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978-1-107-09119-1 - Hyderabad, British India, and the World: Muslim Networks
and Minor Sovereignty, c. 1850–1950

Eric Lewis Beverley

Excerpt

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Introduction: fragmenting sovereignty

As we settle into the twenty-first century it remains very difficult to conceive of political alternatives to either dominant global imperial formations or territorially bounded and autonomous states. All places imaginable can either be plotted on the map as part of one or the other of these characteristic modern geopolitical forms or envisioned in an evolutionary trajectory between subordination and independence. Viewed from the peripheries of dominant imperial or national centers, however, states appear as works in progress, and their frontiers and externalities as sites of alternative political experimentation.

This book examines politics and society in the South Asian state of Hyderabad, and its capital city of the same name, from the late nineteenth through the mid-twentieth centuries. The state, under the Āṣaf Jāh dynasty, whose Muslim rulers were known as the Nizāms of Hyderabad, was formally sovereign and politically autonomous. For the duration of its existence, however, Hyderabad was under pressure from the dominant British colonial authority in the region, which comprised the largest component of the most powerful empire during an era of modern imperialism. Indeed, Hyderabad was surrounded on all sides by territories of the Raj and bound by treaties with the neighboring empire that limited Asaf Jāh power in certain areas (military, diplomatic).¹ Nevertheless, as this book argues, Hyderabad's sovereignty was no mere legal nicety, and it was crucial in providing scope and context for developments in the state. Administrators and intellectuals were engaged in a productive dialogue with histories of regional Muslim rule or political ideas and practices current elsewhere in the world, often creatively combining these two sources of authority. The state's formal autonomy – and institutional difference from the surrounding colonial empire – was also decisive in shaping the social worlds and lived spaces of its populations.

¹ I use 'Raj' as shorthand for the government of British India and its constituent units (Bombay or Madras Presidency, Central Provinces, and so forth). This is not to deny the considerable internal fissures between and within colonial administrative units.

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This introduction elaborates some of the core concepts and contexts that frame the book, both global (the fragmentation of sovereignty in modern imperialism) and particular to Hyderabad (modernist patrimonialist statecraft and bureaucrat-intellectuals as critical figures). It then describes methodological challenges and the book's approach, the sources of the study, and the different sections and chapters of the book.

Sovereignty and statecraft in an age of empire

The legacies of political difference in Hyderabad are often obscured by subsequent political developments and related trends in historical thinking. In focusing on Asaf Jah Hyderabad, this book examines a state that no longer exists as a sovereign political entity. The stories that are told about the past and present of state sovereignty in South Asia make it difficult to account for polities such as Hyderabad. Narratives of the unitary, highly centralized postcolonial Indian nation-state, and the legacy of forceful British colonial dominance in the region, combine to portray competing political entities as ephemeral or insignificant. Accordingly, dominant conceptual frameworks tend to fix the colonial state, anti-colonial nationalism, or postcolonial nation-states as the sole modes of sovereignty worth taking seriously. This study, on the contrary, contends that there is much to be learned – about the history of the last few centuries, and the present – by taking seriously developments in polities at lower levels in hierarchies of global political sovereignty.

I use the term 'sovereignty' here in a strictly political sense: supreme and autonomous political authority of a state over a particular territory or place.² While Hyderabadi performance of sovereignty was important in the making of the modern South Asian political landscape, the state was not an exception. Rather, the view from Hyderabad helps to reveal the contours of the fragmented political scene in South Asia and worldwide. The nascent formulation of state sovereignty within international law served as a resource to empower states such as Hyderabad to act as autonomous and discrete fragments, even as they existed on lower rungs of the global hierarchy of states. Hyderabad's dynamism through the nineteenth century and until decolonization in the region illuminates

² The presumed territorial moorings of political sovereignty, and the related question of autonomy, are two thorny problems that I will address throughout this study. On the historical emergence and contextual production of sovereignty and related concepts see Kathleen Davis, *Periodization and Sovereignty: How Ideas of Feudalism and Secularization Govern the Politics of Time* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008). On the status of Hyderabad and other similar polities as sovereign, see Chapter 3 below.

