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BEYOND BRITISH INDIA REEVALUATING THE FREEDOM STRUGGLE IN THE PRINCELY STATE OF MYSORE

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Abstract

The history of India's freedom struggle has largely been constructed around movements in British-administered provinces, often marginalizing the political experiences of princely states. This tendency has obscured the complexity and significance of nationalist mobilization within regions governed under indirect colonial rule. The Princely State of Mysore presents a distinctive and intellectually rich case, where the struggle for freedom took the form of a dual movement against British paramountcy and for the establishment of responsible government under the Maharaja.

This article seeks to re-evaluate the freedom struggle in Mysore by examining its ideological foundations, institutional evolution, and mass mobilization. Focusing on key moments such as the Shivapura Flag Satyagraha, the Viduraswatha firing, the Isur resistance, and the decisive *Mysore Chalo* movement of 1947, the study argues that Mysore was not a passive or peripheral participant in the national movement. Rather, it functioned as an important political laboratory where constitutionalism, Gandhian methods, and popular protest converged to facilitate a transition from benevolent autocracy to democratic governance. The Mysore experience compels a broader rethinking of the Indian freedom struggle by integrating princely state politics into its core narrative.

Index Terms: *Wodeyars, Mysore Congress, Responsible Government, Shivapura Satyagraha, Mysore Chalo, Princely States, Indian National Movement.*

INTRODUCTION

The historiography of the Indian national movement has traditionally privileged events occurring within British-administered provinces, often relegating the political experiences of princely states to the margins. Canonical accounts of nationalism emphasize constitutional reforms and mass agitations in presidencies like Bombay and Madras, depicting princely states as politically conservative or merely reactive to external developments. However, the Princely State of Mysore challenges this imbalance by offering a sophisticated counter-narrative of modernization under indirect rule. Governed by a hereditary monarchy but possessing a relatively advanced administrative system, Mysore developed a unique political culture where demands for freedom were articulated through the language of 'Responsible Government' rather than outright republicanism. This strategic orientation allowed nationalist actors to negotiate their demands within the framework of monarchical authority, seeking to transform royal rule into a constitutional system accountable to the people.

Nationalism in Mysore was not a sudden rupture but a gradual process of political education and institutional participation. Early consciousness was channeled through representative bodies like the Mysore Representative Assembly, where debates on transparency and Indian participation in governance laid the groundwork for future mobilization. As purely constitutional methods proved inadequate to address questions of political legitimacy, the movement evolved into a broader social coalition. The incorporation of Gandhian methods, such as satyagraha and non-violent protest, allowed the struggle to maintain ideological alignment with the all-India movement while addressing regional specificities. Episodes of mass resistance in rural areas further demonstrated that nationalist consciousness was not confined to urban elites but was deeply embedded in the agrarian heartlands.

By the mid-twentieth century, the contrast between Mysore's administrative modernity and its political exclusion became a central theme of nationalist critique. Despite the state's reputation for industrial and infrastructural progress, the persistence of autocratic authority appeared increasingly anachronistic as Indian independence approached. This tension culminated in decisive mass movements, most notably the 'Mysore Chalo' agitation of 1947, which compelled the final transfer of power to elected representatives. Re-evaluating this struggle is essential for a comprehensive understanding of Indian nationalism, as it highlights how the quest for self-rule was equally vibrant and mature within the negotiated arenas of indirect rule.

PRINCELY STATES AND THE PROBLEM OF NATIONALIST HISTORIOGRAPHY

The study of Indian nationalism has long been shaped by a historiographical framework that privileges direct colonial rule as the primary site of political struggle. Early nationalist historians, writing in the decades immediately following independence, focused overwhelmingly on the confrontations between the Indian National Congress and the British colonial state. Constitutional reforms, mass movements, revolutionary terrorism, and negotiations with imperial authorities in British India were treated as the central engines of national awakening. Within this framework, princely states appeared largely as political backwaters spaces of loyalty, inertia, or delayed reform.

Colonial historiography further reinforced this perception. British administrators and scholars frequently portrayed princely states as beneficiaries of imperial protection, ruled by enlightened monarchs whose subjects enjoyed peace and stability in contrast to the turbulence of British provinces. Political unrest within princely territories was often dismissed as artificial, externally inspired, or the work of a small, Western-educated elite. Such representations served a clear ideological purpose: they legitimized indirect rule by presenting princely governance as culturally appropriate and politically benign. Post-independence academic scholarship, despite its critical stance toward colonialism, often reproduced these assumptions in subtler forms. The dominance of province-centric narratives meant that princely states were examined primarily in terms of accession, integration, and administrative continuity rather than as arenas of sustained political contestation. Nationalism within princely states was frequently treated as an appendage to all-India movements, activated only when events in British India spilled across political boundaries.

This historiographical marginalization is particularly evident in early surveys of the freedom struggle, where princely state politics receive limited and episodic attention. When discussed, movements in these regions are often framed as reactive responses rather than autonomous expressions of political consciousness. Such an approach obscures the fact that nationalism under indirect rule operated within a fundamentally different political environment, shaped by distinct constraints, opportunities, and ideological vocabularies. Recent scholarship has begun to challenge this imbalance by foregrounding the concept of indirect rule as a central analytical category. Indirect rule did not imply the absence of colonial power; rather, it represented a complex system of mediated sovereignty in which princely rulers exercised authority under the supervision of the colonial state. This arrangement generated a layered political order that profoundly influenced the nature of political mobilization. Nationalist actors in princely states were required to negotiate not only with colonial authorities but also with indigenous rulers whose legitimacy was simultaneously traditional, contractual, and colonial.

Within this context, the language of nationalism necessarily differed from that employed in British India. Direct demands for independence or republicanism were often politically untenable, inviting swift repression or accusations of disloyalty. Consequently, nationalist discourse in princely states frequently adopted constitutionalist and reformist idioms, emphasizing accountability, consultation, and responsible government. Far from indicating ideological weakness, this vocabulary reflected a sophisticated engagement with the realities of political power. The demand for responsible government occupies a central place in princely state nationalism and deserves greater historiographical attention. Unlike the demand for swaraj in British India, responsible government sought to redefine sovereignty without dismantling monarchical authority. It represented an attempt to reconcile popular sovereignty with dynastic legitimacy, transforming subjects into citizens while retaining the symbolic framework of kingship. This demand was both radical and conservative: radical in its insistence on accountability, conservative in its accommodation of tradition.

