

Women and Politics in the North-West Frontier Province (1930-1947)

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The purpose of this article is to examine and explore the role of women in the politics of the North-West Frontier Province, especially in the 1930-47 years. 1930 is an year of active politics in the province, and the women were deeply involved in the struggle for freedom of India, especially under the banner of the Khudai Khidmatgar movement. Given the considerable social and economic backwardness of the region and given a whole range of social constraints on women's participation in the outside world, this was not a small achievement. These women remained active in the political life of the province till the very end of the British rule in India. In the 1940s, and especially in 1947, they were joined in political activities by the League women workers who campaigned for Pakistan, and in fact, launched a Civil Disobedience Movement against the then Chief Minister, Dr. Khan Sahib. Indeed, the role and efforts of these women contributed in large part to the success of the Muslim League in the referendum of July 1947. This article discusses at length the role of women under both the Khudai Khidmatgar movement and the Frontier Muslim League. The women in the Frontier Province played a much more active and significant role in politics than that is commonly attributed to them,¹ and that too in spite of all the social and cultural

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1. There are nominal studies on women in the NWFP. Rahat Zakheli in late 1920 wrote some accounts on the status of women in Pashtoon society. In 1931 Abdul Khaliq Khaleeq wrote his famous novel *Shaheeda Sakina*, depicting the traditional behaviour of the Pashtoons with their females, giving details how a woman was deprived of her legitimate share in the inheritance after the death of her father. Another book *Pashtaney* by Samundar Khan came out in the mid-thirties giving some thrilling accounts of the bravery and courage of the Pashtoon women. Recently

taboos. But before we proceed with our analysis of this aspect of the Frontier politics, it will be useful to discuss the general conditions and status of the females in traditional Pashtoon society, and the part played by the Pashtoon women in the freedom movement.

*Pashtoonwali*² defines the status of women very precisely. The role of a woman, her habits, her activities, the places she may visit, how and with whom she may go, (her husband and very near relatives like brother, son, father, nephew etc.) whom she may talk to, all are determined under specific codes which she is not allowed to break. Any defiance is considered dishonour and disgrace for the family leading to her chastisement which, in some cases, may result in her death. According to the Pashtoon code of ethics, strangers desist from speaking to a woman.³ It is also one of the etiquette of Pashtoons to lower their eyes, gaze at the

Sarfaraz Mirza's book *Muslim Women Role in Pakistan* appeared giving a very little space to the Frontier women. There are also few pertinent studies on women by Afghan scholars. Abdur Rauf Benewa, Dr. B. Amir and Fahima Rahimi wrote books on the women in Afghanistan but frankly speaking there are no systematic studies on the women in the NWFP.

2. The way of life of the Pashtoons in the traditional Pashtoon society is to a large extent controlled by an un-written code called *Pashtoonwali*. He is bound by honour to respect it and to abide by its rules, otherwise he will bring disgrace not only to himself but also to his family. Though *Pashtoonwali* is very extensive in its meaning and interpretations, the main characteristics of this code requires a Pashtoon to offer *Melmastia* (hospitality), to grant *Nanawatey* (asylum) irrespective of their creed or caste even to his deadly enemies, and to take *Badal* (revenge) to wipe out insult with insult. One of the other pillars of Pashtoon society is its reliance on the *Jirga* (assembly of elders). In the past the *Jirga* had to perform the three-fold duties of police, magistracy and justice. It maintained peace and order during disorder and anarchy. The *Jirga* was the authority for settling disputes and dispensing justice. Cases of breach of contracts, disputes about tribal boundaries, distribution of water, claims to lands and pastures, and infringement of customs, grant or inheritance were all within the jurisdiction of *Jirga*. Its members were elected by the whole body of the Pashtoon tribe, mostly from among the *Speen Geerey* (senior persons), — the persons of experience, knowledge and character. No records were kept but the memories of the Pashtoon elders served as the record offices. Though in settled districts of the NWFP, after the annexation of the province by the British, the whole tribal system was replaced by ordinary law, it is still in practice in the tribal areas and has not lost its force and validity.
3. In a famous Pashto folklore story Maimoonay was killed by her cousin-cum-husband Sher Alam for violating this rule because once in the absence of her husband she was noticed of talking, though out of necessity, with a stranger. Sher Alam was taunted by one of the fellow-villagers that in his absence his wife Maimoonay was found 'guilty' of talking with a stranger. This enraged Sher Alam and he killed Maimoonay instantly.

