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THE DECCANI SYNTHESIS IN OLD HYDERABAD:  
AN HISTORIOGRAPHIC ESSAY

DR. KAREN LEONARD

A "Deccani synthesis" has long been postulated by historians of the Deccan region of India;<sup>1</sup> it has received new importance in the context of Indian nationalism and efforts towards national integration. An historical synthesis of Muslim and Hindu culture has been found in the Deccan under the fourteenth century Bahmani dynasty and during the reign of the last Nizam of Hyderabad in the twentieth century. We find statements like the following:

"The gulf between the conqueror and the conquered generally maintained by the Muslims of the north did not exist at all in the south."<sup>2</sup>

".....the whole Deccan where social and religious synthesis was so perfect...that it became a firm foundation for the Indian Nationalism to grow and build itself into a prodigious force against the British imperialism."<sup>3</sup>

The theme of synthesis, then, has received popular support. It has played a role in twentieth century Hyderabad and Indian

<sup>1</sup> Some historians of the Deccan have simply presented chronological political narrative, by passing cultural and social issues. A good example is Yusuf Husain Khan, *The First Nizam* (Bombay, 2nd ed., 1963); another is M. Rama Rao, *Glimpses of Dakkan History* (Bombay, 1951). The latter planned a second volume on society and culture but it never materialized.

<sup>2</sup> Iftekhar Ahmad Ghauri, "Kingship in the Sultanates of Bijapur and Golconda, *"Islamic Culture"* XLVI No. 1 (January 1972), 50. This article appears in two parts, the first as cited pages 39-52; the second, on Golconda, in Vol. XLNI, No. 2, pp. 137-151.

<sup>3</sup> S.K. Sinha, *Ancient Deccan*, (Hyderabad, 1970), p. 34.

politics and it has been supported by non-Muslims as well as by Muslims eager to uphold a benign view of Muslim rule in India. But is it in fact a useful and valid theme for medieval or modern Deccani history? It is an assertion of major significance: that a synthesis of cultures took place and that this fusion had significant political dimensions. I believe that the historical data has been loosely and unsystematically used to support this attractive assertion and that more promising lines of analysis must be pursued.

Deccani historiography has been further confused by the frequent use of two closely related themes to support the theme of cultural synthesis. The first of these proposes that common identity was achieved through conflict. It relies for evidence on the ever-present split between Deccani and foreign factions within the ruling group of a Deccani kingdom, factions usually designated *Dakhani* and *Āfāqī* (Deccani and foreigner) or *Mulkī* and *non-Mulkī* (countrymen and non-countrymen). This persistent pattern of conflict is indeed an important theme in Deccani history, but the opposition of Deccanis to "outsiders" need not ascribe to the Deccanis a common cultural identity. It would be difficult to show that the Deccani faction at any one time represented a Hindu Muslim cultural synthesis, much less over several centuries, for *Dakhani* and *Āfāqī* have meant quite different sets of people at different points in history.

The second related theme is that of the development of Deccani Urdu as the main element in the Deccani synthesis and an issue in the *Dakhani-Āfāqī* conflict. While this distinctive dialect of Urdu developed in the Deccan and was intermittently patronized by political rulers from Bahmani to Qutb Shahi times, the term has been used as a convenient and misleading designation for all Urdu literary activity in the Deccan.

Let us examine these related themes more closely and ascertain their relevance to the history of Hyderabad State. The Deccani synthesis theme has been applied to the Bahmani kingdom, its five successor states of Ahmednagar, Bijapur,

Golconda, Berar, and Bidar, and the Nizam's Hyderabad. But no historian has defined "synthesis" and then investigated the cultural elements represented in any one of these cases or the social composition of the groups participating in any of these allegedly composite cultures. That is, no criteria has been proposed to determine the presence or absence of a cultural synthesis. Rather, historians have simply cited instances of Hindu-Muslim interaction, failing to separate cultural patterns from social structure in their discussions.<sup>1</sup> Thus the following facts led Professor Haroon Khan Sherwani, the best-known proponent of the theme, to conclude that the Bahmani dynasty (1347-1526) was an example of Hindu-Muslim synthesis:

