

Operation Polo - Hyderabad's accession to India

Description: History, as we know, is told by the winning side, in the way they'd choose to. During Indian independence, the military action Operation Polo annexed the princely state of Hyderabad to India, against the communists and the Nizam rule. This part of history is often not spoken about as much as we speak of the freedom movement or the partition. Yunus Lasania, in his two-part episode on Operation Polo, tells the story of the Hyderabad rebellion through the people who lived through that time. In this episode, Burgula Narsing Rao, the nephew of the first chief minister of Hyderabad state before the creation of joint Andhra Pradesh Burgula Ramakrishna Rao shares his memories and view of the Hyderabad rebellion during the last phase of Nizam's rule.

Hello everyone! This episode is going to be very special. All the episodes that we will release this month will be important, as they relate with one part of Hyderabad's history, which is suppressed since independence.

In 2017, India celebrated 70 years of its independence. Funnily, the independence day back in 1947 didn't mean anything to Hyderabad. Hyderabad was a princely state until 1948. It comprised parts of Maharashtra, Karnataka and Telangana, had 16 districts (8 in Telangana and 8 in Maharashtra). The present-day Andhra and Rayalaseema areas were with the British. During/after 15 August 1947, most princely states joined the Indian union, but, Hyderabad was one among the handful that refused to join. The state of Hyderabad was ruled by the last Nizam- Mir Osman Ali Khan. He refused to join India or Pakistan and wanted to stay independent. He tried to stall the joining, for as long as a year but didn't succeed.

That's what we will be talking about today. This part of history is not in our textbooks, nor anywhere else. For long, we, in Telangana, had a complaint that our history was erased from history books. That part of history is not easy to find, you will find some material here and there.

September is important because the state of Hyderabad was annexed to India on 17 September 1948. After the negotiations broke down between the Nizam and the Indian government, the Indian union sent their army on 13 September to take over. Hyderabad becoming a part of India is not the issue. The Indian army was sent during/after the military operation, known as Operation Polo. The issue is that a lot of people, more specifically Muslims were killed during that process. There is a flip side to it. The Razakars led by Qasim Razvi were terrorising people and targeting Hindus in some parts.

After 15 August 1947, the Nizam, Mir Osman Ali Khan refused to join India. Before that, in 1946, the communists were gaining strength in Telangana (not in the entire state of Hyderabad). The state was backward in terms of education. The literacy rate was not more than 5-6%, and it was worse in the districts. The districts were controlled by the Jagirdars, who worked directly under the Nizam. Under the last Nizam, Telangana was seeing a revolt by the peasants, who were facing a lot of oppression from landlords, known as Jagirdars. "Dora" is the Telugu word for them. They were the biggest among the landlords. Two incidents happened in 1946 because of this oppression. Chakali Allamma was a revolutionary leader who participated in that revolt against the landlords. The revolt was called the 'Telangana armed struggle' or 'Telangana rebellion'. She was one of the initial people who defied the Zamindar(landlord) Vishnur Ramchandra Reddy. He came from the village of Vishnur. She refused to give him the produce. After that, the peasants who were supported by communists gathered against the landlords and started fighting back. The other incident that took place was the killing of Doddi Komaraiah. These two incidents sparked the Telangana armed struggle. The communists gave a call to arms against the landlords.

Burgula Narsing Rao was very active during that period. He is the nephew of the Burgula Ramakrishna Rao, the first chief minister of Hyderabad state, which existed until 1956. After that, the joint Andhra Pradesh was created. Narsing Rao was a young student leader at the Nizam college. He participated in the movement with the Communists. He was roughed up and beaten up, seeing a lot of things. These immensely important people can give us a completely different view of this history, that we know.

"I come from a family that was politically involved in the history of Telangana. As a young boy, I had my initial education in my village house. There weren't any Government schools in my area. So, my father established a school in the house. It catered to everyone in the village, irrespective of their caste and religion. Then, I came to the city for high school. After that, I went to the Nizam college for my higher education. I finished B.Ed, BA and MA within six years there. I did my MA in political science.

