

Paper presented at the Berkshire Conference of Women Historians

22nd to 25th May 2014

**Telugu nationalism and Police Action against Hyderabad: Notes on History,
Historiography and Memory**

A.Suneetha
Senior Fellow, Anveshi RCWS

suneethaasrv@gmail.com

Abstract:

This essay discusses the politics of the memory and history of the event known as the Police Action against Hyderabad through which the princely state of Hyderabad Deccan was incorporated into the newly independent Indian state in September 1948. It aims to understand why the massive destruction of the lives and livelihoods of Deccani Muslims during this period have been erased from public memory, official histories and progressive political discourse in the region. Even as the individual survivors remember it as an irrational, inexplicable, one-sided attack, the possibility of voicing it as such never arose in the last 65 years. My paper suggests that one of the reasons for this erasure lay in the historical emergence and the continuing hold of the 'Telugu linguistic nationalism' from the 1950s. The hyper visibility of 'autocratic' Muslim king of the Hyderabad state – Nizam Osman Ali Khan and the 'dreaded' private army that rose to support the regime in 1947 known as razakars in this discourse – elaborated in the existing histories, both popular and academic; popular culture and public memory has not only helped maintain silence about police action's effects on Muslims in the region but contributed to the larger process of minoritization of Muslims here.

Keywords:

Deccan history, Police Action, Hyderabad politics, Telugu nationalism, History of Andhra Pradesh, Razakars, Osman Ali Khan, History of the Armed Struggle

Introduction

Speaking in the context of my interviews with Muslim women about domestic life in late 1990s in the old city of Hyderabad, many brought into focus an event that had brought them to Hyderabad from the places where they were born, brought up, married and lived. What they referred to simply as Action¹ had wrecked their lives and families; displaced them to a far away land, dispossessing them of their already meager possessions and properties. Fifty years hence, this catastrophic event had turned into their 'background' information to be related to me when I went to them to investigate how they had negotiated with familial inequalities and violence in the course of their life. The word violence

¹*I thank M.A.Moid, R.Srivatsan, V.Geetha for their comments and suggestions. I am also grateful to participants of the panel on 'Violence, silence and Memory' at the Berkshire conference on the History of Women 'Histories on the Edge' 22 – 25th May 2014. I also thank all the friends and participants for their incisive comments and suggestions about the paper at the Department of Cultural Studies, EFLU.

Action, a shortened form of what is popularized as 'Police Action' in the Indian writings on this period refers to the march of the Indian military on the Hyderabad State in September 1948 to annex it to the Indian Union. Perhaps to distract the international attention, this military operation, officially known as Operation Polo was termed as Police Action.

triggered their memories of Action that perhaps were common knowledge amongst the community but rarely spoken about. However their eager relating failed to enlighten me or inspire my interest for two reasons. One, I quickly slotted this information into the knowledge that I had about Action as something that ended - 'atrocities of Muslim razakars on innocent people'², including these women into the innocent people. The contradicting facts that they narrated failed to dent my firm conviction. Two, despite being active in a human rights organization in the mid 1990s, I, like most other activists, had never heard of the massacre and catastrophe that they were describing and relegated it into the slot of 'background information'³.

I began to revisit this private memory of violence in 2010 when Police Action and the related events of 1948 came into public focus as a part of the questioning of the secular identity of the Telugus in the course of the movement for the de-merger of Telangana districts from Andhra Pradesh since 2009. The movement chose to challenge the prevalent narrative of Andhra Pradesh formation in order to argue for an independent identity of

² Razakar meant 'volunteers'. It was a common term used by political and social organizations between 1920 and 1950 in the Hyderabad State. But it became memorialized and historicized as specific to the formation called Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen which raised a voluntary corps in 1947 to assist the police and the Nizam's army in controlling the disturbances on Hyderabad's border with India as well as to quell the unrest in the Telangana

³ Between 1997 and 1998 Confederation of Voluntary Agencies (COVA) arranged for meetings with these women. Among the ten women that I spoke to, five had migrated to Hyderabad from Bidar during Police Action. At that time, I was a member of the Andhra Pradesh Civil Liberties Committee (APCLC) and from 1998 of Human Rights Forum (HRF). APCLC, established in 1970s played a key role in politicizing people against state violence in the form of custodial deaths of the poor and encounter killings, both through activism against it and documenting it.

Telangana. Since this proposed identity was nested in the erstwhile Hyderabad state, it became necessary to discuss the latter's fate, resulting in a raucous debate about the character of the Hyderabad state - its religious/secular identity, feudal/modern and autocratic/reformative as well as the mode of its merger with the Indian Union through armed action– liberation or integration or annexation.⁴ The effects of such military action on the people of the Hyderabad State inevitably came up in this debate where the question of what happened to Muslims also figured. A few Muslim intellectuals began to mention and discuss Police Action and its effects in public forums. Simultaneously, however, references to the 'Nizam' and 'razakars', deriving from the robust communist folklore, revived at this moment conflating identification of Muslims with the same 'autocratic' Nizam and violent Razakars (Srivatsan, 2010).⁵ Fictional narratives came up to remember this figure as the 'fanatic and fundamentalist Muslim'⁶. Even as protests from Muslim political formations about the ahistorical and non-contextual rendering of the folk songs and of razakars led the Telangana intelligentsia to respond with more careful re-consideration of the legacy of the Nizam (Jadhav, 2011), references to the anti-razakar legacy of the Telangana people continued, prompting questions about the politics of this popular memory. The effects of such public memory in Telugu, argued Khaja, a prominent poet from Telangana has placed Muslims like him in a strange predicament where, on one hand, they get labeled as an

⁴ Vivek and Sangishetty Srinivas ed., *17 September 1948: Bhinna Drukkonaalu*.