Mysore stands out within this broader pattern of princely state politics. Historians have often noted Mysore's administrative efficiency, commitment to economic development, and investment in education and social reform. However, these features have sometimes led to the assumption that political discontent in Mysore was minimal or muted. Such interpretations conflate administrative modernity with political consent and overlook the ways in which modernization itself generated new expectations and political demands. The historiographical challenge, therefore, lies in moving beyond normative judgments about princely rule whether celebratory or dismissive and examining the actual practices of political engagement within these states. In Mysore, representative institutions, public associations, and a vibrant vernacular press provided platforms for political debate long before the emergence of mass agitation. These forums allowed nationalist ideas to circulate, adapt, and acquire local resonance.

Another limitation of existing historiography is its tendency to equate nationalism with overt anti-colonial confrontation. By this measure, movements that prioritized negotiation, reform, or symbolic protest are often undervalued. Yet in princely states, such strategies were not signs of political caution alone; they were rational responses to a political structure that combined coercion with paternalism. Nationalist leaders had to calibrate their actions carefully, balancing moral pressure with institutional engagement. The emphasis on mass movements in British India has also shaped assumptions about popular participation in princely states. Rural society in these regions is frequently depicted as politically quiescent, bound by traditional loyalties to rulers and local elites. However, studies of political unrest in princely states reveal patterns of rural mobilization that challenge this stereotype. Peasant grievances, caste assertions, and local protests often intersected with nationalist agendas, producing forms of political action that were both locally grounded and nationally informed.

In Mysore, such intersections became increasingly visible during the late colonial period. Rural protests against administrative excesses, restrictions on civil liberties, and economic pressures were articulated in nationalist terms, demonstrating the penetration of political consciousness beyond urban centers. These developments complicate the assumption that princely state nationalism lacked social depth or mass appeal. Revisiting princely state nationalism also requires rethinking the temporal framework of the freedom struggle. In British India, nationalist historiography often follows a linear progression from early constitutionalism to mass movements and finally to independence. In princely states, this chronology was less linear and more contingent. Periods of constitutional negotiation coexisted with episodes of mass protest, and moments of apparent political quietude often concealed ongoing ideological ferment. The integration of princely states into independent India further contributed to the marginalization of their nationalist histories. The narrative of national unity emphasized smooth accession and administrative continuity, downplaying the conflicts and negotiations that preceded integration. As a result, the political struggles that compelled princely rulers to relinquish authority were subsumed under the broader story of national consolidation. A re-evaluation of nationalist historiography must therefore recognize princely states as active arenas of political transformation rather than passive recipients of change. Mysore's experience demonstrates that nationalism under indirect rule was neither derivative nor deficient. It was adaptive, context-sensitive, and deeply engaged with questions of legitimacy, authority, and citizenship. By situating Mysore within this broader rethinking of princely state politics, this study challenges the dominant geography of Indian nationalism. It argues that the freedom struggle cannot be fully understood without incorporating the diverse trajectories through which different regions negotiated the transition from colonial subordination to democratic self-rule. Princely states like Mysore were not peripheral to this process; they were central to its complexity and richness.

POLITICAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE CONTEXT OF THE MYSORE PRINCELY STATE

Any serious examination of nationalism in Mysore must begin with an understanding of the political and administrative framework within which political action unfolded. Mysore was neither a fully sovereign polity nor a directly ruled colonial province. Its position within the British imperial system was defined by indirect rule, a form of governance that preserved dynastic authority while subjecting it to imperial supervision. This hybrid political arrangement shaped the possibilities, limitations, and ideological contours of political mobilization in profound ways. By the late nineteenth century, Mysore had acquired a reputation as one of the most efficiently governed princely states in India. The restoration of the Wodeyar dynasty in the early colonial period, followed by sustained administrative reforms, created an image of enlightened monarchy committed to

progress and welfare. British administrators frequently cited Mysore as a "model state," contrasting its orderly administration with the perceived inefficiencies of both other princely states and certain British provinces. This reputation, however, obscured the deeper political tensions embedded within the system of indirect rule. At the core of Mysore's political structure lay a fundamental contradiction. While the Maharaja was formally recognized as the sovereign ruler, real autonomy was constrained by British paramountcy. The presence of a Resident, the requirement of imperial approval for key policies, and the implicit threat of intervention limited the scope of princely authority. This dual sovereignty produced a situation in which responsibility without full power coexisted with power without democratic accountability.

Administrative modernization intensified this contradiction. Mysore invested heavily in bureaucratic expansion, public works, education, and industrial development. A professional civil service emerged, drawing increasingly from English-educated Indians trained in modern administrative practices. While these developments enhanced state capacity, they also transformed the relationship between ruler and subject. Governance was no longer mediated solely through traditional hierarchies but increasingly through impersonal institutions, regulations, and procedures. This institutional transformation had significant political consequences. The expansion of education produced a new public sphere populated by lawyers, teachers, journalists, and government employees. These groups were acutely aware of constitutional developments in British India and increasingly conscious of the disparity between administrative modernity and political exclusion in Mysore. Exposure to liberal political ideas fostered expectations of participation, accountability, and representation that the existing political framework was ill-equipped to satisfy.

Representative institutions were introduced in a limited and controlled manner. Advisory councils and legislative bodies existed, but their powers were narrowly circumscribed. Membership was often nominated rather than elected, and debates rarely translated into binding policy decisions. While these institutions were presented as evidence of progressive governance, they functioned primarily as consultative mechanisms rather than instruments of popular sovereignty. Nevertheless, these bodies played an important role in political socialization. They provided forums in which political language, procedural norms, and constitutional arguments could be articulated and refined. Over time, demands for reform increasingly centered on expanding the powers of these institutions and transforming them into genuinely representative organs. The concept of responsible government emerged from within this institutional context rather than being imposed from outside. The administrative ethos of Mysore also contributed to the distinctive character of its nationalist politics. Unlike in British India, where colonial authority was external and overtly alien, political authority in Mysore was embodied in an indigenous ruler whose legitimacy drew upon history, culture, and tradition. Opposition to the state therefore required careful ideological navigation. Nationalist leaders had to critique policies without appearing disloyal to the dynasty or disruptive of social order.

