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Beyond the Public–Private Divide: Reconstructing Women's Political Agency in India's Anti-Colonial Movements, 1857–1947

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ABSTRACT

India's anti-colonial struggle has traditionally been narrated through major political organisations, male nationalist leaders and mass movements, while women's participation is typically read through a binary between the private household and public nationalist politics. This paper argues that the binary obscures more than it reveals. Between 1857 and 1947, Indian women exercised political agency across a far wider register of spaces than that binary recognises: domestic networks, social reform, education, boycott campaigns, women's organisations, mass civil disobedience, imprisonment and underground resistance, illustrated through cases including Usha Mehta's underground Congress Radio and the Rani of Jhansi Regiment. Agency did not move sequentially from home to public sphere; women instead transformed multiple, coexisting spaces into sites of mobilisation, even as nationalist politics constrained them through idealised images of motherhood and sacrifice. Drawing on a historical-interpretive review of secondary scholarship, the paper addresses three gaps in the literature (analytical,

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conceptual and historical-integrative) through a relational, non-linear framework treating domestic mobilisation, reform, organisation, mass resistance and confinement as interdependent registers of a single political agency. The analysis suggests that this agency developed cumulatively across these registers while remaining persistently shaped, and often constrained, by class, caste, region and community.

1. Introduction

The history of India's struggle against British colonial rule cannot be fully understood without examining the participation of women. From the resistance associated with the Revolt of 1857 to the mass movements of the twentieth century, women took part in political, social and anti-colonial activity through armed resistance, social reform, education, boycott, picketing, civil disobedience, imprisonment, underground work and women's associations. Yet women's contribution has often been represented either through the exceptional lives of a few prominent women or through a supportive role within male-dominated nationalist politics.

This creates an analytical problem. If women's political participation is understood only as entry into formal public politics, a considerable part of their political activity remains outside the historical field of vision. Women participated in nationalist politics not only on public platforms but also through households, neighbourhoods, voluntary organisations, educational institutions and community networks, spaces not traditionally recognised as political. Research on the nationalist movement has challenged the assumption that the domestic sphere was politically inactive, showing that the home itself could become a site of nationalist activity and political consciousness (Legg, 2003).

The public–private distinction is particularly problematic in colonial India because mobilisation frequently crossed the boundary between household and public life. Spinning, preparing and using *khadi*, boycotting foreign goods, sheltering activists, spreading political information and collecting funds could all take place within or around domestic spaces. Imprisonment, too, did not necessarily mark the end of political agency: women's experiences in colonial prisons could themselves become spaces of solidarity and resistance (Thapar-Björkert, 1998).

This study therefore does not treat women's political agency as a simple transition from the 'home' to the 'political sphere'. It instead asks how women created and negotiated political spaces across different locations and historical circumstances between 1857 and 1947. The Revolt provides an initial marker of

visible political and military participation, and independence marks the formal end of colonial rule; between these two points the forms of participation visible in 1857 changed substantially through Swadeshi, Non-Cooperation, Civil Disobedience and Quit India, so the paper treats the period not as a single uninterrupted story but as a series of changing political contexts.

2. Problem, Research Gap and Objectives

Existing scholarship on Indian nationalism has generated extensive work on women's participation, yet three problems remain. First, this participation is sometimes reduced to a small group of prominent figures, obscuring the contribution of less-known women working through local and community networks. Second, women's participation is often separated into 'social reform' and 'political struggle', concealing the connections between education, reform activism and later mobilisation. Third, a public–private framework can unintentionally define political participation according to traditionally masculine forms of public action such as meetings, formal organisations, electoral activity and street protest, so that many forms of women's political work disappear from view. The question this paper addresses is therefore not whether women participated (a well-established fact) but how their political agency was constructed, negotiated and transformed across different social and political spaces.

Earlier studies have examined women's participation in nationalist politics, the domestic sphere, women's organisations, gender ideology and the relationship between feminism and nationalism, and have questioned a periodisation confined to the nationalist period beginning in 1885 (Anagol, 2008). Forbes's (1996) survey of women in modern India traces reform, education, organisational life and nationalist participation across this period, while Chatterjee's (1993) account of how nationalist thought resolved 'the women's question' by assigning women custodianship of an inner, spiritual domain shows how gender ideology and political opportunity were produced together rather than separately. Scholarship on women's organisations between 1917 and 1947 has documented their engagement with education, social reform and political rights while noting their changing social composition (Mathew, 2020).

