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The Hyderabad Political System and its Participants

KAREN LEONARD

WHILE Hyderabad State developed from the Mughal subah, or province, of the Deccan, it did not represent a mere continuation of the Mughal provincial administration. By the end of the eighteenth century, Hyderabad represented a new political system, with a whole new set of participants. This article investigates the development of this political system and the constitution of its ruling class.

The Origin of the State

Hyderabad's position with respect to the Mughal Empire changed greatly during the eighteenth century. At the start of the century, it was the Mughal-administered portion of the Deccan plateau in southern India. But the weakening of the central Mughal authority and the constant intrigues in Delhi meant frequent changes of the officials in the Deccan. Confusion and rivalry there reflected rivalries at the Delhi Court. The rise of the Marathas as a political power in the western Deccan led to further political instability. The Mughals attempted to incorporate Maratha leaders into the empire, and there was constant Mughal-Maratha competition for the Deccani revenues. The situation provided an opportunity for the Mughal subahdar, later known as Nizam ul-Mulk Asaf Jah I, to consolidate his own power in the Deccan.

The gradual separation of Hyderabad from the Mughal Empire was accomplished before the death of the first Nizam in 1748. Though considered loyal to the emperor by many contemporaries and later historians, Nizam ul-Mulk centralized the administration of the Deccan under his personal control. He was first appointed subahdar in 1713, but Hyderabad's effective independence has usually been dated from 1724, when the Nizam won a major military victory over a rival Mughal appointee, or 1740, when the Nizam returned to the Deccan from North India for the final time. On several occasions, Nizam ul-Mulk left the Deccan for North India at the Mughal emperor's request, but he always arranged for his own subordinates to govern during his absence.¹ Moreover, he often returned to the Deccan without imperial sanction.² Upon each return the Nizam's successful resumption of power, displacing rival Maratha and Mughal officials, compelled the emperor to reappoint him subahdar.³ Upon resuming control, the Nizam journeyed about confirming or replacing Mughal appointees in the Deccan.⁴ As there were many cen-

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¹ Khan, *The First Nizam*, 118, 175. Nizam ul-Mulk was called to fight the Marathas further north in 1719; to be vazir of the empire in 1722; and to fight the Marathas and serve as vakil-i mutlaq (vazir) again in 1737.

² Khan, *The First Nizam*, 94-96 (in 1719) and 129-132 (in 1723). In 1740 he left at his own request, which was sanctioned later (p. 200).

³ Khan, *The First Nizam*, 111 (in 1719) and 137 (in 1724).

⁴ Khan, *The First Nizam*, 115, 146-148.

trally appointed officials in the Mughal provinces, this action was a further assertion of the Nizam's personal authority in the Deccan.

The Nizam's recognition of Mughal suzerainty became increasingly nominal. Nizam ul-Mulk conducted war, made treaties, and conferred titles and *mansab* appointments himself.⁵

The Nizam's appointees were termed "Asafia" mansabdars (from his title, Asaf Jah), as distinguished from the "Padshahi" mansabdars appointed earlier by the Mughals (*padshah* means king or emperor).⁶ Under the Nizam and his successors, those customs which emphasized the Deccan province's subordination to the Mughal emperor were gradually diminished or discarded entirely. The office of the "Padshahi Diwan," an official whose seal was supposed to approve the revenue accounts and sanction all land grants on behalf of the emperor, was allowed to lapse.⁷ Ceremonial observances such as the reception of Mughal *farmans* (royal orders) and gifts and the celebration of the Mughal emperor's regnal year, had diminished noticeably both in frequency and scale by 1780.⁸ But Mughal authority continued to be the source of symbolic legitimacy for Hyderabad. The emperor's name was still read in the Khutbah, the discourse in the mosque in which the sovereign's name was mentioned. Coins were struck in the emperor's name until after the Mutiny of 1857, when the Mughal Empire was brought officially to an end. The emperor's farman conferring succession to positions was still sought, though often the imperial order simply confirmed a locally resolved succession.⁹ Thus, while Hyderabad was in practice largely independent of the empire, the symbolic relationship was retained.¹⁰ The Mughal Empire continued to be utilized as a source of legitimacy by individuals and groups in Hyderabad as elsewhere.

The second half of the eighteenth century was the formative period in Hyderabad's history. The Nizam and his principal nobles moved permanently to Hyderabad city from the old Mughal capital of Aurangabad and formed stable relationships through the court and administrative institutions. The long reign of Nizam Ali Khan, from 1762 to 1803, contributed greatly to these important developments. Prior to his reign, the Nizams had been constantly moving, setting up encampments at the site of military campaigns or diplomatic negotiations. The early Nizams fought and negotiated with the Marathas to the west, claimants to the Nawabship of the Carnatic and their French or English allies in the south, and various local rulers like the Pathan Nawabs of Cuddapah, Kurnool, and Savanur-Bankaput, and the Raja of Vizianagaram. But by the late 1760's, Hyderabad's borders were relatively settled. The coastal territories (later known as the Northern

⁵ See the footnote in Khan, *The First Nizam*, 132.

⁶ Makhan L'al, *Tarikh-i Yadgar-i Makhan L'al* (Hyderabad, n.d.), 143-144. The original Persian manuscript of this work was written in the 1820's.

⁷ Henry George Briggs, *The Nizam. His History and Relations with the British Government* (London, 2 vols., 1861), I, 141. The Padshahi Diwan is not mentioned after 1759 in the Persian diary kept by one of the state record offices (the Daftar-i Diwani) and published in translation by the Central Records Office Hyderabad Government: *The Chronology of Modern Hyderabad, 1720-1890* (Hyderabad, 1954).

