Chapter 2. Citizen Power or State Weakness? The Enduring History of Collective Action in a Hyderabadi Bazaar

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Introduction

As I was leaving the town planner’s office in Hyderabad, a uniformed guard at the main door held out his palm and smiled. ‘Baksheesh’, he said. ‘For what?’ I asked. ‘Madam, you met the town planner,’ he responded. I still did not understand why he was demanding money since he had little to do with the appointment. A few days later, I read the autobiography of a courtier who was the sixth Nizam’s [the ruler] tutor and later his advisor in late 19th century Hyderabad, which was the capital of the princely state of the Deccan. The behaviour of the guard in the town planner’s office was similar to that of a Chobdar (doorman) and of a Vaghera (headman) of the previous century. When Sarwar Jang first arrived in the city with a letter of introduction, he found it almost impossible to get an appointment with the Premier Minister of the Deccan. Every morning, he would come to the premier minister’s residence and wait. But each day, he returned home disappointed. He writes in his memoirs:

My friend the Cavalryman approached me, and said in a friendly manner that I had better retire, or the ‘Chobdars’ [doormen] would turn me out by ‘force’ or he added, promise them some Bakshish [a tip] to allow you to remain...For an interview, he added, the strongest possible influence [wielded by a Headman] was required. I met this man [the Headman] and showed him the letter, but he replied in a harsh tone, ‘You have lost your senses. We are not the post office to carry letters. You had better find one of the durbaries for this purpose.’ I replied that if he took my letter, I would serve him gladly i.e. I would remunerate him for his trouble and on hearing this, he became somewhat reasonable, and enquired what I would give him. I mentioned the figure Rs. 50; and then taking the letter and rising, he said, ‘Remain sitting I will soon return.’ He disappeared upstairs, and I remained expectant till about nine or ten o’clock. At last I enquired of the same Chobdar, as to where his Vagera (headman) had gone, and requesting him to get me some information, promised him ten rupees for his trouble. Having heard this he followed the Vagera upstairs, and brought him back, and the latter said, ‘The Nawab Sahib read your letter, and has ordered your presence at one o’clock.’ He then asked me for his remuneration.

A second vignette demonstrates another trait that locals continue to exhibit in their interaction with the state. During one of my visits in July 2012, there was a lot of excitement among the municipality officials, heritage conservationists, political party leaders, and town planner about the possibility of the city becoming a member of UNESCO’s world heritage cities. ‘Hyderabad, Varanasi and Udaipur are the three being considered by the UNESCO team,’ a town planner in the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) told me with great pride. The experts from the International Council of Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) were due to inspect the sixteenth century monuments – Golconda Fort, Charminar and the Qutb Shahi Tombs – for inclusion in UNESCO’s World Heritage list for 2013. To make the cut, the officials were supposed to remove all encroachments around the...
sites.

‘The congested nature of the Charminar area, lack of time and due to other practical problems, we could only do minor restoration work,’ said a senior official with the Archeological Survey of India (ASI) (quoted in Pisharody 2012). The four minarets of Charminar, the cardinal centre of the original city, house a dargah and a temple which have become rallying points for political parties in the state. Both have flags, hoardings, and syntax water tanks dispersed around their sites. The ASI’s ban on construction within 100 metres of Charminar was blithely ignored by the shopkeepers who constructed triple storeyed buildings (unlike the two storeyed structures envisaged by the city’s original architects and captured in the sepia photographs of the court photographer Raja Deen Dayal), and by officials who turned a blind eye. Conservation architect Nitin Sinha who was involved in restoration and conservation works of Lad Bazaar under Charminar Pedestrianisation Project during 2006 said that shopkeepers asked the municipality to allow them to construct 3-4 storey buildings.

‘We were very clear that height restrictions and the architectural character had to be maintained’, said Sinha in a newspaper interview. ‘However, the present scene clearly shows that shopkeepers went ahead with their plans, with the GHMC and ASI making no efforts to stop them’ (Times of India 10 April 2012). The irony was that in October 2012, a few days before the visit of the international team, the ASI erected a notice board (a strangely rusted one, according to the newspaper report) in the bazaar ‘prohibiting any construction activity within 100 metre radius of the protected monument.’ On being asked about the rusted signboard, an ASI official deployed at Charminar said that the notice board was lying in the sixteenth century monument for months because they had to take permission from the GHMC and the police to erect it and hence it got rusted. What the second vignette reveals is that much of day-to-day life within the old city is conducted on the basis of an implicit modus vivendi between those inhabiting the space and those policing it.