ground and step aside from the path when a woman comes across his way. Indeed, Pashtoons are so protective of the modesty and sanctity of their women that they cannot tolerate even appreciation of the beauty or other fine attributes of their women by an outsider or a stranger. They consider such an admiration as an insult to their sense of honour. The Pashtoon society is a 'male-dominated' society the wife, throughout her lifetime, is in a subordinate position; however, as mother she is very much respected by her offspring and she enjoys influence over her sons, daughters and especially the daughter-in-laws.

Women in Pashtoon society, on the whole, do not fare well. Judged by some Pashto proverbs, common in the society, they have no standing, for instance according to a proverb 'There are two places eminently suitable for women — either her own house or the grave'; and other provocative proverbs like 'There are a hundred wives hidden under every hair on the woman's head, sufficiently reveal their position in the society.

The birth of a baby-girl was always unwelcome and the worst dilemma of the whole affair even now is that at the time of marriage she becomes a part of her husband's property and after his death, of his heirs. Like many other tribal peoples, it was a common belief among the Pashtoons that the more sons a man has, the better he can withstand his enemy at the gate. Lamenting on her poor condition a Pashtoon woman says:

(You are Adam, me the Eve; I am from you,
Then why you are so careless about me.
The birth of a baby-girl is a day of mourning for you,
Again and again you are cursing your fate, why is it so?
Both daughter and son are yours,
Then why you are happy on one's birth and sad on the other).⁴

The lives of Pashtoon women, especially those living in the rural areas, are not enviable. They have numerous duties to perform; fetches water, cook, spin, bring firewood from the nearest forests, and in some cases helps her husband in the fields. Interestingly, in the time of battle the Pashtoon women frequently help their husbands in the battlefields. During the prosecution of feuds women are exempt from reprisals. It is considered below the dignity of a Pashtoon male to fire at women, who are at liberty to supply food, water and ammunition to their men engaged in firing at a hill top or entrenchment outside the village.

4. *Pakhtun*, (Utmanzai: 24 October, 1945), 8.

Despite many restrictions on the Pashtoon females, they contributed a lot to Pashto literature and folklore. Hafiza Halima Khattaka, daughter of the great Pashto poet Khushal Khan Khattak; Nazo, mother of Mir Wais Hotak and Zainab, his daughter; Neikbakhta, daughter of Allahdad; Zarghona, daughter of Din Mohammad Kakar and Rabia Qandahari are a few amongst many learned writers who had left their *Diwans* (poetic collections).⁵

A Pashtoon woman always takes great pride in having a courageous husband. In many *tappas* (Pashto odes comprising of two stanzas) the Pashtoon ladies encourage their near and dear ones to sacrifice their lives for *Pashto*.

(May you come riddled with bullets

The news of your dishonour, cowardice may not reach me).

(May you come riddled with bullets

By kissing your wounds I will be praising your courage).

(May you come riddled with bullets

I will be sewing your shroud with my tresses).

A Pashtoon woman would always prefer to be with her husband in the battlefields. She takes delight in telling her husband:

زه پښتنه د تورو نه لښم مينه

په سپين ميدان کښ در سره يم

(You will definitely find me with you in the battlefield
Being a Pashtoon I am not afraid of swords).

5. Nazo's following quatrain is very popular:

(It was dawn, the cheeks of the narcissus were wet

Drops after drops trickled from its eyes

I asked: O beautiful flower what has happened?

