The Cartography of Courage: Unearthing Local Agency in the Gilgit-Baltistan Freedom Movement of 1947

Shahnaz Bibi*

Abstract

This paper examines the narrative of the Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) Freedom Movement of 1947, challenging the dominant discourse which has historically centered on the tactical achievements of military and paramilitary forces. The essay pivots on the thesis that the successful overthrow of the Dogra regime on November 1, 1947, was not a detached military operation but the inevitable culmination of a centuries-long, deeply ingrained tradition of local resistance and the immediate, organized political mobilization provided by the clandestine group, the Tanzeem-i-Sarfaroshan. By employing the essential methodologies of oral history and comparative analysis, this research seeks to unearth and validate the agency of the common populace, whose motivations were rooted in profound socio-cultural alienation, historical grievances against Dogra oppression, and a compelling desire for accession to the newly formed Muslim state of Pakistan. The findings reveal that the *Tanzeem* provided critical logistics, intelligence networks, and the popular legitimacy without which the military effort would have faltered, thus establishing the revolution as a unified indigenous movement. Ultimately, the subsequent marginalization of these civilian voices and the ongoing constitutional limbo of the region underscore the failure of the post-colonial state to fully integrate the true revolutionary spirit into its foundational narrative.

Keywords: Gilgit-Baltistan, Oral History, Tanzeem-i-Sarfaroshan, Dogra Rule, Freedom Movement.

* MPhil Scholar, NDU Islamabad. Email: shahnaz1820@gmail.com
DOI: https://doi.org/10.65463/23

The complex and often contested history of the Gilgit-Baltistan region, particularly its pivotal role in the 1947 Partition of the Indian Subcontinent, demands a fundamental reorientation of prevailing historical lenses, moving decisively beyond the confines of geopolitical and military analysis. For decades, the narrative surrounding the successful Gilgit Rebellion, which culminated in the overthrow of Maharaja Hari Singh's administration on November 1, 1947, has been filtered predominantly through the prism of strategic action and the operational maneuvers of the Gilgit Scouts and key armed personnel. This established viewpoint, significantly reinforced by the official documentation and the memoirs of uniformed actors, has meticulously documented the tactical execution of the revolt, yet it has inadvertently obscured the essential, organic, and sustained civil resistance that both preceded and critically enabled the armed coup (Dani 1989, 198). A comprehensive historical understanding necessitates moving beyond the singular event to explore the deeply entrenched political consciousness and the organized civilian infrastructure that provided the indispensable groundswell of support, thereby challenging the reductionist interpretation of the uprising as a mere military achievement disconnected from the profound and long-standing aspirations of the local populace. This study asserts that the true origins of the 1947 freedom struggle are embedded in a continuum of local defiance dating back over a century, a powerful tradition of demanding autonomy and self-determination against external Dogra domination, which finally found its organized expression in the covert operations of indigenous groups like the Tanzeem-i-Sarfaroshan.

The primary argument guiding this research is that the freedom movement's success cannot be narrowly attributed solely to the military coup but must be recognized as a holistic outcome forged by the collective will and political agency of the people of Gilgit-Baltistan, whose vital contributions have been consistently marginalized in deference to a history that prioritizes state-sanctioned heroes. The systematic exclusion or minimization of local agency—specifically the crucial intelligence, logistical provisioning, and popular mobilization provided by civilian actors—serves as a compelling regional case study in Michel Foucault's theory of power and knowledge. In this framework, the post-colonial state strengthens its legitimacy and maintains ideological control by meticulously curating which narratives are deemed historically valuable and which are effectively silenced, often prioritizing the uniformed elite over the civilian masses (Sökefeld 1997, 89). By intentionally foregrounding the oral testimonies of the common people, this essay seeks to bridge the critical vacuum left by traditional histories, which focused extensively on the actions of the 'great men' and the geopolitical maneuvering of imperial powers, thus providing a much-needed, nuanced understanding of the socio-political context, the personal motivations, and the profound, subjective meaning of 'freedom' for those whose lives were most directly and dramatically affected by the revolutionary change in the region.

