COMMUNAL CONFLICTS AND POLITICAL TRANSITIONS: THE CASE OF HYDERABAD STATE (1935-1948)

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Introduction

This article delves into the political transitions that culminated with the annexation of Hyderabad Princely State into the Indian Union in 1948, highlighting their role in the communalisation of public life in the capital city of Hyderabad. During the period between 1935 and 1948, antagonism between religious communities became a prominent feature of political discourse, shaping debates and struggles over contending political futures. The article illustrates how political transitions fostered the rise of a communalised political environment by examining the interplay between the emergence of party politics and the prospective demise of the feudal order[1] - this in the context of the wider political struggles unfolding in British India. As the idiom of electoral democracy took root within the changing political arena, so did the delineation of fixed majorities and minorities[2]. In this context, socio-political conflicts came to be framed through the paradigm of communalism[3], reshaping religious

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[1] The princely state was, in fact, based on a feudal system with a nobility composed mainly of Muslims and Hindu upper-castes at the top, who lived off the agricultural income from *jagir,* feudal land grants awarded to families in exchange for their service to the Nizam.

[2] K.S. DATLA, *Sovereignty and the End of Empire: The Transition to Independence in Colonial Hyderabad,* in "Ab Imperio", vol. 3, 2018, pp. 63-88.

[3] I have introduced the idea of communalism as an analytical and socio-political paradigm of conflict in the book E. MANGIAROTTI, *Feminist Peace and the Violence of Communalism. Gender, caste, and community in India*, Oxon and New York, Routledge, 2024, p. 4 (in press). I argue that "the terminology of communalism in India […] plays a fundamental role in not only naturalising "religious communities" but also in perpetuating

community belonging along lines of social polarisation. The notion of monolithic religious communities with exclusive boundaries and political connotations began to emerge in the public discourse from the 1930s onward. These developments coincided with the intensification of anti-imperial and nationalist movements in British India amidst ongoing negotiations regarding the Subcontinent's constitutional arrangements. During this period, Hyderabad, the state capital, came to be regarded as a city prone to communal violence.

Political deliberations that culminated in the 1935 Government of India Act and subsequent debates on the status of the princely states within an Indian federation, were accompanied by questions surrounding sovereignty, governance and political participation. These discussions began to be articulated in terms of majority-minority relations. The Indian military intervention, also referred to as the "Police Action ", in September 1948, which sanctioned the annexation of Hyderabad state to the newly formed Indian Union, further entrenched a political discourse centred on the opposing interests of religious communities.

This article therefore establishes a connection between the political shifts unfolding amidst the demise of the feudal order in the princely state and the crystallisation of communal conflict as expression of political and social competition. The central premise of this article is that, in the years between 1935 and 1948, socio-political activism developed along a communal framework. In light of these considerations, the historical inquiry into when Muslim rule in Hyderabad began to be perceived as Islamic minority dominance over a Hindu majority becomes crucial for comprehending the circumstances that led to the emergence of communalism in political discourse and social conflict. Quite paradoxically, it was within the context of a transition to electoral democracy, and the pushes for the secularisation of government and the public sphere[4] that communal conflict emerged as a defining feature of Hyderabad's socio-political landscape[5].

their mutual hostility", confining "the discussion about intercommunity relations within the framework of antagonistic religious communities".

[4] Following Habermas's conceptualisation, Nancy Fraser defines the public sphere as a "theatre in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk. It is the space in which citizens deliberate about their common affairs, hence, an institutionalized arena of discursive interaction" (N. FRAZER 1990, *Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy* in "Social Text", n. 25/16, 1990, pp. 57).

[5] Harshan Kumarasingham has made a similar argument about the paradox of

1. *Trajectories of political participation before the 1930s*

Hyderabad, the largest and wealthiest princely state within the framework of British paramountcy[6], had been governed since 1724 by the Nizam, a Muslim dynasty ruling over a population largely constituted by Hindus (84.44 per cent in 1931)[7]. According to Karen Leonard, Hyderabad state was renowned for its shared public culture. The princes, the court, and numerous noble families[8] patronised religious institutions and celebrations, while "subaltern groups, speaking multiple languages, lived side by side and often worshipped in the same spaces and celebrated the same festivals"[9]. These practices contributed to mould a "multi-religious landscape"[10].

