

COPYRIGHT NOTICE

Datla/The Language of Secular Islam

is published by University of Hawai'i Press and copyrighted, © 2013, by University of Hawai'i Press. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form by any electronic or mechanical means (including photocopying, recording, or information storage and retrieval) without permission in writing from the publisher, except for reading and browsing via the World Wide Web. Users are not permitted to mount this file on any network servers.

INTRODUCTION

No university logo better expresses a commitment to linguistic diversity than that of Osmania University. Unfurling banners at its bottom declare Osmania Vishwavidyālayamū, “Osmania University” in Telugu. The motto at the top, *tamsō mā jyōtirgamay*—“lead us from darkness into light”—is drawn from the Sanskrit *Brhadāranyaka Upanishad* and is written in the Dēvanāgarī script (the same script used to write modern Hindi). At its center is the solitary letter ‘ain, the Urdu—and Perso-Arabic—letter with which the name Osmania begins. The appearance of English in the logo comes as no great surprise since Osmania University is located in the city of Hyderabad, a city of over eight million people known internationally as an English-language business hub. Given that Osmania University is an English-medium university, a fact in keeping with the near-absolute dominance of the English language in Indian higher education, the proliferation of languages and scripts in its logo is perhaps puzzling.



Logo of Osmania University (© by Osmania University).

The presence of several Indian languages is meaningful only when considered against the background of the unique and politically charged history of language discussions in South Asia. South Asia's modern history is characterized by persistent political demands that vernacular languages be accorded recognition, prestige, and patronage, not simply to fulfill the identitarian claims of varied publics but also to fulfill the promises of democracy itself. Discussions of language in South Asia have always been bound up in larger questions of access to education, opportunity, and political debate and in questions of who is allowed to speak on behalf of particular language communities and how. Languages have been and continue to be mobilized for the sake of specific political agendas even as they become a site from which to think through political possibilities and consider the very success and failure of democratic politics on the subcontinent.¹

So the languages of Osmania University are registered in its logo as something more than an effort to *represent* its student constituencies; they also gesture at the city's and the university's roles in some of the most important events in the political history of Indian languages. At its founding, Osmania was a vernacular university. Departing dramatically from the practice of the colonial state, it was the first public university to use a modern Indian language as its medium of instruction in all subjects, from science and medicine to history and the humanities. The language that it employed, Urdu (associated with the subcontinent's Muslim community), vied with Hindi (associated with Hindus) for status as a national language in colonial India. After independence and partition, as Urdu became the national language of Pakistan, the question of a national language for India continued to loom; especially in the 1950s and 1960s, language movements concerned with what would happen to India's other vernacular languages (and the people who spoke them) in the shadow of Hindi erupted in various quarters of the country, posing significant challenges to the stability of Indian democracy.² Hyderabad became the capital of the first linguistically demarcated state, Andhra Pradesh, which was established for Telugu speakers. The establishment of Andhra Pradesh inaugurated a larger political redrawing of the map of Indian states and created nationally recognized provincial arenas in which to fulfill language demands and aspirations. With this reorganization of states on a linguistic basis in the 1950s, the central government was able to contain—successfully, many scholars argue—some of the energy of separatist movements that threatened national stability in the early decades of independence.³

Prior to independence, and the incorporation of Hyderabad into the Republic of India, the logo of Osmania University was written entirely in Urdu,

crowned not with Sanskrit but with lofty Arabic. It is in its postindependence history that the Arabic language disappeared altogether and Urdu was scaled down to only a single somehow illegible letter. This book attempts to recover the solitary letter ‘ain lying at the center of the Osmania University logo in order to understand its significance for the history of colonial India and that of Indian nationalism. In India today, Urdu is associated almost exclusively with Muslims; in Hyderabad, it is associated predominantly with the “old city,” its past, and not with university campuses and their part in forging the city’s future.⁴ Contrary to the expectations created by such a parochial image of Urdu, the history of Osmania University and its use of this language in the decades before India’s independence is central to understanding the larger political issues entailed by recourse to and engagement with vernacular languages in modern South Asia. This history is essential for understanding several things: the effects of and responses to English education in colonial India—understanding, in other words, the consequences of colonial education; the complex engagement of Indians in the modern era with their own vernacular and classical (Arabic, Persian, and Sanskrit) languages and literary traditions; the place of language in the forging of Indian nationalism; and ultimately also the cultural and political negotiations that accompanied nationalism on the eve of independence.

