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## Socio-Political Condition of Women in Medieval India

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### Abstract

*Due to the passage of time, the situation of women in the medieval era deteriorated, rather than seeing any positive developments in their social standing. Only during the medieval time was the system of Hijab and Jauhar developed by the Islamic and Rajput communities to discriminate against females. First and foremost, the word "Purdah" refers to a Woman who is entirely covered with garments in order to hide her body from male sight. Second, if she is a member of a captured Warriors family who has been defeated, the name "Jauhar" refers to a woman who, with her own accord, immolates herself in order to defend her body and possessions from the captivity of an enemy. While women were free to leave their houses at any time without danger of being jailed or incurring any responsibility under either system, they were bound by the community under both systems. While all of these religious restrictions were in place at the time, notable women of the time period were openly involved in social, political, educational, and religious fields, such as Raziya Sultan, the first woman Monarch of Delhi; Chand Bibi, who fought against Akbar; and other notable women of their time period. The bhakti movement had played a key role in both the improvement and the deterioration of the status of women throughout this period as well as in the history of the world. These were the women's rights activists who attempted to achieve women's equality in society at the time. A 'Guru Nanak' was the greatest example of someone who preached equality between men and women during that historical period. Women should be treated equally in every sphere, including the religious, political, educational, and cultural sectors, according to him.*

**Keywords:** Medieval, Monarch of Delhi, Women, Medieval India, Medhatithi

### Introduction

In previous eras, women were seen as psychologically inferior to men, but this is no longer the case. They owed it to their spouse to do anything he said. Women have been denied access to the Vedas for much of recorded history. Because to the reduction in the legal age of marriage, women lost many of their postsecondary options. According to various plays, even the queen's maids-in-waiting were capable of penning magnificent Sanskrit and Prakrit songs. In addition to painting and singing, princesses' creative abilities are said to include the ability



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to draw and write. High-ranking official and concubine daughters were generally expected to be successful in a range of vocations, including poetry. According to the Smriti authors, females were to be given away by their parents between the ages of six and eight, and between the eighth year and the start of puberty. Medhatithi was the first to create new ground when it came to inter-caste marriages. Marriage to the niece of a maternal uncle is strongly discouraged by law. Medhatithi advises against getting married because you and your future spouse are attracted to one other, and instead suggests getting married to a lady who is at least eight years younger than you, or until she reaches puberty. Before she reaches the legal age of marriageability, girls have the option of staying with their father for three years before choosing a mate of their own.

Swayamvara ceremonies were performed on occasion, with the consent of the girls' parents, for their benefit. Remarriage was permitted under specific conditions if the spouse had left or died, or had taken up the life of a hermit, or had become impotent or had become an outcast, among other things. Women were viewed with suspicion in general. However, they were respected and honored inside the household. If a husband abandoned his wife, even if she was guilty, she was entitled to support. The expansion of land-based property rights coincided with the expansion of women's land-based property rights. Historically, women have been permitted to inherit the property of their male relatives in order to protect the wealth of the family as a whole. With rare circumstances, a widow was usually entitled to the entirety of a husband's wealth if he died without children. The property of a widowed mother-in-law could potentially be inherited by daughters. The concept of private property was formed as a result of feudal society's growth. Some writers considered Sati practice to be vital, while others saw it as a waste of time. Ladies of monarchs would occasionally commit suicide by lighting themselves on fire on their husbands' burial pyre, according to an Arab writer named Sulaiman, but it was up to them to decide whether or not to do so.

During this time period, purdah was not widely practised. There is a high degree of culture in general among them. Ores was governed by a number of Queens from the Kara dynasty. Sugandha and Didda of Kashmir were kings of vast kingdoms in the Himalayas. There were both learned women and administrators in attendance. Saraswati, the wife of Mandanamisra, who functioned as an arbiter in her husband's disputes with Sankaracharya, was herself a knowledgeable scholar who had studied under Sankaracharya's tutelage.

