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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Role of Women of United Provinces in the Freedom Struggle of India: A Study of Participation, Agency and Sacrifice

Sajad Ahmad Dar[1]

[1] *Assistant Professor, Sharda School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Sharda University, Greater Noida, India*

Email: sajadhistory07@gmail.com[1]

*** Corresponding Author:**

Sajad Ahmad Dar
Sharda School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Sharda University, Greater Noida, India
Email: sajadhistory07@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The history of India's freedom struggle has predominantly been narrated through prominent male leaders and a limited number of elite women, leaving the experiences of ordinary women comparatively underexplored. This paper examines the participation, agency and sacrifice of women in the United Provinces (modern Uttar Pradesh) during the Non-Cooperation Movement (1920–22), Civil Disobedience Movement (1930–34) and Quit India Movement (1942). Drawing on Suruchi Thapar-Bjorkert's work on "unseen faces and unheard voices," the study analyses how women negotiated purdah, female illiteracy, patriarchy and domestic restrictions to enter nationalist politics. The contribution of Bi Amman of Amroha demonstrates the significance of Muslim women's political mobilization, the participation of Lady Hasan Imam and Mrs. Mehmooda Sami highlights women's role in boycott campaigns. In Meerut, women formed organizations including the Mahila Satyagraha Samiti, Mahila Charkha Sangh and Bangle League; notably, 103 of approximately 500 Congress volunteers were women. Around 60 women also participated in picketing shops during the boycott of foreign cloth and liquor. The paper argues that women transformed domestic practices such as spinning khadi into political action entering public spaces through protest and mobilization. Their participation expanded the social base of nationalism and challenged established gender boundaries.

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INTRODUCTION

Women's involvement was essential in turning the Indian freedom movement from an elitist political movement into a broader mass movement. However, due to the dominance of the history of male leaders and few prominent women, women's contribution is somewhat neglected, leaving less attention on ordinary women and their local political engagement (Thapar-Bjorkert, 2006). The United Provinces region, which currently corresponds to the state of Uttar Pradesh, gives us an interesting insight into this aspect of the national movement, namely the involvement of ordinary middle-class women. Women's participation in politics in the first half of the twentieth century was influenced by patriarchy, domestic life, purdah, and limitations concerning mobility and involvement in public affairs (Forbes, 1996). Nevertheless, women participated in the nationalist politics through demonstrations, meetings, boycott movements, picketing, weaving and organization work. Thus, their participation shows us that the national struggle was not only happening in the institutionalized form of politics but also through households, communities and public spaces. (Sinha, 1997; Thapar-Bjorkert, 1997).

Historical accounts have often centered on elites and nationally acclaimed women, ignoring regular women who engaged in politics through non-recognized means, local level engagement, and under-recorded activities. The domestic realm too could serve as a place for political engagement, because women not only maintained their traditional role but at the same time took part in the process of nationalism (Sinha, 1997). Consequently, middle-class women proved that political agency could be created through mundane activities rather than necessarily through political associations alone. For example, spinning khadi, encouraging swadeshi and influencing family members linked household activities with nationalist politics (Forbes, 1996; Sinha, 1997). Likewise, picketing foreign cloth and liquor shops allowed women to gain access to public political spheres by defying traditional gender roles (Thapar-Bjorkert, 2006). Women's imprisonment during the nationalist struggle further illustrated their readiness to challenge colonial authority and engage in political resistance that had been previously practiced by men only. Therefore, the paper examines the role of women in the freedom struggle of the United Provinces, with particular emphasis on their participation, political agency and sacrifice. The analysis considers women's participation during the Non-Cooperation Movement (1920-22) to the Civil Disobedience Movement (1930-34) and the Quit India Movement (1942) analyzing personalities like Bi Amman, Lady Hasan Imam and Mrs. Mehmooda Sami as well as institutions like Mahila Satyagraha Samiti, Mahila Charkha Sangh and Bangle League. In addition, the research analyzes socio-cultural limitations of women and suggests that the political participation of women has changed both domestic and public dimensions of nationalism. In other words, the approach views women not only as collaborators of nationalist leaders but as political agents whose contribution resulted in political mobilization of Indian society.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative historical and analytical approach to examine women's participation, agency and sacrifice in the freedom struggle of the United Provinces. This paper analyzes the Non-Cooperation Movement (1920-22), Civil Disobedience Movement (1930-34) and Quit India Movement (1942) by utilizing both primary and secondary sources. The sources used are colonial administrative sources, newspaper sources, government sources, autobiographies and memoirs, letters, women's writings and archives. In terms of secondary sources, the sources used include books, research papers etc. written by historians. It is important to emphasize Suruchi Thapar-Bjorkert's contribution on the "unseen faces and unheard voices" of ordinary women. Sources from Meerut, Allahabad, Kanpur, Agra, Ghaziabad and Awadh are comparatively analyzed in order to highlight differences between regions, rural/urban areas, religion and class. The participation of women in picketing, boycott, khadi, charkha and demonstrations, women organizations, incarceration and domestic support are discussed in this project. The project takes into consideration a gender-sensitive and subaltern approach in analyzing how women managed issues such as purdah, patriarchy, illiteracy and domestic duties.