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a broader condition: the enduring fragmentation of sovereignty across imperial terrain.

The focus here on the presence of minor sovereignties in an imperialized world should not be taken as an indication of the weakness of modern colonialism. European empires deliberately and knowingly deployed economic and military coercion, and the justificatory rhetoric of rule by law and order they employed hardly veiled the regular suspension or disregard of legal frameworks. As decades of scholarship have shown convincingly, the Raj (and British and other empires more broadly) asserted dominance over expansive lands in a forceful, often violent and extra-legal, fashion.³ While fully registering the coercive nature of imperial dominance, this book approaches empire from the distinct political terrains visible in frontier zones, and manifest beyond its borders.

Even at the apex of empire's territorial spread in the early twentieth century, British imperial efforts to expand and homogenize political authority remained incomplete. Colonial language cast the entire space of the South Asia subcontinent as a consolidated imperial terrain, which integrated areas of formal 'direct' rule and informal 'indirect' imperialism.⁴ Rhetorics of cohesive empire obscure a picture in which sovereignty was divided among varied imperial entities, formally autonomous states (such as Hyderabad), political entrepreneurs in frontier zones, and emerging sovereign domains in colonial space and institutions (municipalities, provincial administrations). All of these sites of sovereign assertion were loci of widely varied political improvisations informed by a range of exemplary models.

Developments in Hyderabad, because it was not a colonial territory, underscore the possibility of political difference during the height of global imperial power. As such, the view from Hyderabad puts in stark relief a broader trend of political improvisation and experimentation informed by regional and local historical precedents, other Muslim states, and examples from Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Americas. There were comparable dynamics of connectivity and political experimentation in colonized space, albeit often on smaller scales, and frequently bundled with nationalist positions. Similar possibilities were inherent in many

³ On violence and coercion see the essays collected in Ranajit Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997). On extra-legality see Nasser Hussain, *The Jurisprudence of Emergency: Colonialism and the Rule of Law* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003).

⁴ In colonial discourse and much subsequent historical scholarship, Hyderabad, like other South Asian states that were not formally colonized, was dubbed, diminutively, a 'Princely State.' Except in referring to sources that invoke the term I do not use the phrase here, but rather describe Hyderabad and similar polities as sub-imperial, non-colonial, or minor states.

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other South Asian sub-imperial states, and particularly the larger among them, and this book develops more detailed consideration of affinities in several instances.⁵ These parallels indicate that Hyderabad was not an exceptional case in the South Asian political landscape, though particular dynamics in effect there make it problematic to make detailed claims about all sub-imperial states in the subcontinent. Leaving aside the question of to what degree it was exceptional or typical within South Asia, this book is concerned with discussing Hyderabad as a window on and entity within a broader global context of state sovereignty during the period in question.

Rather than emphasizing comparisons with other South Asian sub-imperial states or British India, this book deliberately foregrounds comparisons and connections between Hyderabad and places beyond the subcontinent. This commitment to transnational analysis is intended to participate in and initiate discussions that bring places in South Asia, such as Hyderabad, other areas dominated by the British and other European empires, and places ostensibly outside the imperial web into a single analytical framework. In doing so I seek to demonstrate that Hyderabad, while particular in terms of scale and circuits of connections, is not exceptional in relation to the South Asian or global field.

Viewing Hyderabad in comparison and connection to other places in the world, I argue that state sovereignty (whether imperial or national) remained supple and fluid during the high point of European global imperialism. The ostensibly modal form of the territorial nation-state emerged as the core unit of modern political sovereignty only haltingly and unevenly in Europe itself.⁶ The picture is even more complex when viewed from places subjected to colonial and imperial domination, such as Asia and Africa. There, European (and, later, North American) polities asserted political dominance. In many cases they seized territories and fabricated or extracted sovereign power. In other instances, however, they recognized, manipulated, or created sovereign entities they endeavored to control, often quite successfully, through enacting unequal treaties.

