

## CONTRIBUTION OF ROYAL WOMEN IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF MUGHAL ART

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### **ABSTRACT:**

Since ancient times women played important role in Indian history. In medieval period Royal Mughal women created a remarkable history in the field of politics, art and architecture. Few women are famous in Mughal history like Daulat Begum, Gulbadan Bano Begum, Maham Anga, Noor Jahan, Roshan Ara Begum and Zebunnisa. All these women followed the tradition of 'Purdah' and still left immense impression through their diplomatic and administrative skills in Mughal period.

In present paper researcher tries to highlight the contribution of royal women in the development of Mughal art. The objective of study is to identify the contribution of royal ladies and development of art in their times through the paintings of that era

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:**

The paper has been prepared after studying many books on Mughal miniatures, journals, manuscripts and translation of emperors' biographies.

**INTRODUCTION:**

Women, the symbol of refinement are the most beautiful creation of God. Indian women have shown their zeal in every region since ancient times. In this context in medieval period Royal Mughal women have played important not only in their house hold but also contributed in the field of politics, social, architecture and art and literature. From Emperor Babur to Aurangzeb many Mughal women left their immense impression on the Mughal court. The important contribution and ideology of these women greatly influenced the Mughal Emperors. To name a few, Daulat Begum, GulbadanBano Begum, MahamAnga, Noor Jahan, Roshan Ara Begum and Zebunnisa Begum played important roles in Mughal period.

In this paper researcher tries to highlight the contribution of royal women in Mughal court .

Ahsan KhanDaulatBegum was the first Mughal Lady who was maternal grandmother of Emperor Babur. Babur was 11 years old when his father Umar Sheikh Mirza died. His grandmother Daulat Begum Fosterage and saved him from conspiracies. Babur's relatives wanted to get him out from Farghana. In such a difficult time AhsanDaulat Begum guided and strengthened Babur. Thus in every field she gave her valuable advice to Babur. **Babur wrote in his biography about his maternal grandmother,**

**“Few among women will have been my grandmother’s equal for judgment and counsel; she was very wise and farsighted and most affairs of mine were carried through under her advice.” It was the contribution of Ahsan Daulat Begum which resulted in Babur’s achievements.**<sup>1</sup>

In this category second name is of KhanzadaBegum whose sacrifice is mostly noticed in history. She was the daughter of UmarSheikh Mirza and elder sister of Babur. She sacrificed her life for the betterment of her brother. There was a dispute between ShaibaniKhan and Babur. At this time, Shaibani Khan sent a message to Babur, suggesting that if Babur would marry his sister Khanzada Begum to Shaibani Khan then there would be a permanent alliance between them.

**According to Gulbadan Begum-“KhanzadaBegum took long time to take this decision and lastly Babur got KhanzadaBegum married to Shaibani khan”.**<sup>2</sup>



Reunion of Khanzada Begum and Babur in Qunduz, Afghanistan,

Baburnama, painted by Masur

### **Reunion of Khanzada Begum and Babur in Qunduz**

#### **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:**

Khanzada begum was the eldest daughter of Omar Sheikh Mirza and elder sister of Babur, the founder of the Mughal Empire. She was well educated woman and is known for her sacrifice in history. Babur mentions Khanzada Begum with great respect in his biography. GulbadanBano Begum is also mentioned as the Dearest Lady. (AkkaJanam)

**Description:** This picture has been taken from Babur Nama, In this picture a temporary court has been imposed where Babur and Khanzada Begum are busy in discussion with their important nobles. This painting has been divided into three parts. In upper part of the painting Persian-style hill has been shown and their contours lines have been depicted with brown color. Two camels peeking out from the back of the tent. Emperor Babur and all nobles wearing Turkish style of clothes and turban. On both the sides lady attendants are standing. In lower part of the painting a wall has been created by tent and curtains where the military force is present with their horses. Military soldiers are wearing Turkish style turban. Only soldier shown at the right side is wearing a Rajasthani style turban. It means probably Hindu warriors were also a part of Babur's army. All the tent and canopies have been shown with dark colors but figures are depicted with light colors and the folds of the clothes are shown through the lines. This picture belongs to the early Mughal period, so Persian elements have been used strongly.



### **Gulbadan Bano Begum**

Gulbadan Bano Begum was born in 1523 in Afghanistan, daughter of Babur and Dildar Begum. She was the elder sister of Emperor Humayun. She was an educated woman, a good calligrapher and historian also. On the insistence of his nephew Jalaluddin Mohammed Akbar, she wrote Humayun Nama (history of early period of Babur and Humayun's reign.)

