

Eric Beverley. *Hyderabad, British India, and the World: Muslim Networks and Minor Sovereignty, c.1850–1950*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. 364 pp. \$99.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-107-09119-1.

Reviewed by Karen Leonard (University of California-Irvine)

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Leonard on Beverley Hyderabad

This is an extremely ambitious but rather strange book that will surely stimulate debate and further research about Hyderabad State and the history of India. Some features I like very much. Beverley uses “Muslim” instead of “Islamic” to characterize Hyderabad’s rulers and administration; he proposes that this important princely state presented alternatives to British colonial modernity; he has looked at interactions between the British Indian and Hyderabad judicial systems; he highlights some of the state’s successful rural and urban development projects. And Beverley has read very widely in his attempt to situate Hyderabad State in the wider world, as his many footnotes indicate. He “deliberately foregrounds comparisons and connections between Hyderabad and places beyond the subcontinent” (p. 4). Using Hyderabad as a “central empirical touchstone” (p. 11) to demonstrate “the enduring fragmentation of sovereignty across imperial terrain” (p. 3), Beverley presents copious materials about other “zones of anomaly.” Probably few would question this main point about varying and contested degrees of sovereignty.

However, there are some major problems. The book is oddly put together, forcing disparate parts into a framework that does not really work. It seems he has put together his dissertation (the introduction and chapters 1–4) with research on judicial frontiers and rural and urban development projects (chapters 5–8, and versions of chapters 6 and 7 have already been published) to constitute a book. Further, Beverley is long on assertions and short on evidence, and he uses language that is often turgid, trendy, or vague. Cambridge also seems to have provided little or no editorial assistance.

The introduction lays out ideas that are repeated throughout the book. On page 1 we read that administrators and intellectuals in Hyderabad 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.” He asserts that two “interbraided” themes linked Hyderabad to the wider world: the state’s Muslimness, or Muslim internationalism, and its status as a modern and reforming polity, its progress toward modern governance (pp. 14–15). He mentions Hyderabad’s “ethical patrimonialist framework of reciprocity between ruler and populace and obligatory official benevolence to state subjects” (p. 9) and its “Muslim stateness” (p. 6), its “political solidarities with fellow Muslim-ruled states” (p. 15). How well are these themes evidenced and connected?

Chapter 1 is titled “Minor sovereignties,” and Beverley tells in a footnote that he uses “minor” following post-colonial and poststructuralist theory and criticism, intending to “undermine dominant notions of belonging or canonicity” (p. 19). Three anecdotes said to “elaborate the range of political possibilities” in the state open the chapter (p. 21). We learn in the conclusion that Beverley is following New Historicist scholarship by using “anecdotes” to undermine or reframe older histories (pp. 288–289), but these and later anecdotes struck this reader as ineffective. He goes on to write of colonial anxieties about “global Muslim political cohesion” (pp. 44–45) and asserts that “Muslimness served to secure the Nizam’s position of autonomy and privilege certain networks of international intellectual collaboration that animated politics in the state” (p. 50). Yes, the Nizam and most leading nobles and officials were Muslim, but how exactly is he defining the “Muslim character of the dynasty” (p. 50)? Chapter 2 reviews treaties between Hyderabad and the British East India Company (and later the Crown), asserting that Hyderabad’s “sub-imperial” status was “a fount of productive ambivalence” and experimentation (p. 70).