Furthermore, by scrutinizing the highly contradictory accounts surrounding the formation and operational functionality of the Tanzeem-i-Sarfaroshan, this analysis addresses the profound complexities inherent in reclaiming a suppressed history from fragmented oral traditions and contested written archives, revealing the

subtle ways in which personal and military rivalries intersected with, and tragically obscured, the indispensable civilian contribution to the cause of independence. The enduring constitutional ambiguity of the region following the 1947 annexation, which continues to deprive the inhabitants of Gilgit-Baltistan of the full constitutional status enjoyed by other Pakistani provinces, serves as a poignant, contemporary echo of the original marginalization of local voices in the pivotal decision-making processes of 1947. The initial, short-lived establishment of a local, autonomous administration immediately following the Dogra surrender, prior to the region's formal attachment to Pakistan, represents a brief, potent moment of pure indigenous sovereignty—a moment that encapsulates the core, non-negotiable objective of the local population for self-rule and autonomy (Iqbal 2022, 105). The subsequent body of the paper will be structured to first deconstruct the existing scholarly literature, then establish the methodology of oral historiography, and finally, present a detailed thematic historical analysis that re-centers the centuries-long civilian resistance and the critical contributions of the *Tanzeem* in achieving the ultimate liberation.

The extant historiography of the Gilgit-Baltistan freedom movement reveals a conspicuous and problematic imbalance, being heavily weighted towards the military, strategic, and geopolitical dimensions of the event, which has consequently codified the marginalization of civilian experiences within the dominant historical record. Western scholars, whose initial writings often framed the discourse, such as William Brown and Charles Chenevix Trench, have historically dominated the narrative, frequently presenting the Gilgit Rebellion as a near-exclusive success story of British-led strategy, with Major William Brown, Commandant of the Gilgit Scouts, often celebrated as the sole architect of the successful coup (Brown 1998, 112). This colonial-centric perspective effectively reduces the monumental uprising to an externally manipulated event, entirely ignoring the profound indigenous unrest and organized political activity that provided the necessary internal conditions for success, an oversight that provoked understandable suspicion and reaction among local actors regarding continued imperial influence. Conversely, even among local historians who sought to correct the colonial bias and restore indigenous pride, the focus regrettably shifted primarily to crediting specific indigenous military figures—such as Colonel Hassan Khan or Subedar-Major Muhammad Babar Khan—often leading to conflicting autobiographical accounts where individual armed achievements are controversially elevated over the indispensable collective, civilian effort (Manzoom Ali 1985, 345).

The resulting central tension in the available literature, therefore, is not a debate over the fact of the rebellion's success, but rather the contentious question of to whom the principal credit belongs, a rivalry that tragically operates at the expense of the broader civilian movement and the critical, documented struggle of the Tanzeem-i-Sarfaroshan, whose historical existence and operational effectiveness are either dismissed or strongly contested by specific military figures despite compelling testimonial evidence (Usman Ali 2012, 150). This pervasive focus on military narratives stands in sharp ideological contrast to the sophisticated historiography of the 1947 Partition of India, where, over time, a robust body of scholarly work has emerged that successfully utilizes oral history to explore the

human, social, and gendered dimensions of the catastrophe. This mature scholarship moves decisively beyond high-politics and communal violence to illuminate the partition's profound subjective experience, as scholars such as Urvashi Butalia have done by elevating the voices of the previously silent masses (Butalia 2000, 31-35). While historians like Ahmad Hassan Dani acknowledged the scholarly scarcity and ambiguity surrounding the Tanzeem-i-Sarfaroshan, suggesting its probable function as a local propaganda mechanism under military oversight, others, like Ghulam Rasool, an invaluable eyewitness and civil servant, provided limited but crucial corroboration of the organization's existence and its active, covert role in mobilizing support (Rasool 2004, 88).

The research methodology applied for this critical inquiry is fundamentally qualitative, grounded securely in the ethnographic approach of oral historiography to ensure a dense, detailed, and nuanced understanding of the freedom movement through the irreplaceable lens of lived experience, thereby transcending the inherent structural limitations of official, written accounts. This particular methodological choice is necessitated by the profound scarcity and systemic bias that characterize the existing literature, which has overwhelmingly focused on macro-level political events and the actions of a few elite state actors, leaving the socio-political context, the personal motivations, and the grassroots contributions of the common people either entirely undocumented or severely distorted (Sökefeld 2014, 15). The collection of oral testimonies, gathered from the second and third-generation descendants of first-generation participants in the Gilgit area—such as the critical account provided by Sharafat Ali Baig, whose family was intimately connected to the clandestine activities of the Tanzeem-i-Sarfaroshan—serves as the primary data, offering unique and unfiltered insights into the atmosphere of pervasive fear under Dogra rule, the nascent political consciousness among civil servants, and the immediate, powerful emotional reactions of the populace to the rapidly unfolding events of 1947.