She replied: 'My life is only a short laugh').

The name of Malalay should also be added to the present discussion. The victory of Maiwand (1880) is attributed to her. She plucked a standard from a dying soldier on the battlefield at Maiwand to lead the faltering Afghan troops to victory over the British Indian army with these words:

(Young love, if you do not fall in the Battle of Maiwand

By God, someone is saving you for a token of shame). For more details see Fahimi Rahimi, *Women in Afghanistan*, (Liestal, 1986).

The status of women did not improve much with the opening of the Frontier society to modernity and modern times. According to *The Census Report of 1911*, the proportion of the female population in the NWFP, was 817 women per 1000 males.⁶ It reached 843 females to 1000 males in 1931.⁷ Literate males of all religions were 58 per 1000 and literate females only 6 per 1000.⁸ Interestingly, only one Muslim female out of 1000 in the Frontier was able to read and write.

Education by Religion, Sex and Locality:

District and natural division:	Hindu		Mohammadan		Christian		Sikh	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
Hazara	392	41	17	1	858	676	321	59
Peshawar	340	124	27	1	915	616	450	180
Kohat	330	21	28	1	818	730	578	67
Bannu	351	13	22	—	603	639	572	90
D.I.Khan	442	44	32	1	834	683	465	109

Source: *Census of India 1911*, vol. XIII, North-West Frontier Province (Peshawar: 1912), 188.

There was a slight improvement in later years, which was regarded by the government as 'wonderful progress during the past forty years' in the female education; the number reached to 12 per 1000: 2 in Peshawar, 4 in Kohat, 2 in Bannu, 2 in Dera Ismai'l Khan and 2 in Hazara. The main difficulty, however, according to the *Census Report of 1921*, was that 'the elementary instruction given in primary schools does not teach a girl more than to read and write letters which is not much helpful to her in the management of her house. Even so, she often is a source of suspicion and jealousy to her husband and elder female relatives. On the other hand', *The Report* continued, 'secondary education, which is generally of secular nature, is supposed to have a baleful effect on the religious side of her character and to create a desire for such social environments as are not available in an ordinary Indian household'.⁹ The popular view was that female education should be such as would tend to develop among women a strong religious and moral character and make them useful wives and mothers in the social grade to which they belong.

The local prejudices against female education were so great that the government also gave very little attention to it. In 1901-02 there were only

6. *Census of India 1911*, NWFP, Vol. XIII, 124.

7. *Census of India 1931*, Vol. XV, 77.

8. *Census of India 1911*, 177.

9. *Census of India 1921*, 182.

8 government-recognised primary schools for girls in the entire province, with a total number of 491 students, mostly non-Muslims belonging to the families of government servants and businessmen. There was no secondary school for girls until 1906, when 'Arya Kanya School' of Dera Ismai'l Khan was raised to the status of a middle school. The number of girls primary schools reached 24 in 1920-21 and middle schools increased from 1 to 4. There was a further increase; primary schools from 24 to 45; middle schools from 4 to 23 and high schools from 0 to 2. Both girls' high schools, 'Church of England Zenana Mission High School' at Peshawar, and 'Gobind Girls High School' at Abbottabad, were non-governmental institutions; only small annual subsidies of Rs. 7296 and Rs. 5988 respectively were given to them by the government. The curriculum besides reading and writing consisted of some needlework (knitting and embroidery) and in 1920-21 it was revised and Domestic Science which was 'to form the chief function of a girl in after life' was introduced. There was no college and it was in 1930-31 that one female from the province passed the B.A examination from Punjab.¹⁰

The inhabitants of the province felt the need of a government high school as most of the people were unwilling to send their daughters to a Mission School. On 27 May 1932 a resolution was moved by M. C. Khanna, the minority representative in the NWFP Legislative Council, demanding from the government to open a high school for girls at Peshawar. Giving details of the government expenditure on the boys education, he said, 'the education of boys and girls should go hand in

