

# Re-cession of Seemandhra to the Nizam: A Historical Vignette

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The States' Peoples, a Congress mouthpiece, stated in October 1940 that while this fabulous offer may be tempting to the British in their distress: "The Andhra Desa is not a football...to be kicked from one goal to another. The proposed transfer by gift or purchase concerns the life and liberties ...of eighteen millions of Andhras. You cannot uproot them in a day and transplant a whole sub-nation on a different soil that is.... barren of democratic springs".

It seems evident that history is much used, misused and abused to serve individual, party political and ideological purposes. It is also an incontrovertible fact that history is written by the victors.

On the Liberation / Conquest / Accession / Annexation / Integration (many words can describe the same thing) of Hyderabad, much has been written about what happened and how it happened. Most of it is perception bearing a tenuous relation to reality.

The reality had to wait for a professional historian to consult the archives in Hyderabad, New Delhi and London and other documents and reveal as much of the real picture as was possible.

The book by the Australian historian, Lucien D Benichou, "From Autocracy to Integration: Political Developments in Hyderabad State (1938-1948)" published by Orient Blackswan, is balanced and well-researched. It is required reading for those interested in the last chapter of Hyderabad State. In the context of the Telangana statehood movement, the attitude of the Majlis -e- Ittihad- ul- Muslimeen (Ittihad) towards Coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema emerges from the book.

The Ittihad was formed in 1929. Its objectives were: "(1) to unite and help the various Islamic sects for the solution of their common problems within the principle of Islam, (2) to protect the economic, social, and educational interest of Muslims and (3) to express loyalty to the land and to the Ruler and to respect the prevalent laws of the Realm." (p.90).

Its young founder, Nawab Bahadur Yar Jung, was sophisticated, eloquent, hot-tempered, dynamic and reckless. He dealt with Nizam VII directly, but also negotiated with M Narsing Rao and others of the Andhra Jana Sangh, which represented Congress and Hindu interests.

In the Hyderabad political drama, the only principal actors were Nizam VII and Bahadur Yar Jung: they tried to use or complement each other. This jugalbandhi continued till Bahadur Yar Jung died suddenly on 25th June 1944. He was only 39 years old but had made his decisive presence felt – for good or bad – in the Hyderabad story.

More important things apart, Ittihad advocated a reversal of history, regarding the Nizam's former possessions. In 1766 and 1778, Nizam II had given the Northern Circars (Coastal Andhra region) to the East India Company for an annual rent of 5 lakhs rupees.

Fifty-five years later, in 1823, when Nizam III needed funds, they were sold outright to the Company for one crore and sixty-six lakh rupees.

Nizam II had also made a deal in 1800 with the Company, giving away the Rayalaseema region (as a result called the Ceded Districts) which he had received as part of his share of Tipu Sultan's territories in 1792-99.

In exchange, the Company agreed to station "a permanent subsidiary force of eight battalions of sepoy and two regiments of cavalry" in Hyderabad State for its protection.

What Bahadur Yar Jung proposed in September 1940 was to reverse these treaties. Hyderabad would buy back the Circars and the Ceded Districts for 40 million pounds outright! He also indicated that the British were agreeable.

He campaigned in South India and spoke in Bandar (Machilipatnam), Madras and Eluru. While local Muslims in the Coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema regions were in favour, Telugu-speaking Hindus were vociferously against this plan.

The whole idea seemed quite plausible since the British Isles were besieged by the Germans and the Luftwaffe (the German air force) was bombing London and other British cities. The German invasion of England was expected any day. The British were also running out of money.

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Of course, for Bahadur Yar Jung and the Nizam it was, then as it had been 150-odd years earlier, a simple land transaction, and the people's wishes did not come into the picture.

Nizam VII had already given massive donations for the British war effort, including the cost of a destroyer (lent by the British to the Royal Australian Navy and called HMAS Nizam).

Additionally, in July 1940 he offered 50,000 pounds from the Hyderabad State exchequer and an unprecedented personal gift of five lakhs of rupees. The Nizam had money and the British needed it!

At the Ittihad's 13th Annual Conference at Jalna on 1st January 1942, Bahadur Yar Jung repeated before 15,000 delegates the Hyderabad offer for the Northern Circars and Ceded Districts.

The Deccan Times (Madras) on 1st February 1942 reported that the British government was "quite amenable to His Exalted Highness' demands" and that a notification confirming it would be issued shortly.

The Hindu (9th February 1942) published the Masulipatnam Journalists Association resolution that: "no portion of the territory in and outside the town of Masulipatnam or forming part of ...the Northern Circars should be given over to ...the Nizam of Hyderabad as he has surrendered his sovereign rights ..by previous historical treaties and declarations." (pp.125-126).

Singapore, Burma and the Andamans had fallen by early 1942 to the Japanese and their aircraft-carriers were roaming unopposed in the Bay of Bengal after Royal Navy suffered heavy losses off Ceylon. In April 1942, Japanese carrier-based bombers attacked Kakinada and Visakhapatnam.

The controversy was finally ended when the British denied the existence of the re-cession plan for Coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema. The affair illustrates the fact that the desire to unify territories has many motives and much depends on who is making the case for it.

What Bahadur Yar Jung proposed could also be seen as an attempt to unify the Telugu people under one government.

But in 1939-42 it was unacceptable to the people of Coastal Andhra and Rayalseema. The same people, once the Nizam was dispossessed, became the driving force for merger with Telangana 10 years later in 1953-56!

Meanwhile, Yanam, an enclave within East Godavari, though liberated from the French in 1954, continued to be a part of the Tamil-speaking Pondicherry State and forgotten by the Vishalandhra/Seemandhra enthusiasts.

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