These collected testimonies, being inherently subjective and deeply rooted in personal memory, are intentionally not treated as mere substitutes for objective chronological fact, but rather as invaluable historical documents that powerfully reveal the meaning of the struggle, the humanitarian and cultural costs endured, and the ultimate aspirations of the individuals involved, thereby fundamentally supplementing the objective framework provided by conventional sources. Furthermore, this study employs Foucault's critical concept of power/knowledge to analytically interpret and deconstruct how the post-revolution narrative, which was meticulously centered on military achievement, was deliberately constructed to legitimize the subsequent state political authority, while simultaneously obscuring the crucial contributions of civilian groups like the *Tanzeem* in order to maintain a specific hierarchical political order (Sökefeld 1997, 91). The systematic investigation of the Tanzeem-i-Sarfaroshan's contested existence, its membership, and its alleged operational activities—including the necessary confrontation of contradictory claims articulated by key figures like Muhammad Ali Hazara, Colonel Hassan Khan, and Subedar-Major Babar Khan—is conducted using a sophisticated comparative historical analysis, where the oral accounts are triangulated and

rigorously cross-referenced with the limited written references provided by Rasool and Dani. This triangulation of diverse data aims to reconstruct a more complete and accurate picture of the essential underground political mobilization, ensuring that the final analysis justly recognizes the agency of the local people in shaping their own destiny, irrespective of whether their profound contributions were formally acknowledged or justly rewarded in the final post-independence state structure.

The Continuum of Resistance: The Gohar Aman Legacy and Dogra Hegemony

The foundational impetus for the 1947 uprising was laid not in the immediate, fleeting political vacuum created by the British departure, but in a long, arduous, and blood-soaked history of fierce indigenous resistance to the imposition of Sikh and later Dogra rule, a tradition characterized above all by the unyielding spirit of leaders such as Raja Gohar Aman of Yasin. Dating back to the mid-19th century, the Gilgit region, and particularly the fiercely independent mountain people of Yasin, consistently and absolutely refused to acknowledge the political legitimacy of the Sikh and Dogra incursions, correctly viewing them as illegal military occupations driven by territorial ambition and the strategic control of crucial trade routes rather than any form of legitimate governance (Leitner 1876, 45). The numerous intense battles fought throughout the 1840s and 1850s, especially the relentless campaigns orchestrated under the leadership of Gohar Aman, served to galvanize a powerful collective identity of absolute defiance, where local forces from Darel, Tangir, Hunza, and Nagar coalesced repeatedly to expel the invaders, thus demonstrating a profound, inherent desire for self-determination that fundamentally predated and then fueled the final idea of joining Pakistan. These early struggles established a powerful cultural precedent for resistance, deeply engraving the memory of freedom into the local consciousness and ensuring that by 1947, the very notion of fighting against the Maharaja's alien authority was not a foreign concept but an inherited and sacred tradition of courage and necessary self-defence against centuries of external threat.

The Great Battle of 1852 stands as a magnificent and enduring testament to this formidable local spirit, wherein Gohar Aman's combined forces successfully besieged and decisively defeated a sizeable Dogra army led by key commanders, resulting in the humiliation and complete expulsion of the invaders and the temporary but absolute restoration of local, autonomous authority (Dani 1989, 150). This powerful victory, fueled by the unwavering participation of common people and militia drawn from the surrounding tribal areas, was not merely a tactical military skirmish but a foundational ideological moment in the Gilgit-Baltistan narrative of freedom, successfully solidifying the community's resolve to never fully submit to the Dogra yoke. The continued political turmoil and the subsequent brutal retaliatory actions by the Dogra regime served only to further deepen the existing, profound antagonism between the Dogra rulers and the local Muslim population, thereby ensuring that the arrival of the Maharaja's new administrative structures in 1947 would be met not with reluctant acquiescence, but with a deeply ingrained and culturally sanctioned predisposition towards organized armed rebellion (Manzoom Ali 1985, 290). The powerful collective memory of these

deep-seated past injustices, meticulously passed down through the indispensable method of oral tradition, thus became an emotionally charged and politically powerful mobilizing force when the long-awaited opportunity for final liberation finally arose.