We participated in the Hyderabad freedom movement. But where were these people? They had nothing to do with this. But today, they come to exploit this whole thing because they have an anti-Muslim mind. The Nizam was a Muslim. If he wouldn't have been a Muslim, they would not use this. They all lie. If Nehru was not there, Kashmir wouldn't have come into India. You could have declared independence and left to Pakistan. _Now, they speak of Patel. Patel had no connection with the Kashmir problem. They ask what is so special about Hyderabad? We all fought and represented to the Government of India to take action here. They decided ok. Patel was the Home Minister, and we give credit to him to that extent. It was not his personal decision, it was a cabinet decision. Without Nehru, he wouldn't have been able to do anything.

It was a dangerous time, filled with conflicts and complications. The Nizam was an autocrat. Some politically conscious people were spreading awareness to people at various levels. Andhra Mahasabha played the most important part in Telangana. It was a nationalist organisation which aimed to make the people in Telangana aware and fight for their rights against the landlords, deshmukhs, jagirdars and others. This body played a major role in the social and political life of Telangana. In Hyderabad, the ruler was a Muslim man, and the majority of the population were non-Muslims. In Hyderabad, there is a continuous history from the time of the Qutub Shahis. They built the Charminar. The Golconda Fort was built by the Kakatiyas, and the Qutub Shahi succeeded the Kakatiyas. They were Shia visionaries who came from Iran. They had a liberal outlook and were very broad-minded. Quli Qutub Shah wrote poetry in Telugu. Hyderabad was a multilingual state. It comprised of three places- Telangana, Marathwada and Karnataka, three different languages and Urdu. Urdu was the official language.

Those were the days of monarchs, all over the world. With feudal orders and dynasty's chunks of land, they all had exploited the peasantry, both economically and socially. They did not allow the peasants to move/to come out of the small grooves, in which they were imprisoned. Monarchy and despotism were prevalent here, just like in England and France.

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Jangam taluka was one of the most oppressed areas. About 259 villages were under 11 Jagirdars around 1946. The British were not directly ruling Hyderabad, the Nizam had a lot more independence than the other princely states in India. It functioned as a separate country and that's probably why Nizam wanted to stay independent. After independence, the Telangana armed struggle was going

parallelly. Before that, in 1944, there was one person named Bahadur Yar Jung. He was apparently a powerful orator who had control over the masses and was the leader of the *Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (MIM)*. When he died in 1944, it left a gap, which was eventually filled by Qasim Razvi. Razvi was not a good lawyer. He didn't have the greatest sensibilities of what would happen. He started his own brand of Hyderabad nationalism, saying that the state will remain independent. He started the *Razaakars*, which means volunteers. They were training to "defend Hyderabad from India". But if you talk to an elderly person, you will understand that they didn't have any arms and were not even properly trained. They used to carry sticks around and march, loot or harass people and even target people across Hyderabad. They were largely contained in Telangana because the communists and the peasants were basically fighting the Razaakars and landlords, and simultaneously, the state apparatus/police. A lot of landlords had also joined the Razaakars to protect themselves. It was primarily a Muslim militia. Qasim Razvi was arrested after 1948, jailed for 10 years and later, sent to Pakistan. Parallelly, the Razaakars were causing a lot of trouble. People were terrorized by them as well. There were no communists in Maharashtra and Karnataka. By 1947, Qasim Razvi managed to gain political control. At the same time, different prime ministers were appointed due to the prevailing situation. Mir Laiq Ali was the last person appointed as their Prime Minister. He was working with Jinnah in Pakistan and was called back to take over. Some people say that, knowing that the Hyderabad state did not have a great army, he kept misleading the Nizam into thinking that the state could defend itself. The state barely had trained people or trained army to do that. When Nawab of Chattari was appointed as the Prime Minister, the common people caught him, roughed him up and tonsured his head and moustaches. *On 1 November 1947, The Standstill Agreement was signed between Hyderabad and India for a year, a lot of negotiations were held.* When the British withdrew, the Nizam was left dry, with no one to fight for him. The British had signed The Treaty of Subsidiary Alliance in 1798, under which, the Nizam had to pay the British to use their army whenever he needed them for war or any other purpose. That one year period of The Standstill Agreement didn't go through him, Mir Laiq Ali and the rest. He was close to Gandhi and Sardar Patel. Sardar Patel, the then home minister had sent him here. The last collector of Osmanabad district Mohammad Haider wrote one book on what happened during the period of turmoil. He writes that in September when they learnt that the Indian army had come, Qasim Razvi ordered the Razaakars to attack the Hindus. That had a lot of people traumatised. People who lived through that time agree that the Razaakars targeted people, especially Hindus. In my personal opinion, Qasim Razvi was a maniac.

