CHAPTER - V

AN ANALYSIS OF WOMEN’S SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONDITION

The socio-economic life of women is an interesting topic of study among historians. We cannot ignore their contribution in society. The position of women in the Indian society changed during the Mughal period. The Mughal Age not only witnessed the glorious achievements of its emperors and princes, but also that of the princesses, queens and other ladies of the royal Mughal harem. The ladies of the Mughal dynasty were almost as remarkable as their men and in certain cases even more cultivated. These beautiful, educated and extremely talented women not only contributed towards the social, cultural, literary, artistic and economic fields, but also yielded great power and played a dominant role in contemporary politics.

During the Mughal age, the first lady of the realm was usually the emperor’s mother and not his chief queen, except in the case of Nur Jahan and Mumtaz Mahal. Abul Fazl said that when long fasts came to an end, the first dishes of meat went to Akbar from his mother’s palace. Once when Akbar’s mother was travelling in a palanquin from Lahore to Agra, Akbar was travelling with her. At one place he took the palanquin upon his own shoulders and carried her from one side of the river to another. At one place in the Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri, Jahangir reveals his love and respect to his mother in these words: on the same day, Her Majesty the revered Maryam Zamani (his mother) came from Agra, and I acquired eternal good fortune from the blessing of waiting on her. I hope that the shadow of her bringing up and affection may be perennial on the head of this suppliant.

The daughters of the Mughal family or the Mughal princesses occupied places of great honour in the seraglio. The birth of a girl in those days was less welcomed than that of a boy. But the Mughal emperors loved their daughters a lot and made the best arrangements for their education and cultivation of their talents. Abul Fazl gives information about the celebration of a girl child during the reign of Akbar. He writes.

2. Foster, W., Early Travels in India (1583-1619) contains narratives of Coryat (pp. 234-287), Bombay, 1968, p. 278.
“two and a half months after Prince Salim, in November 1569, a daughter was born in Akbar’s harem”. The girl was named Khanum, and Akbar “ordered rejoicings”.4

The most important position a lady occupied, the more privileges she enjoyed. If she was childless, she was allowed to bring up the child of some other royal lady as her own. Maham Begum, one of Babur’s principle wives and the mother of Humayun had lost four children after Humayun’s birth. She was given Hindal and Gulbadan, the children of another wife Dildar Begum and she brought them up.5 The childless first wife of Akbar, Ruqqaiah Sultan was given Prince Salim’s son Khurram after the child was born.6 She brought him up with a lot of love and care as revealed by Jahangir in his memoirs when he wrote, my father had given my son Khurram into her charge, and she loved him a thousand times more than if he had been her own. Shahjahan’s second son Prince Shuja was brought up by Nur Jahan7 as per Jahangir’s wishes. A folio in the British library, from Akbarnama shows Akbar and Mariyam Makhiani in Humayun’s camp (1542)”8

Jiji Anagah may, however, have been the principal nurse, in the sense that Akbar drew most of his milk from her, for we are told by Abul Fazl how other nurses accused her of “practicing incantations” so as to prevent the infant Akbar from accepting anyone else’s milk but her own.9 Some nurses of Akbar are Daya Bhaval, Fakhar-un-Nisa Anaga, Bhaval Anaga, Hakimch, Bibi Rupa, Khaldar Anaga and Pijanj Anaga etc.10

During the Mughal period girls, like boys, received early education in a ‘Maktab’11, which was a permanent institution of primary as well as elementary education. In these ‘Maktabs’, ‘Maulvees’ were appointed for two purposes – to lead prayers and to teach children. For the education of girls there was arrangement of separate

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Plate 51 Birth of Jahangir, attributed to Bishan Das from Jahangirnama Manuscripts. Mughal, Ca. 1620
‘Maktabs’. But usually, up to the primary standard the girl received their education in the same school where the boy read.

During the Mughal age, higher education of Muslim women was mostly confined to the upper classes of society. The emperors, nobility and higher classes were keenly interested in imparting higher education to their ladies. Believing that, education made bright the path to the apprehension of truth, they adorned their ladies with the jewels of ‘ilm’ (knowledge). These women had ample opportunities and leisure for intellectual pursuits. For the education of their girls, well to do classes appointed learned ladies or old men of tried merits, in their own houses, while highly paid educated matrons and superintendents were appointed in the royal harem. Among the inmates of royal harem, those who were very much interested in receiving higher education had the facility of instruction from several learned scholars.

The curriculum for the secondary and higher education included Ethnics, Arithmetic, Accounts, Agriculture, Economics, the art of Administration, Physics, Logic, Natural Philosophy, Abstract Mathematics, Divinity, History, Medicine, Morals, Law, Ritual, Rhetoric, Household matters, Poetry, Prose, Novels, Astrology, Geography, Scholasticism, Jurisprudence, Tafsir, Fiqhah, Hadith, and traditions, Mysticism, Grammar, Syntax, Biography (lives of Prophets) and calligraphy.

As for their choice in the selection of subjects and books, the Muslim ladies were very fond of poetry, as per the fashion of the day, the spirit of which came from their Persian lady teachers, who often dictated poems to them. The well known books of Shaikh Sadi Shirazi’s ‘Gulistan’ and ‘Bostan’ written in the form of poetry got much popularity among the students of that time. The ladies of the harem took great delight in reading these outstanding books, in their leisure hours. Persian works, as these were not mere books of poetry, but were treated as a treasured sea, tull of knowledge and lessons. Besides the Holy Quran and the study of ‘Hadis’ (Ahadith) the fair sex were taught Persian and Arabic literature, Elementary Arithmetic.

Theology, History, Astronomy and Mathematics. Some of them also gained proficiency in the art of calligraphy. Law was also a subject of interest for them. Many Muslim ladies had deep knowledge of medicine and treatment, which shows that either by experience, family background or education they had acquired such knowledge. The art of administration was regarded very important for the ladies of the royal household, and therefore, it was taught to them particularly.

So far as the higher education of Muslim ladies is concerned only the rich and well to do have opportunities for this. Generally, girls, after acquiring primary education, were put under the tuition of some elderly educated ladies. The widows of the middle classes generally imparted religious education to the poor girls in their own houses and considered it a sacred duty. The masses remained mostly illiterate. Owing to poverty, they had to perform domestic duties, so hardly got time for intellectual pursuits. Those belonging to agricultural and working classes helped their men folk in their home industries such as farming, cattle breeding, weaving, dyeing and other professions. Thus the ladies of the poor class had, unfortunately, to be occupied too much with domestic and farm work and with children and they hardly found leisure for intellectual pursuits. Among them, if some got time for education, their education was confined only to the reciting of the Holy Quran, and that was regarded as their great achievement in the field of learning.

The contributions in the field of learning and education, made by the Mughal rulers of India, are indeed worthy of special consideration. Under their supervision and care their daughters and other distinguished ladies of the harem, received education that immortalized their names. For instance, Babur’s daughter, Gulbadan Begum, was credited the authorship of Humayun Namah. In ‘Humayun Namah’ we find the names of other educated and distinguished ladies. Gulberg, Bega Begum, Dildar Begum and Ayishaa Sultan Khanam were some educated ladies during the age of Babur and Humayun.

