

# The Status of Women in the Mughal Empire: Shah Jahan Reign

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## Abstract

During the reign of Shah Jahan, the Mughal Empire exhibited a complex socio-economic structure characterised by significant wealth concentration among a small elite. Approximately 36.5% of the empire's assessed revenues were allocated to sixty-eight Princesses and Amirs, while 25% were distributed among 587 officers, resulting in 62% of the total revenue of 220 million rupees being controlled by just 665 individuals. This skewed distribution underscores a golden age for the royalty and nobility, but it marginalised the common populace, limiting their access to better livelihoods and opportunities. Shah Jahan's administration was heavily influenced by powerful Mughal family members, with the emperor extending patronage to close relatives, including his beloved sister, following his wife's death. The Mughal harem played a central role in shaping administrative policies, with women wielding considerable influence in various facets of Mughal society. Figures like Nur Jahan emerged as powerful symbols of feminism, while Mumtaz Mahal's charitable contributions, including zakat, aimed to alleviate the plight of the less fortunate. However, the harem's policies and the prominent roles of women also influenced conflicts and resistance, both within the empire and in interactions with foreign powers, highlighting the intricate interplay of gender, power, and wealth in Shah Jahan's era.

**Keywords:** Women's Status, Mughal Empire, Shah Jahan, Nur Jahan, Haram, Mumtaz Mahal

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## INTRODUCTION

The founder of the Mughal Empire was Zahir-Ud-Din Muhammad Baber. In 1526, defeating Ibrahim Lodi for the first time, he founded the Mughal dynasty in India (Anwar, 2014). It was a historic battle of Panipat. The Mughal Empire emerged in India and ruled for hundreds of years. In 1775, the dawn of the Mughal Empire converted into demise, when Bahadur Shah Zafar lost control over the affairs of the Mughal Empire in India and failed to liberalise India for the successor of the Mughal Empire. During this period, harmony between Muslims and Hindus was dominant over the mutual disagreements, India remained a centre of Muslim civilization, and Muslims owned India's tradition from a very long ago (Wilson, 2008). The Mughal Empire was run by the definite institution of the Family (kin). Most Mughal historical accounts and events can be traced back to the genealogy of their families' reigns in India. Those families' genealogical charts provide all-embracing information about the network and structure of Mughal kinship and the number of individual accounts in Mughal India. As the centre of their family's nexus where Mughal women were known as a bridge to connect disparities and alliances of the powerful kingdoms in India. Historically, the Mughal empires and their influence cannot be completely understood without having a clue of their women role and their influence in the respective periods of Mughal India. The roles of Mughal women gave a clear and interesting access to the character of the Mughal Empire in India. Irrespective of the Hindu culture, where women's status was retained at a lower level in their families.

Hindu culture neglected the daughters and sons were preferred over, but Mughal culture celebrated, protected, and honored its women. The death of Mughal (women) sisters or beloved wives would always be the cause of great pain and sorrow for their male partners. To explore the historical role of women's writings at the time of the Mughals have mentioned the role of women in their lives has been mentioned, and descriptive accounts give us the perfect image of the dominant existence of Mughal women. The birth, life, and death are all important phases of women's lives and are mentioned in detail. More than idealising the evolution of women, since the influence in the Mughal era revolved around women's central role in day-to-day decisions and contributions. Many European travellers proved speculative assumptions about the women of Mughal India. Their historical accounts about Mughal women mentioned that the *Mughals were fond of women*. Their claims and assumptions were more appealing to entertain personal biases. The lives of the Mughal *queens* in the Harem *zenana* served as a main role and inspiration for all activities and self-ruled Mughal life. Among the Mughal women, the central role and importance would be given to the elder ones who would enjoy great respect among the other women and men in the Harem. They would serve him as political advisers to the Mughal courts, Supervisors, as well as giving more attention to his offspring.

Furthermore, women enjoyed special names due to their prestige in the Mughal Empire. No one could call them by their real names, as chosen after their births, but dedicated by the Mughal Empire. So far, religion has played an important role in the life and governing features of the Mughal Empire. The family politics and environment of the *Mehal* also came under the influence of the respective Empire-interpreted Islamic laws. The position of women in Islam is pivotal, and Women enjoyed special status in Islamic civilization, irrespective of the fickle social norms regarding the status of women in certain periods of Muslim history. As Prophetic tradition is that *Paradise lies under the feet of mothers*. Shah Jahan's era is very interesting and important for

discussing the role of women, as history witnessed the far-reaching influence of women's roles and personalities during his tenure of governance.