Hindus held government offices: some rulers had Hindu wives; some rulers knew Indian vernaculars: Bahmani's relations with Hindu kingdoms were not based on religious enmity; Hindu traders in the Deccan were not displaced; Muslim saints were revered by non-Muslims; cultural ties were retained with Iran and Arabia; and, finally, Hindu temple architecture showed Islamic influences.<sup>2</sup>

All of these statements may be true, but the data has not been examined according to the criteria for a cultural synthesis. There is evidence of cultural contact and cultural borrowing, but not of the creation of a new, composite culture. Another

1 While both cultural patterns and social structure are aspects of culture, they represent slightly different approaches to its study, and failure to distinguish between them leads to confusion. Of the historians I will be discussing, only Aziz Ahmad makes the distinction: see footnote 2 on page 215.

2 Haroon Khan Sherwani, *The Bahmanis of the Deccan* (Hyderabad, 1953) pp. 143-170. As Professor Sherwani is the most prolific writer on Deccani history and has tried to work out systematic description and analysis in his work, I will be citing him often. The intention is not to criticize his work unduly, for he has himself criticized other writers as over-romantic on the synthesis issue, but to point out the areas which need further work. For his criticism of others, see his footnote terming Dr. Zor's *Hyderabad Farḡhundah Bunyād* "interesting though rather novelesque..." H.K. Sherwani, *Muḥammad-Qulī Qutb Shāh* (New York, 1968), p. 19.

writer, Abdul Haq, in a brief discussion of the Bahmani kingdom and its five successor states, seems to hold that the presence of equally-ranked Muslim and Hindu noblemen is sufficient to proclaim a cultural synthesis.<sup>1</sup>

One of the five successor states, the Qutb Shahi kingdom of Golconda, has frequently been singled out as the best example of cultural synthesis in the Deccan. Again, it is Professor Sherwani who has made the most intensive effort to give evidence for this belief. He has cited the employment of Telugus in high office, the patronage of Telugu literature by one ruler (Ibrāhīm, 1550-1580), the use of the name Tilang for the kingdom, and, again, Indo-Islamic architecture.<sup>2</sup> Iftikhar Ahmad Ghauri has used the terms "national" and "national ruler" in his discussion of the Qutb Shāhi kingdom. He points to religious freedom for Hindus, as evident in the non-collection of *jizyah* from non-Muslims, the lack of mass conversion campaigns, and the celebration of Muharram and other festivals by the population at large.<sup>3</sup> Another strong supporter of the synthesis theme, Professor Abdul Majeed Siddiqui, connected the Qutb Shāhi with the earlier Bahmani kingdom and labelled both favourable to the growth of "Andhra nationality and culture."<sup>4</sup> But his

1 Abdul Haq, "The Influence of Persian on Mahrathi," *Islamic Culture*, X, no. 4 (October, 1936), p. 554.

2 H. K. Sherwani, "Culture and Administrative Set-up under Ibrahim Qutb Shāh," in *Islamic Culture* XXXI, No. 2 (April, 1957), pp. 127-141, continued in XXXI, No. 3 (July, 1957), pp. 235-248. See also his monograph, *Sultan Muhammad Qutb Shāh* (Karachi, 1962). Professor Sherwani seems to use "synthesis" to mean the presence of several cultural elements and their utilization, or knowledge of them by important personages. See his references to the "movement towards the synthesis of cultures" in Muhammad Quli Qutb Shāh pp. 66 and 67. But in the same books he speaks unambiguously of "a conscious fusion of Hindu and Muslim cultures not only at the court but also among the aristocracy and the common people." p. 9.

3 Ghauri, "Kingship in the Sultanates of Bijapur and Golconda," *Islamic Culture*, XLVI, No. 2 (April, 1972), pp. 144-151.

