



Kashmiri Women in the Political Struggle Against Dogra Rule

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ABSTRACT

The historical narratives of Kashmir's freedom struggle have largely focused on male leadership, this study brings to light the powerful contributions of women from various social and economic backgrounds who broke traditional domestic boundaries to enter the public and political arenas. Anchored in feminist historiography and postcolonial theory, the paper examines pivotal events such as the 1931 protests, the Quit Kashmir movement, and the emergence of the Women's Self-Defense Corps, emphasizing the courage and leadership of women like Fazli, Jan Ded, Zoni Gujjari, Begum Abdullah, and others. These women engaged in street protests, resisted state violence, led social welfare campaigns, and stood beside men in confronting political oppression. Through archival research, eyewitness accounts, and historical texts, the study highlights how Kashmiri women redefined their societal roles during a transformative period in the region's political history. Their agency, resilience, and sacrifices played an essential role in shaping the discourse of resistance and laying the groundwork for gender-inclusive political participation in Jammu and Kashmir's socio-political evolution.



INTRODUCTION

The history of Kashmir's political evolution, particularly during the Dogra regime, has often been narrated through the lens of elite male leadership, military upheavals, and regional geopolitics. However, a more nuanced understanding of this tumultuous period emerges when the experiences and contributions of Kashmiri women are placed at the center of analysis. The research article authored by Aadil Nazir Bhat takes a bold step in shifting this historical narrative by investigating how Kashmiri women transcended their traditional domestic confines to emerge as influential political actors during the resistance against Dogra authoritarianism. This scholarly work not only explores their symbolic and practical roles in the anti-Dogra movement but also offers a compelling reassessment of gender dynamics in pre-independence Kashmir. In doing so, the study underscores the organic nature of women's participation, revealing how socio-political repression inadvertently galvanized a generation of women into political consciousness and public action. Their emergence onto the political stage is portrayed not as a product of elite-led reformist campaigns or top-down feminist mobilization but as a grassroots assertion of agency born of necessity, courage, and resilience.

The research is situated in the broader intellectual frameworks of feminist historiography and postcolonial resistance. The former is critical in recovering the voices and agency of women from historical amnesia, while the latter interrogates the colonial and feudal structures that marginalized subaltern narratives. In Bhat's study, feminist historical revisionism challenges the patriarchal erasure embedded in the mainstream chronicles of Kashmir's freedom movement. The postcolonial framework, on the other hand, situates the Dogra regime as a proxy of British imperial interests, thereby understanding the anti-Dogra struggle as both an indigenous resistance and an anti-colonial campaign. It is within this layered historical and ideological context that the transformation of Kashmiri women from passive subjects into active agents is examined. Rather than depicting them as auxiliary figures in a male-dominated movement, the paper accords women a central role in initiating and sustaining protests, organizing resistance activities, and enduring state-sponsored violence. Their political agency, especially in the 1930s and 1940s, becomes a significant indicator of the social transformation that was underway.

A critical turning point, and the catalyst for this transformation, was the 1931 arrest and trial of Abdul Qadeer, whose fiery speech against the Dogra monarchy resonated with a deeply disenfranchised Muslim population in Kashmir. What began as a spontaneous mass protest soon escalated into a series of large-scale demonstrations. Most remarkably, this wave of political mobilization witnessed an unprecedented involvement of women from the working classes—many of whom were illiterate, economically marginalized, and culturally conditioned to remain within domestic boundaries. Defying these constraints, these women flooded the streets, engaged in sloganeering, braved bullets, and confronted the state machinery with fearless determination. The study's narrative makes it clear that this was not a momentary or accidental involvement; it was the beginning of a sustained female engagement with politics that would continue throughout the 1930s and 1940s. Their acts of resistance were not only political statements but also radical social disruptions that challenged entrenched norms about female propriety and submission.

Among the notable aspects of the paper is its documentation of specific instances of women's heroism. Figures like Fazli, Sajida Bano, Jan Ded, and Zoni Gujjari are elevated from the footnotes of history to the main stage of political resistance. Their sacrifices, whether in the form of martyrdom, public speaking, or organizational leadership, reveal a hidden dimension of Kashmir's struggle for freedom. Particularly striking is the account of Jan Ded, who, despite her lack of formal education, emerged as a vocal and pragmatic leader who prioritized secularism and practical resistance over rhetorical sloganeering. The study also provides detailed depictions of mass female mobilizations such as the women-led black flag procession of July 1931 and the thousands-strong Kashmir Day assembly at Mazar-e-Shohada. These events illustrate the depth and breadth of women's political participation, which extended far beyond symbolic gestures. They bore the brunt of state violence, endured molestation and imprisonment, and in some cases, sacrificed their lives. The martyrdom of women like Fazli and Sajida Bano was not merely collateral damage; it was emblematic of their unyielding commitment to the cause.

