



**TRAUMATIC RECOLLECTION OF GULNAR KHANUM, A SURVIVOR OF 1948  
HYDERABAD POLICE ACTION**

**A. H. Parvin**

**<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor, Dept of Languages, Presidency University, Bengaluru-560064,  
Karnataka, ORCID ID: 0000-0002-6833-0335, [parvin.ah@presidencyuniversity.in](mailto:parvin.ah@presidencyuniversity.in)**

**Dr. T. Naresh Naidu**

**Assistant Professor, Dept of Languages, Presidency University, Bangalore-560064,  
Karnataka, ORCID: 0000-0002-8677-2874, [naresh.naidu@presidencyuniversity.in](mailto:naresh.naidu@presidencyuniversity.in)**

.....

**Abstract**

The 1948 Hyderabad Police Action, which was characterized by pain, displacement, and bloodshed, is still a little-known but significant chapter in Indian history. This study examines how personal narratives contribute to the social memory of historical violence by focussing on the painful memories of survivor Gulnar Khanum. Based on feminist historiography, trauma theory, and oral history, this study places Gulnar Khanum's experiences in the larger context of gendered violence and the systematic repression of under-represented voices. The study highlights how trauma, memory, and identity are intertwined in the context of historical crimes by examining her testimony. It also examines the significance of recording and conserving these oral histories for current discussions of justice, healing, and reconciliation.

**Keywords**

Police Action, Trauma, Memory, Displacement, Historical Trauma.

.....



**TRAUMATIC RECOLLECTION OF GULNAR KHANUM, A SURVIVOR OF 1948  
HYDERABAD POLICE ACTION**

**A. H. Parvin**

**<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor, Dept of Languages, Presidency University, Bengaluru-560064,  
Karnataka, ORCID ID: 0000-0002-6833-0335, [parvin.ah@presidencyuniversity.in](mailto:parvin.ah@presidencyuniversity.in)**

**Dr. T. Naresh Naidu**

**Assistant Professor, Dept of Languages, Presidency University, Bangalore-560064,  
Karnataka, ORCID: 0000-0002-8677-2874, [naresh.naidu@presidencyuniversity.in](mailto:naresh.naidu@presidencyuniversity.in)**

.....

**Objectives:**

- ✚ To examine Gulnar Khanum's actual experiences as a victim of the Hyderabad Police Action in 1948.
- ✚ To investigate how oral testimony contributes to the preservation of marginalised histories.
- ✚ To comprehend how trauma, memory, and gender interact with state-sponsored violence.
- ✚ To investigate how recording traumatic memories affects the larger socio-political and cultural conversation.
- ✚ To promote the incorporation of lesser-known histories in popular academic and public discourse, such as the Hyderabad Police Action.

**Research Questions:**

- 1) What insights can be gained from Gulnar Khanum's testimony regarding gendered trauma during the 1948 Hyderabad Police Action?
- 2) How can trauma-related memory affect both individual and societal memory?
- 3) In what ways may the oral histories of marginalized survivors subvert prevailing historical narratives?
- 4) How do identity and gender function in the recording and maintenance of painful memories?
- 5) In what ways may these stories support current discussions about healing, justice, and reconciliation?

**Research Statement**

# The Expression: An International Multidisciplinary e-Journal

(A Peer Reviewed and Indexed Journal with Impact Factor 6.4)

[www.expressionjournal.com](http://www.expressionjournal.com) ISSN: 2395-4132

Being a survivor of the 1948 Hyderabad Police Action, Gulnar Khanum's painful memories offer an important but often ignored viewpoint for comprehending the gendered aspects of historical violence. The study examines how personal testimony might recreate historical narratives that have been systematically silenced and emphasises the value of oral histories in protecting marginalised voices.

## **Research Gap**

The majority of the literature that has been written about the 1948 Hyderabad Police Action concentrates on military and political issues, paying little attention to the actual experiences of survivors, especially women. Compared to other comparable historical events, such as the 1947 Partition of India, there are very few feminist and trauma-focused assessments of the Hyderabad Police Action. Critical viewpoints have been erased from public memory as a result of the lack of measures to record and preserve the oral experiences of marginalised survivors. Not enough is known about how gender, trauma, and memory interact with state-sponsored violence, especially in South Asia.

