

**SOCIAL STATUS OF WOMEN IN MUGHAL RAJ**

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**Abstract**

It is a well-known fact that women throughout the Middle Ages held a variety of occupations and responsibilities within their communities. The Middle Ages were a time in European history that lasted roughly from the fifth century to the fifteenth century. During this time period, women performed a variety of roles, including those of wife, mother, peasant, craftsman, and nun. They also held key leadership positions, such as queen regnant. During the time period known as the Middle Ages, the idea of 'woman' was interpreted in a variety of different ways. During the mediaeval era in European history, the position of women underwent a dramatic shift due to the combined effects of a number of different factors. It is clear from the enormous roles that women played throughout this Age that they emerged as a powerful force across all areas of life during this time period. This is evidenced by the fact that this Age is known as the Bronze Age.

**Keywords:** *Women, Mughal Raj***INTRODUCTION**

Around the year 1500 B.C., there was a discernible shift in the position of women owing to a variety of factors. The restriction of women's access to education was one of the most significant of these factors. The end of the paranoid period was marked by a significant shift in the role that Hindu women played, and during this time, the idea began to gain traction that the role and activity of women had to be restricted to the fundamental tenets of the Hindu way of life. This concept has since gained widespread acceptance. When this was happening, the current was flowing in a number of different ways. The males desired to establish their domination over the Hindu women and have them serve as their subordinates. They were not given the opportunity to make their own decisions, and instead became the means by which Hindu males achieved their goals. The ladies were unable to regain their former rank and grandeur. They gave the impression that they were subservient to the whims of the males. The doctrine of pind-dan, which encompasses the ideas of dual life and the rhythm of the cycle of birth, death, and reincarnation, is responsible for placing Hindu women in a position of subservience. Whatever benefits they obtained during the Vedic time, they have now started to lose them now. The women grow dependant on males. The marriage also diminished the individual value of both parties. It was unable to establish a stable foothold in the ever-shifting landscape of Hindu life. The duties of a Hindu woman in a marital relationship eventually came to be limited to those of the homemaker and the mother of the child. The girl was eventually rejected by the society of the time. The daughter's stance ultimately evolved as a result of the passage of time. During this time period, there was a slow but steady drop in the amount of schooling that was available to women. Girls were only allowed to be educated by close male relatives, such as their fathers, brothers, or uncles, as they were not permitted to enter the homes of the preceptors or the educational institutes. Because of this, the only females who got religion and other forms of schooling were the daughters of wealthy and sophisticated

households. As a direct consequence of this, there emerged a trend toward restricting the rights and privileges of women in general, particularly with regard to their religious practises. The desire to have a boy in order to secure the family's financial future became very strong, and having a daughter started to be seen as a burden. As a result, the average age at which women were married remained about 16 years old. They were able to contribute in some way to the decision of who would become their life companions. A significant number of couples wed for love. Swayamvara was an institution that was widely upheld and practised by Kshatriyas. During the post-Vedic era, the daughter's social and family position declined, which led to more difficult life circumstances. Additionally, her ownership right was exactly the same as it was throughout the Vedic period. Even with regard to her right in the father's separate property, she was not wholly ignored. This was the case even though she was the mother of the child.



**Fig. 1 Mughal painting**

### **STATUS OF WOMEN UNDER MUGHAL PERIOD**

The arrival of the Mughals in India brought with them a number of Islamic concepts and practises that were favourable to women. As a result, the position of women underwent a number of mild modifications throughout this time. As a result, the honour of their ladies was protected by regularising the customary dower and property rights. Furthermore, the economic position of Muslim ladies was attempted to be levelled by recommending the marriage of widows and raising their position. Finally, the Muslim rulers had contributed to the advancement of women's rights and had made purdah an obligatory practise for women.