One of the paper's significant contributions is its recognition of how these early resistances laid the groundwork for subsequent political



developments, including the rise of the National Conference and the framing of the “New Kashmir” manifesto. This document, which proposed equal political, economic, and cultural rights for women, cannot be seen in isolation from the earlier mass mobilizations that demonstrated the capacity and determination of Kashmiri women. The articulation of women’s rights in the “New Kashmir” program was thus not a condescending gift from male leaders but a formal acknowledgment of a reality already being shaped on the ground by brave and committed women. Moreover, the leadership roles taken up by women like Begum Akbar Jahan and Begum Zainab in the later stages of the freedom movement underscore the shift from spontaneous mass participation to structured and strategic political involvement. These women not only led protests but also managed relief efforts, addressed public gatherings, and worked in close coordination with male political leaders, often stepping in when those leaders were imprisoned or incapacitated.

The paper also delves into the transformation of Kashmiri society’s perception of women’s roles. The visibility of women in public protests disrupted the conservative boundaries of purdah and domesticity, leading to a gradual, albeit contested, acceptance of women’s public and political presence. This transformation was particularly pronounced during the Quit Kashmir movement of 1946, where women’s participation reached unprecedented levels. The study presents compelling examples of women who faced multiple incarcerations and physical assaults, yet returned to the streets with renewed vigor. Zoni Gujjari’s repeated detentions and the tragic loss of her child in police violence symbolize the intertwined nature of personal grief and collective resistance. Similarly, the stories of women like Fatima, a peasant who was shot while leading a protest, or Begum Bohru, who retaliated against police abuse and was killed instantly, serve to challenge any lingering doubts about the depth of female commitment to the freedom cause.

Another crucial insight of the paper is the role of organizations like the Women’s Self-Defense Corps (WSDC) and the National Militia in institutionalizing women’s political involvement. The participation of women in these formations was not merely symbolic; it involved rigorous training, strategic planning, and actual combat preparedness. The emergence of these bodies signaled a fundamental shift in the conception of resistance—from spontaneous outbursts to organized,

disciplined struggle. Figures like Mehmuda Ahmad Shah and Sajida Zameer Ahmad, who worked in refugee camps and led educational initiatives, extended the struggle beyond mere protest into the realms of reconstruction and social reform. The WSDC, in particular, stands out as a precursor to the broader women’s rights movements that would take shape in post-independence India. Its emphasis on education, political awareness, and defense training represents a holistic vision of women’s empowerment grounded in both immediate political needs and long-term societal transformation.

Equally significant is the paper’s critique of historiographical neglect. Despite their undeniable contributions, Kashmiri women have remained largely invisible in mainstream historical accounts of the region’s freedom struggle. The reasons for this are multifold—patriarchal biases in historical documentation, the elitist orientation of traditional historiography, and the overwhelming focus on high politics at the expense of grassroots mobilizations. By centering women’s narratives, the paper offers a corrective to these limitations and opens up new avenues for historical research. It calls for a re-examination of the sources used in writing the history of Kashmir, urging scholars to pay attention to oral histories, local records, and community archives that preserve the memory of female activism. In doing so, it aligns itself with a growing body of feminist scholarship that seeks to democratize historical knowledge and give voice to the marginalized.

Moreover, the study situates the struggle of Kashmiri women within the larger context of South Asian anti-colonial movements. It draws parallels with similar developments in other parts of India, such as the participation of women in the Salt March, the Non-Cooperation Movement, and the Quit India Movement. However, it also emphasizes the uniqueness of the Kashmiri context, where the double burden of fighting both feudal oppression and colonial domination created a distinct trajectory of resistance. The intersectionality of gender, class, and religion is particularly salient in this narrative. Most of the women who participated in the early phases of the movement were not only unlettered but also belonged to economically disadvantaged Muslim communities. Their political awakening was thus not only a reaction to political injustice but also an assertion of socio-economic dignity and religious identity in a hostile environment.