## **Scope of the Study:**

With a focus on Gulnar Khanum's oral evidence, the study offers a thorough examination of her experiences during the 1948 Hyderabad Police Action. It takes a multidisciplinary approach, combining historiography, feminist theory, oral history, and trauma studies. The study adds to the larger conversation on historical memory, gendered violence, and the function of oral histories in rewriting marginalised stories. The results are intended to educate the public and academic community about historical tragedies and how they relate to current concerns about justice and healing.

## **Introduction:**

In contemporary Indian history, the 1948 Police Action that led to Hyderabad-Deccan's accession to the Indian Union has not received much attention. There are popular narratives on this military operation, but they have tended to portray the Police Action as the natural conclusion of the people's "Liberation movement" against the Nizam's "autocratic rule." Others argue that Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the deputy prime minister at the time, deserves sole credit for Hyderabad's capitulation. The brutality experienced by common Muslim people, families, and communities has seldom ever been mentioned in these narratives.

Within this intricate and nuanced discussion of the context, this study examines issues of memory, trauma, witnessing, and historiography related to the Police Action against Hyderabad. The paper's entry into the historiography, trauma, and memory domains is marked by its treatment of the ordeals of the Muslim woman who endured the Police Action. The victim and witness, Mrs. Gulnar Khanum, describes the violence of the police action as an unexpected calamity that happened all of a sudden, which is an unexplainable catastrophe. In order to understand how this violence was created, the paper analyses the historical narrative discourse in this area by reading the main body of the traumatic tale against its usual flow, placing its presence in historical context, and analysing the evidence it provides.

## **Brief Historical Account:**

Operation Polo, the official code name for the 1948 Hyderabad Police Action, was a military intervention by the Indian government to incorporate the princely state of Hyderabad into the Indian Union. When India gained its freedom in 1947, Hyderabad,

which Nizam Mir Osman Ali Khan ruled, was the biggest and richest princely state. Despite Hyderabad's geographic proximity to Indian territory, the Nizam, a Muslim ruler over a Hindu majority, stated his intention to maintain his position of power. Citing his autonomy under British paramountcy as justification, he opposed joining the Indian Union. Nizam intended to maintain its independence and later indicated interest in joining Pakistan, in contrast to the majority of princely states that opted to join either India or Pakistan. The Razakars, a paramilitary group under the leadership of Kasim Razvi, that aimed to protect Hyderabad's independence, backed the Nizam's rejection. However, there were accusations against the Razakars of their massive atrocities and sectarian violence, especially against Hindus. As violence increased throughout the area, there was dissatisfaction and a growing fear of lawlessness. The first Home Minister of India, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, who was committed to bringing India together, was among the Indian officials who were worried by reports of Razakar's operations and the Nizam's approaches to Pakistan. Operation Polo, a five-day military assault to capture Hyderabad, was started by the Indian Army on September 13, 1948. About 36,000 Indian troops participated in the operation, swiftly defeating the Razakars and the Nizam's army. The Nizam gave up on September 18, 1948, and Hyderabad became a part of the Indian Union. The Nizam remained the titular head of Hyderabad after it was reorganised as a part of India until 1950, when princely privileges were abolished.

In the aftermath of the police action, there was widespread violence against the Muslim community, including numerous atrocities. According to the Sunderlal Committee Report (commissioned by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru), between 27,000 and 40,000 Muslims were slain, though these figures remain contested. The official narratives have mostly kept quiet about reports of mass murders, rapes, looting, and forced relocation of Muslims. The Muslim community in the area was severely damaged by police action, and many of them experienced trauma and long-term marginalization. The incident is still a delicate and frequently overlooked period of Indian history.

