CHAPTER – 2

POSITION OF WOMAN

Man-woman relationship is the basic and essential human relationship. Both compliment each other and make life meaningful. Since time immemorial, men and women have lived together, worked together, produced children and taken care of them, whether they lived in caves during the food gathering stage or whether they lived in village communities during the agrarian stage of humanity.

Gender relation refers to the relationship between two separate sexes in a particular environment. Ever since the existence of mankind, irrespective of the place or environment, we notice problems at this front, our effort has been made in this chapter to deal the position of the woman from the point of view of various social disabilities prevailed the society during these times. They have been sharing an equal burden may be more at times than men, but without getting a reward or recognition, whether at home or outside. We find women working shoulder to shoulder with men, at all times of our existence right from the prehistoric times. They looked after the family, did the household chore and even made earning to the family income, but seldom got credit for it. Whether it is because of the patriarchal form of our society, which framed social customs to suit the convenience of males or it is the physical superiority of the males as a species. The consequences, invariably, are the same – The suppression of women’s rights.

In Patriarchal societies all over the world and India, in particular, an elderly male member of the family is considered to be the “Head of the household”. A male symbolizes power and authority in the household structure, while a women, by and large, is treated as subordinate to the male in her various roles as wife, sister, daughter, and even mother. The male is expected to protect and look after the family. As head of the household, he assumes responsibility
for the social, physical and integrative needs of the households. On the other hand, the woman had the primary responsibility of carrying out domestic chores like fetching fuel and water, cooking, washing, cleaning and sweeping floors, nursing the children and the sick. The women were also required to nurse the sick and, in the process, also handle their soiled clothes without being aware of the implications.

Women are mothers and wives; women do the working, mending, sewing and washing. They take care of men and are subordinate to male authority, but they are largely excluded from high status occupation and position of power. These generalizations apply, to some degree, practically to every known human society.

The best way to understand the spirit of a civilization and to appreciate and realize its excellence is to study the history of its women folk and the superior status enjoyed by them during the Vedic age, D. N. Mitter writes, “Women held an honoured position in the Vedic age and were quite competent to take part in every aspect of the social, intellectual and spiritual life of the race.” Girls were educated like boys and had to pass through a period of Brahmacharya. The role of women as a wife, mother, sister and a widow has been dealt with and written about by many learned scholars, although women played a vital role in the development of our land and society intellectually, economically and culturally. Ghosha, Gargi and Vachakanvi aspired for knowledge. These women walked side by side of men chalking out the destiny of their land and enriching its culture.

As pointed by Prof. A.S. Altekar in his book “The position of women in Hindu civilization” During Vedic period, she were mostly engaged in military or semi—military activities for the security to the country. As a result, their dependence on women folk increased for the latter took on active and equal part in the agricultural activities and manufacture of war material like bows and arrows. Vedic literature refers to female workers who specialized in dying.

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1 Altekar, A. S. The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization 1938, pp. 600-01.
embroidery and basket making etc. They not only faced the onslaught of invading army but served as efficient bodyguards to the sovereigns of renowned dynasties.

The scenario would have been healthier. Both Orientlists and Modern historians had laid out a historiography scheme in the 19th century, where women were in the higher pedestal. Gargi and Matritreyee, for example, in the ancient period were recognized as a Brahambadinis (enlightened women) whose erudition was supposed to have granted them equal powers as their male counterparts.² Their position was one of authority and honour. In the Vedic and epic period, wife was considered to be ornament of the house or Nucleus.³ Though during the period that followed the Vedic age, there was gradual deterioration in the position of women but she still retained a large measure of freedom in the disposal of her own person and fortune.⁴

Throughout the medieval period, it has been evident that the women in India, belonging to the Hindu or Muslim cults, were mainly molested by males. In the post independent period, the Muslim women were nowhere – got no education and were veiled under Purda with less social security etc. All over the country, women are mostly dominated by males. The Hindu or the Muslim in the villages bear little medical facility for pregnancy and post natal care etc. the infanticide (in case of female birth) are a common scenario. In the pre marriage period, they were not given freedom to choose their partner. Criminalities often are unheard by law due to fear of the village people and social communication gap between the jurisdiction and people. The people feared to oppose against the gesture and, therefore, they did not have judicial co-operation. Rituals become the law and women become victims.⁵ However, some aspects that throw light on gender relations has, generally, been ignored even in studies that

2 Ratnabali Chatterjee, Veiled and Unveiled: Women in Medieval India Proceedings of the Indian History Congress, 62nd Session Bhopal 2001, p. 161
3 P. N. Chopra, Life and Letters under the Mughals, Delhi 1956 p. 86
5 IHC Proceedings, 61st (millennium) session, 2001, Women Ritual Domination and Law, Alok Kumar Maitra. p -1338
highlighted different forms of violence and social neglect concerning women. The chapter, therefore, focuses on the systematic disadvantages of women in India. The incidence of diseases was, generally, greater in women as compared to men. Significantly, as a result of general improvement in health and sanitation, the gap between the male and the female went up.

The patriarchal system enforced the norm of complementary of sex roles. The men were the earners and the decision-makers; they exercised control over financial and social matters; there was little participation of men and women in each other’s spheres in both urban and rural areas. With the general acceptance of polygamy and remarriage of widow, at least among the upper classes, a large segment of the society, a woman was implicitly dispensable. Moreover, compared to their men folk, women could benefit much less from inoculation. This was as much due to the ignorance as to the general disregard for women’s health. The upper classes brought in also the question of ‘Honour’ and ‘custom’. The elite among both Hindus and Muslims forbade their women to get inoculated. The Rajputs believed that exposing their women violated the Purdah and would make their daughter’s marriage difficult. The Sayyids believed that their religion forbade women to get inoculated by men.

Various incidents of molestation of women were reported. The people reacted sharply to the measures involving the handling of women. A Brahman was warned, threatened and served a legal notice as he prevented the medical staff from removing his ailing mother to the camp. Ultimately, he was allowed to keep his mother in the house only. The people of Indian society considered it tantamount to their sexual molestation if woman was touched by the male. In sum as the crisis situations, epidemics provided a mirror to the systemic disadvantages of women. The patriarchal social structure confined women to the roles that steadily exposed them to disease and then deprived them of access to medical facilities. In this way, it is clear that the patriarchal nation’s society, at large, did not always consider women’s health a matter of equal concern. In this situation, a large number of women lost their lives due to epidemics and a larger
number suffered from insensitive handling, lost personal dignity and even honour.

**INHERITANCE:** While a son lives, no other relation or kinsman shares the estate except the wife who is equal to the sun. If there be neither son nor wife, the unmarried daughter inherits. If there be also no daughter, the mother is the heir. If there be no mother, the father takes possession. If there be no father alive, his brother shall be heir. In default of a brother, the brother’s son inherits. In default of a brother’s son, the estate is divided amongst the surviving kindred. If he leaves no relations, the teacher inherits or in default of the teacher, his fellow pupils. In the absence of the above, all their estate lapses to the crown.

