# *CONCLUSION*

The attempt and intention of investigating the lives of the women of Mughal India with the images and perceptions provided by the narratives of the historians and the gaze of the painters, reflected the images and meaning attributed to femininity in the Mughal times. Dominant among the images of 'ideal femininity' is the image of the 'sacred' mother provided by the men's narratives and the male gaze as placed on the highest moral pedestal. Mughal women were therefore adorned with lofty titles and thus an attempt was made by the patriarchs to establish the parameters of the norms to govern the chaste image of royal women. Thus it is important to note that in the official sources as well as in the biographical and private accounts, the image of 'ideal femininity' is emphasized by posing the image of a 'sacred' mother which is tried to be kept divorced from any other aspect of femininity. She is presented as a paragon of virtue who is beyond reproach and is a model for all women to aspire for. Thus 'Abū'l Faẓl, Mirza Ḥaider Dughlat and even the painters of the Mughal atelier, while delineating Akbar's descent trace his lineage to the semi mythical Mongol queen Alanqua, who after her widowhood became a receptacle of divine grace. This 'divine' impregnation resulted in the birth of three divine-off springs, the youngest of whom, Buranjar Qa'an became the forefather of Timur, and ultimately Akbar. On several occasions the authors compares Alanqua to Mary, the mother of Jesus, thus elevating her off-springs to the divine status. For example, the title of Akbar's mother and wife thus are also associated with the same personality: *Maryam Makāni* (of Mary's Status), and *Maryam Zamāni*(Mary of the age). Bestowing such titles convey to us the medieval notions of ideal femininity- 'righteous and chaste', 'cupola of chastity' 'font of spiritual knowledge and glory.' The Alanqua narrative, thus, conveys an image of an ideal feminine sexuality held during that period and the kind of norms set for the women.

This idea of 'ideal femininity' thus became the locus of study in the nineteenth century. Friedrich Engels therefore certainly considered the origin of private property, which led to the overthrow of the mother right, as the great 'world historic defeat of the female sex'.[1] It fostered his utopian dream of freeing women by breaking down

[1] Fredrick Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, in Karl Marx and F. Engels, Selected Works, vol 3, Moscow, Progress Publication, 1970, p. 231

the capitalist mode of production. However, de Beauvoir pointed out that it is by denying the reproductive power of women that this conception of emancipation is made to stand. Other feminists like Kate Millet argued that if male dominance is linked to sexual mode of reproduction, the solution was to reject heterosexual unions. There were other theorists who held the economic system as primarily responsible for mother's powerlessness. Motherhood was originally set up in the family as a historical necessity, but later excluded women's world from production and public life.

It is not the mere fact of motherhood and mothering that makes women vulnerable but their social construction, the implications for women flowing from the meaning attached to the idea of motherhood, and the terms and conditions under which it is allowed to express itself.[2]

Thus looking at it through the feminist lens, one may agree with feminist like Adrienne Rich and Shulamith Firestone, who were of the opinion that women's oppression in patriarchal culture and society was linked to the identification of women to their bodies and their sexuality. This was central to the nature/culture debate where women were identified with nature primarily because of their biological functions, which was mainly reproduction. Women's bodies and role were therefore regarded as a vehicle for reproduction. Thus it provides culturally coded and socially sanctioned images of the perfect woman constructed by patriarchs. Hence the queen mother became an epitome of the Mughal womanhood. One may say that these idealised images of mother were thus a ploy by men to represent the mother in a particular way. However we do find the same representation of a mother in the travellers' accounts as well. Though relying on bazaar gossips and written with an intention of representing the Orients in a certain way, even they did not dare to malign the image of a mother. Their eminence and power can be gauged more from the legal documents where the *ḥukms* unfold the power and authority that they enjoyed in legal matters. Their pre-eminence is also emphasized by drawing the mother figure larger than the rest in the Mughal miniatures. Further the sober attire she is always depicted wearing re-emphasizes her prominence as a role-model of chastity and sublimity. In the political field too, the Mughal women tried to keep pace with men. Thus we come across

[2]MaithreyiKrishnaraj, *Motherhood in India Glorification without Empowerment?*, Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2010, p.22

several politically ambitious women, or women who directly or indirectly influenced the political course of events of those times. They solved differences of opinions, settled disputes, secured pardon for their loved ones, acted as an instrument to conclude peace with the enemy, and sometimes even went out themselves to face the enemy. Thus one may conclude Mughal ladies played very significant role from the times of Bābur to Aurangzeb even to the extent of changing the complete political scenario. One can therefore say that at least the senior lady and mother figures must have enjoyed the same respect and reverence.