Akbar is famous for his keen interest in promoting education, among other contributions. He made excellent arrangements in this field, and appointed matrons.\footnote{Monserrate, Commentarius of father Monserrate, on his journey to the court of Akbar, ed. J.S. Hoyland and annotated by S.N. Banerjee, New Delhi, 1992, p. 203.}

In Mughal history, he is credited with founding a girl’s school, for the first time at Fatehpur Sikri.\footnote{Keay’s, F.E., Indian Education in Ancient and later times, London, 1938, p. 203.} Shah Jahan did not neglect the education of his daughters. For this he appointed a Persian lady scholar, Sati-un-Nisa\footnote{Law, N.N., Promotion of Learning in India during Mohammadan Rule, Delhi, 1973, p. 204.}, as the Superintendent of Mumtaz’s seraglio. It was she who, later on, became the Governess of princesses Roshan Ara and Jahanara.

Aurangzeb was deeply interested in the education of the ladies of the imperial harem. He himself supervised his daughter’s education and academic progress. He had a firm belief, that to impart education was praiseworthy in the eyes of God. Therefore, he taught his princesses, all the necessary rules and other relevant doctrines of Islam. Under his strict guidance, all the ladies of the harem were engaged in the worship of God, reading and transcribing the Holy Quran, together with the performance of virtuous deeds.\footnote{Saqi, Mustad Khan, op. cit., pp. 318-319.}

The ceremony of starting education was called ‘Bismillah Khani’ or ‘Maktab’ ceremony.\footnote{Ashraf, K.M., “Life and Conditions of the People of Hindustan”, Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal, Calcutta, vol. 1, 1935, Article No. 4, p. 249.} It was observed only when a boy or a girl attained the age of four years four months and four days.\footnote{Ibid., vol. I, p. 519.} For this performance usually, an hour was fixed after consulting an astrologer.\footnote{Abul, Fazl, op.cit., vol. I, p. 519.} For two or three days prior to the ceremony, the girl had to sit in a state of ‘Manjha’, i.e. a ceremony of marriage. She was made to dress in yellow clothes, and ‘suhagan’ women (only those, whose husbands were alive) rubbed a scented powder of special make known as ‘ubtan’, over her body. This continued daily, morning and evening, till the day of ‘Maktab’ ceremony. During this period Music was played in the house of the girl concerned, by professional lady singers.

On the occasion, the girl was bathed and dressed in new costly garments either of red or white colour. Gold or silver amulets were then hung on the girls’s neck, and then
she was adorned with flower garlands. Here it is interesting to note that on this occasion, the girl's side locks were plaited, for the first time, with black silk strings. Now the girl was presented before the tutor or a 'Mashaikh' in the midst of the heavy gatherings of guests. A gold or silver plate, including a pen with inkstand, was placed before the girl. Fatiha was recited over the sweet dishes, prepared for this occasion, and the tutor would, then, write on the plate, with sandal wood the words, 'Bismillah-i-r-r-rahman-nir-raheem' (i.e. I begin it in the name of Allah.) when this was over, the girl was ordered to lick it off, which she had to do accordingly. In rich families 'Alhamd', the first chapter of the Holy Quran written on the gold or silver plate was repeated by the girl herself. The poor generally used red paper for writing the verse of the Holy Quran. At the end, the girl was taught, to pronounced in succession, the whole of the ninety sixth chapter 'surah Iqra' of Holy Quran, by the tutor.

During the Mughal age, on having finished the Holy Quran, a day was celebrated with the same pomp and enthusiasm. This ceremony was called 'Khatam Quran' or ceremony of finishing the Holy Quran. When Aurangzeb's most accomplished daughter, Zeb-un-Nisa, finished the Holy Quran and memorized it by heart, Aurangzeb celebrated the day with great rejoicings, and the public offices of the state were remained closed for two days. In course, the tutor was presented gifts of great value.

Thus numerous examples are available in respect of well educated ladies of the Mughals in India. Under the Mughals the aristocracy and nobility also had a healthy tradition of imparting education to their women folk. Here an attempt has been made to give a brief account of the educated Muslim ladies and their contribution to Persian and Indian literature.

Gulbadan Begum was talented daughter of Babur, a worthy sister of Humayun and the most respected paternal aunt of the emperor Akbar. She immortalized her name by writing 'Humayun Nama' a valuable record of events that took place in the reign of Humayun. Though detailed information of her early life is not available, it is clear that

34. Ibid, p. 149.
she was born in 1523 A.D. to Dildar Begum.\(^{39}\) In 1525 A.D. when Gulbadan was about two years old (shortly before her father left Kabul) she was adopted by Babur’s most favourite wife, Maham Begum who reared and educated her.\(^{40}\)

Gulbadan Begum was a woman of extraordinary talents, who appeared to have had an excellent education. In her person were combined great natural gifts with a rare variety of accomplishments. It is true that she was master of several languages\(^{41}\), but she was highly accomplished in Persian and Turkish.\(^{42}\) She was a lady of poetic temperament.\(^{43}\) As was the fashion of the day, she utilized her leisure in composing beautiful poems. Therefore, undoubtedly, Gulbadan was the first literary gem of the Mughal age.\(^{44}\)

Humayun’s wife of his youth, Bega Begum, well known as Haji Begum, was an educated lady. She had profound knowledge of medicine and treatment also.\(^{45}\) Bega Begum was keenly interested in patronizing education, and so when she built her husband’s tomb near Delhi, she founded a ‘madrasa’ near it.\(^{46}\) This once again confirms that she had keen interest in education from the very beginning. Akbar is said to have been much attached to her, and she was to him like a second mother.

Hamidah Bano Begum was famous for her sharp understanding, warm heart and elevated sentiments. She was intelligent and had profound knowledge of Islamic doctrines. ‘Maasir-ul-Umrah’ refers to an important incident when Akbar’s tutor Mulla Abdun-Nabi tore off Akbar’s saffron coloured dress in open court only because it contravened Islamic rules. At this Akbar became furious and complained about it to his mother, Hamida Bano Begum. But in response she replied, “This will be a cause of salvation to you on the last day. Till the day of Resurrection they will tell how a poor Mulla dealt with the king of the age and how the king of happy angry submitted.”\(^{47}\)

\(^{40}\) Ibid., p. 116.
\(^{41}\) Sahay, B.K., *Education and Learning under the Great Mughals, 1526-1707 A.D.*, Bombay, p. 130.
\(^{42}\) Begum, Gulbadan, op. cit., p. 79.
\(^{43}\) Kausar, Zinat, op. cit., p. 152.
\(^{44}\) Jaffar, S.M., op. cit., p. 193.
Maham Anaga, the wet nurse of Emperor Akbar was a highly educated and
distinguished lady. She was retained in charge of the harem\textsuperscript{48} of Akbar till her death.
She was keenly interested in the promotion of learning, patronized education with
heart and soul, and spent her money and energy on it. For the promotion of learning
she founded a 'Madrasa' at Delhi with a mosque attached to it, and gave it the name,
'Khair-ul-Manzil'.\textsuperscript{49}