The Birth of Shah-Jahan in 1592 led to his Empire in India from 1628-1658. Historically, the period of Shah Jahan's rule has been considered a golden age of the Mughal Empire (Faruqi, 2012). The status of women, like dedications to his beloved wife, remained important features in the days of his Empire in Mughal India's history. The powerful and wealthiest Mughal woman, *Nur-Jahan* influence had a memorable influence. She was very shrewd and played a competitive role in the administrative and economic affairs of the Mughal Empire. She also had a great degree of influence over the relations between Shah Jahan and his sons. She pursued special self-interest, being an expert on certain practices to sustain and secure her existence and face the politics of empire. It led to the memorable role of Nur-Jahan in the account of Mughal India's history. Moreover, the status of the beloved wife of Shah-Jahan, Arjumand Bano (Mumtaz Mahal) and sister Jahanara Begum (Begum Sahiba), mentioned in the translated version of *Shahjahan Nama*, is considered a primary mouthpiece of the historical facts regarding the role and status of women during that period.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Primarily, the paper presents a brief historical appraisal of women's status in the Mughal Empire of India. In the second portion, analytically, it covers the personal status and prestige of prominent Mughal women and their influence in the era of Shah Jahan. Primary (translated) and secondary sources have been considered as an approach to investigating the main idea of research.

### **Critical appraisal of Mughal women's life 1530-1707**

Women would often get a very rough deal in history, and they are badly mentioned. Mostly, writers emphasized politics, dynastic practices, and the Kings. Mughal women came up with Baber and ended up with the daughter of Aurangzeb, while changing the course of history in India. Europeans wrote gossip, like street stories, to portray Mughal women as a source of killing thrust only but those women in the Mughal Empire were very powerful and held special status. Jahanara was a great example of a 17th-century Delhi woman. She shaped the city of Shah-Jahana badly and served as a great, ambitious woman (Bokhari, 2009). Generally, we read about the Mughal women's role, which involved dancing and beautifying themselves. However, over almost 300 years, the role and status of women sustained variations and dynamic contributions to the history of Mughal India. Even from the era of Babur Mughals were very programmatic about their women. They educated their women highly. The young women would get equal education as their brothers. There was a strong perception to reflect the reality that highly educated women are a blessing for the status of men and contribute to the prestige and betterment of the overall life of a man and his family. They were the guardian of the Mughal legacy. They had to know about the role attached to them. Mughals would always keep their women shoulder to shoulder. When Baber came to India, he brought his mother and sister with him. Emperor Babar and Humayun travelled everywhere with their families because they had not found a permanent position to reside anywhere in India. All their aunts, sisters, and family would follow them in practice, and their influence was important to them, whether it was for pleasure trips or the battlefield.

Historically, the battle of Chausa in 1539, when Humayun lost to *Sher Shah Suri* and at the end of the battle, many women died because there were no stone buildings or shields constructed behind which women could protect themselves from enemies (Bilal, 2015). It proved how women were important and close to their men, even at the crucial time on the battlefield. For the first time, Emperor Akbar constructed a strong city named Fatehpur in 1571 (D. R. Iftikhar, 2020). It could be a permanent and secure place where the woman and her near dear could stay permanently. Mughal women would own property and operate freely in India. Mughal women were also warmhearted about foreign adventures, like *Gulbadan*, with *Hamida Banu*, who went on a seven-year journey to Hajj (Dr Sayeed, 2007). They never worried about returning and looking after their property and influence; both visited Ajmer to pursue their passion for adventure.

Men would also regard their importance of being emotionally attached to them. Mughal males and females were very candid with each other. Babar favored his wife, Maham Begum. He would be inviting her by saying that there are no thrones on the way to my house, so why don't you visit me? Further, Akbar was the first King who introduced the culture of genealogy for the Mughal Empire (Gallop, 1999). Mughal women wrote down the memories that they had remembered from their childhood. It was tremendous work by a Mughal lady. They were trustworthy of the Empire and could understand the art of writing while narrating the memories they had in their minds. It's a reference to the claim regarding the education standard of Mughal ladies. Instead of taking a rest in the last days of their lives, they preferred to work and write books. Their writings were exceptional pieces of historical memories and provided a great deal of information regarding the life of the Mughals. Unfortunately, many primary sources are silent about the contribution of women in the Mughal era. It shows how the role and contribution of women would become vulnerable to men's dominant approach at certain points in history.

