



Women and Political Mobilization in Colonial Punjab: A Historical Study of Women's Participation in the Pakistan Movement, 1930–1947

Tahira Dar

Lecturer in Higher Education Department, Govt: Graduate College of Home Economics for Women Faisalabad. stars.shine1989@gmail.com

Abstract:

This article examines the agency of Muslim women in the political mobilization that led to the creation of Pakistan, with particular reference to Punjab between 1930 and 1947. Drawing on a source-critical synthesis of archive-based historiography, digitized photographic collections, published memoirs and oral histories, and secondary statistical data from the 1941 Census and provincial election returns, it reconstructs women's involvement across three periods: the reformist-associational period (1930–1937), the organizational-incorporation period (1937–1945), and the electoral and street-mobilization period (1945–1947), culminating in the Muslim League's civil disobedience campaign of January–February 1947. Using social movement theory (repertoires of contention and framing) and feminist theories of nationalism, the article argues, first, that the mobilization of Punjabi Muslim women did not discard a respectable, family- and community-based moral economy but carried it into the public arena; second, that women's visibility gave the League symbolic and tactical capital against the Unionist-led coalition ministry at a decisive moment; and third, that although incorporation into the League was vital to this mobilization, it produced little lasting formal authority for women. Secondary data underline the narrow base from which this mobilization began: only four of the 175 seats in the Punjab Legislative Assembly were reserved for women, and literacy among Punjab's Muslims stood at about 7% in 1941. The study offers a chronology that links organizational history, cultural framing and contentious performance, and identifies gaps in the evidence, especially regarding rural, non-elite and non-Muslim women, as priorities for future archival research.

Keywords: women's history, Pakistan Movement, Punjab, Muslim League, political mobilization, Partition, gender and nationalism

Introduction

Without Punjab there could be no Pakistan. By the 1940s the province was the demographic and strategic linchpin of the Muslim League's demand: Muslims formed only a bare majority of its population, about 53% according to the 1941 Census (Census of India, 1941; Krishan, 2004), yet its agriculture, army recruitment and canal colonies carried a weight far beyond their numbers (Talbot, 1988). In the 1937 provincial elections, however, the League won only two seats in a province governed overwhelmingly by the cross-communal Unionist Party (Talbot, 1980). Within a decade, that political order had been overturned. The transformation of Punjab into a League stronghold is therefore a central theme of the historiography of Partition (Gilmartin, 1988; Jalal, 1985; Talbot, 1996a).

That historiography offers two familiar portrayals of women. In nationalist and commemorative writing, they appear as heroines, most famously in the image of a teenage girl replacing the Union Jack on the Lahore Civil Secretariat with a Muslim League flag in February 1947. In the scholarship on Partition, they appear above all as victims: as symbols of communal honour and as targets of abduction, violence and state-led "recovery" (Butalia, 1998; Menon & Bhasin, 1998). Both treatments are valuable, but neither explains how women's political participation evolved, through which channels, under what conditions and with what effects. Feminist historians of Pakistan have documented the ambivalence of women's role, which was mobilized for the struggle and then constrained once the state had been achieved (Jalal, 1991; Mumtaz & Shaheed, 1987). Several studies have also examined women's participation in the Pakistan Movement more generally (Ali, 2000; Saiyid, 1998; Willmer, 1996). However, the mobilization process has rarely been theorized with reference to the specific political conditions of Punjab.

This article addresses that gap through three research questions:

RQ1. Through which channels did Punjabi Muslim women take part in politics between 1930 and 1947?

RQ2. Which repertoires of action and cultural frames made women's public participation credible to the participants themselves, to their communities and to the League leadership?

RQ3. What did this mobilization achieve for the Pakistan Movement and for women, and what limits did it face?

The argument has three parts. First, women's participation should not be understood as a single event of 1947 but as a process in three phases, the last and most spectacular of which rested on fifteen years of organizational and cultural groundwork. Second, mobilization was achieved by carrying existing moral and kin-based norms of respectability into public life, so that processions, flag-hoisting and imprisonment could be presented as communal duty rather than as a disruption of gender norms. Third, in Punjab's specific confrontation with the Unionist-led coalition ministry in early 1947, women's involvement had real tactical value, made possible by their incorporation into the League, but this incorporation was not matched by commensurate formal representation or lasting institutional authority.

The article proceeds as follows. It first reviews the literature and sets out the analytical framework. It then explains the sources and method, sketches the demographic, constitutional and political context of Punjab, and presents the analysis in three phases, followed by a thematic examination of repertoires, frames and participants. A discussion of outcomes and limits and a conclusion follow.

Literature Review and Analytical Framework

Punjab and the Political History of Pakistan

The political history of Punjab has largely been written as a history of elite alliances and religious networks. Talbot (1988, 1996a) shows how the Unionist Party built a durable alliance on the structures of the colonial state and rural patronage, while Gilmartin (1988) explains how the Muslim League displaced this order in the 1940s by drawing on the moral authority of pirs and shrine networks and by recasting Islam as the language of political community. Jalal (1985) emphasizes the League's instrumental use of the Pakistan demand as a bargaining counter at the all-India level, while Talbot (1980) identifies religious sanction, local influence and the economic vulnerability of the Unionists as decisive in the 1946 election campaign. Khalid (2019) traces the internal reorganization of the Punjab Muslim League that preceded its electoral victory, and Abid and Abid (2011) reconstruct the provincial League's history from 1940 to 1947 using contemporary newspapers and official fortnightly reports. Gilmartin (2009) reproduces and analyses the League's election appeals to Punjabi voters, showing how the language of religious duty was used to mobilize support. Talbot (1996b) uses oral testimony and the vernacular press to recover the popular dimension of the movement in north-west India. Khan (2007) and Talbot and Singh (2009) place these developments in the wider crisis of the final years of the Raj. These treatments are, however, largely male-centred, and women appear in them only incidentally.

Women, Reform and Nationalism

A second body of work provides essential background. Minault (1981, 1998) traces the development of Muslim women's education and associational life, including the All-India Muslim Ladies' Conference and the women's press in Lahore, and shows that reformist women and men alike used female education to strengthen domestic and community life without challenging male authority. Metcalf (1990) describes the same moral economy through the

prescriptive reformist literature. Forbes (1996) places Muslim women's activism within the wider history of Indian women's movements, including the debates on the franchise and reserved seats that followed the Round Table Conferences. Ali (2000) and Saiyid (1998) provide the most detailed accounts of Muslim women's movement from seclusion into politics, the latter with a specific focus on the British Punjab. Chatterjee (1989, 1993) argues that Indian nationalism "resolved" the women's question by locating women in an inner, spiritual domain of cultural identity, a thesis that has been productively applied, and contested, in the context of Muslim South Asia.