⁸ This statement is based on a comparison of the entries to 1780 in *Chronology of Modern Hyderabad* (about the first 60 pages) with the entries for the later period.

⁹ Briggs, *The Nizam*, I, 36-37. See Regani, *Nizam-British Relations*, 52, 55, for instances of local choice of a successor and eventual Mughal confirmation. This was so in the case of Salabat Jung's succession to the subahdar position, for example.

¹⁰ There has been no definitive work on eighteenth century political theory in India. But looking at the functional rather than the symbolic relationship, I have called Hyderabad independent.

Circars) had been ceded, first to the French and then to the English.¹¹ The Nawab of the Carnatic was no longer under the jurisdiction of the subahdar of the Deccan.¹² The soldier-adventurer Hyder Ali had replaced his employer, the Raja, as ruler of Mysore.¹³ Most important, the struggle with the Marathas was waged only intermittently and there were long periods of peace.¹⁴ Within Hyderabad, the succession disputes between descendants of Nizam ul-Mulk were terminated decisively when Nizam Ali Khan seized control in the 1760's. During his long reign, a consistent pattern of political relationships that can be termed a political system developed in Hyderabad.

Patrons, Clients, and Intermediaries

This political system operated through loosely structured patron-client relationships. Another basic characteristic was the use of vakils, or intermediaries, of many kinds. The vakils represented their employers' interest at court and in dealings with others. Most participants were members of the nobility and administration, but groups and individuals from outside were integrated into the local political system through these relationships also. The participants in the Hyderabad political system were diverse and participated in politics in different ways.

The Nizam and powerful nobles were the most important dispensers of patronage in the late eighteenth century political system. Earlier in the century their resources had depended upon military and diplomatic success. Later, when the court was fixed in Hyderabad city, the receipt of regular income from their land grants (jagirs) enabled nobles to maintain large establishments. The Nizam himself, with personal control over the greatest amount of land and its revenues and the largest military, administrative, and household establishments, was the best source of financial support in Hyderabad. Nobles maintained establishments patterned on the Nizam's. They too could dispense administrative posts or cash grants. Also, depending upon their status and the strength of their recommendations, nobles could secure places for their clients in the Nizam's establishment. Successful provision for a large number of diverse clients—relatives, employees, artisans, poets, and religious men—was an essential mark of noble status. Understood in this way, the seemingly wasteful and luxurious style of life followed by the nobility¹⁵ was essential to political power.

For the clients as well, the patron-client relationship was the key to maintenance of position and advancement. Employees with ability could switch allegiance from one patron to another, improving their position in the process. For example, newly arrived Marashtrian or North Indian administrators initially employed in

¹¹ The Circars were ceded to the French by Salabat Jung in 1753, and to the English by the Mughal emperor in 1765 and by Nizam Ali Khan in 1766. Regani, *Nizam-British Relations*, 71-72 and 130-131.

¹² From the time of Nizam ul-Mulk, the Nizam's right to appoint the Nawab of the Carnatic was challenged by others. The challengers included the Marathas, the French, the English, various Pathan Nawabs, and factions within Hyderabad, the Carnatic, and Delhi. The Nawab of Arcot was proclaimed independent of the Nizam in a treaty be-

tween the Nizam and the English in 1768. Regani, *Nizam-British Relations*, 2-3, 18-62, 135.

¹³ B. Sheik Ali, *British Relations with Haidar Ali (1760-1782)* (Mysore, 1963), 2.

¹⁴ Rao, *Eighteenth Century Deccan*, x.

¹⁵ Moreland characterized the Mughal nobility as a consuming class marked by "profitless expenditure" and "extravagance and waste." See chapter III, "The Consuming Classes" in W. H. Moreland, *India at the Death of Akbar* (Delhi, 1962), particularly pages 87-88.

one nobleman's establishment often shifted to another, more powerful, patron.¹⁶ For a client, access to the Nizam's administrative service and eventually to the nobility depended upon a connection with an influential patron or sponsor. An aspirant to even a relatively low appointment in the Nizam's service had to be presented to the Nizam by someone already in good standing at court. Such a sponsor was not necessarily or even usually a relative of the applicant; patron-client relationships were formed on an individual basis and did not follow caste or kinship lines.¹⁷ The loosely structured patron-client relationships encouraged individuals to change patrons and positions to achieve personal advantage.

Another characteristic of the Hyderabad political system was the use of vakils, usually translated as "agents" or "intermediaries." These intermediaries were crucial to the operation of the system. In accordance with prevalent etiquette, members of the nobility seldom met with the Nizam or each other directly. They sent their vakils to attend the court and to negotiate business and even personal matters with other nobles. A continuous ceremonial exchange of greetings and gifts through their vakils served to maintain friendly connections between the Nizam and his nobles and between noblemen. The diplomatic ability of a vakil could do much to maintain or enhance his patron's position. And a vakil's ability to secure jobs for applicants in his employer's establishment put the vakil in a subsidiary role as a patron to those below him.