"In the late 19th century, the rest of India was going through turmoil. Congress and Muslim league were among various other parties. Where did Hyderabad fit in all this? The princely state was like an island. The rest of India had massive transformations. Hyderabad kept itself aloof. That ideology of the Asaf Jahis made the last Nizam Osman Ali Khan want to keep Hyderabad as an independent kingdom. The Government of India wanted Hyderabad to accede to the Indian union. For that, the Nizams were given many concessions.

Majlis-Ittehad-Muslimeen was very active in the 1930s. Its leader Bahadur Yar Jung was a powerful speaker. He propounded the theory of Hyderabad being a Muslim Kingdom. The sovereignty that rested with the Nizam was shared by all the Muslims of Hyderabad. He didn't bother about the 88% non-muslim population. The Arya Samaj people came from north India to fight it. In the 1930s, they played a major role in Hyderabad politics. The Congress was not born here yet, but the Andhra Mahasabha was very active. Congress and communists came from the Andhra Mahasabha later.

With the independence talks going on in the 1940s, the British didn't bother to solve the problems of the princely states. The Indian independence act of 1947 stated that the princely states are left free to do what they want to. So, the Nizam told that they'll be independent. Government of India offered many terms and conditions when negotiating with the other states, to which, they all agreed, and signed the agreement of accession. Mysore, Travancore, Jodhpur, Jaipur and other states did. But, Hyderabad did not. So, the Nizam remained very obstinate. He had a bunch of mad fellows as advisors,

and the maddest of them all was Qasim Rizvi (the leader of the Majlis). I heard him say that "Hyderabad belongs to Muslims and we will continue with this tradition. We will hold the Indian flag at Lal Qila." It had caused a lot of crisis."

Coming back to Operation Polo, on September 13, the situation kept getting worse, especially in the districts. The Indian government sent its army. Here, a lot of local goons and those who had a lot of enemies were given a free hand to loot or kill. That's why so many people were killed. Pundit Sunderlal was sent by Jawaharlal Nehru, the then Prime Minister to look into the mass killings. In the Pundit Sunderlal committee report, he writes that 27,000-40,000 people were killed. After Hyderabad was integrated with India, the Indian army stayed back for 2-3 years to crush the communist revolt. Even when the communists were banned, they were not willing to give up arms. Till 1948, they managed to free a lot of areas controlled by Jagirdars and were able to establish local Gram Rajya. -

Within Operation Polo itself, the history of the Communists and the Telangana armed struggle is lost. The communists are politically coming down in numbers. Usman Ali Khan was not a bad person. There are different versions of the story saying that he was ready to accede to India before Operation Polo took place. Qasim Razvi came to know of it, and the person who was sent to Delhi with the signed document was stopped, and the documents were torn. It is said that Usman Ali Khan had more or less made up his mind. Usman Ali Khan wasn't arrested but was made the Raj Pramukh (governor) after the operation Polo. He possibly was on good terms with the Indian government. He was the Raj Pramukh till 1956.