Gender, Partition and the State

A third literature addresses the symbolic role of women in nationalism. Yuval-Davis (1997) shows that women are often cast as the biological reproducers of the nation and as bearers of its cultural boundaries. In South Asia, Butalia (1998), Menon and Bhasin (1993, 1998) and Zamindar (2007) trace how this symbolic function became a deadly reality during Partition, and how it shaped the treatment of women's bodies and mobility by the postcolonial state. Virdee (2013) uses oral history to show how women's own accounts of 1947 have been silenced or reframed within families and nationalist memory. Jalal (1991) characterizes the position of women in Pakistan as a "convenience of subservience", in which the state's need for women's symbolic and practical participation coexisted with a persistent commitment to their subordination. Mumtaz and Shaheed (1987) extend this discussion in their history of the Pakistani women's movement, which begins with the nationalist-era activism examined here.

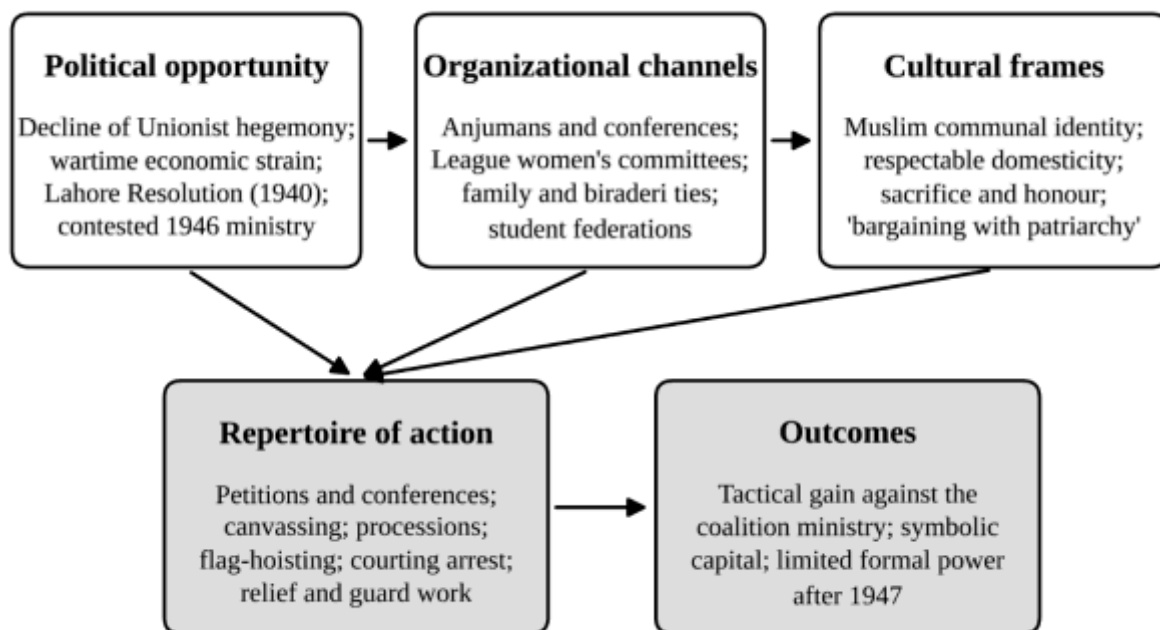
Most directly relevant are two studies of women in the Pakistan Movement itself. Willmer (1996), drawing on photographs from Lahore in 1946–1947, describes women's protests against the Khizr ministry as the first large-scale public mobilization of Muslim women in pre-independence India and as a key League tactic in the final months before Partition. Koul (2022) shows, through the 1941 expulsion of Begum Jahanara Shah Nawaz from the League, how gendered ideas of representation became central to the League's claim to be the sole spokesman of Indian Muslims, making cross-communal, gender-based or regional forms of representation increasingly untenable for women League politicians.

Analytical Framework

This study uses three conceptual tools. The first is Tilly's (1978) notion of the *repertoire of contention*: the limited set of actions that a group knows, has used before and regards as legitimate at a particular time and place. The second is *framing*, through which mobilizers link action to participants' existing values and so reduce the perceived barriers to participation (Snow et al., 1986). The third is Kandiyoti's (1988) concept of *bargaining with patriarchy*, which suggests that women may accept certain constraints in return for protection, status and room for manoeuvre. Together, these tools allow the analysis to ask not only what women did, but why and how it was possible for them to do it, on what terms, and what was exchanged in return. The resulting model is summarized in Figure 1 and structures the analysis.

Figure 1

Analytical Framework for Women's Mobilization in Colonial Punjab



Note. The framework is the author's synthesis of Tilly (1978), Snow et al. (1986), and Kandiyoti (1988). Political opportunity, organizational channels and cultural frames jointly condition the repertoire of action available to women, which in turn produces both tactical gains and structural limits.

Method and Sources

Research Design

The study uses an interpretive historical design. It synthesizes archive-based scholarship on Punjab, digitized primary material, published testimony, and secondary statistical data, organized around a periodization derived from organizational and political history. It is not a fresh reconstruction from unpublished archival collections. Claims that rest on a single account or on partisan sources are identified as such, and where sources disagree on a fact, the disagreement is reported rather than silently resolved.

Sources and Source Criticism

Four classes of sources were used. The first consists of scholarly works based on the principal archives of Punjab, including the Muslim League records, the Freedom Movement archives and provincial government proceedings (Abid & Abid, 2011; Gilmartin, 1988; Jalal, 1985, 1991; Koul, 2022; Talbot, 1980, 1988, 1996a, 1996b; Willmer, 1996). The second consists of digitized visual material, chiefly the captioned photographs of women's protests at the Lahore Civil Secretariat, women's processions and the Lahore Women's Jail between December 1946 and February 1947, held in the Pakistan Movement collection of the Princeton University Library (n.d.). The third consists of memoirs, biographies, oral histories and retrospective accounts, including the political autobiography of Jahanara Shah Nawaz (1971) and the memoir of Shaista Suhrawardy Ikramullah (1963); a biographical study by Ali and Tariq (2008); oral-history interviews conducted by Virdee (2013); a League-sympathetic retrospective (Saeed, n.d.); and a journalistic interview with Fatima Sughra ("Would Pakistan's 'troublemaker' be supported today?", n.d.). The fourth consists of secondary quantitative data: the religious composition and literacy of Punjab from the 1941 Census (Census of India, 1941; Krishan, 2004), the composition of the Punjab Legislative Assembly under the Government of India Act 1935, the 1937 and 1946 election returns (Talbot, 1980; Yadav, 1987), and official figures on abducted and recovered women compiled by Menon and Bhasin (1993, 1998).