“So far as property rights were concerned, Mohammedan ladies were much better than their Hindu sisters. A Mohammedan lady was entitled to a definite share in the inheritance. A daughter was absolutely assured of one-half of a son’s share of an inheritance with absolute right to dispose of it. Under all conditions, women received a half share.” But on the other hand, her Hindu sister retained this right even after marriage. Another method adopted to safeguard the interests of Muslim ladies after marriage was ante nuptial settlement, whereas a Hindu lady had no right to the property of her husband’s parents. Wherever, under Islam, women of a deceased husband’s property, the wife received 1/8 if there were children, ¼ if there were none, and with right to dispose of as she pleases”.

A Hindu lady was entitled to maintenance and residence expenses, besides movable property like ornaments, jewellery, costly apparel, etc. About the immovable property, “No property in land admits of disputes concerning them. The slavery, to which the rights of Parents and husband subject the female, abolishes, at once, all fruits of dowry, divorce, jointures and settlements”.

It appears that the constant seclusion brought about the social, political and intellectual stultification of women who could not exert themselves for their legitimate rights. From the legal standpoint, they were reduced to a position of dependency in every sphere of life. Indian women, mostly, confined themselves
to household work. Those belonging to the agricultural and labouring classes helped their men folk on their home industries, agriculture, breeding of animals, spinning, weaving, tailoring\(^6\) etc. Some women engaged themselves in independent professions like medicine, midwifery and the like. The women at Surat earned money by knitting woollen and silken fabrics, some of them took up dancing and singing as a profession. “Moors and Bengalese take great delight in having women dance before them who are kept for that purpose and are educated from their in fancy in the pursuit of this function. They were extremely supple and were adepts in the art of dancing”.\(^7\)

MOTHERHOOD: In society, the position of mother was most respectable. Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said, “Paradise lies at the feet of the mother”. The contemporary records show that the Mughal kings had utmost regard for their mothers. It has been found from the contemporary records that Mughal kings used to move through some stages to receive their mothers. They would perform Kornish, Sijdah and Taslim, when entering their presence.\(^8\) Babur had great affection for his step grand mother, aunts and other elderly lady of harem. From Ain-i-Akbari, it appears that on his birth day the Mughal Emperor, accompanied by Princes and Nobles would necessarily pay a visit to his mother to receive her felicitations and present her with rare gifts.\(^9\) Sometimes, the weighting ceremony was held in her palace.\(^10\) Jahangir writes in Tuzuk, “I went to meet my mother at Dhar (near Lahore) and performed Kornish, Sijdah and Taslim with all obedience and then took leave of her.”\(^11\) The Mughals brought their own traditions and culture. Hamayun had a great regard for the ladies. He was particularly fond of his sisters whom he often remembered during his illness.\(^12\) Akbar and Jahangir, both used to pay respect to the ladies.

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\(^6\) Jean Baptiste Tavernier, Travels in India, 2 Vols., English translation by V. Ball, London, 1889 II P-127.
\(^10\) P. N. Chopra, Some Aspects of Society and Culture During the Mughal Age, p 120.
\(^11\) Ibid
had much regard for the ladies. The only lady who seems to have enjoyed respect as well as affection of Aurangzeb was Jahanara Begum.

The Rajput mothers also had much honourable position in the society. Rajputs had great regard for their mothers; Rana Sangram Singh II of Mewar had made it a principle to pay his respect to his mother every morning before taking his meals. He would never like to act against the will of his mother, however unreasonable it might have been.13 Traveller Bartolomeo notices with appreciation the great respect paid to a pregnant woman; not only her husband and relations, but all the inhabitants to the place belonging to her caste prayed for her health and safety. According to him; they considered pregnancy as a very distinguished proof of the blessing of Goddess Lakshmi.14

UNWELCOMED DAUGHTER: The birth of a daughter was not welcomed with the same joy as that of a son.15 The birth of a daughter was regarded as inauspicious. It appears from the account of foreign travellers that even in the royal family the difference was clear and well-marked. Manucci writes that only women rejoiced and feasted on the birth of a daughter. While the whole court took part in the celebrations, if a prince was born.16 Akbar had resolved within himself that if "Almighty God should bestow a son on him, he would go on foot from Agra to Saint Muin-ud-din Chisti's mausoleum a distance of about 140 kos".17

CHILD MARRIAGE: Child marriage was a part of Indian social life, not even in Mughal India but it exits since ancient period. Generally, boys at the age of 15 or 16, and girls at nine or ten18 were wedded and this was the custom for both Hindus and Muslims. Fitch, writes, "We found marriages in great store both in

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towns and villages in many places where we passed, of boys of eight or ten years and girls of five or six years old. They lie not together until they be ten years old.\footnote{19}{Fransisco Pelsaert, The Remonstrantie of Francisco Pelsaert Edited by P.Geyl and W.H.Mofeland, Delhi, 1972 (Reprint). P. 84.}

\textit{Manucci} refers to the situation among Hindus were their daughter’s are married before they learnt to talk.\footnote{20}{Ibid.} He mentions that the Brahman’s daughters got married at the age of four or five, and not above ten years of age. \textit{Pelsaert}: Writes, “The hindus join their children in marriage at the age of only four or five years. \textit{Manucci}, noted that girls getting married and giving birth to child even at the age of nine. \textit{Careri}, referring, the Mehomdentan Indian marry very young, but the Idolators at all ages. \textit{Thevenet} – Referring Baglana province lying between khan -desh and Surat the early marriages in this province, and make them Cohabit much sooner than they do in many places of the India; they celebrate matrimony at the age of four, five or six years, and suffer them to bed together when the husband in ten years old and the wife eight; but the women who have children so young soon leave of child bearing, and commonly do not conceive after thirty years of age, but become extremely wrinkly; and therefore there are places in the Indies where the young married couple are not suffered to eye together, before the man be fourteen years old”.

\textit{Abul Fazl}, “In the extensive country of India men are acheive to form this union at a tender age and this introduces the heaven of evil.\footnote{21}{op., cit., Ain –I, P-791} He refers to the marriage of Prince Murad, at the age of Seventeen on the 15\textsuperscript{th} May, 1587 A.D. AT the age of sixteen, Prince Salim got married to the daughter of Raja Bhagwan Dass. \textit{Manucci}. Writes that the young princes were brought up in the palace up to the age of sixteen years and then they were to be married.\footnote{22}{op., cit., Storia –II P-347} Hindus, as a protection against Muslim raiders, who would not usually carry of married women, resorted to early marriage of their daughters. It also acted as a safeguard against vices and helped the bride to know her husband before
physical consummation.23 European travellers write about the early marriages of young girls.24 Manucci, writes that "They married their girls even before they were able to speak", and married before the age of ten years. According to Thevenot at the age of 4, 5 or 6 years, while Tavernier puts the marriage age at 7 or 8.