A third vignette pertains to the public shaming of the city’s power elite (mayor, political party leaders, high officials) by angry baazari-citizens. This will be discussed in more detail later. Critics like Partha Chatterjee (2004, 2011) have argued that in India only the elites can exercise their rights, while the rest of society is doomed to be treated as ‘populations’ or ‘political society’ whose demands are rarely heard or only expressed through clientelistic relations with political parties. How do we characterize disregard for rules by ‘political society’ with the passive approval of the state? If the laws prohibit citizens, particularly the marginalized and poor ones, from claiming a stake in a city’s centre, how do citizens establish their claim to such spaces without inviting the wrath of the state? What forms of mediation do they use, what is the link between these forms and democracy, and how do the outcomes impact on their capacity to transform themselves from subjects into citizens?

These are the questions addressed by the chapter. In the first vignette, the behaviour of the doorman resonated with a courtierly (clientelist) mode of mediation, while in the second vignette, the citizens (shopkeepers) colluded with state officials to bypass the laws and claim a stake to the city’s centre. The third vignette demonstrates the direct interaction and claim making by the citizen. The threats of unruly politics, of riots or sloganeering during the
visits of the high officials are deployed as tools only when the complicit arrangements are disturbed.

Patrick Heller (2011) argues that the inadequate development in India of participatory authority – active citizenship where citizens are viewed as bearers of rights – is a result of an imbalance of political and civil society and a transactional nature of political representation. The case study in this chapter illuminates the need for further nuancing of these arguments. Based on the vignettes above, how do we characterize such relations between state and society? An empowered citizenry? A weak state? Or, as I argue in the chapter, the notions of empowerment and weakness do not capture the range of negotiations between these two sets of actors. The relationship of clientelist engagement – predicated on exchanges and loyalties, not rights (Heller, 2011) – with active citizenship needs to be reworked, particularly in the context of electoral democracy. I argue that the distribution of power between the state and the citizens is less unequal than what is generally presumed in the literature, and the forms of negotiation (use of slogan shouting, public shaming, disregard for laws, use of political party mediators, and traders associations) have deeper antecedents in history rather than being simply a response to weakness in democratic representation, as is often argued. While there is a distinction between the status of citizenship (a bundle of rights) and the practice of citizenship, the latter needs further unbundling.

An analysis of the tussle over Hyderabad’s Charminar Pedestrianisation project helps us understand how citizens and state officials operate in what Yiftachel (2009) calls ‘the grey spaces’ to stake their claim on the core of the city.

**A Brief History of Hyderabad**

Most large cities today have grown from a core, which links the modern to the past, giving meaning to the cultural traditions that have developed and provide identity and meaning to the modern city. In Hyderabad, this core is well defined and enclosed within stone walls of the city first visualised by the first ruler in the sixteenth century, Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah. He visualised on the southern side of the Musi River a ‘bride’ of cities – bazaars, cardinal axes streets, smaller lanes devoted to one profession or object (cloth bazaar, silver bazaar, flour bazaar, spice bazaar etc). His architects planned and constructed 14000 double storeyed shops lining the four main avenues emanating from Charminar, which would mark the city’s centre. A seventeenth century French traveller (Tavernier) recorded in his journal: ‘Lay a pencil at right angles across two parallel pencils and you have the skeleton. Put a dot at the centre, and you have Charminar. Pad the body with peepul, neem and mango trees, and perfume her with jasmine and attar of rose and you get the bride of cities that is Hyderabad.’

Hyderabad is in the centre of peninsular southern India on the Deccan plateau, and in the 19th and 20th centuries, Hyderabad was the one of the largest cities in South Asia (only Bombay, Madras and Calcutta were larger). It was the capital of a princely state of the same name with a predominantly non-Muslim population ruled by a Muslim Nizam. Built in the form of a parallelogram, six miles in circumference and two and one fourth square miles in area, Hyderabad was built on the banks of the Musi River and today constitutes the historic old city (the subject of the chapter). The suburbs of the city extended for three miles from
east to west, and an average breadth of one and a half miles from north to south, covering an area of over five square miles. The other suburbs in the east and south occupied an area of four square miles. In the late 18th century, Secunderabad (one of the largest military stations of British India) was added to the city, but remained under the control of the British Resident who lived in the Residency on the left bank of the Musi river opposite the north-eastern corner of the city. In 1876, the explorer Captain Richard F. Burton penned his impressions of the city.

We have just returned from our first survey of the ‘Lion City,’ and as we saw much that was unexpected...Here we have our first view of the city, whose crumbling towers and ramparts abutting upon the right bank of the River Valley, contrast queerly with the prim Gothic battlements of the North-Eastern or Palace Gate....Before entering the castellated Palace Gate we must remember that Hyderabad is not an ancient city. It owes its origin to Sultan Mahommed Kuli II of the Kutb Shahi or Golconda dynasty, who, about A.D. 1520 built a country palace for one of his mistresses, the lady Bhagwati, a Hindu of no particular caste... and called the outpost Bhagnagar...Why it was baptized Hyderabad – the abode of Hyder of the lion – none can tell.

