

Yata Satyanarayana, dir. *Razakar: The Silent Genocide of Hyderabad*. Hyderabad: Samarveer Creations LLP, 2024, 166 min.

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Cinema is a medium through which a nation displays its emotional life—its anxieties, its personality, its relationship to others, and (sometimes false) memories.¹ Accordingly, the “apparatus theory,” propounded by Jean-Louis Baudry and Christian Metz, states that cinema is ideological by its very nature because films are curated to represent reality, and yet the apparatus of cinema is used to induce a passive, defenceless, dreamlike state in the viewers.² Therefore, beyond their narrative and aesthetic value, films serve as potent historical archives that “capture moments in time, societal attitudes, and cultural practices.”³ This is glaringly visible in the film under discussion, “*Razakar: The Silent Genocide of Hyderabad*,” which was released in theatres on March 15, 2024. It is a Telugu action-drama movie, marketed as a “historical” depiction of the violence that accompanied the integration of the princely state of Hyderabad into the newly independent Indian Union.

On 11 June 1947, eight days after the announcement of the partition of British India, Mir Osman Ali Khan, the erstwhile Nizam of Hyderabad, announced through a farman that Hyderabad would not accede to either of the newly declared Dominions of Pakistan or India. The fact that this decision was governed not by religious, but politically ambitious concerns, is evident from the reasons that the Nizam had put forth for his decision. These were as

¹ Goutam Karmakar and Pippa Catteral, “Nation, Nationalism and Indian Hindi Cinema,” *National Identities* 27, no. 1-2 (2025): 1.

² Giovanna Fossati and Annie van den Oever, “Introduction: Exposing the Film Apparatus” in *Exposing the Film Apparatus: The Film Archive as a Research Laboratory*, ed. Giovanna Fossati and Annie van den Oever (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016), 14.

³ Umair Ejaz and Sheed Isheal, *Cinema as Historical Archive*, ResearchGate, June 2025, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/392554005_Cinema_as_Historical_Archive, 1.

follows: firstly, the “basis of the division of British India is communal”; second, “[t]he subjects of my State have affinities and common interest with both the contemplated new Unions”; third, “[t]he result in law of the departure of the Paramount Power in the near future will be that I shall become entitled to resume the status of an independent sovereign”; and fourth, “[t]he political and constitutional picture in India has in the past few years been changing rapidly and who can say whether the two Units now contemplated for British India represent the final solution or whether there will be still further divisions or whether after all unity may eventually be achieved.”⁴

This decision was not met with acceptance by the newly independent Indian state. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, India’s Home Minister and Minister for States, remarked, “Hyderabad is, as it were, situated in India’s belly. How can the belly breathe if it is cut off from the main body?”⁵ From one perspective, Hyderabad’s political arrangement appeared undemocratic as it had a predominantly Hindu population, comprising 81% of the demography, but its administrative and political life was dominated by a Muslim ruling class. From the inside system, however, the perception was entirely different as Hyderabad was viewed as a state, blessed with a remarkably secular outlook, enjoying communal harmony with a benign ruler.⁶ In November 1947, Hyderabad signed a “Standstill Agreement” with India, which essentially maintained the indeterminate constitutional relationship it had enjoyed with the Government of India under the British system, better known as “paramountcy.”⁷

In light of this conflict of perspective and the Nizam’s political ambition of an independent and sovereign Hyderabad, the paramilitary force of Razakars,

⁴ Nizam’s farman, signed June 26, 1947, All India States Peoples’ Conference (AISPC) Papers, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML), File No. 68, Part II, quoted in Sunil Purushottam, “Federating the Raj: Hyderabad, Sovereign Kingship, and Partition,” *Modern Asian Studies* 54, no. 1 (2020): 158.

⁵ Taylor C. 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* 44, no. 4 (2007): 492.

⁶ Mohammed Hyder, *October Coup: A Memoir of the Struggle for Hyderabad* (New Delhi: Lotus Collection, 2012), 2.