4 Abdul Majeed Siddiqui, *History of Golconda* (Hyderabad, 1956), pp. 6-7. The original Urdu version of this was published in 1939.

detailed material belies his enthusiasm for this theme. Siddiqui reveals that Sultan Muhammad Quli Qutb Shāh, to whom most writers point as the most tolerant of Hindus and chief patron of Deccani Urdu, was a bigoted Shi'a and anti-Sunni, and therefore pro-foreigner and anti-Deccani.<sup>1</sup> Without working out the contradictions implicit in the previous statements, Siddiqui goes on to refer to the reign of this Sultan: "these royal benedictions were evenly affected towards both the Islamic and the local traditions and from the fusion of the two there sprang up a new nation with a common culture."<sup>2</sup> Here he has failed to draw crucial analytical distinctions between an allegedly Deccani content of Qutb Shāhi culture, the languages of its transmission, and the social composition of the groups participating in it. He has further failed to analyze the relationship of culture to politics. Most historians writing on the Qutb Shāhis have accepted the idea of a synthesis because of nationalist sentiments and have relied upon the Hindu ministers and/or Telugu mistresses of rulers to support their assertions; the story of Bhāgmātī, a Telugu dancing girl who may have inspired the founding of Hyderabad city, is invariably cited.<sup>3</sup>

The theme of Deccani—foreigner conflict has fared somewhat better, for at least historians have tried to define the social groups in conflict at different points in history. Professor Sherwani applied this analysis to the Bahmani kingdom, defining *Dakhnīs* as "northerners" who had come to Daulatabad with Muhammad

1 Siddiqui, *History of Golconda*, pp. 344-346.

2 Siddiqui, *History of Golconda*, p. 385.

3 Siddiqui, *History of Golconda*, pp. 230-233, 244-251, 307, 388, 389; Vedam Venketarya Shastri, *The Story of Akanna and Madanna*, (Madras, 1927) pp. 10, 17, 153. The "Cultural Activities" section of *Islamic Culture*, XVII, No. 4 (October, 1953), pp. 434-455, discusses the Bhāgmātī story, and Professor Sherwani presents his theory about it in an appendix, pp. 135-146, of *Muhammad Quli Qutb Shāh*. The most extreme version appears in S. K. Sinha, *Ancient Deccan*, where he asks: "Could there be a greater monument to love or for that matter, to the social status a Dravidian wife enjoyed?" on p. 34.

Tughluq in 1327 and stayed on to found the Bahmani kingdom. He included *Habshis*, Muslims of African origin, in this *Dakhani* group, and he defined the *Āfāqis* as "cosmopolitans" who came to the Deccan later, directly from Iran and Central Asia. Discussing the early stages of Bahmani rule, Sherwani applied these terms to rival units of soldiers in the army.<sup>1</sup> Discussing the later Bahmani period, he used them to designate the factions at Court, and he demonstrated that persistent conflicts between these factions were the major cause of disruption of the kingdom.<sup>2</sup> However, another writer has separated the *Habshis* from the *Dakhani*s and analyzed the conflict within the Bahmani army as three-way, between *Dakhani*s, *Habshis*, and *Āfāqis*.<sup>3</sup> Yet other sources have stressed sectarian differences, defining the *Dakhani*s as Sunni Muslims and the *Āfāqis* as predominantly *Shī'a* Muslims.<sup>4</sup> Such varied definitions may not be completely incompatible but they certainly indicate that research and analysis of these conflicts is in the early stages.<sup>5</sup>

The apparent similarity of the conflict situation over time has given some writers a strong impression of historical continuity of the groups involved. It should be noted that the applications of the theme in the Bahmani period referred only to factions within the Muslim community, in fact, and the later Mulki—non-Mulki groups in Hyderabad State cannot possibly be viewed as continuations of, or even comparable to, these earlier groups.

1 Sherwani, *Bahmanis*, pp. 223-226, 240-243, 366-367.

2 H. K. Sherwani, "Some Aspects of Bahmani Culture," *Islamic Culture*, XVII, No. 1 (January, 1953), pp. 27, 33.

3 Dr. Rahim ud-Din Kamal, "Daktar Zor-shakhshīyyat", in *Yadgar-i-Zor*, [a special issue of *Sab Ras*] (Hyderabad, 1963), pp. 53-54.