There were Turkish, Persian, and Rajput women among the Mughal women when Akbar set the genealogy of the Mughal. The great King Akbar married Rajput women, and the influence of these Rajput women was remarkable over the decisions in Akbar's time. Rajput cultural *Pardha* was influential and reinforced into the Mughal court by allotting a closed *Zanana* space for women. The Ideas of Rajput women were influential in expanding the character of the Mughal Empire of Akbar. The cultural heritage of the Mughal women led to a multicultural, vibrant Empire when the Rajasthani and Turkish women would sit at the side in the Mughal *Haram*. A wonderful exchange of communication would be occurring across the cultural identities of those women. The language dialect of Rajasthan, Persian and Turkish women created a great, diversified and unique magnificent Mughal heritage.

The influence and activities of the Mughal women were not only retained up to the Empire's political affairs and geographical boundaries but also across the continent. Mughal men would give them rewards like great, precious gifts and presents. So, the financial status of the Mughal women was strong and sound. (Mariam-ul-Zaman) *Herkabhai* would run a ship in international waters (Ziad, 2002) and visit abroad directly for the Hajj. She was a wealthy and ambitious woman. that time, the respect and chastity of women were secured by the declaration of Akbar and Abu-Afzal that no one could call a woman by her real name. Under these conditions, when *Mariam ul Zaman* was sailing into Portuguese waters. It was restricted to the Portuguese very violently to cease the Hajj ship (Ziad, 2002). It was her status being a Rajput cultural woman and serving the influence in the Mughal empire. She went to her son, Jahangir and narrated how the Portuguese could block the way of the Mughal Princess. Upon this, Jahangir responded and led to the seizure

of all communication with the Portuguese when they were very powerful on the sea routes; they felt shocked to observe the extent of the response by the Mughal Empire. She was a Queen with extraordinary skills and mental abilities. Akbar, Jahangir, and Shah Jahan had a very strong Rajput connection, but after a while, it came under the influence of Persian women, *Nur-Jahan* and Mumtaz Mahal. It changed the Mughal ruling scenario.

Certainly, when Nur-Jahan rose into the environment of the Mahal, it led to changes and diversification within varieties of music, art monuments, poetry, art, and controlling the trade (Findly, 1989). It was Nur Jahan's family who brought the great changes into the Mughal heritage; she was not alone but his extremely talented family as like her father Itamad-ul-Daulah, her brother Asif Khan, and her mother Asmat Begum, who made a lot of contribution to Mughal life. Nur-Jahan was also greatly instrumental in all kinds of clothing. Her passion was very much in line with Jahangir's intentions. She was supportive and extended the care to Jahangir when he was opium addicted. It is perceived that she was on the throne with Jahangir, but very little information is available to consume and construct the argument to prove the claim. Nur-Jahan's aesthetic sense was very sound. The culmination of her Persian aesthetic, she did build the tomb of her father, Itamad-ud-Daulah. History regarded this development as a draft of the Taj Mahal (Findly, 1989).

At that time, when India was a wealthier and glorious region, women inherited wealth in India by investing and contributing to the construction of different places and providing services to the poor. When Mumtaz Begum died, Jahanara was 17 years old, and she inherited half of her mother's it was a huge fortune. She was given 10 million at that time (Sara, 2018). Moreover, she had trading units and control over the trade activities in Mughal India and resources from villages. Apart from it, these wealthy women were allowed to spend their fortune in a way they preferred. There was no compulsion upon them from the side of their brothers and husbands. Jahanara was fond of constructing buildings in Shah-Jahanabad. By the time of Aurangzeb, and after Shah Jahan, control of the Empire was in the hands of the Nobility.

Women held an important status in decision-making. Zeb-un-Nissa was one daughters of Aurangzeb who wrote poetry and was full of art and skills. Aurangzeb was in his 90s when her grandson was yearning for control over the Empire. At some time, Zeb-un-Nissa would favour her brothers. Conclusively, after Aurangzeb, the power shifted from nobility to noblewomen. The second tear women become queens and serve a different part of the play in history. The historical context explored the role of women in the Mughal era, which was not limited to the Mahal politics but extended up to the trade activities, administrative decisions, battlefields, education, and ownership of great heritages in India. The influence of women was a normal part of life in every sphere of the Empire's affairs. Women were not only present at the corners of the beds but also behind every highly competitive affair of the Empire, their role in economic, trade, administrative, warfare, education, art, and dance parties were far effective and convincing to the Mughal men as well as the public.

