Hyderabad was an important princely state of South India under the British paramountcy. It was ruled by the Nizams who were allied with the British Viceroy and had to adhere to policies decided by them. The Viceroy appointed Residents in the princely states who supervised the policies of the state and also interfered in the administration from time to time. In this chapter we will learn the condition of the people of this state under the British-Nizam rule and how they fought for freedom. The Hyderabad state comprised of regions in which Marathi, Kannada, Telugu and Duscani Urdu were spoken. In this chapter we will consider mainly the Telugu and Urdu speaking parts which form the Telangana districts.

Early years of Nationalism

In October 1888, in Hyderabad a small committee of influential persons circulated handbills and placards for holding a meeting to popularise Indian National Congress. The Congress attracted a large section of the educated classes. Mulla Abdul Qayyum of Hyderabad became a great champion of the Congress. He attended the Congress meetings and appealed to Muslims to actively participate in it. He attacked the nobility, and opposed the special favours granted to them in the Nizam state. He was also responsible for organising ‘jumma-e-mawaj’ which aimed at developing social, intellectual and economic life of the people. Various newspapers were published from the state indicating the extent of nationalist influence. Papers like Hyderabad Telegraph, Deccan Standard, Muslim-e-India, Safa, etc. propagated nationalism. Many of them supported the nationalist cause.

The missionaries like Rev. Gardiner of the Chaderghat Methodist Episcopal church supported the Congress. This Congress had gained roots in Hyderabad and served as a factor in awakening the people on the questions of independence, development and forms of the Government with representative institutions.

In the year 1892 Arya Samaj was established in Hyderabad. Aya Samaj served as a training ground for workers in constructive activities and helped to raise public opinion and build socio-religious awareness. It has credited many leaders to the nationalist movement in Hyderabad.

Feudal system of the state

The Nizams were initially provincial governors of the Moghul emperors. They ruled with the help of hereditary jagirdars and subordinate kings. Jagirdars were given control of dozens and even hundreds of villages which they ruled as they pleased. The rest of the kingdom was ruled directly by the Nizams with the help of ‘donors’ about whom you read in an earlier chapter.

The Nizams wanted to retain the old system in which the king and his nobles controlled all resources and ruled as they willed. They did not allow any democratic system like local bodies or legislatures. The Nizams opposed the Congress led nationalist movement and passed several ‘firmans’ or royal orders curtailing political activity in the state. They had a network of police and spies who kept a close watch on people.

Language and Religion

The Nizam rulers of Hyderabad state were Muslims who spoke Duscani Urdu. However, the majority of the people of the state were Hindus who spoke Telugu, Kannada and Marathi. Urdu was the official language and more than 90% of all official officials were Muslims. Urdu was the medium of instruction from primary school to the university. Even technical text books were translated and made available in Urdu.

The Nizams were slow in setting up schools in their kingdom. Many jagirdars did not even allow setting up of schools in their areas. The Nizams were also suspicious of private schools that they would become centres for propagation of anti-Nizam ideas. They actually discouraged the setting up of private Telugu medium schools and did not allow those students to join Osmania University. As a result even by 1914 only 9.3% people of the state were literate (only 4.3% women were literate). Contrast other princely states like Travancore had 47.7% literacy rate, Baroda had 23% and Mysore had 12.2%.

Do you think the problems faced by the people of Hyderabad state were in some ways different from those faced by living in British ruled states?

Was there any difference between the attitude of the British and the Nizams when it came to democracy?

Andhra Jana Sangham

In the early 20th century a large number of books in Telugu were printed in the Andhra region and libraries had been set up in towns and villages. In 1901 Sri Krishnadevaraya Andhra Bhasha Nilayam was established in Hyderabad by Komaraju Lakshmana Rao along with Nayani Venkataramanarao and Ravikhetu Ranga Rao, which continues to this day. However, Telugu remained discriminated in the Hyderabad state. In 1921 in a meeting in Viveka Vidyasagar College in Hyderabad a person was insulted for bringing a resolution in Telugu rather than in English or Urdu. Telugu speaking people felt greatly offended by this incident and were motivated to fight for the rightful place of Telugu.