Towards the end of the 19th century, under a policy of modernisation of the state's bureaucracy inaugurated under the 6th Nizam Asaf Jah VI (1866-1911)[11], the primary source of contention arose from a *mulkī* (native)/non-*mulkīs* (non-native) binary. Tensions between these two social

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democratic reform leading to the communalisation of politics in Ceylon. See H. KUMARASINGHAM, *A Democratic Paradox: The Communalisation of Politics in Ceylon, 1911-1948*, in "Asian Affairs", n. 3, 2006, pp. 342-352.

[6] In 1766, the signing of a subsidiary alliance between the East Indian Company and the governor of Hyderabad established the semi-independence of the state and its military collaboration with the British crown. Britain controlled the external affairs of the states but left internal matters officially in the hands of the princely rulers. However, the British government retained substantial influence, especially on the political life of the largest states which included Hyderabad, Mysore, Jammu and Kashmir and Baroda. D. KOOIMAN, *Communalism and India and Indian Princely States. Travancore, Baroda and Hyderabad in the 1930s*, Manohar, New Delhi 2002, p. 38.

[7] D. KOOIMAN, *Communalism and India and Indian Princely States. Travancore, Baroda and Hyderabad in the 1930s*, cit., p. 46.

[8] K. LEONARD, *Hindu Temples in Hyderabad: State Patronage and Politics in South Asia*, "South Asian History and Culture", n. 3, 2011, p. 352-73.

[9] T. SHERMAN, *Muslim Belonging in Secular India*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2015, p. 1; K. LEONARD, "The Hyderabad Political System and its Participants", *The Journal of Asian Studies*, n. 3, 1978, pp. 569-582.

[10] K. LEONARD, *Hindu Temples in Hyderabad: State Patronage and Politics in South Asia*, cit., p. 352.

[11] The process of state bureaucratisation began when, under severe financial constraints, the 6th Nizam Asaf Jah VI (1869-1911) was compelled to undertake a series of administrative changes under British supervision. The reforms were implemented, between 1853 and 1883, during the *diwanship* of Salar Jung I. See M. PERNAU, *The Passing of Patrimonialism. Politics and Political culture in Hyderabad, 1911-1948*, Delhi: Manoar, 2000, pp. 29-77.

groups stemmed from the government's practice of appointing individuals from outside Hyderabad to key posts within the state apparatus, thereby excluding Hyderabad natives from positions of prestige and power[12]. Especially in the capital city of Hyderabad, the disparity between the relatively limited social and economic opportunities available to the *mulkīs* and the privileged access of non-*mulkīs* to government jobs came to delineate new social boundaries. Socio-economic alienation became the focal point for mobilisation for young, educated Hyderabadis on the one hand, and for the lower sections of society on the other. For instance, calls for increased public involvement in local politics and expanded civil liberties emerged from within a group of young graduates from the newly established Osmania University (1918), demanding greater professional and social opportunities against the privileged status granted to non-*mulkīs*. At the same time, non-*mulkīs* sought and acquired increasing influence on Hyderabad city's social and political life and, along with it, wider opportunities to access the existing and configure new sources of political power[13]. For example, towards the end of the 19th century Urdu replaced Persian as the language of the administration, marking the non-*mulkīs*' growing cultural hegemony within the government apparatus.

In the context of an emerging middle-class consciousness, Osmania University provided a platform for articulating two contrasting views of a core Deccani identity[14]. On the one hand, the notion of a "Deccan synthesis" depicted religious and cultural diversity as integral to the *mulkī* identity under Muslim rule, aiming to encompass various social movements both within and outside the city. This perspective drew upon Hyderabad's longstanding reputation as a bastion of religious-cultural syncretism. On the other hand, a narrative grounded on Islam as the unifying principle of the state's historical and contemporary power emerged

[12] English-educated graduates from the newly founded Aligarh Muslim University (1920) were often employed in the state administration. K. LEONARD, *Hyderabad. The Mulki/non-Mulki Conflict*, in R. JEFFREY (ed), "People, Princes and Paramount Power. Society and Politics in the Indian Princely States", 1978, pp. 65-106.