**According to GulbadanBano—‘ Daily life of the women of the royal family. She has also described the troubles of the women in the royal family and the visit to Mecca.<sup>2</sup>**

**According to GulbadBano - Young girls were not allowed to attend all the festivals of the Mughal court because each woman tried to attract the attention of the emperor.<sup>3</sup>**

**Regarding her grandfather Babur,--- ‘She writes that he was very intelligent and a great visionary. He had the command on Turkish language. She also writes- Once Babar was sitting in his camp writing his biography that suddenly the camp fell on his head, so that some pages of his book got soaked in water .<sup>4</sup>**

**According to GulbadBano - ‘With the help of his granddaughter, he collected those papers carefully and wrapped in a sheet. Despite being soaked in water himself, burned the fire and dried the papers till morning.<sup>5</sup>**



### **MahamAnga**

Maham Anga was foster mother of Akbar. She brought up Akbar in childhood and helped him in decision making under certain circumstances. Akbar's father Humayun passed away in his childhood and Maham Anga lovingly cared for Akbar. In the early years of life, Akbar had great influence of MahamAnga. MahamAnga became very powerful woman on political grounds. She also contributed significantly in the construction of Madarsa and Mosques. Kharul Manzil Mosque is the notable Mosque for its ancient architectural elements.

She used to conceal the wrong-doings of her son Adham Khan and bailed him out on many occasions. When Akbar announced death penalty to Adham Khan, the relationship between the two was severely soured.



KharulManazilmasjid build by MahamAnga 1561,New Delhi



Artists performing music on wedding celebration

**Artists performing music on wedding celebration**

**Illustration – Banwari&Khurd**

**Left page - composition - Lal &Sanwala**

**Translation – Bevderj, Akbar Nama**

**Historical background:**

During the early years of Akbar's reign, his foster mother Maham Angahad great influence on him. She was appointed as the Governor General of Delhi. She also established many Sarai, Kherul Manzil Mosque and a Madrasain front of Purana Qila in Delhi, which is still present. In the last years of 1560, she organized a celebration on the occasion of marriage of her elder son Baqi Muhammad. On that occasion, a lot of money was granted by the Emperor to distribute among the poor. Her politics ended when Akbar took all the political power in his own hands and sentenced his son Adham Khan to death.

**Painting Description –**

In this painting, Akbar has been shown like a young boy, about ten to twelve years old sitting on throne. On the carpet near him, Maham Anga is sitting. Some important persons are sitting at the bottom of the hall.

A courtier is bowing down and listening to MehmAnga, some courtiers having a bag full of gold and silver to be carried for charity. The splendor of the Akbar's court has been represented by beautiful carpets, tent and curtains.

In the lower part of the painting, some courtiers are playing music & drums and some are dancing with women. Their clothes are floating in the air. Folds of the clothes have been depicted by lines. In Mughal court women dancers were performing only on special occasions. All the courtiers are wearing Indian style of turban. Whereas Emperor Akbar is wearing Turkish style of turban. According to the inscription below the painting, this painting was made by artist Lal and coloring by Banwari and Sanwala. Lal was interested in depicting this type of wedding & festival scenes. He has done painting work in most of Akbar Nama's paintings. By the combination of beautiful attractive colors by the artists Lal and Sanwala. Artist has been successful in showing the dominance of MahamAnga.



### **Noor Jahan**

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She was born in Kandahar, Afghanistan in 1597 in an aristocratic family of Persia. Mehrunisa Mirza was the fourth child of Mirza Ghiyas Beg and Asmat Begum. Her father Mirza Ghiyas Beg was the noble in Akbar's court. For his loyalty and trust, Akbar gave him the title of 'Itmad-ud-Daula' (a pillar of the kingdom). After this, her brother Asaf Khan served the Emperor till the reign of Jahangir and his successor Emperor Shah Jahan. Jahangir married to Noor Jahan in 1611 and gave her the title of Noor Mahal (light of the palace)

Noor Jahan was well educated and intelligent woman. Besides politics she was also interested in poetry, music and painting. She wrote verses in Persian and setup a huge library in which large number of manuscripts was preserved. Noor Jahan had complete hold on governance and Jahangir also gave the rights of government work to Noor Jahan. Jahangir remained engrossed in his paintings and intoxicants and Noor Jahan increased her influence on the Empire. Gradually she started ruling from behind the Purdah. This was the period in Mughal history when she took all the important decisions of the state and appointed her relatives to very high positions. Her father Itmad-ud-Dohla and brother Asaf Khan contributed significantly in governance.