Colonial education forced a reevaluation of non-Western scholarly and literary traditions both by British administrators and Indian subjects. It is by looking at the work of the mostly Muslim educators of Osmania University in the 1920s and 1930s, the high period of anticolonial nationalism, that one can begin to understand how Muslim literary, linguistic, and scholarly forms were negotiated in the late colonial period, as well as begin to understand the larger cultural and political possibilities that attended the move toward Indian and Pakistani independence. What I hope to explain in this book is how Urdu and Arabic (with all their associations with Islam and Muslims) could have stood at the center of the nation-building enterprise at Osmania University in the period before independence and how that history, as in fact the Urdu and Arabic languages in the logo, came to be elided as India and Pakistan became independent.

SECULAR EDUCATION AND LANGUAGE

In 1835, Thomas Babington Macaulay, the law member of the Council of India, famously declared that “a single shelf of a good European library was worth the

whole native literature of India and Arabia.”⁵ Often cited for its resounding dismissal of non-European literary traditions, Macaulay’s intervention in language debates was specifically intended to shape educational policy. While Macaulay’s pronouncement about the superiority of English literature, and ultimately English education, over that of Indian languages did not go uncontested either in official British circles or among Indians, this was a fateful moment in the history of Indian education.⁶ Although the teaching and study of Indian languages in British-funded educational institutions never disappeared, the system of higher education developed by the British in India over the course of the nineteenth century came to prioritize the English language as a medium of instruction and as a subject for study. Though institutions of higher learning like the Madrasa and Sanskrit college in Calcutta, the Sanskrit College in Benares, Delhi College, and later Punjab University offered an education through the medium of Oriental languages (Sanskrit, Arabic, and Urdu), the attempt to teach the modern sciences in Oriental languages met with limited and fleeting success.⁷ The general trend of higher education in India was toward English-medium universities and colleges, especially with the foundation in 1857 of the Universities of Madras, Bombay, and Calcutta, which as degree-granting institutions served as the linchpin and institutional core of a proliferating set of affiliated colleges.

Macaulay’s minute came at a moment between initial experiments with Oriental languages in Indian colleges and the English-medium university system that was to become dominant in the latter half of the nineteenth century. It contributed to a discussion among British officials about whether the English East India Company should patronize the teaching and study of English or Indian languages—a discussion conducted in stark contrasts. By Indian languages, Macaulay and many of his colleagues considered seriously only Sanskrit and Arabic, the classical languages of South Asian education, and the eastern languages already patronized by the British at the Madrasa and Sanskrit College in Calcutta. Macaulay admitted that the study of Oriental languages like Arabic, Persian, and Sanskrit might provide some access to great works of imagination, especially in poetry (though even here he asserted the superiority of the Western poetic tradition), as well as allow the company to fulfill the directives of Parliament “to ascertain and digest the laws of India.”⁸ But he added, “When we pass from works of imagination to works in which facts are recorded, and general principles investigated, the superiority of the Europeans becomes absolutely immeasurable.”⁹ It was therefore, according to Macaulay, precisely as a

language of education, a language in which facts were recorded and principles investigated, that English distinguished itself.

Macaulay's taking only the classical South Asian languages, Arabic and Sanskrit, as possible alternatives to English was owing to his impression that other Indian languages were underdeveloped. The vernaculars, or modern Indian languages, were, Macaulay assumed, not ready for the task of education:

All parties seem to be agreed on one point, that the dialects commonly spoken among the natives of this part of India, contain neither literary nor scientific information, and are, moreover, so poor and rude that, until they are enriched from some other quarter, it will not be easy to translate any valuable work into them. It seems to be admitted on all sides, that the intellectual improvement of those classes of the people who have the means of pursuing higher studies can at present be effected only by means of some language not vernacular amongst them.¹⁰

Macaulay's vision of Indian education was a diffusionist one, intended first to teach a select group of Indians through the English language, or in the words of his oft-quoted directive, "to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect." It was to this class of Indians that Macaulay assigned the additional goal of enriching the vernaculars of India: "to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population."¹¹ Indian vernaculars, albeit allegedly underdeveloped, were ultimately very important to Macaulay's diffusionist vision of modern education in South Asia.¹²

Already with Macaulay one sees that, in discussions of Indian education, questions of imperial governance came together with those of language. Whereas in principle the superiority of English was asserted, Indian languages, it was conceded, were not unimportant. Laws had to be translated and interpreted and a population governed.¹³ What Macaulay's comments disguise, however, in their insistence on the developed state of English and the underdevelopment of Indian languages is the extent to which English literary studies were forged in a colonial context. As Gauri Viswanathan has compellingly argued in her account of literary studies in colonial India, education and the development of literary curricula in colonial India were implicated in an

imperial project of rule, as a “mask of conquest”; the constitution of English as a field of study took place not before its arrival in the colonies but on colonial terrain as part of negotiations over the contours and future of British rule in India.¹⁴

