

**Book Review  
By  
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**A.G Noorani, *The Destruction of Hyderabad* (New Dehli: Tulika Books, 2013), 388.**

*The Destruction of Hyderabad* is a comprehensive account of the last days of Hyderabad as a princely state. The book covers behind the scene moves of protagonists leading to the final act of Indian army action on 14<sup>th</sup> September 1948 and absorption of the state in Indian Union. With this final act was unique Hyderabad culture also met a sad end to its development in which Hindus and Muslims had contributed equally. The final act of destruction of Hyderabad was precipitated by attacks of Razakars on the Hindu community which according to the author had the tacit approval of the Nizam. Razakar attacks further vitiated an already charged political situation and provided the Indian government with a pretext to move in its army and annex Hyderabad. It also caused the massacre of Muslims who were disarmed, at the hands of Hindus who were allowed to retain their weapons by the Indian Army. It may also be of interest to note that planning for moving in Indian troops in Hyderabad had begun as early as January 1948 and it was in reaction to acts of Razakars.

A.G.Noorani is a well-known Indian lawyer, historian, newspaper columnist and a dedicated researcher. He is the author of over 10 books which include *Kashmir Dispute(1947-2012)*, *Islam and Jihad and India – China Boundary Problems*.

Hyderabad was the largest and the richest among over 560 native princely states in British India. Till Partition of the Indian subcontinent in August,1947 these states were governed by Paramountcy Law which gave various degree of autonomy to rulers of the states in dealing with internal matters but states were not free to pursue an independent defence and foreign policy. On the eve of the Partition the states were given to understand by the British officials that “doctrine of Paramountcy allowed them to claim independence” at the end of British rule in India. As a result three princely states, Hyderabad among them aspired to become sovereign countries after the British had left India. According to Noorani the problem of Kashmir, Junagarh and Hyderabad was a British creation. The British

“had led the princes up the garden path, repeatedly pledging its commitment” to the treaties with princely states.

The Nizam had expected Pakistan to help him achieve sovereign status for his state but despite Quaid e Azam’s desire to support the Nizam, nascent state of Pakistan was in no position do so. Shortage of resources at the disposal of newly established state of Pakistan and lack of geographical contiguity with Hyderabad, were the two insurmountable hurdles in the way.

Noorani has documented in considerable detail the aspiration of the Nizam (Ruler’s title) of Hyderabad to attain sovereignty for his state after Partition of India. According to the author, notwithstanding Hyderabad’s large size, high level of its communications infrastructure and services as compared with other parts of India, its modern education system and its fabulous riches, Hyderabad could not have become a sovereign state for three reasons. Hyderabad state was land locked with no outlet to the world without passing through Indian territory, ninety percent population of the state comprised Hindus and Indian National Congress, the dominant political force in India, was working against giving independence to Hyderabad. Thirdly Nizam did not have a powerful backer in the international community supporting his case.

This also explains the failure of the Nizam’s efforts to secure a favorable ruling from the UN Security Council to which he had taken the case for recognition of Hyderabad’s independent status in August, 1948. The author has addressed two questions in this regard. One, the purpose behind Nizam’s move to take the case to UN, and second, why was the Security Council moved so late after the Partition. Noorani also holds Congress leaders Sardar Patel and Jawaharlal Nehru responsible for the destruction of the state of Hyderabad. Both held strong nationalist view though differed on the ideology on which their views were founded. In his views Patel was a Hindu nationalist and Nehru a secular nationalist. Patel had described Hyderabad as an “alien state” with an “alien culture” and an “ulcer in the heart of India” that needed to be removed, and Nehru could not tolerate a state within a state.

The author has extensively quoted from documents made available in recent years to researchers revealing the moves made by the British, the Indian National Congress party leaders, particularly, Patel and Nehru as well as the Nizam and

prominent officials of his court in the period just before the army operation code named "Operation Polo" called police action was taken by India's leaders.

The book does not have heroes in the commonly understood sense. In Noorani's narration the people of Hyderabad who had lost a vibrant Hyderabadi culture and their distinct identity painstakingly built over many decades are the heroes. Villains of the piece in the tragedy of destruction of Hyderabad are represented by the ambiguous stance, with respect to Paramountcy Law, of the British, strong nationalism of Nehru and Patel and ineptitude of last Nizam of Hyderabad, Osman Ali Khan. He was politically and intellectually unequal to the task of dealing with the complex situation faced by his state in the last days of the Raj. The author reaches the conclusion that Hyderabad could not have survived as an independent state as powerful forces were acting against it but what makes him sad is not so much the destruction of Hyderabad as a political entity but the demise of its rich and diverse culture. The last chapter of the book titled *The Aftermath* gives reasons that made the author grieve over the destruction of Hyderabad state. The suffering of the Muslims after annexation of the state by India and loss of esteem by a majority of its residents are some of the reasons for author's sadness over the destruction of Hyderabad. Instead of resorting to army action as a result of which thousands of valuable lives were lost and a people's identity and culture were destroyed, India could have made Hyderabad a part of Indian Union by peaceful measures in the author's views.

*The Destruction of Hyderabad* is a treasure trove of information on the culture of the state and generosity of successive Nizams supporting Muslim educational and religious institutions not just in Hyderabad but also in other parts of India and even in Arabian Peninsula. It is an invaluable addition of source material on the state of Hyderabad, state of its cultural and economic development and final destruction of the state as a distinct political entity. Fifteen appendices comparing original documents given at the end, add further value to the book for the researchers.

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