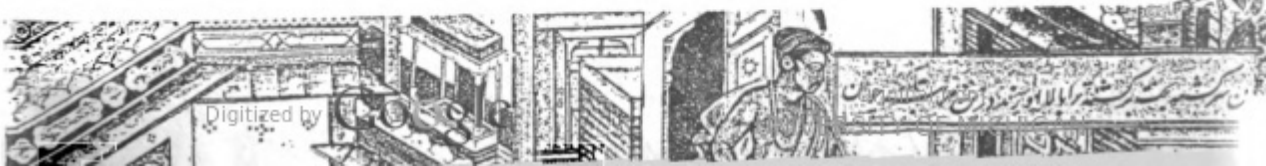


THE MUGHAL HAREM



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The Mughal Harem

K. S. LAL

ADITYA PRAKASHAN
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Preface

In the present work Mughal harem means the harem of the Mughal emperor, the seraglios of royal princes and important nobles, but primarily the harem of the King. By King is meant all the Mughal emperors from Babur to Bahadur Shah Zafar, but in particular Akbar and his three successors—Jahangir, Shahjahan and Aurangzeb. Akbar gave the Mughal harem an elaborate administrative set up, which during the time of his successors developed into an elegant and sophisticated Institution.

The locale of the harem was Agra, Delhi, Fatehpur Sikri and Lahore, where the King and the important nobles lived. It was also Ahmedabad, Burhanpur, Daulatabad, Mandu, and Srinagar in Kashmir as well as in so many other towns, cities, and camps; for the harem had to be wherever the king was. But then it was primarily Agra and Delhi, the two permanent capitals of the Mughals.

The Mughal harem was not a magic arbour full of lovely females. It was a queer establishment wherein mothers and aunts, sisters and cousins, wives and concubines, princesses and minor princes, dancing-girls and maids, besides of course choicest beauties for the master's pleasure all lived under one roof as in a joint family. Each lady had a distinct role to play and each was treated with deference, admiration, adoration and strictness as was her due. At the apex was the queen mother or the mother of the reigning king, followed by the chief wife and secondary wives. It is these wives and concubines—hundreds of them and their entourage of servants, slave-girls and entertainers—that swelled the size of the harem. The Mughal harem was notoriously large.

The present work attempts a study of these women—queens, concubines, princesses, dancing- and slave-girls. Thus in contrast to the history of the Mughal kings and nobles, which has hitherto been the main area of study by scholars of



medieval Indian history, the present work deals with the life of the ladies of Mughal royalty and nobility. In this sense, this is a maiden attempt in a new sphere, a research on the hitherto overlooked area of Mughal social history. But contrary to probable expectation based on the title of the book, it is not a spicy record of sheer hot love. At the same time it is also not a dreary catalogue of ornaments worn by the women from head to foot, or items of their toilet or wardrobe. It also does not repeat what is either already known or is polemical. It does not give details of marriage celebrations in the seraglio, nor the technicalities of the games played or plots of stories read or told. It also does not dilate on the controversies regarding the place of women in Muslim society, or the growth of elaborate *parda* among them. What it attempts is to recapitulate the day-to-day life of the harem dwellers. No attempt has been made to romanticise things, still love affairs and philanderings of the Begums and princesses have been freely narrated. The tastes and temperaments of the ladies of the harem, how they lived and loved, enjoyed and suffered. have been brought into proper perspective. Ladies of the seraglio were not independent personalities. Most of them existed solely for the purpose of giving sexual pleasure to the king or master. Their activities were constantly under watch by matrons, eunuchs and guards. The harem was a living symbol of the abuse of power of arms, wealth and luxury.

The genesis of this monograph may be briefly stated. In the *Journal of Indian History*, Vol. LIII, Part III, December 1975, I published an article under this very title, viz., 'The Mughal Harem'. My esteemed friend Dr. S.P. Gupta suggested that it needed to be developed into a full-fledged research treatise. The suggestion appealed to me and the result is before you. Dr. S.P. Gupta kept up his interest in the work from its inception to completion, even arranging for its publication through the Centre for Research and Training in History, Archaeology and Palaeo-environment. He is, therefore, the first claimant to my gratitude. Many other friends have also lent their co-operation in the preparation of this work. Dr L.P. Sihare, Director of the National Museum, New Delhi was kind enough to permit me to reproduce some Mughal paintings pertaining to the harem and owned by the Museum. Ms Daljeet of the National Museum assisted me in the selection of paintings for the book. There are scores of them out of which only a few could be included in full. Some others have been sketched by Shri Lalit Jain on the borders of the pages of the text. These as well as the line drawings help in completing the story of the Mughal harem as it were. Shri Kushal Pal set the layout of the illustrations in a most splendid way. They are all recepient of my gratitude.

Professor K.A. Nizami showed keen interest in the progress of the work as did Professor Devahuti. Professor Nizami also helped in the translation of some Persian couplets into English. Ms Pushpa Sharma of Kurukshetra brought to my notice some Rajasthani source materials having a bearing on the Mughal harem.



Ms Asha Vohra and Shri K.S. Ramachandran were kind enough to carry out the editing of the manuscript. The latter also saw the volume through the press. I am grateful to all these and many other friends not mentioned here by name. My thanks are also due to the Directors of the Libraries of the Archaeological Survey of India, the National Museum, New Delhi, the University of Delhi and the Centre of Advanced Study in Medieval Indian History, Aligarh Muslim University. It is principally in these libraries that the study was done. Dr A.K. Das, Director, Maharaja Sawai Mansingh Museum, Jaipur, procured the colour transparencies from institutions outside India. Shri O.P. Tandon, Director, Bharat Kala Bhawan, Varanasi provided a few colour slides from his collection. To them also I am indeed thankful.

A trifle liberty has been taken with spellings. At many places the spellings of the old English words of European travellers of the sixteenth-seventeenth century have been changed to modern ones to make their narratives easy to comprehend. Foreign writers give varied spellings for Mughal names. But here spellings of proper names like Jahangir, Aurangzeb, Jahan Ara and Roshan Ara have been given in one uniform fashion, even in the case of quotations from such writers. The word Mahal has been spelt in two ways. When it is used in the sense of seraglio it is spelt with one 'l'. When it forms part of a proper name, as in Nur Mahall and Mumtaz Mahall, it is with two 'ls'. Also, where 'h' in a final position is silent, as in Ferishtah, it has been dropped to help in the correct pronunciation of the word. Thus Ferishtah, *Namah* and *pardah* have been written as Ferishta, *Nama* and *parda*. Another simplification is non-insertion of diacritical marks. The nomenclature of Christian Era as juxtaposed to Hijri Era had been found preferable to Anno Domini and so C.E. is substituted for A.D.

Credit for the extremely attractive get up of the work goes to the publishers M/s Aditya Prakashan, but especially to Dr. S.P. Gupta who guided them at every stage of its production. My son Deepak Lal was good enough to prepare the Index.



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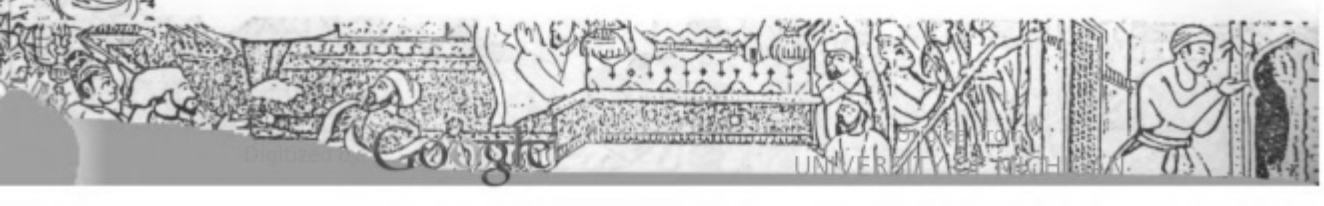


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The author is beholden to the Directors of the National Museum, New Delhi, Maharaja Sawai Man Singh II Museum, Jaipur, The Prince of Wales Museum, Bombay, The Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, The Los Angeles County Museum, Los Angeles and The Chester Beatty Library, Dublin and Bharat Kala Bhawan, Varanasi for granting permission to reproduce illustrations from their collections. Plate 7 has been reproduced with the "gracious permission of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II," United Kingdom.



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(Reproduced from Blochmann's *Ain-i-Akbari*)

Fig. 1. p. 63. The Harem (*Shabistan-i-Iqbal*) in the Imperial Camp

The *Akash Diya* (or the great lamp light) "resembles a lofty mast of a ship, but it is very slender, and takes down in three pieces. It is fixed towards the king's quarters...and during the night a lighted lantern is suspended from the top. This light is very useful, for it may be seen when every object is enveloped in impenetrable darkness. To this spot persons who lose their way resort...." —Bernier

Fig. 2. p. 65. Tents of the Imperial Camp and Harem

On the top is the *Bargah* or tent for Public Audience. The two tents just below the *bargah* were meant for the use of the harem. On the left is the Do-ashiyana Manzil or two-storeyed house. It was called *Shabistan-i-Iqbal* or the Emperor's sleeping apartment. At the window (*jharokha*) of the upper storey the emperor showed himself to the public (*jharokha darshan*).

To the right of *Shabistan-i-Iqbal* is the *Chubin Rawati* (chubin—wooden, Rawati—a square tent). "The king's private tents are surrounded by small *kanats* (*qanats*, standing screens), of the height of a man, some lined with Masulipatam chintz, worked over with flowers of a hundred different kinds, and others with figured satin, decorated with deep silken fringes." —Bernier

Other tents called *Zamindoz, Ajaibi, Mandal, Gulabar,* etc. were all used by the harem for various purposes.

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Fig. 3. p. 127. Boards for *Chaupar* and *Chandal-Mandal* games.

The upper figure shows the board for *Chaupar*, a very popular game with the harem-ladies.

The lower figure is the board for the *Chandal-Mandal* game, which, according to Abul Fazl "was invented by His Majesty (Emperor Akbar)." The players sat on the ground, round the circumference, one player at the end of each of the sixteen radii. The player who was out first was entitled to receive the stipulated amount from other fifteen players. The second that was out, from fourteen players, and so on. "The first player, therefore, wins most, and the last loses most; The other players both lose and win." The game was played in several ways. Abu Fazl gives particulars and directions about some of these. *Ain.*, I, pp. 316-18.

Fig. 4. p. 183. Lighting arrangement in the palace

The single candlestick was known as *yakshakha;* the double candlestick as *dushakha.* There were fancy candlesticks with pigeons, etc. *Akash Diya* was mostly the main Camp Light.

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Abbreviations

(Abbreviations used in references. For complete titles see Bibliography)

Ain.	*Ain-i-Akbari* by Abul Fazl
A.N.	*Akbar Nama* by Abul Fazl
Badaoni	*Muntakhab-ut-Tawarikh* by Abdul Qadir Badaoni
Beni Prasad	*History of Jahangir*
Bernier	*Travels in the Mogul Empire* by Francois Bernier
C.H.I.	*Cambridge History of India*
E and D	*History of India as told by its own Historians* by Elliot and Dowson
Ferishta	*Gulshan-i-Ibrahimi* commonly known as *Tarikh-i-Ferishta* by Muhammad Qasim Hindu Shah Ferishta
Foster	*Early Travels in India* edited by W. Foster
Gulbadan	*Humayun Nama* by Gulbadan Begum
J.A.S.B.	*Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*
J.R.A.S.	*Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*
Jauhar	*Tazkirat-ul-Waqiat* by Jauhar
Khafi Khan	*Muntakhab-ul-Lubab* by Khafi Khan
Lahori	*Padshah Nama* or *Badshah Nama* by Abdul Hamid Lahori
Manucci	*Storia do Mogor* by Niccolao Manucci
Pelsaert	*Jahangir's India* by Francisco Pelsaert
P.I.H.C.	*Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*
Tod	*Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan* by James Tod
Tuzuk	*Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri* by Emperor Nur-ud-din Jahangir



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CHAPTER I

Sources: Indian and European

Persian historians of the Mughal empire have written about the royal harem from a distance. No nobleman, historian or scholar, not even an *Allama* like Abul Fazl, could enter the harem, meet with queens and princesses, discuss their problems and write about them. Most of the Persian chroniclers were official historians; per force the central figure of their narrative was the emperor. The harem was for His Majesty's personal pleasure, and his women remained far too removed from the chroniclers' official notice. Therefore, their references to the seraglio of the royalty and nobility are based on their observations from a distance and not on intimate personal knowledge. They do not throw light on the day-to-day life of its female inmates or about their feelings and sentiments.

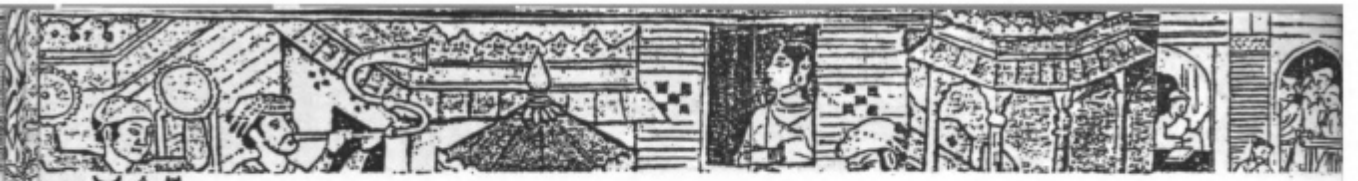
The term harem, originally Arabic, means a sanctuary, but with the passage of time it became synonymous with the female apartments of the elite as also with the inmates lodged therein.[1] It was not customary to write about this 'sanctuary' in official chronicles. In a society where women lived in seclusion, public references to their way of life were as far as possible avoided due both to a discreet sense of expediency and a false sense of decency.

Royal Memoirs

However, this shortcoming, to some extent, is compensated in the autobiographical reminiscences of members of the royal family themselves.

Babur, the first Emperor of the Mughal line (C.E. 1526-30), in his famous memoirs *Babur Nama*, makes emotional, even sentimental, often detailed references to his female relatives—grandmother, mother, sisters and daughters as

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also to his Begums. For Humayun's harem (1530-1556), his sister Gulbadan Begum's *Humayun Nama* is still better. Gulbadan, a princess, herself living in the harem, possessed firsthand knowledge about it. Being a woman, her interests focussed essentially on things feminine and she wrote about the lives of the harem-folk with candour. The *Humayun Nama* is not a voluminous work, but its English translation by A.S. Beveridge,[2] with a scholarly introduction, informative notes and a long Appendix containing biographical notices of prominent ladies, makes the work so complete that it gives all that one would like to know about the harem of the first two Mughal kings—Babur and Humayun.

The most important autobiography in this series is that of Nur-ud-din Jahangir. Unlike the conqueror-emperor Babur, Jahangir was "a true Indian".[3] As master of the harem, his knowledge was intimate and whatever he wrote is not only informative but also authentic. Therefore, from the point of view of our study his memoirs are far more important than any other Mughal monographs or official chronicles. "There is twice as much matter in them as in Babur's Memoirs,"[4] and this matter is supplemented by Motamid Khan and Muhammad Hadi, two Mughal chroniclers. Jahangir ruled for twenty-two years (C.E. 1605-27), but ill-health and sorrow forced him to give up writing his autobiography in the seventeenth year of his reign. He then entrusted the task to Motamid Khan, who continued the memoirs up to the beginning of his nineteenth regnal year. Motamid then discontinued the memoirs in the name of the emperor, but he went ahead with the narrative of the reign till Jahangir's death, in his own work, the *Iqbal Nama-i-Jahangiri*. Muhammad Hadi too continued the memoirs down to Jahangir's death, but he is a late writer;[5] his date being the first quarter of the eighteenth century. Hadi's introduction seems to be almost wholly derived from the *Maasir-i-Jahangiri* of Kamgar Husaini,[6] another work comprising an account of Jahangir's life from his birth to his accession.

There were a number of copies of Jahangir's Memoirs in his own life time. The *Dawazda sala-i-Jahangiri*, is an account of twelve years of the emperor's reign. The *Iqbal Nama* of Motamid Khan, and the *Tatimma-i-Waqiat-i-Jahangiri* by Muhammad Hadi are a continuation, completion and conclusion of the memoirs. The *Tarikh-i-Salim Shahi* is another version of the memoirs.[7] "There is much that no doubt correctly represents the sentiments of Jahangir", but some parts of the *Salim Shahi* must be ranked in the class of fiction.[8] It contains an account of fifteen years of Jahangir's reign. A short work entitled *Intikhab-i-Jahangir-Shahi*[9] is by a "contemporary and companion of Jahangir". All these are critically noticed in Elliot and Dowson's work with translated extracts. But among these the most important and authentic work is the *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*, or the Memoirs of Jahangir up to the beginning of the seventeenth year of his reign, written by the emperor himself. It is this work, which was later translated by





Alexander Rogers and Henry Beveridge.

Because of ill health and excessive drinking Jahangir passed a lot of time in the harem. This circumstance helped him to write extensively on it. His references to his harem are many and varied. He writes about his sisters and other relatives with feeling. He bitterly weeps over the death of Shah Begum, his 'first bride', and for days together refuses to be consoled. He writes about his beloved wife Nur Jahan with emotion; she had won his heart with her devotion. He frankly writes about his drinking bouts, dinner parties and festivities in the company of women. He describes Nauroz festival, weighing ceremonies, outings on *shikar* with the ladies. He recounts the magnificent presents of cloth and gold and jewels exchanged with queens and princesses and the liberal allowances made to them. No other writer residing in the harem, narrates such copious information about the Mughal seraglio as Jahangir.

Historians of Akbar's reign

Historians of the Mughal empire too wrote about the royal harem. But there is a difference of approach to the theme between the historians of Akbar and those of the later times. Abul Fazl's *Ain-i-Akbari* and *Akbar Nama* and Nizam-ud-din Ahmad's *Tabqat-i-Akbari* give sober and succint account of Akbar's harem, but mainly about its administration, both in the palace and the camp. Abul Fazl also describes events like Akbar's marriages with Indian princesses, some senior ladies going on pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina or the king's mother being respectfully treated by the king. Abdul Qadir Badaoni, in his *Muntakhab-ut-Tawarikh* is often critical of Akbar and writes about the latter's amorous inclinations and adventures with a streak of satire. But his book was kept secret during Akbar's time; it was made public only in the reign of Jahangir[10], for Akbar was a monarch both respected and feared. During the reign of Akbar utmost caution was observed not to write anything about the inmates of the harem which could be disapproved by royal dispostion. Consequently, Akbar's chroniclers rarely mention anything about ladies in the harem unless they were senior in age and played some important role in religion or politics.

Jahangir to Aurangzeb

Within a few years of Akbar's death, Indian historiography pertaining to Mughal harem turned a new leaf. Emperor Jahangir married Nur Jahan in C.E. 1611. She was not only his partner in life but also in government. Her functioning



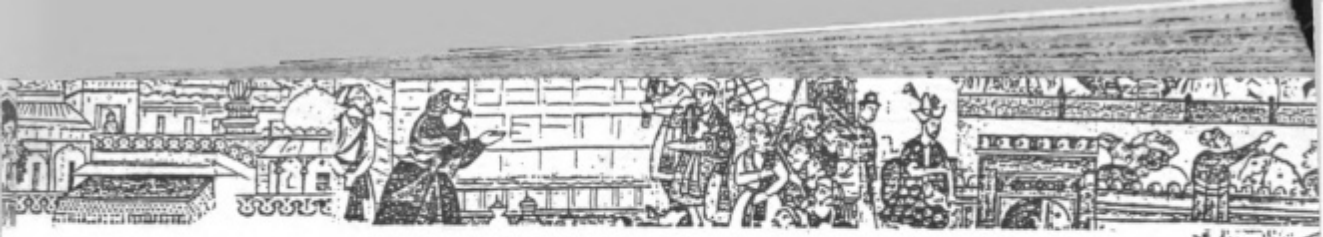


as queen, not merely as a royal consort but as a *de facto* queen, exposed the Royal harem to the scrutiny of the Persian chroniclers. Nur Jahan took active part in politics. She had her friends and foes at the Court, in the harem and even among the chroniclers; some were favourable to her, some others hostile. On the other hand in Jahangir's own memoirs wherever she is mentioned she is depicted as a paragon of virtue. Whatever her merits and faults be, she is not forgotten for many generations to come, and even Khafi Khan writes a whole chapter on her almost a century after her death. By the time of Shahjahan (1627-58) the whole atmosphere of the harem changes. It becomes a very bright and brilliant place and its charm is brought into focus by Persian chroniclers like Qazwini and Abdul Hamid Lahori. During the reign of Aurangzeb certain restrictions were imposed on the activities of harem inmates, but writings about them remained free as is clear from the detailed and saucy narrative of Aurangzeb's infatuation for Zainabadi in Hamid-ud-din Khan's *Ahkam-i-Alamgiri* or Khafi Khan's description of Jahandar Shah's passion for Lal Kunwar. In short, after Akbar's times, Persian historians began to write at some length about the activities of queens and princesses, their role in politics, their interests and hobbies and other affairs. This was but natural since great ladies like Nur Jahan, Mumtaz Mahall, Jahan Ara and Roshan Ara and a host of others dominated not only the Mughal harem but also the Mughal Court for almost a century. Their personalities were impressive and their life-stories exciting. Indian chroniclers wrote about them in the Persian language, a language best suited for narration of beauty and blandishment, gaiety and joy, love and romance. The activities of the harem-inmates, their wealth, their *jagirs,* their buildings, their gardens, their *jashns,* even their romances, all became exceedingly absorbing and met with excellent treatment at the hands of Persian chroniclers.

Later Chroniclers

When the Mughal Empire declined and the harem fell on bad days, its inmates, hungry and destitute, gave up *parda* at times, while some quit the palace. Their plight evoked pity in Persian chroniclers and they wrote about the decline of the Mughal harem in as impressive details as they had written about its glory. They also freely wrote about the degradation of the harem-life at the hands of concubines like Lal Kunwar and eunuchs like Jawed Khan. But by and large the Persian historians wrote only about the important ladies. They had to confine themselves to certain topics and ignore others, as they were to observe the traditional way of thinking and writing. Since it was conventional they praised every king. They praised Shahjahan, condoned his weakness for sex and had to "justify

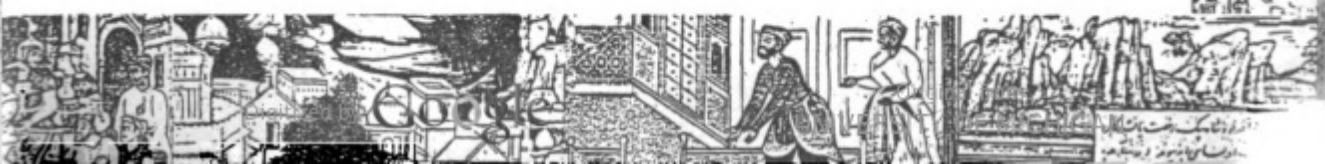




some of his darkest deeds on the grounds of public and political morality of the time."[11] Similarly, because it was not traditional, they do not refer to the commercial activities and financial interests of harem-ladies. What was traditional was often nothing more than meaningless exaggeration, yet in this, they freely indulged. For instance the delicacy of the buildings in the Delhi fort, in the words of the court historian surpassed "in excellence and glory the eight-sided heaven", and in lustre and colour these were "far superior to the palaces in the promised paradise". And decoration on the walls of the *Hammam* in the palace at Shahjahanabad "had achieved such perfection that if Bihzad of Iran would have seen it, he surely would have become disciple of the architects and craftsmen of Hindustan."[12] Another fault was that Persian writers did not exchange notes with any European visitors to the country, who were independently collecting information and writing about the Mughal harem on their own. Their self-imposed censorship about harem affairs, especially affairs of romance as well as their lack of communication with European travellers, precluded them from either corroborating or contradicting the stories of the Europeans about scandals in the harem, with the result that the place of correct information was often appropriated by bazaar gossip.

Accounts of Foreign Travellers

On the other hand, European travellers in the Mughal Empire freely wrote about the life in the harem. Their sources of information were limited and therefore they collected all that they could whether in the form of detailed information or little anecdotes. None of their accounts was designedly written for publication. This fact accounts for an occasional want of proportion, minor matters being described at length, while others were glossed over or omitted.[13] It is exactly here that their importance lies. While Persian chroniclers wrote in flambuoyant language from a high pedestal ignoring "minor matters," European accounts abound in trivial details. Francois Bernier understood the importance of this when he said that, "I agree with Plutarch, that trifling incidents ought not to be concealed, and that they often enable us to form more accurate opinions of the manners and genius of a people than events of great importance."[14] In fact the greatest contribution of European writers is to supplement the information of the Persian chroniclers and thereby complete the picture of the Mughal harem, which without their references to minute details, would have remained perfunctory and lifeless. These foreign travellers have written almost on all aspects of the Mughal Empire—the Court, the nobles, the army, the civil administration, the privileged classes as well as the masses and their poverty. Their writings inform us about the market prices of



commodities, the position of manufacture, trade routes and commerce, land and land use, taxation, etc. Similarly they also write about the life in the harems of royalty and nobility. But, while accepting as true their notices on many other matters, there is a tendency to reject their observations on the harem on the plea that they revelled in spreading scandals. The desire to peep into the sex-life of others is ingrained in human nature. Neither Indians nor Europeans could rise above this temptation. But just because of this they need not be suspected of inventing stories and accused of distorting 'the fair image' of royalty and nobility. It may be remembered that no court historian could dare write anything dishonourable to the Mughal House. But people did talk about such things. The Indians—men and women, nobles and commoners—all talked or whispered about occurrences inside the harem but about which the chroniclers dared not to write, while the Europeans freely could. European travellers did not 'invent' scandals; they wrote only what they heard or what they saw.

Another accusation against the European writers is that they suffered from a superiority complex and denigrated Mughal social life. This allegation too does not stand the test of scrutiny. It is true that both Bernier and Manucci sometimes betray a dislike of Indian character, but they rightly noticed a tinge of flattery, exaggeration and hypocricy in the behaviour and protestations of the servants of the Court.[15] Still at this stage the Europeans who came to India were suppliants of the Indian rulers. Many of them were keen on getting some job or obtain some favour. Some obtained service in the Mughal empire after great effort and that too on a small salary.[16] At this point of time the Portuguese, the Dutch and the English were regarded as petty traders, inasmuch as the Persian chroniclers do not even take notice of them. This may be due as much to the myopic attitude of the Mughal historians as to the insignificant status of the foreigners.

This is one side of the medal. The other is that the coming of these exotic people created a lot of curiosity and interest among the Indians. William Hawkins narrates his experience on the Gujarat coast. "At my coming on shore...," writes he, "I was kindly received, and multitudes of people following me, all desirous to see a new people come."[17] With their professional skill in artillery and medicine, they soon carved for themselves a position of favour with the Mughal royalty and nobility.[18] Akbar liked them so much that when once Father Monserrate, because of his indiscretion, had made himself obnoxious to Muslim courtiers, the Emperor went to the extent of providing him special protection in the palace itself. Jahangir was very partial to Europeans. He insisted on William Hawkins (1608-13) to remain at his court as Resident Ambassador. He was made a captain of 400 horse and given the title of Inglish Khan. He married an Armenian Christian and lived in the typical Mughal style. He enjoyed the privilege of being present at the Emperor's drinking parties. The French physician Bernard too "enjoyed the favour of the



Mughal, and became his companion at table, where they drank together to excess".[19] Catrou goes on to say that, "all Europeans of whatsoever nation, were allowed free access to his (Jahangir's) drinking parties".[20] According to Sir Thomas Roe, Jahangir had many English servants in his retinue.[21] Manucci and Bernier were in the service of Dara, "who was very fond of Europeans...and European missionaries." Manucci later on joined the service of Prince Shah Alam or Muazzam, the son of Aurangzeb. Aurangzeb himself had regard for the Hollanders, and he received Dutch emissaries with deference.[22] Tavernier was almost the official "jeweller" of the Empire. In short, Europeans enjoyed a position of favour and privilege at the Mughal Court. This does not mean that favours were indiscriminately bestowed. If found guilty of misconduct, they were also sometimes disgraced and punished.[23] Still there is no denying the fact that Europeans enjoyed a privileged position at the court. They were keen observers, collected lot of information about the country, the court and the palace. Their knowledge of the life in the harem too was not superficial.

Of the European travellers, traders and missionaries who came to India during the reign of Akbar and who have written on the Mughal harem, the name of Father Anthony Monserrate is very important. Monserrate was a Portuguese and member of the first Jesuit Mission from Goa to the Mughal Court from 1580 to 1582. He worked at his book *Commentarius*[24] for eight years and finished it in 1591. He died in India in C.E. 1600.[25] Monserrate writes about the state of education of Mughal princes and princesses. He saw the ladies going on long journeys and writes about them while on their move and in camp. The way of life of harem ladies in camp is also dealt with by Edward Terry, an Englishman who was in Hindustan in Jahangir's time (1616-19). William Hawkins (1608-1613) gives an idea of the expenses on the Royal harem and the Nauroz celebrations, while William Finch (1608-1611) gives some interesting details about the commercial activities of queens and princesses. He describes the Fort at Lahore and the *Mahals* of the ladies therein; he writes in detail about the Fort at Agra and the *Kanchanis* or dancing girls living therein. Sir Thomas Roe (1612-1616) indeed had a fleeting glimpse of the royal ladies who were behind the curtain, and attempts a description of their beauty. He gives a picture of how Nur Mahall used to go out in a coach covered with gold cloth. Sebastian Manrique (1628-43) and Monsieur de Thevenot (1667) too write about the harem. All these need not be trusted *in toto*. However, all these and many others provide a fund of information on the Mughal harem.

Pelsaert, Manucci and Bernier

Among the Europeans who have dealt with life in harems of royalty and



nobility in some detail, three need special mention—Francisco Pelsaert, Niccolao Manucci and Francois Bernier. Their writings cover a period of a century (*sic.* C.E. 1620-1720). Pelsaert was Dutch, Manucci Italian and Bernier French, but the knowledge of these three about the harem was excellent.

Francisco Pelsaert was an official of the Dutch East India Company. He was sent to India in 1620 where he remained until the end of 1627, rising to the position of Senior Factor. He stayed most of the time at Agra, for no European merchant in India could afford to neglect the indigo trade, and the best indigo was grown in the vicinity of Agra. Besides Agra was Emperor Jahangir's capital. Pelsaert's *Remonstrantie* or *Report* "sums up Pelsaert's seven years' experience in Agra."[26] It is primarily a commercial document "but, fortunately for posterity, Pelsaert included in it a detailed account of the social and administrative environment in which commerce had to be conducted."[27] His trade interests and official position kept him in constant touch with the court and the nobility. He had personal knowledge of the King's habits, of Nur Jahan's political ascendancy and her trade interests.[28] Pelsaert was on friendly terms with many nobles, who invited him and he visited their mansions often.[29] His description of the houses of the nobles and the life inside their harems is vivid with a fair amount of truthfulness.

Niccolao Manucci writes the most detailed account of the Mughal harem and therefore, his career needs to be recounted at some length. He left Venice in November, 1653 at the age of fourteen and landed in India in January, 1656. The same year in June, he enlisted himself as an artilleryman in the service of Prince Dara Shukoh, the eldest son of the emperor Shahjahan. He was with Dara at the battle of Samugarh. Fleeing with the prince, he marched to Multan and Bhakkar. But after the capture of Dara, Manucci returned to Delhi. He refused further service, "as he disliked Aurangzeb."[30] He travelled to Patna, Rajmahal and Dhaka returning to Agra by way of Qasimbazar. At Agra and Delhi he gradually adopted medicine as profession. Meanwhile he took service under Raja Jai Singh of Amber as master of artillery and marched with him to the Deccan. "He saw Shivaji in the Raja's camp in June or July, 1665. In Jai Singh's further move southwards against Bijapur Manucci also took part."[31] Apparently tired of his position, Manucci resigned. He went to Goa in 1667, but returned to Agra and Delhi in 1668. He practised medicine at Lahore for six or seven years, and having acquired some competence, decided on moving into the territory governed by Europeans. This found him in Daman in 1676; he later made his home at Bandra, north of Bombay fort. But only two years later "Manucci was obliged to try his fortunes once more at the Mogul court. He returned to Delhi, where he was called in to attend on one of Shah Alam's wives, and having cured her of a gathering in the ear, the lady interested herself in his affairs and procured his appointment by that prince as one of his physicians. This must have been subsequent to January 30, 1678, the date

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on which Shah Alam was made governor of the Dakhin, and Manucci went there in his train."[32] But finding his position irksome he fled to the European settlements to Narsapur and Masulipatam. Later on he took refuge on the English settlement of Madras at Fort St. George. He married in 1686 and resumed his practice as a physician. In 1706 his wife died and, sometime before 1712, he moved his home to Pondicherry. "In the latter year he proposed to make a journey to the Mogul court on the request of Shah Alam, who had become emperor five years before. The Madras Council also wished to make use of his mediation (because of his knowledge of the Persian language) to clear up certain long-pending difficulties with the Mogul, but the death of Shah Alam, put an end to Manucci's plans"[33] to visit Delhi. "It is said that Manucci died in India in 1717 as an octogenarian."[34]

These details of Manucci's career have been given only to show how a very much-travelled man he was. He had traversed the whole of India and some places and regions many times over. He had served princes Dara and Shah Alam, Raja Jai Singh and his son Kirat Singh. He had worked with and for European compatriots. He had negotiated with Shivaji and Sambhaji. He had participated in wars as an artillery officer and, of course, he had worked as a successful physician with the Mughal royalty, nobility and commonality for a long number of years. To top it all, he wrote an account of Mughal India entitled *Storia do Mogor* (1653-1708) in four hefty volumes. And large portions of these contain an account of the Mughal harem.

Manucci was the most qualified to write about the harem-life. He had left his native land at the age of fourteen, and although he wrote the *Storia* in Portuguese, he had adopted India as his home and spent most of his time in residing at the Mughal court. He mastered the Persian language and tried to live his life in the eastern way. His patron Prince Shah Alam even wanted him to marry a Muslim girl and adopt Mughal way of life, but Manucci refused to succumb to such allurements.[35] Even so, he came in contact with a very large number of people, and he acquired rich information about Mughal politics and society.

Manucci had free access to the harem of Shah Alam, the *Mahal* of Jahan Ara Begum and houses of many nobles. In his early days of service he was conducted into the harem by eunuchs with his eyes covered.[36] But later on when he showed resentment at this, Manucci was allowed by Shah Alam to come into the *Mahal* without being blindfolded.[37] At what point of time this permission was granted is not known, but it should have been when Manucci had become advanced in age and had become popular with harem ladies because of his success as a physician.[38] Before this he used to be "admitted in a familiar way" into Jahan Ara's house, "and was deep in confidence of the principal ladies and eunuchs in her service."[39] This would have been probably immediately after his arrival in India when he joined the service of Dara as a young man of sixteen or seventeen, and the Princess

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who was now more than forty, almost managed the affairs of the Empire. That is how he knew the names of matrons, courtesans and dancing girls in the palace. His narrative shows that he knew many of them personally. He was jovial and a good mixer. He cut jokes with little girls and paid compliments to the beauty of young maidens.[40] Indeed he was very helpful in solving the love-problems of many inmates of the harem.[41]

Manucci thus had firsthand knowledge of the affairs of the Mughal harem and did not depend upon hearsay. "I must add", writes he, "that I have not relied on the knowledge of others; and I have spoken nothing which I have not seen or undergone during the space of forty-eight years that I have dwelt in Hindustan. Nor have I remained in one place, but have been always travelling...which has given me the means of acquiring a more exact knowledge of everything occurring in this vast empire."[42] This he observes, particularly before writing on the "Customs of the Royal Household, and the way of dealing with the people living in the Palace, commonly called the Mahal, or Seraglio."[43] As a historian, Manucci cannot be trusted for the period prior to his arrival in India, but for the later years of Shahjahan's reign and for the fifty years of Aurangzeb, Manucci is one writer whose statements cannot be ignored. "He wrote in the decline of life, thirty to forty years after many of the events had happened...(but) with rare exceptions, Manucci's statements, where they can be verified, are historically accurate, and a fair inference is that, where there is no such corroboration, he may equally be accepted as trustworthy."[44] He has a knack for giving appropriate and convincing details, sticking to the exactness of place and date.

Francois Bernier arrived in India in 1658, two years after Manucci. He was a trained physician and a man of superior education.[45] He too had travelled widely. Landing in Surat he joined Dara's camp in 1659, and accompanied him as a physician. As per the Mughal custom, Bernier used to be covered from head to waist "with a shawl" by the eunuchs before he was taken inside the harem for consultation and treatment of ladies.[46] But he possessed great powers of acute observation.[47] Besides Agra and Delhi Bernier went upto Kashmir in the north and Bengal in the east. He died in Paris in 1688. His is "one of the most readable travellers' accounts ever written."[48] His notices of Mughal harem-life are penetrating because his sources of information were many and varied and his stay in the Mughal capital was for long years.[49]

Their Sources of Information

Wherefrom did these foreigners get the information about the Mughal harem? The main source of information for Europeans in general, and Manucci and

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Bernier in particular, was the inmates of the harem themselves. Matrons and eunuchs of the *Mahal* were the most communicative and loquacious; nor did the maidservants lag behind in this respect. There were European ladies too in the Mughal Seraglio and in the harems of the nobles. In particular, after Shahjahan's attack on the Portuguese colony in Hugli in 1632, when 400 Christian prisoners were taken to Agra, their presence became prominent. The handsome women became inmates of the royal Seraglio; those of a more advanced age or of inferior beauty were distributed among the Umara.[50] When Manucci and Bernier arrived, at the close of sixteen-fifties, women captured young in 1632 would have grown old after a lapse of 26-27 years, and their movements would not have remained too much restricted. Even otherwise the European ladies may not have conformed to the elaborate *parda* observed by Muslims. The small European society of the capital was coalesced, and its members kept contact with one another.[51] No wonder Bernier learnt about palace affairs from an old Portuguese woman, a slave for many years who was privileged in "going in and out (of the *Mahal*) at pleasure."[52] Manucci too learnt many things from the Portuguese women in the palace. One of his informants was Maria de Taides, "one of the sisters living in the palace of King Shahjahan, who had been brought prisoner from Bengal."[53] Maria de Taides was later married to Ali Mardan Khan,[54] while another Portuguese lady was given in marriage to Saadat Khan.[55] One Thomazia Martins too had been taken captive during the fall of Hugli. She had charge of the royal table, "and was much liked by Roshan Ara Begum". She was allowed once a month to stay seven days in her husband's house. "At those times...she informed me of what passed inside the palace."[56]

It is a well-known fact that the Mughal Princedom was ever divided into camps. If one European was a favourite of one prince or nobleman, another was cultivated by the other. In the contest for the Mughal throne, Manucci and Bernier were on opposite sides. Manucci sympathsied with Dara; Bernier was on the side of Aurangzeb, and stories and canards about the 'foes' and their families were volunteered, even when not sought for, by eunuchs and matrons of the respective camps; for they were the best tale-carriers and Europeans the best collectors of tales. Manucci and Bernier were both physicians. Their patients belonged to all classes of people, from queens and princesses to maids and servants. It is a habit of patients to gossip openly with physicians in particular, and they talk to their doctors about matters personal or otherwise, trifling or important, thereby relieving the tension in their minds. Therefore, Manucci and Bernier were in an advantageous position to learn about whatever happened in the harem or the city, about the rumours afloat, about facts and fiction. For example, there was in the palace a female servant called Dil-jo who served as a maid to Shah Alam. She fell ill, suffered from insomnia, halucinations and hysteria. After some remedies had been

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tried, Manucci was asked to treat her. She was young and Manucci, after a few days' treatment, recommended that she should be married by means of which, he hoped, she would regain her health. The girl was married to a slave of the prince's household. Two months after it she began to enjoy 'perfect health'. Other women servants too wished to be treated in a similar way, and Manucci readily helped them to the best of his power, and thus several were married according to their wish.[57] They felt so grateful that they told him all that happened in the *Mahal*.

Appraisal of their Accounts

As such the sources of information of European writers were 'reliable'. It is possible that on some aspects or incidents they were not correctly informed. It is also true that some travellers' stay was short and during their sojourn they could not understand the country and generalized what they learnt about one Begum or one matron as true of the whole harem. They might be guilty of hasty generalizations, but not of wilful scandal mongering. The essentials in the picture of Mughal harem-life, as presented by them collectively, are interesting, informative, and by and large true. These are important too, especially since this aspect of society's life is deliberately ignored by Muslim chroniclers. Their motives too need not be questioned. The Europeans were foreigners in Hindustan. To them Indian way of life was exotic. Every custom here appeared new and evoked great interest in them; and they naturally sought origins, relationships and comparisons of the Indian social scene with those in their own lands. Pelsaert describes the love-lorn life of the wives of Mughal nobility living in strict *parda* and says, "the ladies of our country should be able to realise from this description the good fortune of their birth, and the extent of their freedom when compared with the position of ladies like them in other lands."[58] Similar is the comment of Bernier. Writing about one or two of Jahan Ara's amorous affairs, Bernier observes: "(I write because) Love adventures are not attended with the same danger in Europe as in Asia. In France they excite only merriment; they create a laugh, and are forgotten; but in this part of the world, few are the instances in which they are not followed by some dreadful and tragical catastrophe."[59] There were other comparisons and formulations which impelled European travellers to write about the Mughal life. They were highly impressed with its magnificence and wonderstruck at its grandeur. Manucci writes, "I assert that in the Mughal Kingdom, the nobles and above all the King, live with such ostentation that the most sumptuous of European Courts cannot compare in richness and magnificence with the lustre beheld in the Indian Court."[60] Similar was the impression made on Pelsaert's mind.[61]

Many Europeans were thus intimately acquainted with the Mughal Court and





harem. They wrote about them freely. There was also a sort of competitive spirit prevailing among them. They wrote independently of one another and knew they would be exposed by their compatriots if they wrote anything doubtful or untrue. Therefore, in place of broadcasting scandals they tried to be objective and factual. For example, when Manucci found Bernier ill-informed, he challenged him. "I am very surprised", wrote he, "at what Monsieur Bernier has written namely, that the nazir, or chief eunuch, of the princess (Jahan Ara) would not allow any desired person to enter the palace of the princess, and for this reason she caused the nazir to be put to death by poison. On the contrary, the man obeyed her, and sought every mode of gratifying her, seeing the great interest he had not to work against her."[62] He continues his criticism of Bernier in still stronger words when the latter alleges incestuous relation between Shahjahan and Jahan Ara.[63]

In short, European travellers in the Mughal empire have left a factual picture of the life in the Mughal harem. Their accounts are indeed very valuable in so far as they are not deliberate history. They do not try to make their records spectacular by meaningless rhetoric. They are often more sober in their narratives of love episodes of the elite when compared with the Persian chroniclers.[64] These Europeans did not write to please or pamper the vanity of any sovereign, nor were they afraid of any ruler or Mansabdar. Hence, they wrote freely and fearlessly. Indeed, but for them, this study of the Mughal harem would have remained jejune and lifeless.

An appraisal of the source materials does not obviously mention all the works consulted during the preparation of this treatise. These have been cited in reference at appropriate places. Among the contemporary writers, three in particular have proved to be of immense value for the study of the Mughal harem. They are the erudite Abul Fazl, the Emperor Jahangir and the foreign visitor Manucci. Abul Fazl's mastery of details concerning the reign of Akbar, makes his books—*Ain-i-Akbari* and *Akbar Nama*—indispensable for the present study. Emperor Jahangir, because of his health and habits, spent lot of his time in the harem, and has written about it with freshness and candour in his memoirs. Niccolao Manucci, though a European, was a regular visitor to the Mughal harem for years and decades and knew about it more than any other foreign traveller. These writers also provide three different shades of ideas, inhibitions and opinions. Abul Fazl was a professional historian, an accomplished scholar, and a high officer of the state. Jahangir was a lover of art and Nature. He feared none because he had to please none. Manucci was as much an Indian as a foreigner. Naturally these three writers taken together give almost a complete picture of the Mughal seraglio. No wonder, therefore, that these three have been repeatedly and extensively quoted in the body of this book.





Mughal Paintings

In addition to the writings of Persian chroniclers and accounts of foreign travellers, Mughal paintings form a very important source for the study of the Mughal harem. Mughal miniature paintings as they are called, are available in abundance. They spread over the long centuries of Mughal rule and portray all aspects of Mughal life. Most of these comprise portraits of kings and nobles. Many others depict court scenes, scenes of battles, ***shikar***, animal fights, construction of forts, etc. Besides, a large number of them also illustrate harem scenario. As is the case with Mughal chroniclers, Mughal painters also work without restraint as it were, after the reign of Akbar. From the time of Jahangir onwards, they begin to depict harem scenes with untrammelled freedom. These paintings indeed help in recapitulating the harem atmosphere. Delicate, almond-eyed beauties are depicted bathing, adorning themselves, stretching up to gather flowers from the trees, playing the *Vina* or *Sitar*, or languishing by the lakesides or dressed in their finery awaiting their lovers. Their surroundings are idyllic—flowering landscapes with clinging creepers and chirping birds, and their lady companions talking of the joy of love and the loneliness of separation.

In this regard one point needs to be clarified at the outset. It is said that the paintings describing harem-scenes are only conjectural and imaginary, for the court painters were debarred from the seraglio and had no opportunity to acquire any actual visual experience of such scenes.[65] It is true that queens, concubines and princesses in particular, and other ladies in general, observed *parda* from outsiders. But inside the harem, they moved about freely and came in daily contact with hundreds of persons who could convey to the people outside all that went on in the harem. The lady officials of the harem like the *Anagas* or foster-mothers, the *Daroghas* or matrons, the *Urdu Begis* or armed women guards, the *Mahaldars* or superintendents, were all married ladies. They served as officers in the harem but outside hours of duty they lived in their own homes. Naturally, they would have told their family people all they saw in the harem. The harem was also open, in varied degrees of accessibility, to ladies of nobles, dancing girls and physicians. The eunuchs in particular kept a constant liaison between the inner world of the harem and outside. Outside the harem clothes, garments, ornaments, shoes and a hundred other items of requirements of the inmates of the harem, with specifications of size and shape, were manufactured in the royal *karkhanas*, and the workers knew what was being prepared and also perhaps for whom. The harem was thus not a closed book, and the artists painted harem-subjects in detail on the basis of information made available to them.

The king and nobles were no doubt interested in the illustration of harem-scenes. Else, so many paintings of harem could just not have been available.



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Paintings of official festivities generally depict birth or marriage of princes. Those depicting birth scenes are multi-compartmental and illustrate so many incidents, including even the confinement room, in one picture.[66] Many artists of Akbar's period like Bundi, Lal and Mukund painted portraits of European and Indian ladies, groups of female musicians and scenes of a music party in the garden.[67] Paintings recapitulating the harem exclusively, depict scenes of ladies playing chess and *chaupar,* colouring their feet, enjoying a dance performance or the Holi festival.[68] There are paintings of women dancing individually or in groups,[69] besides depicting princesses riding horses or playing polo.[70] There are paintings of love-lorn ladies being comforted by matrons (*c.* 1610);[71] princesses in diaphaneous garments holding a hawk in one hand and wearing aigrette on their heads,[72] a princess presenting garland of flower to a prince (*c.* 1650-75),[73] or a prince receiving his beloved.[74]

Pl. 1

Now all these paintings could not have been just the result of artists' imagination. An in-depth study of some of these paintings would show that the idea that the ladies did not pose for the painter or no painter was allowed inside the harem may even be fallacious. Maham Begum, wife of Babur used to sit by the side of her husband on the throne.[75] A large painting in the *Akbar Nama* with Maham Anaga as its central figure brings out clearly her robust face, stocky mien, impressive white-and-yellow robes and her authoritarian demeanour,[76] which would certainly indicate that it is her real portrait by one who had seen her closely. As a queen, Nur Jahan did not observe *parda.* She often appeared in the *jharokha.* Her protraits too are probably after her own model. On many occasions Rajput queens did not observe *parda* even in the Mughal harem.[77] It is well-known that Mughal queens and princesses played polo, enjoyed horse riding and shooting animals and birds; these acts would not have been possible with their faces covered. There are many Mughal miniatures delineating such scenes. It is quite probable that some paintings of ladies of the harem who observed strict *parda* might have been executed by female painters. There is also a Mughal miniature showing a lady painting her own portrait while her attendant sits facing her holding the mirror.[78] Abul Fazl, while giving a list of a hundred painters of Akbar's time, does not make mention of a single female painter; but that does not mean that there were no female artists. In his list of poets of his times, he does not give the names of women poetesses, although it is well known that there were many poetesses in the harem, including queens and princesses. Similarly there is evidence to show that there were female painters in the Mughal harem.[79] According to Rai Krishna Das, a portrait of a woman artist named Shafiqa Banu has come to light.[80] Of course, the number of women painters was small, and the involvement of men artist was always imperative, more so because at the royal atelier the preparation of a Mughal miniature was a combined effort of many artists.[81]



There is one more problem about Mughal paintings, harem-paintings in particular. Sometimes, it is difficult to fix the precise date of a Mughal miniature. Some paintings depicting scenes of harem are also not 'purely' Mughal and belong to Rajasthan or Hyderabad or Avadh. But the difficulty is more apparent than real. A date with difference of say fifty years either side would hardly matter as they did not affect the theme or sometimes styles even. Rajasthani and Mughal artists influenced each other throughout the Mughal period, and the harem-paintings of both the schools employ similar motifs. Furthermore, on the decline of the Mughal empire many artists migrated to Rajasthan, Hyderabad and other States. Though their painings could be classified under the above schools, yet in actual fact they are works of Mughal artists or bear an unmistakable impress of the Mughal style.

Be that as it may, harem-paintings truly reflect its life. If the artists could not always see the faces of the ladies whom they had to paint, it was never a problem or handicap for them, for painting of ladies of the harem enjoying Holi[82] or princesses playing Polo[83] did not necessarily involve true to life portraiture of specific feminine personalities.

The number of Hindu painters was large. Their artistic skill made Abul Fazl exclaim that "their pictures surpass our conception of things."[84] Among the Hindus there was no *parda*, and the artists who saw Hindu beauties freely, did not find it difficult to transfer or transplant such faces to the ladies of the Mughal harem. All beautiful faces were alike to the artist painter. This is particularly so in pictures where ladies are found in groups. In these there is an ideal type of face for all. However, but for the actual contours of the face, the painter had a very clear idea of his model—her clothes, coiffures and jewellery; her interests, hobbies and pastimes; her moments of joy or occasions of pain. And these he has faithfully portrayed. Mughal miniature painings are the most realistic in content and form a very important source for the study of the Mughal Harem.

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8. E and D, VI, p. 257.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 446-47.
10. *Ibid.*, V, p. 479.
11. Saksena, B.P., *History of Shahjahan*, p. 336.
12. Saleh, *Amal-i-Saleh*, III, pp. 34-35; Waris, *Badshah Nama*, pp. 48-49.
13. Foster, William, *Early Travels in India*, Preface, p. x.
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15. Manucci, Niccolao, *Storia do Mogor*, II, p. 324; III, p. 303; Bernier, p. 264.
16. Manucci was first employed by Prince Dara on rupees eighty per month. Later on he got service under Kirat Singh, son of Raja Jai Singh, on rupees ten per day as captain of artillery. Manucci, Introduction, p. lviii. Similarly, the salary of a European physician, a blood-letter, appointed by Prince Shah Alam, was two rupees a day which was later raised to seven rupees. Manucci, IV, p. 218.
17. Hawkins in Foster's *Early Travels*, p. 71.
18. Manucci, I, p. 95.
19. Bernier, p. 274.
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21. *The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe*, Hakluyt Society (London, 1899), pp. 321-24.
22. Manucci, I, p. 223; Bernier, pp. 127-28.
23. *Ibid.*, I, p. 90. Jahangir once punished Hawkins as the latter had come to the court drunk against the king's order.
24. Translated from Latin by J.S. Hoyland and annotated by S.N. Banerjee under the title of the *Commentary of Father Monserrate*, p. 72.
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27. *Ibid.*, Preface, p. v.
28. Pelsaert, pp. 4, 51-53.
29. *Ibid.*, pp. 3-5.
30. Manucci, Introduction by William Irvine, I, p. lviii.
31. *Loc. cit.*
32. Manucci, Irvin's Introduction, p. lix.
33. *Ibid.*, Introduction, p. lxiv.
34. *Ibid.*, p. lxvii.
35. *Ibid.*, II, p. 403.
36. *Ibid.*, pp. 356-57.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 400.
38. *Ibid.*, Introduction, I, p. lxi.
39. *Ibid.*, I, p. 220.
40. *Ibid.*, II, p. 341.
41. *Ibid.*, pp. 397-98.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 329.
43. *Ibid.*, 330.
44. *Ibid.*, Irvine's Introduction, pp. lxxi-lxxii.
45. Irvine in Manucci, Introduction, I, p. lxxiii.
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48. Beni Prasad, *History of Jahangir*, p. 406.

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58. Pelsaert, p. 66.
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CHAPTER II

Inmates of the Harem

The term Mughal Harem conjures up a vision of a sequestered place ensconcing beautiful female forms in mysterious magnificence. It was indeed made so by the great Mughal emperor Akbar during his long reign of half a century (C.E. 1556-1605). He brought in a large number of inmates to adorn it. He provided them all kinds of luxuries and made elaborate arrangements for their seclusion and security. During the times of his successors—Jahangir (1606-1627), Shahjahan (1628-1658) and Aurangzeb (1658-1707)—the Mughal harem attained the peak of excellence.

Harems of Babur and Humayun

The harems of Akbar's predecessors—his grandfather Babur's and father Humayun's—were modest in size. Babur mentions several of his wives by name; his daughter Gulbadan Begum gives a comprehensive list. In chronological order, based on the year of marriage, some important wives of Babur were Aiysha Sultan Begum, Zainab Sultan Begum, Maham Begum (mother of Humayun), Masuma Sultan Begum, Gulrukh Begum (mother of Kamran and Askari), Dildar Begum (mother of Gulrang, Gulchehra, Hindal and Gulbadan) and Bibi Mubarika.[1] There were also some concubines. The prominent concubines of Babur were Gulnar Aghacha and Nargul Aghacha, two Circassian slaves gifted by Shah Tahmasp of Persia. "Maham was the chief lady of the royal household and mother of Babur's eldest son; she was supreme, and had well defined rights over other inmates."[2]

Humayun's harem too was not large. Bega Begum, his first cousin was wife of his youth. Hamida Banu Begum mothered Akbar and was honoured with the



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title of Mariyam Makani (dwelling with Mary). There were other wives viz. Mewajan, a slave of Gulbadan married by Humayun, and Gulbarg Begum, daughter of Nizam-ud-din Khalifa. Gunwar Bibi and Khanish Agha were some of the concubines. Bega Begum or Haji Begum, whom Sher Shah sent back to Humayun after her capture in the debacle at Chausa, was the head of the seraglio. By all computation, the harems of Babur and Humayun did not comprise more than two hundred members each.

There were reasons why their harems were not large. Babur's was a chequered life, full of struggle, interspersed with failure and success in equal measure. He was always on the move, either fleeing from a powerful enemy or pursuing a defeated foe. Humayun's career was no less hectic. He had managed to rule only for ten years when he lost his kingdom to Sher Shah. Many inmates of his harem were either drowned or lost in the battle of Chausa. He remained a fugitive and in exile for almost fifteen years. After recovering his throne in Hindustan he did not live for more than a year. And the tenor of his life determined the size of his harem. In short, the careers of Babur and Humayun were not such as to have enabled them to collect a bevy of beauties after every campaign. However, they were not wanting in the excitement and sensibility of love. Masuma Sultan Begum, daughter of Sultan Ahmad Mirza, was Babur's first cousin. She married him in C.E. 1507 and from his account of the affair it was a match of reciprocal love from both sides.[3] Babur's love and longing for Bibi Mubarika reads like a romantic story.[4] Humayun fell in love head over ears with Hamida Banu and married her even as he was fleeing from Hindustan. Abdulla in his *Tarikh-i-Daudi* mentions another escapade of Humayun. He says that an extremely charming girl was once captured by the soldiers of Sher Shah and presented to him. The Afghan ordered her to be sent to the camp of his enemy Humayun, for if he kept such a pretty damsel with him he could do nothing except debauch himself and ruin his political career. It is reported that when the girl was taken to Humayun he got so much enamoured with her that he became utterly indifferent to military operations resulting in the ultimate loss of his throne.[5] Even if the story be true, one thing is certain, the first two Mughal monarchs were not interested in collecting women. Babur could have taken possession of the whole harem of Ibrahim Lodi after his victory at Panipat. Instead, he disbursed the ladies among nobles and princes; even sending some dancing girls to his Begums in Kabul.[6] By and large he confined himself to the legally permitted four wives.

Four Wives

We may digress here to say a word about the number of women a Muslim





could marry, because the question posed a problem to, and was a topic of discussion among the king, the courtiers and the *Ulema* throughout the Mughal period. "Musalmans are allowed by the Koran and the Tradition to have four wives".[7] Various serious and not-so-serious explanations have been put forward for this number four. One is: "One quarrels with you, two are sure to involve you in their quarrels; when you have three factions are formed against her you love best; but four find society and occupation among themselves, leaving the husband in peace."[8] Another, attributed to Khan-i-Azam Mirza Aziz Koka, says: "A man should marry four wives; a Persian to have someone to talk to; a Khurasani woman for his housework; a Hindu for nursing his children; a woman from Mewar-un-Nahr or Transoxiana, to have some one to whip as a warning to the other three."[9] A third explanation is indeed pseudo-scientific. A wife is expected to become pregnant during three months of marriage. Since it is not healthy to cohabit with a pregnant woman, a second wife may be taken to serve for the next three months. The third with her three months would cover the period of nine months of the pregnancy of the first. The fourth is married to serve during the period the first one is delivered of her baby and has rested for three months and thereafter to be fit for conjugal felicity again. That is why four wives, neither three nor five. Whenever a fifth is desired, one of the four may be divorced, for four wives would suffice for uninterrupted sexual pleasure. This is considered to be the legal or customary position. During the reign of Akbar, his "large number of women (posed) a vexatious question even for great statesmen".[10] There were many discussions in the *Ibadat Khana* over this controversial issue. Akbar posed the problem to the *Ulema*. Shaikh Abdun Nabi, the *Sadr-us-Sudur*, or the Chief of the Religious Department was invited for comments. Akbar recollected that the Shaikh had once told him in private that even more than four wives were allowed. But in public he gave an evasive reply. "This annoyed His Majesty very much. 'The Shaikh', he said, 'told me a very different thing from what he now tells me.' He never forgot this."[11] Akbar's poor opinion of the *Ulema* and his antagonism to them had, besides other things, origins in such double-talk and double-thought. Monogamy was out of question to the Mughals. Jahangir could not agree with the Jesuit Fathers who advocated monogamy.[12] Yet, in Akbar's time the question was hotly debated. The consensus reached by the *Ulema* in the *Ibadat Khana* was that a man might marry any number of wives by *muta* or temporary marriage, but only four by *nikah*.[13] In actual practice, there was no restriction on wives with secondary status, especially for kings and nobles, for the king was the law unto himself.[14] Even so, but for the practice of polygamy which was a confirmed cutstom in medieval Muslim society, both Babur and Humayun bequeathed the idea of a moderate harem to their successor Emperor Akbar.



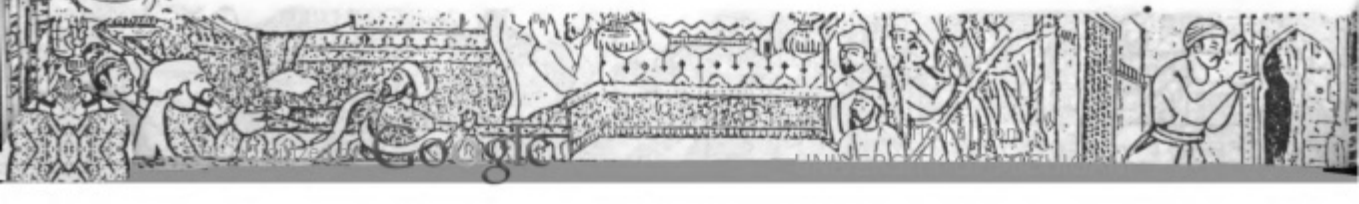


Legacy of Babur and Humayun

There were other traditions too which the first two Mughal emperors bequeathed to Akbar. One was respect for the mother and deference to other senior ladies. How deeply Babur loved and respected Ehsan Daulat Begum, Qutlugh Nigar Begum and Khanzada Begum, his grandmother, mother and elder sister respectively, and how they always stood by him and looked after his interests and safety, is too well known to be repeated. Writing about the deference for old age Mrs. Beveridge writes: "Apropos of the aunt of frequent mention, it may be said that both Babur and Haider[15] convey the opinion that deference to elder women was a permanent trait of their age and set."[16] For instance, after Babur had established his kingdom in Hindustan he invited his aunts, Begums and Khanums from Kabul to Agra. They arrived; "ninety six persons in all and all received houses and lands and gifts to their heart's content."[17] Besides, "To the architect, Khwaja Qasim, His Majesty gave the following order: 'Whatever work, even if it be on a great scale, our paternal aunts may order done in their palace, give it precedence, and carry it out with might and main'."[18] Mirza Haider Daghlat gives a pleasant account of the meeting in Kabul in 1506-07 between Babur and his maternal aunt Mihr Nigar Khanam, elder sister of his mother, and says, that "The Emperor leapt up and embraced his beloved aunt with every manifestation of affection."[19] Then came the sisters. In *Humayun Nama,* whenever harem is mentioned, sisters take the place of precedence.[20] When Humayun was taken seriously ill (and the legend says Babur sacrificed his own life to save him), he remembered his sisters most. "Every time he came to his senses," writes Gulbadan, "his pearl-dropping tongue asked for us and said: 'Sisters, you are welcome! Come, and let us embrace one another.....' It might be three times that he raised his head and that his jewel-dropping tongue let fall these uplifting words."[21] Similar was the affectionate regard for other members of the royal family.

Such affection was reciprocal. Bega Begum, also called Haji Begum, was the wife of Emperor Humayun. She was so devoted to him that she showed resentment even at his slightest neglect.[22] On his death, she built her husband's tomb, the famous Humayun's Tomb at Delhi, and even became its faithful attendant.[23] Babur's wife Dildar Begum, mother of princesses Gulbadan, Gulrang and Gulchehra and prince Hindal was a pleasant and sensible woman and is always spoken of with respect not only by her daughter Gulbadan but even by other historians,[24] while his chief wife Maham Begum and mother of Humayun, exercised all authority due to her position.[25]

There were no inhibitions or undue restrictions about *parda* in the harems of the first two Mughal emperors. "It appears probable", writes Annette Beveridge, "that there was no complete seculsion of Turki women from the outside world...





The ladies may have veiled themselves but...they received visitors more frequently...."[26] Senior nobles and officers of Babur regaled harem ladies in Kabul with absorbing tales about Hindustan.[27] We learn from Gulbadan Begum that the ladies of the royal harem of Humayun mixed freely with their male friends and visitors. They sometimes went out dressed in male attire, played polo and engaged themselves in music. They also enjoyed sufficient freedom in matters of marriage and divorce. They all married, and some remarried more than once after divorce. Aiyasha Sultan Begum, the first wife of Babur, left him within three years of marriage.[28] Babur's sister Khanzada Begum was married at least thrice.[29] She was first given in marriage to Shaibani Khan in 1501. When Shaibani divorced her, she was married to a certain Saiyyad Hada, after whose death in 1511[30] Babur married her off to Mahdi Khwaja. In 1501, at the time of her forced marriage with Shaibani, she was twenty-three, and Mrs. Beveridge thinks that she had almost certainly been married before.[31] Similarly, Gulbarg Begum, daughter of Nizam-ud-din Khalifa married at first, Mir Shah Husain Arghun in 1524 and after separation, she married the Emperor Humayun some time before 1539.[32]

This "comparative freedom gave the (early) Mughal women a greater sense of their dignity and honour."[33] Consequently, many of them turned out to be high-spirited ladies, possessing talent for decision making and a will to assert. The incidents relating to Hamida Banu Begum's marriage with Emperor Humayun clearly point to what a strong independent personality a Mughal lady could be if she chose to be. Daughter of Ali Akbar, also known as Mir Baba Dost,[34] was in the camp of Mirza Hindal when Humayun's eyes fell on her and he became deeply infatuated. When he proposed marriage, she refused to see him. Humayun sent repeated summons but she retorted that "to see kings once is lawful; a second time it is forbidden. I shall not come."[35] Finding her adamant, Humayun appealed to his step-mother Dildar Begum to persuade Hamida Banu to agree. Dildar Begum advised her with the words: "After all you will marry some one. Better than a king, who is there?" Hamida Banu replied: "Oh, yes, I shall marry some one; but he shall be a man whose collar my hand can touch, and not one whose skirt it does not reach."[36] She refused marriage with the 'Emperor' for days and weeks. "At last (and only) after forty days' discussion and persuasion," could Humayun marry the one whom he so deeply loved.