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Figure 1. Conceptual-Thematic Network of Women's Participation, Agency and Sacrifice in the Freedom Struggle in the United Provinces



Keyword Co-occurrence Network from Qualitative Historical Analysis

Source: Author-generated and processed using ChatGPT (2025).

The thematic network showed in Figure 1 shows how women's involvement in the freedom movement in the United Provinces was influenced by interrelated aspects of participation, political involvement, socio-cultural restrictions, organization and sacrifice. Women were involved through picketing, protest marches, meetings, boycott movements, spinning of khadi and charkha work, whereas individuals like Bi Amman, Lady Hasan Imam, Mrs. Mehmooda Sami, Kamala Nehru and Urmila Shastri exemplify different kinds of individual activism. Organizations such as Mahila Satyagraha Samiti, Mahila Charkha Sangh and Bangle League were major venues for organizational activity. At the same time, the purdah system, illiteracy among females, patriarchy, mobility limitations and domestic duties prevented women from political engagement. In spite of the difficulties, women turned their domestic sphere into nationalist action and became involved in protests, picketing and mobilizations in public spaces. Women's political activity made it possible for the social composition of the nationalism movement to become more diverse broke through traditional gender norms and proved the political subjectivity of women. The combination of participation, limitations, political agency and self-sacrifice shows that women were not passive supporters of nationalist leaders.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Historiographical Context: From Elite Leaders to Unseen Voices

In the historiography of women's contribution to India's struggle for independence, the emphasis has generally been on those national leaders like Sarojini Naidu, Annie Besant, Vijaylakshmi Pandit and Sucheta Kripalani. Their contributions have been significant, however, there is a risk of overlooking the role of common women in the political process which took place at local and familial levels. The criticism of Padma Anagol about the "imperialism-nationalism" historiography paradigm holds good in this context as well since she opines that the hegemonic discourse on nationalism has led to ignoring of women's agency and voice (Anagol, 2008). The region of United Provinces, which largely corresponds to Uttar Pradesh of today, serves as a pertinent geographical backdrop for analysis of this overlooked element of nationalism. Mass mobilization in this region acquired significance during the Non-Cooperation Movement (1920–22), Civil Disobedience Movement (1930–34) and Quit India Movement (1942). Women were involved through picketing, boycott of foreign goods and liquors, khadi spinning, political meetings and fund raising and participation in local voluntary organizations. In Meerut alone, out of 500 volunteers in the Civil Disobedience Movement, 103 were women. Additionally, 60 women also participated in picketing the shops in the Cantonment Bazaar, demonstrating that women's political activity extended beyond symbolic support for nationalism.