⁵ Two connotations of Nizam. And Anveshi Broadsheet on Contemporary Politics, Vol.1 (1)

⁶ Kishorilal Vyas Neelakanth's novel titled Razakar.

inheritor of Razakars and on the other remain suspect and excluded by political formations in the contemporary period.

Located in the context of this complex and rich debate this paper tries to probe questions of memory, history and historiography around the question of Police Action against Hyderabad. It argues that these two issues – knowledge/ writing/popular memory about ‘razakar atrocities and erasure of the memory of violence against Muslims during Police Action are not disconnected but are products of socially structured knowledge about the event of ‘integration of the Hyderabad state into the Indian Union’. The altered sociopolitical conditions in which the history of this period was produced – formation of the linguistic state of Andhra Pradesh – anchored both this socially structured ‘official’ knowledge of the event and the silence/erasure in the discourses of Indian and regional Telugu nationalism that framed history and popular memory.

The paper enters the terrain of historiography, history and memory with a discussion of the memories and experiences of those Muslim women who survived the Police Action. These women frame the violence of Police Action as a sudden and inexplicable calamity in the past, but as a private violence without a name. The paper then proceeds to understand the production of this private violence through an examination of the historical narratives of the nationalist discourses in the region, reading the core body of texts against the grain, contextualizing their appearance at different points of time and interpreting the evidence that they present. The absence of an attempt to account for Muslim experience of Police Action is intimately connected to the changes in political power in the region where they lost their voice. The next section attempts to document this loss of voice through an

analysis of attempts by Hyderabad Muslims at different historical moments to account for their experiences of survival, loss and change. With few exceptions, these appear fraught, weak or incoherent. The essay ends by placing this incoherence of their narrative voice in the larger process of minoritization of the Muslims in India and Andhra Pradesh wherein the hyper-visible figures of the razakar and Nizam are invoked and mobilized in official discourses including judicial ones to deny specific policy measures for contemporary Muslims.

How do Muslim women remember Police Action?

In March 2014, Fathima Alam Ali Khan, daughter of Khaji Abdul Gafar, member of Sunderlal's team recalled the scenario among the elite in 1948 as follows, "After Police Action the situation became terrible... Fear and hopelessness reigned. Even among well off people there was struggle for livelihood... Police action finished off jagirdars. Many people's lives were affected". However, one could not let the situation be, "To change this situation and to recreate confidence many efforts were made at the intellectual and social levels". Several women from aristocratic families became part of these efforts⁷

For most women from these families, it was more the quotidian life that became central to dealing with this radical change as Huma Kidwai's partly auto-biographical fictional account of Hyderabad life in mid-twentieth century, *Hussaini Alam House* (2011)⁸ narrates. After the Police Action, men deprived of any income, socio-political role and status as well

⁷ Interview with Fatima Alam Ali Khan, 2nd March 2014, *Siasat Daily*, Hyderabad.

as any employable skills in the society retreated into the *devdis*, while women, schooled and cocooned in the women-only zenana managed the household with ever-depleting resources, assisted by the continued servitude of the remaining loyal servants who often worked for little or no wages in the emerging set up. It is the women who, when the men retreated into religion or solipsism, coped with the calamity and educated the children, immersing themselves into the mechanics of everyday life. The author speaks from the location of a modern Hyderabad Muslim woman in whose life the Police Action figures as an important watershed but remains un-burdened by it.

Yafai (2004)⁹ offers an account of the what rural Muslim communities around Udgir town went through when the Indian army approached: Based on eye witness accounts, recollections and memories, it describes in detail the travails of Muslim women: while some of the young mothers had to either abandon crying babies to escape being detected, older woman carefully supervised the mass suicide of the young women in the surrounding villages and those left behind to take care of the elderly too committed suicide in the end.

While discussing its effects on their families and lives, the surviving women of this class who migrated to Hyderabad in distress at this time, such as Chand Bi, Ameena Bi, Ayesha Begum, Zareena Begum, Saida Bi¹⁰ recalled it as a calamity that threw them into situations

⁹ The author compiled this text in memory of his father who was killed during the Police Action. The father served as the head of the razakar unit in Udgir village. The text describes in detail the socio-political changes and caste-class configures in the jagirdari area that occurred with Indian independence in 1947.

¹⁰ Chand Bee, Ameena Bee, Ayesha Begum, Zareena Begum, Saida Bee were interviewed in 1997 in the Old city of Hyderabad. Md.Mujeebuddin interviewed his family members from Jaheerabad in 2013 as a part of the effort to

that were impossible to comprehend then and since. Their men, born in the service caste and in agricultural families the government service, had access to the lowest rung of government employment – watchmen or home-guards. Except this tenuous link to government they could not recall any of their family members having any political affiliation with government or other political parties. These protagonists hail from Bidar and Medak, two of the most affected districts and unlike those of Huma Kidwai who represent lost wealth and status, these represent loss of family members, livelihood, home and hearth.

As such, their memories do not follow public and political events but are linked to intimate, familial and private events – weddings, child birth or puberty – either of the family members or themselves. But there is an unmistakable and clear link between Indian military's arrival and the – *dhange, jhagade panchanda, gaddaar, bhaagam bhaag* - destruction that they saw and experienced. They also do not discuss it as a riot situation where two communities are pitted against each other, but clearly described it as a one-sided attack on them by 'Hindus'.

Chand Bi', daughter of a beedi maker father and farm labourer mother from Bidar recalls:

'My uncle's engagement was in progress. I was around ten or twelve and had gone out to get thread and bangles, when I heard firing from the terraces. Muslim houses were looted. The

build an archive on Police Action for Anveshi Minority Initiative. While the first set of interviews was oriented towards discussing their familial lives, the latter specifically focused on what happened to their families during the Police Action. Despite the huge time gap and differences in foci, we could not find any discernible differences in the way they recalled the events.

army came in to the village. We all had to run away. My house was also looted. Whatever we had including furniture was taken away’.

