Women have a two-fold relation with history in India as they are simultaneously present and absent in the historical accounts that we can grasp at. And this is because women are both invisible and relatively visible from the point of view of what the ‘man’ wants to see. Man over here stands for patriarchy and norms of its behaviour. Writing a piece inclusive of women is not just an exercise of exploring and re-exploring of the sources and social processes, uncovering the evidence which has ever been marginalised due to the then existing biases and thereafter infusing these aspects with issues of gender. Whereas such writings require a necessary shift of the foci onto neglected segments of our society where the women stand at the zero level, thereby broadening the ambit of history of mankind.

In this thesis the category of women has been analysed in comparison to men and amongst women themselves. The highly monopolistic and hierarchical and narrowly concentrated, in the hands of a few men, sources have been systematically unearthed. Though the sources of Medieval India are particularly in the Classical languages, and this is a great handicap but it is difficult to digest this because many of the sources have been already translated. It is just that these sources have never been looked at from ‘unequal gender relations’ point of view. It is very true that gender when included as a category of analysis enriches our understanding of the past.

The concept of these unequal gender relations’ has been used here in the domain of ‘Labour.’ It is the work that is the central aspect of peoples' lives. It determines their daily activities. In addition, the work largely defines a particular person’s class and status in the given social structure. A person’s work or role is considered to be a natural factor and thereby expectation of an ideal behaviour is always focussed. It is
the stereotypes about the women and men that make it natural that both do different jobs. These types of roles are normative and historically changeable, except a few ordained roles, but the gender roles are culturally and socially constructed. The very division of work ensures that a woman’s choices & rationality differ significantly from her other half and this is because society has historically assigned women different roles.

Amongst all, the most significant aspect is that of household/domestic labour. Here the domestic labour has been analysed in its relationship to class hierarchies within the household and the capacity to buy domestic services. It is very difficult to differentiate between domestic labour and farm/artisanal labour in pre-industrial times. In these times women and men both produced goods for the household and also took care of the home and people living there. Work was not then regarded as separate from private life. But still the overlapping of men’s and women’s task does not mean that there were no strict ideas about the work of both.

This, in fact, leads to double-edged exploitation of women. The combined performance of domestic labour with agricultural, artisanal and mercantile tasks not only results in a continuum between domestic and rest of the labour but also collapses market into non-market sphere.

To put it in plain words, an attempt has been made here to see the relationship of the domestic labour to the labour market and the presence of sexual division of labour in waged work in all the fields i.e. production (agricultural and textile both) and the mercantile. But the fact that the domestic labour is surrounded by the ideologies of mothering, nurturing & caring which make the domestic labour incumbent upon women.

As one steps out from the domestic area and enters the ever-competitive market
field, one is again bound to witness the steps or the ways to delegitimise the contribution of women. It is not that women are assigned the easiest of the jobs but just the reverse is the truth. With this, one of the explanations sought after is that women should be engaged in those activities that would keep her near to the household.

In all the works that fall in the lap of women are the tasks requiring use of physical energy, the most. Whereas the activities of men were/are always based on use of advanced technology. The plough and the loom are two examples which are highly monopolised by men. It is a clear signal that rather than economy, the economic processes & the technology are gendered. And it is the social notions that give meaning to these.

The truth of the matter is that it is the patriarchy that shapes the ends and means of its members concerned. The women’s labour in India is generally considered a meaningful category because it is shaped pre-dominantly by the patriarchy. So in a way it reflects the patriarchal set up and demands. And till the tasks go well with these norms they are tolerated but once this is not so, the women are considered to be frail.

And this is what exactly happens with one class of women, whose presence is considered very important for an equilibrium in the society and whose services can not be dispensed with. To this belongs the troupe of entertainers. The entertainment industry was very lucrative sphere which gave revenue to the state but this never gave them any kind of leverage, be it economic or social. They were always looked upon with contempt, though the profession was not devoid of skill.

Many times a sort of subversion of the patriarchy is witnessed in the acts of sections like prostitute. But this is far from truth because they work within and therefore reinforce patriarchal ideologies. So is the case with Devadasis who could not go
beyond their localities even. And being the wives of the Gods, they after a certain age, could not adopt any other profession and therefore were reduced to the state of destitution. So all these are the ways of reinforcing the patriarchy.

The last but not the least aspect is that of the political awareness among women of medieval times. The women, as supposed to be, were far ahead of just being the sexual objects but, instead, resorted to various ways to secure their own positions. They fully participated in all the circumstances. Many a time they ruled in person, too. These were considered to be aberrations in the normal course. But, it is such 'aberrations' which testify to the innate abilities of the women and also point toward the tricks of patriarchy to retain its position.

The other aspect that has been dealt here with is that of the non-patriarchal values being used by the patriarchal ones to legitimise their strength. It is a section of women who help the patriarchy in strengthening its hold on the women.

A very important area is that of literary activities of the ladies, who so ever got chance. The literary achievements of Medieval Indian women did comprise of the significant contributions from the 'neglected mass of the humankind'.

So what one gets is that not a single field was bereft of her contribution. Everything that the women did was accepted but within the limits. Obviously the things were different for the upper and lower strata of women. But the patriarchal norms could not be crossed by anyone. In a country as ours, the customs prevail upon everything and were made to maintain balance as perceived by the patriarchy. The division of labour could not afford to mislead / misdirect women. It had to be in accordance with the patriarchal norms. The unequal social eminence was every time attached by the patriarchy.
In fact, when patriarchy and women's work converge together, the latter gets marginalised. The division of the work within the family can be a little bit flexible but at large, it has to be within certain confines. And it is these 'confines' that devalue and de-legitimise the important and the necessary labour of women as a 'category'.
August 23, 2001

This is to certify that the Ph.D. thesis entitled "Women and Gender Division of Labour: 1200-1800" submitted by Ms. Karuna Sharma is an original research work of the scholar and is suitable for the submission to the examiners for the award of the Degree.

(PUSHPA PRASAD)
Reader in History
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(Karuna Sharma)
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INTRODUCTION

History has generally ignored women. Their achievements, failures, interests, and aspirations have rarely been incorporated in the tradition of history writing. Perhaps this is particularly true for Indian History where the historical narrative is confined to men, and women make only fleeting appearances, as instruments for the implementation of men's will.

In the case of Medieval India, the interest of much of the conventional historiography being centered on power and state, women naturally find no space.¹ Social historians do better, but even their descriptions of women are confined to the household or the domestic sphere. We have Altekar with his pioneering work, which emphasises women and her position right from the ancient times to the modern day.² K.M.Ashraf's work, *Life and Conditions of People of Hindoostan*, is a classic example of a social history where the role of women is seen as restricted to the performance of domestic chores alone.³

In the field of economic history too, the historians of Medieval India have ignored women. W.H.Moreland was the pioneer economic historian of Medieval India⁴ and

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4. W.H.Moreland, *Agrarian system of Moslem India* (Delhi, 1968); *From Akbar to Aurangzeb- A study in Indian Economic History* (New Delhi, 1972); *India at the death of Akbar- An Economic Study* (Delhi, 1974).
following his scientific method, economic history reached great heights with the publication of *The Agrarian System of Mughal India*. Yet the succeeding historians of Medieval India have not studied the contribution of women to economic life, and the extent of their involvement in the domain of 'production'.

The trade historians too assumed, without much empirical scrutiny of historical facts, that mercantile activities were confined to men and the evidence of the participation of women in trade and commerce was all too easily brushed aside, as an aberration in trade history.

The shift toward women's history took place almost everywhere throughout the world around 70s, which provided the appurtenance and catalyst for the emergence of women's studies in India, too. The little work on women comprises *Women in Delhi Sultanate*, *Women in Mughal India* etc. But these works are purely anecdotal. There is no interpretation or any type of dissection being offered in these works. K.S. Lal in his *The Mughal Harem* highlights the aristocratic household and the women in royal service. But its foci is on the sexual nature of the household and fails to locate the political interests cutting across gender categories.

These studies usually frequent those aspects where only women appear as individuals with their activities, whatever being assigned to them. There is no question being asked about their debasement or the reasons being unearthed for their conditions. Thus the study of gender relations is not just searching for women in history, instead it is an exercise of unmasking hitherto neglected relations between human beings. Gender when included as a category of analysis expands and enriches our knowledge of the past. Women are viewed as quiescent receptacles with their position changing or contemplating the state of world around them. As a corollary, variations in the position of women are then treated as indices of civilisation.

While a beginning has been made from the point of view of using a gender based framework in the case of Early Indian history as well as Modern history, there is a singular paucity of works using 'gender' as a category of analysis in Medieval Indian history. The lack of a strong gender based vantage point is ill starred because it is not as if the sources of Medieval India are peculiarly disadvantaged, but it is just that the

9. A.S. Altekar has interpreted in this way. This has been quoted from article of Uma Chakravarty, "Beyond the Altekarian paradigm: Towards a new understanding of gender relations in early India," Social Scientist (hereafter SS), 16(8), August, 1988.


sources have never systematically explored gender issues. In fact, there is a slow response to engage with gender as a category of analysis from the scholars with mastery over Persian.

Scholars like Rafat Bilgrami, Shireen Moosvi, I.H. Siddiqui, George Kozlowski, have made a slow beginning focussing on socio-economic and political activities related with women. Yet another bunch of work concentrates on social and institutional aspects such as family, kinship, state, etc. To count among these are works of Varsha Joshi, Vijaya Ramaswamy, Kum Kum Sangari, Kum Kum Roy, Uma Chakrabarty, etc.

The insertion of women into history has been the fundamental contribution of the writings mentioned above. But meticulous linkages between various social and economic processes and gender have not been able to take off for the medieval Indian period. The disparate gender relations have not been questioned. The human beings as individuals and their experiences of different social processes seem to be quite sketchy. These studies have neglected human experiences, mentalities and emotions altogether.


14. Uma Chakrabarty, "Rescripting the past: Inserting women into History," Shivdasani Memorial Lecture, Lucknow, 2000, p.6
Gender and not women has been emphasised here for this dissertation concentrates on not just woman but on gender as a structuring prescript of all human societies and analysis of gender relations, as well. Though she would be bestowed with most of the rights but the entire mechanism of obligations are organised in a way that would warrant her with anything consequential. Infact in a patriarchal system kinship, conjugal and familial systems are organised in a way that women are less able to act as fully efficacious subjects than men. The relations between sexes are not ingenuous attributes but social constructs and studying them is like studying the relation of equality and inequality among different social groups.15

Here the aspect of work has been taken into consideration so as to see the extent of inequality. Work varies significantly for men and women. In a particular region or society she might be totally excluded from some industries. Some times she might be segregated by occupations; her average earnings might be less than men. In general her participation in lucrative activities appears to be assiduous and has much greater difficulties than men’s. It is this that induces one to think on these issues. It is the different aspects of female labour, which form a significant part of total labour force, that are to be analysed.

Though division of work by gender is not fixed for all regions and times, the historical division of labour precludes women from entering into high productivity work. The social assumption of women as inferior human beings deprives them of several opportunities of being equally productive. Women’s household works are seen as

compatible with her natural attributes. But this seems to be too little an analysis. No longer does household work pass unnoticed- a natural, unchanging phenomenon unworthy of serious consideration.\textsuperscript{16}

When one sits to analyze the relations between men and women, the axiomatic fact on which it is elaborated upon is biological determinism. This is considered to be the basis of difference in the power and status of men and women. Woman is biologically considered to be weak and being endowed with reproductive capabilities household chores are all given to her, as these would keep her both near the home and her children. And most important of all is that these are not pigeonholed as ‘work’ even.

But if biology had been a predicament then only those married and subjected to demands of bearing and nursing children should suffer most. The association between motherhood and domesticity does not hold any premise, for domestic chores do not abrogate her from other kinds of activities. The relative discreteness between these two aspects enfeeble the arguments that it is the functions of mothering that result in her obstruction.\textsuperscript{17} The origin of asperity lie not in naturally different capabilities or temperaments but in cultural attempts to explain or control woman’s axial role in reproduction. The culture tends to elucidate or organize motherhood in ways that accentuate differences between sexes and lead to sexual asymmetry.

But this is too ephemeral an explanation for anything. This belies the scope of studying the social relations as a part of the whole social/cultural construct. All societies


have a sexual division of labour, which extends far beyond what is determined by biology and produces a hierarchization between the sexes analogous to that between races and classes.¹⁸

Gerda Lerner has postulated that patriarchy is a system of social structures and practices, in which men manage dictatorially, exploit and encumber women. In fact, men have access to control over her labour, and also disposition over her productivity within the household and outside. She uses complicity of women in relation to Ancient Mesopotamian Civilisation to explain their upholding of the patriarchal system that subordinated them and which they in return transmitted to next generation as a sagacious mechanism under conditions of ineffectualness and economic dependency.¹⁹

Lerner has further tried to show how patriarchy works through paternalism and paternalistic dominance. And how women successfully internalize this. It reinforces the sexual division of labour and this leads to women's acquiescence to the working of patriarchy.²⁰ Unless certain elements of unison are present, no doubt reached through certain apportioning of power, it is difficult to imagine how patriarchy can function. The esprit de corps is attained through a variety of means: gender indoctrination, educational deprivation, creating cleavage by defining righteousness and deviance according to her sexual activity, by restraints and outright persuasion.²¹

²⁰. Ibid.
Thus, patriarchy is a supposal to explain universal/trans-historical oppressions. The society is seen as a system of social relations between men, who create coherence, making it possible to command labour of women and maintain primeval apportionment of labour between the sexes. Sylvia Walby distinguishes between private and public patriarchy. The former based on the household is a feasible locale for the expropriation of women's labour. There is a two-way exploitation of women in this case because there is agility in this system. Ideologies are deployed in case of both which on one hand accentuate women's total commitment to the needs of the household and on the other, consistently reiterate taboos against sexuality or reproduction outside family mores. The patriarch views it as a pliable resource at his disposal and serviceable also at public arena. But he retains the might to keep them vulnerable in the public by controlling their basic access to productive resources, mobility and choices.\textsuperscript{22}

The central instrument for maintenance of patriarchy is occupational segregation resulting in lower wages for women, which in turn maintains their economic dependence on men. This is because society has classically assigned woman different roles. Her choice is, infact, determined both by her economic resource position in the existing organisation of production as well as by her home responsibilities (assigned to her by society.)

The allocation of tasks can be restrictive in many senses as physical, spatial, etc but that has implications in terms of understanding variability in gender systems. As for example, differences in mobility patterns and use of space by men within/between culture

helps in terms of understanding possible relationship between gender arrangements. Any sort of fixed structure can not be looked at because task differentiation is more sensitive to and allows for vacillating and changing configurations of human division of labour. The division of labour is eminently historical. The division of labour has nothing to do with economy/biology but is historically constructed and that work is tagged male or female on the basis of historically changeable interests and assumptions. The nature of labour performed by each of the sexes is of far less importance than the social relations in which it is carried out.23

The presence of sexual division of labour is not of course limited to just one sphere but exists in every sphere. This study concentrates mainly on ‘work’ of women in relation to men. Work is an important aspect that helps us to understand the social relations because it is the work that connects individuals to the social structure. The definition of ‘work’ is the application of the mental or physical effort to a purpose.24 According to this definition it may not necessarily point toward the economic domain because the economic domain is generally equated with market work or paid work. Non-market sector then is considered to be unfit for analysis of economy.

Although women’s and men’s tasks overlapped in the pre-industrial era, there were strict ideas about their respective tasks within the specific community. An important criterion for classification of the tasks was that the designation of appropriate activities for women was related to the place of work and ensured non-interaction with non-household members. Women’s work in India becomes a meaningful category precisely

23. Ibid.
because unlike men's it is shaped and monitored pre-dominantly by patriarchal authorities at home and outside, both.\textsuperscript{25}

To start with, we have the household that is the cardinal unit of the society. The routine of the household requires the full participation from women for life sustenance. It's from here that all relations emanate and individuality of people become gendered.\textsuperscript{26} Customarily Indian household consists of women doing certain jobs, which are considered to be for them only, as bringing water and fuel, cooking food, looking after animals. These tasks are not reserved as 'work' as these do not contribute to anything generative. Besides these universal tasks, typically women of ordinary class-cultivating and artisan families also toiled in the field or at the household production unit.

Further, the spatial location of women is confined inside quarters of the household, though for lower strata it was not so. The aristocratic/upper households division of spaces was an appliance for portraying men's control. To maintain this, the household could be provided with servants/slaves and services of women like wet nurse, midwife. Thus an attempt is made here to see whether the inside quarters could exceptionally put circumscription on women or not.

Popularly women of ordinary cultivating and artisan families do not only the so called 'ubiquitous work' of housekeeping and child rearing but endow their drudgery to family based production activities of cultivation and artisanship. The labour of the rural women both in small producer and subsistence households spreads into unpaid agricultural tasks or other gainful activities becoming continuous with subsistence

\textsuperscript{25} Nirmala, op.cit.
labour. Since little of this latter is assigned as ‘work’ in customary terms, it slides soundlessly into the fold of the domestic labour either by default as non-work for unwaged work, or because of partial commoditisation of rural societies, which blurs the lines in production for home consumption and for market and also the difficulty of disaggregating domestic work from productive work in subsistence households geared to self consumption.27

Even when she was an integral part of the rural economy, her labour was devalued and on top of that she was assigned the most difficult of the tasks which were termed as un-skilled and then altogether her labour was marked down. All the hard tasks in the field of transplanting and weeding were given to her and were termed ‘sex explicit’. The same was the case in textile manufacture and was generally associated with spinning process.

The other interesting thing is that in both the sectors of production, the process of ploughing and weaving are denied to women, with a few exceptions here and there, perhaps. The loom and the plough communicate the ownership and control of means of production as well as signify the ultimate outgrowth and thus, the mere touch of women was considered to be not requisite.28 Or may be women are considered to be ritually impure and there by not allowed to touch things necessary for good yields.29

From this, what can be derived is that may be the productive and other technologies carry a gendered meaning. Such a prescription can enable us to move beyond a definition of the economy as determining gender relations to a more complex relational definition of economic processes as gendered.  

Besides this the women also acted as hawkers and sold milk products, and vegetables, parched grains and carried water (paanibharin). The sector of building industry does involve the presence of the women. A traveller of the 17th century found the involvement of the women here quite astonishing. 

Whatever the women did outside the home was translated at a very low wage when compared to men. Many a time for the same work, she was given subordinate payment. It is quite possible to visualise her position through this discrimination. Was her ‘work’ treated as something being done by an individual or was mere extension of her roles as mother and wife. The household, which was considered to be a ‘bailliwick’ of non-work, was the place where much of her labour was deployed. The co-existence of wage and non-wage labour and dearth of market makes it difficult to manoeuvre women’s ‘work’.

The other important demesne where the women played an important role was mercantile activities. Here the institution of family occupies an important place for it is the family, which is an socio-economic unit, and by this, women inevitably become elemental for trading world. Every sector did involve women be it inland or outside

trade. We have for the 16th century a reference to *Meena Bazzar* of Akbar where the sellers, and buyers as well, were women.\(^{32}\) Women who participated in trading activities—especially those who were engaged in retail trade—were looked down upon, and were treated by the society with abhorrence and contemptuousness.