Traditions established by Akbar

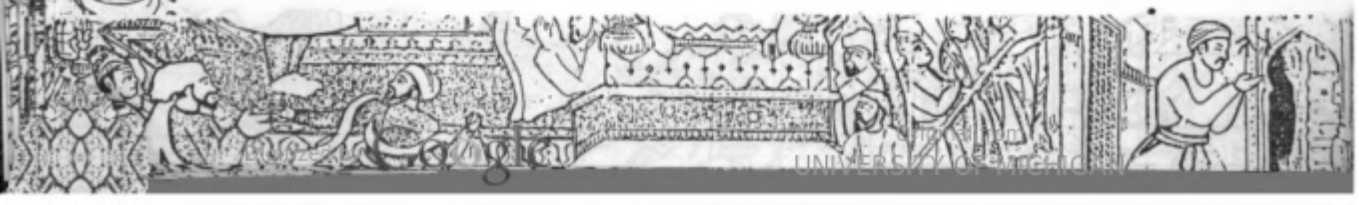
Akbar followed the traditions of his predecessors in many respects though not in all. In so far as respect for senior ladies and love for junior members of the family were concerned, Akbar and his successors continued the practice set by





Babur and Humayun. The mother of the monarch was a very special person. She was more exalted than even his chief wife.[37] "In fact in the Mughal times the first lady of the realm was not the Empress Consort (except in the case of Nur Jahan and Mumtaz Mahall) but the royal mother or the royal sister."[38] Sultan Salima Begum, Akbar's senior consort, occupied a position of great influence in the imperial household and so did Akbar's mother Mariyam Makani. Both these ladies were highly respected by Akbar and Jahangir.[39] Coryat writes that when once Akbar's mother was taken in a palanquin from Lahore to Agra, "he travelling with her, took the palanquin upon his own shoulders, commanding his greatest nobles to do like, and so carried her over the river from one side to the other."[40] Whenever Mariyam Makani arrived from a journey, Akbar went out of the city to receive her.[41] In his memoirs Jahangir writes at many places with emotion about his own mother Mariyam-uz-Zamani.[42] It was in her house that the lunar and solar 'weighings' of the emperor took place and marriages of the princes were performed.[43] Hawkins adds that during the festival of Nauroz, "after many sports and pastimes performed in his palace, he goeth to his mother's house with all the better sort of his nobles, where every man presenteth a jewell unto his mother according to his estates."[44] Respect for and service of parents was commonly practised and universally preached.[45]

In the polygamous Mughal household, there were besides the real mother, a number of foster mothers. Because of Humayun's political vicissitudes, Akbar had been separated from his mother in childhood and consequently he had been breast-fed by many other women. These wet nurses or foster mothers were mostly ladies of rank and were called *Anagas*. A few of these were Daya Bhawal or Bhawal Anaga, a concubine of Humayun;[46] Fakhr-un-nisa, the wife of Nadim Koka; Jiji Anaga, the wife of Shams-ud-din;[47] Koki Anaga, the wife of Togh Begi; Bibi Rupa; Khildar (i.e. mole-marked) Anaga; Pija Jan Anaga, the mother of Saadat Yar Koka; the mother of Zain Khan Koka; a lady called Hakima; and the all important Maham Anaga. Maham Anaga was in charge of Akbar's harem in the early years of his reign. She was styled Walida or Mother,[48] and exercised great influence over the young emperor.[49] It was not only *Anagas* but also their sons and husbands called *Kokas* (or *Kokaltash*) and *Atkas* respectively[50] who swarmed the palace and the court and tried to derive undue advantage from their position. Maham Anaga's son Adham Khan created lot of problems for Akbar. Foster mothers also sometimes created tensions in the harem because of their jealousies and antagonisms.[51] Still, all the kings respected *Anagas* almost as their own mothers.[52] Similarly the Mughals loved and respected their sisters. Jahangir makes very sentimental references to his sisters. His love for his sister Shakr-un-nisa Begum was "such as children feel for their mothers."[53] His memoirs clearly indicate their preferential status as compared with that of other ladies of the harem.[54]



Even the suspicious Aurangzeb greatly respected his elder sister Jahan Ara Begum, although she was always partial towards her favourite Dara Shukoh.

Harem of Akbar and Successors

With regard to the size and organisation of the harem, Akbar did not continue the traditions of his father and grandfather. Instead he followed the precedent of the Sultans of Delhi. In the Sultanate period it was believed that the size of the harem determined the importance and stature of a ruler. Qazi Mughis-ud-din advised Sultan Ala-ud-din Khalji (C.E. 1296-1316) that the expenses of the harem should be increased tenfold because a large and magnificent harem would inspire awe and enhance respect for the king in the minds of the people.[55] Such ideas made it almost imperative for the king to have the largest harem as compared with that of his nobles or the neighbouring independent rulers. The Sultans of Delhi had large seraglios with all their appurtenances and paraphernalia. Even a *Wazir* like Khan-i-Jahan Maqbul could boast of two thousand women in his harem. But the most interesting case is that of Sultan Ghiyas-ud-din of Malwa (1469-1500). "Ghiyas-ud-din found his own chief amusement in the administration of his harem, which it was his fancy to organise as a kingdom in miniature, complete in itself. Its army consisted of two corps of Amazons, of 500 each, one of African and one of Turkish slave girls, who at public audiences were drawn up on either side of the throne. The harem contained, besides these, 1600 women, who were taught various arts and trades and organised in departments. Besides there were musicians, singers and dancers....These women were recruited, at a great trouble and expense, from all parts of India....No old and ugly woman ever appeared before the Sultan. The king himself regulated with meticulous nicety the pay and allowances of all...and decided disputes....When not thus employed he devoted himself to the ceremonies of his faith, with which the daily life of a devout Muslim is encumbered."[56] His son Nasir-ud-din was no better.

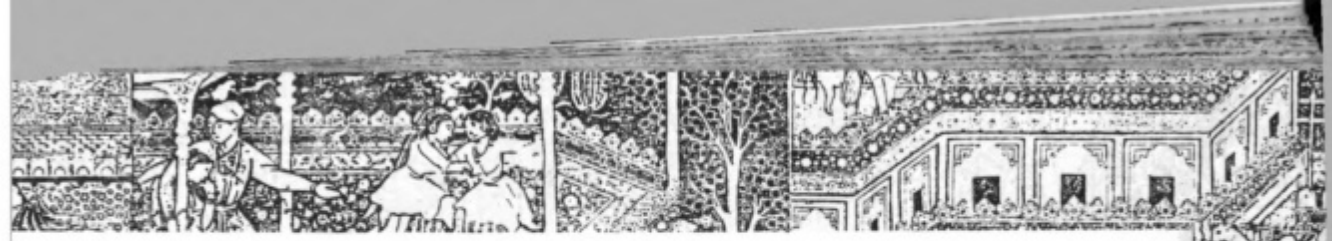
Thus in pre-Mughal Hindustan, a large harem was the trend of the times and Emperor Akbar followed the fashion. A number of factors contributed to the largeness of the Mughal harem under Akbar and after. Akbar was the strongest king of Hindustan. He had no peer; he was *Mahabali* (all powerful). He launched a series of conquests which lasted throughout his life, and were continued by his successors even. Every campaign generally ended with a marriage between the Mughal king or prince and a girl of the defeated ruler's family, and she and her maids brought in a large number of inmates into the seraglio. In particular the Rajput princesses brought along with them hundreds of maidservants and dancing girls.[57] Young women of the enemy killed in war were brought into the harems of

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the king and nobles. For the effective supervision and security of these harems, a large number of eunuchs were required. Hundreds of men were emasculated for the purpose and their would-have-been wives were taken into the seraglios of every order. In medieval times mutilation and castration were common punishments meted out to men in war and in peace and their beautiful women-folk were absorbed into the harems of the elite. Besides, 'silver bodied damsels with musky tresses' were purchased in the slave markets of India and abroad. This helped fill the harem with an assortment of beauties from various countries and nationalities; Indian women predominated. They were known for their beauty, delicacy and femininity. From the time of Amir Khusrau, many a poet in medieval India have extolled their beauty and charm. So also have the Europeans. Orme, along with many others, affirms that "Nature seems to have showered beauty on the fairer sex throughout Industan with a more lavish hand than in most other countries."[58] Their faithfulness and devotion matched their charm.[59] In the harem these amenable creatures were an asset and were welcome in ever larger numbers. In the Mughal harem there was only ingress, no egress. The harem of Akbar and his successors, therefore, became very large.

Henry Blochmann gives the names of just seven of Akbar's wives.[60] The reason is that the contribution of most of the queens and princesses to politics and society and even to matters concerning the harem itself was little. Ladies who possessed qualities of head and heart, or earned sort of name and fame, or played some important role, alone find mention at the hands of the chroniclers. Akbar's first wife (*zan-i-kalan*) was Sultan Ruqayya Begum, a daughter of Mirza Hindal. She had no child, but tended her grandson Shahjahan.[61] Mehr-un-nisa, the widow of Sher Afkun, stayed with her after the death of her husband and before Jahangir married her. Ruqayya Begum died on 19th January 1626 at the ripe age of 84.[62] Another important wife was Sultan Salima Begum, the widow of Bairam Khan whom Akbar married. She was the daughter of Gulrukh Begum and the granddaughter of Babur[63] and was probably a few years senior to Akbar. She was a poetess and wrote under the pseudonym Makhfi. "Jahangir praises her both for her natural qualities and her acquirements. She creates an impression of herself as a charming and cultivated woman."[64] Akbar married Harkha, the daughter of Bhar Mal, the Raja of Amber in February 1562.[65] She mothered Jahangir and was given the title of Mariyam-uz-Zamani. The beautiful wife of Abdul Wasi was married to Akbar when Wasi divorced her at the behest of the Emperor.[66] He also married the daughters of Abdulla Khan Mughal (1564) and Miran Mubarak Shah (1565). Another wife was Bibi Daulat Shad. Blochmann's list is not complete. He fails to mention many other wives like the daughter of Kanhan, the brother of Rai Kalyan Mal of Bikaner,[67] a daughter of Har Rai of Jaisalmer,[68] and a sister of Rana Udai Singh of Marwar,[69] the princesses of Merta[70] and Dungarpur,[71] and

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many others. Akbar's harem was very large indeed and he had many wives, more than seven or ten.

Similarly, Blochmann mentions twenty wives of Jahangir.[72] Xavier also states that in 1597, Prince Salim had twenty lawful wives.[73] But of course, he had many more. Blochmann's tally is like this:

1. Man Bai, the daughter of Raja Bhagwan Das was Jahangir's first wife, and was married to him in 1585. She became the mother of Prince Khusrau and got the title of Shah Begum. She was highly emotional and when Khusrau rose in rebellion against Jahangir, she committed suicide.[74]
2. Daughter of Ray Rai Singh of Bikaner and granddaughter of Ray Kalyan Mal was married to Prince Salim in 1586 when he was 17 years of age.[75] Her Rajput name is unknown.
3. In the month of June of the same year was married to Jahangir, Jagat Gosain, Jodh Bai, Man Bai or Mira Bai,[76] daughter of the Mota Raja Udai Singh and granddaughter of Raja Maldeva of Marwar. Jodh Bai was known for her intelligence, soft voice and ready wit. She died within the life time of Jahangir, who bestowed upon her the title of Bilqis Makani posthumously. She was the mother of Shahjahan.[77] *Amal-i-Saleh* states that the infant was taken over by Ruqayya Begum, Akbar's first but childless wife, who tended him in childhood.
4. Karamsi, the daughter of Keshav Das Rathor was Jahangir's another wife.[78]
5. Sahib-i-Jamal, the beautiful daughter of Khwaja Hasan, cousin of Zain Khan Koka. Zain Khan was the son of Picha Jan Anaga, one of the nurses of Akbar.[79]

6 and 7. Mothers of Princes Jahandar and Shahryar.

8. Was the daughter of Ali Rai, ruler of Little Tibet or Baltistan.[80]

9 and 10. Two others were a daughter of Jagat Singh, eldest son of Raja Man Singh and a daughter of Rawal Bhim, brother of Ray Kalyan Mal of Jaisalmer. Their names are not known, but Jahangir bestowed the latter with the title of Malika-i-Jahan.[81]

11-18. His other consorts were Nur-un-nisa Begum, sister of Muzaffar Husain; Saliha Banu, daughter of Qasim Khan; the daughter of Mubarak Chak of Kashmir; the daughter of Husain Chak of Kashmir; and a daughter of the king of Khandesh. Some others were the daughter of Khwaja Jahan Kabuli, a daughter of Mirza Sanjar, son of Khizr Khan Hazara and the mother of Daulat Nisa.

19-20. In C.E. 1609 Jahangir married the daughter of Ram Chandra Bundela,[82] and in 1611 the renowned queen Nur Jahan.

Nur Jahan and Mumtaz Mahall, the lady of the Taj and queen of Shahjahan, are studied in a separate chapter. Other important queens and princesses find mention at appropriate places in the narrative and therefore, there is no need to give lists of wives of other Mughal emperors after Jahangir. All these fall under three categories—the free born, secondary wives and concubines.



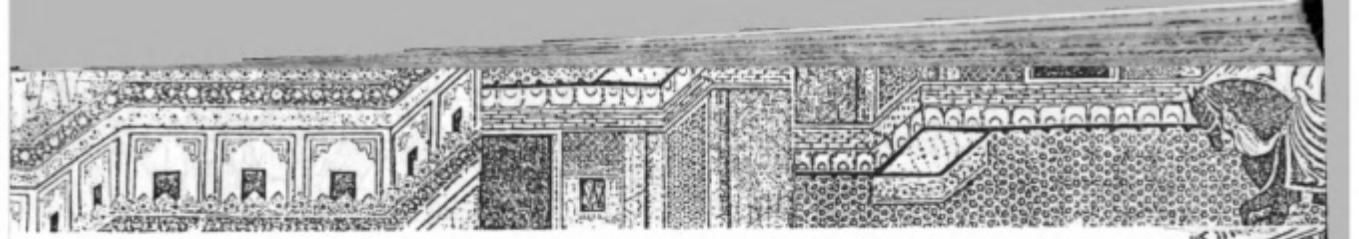


Secondary Wives

Under the first category are included queens like Sultan Ruqayya Begum, Sultan Salima Begum, Nur Jahan and Mumtaz Mahall. The secondary wives were generally the daughters or relatives of Indian princes, who because of their defeat in war, political necessity or personal ambition, married their daughters and sisters to the Mughal rulers or princes. Such ladies are called by A. Beveridge as 'inferior wives'[83] and by Jadunath Sarkar as 'secondary wives'.[84] The process of conquest and the practice of contracting matrimonial alliance after victory initiated by Akbar was continued by his successors, and princesses from Kashmir to Golkonda and Rajasthan to Assam[85] were obtained for the Mughal harem. All Muslim rulers married Indian women, but in Akbar's time it became a rather civilized custom of political design. "His Majesty", writes Abul Fazl, "forms matrimonial alliances with princes of Hindustan, and of other countries; and secures by these ties of harmony the peace of the world."[86] Probably the first marriage of this nature was performed when Raja Bihari Mal or Bhar Mal of Amber pledged his loyalty to Akbar, and a few years later cemented it with blood by marrying off his daughter Harkha to the Emperor. But the way these marriages with Indian princesses took place gave them an inferior status *vis-a-vis* ladies like Hamida Banu Begum or Mumtaz Mahall. *Akbar Nama* describes the marriage of Bihari Mal's daughter thus: "The Rajah...considered that (he should) make himself one of the distinguished ones at the court....In order to effect this purpose he thought of a special alliance (and to) introduce his eldest daughter...*among the attendants on the glorious pavilion* (emphasis added)....Raja Bihari Mal...brought his fortunate daughter to this station (Sambhar) and placed her among the ladies of the harem."[87] Similarly, "Rai Kalyan Mal Rai of Bikaner...represented through those who had access to H.M. (His Majesty) that his wish was that his brother Kahan's daughter might be included among the inmates of H.M.'s harem. The khedive accepted his proposal."[88] Again, "Rawal Har Rai, the ruler or Jaisalmer...was desirous that his daughter...*might be exalted by being included among his* (Majesty's) *female servants*...and that holy and happy starred lady obtained eternal glory by entering the female apartments."[89] "Miran Mubarak Shah the ruler of Khandish, represented through H.M.'s (Akbar's) intimates that his great wish was that his daughter might be included among the ladies of H.M.'s seraglio....Miran's request was acceded and he despatched his chaste daughter in proper form."[90] Jahangir's language in his memoirs is still more straightforward, even to the point of being blunt. After the third year of his accession, writes he, "I demanded in marriage the daughter of Jagat Singh, eldest son of Raja Man Singh."[91] Raja Ram Chandra Bundela was defeated, imprisoned and later released by Jahangir.[92] Later on "at the request of her father I took the daughter of Ram Chandra Bandilah into my service (i.e.



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married her)."[92] Such secondary wives were always mentioned as having been taken into service, or included among female servants or obtaining glory by entering the Mughal harem. Such a style in language was never used in describing the marriage of Ruqayya Begum, Salima Begum, Nur Jahan or Mumtaz Mahall. Secondary wives were conscious of their inferior status. Some maidens indeed tried to wriggle out of such forced alliances. The princess of Bijapur, for instance, was averse to her marriage with Prince Daniyal, and while she was being escorted to Ahmednagar for the wedding, she escaped with her friends during a storm. But she and her chaperon were captured and brought back and the marriage was performed.[94] However, Rajput princesses were much better placed than most others of this category. Many of them enjoyed titles like Mariyam-uz-Zamani, Shah Begum and Malika-i-Jahan. More important, the entry of the Rajput princesses into the Mughal harem "symbolized the dawn of a new era in Indian politics; it gave the country a line of remarkable sovereigns; it secured to four generations of Mughal emperors the services of some of the greatest captains and diplomats that medieval India produced."[95] Besides, the presence of Rajput princesses in the Mughal harem had far-reaching social and cultural consequences which will be analysed at a later stage.

Concubines

In the royal harem, as in the households of Muslim elite, the position of the concubines was unique. The origin of concubinage is not far to seek. "Slaves in early Islam were recruited from prisoners of war, including women and children... and by purchase or raiding....Between the master and the female slave concubinage was permissible, but not legal marriage. The children of such a union belonged to the master and were therefore free; but the status of the concubine was thereby raised only to that of 'mother of children'."[96] This tradition continued and Akbar was conscious of the difference between his 'free born' wives and slaves.[97] The concubines of the Mughals were obtained in the various ways mentioned above. They were called *kaniz, Sarar* and *paristar*. Emperors and nobles spoke about their concubines freely without any inhibition. Indeed, a concubine was sometimes more important than a wife, for while the latter was only his wife the concubine enjoyed the real affection of the man.[98] Concubinage was very common among the Mughal royalty and nobility.[99]

Two prominent concubines of Babur were Gulnar Aghacha and Nargul Aghacha. Although they were *aghachas* (a much better word than *kaniz* or concubine),[100] they "became recognised ladies of the royal household. They are mentioned several times by Gulbadan as taking part in festivities and in family



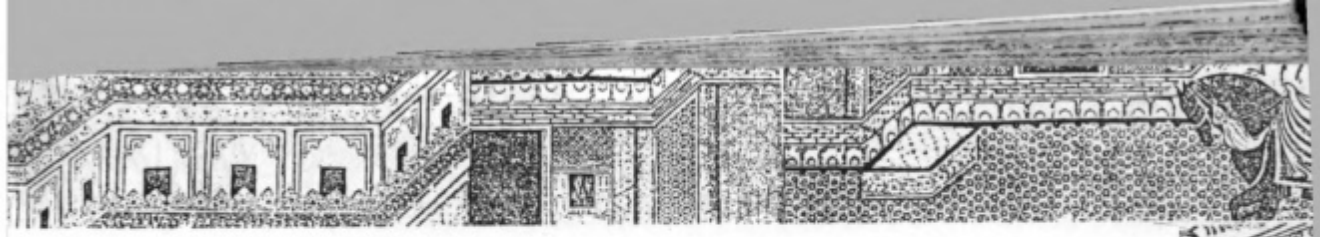


conferences under Humayun...."[101] Abul Fazl says that Gulnar is said to have gone for Haj with Gulbadan in 983 H (C.E. 1575). Then there was the lovely Sarv-qad (cypress shape) lady-in-waiting or concubine of Babur.[102] Hymaun too had his concubines.[103] Some of the wet nurses of Akbar (for example Bhawal Anaga) were Humayun's concubines. Akbar had many more. Bibi Salima (not to be confused with Sultan Salima Begum)[104] was the mother of Shahzada Khanum. "Three months after my birth," writes Jahangir without the slightest hesitation, "my sister Shahzada Khanum, was born to one of the royal concubines (*kanizan*); they gave her over to his (Akbar's) mother, Mariyam Makani."[105] Mothers of princes Murad and Daniyal were concubines while the concubine Bibi Daulat Shad, was the mother of Princess Shakr-un-nisa Begum.[106] Shakr-un-nisa Begum was alive during Jahangir's reign and played an important role in the Mughal harem. Aram Banu Begum, who died a spinster, was another daughter of Akbar born of a concubine.[107] Jahangir too had a large number of concubines, besides his wives.[108] His two sons Jahandar and Shahryar were born of concubines in 1605, within one month.[109] Of the many concubines of Shahjahan, Waris mentions the names of two prominent ones, Akbarabadi Mahall and Fatehpuri Mahall.[110] Aurangzeb's concubine-wife Aurangabadi Mahall was so named because she entered the prince's harem in the city of Aurangabad. Jadunath Sarkar, citing Waris's *Padshah Nama,* says that Akbar had made it a rule that the concubines of the Mughal Emperors should be named after the places of their birth or after the towns wherein they were inducted into the harem. Hence we have ladies with names like Akbarabadi, Fatehpuri, Aurangabadi, Zainabadi,[111] Udaipuri, etc.[112]

As said earlier, there was always a difference between a wife and a concubine. While the wife, whether primary or secondary, was expected to be ever faithful to her husband, the concubine could not. Of course, there were exceptions and loyal concubines could be named. There is the example of the legendary Rupmati who preferred suicide rather than a successor to her paramour lord Baz Bahadur.[113] Akbaradbadi Mahall and Fatehpuri Mahall, shared Shahjahan's captivity in the Agra fort, and they were present by his bedside when he breathed his last in January 1666. Rana-i-dil was originally a dancing girl before she became a favourite concubine of Prince Dara. After his execution, Aurangzeb wished to possess her, but Rana-i-dil refused. On the contrary, Udaipuri Mahall, another concubine of Dara, willingly went over to Aurangzeb.[114] Worse was that Aurangzeb could manage to get Prince Murad imprisoned with the active cooperation of one of his concubines.[115] Pl. 2

In spite of all these virtues and shortcomings, concubines had a charm of their own and had therefore carved a special niche in the hearts of their masters. Shahjahan built the famous Fatehpuri Mosque at Delhi in commemoration of his love





for concubine Fatehpuri Mahall. Even the otherwise austere Aurangzeb was very indulgent to Udaipuri Mahall, the Georgian slave girl of Dara Shukoh who, on the downfall of her first master had gone over to his victorious rival. She was the mother of Kam Bakhsh, and was most of the time drunk. She retained her charms and influence over Aurangzeb till his death, and was the darling of his old age. On the other hand, Hira Bai, surnamed Zainabadi, was the darling of his youth.[116] These are a few examples. There were hundreds of concubines kept by the Mughals who bestowed upon them lovely and charming names indicative of any of their traits. A few concubines of the Mughal seraglio in the seventeenth century were known as Badam Chasm (Almond eyed), Nazuk Badan (of delicate body), Sukh Dain (Giver of Repose), Kutuhal (Joyous), Singar (adorned), Piyar (Loving), Mahan (Proud), etc.[117]

Wives - princesses
concubines
servants
entertainers
maidservants

Kanchanis and Bandis

The female serving classes residing in the harem were, by and large, of two categories; the entertainers and the servants. The entertainers comprised dancing girls and their troupes of orchestra. These were known by the generic term of *Kanchani* given to them by Akbar.[118] Babur was so highly impressed by the peculiar ways of performance of the dancing girls of the harem of Ibrahim Lodi that he gifted one dancer to each one of his important Begums. Thereafter, many Mughal ladies began to possess their own personal troupes of dancing girls for entertainment. These classes were respectable and practised no profession other than dancing and singing.[119] Many lived within the precincts of the *Mahal*. Among the entertainers were also the *Bahu Rupias* who appeared in various fancy dresses and *Bazigars* and *Nats* who entertained with mimicry and acrobatics. However, the most popular were the *Kanchanis*. Manucci has given the names of some superintendents of these artistes which generally ended with Bai, like Sunder Bai, Nain-jot Bai, Chanchal Bai, Gul-ru Bai, Murad Bai, Apsara Bai, Khushhal Bai, Kesar Bai, Kasturi Bai, Hira Bai, Ras Bai, Mrignain, etc.[120]

The last on the list were the slave girls or *bandis*, also called *Khawas* or *paristar*. In the elitist heirarchy of the harem, slave girls or maidservants were hardly noticed. Their duty was to serve, to sweat and sometime provide sex, if need be. "Two facts may be remembered in this connection. Firstly, women had no rights in those days. Secondly, absence of scientific inventions necessitated the manual labour of (a large number of) human hands in providing for the comforts of the rich and women were preferred as companions and friends."[121] These domestics were exposed to the wanton behaviour of despotic masters and mistresses, who, however, generally treated them well. Some of these maids belonged to good





families and were quite cultured.[122]

To the conquering and ruling Mughals there was no dearth of such women. Ten to twelve servants were attached to every lady of importance. Some princesses had as many as a hundred.[123] They were all beautiful and dressed in the best clothes. Their names were equally attractive. Some slave girls of the seventeenth century had names like Gulab (the Rose), Chameli (Jasmine), Nargis (Tulip), Kesar (Saffron), Kasturi (Musk), Gul-i-Badam (Almond flower), Sosan (Lily), Yasmin (Festival), Champa (a flower) Rana-i-Gul (the good flower), Gul-andam (shape of a flower), Gul-Anar (Pomegranate blossom), Saloni (Sweet), Madhumati, Sugandhara (the scented), Koil (a bird), Gulrang (Flower coloured) Mehndi (Henna), Dil Afroz (Heart delighting), Ketki (yellowish flower), Moti (the Pearl), Mrig Nain (Gazelle eyed), Kamal Nain (Lotus eyed), Basanti (Festival-Spring), Hira (Diamond), Kishmish (Raisin), Pista (Pistachio).[124] Such beautiful girls with such lovely names did not fail to attract the attention of their masters or provide them with enjoyment. We will meet them again.

The King

The most important person living in the harem was the king. The seraglio existed for him; queens, concubines, dancers and maids provided him with comfort and pleasure. The king's time was divided between his official work at court and rest and recreation in the *Mahal.* Babur was a busy warrior. Humayun passed lot of time in his harem in Bengal,[125] but not otherwise. Akbar slept only for three hours.[126] His never ceasing conquests, his religious quest for the ultimate truth and multitudinous work of imperial government did not let him remain too much in the harem. Still, "Fridays His Majesty (Akbar) spends in the harem."[127] Jahangir's routine was different. According to William Hawkins, he got up early in the morning, said his prayers and counted the rosary. Then after public appearance (*darshan*) he slept for two hours, had his meal and passed his time in the harem. From noon till three O'clock he was among the people. From three to five in the afternoon he was in the Court. He then retired into the harem, ate and drank and slept for two hours. Thereafter he met high officers. Later on he again ate and slept till the morning.[128] The daily routine of Shahjahan has been described by Abdul Hamid Lahori, Qazwini and Chandrabhan. Many European travellers have also given their accounts of the daily rouine of Shahjahan in general terms. He woke up about two watches before sunrise, said his prayers, went for *Jharoka darshan* for an hour and then to the Diwan-i-Am where official business occupied him from 7.40 A.M.[129] At mid-day he retired to the harem. He took his meal and had a siesta. Then he attended to the petitions presented by Mumtaz Mahall re-

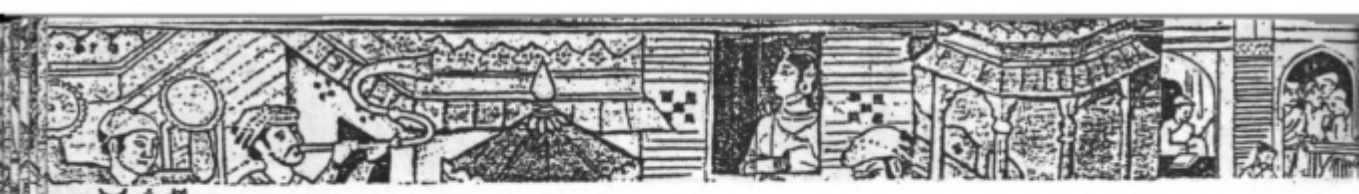


garding deserving cases of charity. From 3 to 8 P.M. he was again in the Diwan-i-Am. At 8 he went into the harem where he took his supper and enjoyed the music and dance of *kanchanis*. He then retired to bed by 10 or so.[130] So did Aurangzeb. All Mughal Emperors made the best use of daylight and woke up at the break of dawn. On an average they spent half of their time in the harem and the other half in official work. Akbar spent lesser time in the harem than the average while Jahangir more. But this general routine was followed both in the palace and the camp. The king slept in the harem, ate in the harem, and relaxed in the harem. In the harem he was both a master and a guest. The women of course were its permanent twenty-four hour residents.

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99. Ovington, J. *A Voyage to Surat in the Year 1689*, p. 234.
100. Gulbadan, p. 225.
101. *Babur Nama*, p. 712.
102. *A.N.* II, pp. 385 and n 1.
103. Jauhar, p. 14.
104. *A.N.* III, pp. 1130n., 1131.
105. *Tuzuk.* I, p. 34.
106. *Ibid.*, p. 34-36.
107. *Ibid.*, I, p. 34.
108. Hawkins, *Voyage*, p. 421.
109. *Tuzuk.* I, p. 20.
110. Saksena, B.P. *History of Shahjahan*, p. 337.
111. Zainabad is the name of a suburb on the bank of the River Tapti opposite Burhanpur.
112. Hamid-ud-din, Khan Bahadur, *Ahkam-i-Alamgiri*, English translation by Jadunath Sarkar (Calcutta, 1949 Ed.), p. 41.
113. *A.N.* II, pp. 213-14.

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114. Butenschon, Andrea, *The Life of the Mughal Princess*, pp. 39, 194-95.
115. *C.H.I.*, IV, p. 215.
116. Sarkar, Jadunath, *Short History of Aurangzeb*, pp. 15-16.
117. Manucci, II, p. 334.
118. *Ain.* III, pp. 256-57 & n. 3.
119. Thevenot, p. 71; Bernier, p. 273; Ovington, p. 257.
120. Manucci, II, pp. 335-36. His list is long.
121. Lal, K.S. *Twilight of the Sultanate*, p. 261.
122. Saksena, *Shahjahan*, pp. 89. 112-13 for the female prisoners of Bundela ruling family and the Portuguese captives of Hugli.
123. *Tarikh-i-Salim Shahi*, p. 51.
124. Manucci, II, pp. 336-38.
125. Jauhar, p. 13.
126. Smith, *Akbar*, p. 243.
127. *Ain.* I, p. 226.
128. Hawkins in Foster, *Early Travels*, pp. 114-15.
129. Lahori, II, p. 220.
130. Saksena, B.P. *Shahjahan*, pp. 238-243.

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CHAPTER III

Dwellings of Harem-Ladies

The residence of the harem-ladies was called *Mahal*. Abul Fazl says that "His Majesty (Akbar) has made a large enclosure with fine buildings inside, where he reposes. Though there are five thousand women, he has given to each a separate apartment...."[1] He does not mention the place where the enclosure was made, whether it was in Agra or Fatehpur Sikri, Ajmer or Lahore, or it was there in all these forts. He also does not specify whether all these more than five thousand women lived within one enclosure or were distributed in many places. His statement, therefore, needs to be critically examined, both with regard to the number of inmates of the harem as well as the enclosure where they lived.

Number of Harem-Dwellers

First to the number of harem-dwellers. When Abul Fazl mentions "more than five thousand women" as the strength of Akbar's seraglio, he does so primarily to emphasise the greatness of the Emperor. Akbar did not have five thousand wives. In the *Ain-i-Akbari* of Abul Fazl, Blochmann refers to only seven wives of Akbar. But this figure is too small. Beveridge thinks Akbar had "more than 300 wives."[2] Add to these, their maids and slave-girls and other numerous members of the royal family: the number of harem-dwellers would become quite large. Similarly, Blochmann lists twenty wives of Jahangir, although his harem was much larger. According to Beni Prasad, Jahangir's harem, even as a prince, consisted of 300 women.[3] Since all the kings and princes had large harems, their long story may be cut short. The harem of Prince Shah Alam, the son of Aurangzeb, contained two thousand women,[4] and the seraglio of Jahandar Shah (C.E. 1712) was one mile long.





These figures rightly emphasise the power and pelf of the great Mughals, but they also show that there was no fixed number of harem-ladies. It varied in accordance with the king's taste and resources. In Akbar's time, according to Abul Fazl, the ladies of the harem were more or less five thousand. His *Ain-i-Akbari* gives reliable data about almost everything important in the empire of Akbar from the specific gravity of precious metals to the prices of perfumes. With regard to the number of harem women also Abul Fazl may not be wrong. But his figure most probably represents the entire inmates of the harem including all categories viz. the Queen Mother, all aunts and foster mothers, the king's sisters and daughters, his chief queen, all secondary wives and concubines as well as all slaves and dancing girls, all the lady officers and officials of the harem, all ladies of the nobles who came to visit or stay in the seraglio on festive occasions, all the king's relatives; in short every lady who in one way or the other was connected with the royal seraglio. Many of these women did not actually live in the harem. For instance, there were female officers like Daroghas, Mahaldars and Tehwildars, appointed by Akbar for supervision and serveillance of the seraglio. These officers functioned, according to Manucci, on lines of those of the court.[5] Now as in the imperial secretariat officers left for their homes after performing their daily duties, the salaried Daroghas and other officers of the harem, who were generally wives or relatives of high nobles,[6] used to go home after performing their assigned duties and did not live in the *Mahal*. Ladies of nobles came to the *Mahal* during Khushroz, Nauroz, marriage ceremonies and many other occasions. Of these, some ladies were permitted to stay in the *Mahal* for a few days, a few indeed for a whole month,[7] but they were not residents of the harem. So was the case with most other sections of the harem society. Many troupes of dancing girls came to the palace, and after the performance they left for their respective quarters. The menials also behaved in the same fashion. But Abul Fazl includes them all as harem inmates, through the method he adopts while computing the strength of Akbar's army. Thus in theory, the maximum number of women who were associated with the palace could be counted at five thousand or even more, but at no point of time did they all get together in the *Mahal*. The number that actually lived in the Haremsara was much small.[8]

Palace Accommodation

About the accommodation of the harem-ladies, Abul Fazl writes that "though there are more than five thousand women, he (Akbar) has given to each a separate apartment in a large enclosure with fine buildings, where he reposes."[9] A century later Bernier was also told by eunuchs about the beautiful apartments of the

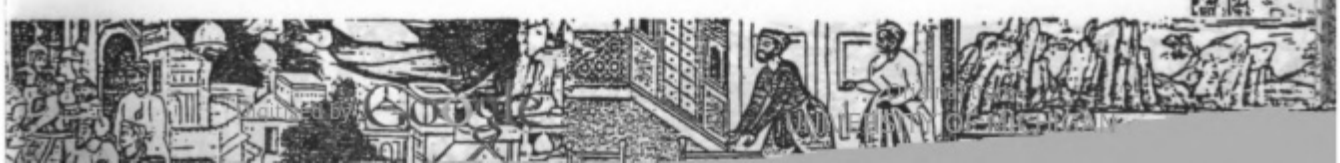




seraglio, "separated and more or less spacious and splendid" which were allotted to harem-ladies.[10] Such hyperbolical statements have rightly misled many modern scholars[11] into believing that a separate, spacious and splendid dwelling was provided to each and every lady of the harem. It was not so because it was not possible to do so. The enclosure was after all nothing else than the *Mahal* or Haremsara which comprised only a portion of the palace, which itself was a part of the fort. The fort of Agra, for instance, "was built over like a city with streets and shops,"[12] and was surrounded by a massive wall encircling it. Inside it was the palace which housed the Diwan-i-Am, Diwan-i-Khass, *Kachehris* and other government offices, tents for nobles and barracks for guards. On one side of the palace were the residences of the royal ladies, called *Mahal*, or the enclosure of Abul Fazl, still seen in Agra and many other Mughal citadels. So the *Mahal*, called so both by contemporary chroniclers and European travellers, formed only a small portion of the palace buildings inside the fort. Obviously, all the inmates of the harem could not be provided with separate, splendid and spacious dwellings in it. This conclusion is confirmed on examining the forts of Agra and Fatehpur Sikri, the Red Fort of Delhi and that of Ajmer. Agra, Delhi and Lahore are about the chief forts that play host to the harem inmates during the Mughal period.

Ajmer fort is a small one, repaired and enlarged in the time of Akbar,[13] but even at first sight it would be apparent that it cannot provide separate accommodation for very many people. About Agra, Percy Brown says: "Within the Agra fort enclosure, the *Ain* states that Akbar built upwards of five hundred edifices of red stone....."[14] "Many of these structures were demolished later to make room for Shahjahan's white marble pavilions, but enough remains to show the general character of these early Mughal palaces. They now consist of a group of buildings in the south-east corner of the fort."[15] Of these the earliest is the Akbari Mahal. At a later date, probably towards the end of the sixteenth century was added the Jahangiri Mahal, "intended as a residence for the heir apparent and his family." That is all. The palaces at Lahore were almost on the pattern of those of Agra. There was a Zenana Masjid in the Lahore Fort[16] which indicates that there were such mosques for ladies in all palaces. In the Allahabad Fort the zenana palace still remains intact, with a very impressive verandah.[17]

Our best guide in this regard is Fatehpur Sikri. It is in Fatehpur Sikri that Akbar built his largest and best buildings. The most important of the residential buildings is the double storeyed Jodh Bai palace. On one side is an annexe for bath and service purposes and on the opposite side a double storeyed pavilion called the Hawa Mahal or House of Air is attached. This Mahal has commodious apartments. There are two other residences. The one is known as Mariyam's house and the other is that of the Turkish Sultana.[18] Recently, the excavation



conducted by the Aligarh Muslim University under Professor R.C. Gaur at Fatehpur Sikri near the Samosa Mahal has brought to light another very interesting part of the royal Haremsara. The huge complex (127.10 x 65.8 metres) is provided with all the luxuries of Medieval country life such as ornamental gardens, reservoirs, wind towers, underground cells and water chutes. There are deep verandahs in front of rooms to ward off the harshness of the hot climate. This combined with *Hammams* and underground cells help in creating a micro-climate and mitigate the heat. "Entrance gate and Deorhi, have a staggered way with multiple turnings to foil any attempt to look into the complex. Apart from a number of living rooms it has two semi-covered pavilions, decorated with dado paintings in black, flanked by red lines. This along with another room which is also very rich in wall paintings, might have been used for social gatherings and festivities of the house. Tahkhana (underground cell) with two entrances and a number of sky holes was a favourable summer resort. This room also has beautiful mural paintings. In front of it a water channel runs, punctuated by shallow water pools at regular intervals. East of it, two water channels and pools at two levels link the main residential part with garden and Hawa Mahal. On the east side, in front of the residential portion is an ornametal garden, divided into six parts with walkways made of rubble stones and the whole have been knitted into one single harmonious whole with an octagonal tank."

R.C. Gaur then adds: "Abul Fazl mentions that Akbar's harem contained five thousand women of different nations and for each the emperor provided separate apartments. Obviously the present standing Haremsara complex could accomodate only a fraction of them" and closes with the hope that "it is probable that further exacavations between the above mentioned complex and the Rang Mahal may expose some more structure connected with the Royal Harem."[19]

William Finch's description of the seraglio in the Lahore Fort, shorn of its embellished language, conforms to the pattern of *Mahals* at Agra and Fatehpur Sikri. The largest *Mahal* could accomodate two hundred women "and into the stateliest (but small in size) were contrived sixteen several great lodgings". Each lady had her own paved courtyard, tank, and enjoyed a little pleasure and an estate to herself.[20] During Jahangir's time Pelsaert speaks of the *Mahals* in Agra. "Among these is the palace of... the mother of Jahangir as well as three other *Mahals* named respectively Itwar (Sunday), Mangal (Tuesday), and Sanichar (Saturday), in which the king used to sleep on the day denoted by the name, and a fifth, the Bengali Mahal, occupied by ladies of various nations."[21]

Shahjahan demolished many of the sandstone structures built by his predecessors in the forts of Agra and Lahore and in their places constructed marble palaces for the use of royal ladies. At Agra he built edifices like the Khass Mahal, the Shish Mahal. the Musamman Burj as well as the Anguri Bagh. In Lahore also

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the Musamman Burj, including the Shish Mahal, the Naulakha and the Khwabgah were built. It would appear that under Shahjahan there was some relief on the pressure of accommodation in the *Mahal*. But most probably not, inasmuch as the room of Jahan Ara, Shahjahan's favourite daughter, was situated between the Shahburj and the bedroom of the Emperor in the Agra fort.

Shahjahan began the construction of an entirely new capital city, Shahjahanabad in 1638. The *Mahals* for the use of the Emperor, the Daulat Khana-i-wala, the private chambers of princess Jahan Ara and the apartments of other royal ladies were interconnected, each bearing a distinct name, viz. the Moti Mahal or the "Pearl Palace", the Hira Mahal or the "Diamond Palace" and the Rang Mahal or the "Painted Palace". These formed the seraglio and were all situated in one line all along the whole length of fort wall.[22] These structures are still present for all to see, and neither these, nor those at Agra, Lahore or Fatehpur Sikri could have provided separate and spacious accommodation for hundreds and thousands of ladies excepting for a very few important queens and princesses. Bernier clearly says so. He learnt from the eunuchs "that the Seraglio contains beautiful apartments, separated, and more or less spacious and splendid, according to the rank and income of females. Nearly every chamber has its reservoir or running water at the door; on every side are gardens...deep excavations that afford shelter from the sun by day, lofty divans and terraces, at which to sleep coolly at night..."[23] The eunuchs "speak with extravagant praise (about the Khass Mahal) facing the river, which is covered with plates of gold...and its apartments are decorated with gold and azure exquisite paintings and magnificient mirrors." William Finch also describes some of the mural paintings in the Lahore Fort.[24]

Bernier himself had not seen the interiors of the palace with his eyes. He was taken into the *Mahal* blind-folded. That is why he had only to repeat what the eunuchs told him; and the eunuchs exaggerated.[25] If indeed, Mariyam's house near Jodh Bai's palace in Fatehpur Sikri is any model, the personal rooms of the queens of Akbar's time were rather small, ill-ventilated and few, although they were all profusely decorated. In Shahjahan's time the space was not perhaps that much cramped. Still, spacious dwellings inside the palace were made available only to a few most important ladies, "according to the rank and income of the females."

Dormitories, Kiosks and Cottages

However, these queens and princesses of status who were allotted magnificent dwellings, did not live in them all alone. They were always surrounded by dozens, sometimes even hundreds of ladies-in-waiting, companions, musicians, dancing girls, maids and slave-girls. Their routine of life was full of gaiety and mirth. Each



evening was an evening of enjoyment, of some concert, dance-*Mehfil* or festivity. Gulbadan Begum provides a pen picture of this atmosphere. She says that every evening Emperor Humayun used to pay a visit to one of the Begums and she spared no pains to make his visit pleasant. She recalls that one day, "he came to the tent (quarters) of this lowly person (Gulbadan Begum) and the entertainment lasted till the third watch of the night. Many Begums were there, and his sisters and ladies of rank and of position, and other ladies, and musicians and reciters. After the third watch His Majesty was pleased to command repose. His sisters and Begums made resting places (*takia*) in his presence."[26] In a note Mrs. Beveridge, the translator of Gulbadan Begum's *Humayun Nama*, adds, "It seems, as again later on, that they fell asleep where they were seated, on mattresses and provided with pillows."[27] Thus it would appear that the inmates tired after the entertainment, which was an affair of every night in one place or another, slept wherever they were, or wherever they found a place, exactly as it happens even today during the celebrations of an Indian marriage. Though Gulbadan's description pertains to the reign of Humayun, yet that was the routine with all Mughal emperors. It also provides a clue to where the ladies of lesser sort lived. During winter and the rainy season entertainments were neither held in the open nor the inmates slept in the open. They slept in verandahs, pavilions or *shamianas* but in the same fashion. Here they made sort of cubicles and dormitories, where they kept their precious belongings like clothes, jewellery and betel, in large and small boxes of wood, metal or ivory.[28] They also collected mirrors of all sizes and other oddities like glass boxes "so that whatever was placed inside could be seen from outside."[29] Such articles were obtained from Europe in "toy trade", of which the Mughals were so fond and about which the ladies so crazy.[30] In these dormitories they also rested in the day. As there were no doors or windows to the halls, warmth and privacy were secured by means of thick wadded curtains, called *parda,* made to fit each opening between the pillars. To these were added latticed blinds neatly made of bamboo strips or reeds woven together with coloured cords and called *jhilmils, chilmans* or *chicks*. Behind the windows, veiled by curtains or slit-blinds breathed women guarding mysteries which are difficult to fathom. It was through one such partition that Sir Thomas Roe (1615-1619) could get a fleeting glimpse of two queens "who glittered with diamonds" and "whose curiosity made them break little holes in a grate of reed that hung before it to gaze at me."[31] Similarly, ladies of nobility, when they came to the palace on festive occasions like Nauroz, Khushroz or Id celebrations and stayed on for some days, slept in the same manner. Those were not the days when one could have separate rooms with attached bathrooms. Queens and princesses with independent lodgings were few. Most others lived in dormitories, kiosks and verandahs, in constant company and in a spirit of camaraderie and togetherness, sharing their stories, yarns and sentiments,



but not always their secrets.

Thus, the provision of accommodation to the dwellers of the harem in the forts of Agra and Delhi, as also in other forts, was somewhat as follows:

Immediately within the main gate of the fort a large space was marked off to provide for the humble dwellings of the palace retinue like servants, slave-girls, dancing girls, *Kanchanis* and courtesans. Lodged as they were, they had easy access to both the city outside and the palace within. The enclosure of the courtesans and dancing girls was called the Chowk.[32] Their's were humble dwellings with thatched roofs and walls of strong cane and bamboo, clay and white lime. These structures, as others of the same kind in the city, were liable to fire hazards, specially during the summer season. Through this service area a wide vaulted passage led directly from the main gate into the palace through the *naubat khana, naqqar khana* or orchestra house, whose sharp and mettlesome music became, through distance, "solemn, grand and melodious" and fell soft on the ears of the harem-dwellers.[33] In the central portion of the palace were located buildings like the Diwan-i-Am, the Diwan-i-Khass, etc. The remaining area was reserved for the accommodation and personal use of the royal household. The Diwan-i-Khass was used sometimes for the Emperor's important meetings with nobles but mainly for recreation with royal ladies. The Diwan-i-Khass is described as the paradise in a couplet inscribed on it. It reads: "If there is a paradise on earth, it is this, it is this, it is this."[34] It was a paradise because harem *houris* assembled there often. Everywhere there was profusion of gold, silver and precious stones on pillars and ceilings. In the *Mahal* portion there were long series of apartments, broad verandahs, large pavilions, small kiosks and spacious courtyards decorated with marble, paintings and mosaic and other beautiful inlaid decorations. These were enclosed by gardens with water courses and fountains all around. In these lived favourite wives, choice concubines and young princesses. But as far as possible they slept in the open spaces or verandahs. This is attested to by most Mughal miniatures.[35] Bernier affirms that the royal palace had "magnificence which is suited to the climate,"[36] and that the harem people enjoyed sleeping in the open during the summer season.[37] Till the middle of the present century and until the pigeon-hole type flats began to be constructed in metropolitan cities, houses in India were built with large verandahs and courtyards, providing lot of breeze in summer and rainy seasons and lot of sunshine during winter. People in medieval times lived according to the requirements of the environment, ecology and climate.

Pl. 3

So, as was the case with men in the Mughal empire, so also was the case with women in the Mughal harem. Luxurious and joyous life was the privilege of a few, service the destiny of most. The elegant and magnificient rooms of the *Mahal* were the preserve of the very important queens and princesses. Ladies lower in hierarchy lived in verandahs, dormitories and kiosks. The service classes lived

in mud and bamboo houses with thatched roofs. Accommodation was provided for all, but not all lived in separate, spacious and splendid mansions.

No Overcrowding

The Mughal harem was not located in one fixed place; its inmates lived in many forts and cities. Mughal emperors were often on the move. When the king was travelling, not all the ladies of the harem accompanied him. Only a few selected ones went. Even many of these with their attendants and slave-girls were left behind in forts and palaces on the route of the king's march. Akbar even built some mini palaces for their stay. According to De Laet (wrote in 1631) emperor Akbar had erected many women's apartments at every few miles from Agra, each of which could accommodate sixteen ladies with servants.[38] This provided extra accommodation for harem inmates and extra recreation to the king on his many halts on the journey. *Tarikh-i-Salim Shahi* says that 400 women accompanied emperor Jahangir to Ahmedabad,[39] while according to Edward Terry, Jahangir had a thousand women 'of all sorts' provided for in his tents.[40] When Aurangzeb went to Kashmir (C.E. 1664), Francois Bernier was in his train. The journey from Delhi to Kashmir took about three months and many ladies of the royal harem were left behind at Delhi, Lahore, Bhimbar and many other places. Immediately before entering the mountainous terrain leading to Kashmir, writes Bernier, Aurangzeb took with him only a few ladies of "the first rank, the intimate friends of Roshan Ara Begum, and those women whose services cannot be easily dispensed with."[41] When Aurangzeb was in the Deccan, Zaib-un-nisa was in jail in Delhi where she could not have been left alone with just a few women guards. Many ladies of the seraglio always continued to live in Delhi when the king was out, for, informs the French physician in another context, "I have sometimes gone into it (the Seraglio) when the king was absent from Delhi...for the purpose of giving my professional advice."[42] Royal sojourns and outings distributed the pressure on harem accommodation.

Another point to be borne in mind is that on the death of a king, his women shifted out of the palace facilitating, again, provision of accommodation to his successor's harem. After the death of Akbar, his widows were sent to reside at Sikandara in the rooms by the side of his tomb.[43] Even Jahangir's mother began to live in the environs of Lahore, so that Jahangir had to go to her village named Dahr to pay respects to her on his visit to Lahore in 1606.[44] Similarly, after Jahangir's death, Nur Jahan stayed on at Lahore and never visited Agra again. When Shahjahan was imprisoned in the Agra fort, all his harem and all his dancing girls remained with him there, while the new emperor Aurangzeb's harem was

established at Delhi.[45]

Many queens, princes and princesses of high esteem possessed their own palaces outside the fort and *Mahal*. On the river front in Agra were the palaces of Ruqayya Sultan Begum and Shahzadi Begum, a sister of Jahangir. Nur Jahan Begum too had similar palaces[46] not only in Agra but also in Lahore and Kashmir. So also was the case with Jahan Ara Begum. Her palace at Lahore was built of white marble and contained canals, fountains and gardens.[47] In Delhi she lived in her own palace outside the royal fort. The princes also owned their mansions and palaces. When the new fort and city of Shahjahanabad was laid out, many princes and Amirs built their own villas and *Havelis*, some costing lakhs of rupees.[48] It was customary for a prince to leave the king's Haremsara on attaining the age of sixteen. When Prince Khurram attained the age of sixteen, he had to be provided with a separate house. But Jahangir did not want to keep him away from himself; he assigned him the house of Muhammad Muqim, styled Wazir Khan, situated inside the fort near the royal apartments.[49] The Emperor also gave a lakh of rupees to Prince Khusrau to renovate the house of Munim Khan which was outside the fort where he could reside.[50] On another occasion "Jahangir arranged a reception for Prince Parwez in the palace of Mahabat Khan that chief being absent at that time..."[51] Agra and Delhi contained numerous magnificent villas of nobles resplendent with marble structures and beautiful gardens, and escheat had rendered the Sovereign proprietor of many stately houses in the city and suburbs fit for occupation by members of the royal family. All these factors relieved the pressure on residential accommodation, and made the harem a really delightful, bright and beautiful place for which it is rightly renowned.

Mahals of Nobles

The harems of nobles too were known as *Mahals*. The *Mahals* of a few great nobles were constructed of stone and marble like those of the king: but mansions of majority of nobles were of inferior construction and with materials like bricks, slaked lime and timber.[52] That is why, while many of the royal palaces in the forts of Agra, Fatehpur Sikri, Delhi and Lahore are still extant, the houses of most nobles and Mansabdars built with less durable materials, some having only mud walls and thatched roofs,[53] have disappeared. But their pen picture remains. What they looked like has been recounted by William Finch, Edward Terry, Pelsaert, Bernier and many others. Terry and Pelsaert write about the houses at Agra and Bernier those of Delhi. Their detailed accounts point to their personal knowledge through visits to the dwellings of the nobles to which some of them were regularly invited. This helps us to have a clear idea of the way the nobles

and their ladies lived.

"The city of Agra and suburbs", says William Finch, writing about the times of Jahangir, "are one way seven miles in length and, three in breadth...the city lies in the manner of half a moon, bellying landward. On the banks of the Jumna there are many goodly houses of the nobility, pleasantly overlooking the river."[54] Pelsaert also says that "every one has tried to be close to the river bank, and consequently the water-front is occupied by the costly palaces of all the famous lords, which make it appear very gay and magnificent."[55] He adds that the luxuriant groves all round Agra made it "resemble a royal park rather than a city."[56]

About the houses of the elite, Jahangir writes that "many persons have erected buildings of three or four storeys."[57] One of the notable nobles of his times was Asaf Khan, and William Finch describes his palace thus: "On the east side of the castle, hard without the (Fort) wall is the garden of Asaf Khan...small, neat, with walks (planted with cypress trees), diverse tanks and jaunters." A fair Devankhana, was flanked by 'diverse lodgings for his women neatly contrived' with galleries and walks.[58] Asaf Khan's palace was "exceedingly handsome and costly"[59] but the basic pattern of the mansions of the nobles was the same. One portion of the building formed the Diwan Khana or the men's quarters, where the nobleman received friends and suppliants, while "the greater portion was occupied by their ladies and was called Zenan Khana".[60] According to Tavernier, "In the houses of the nobles the women's apartments are in the centre, and it is generally necessary to traverse two or three large courts and a garden or two before reaching there."[61] In these lodgings it was necessary to make provision for two things—fresh water in plenty and protection against summer heat. Fresh water was obtained from the river or wells dug in every nobleman's house. Pelsaert also notes that there were gardens and tanks inside the house. In the hot weather, the tanks were filled daily with fresh water. "In this climate water and plants are refreshment and recreation....The water is drawn (by oxen) or sometimes raised by a wheel in such quantity that it flows through a laden pipe and rises like a fountain."[62]

Bernier's observations about the houses of the nobles of Delhi are similar to those of Pelsaert at Agra. "In these hot countries a house is considered beautiful if it be capacious, and if the situation be airy and exposed on all sides to the wind, especially to the northern breezes. A good house has its courtyard, gardens, trees, basins of water, small jets d'eau in the hall or at the entrance."[63] He says that there were handsome subterranean apartments cooled with large fans. These became ideal for repose from noon till four or five in the evening. There were no good dwellings without a terrace; the terrace was a place for the family to sleep at night.[64]

The house was not cluttered with too many items of furniture like tables, stools, benches, cupboards, etc.[65] The side walls of the rooms were provided with niches, Pl. 4 in a variety of shapes, five or six feet above the floor, tasteful and well proportioned in which were kept porcelain vases and flower pots. There were exquisite paintings on walls. In the palace of Mirza Aziz Koka, the parlours were adorned and painted with murals by no less an artist than Mulla Abdus Samad Shirin Qalam.[66] The ceilings too were gilt and painted.[67] The whole floor was covered with a cotton mattress, four inches in thickness, over which a fine white cloth was spread in the summer and a silk carpet in the Winter. These were "covered with brocade, velvet or flowered satin."

The ladies in the harems of the nobles made extensive use of gold and silver, even for their utensils and table service.[68] In the words of Pelsaert, "their Mahals are adorned internally, with 'superfluous pomp' and ornamental dainties, betraying inflated pride.[69] Even their bedsteads were "lavishly ornamented with gold and silver."[70] Some had their cots suspended like a swing a little above the ground by ropes fastened to the four legs. It was "moved gently by their servants to lull them to sleep."[71] The harem of the noble was small when compared with that of the king. "As a rule they have three or four wives, the daughters of worthy men, but the senior wife commands most respect. All live together in the enclosure surrounded by high walls. Each wife has a separate apartment for herself and her slaves, of whom there may be 10 or 20 or 100, according to her fortune. Each has a regular monthly allowance for her [expenditure]—jewels and clothes are provided by the husband according to the extent of his affection. Their food comes from one kitchen, but each wife takes it in her own apartment; for they hate each other secretly, though they seldom or never allow it to be seen, because of their desire to retain the favour of their husband, who they fear, honour, and worship, as a god rather than a man."[72] Other arrangements were similar to those of the royal harem. There were eunuchs to keep watch and concubines and slave-girls for extra pleasure.

Pelsaert noticed that the houses of the nobles at Agra were "hidden away in alleys and corners,"[73] and Bernier found that the dwellings of the Omara at Delhi were scattered in every direction.[74] Manucci also observed that in Delhi many nobles "are very pleased to have their dwellings far from the royal palace."[75] The reason was the mutual fear and suspicion due to the prevailing atmosphere at the court and intrigues in the royal harem.[76] Besides, these people enjoyed the pleasure of idleness and women's company, and many of them avoided attracting the king's attention by living too close to him. Manucci goes so far as to assert that the nobles trained pigeons to obtain intelligence about the movements of the king; what, when and where the king was at a particular time, and had it not been for official and court duties, the nobles would never have bothered

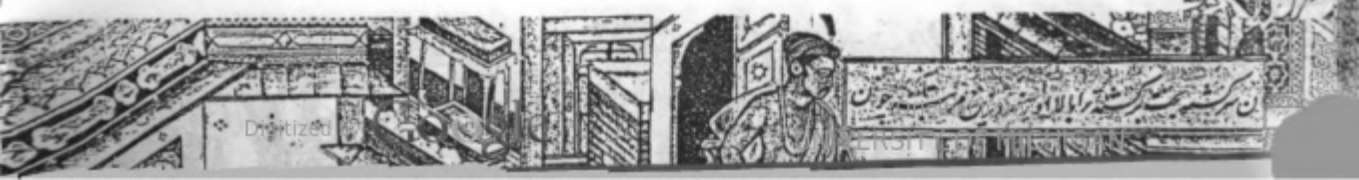
to leave their houses at all,[77] in order to enjoy uninterrupted intimacy of their female beauties.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. *Ain.* I, p. 46.
2. *A.N.* III, Introduction, p. xxi.
3. Beni Prasad, *Jahangir*, p. 26 citing the authority of Hawkins, *Voyages*, p. 421.
4. Manucci, II, p. 343.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 330-31.
6. Eg. *A.N.* II, pp. 335-36; *Maasir-ul-Umara*, pp. 260-61.
7. *Ain.* p. 47. Also Manucci, II, pp. 350-51.
8. On the basis of the figures provided by Abul Fazl in the second volume of *Ain-i-Akbari*, the total strength of Akbar's army has been estimated by modern scholars at more than forty lakhs—as staggering a figure as that of royal harem. (*Report of the Indian Historical Records Commission*, V, 1923, pp. 58 ff; Mount Stuart Elphinstone, *The History of India*, II, p. 234; Saran, P. *Provincial Government of the Mughals*, pp. 258-68; Tripathi, R.P. *Rise and Fall of the Mughal Empire*, p. 234). "This army was organised on the quota system; each high officer or autonomous ruler being expected to produce on demand a fixed number of troops...(but) not all this army... was ever called to fight at one single time." (Lal, K.S. *Growth of Muslim Population in Medieval India*, pp. 65-68). The actual strength of Akbar's army at any given time, does not seem to have exceeded 25,000 men (Irvine, William *The Army of Indian Moghuls*, pp. 58-61). Irvine could arrive at this conclusion because of details provided by Abul Fazl himself (Blochmann, *Ain.* I, Book II, pp. 241-47). But Abul Fazl does not give such detailed break up in the case of inmates of the harem, with the result that all modern scholars, including V.A. Smith believe 5000 to be its actual numbers. (Smith, *Akbar the Great Mogul*, pp. 260-61; Ansari, M.A. *Social Life of the Mughal Emperors*, p. 65). The number in all probability was much less. It is significant that no foreign traveller has mentioned the actual number of harem-dwellers. None has even hazarded a guess.
9. *Ain.* I, p. 46.
10. Bernier, pp. 267-68.
11. Smith, V.A. *Akbar the Great Mogul*, pp. 260-61; Ansari, M.A. *Social Life of the Mughal Emperors*, p. 65; Misra, Rekha, *Women in Mughal India*, p. 76.
12. Pelsaert, p. 4.
13. *A.N.* II, pp. 516-17.
14. Percy Brown, *Indian Architecture (Islamic Period)*, p. 100.
15. Percy Brown in *C.H.I.*, IV, p. 537.
16. *Journal of the Punjab Historical Society*, vol. I, No. 1, p. 5.
17. *C.H.I.* IV, p. 538.
18. Percy Brown in *C.H.I.* IV, pp. 541-42.
19. Professor R.C. Gaur's letter to the author dated 24.4.1986 enclosing the above note.
20. Finch, William, in *Early Travels*, pp. 162-65. I have changed the spellings of some words to render the reading easy.
21. Pelsaert, pp. 3-4.
22. Waris, p. 42: Saleh, III, p. 33.



23. Bernier, pp. 267-68.
24. Finch, pp. 162, 165.
25. Bernier, p. 264.
26. Gulbadan, p. 130. The text has *khana*, literally house, which Mrs. Beveridge translates as tent. In camp also they sometimes slept huddled together in one place. *Ibid.*, pp. 189-190.
27. *loc. cit.*
28. *Tuzuk*. I, pp. 163, 200.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 165.
30. Jauhar, pp. 124, 127; Moreland, *From Akbar to Aurangzeb*, pp. 68-71.
31. Ansari, *European Travellers under the Mughals*, pp. 12, 63.
32. Finch in *Early Travels*, p. 183.
33. Bernier, p. 260 and n.
34. *C.H.I.* IV, p. 556.
    The original in Persian reads:
    agar firdaus bar rue zamin ast,
    hamin ast, hamin ast wa hamin ast.
35. Eg. Falk, Toby and Digby, Simon, *Paintings from Mughal India*, pl. 31.
36. Bernier, p. 256.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 240.
38. De Laet, *The Empire of the Great Mogal*, p. 44. Also Finch in Foster, *Early Travels in India* (1583-1610), p. 149.
39. *Tarikh-i-Salim Shahi*, p. 204.
40. Terry in Foster, *Early Travels*, p. 329.
41. Bernier, p. 391.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 267.
43. Finch in *Early Travels*, p. 186. Pelsaert also writes about 'a large enclosure, inhabited by the widows of the late king Akbar'. Palsaert, p. 3.
44. *Tuzuk*. I, p. 76.
45. Bernier, pp. 21, 166.
46. Pelsaert, pp. 2-3; De Laet, pp. 37-39.
47. Lahori, vol. I, pt. II, p. 541; vol. II, pt. I, p. 331.
48. Saleh, III, pp. 48-49.
49. Saksena, *History of Shahjahan*, p. 11.
50. *Tuzuk*. I, p. 12.
51. *Tarikh-i-Salim Shahi*, p. 215.
52. Pelsaert, p. 66; Terry, p. 330; Also Finch in *Early Travels*, p. 185.
53. Jourdain, John, pp. 162-63; Bernier, p. 246. Also Moreland, W.H. *From Akbar to Aurangzeb*, p. 197.
54. Finch in *Early Travels*, pp. 182, 185. Also *Tuzuk*, I, p. 3.
55. Pelsaert, p. 2.
56. *Ibid.*, p. 1.
57. *Tuzuk*. I, p. 3.
58. Finch in *Early Travels*, p. 165.
59. Pelsaert, p. 3.
60. Foster in *Early Travels*, p. 56; Also Pelsaert, p. 67.
61. Tavernier, I, p. 393.
62. Pelsaert, p. 66.



