



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Going to the cinema: princely urbanism in Hyderabad and Secunderabad

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Abstract

The experience of the urban in nineteenth-century Hyderabad was interwoven with the experience of modern technologies like film. Cinema participated in constituting a modern public; practices of film viewing were practices of enacting the modern. Through a study of conflicts in the space of cinema, this article examines the politics of constituting and controlling the urban in the princely city of Hyderabad and the cantonment town of Secunderabad. It suggests that the princely modern adapted new technologies but was rooted in patrimonial traditions. The article also argues that the cantonment had a dependency relationship with the princely city, and urban space as constituted through cinema was the site of power negotiations between the princely ruler and the British.

This article focuses on the twin cities of Hyderabad and Secunderabad and explores princely modernity in relation to colonial modernity, especially its commonalities and differences in the site of cinema as a modern social space. The central argument of the article is that different models of modernity can be discerned in various cities of British and princely India, but the British colonial authorities did not accept the princely modern, considered it inferior to colonial ideas of modernity, and often painted the princely city as ‘backward’. However, it was the British cantonment of Secunderabad that was dependent on the princely city of Hyderabad for its material sustenance. Both the ideas of colonial modernity and British control over urban spaces were challenged by the princely state of Hyderabad.

In examining princely modernity, I draw on Sudipto Kaviraj’s argument that modernity is a set of social processes comprising ‘capitalist industrialization, the increasing centrality of the state in social order, urbanization, sociological individuation, secularization in politics and ethics’, changes in family structure and intimacy, creation of new order of knowledge and changes in artistic and literary fields.¹ Kaviraj argues that these processes are not developed symmetrically; they are related functionally but are developed sequentially. The precise sequence in which these processes unfold determines the nature of modernity. In the princely state, the actors of modernity and the actions that constituted the modern were different

¹S. Kaviraj, ‘An outline of a revisionist theory of modernity’, *European Journal of Sociology/Archives Européennes de Sociologie*, 46 (2005), 497–526.

from the colonial city. The presence of the princely ruler as a competing sovereign to the colonial rulers, the continuation – instead of a complete break – with the traditional social sphere in the princely state and the negotiated scope of British influence in Hyderabad contributed to the creation of princely modernity. Furthermore, the princely city of Hyderabad had far-reaching connections across the world; as a result, its modernity partook of diverse influences, and was not simply an imitation of colonial models.

Recent work on the princely states emphasizes their alternative modernities. Janaki Nair terms the modernity of the Mysore state as ‘monarchical modern’ expressed through the registers of art and architecture.² Amanda Lanzillo investigating lithographic printing in Rampur and Bhopal argues that the difference of the princely state was articulated while engaging with technologies of perceived colonial modernity.³ Bhangya Bhukya writes that modernity in Hyderabad was a product of the cross-pollination of ideas: ‘The Nizams cleverly interwove the colonial rationality with the long established traditions and culture of the Deccan.’⁴

Building on this scholarship, my article examines how colonial and princely modernities were expressed in the space of cinema. It illustrates the workings of the ‘princely modern’ through the contested relationship between the Nizam and the British officials on questions of comportment, etiquette and attire. It also discusses the anxieties related to race and gender in public spaces. Lastly, it touches on the domains of land ownership and law in the princely city to understand the control and regulation of spaces of cinema.

The article is divided into three sections. The first section locates cinema as a site to study urban politics; the second section presents a brief history of the princely city and the cantonment foregrounding law and politics of land; and the third section highlights a case of conflict between the princely city and the cantonment in the site of cinema and the politics of controlling cinema space.

Cinema was an integral part of the experience of urban in the twentieth century. It was a destination for the new transport networks,⁵ played a significant role in constituting the urban public and contributed to the economy of the place.⁶ As a result, the colonial government took great interest in regulating cinema, often restricting the kind of films that could be exhibited in British India. Films were regularly censored not only for fear of seditious material against the British and

²J. Nair, *Mysore Modern: Rethinking the Region under Princely Rule* (Minneapolis, 2011).

³A. Lanzillo, ‘Printing princely modernity: lithographic design in Muslim-ruled princely states’, *South Asian Popular Culture*, 16 (2018), 245–52.

⁴B. Bhukya, ‘Between tradition and modernity: Nizams, colonialism and modernity in Hyderabad state’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 48 (2013), 120–5.

⁵Stephen Hughes writes that the introduction of new forms of transport coincided with the beginning of cinema in Chennai. He notes that cinema houses were the destinations within urban geography, and terms transport and cinemas as ‘conspicuous signs of colonial modernity’. S. Hughes, ‘Urban mobility and early cinema in Chennai’, in A.R. Venkatachalapathy (ed.), *Chennai, Not Madras: Perspectives on the City* (Mumbai, 2006), 39–48.