This is evident in Suruchi Thapar-Bjorkert's historiographical contribution through her emphasis on the "unseen faces and unheard voices" of common middle class women from northern India. Her work expands the range of evidence in the nationalist historiography through the inclusion of oral testimonies, personal

memory, poetry, cartoons, vernacular periodicals and private letters. The value of vernacular culture in the historiography is even further illustrated by Nijhawan's work on the Hindi periodical Sudha through the examination of women's images in the Hindi public and private spheres during the 1930s (Nijhawan, 2017). This approach is important since many female activists did not hold any formal political offices and thus are understudied in standard political archives. At the same time, the role of women belonging to different socio-religious backgrounds should be studied more carefully because Muslim women have often been marginalized in nationalist historiography. This marginalization of Muslim women is explained by the influence of gender and communal ideologies on their historical invisibility in colonial India, according to Sarkar (2001). The example of Bi Amman of Amroha, Lady Hasan Imam and Mrs. Mehmooda Sami thus highlights the need to study the involvement of women outside of the narrow elite nationalist discourse.

The relationship between nationalism and women was marked by the existence of competing constructions of gender, respectability and political identity. The case of colonial India illustrated by Chatterjee highlights how the "woman question" was dealt with via negotiation of the difference between the outer public sphere and the inner domestic sphere (Chatterjee, 1989). Women gained access to public spaces such as the street, market place and political assemblies still negotiating domestic respectability expectations. Nationalist politics found its way into homes via husbands, son's family networks and everyday practices. As a result, gender was more than just another aspect of nationalism; it was a very important element that helped to construct the identity of the nation itself. Similarly, Mondal argues that there were complex symbolic links established by the nationalist discourse regarding femininity, gender, and sexuality, and that the representations of women had become part of the construction of national identity (Mondal, 2002). The symbolic construction of women as mothers, wives, and culture bearers was also strongly linked to the way the nation was understood by nationalists. In Jolly's comparative approach of the link between women and nationalism, motherhood and the symbolic role of women as "mothers of the nation" became especially prominent.(Jolly, 1994).

Therefore, the historiography of a transition from leaders to common women indicates that nationalism is a political and social process taking place within public and domestic spheres. Agency of women should not only be defined through their political representation but also through the practices of every-day life, networking, culture and community organization. the gender symbolism of nationalist politics was limiting women in their roles, it also opened up political interpretations for women that allowed them to get involved into politics (Fruzzetti & Pérez, 2002). This paper utilizes the broader historiography to analyze how women in the United Provinces used the activities and limitations of their every-day life as a form of political engagement, agency and sacrifice.

Seen in this light, Zahida Khatoon Sherwani's (1894–1922), known by her pen name Zay Khay Sheen, contribution is best understood as an early and less visible form of political participation within the broader history traced in this paper. Her poetry and journalism helped carry political concerns across the boundaries of campus, household and vernacular print culture. This is consistent with the paper's wider argument that women's political agency cannot be measured only through formal membership, public protest or imprisonment. The literary sphere itself could become a site in which women interpreted political events, expressed anti-colonial sentiment and contributed to the formation of political consciousness. Zay Khay Sheen therefore provides a useful link between the intellectual awakening of the First World War period and the more organized and publicly visible participation of women during the Khilafat and Non-Cooperation movements.

The Kanpur Mosque incident further illustrates this connection between literary expression and political mobilization. Zay Khay Sheen wrote on the incident, including the nazm 'Masjid Kanpoor Ki Baatein'; Gail Minault also records a nazm, 'Id ki Khushi men Ghamzadegan-i-Kanpur', which she sent to Zafar Ali Khan for publication in Zamindar (See the collection of nazms by Zay Khay Sheen, 1995). The circumstances surrounding its publication are revealing. When the published poem reached her father, Nawab Muzamillullah Khan, he objected strongly to what he regarded as her anti-government and extremist expression and feared that it might create difficulties for the family (Sherwani, 2018). At the same time, younger members of the Sherwani family continued to communicate the excitement generated by political meetings in Aligarh to their female relatives. The episode thus exposes a tension within elite Muslim families between caution towards colonial authorities and the political enthusiasm generated by the changing public sphere. More importantly for the present study, it demonstrates that women could engage with the political

questions that fed into the wider freedom struggle even when their participation did not take the form of public demonstrations or formal political organization (Minault, n.d).