63. Bernier, p. 247.
64. *Ibid.*, p. 257.
65. Manucci, I, p. 87.
66. Bhakkari, Shaikh Farid, *Zakhirat-ul-Khawanin*, Ed. Moin-ul-Haq, Syed, Karachi, I, p. 87; Also *Maasir-ul-Umara*, Bib. Ind., II, p. 628.
67. Bernier, pp. 247-48.
68. Pelsaert, p. 67.
69. *Ibid.*, p. 64.
70. *Ibid.*. p. 67; Also Manucci, I, p. 87.
71. Terry, p. 60.
72. Pelsaert, pp. 64-65.
73. *Ibid.*, p. 1.
74. Bernier, p. 247.
75. Manucci, II, p. 467.
76. See *infra* Chapter VIII.
77. Manucci, II, p. 467.

CHAPTER IV

Supervision, Surveillance and Security

"The imperial harem constituted a town in itself," writes Vincent Smith and adds that "The maintenance and control of such a multitude of women necessitated a carefully devised system of internal administration and the organisation of adequate arrangements for discipline."[1] Management of a large harem was no easy matter. The problem is best summarised in the words of James Tod who in the context of the Rajput seraglio writes that "The government of the kingdom is but an amusement compared with such a task, for it is within the Rawala (Antapur or Rajput harem) that intrigue is enthroned."[2]

Akbar's genius for organisation and his rare capacity for grasping the minute details of any problem helped him to evolve an efficient administrative set up for his harem also. The administrative structure of the royal harem was conceived on the pattern of a full fledged government department. That is why in the days of Akbar "the imperial palace and household (were) in the best order,"[3] and continued to remain so during succeeding generations as well for, notwithstanding the large number of faithful guards in and outside the harem, "his majesty does not dispense with his own vigilance."[4] The king kept a close watch over everybody and everything. This, Abul Fazl writes about Akbar, but the statement holds good for all the Mughal Emperors who took special care for the supervision, surveillance and security of the seraglio.

Female Officers

The internal administration of the harem was placed under the charge of intelligent and active women called Daroghas, best translated as matrons by

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Manucci.[5] Many other officials—all women—like Mahaldars, Mushrifs, Tahwildars and Begis are also mentioned by Persian chroniclers. Broadly speaking, the female officers of the harem were divided into three main sections: the high (*Mahin banu*), the middle (*Paristaran-i-hudur*) and the low.[6] The first two grades comprised the superior staff of the *Mahal*, the rest belonged to the cadres of maids and slave-girls. The Mahaldar was the chief lady officer and kept an eye on all important matters. Tehwildar was the lady accounts officer and cashier to whom all officials, including Daroghas, had to apply for their salaries. Mushrifs were superintendents and Begis were women guards stationed at the gates of the female apartments. The duties of the female palace officials sometimes interchanged, telescoped and overlapped. Yet all the above mentioned officers served as advisers, superintendents and guards. This set up continued throughout the Mughal period beginning with Akbar, with occasional additions of one or two officers with new designations.[7]

The Daroghas were appointed by the emperor. Many of them rose "from the dust of obscurity" and were elevated because of merit to the several higher ranks of service in the seraglio.[8] Many senior matrons belonged to high families and were well-educated. They were witty, judged well and kept abreast of the happenings in the empire. Great esteem and importance was attached to the office of Daroghas as is evident from the fact that Ismat Begum, mother-in-law of Jahangir, was one of them. Jahangir says about her that "Of the amiable qualities of the matron (Qadbanu) of the family of chastity, what can I write?"[9] It was an honour to serve as a matron. The king was supreme and it was a custom to appoint even sons and daughters of nobles as servants in the harem.[10] "The way in which," writes Manucci, "these kings are waited upon by these women in their Mahal deserves mention. For just as the king has his officers outside, he has the same among the fair sex within the Mahal."[11] From among the Daroghas were probably selected the Mahaldars and Vakils, officers whose influence was great. Sati Khanum and Nur-un-nisa were from among them.[12] Reports of Waqia Nawis and Khufia Nawis (newswriters) were read out to the king by them. To these reports the women officials replied as directed by the king. "It is by the mouth of these illustrious persons, when the king does not come forth, that the officials outside receive the orders sent them from within."[13] Naturally, persons employed as matrons were carefully selected. Some of the educated matrons were appointed as instructors to the princesses.[14]

Matrons of the second grade served as supervisors. They were in charge of the general administration but perhaps their most arduous duty was to keep control over maidservants and dancing girls. They were divided into sections, and the emperor kept them "attentive to their duties."[15] There was an hierarchical set up and, according to the *Ain-i-Akbari*, each matron was in charge of a section



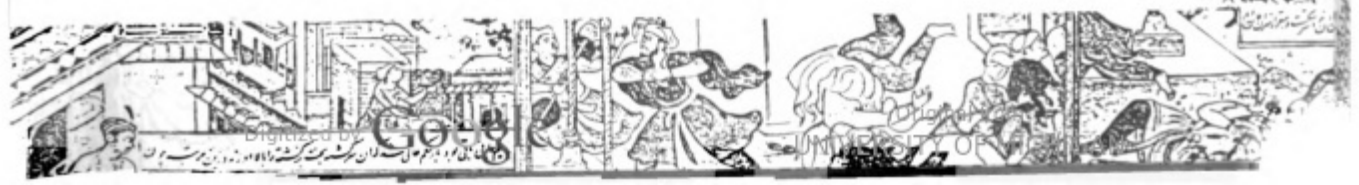
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or a group of sections of subordinates. Manucci confirming this fixes the number of each section at ten. He was well aware of their duties and obligations, knew some of the matrons personally, and mentions the names of several of them. His list contains names such as Niyaz Bibi Banu, Qadir Bibi Banu, Gul Sultan Banu, Simtan Banu, Mihr Nigar Banu, Hira Bai Banu, Naval Bai Banu, Manik Banu, etc. These names were bestowed on them by the then kings Shahjahan and Aurangzeb. Significantly, they all end with the suffix Banu. It was the duty of the matrons to report to their appropriate superiors about all that went on in the *Mahal*, particularly when something went wrong.

The Tahwildar was in charge of accounts. A strict check was kept on the expenditure of the harem which was considerable. The accounts officers had a large staff, for it was their duty to disburse salaries, etc. to the inmates. "If a woman wants anything", writes Abul Fazl, "within the limit of her salary, she applies to one of the Tahwildars (cash-keepers) of the seraglio. The Tahwildar then sends a memorandum to the writer, who checks it, when the General Treasurer makes the payment in cash..... The writer also makes an estimate of the annual expenditure."[16] Abul Fazl continues with further details about the restraints on payment on harem-account, but this need not detain us. It would suffice to say that since all the inmates of the harem were paid salaries and emoluments fixed by the king, the Tahwildar maintained a supervisory control over them as she held strings of the purse.

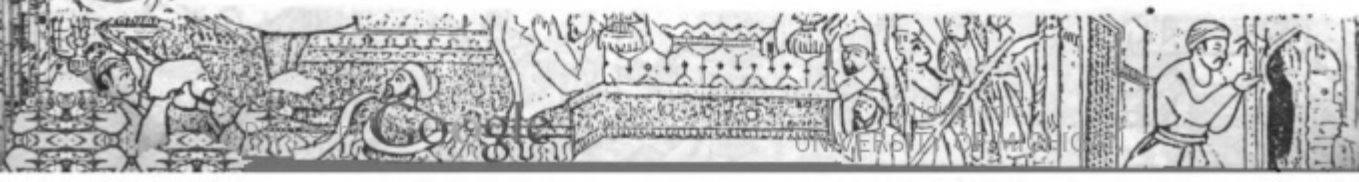
By the time of Aurangzeb, the Mahaldar became probably the most important officer inside the harem. The king was shrewd and cautious. Begis and Daroghas were capable of maintaining control and discipline over the inmates of the harem, but what about the highest echelons? Who was to watch the queens and princesses, and more particularly maintain discipline among young princes? This duty devolved on the Mahaldar. She was the chief supervisor and sort of king's spy in the *Mahal*. She kept the king informed about the activities of the top personalities in the harem and even princes were punished if reported against by the Mahaldar. Hamida Banu, the Mahaldar of the harem of Prince Muhammad Muazzam (later emperor Bahadur Shah), was instructed by the king to be present in person or ask her deputy Sharf-un-nisa to be present whenever the prince wanted to have her pen-case and memorandum book (in which she wrote confidential notes?). But the prince resorted to taking the pen-case and memorandum book in his private chamber "very often at night...where his beloved ones came." This Hamida Banu reported to Aurangzeb from Multan saying, "out of regard for etiquette, it is not allowed by the court regulations that the Mahaldar should be present at that time (when the prince was in the company of his ladies)." Aurangzeb ordered her not to leave the pen-case and Register with the prince under any circumstances.[17] On another occasion Bahroz Khan, the Nazir or





chief eunuch of prince Muhammad Azam, reported to the Emperor that "The prince has behaved badly towards Nur-un-nisa, the Mahaldar, so that he did not take her with himself (on his visits) to the imperial garden at Ahmedabad. The Mahaldar sent a letter outside (the harem to me) forbidding the prince's journey. So, this slave (i.e. Bahroz) came and stopped the riding out of the prince in the absence of any order (from the Emperor)." The prince expelled the Mahaldar from his assembly. The emperor upheld the action of the Nazir, and the prince was so much frightened that he at once submitted a petition through his sister, "begging pardon for his offences." Still he was fined fifty thousand rupees.[18] Aurangzeb reposed great trust in his Mahaldar Aia Bega. In his last will and testament he wrote: "Four rupees and two annas, out of the price of the caps sewn by me, are with Aia Bega, the Mahaldar. Take the amount and spend it on the shroud of this helpless creature."[19]

There were reasons why the Mughal kings trusted the Mahaldars and other lady officers so much. The king lived in the harem, slept in the harem and took his meals in the harem. His safety to a great measure depended upon the loyalty of harem officials. There was always danger of being poisoned, so that even drinking water was entrusted to the care of reliable servants who kept it properly sealed.[20] Extra precaution was taken in the 'Imperial Kitchen' in preparing and serving meals.[21] Abul Fazl writes that "Trustworthy and experienced people are appointed to this Department...Their head is assisted by the Prime Minister himself. His Majesty appoints a zealous and sincere man as Mir Bakawal, or Master of the Kitchen...and gives him several upright persons as assistants... Bad characters, idle talkers, unknown persons are never employed; no one is entertained without a personal security, nor is personal acquaintance sufficient... During the time of cooking, and when the victuals are taken out, an awning is spread and lookers on kept away... the cook and the Bakawal taste it.... The Mir Bakawal attaches his seal, and writes on it the name of the contents...(so) that none of the dishes may be changed." There was a special seal with a peculiar engraving "for all matters connected with the seraglio."[22] The servants of the palace again tasted the food before serving it. "The Mir Bakawal (was) always in attendance."[23] In this way security arrangements with regard to meals were made fool-proof, more so after the sad experience of Babur in Hindustan. As an extra precaution the kings avoided dining out. Akbar generally 'dined privately', reclining on a couch.[24] Jahangir also avoided drinking and eating outside.[25] He did not eat even at the mansion of Aitmad-ud-daula, his father-in-law. Once on a visit to Aitmad-ud-daula, says he, "I remained there till a watch of the night had passed, and then feeling inclined for food I went back to the royal quarters."[26] Terry also noted that the king always "eats among his women in private on great variety of meats always kept ready."[27] Jahan Ara Begum checked every dish before it was served





to Shahjahan.[28]

Similarly, strict security was maintained around the king's bedroom. Abul Fazl says that "The inside of the Harem is guarded by sober and active women; the most trustworthy of them are placed about the apartments of his Majesty."[29] The interior was looked after by Mahaldars and Daroghas, at the doors of the seraglio were posted on guard duty many armed Habshi, Tatar, Turki and Kashmiri women. Armed women or Urdu Begis find mention even in the times of Babur and Humayun, but their importance grew with time and the size of the harem. They were well-versed in the use of bows and arrows. Their duty was "to carry away (inside the harem) and bring back (from it) anything that was necessary." It is interesting to note that then, as at present, the Kashmiri women were generally without *parda*.[30] The cadres of armed women of all kinds was constantly reinforced. When in 1661-62 an embassy was sent by the king of Balkh, "the envoys brought several Tartar and Uzbeg women with them for sale. Aurangzeb purchased some of them. They were placed in the list of numerous Kashgar, Qalmaq, Pathan and Abyssinian women. They were chosen because they are war-like and skilful in the use of lance, arrow and sword."[31] They formed a ferocious band, and the one reason why Aurangzeb did not call on Shahjahan during the War of Succession was his fear of being killed by such armed women-guards of the *Mahal*. Later on, in 1719, when Farrukh Siyar for fear of his life took refuge in his harem, and his opponents tried to enter it, "the women, the Abyssinians and the Turks, all prepared to fight."[32]

In brief, the matrons or Daroghas maintained discipline, imparted education to small maidens, kept an eye on the activities of the young ladies, performed the duties of secretaries and bureaucrats and reported to the king about any untoward happening. The Tahwildar exercised control over the finances of the ladies, and though her authority was indirect, it was no less effective. The Mahaldar watched and kept under discipline even powerful princes and princesses. The armed Begis, of course, guarded the King's bed chamber and protected the *Mahal*. That is why harem officials were trusted and treated with deference by the King. But the atmosphere in the harem was not one of constant eavesdropping. All the lady officials were good mixers. There were many others like astrologers, soothsayers and those who knew the art of amulet making.[33] Being ladies, they all wore fine clothes and jewellery and decorated their hands with henna or *mehndi*.[34] Their principal recreation, relaxation and hobby was to chew betel, play games, and tell stories.[35] The atmosphere of the seraglio was one of lethargic relaxation.

The harem-officers were paid well and regularly; they lived well. Their salaries were sufficiently liberal. Under Akbar, the matrons got so much as 1028 to 1610 rupees a month. Junior officials were paid 20 to 50 rupees, while the lower staff got 2 to 40, "not counting the presents which his Majesty most generously



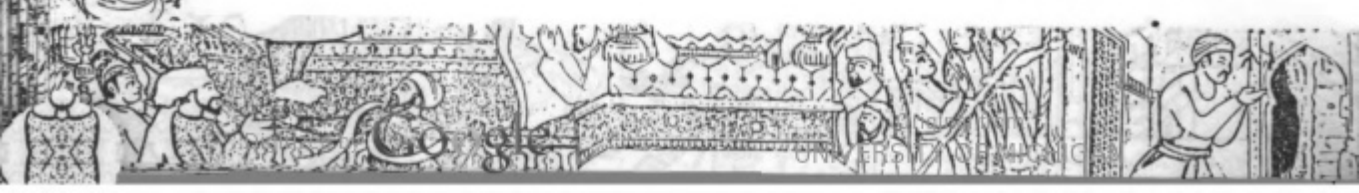


bestows."[36] Even two rupees should not be considered too low a pay as the salary of a clerk too was, in the days of Akbar, two rupees only. By the time of Aurangzeb, the salary of the juniors had risen between 300 to 500 and the lower staff from 50 to 200 rupees.[37] This rise was probably due to inflation. Manucci says that as compared with the other officers of the empire, the servants of the queens and princesses "were more regularly paid and did not endure so much (inconvenience) as the others."[38] Besides, confidants of the king as they were, many among them were pampered and made lot of extra money. Aqa Aqayan was a maid of Jahangir. She served him for 33 years and was much devoted to him and his harem. In her old age she shifted to Delhi and was prosperous enough to "build a garden, a saray and a tomb." On her request the emperor even paid her a visit once.[39] On another occasion, when a maid was found guilty of kissing a eunuch which resulted in the confiscation of her property, Roe and Terry noted that her assets amounted to one lakh sixty thousand rupees in cash and jewellery.[40] If such wealth could be accumulated by the lower staff, surely it is a pointer towards the affluence of the harem officials.

Eunuchs and Nazirs

Outside the enclosure or the haremsara were stationed the eunuchs. The word eunuch is derived from the Greek '*eunoukhos*' which literally means bed chamber attendant. Eunuchs were an important institution of the medieval Muslim world; a harem without them was inconceivable.[41] In Mughal India they were known as Khwaja Sara and were appointed on guard duty in the seraglio. The senior eunuchs or Khwaja Saras were called Nazirs. Each of these had a number of other eunuchs under him. Their cadre was hierarchical. According to Manucci, "there is always one set above the rest who directs and looks after everything that goes on in the Mahal."[42]

The chief Nazir enjoyed the title of Aitmad or Aitbar Khan (the Trusted Lord). One Aitbar Khan was in the service of Babur and Humayun. In the second year of Akbar's reign he chaperoned Akbar's mother and other Begums from Kabul to Hindustan. As a reward for his devotion to duty, the emperor appointed him governor of Delhi where he died.[43] Another eunuch with the title of Aitmad Khan rendered still greater service to the Mughals. His original name was Phool Malik and he was earlier in the service of Salim Shah Sur (C.E. 1545-1553). Salim Shah Sur honoured him with the title of Muhammad Khan. When Akbar came to the throne, Muhammad Khan entered the service of the Mughal Emperor who entrusted him with the task of improving the finances of the state damaged by Maham Anaga. He made him a commander of one thousand and conferred upon





him the title of Aitmad Khan.[44] In 1565, Aitmad Khan escorted the daughter of Miran Mubarak Shah, King of Khandesh (1555-1566) to Akbar's harem.[45] Afterwards he took part in the conquest of Bengal and in 1576, was appointed governor of Bhakkar.[46] He finds a place in the list of Akbar's grandees. Aitmad Khan built Itmadpur, six *kos* from Agra. He possessed there a villa and a large tank. After his death he was buried there.[47] Sultan Mahmud of Gujarat had a eunuch Aitmad Khan whom he greatly trusted.[48] Later on this eunuch joined Akbar's service. He went on a pilgrimage to Mecca and brought a huge stone which was said to contain an impression of the foot of the prophet.[49] He was appointed governor of Gujarat and was a commander of Four Thousand.[50] Aitbar Khan, the chief eunuch of Jahangir was the governor of Agra city. He had his own 'palaces', like "the costly palaces of all the famous lords on the waterfront" of river Jumna in Agra.[51] Aitbar Khan was a favourite of Jahangir, and the rebel prince Khusrau was placed in his charge for some time. An eunuch, Firoz Khan was conferred a mansab of 1500/600 by Jahangir.[52]

Many Khwaja Saras and Nazirs thus were men of importance. Some of them rose to the position of Mansabdars, commanders of armies and governors of Subahs. Bakhtawar Khan (d. 1095 H/C.E. 1698), superintendent of the eunuchs under Aurangzeb, held the rank of 1000. He turned out to be a scholar and a historian and wrote the *Mirat-ul-Alam* and the *Mirat-i-Jahan Numa*. He also prepared an abridgement of the *Tarikh-i-Alfi* and the *Akhbar-ul-Akhiyar*.[53] But they excelled mainly as officers of the harem and loyalty elevated them to great heights. According to Manucci, the chief Nazir of the seraglio "is highly esteemed by the King. He has a large allowance, has charge of treasury, is master of wardrobe, decides on the details and the pattern of Sarapas (robes) to be prepared; in short, it is he who has charge of all the Mahal expenditure of the clothes, the linen, and the precious stones, of the jewellery, of everything that goes into or comes out of the palace."[54] Such a powerful person could easily amass wealth as was done by Nazir-ud-daula, an important eunuch of Akbar. "In the receipt of bribes", writes Jahangir, "there was not his second in the empire", and he left on his death *crores* of *ashrafis* and jewels.[55] Of course escheat brought all this wealth back to the imperial treasury, but it shows the importance of the office of the chief eunuch. Manucci gives a list of about forty nazirs of the time of Aurangzeb, each of whom had a separate title bestowed upon him by the king, like Nadir, Daniyal, Danish, Daulat, Yusuf, Yaqut, Almas, Maqbul, Neknam, Amanat and Aitbar. By their loyalty and nearness to the king and queens, the eunuchs could wield great influence in government and politics.[56] During the later Mughals three eunuchs, Mian Khushfahan, Mian Arjmand and Mian Mahabat even ruled the state on behalf of Mughalani Begum (1754-1756).[57]

Of the subordinate eunuchs, some worked as messengers in the harem, others





were posted at the doors to watch whoever went in or out of the *Mahal*. Entry of men inside the *Mahal* was meticulously checked by them. Whenever a mason was let in, his name, physiognamy and other details were carefully noted down on paper and verified at many check points.[58] Physicians who went inside the harem to treat patients were similarly scrutinized. Bernier went to the seraglio on one such occasion. "But a Kashmir shawl covered my head," writes he, "hanging like a large scarf down my feet, and an eunuch led me by the hand, as if I had been a blind man."[59] Bernier was blind-folded and so was Manucci who adds that, "the eunuchs lead them their heads covered with something thick and brought back equipped in the same fashion."[60] Thus the eunuchs saw to it that no unauthorised person entered the seraglio, and when some one was permitted to enter, the requirements of the *parda* were scrupulously observed. Even when any lady came to pay a visit, if she was not known, she was also searched, no respect being shown to the position or rank of the person. "What forces the eunuchs to such strict measure is the continual fear... that some young man in disguise may enter in female dress."[61] Badaoni knew some men dressed as women and *vice versa*.[62] Consequently, the surveillance by the eunuchs had to be thorough.

The presence of eunuchs had far-reaching repurcussions on society. In matters of women the medieval period was an age of haves and have-nots. On the one hand kings, princes, nobles and the elite had large seraglios; on the other, men in thousands were emasculated simply to serve as domestics or guards in their female apartments. In the Middle Ages there were many slave markets in Muslim cities in India and outside, and trade in slaves and eunuchs was a regular practice.[63] Many slaves and eunuchs were imported at high cost from outside, many others were bought within the country. The practice of coverting men into eunuchs was very common in Bengal, particularly in Sylhet, probably because Bengal was over populated and poorer than the rest of India.[64] Therefore, in Sylhet, it had become a custom for people to castrate a few of their sons and pay the revenue to the governor in that kind.[65] Many other states followed suit.[66] By the time of Jahangir this 'abominable' custom of castrating young boys had reached such dimensions that the emperor had to issue orders repeatedly for the suppression of the practice.[67] In 1668, Aurangzeb also prohibited castration of young children throughout the empire.[68] In spite of this young boys continued to be transformed into eunuchs and Jahangir and his successors went on accepting eunuchs as gifts[69] for guarding their harems.

It is difficult to say how far these unfortunate humans suffered on account of their disability, psychologically or otherwise. Francois Bernier, however, faithfully conveys the prevalent notions about them. He avers that "Emasculation, say the Indians, produces a different effect upon men than upon the brute creation; it renders the latter gentle and tractable; but who is the eunuch, they ask, that is not





vicious, arrogant and cruel?[70] It is in vain to deny however, that many among them are exceedingly faithful, generous and brave."[71] Thus on the one hand eunuchs could be trusted, they could be entrusted with responsibilities because they could nurse no private ambition. They could have no *zenana* of their own, no children and no heirs, and their wealth was after all to become the property of their masters. On the other hand, some of them could entertain feelings of hatred and treachery because of their irreparable physical damage. Aitbar Khan, so much trusted by Aurangzeb as to have been placed in charge of Shahjahan in captivity, remained bitter about his incapacity for ever. Once his parents came all the way from Bengal to see him but he refused to meet them. He castigated them for depriving him "of the great pleasures attainable in this world."[72] It was perhaps this psychological kink which made him extremely cruel and he treated Shahjahan in prison with flagrant disregard and harshness. Ghulam Qadir's castration and psychological humiliation was probably the cause of his excessive cruelty during the time of the later Mughals.

Just the reverse was the case with Daulat Khan. Daulat was a faithful slave of Ali Mardan Khan, the Persian governor of Qandhar who had surrendered the fort to Shahjahan in 1638, and thereafter had taken service under him. On Ali Mardan's death in 1657, Daulat Khan carried his master's body to Persia to bury it in his homeland in deference to his wish. The fact was brought to the notice of the Shah of Persia who directed the 'traitor' Ali Mardan's remains to be burnt instead of buried and the eunuch's nose and ears to be cut off. The mutilated Daulat returned to India and contacted surgeons to somehow restore his nose and ears through rhinoplasty. When this could not be done, he accepted his deformity in a jocular way saying: "I know not what sins I have committed to be made an out and out eunuch twice, first in my inferior part and secondly in my upper half...."[73] So, in spite of a few eunuchs reaching great heights, most of them lived a wretched life. They served within the narrow limits of the harem. That is why they were ignored outside. For example, they are not represented in any Mughal paintings. There are paintings of kings and nobles, there are paintings of princesses and slave-girls. There are paintings depicting various harem scenes. There are paintings of even *Kanchanis* and dancing girls. But there are hardly any portraits of eunuchs. That indicates their unenviable position.

However, whether happy or unhappy they performed their duties with devotion. Good salary, consciousness of responsibility, traditional loyalty, resignation to fate, and fear of the king combined to make them good guards of the harem. The eunuch Khwaja Niamat saved emperor Akbar in the harem from an attempted assassination.[74] Akbar on his part, treated the eunuchs well.[75] They were ever present with the king for service.[76] They closed all the gates of the *Mahal* at sunset.[77] "It was essential," writes Bernier, "not only to the honour of his (Mughal Em-



peror's) house, but even to his personal safety, that the entrance into the seraglio should be vigilantly guarded."[78] Undoubtedly the seraglio of the size of the Mughal harem could be a security hazard if not properly supervised and this responsibility to a large extent devolved on the eunuchs who 'minutely guarded' the doors leading to the harem.[79] William Finch rightly observes that the doors of the harem were bolted from outside,[80] for the security of the harem was not the responsibility of its inmates; it was the responsibility of the female guards and Khwaja Saras.

Security of the Mahal

As a means of further protection, contingents of Rajputs were stationed outside the palace. Many nobles, Ahadis and other troops, were also posted along with them. "The *Omrahs* on guard have their table supplied by the king. Every meal is sent to them ready dressed."[81] If any soldier absented himself without a proper excuse, or from laziness, he was fined one week's pay, or received "suitable reprimand."[82] The custom of appointing Rajput guards originated during Akbar's time and was continued right up to the beginning of the eighteenth century. The trust reposed in them was never betrayed. For instance, in Aurangzeb's reign when the Marathas attacked the camp of Jahan Banu Begum, it was defended with chivalrous courage by the Rajputs under Anurudh Singh. For this gallantry he was publicly rewarded by the Begum. She took out her pearl necklace she was wearing and placed it round the neck of Anurudh Singh, "a rare honour undreamt of by any servant of the State."[83]

The guards changed duties once in the day. The Rajputs and other nobles mounted guard at five O'clock in the evening and changed duty every twenty-four hours.[84] Likewise, the women guards of the *Mahal* changed guard at the end of the day. "Every day, at about five in the afternoon, they (the women guards) paid respect to His Majesty and departed."[85] The king himself was very particular about the security of his harem. Once when Prince Khusrau was in revolt, Jahangir did not think it wise to "leave Agra empty, as it was the centre of the State, the abode of the ladies of the holy harem, and the depository of the world's treasures."[86] Thus the security arrangements of the *Mahal* were excellent.

The Harem on the Move

Equally good were the arrangements for the supervision and security of the harem during a journey. The inmates of the harem were often on the move, travel-

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ling with the king, and living in camp. "Out of his thirty-two years of rule Shahjahan was for about half the time away from the capital of the Empire."[87] And so was his harem accompanying him. And what is true of Shahjahan is true of all Mughal Emperors, at least up to the time of Aurangzeb. As an impetus to the military depotism, to fulfill their expansionist ambitions, to oversee the working of provincial governments, to gratify their curiosity about the land they ruled, and to go on pleasure trips or hunting expeditions, it was necessary for the monarchs to spend 'most of their life in camp'. It is well known that to the Mughals chase and hunt were pastime. Jahangir went on hunting excursions with his ladies and stayed in camp often for two to three months.[88] Besides, with the change in seasons, the Mughal kings were tempted by taste and fashion to withdraw to a purer air from the smoke[89] and tumult of the capital to cool resorts like Kashmir.[90]

On long journeys, important harem ladies travelled on elephants, while others used camels, carts and other conveyances. *Parda* was observed throughout. When they were to mount on elephant, it was taken into a tent erected for the purpose, for maintaining privacy. The *mahawat* too covered his head with a piece of cloth so as to avoid seeing them even by chance.[91] Large and small carriages were also used for travelling. "His Majesty (Akbar)... invented a large cart, which is drawn by one elephant. It is made sufficiently large so as to hold several bath rooms.... It is also easily drawn by cattle. Camels and horses are also used for pulling carriages.... Finely built carriages are called, *bahals.*"[92] A litter like contrivance called *Khajawa*, hung between two elephants or camels[93] and covered with *khas* screens during summer, was another very comfortable mode of conveyance. In Jahangir's time *rath-i-angrezi* or English carriages were also in use.[94] Pictures of various covered conveyances like elephant-*ambaris, chandols,* camel litters and *palkis* have been drawn by Mughal artists. Abul Hasan has left paintings of these in colour.[95] They appear to be completely covered from all sides, like sealed boxes. However, there was provision for ventilation. The ladies did not suffocate nor suffer from claustrophobia, for the "princesses and nobles' wives were shut up in such a manner that they cannot be seen, although they can observe the passer-by."[96]

The desire for ostentation made the procession of royal ladies pompous. During the reign of Akbar, the harem cavalcade was not so showy. According to Father Monserrate, the Queens rode on female elephants, hidden in gaily decorated howdas. They were guarded and escorted by 500 old men of "dignified and venerable appearance." Sometimes one of the sons of the emperor escorted them.[97] Care was taken to drive away any intruders or curious onlookers all along the route of travel. In course of time this procession became showy, elegant and sophisticated.[98]

While travelling these ladies were inaccessible to the sight of man. "Woe to

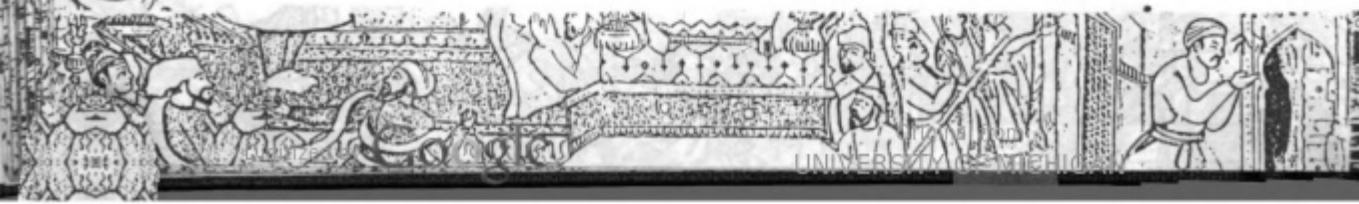


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any unlucky cavalier, however exalted in rank, who, meeting the procession, is found too near. Nothing can exceed the insolence of the tribes of eunuchs and footmen which he has to encounter, and they eagerly avail themselves of any such opportunity to beat a man in the most unmerciful manner..."[99] But there were also people who could not resist the temptation of having a glimpse of 'queens' and 'princesses'. Once Nur Jahan was enjoying cool breeze on the screened terrace. All of a sudden she noticed that a man was staring at her from the ground below. She was so annoyed that she ordered his death. On another occasion, in Srinagar, Jahan Ara Begum saw a man hiding behind a bush and watching her intently. When found out, he muttered a very impressive verse praising her beauty. She ordered him to be banished from the city, although she rewarded him for the couplet.[100] The curiosity to glance at the queens and princesses while on journey was rightly repelled by the alert and stern eunuchs and guards. *Parda* and security were maintained throughout. Travel over short distance within the city was also undertaken on elephants, *palkis, chandols* and other lighter conveyances.[101] It may be mentioned in passing that the ladies of great nobles like Jafar Khan also travelled in the same manner and dignity.[102]

The long distance journey of the harem was leisurely. The usual rate of travelling with the ladies was five *kos* or about ten miles a day,[103] as compared with the march of the army on a campaign when it was twenty to twenty-four miles.[104] The journey from Agra to Kashmir and back used to take more than three and a half months each way. Travel even from Lahore to Agra took seventy days including halts.[105] Coryat was delighted to travel on the Agra-Lahore road "through such a delicate and even tract ground as I never saw before... a row of trees on each side of this way."[106] There were avenues of trees from Agra to Attock and from Agra to Bengal. Furthermore, nobles always made it a point to plant trees.[107] Terry adds that trees were all the year "clothed with leaves, exceeding beneficial unto travellers for the shade they afford them in those hot climates (so that) this very much extended length of way is called by travellers the long walk."[108] But the journey was not always that pleasant. Bernier, who accompanied his 'nawab' Danishmand Khan on the journey of Emperor Aurangzeb to Kashmir in 1664, was bored and tired when he had to travel for more than three months. They had left Delhi on 6 December 1664, reached Bhimbar on 14 March of the following year and Srinagar five days later.[109] The march was full of dust.[110] The journey proved unfortunate in another way too. When the caravan was ascending the Pir Panjal mountains, "from which a distant view of the kingdom of Kashmir is first obtained", an accident took place. The king was followed by a long line of elephants, upon which sat the ladies in their *mikdembars* and *ambaris*. The leading elephant stumbled, pushing the one coming immediately behind. He pushed against the third elephant and so on until fifteen of them fell down the precipice



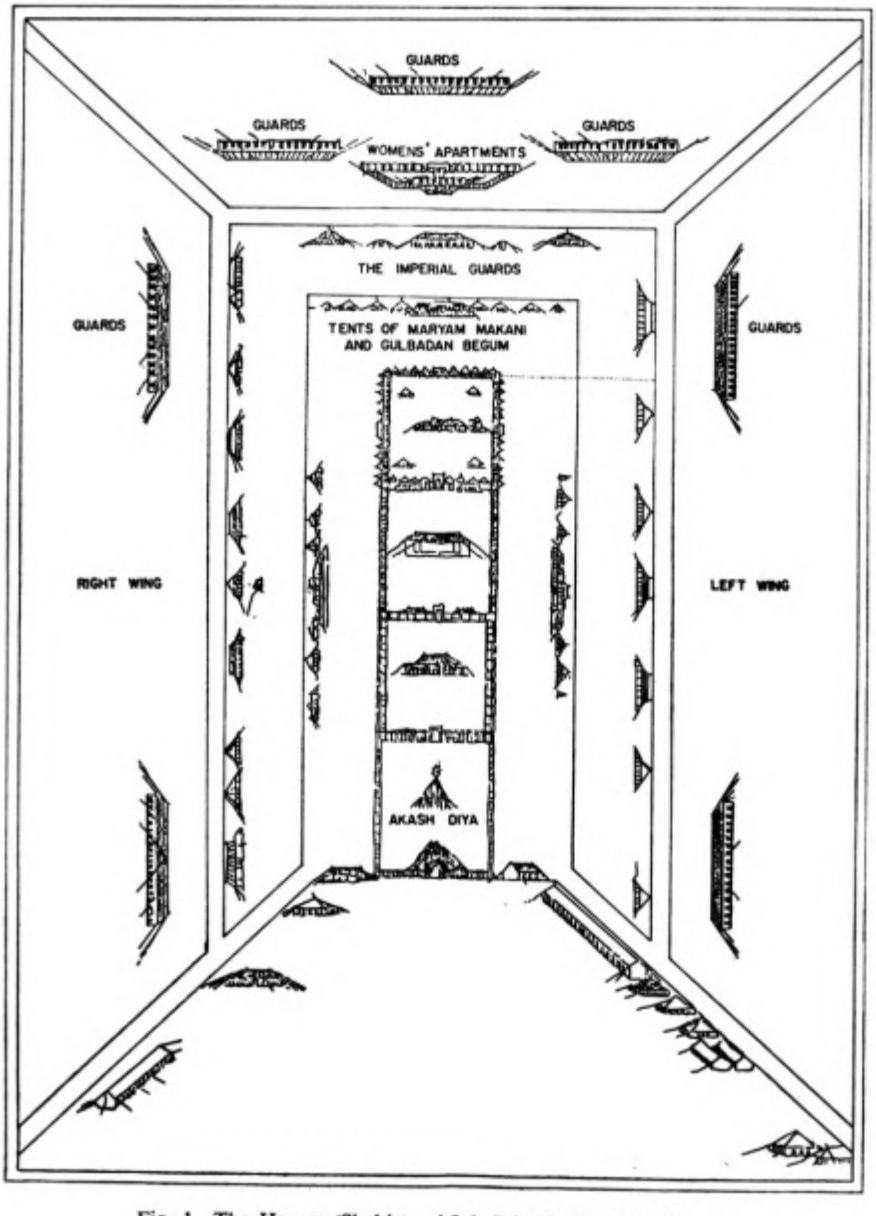


Fig. 1 The Harem (Shabistan-i-Iqbal) in the Imperial Camp
Sketched in Blochmann's *Ain-i-Akbari* Pl. IV.

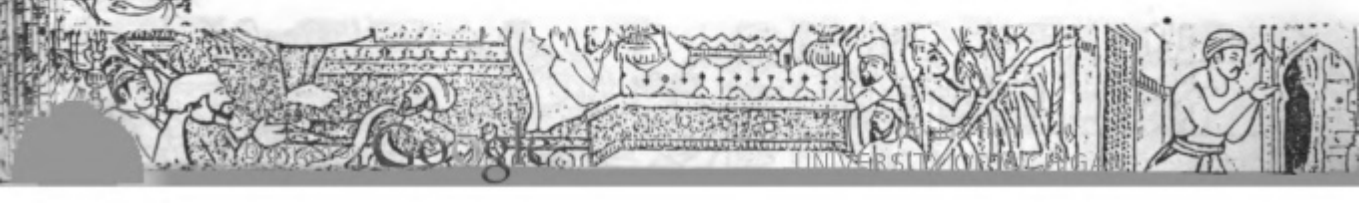
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with their loads of fair ones. Happily the place where the ladies fell down was of no great height; only three or four of them were killed; but there were no means of saving any of the elephants who all perished in great agony. The remainder of the day and the following night, were employed in rescuing the screaming and shouting princesses and other ladies and their effects like bundles of beautiful silks, peacock fans and caskets spilling scents and cosmetics and precious stones. This cast a gloom dampening all pleasure and the troops were under the necessity of halting during the whole of that time.[111] Such accidents were few if not rare. However, once in Srinagar, everybody forgot about the suffering because there was the Jhelum, the Dal Lake, the Hari Parbat and the Takht-i-Suleiman. And since it was the spring season, Nasim Bagh, Nishat Bagh and the Shalimar gardens were blooming in flowers of unbridled colours, beauteous forms and scents.

The Harem in Camp

The harem in camp lived under canvas. There were two separate sets of tents which used to be frog-leaped. One was meant for camping and the other sent ahead in advance to be put up at the next stage of encampment. The Mir Manzil went forward with men and materials, fixed the camp and awaited the arrival of the king. In Akbar's time each camp establishment required for its transport 100 elephants, 500 camels, 400 carts and a hundred bearers. It was escorted by 500 troopers. Besides, there were 100 *farrashes,* 500 pioneers, 100 water-carriers, 50 carpenters, tent makers, torch bearers, 30 workers in leather, and 150 sweepers.[112] New and more new designs of tents were prepared for greater comfort. Humayun had invented a tent called *mihr amez. Mihr* means sun. The tent probably allowed lot of sunlight to enter. Another of his innovations was a tent which had twelve divisions. Every division "had lattices through the interstices of which there shown the light of the stars of dominion."[113] Like the *mihr amez*, Akbar also designed many tents for greater comfort. The large sized ones, some of which were three storeys high, used to be made of timber (*chubin*) which could be erected or dismantled whenever and wherever necessary. Definite rules about the fixing and striking of tents were laid down. Abul Fazl gives a detailed description of the camp with tents erected for holding Diwan-i-Khass, Diwan-i-Am, etc. Behind the *darbar* tents was the seraglio which was even more comfortable and luxurious. About the encampment of the harem he observes that "Outside of it (i.e. court and office tents) twentyfour *chubin raotis* are erected ten yards long and six yards wide, each separated by a canvas, where the favourite women reside. There are also other pavilions and



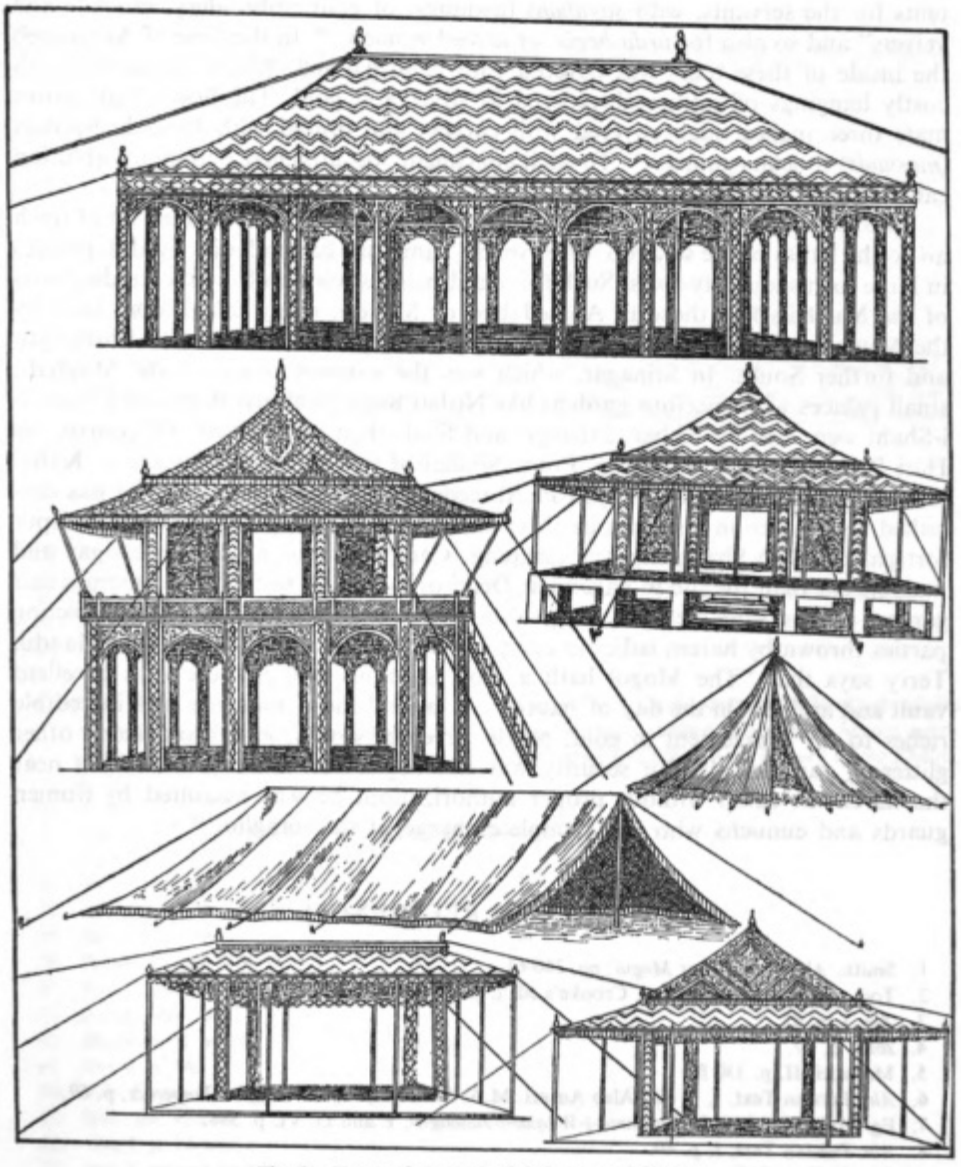


Fig. 2 Tents of the Imperial Camp and Harem

tents for the servants, with *sayabans* (awnings) of gold embroidery, brocade and velvets" and so also for *urdu begis* or armed women.[114] In the time of Aurangzeb the inside of these tents was covered with hand-painted chintzes decorated with costly hangings of satin embroidered in silver and gold. The floors had cotton mats three inches thick covered with carpets and dotted with brocade bolsters (*masnads*) to lean against.[115] To each apartment was attached a room for ablution called Sihat Khana by Akbar.

Life in the camp afforded a glimpse of the countryside and provided lot of fresh air to the ladies of the seraglio. Else even in 'camp' the harem ladies lived in palaces in large towns and city-forts, Such forts and palaces were built by the predecessors of the Mughals like those in Ahmedabad or Mandu, many others were built by the Mughals themselves in all parts of the country from Kashmir to Burhanpur and further South. In Srinagar, which was the summer resort of the Mughals, small palaces with spacious gardens like Nishat Bagh, Shalimar Bagh and Chashm-i-Shahi were laid by Akbar, Jahangir and Shahjahan respectively. Of course, the Hari Parbat fort too was there. From Allahabad to Lahore and Lahore to Kabul there were forts. Jahangir stayed in Ahmedabad for some years and he has described his sojourn in his memoirs. Mumtaz Mahall breathed her last at Burhanpur fort-palace when Shahjahan was camping. Camp life was in no way less gay and magnificent than the life in palaces at Delhi or Agra. All festivals, ceremonies and garden parties were held in camp also. There are Mughal paintings depicting parties thrown by harem ladies in camp.[116] Describing Jahangir's stay at Mandu, Terry says that "The Mogol hath a most spacious house, there with excellent vault and arches. On the day of nauroz... I beheld most immense and incredible riches to my amazement in gold, pearls, precious stones, jewels and many other glittering vanities."[117] But security was not neglected. If any officer went near the harem in camp without proper authorization, he was assaulted by women guards and eunuchs who had complete charge of the seraglio.[118] Pl. 5

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Smith, *Akbar the Great Mogul*, pp. 260-61.
2. Tod, *Annals and Antiquities*, Crooke's ed. I, p. 358.
3. *Ain.* I, p. 45.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 47.
5. Manucci, II, p. 330 ff.
6. *Ain.* Persian Text, I, p. 40; Also Ansari, M.A. *Social Life of the Mughal Emperors*, p. 69.
7. Eg. Muhammad Hadi, *Tatimma-i-Waqiat-i-Jahangiri*, E and D, VI, p. 398.
8. *Ain.* Persian Text, I, p. 40.
9. *Tuzuk*, II, p. 216.
10. *Ibid.*, I, p. 137.

11. Manucci, II, p. 331.
12. Hamid-ud-din Bahadur, *Ahkam-i-Alamgiri*, Text p. 29. English translation by Jadunath Sarkar (Calcutta 1912), p. 69.
13. Manucci, II, p. 331.
14. *loc. cit.*
15. *Ain.* I, p. 46.
16. *loc. cit.*
17. *Ahkam-i-Alamgiri, op.cit.*, p. 65.
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 71-72.
19. *Ahkam i-Alamgiri, op. cit.*, (1949 ed), p. 46
20. Jauhar, p. 111.
    Also *Ain.* I, p. 60.
21. Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 243
22. *Ain.* I, p. 54. It would be interesting to know how sealing wax was made. "The sealing wax," writes Abul Fazl, "is made of the gum of the Kunar, the Bar and the Pipal, and the other trees. Like wax, it gets warm when exposed to fire, but gets afterwards cool and hard." *Ain.* I, p. 274.
23. *Ain.* I, pp. 59-61.
24. Monserrate, Hoyland and Banerjee, p. 199.
25. *Tuzuk*, I, pp. 318-319, 351; II, p. 100.
26. *Ibid.*, I, p. 351.
27. Terry, in *Early Travels*, p. 311.
28. Bernier, p. 12.
29. *Ain.* I, pp. 46-47.
30. Manucci, II, p. 352.
31. *Ibid.*, II, pp. 42-43.
32. Khafi Khan, Text II, pp. 810-815, E and D, VII, pp. 477-478. Three centuries earlier Qutb-ud-din Mubarak Shah (1316-20) fearing an attack by Khusrau Khan dashed towards the female apartments. But before he could reach it, he was overpowered and killed. Lal, *History of the Khaljis*, p. 307.
33. *Tuzuk*, II, p. 235.
34. Manucci, II, pp. 185-86. Also Badaoni as translated in E and D, V, p. 484.
35. Manucci, I, p. 63.
36. *Ain.* I, p. 46.
37. Manucci, II, p. 330.
38. *Ibid.*, II, p. 390.
39. *Tuzuk*, II, pp. 110-11.
40. Roe, p. 215.
41. Jauhar, pp. 30-31.
42. Manucci, II, p. 350.
43. *Ain.* I, p. 442.
44. *A.N.* II, pp. 276-77.
45. *Ibid.*, pp. 351-52.
46. *Ain.* I, p. 13 and n.
47. *Ain.* I, second part, p. 473 and n.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 418-19.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 207, 570; Also Badaoni text p. 311.



50. *Ain.* I, p. 420; III, pp. 596-599; *Maasir-ul-Umara,* I, pp. 93-100.
51. Pelsaert, pp. 2-3.
52. *Tuzuk,* II, p. 83.
53. E and D, VII, p. 150.
54. Manucci, II, pp. 350-51.
55. Cited in E and D, VI, Appendix pp. 496-97 and n.
56. E.g. *The Book of Duarte Barbosa,* II, p. 147.
57. Sarkar, *Fall of the Mughal Empire,* I, p. 440.
58. Manucci, II, p. 351.
59. Bernier, p. 267.
60. Manucci, II, p. 357 and 352.
61. *Ibid.,* II, pp. 350-51.
62. Badaoni, *Nijat-ul-Rashid,* p. 314.
63. Bernier, pp. 134-36, 426.
64. *Ain.* II, p. 136; Manucci, II, p. 79.
65. *Tuzuk,* I, p. 150.
66. *Ibid.,* pp. 150-51.
67. *Ibid.,* pp. 151, 168.
68. *Maasir-i-Alamgiri,* p. 48; Also Sarkar, *Aurangzeb,* III, p. 61.
69. *Tuzuk,* I, p. 247.
70. Said Khan Chaghtai had a passion for possessing eunuchs and had 1200 of them. Jahangir had been apprised of the fact "that his eunuchs oppressed and tyrannised over the weak and the poor." So, when he appointed Said Khan as the governor of Punjab, he directed the latter to prevent his eunuchs from committing oppression. *Tuzuk,* I, p. 13; *Tarikh i Salim Shahi,* p. 16; Also, *A.N.* III, pp. 356, 380; *Ain.* I, pp. 351-52; *Maasir-ul-Umara,* II, p. 403.
71. Bernier, pp. 131-132.
72. Manucci, II, pp. 78-79.
73. *Ibid.,* pp. 215-17.
74. *A.N.* II, p. 270.
75. *Ibid.,* III, pp. 514-15.
76. *Tuzuk,* I, p. 343.
77. Manucci, II, p. 352.
78. Bernier, p. 133.
79. Manucci, II, p. 352.
80. Finch in *Early Travels,* pp. 16, 265.
81. Bernier, p. 258.
82. *Ain.* I, p. 257.
83. Sarkar, Jadunath *Studies in Mughal India,* p. 65.
84. *The Journal of John Jourdain,* p. 163.
85. *loc. cit.* Also Bernier, p. 214.
86. *Tuzuk,* I, p. 73. Also Jauhar, p. 23.
87. Saksena, B.P. *History of Shahjahan,* p. 308.
88. *Tuzuk,* I, pp. 83, 130, 189-91, 234, 294.
89. Pelsaert, p. 61.
90. *Ibid.,* p.30.
91. Manucci, II, p. 334.
92. *Ain.* I, p. 285.



93. Bernier, p. 372.
94. *Ain.* I, p. 285n.
95. These have been reproduced in Shah, K.T. *The Splendour That was Ind,* facing p. 180 and in Manucci, IV.
96. Manucci, II, pp. 72-73; Bernier, p. 374.Also Monserrate, p. 79; Terry, p. 405; Mundy, Peter II, p. 191.
97. *A.N.* III, p. 325; Monserrate, pp. 50, 79.
98. See infra Chapter VI.
99. Bernier, pp. 372-74. He pertinently adds: "It is much worse in Persia, a country whose culture pervaded the Moghul life."
100. Syed Sabah-ud-din Abdur Rahman, *Hindustan ke Musalman Hukmaranon ke ahed ke tammaduni jalwe,* p. 220.
101. Mundy, Peter II, pp. 190-91. Roe, pp. 323-24. Tavernier, I, pp. 312-13.
102. Manucci, I, p. 220.
103. Roe, p. 324.; Terry, p. 405.
104. Jauhar, *op.cit.,* p. 25.
105. See Tables in Beni Prasad, pp. 279-281. also p. 216 and pp. 256-59. Thomas Coryat, however, covered the distance in 20 days, *Early Travels,* p. 244.
106. Coryat, *op. cit.,* p. 244; Terry, p. 293.
107. Bernier, pp. 284-85.
108. Terry, pp. 283-84; Also *Tuzuk,* II, p. 100.
109. Bernier, pp. 351, 358-59.
110. *Ibid.,* p. 215.
111. Bernier, pp. 407-8.
112. *Ain.* I, p. 49. Also Bernier, p. 359.
113. *A.N.* I, pp. 648-49; Also Gulbadan, pp. 189-90 and n.
114. *Ain.* I, pp. 47-48.
115. Bernier, pp. 361-62.
116. Eg. Pal, Pratapditya *op.cit.,* "A princess entertaining in a tent"
(Sub: Imperial Mughal 1600-1625) M. 59, p. 172. Also National Museum, New Delhi No. 58. 54.
117. Terry in *Early Travels,* p. 310.
118. Manucci, II, p. 465.

CHAPTER V

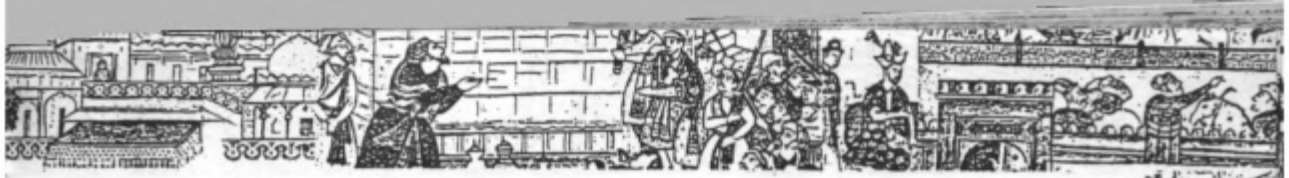
Nur Jahan and Mumtaz Mahall

In the history of the Mughal harem four personalities stand out prominently. They are Nur Jahan, Mumtaz Mahall, Jahan Ara and Roshan Ara. These four ladies represented the quintessence of Mughal feminine model. They lent charm and elegance to the harem in the seventeenth century; the century of Mughal glory and grandeur. And of these four, the personality of Nur Jahan strikes as the most outstanding.

Nur Jahan Begum

Nur Jahan was married to Jahangir on 25th May 1611.[1] She was exceedingly beautiful. Her brilliant biographer Beni Prasad[2] bubbles with joy while describing her charming personality. He writes, "No gift of nature seemed to be wanting to her. Beautiful with the rich beauty of Persia, her soft features were lightened up with a sprightly vivacity and superb loveliness."[3] The Artist who painted her must have seen her often, for, as queen, she did not observe *parda*.[4] He has depicted her as possessing an oval face, close lips, ample forehead and large blue eyes. Her portraits by Mughal artists are available.

Mehr-un-nisa, before she became Nur Jahan, was seventeen when she was married to a Persian officer Ali Quli Istajlu Sher Afkun by name. Through him, she mothered a daughter Ladli Begum. Ali Quli Beg was the subedar of Bengal when he was killed in an encounter in 1607. Emperor Jahangir ordered the officers in Bengal to send the family of the deceased safely to Agra, where Mehr-un-nisa's father Mirza Ghayas Beg held a high office at the court with the title of Aitmad-ud-daula.[5] At Agra, Mehr-un-nisa was appointed a lady-in-waiting to the Dowager



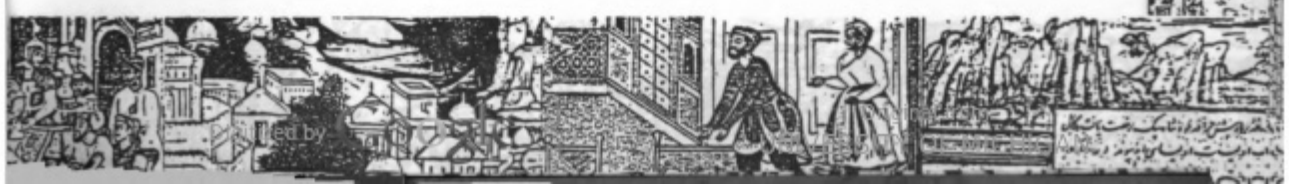
Empress. In March 1611, Jahangir happened to see her at the vernal fancy bazaar, fell in love and married her towards the close of May.

Her entry in the Harem

This marriage was a sequal to love at first sight. But nearly two generations later a romantic story was created with the allegation that Jahangir, 'the Emperor', had managed to murder the governor of Bengal so that he could live in conjugal bliss with Nur Jahan. "Once Jahangir was charged with coveting the wife of Sher Afkun, it was necessary to assume that he had fallen in love with her during the life time of his father. Muhammad Sadiq Tabrezi is followed and improved upon by Khafi Khan, Sujan Rai and others who relate how the prince and Mehr-un-nisa would play together; how he once clasped her to his bosom in a rapture of love; how she freed herself from his arms and complained to the royal ladies; how they told the tale to Akbar, who, deeply incensed, refused to gratify the prince's longing for his sweetheart, how Jahangir (on accession) tried to procure his early love; how Sher Afkun got an inkling of the designs of Jahangir but was ultimately got killed by the latter who then married his early love... The romance soon spread far and wide. We find it nowhere in the earlier half of the seventeenth century; we find it everywhere in the records of the subsequent generations."[6] Thus writes Beni Prasad and asserts that the whole story is unsupported by contemporary testimony. No contemporary Persian chronicler mentions it. No European traveller—Hawkins, Roe, Terry and Finch—heard about it. No East Indian Factors, who wrote hundreds of letters to their principals in England hint at it. Had Jahangir been guilty of such a misconduct, he would not have mentioned Sher Afkun's name even in his memoirs. On the contrary he gives a circumstantial narrative of Ali Quli Istajlu's life and death. Above all, had Jahangir got Sher Afkun killed to obtain his wife, he would not have waited for four long years to marry her. The whole story is a later day concoction. But the scandal remains tagged to Nur Jahan's memory.

At the time of her marriage to Jahangir, Nur Jahan was thirty-four years of age and the king forty-two. In 1611, when he married her, he gave her the title of Nur Mahall (Light of the Palace). Five years later, in March 1616, he bestowed upon her the title of Nur Jahan (Light of the World).[7] She also won "the most enviable but well-deserved title of Padshah Begum or the First Lady of the Realm (1622-23)."[8] But the title of Nur Jahan became so popular that it rendered other titles meaningless and people forgot her real name even: She became famous in history only as Nur Jahan.

When Nur Jahan entered the *Mahal* of Jahangir, the latter was already a much



married man. According to Hawkins he had 300 wives, of which four were chief queens.[9] Beni Prasad, however, thinks that "the monstrous number of 300" included concubines also.[10] Still, soon after her marriage, Nur Jahan began to occupy the first place in the heart of the Emperor and amongst the ladies of his seraglio. Public opinion did not fail to notice her phenomenal rise and acquisition of power. Della Valle records a bazaar gossip when he says, "He (Jahangir) would have carried her (Nur Mahall) into his harem... and kept her there like one of his other concubines, but (she) refused to go into his palace... saying that she had been the wife of an honourable captain and daughter of an honourable father, and should never wrong her own honour, nor that of her father and (former) husband.... (But) he might take her for his lawful wife... and on this condition, she was at his service.... Love returning to make impetuous assaults on the king's heart... at length he determined to receive her for his lawful wife and queen above all the rest."[11] Della Valle was in India in 1623-24. He never visited Agra. His sojourn was confined to Gujarat and the west coast. What he wrote was only hearsay. But he was correctly informed because his contemporary Pelsaert, living in Agra in 1620-27, also says: "Jahangir disregarding his own person and position, has surrendered himself to a crafty wife of humble lineage, as a result either of her arts or her persuasive tongue."[12] At a later date Bernier also refers to Nur Jahan's extraordinary domination over Jahangir.[13]

The opinions expressed in the bazaar gossip and shared and written down by the Europeans were as much an assessment of Nur Jahan's strong nature as of Jahangir's weakness. For, by the time of his marriage with Nur Jahan, Jahangir had already become a slave to his excessive cups of wine. As early as 1594, when he was only twenty-five years of age, his "potion rose to twenty cups of doubly distilled spirits, fourteen during the day time and the remainder at night...." (writes he) "wine made from grapes ceased to intoxicate me, and I took to drinking araq (spirits).... The weight of this was six Hindustani *sirs*." Only when death stared at him, while 'sweet life was dear' to him, did he reduce his daily intake to six cups. To these were added large dozes of opium (*filunia*). Natural vigour and physical exercise through big game shooting warded off total ruin,[14] but drinking had sapped Jahangir's strength, and when Nur Jahan came into his life, he gave himself up entirely to her care. She did look after him with exemplary devotion for she possessed a sympathetic heart. Besides, she had talent and wealth.

Her Wealth

Once married to the Emperor of Hindustan, Nur Jahan began to roll in wealth.

She received from her royal husband grants of land, gifts of gold and jewels, and unaccounted treasures. She also got gifts and presents from Indian Rajas and foreign merchants. The *jagirs* she held spread all over the country, and "would have conferred on her the title of a commander of 30,000."[15] Her large *jagir* of Ramsar was situated about 30 kilometres south-east of Ajmer.[16] In 1617, on the happy occasion of Shahjahan's victory in the Deccan, Nur Jahan was given the *pargana* of Toda as *jagir*. It lay 80 kilometres south-east of Ajmer on the medieval trade route from Surat to Agra and brought her an annual income of two lakhs of rupees.[17] Besides, she had received the right of collecting octroi duty at Sikandarabad[18] on the merchandise coming from Purab or the eastern country of Allahabad, Bihar and Orissa as well as Bengal and Bhutan. "Here the officers of Nur Jahan Begum, who built their *sarai* there collect duties on all these goods...and also on innumerable kinds of grain, butter and other provisions, which are produced in the Eastern provinces and are imported thence. Without these supplies this country (Agra and environs) could not be provided with food, and would almost die of hunger, so that this is a place of great traffic."[19] Obviously Nur Jahan Begum's income from cesses and octroi duties was enormous.