DOWRY: In Muslim society, the marriage had to be settled on hearsay reports with an advantage to the bride's parents who had an opportunity to see and satisfy themselves about the boy, if they so desired. Dowry was demanded and sometimes parents disregarded the suitability of the match and cared primarily for a rich dowry. In some castes and localities the bridegroom had to pay money to the bride's guardians.25 Money played an important part when a marriage was arranged between persons of unequal ages 13 or social status.26 Sometimes for the sake of wealth a young man would marry a woman older than himself. In some cases betrothals were fixed, as we see even today, among the rural folk before the actual birth of their children, it's death and sex disapproves not.27

Akbar tried in vain to bring home to his people that the consent of the bride and bridegroom as well as permission of the parents was essential before the confirmation of the engagement.28 Bernier rightly remarks that many girls would have led a happy married life, if their parents had connected them with a family less noble than their own.29 Hamida Banu's attitude in this respect is admirable. She declined to enter into matrimonial alliance with a monarch exclaiming, "I would rather marry a man whose label I can hold than one whose pedestal I cannot reach".

Whatever might have been to respective positions of wife and husband, it is a fact beyond dispute that most of the Hindus managed to lead a happy

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23 op., cit., Tavernier, XXIV, P-181
25 op., cit., Storia III P-55.
26 ibid.
27 op. cit. Early Travels P-221.
28 op., cit. Ain-I, p-277

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domestic life. The woman adorned her husband, rendered her all tenderness and protection. As a natural consequence, the true love and affection of the husband to his wife was unfailing. He would stick to monogamy and seldom fall a victim to adultery.\textsuperscript{30} Tavernier rightly observes: “Banias (Hindus, when married are seldom untrue to their wives.\textsuperscript{31} He would address her as “O Thou of our son. I desire not paradise itself, if there are not satisfied. It was a love reciprocated. The result was a happy conjugal life in most cases. According to Ovington, sometimes the husband would burn themselves with their wives out of sheer love.”\textsuperscript{32} “Force is not applied as they say, and it may be true at least in the countries where Mohammedan commands, for there no woman is suffered to be burnt without leave of the governor of the place of whom it belongs if not to examine whether the deal of money.\textsuperscript{33}

Prevalence of dowry system was of common practice among the well-to-do. Dowry was taken before marriage – the customary pan or tilak, or the later development of dahej or Javtaka. This dowry system is referred by Dvija Madhava, Mukundaram, Achutananda Das in Orissa. It included jewels, ornamented furniture, land, domestic animals, servants etc. We have the records of foreign travellers and writers noting this system in Mughal India. This was the situation, where the bride’s parents give dowry to the bridegroom there are instances where the parents of the bridegroom give dowry to the bride, popularly known as pan. At times brides were purchased. Manucci notes, “It is not uncommon for a husband to buy his wife”, and in that case the bridegroom loses the earnest money if he refused to marry the girl, or the bride’s parents return double the amount taken to the groom if the bride refuses to marry him. Badooni notes that Raja Bhagwan Das paid two crores of tankas (rupees), horses, elephants, golden vessels set with jewels, golden utensils etc.-all in huge amount -when his daughter got married to prince Salim.

\textsuperscript{30} op., cit., Tavernier, III, P-181.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid
\textsuperscript{32} John Ovington, A Voyage to Surat in the year 1689, Edited by H.G.Rawlinson, London, 1929. PP-331,343.
Analysing the root cause of this evil he further writes: "Many persons whom I then consulted on the subject would have persuaded me that excess of affections was the root-cause. Why those 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 women of honour will refuse compliance with the established custom. Manucci, Thevenot and Caveri also refer to this custom".34

The Mughal emperors, particularly Akbar and Aurangzeb, tried to abolish this custom. Akbar issued orders that no woman should be forced to go through this custom against her will. He also banned the burning of young Hindu widows of tender age. Sometime he personally interfered to stop it from taking place. The extraordinary custom of the women burning themselves with their deceased husbands has not for the worst part fallen into desuetude in India nor was it ever reckoned a religious duty as has been very erroneously supposed in the west. "This species of barbarity like many others rose originally from the foolish enthusiasm of feeble minds".

In a text in the Vedas conjugal affection and fidelity are thus, figuratively, inculcated. "The woman in short, who dies with her husband, shall enjoy life eternal with him in heaven". From this source the Brahmins themselves deduce this ridiculous custom which a more rational solution of it, than the story which prevails in Europe; that it was a political institution, made by one of the Emperors, a practice in those days, common Hindustan.35

DIVORCE AND RE-MARRIAGE: Divorce36 and re-marriages, common among Muslims, were prohibited to Hindu women. The Hindu husband could remarry37 in certain circumstances, as on the death of his wife or if she proved to be

34 Op., cit., Storia III, p 60
36 op., cit., A/n-/-1(1873) -P-277
37 op., cit, Della, Valle (Ed) Edward Grey I-PP-82-83.
Historian Altekar observes, 'No divorce was allowed, even if the husband is a moral wreck or grievously ill treated his wife. Even if the husband died, the woman had no choice even if she is desired to remarry, nor could she find any of her own races who would take her, because she would be accounted as bad, as infamous in desiring a second marriage.

Widow re-marriage, custom suffered little change during the Mughal days and was even more rigorously enforced. Hindu ladies, according to ovington, disliked and abhorred the very idea of remarrying and preferred to maintain their fidelity even after the death of their husband. The very few who desired to remarry, disregarding the custom, were turned out of their caste and community and finding it impossible to find a husband in their own community had "recourse to Christians and Mohammedans. According to Ovington some times Brahmans left large amounts of money for the maintenance of their widow. Widow re-marriage was allowed by Mohammedan law and was practiced by the rich and the poor alike.

WIDOWHOOD: It seems that divorce and remarriages, common among Muslims, were prohibited to Hindu women. A reference in Ain-I Akbari shows that high dowries no doubt prevented rash divorces but Akbar disapproved high dowries.

