CHAPTER-V

Representation of Women in the Foreign Traveller’s Account

The representation of women in society is an elusive concept as it pertains to the degree of women’s access to material resources and social resources within the family, in the community and in the society at large, measured both in absolute terms and relative to men. There are many powerful and influential women in the professional, business, bureaucracy and government who enjoy the privileges and benefits of their status in the society. However, the vast majority of women in the region do not belong to this affluent class. The lives of such women are constrained by many social, economic and religious and political factors.

Historians are taking keen interest in gender history which is about women when talked in a general view. But for a professional historian it is not only about women, it is about them as well as the society as a whole in which they are placed along with men. For a better understanding of the gender based issues of present scenario it is essential to look into the past.

Since the beginning of creation women’s status has been a subject of amelioration. Reformers for age have tried to assign them a definite position in society but in spite of their best endeavor it remains a baffling problem to adjust theories with practice. Also in ancient literature there is a lack of unanimity of views regarding the question of status of women in society in India. It is very difficult to draw up an accurate picture of their position in early medieval period too. Generally, women occupied a subordinate position in India.

A historical portrayal of female's socio-economic and cultural life during the period under review from the account of foreign travellers is an interesting study. The foreign travellers had depicted the life of Indian women in detail. They had an uncommon interest in describing the life of an Indian woman. No aspect of her life remained untouched by the foreign travellers. The foreign travellers tried to give the minutest detail of the women's life whether she was a royal lady or a common woman though it was not possible sometimes to find a glimpse of royal ladies and the ladies of higher classes who lived in harems under many obligations.
Women in Harem

The word *harem* was derived from Arabic word *haram* which originally meant a sanctuary but later began to be applied to female apartments as well as to the inmates living therein.¹

It was called *seraglio* in Turkish and *zenanah* in Persian. It was also called “*harem-sara: harem-gah; mahal-sara; and raniwas.*”² Abul Fazl has given it a more appropriate name *Shabistan-i-Iqbal* or *Shabistan-i-Khan.*³ K.S. Lal writes, “With the passage of time it became synonymous with the female apartment of the elite as also with the inmates lodged therein.”⁴ European travellers generally preferred the term *harem* but also used the term *mahal.* Pelsaert defines *harem* as “an enclosure surrounded by high walls in which all the wives of King lives.”⁵

Upper classes of Hindu society know it as *anthapura.* Varsha Joshi opines that *harem* is very similar to the Sanskrit word ‘*anthapura*’ meaning ‘the inner apartment’ of the household,⁶ suggesting their (women) position in the palace secure, sheltered, and barred from common gaze. And no male was allowed to go the *anthapura* without informing the ladies through maid servants. The *zenani deorhi* is known by different names in different states of Rajasthan- *zenana mahal, ranwas, rawala, antehpur, mahine, and bheetar.*⁷

It was not a confined space inhabited exclusively by wives and concubines but rather consisted of a diverse community of a woman of varying ages interacting with each other in many different levels. There were many dependents as well as slaves and servants, many of whom performed specific tasks and held skilled occupations. Thus the *zenana* comprised of women of all relations who were not simply an object of sexual pleasure, as has been perceived. The harem technically speaking is a physical, social and cultural space exclusive to women. In real life, it has

⁷ Ibid.
a social world of its own where women perform different kinds of work on the basis of hierarchical division of labour. In fact it was this very hierarchical structure of zenana that would induce them to be ambitious. Indrani Chatterjee in her work entitled, ‘Gender, Slavery and Law in Colonial India’, opines that the study of harem is exploring of power articulated through hierarchies of age, wealth, social status and sexuality.

The apartments reserved for use of emperor’s women were called mahals. Harem was a place, which was self-sufficient with a full range of staff and administrators. It was both composite and cosmopolitan, providing employment to women of various religions, provinces and nationalities. The public lives of the women of nobility were governed by laws of seclusion, which was less a social/religious and more a class arrangement.

The travellers fantasized about the number of women in the King’s palace and provided different figures. Italian adventurer, Niccolao Manucci, said that “ordinarily there are within the mahal two thousand women of different races.” William Finch called it “New Moholl. of that longenesse that it may lodge two hundred women in state, all severall.” Thomas Roe stated that the King “keepe a thousands.” Thomas Coryat, also confirmed Roe’s figure by stating that Emperor Jahangir “keepth a thousand women for his own body.” The same was the case with nobility and high officials of the state.

Though the composition sometimes differed but the core idea was always the same in all the sources which says that harem was especially meant for women of the royalty and was restricted to males even Allama like Abul Fazl, could not enter the harem as mentioned by K.S. Lal.

The non-access made harem more important as it always arose curiosity and rumour among the western reader about the eastern beauties. Richard Burton tells that

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11 Early Travels in India, op. cit., p. 279.
the first question asked by a traveller to the East was ‘what are the women like’. Bernier writes, “But who is the traveller that can describe from ocular observation the interior of that building? I have sometimes gone into it when the King was absent from Delhi, and once pretty far I thought for the purpose of giving my professional advice in the case of a great lady so extremely ill that she could not be moved to the outward gate, according to the customs observed upon similar occasions, but a Kachemire shawl covered my head, hanging like a large scarf down to my feet, and an eunuch led me by the hand, as if I had been a blind man.”

The only men, besides their close relatives, who were allowed to enter the harem were the physicians. As some of the Europeans particularly Italian adventurer Francesco Careri, English John Fryer, Bernier and Manucci were physicians or posed as physicians, they were able to provide some eyewitness accounts. Manucci provided the interesting details of the procedure of entering the harem. He stated that “it is the custom in the royal household, when a physician is called within the mahal, for the eunuch to cover his head with a cloth, which hangs down to his waist. They then conduct him to the patient’s room, and he is taken out in the same manner.” On his first entry into the palace, he was also covered in the same way but “by premeditation. I walked as slowly as I could, in spite of the urging of my guides, the eunuchs. The prince, having seen this, ordered them to uncover me, and that in future I was be allowed to come in and go out without being covered. He said that the minds of Christians were not filthy like those of Mahomedans.” Manucci had further to add that as these ladies did not have any opportunity to meet any man except their husbands, some deliberately pretended to be ill so that they got the chance to meet the physicians, to converse with them and have their pulses felt. Manucci has then related what happened at such meetings:

The latter (the physician) stretches out his hand inside the curtain; they (the women) lay hold of it, kiss it, and softly bite it. Some, out of curiosity, apply it to their breast, which has happened to me several times; but I

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13 Building here means seraglio.
pretended not to notice, in order to conceal what was passing from the matrons and eunuchs then present, and not arouse their suspicions.\textsuperscript{16}

It was very difficult for any outsider male to enter the harem and observe it himself but what they did was to get information from the sources like eunuchs, female workers who can go inside the harem freely for some purpose and this is obvious when Bernier writes further, "You (reader) must be content, therefore, with such a general description as I have received from some of the eunuchs."\textsuperscript{17} Pelsaert says, "two or three eunuchs, or more, who are merely purchased Bengali slaves, but are usually faithful to their master, are appointed for each wife, to ensure that she is seen by no man except her husband, and, if an eunuch fails in this duty, he, with everyone else to blame for the Stranger’s presence, is in danger of losing his life.\textsuperscript{18} Bernier corroborates it when he tells, "I shall not easily forget being once surprised in a similar situation, and how narrowly I escaped the cruel treatment that many cavaliers have experienced but determined not to suffer myself to be beaten and perhaps maimed without a struggle."\textsuperscript{19} Thomas Roe also gives the description of the glimpses made of two of principal wives of Jahangir.