Technically medieval India begins from 750 AD to 1750 AD. This period witnessed many political, economic and cultural changes. Condition of women during this period can be seen in the social changes occurred condition of women can be premised on three broad aspects:

In medieval India education for women was limited and even restricted for lower classes. Women (upper class) were allowed to do preliminary and matriculation. Higher education was permitted for any class of women, while having basic education, they were not allowed to pursue educational occupations. All though they were permitted to read religious text and scriptures.

Women in medieval India were either a man's wife or a father daughters or a 9 child's mother. They had nothing that made them known by their identity. They were political and economically dependent on men. Some changes however, in the right to property increase their autonomy and social status if a women's husband died or showed mental infirmity then



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that women had right to property if property was not joint family. she was authorized to sell that property on to give to others.

The society during medieval period was highly patriarchal women were treated as commodity. Social evils such as the Purda Pratha and the Sati system put them even much lower strata. Many historians, some in favour and some against, have debate and discussed these vices. A medieval historian Iqbal talked in detail about the Sati system. It was Akbar who banned Sati and increased the marriage age to 14 year for girl and to 16 year for boys.

But all these reforms proved insignificant as the condition of women in all spheres of life deteriorated particularly that of the upper three Varnas.

### **In Medieval India, Women Played an Important Role.**

India is a mostly male-dominated society. Religion, social conventions, legal frameworks, cultural values, and mores of the area have all played a role in encouraging and fostering patriarchy throughout history in a variety of different ways. Patriarchy, on the other hand, has never existed as a monolithic or unchanging institution. It is one of the most dynamic systems on the planet, being both adaptable and persistent at the same time. It does not, however, change the fundamental concept of the recognised superiority of males over women. The fact that women are just as important to the maintenance of patriarchy as males contributes to the dynamism of patriarchy. Women are willing participants in the subversion of the position of women members within a community because of patriarchal ideologies that are derived from religion and societal acceptability. The consciousness of the gender imbalance and subversion of women, in general, is a relatively new phenomenon, a product of the contemporary era, and has only just emerged. Historically, male supremacy and dominance in all areas of communal and family life were practically unassailable, and women were seldom challenged. In this regard, the mediaeval era was no different from the rest of history. Politics, or the power to govern, was traditionally regarded to be a male-dominated field. Men in pre-modern India deemed it a deplorable state of affairs to be governed by a female monarch. On a few rare occasions, Indian society stood up to this prejudice. However, women were not wholly barred from participating in politics.

Women who were intelligent and talented attempted to exert influence over governmental decision-making from "behind the veil." The mediaeval era in India was distinct from prior periods in the country's history. The entrance of Islam into India altered the political structure of the country in profound ways. It is impossible to say here how Islam impacted women's political engagement in Indian culture, but there is no doubt that there has been an expansion of opportunities in this area in recent years. There is, of course, a logical inconsistency here.

In India, Islam imposed the veiling of women while at the same time allowing for their participation in political activity, as evidenced by the cases of Raziya Sultan and Nur Jahan, Maham Anaga, and others. We do not see such open participation or women wielding political influence prior to the introduction of Islam.

Education is the best parameter to measure political economic and social growth of particular period. During medieval period education was limited to reading religious text and scriptures. It was only in later period of medieval India that education of different subject such as astronomy, mathematics, literature was given to some focus. A number of texts of Sanskrit were translated into Persian. A great deal and attention was paid by Akbar. Large donation



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and grants were given to Brahmins and Ulemas. Apart from the above vocational education was also promoted. Education in metallurgy, crafts and melting were given to people even provided of training was also there during this period. Exchange of knowledge between India and West Asia was an established order. Department of education was established during the Sultanate period. Texts like Ramayana and Mahabharata were translated into Persian. Panchatantra was also translated. Despite all these efforts in educational development the education in technical and scientific field saw no growth at all. However, it was this mode of education that continued until the arrival of British and in particular Law Minister Lord Maculay.