Manucci tells that Kshatriya women were burnt even against their wishes; he himself rescued one such woman who was eventually married to his European friend. Nicolaocounti informs us that financial pressure was often exercised, the widow being informed that she would lose her sight to stridhana if she decided to survive. Bernier has narrated the pathetic case of a child widow

38 John Albert de Mandelslo, Mandelslo's Travels in Western India. Edited by M.S Commissariat, London, 1931. P-52
39 op., cit., Altekar, P-102
40 op., cit., Della Valle, (Edward Grey), I-PP-82-83.
42 op., cit., Storia, III, P-60
43 Jean De Thevenot, Account of India in Indian travels of Thevenot and Careri trans. And ed. S.N Sen, National Archives of India, New Delhi. Pt-III P-84
45 op., cit., Manucci, III, p. 65.
of 12 being burnt against her will at Lahore. In the case of Jaimall, one of Akbar’s officers, his son wanted to forcibly immolate his mother; she was eventually saved only by the intervention of Akbar. Sometimes the unfortunate widows, who were forced to become babies, used to recoil and run away from the funeral pyre. They were then regarded as untouchables and were not accepted back by the members of their family and caste. Sometimes they were rescued by European traders, who used to marry them. From the account of Manucci, it appears that they were not allowed to keep long hair or to put on ornaments. According to Bernier, widowhood was considered a punishment for the sins of one’s previous life. Widow Remarriage was, however, allowed by the Mohammedan law and was practiced by the rich and the poor alike. Thevenot, a French traveller who visited India in 1669, found this practice of suttee very prevalent, and writes thus of it: “The Indian widow do not marry again, but are obliged, if they will not burn themselves, to live in perpetual widowhood; but then they live wretchedly, for they incur the contempt of their family and caste as being afraid to death”. After describing the ceremonies usually observed at the burning of widows, the same traveller goes on to say: “The women were happy that the Mohammedans are become the masters in the Indies, to deliver them from the tyranny of the Brahmins, who always desire their death, because these ladies being never burnt without all their ornaments of gold and silver about them, and none but they having power to touch their ashes, they fail not to pick up all that is precious among them. However the great Mogul and other Mohammedan princes having ordered their governors to employ all their care in suppressing that abuse as much as lies in their power, it requires at present great solicitation and considerable present for obtaining the permission of being burnt.”

To be widow, and more especially a childless or rather sonless widow, is to be the object not of sympathy and pity but of universal hatred and aversion. In the words of one, a Hindu widow herself “widowhood is throughout India

47 op., cit., Bernier, pp. 363-64.
48 op., cit., Storia, III, p. 61.
49 op., cit., Bernier p 314
50 op., cit., Thevenot, p. 4
regarded as the punishment for a horrible crime or crime committed by the women in same former existence upon earth. It is the child widow, or the chillers young widow, upon whom in an especial manner fall the abuse and hatred of the community, as the greatest criminal upon whom Heaven’s adamant has been pronounced.” Again, “A widow is called an inauspicious thing, if she appears on any occasion of rejoicing, she will bring ill –luck. If a man starting on a journey sees a widow on the road, he will postpone his departure rather than run the risk of neglecting so evil a woman”. The relatives and neighbors of a young widow’s husband are always ready to call her bad names and, to address her in abusive language at every opportunity. There is scarcely a day on which she is not cursed as the cause of their beloved friend’s death. In short, the young widow’s life is rendered intolerable.51

A widow cannot re-marry executed the risk of becoming an outcaste; she may not leave the home of her husband’s people, she may not eat with them, she must have her hair cut off and wear wretched clothes and she may only be employed in the lowest and most menial tasks; and when it is remembered that there were in India in 1881 no less than 669,100 widows under the age of nineteen, all of them doomed by the cruel and senseless customs of their country to life long reclusion and misery, the extent of the evil becomes appalling.52 Della-Valle writes that the Hindu husband could remarry53 in certain circumstances as on death of his wife or if she proved to be barren.54 But it was pity that a Hindu woman had no such privilege. Rightly speaking, “no divorce was allowed even if the husband was a moral wrecker who grievously ill-treated his wife.55 According to Bernier, widowhood was considered a punishment for sins of one’s previous life.56 Widow re-marriage was, however, allowed by the Mohammedan law and was practiced by the rich and the poor alike.

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51 Ibid., p -5
52 Ibid., p-6
54 op., cit., Mandelsoo, p. 52.
56 op., cit., Bernier
POLYGAMY: Rightly speaking, polygamy brought many evils in the society and it created domestic unhappiness and immorality, as it was considered injurious for man's health to keep more than one wife. Though the Quran permits a Mohammedan to marry four wives at a time, but Monogamy seems to have been the rule among the lower class of society in both the communities during the Mughal period. Akbar had issued definite address that a man ordinary of means should not possess more than one wife unless the first proved to be barren. Polygamy was the privilege of the rich Mohammedan, each of whom kept three or four wives at a time. The co-wives rivalled each other and used all devices to excel one another and thereby win the love of their husband.

Hindus, with exception of a smaller number of princes and very healthy persons, restricted themselves to monogamy as enjoined by their social custom and the ideal of Hindu society was to have one wife. Della-valle writes, "Hindus take but one wife and never divorce her till death except for the cause of adultery.

PURDAH: The Purdah system in all probability was unknown in ancient India. Purdah was strictly observed among high class families of both the communities during the Mughal period. Wives of the nobles lived in spacious houses surrounded by high walls with tanks, gardens and other luxuries inside. Della Valle writes: “for there (Muslim ladies) less they be dishonest or poor never come abroad.” De Laet writes that purdah was observed mainly by the Muslim ladies and it was not too rigid to the Hindu ladies. But it was also adopted by the Hindu women as a protective measure to save their honour at the hands of the foreign invaders. Commenting on it, Cooper Elizabeth also writes that Hindus

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59 op., cit., Badauni II, p 357
60 op., cit., Pelsaert’s India, p. 66
61 op., cit., Della Valle, vol., Pp. 82-83.
62 op., cit., A.S. Altekar, P-206.
63 op., cit., Mandelslo P-51; Della valle- p-461, Bernier P-413
64 op., cit., Pelsaert’s India P-64
65 op., cit., Della Valle, p -411
adopted *Purdah* as prospective measure to save the honour of their women folk and to maintain the purity of their social order.\(^{67}\)

Bernier rightly observes: “It is indeed a proverbial observation in these armies that three things are to be carefully avoided, the first getting among the choice and led horses where kicking abounds, the second on the hunting ground, the third a too near approach to the ladies of the seraglio”.\(^{68}\) Mohammedans, according to Ovington and Fryer were very jealous of their wives. Even the meanest among them would not allow his wife to stir out uncovered. Those among them who could afford it, went out in palanquins said Della Valle, the Mohammedans would not allow their wives to talk even to their relatives, except in their presence.\(^{69}\) Della Valle writes: “Hindus take one wife and so fearful and jealous of the Mohammedans are of their several wives and women, for they suffer their wives to go abroad whither they please”.\(^{70}\) “Both the sexes had sufficient liberty to go out and enjoy the open air.\(^{71}\) It was the usual custom for husbands or some other male relations to accompany women when going out of doors.

**DEPENDENCY:** The position of a woman with regard to her husband was that of a dependent, in honorable subordination, at least as long as mutual relations remained cordial. Jahangir whites in the Tuzak”. It is a maximum of Hindus, that no good deed can be performed by men in the social state without the partnership or presence of the wife whom they have styled the half of man. Both would give way to accommodate each other to prevent their domestic happiness from being married. Her counsels carried weight, especially, when she had become a mother.