[13] Salar Jung I did not allow any contact between the non-natives, the aristocracy and the British officers settled in Secunderabad. This measure was probably meant to keep the new administrators from challenging the existing social hierarchy. K. LEONARD, *Hyderabad. The Mulki/non-Mulki Conflict*, cit., p. 69.

[14] K. LEONARD, *The Hyderabad Political System and its Participants,* cit.

among non-*mulkī* intellectuals, who hailed the Nizam as the representative of the Subcontinent's Muslims.

In this context, it is important to highlight how the nexus between the *Khilafat*[15] movement in British India and the increasing non-*mulkī* influence in Hyderabad forged significant connections between growing nationalist sentiments in the Raj's territories and political developments in the princely state. Supporters of the *Khilafat* movement endorsed the non-*mulkī* rendition of an emerging Deccani identity, thereby legitimising the Nizam rule in religious and nationalist terms. This endorsement underscored the primacy of religion as a distinctive principle for Muslim socio-political representation.

Consequently, social polarisation became closely intertwined with the emergence of new lines of socio-economic privilege, entailing quests for political participation along the *mulkī*/non-*mulkī* divide, alongside the pursuit of distinct social positioning and identity for the two groups. Despite the growing challenge of distinguishing between natives and non-natives following the settlement of immigrants in Hyderabad city, the tension underscored a struggle for political recognition and social upliftment, increasingly infused with appeals to culture, tradition, and ultimately, religion.

Concurrently, as argued by Karen Leonard, in the early decades of the Twentieth century, representatives of the urban upper castes, such as the *Reddis*, *Kammas* and *Velmas*, who had profited from the administrative reforms of the 1880s, began voicing demands for political representation within a "modernised" state system. At the same time, non-Urdu speaking rural populations, predominantly composed of enslaved "peasants" and groups below the "pollution line", mobilised for increased opportunities for political participation and the dismantling of the exploitative feudal system[16]. A decade later, these grassroots movements

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[15] The *Khilafat* movement, launched in 1919 by Muslim *élites* in British India to forge a pan-Indian Muslim consciousness, aimed to exert pressure on the British regarding the preservation of the Ottoman Empire's pre-1914 boundaries. The movement depicted the Ottoman sultan as the representative of Islam. See G. Pinault, *The Khilafat Movement: Religious Symbolism and Political Mobilization in India*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1982. On Hyderabad state specifically, M. Pernau, *Reaping the Whirlwind. Nizam and the Khilafat Movement*, in "Economic and Political Weekly", n. 38, pp. 2745-2751.

[16] S. Charsley, *Evaluating Dalit Leadership: P.R. Venkatswamy and the Hyderabad example,* in "Economic and Political Weekly", n. 52, 2002-2003, pp. 5237-5243.

manifested either through the emergence of new political entities, sometimes associated with various pressure groups in British India, or through the Telangana People's Struggle (1946-1952)[17].

It is noteworthy that, until the onset of anti-Nizam political mobilisations in the late 1930s, the state did not have a repressive religious policy. On the contrary, several measures taken by the VII Nizam Mir Osman Ali Khan (1886-1967) on religious issues, including the prohibition of cow slaughter in 1922, were specifically aimed at fostering a peaceful co-existence of the various groups[18].

Moreover, despite the ferment generated by the reform of the late 18th century, no mass political parties emerged and no open challenge to the figure of the prince informed the public debate until the beginning of the 1930s. Demand for democratic self-rule, the cornerstone of the anti-colonial movement in British India, arrived in Hyderabad with a delay, primarily due to the fact that, socially and politically, the state had remained isolated from British India and, to a large extent, also from the rest of the other princely states. While not hindering exchanges with political organisations outside the state borders, this insulation limited the development of a political arena. However, these circumstances underwent significant change under the transformations that characterised the following decade and culminated with Hyderabad's integration as a state of a federal, independent India.