This constraint encouraged a political style that emphasized reform over rupture. Public criticism was framed in moral and constitutional terms rather than revolutionary rhetoric. Petitions, memoranda, and public meetings became key instruments of political expression. Far from being merely moderate or elitist, these strategies reflected a keen awareness of the political environment and the risks of repression under indirect rule. The relationship between the state and civil society further complicates simplistic interpretations of Mysore's political culture. The state actively promoted education, cultural institutions, and voluntary associations, often with the intention of fostering loyalty and social harmony. Yet these same institutions became sites of political debate and mobilization. Reading rooms, literary societies, and caste associations functioned as incubators of political consciousness, linking social reform to broader questions of rights and representation. Rural administration in Mysore also played a role in shaping political attitudes. While the state prided itself on efficient revenue collection and infrastructural development, rural populations experienced the state primarily through local officials, regulations, and fiscal demands. Grievances related to land revenue, forest policies, and labor obligations generated localized discontent that occasionally found expression in organized protest. Although not always explicitly nationalist, these movements contributed to a broader climate of political questioning.

The coexistence of welfare-oriented policies and authoritarian controls created a paradoxical political environment. On the one hand, the state projected itself as a benevolent guardian of public interest; on the other, it imposed restrictions on press freedom, assembly, and political organization when faced with dissent.

This duality sharpened political awareness and reinforced demands for institutional accountability. The outbreak of mass nationalist movements in British India during the early twentieth century had a catalytic effect on Mysore's political landscape. While the state sought to maintain order and neutrality, nationalist ideas circulated widely through print, public speeches, and personal networks. Political developments elsewhere provided both inspiration and cautionary lessons, influencing the strategies adopted by Mysore's political actors. Crucially, nationalism in Mysore did not emerge in opposition to administrative modernity but as a response to its incomplete political logic. The contradiction between a modern bureaucratic state and the absence of popular sovereignty lay at the heart of political mobilization. Demands for responsible government were thus rooted in lived administrative experience rather than abstract ideology. Understanding the political and administrative context of Mysore allows us to move beyond binary categories of loyalty and resistance. The freedom struggle in the princely state was shaped by negotiation, adaptation, and incremental challenge. Political actors operated within constraints, yet consistently sought to expand the boundaries of participation and accountability. This context also explains why Mysore's nationalist movement developed its own rhythm and priorities. Rather than mirroring the trajectory of British India, it followed a path conditioned by indirect rule, dynastic legitimacy, and institutional reform. Recognizing this specificity is essential for appreciating the diversity of India's freedom struggle.

EMERGENCE OF POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND EARLY ASSOCIATIONS IN MYSORE

The emergence of political consciousness in the Princely State of Mysore was neither abrupt nor derivative. It was the outcome of long-term social, educational, and administrative transformations that gradually altered the relationship between the state and its subjects. Unlike British India, where colonial domination provided a clear external focus for political opposition, Mysore's political awakening unfolded within a framework where authority was indigenous yet constrained by imperial paramountcy. This produced a distinctive trajectory of political consciousness rooted in reformist engagement rather than immediate confrontation. Education played a foundational role in this process. The Mysore state was among the earliest princely states to invest systematically in modern education. The expansion of schools, colleges, and professional institutions created a new generation of English-educated individuals who were exposed to liberal political thought, constitutionalism, and ideas of citizenship. These individuals formed the nucleus of an emerging public sphere in which political questions were debated with increasing sophistication. Education thus functioned not merely as a tool of social mobility but as a catalyst for political awareness.

The growth of print culture further amplified this process. Newspapers, journals, and pamphlets circulated widely, disseminating information about political developments both within Mysore and in British India. Vernacular publications played a particularly important role in translating abstract political ideas into locally intelligible idioms. Discussions on rights, governance, representation, and accountability entered everyday discourse, reaching audiences beyond the narrow elite. The press became a critical medium through which political grievances were articulated and collective identities forged. Early political associations emerged as institutional expressions of this growing consciousness. These associations were often cautious in tone and reformist in orientation, reflecting the constraints imposed by princely rule. Their demands focused on administrative transparency, expansion of representative institutions, and greater participation of educated Indians in governance. While limited in scope, these organizations laid the groundwork for more assertive political mobilization in later decades.

Social reform movements also intersected with political awakening in important ways. Organizations addressing issues such as caste discrimination, access to education, and social inequality provided platforms for collective action and public debate. These movements contributed to the politicization of social identities and fostered a sense of shared grievance against structures of exclusion. In many cases, leaders of social reform later became prominent figures in political organizations, blurring the boundaries between social and political activism. Caste associations, in particular, played a complex role in Mysore's political evolution. While often organized around specific community interests, they also functioned as vehicles for political education and mobilization. By articulating demands for representation, employment opportunities, and social recognition, these associations introduced constitutional language into popular discourse. Over time, they contributed to a broader understanding of politics as a legitimate arena for negotiating rights and resources. Public meetings and conferences became increasingly common as forums for political expression. These gatherings allowed for the articulation of grievances, the circulation of ideas, and the formation of political networks. Importantly, they

also normalized the practice of collective political participation. Even when resolutions carried no binding authority, the very act of deliberation fostered a sense of political agency among participants.