⁶Manishita Dass writes that cinema played an important role in not just constituting a public sphere but extending it beyond the urban. She points out that spectatorship was a site of imagining community as well as asserting social hierarchies. M. Dass, *Outside the Lettered City: Cinema, Modernity, and the Public Sphere in Late Colonial India* (New York, 2016), 79.

nationalist propaganda, but also due to concerns over moral corruption.⁷ The cinema hall was considered to be a 'breeding ground not only for lax moral hygiene but also for physical disease'.⁸ Cinemas also often became sites for 'anxieties of Empire' concerning 'racial hierarchies'.⁹ All these factors point to cinema as an important subject that can illuminate the wider history of colonial urbanism in India.

This article builds upon the existing scholarship, which is focused on colonial narratives, to position cinema as a part of urban social and cultural history. It poses a specific question: how did the princely cities imagine modernity in the site of cinema? Here, I conceptualize cinema as a complex social, political and economic network. These networks encapsulate the labour that worked to run the cinemas, the audience inside the hall, the parking areas, commercial entities that surrounded cinema spaces, regulatory frameworks in which cinema halls operated, distribution networks and the transport systems that brought people to cinemas. Approached thus, the history of cinema constitutes an important strand in the social history of the urban.

Most studies on early cinema and urbanism have been focused on the colonial cities of Madras,¹⁰ Bombay¹¹ and Calcutta.¹² There are multiple reasons for this. Central to the understanding of early cinema have been colonial sources such as the Indian Cinematograph Committee report, which focused primarily on British India. Secondly, much of film history has examined the industrial mode of production of cinema and hence places such as Bombay and Calcutta, which had flourishing industries, have been the focus of attention. Thirdly, princely cities have for long been seen as 'backward' in comparison with British India and hence not been examined as sites for new technologies. As a result, little is currently known about the history of cinema in the princely states.¹³ Neither the disciplines of film history nor urban history have paid sufficient attention to cinema in the princely cities. Focusing on the princely urban serves to question the dominant frameworks of national and anti-colonial nationalist in the historiography of film,¹⁴ and thus serves to enhance our understanding of both the histories of the urban and of cinema.

⁷William Mazarella, for instance, writes that cinema created a moral panic among the British authorities and the indigenous elites in India. Cinema was thought to be a lowly engagement that would corrupt the young, the unlettered and the women. W. Mazarella, 'Making sense of cinema in late colonial India', in R. Kaur and W. Mazarella (eds.), *Censorship in South Asia. Cultural Regulation from Sedition to Seduction* (Bloomington, 2009), 63–86.

⁸*Ibid.*, 64.

⁹*Ibid.*, 65.

¹⁰K. Bhaumik, 'The emergence of the Bombay film industry, 1913–1936', University of Oxford Ph.D. thesis, 2001.

¹¹R. Chatterjee, 'Journeys in and beyond the city: cinema in Calcutta, 1897–1939', University of Westminster Ph.D. thesis, 2011.

¹²S.P. Hughes, 'Is there anyone out there? Exhibition and the formation of silent film audiences in South India', University of Chicago Ph.D. thesis, 1996.

¹³Ashish Rajadhyaksha and Paul Willeman's *Encyclopedia of Indian Cinema* does not have many entries on film in the princely states. A. Rajadhyaksha and P. Willeman, *Encyclopedia of Indian Cinema* (New York, 2014).

¹⁴Kaushik Bhaumik has pointed out that the frame of the nation dominates the historiography of film. He calls out to study film as a part of the urban. Bhaumik, 'Emergence of the Bombay film industry'.

The specific case of the princely city of Hyderabad is unique because much of the scholarship on film in Hyderabad is dominated by the study of Telugu cinema,¹⁵ which established itself in the city from the 1960s onwards. The Telugu linguistic state¹⁶ has become an overarching framework in most historiography on early cinema in Hyderabad, with histories of film being dominated by histories of the Telugu film industry.¹⁷ Thus, the logics of the nation-state and the linguistic state obscure the origins of cinema in Hyderabad city in the early twentieth century. This article recovers the urban history of the princely city, before it was refashioned as a ‘Telugu’ city.

Princely city, cantonment town

Hyderabad was the capital city of the Asaf Jahi state from 1763 to 1948.¹⁸ The cantonment town was founded in 1798, after the Nizam signed the subsidiary alliance with the British, and it was decided that East India Company forces would be permanently stationed in the state. In 1806, the cantonment was named Secunderabad, after the Nizam at the time, Sikandar Jah. Secunderabad was only given to the British for military purposes; the British did not have any rights on the land and, from time to time, the Nizam’s government actually requested the return of areas within the cantonment that they suspected were not required by the military. Such negotiations and discussions happened in 1917, 1934, 1939 and 1945.