Three specific gaps follow from this literature. The first is analytical: studies of the domestic sphere, of social reform, of women's organisations and of mass nationalist mobilisation are typically pursued as separate literatures, so that connections between them are asserted rather than traced through a single analytical vocabulary. The second is conceptual: the inherited public–private framework defines political action according to visibility in formal, masculine-coded spaces such as meetings, organisations, protest and office, leaving activity conducted through households, informal networks and coercive institutions such as prisons analytically homeless. The third is historical and integrative: the literature reviewed here does not

appear to offer a sustained account connecting the changing forms of women's agency across the full sequence from 1857 through social reform, Swadeshi, institutional organisation, Gandhian mobilisation, civil disobedience, imprisonment and underground resistance to 1947, using political agency as the connecting concept rather than treating each phase as a discrete episode.

Original contribution. This paper addresses these three gaps by developing a relational and non-linear model of women's political agency that treats domesticity, reform, organisation, mass resistance and coercive confinement as interconnected registers of the same underlying phenomenon rather than a sequence culminating in public politics. Its contribution is threefold: it reframes political agency as something exercised across multiple, simultaneously available spaces rather than acquired by movement into a single public sphere; it connects historically separated domains of scholarship through this single framework; and it treats agency and constraint as co-present rather than assuming that expanded participation is equivalent to emancipation.

Accordingly, the study asks how women's political agency developed between 1857 and 1947; how women transformed domestic, social and community spaces into sites of political participation; how major anti-colonial movements created new opportunities for women; whether nationalist politics challenged or reproduced gender expectations; how women's organisations expanded social and political agency; and how class, caste, region, education and community shaped the forms this participation took. Its objectives are to trace these changing forms of agency, to analyse participation beyond conventional public–private categories, to examine the relationship between reform and mobilisation, to explore women's role in major movements and organisations and to assess the tension between agency and gendered expectation.

3. Research Methodology

The study follows a qualitative, historical-interpretive methodology, based on the critical interpretation of secondary literature and published primary material relating to women, nationalism, colonialism and political mobilisation in India. This approach suits the aim of understanding how political agency was constructed within changing historical contexts, rather than measuring participation statistically; a gender-sensitive analytical lens treats gender not as a merely descriptive category but as a factor shaping access to political spaces and the interpretation of political action.

The study draws primarily on secondary scholarship, including historical monographs, edited collections and peer-reviewed journal articles on Indian nationalism, gender and colonial history, supplemented by selected published primary and biographical material, including autobiographical and documentary accounts

of individual activists (e.g., Thakkar, 2021; Hildebrand, 2016). It is accordingly best described as a historical-interpretive review grounded chiefly in secondary scholarship rather than an archival study; published biographical case material is used to illustrate and test the framework rather than to establish new primary findings.

Sources were selected by relevance to five thematic categories (domestic mobilisation, social reform and education, organisational participation, mass and civil resistance, and imprisonment or underground activity) and by the balance of the reference base across the 1857–1947 chronology. These categories provided an organising framework for reading and synthesising the literature. Organisations such as the Women's Indian Association, the National Council of Women in India and the All India Women's Conference, established between 1917 and 1927, are treated as important institutional sites connecting social reform with political rights (Mathew, 2020). Material is analysed both chronologically and thematically, without assuming that women's agency followed a uniform or linear path.

Literature was identified through targeted database and publisher-catalogue searches on terms including 'women', 'gender', 'nationalism', 'colonial India' and 'agency', combined with citation-tracing through key works (notably Anagol, 2008, and Sangari & Vaid, 1989), and included where they addressed women's political, social or organisational activity in or close to the 1857–1947 period; this was a targeted, thematically driven search rather than a systematic review with a fixed protocol.

The study is limited by its reliance on published sources, which were often produced by colonial authorities, nationalist organisations or educated elites; the experiences of rural, working-class, lower-caste and otherwise marginalised women are therefore less visible in the available record, a limitation treated here as methodological rather than incidental. A further limitation follows from the review format itself: because the paper synthesises existing scholarship rather than presenting new archival research, its contribution lies in the connective framework proposed in Section 2 rather than in new empirical discovery.