⁷ Sunil Purushottam, “Internal Violence: The “Police Action” in Hyderabad,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 57, no. 2 (2015): 438.

headed by Karim Razvi, came to gain significant momentum. These “volunteers” were associated with the Majlis-i-Ittehad-ul-Muslimeinn (MIM), a political party with considerable influence over the Nizam.⁸ It is the violence perpetrated by this particular organisation that the film under discussion attempts to focus on. It can be located in the long lineup of films attempting to “educate” the audience about “hidden” truths and “forgotten” history.⁹

Before delving into the plot, one should pay careful attention to the naming of the movie. The use of the term “silent genocide” in the title is not an unaware choice as it is meant to invoke a historical memory of absolute violence and brutality that seems to have been forgotten, and therefore in need of re-invocation. While the role of violence during the state making process cannot be denied, the depiction of this violence in a twisted manner to suit the narratives of the current hyper-nationalist regime, which rests on majoritarian politics, is what appears as a predicament. The teaser of the film claimed that the Nizam’s aim was to make Hyderabad an independent Islamic state, and a “silent genocide” was committed on the Hindu population of Hyderabad state.¹⁰ In reality, however, this violence was not neatly defined along religious lines and played out in a multifaceted manner, stemming from a complex interplay of a number of factors.

The movie begins with a historical invocation of the region’s ancient past, mentioning how during the reigns of dynasties like Ikshvakus, Mauryan, Chalukyas, and Kakatiyas people co-existed in harmony, speaking a variety of languages including Sanskrit, Telugu, Kannada, Marathi, Tamil, and Hindi. The “native” dynasties are painted as peaceful and harmonious, while the arrival of the “Islamic rulers” is depicted as ushering in a period of suffering. It narrates how, with the coming of the Bahmani Sultan, Persian was forcefully imposed on the region. This mention of linguistic impositions clearly feeds

⁸ Taylor C. Sherman, *Muslim Belonging in Secular India: Negotiating Citizenship in Postcolonial Hyderabad* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 7.

⁹ Sowmya Rajendran, “Razakar is a rabid Hindutva project that uses horrifying violence to peddle hate,” *The News Minute*, April 26, 2024. <https://www.thenewsminute.com/flix/razakar-is-a-rabid-hindutva-project-that-uses-horrifying-violence-to-peddle-hate>.

¹⁰ M Ravibabu, “How the Movie ‘Razakar-Silent Genocide of Hyderabad’ Sets Out to Distort History,” *The Wire*, October 17, 2023, <https://thewire.in/film/how-the-movie-razakar-silent-genocide-of-hyderabad-sets-out-to-distort-history>.

into the debate over linguistic identities that have occupied the political sphere of the region since the twentieth century.

The Nizam Shahi dynasty's establishment is said to have been accompanied by excessive taxation, and its alliance with the British degraded the "subjects into servants." The brutal suppression of the Gond rebellion against "Nizam's brutality" also finds mention in the movie, depicting how it was a great "massacre" that preceded the incident at Jallianwala Bagh. By drawing this parallel, the film attempts to embed regional history into the grand narrative of the mainstream Indian National movement. This opening sequence thus serves as a clear indication of how the film attempts to boil down the entire history of the region to a communal narrative.

This is followed by the introduction of the Nizam's character (played by Makarand Deshpande) as a meek, shrewd, and religiously motivated ruler. The film claims that his rule was a period of "religious terrorism," with multiple references to his aim to establish "Turkistan." However, the ultimate villain who is placed at the receiving end of the audience's contempt is Karim Razvis' character (played by Raj Arjun), with multiple scenes of his correspondence with Pakistan's military forces. His religious extremism is highlighted as he gives multiple instructions to his forces for spreading Islam to make Hyderabad a place where only Muslims would live, establishing mosques, and banning all other languages except Persian.

More importantly, the film is heaped with prolonged action sequences showing the violence that the Razakars inflicted on what is understood to be a helpless Hindu population. There are multiple scenes of violence against children, abduction and rape of women, and forced conversions through genital mutilation, all while continually invoking the "jihadi" history of Islam. There is a special focus on the violence perpetrated on women, which fits well within the ideological construction of the honour of a community residing in the body of its women, and a violation of this body is viewed as an attack on the strength and capability of the men of that community.

