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Role of Education in the Liberation of Hyderabad State

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Abstract

The integration of Hyderabad State into the Indian Union through Operation Polo in September 1948 represents a significant chapter in India's post-independence history. While much scholarship has focused on the military and political dimensions of this event, the role of education in shaping political consciousness and facilitating integration has received relatively less attention. This study examines the development of education under the Nizam's rule and its contribution to social reform, political awareness, and the eventual liberation of Hyderabad. It highlights how educational institutions, reformers, and educated leadership played a crucial role in mobilizing public opinion and supporting the integration process.

Keywords: *Hyderabad State, Operation Polo, Education, Political Consciousness, Nizam Rule, Integration, Osmania University, Social Reform, Nationalism.*

Introduction

The annexation of Hyderabad State into the Indian Union in 1948 marked a crucial phase in the consolidation of independent India. After independence in 1947, the Nizam, Mir Osman Ali Khan, attempted to retain Hyderabad as an independent entity rather than merging with India or Pakistan. His position was supported by the Ittehad-ul-Muslimeen, which promoted the idea of a separate Islamic state.

As tensions intensified, communal violence spread across the region, with the Razakars committing widespread atrocities. Diplomatic negotiations between Hyderabad and the Indian government failed, leading to the launch of a military operation on September 13, 1948. This operation, known as Operation Polo, resulted in a swift victory for the Indian Army within five days, culminating in the Nizam's surrender on September 17, 1948. Hyderabad was thus integrated into the Indian Union, strengthening national unity and central authority during a formative period.

Objectives

The study is guided by the following objectives:

1. To examine the educational institutions that existed in Hyderabad State during the 1940s.
2. To analyze the role of education in the liberation and integration of Hyderabad into India.
3. To highlight the importance of education in promoting social reform and societal transformation.

Development of Education in Hyderabad State

Education played a significant role in shaping political awareness among the people of Hyderabad prior to 1948. The Nizam's administration initiated modernization efforts in education during the late 19th century, particularly under Mir Mahbub Ali Khan, and expanded further under Mir Osman Ali Khan. However, education was primarily designed to produce efficient administrators loyal to the state rather than to promote social equality or political consciousness.

The establishment of the Department of Education in 1910 marked a major institutional advancement, leading to the creation of schools, colleges, and vocational institutions. A landmark development was the establishment of Osmania University in 1918, which became the first Indian university to offer higher education in an Indian language, Urdu. This innovation elevated Hyderabad as an important center for learning in fields such as science, humanities, and Oriental studies.

Despite these advancements, educational opportunities remained unevenly distributed. Urban elites benefited significantly, while rural populations, lower castes, and women had limited access. This imbalance contributed to social and political tensions that later influenced Hyderabad's integration into India.

Structure of the Education System

By 1948, Hyderabad's education system followed a three-tier structure:

- Primary education (five years)
- Secondary education (middle and high school)
- Higher education (colleges and universities)

Although technical and vocational institutions existed, they were limited in number and mostly concentrated in urban areas. Rural regions, particularly Telangana and Marathwada, lacked adequate educational facilities.

Enrollment levels were low, with less than 25% of school-age children attending primary schools. High dropout rates, poverty, child labor, and poor infrastructure further restricted educational access, reflecting deep inequalities within society.

Language Policy and Its Impact

Urdu served as the official medium of instruction in Hyderabad's educational institutions. While this policy promoted cultural identity and administrative unity, it also created barriers for the majority of the population, who spoke Telugu, Marathi, or Kannada.

As a result, many rural and non-Urdu-speaking communities were excluded from formal education. Although regional languages were gradually introduced at the primary level in the late 1940s, Urdu continued to dominate higher education until after Hyderabad's integration into India.

Literacy and Access to Education

Literacy rates in Hyderabad State remained extremely low by 1948, with overall literacy below 10%. Male literacy was around 15%, while female literacy was less than 2%, highlighting severe gender disparities.

Educational access was largely limited to urban elites, including upper-caste Hindus, Muslim aristocracy, and wealthy trading communities. In contrast, rural populations and marginalized groups had little or no access to education.

Even where schools existed, they were often poorly equipped and located far from villages. These inequalities reinforced existing social hierarchies and limited opportunities for large sections of the population.

Women's Education

Women's education in Hyderabad before 1948 was minimal due to prevailing patriarchal norms. Although the government initiated some measures, progress was slow and mostly confined to urban areas.

The establishment of the Madarsa-e-Aliya for Girls in 1883 marked an early effort toward female education. However, by 1947, women constituted less than 5% of the total student population.

Cultural practices such as purdah, lack of female teachers, economic hardship, and social stigma discouraged families from educating girls. Female literacy in rural areas was nearly nonexistent. Only after integration into India did reforms begin to address these disparities.

Higher and Technical Education

Despite limitations in primary education, Hyderabad made notable progress in higher education. Osmania University became the center of academic excellence, offering courses in medicine, law, engineering, arts, and sciences. Its Urdu-medium instruction combined traditional knowledge with modern education.

Other institutions such as Nizam College, Medical College, Engineering College, and City College contributed to the development of professional education. Technical and vocational institutions also existed but were limited in reach and accessibility.

Intellectual Climate and Academic Contributions

By the 1940s, Hyderabad had developed into a vibrant intellectual center. Osmania University played a key role by hosting academic conferences and publishing scholarly works in multiple languages.

The university demonstrated that Indian languages could effectively support higher education, challenging the dominance of English. It produced skilled professionals who later contributed to independent India's administration and development.

Educational Reformers and Social Awakening

Education contributed significantly to the rise of social and political consciousness in Telangana. Many educated individuals actively participated in reform movements and the freedom struggle.

Reformers such as Bhagya Reddy Varma, Vaman Nayak, Madapati Hanumantha Rao, Suravaram Pratapa Reddy, and Aghoranath Chattopadhyay promoted education as a tool for social justice and empowerment. Their efforts helped link education with broader socio-political change.

Role of Educated Leadership in Integration

By the 1940s, many educated individuals supported Hyderabad's integration into India and maintained connections with the Indian National Congress. Their political awareness and advocacy played an important role in shaping public opinion.

Leaders such as Swami Ramanand Tirtha, Vande Mataram Ramachandra Rao, Hardekar Manjappa, Raavi Narayana Reddy, B.D. Deshmukh, and K.V. Ranga Reddy emerged from this educated class. They combined intellectual influence with political action, contributing significantly to the liberation movement.

Conclusion

Education played a transformative role in the liberation of Hyderabad State. While the Nizam's administration expanded educational infrastructure, access remained limited and unequal. Despite these challenges, education fostered political awareness, social reform, and nationalist consciousness among the people.

Educated individuals recognized the importance of democratic governance and supported Hyderabad's integration into India. Under the leadership of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Operation Polo brought an end to the Nizam's rule and integrated the state into the Indian Union.

Thus, education acted not only as a means of intellectual development but also as a powerful force for political change and social transformation in Hyderabad's history.

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