Each class has its biases. Scholarly accounts under-report women. Photograph captions establish dates and presence but not motive or scale. Memoirs and League retrospectives are celebratory and tend to round numbers upward; for example, the claim that more than 500 women courted arrest in a single day belongs to the movement's memory and cannot be independently verified

from the sources consulted here, so it is not treated as an established figure. Oral testimony was recorded decades later and is shaped by commemoration, as in Fatima Sughra's recollections of the flag-hoisting. Census and election data are more reliable, but they record the structure within which women acted rather than their actions, and census literacy figures from 1941 were compiled under wartime economy measures and should be read as approximate.

Periodization

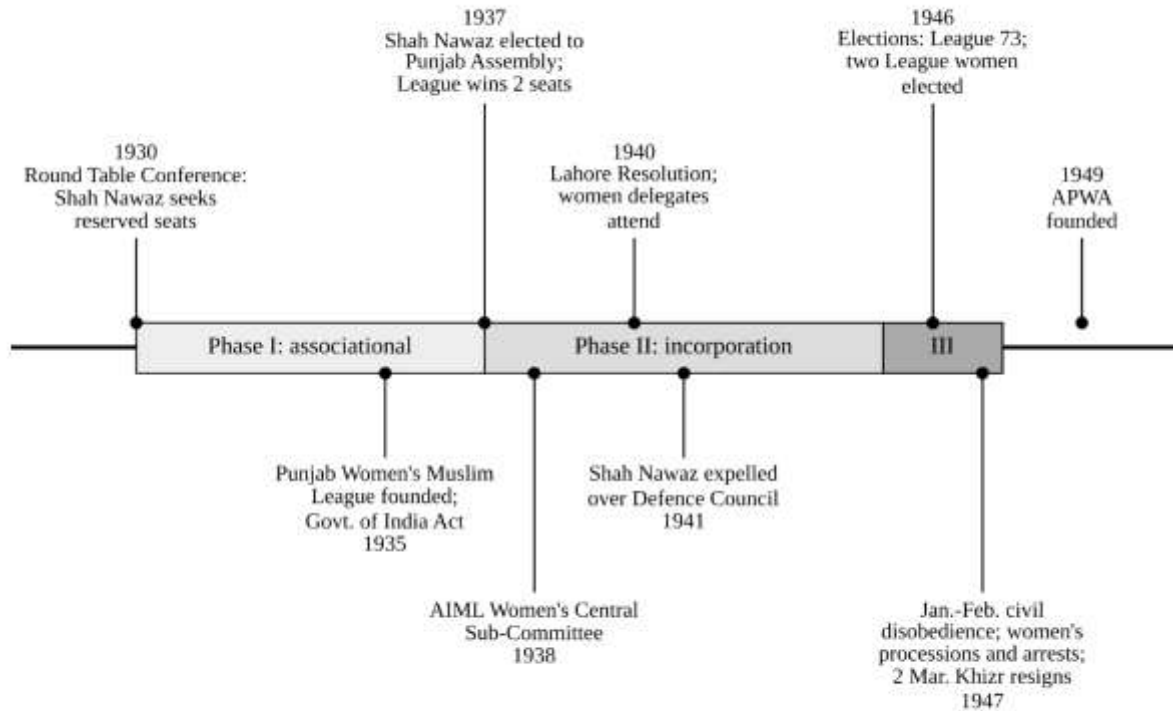
Three phases were identified on the basis of changes in the dominant organizational form and in the political environment (Table 1; Figure 2). The boundaries are analytical: the 1937 elections and the League's reorganization mark the transition from associational to party-based activity, and the 1945–1946 elections and the collapse of the Unionist order mark the transition from party-based to mass mobilization.

Table 1

Periodization of Women's Political Participation in Punjab, 1930–1947

Phase	Period	Dominant organizational form	Principal repertoire	Political context
I	1930–1937	Women's associations, conferences and journals; elite family networks	Petitions, resolutions, constitutional lobbying, education and welfare work	Unionist dominance; 1935 Act reforms; League weak in Punjab
II	1937–1945	Party sub-committees within the Muslim League; provincial women's league	Meetings, membership drives, fund-raising, attendance at League sessions	League reorganization; Lahore Resolution (1940); wartime strain
III	1945–1947	League branches, student bodies, volunteer and guard organizations	Electoral canvassing, processions, flag-hoisting, courting arrest	1946 elections; hung assembly; coalition ministry; civil disobedience

Note. The periodization is the author's analytical construct based on Talbot (1980, 1988), Jalal (1991), Minault (1998), Ali (2000) and Princeton University Library (n.d.).

Figure 2*Timeline of Key Events in Punjabi Muslim Women's Political Mobilization, 1930–1949*

Note. Compiled from Ali and Tariq (2008), Koul (2022), Mumtaz and Shaheed (1987), Talbot (1980, 1996a) and Princeton University Library (n.d.). AIML = All-India Muslim League; APWA = All Pakistan Women's Association.

Historical Context: Punjab Before 1947

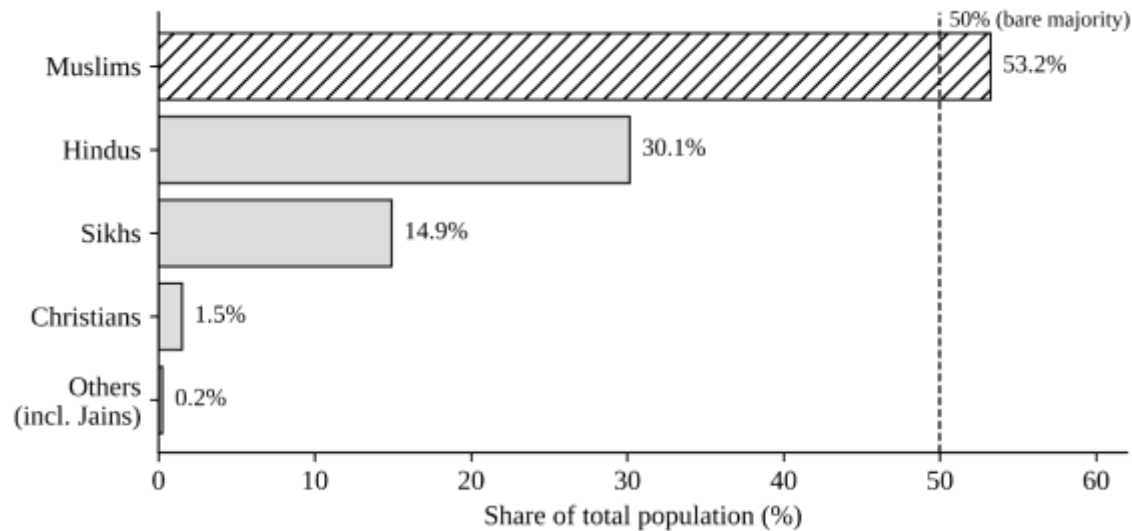
Demographic Setting

The 1941 Census recorded a population of about 34.3 million in the Punjab Province, including the princely states. Muslims formed 53.2% of this population, Hindus 30.1%, Sikhs 14.9%, and Christians 1.5% (Figure 3). The Muslim majority was, however, unevenly distributed: the western districts were overwhelmingly Muslim, while the central and eastern districts, including Lahore and Amritsar, were closely divided (Krishan, 2004; Talbot & Singh, 2009). This fine

demographic balance made every vote, and every visible demonstration of communal support, politically significant.