Government archives' official narratives of the Hyderabad Police Action frequently portray the action as a legitimate and essential intervention to protect India's territorial integrity. The narratives highlight Nizam Mir Osman Ali Khan's denial of membership in the Indian Union; the purported chaos brought on by the Razakars, a paramilitary group affiliated with the Nizam's government that is charged with inciting sectarian violence and intimidating non-Muslim populations; the representation of the operation as a quick, surgical, bloodless military action with few military casualties. These state-sponsored narratives frequently minimise or downplay the widespread bloodshed, mass murders, and human rights abuses carried out by the Indian Army and affiliated militias, especially against the Muslim community.

The sanitised official accounts have been contested by independent academics, journalists, and historians who have highlighted the more sinister facets of the Police Action: According to multiple reports, Muslim villages were targeted following the operation, leading to rape, mass murder, looting, and displacement. The Sunderlal Committee Report, which Jawaharlal Nehru commissioned, is among the most important pieces of evidence. It found that between 27,000 and 40,000 Muslims were slain during the Police Action. The state's unwillingness to face its brutal past is reflected in the report's decades-long suppression. Survivors' memoirs and oral

testimonials offer graphic descriptions of crimes that have mostly been left out of mainstream historiography, such as mass executions and sexual assault.

The gendered aspects of the Police Action have been the subject of recent historiographical endeavours. These studies look at: sexual violence's function as a weapon of state power and communal anger; the erasure of their experiences from public memory and the silence of female survivors. How, during this time, women's bodies were used as platforms for political and social contestation. When compared to the 1947 Partition of India, feminist researchers contend that the gendered impact of the Police Action is still not well studied.

Even though the violence and dislocation were on par with the Partition of India, the Hyderabad Police Action has frequently been overshadowed by it. Comparative research points out: mass murders, displacement, and communal violence as common trends. These events have been remembered and recorded in somewhat different ways, with the Partition garnering significantly more attention in scholarly and popular discourse. How do these distinctions affect our comprehension of India's post-colonial nation-building narrative?

Scholars and regional historians from the Deccan have highlighted Hyderabad's distinct socio-political and cultural background as a multilingual and multireligious princely state; class, caste, and religious identities throughout this time, as well as the function of the Razakars and the Nizam's administration; the ability of local communities—Muslims in particular—to withstand and bounce back from state-sponsored brutality.

The systematic erasing of the event from public memory and the silencing of marginalised voices are recurrent themes in the historiography of the Hyderabad Police Action. This is clear from: the absence of police action depiction in university and school courses; the lack of memorials or commemorative activities for the victims; the wilful destruction of historical records, such the Sunderlal Report, which was just recently released to the public.

Oral history initiatives and digital platforms have been crucial resources for rewriting the Hyderabad Police Action's history in recent years. Among these initiatives are: gathering and conserving survivors' and their descendants' oral testimonies; digitising historical records, including government publications, news stories, and images; raising awareness of the incident and its long-term effects on communities through digital storytelling.

The Hyderabad Police Action's historiography has a number of challenges, such as: Due to censorship and official control, access to archival materials is restricted; survivors' and their families' unwillingness to talk about their experiences because of trauma, shame, and fear; the predominance of nationalist narratives that suppress other viewpoints; the challenge of placing the incident into more general historical frameworks because of its particular dynamics and circumstances.

Gulnar Khanum's account provides a gendered and intensely personal perspective for comprehending the traumatic events of the 1948 Hyderabad Police Action. By concentrating on her personal experiences as a survivor, her story sheds light on the intersection of trauma, violence, and gender and offers invaluable insights on the often-overlooked impacts of historical atrocities on women.

## Oral Narrative of Gulnar Khanum:



Source: <https://maktoobmedia.com/india/hyderabad-police-action-1948-survivor-recalls-operation-polo/>

In this article, an attempt is made to examine the survivor's horrifying memories of Police Action as told through Gulnar Khanum's oral narrative. She was from Deoni village, Latur, situated on the Manjra River bank in Maharashtra. She was living in the vada (ancestral home) with her parents, siblings, as well as her uncle, aunt, and grandparents. In September 1948, when she was 16 years old, the Indian army invaded the princely state of Hyderabad, where her family was also one of the victims. The Indian army killed every man in her home.