After India’s independence from the British, and the accession of Hyderabad to the Union of India on November 24, 1948 after a bloody series of skirmishes between those loyal to the Nizam and the Indian army, the Nizam’s Dominions were reorganized. When land reforms expropriated the nobles’ holdings, and independence displaced them and the Nizam as political elites, their position as status elites also disappeared (Ali 2001). The Police Action by the Indian state dispossessed the Nizam of his power almost overnight, and immediately dismantled the political hierarchy. Political power shifted from the Muslim minority to the Hindu majority. Faiz Ali points out that it is not uncommon to find those from nawabi households now eking out a living as rickshaw pullers and taxi drivers.

From a sleepy city that was the preferred home for retirees, Hyderabad tapped into the computer and outsourcing vein of globalization in the mid-1980s and became a bustling metropolis. As the state capital, it saw the influx of vast amounts capital, migrants, and skills during successive governments. Cyberabad (hi-tec city) was created north of Jubilee hills for professionals from coastal Andhra and other parts of India. Today, the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Area covers an area of 650 sq. kilometres with a population of 6.3 million. The tripartite structure of the city: Hyderabad, Secunderabad and Cyberabad, replicates the division between the locals, migrants and temporary residents. Today, the population of Hyderabad’s old city is evenly split between Hindus (mainly two lower castes) and Muslims (35-37% of the old city inhabitants), while the other parts of greater Hyderabad contain the housing colonies of more recent migrants from coastal Andhra and Telangana.¹ Secunderabad houses the old Sindhi, Anglo-Indian, Parsi and Hindu communities who moved to the city in the previous century. The elites (belonging to different religions and castes) live in Jubilee Hills and Banjara Hills.

**The Charminar Pedestrianisation Project**

Walking, or horse and bullock-drawn carriages were the main mode of transport for most
Hyderabads. The nobles preferred to sit atop elephants and camels until the early part of the 20th century. Then came the bicycles and motorcars. The cobblestone streets in the walled city could take the weight of single elephants, but not the crush of mass transport that became the norm by the turn of the 20th century.

The conundrum for city planners is how best to recreate the space in the centre of the old city so that the dweller, pedestrian and vendor can enjoy a quality urban environment. The intention is to make user groups – pedestrians, private and public motorized and non-motorised vehicle pliers, informal sector vendors, shop keepers – feel that the space belongs to them and they belong to that space. In 1975, the Hyderabad Urban Development Authority (HUDA) proposed to pedestrianise the area around Charminar, and a Hyderabad Urban Conservation Study was published in 1984. But the proposal languished until 1993 when four government bodies (APSRTC, QQSUDA, HUDA and the traffic wing of the city police department) commissioned a proposal to restrict the movement of four wheelers and buses in the central Charminar area. An architectural firm was commissioned to study the old city area and suggest re-routing of traffic, parking and other actions that would pedestrianise the centre and reduce the pressure on the spaces and buildings, particularly the heritage monuments. Two decades later, a hand-out by HUDA said that the implementation of the Charminar Pedestrianisation Project remains ‘elusive’ and has resulted in an ‘unchecked damage to the physical environment’ and a ‘loss of faith on the part of the people’ in CPP. In 2012, the project was revived at an estimated cost of $55 million.

What accounts for this elusiveness in implementing the pedestrianisation project? Let us examine two arguments about whether and why active citizenship cannot emerge/or is underdeveloped in post-colonial India. Democracy, as Patrick Heller notes, is a critical counter-power to the despotic tendencies of the state’s distributive power in modern states where there is a constant tension between democracy and organization (or in Weberian terms between substantive and instrumental rationality). Heller disaggregates democracy’s three forms of authorized power: (a) legal-constitutional (the state is authorized by previous negotiations and such authorization is enshrined in the laws that are enforced by a rule-bound bureaucracy and routinely reviewed and sometimes amended by the judiciary); (b) representative authorization (elected representatives legislate and also perform the function of mediating access to the state through clientelism that can be used to exercise legitimate and illegitimate power); c) participatory authorization (state action here derives its legitimacy from civil society). Participatory authorization is less well theorized and is specifically intertwined with the idea of active citizenship – citizens are viewed as bearers of rights rather than simply as voters. For Heller, the problem of India’s democratic effectiveness, and by extension the state’s developmental capacity, is the inadequate development of (c) because of a weak state and weak citizenry.