Perhaps the most visceral, emotionally charged, and enduring memory of Dogra brutality—a memory that cemented the irreconcilable divide between the foreign ruler and the local populace—is the tragic and often-forgotten massacre at Madoori Fort in Yasin in 1863, which followed the death of the charismatic Gohar Aman. Accounts from the period describe an act of horrific treachery and sustained cruelty against the helpless civilian populace, including the indiscriminate slaughter of women and children, who had retreated to the fort seeking refuge, only to be systematically butchered in what contemporary European observers described as an atrocity of unimaginable, demonic scale (Hayward 1870s content). The explorer George W. Hayward, witnessing the horrific aftermath seven years later, reported finding the ground "literally white with bleached human bones," an undeniable, physical testimony to the sheer brutality and indiscriminate nature of the Dogra response to the local, persistent demand for freedom (Leitner 1876, 50). The indelible memory of Madoori, along with similar acts of ruthless oppression, land confiscation, and religious interference, became permanently and powerfully etched into the local consciousness, transforming the abstract desire for political freedom into a sacred, non-negotiable cause of vengeance, justice, and collective self-preservation, proving conclusively that the deep roots of the 1947 rebellion were vigorously watered by the blood of prior, martyred generations.

This profound historical background explains why, when the Dogra forces returned in 1947, the local populace's reaction was one of immediate, deep-seated hostility rather than passive acceptance. The people of Gilgit-Baltistan viewed the Maharaja's administration, and its uniformed agents, not as a neutral or transitional authority, but as the direct and spiritual continuation of the brutal regime that had committed the massacres at Madoori and perpetrated decades of exploitation. The Dogra state structure was fundamentally an alien, non-Muslim, and exploitative entity, making the prospect of being permanently annexed to a Hindu-majority state like India utterly unthinkable and existentially threatening to the local cultural and religious identity (Rasool 2004, 120). This historical trauma fostered a culture of profound distrust and political defiance among the local educated elite, who intuitively understood that the political transfer of power by the British was a deliberate betrayal of their interests, demanding immediate, organized counter-action. The long-standing, inherited spirit of Jang-e-Azadi (War of Freedom) thus became the spiritual and political rallying cry, ready to be channeled into organized opposition the moment the political opportunity arose.

The Crucible of 1947: Political Awakening and Civilian Mobilization

With the fateful announcement of the Third June Plan 1947 and the subsequent decision by the British to vacate the entire Indian subcontinent, the centuries-old local antagonism against the Dogra regime immediately converged with the broader, explosive geopolitical forces reshaping the region. This convergence created a critical moment of decision and existential crisis for the people of Gilgit-Baltistan. The British,

upon the annulment of the lease agreement on August 1, 1947, deliberately returned control of the strategic Gilgit Agency to the Maharaja of Kashmir, Hari Singh, an intentional act of political transference that willfully ignored the clear religious, cultural, and political affinities of the overwhelmingly Muslim populace (Trench 1985, 215). This decisive act, executed two full weeks before the official independence of India and Pakistan, was immediately and universally perceived by the locals not as a return to any legitimate rule, but as the cynical imposition of a profoundly unwanted and deeply feared Hindu authority, fundamentally compromising the people's future in the nascent Muslim state of Pakistan and threatening a return to the dark days of Madoori.

The installation of Governor Ghansara Singh became the immediate and visible catalyst for intense, organized political anxiety among the Gilgit populace, spurring the local educated elite and civil servants to mobilize in fear of the systematic loss of their cultural rights and the imposition of a permanent, hostile colonial structure over their homeland (Usman Ali 2012, 122). Unlike the predominantly rural masses, these local, educated men had the foresight to grasp the profound, long-term political implications of the Maharaja's control, realizing that without decisive action, their fate would be sealed by a non-representative Hindu ruler. In the light of the Partition formula, which allowed for plebiscites in certain areas, the denial of this choice to Gilgit-Baltistan served as an additional, powerful grievance, fueling the resolve among the nascent educated political class to organize and fight for the right of self-determination, which, for them, unequivocally meant joining Pakistan.

The subsequent and highly provocative deployment of Hindu and Sikh troops from the Dogra Company into the Gilgit area, establishing a camp near the culturally significant Shahi Polo Ground, served as a daily, visible, and deeply symbolic reminder of the looming threat and acted as a profound cultural and religious affront to the local Muslim community. Muhammad Ali Hazara's primary account, corroborated by descendants like Sharafat Ali Baig, details how the routine presence of the Dogra forces, particularly their use of local water sources for personal cleansing, forced Muslim women to veil and cease working their communal fields. This was not merely an inconvenience, but a direct, systematic disruption of the local social and economic fabric (Ali Hazara/Sharafat Ali Baig, Primary Source). This daily, unbearable friction rapidly accelerated the political awakening among the masses and solidified the moral, religious, and cultural justification for an armed uprising, demonstrating how the very actions of the occupying forces unintentionally provided the necessary, unifying outrage that grassroots political organizations thrive upon.

