



THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN NATIONAL LIBERATION MOVEMENTS

Sohiba Makhmudova Uktamjon qizi

Doctoral researcher Institute of History Academy of sciences of
Uzbekistan

maxmudovasohiba07@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0009-006-9501-2451>

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17231173>

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 14th September 2025

Accepted: 29th September 2025

Online: 30th September 2025

KEYWORDS

Turkestan, Russian Empire, national liberation movements, Polat Khan uprising, women and girls, colony, freedom, defenders, fortress, military unit

ABSTRACT

This article examines the national liberation movements that emerged in the regions of Turan and Turkestan in response to foreign invasions, with particular attention to the role and courage of women. It discusses the formation of military units composed of women, highlights the bravery and resilience of female figures who distinguished themselves in these struggles, and considers the involvement of children in resistance activities. Special focus is given to the historical contributions of Malika Tomur Khatun, Qabaj Khatun, and Qurbonjon Dodkhokh.

Introduction

Turan, Turkestan, is a land with a statehood and history spanning thousands of years. Throughout these millennia, it was ruthlessly plundered and turned into a colony by various enemies. In the struggle for the homeland's freedom, independence, and peace, along with brave and fearless ancestors, and young men who sacrificed their lives, women also demonstrated extraordinary courage, fighting valiantly on the battlefield against the enemy.

From ancient history, we know of the bravery of Tomyris [2; 4] (Queen To'maris), as well as Queen Qabaj Khotun, [3; 24-27] who waged war against the Arabs both shining examples of such heroic women.

At the beginning of the 13th century, when the Mongols under Genghis Khan invaded the territory of Turkestan, there was a special military unit consisting of Turkish women, who fought valiantly in the battles that took place in the Khorezm region. According to the research of historian Ziyoyun Buniyodov, during the defense of Gurganj (modern Old Urgench), women stood alongside men and fought against the Mongol invaders [11;192]. The townspeople-especially the women displayed such bravery and loyalty to their homeland that it provoked the wrath and fury of the Mongol soldiers.

The Mongols waged unsuccessful battles for seven months in their attempt to capture Gurganj. The defenders and the townspeople fought with great determination to protect their homeland, themselves, and their families as much as possible. In the end, all the surviving men and children of the city were massacred.



Having witnessed the resistance of Turkish women during the siege, the Mongols punished them in a most tragic way. They ordered, "Let the captive women of Urgench strip completely naked and march!" Dividing them into two groups, they further commanded: "Since the women of your city are skilled fighters, we order these two groups to fight one another!" And so, the poor women of Gurganj were forced into hand-to-hand combat with each other. After this vile spectacle, the Mongols slaughtered the women mercilessly [11; 194].

The 150 year rule of the Mongols was eventually brought to an end through the tireless campaigns of Amir Timur. He restored national independence and freedom by establishing a sovereign state and a national army. Regarding the presence of women in Timur's army, Ibn Arabshah provides the following account:

"In Timur's army, there were also women, who displayed courage during the chaos of battle and fierce clashes. They stood against enemy men and fought valiantly, excelling even more than skilled male warriors in thrusting spears, striking with swords, and shooting arrows. If one of them happened to be pregnant and was overcome with labor pains while traveling, she would separate from her group, dismount her steed, give birth, wrap her newborn in swaddling, mount her horse again, and rejoin her unit. Within Timur's army there were many who were born while on campaign, grew up in such conditions, married, and had families, yet never experienced a settled way of life" [6; 99-100].

Even during the period of the Russian Empire's invasion of Turkestan, women waged unparalleled battles against the enemy. In particular, during the capture of the Ak-Masjid fortress by the Russians, women fought with unmatched bravery. Mulla Niyoz Muhammad described these events as follows: "After Commander Muhammad Ali of Ak-Masjid fought fiercely for three days and three nights, they finally ran out of gunpowder and lead. Realizing this, the enemy blew up part of the fortress wall and stormed inside. The besieged men and women threw down their firearms and engaged in hand-to-hand combat with daggers and swords. Such a terrifying massacre ensued that the heavens themselves had never seen or heard of such a calamity. In the end, many men and women became martyrs, enduring unimaginable suffering" [5; 107].

The valor and heroism of the defenders of the homeland astonished even the Russian military commanders. It is especially important to emphasize the bravery of Uzbek women. In the final decisive battle, they stepped forward to fight face-to-face with enemy soldiers. The Russian soldiers, who witnessed how the men and women of the fortress considered capture dishonorable and chose death instead, were deeply astonished. On July 28, 1853, the fortress of Ak-Masjid fell into enemy hands.

