



**NMML  
OCCASIONAL PAPER**

**HISTORY AND SOCIETY  
New Series**

**30**

**Diverse Social Groups under the Asaf Jahis**

**Salma Ahmed Farooqui**



**Nehru Memorial Museum and Library  
2013**



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*Published by*

Nehru Memorial Museum and Library  
Teen Murti House  
New Delhi-110011

e-mail : [ddnehrumemorial@gmail.com](mailto:ddnehrumemorial@gmail.com)

ISBN : 81-87614-87-0

Price Rs. 100/-; US \$ 10

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Page setting & Printed by : A.D. Print Studio, 1749 B/6, Govind Puri  
Extn. Kalkaji, New Delhi - 110019. E-mail : [studio.adprint@gmail.com](mailto:studio.adprint@gmail.com)



## **Diverse Social Groups under the Asaf Jahis\***

**Salma Ahmed Farooqui\*\***

Ushering in the advent of social history as a new and exciting sub-field within the discipline of history the manifesto of Karl Marx states, “It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but on the contrary it is their social existence that determines their consciousness.” This has encouraged many to explore the past by studying the lives of people who constituted the socio-economic forces. In the background of this statement, the Deccan’s intense interaction with the peoples, states and cultures of north India and overseas opens up vistas that show the evolution of a society based on profound understanding and maturity.

Richard Eaton’s encapsulation of the following socio-economic forces in the context of the Deccan explains these dynamics: When enterprising cultivators came into the region between the twelfth and early fourteenth centuries, they either displaced or incorporated the indigenous pastoral groups. By the fifteenth century, the Deccan was incorporated into a global regime of commerce especially through networks that connected the region with the Iranian plateau. The rise and fall of military slavery in the Deccan between mid-fifteenth and mid-seventeenth centuries evolved a commercial system in the Arabian Sea basin that combined with the political system of the Deccani sultanates supported the trafficking of military labour from Africa to

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\*Paper presented at the Conference titled ‘Rethinking Deccan History: Religion and culture through history in remaking and fashioning regional identities’ held at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi, 15–16 March 2013.

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India. The Africans came as soldiers to the Deccani sultanates. These significant socio-economic developments were to determine the social fabric that was to evolve in the following centuries.

Perhaps in no other region in India are to be found representatives of such diverse nationalities, peoples, and communities as in the Deccan. There were Arabs, Pathans, Afghans, Baluchis, Rohillas, Tartars, Iranis, Bengalis, Madrasis, Marwaris, Komtis, Europeans, Anglo-Indians, Kayasthas, Brahmins, Sindhis, Parsis, Indian Christians, Khojas, Memons, Siddis, Maharattas, Agarwals and so on. Among the missions the Italian and French were there too. The heterogeneous society that had evolved included both Muslims and Hindus of different castes and classes and men of diverse ethnic, racial, religious and social backgrounds. This paper is restricted to non-ethnic social groups only.

### **The Nizam's Hyderabad State**

After the illustrious era of the Qutb Shahis, the Deccan had come under the rule of the Mughal emperor, Aurangzeb. Mir Qamaruddin, who later assumed the title of Nizam-ul-Mulk Asaf Jah I, was the son of an able officer of Aurangzeb. He was first appointed Governor of the Deccan in 1707 C.E. and then for a brief while, he also worked in the capacity of the Mughal *wazir* under the Mughal emperor, Muhammad Shah, and later returned to the Deccan in 1723 C.E. to carve out an independent domain for himself. It was then that he was conferred with the title of Asaf Jah and he established the State of Hyderabad in 1724 C.E. Nizam-ul-Mulk Asaf Jah I was originally in charge of a vice-royalty consisting of six *subas* of the Mughal Deccan: Khandesh, Aurangabad, Berar, Bidar, Bijapur and Hyderabad-Golconda. He controlled, on behalf of the Mughal emperor, a number of subordinate rulers, which included Arcot, Kurnool, Rajamundhry and Chicacole (Srikakulam). He also exercised some kind of suzerainty over the kingdoms of Mysore and Travancore. In addition to this, there were also many chieftains of ancient origin like Wanaparthi, Gadwal, Shorapur, Jatprole, Anagondi and Amarchinta which formed part of the Asaf Jahi dominions.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Bawa, V.K., 1996, *Hyderabad Under Salar Jung I*, S.Chand & Co., New Delhi, p. 8.