To this may be added her income from trade and commerce in which she was keenly interested. Foreign trade at this time was flourishing and lucrative. Indian ships were carrying from India textiles, spices, ginger, pepper, dyes, opium and various other drugs to West Asian countries like Arabia, Persia, North Africa, and brought back wines, perfumes, brocade, China goods, gold, silver, ivory, amber, pearls, horses, etc.[20] Nur Jahan maintained a number of ships and carried on foreign trade mainly in indigo and embroidered cloth.[21] Her commercial enterprizes brought her immense profits.[22] Many European trading companies like the Portuguese, Dutch and English were at this time busy in commercial activity in India. Nur Jahan's relations with the English were good, but while protecting English goods and their interests,[23] her own self-interest was supreme with her. She had to compromise with the fact that the Emperor, his mother and many other members of the royal family were all trading on their own account, and Nur Jahan could not monopolize any item of trade nor could she ignore the Portuguese completely. She had to co-operate with the Portuguese at Daman and Diu, who were carrying on brisk trade between India and the Western countries and her shipmen paid customs to the Portuguese.[24] But her relations with the English merchants were on a better footing and sometimes she issued orders granting them tax concessions.[25] She sent her goods in English ships, preferring them to those of the Portuguese with whom the Mughal relations were not good.[26]

The English profited by her favours. She managed *farmans* for them conferring concessions.[27] In these transactions Nur Jahan's brother Asaf Khan was the chief agent and intermediary. Gifts and presents were exchanged between the

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English and the royal family. William Hawkins, who came to India in 1608, writes that "Knowing the custom of these moors that without gifts and bribes nothing could go forward, I sent my broker to seek out for jewels fitting for royalty and presented jewels to Shakr-un-nisa Begum, the sister of Jahangir and his paramour (Nur Jahan)."[28] Robert Covert, another traveller, on leaving Agra, "gave a gold whistle weighing almost an ounce, set with sparks of rubies" to Jahangir which the latter presented "to one of his great women,"[29] in all probability Nur Jahan. Similarly, Thomas Roe (1615-19) also gave various presents to the Begum. He gave her an English coach, a mirror chest and many toys.[30] The coach created some sensation at the court and was used as a model by local craftsmen. Its English lining was taken off and the carriage was covered with gold and velvet and embellished with other decorations.[31] There was a craze for European curiosities in all Muhammadan courts in the medieval times.[32]

Nur Jahan was not only a consort of the King but also the queen *de facto*. This fact too helped her enrich her coffers through *nazrs* and presents from courtiers. In one of his letters to Monseigneur Colbert, Francois Bernier observed that "in Asia, the great are never approached empty handed."[33] It was a gilded form of bribery. Practically every European traveller makes a note of it and condemns it in strong words.[34] For example, Bernier writes that nobles and others wanting some favour "must find the means of making valuable presents, every year to a Vazir, a eunuch, a lady of the Seraglio and to try other person whose influence at court he considers indispensable."[35] Nur Jahan obtained lot of wealth from such presents and offerings.

Nur Jahan's Cultural Activities

With her enormous wealth, Nur Jahan exchanged gifts with foreign dignitaries, constructed edifices, laid out gardens, patronised art and letters, gave stipends to the needy and provided dowry to the poor. The mother of Imam Quli Khan, the ruler of Turan, sent a letter of goodwill to Nur Jahan along with gifts of some rarities from her country. The latter reciprocated the gesture by sending a return embassy under Khwaja Nasir to Samarqand who carried with him the choicest gifts from India for the mother of the Turani ruler.[36] Such exchange of "the dues of acquaintanceship" were not uncommon,[37] and by exchanging letters and gifts ladies of the seraglio contributed to the development of goodwill and mutual understanding between India and the countries of West Asia. Within the country also gifts of goodwill were bestowed. After peace was concluded with Chittor, Prince Khurram returned to the Court accompanied by prince Karan. "On the day when he (Karan) went to the darbar in the female apartments, there were



given to him on the part of Nur Jahan Begum a rich dress of honour, a jewelled sword, a horse and saddle, and an elephant."[38]

Nur Jahan built many gardens and *sarais*. The Mughals were very fond of gardens and Nur Jahan was no exception. She is credited with designing and inspiring construction of many pleasure resorts.[39] She built a garden called Shah Dara, near Lahore.[40] At Nur Sarai, a place which takes its name after the queen, "The Vakils of Nur Jahan Begum... built a lofty house, and made a royal garden."[41] Another *sarai* was built at Patna.[42] Nur Manzil garden[43] and Nur Afshan garden too were named after her with her designs. About half the year, in the summer season, the queen used to stay with Jahangir in Kashmir, considered to be the "terrestrial paradise of the Indies."[44] There she built a number of gardens and picnic spots. Achhbal, 8 km off the high road from Srinagar, was a favourite resort of Nur Mahall. There the springs gush forth dispersing themselves in various directions with violence. Its water is cold as ice. "The garden is very handsome, laid out in regular walks and full of fruit-trees—apple, pear, plum, apricot and cherry. The waterfall produced the finest effect imaginable; especially at night, when innumerable lamps, fixed in parts of the wall adapted for that purpose, are lighted under this sheet of water."[45] At Vernag (The Powerful Snake), about 18 km from Achhbal, Jahangir built gardens between 1612 and 1619. "It is said that they were designed and laid out by his wife Nur Mahall." This garden too is described by Bernier. He says, "one of the ponds contained fish so tame that they approach upon being called, or when pieces of bread are thrown into the water. The largest have gold rings with inscriptions, through the gills placed there, it is said, by the celebrated Nur Mahall."[46] Such was her aesthetic taste, such her love of nature. The imperial gardens with their fountains and pavilions are still a favourite resort of tourists to Kashmir. No wonder, emperor Jahangir writes that "In the whole empire there is scarcely a city in which this princess has not left some lofty structure, some spacious garden, as a splendid monument of her taste and munificance,"[47] and "as an expression of her desire for lasting fame."[48]

Nur Jahan also constructed three sepulchral edifices. These are tombs of her father, of her husband and that of her own. For her father Aitmad-ud-daula "legend has it that Nur Jahan proposed the erection of a mausoleum of pure silver but was persuaded to adopt the more durable marble."[49] It "bears in every part of it the imprint of the refined feminism of this remarkable queen. There is no other building like it in the entire range of Mughal architecture... With much of its ornamentation of inlaid semi-precious stones (*pietra dura*), it conveys the impression of a rich article of jewellery magnified into architecture."[50] The building, completed at an enormous cost in 1628, still stands and is popularly known as Aitmad-ud-daula. The mausoleum of Jahangir at Shah Dara near Lahore is very dissimilar to the Aitmad-ud-daula at Agra. There may be two reasons for

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this. The tomb at Shah Dara was in all probability originally planned by Jahangir himself, while Aitmad-ud-daula by Nur Jahan. Again while Aitmad-ud-daula was constructed at state expense, the mausoleum of Jahangir was erected by his widow from her own resources.[51] The building is of red sandstone inlaid with marble. Nur Jahan's own resting place is a sepulchre like *baradari*[52] and is the humblest of all.

Nur Jahan was a woman of parts. She was talented and cultured, intelligent and ready witted. She loved refinement and shared with Jahangir his love of arts and ornamentation. She possessed skilful taste in adorning apartments and arranging feasts. One could feel her influence in styles of dress and costumes, jewellery and perfumes. She discarded old designs of clothes which were inconvenient to wear and instead designed new patterns. In place of the *peshwaz* or ladies' gown, she introduced a very light dress called *dudami* which weighed just two *dams*. Her *panchtoliya*, a scarf weighing only five *tolas*, too was a light substitute for head-cover or *orhani*. Her new fashions in *badla* (brocade) and *kinari* (lace) and above all her *farsh-i-chandni* or sandalwood coloured carpets, became famous in her own time.[53] Nur Jahan also "laid down new patterns and elegant designs for many gold ornaments."[54] Her *itr-i-gulab* (perfume of rose) which was also known as *itr-i-Jahangiri*, became very popular.[55]

Her genius was not confined to feminine interests. She possessed a library which she enriched with occasional additions and purchases. Once she acquired *Diwan-i-Kamran* or anthology of Prince Kamran's verses for three *mohars*.[56] She was well-versed in Arabic and Persian. Like most Mughal elites she was fond of Persian poetry.[57] One of her ladies-in-waiting, called Mehr Harwi, was a poetess. Nur Jahan herself composed verses, sometimes instantaneously and on the spur of the moment. She wrote under the common feminine poetic sobriquet of *Makhfi* (or Hidden). A few of her verses, quoted by Khafi Khan, are worth translating. These pulsate with feelings of intense love, despondency and suffering, and Sufi sentiment.

1 "The red rubies that are sewn (like buttons) on thy silken robe
Are in truth drops of my blood which hold thy garment at the collar."

2 "I do not bestow my heart (just) at appearances until I come to know of the real character;
I know the reality about the seventy-two sects of people (i.e. all the people)."

3 "Oh Recluse! do not create terror in my heart about the Day of Judgement,
I am aware of the extreme suffering which results from separation from the beloved."[58]

Nur Jahan also dabbled in painting, an interest she shared with that of her





husband. She herself painted with some amount of excellence. This queen represented the highest in medieval Indo-Iranian culture.[59] She also presented a rare combination of contradictory qualities like being interested in fine arts like poetry and painting and at the same time being an accomplished horse-rider and an excellent shot. No wonder Khafi Khan devotes a whole chapter of his book *Muntakhab-ul-lubab* to the affairs (*ahwal*) of Nur Jahan Begum, a unique distinction for a woman in Mughal India.[60]

Nur's Interest in Sport

Nur Jahan was probably the only Mughal queen who actively participated in big game shooting. Hunting is a strenuous recreation and few ladies were actually interested in this manly sport. But Nur Jahan was an exception. Some of her singular achievements in this field have been mentioned by her loving husband in his memoirs. In 1616 when Jahangir was camping near Ajmer, she shot a bird called 'Qrisha, the like of which for (small) size and beauty of colour had never been seen'; it weighed only about 200 grams.[61] And the next year, she shot four tigers in a row. "When the tigers came in sight," writes Jahangir, "Nur Jahan Begum submitted that if I would order her she herself would kill the tigers with her gun. I said, 'Let it be so'. She shot two tigers with one shot each and knocked over the two others with four shots. In the twinkling of an eye she deprived of life the bodies of these four tigers. Until now such shooting was never seen, that from the top of an elephant and inside of a howdah (*amari*) six shots should be made and not one miss, so that the four beasts found no opportunity to spring or move. As a reward for this good shooting I gave her a pair of bracelets (*pahunchi*) of diamonds worth 100,000 rupees and scattered 1,000 ashrafis (over her)."[62] The feat was indeed marvellous. On another occasion, in 1619, when Jahangir was in Mathura, "the huntsmen represented that there was in that neighbourhood a tiger that greatly troubled and injured the ryots and wayfarers. I immediately ordered them to bring together a number of elephants and surround the forest and at the end of the day myself rode out with my ladies. As I had vowed that I would not injure any living thing with my own hand, I told Nur Jahan to shoot at him. An elephant is not at ease when it smells a tiger and is continually in movement, and to hit with a gun from a litter (*imari*) is a very difficult matter. Yet Nur Jahan so hit the tiger with one shot that it was immediately killed."[63] There are many more such instances but all need not be cited. In big game shooting she was as strong and accomplished as the Emperor himself or any of the greatest nobles.



Her Philanthrophy

However, her steel frame ensconced a very tender heart. Whoever sought her succour she protected them from tyranny and oppression.[64] Her charity was boundless. "If ever she learnt that any orphan girl was destitute and friendless," writes Motamid Khan, "she would bring about her marriage, and give her a wedding portion."[65] Her reputation for compassion had spread far and wide, for Muhammad Hadi confirming Motamid writes that "Nur Jahan won golden opinions from the people. She was liberal and just to all who begged her support. She was an asylum for all sufferers, and helpless girls were married at the expense of her private purse. She must have portioned about 500 girls in her life time, and thousands were grateful for her generosity."[66] Most of them were maidservants of the harem and she married them off to Ahadis (gentlemen troopers). She also sent many persons to Muslim holy places like Mecca, Karbala and Najaf on pilgrimage.[67] It is stated that on prescribed days of bath, she would distribute three thousand rupees in alms.[68]

But the goodness of her heart is best manifested in her service and devotion to her husband the King. Jahangir's health was badly shattered on account of excessive drinking. There were many occasions when Nur Jahan's healing touch alone helped him recover. In 1614, he fell ill with fever, headache and rashes on the skin. Thinking that "some injury might occur to the country," writes he in his memoirs, "I kept this secret and did not inform the physicians and hakims... and only imparted this to Nur Jahan Begum than whom I did not think anyone was fond of me."[69] It took Jahangir twenty-two days to recover during which Nur Jahan nursed him with utmost devotion. From 1621 onwards her nursing alone could save him from disaster. Jahangir narrates this charged with emotion. "When the weather became hot, the evil effects of this increased, and my weakness and laboured breathing were augmented. Nur Jahan Begum, whose skill and experience are greater than those of physicans, especially as they are brought to bear through affection and sympathy, endeavoured to... carry out the remedies that appeared appropriate to the time, and soothing to the condition.... She, by degrees, lessened my wine and kept me from things that did not suit me and food that disagreed with me."[70]

During their fifteen years of married life, Nur Jahan could not beget a son. Therefore, all her affection was showered upon Jahangir, and she loved and nursed him like a husband and a child as well,[71] more so because of his indifferent health, and Jahangir trusted no one more than his beloved wife. His trust and dependence upon her increased with his advancing age. This set tongues wagging, accusing her of grabbing political power.



Nur Jahan and Mughal Politics

Had Nur Jahan confined her activities to her literary pursuits, innovating new fashions and dresses, helping the poor and nursing her ailing husband, she would have earned from one and all the sort of praise bestowed on her by Motamid Khan and Mohammad Hadi. But she was ambitious, and her intelligence matched her ambition. Therefore, like all great men she was liked and disliked in equal measure by her contemporaries; she became an object of controversy.

This controversy primarily revolves around:

(i) her ambition to rule through her family clique;

(ii) her grabbing of royal power through her influence over her loving and doting husband Jahangir; and

(iii) her plunging the country into disorder because of her animosity to Shahjahan and Mahabat Khan.

Contemporary Persian chroniclers are divided on the issues. Chronicles written in the time of Jahangir, including the memoirs from the royal pen, do not accuse her of any nefarious motives or plans. Those written in the time of Shahjahan and after, are critical of her. Persian historians, therefore, score each other off. But almost all foreign travellers who visited India during Jahangir's reign or a little later, like Sir Thomas Roe (1615-19), Edward Terry (1616-19), Francisco Pelsaert (1620-27), Pietro Della Valle (1623-24), John De Laet (wrote 1631) and Peter Mundy (1628-34), do mention the existence of a clique or *junta* formed by Nur Jahan and of her undue influence over her husband Jahangir.[72] Although, their exhibition of an unwarranted animosity to her vitiates their appraisal of the queen, still their accounts are detailed. They also convey the 'public opinion', the whispering talk of the nobles and bazaar people. Peter Mundy alone is honest enough to admit that what he wrote about Nur Jahan and others is "the vulgar report and commonly received opinion."[73] Still 'the public opinion' deserves to be critically assessed. Let us, therefore, see what are the facts and what is the common opinion.

Ever since her marriage in 1611, when Jahangir 'had reached the forty-third year of his life and acquired love of ease', Nur Jahan was gradually acquiring control of state affairs. In this process, her father Aitmad-ud-daula, 'grown grey in the imperial service', was made the Prime Minister. Her mother, the discoverer of *itr* of roses, was appointed as the chief matron of the royal harem,[74] besides being Nur Jahan's counseller and guide. Asaf Khan, her brother, was appointed master of the household in 1611, in the year of her marriage itself, and became a a very important member of the government. In April 1612, his daughter Arjumand Banu Begum was married to Prince Khurram, a prospective candidate for the throne on whom Jahangir bestowed the title of Shahjahan in 1617. They all worked in unison and helped in running the government.



There was nothing new in this. The very nature of the regime in medieval India was familial. The government both of the Turkish Sultans and the Mughal Emperors was primarily a family affair.[75] All governors and high officers were generally relations of the King. Therefore, there is nothing strange or surprising in the ascendancy of Nur Jahan's relations. The biggest mansabs, jagirs and offices were bestowed on members of the ruler's family. The country itself was considered to be the personal property of the ruling house and sometimes, in moments of crises, the idea of dividing the empire amongst the sons of the King was given a serious thought.[76] So far as the 'Nur Jahan *Junta*' is concerned, it may be stated that although she sought the advice, help and co-operation of Aitmad-ud-daula, Asaf Khan and Shahjahan, she was neither their stooge, nor their leader. Nur Jahan's influence on Jahangir was the influence of an intelligent but devoted wife. It was mostly moral, emotional and even spiritual.[77] These are the facts. But the common opinion or the gossip among the people was that Nur Jahan had grabbed power both in the harem and in the court by exercising a subtle control over her husband and King. Della Valle observes that he heard that Nur Jahan, "commands and governs to this day in the king's harem with supreme authority, having cunningly removed out of the harem... either by marriage or other handsome ways all the other women who might give her any jealousy; and having also in the court made many alterations by advancing her own creatures."[78] He is corroborated by Muhammad Hadi, who says that Dila Rani, the favourite of Nur Jahan, "superseded Haji Koka in the appointment of superintendent of the female servants of the palace, and without her seal the Sadr-us-Sadur would not pay their stipends." At court "the servants and eunuchs of Aitmad-ud-daula became Khans and Turkhans."[79]

There is no doubt that Nur Jahan exercised influence in the harem right from 1611 because of her charm and devotion to the king. From about 1622 till the time of Jahangir's death in 1627 she was the ruling Queen, sharing power with the King. In and after the year 1621 many important events happened in quick succession. In February Shahjahan got Prince Khusrau murdered in the Deccan with the clear motive of remaining the sole claimant for the throne. In April, Nur Jahan's daughter Ladli Begum was married to Shahryar, "who was the most beautiful of all the princes,"[80] and could contest Shahjahan's claim. In that very year, Asmat Begum, the mother-in-law of Jahangir, died and then the Emperor himself fell critically ill. In January 1622, Aitmad-ud-daula breathed his last.

What did all these events mean to Nur Jahan? She knew that because of his weak health, Jahangir could not rule effectively by himself. He could not trust his son Shahjahan, the murderer of Khusrau, whom, despite his occasional disobedience, Jahangir had loved dearly. Therefore, Nur Jahan, his beloved and ever faithful wife, was the only person the Emperor could rely upon. First he gave



the establishment and everything belonging to the government of Aitmad-ud-daula to Nur Jahan Begum and ordered that the drums and orchestra of Nur Jahan should be played after those of the King.[81] Later, on his orders, coins were also struck in her name.[82] Some *farmans* were also issued occasionally with her name.[83] Sometimes, she also sat in the *Jharokha,* received people's salutations and issued orders. Thus from 1622 onwards, she shared power of government with Jahangir as 'Empress'. Motamid Khan speaks as if all coins and *farmans* bore the name of Nur Jahan, but that is not correct.[84] As Richard Burn has pointed out, "the coinage of Nur Jahan is . . . limited to only a few years, during which she was at the zenith of her power, and it was struck only at places where her adherents . . . were in authority. Jahangir had called his gold coins of the heavy standard *nur-jahani,* and this probably added to the confusion."[85] Many of the coins catalogued by Lane Poole, Whitehead and others do not bear her name. The few *farmans* and *nishans* of Nur Jahan available in the Rajasthan State Archives at Bikaner pertain mainly to the period 1622-26 when Jahangir had become almost an invalid.[86] Some *farmans* are in the name of both Jahangir and Nur Jahan, while many others of Jahangir's reign do not bear her name. *Khutba* of course was never read in her name.[87] In short, Jahangir never let the reins of government slip from his hands right up to the end of his life. Only, after 1622 he became more and more dependent on his trustworthy wife in matters of government and administration.[88] They ruled together, with Nur Jahan remaining one step behind the Emperor. Her title itself was a part of Nur-ud-din Jahangir's name.[89]

It was again not entirely due to Nur Jahan's animosity towards Shahjahan that the latter rose in rebellion against his father and the country plunged into disorder. Shahjahan's rebellion followed the tradition of the Mughal house. To rise in revolt against the ruling father and fight brothers to seize the throne was a bloody pastime of the Mughal princes. Shahjahan's father and his sons, all threw filial affection to the winds to seize power and throne. Shahjahan was no exception. He too waded through blood to the throne. Every one was ever apprehensive of such an eventuality. In this regard an incident would be pertinent to recall. Once Prince Shahryar got pain in his eyes. Jahangir ordered Muqarrab Khan to cure him. When Muqarrab reported about the recovery, the Emperor said: "Yes they (the eyes) will no doubt continue quite well, if they be not deprived of light by his brothers."[90] Therefore, Nur Jahan or no Nur Jahan the usual quota of royal lives would have been sacrificed at the altar of traditional fratricidal strife for succession. However, in such contentions the role of the senior ladies used to be of peace-makers, but that used to have no effect on the course of the conflict. Nur Jahan's only fault was that she did not waste her time and talent on such a futile exercise. On the contrary, she took steps to see that Shahjahan did not overstep his ambition and her full-blooded participation in the conflict did keep the rebellious prince fleeing





from place to place for years. The price paid for the policy was high. The support of her brother Asaf Khan to Shahjahan who was his son-in-law, "aliented the mind of the Begum from a brother who was the pillar of the empire."[91]

Her coup de main and exit

Over the years the excessive influence of a 'woman' in government and politics had alienated many important nobles. In about 1618 Mahabat Khan, a brave and outspoken general, assumed the role of their spokesman. With his usual frankness, he pressed his master to free himself from the shackles of feminine bondage. "The whole world is surprised," he protested to Jahangir, "that such a wise and sensible emperor as Jahangir should permit a woman to have so great an influence over him."[92] But her influence never slackened. Eight years later Mahabat Khan rose in rebellion. He even went to the extent of taking the king captive in a surprise attack. When Nur Jahan learnt about it, her blood was up. Her husband and king had been taken prisoner and this she could never tolerate. She called a council of prominent nobles, castigated Asaf Khan and rebuked the others. "All this has happened through your neglect and stupid arrangements," she reproved, "what never entered into the imagination of any one has come to pass and now you stand stricken with shame for your conduct before God and man. You must do your best to repair this evil."[93] River Jhelum separated the captive Jahangir from Nur Jahan. Accompanied by many royal officers, she plunged into the river to fight Mahabat. In the melee her granddaughter was injured, her elephant was wounded, but she did not flinch and personally supervised the operation.[94] Having failed in battle and in effecting the Emperor's release, she surrendered herself to Mahabat Khan and joined her husband in captivity. But imprisonment was galling to such a strong spirit. Once again she started planning to rescue her husband. "She cajoled the unwilling, she bribed the greedy; she strengthened the wavering; she held out promises to all,"[95] and at last secured the emperor's release.

But all in vain. Jahangir breathed his last on 28th October 1627 near Rajouri, when returning from Kashmir. With his death, her power disappeared. Despite her best efforts to enthrone her son-in-law Shahryar, Shahjahan succeeded to the throne. She herself was content to accept a pension of two lakhs of rupees a year from the new emperor. Thence-forward she wore only white clothes and lived till her death in 1645, in sorrow, with her daughter, the widow of Shahryar.

But Nur Jahan's glory never vanished. Beauty and romance enveloped her in youth, power and magnificence during the years of her rule. She knew how to wield power when she possessed it. She renounced it when it went out of her grasp. Jahangir's death left her a widowed recluse and she wrote:



"My eyes have no other work but to shed tears,
Yes, what work can people without hands and feet do."[96]

The tragedy of her life inspired the poet Moore's famous *Lala Rookh*. In the whole history of the Mughal empire no lady is remembered more than she. No lady was ever so powerful as she. And perhaps no lady was ever so beautiful as she. She was the Light of the Seraglio—Nur Mahall. She was the Light of the World—Nur Jahan.

Nur Jahan had asked Shahjahan in a letter that her grave be in the shadow of the mausoleum of her husband so that 'in death also I may reflect subservience which in my view is the glory of womanhood'. The widowed queen had completed Jahangir's tomb at her own expense in the course of the eighteen years she survived him. She had also built a tomb for herself,[97] in which her remains were laid to rest together with those of her only child Ladli Begum. The inscription on the grave of Nur Jahan composed by her reads:

"Let there be neither a light nor a flower
On the grave of this humble person,
Nor the wings of the moth burn (in the flame of love)
Nor the bulbul (nightingale) send out his wailing cry."[98]

It is an irony of fate that the greatest and most powerful queen in the whole history of the Mughal harem lies buried in such a lowly place. Whatever may be said for or against her, there is no doubt that Nur Jahan Begum was great and achieved glory.

Mumtaz Mahall

Mumtaz Mahall stands sandwiched between the regnant Nur Jahan and the charming Jahan Ara. But her memory has not suffered on that account; she was as exquisitely lovely as her wonderful aunt, the famed Empress Nur Jahan. It has suffered because of her very short tenure as queen. While Nur Jahan dominated the Mughal harem for seventeen years and Jahan Ara for about thirty, Mumtaz Mahall remained queen just for three years. On the other hand, on one point she scores over both, for while Nur Jahan and Jahan Ara lie buried in lowly graves, the mausoleum of Mumtaz is world famous. That 'bubble in marble' called the Taj Mahal, deservedly commemorates the history of a woman who was a class by herself. Shia by conviction, Persian through parentage, this Mughal queen lived like a Hindu princess, devoted to her husband and family and suffering all

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the while, producing one child almost every year.

Arjumand Banu Begum, later known as Mumtaz Mahall, was the daughter of Asaf Khan, brother of Nur Jahan, and wazir of the Empire of Jahangir. She was married to Prince Khurram (later Shahjahan) in April 1612. The nuptials of the heir-apparent with the niece of the Empress and daughter of her brother, the wazir, was of great political significance. Besides, "few marriages in polygamous households have been so happy." Arjumand Banu possessed a pure and generous heart. Her cheerfulness was imperturbable. She preserved patience under the direst sufferings. She had a lofty sense of conjugal duty. "She surrendered her mind and soul to her husband who loved her as never wife was loved."[99]

Uneasy lies the head that wears the crown, goes the saying. And more so is that which has to strive and struggle for it. Shahjahan was ambitious and clever and for staking his claims to the throne he was in rebellion and wildreness for no less than four years. During this period Arjumand Banu was always by his side. "His very misfortunes rendered her devotion all the more fervent."[100] She sustained him in his sufferings, wanderings and exile and also in his flight from place to place in the inhospitable regions of Telingana, Bengal, Rajasthan and the Deccan.[101] As if this was not strenuous enough, in her nineteen years of married life she gave birth to fourteen children bringing forth one issue almost every year.[102] Both these factors combined shattered her health and were responsible for her early death.

When Shahjahan ascended the throne on 4th February 1628 "at the exact time indicated by court astrologers,"[103] Arjumand Banu's joy knew no bounds. With other ladies of the harem she showered gold and silver on him and distributed alms lavishly. Shahjahan also bestowed gifts and presents and titles on her. Mumtaz was now the Empress and he gave her a present of two lakh ashrafis (gold) and six lakh rupees (silver) and fixed for her the highest amount for Begums on record, an annual allowance of one million rupees.[104] She enjoyed the title of Malika-i-Jahan (the queen of the world), but she has always been popularly known as Mumtaz Mahall (exalted of the palace), a title bestowed on her by Shahjahan on his accession.[105]

Mumtaz Mahall participated in the affairs of the State. The royal seal was entrusted to her charge and it was her privilege to affix the royal seal on State documents which were sent to her in the harem.[106] Shahjahan usually consulted her on private as well as state affairs.[107] She also advised the king in some matters in which she was personally interested. For example, when Shahjahan wanted to punish Saif Khan, the governor of Gujarat, whose loyalty he suspected, Mumtaz Mahall interceded on his behalf because he was the husband of her sister. Mumtaz Mahall was very fond of her sister and it was on her recommendation that Shahjahan relieved the rigours of the imprisonment of Saif Khan.[108] The empress was



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hostile towards the Portuguese of Hugli. Manoel Tavers, a resident of Hugli, had let down Shahjahan while he was in rebellion against Jahangir. Taking advantage of his helpless position, Tavers had seized some of his richly laden boats, and carried away some of his female servants including two slave-girls of Mumtaz Mahall. This and similar other insults rankled deep in the hearts of the royal couple. When Shahjahan became Emperor, he did not forget to avenge them. According to Manucci, his feeling of revenge was kindled by Mumtaz Mahall's resentment, who had shared the humiliation.[109] The campaign against the Portuguese began in her life time, but because of her untimely death, Mumtaz could not witness its culmination and extinction of the Portuguese menace in Hugli.

Having been born and brought up in the family of Aitmad-ud-daula and Asaf Khan, Mumtaz Mahall had been properly educated and was highly cultured. She was adept in the Persian language and could compose verses.[110] Her female Nazir, Sati-un-nisa Khanum was a lady learned in Persian and Islamic theology. She was a good poetess also.[111] Her companionship probably inspired Mumtaz also to try her hand in writing poetry. Mumtaz was a generous lady. Her benevolence provided dowry for many needy girls.[112] On her recommendation many persons received help and scholarships. She used to place before the king cases of the helpless and the destitute for royal favour. Hakim Rukna Kashi was given more than twenty thousand rupees on her recommendation. She also favoured and patronised a renowned Sanskrit poet Vanshidhar Mishra.[113]

We have earlier referred to Mumtaz Mahall's prodigious progeny. A daughter was born to her on 13th April 1630 and was named Husn Ara Begum. Next year again she gave birth to a female child on 7th June 1631. She could not survive the strains of delivery and sank rapidly. Her death was a great shock to Shahjahan. The court went into mourning and for a week, Shahjahan did not appear in *Jharokha*.[114] When his sadness subsided a little, he decided to immortalize the memory of his dear wife by building a large city to be called Mumtazabad, just like Sikandara or Akbarabad. In twelve years, 1631-1642, the entire tonwship of Mumtazabad including markets and inns and other imperial buildings was completed under the supervision of Makarramat Khan and Mir Abdul Karim.[115] The total cost came to 50 lakhs of rupees. Private merchants too built inns and other buildings at Mumtazabad at much expense, but that was apart from the imperial expenditure.[116] The layout and grandeur of Mumtazabad may be surmised from the fact that its construction took as much time and as much expense as the fort-city of Shahjahanabad at Delhi which took ten years to build and cost 60 lakhs.[117] The name of Mumtazabad could not last long, it merged with the older city of Agra, but its most majestic monument, the Taj Mahal, still stands. It is said that since religion restrained preservation of Mumtaz Mahall's beauty in the form of sculpture, the Taj truly reflected her loveliness. During his last days,



which infirmity of age and rigours of captivity had made miserable, Shahjahan used to gaze at this loveliness in poignant nostalgia from the Musamman Burj in the Agra Fort from where the view of the Taj is straight and clear.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Motamid Khan, *Iqbal Nama-i-Jahangiri*, Bib. Ind. Persian text, p. 56. Husaini, Kamgar *Maasir-i-Jahangiri* edited by Alavi, Azra. Persian text, p. 143. Also Coryat, Thomas in *Early Travels*, p. 279.
2. The Chapter on Nur Jahan as well as other notices about her in Beni Prasad's *History of Jahangir* form an excellent biography of Nur Jahan.
3. Beni Prasad, p. 157.
4. Motamid Khan, *Iqbal Nama-i-Jahangiri* in E and D, VI, p. 405.
5. Tripathi, R.P. *Rise and Fall of the Mughal Empire*, p. 369.
6. Beni Prasad, pp. 156-57.
7. *Tuzuk*. I, p. 319.
8. Tripathi, *op. cit.*, p. 421.
9. Hawkins, *Voyages*, p. 421.
10. Beni Prasad, p. 26.
11. Della Valle, *Travels*, I, pp. 53-54.
12. Pelsaert, p. 50.
13. Bernier, p. 5.
14. *Tuzuk*. I, pp. 307-09; Beni Prasad, pp. 23, 379. Also Finch, *Early Travels*, p. 154 for Jahangir's love of sport.
15. Blochmann in *Ain*. I, p. 574.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 342.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 380.
18. To be distinguished from Sikandara, the place where Akbar's tomb stands and which lies some distance west of the river. Pelsaert, p. 4 n.
19. De Laet, p. 41. Pelsaert, pp. 4-5.
20. Pant, D. *Commercial Policy of the Mughal Emperors*, pp. 106-07.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 109.
22. *English Factory Records* (1642-45), p. 148.
23. *Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe*, II, pp. 436, 444.
24. *English Factory Records* (1618-21), p. 81.
25. Eg. the *hukum* of Nur Jahan dated 13th June 1627 reproduced and translated by Farhat Hasan in his paper "Two official documents of Jahangir's Reign" read at the forty-sixth session of the Indian History Congress, Amritsar, 1985.
26. Pant, *op. cit.*, p. 164.
27. Roe, Thomas and Fryer, John. *Travels in India in the Seventeenth Century*, p. 144.
28. Hawkins, *Early Travels*, p. 94. Original spellings have been changed to render the quotation easily comprehensible.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 67 n.
30. *Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe to the Court of the Great Mughal (1615-1619)*, II, pp. 324, 384-86, 427, 458.



31. *C.H.I.* IV, p. 162. Chopra, P.N. *Social Life During the Mughal Age*, p. 127.
32. Jauhar, pp. 124-127.
33. Bernier, p. 200, also p. 231 for *nazrs* and bribes.
34. Pelsaert, p. 57; Mundy, Peter. II, pp. 143, 233; Mandelslo, p. 121; Manrique, II, p. 271; Bernier, p. 271; Manucci, II, p. 378.
35. Bernier, p. 230.
36. *Tuzuk*. II, p. 205.
37. *A.N.* III, p. 125.
38. *Tuzuk*. I, p. 278.
39. Stuart, *Gardens of the Great Mughuls*, p. 126.
40. Mundy, II, p. 214.
41. *Tuzuk*. II, p. 192. Also Mundy, II, p. 78.
42. Mundy, II, p. 159.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 197.
44. Bernier, p. 186. Also Pelsaert, p. 30.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 413.
46. *Ibid.*, pp. 413-14 and n.
47. *Tarikh-i-Salim Shahi*, p. 46.
48. Moreland, W.H. *From Akbar to Aurangzeb*, p. 197.
49. Beni Prasad, p. 277.
50. Percy Brown in *C.H.I.* IV, p. 552. Also Fergusson, *History of Eastern and Indian Architecture*, II, pp. 306-07.
51. Beni Prasad, p. 367.
52. Latif, S.M. *History of Punjab*, p. 163.
53. Blochmann in *Ain*. I, p. 574.
54. Hendley, *Indian Jewellery*, I, p. 10.
55. Khafi Khan, I, p. 269.
56. Ohja, P.N. *Some Aspects of Northern Indian Social Life*, p. 132. Ms. of the *Diwan-i-Kamran*, Khuda Baksh Library, Patna.
57. Law, N.N. *Promotion of Learning in Medieval India*, p. 202.
58. Khafi Khan, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 270-71.
    1. *Tura na takma-i-lal ast bar qaba-i-harir,*
       Shuda ast qatra-i-khun minnat-i-gareban gir.
    2. *Dil ba surat na diham ta shud sirat malum,*
       Banda ishqam wa haftad-o-do millat malum.
    3. *Zahid ahwal-i-qayamat mafugan dar dil-i-ma,*
       Hawl-i-hijran guzar nadim qayamat malum.
59. Also Tripathi, *op. cit.*, pp. 421-22.
60. Khafi Khan, I, pp. 263-72.
61. *Tuzuk*. I, p. 348.
62. *Ibid.*, p. 375.
63. *Ibid.*, II, pp. 104-05.
64. Motamid Khan, *Iqbal Nama-i-Jahangiri*, E and D, VI, p. 405.
65. *loc. cit.* Also Khafi Khan, I, p. 269.
66. Muhammad Hadi, *Tatimma-i-Waqiat-i-Jahangiri* (or Epilogue to Jahangir's Memoirs), E and D, VI, p. 399.
67. Khafi Khan, I, p. 267.



68. Shah Nawaz Khan, *Maasir-ul-Umara*, Eng. Trs. II, p. 1078.
69. *Tuzuk*. I, pp. 266-67.
70. *Ibid.*, II, pp. 213-14.
71. Jahangir was highly emotional (e.g. *Tuzuk*. I, p. 328) and did possess some child-like habits. When Robert Covert gave him "a small whistle of gold...he whistled therewith almost an hour." (Foster, *Early Travels*, p. 67 n.). "Likewise when a China dish, which Jahangir liked very much, was broken when together with other articles it was placed on a camel which fell and broke the whole parcel, the nobleman incharge was mercilessly flogged. He would have died if not saved by the King's son. Jahangir was consoled only after Shah Abbas of Persia, who having heard of the loss, sent a similar dish he had to the emperor of Hindustan." William Hawkins in *Early Travels*, pp. 109-10. No wonder, Jahangir was also very fond of travelling in the English carriage to which were attached four horses. *Tuzuk*. I, p. 340.
72. Roe, Thomas, I, p. 118; De Laet, pp. 201-02; Pelsaert, p. 50; Terry, p. 329; Della Valle, I, p. 54; and Mundy, II, pp. 205-06.
73. Mundy, II, p. 206.
74. *Tuzuk*. II, p. 216.
75. For the pre-Mughal period see Lal, K.S. *Early Muslims in India*, p. 62 & n; also pp. 14 and 86 and Lal, K.S. *History of the Khaljis*, p. 16.
76. So thought Shahjahan. Saksena, p. 310, quoting Qazwini. So also thought Aurangzeb.
77. Tripathi, *op. cit.*, p. 422.
78. Della Valle, *Travels*, I, p. 54.
79. *Tatimma i Waqiat-i-Jahangiri*, E and D, VI, p. 398.
80. *Intikhab-i-Jahangir Shahi*, E and D, VI, p. 450.
81. *Tuzuk*. II, p. 228.
82. With the caption
ba hukm shah Jahangir yaft sad zewar
ba nam Nur Jahan badshah begum zar
(by order of the king Jahangir, gold has a hundred splendours added to it by receiving the name of Nur Jahan, the Queen Begum).
83. *Maasir-i-Jahangiri*, p. 144.
84. Beni Prasad, pp. 166 & n 21.
85. *C.H.I.* IV, 180. Richard Burn writes on the authority of Hodivala, "The Coins bearing the name of Nur Jahan," *J.A.S.B.* 1929, p. 57.
86. *A Descriptive List of Farmans, Manshurs and Nishans Addressed by the Imperial Mughals to the Princes of Rajasthan*, Published by the Government of Rajasthan, pp. 38, 39, 65. Also Tirmizi, *Edicts from the Mughal Harem*, pp. 20-53.
87. Muhammad Hadi, E and D, VI, p. 398.
88. Hodivala, Numismatic Supplement, *J.A.S.B.* XLII, 1929, pp. 59-68.
89. Blochmann in *Ain.*, I, p. 573 n 3.
90. *Intikhab-i-Jahangir Shahi*, E and D, VI, pp. 450-51.
91. *Maasir-ul-Umara*, pp. 288.
92. *Intikhab-i-Jahangir Shahi*, E and D, VI, p. 452.
93. *Iqbal Nama, op. cit.*, p. 424.
94. Shirazi, *Fath Nama-i-Nur Jahan Begum*, p. 19.
95. Beni Prasad, p. 355. Also *A Dutch Chronicle of Mughal India*, p. 85.
96. Translated by Barkat Ullah and cited in Macnicol, Margaret. *Poems by Indian Women*, p. 78.
97. Lahori, II, p. 411.

98. The original reads:
Bar mazar-i-ma ghariban
Ne chiragh-i-ne gule,
Ne pare-parvana sozad
Ne sada-i-bulbule.
99. Beni Prasad, p. 165.
100. *Ibid.*, p. 318.
101. Lahori, I, pp. 387-390; Khafi Khan, *op. cit.*, I, p. 459; Also Mundy, II, pp. 212-13.
102. For instance, Jahan Ara was born in C.E. 1614, Dara Shukoh in 1615, Shah Shuja in 1616, Roshan Ara in 1617, Aurangzeb in 1618 and so on.
103. Saksena B.P. *History of Shahjahan*, p. 63.
104. Lahori, *op. cit.*, Pt I, pp. 92, 96.
105. *loc. cit.*
106. Chaudhury, J.N. 'Mumtaz Mahal', *Islamic Culture*, XI, 1937, p. 377.
107. Ibn Hasan, *Central Structure of the Mughal Empire*, p. 100.
108. *Iqbal Nama*, p. 301; Saksena, p. 61.
109. Manucci, I, p. 182.
110. Law, N.N. *Promotion of Learning in Medieval India*, p. 202. Jafar, S.M. *Education in Muslim India*, p. 175.
111. Sarkar, *Studies in Mughal India*, p. 22. Also *Ahkam-i-Alamgiri*, p. 151.
112. *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.
113. Chaudhury, J.B. *Muslim Patronage to Sanskrit Learning*, Second Edition (Calcutta, 1954), Pt. I. p. 77.
114. Saksena, *op. cit.*, pp. 309-10.
115. Lahori, II, pp. 324-30.
116. Saleh, II, p. 374.
117. Waris, p. 54; Saleh, III, p. 32 says it cost 50 lakhs.

CHAPTER VI

Jahan Ara and Roshan Ara

Jahan Ara Begum was the eldest child of Mumtaz Mahall and Shahjahan. She was born at Ajmer on 23rd March 1614.[1] The cultured and talented Sati-un-nisa Khanum, the lady-in-waiting on Mumtaz Mahall, was appointed as her tutoress and her influence stood in good stead to the princess. Nazir, the brother of Hakim Rukna Kashi, taught her Persian and the Quran. The princess learnt many other disciplines including a smattering of the science of medicine.[2] Jahan Ara grew up into a beautiful girl both in looks and temperament. Manucci knew her to be "most lovely, discreet, loving, generous, open minded and charitable" and one who "was loved by all."[3]

The Begum Saheb

Fate thrust upon the princess the cares and duties of a mature lady rather early in life. In June 1631 Mumtaz Mahall died and after her death her eldest daughter Jahan Ara Begum took her place as the first lady of the Seraglio, with the rank and honour enjoyed by Mumtaz Mahall. Thereafter, she was popularly called as Begum Saheb. The chief lady of the palace used to keep the Emperor's private seal which she affixed on important documents. Jahan Ara was the keeper of this seal for the next thirty years. She received the utmost affection from her doting father Shahjahan. She was loved and respected by her brothers. Dara was younger to her by one year and Aurangzeb by four.

Her first task was to perform the marriage of Dara Shukoh which could not take place in the lifetime of Mumtaz Mahall. Dara had reached the age of sixteen and Mumtaz had already made preparations, but now Jahan Ara had to complete

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the arrangements. Assisted by Sati-un-nisa Khanum who, after the death of Mumtaz Mahall had been appointed Chief of the harem by Shahjahan,[4] she collected all the presents which consisted of jewels, costly clothes and other precious gifts in one place, which the Emperor Shahjahan accompanied by some nobles came to inspect. On the side of the bride, the daughter of Parwez, Iffat Jahan Banu Begum, the mother-in-law of Dara, made all the arrangements and gave costly presents. The marriage was celebrated with great eclat, and embroidered *Khilats* (robes of honour) and other gifts were given to the bridegroom's maternal grandfather Asaf Khan and other nobles.[5] The total expenditure on this marriage came to three million two hundred thousand rupees. Of this, six lakhs were spent by the Emperor, sixteen lakhs by Jahan Ara and ten lakhs by Iffat Jahan Begum.[6] This gives an idea of the Mughal affluence and how money was spent like water in the harem. Jahan Ara also made arrangements for the marriage of Aurangzeb and Shuja; the latter married the daughter of Mirza Rustam Safvi on 23rd February 1632.[7] She again distributed *khilats* to nobles on the occasion.

Pls. 6, 7.

Her Marriage Proposals

There was some talk in the highest circles about the marriage of Jahan Ara herself. At what point of time her marriage proposals were discussed is not known. She was elder to Dara and Aurangzeb. Dara wished and petitioned to the Emperor that the princess may be married to Najabat Khan, who descended from the royal family of Balkh. He was brave and well-proportioned, but Shaista Khan was opposed to the suggestion. He argued that if the marriage took place, Najabat Khan would have to be placed in the same category as other princes and that would not be in the interest of the State. His other argument was that Najabat Khan was related to the king of Balkh against whom Shahjahan must some day or the other make war. Moreover, he reminded the king about the 'supposed' regulation of Akbar that royal daughters should not be married. Shaista Khan was the son of Asaf Khan. He was brother-in-law of Shahjahan and maternal uncle of Jahan Ara. His word carried weight.[8] And so Shahjahan did not approve of the proposition, "although from his fondness for her he would have liked to find her a husband."[9] At a later date, Shaista Khan himself proposed her marriage to Nazr Khan, a nobleman of Persian descent. He was Irani as against the Turani Najabat Khan and racial prejudice might have biased Shaista Khan's judgement against Najabat and in favour of Nazr. Shahjahan probably saw through it. He had also come to know that Jahan Ara and Nazr Khan were in love. Shahjahan disliked the liaison and did not approve of her marriage with Nazr Khan.[10] These developments did not discourage Dara. He promised, writes Manucci, "that on his

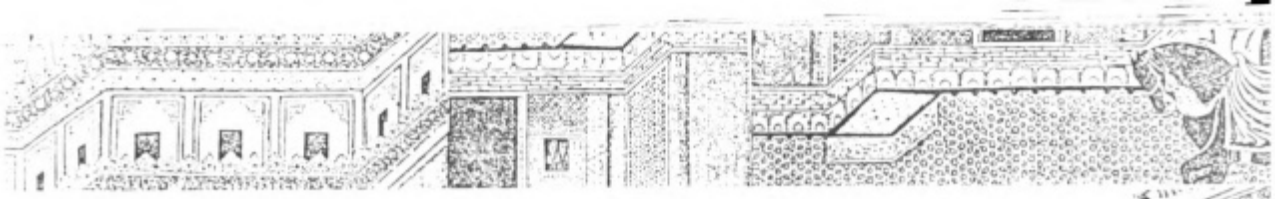
accession to the throne (so it was said), he would grant her permission to marry."[11] "This pledge was a remarkable one," writes Bernier, "the marriage of a princess being of rare occurrence in Hindustan, no man being considered worthy of royal alliance, an apprehension (also) being entertained that the husband might thereby be rendered powerful, and induced perhaps to aspire to the crown."[12] Nonetheless, her beauty, her goodness and her very cordial relations with Dara had made the prince think of marrying her off to an eligible suitor when he became king. But that was not to be. It is also probable that had her mother Mumtaz Mahall lived for some more years, she would have arranged the wedding of her daughters Jahan Ara and Roshan Ara. But these are hypothetical assumptions.

Charge of Incest

In short, Jahan Ara could not marry. She always hoped that one day she would. "Her father loved (her) to an extraordinary degree" probably because she was alone, and to get herself married "she used all her cleverness to satisfy her father and served him with the greatest love,"[13] so that he may permit her to marry. This became a fixture and a routine, giving rise to a rumour that the love between father and daughter exceeded the limits of decency. The first foreign traveller who wrote about this scandal was De Laet. Later on Peter Mundy (1628-34), Bernier (1658-66) and Tavernier (1641-66) accuse Shahjahan of having incestuous relations with his daughter. De Laet wrote in 1631. His narrative of the Mughal emprire is based on the accounts of other travellers like Finch and Roe. He also kept in touch with the Dutch Factors at Surat. His information was thus only second hand. On the other hand Bernier and Tavernier were staying in the capital of the empire and saw for themselves the happenings therein. And both accuse Shahjahan of incest.[14]

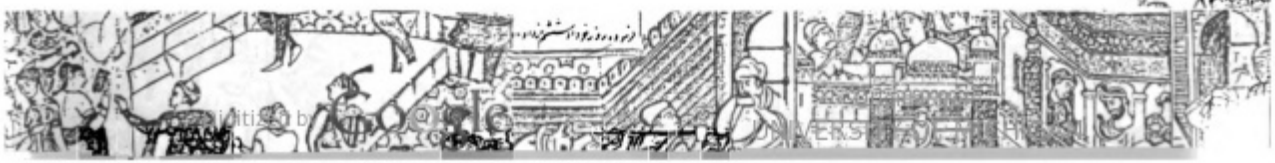
Bernier writes, "Begum Sahib, the elder daughter of Sahahjahan was very handsome and of lively parts. Rumour has it that his attachment reached a point which it is difficult to believe, the justification of which he rested on the decision of the *Mullas,* or doctors of their law. According to them it would have been unjust to deny the king the privilege of gathering fruit from the tree he himself had planted."[15] Tavernier too repeats the accusation and attributes Jahan Ara's stay in prison with Shahjahan for eight years to her "intense love for him."[16]

The whole story has been thoroughly examined by a number of scholars,[17] and it is needless to repeat what they have said. Vincent Smith believes in the story of incest; Richard Temple refutes it. T.W. Beale is all praise for Jahan Ara's great qualities.[18] In these circumstances, it is not possible to say anything with finality and one feels inclined to agree with Saksena when he says that "it is impossible to find confirmatory evidence for these scandals in the works of Indian chroniclers."[19]



Even so, a few points may be reconsidered. De Laet wrote about the time when Jahan Ara had taken the position of her deceased mother as the First lady of the realm. It was her duty to be a comforter of her distressingly sad father. The exuberance of this affection could have been misconstrued. When Bernier and Tavernier wrote, the royal family had broken into two camps with Aurangzeb and Roshan Ara on one side and Dara, Shahjahan and Jahan Ara on the other and enmity between the two had reached its climax. Both sides were levelling all kinds of charges against each other.[20] In this conflict, Bernier was on the side of Aurangzeb. In his 'camp' he heard all kinds of things about Shahjahan and Jahan Ara and later on wrote them down. In 1665-66 he and Tavernier travelled together from Agra to Rajmahal where they parted company. During their long journey they must have exchanged notes on the affairs in India and Tavernier must have been exposed to Bernier's views. Independent of that, Tavernier by himself felt that Aurangzeb was interested if not actually involved in the spread of the story. For, writes Tavernier, "he (Aurangzeb) caused his sister to be confined in the fortress, that she might keep company of the king, whom she dearly loved."[21] The statements of Bernier and Tavernier are challenged by Catrou and Manucci. Catrou attributes the rumour to the malice of the courtiers. He writes, "To a great share of beauty Begum Sahib united a mind endowed with much artifice.... The attachment she always had for her father, and the profusion of the avaricious Shahjahan towards his daughter, caused suspicion, that crime might be blended with their mutual affection. This was a popular rumour which never had any other foundation other than in the malice of the courtiers."[22] Manucci, who otherwise talks freely about the aberrations of Jahan Ara and particularly her love affairs, criticises Bernier for his allegations in no uncertain terms. He says that "(Bernier) puts many things of his own in Moghul history.... He writes many things which did not occur... nor could he have been well informed, for he did not live more than eight years (at the Mughal Court); it is so very large that there are an infinity of things to observe. Nor could he so observe, because he had no entrance to court."[23] He asserts that Bernier's statement attributing incestuous dimensions to Shahjahan—Jahan Ara affection was founded entirely on the talk of the low people.[24]

Thus the rumour was fed by the malice of the courtiers, the verdict of the *Mullas*, Aurangzeb's 'confining' Jahan Ara in the Agra Fort with the Royal prisoner and the talk of the low people. All these circumstances point to Aurangzeb's involvement in magnifying a rumour into a full-fledged scandal. Right from the beginning the relations between Dara and Aurangzeb were not cordial. The nobles and courtiers had been divided into two camps in support of the two princes. When Aurangzeb won the throne the number of his supporters swelled. *Mullas* were close to Aurangzeb while Dara maintained a distance from them.





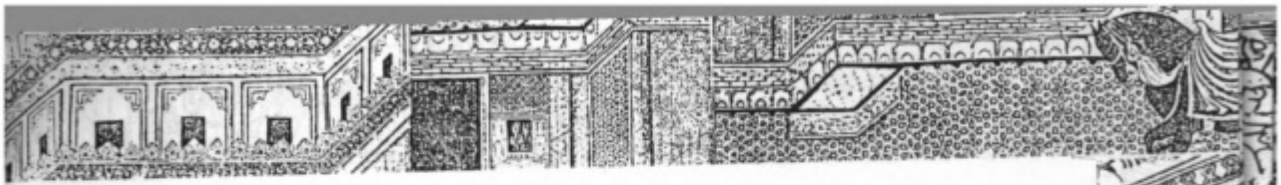
It is possible that they surreptitiously helped confirm the allegation by their *fatwa*. Jahan Ara's stay with Shahjahan in prison was very convenient to Aurangzeb. He killed two 'enemies' with one stone as it were, both physically and morally—physically by imprisonment and morally by slander. Aurangzeb had disobeyed Shahjahan, he had incarcerated him for years, but if he really helped give a twist to Shahjahan's paternal love for Jahan Ara by turning it into a scandal, it was the unkindest cut of all his unfilial acts.

Shahjahan loved his daughter dearly and Jahan Ara fully reciprocated this affection. Bernier himself writes, "Shahjahan reposed unbounded confidence in this his favourite child; she watched over his safety, and was so cautiously observant that no dish was permitted to appear on the royal table which had not been prepared under her superintendence."[25] Shahjahan was equally concerned about Jahan Ara's health and happiness. In March 1644 she met with an accident. She was walking with some maids when her skirt brushed one of the candles lighting the passage in the Agra Fort, and she was so severely burnt that for the next four months she hovered between life and death. Hakims, Vaids and European doctors of the empire were pressed into service to cure her.[26] The Physician Royal laboured in vain to treat her burns but a slave named Arif prepared an ointment which entirely healed her sores. On 25th November began a most splendid festivity in celebration of her complete recovery. Arif was weighed against gold and given 7,000 coins in cash.[27] During her illness Shahjahan distributed 5,000 rupees daily in alms totalling to seven lakhs in all. On her recovery he spent five lakhs more for charitable purposes.[28]

Jahan Ara's Riches

Jahan Ara Begum possessed enormous wealth. On his accession Shahjahan had given her one hundred thousand *ashrafis* and four hundred thousand rupees and fixed her an allowance at six hundred thousand rupees.[29] In the case of royal ladies whose allowances were large, usually one half of the amount was paid to them in cash and the other half was given in the form of assignments of land or customs revenue. Jahan Ara received many such assignments. The *jagirs* assigned to her included, among others, Achhbal and Vernag in Kashmir, Doraha[30] and Panipat in Punjab, Bachhpur or Machalpur in Central India and Safipur in U.P. The revenue of the Sarkar of Doraha was given to her for the upkeep of her gardens and that of the flourishing port city of Surat for her expenditure on betel.[31] In 1648-49, on the inaugural of the twenty-third year of his reign, Shahjahan granted her the pargana of Panipat, the annual revenue of which was one crore *dams*.[32] "She had in addition many precious stones and jewels that





had been given to her by her father."[33] It was customary in the harem to reciprocate such gestures and she also gave presents to her father and brothers. Once on the occasion of the weighing ceremony of Shahjahan, she gave him a pearl of great value and distributed gold and silver in *nisar*.[34] On the accession of Aurangzeb, she presented precious jewels to the new emperor and again sent presents to him on the occasion of his weighing ceremony.[35] On another occasion when Shahjahan recovered from illness the princess along with some other ladies distributed fifty thousand rupees to the poor.

"This princess", writes Bernier, "accumulated great riches by means of her large allowances and of the costly presents which flowed in from all quarters, in consideration of numberless negotiations intrusted to her sole management."[36] As in the case of Nur Jahan, these came from both Indian and foreign channels. The Dutch sought her favours to resolve their problems.[37] She also received presents from the English consisting of perfumed oils, broad cloth, embroidered cloth, mirrors and cabinets.[38] Tavernier, who came to India in 1641, presented rich gifts to her.[39] In 1654 Raja Prithvichand of Srinagar in Garhwal sought the pardon of emperor Shahjahan through Jahan Ara Begum[40] to whom he naturally presented with gifts. In the same year Qutb Shah of Golkunda, who had been troubled by Aurangzeb, appealed to Jahan Ara and she secured his pardon against payment of indemnity.[41] There are many more such instances when her intercession brought her gifts and gold. Jahan Ara Begum's finances were also augmented by her commercial enterprises. She owned a number of ships and used to carry on trade on her own account.[42] She contracted friendly commercial relations with the Dutch and the English and with their co-operation carried on extensive commercial activities and made enormous profits.[43] According to Manucci, her income was thirty lakhs of rupees a year besides precious stones and jewels.[44]

Her Cultural Activities

Her liberal resources helped her to patronize scholars, distribute charity and largeeses,[45] construct edifices and lay out gardens; all this she did with the zeal and taste of a princess. She composed verses and poetic eulogies were written about her. Her religious propensities brought forth hagiologies from her pen.

In Shahjahan's reign building construction reached its highest watermark of the Mughal Age. It is rightly said that Shahjahan "found the Mughal cities of sandstone and left them of marble."[46] In this enterprise, his talented daughter too made her contribution. She built in 1648 a mosque at Agra at the cost of five lakh rupees. Earlier Shahjahan himself had been interested in constructing it, but





when Jahan Ara sought permission to build it out of her personal allowances,[47] the work was handed over to the officers of her establishment. She established a *Madrasa* in the Jama Masjid of Agra.[48] She also constructed a monastery (*rabat*).[49] Her constructional works catered for both the rich and the poor. She built the famous *Sarai* at Delhi with a garden and a reservoir. It "is between the fortress and the city."[50] The caravansarai of Begum Saheb which was built to embellish the new city of Delhi and was known as Begum Sarai, impressed Bernier also. He compares it to the Palace Royale in Paris and says that here stayed rich Persian, Uzbek and other foreign merchants in chambers "in which they remain with perfect security, the gate being closed at night."[51] This *sarai* was razed to the ground after the Indian uprising of 1857. She also built the famous caravansarai at Kirki.[52] In Srinagar, Kashmir, she built a house for the poor at a cost of twenty thousand rupees.[53] She built a country house for herself in the village of Achhbal with gardens and fountains.[54] Her palaces in Delhi and Lahore were magnificent. The latter was built of white marble and had cost seven lakhs of rupees. Like all the Mughal royalty, she loved gardens. Outside the Delhi fort, on the northern side of Chandni Chowk, she laid out a garden called Begum Ka Bagh. It is now Gandhi maidan opposite Delhi Junction Railway Station. In her own time it was watered by Nahr-i-Bihisht and became a rendezvous for friends and lovers. Her three gardens in Kashmir, named Bagh-i-Aishabad, Bagh-i-Nur Afshan and Bagh-i-Safa were laid out under the supervision of Jawahar Khan Khwaja Sara.[55] She also had gardens and orchards built at Ambala, Surat, and Bachchol. After the death of Mumtaz Mahall, she inherited Bagh-i-Jahan Ara, which was gifted to her by Shahjahan.[56] He also gave her gardens at Ambala, Srinagar and Kabul.[57]

Her Role in Mughal Politics

As the first lady of the realm and as such among all the ladies of the *Mahal,* the Begum Saheb was the most respected.[58] Naturally, life was full of interest for Jahan Ara, and with her influence and resources she could not help being dragged into the vortex of court politics. During the so called 'war of succession' which has become so famous in Mughal history, Jahan Ara played a very active role in supporting Dara, but she meant no injury to Aurangzeb. On the contrary she had helped him on many occasions. For instance, when she had been badly burnt in 1644, Aurangzeb had come to Agra to see her. A few weeks later he resigned his viceroyalty of the Deccan either as a protest against Dara's alleged hostility, or was dismissed from his post. However, at the intercession of the affectionate Jahan Ara the emperor restored Aurangzeb to his favour. Later on when Aurangzeb rose in rebellion for the throne on the plea that Shahjahan was favouring the





'renegade' Dara, Jahan Ara admonished him. "The Emperor was in actual control of the State of Affairs".... wrote she "(and) he devotes the whole of his time to looking after the welfare of his subjects and to propagating religion," and added, "It is against all canons of wisdom and foresight to fight the eldest Prince, you should observe the path of loyalty and obedience and should stop at the place whither you have arrived. To prevent the waste of Muslim lives on either side, send your representations to court."[59] The counsel fell on deaf ears, but the letter shows the character and determination of Jahan Ara Begum in asserting her authority as an elder sister to defend the State. The princess personally visited Aurangzeb on 10th June 1658 to try a *rapprochement* between father and son and between the two brothers. Later on, after Dara's defeat, Jahan Ara visited Aurangzeb again, proposed partition of the Empire and entreated him to have an interview with Shahjahan, but Aurangzeb turned down all her proposals.[60] She failed in her mission but she bore no rancour against the new emperor, and maintained decency by sending him presents.[61] Aurangzeb responded by permitting her to stay with her father in prison in the Agra Fort. For more than seven years she tended and comforted Shahjahan and her loving care alleviated, to some extent, the cruelty of his other offspring.

At last Shahjahan breathed his last on 22nd January 1666. Jahan Ara's grief knew no bounds. In a long elegy this poetess-princess poured the agony of her soul by cursing the 'blue sky' and the detestable world for taking away the great gardener who had removed all thorns and made the earth clean. In the customary Persian idiom she declared that the sun and the moon wept bitterly at the demise of such a handsome king, and added that the decree of fate may change but nothing could reduce the pain inflicted by this calamity.[62] She distributed two thousand gold coins among the poor on Shahjahan's death. Nearly a month after the event Aurangzeb came to Agra and visited Jahan Ara. During the last days of Shahjahan, Jahan Ara's entreaties had conquered his just resentment and during his last days he had at last signed, after many previous refusals, a pardon to Aurangzeb for the wrongs he had done to his father.[63] On his arrival at the women's apartment in the seraglio, the princess received him cordially and presented him with a large golden basin full of precious stones.

Her Death

Once Shahjahan was no more, Jahan Ara moved to Delhi. There she was lodged comfortably in Ali Mardan Khan's mansion. Despite all court politics and bitterness generated by fratricidal strife for power, Aurangzeb respected his elder sister,[64] and she remained the first lady of the court till her death.[65] He

used to call on her *haveli* and in 1669 he ordered Danishmand Khan, an eminent and cultured noble of the empire, to attend upon her. During Shahjahan's imprisonment and after, Jahan Ara Begum gave most of her time to religious pursuits and devotion to God. From the beginning she had a religious bent of mind. After her recovery from her burns in 1644, she had gone on a pilgrimage to the *dargah* of Khwaja Muin-ud-din Chishti at Ajmer,[66] and had constructed a corridor known as Begami Dalan near his *mazar*. She had written a biography of the saint under the title *Munis-ul-Arwah*.[67] She was the author of another religious work entitled *Khazain-ul-Asfiya*.[68] Along with her brother Prince Dara, she had imbibed a strain of mysticism in which Dara was saturated. She made Mulla Shah her spiritual preceptor and guide,[69] and in the course of years wrote many pamphlets (*risalas*) on sufism.[70] In her *Risala-i-Sahibiya* she writes that God had concentrated in her the ardent desire for the search of the right path. Five years after the death of her father, she was still immersed in religious studies. She was then in late fifties. Her end came ten years later in September 1681.[71] Aurangzeb bestowed upon her the title of *Sahibat-uz-zamani* (Mistress of the Age), posthumously.[72]

At the time of death Jahan Ara divided her property among her nieces, leaving to each a good deal of money and jewels. To her favourite Jahanzeb Begum, affectionately called Jani Begum, the daughter of the forgotten Dara Shukoh, she left much more. "On news of her death", says Manucci, who was in the camp of Shah Alam, marching towards the Deccan, "(they) halted for 30 days by the wish of Aurangzeb" who showed himself touched by the death of a princess "who although she had her faults left behind her, on the whole, the name and fame of a wise woman."[73] Her epitaph, written by herself, and inscribed on her tombstone in the graveyard complex of the shrine of Nizam-ud-din Auliya in Delhi where she lies buried, gives expression to two of her many great qualities in one couplet —her humility and her excellence as a poetess.