Those vakils who were the agents of regional political powers such as the Peshwa of the Marathas or the Nawab of Arcot attended the Nizam's Court and represented their employers' interests there. But they, like the local vakils, served a double function—they too acted as patrons within the Hyderabad political system. These vakils maintained large households in Hyderabad city and employed many subordinates to administer their employers' properties in Hyderabad.¹⁸ Often these vakils could dispense jobs and support of the same magnitude as Hyderabad nobles directly attached to the Nizam. Sometimes a vakil's position in the local political system became more advantageous to him personally than his position as an outside power's representative at the court. The Nizam granted land (jagirs) to some of these external vakils¹⁹ and eventually some switched their allegiance to the Nizam, bringing their employees or clients with them.²⁰

The political power of these vakils of external powers was directly related to that of their employers. At first the Mughal vakils were pre-eminent in Hyderabad, but in the last half of the eighteenth century the vakils of the Peshwa, of the Peshwa's nominal subordinates, the Maratha chiefs Scindia and Holkar, and of the

¹⁶ Makhan L'al, *Tarikh-i Yadgar-i Makhan L'al* (Hyderabad, n.d.), 61-71 contains numerous examples of such shifting in these brief biographies.

¹⁷ This conclusion is based primarily on the numerous examples of patron-client relationships throughout L'al, *Yadgar*; and throughout *The Chronology of Modern Hyderabad, 1720-1890* (Hyderabad, 1954).

¹⁸ The vakils of the Nawab of Arcot employed local men to supervise the Nawab's jagirs outside the city and his nearby gardens and to attend to the tombs of his relatives and associates in the city. Details of these jobs appear in letters in the private

collection of Dr. Muhammad Ghaus of Madras, in a file tentatively numbered 32: *Persian Correspondence on behalf of the Nawabs of Arcot to their Vakils in Hyderabad, 1802-1857*.

¹⁹ These grants are listed in *Jagirdaran o In'am-daren Subajat-i Dakan, 1198 H.* [1784], Persian manuscript number 1015.4 in the India Office Library in London.

²⁰ L'al, *Yadgar*, 61-71. This section gives brief biographies of the Hindu nobles of Hyderabad, several of whom were originally vakils of outside powers.

Nawab of Arcot were more powerful.²¹ The most important vakil by the early nineteenth century was of course the British Resident, who by then represented the Mughal emperor as well as the East India Company.²² It is as a vakil that the resident's function in the Hyderabad political system is best understood in the eighteenth century, before the more overt intrusion of British power in the nineteenth century.

The Samasthans and other Local Rulers

There were many semiautonomous local rulers in the Nizam's territories who paid an annual tribute and continued to govern their inherited lands themselves. The most important of these were the seven or eight *samasthans*, or Hindu "royal houses."²³ The samasthan Rajas and other local rulers can be viewed as patrons like the Nizam and the nobles in Hyderabad city, for they maintained their own courts and provided for many diverse clients. Yet their position in the political system, and in the nobility of Hyderabad, was more nominal than real.

These indigenous rulers were never fully integrated into Hyderabad politics and society. Most of the samasthans were in the Telingana area (including Raichur) of Hyderabad; only Sholapur was in Marathwara. Most of them were from Telugu-speaking peasant castes.²⁴ The founders of the samasthans had earned their holdings from earlier Deccani powers (the Bahmani kingdom and its successor sultanates; Vijayanagar; the Peshwa of the Marathas; or the Mughals) in recognition of military achievements.²⁵ Thus in most cases the Nizams of Hyderabad simply confirmed the traditional tributary relationships.²⁶ A local ruler maintained a court in his ancestral domain and though he was given a title and other attributes of the nobility he had no administrative responsibilities in the Nizam's territory. His vakils represented him at the Hyderabad Court but did not maintain relationships with other local rulers or members of the nobility. Such a ruler did not adhere to the life style of the Hyderabad Court but continued to follow his own ancestral traditions. The local rulers, then, consisted of indigenous landholders tied to the Nizam as tributaries but not to other participants in the political system.

The Financial and Military Groups

The bankers and moneylenders of Hyderabad city and the military commanders (usually mercenaries) also played important parts in the political system.

²¹ This generalization is based on the incidence of entries in L'al, *Yadgar*; Jagirdaran o In'amdaran (1784); and *The Chronology of Modern Hyderabad*.

²² In 1807 a farman or order from the Mughal emperor to the Nizam was presented to him by the British resident. *The Chronology of Modern Hyderabad*, 110.

²³ The term is commonly used in South India both for the residence of a person of rank and for a noble family or royal family as well. H. H. Wilson, *A Glossary of Judicial and Revenue Terms and of Useful Words Occurring in official Documents Relating to the Administration of the Government of British India* (London, 1855), 458.

²⁴ Only the rulers of Paloncha and Sholapur

were Brahmins. The rulers of Amarchinta, Gadwal, and Wanparty were Reddis; the ruler of Anagondi was a Razu; the ruler of Jatpole was a Telaga Balaja.

²⁵ The historical background of the samasthans can be found in K. Krishaswamy Mudiraj, *Pictorial Hyderabad* (Hyderabad, 2 vols., 1929 and 1934), II, 618-645.

²⁶ Details such as the year of confirmation and its terms can be found in L'al, *Yadgar*, 143; Syed Hussain Bilgrami and C. Willmott, *Historical and Descriptive Sketch of the Nizam's Dominions* (Bombay, 2 vols., 1883), I, 128; and Government of India, *Imperial Gazetteer of India Provincial Series Hyderabad State* (Calcutta, 1909), 296 on.

Though they were without formal positions such as those held by the local rulers, these two groups were active, and sometimes decisive, participants in politics. They provided essential financial and military services. Neither group was obligated to maintain a formal relationship to the Nizam's Court. Neither group dispensed patronage in quite the same way as the Nizam and the nobles. They adhered less to the style of life set by the Hyderabad Court than to the patterns peculiar to their respective communities. Unlike the local rulers, the nobility, or the vakils as a group, these two groups usually could be broken down into functioning caste or community units.