I know a lot about this because I have interviewed a few dozen people from different parts, who have witnessed Operation Polo. Whether they were children, youngsters or teenager, they will remember the turbulence that took place then.

There was a lot of anger due to the Razaakars, as anyone who wanted to join India was considered to be enemies. The best example is the murder of journalist Shoaibullah Khan on August 1948. He used to write for a newspaper called Imroz and he had a very pro India stance. The Razaakars had said that anybody who had taken an anti-Hyderabad or pro-India stance would face consequences. That consequence was the Murder of Shoaibullah Khan. Narsingh Rao had witnessed it. He will tell us what happened on that fateful night.

"1946 was the turning point. While the negotiations were going on at the national level, except Hyderabad, most of the princely states more or less agreed to the terms given by the government of India. I and my colleagues were active student leaders in 'All Hyderabad students union'. I witnessed what happened in Hyderabad on the 15 August 1947. We hoisted the national flag in Sultan bazar, many others did it in the lanes and colonies. When the police could not manage, the Hyderabad government banned the hosting of the national flag. The Government of India was confronted with the partition. The country was divided. Lakhs of people went from here to Pakistan and came here from Pakistan. That was a major problem for them to tackle. The government of India wanted some breathing space to tackle the Hyderabad problem. They said they'll see when the time comes. Meanwhile, they signed an agreement with the Nizam, called The Standstill Agreement, to last a year.

As a reaction, the communists gave a call for arms struggle against the nizams, the Razaakars and the landlords in 1947. Landlords were predominantly Hindus. The Majlis organised a militia, where all the young fellows were recruited as Razaakars, and given small guns and swords. When the police action took place, the Razaakars fell under the Indian tanks. It was a tragedy. On 22 August 1948, I saw a Muslim journalist Shoaibullah Khan being killed by the Razaakars. He brought out Imroz, an Urdu daily newspaper. My uncle patronized the fact that its office was in our house. He used to write good, well-balanced articles, asking the Nizam to make a settlement with the Government of India. But, the Nizam

fell in the trap of fanatics. Did the Nizam do it on his own or was he imprisoned by the Majlis? The Government of India (particularly Nehru) asked Nizam to think about the future of the Muslims in Hyderabad. Nehru wrote a letter to the Nizam saying "This is my last letter. Get over this and settle the matter. Any dream of remaining independent is a mirage, which can't work. Please understand. We are prepared to give any number of concessions. We shall have a responsible government and elected assembly in Hyderabad.

Shoaibullah Khan's murder shook everyone. Nehru said that "This shows the extent Hyderabad has gone down in its governance and intolerance, that even a Muslim journalist cannot survive". Well, that is the beginning of the end. I bid him goodbye in the night at around 1-1:30am, when they close the office. His house was nearby, his brother in law lived with him. Razaakars fired from the other side. Then, they cut his right palm. 10 days before it happened, Qasim Razvi said in a meeting, "Right palm of those who write against us will be cut into pieces". His brother-in-law's left arm was cut.) (On 13 September, the Government of India came in. The rest is history. When the army came, everything was over in 5 days. Poor young Muslims were massacred. Hyderabad problem was something which could have been solved, but it was not. They could have avoided the bloodshed and all and we know it. That was the end of the police action. Hyderabad was integrated with the rest of the country."

This brief introduction to Operation Polo was to make you all understand the relevance and importance of this, at a time in India when we are seeing a lot of generalised communalisation in everyday life. Operation Polo will give us quite a bit of perspective. We tend to look at partition as something that affected so many people, but we are unaware of something that took place in our own region.

And, if there's anybody out there whose family members have witnessed operation polo and would want to share some of their memories with us, they're most welcome to reach out and contact us. We'll be more than happy to come and meet interview them. Thank you.