The Mysore Representative Assembly occupies a central place in this phase of political development. Although its powers were limited and largely advisory, it provided an institutional space for dialogue between the state and educated elites. Debates within the Assembly reflected growing dissatisfaction with the constraints of indirect rule and the absence of executive accountability. Over time, the Assembly became a site where demands for responsible government were systematically articulated and refined. Despite its limitations, participation in such institutions had lasting consequences. It trained political actors in parliamentary procedures, legislative debate, and constitutional argumentation. These skills proved invaluable when mass politics later emerged. The experience of institutional engagement ensured that political mobilization in Mysore was informed by a deep familiarity with administrative structures rather than driven solely by emotive protest. Rural political consciousness developed more unevenly but was no less significant. The expansion of state regulation into rural life through revenue administration, forest policies, and local governance brought villagers into direct contact with the state. Grievances arising from these interactions sometimes found expression through petitions, protests, and collective resistance. While not always framed in nationalist terms, such actions reflected an emerging awareness of rights and state responsibility. The diffusion of Gandhian ideas in the early twentieth century further accelerated political consciousness. Concepts such as non-violence, satyagraha, and moral resistance resonated with existing traditions of ethical governance and social reform in Mysore. Gandhian nationalism provided a moral vocabulary that enabled political critique without directly challenging dynastic legitimacy. This was particularly important in a princely context, where overt hostility to the ruler could invite repression. The interaction between local political traditions and national movements produced a layered political identity. Activists in Mysore increasingly saw themselves as participants in a pan-Indian struggle while remaining deeply rooted in regional concerns. This dual orientation allowed for strategic flexibility, enabling political actors to align with national campaigns while tailoring their demands to local realities. Importantly, early political mobilization in Mysore avoided rigid ideological polarization. The emphasis remained on dialogue, reform, and gradual transformation. This does not indicate political timidity but rather a calculated response to structural constraints. By operating within permissible spaces while continuously pushing their boundaries, early activists expanded the scope of political possibility. By the late 1920s and early 1930s, the cumulative effect of these developments was unmistakable. Political consciousness had moved beyond elite circles and begun to permeate broader sections of society. The language of rights, representation, and responsibility gained increasing traction. This period thus marks the transition from formative political awareness to organized political action.

The emergence of political consciousness and early associations in Mysore laid the essential foundations for mass mobilization in subsequent decades. They provided ideological coherence, organizational experience, and a trained leadership cadre. Without this preparatory phase, later movements such as the Shivapura Satyagraha and the Mysore Chalo agitation would not have been possible. Understanding this phase is crucial for appreciating the distinctive character of Mysore's freedom struggle. It reveals a movement grounded in institutional engagement, social reform, and ethical politics. Rather than being peripheral to the national movement, Mysore represents an alternative pathway to political modernity one shaped by negotiation, adaptation, and sustained civic engagement.

FORMATION AND GROWTH OF THE MYSORE CONGRESS

The formation of the Mysore Congress marked a decisive turning point in the political history of the Princely State of Mysore. It represented the transition from dispersed reformist initiatives to a structured, ideologically coherent, and mass-oriented political movement. While its emergence was closely linked to the broader Indian National Congress, the Mysore Congress developed a distinctive identity shaped by the specific constraints and opportunities of princely-state politics. In the early decades of the twentieth century, the Indian National Congress followed a cautious policy regarding princely states. Concerned that direct intervention might provoke repression and undermine nationalist unity, the Congress initially refrained from organizing political activities within territories under princely rule. This created a political vacuum in Mysore, where nationalist aspirations existed but lacked an all-India organizational framework. In response, local leaders began to explore alternative institutional arrangements that could articulate political demands without violating the norms of indirect rule. Early attempts at organization took the form of federations and political conferences

that sought to coordinate reformist activity across the state. These bodies emphasized loyalty to the Maharaja while simultaneously demanding administrative accountability and greater public participation. Such dual positioning reflected the delicate balance nationalist leaders had to maintain: opposing authoritarian governance without delegitimizing indigenous sovereignty.

The formal establishment of the Mysore Congress in the late 1930s signaled a new phase of political confidence. By this time, the ideological influence of Gandhian nationalism had deepened, and the boundaries of permissible political activity had expanded. The Mysore Congress consciously aligned itself with the principles of the Indian National Congress non-violence, mass mobilization, and moral resistance while adapting these principles to the princely context. Its primary demand was not the abolition of monarchy but the establishment of a responsible government answerable to a representative legislature. Organizationally, the Mysore Congress sought to move beyond elite politics. Efforts were made to establish local committees, recruit volunteers, and mobilize students, workers, and peasants. This expansion transformed the Congress from a discussion forum into a vehicle of popular political participation. Public meetings, processions, and campaigns became increasingly common, signaling the emergence of mass politics in the princely state. Leadership played a crucial role in this transformation. Mysore Congress leaders combined ideological commitment with strategic pragmatism. Many were drawn from the educated middle classes lawyers, teachers, journalists who possessed both administrative experience and moral authority. Their ability to communicate political ideas in accessible language helped bridge the gap between abstract constitutional demands and everyday social concerns.

The relationship between the Mysore Congress and the state administration was marked by both confrontation and negotiation. While the organization criticized policies that restricted civil liberties and political expression, it also engaged with state institutions through petitions and dialogue. This dual strategy allowed the Congress to maintain legitimacy while steadily expanding its influence. Repressive measures, when employed by the state, often had the unintended effect of enhancing the Congress's moral standing and popular support. The late 1930s witnessed a qualitative shift in the Congress's activities. The focus moved from institutional reform to symbolic action and direct protest. This shift reflected growing frustration with the slow pace of constitutional change and the state's reluctance to concede meaningful power. Campaigns centered on civil liberties, freedom of expression, and political representation gained momentum, preparing the ground for mass satyagrahas. The Mysore Congress also functioned as a crucial intermediary between local political culture and the national movement. It facilitated the circulation of ideas, strategies, and personnel between Mysore and British India. National developments such as the Civil Disobedience Movement and debates on provincial autonomy influenced the Congress's agenda, even as local realities shaped its methods. Internal debates within the Mysore Congress reveal the complexity of princely-state nationalism. Questions regarding the pace of agitation, the limits of loyalty to the Maharaja, and the relationship with the all-India Congress generated intense discussion. These debates were not signs of weakness but indicators of ideological maturity. They reflected an ongoing effort to reconcile competing imperatives: mass mobilization and political stability, nationalism and regional identity.

The Congress's engagement with social issues further broadened its appeal. By addressing concerns related to education, employment, and social justice, it connected political reform with everyday experiences. This integration of social and political agendas helped embed nationalism within the fabric of Mysore society. By the eve of the Second World War, the Mysore Congress had established itself as the principal platform for political opposition in the state. Its organizational network, ideological clarity, and growing mass base enabled it to articulate demands with unprecedented authority. The struggle for responsible government had become a popular cause rather than an elite aspiration. The formation and growth of the Mysore Congress thus represent a critical phase in the evolution of Mysore's freedom struggle. It institutionalized nationalism, transformed political consciousness into organized action, and created a leadership capable of negotiating the transition from princely subjecthood to democratic citizenship. Far from being a peripheral offshoot of the Indian National Congress, the Mysore Congress exemplifies how nationalist politics were creatively adapted to the distinctive conditions of princely India.