The major financial communities in Hyderabad, except for the Telugu-speaking Komatis, were not indigenous and had moved into the Deccan over a long period of time. Marwaris, Agarwals, Jains, and Goswamis came from western and northern India to Hyderabad in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Many came first as merchants, dealing in shawls or jewels, and then took up moneylending and banking.²⁷ Caste-fellows settled in the same areas of the city and followed the life styles characteristic of their castes.

In business matters, members of these financial communities acted as individuals, dealing directly with many nobles and often with the Nizam's household too. The resources and policies of members of the financial community became increasingly important in the early nineteenth century, a time of great financial difficulty for Hyderabad.

The military commanders and their troops were indirectly tied to the political system through their employers. Like the Mughal army, Hyderabad's army was not centralized. It consisted of units of troops maintained on behalf of the Nizam by leading nobles. The nobles drew cash allowances from the Nizam's treasury to support these troops. In most cases a commander and his troops were from the same caste or community, as with the Afghan, Arab, and Sikh units.²⁸ Most of the imported mercenary groups in Hyderabad dated from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

There were some units commanded by European military adventurers, with troops drawn from Deccani Hindu martial castes. These troops were trained in the European manner and therefore were called "linewallas" (those in a line). This innovation in Indian military practice stemmed from the French and English wars in the Carnatic, and many of the military adventurers serving in Hyderabad (as throughout India) were Frenchmen. Monsieur Raymond (d. 1798) was the most famous European military commander in Hyderabad.²⁹ Others, whose descendants continued to serve with the Hyderabad military forces, were Irish and Portuguese.³⁰

The military commanders lived near the troop encampments at the edge of the city and their life-style differed from that of the nobility, though they had some of the attributes of nobility. They often possessed great personal influence in politics, usually

²⁷ For information about the financial communities, see Ghulam Husain Khan, *Gulzar-i Asafiyah* (Hyderabad, 1308 H. [1890-91]), 622-632 (about the bankers of Begum Bazar and Karwan) and Mudiraj, *Pictorial Hyderabad*, II, 433-440, 474-508.

²⁸ For information about these and other military units see L'al, *Yadgar*, 171-174, and Khan, *Gulzar-i Asafiyah*, 478-492.

²⁹ The best source for Raymond is Sir J. Sarkar, "General Raymond of the Nizam's Army," *Islamic Culture* (Hyderabad), VII (1933), no. 1, 95-113.

³⁰ Brief biographies of some of these (Finglas, Piron, Boyd, and Raymond too) are included in the appendix of Herbert Compton, *A Particular Account of the European Military Adventurers of Hindustan from 1784-1803* (London, 1892).

of a temporary nature. But the power of the military men, like that of the financial community, was essentially negative. Through the threat of withdrawal of military or financial service, these two groups would play a key role in nineteenth-century Hyderabad politics.

In the Hyderabad political system, then, individuals could achieve and exercise personal power in a variety of ways. The entire system, based upon many individual patrons and establishments, and relying heavily on intermediaries, offered considerable scope for manipulation. Patronage, particularly with respect to employment, was dispensed at all levels, both directly and through intermediaries. The nobles maintained large establishments and extensive ties with other nobles. Their resources were based upon hereditary control of land and its revenues. The vakils, those representing both local and outside employers, depended on their personal diplomatic skill and on their influence over the patronage dispensed by their employers. The military commanders depended on their control of troops for their power, while the power of the bankers and moneylenders was based on their command of cash and records of transactions. The political system was to change over time, however, and yet another category, officials of the civil administration whose power was based on the control of records, became serious participants toward the end of the eighteenth century.

In the course of the eighteenth century, power within the Hyderabad political system was redistributed. In the early and mid-eighteenth century, political power had been strongly concentrated in the persons of the Nizam and the nobles, particularly those with military and diplomatic skill. Positions were earned and disputed in an essentially military arena. During that same period, the vakils of regional political powers were important figures in Hyderabad, partly because of the power of their employers and partly because of their own local function as patrons. But with political relationships in South India becoming stabilized chiefly through the increasing dominance of the East India Company, and with the growing importance of administrative rather than military control, another important source of patronage emerged: the civil administration. The administration was to become the primary source of patronage in the nineteenth century. As administrative functions previously performed by diverse individuals and groups were incorporated into a sprawling administrative structure, power remained widely diffused. Though the administrative structure was inclusive, it was not highly centralized. The generally hereditary nature of many administrative positions contributed to this decentralization. Officials of the administration derived their power from the control of records. These new entrants into Hyderabad politics were to play a major role in the nineteenth century.

The Administrative System

The Hyderabad administration was separated gradually from the Mughal administration as Nizam ul-Mulk established himself in the Deccan. Its structure and operation, though generally viewed as continuations of the Mughal system, showed some interesting differences from the accepted Mughal model.⁸¹ The most consequential

⁸¹ A good basic discussion of the Mughal system appears in Jadunath Sarkar, *Mughal Administration*, 5th ed. (Calcutta, 1963). Most of the admin-

istrative terms used in Hyderabad and the functions they denoted were identical to those in the Mughal system.

differences concerned the arrangements for keeping the central financial records and collecting the land revenue.

The administrative structure was, superficially, tightly organized under the Nizam as subahdar of the Deccan. A Diwan of the Nizam's choice, either Muslim or Hindu, conducted the actual business of the administration, directing foreign relations, appointing *taluqdars* (revenue contractors), and generally supervising the collection of revenue and the disbursement of funds. Despite the authority attributed to the Diwan in the traditional Mughal structure, the Diwan of Hyderabad did not always possess great power. But in the eighteenth century most of those appointed Diwan had already achieved personal power.