2. *Constitutional reform and political debates after the Government of India Act 1935*

Political activism in Hyderabad began to question the Nizam rule when, with the enactment of the Government of India Act of 1935, de-

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[17] Of particular interest were the mobilisation of the lower castes and Dalits. See for example, S. Charsley, *Evaluating Dalit Leadership: P.R. Venkatswamy and the Hyderabad example*, cit.; P. Muthaiah, *Dandora: the Madiga Movement for Equal Identity and Social Justice in Andhra Pradesh*, "Social Action", n. 2, 2004, pp. 184-209; K. Ratnam, *The Dalit Movement and Democratization in Andhra Pradesh*, "Washington Working Papers", East-West Centre, n. 13.

[18] In 1924 an extensive and violent clash between Hindus and Muslims marked the beginning of a crescendo that peaked in the second half of the 1930s (D. KOOIMAN, *Communalism and Indian Princely States*, cit., p. 183).

bates about a transition towards "responsible government" opened up new opportunities for participation in the public sphere. The document established the foundational principles of an Indian federation's constitutional framework, comprising a central government and parliament, along with popularly elected provincial legislatures and the erstwhile princely states. Each princely state would turn into a "Federated State" by means of an Instrument of Accession[19]. The act left ample scope for contention regarding the institutional dispositions concerning the princely states in the federal arrangement.

This aspect became the focal point around which political forces both in opposition to and in support of annexation, mobilised. Disparate groups and organisation gained new visibility, attentive to the new opportunities for accessing power resulting from the democratisation of the political system[20]. In this context, local branches of organisations rooted in British India played a key role in framing socio-political competition along communal lines. The growth of the Arya Samaj from the 1930s and the establishment of the Hindu Mahasabha (HM) in 1932 are examples of this trend. The Arya Samaj, emerged in Hyderabad in 1893 with the aim of spiritual renewal among Hindus, but gained momentum in the 1930s. It campaigned to reclaim lower-caste individuals who had converted to Islam back to Hinduism, while also propagating a narrative portraying the Nizam as an Islamic despot. While the Arya Samaj presented itself as a non-political movement, the HM became active in Hyderabad as a Hindu political party in 1932. It demanded the reorganisation of the state administration based on numerical ratios between the religious communities, as well as the recognition of greater civil liberties and of broader political participation for the Hindu majority[21]. These organisations' political narratives relied on a nationalist rhetoric that portrayed Hindus and Muslims as distinct political communities.

The emergence of the Majlis-i-Ittihad-ul-Muslimeen (MIM) in 1926[22],

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[19] *Government of India Act 1935,* Chapter 2 "Accession of Indian States", "The National Archives", record available at: https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Geo5and1Edw8/26/2/section/6/enacted

[20] For an analysis of the debates regarding the future constitutional arrangement of Hyderabad state see K.S. DATLA, *Sovereignty and the End of Empire: The Transition to Independence in Colonial Hyderabad*, cit.

[21] D. KOOIMAN, *Communalism and Indian Princely States,* cit., p. 182.

[22] According to Moid and Suneetha, in its earlier years, the MIM's attempted "to bring

and its morphing into a political party aimed at representing and mobil-ising Muslims by articulating and preserving their interest, must be un-derstood in the context of the dynamics of Muslim minoritisation that unfolded amidst the prospect of a transition to majority representation[23].

The debates over constitutional reform and future administrative arrangements also led to the emergence in 1938 of the Hyderabad State Congress (HSC). The party advocated "responsible government" in an-ticipation of the princely state's integration into a future Indian federation. The Nizam, suspicious of the party's obvious connection with the Indian National Congress (INC) outlawed the organisation before a congress could sanctioned its constitution[24].

