



The Fall of Hyderabad and the Telangana Peasant Uprisings: A Study of Political, Social, and Administrative Dimensions (1946–1948)

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Abstract

The integration of Hyderabad State into the Indian Union in 1948 is often attributed to the military intervention known as Operation Polo. However, this study argues that the collapse of Hyderabad was the result of cumulative internal crises rather than a singular military event. Focusing on the Telangana Peasants' Armed Struggle (1946–1951), the paper examines the political instability, social inequalities, and administrative failures that weakened the Nizam's regime.

The feudal agrarian system—characterized by jagirdari land tenure, vetti (bonded labor), and excessive taxation—created widespread rural discontent. This led to the mobilization of peasants across nearly 3,000 villages, where alternative governance structures (sanghams) were established. Simultaneously, the rise of Razakar militias and the Nizam's insistence on independence intensified political isolation and communal tensions.

The study adopts a qualitative analytical approach, drawing on historical records, scholarly studies, and agrarian data. It concludes that Operation Polo functioned as the final phase of an already collapsing system. The Telangana uprising played a decisive role in dismantling feudal authority and paving the way for democratic transformation in the region.

Keywords: *Hyderabad State, Telangana Peasant Uprising, Operation Polo, Razakars, Feudalism, Administrative Collapse, Agrarian Crisis*

1. Introduction

Hyderabad State, one of the largest princely states in pre-independence India, covered an area of approximately 82,698 square miles and was ruled by the Asaf Jahi dynasty. Under the Nizam's rule, the state exhibited a feudal socio-economic structure, where agriculture formed the backbone of the economy and the majority of the population depended on it for survival.

Despite its apparent wealth and administrative legacy, Hyderabad State faced deep-rooted structural challenges. By the mid-20th century, these challenges manifested as political isolation, social unrest, and administrative inefficiency.

The commonly held narrative attributes the fall of Hyderabad to Operation Polo in September 1948. However, such an interpretation overlooks the internal dynamics that had already destabilized the state. The Telangana Peasant Uprising, which began in 1946, was a significant force that exposed the inherent weaknesses of the feudal system.

This paper seeks to analyze the fall of Hyderabad through a multidimensional lens, focusing on political, social, and administrative factors.

2. Objectives of the Study

The study aims to:

1. Examine the political factors that led to Hyderabad's isolation and eventual integration.
2. Analyze the socio-economic conditions that triggered the Telangana Peasant Uprising.
3. Investigate the administrative failures of the Nizam's regime.
4. Assess the role of Razakar militias in accelerating instability.
5. Evaluate the significance of Operation Polo in the broader context of Hyderabad's collapse.
6. Understand the long-term implications of the uprising on post-liberation reforms.

3. Review of Literature

Existing literature on Hyderabad State broadly falls into three categories: political histories, agrarian studies, and movement-based analyses.

Historical records such as Hyderabad Gazetteers provide detailed insights into land distribution, crop patterns, and revenue systems. These sources highlight the dominance of feudal structures and the limited development of irrigation and agricultural productivity.

Agrarian studies emphasize the exploitative nature of the jagirdari system, where peasants were subjected to bonded labor (vetti), high taxation, and forced extractions. Research also points to significant land inequality, with a small elite controlling a large portion of agricultural land.

Studies on the Telangana Peasant Uprising describe it as one of the most significant agrarian movements in Indian history. The role of communist leadership, the formation of village-level sanghams, and the participation of marginalized communities have been widely documented.

However, there remains a gap in integrating political, social, and administrative perspectives into a unified framework. This study attempts to bridge that gap by presenting a comprehensive analysis.

4. Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative and descriptive analytical approach.

Data Sources

- Historical documents and gazetteers
- Scholarly articles and research papers
- Secondary sources on agrarian history and peasant movements

Analytical Framework

The study is structured around three core dimensions:

- Political instability
- Social inequality
- Administrative inefficiency

These dimensions are examined in an interconnected manner to understand their cumulative impact.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 Political Dimensions: Isolation and Conflict

The Nizam's decision to remain independent after Indian independence in 1947 placed Hyderabad in a politically vulnerable position. While most princely states acceded to India, Hyderabad's refusal created tensions with the Indian government.

The Hyderabad State Congress and other nationalist groups demanded integration, while communist groups pursued a more radical agenda through armed struggle.

The emergence of the Razakar militia, led by the Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen, further intensified political instability. Their actions alienated large sections of the population and contributed to communal polarization.

5.2 Social Dimensions: Agrarian Inequality and Peasant Mobilization

The agrarian structure of Hyderabad was deeply unequal. A significant portion of land was controlled by jagirdars, while peasants worked as tenants under exploitative conditions.

Key features of the system included:

- Bonded labor (vetti)
- High taxation (25–50% of produce)
- Forced evictions
- Social and caste-based discrimination

These conditions led to widespread dissatisfaction among peasants. The Telangana Peasant Uprising emerged as a response to these injustices.

Peasant organizations, known as sanghams, were formed in thousands of villages. These groups not only resisted feudal oppression but also established alternative governance systems, including local courts and administrative mechanisms.

5.3 Administrative Dimensions: Collapse of Governance

The administrative structure of Hyderabad State was unable to respond effectively to the growing crisis.

The reliance on outdated bureaucratic systems and the increasing influence of Razakar forces weakened governance. Law and order deteriorated, and state authority declined in rural areas.

In contrast, the sanghams provided localized governance, which further undermined the legitimacy of the Nizam's administration.

5.4 Cumulative Impact and Operation Polo

By 1948, Hyderabad State was facing a multi-dimensional crisis. Political isolation, social unrest, and administrative breakdown had already weakened the state.

Operation Polo, carried out by the Indian Army in September 1948, resulted in the swift surrender of the Nizam's forces.

However, this study emphasizes that the military action was not the root cause of Hyderabad's fall. Instead, it was the culmination of long-standing internal conflicts and systemic failures.

6. Conclusion

The fall of Hyderabad State cannot be understood solely through the lens of military intervention. It was the result of a complex interplay of political, social, and administrative factors.

The Telangana Peasant Uprising played a central role in exposing and dismantling the feudal system. It not only challenged existing power structures but also laid the foundation for democratic reforms.

Post-liberation developments, including land reforms and the abolition of jagirdari, reflect the long-term impact of these movements.

This study highlights the importance of internal socio-economic dynamics in shaping historical outcomes and underscores the role of grassroots movements in driving systemic change.

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