## **Nobility**

The second half of the eighteenth century was a formative period for the Hyderabad State when autonomous administrative machinery was developed. The nobility were either from Mughal or Maratha stock or men belonging to earlier Deccani sultanates. The nobility was entrusted with military duties and the administration was based on the collection and development of resources for warfare. The nobles were given titles and land grants such as jagirs and *mansabs*. Jagirs were used to provide individuals with a permanent income and a territorial base in Hyderabad. There was no uniformity in giving *mansabs* which was more dependent on varying ranks held by the noblemen but it definitely denoted their stature. Jagirs became a major factor in defining noble status. Distinctions within the nobility were very important for the large group of jagirdars and higher ranked *mansabdars*. A nobleman was essentially recognized on the basis of his administrative or military service. Other factors that mattered were his personal equation with the Nizam, his participation in court ceremonies and personal distinctions awarded by the Nizam.<sup>2</sup>

The most prominent Muslim noble family of Paigahs in the Hyderabad State was a *sunni* family of Indian origin. They ranked next to the Nizam and his family. Their main responsibility was to maintain large military forces for the Nizam because under Asaf Jah I, Muslim nobles held jagirs or estates on military tenure.<sup>3</sup> The Paigah nobles which had its own role in building the city and contributing to its progress also had the privilege of marital alliance with the royal family of the Nizams. The Begumpet, Basheer Bagh, Jahanuma, Asmangarh, Falaknuma palace complexes, and several other activities such as sports and games owe their beginning to them. The three important lineages of the Paigahs were Asman Jah, Khursheed Jah Bahadur and Sir Vicar ul Umra.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Raj, Sheela, 1987, *Medievalism to Modernism*, Sangam Books, London, p. 44.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>4</sup> Chandraiah, 1998, *Hyderabad-400 Glorious Years*, Chandraiah Memorial Trust, Hyderabad, pp. 88–89.

Next in rank of nobility were the premier nobles of exempted states and *samasthan* rulers. The latter were semi-autonomous local rulers who paid an annual tribute and continued to govern their inherited lands themselves. The origin of the rajas of Hindu *samasthans* in the Nizam's Dominion goes back to the time of the ancient Hindu kingdom of Warangal.<sup>5</sup> During the Asaf Jahi rule they also paid tribute or revenue to the Nizam according to the size of their estate. Whenever there was war the Nizam took military assistance from the rajas of the *samasthans*. This military assistance was by and large optional except in the case of the Raja of Gadwal. In course of time the stronger and bigger chiefs survived as rajas and the rest of the zamindars were reduced to the status of *deshmukhs* and *sardeshmukhs* particularly when revenue administration was reorganized under Salarjung I. Hence most of the zamindars lost their authority over the *samasthans*.<sup>6</sup>

There were about 16 *samasthans* which survived till independence. Some of the important *samasthans* were Wanaparthi, Gadwal, Jatprole, Amarchinta, Palvancha, Gopalpet, Gurugunta and Anagondi. The rajas enjoyed a high position in the Nizam's Dominion and acknowledged the sovereignty of the Nizam. Most of them were included in the nobility and were granted *mansabs* and titles of Rajas, Maharajas etc. Some of them were allowed to mint their own coins and print stamps to raise revenue. Most of the *samasthans* exercised both criminal and civil jurisdiction over their own subjects but the rules and practice differed slightly. The rajas were progressive and managed the administration of their respective territories well.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> They were mostly *zamindars* and military chiefs who established their authority over the surrounding territories. They were known as *Poligars* and their territories, *Palayams*. They participated in the victorious expeditions of the kings. During the earlier Vijayanagar times they were the military chiefs. Later under the Bijapur and Golconda sultanates they gained prominence but their territories became part of one large kingdom. After the conquest of the Deccan by Aurangzeb in 1687, there were large number of such zamindars throughout the dominion but most of them could not find regular military service in the Mughal army. They therefore paid revenue and became zamindars or landlords.