### **Shah Jahan's Empire and the Dominant Role of Prominent Women**

The rise of the Shah Jahan Empire: (1629-1658)

Shah Jahan is known mostly as an emperor who built the Taj Mahal. His period is characterized as a golden and wealthy age of Mughal India. He was born in 1592, and he took his last breath in

1666 as a prisoner by his son Aurangzeb (Iftikhar, 2013). He was born as Khurram; later, he received the title of Shah Jahan, which means the Sovereign of the world. Shah Jahan waited until his father died so that he could take control of the Empire. He stabbed his brother after the death of his father, when Nur-Jahan had devoted her attention to building tombs for her husband. By the time of 1646, Shah Jahan's expeditions had rewarded him with great wealth and control over the crucial routes in India. As the state became a huge military power, and needed more expenditure to govern. Political unification and law and order were crafted to lead toward a stable state, and routes such as Lahore, Delhi, Agra, and Ahmadabad were linked to waterways and distant palaces and forts.

The character of Shah Jahan was full of pride and contempt. He would call himself the King of the Sun. He did not give any importance to Islam; he was addicted to drinking and would fully decorate the tombs of his beloved wife (Iftikhar, 2013). Historically, when it was his 42<sup>nd</sup> birthday, he weighed himself against the gold, and that amount of gold was distributed among the people and dancing girls around him. He was fond of dancing and music. Women were guarded by Parda in his Empire with special care by the emperor in his Mahal. He was curious about the travel and movement of women abroad. He had three official wives and had so many beloved ones. His most beautiful and beloved primary wife was Arjun Banu, titled *Mumtaz Mahal* (Long, 2004). After her death, Shah Jahan spent two years in prison put by his son Aurangzeb. In the history of the Mughal Empire, the era of Shah Jahan holds exceptional importance from the perspective of individual women's accounts and their role in the overall affairs of the Mughal Empire. They experienced a great extent of influence on the family structure during the respective era, and their role was not limited to Mahal politics. During the era of Shah Jahan, these women revolutionized the sense of the changing power structure and relations among the members of the Aurangzeb family. The daughter of Itimad-ud-daula, Nur Jahan and beloved wife of Shah Jahan, Mumtaz Mahal (Arjumand Banu Begum), Shah Jahan's daughter Jahanara Begum (Begum Sahiba). Wife of Aurangzeb Udaipur Begum, the eldest daughter of Aurangzeb Zeb-un-Nissa and his second daughter Zeenat-un-Nissa. These women served up an important role and contributions during the era of Shah Jahan (Long, 2004).

The life of Nur Jahan and her Influence: (1577-1645)

*Nur Jahan* was born when her parents were on their way from Tehran to the Agra court. She grew up in a well-educated family attached to the Mughal empire. In 1611, on the Nauroz festival, Jahangir watched her in the gathering and proposed marriage. From the early age of life in Haram, she was observed as a very smart woman, asserted Khuram, as a caretaker of her interests (Saksena, 1931) In Islamic traditions, marrying a widowed woman is a practice of high morals and prestige in society. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) also provided an example by marrying Hazrat Khadija (R.A). After her marriage, Shah Jahan gave her the title of Nur Mahal, Light of the Palace. She would play an important role in recommending Jahangir's decisions. She became the dominant member of the women charged with duties in the Mughal court.

Her kindness was preserved in history when she would grant charity to orphans. She was a wealthy woman of the Mughal Empire and received two lakhs of rupees from the treasury. The Empire issued a coin currency in the name of Nur Jahan; she never wanted power in favour of Shah Jahan, and it was the reason Shah Jahan declined. Despite this fact, her relations with Shah Jahan were not close and normal (Saksena, 1931). She was tolerating Prince Pervaiz because she had to deal

with the power and influence of Shah Jahan (Saksena, 1931). Nur Jahan wanted a grand rival alliance to upset Shah Jahan from power (Saksena, 1931). On the other side, Shah Jahan dispatched his Devan, Afzal Khan, to convince his father not to act upon the counsel of women (Nur Jahan). She was of a very sharp mind when she planned a plot against Mohabbat Khan; she realized the members who were playing against her fate in the empire (Saksena, 1931). The death of Jahangir led to the question of his successor to succeed him in the royal responsibilities. Nur Jahan had to plan a long makeup of fanatical effort to perpetuate the domination. She realized the power of Shah Jahan that could not be dominated, and Shahryar was her choice for the future control of the Empire because she could easily tickle his resistance by bringing him under her influence.