A member of the intellectually active Sherwani family of Bhikampur, Zay Khay Sheen responded in her poetry to international and local events that were shaping political consciousness among Muslims in India. Her nazms on the Balkan and Tripolitan wars and, subsequently, on the Kanpur Mosque incident connected distant events and local colonial politics with a growing sense of political grievance (Minault, n.d). She also contributed to women's and literary periodicals such as Khatun of Aligarh, Ismat of Delhi and Sharif Bibi of Lahore (Minault, n.d). Her significance for the history of the freedom struggle lies not simply in the fact that she wrote about political events, but in the way literary production itself became a means of participating in an expanding anti-colonial public sphere (Minault, n.d; Sherwani, 2018). Her case therefore complements the evidence of meetings, organizations, boycott campaigns and other forms of activism discussed in this paper, while also reminding us that women's political engagement could take place through the production and circulation of ideas.

This broader understanding of women's agency also requires attention to forms of political expression that predated and accompanied the more visible mass movements of the 1920s and 1930s. The intellectual and literary environment around Aligarh during the First World War provides an important example. Poetry and prose had already become vehicles for commenting on contemporary political developments, and the circulation of writings associated with figures such as Shibli Nomani, Hasrat Mohani, Hashmi Faridabadi, Mohamed Ali, Abul Kalam Azad and Zafar Ali Khan helped create a political vocabulary through which colonial rule, Muslim concerns and questions of public action could be debated. Women were not entirely absent from this emerging political-literary sphere. The writings of Zay Khay Sheen, are particularly significant because they show how a Muslim woman could enter political discourse through literature at a time when conventional access to public politics remained restricted (Minault, n.d; Sherwani, 2018).

Constraints and Catalysts: The Socio-Cultural Context of United Provinces

The involvement of women in the nationalist movement of the United Provinces took place in an elaborate social setting, characterized by patriarchal norms, practices of purdah, illiteracy among women, immobility, and caste and religious differences. such factors posed barriers to women's education and participation in public affairs, at the same time, the nationalist politics brought about new avenues in which these barriers could be negotiated. This makes the United Provinces an important case to study the interaction of social barriers with political mobilization. The connection between gender, religion and political mobilization was especially complicated, as women had the potential to be both mobilizers and symbols through which collective identities were constructed (Basu, 1993).

Purdah and female seclusion were two of the major obstacles to women's involvement in public affairs, especially amongst Muslims and upper caste Hindus. Women were supposed to stay at home and refrain from politics altogether. But the nationalist movement provided conditions under which some women did break these barriers, one being the mother of nationalists, Maulana Mohammad Ali and Maulana Shaukat Ali, named Bi Amman of Amroha. In the period of Khilafat and Non-Cooperation, after the arrest of her two sons, she used to address political gatherings and go around various places in India. Her transition from maintaining purdah to appearing before political gatherings shows how nationalist activism could confront the prevailing norms of gender roles. Her case is an example of how political activism could be attained despite existing social constraints and how religious identity did not hinder women's anti-colonial activism.

Female illiteracy was yet another key structural constraint that existed at that time. Female illiteracy in the United Provinces of India according to the 1911 census report was very low. This reflects the general state of educational disparity that the women had faced during the colonial era. Restrictions on formal education meant that women could not participate through the traditional means of politics and knowledge. The focus of Gandhi on Khadi, charkha, swadeshi and constructive work facilitated the involvement of women through tasks which could be performed in the home environment. Charkha spinning changed a domestic chore into a nationalist task, whereas the use and promotion of khadi was in opposition to the dependence on British manufactured fabrics. Women made their contribution through fundraising, preparing nationalistic material, inspiring family members and taking part in boycott movements. Thus, political participation did not necessarily involve literacy or membership of organizations.