10. For more details see *Census of India 1921*, Vol. XIV, 181-182, and, *Census of India, 1931*, Vol. XV, 166; and *Central Legislative Assembly Debates*, (15 July 1930), 384-387. Following is a complete list of the Girl Schools (Middle and High) in the province: Peshawar District: (1)C. E. Z Mission High School. (2)M. B. A. V Hindi School, Karimpura. (3)M. B. V A Urdu School, Yakatut. (4)Gurmat Arorbans A. V. Kanya Patshala, Karimpura. (5)Arya Girls Middle School, Peshawar Cantonment (6)Danish Mission A. V Girls School, Hoti (Mardan). Hazara: (1)Sanathan Dharam Girls School, Haripur. (2)Rukmani Girls School, Haripur. (3)Gobind Girls High School, Abbottabad. (4)Arya Girls Middle School, Abbottabad. (5)M.B. Urdu Middle School, Abbottabad. (6)Siri Guru Nanak Kanya Patshala, Mansehra. Kohat: (1)M.B. Urdu Middle Girls School, Kohat. Bannu: (1)M. B. Gunter Gurmukhi Middle School, Bannu. (2)M. B. Gunter Urdu Middle School, Bannu. (3)Daulat Ram Arya Kanya Patshala, Bannu. Dera Ismai'l Khan: (1)M. B. Nagri Girls Middle School, Dera Ismai'l Khan. (2)M. B. Urdu Girls Middle School, Dera Ismai'l Khan. (3)Arya Kanya Patshala, Dera Ismai'l Khan. (4)Jamna Devi A.K.B. Br. School, Dera Ismai'l Khan. (5)D. B. Urdu Girls School, Kulachi. (6)Arya Kanya Patshala, Kulachi and (7)Arya Kanya Patshala, Tank.

hand. We should not starve one to feed the other'.¹¹ Fearing the opposition of some Muslim members he made it clear 'I am not asking for a Hindu school... I want, is a Govt. High School for Girls and for the girls of all communities.... The school in question is going to be a non-sectarian institution and a government institution for the girls of Peshawar or perhaps for the girls of this province'.¹² The long outstanding demand for a Government Girls High School was fulfilled in 1933. On 15 May 'Lady Griffith High School' for girls started its classes for the female students of the province.

The Khudai Khidmatgars who were devoted to socio-economic uplift were the foremost advocates of female education. An educated woman, according to them, can take care of herself better than an inexperienced, uneducated, mentally confused woman. The columns of *Pakhtun* (the official organisation of the Khudai Khidmatgars which started its publication from May 1928) were open for women to write about their problems. The main inspiration, of course, was provided by Abdul Ghaffar Khan and his close associates. In January 1929, an article contributed by Mian Jaffar Shah appeared in the *Pakhtun* on women and their services to community and nation. He regarded it as ridiculous on the part of the Pashtoons that they were considering their females as their 'mean of entertainment' only. Women, according to him, shared lot of responsibilities to be undertaken both in time of peace and war. 'If a woman is uneducated and cowardly', remarked Jaffar Shah, 'it will naturally affect the coming generation. If she knew how to educate her offspring in the cause of the nation, that would definitely result in getting rid of slavery'.¹³ Abdul Ghaffar Khan endorsed the views of Jaffar Shah, and cited examples from the Holy Quran according to which both are essential to one another. He stressed the need of education for females and urged the Pashtoons to give their women the best modern education, as acting against it would definitely result in prolonging their slavery.¹⁴

Responding to the call of Abdul Ghaffar Khan, one Sayeda of Adina (Swabi) censured the attitude and discriminative behaviour of their males

11. Mehr Chand Khanna, *NWFP Legislative Council Debates*, (27 March, 1932), Vol. I, No. 10, (Peshawar: 1932), 372.

12. *Ibid.* (12 October, 1932), Vol. II, No. 2, 152.