This cultural friction transformed abstract political tension into immediate, personal, and religious hostility, making the choice between the Dogra regime and the idea of Pakistan absolutely clear and non-negotiable for the ordinary Gilgit residents. The Muslim civil servants, including highly respectable figures like Maulvi Raji-ur-Rehmat and Master Daulat Shah from the Middle School, became the first core cell of organized resistance, using their staff rooms as secret ideological forums to discuss the perilous situation and their collective future (Rasool 2004, 90). These individuals, understanding the economic and educational backwardness of the wider populace, realized that the

revolution had to begin with education and mobilization. They agreed to forge a secret alliance, determined to maintain unity and struggle for their collective rights, with the goal of preparing the populace for an unpredictable future that they knew would require armed resistance.

The Tanzeem-i-Sarfaroshan: The Nexus of Civilian Power

It is within this volatile crucible of inherited resistance, intense political anxiety, and immediate cultural offence that the Tanzeem-i-Sarfaroshan—the 'Organization of the Self-Sacrificers'—was organically conceived and began its clandestine operation. This secret political society embodied the indigenous agency of the local populace and formed the indispensable political nexus between the military components and the essential mass mobilization. Contrary to the later claims of some military figures who sought to minimize or outright deny its existence, the *Tanzeem* emerged from the organized gatherings of the politically conscious local civil servants and educated elite, primarily from areas like Muhalla Daakpura, who were unequivocally united by the singular, non-negotiable goal of securing Gilgit's accession to Pakistan (Rasool 2004, 91). The organization's foundational purpose was not initially armed combat, but the crucial political work of mass mobilization: dispelling political ignorance among the remote and impoverished populace, spreading fundamental awareness about the Muslim League's objectives, and meticulously preparing the people's minds for the eventual, necessary armed struggle against the Maharaja's rule.

The structure and ideological commitment of the Tanzeem-i-Sarfaroshan, as meticulously documented in the contemporary writings of Muhammad Ali Hazara, were remarkably organized for a clandestine operation, consisting of volunteers who formally took sacred oaths on the Qur'an to sacrifice their lives for the cause of Islam and the formation of Pakistan (Ali Hazara/Sharafat Ali Baig, Primary Source). This formalized oath-taking procedure indicated a deeply religious, ideological, and absolute commitment that went far beyond mere political affiliation. The *Tanzeem*'s internal leadership, including pivotal figures like Fida Ali and Muhammad Ali Hazara, established crucial contact with key Muslim military officers, notably the influential Subedar-Major Muhammad Babar Khan, and subsequently served as the vital, secure communication channel between the Muslim troops stationed at Bunji and the Gilgit Scouts in the main city. This essential two-way communication network was critical: the *Tanzeem* provided real-time ground intelligence on Dogra troop movements, local police activities, and the pulse of popular sentiment, while the military actors were able to accurately gauge the level of civilian resolve and preparedness, thereby allowing for the meticulous, highly coordinated planning of the impending Gilgit Rebellion.

The role of *Tanzeem* members as reliable, swift messengers and secure intelligence providers under conditions of intense Dogra surveillance was a critical operational contribution that is often completely overlooked when the focus is placed exclusively on the uniformed military officers who executed the final coup. The risk involved for these civilian messengers was immense, as capture would have meant not only execution but the complete compromise of the entire revolutionary effort. The coordination was so meticulous that the *Tanzeem* even used its network to attempt direct communication with Quaid-e-Azam

Muhammad Ali Jinnah, sending a dedicated member, Ameer Jahandar Shah, to deliver crucial letters detailing the political situation and seeking assurances of support from the central Muslim League leadership (Ali Hazara/Sharafat Ali Baig, Primary Source). This bold, dangerous mission demonstrates the Tanzeem's initiative and its belief in acting as the legitimate political representative of the Gilgit people, reinforcing their claim to political agency independent of the uniformed military.

