

Cultural Contribution of Mughal Ladies

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ABSTRACT

Hindustan was considered one of the regions which attained political and cultural strength during 16th and 17th centuries. Mughal dynasty had a lush green Central Asian cultural background enhanced the beauty of various cultural areas just like architecture, painting, dance and music etc. even Mughal women were the patrons of various cultural activities. This notion is very controversial that Mughal women who were very secluded how they could be the active participants of cultural activities? First, Mughal ladies like Noor Jahan Jahanara, Zab-un-Nisa were educated women of age having their own libraries. Second, they consciously contributed in cultural life of that period. This paper identifies various cultural fields which were originated, financed and looked after by the Mughal women.

KEY WORDS: Culture, Mughals, Sub-Continent, Ladies

Introduction

The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were witnessed by a flurry of cultural activities in India as the land had not seen in over a thousand years. The clan of the fabulously talented Mughal dynasty catalyzed much of this. There were also substantial achievements in many fields outside royal patronage. Though there were two different religious identities i.e. Hindus and Muslims, but both these communities influenced each other and there was great cultural interaction between them. But the royal and elite cultural effervescence was primarily a royal spectacle (Early, 1997: 854).

The Mughals came from a lush cultural background (Central Asia) and they valued intellectual, literary and artistic achievements. Their liberal resources helped them to patronise scholars, distribute charity, construct edifices buildings and lay out gardens. Mughal emperors themselves were multi-talented people. They have major cultural accomplishments to their credit. They also gave enough liberty to their ladies in spite of *Purdah* or seclusion to patronise the cultural activities. So, Mughal ladies utilized their time and resources on the literary

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pursuits of that age. Royal ladies like Silma Sultan Begum, Gulbadan Begum, Nur Jahan, Jahanara and Zeb un Nisa had their own libraries (Misra, 1967: 84-85).

Some ladies devoted themselves to religious and literary activities, others passed their time in music, dancing and fine arts which were considered the best sources of their entertainment. Many of them went on excursions and pleasure trips. Most of the ladies were interested in dresses, toilet and ornaments. But all their cultural activities were restricted behind the *purdah*.

Literary Accomplishments

The ladies of Mughal royalty were quite educated. They occupied themselves in reading, writing and composing verses. Mughal Emperor always hired some experienced old person especially for the education of their women; she was entitled Atun Mama (Lady Teacher) (Gulbadan: 208).

During Akbar's time the regular training was given to the ladies of royal household. Akbar set apart certain chambers as a school for girls in his palace at Fatehpur Sikri (Law, 1916: 202).

The Mughal emperors also used to employ educated ladies usually Persian to teach their daughters (Sarkar, 1913: 301).

Shahjahan appointed Sati un Nisa Begum (Nazir (Accountant) of Mumtaz Mahall) for the literary training of Jahanara Begum. Jahanara Begum picked the knowledge of Persian and Arabic from Sati un Nisa (Tamuri: 100).

Aurangzeb educated his daughters not only in religious sphere but also they had a comprehensive knowledge of linguistics. He appointed Hafiza Mariyum and Mulla said Ashraf Mazindarani as her teacher, a highly educated lady and a great Persian poet respectively (Lal, 1988: 110).

The curriculum for the education of ladies included study of Persian, Arabic, Theology, History etc. (Manucci, 1906: 331). Some ladies learnt Quran by heart; other took interest in reading the books like Gulistan and Bostan written by Sheikh Sadi Shirazi (Op.cit, 1919: 201).

Educational Institutions

Mughal women also promoted the cause of learning by establishing educational institutions. They had founded *Madrasas* (Schools) and gave stipends to the needy and deserving persons for promoting learning. Bega Begum, wife of Humayun, founded a college near the tombs of her husband (Benerjee, 1938: 317). Maham Anga (foster mother of Akbar) established a *madarasa* at Delhi attached to a mosque Khir ul Munazil (Op.cit, 1916: 202). Jahanara Begum founded a madarsa attached to Jamia Masjid Agra (Ibid: 203).

The patronage given by these ladies to spread the education was not confined to the capital alone. In some provinces of the empire, some ladies took keen

interest in the promotion of education. Bibi Razi, the wife of Muhmud Shah of Jaunpur, built a college and allotted stipends for students and teachers (Ibid: 101).