In 1924 Madapati Hanumanta Rao and others formed the Andhra Jana Sangham to establish libraries and reading rooms, encourage students and scholars and collect Telugu manuscripts and promote Telugu literature. They published small booklets and held meetings in the villages to set up libraries. Some of these booklets spoke of the problems faced by small traders, peasants, labourers and other poor people. They also set up over 4,000 schools many of which had to be closed down due to the opposition of the government. Nevertheless the movement grew in momentum as more and more people - women, students, singers etc. participated in it.

What are the languages spoken in your area?

What is the medium of teaching in schools and colleges today in our state?

Do you think all teaching should be done in one’s mother tongue?

Why do you think it is important to publish books in mother tongues?

Andhra Maha Sabha and the Library Movement

The leaders of various sections decided to unite into one large organisation and thus Andhra Maha Sabha (AMS) was formed in 1930. Among its founders were Madapati Hanumanta Rao, Ravi Narayana Reddy, etc. Its initial objectives were to improve educational facilities. They submitted prayers and requests to the government seeking the establishment of schools and redressing grievances of the people. In its annual conference in 1935 the
following demands were identified:

1. Compulsory primary education should be implemented.
2. Mother tongue (Telugu) should be the medium of instruction.
3. The legitimate rights of the people in Jages should be protected.
4. Child marriages should be discouraged.
5. Local self Government should be introduced.
6. Untouchability should be eradicated and the untouchables should be given due place in the society.

You can see that they combined both educational and social reform objectives. The AMS activities spread rapidly all over Telangana and libraries and cultural centres were established in even remote villages. Peasants and labourers were influenced to them to learn to read, listen to newspaper, discuss current topics, and also their own problems with the Nizam government and dora.

Night classes and discussions were held in these centres. People read books by social reformers like Veerasaivas and nationalists like Gandhi, Nehru etc. They also wrote new books on local problems. As Editor of the Golconda Patrika, Suravaram Pratapsreedey inspired nationalistic fervour amongst the people. Kalluri Narayana Rao, Dasarathi Krishnamacharya, Dasarathi Ramacharya are some of the literary luminaries who fought for the freedom of Hyderabad State.

As more and more people joined the movement they began to expect that their issues would be taken up by the AMS along with education. The Nizam government subscribed these centres to a lot of harassment as they were becoming centres of new radical thinking. By 1940 many communists had joined the AMS and they insisted on taking up other demands of the rural people like end to vetti, land reforms, oppression by dora etc. Some of the old leaders of the AMS disagreed and wanted it to continue as an educational and literary forum. Soon the radical elements gained leadership and a new movement of the peasants started.

The Telangana Sanghams

The Indian National Congress only functioned in the British India and did not function directly in the princely states. However the common people faced more oppression and injustice in these princely states and they wanted to join the larger freedom movement of India. In such states the nationalistic forces came together to fight for democratic rights, reforms, representative government etc. This happened in Hyderabad State.

In 1938, seeing the rising tide of nationalism in Hyderabad, the Nizam banned the singing of ‘Vandematram’ the popular nationalist song. This caused a mass reaction and strikes of schools and colleges took part in agitations singing that song. The Nizam responded by closing down the colleges forcing many students to go to other states to continue their studies.

Enthused by the response of the youth of the state, the Nationalists of Hyderabad, who were sympathetic to the Congress movement in the country had set up the Hyderabadd State Congress in 1938. Its prominent leader was Swami Ramakandhra Theertha. Several young leaders like B. Ramakrishna Rao, Jamalapuram Kesavarao, K. V. Ranga Reddy, J. V. Narasimha Rao were top leaders of the movement. Young Congress leaders like Dr. M. Chenna Reddy later became Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh and P.V. Narasimha Rao became Prime Minister of India. The State Congress demanded that fundamental rights should be conferred upon the people. They wanted the circulars restricting the freedom of speech, association, press, religious processes, etc. be cancelled immediately. They also demanded that the laws for the state be made by elected representatives and not the Nizam.

In 1942 they started satyagraha in tune with the national Quit India movement. It was banned and its leaders arrested. In 1946 when the independence of India was imminent, the Hyderabad State Congress began a campaign for merger of Hyderabad state with the Republic of India to put an end to the rule of the Nizam.

The movement was transformed in 1947-48 into a broad anti-Nizam and anti-feudal struggle under the leadership of the Communist Party of India.