The banning of the HSC led to the organisation of a local *satyagraha*[25], inspired by the protests and demonstrations in British India. While the Indian National Congress refrained from direct involvement, it supported the initiative, allowing its members to take part in the movement. Con-currently, the Arya Samaj and the Hindu Mahasabha initiated a separate *satyagraha* rooted in Hindu-Muslim rhetoric, opposing the Nizam's re-sistance to what they viewed as the inevitable transition towards majori-tarian rule. The two protest fronts inevitably overlapped, which prompted the withdrawal of the HSC from the agitation[26]. While the *satyagraha* in Hyderabad lacked a real unifying motivation, it proved instrumental for the visibility of parties and organisations which championed an anti-Nizam stance.

By the beginning of the 1940s, the demands animating the political

unity among the Muslim sects and protect their economic, social and educational interests as 'Muslims'". M.A. MOID, A. SUNEETHA, *Rethinking Majlis' Politics: Pre-1948 Muslim Concerns in Hyderabad State*, "The Indian Economic and Social History Review, n. 1, 2018, pp. 32-33.

[23] M.A. MOID, A. SUNEETHA, *Rethinking Majlis' Politics: Pre-1948 Muslim Concerns in Hyderabad State*, cit.

[24] In addition to the aforementioned political parties, movements and parties emerged in Hyderabad in the 1930s that promoted regional autonomy for certain language groups in the territory, such as the Andhra Jana Sangham. These movements, however, did not have a strong influence on Hyderabad politics before the annexation of the state to the Indian Union in 1948.

[25] The term *satyagraha* refers to the philosophy that inspired the methods of non-violent passive resistance promoted by Gandhi in India and South Africa.

[26] M.A. MOID, A. SUNEETHA, *Rethinking Majlis' Politics: Pre-1948 Muslim Concerns in Hyderabad State*, cit., p. 36.

debate in Hyderabad changed, ranging from civil rights to democratisation, and from advocating "responsible government" under the prince's rule to calling for his outright dismissal. Religious belonging had firmly entrenched itself in the political discourse framed along the lines of communal conflicts.

Faced with the prospect of losing dominance over the state, the Nizam Mir Osman Ali Khan strenuously opposed future annexation to the Indian Union. Political modernisation and the transition to democratic governance represented a disruption of power dynamics and balances, which had until then allowed the Nizams to rule over a large Hindu population without encountering major political opposition. The Muslim elite, which enjoyed a privileged position within the state administration or in the feudal nobility, largely supported the Nizam and rejected a transition towards a political system based on majority rule. On the contrary, the urban Hindu population found themselves in a more favourable position: engaged in productive activities, they had cultivated a middle-class consciousness and sought to capitalise on the opportunities presented by the political and economic arrangements in the newly formed Indian Union.

In the context of the developing socio-political landscape, political parties and movements began to actively mobilise in Hyderabad, fuelling a discourse of Hindu-Muslim antagonism. The MIM projected itself as the spokesman and representative of a pro-Nizam stance, extending it to coincide with the interests of a multifaceted Muslim community[27]. The party thus countered any attempts to force the integration of the state into a future Indian federation.

Conversely, Hindu organisations supported the annexation and portrayed the princely ruler as a despot who had oppressed the Hindu majority and opposed democratic reforms. They viewed a liberal representative regime as a means to obtain greater political influence, contributing to forge the notion of a Hindu majority and garnering support based on religious belonging.

The concerns of the Muslim urban population which mobilised around the MIM over their fate in a majoritarian institutional arrange-

[27] For a historical reconstruction of the coming about of the notion of Muslim minority in Hyderabad see T. SHERMAN, *Muslim Belonging in Secular India,* cit., 2015.

ment were founded in reality. The princely state's forced merger with the independent India in 1948 negatively affected its social position, while significantly favouring the rise of the new Hindu bourgeoisie. With the dismantling of the feudal apparatus, those who were employed in the state administration lost their jobs, while members of the Muslim nobility mostly emigrated to other parts of India, to Pakistan or the Gulf countries.

In conclusion, the political and institutional instability produced by the prospect of a transition towards liberal democratic representation was the context within which the political and social competition in Hyderabad took on a communal connotation. The rapid political modernisation against the background of a demising feudal order and the resistance of a ruler ultimately identified as the representative of a religious minority, favoured the development of political parties that claimed to represent monolithic and antagonistic religious communities. Under the influence of the communal violence that was already disrupting socio-economic and political life in British India, relations between Hindus and Muslims took on an increasingly communal connotation which merged disparate political and economic demands with discourses about religious belonging. The emergence of communalised political discourse framed the Nizam feudal order as minority rule and led to the fracturing of social relations along communal lines.