4 Siddiqui, *History of Golconda*, and Rao, *Glimpses of Dakkan History*, do this throughout. See also Muhammad Sadiq, *History of Urdu Literature*, (London, 1964), p. 44.

5 Recent research dissertations on Golconda and Bijapur may contain useful material: John Richards on Golconda, University of California, Berkeley, Ph.D. of 1970; Richard Eaton on Bijapur, University of Wisconsin, Ph.D. of 1972.

Yet another problem has been the failure to relate the theme of conflict to the theme of cultural synthesis explicitly; the existence of a Deccani political faction has simply been taken as further proof of a Deccani cultural synthesis.

The third theme, the development of Deccani Urdu, has been treated as the basic element underlying the Deccani cultural synthesis. This dialect of Urdu was derived largely from Punjabi, with borrowings from Marathi and two Dravidian vernaculars, Telugu and Tamil. Some writers maintain that patronage of Deccani Urdu was an official policy of Muhammad Tughluq, the Bahmanis, and the five successor states.<sup>1</sup> This assertion has been linked with the Deccani—foreigner conflict to support the idea of a synthesis.

This dislike of foreigners and things foreign [on the part of the Bahmani Dakhani party] must have acted as a strong incentive to the cultivation of their own language. It was partly due to this sense of national solidarity that the rulers in the south had strong affiliations with their Hindu subjects."<sup>2</sup>

Unfortunately for his argument, the same author has admitted that the Bahmani contribution to Deccani Urdu literature was "negligible".<sup>3</sup>

Even under the Qutb Shāhī rulers of Golconda, Deccani Urdu was not systematically patronized. The dialect's greatest popularity as a medium for poetry was attained under Muhammad Quli Qutb Shāh, who ruled from 1580 to 1612,<sup>4</sup> and the first

1 For example, Kamal, "Daktar Zor," in *Yadgar-i-Zor*, pp. 53-54.

2 Sadiq, *Urdu Literature*, p. 45. Other equations of the development of Urdu in the Deccan with a unique Deccani culture have been made by Syed Mohi ud Din Qadri Zor, *Dakni Adab ki Tārīkh*, (Delhi, n. d. 1959), and his *Dastan-i-Adab-i-Haidarabad*, (Hyderabad, 1951), and by Siddiqui, *History of Golconda*, pp. 374-382.

3 Sadiq, *Urdu Literature*, p. 44.

4 Sherwani, *Sultan Muhammad Qutb Shāh*, pp. 20, 46-55.

prose in Deccani Urdu was written in 1635.<sup>1</sup> But this period was followed by a revival of Persian influence at the Qutb Shāhi court; there is in fact little further evidence of Qutb Shāhi patronage of Deccani Urdu.<sup>2</sup>

In Hyderabad State, the Urdu literary activity of the late nineteenth century did not revive Deccani Urdu. The flowering of Urdu under royal patronage then was directly tied to North Indian Urdu literary developments and did not emphasize or build upon any Deccani heritage.<sup>3</sup> A kind of Deccani Urdu did continue to be spoken at lower levels of the Deccani Muslim communities, but that dialect could not claim to be the literary vehicle of a Deccani culture that was a synthesis of Muslim and Hindu elements.<sup>4</sup> The theme of the development of Deccani Urdu, then, has severe limitations, both intrinsically and when used to support the idea of a Deccani synthesis over time.

We must conclude that these three themes—the Deccani synthesis, persistent Deccani—foreigner, and the development of Deccani Urdu—have not been well-substantiated as the interlocking keys to Deccani history. They have not been carefully defined, thoroughly investigated, or applied consistently over time. Yet they have continued to seem useful and relevant, and in combination they served as the basis of a twentieth century political and cultural movement: the *Mulki* movement in Hyderabad. This was primarily a cultural movement, based on belief in a Deccani synthesis and research on Deccani Urdu,<sup>5</sup> but

<sup>1</sup> Sadiq, *Urdu Literature*, p. 50.