MASS MOBILIZATION AND SYMBOLIC POLITICS: THE SHIVAPURA FLAG SATYAGRAHA (1938)

The Shivapura Flag Satyagraha of 1938 represents a decisive moment in the evolution of mass politics in the Princely State of Mysore. It marked the transition from primarily institutional and reformist modes of political engagement to open, symbolic, and mass-based resistance. More than a single episode of protest, the satyagraha functioned as a political watershed that redefined the relationship between the state and its subjects and reshaped the trajectory of the freedom struggle in Mysore. The immediate context of the Shivapura Satyagraha lay in the restrictive political climate of the late 1930s. Despite the growing influence of the Mysore Congress and repeated demands for responsible government, the state administration continued to impose limitations on political expression. Among the most contentious of these restrictions was the prohibition on hoisting the Indian national flag within the state. The ban was not merely administrative; it carried deep symbolic significance. By denying the public display of the national flag, the state sought to regulate political loyalty and restrict the circulation of nationalist symbols that could challenge its authority. The decision of the Mysore Congress to organize a flag satyagraha at Shivapura was therefore both strategic and symbolic. Shivapura, a village in the Mandya region, was chosen not by accident but by design. Its rural setting underscored the Congress's intention to extend political mobilization beyond urban centers and elite circles. The satyagraha was conceived as a Gandhian protest non-violent, disciplined, and morally charged aimed at asserting the legitimacy of nationalist expression within a princely framework.

The act of hoisting the national flag carried layered meanings. At one level, it was an assertion of identification with the all-India national movement. At another, it represented a claim to political agency by ordinary subjects of the princely state. The flag became a medium through which abstract ideas of freedom, sovereignty, and unity were translated into a visible and participatory political act. In this sense, the satyagraha transformed symbolism into a form of mass pedagogy. Leadership was central to the organization and execution of the movement. Leaders of the Mysore Congress emphasized strict adherence to non-violence and discipline, conscious of the potential consequences of confrontation under princely rule. Volunteers were trained to face arrest without resistance, reinforcing the moral contrast between popular protest and state repression. This emphasis on ethical conduct was not merely ideological; it was a strategic necessity in a political environment where legitimacy was constantly contested. The response to the satyagraha exceeded the expectations of its organizers. Thousands of volunteers and sympathizers converged on Shivapura, drawn by the powerful symbolism of the protest. Participation cut across social boundaries, involving students, peasants, workers, and members of the middle classes. The scale of mobilization demonstrated that nationalist sentiment had penetrated deeply into rural society, challenging the assumption that political consciousness in princely states was confined to urban elites. The state's reaction revealed the limits of its tolerance for political dissent. Attempts to suppress the satyagraha through arrests and prohibitory orders only intensified public attention and sympathy. Repression exposed the contradiction between the state's self-image as benevolent and its unwillingness to accommodate basic political expression. In this way, the satyagraha functioned as a moral indictment of authoritarian governance under indirect rule. Crucially, the Shivapura Satyagraha altered the balance of political legitimacy. While the state possessed coercive power, the Congress increasingly claimed moral authority rooted in popular participation and ethical protest. This shift had lasting consequences. The state was compelled to negotiate, signaling an implicit recognition of the Congress as a representative political force. Although concessions were limited, the psychological victory was significant.

The satyagraha also redefined the repertoire of political action in Mysore. Symbolic protest emerged as a powerful tool capable of mobilizing masses without resorting to violence. The success of the flag movement demonstrated that Gandhian strategies could be effectively adapted to princely contexts, despite differences in political structure from British India. This adaptation was not mechanical imitation but a creative reinterpretation shaped by local conditions. Equally important was the pedagogical impact of the movement. Participation in the satyagraha educated large sections of the population in the practices of collective action, discipline, and political sacrifice. Arrests and imprisonments became rites of political initiation, conferring legitimacy and status within the nationalist movement. Through these experiences, nationalism was no longer an abstract idea but a lived reality. The Shivapura Satyagraha also influenced internal debates within the Mysore Congress. It strengthened advocates of mass action and demonstrated the limitations of purely constitutional methods. At the same time, it reinforced the importance of maintaining moral restraint and strategic discipline. The movement thus contributed to a more mature and nuanced political culture within the Congress. From a broader historiographical perspective, the Shivapura Satyagraha challenges the marginalization of princely-state movements in narratives of Indian nationalism. It illustrates that symbolic

politics and mass mobilization were not exclusive to British India but were equally potent under indirect rule. The protest reveals how subjects of princely states creatively negotiated political constraints to assert national belonging and democratic aspirations. In retrospect, the Shivapura Flag Satyagraha can be seen as the moment when the freedom struggle in Mysore acquired irreversible momentum. It bridged the gap between elite leadership and popular participation, between constitutional demand and mass assertion. The movement laid the groundwork for subsequent agitations, including the more confrontational phases of the 1940s. Ultimately, the significance of Shivapura lies not only in what it achieved but in what it made possible. By demonstrating the power of symbolic action and collective discipline, it transformed political imagination in Mysore. The satyagraha affirmed that even within the constraints of princely rule, the language of freedom could be spoken loudly, visibly, and collectively.

REPRESSION, RESISTANCE, AND RADICALIZATION: VIDURASWATHA AND ISUR

The expansion of mass mobilization in Mysore during the late 1930s and early 1940s inevitably provoked a harsher response from the princely state. As nationalist politics moved beyond symbolic protest and elite negotiation, the state increasingly relied on coercive measures to maintain authority. This phase of repression did not suppress the movement; rather, it transformed its character. Episodes such as the Viduraswatha firing and the resistance at Isur reveal how state violence radicalized political consciousness and deepened popular commitment to the cause of freedom. The Viduraswatha tragedy of April 1938 occupies a central place in the political memory of Mysore. Occurring in close temporal proximity to the Shivapura Flag Satyagraha, it underscored the escalating tension between popular mobilization and state authority. Villagers had gathered near a sacred peepal tree to participate in a political meeting inspired by nationalist ideals. The gathering itself symbolized the fusion of cultural tradition with political aspiration, as sacred space became a site of political expression. The decision of the state authorities to respond with police firing marked a decisive rupture. The killing of unarmed civilians shattered the carefully cultivated image of the Mysore state as a benevolent and progressive administration. For many, Viduraswatha became a moment of political awakening, revealing the coercive foundations of princely authority when confronted with popular dissent. The comparison with Jallianwala Bagh was not merely rhetorical; it reflected a shared experience of violence that transcended administrative boundaries. The immediate aftermath of Viduraswatha was characterized by widespread outrage and grief. Martyrdom emerged as a powerful political idiom, transforming victims into symbols of sacrifice and moral legitimacy. Public commemorations, songs, and oral narratives ensured that the memory of the event circulated widely, particularly in rural areas. Through these practices, political consciousness was sustained and transmitted beyond formal organizational structures.