Although the harem was a no entry zone for males but some of the travellers were liked so much or got very friendly by the emperor and nobles that they were very much favoured by them and were invited to the harem also. There is a lot of references by the foreign travellers enjoying the privilege of being present at the Emperors’ drinking parties or companion at table, where they often drank together to excess.\textsuperscript{20} Catrou writes, "All the Franks in Agra, that is, all Europeans of whatsoever nation, were allowed free access to the palace. He continued drinking in their company till the return of day, and he abandoned himself especially to these midnight debaucheries at the season with the Mahomedans observe as a fast with the most scrupulous exactness."\textsuperscript{21} Roe remarks, Jahangir had many English servants in his retinue. Father Anthony Monserrate is very important in throwing light on the state of education of Mughal princes and princess. He saw the ladies going on long journeys and writes about them while on their move and in camp. Terry also writes on the way

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\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 328-31 \hspace{1em}
\textsuperscript{17} Bernier, op. cit., 267 \hspace{1em}
\textsuperscript{18} Pelsaert, op. cit., pp. 65-66. \hspace{1em}
\textsuperscript{19} Bernier, op. cit., p. 373. \hspace{1em}
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., p. 274 \hspace{1em}
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.
\end{flushright}
of life of harem ladies in camp. William Finch gives some interesting details about the commercial activities of queens and princesses. William Hawkins gives an idea of the expenses on the Royal harem and the nauroz celebrations.

The expense on the harem was ‘extraordinary’, as it never amounted to less than one crore of rupees per annum.\(^{22}\) According to Hawkins, “the expences daily for his (King’s) women by the day is thirtie thousand rupia.”\(^{23}\) John Jourdain also confirmed that “his wives, there slaves and his concubines’ doe spend him an infinite deale of money, incredible to be believed.”\(^{24}\) Bernier had emphasized also “the enormous expenses of the seraglio, where the consumption of fine clothes of gold, and brocade, silks, embroideries, pearls, musk, amber and sweet essences, is greater than can be conceived.” Careri maintains that the expenditure on the harem was twice than the amount spent on maintenance of the abundance of elephants, horses and servants.\(^{25}\)

Manucci writes in detail regarding pay and pension of the inmates of the harem. They received special presents in cash from the King from time to time. Their only business was to live in style and splendour in order to make themselves attractive to the king. Manucci described the royal antics when “the king took it into his head to fix the costume of the women in his harem, dividing them into groups or companies—that is, so many got up in such a manner and in such colours, another company in another colour, and so on for the whole of them. He was also anxious that these clothes should all be of the finest materials procurable.”\(^{26}\) Manucci also added that the King also built a special hall “for the greater satisfaction of his lusts”. It was twenty cubits wide, “adored throughout with great mirrors”. It consumed a huge amount of money and “the gold alone cost fifteen millions of rupees, not including the enamel work and precious stones, of which no account was kept.” Manucci believed that “all this expenditure was made so that he might obscenely observe himself and his favourite women.”\(^{27}\)

\(^{22}\) Manucci, op. cit., Vol. II, pp. 338-39, 341
\(^{23}\) Early Travels in India, op. cit., p. 104.
\(^{27}\) Ibid. Vol. I, p. 188.
The travellers have described a special bazaar (fair) which were for the women of hareem at the time of the Nauroz. English traveller, Peter Mundy, mentioned that in this fair, the wives and daughters of all the nobles attended as “noe man daringe to refuse the sendinge them if the king require them (although of the greatest Amrawe).” He has also given the reason for holding such a fair: “these they do because the Kingses weomen are never suffered to goe abroad, that they may then see the varieties, curiosities etts., necessaries that are in the Cittie or elsewhere.” However, in contrast to Mundy, many European travellers attributed it to the erotic pleasures of the Emperor. Coryate described that “by this means he (Emperor) attains to the sight of all the prettie wenches of the towne.” Manucci’s description was also filled with erotic allusion. He wrote that Emperor Shah Jahan’s only interest lay in searching beautiful women “to serve his pleasure.” With this purpose in view he arranged eight day’s long fair in which hordes of women, which when once counted numbered more than thirty thousand were invited. They attended the fair with a variety of goods the best piece being “her own body.” Honourable women avoided the festival but those who showed up, vied for the love of the Emperor who had a round of all the “stalls” and whomsoever, amongst the sellers, “attracted his fancy” was in due time “produced” in the royal presence through his appointed “matrons” who had been given “an agreed-on-signal” for the purpose.” Thus for Manucci, the buyers, the sellers, the merchandise and the bargain nothing was real. The entire show was meant for facilitating the King to select women for his carnal pleasures.

Eunuchs played an important role both inside and outside of the Mughal hareem. They performed different functions and for that were given handsome allowances. There “Virile Parts are off smooth, to prevent the least Temptation from the Sex.” They were very friendly with the women folk. Princess won them over through generous financial help and at times “gets permission to enjoy that of which I cannot speak.” They also facilitated men to clandestinely enter hareem and obtain “the

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29 Early Travels in India, *op. cit.*, p. 279.
30 Manucci, *op. cit.* Vol. I, p. 188.
favour of husbands.” They also acted as their spies because they were always found eavesdropping.32

In the opinion of a few European travellers, the Indian women were though not allowed to go out without veil and were shut up in harem; they were mostly crafty and cunning and generally controlled their husbands. It was Thomas Roe who gave currency to the notion that Nur Jahan and her junta- comprising her father, brother and son-in-law – wielded the real power of the Empire and Mughal Emperor Jahangir was a puppet in their hands.33 Roe contended that “Normahall fulfill (s) the observation that in all actions of consequence in a court, especially in faction, a woman is not only always an ingredient, but commonly a principall drugg and of most virtue; and shee shows that they are not incapable of conducting business, nor herself voyd of witt and subtilye.”34 Pelsaert wrote that the Emperor “disregarding his own person and position, hais surrendered himself to a crafty wife of humble lineage.... he (Jahangir) is King in name only, while she and her brother Asaf Khan hold the kingdom firmly in their hands.”35 In the power struggle between Prince Khurram and Prince Khusrau, when the latter wanted to visit the royal court, it was Nur Jahan who did not allow the king to see his son, even though “the King had fallen downe and taken his mistris (Nur Jahan) by the feete to obteyne her leave to see his sonne.”36

During the war of succession among the sons of Shahjahan, the latter’s two daughters; Jahanara and Roshanara also played an important role. Bernier, while conceding their contribution in the war, asserted that “the most momentous events are too often caused by the influence of the sex, although the people may be ignorant of this fact, and may indulge in vain speculations as to the cause of the agitation they deplore.”37

The pleasures of the harem life were not the monopoly of the sovereigns only. On the other hand, almost all the nobles, including even the Hindus, had their own harems generally designed on the royal pattern. The harem life might have produced demoralizing effects on the rulers and the nobility alike.

34 Roe, op. cit., p. 235.
35 Pelsaert, op. cit., p. 50.
37 Bernier, op. cit., p. 16.
The Mogul nobility, in fact, practically sunk in the vices of the age, wasted the major portion of its huge wealth over luxury and debauchery. Pelsaert writes, “As a rule noble had three or four wives, the daughters of worthy men. All lived together in the noble's Mahal or palace which consisted of an enclosure, surrounded by numerous slaves, of her own – 10, 20 or even 100 according to her fortune.”