She was an expert at creating misunderstandings between the Royal brothers when she told her son-in-law, Sheharyar, to imprison his brother, Asif Khan. It was an astute way to mechanize the environment and to have control of power for the future (Saksena, 1931). Translating the book of Muhammad Salih Kamboh by Dr. Nazir Hussian Zaidi, he writes that Nur-Jahan would always look for her ideal choices to fix the environment around her and avoid further confrontation when Jahangir was ill. She nominated Shahryar as a successor of Jahangir because she understood the situation; in case of Jahangir's death, the persisting power vacuum may undermine her authority. Nur Jahan would remain in the struggle to have control over power and enjoy the lust of power; she would try to misguide Jahangir all the time as she intended to depose him from power and clear the way to absolute authority. She would remain indulging in thinking and presenting unfair opinions in front of Jahangir (Kamboh, 1971). Soon after controlling the power, Nur-Jahan faced an extremely humiliating defeat from Rajpur forces. Muhammad Saleh Kamboh elaborating on the role of women according to his understanding is that:

“Allah create women to sustain human creature and their primary responsibility is to take care of their family and teach moral character to their offspring rather than taking part in politics, running toward battlefields. He explains further that under the command of Nur Jahan, it was never possible anywhere that the Mughal could secure victory anymore. Further, hesitated that the philosophy of the people with great wisdom says that the families where women dominate the decision power, it sooner or later gets destroy and remain uncivilized. Every group is under the shadow of defeat and humiliation where women are leading the decision, no doubt a humble (wife) life partner can bless the family with prestige, greatness, and honor” (Kamboh, 1971).”

Conclusively, there were two spirits to govern in one Mughal Mahal. It was Nur Jahan and Shah Jahan. Nur Jahan tried her best to impress her husband while avoiding the control of power in the hands of a person who had radical aspirations to influence and was power-hungry. Despite the fact of owning the honour and respect with considerable control over the power, a lavish life and being financially secure, she never wanted to tolerate the power of Shah Jahan. She was dedicated with a special title, also had a passion for poetry, hunting and architecture. She had a background in the royal family and participated greatly in the affairs of the Mughal Empire and policies of the Mahal. Though she enjoyed a supportive environment from men and women due to her status of being the 20<sup>th</sup> wife of Emperor Jahangir. She spent her life helping poor women arrange marriages, looking after of women prisoners in the Haram, designing buildings, and had an army under her command to defend the Empire. She spent the final years of her life in exile in Lahore.

Arjumand Manu Begum: (1593-1631)

The most beloved wife of Shah Jahan was Mumtaz Mahal (1593-1631). She bore many children and would remain everywhere at the side of her husband Shah Jahan. She was picked from the Nobel ladies' bazaar. She also enjoyed a great status in the Harem of the Mughal Empire. She left Shah Jahan at the birth of her 14<sup>th</sup> child in the Mahal, where she could not bear the pain. After her death, the life of Shah Jahan was occupied by great sorrows and weeping. He would remain in isolation, eat less, dress very simply, and his heart would burn while reminding the era of love and joy with her beloved Mumtaz. The Empress Mumtaz would receive presents of two thousand Ashrafis and a thousand rupees, with an additional one million rupees annual allowance from the Mughal treasury (Saksena, 1931). Jahanara (Mumtaz) was so close to Shahjahan, and she wanted brothers of Shahjahan to respect her and advised them to avoid mutual confrontation. In her letter to Aurangzeb she tried to convince him that the Emperor is in actual control of the state affairs and that with the except of time spend in prayers you should devote your time and attention to the welfare of the people and propagate religion, she warned him of his temerity and said further that "It is against all canons of the wisdom and foresight to fight the elder prince (Shah Jahan), you should observe the path of loyalty and obedience (Saksena, 1931)." The death of Mumtaz Mahal grieved Shah Jahan, and he decided to return to the North of India (Saksena, 1931).

Jahanara Begum: (1614-1681)

After the Death of Mumtaz Begum, the beloved eldest daughter of Shah Jahan supported him greatly and helps her father to bear the burden of sorrow in the absence of their beloved wife and mother. Begum Sahib was known for her beauty and kind heart, and she would receive a greater number of jewels and wealth but remain unmarried in her life. One day, when she was going back to her room, the clothes touched the candle and caught fire. Upon this, Shah Jahan cried, prayed, and gave charity to the poor one. Until her complete recovery, Shah Jahan kept on granting charity to poor people (Kamboh, 1982). She was as close to Shah Jahan as the gossips of European travelers converted their relationship into derogatory terms. Their writings were more hateful speculations and exaggerations. The writers were in contempt and doubt to test their arguments by providing solid evidence regarding the relationship between Shah Jahan and his beloved daughter. They could not prove their allegation against of Shah Jahan when, after the death of his beloved wife, his beard grew white in a few days, and his sole supporter Jahan Ara was there to support him at the time when there was a mountain of sorrow in his heart (Saksena, 1931). The situations imagined after Shah Jahan's beloved wife depict the picture of her importance and psychological and cultural influence of a woman (wife) over the life of a man, whether it could be her husband or son. Especially the beloved wife of Shah Jahan lived an important part of her life during the era of the Shah Jahan Empire. She was prominent among those three female personalities in the respective era of the Mughal Empire.