After the Diwan, the most important civil administrators in Hyderabad were the *Daftardars* (record-keepers). For those familiar with the Mughal administration, the most noticeable feature of the Hyderabad system would be the prominence of these keepers of the central financial records. In the Mughal Empire the Diwan closely supervised financial affairs, but in Hyderabad actual control of finances lay with the two hereditary *Daftardars*. These two hereditary record offices were established in Hyderabad by 1760, probably earlier.³² They divided the work along geographical lines, one covering Marathwara, the western region, and the other covering Telingana, the eastern region. Though nominally responsible to the Diwan, the two *Daftardars* kept independent accounts of income and expenditure. They issued and recorded jagir, inam, and mansab grants; they recorded the revenue settlements and collections; and they issued written orders for the appointment of revenue contractors.³³ These hereditary offices were held by two Hindu noble families. Clearly the two well-defined offices, with hereditary control of records, held an important position in the administrative structure of Hyderabad, a position which, potentially at least, weakened the authority of the Diwan.

Another structural difference from the Mughal administrative model occurred in the Hyderabad arrangements for collection of the land revenue. The Hyderabad government was organized only to receive and disburse revenue, not to collect it. While this was also true of the Mughal administration (and other Indian administrations), which depended upon indigenous revenue officials at the lower levels, there was an effort to employ salaried Mughal officials in the middle levels of the revenue collection system. But in Hyderabad an intermediary group of independent contractors performed this job. They were called *taluqdars* and they contracted with the Diwan to collect the revenue from specified areas. They kept a percentage of the fixed demand and they also kept whatever excess amount they were able to collect. The *taluqdars* kept private accounts; their only recorded dealings with the government were through the *Daftardars*, who fixed the revenue demand, recorded tal-

³² The *Daftar-i Diwani* was connected with the Rae Rayan family, traditionally from 1750: Ghulam Saundani Khan, *Tuzuk-i Mahbubiyah* (Hyderabad, 2 vols., 1319 H. [1902]), II (Nobles), 17. The family's first jagir grant recorded was in 1168 P. [1758-59] in the jagir register: *Rejister Asnad-i jagir*, vol. I no. 12 serial number 101/12. This register is in section R2 of the Andhra Pradesh State Archives. The *Daftar-i Mal* was connected with a Kayasth family. Its founder is listed as

sardaftar (head of the office) in a 1760-61 entry in the above *Rejister Asnad-i jagir*, vol. I no. 11 serial number 113/12. For this family also see *Daftar-i Mal Jagir Rejister*, "naqul-i asnad-i Shiv Raj," file no. 66 of 1342 F. [1932-33] which is also in section R2 of the Andhra Pradesh State Archives.

³³ Manik Ra'o Vithal Ra'o, *Bustan-i Asafiyah* (Hyderabad, 7 vols., 1327 H to 1350 H [1909-32]), I, 148-149.

uqdari appointments, and noted the areas and amounts for which they were responsible.⁸⁴

Revenue contracting was often resorted to in the Mughal Empire too, particularly in the eighteenth century; but it was considered a poor method of collection, and the Mughal administration attempted to collect through its own directly controlled agents. But in Hyderabad there was no attempt to establish a direct administrative link between the central accounts offices and village-level accounts. There was little attempt to control the intermediary group of taluqdars, much less the lower intermediaries such as *deshmuḳhs* and *deshpandiyas* who held hereditary rights just above the village level and who dealt with the taluqdars on behalf of the village officials.⁸⁵

The Mansabdari and Jagirdari Systems

The operation in Hyderabad of these two basic Mughal administrative institutions also seems to differ from the Mughal model (though perhaps not from Mughal practice). Hyderabad may represent the institutionalization of those tendencies toward breakdown often noted in the eighteenth century Mughal institutions: the retention of jagirs as inheritable property, the indiscriminate expansion of the mansabdari system, and the subsequent expansion of the jagirdari system to meet the salary demands of mansabdars.

In Hyderabad there was no real jagirdari system, for that essential practice, the transfer of jagirs to prevent an official from acquiring a territorial base of power, was so seldom implemented. Jagirs were treated as inheritable property from the eighteenth century, though they were granted for different purposes and the grants sometimes specified "in perpetuity" and sometimes did not. If there was a legitimate and competent heir, jagirs in Hyderabad stayed in the family of the original grantee.⁸⁶ This practice contrasted with the Mughal effort to transfer jagirs regularly, and the contrast assumes some importance in the context of the establishment of Hyderabad's independence. It has been suggested that the strain put on the Mughal jagirdari system by the inclusion of large numbers of Deccani mansabdars in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries was a major factor in the decline of the Mughal Empire.⁸⁷ In that situation, the Nizam's policy of permitting jagirs to be inherited would have given men an incentive to transfer their allegiance to the Nizam, and it also would have destroyed an important link to the central Mughal administration. Thus, while jagirs in the Mughal Empire theoretically were used to prevent individual acquisition of property and tie men to the Delhi administration, jagirs in Hyderabad were used to provide individuals with a permanent income and a territorial base in

⁸⁴ Ra'o, *Bustan-i Asafiyah*, I, 149-152. A list of the taluqdars and their assignments in the early nineteenth century appears in L'al, *Yadgar*, 84-90.