The women of nobility enjoyed almost all the facilities enjoyed by the royal ladies like they were also served by a great number of slaves. Their palaces were beautified with waterfalls, tanks and gardens. These royal and noble class ladies spent a huge amount of money over their dress, ornament and amusements. Manucci observed, “In the cool of the evening they drink a great deal of wine, for the women learn the habit quickly from their husbands”.

Manucci also holds that all the nobles practically followed the same methods as the Emperor for maintaining strict supervision over the inmates of their harems. Most of the Hindu Rajas and the nobles also maintained their harems like their Muslim counterparts, but they normally kept their concubines in separate establishments and not in their homes. Among the Hindus the offspring of such irregular unions formed a lower caste occupying definitely a social status inferior to those born in wedlock.

The harems of the nobles were also great centres of mirth and gaiety, where numerous dancing damsels of uncommon grace and voice got full opportunities to exhibit their talents. Pelsaert refers to the mirthful and licentious life of the nobles thus: ‘The husband sits like a golden cock among the gilded hens until midnight or until passion or drink sends him to bed’.

Women and Profession

The study of the social division of labour between sexes focuses on the women’s social status. Scanty information regarding women’s profession lay scattered in the travelogues of the period. Also the information on women’s work and profession is difficult to be found for the entire pre-colonial period as there are only

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38 Pelsaert, op. cit., pp. 64-65.
42 Pelsaert, op. cit., p. 65.
The management of house and household chores were confined to women in all class and society. The skills, expertise, talent and experience that were required in the management of the household were not recognized by the male dominated society, and were conceived as natural and therefore inferior in attribute of femininity. Whatever division of work is allotted for woman is considered to be compatible with her natural or biological function and thus, domestic chores are assigned to her.

The maintenance of the household requires doing certain kinds of work and hard labour. In case of the majority of ordinary women, the work around household consists of a great variety of subsistence activities such as rearing children, carrying water, collecting fuel, cooking food, serving meals, food transportation, tending cattle, spinning cloth for house use, etc.

Wealthy households include extra household female member such as mistress, wet-nurses, slaves or servants and concubines. The presence of servants or maids among richer families would obviously tend to lighten the work of the women. They would have to do less manual work. In these families, there were a number of lower class recruits to take over the drudgery of housework and childcare.

The female servants formed an important section of the household. The servants, both male and female received their wages in cash in addition to some food and clothing. Higher caste families hired women of lower orders to fetch water from well and for other related services. These women were known as Panibharin and were usually allowed food and clothing than paid by a certain sum for each pot of water but many a times earned annas per month. Many unfortunate widows gave themselves up as domestic servants among richer family in return for food and shelter.

Slave women did much of the household tasks. Lekhapaddhati cites women slaves doing household works as grinding, cutting, smearing the floor, sweeping the floor, fetching water, milking cattles, agricultural work, etc. \(^{25}\) They were used for

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spying, as well or given in dowry. Thus the tasks performed by female slaves were diverse and multiform.

The condition of female slave was not much changed in the centuries under study. The ordinary slaves lived with nothing, their clothing is only white linen, which though fine was bought very cheap, and their diet for the most part is nothing but rice, so that everybody, even of mean fortune, keeps a great family and is splendidly attended this is easy enough. Considering the very small charge. observes Pietro Della Valle in 1623 A.D. in Surat. Ovington in 1698 A.D. also give similar kind of information from Gujarat, according to him due to the easy availability and cheap maintenance ordinary people maintain female slaves, or concubines.

The establishment of the profession of concubinage had been a well established feature of royal household whether it was the Hindu Kingdom of the South or the Mughal Empire in the North.

To enforce discipline among the numerous concubines, matrons were placed over them. The eunuchs were placed as sentries over them and were allowed entry in the harem as male attendants of the harem. But in case of misbehaviour with any of the concubines, the concubines could sometimes deal strictly with them.

Nevertheless, the welfare and entertainment of concubines was also taken care of, along with that of Begums. In the festive gatherings, for the entertainment of wives and concubines the musicians and dancers performed and female servants were attached in service to them. The luxuries and spending by wives and concubines had been commented upon a great deal by the European travellers.

47 Ovington, op. cit., p. 140.
50 Early Travels in India, op. cit., p. 104. Hawkins informs that the expenses daily for his women is 30,000 rupees while Jourdain finds it difficult to compute and spending according to him was infinite. Early Travels.
The concubines were seen as threat to the stability of married life. In the description of noble’s harem, in which were numerous slave girls (and potential concubines), the tension is evident. The helpless wives unable to check their husband treated the slave-girls with great severity. Pelsaert reports ‘if one of the pretty slave-girls takes his fancy, he calls her to him and enjoys her, his wife not daring to show any sign of displeasure, but dissembling though she will take it out of the slave-girl later on.’ Mundy, similarly, has found a slave-girl, near Sikandra (Agra), only 10 years old, who had runaway upon the ‘hard usage’ of her mistress; the cause being, as the girl informed Mundy, that the mistress had conceived her husband’s affection towards her.

There appears to be a lot of jealousies on part of the masters to guard their women against other men. There are numerous references of destruction of harem so that they could not be taken by the victor. For instance De Laet reports of Qasim Khan, governor of Bengal, leaving all his property but killing all his women when he had to flee from the royal forces.

The institution of concubinage became the social instrument for integrating captive women into household of their captors thus assuring their captors not only their loyal services but also those of their off-springs. Concubinage is legal in the Islamic world.

An important role was played by women as midwives and nurses of babies. Midwifery is typically a woman’s work. These midwives and nurses invariably appear in Mughal paintings, depicting scenes of birth of Princes like the birth of Prince Salim. (Plate- XI). Fryer (1672-81 A.D.) observed:

“At their labour they seldom call midwives, being petty quick that way, though there are not a few live well by that profession.”

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52 Pelsaert, op. cit., p. 65.
54 Laet, Joannes De, op. cit., p. 194.
Chamars, Hajams, etc., the lower caste women mainly performed it, for it is considered to be a polluting task. It is quite an underpaid work. It provides an income for desperately poor women with a few marketable skills.

Wet-nursing is another work that is obviously exclusive to women called dhays who nurse children. Lactating mothers would sell their milk to elites, and for the service so rendered they received and other favours by way of compensation. Almost all women of ruling and elite families required the services of the wet nurse. In a polity where becoming a mother was important the availability of nurses was critical for survival of any infant. Besides, among ordinary families the need of a wetnurse might arise if the mother was ailing with some problem and therefore could not feed the child. Further, the presence of dhatri could relieve the mother and hence geared up the production process.

On several occasions, a dhatri could use her position to acquire social and material benefits and a dignified position. If she becomes a dhatri of king's children, she would obviously develop a bond of love and care with children and have the opportunity to get her family members placed in good position and could exercise enough authority herself.

Besides this the fetching of water from the village well was another customary chore of Indian women. Fryer observed in 1676 A.D.,

"Indian wives dress their husband's victual, fetch water and grind their corn with a hand-mill, when they sing, chat and are merry."

A country scene from Anwar-i-Suhaili (1597 A.D.) shows men and women at work, here a man is standing on the top of the well and a woman has a basket on her head. (See Plate- XII). Abul Fazl, recorded the observation of Akbar in the Ain-i-

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56 Begum Gulbadan, Homayun Nama, Tr. Annette S. Beveridge, Low Price Publications, Delhi, First Published, 1902, Third rpt. 1996, p. 95.
57 Chatterjee Indrani, Gender, Slavery and Law in Colonial India, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1999, p. 67.
60 Fryer, op. cit., Vol II, p. 454.
Akhari that women were fetching water from rivers, tanks and well, and balancing the vessels on their head.