3. *"Police Action" and the crystallisation of communal conflicts*

The violence of the partition, which rocked the Indian subcontinent during the transition to independence, left an enduring imprint on India's political memory. Like other parts of the Indian Subcontinent, Hyderabad state, once regarded as a haven for harmonious interfaith relations, emerged as a hotspot of Hindu-Muslim conflict. However, a communal interpretation of these dynamics would risk overlooking how religious belonging alone did not necessarily imply a shared political agenda. The Telangana People's Struggle (1946-1952) is an illuminating example of the multiple voices which found expression during the political changes of the time. The armed rebellion engaged the rural populace of the eight Telugu-speaking districts (which included Hyderabad city) with a primary aim to dismantle the feudal

socio-economic order. Rooted in the *vetti* system, a form of forced labour that included sexual slavery, this order disproportionately affected the lower castes. Together with the improvement of rural workers' living conditions in Hyderabad state, the movement sought to carve out new spaces for political participation for the downtrodden groups. The lower sections of the society mobilising within the Telangana People's Struggle were thus questioning the state's feudal foundations amidst changing socio-political balances. The movement openly challenged the rule of the Nizam and the power hierarchies that upheld the dominance of nobles and upper-caste landlords. In that respect, these peasant struggles were not solely directed against the Nizam, nor were they, in any "communal" sense, anti-Muslim revolts. Rather, they aimed at challenging the foundational aspects of the social hierarchy, especially in anticipation of Hyderabad's potential integration into India. However, the antagonism between religious communities, which became a focal point in official political discourse, arose from the deep-seated social and political instability following the decline of the feudal system and the unfolding events in British India. As mentioned, between 1935 and 1947, a political discourse emphasising religious community belonging and representation emerged in Hyderabad alongside multiple social conflicts. Following the Indian Subcontinent's partition, the Nizam expressed his intention to maintain Hyderabad as an independent state, as stipulated in the provisions of the 1947 India Independence Act. In response, the Indian government imposed an economic embargo and attempted to coerce annexation. Meanwhile, within the state, the HSC and Hindu nationalist organisations initiated further forms of protest, while the Telangana People's Struggle continued to target the gatekeepers of the feudal order in rural areas[28].

Discussions within the Government of India regarding the integration of the recalcitrant princely states, such as Kashmir, Junagarh and Hyderabad, contributed to crystallise political debates around a paradigm of communalism. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru feared that resistance to democratisation in Hyderabad could exacerbate social conflicts within the state, potentially leading to spill-over effects in

[28] See K. Sirgamalla, B. Srinivas, *Social Background of the Telangana Peasant's Armed Struggle (1946-1951)*, in "Proceedings of the Indian History Congress", vol. 78, 2017, pp. 1103-1109.

neighbouring Indian provinces. Moreover, while he initially opposed a military intervention, he never considered the possibility of an independent autocratic state nestled within the context of democratic India. During a speech, on 14 March 1948, he said that "our policy has been that there must be full responsible government in every State, there must be an equal measure of freedom there as in the rest of India. […] We cannot have autocracy in any part of India, because autocracy and democracy cannot pull on together"[29]. Again, on 13 April 1948, at a public meeting in Cuttack, the PM said that "in Hyderabad, people in high positions want autocracy to continue. But this is impossible in the present-day world when democracy is the order of the day […] Hyderabad at present is marred by conflicts[30]. Two days later, in a letter to the Premiers of India's provinces he insisted that "[…] the people of Hyderabad cannot continue to live under an authoritarian and feudal regime, which is becoming increasingly violent and oppressive and which threatens the lives and property of the greatest majority of the population […]It is manifest that Hyderabad cannot remain as it is, a feudal island in a democratic India"[31].