> "Let nothing cover my grave except the green grass,
> For the green turf is covering enough for the poor."[74]

Roshan Ara Begum

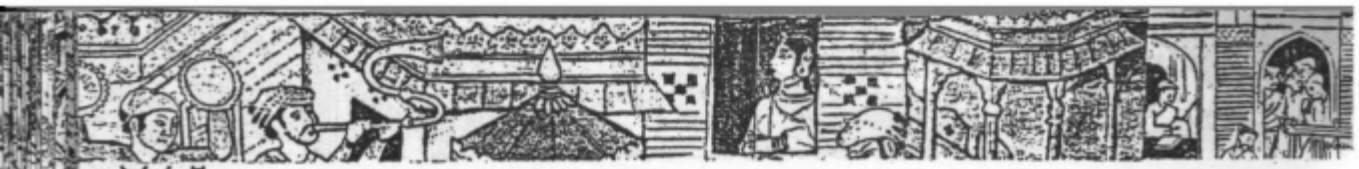
Roshan Ara Begum was Jahan Ara's younger sister. She was the second daughter of Shahjahan and his fourth child. She was born at Burhanpur on 2nd September 1617,[75] and was thus three and a half years younger to Jahan Ara. As children the princesses lived and played together. In the Agra Fort palace there are two small receptacles carved in the marble walls, which, we are told, served as piggy banks for their delicate little hands to keep their 'pocket money' of gold



and silver coins. But as they grew up a distance began to separate them. Roshan Ara was less beautiful than her elder sister and less remarkable for wit and intelligence.[76] Nevertheless, she possessed sprightliness of temper, "and was not deficient in cunning."[77] In the conflict for the throne between Dara and Aurangzeb, she chose to be with the latter. Dara was her senior while Aurangzeb (born at Dohad on 24th October 1618) was just one year younger to her. Naturally, from childhood itself the young princess had become more attached to her 'little' brother. Jahan Ara being on the side of Dara, the two sisters drifted apart and in the course of time became antagonists. While Jahan Ara tried to bring about reconciliation between the two brothers, Roshan Ara did her best to assist Aurangzeb against Dara. She was in the know of the transactions in the court and the palace and surreptitiously conveyed to her brother reports of all the developments in Delhi and Agra.[78] In particular, it was Roshan who apprised him of the plan that as soon as he would enter the palace for an interview with Shahjahan, the armed Tatar female guards of the seraglio shall fall upon him and kill him.[79] She also placed at his disposal all the gold and silver available with her during the war of succession. Aurangzeb was greatly obliged to her for all this, and on his success she was naturally elated and handsomely rewarded. By nature Roshan Ara was revengeful and unscrupulous. She was one of those who vehemently advocated death for Dara Shukoh.[80] As if this was not enough, on his execution under the most tragic circumstances she gave a grand feast.[81]

After the accession of her favourite brother, Roshan Ara Begum began to enjoy the pleasures of royal life in the palace of Delhi, while to her satisfaction her elder sister Jahan Ara passed her days in the Agra fort with her imprisoned father. As in any Indian home, so in the Mughal seraglio, the elder sister occupied a very important place. And Roshan Ara was older than Aurangzeb. In May 1662, Aurangzeb fell ill of a sudden fever, and Roshan Ara immediately plunged into political speculation and created a lot of confusion in the empire. Reminiscences of the happenings during the last War of Succession flashed before her eyes and just as Dara had done at the illness of Shahjahan, she began to withhold reports about Aurangzeb's illness,[82] and did not allow anyone to go near the ailing monarch. Thinking that another civil war was in the offing, she took the side of Aurangzeb's younger son Azam, then only nine years old and actually living in the ladies apartments, as against the elder Muazzam. She took the Royal Seal in her possession and wrote letters to many Mughal generals and Rajput Rajas to support the cause of Prince Azam.[83] "When the mother of Sultan Muazzam learnt this, she said to Roshan Ara Begum that what she was doing was not right, thus to rouse the empire, setting on foot in it confusion and disquiet, while the king was still alive, and there was hope for his recovery. Having said this, she proceeded to the king's bedside, but Roshan Ara Begum boldly seized her by the





hair and ejected her from the royal chamber. The queen, not to afflict her suffering husband, bore it quietly and patiently."[84] Prince Muazzam resented her behaviour, but she treated him also with disdain. When Aurangzeb recovered after two months, he retrieved the Great Seal lest Roshan Ara should misuse it for any sinister design.[85] He had come to know of her activities during his illness and was much displeased. But he was obliged to her for her help in the War of Succession, and had to keep calm.

"Since the time of Aurangzeb's recovery it has been constantly rumoured" writes Bernier, "that he intended to visit Kashmir" for change of air and recuperation. Many intelligent persons, however, could scarcely persuade themselves to believe that the king would venture upon a long journey while his father remained a prisoner at Agra. But Roshan Ara was keen to go. She had seen the grand style in which her sister Jahan Ara had lived during Shahjahan's reign. So when Aurangzeb was in power, she was anxious "to appear in her turn among a pompous and magnificent army, as her sister Begum Saheb had done during the reign of Shahjahan", and insisted on Aurangzeb to go to Kashmir. Thus, continues Bernier, this excursion may "rather be attributed to the arts and influence of Roshan Ara Begum", than to the desire of the king.[86]

Aware of her importance, Tavernier, who was in India from 1641 to 1664 called her the 'Grand Begum', and once presented to her eunuch a watch with a painted case.[87] Bernier too was aware of her constant influence at the court. In a letter written from Surat on 10th March 1668, as a guideline for the establishment of French Factories in the Mughal empire, he wrote, "Roshan Ara Begum is so much in favour that it would perhaps be better to give her a few presents," but experienced as he was in Indian affairs, he also suggested that one should enquire before so doing.[88] In 1669, Aurangzeb conferred on her the title of Shah Begum which he had promised her. In addition, he also gave a cash award of five lakh rupees.[89] Like all Mughal princesses she lived magnificently, endowed charitable institutions and built the famous Roshan Ara Garden in Delhi. She died in September 1671, at the age of fifty-four, ten years before her elder and more talented sister, and lies buried in the centre of her own garden.

Life style of the Princesses

Jahan Ara and Roshan Ara were one of the richest ladies of the world. And life for the rich is a many splendoured thing. In all ages and climes the rich have sought to achieve the best of both the worlds. They strive for immortality by earning a name for piety and also desire to live with magnificence and enjoy the pleasures of good living. The first urge leads to performance of virtuous deeds like building

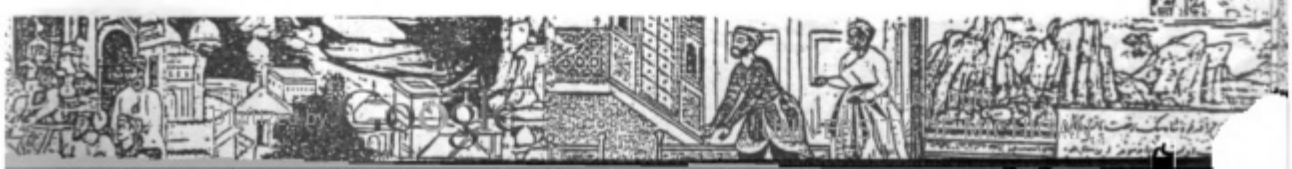




mosques, *madrasas, sarais,* gardens, homes for the poor, distributing large amounts of money in charity and passing days in devotion to God, and thereby carving out a place in the next world. The other prompts one to live in this world in magnificent palaces, dress well, decorate oneself with ornaments and jewellery, and lead a life of merrymaking and love. The two princesses tried to live a full and complete life, denying themselves neither the performance of acts of piety nor the enjoyments of pleasures of good living. The first aspect of their life has been discussed in the preceding pages, the second may be studied in the following.

It is needless to mention that the princesses occupied the best rooms in the *Mahal* and they possessed the best wardrobes and jewellery. Even the bedstead of Jahan Ara was made of gold.[90] Jahan Ara had her own palaces in more than one city. It was a splendid spectacle to watch the princesses travelling. Describing the magnificent procession of Roshan Ara Begum when she travelled with the king to Kashmir in 1664, Bernier writes, "stretch imagination to its utmost limits and you can conceive no exhibition more grand and imposing than when Roshan Ara Begum, mounted on a stupendous Pegu elephant and seated in a *Mikdembar* (decorated *howda*), blazing with gold and azure, is followed by five or six other elephants... nearly as resplendent as her own, and filled with ladies attached to her houshold." In front of the princess marched the chief eunuchs on horses richly caparisoned, each mounted with a baton of office in his hand. Behind her followed a troupe of female servants, Tartars and Kashmiris, fantastically attired and riding handsome pad-horses. "Immediately behind Roshan Ara's retinue appears a principal lady of the court, mounted and attended much in the same manner as the princess. This lady is followed by a third, she by a fourth, and so on, until fifteen or sixteen females of quality pass with a grandeur of appearance, equippage, and retinue more or less proportionate to their rank, pay and office. There is something very impressive of state and royalty in the march of these sixty or more elephants; in their solemn and, as it were, measured steps; in the splendour of the *Mikdembars*, and the brilliant and innumerable followers in attendance...." The *amari* placed on elephants was like a 'dome roofed throne'... (and) "these distinguished lovely females seated in *Mikdembars* are thus elevated above the earth like so many superior beings borne along through the middle regions of the air."[91]

This is the description of a long journey. On short travel, the princesses used litters suspended between two small elephants or camels, but more often *palkis* and *chandols*. The *chandols* borne on men's shoulders, were not unlike the *Takht-i-Rawan* (or the moving throne) the use of which was a royal prerogative.[92] "They are gilt and painted and covered with magnificent silk nets of many colours enriched with embroidery, fringes and beautiful tassels." In the *Takht-i-Rawan* the princesses travelled or rather floated in the air, in all magnificence. "It is in this



style," writes Bernier, "that I have sometimes seen Roshan Ara pursuing her journey." Manucci describes how princess Jahan Ara went out in the city in a *palki*. "When the Begum Saheb leaves her palace to go to the court, she proceeds in great pomp, with much cavalry and infantry and many eunuchs.... They proceed very slowly, men in front sprinkling water on the roadway to lay the dust. They (the princesses) are placed in a palanquin which has over it a rich cloth or net of gold, sometimes ornamented with precious stones or pieces of looking glass. The eunuchs surround the palanquin, driving away the flies with peacock feathers stuck in the handles of enamelled gold-work or adorned with precious stones."[94] Male guards and eunuchs, holding sticks of silver and gold went ahead shouting, "out of the way, out of the way !" and people afraid of the maltreatment, melted away. If some nobleman happened to pass that way, he stood with his hand crossed at a "distance of 200 paces, less or more." When he beheld the *Sawari* he bowed in respect. If the princess desired him to be honoured she sent him a *pan* which was carried in a gold brocade bag.[95]

But such movements were not of frequent occurrence, for the princesses did not move out in the city often. At home they passed their time in ordering about their servants and officers on matters personal and official, playing various indoor games, reading books, novels and poetry and composing poems. Jahan Ara in particular was a poetess of no mean merit. They drank wine, especially Jahan Ara. She was much senior to Manucci in age and, as we have seen earlier, he used to often visit her. He writes about how the princess used to amuse herself, "her mansion being outside the fortress."[96] She was very 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 a most delicious beverage made from wine and rose water, flavoured with many costly spices and aromatic drugs." Manucci says that sometimes she drank so much that she was unable to stand, "and they had to carry her to bed." Occasionally the Begum Saheb sent him bottles of her special wine in recognition of his services to the staff of her harem. In return he used to present her with bottles of foreign liquor. Wine was drunk "at night when music, dancing and acting and other delightful pranks go on around."[97] **Pl. 8**

Love episodes of Jahan Ara and Roshan Ara

With such a routine, the two great princesses could not deny themselves the pleasures of love. When, in 1631, Mumtaz Mahall died, her eldest daughter Jahan Ara was seventeen years of age and the younger Roshan Ara was fourteen. No medical, sociological or psychological authority need be cited to emphasise that

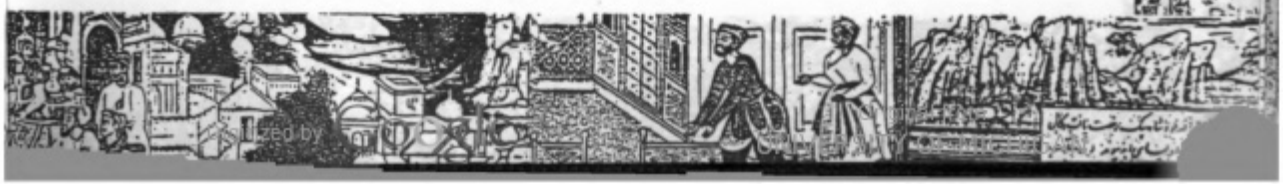
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at such an age a young maiden's fancy 'lightly turns to thoughts of love'. In the Mughal house marriageable age for girls was fourteen or fifteen. Hamida Banu Begum was married when she was fourteen.[98] Gulchehra Begum, daughter of Babur, also was fourteen when she was married.[99] Gulrang Begum was sixteen or seventeen when she was given away in marriage.[100] Humayun's daughter Bakshi Begum was only ten at the time of her betrothal.[101] There were dozens of such precedents, but there was no hope or prospect of marriage for these two princesses for reasons already discussed. Shahjahan loved his daughter Jahan Ara dearly as also did her elder brother Dara, but paternal or fraternal affection was no substitute for conjugal love.

Now, in medieval society, if a girl had to remain a spinster, she knew how to live like one and shunned male society. But Jahan Ara was no ordinary girl. She was a princess actively involved in state politics. She was beautiful, exceedingly beautiful. She came in contact with the greatest and the best in the highest society. Besides, there had been proposals for her marriage on many occasions and she never lost hope. She had an affable nature and from the days of her youth there were stories told about her love. "The principal one was," writes Manucci, "a vigorous youth of goodly presence, the son of the chief dancer in her employ, who was her mistress of music." The princess gave him the epithet of *Khanazad* or Born in the House. Later he was given the title of *Dulera* or "Always a Bridegroom", and his name was great in the city as the favourite of the princess.[102] But the young fool got into trouble with Mahabat Khan. The latter complained to the Emperor and Dulera was dropped from grace. Such was her vivaciousness that even the affection between father and daughter began to be misconstrued. Was it because of such scandalous rumours or was it because she was the first lady of the realm—whatever be the reason—Jahan Ara began to live in a separate mansion outside the palace and the Fort.[103] When this happened is not precisely known. But it provided her with a fair amount of freedom to live as she liked and to make love if she chose to.

It is mainly Bernier and Manucci who write about the amorous affairs of the royal princesses. We have seen earlier[104] that their sources of information comprised the European women in the Imperial seraglio captured in the attack on Hugli and the Mughal maids and eunuchs whom these physicians used to treat from time to time.[105] Between the capture of Hugli (1632) and the arrival of Manucci (1656) and Bernier (1658), Jahan Ara and Roshan Ara had lived the prime years of their youth. The former grew in age from 18 to 42 and the latter from 15 to 38. The stories of their love affairs were probably known to all palace dwellers in Agra and Delhi when Manucci and Bernier arrived, and they too learnt about them when they joined the Mughal service and began to move in Mughal Society.





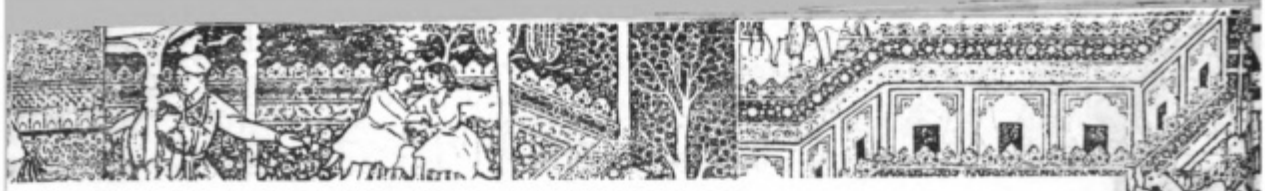
Francois Bernier writes, "I shall introduce two anecdotes connected with the amours of this Princess (Jahan Ara Begum) and hope I shall not be suspected of a wish to supply subjects for romance. What I am writing is a matter of history."[106] It is said that Jahan Ara or Begum Saheb, although confined in a seraglio and guarded like other women, received visits from a handsome young man of no very exalted rank but of an agreeable personality. It was scarcely possible, surrounded as she was on all sides by those of her own sex whose envy she had long provoked on account of her beauty and influence, that her conduct should escape detection. Shahjahan was apprised of the affair and resolved to take her by surprise. He entered her apartments at an unusual and unexpected hour. The intimation of the king's approach was too sudden to allow the frightened youth the choice of more than one place of concealment. He sought refuge in the capacious cauldron used for the baths. The king's countenance denoted neither surprise nor displeasure; he discoursed with his daughter on ordinary topics, but finished the conversation by observing that she was looking rather slovenly and that it was proper she should bathe. He then commanded the eunuchs to light a fire under the cauldron and did not retire until they gave him to understand that the wretched victim had been roasted to death.[107] Manucci contradicts Bernier. He says how could Shahjahan kill a man by roasting him in a bath cauldron without the news spreading. There were a number of foreign ambassadors living at the court at that time. Such an act would have done great damage to the reputation of the Emperor and his harem. Manucci's concern is understandable. He was in the good books of Jahan Ara and would not have liked any aspersions cast on her, although he knew that the Begum Saheb did have her love affairs.[108]

At a subsequent period, according to Bernier, the Begum Saheb formed another attachment, which also had a tragic termination. She chose for companionship her *Khan-i-Saman* or steward, a Persian named Nazr Khan, a young nobleman remarkable for grace and intelligence and the favourite of the whole court. As seen earlier, Shaista Khan, the maternal uncle of the princess, even ventured to propose him for the Begum Saheb's hand; but the suggestion was very much ill received by the Emperor. He had indeed already entertained some suspicion of an improper intercourse between the favoured nobleman and the princess and did not long deliberate on the course he should pursue. As a mark of distinguished favour the king presented a betel (*pan*) in the presence of the whole court, to the unsuspecting youth, which he was obliged immediately to chew. Little did the unhappy lover imagine that he had received poison from the hand of the smiling monarch. He withdrew from the palace and ascended his *palki* but died before he could reach home.[109]

Roshan Ara Begum, Shahjahan's younger daughter, too was a votary of



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pleasure, although less discreet in such matters. Bernier appreciated Aurangzeb. But he does not seem to hold a very high opinion of his favourite sister Roshan Ara and freely writes about her romantic affairs. According to him as well as Manucci, the princess once admitted two young men in the harem for several days enjoying their company. After some time one of them was permitted to go and was committed to the care of her female attendants who promised to conduct their charge out of the seraglio under cover of the night. But during the course of the operation they became panicky and fled, leaving the terrified youth to wander alone about the gardens. He was found and taken before Aurangzeb who interrogated him closely. All that he could get to know was that this young man had entered the seraglio by scaling the walls. Aurangzeb was shrewed and possessed a sound judgement. "He was reserved, subtle and a complete master of the art of dissimulation.[110] Consequently, unlike Shahjahan, he did not exercise cruelty towards men who used to visit Roshan Ara but instead tried to hush up things. He, therefore, decided that the youth should leave the seraglio in the same manner, that is, by secretly climbing over the walls. But the eunuchs exceeded their master's instructions and threw the culprit from the top of the wall to the ground below.[111] Aurangzeb was much disturbed at the senior eunuchs's act, which affected the good name of the princess. The Emperor punished him by removing him from office for some days though the reason given out was that he was too severe to the servants in the palace. "But the princess began to lose some of the esteem that Aurangzeb had for her."[112]

In the case of the second paramour, the youth had entered the seraglio by the regular gate, had kept company of the princess for some time, till one day he was seen moving about the gardens. The Emperor called him, questioned him and then commanded him to quit the palace through the same gate. "Aurangzeb determined, however, to inflict a severe and exemplary punishment upon the eunuchs" whose duty it was to guard the entrance to the seraglio.[113] Manucci also writes about the amorous adventures of Roshan Ara Begum, and he derives a singular pleasure out of these. He sympathised with Jahan Ara and therefore only makes passing references to her love adventures. But Roshan Ara he does not spare. He writes: "Roshan Ara Begum, kept there nine youths in secret for her diversion. The discoverer of this noble conduct was Fakhr-un-nisa Begum, the daughter of Aurangzeb. This lady, although not desirous of marriage, had no intention of being deprived of her satisfaction. Therefore, she asked her aunt to make over to her at least one out of nine. Roshan Ara Begum declined the request in spite of her niece's importunity. Moved by envy the young girl revealed to her father what was hidden in the apartment of Roshan Ara Begum. By diligent search they caught the youngmen, who were well clothed and good looking. They were made over to the criminal authorities, being announced to the world as thieves; and following the



orders he had received, the Kotwal, Sidi Faulad, destroyed them in less than a month by various secret tortures."[114] Manucci may not be correct in all the details, but Aurangzeb never gave Roshan Ara permission to live in a separate mansion outside the palace, a privilege Jahan Ara enjoyed.

As these are only hearsay writings, the veracity of these can never be checked as the medieval chroniclers say:

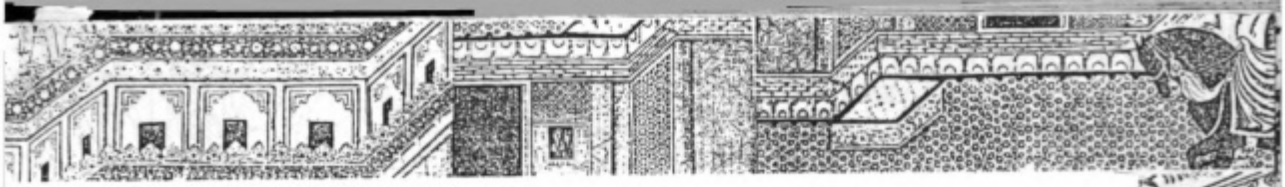
"God alone knows the truth."

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. 21 Safar 1023 H. Lahori, I, Pt. I, p. 391. *Amal Saleh*, I, p. 80. Mumtaz's first child Hur-un-nisa was born in Agra in 1022 H and died in 1025 aged three years and one month.
2. Lahori, II, Pt. II, p. 629.
3. Manucci, I, p. 216.
4. *Maasir-ul-Umara*, pp. 260-61.
5. Qazwini, III, p. 500.
6. Qanungo, K.R. *Dara Shukoh*, 1, p. 12. Also Saksena, *History of Shahjahan*, p. 312.
7. Qazwini, III, pp. 498-500. Lahori, I, Pt. II, p. 97.
8. He died in 1694, aged 93 years, after having filled many important offices of the State under Shahjahan and Aurangzeb.
9. Manucci, I, p. 218.
10. Bernier, p. 12.
11. Manucci, I, p. 216.
12. Bernier, p. 12.
13. Manucci, I, pp. 216-17.
14. Mundy, II, p. 203, writing about the scandal, gives the name of the girl as Chamani Begum (Garden Princess). Shahjahan had a daughter by this name but she died of smallpox in 1616 at a very young age. *Tuzuk*, I, pp. 326-27.
15. Bernier, p. 11.
16. Tavernier, I, pp. 342, 344.
17. Smith, *The Indian Antiquary*, 1914, pp. 240-44. Temple, Richard. *The Indian Antiquary*, 1915, esp. p. 24. Saksena, *History of Shahjahan of Delhi*, pp. 338-43.
18. Beale, T.W. *Oriental Biographical Dictionary*, p. 190.
19. Saksena, *op. cit.*, p. 337.
20. See for e.g. Dara's comments on Aurangzeb—Zainabadi affair, *infra* chapter IX.
21. Tavernier, I, p. 344.
22. Catrou cited in Bernier, p. 11 n.
23. Manucci, II, pp. 75-76.
24. *Ibid.*, I, p. 217.
25. Bernier, p. 12.
26. Yazdani, G. *Jahanara*, p. 7 and Khafi Khan, p. 609.
27. Lahori, II, pp. 395-400; and Khafi Khan, I, p. 606.
28. *Maasir-i-Alamgiri*, p. 364.

29. Saksena, *Shahjahan*, pp. 63-64.
30. Lahori, I, Pt. II, p. 51; also II, Pt. I, p. 207.
31. Manucci, I, pp. 67, 216.
32. *Amal-i-Saleh*, III, p. 109.
33. Manucci, I, p. 216.
34. Lahori, II, Pt. I, p. 315.
35. *Maasir-i-Alamgiri*, pp. 19, 46; Tavernier, I, p. 80.
36. Bernier, p. 12.
37. *English Factory Records* (1651-1654), pp. 11, 12, 50 and (1646-50), pp. 219-20.
38. *Ibid.*, (1646-50), p. 304. Also *J.A.S.B.*, 1911, pp. 453-54.
39. Tavernier, I, p. 141.
40. Qanungo, *Dara Shukoh*, I, pp. 136-37.
41. Sarkar, *Aurangzeb*, I, p. 239.
42. Pant, *The Commercial Policy of the Mughals*, p. 211.
43. *English Factory Records* (1642-45), p. 148; (1646-50), pp. 219-20; (1651-54),pp. 11-12, 50.
44. Manucci, I, p. 216.
45. Mulla Shah Badakhshi, *Pir* of Dara and Jahan Ara was given by her five thousand rupees on completion of the first of Ramzan. Kavindra Acharya got one thousand five hundred rupees at Lahore. Qanungo, *Dara Shukoh*, I, p. 148 n.
46. *C.H.I.* IV, p. 553.
47. Lahori, I, Pt. II, p. 252; Also Blochmann in *Ain*. I, p. 375.
48. Khan, Yusuf Husain. Educational System in Medieval India, *Islamic Culture*, 1956, p. 117.
49. Lahori, II, Pt. II, p. 469.
50. Manucci, I, p. 221.
51. Bernier, pp. 280-81; Also Carr Stephen, *Archaeology and Monumental Remains of Delhi*, p. 247; Fanshaw, *Delhi Past and Present*, p. 52.
52. Tavernier, I, p. 41.
53. Khafi Khan, I, p. 706.
54. Yazdani, *Jahanara*, p. 26.
55. *Amal-i-Saleh*, II, p. 36; Lahori, I, p. 195.
56. Lahori, I, Pt. II, p. 7; II, Pt. II, p. 587; Thevenot, p. 35.
57. Yazdani, p. 26.
58. Manucci, I, p. 221.
59. Aqil Razi Khan, *Waqiat-i-Alamgiri*, Ed. Zafar Hasan, pp. 16-17; Sarkar, Jadunath. *Aurangzeb*, II, p. 73. *Jami-ul-Insha* cited in Saksena, B.P. p. 320. Saleh says that Jahan Ara sent this letter through her own Bakshi, Muhammad Faruq.
60. Aqil Razi Khan, *Waqiat-i-Alamgiri*, pp. 10-11.
61. *Maasir-i-Alamgiri*, p. 19.
62. *Amal-i-Saleh*, III, pp. 269-72.
63. Sarkar, *Short History of Aurangzeb*, pp. 110-120.
64. Bernier, pp. 198-99.
65. Sarkar, *Aurangzeb*, III, p. 36.
66. *Amal-i-Saleh*, II, p. 422.
67. *A.N.*, II, p. 237 n. 5.
68. *Ibid.*, p. 238 n. 1.
69. Hasrat, Bikramjit. *Dara Shikoh, Life and Works*, pp. 82-83.
70. See *J.A.S.B.*, VII, No. 7, July 1911.

71. Her death is described best in *Maasir-i-Alamgiri*.
72. Sarkar, *Aurangzeb*, III, p. 38.
73. Manucci, II, pp. 255-56.
74. The original in Persian reads: *baghair sabza na poshad kase mazar mara*
ki qabr posh ghariban hamin gayah basast
75. *Tuzuk*. I, p. 389.
76. Bernier, p. 14.
77. Latif, S.M. *Agra Historical and Descriptive*, p. 44.
78. Sarkar, *Aurangzeb*, I p. 314; III pp. 58-59.
79. Tavernier, I, pp. 376-77.
80. Bernier, p. 100.
81. Manucci, I, p. 357.
82. *Ibid.*, II, pp. 54-56. Bernier, p. 123.
83. Sarkar, *Aurangzeb*, III, p. 59. Bernier, pp. 124-25.
84. Manucci, II, p. 55.
85. Bernier, p. 125.
86. *Ibid.*, pp. 350-51.
87. Tavernier, I, pp. 114-15.
88. Ray, Aniruddha. 'Last Memoir of Francois Bernier from Surat', *P.I.H.C.*, 1981, pp. 241-257, esp. p. 246.
89. *Alamgir Nama*, p. 368; Tavernier, I, pp. 376-77.
90. Manucci was amused at the pun on '*Sone Ka*' (meaning 'made of gold', also meaning 'for sleeping on') as on her bedstead were inscribed the Hindi words "*Begum Saheb ka palang sone ka*". Manucci, I, p. 217 & n.
91. Bernier, p. 372, also p. 375.
92. *Ibid* , p. 128 n.
93. *Ibid.*, p. 371-72.
94. Manucci, I, p. 220.
95. *Ibid.*, II, p. 202, also p. 21.
96. *Ibid.*, I, p. 218.
97. *Ibid.*, pp. 217-20.
98. Jauhar, p. 31 n.; Gulbadan, pp. 150-51, 240.
99. Gulbadan, p. 231.
100. *Ibid.*, p. 232.
101. *Ibid.*, p. 214.
102. Manucci, I, p. 218.
103. *Ibid.*, I, pp. 216-17.
104. *Supra*, Chapter I.
105. Bernier, p. 132. Manucci, I, p. 220; II, p. 35; III, p. 179.
106. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
107. Bernier's version, slightly abridged has been given in his own words.
108. Manucci, I, p. 217.
109. Bernier, pp. 12-14.
110. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
111. *Ibid.*, p. 132. Manucci, II, pp. 35-36.
112. Manucci, II, p. 36.
113. Bernier, pp. 132-33. 114. Manucci, II, pp. 89-90, and n.



CHAPTER VII

Princesses and Princes

Nur Jahan and Mumtaz Mahall, Jahan Ara and Roshan Ara, were models for all Mughal queens, princesses and ladies of nobles. The harem-ladies endeavoured to emulate their way of life and thought. But these four were the great, the very important ones. Nur Jahan and Jahan Ara were the most powerful ladies not only in the harem but in the whole empire. They were not only great as individuals; they raised the stature of Mughal womanhood to the pinnacle of excellence. Most others were, of course, not as important as they were.

Our study of the everyday life of these harem-ladies would fall into two parts: (1) the routine of the young and (2) that of the old. The first is dealt here and the next will follow.

Education of Princesses

The position of women in the Mughal society was inferior to that of men. Pl. VI When a prince was born, the whole court rejoiced. When a princess was born, the jubilation was confined to the women of the *Mahal*.[1] When Emperor Akbar ordered rejoicings at the birth of Iffat Banu, a daughter to Prince Salim, it was considered, according to Abul Fazl, "contrary to the custom of contemporaries."[2] Pl. 9 As she grew up, a princess was taught to read and write. Often the girls in the palace gathered together in one place to receive rudimentary instruction. Sometimes the duty of the school mistress and governess was combined in one person called Atun Mama.[3]

According to Father Monserrate, Akbar was greatly interested in female education and according to Abdul Qadir Badaoni, the emperor recommended a



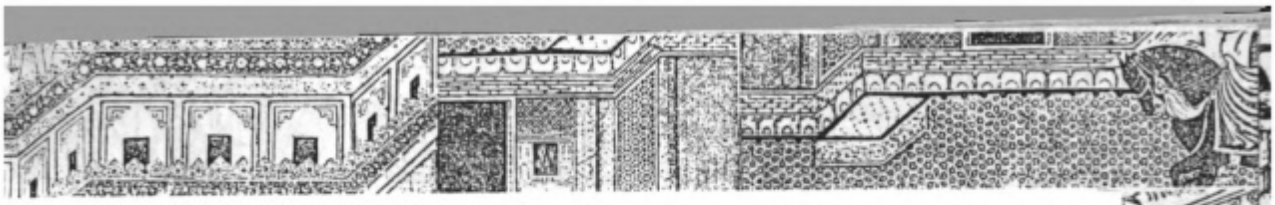


new syllabus. "He (Akbar) gives very great care and attention to the education of the princesses," writes Monserrate, "They are taught to read and write and trained in other ways by matrons".[4] Akbar established a school for girls in Fatehpur Sikri.[5] Some royal ladies also were interested in promoting the cause of education. They established *madrasas* and gave stipends. Bega Begum, Humayun's consort, founded a college near the mausoleum of her husband.[6] Maham Anaga, the foster-mother of Akbar, established a school at Delhi which was attached to the Khair-ul-Manzil Masjid.[7] Thus the king and many ladies of the harem spent lot of money on the promotion of education.

But the 'tools' of education were limited. There were no printed books, paper was scarce, pens were nothing more than sharpened reeds, and ink was made from lamp black. When most of the nobles and even many kings were uneducated, and some even could not write their names and signed a document by an impression of the thumb or palm, education of harem-ladies was not considered of much consequence. *Parda* was also an impediment to the education of princesses.[8] Despite these drawbacks, some princesses exhibited special interest in acquiring 'higher' learning. Their number was small, but in any society in the Middle Ages, learned ladies were but few. Among the Mughal princesses, Gulbadan Begum was well-versed in Persian and Turki and had a library of her own in the harem. She was gifted with a poetic temperament and often composed verses.[9] She wrote the famous historical work *Humayun Nama* at the request of her nephew, Emperor Akbar. Nur Jahan, Jahan Ara and her niece Zaib-un-nisa, daughter of Aurangzeb, were literary figures of their age. Aurangzeb educated all his daughters well, especially in religious lore. Zaib-un-nisa, Badr-un-nisa and Zabdat-un-nisa memorised the Quran and read many books on the faith.[10] Zinat-un-nisa, his second daughter, too was taught by him in "the necessary rules of the (Muslim) faith."[11]

Princess Zaib-un-nisa was the most accomplished and her academic achievements show how a talented princess received her education in the Mughal harem. She was taught by Hafiza Mariyam and Mulla Said Ashraf Mazindarani, a highly educated lady and a great Persian poet respectively. Shah Rustam Ghazi, a renowned scholar, too helped her in her literary pursuits. She was a poetess,[12] a proficient mathematician[13] and had learnt the Quran by heart for which she was rewarded thirty thousand gold pieces by her father.[14] But her major interest was poetry. Among the poets of her circle were Nazir Ali Saib, Shams Waliullah, Chandrabhan Brahman and Bahroz.[15] *Zaib-ul-Munshat* is a collection of her letters, reflecting her extremely refined literary accomplishments in the epistolary art.[16] She was also skilled in the art of calligraphy and could write in *shikast* (cursive), *nastaliq* and *naskh* styles.[17] But such talented princesses were not many and their accomplishments too were not fully recognized. Gulbadan Begum's





Humayun Nama is not considered to be a great literary achievement.[18] Poetesses like Gulbadan Begum, and her sister Gulrukh Begum, Sultan Salima Begum, Nur Jahan Begum and Jahan Ara Begum are not considered equal to their male counterparts. Abul Fazl gives the names of fifty-nine topmost Persian poets of Akbar's court and Badaoni of one hundred and fifty-three,[19] but not one among them is of a lady. The poetesses perforce chose to remain anonymous and such great queens and princesses as Nur Jahan and Zaib-un-nisa wrote poems under the *nom-de-plume* (*takhallus*) of Makhfi or Hidden. Obviously, it was not considered ethical enough for ladies to compose verses or write love lyrics as freely as men. At least they do not receive approbation of the medieval chroniclers.

Literary education apart, other arts which are considered to be part of 'female education' such as dancing and music, calligraphy and painting, and even cooking, too were not widely cultivated by the ladies of Mughal royalty and nobility. Such arts and pastimes were denied to them by religion, riches and restrictions. Dancing and music were very highly developed in India in the ancient times, with a religious backdrop not meant for entertainment. In medieval times, however, in parts of the country where Muslim rule became entrenched, dance and music became a medium of entertainment and the preserve of dancing girls. Naturally, the elites in the harem could not cultivate it; dance and music were considered to be the degraded professions of dancing girls, *patars* and *Kanchanis*. Muslim religion too discouraged it.

The art of painting flourished under the Mughals. Mughal miniatures are renowned the world over. But it was all the work of men; Muslim women painters of any consequence were but few. So also was the case with the art of writing and calligraphy. A few princesses did evince interest in learning calligraphy, painting and music, but they were rare and exceptional. Stitching and embroidery of course were meant for the artisans and workers of the *karkhanas*. Cooking was confined entirely to servants.[20] The harem was the abode of the rich and the lazy, "passing the days in amusement and the nights in talk."[21]

Education of Princes

Early education of the royal princes was also imparted in the harem, and a discussion about it here would, therefore, be pertinent. On the birth of a prince, the emperor gave the infant a name and fixed an allowance for him. At the age of about five, the boy was taught to read and write. Nizam-ud-din Ahmad gives an account of the ceremonial initiation of Prince Salim into the rudiments of learning. Qutb-ud-din Atka, writes he, "a nobleman of high rank was appointed tutor to Prince Salim. In celebration of this appointment he gave a grand feast....





According to the usual custom, he made presents of money and jewels to the prince, and the clamour of congratulations reached the sky."[22] Prince Murad was taught the letters at the age of eight because of his incessant ailments in childhood.[23]

As the princes grew up, they were made over to learned men. The education imparted was of the orthodox type, but in Akbar's time, it was liberal. Christian and Hindu teachers were freely appointed to instruct the princes. Father Monserrate gives an account of the education of Akbar's sons who were taught not only Arabic and Persian but also Hindi and Portuguese by highly learned Indian and European teachers.[24] Prince Murad's education was first entrusted to Monserrate and afterwards to Acquaviva.[25] But on the protest of Hamida Banu Begum and other ladies of the harem the tuition of Jesuit fathers was discontinued.[26] Pandit Shiv Dutt Brahman, 'who was famed as the Bhattacharjee of the age', was appointed to instruct Prince Khusrau, the son of Jahangir, in Indian Philosophy.[27] Liberal education produced princes like Salim, Khusrau and Dara, but there was opposition to such learning in the harem and court circles. That is why, by and large, instruction remained pedagogical. But too much emphasis on Arabic, grammar and obscurantist theology was counter-productive and even Aurangzeb was not happy at the instruction the *Mullas* had given him in his early years. The Mughal emperors themselves often imparted education to the princes in the form of guidance or a set of precepts. To a father, the prince was ever a child needing guidance and instructions. Jahangir laid down some precepts for his sons and disciples adding that man acquired "prudence by seeing the world at large, by feeling alternately the effects of heat and cold."[28] His maxims conclude with the following sage remarks:

"Bodily strength is obtained by three practices. 1. To speak little. 2. To eat little. 3. To sleep little." (Here his model was his father Akbar).

"Three combinations are incompatible. 1. Power with the eating of lawful things. 2. Kindness with anger. 3. Truth with loquacity."

"Four things make a man fat. 1. To put on new clothes. 2. To indulge much in hot baths. 3. To eat greasy or sweet food. 4. To live according to one's desire."

"Six things make the heart black and sorrowful. 1. To put on dirty clothes, and cut your hair but seldom. 2. To be in a state of ceremonial defilement. 3. To tell lies. 4. Backbiting. 5. To be abusive. 6. Negligence in prayer."

"Whoever attends to these precepts", concludes he, "will always be held in consideration by great and small."[29]

Aurangzeb gave detailed directions to his eldest son, Prince Muazzam, then aged fifteen for regulating his daily life. "Whether you are in the residence or on a march," wrote he, "get up from bed 72 minutes before sunrise. After spending 48 minutes in bathing and getting ready come out of your rooms for the morning prayer. After saying the prayer and reciting set passages, read one section of the



Quran. Breakfast in the apartment comes next. If you are on a march, take horse 48 minutes after sunrise. The principal meal and some repose will fill your time till two hours before sunset, when the *asr* prayer should be said. But if the meal alone should suffice to refresh you, spend the interval in improving your writing, composing letters or reading prose and poetry. After the *asr* prayer, read Arabic for a short time, and then some 24 minutes before sunset hold a select audience at which you should sit till 48 minutes after nightfall. Then leave the chamber and read a section of the Quran and retiring to the inner apartments go to bed at 9 P.M." He further advised the Prince in these words: "Graudally make yourself perfect in the habit of wearing arms. Let your sweat dry before you take off your coat and lie down, lest you should fall ill. At all times, whether marching or holding court, speak just as many words as are necessary."[30] There are dozens of letters of Aurangzeb addressed to his sons advising them not to be casual while composing communications, to give proper care to diction and even improve their handwriting.

Besides the king and the learned tutors, "courteous eunuchs" and matrons also educated the princes in "the liberal and military arts." According to Manucci they enacted many comedies and held mock courts to show how cases should be tried and judgements delivered. "They show them combats and fights and similar things (so that) should they obtain rule ... (they may) be able to judge with discernment and without passion."[31] The prince was also trained to be brave and to suffer without a whimper. Hawkins relates an incident. Once Jahangir beat his son Shahryar, but the boy did not cry. This angered the King still more and he struck him repeatedly and so severely that blood oozed out from his cheeks. Even then there was no expression of pain on the face of the prince. On being asked about this behaviour, "He answered that his nurses had told him that it was the greatest shame in the world for princes to cry when they were beaten...and ever since they nurtured me this kind... nothing shall make me cry to death."[32] The stoicism with which Prince Kamran bore his blinding without a single groan confirms the effects of the training imparted to the Mughal princes.[33] Manucci once treated the little child of Sultan Muiz-ud-din, son of Shah Alam. "One day," writes Manucci, 'I said laughingly to make him forget the pain he felt, that he must not be angry. The eunuchs and the matrons who were present found what I had said to be most extraordinary, and replying to me, they said that the Moghul princes were never disturbed in mind, and all they did was void of passion and full of prudence."[34]

Thus the education of the princes was comprehensive. It was religious, literary, martial and practical. Even so, training by matrons and eunuchs could not be that good. Bernier was not impressed with the education of princes in the seraglio. Writes he: "intrusted from infancy to the care of women and eunuchs, slaves from

Russia, Circassia...Gurjistan (Georgia) or Ethiopia, whose minds are debased by the very nature of their occupation; servile and mean to superiors, proud and oppressive to dependants; these princes...leave the walls of the seraglio quite ignorant. (They) affect to be dignified and grave, though... gravity and dignity form no part of their character."[35] Even Manucci agrees with Bernier's conclusion because eunuchs themselves could not be great and good, and young princes were too much in their company. He says that such education in general did not turn the princes into great men. They displayed all imaginable gravity when they gave audience, in order to inspire fear in everybody, "but in their Mahal and in private they are lowly,"[36] because the sons were educated in the vices of kings, and drinking wine, taking drugs and dallying with girls too they learnt early in age. Sometimes young princes were given wine with water or rose water as a remedy for cough or minor ailment.[37] Later on they drank with the permission of the king. Jahangir offered wine to Prince Shahjahan for the first time when the latter was 24 years old, warning him at the same time with the lines attributed to the great physician Avicenna. Pl. 10

"Wine is a raging enemy, a prudent friend;
A little is an antidote, but much a snake's poison.
In much there is no little injury,
In a little there is much profit."[38]

But such shibboleths from the lips of the ever-inebriated Jahangir were not of much value. The princes were prisoners of the environment. They could not resist imbibing good and bad habits which were the reward and bane of being born in the palace. As they grew up, most of them took to drinking in a big way. This they often did in secret,[39] in their own harems, but the fact was an open secret.

In brief the princes were pampered but not spoiled. The king always kept a watchful eye on them. Manucci writes that, "When the king goes out to hunt or visits the mosque, he takes these princes with him. This is the mode in which they are brought up inside the palace until the age of sixteen years. At this age they are married." The bride was chosen by the King. Any reluctance to marry the girl selected by the monarch met with punishment.[40] At about the time the princes were married, they were given a separate mansion in the palace and an official assignment,[41] "but along with all that he (the king) keeps near them good tutors and most careful spies, who inform of all that passes every day."[42]

Parda or Seclusion

A prince was married when about sixteen years of age. The average age of



marriage for a princess was twelve to thirteen.[43] It was also about this age, or a little earlier, that she was taught to live in *parda*. Parda meant living in seclusion or behind a screen or at least covering off the face by a veil. Akbar used a very interesting if not appropriate Hindi word for *burqa*—'*chitragupta*.'[44] When she grew old, there was no need to continue *parda*, but by that time, it had become a habit. *Parda* was not necessary in the harem either. The *Mahal* was a secluded place, inhabited by women only. But the ladies were obliged to observe it while going on journeys. Physicians, goldsmiths, jewellers, artisans and masons used to come to the *Mahal* when required and women stayed away from their view. There were also *Khanazads* and *Salatin* and other *na-mahram* relatives with whom marriage was permissible and therefore contact was discouraged by observance of *parda*. *Parda* in its elaborate and known form is a Muslim institution. The Mughal harem observed it scrupulously.[45] It was a great honour done to one if the King asked his ladies to unveil before him. Once Jahangir paid a visit to his father-in-law Aitmad-ud-daula and he "bastowed everlasting honour on him by directing the ladies of the harem not to veil their faces from him."[46]

They say excess of everything is bad and so it was with *parda*. If a fire broke out in the seraglio, many women preferred to be consumed by flames rather than flee and be seen by strangers. Bernier affirms that, "many inmates of the Seraglio fell victims to the devouring elements, for these poor women are so bashful and helpless that they can do nothing but hide their faces at the sight of strangers and those who perished possessed not sufficient energy to fly from danger."[47] After centuries of seclusion, submission and suppression, those permanently dependent people naturally became too enervated to flee from danger. Soldiers in the army of Aurangzeb before engaging in battle or preparing for a retreat, killed their women without compunction if there was any fear of their being exposed to the sight of other men.[48]Amir Khan, the governor of Kabul, felt no scruples in renouncing his wife when she attempted to save her life by leaping from the back of an elephant which had run amuck when her veil got dislodged and exposed her face.[49] Ovington rightly writes that "All women of fashion in India are closely preserved by their husbands who forbid them the very sight of strangers."[50] Muhammad Zahir-ud-din Azfari writes that Taj Mahall, the chief queen of emperor Muhammad Shah, observed such strict *parda* that she would not take even a male child on her lap and would cover her face even if a boy of four came into her presence. No wonder that even when dying she did not allow a physician to feel her pulse.[51] The adverse affects of *parda* on the education, health and self-confidence of the harem-inmates are too obvious. Still men went on augmenting restriction on them. Else, there was no need for Abdul Qadir Badaoni to reiterate that a woman should live within the four walls of the house, keep herself covered with *chadar*, use covered *amari* while on journey and travel only under the supervision of men.[52] He adds





that she should not decorate herself or be seen by a *na-mahram* or stranger when her husband was away on a journey.[53]

Spinster Princesses

Another restriction on princesses was as amusing as it was atrocious. It became customary not to marry the daughters of the King, and the introduction of this pernicious regulation is attributed to Akbar by many writers including Manucci.[54] Akbar married his daughters and sisters to eligible grooms. Sakina Banu Begum, sister of his half-brother Muhammad Hakim was married to Naqib Khan's son.[55] He gave his sister Bakhshi Banu Begum in marriage to Ibrahim of Badakhshan, and after his death to Sharif-ud-din.[56] His duaghter Aram Banu Begum was married to Mirza Abdur Rahim, who later on became Khan-i-Khanan.[57] Another daughter, Shakr-un-nisa Begum, was married to Mirza Shah Rukh.[58] Akbar's elder daughter Sultan Khanum became the wife of the prince of Khandesh,[59] while Shahzada Khanum was married to Muzaffar Shah the ex-king of Gujarat.[60] There are many more such instances. Similarly, the wise monarch continued Mughal tradition of widow remarriage. Humayun's daughter Fakr-un-nisa Begum was first married to Abul Maali. After his death, she got married to Khwaja Hasan.[61] Akbar himself married the widow of Bairam Khan. Similarly, Haji Begum, a daughter of Muhammad Muqim was married first to Qasim Koka, and after being widowed, to Muhammad Hasan. After the death of Muhammad Hasan she married Muhammad Isa.[62] Indeed, so many ladies of royalty and nobility got married, some even twice or thrice, that all individual cases need not be mentioned. When prince Daniyal died, and his harem of three hundred women was placed under the protection of prince Salim, he explained to them that if any of them desired to marry they should inform him and also indicate their choice of the *Amirs* they wished to marry.[63]

Akbar thus did not prohibit the marriage of princesses. There is no evidence for it. All that he disapproved was marriage between first cousins.[64] Probably he thought that consanguineous marriages brought forth unhealthy progeny,[65] or was influenced by the Hindu environment in which such marriages were taboo. Whatever the reason, "he forbade marriages between cousins and near relations though this was sanctioned by Muslim law."[66] His ideas may or may not have received recognition by his successors, but by the time of Shahjahan certain constraints on the marriage of princesses are clearly seen. The custom of not marrying royal princesses owes its origin to many sources. Indian social psyche clung to the theory of hypergamy and it was the desire of the king not to feel inferior to any one in the empire. For, in the Indian circumambience, to which the Mughals themselves had



made substantial contribution, he would have become inferior to his son-in-law and the latters's family by marrying his daughter.[67] The daughters of the king were not married also to restrict the number of contenders to the throne. The sons of the king were prone to fighting for the crown; his sons-in-law would have added to the dimension and intensity of the conflict.[68] But the most important reason was that both Shahjahan and Aurangzeb waded through blood to the throne, killing in the process their cousins, nephews and other relatives who could have been prospective grooms for their daughters and nieces. Sometimes princesses used to be married outside the family, especially to great *Amirs*. But this practice also began to be discouraged and Shahjahan did not agree to marry Jahan Ara to a nobleman. The nobles too were not enthusiastic about marrying princesses, who in due course "became rulers of their husbands", and on the slightest provocation "tried to degrade the position and *mansab* of their husbands by complaining to the king".[69] Thus on the one hand there were emperors like Shahjahan who were reluctant to marry off their daughters to nobles, and on the other there were young *Amirs* and their parents who avoided to take princesses as their spouses for fear of living with a domineering wife. Either way the young ladies suffered. Many princesses, including Jahan Ara and Roshan Ara, could not be married mainly because of the dearth of eligible grooms whom the malevolent Mughal practice had destroyed during the accession of Shahjahan and Aurangzeb.

Princess Zaib-un-nisa

A very tragic instance is that of Zaib-un-nisa, the eldest daughter of Aurangzeb. Born at Daulatabad in 1638 to a Persian mother Dilras Banu Begum, Zaib-un-nisa (the Adorner of Women) grew up into an extremely pretty and comely girl. "In personal appearance she is described as being tall and slim, her face round and fair in colour, with two moles or beauty spots on her left cheek. Her eyes and abundant hair were very black and she had thin lips and small teeth". J.D. Westbrook adds that in the Lahore Museum there is a contemporary portrait which corresponds to this description.[70] There is no doubt that Zaib-un-nisa possessed a pleasing personality. She herself was conscious of her winsome looks and once wrote:

"When from my cheek I lift my veil,
The roses turn with envy pale."[71]

Added to her beauty were her talents. We have already referred to her excellent education. The love of letters almost inseparable from palace refinement was particularly fashionable with the Mughal princesses and the lack of patronage of poets by Aurangzeb was amply compensated by her. She spent most of her allowance

of four lakhs a year on literary patronage and charity.[72] Zaib-un-nisa herself excelled as a poetess. Her pen name was Zaib, but she chose to write under the pen name Makhfi. She was also skilled in the use of arms and several times took part in wars.

For such an accomplished princess there was no dearth of suitors. Her uncle Dara liked her immensely and by the wish of her grandfather Shahjahan, Zaib-un-nisa had been betrothed to Sulaiman Shukoh, the eldest son of Dara Shukoh. But the marriage could not come off because Aurangzeb ordered the execution of Dara and poisoning of Sulaiman Shukoh. In the absence of a cousin, Aurangzeb was prepared to marry her even outside the family. One of those who wished to marry her was Mirza Farukh, son of Shah Abbas II of Iran. But Zaib-un-nisa demanded that she should first meet the prince to see what he and his talents were like. "The record remains of how he came with a splendid retinue, and was feasted by Zaib-un-nisa in person in a pleasure house in her garden, while she waited on him with her veil upon her face. He asked for a certain sweatmeat in words which, by a play of language, also meant a kiss."[73] Zaib-un-nisa was greatly offended. The prince protested, he begged pardon, but she refused to marry him.[74]

She also could not marry Aqil Khan whom she probably loved. Aqil Khan was the son of the governor of Lahore when Aurangzeb visited the city in 1664 on way to Kashmir for convalescence. One day while she was enjoying fresh air on the terrace, Aqil Khan happened to see her and spontaneously uttered a poetic composition—'a vision in the red appears on the roof of the palace', because at that time the blooming Zaib was dressed in pomegranate (*gulnar*) coloured clothes. At the spur of the moment she completed Aqil's couplet by adding 'neither supplication, nor force nor gold can win her.'[75] Their romance ripened, but in the end Aqil Khan, through cowardice or discretion, did not dare come to Delhi to wed her. The allegations of her illicit relations with Aqil Khan have been refuted by Jadunath Sarkar,[76] and there is no better authority on Aurangzeb's reign than Sarkar. Even so "Zaib-un-nisa's personality is (so) engulfed in romantic tales of love episodes" that it is difficult to separate fiction from fact.[77] Even the Maratha warrior Shivaji was a hero of her dreams.[78] She poured out her emotions in her love lyrics. She was in the habit of sitting in the upper kiosk of the terraced Shalimar Garden of Shahjahan, enjoy the sight of the waterfall and composed her sweet and charming odes. "Once seated on a golden chair (in this pavilion), Zaib-un-nisa, as she beheld the waterfall in full play, composed the following unrivalled quatrain extempore:

Oh waterfall; for whose sake art thou weeping?
In whose sorrowful recollections has thou wrinkled thy brow?
What pain was it that impelled thee, like myself, the whole night,
To strike thy head against stone and to shed tears?"[79]



Zaib-un-nisa built her own garden and tomb at Nawankot, a village at Lahore; the Lahore of her days of youth and love. For its upkeep, she gave it to her slave girl Mian Bai. Unfortunately while Mian Bai was buried there, Zaib-un-nisa was not destined to lie there in eternal peace. Instead she passed the last twenty years of her life in incarceration in Delhi (1681-1702) and after her death was buried there.

Zaib-un-nisa had been punished by Aurangzeb for her sympathy with her younger brother prince Muhammad Akbar, who had rebelled againt his father in 1681. Zaib-un-nisa had held a secret correspondence with him When the rebellion failed and Akbar's camp was seized, Zaib-un-nisa's letters to the prince were found out. Aurangzeb was furious. He confiscated her property, her pension of rupees four lakhs a year was stopped and she was imprisoned in the Salimgarh fort for the rest of her life, where she died at the age of sixty-five.[80]

At Salimgarh, Zaib-un-nisa wrote bitter poetry. She bewailed:

"Seek not relief from the prison of grief, O Makhfi...
O Laila, there is no rest for the victim of love even in the grave.
Let no one know the secrets of thy love,
On the way of love, O Makhfi, walk alone."[81]

She was a born poet and was adept at converting the love of God (*ishq-i-haqiqi*) into love of mortals (*ishq-i-majazi*) in which all Sufi poets excelled, and wrote some of the most erotic poetry. In all she wrote more than four hundred *ghazals* (lyrics). These are couched in Sufi sentiments, but clearly exude a spirit of despair at unrequitted love.[82] But there is no surrendering to sorrow. The verses are saturated with the pride of beauty, a princess and a 'Rustam of her Age' in poetry. When one reads her verses one is reminded of Abul Fazl's words: "He who joins words to words, gives away a drop from the blood of his heart".[83] Zaib-un-nisa's heart did bleed when she wrote:

"O foolish springs
That bring not the Beloved to my abode;
Yea, all the friends of youth have gone from me,
Each has set out on his appointed road."

"The storm sweeps round my house, its ramparts fall,
its deep foundations sway before the gale.
I am a bird, who, flying home to rest,
Finds that the waters have o'erwhelmed his nest."

"For many years hath sorrow dwelt with me,
Yet I repine not, and so fiercely wage
My war against despair, it turns to flee,
I am the Rustam of this later age."[84]



The fierce war of this fearless soul came to an end in 1702. She was buried in the Zinat-ul-Masjid at Delhi.[85]

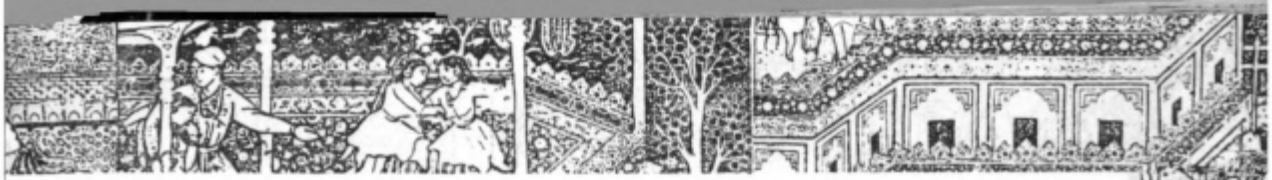
But such tribulations brought about unhealthy reactions. Some maidens gave up all hope of marriage and resigned themselves to a spinster's life. Some others turned introvert, became morose and remained unhappy, By the time of Aurangzeb the evils of the custom were widely recognized. The *Mullahs* and *faqirs* protested to the Emperor against the royal practice of making the daughters of the sovereign live and die as spinsters.[86] Aurangzeb married off girls in the family when he got suitable grooms. Murad Bakhsh's daughter was married to a Pirzada or holy man of Balkh. He married two of his own daughters, Mehr-un-nisa Begum and Zabt-un-nisa Begum—one to the son of Dara and the other to the son of Murad Bakhsh. He also married the beautiful Jani Begum, the daughter of Dara, to Sultan Azam, on whom was conferred the title of Azam Tara[87] on that occasion. But many were not that lucky. Zinat-un-nisa was another daughter of Aurangzeb who remained unmarried. She used to chaperon Aurangzeb's harem in the Deccan. This good lady begged her father to give the amount due to her as dowry and spent it in building a mosque, also called Kumari Masjid, in which her tomb is also located. Her epitaph, written by herself reads: Pl. 16

"In my grave the grace of God is my only help.
It is enough if the shadow of the cloud of mercy covers my tomb."[88]

Badr-un-nisa died young at the age of twenty-two before a suitable match could be found for her. In his old age in a letter to prince Kam Bakhsh, son of Udaipuri Mahall, Aurangzeb writes about the unhappiness of Udaipuri and a daughter Hijat-un-nisa, "who has not enjoyed the pleasures of the world (and) is in grief."[89]

Adornment and Beautification

Married or spinster, happy or unhappy, the princesses lived in the *Mahal*, well protected and well looked after. They rarely went out. They did not visit ladies of nobles; it was the other way round. In the event they went, they did so with the special permission of the king; they left at nine o'clock in the morning, accompanied by three or four eunuchs and a dozen ladies of honour, and returned before nightfall.[90] Otherwise they lived confined within the seraglio, but there with all luxury and magnificence. They knew the joy of possessing and spending money. Great princesses like Jahan Ara and Roshan Ara had large estates and allowances; others too were given allowances and gifts of cash and jewels.[91] On one occasion when Roshan Ara Begum was given seven lakh fifty thousand rupees by Aurangzeb, Zaib-un-nisa Begum got four lakhs, Zinat-un-nisa two lakhs, Badr-un-nisa



one lakh seventy thousand and Zabt-un-nisa one lakh fifty thousand.[92] Since the princesses had little work to do and remained confined to the *Mahal*, they spent most of their time and money in toilet and beautifying themselves. In the *Ain-i-Akbari*, Abul Fazl lists the sixteen celebrated items of Indian women's toilet (*solah singar*). These consisted mainly of bathing, anointing the body with sandalwood paste and other unguents, wearing dresses of various kinds, using collyrium, wearing pendants and earrings, adoring the nose with 'clove' or ring of pearls and gold, wearing ornaments round the neck, decking with garlands of flowers or pearls, rubbing perfumes, decorating hands with henna, using essence of rose, wearing belt with hanging bells, decorating ankles with ornaments, and eating *pan*.[93] Half-a-century earlier, Malik Muhhammad Jaisi in his *Padmavat* too gives a similar list of items of beautification. For the seventeenth century harem-inmates, Manucci's description in his *Storia do Mogor* is both elaborate and true to life.

The ladies of the harem bestowed great care to their toilet, and used all kinds
Pl. 14 of unguents to keep their bodies clean, soft and silky. Hair on the head was elaborately groomed; where necessary, black dye was freely used. In the words of Manucci, "their hair is very well dressed, plaited and perfumed with scented oil." The variegated patterns of coiffures were bedecked with flowers and perfumed oils. Abul Fazl says, "sweet-smelling flowers are used in large quantities. Oils are also extracted from flowers and used for the skin and the hair."[94] He gives a long list of 'fine smelling flowers' and 'flowers notable for their beauty'. These included such aromatic kinds as *Sewti*, *Chameli*, *Mogra*, *Champa*, *Ketki*, *Juhi*, *Molsari*, *Nargis*, *Kewra*, *Ratan Manjari* (bright red), *Kaner* (red and white), etc.[95]

Beauty of the face lives mainly in the eyes, the lips and the nose, and these were given special attention. The eyebrow was kept symmetrically arched, eyelids were repeatedly pencilled with *kajal*. *Missi*, a preparation of antimony, was applied to gums and teeth, but mainly to lips. The custom was based on the Arab admiration for the rose-red colour of the lip.[96] The nose was decorated with a *nath* or clove, which was usually studded with diamond. The *nath* was generally "a love-token presented to the bride by the bridegroom;"[97] its very mention brought blush to the cheeks. *Pan* too had its decorative and medicinal value. It reddened the lips, sweetened the breath and served as a deodorant.[98] According to Manucci, princesses always kept their hands and feet painted red with henna.[99] Henna was used both as a cosmetic and a medicine for skin irritations. Its remedial properties rendered it "of the value of pearls."[100] But for princesses there was no problem of cost and they used *mehendi* or henna liberally.[101]

Ornaments the harem-inmates wore from early childhood, and they remained "the very joy of their hearts" throughout their lives.[102] Abul Fazl gives a list of the then popular ornaments,[103] Manucci describes them: "They (the princesses) wore on their arms, above the elbow, rich armlets two inches wide, entriched on the



surface with stones, and having small bunches of pearls depending from them. Pl. VII
At their wrists are very rich bracelets, or bands of pearls, which usually go round nine or twelve times. In this way they often have the place for feeling the pulse so covered up that I have found it difficult to put my hand upon it. On their fingers are rich rings, and on the right thumb there is always a ring, where in place of stones, there is mounted a little round mirror, having pearls around it. This mirror (*arsi*) they used to look at themselves, an act of which they are very fond at any and every moment. In addition, they are girded with great stones; at the end of the strings which tie up their drawers there are bunches of pearls made up of fifteen strings, five fingers in length. Round the bottom of their legs are valuable metal rings or strings of costly pearls.... There hangs from the middle of their head in the centre of their forehead a bunch of pearls or precious ornaments in the shape of star, sun or moon or flower beset with glittering jewels."[104] He continues, "All these princesses own six to eight sets of jewels," besides other sets. No wonder "goldsmiths (both Indian and European)[105] are almost continuously busy making ornaments. The best and the most costly of their productions are for the King's person, the queens and the princesses....."[106]

Harem-ladies dressed in the best and costliest clothes, whether of cotton, silk or wool. Every day they changed their clothes several times. "Ordinarily", writes Manucci, "they wear two or even three garments, each weighing not more than one ounce, and worth from forty to fifty rupees each. This is without counting the (gold) lace that they are in the habit of adding. They sleep in these clothes, and renew them every twenty-four hours and never put them again, but give them away to their servants."[107] Many paintings of the Mughal harem show ladies wearing muslin so fine as to be almost transparent. "Because of their intense fineness of texture, they are spoken of in poetic language at the later Mughal courts as *Ab-e-Rawan* (running water), *Baft Hawa* (woven air) and *Shabnam* (evening dew)".[108] Muslins called *shabnam* were manufactured mostly at Dhaka and were famous as Dhaka *malmal*. These diaphanous fabrics were made of the finest thread and gleamed like a sheet of the dew. If laid on wet grass the cloth could hardly be seen. It is said that once, when Aurangzeb remonstrated with his daughter Zaib-un-nisa for wearing such transparent clothes, she answered that she was putting on seven folds of them. Such were the garments of the princesses, light, cool and airy, soft to touch and woven like gossamer often revealing surreptitiously what they were supposed to conceal. Pl. 2

They covered their heads with a sheet of cloth of gold spangled with stars of different makes and colours or wore turbans with an aigrette with ostrich feathers and ruby plum,[109] and surrounded by pearls and precious stones. "This is extremely becoming, and makes them look very graceful".[110] During the cold weather, they wore the same clothes, covering themselves on the top of the other



things with a woollen *qaba* or a long open gown and shawls of fine Kashmir make.[111] Their shawls too were "so thin that they can be passed through a small finger ring".[112] Their *jamawars* were suits of woollen cloth with flowers interwoven with wool or silk. They also wore *Tus* or cloth made of wild goat's hair, but perhaps their most favourite fabric was *pashmina* which was made of exceptionally light and warm wool, like the lamb's wool.