<sup>6</sup> Khan, Raza Ali, 1990, *Hyderabad — 400 Years*, Hyderabad, p. 129.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

In mid-eighteenth century, the early nobles were gradually displaced by men of administrative calibre who were elevated to noble status. North Indian and Maharashtrian Hindu families had come to Hyderabad and became part of the administration.<sup>8</sup> The premier nobles had smaller income compared to the elite nobles such as the Paigahs but they had full control over the revenue and judicial administration in their estates. Statistically speaking, there were 10 leading noble families in Hyderabad during the time of the sixth Nizam. Five were Shia Muslim, four Hindus and one Sunni Muslim. Out of the four Hindu families' one was Deccani Maratha, one Chitpavan Brahmin, one Kayastha and one Punjabi Khatri.<sup>9</sup>

### **Administrative-Bureaucratic Class**

While examining the bureaucracy of the Hyderabad State, what comes to light is that the rulers relied more on the work of their ministers and their advice and suggestions than on themselves as rulers possessing and capable of exercising autocratic powers. The supreme authority was undoubtedly the paramount sovereign and the ultimate authority always rested in his hands, but his prime minister was the man on whom he relied for advice, through whom he transacted most of his business and conducted the affairs of his kingdom. Among the long line of ministers who served the State were men who were giants in learning, scholars, soldiers and statesmen, and most if not all of them though wielded immense power were absolutely loyal to their sovereign and conscientious in discharging their duties. Some ministers were spendthrifts or partial in their leanings or were intriguing but all of them were steadfast and loyal to their sovereign and never worked against the master.

Many nobles, Hindus and Muslims, had come from Delhi along with Asaf Jah I. A good example of this is the *kayasth* family of Bansi Raja, whose forefathers were part of the military and administrative occupations of Asaf Jah I and had shifted to the Deccan from Delhi.

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<sup>8</sup> Raj, Sheela, 1987, *Medievalism to Modernism*, Sangam Books, London, p. 45.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, p. 46.

Another family that migrated to the south from Uttar Pradesh was of Rai Daulat Rai. In appreciation of their services, these families were recognized and rewarded with distinctions, titles and awards. In return, these families remained loyal to their rulers and to the people of Hyderabad.<sup>10</sup> To the Muslims, Asaf Jah I granted jagirs or estates on military tenure and employed them as his generals. In this way, an enormous army could be raised. The Hindus brought by Asaf Jah I were employed in administrative work especially in the departments of revenue and finance. Jagirs were granted as remuneration for their services, for civil and military purposes and later these became hereditary.<sup>11</sup>

The Nizams did not make a distinction between a co-religionist and one who belonged to another religion. There were Muslim and Hindu prime ministers appointed to the State. Nawab Yusuf Ali Khan Salar Jung Bahadur and Maharaja Kishen Pershad representing different communities are best examples in this regard. These were not the only two influential families, there were other Hindu and Muslim families which have a long lineage behind them, each having served the state in one high position or another of trust and responsibility. Religion therefore played no role in selection and appointment of prime ministers. The prime minister's position was elevated by the Nizams with privileges of hereditary succession. Ministerial rule came to an end in 1914 when on the resignation by Nawab Salar Jung III from his august office of prime minister on account of reasons of health His Exalted Highness the Nizam assumed the reigns of administration entirely in his own hand acting as his own prime minister till he formed an Executive Council in 1919.<sup>12</sup>

Once a nobleman was bestowed with a title, it continued for posterity. This gave scope for families and individuals to rise in social hierarchy like the Chandulal and the Salar Jung families. These families were not among those who came to Hyderabad with the first Nizam,

<sup>10</sup> Raj, Sheela, 1996, *Hyderabad in the Days of the Nizams (1828–1896)*, Narahari Pershad Charitable Trust, Hyderabad, p. 17.