So the Mughal ladies were educated and they had done a lot for promotion of learning especially in that era in which the concept of learning was quite ignored regarding women.

Paintings

During Mughal rule in India, there were a number of schools of painting and known as artistic families. As far as matter of female painter is concerned there is only one available reference of female painter named Nadira Bano, the daughter of a pupil of Aqa Riza who made copies of Flemish etchings (Schimmel: 273). The royal ladies were very much interested in paintings but no reference is available which could show them achieving any learning in this art. These ladies patronised those painters who were appointed by the Mughal emperor for their esthetic taste. Nur Jahan shared actively her husband (Jahangir's) interest in painting (Brown, 1981: 157). Fancy portraits professing to be Nur Jahan's shooting at birds and animals are seen in some collections, but none of them bears any real evidence of being authentic representation of the scenes the painters of that age intend to depict (Ibid: 158).

According to Manucci "I do not being forward any portraits of queens or princesses, for it is impossible to see them. Thanks to their, being always concealed. If any one has produced such portraits, these should not be accepted, being only likeness of concubines and dancing girls, which they have been drawn according to the artist fancy" (Op.cit, 1901: 331). Manucci has given the portraits of 'Dakin women' (Ibid: 332) and 'women of Hindustan' (Ibid: 362) in his account.

But scholars like K. S Lal convincingly stated that Nur Jahan herself painted some amount of excellence (Op.cit, 1988: 77). Women were being depicted in the miniatures produced in Jahangir's period. It is likely that Nur Jahan could ask the painters in Jahangir's studios to paint any image that appealed to her, it was due, perhaps to the influence of Nur Jahan, the favourite queen of Jahangir, that women became more popular as a subject matter of painting (Pratapaditya, 1983: 44).

Nur Jahan exercised influence upon the paintings under Jahangir. She was no doubt the appreciative beneficiary of many of the single images and illustrated manuscripts made in the imperial studios. A copy of Hafiz's Diwan, for example, copied by Khwaja Abdus Samad Shiringqalam during Akbar's reign, illustrated with miniatures under Jahangir, bore the seal of Nur Jahan, indicating that it was presented to her on some occasion by her husband (Das, 1986: 83).

Jahangir's pictorial hoard some time helped by his royal consort because she was the collector and curator of some of Jahangir's paintings. In early years of Jahangir's reign, he liked the religious paintings like the image of Madonna and

Jesus Christ suggested by his favourite queen (Findly, 2005: 224). The paintings of female images, whether of urban matrons, Roman goddesses or feasting courtesans must certainly have been drawn at Nur Jahan's instance (Ibid: 225). Annemarie Schimmel points out 'there is a small picture of Dara Shikoh dressed for bed. He and his beloved wife *Nadira Begum* are deeply gazing into each other's eyes. Their servants clothing is shimmering against the dark background and the lamps are casting a golden background light (Schimmel: 276). Keeping in view the interests of *Nadira Bano*, Dara Shukoh presented her an album that proved her a lover of paintings. Rajput school of painting also bears the feminine images. Religious love epics of Hindu mythology depicted illustrations and miniatures of Mughal period. The love story of Ram and Sita, Radha and Krishna reflected through Rajput paintings of Akbar reign (Wellsz, 1952: 35).

Music

Music was considered the favourite activity of the ladies of Mughal *harem*. They always took keen interest in music. Ratnavali, the wife of Puran Mahal (of Raisin) sang Hindi songs in her sweet and melodious voice. Queen Mrignayni (Man Singh's wife) was expert in music (Serwani, 1972: 402). Mira Bai was a well known singer (Op.cit, 1938: 323) of that period.

The daughter of Nayak Bikhshi (court singer of Akbar) was an expert in music. Even Mian Tan San spent his time in Deccan for training under this eminent singer of that age (Aslam, 1992: 92).

