History Stack Exchange is a question and answer site for historians and history buffs. It only takes a minute to sign up.

Sign up to join this community

Anybody can ask a question

Anybody can answer

The best answers are voted up and rise to the top

History

How did the Mughals view homosexuality?

Asked 2 years, 7 months ago Active 2 years, 7 months ago Viewed 4k times

8

What was the attitude toward homosexuality of the Mughals? Was it different between the ruling class and the common people? Was homosexuality, officially or unofficially, permissible during the reign of any Mughal ruler, or was it illegal throughout the period?

india sexuality mughals law lgbt

edited Dec 7 '17 at 7:41
Semaphore ♦
88.4k 17 346 374

asked Dec 6 '17 at 20:58
Saaqib Mahmood
463 3 9

@Semaphore your answer was very illuminating, indeed. I've accepted it. But I thought you would also discuss if there were some more well-known figures of the Mughal era who indulged in or favored homosexuality. Any religious scholras of Islam of that era to have allowed homosexuality as acceptable? – Saaqib Mahmood Dec 12 '17 at 18:37

Many sultans and other aristocrats engaged in homosexuality in the Mughal period; I'll add some. But I don't believe any Islamic authority ever ruled it was theocratically acceptable. – Semaphore ♦ Dec 12 '17 at 18:57

Also worth noting, Mahmud Ghaznavi and his slave Ayaz. Also note, the heinous practice of Bacha-Bazi (The act of using underage boys for sex) which is still rampant in tribal/rural areas of Afghanistan, Central Asia and Northern Pakistan. – NSNoob Jan 13 '18 at 11:48

1 Answer

Active | Oldest | Votes

By using our site, you acknowledge that you have read and understand our Cookie Policy, Privacy Policy, and our Terms of Service.

9

None other than Babur, the first Mughal Emperor himself, was known to have had a crush on a boy he saw in Kabul. He even recorded it in his own memoirs, the *Barburnama*. By all appearances, homosexuality was not particularly frowned upon among the Muslim ruling elite. For homosexual men, at least.

> In Islamic sufi literature homosexual eroticism was used as a metaoporical expression of the sppiritual relationship between god and man, and much Persian poetry and fiction used omosexual relationships as examples of moral love. Although the Qur'an and early religious writings display mildly negative attitudes towards homosexuality, Muslim cultures seem to treat homosexuality with indifference, if not admiration.
>
> **De Sondy, Amanullah. *The Crisis of Islamic Masculinities.* Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015.**

Other examples of prominent Mughal man engaging in homosexuality includes Ali Quli Khan, a Mughal commander of the Second Battle of Panipat. The poet Sharmad Kashani had such a crush on a Hindu boy, Abhai Chand, that he went to his home naked. Jean-Baptiste Tavernier reports that a governor of Surat once provoked an uprising of dervishes and fakirs, by attempting to force himself onto a beautiful son of a fakir.

Which is not to say homosxuality was legal per se. Islamic law generally forbade sodomy, with various punishments proscribed by different jurists. On the harshest end of the spectrum execution was prescribed, including by stoning, burning, or being thrown from a minaret. The dominant school of thought in the Mughal Empire, Hanafi, was much more lenient and did not demand a death penalty. Punishments could be a fine or left up to the judge's discretion.

In practice, however, even this milder stipulation was largely ignored.

> [T]hese legal provisions were rarely implemented since guilty was very difficult to establish. The Shariah demands incontrovertible evidence, such as confessions or four faithful eyewitnesses confirming that they saw penetration occur . . . The difficulty of finding eyewitnesses to confirm instances of penetration in effect removes private acts between consenting individuals from the realm of punishment.
>
> **Kidwai, Saleem. "Introduction: Medieval materials in the Perso-Urdu tradition." Vanita, Ruth, and Saleem Kidwai, eds. *Same-Sex Love in India: Readings in Indian Literature.* Springer, 2000.**

In general, among the elites at least, as long as men fulfilled their other duties at home, they were free to engage in whatever other dalliances they may desire.

Curiously, in contrast, homosexuality was reportedly regarded as a major taboo among the common, mostly native Indian, people of the Mughal Empire.

> Homosexuality, though prevalent among the Mughal amirs, seems to have been rare among the common people in India. Hindus . . . according to Albiruni, considered [homosexuality] as revolting as eating beef.
>
> **Eraly, Abraham. *Last Spring: The Lives and Times of Great Mughals.* Penguin UK, 2000.**

edited Dec 12 '17 at 19:27 answered Dec 6 '17 at 22:50

By using our site, you acknowledge that you have read and understand our Cookie Policy, Privacy Policy, and our Terms of Service.

By using our site, you acknowledge that you have read and understand our Cookie Policy, Privacy Policy, and our Terms of Service.