The women during the sixteenth and seventeenth century were not only confined to the household work but also opted many other professions as well. Women were involved in agriculture work also. Women were not only confined to domestic farming, but they also worked as part-time wage earners. After the harvest was collected from the field, it created more work for women. The beating of rice and husking of other grains was exclusive a women’s job. The grinding of the grain on the rotary hand-mill was also mainly done by women. The peasant’s housewife did not perform tasks subordinate to those of men but participated equally in the process of agricultural production. Norris reports that the women at Coromandel Coast did various agricultural works like cleaning, grinding the paddy and carrying the wood.

At Calicut washermen were both ‘women as well as men’. They were not only competent but also cheap. (Plate- XIII). Women are seen preparing lime-mortar, and carrying it in Pan, held in hand or over their heads, to the mason at work in the painting showing Akbar’s construction of the Agra fort. (See Plate- XIV & XV).

Another important profession adopted by women for their livelihood was to work as public entertainers. Under this category comes the profession of singing and dancing, acrobatics and juggling etc.

Singing and dancing was very old profession of women. This profession was carried out by women who worked as public entertainers.

Pietro Della Valle (1623 A.D.) in Gujarat mentions that:

"Amongst the mahometan women there were infinite, who go every day publickly to house and where they please, to play music, sing, dance and do what else belongs to their profession."
These public entertainers were using instruments like drums, bells etc. Many times they were used for entertainment of guests by playing instruments, dancing and singing. These women entertainers were some time worked as prostitutes as well. Nicholas Withington (1612-16) in his account of Gujarat mention that,

"At our being here (Gujarat) the women of towne came into carvan and danced, everyman giving them some thinge; and afterwards they asked openly, who wants to be bed fellow."^66

Many women prostitutes were attached to the royal court and nobles establishments. Women were also serving as attendants and servants, they were appointed to perform a variety of tasks high and low, skilled and unskilled in aristocratic households.

From the accounts of foreigners it seems that another class of female entertainers were acrobat (nats) and jugglers. In Baburnama there is a reference by Babur to entertainers called lulis. Perhaps they were acrobats.^^ Babur, Zahiruddin Muhammad, *Baburnama or Memoirs of Babur*, English tr. from the Original text by Annette Susannah Beveridge, Oriental, New Delhi, 1922, rpt.1979, Vol. II, pp. 633-4. The accounts of Peter Mundy also talks of there nats.^^ Peter Mundy also talks of there nats. Barbosa while talking of Vijayanagar comments that, 5 to 6 thousand women who march with army. They are musicians, dancers and acrobats very quick at their performances.^^ Young girls also performed acrobatics feats for entertainments of their royal patrons.

Commercial Activities

Women played a considerable role in the commercial activities during the period under review also. Their involvement in the mercantile activities was not a new phenomenon in India because there are examples in history where we can clearly see women handling business and trade independently. Their involvement in trade and commerce came most often from ruling family and noble class women. Women in the imperial harem were actively engaged in commercial activities.

^66 *Early Travels in India*, op. cit., pp. 208-09.
Jahangir’s own mother, Maryam Zamani, for example, owned ship called Rahimi through which she traded with the markets of West Asia and the Persian Gulf. The significance of Rahimi in the overseas commercial activities is reflected from the fact that when in 1611 it was captured by the Portuguese they demanded 30,000 rials for its release.  

Maryam Zamani showed a remarkable interest in trade and commerce, particularly overseas trade. She was among the most well-known of the ship owners: “the Great Mogul’s mother was a great adventurer, which caused the Great Mogul to drive the Portigals out of this place”. Her ship carried merchandise for the vendors of Holy city, Mecca, and trafficked in pilgrims going for hajj. There is evidence to suggest that the queen herself invested in the purchase and sale of commodities freighted on Rahimi: “Captain Hawkins brought indigo out of queen mother’s hand, her factor having made price for it...”, or those acting under her protection. Besides, indigo other Indian commodities belonging to the Queen were also loaded on the Ship.

An extremely important woman actively involved in overseas trade was Nur Jahan. Foreign trade in her time was quite flourishing and lucrative. She owned her own ships and was actively engaged in overseas trade and commerce. Some of her commercial enterprises brought her immense profits, especially in indigo and embroidered cloth trade. She was an extremely astute and practical merchant, showing no hesitation in cooperating with the Portuguese for commercial security and profits.

Several of her business ventures were based on the cooperation of private Portuguese merchants, and her ships would regularly pay cartaz dues to the Portuguese. Her relations with the English merchants were on a better footing and

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75 Foster, Early Travels, p. 123.
77 Ibid. p. 209.
sometimes, she issued orders granting them concession. In 1627 she passed an order exempting the English from payment of road dues and transit tolls. She sent her goods in English ships, preferring them to those of the Portuguese, and even the Indian merchants.

Referring to Nur Jahan’s interest in trading activities, Roe informs that, “on going to Jahangir, every way of new points of power, however, the queen Nur Jahan, asked to see the ambassador’s seal, keeping it overnight.” Roe further acknowledge in his Journal that Nur Jahan played a crucial role in his negotiations with the imperial court, as also in determining the demand of foreign goods and luxury items in the imperial court.

Thomas Roe called “Nur Jahan as his solicitor and her brother as his broker.” He repeatedly emphasizes her special interest in trade and commerce and the support he and English had found in the development of their own trade in Mughal India. E.B. Findley is quite correct when she calls Nur Jahan a shrewd business woman who saw the English as an opportunity for expanding overseas commerce.

Jahanara was another important woman in Mughal harem about whom we have much evidence concerning her interest in trade and commerce. She fully participated in trading operations and owned several ships chiefly Sahibi and Ganjawar. Her shipping interests had a dual objective. The first was to increase profits from overseas commerce, and the seconds, was to assist the pilgrims going for Hajj. In 1643, one of her ships carrying for hajj included a cargo of goods worth rs.10 to 15000 which were to be sold at Jeddah and with the profits thus accrued her agents were to buy horses.

So much was her importance that for trading purposes everyone had to win favours of principal members of court and esp. Jahanara, who was particularly interested in revenue, and it was very important “to procure her nishan to assist us

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50 Roe, op. cit., pp. 401-404, 412.
51 Ibid. p. 436.
52 Letters Received, op. cit., Vol. VI, (1617) July to December, pp. 150.
56 Ibid. p. xi.
She was also bribed by English "by procuring some oyles, nutmegs, cloves, and mace of which these sorts the Begum is very desirous."

It was not just in foreign trade that women were deeply involved. Even the internal trade had a considerable amount of participation of women. These women also catered to the demands of internal market. The royal women who had important centres as their jagirs drew a lot of revenue from the internal markets. Broach city brought on income of 2, 30, 000 mahmudis for its owner, Nur Jahan, by way of tolls from internal trade. Nur Jahan also had Toda as her jagir which lay 80/km. South-east of Ajmer on medieval trade route from Surat to Agra and brought her an annual income of 2lakhs of rs. At Sikandra, her officers collected duties on all goods coming from East, before being sold presumably in the profitable market of the main city (Agra). Without these supplies this country, Agra, and its environs could not be provided with food, and would almost die of hunger so that this was a place of great traffic.