Besides manual work, women also were involved in activities called ‘entertainment work’. In the public realm, women did earn their livelihood by participating in these sorts of activities. It would be an exercise here to delve into and see whether these activities were specialised or were just activities being done ordinarily: was it fact that the presence, or rather performance by the specialised singers and dancers, was much yearned actuality? Was her labour deeply circulated with other forms of labour? It is an assumption that despite so crucial a role in society, which has been called as maintaining order in society, they were treated with much derision.

Lastly the ‘harem’ which was an important institution of the medieval Indian Society, has been interpreted as just a delectation alternative where sex played an outweighing part or where the women had only a sexual identicalness.\(^{33}\) Further, it has been a doctrine that women of the harem had no social/political role at large and were busy with plots or conspiracies.\(^{34}\) This may not be strictly true; in any case women’s recourse to plots and conspiracies is an indication of their attempting to bound their own material interests in an unsecured locale.\(^{35}\) An attempt would be made here to


\(^{33}\) K. S. Lal, *The Mughal Harem* (Delhi, 1988).

\(^{34}\) Ibid.

look into real character of harem as both a political and a social space, as it could have had a social world of its own. Its life was very much related and entangled with the political, economic and social world outside.

The women had a hierarchy amongst themselves. We are not unaware of the tensions among them within the harem. Unless certain distribution of power is made within patriarchal arrangements it is difficult to imagine how any degree of acquiescence from women could be obtained. Because without the cooperation of women themselves, patriarchy can not firmly establish itself.

The political role of royal ladies can not be sidelined altogether. They played an important part in the politics of medieval India. It is not that the inside/closed quarters put some restrictions on their active political participation. Their role was much more beyond being just mere bed partners. An attempt is made here to see whether political ambitions could cut across gender hierarchies.

The women were viewed by the patriarchal society as skimpy in intellect. Yet, in all political matters, the rulers and the political elite eagerly sought their services. The harem played a weighty part in the political activities, precisely because men could not dispense with the services of women.

Besides, the harem did employ not an inconsiderable number of slaves/servants of both the sexes. They had their own hierarchy. Variegated activities were performed by female servants/slaves both for the royal ladies and men.

A fairly important activity of royal ladies was their active interest in ‘belles-lettres’ pursuits. She worked as tutors to others and earned through this or the calligraphy,
writing letters or the representations could be an important source of income.

A rough picture that might arise from the above exposition could be that woman was an important participant in almost all the fields. Not a single field was bereft of her contribution. But did it help her anywhere in having social leverage? Other question arises: could she bargain her position? How does division of labour and its evaluation take place? How much labour was supposed to have been subsumed within the household?

The division of labour has had sexual as well as symbolic dimensions together with economic terms. It would have had social backing. In a country like India, the customs could have prevailed upon everything else. And further, the customs were made to maintain balance as perceived by the patriarchy. The division of labour could not be very unyielding and could be inflected. The use of woman as 'labour' could not appear to depreciate her from patriarchal mandate. The public arena could not have been integrally eschewed for women.

The dichotomy of public/private, nature/culture is subject to inquisition as far as medieval society goes. The sexual division of labour is often identified with a division where by women remain in the home and men work outside the domestic sphere. Men do production, while women's unrivaled responsibility is the sphere of reproduction i.e. housework. This renders invisible whatever activity women engage in besides household chores (sustenance). To base the division between the domestic and the public on economic activities can not explain the unequal social eminence attached to these activities. Further, the public has been located as the sphere of universality,
rationality whereas the private incorporates home, family and 'natural' subjugation of women. These invisibilise domestic labour or other works performed in private spaces.

A focus on universals/givens discovers sum and substance in ingenuous characteristics. But can definite consequences necessarily follow from the differences between men and women. Instead of asking how the categories of male and female are endowed with culturally specific characters, thus taking the differences between them as assumed, we need to question how the particular societies, circumscribe themselves. Using her for 'work' could have had no problem till it was in accordance with norms and prerequisites of the patriarchy. Nevertheless, there is more suppleness in the system than is implied by the categories.

Infact, the intercommunication of patriarchal convictions with relations of production marginalises women's work and presents no discretionary plot for them. The sexual division of labour, however, is a matter of rational choice by families as a part of household strategy. The public/private participation might mean just the appropriation of her labour to private ends. To be precise, there is no public or private at the level of production but at the spatial level there is a hierarchisation of spaces especially in relation to elite households. The residential arrangements allow us to understand the limitations that were imposed by the patrilineal society on women. The spatial arrangement between sexes is socially created to maintain social order. Infact, spatial arrangement is related to gender stratification. The private sphere within home has been treated as a peculiarly feminine domain. The degree of seclusion from common glare served as a signification of status for both men and women.
Since little or no research has been done on women and work in Medieval India all available sources, and useful secondary works, have been explored whether relating to north or south India. For similar reason a long span of time from c.12 century to the early part of 19th century have been used. This study as it describes the middle ages of Indian history, has mainly utilised Persian as well as English sources. The Persian sources like any other source disregard women but one does find incidental references to women that are helpful for this study. In standard Persian histories, such as Tabqat i-Nasiri, Tarikh i-Firuzshshi, Ain i-Akbari and Akbarnama, Muntakhab ut-Tawarikh, Mirat i-Ahmadi etc., one does find references to women's work and the society's understanding of such work.

The extant Persian documents, Eg. Surat Documents, Cambay Documents and Allahabad Documents have also been found to be considerably efficacious for our study. The Malfuzat literature, both in Persian and Urdu, Khair ul-Majalis and Fawaid ul-Fawad has been comprehended.

The Sanskrit source Lekhapaddhati has been very useful regarding slaves especially.

The political role of Rajput ladies has been distinctly visualised from 'Rajasthani Ranivason ke Patra'.

An another relevant source perused is that of Rahim, that provides an extensive insight into various castes and their specific professions.

Besides, a sumptuous source of information has been culled from English official records as English Factory Records (13 Vols.) and Letters received by English East India Company from its servants (6 Vols.). These have been very productive in
understanding the mercantile history of ‘women’. The travellogues, English as well as other languages’ translations, though exaggerated many a times, account for a vast literature on India. To name a few, we have Alberuni, Ibn Battuta, Thomas Roe, Bernier, Tavernier, Thomas Best, Durate Barbosa, Manrique, Jourdain, Manucci and so on.

The other important source of information had been the paintings of Mughal Rajasthan and Pahari school. In them, the presentation of the rural scenes often captures glimpses of social life of ordinary men and women.
CHAPTER-I

WOMEN AND THE HOUSEHOLD

The family (and the household) is the primary unit of the society, comprising in it gender relations which form important section for analysis of the family and the consequent household as a productive society. Being so it combines economic, political, ideological aspects and thereby functions in a unique way in the reproduction of the society. Keeping in mind these, it becomes a promising area for investigation to locate some clues for explaining the social division of labour between sexes and thus women's social status and therefore the studies of these sorts, based on the household, are gaining momentum.¹

Infact the maintenance of the household requires doing certain kinds of work and hard labour. Conservative theorists argue that because men & women are socialised differently, they are suited to different types of work: men are concentrated in jobs that require more technical proficiency & decisions-making ability whereas women predominate in the more nurturing, expressive jobs.

Whatever division of work is allotted for woman is considered to be compatible with her maternal/biological functions and thus, domestic chores are assigned to her. To this Radical theorists point to patriarchy rather than socialisation process. The point

of compatibility between domesticity and maternity stands no chance for those who are void of problems of being mother. And secondly the so called 'women chores' do not debar her from sharing in non-domestic tasks with men.

While studying household as an economic unit may illuminate processes and differences in resource allocation but exclude the examination of those who not only support the labour market and wider economy but also do emotional and obligation work in support of each other and relation. The labour of women in household is not seen as work, in terms of its relation with economic development or material well being. Instead their labour is viewed as part of 'nature', a natural activity. But no longer women’s responsibility for childcare passes un-noticed as a natural phenomenon.

The maintenance of the household requires a lot of work, and hard labour. The household dimension of women’s work is the invisible economic base of the agrarian societies. However, owing to the fact that the burden of household work is solely borne by women, patriarchal societies derecognise and delegitimate it by ideologically situating or relocating it outside the domain of production or even ‘work’. In 1970s/80s, the feminists broadened the definition of ‘work’ to include housework, sexual and emotional servicing of men, the caring of children and elderly. There is in fact day to day servicing of the present labour force, ensuring feeding, clothing & replenishing their spirits.

3. Linda & Pringle (ed.), Defining Women - Social Institutions of Gender division (Milton Keynes, 1992). These types of work are essential in producing socialised individuals & current/future labourers. Heneritta L. Moore in Feminism and Anthropology (Cambridge, 1988) has emphasised that “her subordinate position is due to her confinement to a domestic sphere by ideologies of mothering, caring and nurturing.”
The family functions as an internal engine of growth in the process of proto-industrial expansion. The peasants' household in traditional agrarian societies lived from agriculture through manufacture of handicraft products for familial consumption and local demand was an important characteristic feature. Hans Medick speaking of proto-industrial societies remarks that there is a sort of the unity of production, consumption and generative reproduction, which was the characteristic feature of peasant household and family. Being so naturally then, the women were essential in the family economy. The peasant's wife bore children who meant more hands to toil and she was herself a means of production. It was because of her labour that she was valuable both for agriculture and home industries, as well. And thus it would be justified to describe women as the vanguard of the peasant household industries. Sheila Rowbotham points that it was the identification of the workplace with home and the combination of 'work' with the housework which marked the women's productivity.

In case of the majority of ordinary women, the work around household consists of a great variety of subsistence activities such as rearing children, carrying water, collecting fuel, cooking food, serving meals, food transportation, tending cattle, spinning cloth for home use, etc. We have seen certain plates throwing light on various aspects of productive activities. As details from Sanchi Stupa I, of period c.50 B.C. to 100 AD, reflect on women engaged in household tasks-husking rice in mortar with pestle, crushing

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6. Ibid.
grain with stone pestle, winnowing rice & rolling dough for cake. Besides this the fetching of water from the village well was a task well done by women. *Waqiat i Mushtaqi* points to women (Rajput) filling water from the well. Further Fryer, referring to the role of women in domestic work says, ‘Indian wives drfs their husbands victuals and fetch water and grind their corn with a Hand mill and when they sing, chat and are merry. They are wholly devoted to care of house.’ A country scene fi-om *Anwar i Suhaili* (1597A.D.) shows men & women at work, here a man is standing on the top of the well and a woman has a basket (full of _ _ ?_ _ ) on her head. In addition to performing domestic labour, women could be seen in the fields.

Looking after cattle and making milk products formed another major sector of women’s work. The feeding of the cattle was a part of women’s domestic chores, a painting shows woman giving water to cow and the same collection shows a woman giving water to oxen. However milking of cows was a job which men and women both performed and there seems no strict division of work here for the paintings show men and women both milking cows.

Along with this especially women have done a whole range of other activities like making of milk products. The visual reference for this can be taken from Lingaraja

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8. S.P. Verma. “India at work in sculpture and painting.” *Souvenir for Indian History Congress*, 1994, pl.III.
11. S.P. Verma. op.cit. , pl IX.
14. Ibid., p.31. fig.8.
16. Ibid., p. 61.
temple 1000 AD, where Mother Yashoda is churning butter. Explaining the term for butter *maska*, the illustration in the *Miftah ul Fuzala*, shows a woman sitting and churning buttermilk. A Jain painting of c.1500 shows women milking cows and making butter. *Khair ul Majalis* points towards woman earning her livelihood through her cow. A *Razmanama* illustration c.1585 again depicts women making butter and carrying milk and buttermilk.

The management of house and household chores were confined to women to the exclusion of men. The skills, expertise, talent and experience that were required in the management of the household were not recognised by the male dominated society, and were conceived as natural and therefore inferior—attribute of femininity. The gendered notion of work meant that women’s work was always valued less and generally paid less. The peasant housewife did not perform tasks subordinate to those of men but participated equally in the process of agricultural production.

However, in order to ensure the availability of women’s labour for household work, women’s education was generally discouraged. Forster says, “Women are debarred from use of letters. It is urged that the knowledge of literature would conduce to draw a woman from the household chores.”

17. S.P. Verma, op.cit., pl.IV.
The labour of women in the domestic sphere differed according to class. In the garden meetings of big nobles and omrahs, the only female present were maids/dancing girls. The female family member remained in strict seclusion and none could see them in general.

The nature of women's work in the household had particular caste connotations. Not all women performed similar work in household: the nature of their work was largely influenced by the constraints of the caste to which they belonged. The only work that Kayastha women did was to attend to household chores and to serve their family members unlike the Khatris, they did not touch the spinning wheel and shunned other similar production activities.

Most wealthy households include extra-household female members such as mistresses, wetnurses, slaves/servants and concubines. The presence of servants/maids among richer families would obviously tend to lighten the work of the women. They would have to do less manual work. In these families, there were a number of lower class recruits to take over the drudgery of housework and childcare. Mahabharata householders enjoyed female servants/slaves. Yuddhistra is stated to have kept a number of beautiful well-dressed female slaves or maid-servants. In 16th century when Keshavdas is writing his Ramchandrika, in 13 chapter verse 27, he refers to an old female slave who comes to wake up the householder.

The female servants formed an important section of the household. Details of Ajanta fresco, Cave 1, c.600 A.D., point toward attendants carrying pitchers. This shows the presence of domestic help. However a mention is made of maid-servant in Fawaid ul Fawad, Malfuzat literature, where while engaged in grinding wheat the lady sang the praise of the God. A painting, c. 1740, depicts a rather modest home where two maid-servants are seen killing a snake, as the operation is observed by one who is apparently their mistress.

The servants, both male and female received their wages in cash in addition to some food and clothing. Caste families hired women of lower orders to fetch water from well and for other related services. These women were known as Panibharin and were usually allowed food and clothing, than paid by a certain sum for each pot of water but many a times earned 8 annas per month. In the village, many a time old women rush upon the fields to assist in labour. Many unfortunate widows gave themselves up as domestic servants among richer family in return for food and shelter.

Slaves constituted another important external element in the household. Narada, Vijnaneswara mention 15 types of slaves. There were many sources of procuring

27. S.P. Verma, op.cit., pl.II.
slaves, both male and female. Prisoners of war were an important source. The natural calamity, as famine, was also a source of enslavement. The 13th century Lekhapaddhati documents of Gujarat cite one Swayamagata-Dasi Patra Vidhi where onelady being harassed by famine and mlecchas sells herself off. Slaves were occasionally brought from such far off places as Africa, it is in Humayun-Nama that Gulbadan had amongst her slaves a Russian of Moscow and his Polish wife; sometimes the local officials sold vagrant and idle people as slaves. It is Barani who says, the subjects were so obedient that they paid tax even by selling their wives and children.

It was Alauddin Khalji who passed regulation for slaves. The prices for sale of slaves of both the sexes were -first class from 20 to 40 tankas, second class from 20 to 40 tankas, and third class from 5 to 10 tankas. But basically standard value of serving girl/between 5 to 12 tankas and later they could fetch 500 to 1000 tankas and even 20,000 tankas. The price of a slave girl does not exceed 8 tankas in Delhi and

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40. Gulbadan Begum, Humayun-Nama, tr. A.S. Beveridge (Delhi, 1994), p.75.


44. Fuller, op.cit., p.119.
those who are fit for service as well as concubinage cost 15 tankas. But outside Delhi they could be cheaper. The difference in price was caused by grace of her department or refinement of her manners.\(^45\) Besides there was another regulation later on that if a slave girl or a concubine of a person had fled away, the administrator of royal affairs should find them out and restore them to rightful owners.\(^46\)

A slave could be sold, mortgaged by owner in order to obtain money from his creditor dhanika; she could be sold for cash and kind and against a gift in order to earn more income. Brahaspati Smriti says a female slave could never be acquired and possessed without a written deed. There are references to female slaves in ‘Sale deeds’ in Lekhpadddhati (13th century Gujarat).\(^27\) The 14th-century Mithila documents talk of mortgaging of slaves-Rs.6 for a male, Rs. 4 for a female and Rs.3 each for a son and a daughter.\(^48\) We have a whole range of documents acquired by National Archives of India (New Delhi) throwing light on the sale and purchase of slaves girls. These documents are known as Chithhi-i-barda-firoshi. In one dastawez, of the year 1740, slave girl was sold for Rs. 10/- (Alamgiri coins);\(^49\) another slave girl was sold for Rs. 15/-\(^50\) and many other like these. In some cases transactions in slave were exempted from taxes mahsul, Chitthi-i-muafi\(^31\) but in most other cases purchase and sale of female slaves was taxed by the state.\(^52\)

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47. Pushpa Prasad, “Female slavery”, op.cit., p.269.
50. Ibid. 2382/11
51. Ibid. 28382/25 (1753), 2382/21 (1753), 2382/22 (1754)
52. Ibid. 2382/28 (1740), 2382/26 (1753), 2382/20 (1753).
Slave women did much of the household tasks. *Lekhapaddhati* cites women slaves doing household works as grinding, cutting, smearing the floor, sweeping the floor, fetching water, milking cattle, agricultural work, etc.53 They were used for spying,54 as well or given in dowry.55 One of the writers has also expressed that these girls were used by their masters in prostituting and the slave girl would bring back money and give to the master.56 Thus the tasks performed by female slaves were diverse and multiform.

It was not uncommon for a sufi or *darwesh* to have a slave girl.57 It is said about Main Zain-ud-din, a religious man that whenever a slave, of any sex, was bought for him from *baazar*, he placed him/her under charge of a tutor for teaching prayer.58 Again our text *Masalik* is very helpful as it also points toward refinement of manners59 and dexterity, that gets corroborated by Manucci who points that, "the slave girl poured water into ink-stand very dexterously showing that she was a slave of a scribe."60

The relationship between the female slaves and the household women was a complex one, but where the former enjoyed sexual intimacy of the male head, jealousy was common. Sheikh Nasiruddin Chiragh told a prospective female disciple *murid*

55. Ibid. p.341.
59. Al Umari, op.cit., p. 45.
that she could become his disciple if she behaved well with her slaves.  

The institution of concubineage became the social instrument for integrating captive women into household of their captors thus assuring their captors not only their loyal services but also those of their off-springs. Concubinage is legal in the Islamic world. It appears from several documents in the National Archives of India that the sale and purchase of concubines was tax-free. In a document, *Chitthi-i-muafi*, it is mentioned that the purchase of a concubine, Challiya by Maulaim *tawaif* was exempted from cesses *mahsul*. The birth of a son could raise the status of a concubine where the paternity of child was certain. There are ample references to jealousies among concubines in order to obtain the favours of the male head of the household. A concubine had no protection against the unreasonable demands of their masters. Martin says that a good many women under descent nature of maids were in reality concubines. Further the documents from Surat allows for the married women to release or free a concubine in the household.

