change. It transformed a feudal princely state into an integral part of a democratic republic, laying the foundation for socio-economic progress in Telangana. The legacy of this transformation continues to resonate, reminding us that nation-building is both a political and social process—one that requires vision, resilience, and collective effort.

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