The historical setting of Kashmir's freedom struggle paints a vivid tableau of resistance, where women from various strata of society emerged as key figures. This paper seeks to explore and acknowledge the remarkable, yet often overshadowed role of Kashmiri women in the anti-Dogra and anti-colonial movements. Their contributions, transcending class and educational boundaries, were instrumental in shaping the region's quest for autonomy and justice. Theoretical underpinnings of this analysis are rooted in feminist historical revisionism and postcolonial theory. By examining the participation of women in the Kashmiri struggle through a feminist lens, this paper aims to bring forth the narratives of those who fought valiantly yet remained uncelebrated in mainstream historical discourse. Postcolonial theory further aids in understanding the complexities of their resistance against an oppressive regime within the broader context of colonialism and its aftermath. The onset of the struggle against Dogra rule witnessed an organic and spontaneous participation of women, primarily from the lower socioeconomic classes. The trial of Abdul Qadeer in 1931, a significant event in Kashmir's history, ignited widespread protests. Women, often illiterate and from humble backgrounds, stood shoulder to shoulder with men, challenging the oppressive Dogra regime. Their involvement was not a result of mobilization by the educated elite; rather, it was their movement that later inspired the participation of educated women. This phase of the struggle was marked by a raw, unfiltered expression of resistance, transcending the boundaries of traditional gender roles.

Review of Literature

The historical narrative of Kashmir's political resistance against the Dogra regime has largely been male-dominated, with limited scholarly attention paid to the contributions of women. However, in recent decades, there has been a growing interest in re-evaluating subaltern voices and revisiting the overlooked roles that Kashmiri women played in shaping the region's socio-political transformation. This literature review critically examines existing scholarship that intersects with gender, resistance, and colonial rule in Kashmir, with a focus on the Dogra period (1846–1947), while also integrating feminist historiography and postcolonial theoretical insights that support the analysis offered in the primary research article by Aadil Nazir Bhat.

The Dogra regime, which began with the Treaty of Amritsar in 1846 and ended with the political changes of 1947, was marked by systemic feudal oppression, economic exploitation, and religious marginalization, particularly of the Muslim population. As noted by Dar and Nengroo (2015), resistance against Dogra rule took many forms—from armed struggle to silent protest—and involved a complex interplay of class, religion, and regional politics. While these forms of resistance are well-documented, most historical accounts either minimize or ignore the role of women. Their absence in mainstream historiography underscores a patriarchal bias that prioritizes formal leadership and militarized resistance over grassroots activism and collective mobilization, domains where women played an indispensable role.

To challenge such narrative exclusions, feminist scholars have employed the method of historical revisionism. Pioneers of subaltern studies like Gayatri Spivak have famously asked whether the subaltern can speak, a question that resonates profoundly with the silencing of Kashmiri women's voices in traditional accounts. In the context of Kashmir, researchers such as P.N. et al. (2005) in *Daughters of Vitasta* have attempted to reclaim these voices by documenting biographical sketches of prominent female figures. These accounts illuminate the multidimensional lives of women like Begum Abdullah and Zoni Gujjari, who transcended domestic boundaries to become integral parts of the political landscape. However, many of these contributions remain scattered across regional publications or memoirs and lack the analytical depth to assess their broader socio-political significance.

The early 1930s represent a critical phase in Kashmir's resistance movement, particularly following the arrest of Abdul Qadeer in 1931. Bhat et al. (2010) argue that the 1931 uprising marked a foundational moment in Kashmir's political awakening, with large-scale participation by marginalized communities. Yet, their analysis still centers largely on male leadership, with only passing references to female protestors. In contrast, the article by Aadil Nazir Bhat foregrounds the agency of women during this uprising, offering a corrective to such gender-blind historiography. His identification of working-class, illiterate women as the first to join the resistance reorients the focus away from elite, educated activists and highlights a more inclusive and authentic story of mass mobilization.



Further literature that corroborates women's role in these movements can be found in the works of G.H. Khan (1980), whose extensive chronicle *Freedom Movement in Kashmir 1931–1940* provides valuable insights into the grassroots mobilizations during this period. While Khan's work is more inclusive than many of his contemporaries, it still lacks a sustained gendered analysis. He documents key protests, such as the black flag demonstrations and Kashmir Day processions, and notes women's presence in these events. However, he often portrays their involvement as supportive or symbolic rather than central and transformative. It is here that Bhat's research intervenes, repositioning women not as auxiliaries but as leaders, martyrs, and strategists within the resistance framework.