There are a number of Mughal / miniatures depicting the dancing performance and singing of women. Paintings of ladies holding various musical instruments like Drum, Tambourine, Duff, Sittar (Op.cit, 1981) depicted the popularity of music in this period. Abdul Fazal refers to a particular class of female singers, the women while they sing and play upon thirteen pairs of talas at once. They are mostly from Gujrat and Malwa. Tera-Tal is still very popular in Rajisthan. "Dhadi women" sang on a particular instrument named Dahada belonged to the Punjab. They could play Daff, Dafzan and Tambourine. (See Fig. 6.1) "Kanjri", a group consisted of male and female experts in dancing and singing. Emperor Akbar did not like the name of this group and called them by the name of Kanchains (Group of Women Dancers) (Abul-Fazal, 1964: 226).

Banarsi Prasad Saksena writes, "that emperor Shahjahan had given sometimes to Music in hectic routine of his administrative life. He specially employed concubines for singing and dancing in the night parties (Seksena: 337).



Figure 6.1: Royal Musicians Performance at a Marriage

Akbarnama, 1590 or earlier. Courtesy of the Board of Trustees of the Victoria and Albert Museum, IS.2-1896 f.8/117. The heralding ensemble (naubat or naqqara khana) on the right announces the presence of the Emperor. Three Indian women in the centre sing and play the drum (*dhol*) and cymbals (*tala*), while central Asian female musicians accompany dancers on tambourine (*da'ira*).

Hira Bai was considered one of the famous musicians of Shahjahan's period. Aurangzeb was deeply involved in the love of Hira Bai Zainabadi. Unfortunately she died in youth (Aslam: 145) and Aurangzeb had faced this emotional setback. In the early years of Aurangzeb reign Saraus Bai was the popular singer. She was the darling of prince Murad/ (Aurangzeb's brother). She spent a very hard time with him when Aurangzeb confined Murad in the fort of Gawaliyar (Ibid).

Noor Bai, another female singer of Aurangzeb's period sang the Rubai of Umer Khayam very melodiously and sweetly (Ibid: 153).

Dance

The art of dancing was not the activity of upper class women. They were just the entertainers. It seems to have been confined to a class of professionals alone. Dance was just performed in the restricted assemblies and parties of Mughals. Marriages, birthdays and different ceremonies of royalty and nobility were the occasions of dance performance (See Fig. 6.2 – 6.3) (Op.cit, 1988: 168). Royal family and nobles did not like that their females trained in this art because they could get the dancers on a nominal prices.

Many paintings depicted the dance performances of professional ladies. They were performing in a stylish movement called “Chacha” or “sea saw”. In the course of the dance they hold hands and circle eight times. It was originally a Hindu dance but later on it was taken over by the Mughals (Op.cit, 1981).

There was a specific class of women who took dance as a profession. Akbar used to call them “Kanchains”. Most of these Kanchains were handsome and well dressed and sang to perfection, their limbs being extremely supple. They danced with wonderful agility and were always correct as regards to time (Bernier, 1934: 274-76).

Abul Fazal refers to a particular class of female dancer, the women while they sing play upon thirteen pairs of Talas at once, two (cymbals or sanj tied) on each wrist, two on each shoulders one on the breast and two on the fingers of each hand. They are mostly from Gujrat and Malwa (Op.cit, 1964: 225-227).

Emperor Aurangzeb prohibited dancing and singing at court, yet he allowed it in his palace for the entertainment of the queens and his daughters (Op.cit, 1906: 335).

Peter Mundy visited India in 1628, he writes, “there are also dancing wenches of whom they are diverse sorts as *Lulleness (lalni)* *Harcances (Harakin)*, *Kanchanees (Kanchain)* and *Doomeness (Domnis)* being of several castes and used different manners of music. Most commonly they are hired at solemn feasts where they play, sing, and dance and there is rarely any meeting of friends without them..... (Mundy, 1919: 216). Bernier refers to them as dancing girls (Op.cit, 1934: 273).

Abul Fazal mentioned a special performance of dance named “Akhara” (Style of Dance) which entertained the nobility and in which domestic servants are taught to sing and play four pretty women lead off a dance and some graceful movements are executed. Four others are employed to sing while four more accompany them with Cymbal* (instrument), two other play the Pakhawaj. Two the upang* and while the Deccan Rubab*, the vina* and Yantra* each taken by one place. The lighting arrangements enhance the beauty of the occasion. Two women hold lamps near the circle of performers..... (Op.cit, 1964: 346). This group of performers was called Natwa. They specially trained their young girls in singing, dancing and playing instruments. Then these Natwas presented these girls before some noble and achieved their aims..... (Ibid: 226).