Zareena Begum too belonged to a poor family of agricultural labourers in Bidar. While she waiting to go to her in-laws house, she recalled

‘Police action happened. My husband ran away to Hyderabad. Then, *jhagade panchaada* happened. But, we did not know. We were there. Our people were also killed. Hindus killed my grandfather, his younger brother and my uncle. We scattered in all directions. My family assumed that my husband died too since no one could locate him for several months’.

Ayesha Bi, also from Kalyani in Bidar district, whose father was a watchman and husband worked in the court of the local amin recalled,

‘Then the killings began in Police Action. Husband died, father-in-law died, brother in law died.. When the villagers went to hide in the jowar fields, they were pulled out and killed. ..Lot of people ran away. Everyone ran away to Hyderabad. There was nothing left, to eat. We had nothing to wear and nowhere to live’.

Those who lost their houses barely saved themselves by escaping to another village or hiding in some one’s house; but they could not bring themselves to talk about their immediate neighbours. Syeda Bi was thirteen or fourteen around Police action. Born in a farm labourer’s family in Bellapur of Narayankhed mandal, she recalls bombing, burning, not having anything to eat or drink and hiding in a friends’ house during the disturbance,

‘Many people died then. We hid ourselves and our furniture in their house. You can say that they saved us.. As for the rest—who knows what happened to them? Maybe they ran away—we don’t know. People ran away in all directions. I can only talk about my family’.

For survivors the memory of that time is intact– where they ran away to, who got killed in the village and what happened to their relatives. ‘During Police Action I was around fifteen..sixteen. I remember everything.. which villages we went to hide in, who all got killed, everything..’, said Chand Bi.

But women described this event-violence as a sudden catastrophe that came from nowhere, without rhyme or reason. None of them identified their attackers except as Hindus, an amorphous and anonymous but a real category whose motives were not clear or comprehensible – ‘Who knew who killed?’, ‘We never knew why they did that’ – were some of the expressions they used to describe the reasons of the attackers. Moiz Bi remembered escaping to her native village Vakulaaram when her house was burnt and whatever they owned was lost. All the five or six Muslim houses, thatched roof ones were burnt. ‘They came from other villages and burnt our houses. We didn’t know who did it’.

Neither solace nor rehabilitation came their way from the new nation-state. Even if they were ‘saved’ from mayhem by friendly neighbours they had to depend on their own families and resources for survival. Whatever help they received – whether being sheltered in the mosques or provided with wage work - came from the Muslim communities in Hyderabad city which organized such rehabilitation. Moiz Bi and her husband ran away to her parents’ village and the entire family lived in the ‘fields’ outside the village for three years and slept near the village tank in the night. ‘If someone gave us food, we would eat. One day’s wages

in kind would be made to last for two or three days'. Ayesha Bi recalls that her mother and her mother-in-law stayed in Mecca Masjid in Hyderabad and after a lot of effort found the work of making beedi and zarda paan. Chand Bi's family came to Hyderabad in search of her husband who was thought to be dead. They kept shuttling between the home village and Hyderabad for several years before settling down in Hyderabad.

Azaadi or Indian independence therefore is either a non-event or it was associated with 'the time of Action' or situated 'in the razakar times'. In fact, many of them could not respond when asked about what happened during azaadi, unless prompted with the term Action. When some of them did recognize its significance, it was as a memory always full of fear, terror, violence and complete dislocation. 'I had no idea about azaadi. I only knew that there was looting, running away, only this' says Chand Bi.

Where do the perspective, experience and memory of women like Chand Bi about Police Action – as the irrational violence of Hindu mobs and army - figure in the writing about this period is the question that we turn to now.

Police Action in writing

Writing on the Police Action is located in specific ideological frameworks—nationalist, communist, Arya Samaji, Telangana and that of minority politics. The writing has also been produced at particular political junctures in the post- Andhra Pradesh formation period including those times when the narrative of Telugu nationalism came under severe strain.

There are three broad strands of writing on the events surrounding Hyderabad's 'integration' into the Indian Union.

The first sees Police Action on the Hyderabad state as inevitable. Among them, in the immediate aftermath of annexation of Hyderabad State came event based memoirs such as Ali Yavar Jung's *Hyderabad in Retrospect* (1949), Vandemataram Ramachandra Rao's *Hyderabad Freedom Struggle* (1949) and K.M Munshi's *Fall of Hyderabad* (1957) who, as direct participants and as bureaucrat-politician-freedom fighters wrote them as memoirs cum histories of the period between 1947 and 1948. The subsequent wave began in the late 1960s, when more 'comprehensive histories' got written such as Mandamala Narsing Rao's *Fifty Years of Hyderabad* (1977) Ramananda Teertha's *Memoirs* (1967) Khanderao Kulakarni's *Pages from the Secret History of Hyderabad* (1978) and much later, V.H.Desai's *Saga of Hyderabad Freedom Struggle* (1990) V.K.Bawa's *Last Nizam* (1991). Telugu nationalism is here seen as a sub-set of the Indian nationalism. They are either silent about the violence on Muslims or when they do acknowledge it describe it as a backlash against the violence by the Muslim razakars.

The second set of writings about this period came from the communist leaders who also sought to document their militant struggle against feudalism in Telangana region of the Hyderabad state such as Chandra Pullareddy's *Veera Telangana Viplava Poratam* (1968) Sundariah's *Telangana People's Struggles and Lessons* (1973) Arutla Ramachandra Reddy's *Memoirs* (1984) and the more recent *Bhimreddy Narasimhareddy's 'experiences'* (2012). This 1970s construction of Hyderabad freedom struggle came during and after the aggressive movements for separate states of Telangana and Andhra in 1969 and 1971 respectively. In

them, telugu nationalism is elaborated in the robust form and the communist struggles against feudalism and the struggle against Osman Ali Khan are understood as inevitably leading to the formation of the linguistic state of Andhra Pradesh. Notably, they do acknowledge the violence against Muslims which they attribute to the conflict between communal formations of Arya Samaj and Majlis. They claim that despite a few aberrations, the secular nature of communist ideology prevented such violence in Telangana region.