State repression had paradoxical consequences. While intended to deter dissent, it exposed the limits of constitutional reform under an authoritarian framework. For many activists, Viduraswatha confirmed that demands for responsible government could not be indefinitely postponed or contained within institutional channels. The episode thus contributed to a gradual radicalization of political strategy, encouraging a more confrontational stance toward the state. The trajectory of resistance reached a new intensity during the Quit India movement of 1942. Although the movement was launched in British India, its resonance in Mysore demonstrates the depth of nationalist sentiment in the princely state. The village of Isur emerged as a dramatic site of resistance, where local inhabitants symbolically declared the end of British rule and princely authority. This declaration, though short-lived, represented an extraordinary assertion of popular sovereignty.

The resistance at Isur differed in important ways from earlier protests. It was less mediated by formal political organizations and more rooted in localized collective action. Villagers participated not merely as supporters of nationalist leaders but as agents asserting direct control over their political destiny. This form of resistance blurred the line between nationalist agitation and revolutionary defiance. The state's response to Isur was swift and severe. Military force was deployed, leaders were arrested, and punitive measures were imposed. The violence inflicted on the village was intended to serve as a warning against similar acts of defiance. Yet, as in Viduraswatha, repression failed to extinguish resistance. Instead, it reinforced the perception that the state was fundamentally unwilling to accommodate popular will. These episodes illustrate a critical transformation in the nature of the freedom struggle in Mysore. Political action was no longer confined to petitions, symbolic protests, or controlled satyagrahas. It had entered a phase where the possibility of violent confrontation, though not embraced as a strategy, became an ever-present reality. This shift heightened the stakes of political engagement and intensified demands for structural change. Rural participation in these movements challenges

conventional narratives that portray peasant politics as reactive or peripheral. In Mysore, rural communities were not passive recipients of nationalist ideology but active contributors to its evolution. Their experiences of taxation, regulation, and coercion provided a material basis for political dissent. Nationalism thus intersected with everyday struggles over livelihood, dignity, and autonomy. The moral economy of resistance also underwent significant transformation. Martyrdom and suffering were increasingly framed as necessary sacrifices for collective freedom. This moral framing strengthened solidarity and legitimized continued struggle despite repression. It also fostered a sense of historical continuity, linking local sacrifices to the broader narrative of the Indian freedom movement. From a historiographical perspective, Viduraswatha and Isur complicate the image of princely states as politically quiescent or insulated from mass nationalism. They reveal that indirect rule did not preclude intense conflict between state and society. Instead, it produced distinctive forms of resistance shaped by local conditions and political imagination.

These episodes also forced the Mysore Congress to reassess its strategies. While committed to non-violence, the organization recognized the depth of popular anger and the limitations of moderation. The challenge lay in channeling radical energies into disciplined political action without losing moral authority. This tension would shape the movement in the final years before independence. Ultimately, repression in Mysore did not weaken the freedom struggle; it transformed it. By exposing the coercive underside of princely governance, state violence undermined its own legitimacy. Resistance, in turn, became more resolute, more inclusive, and more deeply rooted in popular experience.

Viduraswatha and Isur stand as reminders that the path to freedom in Mysore was marked by sacrifice and struggle. They demonstrate that the freedom movement in princely states was neither passive nor peripheral but integral to the broader process of India's decolonization. Through repression and resistance, political consciousness in Mysore acquired a depth and urgency that would shape the final phase of the struggle.

CONSTITUTIONAL DEADLOCK AND POLITICAL NEGOTIATION IN THE 1940S

The decade of the 1940s constituted a period of profound constitutional tension in the Princely State of Mysore. By this time, the freedom struggle had moved beyond questions of political awakening and symbolic protest to confront the fundamental issue of sovereignty and authority. The state found itself caught between competing pressures: the growing insistence of its subjects on responsible government, the ideological momentum of the all-India nationalist movement, and the constraints imposed by British paramountcy. This convergence produced a constitutional deadlock that defined the final phase of princely-state politics in Mysore.

The Mysore administration entered the 1940s with a strong reputation for efficiency and development. Industrial growth, urban planning, and infrastructural modernization had transformed the material landscape of the state. Yet these achievements increasingly appeared hollow in the absence of political accountability. For nationalist leaders and an expanding section of the public, administrative competence could no longer substitute for democratic legitimacy. The central question was no longer whether Mysore was well governed, but who had the right to govern. The structure of governance itself lay at the heart of the deadlock. Executive authority remained concentrated in the hands of the Diwan and the Maharaja, while representative institutions possessed only advisory powers. Although legislative bodies existed, they lacked control over the executive and finance two pillars of responsible government. This imbalance became increasingly untenable as political consciousness deepened and expectations rose. Negotiation emerged as a central mode of political engagement during this period. The Mysore Congress repeatedly articulated its demands through memoranda, resolutions, and delegations. These demands were framed in constitutional language, emphasizing continuity rather than rupture. Responsible government was presented not as a revolutionary break but as the logical culmination of Mysore's own administrative evolution. This rhetorical strategy sought to reconcile loyalty to the dynasty with the principle of popular sovereignty.