Figure 6.2: Dance parties of Mughal Emperor Zanit Zaid, The Magnificent Mughals.



Fig. 6.3: The Wedding of Shah Jahan on His 42nd Lunar Birthday.

Painted by Bhola. Padshah Nama, ca. 1635. the Royal Collection © 2000 Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. Holmes Binding 149, p. 140, f. 70b. The naubat/naqqara khana musicians play from the balcony, while below dancers are accompanied by singing, dhrupad rabab, rudra vina, dhol, tambur, castanet and possibly other instruments.

The dancing and singing women received on the occasions handsome presents from princesses and other great ladies when the ladies attend they never do it with empty hands, but always carry costly presents to be offered” And when they

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leave, thir hands are filled with Kichari”(A special dish made of rice and vegetables) not the rice and vegetable preparation, but a mixture of gold and silver coins, with all kinds of precious stones and pearls, large and small” (Op.cit, 1901: 346).

According to Ovington, here the dancing wenches or Quenchenies, entertain you. If you please with the sprightly motions, and most charming aspects, with much amorous glances and to taking irritable a move, that as they cannot but gain an admiration from all, so they frequently captivate a zealous rich spectator and make their fortunes with the booty of the enchanted admirer” (Ovington, 1696: 257).

Architecture

The first lady who seems to pay higher attention towards construction was Haji Begum (the wife of Humayun). She built the tomb of her husband Humayun with great care. She also built an Arab Sarai for the accommodation of Arab travelers and merchants (Op.cit, 1938: 317). A royal house and garden was built on the road from Agra to Bayana under the supervision of Haji Begum (Ibid). Thevenot writes, “Upon the road from Agra to Bayana there is a royal house built by the queen mother (step) of Eebar (Akbar) with gardens kept in very good order” (Thevenot and Carri, 1696: 257).

Near the fort of Lahore Begum Shahi mosque was constructed by Mariyam Zamani (Jahangir’s mother Manmati, daughter of Raja Bihari Mal) (Zaid, 2002: 200).

A garden and a well was also built by the order of Maryam Zamani Begum in the pargana of Jusat on the road, Jahangir writes, “Certainly the baoli (step well) was a grand building and had been built exceedingly well. I ascertained from the officials that the sums of Rs.20,000 had been expended on this well (Jahangir, 1925: 64).

Khusrau Bagh in Allahabad was built by one of the daughters of Jahangir in 1620 A.D (Op.cit, 2002: 200).

Emperor Jahangir also mentions other gardens in his memories, first of all “I walked around the Shaharara ----- then in the garden that Bika Begum, grandmother of my father had made. ----- then a ground, Maryum Makani, my own grand mother had prepared. The Shaharara garden was made by Shaharara Banu Begum (daughter of Mirza Abu Said) who was aunt of the Late king Babur” (Jahangir, 1925).

The Mughals were fond of gardens and Nur Jahan was no exception. But she is credited with designing and inspiring construction of many buildings. She built a garden called Shah Dara near Lahore (Op.cit, 1988: 75). In 1620 A.D, the Vakils (Managers/ Representatives) of Nur Jahan completed a large Sarai in Jalandhar (district Punjab). It was totally financed by Nur Jahan popularly known as “Serai

Noor Mahal". According to Shuja-ud- din Serai Noor Mahal is local idiom "meant some specious and important edifice" (Shuja-ud-din: 102).

After its completion Nur Jahan gave a grand feast (Op.cit. 1925: 106-107).

Peter Mundy stopped at this Sarai on 6th August 1632 A.D, and finding it still in use. He writes, "This sarai is very fair one, built by the old Queen Noor Mohol - ---- for the accommodation of travelers" (Op.cit, 1919: 95). Nur Jahan was still alive when Mundy visited the Agra Sarai (also known as Nur Mahal Sarai) but she has been fully retired from royal activities.