The second argument by Partha Chatterjee (2004, 2011) projects the concept of ‘political society’, a ‘popular politics’ that he distinguishes from ‘civil society’ or the politics of rights-bearing, enfranchised bourgeois citizens. Political society, for Chatterjee (ibid. 40), involves claims to habitation and livelihood by ‘groups of population whose very livelihood or habitation involve violation of the law’.
Unlike citizenship, which carries the moral connotation of sharing in the sovereignty of the state and hence of claiming rights in relation to the state, populations do not bear any inherent moral claim. When they are looked after by governmental agencies, they merely get the favour of a policy whose rationale is one of costs and benefits in terms of economic, political, or social outcomes. When these calculations change, the policies change too and so does the composition of the target groups. Large sections of the urban poor could not be treated as legitimate citizens precisely because their habitation and livelihood were so often premised on a violation of the law. Policies on this terrain of governmentality are never simply a matter of disbursing charity. Rather, there is always an attempt to calibrate rewards and costs, incentives and punishments, in order to produce the desired outcomes.

However, Chatterjee’s triad of the state, civil society and political society is too rigid to help us understand the dynamic between the state and the denizens of the Charminar neighbourhood where the shopkeepers prevailed due to other reasons. Heller’s ‘participatory authorization’ is more apt in the context of old Hyderabad, but requires further nuancing since the modes of mediation and the forms of interaction between the state and citizens are more complex, involving a mix of participatory and clientelist modes.

In the context of CPP, the elusiveness, I argue, is engendered by the way in which the locals negotiated with the state in what Yiftachel (2009) calls ‘the grey spaces’ to stake their claim on the core of the city. ‘The concept of ‘gray space’ refers to developments, enclaves, populations and transactions positioned between the ‘lightness’ of legality/approval/safety and the ‘darkness’ of eviction/destruction/death. ’ This grey spacing is slow and gradual — ‘a slow encroachment of the ordinary’ (Bayat 2007 and Perera 2009) through familiarization of the cracks in the workings of oppressive power. But this familiarization can come from different channels. In Hyderabad, it comes from the four-century long habitation of the bazaaris with the state including the modes of interaction with officials and the laws in a manner that suits the everyday convenience of the state official, shopkeepers, vendors and pedestrians. The processes – the need to win votes – unleashed by electoral democracy played a role in creating spaces for excluded groups to make claims. The channels of mediation used by those affected by the project were direct and indirect, formal and informal, clientelist and active citizenship. The picture that emerges is messy but we can highlight clear links with history and with democracy that complicates narratives about the processes by which active citizenship can emerge in post-colonial India.

**Negotiations and Channels of Mediation**

There were two major issues connected to the process and to the choices made about the layout of the Charminar Pedestrianisation project. The process issue pertained to how the pedestrianisation efforts would affect the livelihood of the shopkeepers and vendors. The laying of the granite pavement and interlocking cement tiles required the stoppage of traffic around the city centre since the GHMC feared that traffic would damage the granite. The choice issue pertained to the physical placement of the vendors in the new set up. The vendors wanted to line up along the side of the street, whereas the municipality wanted them in the centre of the pedestrian area. ‘If they are along the sides of the street, more encroachment will occur,’ said a municipal official.
Chatterjee’s ‘civil’ and ‘political’ society used similar tools to achieve their objectives. Let us apply Heller’s typology to these modes of interaction with the state.

Legal means (Legal Authorization)

In May 2010 the Jewellers and Sharaff Association of Charkaman (an association of shopkeepers) petitioned the High Court which ordered the GHMC ‘to ensure that to the extent possible traffic of light motor vehicles is not stopped.’ The association representative told a newspaper reporter that that they had demanded information about the CPP using the Right to Information Act (RTI) passed in 2008. In this instance, the state treated the shopkeepers as ‘populations’ and ‘political society’ who in turn used legal and associational means to demand their rights as citizens including the right to be informed.

But what of those who did not belong to the association, namely Chatterjee’s ‘political society.’ In an attempt to organize and create spaces that were being occupied illegally, the GHMC began removing unauthorised structures. Five bookshops petitioned the High Court to stop the GHMC, which wanted to align the roads, from removing the ‘chabutra’ (feeding table/dais for birds) in front of their shops. The court directed the GHMC not to demolish any existing structures or convert the open space in front of the shops into a road.

Other hawkers/street vendors petitioned the high court that, however, rejected the appeal and held that it was in the interests of the public and liveability that the municipality remove these businesses (Mohd 2000). The petition challenged the traffic police’s drive to stop persons setting up unauthorised kiosks and push carts on foot paths, roads and open places in order to ensure the free flow of vehicular traffic/ pedestrians. The court held that hawkers ought to conduct their business in accordance with law and that they had no fundamental right to violate the provisions of the Hyderabad Municipal Corporation Act as well as the City Police Act. The court pointed out that all the business was packed in a box or kept on a push cart which could be shifted from place to place wherever they attract customers:

The traffic problem in the city of Hyderabad has reached peak point whereas the pedestrians and general public are faced with serious problems. If the foot paths and the road margins are occupied by the hawkers to suit their convenience it cannot be said that their fundamental right has been violated if they are sought to be evicted. In such an event apart from the provisions of the Municipal Corporations Act and the City Police Act even under the common principles of natural justice no notice is feasible of being served on the petitioners.