But still the last word was that of her husband. Even, “the daughter of a hundred kings” who had contemptuously refused to fetch a glass of water for her lord, and thus become, “cup-bearer to the chieftain of Sadri” had to be reminded

\(^{67}\) *Harem and Purdah*, p. 65.
\(^{68}\) *op., cit.*, Bernier P-374.
\(^{69}\) *op., cit.*, Della Valle, P-430.
\(^{70}\) *op., cit.*, Della Valle, P-434.
\(^{71}\) *op., cit.*, De-Laet, P-81.
by her father, the Rana of Mewar, of her position as a wife with respect to her husband, the chief of Sadri. The heir-apparent of Mewar stood at the edge of the carpet spread in the darbar hall “performing the menial office of holding the slippers of the chief”. Who had been invited to the court by his sovereign? Tod writes; “shocked at such a mark of respect, he stammered forth some words of homage, "as my son-in-law no distinction too great can be conferred. Take home your wife; she will never again refuse you a cup of water. Some of the husbands, however, it is to be regretted, treated their wives very harshly.

SATI: The history of sati goes back to very ancient times. According to V.A. Smith, this rite was brought into India by early immigrants. It continued throughout the Hindu and Rajput period. The heroic sprit shown by Hindu women who practised sati was admired by then Muslims as something noble. Amir Khusrau describing the burning of the woman on the funeral pyre of her husband observes, "Though this is not allowed in Islam, yet what a great achievement it is .... If this practice is made lawful amongst us, pious devotees might surrender their lives."

Malik Muhammad Jaisi had great praise for such types of women. He says “Sati who burns for truth to her lord, if there is truth in her heart then the fire is cooled”. Ibn Battuta, a Moorish traveller who visited India in the 14th century stayed at the court of Mohd. Thuglaq and enjoyed various positions, including that of a Qazi, has given a graphic picture of a lady whose husband fell in the battle. The entire scene was enacted before his own eyes. The sati, in this case, on hearing the news of her husband’s death just took a bath and put on her best clothes and jewels. A procession was soon formed her to conduct her to the place of cremation. The Brahmins did not miss the opportunity and joined the procession, not failing to explain to the young widow the transitory nature of life and the reality of life beyond. Once, she was burnt both priest assure her, a sati was sure to find awaiting her in the company of her husband for all eternity.

72 Noh Sipihr, p 195, or A Rashid-Society and Culture in Medieval India
73 Padmavat, p. 112.
riches, apparel, honour and happiness beyond measure.⁷⁴ A study of the women of one period would be incomplete without a reference to the custom of sati. It prevailed throughout the Mughal period.

The Emperor Humayun was the first Mughal sovereign to think of extending an absolute prohibition to all cases.⁷⁵ Commenting on sati, R. B. Lall writes that some of the Mughal Emperors like Akbar and Jahangir showed a keen interest to suppress this cruel practice, but there was no active interference on practice on the part of the state to put an end to it.⁷⁶

Hawkins tells us that women burnt themselves voluntarily. The king used to persuade these women not to burn themselves, but they would not listen so the king gave permission. Thevenot writes “the glory of widowhood consist in being burnt with their husband is so horrid, that I desire to be excused that I write no more of it”. Bernier says that this abnormal practice as the result of deeply-rooted prejudices. He adds that widows were sometimes forced to burn themselves.⁷⁷ Manucci also writes about the burning of widows. In Assam at the death of the master of the house, they burnt with him all his wives, Concubines and servants setting them all on fire after binding their feet⁷⁸.

Contemporary record indicates that Akbar had interfered personally in certain famous cases and stopped widows burning themselves. Manucci also says that Mughal emperors had imposed prohibition on Sati in order to remove it from the society.⁷⁹ According to Badauni, Akbar issued an order that a woman should not be forced to Sati.⁸⁰ Jahangir also prohibited it. Aurangzeb also disallowed a woman to be burnt.⁸¹ Manucci says that after returning from Kashmir, Aurangzeb issued an order that the officials should not allow a woman to be burnt. Thus it appears that the Great Muhals had ordered the governors to

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⁷⁵ M. P. Srivasta, *Society and Culture in Medieval India*, p. 121
⁷⁶ *India as seen by the Foreigners in the 16th and 17th centuries*, p. 142.
⁷⁷ *op. cit.*, Bernier, p. 311.
⁷⁸ *op. cit.*, Manucci II, p. 100.
⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 97.
⁸⁰ *op. cit.*, Badoum, II, p. 388.
⁸¹ *op. cit.*, Thevenot, p. 12.
suppress this abuse although this social evil continued till 1829 AD when Lord William Bentinck suppressed it by legislation.

Sati was prevalent practice in spite of the efforts of the Mughals to check it. Linked as they used to be from their infancy, separation was intolerable.82 In sati they saw hidden the symbolic meaning, the deep passionate joy of the sacrifice and the expression of love stronger than death. Even the betrothed girls had to commit sati on the funeral pyre of their husband. Those widows who would not burn themselves with their husband, society treated them very unfairly. Society looked down upon them.83 Thevenot expresses that widowhood was considered a punishment for the sins of one's previous life.84 Ovington recorded an immemorial example that some times the husband would burn themselves with their wives out of sheer love.85

PUBLIC WOMEN: The prostitutes or the dancing and public women were engaged for the sake of amusement. From time to time, e.g. feasts, Festivals, marriages etc. they were commonly known as Nartaki, 'Veshya,' 'Patur or Danika'. Reffering to prostitution, Alberuni observes thus, people think with regard to harlotry that it is allowed with them. Nicolo Conti writes thus, “Public women are everywhere to be had, residing in particular houses of their own in all parts of the cities, who attract the men by sweet perfumes and Ointments, by their blandishments, Beauty, and youth, for the Indians are much addicted to licentiousness; but unnatural crimes are unknown among them.86 Chandbardai, in his “Prithviraj Raso,” refers to a prostitute named chitrarekha patronized by sultan Shahabuddin Ghotri, whose brilliance and beauty was reminiscent of those of rate (The wife of Cupid) she was well -versed and proficient in music and songs.

HAREM AND PROSTITUTES: The imperial Harem was an important institution in Mughal India. It was a place where the Emperor, the ladies of the royal family

82 op., cit. Ovington P-323
83 op., cit. Mandeleslo. P-86, Bernier P-314
85 op., cit. Ovington, pp -331 -343
and nobles of high ranks resided. Abul Fazl says: “His majesty has made a large enclosure with fine buildings inside, where he reposes. Though there are more than five thousand women, he has given to a separate apartment. He has also divided them into sections and keeps them attentive to their duties. The Mughal Emperors made suitable arrangements for the entertainment of the inmates many beautiful and renowned dancers and singers were appointed. They were not permitted to sing anywhere else except at some great festivals. Even Aurangzeb who was so much opposed to music allowed its continuance in the Mahal. Another source of amusement was the fancy fair like Mina-Bazar.

