



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Nationalism and Muslim Women During Pakistan Freedom  
Movement in *From Purdah to Parliament***

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**PAPER INFO**

**ABSTRACT**

**Received:**

September 14, 2019

**Accepted:**

December 25, 2019

**Online:**

December 31, 2019

**Keywords:**

Nationalism,  
Pakistan  
Movement,  
Muslim  
Women,  
Postcolonialism,  
Hybridity

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Colonial discourse generally depicts domination of colonizers as a threatening force to culture, ideology and civilization of colonized land and it highlights their struggle to liberate them from external tyranny. Building upon this notion, this essay uses Shaista Suhrawardy Ikramullah's novel *Purdah to Parliament*, to analyze nationalistic tendency, which refer to provide the nationalistic Strule of Muslim women in the pre-independence era. The ascent of Muslim nationalism mingled with idea of separate homeland demanded the enrollment of Muslim women to support the cause. This paper provides indispensable insight into issues related to nationalism and nativism, fabrication of their women's national identity, their past and their transformation with regard to the idea of nationalism. Along with Fanonian nationalism This notion of colonial power, however, takes into account various mechanisms through which power has been employed by colonizers and resisted at different levels by colonized in order to liberate themselves. This nationalistic struggle depicts that alongside men; creation of Pakistan was also the result of Muslim women struggle

**Introduction**

Enlightenment period in Europe gave rise to standards of civilization which helped to shape the structure of thought. According to this set pattern of modernity, cultures were recognized as civilized or uncivilized. For example, West was associated with Civilized, developed and progressive while non-west as Barbarous, under developed and rural. This stereotyping on Western part provided the model for comparison of West with other societies, which were

completely different in their histories, cultures and traditions. Colonial subject, thus, provide us to look for this power monopoly employed by westerns over non-westerners and how these colonized resisted against this power myth and perspective of colonists regarding race and subordination (Mondal, 2012).

Postcolonial literature explores this relationship between colonizers and colonized that how they interacted with each other in fixed power structures and what and how it happened that colonized shed colonizer's influence. *Purdah to Parliament* is such a postcolonial text written by Shaista Surawardy Ikramullah. The text throws light on the era when Muslims and Hindus were under control of western influence. *Purdah to Parliament* is set in 1915 in Sub-continent. It is autobiography of Ikramullah, which covers the days of British Raj, colonial era of India and aftermath. Through depiction of her life, book provides glimpses of different periods presenting transformation of India from colony to nation-state. The novel depicts the colonial era and its consequences on lives of Indians, and how they shattered this impact through anti-colonial movement. Moreover, the novel presents the social and political movement that put forward rapid changes through the entry of British into common lives of purdah-observing houses. It exemplifies the entry of woman, brought up under purdah, into parliament, Foreign Services and United Nation.

Colonialism brought many changes to the lives of natives in India. One such enormous transformation was in the outlook of Muslims who began to think radically different with regard to their women's position after introduction of modern Western education. It forced Muslims to stick to their religious and culture tradition but also adopt the new changing environment. As the struggle for separate nation was laid, women also came out to participate and play their exemplary roles to create national identity. The rising of Muslim nationalism demanded the women to support this in order to be liberated from foreign Dominance. *Purdah to Parliament* by Shaista Ikramullah gives insight into roles of women in creation of Pakistan. It portrays political awakening of women for sake of national interests.

The nationalistic tendency was strong enough to merge women in the struggle for Pakistan. "The by-product of this movement was the milieu in which the Muslim women were able to break the centuries old bondage of traditions that kept them in the confines of home as non-entity and an opening to public sphere" (Farooq, 2004). Muslims women first stepped out of their houses to be part of the struggle movement and *Purdah to parliament* highlights tis exemplary struggle on part of women. This paper will also highlight the transformation of women from

domestic tasks to national tasks in order to support the major cause. The objectives of this paper is to explore the development of Muslim women with regard to nationalism and their contribution in Pakistan movement in order to get their separate homeland.