13. Mian Jaffar Shah, 'Women and Their Service to Community', *Pakhtun*, (January, 1929), 16-19.

14. *Ibid.*, 20

with regard to females in every field of life. Protesting at the confinement of females in the four walls of their houses, she considered it harmful for future generations. She considered the ignorance of the females as one of the main causes of slavery. The panacea of this backwardness, according to her, 'is to educate your women enabling them to utilise the latest technology'.¹⁵

Some articles contributed by Pashtoon women appeared in the *Pakhtun* without disclosing their identity. They shied away from giving their names, and instead used 'Yau Khor' (A Sister). The following lines appeared in June-July 1931 issue of the *Pakhtun*, giving the name of the contributor as 'A Sister':

(If you made the rain of sacrifices
The garden of freedom will certainly blossom
If the rain of sacrifices be made
The garden of freedom will certainly blossom).¹⁶

Interestingly some of the learned women sent their articles and other writings using the names of either of their younger brothers or cousins.¹⁷

During the Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930-33, launched in the NWFP by the Khudai Khidmatgars against the British Indian government, the participation of women was on a limited scale. The main reason was the observance of strict *purdah*, which made it very difficult for the women to meet or talk with any male who was not a member of their family. However, the attendance of females in large numbers, of course, behind walls or on the roof-tops of their houses, wrapped in *chaddars*, became a common feature of the meetings of Abdul Ghaffar Khan. Interestingly, in Swabi and Nowshera, during the campaign, the elderly women actively participated, and in Pabbi, Dur Marjan and Noor-un-Nisa of Taru Jabba became popular for leading the processions in Nowshera. Pashtoon females in great numbers contributed articles to *Pakhtun*. Sayeda Bushra Begum, a prominent woman Khudai Khidmatgar of Ziarat Kaka Sahib, lamenting on the backwardness of the Pashtoon

15. Sayeda of Adina, 'Our Women', *Pakhtun*, (February, 1929), 11-15.

16. *Pakhtun*, (June-July, 1931), 53.

17. Qanita Begum, who became one of the most important figures in the Provincial Women Muslim League, used her younger brother's name for a long time. Later on she used a pseudo name for sending her articles to *Asmat*, Delhi, and *Tehzeeb-i-Niswan*, Lahore, without disclosing her identity for a long time. Interview Qanita Begum, (Peshawar: 7 October, 1984).

women, accused the males for intentionally keeping their womenfolk behind the four walls, in order to establish their domination over the females. According to her:

دجھالت پہ حال کین لوئے لونہہ خہ او کھری
ورنہ خہ ظلمہ دوطن او قوم خدمت لرے نر
موثر تہ بار بار چہ پیغور دجھالت را کوئی
ذمہ واری پہ کوم فریق ددے لصنت لرے نہ

(You brought-up us in the darkness of ignorance
what kind of service than you expect [from us] to be offered
in the cause of nation and society.
You are by and large blaming us for ignorance
But let me ask you who is responsible for this ignorance).¹⁸

Bushra Begum further emphasised that the majority of the Pashtoon women hated precious jewellery and splendid clothes and said that their real beauty lay in raising their standards and status in society. She demanded modern education for the womenfolk.¹⁹ Endorsing her views, Noor Jehan Begum, another contributor to *Pakhtun* came out openly protesting over their confinement to their houses saying:

دھندوستان بنجے خدمت کوی دقوم او وطن
موثر تہ کور کینے د مضمون شریکل منع دی

(The Hindustani women are out of their homes, rendering service to the nation. But for us even to write inside the four walls is forbidden).²⁰

Mahar Sultan, a former student of Azad School, Utmanzai, suggested that if there is one educated women in a village it is her responsibility to give basic education to those who are unable to get it.²¹ Nagina, another learned writer echoed similar words and accused the Pashtoon males that they love freedom but are denying it to their females. According to her, their greatest enemy 'is no one else but the Pashtoons, for they are treating us like animals. Our hands, our feet and our brains are kept in a state of coma. If you want us to share the responsibilities of

18. *Pakhtun*, 21 (October, 1938), 15.