English education, in this account, was considered an alternative to an education in Christian morality, introducing Indians to English morals and values under the cover of literary study. Following Viswanathan, one could argue that experiments in English education in India formed a model of secular higher education worldwide, because there, in a context where the British operated by a rule of colonial difference and were particularly defensive about injuring the religious susceptibilities of their subjects, they forged academic subjects that were explicitly defined as *not* Christian nor necessarily classical (which was the dominant content of higher education in England at the time), curricula that were defined foremost as secular and scientific. Viswanathan presents a productive argument: because the constitution of curricula in higher education was never merely an academic subject but was entwined with discussions of the character of the modern state and its relationship to both religion and the public—issues that were by no means settled in England at the time—it provoked a debate that raged between the British state, the government of India, missionaries, and local administrators. The other side of this story, how Indians engaged in this complex debate over education, modernization, language, religion, and literary study, remains largely untold. It is a central contention of this book that the inauguration of English education in India provided both a model of secular education and, in doing so, a profound epistemological challenge that lay at the center of language politics in early twentieth century Hyderabad. This, as much as the contest with Hindi speakers, explains the projects of reform enacted upon the Urdu language and in Urdu language scholarship by intellectuals at Osmania University.

Significantly, colonial India saw the constitution of English as a subject of academic study central to the emerging secular practices of the colonial state at the same time that Indian languages were themselves constituted as bounded objects, with distinct and mutually exclusive literary and linguistic traditions, associated with specific peoples and territories. It was not surprising, therefore, that in the face of an increasing dominance of English education, Indians should call for educational institutions and universities that acknowledged and promoted the status of their own languages, insisting on the ability of Indian languages to be vehicles of a modern education at even the highest level. With

Hindi and Urdu the efforts of men like Sayyid Ahmad Khan to create an Urdu college and Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya to establish a Hindi university had foundered because of the lack of British approval and patronage.¹⁵ These two men did eventually succeed in establishing two institutions of higher education, the Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College, later Aligarh Muslim University, and Benares Hindu University; however, both were English-medium institutions whose novelty was marked by their serving especially—though not exclusively—Muslims and Hindus, respectively, *not* (despite the initial intentions of their founders) by their use of Urdu or Hindi as a medium of instruction. The creation of a university providing instruction in all subjects through an Indian vernacular happened first in a territory not directly ruled by the British, in the princely state of Hyderabad.

URDU LANGUAGE POLITICS

A growing literature on South Asian history, language, literary traditions, and politics has demonstrated how premodern languages, “part of a flexible ideology of occasion and identity,”¹⁶ were transformed over the course of the modern era to be the objects of an impassioned populist politics of difference.¹⁷ This transformation involved the standardization of languages through the medium of the printing press, ushering in the publication and dispersal of journals, tracts, educational literature, grammars, and dictionaries; the proliferation of vernacular translation, educational and literary societies promoting particular, and often self-consciously modernist, literary standards; the association of particular territories and groups of people with exclusive linguistic identities; the consolidation of vernacular publics that privileged certain caste groups; and the emergence and evolution of organizations that articulated political demands around linguistic claims.¹⁸ The Urdu language seems a particularly appropriate example of this transformation. Tied as Urdu has become to the fate of India’s largest religious minority, Muslims, and to the emergence of the independent state of Pakistan, for which Urdu is the official national language, histories of the Urdu language are particularly—and understandably—preoccupied with explaining how the shared and flexible literary and linguistic traditions of South Asia’s Muslim community came to be politically focused on the Urdu language.¹⁹ The Urdu language as a linguistic and communal challenge figures prominently in histories of late nineteenth and early twentieth century Indian

nationalism even as it reemerges as a problem in the post-1947 period, and especially for Pakistan with the independence of Bangladesh in 1971.²⁰

The identification of separate languages (each possessing a fixed script, grammar, and literary tradition) with distinct communities of people produced over the course of the nineteenth century an increasing acceptance of the idea that Hindi and Urdu were separate and competing languages, belonging to Hindus and Muslims, respectively.²¹ This association became ever more important during the course of the Hindi-Urdu language debates of late nineteenth century North India. The demand that Hindi be accorded official recognition as a language of government in North India was also a claim that the exclusive recognition of Urdu favored Muslims—gave them privileged access to government jobs and economic security. The idea that Urdu was a Muslim language became more salient over the course of the nineteenth century despite the fact that, from the 1830s, Urdu replaced Persian for the first time in North India and functioned as the official language of administration over a large—and diverse—swathe of British Indian territory, from Bihar, the North-West Provinces, and parts of the Central Provinces extending to, in the second half of the nineteenth century, Punjab and the princely states of Kashmir and Hyderabad. This official language policy continued beyond 1900, when Hindi was added to Urdu as the language of administration in some of these territories, through to independence and the partition of the subcontinent. Even though Urdu has never *in fact* been an exclusively Muslim language, from the turn of the twentieth century, writers, educators, and literary critics had certainly to address the assumption that it was.