Life of Women in the Mughal Haram

The social, economic, and political lives of women were emphasized in general in the Mughal era, and the lives of Royal women are preserved with special approaches in history. All the sovereign women would be gathering in the Haram. The Mongol, Persian and Turkish royal women had certain political privileges in the Mughal era (Shamim, 2010). The Harem has signified the totality of the female.it was secluded from the views and communication of the public. Abul Fazl gave it

an appropriate sense as a place where anyone could sleep and dream. The queens and many ordinary servants would be living there. There, the Muslim, Hindu and Christian women were in the same place. During the time of Akbar, the cross-cultural and ethnic number of women in the Harem was almost 5000 (Shamim, 2010).

Abul Faz writes that if a woman wanted anything within the limited extent of her salary, she could appoint a cash keeper for her. That person would deal with the cash. No system of cheques was available at that time (Shamim, 2010). Also, the arrival of non-Muslim women in the Harem symbolised the new era in Mughal history it led toward the Hindu-Muslim cultural amalgamation. The non-Muslim women secured some important positions in the Mughal Harem, as it constituted Muslim and non-Muslim queens. Abul Fazl writes that his majesty, for matrimonial alliances with the princes of Hindustan and from other countries, secured the cause of peace and harmony in the world (Shamim, 2010). As its influence was greater when Akbar's Hindu wives brought the teacher of Hindu philosophies in the Royal (Shamim, 2010). Further, the Sultan of Delhi married a Rajput princess, by they never enjoyed the same status as the Rajput ladies in the Harem of the Mughals used to (Shamim, 2010). The Mughal Harem was polygamous, and the women had an interest in political development, court rituals. Factually, the system of the Mughal Court depended upon the decisions of the powerful women. Powerful women like Maham Anaga and Nur Jahan would actively resolve many political subjects in the court (Sharma, 2009).

The court's rituals were dependent upon the letters and recommendations of the Royal ladies. Nur Jahan's letter of protection in management conflicts among Mughal members was a normal matter. When there was pressure from Salima Sultan Begum and other royal women, Akbar pardoned his foster-brother in the court (Sharma, 2009). Apart from Nur Jahan being a Royal member of the Harem, she took overseas trade activities and commercial enterprises. She was willing to trade proceed trade activities with the Portuguese at several points of time. Her relations with English merchants were good and friendly; she had a special interest in opening the trade transit with English traders. Other than that, women would receive a special financial grant in Mahal. The security of women in Mahal was also one of the major points of concern. These women had strong bodyguards, but the security of the women from the people living in Mahal was also great to the point of worry for the emperor of the time (Faruqui, 2012). Mughal was very keen to control the birth of Mughal offspring so that the competition could be avoided in the future. Shah Jahan's determination to restrict the number of princely competitors while he tried to have control over the sexual relations in the Harem, for that matter, he denies the right of marriage to his three daughters, Jahan Ara, Roshan Ara, and Gauhar Ara (Faruqui, 2012).

### Cultural Contribution of Mughal Women

Royal ladies like Salima Sultan Begum, Nur Jahan, Jahan's Ara, and Zeb ul Nissa had their libraries. Some ladies devoted their time to other activities while passing their time in Music, dancing, and fine art. These were considered the best source of entertainment. Many of them were out on the trips, and the remaining were busy pursuing their passion for dresses, toilets, and armaments. All these women contributed actively to the Mughal culture from behind the veil (pardah). Shah Jahan appointed Nisa Begum as the accountant of Mumtaz Mahal while Jahan ara picked up the knowledge of Persian and Arabic from Sati ul Nisa (Iftikhar, 2010).

## Educational Institutions

Mughal women were highly educated and skillful, and they promoted the cause of learning by establishing educational institutions. They had founded Madrasa, also provided funds for the needy students to promote and encourage the learning environment. Maham Begum founded a college near the Tomb of Humayun. Maham Anga established a Madrasa at Delhi with an attached mosque. Jahna Ara founded a Madrasa attached to Jamia Masjid Agra. There were also some schools of painting and art. Nur Jahan's paintings of birds and animals are seen in some collections, which shows the courage and talent of Mughal women for painting and art (Iftikhar, 2010).