<sup>2</sup> Siddiqui notes some later literature: *History of Golkunda*, pp. 379-382.

<sup>3</sup> Ram Babu Saksena, *History of Urdu Literature*, (Allahabad, 1927), pp. 187-204.

<sup>4</sup> Contemporary Deccani Urdu has been studied by linguists recently by Ruth L. Schmidt, "A Structural Analysis of Hyderabad Dakhini Urdu," unpublished dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1969.

<sup>5</sup> Led by Osmania University Urdu professor, Dr. Zor, the movement was institutionalized in the Idāra-i-Adbiyāt-i Urdu, or Aiwān-i Urdu. This research

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it had a political expression as well.<sup>1</sup> While its origins lay in the political conflict between Hyderabadis and "outsiders" dating from the later nineteenth century,<sup>2</sup> it entered its most active phase from about 1920 until 1948.

Here we are concerned not with the details of this *Mulki*—non-*Mulki* conflict, but with the use of the three historiographic themes to support the *Mulki* position. Many of the participants in the *Mulki* movement were scholars. They founded scholarly institutions and published historical and literary works to support their political goals. Hyderabad appeared to them to be a unique and admirable society, and their hopes for its political future were expressed in the slogan "Long Live the Nizam, the Royal Embodiment of Deccani Nationalism."<sup>3</sup>

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libRARY also publishes books on Deccani themes and puts out a magazine, *Sab Ras*, (titled after the first Deccani Urdu prose piece). *Sab Ras* published a special issue honouring Muhammad Quli Qutb Shāh (vol. 22, Nos. 4-6, 1958); an annual commemoration at his tomb is sponsored by the Aiwān-i-Urdu. Hindus were and are active in this society. Its better-supported offshoot, the Abul Kalam Azad Oriental Research Institute, also patronizes and publishes research on Urdu and Deccani synthesis themes.

1. I am thinking here of the Osmania Graduates Association, the Hyderabad Political Reform Association of 1919, the Society of Union and Progress of 1926, the Nizam's Subjects' League or *Mulki* League of 1935, and even the Hyderabad State Congress to some extent.

2. I have discussed this conflict briefly in my Ph. D. dissertation. "The Kayasths of Hyderabad City," University of Wisconsin, 1969, of which a copy is available in the Andhra Pradesh State Archives, Hyderabad India. I have also written two papers relevant to it. "The *Mulki*-non-*Mulki* Theme in 20 Century Hyderabad Politics," given at the Association of Asian Studies meetings in 1961 and "Cultural Change and Bureaucratic Modernization in Nineteenth Century Hyderabad, *Mulkis*, Non-*Mulkis*, and the English," to be published in a felicitation volume for Professor H. K. Sherwani from Hyderabad.

3. K. M. Munshi; *End of an Era* (Bombay, 1957), p. 20. The contrasting slogan of the Ittehad ul Muslimeen he alleges to have been "Long Live Nizam, the Royal Embodiment of Muslim Sovereignty in the Deccan."

Partisans of the *Mulki* movement accepted and used the cultural synthesis theme. Despite the quite different social composition of the ruling and administrative groups under the Bahmanis, the successor states, and Hyderabad State, *Mulki* scholars implied historical continuity from an earlier Deccani synthesis. In the earlier states, participants in a composite culture would have been Deccani and "foreign" Muslims and Marathi, Kannada, and Telugu speakers, particularly the latter under the Qutb Shāhis. But in Hyderabad, the majority of the Hindu participants in the central administration were Hindustani speakers originally from North India. And most of the Muslim nobility of Hyderabad was also drawn from North India, not from the old Deccani nobility.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps recognizing the limited role of Deccani Urdu under earlier states, *Mulki* writers reinforced the argument for literary synthesis by discussing Hindus who wrote in Persian and standard Urdu, and Qutb Shāhi patronage of Telugu.<sup>2</sup> Despite such efforts, the thesis that a distinctive Deccani group and culture continued from medieval to modern times clearly cannot be upheld. But, just as clearly, the idea that

<sup>1</sup> One of the many sources for this conclusion is the second volume of Ghulam Samdani Khan, *Tuzuk-i-Mahbūbiyah* (Hyderabad, 1902), with its biographical sketches of leading nobles and officials. See also my article, "The Hyderabad Political System and its Participants," *Journal of Asian Studies* XXX, No. 3, (May, 1971), pp. 569-582.