Figure 3

Religious Composition of Punjab Province, 1941 Census



Note. Figures include the princely states attached to the province (total population 34,309,861). Data from the Census of India (1941), as compiled in Krishan (2004).

The same census shows how narrow the educated base for women's public activity was. Literate persons made up only about 10.9% of the province's population, and Muslims were the least literate of the major communities, at about 7.0%, compared with about 16.4% among Hindus and 17.0% among Sikhs (Table 2). Female literates accounted for only about 2.7% of the total population and about 1.5% of the Muslim population. In practice, this meant that the pool of Muslim women able to read the reformist press, write petitions or serve as organizers was very small and concentrated in a few urban, professional and landed families.

Table 2

Selected Socio-Political Indicators for Punjab, 1935–1947

Indicator	Value	Source
Total population, Punjab Province including states (1941)	34.3 million	Census of India (1941)
Muslim share of population (1941)	53.2%	Census of India (1941); Krishan (2004)

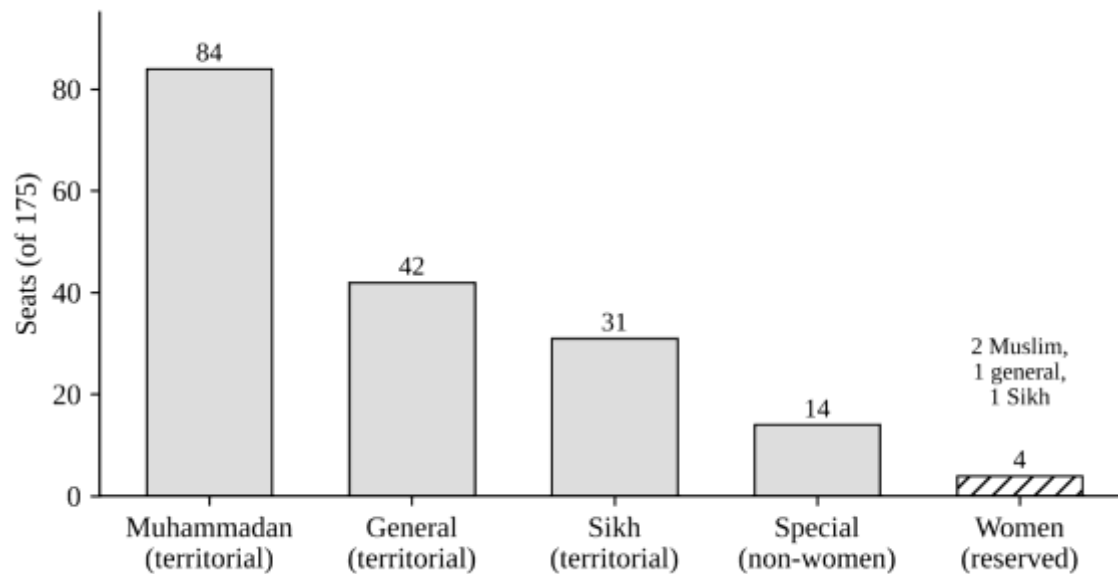
Indicator	Value	Source
Literate persons, all communities (1941)	10.9% of population	Census of India (1941)
Literate persons among Muslims (1941)	7.0% of Muslim population	Census of India (1941)
Female literates among Muslims (1941)	1.5% of Muslim population	Census of India (1941)
Seats in the Punjab Legislative Assembly (1935 Act)	175	Yadav (1987)
Seats reserved for women	4 (2 Muslim, 1 general, 1 Sikh), 2.3% of the house	Yadav (1987)
Women enfranchised under the 1935 Act (all-India)	about 6 million	Forbes (1996)
Women elected to Indian legislatures (1937, all-India)	about 80	Ali and Tariq (2008)
Muslim League seats, Punjab Assembly (1937 / 1946)	2 / 73	Talbot (1980)
Women in Pakistan's first Constituent Assembly (1947)	2	Mumtaz and Shaheed (1987)

Note. Literacy figures are literate persons as a percentage of the relevant population and are approximate because the 1941 tabulations were curtailed by wartime economy measures. Sources differ slightly on the 1946 League total (73 or 75 seats).

Constitutional Setting

Administration in colonial Punjab rested on the relationship between the state and rural intermediaries. The Unionist Party, a cross-communal alliance of landholding interests led successively by Sir Sikandar Hayat Khan (premier from 1937) and Malik Khizr Hayat Tiwana (premier from 1942), benefited greatly from the Government of India Act 1935 and won an overwhelming majority in 1937 (Talbot, 1988, 1996a). The 1935 Act widened the franchise but retained property and educational qualifications; women could qualify through property, literacy or as the wives or widows of qualified men. Nationally, the Act enfranchised roughly six million women, a formal extension of women's political rights that in practice favoured a small number of elite families (Forbes, 1996).

The structure of the Punjab Legislative Assembly reflected these limits. Of its 175 seats, 84 were Muhammadan territorial seats, 42 general, 31 Sikh and 18 "special", of which only four were reserved for women: two Muslim, one general and one Sikh (Figure 4). Women could therefore enter the legislature in meaningful numbers only through reserved seats, and Muslim women's formal representation in the province was limited to two members in a house of 175.

Figure 4*Composition of the Punjab Legislative Assembly Under the Government of India Act 1935*

Note. Special seats other than women's seats comprised European (1), Anglo-Indian (1), Indian Christian (2), commerce and industry (1), landholders (5), trade and labour unions (3) and university (1). Data from Yadav (1987).