The nobles both Hindu and Muslim had their own harems designed on the pattern of royal harem. These harems were great centers of mirth and gaiety. Large number of women singers and dancers were appointed for their entertainment. Manucci says that among the singers and dancers there was a special caste called Cancheny who attended the court twice a week. This class was more esteemed than others by reason of their great beauty. These public women might have been largely responsible for the growing moral laxity in society. Akbar and Aurangzeb took drastic steps against them. A particular area was set apart for their habitation. An officer was appointed for this purpose and if anybody wanted to visit them home, he had to give him his name and address. After learning the names of Amirs and nobles who visited the prostitutes Akbar severely reprimanded and punished them. But Akbar could not eradicate this evil. After the death of Akbar, this evil spread to a greater extent. But Aurangzeb could not tolerate it and enforced many laws to prohibit it. His order to ‘kill the music and bury it’ also might have affected this profession considerably. The status of women in Pre-Mughal India was better than that of the Mughal period was not wrong, the darkness, the suppression and the ignorance gave rise to the later women’s movements in British India.

Role of Important Hindu Ladies and their Literacy and Cultural Activities

This work is based mainly upon the accounts of the foreign travellers. Besides, some information has been taken from Persian chronicles as well as
contemporary vernacular literature like Hindi. A good number of modern works, articles in various journals, gazetteers have also been utilized. Here, the researcher mainly discusses about some very notable educated Hindu ladies of the 16th and 17th centuries. These ladies were Chandravati, Madhvi Dasi, Mira Bai and Rupmati. Chandravati was the daughter of celebrated poet of Mansacult, Dwija Vamsidasa. Her life was tragic one. She started writing the Ramayana in Bengali, which remained incomplete due to her sudden death. Madhvi Dasi belonged to Orissa and when Chaitanaya Mahaprabhu came to Puri, she became his disciple. Mira Bai was the eminent poetess of Krishana cult. She belonged to royal Rajput family but after the death of her husband, she devoted herself fully to Lord Krishna. Her Bhajan was very familiar to the Indians. Rupmati was the beloved wife of Baz Bahadur, the ruler of Malwa. She was expert in dance, music and poetry. She bravely died for the sake of her chastity.

**EDUCATION:** These unfortunate creatures had to put up with their parents who treated them no better than ordinary maids, doing all the menial jobs in the house, hated and despised even by their family. In the absence of formal schools in Ancient India, and lack of interest amongst rulers in educating the masses, education was imparted by the *Gurus* in their *Ashramas* by word of mouth. This was mostly in elegant poetry. Students, some of them women, memorized the teachings and sang them while seeking alms from door to door. This was the earliest version of extension education of women. In the earliest times at which government existed its sphere of interest seldom included the education of one and all of its citizens. 87

These traditional means of women's education faded away and became almost extinct when women were excluded from social and public life in the medieval period. The inevitable consequence was the rusting of their mental faculties and contraction of their mental horizons. Women became mere puppets in the hands of society which adversely affected the succeeding generations. Through cumulative degeneration, the society lapsed into a deep slumber of

87 Manindra Kapoor. *Women and Family Life Education in India* Jaipur. 1986, p 7
ignorance and inertia. Women have an important and unparalleled role to play in the nation’s development. The potential is there undoubtedly, but sadly, it has been not exploited. Manifestation of the potential within is possible only through education.

Muslim women in India had no reason to fear comparison with contemporary Muslim women in other parts of the world. A study of contemporary literature tells us much about the inner life and thoughts of the people and also of the state of learning, acquired by women who flourished in religious circles and courts of kings. Muslims never built any separate educational centers for their girls and she memorizes Quran may be exceptional.

Women must have been educated at home by their elderly and learned relations. Ratnawali, the wife of Puran Mal, possessed great poetic gifts. Mira Bai, one of the best representatives of Hindu culture, wrote Narayana Mora, Geeta Govind’s, Tika or contemporary Raj Govind, Mira Ke Pad and Garba Geet. Gulbadan Begum wrote the Humayun Nama. Malik Mohammad Jaisi had great praise for such type of women. He says: “Sati who burns for truth of her lord, if there is truth in her heart then the fire is cooled.”

Women have been regarded as the nuclei of a nation. Just as the body is made up of millions of cells controlled by their nuclei; a nation is made up of millions of families depending upon the women, house –wives and mothers for their progress and well –being. The health and growth of the body depends on the vitality of its cells; so also the health and growth of the nation depends on the vitality of its women. Throughout history, education has been a significant mechanism for shaping the populace in accordance with the views of state from Ancient period to modern period. The education of males and females trained them for different adult roles. Male education was often pointed towards men’s

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88 Ibid
89 Ibn Battuta, Rehla, p. 179
90 op., op., Gulbadan Begum, pp. 113, 120.
91 Malik Mohammad Jaisi, Padmavat, p. 112.
92 Ibid, p-1, Introduction.
public roles as administration, military and political leaders; girls were raised to be wives and mothers of outstanding men. Social and economic changes encouraged several strange-spirited women to push for higher education for women. Education was the most significant route to social mobility and alternative gender.

PARTICIPATION IN ADMINISTRATION AND POLITICS:- From Baburnamah, it appears that during the reign of Babur ladies took active part in politics and administration. Ehsan Daulat Begum gave valuable help in the administration of Babur. She was a wise and farsighted lady. Babur’s mother, Qutlug Nigar Khanum always accompanied him in his war and his Shia wife Mahim Begum took active part in the administration. Bibi Mubarika, another wife of Babur, strengthened his hold in Afghanistan. During the reign of Humayun, Khanzada Begum held on an important position in the Harem and she was given the title of Badshah Begum. In the complicated family matters she was consulted by Humayun, who had a great faith in her. Gulbadar Begum took keen interest in the political affairs and had much influence of Humayun and his brothers. Humayun always addressed her as ‘Dearest lady’. Haram Begum, wife of Humayun’s cousin Sulaiman Mirza, also took keen interest in administration. She helped Humayun in his Balkh expedition by collecting a strong army. She also encouraged by collecting a strong army. She also encouraged her husband Mirza Sulaiman to make an attempt to capture the fort of Kabul in 1556 A.D. She showed dexterity and skill in the administration of the Kingdom and in the management of the army. It appears from contemporary sources that there were several instances when ladies acted as mediators and they were successful in settling the disputes. Jahangir, who had been for years in rebellion against his father, was forgiven on the intervention of Salima Begum.

93 Ibid, p.136
95 Ibid., p 375
96 G H N (Bev Trans), p 103
98 G. H. N. (Bev Trans), p 195.
Rani Karmavati, wife of Rana Sanga also played a vital role in the politics during the reign of Humayun. When Bahadur Shah of Gujrat threatened an invasion of Mewar, the political situation became worse.