### **Material and Methods**

In this paper, the researcher has made use of the theory of nationalism proposed by Frantz Fanon to see how Muslim women developed and emerged with respect to idea of nationalism. For this purpose, textual analysis method is used to comprehend the different elements necessary of analysis. As textual analysis, method looks for plot, character and theme development along with its connection with other texts and with the world. The story of text is being viewed connected with the real world and most importantly, the greater meaning that is being inferred from the connection of text with other texts. The frame of reference used for analysis for the text is nationalism by Frantz Fanon. The rationale of analysis is colonial suppression of a nation under colonizers and the issue of national identity being created during the colonization.

### **Nationalism and Muslim Women during the Pakistan Movement in *From Purdah to Parliament***

Pakistan came in to existence in 1947. Muslims of Subcontinent struggled hard for it. It was not only dream of Muslim men but also of Muslim women equally. Pakistan movement presented other side of Muslim women who were earlier supposed to being traditional in outlook, but this movement broke the customary perspective with reference to women. Shaista Ikramullah has narrated three generations in her novel, the generation of her mother, restricted in purdah and four walls of houses. Then, her own generation who was brought up under modern education and then third generation, the young girls studying in colleges and schools very much aware of how they had to raise their voices in support of Pakistan movement. It is worth mentioning that whenever a literature is written in third world county by women, it basically revolves around the gender notions, the issues of women, but in *Purdah to Parliament*, Shaista Ikramullah has only focused on the women's awakening in political dimension. It was not the case Muslims women faced no issue therefore they demanded no rights, but it shows that how dedicated they were regarding their work, it does not seem to bother them, that they should demand their feministic rights. Shaista Ikramulah has thrown light on this transformation of women. From the woman in *Purdah to Political movement*, it also shows her own transformation, from *Purdah to Parliament*.

“Cooking and sewing were considered the important items of girl’s education”(Ikramullah, 1963). This was time when men started to make compromise on certain aspects but for their women they were as concerned as they were before advent of modern education, “NawabSyud Muhammad perforce had to accept certain things for himself and his sons, but he was determined not to accept them for his womenfolk. They were kept in the strict purdah and even visits from women were restricted” (Ikramullah, 1963, p. 5). This was time of 19<sup>th</sup> century, where the women only get domestic education. After this era, the writer has explained the life of his mother and women of her mother’s generation where somehow the changed had started to prevail. However, these women were also confined to their houses but many things were changed. Shaista Surawardy explains this era as time of modernization, where the western culture was laying its foundation. The life of women behind the veil has been portrayed by author that how women used to spend their lives, their socialization, their private life, their married life, their relation with their children and their relation with their men but none of it leads us to any entry of these women into political matters. The sole purpose of women was to remain in the house, her activities, personal and public limited to only household task. In the late nineteenth century, Muslim circles were not ready to accept the new emerging outlook towards Muslim women.

Despite of all these social, personal and public activities, women of this time did not let go the importance of education. There were women who became pioneer for women’s empowerment, as mentioned in the book by author, “Khujista Akharbano Begum, she was pioneer of women’s education in India, founder of two girls’ school and author of several books” (Ikramullah, 1963, p. 12). It was end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, although not many women were fascinated by this idea of empowerment, however, still there were few women in India, like KhujistaBano, who were trying hard to fabricate education for women. It is also worth mentioning that women came out from their homes to support their men but it was not the case they left their tradition, they worked under the boundary of their religion and customs, “ Besides her intellectual attainments, truly remarkable for that time, she possessed great sweetness of character and disposition” (Ikramullah, 1963, p. 12).