The peasants started. In retaliation the zamindars fired upon a demonstration of peasants in Kadwendi village and killed Dodd Komarai in July 1946. This incident sparked off the famous Telangana Armed Struggle. Sanghams were set up in village after village and processions were taken out singing songs of Dodd Komarayya. The movement they began to expect that the pitch of the struggle would rise and the zamindars would find out that the peasants were not so innocent as they were thought to be.

The movement spread across the state. It was joined by people from all walks of life, from teachers and engineers to labourers and cultivators. The movement gained momentum and the zamindars were forced to the wall.

When the Government of India decided to end this movement the zamindars decided to sabotage it. They tried to violently suppress the movement. The Nizam did not intervene and just watched the situation. In 1948 the independent Indian government took action and merged Hyderabad with India. Telangana gained a measure of freedom after the merger to end land reforms and protect the peasants from the dora. However, it was superseded by the Indian armed forces and it gradually declined by 1950.

The  Telangana Armed Struggle

Joining the movement in Hyderabad, the Communists established Sanghams. In retaliation the zamindars fired upon a demonstration of peasants in Kadwendi village and killed Dodd Komarai in July 1946. This incident sparked off the famous Telangana Armed Struggle. Sanghams were set up in village after village and processions were taken out singing songs of Dodd Komarayya. The movement they began to expect that the pitch of the struggle would rise and the zamindars would find out that the peasants were not so innocent as they were thought to be.

The movement spread across the state. It was joined by people from all walks of life, from teachers and engineers to labourers and cultivators. The movement gained momentum and the zamindars were forced to the wall.

When the Government of India decided to end this movement the zamindars decided to sabotage it. They tried to violently suppress the movement. The Nizam did not intervene and just watched the situation. In 1948 the independent Indian government took action and merged Hyderabad with India. Telangana gained a measure of freedom after the merger to end land reforms and protect the peasants from the dora. However, it was superseded by the Indian armed forces and it gradually declined by 1950.

The movement was transformed in 1947-48 into a broad anti-Nizam and anti-feudal struggle under the leadership of the Communist Party of India.

The peasants started. In retaliation the zamindars fired upon a demonstration of peasants in Kadwendi village and killed Dodd Komarai in July 1946. This incident sparked off the famous Telangana Armed Struggle. Sanghams were set up in village after village and processions were taken out singing songs of Dodd Komarayya. The movement they began to expect that the pitch of the struggle would rise and the zamindars would find out that the peasants were not so innocent as they were thought to be.

The movement spread across the state. It was joined by people from all walks of life, from teachers and engineers to labourers and cultivators. The movement gained momentum and the zamindars were forced to the wall.

When the Government of India decided to end this movement the zamindars decided to sabotage it. They tried to violently suppress the movement. The Nizam did not intervene and just watched the situation. In 1948 the independent Indian government took action and merged Hyderabad with India. Telangana gained a measure of freedom after the merger to end land reforms and protect the peasants from the dora. However, it was superseded by the Indian armed forces and it gradually declined by 1950.

The movement was transformed in 1947-48 into a broad anti-Nizam and anti-feudal struggle under the leadership of the Communist Party of India.

The peasants started. In retaliation the zamindars fired upon a demonstration of peasants in Kadwendi village and killed Dodd Komarai in July 1946. This incident sparked off the famous Telangana Armed Struggle. Sanghams were set up in village after village and processions were taken out singing songs of Dodd Komarayya. The movement they began to expect that the pitch of the struggle would rise and the zamindars would find out that the peasants were not so innocent as they were thought to be.

The movement spread across the state. It was joined by people from all walks of life, from teachers and engineers to labourers and cultivators. The movement gained momentum and the zamindars were forced to the wall.

When the Government of India decided to end this movement the zamindars decided to sabotage it. They tried to violently suppress the movement. The Nizam did not intervene and just watched the situation. In 1948 the independent Indian government took action and merged Hyderabad with India. Telangana gained a measure of freedom after the merger to end land reforms and protect the peasants from the dora. However, it was superseded by the Indian armed forces and it gradually declined by 1950.

The movement was transformed in 1947-48 into a broad anti-Nizam and anti-feudal struggle under the leadership of the Communist Party of India.