Official documents give geographical and historical descriptions of the settlement of Secunderabad. According to one such document, eighteenth-century Hyderabad was bounded to the north by the Musi River, which flows from west to east. Beyond this, there were open lands; it was on this land that the Residency was built in the late eighteenth century.¹⁹ The areas containing the Residency bazaars and settlement later became part of the wider city. The eastern boundary of the city was marked by Hussain Sagar Lake. Beyond this was ‘no man’s land’, after which the cantonment boundary started.²⁰ The cantonment lands were lent by the Nizam’s government for the use of British troops and were to be administered by the colonial government on their behalf. Secunderabad Cantonment had two divisions, the northern part containing the barracks, officers’ bungalows,

¹⁵I have illustrated elsewhere that all histories of film in Hyderabad have been written in the mode of writing a pre-history of linguistic state, i.e. all histories only refer to the Telugu cinema. C.Y. Krishna, ‘Film in the princely state: the Lotus Film Company of Hyderabad’, *Wide Screen*, 8 (2019).

¹⁶Stephen Hughes also questions the association of a particular language with film. He argues that most people working in early cinema came from different geographical locations and early cinema cannot be given a linguistic association. S.P. Hughes, ‘What is Tamil about Tamil cinema’, *South Asian Popular Culture*, 8 (2010), 213–29. Lisa Mitchell traces the making of the Telugu linguistic identity and argues that the linguistic identity was a result of the political process. L. Mitchell, *Language, Emotion, and Politics in South India: The Making of a Mother Tongue* (Bloomington, 2009).

¹⁷I.V. Rao, ‘Aravai ella Telugu Talkie’, in R. Muddali (ed.), *Aravai ella Telugu Cinema* (Hyderabad, 1994), 1–37.

¹⁸It was also the capital of the Qutb Shahi dynasty from 1591 to 1687. See Shah Mansoor Alam’s classification of different phases of the city: S.M. Alam, *Hyderabad–Secunderabad (Twin Cities). A Study in Urban Geography* (Bombay, 1965).

¹⁹Telangana State Archives (TSA)/SR/F 276 943/40, letter from the Resident at Hyderabad, 27 Jul. 1938.

²⁰*Ibid.*

regimental bazaars and cinemas with all the required arrangements for the large garrison. The southern part was traditionally described as the 'Indian town pure and simple'.²¹ In the cantonment, the military exercised civil, criminal and ecclesiastical jurisdiction. They also had fiscal jurisdiction, except on revenue and customs. The Nizam's government determined the taxes that could be levied in the Secunderabad area. It allowed the military to impose taxation to meet the local administrative expenditure but did not allow imperial taxes. Taxes like the municipal, police and water taxes, and motor vehicle registration fees, were all collected by the British. Local tax on drugs and alcohol was collected by the Nizam's excise department. A percentage of the Abkari tax on the receipts of liquor shops was given to the British as a grant to support the general maintenance of the cantonment. In turn, the British were responsible for education, public health and the security of the town. The income from excise was large enough to support a town improvement trust in Secunderabad, which existed alongside 13 additional semi-administered areas.

Secunderabad town was inhabited by the employees and officers of Nizam's Railway. This included a Hindu trader community, Anglo-Indians, Europeans working for the railways and Tamils who worked for the British. The northern boundary of the cantonment was Alexandra Road (Figure 1). The brigade parade ground occupied a large part of Alexandra Road and for some years there was an embargo on buildings in this area to prevent the cantonment from becoming a town. As a consequence, the area to the south of Alexandra Road was not well populated. Secunderabad town was not a civil or military station and was not handed over to the British by a treaty. It initially started as a small bazaar and gradually became a sprawling settlement. The Nizam did not want a rival town near his capital city and stipulated that all commercial and industrial development had to happen within the suburbs of Hyderabad.²²

There were profound differences in the culture of Secunderabad cantonment and Hyderabad city owing to their distinct histories, separate administrative regimes and the different communities living in the area. Travelling show people and exhibitors arrived at Secunderabad through the railway network and then travelled to Hyderabad. Cinema was a part of the larger performance network and came along with other entertainments and variety shows. The Europeans perceived Secunderabad as being, essentially, a colonial city. Some descriptions of the space stand testimony to this fact. For instance, a report titled 'Vaudeville conditions in faraway places' recounts the experience of Charles V. Bell, described as a 'globetrotting manager'.²³ Bell's experiences are presented in this account as advice to touring artists on how to overcome difficulties during travel. He declares his company's experience in Hyderabad as 'out of ordinary'.²⁴ The Nizam was described as 'the most powerful prince in India' and Hyderabad as 'a forbidden city' and 'sacred soil'.²⁵ Bell describes the city as being dangerous for the white men, observing that

²¹*Ibid.*

²²*Ibid.*

²³'Vaudeville conditions in faraway places', *The Billboard*, 1 Nov. 1924.