In medieval times, painting as a profession, appears to have been a male domain, since only a few women painters are known to have worked at the Mughal atelier. The descriptions given on the Mughal miniatures reveal their names, Viz. Nzdira Bano, Daughter of Mir taqi and pupil of Aga Riza (the well known painter in the services of prince Salim during Akbar's reign), Ruqai Bano and Sahifa Bano. However, the style of their work established their affiliation with Jahangir's studies.

Rani Karmavati who had tact, ability and political foresight, sent a Bracelet (Rakhi) to Humayun and appealed for help but she could not get any substantial help from him. In the second attack of Chittor in 1535 AD by Bahadurshah, she performed Jauhar as she could not protect the fort. Bahadurshah captured the fort on March 8, 1535 AD. The vital role of Rani Karmavati in the politics of Mewar proves her ability and interest in politics.

In the reign of Akbar, Mahchuchak Begum (a step mother of Akbar) took active part in the political affairs of Kabul, Mahamanaga, the chief nurse of Akbar, controlled the affairs of the state for full four years 1560-64 by Sheer audacity and cleverness. According to Dr. R.P. Tripathi, she wished to retain powers either in her own hands or in collaboration with her relatives, and Akbar did not like it. We find that in 1561 AD, Akbar appointed Shamshuddin Atka Khan as the Prime Minister and when he took the management of the political, financial and military affairs, she became displeased. It is said that her aim was the ruin of Bairam Khan and promotion of her son's interest. But the facts reflected in the Persian sources do not support this contention. Bairam Khan was
not punished; nor did Adam Khan gain any favour. It seems that Akbar was not
under her influence and was using her as his instrument.

Apart from the Harem, the Hindu women Rani Durgavati the Chandel
Princess of Gondwana, famous for her beauty and accomplishments,\textsuperscript{104}
governed her country with great courage.\textsuperscript{105} V. A. Smith writes that her country
was better administered and more prosperous than that of Akbar the Great.\textsuperscript{106}
She was not ready to submit her authority to Emperor Akbar. She fought bravely
when the eminent general of Akbar was ordered to invade Garha.\textsuperscript{107} She was
wounded in the battle and she then fought to die with honour than to live in
disgrace. So she stabbed herself and thus she died in honour. Chandbibi’s
name also shines brilliantly in the annals of Ahmednagar. She played an active
role in the administration of Ahmednagar.

Another lady of this period was Bakhtunnisa Begum, half sister of Akbar,
who was appointed to the (governor) government of Kabul. She helped Akbar in
solving the problem of Abdhulla Khan Vibek. Miriam Makani, Akbar’s mother
and Salima Sultan Begum, his wife, also played important roles in political
matters. Makhduma-u-Jahan ruled the Deccan very ably as a regent on behalf
of Nizam Shah of the Bahmani family.\textsuperscript{108} Sahibji, the daughter of Ali Mardan,
was a clever and able lady. She was the actual governor of Kabul during her
husband’s vice-royalty. She displayed her great administrative qualities after the
death of the husband, by ruling over the turbulent Afghans without allowing any
serious opposition.\textsuperscript{109}

During the first year of the reign of Jahangir, his step mother Salima
Sultan Begum, with some other ladies of the harem, played a very significant
role in contemporary politics in 1606 AD. Khusru, the eldest son of Jahangir who
had revolted, was given pardon by the pressure of Salima Sultan Begum.\textsuperscript{110}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[105] op., cit. Akbarnamah, II, pp. 208-214.
\item[106] op., cit. Akbar the Great Mughal, pp. 69-70.
\item[107] Ibid, p. 50.
\item[109] Sarkar, Studies in Mughal India, pp. 114-117.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Nurjhan personally looked after the affairs of the state and was the real power behind the throne of Jahangir. Jahangir reposed great confidence in her. She was a very ambitious lady and wanted to have power in her own hands.¹¹¹ Beni Prasad writes that Nurjahan formed a Junta (clique) of her close relatives including her father Itimad-ut-Daula, her mother Asmat Begum and her brother Asaf Khan and it is worthwhile to mention that through the help of this junta she exercised her influence by giving important places to her relatives. When in power, she ruled everything, when out of power she abstained, religiously, from all active life. Such was her nature.¹¹²

The foreign travellers, namely Pelsaert, Terry, Peter Mundy and Thomas Roe have mentioned about the existence of Nurjahan’s Junta in the court. But no reference of this Junta is forthcoming in the contemporary Persian works.¹¹³ Commenting on it, R. P. Tripathi says, “Whatever influence Nurjahan exercised over Jahangir was of a purely personal nature, based possibly on her emotions and her devotion to him.”¹¹⁴

In the reign of Shahjahan, Mumtaz Mahal occupied the premier position in the Harem and the Emperor, usually, consulted her on private and state affairs.¹¹⁵ When she died in 1631 AD Jahanara Begum, the eldest daughter of Shahjahan, took keen interest in politics. When Aurangzeb was bent upon annexing the Kingdom of Qutub Shah, the latter wrote letters to Jahanara Begum and Dara Shukoh. Jahanara and Dara Shukoh intervened in this issue and Qutubshah was pardoned. After paying indemnity, Qutubshah secured peace.¹¹⁶ From Waqiat-I-Alamgiri, it appears that Jahanara Begum favoured Dara Shukoh in the war of succession. Before the battle of Samugarh started on 23rd May 1658 AD, she wrote a letter to Aurangzeb asking him to give up the evil designs and obey his father.¹¹⁷ Raushanara Begum, the second daughter of

¹¹² P.N. Chopra, Some Aspects of Society and Culture During the Mughal Age, p. 125.
¹¹³ Tawarikh-I-Jahangir Shahi and Fathehnama-I-Nurjahan are Persian works.
¹¹⁴ Rise and Fall of the Mughal Empire, p. 422.
¹¹⁷ Agil Khan Razi, Waqat-I-Alamgiri, pp. 16-17.
Shahjahan, helped Aurangzeb in his plan of snatching the crown from the hands of his father.118 And when Aurangzeb took up arms in order to occupy the throne of Delhi, she placed at his disposal all gold and silver available to her.119 She was given a reward of five lakhs of rupees and the title of Shah Begum in 1669 AD.