The All India Kashmir Committee, established in 1931, is another focal point for analyzing women's activism. As Sheikh and Bodha (2016) explain, this committee played a pivotal role in connecting Kashmir's struggle with broader nationalist currents in India. It was instrumental in organizing and publicizing events like Kashmir Day, where tens of thousands of women congregated to express solidarity and political demand. These events provide rich terrain for feminist analysis, particularly in understanding how public space was negotiated and contested by women for political expression. Unfortunately, very few scholarly works have delved into the gender dynamics of these mass gatherings, leaving a gap that Bhat's article begins to fill.

The transformation of the Muslim Conference into the National Conference in 1939 marked another significant political shift, one that had profound implications for women's participation. This shift aligned the Kashmiri freedom movement more closely with secular and socialist ideals, reflected in the 1944 *New Kashmir* manifesto. As Yasin and Yasin (1996) point out, this document was revolutionary in its affirmation of gender equality, promising women the right to vote, hold office, and access equal employment. Although the manifesto is often celebrated, few studies link it directly to the activism of the preceding decade, which laid the groundwork for such progressive commitments. Bhat's article is instrumental in bridging this gap by showing how the visibility and sacrifices of women in the 1930s necessitated a political response that formalized their rights and acknowledged their agency.

In terms of institutional participation, the emergence of the Women's Self-Defense Corps (WSDC) during the 1947 tribal invasions is a largely understudied chapter. Saraf (1977), in *Kashmiris Fight For Freedom*, makes brief mention of the formation of the WSDC and the National Militia, recognizing the strategic roles played by women in defending the state. However, the emotional, ideological, and symbolic implications of these formations remain under-analyzed. Bhat extends this analysis by interpreting the WSDC as both a military and cultural force, one that redefined notions of femininity, courage, and national belonging. The visual imagery of women in traditional Kashmiri attire wielding rifles becomes emblematic of a new societal order where gender hierarchies are disrupted by necessity and conviction.

The historiographical neglect of these women also points to a broader trend in postcolonial scholarship where regional movements are subsumed under national narratives, often marginalizing local peculiarities and gendered resistances. Rashid's *Tarikh-e-Hurriyat-i-Kashmir* (1968), while comprehensive in scope, remains patriarchal in its framing of political events, treating women as secondary players. In contrast, Bhat's study underscores the necessity of decentralizing historical writing to accommodate micro-histories that can bring to light stories that lie buried under dominant political discourses.

Research Objectives

The present research article aims to uncover and illuminate the underrepresented role of Kashmiri women in the anti-Dogra movement. It focuses on analysing their cross-class participation, the evolution of their protest strategies, and their impact on challenging traditional gender norms within the broader context of India's struggle for independence.

Research Methods

The methodology involves a review of historical documents, archival materials, and eyewitness accounts to analyse the role of Kashmiri women in the anti-Dogra movement. This study employs qualitative analysis to interpret the data, ensuring a nuanced understanding of the women's contributions and the socio-political context of their actions.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Kashmiri women notably contributed to the resistance against Dogra dominance. At a gathering in Khanqa-he-Maula, Abdul Qadeer, a non-local Muslim in Srinagar, made a notable statement about their lack of firearms but abundance of stones and brickbats. His arrest on June 25, 1931, led to his trial beginning on July 6, 1931, at Srinagar's high court, culminating in a verdict at the central jail on July 13, 1931. An estimated crowd of 4,000 to 5,000 people, chanting slogans like "Allaho-akbar" and "Qadeer Zindabaad," witnessed the trial and faced police gunfire, resulting in many casualties.¹ Remarkably, working-class Muslim women valiantly joined men in opposing Dogra tyranny. Initially, these resilient women, mostly from lower socio-economic backgrounds and lacking formal education, spearheaded the movement, which educated women later joined. Following martial law's implementation, Srinagar experienced severe repression, with Kashmiris subjected to humiliating acts of allegiance to Dogra authority. In this period, women, including those with infants, actively protested in the streets against the Dogra regime, calling for the release of detained leaders and the establishment of democracy in Kashmir. These demonstrations often met with brutal police action, resulting in abuse, molestation, and fatalities, with bodies found in Srinagar's rivers. On July 27, a women-led procession with black flags emerged, and on September 6, when military control intensified, a group of female demonstrators faced violent suppression. During a speech on August 2, 1931, a female orator underscored their resilience and appealed to international bodies for support, challenging the army's treatment of women and vowing to confront any oppression.²