There were multiple social strata in the United Provinces, which had large numbers of Hindus and Muslims as well as caste and community groups. The diversities defined the nature of nationalism for women. Muslim women became very active during the movements of Khilafat and Non-Cooperation, where the struggle against colonialism met religion and politics. Bi Amman became one of the notable activists of this time. Lady Hasan Imam and Mrs. Mehmooda Sami were among those who engaged in Civil Disobedience Movement. Women in Hinduism, too, were active in swadeshi movements, engaging in forms of picketing and khadi production. The relation between religion and women's politics indicates that nationalism created space for women's mobilizations; it did so within certain gender and religious frameworks. Studies on women and nationalist politics have further established that the degree and nature of women's involvement was dependent on how the political parties engaged or failed to engage women in their organizational framework (Williams, 2013). The involvement of women was not merely confined to that of symbolic or supportive nature. In different aspects of the struggle for independence at the end of the colonial period, women also joined themselves in militancy and militarism in the nationalist movement, revealing thus the great scope of political activism among women outside the traditional family arena (Hills & Silverman, 1993). Even though such instances go beyond the geographic scope of the United Provinces, they are useful in locating the role of regional women in the broader process of the changing nature of women's political involvement during the last few decades of colonial rule.

Mechanisms of Participation: The Domestication of the Public Sphere

The involvement of women in politics within the United Provinces is not merely their transfer from the private sphere to the public sphere. Women have politicized and domesticated household traditions and gender norms in order to become active participants in the nationalist struggle. The above phenomenon can be explained through the theory of "domestication of the public sphere," wherein women have become politically active maintaining or compromising on traditional gender roles and norms of behavior. This gave rise to a unique form of political activism among women; however, it also shows the impact of patriarchal ideas on the nationalist movement (Banerjee, 2010). The formation of women's groups proved to be a vital institutional tool that enabled individual activism to translate into a form of political mobilization. In Meerut, there was the formation of the Mahila Satyagraha Samiti in order to organize women volunteers for the Civil Disobedience movement. There were also other groups such as the Mahila Charkha Sangh and the Bangle league which served as different forums for political mobilization, khadi activities, and boycotts. Importantly, out of the total number of about 500 volunteers belonging to the Congress movement in Meerut, 103 were women. This means that women constituted more than one-fifth of the reported Congress volunteers in the city, demonstrating that their participation was not merely symbolic. Moreover, they helped the women in establishing networks beyond the confines of their homes and provided experience in the organization of meetings, organizing volunteers, supporting Swadeshi, and even in organizing protests. It is important to note here that all such engagements took place within a certain context and were influenced by the social conventions regarding the gender roles of the women (Parr, 2023).

Picketing was one of the most notable aspects of women's political activism. Picketing included opposition to foreign textiles and liquors, blending economic nationalism with social reformism. According to an account from the Commissioner of Meerut Division, about 60 women along with the same number of men were found picketing shops, including the cantonment bazaar. In the beginning, merchants shut their shops but soon gave way to the women volunteers and had bales of foreign cloth sealed. This episode thus shows the efficacy of the involvement of women in nationalist movement: their involvement caused social and moral pressure; it also disrupted the colonial economic network. Moreover, the participation of women in liquor picketing also found support in the form of Mahatma Gandhi himself, who believed that women could use their moral force in challenging the drinking problem due to their moral standing in domestic and social sphere of life. Gandhi's support gave women greater political avenues, his reasoning often rested on stereotypical ideas of women's morality. This meant that the involvement of women was both a challenge to patriarchal control and worked via stereotypes of gender. The importance of the United Provinces does not only lie in the number of women who got involved but also in the manner in which they used their domestic respectability, morality and networks in their political struggles (Parr, 2023).