Thus the court upheld the livelihood concerns of the bookshop owners, but rejected the hawker’s petition in favour of supporting the municipality’s attempt to ease congestion. The citizens utilized the legal form of democratic authorization to make their demands known to the state, and received the state’s reply. If we apply Chatterjee’s argument to the above set of petitions, the court’s support for the municipality’s argument confirms the subject status of political society (hawkers and vendors). However, there is another interpretation that involves the practice of democratic citizenship, which will be explicated in the next section.
Use of Dominant Political Party (Representative Authorization)

Political parties were the second mode of mediation used by the affected groups in the CPP project. ‘Who is the most powerful person in the old city today?’ I asked a constable, a police officer, a flower seller, a dargah head, a shopkeeper, a vendor, and a resident. ‘The Owaisi brothers’, was the reply.

The Majlis-e-Ittehadul-Muslimeen (MIM) was formed in 1927 ‘for educational and social uplift of Muslims’. But it articulated the position that ‘the ruler and throne (Nizam) are symbols of the political and cultural rights of the Muslim community... (and) this status must continue forever’ (The Hindu 27 April 2003). This stance challenged the Andhra Mahasabha and the communists who questioned the feudal order that sustained the Nizam’s rule, and the Arya Samaj, which gave social and cultural expression to the aspirations of the urban Hindu population in Hyderabad State. In the mid-1940s, the Majlis organised the razakars (volunteers) to defend the ‘independence ’ of this ‘Muslim’ State from merger with the Indian Union (The Hindu, 30 September 2008). A veteran of several elections, Sultan Salahuddin Owaisi became a councillor in the Municipal Corporation of Hyderabad in 1960 and a Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) in February 1962, and a Member of Parliament (MP) in 1984 (ibid). Due to poor health, he did not contest the election in 2004 but his elder son, Asaduddin Owaisi, successfully retained the seat. While most parties have suffered erosion in their vote bank, the MIM has been able to retain and expand the voting base, going from 58,000 votes in the 1962 Parliamentary elections to 112,000 in 1980 to 222,000 in 1984 and over 400,000 lakhs in 1989. Despite widespread allegations of Majlis leaders having ‘made money’, most ordinary Muslims continue to support them because, as one bank executive put it ‘they represent our issues clearly and unambiguously’. Apart from a bid for control by a breakaway faction, the MIM has not faced any other serious challenges in its fifty year history.

An Assistant Town Planner told me that the MIM was opposed to the pedestrianisation project because the livelihoods of street vendors would be affected. ‘We cannot remove these people (unauthorised vendors) because of these political parties,’ he said. The MIM MLA, Amin Jaffrey, said that their duty was to communicate the demands of their constituencies to the state. The vendors (Chatterjee’s political society) had individually and collectively approached him and the other leaders of MIM to intercede with the municipality and ensure that they were not removed. The assistant town planner later said that the government ‘was trying to address it by proposing the middle of the road as the vending area, while pedestrians could walk on either side.’ The vendors, however, rejected the solution and communicated through the MIM that they would prefer to be on the two sides. The assistant town planner said that the state was loath to allow such an arrangement because ‘if you do that, you cannot stop proliferation of vendors.’ At present, the municipal officials, city government, the MIM, and the vendors (individually and through associations) are engaged in a series of discussions on the issue. The street vendors, through representative authorization, partly achieved their objective of ensuring that the state does not evict them from the spaces where they earn a livelihood. But this could well be a temporary reprieve.
Simultaneously, as we shall see below, ‘civil society’ utilized ‘unruly’ politics to put pressure on the state.

Orderly and Unruly Interaction (includes Participatory Authorization)

In January 2011, the shopkeepers, mainly jewellers along the stretch between Gulzar Hauz and Charminar, ‘gheraed’ (crowded around) the Mayor and demanded to know why the road outside their shops had been dug up and why they had not been informed by the GHMC or other government departments of the pedestrianisation project or that the road was to be closed for a couple of days. The angry shopkeepers said that they had learnt from a leading Hindi newspaper that the road in front of their shops would be closed within three days. The shopkeepers also complained that they were told to change their signboards according to the norms specified by the GHMC, but they were not informed about these norms were. When the Mayor, Deputy Mayor, GHMC Commissioner, and MIM members of the legislative assembly did not respond, the shopkeepers began shouting slogans against the government. As the slogan shouting increased, Akbaruddin Owaisi (the brother of the MIM leader) asked the deputy mayor to ensure that the road ‘was closed on no account’. He also asked the GHMC Commissioner to carry out the work by adjusting the timings, ‘so that the commuters and shopkeepers are put to the least hardship possible.’ The jewellers association again achieved its goal of ensuring that customers could approach their shops during the holiday season.