The household also included the services of the wetnurse and midwife. Midwifery is typically a woman’s work. *Chamars, Hajams*, etc., the lower caste women mainly performed it, for it is considered to be a polluting task. It is quite an underpaid work.

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It provides an income for desperately poor women with a few marketable skills. They appear invariably in Mughal paintings being depicted in birth scenes e.g. of Emperor Akbar himself and of his sons as well as of the birth of Lord Krishna, painted in 18th century. It is held to be esteem among rich and lazy only. It is exclusively a female job because it involves the most intimate exposure of women’s body. It should also be kept in mind that the work of the midwife is not confined to securing the birth of the child, but also involves the need to provide psychological and emotional support to the mother. The bond develops (ideally) beyond the technical to transpersonal. The relationship is not just mechanical.

Wet-nursing is another work that is obviously exclusive to women called dhays who nurse children. Lactating mothers would sell their milk to elites, and for the service so rendered they received and other favours by way of compensation. Almost all women of ruling and elite families required the services of the wetnurse. In a polity where becoming a mother was important, the availability of nurses was critical for survival of any infant. Besides, among ordinary families the need of a wetnurse might arise if the mother was ailing with some problem and therefore could not feed the child. Further, the presence of dhatri could relieve the mother and hence geared up the production process.

68. Geeti Sen, *Paintings from Akbarnama* (New Delhi, 1984), pls.56,57
70. Roe &Fryer(ed.), *Travels in India in the 17 century* (Delhi, 1993), p.317
73. Gulbadan Begum, op.cit.,p.95
On several occasions, a *dhatri* could use her position to acquire social and material benefits and a dignified position. If she becomes a *dhatri* of king’s children, she would obviously develop a bond of love and care with children and have the opportunity to get her family members placed in good position and could exercise enough authority herself.

Many comments have been made upon Maham Anaga. Abul Fazl calls her ‘cupola of chastity’. She is entitled to praises as she belongs to the category of those mothers who screen’s a son’s every fault and pushes his fortunes with all her influences. Further, it is also said that, ”at 19th, he rebelled against his nurse when she had set his feet on the primorse path to ruin of person and empire.” This is enough to understand the extent of control a person of dhatri could exercise.

There is obviously no direct evidence to reveal the contemporary perception of women’s work, but indirect evidence is provided by the institution of *parda* and the spatial arrangement of houses in medieval India. *Parda* can be comprehended as a social & historical phenomenon of segregation. The culture of *parda* represents a spatial boundary between men & women but more importantly, it represents the confinement of women not just within the house but within its deepest recesses.

*Parda* is not just an Islamic institution and adopted by Hindus at the time of

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75. W. Foster (ed.), *English factories in India* (Oxford, 1921), Vol. X, pp. 73-4
77. Ibid.
78. Uma, “Pativrata”, op.cit.
Muslim invasion because for Hindus, it was and is an elaborate means of signalling obedience. *Parda* among Hindus focussed on the separation of women from their male in laws while the Muslim culture kept sexually mature women, married or not, apart from society at large. It includes norms involving sexual modesty and a generally demure behaviour towards men and senior women. Infact if one looks at core effect of *parda* one is bound to get that, it does not require women folk to withdraw from labour on family farms or elsewhere. But one negative effect is that, due to this the work performed in the house gets unnoticed. All the more household work is further devalued due to its invisibility.

But at large it can not be deconstructed without reference to class background of women in question. Engels comments that, “it was no a historical overarching concept but an ideology related to social/economic power relations.” 79 It applied to that category of people for whom the compulsions of high caste and property combined to confine women within the safety of four walls. It could not operate for those categories where the women had to labour along with their folk. 80 Infact, it helps to bridge the division between public & private domain in the case of women who work outside the home.

In the peasant economy, in which she provided an indispensable source of labour & thus could not be kept secluded, there was always a scope for accommodating her by allowing her to work but in veil. Women can move about and earn their living but

80. Uma, op.cit.
they have to cast down their eyes and to conceal those parts of their body that are apt to excite passions and not to display their ornaments. In one sense, *parda* does limit the sphere that women can legitimately occupy but for poorer sections, it does not. There is every scope of utilising or rather exploiting women’s hard labour, even while getting the norms related with *parda* respected. In the inside quarters it invisibilises her hard domestic labour. In reality, it also exposes the apparent distinction between themselves by creating two groups of women: high class and lower class women.

Coming to the aspect of physical demarcation of home, the home was internally differentiated by gender. The analysis of residential arrangement allows us to understand the limitations that were imposed by the patrilineal society on women. Tavernier informs that, “all houses of private persons have large enclosures in the middle of which is the dwelling so that no one can approach the women’s residence.” Further talking about Agra he says “the house of nobles are beautiful and well built but that of private persons have nothing fine about them as is the case in all the other towns of India. They are separated from one another and are concealed by height of walls from fear lest any one should see the women.”

The study of the houses of aristocracy shows that these were surrounded by a boundary wall provided with a well-guarded door. The size and height of door might have been an indicator of social status. The *deorhi* a passage which makes 2 or 3 sharp bonds with the intention of foiling any attempt to see into the house, became a characteristic feature of every upper class house.

82. Zinat Kausar, *Muslim women in Medieval India* (Patna, 1992), p.194. fn.58
84. Ibid., p.86
Besides this, we can grasp the spatial distribution in the houses of the merchants from the plans of the houses of Shantidas Jawhari, where from the plan of houses we can make a few generalisations. For example, one of the houses shows the location of verandah *dheri*, rooms and if seen analytically there are some service structures like kitchen and *abdarkhana*, which were generally in *zenanakhana*. Thus the women apartment could be to the right of the plan.\(^86\)

Together with this, the contemporary perception of space determines the value of work, and undermines women's labour. A work that is performed within the precincts of the household, as is the case with most women's work, it is not viewed as economically productive and / or useful, whereas, a work that is performed outside home, is seen as a productive activity. For example, animal shed was often located within domestic space & was usually managed by women. Whereas selling of milk in the market was done by men and butter was made by women at home.\(^87\)

The spatial arrangement between sexes is socially created to maintain social order. Infact, spatial arrangement is related to gender stratification. The private sphere within home has been treated as a peculiarly feminine domain. Infact, degree of seclusion from common gaze served as an index of status for both men and women.

The poorer women and men mingled in *baazars* or village green for their cramped

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household and lack of servants/slaves prevented segregation. Foster says, “I speak of ordinary women such only being permitted to appear in public. Those of higher classes are never seen abroad; nor is it consistent with usage of any Mohammedan nation even to speak of female part of the family. The delineation of inner spaces of the household as legitimate spaces suggests these as being intensely moral realms, where not everyone could have access to.

Female segregation in Medieval India, indeed, did not prevent women either from participating in work activities or even from exercising some degree of control over property. There is no definitive or uniform code relating to women’s property rights amongst Hindus. Manu being a patriarchal to the core had to take into consideration the existing laws belonging to other popular traditions, apart from the Vedic sources, which do speak of women’s rights to inherit their ancestral property. Thus he says on the account of marriage brothers should forego one-fourth of their own shares in favour of their sisters. To this N.N.Bhattacharya says it was more of an obligatory nature than a legal compulsion. Brihaspati, Katyayana say that a daughter should inherit if she was not married. An inscription from Mysore (1188) throws light on division of landed property between sons and daughters.

88. Forster, op.cit., Vol.II, p.21
The very conception of *stridhana* shows that the women could acquire property by inheritance, purchase and partition and also by way of gifts from her relation at or subsequent to their marriage. Not only this widows also got shares amongst all the heirs. *Lekhapaddhati* is very helpful in this. She got both inherited movable and immovable property. Not only this the 13th century Kolar District Inscription reports sale by a widow of her share in landed property. A 15th century evidence points that a Brahman widow built a temple and also gift of land for spiritual benefit of herself and her husband.

Whereas, the *Sharia* recognises the claim of women over property, though her share in ancestral property was half to what men received under the law of inheritance. Women were entitled to half the share of what her brothers received from their natal property. Married women were allowed a share in the property owned by her spouse after his death.

*Ain i Akbari* mentions that four types of people deserved support (a) seekers of true knowledge (b) devout persons who abandoned these world (c) destitute (d) nobles whose ignorance prevented their taking of gainful employment. Each of these groups, as is clear from the *Ain* itself, did include women. Moreover, imperial decrees indicate that women usually received a share of empire’s revenue, when they were heirs of a male who belonged to one of the four categories mentioned above she could dispose her own property at her own discretion.

92. P.V. Kane, op.cit.,p.790.
93. Pushpa Prasad, "Land grants", op.cit.p.5
94. Ibid.,p.6
95. Ibid.p.7
97. References to Madad i-Maash grants being given and inherited, both, are present with us: *Documents in Central Record Office, Allahabad*: Doc. Nos. RRA: 173, 175, 176, 846, 911, 920 926; *Calender of Acquired Documents 1352-1754*, Vol. II, Doc. Nos. 2618/2, 2578/7, 2618/1, 2578/12, 2608/2
Kanaklatha Mukund has studied property rights in South India where we get inscriptive references to women making gifts to temples, sale & assignment of property or land revenues. These also indicate that the ownership rights of women with regard to their property extended to the power of alienation through gifts & sales. 99

Further, the claims of female heirs, as prescribed under Hindu/Muslim laws, were honored. The 17th century records from Awadh, actually show women, Hindus/Muslims both, inheriting selling or otherwise disposing off their zamindari/milikiat rights. 100 No law either Hindu or Muslim, excluded women from pressing or distributing wealth. She could exercise all the privileges of distributing wealth and of ownership. Thus ordinary women did control property, and participated in its maintenance and organisation. But, it is not the question of ownership but that of control, that is important here. Our evidence tends to suggest that they not only owned but also controlled the property.

Further, the documents from Surat throw light on yet another aspect where she could lay a claim at mahr (being a widow) and secondly, the mahr could be retrieved by selling female slave/concubine or selling her free or getting her married off. 101 This evidence suggests the: extent to which women were conscious of their rights over property and assets.


100. Allahabad Docs.,op. cit., ALD :515, 464; RRA :1294. Besides a whole range of Acquired documents throw light on sale, purchase and mortgage of property by someone else on their behalf. NAI:2431/11, 2164, 2614/1-2, 2431/10, 2403/27, 2060, 2431/13, 2535/xiv, 2403/31, 2624, 2403/61, 1292

Besides this, women also maintained from their own expenses certain buildings as palaces, tombs, mosques, bazaars, and wells. Lalrai Stone Inscription of 1176 from Gujarat highlights Rajputras making a grant conjointly with Queen Mahibaladevi for celebrating festival of Santinatha.\textsuperscript{102} Sultan Raziya got \textit{Madarsa i- Nasiriya} build.\textsuperscript{103} Maham Anaga built \textit{Khair-al-Mawazil mosque} and a \textit{madarsa} in 1561.\textsuperscript{104} It was prerogative of the leading court ladies to build in & around markets. C.B. Asher while talking about Shahjahanabad & its environs talks about the activities of Jahanara where she got constructed gardens, sarais, etc. Even her sister Raushanara was not far behind in and got a garden built to the north of walled city.\textsuperscript{105} It also highlights the control of women over fund as well as labour. It signifies a sense of authority.\textsuperscript{106} This type of involvement with charity work and support of faith raises the question of the public role of women. That they were acting as patrons, clearly shows that they had a public persona and enjoyed same social prestige.

The \textit{Smritis} or the Hindu law books have never been consensual on these aspects. But property was important as far as women were concerned because there was an emphasis on \textit{sati} amongst upper classes whereas \textit{karewa} was prevalent in lower orders. The popularity of \textit{karewa} among the overwhelming majority of landowning classes emanated out of the need for retaining landed property within the family. The main reason for making the marriage arrangements within the family was to transfer control of her deceased husband's land from the widow to his brother or to a patrilineal family

\textsuperscript{102} \textit{Epigraphica Indica (hereafter EI)}, Vol-XI, pp.50-1.
\textsuperscript{104} C.B. Asher, \textit{Architecture of Mughal India} (Oxford, 1992), p.221.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid., p.204.
\textsuperscript{106} Indrani, op.cit.
member, because a widow who re-married lost all her rights to property, even if she married her husband’s brother. She had only right to maintenance. Even the prevalence of sati system stopped the transference of property rights to women or any other man in question.

Together with this, the prevalence of dowry and bride wealth in medieval India reflects on the varying control of women over family assets and property. Women bringing in dowry to their conjugal family ensured their participation in the joint family assets. In cases where bride wealth prevails, a woman becomes an asset for the natal family, for it is her marriage that brings in wealth/property to the family.

To conclude, women’s role and work was crucial in the maintenance of the household economy. Women’s labour actually constituted and sustained the household as a viable social and economic unit. However, their labour in the household was systematically de-valued and de-legitimated under the prevailing patriarchal ideology. The household was not a ‘private space’ strictly speaking, for it did also include a large number of production activities that are usually consigned to the space of the public. Women’s labour was crucial in these spheres of production, as well. An informal market space had not as yet developed in the Medieval period, most economic activities were crucially related to, even integrated with, the household where women’s labour was both qualitatively and quantitatively higher than the labour of men. Women sustained all economic activities, without even receiving due credit for the same.
CHAPTER-II

WOMEN IN PRODUCTION

In medieval India women played an important role in the organisation of production. There was a wide range of activities opened for women and so their role was very crucial. But this was not without any gendered division of labour. Infact the access to productive and other technologies in agriculture and craft production was also gendered and thereby served to perpetuate patriarchal dominance.

The second point that needs to be made is that the productive work of the women was subsumed within the household/domestic economic unit, obscuring and even subverting their productive role in the society. In almost all areas of productive activity the involvement and participation of their labour was crucial.

The peasant together with his family universally appears as a separate individual producer tilling his own fields. Women provided labour for the peasant household, as well as for cultivation & for animal husbandry. The peasant economy, in which she provided an indispensable source of labour, could not keep her secluded & thus accommodated her. Using her labour for outside activities does not appear to detract her from familial patriarchal authority in India so long as the outside work is in accordance with norms & requirements of the latter.1

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Before going into details of the direct field operations, there was another task performed by women that too merits classification as field work. They not only cooked food for their men working in the fields, but also carried it to the field. In an illustration in the *Anwar-i Suhaili* a woman is shown bringing food to her husband standing on the well irrigating the fields; in another instance (c. 1600) we see woman with food on her head while a man is working in the field.

From the sowing of the seed to the harvesting of the crop, women’s labour was always involved. A Mughal miniature of c. 1610 depicts a woman sowing seeds by broadcast, walking behind the man driving the plough. The work in the field that women did included transplantation, weeding and helping in harvesting. They assisted in weeding and gathering of crops along with the men. Though the actual operations being carried out by women are not always clear enough in Mughal miniatures, women working in the fields form part of the typical rural scenes for the artist to depict in 16th/17th centuries. However, a line drawing of early 19th century from Kashmir very clearly depicts a woman-transplanting paddy along with a man. In another figure she is in the kitchen garden, hoeing the plot watered by man from a pot and thereby helping in irrigation.

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2. *Anwar-i-Suhaili* 1596–7, Bharat Kala Bhavan (Varanasi), No.9069, f.61.
3. Ibid., f.25.
5. Such illustrations may be in *Razmanama* (c. 1660) and 18th century *Kangra Paintings* reproduced by Prince of Wales Museum, Bombay (not numbered) and Percy Brown, *Indian Paintings* (Calcutta, 1953), pl. 15. Resp.
7. Ibid., p. 348, fig. 43.
It has been pointed out that when the corn was sown women and children would go to the fields every morning to collect grass and weeds springing up with grain. It does appear from the available evidence that weeding was exclusively a woman's work while harvesting involved a more complicated division of labour between sexes. Here women tended to bind the corn and bring the bags on their backs.

Besides weeding, transplantation was also exclusively a woman's work. It is a very tough and tedious task. They had to stand 6 inches or so in water, bending and moving backwards as they transplant seedlings. Even today, women are supposed to withstand better the fatiguing postures and movements required for this work. They are preferred for they are more adept at uprooting and handling the sapling and replanting them in straight rows which in turn facilitates weeding and reaping.

The cleaning and grinding of food grains was considered woman's job. Miftah ul Fuzala shows a woman turning a rotary hand mill with a single spindle. In 1676 Fryer noted about India generally that, Indian wives dress their husband's victuals, fetch water, and grind their corn with an hand-mill, when they sing, chat and are merry. Further, rice cleaning is another important activity done by women and in the illustration of pestle and mortar, the Miftah ul Fuzala shows a woman working with it. There is a reference which shows that 3 women cleaned 60 sers/day so that each for a day's

9. H. Buchanan, A Journey from Kingdom of Nepal and of the Territories annexed to Dominion by House of Gorkha (Delhi, 1990), p.223.
10. Mohammad Shadiabadi, Miftah ul-Fuzala, British Museum and Library, MS Or.3299: Microfiche with CAS in History, Aligarh, no.446. f.119a
11. J.Fryer, An account of East india & Persia being 19 years travels 1672-81 (Delhi, 1990), p.118
12. Miftah, op.cit., f.89a; S.P.Verma, India at work in sculpture and painting (Aligarh, 1994), pl.XXIV.
work got 6 lb. of clean rice. At harvest, she would work the whole day and bring 40-60 baskets of ears, each giving about 2 sers or 8 lbs of grain. Thus the cleaning and husking which took place in the household of the consumer was confined to women.

Women were equally involved with men in the tilling of the fields. Many a times, women would make their labour available to farmers on wages. We are informed that “a farmer with 4 ploughs usually requires 6 men, 4 women and 8 oxen to transplant paddy plants. He must also hire women”. Besides, wives of the servants were to provide their labour at seed time.

It is thus clear from the evidence of Buchanan that the cultivation was done with the help of farmers and their families (including of course, their women) and some hired servants of both sexes. The participation is thus almost equal to that of men. But women’s participation is only apparently equal. A closer look at the gendered division of labour would show that women bore an exceedingly higher burden in the process of cultivation. The more tedious and tough tasks were assigned to women. The work of weeding and more especially, transplanting are very tough because these require constant bending and standing in water for hours together, in the latter case. And infact taken together, a woman reaping, weeding & transplanting makes as high wages as the man ploughing.

15. Ibid., Vol.III, p.35
16. Ibid., Vol.II, p.315
It is generally believed that ploughing being an arduous and relatively tiresome activity has not been assigned to women. Certainly, compared to the activities of women, ploughing is not at all quite an arduous task. Women's labour is based on the use of such tools as sickle, baskets and winnowing fans, which function on the sole deployment of their energy. On the other hand, men use tools dependent on external sources of energy. The plough is a typical example of this. The male monopoly over the plough, which occupies a central place in intensive agriculture only, reinforces our hypothesis that women worked harder and suffered greater than men in agricultural production.