### **Socio-Political Status of Women during medieval Time**

In medieval society, women of both Hindu and Muslim religions had a secondary status. Nevertheless, on the basis of comparative position, it can be said that Muslim women had more social and political rights than other women of the society. Even education was arranged for the women living in the harem. Women of this period have made their special contribution in various fields of politics and culture. For example, Humayun's wife Hamida Banu Begum was an intelligent woman who assisted Himayun and his son Akbar in the administrative work. Akbar's wife Salima Begum and Jahangir's Nur Jahan had a special status during their reign. Similarly, Babur's daughter Gulbadan Bano Begum, showing her literary excellence and wrote Humayunnama. Shah Jahan's daughter Jahanara had a special love for poetry. Even in the Hindu ruling class, women belonging to the families of autonomous rulers, zamindars, jagirdars, and Rajput chieftains had a better position than women in other Hindu societies. These women also enjoyed a high level of comfort.

Contrary to the positive side described above, in the context of medieval India, the birth of daughters was considered an unfortunate event in both Hindu and Muslim societies due to the patriarchal system. According to the English scholar James Todd, who did excellent research work on the medieval social system; there was relatively less happiness in the society and family when daughters were born. The mother who gave birth was also treated with a low status. Talking about the distribution of property in medieval society, we find that Muslim women have relatively more property rights than Hindu women. The system of governance being in line with the Muslim system can be considered as the main reason for this, but even then it would be appropriate to hold the immediate social system equally responsible. Because, the economic condition of men of Hindu society was comparatively better as compared to women and it was almost equal to that of men of Muslim society. In the Hindu social system, women were denied the inheritance of property, yet every unmarried daughter had the right to receive one-fourth of the son's wealth that was given to her brothers. Similarly, after death, the property of the mother was distributed equally among the sons and unmarried daughters.

There was no change in the status of women in Hindu society. The old rules stipulating the marriage of girls at an early age and service and loyalty of the wife to the husband remained unchanged. The marriage could be broken in some social circumstances like leaving the wife, running away, getting some dreadful disease etc. But not all scholars agree with this. Among the practices described in Kaliyuga, there is also the remarriage of women. But it is obvious that this taboo was applicable only to the above three varnas. As far as the practice of Sati is concerned, some law-makers strongly advocate, but some add certain conditions to it. Many



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foreign travelers have mentioned the use/usage/practice of this practice in many areas of the country. According to him, permission had to be taken from the Sultan to commit sati.

On the basis of the above description, it can be said that there were wide differences in the social and economic rights of Hindu and Muslim women on the basis of religious division. Also, such differences were greater between upper and lower class women. In other words, upper class women of Hindu and Muslim religions and lower class women of these two religions had equal rights. Such rights can also be seen in the context of education. Higher class women got more opportunities for education whereas lower class women spent more time in domestic work and service work of upper class women. During this period the problem of child marriage is equally visible in all religions and all social classes. After marriage, from childhood, the life of women started being governed by family responsibilities and they got less opportunities for personal development. Other social evils like purdah system and polygamy in the wealthy class are also visible in this society.

### Minaj

She had all of the great characteristics and qualities that were required of a Queen to be Queen.

Her sexual orientation, on the other hand, was her most significant drawback. Modern academics, on the other hand, do not concur with this evaluation. It was Raziya's failure, as according to Mohammad Habib and Khaliq Nizami, that resulted from her inability to create an alliance with the Chihalgani, who were the most powerful group of nobles at the time.

Satish Chandra, like Satish Chandra, believes that the Chihalgani, not her gender, is to blame for her failure. Even in post-Raziya periods, the Chihalgani was responsible for the upheaval, which put to a stop under the iron fist of Balban in the late 18th century.

From a political standpoint, Raziya's rule was characterised by excellent political judgement as well as tenacity and boldness. She dealt with several rebellions and formed appropriate alliances, but her primary goal was to destroy the Chahilgani nobility and prevent them from sharing power with her. One of her accomplishments was her refusal to be pulled into the Mongol battle, which allowed her to keep her realm safe from looting. She was well aware of her limits. The Mughals were a powerful empire. Their legitimacy was unsurpassed in Indian history, since the Mughals founded the largest empire of mediaeval India and constructed the largest empire of mediaeval India. Babur conquered Delhi in 1525-26, laying the groundwork for the establishment of the Empire. The Mughals established precedents and institutions that have endured for centuries on Indian soil. The architect of this Empire was Babur's grandson Akbar, during whose rule the Empire expanded both physically and culturally. Babur was the founder of the empire. Since the beginning of his administration, a number of changes have occurred, some beneficial, others detrimental. In addition, the role played by women in the politics of the Mughal Empire was one of a kind in many aspects. In terms of this problem, we may split the Mughal era into two parts: the period before to Akbar and the period after Akbar.