The state's response, however, was characterized by hesitation and incrementalism. Concessions were often limited, procedural, or ambiguous. While reforms were announced, their implementation was delayed or diluted. This pattern reinforced nationalist skepticism and intensified frustration. Political negotiations thus became exercises in endurance, testing the patience and resolve of both sides. The Second World War added a further layer of complexity. Wartime exigencies provided the state with a justification for postponing political

reform, citing the need for stability and order. At the same time, the war heightened political awareness and economic strain, particularly among the working classes and rural populations. Inflation, shortages, and increased regulation sharpened grievances and reinforced demands for accountability. The resonance of the Quit India movement during this period further destabilized the political equilibrium. Although the movement was suppressed within Mysore, its ideological impact was profound. The call for immediate freedom undermined the legitimacy of gradualist approaches and strengthened the argument that political authority must derive from popular consent. The gap between nationalist aspirations and constitutional realities widened dramatically.

Within the Mysore Congress, debates intensified regarding strategy and timing. Some leaders continued to emphasize negotiation and constitutional methods, wary of provoking repression or instability. Others argued that prolonged compromise risked demoralizing the movement and legitimizing authoritarianism. These debates reflected a broader tension within Indian nationalism between gradual reform and decisive action. The role of the Diwanate during this period became increasingly controversial. While the Diwan embodied administrative continuity and expertise, the office also symbolized the concentration of power beyond popular control. Nationalist critiques targeted not individuals but the structural logic of Diwanism itself. The argument was clear: modern administration without democratic accountability was fundamentally incomplete. The Maharaja's position was equally complex. As a symbol of historical continuity and cultural legitimacy, the ruler retained considerable moral authority. Nationalist leaders were careful to frame their demands in ways that preserved the dignity of the monarchy while limiting its political prerogatives. This delicate balancing act reflected both strategic calculation and genuine respect for dynastic tradition.

Despite prolonged negotiation, the constitutional deadlock remained unresolved by the mid-1940s. Each reform raised expectations that were not fully met, leading to renewed agitation. The gap between promise and performance eroded trust and radicalized political sentiment. What had once been a movement for reform increasingly became a struggle for power transfer. The approach of independence fundamentally altered the context of negotiation. As British withdrawal became imminent, the question of Mysore's political future assumed urgent significance. The legitimacy of continued autocratic rule became increasingly difficult to defend, both domestically and internationally. Nationalist leaders now framed responsible government not merely as a demand but as a historical necessity. The constitutional deadlock of the 1940s thus served as both a crisis and a catalyst. It exposed the structural limits of princely governance under indirect rule and clarified the stakes of political struggle. Negotiation, once a means of gradual reform, became a battleground over sovereignty itself. This period also demonstrated the political maturity of the Mysore freedom movement. Despite growing impatience, the movement largely avoided indiscriminate violence and maintained organizational discipline. The emphasis remained on legitimacy, moral authority, and collective will. These qualities would prove decisive in the final confrontation between state authority and popular demand.

In retrospect, the constitutional impasse of the 1940s can be seen as the final test of Mysore's political system. Its inability to resolve demands for responsible government within the existing framework made transformation inevitable. The stage was thus set for a decisive mass movement that would compel the transfer of power.

THE 'MYSORE CHALO' MOVEMENT AND THE TRANSITION TO POPULAR GOVERNMENT (1947)

The 'Mysore Chalo' movement of 1947 represents the culmination of decades of political mobilization, negotiation, and resistance in the Princely State of Mysore. Unlike earlier agitations that sought incremental reform within the existing framework of princely governance, this movement directly confronted the question of political authority. It transformed the demand for responsible government from a constitutional aspiration into an unavoidable political reality. The context in which the Mysore Chalo movement emerged was shaped by the dramatic events of 1947. With the transfer of power in British India and the creation of independent India on August 15, the legitimacy of continued autocratic rule in princely states was profoundly undermined. While the broader Indian leadership moved swiftly to integrate princely states into the Union, the internal political arrangements of these states remained unresolved. In Mysore, the persistence of an unelected executive authority stood in stark contrast to the democratic transformation unfolding across the subcontinent. The Mysore Congress interpreted this moment as a historical turning point. For years, it had pursued responsible

government through petitions, negotiations, and controlled agitations. Independence altered the balance of power, creating an unprecedented opportunity to press for immediate political change. The Congress framed the Mysore Chalo movement not as rebellion but as a legitimate assertion of popular sovereignty in an independent nation.

The slogan "Mysore Chalo" carried deep symbolic resonance. It evoked earlier nationalist mobilizations while situating Mysore's struggle within the broader narrative of Indian freedom. The call invited citizens across the state to march toward the capital, transforming spatial movement into political expression. The journey to Mysore became a metaphor for the transition from princely subjecthood to democratic citizenship. Mass participation was the defining feature of the movement. Thousands of people from diverse social backgrounds students, workers, peasants, and professionals responded to the call. This broad-based mobilization demonstrated that the demand for responsible government had transcended organizational boundaries and become a popular consensus. The movement's scale made it impossible for the state to dismiss it as a sectional or elite agitation. Organizational discipline remained central to the movement's strategy. Drawing on Gandhian principles, leaders emphasized non-violence, order, and moral restraint. This discipline served multiple purposes. It minimized the risk of repression, reinforced the movement's legitimacy, and highlighted the contrast between popular will and autocratic authority. The emphasis on ethical conduct also reflected the political maturity of the movement, which sought not merely to seize power but to establish democratic norms. The state's response revealed the depth of the legitimacy crisis it faced. Attempts to restrict the movement through prohibitory orders and arrests failed to stem its momentum. Repression at this stage risked provoking widespread unrest and international criticism in a newly independent India. The administration increasingly found itself isolated, unable to justify continued resistance to popular demands.

Negotiations resumed under intense pressure. Unlike earlier rounds of dialogue, these discussions unfolded in a radically altered political environment. The prospect of integration into the Indian Union, combined with sustained popular agitation, constrained the state's options. The logic of responsible government had become irresistible. The eventual decision to transfer power marked a historic rupture. The appointment of a popular ministry under K. C. Reddy represented the formal realization of the demands articulated over decades. This transition was not merely administrative; it symbolized the transformation of political authority itself. Governance was redefined as a trust exercised on behalf of the people rather than a privilege derived from dynastic or colonial sanction. The Mysore Chalo movement thus achieved what earlier phases of the struggle had only anticipated. It converted moral legitimacy into political power and translated mass mobilization into institutional change. Importantly, this transition occurred without the large-scale violence that accompanied similar processes elsewhere. This outcome reflected both the strategic restraint of the movement and the political culture that had evolved through years of disciplined struggle. The implications of this transition extended beyond Mysore. The movement demonstrated that princely states could achieve democratic transformation through internal mobilization rather than external imposition. It challenged the assumption that princely rulers alone determined the political fate of their territories. Instead, it affirmed the agency of subjects as active participants in shaping postcolonial political order. From a historiographical perspective, the Mysore Chalo movement complicates simplistic narratives of India's independence as a singular moment of liberation. It highlights the uneven and negotiated nature of decolonization, particularly in regions governed under indirect rule. Mysore's transition underscores the importance of internal struggles that paralleled and complemented the broader national movement.