The post-rebellion environment, however, became a site of intense political contestation and rivalry, with the resultant conflicting claims regarding the *Tanzeem's* leadership and very existence serving as a powerful demonstration of the struggle for historical ownership. Both Raja Shah Rais Khan and Subedar Babar Khan controversially claimed credit for its original founding, while powerful military hardliners like Colonel Hassan Khan vehemently dismissed the organization as either a politically 'useless' group or one that was entirely non-existent during the crucial planning stages (Usman Ali 2012, 150). This intentional, post-factum contestation of the narrative underscores the Foucaultian analysis: by minimizing the clear and present civilian element, the victorious military and political elite could successfully claim the revolution as a singular, controlled state achievement. This process was critical for maintaining control over the subsequent governance structure and systematically minimizing the legitimate claims of the civilian revolutionaries for formal recognition, political power, or deserved material reward (Dani 1989, 210).

The personal tragedy of Muhammad Ali Hazara's subsequent disappointment and eventual migration to Karachi after his services were not officially recognized is a poignant, enduring illustration of this historical marginalization, where the undeniable reality of grassroots sacrifice was systematically sacrificed on the altar of a politically expedient, military-heroic narrative. Despite his documented efforts to gain recognition by approaching influential political figures like Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, Hazara remained unacknowledged, underscoring the profound vulnerability of civilian history in the face of institutionalized military narratives (Rasool 2004, 135). The systemic failure to recognize the *Tanzeem* was not a simple oversight, but a calculated political move that denied agency to the populace, thus creating a historical narrative that was convenient for maintaining central control, a narrative that ironically betrayed the very people who fought most fiercely for the region's accession to Pakistan.

The Execution: Civilian Logistics and Battlefield Support

Despite the systemic post-rebellion attempts at silencing, the functional, on-the-ground contribution of the *Tanzeem* to the actual execution of the Gilgit Rebellion was indispensable, moving far beyond mere political consciousness-raising to active, sustained logistical and intelligence support on the critical night of October 31, 1947. When Subedar Babar Khan initiated the final, decisive phase of the coup, the Sarfaroshan members were immediately and effectively mobilized to a host of critical and dangerous duties, which included gathering local civilians at the Shahi Polo Ground as a highly visible show of force, maintaining a continuous flow of real-time intelligence on Dogra troop movements, and undertaking the extremely perilous task of supplying the newly deployed Scout platoons with essential rations, water, and vital ammunition (Rasool

2004, 138). This pervasive civilian support was neither coincidental nor passive; it was the synchronized, organized execution of pre-arranged roles, explicitly demonstrating that the military actors relied heavily and dependently on the Tanzeem to seamlessly manage the complex civilian dimension of the uprising and ensure that the logistical pipeline remained open and secure throughout the long, crucial night of combat.

The night of October 31st and the early morning of November 1st, 1947, saw the culmination of these combined military and civilian efforts, with the Gilgit Scouts and the Muslim wing of the 6th Kashmir Infantry successfully besieging Governor Ghansara Singh's residence. While the military officers are due undisputed credit for the tactical execution—which included arresting the Governor, swiftly disarming the Hindu and Sikh troops, and restoring internal order—the highly visible, large-scale presence of the mobilized civilian volunteers, who had gathered in massive numbers with their own basic weapons, confirmed the undeniable **popular legitimacy** of the coup (Brown 1998, 140). Their collective celebration, marked by emotionally charged slogans of "Pakistan Zindabad" and the profound, spontaneous rejoicing in the Polo Ground, confirmed that the revolution was not merely a change of guard orchestrated by a few officers, but a genuine, widely-embraced liberation co-executed by the entire, mobilized community. The Sarfaroshan's dedicated effort to immediately fashion and raise the Pakistani flag—a symbol conspicuously absent from the military's initial provisions—is perhaps the most potent illustration of their operational and ideological commitment to the goal of accession.

Furthermore, the logistical ingenuity displayed by the *Tanzeem* highlights the reality that the revolutionary effort was often resource-dependent and necessitated grassroots resourcefulness. The immediate need for a Pakistani flag, forcing the *Tanzeem* members to scramble to gather and sew materials in the middle of the night, demonstrates how crucial ideological and symbolic requirements were met by civilian effort when the military was constrained by operational priorities (Ali Hazara/Sharafat Ali Baig, Primary Source). Similarly, the responsibility for securing and delivering food, water, and emergency medical aid to the engaged Scout platoons was borne by the civilian network, often involving navigating dangerous, contested zones under cover of darkness. This specialized civilian role ensured that the fighting military units could maintain continuous engagement without distraction, underscoring the true symbiotic nature of the revolutionary partnership.