It is however significant to note that it is from Akbar's time that chastity comes to get associated with the female body. Prior to the reign of Akbar, there is little evidence of such obsession with female chastity. However the perceived notion that women are meant to reproduce offspring is perceptible from the Bābur's account and can be observed in the regulations of Akbar. Marriage in the eyes of Akbar definitely served the purpose of reproduction however as far as the issue of *sati* and property rights is concerned we find a benevolent patriarchy prevailing. Empowerment of women is often traced back to the French Revolution and Bengal Renaissance which pronounced the idea of liberty, equality and fraternity; however we see that way back in sixteenth century a Mughal emperor is bothered and identifies with the issues of women. Thus an attempt is made by the Emperor in order to emancipate the condition of women by prohibiting *sati* to some extent and also in the matters of property rights. This idea has been put forth by D. Rothermund in his unpublished paper 'Akbar and Philips II of Spain'.[3] Later by the reign of Jahāngīr and Shāh Jahān we see that women if found in deplorable conditions were given the land grants and monetary help. However the conditions were not so perfect as there are instances where women were sent out of the *ḥaram* if they failed to reproduce. Reproduction was further complicated when it was expected to bring forth a son. Women were also threatened to be divorced. On the other hand rearing and bearing children invited several controversies and scandals which may be roused because of jealousy or to compete to become a chief queen, as we know from the account of Gulbadan narrating the incident of Maywa-jān that how she bluffed her pregnancy. The same is reflected in the travel narratives as well where Tavernier remarks that out

[3]DictmanRothermund, Akbar and Philip II of Spain: Counting Strategies of Imperial Consolidation, International Seminar on Reason and Tolerance in Indian History, The Akbar Fourth Centenary, October 2006, Indian Council of Historical Research, New Delhi

of jealousy few women caused miscarriages. Thus reproduction and producing an heir resulted in covetousness among the ladies of the *ḥaram*. The Mughal miniatures as well represent various birth scenes like that of Akbar, Jahāngir and Murād thus glorifying the reproductive role of a woman and entrenching the patriarchy firmly. However no such depiction is found for any Mughal princess, we only come across of few narrations of celebrations in the *ḥaram*.

As we find the prevalence of polygamy in the Mughal household, it often resulted in the absence of a separate time for the wife which also resulted in jealousy among the *ḥaram* inmates. Even the wives had to go through the loneliness and denial of attention and sexual pleasure as is evident from the texts as well as paintings. It is in this scenario that a wife of the Mughal Emperor Ḥumāyūn, Begā Begum was found complaining to the Emperor in the account of Gulbadan. The paintings also depict various Emperors and princes being attended by the ladies of the *ḥaram.* Few illustrations also depict women showing their annoyance on the denial of attention. Similarly, the travel narratives project a crafty and jealous image of the women, suggesting a struggle amongst the co-wives for space with the husband. Mannuci thus remarks that the women's minds dwelling on 'nothing but malice', and that they imagine and try to do things by which they could please her husband and hinder his going near other women. Pelsaert too remarks that the wives 'hate each other secretly'. Another charge was that they were sex starved and thus indulged in adulterous relations. They were even charged of an incestuous relation between Shāh Jahān and Jahān Ārā. Adultery and incest was however severely punished as apparent from the court chronicles as well as the private accounts. The notion that women were sex starved cannot be altogether refuted. Femininity is often associated with sexual objectification and sexual appeal. Sexual passiveness or sexual receptivity is sometimes considered feminine however sexual assertiveness and sexual desire is considered masculine. We further see even the intimate depictions of sexual intercourse depict women attendants and others which shows that it was not a private act altogether. And to enhance the macho image of the Emperor or prince, other women were also shown in the background. Probably this was the reason that by the mid eighteenth century we have a miniature of lesbians.

No matter what treatment was meted out to the wives, they were expected to be submissive and subservient to their husband. Thus a devoted and subservient wife

was often praised in the chronicles. Similar platitudes of goodness and affection defining normative character of the devoted wife are reflected in the manner in which Jahāngīr mentions his wife Mān Bāi. Another example is projected by Bābur when he relates to Apāq Begum. The travellers also took notice of the same and appreciated Hājī Begum for her devotion and her service. On the other hand Fryer remarks that the women are comfortable subjecting to the wills of their husbands, being truly no more than chief slaves. However, women of a dominating nature were detested by our authors as reflected in the writings of Babur and others. Even the regulations of Akbar seem to be very repressive when Badāūnī relates that if a woman quarrelled with her husband she was sent to *Shaitānpurah*. Thus there were repercussions if a woman dared to challenge the normative behaviour defined by the patriarchs. This is further reflected in the events related by the authors. There are instances of domestic violence which sometimes grew to an extent of murdering of a wife. Such incidents often appear in the official chronicles, private memoirs as well as in the travel narratives. It appears that wife bashing was very common so much so that a painting depicts a woman being beaten by her husband. It is probably therefore we get a separate condition in the *nikāhnāmā* that prohibits a husband to beat her wife in such a way that it leaves a mark on her body. We also find there several instances of rape and capturing of women depicting the vulnerable condition of woman. In the words of Ruby Lal "capturing and bartering away was the fate of many women during the peripatetic Mughals". One such incident is the case of Khānzāda Begum. Thus the reading of the sources reveals that violation of a woman of the house whether forced, or with due consent was taken to be the ultimate disgrace, both of the family and the community. Probably that very reason made Bābur to gloss over the information regarding her thus he says she fell in the hands of Shaibāni Khān, however, when the information is supplemented by Mirza Ḥaider Dughlat account we learn that Babur handed over her sister to him in order to save his own life. Similarly Gulbadan's statement that "at length it had to be done" shows a tone of sacrifice made by Khānzāda Begum for her brother and for the sake of realm. Records also speaks of when came back or was been rescued as was the case of Khānzāda Begum we notice that no social stigma was attached to her as one can expect in today's time. One miniature from the *Bāburnāmā* depicts Khānzāda Begums returns by Farrukh Chela. At the age of thirty three she was returned to Bābur at Qunduz by Shāh Ismāil with an escort of soldiers. Seated in front of Babur is depicted Khānzāda Begum attended by

