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A STUDY ON EDUCATION FOR WOMEN DURING THE MUGHAL EMPIRE IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT:

The educational system that was in place for women during the reign of the Mughals is described in this correspondence. There were many levels of women's status during the Mughal Empire. During the time of the Mughal dynasty, both Muslims and Hindus held the belief that the education of women was of lesser significance than that offered to men. Women who belonged to the royal class or the aristocratic class were the only ones who may be allowed to study literature and education. Because to the Purdah System, early marriage, societal taboos, and a great number of other factors, it was very difficult for women from middle class and lower class backgrounds to get an education. Many of them had a strong command of the poetic language. In addition to the literary masterpieces that they produced throughout the Mughal era, women also made substantial contributions to education by establishing institutions during that time period. There were a few princesses and ladies who belonged to aristocratic families who had built mosques and connected madrasas to them in order to provide education.

KEYWORDS:

WOMEN, EDUCATION, RELIGION, MUGHAL EMPIRE AND CULTURE.

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INTRODUCTION

Women from poorer socioeconomic backgrounds, on the other hand, had quite different educational experiences. Formal education was out of reach for the majority of women, especially those living in rural regions. Their formal education mostly consisted of religious instruction and the acquisition of practical skills for handling domestic tasks. Conventional wisdom was that women should focus on being good spouses and mothers and not worry too much about advancing their careers or pursuing other interests. Such a wide gap in educational possibilities highlighted the severe class differences that existed under the Mughal Empire (1). Depending on their social level, women in the Mughal Empire had vastly different educational opportunities. The education of women was highly prized by the upper classes, especially the royal family and the nobles, although it was typically restricted to household matters. The cultural refinement of the Mughal courts was on full display in the fact that the women who circulated in these circles were usually experts in fields like as music, poetry, literature, and religious studies.

Rather of preparing them for more significant positions in society, their education was primarily intended to enhance their rank and intellectual capacities inside the court. Gulbadan Begum, who was the daughter of Emperor Babur and a well educated lady, wrote the "Humayun-nama," which offered a unique female viewpoint on the Mughal empire. Her works are important historical documents, but they also show that Mughal women were capable thinkers who, despite social norms to the contrary, left an indelible mark on the literary canon of their empire. Similarly, educated women who held powerful positions at court, such as Nur Jahan, Mumtaz Mahal, Jahan Ara Begum, etc., saw education as a way to improve their life at the palace. Throughout the course of history, influential female leaders have left a lasting impression on the globe with their expertise and inventiveness (3). In spite of this, there has not been a comprehensive investigation of the role that women played throughout the Mughal Empire (1526 AD to 1707 AD, extended to 1857 AD), particularly in the field of education. An investigation into the education of women is absolutely necessary if one want to get a more profound comprehension of the social structure and the changing position of women throughout this age.

The Mughal rulers' faith in Islam had a major impact on traditional views on the role of women in education. While

education was highly prized, women were sometimes unable to fully participate in public life or formal schooling due to cultural traditions like purdah, which mandated their seclusion. The moral and spiritual development of women depended on their obtaining an education, and some women overcame these challenges to do so, especially in the field of religious studies. Under the Mughal period, there was a nuanced perspective on women's education. Social conventions at the royal court meant that upper-class women may attend more generalised schools, but they were still expected to keep their education focused on the home. The majority of women, particularly those from less privileged homes, could only get an education at home, which tended to concentrate on religious and practical subjects. It is interesting to note the ways in which the Mughal Empire's educational system, social conventions, and gender roles interacted to shape women's experiences at that time.

Beliefs on women's education were also greatly impacted by Islam, the religion practiced by the Mughal rulers. Cultural practices like purdah, which mandated the separation of women, limited their access to formal education and public life, despite the universal importance of education. Some women overcame these challenges and went on to get degrees, mostly in religious studies—a field that was seen to be crucial to their moral and spiritual development. There is a lot of nuance to the Mughal perspective on women's education (2). Due to social conventions at the royal court, upper-class women's education was typically limited to domestic subjects, even if they had access to a more comprehensive education overall. Homeschooling was the only option for most women, particularly those from poorer socioeconomic situations, who could only learn the basics of life and religion. It is interesting to note the ways in which the Mughal Empire's educational system, social conventions, and gender roles interacted to shape women's experiences at that time.