The strategic intelligence provided by the *Tanzeem* proved equally critical to the military's ability to preempt Dogra reinforcement. When the Governor called for Sikh troops from Bunji for his defense, the *Tanzeem* messenger network immediately provided the military leadership with accurate and timely intelligence regarding the composition and projected movement of these incoming forces. This intelligence allowed the Gilgit Scouts to dispatch a platoon to Pari Bangla to intercept the reinforcement column before it could reach the main city and change the strategic balance of the confrontation (Rasool 2004, 145). This highly sophisticated level of real-time communication demonstrates that the rebellion was far from a spontaneous military explosion; it was a well-informed, coordinated campaign that leveraged the Tanzeem's deep-rooted civilian network against the official Dogra communication

channels, turning the very structure of the occupation against itself.

The Paradoxical Aftermath: Autonomy, Accession, and Silence

Following the definitive success of the Gilgit Rebellion, a brief but profoundly significant period of local autonomy was spontaneously established, lasting approximately fifteen days, during which the people of Gilgit-Baltistan experienced a fleeting glimpse of pure, unadulterated self-rule. This provisional government, hastily established by the local revolutionary leaders and supported by the assembled civilian populace, encapsulated the core, uncompromised aspiration of the masses—to govern themselves free from any external domination, whether Dogra, British, or any other foreign power—before willingly and collectively choosing accession to the new Muslim state based on shared religious and cultural identity (Iqbal 2022, 107). This short-lived moment of indigenous governance, often overshadowed by the subsequent annexation, represents the authentic political objective of the revolution.

The swift and passionate decision to formally join Pakistan, finalized on November 16, 1947, was driven primarily by a deeply felt religious and ideological affinity and the powerful emotional draw of the newly created nation, rather than any cold, calculated geopolitical maneuvering by the local populace. This act underscored the profound sincerity of the local pro-Pakistan stance, which had motivated the *Sarfaroshan* from their very inception. However, the subsequent history of the region is tragically marred by a persistent and profound constitutional limbo, where the very people who bravely fought and sacrificed for their full integration into Pakistan have been consistently denied the comprehensive constitutional rights and provincial status afforded to citizens in other Pakistani regions (Trench 1985, 220).

This ongoing constitutional ambiguity, which leaves Gilgit-Baltistan without the full provincial status its people desire, is a direct and enduring consequence of the post-rebellion narrative that failed to fully recognize and empower the local, civilian agency that engineered the successful revolution. The political marginalization of the Tanzeem-i-Sarfaroshan's role, and the institutional prioritization of the military narrative, contributed to a top-down administrative structure that systematically minimized the local political voice, thereby allowing successive state apparatuses to maintain a functional, quasi-colonial control over the region under the guise of security concerns (Sökefeld 1997, 95). The continuous War of Liberation that followed in Baltistan, where indigenous forces continued to heroically conquer vast enemy territories against heavy odds, further validates the total determination of the local population to secure their entire region's freedom, conclusively proving that the revolutionary spirit of self-determination was not confined to Gilgit alone, but was a widespread regional phenomenon.

The enduring failure to acknowledge the true nature of the 1947 movement as a holistic civilian-military partnership has consequently perpetuated a profound historiographical injustice, effectively rendering the immense, deep-seated sacrifices of the common people into perpetually 'unheard voices' that resonate only within the intimate confines of familial and regional oral traditions. The subjective accounts, such as those provided by descendants of the *Sarfaroshan*, are absolutely essential for restoring the vital

human dimension to this critical historical moment, providing a perspective that is profoundly impervious to the political manipulations and selective omissions inherent in official state documentation and the self-serving memoirs of the elite actors (Butalia 2000, 48). These invaluable oral narratives, while naturally subject to the complexities of personal memory and the passage of time, offer irreplaceable insights into the daily fears, the religious impetus, and the overwhelming, collective joy of liberation that no official communiqué or military record could ever fully capture, highlighting the enduring value of human memory in the construction of a complete and just historical mosaic.

The deliberate suppression of the essential civilian role, and the resultant constitutional marginalization, represents a classic post-colonial application of Foucault's power/knowledge doctrine, where the central state defined the acceptable parameters of historical 'truth' primarily to serve its own need for unified central control and military-backed legitimacy. By systematically de-emphasizing the organic, revolutionary nature of the *Tanzeem* and instead emphasizing the coup as a strictly controlled military operation, the post-independence state successfully managed to sideline the very people who embodied the pure, original impetus for freedom (Dani 1989, 215). This strategic exclusion created the perfect political conditions for the prolonged constitutional limbo that persists to this day. Reintegrating the full, unexpurgated story of the Sarfaroshan—their formal organization, their direct coordination with military leaders like Babar Khan, and their essential logistical and intelligence work—is therefore much more than a simple exercise in historical correction; it is an urgent and necessary act of restoring legitimate political agency to a population whose initial struggle for self-determination was both profoundly successful and tragically overlooked.