## **Dower or Mehar**

Dower, also known as mehar, is traditionally seen as an indispensable component of a Muslim marriage; without it, the union will not be recognised as legitimate under Islamic law. <sup>2</sup> The system of giving Mehar (dower) is an ancient custom that can be traced back to the pre-Islamic days in Arabia, when a price for a bride was paid at the time of marriage. By "dower," we mean a certain sum of money paid by the bridegroom to the bride immediately after "Nikah." Dower is also known as "dower money." The amount of the dower was determined during the Mughal era, just as it is today, by the mutual agreement of the couple that was getting married; however, in practise, the guardian considered it their duty to settle the amount; the couple was informed of it for the purpose of obtaining their final consent, and it was communicated to the religious heads (Qazi) before the Nikah was recited. Insofar as the determination of the amount of dower is concerned, Islam has not specified any limit on this account. The sole objective is to make the wife economically and financially sound so that she does not find herself helpless as compared to her husband and so that she feels confident enough to defend her right. On the other hand, Islam mandates that the amount of the dower should be proportional to the bridegroom's wealth<sup>3</sup> when it comes to marriages. It is essential to point out that although while high dower was favoured, most individuals were unable to pay the enormous quantity of money that was determined, either at the time of the nikah or afterward. This was the case both before and after the nikah. It has been common practise to not pay the dower, and as a result, it has functioned similarly to an obligation that is due immediately. As a result, the dower has always been owed, and the wife's entitlement to it has never been lost to the passage of time. <sup>4</sup> They typically settled dowers in a reasonable manner that was appropriate to the means of the bridegroom. This is because high dowers were not possible to establish among impoverished Muslims because of their weak financial condition. Regarding low dower, Islam does not offer a measuring yard; as a result, there is permission to take even lower dower; nonetheless, its minimum is never less than ten dhirmas. However, the maximum is never more than twenty dhirmas.

## **Divorce**

The practise of divorce was common in Muslim society, despite the fact that it was looked upon with tremendous disdain by those who were intelligent and honourable. Divorce is, without a doubt, permitted under Islamic law; nonetheless, God frowns upon it, and Muslims are only permitted to practise it in extreme circumstances and as a last resort. In the event that a husband and wife have disagreements, Islam places a strong emphasis on the fact that both parties should make every attempt to reconcile their differences and that marital disputes should be handled via the use of arbiters. The verse "And if ye fear even a breach between them (husband and wife), then send ye a judge chosen from his family, and a judge chosen from her family, that peace be maintained" can be found in the Quran. However, if the disagreements become severe and all attempts at reconciliation fail, then the final separation is allowed by divorce. The Islamic belief that marriage is a civil contract rather than a sacrament of divine origin paves the way for the dissolution of the nuptial tie, which leads to the legalisation of divorce in Islam. In the context of the divorce, it is important to note that the wife had the legal right to demand a separation on the grounds of ill usage, rather than with holding of due and proper means of maintenance and certain other causes. This right should be mentioned because it is relevant to the topic at hand. In these circumstances, the agreement that was made for the purpose of ending the marriage was referred to as a "Khuld," and it was common practise during that time that the wife was required to return her dower or Mahar as well as any other additional payment that was proposed by the husband. However, with this kind of divorce, it was also dependent on whether or not the husband was prepared to grant the wife a divorce.

## **Purdah System**

According to the Holy Quran, women should not leave their houses unless absolutely necessary. If they are need to leave their homes, however, they are required to observe purdah by dressing modestly and behaving in a way that does not draw the attention of male onlookers. Seclusion of women may be traced back to all ancient cultures, and it was particularly prevalent among the elite during the palmx days of Hindu civilisation in India. The Purdah system was in place in India among the Hindus for a very long time before the arrival of the Muslim religion. During the time of the Mughal Empire, purdah was primarily practised by all classes of Muslim women, with few minor exceptions. According to Hamilton's account, Mohammedan women were required to wear veils whenever they travelled outside of their own country. Eight members of society's highest class scrupulously practised purdah, to the point that no one could even see the toes of their covered feet. In point of fact, purdah grew to be seen as a benchmark of respectability among more upper-class individuals. However, the Empress Nurjahan did not adhere to the purdah standard and displayed her outstanding personality in public. This was in contrast to Razia Sultan. She made public appearances on state occasions, and she always insisted on seeing with her own eyes the things and the people whose circumstances and whose affairs she was called upon to govern and manage. She did this by going to the places where those things and those people were located. On the other hand, much attention was paid to concealing the face upon the lips. When the respectable ladies of the higher portion needed to go around, they were transported in vehicles known as "Dolis," which were accompanied by men. Purdah was also carefully observed by the ladies of the middle class, and they always came abroad dressed in 'Chadaf and Burquas,' which are long clothes that cover the wearer's head, body, and legs down to the ankles.

