

Let the Tragic Past Rest in Peace, Concentrate on Present and Future

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The annual debate over Hyderabad Liberation Day has arrived. First, the facts: (1) The Nizam's Hyderabad State was subject to the British crown alone, (2) on August 15, 1947, the Nizam became supreme ruler of Hyderabad, (3) India violated the Standstill Agreement and invaded in September 1948, (4) despite the military occupation, the Nizam continued as Head of State till January 1, 1950, when he adopted the Constitution of India.

First, historically and all over the world - in time and space - countries are ruled by minorities - either persons, families, feudal estates, parliaments, political parties, armies - by what we can call the "ruling elite".

Second, the real question is what are the functions of the ruling elite? The main functions of the ruling elite is to protect and control the ruled. The objective is to maintain peace (as defined by the rulers) and to permit development (as directed by the rulers). Primarily, of course, the purpose is the perpetuation of the ruling elite and the ruled have very little choice.

Third, what is the nature of the ruling elites? The ruling elite was either alien having captured power by conquest and violence or a "natural" ruling elite with deemed consent or consensus, approved by tradition, religion or election.

Four, what is a "natural" elite. This is largely a group that has the same racial, religious and linguistic characteristics as the majority. Such mutual identification makes ruler and ruled operate on the same platform and on all contention issues some unanimity and mutual support is possible.

In the last 1,100 years, vast areas of India have been ruled by alien elites which were different compared to the majority in terms of race, religion and language. The disconnect between these rulers and ruled was immense and almost impossible to bridge. This resulted in a cold (sometimes hot) war between the two elements. Many times the alien rulers had to maintain their position though use of brute force actual (whenever the majority revolted) or tacit (when tiredness set in).

But all rulers have to make some sort of concessions to the sensitivities of the majority to preserve the peace and maintain their rule. This was not so much a question of goodwill but of practical politics. To retain power, every ruling elite has had to co-opt members from the ruled - persons of quality and competence and having the respect of the masses.

This was especially required for alien ruling elites in order to bridge the apparent disconnect. Thus some elements of those coopted received status, power and wealth. Occasional revolts by elements within the alien ruling elite or conquest by neighboring elites resulted in a change in personnel, which may or may not result in real change for the ruled. Such is the history of governance everywhere - even in Hyderabad and Telangana.

The Muslim conquest of the Kakatiya kingdom in 1324 established a new set of alien rulers from outside the region. First came the Delhi Sultans, then the Bahamani Empire, followed by the Golconda Sultanate, the Mughal Empire and the Nizamate. Only after 628 years, by the General Election of 1952, was the majority able to choose their own rulers.

Hardly had four years passed when linguistic forces more powerful than armies, tore Hyderabad State into three pieces attaching them to other major political formations. Once again the people of Telangana had to put up with an (elected) ruling elite which, though similar in race, religion and language, was deficient in fairness and wanting in good behaviour. Now that long phase has ended and we have a separate State and a popular government which owes no other loyalty other than to the Telangana people.

For the Seemandhra ruling elite and their supporters settled here, this transition though traumatic has been smooth beyond expectations. Despite the past, they have been treated decently by the Telangana people. They have protection under the Constitution, courts and, what's more, through by special legislative provision, by the Governor and the Union of India. Compare that to the dislodgement of earlier ruling elites!

The events of September 1948, according to the Sundarlal Report, saw 27,000 to 40,000 Muslims murdered in the wake of the invasion. The 22,000-strong Hyderabad Army was disbanded, scores of Muslim officials sacked, Muslim landlords were unable and unwilling to go to their villages and jagirs etc. Many Muslim members of the ruling elite migrated to Pakistan.

The events of August 1947 were far worse : a million Hindus and Muslims butchered mercilessly and 13 million Hindu and Muslim refugees, including officials, army personnel, landlords and businessmen, forced to move to another country.

What's more, war in Kashmir broke out between India and Pakistan which still festers on. For India, 15th August is commemorative both of triumph and disaster. Hyderabad escaped that event but its turn came, inevitably, on 17th September 1948.

Winston Churchill wrote in another context : “Such is the bitter taste of worldly power; such are the correctives of history”. Therefore, dear readers , have a heart and shed a tear for those who died and suffered in that August of 1947 and in the September of 1948; and make a wish for peace and forgiveness.

Speak no more of triumphs and defeats, they belong not to you but to the past! Let the tragic past rest in peace, undisturbed and unrepeatd and concentrate your energies on the present and future.....

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