Associational Precedents

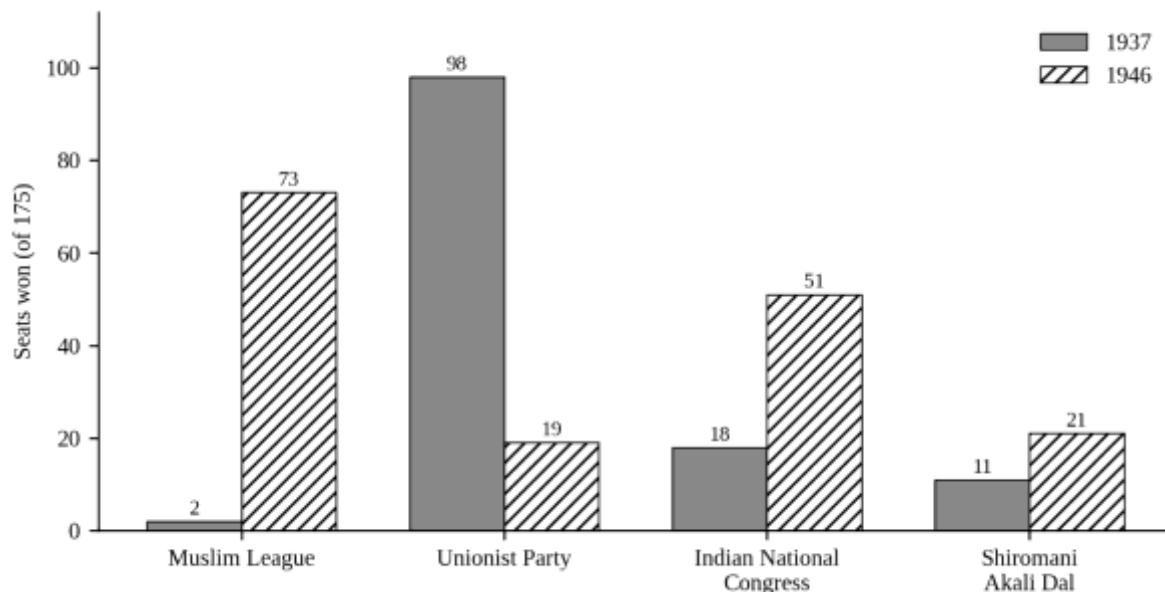
Muslim women's public activity was not new in Punjab. Lahore was a centre of reformist associational life and of a women's press, including the journal *Tehzib-i-Niswan* (founded 1898), and of community institutions such as the Anjuman-i-Himayat-i-Islam (founded 1884) (Minault, 1998). Women's bodies such as the Anjuman Khawateen-i-Islam in Lahore promoted female education and social reform, and the All-India Muslim Ladies' Conference, founded in 1914, gave elite women a forum to discuss education, seclusion and family law (Ali & Tariq, 2008; Minault, 1981). These institutions established a precedent: women could leave the home for a public forum, provided the subject was the "moral improvement" of the community. Their limits mattered as much as their achievements, because they were based on an urban, educated and narrow elite, and their politics were reformist rather than mobilizational (Saiyid, 1998).

The Political Opportunity of the 1940s

By the mid-1940s, wartime inflation, the pressures of military recruitment and the breakdown of the Unionists' patronage system had opened the way for the League (Talbot, 1980). The League's 1946 campaign in Punjab combined promises that Pakistan would remedy the grievances of the rural poor with the organization of religious leaders, such as a committee of pirs, and the mobilization of shrine networks (Gilmartin, 1988, 2009; Talbot, 1980). The results of this transformation are shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5

Seats Won by Major Parties in the Punjab Legislative Assembly, 1937 and 1946



Note. Seat totals are those commonly reported for the 175-member assembly; sources differ slightly. Talbot (1980) reports the League winning 75 seats in 1946, while other tallies give 73. The 1937 Unionist total includes members of all communities. Minor parties and independents are omitted. Data are from Talbot (1980) and Yadav (1987).

Analysis: Three Phases of Mobilization

Phase I (1930–1937): Reformist Associational Politics

In the early 1930s, Punjabi Muslim women's public political activity was confined largely to associations and constitutional lobbying. At the first Round Table Conference in London (1930),

Begum Jahanara Shah Nawaz of Lahore, daughter of Sir Muhammad Shafi, was one of only two women delegates; she argued for reserved seats for women in the legislatures, and she attended the third session in 1932 as the only woman delegate from India (Ali & Tariq, 2008; Forbes, 1996). The significance of this episode lies less in its immediate result than in what it created: a small group of elite Punjabi Muslim women with first-hand experience of constitutional politics and of the institutions of the colonial state.

The same circle then began to organize. Biographical accounts date the founding of the Punjab Provincial Women's Muslim League to 1935 under Shah Nawaz's leadership (Table 3). Its early status was uncertain. When she reported on it to the All-India Muslim League Council at Lucknow in October 1937, Jinnah reportedly said that he did not believe in separate organizations for men and women and wanted them to work together from the primary level of the League upward (Saeed, n.d.). Whatever the exact wording, the episode reveals two features of this phase: women initiated the organization, and the male leadership was reluctant to create a separate structure for them.

Women's entry into the legislature followed the same elite pattern. In the 1937 elections, which returned about 80 women to legislatures across India, Shah Nawaz won a reserved seat in the Punjab Legislative Assembly and became the first Muslim woman to serve as a parliamentary secretary, holding the education, medical relief and public health portfolio in the Unionist ministry until 1942 (Ali & Tariq, 2008). This detail matters. In 1937, the most prominent Muslim woman politician in Punjab worked within the Unionist government rather than against it, and her speeches in the Assembly, for example on the links between child marriage, early maternity and high female mortality, belonged to the reformist rather than the nationalist register (Ali & Tariq, 2008). The League's own weakness, with just two seats in the Assembly, underlined how little purchase it then had in the province.