While the violence that the Razakars inflicted on the population of Hyderabad is a historical fact, the ahistoric characterisation of the film lies in how the violence is portrayed- as being carried out along purely communal lines. A

critical examination of the emergence and operation of this organisation reveals a reality that is multi-layered and more complex. Established in 1929, they emerged as a “self-defense” wing of the MIM, a typical feature of Indian politics in the period under discussion. Like the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a Hindu nationalist paramilitary group, the Razakars received great public support as the frequency and severity of Hindu-Muslim violence increased across India from 1946.¹¹

After the partition of the country, the majority of India’s Muslim leadership moved to Pakistan. During this tumultuous period, “the notion of kingship (and Muslim nationhood) suggested by the alliance between the MIM and the Nizam was an attempt to fashion a new basis for Muslim political authority on the subcontinent.” It is essential to note that their notion of a Muslim nationhood, “*ana ‘l-malik*” (literally, “we are rulers”), held that the sovereignty of Hyderabad would rest in the Muslim population of the province rather than the personage of the Nizam. No amount of verbosity can conceal the fact that, between 1943 and 1948, Mir Osman Ali Khan lost control over the administration and became a puppet of the Razakars.¹²

Nevertheless, they were deployed to aid the Nizam’s government alongside the Hindu landed classes in the Telangana region, where the Communist Party of India was leading a revolutionary peasant movement. Thus, the main targets of their violence were not identified along communal lines, but along ideological and class lines instead. The movie actively disremembers this historical fact through its amnesia regarding the Communist movement and its unidirectional focus on portraying the violence inflicted upon the Hindu population by the Razakars, depicted as the “private army of the Nizam.” A recurring theme in the movie is the repeated exploitation of the Hindu peasant population by the “outsider Muslim” zamindars and *pattedars*, who are termed as the “instruments” of the Nizam.

Chakali Ilamma, a revolutionary leader of the Telangana Rebellion (played by Indrāja), is presented heroically, but her Communist associations are entirely

¹¹ Sunil Purushottam, “Internal Violence: The “Police Action” in Hyderabad,” 441.

¹² Capt. Lingala Pandu Ranga Reddy, “Of Bonds, Broken Promises and Betrayals,” *Deccan Chronicle*, September 17, 2019, <https://www.deccanchronicle.com/opinion/oped/170919/of-bonds-broken-promises-and-betrayals.html>.

erased. She is shown as being harassed by a state-appointed landlord or jagirdar, but though he is of the Reddy caste, he is dressed like a Muslim, and is 'saved' by another Reddy who is visibly Hindu.¹³ The film woefully ignores that, while the regime was patently pro-Muslim, the rural set-up was bolstered by Hindu upper castes.¹⁴ Thus, the Razakars had taken it upon themselves to persecute individuals, whether Hindu or Muslim, who opposed their vision of Hyderabad's future.¹⁵ This is also shown in only one isolated sequence of the famous journalist Shoebullah Khan of the Urdu newspaper *Imroze*, whose arm was cut off and he was eventually killed.¹⁶

The movie also does not forget to project the idea of Hinduism as a peaceful religion whose actors used ideology, instead of violence, to fight back the Razakars through peaceful methods such as '*shudhikaran*' (re-conversion). To this end, one particularly evocative scene using religious symbolism is when a cow is shown as successfully defeating the attacking force of the Razakars. At the same time, the movie also narrates how the Hindus fought back to protect their religion by taking the way of organised militarisation. It is here that one can look at the report of Pandit Sunderlal and Qazi Abdulghaffar, prepared in the aftermath of this violence. They recorded that, after 13 September, there had been a widespread anti-Muslim purge, which had occurred primarily in the Marathwada and Telangana areas wherein the Hindu residents, as well as some members of the Army, attacked persons and property, and while conservative estimates suggest that 50,000 Muslims were killed, others claim several hundred thousand died.¹⁷

The film's ultimate alignment towards the current political regime becomes explicit in the portrayal of Jawaharlal Nehru and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel (played by Tej Sapru). While the former is visualised as a reluctant leader, the latter is shown as a headstrong saviour and unifying force. The taking over of Patel's legacy by the extreme right often forgets the ban he had placed on the RSS in 1948 in order to "root out the forces of hate and violence that are at

¹³ Rajendran, "Razakar is a rabid Hindutva project."

¹⁴ Ravibabu, "How the Movie."