<sup>11</sup> Gribble, J.D.B., 2002 reprint, *History of the Deccan*, Vol.II, Rupa & Co, first pub. 1924, New Delhi, pp. 5–6.

<sup>12</sup> Mudiraj, Krishnaswamy, *Pictorial Hyderabad* Vol. I, reprint 2007, Chandrakanth Press, Hyderabad, pp. 208–09.



but were the natives who became extremely prominent in the Nizam's administration. The former became indispensable to the ruling family as a result of the connections with the banking community of Hyderabad. The Salar Jung family was of Deccani origin, having served under Bijapur and later transferred its loyalty to the Mughals, intermarrying with Shia families of north Indian origin.<sup>13</sup> The rulers and prime ministers never demonstrated communal feelings and religious prejudices and did not let it sway their actions at any time and the political affairs were never swayed by them. Even Sir Salar Jung when he was beset with tremendous difficulty brought about extraordinary reforms, financial improvements, and new trends in administration despite an empty treasury always staring him in face. The appreciation, gratitude of the sovereign was equally mentionable.

Raja Ram, the son of Rai Daulat Rai was appointed the supervisor of 36 departments of the Nizam's government, including that of the kitchen and finance. Such responsibilities are pointers that Raja Ram was one of the trusted employees of the Nizam. After him, his succeeding generations were patronized by the Asaf Jahi rulers.<sup>14</sup> Narhari Pershad, a learned scholar and administrator, is another example of a prominent nobleman who worked in different capacities during the reign of three successive Nizams, Sikandar Jah Nizam III, Nasir-ud Daulah Nizam IV and Afzal ud Daulah Nizam V.<sup>15</sup>

Most bureaucrats during this time were of Kayasth origin. The Kayasth class has often been characterized as having strong cultural leanings towards the Muslim community as its members who became prominent administrators, poets and scholars in Arabic, Persian and Urdu, often shared dress and food habits with the Muslims. Karen Leonard gives the example of six sub-castes of the Kayasths who had settled in the old city of Hyderabad — Saksenas, Mathurs, Srivastavas, Gaurs, Bhatnagars, Nigams, later joined by the Asthanas.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Bawa, V.K., 1996, *Hyderabad Under Salar Jung I*, S.Chand & Co., New Delhi, pp. 21–22.

<sup>14</sup> Raj, Sheela, 1996, *Hyderabad in the Days of the Nizams (1828–1896)*, Narahari Pershad Charitable Trust, Hyderabad, p. 18.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>16</sup> Leonard, Karen, 2012, *Indo-Muslim Cultures in Transition*, Brill Publishing, USA, pp. 166–168.

## **Professional Groups**

Among the major communities, Hindus and Muslims had a higher concentration in the city of Hyderabad and other big towns because of their occupation. They were employed in military and industrial professions. The Hindus were in charge of administrative services and their major occupation in rural areas was agriculture. An analysis of the different occupations brings to light the interesting fact that in the beginning of the first decade of the twentieth century there are some stray examples of social mobility where people did not restrict themselves to one occupation alone. Many Hindus deserted their traditional occupations and joined others which suited them. Education played a major role in the development of society and inspired the people to change according to the needs of a changing society. The village or rural population was mainly composed of peasants. Besides the peasants, the village population also included craftsmen such as blacksmiths, carpenters, potters, weavers, cobblers, washer men, oilmen, barbers and others. They all worked almost exclusively to meet the needs of the village population. The village community also included within it a class of menials who did the work of scavenging. These outcastes, most of whom were descendants of the aboriginal population, were absorbed in Hindu society from their early years.

The social structure of the population of Hyderabad State in the urban areas was mostly determined by the nature of the town. One with political status like the capital had the ruler with his court of noblemen and satellites, army chiefs and state officials of various grades.