Salima Sultan Begum was adorned with all good qualities. She was a highly cultured
lady, possessed good taste in Persian literature and was a composer of Persian
poems.\textsuperscript{50} The collection of poems called ‘Diwan’ is of very high rank and still
occupies an important place in Persian literature. She was very keen about reading
books, and being a wife, she utilized Akbar’s library\textsuperscript{51}, besides her own library.\textsuperscript{52}

Jahan Begum was the most beautiful and highly educated daughter of Akbar’s
courtier. She was married to prince Danyal towards the end of 1598 A.D.\textsuperscript{53} She was
very generous and a great patron of learned scholars. She was also very respectful to
saints and Mashaikh.\textsuperscript{54} She had gained proficiency in the Holy Quran, and wrote a
commentary on it.\textsuperscript{55} For this Akbar rewarded her with 50,000 (fifty thousand)
dinars.\textsuperscript{56}

Dai Lado was the wet nurse of Emperor Jahangir. She was a great patron of learning.
She founded a school of Lahore which was presided over by a learned scholar, named
Maulvee Asmatullah.\textsuperscript{57}

Nur Jahan gained proficiency in different branches of learning, such as music
dancing, painting, sewing, cooking, decoration, riding, hunting and all fine arts. She
was a highly educated lady with a mind singularly gifted and able. Skilled as was she
in political matters, she was equally gifted in literature too. By these unique abilities
she blossomed like a lovely flower, and her mind unfolded with the beauty of her face

\textsuperscript{49} Fazl, Abul, Akbarnama, vol. II, p. 313.
\textsuperscript{51} Badaoni, Abdul Qadir, Muntakhab-ul Tawarih, vol. II, tr by Wolsely Haig, Lowe, Calcutta,
\textsuperscript{54} Rahman, Abdul, op.cit., p. 442.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{56} A.M.A., Shustry, Outlines of Islamic Culture, Bangalore, 1950, p. 589.
\textsuperscript{57} Bhagi, L.M., op.cit., p. 353.
and figure. She was a highly cultured lady, well-versed in Persian and Arabic literature.\textsuperscript{58} Nur Jahan also patronized several renowned poets of her age.\textsuperscript{59} She had a great love for books, and collected a fine library of rich books. This beautiful Persian lady, with a quick understanding and piercing intellect was the greatest women of her time.

Mumtaz Mahal was an accomplished lady with a graceful face. Singularly gifted and highly educated, the lady was trained in the arts of music and painting. She acquired proficiency in Persian and Arabic literature.\textsuperscript{60} She also had a poetic vein and composed poems in Persian.\textsuperscript{61} Mumtaz, a highly cultured lady with political genius and administrative skill, often assisted her husband in the hard task of administering the empire.\textsuperscript{62} Being a great patron of learning, she helped many scholars, poets and learned men. She was the mother of fourteen children and was always curious about their proper education.\textsuperscript{63} Mumtaz was a generous and pious lady, and often spent her afternoon in charitable works along with her husband.

Sati-un-Nisa, a learned Persian lady, belonged to a family of scholars and physicians and by good fortune joined the service of Mumtaz Mahal.\textsuperscript{64} She was gifted with an eloquent tongue and knowledge of etiquette and housekeeping. She advanced beyond other servants, and reached the rank of \textit{Muhardar}\textsuperscript{65} (seal keeper). For her charming manners, versatility, talents, higher education and profound literary taste she was appointed instructress to princess Begum Sahib.\textsuperscript{66} Sati-un-Nisa was highly educated in Persian and Arabic. She was not only a good recite of the Holy Quran, but knew it by heart\textsuperscript{67} (\textit{Hafiza}). She possessed a political faculty and was renowned as ‘the princess of poets’.\textsuperscript{68} She acquired proficiency in Persian and could thoroughly understand Persian works of prose and poetry.\textsuperscript{69} She also gained mastery in the art of

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{59} Rahman, Abdul, op.cit., p. 445.
\bibitem{60} Edward & Jarrett, HLO, \textit{Mughal Rule in India}, 1962, p. 160.
\bibitem{61} Jaffar, S.M., \textit{Education in Muslim India}, p. 195.
\bibitem{63} Choudhary, J.N., ibid., p. 374.
\bibitem{64} Khan, Shahnawaz, \textit{The Maathir-ul-Umara}, vol. 1, p. 260.
\bibitem{65} Rahman, Abdul, op.cit., p. 448.
\bibitem{66} Ibid., p. 443.
\bibitem{67} Ibid., p. 448.
\bibitem{68} Jaffar, S.M., \textit{Education in Muslim India}, p. 197.
\end{thebibliography}
medicine and treatment, as she belonged to a family of physicians. After the death of Mumtaz-uz-Zamani (Mumtaz Mahal) Shah Jahan, who appreciated her merit, made her Sadr-un-Nisa (female Nazir of the harem).

Jahan Ara was the eldest daughter of Emperor Shah Jahan. She was very intelligent and interested in the pursuit of learning. For her education, Shah Jahan appointed a highly educated lady as her governess, Sati-un-Nisa. Under her supervision Jahan Ara was taught the Holy Quran and Persian, and very soon she gained proficiency in them. She was a genius in poetry and composed poems in Persian.

Jahan Ara was also a patron of learning, and encouraged a number of scholars and fixed allowances and stipends for them. She was keenly interested in history and liked songs very much. She was witty and generous and elevated to the rank of the first lady of the realm, ‘Padshah Begum’.

Zabinda, an accomplished lady, was Shah Jahan’s fourth daughter like other princess of her time, she had poetical talents. She has to her credit a number of poems mystical in nature. The poems are of a very high order.

Hafiza Maryam was a highly educated lady who knew the Holy Quran by heart, that’s why she has been called Hafiza. She was also famous for the art of reciting the Holy Quran in an attractive way. The fragrance of her good qualities reached Aurangzeb gradually, and being impressed by her, he appointed her the tutor of his daughter Zeb-un-Nisa. From her, Zeb-un-Nisa learnt to commit to memory the words of God and the practice of the accomplishments.

Zeb-un-Nisa inherited a good intellect from her father, and from her very childhood she showed remarkable signs of literary pursuits. Aurangzeb himself guided her education. She was also taught by a number of tutors. Her first tutor was Roshan

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76. Ibid., vol. II, p. 127.
77. Jaffar, S.M., *Education in Muslim India*, p. 196.
79. Ibid., p. 681.
Aurangzeb appointed a highly gifted and trained governess, Hafiza Maryam, for her. According to the Muslim custom Hafiza Maryam first taught her the Holy Quran. As a result, Zeb-un-Nisa mastered the Holy Quran and recited it to her father when she was only seven years old. Aurangzeb expressed profound joy at this and gave her thirty thousand gold Mohars, as a reward of her diligence. On this occasion a feast was arranged. Between the age of eight and twelve she studied Arabic and gained proficiency in it. Later on Shah Rustam Ghazi, an eminent scholar was appointed as her teacher. Aurangzeb's former teacher Mulla Jiwan also guided her for some time. Under his instruction Zeb-un-Nisa was taught a number of books, and became master of Persian and Arabic prose and poetry. In her twenty first years Aurangzeb appointed Mulla Sayyed Ashraf Mazandrani as her tutor. She gained proficiency in theology and also cultivated a taste for poetry under him and so proved herself a gifted poetess. In the beginning she tried her hand at Arabic and wrote a 'Qasidah' but later on she started composing verses in Persian and proved a renowned poetess.