4. Conceptualising Women's Political Agency

Political agency refers here to the ability of individuals and groups to make choices, organise collective action, negotiate political structures and influence political processes, even under conditions of social or institutional constraint. For women in colonial India, agency cannot be restricted to formal political office or organisational membership: a woman could exercise political agency by joining a protest, organising a boycott, producing nationalist literature, mobilising other women, sheltering activists, resisting colonial authority, participating in underground networks or transforming domestic practices into political acts.

This broader understanding matters because nationalist politics was itself shaped by gendered assumptions. Women were frequently represented through ideals of mother, wife, moral guardian and custodian of the nation, representations that could restrict autonomy while also providing culturally legitimate routes into political participation. Women's agency therefore developed through both opportunity and constraint simultaneously.

This is not a claim that all female social activity is political by definition. Household routines, education and everyday family life become political agency in the sense used here only when mobilised toward collective action, resistance to authority, or a change in who could act publicly, as with *khadi* production, which was political through its link to organised boycott rather than through domestic work itself.

This framework draws on several established strands of feminist theory. The public–private divide examined throughout this paper follows a long-standing feminist critique of Western political thought, which identified the separation of a masculine-coded public sphere from a feminine-coded private one as a device of modern political theory rather than a natural fact (Elshtain, 1981). The treatment of nationalism as itself gendered, producing particular ideals of womanhood alongside its political programme, follows the broader argument that nations are constituted through gendered symbols and expectations rather than being gender-neutral projects (Yuval-Davis, 1997). The attention paid in Section 10 to how caste, class, region and community differentiate women's agency draws on the insight that gender does not operate as a single axis of experience but intersects with other structures of power (Crenshaw, 1989). Chatterjee's (1993) account of how nationalist ideology resolved 'the women's question' through a domestic–spiritual and material–public division of labour, discussed in Section 2, remains the paper's most direct theoretical anchor within the literature on Indian nationalism and gender.

5. From 1857 to the Emergence of Political Agency

The Revolt of 1857 occupies an important place in the history of resistance to colonial rule. Women such as Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi and Begum Hazrat Mahal became prominent figures in accounts of the rebellion, challenging any assumption that women were absent from political and military resistance. The revolt demonstrated that women could occupy roles involving leadership, military organisation, communication and the defence of territory in conditions of extreme conflict.

Two distinctions matter for how 1857 is used here. The first is between elite leadership and wider participation: the visibility of Rani Lakshmibai and Begum Hazrat Mahal should not be mistaken for the full range of women's involvement, which also included less-documented logistical, communicative and

supportive roles among ordinary women attached to households and encampments. The second is between how the revolt was recorded and how it was later remembered: colonial narratives cast women's participation as an aberration confirming the need for imperial control, while nationalist memory retrospectively absorbed 1857 into a continuous freedom struggle culminating in Gandhian mass politics. Both framings risk obscuring what 1857 shows on its own terms: that women could exercise political and military agency under conditions of extreme conflict, without that agency yet being organised through the structures that later gave women's participation its twentieth-century form.

The political circumstances of 1857 nevertheless differed substantially from later organised mass nationalism, and it would be analytically misleading to treat the women of 1857 simply as early versions of twentieth-century nationalist activists. Rather, 1857 provides an initial historical point from which the changing forms of women's political action across the following ninety years can be traced: a periodisation choice consistent with scholarship questioning accounts of women's nationalist history that begin only with the organised movement after 1885 (Anagol, 2008).

6. Social Reform, Education and the Political Meaning of Everyday Life

During the late nineteenth century, debates over women's education, marriage, widowhood and social status became increasingly prominent. Education created new possibilities for social participation, though it did not automatically produce political freedom; its meaning depended on context. Figures such as Pandita Ramabai became important voices: Chakravarti's (1998) biographical study situates Ramabai's critique of Brahminical patriarchy within the reconstitution of caste and gender hierarchies in nineteenth-century western India, showing how caste shaped the terms on which women could speak publicly. Reform initiatives contributed to networks through which women discussed their lives collectively, and Sarkar's (1992) study of domesticity and nationalism in nineteenth-century Bengal shows that the home became a site where nationalist and reformist ideas about womanhood were actively worked out, not merely a private space nationalist politics later entered. Nijhawan's (2012) study of the Hindi periodical press shows this network extending into print: women's and girls' periodicals in colonial North India carried debates on education, marriage and reform to readers beyond the small circle of prominent reformers, so that political consciousness was also produced through everyday acts of reading and circulation, not organisational membership alone.