The bulk of the army was stationed in the capital city where also gathered as auxiliaries such social groups as musicians, sculptors, painters, poets, courtesans and dancing girls who catered to the physical and artistic needs of the rulers and nobility. In such towns the aristocracy was the dominant class. This class led a life of luxury and enjoyed all comforts.

The second biggest group next to the aristocracy was the middle class represented by various professions like medicine, law, engineering, teaching, administration, priests and others. A large number of members

of this class were the brahmins. The majority of administrative posts were held by kshatriyas. The third category was of artisans who engaged themselves in the preparation of luxury and semi luxury goods. They were the vaishyas. Statistics wise the majority of the population was Hindu and more than 90 per cent of Hyderabad State was rural-based. Hyderabad State's cosmopolitan society representing multi-coloured hues maintained a harmonious existence between the two major communities, Hindus and Muslims, who showed similarities in conduct, conversation, dress and hospitality.<sup>17</sup>

### **Foreigners**

#### *The British Residents*

Asaf Jah I was an able administrator and a seasoned diplomat, but after his death in 1748, a violent power struggle ensued and became complicated due to the involvement of neighbouring and foreign powers. After more than a decade of shifting military alliances and armed conflicts, Hyderabad gained internal stability during Mir Nizam Ali Khan Bahadur's reign, who was the second Nizam. Between 1765 and 1800 he concluded several treaties with the British, one of which was the Subsidiary Alliance of 1798 which brought Hyderabad and its foreign affairs under the effective control of the British. Although the treaty made the Nizam secure from his internal and external enemies, it was also instrumental in increasing British interference in the state administration. Among the terms of the treaty was the positioning of a British officer known as a Resident in the Nizam's Dominions.

The early Residents did not always live in the Residency that was built for their stay but used it only as a sort of rest room on their way to the city. Here they had to wait until a guard of honour arrived from the city to accompany them to the royal palace. They had also to wear a special dress, take off their shoes but not hats when they entered the Nizam's presence and squat on the carpeted floor along with other nobles as European furniture had not been introduced yet. It was only after 1857 that some of these inconveniences were removed and in

<sup>17</sup> Raj, Sheela, 1987, *Medievalism to Modernism*, Sangam Books, London, pp. 39–41.

the reign of the sixth Nizam, Nawab Mir Mahboob Ali Khan the present European modes of reception were adopted.

The correspondence between the two governments had some special features too for the Nizam subscribed himself as the *Maba-Dowlat* (our royal self) and the British government as *Niazmund* (seeker of royal audience). In the reign of the fourth Nizam Nasir ud Daulah, however the terms used came to be changed into those of equal friendship. The Nizams started bestowing titles upon the Residents as they did with their own nobles. The early Residents took great pains to make themselves popular by all means. Capt. Achilles Kirkpatrick was the first Resident to be entrusted with powers to represent his own as well as the Nizam's government and thereby discontinue the practice of sending an envoy to Calcutta. He even entered into a matrimonial alliance with a native woman. Others are known to have gone to the length of wearing native clothes in order to move freely in native society. They used to attend the nautch gatherings and local social functions at the houses of the nobles and ministers, dressed like Muslim noblemen and even had *paan* and *hookah*. Such practices were started by the Frenchmen perhaps and the English too observing the great popularity of those people were not slow to adopt them.<sup>18</sup>

### *The French*

French influence in Hyderabad began around the eighteenth century. Monsieur Raymond, a Frenchman, fondly known as Musa Ram by the Hindus and Musa Rahim by the Muslims succeeded in gaining a great amount of love, esteem and respect of the local people. As a soldier he had entered the service of the second Nizam, Nizam Ali Khan's service. A year later the Nizam's Ordnance Department was placed under Raymond who was designated as the *Amir-i-Jinsi* or Controller of Ordnance. The establishment of the gun foundry in Hyderabad was because of his efforts. He died at a young age but he is still revered by the people.