Khanum recollects the incident very vividly, which happened on September 16, 1948. When the troops entered the village, many civilians fled from their homes to save their lives, while Khanum's family stayed back in their homes, thinking that home was the safest place. However, the armed forces stormed into their home, dragged every man in the family, kicked and lined them up, and shot them in the head. Her brother, father, uncle, and cousin were all beheaded, leaving her as the family's eldest child. Khanum acknowledges that she was unable to cope with the trauma of her father's passing. She and her sisters wept for a long time.

She recalls how the military stormed the area with tank guns firing in all directions, murdering men and torching shops and homes, and then goons of the town started robbing Muslim homes, raping women, and stabbing people who were fleeing for their lives and stealing their possessions. To save their honour, many teenage girls, young ladies, and mothers, with their infants clinging to their breasts, plunged into wells. Khanum was instructed to take her toddler brother and escape to the town and take care of him well, while her mother and sisters would leap into the well to save their honour. Khanum pleaded with her mother not to give up. Finally, her mother took her advice, and they left the place starving until they discovered a secure hut in the bushes. To save her kid, Khanum's mother disguised her 3-year-old brother as a female wearing a dress and bangles and strapped him to her breast. She recalls how her mother applied ash to Khanum's pale skin to conceal it. There was a reason to keep a fair-skinned, brown-eyed Khanum hidden because she would make an easy target in such a conflict. Her mother covered her with a white towel and pleaded with her not to approach strangers. There were many such mothers, and young girls who had fled from the terror were among them.

Even though Khanum's mother was pregnant, she was determined to save every family member, as if they were all inside her womb. They were absolutely clueless where to go, and the sky, moved by the pathetic sight, wept with them. That evening, the rain never stopped, and the blood covered the entire roadway. In order to avoid the thugs, military, and police, they walked throughout the night in the forest with thirst and hunger. Her mother would go and fetch some water from a pool of rainwater to quench the thirst of her sobbing sisters by filtering it from her *chadar*.

Khanum's mother, sisters, and toddler brother arrived in Kamla Nagar on September 17, 1948, covering 31 kilometres on foot. They hurried to the closest station when word spread that a refugee train was leaving for Hyderabad. A few police officers urged them to board the train. Her sisters began screaming as soon as they entered the compartments that were covered in a pool of blood, where men had been killed and women had been left half-dead and naked on the floor. They refused to board the train and instead walked 29 kilometres to their grandmother's home in Udgir, away from Kamal Nagar, hungry and thirsty. One of their uncles had already been shot dead when they arrived, while the others were missing. Following the military operation, a new threat of hoodlums emerged who harassed women in public places, knocked their doors at night, and pelted stones at the windows.

They seldom returned to Deodi, according to Khanum, because there was no place for them to call home. In their own house, they were being hunted. Even after the tragic incident, Khanum's mother continued to sleep with a dagger by her side. In order to raise her seven sisters and one brother, her mother took up a job as a weed puller in the fields, gathering grains and harvesting crops. Khanum was married off after three months of Police Action. Even Khanum's in-laws from Kalyani (present-day Bidar) were victims of the traumatic incident. (Khurram Muraad Bidri, Maktoob Media, 2021)

## **Discussion:**

Gulnar Khanum's testimony helps to reconstruct a more thorough and complex historical memory of the Hyderabad Police Action. The official narrative, which usually portrays the operation as a necessary and bloodless event, is challenged by highlighting the lived experiences of women survivors. Her experience also demonstrates the importance of oral histories in preserving the personal dimensions of historical trauma, ensuring that future generations understand the human cost of such events.

According to Gulnar Khanum's evidence, women faced unique vulnerabilities during the 1948 Hyderabad Police Action, demonstrating how violence disproportionately affects marginalised genders during state-sponsored or communal confrontations. Her recollections illuminated the psychological and social trauma inflicted on women, especially the stigmatisation that followed, in addition to the physical assault she described. Das (2007) argues that in these circumstances, gendered trauma is made worse by cultural norms that silence women and make them internalise their pain rather than openly discuss it.