The Nizam's government crackdown on protest movements led to the unleashing of violence by the MIM's voluntary paramilitary corps known as the Razakars. Founded under the leadership of party president Qasim Razvi (1946-1948), the Razakars engaged in a violent guerrilla war aimed at preserving the princely state from merging with India and responding to the multiple armed confrontations waged from across the border regions by HSC's activists and Arya Samajis as well as by the Communist in the Telangana region[32]. Their violence was not specifically targeted at the Hindus, but rather directed towards anyone — individuals or organisations — labelled as enemies of the Nizam regime. However, as Taylor Sherman aptly notes "the Nizam had emerged as a guardian of

[29] Speech at a public meeting, Vishakhapatnam, 14 March 1948. A.I.R. tapes, N.M.M.I. *Selected works of Jawahalal Nehru Series II*, January-April 1948, p. 279.

[30] J. NEHRU, *Autocracy in Hyderabad* Speech at a public meeting, Cuttack, 13 April 1948, From Hindustan Standard, 15 April 1948, *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru Series II, vol. 6, April 1948-June 1948,* pp. 214-215

[31] J. NEHRU, *Letters to the Premiers of Provinces*, 15 April 1948, *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru* Series 2, April 1948-June 1948, p. 263.

[32] M.A MOID, A. SUNEETHA, *Rethinking Majlis' Politics: Pre-1948 Muslim Concerns in Hyderabad State*, cit. p. 48.

India's Muslims during the violence of partition"[33], reinforcing the idea that the deep-seated political divisions in Hyderabad were religiously motivated. Prominent figures in the Indian government, including Secretary of the States Ministry vp Menon and States Minister Sardar Vallabhabhai Patel, were among those who endorsed this perspective. Proponents of the military intervention in Hyderabad state considered the turmoil that was marring the state a threat to the stability of the entire Indian nation, which needed to be quelled to prevent a resurgence of Hindu-Muslim violence across the country. In response to the Nizam's refusal to merge and amidst widespread violence and intense instability within the princely state, the Government of India resolved to annex the state of Hyderabad forcefully, initiating a full-scale military intervention on 13 September 1948[34]. It took four days to overcome the forces loyal to the Nizam and demote the princely state. Nevertheless, the violence that accompanied the "Police Action" marred social peace in Hyderabad and impacted the power dynamics between different groups and communities, ultimately deteriorating Hindu-Muslim relations.

The framing of the Razakars' suppression as a fight against communal forces by representatives of the Government of India as well as by local political groups hostile to the Nizam, reflected the ongoing communalisation of the political discourse. In a telegram to Pakistani Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan dated 11 September 1948, Jawaharlal Nehru wrote: "We have taken every possible precaution to prevent communal trouble in India and are determined to safeguard the life, property and honour of the minorities to the best of our ability. Indeed, such action against Hyderabad as may be taken by us will have been forced on us largely by the necessity to prevent a further deterioration of the communal situation of which, due to the feeling roused by Razakar atrocities, there has for some time now been grave risk"[35].

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[33] T. Sherman, *Muslim Belonging in Secular India,* cit. p. 24.

[34] For the purposes of this essay, the reasons behind the decision of the Indian government to force the annexation of the State of Hyderabad through a full-scale military action will not be examined. See, for reference, T. C. Sherman, *The Integration of the Princely State of Hyderabad and the Making of the Postcolonial State in India, 1948-56*, in "Indian Economic & Social History Review", vol. 44, 2007, pp. 489-516; P. Chopra (ed), *Thematic Volumes on Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel: Kashmir and Hyderabad*, Konark, Delhi, 2002.

[35] J. Nehru's cable to Liaquat Ali Khan, Prime Minister of Pakistan, New Delhi, 11 September 1948, *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru* Series 2, vol. 7, p. 251.

The "Police Action" was followed by massive violence against the Muslim population[36], largely rationalised as "retribution" for the atrocities perpetrated by the paramilitary formations loyal to the Nizam. Prime Minister Nehru's remarks on the aftermath of the "Police Action" illustrated this perception: "During this period there was some disorder, chiefly in the interior. This was caused by Hindus who had suffered at the hands of the Razakars and some of whom had been driven out and were returning and retaliated. Some arson and looting also took place"[37].

