

A STUDY ON COMMUNAL VIOLENCE IN HYDERABAD

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Introduction

I would now like to explore the history of communal violence in one city in India, namely Hyderabad, in order to see whether the general theories on communal violence apply in this case. Hyderabad was ruled from the seventeenth until the twentieth century by the Nizams, a Muslim dynasty. The feudal rule of the Nizams favoured Muslims who ruled as a minority over the, mainly Hindu, inhabitants of the state. Muslims dominated state employment and the official language of the state was Urdu, despite the fact that this was not the language of the majority of its inhabitants.

Despite the fact that the Nizams clearly suppressed their Hindu subjects, communal violence did not break out until the first Hindu-Muslim riots in 1938. This was a result of the emergence of various rival Hindu and Muslim organisations which raised the population's religious and political awareness.

The two main organisations were the Arya Samaj, a Hindu revivalist organisation, and the Majlis-e-Ittihadul Muslimin (Majlis), or Organisation for the Unity of Muslims, an Islamic organisation aimed at unifying Muslims, converting non-Muslims and supporting the Nizam unquestioningly. The years 1937 and 1938 saw a build-up of tension due to a wave of conversions from both sides, leading to the first riot in April 1938. Over the coming decade, the Nizam suppressed any Hindu or secularist organisations and gave his full support to the Majlis.

A move which had disastrous consequences for Hindu-Muslim relations in the state. In 1938, the Majlis founded the Razakars, a paramilitary organisation which viewed the Muslims as the natural rulers of the state. When, in 1947, India gained its independence from the British and was partitioned into India and Pakistan, the Nizam declared himself independent from both, but was put under increasing pressure to join India. Surrounding this, the Razakars started a campaign to terrorise Hindus and committed many murders and other atrocities in the name of Islam and with full support of the Nizam. When the Indian government sent in troops in 1948 and forced Hyderabad to accede to India, the Muslim rule was at an end.

This was disastrous for the Muslims in the Old City of Hyderabad who lost their jobs in the Nizam's administration. Many migrated to Pakistan, but those who stayed were forced to live a life of economic and social deprivation.

As well as losing their livelihood, Muslims also suffered directly after the accession of Hyderabad due to the wave of violence Hindus unleashed as retaliation for what the Razakars had done. After a lull in violence.

The Pardhi community, an economically depressed caste of Hindus, was hit so hard that it began to migrate out of the old city after a few days of violence. One witness, who asked not to be named, recalled that as the migrants were leaving the old city, they were received by a prominent politician on the street. He suggested that the migrants remain in their localities, offering the hollow reassurance that if Muslims were to continue killing Pardhis in the old city, revenge would be carried out in the new city, where Hindus enjoyed a substantial majority.

Violence continued unabated for several days, and on the sixteenth of December, Chenna Reddy resigned as chief minister and large-scale communal rioting came to a halt almost instantly. Observers have noted that the abruptness with which rioting ceased is a clear indication that dissident factions within Chenna Reddy's Indian National Congress Party may have been largely responsible for promoting or even participating in the violence. Yet, this explanation cannot by itself account for the deaths of up to or even upwards of 300 individuals. In truth, the gradual build-up of a communally charged atmosphere, to use the parlance of the subcontinent, had been taking place for months prior to the riot that took place in December of 1990.

This was occurring primarily for two reasons: land-grabbing disputes in Hyderabad and the upcoming parliamentary elections of 1991. While the former involved the playing-out of an entirely local issue, the latter superimposed the communal tension that was building up at the national level onto the local political situation.

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