We have a whole range of Edicts from Mughal harem which reflect the role of royal ladies in commercial activities. There is one hukm of Nur Jahan dated 27 January 1665 where she announces measures to encourage people, particularly merchants, to settle down at Nur Gunj katra in qasba Sironj. This clearly highlights the interest that imperial women undertook to increase trading activities. Royal women also constructed and maintained sarais on important junctions of trade routes for the convenience of traders. Jahanara also took active interest in the collection of revenues. In one nishan, she acknowledges receipt of musk and in another nishan, she gets interested in ice boxes from Garhwal and she complains about ice not coming from her own show house (21/27 June 1678). In another nishan, she instructs her officials to be diligent in collection of snow and to make due payment to labourers.

\[\text{Ibid.}, \text{Vol } 8 \text{ (1646-1650), pp. 219-20.}\]
\[\text{Ibid.}, \text{Vol } 9 \text{ (1651-1654), p. 11.}\]
\[\text{Prakash, Om, The Dutch Factories in India 1617-1623, A Collection of Dutch East India Company documents pertaining to India, Munshiram, New Delhi, 1984, p. 134.}\]
\[\text{Pelsaert, op. cit., p. 4.}\]
\[\text{Ibid.}, p. 41.\]
\[\text{Tirmizi, “Introduction in Edicts”, op. cit., p. 30.}\]
\[\text{Manucci, op. cit., Vol., I, p. 97.}\]
\[\text{English Factories, op. cit., Vol 9(1651-1654), p. xi.}\]
\[\text{Tirmizi, “Introduction in Edicts”, op. cit., p. 104.}\]
\[\text{Ibid., p. 108}\]
Manucci informs us that she had an income of 3m. of rs. in addition to revenues of the port of Surat.\textsuperscript{99}

The trading world in Medieval India comprised of lot more activities than large scale trade. The business of insurance did involve her presence. In one instance, Huri Khanum, Begam Saheb’s nurse had promised to procure Begum’s nishan regarding the whole affair.\textsuperscript{100} There is evidence to suggest that in money lending operations, women did play an important role. Their chief borrowers were the traders and merchants of the same area. There is also some evidence of even the English merchants borrowing money from “a Banyan woman”.\textsuperscript{101}

Besides this, women’s participation in petty commerce seems to have been quite considerable. Women used to travel about to different villages markets carrying their wares on little ponies. The peddling trade has another aspect also which was very lucrative. There had been sarais which were intended for the travellers\textsuperscript{102} and since the time of Humayun, many were built upon the royal highways throughout the realm.\textsuperscript{103} Almost all the foreign travellers have spoken about caravansarais and its dwellings and comforts, there were divided into dwelling rooms and chambers with a male or female Regent for women also carry on this occupation.\textsuperscript{104} Tavernier mentions that here at sarais there came some women who sold flour, rice, butter, vegetables who make their business to prepare bread and cook rice through some might say that sarais was a work of charity but it had commercial purpose and was a place for entertainment too.

\textbf{Matrimonial Practices}

Marriage was an important social-institution during the medieval period in India both in Muslim as well as in the Hindu society. The institution of marriage and

\textsuperscript{98} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{100} English Factories, \textit{op. cit.}, Vol. 10 (1655-1660), pp. 15, 73-4
\textsuperscript{101} Ibid. Vol. 2(1622-1623), p. 234.
\textsuperscript{102} Manucci, \textit{op. cit.}, Vol. I, p. 67.
\textsuperscript{103} Ibid. Vol. I, p. 115.
aspects related finds an important topic of observance by the travellers of the period under review. There was not much difference in the prevalence of this institution as before the advent of Mughals in India. The eleventh century traveller Alberuni writes about the custom of marriage in India as “The Hindu marry at very young age: therefore the parents arrange the marriage of their sons....... husbands and wife can only be separated by death as they have no divorce.”

Marriage was more of a family question than a personal concern of the marrying couple. The bridegroom and the bride have no share in choice as it is made by the parents if alive otherwise family and friends. Even the example of arrange marriage is found in the royalty. The ladies of the Imperial household took great interest in match making. Due to untimely death of Mumtaz Begum, “Jahanara took the responsibility of performing Dara’s marriage”. Akbar favoured the idea of allowing freedom to the boys and girls in matrimonial matters. In India a man cannot see the woman to whom he is marrying, there are peculiar obstacles, but His Majesty maintains that the consent of the bride and bridegroom and the permission of the parents are absolutely necessary in marriage contracts.

Inter-caste marriage was out of fashion. Marriage generally took place between boys and girls of the same caste, sub-caste at profession. Nicholas Withington (c. 1612-13) mentions that son of a baker married to a baker’s daughter. But many Rajput princesses were married to Mughal prince shows that the inter-caste marriages were prevalent among royalty for enhancing power and prestige through matrimonial alliances. The Royal Marriage celebration had grand show. The celebration of marriage in royal and noble class started with the wedding feast very much like the Hindu custom. These rejoicings continued for many days. Friends and Relations gave different kinds of presents in the trays full of fruits-dry and fresh; cotton, silk, gold etc. known as ‘Kistis’. The marriage procession that started from the bridegroom’s house was similar to that of the Hindu custom. Firework, singing and

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111 Careri, *op. cit.*, p. 225
112 *Early Travels in India, op. cit.*, p. 221.
dancing women, with a large cavalry to escort the procession was a common feature of the Royal wedding. The 'Mulla' performed the marriage ceremony. At the end, the bridegroom was given a box containing a paste called 'henna' (mehndi). The bridegroom took the bride to his house carrying the dowry along with him. The Muslim middle and lower class marriage were performed almost in the same manner; the difference was only that of standard.

Many evil practices were related to marriage like early marriage, dowry, divorce, widow-remarriage, polygamy etc. These social malpractices had weakened the dignity of women in general.

Early marriage was a distinctive feature of Indian society. Account of foreign travelers confirms its popularity during the period under study. Ralph Fitch (1503-91), remarks the child marriage, that

"They say (people), they marry their children
So young, because it is an order that, when
The man dieth, the woman must be burned
With him, so that if the father die, yet they
May have a father in law to help to bring up the
Children which bee leaves their sonnes without
Wives, nor their daughter without husbands."

Withington (1612-16) also observes the same when he mentions that Banias marry their children at very young age, about three years or under, sometime marriages were fixed before the birth of child. It was equally prevalent in Muslims. Careri says, "Mehometan Indian marry very young, but the idolaters at all ages." Middle and lower class people were anxious to get their daughters married as soon as possible after attaining puberty because they were very particular about the chastity of their womenfolk. Abul Fazl writes that the people of India were very eager to give their children in marriage at a very tender age. Akbar was anxious that young girls should not be given away in marriage because of the hazard this pose to their health. The anxiety was reflected in actual prohibition of marriage of girls below the age of

113 Manucci, _op. cit._ Vol. III, pp.150-152
114 _Early Travels in India_, _op. cit._ pp. 16-17.
115 _Early Travels in India_, _op. cit._, p. 221. If two neighbors women were pregnant, they make promise before the birth of child and fixed marriages of their unborn children.
116 Careri, _op. cit._, p. 248.
117 _Ain_, _op. cit._, Vol. 1, p. 288.
puberty, defined as 14 or 12 years.\textsuperscript{118}

Inspite of prohibition girls were married at early age during the seventeenth century. Among both Hindus and Muslims girls were married at the age of four to seven years\textsuperscript{119} and cohabit at between eleven-twelve, or sometime sooner.\textsuperscript{120} Manucci and Thevenot refer to the practice of keeping certain gap between the performance of the formal marriage ceremonies and the actual commencement of the conjugal life.\textsuperscript{121} It indicates cohabitation was not before the age of puberty.

