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**Title of the Thesis: - ‘Changing Perception about Women in Eighteenth century North India.’**

## **ABSTRACT**

The period of eighteenth century has played a significant role in giving a new shape to the Indian economy, society, polity, and culture. This period presents different shades of life with multiple fluctuating trends. Looking at the trends of history writing, historians have approached towards this century with their main concentration on the themes such as decline of the Mughal Empire due to the crisis in the political and administrative institutions, agrarian conditions, economic changes, trade relations, and class struggle. The debate is revolved around the notion of the ‘Dark Age’ or a period of economic prosperity and finally to comprehend whether it was a period of transition or continuity.

In order to understand all the above-mentioned developments, one needs to study the place of women, their condition, their roles, and power in the period under review. In this work an attempt has been made to study how the changing political, economic, and socio-cultural equations during eighteenth century reflected about women.

Considering all the above aspects, this work investigates how the period opened up new spaces for an expression of women’s power, ideas, attitudes, beliefs and identities in many ways. Hence, in this work an attempt has been made to locate and identify the multiplicity of women images as reflected through the literature of the eighteenth century North India. The effort is made to study women’s participation in the affairs of eighteenth century which led to the emergence of their different images. I have mainly confined myself to Delhi and Awadh- two important regions of North India. The reason behind the selection of Delhi and Awadh is to study the condition of women in the two contiguous regions, one being the center and other a province.

The political scene of eighteenth century was dominated by the influence of mainly two classes of women belonging to two different background i.e. royal women and courtesans. The

main element during this period was overlapping i.e. the courtesans also marked their strong presence at Mughal court. At the same time establishing their own identity in the form of *tawaifs*. Then there were some courtesans who on the basis of personal intellect and capacity rose to power and occupied status equal to the respectable royal ladies.

This century sets apart in the sense that the kind of challenges faced by women in the backdrop of Mughal rule and the means and ways adopted by them to tackle the situation led to form different perceptions. At the same time revealing the weakness of monarch to handle their age-old traditions not just outside the court but also within their household.