<sup>2</sup> See Nasir ud-din Hashimi, *Dakhini Hindu aur Urdu* Hyderabad, n.d. (1958), published by the Idara-i Adbiyat-i Urdu. He discusses Hindu authors of Persian and Urdu poetry and does not discuss Deccani Urdu, but the book implicitly supports the Deccani synthesis theme. Discussing Qutb Shāhi support of Telugu, Siddiqui actually terms Muḥammad Quli Qutb Shāh a *mulki*: *History of Golconda*, 382-385. A recent book in this vein is by E. Vasumati, *Telugu Literature in the Qutub Shahi Period* (Hyderabad, n.d. (1966)); author received a scholarship from the Abul Kalam Azad Oriental Research Institute for this work and it published it. Professor Sherwani has chided both Dr. Zor and Professor Siddiqui for believing that Sūltān Muḥammad Quli Qutb Shāh might have written in Telugu himself: *Muḥammad-Quli Qutb Shāh*, pp. 44-46, add footnote 2; he thus rebukes those going beyond their evidence to assert cultural synthesis.

conflict for political power was often based on social groups of "locals" versus "outsiders" is a valid and useful thesis. The current controversy pitting natives of Telengana against coastal Andhras well illustrates such conflict and the continuing relevance of the terms *Mulki-non-Mulki*, although shifts have occurred in the composition of the groups over time.

Although the historical development and continuity of a distinctive Deccani group and culture cannot be substantiated, we are still left with assertions of a Hindu-Muslim cultural synthesis in Hyderabad, the basic belief of the *Mulki* movement. Certainly Hyderabad's heterogeneous society included both Muslims and Hindus, and men of diverse ethnic, racial, religious, and social backgrounds achieved success within the Nizam's state. Religious institutions of many kinds secured the patronage of the Nizam, and the urban Court culture was undeniably eclectic. But a cultural synthesis means more than this. There must be a single coherent cultural whole, a composite of originally distinct elements, aspired to by all or most of the population. In Hyderabad, we find, instead, patterns of culture relevant to different levels and groups in society.<sup>1</sup>

The Court culture was an essentially Mughul culture imported to the Deccan, reflecting little which could be designated as either Deccani or Hindu elements in a hypothetical synthesis.<sup>2</sup> This style of life was aspired to by the limited but significant elite

<sup>1</sup> Very relevant here is the work of Aziz Ahmad. He includes little material on the Deccan in his *Studies in Islamic Culture in the Indian Environment* (Oxford, 1964), but he distinguishes between synthesis and other modes of cultural interaction, referring to the "assimilation" of Hindus into the ruling elite (page 101 on) the "syncretism in folk-beliefs" (page 163 on). He does, however, refer to the development of Deccani Urdu as a "more composite process" (page 241), and discussing the Emperor Akbar states that "he developed to a point of cultural synthesis the intellectual policy of Muḥammad bin Tughluq, Firūz Tughluq and some rulers of Bengal and the Deccan." (page 181). But careful reading indicates that here he is talking primarily of court patronage; he generally opposes assertions of cultural synthesis.

<sup>2</sup> Professor Sherwani would de-emphasize the idea of religious synthesis, (Continued on page 216)

group of nobles and those in the higher levels of the state administration. A further limitation should be noted: when the noblemen and officials went home, they conformed to domestic caste or community cultures maintained by their women and other dependants. This disparity between Court and domestic cultures was perhaps greatest in the case of non-Muslims, but even for Muslims, whose women shared the linguistic and religious references of the Mughul culture, the "home" and "work" cultures differed considerably.