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The Symbolic Repertoire: Bangles, Holi, Oaths and Regional Mobilisation

The women of the United Provinces evolved a symbolic code of their own in which common items, festivals and social rituals became vehicles of nationalist politics. The use of bangles carried a special significance in that it involved a reversal of common gender symbolism. The use of bangles by women shamed Indian males who were viewed as loyal to the colonial administration, suggesting that political inactivity symbolized cowardice on their part. According to Satya Saxena of Kanpur, bangles were sent to loyal Indians in sealed packets and women even visited the home of T.D. Kochar, an executive officer of higher rank, and asked him to put on bangles. Such was not mere theater. The women used social honor, masculinity and social prestige where formal political power eluded them. This practice illustrates a contradiction since the women used the use of a gendered language to challenge the political dominance of the male authority in India by defining courage according to the masculine ideals (Sreenatha & Pan, 2026). Burning of foreign cloth became an effective mechanism of symbolism. In the Civil Disobedience Movement, public bonfires of foreign cloth in Meerut were likened to Holi, the Indian festival representing the triumph of good over evil. At the Nauchandi Mela in Meerut, it was stated that women held dharnas as long as fourteen hours a day and the Mahila Satyagraha Samiti threatened to burn foreign cloth in case a woman was arrested. Thus, the symbolism connected boycott to cultural nationalism in that foreign textiles were symbols of the economic dominance of the colonizers khadi was symbolic of local production and self-respect (Tarlo, 1991). However, colonial authorities of the time tended to view the practice of women's picketing as "tamasha" or a spectacle and referred to female protesters as politically irresponsible. But, the colonial regime was serious about such practices; the Prevention of Intimidation Ordinance of 1930 was expanded to include "molestation, boycott and unlawful instigation in connection with cloth and liquor picketing in districts including Muzaffarnagar, Dehradun, Bulandshahr and Saharanpur.

Taking of the oath became another vehicle through which commitment was turned into a common moral duty. In Meerut, Urmila Devi Shastri spoke at a gathering of prostitutes and convinced those present to take an oath to wear only khadi. This example is especially significant since it shows how nationalist mobilization included even women who were not members of the upper classes. The history of political activity of Urmila Devi Shastri serves as yet another example of the price of involvement in politics. She was arrested in Meerut in 1930 for boycotting British goods and liquor. She rejected the magistrate's proposal to be acquitted if she apologized and ended up being imprisoned. Her account of the experience is titled Kaaragaar (My Days in Prison) written in 1930, provides a rare first-person account of women's incarceration and the physical and psychological experience of colonial repression. Meerut therefore turned out to be one of the important sites for the mobilization of women. After the visit of Gandhi and political mobilization in the town in November 1920, women like Kamla Chaudhary, Urmila Shastri and Prakashvati Sud came to be associated with the nationalist movement. In the Civil Disobedience Movement era, the role of women's organizations including the Mahila Satyagraha Samiti, Stree Samaj and others was to offer organizational links for meetings, picketing, khadi work and social reforms. Evidence also indicates that women's activism was connected with wider reform concerns: Urmila Shastri advocated women's inheritance rights and the Arya Marriage Bill.

The regional trend was larger than Meerut. For instance, Agra saw vigorous protests against foreign cloth by the likes of Parvati Devi and Sukhdevi Paliwal. It is said that 150 shopkeepers signed pledges to refrain from selling foreign cloth for six months Sukhdevi Paliwal advised temple authorities in Firozabad to dress the deities in khadi and prevent those wearing foreign cloth from entering. From the above instances, it becomes clear that the role played by women was economic as well as religious in nature rather than merely through demonstrations (Basu, 1993). The rural–urban distinction, however, is crucial for a critical assessment. The cities provided educated and activist people and organizations and a means of communication network, but rural support cannot be seen as merely an extension of urban nationalism. Political agitation among peasants in Awadh had its own dynamic, and movements such as that led by Baba Ram Chandra provided the avenue for rural women to enter into anti-colonial politics. The scale of political agitation within the United Provinces can be understood from the colonial documents in which 25,523 political convictions were recorded in the period from 1930 until March 1933 in provinces like Meerut, Agra, Allahabad, Banaras and Awadh districts (Jassal, 1998; Pandey, 1982). Hence, women's participation should not be viewed merely as symbolic participation on behalf of Gandhi and the Congress. The use of symbols like bangles, khadi, Holi imagery, oaths, picketing and jail terms, and networks by women is an indication of political ingenuity amidst structural