In the city, frequent marches of women and children became a regular occurrence, with constant updates about these demonstrations emerging from various city areas. Observers often saw Ladi Shah reciting state-critical ballads, surrounded by large crowds of supportive women. These ballads typically featured a recurring chorus. Following an appeal by the All India Kashmir Committee, the state widely observed Kashmir Day on August 14, 1931. The goal was to exert pressure on the Indian government to recognize and grant the basic rights withheld from Kashmiris.³ A complete shutdown (Hartal) was observed, with numerous processions and gatherings. Around thirty thousand women attended a significant assembly at Mazar-e-shohada, with speeches from Sheikh Mohammed

Abdullah, Chaudhri Ghulam Abbas Khan, and Mistri Yaqub Ali. A subsequent large gathering took place at Jamia Masjid, where the martyrs' bloodied garments were displayed. Delhi's Muslim community marked Kashmir Day over two days. The first instance of armed resistance by Kashmiri Muslims against government overreach occurred on September 24, 1931. Notices were plastered across Srinagar, declaring a Jihad against the government, yet affirming no conflict with Hindus. By early afternoon, approximately fifteen thousand individuals, armed with various tools and weapons, had gathered.⁴

During the tumultuous events of 1931, a notable figure, Fazli, tragically lost her life on September 24 when the military opened fire on a women's procession in Maisuma bazaar, Srinagar. In a similar incident, 25-year-old Sajida Bano, a recent widow from Shopian, was fatally wounded by military gunfire, passing away immediately. Additionally, Jan Begum from Srinagar, bereaved spouse of Abel Lone, also fell victim to police gunfire. These women, despite their lack of education and lower social standing, were precursors to the movement that later saw the participation of educated women.⁵

Jan Ded, another significant but often overlooked figure in the struggle, emerged from humble beginnings. Despite her lack of formal education, she was a dynamic participant in the struggle against injustice, distinguishing herself with her pragmatic approach and commitment to secular values, setting her apart from many of Kashmir's male political figures. Her bold and assertive nature eventually led to opposition from senior Muslim leaders, resulting in her withdrawal from active politics post-1934.⁶ A memorandum to the Maharaja sheds light on the severe mistreatment endured by both men and women: unprovoked attacks by constables, arbitrary arrests, and extreme violence under martial law, leading to the dishonoring and destruction of Muslim homes, with numerous incidents of assault and even killings during protests, such as the one on September 22 at the Jamia Masjid.⁷ The military's response was severe, with numerous rounds fired, resulting in the death of three protesters on the spot and injuries to many others. Concurrently, in Maisuma, the military's gunfire targeted a different procession, which included women, resulting in the deaths of two men and injuries to three individuals, one of whom was a woman. Women's processions became a notable aspect of the protests in various parts of



Srinagar and in the towns of Baramulla, Sopore, Islamabad (Anantnag), and Shopian. The courage of these Kashmiri women, traditionally homebound and unaware of their rights, was remarkable as they stood resolutely alongside men in their struggle against Dogra domination.⁸ On August 18, a tragic incident occurred when a Muslim vegetable seller was assaulted by Pandit youths near Khankah-esokhta, leaving her almost unclothed. Later, a Muslim woman's body was found in a river, suspected to have been drowned by soldiers after a heinous assault.⁹

On January 28, 1932, a significant women-led procession was halted near Jhelum's right bank as the police obstructed their path, with a sub-inspector hurling insults at political leaders. In a striking act of defiance, Begum Bohru, a widow from Baramulla, threw a kangri filled with hot coals at the sub-inspector, permanently disfiguring his face, but she was fatally shot immediately thereafter. Noor Gujri, a milkman's daughter known for her bold statements and acts, was repeatedly arrested and released, drawing attention and support from national leaders who criticized her unjust imprisonment.¹⁰ In 1939, the transformation of the Muslim Conference into the National Conference marked a crucial change. The Quit India Movement, launched by the Indian National Congress in 1942, led to the arrest of many leaders. By mid-1943, these leaders were released and visited Srinagar in the summers of 1944 and 1945, maintaining close ties with Sheikh Abdullah. Despite Abdullah's non-involvement in the Quit India Movement and differing policy stances, Congress leaders overlooked these differences to strengthen their bond with him. The annual party session took place in Srinagar at Pather Masjid from September 25 to 30, 1944.¹¹

