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Royal Women and the Construction of Imperial Masculinity in Mughal Empire

Navendu Shekhar*

The Mughal Empire has always been an important field of studies and research among scholars and academicians. The males have always found a place in the scholarly writings whereas women has been neglected. The women have not found the place in the scholarly writings and research related to this period. However, we have considerable information about the women who played an important role and had profound influence in Mughal polity and culture. Most of them were royal women¹ who were active in every field of life and as a member of royal and ruling families, they actively participated in the day to day administration of the Mughal Empire. This essay tries to examine the status of these royal women and the changes that was brought during Akbar's reign through the construction of imperial masculinity.

Both men and women were considered equal in accordance with Islamic faith, but it practice the position of women was subordinate to that men². Mughal age was not immune from practicing this custom and tradition. Babur founded Mughal Empire in 1526; however, he alone can not be credited for this. Aisan Daulat Begum who was Babur's maternal grandmother played an important part in his success. Babur acknowledges her influence in his memoir. He says, "She was very wise and farsighted and most affairs of mine were carried through under her advice". During the initial years of Mughal rule, it was not only Aisan Daulat Begum who influenced Babur, but there were other women who contributed to empire building³. Humayun also got a mentor in his mother Maham Begum⁴ who taught him basics of administration. Maham Begum was highly educated, intelligent, and broad-minded.

Babur's successor Humayun's faced political rivalry with Afghan ruler and spent most of his time in battles and conflict. He was forced to seek exile in Persia. Humayun was not alone in his struggle, as his wife supported him in his struggle, who even parted his son for years⁵. She was source of inspiration for Humayun. She had political acumen, which was very much visible during the rule of his minor son Akbar. She was instrumental in taking important decisions and thus helping his son in administrative work. She was also instrumental in making a marriage alliance between Akbar and the daughter of Munim Khan who was a trusted noble of Humayun. Thus due to political sagacity and determination with which she used her position as dowager queen, she had a position of great respect

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