The ladies of the Mughal harem did not enjoy the pleasure of wearing nylons, chiffons and georgettes, but a better material provided softness and liquefaction to their dresses. It was silk. The very touch of silk soothed the fingers and the body, its sleek lusture was synonymous with spendour. Silk turned plain looking princesses into gorgeous beauties. In the Middle Ages silk was the loot of every conquest, the stuff of every trade. It was the queen of textiles and the most coveted fabric of the harem. This soft-to-touch luxury covered the ladies of the seraglio from head to foot. They wore it; they slept in it snugly. The dresses of ladies were embroidered with gold and silver threads, and laces were stiched on frings to make them graceful. These clothes were perfumed with essence of rose and other flowers. Abul Fazl's catalogue of perfumes and the method of their preparation makes an interesting reading.[113] How much the Mughals loved perfumes is brought out by the royal memoir-writer Jahangir himself. When his mother-in-law, Asmat Begum, struck upon a new method of preparing essence of rose, or *itr-i-Jahangiri*, the enthusiastic son-in-law wrote, "It is of such 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 red rose-buds had bloomed at once."[114] The aromatic essences were used on the body and rubbed on the clothes. The harem-ladies in general and the princesses in particular gave great attention to their make-up from head to foot. Even their shoes used to be splendid, worked in many patterns, with gold and silver spangles. They were made with sharp points curling upwards but worn down at the heel, variously coloured and garnished with precious stones.

Internal and external trade, royal workshops and private manufactories provided the requirements of the *Haremsara*. Silk was imported from many foreign countries like China and Persia as well as produced indigenously. Bernier says that the consumption of fine cloths of gold, brocades, silks, embroideries, pearls, musk, amber and sweet essences in the seraglio "is greater than can be conceived."[115] Manucci and Bernier talk in general terms, but Abul Fazl gives specific names of cotton, silk and woollen fabrics, Indian as well as those imported from "Turkey, Europe and Portugal."[116] The well-known fabrics were Satin, *Atlas, Kimkhab Katan, Tafta, Ambari, Tasser,* etc. Plain and brocaded velvet (*makhmal*) was imported from Europe, Sashan, Yazd, Mashad, Herat and many other places.[117] By the time of Shahjahan more and more foreign stuffs had begun to be imported.[118]



Quilts and coverlets, bedsheets and pillows, were made at home. Silk quilts of Satgaon were famous. These were also prepared at Patna, Qasim Bazar, Murshidabad and Orissa.[119] Banaras silks and embroidered silk fabrics were rightly renowned. Terry says that the country, "yields good store of silk which they weave curiously, sometimes mingled with silver or gold. They make velvets and satin taffetoss...."[120] Fine cotton cloth was manufactured at Delhi, Lahore, Agra, Patna, Banaras, Burhanpur, Dacca and many other places.[121] "Dacca produced ...prodigious quantity of fine white cloth and silken stuffs."[122]

Clothes, embroideries, carpets, shoes, vanity boxes, items of furniture and scores of other nick-nack were prepared in the royal *karkhanas* and imported from abroad. European ambassadors, traders and visitors were happy to provide large and small looking glasses, gold and silver laces, fine scarlet and green broad cloths and several articles of Chinese and Japanese workmanship.[123] The Royal manufactories or *karkhanas* were spread all over the country from Kashmir, Lahore and Agra to Ahmedabad, Fatehpur and Burhanpur. The workmanship of Kashmir was renowned. Its *palkis,* bedsheets, trunks, inkstands, boxes and spoons, were used all over India. But its shawls were superb. "Great pains have been taken to manufacture similar shawls in Patna, Agra, and Lahore, but notwithstanding every possible care, they never have the delicate texture and softness of the Kashmir shawls."[124] Kashmir, Fatehpur and Jaunpur carpets were also famous. Woollen carpets or *qalins* were imported from Iran and Central Asia. Thick carpets were called *Pari* while *shatranji* carpets were both woollen and cotton. In short, there were "Karkhanas in large halls seen in many places. In one hall (worked) embroiderers, in another goldsmiths, painters, varnishers, lacquer workers, joiners, tailors, turners, shoemakers, (makers of) silk, brocade and those fine muslins of which are made turbans, girdles with golden flowers, and drawers worn by females.... so delicately fine as to wear out in one night."[125]

With all these items of dress and decoration, the harem-ladies knew how to live in sensual luxury, and the Mughal kings and nobles knew how to provide them with this luxury. Young ladies in neck-bottom dresses, having their little hands painted with delicate designs of henna, laughing like wayward birds, one with the spirit of feminity, generated togetherness and a feeling of camaraderie. Many Mughal miniatures have recaptured the sensuous grace and appealing charm that have remained the hallmark of Indian ideal of feminine dress and beauty.

Relaxation and Recreation

Camaraderie was the greatest relaxation of the young ladies of the harem. Western women's concept of privacy is to be alone. Eastern women's concept of



privacy is to be relaxed among other women. Ladies in the harem did not love privacy so much as company. Seclusion was from men. Among women themselves there was greater togetherness, and a sort of community living. Female society was unlimited. Every princess had companions among ladies of honour or ladies in waiting. Companionship was contagious. It brought the young ladies inseparably together. They all lived huddled together all the time chatting, laughing and talking. The princesses and hundreds of other beauties, collected from all over the country and abroad, all 'buxom, blithe and debonair', filled the *Mahal* with mirth. Gathered in friendly groups they flitted about gossiping, singing, and laughing, morning, day and night, making the palace reverberate with their delicate but dazzling presence. Whether it was in palace or in camp, the entire time was passed in jollity and carousing.[126]

Pl. VII

All company is insipid without food. The young ladies treated themselves to delicious and abundant food—another great relaxation. In this pastime, they were as good entertainers as they were hospitable. Mughal kings and nobles were renowned for their elegant tastes, a major item of which was satiation of the palate. Meals prepared for the king would have been shared by the harem-ladies. If not all the inmates, at least queens, princesses and favourites would surely have partaken of it. Abul Fazl writes that in the imperial kitchen "cooks from all countries prepare a great variety of dishes of all kinds of grains, greens, meats; also oily, sweet and spicy dishes. Every day such dishes are prepared as the nobles can scarcely command at their feasts, from which you may infer how exquisite the dishes are...." "Sukhdas rice from Bahraich, *Dewzira* rice from Gwalior, *Jinjin* rice from Rajori and Nimlah, *ghi* from Hisar Firoza; ducks, water-fowls, and certain vegetables from Kashmir," were used in cooking. "The victuals are served up in dishes of gold and silver, stone and earthenware.... The servants of the pantry send various kinds of bread, saucers of curd piled up, and small stands containing plates of pickles, fresh ginger, limes and various greens.... Some victuals are also kept half-ready, (so that) in the space of an hour a hundred dishes are served up."[127] "I (Abul Fazl) shall give some particulars. Cooked victuals may be arranged under three heads, first, such in which no meat is used, called now-a-days *sufiyana;* secondly, such in which meat and rice, etc., are used; thirdly, meats with spices. I shall give ten recipes of each kind."[128] And then follow recipes of mouth-watering dishes and pickles.[129] Such delicious food would have continued to be cooked in the reigns of Akbar's successors. If anything, culinary art would have become more sophisticated and the number and variety of dishes would have only increased. Various kinds of flavours were used in cooking.[130] Dried and fresh fruits, both Indian and foreign, were also consumed in the harem with great gusto.[131] Mango was universally liked.[132] Coffee with milk was frequently sipped,[133] and *pan* was constantly chewed.





Cooking was done centrally and food for the women of the seraglio commenced to be taken from the kitchen in the morning, and continued till night.[134] Therefore, there was all the time in the world available for chit-chatting, playing games, and telling stories. Abul Fazl's *Ain-i-Akbari* mentions only four indoor games in the following sequence—*Chaupar*, *Chandal-Mandal*, Cards and Chess. It also gives the impression that these games were confined to Akbar and his nobles and that the emperor by playing with his courtiers, 'weighs the talents of a man', or as in chess, 'his chief object is to test the value of men.'[135] But there are many Mughal miniatures showing harem-ladies playing these games. It is also well-known that Zaib-un-nisa spent much time playing *chaupar* with her girl friends.[136] Thus indoor games mentioned above, and others such as these, were freely played in the Mughal harem.

The chessboard was of the pattern of modern chess table with 64 squares, although there was some difference in the shape of chessmen.[137] It was popular with princesses as well as ladies of nobles. Often Akbar played it with slave-girls as pieces on a large chequered stone platform built in a courtyard of Fatehpur Sikri still seen there. It must have been an exciting experience to watch a bevy of beautiful girls, attired in as chessmen standing on the board and changing places at the bidding of the emperor and his playmate. Usually the onlookers too were ladies. The Mughal nobles and their ladies were specially interested in chess and Manucci, who visited them often, expresses their belief when he says that by playing chess "they learn to govern, place and displace, give and take with discretion....."[138]

An easier and, therefore, a more pupular game among the harem-ladies was *chaupar,* played even to this day under three different names—*Pachisi, Chausar* and *Chaupar*. There are Mughal paintings showing princesses playing this game.[139] The table of this game was marked out on a marble square in a quadrangle; such tables are found both in the Agra Fort and Fatehpur Sikri. Akbar is said to have used slave-girls as pieces in the game. The game was usually played by four players, two contending against the other two. It was easy to play it at any time and at any place. The young ladies could draw on the floor or on some paper two parallel lines of equal length, with two others of the same length bisecting the former at right angles and start off with the game. Akbar invented a game called *Chandal-Mandal* in which sixteen players could be accommodated at a time. It could be played in 12 different ways as described in the *Ain-i-Akbari*[140] and therefore, very many ladies could participate in the game in one group or more at the same time. Then there were playing cards or *ganjafa*. These were different from the modern playing cards as all the cards had pictures inscribed on them. All games were played with stakes, sometimes the losses were heavy and tempers got frayed.[141] The game of *Nard* or Backgammon was played on a square wooden board.

The ladies of the harem did not generally participate in outdoor games both



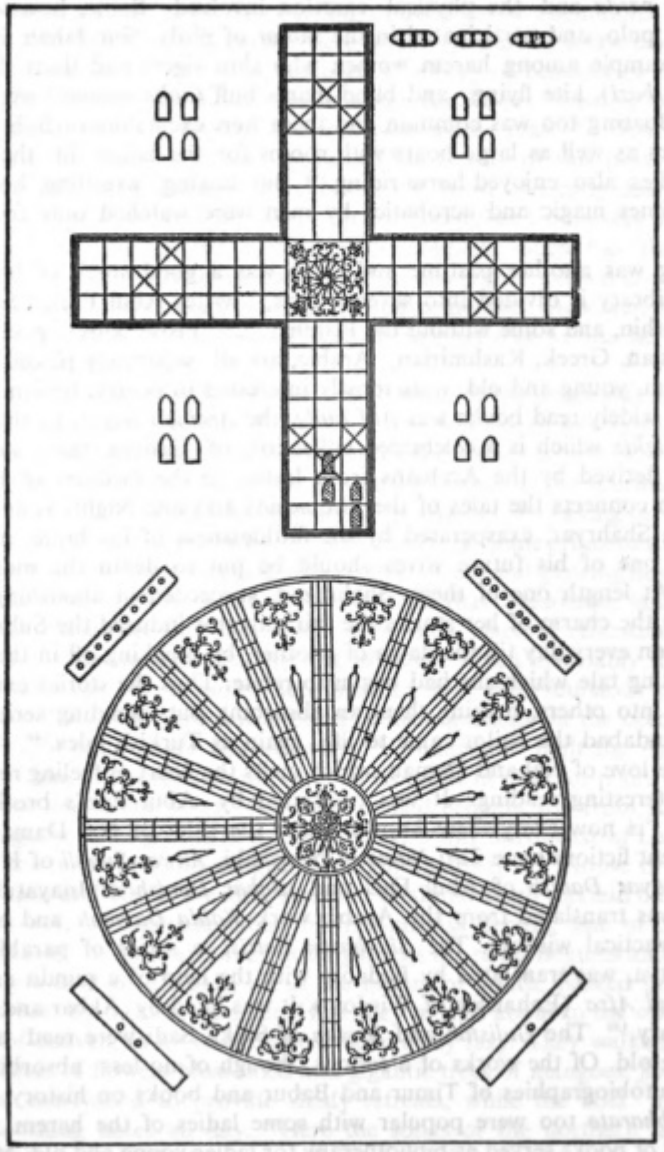


Fig. 3, Boards for Chaupar and Chandal-Mandal games



because of *parda* and the physical exertion involved. Some, however, played Pl. 1
chaugan or polo, and participated in the *shikar* of birds. Nur Jahan is probably the lone example among harem women who shot tigers and lions. But pigeon flying (*ishq bazi*), kite flying, and blind man's buff (*ankh micholi*) were common pastimes. Boating too was common and there were excursions on light boats with painted oars as well as large boats with rooms for the ladies in the middle.[142] Mughal ladies also enjoyed horse riding.[143] But boxing, wrestling, horse racing, and sometimes magic and acrobatics by men were watched only from behind a curtain.

Reading was another pastime and there was a good stock of books. "His Majesty's library is divided into several parts," writes Abul Fazl, "Some books are kept within, and some without the Harem....[144] Prose books, poetical works, Hindi, Persian, Greek, Kashmirian, Arabic, are all separately placed."[145] Ladies of the harem, young and old, were mostly interested in poetry, fiction and fables. One of the widely read books was *Alif Laila*, the *Arabian Nights* or the *Thousand and One Nights* which is a celebrated collection of Eastern tales supposed to have been derived by the Arabians from India *via* the medium of Persia. The story which connects the tales of the Thousands and one Nights is as follows:— The Sultan Shahryar, exasperated by the faithlessness of his bride, made a law that every one of his future wives should be put to death the morning after marriage. At length one of them, Shahrazad, succeeded in abolishing the cruel custom. By the charm of her stories the fair narrator induced the Sultan to defer her execution every day till the dawn of another, by breaking off in the middle of the interesting tale which she had begun to relate. Thus the stories extended and telescoped into others, making them an absorbing but unending series. The old book of Sindabad the Sailor came to life again as Turkish tales.[146] "The Hindi story of the love of Nal and Daman, which melts the heart of feeling readers" was another interesting reading. It was translated by Abul Fazl's brother Shaikh Faizi, and "is now everywhere known under the title of Nal Daman."[147] The other current fictions were *Tuti Nama* of Naqshabi, *Anwar Suhali* of Husain Waiz Kashafi, *Ayar Danish* of Abul Fazl and *Bahar Danish* of Inayatulla.[148] *Ayar Danish*[149] was translated from the Arabic work *Kalila Damnah* and is a masterpiece of practical wisdom. The *Singhasan Battisi*, a series of parables of Raja Vikramaditya, was translated by Badaoni with the help of a pundit and was entitled *Khirad Afza* (Enhancer of Wisdom). It was liked by Akbar and was added to his library.[150] The *Gulistan* and *Bostan* of Shikh Sadi were read and reread, told and retold. Of the works of a serious, though of no less absorbing nature, were the autobiographies of Timur and Babur and books on history. *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* too were popular with some ladies of the harem. These and similar sets of books served as bibliotherapy for ladies young and old. Many books



were not always actually read. Story telling or *qissa goi* was common. Most of the tales of Arabian Nights, for example, were learnt by heart by a few talented ladies who related them to an interested audience of a bevy of beauties or individually to delight their mistress or induce her to sleep. But books "treating of love, very much as our romances", writes Manucci, were avidly read.[151] That is also why Pl. VII Persian romantic poetry was very popular. The beauty of this poetry lies in its sensitivity. It provided excitement, emotion and balm to pining hearts. It made pangs of love easy to bear. That is why verses flowed free from every lip and every conversation was interspersed with gripping couplets. Such was the craze for romantic poems that Aurangzeb had to forbid the highly sensual composition of Hafiz Shirazi from being read by Begums and princesses. However, he made an exception in the case of his eldest daughter Zaib-un-nisa as she herself was an accomplished poetess.[152]

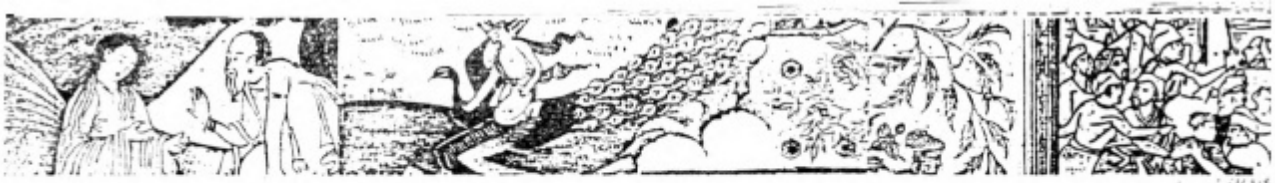
As Manucci rightly points out, the amusements of the princesses and the high class ladies were mainly indoor. "They have the permission to enjoy the pleasure of the comedy and the dance, to listen to talks and stories of love, to recline upon beds of flower, to walk about in the gardens, to listen to the murmuring of the running waters, to hear singing and other pastimes".[153] Taking a stroll in the Pl. 5 garden with female companions was very exhilarating. Some princesses had gardens of their own with pavilions, running waters, shady trees and glowing flowers. Abdul Hamid Lahori informs us in the *Badshah Nama* that Shahjahan laid out many gardens with the object that they might serve as a place of refreshment and re-creation for the harem, and that the use of tents, which invariably filled a large space whenever the royal ladies accompanied him on excursions of pleasure, might be avoided. Men were not allowed in these gardens on the occasion of the Royal visit and strict *parda* was observed.[154] Shahjahan built the Anguri Bagh, a *zenana* garden, in the fortress of Agra. In its tanks in place of plain water, there splashed rose and *keora* water. The emperor had brought soil from Kashmir and there were grape vines grown in it.[155] Similarly, 5 km north-east of Lahore Shah-jahan laid the renowned and delightful garden Shalimar or "House or Joy", 1200 paces in length and 800 in breadth. Another Shalimar Bagh was laid out near Badli Sarai north-west of Shahjahanabad by Izzu-un-nisa Begum, one of Shahjahan's favourite queens. In these and such other gardens the royal Begums and princesses, attended by a host of damsels, all in the bloom of youth, basked in the sun in winter and beat the heat in summer. Here they moved about in the open, open to the winds of heaven, in an environment beautifully lazy. They walked in gardens where all kinds of flowers blossomed and gigantic trees of mangoes, *jamuns*, *neem* and *peepal* intertwined to provide shady retreats, while the koel and cuckoo whistled soothing notes all day. "Here the songs of the northern lands of the Punjab, of the hills of Kashmir, and the vale of Kabul were sung by the female

attendants, the country dances held to amuse the royal visitors."[156] The hours would pass unheeded while the slave-girls played and sang.[157] The Begums used to enjoy listening to the music of running waters "reclining upon beds of flower" in the small marble recesses, often playing blind man's buff. Music was meat for some and medicine for others. The young ladies sang mellifluously and listened to others singing. And when it was *Jashn-i-Mahtabi*, the whole atmosphere was made ethereally white and soft. In the moonlit night, they all dressed in white. Carpets, cups, candles, fans—everything was of white so as to lend a heavenly feeling about the whole atmosphere.

These were more or less the routine recreations. The young ladies also enjoyed celebrations of births, *maktab* (initiation to education), *aqiqa* (tonsure) and marriages. Such occasions were almost numberless in the large establishment of the Mughal harem. Both Hindu and Muslim festivals were celebrated. Id-i-Milad, or the feast of the Prophet's nativity, Shab-i-Barat, the night of the Prophet's ascent to Heaven, Id-ul-Fitr, the festival of breaking the long fast of Ramzan, Id-ul-Zuha the festival of sacrifice and many other minor Muslim festivals to which references have been made both by Persian chroniclers and foreign travellers Pl. 12 were solemnized with great eclat. So also was Dasehra, Diwali, Holi, Raksha-bandhan and Vasant.[158] The harem-ladies arranged feasts on such occasions and helped in decorating the venue of the celebrations. Illuminations, fireworks, Pl. 11 abundant display of gold, silver and pearls, diamonds and jewels were the high-lights of these festivities. The same was with Nauroz, Khushroz and weighing ceremonies of the emperors and the princes. There the emotional participation of all the dwellers of the harem was predominant.

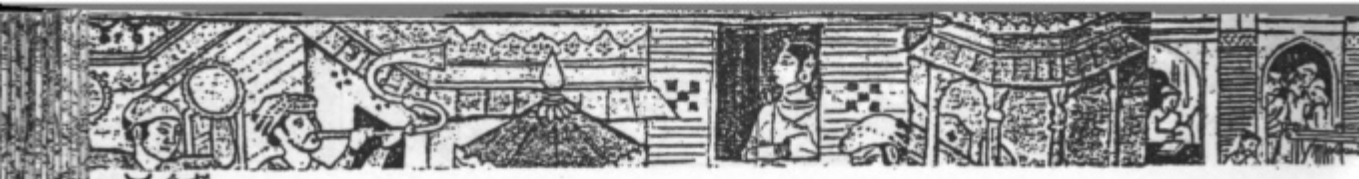
NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Manucci, II, p. 343.
2. *A.N.*, III, p. 816.
3. Banerjee, S.K. Some of the Women Relations of Babur, *Indian Culture*, IV, 1937-38, p. 53. *Babur Nama* refers to an Atun Mama who was probably Qutlugh Nigar Khanum; Also Gulbadan, p. 121; and Manucci, II, p. 331.
4. Monserrate, *Commentarius*, p. 203; Badaoni, II, pp. 306-07.
5. Law, N.N. *Promotion of Learning in India under Muslim Rule*, p. 203; Jafar, S.M. *Education in Muslim India*, p. 190.
6. Banerjee, *Humayun Badshah*, II, p. 317.
7. *A.N.*, II, p. 313; Badaoni, II, p. 62; Also Yusuf Husain Khan, *Glimpses of Medieval Indian Culture*, p. 84.
8. See, e.g. Herklots, *Islam in India*, pp. 283-84.
9. Gulbadan, p. 76.
10. *Maasir-i-Alamgiri*, p. 318.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 322.



12. Ahmed, H.S. Zebunnisa Begum and Diwan-i-Makhfi, *Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society*, 1927, p. 42.
13. Magan Lal and Westbrook, J.D. *Diwan of Zaib-un-nisa*, p. 8.
14. Sarkar, *Studies in Mughal India*, p. 79.
15. Westbrook, *op. cit.*, p. 9.
16. Ahmed, H.S. *op. cit.*, p. 42.
17. *Maasir-i-Alamgiri*, p. 322; Sarkar, *op. cit.*, 79. Law, p. 204, Jafar, p. 197.
18. Gulbadan, p. 76.
19. *Ain.*, I, p. 617-680; Badaoni, III, pp. 480-557.
20. Although out of regard for some important personalities, the princesses did cook sometimes. Jahan Ara Begum writes in her *Risala-i-Sahibiya* that she herself prepared bread, vegetables and other varieties of food and sent it to the saint Mian Mir.
21. Gulbadan, p. 180.
22. *Tabqat-i-Akbari*, E and D, V, p. 413.
23. *A.N.*, III, p. 388.
24. Payne, *Akbar and the Jesuits*, p. 36.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 223 also pp. 24-25.
26. Gulbadan, p. 75 and n. 1.
27. *A.N.*, III, p. 922.
28. *Tarikh-i-Salim Shahi*, Trs. Price, p. 44.
29. *Ibid.*, E and D, VI, pp. 262-63.
30. Sarkar, *Studies in Aurangzeb's Reign*, pp. 39-42.
31. Manucci, II, pp. 346-47.
32. Hawkins, in *Early Travels*, p. 117.
33. Jauhar, p. 106
34. Manucci, II, p. 347.
35. Bernier, pp. 144-45. Also about education by Mullas, pp. 156-60.
36. Manucci, II, p. 401.
37. *Tuzuk*, I, p. 306.
38. *Ibid.*, I, p. 307.
39. Manucci, II, p. 393.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 187.
41. Shahjahan got it at 16. *Tuzuk*, I, p. 87. So also did Aurangzeb, Hamid-ud-din Bahadur, *Ahkam-i-Alamgiri*, English Translation Jadunath Sarkar, Third Ed. Calcutta 1949, p. 1.
42. Manucci, II, p. 347.
43. Herklots, *Islam in India*, p. 58. Terry in *Early Travels*, pp. 320-21.
44. *Ain.*, I, p. 96.
45. Even a good king like Akbar issued orders that if a young woman went about the streets unveiled or allowed herself to be seen, she was to be sent to the quarters of prostitutes. Badaoni, Text II, pp. 391-92. Trs. II, pp. 404-406.
46. *Tuzuk*, I, pp. 351.
47. Bernier, p. 246.
48. Manucci, III, p. 272, 423; Finch, p. 146; Jourdain, pp. 162-63.
49. Sarkar, *Studies in Mughal India*, p. 116.
50. Ovington, *A voyage to Surat*, p. 211.
51. Azfari, *Waqia-i-Azfari*, trs. by A. Satter, Oriental Research Institute, Madras University, Madras 1937, p. 26. Muhammad Zahir-ud-din Azfari belonged to the class of Salatin. He





was born in 1758. In 1789 he escaped from the *Mahal* which was a veritable prison house of the Salatin (see infra Chapter XI), and travelled throughout the country. He wrote an account of his travels entitled *Waqia-i-Azfari.*

52. Badaoni, *Nijat-ul-Rashid,* p. 460.
53. *Ibid.,* p. 472.
54. Manucci, II, p. 58.
55. *A.N.,* II, p. 364, n.
56. *Ibid.,* p. 197 and n.
57. *Ibid.,* II, pp. 128-129 and 31.
58. *Ain.,* I, p. 321.
59. *Ibid.,* I, p. 516.
60. Pelsaert, p. 2.
61. *A.N.,* II, pp. 364-65. Also p. 318 and n.
62. *Ibid.,* pp. 526-27.
63. *Tarikh-i-Salim Shahi,* pp. 107-08.
64. Also see *A.N.,* III, p. 677.
65. *Ain.,* I, p. 288.
66. Sharma, S.R. *Religious Policy of the Mughal Emperors,* p. 25. *Ain.,* II, p. 398. Badaoni, II, p. 306.
67. See Prof. Rivers on hypergamy in *Jornal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society,* 1934.
68. Bernier, p. 12.
69. Tavernier, *Travels in India,* I, p. 393.
70. Westbrook in the introduction to the *Diwan of Zaib-un-nisa,* pp. 13-14.
71. Translated by Sarojini Naidu and cited in Margaret Macnicol, *Poems by Indian Women,* p. 77.
72. *Maasir-i-Alamgiri,* pp. 231, 272, 381. *Mirat-ul-Alam,* p. 605.
73. Westbrook in *Diwan of Zaib-un-nisa,* pp. 10-11.
74. *loc. cit.*
75. *Surkh poshe ba labe bam nazar mi aed.*
Na-bazari, na bazore na bazar mi aed.
76. Sarkar, *Aurangzeb,* III, pp. 34-35.
77. Ansari, *Social life of the Mughal Emperors,* p. 89.
78. Devee, *The Beautiful Mogul Princesses,* pp. 60-61, 78.
79. The Persian version reads
"Ay abshar nauhagar az behr kesti,
chin bar jabin fagunda ra andoh kesti,
Ayacha dard bud ki chun ma tamam shab,
Sar ra sang mi zadi wa mi garesti."
80. *Maasir-i-Alamgiri,* p. 126; Sarkar, *Aurangzeb,* III, pp. 32-34.
81. *Diwan-i-Zaib-un-nisa,* pp. 17-18.
82. Macnicol, *op. cit.,* p. 18.
83. *Ain.,* I, p. 618.
84. *Diwan of Zaib-un-nisa,* pp. 19, 107, 77 respectively.
85. Syed Ahmed Khan, *Asar-us-Sanadid,* pp. 51-52.
86 Sarkar, *Aurangzeb,* III, p 35.
87. Manucci, II, pp. 187-88.
88. Translation by Barkat Ullah in Macnicol, *Poems by Indian Women,* p. 79.
89. *Ruqaat-i-Alamgiri,* trs. Billimoria, pp. 73-74.
90. Tavernier, *Travels in India,* I, p. 392.



91. *Tuzuk*, I, p. 10.
92. *Alamgir Nama*, I, p. 368.
93. *Ain.*, III, p. 312.
94. *Ibid.*, I, pp. 78-79.
95. *Ibid.*, I, pp. 81-82. Jahangir also gives many names of flowers, *Tuzuk*, I, pp. 5-7.
96. Burton, *A Thousand Nights and A Night*, III, p. 365.
97. Ali, Meer Hassan, *Observations on the Mussulmans of India*, p. 58 n.
98. Right from the coming of Muslims in India, Amir Khusrau, Ibn Battuta and many other writers have praised the great qualities of *tambul* or *pan*. For detailed references see K.S. Lal, *Twilight of the Sultanate*, pp. 275-76.
99. Manucci, II, p. 238.
100. *A.N.*, III, pp. 939-40.
101. Pal, Pratapditya *Court Paintings of India*, fig. M 67 of later Mughal times (1700-1750) shows a lady colouring her feet.
102. Ovington, *op. cit.*, p. 320; Also *The First Englishmen in India*, p. 76.
103. *Ain.*, III, pp. 312-13.
104. Manucci, II, pp. 330-40. Also Ovington, p. 320 and Roe and Fryer, *Travels in India in the 17th Century*, p. 384.
105. *Tuzuk*, II, pp. 80-82.
106. Manucci, II, p. 339.
107. *Ibid.*, II, p. 341; also Bernier, p. 258.
108. Coomaraswami, *Arts and Crafts of India and Ceylon*, p. 196.
109. Abdul Aziz, *Arms and jewellery of the Indian Mughals*, pp. 212-13.
110. Manucci, II, p. 341.
111. For Mughal shawls see *Ain.*, I, p. 258.
112. Manucci, II, pp. 341-42.
113. *Ain.*, I, pp. 83-93.
114. *Tuzuk*, I, p. 271. Also Beni Prasad, p. 160.
115. Bernier, p. 222.
116. *Ain.*, I, pp. 93-102.
117. *Ibid.*, pp. 98-100.
118. Lahori, II, Pt. I, pp. 363-64; Manucci, II, p. 340.
119. Mukerjee, R.K. *Economic History of India*, pp. 117-119.
120. Terry in Foster's *Early Travels*, p. 302.
121. Manrique, I, p. 56; II, pp. 147, 180, 424.
122. Manucci, *op. cit.*, p. 430.
123. Bernier, pp. 128, 292.
124. *Ibid.*, pp. 402-403.
125. *Ibid.*, pp. 258-59.
126. Jauhar, p. 104.
127. *Ain.*, I, p. 59.
128. *Ibid.*, p. 60.
129. *Ibid.*, pp. 60-64.
130. *Ibid.*, p. 78.
131. *Ibid.*, pp. 74-78.
132. *Tuzuk*, I, pp. 5, 116, 332.
133. *Ibid.*, I. p. 155.

134. *Ain.*, I, p. 59.
135. *Ibid.*, pp. 315-320. Also *A.N.*, II, p. 534.
136. Sarkar, *Studies in Mughal India*, p. 82.
137. For details see *Ain-i-Akbari*, I, pp. 315-320, 374, and plate XVII. Herklot, *Islam in India*, pp. 333-35. Also Badaoni, Trs. II, pp. 18, 324; III, pp. 408-467.
138. Manucci, II, p. 460.
139. Pal, Pratapditya. *Court Paintings of India*, figs. M. 50, M. 68.
140. *Ain.*, I, pp. 317-18.
141. *Ibid.*, p. 374.
142. *Babur Nama*, pp. 387, 406; *A.N.*, II, p. 112; *Tuzuk*, II, p. 151; Peter Mundy, II, p. 158
143. *A.N.*, II, p. 111.
144. *Ain.*, I, p. 107.
145. *Ibid.*, I, p. 110. See 'Lady Reading a Book' (c. 1600) in Rajkumar Tandon, *Indian Miniature Painting*, 16th through 19th centuries, Natesan, Bangalore 1982, pl. vi.
146. Hamilton Gibb in *The Legacy of Islam*, p. 200.
147. *Ain.*, I, pp. 112-113.
148. Chopra, P.N. *Society and Culture in Mughal India*, pp. 173, 80-81.
149. *Ain.*, I, p. 112.
150. Badaoni, II, p. 183.
151. Manucci, II, p. 331.
152. Westbrook in *Diwan of Zaib-un-nisa*, p. 9.
153. Manucci, II, pp. 352-53.
154. Latif, S.M. *Lahore Its Architectural Remains and Antiquities*, p. 141 n.
155. Lahori, I, Pt. II, p. 241.
156. Latif, *op. cit.*, pp. 140-41.
157. Devee, *The Beautiful Moghul Princesses*, p. 2.
158. *Ain.*, I, p. 226.

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CHAPTER VIII

Ladies of Royalty and Nobility

The inmates of the harem dressed well, ate well and tried to enjoy life as best as possible. But not all in equal measure. The aspirations and activities of the young, the not so young and the old differed. In the course of years charming girls became mothers and grandmothers. Maham Begum, the beloved wife of Babur became the respected mother of Humayun, and Hamida Banu, the extremely lovely girl of fourteen, over whom Humayun fell headlong in love, became Akbar's mother and Jahangir's grandmother,[1] while Babur's young daughters became Humayun's ageing sisters and Akbar's old aunts. So also did their maids and slave-girls grow grey with age. Because of generation gap, the life pattern of the young and the old differed. Adolescent girls and very young ladies participated in festivities with curiosity and gusto but they lacked the capacity to organise celebrations of marriages, festivals and such other activities which became the task of senior ladies. On such occasions the younger ones would have relished the dainty dishes prepared; a luxury which age denied the old. Young girls would not have been interested in the births and deaths in the palace; such happenings were kept sort of secret from them. The younger generation would have resented the intrusion of the old in their affairs — their day-dreams, reading romantic stories or playing chess. Conversely, elder ladies would not have shared with the young their problems of life or secrets of love; talk about sex was taboo for the young in the medieval world. So, the generation gap existed but any separation of the two at any point of age would be arbitrary. Still, let us say that the young girls were not exposed to all the celebrations in the *Mahal* in which sex orgies dominated or the master bargained for beauty and love on occasions like Nauroz and Khushroz.

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Nauroz and Khushroz

Nauroz was primarily a court function; the participation of harem-ladies was incidental. The celebration of Nauroz or the New Year's day was borrowed from Persia and was the greatest festival in the Mughal capital. It marked the advent of spring and was held on 20th or 21st March or 1st Farwardin, the first month of the Persian year.[2] The Mughals outdid the Persians and celebrated it for eighteen or nineteen days,[3] while the Persians celebrated it only for twelve. Most chroniclers and many foreign travellers have described the gaiety and splendour of the festivities when "wine flowed in rivulets, verse and ode flew in hundreds, gaiety and merriment ruled everything", while dance and music thrilled the hearts of all.[4] Father Monserrate, describing the Nauroz festival of March 1582, says that "Women were allowed to visit the palace and see its magnificent appointments."[5] The fair was held in the palace as well as in camp.[6] Terry witnessed it in Mandu, where there were "incredible riches" and glittering vanities and presents were freely exchanged.[7] But the ladies of the harem could watch the celebrations only from behind the curtains and hence we shall not dilate upon it.

Khushroz, on the other hand, was meant for ladies only. Emperor Akbar arranged a fair-*cum*-bazaar exclusively for the ladies of the *Mahal* every month[8] for three days. This fair was held prior to Akbar's time,[9] and was continued by his successors also. But Akbar had reasons to elevate it to the status of an institution and make it a source of great enjoyment. It was necessary to hold a market within the precincts of the *Mahal*. Commoners and even nobles, could make purchases in the city markets, and their ladies could visit such markets or the better shopping centres, like the one established in the fort of Fetehpur Sikri.[10] But the king, the royal ladies, and princesses could not go out for "shopping". For them shops had to be brought into the palace. That is how it became customary to hold markets within the palace.[11] These Khushroz or Mina Bazaars were held from the door of Jodh Bai's Palace to the courtyard and garden of Mariyam's Mahal in Fatehpur Sikri, and in the Agra Fort in the courtyard adjacent to the Mina Masjid. For the convenience of the harem-ladies in general, and his own amusement in particular, Akbar began to arrange the bazaar exclusively of women and Abul Fazl rightly says that His Majesty gives to such days the name of Khushroz, or the joyful days, as they are a source of much enjoyment."[12] Abul Fazl does not elaborate on this "source of much enjoyment" and "magnificent appointments," but the senior ladies knew about them and these are better described by the anti-establishment historian Abul Qadir Badaoni. But of this more in the next chapter.





Birthday Celebratio ns

Of the various other functions the accession anniversary and weighing ceremony of the king were solemnized with great pomp and fanfare. The weighing ceremony was a court-*cum*-harem function. Originally a Hindu custom, it was introduced by Akbar in his palace. Abul Fazl writes about it, Jahangir mentions it in his memoirs on many occasions and foreign travellers give detailed description of it. The king was weighed twice on solar and lunar birthdays, while the princes, his sons and grandsons, were weighed once in every solar year.[13] That is how weighing ceremonies and festivities associated with the *salgirah* were of frequent occurrence. This ceremony had special significance for the harem as the Memoirs of Jahangir and the *Padshah Nama* of Lahori affirm. The articles against which the royal person was weighed were sent from the harem or by the mother of the reigning emperor. Sometimes the ceremony was held in the mansion of the queen mother herself.[14] In the harem was also preserved the string with which the King's height was measured, one knot tied on it for each year, hence the word *salgirah* or "the year's knot." Terry writes that "Jahangir was yearly weighed and account kept thereof by his physicians, thereby guessing at his bodily state."[15]

Akbar's regulation about weighments continued under Jahangir and Shahjahan. The solar *wazan* (weighing) ceremony was retaine deven by Aurangzeb.[16] Most of the foreign travellers witnessed the brilliance of this ceremony and have written about it.[17] Sir Thomas Roe's description may be quoted at some length in evidence. "The king's birth-day and the solemnity of his weighing to which I went.... was carried into a very large and beautiful garden...where was prepared the scale, being hung in large trestles, and a cross-beam... the seals of massy gold, the borders set with small stones... the chains of gold large and massy..... Here attended the nobility, all sitting about on carpets (and the ladies watched from behind the curtains). The king... appeared clothed, or rather laden with diamonds, rubies, pearls and other precious vanities, so great, so glorious; (He was weighed) with gold and jewels... Then against cloth of gold, silk, stuffs, linen, spices... Lastly, against meal, butter, corn... and all the rest of the stuff.... At night he drinketh with all his nobility in rich plates."[18] The ladies celebrated the occasion with great enthusiasm.

Garden Parties

There were many other occasions for ladies to celebrate. Akbar used to go boating along with his 'veiled' ladies and "enjoy the spectacle of the variegated



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spring" in various gardens.[19] Jahangir, in particular, used to pass many days and nights in outings and picnics in the company of ladies. On one occasion he visited Humayun's tomb in Delhi in the company of ladies and children[20]; on another, he passed most of the night with the ladies on the banks of Anasagar Lake on way to Gujarat. During his sojourn in Gujarat, Jahangir was entertained by one of his queens in her father's garden, and his picturesque description of the event needs to be quoted in detail. "Close to the suburbs of Ahmedabad, was the garden of Khan-i-Khanan, whose daughter Khair-un-nisa Begum was present among the inmates of my harem," writes Jahangir, and adds that on her request he decided to pass a few days in that garden. In the course of five days, by employing about four hundred artificers of Ahmedabad, "She had so effectually changed the appearance of the garden by making use of coloured paper and wax, that every tree and shrub secured as abundantly furnished with leaf, and flower and fruit, as if in the very freshness and bloom of spring and summer. These included the orange, lemon, peach, pomegranate and apples. So perfect, indeed, was the deception produced, that when I first entered the garden.... I unwittingly began to pluck at the fruit and flowers, the artificers having copied the beauties of nature with such surprising truth and accuracy.... The different avenues throughout the garden were at the same time furnished with a variety of tents and canopies, of velvet of the deepest green; so that these, together with the verdure of the sod, contrasted with the variegated and lively tints of the rose and an infinity of other flowers, left altogether such an impression on my mind, as that in the very season of the rose I never contemplated in any place. From this scene of fascination and enchantment I was not permitted to withdraw myself for three days... during which, independently of the delicious repast on which we feasted, the females of my harem by whom I was accompanied, to the number of four hundred, were each of them presented with a tray of four pieces of cloth of gold of the manufacture of Khurasan, and an ambertchei or a perfume stand of elaborate workmanship and considerable value...What the Begum presented to myself on the occasion, in jewels, pieces of the richest fabric... and horses of the highest value could not have amounted to a less sum than four laks of rupees. In return I presented her with a chaplet of pearl of the value of five laks of rupees...."[21]

Such garden parties, arranged with frivolous and costly labour were unceasing. In every garden there were fruits sweet and sour. At every party there was gaiety and merriment, feasting and music and exchange of costly presents. Of the many such parties described by Jahangir one more may be described in the words of the King himself: "I held a meeting in one of the houses of the palace of Nur Jahan Begum (in Malwa), which was situated in the midst of large tanks, and (invited) the Amirs and courtiers to the feast which had been prepared by the Begum. (There were) all kinds of intoxicating drinks....All sorts of roast meats, and

Pl. 13





fruits.... After three or four *gharis* of night had passed, I dismissed the men and summoned the ladies, and till a watch of the night (remained?) passed the time in this delightful place, and enjoyed myself.... This Thursday was the day of my ascension of the throne; secondly, it was Shab-i-barat; thirdly, it was the day of the *rakhi*.... and with the Hindus a special day. On account of these three pieces of good fortune I called the day Mubarak-Shamba."[22] Similarly Nur Jahan entertained Jahangir in the Sarai Nur Mahal in Jalandhar.[23] But the grand dinner Nur Jahan arranged in 1617, on the occasion of Prince Khurram's victory in the Deccan, is the most memorable. She arranged a grand banquet and conferred on the prince dresses of honour of great value and other presents. She also gave gifts to his harem-ladies, his children and his servants. "The cost of this entertainment was about 300,000 rupees."[24]

Pl 13.

Marriages too were held in the open spaces of the gardens. A marriage was always a great occasion and celebrations lasted from three to fifteen days.[25] The marriage of Jahangir's son Parwez with the daughter of Murad Baksh was held in the palace of Mariyam-uz-Zamani.[26] Jahangir's succint account of the marriage of his step son prince Shahryar is interesting. "The feast of the *Kar-i-Khair* (consummation of marriage) of my son Shahryar (1621) increased the joy of my heart. The Hinna bandi (putting on henna) assembly took place in the palace of Maryam-uz-Zamani. The feast of the *nikah* (marriage) was held in the house of Aitmad-ud-daula. I myself went there with the ladies and adorned the feast of joy, in the Nur Afshan garden, I presented my son Shahryar with a jewelled charqab (coat), with a turban and waist-belt (Kamarband) and two horses, one an Iraqi, with a gold saddle, and the other Turki, with an embroidered saddle."[27] A marriage ceremony in the palace was always associated with lavish feasting, ornaments, horses, processions, music, dance of girls, fireworks, and of course rich presents to the couple by the king.[28]

Pls. 6, 7 & 11

Tensions

It was but natural that everything was not all gaiety and mirth in the large establishment that was the Mughal harem. There were also many pulls and pushes. In the seraglio lived women of many nationalities such as Iranis, Turanis, Europeans and Indians, from all parts of the country, from Kashmir to Bengal and the South; all belonging to different regions, ethnic groups and religions. Naturally, every lady of consequence tried to win the master's undivided love and openly competed to gain ascendancy in the harem. Women's beauty gave them a power as undefined as unique. With assiduity and grace they could win a position not enjoyed even by the greatest commander or scholar of the empire. Such a





situation led to confrontations, stresses and strains. These tensions in the harem also derived sustenance from the politics of individuals and groups at the court.[29] In the Mughal empire there was race and status rivalry between the '*Omarahs*' or high nobles and the junior *mansabdars*.[30] There was rivalry between Shias and Sunnis and between the Mughals, the Pathans and the Rajputs.[31] In the Mughal harem some fallout of these rivalries was also visible.

Outwardly the Rajput wives of Akbar and Jahangir, briefly noted in an earlier context, did not play any significant role in the Mughal harem. Even the names of some of them are not known. Many names and relationships are controversial. Only a few were given high sounding titles probably because they gave birth to heir apparents like Mariyam-uz-Zamani to Prince Salim and Shah Begum to his son Prince Khusrau. Still their position was not unimportant. The Rajput princesses of Amber and Marwar gave to the country two Mughal emperors, Jahangir and Shahjahan respectively. This was a matter of pride for both the Mughals and the Kachhawa-Rathor Rajputs. In spite of the language of Abul Fazl regarding the marriage of the daughter of Raja Bhagwan Das to Jahangir, it is said that when Bhagwan Das was seeing off his daughter he said to Akbar: *"Mhari re beti thare mahlon ki cheri, ham bandh ghulam re.* (My daughter is the maid of your palace, and we are your slaves).

To which Akbar promptly replied:

"Thari re beti mhare mahlon ki rani, tum sahib sardar re". (Your daughter is the queen of our palace, and you are (our) great lord."[32]

Udoubtedly the entry of the Rajput princesses into the Mughal harem infused a new life in the Mughal empire and inaugurated a new era of Mughal-Rajput co-operation and interdependence. Besides, "a daughter married to the Emperor was the Raja's ambassador of goodwill....the girls were hardly married to the Emperor, who had dozens of wives and hundreds of concubines; they were married to the imperial throne."[33] Whether the marriages were forced alliances and hence left bitter memories behind,[34] or were willingly contracted and generated goodwill for all,[35] was not a matter of concern to the Rajput brides. They were brought up in the Indian ideal of womanhood in which their glory lay in service of the 'master' as also in suffering in silence. The devotion of these princesses to their royal husbands was exemplary. It was the fruit of Rajput upbringing, habit and discipline. The response of the Mughal royal family was equally nice. They treated their Rajput wives with respect and affection, more so because these princesses came from loyal and respectable families of rulers.[36] It is true that the Rajput ladies who entered the royal harem lived like Muslims and after death were buried in the Muslim cemeteries; still during their life-time they practised Hindu religion as would appear from the inspection of buildings of Agra, Fatehpur Sikri and Allahabad in which these ladies resided, as well as the testimony of





Muslim historians like Abul Fazl and Badaoni. Unlike earlier times when all contact was snapped after such marriages, Akbar and his successors maintained good relationships with Rajput rulers after such 'matrimonial alliances'. For instance, Akbar sent his Rajput wife, and mother of Jahangir to Amber, 'to do honour to Bhagwan Das 'by personally conveying their condolences to her parents' family on the death of her brother Bhupat.[37] When Prince Daniyal was born at Ajmer in September 1572, Akbar was bound for an expedition to Gujarat. He did not know how much time would be spent on the campaign and therefore he sent the infant Daniyal to Amber to be brought up by his maternal grandmother, the Rani of Bhar Mal.[38] These instances find specific mention. There were probably many more pointing to such continual contacts between the Mughal harem and the *antapur* of the Rajput Rajas. Equal consideration was shown by Akbar to his Rajput in-laws. For example, after the conquest of Orissa, when Raja Man Singh came to pay his respects to the Emperor at Lahore, Akbar ordered that the "Prince Royal (Salim) should go out to meet him and bring him to the king's presence."[39] Such was Akbar's regard for Rajput sentiments.

But back to the influence of Rajput ladies in the Mughal harem. On marriage every Rajput princess brought with her hundreds of Rajput maidens — ladies-in-waiting, *bandis* and often some troupes of dancing girls. In the reign of Akbar alone there were no less than 38 Rajput princesses married in the royal family—12 to Akbar, 17 to Prince Salim, 6 to Daniyal, 2 to Murad and one to Prince Khusrau, son of Salim.[40] With the influx of Rajput women, Hindu culture in its varied aspects spread in the seraglio. In Fatehpur Sikri lamps were lighted during Hindu ceremonies and recitation of *Bhajans* and *Hom* (or burning of incence) was per-
Pl. 12 formed every day.[41] Hindu festivals like Holi, Diwali (with the ritual gambling),[42] Dashehra and Rakshabandhan began to be celebrated in the *Mahal* because of its Rajput inmates.[43] Rajasthan is a land of song and dance, colour and pageantry. Hindu dance performances became a part of everyday cultural life of the Mughal harem. As Abdul Qadir Badaoni puts it, "on hearing how much the people of the country prized their institutions, he (Akbar) began to look upon them with affection."[44] Mughal kings started to get horoscopes of all the princes like Salim, Murad and Daniyal[45] cast by the Hindu Pandits. The use of beef, extremely repugnant to the Hindus, was forbidden. Killing of animals and cooking of meat on certain days was restricted.[46] Even the use of onion and garlic was discouraged. Akbar's religious tolerance was directly associated with the presence of Rajput wives and Hindu women in the harem.[47] Akbar's marriages with Hindu princesses provided the means for bringing Hindu teachers to the religious discussions in the imperial presence and for coaching the royal princes in Indian Philosophy and Thought.[48] In
Pl. V Akbar's time Hindu saints of Pranami and Radhavallabhi sect were frequently associated with the Mughal Government.[49] Rani Rup Manjari, one of the wives of Akbar,



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was the follower of the noted Vaishnav Saint Shri Gosainji.[50] In short, in the Mughal harem the proud Rajput ladies maintained their identity and important position. According to Inayatullah, Man Bai or Shah Begum who married Jahangir in 1585, "was ever ambitious of an ascendancy over the other inmates of the harem, and grew violent at the slightest opposition to her will..."[51]

On the other hand there were forces countering this influence. The Mughals were conscious of their ethnic and political superiority, and always distinguished between the 'free-born' women and others. Rajput influence began to be resented in many quarters, not only in circles to which men like Abdul Qadir Badaoni belonged, but perhaps even in the Mughal court itself. If James Tod is to be believed, even Akbar became aware of the fact "that his policy of strengthening his throne by Rajput alliances was not without hazard, these alliances introducing a direct influence in the state."[52] Consequently, the policy saw a gradual change and with the passage of time marriages with the Rajput houses became fewer. It has been computed that during the reign of Akbar, Jahangir, Shahjahan and Aurangzeb 33, 7, 5, and 9 marriages were contracted respectively with the girls belonging to the leading Rajput families.[53] Of the twenty wives of Jahangir mentioned by Xavier and Blochmann, seven were Rajputanis. But under Shahjahan this situation changed both in regard to the number of marriages as well as the concessions granted to Rajput ladies. In Shahjahan's time when Anup Kunwar, the daughter of Amar Singh, was married to Sulaiman Shukoh, the emperor himself taught her to recite the *kalima*, and she was converted to Islam before the marriage.[54]

It was probably with the entry of the ambitious and talented Nur Jahan into the Mughal harem, that the change began to take place. She and her family exercised immeasurable influence in the Mughal court and harem in Jahangir's time. Henceforward, marriages of the Mughal kings and princes with Rajput maidens could be counted on finger tips, while there were hundreds of marriages of the Mughal royalty with the scions of the Muslim nobility—Turani and Irani in particular.[55] The Mughal ruling family itself was Turani and its influence of course was great. So was the case with the Iranis: their culture pervaded the Mughal court and harem-life. Irani aristocratic immigration and influence dated back to Humayun's time and it developed under Akbar. Persian ladies in particular were expert in the art of gracious living. The quality of their dress, the delicacy of their cuisine, the elegance of their speech, the enthusiasm evinced in music and poetry marked them out as exponents of a great civilization in its golden ages. By the time of Aurangzeb, Bernier and Manucci did not fail to notice that the prevalent Mughal etiquette and elegance was Persian in character.[56] However, Rajput influence in the harem never ceased. Rajput women had too much taste to relinquish their customs and too much vanity to adopt foreign attitudes, and if Rajput and





Persian cultural influences did not always come into open clash; they always did strive for supremacy.

Jealousy

There were other tensions, though not so deep in effect. These may be classed under the generic term jealousy. The set up of the harem was conducive to encouraging back-biting, carrying tales and running down one another. Jealousy pervaded the whole atmosphere and the green eyed monster made no distinction between sex or position. These jealousies were shared and fanned by ladies of
Pl. 8 nobles who come to the *Mahalsara* for short or long visits, and were fuelled by the various intoxicants which the harem-ladies were in the habit of taking and sharing with the visitors. These were fed by gossip and the leisure at the disposal of the harem-inmates made gossipping their routine.

They gossipped in sorrow as in joy. Gossip seemed to be the one compensation for life's privations and adversities. Therefore, gossip was the harem-dwellers' chief vice, hobby and luxury. Amidst the buzz of human voices, the happy playfulness of children and constant chewing of *pan* there was no end of *tete a tete* which concentrated on talking ill of others. But there was one check. Jealousy could not be exhibited openly for fear of creating a bitter atmosphere and thereby losing the master's favour. It would also have been against the sophistication of the Mughal culture. The harem-ladies were naturally gifted with good sense and politeness. They were shrewd in their remarks and their language was cautious, correct and refined. Therefore, tales were carried only in whispers and ears poisoned only in secret. Outwardly, there was elegance in behaviour and sweetness in conversation.

Anarkali

It would be a truism to state that in the palace circles, private lives of the princes and their love affairs were subjected to critical scrutiny, and sometimes girls proved a source of discord between father and son, and brother and brother, in a love den like the Mughal harem. One such case is that of Anarkali. Anarkali (or the pomegranate blossom) was the title given to Nadira Begum or Sharf-un-nisa, one of the favourites of the harem of Akbar. One day, in the year 1598, while the Emperor was at Lahore seated in an apartment lined with looking glasses with the lovely Anarkali attending on him, he saw her reflection in the mirror responding to a loving smile of Prince Salim. Salim was then thirty, youthful and handsome,



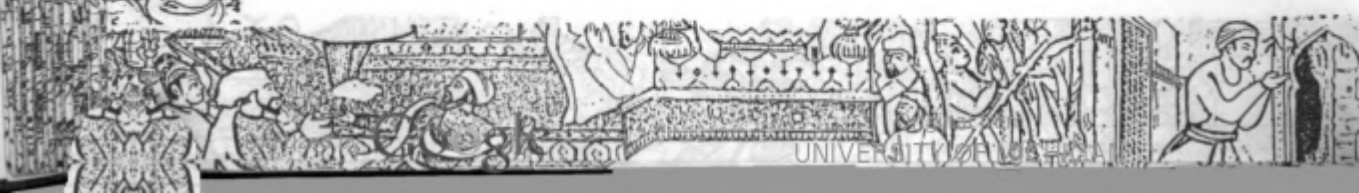


and Akbar fifty-seven. The ageing monarch's jealousy was also fired by the fear of Salim's political ambitions. Salim was so eager to ascend the throne that his relations with Akbar had become strained since 1591, but when in 1599 Akbar was affected by a severe attack of colic, he was convinced that Salim had attempted to poison him through the royal physician Hakim Humam.[57] In this atmosphere of mutual suspicion the smile of Anarkali prompted Akbar to think that there was some sinister conspiracy and he ordered her to be buried alive. William Finch and Edward Terry also aver that relations between Akbar and Salim had become strained because of Anarkali. According to Finch, Salim's love for Anarkali could not be kept secret for long and Akbar ordered her to forsake the Prince. When she declined, Akbar ordered her to be entombed alive, vertically, brick by brick, and so she died.[58] This atrociously cruel, even cynical, but typically medieval punishment turned the Anarkali episode into a legend. Salim felt intense remorse at her death, and on becoming king he had an immense sarcophagus of pure marble raised over her sepulchre. The date given in letters and figures on the tomb is 1008 H (1598 C.E.) which refers to the death of Anarkali and on the sarcophagus 1024H(1615 C.E.), the date of the building of the marble superstructure. On the sides is engraved a Persian couplet composed by Jahangir, her royal paramour. Translated it reads:

> "Ah! could I ever behold the face of my beloved once more,
> I would give thanks unto my God until the day of resurrection."[59]

On another side are the words 'Majnu Salim Akbar' or 'the profoundly enamoured Salim, son of Akbar'. The inscription shows how passionately fond Salim had been of Anarkali and how deeply her death had grieved him.[60]

Anarkali's case has become classic, but instances of backbiting among royal scions resulting in grave misunderstandings were common. The drinking orgies of Prince Salim were meticulously reported to Akbar, creating misunderstanding between the two and culminating in the murder of Abul Fazl. Prince Khusrau's rebellious intentions and secret movements were regularly made known to his father Jahangir. The king was warned about Khurram's role in Khusrau's murder. Aurangzeb knew all about the plans and movements of his brothers before and during the so-called War of Succession. All this was not only court politics; it was court-*cum*-harem politics. A very interesting case was the love episode of Aurangzeb and Zainabadi. The details of Aurangzeb-Zainabadi affair will be discussed in the next chapter, but Dara made capital out of the incident to slander his brother. He told Shahjahan: "See the piety and abstinence of this hypocritical knave; He has gone to the dogs for the sake of a wench of his aunt's household."[61]



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Vilification and Vengeance

The jealousy of men towards women sometimes assumed both comical and dangerous aspects. "Ismail Quli Khan was governor of Gujarat under Akbar... He kept 1200 women, and was so jealous of them, that whenever he went to court, he put his seal over the strings attached to their night drawers." How this was done has not been told by Abul Fazl; it may just have been a canard, spread in jest or earnest, to malign him but asserts Abul Fazl, "The women resented this and other annoyances, made a conspiracy, and poisoned him."[62] High spirited ladies did not tolerate ill-treatment and molestation inflicted by their husbands. They approached their nasty husbands with inward contempt and external reverence, and at an opportune moment they conspired and did away with such men by poisoning. Sharif Arnami's son was killed by his womenfolk because of his bad behaviour.[63] But individually the ladies were always the sufferers. Fatima Bibi was an Urdu Begi of Humayun. She held a high position in Akbar's harem. She had a beautiful daughter named Zohra. Zohra was married to Muazzam Khan, a maternal uncle of the emperor. He ill-treated his wife and many a time Fatima Bibi complained to Akbar that Muazzam threatened to kill her daughter. One day, in a paroxym of rage, Muazzam did actually kill his wife, and Akbar could do nothing to stop him.[64] Similarly Sultan Muiz-ud-din, son of Shah Alam and grandson of Aurangzeb, cherished a raging jealousy against his wife simply because she was exceedingly beautiful. "She was the most lovely and perfectly formed creature," writes Manucci and goes on to say that "this is why he poisoned her with his own hands in some betel he gave her." Her mother entreated Manucci to treat her. This he did in secret and she escaped. He tried again to poison her on three occasions, while Manucci continued to give her antidotes. "But ultimately he killed her by poisoning when he was sent as governor at Burhanpur."[65]

Such cases of use of brute force and murders could only be few. The ladies by and large resorted to passive resistance to combat insult and injustice. Very often, once they quarelled or developed a dislike for their men they would never talk to them again. Bidar Bakht was the son of Azam, the favourite son of Aurangzeb. He quarrelled with his wife Shams-un-nisa and called her the daughter of a *paji* (rascal). She said she would not speak to him again and "so from that day she had given up speaking to him."[66] Another interesting case is that of Princess Jahanzeb Banu Begum, lovingly called Jani Begum. She was the daughter of Dara Shukoh, after whose execution she was sent first to Roshan Ara Begum and on being ill-treated by her, Aurangzeb sent her to stay with Jahan Ara in the Agra Fort.[67] Her privations steeled her body and mind and by the time she was married to Muhammad Azam, the third son of Aurangzeb,[68] she had become an exceptionally brave lady. Once when Prince Azam Shah was besieging the Fort of Bijapur, he





became greatly dispirited because of shortfall in provisions. Jani Begum took bow and arrow in her own hands and riding on an elephant successfully led the siege.[69] In the medieval period when the master went to war, his wife remained in the castle as its mistress, representing her husband and charged, in his absence with the defence and honour of the fort. This elevated them to almost sovereign position and gave to the women of the period a dignity, a courage, a distinction which they did not fail to display in the hour of crisis. Jani Begum was one such. And yet this brave princess never showed any pain or anger when her husband brought into the palace a public woman as his consort.[70]

Numerous instances of jealousy among women can be cited but a common practice was to spread scandals about one whom they considered to be a 'rival'.[71] The best way to beat a rival was to see that she did not have any children, particularly sons. Such a situation would have cost the "barren" one the affection of the master and denied her access to importance. The mischief was age old. Babur was very much devoted to his Afghan wife Bibi Mubarika. Through harem intrigues she was administered drugs to deprive her of motherhood and she died childless early in Akbar's reign.[72] In such an atmosphere it was necessary for a lady to assert from time to time that she was going to be a mother. Bega Begum the consort of Humayun was in the family way. At this, her 'rival' Mewajan also told Maham Begum, the mother of Humayun, "I am in the family way too." Maham Begum therefore got ready two sets of baby-clothes and customary weapons and awaited the arrival of the princes. Bega Begum gave birth to Aqiqa, a baby girl. For Mewajan, "ten months passed by. The eleventh also passed. Mewajan said, 'My maternal aunt...had a son in the twelfth month'...But in the end everyone knew that she was a fraud."[73]

Such amusing cases apart, abortion was practised in the Mughal harem as an instrument to stall the birth of rival princes in the game of power politics. Jean Baptiste Tavernier puts it in its true perspective. He writes: "As it is the custom that the first born succeeds to the throne, although he be the son of a slave, immediately that the King's harem became aware that there is one among them with child, they use all conceivable methods to make her have a miscarriage." For this nefarious act they sometimes utilized the services of European physicians. Manucci relates that Aurangzeb was against the royal princes having more than four sons. Shah Alam's wife Nur-un-nisa Begum happened to conceive. She already had five children. They wanted Manucci to effect the abortion, but he refused. A son was born but later on he was secretly poisoned by Aurangzeb.[74] Let us continue with the narrative of Tavernier. "When I was at Patna in the year 1666", writes he, "Shaista Khan's surgeon, who is a half-caste Portuguese, assured me that the Princess, wife of Shaista Khan, in one month had caused miscarriages to eight women of his harem, not permitting any children but her own to survive."[75]



Shaista Khan, son of Asaf Khan, was governor of Bengal under Shah Jahan. Such tricks, however, did not always work. The desire to have sons was shared equally by men and women. There was a craze to have a male heir, and a desire for as many children as nature was kind enough to bestow. Said Khan Bahadur, Zafar Jung,[76] had no children. Emperor Shahjahan suggested a medicine to him which proved effective and "at the end of four years he had a number of sons by various wives, concubines and slave girls that he possessed. He had sixty male children. The king gave them all the epithet of *Khanazad*, by which they were mostly known. All drew good pay. Zafar Jung died in 1651-52 C.E., leaving twenty-two sons.[77] Jahangir writes that Abul Qasim Tamkin had "thirty sons", and half the number of daughters.[78] Female children, however, were not desired. Indeed, an *Amir* who had a number of daughters, threatened to divorce his wife if a girl was born to her again.[79] The nobleman Daud Khan even killed his female children without compunction.[80]

In brief, a woman wanted to keep her husband to herself and wished him to have children from her only. This was confessed to Niccolao Manucci once by one of these ladies herself. It was the wife of Asad Khan the *wazir*; her name was Naval Bai, and she told him that her only thoughts were to imagine something by which she could please her husband and hinder his going near other women.[81] Women were numerous, so numerous that often the mothers of the sons could not be identified.[82] In a society in which a Muslim could marry four wives and have as many concubines as he pleased, the greatest achievement for a lady was to keep her husband to her ownself and eliminate the other women by every means.

Advancing Years

Jealousy, 'malice and lewdness,'[83] were generally things for the grown up and the middle aged. With advancing years, "all the fires of youth, the fancies, furies, curses, passionate tears" gradually disappeared and the tenor of life turned towards serenity. The family life of royalty and nobility remained intact in spite of polygamy and concubinage because of the sobriety and dedication of the senior ladies which provided stability to the harem.[84] In turn, senior ladies were universally respected. Deference to elder women was a permanent trait of the Mughal times. Troubles were carried to them for advice and sympathy; they were makers of peace.[85] Khanzada Begum was sent by her nephew Humayun to Kamran to impress upon the latter the undesirability of opposing his elder brother.[86] Till the time she died in 1545, she tried her best to help Humayun during his days of adversity. Similarly, when Mirza Muhammad Hakim, rebelled against Akbar in 1581, Bakht-un-nisa Begum, a half-sister of Akbar, tried reconciliation.[87] It was



through the efforts of Gulbadan Begum, Salima Sultan Begum and Hamida Banu Begum (Mariyam Makani) that harmony was brought about between Akbar and Salim when the latter revolted against his father in 1601 C.E.[88] These ladies may not have always succeeded in their missions, but many a prince and nobleman was pardoned at their intercession.[89] For example Aziz Koka, better known as Khan-i-Azam, was a partisan of Prince Khusrau who rose in revolt against Jahangir in 1606. He had no control over his tongue either, and some prominent nobles suggested to the emperor that Khan-i-Azam should be put to death for his complicity. The harem was shocked. Salima Sultan Begum called out from behind the curtain, "your majesty, all the Begums are assembled in the *zenana* for the purpose of interceding for Mirza Aziz Koka. It will be better if you come there, otherwise they will come to you." Jahangir was constrained to go to the female apartment immediately and on account of the pressure exercised by the Begums, he finally pardoned him.[90] The presence of senior ladies had a sobering effect on the general atmosphere of the harem. Perhaps one reason of Shahjahan's excessive pursuit of pleasure was due to the absence of this influence. His mother had died in 1619 and his grandmother (Jahangir's mother) in 1621. Nur Jahan's mother also had expired in 1621.[91]

This should not give the impression that senior ladies could dominate or dictate affairs of state or put a check on the "affairs" of the King. Medieval social norms and traditions of the House of Timur precluded any such influence. "All that they could do was", writes Barthold, "to soften his (the King's) wrath against some prince who had fallen from grace".[92] They were submissive. The Mughal's was not a petticoat government ruling through the harem. All the ladies were dependent on the king in every way. All the ladies, from the queen mother to the youngest person in the harem, got their titles, honours, *jagirs* and rewards from the King. It was at the order of Jahangir that Nur Mahall began to be called Nur Jahan. It was on his order that coins were struck in her name. All the members of the royal family, including the queens, were subject to the king's commands. They submitted regular petitions if they desired to obtain anything from the king. All the inmates of the harem carried out his orders faithfully. Some ladies were even punished if they transgressed the limits of their rights and privileges.