maidservants. This is a symbolic representation of Khānzāda Begum's power and respect which she enjoyed as a senior woman is clearly manifested in this illustration. Though drawn much later in 1590's as rightly pointed by Ruby Lal "is far from any stigma, or question mark attaching to the status of this returned relative, she is the main focus of the cast and is represented in a commanding position." Similarly the way that Gulbadan Bāno Begum records the loss of one of the daughters of Ḥumāyūn during the battle of Chausa reveals that the men preferred to have them dead, or die protecting or avenging their honour rather than face such disgrace. On the other hand the avenues through which women passed into the *ḥaram* were many. Each Mughal victory brought in numerous women captives. The insistence on beauty was an important criterion inducting women to the *ḥaram*. Jahāngīr at the very beginning of his reign therefore promulgated an ordinance to the effect that collectors and *jāgirdārs* were not to intermarry with the people in their districts without the king's permissions. One illustration from *Timurnāmā* illustrates the captive women standing before the emperor.

Praises are also for women who stood out but they were lauded for the masculine attributes they possessed. For the authors one may say that a successful woman was an anomaly, extraordinary, unlike of other women, admired because of her likeness to a man. The power exercised by a woman was also sometimes abhorred by several authors for example Māham Anagā and Nūr Jahān received much acrimony by the authors of the official accounts and the travelogues except Jahangir. The legal documents further confirm the power exercised by Nūr Jahān. Perhaps the reason of the rancour was because they chose to take decision on their own. This characteristic feature of men further come down to the age of Enlightenment when so called modern scholars political theorists and philosophers from Plato and Aristotle to Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau, argued for a natural difference between men and women; men being naturally more rational and therefore suited to politics and public life and irrational women being more suited to the emotional life of the home. To challenge this idea we have several women from royal households, who were women of letters and poetesses, a woman named Nihāni stood out in the biographies provided by Badāūnī in his third volume. These women were not only accomplished writers but also maintained libraries and constructed *madarsas*. Jahāngīr words for Salimā Sultān Begum can thus be considered as an example of one such stereotypical notion.

However there are few who received due respects as well. Almost all the authors gave highest accolades for Rāni Durgāvati who had the mind and courage of men. Thus making her an example stood in stark contrast to the typical weakness of "womanhood" because of her energy courage and beauty.

The depiction of mercantile and ordinary class can be more clearly gleaned from the travelogues. The paintings sometimes offer us the visual replica of what the travellers have said. Travellers' accounts have vividly described them from their stature to their clothing's and jewellery making their social strata apparent. All other occasions, the miniature paintings and book illustrations also go on to record facts generally missed out by our written sources. A large number of these depict some of the daily chores in which these women indulged. Fairly good idea of the various professions followed by these women can also be had from these illustrations. Thus we have a miniature depicting women working on a construction site, drawing water, carrying food for her husband, helping her husband in the fields and manning the shops as well. Some depicts women from a very rural background marked by poverty as perceptible from their attire. Some paintings offer a clear reflection of what the travel accounts have said. Consider the example of Bernier when he relates about women visiting the astrologers the imitation of it can be seen paintings. Bernier sarcastically remarks that these "wise doctors" were visited by "silly women", wrapped in white cloth from head to foot, whisper to them all the transactions of their lives, and disclose every secret with no more reserve than is practised by a scrupulous penitent in the presence of her confessor. A painting which we have referred above illustrates a number of women, some draped from head to foot in *hijāb* surrounding the bazaar astrologer who sits on a platform in a bazaar square with his instruments and wares spread before him. It confirms what Bernier had told us.

Ordinary women rarely appear in the official accounts, however, the legal documents show a more liberal picture of the middle class women where they can be seen inheriting property, fighting legal battles for their rights with their brothers and family members. These documents reveal not only their rights but also their travails. Of much importance are the *nikāḥnāmās* dating back to the period of Akbar and coming down to the 18$^{th}$ century which reveal that the women enjoyed a number of rights as a wife: she could decide if the husband could marry a second time, or bring home a concubine or a slave girl. She also enjoyed a right denied in many societies-

the right to divorce her husband if he failed on any of the conditions included in the marriage contract document. Even a non-Muslim woman had the right to *meḥr* (bride money) from her husband.