## **Widows Position**

During the whole time that the Mughal Empire existed, Muslim widows held a respected place in society. Because Islam holds a more compassionate and liberal perspective towards widows, unlike Hinduism, they are permitted to attend and enjoy festivals of betrothal, Nikah, and birth ceremonies. This is because Islam grants widows permission to enjoy the fruits of life and allows them to participate in festivals. The only restriction that was placed on her following the death of her husband was that she had to rigorously observe the time of Iddaf, which lasted for four months and ten days. She was not allowed to leave the house until it was very necessary, and even then, she had to wear a veil and go out during the day. She was not allowed to leave the house at all unless it was absolutely necessary.

In the event that she became pregnant, she was required to adhere to the Islamic regulations of Iddat right up to the moment she gave birth to her child. During the Mughal era, it was a significant aspect of Muslim society that educated women who had lost their husbands were given respectable roles in society. They provided educational opportunities for the imamates of the royal harem as well as the families of the nobles. They were treated with reverence by the affluent elite, which honoured them by employing them as the daughters' and sisters' teachers. Her children, who thought that the paradise lay at their mother's feet and always obeyed her and took care of her, regarded a widow in her family with more respect than they had in the past. In order to be a good wife, a woman had to obey her husband's mother and win over the other members of her husband's family by providing devoted devotion. However, in most cases, over the course of time, the woman earned the right to exercise autonomy over the management of the home. Even Muslim wives were required to maintain a respectful relationship with their mothers-in-law; failure to do so may result in the breakdown of the marriage. The ladies who chose to follow the family method were shown a high level of respect by their relatives as well as their neighbours; nevertheless, when it came time for them to actually give birth, they were not touched by anyone other than the midwife. The wives were in a

submissive position not just in respect to their husbands but also to their children. Even though he frequently sought his wife's advice and input on a variety of issues, the final decision-making authority in the majority of situations was delegated to the husband. There was no way to carry out any kind of social activity among Hindus without the presence of a woman, who was considered to be the more important half of a man. In a nutshell, despite the fact that wives were given a lesser status in comparison to their husbands, they were nevertheless shown respect and value.

During the mediaeval period, the standing of Hindu women, who were formerly accorded prideful positions and regarded on an equal footing with males, significantly deteriorated. The establishment of the *pardah* system was one of the direct consequences that resulted from the migration of Muslims to India. The *pardah*, also known as the veiling of women, was a common practise among Muslims and was later adopted by the women of Hinduism in response to the pressures of their society. The Hindus adopted the *pardah* as a protective measure to preserve the honour of their women folk and to keep their social order as pure as possible. The desire of Hindu households to mimic the practises of the ruling class was perhaps another factor that contributed to the widespread use of *pardah*.

It is important to note that the members of upper-class households in each of these communities were the ones that adhered to the *pardah* practise the most strictly. Women from higher castes were rarely seen outside of their homes. They travelled in covered palanquins whenever they were required to go outside. Even Muslim women who belonged to the middle class followed the *pardah*. On the other hand, Hindu women who belonged to middle or lower classes did not observe *pardah* and were free to go about without being restricted. Nevertheless, they wore *dopattas* over their heads when they went out in public. Women from low-income households who were required to assist their husbands and fathers in agricultural labour or other activities also did not observe the *pardah*.