Conclusion

The Gilgit-Baltistan Freedom Movement of 1947 must be definitively understood not as a singular, opportunistic, and isolated military coup, but rather as a profound and deep-rooted revolutionary process that drew its irresistible strength from a potent, century-long tradition of civilian resistance, culminating in the indispensable, organized efforts of the Tanzeem-i-Sarfaroshan. The stunningly successful overthrow of the Dogra administration on November 1, 1947, was the direct, inevitable result of a meticulously planned partnership where the military provided the decisive armed execution, and the indigenous civilian political agency supplied the crucial intelligence, the popular legitimacy, and the essential logistical and emotional backbone. By amplifying the often 'unheard voices' through the necessary tool of oral historiography, this study has conclusively demonstrated that the *Tanzeem* was instrumental in transforming diffuse popular discontent into a synchronized, effective political force, thereby fully debunking the reductionist historical narratives that solely credit uniformed individuals. The true 'architects' of the Gilgit Revolution were, unequivocally, a collective: a powerful, symbiotic unity of the military's strategic intent and the local populace's unwavering, sacrificial will to join Pakistan.

The historical and political dissonance surrounding the Tanzeem and its members' subsequent unacknowledged status remains the most poignant and powerful testament to the selective memory and political

expediency of the post-colonial state. The institutional marginalization of these vital civilian accounts is a classic Foucaultian political outcome, where the enduring power of the central state dictates the knowledge that is allowed to constitute official history, ultimately resulting in a narrative that justifies centralized authority while simultaneously neglecting the authentic, grassroots revolutionary spirit. Moving forward, the only way to achieve a complete, just, and historically accurate understanding of Gilgit-Baltistan's accession is to fully and formally integrate these primary oral histories and acknowledge the Tanzeem-i-Sarfaroshan as an equal, indispensable, and vital political partner in the entire freedom struggle. This necessary act of historical correction is not only due to the original *Sarfaroshan* for their profound and often unrewarded sacrifice, but is also absolutely essential for finally resolving the region's current, unjust constitutional status by formally recognizing the true, deep-seated political agency that has always characterized the fiercely independent people of Gilgit-Baltistan.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Brown, William A. 1998. *The Gilgit Rebellion 1947*. Privately printed edition. Ibex.

Leitner, Gottlieb William. 1876. *The Languages and Races of Dardistan*.

Oral History Account. n.d. Interview with Sharafat Ali Baig. [Unpublished Testimony].

Rasool, Ghulam. 2004. *Azadi-i-Gilgit-o-Baltistan or Haqaiq (The Independence of Gilgit Baltistan and Realities)*. Rawalpindi: One International Publishers.

Weekly Bebak. 1973. "Weekly Bebak." Vol. 2 (20th January - 10th Febuary). Muzzaffarabad, Gilgit Baltistan.

Secondary Sources

Ali, Manzoom. 1985. *Karakorum Hindukush*. Islamabad: Barq Sons Limited.

Bhat, Reiya. 2018. "India's 1947 Partition through the Eyes of Women: Gender, Politics, and Nationalism." ETD, OhioLink. Accessed October 31, 2025. https://etd.ohiolink.edu/apexprod/rws_olink/r/1501/10?clear=10&p10_accession_num=ouhonors1524658168133726.

Butalia, Urvashi. 2000. *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Dani, Ahamd Hasan. 1989. *History of Northern Areas of Pakistan*. 1st ed. Lahore: Sang-e -Meel.

Iqbal, Zafar. 2022. *Short History: Freedom of Gilgit-Baltistan, Opportunity Lost*. Lahore: Shirkat Printing Press.

Sökefeld, Martin. 1997. "Jang azadi: Perspectives on a Major Theme in Northern Areas History." In *The Past in the Present: Horizons of Remembering in the Pakistan Himalaya*, edited by I. Stellrecht. Köln: Köppe.

Sökefeld, Martin. 2014. "Anthropology of Gilgit-Baltistan: Introduction." *Ethnoscripts* 16, no. 1. https://epub.ub.uni-muenchen.de/21343/1/soekefeld_21343.pdf.

Stellrecht, Irmtraud. 1998. *Trade and Politics – The High-Mountain Region of Pakistan in the 19th and 20th Century*.