⁵ Chapter 3 develops an extended discussion of Hyderabad and other sub-imperial states in colonial discourse. Parallels with such sub-imperial states as Kashmir, Mysore, Baroda, Travancore, Kalat, and Bhopal are noted in Chapters 2, 4, 6, and 7. The book's conclusion discusses the differential postcolonial careers of sub-imperial sovereigns in India and Pakistan.

⁶ Derek Croxton, "The Peace of Westphalia of 1648 and the Origins of Sovereignty," *International History Review* 21.3 (1999): 569–91; Wolfgang Knöbl, "State Building in Western Europe and the Americas in the Long Nineteenth Century: Some Preliminary Considerations," in *State and Nation Making in Latin America and Spain: Republics of the Possible*, ed. Miguel Angel Centeno and Agustín Ferraro (Cambridge University Press, 2013), 56–75.

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These minor states – sovereign but subordinated – occupied a vast legal gray area in which they were neither colonial territories nor full-fledged states with complete self-determination. A variety of states worldwide – Siam, Iran, the Ottoman Empire – were neither formally under colonial rule nor sovereign in the sense of possessing complete autonomy throughout their domains. Like many other ‘minor’ polities, Hyderabad was a key node in the circulation of a wide variety of people with diverse relationships to empire.

Conceptual and historical connections between Hyderabad and other places in the world are difficult to see when viewing South Asia’s and Hyderabad’s history retrospectively through the context of subsequent history and the nation-state form. The rise of nationalism in South Asia, as in other locations, generated, coordinated, and brought into conversation diverse and often conflicting political visions, some mediated through eclectic global connections.⁷ Owing to the centrifugal dynamics of the nation-state form as a political unit, however, South Asian nationalist thought ultimately inscribed the boundaries of the subcontinent itself as its political horizons. Further, the widespread popular and state violence that marked Hyderabad’s brief post-1947 independence, and 1948 integration into postcolonial India, solidified the state’s provincialization within a subcontinental political formation, and also had implications for the retrospective image of Muslim rule there.⁸

The late colonial and early postcolonial crisis in Hyderabad hinged upon tensions regarding the relation between religious community membership and political authority. After the formation of postcolonial India and Pakistan, a militia organized by the Majlis-i Ittihad al-Muslimin (MIM, a Muslim political organization in Hyderabad) claiming to represent the Asaf Jah state took control of Hyderabad, ostensibly to preserve the state for the purpose of Muslim political dominance in the region. This occurred in a context where militant Hindu majoritarian interests both from within Hyderabad and beyond its borders were attempting to assert control in the state. The 1948 Indian military blockade and

⁷ For a consideration of Hyderabad’s critical role in negotiating the terms of late colonial nationalism in British India and an anticipated postcolonial nation-state see Kavita Saraswathi Datla, *The Language of Secular Islam: Urdu Nationalism and Colonial India* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2013). While its orientation is quite different, Datla’s account of the potential Hyderabad’s alterity and global connections had for rethinking South Asian nationalist visions of political modernity are parallel and complementary to the account of Hyderabad’s alterity and its potential for moving beyond colonial and territorial nationalist political visions presented here.

⁸ On Hyderabad’s integration see Sunil Purushotham, “Internal Violence: The ‘Police Action’ in Hyderabad,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 57.2 (forthcoming [2015]). The account in the subsequent paragraph draws in part from this source.