²⁴*Ibid.*

²⁵*Ibid.*

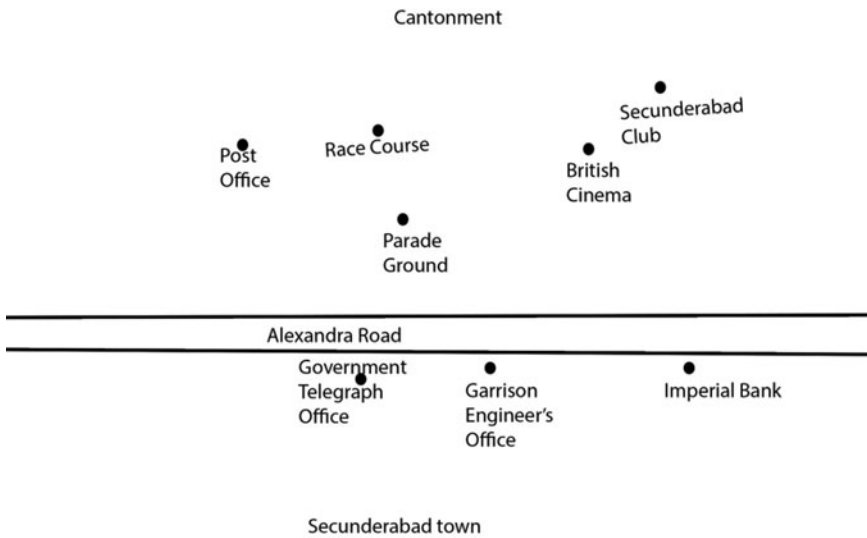


Figure 1. Map of Secunderabad Cantonment and town.

they could not enter the territory and, if they did, they could not be sure to come back alive. Bell's company went to Hyderabad on the invitation of the Nizam, travelling on his private elephants. According to this report, 'so pleased was the Indian prince with the company's performance...that he invited them to join him on a six-month tiger hunt'.²⁶ These descriptions show how Hyderabad was perceived and represented as an exotic Oriental city, while Secunderabad was perceived as a good market for performance companies owing to the European presence. Such Orientalist descriptions were common in the European newspapers and often served to reinforce the idea of the princely city as backward (not modern) in comparison with the cantonment and other colonial cities.²⁷

The film viewing practices in the British town and Residency were very different from those in Hyderabad city. Secunderabad was the largest military station in South India and hence was also a hub for exhibiting films. Cinemas in Secunderabad mostly catered to British audiences and to Indians employed by the British, therefore exhibiting primarily Hollywood, British and other European films.²⁸ Hyderabad, on the other hand, was a big market for Urdu cinema, as well as for Telugu and Marathi films.

For the British residents of the cantonment, trips to the cinema generally dovetailed with other social engagements like dinner and dancing and hence an occasion for public sociability. Prospective films at the cinemas in Secunderabad were

²⁶*Ibid.*

²⁷Barbara Ramusack has argued that the princes were often caricatured as Oriental despots and this served to create legitimacy for British rule. I extend her argument to the sphere of urban; the princely city was often thought to be 'backward' compared to the colonial city. B.N. Ramusack, *The Indian Princes and Their States* (Cambridge, 2004).

²⁸TSA, Garrison Directory, Sep. 1936.

listed every month in the Garrison Directory, along with sporting and social engagements like golf, horse races, polo tournaments and game shooting. The memoirs of military personnel and British officers who worked in India are rife with references to cinema. Speaking of life in a military station, Major T.E. Brownsdon wrote that the garrison had a very active social life:

one was frequently asked out to drinks or a meal and it was quite common to go on to cinema after dinner. I have noticed on reading through my diaries the constant mention of the cinema; every station had one or two and there was a constant supply of up-to-date films, which were greatly patronized by Indians as well as British.²⁹

The presence of cinemas in close proximity to the British settlement in Secunderabad is a testimony to the significance of film viewing to the social life of the cantonment. At the same time, the differences in the film viewing practices of the cantonment and princely city reflect the different approaches to performative modernity, each drawing from distinct social and cultural influences. I elaborate on these differences using the case of the British Cinema.