Widespread government patronage of Hindi and Urdu was linked to the fact that, unlike other vernaculars, which had long and complicated histories of laying claims to specific regions, these languages (or literary variants) were recognized in the colonial period to be transregional.²² So, for example, G. A. Grierson, the man responsible for the highly ambitious *Linguistic Survey of India*, believed that each individual had a mother tongue and that therefore language communities, as indeed the languages themselves, could be identified on a map. Standing apart, however, was the “exception” that Grierson “called ‘Literary Hindostani,’ in its Urdu and Hindi versions and their varying literary styles.”²³ The idea that Hindi and Urdu were but two—religiously identified—versions of the same, or the only, pan-Indian language (Hindustani) was no doubt, as later chapters of this book show, what made the contest between Hindi and Urdu so vociferous.

The history of this polemic and the conflict between Hindi and Urdu language speakers has been the primary focus of the secondary literature on the history of the Urdu language in the colonial period. This book endeavors to present an argument beyond the now familiar story of communal language politics.²⁴ It explores a history of Urdu advocates, educators, and literary critics who employed Urdu not simply as a tool in the articulation of their identitarian claims but as the grounds on which they grappled with the most pressing questions of early twentieth century South Asian political history, namely the shape and future of a secular national culture and—for them equally pressing—the place of the Muslim past and scholarly traditions within it.

In contrast to scholarship that sees any attempt to address Muslim cultures and experiences as communal, the argument presented here attends to the ways that the Muslim intellectuals of Hyderabad sought to secularize and therefore radically reformulate their own linguistic, historical, religious, and literary traditions. Secularism, as it is used here, is less an approach to politics or a solution to communal problems and rather more a set of projects—enacted by a diverse set of actors, including South Asia’s Muslim intellectuals—that was essentially productive, that reordered traditional epistemologies and created new and conflicting ways of understanding one’s heritage, language, and culture. As Talal Asad has argued, “secularism is not simply an intellectual answer to a question about enduring social peace and toleration. It is an enactment by which a *political medium* (representation of citizenship) redefines and transcends particular and differentiating practices of the self that are articulated through class, gender, and religion.”²⁵ Thinking about secularism in this way allows us to move away from normative and polemical debates about whether secularism is good or bad, a foreign and Western import or indigenous product, to think rather about what it means to render traditional knowledge nonreligious, to make a language stand above religion. What this book describes is a concerted effort by Muslim intellectuals to draw from Muslim scholarly traditions and history elements that would be useful to the forging of Indian citizens. In short, the Urdu language in the early twentieth century became a means not only of asserting difference but also of imagining a common secular future.

The story I propose to tell is of how the mostly Muslim educators of the princely state of Hyderabad attempted to replace English with Urdu as the medium of instruction at the university level by founding India’s first vernacular university. In doing this, they hoped to challenge the increasing pervasiveness of English as the language of higher education and hence also a language of