## Music

Bansari Prasad Saksena writes that Shah Jahan had dedicated some time to Music routine during his life. He had nominated concubines for music and dances. Mughal was fond of the dancing girls, and many of them fell in love with them as Aurangzeb had a hard time chasing the famous dancer Hira Bahi Zain Abadi (Iftikhar, 2010). Music was considered a favourite activity of the ladies in the Mughal Harem. They always took a keen interest in the dances. Queen Mrignayni was the wife of a Hindu and an expert in Music. There were several Mughal paintings depicting dance performances and dancing women. Ladies holding various musical instruments like the Drum, Tambutina. Gujarati women were experts in particular dances. The wine was available in private dance parties in the Harem and the women would drink wine openly. It was a delicious environment for them to enjoy the spirit made from wine and rose water. Sometimes the ladies would drink too much so that they may not be able to walk to their beds (Iftikhar, 2010).

## Art

Mughal passion for construction the gardens, as Nur Jahan followed the spirit and contributed to the design of many buildings. She designed a beautiful garden called Shah Dara near Lahore. Noor Mehal is also one of the great artistic expressions of the Mughal lady Nur Jahan. Many travelers would visit there when Nur Jahan was alive but restrained from royal activities. Taj Mehal was built by Shah Jahan and according to Percy Brown, Taj Mehal is influenced by the tomb of Humayun supervised by his wife Haji Begum (Iftikhar, 2010). A building which is said to be a mark of transition between the red sandstone cum marble construction of Akbar and Jahangir and pure marble of Shah Jahan is that gem of tomb of Itimadu ul Daulah at Agra built by his daughter the Mughal lady Nur Jahan. Jahana Ara, the daughter of Shah Jahan, had great art skills. She ordered to build a mosque at Agra, at a cost of her allowance of rupees five lakhs. Zinat Ul Nisa Begum, the daughter of Aurangzeb, built a mosque which is known as Kawai Masjid. It is said that she demanded her dowry to construct a mosque instead of marrying. Zebul Nisa Begum, daughter of Aurangzeb, was also a font in this regard; she designed a beautiful garden for herself in Nawan Kot near Lahore. Aurangzeb's wives Azzun-Nisa Begum built a garden in Kashmir and the Lahore (Shalimar) garden at the cost of 4 lakhs. Zeb ul Nisa, a wet nurse of Emperor Shah Jahan, also built a mosque in 1635. It is near Lahore Railway Station, Punjab, Pakistan and known as Dai Anga Masjid (Iftikhar, 2010). Ladies of Mughal royalty and nobility would mostly spend their time fixing their physical appearance. According to Abul Fazal, there were 16 time periods for women's toilets in a day where they would decorate themselves. Also, the cooking responsibility of the women were allotted workers. Very rarely would the royal women take an interest in cooking. As Nur Jahan took an intense interest in cooking and would prepare delicious food,

Jahanara Begum sometimes used to prepare some food. She would prepare Nan and Saag to serve on a special occasion.

### Labor Class of women in Mughal India

Generally, women would work in the houses and carry food and daily life needs, and their folks would remain busy in the fields. Women would help in harvesting, caring for the animals in their houses, rice beating and collecting the grains were their primary responsibilities. Their daily job was to cook and prepare their male members of the family for working outside in the fields (Iftikhar, 2010). They remained involved in physical work, especially construction work, engaged in breaking the stones, preparing cement, staining, and mixing lime. Mughal Indian women were also running small level of businesses at a lower-level others were helping their husbands in the working environment. They would walk from home to home and deliver fresh milk. Also, the plantations sector consists of a higher number of women workers (Iftikhar, 2010).

