

Status of Women in Mughal Period: A Historical Perspective

Asfia Khatun

M.A (Political Science), Department of Political Science, Presidency University, Kolkata, West Bengal, India

ABSTRACT:

Women along with man, from time immemorial, has formed an integral part of social structure. Her role in the various walks of life has contributed to the evolution of values which have counted for, what may be described, all round progress. Her status is the measuring yard for assessing the standard of culture of any age. This article examines the right and status of women during Mughal Period in India. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Indian society was characterized by patriarchal norms and gender-based disparities, with women facing numerous challenges and limited opportunities. Dependence of women on their husbands or other male relatives was a prominent feature of this period. Females were expected to remain in seclusion and modesty. The status of women in medieval period was not that progressive. The key cause of this was, there was prevalence of male dominance. The women lack in various aspect of day to day live. They were not allowed to express their ideas and views. Women were dedicated towards the implementation of household responsibilities. In addition, they were overwhelmed by the practices of polygamy, sati, child marriage, and female infanticide. However, amidst these constraints, some remarkable women emerged as influential figures in politics, cultural patronage, and economic activities. Their contributions and resilience continue to inspire and shape the narrative of women's roles and empowerment in history. Improvements came about in their conditions with the advent of Islam and they were given rights.

KEYWORDS: Mughal period, Islam, Hindu, pardah system, dower, divorce,

INTRODUCTION:

Women's in ancient India wielded considerable influence in society and played a significant role in the development of social, cultural and philosophical values and trends; and held a respectable position in the society. Ever since the days of the famous Indian law-giver Manu, Hindu Law has assigned to women a dependent, but by no means, a dishonourable status in society. As a girl, she was under the tutelage of her parents, as an adult, of her husband, and as a widow, of her sons.' In religious matters women enjoyed status equal to that of men. They must be honoured by their family member's desire welfare. Women in India in the pre-Muslim period, although dependent upon and protected by men enjoyed in theory as well as to a considerable extent in practice, a honourable status in society. With the advent of Mughals in India, the position of women underwent many moderates changes, as they brought with them many Islamic ideas and practices in favour of women. The muslim gave their ladies a more respectable position by enforcing the system of pardah, and thus safeguard the honour of their ladies by regularizing the customary dower and property rights,, the economic position of muslim women was tried to be leveled by

recommending the marriage of widows and raising their position, the muslim rulers had contributed for the upliftment of women.

The improvement of women's status was also visible in the royal sultanate rule and later to a greater extent, under the Mughals. Women living in the royal courts were allowed to receive education and also women were given a chance to prove themselves in different fields. They even took part in the administration of the country. Among the women that made their mark in the Delhi Sultanate, the name Raziya Sultana stands out even today. Raziya Sultana was the only woman to sit on the throne of Delhi. Despite much opposition to her gender, she was able to ascend to the throne and rule the Delhi Sultanate for four years (1236–1240 CE) before being deposed and later murdered. Her four short years were very valuable as she gave a lot of patronage to poets and authors and campaigned for equal rights for women. She was heartily focus on women education and also writes many verses in Persian literature.

POSITION OF WOMEN:

Pardah system: With the advent of Islam, new forces appeared on the Indian horizon. strict veiling of women was the common practice among the Muslim in their native. In islam women are considered as precious so they should absorb Pardah and cover themselves in a way so as not to attract the male passers. Pardah system was also existed among Hindus long before the advent of the muslims. Seclusion thus became a sign of respect and was strictly observed among the high-class families of both communities. But like Razia Sultan, Empress Nurjahan also broke the Pardah convention, and showed her extraordinary personality in the public. She also appeared in the public. However care was taken to veil the face upon the lips.

Widows: Divorce and remarriage, common among Muslims, were prohibited for Hindu women. Widow remarriage, except amongst the lower caste people, had completely disappeared in Hindu society during the medieval age. The custom of sati was prevalent. Even betrothed girls had to commit sati was prevalent. Even betrothed girl had to commit sati on the funeral pyres of their would-be-husbands. Those widows who would not burn themselves with their husbands were treated harshly.

Sati: among the Hindus one of the disastrous thing is the death of the husbands in the life of the women. Sati was prevalent in the Indian society before the advent of the Mughals. It was the custom among Hindus that after the death of the husband the widow women had to burn themselves along with their husbands. This practice were discouraged by the Mughal emperors and adopted measures to prevent it as far as possible but did not succeed. Muhammad Tughluq was, in all probability, the first medieval ruler who place restrictions on its observance. Though Akbar did not forbid the sati altogether, he had issued definite orders to the kotwals that they should not allow a woman to be burnt against her inclination. Aurangzeb was the only Mughal who issued definite orders (1664) for bidding sati in his realm altogether.

EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN:

Concept of Mahr or dower: In the holy Qur'an four different words are mentioned: Ajr (reward), Saduqa (marriage gift), Farida (legal obligation), Nihla (graciously) are used to defined the concept of mahr at the marriage in Islam. In the literal sense, the Arabic term 'mahr' means dower. It is the sum of money that becomes payable by the husband to the wife on marriage. The mahr is executed either by agreement

between the parties or by operation of law. In other words dower is an obligatory bridal gift or reward offered by the groom to the women graciously with kindness. The word mahr is not used in the Quran at all. However the term mahr is equated with above mentioned Quranic terms. Also the Quran does not mentioned the minimum and maximum amount of dower to be paid to the bride, but it does suggest that those who divorce their wives should grant them a fair provision according to one's ability (2:237). So it could imply that those men who want to get into wedlock should provide the bride wealth based on their richness. The subject matter of gift can be money or any other thing having value, without a higher limit, depending upon the acceptance of the wife. Upon the object or property given as mahr, the ownership lies exclusively with the wife. There are two things that are evident from the hadith of shahi al bukhari and shahi Muslim :-

1. The bridal gift to bride is an obligatory
2. Husbands have to offer the gift according to his ability and there is no minimum or maximum fixed amount of dower.