Her officers also built a Sarai at Sikanderabad (Pelsaest, 1925: 4). Bernier describes, "The garden is very handsome, laid out in regular walks and full of fruit trees, apple, pears, plum, apricot and cherry. The waterfall produced the finest effect imaginable especially at night..... at vernag (powerful snake) Jahangir built many gardens between 1612 – 1619. It is said that they "were designed and laid out by his wife Nur Mahal" (Op.cit, 1934: 413).

Nur Manzil garden and Nur Afshan gardens too were named after her with her design (Op.cit, 1919: 197).

Pelsaert a Dutch merchant noted "Many garden on the eastern bank of Jamuna with handsome walls and gateways; belonged to the King named charbagh (T. Siar baegh) the other Moti Mohal" (Op.cit, 1925: 5).

Peter Mundy, English traveler noted many gardens around the city of Agra. Among these gardens three were great" Darree ca bagh" of King Ecbar's and Motee Bagh on the sides of the River Jamma the latter was built by Noor Mohol (Op.cit, 1919: 214). Temple who edited the travels of Peter Mundy explained a fair identification as Moti Bagh was situated on eastern bank of Jamma but it does not solve the question of Zohara bagh which is on the eastern banks, then one may ask where is the layout of Moti Bagh. According to Temple, Mundy made a mistake at some point in his geography (Op.cit, 2005: 250).

Noor Jahan financed to build a mosque at Srinagar (Kashmir) which is called Nau Masjid, Shahi Masjid or Pathar Masjid (Shuja-ud-Din: 44).

The tomb of Itmaid ud Daula (her father) at Agra, Jahangir (her husband) at Lahore and herself at Lahore were built under her supervision. It bears in every part of it the imprint of the refined femininity of this remarkable queen -----

these buildings conveyed the impression of the rich articles of jewellery magnified into Mughal architecture (Op.cit, 1988: 75-76).

Besides Nur Jahan, another lady Aqa Aqayan, who served Emperor Jahangir for 33 years, built a garden, a serai and a tomb in Delhi (Jahangir, 1925).

Purhunar Bano Begum, elder daughter of Shahjahan buried in a mausoleum constructed in Delhi under her own supervision (Op.cit, 2002: 203).

Taj Mahal a building was constructed by emperor Shahjahan for his beloved wife Arjumand Bano Begum (Mumtaz Mahal). This Mughal building has the influence of different buildings constructed earlier by the Mughal queens. According to Parcy Brown, Taj Mahal is influenced by the tomb of Humayun (Brown: 165) supervised by his wife Haji Begum.

A building which may be said to mark the transition between the red sandstone cum marble constructions of Akbar and Jahangir, and the pure marble creations of Shah Jahan, is that gem of a tomb, that of I'timadu'd-Daulah at Agra which may be said to be a forerunner of the Taj in certain respects, built by I'timadu'd-Daulah's daughter, the empress Nur Jahan, in 1627-28 A.D (Sherwani, 1968: 32).

Nur Jahan also designed and supervised a building of his husband's tomb at Shahdara, Lahore. Taj Mahal has certain reflects of this building named Jahangir's tomb. These three buildings were either designed or supervised by the females.

Jahanara Begum, daughter of Shahjahan had a good architectural sense. She had ordered to build a mosque at Agra at a cost five lakh rupees. Jahanara built this mosque out of her own allowances (Lahori, 1867: 252).

She established a Madrasa in this mosque. She also built a monastery. Jahanara also financed to build carvanisarai of Begum Saheb. It is between the fortress and the city Agra (Op.cit, 1906: 221).

Bernier compared this Sarai of Begum Saheb to the palace Royyall in Paris, stayed here rich Persian, Uzbek and other foreign merchants in various chambers, in which they remained with perfect security and the gate of Sarai being closed at night. She also built the famous carvanisarai of Benana (Kerakoh) (Tavernier: 49).

In the village of Achhbal she built a country house with garden and fountains for her personal use (Op.cit, 1867: 51).

Jahanara Begum loved gardens. Her three gardens were in Kashmir named Bagh-i-Jahanara designed by Jawhar Khan (Khawaja Sara), Bagh-i-Noor Afshan (constructed by Nur Jahan) Bagh-i-Safa (Srinagar) (Kumbuh, 1988: 231). Out side of the Delhi gate on the northern side of Chandni Chowk she laid out a garden called Begum Ka Bagh (Op.cit, 1988: 96).