In part 1, “Ideas,” which includes chapters 3 and 4,

chapter 3, “A Passage to Another India: Hyderabad’s Discursive Universe,” fulfills dictionary meanings of discursive (rambling, wandering from one topic to another, digressive). Drawing on E. M. Forster’s Dr. Aziz to speak about Hyderabad’s “Muslimness,” Beverley highlights early British colonial authors who wrote about Muslim misrule and used “Moglai” to mean disorder. Then he turns to “Hyderabadi historiography,” represented here by “Hyderabadi historians” J. D. B. Gribble (*A History of the Deccan*, 1896) and Syed Hossain Bilgrami and C. Willmott (*Historical and Descriptive Sketch of His Highness the Nizam’s Dominions*, 1883-84). Gribble, a British civil service officer who later worked in Hyderabad, emphasized the state’s cosmopolitan Qutb Shahi rather than its Mughal heritage, as Beverley points out; yet he labels Gribble’s work “Muslim regionalism.” He terms Bilgrami and Willmott’s book an “official” history inspired by the British Indian census and similar to the work of British colonial gazetteers (illustrating his second theme, progress toward modern governance). Bilgrami and Willmott both worked for the state, the former a leading *non-mulki* official (*non-mulki* means non-countryman or outsider, as opposed to *mulki*, countryman or son of the soil, a distinction very significant in Hyderabad from the 1870s) and the latter a Britisher who was a minor official in Hyderabad. Like Gribble, Bilgrami and Willmott saw “ethical rule” on the part of past and present Deccani “Muslim polities,” emphasizing the “benevolent policies” and “progressive character” of the Qutb Shahis and the “key roles of non-Muslim officials and subjects in Hyderabad” (pp. 94-95). Beverley then draws on work by Muhiuddin Qadiri Zor, an early twentieth-century Hyderabadi Urdu scholar, who also celebrated the Qutb Shahi dynasty’s egalitarian and progressive character. Beverley characterizes these historians as stressing “the particularity of Muslim rule in the region” (p. 98). Asserting that “state bureaucrat-intellectuals and their allies recast the polity’s Muslimness as a sound ethical foundation for legitimate political authority,” he remarks on Hyderabad’s “indelibly Muslim discursive universe” (p. 99).

Chapter 4, “Hyderabad and the world: bureaucrat-intellectuals and Muslim modernist internationalism,” is the crucial chapter, since the book’s subtitle focuses on Muslim networks. It opens with three anecdotes about “Hyderabadi bureaucrat-intellectuals and others who mediated between Hyderabad and other places in the world” (p. 102). The first discusses the brief visits to Hyderabad of Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1879-82) and his English follower Wilfrid Scawen Blunt (1883-84) and asserts that both men related to modernist Muslim in-

tellectuals when in Hyderabad. The second presents a 1904 letter from Charles Willmott (Bilgrami’s co-author, above), a sixteen-year British employee of the Nizam, requesting a pension and detailing his roles in administrative and literary “modernization” projects. The third anecdote summarizes the North Indian pro-Ottoman nationalist Maulana Shaukat Ali’s arrangement of the marriages of the former Ottoman caliph’s daughter and niece to two sons of the Nizam in 1931. This was Shaukat Ali’s attempt to advance global Muslim political solidarity, not the Nizam’s; no one has convincingly argued that the Nizam ever wanted to claim the caliphate. Also, Beverley writes that the collapse of the Indian Khilafat movement in 1924 “signaled the denouement of Hyderabadi Muslim internationalism” (pp. 126-27). These anecdotes, further discussion of them, and facts like the publication of the scholarly journal *Islamic Culture* from Hyderabad under the editorships of Marmaduke Pickthall and Muhammad Asad, the former Leopold Weiss, fail to show that Hyderabad was a “Muslim state” (p. 125). The Nizams also patronized many Hindu and other people and institutions in and beyond Hyderabad, as Hyderabadi historians have shown in many works not cited in this book.