The peasants started. In retaliation the zamindars fired upon a demonstration of peasants in Kadwendi village and killed Dodd Komarai in July 1946. This incident sparked off the famous Telangana Armed Struggle. Sanghams were set up in village after village and processions were taken out singing songs of Dodd Komarayya. The movement they began to expect that the pitch of the struggle would rise and the zamindars would find out that the peasants were not so innocent as they were thought to be.

The movement spread across the state. It was joined by people from all walks of life, from teachers and engineers to labourers and cultivators. The movement gained momentum and the zamindars were forced to the wall.

When the Government of India decided to end this movement the zamindars decided to sabotage it. They tried to violently suppress the movement. The Nizam did not intervene and just watched the situation. In 1948 the independent Indian government took action and merged Hyderabad with India. Telangana gained a measure of freedom after the merger to end land reforms and protect the peasants from the dora. However, it was superseded by the Indian armed forces and it gradually declined by 1950.

The movement was transformed in 1947-48 into a broad anti-Nizam and anti-feudal struggle under the leadership of the Communist Party of India.

The peasants started. In retaliation the zamindars fired upon a demonstration of peasants in Kadwendi village and killed Dodd Komarai in July 1946. This incident sparked off the famous Telangana Armed Struggle. Sanghams were set up in village after village and processions were taken out singing songs of Dodd Komarayya. The movement they began to expect that the pitch of the struggle would rise and the zamindars would find out that the peasants were not so innocent as they were thought to be.

The movement spread across the state. It was joined by people from all walks of life, from teachers and engineers to labourers and cultivators. The movement gained momentum and the zamindars were forced to the wall.

When the Government of India decided to end this movement the zamindars decided to sabotage it. They tried to violently suppress the movement. The Nizam did not intervene and just watched the situation. In 1948 the independent Indian government took action and merged Hyderabad with India. Telangana gained a measure of freedom after the merger to end land reforms and protect the peasants from the dora. However, it was superseded by the Indian armed forces and it gradually declined by 1950.
Women in the Telangana Struggle

Women suffered most under the rule of Nizams and doras. They were constantly harassed. They not only had to work for the landlords but also to serve the visiting officials. Many women were made slaves of the landlords. Such women attended the night schools of Andhra Maha Sabha and decided to join the Sanghams and the Communist Party. Some of them took arms and fought the Razakars, some of them sang songs and inspired people, some of them acted as doctors and nurses. But they had to make supreme sacrifices for the sake of the movement. Read below an interview given by one such woman:

“My name is Kamalamma. I come from the village in Manukota Taluqa. Ours was a bonded labour family. My mother was a slave in the house of some landlords. My father died when I was fifteen. The Telangana struggle had started then. The dorasani wanted to send my sister as a slave to one of her daughters. The dorasani used to beat my husband. That was the life of a bonded labourer, graze buffaloes, collect dung, one had to do everything. They even used him as a goonda. Unable to bear the trouble in these landlords’ houses we came into the struggle...

First my brother became a squad commander. My husband and I also joined the Communist Party. My work was in the cultural squad. My voice was good; I used to sing songs, and travel to several places. We worked in the forest and helped the Koya tribal women. I was also in a hospital centre and learned first aid and to give injections. Then my son was born in the forest. The comrades told me, ‘The boy will cry and all of us will get caught because of this child. You give him away to someone or leave him somewhere…’ But no one would take him. I walked for two days and left him with a coal miner. After that neither my body, nor my mind stayed in my control. There was one torrent of tears from eyes to the earth…’

Why do you think the Nizam was allowed to retain power even after the merger?

Why do you think the Nizam agreed to pass the firmanas abolishing the feudal system?

Why do you think the Nizam’s rule ended on 26 January 1950?

Key words

1. Firmanas 2. Vetti 3. Feudal System

Improve your learning

1. What aspects of the Nizam rule would you consider to be ‘undemocratic’?
2. Why do you think the literacy rate in Hyderabad state was lower than other princely states?
3. Describe the activities of the Andhra Maha Sabha for the promotion of education.
4. What were the demands of the Hyderabad state Congress and how many of them were fulfilled after 1948?
5. Do you think the Telangana Armed struggle helped to end the rule of the Nizam? Give your reasons.
6. Read the paragraphs under the heading ‘Feudal System of the State’ and answer the following: Do you support the feudal system of the Nizams? Why?
7. Many movements were led against the rulers in the past. Do you find any movements taken up nowadays? If yes, what are they?