

## FINDINGS FORMET FOR EXAMINATION

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Topic of Research: Perceptions of Motherhood in Mediaeval India 1200 to 1700

### FINDINGS

In mediaeval Indian history, I have conducted research on perceptions of motherhood, social, political, cultural, devotional, and spiritual across the Sufi, Bhakti Sultanate, and Mughal periods. During the Sultanate era, mothers played a crucial role; they even engaged in various conspiracies to ensure their sons became sultans. Mothers acted as kingmakers.

Similarly, the mothers of Sufi saints educated their sons and shaped them into the great scholars of their time. Figures such as Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki, Baba Farid, and Nizamuddin Auliya were deeply influenced by their mothers. Sufi mothers were also believed to possess spiritual powers, such as Bibi Qarsum and Bibi Zulaikha, whose miracles are mentioned in Sufi literature. There are also examples where devotees would visit a saint's mother's grave before visiting the saint's dargah. Sufi literature shows the role of mothers in educating their children, as seen in texts like Maktubat-i-Sadi, Maktubat-i-Do Sadi, Fawaid-ul-Fawad, and Khair-ul-Majalis. Khair-ul-Majalis even tells us the story of a blind child whose mother had a great role to educate him and made him a great scholar. Discussions on motherhood appear in Sufi writings such as maktubat, malfuzat, and tazkiras. At the dargah of Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki, the word "Mai" is mentioned in qawwali, which is derived from Hindi.

In the Bhakti movement as well, saints wrote extensively about maternal love and affection. Surdas's expression of vatsalya prem (parental love) is unparalleled. Saints like Kabir and Guru Nanak composed poetry on motherhood. Tulsidas and Andal also wrote about maternal love. Chaitanya had immense love for his mother and stated that even if he were born ten million times, he could never repay his mother's debt. Both Sufi and Bhakti saints considered a mother's blessings essential for attaining spiritual heights. No contemporary poet wrote as extensively on vatsalya and motherhood as Surdas, and Acharya Hazari Prasad Dwivedi praised this in his book Sur Sahitya.

During the Mughal period, motherhood held great importance. Women such as Hamida Banu Begum (Akbar's mother), Salima Sultan Begum, and Nur Jahan played significant roles in Mughal politics. Hamida Banu Begum even wrote a letter to Goswami Vitthal Das granting full freedom for cows to graze in Khalsa lands. Mothers played political, religious, and cultural roles. In times of peace, senior women acted as ambassadors of peace. Mothers also played roles in international diplomacy. The mothers of Mughal emperors were involved in international trade and played major roles in international trade. They also served as links between the nobility.

Mediaeval Indian society used to love to have male children. Various efforts were made to obtain sons, such as seeking blessings from Sufi saints. Women who could not bear children were mocked and taunted. Babur's wives allegedly gave drugs to Mubarak Begum so that she would not conceive. The mothers of emperors received the highest respect. In extreme cases, when women died during childbirth, their wombs were cut open to save the child, as happened with the mother of Bahlol Lodi. She died when a roof collapsed on her, and the child was extracted from her womb while she was nine months pregnant. Despite their immense contributions, mediaeval mothers' achievements have largely been ignored. This research represents half of the population that has not yet received adequate scholarly attention.

Motherhood was highly significant in the mediaeval period. All Mughal emperors deeply loved and respected their mothers. Motherhood was also important for kingship; for example, Sikandar Lodi's mother was a goldsmith (sonar), due to which some nobles opposed him. However, his mother played a crucial role in making him sultan. At times, motherhood was also mocked, as seen in references to the mother of Kam Bakhsh.