This period matters because political agency did not always begin with participation in nationalist organisations; it could begin with education, reform and the creation of spaces in which women developed the capacity to speak collectively. The relationship between reform and nationalism was itself complex:

nationalist politics could use the question of women to demonstrate the cultural strength of Indian society, while women could use reform debates to challenge existing restrictions, so that the social question and the political question became increasingly interconnected.

The Swadeshi movement following the 1905 partition of Bengal extended this logic by expanding political mobilisation through boycott, indigenous production and nationalist education beyond conventional organisations. Women participated through activities closely tied to everyday life, including boycotting foreign goods, spinning and domestic production; this mobilisation within households, consistent with Sarkar's (1992) account of how domestic life in Bengal was itself drawn into nationalist politics during this period, demonstrated that ordinary practices could acquire political significance and that the home was not necessarily outside politics but a space through which political meaning could travel via consumption, discussion and social networks.

7. Women's Organisations and the Institutionalisation of Agency

The establishment of women's organisations marked an important development in the institutionalisation of women's political agency. The Women's Indian Association, founded in 1917, was followed by the National Council of Women in India and the All India Women's Conference, which worked on education, social reform and political rights (Mathew, 2020). Their significance lies not merely in the numbers involved but in the creation of institutional spaces in which women could formulate collective demands concerning education, child marriage, health, suffrage, legal rights and political representation.

This institutional development complicates any assumption that women entered politics only through male nationalist organisations; women increasingly became political actors with agendas that could overlap with, but were not always identical to, nationalist priorities. At the same time, these organisations were not free from social inequality: scholarship has noted that early women's organisations often had an upper-caste and middle- or upper-class character before gradually becoming more socially diverse (Forbes, 2005), underscoring that 'Indian women' was never a socially homogeneous category.

This agenda extended into a campaign for direct political rights. The Women's Indian Association lobbied during the Montagu–Chelmsford reform process from 1917 for women's enfranchisement, though the franchise granted under the Government of India Acts of 1919 and 1935 remained limited to property- and education-qualified women (Forbes, 1996). The All India Women's Conference pressed further, from the 1930s, for universal adult franchise and legislative representation rather than the reserved seats offered at the Round Table Conferences, treating equal citizenship as the basis of political voice (Forbes, 1996). This

gives the sixth register (political rights and voice) substantive content of its own, distinct from the organisational activity from which it grew.

8. Gandhian Mass Mobilisation and Civil Disobedience

The emergence of mass Gandhian politics transformed the scale of women's participation. The Non-Cooperation and Civil Disobedience movements drew large numbers of women into picketing, boycott campaigns, spinning, the propagation of *khadi*, political meetings, fund collection, demonstrations and imprisonment. The importance of this mobilisation lay partly in its capacity to connect politics with everyday practices, yet women's participation should not be read simply as emancipation delivered by Gandhi: Gandhian politics created political opportunities while also drawing on culturally familiar ideas of sacrifice, morality, motherhood and service, and scholarship has emphasised the resulting tension between expanded participation and continued gendered expectation (Thapar-Björkert & Ryan, 2002). Women did not merely receive political roles from nationalist leaders; they negotiated those roles and often used nationalist mobilisation to enter spaces previously closed to them.

Civil disobedience made women more visible in public political action through demonstrations and picketing, but this visibility should not obscure the less visible chain running from household to neighbourhood to local network to political mobilisation, through which women persuaded relatives, organised local participation, distributed information and sustained political activity. Imprisonment, public protest and confrontation with colonial authority placed women in spaces traditionally coded as male, and research on women activists in Uttar Pradesh shows that imprisonment itself could become a site of solidarity and identity formation rather than simply an endpoint of resistance (Thapar-Björkert, 1998). Prison should therefore be understood not as purely public or private but as a colonial institution in which political identities were actively negotiated, complicating the public–private framework in a further way.

9. Beyond Congress: Ideological Diversity and Underground Resistance

A Congress-centred narrative risks making women's political history appear narrower than it was. Women participated across revolutionary movements, socialist politics, underground networks and the Indian National Army, demonstrating that women's political agency was ideologically diverse rather than confined to a single nationalist project. Two cases illustrate this diversity in more analytical depth.

