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“Docile” Indian Women Protest – We shall Resist: Passive Resistance in South Africa 1946-1948

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ABSTRACT This paper provides a gendered perspective of the 1946-1948 passive resistance movement in South Africa. It analyses the role Indian women played in the movement and addresses three issues: Firstly, it examines the socio-economic and political conditions of the 1930s and 1940s and ways in which it aided in the politicization of Indian women. The economic crisis during this period seriously affected working class women and provided a basis for political protest. It argues that political awareness, to a very large extent, is inculcated via a process of socialization. This is clearly evident in the political profiles of women in leadership positions in the passive resistance campaign. Secondly, it challenges the myth of the “docile” and “passive” Indian women, and argues that women’s political participation was based on their own determination and not prescribed by men. The degree of women’s activism and the brave accounts of their courage and valor, bears testimony to this fact. Thirdly, it assesses to what extent did political participation challenge gender hierarchy? Did political activism aid women’s liberation? This paper hopes to provide a feminist interjection to the historiography of the 1946-1948 passive resistance campaign in South Africa.