19. *Ibid.*, 16.

20. *Pakhtun*, (21 October, 1938), 16.

21. *Pakhtun*, (1 November, 1938), 25-26.

national work, give us education'.²² The Khudai Khidmatgar leadership advised the females that they should help themselves instead of waiting for help from their men. Abdul Ghaffar Khan reiterated that his aim 'is to struggle for the rights of depressed and especially for the women who were lagging far behind their men in education. But progress in that connection is possible only when they should decide to help themselves'.²³ The central leadership of the Congress helped them to organise the Frontier women on the pattern of educated Hindustani women, who were sharing the burden of their males in every walk of life. In 1939, Bibi Amtus Salam and Mirabehn were sent to the NWFP to assist Abdul Ghaffar Khan in female education and social reforms among the Frontier women.²⁴

In 1946, however, the tone of the writing of the female writers changed. Most of the articles appearing in that year and the subsequent year (1947) carried the political messages of Abdul Ghaffar Khan and the Khudai Khidmatgars. The main insistence was on Indian unity and opposition to the League's proposed Pakistan. The League's 'Direct Action Day' and its repercussions in the other parts of India was criticised. The grouping clauses of the Cabinet Mission Plan came also under criticism. In June 1946, an article written by Alaf Jan Khattaka, a female Khudai Khidmatgar, under the caption of 'Who is to Guide the Pashtoons', appeared in *Pakhtun*. She insisted that owing to the peculiar conditions of their area the Pashtoons must unite because in unity lies their bright future. As they have their own traditions, particular culture and way of life, it is better to have their own leaders instead of relying upon Hindustanis or Punjabis.²⁵ She advised the Pashtoons:

او کمره پښتو ماته پښتنه د باچا خان او کټه
تیکه پښتو کمره د زرو پښتون وښان او کټه

قامونه وینه تو لوی د خپل لیدر په خولو
ته بے پشتون او پښتانه په پښتو نه بیکار یوی

(Nations are always ready to follow the footsteps of their leaders and are ready to sacrifice themselves on the call of their leaders

You should also do Pashto to the broken ribs of Bacha Khan.

You are a Pashtoon and the Pashtoons are for Pashto

22. *Pakhtun*, (11 November, 1938), 4.

23. Abdul Ghaffar Khan on female education in *Pakhtun*, (1 February, 1946), 7.

24. D. G. Tendulkar, *Abdul Ghaffar Khan*, (Bombay: 1967), 289-290.

25. Alaf Jan Khattaka, 'Who is to guide the Pashtoons', *Pakhtun*, (24 June, 1946), 23.

You must hold on to you Pashto in order to win over the prestige and honour of the old Pashtoons).²⁶

The Khudai Khidmatgars responded positively to the call of Abdul Ghaffar Khan and started sending their daughters and other female relations to schools. Abdul Malik Fida, Sarfaraz Khan and Amir Mohammad Khan were a few among many who sent their daughters to school, enabling them to share the responsibilities of their males.

Women participation in social and political life of the NWFP was not exclusively the work of the Khudai Khidmatgar movement. The Frontier Muslim League was equally keen on women's development. The League women, also did not lag behind. They did their best to stay involved. As there was no female college in the province, a few students from the NWFP went to Lahore and joined the Jinnah Islamia College of Fatima Begum. They came under the direct influence of Fatima, who imbued them with the ideas of a separate homeland for the Muslims of the sub-continent. After completing their studies at Lahore, they came back to the province and started taking active part in politics. Before discussing the participation of these women in active politics in the NWFP, few words are essential about their social background. Keeping in view the province's backwardness in many walks of life, including education, it was very difficult for ordinary people to send their daughters to educational institutions outside of the province. It was a privilege of the few elite families to send their daughters to the Punjab, and in some cases even to Delhi, enabling them to get the modern education. Thus like the Frontier Provincial Muslim League, majority of the Frontier Women Leaguers were also from elite families.