Unfortunately, one of the evil characters of the Mughal time society was that of prostitution. There were many sex workers employed by someone. Akbar set a separate colony for prostitutes outside Fatehpur, and a separate quarter was assigned to them. The quarter was called *Shaitanpura or Devils-Villa*. Akbar employed a clerk to check on the people who wanted to go into the Devil's villa. If anyone wanted a virgin, they would have to apply through a proper process to get permission. In later times, the conditions were relaxed by the time Shah Jahan was ruling, and people would visit the houses of those prostitutes. People would like to take them to late-night parties. An Italian writer writes that all *Muhammadans* were very fond of women, and the principle of relaxation was for pleasure only. The Mughal and Amirs were the primary agents of these activities and remain equally involved. They convinced those women who could satisfy their sexual needs (Iftikhar, 2010). Public prostitutes were also contributing to the social level passively. These women were highly skilled in songs, dancing, and the art of spying into different places (Shamim, 2010). Moreover, the practice of Sati was prevailing before the time of the Mughals, and it was not as compulsory. Akbar banned it because if the women are not willing to give their life at the time of their husband's death (Shamim, 2010). Socially, the Mughal society was tolerant, and there was no limitation on the communications and relations between Hindus and Muslims. Maintaining concubines, there were large colonies of prostitutes in all major cities and towns. According to an estimate, there were almost 20000 common women without lenience engaged in this profession who got into the centres to sign the registry for themselves. The women were obliged to go to the kind portion every Friday and perform a dance if the King wished. Furthermore, at night, the lamps would hang at the front of their door if someone came and met them to serve their profession. Soft and sweet drinks were available, which would be made up of natural plants and tree leaves (R. Iftikhar, 2020).

Female servants would be working for the aristocratic families of Mughal society. When Nur Jahan took power, she employed servants between 20 to 40 years of age who were married to the troops. Women after the age of 40 were free to go or live in their places; some of them could live with anyone to spend the remaining life. Their living style was interesting because they would live in separate apartments in the same place called the Mahal. Each wife would have a separate apartment and have her slaves count from 10 to 20 according to her affordability and fortune. Sometimes the servants would get bad treatment from their masters and their masters would keep them engaged

in work from early morning till late night, where the maximum output could be produced by them (R. Iftikhar, 2020).

A person who gets married to a slave girl, her first wife, could sell the slave girls and keep the money as financial security with herself. Such conditions were part of customs at the time of Aurangzeb. The prices of slaves would not be recorded in the official documents of the Mughals. The price of a beautiful slave was something around higher than 250 rupees. The slave pair of man and woman also got sold, even if they had children, the dealers had the right to isolate the children from them. Many times, wealthy people separate children from parents while buying slaves for sexual activities.

### **Financial Support of the Women by the State**

Mughal emperors provided some relief to the needy and destitute women in Indian society. Special offers were declared for the poor women, “Sadr-i-Nath”, to grant land and financial help to the poor women. The office and administrative facilities were provided for the process of the charity and welfare programs. The first post was Haji Koko, Akber’s foster sister who was appointed by Jahangir. Also, Nur Jahan was appointed to do the work on this post. The only conditions for the eligibility of women for these funds and grants were that they had no means of livelihood. In the Jahangir era, the policy of granting became liberal and may have allowed women to pursue to secure the grants for their business. Shah Jahan mentioned the two types of lands owned by the poor one in India. The one was *Cha Ha Mustami Land*, owned by women, and the other was *Chak Ha Muzkarti Land*, which was owned by men. Jahangir would grant government resources to widows in some cases (R. Iftikhar, 2020). The guarantee of the owner would be some female or their family members, like a mother, sisters. In case of the death of all relatives of any woman, the property would be meant for her closest relatives. In the case of mother and grandmother, some females would heir to serve the guarantee, and the only Shariat Laws of inheritance were applied in those cases. In practice, the land granted would be under the use of a male member of society in many cases. The working women of medieval times were appreciated by the state. The Mughal empire took certain steps to facilitate the approach, but the patriarchal political history of the medieval period passed the great influences of men over the exploited women.

### **CONCLUSION**

In the era of Shah Jahan, 36.5 % of the entire assessed revenues of the Empire were assigned to sixty-eight princesses and *Amirs*. More, 25% of the 587 officers, 62% of the total revenues of 220 million rupees of the empire, were appropriated by 665 individuals. So, the period was a golden age for the King, princes, and individuals. The custodian of the Mughal heritage deprived the common masses at a higher level of their right to better livelihood and better opportunities (Iftikhar, 2013). Shah Jahan’s empire was under the control of multiple influential members of the Mughal family. Also, Shah Jahan wanted to extend his patronage over some of his near and dear family members, like her beloved sister, after the death of his wife. Convincible, the condition of women in the Harem and the life of common women revolving around the Harem politics, remained as a central theme of the Mughal administrative traits. Women enjoyed a great level of influence in different aspects of Mughal life. Also, women shift the central point of wars and resistance from the Kings and forces abroad. One cannot deny the fact that a great and powerful,

wealthy lady named Nur-Jahan served as an icon of *feminism* in the era of Shah Jahan, while the prominent Mumtaz's difficulties would serve the life of poor ones in the shape of charity and Zakat.

### Competing Interests

The author declared no known competing interests.

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