



The Razakars' Reign of Terror: Atrocities Against Hindus and Nationalist Supporters in 1940s Hyderabad

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Abstract

The princely state of Hyderabad under the seventh Nizam, Mir Osman Ali Khan, represented a complex socio-political landscape where a Muslim elite minority governed a Hindu majority (85–90%). As India moved toward independence in 1947, the Nizam's aspiration for a sovereign "Azad Hyderabad" led to the meteoric rise of the Razakars, the paramilitary wing of the Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (MIM). Under the leadership of Qasim Razvi, this militia unleashed a systematic campaign of terror between 1946 and 1948 to suppress the growing demands for democratic reforms and integration with the Indian Union. This paper provides a comprehensive historical analysis of the Razakar atrocities, focusing on their ideological foundations, specific incidents of violence in the Telangana region, and the socio-economic impact on the peasantry. By synthesizing archival fragments, personal memoirs, and scholarly reports—including the Sunderlal Committee findings—this study examines the cycle of violence that necessitated "Operation Polo." The research highlights the dual tragedy of the era: the brutal repression of Hindus and nationalists by the Razakars and the subsequent communal retaliation following the state's integration. Ultimately, this work seeks to reconstruct a balanced agrarian and political chronicle of 1940s Hyderabad, offering insights into the lasting scars on the region's social fabric.

Keywords: *Hyderabad State, Razakars, Nizam, Telangana Armed Struggle, Qasim Razvi, Operation Polo, Feudalism, Communal Violence, Azad Hyderabad.*

1. Introduction

In the twilight of British colonial rule, the princely state of Hyderabad stood as a paradox of immense wealth and medieval feudalism. Spanning over 82,000 square miles across present-day Telangana, Maharashtra, and Karnataka, it was the premier state of the Indian subcontinent. However, beneath the opulence of the Asaf Jahi dynasty lay a volatile demographic and political divide. While the Nizam and his administrative machinery were predominantly Muslim, the vast majority of his subjects—approximately 85–90%—were Hindus who bore the brunt of a rigid feudal hierarchy.

The 1940s served as a crucible for these tensions. The global surge in democratic ideals following World War II, coupled with the burgeoning Indian nationalist movement, placed the Nizam in a defensive posture. His refusal to accede to the Indian Union on August 15, 1947, transformed Hyderabad into an island of autocracy surrounded by a newly independent democratic republic. To enforce his vision of "Azad Hyderabad," the Nizam relied increasingly on the Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (MIM) and its militant volunteer force, the Razakars.

Under the fanatic leadership of Qasim Razvi, the Razakars evolved from a defensive volunteer group into a state-sponsored paramilitary engine of repression. They targeted not just the Hindu majority, but specifically those who championed integration: Congress supporters, Arya Samajists, and the communist-led peasant revolutionaries of Telangana. Their methods—ranging from village raids and public executions to systematic sexual violence—were designed to shatter the morale of the nationalist movement. This paper explores this "reign of terror," analyzing how the militia's actions eventually forced the hand of the Indian government, leading to the military intervention known as Operation Polo.

2. Objectives

This research aims to holistically reconstruct the agrarian and political tableau of 1940s Hyderabad through the following objectives:

- **To Analyze Ideological Foundations:** Examine the "Ana-l-Malik" (I am the Sovereign) doctrine and how it fueled Razakar militancy.
- **To Document Specific Atrocities:** Delineate the patterns of violence in rural Telangana, focusing on the targeting of Hindu peasants and nationalist leaders.
- **To Evaluate the Role of Feudalism:** Understand how the *Jagirdari* and *Deshmukhi* systems provided the socio-economic infrastructure for Razakar operations.
- **To Examine the Resistance:** Analyze the emergence of village self-defense squads and the Telangana People's Struggle as a counter-response to paramilitary terror.
- **To Assess Historical Legacies:** Investigate the aftermath of Operation Polo and how the memory of Razakar violence continues to influence contemporary Telangana politics.

3. Review of Literature

Scholarship on the 1940s Hyderabad crisis is bifurcated between administrative histories, subaltern peasant narratives, and communal critiques.

Primary Sources: The *Hyderabad Gazetteers* and the *Sunderlal Committee Report* (long suppressed by the Indian government) provide the statistical backbone for understanding the scale of violence. While the Gazetteers focus on the Nizam's administrative efforts, the Sunderlal Report offers a harrowing account of the post-integration retaliation against Muslims, providing a necessary counter-balance to the Razakar narrative.

Feudal and Peasant Studies: P. Sundarayya's *Telangana People's Struggle and Its Lessons* (1972) remains the definitive text on the communist-led resistance. Sundarayya details how the Razakars functioned as the "armed fist" of the landlords (*Dorala*). Similarly, Barry Pavier (1981) and D.N. Dhanagare (1983) explore the socio-economic origins of the rebellion, highlighting how the *vetti* (forced labor) system made the peasantry ripe for revolution.