Moreover, male control over the plough can be viewed as a male strategy to deny women control over agricultural production. The patriarchal control over ploughing has allowed men to take control over an operation that is usually critical for good yields under settled, intensive agriculture. At the same time, their control provides ideological justification for male right over agricultural produce. The analogy of sexual production which goes back to Vedic times is often invoked in this regard, in which woman is symbolised as field, the man as seed. The produce consequently also belongs to man.¹⁸ To conclude, the gendered division of labour in agricultural production allowed for the appropriation of women's labour without adequate entitlements. It also served to constrain and disempower women's subjectivity.

The predominance of women in agricultural activity is suggested from a number of indirect evidences. Wessels (1603-1791), for example, informs us that in Srinagar,

women cultivated while men were traders. And again from another source, in situations of drought and scarcity, women were the principal labourers in the field. It would seem that even in lands that were inhospitable to agriculture, it was the labour of women that predominated.

Even though, as we saw, women were equally involved in the organisations of production, the wages they receive for their labour was far less when compared with those of men. The gendered discrimination in wage payments suggest that women's labour was socially and economically devalued in relation to the wages of men. Buchanan provides us with figures of wages paid in South India. According to his evidence, at the time of transplantation of crops, a hired man received 2 Hanies of clean rice or annually 21.25 bushels, together with 1.5 re worth of cloth, a Pagoda in cash and a house whereas a hired women got 1.5 Re for cloth and .25 of man's allowance of grain. At seedtime and harvest, a man was paid about one-third to one-fourth of a fanam per day whereas a woman got one-fourth to one-fifth of a fanam per day.

Further, looking after cattle was a job typically assigned to women. Explaining the term *maska*, the illustration in the *Miftah ul Fuzala*, shows a woman sitting and churning buttermilk. A Jain painting of c. 1500 shows women milking cow and making butter. A *Razmanama* illustration c. 1585 depicts women making butter and carrying

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22. Ibid. p. 11.
23. Miftah, op. cit. f. 89b.
milk and butter milk. 25 Infact feeding cattle was part of women's domestic chores, a miniature of Rajput school, c.1750 shows women feeding cows. 26 Women, children and old people take care of their neighbour's cattle and collect cow dung for fuel. 27 Village herdsman attended by some boys and girls drives cattle to pasture 28 while a few labouring cattle and buffaloes are left at home in-charge of women. 29 The cattle were milked by men, who carry produce home to women for they prepare butter 30 and other dairy products.

Forbes writes that the simplicity of patriarchal age was realised in rural occupations of women at Harrasar, the pastoral lives of Mesopotamian damsels and many customs described by Homer still exist in Brahmin villages of Concan: drawing water and tending cattle to pasture and washing clothes at tanks. 31 It is an indication to the fact that many a task relate to the field and some to the household.

Further, Forbes also mentions that “in several parts of India, especially Mysore and Malabar, ryots take as many wives as they can maintain for women are extremely useful in different branches of husbandry and are not liabilities to their husbands.” 32

Women’s participation in production is constrained not only by considerations of gender but also equally by facts of caste. Grain parching bharbunja was distinctly a

29. Ibid., p. 11
30. Ibid., p. 14
32. Ibid., p. 76.
woman's industry. They parched pulse and maize for all people and receiving a little of grain from each. They would get two paysas in Patna per day but in other places they make less whereas a few are able to purchase gain, parch it in their house and retail it in a shop. Further, in Shahbad District Report it has been given that, "among Kandu, agricultural sudras, men cultivate and women, alone, parch grain. And many a times poor women are hired by those who retail provisions."

In some popular songs, indeed, women of certain caste groups were even singled out for praise, specially their hard work and industry: wife of a kurmi is very hard working "Good is the caste of the kurmin, with a hoe in her hand she goes to the fields and works with her husband". It seems that though both men and women might have been industrious; but women bore a heavier burden of work in the household economy.

While Russell might say "women do lightest of labour at fields; but he is proved wrong when Risley mentions that, "man abhors the labour of practising any craft but he expects that while he is amused and unemployed, the female part of the household shall be busily engaged in the field or in looking after pigs and poultry." Thus relatively she is more burdened.

In so far as the craft sector and the building industry were concerned, women's participation was no less important and widespread. The pottery seems to be the earliest

33. M. S. Yagik (ed.), Rahim Ratnavali (Varanasi, n.d.)
34. Buchanan, Behar-Patna, op.cit., p.636
36. Yagik, op.cit.,
sector where there was full-scale participation of women. Citing from Poona D.D. Kosambi informs that since the ancient period the largest pottery is rough turned by women on the slow potter’s disc, which is never used by the men. The rough pots are compacted and shaped by the male potters.39

The building industry shows full-scale participation of women. This comes out clearly from several extant paintings of the period. However women’s participation here was confined to the unskilled sector as pounding of bricks, sieving line, carrying mortar. In a depiction of the building of Akbar’s capital of Fatehpur Sikri, women are shown performing tasks like breaking stones and old bricks by pounding to prepare rubble, preparing bitumen mortar-cement and staining and mixing lime used to surface walls.40 In another painting of construction of Agra Fort, women are seen preparing lime mortar, and carrying it in pans, held in hand or over their heads, to masons. At least one of them walks up a slanted platform with the pan on her head.41 Yet in another Mughal painting, 1596 AD, women are shown carrying pans filled with bitumen.42

We have inscriptional evidence from Rajasthan around 1597 where during construction of a step well the number of men employed is 171 whereas women are 221.43 It is easier to believe Elphinstone who says, amongst the rudest of the tribes, he has no where seen the employment of women in building industry as in India.44

40. Laurence Binyon, Court Painters of the Grand Moguls (Hamphrey. Arnold, 1921), pl IX.
41. Geeti Sen, Paintings from Akbarnama (Delhi, 1984), pls. 31, 61.
42. A.J. Qaisar, Building construction in Mughal India (New Delhi 1988), pl.5.
This had implications on the wages that were paid to both men and women. *Ain-i-Akbari* provides us with wages of some of the labourers in which we can put women: Surkhi-Kob: pounders of bricks got 1.25 dams for a heap of 8 mans. Gilkars: workers in lime: as the sieving of lime is not a skilled activity woman can be put in the "last category who got 5 dams." Since women’s labour, in urban economy was confined to unskilled labour women received far less as wages than men.

There were other works where there was division of work between both sexes. There was a large involvement of women in manufacture of salt. Sangam literature is again helpful here. Salt makers were known as *umanar* and their wives played an important role in the making and marketing of salt. One man, a woman and two boys/girls were usually employed at furnace for six months. The people belonging to smelting houses and working there are divided like this-4 are bellow men, 3 men make charcoal and 3 women and 1 man collect and wash sand. Further, woman helped their husbands in blowing bellows and dragging hot iron from the furnace. In one instance, a person who obtained 13 salt fields, containing 360 canneries was employing 10 men and 10 women of *Vaiyuvan* castes for the production of salt. During preparatory months he paid each man and his wife ½ a *fanam* day. In the preparation of quicklime and the

burning of each kiln, one required 250 days labour of men and women and children at
from 1½ of 4 pan of canneries, according to age and sex employed to collect nodules.\(^51\)

In these instances, it was deployment of family labour and the wages \(=\) re also
family wage. As in smelting furnaces, on an average a family of one man his wife & a
boy/girl are able to assist in collecting ore. Each family can make about 2¾ rs. a month
& cultivate 4 or 5 bighas of high land.\(^52\) While their men worked with spade, women
carried earth/clay on their heads.\(^53\)

\textit{Vatsayanani Samhita} informs of female maker of baskets.\(^54\) Some poor families
made baskets and mats, chiefly through labour of women.\(^55\) Women made platters.\(^56\)
\textit{Telis} having oil mills got them managed by women so that each family trades and
manufactures, too.\(^57\) Besides this, certain families made a living by their women selling
vegetables,\(^58\) fruits,\(^59\) flowers\(^60\) and wine.\(^61\) Great many poor women earned a living by
carrying water for wealthy families \textit{pamniabhrit} by drawing water from well.\(^62\)

\begin{itemize}
\item \(^51\) Martin, \textit{Bhogalpur District}, p. 252.
\item \(^52\) Ibid., p. 263
\item \(^53\) Crooke, op. cit., Vol. III, p. 391.
\item \(^55\) Martin, \textit{Dinajpoor District}, p. 934: Vijay Ramaswamy, op. cit., p. 156.
\item \(^56\) Buchanan, \textit{Behar-Patna, Report}, op. cit., pp. 617-8.
\item \(^57\) Vijaya Ramaswamy, op. cit., p. 157.
\item \(^58\) Rahim, op. cit., p. 27.
\item \(^59\) Ibid.
\item \(^60\) Ibid., Vijaya Ramaswamy, op. cit., pp. 159-60 T. Falk & M. Archer, op. cit., pl. 26.
\item \(^62\) Rahim, op. cit.,
\end{itemize}
How does one explain the restriction of women to unskilled work in the building and craft industry. One reason for this could be that her labour was socially devalued and economically inferior. It was believed that women were bearers of an inferior and weaker constitution and therefore, their labour could not be placed on parity with the labour of men.

From the available evidence, this is far from true. In both agricultural and non-agricultural sectors, women were performing work that required much harder strength, stamina and energy. As for example, transplantation is a very tedious task, requiring bending for hours together and in the same way, pounding of bricks is very hard. The age-old explanation for women’s works attempt to rationalise an age-old tradition of gendered inequality. The assumption that women are physically weak is a culturally defined position that serves to perpetuate gender hierarchy and places obstacles in the way of women’s participation in skilled and better paid jobs.

The gendered basis of wage difference and the exclusion of women from certain skilled and classified jobs in medieval India show the extent of patriarchal domination in the economic domain. They also provide us with a clue to an important problem in medieval history- that of the ability of the patriarchal social structure to appropriate women’s labour without letting women benefit from it socially, culturally or economically.

We can say that in an agrarian economy, with a patrilineal kinship structure, the labour is the most important resource after land. In such a system, control and use of both land and labour are generally governed by patrilineal principle. Women’s labour is subsumed within the domestic mode of production, preventing them from gaining
social benefits from their productive role in economy. The subsistence level economy with total dependence on intensive family labour for cultivation, indeed, makes women economic assets. In addition, they engage in extensive animal husbandry work as well. Yet, their economic role did not translate in terms of enhancement of status, owing largely to the patriarchal nature of the family and household.

The sexual division of labour was structured in such a way that men not only controlled certain means of production but also means of reproduction. Since rural classes were defined in terms of the position of the male head of the household, this blurs both labour of woman that precedes fieldwork of peasant men and various post harvest processing tasks.

Together with this, domestic production constitutes an integral part of subsistence economy and is a single whole. The role of family and household is not confined to the agricultural sector, but includes the textile industry, as well. Manufacturing was predominantly a rural activity, though most urban sectors also had their artisanal industries especially for production of certain luxury & semi-luxury goods.

In country, as in town, the artisan’s family was the basic unit of production. The traditional organisation for manufacture of textile mentions a division of labour. If the family was the work unit, the artisan’s home was the typical workshop. Thus, despite the high degree of occupational specialisation on a hereditary basis, a characteristic common to all agrarian societies, was not altogether absent in India, the line of demarcation between agriculture & manufacturing activities was not always clear. 63

The most important component of textile industry was spinning and weaving. Usually, the spinning in peasant family was almost exclusively done by women.\textsuperscript{64}

The production of cotton thread was a complicated process and required significant inputs of both skilled and unskilled labour. After the collection of seeds, which surely involves women, there is the process of separating the fibre from the seed. The Ajanta frescoes of 6th century show a woman using the cotton gin, now called \textit{charkhi} and two rollers horizontally mounted on a stand.\textsuperscript{65} In one 18th century painting a woman is shown carrying the same instrument now provided with worm-gears as well.\textsuperscript{66} After the seeds were expelled the fibres had to be separated from each other. The Ajanta frescoes show a woman working with a roller and a board, to obtain the separation.\textsuperscript{67} The hand beating was a way for removing fibres. In the 1660s women continued to scratch fibres by this process.\textsuperscript{68} Buchanan has cited for 19th century from Dinajpur how women separated seed by usual hand-mill and then beat it.\textsuperscript{69}

The next process namely spinning was almost exclusively done women by hand spindle or by wheel. Sangam literature refers to these spinners as \textit{parutti pentukal}. The \textit{sudra} Lingayat saint Jedara Dasimayya belonged to the professional caste of weavers and it is said his saintly wife Duggali spun the thread, which he wove into cloth.\textsuperscript{70} Amir Khusrau links needle and the spindle to a young woman's spear and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{64} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{65} S.P. Verma, op.cit., pl.VIII.
\item \textsuperscript{66} Ibid., pl. XV
\item \textsuperscript{67} Ibid., pl. VIII.
\item \textsuperscript{69} Martin, \textit{Dinajpur Report}, op. cit., p.959.
\item \textsuperscript{70} Vija$a Ramaswamy, op.cit., p.154.
\end{itemize}
arrow. Miftah ul Fuzala explains the term for spindle duk and shows it being worked by woman. It also defines charkha as the device by which women spin. The earliest written reference to spinning wheel goes to Isami who says that a woman is suited only to work on the spinning wheel.

The next step before reaching finally to loom were stretching and sizing. The process of warping and wefting come into simple weaving which do involve women. For this we have references from 19th century where in Dinajpur they were involved in warping and winding. Tanjore in 18th century shows a weaver brushing warp, and a woman holding a bobbin asari. Each loom requires one man and women, the latter to wind and to assist in warping and dyeing. A man and woman weave and warp seven pieces a month. Besides, they wind monthly 2000 tassar cocoons, which cost 10rs. Thus the Patoya and his wife make annually by weaving 261/4rs, and by weaving tassar 24rs, in all 50.25rs, which was considered quite modest. Thus, she besides cooking, cleaning the house, beating the rough grain used in the family can do more than warp and wind.

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73. Ibid., f. 94b.
76. Milfred Archer, Company paintings (London, 1992), p. 56; in the visual for carpet weaving man is holding a durie under his arm, the woman a distaff, ibid., p. 62.
79. Ibid., p. 411.
It is said and seen that men did actual weaving. But 19th century references of Buchanan from Assam and Rangapur point toward women's involvement with loom.

However, we do come across women who were just as expert weavers as the men. Russell cites that the ridicule attaching to weaver's occupation is due to its being considered proper for a woman rather than a man. The process of weaving which is considered to be a difficult and skilled task was not merely a question of assembling the necessary raw materials and settling the unemployed to work. But the cotton industry called for an empirical knowledge of the preparation and treatment of the natural fibre before it could be made ready for weaving. Thus the production & treatment of thread was a key element in the successful manufacture of the finer type of textiles & often required as much time as the actual process of weaving itself.

What comes out from the analysis of women's participation is the hierarchy in production: There was sexual division of labour in the domestic arena, be it for self-consumption or for market. For example, no caste is here disgraced by spinning cotton, a very large proportion of them spin some everyday when their other chores permit but no great number sit constantly at their wheel. Further, a woman who does not beat rice, and does no work but spin and looks after family, can work / spin a

Thus there was a lot of similarity between women and spinning. Besides this, the drudgery of spinning thread was naturally imposed on any widow in the household & hence the saying goes, it's always moving like a widow's spinning wheel. This is enough to understand the accommodation of labour force of widows into household's viability & survival.

Female participation and involvement in the textile industry, however, did not allow them to exercise any leverage in gender relations. Vijaya Ramaswamy explains that women were not allowed to touch loom because of the concept of ritual purity. But truth of the matter is that the loom symbolises male ownership, as in the case with plough. The idea behind the control of the means of production through the control of machines, e.g. loom, could be a way to ensure the dominance of male over production, and to appropriate women's labour in the service of patriarchy. The commercial production combined with domestic putting out system led to a sharply defined hierarchy of specialised function. The father/master was at the head of the household with a hierarchy of women and boys/girls beneath him. This structure based on the supremacy of male became the basis for future hierarchical divisions in industry.

For all that has been said in the previous pages, we see the involvement of both sexes in both sectors (village as well as urban). If we critically look at the scenario, we come to find that she is more involved in work at village level. Since the household is a production site, it involves the contribution of all family members. Being an

86. Ibid.
agricultural country and further, there being hardly any difference between agricultural & manufacturing sectors, the deployment of women’s labour was very crucial for sustenance & viability of the household. Whatever she performs at field is collectively considered to be part of work, which is an extension of helping family.

Whereas invisibility of woman is compounded by the organisational features of putting-out system i.e. splitting up the production process where individual woman does not have any sense of overall production process. That is while her labour is tapped for agriculture and other activities within peasant-households and they have little or no control over the produce generated through such activities.

In the less industrialised societies or the time we are referring to, the separation of wage work from home is not so well marked. However, there are clear gender divisions associated with allocation of tasks, albeit varying across space and time. Work is represented as a masculine domain and women’s work is often interpreted as an extension of their roles as wives and mothers, and thus a secondary activity in their lives. This led to an apriori assumption that wage labour was a superior form of work or those men were natural wage earners. The interplay of patriarchal ideology with pre-capitalist relation of production marginalises women’s work & presents a no option scenario for them.

Women’s labour was subsumed in the category of household work, and even the wages they earned in the market were seen as part of the family income. The household, which is considered to be domain of non-work, is the place where much of women’s

labour was deployed. In this domain, their work was systematically devalued and de-legitimised.

The sexual division of labour can not be understood in purely economic terms. It has sexual as well as symbolic dimensions. It is just not imposed on people but comes out as part of a social package in which it is presented as right, natural. There is no doubt that women’s work is determined and constrained by the caste system. The role of women and the kinds of work they could do were largely determined by their position in the caste system, for example, spinning being such an important industry comprised of all women but with different purposes. The poor would get involved for money whereas the rich would be involved for leisure. Further, there are women of certain caste who are well praised for their participation in various activities as *kurmin* is praised for her involvement with agricultural operations, with her husband.

Now, the institution of marriage could also be visualised from an angle where it would be clear as to how far this institution effected sphere/realm of production. In the medieval period, marriage was a *defacto* contract of work. Women’s labour was crucial, and it is not simply their sexual role, but also their role in the domain of production, that influenced, and even, determined the nature and significance of marriage. We have a reference where during Firoz Shah Tughlaq’s reign, things were so plentiful & cheap & the people were so well-to-do and enjoyed such ease that the poorest married their daughters at a very early age.  

To conclude, women’s labour was significantly deployed in the domain of

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production. Perhaps, they played a more important role in the domain of agricultural production, but even in non-agricultural sector, the role of their labour was quite significant. However, the social institutions, particularly the family, kin, household and the caste, prevented women from letting their significance in production translate into social, political and cultural terms. Even despite the important role of women in economy, they remained subordinate, subservient and oppressed social group. The participation in production is not causally related to betterment of social condition. It is only a necessary pre-requisite- the first condition, as it were.
CHAPTER-III
WOMEN IN MERCANTILE ACTIVITIES

Among the merchants of Medieval India, the family was not only a social unit, but also a commercial unit. A merchant family firm was an important constituent element of mercantile activity and organisation of merchant life. The close relationship between family and commerce, inevitably came to involve women in mercantile activities. The role of women in trade and commerce, was still quite significant.