Etiquette and behaviour in cinema space: the case of the British Cinema

The British Cinema was a theatre located in the Secunderabad Cantonment. This was an erstwhile theatre called the *Laik-ud-Daula* that was now modified for the purpose of modern cinema exhibition.³⁰ The structure was located in the British administered area of Secunderabad and regularly hosted European performances, vaudeville shows and film exhibitions. In addition to British officers, the Nizam and his nobles also frequently attended the British Cinema. The behaviour of the Nizam and his associates during a particular cabaret performance in 1926 led to the issue becoming a point of discussion for the Government of India. The incident points to the differential usage of cinema space in the princely city and the cantonment, reflected in the comportment, etiquette, behaviour and practices of cinema.

Cinema in the cantonment, as already noted, was an occasion for public sociability. But this was a highly segmented and stratified public, marked by strictly enforced racial and class boundaries. The British viewed cinema as a Western technological invention and art form, and had very specific ways of accessing it. Even until the 1940s, cinema often went along with the other performances and hence the etiquette of cinema also drew from performance practices. The proscenium theatre practised a strict separation between the performers and the audience; speaking in the middle of the performance was thought to be ungentlemanly.³¹ The British idea of art appreciation was 'predicated on rational disinterested pleasure', wherein the audience

²⁹British Library, Private Papers, MSS Eur F226/5, memoirs of former members of the Indian Political Service or their wives. Major T.E. Brownsdon worked in Quetta Valley-Indian Army, 1932.

³⁰India Office Records (IOR), PSD/P. 4543/1926.

³¹Deane Heath writes about the cult of gentlemen. She argues that the idea of gentlemanly behaviour originated in the rise of industrial capitalism in the late eighteenth century where aesthetic judgment and taste were markers of social distinction. High culture was 'predicated on rational disinterested pleasure' and low culture was 'predicated on pleasures of the appetite'. D. Heath, *Purifying Empire. Obscenity and the Politics of Moral Regulation in Britain, India and Australia* (Cambridge, 2010), 41.

remains separate from the performers.³² The etiquette of cinema attendance also meant dressing for the occasion according to one's status and maintaining the social hierarchies. The social space of cinema therefore reflected the existing social hierarchies. The design of cinema was based on social distinctions; for example, there were royal boxes and boxes for dignitaries that were priced higher than other seats. These box seats had a separate cabin-like structure that kept them distinct from others, providing a visual manifestation of the social classes. Class divisions were maintained through the assignment of separate boxes to the upper echelons of society, allowing for more privacy instead of being in a shared public space.

The performance spaces in Hyderabad, on the other hand, were shaped by the cultural idioms and etiquette of patronage. The patrimonial social system found in Hyderabad, as well as in other princely states, placed high importance on the appreciation and patronage of art, leading several rulers themselves to engage with some form of art.³³ In the local performance tradition, the front seats were always reserved for dignitaries and the performance was often modified according to the audience and changed according to the whims of the patron. For instance, it was not unusual for the patron to demand a particular performance or for the performance itself to be stopped several times depending on the dignitaries. Shouting during the performance or interacting with the performers was part of this culture. The patrons would often express, very vocally, their appreciation for the performers during the performance itself. The idea of the separation of the fourth wall was not applicable to performances in the local traditions. The tickets of the performances for the Nizam and his associates were sponsored by the nobles. The practice of gifting the ruler and presenting *nazars* was common in patrimonialism.³⁴

These differences in practices of public sociability led to conflict between the British officials and the Nizam. In the British Cinema, the Nizam was criticized for improper behaviour: sitting on the stage, shouting from the box to interrupt the performance, sending attendants across the stage and walking on the stage in the British Cinema. He was also accused of poor theatre etiquette: he was said to dress like 'a seedy shopkeeper in a moth-eaten fez secured to his head by what looks like a dirty duster, and an old flannel Sherwani (long coat)', as well as being unshaven and often seen shouting to his Begum in the other box.³⁵ The Nizam's conduct in the cinema challenged colonial social and cultural norms. For the British, the Nizam was incapable of the behaviour that modern cinema space demanded. The question of etiquette in cinema spaces was also about the performance of power; the Nizam was performing his status according to traditional patrimonial idioms, which were not in accordance with British norms. In the princely city, the Nizam did not have to show his social distinction through dress and 'gentlemanly' behaviour; rather, this distinction was inscribed and embodied in his person.

³²*Ibid.*

³³Margrit Pernau writes that there was a lot of emphasis on the cultivation of a cultured individual through the specific refinement of manners and patronage of art as a noble. A noble was also valued if he participated in artistic pursuits. She notes that encouragement of artists was more important than financial assistance, thus qualifying the nature of patronage. M. Pernau, *The Passing of Patrimonialism: Politics and Political Culture in Hyderabad 1911–1948* (New Delhi, 2000).