Political and Ideological Analysis: Sunil Purushotham's *From Raj to Republic* (2021) provides a modern scholarly lens on the "sovereignty" crisis in Hyderabad, arguing that the Razakar violence was a desperate attempt to maintain a dying imperial order. A.G. Noorani's *The Destruction of Hyderabad* (2014) critiques both the Nizam's intransigence and the Indian state's military heavy-handedness.

Communal Perspectives: Works by T.H. Chowdary and recent popular media (such as the film *Razakar*) highlight the religious dimension of the atrocities, focusing on temple desecration and forced conversions. These works, while often criticized for being polemical, reflect the oral histories and collective memory of the Hindu survivors in the Marathwada and Telangana regions.

4. Methodology

This study employs a **qualitative-dominant historical synthesis**, drawing from a wide array of secondary sources and archival fragments.

- **Descriptive Mapping:** Categorizing the types of violence (looting, arson, sexual violence) and mapping them across the Nalgonda, Warangal, and Jangaon districts.
- **Comparative Analysis:** Contrasting the Razakar tactics in urban centers (where they focused on political intimidation) versus rural areas (where they engaged in scorched-earth policies).
- **Thematic Synthesis:** Integrating the peasant "Sangham" narratives with the broader geopolitical struggle between the Nizam and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel.
- **Humanization Protocol:** To avoid the "dryness" of statistics, the paper incorporates specific vignettes of martyrs like Doddi Komarayya and Shoebullah Khan to illustrate the human cost of the conflict.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 The Rise of Qasim Razvi and Paramilitary Fascism

The death of Bahadur Yar Jung in 1944 left a vacuum in the MIM that was filled by the extremist lawyer Qasim Razvi. Razvi transformed the Razakars from a civilian volunteer force into a uniformed militia. He preached that every Muslim in Hyderabad was a "King" and that the Hindus were mere subjects. This supremacist ideology was weaponized through daily drills and public speeches where Razvi threatened to "march to Delhi" and fly the Nizam's flag over the Red Fort.

5.2 Patterns of Village Atrocities

The Razakar raids followed a predictable and terrifying pattern. Usually launched from urban "camps" or the houses of local Deshmukhs, these raids targeted villages known to support the Congress or the Communist Sanghams.

- **Economic Sabotage:** Razakars routinely looted granaries and stood over farmers to collect the "Grain Levy," leaving the actual tillers to starve.
- **Symbolic Violence:** Pulling down the Indian tricolor or the Communist red flag was often the first act of a raid, followed by the public beating of village elders.
- **Gendered Terror:** The systematic rape and public stripping of women were used as tools to dishonor entire communities and discourage men from joining the resistance.

5.3 Case Studies in Resistance: Bairanpalli and Nomula

The terror did not go unopposed. In villages like **Bairanpalli**, the peasantry constructed stone battlements (*Burj*) and used muzzle-loaders and slings to repel Razakar attacks. In August 1948, Bairanpalli was the site of a heroic stand where villagers fought off hundreds of Razakars before being overwhelmed by the Nizam's regular army using heavy machine guns. These incidents demonstrate that the "reign of terror" actually catalyzed the birth of a militant nationalist identity among the rural masses.

5.4 The Murder of Shoebullah Khan

It is crucial to note that the Razakars did not only target Hindus. They were equally brutal toward "traitorous" Muslims. The assassination of **Shoebullah Khan**, the editor of the newspaper *Imroz*, remains a haunting example. Khan had consistently criticized the Razakar atrocities and advocated for integration with India. In August 1948, Razakars intercepted him, severed his hands—symbolizing his "sinful" writing—and murdered him, proving that the militia was an enemy of all democratic voices.

5.5 Operation Polo and the Aftermath

By September 1948, the law and order situation had collapsed. The Indian government, led by Sardar Patel, initiated "Operation Polo." Within five days, the Nizam's forces surrendered. However, the "liberation" was followed by a dark chapter of communal retaliation. The Sunderlal Committee reported that in the chaos following the surrender, Hindu mobs and certain irregular elements within the Indian forces engaged in retaliatory violence against Muslim civilians, resulting in 27,000 to 40,000 deaths.

6. Conclusion

The Razakar reign of terror was more than just a communal riot; it was the violent death-throe of an absolute autocracy. For two years, the paramilitary force held the people of Hyderabad hostage to an impossible dream of an independent Islamic state in the heart of democratic India. Their atrocities—targeting the most vulnerable peasants and the most vocal nationalists—irrevocably broke the trust between the ruler and the ruled.

The legacy of this period is a "double tragedy." The first was the systematic oppression of the majority by a paramilitary minority, and the second was the bloody communal reprisal that followed liberation. This history serves as a grim warning of the dangers of state-sponsored militias and the radicalization of political discourse. For modern Telangana, the 1940s are not merely a date in a textbook but a lived memory of struggle, sacrifice, and the complex journey toward a secular democracy. Accountability for the past and a commitment to pluralism remain the only safeguards against the recurrence of such cycles of violence.

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