Another of such battles was for the Marki fortress, located in present-day Tashkent province. In late April 1862, Colonel Kolpakovsky launched an assault on the fortress. According to Avaz Muhammad Attor Khoqandi in his work *Tarikhi Jahonnamoyi*: "When the people of the fortress learned of the attack, they all united and stood in defense like a wall as strong as Alexander's barrier. The infidels, having witnessed the courage of the Muslims, realized that capturing the fortress would be extremely difficult even approaching it was impossible.



Then the Russians resorted to the deceit and trickery characteristic of vile and ruthless men. They quickly dug a tunnel beneath the fortress gate, filled it with various combustibles, and set it alight at night with a blazing fire. The flames swiftly reached their mark and exploded with such force that the fortress gate, along with the wall, was blown away and reduced to rubble". "Despite heavy losses, 1,600 men, women, and children among the defenders of the homeland were killed. After this dreadful event, the fortress buildings were razed to the ground" [1; 38].

It should be especially noted that these battles drew not only women but even young children into their grasp, as they too fought bravely with the hope of not surrendering their homeland to the enemy. The Russian military, in pursuit of its goals, stopped at nothing, acting with cruelty and violence. The defenders of the homeland especially women fought them on equal terms.

During the 1873 revolt in Kokand, known as the Polat Khan uprising against the tyranny of the khan and the colonial policies of the Russian Empire, Qurbonjon Dodkhoh and her sons Abdullabek, Qamchibek, Mahmudbek, Hasanbek, and Botirbek played leading roles. After the rebellion was suppressed by Russian troops, Qurbonjon Dodkhoh in 1875 – 1876 took leadership of the liberation movement in the Alay region against the colonial oppression of the Russian Empire [9; 87].

Qurbonjon, daughter of Mamatboy whose given name was Qurmonjon was born in 1811 in the village of Modi, southwest of the city of Osh, into the Japalak clan of the Mungush tribe [7; 50]. According to Islamic tradition, since she was born on the day of Eid al-Adha (Qurbon Hayit), she was given the name Qurmonjon.

Her father played a significant role in her upbringing and maturity. Mamatboy himself was a literate, just, and kind-hearted man. He raised his daughter in accordance with the traditions and customs of the people. From childhood, Qurbonjon was independent, free-spirited, truthful, respectful of elders, proud, and often dressed like a boy and went hunting. She also mastered methods of combat and the military arts. With her intellect, bravery, and courage, she stood apart from other women.

At the age of seventeen, Qurbonjon's father, Mamatboy, gave her in marriage to Qulseyt's son, Turakul. However, going against the customs of that time, Qurbonjon returned to her father's home after only a year. She remained there for the next three years.

In 1832, at the age of twenty-one, she married Olimbek Dodkhoh, the son of Hasanboy and a minister of the Kokand Khanate. From that time, Qurbonjon began, almost unintentionally, to take part in the political affairs of the region. Qurbonjon and Olimbek Dodkhoh had several sons: Abdullabek, Mahmudbek, Hasanbek, Botirbek, and Qamchibek.

When Olimbek brought Qurbonjon to the khan's palace, he introduced her to Nodirabegim in 1833. Influential Uzbek women such as Nodirabegim, Uvaysiy, Anbar Otin, Mohzodabegim, and Zebunisobegim left their mark on her later life. As evidence of this, Qurbonjon Dodkhoh also wrote literary works under the pen name Zinnat [4; 13].



After Olimbek Dodkhoh was killed in palace intrigues during struggles for power in 1861, Qurbonjon temporarily took on the role of governor of Andijan in her husband's place, striving to pursue a just policy. After some time, she returned to her homeland with her children. By then, she had already become known as the "Queen of Alay" [8; 154].

In 1862, when the Emir of Bukhara, Muzaffar, marched with his troops to place Khudoyorkhan on the throne, Qurbonjon welcomed him in Osh. Impressed by the woman's courage, intelligence, and prestige, the Emir conferred upon her the title of *Dodkhoh* (a word of Persian origin meaning "seeker of justice." In the Kokand Khanate and the Emirate of Bukhara, it referred to the commander of a fortress or military leader, as well as an official overseeing judicial matters. In the Kokand Khanate, this position ranked ninth in the hierarchy of officials after the *parvonachi* and before the *biy*. The *Dodkhoh* received an annual salary of 700 botmon of grain and 1,000 gold coins) [10; 4].