The basic organising unit in the organisation of trade and commerce was the family. Women being an important section of complex structure of the Medieval family played an important part. The concept of stridhana which dates back to the ancient times is quite significant here. A woman could give this property of her for the business to her husband. Yajnavalkya, amongst a few cases, points toward a man’s being totally bankrupt and using his wife’s money to save himself and his family.¹ This is further corroborated by an evidence of Chola period where the wife gives out her stridhana so that her husband could start his business afresh.²

The significance of women in the world of trade is borne out from the autobiography of a petty merchant, Banarsi Das. He too repeatedly highlights the significance of the role of women and her stridhana in his family in sustaining and promoting the business activities of his family.

1. N.N. Bhattacharya, “Proprietar)' rights in Ancient India.” K.K. Roy (ed.), Women in Early Indian Societies (Delhi, 1999), p.19
Banarsi Das tells us that once when he lost all his money and returned back home, it was his wife who encouraged him to start his business afresh and gave him the necessary capital from her own savings. His mother-in-law also gave him crucial monetary help in re-establishing business. She further persuaded her son-in-law to shift his trading activities to Agra where his father-in-law was already a well-established merchant.¹

This is a clear example of how women influenced, and participated in the trading activities. The example of Banarsi Das clearly suggests some of the ways through which they crucially assisted their family merchant firms. They provided capital when business ventures failed, support of their natal kin connections to re-establish business, and pragmatic advices.

The above example is that of an indirect role that women had in trade but there are ample references to their ‘active’ participation in trade, almost of all types, also. But before going into details, it would be better to look at women as ‘great consumers’ and how this would have shaped the nature and volume of various trades. Women of all the classes were major consumers of products and their preferences clearly played a significant, if not decisive, role in determining the character of market. There is a reference to the *karkhanas* where different types of clothes were made for the Sultan Mohammad-bin-Thughalaq and his harem to be given to the *amirs* and their ladies.⁴

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The million of yards of cotton and silk materials produced in India every year were bought primarily by women for their own use and also copper pots, dishes, basins and other articles for use in Hindu houses were ultimately scrutinised by women, for their quality and value. Further, Bengal and Eastern Provinces brought clothing for Hindu women at Gujarat and also orhmis or women’s head coverings worked very cleverly and ingeniously with gold thread.

Likewise, the craft industries that produced gold and silver jewellery and set stones for ear rings, bangles, necklaces and nose ornaments, all had women’s tastes in mind and drug and cosmetic vendors knew that it was women who would be the primary purchasers of their commodities.

The interests of women shaped the quality of imports from overseas, as well. Foreign goods were quite common with royal families. The one item expressly imported for women, however, were hats, “that it would be hats that would be expressly brought for noble women is significant, for the Indian body image designates head as the most sacred part of the figure”.

We hear of a Meena Bazzar, which was conceived by Akbar. Here it were ladies who came for buying and selling, as well. The ladies coming here for selling or having shops were belonging to different castes. The renowned poet Rahim in his Nagarshobha talks of these ladies and their specific trades.

5. Francisco Pelsaert, Remonstrantie c. 1626, tr.Moreland & Geyl as Jahangir’s India (Delhi, 1972), p.7
6. Ibid., p.9
7. K.M. Ashraf, op.cit., p.143
Thus the involvement or rather patronage for trade came most often from ruling family and noble classes. Together with the ladies of the harem and the wives of the amirs, the king sat there and distributed the prizes. Even in the harem we hear of a faire, "one day in the yeare, for the solace of King's women, all the trade-men's wives enter the mahal with somewhat to sell in manner of a faire." This makes clear that it served a commercial motive as this would have given the ladies of the harem a chance to buy things and have the feel of "baazar", a place otherwise denied to them. The other thing that comes out from this is the active participation of trade men's wives in commercial ventures.

Together with being great consumers for many products, women also participated and carried on trade in capacity of peddlers, vendors, shopkeepers and more vigorously in foreign and domestic trade. Even the fields of brokerage or credit were not the ones from which they could be excluded. Dealing with these one by one, of the channels to outside world, the most exciting for women were the possibilities opened up by foreign trade. The palace fairs, of which we have just talked about, always provided women of means the chance to buy and sell but the coming of European merchants in substantial numbers to the Mughal court made available life beyond harem walls that could also be totally in keeping with domestic purpose.

Women in the imperial harem were actively engaged in commercial activities. Jahangir's own mother, Maryam Zamani, for example, owned ship called Rahimi through

which she traded with the markets of West Asia and the Persian Gulf.\textsuperscript{11} The significance of Rahimi in the overseas commercial activities is reflected from the fact that when in 1611 it was captured by the Portuguese, they demanded 30,000 rials for its release.\textsuperscript{12}

Maryam Zamani showed a remarkable interest in trade and commerce, particularly overseas trade. She was among the most well-known of the ship owners: "the Great Mogul's mother was a great adventurer, which caused the Great Mogul to drive the Portigals out of this place".\textsuperscript{13} Her ship carried merchandise for the vendors of Holy City, Mecca, and trafficked in pilgrims going for hajj.\textsuperscript{14} There is evidence to suggest that the Queen herself invested in the purchase and sale of commodities freighted on Rahimi: "Captin Hawkins brought indigo out of QM's hand, her factor havinge made price for itt...";\textsuperscript{15} "arranged by Queen herself"\textsuperscript{16} or those acting under her protection.\textsuperscript{17} Besides, indigo other Indian commodities belonging to the Queen were also loaded on the ship.\textsuperscript{18}

An extremely important woman actively involved in overseas trade was Nur Jahan. Foreign trade in her time was quite flourishing and lucrative. She owned her own ships and was actively engaged in overseas trade and commerce. Some of her commercial enterprises brought her immense profits, especially in indigo and

\begin{itemize}
\item[11.] Ibid., p.203
\item[12.] Foster, Letters received, op.cit., 1896, Vol.I, pp.186-8
\item[13.] Ibid., (1897). Vol.II, p.43
\item[14.] Ibid., Vol.I, pp.163,167,178,180-4
\item[15.] W. Foster (ed.). The Journal of John Jourdain 1608-17 (Delhi, 1992), pp.155-6
\item[16.] Foster, Early Travels, op.cit., p.123
\item[17.] Foster, Jourdain, op.cit., pp.156,186,191
\item[18.] Ibid., p.209.
\end{itemize}
embroidered cloth trade. She was an extremely astute and practical merchant, showing no hesitation in co-operating with the Portuguese for commercial security and profits.

Several of her business ventures were based on the cooperation of private Portuguese merchants, and her ships would regularly pay cartaz dues to the Portuguese. Her relations with the English merchants were on a better footing and sometimes, she issued orders granting them concession. In 1627 she passed an order exempting the English from payment of road dues and transit tolls. She sent her goods in English ships, preferring them to those of the Portuguese, and even the Indian merchants.

Referring to Nur Jahan’s interest in trading activities, Roe informs that, “on going to Jahangir, ever wary of new points of power, however, the queen Nur Jahan, asked to see the ambassador’s seal, keeping it overnight.” Roe further acknowledges in his Journal that Nur Jahan played a crucial role in his negotiations with the imperial court, as also in determining the demand of foreign goods and luxury items in the imperial court.

Thomas Roe called ‘Nur Jahan as his solicitor and her brother as his broker.”

He repeatedly emphasizes her special interest in trade and commerce and the support,

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23. Ibid.,p.436.
he and English had found in the development of their own trade in Mughal India. 25 E. B. Findley is quite correct when she calls Nur Jahan a shrewd business woman who saw the English as an opportunity for expanding overseas commerce. 26

Jahanara was another important woman in Mughal harem about whom we have much evidence concerning her interests in trade and commerce. She fully participated in trading operations and owned several ships chiefly Sahibi and Ganjawar. 27 Her shipping interests had a dual objective. The first was to increase profits from overseas commerce; and the second, was to assist the pilgrims going for Hajj. In 1643, one of her ships carrying for hajj included a cargo of goods worth 10 to 15000 of rs. which were to be sold at Jeddah and with the profits thus accrued her agents were to buy horses. 28

So much was her importance that for trading purposes everyone had to win favours of principal members of court and esp. Jahanara, who was particularly interested in revenue, 29 and it was very important “to procure her nishan to assist us therein”. 30 She was also bribed by English “by procuring some oyles, nutmegs, cloves, and mace of which these sorts the Begum is very desirous.” 31

It was not just in foreign trade that women were deeply involved. Even the internal trade had a considerable amount of participation of women. These women

25. Ibid., Vol.IV, pp.11.310.
29. Ibid., p.xi.
30. Ibid., Vol.VIII,pp.219-20; Vol-IX,p.11.
31. Ibid., Vol-IX,p.11.
also catered to the demands of internal market. The royal women who had important centres as their jagirs drew a lot of revenue from the internal markets. Broach city brought an income of 2,30,000 mahmudis for its owner, Nur Jahan, by way of tolls from internal trade. Nur Jahan also had Toda as her jagir which lay 80/Km. south-east of Ajmer on medieval trade route from Surat to Agra and brought her an annual income of 2 lakhs of rs. At Sikandara, her officers collected duties on all goods coming from East, before being sold presumably in the profitable market of the main city (Agra). Without these supplies this country, Agra, and its environs could not be provided with food, and would almost die of hunger so that this was a place of great traffic.

We have a whole range of Edicts from Mughal harem which reflect the role of royal ladies in commercial activities. There is one hukm of Nur Jahan dated 27 January 1665 where she announces measures to encourage people, particularly merchants, to settle down at Nur Gunj katra in qasba Sironj. This clearly highlights the interest that imperial women undertook to increase trading activities. Royal women also constructed and maintained sarais on important junctions of trade routes for the convenience of traders.

32. Om Prakash, Dutch Factories in India 1617-23 (New Delhi, 1984), p.134.
34. Pelsaert, op.cit., p.4.
35. Ibid., p.41.
Jahanara also took active interest in the collection of revenues. In one nishan, she acknowledges receipt of musk and in another nishan, she gets interested in ice boxes from Garwhal and she complains about ice not coming from her own show house (21/27 June 1678). In another nishan, she instructs her officials to be diligent in collections of snow and to make due payment to labourers (23/28 June 1680). Manucci informs us that she had an income of 3m. of rs. in addition to revenues of the port of Surat.

The trading world in Medieval India comprised of lot more activities than large-scale trade. The business of insurance did involve her presence. In one instance, Huri Khannum, Begum Saheb’s nurse had promised to procure Begum’s nishan regarding the whole affair. There is evidence to suggest that in money-lending operations, women did play an important role. G.S.L Devra has cited evidence from Rajasthani sources, of ladies of royal Rajput households engaged in money lending. Their chief borrowers were the traders and merchants of the same area. There is also some evidence of even the English merchants borrowing money from “a Banyan woman.”

Besides this, women’s participation in petty commerce seems to have been quite considerable. Most of the milk and its products was hawked by ladies. There is a

40. Ibid., p.108.
41. Ibid.
reference where a woman earned her livelihood through her cow. Buchanan writing about Bihar describes the division of work among pastoral castes as follows: The young men were farmers, the old and the children tended cattle & women sold milk and the cakes of dung that were used for fuel.

The poet Rahim talking of Meena Bazzar refers to ladies of different castes and their respective trades. In the same way Tashrih ul Aqwam of early 19th century also describes women of these castes carrying their profession. Amongst these the ones like bangle and flower selling were women specific for it required more intimate contact with ladies.

The local market networks and those of big cities remained loosely linked in many parts of the country. Farmers and village artisans disposed off their surplus produce in small periodic \textit{hats} and the produce of wider world reached them by way of itinerant merchants and religious fairs. The periodic fairs which were religious, many a times, were a good centre for exchange and selling of goods. E.g. we have reference to women selling bangles at fair and further, that women travelled about to different village market carrying wares. We've visual reference to women selling religious

\begin{itemize}
\item[47.] F.Buchanan, \textit{An Account of District of Behar and Patna 1811-2} (Delhi, 1986), Vol.II. p.635.
\item[48.] Rahim, op.cit.,p.246.
\item[49.] James Skinner, \textit{Tashrih ul Aqwam}. Rotograph with CAS on History, Aligarh, No.
\item[50.] R.V.Russell, \textit{The Tribes and Castes of Central Provinces of India} (Delhi, 1975), Vol.III. p.283.
\item[51.] W.Crooke, \textit{The Tribes and Castes of North-West India} (Delhi, 1974), Vol.II, p.232; Russell. op.cit., Vol.II, p.283.
\end{itemize}
icons at fairs. The itinerant trade was an activity, which was very important and lucrative as far as ladies were concerned. Itinerant woman traders sold herbs in periodic markets. Women also sold baskets in the market and got ready money.

Women used to travel about to different village markets carrying their wares on little ponies. The peddling trade has another aspect also which was very lucrative. There had been sarais which were intended for the travellers and since the time of Humayun, many were built upon the royal highways throughout the realm. Almost all the foreign travellers have spoken about caravansaries and its dwellings and comforts; these were divided into dwelling rooms and chambers with a male or female Regent: for women also carry on this occupation. Tavernier mentions that here at sarais, there came some women who sold flour, rice, butter, vegetables who make their business to prepare bread and cook rice. Though some might say that sarai was a work of charity but it had commercial purpose and was a place for entertainment too.

Besides, peddling many a times women sat on shops and sold various products. As Mirat i-Ahmadi informs us, women sat at every shop and sold articles of luxury and pleasure. One visual shows a woman sitting in the shop and measuring rice.

61. Ibid., p.71.
Amongst basket weavers, women take the greatest share of trouble for they carried it to the market for sale. At Surat, they gained livelihood by preparing lac after colour had been extracted.

Besides the active participation by women in trade and its organisation, women also had a say in disputes regarding mercantile property or the goods involved in business enterprises. We have a whole set of documents from Surat which throw light on the involvement of women in disputes regarding mercantile property. In one instance, a woman through her waqil sought to get back the money which her father had given to two persons to buy goods. The amount stood around somewhere 1000 hun. The other case also points toward the mercantile property, cash as well as kind, being retrieved by a widow of the merchant and in another case, it was fought for by son of a merchant on behalf of his mother and two sisters.

Till now we have seen the full scale participation of women in economic life of urban settlements. The trade, foreign as well as internal, had a good proportion of women participation. Buchanan talking about Bihar and Patna comments that, 'the women who retailed greens and fish are considered as frail'. The presence of women in the market was considered to be a lewd act, a mark of indecency, perhaps. Russell while giving an account of tribes and castes, talks about Kunjra, a caste of green-grocers, where their women have a dubious reputation, as the better looking girls who

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66. Ibid., ff.226a-226b.
67. Ibid., ff.227a-227b.
68. Buchanan, Behar-Patna, op.cit., p.290.
sat in the shops were said to use considerable freedom of manners to attract customers.  

This is very much true for we have further corroborative finding from Shahbad district where it was said that women exposed themselves in market to vend their commodities.

This clearly reflects the contemporary patriarchal perception on women’s presence in the public world of market and trade. It is indeed a great tribute to these women who participated in trade and commerce that they did so in spite of such discouraging, and even degrading approach of the society at large to their work.

Women were involved in large number activities, which can loosely be defined as entertainment work. It is not a productive activity, strictly speaking, but is related to it indirectly, as aiding and assisting it. If production is related to the material reproduction, entertainment is related to the symbolic reproduction of the society. Both constitute work in the way we understand the word today. In Medieval India too, entertainment, especially if it was placed within the public domain, was viewed as work, as crucial for the maintenance of the society. It seems it were those forms of entertainment that were placed in the private domain that were usually de-legitimated from the sphere of the work. Indeed, in the public domain women did earn their livelihood by participating in entertainment activities.

It is, therefore, important that in discussing the role and extent of women's participation in entertainment, we distinguish public entertainment from private/family entertainment. The public entertainment differs from the private festivities in the sense that they serve to reinforce the bonds of identity and community. Public festivities enclose the participants with a strong community feeling. This feeling is further strengthened by the exclusion of the outsiders as the other.

The public is a world of ritual, theatre and symbolic/metaphoric transformation of the social reality. The public entertainment is integrated to the process of social identification.¹ Since, women are markers of identity, the participation and involvement

of women assumes considerable significance.

Women were involved in festivals, rituals and public fairs. The feasts and festivals are major events created by an entire community to depict essential life of that community. Alberuni is very prompt in saying that women and children only celebrate most of the Hindu festivals. The jatras and kirtans, being religious in ethos, were also a source of entertainment. These are occasionally held in villages that are usually attended by a big crowd consisting mostly of ladies. We have a visual from Murshidabad School of Hook-Swinging festival, which is being attended by all, and all type of activities as selling, buying and a sort of intermingling of all people is visible. During Muharram procession, women are watching the taziyas being immersed in water.

Besides we have certain women specific festivals or merry-making which highlight the assemblage of women. Teej is one such festival of which we would see in detail. We have pictorial evidence to this, which is termed as sravana-masa, merry making. The site of the festival constitutes an assemblage of women that is gender exclusive. It is indeed one such occasion on which the public space is appropriated by women, ritually upsetting the male privileged position in that space.

4. Milfred Archer, Company Paintings (London, 1992), p.72. The same collection also figures a picture from Tanjore of 1830, where in various rituals woman was part of the whole scenario i.e. a man is beating amridanga, a woman is carrying above her head a shrine with a seated figure of Bhairava, the open door of which are decorated with painted panels, p.59.
5. Ibid., p.81.
7. James Todd, Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan (Delhi, 1971), p.461. Besides other festivals are as gangore which almost exclusively appertain to the women. The Rali mela and Aranya Shashti are also two occassions. One can see, C.H. Buck, Faiths, Fairs and Festivals of India (New Delhi, 1977), p.88-91.
All festivals are not simply entertainment activities, but also involve work. In the teej, women were engaged in the preparation of food, tailoring of new dresses and other such activities and for these various kinds of work, women did employ the services of other women. The festive moods of women quite exclusively appertain to themselves. As for example, nayika is depicted as playing holi with her sakhis or ladies are seen with fireworks.  

In the same way, public fairs are very big public celebrations and are an index to the cultural, social and domestic life of all the people. These are a sort of collective ceremony. The fairs were generally religious in nature, but were always composite in terms of their social composition. J.C. Oman while talking of fairs points toward this, that the persons of both the sexes attend these. It was very common to have dancing shows and nautankis, as well. Here it was the men alone who participated and men performed even women's roles.

This should not be seen as evidence to the exclusion of women from the public spaces. Rather, the absence of women from nautankis and such type of places reflected the social taboos against gendered intermixing and promiscuity on social occasions. It was only under the impact of Europeans that we start seeing women, too. In Awadh, the repository of culture, Nasiruddin Haider and his mother, Badshah Begum patronised Indianised version of theatrical performances by jalsewaliyan especially of female

8. Rita Pratap, op.cit., p. 53, fig. 22.  
9. Ibid., p. 54, fig. 23.  
performing artistes. Wajid Ali Shah established *parikhana* for imparting training in dancing and singing to female artistes.  