Zeb-un-Nisa was quite conversant in letter writing, and collection of her letters known as ‘Zeb ul Manshaat’ was seen by the author of ‘Tazki-rat-ul-Gharib’ himself. Aurangzeb appreciated the sweet literary style of her letters. She was fond of the art of calligraphy and, with the help of expert calligraphists of the age, she gained proficiency in it. She could write correctly 'nastaliq', 'naskh' and 'shikastah'. Her whole mind was centred on studying the leading books of the age, and she made herself a master in Mathematics, Astronomy, History and Law.

Zeb-un-Nisa was keenly interested in ‘Mushairah’ (poetical contest), and often organized it in her palace, and she herself relaxed behind a curtain. She always tried
to keep herself busy in dealing with outstanding problems of the court and in different Arts and crafts too.

Zinat-un-Nisa, the second daughter of Aurangzeb was also a highly cultured lady. From her very childhood, her learned father had taught her under his strict supervision. As a result she gained proficiency in Islamic doctrines. She was also a composer of poems, like other princesses of the Mughal age. She also encouraged men of letters and fixed scholarships for them. She was styled ‘Begum Sahiba’, after the accession of Bahadur Shah.

Badr-un-Nisa, the third daughter of Aurangzeb and Nawab Bai was an educated lady, though not so highly educated as her sisters. Under the guidance of her father, she memorized the Holy Quran. She was greatly loved by Aurangzeb for her good character, manners and kind heartedness.

However, she had more inclination towards religion, which become deeper, when she memorized the Holy Quran and simultaneously when she attained the age of maturity. Since she had less inclination towards field of education other than religion, and was distinguished only because of this, her father loved her a lot.

It is remarkable to mention that in urban areas, marriages of Muslim girls were mostly celebrated when they reached the age of twelve or thirteen. So Terry refers, “they marry for the most part at the age of twelve or thirteen.” But if the parents of a girl could easily secure a suitable match, they preferred to marry her even at an earlier age. It is also noteworthy in such cases, that when the marriages of the girls were finished at a tender age, they were mostly left in their paternal home after Nikah ceremony till the marriageable age. The actual marriage ceremony and Rukhsati were performed when the bride and the bridegroom had attained the age of puberty.

During the Mughal age of the evil practice of marriage at an early age was usually observed by Indian Muslims. In imperial families, however, marriages were solemnized when the girls completed the age of thirteen or fourteen and boys fifteen

92. Elliot & Dawson: *History of India as told by its own Historians*, vol. VII, p. 197.
94. Law, N.N., *Promotion of Learning*, p. 204.

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or sixteen. Babur’s daughter Gulrang’s marriage took place in 1503 A.D. with Isan Timur on completion of her fifteenth year. Babur’s daughter Gulchihra’s marriage to Tukhta Bugha Khan was celebrated when she was fourteen years. Gulbadan Begum’s marriage was also contracted with Khizr Khwaja Khan not prior to fourteen years. Arjumand Bano Begum was married to Shah Jahan when she was 19 years five months and seven years old.

Manucci also records that young princes were brought up in the palace, up to the age of 16 years and then they were to be married. In this connection some marriages were performed at earlier age also. Babur’s first marriage with Ayisha Sultan appears to have taken place at the age of eleven. Bakhshi Banu Begum, daughter of Humayun and Gunwar Bibi, was given in marriage to Ibrahim when she was ten years old.

However, the prevalent system of child marriage was not admirable. Abul Fazl remarks, “In the extensive country of India men are active to form this union at a tender age, and his introduces the leaven of evil”. It, therefore, clears that these were obstacles on the way of girl’s progress, prosperity, the development of her mind and physical stability.

The evil resulting in the practice of child marriage did not escape the keen eyes of Akbar, who made laws in this connection to check the practice in question. Abul Fazl writes, “He abhors marriages which take place between men and women before the age of puberty. They bring forth no fruit and his Majesty thinks them even hurtful, for afterwards, when such a couple ripens into manhood, they dislike having connection and their home is desolate”. As the children born of early marriages were generally

99. Ibid., p. 231.
100. Ibid., p. 31.
103. Babur, Zahiruddin Muhammad, *Buburnama or Tuzuk-i-Baburi* tr. by Mrs. A.S. Beveridge, New Delhi, 1970, p. 120.
weak he forbade girls before fourteen and boys before sixteen years age to be married.\textsuperscript{107}

There is no denying the fact that the unmatched marriages were the worst of all marriages. The Muslim girls of the period realized this and always tried to avoid such marriages. But they could not escape from this evil. Emperor Akbar was not in favour of this type of marriage and he passed a law that a man could not marry a girl more than twelve years younger to him\textsuperscript{108} and vice versa. This shows that coming to the age of Akbar unmatched marriage was a common vice. Akbar for the first time, therefore, tried to check this bad system by enforcing this law in the country.

Muslim widows enjoyed a respectable position in society throughout Mughal period. Unlike Hindu, a Muslim widow was allowed to attend and enjoy the festivities of betrothal, Nikah and birth ceremonies. Mughal rulers never forbade their ladies to remarry; they encouraged widow remarriage by themselves marrying widows. As a result during the Mughal rule, widow remarriage was widely practiced by the rich and the poor alike. Manucci also refers to this custom thus, “since the law thus directed that the wives of a dead elder brother belonged to the living younger brother”.\textsuperscript{109}

Under this custom Aurangzeb wished to marry Rana-i-Dil the widow of Dara but this marriage did not materialize.

During the Mughal period, polygamy was prevalent among both the upper and lower classes of Muslim society\textsuperscript{110}, though ordinarily it was not encouraged. People of lower classes were normally monogamists, and their lives usually had no rivals in their homes. But those with adequate economic stability could afford to indulge in the extravagant luxury of maintaining several wives.

Babur, the first Mughal Emperor had married seven wives. They were Aisha Sultan Begum, Zainab Sultan Begum, Maham Begum, Masuma Sultan Begum, Gulrukh Begum, Dildar Begum, Mubarika Bibi.\textsuperscript{111} Humayun also had many legal wives. Among them Bega Begum, later on called Haji Begum, Bibi Gonoor, Chand Bibi,


\textsuperscript{110} Thevenot, Indian Travels of Thevenot and Careri, ed. By Surendra Nath Sen, New Delhi, 1949, p. 117.

\textsuperscript{111} Begum, Gulbadan, Humayan Nama, pp. 28, 29-30.
Shad Bibi, Gulbarg Begum, Mewa Jan, Hamida Bano Begum. Abul Fazl has mentioned that Akbar had the following queens: Ruqayya Sultan Begum, Salima Sultan Begum, a daughter of Raja Bihari Mal, the first wife of Abdul Wasi, Bibi Daulat Shad, A daughter of Abdulla Khan Mughal, a daughter of Miran Mubarak Shah of Khandesh, Qismiya Bano, the daughter of Arab Shah entered the royal Harem a daughter of Qazi Isa, a daughter of Shamsuddin Chak.