³⁴*Ibid.*

³⁵TOR/PSD/P. 4543/1926, letter from W.P. Barton to Sir John Thompson, 9 Nov. 1926.

Other issues that contributed to the ire of the British audience pertained to the changes in the seating arrangement inside the theatre. The Nizam and his associates preferred to watch the performance at a close distance and this led to the arrangement of the seating outside the wings of the stage, in full view of the audience. The Nizam was said to always have two boxes reserved for him, and the management of the theatre had to seek permission from him to release the box tickets. This distinguished treatment demanded by the Nizam was distasteful for the British. The Nizam attended performances with his entire family, leading to large expenditures from sponsoring nobles. The British viewed this arrangement as wasteful. While the visit of the viceroy or the British princes also always led to elaborate programmes, this was not seen as wasteful and was seen as a part of the empire etiquette. But as the British officials did not accept the ruling authority of the Nizam, the patrimonial customary respects paid to him were seen as needless extravagance.

The cinema was attended by British officers and their wives and they were irritated by the behaviour of the Nizam's 'entourage'.³⁶ One of their internal reports stated, 'apart from the practice of blocking up the stage, the Nizam's general conduct at the theatre is disliked by the theatre visitors. It is certainly not the best of taste in a theatre in a British cantonment.'³⁷ The cantonment was thought to be superior to the princely city. The 'lowly' behaviour exhibited by the Nizam was deemed acceptable for a princely city but not for the cantonment. The Residency also repeatedly expressed a concern that the costumes worn in the cabaret performance, held in the British Cinema, which might be appropriate for London, were not appropriate for Hyderabad. The European metropolis was perceived to be the highest seat of modernity, situated at a level that the princely city could never attain. The British officers often told the Nizam to 'shut-up' in response to his shouts during the performance. The presence of the Nizam in the cinema space disrupted British control in the cantonment, presenting an alternative power structure. They contemplated several ways to restrict the access of the Nizam and his nobles to the cinema. This was a question of control of urban space in Secunderabad, the question of who could be allowed entrance to and who had to be restricted from the cinema space.

The ability to control the access to public space reflected the power relations in the city. Contrary to the popular discourse of British supremacy in controlling all spheres of the princely states, the case of Hyderabad and Secunderabad tells a different story. The British Resident was unable to impose sanctions on the movement of the Nizam and his nobles in the cantonment (cinema) because the power of the Nizam was supreme in the princely state and the British did not have the power to dictate the terms of access. Another reason for this inability was the economic dependence of the cantonment on the princely city. The owner of the British Cinema also owned three other theatres in Hyderabad under the patronage of the Nizam. He received good revenue from those theatres, and was not willing to anger the Nizam by refusing his requests to place seats on the stage. The British Cinema was not financially as lucrative as the others and hence the Residency officials feared that the cinema would be shut if they angered the Nizam. They did not want to lose their source of entertainment. The British officials also could not refuse cinema admission to

³⁶*Ibid.*

³⁷*Ibid.*

people from Hyderabad because it was not financially viable without Hyderabadi attendees. However, the cinemas in Hyderabad were out of bounds for military personnel from Secunderabad. The cinemas in Hyderabad were financially sustainable because cinema there was an attraction for a wide population, whereas in the cantonment the cinemas were mostly attended by military personnel.

As the British were unable to restrict the Nizam's access to cinemas, they attempted alternative ways to control the cinema space. They discussed imposing restrictions on the seating arrangements on the stage. This also was to be done without explicitly angering the Nizam by making a personal comment on his behaviour. The British could not afford to offend the Nizam. Finally, the British also resorted to attempting to censor the costumes of the performers. One distraught British official wrote, 'It is presumably impossible to change Nizam's skin, but some reform of stage costumes may not be beyond the power of the British Raj', asking his colleague to check if there could be any censorship of the costumes of the performers.³⁸

As they could not control urban (cinema) space by force or by influence, the British employed the parlance of law to control the space. All the lessees who operated commercial enterprises in the cantonment had to take licence from the cantonment authority under section 124 of the cantonment act. The British Resident, while addressing the issue to the political secretary of the Government of India, wrote in 1926 that he was considering making the lease subject to keeping spectators off the stage. Thus, law was the last resort where other means of influence could not work.

Controlling urban space

The question of control and access over urban spaces, as fashioned in the context of cinema, was also one of the significant points of discussion between the Nizam's state and the Residency during the multiple rendition negotiations surrounding the cantonment lands. The rendition negotiations were between the British and the Nizam state for control of lands in Secunderabad, which were temporarily placed under the British control for military purposes.