<sup>18</sup> Mudiraj, Krishnaswamy, *Pictorial Hyderabad Vol I*, reprint 2007, Chandrakanth Press, Hyderabad, pp.150–151.

With the coming of the French and British to Hyderabad, Christian missions made a mark in the region. Based on a philosophy of serving poor and needy fellow humans, it soon gained new converts and also gave a new dimension to the concept of social work among the Indians. Many locals living under the Nizam's Dominions, especially in rural areas, converted to Christianity as a result of the proselytizing activities of the missionaries. But the new converts carried on with the traditions and customs that they had been practicing so far. They did not claim to be a separate sect altogether; on the other hand, they retained their original surnames and preferred in general to have Indian names. The marriage customs of Christians, particularly Roman Catholics were similar to those of Hindus. On Christmas and New Year, greetings were exchanged between the Christians, Hindus and Muslims with great joy. A beautiful cathedral in Medak, the largest diocese in India, was completed by Rev. Charles W. Posnett in 1924.<sup>19</sup> Believed to be one of the tallest and largest churches in the country, it is a fine example of Gothic architecture. The cathedral has three marvellous stained glass windows depicting the Divine Manifestation, the Crucifixion and the Ascension.

### *Arabs*

Political instability in the state from 1803 to 1853 was manifested in frequent changes of the Nizam's Diwan or prime minister and an unstable revenue administration. Law and order could not be maintained while Arabs, Rohillas, Pathans, Sikhs and other warlike groups wanted regular payment from their employers. The Diwan was forced to rely on moneylenders who gave loans to the state in exchange for rights to collect revenue from districts. The insecurity of the tenure added to the exploitation of the ryots as the assignee wanted to recover his debt at the earliest. In such circumstances, the Arabs grew in number in the Nizam's army as well as started loaning money to the state.

The appointment of the celebrated Prime Minister Nawab Salar Jung I during the reign of the fourth Nizam, Mir Farkhonda Ali Khan

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<sup>19</sup> Regani, Sarojini, article titled 'Confluence of Cultures' in *Andhra Pradesh - Maa Telugu Talli*, Nagarjuna Foundation, Hyderabad, 1998, pp. 62-63.

Nasir-ud Daulah's reign, marked a new epoch as a number of reforms were initiated between 1853 and 1883 which could be sustained. This earned him the backing of the Arab *jamadars* and the *sahukars*. Salar Jung entrusted the entire responsibility of organizing the Regular Forces of the Nizam on Bansi Raja, the Nizam's chamberlain's shoulders. Bansi Raja accepted the responsibility with self-determination, diligence and hard work. In 1862 he laid the foundation of the Regular Troops. As a result, he was made the *sarrishtedar* of the Regular Troops.<sup>20</sup> Salar Jung established a court *Qadat-i-Urub* to try the Arabs who had defied the normal courts of law. Through this, Arab financial claims could be adjusted in a short period of time. Slowly but steadily, Arab mercenaries and soldiers were brought under control.<sup>21</sup>

Arabs were found in large numbers in Hyderabad State and went about with regular arsenals packed around their waists. As there was no Arms Act one could carry as many guns, daggers, swords, stiletos as one fancied. One might suppose that with such freedom, murder and crime must have been frequent. This was not the case. The city of Hyderabad was as law-abiding as any other in India and it has a police which, where its CID is concerned, could beat several British cities.

### *Hadramis*

The Nizam and the Muslim nobility regarded the Arabs as fellow Muslims, particularly, when no attempt was made by the Hadramis, immigrants from Hadramaut in Yemen, to compete with the Deccani Muslim nobility. Salar Jung I employed the Quayti *jamadars* for security duties and revenue collection, and rewarded them with land grants, titles, and access to the British colonial authorities in Hyderabad, Bombay and Aden.<sup>22</sup> The Hadrami Arabs benefited largely from the modernization process implemented by Salar Jung I as law and order

<sup>20</sup> Raj, Sheela, 1996, *Hyderabad in the Days of the Nizams (1828–1896)*, Narahari Pershad Charitable Trust, Hyderabad, p. 24