Table 3

Selected Women's Organizations and Institutional Milestones Relevant to Punjab

Year	Organization or event	Relevance to Punjab	Principal source
1884	Anjuman-i-Himayat-i-Islam, Lahore	Community institution later associated with women's education and orphanage committees.	Minault (1998)
1898	<i>Tehzib-i-Niswan</i> (Lahore)	Early public forum for	Minault (1998)

Year	Organization or event			Relevance to Punjab	Principal source
	women's journal)			Muslim women's education and reform	
1914	All-India Muslim Conference		Ladies'	National forum for elite women's reformist deliberation	Minault (1981)
1930–1932	Round Table Conferences			Shah Nawaz among very few women delegates; sought reserved seats	Ali and Tariq (2008); Forbes (1996)
1935	Punjab Provincial Muslim League		Women's	Provincial women's body founded by Shah Nawaz; dating varies by source	Saeed (n.d.); Ali and Tariq (2008)
1937	Punjab Legislative elections		Assembly	Shah Nawaz elected to a reserved women's seat; parliamentary secretary to 1942	Ali and Tariq (2008)
1938	All-India Women's Central Committee	Muslim League		Party-level structure with provincial sub-committees, including Punjab	Jalal (1991); Mumtaz and Shaheed (1987)
1940	Lahore session of the Muslim League			Women delegates hosted and organized in Lahore	Ali and Tariq (2008)
1941	Expulsion of Shah Nawaz from the League			Conflict over representation and the National Defence Council	Koul (2022)
1946–1947	Punjab Muslim League Women's Sub-Committee; street mobilization			Office and processions documented in photographs, January–February 1947	Princeton University Library (n.d.); Willmer (1996)
1947	Muslim Women's Guard		National	Volunteer civil-defence and relief body during the 1947 violence; League-affiliated account	Saeed (n.d.)
1949	All Pakistan Association (APWA)		Women's	Post-independence successor to nationalist-era women's activism	Mumtaz and Shaheed (1987)

Note. Where sources date an organization differently, the range is shown. Entries from League-affiliated sources are flagged in the text as retrospective claims.

Phase II (1937–1945): Organizational Incorporation

The League's reorganization after 1937 created institutional space for women. In 1938, a Women's Central Sub-Committee was established, followed by provincial sub-committees, which gave women a recognized place within the party structure (Jalal, 1991; Mumtaz & Shaheed, 1987). In Punjab, this meant that established activists could work inside the League rather than through independent bodies, gaining access and legitimacy in exchange for subordination to the League's agenda. The Lahore session of March 1940, at which the Pakistan Resolution was adopted, was an early test of this arrangement: Shah Nawaz hosted and

organized the women delegates, and women's attendance at the session was presented as evidence of the breadth of support for the new demand (Ali & Tariq, 2008).

Incorporation had two sides. For the League, the women's sub-committees were a means to carry the Pakistan demand beyond formal politics into households and the educated middle class. Jinnah's address to students at the Islamia College for Girls in Lahore in November 1942, in which he claimed that even Muslim women and children understood the Pakistan demand, illustrates this strategy (Abid & Abid, 2011). For women, the sub-committees offered legitimacy and an organizational structure: the "bargain" identified by Kandiyoti (1988), in which recognition and a stake in a shared cause were exchanged for acceptance of the party's priorities.

The arrangement was not free of conflict. In 1941, Shah Nawaz was expelled from the League after refusing to resign from the Viceroy's National Defence Council, which the League had instructed its members to leave (Koul, 2022). She claimed to sit on the Council as a representative of Indian women and of Punjab, but Jinnah insisted that a League member could represent Muslims or no one. Koul (2022) shows that the episode helped the League consolidate a homogenizing vision of Muslim identity in which cross-communal, gender-based and regional forms of representation were no longer acceptable. Shah Nawaz rejoined the League before the 1946 elections. Her case shows that women's position within the party depended on accepting its claim to be the sole representative of Muslims, and that women who asserted other identities could be disciplined like any other members.

Evidence for the day-to-day work of this phase, such as membership drives, meetings and fund-raising, is thin and largely retrospective. It is nevertheless clear that by the mid-1940s a small layer of women organizers had become established in the League, with links to girls' schools and colleges and to the families of League leaders. This layer supplied the trained personnel for the mobilization of 1946–1947.

Phase III (1945–1947): Electoral and Street Mobilization

The 1946 Election Campaign

The League's success in 1946 rested on a campaign that carried the Pakistan demand into village and shrine networks (Gilmartin, 1988; Khalid, 2019; Talbot, 1980). It won 73 seats in the 175-member assembly (75 in some tallies), almost all the Muslim seats, but no non-Muslim seats, and

so fell short of a majority. A coalition of the Unionists, Congress and the Akali Dal formed the government under Khizr Hayat Tiwana in March 1946, leaving the League in opposition as the largest single party (Talbot, 1980, 1996a).

Women's role in the campaign is documented more fully than in the earlier phases. Both reserved Muslim women's seats were won by League candidates, Begum Jahanara Shah Nawaz and Begum Salma Tassaduq Hussain, a result that the League treated as a test of its claim to represent all Muslims (Ali & Tariq, 2008). Abid and Abid (2011) also record that Muslim women's organizations joined the Punjab Muslim Students' Federation in street protests against the "unholy alliance" of the coalition in August 1946. Beyond these episodes, however, Punjab-specific evidence on canvassing, women-only meetings and the mobilization of household networks remains thin. This is an area in which systematic study of the Urdu press and the League's election files would greatly strengthen the account.

The Civil Disobedience Campaign (December 1946 to February 1947)

The turning point in women's involvement came with the League's civil disobedience campaign against the coalition ministry. Photographs show women protesting in front of the Civil Secretariat in Lahore as early as December 1946, before the campaign was formally launched (Princeton University Library, n.d.). The decisive escalation came on 24 January 1947, when the provincial government declared the Muslim League National Guard and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh unlawful. In the police search of the National Guard headquarters in Lahore that followed, several prominent League leaders, including Begum Shah Nawaz, were arrested (Abid & Abid, 2011; Talbot, 1996a).

Over the following weeks, women became a prominent public presence. Contemporary newspapers report that "ladies of eminent families" came out into the streets (Abid & Abid, 2011), and photographs dated January and February 1947 show League women marching in Lahore, including past the office of the Punjab Provincial Muslim League Women's Sub-Committee (Princeton University Library, n.d.). Willmer (1996) argues that these protests constituted the first large-scale public mobilization of Muslim women in pre-independence India. Ali and Tariq (2008) record the arrest of sixteen Muslim women and the imposition of Section 144 during the January agitation, as well as an incident in which Lady Shafi, Shah Nawaz's mother, was struck by police during a procession. League-affiliated retrospectives go further,

claiming that more than 500 women courted arrest in a single day and describing daily women's processions that continued despite tear gas, baton charges and arrests (Saeed, n.d.); as noted above, these figures cannot be verified. The same sources report that Mumtaz Shah Nawaz, then in custody, raised a League flag made from her own dupatta on the roof of the jail (Ali & Tariq, 2008; Saeed, n.d.).

The best-known incident occurred on 16 February 1947, when Fatima Sughra, then a schoolgirl of about fourteen, climbed the Civil Secretariat, removed the Union Jack and replaced it with a League flag (Princeton University Library, n.d.; "Would Pakistan's 'troublemaker' be supported today?", n.d.). In later interviews, she said that she had not fully understood what she was doing at the time, and she credited the elite "Begums" with mobilizing girls like her (Virdee, 2013). Her account captures both the spontaneity of the act and the way the movement later remembered it. The campaign was called off after a settlement between the provincial government and the League leadership, and women leaders were photographed leaving the Lahore Women's Jail on 26 February 1947 (Princeton University Library, n.d.). Khizr Hayat Tiwana resigned as premier on 2 March 1947 (Talbot, 1996a). Women activists from Punjab also helped organize women's protests against the Congress ministry in the North-West Frontier Province during the same period (Willmer, 1996). The sequence is set out in Table 4.