After the death of Mumtaz Mahall she inherited Bagh-I-Jahanara (Op.cit, 1968: 99).

Raushanara Begum (Jahanara's sister) like all Mughal princesses built famous Roshanara garden at Delhi (Op.cit, 1988: 100).

Zinat un Nisa Begum, daughter of Aurangzed built a mosque after her name better known as Kuwari Masjid or Maiden's Mosque (Faruki, 1977: 544). It is said that she demanded the amount of her dowry and instead of getting married, built a mosque (Sarkar, 1925: 62).

Norris writes about princess Zinatunnisa Begum, "The princess had built fourteen carvansarais on the roads out of charity to poor travelers and merchants" (Norris, 1959: 236).

Zebannisa Begum, another Aurangzeb's daughter was not behind the other royal ladies in her garden building, as Chau Burji proves. She bestowed it on one of her friends and planned a second garden for herself in Nawan Kot (near Lahore). Here she was buried; by her special order the minarets of her mausoleum were built and carved to represent four slender marble palms (Stuart, 1913: 134-135).

One of Aurangzeb's wives, Azzun-Nisa Begum (bibi Akbarabdi) built a garden in imitation of Kashmir and Lahore (Shalimar) garden. It took four years for completion and cost about two Lakh rupees (Ibid: 103).

Dai Anga (Zub un Nisa) wet nurse of Emperor Shahjahan also built a mosque in 1635 A.D. The mosque is known after her name Dai Anga Masjid presently situated near the Lahore Railway Station, Punjab, Pakistan (Latif, 1892: 163).

Dress

Women adopted many amorous tricks to increase their charm and beauty through various designs of dresses. Elite women wore elegant and costly dresses; some travelers have given incredible amount of the cost of their dresses.

Bernier observes, "The article of dress which lasts only few hours, may cost ten to twelve crown and even more when beautifully embroidered with needlework" (Op.cit, 1934: 259). Manucci writes "that each garment cost forty to fifty rupees and sometime more".

The materials used in the dress were usually *silk*, *Doria* (striped cloth), *Zarbaft* (varieties of cloth woven by golden thread), *Tiladoz*, *Mukleshkar*, *Kamkhwab* (cloth made of gold). *Kalabattu* and *Muslin* especially the *Muslin* of Malwa (Different Fabric Used for Dresses) was very popular. The merchants were ordered to send it only to Mughal Seraglio or to nobles and courtiers of the Mughal court (Valle, 1892: 44). The difference of the dress of royalty and nobility and middle class lay in quality, material, price and style.

The dress of the ladies of early Mughal period (Babur, Humayun) seems to be an echo of the fashion of Khurasan and central Asia (Islamic Culture, 1960). The women of the king household wore wide and loose, painted drawers. Both Hindus and Muslim ladies of Harem wore similar dresses. In Humayun's times the ladies used a high crested cap called "*Taqi*". It was worn by unmarried girls. The married women wore a *Taqi* with a veil hanging called *Lachaq* or *Qasaba* (Veil of caps used by married women in medieval times) (Op.cit, 2002: 113).

The chief article of their dress was *Angya* (a bodice or jacket, half or full sleeve). To cover the lower part of the body they either wore tight fitted ornamented trousers or *Langha* (Op.cit, 1960). Abdul Fazal writes the cost of *duputta* varied from (6 to 8 Rs.) (Op.cit, 1964: 176). The dress covering their head was given proper importance. Some of the women hid their faces behind the veil (*mijar*) (Op.cit, 1960). Woman of upper classes used this veil due to strict *pardah*.

Ladies of aristocracy wore *Qabas* of fine wool of Kashmir. Their texture of this wool was so fine it could pass through a small finger ring (Op.cit, 1906: 341).

Nur Jahan had designed the clothes in very innovative styles. She had become the fashion queen of her age and people followed her designs with interest. Several varieties of brocades, lace and gowns were introduced by this queen. She introduced a light weight dress *dodami* (weight only two dams). Her *panch tola*

scarf was a light substitute of *orhani*. She launched new patterns in (*Badla, Brocade, Kinari* (lace). She made a *Nur Mahalli* (marriage dress) that cost only 25 rupees (Khan, 1963: 276). Kafi Khan remarks that the “Fashion introduced by Noor Jahan governed the society and the old ones survived only among backward towns of Afghans” (Ibid: 275).