20<sup>th</sup> century brought many new dimensions into life of Muslim men and women also, because this was time when Muslim men started to readjust their traditional system, considering the need of their women to get modern education (Farooq, 2004). While narrating the story of her education, Shaista Ikramullah exactly demonstrates these modernist views of his father, which according to

Muhammad Farooq was Muslim modernist who played his role for the empowerment of their women. "In 1927, my going to English school was looked upon with much disfavor and yet by 1947 every girl of good family was going to school" (Ikramullah, 1963, p. 31). Shaista Ikramullah unfolds this story of her modern education in 1927 which was actually beginning of women's empowerment. After 20 years, according to writer, it became a common thing, "In another twenty years' time women were taking part in processions, had been to goal, worked in refugees campuses and were sitting in legislatures and participating in international delegations, it seems incredible, but it has happened" (Ikramullah, 1963, p. 31). Although this status of women described by Shaista in 1947 is incredible. However, years from 1927 to 1947 were crucial as in these twenty years of time women passed through different stages of transformation. This is how the foundation of women's participation in nationalism started.

Nationalism is an ideology, which upholds people with same culture and in colonialism, it is idea to which native stick to, in order to get freedom from colonized. It was the case in Sub-continent where Muslims gathered themselves under rubric of this nationalism where men, women, children everyone put his part to make this dream come true. As part on women's roles, it also brought revolution to their lives, Women were participating earlier on small scale, very few of them, but as described in novel the incident of jallianwala brought everyone under one platform, this is what Fanon says as revolution on native part. Fanon puts his focus on tracing subjectivities among natives under the rubric of nationalism. Fanon points that here; the pre-colonial identity of native begins to re-assemble in order to produce the factors responsible for national liberation (Nandy, 1989). Fanon refers national struggle as revolution of natives. Fanon was not the critic, neither academic; rather he was participant in national struggle against French. For Fanon, liberation begins when one starts to realize the so-called constructions made to degrade natives.

Decolonization explodes with violence. As it is the case in Subcontinent, where incident of Jallianwalla awoke people and filled them with fury and rage against British. It was period when people started seeing colonizers as evil, "The storm that was to sweep the pattern of life that I knew as child was already brewing". This violence also provoked women and nationalism does not confine only on men's part. Here, Fanon points out that decolonization is process that is achieved only through violence, "Their first encounter was marked by violence and their existence together--that is to say the exploitation of the native by the settler--was carried on by dint of a great array of bayonets and cannons" (Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 1963, p. 35). After getting consciousness on colonial

oppression, the colonized people go through transformation in their subjectivity, for it, Badiou has used the term –Subjective Becoming. This subjectivity creates nationalism, which takes place at all level, individual, social and collective. (Neocosmos, 2011). The novel –Purdah to Parliament offers insight into stages of liberation struggle and how it operated at all levels from individual to collective.

Not only men but also women recognized this change of subjectivity. And above all, they felt hatred towards British. This is obvious in the behavior of girl, in the novel, who tried to kill Chancellor during ceremony of Convocation, “Bina Das, a girl student, twenty three years of age, attempted to shoot Governor”(Ikramullah, 1963). Fanon is of opinion that “Decolonization is the meeting of two forces” (Fanon, 1963, p. 35). In an essay “On National Culture”, Fanon remarks that dignity is associated only with one’s own civilization. Native pondered over their weaknesses and they found that it was due to their cultural sluggishness, that caused them oppression and at this point, they shed colonial effect. (Lazarus, 1993). This was exactly what happened to Muslims of India, who realized that if they have to retain their values, they should have separate homeland. Muslims women also realized the need for it, because under colonialism and Hindu-imperialism, traditions and Muslim culture ceased to survive, so in order to keep their identity intact, they demanded separate homeland, where they could be free of any external domination

After this violent phase, the national liberation struggle started where women with all their efforts took part in it. The last of anti-colonial struggle is to immerse in liberation movements and fighting for the sake of land. At this stage, Fanon describes, colonized ceases to be colonized and colonizers seek to come into terms with colonized people. From here, the colonized people begin to assemble under movements of liberation against western Imperialism. It is particular characterized by total identification with one’s own cultural values. Revolutionary change occurs in natives’ personality. As Fanon describes in his book *The Wretched of the Earth* “the native, after having tried to lose himself in the people and with the people, will on the contrary shake the people. Instead of according the people’s lethargy an honored place in his esteem, he turns himself into an awakener of the people; hence comes a fighting literature, a revolutionary literature, and a national literature” (Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 1963).