Furthermore, the impact of the Court culture was largely confined to Hyderabad city. The rule of a Muslim Nizam had little impact on the peasant cultures of the Nizam's rural Hindu subjects. In the countryside the mother tongues were Kannada, Marathi, and Telugu, and these vernacular cultures displayed little reorientation towards Hyderabad city and its Court culture. Even in the city, local cultural traditions survived and flourished alongside the Court culture. Qutb Shāhi cultural observances, usually Shī'a Muslim in origin, continued through the survival of local landmarks and the popular festivals centered on them. Many of these urban festivals were attended by the lower levels of the populace, people whose women could participate in public neighbourhood activities. While neighbourhood cultures both old and new flourished, they did not combine to form a coherent whole for the city, nor did they merge with the Court culture. A series of indigenous and local patterns of culture co-existed with the urban Court culture even in Hyderabad city.<sup>1</sup>

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while espousing that of significant cultural interaction. In personal discussion with me (June, 1971), he noted his dislike for the term "Islamic" in such a context, preferring "Muslim" to indicate that cultural rather than religious issues were involved.

1 Descriptions of city's religious and cultural patterns occur in many works, particularly Manik Rao Vithal Rao, *Bustān-i Āḡafīyah* (Hyderabad, 7 vols., 1909-1932), II; Ghulam Husain Khan, *Tārīkh-i Gulzār-i Āḡafīyah*. Two good books on local landmarks are Bilgrami, *Landmarks of the Deccan*, and Satguru Pershad, *Farkhundaḥ Bunyād Hyderabad* (Hyderabad, 1964).

How, then, can we analyze the successful integration of men of many backgrounds into Hyderabad politics and society? The concept of a plural society, in which members of diverse ethnic, racial, religious and social groups maintain an autonomous participation in their traditional cultures but within a common and controlling political framework, serves best. While much of the literature on plural societies has focussed on colonial or post-colonial situations,<sup>1</sup> the general notion of cultural plurality, with a small political elite presiding over more localized, segmented social groups, seems readily applicable to Hyderabad. The unity of this political elite might be structurally limited by the fact that some of the participants were members of birth-ascribed groups, and prohibitions existed on social intercourse and intermarriage. But members of the Hyderabad elite shared the exercise of political and economic power through the dominant institutions of the government. And though the system as a whole might be characterized by social separation and cultural heterogeneity, these men also shared a common adherence to the Mughul Court culture.<sup>2</sup> It is the integration achieved at this level of society, through the ruling political institutions and the Court culture, which most proponents of the synthesis theme have really had in mind.

1 This follows the lead of J. S. Furnivall, who developed the concept in *Colonial Policy and Practice: A comparative Study of Burma and Netherlands India* (Cambridge, 1948). But many have commented on the cultural plurality of Indian society, for example Andre Beteille in (ed.) P. Mason, *India and Ceylon* (Oxford, 1967), p. 93 I found most useful the discussion by Gerald D. Berreman, "Race, Caste, and Other Invidious Distinctions in Social Stratification," *Race*, XIII, no. 4 (April, 1972), pp. 400-401.

2 This cultural model prevailed in most of urban India before British days. Here Bernard Cohn's attempts to generalize about pre-British Indian elites are relevant, particularly his remarks about the "international Persianized civil servants," pages 125 and 128-129 of "Recruitment of Elites in India Under British Rule" in (ed.) L. Plotnicov and A. Tuden, *Essays in Comparative Social Stratification* (Pittsburgh, 1970).

To call old Hyderabad a plural society rather than a cultural synthesis does not denigrate its uniqueness or the considerable degree of successful integration which it was able to achieve. But it does remove much of the emotional and ideological overtone with which historians have approached the analysis of Hyderabadi society. It also helps to explain why political pressures resulted in a more rapid disintegration of Hyderabadi society after 1948 than one would have expected had a true cultural synthesis existed. Historians must now look at the different patterns and levels of culture comprising the plural society of old Hyderabad, and we must extend such an analysis to the earlier Deccani states as well. Our reconstructions of the past will be more complex but also much nearer to reality.