The custom of dowry was prevalent among all classes of Hindu society.\textsuperscript{122} Dowry was the gift generally given to daughters at the time of marriage. Usually household staff and slaves were gifted at the time of marriage as dowry. Dowry was demanded, and sometimes parents disregarded the suitability of the match\textsuperscript{123} and cared primarily for a rich dowry. In some castes and localities the bridegroom had to pay money to the bride’s guardians.\textsuperscript{124} The Muslim society, particularly its richer and higher sections, could not remain altogether unaffected by the system of dowry. Both Badauni and Nizamuddin Ahmed refer to the prevalence of this practice among the high class Moslems.\textsuperscript{125}

The right of separation or divorce is allowed by Muslim law but conditionally. Manucci holds that divorce among the Muslims was possible but the husband had to pay compensation to the divorced wife for her maintenance.\textsuperscript{126} But, among the Hindus it was not allowed, except in the cases of low castes and the Shudras.\textsuperscript{127} Manucci writes, “But this practice is not known anywhere in the Brahman or Rajah caste, nor those of the shopkeepers. In these castes if the wife was divorced, she could not remarry.”\textsuperscript{128} Abul Fazl also holds that divorce was not customary among the Brahmins.\textsuperscript{129}

Remarriage was not permitted for women. Alberuni (c.1030) mention if a wife loses her husband by death, she cannot marry another man. She has only to choose

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item\textsuperscript{118} Ibid. Vol. I, pp. 204, 213.
\item\textsuperscript{119} John Fryer, \textit{op. cit.}, Vol I, pp. 181 and 185, Ovington, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 189.
\item\textsuperscript{120} Ovington, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 189.
\item\textsuperscript{121} Manucci, \textit{op. cit.}, Vol. Ill, pp. 58-59, Thevenot, \textit{op. cit.}, p.117.
\item\textsuperscript{122} Careri, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 248.
\item\textsuperscript{123} Purchas, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 191.
\item\textsuperscript{124} Manucci, \textit{op. cit.}, Vol. Ill, p. 55.
\item\textsuperscript{125} Ojha, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 131.
\item\textsuperscript{126} Manucci, \textit{op. cit.}, Vol. Ill, p. 152.
\item\textsuperscript{127} \textit{Ibid.} Vol. Ill, pp. 152, 170.
\item\textsuperscript{128} \textit{Ibid.} Vol. Ill, p.70.
\item\textsuperscript{129} \textit{Ain}, Vol. Ill, p. 339.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
between two things either to remain a widow as long as she lives, as to burn herself.\footnote{130} Middle and lower class women, after the death of husband, they never can marry again, but lives to bewail her widowhood, and perhaps her virginity, in all days of life.\footnote{131} Sometime husbands died before the fulfillment of marriage and the widow obliged to disconsolate virginity all her life and must never contact another man. Sometime they became widow at six or seven years of age.\footnote{132}

Remarriage for Muslim men after the death of wife or during her life time was common in India. "A man can marry four wives,"\footnote{133} besides they take liberty to keep as many women as they were able.\footnote{134} Akbar was keen to develop the system of monogamy. Badauni mention that in 1587, Akbar issued a decree that no one should marry more than one wife, unless she was barren.\footnote{135} Abul Fazl tells us of no such order issued by Akbar but he support monogamy.\footnote{136}

Polygamy is allowed in Islam with certain rules but strictly restricted in Hindu religion. Inspite of the fact, we do find evidence of its prevalence in the richer sections of Hindu society also. In the rich Muslim society it was prevalent commonly. Generally Hindus people were monogamous. Della Valle writes. "Hindus take but one wife and never divorce her till death, except for the cause of adultery."\footnote{137} The above statement finds corroboration in the accounts of Mandelslo and Hamilton also.\footnote{138} In the extreme case if a wife proved to be barren, they had the liberty to marry another with the consent of the Brahmans.\footnote{139} The result of polygamy was the bitter relationship existing between the co-wives in the household of a polygamist.\footnote{140}

Social Customs

Many social customs that were prevalent in the society of that period considerably hampered the progress of women, both Hindu and Muslim. The customs
like sati and purdah had attracted the attention of the foreigners mainly. There accounts contain full of references of sati and purdah. Besides, some other evil prevalent in the Indian society of that time find scattered references in traveler’s account.

The word sati is a Sanskrit word which means “a true wife” and the term was properly applied to a woman whose faithful devotion to her husband, during his lifetime, earned for her this well-deserved title of praise.

The practice of burning widows in the funeral pyre of their husbands prevailed throughout the period under study. It attracted the attention of almost everyone who was a stranger to the country. However it was not a new thing in India. This inhuman practice of widow-burning was an ancient custom and a Hindu woman was bound to burn herself alive with the corpse of her husband to honour him.141 About Sati, when one asks the widow the cause of it, they say it is the custom, they pretend it was always so in the Indies, and so they hide their cruel jealousies under the veil of antiquity.142 The prevalence of sati system during the 16th century is well described by the Portuguese and Italian travellers who visited Southern India. It gained a wide currency in the Mughal Empire also and became more or less obligatory in nature. Almost every contemporary foreign traveller invariably refer to it, with all its rituals, and some of them even speak about the element of compulsion attached to it, which was normally exercised by the Brahman priests.143

Ralph Fitch refers to Sati thus, “And when the husband dies, his wife if she be alive is buried with him, if she will not, her head is shaven and then is never any account made of her after”.144 De Laet says, “When her husband dies, the widow of her own free will, leaps upon his pyre and is burnt up together with his corpse, as is a well-known fact”.145 Here, we found a reference to the voluntary or optional nature of this practice. Pelsaert observes, “when a Rajput dies, his wives (or rather his wife, for, they marry only one if there is genuine love) allow themselves to be burnt alive, as is the practice among the Banian and Kashtryia, and in Agra this commonly occurs two or three times a week.”146

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142 Thevenot, op. cit., p. 119.
145 De Laet, op. cit., p. 87.
146 Pelsaert, op. cit., p. 78.
Bernier describes it in great details with a particular reference to the part played by the Brahman priests.\textsuperscript{147} He writes, "It is true, however that I have known some of these unhappy widows shrink at the sight of the piled wood so as to leave no doubt in my mind that they would willingly have recanted, if recantation had been permitted by the merciless Brahmin's."\textsuperscript{148} He tries to examine the root cause of the popularity of this practice, in those days, and says, "Many persons whom I then consulted on the subject would have persuaded me that excess of affection was the root cause why these women burn themselves with their deceased husbands; but I soon found that this abominable practice is the effect of early and deeply rooted prejudices. Every girl is taught by her mother that it is virtuous and laudable in a wife to mingle her ashes with those of her husband, and no woman of honour will refuse compliance with the established custom."\textsuperscript{149}

Manucci also refers to sati in details\textsuperscript{150} and he cites the cases of forced sati at Agra\textsuperscript{151} and Rajmahal.\textsuperscript{152} Thevenot\textsuperscript{153} and Careri\textsuperscript{154} also refer in details to cases of forced Sati as well as to the ceremonies attached to this practice and they too put the larger share of the blame upon the Brahmins. The rites associated with Sati were differently performed according to the economic position of the woman's family. There was no feasting and rejoicing if the widow belonged to a low caste and was a poor.\textsuperscript{155} But if she is a woman of high rank and rich then the ceremony was performed with much pomp and show like a festival.\textsuperscript{156}

Amongst the poor peoples in Vijayanagara the Sati was performed by burying alive with the husband and when the wall is as high as necks, woman was strangled; the workmen finish the wall over their heads so they lied buried together.\textsuperscript{157}