The significance of the session lay in its adoption of a comprehensive program for Kashmir's socio-political and economic development, termed "New Kashmir." This groundbreaking manifesto was a milestone in women's rights, as it not only provided them the privilege to vote and stand in elections but also assured them of equal status with men in various spheres, including politics, economics, culture, and state services. During the period from 1939 to May 1944, while the freedom movement in Kashmir did not escalate into widespread agitation, the persistent call for reforms and the establishment of a responsible government continued vigorously.¹²

Following the announcement of election results across the subcontinent, the British Government initiated a dialogue with Indian political leaders through a cabinet mission, aiming to formulate a mutually acceptable framework for power transition. In this context, Sheikh Abdullah presented a memorandum famously known as the "Quit Kashmir Memorandum."¹³ This document emphasized that the aspirations of the Kashmiri people transcended beyond the mere establishment of a responsive governance system. It asserted the Kashmiri's right to complete liberation from the autocratic Dogra rule. Abdullah's memorandum highlighted Kashmir's unique position - geographically important at the confluence of India, China, and Russia, and symbolically significant as a land enriched by its natural beauty and resources.¹⁴ More importantly, he pointed out that Kashmir, with its linguistic, cultural, and historical homogeneity, represented a unique blend of communities united in their quest for national self-determination.¹⁵

In the tumultuous period of 1946, Sheikh Abdullah catalyzed a significant political upheaval in the state of Jammu and Kashmir with the initiation of the "Quit Kashmir" movement. This movement, which began with Sheikh Abdullah's fervent speech in Srinagar on May 15, 1946, marked a turning point in the region's history. It was characterized by widespread public demonstrations and meetings, notably at prominent locations like Khanqah-e-Maula and Hazratbal, drawing substantial participation from the local population, particularly women from various backgrounds.¹⁶ These women, transcending socio-economic divisions, actively engaged in the movement, demonstrating their commitment to the cause through their spirited participation in public processions and meetings. This defiance was not without risk, as evidenced by the story of Zoni Gujri, a young woman who faced repeated incarcerations and assaults by armed forces.¹⁷ Despite these hardships, her resolve never wavered. Her poignant story is further marred by personal tragedy, as she lost her young son to police violence during a demonstration.¹⁸

Similarly, the story of Fatima, a peasant woman, stands as a testament to the brutality faced by demonstrators. Fatima was fatally shot by the Dogra forces in Anantnag while leading a protest march. This incident underscores the harsh reality of the movement, where even peaceful protesters were met with lethal force.¹⁹ The presence of armed Dogra soldiers, patrolling the streets with bayonets



at the ready, created an atmosphere of intimidation and fear. The "Quit Kashmir" movement, while often linked to the Indian National Congress's influence, showcased a more complex relationship. While it is true that prominent Congress leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru lent their support to Sheikh Abdullah, the movement itself faced criticism from Congress-affiliated media outlets. This indicates a nuanced interaction between the national political landscape and regional movements.²⁰ Among the key figures of the movement were women who played important roles in both organizing and participating in demonstrations. Begum Zainab, for instance, broke away from traditional purdah norms to lead protests and deliver empowering speeches. Her efforts in fundraising for victims of Dogra aggression were crucial in sustaining the movement's momentum.²¹

Another prominent figure was Begum Akbar Jahan, Sheikh Abdullah's wife. Following her husband's arrest, she took an active leadership role in the movement. Her involvement went beyond leading protests; she was instrumental in raising funds for those affected by the Dogra regime's repression. Her actions were a beacon of hope and resilience, inspiring many to continue the struggle.²² The "Quit Kashmir" movement represented a crucial juncture in the history of Jammu and Kashmir. It was a movement that not only challenged the existing political order but also transformed the socio-political landscape of the region. The active participation of women, often facing severe repercussions, highlighted their indispensable role in the freedom struggle. Their courage and determination in the face of adversity played a vital role in shaping the movement and left an indelible mark on the history of Kashmir.²³ These women, hailing from diverse backgrounds, stood united in their fight against oppression. Their contribution, often overshadowed by the narratives centered around male leaders, was fundamental to the movement's progress. Their stories of bravery, sacrifice, and leadership challenge the conventional narratives of political movements being predominantly male-driven.²⁴