## **1. What insights can be gained from Gulnar Khanum's testimony regarding gendered trauma during the 1948 Hyderabad Police Action?**

The terrifying story of Gulnar Khanum offers a deep understanding of the gendered aspects of the trauma endured during the Hyderabad Police Action in 1948. Her account effectively conveys the two vulnerabilities that women encounter during such violent incidents: the risk to their physical security and the social demands related

to honour. As demonstrated by Khanum's mother's urgent attempts to protect her children by disguising her son and hiding Khanum's physical appearance with ash, women were not only passive victims but also active protectors of their families. (Bidri, 2021).

Through rape, forced relocation, and the fear of dishonour, the story reveals the systematic targeting of women's bodies as instruments of communal disgrace. Gendered trauma combines with socio-cultural ideas of honour and shame, as exemplified by the stories of women jumping into wells to avoid rape, mothers with infants, and teenage girls. Khanum's account of her mother's tenacity—walking miles during pregnancy and continuing to provide for her children in spite of starvation—also highlights the tremendous strain that is placed on women as carers and survivors during and after such conflicts.

This testimony illuminates the frequently disregarded facets of gendered trauma, in which violence affects women's intimate and emotional life outside of the battlefield, permanently changing their sense of agency and safety.

## **2) How can trauma-related memory affect both individual and societal memory?**

Khanum's memory demonstrates how trauma moulds individual memory by generating strong, enduring images of loss and violence. Her detailed account of her father, brother, uncle, and cousin being killed in front of her during the slaughter of male family members demonstrates how these events are ingrained in survivors' memories (Bidri, 2021). In this instance, personal memory is a dynamic and changing story that is influenced by the urge to process grief, make meaning of the events, and pass them on to future generations.

Collectively, her account adds to the wider recollection of the Hyderabad Police Action as a horrific incident that upended whole communities. The memories of mass murders, sexual assault, and forced relocation exemplify the collective agony of Muslim families during the Police Action. Shared experiences of relocation and survival, like the terrifying trek to Kamla Nagar and then to Udgir, where the ladies faced bloodied train compartments and public harassment from thugs, serve further to solidify collective memory (Bidri, 2021).

Personal pain is woven into collective memory through memories such as Khanum's, reminding people of past injustices and forming a sense of community. Official histories, which frequently sanitise or erase the atrocities committed against marginalised populations, are counternarrated by these experiences.

## **3) In what ways may the oral histories of marginalized survivors subvert prevailing historical narratives?**

Gulnar Khanum's and other oral histories subvert prevailing narratives by exposing the human cost of government actions frequently euphemized in official reports. By presenting the Hyderabad Police Action as a necessary military operation to integrate the princely state, the Indian government has concealed the targeted crimes and systemic violence committed against Muslim populations (Bidri, 2021). This sanitised story is upended by Khanum's testimony, which highlights the horrific facts of forced relocation, sexual assault, and mass murder.

Her account also underlines how official histories have erased women's perspectives. Oral histories highlight the lived experiences of marginalized survivors, especially women, whereas state-centric narratives frequently concentrate on political



and military tactics. Testimonies like Khanum's force historians to address the biases and omissions in official records by capturing the psychological, physical, and social tolls of the Police Action on women and families. Furthermore, by elevating historically marginalised voices, oral histories democratise historical record. According to Spivak (1994), they provide a subaltern viewpoint that opposes hegemonic discourses and makes sure that the experiences of under-represented groups are not erased.

#### **4) How do identity and gender function in the recording and maintenance of painful memories?**

The documentation and preservation of traumatic memories are significantly influenced by gender and identity. Because of her identification as a Muslim woman, Gulnar Khanum found herself at the crossroads of several types of marginalisation throughout the Hyderabad Police Action. Her story illustrates how a woman's religious identity and gender both influence her trauma experiences, making Muslim women especially susceptible to conflict-related violence and persecution (Bidri, 2021).

Women like Khanum and her mother's coping mechanisms were further impacted by the emphasis placed by society on women as the custodians of family and community honour. Using ash to cover Khanum's pale skin and disguising her son as a girl highlights how gendered ideals of hiding and protection influenced their survival tactics. It is also crucial to record these stories because many women's experiences were suppressed or downplayed due to the cultural stigma associated with sexual violence.