The third set of writings, predominantly by Muslims, strain against these two narratives while trying to account for their experiences during and after the integration. Neither the subject of these writings nor their voice are anchored in nationalism or class struggle but they are trying to articulate a critique. Leaving aside the considerable body of writing which is nostalgic about the lost Hyderabad culture, it is this writing that has been able to name, describe and remember the effects of Police Action on Muslims including Muslim women. Located within the knowledge of the marginal status of Muslims in India and Andhra Pradesh this writing prizes open and challenges the claims of both nationalisms – Indian and Telugu. Beginning with Fareed Mirza's *Police Action in the Erstwhile Hyderabad State* (1977), Omar Khalidi's *Hyderabad: After the Fall* (1997), M.A.Moid (2008)'s *Understanding Muslim Situation in Hyderabad* Mohammad Hyder's *October Coup* (2012), the above mentioned Huma Kidwai's *Hussaini Alam House* (2011) and A.G.Noorani's *The Destruction of Hyderabad* (2014) have sought to retain the Muslim memory of Police Action, in the face of the force of the linguistic nationalism at the local level and Indian nationalism at the national level. This memory is not mobilized to invoke nostalgia at the loss of their earlier status but more to assess if and what Muslims have gained through the nation-state.

Nationalism, Nizam and Police Action 1948

It is well known that in 1947 when the British Indian Empire was divided into two nation-states of India and Pakistan the 565 princely states i.e., local kingdoms that the British administered indirectly without replacing the native kings were given three options a) to accede to India b) to accede to Pakistan c) to stay autonomous. A majority of these states complied and acceded to either of these nation-states but Hyderabad sought time to think through their options and entered into a Standstill Agreement with India where it got time for a year to finalize its decision and choose one of the options.

The nationalist narrative of Hyderabad state concentrates on the events of this particular period between 1947 and 1948 and argues that there were several grounds that made Indian military action against Hyderabad inevitable. The first was that of democracy: that the 'majority' of people in the State wanted merger into India which the ruler Osman Ali Khan, being a despot did not respect. The Indian nation-state, having instituted democracy could not be a silent witness to the suppression of democratic aspirations in the princely state. The second was that of communalism: that the wishes of the majority were being disrespected because of the communal divide between the Hindu people and the Muslim king. As a nation-state born in the midst of the Partition violence, it had to come to the rescue of the Hindus in the state. Third was the ground of 'break down of law and order' in the Hyderabad State where Osman Ali Khan had let loose a Muslim private army called razakars (volunteers) against the people and had also lost control over them. As democracy, communal harmony and law broke down, the Indian State walked in to re-institute, rescue and establish them.

The narrative stresses that it was done through procedure. The Indian State had issued a charge sheet against the Hyderabad in the form of a White Paper where scores of instances of breakdown of law and order breakdown were listed that were in violation of the Standstill agreement. It had asked for disbanding of the voluntary army and when the Hyderabad government refused to comply, imposed economic restrictions against it. Only after all the options were exhausted and Osman Ali Khan refused to agree to a reasonable solution that Police Action was undertaken.

This neat binary of secularism, democracy and law on one side and communalism, autocracy and anarchy on the other has been becomes difficult to hold onto in the face of the new evidence put together by Sunil Purushottam about the systematic effort by the Indian State to destabilize the Hyderabad State ¹¹. Even a cursory glance through the memoirs/ histories about 'Hyderabad freedom struggle' put together by Kulakarni, Narsing Rao and others gives us a window into actualization of this effort: getting together with Hindu radicals to rob Umri bank to the tune of Rs.21 lakh, attempt on the life of Osman Ali Khan, bombing police stations to acquire weapons, and most importantly, getting trained in the para-military camps set up by the Indian army on the borders of the Hyderabad state, the important milestones in these writings, denote a determined effort to shift the balance of power through the use of force. One is not taking exception to attacks on the heads of the State or government, which are usual and not exceptional to the freedom struggle of Hyderabad, but what is left out of this narrative are the systematic and violent attacks on

¹¹ Purushottam 'Internal Violence: The "Police Action" in Hyderabad

the people in the border areas, both Hindus and Muslims, as part of this struggle that Purushottam carefully documents.

What the nationalist historians ‘documented’ or ‘recorded’ as attacks on Hyderabad State and its law and order machinery of police, army and ‘razakars’ is in complete contrast with the memories of people who lived through these times. During the late 1990s, I was told by a kamma peasant woman who lived on one such border village in Nizamabad that the few months between Indian independence and Police Action were of complete chaos, mainly due to the raids of nationalist bands on these villages in the night. “Razakars came in the day to demand food and grain. They could be tackled. But ‘they’ came in the night’ on the pretext of countering razakars and were more troublesome. For several months, on every night, we hid all our precious possessions, including cooking vessels in the earth, stood vigil and were sleepless. Many people were robbed in my village and I heard of quite a few killings by these ‘dacoits’ in the neighbouring villages”¹². In fact every opportunity was used by the nationalists to create conditions for military intervention by the Indian state. As long as one could justify it in the name of destabilizing the Hyderabad state, even violence against ordinary people was justified.

Is it possible to hypothesize that this loss of distinction between the State and its people in the nationalist *practice* between 1947 and 1948 made it difficult for historians to acknowledge its disastrous effects and add or include Police Action violence on Muslims into their ‘documentation’, ‘records’ and ‘history’?

¹² Interview with a 70 year old Reddy woman from Bodhan, Nizamabad district, conducted in 1997.