⁸⁵ Such intermediaries held a variety of rights in the recording and collection of land revenue. Such men were recognized by the current ruler, in this case the Nizam, and they worked with officials appointed from above. They could move up into the central administration through these contacts. See Irfan Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India* (New York, 1963), 288-292 and S. N.

Hasan, "Zamindars in the Mughal Empire," *Indian Economic and Social History Review* (Delhi), I and IV.

⁸⁶ This generalization is based on tracings of families in the volumes of *Rejister Asnad-i Jagir* and in *Jagirdaran o In'amdaran* [1784]; also on collected Kayasth family histories and histories printed in biographical collections such as Ghulam Samdani Khan, *Tuzuk-i Mahbubiyah*, II.

⁸⁷ N. Athar Ali, *The Mughal Nobility Under Aurangzeb* (New York, 1966), 26-29, 173-174.

the Deccan. While this policy must have alienated men and land from the Mughal system, at the same time it would have relieved some of the pressure on the Mughal jagirdari system.

The operation of the mansabdari system in Hyderabad, and particularly its less definitive relationship to the nobility,³⁸ also contrasted with the accepted Mughal model. While the use of jagirs in Hyderabad was a simplification (if not a corruption) of the Mughal system, the mansabdari system operated in a more complex way than has been ascertained for the Mughal Empire. This apparent difference may be due simply to the adjustment of the system to actual practice—an adjustment predicted but not yet confirmed in materials pertaining to the Mughal mansabdari system.³⁹ For example, the two parts of a mansab—the *zat*, or personal rank, and the *savar*, or number of troops a mansabdar was to maintain—had both been rigidly retained in the Mughal system, though any correspondence between the *savar* figure and the number of troops, if any, actually maintained by a mansabdar became increasingly remote. But in Hyderabad the *savar* rank was not uniformly applied. Military officials held the highest *savar* ranks, civil officials held proportionately lower *savar* ranks, and the lowest level of clerical and managerial mansabdars held only *zat* mansabs, without a *savar* rank at all.⁴⁰ Thus the Hyderabad usage more accurately reflected a mansabdar's occupation. The *savar* rank more closely indicated actual maintenance of troops, while the *zat* or personal rank served a different function at different levels. In the case of the lowest mansabdars, the *zat* mansab accompanied a particular and usually hereditary job, and it really stood for a fixed salary. On this lowest level, promotion meant not a raise in mansab rank, but additional jobs and the mansabs or salaries which accrued to them.⁴¹ Though there was a tendency to inherit positions in the higher administrative levels too, the *zat* mansab held by a high official fluctuated according to that individual's personal status rather than his position or salary.⁴² In addition to this obviously different function of the *zat* ranking on the two levels, the tendency to inherited positions and their associated mansabs also contrasts with the generally accepted model of the Mughal mansabdari system.

The mansabdari system, then, does not seem to represent the basic underlying structure of the Hyderabad administration. On a high level, mansabs were primarily a military and ceremonial distinction, best understood as marks of favor like titles

³⁸ The nobility of the Mughal Empire has generally been defined by mansab rank alone. Sarkar considered holders of *zat* mansabs of 500 and above to be nobles, while holders of *zat* mansabs of 3000 and above were the highest nobles or *umra-i 'azzam*: Jadunath Sarkar, *Short History of Aurangzib*, 3rd ed. (Calcutta, 1967), 453. Athar Ali considers holders of *zat* mansabs of 1000 and above to be nobles, while holders of *zat* mansabs of 5000 and above were the highest nobles: M. Athar Ali, *Mughal Nobility*, 27; and also his article, "Foundation of Akbar's Organization of the Nobility—An Interpretation," *Medieval India Quarterly* (Aligarh), III (1958), nos. 3 and 4, 290.

³⁹ Athar Ali, *Medieval India Quarterly*, III, nos. 3 and 4, 298.

⁴⁰ See the way mansabdars are listed in L'al, *Yadgar*, from 118 and particularly after 155 for

those on the lowest level. The generalization about military and civil officials is based on collected biographies and on the ten *umra-i azzam* or highest noble families of Hyderabad which will be discussed later.

⁴¹ A good example of this is the career of the Bansi Raja Saksena Kayasth family. This family gradually acquired posts and mansabs and finally reached noble status with the award of a high *zat* rank and a *savar* rank and titles and other distinctions. The process took five generations, from 1760 to 1884.

⁴² For example, the successive heads of the two *daftars* or record offices inherited the same jobs and salaries as their predecessors, but their *mansab* ranks varied according to each individual's standing with the current Nizam.

and other honors awarded by the Nizam.⁴³ The functional connection of *zat* mansabs to the lowest level of administrative positions was an essentially different use of mansab rank, not part of a uniform system. In fact, only aspects of the Mughal mansabdari system were used in Hyderabad, and in different ways. There was not a uniform and integrated system of mansab ranking throughout the administration.

The Hyderabad practices concerning jagirs and mansabs had clear implications for the nobility as an institution. (The composition of the nobility will be taken up next.) First, mansab rank alone was not a sufficient definition of noble status, since the system was not applied uniformly and since hereditary possession of jagirs became a major factor in defining noble status. There was no definite and exclusive correlation between mansab rank and noble status. Of the ten families consistently considered the *umra-i azzam*, or highest nobles, of Hyderabad,⁴⁴ at least two or three families held only average mansab ranks.⁴⁵ Even the addition of jagir holdings as part of the qualification for noble status does not fully account for the composition of the nobility at any given time.⁴⁶

Second, because of the generally hereditary nature of jagirs and of many jobs, there was a large hereditary nobility in Hyderabad. Given the relatively large group of jagirdars and high mansabdars in Hyderabad, distinctions within the nobility were very important. A smaller group of nobles with real political power could be distinguished at any given time. Inclusion within this smaller group depended upon two further criteria: current administrative or military service and an individual's personal standing with the current Nizam. This last criterion could be judged by participation in the ceremonial relationships centered on the court and by the personal distinctions awarded by the Nizam. Mansab rank really fell into this last category, as a distinction, in Hyderabad. It was one of many determinants rather than the single determining factor in the definition of noble status. The flexibility allowed by these multiple criteria meant that there was no uniform pattern of achievement common to members of the Hyderabad nobility. The recruitment and composition of the nobility illustrates this.