<sup>21</sup> Khalidi, Omar, 2006, *Muslims in the Deccan: A Historical Survey*, Global Media Publications, New Delhi, pp. 69–70.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

was restored, administration was streamlined, there was proper revenue collection and spread of education.<sup>23</sup>

### *Women*

Women in Asaf Jahi times, although secluded, were enterprising and involved in development of society. There is interesting information about Dulhan Pasha Begum, the wife of the seventh Nizam, Mir Osman Ali Khan. She was known for her queer behaviour but people of Hyderabad had great regard for her and held her in high esteem. It is alleged that she often stopped her car to give presents to passers by. At other times while shopping she would pick up whatever would catch her fancy and the Nizam would be sent the bill. Asaf Jah I had six daughters while 12 daughters were born to Asaf Jah II. Similarly Asaf Jah III had 12 daughters. It is surprising the three daughters of the sixth Nizam died unmarried. Sometimes these royal women were married to nobles of outside states. Many of the women of the royal Asaf Jahi family were married into families of the Paigahs and in turn the Paigahs took women from the Nizam's family as well as their wives.

During the reign of Nizam II, a family of highly cultured courtesans migrated to Hyderabad. One of them was the famous courtesan, Mahlaka Bai Chanda who was also an outstanding poetess and an expert dancer patronized by the second Nizam for her poetry and dance. Her elder sister, who was also equally well versed in fine arts, was reported to have married the then Prime Minister Ruknud Daulah. She had a jagir conferred on her by the Nizam near Maula Ali. It is now believed that Osmania University and English and Foreign Languages University campus and the site where the Nampally girls school is situated once belonged to her.<sup>24</sup>

The *purdah* system was in vogue in Asaf Jahi society. Men generally did not enter into women's apartments' or *zanana* areas. Neither did the women enter into areas where men were present. In the process,

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>24</sup> Chandraiah, 1998, *Hyderabad—400 Glorious Years*, Chandraiah Memorial Trust, Hyderabad, p. 246.

while Salarjung I was dying, his mother, his wives and other women relatives could not enter his room since male doctors were treating him. This was described by one of the French governesses appointed to the daughter of Salarjung I. The noteworthy point here is that Salarjung I was a pioneer among noblemen in Hyderabad in that he educated his daughters through French governesses. They were educated privately at home and not sent to school although girls' schools were started by Christian missions and Hindu philanthropists. Like the Nizam, Salarjung I had many concubines. After his death his mother wrote to the Nizam's administration asking that the concubines of her late son be granted enhanced pensions.<sup>25</sup>

Interestingly, there were two dalit women battalions consisting of 1,000 *dhed* and *chamar* women who played a conspicuous and gallant part against the enemies of the Nizam. Since the establishment of power, the Nizams maintained an army of women which mounted guard in the middle of the palace and accompanied the women of the Nizam's family wherever they moved. This practice continued till the fourth Nizam Nasir ud Daulah's time.<sup>26</sup>

In the decade 1881–91, a girl's institution was founded at Bolarum under the supervision of Miss Lyons. In 1890 the first government middle school for girls at Nampally was founded. In 1895 the Stanley Girls' School was started which became a high school in 1908 and the Khatri schools *Mufedul Anam* opened a primary section for girls at the end of the nineteenth century. Some emancipated women also participated in furthering education of girls. The daughter of Salarjung I, Noorunissa Begum, opened a school in her palace in memory of her father where education was given to daughters of nobles and jagirdars. In 1905 another girls' school was opened at Saroornagar Orphanage for all castes and communities. Embroidery and domestic skills were also taught there. In 1907 the famous Mahboobia Girls School was opened for high society girls. There were European teachers who taught subjects prescribed for Cambridge examination. The opening of so many educational institutions for girls speaks volumes of the activities

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 248.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*





that were being encouraged by the State for establishing a progressive and liberal minded environment.<sup>27</sup>

During the famous floods of 1908, ladies committees were formed by elite ladies such as Mrs. Hydiri and Ms. Sarojini Naidu to carry out relief work. Many elite women worked together distributing clothes among flood victims. Among some prominent educated Muslim women, Ms. Tyeba Bilgrami's name figures tall. The key to progress, she believed, whether cultural, political, social or economic, was education of women. She guided Muslim women in Hyderabad, organized charity, introduced vocational instruction for girls and encouraged arts and crafts.