Both sets of actors used formal channels (courts and political representatives), direct channels (approaching the mayor and officials directly and through their associations), and unruly politics (slogan shouting/gherao) to press their demands. These groups selected from a repertoire of actions that encompassed the legal, representative and participatory authorizations delineated by Heller. MIM’s behaviour can be characterised as clientelist but the MIM leader said that the party had to respond these days to the growth of an active rights-talking citizenry. ‘We decided in 2008 that we should do more and focus on the fundamental issues,’ said the Asasuddin Owaisi (2012). ‘The old days of rhetoric will not do anymore. We can survive and win elections but we should do more for our people.’ The basic issues listed by him were tackling poverty, lack of good schools, unemployed youth, and providing basic amenities. The Charminar Pedestrianisation project was, he said, an important aspect of reviving the old city. In the last two decades, the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has emerged as a new player in the politics of the old city. While electorally, the BJP has not been able to dislodge the MIM from its citadel, clashes between BJP and MIM supporters have often led to flare-ups (Radhakrishna 2004). Owaisi’s words reflect the fact that though MIM is a significant player in the politics of the old city, it is now struggling to retain its influence in the face of a more demanding citizenry that is aware of its power in an electoral democracy.

For Chatterjee, it is the task of political organization to mould the empirical discreteness of a population group into the moral solidarity of a community. In the case of Hyderabad, this moulding – a moral solidarity of mulkis (insiders) – occurred through the historical and cultural mores prevalent among the denizens of the old city who were heterogeneous in their economic, caste and religious attributes.
Historicising the Practice of Active Citizenship

The repertoires of mediation used by political and civil society in the CPP project thus have antecedents in the pre-independence era, and are not simply a response to democratization. Heller’s participatory authorization was present in a different and more diluted form in the Nizam’s Hyderabad where the bazaaris faced similar problems of a state that was indifferent to their woes, and incompetent. Under the Nizams, the Minister of Police and Public Works oversaw the administration of the municipal officers. ‘The city streets are too narrow to admit of much wheeled traffic. Their drainage and sanitation generally are still defective,’ wrote C.B. Saunders, British Resident at Hyderabad in his Administration Report of Hyderabad for 1869-70. ‘When the father of the late Nizam was once reminded by the Resident that his capital stood in need of sanitation, his reply was ‘Kadeem se kaseef ‘ [from ancient times it has been unswept]. A Municipal Committee, it is true, has been created to take into consideration measures for the purification of the city; but for some time the only results of their consideration seemed to be conclusion that very little could be done.’ (Mehdi Ali, Hyderabad Affairs, vol V, p.285).

The Deccan Times correspondent wrote in his despatch of March 6, 1880: ‘When a vacancy occurs it is almost impossible for an outsider to enter the lists as a candidate unless he can satisfactorily answer to himself one of two questions – have I any influential friend or relative in the service? If not, have I a sufficiently long purse to pay my way to success? We can testify to more than one case that has come to our knowledge where men of superior abilities and respectability have been rejected, and mere ignoramuses chosen instead, who possessed neither the educational nor physical fitness required for the post.’ (Mehdi Ali, Hyderabad Affairs, Vol 5, p.303)

It was, however, not uncommon for a riot to occur if the grain prices were raised, or if there was an outbreak of an epidemic due to poor sanitary conditions in the city. Simultaneously, the shopkeepers used the Warden of their locality – these prominent men appointed in an honorary capacity by the Nizam in each locality to keep the peace and mediate with the state – to intercede with the ruler’s ministers.

Hyderabad state, Beverly (2007) says, was a ‘native’ state with a significant degree of sovereignty and ability to exercise considerable power in defence of its subjects, government interests and their own visions of progress (albeit a contingent and improvised one that emerged at the margins of British India’s urbanism) (Beverley 2007). The fact that the nobles in the court of the Nizam also had control over their own estates, and in several cases had their own armies, minted their own coins and even dispensed justice in their own courts, led to the situation of fragmented sovereignties, of states within states. While this, for Beverly, introduces a contingency into the use of colonialism and nationalism as foundations upon which historical understandings are constructed, for our purposes, the fragmented power structure also highlights the historical weakness of state power in the Deccan where the Nizam was the overlord under the suzerainty of the British Empire, but the nobles were mini-Nizams/little kings in Bernard Cohn’s terms, in their own fiefdoms.