In Vijayanagara the practice of Sati was so customary that it was held with great honour when the King dies four or five hundred women burn themselves with

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{Bernier} Bernier, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 306-315.
\bibitem{Ibid.1} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 313.
\bibitem{Ibid.2} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 310-11.
\bibitem{Manucci} Manucci, \textit{op. cit.}, Vol. III, p. 60.
\bibitem{Ibid.3} \textit{Ibid.}, Vol. II, p. 97.
\bibitem{Ibid.4} \textit{Ibid.}, Vol. III.
\bibitem{Thevenot} Thevenot, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 119-120.
\bibitem{Careri} Careri, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 249-250 and 255.
\bibitem{Barbosa} Barbosa, \textit{op. cit.}, Vol. I, p. 214.
\bibitem{Purchas2} Purchas, \textit{op. cit.}, Vol. X, p. 96.
\end{thebibliography}
the King. Some of the women throw themselves with the corpse of the King while others with the ceremonies. Many intimates were also burnt with him. When a great man died in Vijayanagara he was burnt with his wife and with all his slaves with whom the great man had “Carnall Copulation”. Jourdain also gives the same detail about the burial of a great man at Mandu the reason cited by him for the burning of wives and slaves is to serve the dead man in another world.

Thus in the fact of evidences, it can safely be asserted that sati was obligatory in some parts of India and in certain cases force accompanied it, though in some parts e.g., in Rajputana, ladies burnt themselves more willingly than in other parts of India. Although the practice was more or less prevalent in almost all parts of Mughal India, the main homes of it were, however the Ganges Valley, the Punjab and Rajputana in the North, and Madura and Vijayanagara in the South. In Bengal the rite of Sati became widely prevalent at least from the 12th century.

Mandelso relates a case of sati which occurred at Cambay. Thomas Bowrey also records a case of sati at Chromandel along with a picture with the captain, “the widow burneth alive”. Fryer even suspects that a widow's kinsmen drugged her with datura, “when half mad she throws herself into the fire.”

Humayun took a bold step against sati and tried to extirpate it together. He extended an absolute prohibition to all cases where a widow was past the age of child bearing even if she offered herself willingly. Curiously enough the Hindu prince made no violent protest or demonstrates against this. The ordinary rule in the system of official permit for burning a widow however remained in force. The officers of the Padishah were present on such occasion to prevent any act of violence.

Akbar endeavored to prevent forceful sati in his Kingdom. His edict banning sati runs thus; 'If a Hindu woman wished to be burnt with husband, and then should

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159 Ibid.
162 Jourdain, op. cit., p. 149.
not prevent her, but she should not be forced against her will.\textsuperscript{166} Vigilant and ruthless men had been appointed in every city and district to prevent the forcible burning.\textsuperscript{167} It is difficult to infer that he pursued a general policy of total prohibition of sati though the Hindu widow could not immolate herself without the formal sanction of the governor, but the latter could only advice and delay his decision; if the woman remained firm he was bound to grant the remission.\textsuperscript{168}

Jahangir went even a step further of his father. In \textit{Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri}, we find an order which not only prohibited sati and infanticide but even enjoined punishment for its infraction.\textsuperscript{169} But it was never strictly enforced. The governors were not permitted by king's order to refuse permission. Yet they endeavored by various means; sometimes even by offer of 'enticing promises' to prevent self-immolation by widows but in most cases only in vain.\textsuperscript{170} Even Jahangir himself was reluctantly compelled to give leave for burning a widow in Agra.\textsuperscript{171}

Shahjahan faithfully pursued the policy of his predecessors towards sati. "The Mughal hath almost abolished that custom so that it may not be done without special license from the King or governors of the place where they dwelt".\textsuperscript{172} These governors being a Mahometan and abhorring that execrable custom of self murder is very shy to permit them.\textsuperscript{173} Shahjahan is even credited with prohibiting women with children from burning themselves; such women were commanded to live for the education of their children.\textsuperscript{174}

Aurangzeb issued an order after his return from Kashmir in 1663 prohibiting totally the sacrifice of widows in the Mughal Empire.\textsuperscript{175} Despite this order Aurangzeb hardly succeeded in suppressing sati altogether. Yet this much is certain that through orders to his governors to employ all their case in suppressing the abuse, he made the performance of sati difficult and thus saved a great many living woman from the pyre. Both Thevenot and Careeri testify the strong vigilance employed by his governor to

\textsuperscript{166} Badaoni, \textit{op. cit.}, Vol. II, p. 338.
\textsuperscript{168} Mandelslo, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 43.
\textsuperscript{169} \textit{Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri}, \textit{op. cit.}, Vol. II, p. 79.
\textsuperscript{170} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{171} \textit{Ibid.} pp. 220-221.
\textsuperscript{172} Mundy, \textit{op. cit.}, Vol. II, p. 35.
\textsuperscript{173} Travernier, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 407.
\textsuperscript{174} \textit{Ibid.}
prevent the large scale slaughter of woman at the altar of their dead husband. On the whole, it can be safely asserted that the mughal emperors and their officers viewed the right of sati with unconcealed disfavor and tried their best to prevent it by persuasion if possible. The practice of sati was checked to a great extent under the Mughal by indirect means, but at the same time it is true that sometimes the eager aspirants to sati and their relatives would buy off the permission from the governors and other authorities with costly presents ready money and great solicitation. Still it can be maintained that the earnest vigilance of the mughal emperors and their officers succeeded in reducing the number of sati during the mughal rule, a fact loudly proclaimed by most of the travellers of the period.

The practice of widow burning was condemned by the travellers and is quite ocular when they calls it 'beastly deed', 'hellish sacrifice', 'barbaric inhumanity'. Abbe Carre goes to the extent of referring sati as the 'widow lands in hell'. Europeans travellers have recorded that women in India, especially the Muslim women, observed strict purdah. English traveller, J. Ovington wrote that "all the Women of Fashion in India are close penn'd in by their jealous Husbands, who forbid them the very sight of all Strangers. However the Watch is neither so careful,nor their Modesty so blameless, but that they sometimes will look abroad for Variety, as well as their roving Husbands do." Manucci contended that "the Mahomedans are very touchy in the matter of allowing their women to be seen, or even touched by the hand; above all, the lady being of the blood royal, it could not be done without express permission from the king." Purdah was no less strictly observed among Muslim ladies of other classes. Careri observed that "The

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176 Thevenot, op. cit., pp. 120, 250.
179 Purchas, op. cit., Vol. X, p. 94.
180 Early Travels in India, op. cit., p. 323.
181 Careri, op. cit., p. 232, Bowrey, op. cit., p. 35.
183 Ovington, op. cit., 127.
184 Manucci, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 195. He even records that he had seen that if a house caught fire, women preferred to be burnt alive "than merely to expose themselves to the view of strangers." (Vol. III, p. 259).
Maohammedan women did not appear in public, except only the vulgar sort and the leud ones.\footnote{Careri, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 248.}