With the national movement and spread of education, literacy and modernity a number of women from elite, middle class and lower class, and working women came into the open and led a variety of activities. The leading role of Sarojini Naidu, Rani of Wanaparthi, Gadwal and wives of senior civilians participated in women's functions and took up their cause. Princess Durreshawar and Princess Niloufer, the daughters-in-law of the seventh Nizam should be credited for giving a lead in this direction. Along with them, European ladies like the wives of Residents, ministers like Cason Walker, Lady Hydiri, Lady Dr. Mallana were also active.. There was another set of women who participated in the national movement, Andhra Maha Sabha, and the Library movement displaying political consciousness.<sup>28</sup>

The marriages of the seventh Nizam, Mir Osman Ali Khan's elder son Nawab Mir Himayat Ali Khan Azam Jah Bahadur to Princess Durrushehvar, the daughter of Abdul Mejid Khan II, the last Caliph and ex-Sultan of the Ottoman Empire, and his younger son Nawab Mir Shujat Ali Khan Moazzam Jah Bahadur to her cousin, Princess Niloufer were significant for they were perceived as an alliance between two illustrious dynasties — the Osmania and the Asafia.

Apart from their political significance, these marriages were instrumental in bringing about a change in Hyderabad's society by

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 250.

impressing upon the people western ideas of freedom and liberty that were symbolized in the demeanor of the Turkish princesses. They broke the barrier of the purdah and freely mingled with the nobility and common people at gatherings. Both the princesses also worked for the emancipation of women by speaking against the *burkha* and collected funds to start hospitals for women and children. Princess Niloufer took leadership in organizing a society to collect funds for construction of a hospital for women and children named after her and also became its head. Princess Durrushehvar, apart from her social activities, was responsible for opening a hospital.

Women brought up in Hyderabad's royal past in strict Asaf Jahi court traditions on the one hand and liberating British influences on the other, stuck to family values, traditions and culture. Trends changed but culture remained deep-rooted. Most of the middle class women got the best of modern education as they were both tutored at home and at English missionary schools, and also sent to attend cooking and baking classes. It was an obviously closely guarded social life with little interaction with the outside world. The noble gentry and women folk used to gather in the evenings to exchange notes and sometimes even share gossip, after rounds of polo or rough-riding, over a spread of delicacies laid out for high tea. Some of the noble ladies were confined to their *havelis* and *deodis* but others could go out escorted by their mothers or *ayaahs*. But it was not just the four walls of the zenana or high society social events that elite women were restricted to. Many women from these privileged backgrounds successfully moved out into the wider world and became useful members of society. Life in the zenana was hectic with various rituals and games taking up most of the day.

## Conclusion

Composite culture had become the mainstay of Deccani society with the integration of the Indian, Persian, Turkish, Arab and colonial trends. The intermingling of religious beliefs and cultural practices, which was the result of several external influences in the form of trade, commerce, conquests, religion and culture, gave rise to a bond among people. Various social classes whether nobles, bureaucrats, professional



groups, foreign residents or women, were fixed within the system and became useful members of the State by ingeniously contributing to financial and social reforms, administrative reorganization and educational development. What contributed to the making of such a social system were the policies adopted by the Nizams where religion did not play a role in selecting competent administrators. This gave scope for families and individuals to rise in the social hierarchy. Religious prejudices did not sway the actions of both rulers and their prime ministers at any time and the political affairs were not affected by them. The feeling of secularism and composite culture, in due course made Hyderabad a haven to live in. This was the reason that the famous poet Faiz described Hyderabad as the Garden of Eden.

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