Fanon puts his argument that in order to bring revolution, people in colonial era starts political struggle to construct identity to which Neocosmos refers as –fight for freedom. He says as this liberation is conducted at all levels, as happened in India, where men and women participated. ShaistaIkramullah also

says about this participation on women's part. How they arranged meetings for women where they can express their political views, "this ladies meeting was sponsored by a group of women who were nothing farther than criticism of the government, but this aspect of the matter had not struck my young egoistical mind at that stage" (Ikramullah, 1963).

Women's first task in public spheres was not direct participation in Movement and league, rather they were raising their voices restricted to only women's platform, one such platform mentioned by writer is Delhi Women's league, although Shaista Ikramullah only had to attend lectures but this league left real impact on her as she became the "Ardent Muslim leaguer" (Ikramullah, 1963, p. 72). "The Muslim League has been recognized in 1937 under the presidency of Mr. Muhammad Ali Jinnah" (Ikramullah, 2000, p. 82). Under leadership of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Muslims of Indian assembled to emancipate themselves from colonial domination along with Hindu imperialism. However, this political work, Shaista Ikramullah says, Muslim women "refrained from doing so because the Muslim league was not yet strong enough" (Ikramullah, 1963, p. 91)

Nevertheless, on other hand women felt need of separate platform where they can educate the rest of women for national cause. For this purpose "Muslim Girl Students' organization" (Ikramullah, 1963, p. 88) was formed in 1941. Another striking feature of this women's emancipation is that being in public sphere they did not leave their customs and tradition, rather within these boundaries, they serve their purposes, "All these girls kept strict purdah" (Ikramullah, 1963, p. 88). The organization was supported by Miss Jinnah the real intellectual as "the great part she played in bringing the Muslim women forward" (Ikramullah, 1963, p. 89). —Change in subjectivity among masses happens as they interpret that it is not enough just to think of colonizers as evil, rather they have to play their role in national liberation struggle and as Michael Neocosmos points out that it happens at all levels from individual to collective. So, this is what happened to Muslim girl students of India, who found this need that they had to participate in freedom fighting and they realized that, "There was no separate Muslims Women's Student Federation yet" (Ikramullah, 2000, p. 87). Therefore, as a reaction, the delegates of student came to Mrs. Shaista Suhrawardy and after careful estimation, Fatma Jinnah — "agreed to help them to form a separate Muslim Girl Students 'organization" (Ikramullah, 2000, p. 88). This phenomenon is explained by Fanon as, —the people involved in a struggle for national liberation in which — "the women, the family, the children, the aged — everybody participates" (Neocosmos, 2011, p. 5).

A colonial state can only be recaptured through national liberation struggle. Nationalism is a tool under which crowd of people can be organized into nation state. For Fanon, nation is product of will. Shaista Ikramullah writes in her novel that – “In time of national resistance to foreign domination it is right for all the rules to be broken ” (Ikramullah, 2000, p. 91). She is of opinion that the process of –becoming from colony to nation state, takes a lot of effort, but in order to attain freedom, “one has to define oneself in terms of one's opposition to the colonial system” (Lazarus, 1993). It was due to Muslims struggle that they put their demand before Hindus and British. Firstly there were few women working for women’s emancipation but later on the strength grew, “how little interest in politics there was amongst women in February 1942 and how quickly and rapidly political consciousness grew, for in march 1947, when in this selfsame hall we organized a meeting of Muslim league women’s subcommittee with Quaid e Azam.... Hall was packed to capacity... hundreds of women were standing there as well” (Ikramullah, 1963, p. 93). Although not many women participated in conference but it was beginning of political consciousness among women” (Ikramullah, 1963, p. 95).