The first is Usha Mehta, a twenty-two-year-old student who, with a small group of associates, established the clandestine Congress Radio during the Quit India Movement in August 1942, broadcasting nationalist news and leadership statements for some three months before her arrest (Thakkar, 2021). What this case

reveals about political agency is specific: Mehta's authority derived not from elected or organisational office but from technical improvisation and personal risk exercised outside any formal institutional office, in a role of communication and information control that had no equivalent in the vocabulary of either domestic or conventional public politics available at the time. Her subsequent four years of imprisonment, during which she refused to disclose her associates despite reported coercion (Thakkar, 2021), extends the earlier argument that confinement did not terminate political agency but became a further site on which it was tested and sustained.

The second is the Rani of Jhansi Regiment, an all-women unit recruited from the Indian diaspora in Southeast Asia and organised under Subhas Chandra Bose's Indian National Army (INA) from 1943 (Hildebrand, 2016). Hildebrand's interview-based reconstruction shows recruits of varying class, caste and regional background undergoing formal military training and deployment to the Burma front, though the Regiment was held back from direct engagement during the INA's retreat from Imphal and reassigned to casualty care, correcting the popular myth that it fought at the front line. That the Ranis nonetheless trained and mobilised as soldiers still challenges assumptions that women's wartime contribution was necessarily auxiliary or domestic. The Regiment does not fit the Congress-centred, civil-disobedience model of women's politics traced in Sections 6 to 8: it shows that the wider ideological field of anti-colonial nationalism, encompassing the Congress, revolutionary and INA currents alike, offered women distinct and sometimes competing models of what political and military agency could mean.

The Quit India Movement of 1942 produced a significant expansion of underground political activity more broadly: with many established leaders imprisoned, communication networks and local organisation became especially important, and women acted as organisers, communicators and couriers. This period challenges the assumption that women were primarily peaceful supporters of male political leadership, demonstrating that agency could operate outside formal institutions and conventional public visibility.

10. Class, Caste, Region and the Limits of a Single Category

Any serious study of women and nationalism must avoid treating Indian women as a single homogeneous category. Experience differed according to caste, class, region, religion, education, occupation and urban or rural location; an educated urban woman associated with a national organisation encountered a different political environment from a rural working woman. This diversity also poses a methodological challenge, since much historical documentation was produced by educated elites and political organisations, making elite women's voices more visible in the record than the experiences of ordinary women. A more inclusive history therefore requires reading political participation beyond formal membership and leadership.

Two comparative cases make this concrete. Kumar's (1989) study of peasant women in Oudh between 1917 and 1947 shows women's participation in Baba Ram Chandra's *kisan* (peasant) movement taking forms quite different from the reform-oriented and organisational agency of urban, educated women discussed in Sections 6 and 7: collective resistance to landlord and revenue demands, entangled with agrarian rather than nationalist organisations. The same broad category of 'women's political participation' therefore concealed sharply different social locations, grievances and forms of leadership. A related case just beyond this paper's end date, the Telangana peasant struggle of the late 1940s, in which women organised through armed squads and village-level resistance rather than through Congress-affiliated organisations (Kannabiran & Lalitha, 1989), suggests that the agrarian, class-inflected forms of women's political agency visible in Oudh were not a marginal exception but part of a wider pattern that the Congress-centred and organisation-centred sections of this paper, by design, capture only partially: a limitation of scope rather than of the underlying argument.

Caste requires separate attention, since it structured a distinct exclusion from the nationalist and reform narratives traced above. Paik's (2016) study of Dalit women in colonial western India argues that neither the colonial government, mainstream reform movements nor the organised women's movement gave sustained attention to the 'Dalit question', so Dalit women were denied a recognised space to speak about gender, caste and untouchability together, and rarely appear as subjects in accounts of the nationalist struggle or women's reform. Where Dalit women exercised political agency, Paik shows, it was substantially through separate reformist and Ambedkarite networks associated with Jotirao Phule and B. R. Ambedkar, rather than through the Congress, the Women's Indian Association or the All India Women's Conference. This confirms that the diversity emphasised here is not only a matter of class and region: the organisational agency documented above coexisted with caste exclusion that this paper's Congress-centred sources register only partially.