Table 4

Chronology of the Civil Disobedience Episode and Women's Involvement, December 1946–March 1947

Date	Event	Women's involvement	Source
Dec. 1946	Protests at the Civil Secretariat, Lahore	Women photographed protesting in front of the Secretariat	Princeton University Library (n.d.)
24 Jan. 1947	League National Guard and RSS declared unlawful; League leaders arrested	Begum Shah Nawaz among those arrested at National Guard headquarters	Abid and Abid (2011); Talbot (1996a)
Late Jan. 1947	Section 144 imposed; processions defy bans	Sixteen Muslim women reported arrested; Lady Shafi struck by police	Ali and Tariq (2008)
Jan.–Feb. 1947	Daily	Marches by League women; retrospective claims of	Princeton

Date	Event	Women's involvement	Source
	processions and defiance of bans on demonstrations	mass arrests (unverified count)	University Library (n.d.); Saeed (n.d.); Willmer (1996)
16 Feb. 1947	Flag-hoisting at the Civil Secretariat	Fatima Sughra replaces the Union Jack with a League flag	Princeton University Library (n.d.); Virdee (2013)
26 Feb. 1947	Campaign called off after settlement; prisoners released	Women leaders photographed leaving Women's Jail	Princeton University Library (n.d.)
2 Mar. 1947	Khizr Hayat Tiwana resigns as premier	Indirect: campaign contributed to the coalition's collapse	Talbot (1996a)

Note. Dates are taken from the sources cited. The causal link between the campaign and the resignation is interpretive.

It would be an overstatement to claim that women's processions brought down the ministry. The coalition faced a wider crisis, including rising communal tension, a loss of confidence among Muslim legislators, and the political uncertainty created by the British government's announcement of 20 February 1947 that it would leave India by June 1948 (Khan, 2007; Talbot, 1996a). However, the visibility of the campaign, and especially the spectacle of educated, middle-class and elite Muslim women courting arrest, raised the political cost of continued repression and strengthened the League's claim to speak for the Muslims of Punjab. In this sense, women's participation had tactical value far exceeding its numerical weight.

Repertoires and Frames

The repertoire available to Punjabi Muslim women in 1947 was the product of the earlier phases. Petitioning and conference politics came from Phase I, committee organization from Phase II, and public performance from the events of 1946–1947. Table 5 sets out the main forms of action, the frames that legitimized them and the limitations of the evidence.

Table 5

Repertoires of Action, Legitimizing Frames and Evidentiary Cautions

Repertoire	Illustrative evidence	Frame mobilized	Evidentiary caution
Petitioning and conference	Round Table reserved seats; lobbying for women's	Community welfare; women's education and	Elite and small-scale; well documented in scholarship

Repertoire	Illustrative evidence	Frame mobilized	Evidentiary caution
politics	conferences	reform	
Legislative work	Shah Nawaz as member and parliamentary secretary, 1937–1942	Social reform within existing institutions	Well documented; individual rather than collective
Party organization	Provincial women's league; League sub-committees	Women's duty to the national cause	Day-to-day work poorly documented
Electoral canvassing and candidacy	Two League women elected to reserved seats, 1946	Representation of Muslim women within the League	Punjab-specific canvassing evidence thin
Processions and slogans	Daily marches in Lahore, Jan.–Feb. 1947	Defence of League leaders and civil liberties; communal solidarity	Scale known mainly from partisan sources and photographs
Symbolic acts (flag-hoisting)	Fatima Sughra, 16 Feb. 1947; reported jail flag-raising	Replacing imperial with communal symbols	Retrospective testimony; commemorative status
Arrest and imprisonment	Women leaders held in Lahore Women's Jail; released 26 Feb.	Sacrifice and honour	Totals unverified
Relief and guard work	Muslim Women's National Guard during the 1947 violence	Protection of the community	League-affiliated account only

Note. Frames are inferred from the language of the sources and from the analytical literature, not from systematic content analysis.

The frames that legitimized this repertoire were not feminist in the modern sense. They drew on the language of community, sacrifice and honour, which placed women's action within established understandings of moral duty. Chatterjee's (1989) argument that nationalism assigned women to a protected domain of cultural identity may also explain why public action could be accepted as an extension of that role: the dupatta, the emblem of modesty, could become a flag, and modesty itself could become a sign of commitment to the cause. Women created room to act by working within the gender order, in Kandiyoti's (1988) terms. Willmer (1996) notes that many women saw in Pakistan the promise of a "moral state" that would honour both their faith and their aspirations, which helps to explain why some were, in Shah Nawaz's phrase, "more impatient for Pakistan than men". The popular claim that women "abandoned the veil" to join the struggle is too simple. Many marched in burqas; what changed was not the veil itself but the range of public spaces in which respectable women could legitimately appear.

Who Mobilized?

The sources name only a few women: Jahanara Shah Nawaz and her daughter Mumtaz, her mother Lady Shafi, Fatima Begum, Salma Tassaduq Hussain, Geeti Ara, Hassan Ara Hafeezullah and Fatima Sughra (Ali & Tariq, 2008; Saeed, n.d.; Virdee, 2013). Most were

educated, urban and connected to League or professional families, which is consistent with the broader literature on Muslim women's organizations (Minault, 1998; Saiyid, 1998) and with the very low levels of female literacy recorded in the 1941 Census. It does not follow, however, that participation was confined to elites. Photographs show groups of marchers whose names are not recorded, and because the League relied on family and neighbourhood networks to bring women out, participation may have been wider than the list of named leaders suggests. Virdee's (2013) interviews also show that working-class and rural women often discounted their own political roles, so their absence from the record reflects in part how memory was gendered and classed.

There is little evidence on rural women, working-class urban women or women in smaller towns. This is a limitation of the sources, not a finding. The sources also say almost nothing about the politics of Hindu, Sikh and Christian women in Punjab during the same period, which is essential for a complete comparative picture.

Discussion

Outcomes and Limits

The findings support the three parts of the argument. The continuity of personnel (Shah Nawaz was active in all three phases), organizational forms (from associations to party sub-committees to street mobilization), and frames supports the first claim, that the mobilization of 1947 was built on earlier foundations. The nature of the repertoire itself, which used symbols such as the dupatta and a language of sacrifice that sat comfortably with existing gender norms, supports the second claim, that mobilization proceeded by extending respectability rather than rejecting it. The third claim, that incorporation was vital but brought little formal power, is supported by the contrast between women's visibility in early 1947 and their position after independence.