Jahangir also had several wives but four among them were the chief ones. Hawkins states, “He had three hundred wives whereof four be chief as queens to say the first named Padshah Banu, the second is called Noor Mahal, the third is the daughter of Seinchau (Zain Khan Koka), the fourth is the daughter of Hakim Hamaun”. Other wives of Jahangir were a daughter of Rai Singh Bhatta, Jagat Gosain, Sahib-i-Jamal. Karamsi, a daughter of Darya Mabhas, a sister of Mirza Muzaffar Hussain, Nur-un-Nisa, Malika-i-Jahan, a daughter of the ruler of Khandesh, a daughter of Sayyad Khan, a daughter of Mirza Sanjar, a daughter of Ram Chand Bundela.

Shah Jahan was also polygamous like his father and married many women like Qandhari Mahal, Arjumand Banu Begum, a daughter of Shah Nawaz Khan, Akbarabadi Mahal, Fatehpuri Mahal, Sarhindi Begum. Aurangzeb married more than four and he married one or two only after the death of his existing queens thus making the number four at a time. The legal wives of Aurangzeb are mentioned as such Dilras Bano, a daughter of king Raju of Rajori in Kashmir, given the name Rahmat un Nisa, Udaipuri Mahal, Hirfa Bai also called Zainabadi Mahal, Dil’aram and Daulatabadi Mahal are recorded as belonging to Aurangzeb’s harem.

Akbar was himself polygamous yet he was a great supporter of monogamy. Abul Fazl says, “Nor does His Majesty approve of every one marrying more than one wife: for this ruins a man’s health and disturbs the peace of home.” Badaoni also refers to Akbar’s introduction of monogamy thus, that people should not have more than one
legal wife, unless he had no child. In another case the rule should be one man and one woman. 122

In spite of this social reform, the practice of polygamy continued among the wealthy Mohammedans as Monserrate says, "He also invented and introduced amongst the Musalmans two forms of marriage, first that with regular consort, merely called wives and who may be as numerous as a man's resources allow." 123

During the period under review the practice of concubine was prevalent among the richer sections of Muslim society. Mughal emperors and their nobles kept in their harem as many concubines as they desired, exclusive of their married wives. Polygamous persons had a number of concubines; each concubine tried her best to win the favour of her master. For this they not only adorned themselves beautifully but also used the best available perfumes and sweet scented ointments of the time. 124

In the evening they used a composition of pearl, gold, opium, Amber and other stimulants, as these produced a pleasant elevation of the spirit. In order to excite the lust of their masters they also encouraged them to use these intoxicants. 125 These concubines also served the master by driving flies away, rubbing his hands and feet and dancing and playing on musical instruments. 126 By means of attractive and fascinated presentation they sometimes gained the special favour of their masters, who would make them their legal wives.

During the Mughal age emperors kept a large number of concubines and for their selection, "Mina Bazar" was the best market. Manucci refers to it thus, "Many of them come out of the palace very rich and satisfied, while others continued to dwell there with the dignity of concubines." 127 The Mughal emperors and the nobles made fine arrangements for keeping their concubines in their harems. Each concubine was assigned a separate quarter to live in, 128 these concubines were seldom visited by their

126. Ibid.
master. Generally they were very faithful to their master and always tried to gain his favour and company.

The life of Muslim women under a polygamous husband was nothing but a pathetic tale, though they led a very luxurious life whose pomp, splendor and luxury could only be imagined by a common lady of the Mughal period. Their residences, well decorated and well furnished, were the picture of magnificence.

All means of entertainment were provided inside their quarters and lady singers and dancers tried their best to entertain them. Not only that, but for their comfort fans were kept going steadily in the room or in the open air where they usually sat. Besides, a number of slaves and maids were always kept ready to serve them. These ladies possessed many gold and silver vessels. Different varieties of dainty dishes prepared by cooks were served to them daily. In addition, they received a big amount from their husbands every month for the expenses of costly clothes, ornaments, shoes, perfumes and betel. Thus they could afford whatever the desired viz., horses to ride on, male servants to attend on them outside the houses and female salves inside their houses.

They were often very jealous of each other and tried their level best to gain favours of their husband but they never expressed their feelings in words before him as they feared to annoy the master. The mother having a son was always loved more and was supported by a husband. Fryer states that among the wives the senior wife commanded most respect, but the mother of the first son received more respect than others in the eyes of her lord. Babur's beloved wife Bibi Mubarika could not bear any child due to the enoy of other wives who administered drugs to deprive her of motherhood and weaken her husband's (Babur's) affection.

Due to their hostile relations they lived in separate quarters and dined privately. Pelsaert rightly remarks, "Their food comes from one kitchen but each wife takes it in

130. Pelsaert, Francois, Jahangir's India, p. 65.
her own apartment far they hate each other secretly though they seldom or never a
low it to be seen because of their desire to retain the favour of their husband, whom
they fear, honour and worship as god rather than a man.”

It is noteworthy that the status of co-wife was inferior to that of the first wife, as the
senior wife commanded most respect. Generally co-wives had unfriendly and
strained relations among themselves. When, the husband was partial towards a
particular wife, her co-wives become more jealous, and tried to take revenge secretly.
Jahangir was greatly attached to his wife Nur Jahan, so she was always a victim in the
hands of Jodha Bai. Similarly Aurangzeb had a special liking for Udaipuri Mahal, so
her co-wives were very jealous of her. A husband’s partiality for a particular wife
and negligence to others also gave pain; one can easily imagine the heart burning
when his favourite one accompanied him in visiting the court or some other place.

Sometimes a neglected wife tried to draw the attention of her husband by means of
costly dress, jewellery and perfumes and sweet anointments. Infact whenever a
number of co-wives lived together they found no mental peace because of the
constant strife among themselves. All co-wives, from a queen to an ordinary slave,
burned with jealousy. Sometimes the senior wife under a polygamous husband was
neglected, while the maid servants were raising to the status of legal wives as a result
illicit relations with the master. These slaves warmly welcomed the master in a
befitting dress for the occasion and would “seem to fly, rather than run, about their
duties”. To gain the master’s sympathy they rubbed his body with pounded sandal
wood and rose water and with some other scented and cooling oil.

Pelsaert has tried to show women’s unsatisfied passion under a polygamous husband
by writing thus, “these women wear indeed the most expensive clothes, eat the
daintiest food and enjoy all worldly pleasures except one, and for that one they grieve
saying they would willingly give everything in exchange for a beggar’s poverty.”

135. Pelsaert, Francois, Jahangir’s India, p. 65.
136. Pelsaert, Francois, Jahangir’s India, p. 64.
140. Pelsaert Francois, The Voyage of, to the East Indies, p. 65.
141. Pelsaert, Francois, Ibid., p. 56.