During Akbar's reign, the Empire gained institutional grandeur as well as a certain rigidity in its outlook. There were a number of factors contributing to this, which will be described more below. Nevertheless, prior to Akbar's reign, the political situation was much more fluid and therefore open, owing to the fact that both Babur and Humayun spent much of their time wandering (living an unsettled life) from place to place and engaged in almost continuous



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warfare for political and personal survival before Akbar came to power. This mobility enabled the women of their day to take on significant and direct political tasks, such as mediating and administering, among other responsibilities

### **Women during Reign of Babur**

Babur's period was a time when women, particularly older women such as mothers, foster mothers, and sisters, played a significant role in political life. Their responsibilities included not just providing advice on significant political affairs, but also acting as the king's primary mediators. Following his expulsion from his home realm of Farghana, Babur's attempts to reclaim it were repeatedly failed by his own kinsmen throughout this era. His status was in turmoil at the time. Continual claims and counter-claims to sovereignty were at the forefront of the battle for dominion. While military strength and resources were necessary in many scenarios throughout this time period, talks also played an important role in many of these circumstances. All claims to numerous kingdoms throughout Central Asia adhered to a common ancestry of Chingizi-Timurid bloodline, which they all claimed as their own (Timurid, Uzbek, etc). Due to the marriages of these conflicting claimants, there was also a strong sense of family amongst them. It was because of this condition that women were able to intervene in political affairs. In certain cases, only women were allowed to engage in discussions, while males were barred from doing so. Gulbadan Begum recalls a number of such ladies that Babur thought to be critical to his political survival in her writing.

### **IsanDawlat Begum**

Babur's grandmother was well-known for her ability to strategize and use strategies. In the immediate aftermath of Babur's father's death, she was put in charge of administration and political matters. Babur was around 11 years old at the time. She devoted all of her time and energy to preserving Babur's realm, which included dealing with intrigues against him. She even chose the officers for each position, and any reshuffles were carried out under her direction. She told Babur tales about Chengiz Khan and Timur in order to raise his spirits and to provide him with lessons in battle strategy. Many ladies could not have equaled my grandmother's capacity to judge and counsel; she was exceedingly informed and foresighted, and most of my affairs were carried out on her advice," Babur said in his memoirs. Additionally, he was supported by his mother, QutluqNigarKhanum. She led a personal army of over 1500 soldiers and was known for her courage, patience, and endurance. It was Babur's wife who followed him on all his adventures, both on the battlefield and off. The wandering king Babur tells of her enduring severe trials for his benefit while he was on the run. She passed away in 1505 without witnessing her son become a prosperous monarch of England.

### **Maham Begum**

She was Babur's favorite wife, and throughout Babur and Humayun's reign, she rose to prominence and gained influence. She belonged to the Shia religion and was instrumental in assisting Babur in establishing political links with Iran. During his trips to Balkh and Badakshan, she saw Babur's agony firsthand. The title Padshah Begum was bestowed to her




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by Babur.Khanzadeh Begum, Babur's oldest sister, protected him in 1501 by marrying Shiabani Khan, a more powerful competitor, when Babur was unable to defend himself. As a result, Babur was besieged in Samarkand without any assistance, and the only way he was able to rescue himself was by consenting to let Shiabani Khan to take his sister in exchange for his own life. According to Mughal sources, Khanazadeh Begum's conduct was seen as a 'Sacrifice,' and when she returned to her brother ten years later, in 1511, she was not only warmly welcomed, but she was also awarded a particular status in the Mughal domestic realm as a result of her actions. The coveted title of Padshah Begum was bestowed to her during Humayun's reign, and she served as the Harem's head lady. She continued to give political counsel to the Emperor, as well as acting as a peacemaker and negotiator in international negotiations. The incident in which Mirza Hindal insisted on the Khutba being recited in his name rather than Humayun's name was one of the most significant instances of her interference.