Beverly points out that while the officials in the British ruled Secunderabad cantonment, used the stark force of law to make their arguments about urban construction, the
Hyderabadi officials used the notion of ‘public utility’ to build their case. This, argues Beverly, represents an incorporation of ideals of civic virtue and governance from the language of colonial liberalism into the lexicon of Hyderabadi urban modernity. Hyderabad presented an unruly internal frontier to the British Raj [rule] where owing to the sovereignty situation (the Nizam had sovereign power over his domain but was subject to British suzereignty), the British could not unleash state violence on the Nizam’s subjects, but these subjects could cross the border at will. This indeterminacy also provided a resource for the population to hedge bets through ‘legal forum shopping’ (Beverly 2007). Hyderabidis were considered highly litigious. If they could not achieve their purpose through litigation, they resorted to sending anonymous notes containing accusations against low and high level state officials to those in power.

With this history in mind, the story that unfolds in CPP is about the continued sway of fragmented sovereignties in independent India, which creates the space for a rich variety of alternative forms of power to be exercised. The multiple tools used by the Jewellers Association and the hawkers highlight a context where the fragmentary nature of the state’s political authority has limited its monopoly power, but where the citizens are neither fully empowered nor completely helpless. In his study of the Alliance, a movement concerned with gaining security of land, housing, and infrastructure in Mumbai, Appadurai (2002) analyzes such emerging forms of citizenship in Mumbai. He refers to this as ‘deep democracy’ or ‘globalization form below.’ Appadurai describes how the Alliance, along with the pavement dwellers, engage with urban governmentality and its new forms of illegality (without resorting to violence or support of political parties) through the use of ‘legitimate precedents’ such as self-enumerated surveys and exhibitions of houses and public toilets. Thus, through such activities the pavement dwellers (deemed as illegal occupants by the state) try to gain legitimacy and attract the state’s attention toward their poverty.

But the tussle over CPP does not reflect a deep democracy but rather creates what Heller calls ‘suboptimal equilibrium’. The shopkeepers attained their short term objective of keeping their businesses afloat by ensuring that citizens got access to their shops. But the outcome was suboptimal for the citizens because the solution was temporary – construction work stopped during the festival season – but did not address the deeper concerns of different groups about their access to these central spaces. Similarly, the street vendors staved off their eviction, but only temporarily.

Such suboptimal equilibrium induced by fragmented sovereignties and weak citizens can be seen in other Indian cities. For instance, Anjaria (2006) highlights that in their daily lives the hawkers in Mumbai have in place informal mechanisms that serve to self-regulate, as well as preserve urban space. He describes how, by what is termed as ‘official legality’, the unlicensed hawkers have to deal with a host of state agencies in their daily activities. One such example is the ‘pauti (receipt) system’, under which the hawkers have to pay state officials ‘unauthorized occupation cum refusal charges’. Thus, this was, according to Anjaria, a ‘clever manoeuvre of the state to collect revenue from an officially illegal population’ (ibid.:2140-41).

How can one ascend to an optimal equilibrium? Episodes of structural change occur only when massive, non-institutionalised disruption like riots, unruly demonstrations etc
threatens established institutions, says James Scott (2012) in Two Cheers for Anarchism. Scott points to the irony that the fact that democratic progress and renewal appear instead to depend on major episodes of extra-institutional disorder is massively in contradiction to the promise of democracy as the institutionalization of peaceful change. ‘And it is just as surely a failure of democratic political theory that it has not come to grips with the central role of crisis and institutional failure in those major episodes of social and political reform when the political system is re-legitimated’ (2012: p?).

Scott points out that just as much of the politics that has historically mattered has taken the form of unruly defiance, it is also the case that for subordinate classes, for most of their history, politics has taken a very different extra-institutional form. This is the realm of ‘infrapolitics’ because it is practiced outside the visible spectrum of what usually passes for political activity. For Scott, infrapolitics includes acts as foot-dragging, poaching, pilfering, desertion, squatting and flight. Infrapolitics, forms of informal cooperation, coordination and action that embody mutuality without hierarchy – these are the forms discernible in the Hyderabad case study. Also, it is a case where all the actors ignore the prevailing laws and it is only when those laws need to be enforced for a reason (e.g. Hyderabad’s bid to become a heritage city) that infra-politics rears up to fight to return to the status quo i.e. continue ignoring the laws. So it is not clear that infrapolitics can always deepen democracy or create rights bearing citizenry; we need to study the conditions under which this occurs.