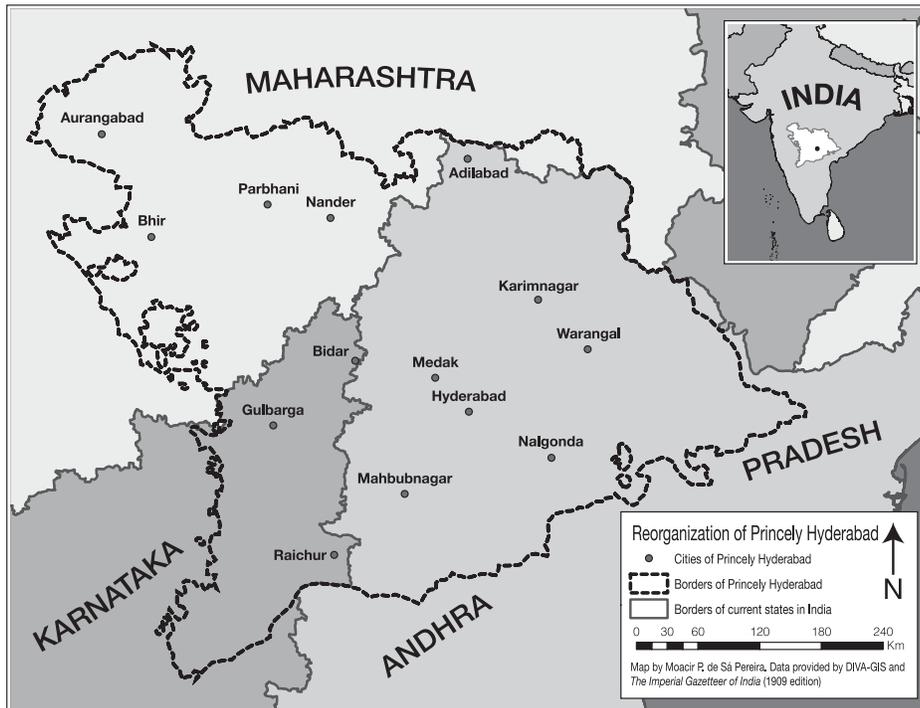
prestige in colonial India. These educators hoped to make Urdu a language representative of common people and, in turn, a language that would serve them, that would encompass all their linguistic needs. The desire was to create a modern vernacular, systematized and uniform, that would perform a variety of functions, quotidian, administrative, poetic, literary, scientific, philosophical, and academic—a worldly vernacular that would rival English as a language of business, science, and learned conversation and that could also therefore potentially *democratize* the effects of Western education; a language that could therefore claim to be the national language of a united India. It is the enactment of these novel secular projects through language reform and education that are largely missed in narratives of the identitarian politics surrounding Hindi and Urdu.

PRINCELY HYDERABAD

Although Urdu was patronized over a large and scattered territory, studies of the Urdu language have been curiously focused almost exclusively on North India. In order to uncover a unique history of Urdu language reform, this book shifts our understanding of the formation of the modern Urdu language from its geographical heartland in North India to discussions that took place in the heart of the Deccan. At nearly eighty-three thousand square miles (larger than present-day Bangladesh) stretching across the center of peninsular India and with a population at independence of sixteen million, the state of Hyderabad was one of the most important of the over five hundred fifty native states that were central to the administration of British India. Often called the premier princely state, Hyderabad was important to the British for several reasons. First, located as it was across the center of the Indian subcontinent, it not only bordered territories directly ruled by the British but it had also been a key strategic ally in Britain's conquest of and expansion across the subcontinent. Hyderabad's special status among the princely states of India was also owing in part to its being the largest native state ruled by a Muslim dynasty and a major site of Islamic culture in southern India. From 1724 to 1948, Hyderabad was ruled by hereditary Muslim kings, the Nizams or Asaf Jahis, the first of whom had been deputed to be governor of the Deccan by the Mughal emperor in Delhi.²⁶

Like so many of the ruling houses of eighteenth-century India, Hindu and Muslim, the Nizams used Persian as their language of government. It was only

in the 1880s, following the cue of the British in North India of a half century earlier, that the Hyderabad government changed its official language from Persian to Urdu. After 1948, when Hyderabad was forcibly incorporated into the Indian Union, the borders of Asaf Jahi Hyderabad were reordered, and beginning in the 1950s different portions of this former princely state were incorporated into the new linguistically defined Indian states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Maharashtra, which represented Telugu, Kannada, and Marathi speakers, respectively. As it existed in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, however, Hyderabad was a linguistically and religiously diverse territory. The 1901 census recorded that 47 percent of the population was Telugu speaking, 26 percent Marathi speaking, and Kannada and Urdu were spoken by 14 and 10 percent of the population, respectively. The same census also recorded smaller numbers of people speaking other languages, like Marwari, Tamil, Gondi, and Lambadi.²⁷



As John Roosa has pointed out, the language of public discussion in this multilingual context was often Urdu, and approximately 25 percent of the Hyderabad population claimed Urdu as their second language.²⁸ That Urdu had become the language of public discussion in multilingual contexts, especially when they came within the purview of the state, is also apparent in the government's decision to replace Persian with Urdu. This decision originated with the Hyderabad Law Department in 1884 and was intended to bring the official language of government to accord with the language spoken and used in government courtrooms. The Revenue Department was quick to make a similar change, claiming policy should be changed to accommodate existing practice. Subsequently, in 1886, the state ratified the decision of these departments and made Urdu the official language of the entire government.²⁹ This change in official language policy was only one small piece of the wide-ranging governmental reforms enacted by the state of Hyderabad in the nineteenth century. The same period witnessed an array of administrative reforms that transformed its revenue operations, army, and the functioning of its courts.