The first branch of the Women Muslim League in the NWFP was opened in April 1939. On 19 April a meeting under the presidentship of Qanita Bibi, sister of Mian Zia-ud-Din, secretary of the Provincial Muslim League, was held at Peshawar. Begum Habibullah (UP), the main speaker, appealed to the Muslim women of the Frontier to join the League in order to combat the Hindu women who had formed their own societies. Begum Mufti Abdul Wadud was made the President of the nascent branch of the Frontier Women Muslim League and Qanita became its vice President.²⁷ No further details are available of other office holders.

26. *Pakhtun* (1 April, 1946), 2.

27. Interview Qanita Begum, Peshawar, (7 October, 1984); *Khyber Mail*, (Peshawar: 23 April, 1939); CID Diaries, F. No. 769, Special Branch Peshawar, 75.

Nothing was heard of this branch of the League for a year. In April 1940, some activities of the women Leaguers were reported from Peshawar, but, on the whole, the branch remained dormant for a long time.²⁸ The first serious foray of the women League was their full-fledged participation in the elections of 1945-46. In October 1945, All-India Muslim League send a delegation to the Frontier under Lady Abdullah Haroon, President All India Zenana Muslim League. Other members of the delegation include Begum Salma Tassaduq, Begum H. A. Hakim, Fatima Begum, Begum Zahida Shah and Begum Karim Dad Khan. The delegation reached Peshawar on 17 October. Meetings were addressed at Peshawar and Mardan, exhorting the Muslim women to vote for the League candidates in the elections and to contribute generously to the League's election funds. When the meetings were over, a 'large number of *pardah* women' were reported as enrolling themselves as the primary members of the Women Muslim League.²⁹ Another branch of the Women Muslim League was formed at Peshawar with Begum Qazi Mir Ahmad as President and Begum Abdul Wahid as Secretary.³⁰ The Women Muslim League supported the official League candidates during elections.

The women Muslim Leaguers of the NWFP came to the forefront of Frontier politics during the early months of 1947. The provincial League launched a Civil Disobedience Movement against the Congress Ministry of Dr. Khan Sahib. After a majority of the male members of the organisation were arrested, the Women Leaguers came out defying Section 144 in front of courts and other government offices. On 2nd March, a small procession of women Leaguers was organised at Abbottabad by Mrs. Kamal-ud-Din, the Hazara League leader. She appealed the Muslim women to join the Provincial League's civil disobedience against the Congress ministry.³¹ On 12 March, another women's procession set out in Peshawar. The procession, consisting of 25 ladies in *burqas*, marched through the main bazaars of the city and left a 'deep impression' on other Muslim women. The processionists, according

28. *Khyber Mail*, (28 April, 1940); CID Diaries, F. No. 803, 3.

29. *Khyber Mail*, (19 October, 1945).

30. Other members of the Cabinet and the Working Committee included Begum Faqir Mohammad, Begum Mufti M. Ayub Khan, Begum Sardar Haider, Begum Salim Khan, Begum Abdul Wahab, Begum Jan Mohammad, Muntaz Majid, Muntaz Jamal and Fahmida Rauf. Interview Begum Sardar Haider, (Peshawar: 18 November, 1984).

31. CID Diaries, (3 March, 1947), F. No. 803, SBP, 67.

to *The Pakistan Times*, (29 March 1947) were the educated young ladies of Peshawar. 'A certain number [of people] were angry while others amused but most of the people were too stupefied to say anything. As the procession marched through the streets, shouting League slogans, the public stood and stared. The women of Peshawar watched from their house-tops and gazed at their veiled-sisters in the streets below. When the procession returned to the League office in Egerton Road, these brave women were exhausted physically, but their spirits were undaunted. They made a history for the women of the Frontier Province'.³²

During the League's Civil Disobedience Movement in the Frontier, the women's processions in Peshawar became a routine affair. Other affected towns were Mardan, Kohat and Abbottabad. Interestingly, not even one women's demonstration was reported from Bannu or Dera Ismai'l Khan. The rural areas of the province remained untouched by the women's agitation. The main reasons were the popularity of and support for the Khudai Khidmatgars in rural areas, and the observance of a strict *purdah* system there. As the Pashtoon values desists to use force against them, the women Leaguers were left free to organise meetings and processions, and they enjoyed full freedom of expression and movement.