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subsequent invasion of Hyderabad resulted in both widespread anti-Muslim violence and a dismantling of much of the Asaf Jah central political structure and disemployment of its participants. The MIM's rhetoric, and the subsequent acrimony and violence of the Hindu majoritarian and Indian official response, has left in place a historical image of Asaf Jah rule as oppressive Muslim political dominance. This impression, together with the provincializing tendencies of the nation-state form, obscure the global circuits and political experimentation that Hyderabad's Muslim stateness in previous decades facilitated.⁹

Hyderabad was, crucially, ruled by a Muslim dynasty historically loyal to the Raj in an era of pronounced imperial anxiety about the potential for transregional Muslim political engagement. This led the British to countenance not only Hyderabad's internal autonomy but also its significant international networks. Ideas of universal solidarity between Muslim states provided one key idiom of global political community for Hyderabad, and channeled many connections between intellectuals, state officials, and the rest of the world. Related political experiments were aimed at 'modernizing' institutions and spaces in the state, but were shaped by both existing 'patrimonial' state structures and political rhetorical frameworks in place in Hyderabad.

Patrimonial modernity

In describing the experimentation and improvisation that shaped Hyderabad's political scene between 1850 and 1950, this study uses *patrimonialism* and *modernity* to describe discourse and practice in the state. These two concepts are often conceived as mutually exclusive stages in developmental teleologies in political and scholarly discourse alike. In Hyderabad, state officials and advocates intermingled the two political languages in describing, legitimizing, and disseminating to domestic and global audiences the content of official projects.

As a type of political rhetoric, patrimonialism entails personalized authority premised on relationships of reciprocity between ruler and ruled. Such ideas had a lengthy history in Hyderabad, linked to the long-standing dynastic political structure of the state and established ethical frameworks in Indo-Muslim political discourse. Patrimonialist rhetoric, however, also resonated with languages of statecraft in proximate, yet divergent, contexts in modern South Asia and elsewhere.

Patrimonialism has usually been cast as part of an evolutionary transition between forms of authority. As such, patrimonialism (personalized

⁹ The term 'stateness' here indicates the contingency and scalability of state sovereignty, as opposed to 'statehood', which casts sovereignty as a zero-sum game. See J. P. Nettl, "The State as a Conceptual Variable," *World Politics* 20.4 (1968): 559–92.

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authority) is viewed as an earlier stage in an inevitable transition to bureaucratic (depersonalized, normative) authority. Work on South Asia and other colonized places has largely echoed this teleological view. As such, patrimonialism is used as a sociological concept to describe pre-modern state forms or ostensibly retrograde political forms in non-colonial states outside Europe.¹⁰ The early modern Mughal state, for example, has been seen as a “patrimonial-bureaucratic empire” that combined “pre-modern” with “modern” modes of authority, and declined with the wane of the latter.¹¹ A key work by Margrit Pernau has extended this framework to suggest that the first half of the twentieth century in Hyderabad witnessed the “intermingling” of patrimonialism (loyalty of officials to the ruler) with bureaucratized forms of political legitimization. Pernau described this as a “partial” transition from authority of “men of culture” within the state to that of “men of technical knowledge,” and emphasized enduring mutual dependence between these groups.¹² Such ‘transition narratives’ about its inevitable decline or uncanny persistence treat patrimonialism as a sociological category with temporal, teleological implications.¹³ My contention here is that patrimonialism as a mode of political rhetoric had important stakes for legitimization of a wide variety of political projects and states.¹⁴ In Hyderabad patrimonialism was frequently blended with languages of technocratic, rationalist, or modernist political change. Such combinations do not necessarily indicate internal contradiction or demonstrate structural tension.

Recent scholarship on Africa has theorized patrimonialism as a mode of political authority that potentially applies to many different state forms.¹⁵ Beginning by decoupling modes of legitimization from types of

¹⁰ For a key use of the term for South Asia see Stephen P. Blake, “The Patrimonial-Bureaucratic Empire of the Mughals,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 39.1 (1979): 77–94. On pre-modern patrimonialism elsewhere see Karen Barkey, *Bandits and Bureaucrats: The Ottoman Route to State Centralization* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 9–17, *inter alia*. For patrimonialism and South Asian sub-imperial states see Margrit Pernau, *The Passing of Patrimonialism: Politics and Political Culture in Hyderabad, 1911–1948* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2000); Susanne H. Rudolph, Lloyd I. Rudolph, and Mohan Singh, “A Bureaucratic Lineage in Princely India: Elite Formation and Conflict in a Patrimonial System,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 34.3 (1975): 717–53.