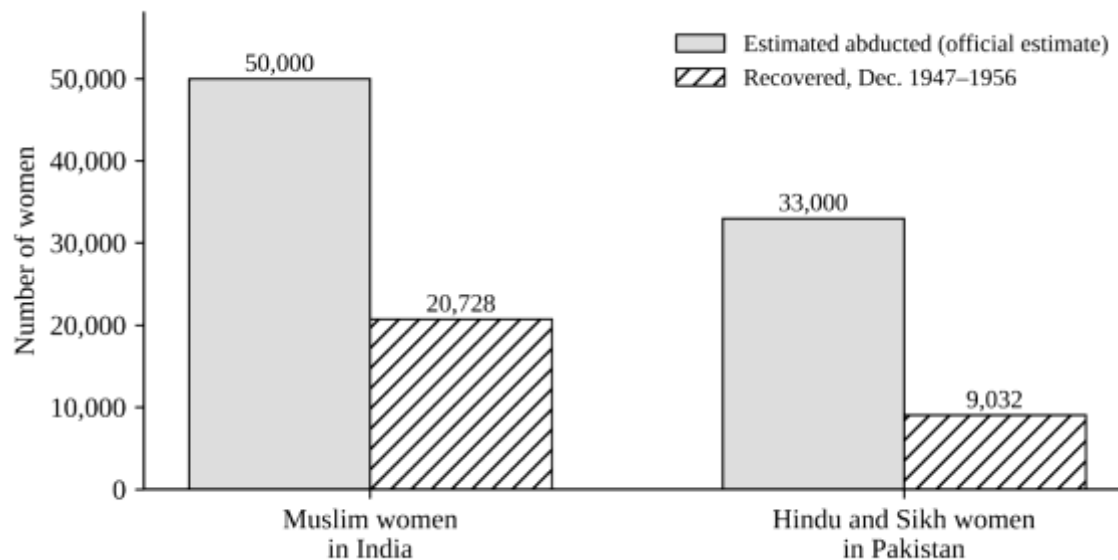
That contrast is clear in the post-independence period. Only two women, Jahanara Shah Nawaz and Shaista Ikramullah, sat in Pakistan's first Constituent Assembly (Ikramullah, 1963; Mumtaz & Shaheed, 1987). Women's activism continued in new institutional forms, notably the All Pakistan Women's Association (APWA), founded in 1949, and in 1948 women members of the Punjab Assembly, supported by women demonstrators in Lahore, successfully pressed for the inclusion of women's inheritance rights in the provincial Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application legislation (Ali & Tariq, 2008; Mumtaz & Shaheed, 1987). Yet, as Jalal (1991) and

Mumtaz and Shaheed (1987) argue, the new state limited women's formal political participation and marginalized women's rights in the agenda of national consolidation.

The violence of 1947 also shaped women's postcolonial citizenship through ideas of protection and honour, which narrowed their autonomy. Estimates of deaths in the Partition violence range from about 200,000 to one million, and Punjab was its principal theatre (Talbot & Singh, 2009). According to official estimates, about 50,000 Muslim women were abducted in India and about 33,000 Hindu and Sikh women in Pakistan; between December 1947 and 1956, the two states' recovery operations returned 20,728 Muslim women and 9,032 Hindu and Sikh women (Figure 6; Menon & Bhasin, 1993, 1998). The recovery programme treated women as the property of the community and the nation, often returning them against their will to families that might reject them (Butalia, 1998; Menon & Bhasin, 1998). By the end of 1947, the women who had marched in Lahore in February lived in a state whose creation had been accompanied by mass violence that targeted women's bodies disproportionately.

Figure 6

Estimated Abducted and Recovered Women in India and Pakistan After Partition



Note. Abduction figures are official estimates and are widely regarded as approximate; recovery figures cover the Inter-Dominion recovery operation from December 1947 to 1956. Data are from Menon and Bhasin (1993, 1998).

Punjab's Specificity

Three features distinguish the Punjab case. First, because of Unionist dominance, the League had little organization in the province in 1937, so women's organizing was an integral part of building the League itself rather than an extension of an existing structure. Second, the stakes of mobilization were especially high because Muslims were only a bare majority in Punjab and faced well-organized Hindu and Sikh political movements (Talbot, 1988), a balance captured by the census data in Figure 3. Third, the timing of the civil disobedience campaign, immediately after a disputed election and directed against a coalition ministry that had excluded the largest party, made women's visibility particularly effective. Whether these features produced a distinctively Punjabi pattern of women's mobilization, or one shared with Bengal, Sindh, the North-West Frontier Province or the United Provinces, cannot be determined without comparative research, although Willmer's (1996) evidence of Punjabi women's role in the Frontier protests suggests that the Punjab model was exported.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study has four main limitations. First, it is a synthesis and does not draw on unpublished archival holdings. Second, its evidence centres on a small number of named women and on events in Lahore, the provincial capital and the main arena of the 1947 campaign. Third, it relies partly on partisan and retrospective sources whose claims can be tested only against one another and against the photographic record. Fourth, it focuses on Muslim women and the Muslim League and does not examine the parallel mobilization of Hindu and Sikh women or the relationship between them. Future research should make systematic use of the Urdu and English press of 1945–1947 (including *Dawn*, *The Pakistan Times*, *The Civil and Military Gazette* and *Inqilab*), League and provincial government records, the Punjab Legislative Assembly debates, oral histories of participants and their families, and district-level evidence from outside Lahore, and should compare the Punjab case with other provinces.

Conclusion

The participation of Punjabi Muslim women in the Pakistan Movement was not a sudden outburst in 1947, nor merely an extension of men's politics. It developed in three stages, from reformist associations to party incorporation to street mobilization, each of which supplied

resources, frames and experience to the next. It succeeded by drawing on, rather than discarding, the language and institutions of respectability, and it had real tactical consequences at the specific political moment of early 1947. Secondary data show how narrow its starting base was: four reserved seats in an assembly of 175, Muslim literacy of about 7%, and female literacy far lower. They also show how limited its formal rewards were, with two women in Pakistan's first Constituent Assembly. The mobilization brought only limited and uneven gains for the women involved. This is a pattern common to many nationalist movements: women are encouraged to participate when the cause requires it and constrained once it has been won. Preserving the detail of that participation, including that of the women whose names are absent from the record, is an important task for the historiography of Punjab and Pakistan.

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