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women’s life was unstable and miserable in the presence of other co-wives, because in the household of the polygamists the God of quarrels reigned supreme.¹⁴²

The royal ladies of the Mughal harem had a lavish lifestyle. The important harem ladies owned a lot of wealth and money which they spent as they wished. As Manucci says, “these queens and princesses have pay or pensions according to their birth or the rank they hold. In addition, they often received from the king special presents in cash, under the pretext that it is to buy betel, or perfumes, or shoes.”¹⁴³

A part from their regular allowances some important ladies of the Mughal household owned vast jagirs bestowed upon them by the emperor. Soon after his accession, Humayun paid a visit to his mother, sister and other ladies of his seraglio and he gave those jagirs and confirmed their mansabs.¹⁴⁴ Jahangir mentions in his memoirs that he “increased the allowances of all the veiled ladies of my father’s harem from twenty per cent to hundred per cent, according to their condition and relationship”¹⁴⁵ after his coming to the throne in 1605 A.D. The maximum numbers of jagirs, during his reign were owned by Nur Jahan Begam. Shah Jahan too bestowed a lot of jagirs on his ladies and Manucci says that during his reign all the ladies of rank had their own nazirs who looked after their jagirs on his ladies and Manucci says that during his reign all the ladies of rank had their own nazirs who looked after their jagirs, properties and incomes.¹⁴⁶ The largest numbers of jagirs were given by Shah Jahan to his eldest daughter prince Jahan Ara.¹⁴⁷

It is quite evident that the royal Mughal ladies had a lot of wealth in their hands. The more important place she occupied in the emperor’s life, the wealthier she was. As a result they earned lakhs and lakhs of rupees apart from the gold, silvers, gems, jewelry and other costly articles they owned. On Shah Jahan’s accession ten lakh rupees were fixed as the annual allowance of Mumtaz Mahal, Jahan Ara Begum’s annual allowance was fixed at six lakh rupees.¹⁴⁸ Manucci estimated Jahan Ara Begum’s income to thirty lakh rupees annually apart from the precious stones and

¹⁴⁷. Mukherjee, Soma, Royal Mughal Ladies and their Contributions, New Delhi, p. 31.

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jewels owned by her.\textsuperscript{149} Totally it amounted to nearly three million rupees.\textsuperscript{150} Shah Jahan continued to give Nur Jahan Begum an annual maintenance allowance of two lakh rupees when he came to the throne.\textsuperscript{151}

Humayun’s mother Maham Begum on the occasion of Humayun’s accession to the throne in 1530 A.D. arranged for a grand feast and gave special robes of honour to about seven thousand persons.\textsuperscript{152} Nur Jahan Begum was well known for arranging grand feast and bestowing costly gifts on others. When Prince Khurram (Shah Jahan) came back from his successful Rajputana campaign, he was presented a rich dress of honour a jeweled sword, a horse and saddle and an elephant by Nur Jahan Begum.\textsuperscript{153}

The royal life in the Mughal harem and cultural heritage bears testimony to the economic affluence and prosperity of the Mughal age which was one of the most glorious periods of Indian history. The Mughal Empire witnessed developments in all spheres of economy which included agriculture, internal and external trade, commerce and industries, banking and currency. The Mughal ladies took a lot of interest in this field and participated actively in the economic scenario of the Mughal Age. Though too many royal ladies of the Mughal harem did not actively participate in the economic field, yet there were distinguished ladies of that time, like Jahangir’s mother Mariyam-uz-Zamani, Nur Jahan Begum, and Shah Jahan’s daughter princess Jahan Ara, who are known to have taken an active participation in the trade and commerce of that time.\textsuperscript{154}

Akbar’s wife and Jahangir’s mother Mariyam uz Zamani, was greatly interested in trade and commerce of her time and was the first royal Mughal lady who participated directly in it. She had her own ships and carried on brisk trade from the Surat port to various ports on the Red Sea. One of her ships was the famous Rahimi of Surat.\textsuperscript{155} Sir Thomas Roe also mentioned Mariyam uz Zamani’s ships in his account.\textsuperscript{156}

\begin{itemize}
\item[150.] Ibid., p. 216.
\item[152.] Begum, Gulbadan, \textit{Humayun Nama}, p. 114.
\item[154.] Mukherjee Soma, \textit{Royal Mughal Ladies and their Contributions}, New Delhi, p. 236.
\item[156.] Foster, William, \textit{The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe in India}, London, 1936, pp. 74, 387-88.
\end{itemize}
One of Jahangir’s wives Jagat Gosain did not contribute directly towards the economic field, but she is said to have founded a village called Sohagpura. This village was a famous manufacturing centre for fine bangles of glass which were quite popular and considered auspicious by unmarried and married ladies.¹⁵⁷

Nur Jahan Begum carried on sea trade with foreign lands with a lot of enthusiastic vigour. She owned a number of ships. Her chief agent in her activities concerning foreign trade was her brother Asaf Khan.¹⁵⁸ Her ships too operated between Surat and the Arabian coasts. Nur Jahan was a very intelligent woman. She realized that the rivalry and tensions that existed between the Mughals and the Portuguese would prevent her ships from taking her goods to foreign lands. So she tried to favour the English so she could send her goods out on English ships.¹⁵⁹

Nur Jahan Begum also took an active interest in internal trade. Through the river Jamuna in Agra, a number of articles manufactured in Agra were sent to other parts of the country and similarly many articles of trade and commerce entered Agra through this route Pelsaert, while describing the city of Agra in his accounts. wrote that Nur Jahan Begum had offices there which “collect duties on all these goods before they can be shipped across the river and also on innumerable kinds of grain, butter and other provisions which are produced in the Eastern provinces, and imported thence”.¹⁶⁰

During the reign of Shah Jahan, his eldest daughter Jahan Ara Begum was the only royal Mughal lady who took an active interest and participated wholeheartedly in the prosperous trade and commerce of that time. Jahan Ara Begum invested her wealth in conducting brisk foreign trade and also got back in return huge profits. She owned a large number of ships and established friendly commercial relations with the Dutch and the English. Their co-operation helped her to carry on extensive trade and make huge profits.¹⁶¹ Manucci estimates her income to thirty lakhs of rupees a year apart from the precious stones and jewels owned by her.¹⁶² The most famous and largest of Jahan Ara Begum’s ships was called Sahebi. This ship Sahebi was used by the princes

¹⁵⁹. Ibid., p. 165.
¹⁶⁰. Pelsaert, Francisco, Jahangir’s India, p. 4.
for profits as well as to assist Haj pilgrims.\textsuperscript{163} Another ship by the name of Gunjawar, which originally belonged to Shah Jahan was given by him to Princess Jahan Ara in December 1629 A.D., along with the instruments, valuables, drugs and material. It also operated from Surat.\textsuperscript{164}

Mughal miniatures are court paintings and these are confined to the life of court, and the greater part of the story of the people in general remains untold.\textsuperscript{165} Numerous visual and literary records provide us some information about day to day life of ordinary women in Mughal society.