The majority of Hindus adhered to the practise of monogamy; however, a small segment of the Hindu population, which was made up of princes and wealthy people, engaged in polygamy. The Hindus of the middle class married a second time only in the event that their first wife was unable to bear children or passed away. The Brahmins gave their approval before this was carried out as well. Monogamy was the most common form of marriage among Muslims, despite the fact that the Quran allows men to have up to four wives at the same time. Polygamy was practised only by wealthy Muslims who could afford to keep three or four wives at once. <sup>15</sup> In general, remarriage after widowhood was not permitted. According to Altacker, the ban on widows remarrying began to be enforced about the year 1000 A.D., and it extended to cover child widows as well. The practise was completely outlawed in Hindu culture around the year 1100 A.D. In the beginning of society, widows from higher castes were not permitted to remarry, although widows from lower castes were permitted to do so. <sup>16</sup> Due to Sanskritization and a desire to boost their respectability, the lower castes have, since the turn of the past century, begun to impose upon themselves the restriction of widow remarriage.

It is claimed that the practise of tonsuring widows first emerged about the eighth century A.D., when it was still common among many aristocratic classes. More recently, however, the practise has been eradicated. It is thought that the Brahmins adopted the practise of tonsuring widows as a result of the influence of Buddhism, which required Buddhist nuns to go through the process of tonsure in order to appear more like the monks. Henry Maine is of the opinion that superstitious beliefs, in conjunction with Brahmanical dislikes of the enjoyment of property by women, had led to the practise of *sati*. This practise was intended to fight the ancient rule of civil law, which made her a tenant for life in respect to her husband's property. Henry Maine's opinion can be found in his book "Superstitions and Beliefs." It is also thought that the habit came

into existence as a result of recurrent battles and foreign invasions, which left behind widows who decided to commit "Sati" rather than spend a life of humiliation or dishonour. This led to the spread of the practise. However, despite the fact that it began as a series of voluntary gestures, as time passed, several instances were documented in which widows were hurled against their will into the flames of the pyre and forced to throw themselves into the fire. During the time period of 1500–1800 A.D., the practise of "Sati" or "Jauhar" was also highly widespread as well as popular, notably among the Rajputs and Marathas of central India. "Sati" grew increasingly common among the royal families in northern India, and it was fairly common in Kashmir. According to Sankna and Angirasa, the enticement that was dangled in front of a Sati was the promise that if she died with her husband, she would live in paradise for 3.5 centuries after their deaths.

Several Muslim monarchs tried to put an end to the practise of sati by discouraging it and taking steps to eliminate it to the greatest extent feasible, but they were unsuccessful. Not only did this age bring to a decline in the quality of women's social lives and physical lives, but it also led to a progressive erosion of women's rights in the areas of education, society, religion, and the economy. The legal position of Hindu women with regard to inheritance right was also unsatisfactory. Under the doctrine of stridhan, they were gradually excluded from succession to property, which led to their dependence on men. The legal situation of Hindu women with regard to inheritance right was also unsatisfactory.

### **Muslim Society**

As a consequence of ongoing immigration from Muslim nations located in central and west Asia, the community of Muslims has managed to maintain the multiethnic makeup that it had developed over the course of the preceding centuries. In the north-western part of India, the Muslim immigrants of the pre-Mughal period lived side by side with the central Asians and Persians who invaded India during the reigns of Babur and his successors. These immigrants came to India from central Asia and the Persian Empire. The majority of the immigrants who settled in coastal areas were merchants who had come from Arabia and the Persian Gulf in their homeland. A number of Muslim communities of mixed origin had come into existence as a consequence of their regular or irregular unions with the local Hindus or converts. Some examples of these communities include the Navayats of western India, the Mappillas or Moplabar, and the Labbais of the Coromandel coast. In addition, there was a sizeable population of Muslims descended from Abyssinians, the vast majority of whose ancestors had been brought to the country as slaves. Because significant portions of Afghanistan were an essential component of the Mughal Empire, Afghans who currently reside in India cannot properly be categorised as immigrants due to this fact. In spite of their nominal unity under Islam, Muslims of different countries of origin had ethnic and theological distinctions that had an impact on politics and society.