However, as outlined in this article, this narrative must be contextualised within a broader rhetoric of communalism that pervaded the final period of the Nizam's rule and influenced discussions surrounding military intervention. The emergence of a discourse of communal conflicts in Hyderabad can thus be situated within larger debates about the nature of Indian national unity[38] and democratic representation.

Conclusions

The tendency to identify certain forms of social conflict in India as communal has hindered a more accurate historical analysis regarding the circumstances and events that, on a local scale, contributed to the emergence of a political discourse based on antagonism between religious communities. Firstly, this article proposes a reconstruction of the sociopolitical transformations, including the emergence of party politics, that occurred in the princely state of Hyderabad between the 1930s and 1948. The intense social instability and conflicts that characterised this period culminated in the state's annexation into the newly formed Indian Union. This turbulent political and social landscape favoured a reconfiguration of power relations among different social groups, marked by the crystallisation of Hindus and Muslims as political communities in conflict.

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[36] See M. PERNAU, *The Passing of Patrimonialism*, cit., pp. 336; P. SUNDARAYYA, *Telangana People's Struggle and its Lessons.* New Delhi, Foundation Books, pp. 139-40. See also A.G. NOORANI, *Of a Massacre Untold*, "Frontline", vol. 18, n. 5, 2001.

[37] J. NEHRU's cable to G. S. Bajpai – Secretary General of the Ministry of External Affairs, *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru* Series 2, vol. 8, pp. 113-114.

[38] See T. Sherman, *The Integration of the Princely state of Hyderabad and the Making of the Postcolonial State in India, 1948-56.* "Indian Economic and Social History Review, vol. 44, n. 4, pp. 489-516.

The article then argues that religious communities did not inherently exist as predefined categories but rather emerged and solidified as majority and minority groups within the context of a political transition towards majoritarian representation. Concurrently, the essay seeks to downplay the emphasis on identity and belonging as primary drivers of conflict. The article therefore pays particular attention to the structural and contingent factors that facilitated the progressive absorption of other sources of social conflict (such as *mulkī* and non-*mulkī* issues, the Telangana People's Struggle) into a confrontation between monolithic Hindu and Muslim communities. Specifically, the political transitions of the 1930s, marked by increased political participation and power competition, unfolded as a standoff between two communalised factions. On the one side, stood the Muslim minority, embodied by the Nizam, the MIM and eventually the Razakars. On the other side were the Hindu majoritarian forces, led by political organisations associated with nationalist groups in British India, aiming to subvert the power balances in a newly formed administrative entity.

The rapid modernisation of the public sphere and external influences on the princely state led to political and institutional instability. This environment gave rise to conflicts between those aiming to preserve the minority community and those seeking to shift the balance of power through new opportunities for majoritarian representation. The definitive institutionalisation of communal conflict as a form of political competition was then facilitated by the armed intervention of the Indian government for the annexation of the Hyderabad State and the simultaneous radicalisation of the forces loyal to the Nizam. The impending dissolution of the princely state thus marked the definitive emergence of communal conflicts as manifestations of political competition between religious communities.

Riassunto - Il saggio analizza come le transizioni politiche che hanno accompagnato l'annessione dello Stato principesco dell'Hyderabad all'Unione indiana nel 1948 abbiano definito le dinamiche di comunitarizzazione della vita pubblica. In particolare, l'antagonismo tra le comunità religiose è emerso come una caratteristica distintiva dei dibattiti politici sull'annessione dello Stato principesco e sulla riconfigurazione dei rapporti di potere nel successivo ordinamento amministrativo. Lo scopo del saggio è illustrare come e perché la rapida e violenta transizione politica, insieme all'altrettanto repentina burocratizzazione di un sistema socio-politico basato su un'organizzazione feudale, abbia favorito la riconfigurazione dell'appartenenza comunitaria lungo linee di polarizzazione sociale basate sull'appartenenza religiosa e l'elaborazione di un discorso politico basato sul paradigma del comunitarismo.