White dress was normally used by widows according to Indian tradition. Hindu women were fond of dark colour. Jagat Gosain, wife of Emperor Jahangir once wore a colorful dress. Nur Jahan who often used white and sophisticated colours and ironically commented “This rustic woman always select gaudy colors. I have never seen her in sober colour. Jagat Gosain immediately replied “A widow may select white clothes but a “*Sohagan*” (married woman) must have colour clothes”. So, Indian women normally used dresses of dark colours.

Nur Jahan also discovered *Farahs I Chandni or Sandal wood and* coloured carpets became famous in her own time (Shuja-ud-Din: 95).

An elegant item of female dress in lace according to Manucci “They are in habit of adding. Normally ladies of Elite class wear two or even three garments, each weighing not more than one ounce and worth fifty rupees each. They sleep in these clothes and renew them every twenty-four hours, never put them again and give them away to their servants ----- they cover their heads with a sheet of cloth---- (Op.cit, 1906: 341).

Multicoloured saris called *chunris* were also in fashion. Bernier gave the *illustration* of Raushenara Begum (sister of Aurangzeb) wearing a sari (Op.cit, 1934: 351).

Jahanara Begum used the word *dupptta* which was used by her pir and she wanted to take this (Aslam, Trans,102).

In the reign of Aurangzeb Zebunissa introduced a woman garment named Angiya – Kurti (Op.cit, 1967: 123).

Manucci writes, “They wear neither gloves nor stockings on account of the great heat which prevails in India” (Op.cit, 1906: 341).

The ladies of upper class used slippers called “paposh”(Pa=feet, Posh=cover/ Footwear) of various patterns embroidered by silver and gold flowers. Poor women moved about without shoes (Op.cit, 1967: 123).

Imperial workshops (karkhanas) were established in the town of Lahore, Agra, Fatehpur Sikri and Ahmadabad provided clothing and other articles to royal household (Nath, 2005: 189). Bernier says that “The consumption of fine clothes of gold brocade, silk, embroideries, pearls, musk, amber and sweet essences in seraglio, is greater than can be conceived” (Op.cit, 1934: 222).

Women’s Toilets

The ladies of Mughal royalty and nobility spent most of their times in enhancing their physical charm. Abul Fazal describes sixteen items for women toilet, which

include bathing, anointing, braiding the hair, decking the crown of jewels for their heads, tinting with collyrium and mark paste, the sandalwood, staining the hands with henna and decorating herself with the various ornaments as nose rings, necklaces, rings, wearing a belt hung with small bells, garlands of flowers etc (Op.cit, 1964: 283).

“Their hair is always very well dressed plaited and perfumed with scented oil” (Op.cit, 1906: 341). Girls upto the age of 12 kept only a small tail of hair and made their long hair into tresses bound with ribbons and richly adorned them with beautiful flowers peals and jewels (Ibid: 40).

Abul Fazal gave an interesting account by cataloguing perfumes of Mughal age and various methods of their preparations (Op.cit, 1964: 141-167). Mughals were lovers of perfumes as Jahangir writes in his Tuzuk, it is of much strength in perfume that if one drop is rubbed on the palm of hand it scents a whole assembly and it appears as if many rose-buds had bloomed at once (Op.cit, 1925: 271). Jahangir’s mother in law, Asmat Begum struck upon a new method of preparing the essence of rose or itr I Jahangiri, named it by Silma Sultan Begum (Ibid).

The aromatic essence were used in the body and rubbed on the clothes as well. The *harem* ladies in general and queens princesses in particular gave great attention to their make up from head to toe. According to Manucci, they often receive from the king special presents in cash under the pretext that is to buy betel or perfumes or shoes (Op.cit, 1906: 341).

Manucci continues, “Their dresses are superb and costly, perfumed with essence of roses. Every day they change their clothes several times. This is due to the Vicissitudes in the weather” (Ibid: 340).