conditions. However, the actions of these women were gendered to such an extent that it depicted women as moral and suitable for social reform. In other words, the above information portrays how there was a dual process of nationalism as women made new spaces through gendered actions of persuasion, protest, and sacrifice (Kumari, 2019).

Imprisonment and Sacrifice

Prison incarceration was one of the most important means of women's political participation in the period of Civil Disobedience Movement between 1930 and 1934. Women in the United Provinces were detained because of picketing foreign cloth and liquor shops, spreading illegal literature, organizing meetings, disobeying government orders and hoisting national flags. It is documented by colonial sources that women's participation had already gained such an importance that led to systematic monitoring and legal proceedings. According to official reports, as of 31 July 1932, 2,711 women in India were convicted of offences related to Civil Disobedience Movement, even though not all of them received jail sentences, and 1,020 women were imprisoned on 31 July 1932. The United Provinces recorded 10,766 people incarcerated in jail because of offences related to the Civil Disobedience Movement and 4,953 people convicted till the end of July 1932. These numbers illustrate the extent of colonial oppression; however, provincial statistics usually fail to account for women's contribution. (Thapar-Bjorkert, 1998).

The case of women prisoners also proves that being imprisoned was more than just symbolism. Kamala Nehru was convicted in 1930 for speaking to a Congress rally at Bhardhaya village in the United Provinces with a crowd of around 4,000-5,000 people. She was sentenced to six months' simple imprisonment for failing to assist in her prosecution. Evidence from contemporary times also indicates that fines were used as a means of punishment by the colonial government. Satyagrahis had two options: to pay the fine or else be arrested. However, by 13 March 1931, as many as 3,974 male and 36 female Civil Disobedience prisoners were released in the United Provinces as part of the Gandhi-Irwin compromise. The low number of female Civil Disobedience prisoners released does not imply their low involvement, since the arrest and prosecution of women depended on different stages and campaigns. Most women prisoners belonged to the middle class and led isolated lives before joining politics, which included purdah. Their confinement to the prison was at once an act of defiance against the colonial rule and subversion of gender roles. Women who were incarcerated in prison alongside their children or babies illustrate how gender roles also have something to do with political action. The prison situation has confined women in the space where politics and their assigned role of caring for babies met each other. Consequently, imprisonment was a site where colonial repression, gender inequality and nationalist agency intersected (Forbes, 1996).

Women's involvement in politics could not have been recorded only through arrests. "Homemakers were an influential political interest group which unfortunately was inadequately recorded." Women who stayed at home had the ability to offer food, shelter and communication channels to those involved in political activism; protect nationalistic literature; aid those wounded during the political activities; raise funds and encourage their husbands, sons and daughters to engage in politics. This helped change the role of home from a private entity to political infrastructure. Colonial sources recorded arrests and prosecutions but not unpaid domestic assistance. A woman who does not participate in processions is not necessarily non-political. She takes up the responsibility of taking care of her family her husband is in prison, gives resources to those involved in activism, or even encourages her children to become members of a nationalist group. This adds further meaning to participation and also helps build an argument that politics can happen inside the home in a nationalist mobilization effort (Sinha, 1997).