In the second half of the book, Beverley pursues his second theme, that Hyderabad’s difference from colonial India was “conducive to political improvisation and experimentation informed by regional and local historical precedents, other Muslim states, and examples from Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Americas” (p. 3). Chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8 show contested sovereignties on the frontier (Hyderabad and the Bombay Presidency) and in Hyderabad City (the Resident, Cantonment authorities, and the Nizam’s government). Based on historical records, chapters 5 and 6 commend Hyderabad’s achievements: the effective famine relief provided by the state in the late 1870s, its initiatives for tribal and Adivasi (Dalit) advancement, and its defense of its citizens from British criminal prosecution, albeit by a judicial system seen by the British as “atemporal” and “Moglai” because of its decentralized and patrimonial nature. Chapters 7 and 8 describe urban planning initiatives, the founding of the City Improvement Board (CIB) in 1912 and its achievements, especially of the provision of housing for the working poor. By the 1930s and 40s, the CIB and the Town Planning Department were undertaking industrial and economic developments beyond the city, under the guidance of “a new iteration of the Deccani bureaucrat-intellectual: the planner-technocrat” (p. 248). The legacy of these planner-technocrats and their “fused technical and ethical languages,” Beverley asserts, persisted after the integration of Hyderabad into India and the Nizam’s loss of

authority in 1948 (p. 250).

In the conclusion, Beverley suggests that “Hyderabadi political idioms—Asaf Jahi cosmopolitanism, patrimonialist modernity, Muslim internationalism, eclectic readings of Mughal or Deccani political legacies—and institutional practices did, however, have post-imperial afterlives” (p. 294). Here as elsewhere Beverley relies heavily on assertions. How does this second theme relate to the first theme of the “Muslimness” allegedly displayed by the state and its representatives? Is it because the state’s ruler and many officials were Muslim that its policy and planning initiatives were progressive, or was the state progressive because it was “sub-imperial” and exercised some creative autonomy? Rather than invoke terms and narratives familiar to Hyderabadis and historians of Hyderabad as he argues that Hyderabad was different from British India and offered alternative narratives of sovereignty and modernity, Beverley invents new ones—perhaps he does this to facilitate comparisons with other political entities. Thus he calls Hyderabad a “sub-imperial state,” “minor state,” “minor sovereignty,” and “zone of anomaly” rather than a princely state (and we who have worked on princely states have long argued that they presented alternatives to the dominant British colonial narrative). The important mulki/non-mulki conflict, mentioned above, distinguished the state’s leading late nineteenth-century administrators, men chiefly recruited from British India for the Diwan Salar Jang’s new Diwani administration, from the indigenous Hyderabadis employed in the state’s declining Mughlai administration. Beverley comes up with “bureaucrat-intellectuals,” presumably for these non-mulkis, and then he holds up a very few of them, most notably Chiragh Ali, as modernist Muslim intellectuals representative of Hyderabad’s

“discursive universe.” Instead of discussing the popular notion of Hyderabad’s “Deccani synthesis” or composite culture, Beverley writes of officials harmonizing modernist administrative projects “within an ethical patrimonialist framework of reciprocity between ruler and populace and obligatory official benevolence to state subjects” (p. 9) and “modernist patrimonialist statecraft” (p. 2). In the conclusion he writes about “the polyglot, multi-religious, internationalist, cosmopolitan discourse of Hyderabad legitimacy” (p. 292) being “superseded by parochial idioms of solidarity between predominantly Hindu Telugu speakers” (p. 293).

Finally, one notes some errors or overstatements. For the state’s takeover by India in 1948 Beverley’s sources from within Hyderabad are few and selective. He stresses the role of the (Muslim) Majlis-i Ittehad al Muslimin, but the Majlis did not “take control of Hyderabad” (p. 5). “Hyderabad’s post-World War II decline into widespread violence and militia rule and its violent integration into postcolonial India in 1948” is a debatable and misleading generalization. When the Indian army mounted Operation Polo, or the Hyderabad “Police Action,” in 1948 to incorporate Hyderabad into India, Hyderabad’s general surrendered outside the city to spare Hyderabad lives. While violence took place in some districts after that against Muslims, the casualties were far fewer than rumored, as V. K. Bawa’s *The Last Nizam* (1991), Mohammad Hyder’s *October Coup* (2012), and the finally published *Sunderlal Committee Report* (in A. G. Noorani, *The Destruction of Hyderabad*, 2014) make clear. But “such crisis moments,” Beverley writes, “form background and framing contexts rather than core concerns” (p. 13). If so, one wonders if the empirical is in fact the touchstone of his argument.

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