¹⁵ Sherman, *Muslim Belonging in Secular India*, 7.

¹⁶ Serish Naniseti, "Using cinema to stoke communal tensions," *The Hindu*, September 15, 2023, <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/using-cinema-to-stoke-communal-tensions/article67307190.ece>.

¹⁷ Sherman, *Muslim Belonging in Secular India*, 11.

work in our country and imperil the freedom of the Nation and darken her fair name."¹⁸ However, such facts come in the way of framing a villain, so Nehru once again is held responsible for Hindu deaths, and his role in Operation Polo is limited to looking flummoxed and paying subservience to the United Nations.¹⁹ Multiple scenes in the movie attempt to tell the audience that Nehru was not good at decision-making and not worried about the crisis at hand. On the other hand, Patel's character single-handedly shoulders all concerns regarding the "genocide" of the Hindus in Hyderabad and is shown as wanting to "liberate" them.

The makers cunningly employ evocative dialogue-writing to warn the Hindu audience of the disaster that would befall them if Muslims were given any sort of authority. This glaring Islamophobia is seen in the reference to Muslims as "*rakshas*" (demons) and a "disease" which needs to be remedied in order to "save Hyderabad" and establish an "Akhand Bharat." The long sequence in which the Indian Army and Police forces are depicted as the emancipators of the Hindus, and harbingers of harmony, could not have been far from reality. The invasion of Hyderabad had not heralded a new era of communal harmony in the territory; instead, the main task of the new authorities in the state was to cope with the aftermath of the turmoil.²⁰ To this end, they had detained not just the Razakars but also Hindu militants and Communist leaders, along with anyone else associated with the unrest. The Sunderlal Committee report estimated that, between 1948 and 1951, 2,000 communists were killed by the Indian Army with the help of local landlords, thus reinstating them in their villages.²¹

However, this historical episode is omitted completely since it doesn't sit right with the point that the movie tries to make. It focuses on the abandonment of Hyderabad's cause by Pakistan since it held Kashmir as a priority. Following this, the movie's narrative ends with the entry of the Government of India's forces and their "rescue" of the population of Hyderabad. There is a long

¹⁸ Ministry of Home Affairs (India) "Government Communiqué dated February 4, 1948," cited in *Sardar Patel's Correspondence, 1945-1950*, vol. 6.

¹⁹ Sowmya Rajendran, "Razakar is a rabid Hindutva project."

²⁰ Sherman, "The Integration of the Princely State of Hyderabad", 499.

²¹ Ravibabu, "How the Movie."

sequence of the fall of Pakistan's flag and the chants of *Vande Mataram*, while the closing scene is a cinematic sequence of the Statue of Unity.

The film, thus, becomes successful in fulfilling its true intention—the use of a historical episode for the construction of a stringent “us versus them” narrative which serves to bolster the communal differences of the contemporary era that are accompanied by a heightened sense of identity. The actors, protagonists, and antagonists play their roles in an extremely convincing manner with soul-stirring music to evoke emotions in the audience. Additionally, the fact that it was produced by the ruling party's leader, Gudur Narayan Reddy, also strengthened its case as it was passed by the Censor Board without any edits, and there were appeals for tax exemptions. Some critics hailed the movie as a “seamless, brilliant, honest, and sensitive portrayal of the most brutal terror unleashed by Razakars.”²² However, largely, it was condemned as an extreme attempt of historical distortion by doing away with the complexity of the events it claims to portray. Despite being made on a modest budget, the film rewrites another right-wing Hindutva narrative similar to ‘The Kashmir Files’ (2022) and ‘The Kerala Story’ (2023), albeit with less art.²³

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²² Pradakshina, “Razakar: The Silent Genocide of Hyderabad- The definitive untold true story of Hyderabad on the screen”, *PGURUS*, March 28, 2024, <https://www.pgurus.com/razakar-the-silent-genocide-of-hyderabad-the-definitive-untold-true-story-of-hyderabad-on-the-screen/>.

²³ Prakash Pecheti, “Razakar: Silent Genocide of Hyderabad review: This right-wing Hindutva narrative falls into the ‘commercial cinema’ trap,” *South First*, March 15, 2024, <https://thesouthfirst.com/entertainment/razakar-telugu-movie-review/>.

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