The two wives of Aurangzeb, Dilras Banu Begum and Udaipuri Mahal were active and ambitious ladies in the reign. But it seems that Aurangzeb did not allow his wife to take active art in politics. However, it appears that Udaipur Mahal continued to influence Aurangzeb till his death and it was the result of her influence that he pardoned many faults of his son Kambaksh.120 Aurangzeb’s sister also took active interest in the affairs of the state. Raushanara Begum had helped him in the war of succession and when Aurangzeb fell ill in May 1662 AD, she began to look after the affairs of the state. The other sister of Aurangzeb, Jahanara Begum also played considerable part when the Maratha conqueror Shivaji paid a visit to Agra121 in the year 1666 AD. It appears that the daughters of Aurangzeb, Zebunnisa Begum and Padshan Begum took active interest in the political matters. It is a fact that when Mohammad Akhtar the younger brother of Zebunnisa raised the standard of revolt, she actively helped him.

Another lady who played an active role in the reign of Aurangzeb was Sahibji, wife of Amir Khan who was appointed Governor of Kabul in 1678 AD.122 She had a good grasp of the current politics.123 We find that the Maratha as well as Rajput ladies played a decisive role in the administrative affairs and proved their administrative enthusiasm. The Maratha King Raja Ram’s widow, Tara Bai, became the supreme guiding force in Maharashtra,124 “She displayed such marvelous capacity and administrative ability in encountering the Mughal onslaught that threatened to engulf the Maratha state that all the efforts of the

118 Rekha Mishra, Women in Medieval India, p. 35.
120 Alamgirnamah, p. 368.
124 Ibid, p.244
Emperor Aurangzeb failed miserably. The Rajput women of noble families were trained as soldiers and they often displayed great bravery, courage and heroism. The valiant Durgavati fought and won many battles against BazBahadur and the Minas. Chandbibi, a famous Muslim heroine personality, defended the fort of Ahmednagar against the mighty forces of Akbar. Nurjahan gave ample proof of her martial capabilities in leading an attack against Mohabat Khan. These examples are enough to show that ladies in the medieval India could defend themselves and their country.

WOMEN’S INTEREST IN PILGRIMAGES: We find that some of the ladies devoted themselves to religious pursuits. They spent their time in the service of God, in prayers (Namaz) and reading the holy (Quran). Jahanara Begum spent much of her time in religious pursuits and devotion to God. A reference in Humayaunama of Gulbadan Begum shows that Sultanam the wife of Nizamuddin Ali Khalifa Barlas, visited Mecca along with Gulbarag Begum. The wife of Humayun was allowed to go on pilgrimage to the holy places and Akbar arranged it by providing all necessities. Akbar again made arrangements in the year 1575 AD, when Gulbadan Begum, along with many other ladies, went on a pilgrimage of the holy places.

GRANT OF TITLES AND PARGANAS: The prestige of the ladies who belonged to royalty was enhanced by giving titles to them. The title of Mariam Makani was given to the mother of Akbar. Jahangir’s mother was known as Maryamus Zamani. The mother of Shahjahan was given the title of Bilqis Makani. The popular title of Nurmahal (the light of the palace) and Nurjahan (the light of the world) was enjoyed by Mehrunnisa. Mumtaz Mahal, the wife of Shahjahan was

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125 Khafi Khan, II, pp. 469, 516.
126 op., cit., Akbarnamah, II, p. 325.
127 Ferishta Ill, p. 312.
128 Iqbalnama, pp. 262-63.
given the title of *Malika-I-Jahan*. Jahanara enjoyed the title of *Padshah Begum*. According to Manucci, she was usually known as *Begum Saheb*.\(^{133}\)

Babur was first Mughal sovereign who started granting *Parganas* to the ladies of the Mughal Harem. Jahangir also granted land to the ladies. Nurjahan enjoyed a number of *Jagirs*.\(^{134}\) Shahjahan also sanctioned grants and allowances to the ladies of the royalty. Thus it appears that the Mughal emperors treated their ladies with utmost regard.

**VOLUNTARY ROLES OF WOMEN:** Upper class women enact clear cut gender roles that often differ, dramatically, from those of their middle and working class sisters. Some sociologists argue that upper class women’s gender roles involve setting styles and acting as arbiters of culture. Through their activities with charity balls and other cultural\(^{135}\) social events, upper class women influence the taste and behavior of their middle class sisters, particularly, for whom they commonly serve as role models.\(^{136}\)

According to European travellers: Nurmahall as a pattern of all the virtues, and worthy to wield the supreme influence which she obtained over the emperor. “By degrees,” says Muhammad Hadi, the continuer of Jahangir’s memories, “she became, except in name, undisputed Bovereign of the empire, and the king himself became a tool in her hands. He used to say that Nur –Jahan Begum has been selected, and is wise enough, to conduct the matters of state. Nur –Jahan won golden opinions from all people. She was liberal and just to all who begged her support. She was an asylum for all sufferers, and helpless girls were married at the expense of her private purse. She must have portioned about five hundred girls in her life time, and thousands were grateful for her generosity.”\(^{137}\)

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133 op. cit., *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*, Rogges of Beveridge Trans., vol. I, p. 76
135 Ibid, p -129
136 Ibid, p -130
137 Stanley Lane Poole, *The Mughal Emperor of Hindustan*, Sarvadeshir Prakashan, Delhi – N.D. p -XIX
The most basic division of labour appears to be founded on Gender. Some jobs are considered suited to men hunting, mining, Combating, protecting etc. and some to women childbearing and rearing, cooking, cleaning, and home making, in all societies. Although, Anthropologists like Murdock and Tiger and Sociologists like Parsons, believed this sexual division of labour and inequality of sexes to be neutral, due to biological and genetic differences between men and women.138

Most women who are only housewives do a lot of economically productive work in the sense that if they didn’t do it, money would have to be paid to get it done; but their work is not recognized as no money is generated directly. Unless their feminine jobs, which require lots of manual effort as well as various types of skill are recognized as useful, productive work, women’s status will not improve. These jobs include cooking, cleaning, childcare, upbringing and primary education of children, moral and cultural training, nursing, interior decoration, home economics and above all providing a healthy, happy, emotionally secure atmosphere to the family members.

Thus, the traditional role of women is as important as of Men. In contemporary Indian society, the number of working women increased, becoming economically independent and more self confident. While a majority of them are successfully handling their dual roles with help from family members, even constitution of India which promised liberty equality, fraternity and justice to all the citizens of India, regardless or religion, caste class or gender. Women have come a long way, making rapid strides in various fields, even domains previously identified as ‘male bastion.

At the same time, it is being increasingly realized that sound human development necessitates a condition of gender equality; a society where women are empowered have the freedom to make their own choices. This

138 Zainab Rahman, Women And Society, Delhi -2005, P -38
necessitates a look into the status of women, which is the focus of the present work. If educated and bold women too began to raise a demand for equal rights, although in the initial years such demands focused primarily on women's equal rights to acquire an education. If women are denied the right to be borne, they are subjected to the crudest forms of violence and sexual slavery; their voices remain excluded from decision making, in policies and plans which impact them. Moreover, women in medieval India may work from dawn to dusk, but their economic contribution is scarcely acknowledged at the national level and their access to health, education and other facilities lags behind that of men.

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