Women from respectful families were unusually kept aloof from the public spaces. This was owing to the fact that the male gaze was considered to be polluting for women. Further, since women were the bearers of the dignity of the household, they had to be protected from such ritual pollution.

The most conspicuous women present at public ceremonials were dancers, musicians and singers. Ibn Battuta tells us that, "On the side of Hauz Khas, were 40 domes and around it musicians *ahl ut-tarab* and their place is called *tarbabad*, female singers recited *taravih* in the mosque". No religious ceremony or festival was thought to be complete without the accompaniment of dancing women. In the family, birth ceremonies and marriage processions all invited huge crowd of the people. The birth scene of Prince Salim shows women singers and musicians performing. The marriage scene shows royal musicians performing on drums, *naqqaras* and the trumpets. Ladies are wearing typical Turkish costume whirl with *janjiras* in their hands. This profession was not devoid of skill and a refined taste. We see in one visual the celebrated dancers from Mandu dancing before Akbar.

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15. Ibid., pls. 17-18.
16. Ibid., pl. 19.
The entertainers of which we would be discussing were a differentiated lot. The core of entertainment was dancing and singing. It was the particular audience and the place that determined their rank, status wealth and security. For the purpose of offering them to the Sultan’s services well-known reprobates and old procuresses had trained up young girls with beauty, manner, grace, bold brunets and shameless to sing melodiously, to strike rubab, to recite ghazals and to engage in repartees and to play norod and chess. Music assemblies were quite common. Our text Tabqat i-Nasiri points to Sultan Rukunuddin’s inclinations toward sensuality, his honorary dresses and his presents being made to people as musicians and singers. Sultan Nasiruddin talks to Rukunuddin and advises him not to get submerged into pleasure and merry-making just and keep the rivals, beautiful girls, musicians, (who put him in luxury) away from himself.

In the same way, Sultan Jalaluddin was a man of poetic bent. He used to organise Majlis i-Sultan, where all types of merry-making were possible. The dancing girls, as Nusrat Bibi and Mehar Afroz were very beautiful and jolly. They were present in majlis of Sultan. It is said that the majlis of Sultan was like the one that could be seen in dream. Amir Khusrau talks about Turmati Khatur, a remarkable singer, entrusted with duties of Amir i-Murtabin, sang and played with fixed principles of knowledge

17. Mohammad Habib, Politics and Society in Early Medieval India (Delhi, 1981), p.82.
19. Barani, Tarikh i-Firuzshahi, (ed.) Syed Ahmed Khan (Calcutta, 1862), p.152. Tabqat i-Akbari also supports this time period of fun and rejoicing. (That is the work of dissipation, debauchery went on to a prodigious rate and doors of wickedness and prostitution were wide open. Nizamuddin Ahmad, Tabqat i-Akbari. tr. B. N. De (Delhi, 1992), Vol. I, p.120.
through art. Babur sent them (Ibrahim Lodi’s harem) to Kabul for his Begums.

Further, in *Muraqqa i-Dilli*, which belongs to 18th century, in the chapter “Arbab i-Tarab”, is given a list of dancers who were accomplished in the art of dancing. It also mentions that dancers were talented composers of poems, as also those who were well versed in the art of elegant conversation. Further, it also mentions one of the important evidences of one Panna Bai, who was a disciple of Nemat Khan, who taught her renderings of *khayyal* and *ghazals* to be presented at royal court. The learned scholars could only follow her selective usage of words and her conversation was more appealing than the coquetry of other women. The dancing girls in royal services were bestowed with large amounts of money and other riches. They usually enjoyed good relations with nobles, and their letters of recommendation were generally favourably received and for this reason, much sought after.

It is interesting to note that during the Mughal age there were a number of professional singers and dancers. Abul Fazl refers to different classes of musicians. *Hurkiyah* ladies played upon tala and sang *Dhrupad*, *Dhadi* women were employed

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25. Ibid., p.108.
26. Ibid., pp.103-4.
27. Ibid., p.109.
28. Ibid., pp.103-5.
to sing sohla and Dhrupad with the Daf and Dhol on the occasion of nuptial and birthday festivities, and they performed only before a female audience. He gives a description of Sezdah Tali who mostly belonged to Gujarat and Malwa. Besides this, there was a class known as kanjari. Akbar named the ladies of this class as kanchanis.\textsuperscript{30} Nat girls were instructed by their parents and admitted in the harem. Bazigars and rope dancers entertained ladies. Besides these Lullenees, Domenees and Hentsinis were other lady musicians.\textsuperscript{31}

\textit{Ain i-Akbari} gives a list of singers where it mentions Akhara, an entertainment held at night. Here (female) domestic servants were taught to sing and play. They even instruct their own girls and take them to nobles and profit largely by the commerce.\textsuperscript{32} In the reign of Shah Jahan, he had many singing and dancing girls in his seraglio. Female dancers and public women enjoyed great liberty and were found in great numbers in cities.\textsuperscript{33} In all such occasions, female dancers were in great demand. We have very many pictorial evidences to music sessions e.g. during marriage processions, a lady dancer is dancing, a male musician is playing tabla and two female musicians are playing manjira.\textsuperscript{34}

The royal ladies could not be far behind. They had their own band of entertainers.

Varsha Joshi talking of Rajputs says, apart from state owned patarkhana, each royal

\textsuperscript{31} Francisco Pelsaert, ‘Remonstrate’ c. 1626, tr. Moreland & Geyl as \textit{Jahangir’s India} (Delhi, 1972), p.83.
\textsuperscript{32} \textit{Ain i-Akbari}, op.cit., Vol.III, p.273. One of the orders of Sher Shah Suri was that ‘patars should be taken by force from those amirs who kept Akharas’ this evidence comes from \textit{Muntakhab ut-Tawarikh}, tr. G.S.A. Ranking (Delhi, 1973). Vol. I. p.250.
\textsuperscript{34} Rita Pratap, op.cit., p.49, fig.21.
lady had her own, which accommodated more than 20 people.\textsuperscript{35} It was quite common for ladies to enjoy music on terrace. Infact music and dancing parties provided a pleasant means of recreation to the ladies of royalty.\textsuperscript{36} Manucci tells that, each lady had under her, her own set of musicians. None was allowed to sing elsewhere.\textsuperscript{37} Stephen Blake while talking about 18th century Shahjahanbad points to one Nur Bai who besides entertaining \textit{amirs}, also arranged special sessions for high ranking women of the Mughal Court.\textsuperscript{38}

These dancing women usually attend on certain days of the week at court of prince or governor of district either to take an obeisance or exhibit professional entertainment.\textsuperscript{39} And in some provinces, they were endowed with lands,\textsuperscript{40} besides receiving robes and allowances being received.\textsuperscript{41}

Further, not only professional musicians but rich families also invited female mimics, to entertain the audiences. A pictorial evidence of the period 1760 shows a nawab watching a performance by mimics.\textsuperscript{42} Another class of entertainers was the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{36} M.S. Randhawa. \textit{Indian Miniature Painting} (New Delhi, 1981, pl. 26. Like while playing Chaupar, there were two musicians who are playing \textit{tanpura to ahol} (1775). Rita pratap. op.cit. p. 57. fig. 24.
\item \textsuperscript{39} G. Forester. \textit{A Journey from Bengal to England}, (Delhi, 1997), Vol.I, pp. 59-60.
\item \textsuperscript{40} Manucci. op.cit., Vol.II, p. 32.
\item \textsuperscript{41} Ibid., Vol-II, p. 322.
\item \textsuperscript{42} Randhawa. op.cit., pl. 29.
\end{itemize}
jugglers, nats and many. In Baburnama there is a reference by Babur to entertainers called lulis. Perhaps they were acrobats.43 The poet Rahim while describing all the women of different castes with their profession in Nagarshobha refers to the caste of both Natni and Bazigarni.44 The account of Peter Mundy also talks of these nats.45 The pictorial depiction of acrobatic performance can be seen from Acrobats (c. 1750) produced at the back cover of "India at Work".46 Barbosa while talking of Vijayanagar comments that, 5 to 6 thousand women who march with army. They are musicians, dancers and acrobats very quick at their performances.47

There was another set of performers, mirasin, who were employed by elite families for domestic entertainment. The mirasin sang folk songs to the accompaniment of music played by their spouses. Usually they were allowed into female quarters and were in status superior to the common class of entertainers.48 These sang in groups of five or six women, and each group received between two to ten rupees for an evening performance.49

Another sources of entertainment were the prostitutes and courtesans. These were an important profession, too. In prostitution, the sexual aspect of reproductive labour is detached from its procreative adjunct and subject to a network of commercial relations.50 The prostitution in India was inseparably associated with professional

44. M.S. Yagik (ed.), Rahim Ratnavali (Varanasi, n.d.), veises. 71, 72, 118.
46. Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris (c. 1750) produced at the back cover of S.P. Verma, India At Work in Sculpture and Painting, Indian History Congress (Aligarh, 1994), op.cit.
49. Ibid., p. 612.
entertainers and the term ganika indicated an accomplished courtesan. She was perceived as a product of feudal society. And as far as Medieval Indian period is concerned, the women employed in this profession combined it with a large number of other skills, such as dancing, singing, etc.

This profession was intended to be regulated by the state and a whole set of arrangements was made by the state as that gave it with revenue. A special officer ganikadhyaksha was to be appointed for that purpose. Her relations with the visitors were to be governed by a strict code of conduct. It is said that during Alauddin Khalji’s reign he made a measure to stop this abominable profession and prostitute had lawfully been married. But it was such a lucrative source of revenue that, state itself made a whole set of arrangements. They had a separate quarter of town assigned to them, Shaitanpura (Devilsville) A darogha and a clerk were appointed for it who registered the name of visitor to prostitutes. An account of Akbar’s period informs that how these ladies through their beauty these were able to attract customers towards them. Tavernier is kind enough to give their numbers as 20,000 and also that they sold tari and thus government drew revenue through these, too. The tax on brothels was such that the 12,000 policemen attached to office of prefect of the city had the pay equal to12000 fanams derived from proceeds of brothels. The greater part of the time of

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54. Rahim, op.cit., verse 16.
56. Elliot & Dowson, History of India as told by its own historians (Allahabad,1967), Vol. IV, pp.111-12.
Baz Bahadur was spent in the society of prostitutes and dancing women and in all kinds of vices. Their number had been quite significant so much so that there was a thrust to remove them from bazaars of Ahmedabad City. “They performed as singers and dancers for the recreation of Mahometan barbarity,” says one of the travellers of the 17th century. Even the caravansarai, of which we hear a lot, were a site for this gainful profession and they paid tax to state for allowing them to continue with this.

Besides this the usual name in the text for women belonging to this profession, who are not ganikas maintained by state is rupajivas, who earn their living by means of their beauty but also appear among attendants in the palace. These were educated and trained in music, dance, poetry, etc. The courtesans were expert dancers and singers. They were proficient in several arts and attracted customers with all charm at their command. A courtesan had a good disposition beauty and other winsome qualities and is also “accompained with all arts.” She formed friendship with such persons as would "enable her to separate men from other women and attach them to herself."

Her duty consisted in framing connection with suitable men after due and full consideration.

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60. Ibid, p. 242.
62. A 19th century account mentions that, many of the women in Akhtar i-Taban are related to princes or viziers but a few dancing girls appear too. Further, it also highlights that the most of the Urdu-writing poetesses were beauties of baazar such as Zuhra from Lucknow; then Shirin, who was a dancing girl, produced an Urdu Divan: Annemarie Schimmel, “A Nineteenth Century Anthology of Poetess.” Islamic Society and culture, (ed.) M. Israel & K. Wagle (Delhi, 1983), p. 54.
and obtained wealth. A courtesan leading in this manner the life of a wife was not troubled with too many lovers, yet attain abundance of wealth. *Ain* calls these type of ladies as *Samanya* i.e. property of none and are concerned only in money making.  

The courtesans were exotic Indian women, consorting with kings/courtiers, manipulating men and means for their own social/political ends. They had cultivated noble ways to contest male authority in their liaisons with men and thus inverted rules of gender of larger society. They were regarded as preservers of court culture, they invited people to their saloons for their cultural soirée.

The modern feminists have tried to see this as being something that gave these women an all together a different life style, i.e. compared to an unhappy or abused life with a husband or in-laws or ostracism as a widow, it represented for some women a career that could offer fame, wealth and supportive companionship of other women.  

Veena Talwar Oldenberg talking of beauties of Lucknow of 19th century has described the experiences of this world— the world of *tawaif* was as complex and hierarchical as the society, of which it was part. They were part of a larger establishment run by the *chaudhrayan*. Typically a wealthy courtier, often the king himself, began his direct association with a *kotha* by bidding for a virgin, whose patron he became with full privileges and obligations of that position. The head received a fixed proportion of earnings to maintain apartments to hire and train dancing girls.  

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men in the *kotha* was congenial but business like. Men played diverse roles not only as
servants, cooks, musicians but they were also wealthy powerful patrons. The latter
related on equal terms with the courtesans, precisely for power was genuinely shared
in that cultural setting. Infact, a woman was not without being subjected to blatant and
insidious forms of management, client and state violence.\(^67\)

The prostitute could not be assimilated to domestic realm of marriage and
reproduction. If prostitutes were not present, it was considered that the host was reluctant
to entertain guests.\(^68\) They were used for the entertainment of travellers. Everyone
regarded it as a crime to be intimate with a woman, who had a spouse, people held
those in great contempt then. Further, the attitude of the people was such that it was
said “during *Holi* festival, leave alone women, even prostitutes do not open their doors.”\(^69\)
This is enough to understand that they were not considered ‘women’ as a category.

The prostitutes had a world of their own. Their lifestyle subverted hierarchies of
caste and class. They did maintain vital links to an over arching matriarchal culture,
while consciously inverting or rejecting its values. It is quite obvious that the hegemonic
gender relations are exclusively perpetuated and sexuality itself constructed through
the process of differential socialisation of men and women.\(^70\) But still it is an expression
of sexual politics–of oppression and male domination.\(^71\)

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67. Ibid.
71. Oldenberg, op. cit.
We have yet another section of entertainers who submitted themselves totally to the temple and its Gods, called the devadasi. The socio-religious activity of dedicating girls to temples, which was part of the overall ideology of bhakti, can not be viewed in isolation from general economic/historical development of the times. “It was the process of sub-infeudation, the proliferation of temple building activity and the popularity of sectarian cults through bhakti movement, especially from 8th century onwards that can ultimately be considered as the vital factors which explain the concomitant increase in number of girls dedicated to temples. The temple girls had not only to perform religious/ritual duties but also had to use dance and music to explain main elements of religious ideology.” They were experts in their arts and existed as one single unit in temple under the charge of one of the masters. In the temple complex, there was a hierarchy of professional groups of which temple girls were an important element.

The young devadasi underwent a ceremony of dedication to deity of local temple, which resembled in its ritual structure the upper structure, the upper caste. Tamil marriage ceremony. She was set apart from her non-dedicated sisters, in that she was not permitted to marry and her celibate or unmarried status was legal in customary terms. Significantly, however, she was not prevented from leading normal life involving economic activity and child bearing. She also enjoyed the privileges of having a family outside

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the conventional domestic place since she commanded an independent source of income and a great deal of religious honour.

She on being nityasumangali was provided the excuse to enter the secular society and improve her artistic skills among connoisseurs and their families, who were obliged to respect her. What in ordinary home was performed by sumangalis: family ceremonies welcoming bridegroom, songs of fertility at marriage, were in big houses of locality performed by devadasi. Welcomed on all good occasions at rich men's place, her strict professionalism made her adjunct to conservative domestic society, not its ravages.

It is maintained that an Arab traveller, Zeid al Hasn (867 A.D.) talks about them and says, "she prostitutes at certain rate and delivers her gains into the hands of Idol's priests to be used by him for use and support of the temple." Kautilya has already called them as vesyas. Alberuni points out that the kings made them an attraction for their cities, a bait of pleasure for their subjects for no other but financial reasons. By revenues, which they derive from the business both as fines and taxes, they want to recover the expenses which their treasury has to spend on army. Forbes explains that they were not considered in the character of vestal origins in ancient Rome, or of those who we read among the Peruvians. Infact the dasarva was not only to God but to priestly order, too persisted. Saroj Gulati opines that Brahmans had newly acquired property and wealth and to save this, they were stopped from going to prostitutes and

a separate set of prostitutes were provided with.80 Infact these were slaves with no clear definition of their rights and duties. In addition they served to advertise in a perfectly open and public manner, their availability for sexual liaisons, with a proper patron and protector. Sexually inaccessible to all, but a chosen patron- an upper caste, upper class, married Hindu male that is what Bina Aggarwal tries to explain.81

The efficacy of devadasi as a woman and a dancer began to converge with the efficacy of temple as living centre of religious/social life, in all its political/commercial and cultural aspects.82 It was crucially a woman's dedicated status, which made it a symbol of social prestige and privilege to maintain her mother. The economic/professional benefits were considerable and most importantly not lacking in social honour. It was the conscious economic motivation, which lay behind the temple dedications. Although temple cooperated in rituals but the pressure to perform ceremony remained internal to household and reflected not only the self interest of the family against outsiders but also internal mechanism of competition. Infact, the minor status of the girl ensured the retention of hereditary rights by her to service and land benefits in a given temple.

They were paid by being assigned share in land, the revenue from specified taxes or kaneri.e. landholding rights in temple land. Kanaklatha Mukund from 13 century has cited many inscriptive evidences to property owned, sold and bought by the teveratiyal which indicate that they had property independent of the temple.83 So

81. Bina Aggarwal. op.cit., p.15.
much was that even their rights were not questioned. The property transmission within
the household recognised the joint and inalienable nature of privileged land use, which
could only remain with the family as long as there was a member actively, employed in
the temple. The clear desire to keep economic backbone of household a woman was
consequently linked to the fact that it was the woman who was primary source of both
earned and ancestral property. The men could go out to make their livelihood but
women were restricted.

The household property was largely earned income acquired in the form of cash,
jewellery, goods and it was through its women that household made profits in this sphere
and in this way all the things belonging to the mother passed on to her daughter. While
discussing property forms, political power and female labour in the origin of class and
state societies, Stephanie Coontz and Peta Handerson opine that the domestic authority
in the matrifocal societies did not produce the mirror image of men in patrilocal societies.
It was not reinforced by female control over external affairs, women had less incentive
to make demands of husbands than males did to make demands of wives.

Besides, the devadasi system encouraged a greater functional specificity and
technical excellence of dance tradition, sexual division of labour underlying dance was
of a non-domestic nature. Despite female household authority in the professional sphere,
it was the male guru who exercised control over the dancer. They denied women of a
professional career and also restricted, circle of marriage exchange. Thus the self

84. Ibid., p. 133.
conscious and competitive functional division with dance tradition between male and female skill reflected most dramatically in emergence of two distinct structure of household organisation. The dasi/matrifocal household was characterized by these features: firstly, an excess of female residents; secondly, a dichotomous power structure where female had household control and male had professional; and thirdly, a dichotomous ethical (conjugal and celibate) structure.  