The rendition documents represented the respective claims to control over urban spaces put forward by the Nizam and the British. They held negotiations over land, rights of access to specific spaces and maintenance grants given by the Nizam. The Nizam state often made requests for secession of lands back to them, under the clause that land use was restricted solely to military purposes. The Nizam's government often also cited seditious and communal activities in Secunderabad as a reason for requesting control. The press in Secunderabad was known to publish anti-Nizam and communal propaganda. The British, however, did not want to yield any land under their control, often rejecting such requests on the grounds that the land was being used for 'strategic' and 'sanitary' purposes.³⁹ The primary objective on both sides, but specifically on the part of the British, was to cede parts of the Secunderabad area without appearing to be caving in to pressure. These negotiations, once again, highlight how power was exhibited in princely and colonial spaces. The British Residency wanted to cede part of Secunderabad town area that was not in use

³⁸IOR/PSD/P. 4543/1926, note by Mr Garrett (Political Department), 13 Dec. 1926.

³⁹TSA/SR/F 276 943/40.

by the military, as it would reduce the administrative burden and would not affect business interests. But they wanted it to appear as if they were willingly giving up the area and not succumbing to pressure from the Nizam. The official summary documents indicate that the British perceived the question of agreeing, or not agreeing, to certain demands as 'an example of the weakening of the Government of India'.⁴⁰ For the officials of the Nizam state, on the other hand, this issue was an opportunity to display their negotiation and diplomacy skills. Akbar Hydari, a diplomat, mounted pressure on the Residency during his prime ministerial tenure (1937–41) by repeatedly bringing the question of secession to the fore; it was his way of displaying his loyalty to the Nizam.

Ideas of hygiene and etiquette were repeatedly invoked in these discussions. At this time, colonial urban design was dominated by discourses about hygiene.⁴¹ In the early modern period, hygiene had meant a wide variety of practices that towards the nineteenth century were concentrated around the idea of cleanliness. Along with this shift, governments began taking an active role in promoting hygiene. They prevented 'diseases of the national body through sanitary policing, public works and state-sponsored medical institutions'; hygiene became associated with 'cleanliness, manners and class status'.⁴² The focus on personal and public hygiene was accompanied by the fear of germs. These ideas spread to the colonies with the colonial masters; Ruth Rogaski terms this 'hygienic modernity'.⁴³ The British believed that the built environment could influence the behaviour of the people; changes in the built environment were therefore, in part, aimed at also 'civilizing' local populations.⁴⁴ Considerations of hygiene and germs became discussion points in decision-making. As seen in the case of the British Cinema, film exhibition spaces were sites to exhibit 'civilized' (gentlemanly) behaviour.

These same ideas of spatial policing can be seen in the rendition documents. In the rendition agreement proposal of 1945, one of the clauses focused on the maintenance of amenities in the area to be ceded. The British Residency had a clause that the Nizam state must guarantee that 'a high standard of service and cleanliness in hotels, cinemas, cafes etc., would be ensured by special measures adopted for the purpose'.⁴⁵ After the rendition of the area to the Nizam, the British military would still make use of entertainment facilities in the area, and they were worried that they would deteriorate under Nizam rule.

Another dimension to these disputes concerned the regulation of the cinemas, once they were under the Nizam's authority. The British Residency's chief concern was that the Nizam's police force would have the jurisdiction of the cinemas, which would still, as previously noted, be used by white soldiers. The British expressed a concern that the Nizam police would have to deal with 'exhilarated British soldiers'.⁴⁶ There were five cinemas in the 1930s in this area. The Rivoli was to the

⁴⁰TSA, Simla Records (SR), Political Department (PD), F. No. 65-I.B. (Secret) of 1939.

⁴¹See R. Peckham and D.M. Pomfret (eds.), *Imperial Contagions: Medicine, Hygiene, and Cultures of Planning in Asia* (Hong Kong, 2013).

⁴²See R. Rogaski, *Hygienic Modernity* (Berkeley and London, 2004).

⁴³*Ibid.*

⁴⁴W.J. Glover, *Making Lahore modern: Constructing and Imagining a Colonial City* (Minneapolis, 2008).

⁴⁵TSA/AB/RO/F. No. 367/1945.

⁴⁶TSA/SR/PD/F. No. 65-I.B.

south of Alexandra Road. The Garrison, the British Cinema and the Tivoli were located to the north of Alexandra Road. The Rex was on Alexandra Road. The Rivoli was the cinema that was to be affected by the rendition. There were two options considered by the British on the question of regulating the cinema: that the cinema be supervised by the military police across the road, or that they make it out of bounds for the troops (like the other cinemas in Hyderabad). A third suggestion posited that the Rivoli remain within bounds for the troops until a problem arose. There were instances when special permission was given to the troops to go to Hyderabad to watch films when talkies first came to Hyderabad.⁴⁷ This was taken as a precedent to keep the Rivoli within bounds for the troops. The British military had cordial relations with the Nizam's police, and therefore thought that the Hyderabadis would not restrict British movement in the area.