These late nineteenth century administrative reforms took place in a new context of British and princely state relations. The British policy of annexing Indian princely states came under serious doubt in the aftermath of the Revolt of 1857. As Thomas Metcalf has argued, "Foremost among the causes of the revolt was Lord Dalhousie's policy of annexing the princely states of India. . . . By 1858, after these clear indications of Indian feeling, the British were convinced that to persevere in the course of annexation would be foolish and reckless in the extreme."³⁰ Not only could annexation be a cause for disaffection and unrest but India's princes could also prove to be loyal supporters of the British in moments of crisis, as in 1857, when "almost without exception they cast in their lot with the British."³¹ Similarly, Vanaji Ramaswami, at the very beginning of her study of Mysore, Travancore, and Cochin, describes how the attitude of British administrators toward the princely states changed radically in the latter half of the nineteenth century: "The Indian Mutiny of 1857 brought home to the British administrators the new realisation of these territories as breakwaters during times of danger, and the necessity of befriending the princes as collaborators. From this stemmed the new argument which seemed to realise 'the intrinsic merit of Indian polity,' on its own ground, replacing the old self-righteous tones of paternalism which held that administration deteriorated once it reverted to Indian rule."³² Ironically, it was as the head of the

Mughal Empire was being officially unseated in Delhi that the British were able to develop a more “tolerant” attitude toward India’s princes. This tolerance was coupled with a shepherding of the princely states toward “internally” generated reform that the British encouraged by means of the employment of British men and women in key posts in native administrations, timely interventions in succession disputes, the cultivation of native ministers of government, and the introduction of English education and training for native princes themselves. What existed in the relatively more stable political map of post-1857 South Asia was a patchwork of states, islands surrounded by British territory that came to represent in the colonial imagination the workings of indigenous culture and alternative political modalities—however transformed.³³

Hyderabad’s status as a princely state contributed to the foundation of Osmania University in at least two ways. On the one hand, as a quasi-independent sovereignty, the Nizams of Hyderabad were able to patronize educational and literary projects that did not much interest the colonial government.³⁴ This by no means meant that the state of Hyderabad operated without reference to British colonial projects and demands. As we shall see, the educational decisions that the Hyderabad government made were always formulated in dialogue with programs designed by the British across its borders. Here the interests of the colonial state and Hyderabad could dovetail; so, for example, the founding of Osmania University came in a period when the British were encouraging the creation of independent universities of the residential type in every province. Second, Hyderabad as the largest *Muslim* princely state in the imperial order made it a recipient of a wide variety of proposals and petitions from all over South Asia and occasionally beyond. It was this status that ultimately drew Muslim intellectuals from across the Indian subcontinent to Hyderabad and to the Osmania University project, as administrators, teachers, translators, and writers. In fact, though I refer to them as the educators of Hyderabad, many of them were among the most important literary figures of their time and came to Hyderabad from North India. I attempt in this book to treat the history of Hyderabad, often studied as a place apart, in a way that does not take its separateness for granted—attending to both the particularity of circumstances in Hyderabad and making a case for the centrality of its history to all-India discussions and debates.

Hyderabad, I argue, was a critical site for Indian engagements with two pressing—and linked—questions posed by the Indian colonial experience:

first, the question of modern education, and second, that of India's national future. In Hyderabad, educators and intellectuals discussed the relevance of non-Western religion, scholarship, and languages to the demands of the modern age—much as the colonial state had done before them. It was the political context of princely India that allowed them to enact educational reform and take up public projects that were driven by profound engagements with the educational policy of British India. In a period of increasing anticolonial agitation, these men also discussed the relationship between the Muslim past and traditions and the unfolding and newly emerging national aims. In this they were again confronting issues that had become important to India as a whole; for it was shortly after 1918 that Gandhi launched the joint Non-Cooperation and Khilafat campaign, pan-Indian agitations that placed the character of an independent Indian nation and the cooperation of Muslims and Hindus on the table as issues urgently in need of attention by the British, Hindus, and Muslims alike.