Telangana Armed struggle, Razakars and People's power

The interwar period saw Hyderabad State going through severe shortages and agrarian crises, leading to heavy indebtedness among peasants, amassing of lands by the landlords and local officials, increase in *vetti* or bonded labour of the rural populace, wide-spread drought conditions and increase in rural unrest. Andhra Maha Sabha, the sociocultural forum transformed itself into a political forum and by the 1940s its 'extremist' faction decided to address the rural situation through direct action, rather than petitioning the Nizam, under the influence of the Communist Party of India. By 1947 it turned militant, trained its volunteers and acquired arms to fight the landlords, police and the razakars that they deployed. Under pressure from below from small peasants and agricultural labourers, it established 'people's rule' (*prajarajyam*) distributed land, educated women and threw out the landlords in scores of villages of Nalgonda and Warangal districts. After the Indian army ran over the nearly non-existent Nizam's army, it turned its attention to this (Telangana Armed) struggle and dealt with it through nearly 4000 killings, 1,50,000 incarcerations in armed camps and terrible sexual violence against women. In 1951, the Party called off the struggle to declare that it would now work to establish prajarajyam in Vishalandhra, i.e., the people's rule in the larger linguistic state of Andhra Pradesh.

The communist perspective on the Hyderabad State takes the principles of democracy and secularism that Congress nationalists espoused to their logical ends. Democracy, for the communists, could not even be approached unless the feudal-patrimonial rule in the Hyderabad State was challenged and 'the people' could at least demand an end to its most obvious sign – bondage or *vetti*. However, while extending these principles, in contrast to

the Congress nationalists of the Hyderabad State, the CPI saw the end of the despotic rule as essential to the 'true and full freedom' of the 'people', as important as the end to the colonial rule of the British. Both would pave way for the unification of the 'Telugu jaati/nationality/people' currently dispersed under the feudal and despotic rule of the British and the Asaf Jahis, their subsidiaries¹³.

However, as Paviar (1974) pointed out, the writings of the Party intellectuals focused solely on what the Party did rather than on analysis of the fast changing landscape of the Hyderabad State. The narrative of struggle against feudalism and monarchy was so strong that even non-party intellectuals like *Stree Shakti Sanghatana* (1988) and Inukonda Tirumali (1995), focusing on the participation of the women and Dalits failed note how the Party's own popular mobilizations would have played in the communal balance of power in the Hyderabad State. While the Party's avowed secularism meant equal distance from the Arya Samaj and the Majlis the same principle also prevented it from seeing its own partisan role in the developing hostility between the 'Hindus' and 'Muslims' in the State where the peasant mobilizations by the Party functioned as mobilizations for formation of a Hindu majority against the 'Muslim' Nizam, his administrators and his military. While the Communist Party's avowed agenda was popular sovereignty and democracy where the socio-economic relations would be transformed and where adequate and proportionate representation would be ensured to 'Muslims', its militant struggle occurred at a polarized historical moment where the popular struggle against autocracy in the Hyderabad State was avowedly Hindu. Andhra Maha Sabha, the parent body of the Party's Telangana leaders

¹³ Sundariah 'Vishalandhralo Prajarajyam'.

was a broad platform where leaders and cadres of all hues mingled and worked together¹⁴. Some of the active and most important leaders from the region were politicized through these Hindu socio-political formations in their early years¹⁵. Instances of communist party cadre indiscriminately killing Muslims on the pretext of being razakars, housing razakars or for being caretakers of their weapons that have emerged in the recent memoirs¹⁶ suggest this blind spot in the self-proclaimed progressive narrative of the armed struggle and its secularism.

Crucially, it is the Communist Party's spirit of 'freedom from despotic rule'¹⁷ of the Nizam' that went on to inform most of the memorialization of the popular militant struggle in the region. Even though the Party's history (Sundariah, 1973) described nationalist government under Nehru as equally feudal as the Nizam, it was struggle against the 'despotic Nizam', his 'feudal lords' or *doras* and his private army of razakars that remained

¹⁴ The two volume proceedings of the *Nizamandhra Rashtra Mahasabhalu* amply and vividly demonstrate this confluence of ideologies and ideologues.

¹⁵ In his recent memoir, Bhimreddy Narsimhareddy, a very important leader in the Telanagana peoples' struggle talks of his early training in the Arya Samaj.

¹⁶ Ibid. This author's own interview also recorded the experience of a Muslim family whose eleven members were killed by the Communist Party members in Gundraipalli of Nalgonda district on the charge that they did not reveal the whereabouts of the local razakar leader with whom one of the family members was associated.

¹⁷ Sundariah uses *niramkushatvam* – despotism and autocracy – to describe both the British rule and the Nizam's rule, both of which being feudal, should have to go, paving way to modern nation-states.

as enduring images and features of this memorialization which sustained through the consequent waves of Naxalite movement in the region.

What is more interesting is that the Party's utopia of bringing all Telugu speaking people/areas into a single administrative unit under the principle of linguistic nationality went onto become the ideological basis for the post formative history of Andhra Pradesh and the way the armed peoples' movement of 1940s was woven into the 'unfolding' story of Telugu nationality that culminated in the formation of the state of Andhra Pradesh in 1956. Within this secular history of Telugus - the Hindu, nationalist and communist struggles, memoirs and histories for Telugu identity, whether under the Asaf Jahis or the British came to be amalgamated at will, as chapters in the forward march towards identity and statehood (Ramarao, 2008) . In this thick Telugu narrative of progress and democracy, Nizam and razakars inevitably figured as symbols of backwardness, despotism and religious fundamentalism most specifically through the memory of the militant peasant struggle.

Even though the Communist Party's agenda was avowedly secular, there was limited place for Muslims in the secular identity of Telugus that they (the communists) helped build. In order to fit into Telugu identity, culture and nationality, Muslims too would have to leave their past and their attachment to the past, if any, in whatever form, and embrace the inevitable progress that that Telugu linguistic state promised for them. Any discussion of the Police Action would count as an attachment to the past, specifically Muslim past, which would not have space in the new Telugu identity.