Along with cinema spaces, other areas were also discussed during rendition negotiations. The areas whose access was similarly discussed were those containing the hospital, the regimental bazaar, Oxford Street, Cantonment Station, the graveyards and the jail. Oxford Street was an entertainment space with cafes and the main shopping area for the officers' wives. However, the British were set to lose control over it after secession, and some feared that it would become unsafe under 'Mughlai' rule.⁴⁸ This concern was brushed aside by the British themselves as the officers' wives safely shopped in Abid's Road which was under the Nizam rule. These concerns for the safety of officers' wives can be seen as continuities with colonial anxieties of white women being leered at by brown men. The anxiety of the British officials was associated with the presence of European women in public spaces. The elite women of the princely city often observed *pardah*, a practice of separation from men in public. Cinemas also had a separate *pardah* section. Thus, the elite women were thought to be well protected, while European women were viewed as at risk. The British discussed modifying the policy of not having cafes in the cantonment to prevent the European women from travelling to the Nizam-controlled town area. Ultimately, the British perceived a threat to themselves and their wives from encounters with local people in urban spaces, and hence attempted to restrict the occasions of such intermingling. Such a feat could not be socially or financially viable and hence they employed the parlance of law.⁴⁹

The idea of what spaces were within bounds and what were out of bounds encapsulates the struggle for the control of urban spaces between the princely city and the cantonment. The cinemas in the cantonment could be made out of bounds for Hyderabadis, but if this was done, it would not be financially viable. The British wished that they could make the British Cinema out of bounds for the Nizam, but that was not possible. The cinemas in Hyderabad were out of bounds for the British troops because the soldiers would be placed under the Nizam's jurisdiction, which was not acceptable to the Secunderabad authorities. The norms of the princely state were not considered suitable or applicable to Europeans. The British considered

⁴⁷*Ibid.*

⁴⁸The British referred to the rule of princely states as Mughlai. Ramusack writes that this was used as a derogatory term to present the princely states as backward states. Ramusack, *The Indian Princes*.

⁴⁹As seen in the case of the British Cinema, restricting access of the Hyderabadis made the cinema financially unviable.

it a blot on their prestige to be governed by an Indian ruler. The cinemas in the Secunderabad town, therefore, were within bounds for the British troops as long as there was no perceived trouble. The British were unable to claim complete control over the cantonment and the adjacent town. Instead, in order to avoid being governed by the princely state, the military set boundaries outside the cantonment; they could not move freely. The act of setting boundaries was an act of claiming control over a particular space.

Conclusion

This article has used the unique spatial juxtaposition of the princely city of Hyderabad and the cantonment town of Secunderabad for a comparative study of the princely modern and the colonial modern. The Secunderabad Cantonment and town were a liminal space; they were under the administrative control of the British but were still within the sphere of influence of the Nizam's authority. Studying cinema in such a liminal space, this article has sought to show how the 'princely modern' (as observed in the site of cinema in Hyderabad) frequently challenged colonial conceptions of modernity.

Equally, in the space of cinema, the British and the Nizam performed their authority differently. The British insisted on exhibiting authority through 'gentlemanly' behaviour in attire and etiquette, whereas for the Nizam authority was inscribed in his person. This difference is indicative of the social structures and networks in which the princely city and the cantonment were embedded. The article has also sought to highlight the hierarchies in different models of modernity. The British regarded the European metropolis as the primary seat of the modern, followed by the colonial cities and cantonments. They did not accept the modernity of the princely city and often painted it as a 'backward' space.

Secondly, the article explored the politics of control of cinema space between the Nizam state and the British. Cinema space was of social and political importance for both the princely city and the cantonment town. However, without the princely city, the business of cinema was not economically sustainable in the cantonment town. Also, due to the supremacy of political influence of the Nizam in the cantonment town, the British could not exert complete control over the urban space.

In the princely city and the cantonment, urban space was controlled by restricting or allowing access to it. Scholarship has often assumed that British authority was supreme, even in princely cities.⁵⁰ This article has argued, to the contrary, that urban space was largely controlled by the Nizam, and the British had limited powers of influence in both the princely city of Hyderabad and in the Secunderabad Cantonment. These arguments suggest the need for a more nuanced understanding of how urban space was configured and controlled in princely cities.

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⁵⁰W. Ernst and B. Pati (eds.), *India's Princely States. People, Princes and Colonialism* (London, 2007).

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