Generally the contemporary elite perception of the dancing girls was full of contempt, even disdain. Amir Khusrau, for example, says "the swing (Bed Peach) and tambourine (Duff) which women play open are no better than pillories and rope for them." In fact, the boundaries of just singing and dancing could be easily transgressed. Those who came to the court for entertaining during festivities were many a time kept for night. They were not seen in baazar but those of more private and more respectable class. But the same author while commenting about time says that "they were always correct in time, after all they were but common women."  

In a similar vein, Malcolm while describing them informs that, these women "who are all slaves, are condemned to a life of toil and vice for the profit of others and some of the first Rajput Chiefs or Zamindars, who have from 50 to 200 female slaves, after employing them at night to their own dwelling, when they are at liberty to form such connections as they please but a large share of profits of that promiscuous intercourse into which they fall is annually exacted by their masters."  

86. Amrit Srinivasan, op.cit.  
89. Ibid. p. 274.  
Yet, music and dancing were great pastimes and an important profession for women. Dancers avowedly devoted to public pleasure were usually taught the use of letters, as well. Thus, women's skills and labour were extensively deployed for purposes of social entertainment. The services of women dancers, singers specially prostitutes/devadasi, etc. were required in almost all the functions and festivities in both the private/domestic and public places. But the experiences of each of these classes differed. The contempt of the society cast upon these have been just studied by us. But amongst themselves too, they were a differentiated lot as far as their end and social security/prestige was concerned. Kuttanimata, a major text on prostitutes, describes the plight of discarded prostitute reduced to begging and stealing. As looks, age and accomplishments languished, the declivity of the price and social prestige showed its fangs. There was no guarantee for anything. Tavernier informs us that the old courtesans amass sum of money in their youth, and they buy young female slaves to whom they teach dances and lascivious songs and all the tricks of their infamous trade.

The institutionalised prostitutes however were offered with some what better prospects (for old and retired courtesans) Like, for devadasi, whose service is at end and who there after may be engaged in spinning (2.23.2) or may be given pension by the state. But since women and their labour were exploited in most spheres of life, we may assume that this rule was not strictly observed. Devadasi's position was more abject than presumably of those organised in brothels regarding whose rights and

93. Tavernier, op.cit., p.58.

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privileges some rules had been clearly enunciated. They were skilled only in dance and they could be just a dancer. They could have no family and would be aloof from the society and would be forced to destitution.\(^5\)

They might stand at a better footing than other ladies of the family and negotiate with patriarchy though that is not devoid of limitations. But the society at large exploits their labour. It is the society that creates such situations for these women to be not to be able to remain chaste. They alone cannot make the profession viable as a profession till there is a section that becomes their patron.\(^6\)

Women's labour was deeply integrated with the forms of entertainment in Medieval society. Yet, for performing so crucial a role in the society, they were treated with almost no respect and dignity by the society in return.

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\(^6\) Ibid. p. 234.
CHAPTER-V
HAREM AND THE STATE

The term Harim (or the zenana) is applied to those parts of a house to which access is forbidden and hence, more particularly to women's quarters.¹ It is not a new institution in India, as one might think. It was not due to Muslim invasion that women were made to remain inside quarters or that seclusion was just to imitate Muslim lifestyle by the upper classes of Hindu society. Hindus know it as antahpura, a Sanskrit word which means the inner apartments,² suggesting their position in the palace secure, sheltered, and barred from common gaze. And no male was allowed to go the antahpura without informing the ladies through maid servant.

Feminists like Kum Kum Sangari have postulated that patriarchies work simultaneously through coercion and also obtaining in various ways different degrees of consent from women. It is difficult to rule without the help of certain elements and thus, there is distribution of power within patriarchal arrangements. Sangari elaborates in her essay that the politics of household seems to be structured according to degree of access women have to patriarchal power over daughters, sons and in other forms accruing from an acceptance of delegated or surrogate patriarchal roles which included surveillance of other women.³

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The harem conceived woman as constituting literal and figurative centre of polity. It was considered a powerful institution from where the other institutions took their instructions from i.e. the king, as a patriarch was invulnerable. We would try to locate whether the *zenana* was a hallmark of patriarchal values and also, did it work only on coercion or did the consent/help of women, helped men to secure their own power. And we would see how women would utilise their whatever means to secure their own positions for their future.

It is generally accepted that *zenanas* had a major disadvantage in terms of participation in the outside world and that the women inside were generally passive. There is also a thinking that the women in the harem have limited access to economic resources and that their seclusion induces them to concentrate mainly on maintenance and reproductive tasks.

It is believed that the women's life in harem centered round their sex appeal. For many, as K.S.Lal, it conjures up a vision of a sequestered place ensconcing beautiful female forms in mysterious magnificence. Its origin most of the times was located in the polygamous nature of men and as a household unit, an institution of male polygamy, harem was related to the contemporary notions of sexual propriety. But the research of Leslie Pierce, on the role of women in Ottoman Empire, should be a corrective on this, because she points that the life in the harem involved a complex set of relationships that did not necessarily include a sex role.

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It was not a confined space inhabited exclusively by wives and concubines but rather consisted of a diverse community of women of varying ages interacting with each other in many different ways and at many different levels. There were many dependents as well as slaves and servants, many of whom performed specific tasks and held skilled occupations. Thus the zenana comprised of women of all relations who were not simply an object of sexual pleasure, as has been perceived. The harem technically speaking is a physical, social and cultural space exclusive to women. In real life, it has a social world of its own where women perform different kinds of work on the basis of hierarchical division of labour. Infact it was this very hierarchical structure of zenana that would induce them to be ambitious. Indrani Chatterjee opines that the study of harem is exploring of power articulated through hierarchies of age, wealth, social status and sexuality.6

It was the polygamous nature of the household that helped women to carve a niche for themselves. There could be two ways of participation- interference from behind the curtain or the active participation. Infact, the zenanas truly were intensely political arenas. It was not the age that was important but a woman’s rank as grandmother, mother, wife, sister that was important. E B Findley has remarked that “it was the seniority system that was the harem’s most powerful guarantor of personal civility, internal cohesion and generational compatibility”.7 The normally friendly relationship between wives in the harem shaped by the courtesy of seniority system was not devoid of jealousies.

6. Indrani Chatterjee, Gender, Slavery and Law in Colonial India (Delhi, 1999).
The apartments reserved for use of emperor’s women were called mahals. Harem was a place, which was self-sufficient with a full range of staff and administrators. It was both composite and cosmopolitan, providing employment to women of various religions, provinces and nationalities. The public lives of the women of nobility were governed by laws of seclusion, which was less a social / religious and more a class arrangement.

The *zenana deorhi* as one calls in Rajasthan, or the harem comprised of *rajamata, patarani, pardayats & paswans* (concubines) other female relatives or female attendants. For Rajasthan Varsha Joshi has given a list of female attendants—*Dhai Maas, dholans, purohits, nayans, darjans, varis, davris*. To this she calls “replication of caste system within female quarters.” And Indrani Chatterjee has termed this as “slave based harem systems within ideological and ritual confines of Hindu Rajput polities.”

Each rani had her own establishment in her *zenana*. She had her individual staff members known by name of Rani as *Rathorrnji ki sarkar, Jhalji ki Sarkar.* And the most important woman here was the Queen Mother, who held a very high dignity and commanded an influential position. She played a vital role in the transmission of political values and protection and preservation of dynasty and furthered the interest of their sons.

All women had separate apartments not only for themselves but also for their slaves and attendants. Talking of Mughal Harem, Manucci says that ordinarily there

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9. Indrani Chatterjee, op. cit.
were within the *mahal* 2000 women of different races. Each had her own office or special duties either in attendance on king, his wives and his concubines.\(^{11}\) The handmaids would perform many kinds of work: "They do him service with cleanliness and neatness, they do all the work inside the gates and hold all the duties of the household."\(^{12}\)

It had been a custom that female guards, quite active, bearing bows guarded the king in his inside quarters.\(^{13}\) We have a visual where Babur had female bodyguards.\(^{14}\) These women were called *urdubegis*, and mostly came from parts of Central Asia and Kashmir.\(^{15}\) Another visual reference shows Mohammed Shah of Gujrat (1745) being carried by female servants on the moving throne, *Takht i-ravan*.\(^{16}\)

Within the structure of harem, that all-purpose servant, the eunuchs, who could move around freely in the harem, played an extremely important part and they surrounded the king when he got up.\(^{17}\) Their chief function was to guard the king, the queen and other female members in the harem. They were privileged people and, occasionally those with special qualities of valour would be raised to high positions such as Malik Kafur, Malik Amber.\(^{18}\) Thomas Roe says: - "The king hath no man but eunuchs that come within the lodgings or retrying of his house, his women watch within

\(^{17}\) Kautilya, op.cit., p.51.
\(^{18}\) Jamila Brijbhushan. *Muslim Women in Purdah and out of it* (New Delhi, 1990), p.27.
and guard him with manly weapons". Each women of rank had two or more eunuch heads, one being called Nazir who was appointed for each wife to ensure that she was seen by no man, except her husband. They had the most freedom to arrange contacts outside zenana on matters of trade, military maneuvers, courtly intrigues and secret communications. He managed delicate relation between the Emperor and his women. As his sexual life was "non-existent", he could be trusted for not committing any sexual impropriety.

As the harem was polygamous, for an individual woman the important thing was not exerting herself at court but more it was of making herself viable between complex lives of others immediately around her. Infact, a woman's life was unstable and miserable in the presence of co-wives. Fryer mentions that, "among the wives, the senior wife commanded more respect but the mother of first son, who would be the heir of the king, received more respect and a special place than others in the eyes of her lord." 20

Many a time the king's favourite wife could pose dangerous and ambitious, both. Shah Turkan has been quite ambitious since time of Iltutmish and had a good many followers. She had influence over many matters and the great was her bounty towards men of learning. 21 In the same way, Mallika i-Jahan, wife of Jalaluddin Khilji

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was a treacherous mother and a great problem for Alauddin Khilji. Makhdama i-Jahan and Khudavandzada, mother and sister of Muhammad bin-Tughlaq were quite powerful. Rani Karnavati, wife of Rana Sanga had considerable influence over her husband. Nur Jahan was quite articulate in her designs and moves and could prevail upon Jahangir. So, the king as a patriarch could not be invulnerable but rather, his exercise of power was accompanied by constant watchfulness. The king, who was ought to be in control of his household, was subject to challenges from within. Thus, the non-patriarchal values could make patriarchy ineffective at certain points.

At the same time, as a lady one could not exercise unlimited power and thus had to take help of a man or men. The most readily available males for political purposes were her brothers, son or the nobility. They directly did not have power in the patriarchal set up, yet through intermediaries they worked. Shah Turkan was deeply helped by Junaidi and his group in her political ambitions. So was the case with Raziya and so were the steps of Nur Jahan where she takes the help of Shariyar against Khurram. It becomes quite clear that women as such could not work without agency of men. They could not act independently and directly but must act through men i.e. they can be active custodians of those values and social relation but they can not usually take action.

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23. Ibid., p.133.
27. K.K. Sangari, op.cit.
As the society was patriarchal, hence women did not have direct access to power and thus had to make their way either by being favourite consort or through her sons. Rekha Mishra has pointed about Maham Anaga and Akbar that he took advantage of Maham Anaga's position and talents but did not allow himself to be dominated by the ladies of the harem. Thus the talents of the women could also be exploited by the patriarchy to fulfill its ends. Thus, what picture one gets is that, the harem was a great political arena, because of its polygamous nature and hierarchical structure where the mother of the heir had a great security and higher position.

As is well known, fratricidal strifes were a frequent occurrence in settling the issue of royal succession. In such contentions, the role of senior ladies used to be of a peacemaker but used to have no effect on course of conflict. But this is not true. Women in harem played a crucial role in these disputes of succession, and all factions engaged in rivalry largely sought their support. The Valide Sultan played a vital role in transmission of political values and protection and preservation of dynasty. She was more than just a female. The authority exercised by them transcended both in its sources and its effects, the bonds of individual family.

In a polity, where the empire was considered the personal domain of dynastic family, it was natural that important women within dynastic household, in particular mothers would assume legitimate role of authority outside royal households. Infact, their role became rather more important during minorities of the heir. Bhim Singh's

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28. Rekha. op.cit.
29. Lal. op.cit.
mother, Jhalaji Sardar Kunwari was important during his infancy. In 1548, Durgavati took regency of her own son, Bir Narain. Abul Fazl says she did great things by dint of her foreseeing abilities. Kathryn Hansen has analysed that these sort of women constitute the corp of virangana, which forms an alternative paradigm of womanhood, repeatedly surfacing to challenge the patriarchal premises of society and assert the female potential for power as well as virtue.

In the succession disputes, they played an important role and formed different cliques and adjustments so as to further interests of their own candidate. K S Lal is clearly mistaken in arguing that it was the “suppression of women and their sentiments which led to intrigue, cruelty and participate in struggle for successions.” There is an example where Bibi Mughlai declined to put her sons in dangers and temptations of throne. This throws light on the hardships involved during successions. Women came to enjoy a kind of matriarchal authority providing links between generations and symbolising its continuity at times, when it seemed threatened. The participation in political intrigues allowed women in the harem to better defend their material interests and to exercise influence in the assignment of high offices and great fiefs or also tried to solve political problems like men. Besides this a queen regent also defies norms of

36. Lal. op.cit.p.204.
37. Munjhu Ibn Muhul Sikandari, Mirat i-Sikandari, tr. F.L. Faridi (Delhi, 1990), p.41.
39. Shekhawat. op.cit.,p.70.
sati. Her status then is defined by her relationship not to a man but by her valorous deeds.\textsuperscript{40}

The contemporary perception for women participating in such type of disputes was obviously derogatory. In one view they have less brains\textsuperscript{41} and that “it is wrong to place confidence in them for they are deficient in intellect.”\textsuperscript{42} This contempt for the ability of women actually reflects a fear, a patriarchal anxiety, and more importantly, an indirect affirmation of the significance of women in the contemporary political scene.

The medieval harem had a well-articulated system of order maintained by a strict system of salaries and allowances, titles, etc. The inscriptions evidences of Early Medieval period, i.e. V.S. 1236, highlights that Queen Jalhanadevi had a bhukti as her personal property.\textsuperscript{43} While citing papers from Rajasthani anthapura the author notes that the ladies received jagir as well as money allowances for maintenance. The income and its expenditure, festival celebrations and account of all other things was looked after by kamdars. It was from this income that they got built wells, lakes, temples, etc.\textsuperscript{44} Shah Jahan awarded 2 lacs of ashrafis and 6 lacs of rupees to Her Majesty Arjumand Bano Begum and 10 lacs of rupees was fixed as the annual allowance for her.\textsuperscript{45} The jagirs and allowances which royal women received allowed them to

\textsuperscript{40} Hansen, op.cit.
\textsuperscript{42} Elliot & Dowson (ed.). *History of India as told: by its own historians* (Allahabad, 1967), Vol. IV, p.320.
\textsuperscript{44} Shekhawat, op.cit., pp 64-66.
legitimise their authority and to develop their social and political works. They would spend their income in constructing gardens, mosques, sarais, etc. We have a reference where Jahanara begged that the mosques be executed out of her personal fund and accordingly, a sublime firman was issued authorising the comptroller of Princess's household to undertake the work. The construction of any site/monument or for that matter any public building was a sign of control of fund and labour, as well. An ambiguous attitude is implicit in the justification for the payment prescribed for such kinsfolk so that “to ensure that they were not hostile and did not attempt to challenge the ruler”.

As far as service class goes, the matrons, have generally three, four or five hundred rupees a month as pay, according to the dignity of the post they occupy. The servants under their orders have from 50 upto 200 rupees per month. In addition to these matrons, there are female superintendents of music and their women players, they have about the same pay more or less, besides the presents they receive from the princes and princesses.

It has usually been believed that harem represented a western public/private dichotomy. But in true sense, the segregation permitted the articulation of a hierarchy of status and authority among women parallel to that which existed among men. The complex network of social, economic and political relations that existed in the harem, indeed, even transcended the public/private domain. The public realm is associated

46. Ibid., pp.318-9.
47. Indrani, op.cit.
with the exercise of power and control over persons; the domestic, in lacking these qualities, becomes by definition, a subordinated space. There was always a marked presence of women into public sphere and they may fight for the values in which they have their own stake. We would see that their seclusion would prevent them neither from exercising political control nor would stop them from having control over their property. The zenana, which comprises of ladies from different royal households, would tend to use their resources and connections to become powerful.

Women were an important component of the traditional structure of authority if not as an individual, then as link between lineage groups. Brides were items of exchange in marriage networks and by cementing alliances, they could be of considerable political importance. It is said that “of the women from powerful lineage, their traditional familial roles were as much a source of strength as they were evidence of subordination.” “In accordance with Indian custom of wiping out blood feuds by marriage,” marriages served to establish political relations and settle political disputes among families/household. Decisions of private realm could influence fortunes of the family in the public sphere.

Marriage was also a means of increasing political power and social status for families entering into matrimonial relations with their superior households. Women became a gift to the superior noble or even to the king whereby the household and kin

group elevated its ritual position. Besides, the other political use of women was found in their being sent as envoys for purposes of political negotiations: *Shah Jahan Nama* (1638) states how Bharji, *Zamindar* of Baglana sent his mother accompanied by his *wakil* to wait upon Prince Aurangzeb and present keys of remaining 8 forts.55

We do find references to women getting directly involved in political affairs. The *Atpur Inscription* of 971 A.D. highlights that the fame of Queen Hariyadevi was visible in the form of Hrarsapur(town)56 Shah Turkan was very important in politics of early Delhi Sultanate. Juzjani says she was not a man but a war leader.57 She issued royal orders in her name.58 *Tabqat i-Akbari* cites how Malik Alauddin suffered much vexation at the hands of *Malikah i-Jahan, his mother-in-law*, since he could not bring any matter before the Sultan, without her prior notice.59 Further, *Mirat i-Ahmadi* cites an instance of Umabai, wife of late *Senapati*, Khanderao Dahkade, who was entrusted with collection of *chauth* from Gujarat. She was absolute *Maratha Bakshi*. She attended to affairs of chiefship, appointed servants, etc.60 Further, we have reference to rulers of surrounding territories of Ally Adil Shah, who responded by saying that "though women in sex, they held their dominion by power of masculine minds."61

Raziya is the first example of a woman who directly ruled over the Delhi Sultanate.