An intersectional approach is necessary to preserve these memories, acknowledging the ways in which overlapping identities—gender, religion, and ethnicity—influence trauma experiences. Khanum's testimony challenges nationalist and patriarchal paradigms that frequently omit or misrepresent the voices of women in historical records.

#### **5) In what ways may these stories support current discussions about healing, justice, and reconciliation?**

Stories like Gulnar Khanum's have the power to change current discussions about justice, healing, and reconciliation by emphasising survivors' real-life experiences and calling for accountability for past wrongs. Khanum's striking memories of the abuse her family experienced highlight the necessity of reparative justice policies, including open recognition of the crimes, compensation for impacted families, and the inclusion of under-represented voices in historical accounts (Bidri, 2021).

These kinds of stories can also help reconciliation efforts by encouraging empathy and understanding between communities. Khanum's account can be used as a starting point for interfaith discussions and initiatives to resolve tensions within the community by capturing the common sorrow endured by Muslim families during the Police Action. Survivors can regain their agency and process their trauma in healthy ways through storytelling, which promotes healing on both an individual and societal level.

Furthermore, these accounts link historical occurrences to current fights for equality and justice, challenging the idea that they were isolated happenings. The significance of hearing under-represented perspectives in tackling systemic violence and developing more inclusive frameworks for justice and healing is emphasised.

#### **Suggestions:**

# The Expression: An International Multidisciplinary e-Journal

(A Peer Reviewed and Indexed Journal with Impact Factor 6.4)

[www.expressionjournal.com](http://www.expressionjournal.com) ISSN: 2395-4132

To save the stories of survivors of the Hyderabad Police Action for future generations: 1) Encourage the recording and digital storage of their oral testimony. 2) Encourage multidisciplinary research that examines under-represented historical occurrences by combining feminist historiography, trauma studies, and oral history. 3) Encourage the inclusion of lesser-known incidents, such as the Hyderabad Police Action, in university and school curricula in order to raise awareness of under-represented histories. 4) Provide forums for survivors and their heirs to tell their tales and have discussions about reconciliation and healing. 5) Encourage public history projects to raise awareness of the gendered effects of past violence, such as documentaries and exhibitions.

## Conclusion

The gendered trauma of the 1948 Hyderabad Police Action is profoundly shown by Gulnar Khanum's testimony, which also shows how trauma shapes both individual and societal memory and how oral histories can subvert prevailing perspectives. Her story highlights how gender and identity play a part in recording terrible memories and adds to the current discussions about justice, healing, and reconciliation. We can guarantee that the histories of under-represented groups are preserved and serve as a basis for creating a society that is more inclusive and just by elevating voices like Khanum's.

Gulnar Khanum's testimony demonstrates the enduring emotional and psychological scars that the Police Action inflicted to women. In addition to the physical violence, she talks about the pain of losing loved ones, seeing atrocities, or being uprooted from her home. Her story also highlights how these incidents impact on women's identities in society, namely the way Muslim women in Hyderabad have been marginalised for a long time after the police action. The intersections of gender, religion, and class impact Khanum's life as a Muslim woman. Her experience demonstrates how Muslim women experienced dual marginalisation as members of a religious minority and as women in a patriarchal society.

## Works Cited

- Bidri, Khurram Muraad. "Gulnar Khanum: A Survivor's Horrifying Testimony of the Hyderabad Police Action." *Maktoob Media*, 2021.
- Das, Veena. *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary*. University of California Press, 2007.
- Jelin, Elizabeth. *State Repression and the Labors of Memory*. University of Minnesota Press, 2003.
- Menon, Ritu, and Kamla Bhasin. *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition*. Kali for Women, 1998.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, edited by Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, Columbia University Press, 1994.

# The Expression: An International Multidisciplinary e-Journal

(A Peer Reviewed and Indexed Journal with Impact Factor 6.4)

[www.expressionjournal.com](http://www.expressionjournal.com) ISSN: 2395-4132

Vol. 10 Issue 6 (December 2024)

Editor-in-Chief: Dr. Bijender Singh