Muhammad Farooq recognizes this effort of Shaista Surawardy on part of women’s empowerment, he writes, “Many women belonged to well off, socially and politically prominent families, for instance, the famous Faizi sisters (Atiya Begum, Zuhra Begum and Nazli Begum), the Suhrawardy family of Bengal and many others took part in struggle for the uplift of Muslim women. These voluntary efforts for women education created an awakening amongst Muslim women all over the subcontinent” (Farooq, 2004). Shaista Suhrawardy also celebrates this “political consciousness amongst Muslim women”. For this cause, “women from various parts of countries had been nominated to form committee in their provinces” (Ikramullah, 1963, p. 105)

Another thing worth mentioning is that Muslim women are thought to be suppressed by their men but it was not the case as Muslim men supported their women. Shaistalkramullah says about Quaid e Azam, the leader of Pakistan movement, “Quaid believed in Women’s emancipation” she further adds, “this was being brought about not only by the stress of events but directly encouraged by Quaid e azam” (Ikramullah, 1963, p. 105). Similarly, she portrays how her husband supported her, her husband when she was criticized for active participation, said, “My wife is an intelligent woman and comes from political party, I will not and cannot control her. For myself I have nothing to do with politics. If government doesn’t trust me, I am prepared to resign” (Ikramullah, 1963, p. 91)

Women came out in public spheres to help their men to support cause of Pakistan creation. Women participated in elections, “during these elections much work was done by students and women. It was the first time that Muslim women en masse had taken part in political activity” (Ikramullah, 1963, p. 115). Similarly women worked day and night along with their men to liberate themselves, “One thing, however, this political struggle did achieve for us, it brought women into the forefront of public life’ (Ikramullah, 1963, p. 117). Malik (2017) writes, “Pakistan was surely as much the dream of Muslim men as the Muslim women since they actively participated in the ‘Pakistan Movement.”. It can be clearly seen in the effort of women. “Women worked in towns and villages among every stratum of society ... and men were grateful for their help and forgot their centuries old prejudices” (Ikramullah, 1963, p. 117)

Several factors are included in national liberation struggle that change the subjectivity and consciousness of Muslim women about forming a nation state. The movements, organizations, along with the hard work of Muslim women intellectuals that succeed to assemble other women to fight for their rights of freedom. All these factors played their part to shake Muslim women of India to liberate them. Muslim Women Struggle of national liberation was clear depiction that they would not come to any term other than attaining their homeland, no matter what cost they had to pay. Their efforts paved the way of Pakistan, as Shaista writes –This moon is not one that shall ever remain in eclipse (Ikramullah, 2000, p. 101).It means that Muslim men and women were not destined to be ruled by British for the rest of generations, they carved their own destiny by sacrificing a lot in national struggle and at last, “Pakistan was established as a sovereign independent State on 14 August 1947” (Ikramullah, Purdah to Parliament, 2000).

### **Conclusion**

Before the partition in Sub-continent, the shape of political movement altered the Muslim women’s objective reality. From compliant, willing and unassertive as human beings, they came forward as major political powers asserting their opinions and struggling hard along with men. The Muslim women’s participation in Pakistan movement is evidence of their strength. Directly or indirectly being involved in movement, these Muslim women got knack of politics. This political awakening of Muslim women was largely endorsed by their menfolk, also by Quaid e Azam. This introduction of Muslim women into politics and movement helped to pave ways for the creation of Pakistan. It can be said with perfect utility that Pakistan was result of not only men’s Struggle but Muslim women also sacrificed alot to make this dream come true. However, development

of women's identity and issues related to it in the novel *Purdah to Parliament* narrates the theoretical significance of Fanon's theory of national liberation struggle. The conception of nationalism has portrayed enough on colonial power, how it had been exercised in the colonial era by British and resisted at different ways by Muslim women in order to form a nation-state.

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