According to Muslim personal law, the wife can claim for dower on the dissolution of her marriage and the amount can be very high or low. In many cases it was found that the husband was having sufficient income but the amount of dower was very less that it was impossible for the wife to maintain herself from such low amount, therefore legislature was given full power to make laws and the courts will not be bound to award the amount of dower which was mentioned in the marriage deed. Section 5 of the Oudh laws act, 1876 provided that the court will award the amount of dower which is reasonable according to the income of husband and iddat of the wife and not according to the amount mentioned in the marriage deed. During Mughal age like today the amount of dower was fixed by mutual agreement of the couple concerned, but in practice the guardian considered it their duty to settle the amount and the couple were informed of it for getting their final consent, and it was communicated to the religions heads (Qazi) prior to reciting (Nikah). So the grant of absolute ownership of the mahr to the wife manifests the revolutionary measure adopted by Islam to vest women with property rights and to ensure them an equitable marital status. Having being so prescribed, it brings the maraging women, who had been ever deprived of such status throughout history, to an equal legal position with men in concluding the marital tie and after.

Divorce: the system of divorce was prevalent in muslim society, but was looked upon with extreme disapproval by wise and honourable persons. No doubt, divorce is lawful in Islam but disliked by God and allowed only under stringent conditions as a last resort. In case of differences between husband and wife, islam strictly laid stress that every effort should be made by both the parties to smooth out differences and at reconciliation and the conjugal disputes must be settled by means of arneters. Divorce is lawful in islam because marriage is regarded as civil contract, rather than a sacrament of divine origin, and so the nuptial tie may be served. In connection with divorce it is worth mentioning that the wofe was also entitled to demand a separation on the ground of ill usage, than with holding of due an dproper means of maintenance and certain other causes. In such cases an agreement entered into for the ourouse of dissolving marriage was know as "Khuld" as was prevalent during the wife had to give back her dower or any other addition sum proposed by the husband. But this type of divorce was also subject to willingness of the husband to grant her a divorce.

Education: Education in Muslim India was not confined to men only. During the Mughal period women's education, both among Hindus and Muslim was considered less important than the male education. It is a

fact that there was no separate education system for girls rather all educational institutions (Madrasas) were meant for boys. Women, owing to the pardah system could not attend public institutions. Therefore, education amongst women class was not so common. Since the small girls did not observe pardah (Seclusion), therefore, they sat with boys in elementary schools. Their education mainly consisted reading the Quran and learning the basic concepts of Islam. Most of the girls would attend Maktab as it was customary, that Imam of the nearby mosque would give time to the children for teaching Quran. Still there were persons who looked after the intellectual welfare of the fair sex.

Property rights enjoyed by women: In respect of the partition of the ancestral property or the property of the father among his children, the Muslim women received a good treatment as compared with the Hindus. Islamic law of inheritance women recognizes the right of daughter, but an equal share as male members. Daughters share was being half that of son. On the other hand, in Hindus religion girls do not inherit father's property except if unmarried daughters inherit father's property except if unmarried daughter inherit who gets a forth share of a son which was to be spent on her marriage and her dowry.

CONCLUSION:

Women in Medieval India wielded a considerable influence in society and played a significant role in the development of social, cultural and philosophical values and trends and held a respectable position in society. A change in the status of women came as a sequel to the advent of the Mughals in India. There had been a growing emphasis on the social, economic, political and cultural life of women in general, as well as that on royal women of the Mughal period. In Mughal India the women's participation in politics and their position depended on their personal ability rather than their blood relations, like Maham Anaga, who played an important role and exercised an unbounded influence in the harem and over Akbar himself. The contribution and the interference of the women of ruling class in contemporary politics reflects the position of women. The senior Mughal women are recorded ubiquitously as having played a central part in the affairs of peace- making. In some cases, they were even handed over the charge of the government. Apart from the Muslim women and the ladies of the Mughal harem, the Hindu women also played a significant role in the history of politics of Mughal India. Sometimes women ruled the kingdom of exercising the real authority and even possessed a large and well-equipped army under them. All this portrays that sometimes women in Mughal India attained high power and status. The conditions of women in both social-economic and political-religious spheres fluctuated, keeping pace with the different regimes; however, women showcased their excellence in various fields and proved that they are no longer unfit to access the areas acquired by men. Patriarchy never gave space for all round development of women.

REFERENCES:

1. Altekar, A.L. position of women in Hindu Civilisation. Banaras, 1938.
2. Ansari, Muhammad Azhar, 'The Harem of the Great Mughals', IC, 34, January, 1960
3. Majumdar, R. C , The History and Culture of the Indian People: The Mughal Empire, Bombay, 1974
4. Begum, Gulbadan Bano, Humayun Noma, ed., A. S. Beveridge, Tashkant, 1959; eng. tr., A. S. Beveridge, Low Price Publication, New Delhi, 1989 [reprint] Edward, S. Holdon, Mughal Emperors of Hindustan A.D. 1398-1707, Delhi
5. The Holy Qur'an
6. Islamic culture. Hyderabad, vol. XI, 1937; vol, XXX,1956



7. women in Mughal India, Rekha Mishra, page-139.