Conclusion

The case study discussed in this chapter illuminates claim-making by different groups who invoke formal and informal mechanisms to bargain with the state and political society and highlights a different form of authorization that invokes universalizing principles which remain legally un-institutionalised, but are nevertheless practised in routine interactions with the state. The terms ‘participatory authorization’ or active citizenship need to be more nuanced in order to include the processes highlighted in the Hyderabad case. A person brought up within the framework of courtierly politics is not necessarily going to change his habits when it comes to negotiating with those in power in a democracy. The definition of clientelist engagement – predicated on exchanges and loyalties, not rights (Heller, 2011) – needs closer scrutiny in the Charminar Pedestrianisation case where the language and the intervention used is simultaneously rights based and clientelist. The case study also reveals another type of engagement with the officials where both are complicit in breaking the law. In the second vignette, the shopkeepers and vendors ignored the laws about building near a historic monument, and the municipal officers delayed giving permission to the government’s archaeological protection unit to set up its signs in the area. Contrary to the hypothesis that these forms of politics emerge in contexts where formal democratic representation is weak or non-existent (Piper and Von Lieres 2011), the Hyderabad case tells us that the language of citizen-state interaction has deep historical roots. The Hyderabad case also demonstrates that contrary to Mann (1986:7), formal institutionalization is not necessary to achieve routine collective goals.

The modes of claim making in our case study highlight an interesting question about democracy and its link with the creation of rights bearing citizens who make claims on the state. For those living in the old city, MIM’s monopoly has engendered a clientelist mode,
creating further difficulties for citizen groups to engage with the state as rights bearing citizens. However, the practice of electoral democracy and the need to win seats within the context of fragmented sovereignties and challenges from new groups like the Hindu nationalist BJP has meant that the MIM too has to consider changing its reaction to the demands of its constituency. But these adjustments, in the short run, continue to perpetuate a suboptimal equilibrium where the state and the citizens operate from a position of weakness, not strength. Weak states, fragmented sovereignties, and weak citizens create a situation where suboptimal equilibrium holds sway. However, if achieving participatory authorization is seen as a process, then one can say that history (by moulding a sense of community and a habit of interaction with the state) and democracy (by generating rights based opportunities for weaker sections) have generated in the grey spaces between a weak state and a weak citizenry, a process of transforming subjects into citizens, and of increasing citizen-power.

References

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i In 1901, Hyderabad had a population of 448,466, with Hindus numbering 243,241, Muslims 189,152 and Christians 13,923. The main Hindu caste groups included the agricultural Kapus or Kunbis (26%), and the lower castes, the Malas (14%). 88.6% were Hindus and 10.4% were Muslims. Literacy rates were low; 54% and 3% of men and women per thousand populations respectively were literate. Christians had larger numbers of literate, followed by Muslims, and then by Hindus. Mirza Khan records in the Hyderabad Gazetteer (p.78): ‘While the Musalmans [Muslims] form only 10.4 percent of the population of the State, they include 83% of students in colleges, 45% of the pupils in secondary and 42% of the pupils in primary schools. These results are due to the position held by Muhammadans [Muslims] in a State where the ruler belongs to their religion.

ii According to historians, over 150,000 ‘volunteers’ were organised by the Majlis for the Nizam State’s defence but they are remembered for unleashing unparalleled violence against Hindu populations, the communists and all those who opposed the Nizam’s ‘go it alone’ policy. Kasim Rizvi, the Majlis leader, was imprisoned and the organisation banned in 1948. Rizvi was released in 1957 on the undertaking that he would leave for Pakistan in 48 hours. Before he left though, Rizvi met some of the erstwhile activists of the Majlis and passed on the presidency to Abdul Waheb Owaisi, a lawyer. The 1970s saw an upswing in Majlis’ political fortunes. In 1969, it won back its party headquarters, Dar-us-Salaam — a sprawling 4.5-acre compound in the heart of the Old City. It also won compensation that was used to set up an ITI on the premises and a women’s degree college in Nizamabad town. The 1970s were also a watershed in Majlis’ history because after 31 years, Hyderabad witnessed large-scale communal rioting in 1979. The Majlis came to the forefront in ‘defending ’ Muslim life and property.

iii The Majlis that emerged after 1957 is a completely different entity from its pre-independence edition, he says adding that comparisons with that bloody past are ‘misleading and mischievous’, said Asasuddin Owaisi in an interview with the author. ‘That Majlis was fighting for state power, while we have no such ambitions or illusions’. He stoutly defended the need for ‘an independent political voice’ for the minorities, which is willing to defend them and project their issues ‘firmly’. ‘How can an independent articulation of minority interests and aspirations be termed communal’, he asked. ‘We are a threat not only to the BJP and Hindu communalism, but also to Muslim extremism. By providing a legitimate political vent for Muslims to voice their aspirations and fears, we are preventing the rise of political extremism and religious obscurantism when the community is under unprecedented attack from Hindu communalists and the state’.


v Reference to the needs of the public was a universal feature in the emerging language of urbanism in the 19th century. Beverly refers to Zeynep Celik’s work on Istanbul in the 19th century during which the urban fabric was regularised (fire resistant buildings were constructed and streets standardized).