¹¹ Blake, “Patrimonial-Bureaucratic Empire.”

¹² Pernau, *Passing of Patrimonialism*, 59, 271, 321, 358.

¹³ On the transition narrative as a historiographical entity see Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton University Press, 2000), 30–37.

¹⁴ For a critique of the presumed evolutionary relationship between patrimonial and bureaucratic state forms, and an argument that the latter can often be components of effective states, see Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne H. Rudolph, “Authority and Power in Bureaucratic and Patrimonial Administration: A Revisionist Interpretation of Weber on Bureaucracy,” *World Politics* 31.2 (1979): 195–227.

¹⁵ Anne Pitcher, Mary H. Moran, and Michael Johnston, “Rethinking Patrimonialism and Neopatrimonialism in Africa,” *African Studies Review* 52.1 (2009): 125–56.

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regime, scholars argue that patrimonialism as a mode of legitimization is “remarkably adaptable” to numerous types of regimes ranging from authoritarianism to liberal democratic. Emphasizing the typological, rather than teleological, character of the designation allows for a clear elaboration of the concept itself: patrimonialism is a political relationship centered on a mutual understanding of reciprocity between ruler and ruled, with expectations of “voluntary compliance” by the subordinated and accountability by leaders.¹⁶

In Hyderabad, ostensibly progressive and benevolent authoritarian or autocratic state authority defined a context for patrimonial legitimization. As in several other sub-imperial states, officials in Hyderabad were largely insulated from internal political opposition and British colonial intervention. The patrimonial rhetorical framework of Hyderabad – ruler as ultimate source of legitimate authority obliged to see to the needs of subjects – was conducive to a variety of progressive modernization projects ranging from legal and revenue reforms, to state welfare for famine sufferers or marginalized communities, to urban and economic planning. The patrimonial, ethical, and explicitly modernizing character of state practice in Hyderabad was institutionally enacted and globally disseminated by a particular type of official figure that emerged in Hyderabad and worldwide during the modern period.

Hyderabadī bureaucrat-intellectuals as Deccanī *letrados*

The bureaucrat-intellectual – characterized by knowledge of putatively modern statecraft techniques, awareness of global trends, political savvy and connections, and finely honed polyglot rhetorical skills – was a key social and political actor in Hyderabad since mid-nineteenth-century political reforms in the state. These Deccanī *letrados*¹⁷ were critical in yoking Hyderabad’s patrimonial loyalty networks – the framework of the state’s political structure – into changing and revived global circuits, especially between Muslim states. Officials in longstanding

¹⁶ Ibid., 127, 144.

¹⁷ Deccanī, as a geographical term, refers to the Deccan Plateau in the center of the South Asia subcontinent. Hyderabad State spanned the eastern Deccan between the eighteenth and mid-twentieth centuries (this region is now divided between Indian provincial states, including Telangana, and parts of Maharashtra and Karnataka). Culturally, Deccanī (or Dakkanī, Dakhnī) refers specifically to linguistic (especially the southern variety of Urdu–Hindi) or culinary practices of the region that comprised the erstwhile Hyderabad State. *Letrado* is a Spanish term referring as a noun or adjective to one who is, or the state of being, learned or educated (literally, ‘lettered’).

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institutions (judiciary, police, revenue, and education administrators; *dīvāns* or prime ministers) and newer disciplines (engineering, urban and economic planning, transportation) worked to harmonize modernist administrative projects within an ethical patrimonialist framework of reciprocity between ruler and populace and obligatory official benevolence to state subjects.