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54. Ibid., Vol-I, p. 179.
55. Inayat Khan, op.cit., p.245.
58. Ibid., p.630.
She has been called *Umdat un-Niswan*.\(^{62}\) She was not born of the right sex but a review of her achievements in various fields illustrates that her feminine sex created no problem for her.\(^{63}\) Initially her coinage had name of her father which had testified to her insecurity, but in 1237 his name was dropped.\(^{64}\) Though her accession was without precedent in Islamic world but women in Eastern Steepes enjoyed greater freedom. May be in raising up their master’s daughter, Turkish officers were strongly influenced by their pagan background.\(^{65}\) While discussing judiciary, Peter Jackson remarks that sources of 13th century give some prominence to their inauguration of a new reign by a pledge of allegiance *baya’t*. This is first mentioned in 1236 when according to Juzjani, the Turkish *amirs*, who abandoned Firuz Shah entered capital and performed *baya’t* for Raziya.\(^{66}\)

Later on the family of Babur, which inherited traditions of Chengiz Khan and Timur, allowed their females sufficient political rights and thus enabled them to take active part in politics. Qutlugh Nigar Begum, Babur’s mother accompanied him in his wars and wanderings. Few of her sex excelled her in sense and sagacity.\(^{67}\) Rajasthan region has examples where during war-times ladies used to organise army and tried to protect forts.\(^{68}\) Varsha Joshi talks of Umadeo of Jodhpur fought in 1542,\(^{69}\) Rani Ganga Bai, wife of Rai Singh, who was influential.\(^{70}\)

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66. Ibid., p:57.
69. Varsh. op.cit., p:97
70. Ibid., p:92
Some women, indeed, adroitly exploited their talents to assume full control over
the emperor, thereby exercising indirect sovereignty. Nur Jahan is an important instance
commanding total control over the person of the emperor, and by virtue of that control
exercising the powers of the sovereign. In order to strengthen her position, she ensured
that all high offices would be placed under the control of her family members. Rekha
Misra in *Women in Mughal India* opines that Nur Jahan’s influence on Jahangir was
emotional in nature, “it will be unfair to attribute purely political ambition to her acts.”
In a similar vein, K S Lal has argued that, “she did not entertain any political ambitions
of her own, but was merely serving her spouse as loyal, devoted wife.” While it is
true that in real life, Nur Jahan was not as manipulative as she is generally made out to
be, there is still no reason to suspect her skills in the art of politics, diplomacy, court
intrigues and political negotiations. Her political skills made Khurram so very suspicious
of her that he advised his father, Jahangir, to come out of Nur Jahan’s influence.

Next to the emperor, the position of primacy was enjoyed by the royal family,
which included mother, consort, queens and princess. The ladies enjoyed considerable

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71. This point has been emphasised by Beni Prasad in his book *History of Jahangir*
Hasan has, however, contested the theory and has argued that high mansabs were given to
many members of families of leading nobles and it would be incorrect to assume that the
sole passport to promotion was the favour of Junta (“The theory of Nur Jahan’s Junta-a
critical examination,” *Indian History Congress*. 1958, pp:314-35) In the same vein, Irfan
Habib has also emphasised the presence of nobles from other families and that those of her
family held great positions, even, before her marriage to Jahangir, (“The family of Nur
Jahan during Jahangir’s Reign -a political study.” *Medieval India: Miscellany*, 1969, vol-
1, pp:74-96.


73. Lal, op.cit.,p:80.fn.70.

74. Findley, op.cit.

prestige. The Queen Nayankaladevi endowed with all prerogatives, but with the king’s consent gave the village of Daravali to purohita.\footnote{Bilhari Stone Inscription of Chedi rulers reflects upon steps of Queen who erected a temple with revenue of villages.}\footnote{We have hukm of Hamida Banu Begum addressed to karoris of pargana Mahabad, in pursuance of the Imperial firman (1581).\footnote{We have hukm of Maryam Zamani Wali Nimat Begum 1623 (mother of Jahangir) is passed to realise arrear of the revenue from pargana of Chaupala in sarkar Sambhal.\footnote{As the case with Nur Jahan, the grants of appointments that went out under king’s name, Nur Jahan put her seal on all grants of land conferred upon (which were sealed by Sadr of Empire) or confirmed even the favours as hukm of Nur Jahan 1626, against Jai Singh.\footnote{She collected duties on goods from merchants who passed through her jagirs and traded with Europeans, who brought luxury goods from the Continent.\footnote{Her powers grew so vast that toward the end of Jahangir’s life, she acquired the de facto sovereignty governing the empire in the name of the King.\footnote{We have hukm of Mumtaz Mahal confirming appointment of Deshmukh (1629); we do find references to acknowledging receipt of produce from their assigned territories,}}}}}}\footnote{We have hukm of Mumtaz Mahal confirming appointment of Deshmukh (1629); we do find references to acknowledging receipt of produce from their assigned territories,}}
as *nishan* of Jahanara 1678, which acknowledges receipt of musk pods. 84

Women played an extremely important role in the court rituals, and occasionally their intervention determined the decisions of the imperial court. Akbar pardoned Niyabat Khan when the Queen undertook to provide a security on his behalf. 85 Jahangir also pardoned Mirza Koka as a result of pressure from the Imperial women to do so. 86 Jagat Singh was forgiven by Jahangir, for example, owing to the intercession of Nur Jahan. 87 Further, it was on Jahanara’s request that Aurangzeb was bestowed with a robe of honour and later on, a vast number of men and women were given superior *mansabs*, stipends and daily allowances. 88

Besides being active in politics of the times, a fairly important activity of ladies of royalty was their active interest in literary pursuits. They occupied themselves with reading, writing and composing verses. Shah Turkan who was also much known amongst men of letters. 89 Due attention was paid toward their education. Raziya composed verses under *nom-de-plume* of Shirin. She could recite Quran and all prayers in a proper manner, patronised men of letters and got *Madarsa i-Nasiriya* constructed. 90 And so did her accomplishments prove that Turkish royalty did not neglect the education of their daughters.

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87. Ibid., Vol. II, p.656.
There is a visual of a school where girl students are also present and many a time for education of their girls, well-to-do classes appointed learned ladies or old men of tried merits in their houses. During reign of Akbar definite arrangements were made for imparting regular education to ladies of Imperial Harem. Monserrate says, "He (Akbar) gives very great care and attention to education of princesses... they are taught to read and write, are trained in other ways by matrons." In a painting which is of Persian style, a prince is reading out poetry to a princess (c. 1560-70). A Hyderabad school painting of mid-18th c A.D. shows a mulla instructing a young princess.

Muslim upper class ladies were fond of poetry, and were usually introduced in the art of composing poetry by Persian lady teacher. Gulbadan was considered to be well versed in Persian and Turki, both. Gifted with a poetic temperament, she often composed verses, and she wrote *Humayun Nama*. Another lady outstanding in the field of literary pursuits was Salima Sultan Begum, a niece of Humayun. She was well-versed in Persian and made rich contributions in literary sphere by composing verses. The most outstanding women scholar was Nur Jahan. She composed poetry. Jahanara was a highly educated lady. Zeb un-Nisa, daughter of Aurangzeb, was a good singer.

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and also learnt Quran by heart and got 30,000 gold coins as reward,\textsuperscript{97} she knew Arabic and Persian and in writing, she could practice various kinds of hand as \textit{nastaliq, naska, shikastah.}\textsuperscript{98} Mira Bai was a well-known singer. Parita Mukta has studied her and says that, she forms a community around her which projects a community of affinity which heals, nurtures and strengthens community of the oppressed through the power of religious expression.\textsuperscript{99} Ratnavali, wife of Puran Mal sang Hindi melodies sweetly. Man Singh’s wife, Mrignayani was expert in music.\textsuperscript{100} Amongst \textit{Sahitya Sadhna} we have Rajkumari Sodhi Nathi of Amarkot, Rajputri Champadevi of Jaisalmer, Rajmata Rupkunwari of Alwar, etc.\textsuperscript{101} Besides, the Rajput ladies were given training in horse riding and wielding weapons.\textsuperscript{102}

Even, the women of service class were not behind in this field. The in-charge of Harem, Sati Khanum, knew the art of reading Quran and was acquainted with Persian literature and was appointed as instructress to Begum Sahiba.\textsuperscript{103} Further, we have reference to female \textit{waqia navis},\textsuperscript{104} also, who would read out news letters in king’s presence.

Women’s role in the field of education should be seen as part of productive activity, as constituting an intellectual activity or ‘Work’. Women, as we saw, worked

\textsuperscript{97} Elliot & Dowson, op.cit.,vol-VII, p:196.
\textsuperscript{98} Saqi Mustaid Khan, \textit{Maasir i-Alamgiri}, tr. J.N. Sarkar (Bihar) p:322.
\textsuperscript{99} Parita Mukta, \textit{Upholding the common life – The Community of Mira Bai} (Delhi, 1994). p.40.
\textsuperscript{100} Rekha Mishra, op.cit.,p.95.
\textsuperscript{101} Shekhawat, op.cit.,pp.66-7.
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid.p.65.
\textsuperscript{103} Musta’d Khan, op.cit., p.260.
\textsuperscript{104} Gulbadan Begum, op.cit., p.132.
as tutors to other women, educating them in the art of composing poetry, in reading and writing good prose, etc. Some women also earned through the art of calligraphy, writing letters, representation, orders, etc. on behalf of the royal women. It is true that most women were primarily instructed in religious education but that did inevitably expand into secular areas of knowledge—medicine, astrology and calligraphy, for instance.

The harem abounded in various recreational activities. A number of dancing girls was maintained by the Sultan as well as by his ladies to amuse and entertain themselves. There is evidence of dancing girls being sent outside India to Kabul for great begums. These were best of dancing girls of Ibrahim Lodi (so much were they prized) Mirat i-Sikandari mentions that, “each one of the dancing girls had two servants. One of whom held betel leaves and other one scented oil (to feed the lamps).”

The Mughal paintings and those of various other schools also highlight the lighter shades of the harem. The court life depicted here revolves around the ladies of the harem and many a times the king, too. The celebrated dancers from Mandu seem to have won heart of Akbar. In a scene from late 16th century, a prince in a garden is watching a dance performance. The ladies themselves enjoyed the music sessions on the terraces. The most memorable of the events were birth of a prince where the

112. Barret & Gray, Paintings of India (Lausanne, 1963). pp.177-81.
mood was of the festivities, where the women musicians and dancers and also the women of the harem were present.\textsuperscript{113} Besides this, the paintings have also captured the marriage scenes at the court. In one painting royal musicians were performing at a marriage with their drums, \textit{naqqaras}, and trumpets.\textsuperscript{114}

A special kind of fair was held at court “A whimsical fair is held at seraglio, it is conducted by the handsomest and most engaging of wives of the omrahs”.\textsuperscript{115} The purpose of these fairs was to legitimise authority of the monarch before the women present at the fair, who could have moulded opinion in general.

Besides dancing and singing, women were also involved in such games as chess\textsuperscript{116} and \textit{chaugan} (polo).\textsuperscript{117} It is informed by Abul Fazl that it was a means of learning promptitude and decisions. It tests value of a man and strengthens bonds of friendship.\textsuperscript{118} If we take Abul Fazl \textit{verbatim}, we can reach to a conclusion that the contemporary attitude was not altogether biased toward women. Infact, it was not that women were devoid of power of reason but that patriarch mind was not ready to share power with women who could pose a threat to their own power.

Politics is not an exclusively male domain. We have seen that in our period, women negotiated with power and exercised an impressive control over political

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{113} G. Sen, op.cit., pls. 56-7.
\item \textsuperscript{114} Ibid., pls. 67-68.
\item \textsuperscript{115} F. Bernier, \textit{Travels in Mogul Empire}, tr. A Constable (Delhi, 1983), p.272.
\item \textsuperscript{116} Habib & Nizami (ed.), \textit{Politics and Society during Early Medieval period} (Delhi, 1981), p:82.
\item \textsuperscript{117} Khandalvala & Chandra (ed.), op.cit., pl.41.
\item \textsuperscript{118} Abul Fazl, \textit{Ain i-Akbari} (Lucknow, 1882), p.153, Ain. 29.
\end{itemize}
activities. Though the contemporary chronicles may call her as having less brain but at the same time she is also compared with the “lioness and called as a courageous woman”. The very advise of Khurram to his father, Jahangir, against Nur Jahan is enough to understand that she was working against interests of Khurram. The harem was not socially segregated but was actually a centre of articulated authority and hierarchical relations. The interests of men and women combined to create a variety of factions and configurations, which cut across the dichotomy of gender. It is certainly not argued here that women enjoyed unlimited power and that there were no restraints to their exercise of authority. The fact of the matter is that women could not act independently but through men. They could be custodians of values they try to preserve but could not usually take a action.

Our argument is simply that man’s power over imperial sources of social and economic power was considerably constrained by the participation of women. The institution that was considered to be the epitome of patriarchy was subject to challenges from within and at the same time, drew strength from non-patriarchal networks. Indeed, women’s work in the field of administration and statecraft played an important role in the shaping of the medieval political system.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has revealed that gender when included as a category of analysis expands and enriches our knowledge of the past. It rejects the traditional efforts to define women’s nature through just biological sex. But one should not forget that it is the term sex, which provides the site upon which gender was thought to be constructed. The gendered experience is not just in relation to men but conditioned by social factors at large. Thus this study reveals the social construction through male/female distinction.

The concept of gender has been used here to see the division of tasks amongst men and women, which has been existing since time immemorial. It us this very division that ensures that a woman’s choices and rationality differ significantly from a man’s. It is not that one is born with certain works being assigned to one but that the society historically assigns one those. The women’s place in human social life is not in any direct sense a product of the things she does, but of the meaning her activities acquire through concrete social interaction.

It has been revealed that there was a significant participation of women in all spheres of work, in Medieval India. It is, of course, common knowledge that women played a pre-eminent role in the domestic/private sphere, and that, it was primarily owing to their labour that the organisation of the family household was maintained. This study has reinforced this assumption, and has argued that it was woman’s work in the household primarily that ensured the material and symbolic reproduction of the society.

We further argue that in view of the lack of concrete boundaries between the
private and the public spheres in medieval society, women played an extremely important part in the so-called public spheres, as well. Our study has brought out the diverse nature of work performed by women in production activities. Women were co-partners of men in agricultural production. Like men, they were actively involved in trade and commerce. They were engaged in all areas of commercial activity, right from retail trade to freighting goods overseas and owning ships of their own.

The household is a site of work and involves a large range of activities, in all which women predominate. Here she is endowed with so-called natural activities that is, cooking food, tending cattle, bringing fuel and water, taking care of the children and old, so on. These are treated as external to the productive domain. It was not realised that her labour was essential to the social/economic viability of the place concerned. The patriarchal perception allows the society to usurp women’s labour without offering them anything in return.

Women’s work in the household was determined by considerations of class and status. In affluent households, women still performed little work, for female slaves and/or servants did the chores of the household. The peasant and artisan families, of course, were denied such a luxury, and their women had to participate in subsistence activities. The household somewhere belonged between a continuum moving from a purely domestic sphere, through the subsistence to the purely market sphere. Thus the household was not typically a private space for it did also include a large number of production activities that are usually consigned to the place of public.

The peasant household heavily depended on family labour for cultivation and,
therefore, women constituted an important part of rural economy. At every stage of
cultivation, their labour was quite significant but was constrained by a gendered
division of labour. The most difficult of the tasks were undertaken by her, such as
transplantation and weeding. Though important at all stages, she was kept aloof from
the stage of ploughing for that symbolises ownership. And handling over this main and
final stage to women would erode the basis of patriarchal domination. This helps in
appropriating women’s labour without adequate entitlement and helps to invisibilise
other dimensions of women’s labour in agricultural production.

Likewise in the manufacturing sector, spinning was exclusively women’s job though
evidence to their participation in weaving is not altogether absent. But men at large
tend to control the means of production, control of tools and instruments, so as to
ensure the dominance of the male and the appropriation of her labour, thereby
maintaining the gender hierarchy. It implies that the technological tools in themselves
carry a gendered meaning. The economy in itself might be gender neutral but the
economic processes are not devoid of ascription of gendered meanings. It is these
things that make labour more vulnerable and hence more exploitable.

Besides there was a gap between the wages received by two which again is
symbolic of women’s labour being socially and economically devalued in relation to the
men.

This serves to perpetuate gender hierarchy and places hindrances in the way of
her participation in skilled and better paid jobs.
Ideologically there is no separation of wage work from homework. Work is represented as a masculine domain and her work is seen as an extension of her role as a wife or mother. Her labour was subsumed in the category of household work and even the wages they earned in the market were seen as part of family income.

At another level the close relationship between family and commerce came to involve women in mercantile activities, as well. We have seen throughout how women helped in reshaping mercantile fortunes. From peddling to large-scale overseas trade, women were everywhere to be seen. In fact, many a time certain itinerant mercantile activities were women specific, as for example, bangle selling. Women’s presence in the market was looked down upon but despite this, they continued to engage in these activities.

Further entertainment might be not a productive activity but it is indirectly related as assisting and aiding it. It all the more reflects society at large. The public entertainments are integrated to the process of social identification and since women are markers of identity, their involvement assumes considerable significance.

Several women earned their livelihood through participation in entertainment activities. The dancing women were yearned for at festivities, it being considered a discourtesy not to have them on ceremonial occasions. It was highly specialised field and they were taught use of letters.

Another important source of social entertainment was prostitutes who had a world of their own. Their lifestyle undermined to a certain extent the hierarchies of caste/class
but they did maintain overarching links with the patriarchal culture by reinforcing social norms imposed on them as different ‘class’.

Further the image of ‘harem’ has been constructed merely as a zone of sexual activity but this is not so, as our findings have shown. The public realm is associated with the exercise of power and control over persons, the domestic in lacking these, becomes quiet space. But women exercised a great influence on conduct of government.

Besides they had their own hierarchy through which they functioned. As has been widely said by Gerda Lerner that patriarchy functioned with the cooperation of women themselves. Thus, unless certain distribution of power is made within patriarchal arrangements it is difficult to imagine how any degree of consent from women could be obtained.

The aristocratic household/harem provided employment to a considerable number of people of both the sexes. Here women could be guards, tutors, and servants/slaves. Harem, in itself, was a very large social/political unit. The political participation of women was nonetheless very crucial and went on to shape the medieval political system. Though men may accuse her being deficient in intellect, we have ample evidence to show that they played a significant role in political and administrative matters, as well. The women most of the times shared value with men and did have stake in social relations. If they could not act independently, they acted on behalf of men.

It was not that they had any formal education. Women of royal/aristocratic backgrounds did have a very sound religious education, which was not in any sense
devoid of secular contours. They were fond of poetry and were usually introduced in this art.

Nevertheless though the women's labour was immense, it was hierarchically treated as subordinated to men. In the devaluation of women's labour, patriarchy took recourse to a large number of social institutions, particularly religion, caste, kin and family. As a widespread norm men also took pains to deny education to women, indeed an important recourse for upliftment in any age. Amir Khusrau represents the spirit of his age when he say, 'the culinary and needle work are prescribed for women, the mindset of girls is sought to be kept occupied with cultivation of feminine skills.' In highlighting the significance of women's labour to Medieval Indian society, this study hopes to give women their due place in history.

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