THE MUGHAL EMPIRE (1526–1707 AD) AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

During the Sultanate era, women were viewed as uneducated and undeserving of literary pursuits. Even if conditions were slightly better during the Mughal era, educational advancement was nevertheless of a similar kind. There were several levels of female status throughout the Mughal Empire. The only women who could afford to go to college were those from the upper class. Little education was provided to girls and women from middle-class and lower-class households. Some older women maintained private schools, although just a few of them went there. Occasionally, the girl's dad would double as her guide and instructor. Girls from low-income households were practically never taught to read or write, with the possible exception of a small few who were assembled and given periodic lessons by mosque Mullas or pundits in Pathshala. Cooking, embroidery, and other domestic arts and crafts made up the bulk of the research subjects (7).

Female education was slow to spread throughout the Mughal Empire for many other reasons as well. This is a partial list of some of them:

Purdah System: One of the most significant of these was seclusion, which included customs like as the Purdah system, which restricted women's movement and prohibited them from leaving their houses. It was impossible for the ladies to finish their education or attend school as a result of this circumstance.

Early Marriage: There was a widespread practice in both Muslim and Hindu households to marry off young girls, which further hampered their ability to receive an education. They were compelled to take a break from their academic pursuits. In his Akbarnama, Abul Fazl makes reference to the practice of marrying off children. Throughout his works, he provided a description of an Indian culture that was ready to marry off its youngest members (6). Those who were considered to be kings and nobles in the community were descended from affluent individuals from many walks of life. As a result, they did not fully disregard the need of education for their female members. Unfortunately, after they were married, women were required to devote their attention to the upbringing of their children. This meant that they had very little time or chance to pursue their intellectual interests, such as literature and philosophy.

Social and Religious Taboo: Throughout the Middle Ages, no town allowed female students to attend the school owing to the restrictions imposed by religion and society. Despite this, women continued to have access to private training, particularly from wealthy individuals such as nobles, kings, and the wealthy.

But many women, especially those from the upper and aristocratic classes, overcame these challenges and succeeded magnificently in many fields of study, including but not limited to: language, literature, music, archery, swordplay, etc. Women from poor and middle class backgrounds have looked up to these ladies. Listed below are a handful of them:

Gulbadan Begum (1523-1603): The daughter of the Mughal emperor Babur was Gulbadan Begum. Her stepmother, Maham Begum, instilled in her a love of literature and poetry, which she later liked writing. Both Persian and Turkish were her native tongues. Humayun Nama, compiled as a result of Akbar's ambition, is evidence of her success. She was quite interested in domestic affairs and also gave serious consideration to academic interests. Humayun Nama has a plethora of information about the educational endeavors of wealthy Muslim women. Additionally, she gave a rundown of the events and Humayun's hardships throughout that period.

Salima Sultana Begum (1539-1613): Bairam Khan was married to Salima Sultana before Akbar. In addition to being the daughter of Mirza Noor-Ud-din Muhammad and the niece of Humayun, she was also the granddaughter of Babur. Akbar often went to her for advice on various political matters because of her considerable influence in

state politics. She devoted herself wholeheartedly to learning Persian literature and language.

Nur Jahan (1577-1645): During Jahangir's reign, Noor Jahan was head and shoulders above all other women. Jahangir was her husband. She embodied the essence of language and literature. She loved poetry and was good at making up answers on the go. She learned to wield a sword and an arrow. She was considered the unofficial head of state throughout Jahangir's reign. A courageous woman, Nur Jahan could understand political matters and take part in administrative affairs. The aristocracy envied Nur Jahan's power and influence.

Sati al-Nisa Khanam (1580-1647): Persian poet Talib Aamli's sister, Sati al-Nisa Khanam, was married to Naseer Ashair. She educated Jahan Ara in Qiraat, the Quran, and Persian literature and language. The Iranian literary family of Sati al-Nisa Khanam was quite illustrious. The two daughters of Shah Jahan, who were mentioned before, were tutored by her (4). In the classroom, she excelled. On top of that, she was really interested in helping others. The Quran's Hafiz was she. On top of that, she was well-versed in pharmaceuticals.

Mumtaz Mahal (1593-1631): Asaf Khan, the Wazir of Emperor Jahangir, had a daughter named Mumtaz Mahal. Being a poet by profession, she was regarded as one of the most intelligent ladies of her day. While Shahjahan was still in his early years as queen, Mumtaz Mahal did have some political influence. She received the Royal Seal as a gift. After the state papers were finished and sent to the royal harem, she was honored to put the imperial seal on them. Because of this, she gained knowledge about current events and even took part in some of them.