After this event, her influence grew even more, and she became the official representative of the Alay and Gulchin Kyrgyz tribes. To confirm her authority, Khudoyorkhan also granted her the title of *Dodkhoh*. In this way, the brave and fearless woman became renowned as Qurbonjon *Dodkhoh*.

From February 1875, Qurbonjon *Dodkhoh's* brave and courageous son Abdullabek began leading the resistance movement in the Alay region.

Although he achieved some successes in battles against Russian troops commanded by General Mikhail Skobelev in early April, he suffered defeat in the battle of Janiriq on April 25. Several more clashes took place over the summer. However, Abdullabek and his brother Mahmudbek were eventually forced to retreat toward the Pamirs. Determined to continue the struggle, Abdullabek carried on fighting in the Pamirs and later in Afghanistan.

When news reached Qurbonjon *Dodkhoh* that her son Abdullabek had been killed in battle in Afghanistan, she herself continued to resist the Russians and led further struggles for some time.

Under orders from Governor-General Kaufmann, General Skobelev and P. Ionov, the head of the Osh district, were instructed to negotiate with Qurbonjon *Dodkhoh*. General Skobelev personally met with her, and a peace agreement was reached.

As a result, by the end of 1876 the national liberation movement against the Russian Empire came to a halt. In the autumn of 1876, Qurbonjon *Dodkhoh's* sons Mahmudbek, Hasanbek, and Botirbek were recalled from exile in Kabul and assigned leadership over various districts of the Alay region [10 ;4].

Her youngest son, Qamchibek, was accused of killing a customs officer in 1895 and arrested. At that time, Qurbonjon *Dodkhoh* was eighty-four years old. Although she was deeply grieved and sorrowful, she refused requests from people who pleaded with her to intercede on her son's behalf. For a mother, there can hardly be a heavier burden in this world than to witness her own beloved child being hanged before her eyes. Yet this patient, brave, and strong woman endured even this trial with dignity. She regarded her son as equal to others, and rather than sacrifice hundreds of people to save one of her own children, she chose to give up her beloved son. Even as her son was led to the gallows, she looked at Qamchibek and said: "Why do you bow your head, my son? Raise it high! I am



pleased with you. May your soul be at peace, may your spirit dwell in paradise. Allahu Akbar!" Then she left the square.

This event took place in Osh in 1895, and in fact, it was a scheme deliberately orchestrated by the Russian Empire. In May 1898, shortly before the uprising in Andijan led by Dukchi Eshon, Qurbonjon Dodkhoh visited Mingtepa in 1895, where she discussed the planned rebellion with Muhammadali Khalfa Sobir oglu (1856 – 1898) [12; 355].

This episode holds a special place in her political activity. In the spring of 1901, the Russian Empire's Minister of War, General-Adjutant Aleksandr Kuropatkin, visited Tashkent and also met with Qurbonjon Dodkhoh. During their conversation, Governor-General Kuropatkin rose with dignity and said: *"Her Imperial Majesty Maria Fyodorovna Romanova, the wife of the Emperor, graciously ordered me to present this gift to Qurbonjon Mamatova"* He then gave her a ring as a gift. Afterwards he asked: *"What message should I convey to Her Majesty? Do you have any request?"* Qurbonjon Dodkhoh replied: *"Express my gratitude to the Empress for her gift. My only request is that she may never, as a mother, experience the grief of losing a child"* [7; 53]. Indeed, Maria Fyodorovna herself never lost a child, but in the aftermath of the February Revolution her entire family was executed by the Bolsheviks.

Her later years were marked by personal loss. Her son Botirbek died at the age of 52 in 1895, Mahmudbek passed away in 1909, and Hasanbek in 1913 at the prophetic age of sixty-three.

Qurbonjon Dodkhoh lived to see 31 grandchildren, 57 great-grandchildren, and 6 great-great-grandchildren. She passed away in Osh on February 1, 1907.

Conclusion

The national liberation movements that arose in Turkestan during the colonial domination of the Russian Empire vividly reflect the people's determination in their pursuit of freedom and justice. Within these struggles, the active participation of women holds particular historical significance, as they played essential roles not only in the social sphere but also in direct armed resistance. Courageous figures such as Malika Tomur Khatun, Qabaj Khatun and Qurbonjon Dodkhoh left a remarkable legacy in the history of national liberation through their bravery, determination, and patriotism.

The involvement of women in national liberation movements demonstrates their importance not only within the domestic and familial domain but also in the broader social and political life of the nation. Their heroism continues to serve as an inspiring example for future generations in valuing freedom, dignity, and national pride. Therefore, any comprehensive study of the history of national liberation in Turkestan requires a deeper exploration of the role and contributions of women.

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