OSMANIA UNIVERSITY AND MUSLIM “SEPARATISM”

With the exception of a few individuals, South Asia's Muslims are thought to have never been centrally involved in imagining a secular Indian nation;³⁵ they were allegedly disqualified by their allegiance to a pan-Islamic community, symbolized in the immediate aftermath of World War I by the figure of the Ottoman caliph and then later seemingly crystallized in the demand, which began being formulated in the 1930s, for an independent Muslim nation-state, Pakistan. Political cooperation between Hindus and Muslims as it was engineered, for example, by Gandhi during the Khilafat movement is understood as a parallel rather than joint struggle, and the search for the seeds of Muslim separatism has led scholars as far back as the nineteenth century to prominent Muslim educational figures like Sayyid Ahmad Khan.³⁶ Whereas revisionist accounts of high politics in the decades prior to partition have allowed scholars of the region to acknowledge the contingent nature of the demand for Pakistan, Muslim engagements with twentieth-century Indian nationalism itself—with the project of imagining a secular national culture that would include both Hindus and Muslims—have remained largely unexplored.³⁷

This emphasis on a protean and ubiquitous Muslim separatism is the result in part of an attempt to understand the causes of the devastating and tragic

events surrounding the partition of the subcontinent in 1947, which created the largest mass movement of people in modern history and an unquantifiable experience of violence, suffering, and loss. The seamlessness with which the events of Muslim political history are joined together—Muslim associational politics of the nineteenth century, the Khilafat movement, communal rioting, the demand for Pakistan, and partition—suggests a certain coherence to the political categories within which Indian Muslims were operating. It is this narrative, in fact, that allows the claim that it was the nineteenth-century activities of India's most famed Muslim educator and founder of Aligarh Muslim University, Sayyid Ahmad Khan, that laid the groundwork for the creation of Pakistan in the mid-twentieth century.

The activities of Muslim intellectuals in the princely state of Hyderabad stand in contrast to this narrative, allowing one to see the early twentieth century (a crucial period in the articulation of nationalist demands) as characterized *not* by an effort on the part of South Asia's Muslim intellectuals to stand outside the Indian nation but rather, and quite to the contrary, by these intellectuals' singular refusal to be *minoritized*, to be considered anything less than truly national and secular. In this sense, I would argue, the early twentieth century marked a significant break with the associational politics of the nineteenth century, where different groups were identified and cultivated—both by the British and among themselves—to articulate their interests separately and directly with the colonial state. The terms of political debate had changed. In their debates over the importance of instruction in the vernacular, the shape of the Urdu language and its past, and in their activities as literary scholars and educators, the Muslim intellectuals who ran Osmania University in Hyderabad were profoundly engaged with questions of colonial displacement and national belonging, occupied as they were in an effort to transform the Urdu language for national purposes and to produce alternatives to the system of higher education introduced to India by the British. In this they were as interested in the future of a larger Indian public as they were in the place of Muslims within it.

Throughout the tumultuous political events of the 1920s, intellectuals associated with Osmania University concentrated on reforming Muslim cultural forms—whether language, scholarly practices, or organizational practices—for the secular future of the Indian nation. The purpose of recounting this history is *not* to highlight the work of exceptional individuals espousing a secular politics or attitude but to reimagine this period of South Asian politics, to understand some of the “normative impetus internal to secularism”³⁸ that was

important to twentieth-century reform, both Hindu and Muslim. Only by acknowledging this strain of Indian and Muslim nationalism can we arrive at a history that sees the unfolding of secular agendas and diverse and sometimes competing national imaginations *simultaneously* and on the same conceptual ground.³⁹ It was only as independence neared and political decision making became more concentrated in the hands of the Indian National Congress that the attention of some of Hyderabad's most famed educators turned from this educational project toward contending with Urdu's rival Hindi, in order to secure a place for Urdu at the national center in Delhi. Ultimately, the claim of the men involved with Osmania University that Urdu be recognized as something more than the language of Muslims was unable to stand the test, either in Delhi or in Hyderabad. This experience, the experience of being *minoritized*—despite their best efforts—is what led some of them to be profoundly disappointed with and critical of the politics of official nationalism.⁴⁰ Addressing this history allows us therefore to approach one of the central paradoxes of prepartition history: some of the most strident criticism of the Indian nationalist movement emerged not from the traditional ulama—many of whom stood behind the Indian National Congress—but from the ranks of India's secular Muslim intellectuals.

THE LANGUAGE OF SECULAR ISLAM

The history of education in Hyderabad demonstrates the extent to which the Muslim intellectuals of South Asia were shaped by secular and national projects. Secularism, in this context, entailed a concomitant “construction of religion as a new historical object: anchored in personal experience, expressible as belief-statements, dependent on private institutions, and practiced in one's spare time. This construction of religion ensures that it is part of what is *inessential* to our common politics, economy, science, and morality.”⁴¹ The projects pursued by the intellectuals of Osmania involved identifying elements of the past that could be retrieved and used for novel national aims, sifting through the Islamic past and scholarly traditions for pieces of it that had more than “Muslim” value, identifying vocabularies and experiences that could be used for a newly defined common good. Simultaneously, as we shall see, it involved relegating aspects of their own complex Muslim cultures and past to a secular domain of religion, a move that Barbara Metcalf in another context has called cultural encapsulation.⁴² It was this newly constituted domain of religion that

was thought to be separable from an education devoted to the promotion of common interests—political, economic, and scientific. The grounds for the forging of these agendas were the modern education of the university and the medium of instruction at Osmania; the Urdu language came to be conceived as a secular language that bore the impress of the Islamic past.