The Turani people of Central Asia and the Afghans followed Sunni Islam, whereas the Persian people of Iran followed Shia Islam. These Muslims came from a variety of different countries, and there was a lot of competition between them for social and political advancement. Nevertheless, Muslims of non-Indian ancestry, when viewed as a separate group, made up the majority of the Mughal era's governing elite. This was especially true during the period of the Mughal emperors. On the basis of their birth, their ethnicity, and their culture, they asserted that they were superior than the Hindustani Muslims, which are Muslims who converted from Hinduism and their descendants. The vast majority of Muslims were descended from Hindus who had converted to Islam; nonetheless, they had a propensity to claim foreign heritage in order to gain political and social benefits. The vast majority of Muslims were descendants of Hindu converts.

They were accepted on equal terms in mosques during the Friday prayers and also on occasions of significant religious festivals, despite the fact that most Turanians and Iranians held a negative opinion of them in general. On the basis of race, there were no restrictions placed on the ability of two people to marry each other. It was possible for a Muslim of humble origins to climb the social ladder and become a member of the nobility if they were talented enough or were lucky enough. Internal mobility was far higher in the Muslim community than it was in the Hindu culture. In addition to racial and theological divisions, such as the conflict between Shias and Sunnis, there were also blatant socioeconomic disparities that existed within the Muslim culture. A work written in the sixteenth century in Persian mentions three classes: (a) the ruling class, which includes the imperial family, the nobility, and the army; (b) the intelligentsia, which includes theologians (ulema), judges (qazis), men of learning and men of letters; and the class that caters to pleasures, which includes the classification is obviously incomplete and unsatisfactory. For instance, it does not make the producing classes, such as peasants and craftsmen, who cultivated the foundation of the state and society, nor does it transform the lower levels of the official bureaucracy, who are comprised of minor officials, into the backbone of the state and society.

### **Hindu Society**

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, exclusiveness and conservatism were two opposing movements that emerged within Hindu culture. On the one hand, these developments were characterised by liberalism and catholicity, while on the other, they were characterised by exclusivity. There were certain Vaishnava and Tantric instructors who did accept, at least to some degree, the religious and social rights of women, as well as the rights of the Sudras. There are certain disciples of Chaitanya who are not members of the Brahmin caste who go on to become spiritual perceptors (gurus) for members of the Brahmin caste as well. In Maharashtra Tukaram, a Sudra, and in the Brahmins. villey Sankardev and Madhavdev, who were members of the Kayastha caste, were known to have Brahmin followers. However, the Brahmin authors of the Nibandhas attempted to uphold the purity of the ancient socioreligious order, known as Varnasrama dharma, by regulating the life and behaviour of all classes of Hindus down to the minutest of details, and ensuring that this was done in accordance with the rules of caste that had been practised for generations. Some of the authors of the Smriti nibandhas were supported by royal sponsors, which provided political validity for their injunctions. Keshava Pandit, one of them, served as a judge in the court of the Maratha King Sambhaji. However, there were notable authors such as Raghunandan and Ramnath of Bengal at that time. Pitambar of Kamrup and Kamalakar Bhatta of Maharashtra, whose authority was recognised by the Hindu society despite the fact that it was not supported by royal sponsorship, were two such individuals. Their authority was accepted by the Hindu community despite the fact that they did not have royal backing. Their influence was successful in preventing the liberal trends from spreading. They raised their voices in protest against the lower castes' attempt to seize the advantages traditionally held by the Brahmins.

### **Position Of Women**

Purdah System: New political and religious powers emerged on the horizon of Indian history with the arrival of Islam. The strict covering of women's faces with veils was a practise that was popular among Muslims in their own country. It was only natural that a larger emphasis would be placed on it in a foreign country such as India. As a preventative step, Hindus instituted a practise known as purdah. Another reason that worked in favour of the introduction of Purdah among Hindu families was the inclination of Hindu households to model their behaviour after that of the ruling elite. Because of this, reclusiveness came to be regarded as a mark of respect, and it was closely adhered to by the elite families of both societies. Barbosa has made reference to the fact that the ladies of Bengal observe Purdah in a very stringent manner. Purdah

was not practised by the south Indians, with a few noteworthy exceptions among Muslim families. Purdah was a practise that was solely observed by members of the royal family during the time of the Vijayanagar Empire. No such forced Purdah system was seen among the Hindu middle class, and most definitely not in the Hindu masses. This was evident among the Hindu middle class. Child Marriages: The culture of the time did not let young women to live with their families for more than six to eight years after they were born. This was because child marriages were common. Because of the inflexibility of the tradition and the fact that the wedding was held at such a young age, there was absolutely no opportunity for either the bride or the bridegroom to have any time to think about a spouse of their own choosing. Dowry was required, and in some castes and communities, the practise of paying the bride's family a bride price was also reported to be common.