Numerous miniatures painting showing the village life: women at village well\textsuperscript{166}, women pulling water from the well\textsuperscript{167}, women churning butter, activity of daily life of villagers\textsuperscript{168}, Razmnama painting showing various village activities, women carrying water with earthen pots pitcher (ghara). All these miniature paintings of Mughal period give us a visual record of social life and manners of the villager depicted in the miniatures.

\textit{Parda} was observed mainly by the rich ladies and was not so rigid with the common ladies.\textsuperscript{169} Abundant references of the observance of \textit{Parda} are found in the accounts of contemporary foreign travelers.\textsuperscript{170} Parda was mainly confined to the rich and well to do classes.\textsuperscript{171} Poor women, especially in villages, worked in fields and could not afford to observe \textit{parda}.\textsuperscript{172}

As regards the education of common women, girls belonging to middle class family did not receive much education. Some of them visited schools, run in private houses by some elderly ladies. Sometimes the father of the girl also acted as her teacher. Girls of the poor family were almost left illiterate except a few who were collected and sometimes given instructions by the Mullas of the mosque or by some Pandits in

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{163} Moosvi, Shireen, "Mughal Shipping at Surat in the First Half of 17\textsuperscript{th} Century", \textit{Proceedings of Indian History Congress}, 51\textsc{st} Session, Calcutta, 1990, p. 312.
  \item \textsuperscript{164} Ibid., p. 311.
  \item \textsuperscript{165} Verma, S.P., \textit{Art and Material Culture in the Painting of Akbar Court}, Delhi, 1978, p. XXVIII.
  \item \textsuperscript{166} Verma, S.P., \textit{India at Work in Sculpture and Painting}, Aligarh, 1994, pl. V.
  \item \textsuperscript{167} Leach, L.Y., \textit{Mughal and Other Paintings from the Chester Beatty Library}, London, 1995, vol. I, p. 225, Fig. 2.74.
  \item \textsuperscript{168} Das, A.K., \textit{Dawan of Mughal Painting}, Bombay, 1982, pl. VII.
  \item \textsuperscript{169} Manucci, Niccolao, \textit{Storia Do Mogor}, vol. 1, 62.
  \item \textsuperscript{170} Tavernier, Jean, Baptiste, \textit{Travels in India}, vol. 1, p. 181.
  \item \textsuperscript{171} Bernier, Francois, \textit{Travels in the Mogal Empire (1656-68)}, Oxford, 1934, p. 413.
  \item \textsuperscript{172} De Laet, \textit{Empire of the Great Mughals}, p. 81.
\end{itemize}
Pathshals. The subjects of studies were mainly domestic science such as needlework, embroidery, cooking and household work. On the whole, the education of common women was not widespread. There were no regular and separate schools for them. Boys and girls in the early years studied together, but even that seems doubtful due to the strict parda system prevalent in those days.

Widow Remarriage was hardly practiced and sati was considered by the Hindus as an act of chastity. Sati practice was checked and no woman could burn herself without the prior permission of the governor and in no case a widow was burn against her wishes.

Sati is an ancient institution and custom of the India. Sati was sure means of reunion of wife with her dead husband. The greatest tragedy in the life of a Hindu woman was the death of her husband. A widow had to burn herself with the dead body of her husband or had to lead a life of suffering and misery and was treated with contempt by the other member of the family.

Society looked down upon the widows who did not perform sati. They were not allowed to grow their hair long or to put on ornaments and good dresses. Widowhood was considered a punishment of the sins of previous lives. Almost all the foreign travelers who visited India during the Mughal period mention that women used to burn themselves with the dead body of their husband. Still there were many ladies who refused to perform it. Travernier described “the custom among the gentiles of burning bodies of after death is very ancient, they generally burn them on the bank of rivers, where they wash the bodies of the deceased to complete the clearing of those sins from which they have not been purified during life, a living woman to be burnt in the fire together with the body of her deceased husband”. Monsorret also refers that, the wives of the Brahms a famous class of nobly born Hindu are accustomed, in accordance with an ancient tradition of their religion to burn themselves on the same pyres as their dead husband.

176. Pelsaert, Francois, Jahangir’s India, p. 80.
Prince Daniyal watches as the flames consume the sati and her dead lover. This lovely little manuscript is attributed to about 1630, with three ministers. This miniature showing the meeting of lovers on the pyre watched by Daniyal, are in subdued nimqalam (badly painted) style that heightens their photos. The final scene is especially effective, the solidity of the workers contrasting with the faintness of two figures in the pyre, already etherealized by their passion. In medieval India, the custom of sati gained an upper hand. It required the widow to burn herself to death on the funeral pyre of her husband. Usually she was expected to follow her dead husband to the other world by immolating herself on the funeral pyre of her husband. In such a case she was greatly honored and praised as the idol of Indian womanhood. If she did not commit sati or the act of self immolation, then she was, as noted above, condemned to a life of humiliation.

Akbar issued an order that a woman should not be freed to sati. Jahangir also prohibited sati. Aurangzeb also disallowed women to be burnt. We learn from Manucci that the emperor (Aurangzeb), on his return from Kashmir (December 1663 A.D.) issued an order that in all lands Mughals control never again should the official sallow a woman to be burnt. This order endures to this day. This humanitarian rule is also mentioned in the official manuals of his reign.

The custom of Jauhar was more or less confined to the gallant Rajputs. Abul Fazl refers to this fatal custom performed by the Rajput of Chittor, on its fall, thus, “for it is an Indian custom that when such a calamity has occurred a piti is made of sandalwood, alone etc., as large as possible and to add this, dry firewood and oil. Then they leave hard hearted confidents in charge of their women. As soon as it is certain that there has been a defeat and that the men have been killed, these subborn ones reduce the innocent woman to ashes”. Jauhar, in fact, refers to the high standard of womanly honour maintained among the brave Rajputs.

181. Thevenot, Monsieur De, Indian Travels of Thevenot and Careeri, p. 120.
Epilogue

The proposed thesis seeks to present a different picture regarding the depiction of women in Mughal India. The great mass of textual and archaeological source material available to us enable to reconstruct a plausible picture of social life of women in Medieval India, the women’s history of the period remain largely unexplored for the want of adequate source of information. Official chronicles and other historical account concern with this aspect only to the extent of giving biographical notes or at most with the fine art, especially poetry. All these fragmentary evidence are hardly helpful us in the way of construction a wholesome view.

In the absence of textual evidence nothing can be of greater value than contemporary painting for the purpose. More than any amount of words the visual experience acquired through this medium provided us in illustrated from the knowledge of a variety of those things that a chronicler would never think of as worthy of report. Fortunately the Mughal period is the richest in this respect. The Mughal kings maintained a whole establishment of painters. A good many of these have been lost yet those that we have, provided us with ample ground for studding the culture of the time.