Composition of the Nobility

The political and administrative systems have been discussed primarily in terms of function. Some indications of the origins of participants have been given in the cases of the local rulers, the financial communities, and the military units. Because of its position as the political, social, and economic elite, the Hyderabad nobility deserves careful examination.

By the late eighteenth century a distinctively Hyderabad nobility, tied to the Nizam's Court, can be discerned. Some of the men who constituted this nobility were recruited from the Mughal service, from the Maratha service, and from families

⁴³ In L'al, *Yadgar*, mansab ranks are indeed listed under the heading "titles and awards . . ." (page 118). This list includes privileges like the right to a kettle drum escort, a band escort, a palanquin, and titles and mansab ranks.

⁴⁴ These ten families are those of Raja Rao Ramba, Shauket Jung Hissam ud-daula, Salar Jung, Rukn ud-daula Khan-i Dauran, the Paigahs, Raja Rse Rayan, the Malwalas, Shar Yar ul-Mulk, Fakhr ul-Mulk Hisam ul-Mulk, and Maharaja

Chandu Lal.

⁴⁵ These were the Malwala family, the family of Chandu Lal, and, in the nineteenth century the family of Shaukat Jung.

⁴⁶ Often the families in civil administration with relatively low mansabs did compensate by having large jagirs. The best example here is the Malwala Kayasth family, which held substantial jagirs from 1760—yet no family member ever held a *zat* mansab over 4500.

traditionally associated with the earlier Deccani sultanates.⁴⁷ Some were men of obscure origin. The first Nizam's highest mansabdars were almost all military commanders. They were predominantly Muslims, with a few Rajputs and Marathas.⁴⁸ Most of the Muslims and Rajputs had received their mansabs and titles directly from the Mughal emperor and held jagirs in North India. Others, including the Marathas, had traditional family ties to earlier Deccani rulers or to the Peshwa of the Marathas, and they had simply joined the Nizam's service as he assumed power in the Deccan. A good example here is Raja Rao Rumbha Nimbalkar, the Maratha military commander whose ancestors had served the sultanate at Bijapur. He left the Peshwa's service when offered a Mughal mansab of 7000 and then moved into the Nizam's service at the same level.⁴⁹ The Arab Shia family of Hyderabad's famous nineteenth century Diwan, Salar Jung, had served at Bijapur also and moved into the Nizam's service through the Mughal service.⁵⁰

Other high mansabdars were the rulers of the samasthans, whose relatively nominal noble status has been pointed out. As military conquest gave way to administration of territory, attendance at the Hyderabad Court and participation in the court culture became an important qualification for nobility. The Deccani local rulers, and those military men who had established themselves as landholders in rural areas,⁵¹ no longer participated in the activities of Hyderabad city. From the mid-eighteenth century on, many of these early nobles were effectively displaced by men who moved from low administrative positions to high positions and noble status. The North Indian and Maharashtrian Hindus who had come to Hyderabad and staffed the administration began to win places in the nobility.⁵²

Two Daftardar, or record-keeping, families exemplify this process. The ancestor of the Dafter-i Diwani's Maharashtrian (Chitpavan) Brahmin family was a *patwari* (village revenue official) whose sons moved up in the central administration through the patronage of a powerful Diwan.⁵³ The founder of the Dafter-i Mal's North Indian Kayasth family came to the Deccan as a clerk in Nizam ul-Mulk's personal service.⁵⁴ As the need for adequate administrative control increased, these and other

⁴⁷ The transition was often indirect. Many moved from the sultanates of Golconda and Bijapur to the Maratha, Mughal, or even Mysore services before joining the Nizam's service. Some moved from the Marathas to the Mughals to the Nizam, or from the Mughals to the Nawab of Arcot to the Nizam.

⁴⁸ This generalization is based on the references throughout Yusuf Husain Khan, *The First Nizam* (Bombay, 1963).

⁴⁹ See the family history by Rshvant Ra'o, *Tarikh-i Khandan-i Rajah Ra'o Rumbha Jivant Bahadur Nimbalkar* (Hyderabad, 1311 H. [1893-94]).

⁵⁰ See the account in Ghulam Samdani Khan, *Tuzuk-i Mahbubiyah*, II (Nobles), 235-242.

⁵¹ A good example of this development is the family of Raja Gopal Singh Gaur, a Rajput appointed as qiladar, or commander of the fort, of Qandhar. This Rajput noble family was prominent in the eighteenth century but resided at Qandhar and was not influential in the nineteenth century. Samsam-ud-daula Shah Nawaz Khan and

Abdul-Haqq, trsl. H. Beveridge, *The Mashir-ul-umara*, 2nd ed. (Calcutta, 1941), I, 593-594; Jagirdaran o In'amdaran [1784], folios 70 and 71; *The Chronology of Modern Hyderabad*, entries covering 1774-1790, 48, 59, 60, 63, 64, 66, 89; L'al, *Yadgar*, entries on 101, 160, 164, 165, 78, 86, 90-92; Muhammad Sayyid Ahmed, *Umra-i Hinud* (Aligarh, 1910), 312.