Muslim writing on Police Action:

The armed battle between the Indian military forces and the totally unprepared and underequipped Hyderabad forces lasted 5 days between 13th and 17th September at the end of which Osman Ali Khan agreed to abide by the Indian Constitution and a military government was established in the State. During and after the army reached Hyderabad city, along the routes that it took through several interior villages, the Hindu mobs turned on the local Muslim populace looting, killing and driving out the rest. A team led by Pandit Sunderlal, a congressman from UP, that toured scores of villages to take the testimonies and record the evidence reached the conclusion that nearly 40,000 people were killed in Osmanabad, Bhir, Gulbarga, Nanded, Bidar, Nalgonda and Medak¹⁸. Those Muslims who left the villages moved to nearby towns and Hyderabad, changing the demographic profile in the process. While abolition of jagirdari deprived number of poor Muslims of livelihood, the military government's large scale dismissal or suspension of Muslims from the formal jobs increased unemployment and destitution even¹⁹.

Writing by Muslims about experiences of Police Action, though limited, has largely occurred in Urdu but it is difficult to find a Muslim narrative of Police Action that is not fraught with

¹⁸ Sunderlal and Qazi Abdulghaffar A Report on the Post-Operation Polo; See Sunil Purushottam for a detailed discussion of the report.

¹⁹ "The 11-15 percent of Muslim population of the defunct Hyderabad State.. depended on its livelihood on six big categories of employment, five of which were inextricably linked with the survival of the princely Muslim state: i) jagirs, mansabs and imams ii) employment in government and quasi-government departments and establishments iii) regular army and the Nizam's irregular forces iv) offices of the feudal estates and household establishment of the feudal gentry v) private service with aristocratic families vi) professions other than government service"

Rasheduddin Khan, Major aspects of Muslim problem in Hyderabad p.150

guilt, bewilderment and astonishment, M.A.Moid points out. Invariably the needle of suspicion turns to what Muslims 'did' to precipitate such a 'reaction' by the Hindus, where razakar violence gets configured entirely as Muslim violence against Hindus. The scale of violence, quick desertion by colleagues and friends that many politically active Muslims experienced during this period shaped their subsequent response to the emergent political scenario in which, as I argued in the above section, Muslims as such were being relegated to the to-be-discarded past which was backward and feudal. In the repeated attempts to raise the question of Police Action by Muslims, as R.Srivatsan pointed out, it is this predicament of 'lost voice' that is clearly discernible²⁰. This is not only related to the minoritization of Muslims in post-independent India but also with the disintegration of the Hyderabad State into three separate parts that were merged into linguistic States of Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka.

Fareed Mirza's auto-biographical narrative in *Police Action in the Erstwhile Hyderabad State* opens a window into this predicament – of losing voice despite being a nationalist Muslim between 1947 and 1950. In this memoir of 1977 he describes what he saw, did and experienced just before and after the Police Action. Early in the book he makes it clear to the reader that he was opposed to the razakars and never supported Muslims as a group or the Nizam as he was politically invested with-in the Congress and saw Gandhi's path of non-violence as the only way to anti-colonial and secular nationalism. Moreover he practiced his ideology through his act of resignation from the post of Tehsildar protesting

²⁰ The author gratefully acknowledges this unpublished insightful essay titled *Janaab Fareed Mirza ko Gussa Kyo*

the inaction of Hyderabad government against razakar violence on Hindus in Nanded. Only after establishing his credentials in this manner that he moves on to describe what happened to the Muslims after Police Action as appalling, out of all proportion and completely ignored. As a member of the Rehabilitation Committee set up by the government, he assists the Sunderlal's team in their visits and preparation of the report but is forced to run from pillar to post to obtain a modicum of rehabilitation to the countless women, widowed, vulnerable to sexual exploitation and left totally destitute due to the carnage. The absolute unresponsiveness of the military administration in the Hyderabad state after merger totally bewildered him. The incoherent questions that reverberate in his memoir are these - Why was it that the nationalist government that he whole-heartedly helped to bring in, still responded to pre-Action razakar atrocities but not the post-Action atrocities that occurred on a much larger scale – that too in the face of mounting evidence – gathered by none other than dedicated nationalists like himself? Were Muslims also not the citizens? Or was his voice in-authentic? What was it that made his voice and appeals suddenly unappealing, in a span of one year? Wasn't it the defeat of Hyderabad state and the consequent identification of him as a Muslim which made him unworthy of listening?

After a decade, Omar Khalidi's *Hyderabad after the Fall* (1986), shunning any 'nostalgia for the rotten system' that Hyderabad's courtly culture represented, attempts to get a grip on the effects of the Police Action on Muslims by bringing together scholarly essays along with journalistic and experiential accounts. Forty years after the event, many essayists, largely sympathetic to the plight of Hyderabad's Muslims, concur on the following: that Muslims asked for far too much in the Hyderabad State; that they and the Majlis, being communal-feudal, were shortsighted not to accede to the Indian Union; that as a minority

they angered the majority Hindus that they could not afford to do and suffered as a consequence. Such consequences or the effects of Police Action on Muslim lives, figured under the neutral and clear social science categories of 'communalism', 'isolation from the mainstream', 'levels of unemployment and poverty among Muslims in Hyderabad' or 'attachment to the past', 'voting on religious lines' and 'communal Muslim parties'. The overarching question for many essayists was the problem posed to 'nation-building' by such an 'isolated minority' and the plea was to address these problems so as to strengthen the nation-state. Even as they capture the sense of disoriented-ness that Muslims of Hyderabad Deccan experienced but feel obliged to tell them to reconcile with 'their fall in privileged status' and the deleterious effects of Police Action gracefully so that they do not vote communally, refuse to integrate with nation-state, and cling on to the past. Khailidi sticks to the facts, factual accounts and research essays to demonstrate 'what happened' in his bibliographical essay, concentrating on contesting the dominant nationalist account of 'peaceful accession of Hyderabad' by using excerpts from the Sunderlal report to overturn this claim. They do not suffer from the angst, confusion, bewilderment and the loss of voice that Fareed Mirza wrote about, but Khalidi, as a secular Muslim scholar, is obliged to speak with them where Police Action gets invariably connected with what Muslims 'did' earlier in the Hyderabad State.