Participation of Muslim women was another issue which needed to be examined more critically than simply stating that their participation fell short during the Civil Disobedience period. For example, Bi Amman of Amroha had earlier shown the political role of Muslim women during the Khilafat and Non-Cooperation movements. In August 1921, during a tour of the United Provinces, both Bi Amman and Begum Mohammad Ali led the women in contributing jewelry for the nationalist cause. In Civil Disobedience time, women like Lady Hasan Imam and Mrs. Mehmooda Sami took part in boycott mobilization, women from elite Muslim household's negotiated purdah to enter nationalist activity. Their activism went against the colonial authorities and redefined gender roles in their societies (Nayak, 2020). Therefore, their sacrifice was not only in going to jail but also in making sacrifices financially, being critical socially, and disrupting domestic and political life

that had been deemed unsuitable for women. It is imperative to reclaim such acts of agency to acknowledge the different roles women played in anti-colonial politics (Anagol, 2008). The earlier literary intervention of Zay Khay Sheen provides an important antecedent to these more visible forms of mobilization. Her engagement with the Balkan and Tripolitan wars and the Kanpur Mosque controversy shows that Muslim women were participating in the formation of political opinion before their presence became more readily visible through organized nationalist activity (Minault, n.d).

CONCLUSION

The participation of women in the freedom movement of the United Provinces brings forth an important yet unexplored dimension to the history of India's ant colonial struggle. The present research work proves how nationalism was not only a product of leaders but also of common women who through their daily practices made their homes and the public spheres sites of politics. Against the backdrop of purdah, illiterate status, patriarchy, limited mobility, and other social fissures, women engaged in varied activities through protests, boycotts, picketing, khadi making, political gatherings, fundraising, and imprisonment and community mobilization. The formation of the various women's groups created valuable venues for collectivity and leadership at the grassroots level, and the example of individuals like Kamla Chaudhary, Urmila Shastri, Prakashvati Sud, Bi Amman, Lady Hasan Imam, and Mrs. Mehmooda Sami highlights the variety of ways through which women engaged politically. Such activism is an indication that Muslim women and women from diverse social groups cannot be considered peripheral to nationalist politics. Importantly, women transformed familiar cultural and domestic practices into political instruments, thereby challenging the conventional separation between private and public spheres. They were involved in accordance with the morality, sacrifice, and respectability associated with women through patriarchal expectations. It is evident that nationalism creates a contradiction when women are provided with political chances but remain confined within the patriarchal structure. Their imprisonment and social sacrifice prove that activism cost them greatly. The role played by homemakers, who are generally not included in any official documentation, is another example that indicates that participation in politics was not limited to overt acts of protests. Thus, a feminist approach to history reveals that women were political subjects and were not just supporting the cause of a male-dominated struggle. Further research into oral history, literary sources, correspondence, and district archives can enhance the process of writing women back into history in relation to the Indian freedom movement. The literary interventions of Zay Khay Sheen further broaden this understanding by showing that poetry and vernacular print culture could also serve as channels through which women entered the political life surrounding the freedom struggle.

Ethical Consideration

The study draws upon both primary and secondary historical sources**,** including colonial administrative records, government reports, newspapers, memoirs, letters, archival materials, scholarly books and peer-reviewed research articles. As the study does not involve interviews, surveys or direct interaction with living human participants, formal ethical approval was not required. Primary historical materials have been interpreted critically and in their appropriate historical context, with attention to the limitations and possible biases of colonial and nationalist records. All concepts, interpretations and analytical arguments presented in the study are the original work of the author. ChatGPT was used only for grammatical correction, language refinement and preparation of the conceptual figure**;** intellectual ownership, historical interpretation and analytical responsibility remain solely with the author. Proper citation, source acknowledgement and academic integrity have been maintained throughout the study.

Data Availability Statement

The study is based on primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include colonial administrative records, contemporary newspapers, government documents, memoirs, letters and other archival materials relating to women’s participation in the freedom struggle of the United Provinces. Secondary sources include scholarly books, peer-reviewed research articles and historiographical studies, particularly works examining women’s participation in the Indian national movement. The documentary and historical materials used in the study are appropriately cited within the paper and included in the reference list. Since the study does not involve primary data collection from living human participants, no confidential or personally identifiable

research data were generated. Additional source materials and information used in the historical analysis are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this research.

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