**Role of Muslim Women in the Creation of Pakistan (Part II)**

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By winning 79 out of the 175 seats in the Punjab Legislature, the Muslim League emerged as the biggest group in the province and was expecting to be invited to form the provincial government. Instead, the governor allowed the Union Party, in alliance with the Congress and the Akali Sikhs to form a coalition government. This created considerable resentment among the Muslim population, which had overwhelmingly voted for the Muslim League; enabling it to win 79 out of the 86 Muslim seats. As a result, meetings were held and processions were taken out to protest against the imposition of a non-Muslim League government. The Provincial Women’s Sub-Committee joined the fray and, besides passing a resolution on March 8, 1946, condemning this “unconstitutional and unjust act,” it also took out a peaceful procession by 500 Muslim women and girl students outside the Chief Minister’s residence (Eastern Times, March 9, 1946). This feeling of discontent continued to simmer for the next few months amidst an atmosphere of political tension. The situation took a turn for the worse when, on January 24, 1947, the Unionist Government banned the Muslim League National Guard and declared its flag and uniform as being illegal. When the Muslim League’s leaders resisted, the police arrested Khan Iftikhar Husain Khan, Sardar Shaukat Hayat Khan, Malik Feroze Khan Noon, Mian Iftikhar-ud-Din, Mian Mumtaz Daultana, Sayyid Amir Hasan Shah and Begum Jahanara Shahnawaz. On the same day, another police party raided the residence of Sayyid Amir Hasan Shah, where women leaders of the Muslim League drew lots to decide as to whom among them should have the privilege of offering voluntary arrest. As a result Begum Kamal-ud-Din, a visiting leader from the NWFP, was arrested (Eastern Times, March 9, 1946). On the next day, large gatherings of Muslim women and college girls took out peaceful processions in the streets and bazaars of Lahore; chanting slogans such as, “Lay kar rahain gay Pakistan.” Even though they were baton-charged, tear-gassed and four women were arrested, they were not intimidated.

On the same day, Begum Salma Tasaddaqque, along with 15 other Muslim women, was arrested and Section 144 was imposed in Lahore. As the main leaders were arrested, other well-known women such as Begum Bashir Ahmad, Begum Viqar-un-Nisa Noon, Begum Shaukat Hayat and some women leaders from other provinces stepped into the breach. They continued with the policy of mounting peaceful processions and protest demonstrations. On February 14, 1946, three young burqa-clad girls entered the goal premises where the arrested women leaders were being kept, climbed the building and hoisted the League flag shouting “Allah-o-Akbar” (God is great). They were dragged off and beaten up. This led to a massive procession by Muslim women that continued on its path towards the Secretariat, despite being heavily baton-charged (Inqilab newspaper, February 17, 1947). Later, a thirteen-year-old girl named Fatima Sughra climbed the gate of the Secretariat, removed the Union Jack and replaced it with the League flag. This was the first time that the Muslim League flag had flown over a government building in place of the Union Jack. Eventually, the Punjab Government felt compelled to release all the arrested leaders on February 26, 1947. The contribution of the Muslim women of Punjab, in this phase of street agitation, can best be summed up in the following words, “The women – old and young, educated and illiterate, aristocratic and poor – unflinchingly joined in and spearheaded the agitation after the arrest of the Provincial Muslim League leaders, with complete harmony and unanimity” (Eastern Times, March 1, 1947).

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Although most of the activities described above took place in Lahore and Karachi, the Muslim women of the NWFP also played a crucial role, both during the election campaign of 1945-6 and the Referendum of July 1947, including the civil disobedience campaign that preceded it. Even though the Pathan women were relatively late starters, having entered into the political fray very close to the 1946 Elections, the Muslim League’s Provincial Women’s Sub-Committee fulfilled its role remarkably. It arranged meetings in Peshawar, Mardan, Bannu, Kohat, Abbottabad, Nowshera, Dera Ismail Khan and many far-flung areas, and launched a determined election campaign that preached the Muslim League’s political message in every city and village. However, the final election results were a bit disappointing, in the sense that the Muslim League could win only 17 out of a total of 36 seats. This allowed Congress to continue forming the Government under Dr Khan, in a Muslim majority province (Sarfaraz Hussain Mirza, The Role of Muslim Women in the Pakistan Movement).