**According to Rubi Lal ‘No other mughal queen had sat before or after in Jhorkha, an elaborately carved balcony projecting from the place wall, from where government business was conducted.’<sup>6</sup>**

Noor Jahan also handled the administrative work well. She issued coins in her own name and later was also signed by the emperor. Matters related to women or the domestic and foreign trade or the system of tax collection from merchants, she improved each department which made Agra a great centre of economy. It was due to her interest and expertise in traditional Persian culture that she made significant contribution in the development of perfume-making, jewelry, apparel and fashionable designs. This was a great gift to India of the Mughal period. Many paintings were also made during the period of Noor Jahan, which is a unique example of the Mughal art. Apart from this, excellent gardens and magnificent architecture were also seen. Noor Mahal Sarai in Jalandhar is a specimen of this. Noor Jahan died in 1645. She has a tomb in Shahdara, close to the mausoleum of Jahangir in Lahore.



**Jahangir and Prince Khurram welcomed by Noor Jahan:**

**Jahangir and Prince Khurram welcomed by Noor Jahan:**

**Artist – Manohar**

**Jahangir period 14-17**

**Collection - Fryer Artist Rooms, Washington**

**Historical background:**

In the history of Mughal paintings, Noor Jahan welcoming Jahangir and Shahzada Khurram is remarkable. In the last years of Jahangir's reign, Noor Jahan was a powerful politician. She had acquired more power on the strength of her intelligence and ability. On basis of her power she sent her step son Khurram to conquer Mandu by the orders of Jahangir. After winning the kingdom



of Maharana of Udaipur Jahangir departure Mewar from Ajmer. At that time Shahzada Khurram conquered Mewar. After Mewar Shahzada Khurram won the south, which gave satisfaction and happiness to Jahangir.

This incident he **described in Tuzuk-e-Jahangir in this way –“ After saluting he prostrated the ground and I called him in a jharokha and hugged him. I gave him a beautiful rose and lots of love. To commemorate this victory, I conferred upon him the title of Shah e Jahan (Emperor of the whole world)**<sup>7</sup>

Queen Noor Jahan was not behind. She organized a grand dinner on the occasion of Shah Jahan's victory. **Which is described by Jahangir in this way - On Tuesday 2st of May, Noor Jahan Begum honored her son Shah Jahan's victory and presented a turban on which the flowers were made. The famous elephant named Sarang and two female elephant which were given to his father Akbar by Adil Shah of Bijapur, also gifted a box of jewelry. In addition, 20,000 zat and 10,000 riders were given.**<sup>8</sup>

**Description:** This dinner was hosted by Noor Jahan in the courtyard in a garden which was decorated in a very beautiful manner. In it, everything was arranged for the service and entertainment, in the middle of the painting, Noor Jahan presenting jam to Jahangir, who has a jam in his other hand. Shahzada Khurram, sitting near Jahangir and watching this scene carefully. A small Halo has been shown on the head of Jahangir, which is full of European influence. In the background of the painting a beautiful landscape is created.

A beautiful carpet depicted on which a dragon has been created which shown Chinese influence. It is clear that by this time, foreign elements started appearing in Jahangir's period's paintings. The main attraction of this painting is the depiction of real portrait of Noor Jahan who is famous for her beauty. In this picture she is wearing Shalwar Kurta which is considered to be the beginning of a new tradition. While in other Mughal paintings, women are wearing long and lehenga and choli.

The second main attraction of the picture is on the wall of the garden -a painting of Jesus Christ & Virgin Mary depicting European influence in Mughal painting. Beautiful and very lively depiction of flora & fauna provide evidence of the skill of the artist. In this painting we can see Persian, Indian, European and Chinese influences which create a marvelous effect of Mughal painting.

## **CONCLUSION:**

The contribution of royal ladies in Mughal history is remarkable. Besides these royal women, many ordinary women also served in Mughal haram. Gulabadan Bano mentioned that on special occasion royal ladies also contributed their services in dancing, music and cooking. Besides these ladies, two women artists Sahifa Begum and Rukhya Begum of Jahangir's period also contributed in the development of art.

## **Suggested books J**

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2. V.A.Smith -History of Fine art in India and Silone, Oxford, 1911
3. Asok Kumar Das—Splendor of Mughal painting during jahangir's time , Mumbai, 1986

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7. Padshah Nama – Translation by WillorThakston, page350.

8. Peter Mundi—Travells of Peret Mundi in Europe and Asia, page 201 &202)