Chapter 1 analyzes the significance of Osmania University's foundation against the background of the various suggestions for educational reform that were being articulated in Hyderabad at that time. It provides an account of the educational context in which Osmania University was inaugurated and seeks to make clear that in creating a vernacular university, educators and administrators in Hyderabad were making a choice, from among multiple options, about the future of their educational system. In particular, the chapter demonstrates the extent to which language rather than religion became the preferred means for enacting educational reform, for forging a united public, and for producing Indian students who could face the challenges of the modern world.

Chapter 2 considers the projects pursued at the newly established university by turning to the efforts of these Muslim educators to create Urdu-medium textbooks that would allow students access to higher education through an Indian language. In doing so, the chapter argues, those who produced textbooks for Osmania University were also involved in a fundamental reformation of the Urdu language and in reconceiving the relationship between Urdu and other languages, whether Hindi, Sanskrit, English, Persian, or Arabic, in order ultimately to emphasize its secular and national credentials. This project inevitably created tension among these Urdu intellectuals as translators and linguistic experts argued over and tried willy-nilly to fix the relationship between Urdu, an Indian national culture, and the Islamic past. Textbook creation also involved a reassessment of the scholarly traditions of classical South Asian languages as scholars in Hyderabad attempted to determine which vocabularies should be preserved, updated, or abandoned.

Chapter 3 examines more closely two series of textbooks commissioned by the new university that asserted the importance of Islam to the history of civilization and the importance of Muslims to the history of India. Both underscore the extent to which Osmania University's intellectuals accepted and engaged in shaping modernizing and nationalist narratives, creating novel narratives of their own past that, especially in the case of the history of India, explicitly engaged historical writing and nationalist imaginaries in other vernacular languages. In all these projects, emphasis was consistently placed on recovering

the secular achievements of a Muslim past that would serve India's new national purposes. In the process, as when they discussed scientific and scholarly vocabulary in Urdu, these intellectuals both defined the purposes of history writing and decided which narrative traditions (religious and otherwise)—in Urdu, Persian, Arabic, English, and other vernacular languages—were of use to advancing the secular purposes of an Osmania University education.

Chapter 4 returns to the question of the Urdu language and the modernizing agendas of the men associated with Osmania University by taking a closer look at their activities outside the domain of the university proper, in Urdu-language organizations and as literary scholars. This is where we begin to see how the challenges posed to Urdu at the national center began to undermine the activities of Muslim intellectuals in Hyderabad. For the effort to reform Urdu and to make it the language of secular Islam in India (a language that would fulfill secular purposes *and* retain some connection to the Islamic past) came to conflict in principle with Hindi's increasingly favored status as a national language for an independent India.

Chapter 5 of the book explores the question of Urdu's position in relation to other vernacular languages by taking as its subject the first large-scale student protest at Osmania University in 1938. In Hyderabad too during the course of this movement the claims of Urdu to national status came increasingly to be questioned not by Hindi speakers but by the speakers of South Indian vernaculars, Telugu, Marathi, and Kannada. The student protest at Osmania University was bound up with the activities of national organizations like the Congress, the Hindu Mahasabha, and the Arya Samaj. After this period, the political and cultural possibilities available to the state of Hyderabad and its population changed dramatically owing to both all-India discussions and the emergence of popular movements in Hyderabad's countryside. Viewing the unfolding of organized nationalist politics from the margins sheds light on the complications attending secular nationalism's arrival in Hyderabad and force us to consider solutions to India's linguistic impasses offered from outside the national center.

This book is thus an attempt to recover some of the intentions and implications of a project that began to be challenged in the 1930s and came definitively to an end during partition and its aftermath. After the mid-1940s, Urdu would no longer be a key to effective education for all Indians but a marker of being Muslim in India and the national language of Pakistan, with only Hindi and

English able to make claims for national status in an independent India. The concluding chapter of the book comments on subsequent Urdu literary production and on what an understanding of this singular moment in Indo-Muslim history might contribute to a broader understanding of the production of secular and minority cultures in the modern world.