Privileges and Activities

Senior princesses and queens enjoyed high titles conferred upon them by the king in their life time or posthumously, and they were addressed by such titles. It was considered undesirable that all and sundry people should mention such august ladies by their names, and therefore, just as Babur was called Firdaus-i-





Makani, Humayun Jinnat Ashiyani and Akbar Arsh Ashiyani, Akbar's mother was known as Mariyam Makani (Dwelling with Mary), Jahangir's Mariyam Zamani (Mary of the Universe) and Shahjahan's Bilqis Makani (Lady of pure Abode). Aurangzeb's mother had died long before his accession. Her place was taken by his elder sister Jahan Ara Begum, upon whom, after her death, the emperor conferred the title of Sahibat-uz-Zamani (Mistress of the Age).[93] They had the privilege of issuing orders concerning their own affairs and some others pertaining to the state. These queens and princesses appointed their own *Nazirs* and other officers to look after the management of their assignments and *jagirs*, property, land and income.[94] Nur Jahan had her own *vakils*.[95] Hakim Hamam served as Diwan of the Sarkar of Mumtaz Mahall,[96] and later on of her daughter Jahan Ara Begum.[97] Similarly, Saiyyad Ashraf was appointed the Mir-i-Saman of Zinat-un-nisa Begum, also called Badshah Begum.[98] These officers were lodged at a convenient distance from the harem so that they could be easily contacted by the Begums.

Some ladies also had the privilege of issuing official orders. The right of issuing royal *farmans* was the exclusive prerogative of the emperor. The only exception is to be found in the case of Nur Jahan who shared this privilege with Jahangir. There were other official documents like *hasb-ul-hukm*, *nishans*, *sanads* and *parwanas* which were issued by princes and other high officials of the court. In some exceptional cases orders were also issued by queens and princesses. But a few things are evident in such documents. The privilege of issuing such orders was confined to the highest ladies of the harem such as Hamida Banu Begum, Mariyam-uz-Zamani, Nur Jahan, Mumtaz Mahall, Nadira Banu Begum (the consort of Dara Shukoh), and Jahan Ara Begum.[99] Secondly, the words of the documents are high but the contents or the topics are prosaic.[100] It also appears that these ladies could not themselves award punishment to officers and people.[101] But their *hukms* and edicts do show that some queens and queen mothers helped in implementing the religious and agrarian policies of the reigning monarchs.

Most of the important senior ladies possessed wealth. They received it during the course of their life in the form of *Jagirs*, salaries, allowances, gifts, presents, maintenance allowances and the like. Once in a while such allowances were stopped or even personal wealth was confiscated by the king as in the case of princess Zaib-un-nisa. Similarly, in 1687, the property of Nur-un-nisa Begum, the favourite wife of Prince Muazzam or Shah Alam was confiscated because she was suspected of being in complicity with her husband who, during the Mughal siege of Golkonda, had entered into a secret correspondence with its ruler Qutb Shah.[102] But, by and large, queens, princesses and ladies of nobility kept their riches to themselves undisturbed and even augmented them by embarking upon trading activities.[103] Talking about the riches of the ladies of the great nobles,



Pelsaert noted that "they use more gold and silver in serving food than we do (in Europe)."[104] Tavernier says: "The wife of Jafar Khan (the Grand Wazir) expends more than all the wives and daughters of the king put together. It is on this account that her family is always in debt..."[105] Manucci's information was that the wife of Khalilullah Khan, the granddaughter of Asaf Khan, wore shoes worth three million rupees on account of the precious stones garnished on them.[106] Even in the case of death of their husbands and in spite of the law of escheat, they were not rendered destitute. William Hawkins says that on the death of a noble the king takes his property in escheat, but "gives what he likes to the noblemen's wives and children."[107] The wealth of Asaf Khan, father-in-law of Shahjahan, was estimated at two crore fifty thousand rupees. At his death Shahjahan took away most of it including his residence at Lahore, which was given to Dara Shukoh, but he did leave a few lakhs to his family.[108] Muhammad Saqi Mustaid Khan says that Aurangzeb went to the house of Khalilullah Khan, the Subedar of Lahore, after the latter's death and gave an annual stipend of fifty thousand rupees to his widow Hamida Banu.[109] In brief, ladies in old age had enough money of their own and spent it as they liked.

Rich ladies spent their wealth mainly in distributing largesses, giving charity, constructing works of public utility[110] and going on excursions to holy shrines. In the time of Humayun, Sultanam, the wife of Nizam-ud-din Khalifa, went on pilgrimage to Mecca.[111] Emperor Akbar provided all necessities for Haji Begum, consort of Humayun, to go on a pilgrimage to holy places, and "a large number of persons obtained the same favour by this opportunity."[112] In 1575 Akbar again made arrangements for the visit for his aunt Gulbadan Begum to Mecca. She was accompanied by Salima Sultan Begum, Gulzar Begum, daughter of Kamran, Sultan Begum, wife of Askari, Gulnar Agha, a wife of Babur, and many others. "Prince sultan Murad was directed to attend upon her up to the shore of the southern ocean...(and many) vigilant servants of the court were sent along with her and an order was given that the great *Amirs*, the officers of every territory, the guardians of the passes, the watchmen of the borders, the river police, and the harbour-masters should perform good service for the travellers."[113] Arrangements made by Akbar were excellent, but the activities of the Portuguese in the Arabian Sea discouraged such voyages in future.[114] However, at home harem-ladies visited sacred places like the tombs of Shaikh Nizam-ud-din Auliya at Delhi and Khwaja Muin-ud-din Chishti at Ajmer.[115]

The urge to do things of piety prompted these ladies to give charity to the poor as well as to build gardens, wells, and *sarais*, and similar other buildings. They had the spirit to conceive, and the wealth to accomplish, the noblest of undertakings, and despite their seclusion their presence and patronage created the splendour of their times. For example, the tomb of Humayun was built under



the supervision of his widowed wife Haji Begum. She constructed an Arab Sarai for the accommodation of Arab travellers and merchants.[116] She also built a royal garden on the Agra—Bayana road.[117] On her return from Mecca this lady mostly stayed at the mausoleum of her husband and distributed large sums of money in charity.[118] Sultan Salima Begum, Mariyam-uz-Zamani and many other royal ladies kept busy in such pious activities.[119]

Last Days and Death

The main physical problem of old age was illness for which there were but few remedies in those days. Manucci was proud of his professional skill. He says that few Hakims could as effectively cure diseases like the stone, paralysis, apoplexy, dropsy, anaemia, malignant fevers, madness, colic, cancer and other difficult complaints as himself.[120] Jahangir also mentions a number of prevalent diseases like consumption, hectic fever, heat stroke, heart attack, cholera (*haiza*) etc. in his *Memoirs*.[121] Epidemics did not spare the royal family and Aurangzeb's consort Aurangabadi Mahall died of plague in November 1688.[122] Manucci, Bernier and many other foreign visitors, however, repeat an interesting statement made by so many earlier travellers, that the climate of India, with its heat and perspiration, was conducive to quick recovery from ailments.[123] For most of the common diseases fasting was prescribed as the principal remedy.[124] Another recipe recommended was bleeding. Manucci was a popular physician in harem circles, and was given four hundred rupees and a set of robes (*sarapa*) for attending on queens. He bled regularly Shah Alam's mother twice a year as she was a chronic patient of gout.[125] During the operation "she put her arm out from the curtain, but wrapped up, leaving only one spot uncovered, as wide as two fingers, close to the veins..... Every month the princesses and the ladies have themselves bled, which is done in the way I have above described. It is just the same when they want themselves bled in the foot, or have any wound or fistula dressed. Nothing is ever shown but the part affected, or the vein they wish opened."[126] So, *parda* even in old age came in the way of correct diagnosis and proper treatment. A curious method adopted for diagnosing disease without even feeling the patient's pulse was that a handkerchief was rubbed all over the body of the patient and then put into a jar of water. By its smell the physician judged the cause of illness and prescribed the medicine.[127] The medicines ranged from henna, opium, various roots and drugs and condiments to even fruits like melons.[128]

No amount of charity or treatment could save these ladies from the ravages of old age and debiliting diseases, and their life became more and more difficult with the passage of time. After Akbar's death, his widows were sent to reside



at Sikandara, in the rooms by the side of his tomb, "where they were expected to spend their lives." A *rozinah* (daily allowance) was fixed for their expenses.[129] This one sentence of William Finch (1608-11) sums up the tragedy of widowhood and old age. The best thing for a lady was to die during the life time of her husband. It was not that the royalty and nobility were devoid of human sentiments and did not mourn the death of ladies. On the death of his mother, Akbar "shaved his hair, moustaches, etc. and cast off his turban and donned the garb of woe. He was the first to bear the body on his shoulder, and then the grandees conveyed it in turn."[130] Jahangir did not change his dress for some days on the death of Qutb-ud-din Koka's mother whom he regarded as his own mother.[131] He turned extremely sad at the death of the mother of Prince Khusrau, and wrote about the poignant event in his memoirs thus: "She was my first bride, and I was married to her in youth. After the birth of Khusrau I gave her the title of Shah Begum...Her death took such an effect upon me that I did not care to live, and had no pleasure in life. For four nights and days, that is for thirty two watches, in the depth of distress and sorrow, I did not care to eat or drink. When my father heard of my state (he sent his condolences)."[132] Shahjahan's suffering at the death of Mumtaz Mahall is too well known to be mentioned.[133] Prince Azam, although he was greatly fond of music and dance, gave up both at the death of his beloved wife Jahanzeb Banu Begum, daughter of Dara Shukoh.[134] However, except at the demise of the very important and very loved ones, "death (was) never mentioned throughout the palace," writes Manucci, and adds, that "when some lady fell ill, she was shifted to a very pretty set of rooms called *bimar khana*, where she was tended with all care. If she recovered all went well. If she died, it did not matter much to any body."[135] After all the death of an inmate was a very trifling incident in the general history of the harem.

But on this we need not dwell much for the harem was not meant for the old and the ailing. It was meant to be a bright place, an abode of the young and the beautiful, an arbour of pleasure and a retreat for joy. We shall now turn our attention to these aspects.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Hamida Banu was exceedingly pretty. Her miniature portrait in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, has been reprinted in black and white in K.T. Shah, *The Splendour that was Ind.* p. 63. She died at the age of seventy-seven.
2. *Tabqat-i-Akbari*, II, p. 556; Badaoni, II, pp. 261-62; Trs., II, p. 269. and *Ain.*, I, Text pp. 276-77.
3. *Tuzuk*, I, pp. 48-49. 18 days in Akbar's time as per *Tabqat-i-Akbari*.
4. Do, B. *Tabqat-i-Akbari*, II, p. 559.
5. Monserrate, *Commentarius*, p. 176.



6. *Tuzuk*, I, pp. 48-49.
7. Terry, *Early Travels*, p. 310; *Ain.*, I, text p. 183.
8. Abul Fazl names the 13 monthly lunar festivals. *A.N.*, II, p. 24.
9. Gulbadan, p. 126; also *Ain.*, I, p. 276.
10. The Archaeological Survey of India and the Department of History Aligarh Muslim University, have, during their joint excavations at Fatehpur Sikri found (in 1980-81) the site and shops of the market in fairly good condition. "It appears that there were 350 shops, 175 on either side of the road between Chahar suq and the Agra gate." It is one km. long. Vide Gaur, R.C. Medieval Roads and shops at Fatehpur Sikri, P.I.H.C. 1982, pp. 808-10.

    I had the pleasure of visiting the site in the company of Prof. K.A. Nizami and Prof. R.C. Gaur of the Aligarh Muslim University in April 1983.
11. *Tuzuk*, II, p. 31.
12. *Ain.*, I, p. 287.
13. *Ibid.*, 277.
14. *Tuzuk*, I, 230, 239; also pp. 77-78 and 81.
15. Terry in *Early Travels*, p. 328.
16. *Ain.*, I, note by Blochmann, pp. 277-78.
17. Bernier, pp. 260-69; Manucci, II, pp. 348-49; Manrique, II, pp. 200-04; Tavernier, I, pp. 379-81.
18. Roe, *op. cit.*, pp. 411-13.
19. *A.N.*, III, pp. 889, 931, 995, 1028, 1049.
20. *Tuzuk*, II, p. 109.
21. *Tarikh-i-Salim Shahi*, pp. 203-04.
22. *Tuzuk*, I, pp. 385-86.
23. Latif, S.M. *Lahore Its Architectural Remains and Antiquities*, p. 49.
24. *Tuzuk.*, I, p. 397.
25. Manucci, III, pp. 150-52; Pelsaert, p. 82.
26. *Tuzuk*. I, p. 81.
27. *Ibid.*, II, pp. 199-202. For other entertainments see *Ibid.*, pp. 153, 202-203.
28. *Maasir-ul-Umara*, p. 106.
29. Chandrabhan Brahman, *Guldasta*, Aligarh Ms fols. 4b-5a; also Bernier, pp. 3, 40.
30. Bernier, pp. 204-11.
31. *Ibid.*, pp. 207, 209, 215.
32. Syed Sabah-ud-din, *Hindustan ke Musalman Hukmaranon ke tamadunni jalwe* (Urdu), p. 496 quoting from *Mughal and Urdu* by Nasir Husain Khayal. Also Chopra, P.N. *Life and Letters under the Mughals*, p. 388.
33. Lal, K.S. Haldi Ghati and After in *Studies in Medieval Indian History*, p. 170.
34. This view is held by James Tod, II, p. 66; Raghubir Singh, *Purva Adhunik Rajasthan*, p. 42; Goetz, H. *Indian Culture*, XLV, 1948, p. 94 and many others.
35. This is the view of Gehlot, *Rajputane ka Itihas*, III, pp. 63-64 n; Bhargava, V.S. *Marwar and the Mughal Emperors*, Appendix IX, pp. 196-197; Sarkar, *A History of Jaipur*, pp. 37-40, and many others.
36. *Tuzuk*, I, pp. 16, 19-20, 266, 325-26. Also *A.N.*, I, p. 113.
37. *A.N.* III, p. 49.
38. *Ibid.*, II, p. 543. He was called back in April 1573 after the conquest of Gujarat, *A.N.*, III, p. 49.
39. *Ibid.*, III, p. 997.
40. Khan, Refaqat Ali, *The Kachhwahas*, p. 211.
41. Gehlot, *op. cit.*, III, p. 64.

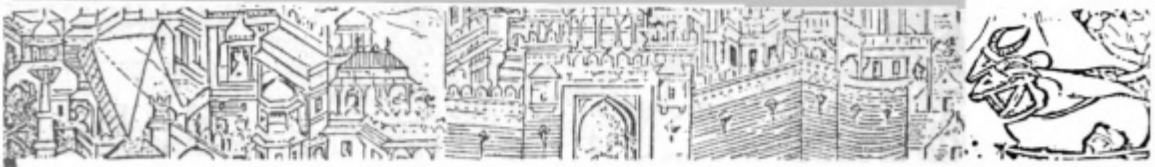


42. *Tuzuk*, I, p. 268; *Ain.*, I, p. 226.
43. Badaoni, II, p. 63; *Tuzuk*, I, pp. 246-47; *Ibid.*, II, pp. 100-01, 176.
44. Badaoni II, p. 258.
45. *A.N.*, II, pp. 346-47, 354-55 and 543 and n. respectively.
46. Badaoni, II, pp. 321-22. *Tuzuk*, I, p. 184.
47. Smith, *Akbar*, p. 43. Haig, Wolseley in *C.H.I.*, IV, p. 82. *Ain.*, I, p. 195.
48. Sharma, Sri Ram *The Religious Policy of the Mughal Emperors*, p. 18.
49. *The Sarbangi of Rajjab Das*, Ed. S. Iraqi, p. 32.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 26 n.
51. Inayatullah, *Takmil-i-Akbar Nama*, E and D, IV, p. 112.
52. Tod, II, p. 286.
53. Zaidi, Inayat Ali in P.I.H.C., 1974, pp. 131-42. Refaqat has 38 for Akbar's reign, See note 40 *supra*.
54. Saksena, *Shahjahan*, p. 319.
55. P.I.H.C. 1972, pp. 304-12; 1975, pp. 166-179.
56. Bernier, pp. 372-74; Manucci, I, pp. 22, 37.
57. Badaoni, Lowe, II, pp. 390.
58. Finch in *Early Travels*, p. 166; also Terry in *ibid.*, p. 330 and n.
59. The original in Persian reads:
    "Ta qiyamat shukr goyam kardgar-i-khwesh ra
    Ah gar man baz binam ru-i-yar-i-khwesh ra"
60. Latif, S.M. *Lahore*, pp. 186-87.
61. Hamid-ud-din Khan, *Ahkam-i-Alamgiri*, pp. 39-40.
62. *Ain.*, I, p. 389.
63. *A.N.*, III, pp. 881, 1200; Also *Maasir-ul-Umara*, I, p. 105.
64. *Ibid.*, II, pp. 334-337.
65. Manucci, II, pp. 410-11.
66. *Ahkam-i-Alamgiri, op. cit.*, p. 72.
67. Butenschon, Andrea *The Life of a Mughal Princess*, pp. 195-96.
68. *Maasir-i-Alamgiri*, pp. 77-78.
69. Khafi, Khan, II, p. 317; Yazdani, *Jahanara*, p. 21.
70. Manucci, IV, p. 196.
71. *A.N.*, III, p. 212.
72. Gulbadan, pp. 216-17, 266.
73. *Ibid.*, pp. 112-13.
74. Manucci, II, pp. 410.
75. Tavernier, I, p. 393 & n.
76. *Maasir-ul-Umara*, II, p. 429.
77. Manucci, I, p. 194.
78. *Tuzuk*, I, p. 31.
79. *Ain.*, I, p. 375.
80. Manucci, III, p. 481.
81. *Ibid.*, II, p. 352.
82. Mujeeb, *The Indian Muslims*, pp. 206-7.
83. Manucci, II, p. 352.
84. *Maasir-ul-Umara*, pp. 250-51.
85. Gulbadan, Introduction, p. 20, also trs. p. 118.
86. *Ibid.*, pp. 160-61.

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87. Smith, *Akbar the Great Mogul*, p. 143.
88. *A.N.*, III, pp. 1222-23; Also Payne, *Akbar and the Jesuits*, p. 188.
89. *Ibid.*, III, pp. 571, 660.
90. *Maasir-ul-Umara*, I, p. 328.
91. *Tuzuk*, II, pp. 26, 84, 216.
92. Barthold V.V., *Four Studies in the History of Central Asia*, pp. 31-32.
93. *Maasir-i-Alamgiri*, p. 213.
94. Manucci, II, pp. 235, 350-51.
95. *Tuzuk*, II, p. 192.
96. Saksena, *Shahjahan*, p. iv.
97. Lahori, II, Pt. I, p. 104.
98. Irvine, *The Later Mughals*, I, p. 227.
99. Tirmizi, *Edicts from the Mughal Harem*, pp. iii, 1-117.
100. In an order issued by Hamida Banu Begum, a Brahman, Bithaleshar (son of Vallabhacharya) of Mahaban (Mathura) in the sarkar of Agra is permitted to graze his cows freely. Jhaveri K.M. *Imperial Farmans*, Farman No. 3.

    In another order issued by Mariyam-uz-Zamani, Madabbir Beg is asked to restore the *jagir* which was usurped by one Surajmal in *pargana* Chaupala (Moradabad). *Indian Historical Records Commission*, VIII, 1925, pp. 167-69.
101. Tirmizi, *op. cit.* Introduction xxxi and pp. 104-5.
102. Sarkar, *Aurangzeb*, III, pp. 46-47.
103. Foster, *Early Travels in India*, pp. 123, 129, 191, 203.
104. Pelsaert, p. 67.
105. Tavernier, I, pp. 389-90.
106. Manucci, I, pp. 193-94.
107. Hawkins in *Early Travels*, p. 112.
108. *Maasir-ul-Umara*, pp. 293-95.
109. *Massir-i-Alamgiri*, p. 23.
110. *Maasir-ul-Umara*, pp. 49-50.
111. Gulbadan, pp. 159, 230.
112. *A.N.*, II, pp. 366-67.
113. *Ibid.*, III, pp. 205-6.
114. Payne, *Akbar and the Jesuits*, pp. 153, 269-270.
115. *Amal-i-Saleh*, II, p. 422. *Tuzuk*, I, p. 110.
116. Banerjee, *Humayun Badshah*, II, p. 317. Monserrate, p. 96.
117. Thevenot, p. 57.
118. *A.N.*, II, p. 484.
119. There is a mosque of Mariyam-uz-Zamani which was built by her at Lahore. Latif, Abdul, *History of Lahore*, p. 131.
120. Manucci, II, pp. 356, 390, 404, 412, 468.
121. *Tuzuk*, I, pp. 144, 170, 248, 257, 305, 325, 438. For insanity see also *A.N.*, III, pp. 796, 954.
122. *C.H.I.*, IV, p. 290.
123. Manucci, II, p. 356; Bernier, pp. 253-54; Fryer, *An Account of East India and Persia*, p. 69; For ref. by earlier travellers see Lal K.S., *Growth of Muslim population in Medieval India*, pp. 56-57.
124. Terry in *Early Travels*, p. 310.
125. Manucci, II, pp. 354-55.



126. *Ibid.*, p. 355.
127. *John Marshall in India*, p. 328 cited in Chopra P.N., *Society and Culture in Mughal Age*, p. 110.
128. *Maasir-ul-Umara*, p. 184.
129. Finch, *Early Travels*, p. 186.
130. *A.N.*, III, p. 1245.
131. *Tuzuk*, I, p. 85.
132. *Ibid.*, I, p. 56. Also *A.N.*, III, p.1239.
133. *Maasir-i-Alamgiri*, pp. 246, 295.
134. Sarkar, *Studies in Aurangzeb's Reign*, p. 81.
135. Manucci, III, p. 153.


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CHAPTER IX

Pursuit of Pleasure by Men

The *raison d'etre* of harem was the King's pursuit for pleasure. And pleasure was of the flesh, wine and song; the harem catered to this need in full.

Dichotomy in Love

There appears to be a dichotomy in the psychology of pleasure as far as the King's conjugal life is concerned. On the one hand there is the fact of the dominating love of Nur Jahan over Jahangir, on the other his harem had at least three to four hundred wives and concubines. Shahjahan built the Taj to immortalize his love for Mumtaz Mahall, but the scandals associated with his life rule out any exclusive devotion to her. Prince Dara's love for Nadira Begum was no less steadfast and romantic than that of Shahjahan for Mumtaz Mahall,[1] but he too
Pl. I followed the norms of the Mughal polygamous society. There is another dichotomy, more funny and more interesting. All Mughal kings had large harems, but they held in contempt other rulers who organised big seraglios. Sultan Nasir-ud-din of Malwa (C.E. 1500-1510) had inherited the tradition of a large harem from his father Ghiyas-ud-din (1469-1500). He was also prone to performing antics practised by his father. Once in a state of drunkenness he was about to be drowned in a tank in his harem in which he was used to enjoy bathing in the company of unclad young beauties. Such frolicking was a common pastime with rulers and there are paintings showing a bunch of young women bathing in a pool to the delight of the master. Nasir-ud-din was dead drunk, and he began to drift in the water unsteadily. Some of the girls saw him drowning and they rescued him by catching hold of the hair of his head. Next day, when he regained



sobriety and learnt how the maids had pulled him out, every sentiment of humanity was thrown to winds, and he ordered the death of his saviours.[2] When Jahangir was in Mandu he heard about 'Nasir-ud-din's shameful conduct' as well as about his possessing a large harem because of which Sher Shah had ordered Nasir-ud-din's grave to be beaten with sticks. The Mughal emperor too expressed his indignation and he says in his memoirs that "when I went to his tomb, I gave it several kicks, and ordered the servants on attendance on me to kick the tomb."[3]

In short, besides dichotomy there was jealosy too. In the harem conjugal love, sexual licence and strict control over women went hand in hand. H.A.R. Gibb quoting Brunetiere says that "Women in the bourgeois life in the Middle Ages seemed to have bowed the head as low as in any age and in any place beneath the law of force and brutality" and adds, "the artificial sentimentality of chivalry had nothing in common with the life of the seraglio."[4] Married ladies knew their hapless position and peace among the inmates of the harem was maintained by the rule of the rod on the one hand and submission on the other. Once the personality of woman was suppressed through ages of oppression, all chances of disagreement between the two sexes disappeared. Her moderation was forced by her fears and domestic life became happy and harmonious. Marriages in the polygamous Mughal society were marked by their casualness. They were contracted either for political considerations or social convenience or sheer sex. Akbar contracted many matrimonial alliances. Jahangir, judging from the dates of marriages and number of his wives and concubines, was married to one princess or the other almost every month.[5] How casually a marriage was treated in the Mughal system is exemplified by the case of the marriage of Shahjahan to Arjumand Banu Begum, later known as Mumtaz Mahall. He was betrothed to her in March 1608. "Jahangir with his own hands put the ring on the finger of his prospective daughter-in-law and the occasion was celebrated with great rejoicings."[6] But in September 1609 he was betrothed to the daughter of Mirza Muzaffar Husain Safavi, a lineal descendant of Shah Ismail of Persia and married her first on the 29th October 1610, while Arjumand Banu Begum who had been betrothed earlier had to wait for five years to be married to Shahjahan on 27th March 1612.[7]

Such was the regard marriage received and such was the position of a wife. It also meant that the real pleasure lay in extra-marital sex. This rendered a concubine or even a prostitute very important. Terry noted that "the prostitutes sometimes say that he (husband, nobleman or king) cannot love his wife, be she ever so amiable or lovely, and only for this reason, because she is his wife". He adds that "To what an height of wickedness can licentiousness raise up a man, in making him to urge such a relation as a wife to be the only reason of dislike or disaffection, which should be the firmest bond of his love."[8] As an example, the case of Zainabadi Mahall, a concubine of the ultra-puritan Aurangzeb, may be studied



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in detail. It is narrated in *Ahkam-i-Alamgiri*, whose authorship is ascribed to Hamid-ud-din Khan Bahadur. He says that "The affairs of Zainabadi happened in this manner. At the time When Aurangzeb was made governor of the Deccan and was going to Aurangabad (his headquarters) on arriving at Burhanpur, the governor of which was Saif Khan (who had married the prince's maternal aunt, viz., Saliha Banu, the daughter of Asaf Khan), he went to visit her. As it was the house of his aunt, not much care was taken to remove the women of the harem out of his view, and the prince entered the house without announcing himself. Zainabadi, whose original name was Hira Bai, was standing under a tree, holding a branch with her right hand and singing in a low tone. Immediately on seeing her, the prince, unable to control himself, sat down there, and then fell down at full length on the ground in a swoon. The news was carried to his aunt. Running barefooted (to the place) she clasped him to her breast and began to wail and lament. After 3 or 4 *gharis* (7 to 9 hours) the prince regained consciousness... It was midnight when the prince recovered his speech and said, 'If I mention my disease, can you apply the remedy'. When his aunt heard these words, she... said, what do you talk of remedy? I shall offer my life itself (to cure you). Then the prince revealed the whole matter to her. On hearing it she (almost lost her consciousness and became tongue tied)... The aunt replied, 'May I beg your sacrifice'! You know the wretch (i.e. her husband); he is a bloodthirsty man and does not care in the least for the Emperor Shahjahan or yourself. On merely hearing of your request (for Hira Bai) he will first murder her and then me....."

"After sunrise he (Aurangzeb) came back to his own house, and did not eat anything at all. Summoning Murshid Quli Khan, who was the prince's subordinate and diwan of the Deccan, he discussed the case in detail with him, as he was his trusted confidant of secrets. The Khan said, 'let me first despatch him (i.e. murder Saif Khan), and if afterwards anybody slays me, there will be no harm, as in exchange of my blood-price the work of my saint and spiritual guide (i.e. the prince Aurangzeb) will be achieved...' The prince replied, 'you should (first) speak (to Saif Khan), relying on God (for success)'. Murshid Quli Khan set off without any grumbling and told everything to Saif Khan, who replied, 'Convey my salam to the prince... let him send Chatter Bai, his own concubine (harem), that she may be exchanged (for Hira Bai)'. With this message he (Saif Khan) sent the aunt in a litter to the prince; when she objected saying that she would not go, he insisted, 'Go quickly, if you love your life'. So she had no help but to go and tell everything to the prince, who was highly pleased and cried out, 'what of (giving him) one (inmate of my harem) ? Immediately take with yourself in the *palki* in which you have come.. (two girls) as I have no objection. The aunt sent a report of the fact to her husband by means of a eunuch. Saif Khan said, 'now no cover is left (for me to take refuge in)'... and sent (Hira) Bai to the prince without delay."[9]



There are many discrepancies in this account. Jadunath Sarkar prefers the version as narrated in the *Maasir-ul-Umara*. Here the name of the nobleman given is Mir Khalil, which is correct and not Saif Khan. It also mentions that Zainabadi was a very good musician and unique in blandishments and that she tempted Aurangzeb to drink wine but after testing his sincerity snatched away the cup. Sarkar adds that the incident happened in 1653 at the earliest "when Aurangzeb was 35 years old and father of six children."[10] By sheer chance, Hira Bai died soon after. "On the day of her death the prince became very unwell, in extreme agitation he rode out to hunt", pleading that lamentations in house cannot relieve him of his sorrow as solitude in sport would.[11] If such was the value of love to an austere Mughal prince, what could love mean to the philandering Mughal royalty and nobility, young and old. No wonder Manucci, who also refers to the episode adds that "In after days he (Aurangzeb) was accustomed to say that God had been very gracious to him by putting an end to that dancing girl's life, by reason of whom he had committed so many inequities" and almost lost the chance of acquiring the throne.[12]

The episode throws so many sidelights on harem-life. It shows how much the writer enjoyed describing the whole incident with embellishment; and it shows how princes, who were accustomed to continually falling in love, could go to the extent of pretending to lose consciousness at the mere sight of a girl and remain unconscious for hours together. On hearing of his request the aunt also lost her consciousness; for if the request was to be mentioned to the nobleman, he would have killed both the girl and his own wife. Was this the value of women's life? It shows that a loyal and sycophant nobleman (Murshid Quli Khan) was prepared to kill any one for the sake of satisfying his prince's craving. It shows how easily concubines were exchanged. And it shows how once love or lust was satisfied, the prince did not feel sad even at the death of Zainabadi. He even thought of it as "a good riddance". Such were the Mughal lords. Such was the life in the great Mughal harem.

Akbar's ways

In matters of sex Akbar's predecessors, Babur and Humayun, though no angels, were normal specimens of a polygamous society. They had their wives, their concubines, and their slave girls, but licentiousness as a hobby was not cultivated by them. However, Akbar was very fond of chasing women. An incident of 1564 throws ample light on Akbar's ways. On 11th January he was returning to Agra after visiting the famous shrine of Shaikh Nizam-ud-din Auliya in Delhi. A man called Faulad Koka discharged an arrow which wounded the Emperor in



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the shoulder. The arrow was extracted, the assailant cut to pieces and Akbar could go back to Agra after ten days' treatment and rest at Delhi.[13] But the attack was prompted, according to Badaoni and following him Vincent Smith, by the resentment felt by the people 'at the royal invasion of the honour of families'; the king was engaged in a scheme for marrying certain ladies, belonging to some families in Delhi. Abdul Qadir Badaoni writes that Akbar happened to see the beautiful wife of one of his officers Abdul Wasi Khan and fell in love with her. "It is the custom among Mughal kings that if they cast their eyes with desire upon a woman it becomes obligatory on the husband to divorce her."[14] Abdul Wasi, therefore, divorced his wife and Akbar married her.

This happened two years after he had married the daughter of Raja Bihari Mal. He was then one and twenty. Whether this incident had a chastening effect on him is doubtful, for throughout his life, Akbar allowed himself ample latitude in regard to women. Malwa was one of the earliest kingdoms to be attacked in 1561, and the greatest sin Adham Khan committed in this campaign was that he stole some very beautiful women of Baz Bahadur's harem which by right should have been the prize of Akbar.[15] Adham Khan's crime was unpardonable but Akbar's impatience and craving for the girls too was unbecoming.[16] Since then till the end of the century, his unceasing conquests brought women into his harem in ever swelling numbers, so that, according to Ralph Fitch (1588-91), he had 800 concubines in Fatehpur Sikri.[17] Akbar and his successors never tired of filling their harems with women of all nationalities, foreign as well as Indian. Indian women were brought from all parts of the country. Rajputanis in particular were preferred for political reasons, Kashmiri women for their fair skin and Bengali beauties for their amiable disposition.[18] "It is from this country (Kashmir)," writes Bernier, "that nearly every individual, when first admitted to the court of the great Mogal selected wives or concubines, that his children may be whiter than Indian's and pass for genuine Mogals."[19] Kashmiri wives were a fashion with the king too. Salim Shah Sur, son of Sher Shah Sur, had a Kashmiri wife.[20] So also had Akbar and Jahangir.[21] Emperor Bahadur Shah (1707-12) was the son of a Kashmiri mother. Shahjahan had demanded a beautiful girl as part of revenue from the Raja of Rajauri. The girl sent was Nawab Bai or Rahmat-un-nisa. She became the wife of Aurangzeb and mother of Muazzam, later Bahadur Shah. The mother of Farrukh Siyar too was a Kashmiri.[22] Such was the craze for the fair skinned Kashmiri women that even the seraglio of the blind Shah Alam II in Delhi had, in 1794 "Cashmerian beauties who formed the principal ornaments of the palace."[23]





Use of Intoxicants

Wine goes with women and *vice versa*, and therefore, we shall digress a little to study the effects of intoxicants on the sex habits of the Mughals. But for a few rare exceptions, the Mughal kings, princes and nobles were hard drinkers and drug addicts. It is said that if taken in moderate quantities, wine and drugs stimulate the urge for sex. But excessive use benumbs desire and saps at strength. Babur drank wine and took *majun*, a preparation of opium. He candidly narrates his drinking orgies,[24] but there is no mention of nocturnal orgies with women. Humayun had become so much addicted to opium that it had an adverse effect on his sexual urge. He used to feel drowsy and sometimes, even avoided the company of women.[25] Akbar drank hard and took excessive doses of opium. On occasions he got so badly intoxicated that he become a problem to his nobles.[26] "It is certain that for many years he kept up the family tradition and often drank more than he could carry", and ate *post*, a heady preparation of opium in good measure.[27]

Tobacco was also introduced in the palace in the days of Akbar. Asad Beg had brought large supply of tobacco from the Deccan (1605).[28] Jahangir was aware of its harmful effects and declared tobacco smoking an evil and prohibited its use in 1617.[29] But it was sold everywhere and by the time of Shahjahan its use had become widespread.[30] Similarly, Jahangir had forbidden the use of *bhang* (hemp) in 1609. Later on Aurangzeb tried to control its use and sale.[31] Hot climate, restrictions of religion and prohibition by Government[32] discouraged the use of wine among the people. Besides, foreign wine, whether Shirazi or Canary was very dear. It was first brought to Surat and from that port of disembarkation to Agra—Delhi in forty-six days. Official restrictions and high cost prohibited its open sale in the shops of Delhi.[33] But high cost did not have any meaning for royalty and nobility. They freely drank foreign wines and liquors, but preferred to consume large quantities of *araq*. It was distilled in every nobleman's house from native grape or unrefined sugar. It was more popular because it was heady.

Excessive drinking was the bane of the whole Mughal family. Two of Akbar's sons Murad and Daniyal died of heavy drinking, the former in his 30th year and the latter in the 33rd year,[34] while his nephew, son of Mirza Hakim, was imprisoned for drug addiction.[35] Salim or Jahangir was no better. He used to mix wines and drank cocktails.[36] Once, when he was in Kabul, he had two round basins cut in rock each of which could contain two maunds of liquid. He got them filled with wine and ordered those present to partake of it.[37] Hawkins, Roe and many others, besides Jahangir himself, repeatedly write about the Emperor's excessive drinking and his large dozes of opium.[38]

Akbar and Jahangir were hardcore drinkers. Shahjahan and Aurangzeb were





not. And yet their interest in women was no less deep than that of the first two. As already observed, excessive use of wine and other intoxicants had an adverse effect on the sex life of the Mughals. Some princes died at an early age. Some others became ineffective early in life.[39] Still, there were recipes and drugs used to offset the adverse effects of intoxicants and increase potency.[40] And the Mughals enjoyed sex to their entire satisfaction depending on the state and duration of the health of the individuals.

Shahjahan and Aurangzeb

Shahjahan indeed was greatly interested in women. He was a sober drinker. He certainly enjoyed European grape wine in the cold climate of Kashmir.[41] Still wine was not so important to him as women. Manucci writes that "It would seem as if the only thing Shahjahan cared for was the search for women to serve his pleasure."[42] Bernier corroborates him and remarks that Shahjahan had weakness for the flesh.[43] And knowing his propensities some wives and daughters of the nobility placed themselves or had to place themselves at the service of the king. The intimacy of Shahjahan with the wives of Jafar Khan and Khalilullah Khan was the talk of the metropolis. "When these ladies went to the court the beggars, asking for alms from them, used to cry out to Jafar's wife, 'Oh breakfast of Shahjahan, remember us' and to Khalilullah's wife, 'Oh luncheon of Shahjahan, succour us'."[44] Farzana Begum, a sister of Mumtaz Mahall and wife of Jafar Khan, had been the mistress of Shahjahan. It was even said that her son Namdar Khan was the son of Shahjahan. "As for myself", adds Manucci, "I have no doubt about it, for he was very like Prince Dara."[45] Frey Sebastian Manrique speaks of Shahjahan's violating the chastity of the wife of Shaista Khan with the assistance of his daughter.[46] All this happened when he had a number of concubines of his own. Waris mentions the names of Akbarabadi Mahall and Fatehpuri Mahall as the two favourite slave-girls of Shahjahan. Of course, there were many more. There was a large staff of dancing girls attached to his court. His adventures, flirtations and philanderings during the festivities of Nauroz and Khushroz too were exceptional. These will be noted presently. The builder of the Taj earned great name and fame. His reign is called the golden age of the Mughal empire. But in matters of sex, he did not know where to draw the line. His life may not have been an unceasing round of bestial sensuality, but of the twenty-seven Mughal emperors who ruled between 1526 and 1857,[47] no other monarch, great or small, has been accused of such a stinking crime as incest. Sex remained his craze till the end, although he had been sufficiently punished for that. Manucci says that Jafar Khan and Khalilullah Khan, whose wives Shahjahan had violated, avenged their



humiliation by surreptitiously siding with Aurangzeb in the War of Succession. But he could not change his ways. As a prisoner in the fortress of Agra, he was permitted by Aurangzeb to retain "the whole of his female establishment, including the singing and dancing women."[48] Even when he had grown very old, he did not give up excessive indulgence in sex and took all kinds of aphrodisiacs for the same purpose.[49] Manucci's information about the manner of his death was in consonance with the tenor of his life. Shahjahan had two slave-girls, Aftab and Mehtab by name. One day while he was twirling his moustache before a mirror in extreme old age, the girls smiled mockingly from behind him. He saw their reflection in the mirror and felt so much disturbed that, it is said, the shock precipitated his end.[50]

Shahjahan's ways were the usual routine of the Mughals. They were extremely sensual. This is also borne out by harem miniatures painted on the folios of contemporary Persian manuscripts. There are paintings which depict lone amorous couples making love. There are paintings of the *Mahal* in which the king is seen surrounded by a cluster of women. There were pretty slave-girls constantly fanning the master, many more sprinkling rose water, serving wines, sweetmeats and fruits. Female singers and instrument players were in attendance enlivening the assembly by their ravishing dances. Mughal miniatures pertaining to the harem mostly depict scenes in which bunches of beautiful maidens are found entertaining the royal guest. There was no check on the unbridled sex life of the Mughals. Even Aurangzeb was not different. Aurangzeb's dress, food, and recreations were simple. He had banished music and also placed some restrictions on the activities of the *kanchanis*. Despite all this, the harem life continued as before, for, writes Manucci, "although the women in the Mahal treat themselves so sumptuously... Aurangzeb sees no harm. For all Mahomedans are very fond of women, who are their principal relaxation and almost their only pleasure. Further, it is an ancient custom of the Mughal kings to act in this way". This holds true in the case of Aurangzeb also. His infatuation for Zainabadi bordered on the ridiculous.

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Pl. 5

But surely he kept a watch over the love plays of his sons. "One night it happened", writes Manucci, "when there was very bright moonlight, the prince (Shah Alam) was enjoying himself with some ladies who were his mistresses." The spies of the prince warned him that Aurangzeb was coming. "As soon as he heard this, he promptly rose and having hidden the ladies in different places, he went into a room and set to work reading the Quran aloud, as is the custom." Aurangzeb was highly impressed. It was a wonderful deception. But in the prevailing atmosphere of strict etiquette on the one hand and unbridled licentiousness on the other the princes perforce became hypocritical. Shah Alam ate in plates of gold but had wooden plates for show. He drank wine enthusiastically, and so did his son Muiz-ud-din, but the latter kept up a show of decorum before the

former.[51] In spite of all this in matters of women and wine, Aurangzeb was better than Shahjahan and Akbar. But the interlude of his temperance was short-lived. Many of his successors crossed all limits of licence.

Collection of Beauties

The avenues through which women passed into the harem were many. Each Mughal victory brought in female captives.[52] So common and yet so cruel was the method of capturing women for officers and men in war and during peace that Akbar issued an order in 1563 prohibiting capture and enslavement of women by victorious troops.[53] Jahangir, at the very beginning of his reign, promulgated an ordinance to the effect that collectors and jagirdars were not to intermarry with the people in their districts without the king's permission,[54] for it was well-known that the nobles used to abduct beautiful girls to fill their harems.[55] Still, women were regularly procured for their seraglios from several regions ranging from Rajasthan to Assam and Tibet, from Bundelkhand to Malwa and Gujarat, and from Kashmir to Bengal and the Deccan. Campaigns against the Portuguese brought a bevy of European women. The best were selected for the harem of the king, the second best went to the nobles. When a conquest was followed by a 'matrimonial alliance', a large number of *bandis* and maids followed the new bride.[56] Some were also purchased. Many women were procured through the
Pl. 17 offices of matrons who 'by promises and deceit...have carried them off into whatever places the king or prince requires. When it happens that he does not wish to keep them (permanently) the king sends them back with some great present."[57]

But the best selections were made during Khushroz, referred to on many occasions earlier also. Khushroz or fancy bazaar was arranged every month for three days. When it was combined with the vernal festival of Nauroz, the duration and celebrations of the 'Happy Days' increased in time and gaiety. Badaoni saw Khushroz in the following light.

"In order to direct another blow at the honour of our religion, His Majesty ordered that the stalls of the fancy bazars, which are held on New Year's Day, should, for a stated time, be given up for the enjoyment of the Begums and the women of the harem, and also for any other married ladies. On such occasions, His Majesty spent much money; and the important affairs of harem-people, marriage contracts, and betrothels of boys and girls, were arranged at such meetings."[58] James Tod writes more candidly. "The ingenous Abul Fazl," writes he, "softens down the unhallowed purpose of this day... There is not a shadow of doubt that many of the noblest were dishonoured on the Noroza."[59] Khushroz served as an occasion for the king to select beauties to fulfil his desires. Contem-

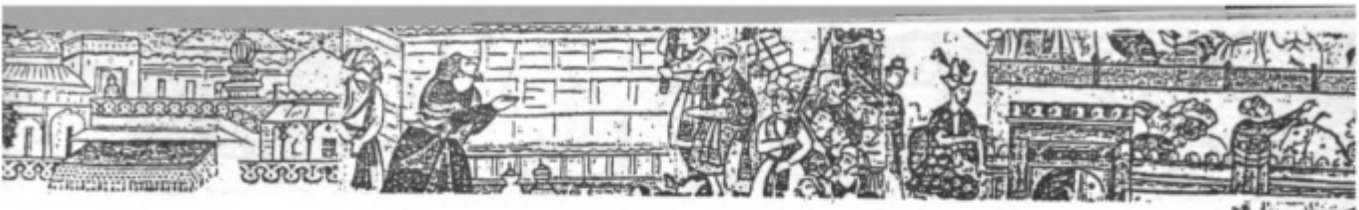
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porary Hindi poets like Dursa and Prithviraj too attribute licentious and lascivious motives to Akbar behind his organising Nauroz, Khushroz and Mina Bazaar festivities.[60] That is why the celebration was disliked by the Rajputs.[61] The wives and daughters of the nobles were invited to the fair and "on such occasion the king saw the females of all the nobility."[62] Many of those selected like the wife of Rae Singh, "returned to their dwelling... despoiled of their chastity.... (though) tramping the tinkling sound of the ornaments of gold and gems on her person." Once in a while, ladies with courage and virtue, stood up against the royal advances like the wife of Prithviraj Singh, Rae Singh's younger brother. She was a princess of Mewar and once on returning from the fair found herself entangled amidst the labyrinth of apartments at the end of which Akbar stood before her, "but instead of acquiesence, she drew a poniard from her corset and held it to his breast, dictating, and making him repeat, the oath of rununciation of the infamy of all her race."[63] But such instances were rare, and the fair provided opportunities for Akbar to satisfy his carnal desires. At a later date the Jesuit priest Padre Radolfo Aquavivia reproved the Emperor for his licentious relations with women. Akbar even sometimes tried to subdue his desire by fasting. But, despite all this, his pursuit of pleasure of flesh continued.[64]

By the time of Shahjahan the fair became very elegant. The best description of the festivities is provided by Francois Bernier. "A whimsical kind of fair" writes he, "is sometimes held during these festivities in the Mahal, or royal seraglio; it is conducted by the handsomest and most engaging of the wives of the Omrahs and principal Mansabdars. The articles exhibited are beautiful brocades, rich embroideries of the newest fashion, turbans elegantly worked on cloth of gold, fine muslins worn by women of quality and other articles of high price. These bewitching females act the part of traders, while the purchasers are the King, Begums or princesses, and other distinguished ladies of the seraglio. If any Omrah's wife happens to have a handsome daughter, she never fails to accompany her mother, that she may be seen by the King and become known to the Begums."[65] Peter Mundy says that to this fair "the wives and daughter of all sorts" come, "no man daring to refuse to sending them if the king require them."[66] No *parda* was observed. "Women need not be veiled before the king or a bridgroom, both known as Shah,"[67] and the king was after all an ever green bridegroom. Bernier continues, "The charm of this fair is the most ludicrous manner in which the King makes his bargains frequently disputing for the value of a penny. [This was the best way of dallying at the stall of the beauty the king wished to flirt with]. He pretends that the good lady cannot possibly be in earnest, that the article is much too dear, that is, is not equal to that he can find elsewhere, and that positively he will give no more than such a price. The woman, on the other hand, endeavours to sell to the best advantage, and when the King perseveres in offering that she





considers too little money, high words frequently ensue and she fearlessly tells him that he is a worthless trader, a person ignorant of the value of merchandise; that her articles are too good for him, and that he had better go where he can suit himself better, and similar jocular expressions.... But sooner or later they agree upon the price, the princesses, as well as the king. buy right and left, pay in ready money, and often slip out of their hands, as if by accident, a few gold instead of silver rupees, intended as a compliment to the fair merchant or her pretty daughter. The present is received in the same unconscious manner, and the whole ends amidst witty jests and good humour."[68] Manucci corroborates him and says that Shahjahan was ever intent on search for women to serve his pleasure and "for this end he established a fair at his court. No one was allowed to enter except women of all ranks that is to say, great and small, rich and poor, but all handsome."[69] It was at these fairs that the kings and princes made their selections and arranged to obtain their choices through the matrons.

Dancers and Musicians

Besides collecting beauties, the kings regularly enjoyed the performances of dancing girls. These, both singers and dancers, were known by the common name *kanchanis*. Such was their popularity, so large their number and so common the custom of inviting them that many chroniclers and most European travellers refer to them repeatedly.[70] Some Europeans praise the dance of the *domnis*, some others of Persian women. "There are many classes of dancers," writes Pelsaert, "among them (are) *lolonis*, who are descended from courtesans who have come from Persia to India and sing only in Persian; and a second class, *domnis*, who sing in Hindustani, and whose songs are considered more beautiful, more amorous, and more profound, than those of the Persians, while their tunes are superior; they dance, too, to the rhythm of the songs with a kind of swaying of the body which is not lascivious, but rather modest. Other classes are named *horckenis* and *hentsinis* who have various styles of singing and dancing but who are all alike accommodating people."[71] Most of these accommodating people were just harlots and prostitutes. Peter Mundy, who visited India in C.E. 1628, also mentions about *lalnis*, *harkanis*, *domnis* etc. These were so called because of their different styles of music.[72] According to Manucci, "All these women are pretty, have a good style and much grace in their gait, are very free in their talk and exceedingly lascivious; their only occupation, outside the duties of their office, being lewdness."[73]

By the words, "the duties of their office", Manucci in all probability means the custom *cum* obligation of the dancing girls to attend the royal palace on certain days to pay obeisance to the king and dance and sing before him. According to



Bernier, Shahjahan was fond of fair sex and introduced at every fair and festival into the seraglio singing and dancing girls called *kanchens* (the gilded, the blooming), and kept them there for that purpose the whole night. All Mughal Emperors enjoyed the dance performances of these girls, some less some more, but all. They were "not indeed the prostitutes in bazars, but those of a more private and respectable class, who attend the grand weddings of Omrahs and Mansebdars, for the purpose of singing and dancing. Most of these kanchanes are handsome and well-dressed, and sing to perfection; and their limbs being extremely supple, they dance with wonderful agility and are always correct in regard to time."[74] Their gyrating movements almost whirled them into air, and colour, and clappings with songs to the beat of drums presented an ethereal vision. There are dozens of Mughal miniatures depicting such dance performances. Abul Fazl refers to a particular class of female dancers known to perform *Sezdeh Tal* (*Tereh* or thirteen beats). He writes: "The women while they sing play upon thirteen pairs of *talas* at once, two (cymbals or *sanj* tied) on each wrists, two on each shoulders, one on the breast and two on the finger of each hand. They are mostly from Gujarat and Malwa."[75] *Tereh Tal* is still very popular in Rajasthan. When singers and dancers were joined by instrument players, the atmosphere became surcharged with rhythmic symphony. Abul Fazl says that the Dhadhi women played on the *Daff* (a drum) and *Dafzan* and tambourine. Besides, there were *Pakhawaj* and *Rabab* players. According to him *Dhadhis* were Punjabi singers, and *Qawwals* belonged to this class.[76] Dances were generally performed in restricted assemblies of royalty and nobility and added to the delight of marriages, birthdays and such other ceremonial occasions. Pls. 7 & 8

It was not enough for Shahjahan that the *kanchanis* visited the palace and paid their respects. "When they came to him on the Wednesdays to pay their reverence at the Am-Kas, according to an ancient custom", says Bernier, "he often detained them the whole night, and amused himself with their antics and follies." A visitor to Shahjahan's palace was once invited to dinner. After the banquet, dancing girls appeared with "all the charms of lascivious and suggestive dress, immodest behaviour and posturing", but the guest remained impassive.[77] It is not for nothing that Shahjahan earned notoriety for his nocturnal orgies. In the reign of Shahjahan female dancers and public women enjoyed great liberty. But Aurangzeb ordered them to marry or clear out of the the realm (C.E. 1667-68). He 'buried' music and turned out the musicians.[78] But the order was more or less symbolic. They never ceased to be. Music and musicians, dancing girls and prostitutes were more than compensated under the rule of his successors.

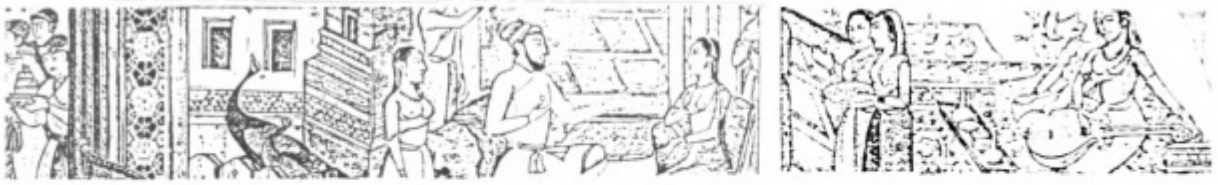
Last But Not Least

In the pursuit of pleasure slave-girls and maids were as much important, as much in demand, as any *kanchanis*, concubines or even the free-born. Whether they were purchased from the market,[79] captured during war, selected during excursions, or came with brides—whatever their channel of entry into the harem—the slave-girls kept in the *Mahal* were invariably good looking. They were always elegantly attired. Their garments were sometimes gifted to them by their master or mistresses; also clothes once worn by the princesses were given away to them.[80] So the maids dressed almost like princesses. This is clearly borne out by the large number of Mughal paintings, in which princesses and their maids are shown together. It is sometimes difficult to distinguish between the two. They not only dressed like royal maidens but they were also equally beautiful, delicate and slim. They even behaved like princesses. The level of education of the two was the same. Some of the slave-girls were taught to sing and play musical instruments. Many of them could recite verses and love lyrics. Their feelings and problems were the same. Both used to remain, by and large, love-sick in the harem. Therefore, their topics of conversation too were the same. The only difference was that when conversing, the mistress sat on a high cushion or settee, while the *bandi* sat on the ground. The *bandis* thus were both servants and companions of their mistresses. The mistress in distress poured out her heart to her slave-girl, and the maid sought the advice of the former regarding her problems. The slave-girl used to be adept in the art of conversation. The habit of speaking correctly and elegantly is so familiar to the females of Muslim society that maidservants, long accustomed to serve in the *Mahal*, were readily distinguished by their refined language. Placed as they were, they knew how to stoop to conquer. No wonder they received loving care and lovely names from their masters. Manucci gives a list of more than fifty names, some of which like Gulal, Champa, Chameli, Nargis, Yasmin, Anarkali, Saloni, Madhumati, etc. have been given before. All Mughal emperors, including the austere Aurangzeb seems to have been very choosy about names. If the master liked a maid for his pleasure, he had just to call her or even marry her. An instance of this may be cited. Humayun was a much married man when, according to his sister Gulbadan Begum, his mother Maham Begum 'developed' a great longing to see a son of Humayun. She writes: "whenever there was a good looking and nice girl, she (Maham) used to bring her into his service." Mewajan was a domestic in Gulbadan's retinue, and "Maham Begum said, 'Humayun Mewajan is not bad. Why do you not take her into your Service?' So, at her word, Humayun married her and took her that very night."[81] Such lucky ones to be married to the King were few. Many others were married off to gentlemen troopers but only through the generosity of Begums like Nur Jahan and Mumtaz Mahall. Even for the

Pl. 16

Pls. 3, 4, 8, 10 & VII

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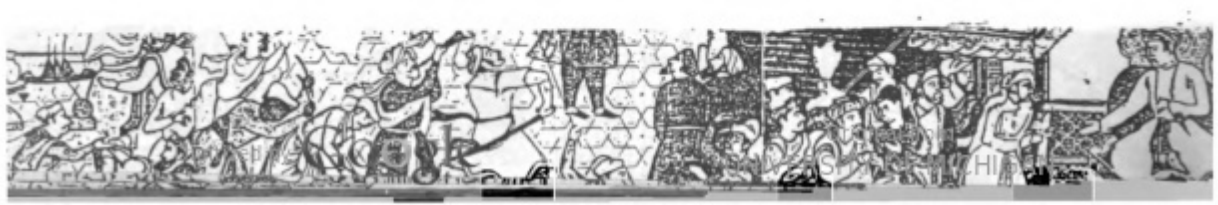


majority of those who could not marry, there was no problem. Only in exceptional cases, where the maid's beauty excited the jealousy of the queen, or the master's attention to the girl became an irritant to the mistress, were they severely treated. Else, their life was not of unmitigated suffering as their nomenclature suggests. Specially lucky were those who were favoured by the master.

The Nobles

The nobles or *Amirs* were chips of the Mughal block. It is they who completed the picture of the luxurious and licentious life of the Mughal elite. Francisco Pelsaert gives a succint but delightful description of the sex-play of a nobleman in his harem. "Each night", writes he, "the Amir visits a particular wife, or *mahal,* and receives a very warm welcome from her and from the slaves, who dressed specially for the occasion, seem to fly, rather than run, about their duties. If it is the hot weather, they undress the husband as soon as he comes in, and rub his body with pounded sandalwood and rosewater, or some other scented and cooling oil. Fans are kept going steadily in the room, or in the open air, where they usually sit. Some of the slaves chafe the master's hand and feet, some sit and sing, or play music and dance, or provide other recreation, the wife sitting near him all the time. The husband sits like a golden cock among the gilded hens until midnight, or until passion, or drink sends him to bed. Then if one of the pretty slave girls takes his fancy, he calls her to him and enjoys her, his wife not daring to show any signs of displeasure, but dissembling, though she will take it out of the slave-girl later on."[82]

No noble could be content with the company of his wife alone, when courtesans and dancing girls were available just for the asking and his own thirst for sex insatiable. The whole atmosphere was ridden with licentiousness and sex, and luxury and licence stood confusedly intermingled. This was the urban scene throughout Mughal India from Kabul to Agra and from Agra to all the major cities of India. Sidi Ali Reis, the Turkish admiral, visited Kabul on his return from the court of Humayun. About the city, he wrote that "Pleasure and merriment prevailed everywhere, feasting and banquetting were the order of the day. In every corner were gaily dressed slender *lulis* (gypsies) enticing one with music and song to join the merry crowd; the populace in fact seemed to have no thought for anything but for pleasure and enjoyment."[83] Similar atmosphere prevailed in Agra and Delhi where courtesans and pretty damsels singly and collectively performed their lascivious dances to the tune of instrumental music and beat of the drums. In the time of Akbar, writes Badaoni, "the prostitutes of the realm (who had collected at the capital, and could scarcely be counted, so large was





their number), had a separate quarter assigned to them, which was called *Shaitan-pura* or Devils-ville." Akbar appointed a *Darogha* and a clerk to register the names of such as went to the prostitutes, or took them to their houses. 'If any well-known courtier wanted to have a virgin, he (had to) first apply to his Majesty and get his permission."[84] Infringement of these regulations invited punishment,[85] but most nobles went scotfree. In later times these conditions got relaxed still further, and by the time of Shahjahan the *Umara* made it a fashion to pay visits to the houses of dancing girls and prostitutes. According to Peter Mundy, they were all "whore though not in so public in manner....There is scarce any meeting of friends without them... Once the gathering was warmed up they took up whom they take a mind either for the night, or otherwise."[86] Manucci says that there was never any dearth of women of pleasure.[87] It was a regular practice with the nobles to attend dance and music sessions at the houses of the dancing girls and then take home the one they chose.

Europeans too did not fail to join the mainstream of the public life of public women. They attended the dance and music sessions of the *Kanchanis*. They could feel free with them, appreciate their beauty and performance and develop a longing for them. About the singing of Muslim women Nicholas Doughnton (1608-15) remarks that they sang "with such elevated and shrill voices, strained into the highest, yet sweet and tunable, rising and falling according to their art and skill, that I have been ravisht in those silent seasons with the sweet ache or reflection thereof from a far distance, and keep waking hours together, listening to them, anticipating (in my desires) the new moon which they constantly thus celebrate."[88] The French physician, Bernard fell deeply in love with a dancing girl. His income and popularity had greatly increased by his attendance on the high ladies of the seraglio and *Umara* of the court. He was much liked... by the '*kanchans*', on whom he lavished vast sums. "Among the females of this description who nightly filled his house", writes Bernier, "was a young and beautiful damsel remarkable for the elegance of her dancing with whom our countryman fell violently in love, but the mother resisted all (his) overtures and incessant solicitations." Then an incident happened. Jahangir once offered Bernard a present before all the *Umara* by way of remuneration for an extraordinary cure which he had effected in the seraglio. But Bernard asked for a different remuneration. "Your Majesty", said he, "will not be offended if I refuse the gift so munificently offered and implore that in lieu thereof your Majesty would bestow on me the young Kencheny now waiting with others of her company to make the customary salam." The whole assembly smiled at this refusal of the present and at a request so little likely to be granted, he being a Christian and the girl a Mohammadan and a Kencheny; but Jahangir, who never felt any religious scruples, was thrown into a violent fit of laughter, and commanded the girl to be given to him. "Lift her on the physician's



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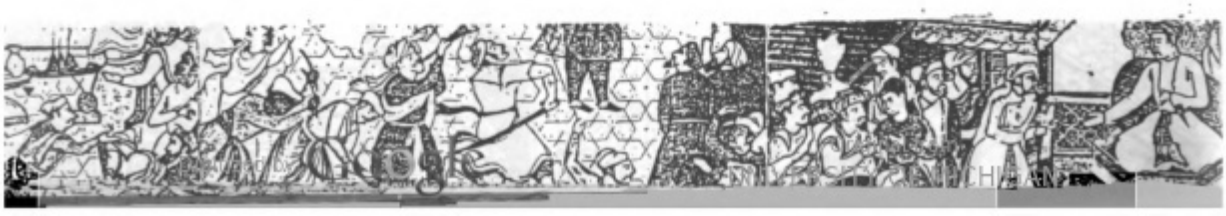
shoulder", ordered the king, "and let him carry the kenchen away." No sooner said than it was done. In the midst of a crowded assembly the girl was placed on Bernard's back, who withdrew triumphantly with his prize and took her to his house.[89]

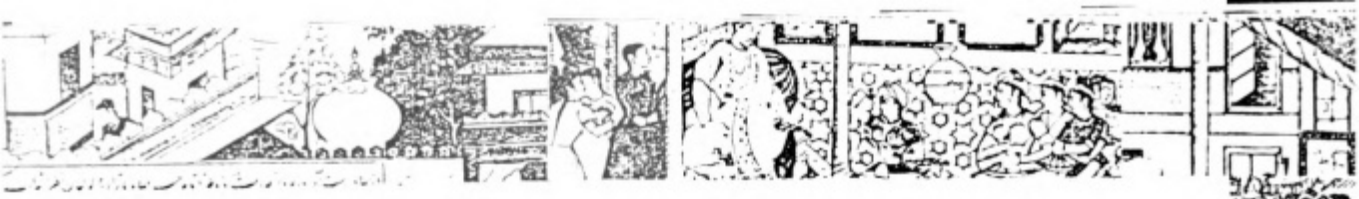
Jagannath Pandit's venture was similar to that of the Frenchman Bernard. The buildings of the court and harem were located in the palace complex and in spite of all restricions, young and talented gentlemen could sometimes manage to see and meet their objects of love in the harem. Such an one was Jagannath Pandit, an erudite Brahmin from Telingana. He was introduced into the court by Mirza Raja Jai Singh and in deference to his learning, Shahjahan had conferred upon him the title of Panditraj. Author of a number of Sanskrit treatises, Pl. V patronized by many Rajas and nobles, and basking in the royal favour, Panditraj lived in great style. He fell in love with a tall dark and comely princess nicknamed Lavangi. Like Bernard he shunned all rewards of elephants, horses and riches except "the doe-eyed Lavangi with well-shaped breasts and body as delicate as butter... uttering nectar like words." He succeeded in securing his object of love. But for this he was persistently taunted and maligned by his opponents. He retaliated by writing a satirical work entitled *Aniyoktivilas* directed against his Brahmin foes. They, on their part, ostracised him ostensibly because he had married a Muslim. This made his last days unhappy. Panditraj left Delhi after the execution of Dara Shukoh. Ultimately he and Lavangi committed suicide by drowning in the Ganga at Kashi.[90]

Degraded love and licence

The affairs of Bernard and Panditraj were matters of genuine love. But so far as the generality of the Mughal nobles were concerned, there was no limitation to their pursuit of sexual pleasure. In the capital, the king's presence was some sort of a deterrent. In far off places, licentious life of the nobles found its full vent. In this context the case of Mirza Ghazi Beg, the governor of Sind during the reign of Akbar, is worth citing. "Not only was he given to wine, but he required every night a virgin; girls from all places were brought to him and the women of the town of Thatha are said to have been so debauched, that every bad woman, even long after his death, claimed relationship with the Mirza."[91] The Mirza's behaviour was exceptional, but equally exceptional would have been the morals of those who did not behave like the Mirza.