Jahan Ara (1614-1681): Shah Jahan took care of Jahan Ara's schooling as she was his daughter. That is what historians assert. Among the Mughal era's most educated women, she stood out. Historiography and biographies were Jahanara's favorites. She celebrated the life of Khwaja Moinuddin Chisti Ajmiri in her famous Persian book Moonas ul Arwah, which she wrote when she was 26 years old (4). Jahan Ara was also an accomplished calligrapher. In India, in Muslim Aligarh University's Azad Library, you might be able to find some of her calligraphic works. She received instruction from Sati alNisa Khanam. The establishment of Madarsa also had the backing of Jahan Ara. She constructed the Agra Masjid and the Madarsa that stood next to it. The construction of shops also contributed financially to this Madarsa.

Roshan Ara (1617-1671): Roshan Ara, the elder daughter of Shah Jahan, exemplified great virtue in her selflessness and devotion to God. Younger than her was her sister Jahan Ara. Subsequent events validated her role as teacher to the daughters of Aurangzeb Alamgir. Her talent is on full display there. Additionally, Sati al-Nisa Khanam taught her.

Zeb-un Nisa (1638-1702): Aurangzeb Alamgir has one daughter, Zebun Nisa. Her several tutors were appointed by Alamgir. This quality of reverence was passed down to Hafiz e Quran by Hafiza Maryam Zamani. Mulla Saeed Ashraf then instructed her in the practices of Hadith and Fiqh. She learned Fiqh and the Quran from the renowned Aalim Mulla Ahmed Jeevan. She could speak Persian and Arabic with ease. She had a talent for calligraphy as well. She had extensive knowledge in mathematics and history. Along with being a poet, she had other talents. Her poetry collection is called Deewan e Makhfi.

During the Mughal Empire, women played an active role in advancing education by establishing universities and contributing to literature. Ameer Nadeem Koka's wife Maham Begum established the Delhi-based Madrasa Khairul Manzil. She served as Akbar's wet nurse as well. His madrasa was accompanied by a Masjid. Construction began on this lavish marble edifice. Renowned historians Abdul Qadir Badayuni and Abul Fazal made mention to the Madrasa known as Madrasa Maham and Madrasa -e Begum. Maham Begum supplied this institution with competent teachers. As part of her continued support for education, Humayun's wife Bega Begum (Hajji Begum) also established a college near her husband's grave.

The ladies of the court were educated in separate apartments at the Fatehpur palace, which Akbar supplied. Muslims weren't the only intellectual women in ancient India. Durgavati, Madhavi, Chandravati (daughter of Mansa mangal poet Bansidas), Chand Bibi, etc. were all members of the royal and aristocratic families. It was also of great importance to the Hindu ladies to compile books for personal libraries (5). Supporting education was a top priority for Hindu widows. During the Mughal Empire in India, women's education was not deliberately neglected and their status was increased. Education for women in the Mughal Empire typically focused on developing skills that would be useful in their positions as housewives, mothers, and managers. On the other hand, this period saw the rise of women's schools and tutors who offered formal education in a variety of fields, which opened doors for many women.

Nevertheless, social and cultural standards that placed an excessive value on women's domesticity and seclusion nevertheless restricted opportunities for women's education during the Mughal Empire, even though there were female tutors and women's colleges. Despite this, many women were still expected to stay indoors and restrict their contact with males who were not part of their immediate family. Because of this, it was more difficult for women to enroll in institutions that were traditionally male-dominated. In general, women in the Mughal Empire had crucial opportunities to receive formal education in a variety of subjects with the advent of women's tutors and women's schools. These opportunities may have been small in scale and mostly reserved for wealthy and powerful women, but they did set the stage for women to make significant cultural and intellectual contributions throughout the Mughal era and beyond.

CONCLUSIONS

Within the context of the Mughal Empire, the educational options that were accessible to women were a microcosm

of the larger cultural and social structures that existed during that time period. Despite the fact that women who came from wealthy homes were able to obtain a more thorough education, their horizons remained limited because of cultural norms that placed a priority on housekeeping. The vast social differences that existed during this time period were brought to light by the fact that women from lower socioeconomic groups were disproportionately underrepresented in formal education throughout this time period. Despite the fact that Islamic teachings had an effect, the applicability of Islamic principles to women's education was often restricted by local conventions. Regardless of all of this, a considerable number of women who served in the Mughal court made major contributions to the canon of literature and art that the empire established by producing. The purpose of this study is to shed light on the opportunities and limitations that women experienced during the time of the Mughal Empire by delving into the intricate web of links that existed between gender, social status, and educational attainment.

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