The Civil Disobedience Campaign that the Punjab Muslim League had started against the Unionist-Congress-Akali Sikh coalition government in the province had its effect on the populace of the NWFP. Here too, a Congress-led government was ruling a Muslim majority province. Consequently, in the wake of mounting public resentment against the government’s repressive actions in the Hazara District, its restrictions on holding Muslim League meetings and demonstrations, and the arrest of Khan Abdul Qayum Khan along with several other Muslim League leaders in February 1947, the decision was taken to mount a civil disobedience campaign against the Provincial Government. The Muslim women of the Province surprised everyone by the extent and effectiveness of their participation. On February 20, 1947, when the women of Mardan took out a procession in defiance of Section 144, they signalled the new parameters of their participation. This was soon followed by an even more surprising development when, in March 1947, a group of 30 unveiled Pathan women commenced their march from the residence of Begum Abdul Waheed, President of the Peshawar City Women’s Sub-Committee, and walked in various bazaars and streets of the City (Sayyid Muhammad Tufail Ahmad Badar, Aftab-i-Haram). Similar processions took place on March 12, 13 and 15, 1947. While old men shed tears, the excited masses joined the women and swelled their numbers. The women retained their composure, discipline and determination even when they were baton-charged, tear-gassed and on one occasion, even fired at. They picketed the police stations and mounted protests in front of the Civil Secretariat. They soon developed a routine of violating Section 144 in front of the District Courts and hoisting Muslim League flags on Government buildings (Inqilab newspaper, April 12, 1947). On April 1, 1947, the Provincial Women’s Sub-Committee held a meeting presided over by its President, Begum Khawaja Allah Bux. This was attended by a large number of women who passed a resolution asking the Chief Minister, Dr Khan to resign and hold fresh elections (Zamindar, April 2, 1947). Two days later, a procession of about 1500 women marched to the Chief Minister’s residence and hoisted the Muslim League flag over it. On April 9, another large women’s procession, under Fatima Begum, condemned the Government’s “unwarranted and uncalled for black laws”( Eastern Times, April 12, 23 and 24, 1947). The process was repeated on April 14, 22 and 23, 1947. In addition to these activities, the Muslim women of the NWFP also formed a secret organisation called the “War Council,” which was tasked with mounting a campaign against the government. This set up an underground radio station called the Pakistan Broadcasting Station and used it to broadcast daily news bulletins in favour of Pakistan and provide details of the ongoing civil disobedience campaign (Sayyid Muhammad Tufail Ahmad Badar, Aftab-i-Haram and Eastern Times, April 20, 1947).

The success of the civil disobedience campaign eventually compelled the Viceroy to visit the NWFP towards the end of April 1947, to see things for himself. He was greeted by a massive crowd of well over 70,000 Muslim League sympathisers and was astonished to see such a large number of women amongst them. A delegation of the women’s representatives created history by first meeting the Governor and later the Viceroy (Alan Campbell-Johnson, Mission With Mountbatten, (London: 1951). This visit led to the British Government’s decision to hold a referendum in the NWFP, to give its people a chance to decide whether they wanted to join Pakistan or not. The Pathan women, in response to Mr Jinnah’s appeal of June 3, 1947, recast their efforts to urge, not only their sisters, but also their brothers, husbands, and sons to vote for Pakistan (Sarfaraz Hussain Mirza, The Role of Muslim Women in the Pakistan Movement). The Muslim League won the Referendum held in July 1947, by an overwhelming majority of both male and female votes (Eastern Times, July 8, 1947).

In conclusion, at the time of Partition, Muslim women had formed a very important group within the Pakistan Movement. They were recognised, heard and addressed as a separate entity in their own right and, then, there were no restrictions on Muslim women travelling alone to attend political rallies. Their remarkable contribution to the AIML’s outright victory in the 1946 general elections, and their surprisingly effective participation in the civil disobedience movements against the non-Muslim League governments of the Punjab and NWFP, had earned them the admiration of the Muslim leadership. Logically, this should have enhanced their level of political empowerment in the new state of Pakistan. However, the reality, as we know, was to be somewhat different. Soon after independence and the Quaid’s death in 1948, women experienced an abrupt end to this temporary political freedom and had to wait till Imran Khan and Tahirul Qadri’s ‘dharnas’ in 2014 to exercise a similar level of political participation.

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