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RAZAKARS' VIOLENCE IN HYDERABAD: A DARK CHAPTER OF HISTORY

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Abstract

The integration of princely states into the Indian Union after independence in 1947 was a complex and often turbulent process. Among the most dramatic cases was the princely state of Hyderabad, ruled by the Nizam, Mir Osman Ali Khan. Hyderabad was one of the largest princely states in India, with a predominantly Hindu population governed by a Muslim ruler and elite administrative class. During the final years of the Nizam's rule, the rise of the Razakars—a paramilitary organization led by Qasim Razvi and associated with the Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (MIM)—created an atmosphere of violence, fear, and political instability. The Razakars sought to preserve Hyderabad's independence and defend the Nizam's authority, but their methods involved widespread atrocities including killings, forced conversions, looting, and the suppression of political dissent. Their campaign particularly targeted Hindu villagers, nationalist activists, and participants in the Telangana peasant rebellion. This period witnessed severe communal polarization and human suffering across several districts of Hyderabad State. The escalation of violence eventually led the Government of India, under the leadership of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, to launch Operation Polo in September 1948, resulting in the integration of Hyderabad into the Indian Union. This study examines the origins, ideology, and activities of the Razakars, the socio-political environment in Hyderabad during the late 1940s, and the impact of Razakar violence on society and national integration. Through historical analysis, the article highlights the dangers posed by communal militias and emphasizes the importance of democratic governance, rule of law, and national unity in preventing such crises.

Keywords: *Razakars, Qasim Razvi, Hyderabad State, Nizam of Hyderabad, Operation Polo, Telangana Rebellion, Communal Violence, National Integration, Princely States, Post-Independence India.*

1. Introduction

The period immediately following India's independence in 1947 was marked by enormous political transformation. While British India was divided into India and Pakistan, the subcontinent also contained more than 560 princely states that enjoyed varying degrees of autonomy under British paramountcy. These states were expected to accede either to India or Pakistan. Most of them eventually joined the Indian Union through diplomatic negotiations led by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and V.P. Menon. However, a few states presented serious challenges to the process of integration. Among these, Hyderabad was one of the most complicated cases.

Hyderabad State was ruled by Mir Osman Ali Khan, the seventh Nizam, who was one of the wealthiest monarchs in the world at the time. The state had a population of approximately 16 million people, of whom nearly 85 percent were Hindus. Despite this demographic reality, the political and administrative power in the state was concentrated in the hands of the Muslim ruling elite. After India achieved independence in August 1947, the Nizam expressed his desire to remain independent rather than join the Indian Union.

The political situation in Hyderabad became increasingly volatile during this period. Several political movements emerged within the state demanding democratic reforms and accession to India. The Hyderabad State Congress, representing nationalist forces, advocated for democratic governance and integration with India. Simultaneously, the Telangana peasant rebellion, led largely by communist organizations, challenged the feudal structure of land ownership and demanded social and economic justice.

Amidst this unstable political environment, the Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (MIM), under the leadership of Qasim Razvi, mobilized a militant force known as the Razakars. Initially presented as volunteers defending the sovereignty of Hyderabad, the Razakars soon transformed into a powerful paramilitary organization. Their activities involved intimidation, communal violence, and repression of political opposition.

The rise of the Razakars intensified communal tensions in Hyderabad and led to widespread violence across the region. Reports of atrocities, including killings, sexual violence, forced conversions, and destruction of property, became increasingly frequent. The violence destabilized the state and alarmed the Government of India, which viewed the situation as a threat to national security and social harmony.

Ultimately, the deteriorating law and order situation prompted the Indian government to intervene militarily. In September 1948, the Indian Army launched Operation Polo, also known as the “Police Action,” which resulted in the defeat of the Razakars and the integration of Hyderabad into the Indian Union.

This article seeks to examine the historical context, causes, and consequences of Razakar violence in Hyderabad and its role in shaping the political destiny of the region.

2. Objectives

The primary objectives of this study are:

1. To examine the historical background of Hyderabad State during the period of Indian independence.
2. To analyze the emergence and ideological foundations of the Razakar movement under Qasim Razvi.
3. To study the nature and extent of violence committed by the Razakars across Hyderabad State.
4. To understand the relationship between Razakar activities and the Telangana peasant rebellion.
5. To evaluate the role of Operation Polo in restoring law and order and integrating Hyderabad into the Indian Union.
6. To assess the long-term historical and social implications of Razakar violence.

3. Review of Literature

The events surrounding the Razakar movement and the annexation of Hyderabad have attracted considerable scholarly attention. Historians, political scientists, and journalists have examined the issue from multiple perspectives, including political integration, communal relations, and peasant movements.

P. Sundarayya’s book *Telangana People’s Struggle and Its Lessons* provides one of the most detailed accounts of the Telangana rebellion. Sundarayya describes how peasants organized themselves against feudal landlords and how the Razakars violently suppressed the movement. His work highlights the socio-economic dimensions of the conflict and emphasizes the role of class struggle in the region.