Nationalist participation, moreover, did not automatically dismantle patriarchy. Nationalist politics could provide women with new political opportunities while continuing to associate them with culturally idealised roles: the image of the patriotic mother and self-sacrificing moral guardian could encourage participation while simultaneously defining its acceptable limits. Nationalism therefore worked in two directions at once, towards mobilisation, public participation and political consciousness on one side, and towards gendered ideals, domestic expectation and limits on autonomy on the other. Women's agency consisted partly in negotiating this contradiction, cooperating with, adapting and at times challenging nationalist projects rather than simply accepting them (Thapar-Björkert & Ryan, 2002).

11. Discussion: A Relational and Non-Linear Agency

The historical evidence gathered here suggests that women's political agency cannot be represented as a straight movement from home to public sphere to political freedom. A more accurate representation is one in which women moved between household, community, organisation, street, prison, underground network and political institution depending on circumstance: a woman might participate in a boycott from her home, attend a political meeting, join a demonstration, be arrested, continue political activity in prison, and later join an organisation advocating women's rights. Political agency was accordingly mobile, negotiated and context-dependent, a reading that supports scholarship questioning conventional periodisation and calling for greater attention to women's conscious agency and changing gender relations (Anagol, 2008).

This relational model can be represented schematically. Rather than a single ladder rising from domesticity to freedom, the sections above describe six registers of agency in continuous, two-way interaction with one another, all of them differentiated by the same set of social axes: class, caste, region and community.

Figure 1. Six registers of women's political agency in continuous, two-way interaction

Note. Arrows indicate two-way movement between registers; a woman's trajectory could run in either direction.

A woman's trajectory through this model could double back on itself: household mobilisation could follow imprisonment as readily as precede it, precisely because the model resists the ladder image it replaces.

Three conclusions follow. First, political agency existed before formal political participation: education, reform activity, household mobilisation and women's organisations created capacities that later facilitated participation in mass movements. Second, the domestic sphere was not necessarily apolitical; households could become spaces for political discussion, economic boycott, production and communication. Third, women's participation involved empowerment and constraint simultaneously, so it should not automatically be equated with complete emancipation. The historical significance of women therefore lies not only in their contribution to independence but in how they negotiated the meaning of political participation itself.

12. Major Findings

The study identifies six major findings. First, women's political agency existed in multiple, simultaneously available forms (domestic, organisational, mass-mobilisational and coercive) and cannot be reduced to visibility in public protest. Second, social reform, institutional organisation and nationalist mass mobilisation were interconnected phases of a single developing capacity for collective action, with reform-era networks providing the groundwork later drawn upon by Gandhian and underground politics. Third, imprisonment and underground activity, illustrated by Usha Mehta's Congress Radio and the Rani of Jhansi Regiment, show agency continuing beyond conventional public spaces. Fourth, agency and constraint operated together rather than sequentially, as nationalist mobilisation expanded women's opportunities while reproducing gendered ideals of sacrifice and motherhood. Fifth, this agency was substantially differentiated by caste, class and region: the peasant mobilisation in Oudh and Telangana followed a distinct logic from the urban, organisation-based agency of the Women's Indian Association and the All India Women's Conference. Sixth, these findings together support a relational, non-linear model of political agency, in which women moved between household, organisation, street, prison and underground network according to circumstances.

13. Conclusion

The history of India's anti-colonial struggle was not created exclusively in political assemblies, legislative institutions or public demonstrations; it was also shaped within households, neighbourhoods, voluntary organisations, educational spaces, prisons and underground networks. Women's political agency developed through a complex interaction between social reform, nationalism, gender expectation and political resistance, and nationalist politics did not necessarily produce complete gender emancipation: women appropriated inherited ideals of sacrifice and motherhood, negotiated their limits, and used mobilisation to create new forms of agency.

The study therefore argues for understanding women's political agency as a relational and non-linear process, emerging through interaction between individual choice, collective organisation, nationalist politics, colonial repression and existing social structures. Its significance extends beyond how many women participated or which women became famous leaders: the deeper question concerns how women transformed the spaces available to them into spaces of political action. India's anti-colonial history is therefore understood more fully when women are recognised not simply as supporters of nationalism but as political actors who helped redefine the meaning and practice of political participation itself. Future research could extend this framework through more sustained attention to regional, agrarian and caste-differentiated political practices, of the kind visible in Oudh, Telangana and among Dalit reformist networks, using vernacular sources, oral testimony and local records less dependent on the educated, urban archive on which the present synthesis relies.

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