Mohammad Hyder seeks to undercut this assumption in his October Coup (written in 1977 but published in 2012), an autobiographical memoir of events between 1947 and 1950. As the district magistrate of Osmanabad district between 1947 and 1948, Hyder disagreed with the course of collision that the Hyderabad government took with the Indian government. Like Fareed Mirza, he also makes it clear to the reader that he disagreed with

Qasim Razvi and expressed his disagreement to him. However, soon after Police Action, he was arrested, dismissed from his job and was tried for treason by the Indian government on the charge that he 'harassed' the 'Congress nationalists' in his district. Was it not his bounden duty as a faithful servant of the Hyderabad government to control the Congress activists who disturbed law and order, he asks? How does following the orders of one's own government make one a criminal? In persecuting the Hyderabad State's officials and employees as well as its army's behavior towards Muslims of the State, the Indian government did not reflect the nationalist ideology but simply acted like any military victor does towards the vanquished 'vindictive (and) a bloody aftermath to surrender'(p.179). Hyder, writing in late 1970s, did not feel confident enough to describe the violence on Muslims that he had intimate knowledge of, saying that it was indescribable and unbearable to even recall it.

The question of Muslim guilt and silence about Police Action comes across poignantly and powerfully in the writing of M.A.Moid (2008, 2010 & 2012)²¹. Investigating Hyderabad politics and culture after 1990s, he discovers that it invariably led to Police Action and its aftermath which was a watershed in most Muslims' lives, whether they were politically active or not. He found that it was local organizations such as Tamir-e-Millat that provided succor and a base for the scattered and destitute Muslim women who reached Hyderabad from various corners of the State. Appealing to the distraught men and women to focus on

²¹ *Muslims, Communists and First General Elections: Understanding Muslim Situation in Hyderabad*, Silences and History, all citations are from this essay and 'Muslim Perceptions and Responses in Post-Police Action Contexts in Hyderabad'

everyday life and livelihoods, they helped the community to cope and pull themselves together. Based on the interviews with men who had no political role nor any explicit political stand but witnessed and experienced the Police Action, he notes, “Muslims were shocked, not by just the destruction of property and the deaths sustained by the community, but also by the realization that they were hated and hated so intensely. .(though) they thought that the hate shown during Police Action was a momentary act of madness, a rage, a spontaneous overreaction..but they realized that most of the actions against them were well-planned”. Finding that every political position that they had held till then was either wrong embarrassing as it could not explain what happened, they were burdened by guilt and retreated into silence. “The common Muslims, who suffered most in every sense, became silent. They did not want to share their grief and suffering because it was an impossible task to recall the horrors of Police Action.. the urgent need was to escape from haunting memories and focus on bread and butter concerns.. after a point, silences became so natural that talking about the past became meaningless”²²

Post script:

I had gone to understand domestic violence in the lives of Muslim women of the old city of Hyderabad where the mention of *gharelu jhagade* and *maar peeth* triggered the memories of Police Action as it was that violence that marked their minds and bodies and forced their families and domestic lives into the present form. Given their painstaking reconstruction of

²² Vinod Jairath and Huma Kidwai in their essay titled Violence of Silence comment that the imposition of silence led to a feeling among the Muslims of Hyderabad that they were less than equal citizens, but may have also led to depend on the internal strength to rebuild their lives.

domestic life under conditions of displacement it was clear that they did not see the notion of 'domestic violence' as relevant to their lives even at that time. But what became clear to me while re-reading their accounts now is that they tried to convey the precariousness of their domesticity, family and home after the Police Action. And that any harassment that they have faced in the marital family paled into insignificance in a context where the entire community – including and especially the men in their families– got displaced and disoriented. Domestic violence therefore did not assume the character of an existential and personal problem that it often assumes in the liberal feminist discourse. Theorizing their experience of the family (and violence) would require an entirely different framework that weaves not only the catastrophic event but the 'loss of voice' that I outlined above.

It is also not my argument that razakars/Nizam were 'innocent' or that Police Action violence on Muslims memories need to be discussed as a humanitarian issue or human rights violation. Regarding the first issue I tried to argue that meaning given to razakars and Nizam come from a perspective that has deep political investments in majoritarian nationalisms, both at the pan-Indian and local level and concomitant interest in minoritization of Muslims. The hyper visibilization of these two figures has deflected attention from the pervasive violence on all sides during that period. Such a 'moral economy', (Sherman, 2010) enabled in maintaining silence about and legitimize violence on Deccani Muslims on behalf of the majority, nation and the republic. This strategy has been so successful that in the erstwhile state of Andhra Pradesh it was quite possible to argue that Muslims did not need reservations because most of them enjoyed high positions in the Nizam's administration and to call the contemporary minority party from this region All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen to be a 'razakar party' for advocating the reservations

for Muslims. Perhaps the reason why AIMIM maintained silence about Police Action for nearly six decades is that the wherewithal – information, perspective, mobilization - to fully articulate it as a ‘human rights’ issue has been difficult to put together and nationalist historiography has to take a significant share of blame for this failure.