After the fall of the Unionist Ministry in Punjab, in which there was a notable participation of women Leaguers,³³ they tried the same tactics in the NWFP.³⁴ The women workers of the League came in large number from the Punjab and other parts of India.³⁵ Dr. Khan Sahib's policy was to arrest no women, so there was no restriction on the women Leaguers, and they acted freely against the ministry. The women agitators disrupted the government machinery to a great extent. On several occasions the provincial Secretariat was stormed and the Pakistan flag hoisted. Picketing government installations including the schools was a daily routine. 'Pakistan Tickets' were issued at railway stations. To check the advance of the women processionists, the police linked arms to block

32. *The Pakistan Times*, (29 March, 1947).

33. For details see Ian Talbot, *Punjab and the Raj 1849-1947*, (Delhi: 1988).

34. D. Willmer, 'Women as Participants in the Pakistan Movement: Modernization and the Promise of a Moral State', *Modern Asian Studies*, 30, 3, (1996), 573-590.

35. Prominent women Leaguers from Punjab and other parts of India who assisted the Frontier Women Muslim League against Congress ministry include Fatima Begum, Nasira Siddiqi, Zubeda Shah, Begum Karim Dad, Mumtaz Shah Nawaz and Hassan Ara. *The Pakistan Times*, (2 April, 1947); For more details see Sarfaraz Hussain Mirza, *Muslim women's Role in the Pakistan Movement* (Lahore: 1969).

them, and when their lines were broken, retreated and reformed their passive barricades. The first serious injuries to women protesters were incurred on 14 April when they attempted to impede the 58 Down Bombay Express coming from the Peshawar Cantonment. The protesters sat down on the railway track and the engine driver did not stop the train. Five women were seriously injured while another 30 received minor injuries.³⁶ Following this incident, they were prevented by the Provincial Muslim League from exposing themselves to serious physical danger. Quaid-i Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah, in his statement of 3 June 1947, appreciated the efforts of the Frontier women in the movement for the achievement of a separate homeland for the Indian Muslims.³⁷

Thus, the League successfully exploited the traditional Pashtoon values to its advantage by usefully bringing out their female workers against the Congress ministry. The women protesters were given complete freedom of speech and movement throughout the agitation; in very rare cases expulsion orders were served asking them to leave some particular locality. No woman agitator was arrested, physically assaulted or tortured by the Congress ministry, as it was against *Pashtoonwali* to cause harm to females, and they faced every provocation with patience.

36. For these and other details see CID Diaries, March-May 1947, SBP, F. Nos. 802, 803, 812, 813, 814 and 815; *Civil and Military Gazette*, (Lahore: April, 1947); *The Pakistan Times*, April 1947; Interviews with Mumtaz Majid, (Peshawar: 31 October, 1984); Mrs. Nazir Tila M. Khan, (Peshawar: 10 December, 1984); Mrs. Sardar Haider, (Peshawar: 18 November, 1984); Qanita Begum, (Peshawar: 7 October, 1984) and S. A. Rittenberg, 'Independence Movement in the India's North-West Frontier Province 1901-1947', (Columbia: 1977), 380.

37. Quaid-i Azam Jinnah appreciated the participation of the Frontier women in the Pakistan movement in these words: 'I cannot but express my appreciation of sufferings and sacrifices made by all the classes of Mussalmans and particularly the great part the women of the Frontier played in the fight for our civil liberties'. G. Allana, *Pakistan Movement Historic Documents* (Karachi: 1968), 540.