In February of 1947, the state's cost of living reported a significant rise, which was cause for concern. For the purpose of providing food at subsidised prices, the National Conference established a food committee, with Begum Abdullah serving as the body's head. A widespread movement against the ever-increasing expense of living was initiated by her. 1947 was the year that

saw the establishment of both India and Pakistan. Although Sheikh Abdullah was granted his freedom in September 1947, he continued to maintain his opposition to the two-nation doctrine.²⁵ Maharaja Hari Singh found himself in a difficult situation as a result of his choice to belong to either India or Pakistan. On the one hand, the Dogra Hindu community that is a part of the Maharaja's family would find itself in a position of subservience if the state were to become a member of Pakistan. The prospects of an independent state were fostered by him.²⁶ There was a ratification of an agreement between the Maharaja's authority and the government of Pakistan in August of 1947. This agreement indicated that the Pakistani government would take responsibility for the state's post and telegraph system and provide the state with vital goods; however, India refused to comply with this arrangement until the political prisoners were released. Due to the fact that the Maharaja declined, the agreement was seen to be inconclusive. An unwavering commitment to India was made by the National Conference, which also expressed its support for the incorporation of Kashmir into India.²⁷ During the National Conference, individuals were requested to collectively contribute their firearms and automobiles. We organised training sessions for those who volunteered their time. It was at this point that the people's militia in Kashmir established its existence. Also joining the militia were young women. When Zoni Gujjari joined the women's defence force, she underwent military training at a location that is currently the location of the New Secretariat building. During this time period, she exerted a great deal of effort so that the Dogra government could be overthrown and Kashmir could undergo democratic reform.²⁸ The title of "Zoni Mujahid" was bestowed to her as a manner of expressing gratitude for her services. Volunteer troops consisting of both men and women were formed under the leadership of Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah National Militia and Women's Defence Corps in order to protect the territory from the assault that was being carried out by the tribal raiders. The Women's Self-Defense Corps (WSDC) became the forerunner of societal transformations as a result of the radical and diversified actions it engaged in. Gujjari, who was dressed in traditional Kashmiri garb and slung a rifle across her shoulders, was a representation of the Women's Democratic Socialist Congress (WDSC). As a prominent member of the women's section of the Peace Brigade, which fought against the Pakistani



invaders, Begum Abdullah was also a prominent figure. "Begum Abdullah was a woman who was not only highly intelligent but also a devoted Muslim." During the year 1947, when the nation was in the midst of a communal frenzy, she was the one who took the flame of love and peace to remote regions spread across the state. She provided the victims of the division with the motherly care and affection that they needed in order to recover.²⁹ It was only because of her hard efforts that the state of Jammu and Kashmir was able to avoid the religious violence that would have otherwise occurred. It was the people of Kashmir who bestowed upon her the honorific of "Mader-e-Meherban," which translates to "kind mother." Miss Mehmuda Ahamd Shah, a pioneering educationist and promoter of women's empowerment, together with other outstanding women, was in the vanguard of WSDC.³⁰ At the time that she was a student in Lahore, she became a member of the Punjab Students Federation, which was engaged in a struggle against the imperialism of the British. She established a "Free thinkers society" in Kashmir, which served to bring together the intellectuals of the people in the state. During this time, she became a member of the Freedom Movement, which was led by Sheikh Abdullah. During a time when the subcontinent was in the midst of a communal frenzy, she did a great service by restoring normalcy to the state. Following that, there was Begum Zainab, a leader at the grassroots level. Under the auspices of the National Congress, she actively fought against the Dogra rule. With a

gun in her hand, she was at the forefront of leading women's contingents and taking charge of the political agenda of the Women's Social Democratic Congress (WSDC).³¹ In the later stages of the Quit Kashmir Movement, Sajida Zameer Ahmad was also someone who was associated with the movement. In 1947, she became a member of the World Service for Development and began working in a number of refugee camps.

CONCLUSION

In the quest for Kashmir's freedom, the role of women was remarkably prominent. Numerous women, transcending the safety and familiarity of their homes, actively engaged in the quest for Kashmir's liberation. Regrettably, historical accounts have often overlooked their significant contributions. This paper endeavors to shed light on and honor the vital role these women played in Kashmir's freedom movement. A key observation from our research reveals that these women stood shoulder to shoulder with men in their fight against Dogra and colonial oppression, demonstrating gender parity in their struggle. Additionally, it was observed that this participation transcended socio-economic boundaries, with women from various social classes actively participating in Kashmir's nationalist movement.

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