Manucci tells us that Indian ladies frequently used *Heena (Mehndi)* to give red colour to their hands and feet (Ibid: 341).

For looking brighter and preitler, a creamy ointment called *ubatan* was used by both males and females. Ladies reddened their lips with betel leaf which served them as lipstick (Ibid: 340).

Foods & Drinks

The imperial kitchen was known as *Matbakh* (the kitchen in Persian (Ansari, 1959: 226).



Figure 6.18: A Rajput princess smoking a hookah. Tobacco was introduced into India by the Portuguese; smoking the hookah then became an elite refinement. Abraham Early, *Mughal World, A tainted Paradise*.

All the ladies of the royal *harem* got their daily meals from one *Matbakh* (one kitchen (Op.cit, 1964: 98-99)).

Cooking was generally concern of the professional cooks employed in the *harem*. It was only on some special occasion that ladies took some special interest in cooking. Nur Jahan is reputed to have developed new ways to prepare and serve food. In 1617 A.D, Nur Jahan organized a royal feast in Mandu (Op.cit, 1925: 397), where excellent food prepared from meat and fruit was served under her directions. She contributed liberally to the development of receipts of rare and distinguished taste. Culinary tradition in India, actually, attributed a number of speciality dishes to Nur Jahan and her contribution to Mughal cuisine appear on menus in the restaurants and cookbooks (Op.cit, 2005: 221). A knife belonged to Nur Jahan (carved with jade and gem studded fruit Knife) is now at Salar Jung Museum in Hyderabad. It is said that knife used by her if not for the preparation of fruit, at least for its presentation (Ibid: 221).

Jahanara Begum sometimes used to prepare some food stuff. She writes in *Riasala I Shahebiya* that she herself prepared Nan and Saag and sent it to the saint Hazrat Mian Meer (Aslam, Trans.: 96). Once *Udaipur Mahal* invited Emperor Aurangzeb to her apartment as she prepared a rogout (stew) for him (Op.cit, 1906: 276).

Abul-Fazal mentions certain kinds of food which were prohibited for Hindus. They did not eat those foods touched by the hands of a woman in her courses (periods), from the house of courtesan or a singer or dancer etc (Op.cit, 1964: 276).

Sometimes, women indulged in smoking. Abraham Early in his latest edition *Mughal World* gave the illustration of a rajput lady enjoying *Hukka* (Op.cit, 2006).

(See Fig. 6.18). An attendant called Huqah-bardar” was employed to keep it constantly going on (Op.cit, 2005:25).

Tavernier writes especially ladies were in habit of chewing betels throughout the day (Tavernier, n.d.: 294). The chewing of the bettels was included in Singhar and vermilion lips with *pan* were considered to enhance the beauty (Op.cit, 1964: 283).

Available references indicated the consumption of wine in the royal harem. Babur mentions a private party and writes, “I gave hundred *shahrukhis* to Tradi Baig and told him to get wine and other things ready as I had a fancy for a private and unrestrained party. I invited Muhammad i Qasim Barlas and Shahzada to this party, said Tardi Baig, Hul-Hul aniga wishes to drink wine with you, said I, “for my part I never saw a woman drink wine, invite her” (Babur, 1975: 417). Manucci especially attached this controversy to Begum Saheb (Jahanara). The princes was also fond of drinking wine, which was imported for her from Persia, Kabul and Kashmir. But the best liquor she drank was distilled in her own house. It was most delicious spirit made from wine and rose water, flavoured with many costly spices and aromatic drugs. Many a time she did me the favor of ordering some bottles of it to be sent to my house, in sign of her gratitude for my curing people in her harem ---- "the lady's drinking at night, when various delightful pranks, music, dancing and acting were going on around her ---- sometimes she was unable to stand and they had to carry her to bed (Op.cit, 1901: 219-220).

Manucci may not be correct in his details because physicians were not allowed into the harem usually, that he had observed so much detail of relaxing parties.


The Hindu families took two meals a day. The children of the house were the first to eat. The master of the house was second and the ladies of the house came last. The wife did not join their husband at dining table because it was considered a disgrace for the male members of the family (Srivastara, 1978: 8).

This study is purely the study of Cultural of elite class women. The cultre of common Indian Women is different topic further explore.

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