The movement also redefined the relationship between monarchy and democracy. While the symbolic status of the Maharaja was preserved, executive authority was transferred to elected representatives. This arrangement reflected the movement's long-standing commitment to constitutional transformation rather than revolutionary overthrow. The monarchy was retained as a cultural institution, while sovereignty was vested in the people. The legacy of the Mysore Chalo movement lies in its affirmation of democratic citizenship. It marked the moment when subjects became citizens, endowed with rights and responsibilities within a constitutional framework. The political culture forged through this struggle influenced the subsequent evolution of democratic politics in the region. In retrospect, the Mysore Chalo movement represents the logical culmination of Mysore's freedom struggle. It brought together the strands of institutional reform, mass mobilization, moral resistance, and constitutional negotiation into a decisive political moment. The transition to popular government was not a gift bestowed from above but the outcome of sustained collective action. This

final phase underscores the central argument of this study: that the freedom struggle in Mysore was neither peripheral nor derivative but a sophisticated political project in its own right. By reconciling monarchical tradition with democratic aspiration, Mysore offered a distinctive pathway to freedom within the complex landscape of Indian decolonization.

CONCLUSION: REASSESSING MYSORE'S PLACE IN THE INDIAN FREEDOM STRUGGLE

The political history of the Princely State of Mysore compels a fundamental reassessment of how the Indian freedom struggle is conceptualized and narrated. Conventional historiography has tended to privilege events unfolding in directly administered British territories, often portraying princely states as politically stagnant or derivative arenas of nationalism. Such frameworks underestimate the complexity of political life under indirect rule and obscure the distinctive contributions of princely-state movements to the broader process of decolonization. The trajectory of nationalism in Mysore demonstrates that indirect colonial governance did not inhibit political modernity; rather, it reshaped its forms and strategies. Operating within a system that combined indigenous monarchy with imperial oversight, political actors in Mysore developed a nuanced approach to resistance. Their struggle was not directed against an overtly foreign regime but against the structural limitations of princely autocracy and the absence of democratic accountability. This required ideological precision and strategic adaptation. Unlike revolutionary movements that sought immediate rupture, the Mysore freedom struggle evolved through gradual institutional engagement. Representative assemblies, political associations, public meetings, and constitutional negotiations formed the early stages of mobilization. These mechanisms were not merely reformist compromises but foundational arenas in which political consciousness was cultivated. They trained leaders in procedural politics and accustomed the public to the language of rights and representation.

The Shivapura Flag Satyagraha marked a critical transition from elite constitutionalism to mass symbolic politics. By asserting the right to display the national flag, activists transformed political symbolism into a vehicle of collective participation. The subsequent repression at Viduraswatha and the radical assertion at Isur further deepened the movement's moral and political intensity. These episodes revealed that princely governance, despite its developmental achievements, rested on coercive authority when confronted with popular dissent. The constitutional deadlock of the 1940s exposed the structural contradiction at the heart of Mysore's political system: a modern administrative apparatus operating without democratic sovereignty. Negotiations between the Mysore Congress and the state underscored both the maturity of the movement and the limits of incremental reform. By the time independence arrived in 1947, the logic of responsible government had become historically inevitable. The Mysore Chalo movement represents the culmination of this process. It translated decades of political education, organization, and sacrifice into a decisive transformation of authority. The transfer of power to a popular ministry did not signify the destruction of monarchical tradition but its constitutional redefinition. In this synthesis of continuity and change lies the distinctive contribution of Mysore to India's democratic transition.

Several broader historiographical implications emerge from this study. First, the experience of Mysore challenges binary distinctions between colonial and princely India. Political mobilization, repression, negotiation, and mass participation were not confined to British provinces but were equally central to princely territories. Second, the case demonstrates that nationalism in princely states cannot be dismissed as derivative of the Indian National Congress. While influenced by all-India currents, Mysore's movement developed its own institutional forms, political culture, and strategic logic. Third, Mysore's trajectory highlights the importance of political culture in shaping modes of resistance. The presence of an indigenous ruler required activists to frame demands in constitutional rather than revolutionary terms. This fostered a politics of moral persuasion and disciplined mobilization that ultimately proved effective in securing democratic transition. The movement's emphasis on non-violence, negotiation, and legitimacy contributed to a relatively stable transformation of authority. Comparatively, Mysore stands out among princely states for the coherence and continuity of its political evolution. Whereas some states experienced abrupt or externally imposed transitions, Mysore's shift to popular government emerged from sustained internal struggle. This process underscores the agency of subjects within princely India and complicates narratives that portray integration into the Indian Union as solely the outcome of central negotiation.

The study also contributes to theoretical discussions of political modernity under conditions of layered sovereignty. Indirect rule created overlapping centers of authority, requiring political actors to navigate multiple hierarchies simultaneously. Mysore's freedom struggle illustrates how such complexity could generate innovative forms of constitutional politics rather than paralysis. Nationalism here functioned as a mediating force, reconciling regional identity, dynastic continuity, and democratic aspiration. Finally, reassessing Mysore's place in the Indian freedom struggle expands our understanding of decolonization as a plural and negotiated process. Independence was not a singular event but a series of transformations unfolding across diverse political contexts. The experience of Mysore reminds us that democracy in India was forged not only in the legislative councils of British provinces or in the prisons of colonial cities, but also in the villages, assemblies, and streets of princely states. In conclusion, the freedom struggle in Mysore was a sophisticated and sustained political project that bridged tradition and modernity. It transformed subjects into citizens, autocracy into constitutional governance, and symbolic protest into institutional power. Far from being peripheral, Mysore occupies a central place in the mosaic of India's nationalist history. Recognizing this significance enriches both regional historiography and the broader narrative of Indian independence.

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