The dynamic roles of bureaucrat-intellectuals in Hyderabad during the putative era of modernization provide key material for rethinking frameworks for conceiving political change in modern South Asia. Scholarship on the colonial period, in considering engagements between South Asian ‘native informants’ and British Raj officials, has stressed the increasing prominence of racialized European dominance in South Asian governance. Such arguments track the openness of imperial racial hierarchies and fluidity of social boundaries up to the second quarter of the nineteenth century, followed by the effective eclipse of non-British political agency until nationalism and independence.¹⁸ According to this narrative, even if governance ideas were mined from native informant discourse and hammered into shape in dialogue with them, at the stage of their compilation and articulation of political systems, colonial officers were without question at the helm.

Recent work by Bhavani Raman identifies the key role played by South Asian scribes, as repositories of embodied knowledge, in the emergence of a political culture premised on the production of documents.¹⁹ Her consideration of colonial consolidation from the perspective of the early colonial administrative office (*kaccheri* or *cutcherry*) casts the process of state-making as indelibly local. Rethinking the making of the Raj from the bottom up through textual and oral administration, and the focus on an emergent technology of documentary practice, shifts attention away from stymied debates about South Asian versus British policy agency. Examining governance practice in Hyderabad through the state’s bureaucrat-intellectuals provides a means to extend this approach from the locality of the administrative office to the autonomous South Asian polity. Here, state intellectuals could function largely independent of racialized frameworks within colonial bureaucracies by drawing on global flows of administrative ideas. Conceptualizations of the political roles of intellectuals in other imperial contexts also help frame this discussion about political change in Hyderabad.

¹⁸ For an influential version of this argument see Nicholas B. Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton University Press, 2001).

¹⁹ Bhavani Raman, *Document Raj: Writing and Scribes in Early Colonial South India* (University of Chicago Press, 2012).

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Describing the relationship between literate culture and state power in colonial and postcolonial Latin America, Uruguayan scholar Angel Rama identified *letrados* as “‘lettered’ functionaries . . . involved in transmitting and responding to imperial directives” during the consolidation of Latin American colonial rule.²⁰ These figures served as cultural mediators, formulating and maintaining the “cultural dimension of the colonial power structure,” meeting the “administrative requirements of the vast colonial enterprise,” and “evangelizing and overseeing the transculturation of an indigenous population numbering in the millions.”²¹ For Rama, rather than functioning as “mere executors of orders issuing from the institutions that employ them,” *letrados* were “intellectual producers” who elaborated ideological messages and designed cultural models.²²

The “fluid and complex relationship between intellectuals and institutions” Rama emphasizes helps frame the state as a work in progress, and situates bureaucrat-intellectuals as critical agents in mediating between and manipulating a range of symbolic idioms. This dynamic continued into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries when *letrados* elaborated and refashioned “the ideals and myths of modernization” in Latin American contexts.²³ Similar figures in Hyderabad during this period – Deccani *letrados*, one might say – served to mediate between established idioms. These ranged from political languages linked to Muslim rule in the Deccan region and South Asia as a whole to broader cosmopolitan lexicons such as Persianate Muslim statecraft and, indeed, putatively global ideologies of modernity. Hyderabadī bureaucrat-intellectuals and their writings elaborate the complex mediations between the diverse political idioms and places encountered in the study, and recur frequently as authorizing state agents in official archival and documentary records.

Transnational approach, fragmented sources

This book is not a conventional monograph, but an attempt to examine several linked themes of increasing global relevance – the changing international regime of state sovereignty, transnational political thought, Muslim modernist statecraft, legal jurisdictions and the social possibilities they produce, expanding cities and urbanist projects – through one empirical context located on the borderlands of empire. The fragmented character of political sovereignty the book describes is mirrored by the

²⁰ Angel Rama, *The Lettered City*, trans. John C. Chasteen (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996 [Spanish 1984]), 18.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 17, 19. ²² *Ibid.*, 22, emphasis in original. ²³ *Ibid.*, 52.