Srinath Raghavan’s *India’s War: The Making of Modern South Asia, 1947–1948* examines the military and diplomatic aspects of India’s early years of independence. Raghavan discusses Operation Polo in detail and explains the strategic considerations that led the Indian government to intervene in Hyderabad.

H.K. Sherwani's *The Hyderabad State, 1911–1948* offers an important perspective on the administrative and political structure of Hyderabad during the final decades of the Nizam's rule. Sherwani provides insights into the internal dynamics of the state and the tensions between different political groups.

The Sunderlal Committee Report, commissioned by the Government of India after the annexation of Hyderabad, remains an important primary source for understanding the scale of violence during this period. The report documents the human cost of communal conflict and provides valuable evidence regarding atrocities committed by various groups.

Journalistic accounts published in newspapers such as *The Hindu*, *Indian Express*, and *India Today* have also contributed to public understanding of the events. These sources highlight specific incidents of violence, including massacres in rural villages, and explore the political context surrounding the rise of the Razakars.

Together, these works provide a comprehensive foundation for understanding the Razakar movement and its impact on Hyderabad's history.

4. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative historical research methodology. The research is based primarily on secondary sources, including books, academic articles, historical reports, and credible journalistic publications.

The methodology involves the following steps:

1. **Collection of Historical Sources:** Relevant books, journal articles, archival reports, and online resources were collected and reviewed.
2. **Content Analysis:** Information related to the Razakar movement, Hyderabad State politics, and Operation Polo was analyzed to identify key themes and patterns.
3. **Comparative Interpretation:** Different historical interpretations were compared in order to develop a balanced understanding of the events.
4. **Synthesis of Findings:** The collected data was synthesized into a coherent narrative that explains the causes, development, and consequences of Razakar violence.

This qualitative approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of the political, social, and historical dimensions of the issue.

5. Results and Discussion

Rise of the Razakar Movement

The Razakars emerged during a period of political uncertainty in Hyderabad State. Under the leadership of Qasim Razvi, the Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen transformed from a political organization into a militant movement dedicated to preserving the Nizam's rule.

Razvi believed that Hyderabad could remain independent despite the political realities of post-colonial India. He mobilized thousands of volunteers and trained them as Razakar fighters. These volunteers were encouraged to defend the state against perceived threats from nationalist and communist groups.

Nature of Razakar Violence

The Razakar militia became notorious for its brutal tactics. Villages suspected of supporting the Indian National Congress or communist movements were attacked. Houses were burned, crops destroyed, and villagers were subjected to violence and intimidation.

Numerous reports describe incidents of forced conversions, sexual violence against women, and mass killings. The Bhairanpally massacre in 1948 is often cited as one of the most tragic examples of Razakar brutality. Similar incidents occurred in several districts across Telangana.

The violence created widespread fear among civilians and forced many families to flee their homes. Economic activity declined, and agricultural production suffered due to instability.

Role in Suppressing the Telangana Rebellion

The Razakars also played a significant role in suppressing the Telangana peasant rebellion. The rebellion challenged the feudal land system and demanded land redistribution. Razakar forces collaborated with feudal landlords and state authorities to crush the movement.

Their operations included raids on villages, arrests of suspected rebels, and public punishments intended to deter resistance.

Impact on Communal Relations

Razakar violence significantly deepened communal divisions in Hyderabad. The targeting of Hindu communities and nationalist activists created resentment and fear. Communal polarization intensified, making peaceful political compromise increasingly difficult.

Operation Polo and the End of Razakar Rule

By 1948 the situation had deteriorated to the point where the Government of India considered military intervention unavoidable. Operation Polo began on 13 September 1948 and lasted for five days.

Indian forces quickly defeated the Hyderabad army and Razakar militias. The Nizam surrendered on 17 September 1948, and Hyderabad was officially integrated into the Indian Union.

The Razakar organization was banned, and many of its leaders, including Qasim Razvi, were arrested.

6. Conclusion

The Razakar movement represents one of the most turbulent episodes in the history of Hyderabad State. The rise of a militant paramilitary organization during a period of political transition led to widespread violence and social disruption. The Razakars' actions not only caused immense suffering but also weakened the legitimacy of the Nizam's government.

The intervention of the Indian state through Operation Polo ultimately ended the Razakar regime and integrated Hyderabad into the Indian Union. While the operation restored political stability, the memories of violence continued to influence regional politics and communal relations for decades.

The history of the Razakars serves as a reminder of the dangers posed by communal militias and authoritarian rule. It underscores the importance of democratic institutions, rule of law, and inclusive governance in maintaining social harmony.

Understanding this historical episode is essential for appreciating the challenges faced by India during its formative years as an independent nation.

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