There are many miniatures in which women have been depicted as central part of social life. These paintings includes but of goddess in Sarnath sculptures, dark princess, dying princess, flying Apsara in Ajanta cave paintings, Buddha and Jaina manuscripts depict folios from Prajnaparamita and Kalpasutra, Raghmala series depicts lalit Ragini, Asavari Ragini, lovers etc. These miniature paintings are also helpful for the study of social life like birth celebration of Humayun, Salim, celebration of Holi, woman is playing polo, Laila and Majnun at school etc. The Rajasthani paintings of Madhumadhavi Ragini, Hindola Raga, Bengali Ragini, Krishna and his wife are also a good source material for the study of present topic. Women laborers’ carrying building material, young girl pulling water from the well are also some important Mughal paintings for the study of common women folk. Nevertheless all these painting provided us with a good source for the study of the life of women. However, such a study will be of a very general in nature.
Sculpture has played an important role in Indian society, religious and secular requirements such as the ornamentation of items of luxury as well as objects of daily use. The human and animal figures show a high degree of finish and excellence and disclose an advance stage of development of art in the Indian history.

Ajanta caves are richly decorated with paintings. These paintings mostly depict the stories of the Buddha’s past lives as described in the Jatakas and Avadanas. The treaties provide exhaustive details of methods used in the rendering of different kind of people, animals and landscapes. Ajanta’s creative genius lies in the portrayal of women. The lovely ladies of the courts with their handmaids, the dancers and the musicians, the devotees, the common women and even the beggar girls are all drawn with extraordinary knowledge.

During the Ancient period the activities of women were confined within certain spheres principally the domestic social and religious. The religious status of women was as high as that of men. The position of the wife was an honored one in the family. The widow remarriage also prevailed in Vedic society. A woman could marry again probably in the life time of her husband. A husband cannot divorce his wife without her consent. Sati was also performed during that period. The women of ancient period also worked as ganikas, pratiganikas, rupajivas, vesyas, dasis, devadasis, pumscalis, silpakarikas, kausikastri etc. These women were to be given pension by the state in old age.

By the eleventh century the Buddhists in the monasteries of eastern India and the Jains in the west and south had begun to illustrate some of their religious books. These books were made of bound palm leaf folios. In the northwest region birch bark was preferred to palm leaves. Both palm leaf and birch bark books were provided with wood covers. These paintings provide rich source material of study, which depicts important scenes of Buddha and Jaina literature.

The subject of the Malwa illustrations in the seventeenth century, for example, the Ragmala, the Krishnalila, the Nayikabheda, the Durgapatha, etc. were especially popular. The Ragmala series is an extension of the Sultanate tradition including the Charupanchasika style. In Ragmala paintings the human figures are usually slow moving. The Rasikapriya miniatures reveal a number of characteristics such as typical regional dress, including short choli (bodice) on the women is shown; the skirt are
generally made from a striped cloth. The tall and slender figures and the naturalistic treatment of their faces obviously attempt to neutralize, the force of the older form. The traditional knowledge of portraying love illustrations was fully utilized in the *Nayikabheda* paintings of the Malwa School. These miniatures reproduced here, the main interest lies in the idealized setting of the blossoming trees and the sensitive movement of highly accomplished vines, both of which produce a sublime effect of light and shade.

The Mughal women were beautiful, educated and talented. They contributed towards the social, cultural, literary and artistic fields. They also expand their time in music, dancing, fine arts, religion and literary activities. Many Mughal paintings depict their contribution in the arrangement of dinner party, excursion, marriage of east, picnics, garden parties, drinking and drug parties and birthday celebrations. Mughal women participated in various indoor and outdoor games. They took part in *chaupar*, *chandal mandal*, cards, and chess, hunting and shooting.

In medieval India female education was not encouraged. It was a privilege confined to the ladies of royal family. Several social factors like *parda* system, child marriage and low position that women generally occupied, played a great role in the low level of education among women. Some women poetesses like Gulbadan Begum, and her sister Gulrukh Begum, Sultan Salima Begum, Nur Jahan Begum and Jahan Ara Begum are not considered equal to their male counterparts.

Princesses were taught to live in *parda*. It meant living in seclusion or behind a screen or at least covering of the face by veil. The rich and magnificent setting in which *palki* (*palanquins*) and *chandols* have been presented would make one fell that they were favorite conveyances of aristocratic women. There was another short of littersuspended between small elephant or camels. Women of the middle and lower class had to content themselves with the *Doli* which looked like *palki* but was much smaller in size and could accommodate only one person.

The Rajasthani paintings furnish a rich data useful for a social historian about dress, fashions, religion, climate cultural trends, ideals of beauty, pleasure etc. of an age in which painting is drawn. Paintings from Jodhpur, Bundi, Mewar and Chawand are related to music and amusement. Pahari paintings also depict theme of music and
dance. Music was a principal interest and almost every court has singing girls and musicians.

It has been revealed that there was a significant participation of women in all spheres of work, in Medieval India. The household is a site of work and involves a large number of activities, in all which women predominate. Here she was endowed with so-called natural activities that are of cooking food, tending cattle, bringing water, taking care of children and old, so on. These are treated as external to the productive domain.

The patriarchal perception allows the society to usurp women’s labor without offering them anything in return.

Likewise in the manufacturing sector, spinning was exclusively women’s job though evidence to their participation in weaving is not altogether absent. At another level the close relationship between family and commerce came to involve women in mercantile activities, as well. We have seen throughout how women helped in reshaping mercantile fortunes. Several women earned their livelihood through participation in entertainment activities. The dancing women were yearned for at festivities. The female guards were appointed inside the harem to look after the women of aristocracy. The common women worked outside the home to wash clothes, carrying brick and stone etc. Women were an important part of this labor group. She also worked as painter. Nadira Banu, Sahifa Banu, Ruqiya Banu and Nini were some important female Mughal painters.

The daughters of the Mughal family or the Mughal princesses occupied places of great honor in the seraglio. During the Mughal age of the evil practice of marriage at an early age was usually observed by Indian Muslims. Some marriages were performed at earlier age also. Muslim widows enjoyed a respectable position in society throughout Mughal period. Mughal rulers encouraged widow remarriage by themselves marrying widows. Polygamy was prevalent among both the upper and lower classes of Muslim society, though ordinarily it was not encouraged. The practice of concubinage was prevalent among the richer sections of Muslim society. Mughal emperors and their nobles kept in their harem as many concubines as they desired.

It is noteworthy that the status of co-wife was inferior to that of the first wife, as the senior wife commanded most respect. Sometimes a neglected wife tried to draw the
attention of her husband by means of costly dress, jewelry and perfumes and sweet an
ointments. A women’s life was unstable and miserable in the presence of other co-
wives, because in the household of the polygamists the God of quarrels reigned
supreme.

The important harem ladies owned a lot of wealth and money. Some important ladies
of the Mughal household owned vast jagirs. JagatGosai founded a village called
Sohagpura. NurJahan Begum carried on sea trade with foreign lands. During the reign
of Shah Jahan, Jahan Ara Begum also took an active interest and participated
wholeheartedly in the prosperous trade and commerce of that time.

The custom of sati, was as greatly in vague in Hindu society, as well as jouhar
(massacre of women or even of battle) too. Jouhar, custom was greatly vogue in
Rajput society in medieval times. Widow remarriage was hardly practiced and sati
was considered by the Hindus as an act of chastity. Mughal emperors like Akbar and
Jahangir prohibited sati.

Lastly medieval Indian paintings often provide rich and varied fare on social life of
women, for which the literary sources offer comparatively poor evidence.