⁵² This was true of the two Daftardar families and of Maharaja Chandu Lal. Chandu Lal's family held the post of peshkar of customs until he assumed the post of acting Diwan in the early nineteenth century, and then titles, increased mansab ranks, and finally jagirs were granted to family members. Chandu Lal, *'Ishratkudah-i Afaq* (Hyderabad, 1325 H. [1907]). His family was the last of the ten to attain nobility.

⁵³ The best family history is by Muhammad Nadir 'Ali Bartar, *Khandan-i Rajah Ra'o Rayan Amanatvant* (Hyderabad, n.d.).

⁵⁴ The best account of this family is in Shiv Narayan Saksenah, *Kayasth Sajjan Caritra* (Jaipur, 3 vols., 1912-1913), II, 1-32.

Hindu administrators became indispensable to the revenue and financial operations, and eventually they achieved recognition as members of the nobility.

A large number of the Muslim nobles were Shias by the end of the eighteenth century. Nizam ul-Mulk and his father had been noted as leaders of the Turani, or Turkish Sunni, faction in Mughal Court politics.⁵⁵ But by the late eighteenth century, many Muslim nobles were Shias and the most prominent Muslim noble family in Hyderabad was a Sunni family of Indian origin. This family, known as the Paigahs, maintained a very large military force for the Nizam.⁵⁶ Shias had increased for two reasons. First, the earlier Deccani sultanates at Bijapur and Golconda had been ruled by Shias, and many families once associated with those sultanates attached themselves to the Hyderabad Court. Second, during the late eighteenth century, several successive Shia Diwans of Hyderabad attracted other Shias from Mysore, Madras, and Oudh (where power was passing to the English).⁵⁷

By the late eighteenth century, then, the nobility of Hyderabad included a proportionately very large number of Shia Muslims and Hindus. Only one of the ten families most often counted among the highest nobles was Sunni; five were Shia; and four were Hindu.⁵⁸ The ten families showed diverse patterns of origin and achievement. Of the four Hindu families, two were Deccani: Maratha (the martial peasant caste of Maharashtra) and Chitpavan Brahmin. The other two families come from North India: Kayasth and Punjabi Khatri. The Maratha family was the first of these ten highest-ranking noble families to establish itself and it did so through military leadership. The other three Hindu families achieved noble status at later dates through administrative service. Of the five Shia Muslim families, three had previous connections on the maternal or paternal side with the earlier Shia-ruled Deccani sultanates. The Shias achieved their positions through both military and administrative service, three through the former and two through the latter. The Sunni Muslim family achieved noble status after most of the other families, through military service in the late eighteenth century.

It is clear that the ten families did not attain noble status at the same time or in the same way. The traditional view that these ten families "always" constituted the highest nobility of Hyderabad is fallacious.⁵⁹ Furthermore, there were considerable differences in the way they achieved noble status. No particular order or combination of acquisition of responsible positions, jagirs, high mansab ranks, and various titles

⁵⁵ Zahiruddin Malik, "Nizam-u'l-Mulk at the Court of Muhammed Shah (1721-1724)," *Medieval India Quarterly*, V (1963), 120-132; W. Irvine, *Later Mughals* (Calcutta, 2 vols., 1922), chapter XI.

⁵⁶ Khan, *Tuzuk-i Mahbubiyah*, II (Nobles), 1-6. See the family history by Tej Ra'o, *Sahifah-i Asman Jahi* (Hyderabad, 1321 H. [1904-05]).

⁵⁷ The origin of the Hyderabad Shias has been disputed. One author states that they served with the Golconda sultanate: A. M. Siddiqui, *History of Golconda* (Hyderabad, 1956), 345. Another states that earlier Deccani Shia families did not survive: Henry George Briggs *The Nizam* (London, 2 vols., 1861), I, 118. This apparent contradiction is perhaps due to Briggs failure to notice that Shia families coming directly from the Mughal, Mysore, and other services had previously been connected

with the Bijapur or Golconda sultanates. But the families I have traced were all connected with Bijapur and not Golconda; Khan, *Tuzuk-i Mahbubiyah*, II (Nobles), 179-181 for Shah Yar ul-Mulk; 305-306 and 429-430 for Fakr ul-Mulk; and 235-242 for the Mir Alam branch of Salar Jung's family.

⁵⁸ See footnote 44.

⁵⁹ The families of Chandu Lal and Salar Jung, whom the English took to be long-established premier nobles, actually achieved and reestablished (respectively) noble status chiefly through their success in dealing with the British Resident. In the early nineteenth century the influence of the Resident was a serious threat to Hyderabad, and their effectiveness as intermediaries elevated them within the Nizam's Court.

and distinctions can be said to be characteristic of the nobility. It seems that most of the "administrative" nobles (usually Hindus) began with a substantial jagir which was attached to their positions and a low personal mansab rank, while the military men (usually Muslims) initially had high mansab ranks and got large jagirs later. But in some cases the information is questionable or incomplete.

It is clear, however, that a different combination of achievements and circumstances qualified each family as "noble." These ten families well represent the nobility eventually constituted in Hyderabad, a nobility which was not based on those Mughal nobles who followed the Nizam to the Deccan, but a body of men of diverse origins and without a common career pattern. In other words, this was a new nobility, built up within a framework of the new political system in the Deccan.