References

- Ali, Mir Laik. *Tragedy of Hyderabad*, edited by K.Jitendrababu, Hyderabad, 2011.
- An ex-official of Hyderabad (Ali Yavar Jung) *Hyderabad in Retrospect* , Bombay, 1949.
- Babu Jitendra ed. *Telangana Chaitanyamtho Ragilinchina Nizam Rastrandhra Mahasabhalu Part I (Nizam State’s Andhra Maha Sabha; Raising the Consciousness in Telangana)*, Hyderabad, 2009.
- Bawa V.K. *Last Nizam: The Life and Times of Mir Osman Ali Khan*, New Delhi, 1997.
- Desai V.H. *Vande Mataram to Jana Gana Mana, Saga of Hyderabad Freedom Struggle*, Hyderabad, 1990.
- Hyder, Mohammad. *October Coup*, New Delhi, 2012.
- Jadhav, K.R. ‘Hyderabad before and after 17 September 1948’, in *Anveshi Broadsheet on Contemporary Politics*, Vol.1 (3), Hyderabad, 2011, p. 24.
- Jairath, Vinod and Huma Kidwai. ‘Violence of Silence: ‘Police Action’ in Hyderabad and its Aftermath’ in Rama Charan Tripathi (ed.) *Violence and the Other*, forthcoming.

Rasheduddin Khan. Major aspects of Muslim problem in Hyderabad in Omar Khalidi ed. *Hyderabad after the Fall*, Hyderabad, 1988, pp. 150-165

Kidwai, Huma R. *Hussaini Alam House*, New Delhi, 2011.

Khalidi, Omar. *Hyderabad: After the Fall*, Hyderabad, 1988.

Kulkarni, Khanderao. *Hyderabadu Ajnatha Charitra Putalu (Pages from the Secret History of Hyderabad)* translated into Telugu by Nikhileshwar, Hyderabad, 1978.

Mirza, Fareed. *Pre and Post Police Action Days the Erstwhile Hyderabad State, What I Saw, Felt and Di*, Hyderabad, 1976.

Moid M.A. *Muslims, Communists and First General Elections: Understanding Muslim Situation in Hyderabad*, Unpublished report, Anveshi Research Centre for Women's Studies, Hyderabad, 2007.

Moid M.A. *Understanding Muslim Situation in Hyderabad*, Unpublished Report, Anveshi Research Centre for Women's Studies, Hyderabad, 2008.

Moid M.A. Muslim Perceptions and Responses in Post-Police Action Contexts in Hyderabad in Vinod Jairath ed. *Frontiers of Embedded Muslim Communities in India*, New Delhi, 2010, pp.220-241.

Moid, M.A. Silences and History in *Anveshi Broadsheet on Contemporary Politics*, Vol.1 (1), 2010, pp. 4-5

Munshi, K.M. *Fall of Hyderabad: Hyderabad Memoirs*, Mumbai, 1957.

Neelkanth, Kishorilal Vyas. *Razakar*, Hyderabad, 2007.

Noorani, A.G. *The Destruction of Hyderabad*, New Delhi, 2014.

Paviar, Barry. 'The Telangana Armed Struggle', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.9 (32/34), 1974, pp: 1413-1420.

Purushottam, Sunil. 'Internal Violence: The "Police Action" in Hyderabad', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 2015, 57(2), pp: 1-32

Naring Rao, M. *Yebhai Samvatsaraala Hyderabadabadu (Fifty Years of Hyderabad)*, Hyderabad, 2012.

Ramachandra Rao, Vandemataram. *Hyderabad Freedom Struggle*, Hyderabad, 1949.

Rama Rao, P.A. *History of the Struggle in Princely States of India (Volume I) Hyderabad State* Hyderabad, 2008.

Ramachandra Reddy, Arutla. *Telananga Struggle: Memoirs*, Translated from Telugu by B.Narsing Rao, New Delhi, 1984.

Shankar Rao, Elikatte ed., *Telangana Raithanga Saayudha Poratam: Bhimreddy Narasimhareddy Anubhavaalu (Telanagna Peasants' Armed Struggle: Bhimreddy Narasimha Reddy's Experiences)*, Nalgonda, 2012.

Sherman, Taylor C. Moral Economies of Violence in Hyderabad State, 1948 in *Deccan Studies*, Vol. 8 (2), July-December 2010, pp. 65-90

Srinivasulu, K. Discourses on Telangana and Critique of the Linguistic Nationality Principle' in Asha Sarangi and Sudha Pai ed. *Interrogating Reorganization of States, Culture, Identity and Politics in India* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2011).

Srivatsan, R. 'Janaab Fareed Mirza ko Gussa Kyo Nahi Aata Hai?' Unpublished essay.

Srivatsan, R. 'Two connotations of Nizam' in *Anveshi Broadsheet on Nizam's Rule*, Vol.1(1), 2010, pp.11-12.

Stree Shakti Sanghatana. *We were Making History: Life stories of Women in Telangana Armed Struggle*, New Delhi, 1988.

Sundariah, Pucchalapalli. *Veera Telengana Viplava Poratum-Gunapatalu (Telengana Peoples' Struggle and its Lessons)*, Hyderabad, 2010 (1973).

Sundariah, Pucchalapalli. *Vishalandhralo Prajaraajyam*, Vijayawada, 2010 (1946).

Sunderlal, Pandit and Qazi Abdulghaffar, A Report on the Post-Operation Polo Massacres, Rape and destruction or Seizure of Property in Hyderabad State in Omar Khalidi ed. *Hyderabad after the Fall*, Hyderabad, 1988.

Vivek, Tadakamalla and Sangishetty Srinivas ed., *17 September 1948: Bhinna Drukkonaalu (September 17, 1948: Diverse Viewpoints)*, Hyderabad, 2008.

Tirtha, Swami Ramananda. *Memoirs of the Hyderabad Freedom Struggle*, New Delhi, 1967.

Tirumali, Inukonda. *Against Dora and Nizam: Peoples Movement in Telengana 1939-1948*, New Delhi, 2003.

Trouillet, Michel-Rolph *Silencing the Past: Power and Production of History*, Boston, 1995.

Yafai, A.R. *Jaanbaaz Shaheed: Salaa Yafai (Courageous Martyr: Salar Yafai)*, Hyderabad, 2004.