Manucci has observed that “the chief doors of the mahal are closed at sunset, and the principal door of all is guarded by good sentinels posted for the purpose, and a seal is attached. Torches are kept burning all night.”\footnote{Manucci, \textit{op. cit.}, Vol. II, p. 328.} The women of the harem were “all closely guarded, not visible to any, but (to the King) himself”.\footnote{Ovington, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 127.} As harem was a no-go area for the men except for the king and close relatives, the Europeans found it difficult, rather impossible, to give an authentic firsthand account of its inmates. Italian adventurer, Pietro Della Valle, conceded its failure to describe the female apartments of the Mughal King. He wrote: “What ‘tis with inside I know not, for I enter’d not into it...”\footnote{Della Valle, \textit{op. cit.}, Vol. I, p. 98.} Mundy also wrote that mahal was the place “where his weomen are kept, and where noe man enters but himself, having Euenuches to looke to them.”\footnote{Mundy, \textit{op. cit.}, Vol. II, p. 201.} Thomas Roe wrote: “No man enters his house but eunuchs; his women are never seene...”\footnote{Roe, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 270.} Edward Terry, chaplain to Thomas Roe, related that as “there lodge none in the King’s house but his women and eunuchs, and some little boyes which hee keeps about him for a wicked use.”\footnote{Early Travels in India, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 311.} Francois Bernier, in spite of his twelve years’ service with Mughal nobles, omitted the harem in his description of the fort at Delhi. He frankly admitted that “I wish I could lead you about in the Seraglio, as I have done in the rest of the Fortress: but who is the Traveller that can speak of that as an eye-witness?”\footnote{Bernier, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 49-50.}

Some European travellers also took notice of the mode of travelling of Indian women in purdah. While describing the march of Roshanara Begum with her retinue, Manucci graphically described that “they seemed so many ghosts or spirits of the abyss, you could not tell if they were handsome or ugly, old or young, men or women; for, let alone the face, you could not see even the tips of their toes.” He related that in front of the Princess’s elephant, there marched “a number of bold and aggressive men on foot to drive away everybody, noble or pauper, with blows from sticks and
Mundy also figuratively described that before and after the women’s chandowlies and palanquins, there walked “Capons (eunuchs) or gelded men on horseback, besides a guard of Gunners, suffering none to approach anything near them.”\(^\text{194}\) Manucci has also refuted the story told by Bernier that “he managed one day to go near enough to see a women servant whisking away the flies from Roshan Ara Begam.”

For Manucci, this was “impossibility” because “the princess and nobles’ wives are shut up in such a manner that they cannot be seen, although they can observe the passers-by.”\(^\text{195}\) In the opinion of Thomas Roe, the Muslims were so strict in their observance of purdah that a fight would ensue if “a stranger by force (was) to open in the streets the close chayres (i.e. doolies) wherein their women are carried (which they take for a dishonour equal to ravishment)?”\(^\text{196}\) According to John Fryer, “When they (Muslim women) go abroad, they are carried in close Palenkeens, which if a Man offer to unveil it is present death; the meanest of them not permitting their Women to stir out uncovered; of whom they are allowed as many as they can keep...”\(^\text{197}\) German traveller John Albert de Mandelslo, Manucci, Bernier, Thevenot and Careri have also frequently mentioned that like royal ladies, the women of the noble families both among the Hindus and the Muslims, went out of their houses well-guarded in properly covered palanquins surrounded on all sides by servants and eunuchs.\(^\text{198}\)

European travellers have advanced a number of reasons for observance of purdah but for most of them, the real cause was the men’s jealousy of other men and their distrust of their womanfolk. John Fryer wrote that “The Moors are by Nature plagued with Jealousy, cloistering their Wives up, and sequestering them the sight of any besides the Capon that watches them.”\(^\text{199}\) Manucci contended that “the reason is that Mahomedans are most extraordinary distrustful upon this chapter; and what deserves mention is that some do not even trust their own brothers, and do not permit their women to appear before them, being jealous of them.”\(^\text{200}\)

\(^{196}\) Roe, op. cit., p. 327.
\(^{197}\) Fryer, op. cit., Vol I, p. 181.
\(^{199}\) Fryer, op. cit., Vol I, p. 181.
Despite the practice of strict *purdah*, the Europeans never concealed their wish to have a glimpse of Indian women. Roe related the incident how he saw two wives of the emperor watching him while standing in a window over which “a grate of reede” having “little holes” was hung. He himself first saw their fingers, then their eyes and sometimes “full proportion.” Their complexion was fair and they had “smoothed up” black hair. Their diamonds and pearls shed enough light to “show them.” They “were so merry” that they must have “laughed at me.” Roe was able to have a glimpse but Hawkins could only lament that “there are likewise private rooms made for his Queenes, most rich, where they sit and see all, but are not seen.”

The same thing happened to the second English ambassador to the Mughal court, William Norris. The latter met on the road the daughter of the Governor of Surat. She herself was in a closed *palanquin*. According to Norris, “she pulled up ye side to looke out”, but he could “discover neither her face nor dresse.”

Fryer, who was official surgeon of the East India Company, went inside the *harem* to see an ailing lady. As was the normal routine, he was to feel the pulse of the patient from behind a curtain. But the curtain accidentally fell down. Fryer described the incident as if the door of an animal cage stood opened. He discovered “the whole Bevy, fluttering like so many Birds when a Net is cast over them; yet none of them sought to escape.” He found them altogether busy in “good Housewifery such as ‘Needlework’ or making “confection” or “Achars” (Pickles) with “no indecent decorum in managing their Cloystered way of living.” It was a great opportunity for Fryer to directly observe the women of the *harem* and their living conditions. However, what he was able to see was that the women were employed in just normal routine household work. It was a disappointment for Fryer and his readers who expected a place of debauchery which was a stereo-typed image of *harem*, popular in the west. He, therefore, referred immediately to Odyssey and tried to prove the wickedness of women who “are incontinent in their Desires, for which reason they debar them the sight of anything Male, but their Lord.”

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201 Roe, op. cit., 282-283.
202 *Early Travels in India*, op. cit., p. 118.
203 Norris, op. cit., p. 241.
205 Ibid.
European travellers believed that this custom of observing purdah negatively affected the women’s minds. For Manucci, the harem life meant a veritable prison with its own drudgery and monotony. He contended that “the women, being shut up with this closeness and constantly watched, and having neither liberty nor occupation, think of nothing but adorning themselves and their minds dwell on nothing but malice and lewdness.” He has also told the readers that once the wife of Asad Khan, the wazir, confessed that “her only thoughts were to imagine something by which she could please her husband and hinder his going near other women.”

Purdah is generally considered as an Islamic institution. But we have sufficient references in history that confirms the maintenance of purdah by the women of Hindu upper and well-to-do classes. Actually people of that period were very particular about the chastity of women. The women themselves were much concerned about their chastity during that period. Lower class women living in the countryside could not have afforded to observe the rules of purdah or to remain in seclusion with the same rigidity as their sisters belonging to the upper classes of society as they had to work outside for their maintenance.

The Muslim women observed purdah with greater rigidity than the Hindu ones. “The Mohammedan women do not come out into public unless they are poor or immodest; they veil their heads and draw their hair forward in a knot from the back.” Manucci refers to the fact that purdah was more strictly observed among the Moslems than among the Hindus. He further mention, “Among the Mohammedans it was a great dishonor for a family when a wife is compelled to uncover herself.” Thevenot referring to purdah among the Muslim women writes, “If these Indian women be idolators they go barefaced and if Mohametans, they are veiled.” Careri observes, “The Mohametan women do not appear in public, except only the vulgar sort and the leud ones. They cover their heads but their hair hangs down behind in several tresses.”

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207 De Laet, op. cit., p. 80.
208 Manucci, op. cit., Vol I, p. 62. In this connection, Manucci while referring to the women of Surat writes, “The latter, mostly Hindus, do not conceal the face as in Persia and Turkey, where women go about with their faces hidden.
210 Thevenot, op. cit., p. 53.
211 Careri, op. cit., p. 248.