**Monogamy:** During the mediaeval period, it appears that monogamy was the norm at the lowest levels of society in each of these cultures. Both communities practised polygamy. In spite of the fact that the ulema in the Ibadat Khana in Akbar's time had decided that a man could marry any number of wives by mutah but that only four wives could be married by nikah, Akbar had issued orders that a man of ordinary means should not possess more than one wife unless the first wife turned out to be infertile. Akbar's orders were very strict. The wealthy were the only ones allowed to practise polygamy.

**Position of Widows:** Hindu women were not permitted to get divorced or remarry, two practises that are popular among Muslims. During the mediaeval period, the practise of remarrying widows was largely eradicated from Hindu culture, with the exception of those belonging to lower castes. The practise of sati was widely practised. It was common practise for even females who were engaged to be forced to do sati. Even girls who were engaged to be married were required to perform the ritual of sati on the cremation pyres of their future husbands. Widows who chose not to commit suicide along with their spouses were ostracised by society and subjected to severe treatment.

**Custom of Sati:** The practise of sati, or female genital mutilation, was prevalent among a wide segment of the Hindu population, notably the upper classes and the Rajputs. Some of the Sultans of Delhi attempted to dissuade their subjects from practising this tradition. It is difficult to explain for the widespread popularity of sati in the Vijayanagar Empire, whose regulations do not appear to have placed any sort of limit on the practise of sati, despite the fact that sati was solely a voluntary practise in the south and was not required of widows. There is a high degree of certainty that Muhammad Tughluq was the first mediaeval king to impose limitations on the use of this custom. Though Tughrah Akbar did not put an end to the practise of sati in its entirety, he did issue clear orders to the kotwals that they were to ensure that no lady was sacrificed in a sati ceremony without her will. Aurangzeb was the only Mughal ruler who, in 1664, issued definitive directives for the practise of sati over his whole dominion.

**Economic Position:** In terms of the economy, a Muslim woman was eligible to receive a portion of the inheritance together with the unrestricted ability to sell or give it away. In contrast to her Hindu sister, she continued to exercise the right even after she was married. Another protection for Muslim women was called an entente nuptial settlement, which was known as "mehr." In contrast, a Hindu woman had no claim to the property owned by her husband's parents. In addition to moveable property like as decorations, jewellery, and so on, a Hindu lady was only permitted to receive financial support for her upkeep and her home. Therefore, from a legal standpoint, women were relegated to a position of subservience in each and every facet of life, and as a result, they experienced greater levels of inequality. However, under the Chola dynasty (which lasted from the 8th through the 13th century), southern women enjoyed the legal right to inherit property.

## Conclusion

Every social stratum and civilisation values women. They care for their houses and help young generations grow and mature. The European travellers gave a detailed assessment of women's social characteristics and position and status in the cultures they visited. Social division of labour study focuses on women's social position. During the Empire, travelogues supplied little information about women's work. Because there are only occasional allusions to women's employment and profession in Indo-Persian and 16th-18th century literature, it is difficult to gather information throughout the whole pre-colonial period. Especially before colonisation. Contemporary writers don't fully depict the lives of Mughal women. This research examines European travelogues to augment contemporary sources and compare the two sets of content. Women performed many roles in Mughal culture. During the Mughal era, India had regal women and plain women. The Royal Women were educated and had some independence. Participating in various activities enlarged their perspectives. Common women were generally homemakers and relegated to housework. In some socioeconomic groups, these women were victims of social problems. This research compares and contrasts the common jobs of the era.

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