In the medieval state, the Khutba was seen as a sign of sovereignty. A Khutba could only be read in the Emperor's name, and that was the only way to do it. Hindal's insistence on a certain course of action was a kind of rebellion. Humayun sent Khanzadeh Begum to negotiate with Hindal about the sovereignty of Humayun and to convey to him the danger posed by the Uzbeks, as well as the need of Babur's sons uniting under one banner. She was instrumental in bringing the situation to a resolution. Until her death in 1545, she strove on several additional times to bring about peace and harmony between Humayun and his fighting brothers, Hindal, Kamran, and Askari. Hamida Banu Begum: Humayun's sister-in-law and peacemaker. She was Humayun's favorite wife, and it was only after tremendous persuasion on his behalf that she agreed to accept the Emperor as her spouse. I want to marry someone, but he must be a guy whose collar my hand can touch rather than one whose skirt does not reach the collar, according to Gulbadan Begum's recollection: I will marry a man whose collar my hand can touch rather than one whose skirt doesn't reach the collar. She grew in prestige within the Harem as a result of her marriage to Akbar and becoming his mother. Furthermore, her political sagacity was such that she was appointed to take over as Regent of the Empire while Humayun was absent. During Akbar's reign, she also served as an important counsellor to the emperor. Maryam-Makani was given to her as an honorific title. During her lifetime, she was also the first lady of the Empire, a position she held until 1604.

The following were some of the women who played significant roles in assisting the early Mughal Emperors to survive and maintain control of the Empire during Babur and Humayun's reign. The wives of captured Rajput nobles, who place a high priority on honour, have historically followed the rite. Sati, a widow's self-immolation, was a common practise in feudal Japan at the time. There were many Hindus who used the Devadasi technique at the time.

In the Devadasi system, women were supposed to be the spouses of the gods. For emperors and priests, as well as members of the most affluent social strata, they had to provide entertainment. The Bhakti movements of the mediaeval period created a new class of men and women who were unconcerned with gender inequality and ready to challenge it. As a result of this progressive trend, women's viewpoints were enlarged. In the early stages of Bhakti, female poet-saints had a significant impact. This despite the fact that a majority of the



movement at the time was headed by males. Not much was done by these poet-saints to address social inequalities or the patriarchal society at large. Akkamahadeva, commonly known as Akka or Mahadevi, was born in Karnataka in the 12th century CE. Akka was her hometown and she was a devotee of Shiva. Mirabai, also known as Mira, is said to have been born into a Rajput family that was in power at the time of her life. In her poetry, Mirabai describes a vision she had of Lord Krishna as an infant. As in the case of Chand Bibi, the last ruler of Ahmadnagar, who rose to the occasion and led her people in a courageous and victorious war against the Mughal army led by Akbar's son prince Murad, the Mughals routinely attacked Ahmadnagar. Raziya Sultana, the daughter of Sultan Iltutmish, was an important political figure in mediaeval India.

## Conclusion

From what we can tell, male kings predominated in medieval India over a wide range of areas and time periods. Women, on the other hand, did not abstain from politics, as was expected by society at the time, but instead managed to make their imprint in a variety of ways. As a form of political involvement, serving in an advising capacity was by far the most prevalent and appreciated among women. Additionally, regents may wage wars and run nations, but they were never fully in charge of the government as kings or reigning queens. Men had political power in the mediaeval Indian mindset, which was a unique feature of the culture. Women were not permitted in any way. India is a mostly male-dominated society. Religion, social conventions, legal frameworks, cultural values, and mores of the area have all played a role in encouraging and fostering patriarchy throughout history in a variety of different ways. Patriarchy, on the other hand, has never existed as a monolithic or unchanging institution. It is one of the most dynamic systems on the planet, being both adaptable and persistent at the same time. It does not, however, change the fundamental concept of the recognised superiority of males over women. The fact that women are just as important to the maintenance of patriarchy as males contributes to the dynamism of patriarchy. Women are willing participants in the subversion of the position of women members within a community because of patriarchal ideologies that are derived from religion and societal acceptability.

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