As if this was not bad enough, the unnatural love of beardless boys too was common. It is strange that it is those who indulged with women unbridled were the very persons who sought delight in the company of young handsome boys.





This disease of double degradation was common in Mughal society. From Emperor Babur to Prince Kam Bakhsh, even the members of the royal family were not immune from it.[92] According to Khondamir, all the inhabitants of the kingdom were divided into three classes—*Ahl Daulat* (nobles), *Ahl-i-Sadat* (religious men) and *Ahl-i-Murad* (entertainers). "Those who possessed beauty and elegance, those who were most lovely, also clever musicians and sweet singers composed the third class, and the appellation of Ahl-i-Murad (people of pleasure) was conferred on them, because most people take great delight in the company of such young-looking men, of rosy cheeks and sweet voices....."[93] But the idea of having catamites was abhorrent and Akbar resorted to stern action in many cases.[94] But the gay nobles were hard to reform and the king himself had to restore to some of them their beloved boys when he learnt that they were desperately disconsolate.[95] Abdul Qadir Badaoni's comment, though made for the reign of Akbar, holds good for all the centuries of Mughal rule. He says that search for boys was as keen as that for virgins "and drunkenness and ignorance soon led to bloodshed.[96] Though in some cases capital punishment was inflicted, certain privileged courtiers walked about proudly and insolently doing what they liked."[97]

A story of double degradation, which even the sober Abul Fazl could not resist from narrating with relish may be retold in some detail. It deals with the loves of the nobleman Ali Quli Khan Khan-i-Zaman and a camel driver's son, as well as the adventures of the two with a rank prostitute. In the reign of emperor Humayun, Shaham Beg, the son of a camel driver, who was conspicuous for external beauty was one of the special bodyguards of the King. The Khan-i-Zaman fixed his lustful gaze on Shaham and "spent his days in giving to his outburst of concupiscence, and ebullition of bestial desire the name of love." After the death of Humayun, Shaham Beg joined the retinue of Akbar, but Zaman Beg carried on as before. He used to call Shaham "My Padshah, my Padshah," bow down before him and perform the kornish. He even transferred two thirds of his property to Shaham. Emperor Akbar was very annoyed and Khan-i-Zaman had to keep away from his catamite for some time.[98] At this Shaham Beg went to his old lover Abdur Rahman Beg in Faizabad.[99] While at Abdur Rahman's, Shaham pined for his former girl friend Aram Jan, who was now Abdur Rahman's wife and asked that she be returned to him. This episode brings into focus another side of the coin of depravity. Aram Jan was a prostitute. Ali Quli Khan had given his heart to this street walker, "who was embraced of thousands and married her." He used to bring that slut to the drinking bouts which he had with his beloved boy Shaham in order that she might recite and sing. Shaham Beg by degrees fell in love with her and one day he asked Ali Quli to hand over the girl to him. Ali Quli Khan could not refuse the request of one on whom he doted and made over to him his own wedded wife. Shaham Beg for a time enjoyed his lust.



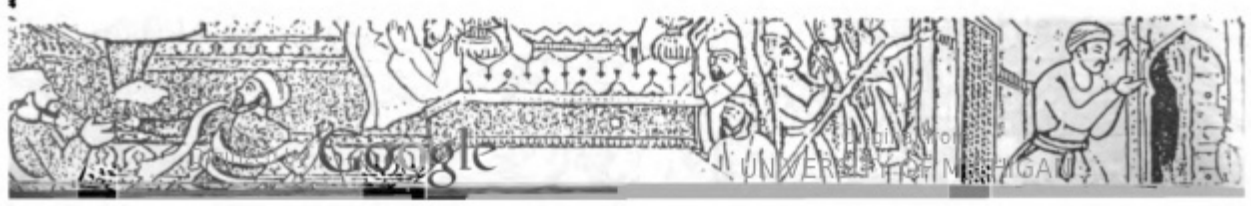
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When his heart grew cold he made over the whole to Abdur Rahman Beg. Rahman made her his wife and kept her in *parda*. When Shaham Beg came again to Abdur Rahman he requested that his old girl Aram Jan be returned to him. But Abdur Rahman refused to do so. In course of time, Shaham Beg grew so arrogant and violent in insisting on his demand that one day Abdur Rahman's brother killed him. At this Abdur Rahman fled to the Court and related the whole incident to the emperor Akbar who disapproved of such obnoxious people as Ali Quli and Shaham, bestowed favours on Abdur Rahman and welcomed him among his peers. The story is not yet over. When Ali Quli heard of this, he determined on revenge, but in vain. At last he "conveyed the carcass of that camel driver's son to Jaunpur, buried it on the edge of a tank and erected a lofty building over it."[100] This is not an isolated case. For many nobles the standard of love was very low. Such activities were not always carried on outside the harem of the nobleman. How amused or disgusted the ladies of his seraglio would have felt, is anybody's guess.

This unnatural behaviour was sustained and fed, if any feeding was necessary, by Persian poetry, quantities of wine and aphrodisiacs. In Persian *ghazals* (lyrics) beardless boys are treated as objects of love. Separation from the boy-beloved brings pain; his presence joy.[101] Such pain and pleasure became acute when douched in wine. And all the nobles drank, from the chief minister to the smallest mansabdar. Aurangzeb knew that all the noblemen drank in his empire. His puritanism prompted him to dissuade at least his chief minister Jafar Khan from drinking. He "caused him to be spoken to several times, and in the end spoke to him himself, saying that it was not a fit thing for the first minister in a kingdom of the faithful to drink wine, he being under obligation to set a good example. Jafar Khan replied that he was an old man, without strength in his hands or firmness in his feet, had little sight in his eyes and was very poor. By drinking wine he got sight for seeing, power for wielding the pen in the service of His Majesty, felt strength in his feet to run to court when his Majesty called, and seemed in imagination to become rich. For these reasons he drank..... Aurangzeb laughed at this speech.... and Jafar Khan kept to his old habit."[102]

Wine is prohibited in Islam and it was expected of the custodian of justice at least to refrain from drinking. But as Edward Gibbon puts it "the wines of Shiraz always prevailed over the laws of the Prophet" and in the craze for wine, the clericals were not to be left behind. The participation of Miran Sadr Jahan and Abdul Hay, the chief justice in a drinking feast created lot of interest and amusement in Akbar at seeing his ecclesiastical and judicial dignitaries over their intoxicating cups.[103] It appears that a watch was kept on the Qazis in this regard. There is a very telling Mughal miniature of C.E. 1640 in which the king discovers a drunken Qazi with emptied cups lying all about him.[104] Aurangzeb claimed



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that while all the nobles drank. only he and Qazi Abdul Wahab did not drink. But Manucci asserts that he knew the Qazi personally and the latter was given to drinking, Manucci himself sometimes supplying the bottles.[105]

Away from the capital many more drank and in great quantities. One such case is that of Mirza Jani Beg. We have already met his dissolute son Mirza Ghazi Beg. In drinking, the father and son both excelled each other.[106] Some hard drinkers like Lashkar Khan and Shaikh Jamal came drunk to the Darbar and were severely punished by Emperor Akbar.[107] Two very important nobles of Jahangir also were hard drinkers. Shah Beg Khan who had rendered valuable service to the empire in many ways drank a mixture of *cannabis*, opium and wine, and Shahnawaz Khan spoiled his health because of too much drinking.[108] There are instances of nobles who died of excessive drinking.[109] Still it was firmly believed that drinking of wine and taking of other intoxicants made the nobles more effective in and outside their harems.

In the end, only one example should suffice to give an idea of the ways of the society's elite. Manucci was friendly with Qazi Abdul Wahab who invited the physician frequently to his house. "I will recount a judgement delivered by the Qazi in my presence", writes he, "There was a woman who came to him requiring the condemnation of a young man then in custody for having slain her husband. The Qazi in a mild tone counselled her to forgive and if she would listen to him he would advise her to marry the man, or else some other should she object to having the murderer. The woman consented to the proposal, the young man was released and she married him. Seeing this an easy way of proceedings, I (Manucci) took the liberty to say to the Qazi that the sentence he had just pronounced was likely to be the cause of several murders; for there being many women who were not content with their husbands, they would procure their murder by the hand of their lover, in order to marry again at once with the latter. He admitted the force of what I said, but he made believe to laugh at it and said it was a charity to secure a benefit to the young man and save his life. But if the woman had persisted in her complaint, he would have condemned him to death. All the same, from all that I could see, I believe that the Qazi acted thus merely to keep the woman three days in his house, for, in spite of his age, I fancy that he was not a stranger to such matters and the woman was very pretty."[110] This is about the chief judge of the realm. His nephew often heard cases and pronounced sentence in his uncle's place. Once he caused a woman to be carried off. Her husband lodged a complaint with the Qazi. He showed he was shocked, but did nothing. In the end the man was compelled to take the law in his own hands and he killed the Qazi's nephew.[111]

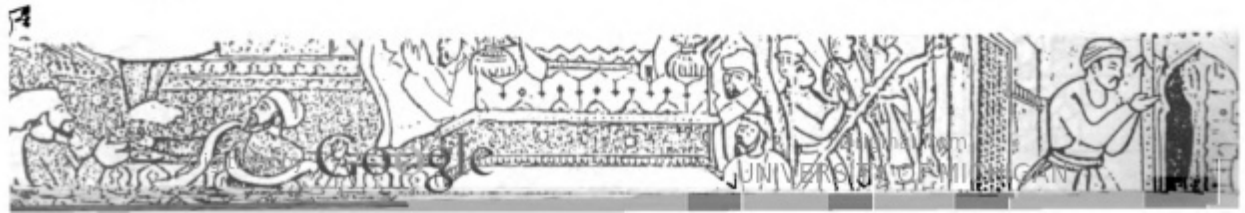
Varied were the ways of the pursuit of sex by the Mughal royalty and nobility in the harem and outside of it.





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3. *Tuzuk*, I, pp. 366-67. Ghiyas-ud-din and Nasir-ud-din together with other members of the family were buried in one sepulchral monument. Sir John Marshall in *C.H.I.* III, p. 621. n.
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10. *Ibid.*, p. 39, 41.
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13. *A.N.*, II, p. 313; Smith, *Akbar*, pp. 47-48.
14. Badaoni, II, pp. 60-61. Lowe, II, pp. 58-59. *A.N.*, II, pp. 204-05 and n.
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25. Gulbadan, pp. 130-31.
26. *A.N.*, III, pp. 43,44. Also *Tuzuk*, I, p. 2; II, p. 41.
27. Smith, *Akbar*, p. 82.
28. E and D, VI, pp. 165-67.
29. *Tuzuk*, I, pp. 276-77.
30. *Hobson-Jobson*, p. 926.
31. Ovington, *A Voyage to Surat*, p. 230; Manucci, II, p. 7.
32. *Tuzuk*, I, p. 8. "Institutes of Jahangir," E and D, VI, p. 499.
33. Bernier, pp. 252-53.
34. *A.N.*, III, pp. 1125-27; *Tuzuk*, I, p. 34.
35. Inayatullah, *Takmil-i-Akbar Nama*, E and D, VI, pp. 111, 114. The circumstances of the death of Daniyal are symbolic of the norms of times. On instructions from his father Akbar, the prince had renounced wine and had taken a vow never to drink again. But he could not keep his promise and pined for wine. On the other hand Akbar appointed guardians who saw to it that no drinks reached him. "When the road to bring wine was completedly closed", writes Jahangir in his memoirs the prince managed to smuggle it through a musketeer who poured the spirit into the barrel of a gun. "The rust of the iron was dissolved by the strength of the spirit and mingled with it, and the prince no sooner drank of it than he fell down."
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36. Finch, *Early Travels*, p. 185.



37. *Tuzuk*, I, pp. 108-09.
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64. Smith, p. 82. See also *A.N.*, III, Introduction by Beveridge, p. xxi.
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91. *Ain.,* I, pp. 392-93.
92. Bilimoria, *Ruqqat-i-Alamgiri,* p. 162 n.
93. Khondamir, *Humayun Nama,* E and D, V, p. 120.
94. *Ain.,* I, pp. 335, 520 n., 531, 663 n.
95. *Ibid.,* pp. 374, 387.
96. For instance two noblemen, Mirza Sharaf and Mir Masum Kabuli were inimical to each other, "each waiting for an opportunity to kill the other. Masum at last bribed a boy of the name of Mahmud, whom Mirza Sharaf liked and had his enemy poisoned." *Ain.,* I, p. 340.
97. cited by Blochmann in *Ain.,* I, pp. 202.
98. *A.N.,* II, pp. 104-05, Also *Ain.,* I, p. 335.
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100. *Ibid.,* pp. 128-29. The story of Shaham Beg and Aram Jan is told at length by Badaoni also.
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105. Manucci, II, pp. 5-6.
106. *Ain.,* I, pp. 391, 392.
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CHAPTER X

Pursuit of Pleasure by Women

The pleasure of sex is mutual; it is most enjoyable when both sexes are wholly involved. But in the Mughal elitist society, its royalty and nobility, while men were ever busy in their hunt for women, women themselves were kept under every conceivable restraint. But that did not deter them from seeking pleasure clandestinely or otherwise. However, the pattern of the two differed, men went about boldly and openly and women cleverly and surreptitiously.

Lovelorn Ladies

It need hardly be emphasised that the harem-inmates were treated as the personal property of the master. They had to live under strict surveillance and supervision. They were kept secluded from the company of men. They could remove their veils only before their husbands or the nearest relatives like father and real brothers.[1] During the time of Babur and Humayun women were comparatively free,[2] but from the time of Akbar strict *parda* began to be enforced. Harem-women were kept shut indoors. Walls of the seraglio were built too high for the inmates to look outside or any stranger to peep inside. The doors of the rooms were fastened from outside,[3] and utmost care was taken to keep surveillance on the dwellers of the harem.

Great emphasis was laid on the chastity of women. It is significant that whenever medieval chroniclers mention the name of a lady, they prefix it with words like pure and chaste.[4] This chastity was desired, demanded and expected by men and was enforced by them through every possible means. There could be no compromise between the institution of harem and the idea of freedom for women.

Women had to be kept secluded if the 'sanctitity' of the harem was to be maintained. However, restrictions on women sometimes bordered on insanity and vulgarity. Thomas Coryat says that, "whatsoever is brought in (inside the harem) of virile shape, as for instance radishes, so great is the jealously, and so frequent the wickedness of this people, that they are cut and jagged for fear of converting the same to some unnatural abuse."[5] Fifty years later he is corroborated by Manucci, who says that 'Nor do they permit into the palace radishes, cucumbers, or similar vegetables that I cannot name."[6] The otherwise orthodox Badaoni even hints at the prevalence of lesbianism.[7] For the slightest indiscretion women were invariably punished. As a harassment, mice were put into their trousers.[8] "Those who dishonoured their husband's beds and those unmarried who became unchaste, were given severest punishments by brothers, even death, who for such acts shall be commended rather than questioned."[9]

Pl. 12 End leaf

Stolen Pleasures

But men's restrictions have always evoked revengeful reactions in womenfolk. No prohibition could suppress the desire for satisfying the nature ordained pleasure of sex. It was unnatural to let a chance to go waste. In this regard the harem, instead of becoming their prison, gave them a place of vantage. The king or nobleman was in the harem only when he was free from official work or political manoeuvrings, but women were its permanent residents and, despite all surveillance, they could conspire and co-operate to seek and find moments and means of enjoyment. Princesses of course were so well looked after that they were always accompanied by ladies-in-waiting and maids. Even then Jahan Ara and Roshan Ara could meet their friends and lovers. Other womenfolk had better opportunities, for their not so important position permitted them to be alone when they so chose. Even for ladies of rank the cupid of the secluded was, in general, a very sensual deity, and the amours of a princess were expressed in the plainest advances.

Pl. 16

Pl. II

Ordinarily, no man could approach the ladies in the harem barring "their husbands and the doctors who feel their pulses."[10] Since husband was a scarce commodity, physicians could be easily invited. "There are some (women) who from time to time affect the invalid," asserts Manucci, "simply that they may have the chance of some conversation with and have their pulse felt by, the physician who comes to see them. The latter stretches out his hand inside the curtain; they lay hold of it, kiss it, and softly bite it. Some out of curiosity, apply it to their breast, which has happened to conceal what was passing from the matrons and eunuchs then present, and not arouse their suspicions."[11] Naturally physicians were very well treated by these ladies, and they too on their part, "maintained

much discretion both in their way of acting and in their speech, which is always restrained and polished."[12] Thereby they could gain the confidence of the king, princes and princesses.

The possibility of harem-ladies coming in contact with physicians should have been well-known, and doctors were constantly tested. Manucci was once called to examine a lady. When he put his "hand inside the curtains of the bed to feel her pulse; for this is the way one has to deal with these ladies," he noted that the arm was thick, muscular and hairy. Without delay he rose saying that the arm he had touched was a man's, at which prince Shah Alam himself burst out laughing.[13] On another occasion the hand of a healthy slave-girl was put out to Fryer to examine instead of the patient's.[14] Despite such periodical trials of physician's character and qualities, the atmosphere in the harem was not devoid of pranks and practical jokes. The ladies by their ingenuity invented jokes which created much merriment, fun and laughter. Once a lady sent Manucci a bottle full of urine and wished to know whether he could recognize from it the disease she was suffering from. "I set my imagination to work", writes he, "and answered with a smile that the urine came from a person who had eaten largely of green stuff the preceding night. As soon as I pronounced these words there was a great outbrust of laughter behind the curtains of the bed, and they said I was a great doctor. In the end they informed me that it was the urine of a cow."[15]

Consultation with physicians apart, ladies could sometimes arrange to invite men inside the harem for a tryst. Messages were sent through maidservants and eunuchs. Occasionally carrier pigeons were also used.[16] Eunuchs were useful for smuggling men into the harem.[17] Some of the young men invited were regular lovers, others too were no strangers. Many of them had been brought up in the palace itself and were known as *Khanazads* or belonging to the household.[18] Salatin was an appellation bestowed on important nobles and their sons who were generally close relatives of the royalty. In childhood the *Khanazads* moved about freely in the harem as they were 'born in the house'. So also was the case with the Salatin. As they grew up their entry into the seraglio was restricted but not forbidden. The salatin were married in the royal household and stayed within the precincts of the *Mahal* and these young men were generally the favourites of the harem-ladies, young and not so young, for as says Manucci, "under cover of this title these princesses and many great ladies gratify their desires."[19] An invitation from a princess or a beautiful lady was too high an honour to be rejected, too tempting an offer to be refused. Even the fear of detection and subsequent death could be no deterrent, for capital punishment in a despotism could be summarily awarded to any one at any time, and people had got used to such hazardous existence. In the Mughal Empire, "Wealth, position, love, friendship, confidence, everything hangs by a thread and a very small fault, or a trifling mistake

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may bring a man to the depths of misery or to the scaffold."[20] Under such circumstances risk for the sake of love was a pleasure.

Dark Nights

Nights were the best suited for love meetings. Besides, the desparate courage of the two parties, their accomplices, confidants and collaborators and above all the atmosphere of the harem itself was more often than not conducive to such bold escapades. Days were spent in make-up and decoration and the dark nights in expectation. In the sixteenth-seventeenth centuries, the Fort, the palace, the *Mahal* and the camp were really dark places during the night.[21] This statement needs elaboration. In the Mughal period there was no electricity, no kerosene lanterns, nor even match boxes. Fire lighted once was kept burning by constant feeding. Abul Fazl describes how fire was produced and preserved as a permanent lighting medium. "When the sun enters...Aries", writes he, "they expose a round piece of a white shining stone, called in Hindi *Surajkrant*, to the rays of the sun. A piece of cotton is then held near it, which catches fire from the heat of the stone". This 'celestial fire' is preserved for a year in a vessel called *Agingir*, i.e., fire pot. "The lamp lighters, torch-bearers, and cooks of the household use it for their offices."[22] How scarce and how important was the light from the lamps and torches is also stressed by him. In his words, "when the sun sets, the attendants light twelve white candles, on twelve candlesticks of gold and silver... a singer of sweet melodies sings (*bhajans*)". Besides wax candles there were also oil-burners with several wicks and fat-burners, in which fat was burnt instead of oil. "They allow for every wick one *ser* of oil, and half a *ser* of cotton."[23] Naturally, utmost economy was practised on the fuel even in the royal palace. Full advantage was taken of moon light and the number of candles was reduced or increased as the moon waxed or waned. On the full moon night only one candle was lighted.[24] In the Fort and the camp a lone lamp was hung from a high pole column, called *Akash Diya*, to indicate the imperial headquarters.[25] Even entertainments and dance and music sessions were held in semi-darkness. About these evenings in the palace and the harem, Abul Fazl writes that "Besides the usual lighting arrangement and lamps of entertainments, two women holding lamps stand near the circle of the performers. Some employ more."[26] Some paintings of the period show a dance scene in which the dancer is flanked on either side by just two girls with lighted candles. In brief, provision of light in the medieval times was limited. That is why most of the functions of the Mughal court and palace like coronations or weighing ceremonies of emperors and princes, marriages of royalty and even Nauroz festival were held during day time.[27] Till the reign of Jahangir, even the Khushroz bazaar



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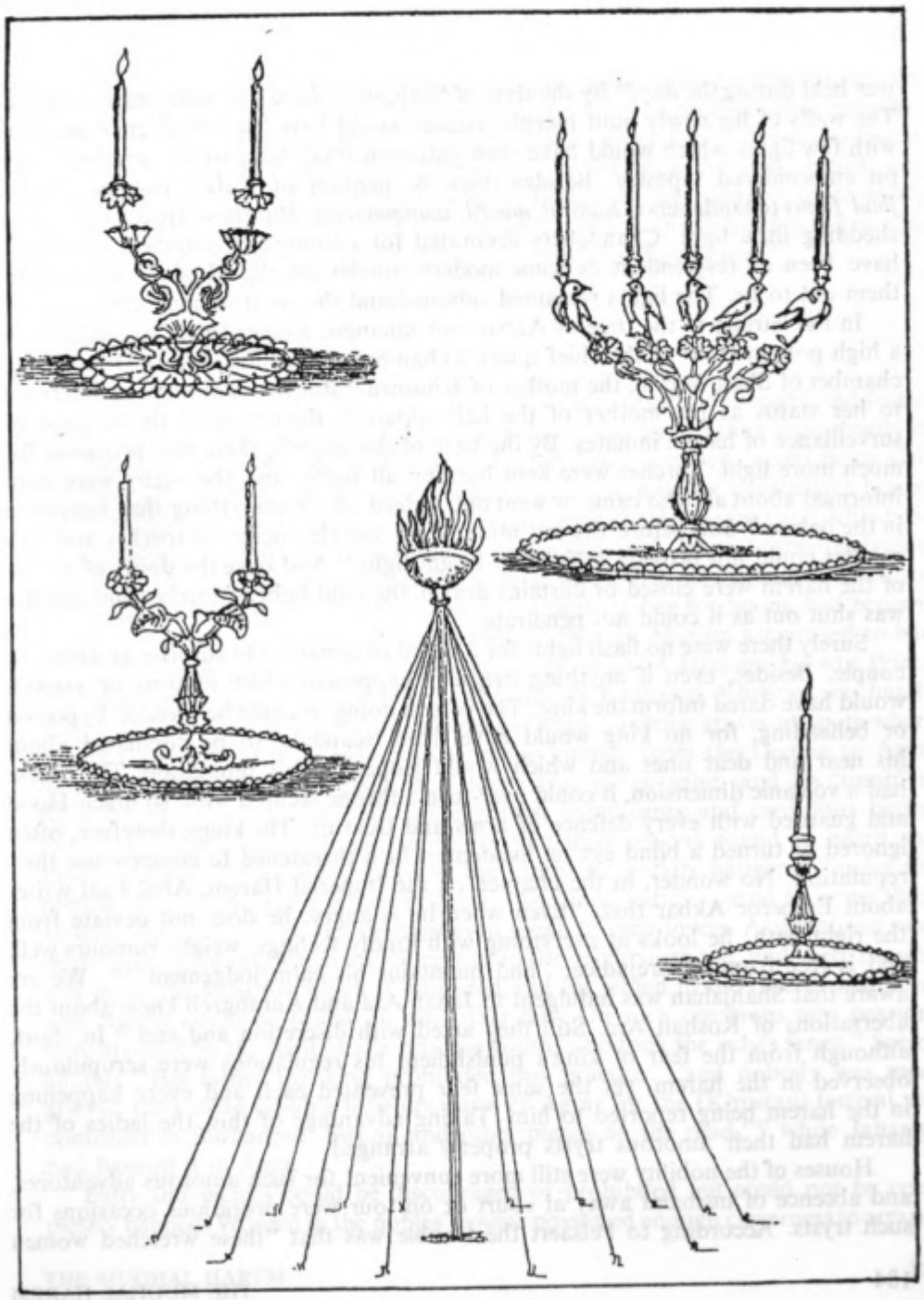


Fig. 4 Lighting arrangement in the palace

was held during the day.[28] By the time of Shahjahan there was some improvement. The walls of his newly built marble palaces would have been brightened up even with few lights which would have shed glitter on brocaded curtains and brilliance on embroidered tapestry. Besides there is mention of Kafuri candles, *fanus*, *jhad fanus* (chandeliers), *Kanwal*, *qandil*, *qumquma* etc. But these are all big names shedding little light. Chandeliers decorated for evening entertainment could not have been as resplendent as some modern movies on the Mughal times make them out to be. The lights remained subdued and the environment semi-dark.

In the harem, in the time of Akbar and Jahangir, a large torch was lighted on a high pole in front of the chief queen's chamber. It was installed in front of the chamber of Shah Begum, the mother of Khusrau.[29] But that was more in deference to her status as the mother of the heir apparent, than to serve the purpose of surveillance of harem inmates. By the time of Aurangzeb, there was provision for much more light. Torches were kept burning all night, and the *nazirs* were kept informed about all who came or went out, indeed about everything that happened in the palace.[30] Still before the invention of gas and electricity, oil torches and wax candles could not provide sufficiently bright light.[31] And once the doors of rooms of the harem were closed or curtains drawn, the mild light of torches and candles was shut out as it could not penetrate.

Surely there were no flash lights for a guard or a matron to surprise an amorous couple. Besides, even if anything irregular happened, which matron or eunuch would have dared inform the king? The person doing so could be silenced by poison or beheading, for no king would have liked 'scandals' to be circulated about his near and dear ones and which would jeopardise his reputation. The harem had a volcanic dimension, it could over-turn a throne secured with so much blood and guarded with every defence of arms and treasure. The kings, therefore, often ignored or turned a blind eye on incidents which threatened to compromise their reputation. No wonder, in the chapter on the Imperial Harem, Abul Fazl writes about Emperor Akbar that, "Even when he is angry, he does not deviate from the right path; he looks at everything with kindly feelings, weighs rumours well, and is free from all prejudice... and maintains his calm judgement."[32] We are aware that Shahjahan was indulgent to Jahan Ara and Aurangzeb knew about the aberrations of Roshan Ara. Still they acted with discretion and tact.[33] In short, although from the fear of king's punishment his regulations were scrupulously observed in the harem, yet the same fear prevented each and every happening in the harem being reported to him. Taking advantage of this, the ladies of the harem had their amorous trysts properly arranged. Pls. 16 & 17

Houses of the nobility were still more convenient for such amorous adventures, and absence of husband away at court or on tour were propitious occasions for such trysts. According to Pelsaert the trouble was that "these wretched women

(inmates of the nobles' harem) wear, indeed, the most expensive clothes, eat the daintiest food, and enjoy all wordly pleasures except one, and for that one they grieve.....[34] Some of the nobles, again, have chaste wives, but they are too few to be worth mentioning; most of the ladies are tarred with the same brush, and when the husband is away, though he may think they are guarded quite safely by his eunuchs, they are too clever for Argus himself with his hundred eyes, and get all the pleasure they can, though not so much as they desire."[35]

Excursions and Picnics

Excursions and picnics by ladies were occasions when they sought and found pleasure. As against the ladies of the royal palace, who passed their time mostly in the *Mahal*, ladies of nobles used to go out often. Such occasions could be to visit the shrine of a saint, to participate in a get-together at another nobleman's house, to call on ladies of the Imperial seraglio, to participate in the Nauroz and Khushroz in the palace, or to attend celebrations in connection with *Ids* and other festivities. Usually a very convenient occasion for outing was a visit to the tombs of saints. Pilgrimage to the *Dargahs* of saints, real or fictitious, to beg for boons, had become a part of Muslim socio-religious life in India.[36] Puritan Muslim kings used to ban it but the practice persisted. For example, in the reign of Jahangir his son Prince Khusrau had been murdered by his brother Prince Khurram. Khusrau was finally buried at Allahabad, but some mendicants erected symbolic graves at spots where the bier was supposed to have rested on the journey from the Deccan to Agra. Khusrau's popularity had made him into a true *pir* or saint, and his 'tomb' at Agra became the meeting place of devotees, mendicants and credulous ladies. For it was announced to common people that their prayers would be heard and wishes granted if they worshipped at the tomb. As usually happens, "under the pretext of a pilgrimage", writes Pelsaert, "Secluded ladies...used to come there without reproach to see, and perhaps even speak to their lovers. Assignations were made in the gardens, which are numerous in the neighbourhood, and there passion was given the food for which it hungered and for which in the case of many, no opportunity could be found on any other day. On such occasions new passions were aroused by the sight of a handsome youth, who took the lady's fancy." Seeing all this "His father the king prohibited this practice...and nobody was more grieved than these pitiable little creatures of Agra; for the (Khusrau) festival still continues in Burhanpur, Sironj, and other places on the road,"[37] while Jahangir had banned it in Agra.

Fairs and picnics could be discouraged or prohibited but could not be completely banned. Women in the nobles' *zenana* possessed enough cleverness to arrange

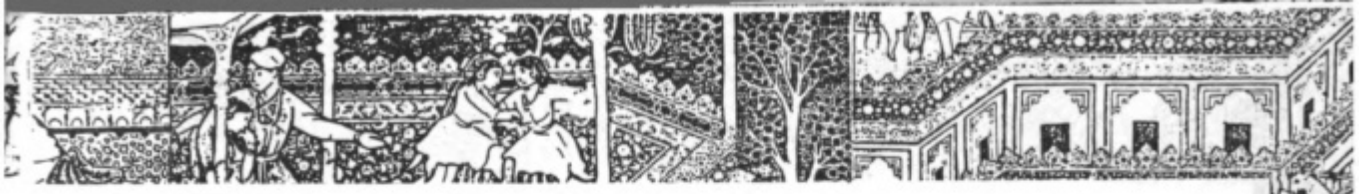


for an outing. They sought freedom as individuals and as groups. In this context Manucci tells a very interesting story. In front of the royal palace at Lahore was a garden called Dil-Kusha. "To it went for recreation twelve officials, and in lightness of heart drunk as they were, they sent out in search of twelve women. One by one eleven appeared, and one man was left without a lady. As the sun was setting, there appeared one at entrance of the garden, who walked most gracefully. She was very lovely and well dressed, so that she roused envy in the whole company. Drawing near to him to whom she was allotted, who had come forward to greet her, she perceived it was her husband! Vigorously hastening her pace, and with demonstrations of rage, she fell upon him, tore his clothes, beat and abused him, and said he must have lost his way out walking; the company he found himself in was not such as suited a person of gravity. She dragged him away and took him home, making him out the sinner, although she was an adultress herself."[38]

Ladies of nobles were thus not always obliged to their men for determining their tenor of life. Women's lib is some sort of a movement to-day, but the lib-spirit has always animated even the most modest dames. In matters of love sometimes they acted with vengeance. At least no inhibitions and prohibitions have been able to suppress them. In this they, among themselves, could co-operate, help and share. For feminine ingenuity in this sphere, let us revert to the chief Qazi Abdul Wahab, or rather to the Qazi's daughter.

The daughter of Qazi Abdul Wahab, a Bohra from Gujarat and the Chief Qazi of the realm, on learning that the King Aurangzeb was marrying off his daughters and nieces, also wanted to be married. However, her father had no such intention, for she looked after his house and had his wealth under her control. Nevertheless, she managed to get her father to give her in marriage without being aware of it. She developed friendship with a youth in the neighbourhood. Later on she sent all her property to a place of security. Then she went in the youth's company to the Qazi's public audience. On arriving there, the youth told Abdul Wahab that he and the woman in the palanquin had made a vow to be married. The Qazi, not recognising the woman as his daughter, asked her if she consented to marriage with the youth. Disguising her voice, she answered 'Yes'. The Qazi performed the ceremony and dismissed them. But being afraid that the Qazi by his influence might get their marriage annulled when he came to know the truth, the couple appealed to the Emperor. Aurangzeb laughed over their story and peremptorily called the Qazi to his presence. Rendered anxious by such a message, Abdul Wahab started for his house only to find his daughter missing and realized that the marriage he had just performed was that of his daughter. "He was much cast down, but his sadness was doubled when, opening his boxes, he found that all he had gathered together by impostures had been carried off by his daughter with a liberal hand."[39] He suffered a heart attack and died soon after.


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Eunuchs and Ladies

Love escapades during outings apart, in the *haremsara* itself there were limitless opportunities for joys of love. It is needless to repeat that the harem-ladies were attended upon by eunuchs. And while the eunuchs were kept by nobles to spy over their womenfolk, the latter could win them over in their own interest. "Two or three eunuchs, or more", writes Pelsaert, "who are merely purchased Bengali slaves, but are usually faithful to their master, are appointed for each wife, to ensure that she is seen by no man except her husband; and, if an eunuch fails in this duty, he, with everyone else to blame for the stranger's presence, is in danger of losing his life. They are thus held in high esteem by their master, but the women pay them still greater regard, for the whole management of the *mahal* is in their hands, and they can give or refuse whatever is wanted".[40] The eunuchs on their part were loyal to their masters and mistresses. According to Nizam-ud-din Ahmad, it was a eunuch of Baz Bahadur who stabbed Rupmati to death to save her honour from Adham Khan.[41] Manucci also noted that the houses of the great were ordinarily under the direction of these persons, who were "spies for everything that goes on in secret".[42] Bernier found that an eunuch was privileged to enter anywhere.[43]

Thus an eunuch had to be in the good books of both his master as well as his mistress. He could spy for both, he could spy on both. So he sometimes developed the habit of double crossing. Eunuchs were under orders of the master, yet since most of the time they kept the company of their mistresses, they guarded their secrets. Naturally, for keeping secrets of ladies they could get from them "whatever they desired—fine horses to ride, servants to attend them outside, and female slaves inside the house, clothes as fine and smart as those of their master himself. The wives felt themselves bound to do all this, in order that what happens in the house may be concealed from their husband's knowledge; for many or perhaps most of them, so far forget themselves, that when their husband has gone away, either to Court, or to some place where he takes only his favourite wife, and leaves the rest at home, they allow the eunuchs to enjoy them according to his ability, and thus gratify their burning passions when they have no opportunity of going out."[44] Manucci also affirms that the eunuchs were favourites of the princesses "whom they enjoyed."[45]

Thus, trusted as confidants of young ladies and keeping constant company of the love-sick women of the harem, the eunuchs could not but have their own love affairs. But how could that be possible ? How could an eunuch make love to a lady? Some eunuchs were born inter-sexual, with characteristics of neither sex fully developed due to harmonal or genetic disturbances. Some others were hermaphrodite who combined characteristics of both sexes: they were endowed





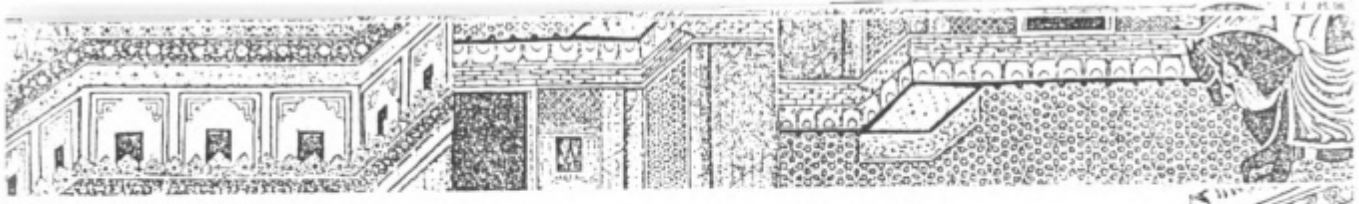
with both male testes and female ovaries. But such cases are rare. A few men took drugs like camphor to become impotent.[46] But the vast majority of eunuchs were strong men who were subjected to castration. Perhaps in some cases the operation for castration was not completely successful. In any case, the operation did not mean change of sex; it only meant shedding of male sex without impairment of physical strength. That is why they were expected not only to guard the harem dwellers but if need be also to fight to defend them. That is why many strong and well built men were purchased by Kings and nobles at high price even from international markets to be made eunuchs to guard their harems and at the same time remain harmless for women. But after castration their physical strength remained undiminished, indeed it increased, because they could not marry and lead a life of sexual indulgence. This strength was their asset so far as ladies of the harem were concerned.

Whatever the nature or extent of disability, emotional love and physical contact could surely have been possible in many cases. For eunuchs were primarily men. Some important eunuchs, as seen earlier, enjoyed the title of Khan (Lord) and were appointed administrators, governors, army commanders and mansabdars. They were all treated as men for all practical purposes. Their names did not end with Banu, Begum or Bai. Their names as given by Manucci are all names of men like Danish, Daniyal, Daulat, Yusuf, Almas, Maqbool, etc. Those appointed on harem duties had free access into the harem. Some eunuchs were very handsome;[47] also they wore no beards. They[48] were divided into three categories depending on the colour of their skin as *Sandali* (of sandalwood colour), *Badami* (of almond colour) and *Kafuri* (of camphor colour).[49] The *Kafuri* were very fair as their nomenclature denotes. Harem-ladies would have been enamoured of such fair and 'masculine' persons. That explains the instances on record where eunuchs had amorous affairs.[50] Henry Elliot in a note on Institutes of Jahangir[51] cites two cases of love affairs of eunuchs. In the first instance mentioned by Roe, "a gentlewoman was taken in the King's house in some improper act with an eunuch.... The poor woman was set up to the armpits in the ground....to remain there three days and two nights in that situation, without sustenance, her head and arms being exposed to the violence of the sun. If she survived, she was then to be pardoned. The eunuch was condemned to the elephants." In the other case Jahangir "happening to catch an eunuch kissing one of his women whom he had relinquished, he sentenced the lady to be put into the earth, with only her head left above ground, exposed to the burning rays of the sun, and the eunuch to be cut in pieces before her face."[52]

Such incidents could hardly deter women from their pursuit of pleasure with eunuchs. The eunuchs had a position of influence in the harem. Princesses and ladies always tried to win their favours for keeping their secrets, serving as their



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spies, and helping them in many other ways like bringing "secretly....men into the harem". Therefore, they were favourites of the princesses, who were very
Pl. 3 liberal to them.[53] The eunuchs could not supress their identity. "They were obliged to wear on their heads a turban like men, though they go in the habit of women."[54] But this only gave them an added advantage to enjoy the company of females. Manucci even goes on to say that their constant association with women made them (psychologically) inimical to men and friendly to women. They indeed worked in unison[55] as seen in the case of the scribe of Aurangzeb, when eunuchs and women combined to wreak vengeance on the killer of the eunuch Didar Khan. Didar Khan, one of the principal eunuchs of the seraglio of Aurangzeb, became enamoured of a beautiful woman, the sister of a neighbour, a scrivener by profession. An illicit intercourse continued for some time between them till one night they were discovered in the same bed, at which the brother stabbed Didar Khan through the body and left his sister for dead. "Nothing could exceed the horror and indignation of the whole seraglio. Women and eunuchs entered into a solemn league to kill the scrivener." Aurangzeb, however, intervened and brought the turmoil to an end.[56] More important, Jawed Khan, the head eunuch in the time of Muhammad Shah (1719-1748) carried on a secret intimacy with the queen under the very nose of the Emperor. Since we will revert to the details of this case in its proper context, we shall refrain from any detailed discussion here. All that need be said here is that love affairs of eunuchs were of no uncommon occurrence. In this and in many other ways they behaved as men. The eunuchs collected gold and accumulated riches.[57] They spent like other 'officers' of the empire on building spacious villas, water tanks, magnificent tombs, and even towns.[58] They observed their Muslim religious faith with devotion. They drank wine and wore gorgeous dresses. They worked with womenfolk, but by irony of fate and cruelty of man, they were denied the pleasure of sex. Therefore, many of them could seek enjoyment as far as possible or at least boast or exaggerate about their adventures. Some could only revel in broadcasting scandals which were picked up by foreign travellers with avidity.

Drinks and Drugs

As with men, women of the seraglio too used to drink wine and take drugs. There was regular liaison between the ladies of the royal palace and those of the nobility. The nobles sought matrimonial alliances in the king's family and many got near the throne by marrying off their daughters to the princes. The ladies of the noble's *zenana* visited the royal harem on all and sundry occasions, attended fancy bazaars arranged for ladies in the palace, and sometimes many stayed there



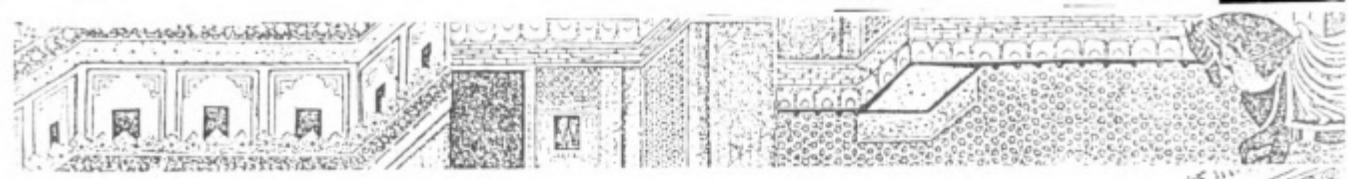


for a long period. There, besides arranging marriages and participating in ceremonies and festivities they imbibed, lent and shared the vices of drinking, taking *bhang*, opium and other drugs. Therefore, strict measures were adopted to keep drugs and wines out of their way. Manucci writes that the eunuchs searched "everything with great care to stop the entry of bhang, wine, opium, nutmegs or other drugs which could intoxicate, for all women in mahals love much such beverages."[59] As early as the reign of Jahangir, Pelsaert had noted that "In the cool of the evening they (the ladies) drink a great deal of wine, for the women learn the habit quickly from their husbands, and drinking has become very fashionable in the last few years."[60] Thus the practice of drinking by harem-ladies was widespread and well-known. Consequently, the *Mullas* impressed upon the puritan Aurangzeb the need for making laws for women, prohibiting them from indulging in the pleasures of intoxicants, and even wearing tight trousers which were becoming a fashion. Aurangzeb had issued some such orders in the beginning of his reign, but nobody cared to follow them,[61] and even his favourite wife Udaipuri Mahall was always found in a state of drunkenness. Under Aurangzeb the connection between the throne and the ecclesiastics was intimate and the banner of the church could easily be unfurled for the suppression of the female. At the insistence of the *Ulema* Aurangzeb seems to have reissued the orders in 1666 (*sic*). Evidently the ladies of the royal harem did not like it, knowing that the ladies of the *Ulema* also drank. So, to clinch the issue, Jahan Ara Begum invited to her palace a number of the wives of the most eminent *Ulema*. They came dressed in the latest fashion wearing tight-fitting trousers and heartily drank the wine offered to them. Soon they got intoxicated and lay pell-mell on the floor. Then Jahan Ara Begum brought in Aurangzeb and asked him if it was fair to forbid the ladies of the palace what was permissible for the wives of those who were guardians of the *Shariat*.[62]

Pl. 8

In short, besides adorning themselves, if the ladies of the royalty and nobility had any other thought, it was to regale themselves with delicious stews; to make themselves magnificently with clothes, jewellery and pearls and to perfume their bodies with aromas and essences of every kind. Their tenor of life prompted them to partake of drugs like opium and nutmeg and drinks like wine and bhang. They used to make exciting perfumes and 'drugs' containing amber, pearls, gold, opium and other stimulants at home and ate them occasionally because these compounds produced a pleasant elevation of the spirit. Their ingenuity provided them with other pleasures too. Still, it must be added that the women of the Mughal nobility were beautiful and slim, delicate and decent, coy and cultured. They were not shameless like men. They had their diversions, but kept them within the bounds of decency. Indian women in particular were devoid of aberrations. What Akbar told the 'learned Christians' in the Ibadat Khana, held good for the whole





of the Mughal period and empire. "The extraordiary thing is", said he, "that it occurs among the Brahman (i.e. the Hindu) religion. There are numerous concubines and many of them are neglected and unappreciated and spend their days unfructuously in the privy chamber of chastity, yet in spite of such bitterness of life they are flaming torches of love and fellowship".[63] Jahangir corroborates this.[64]

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Terry in *Early Travels*, p. 230.
2. Gulbadan, p. 7.
3. Finch in *Early Travels*, pp. 16, 265.
4. *A.N.*, III, p. 1117; *Tuzuk*, II, p. 216.
5. Coryat in *Early Travels*, pp. 278-79.
6. Manucci, II, pp. 350-51.
7. Badaoni, *Nijat-ul-Rashid*, p. 261.
8. A threat to cause mice to be put into his women's trousers was held out by the Emperor Farrukh Siyar to his wazir. Manucci, I, p. 198.
9. Terry in Foster's *Early Travels*, p. 320.
10. Manucci, II, p. 354.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 353.
12. *loc. cit.*
13. Manucci, II, pp. 398-99.
14. Fryer, *Travels in India in the 17th century*, 1873 ed., p. 346.
15. Manucci, II, p. 399.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 467. See also *Tuzuk*, I, p. 387 for carrier pigeons.
17. Manucci, II, p. 80.
18. *Tuzuk*, I, pp. 18, 231, 257, 441; II, p. 87. Manucci, II, p. 467.
19. Manucci, I, p. 218.
20. Pelsaert, p. 56.
21. Jauhar, p. 71.
22. *Ain.*, I, p. 50.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 51.
24. *Ain.*, I, p. 51. Also Badaoni, II, pp. 261-65.
25. *Ain.*, I, pp. 51-52; Tod, I, p. 260; II, p. 604. The *Akash Diya* is also mentioned by Monserrate and Bernier.
26. *Ain.*, III, p. 273.
27. *Tuzuk*, I, pp. 77, 78, 111, 115, 239.
28. It occurred to Jahangir in the thirteenth year of his reign, and when he was at Ahmedabad, "That if a bazaar were prepared at night-time, and a number of lamps were arranged in front of the shops, it would look well. Undoubtedly it came off well and was unusual." *Tuzuk*, II, p. 31.
29. Finch in *Early Travels*, p. 164.
30. Manucci, II, p. 352.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 341. Della Valle, II, p. 229.



32. *Ain.*, I, p. 46.
33. Manucci, I, p. 217.
34. Pelsaert, p. 66.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 68.
36. Reis, Sidi Ali *Travels*, pp. 53-54.
37. Pelsaert, p. 72 and n. This prohibition was not a novelty. More than two centuries before, Firoz Shah Tughlaq (1351-88) had noticed the improprieties resulting from visits of ladies to tombs on holidays and he "commended that no women should go out to the tombs under pain of compulsory punishment." *Fatuhat-i-Firoz Shahi*, E and D, III, p. 380.
38. Manucci, II, p. 463.
39. *Ibid.*, pp. 188-89, also I, p. 277 and III, p. 52.
40. Pelsaert, pp. 65-66.
41. *Tabqat-i-Akbari*, E and D, V, p. 271.
42. Manucci, II, pp. 80-81.
43. Bernier, p. 131.
44. Pelsaert, p. 66.
45. Manucci, II, p. 80.
46. Itmad Khan was a very important officer of Akbar. He was originally a Hindu and a servant of Sultan Mahmud of Gujarat. He was trusted by the sultan and put in charge of his harem. It is said that from gratitude, he used to eat camphor and thus render himself impotent. *Ain.*, I, pp. 418-19.
47. *Ain.*, I, p. 520; *Tarikh-i-Salim Shahi*, p. 108.
48. Badaoni cited in *Ain.*, I, p. 202.
49. Kidwai, Salim Sultans, Eunuchs and Domestics in Medieval India Patnaik U. and Dingwaney, M. (eds) in *Chains of Servitude*, Sangam Prakashan, New Delhi 1985.
50. Also Pelsaert, p. 66.
51. E and D, VI, pp. 493-516.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 505.
53. Manucci, II, pp. 80-81, Bernier, pp. 132-33.
54. *Indian Travels of Thevenot and Careri*, p. 33.
55. *Maasir-ul-Umara*, pp. 224.
56. Bernier, p. 131; Mustaad Khan, Saqi. *Maasir-i-Alamgiri*, p. 73.
57. Manucci, II, p. 80; E and D, VI, Appendix pp. 496-97.
58. *Ain.*, pp. 352, 473; Tavernier, *op. cit.*, I, p. 89.
59. Manucci, II, pp. 350-51.
60. Pelsaert, p. 65.
61. Manucci, II, p. 150.
62. *Ibid.*, I, p. 150.
63. *A.N.*, III, p. 372.
64. *Tuzuk*, I, p. 150. For general observation on the fidelity of Indian women see Tod, I, pp. 484-85, 487, 497, 501.

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CHAPTER XI

The Last Phase

The grandeur of the Mughal harem diminished and ultimately disappeared long before 1858 when the last Mughal Emperor made his exit. It declined primarily because of political and economic crises, as also because of moral decay. This moral decay is reflected both in the harem and the society as both received sustenance from each other. The ill-treatment of the innocent residents of the harem in its days of adversity evoke our pity, but the filth it siphoned into society provokes our contempt. Our task too becomes difficult for the study of the Mughal harem during the post-Aurangzeb period of hundred and fifty years (1700-1850). During these years references to the harem in contemporary history and literature become less and about society more. But as our main concern is the harem, we shall resort to extreme brevity in alluding to society while at the same time liberally drawing upon whatever little is known about the Mughal harem.

Moral Decay

Emperor Akbar did 'not allow the intoxicating pleasures of this world to overpower his calm judgement.'[1] His successors too, by and large, were men of calm judgement and kept their sensual pleasures within the bounds of decency. Shahjahan's aberrations attracted adverse comments, but these were not repeated by Aurangzeb. But Aurangzeb's descendants were made of weaker stuff. Only five years after his death in 1707, in the reign of Jahandar Shah (1712) debauchery became rampant in the seraglio. "A story about him was spoken of in society, and has become notorious from city to city. He used to go out sometimes in a cart with a mistress (Lal Kunwar, a vulgar thoughtless dancing girl from the streets),[2]



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and some companions to enjoy himself in the market and drinking shops. One night he and his favourite went out in this way, and both drank so much that they became drunk and senseless. On arriving at the door of the palace, Lal Kunwar was so drunk that when she got out she took no notice whatever of the Emperor, but went to bed and slept heavily. The Emperor, who was perfectly helpless, remained fast asleep in the cart, and the driver drove home and put the cart away. When the servants saw that the Emperor was not with Lal Kunwar, they were alarmed, and having roused her up, they inquired what had become of him. Lal Kunwar recovered sufficient sense to see that the Emperor was not by her side and fell acrying. People went running about in all directions till the Emperor was found in the cart."[3] The Mughal harem had degenerated to this level.

Lal Kunwar received a large allowance, besides clothes and jewels, and imitated the style of Nur Jahan, the famous queen of Jahangir.[4] This shows how Nur Jahan had become a model for the royal ladies. Nur Jahan's relatives had been in high offices in the reign of Jahangir and Shahjahan. This bazaar woman Lal Kunwar also tried to emulate Nur Jahan by getting her own relatives appointed to high offices. The only difference was that while Nur Jahan's relations were men of merit, Lal Kunwar's were the scum of society. "All the brothers and relatives, close and distant, of Lal Kunwar. received *mansabs* of four or five thousand, presents of elephants, drums and jewels and were raised to dignity in their tribe. Worthy, talented and learned men were driven away and bold and impudent wits and tellers of facetious tales gathered round. The brother of Lal Kunwar, Khushhal Khan, who had received a *mansab* of 5000 and 3000 horses, was named Subadar of Agra."[5] Zulfiqar Khan, the Bakhshi-i-Mumalik purposely made a delay in the preparation of the *farman* about Khushhal Khan's elevation and Lal Kunwar complained to the King. Jahandar Shah asked the Bakhshi what was the cause of the delay. Zulfikar Khan was very outspoken to Jahandar and he replied, "We courtiers have got into the habit of taking bribes, and we cannot do any business unless we get a bribe", and the bribe he asked from Lal Kunwar was a thousand guitar players and drawing masters (*ustad-i-naqqashi*). "When the Emperor asked what he could want with them, he replied you give all the places and offices of us courtiers to these men, and so it has become necessary to learn their trade."[6] Lal Kunwar's brother Niamat Khan was a *sarangi* player, yet he was appointed governor of Multan.

In brief, the vulgarities of the harem vulgarised the entire tone of the court, society and administration. This queen or concubine or prostitute—whatever epithet that could be used for this dancing-girl—became all important in the palace and outside. Her name became so prominent that it began to be associated with places and monuments. The locality of her birth was known as Lal Kuan, the Qila-i-Mubarak, Qila-i-Mualla or Qila-i-Shahjahanabad began to be called

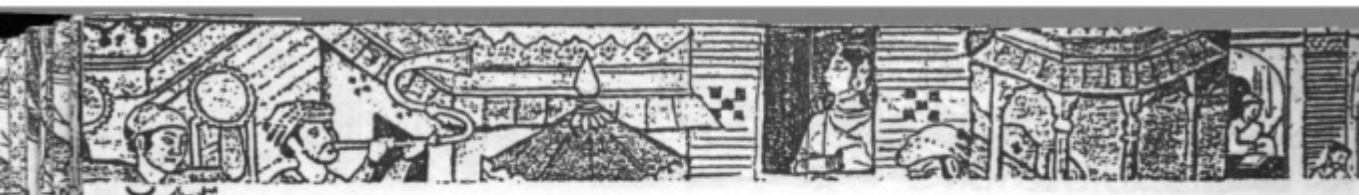




Lal Qila,[7] her mosque Lal Masjid and her burial place Lal Bangla.[8] A melon seller Zohra was her friend of early days. At her request, Zohra was called by Jahandar Shah into the harem and appointed Lal Kunwar's lady-in-waiting. Princesses and ladies of noble birth were there too, but in the post-Aurangzeb period we come across a set of women who were very different from those of the preceding century. Instead of the gentle ladies of the Mughal or Rajput families, there emerge into prominence concubines of low origin, highly ambitious and scheming like Lal Kunwar. Jahandar's "partiality for low women, his liking for low company and his patronage of the base-born" had disgusted all.[9] In the space of a few months four princes perished by the sword and the seraglio was shaken by the furies of the contending armies. Things were not to improve in the coming years. The shrewd French physician Bernier knew that this malady was of old. "If the sceptre be not firmly grasped by the first minister," writes he, "then the country is governed by eunuchs, persons who possess no enlarged and liberal views of policy and who employ their time in barbarous intrigues; banishing, imprisoning and strangling each other, and frequently the *Grandees* and *Vizier* himself. Indeed, under their disgraceful domination, no man of any property is sure of his life for a single day."[10] After Farrukh Siyar's death (in 1719) Maharaja Ajit Singh of Jodhpur felt so disgusted that he "took back (Indra Kunwar) the Maharani, his daughter, who had been married to Farrukh Siyar, with all her jewels and treasures and valuables... he made her throw off her Musulman dress..... and sent her to her native country...."[11]

In such an atmosphere of degeneration even the eunuchs accelerated their pursuit of pleasure and power. Their physical abnormality and mental oddity made them worse vermins. They pursued their interests unabated taking advantage of every political crisis. The case of the eunuch Jawed Khan is an instructive pointer to the fact that moral degradation was not a temporary phase of the time of Jahandar Shah, but it had permeated the Mughal harem as a permanent feature. No wonder we hear of the open outrage of social norms of harem by this eunuch. "Jawed Khan, the head eunuch, who in the time of Muhammad Shah had the entire management of the harem, and had the *entree* to the women's apartments, and although 50 years old, could neither read nor write.... prevailed on the simple minded youth of an Emperor to appoint him *darogha* of the *Diwan-i-Khass* with a *mansab* of 6000.... (He) had in the days of (Muhammad Shah) carried on a secret intimacy with Ahmad Shah's mother (Muhammad Shah's concubine) who was originally a dancing girl, now openly governed the realm in concert with her, and contrary to the custom of all harems, where no male domestics are allowed at night, he always remained in the women's apartments all night...."[12] The queen and the Nawab took the whole government into their own hands and the Emperor (Ahmad Shah) had nothing left but the empty title[13] and an empty treasury.





Depleted Treasury

Yes, an empty treasury. There was a time when the expenditure on the harem was beyond belief. The imperial *subahs* and subordinate kingdoms had piped into the imperial exchequer a perennial stream of gold and treasure and the king's discretion alone defined the measure of his private expense. Apart from the expenses on establishment and salaries of officers—*Nazirs* and Matrons and others—harem-ladies were constantly presented with gifts and lands, monthly and yearly allowances, besides all kinds of amenities and perquisites. From the days of Babur and Humayun when "the strings of bounty were ever loosened" for the ladies of the harem, and Babur had sent to his sisters and begums and *aghas* gifts of "one gold plate full of jewels, ruby and pearl, cornelian and diamond..... trays full of *asharafis* ... and all sorts of stuffs", to the time of Shahjahan and even Aurangzeb, when an unending stream of gifts and presents flowed into the seraglio, wealth was never wanting in the harem. So rich were the ladies that they also presented gifts on their own. Princess Gulbadan Begum presented seven thousand *khilats* on one accasion alone.[14] Nur Jahan, Mumtaz Mahall and Jahan Ara also showered gifts lavishly. The kings of course were the most liberal. Jahangir's memoirs refer to gifts and presents frequently. As an example, the presents by Shahjahan to his step-mothers and begums after his victory in the Deccan amounted to more than two million rupees.[15] This when he was only a prince. On his accession Shahjahan gave to his wife Mumtaz Mahall and daughter Jahan Ara fabulous amounts. "It is said that on his coronation Shahjahan spent a sum of one crore and sixty lakhs of rupees. Of this sum only thirty lakhs went to the nobles, the rest was given away in the shape of gifts and presents to the members of his own family."[16] Persian chronicles and accounts of foreign travellers are full of references to lavish gifts to Nur Jahan and other inmates of the harem on accasions like the Emperor's weighing ceremony, Ids, marriages, etc. Even when times were not so propitious Lal Kunwar, the concubine of Jahandar Shah, received an allowance of twenty million rupees for her household expenses, apart from jewels and clothes.[17] The daily expenditure on the harem too was enormous. Regular accounts of the day-to-day expenses on the royal kitchen and *karkhanas* were maintained in the *Arbab-ut-Tahawil* during the reign of Akbar.[18] Even at that time the expenses were 'daily increasing'.[19] In the reign of Jahangir, William Hawkins computed the daily expenditure on the harem at 30,000 rupees.[20] This comes to about 9 lakhs per month and 1.08 *krors* per year. Later in the day, glib generalisation put it to even a *kror* of rupees per day.[21] It is not possible to fix with any amount of certainty the actual expenditure on the harem. There was no state budget. There was no separation of expenditure on the army, administration, buildings, *karkhanas* and the harem, and so it may be said with John Jourdain (1608-1617)



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that "His (the Mughal's) wives, their slaves and his concubines do spend an infinite deal of money, incredible to be believed and, therefore, I omit it."[22] Even under the austere Aurangzeb the expenses on the *Mahal* remained enormous.[23]

Such wasteful expenditure was continued even when the imperial revenues had dwindled. This necessitated drawing on the reserve of the Mughal treasures. Part of this wealth had been accumulated in the Agra fort ever since the time of Babur and consisted of jewels, precious stones and precious metals of queens and princesses like Nur Jahan, Mumtaz Mahall and Jahan Ara. These ladies had received fabulous amounts from their kings. In the course of years and decades their riches like gifts of ornaments, precious stones, jewellery etc. had changed hands—from princesses to princesses—and had ultimately returned to the royal store rooms, "amounting in value, according to various reports to two or three *crors* of rupees.... There was the sheet of pearls which Shahjahan had caused to be made for the tomb of Mumtaz Mahall which was spread over it upon the anniversary of her marriage, and on Friday nights. There was the ewer of Nur Jahan and her cushion of woven gold and rich pearls, with a border of valuable garnets and emeralds."[24] At the fall of Agra in the time of Shahjahan II or Rafi-ud-daula (C.E. 1719), the Amir-ul-Umara Husain Ali, one of the notorious Saiyyad brothers, took possession of this wealth. While such loot of the treasure went on in Delhi and Agra, Nadir Shah's invasion (1739) stripped the Mughal harem of almost all its wealth. "The value of the pearls, diamonds and other jewels taken (by him) from the imperial treasury was described as being beyond computation. They included Shahjahan's wonderful Peacock Throne, the jewels alone of which, without reckoning the precious metal of which the throne was made, were valued at twenty million rupees.... Different authorities estimate the cash (he carried away) alone at amounts varying from eight to more than thirty million sterling, besides jewels, plate, cash, stuffs and other valuable property. He also took with him "a thousand elephants, seven thousand horses, ten thousand camels, and 'a hundred eunuchs'."[25] Abdali's invasion only made the capital and the harem all the more poor.

Hungry Inmates

Tarikh-i-Ahmad Shahi describes the condition of the harem on the eve of Abdali's invasion. Such was the state of political and economic uncertainty that "the Khwajas and peons of the harem, having left their posts, assembled at.... the Nazir's gate, and sitting down there, stopped the way for passengers and supplies of water, grain, etc... A disturbance threatened, and the Nazir, Roz-Afzun Khan had that day sent in his resignation to the Emperor, because there were no



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receipts and the expenditure from the Treasury was enormous."[26] Seven years later in 1757 during the reign of Alamgir II (1754-59) no fire was kindled in the kitchen of the harem for three days and one day "the princesses could bear starvation no longer and in frantic disregard of the *parda* rushed out of the palace to the city; but the fort gates being closed they sat down in the men's quarters for a day and a night, after which they were persuaded to go back to their rooms."[27]

How long could princesses, wives, concubines, dancing-girls and the army of women and eunuchs be kept confined, hungry and naked in the harem under the changing political conditions? Most of them sooner than later had to fall back on their own resources. Khafi Khan throws light on this. He says that "Saiyad Abdulla Khan was very fond of women, and the common talk was that two or three of the late king's (Farrukh Siyar's) beauties pleased him and he took them to himself, for the gratification of his lust and desires, although he had seventy or eighty beautiful women."[28] On the fall of Abdulla from power, when in 1720, the intelligence of his captivity reached Delhi, "his women, of whom he had gathered a large number around him, were in dismay: some of noble birth, remained in their places, but a good many made the best of the time, and before the arrival of the royal guard, they seized whatever they could, and disguising themselves with old veils and sheets, they took their departure."[29] To where? Obviously to fend for themselves. There were few avenues of employment open to helpless and charming girls of the harem in the Mughal dominions. They were not trained for any vocation. Further, they had little chance of a decent marriage. Therefore, the young, beautiful and intelligent amongst them could easily move into the dancing profession. There had always been a close contact between the harem of kings and nobles on the one hand and the houses of the prostitutes on the other. "Most of the courtesans had been in the palace and were or had been mistresses of dignitaries."[30] Earlier, only prostitutes used to come to the palace and some of them stayed on permanently as mistresses. Now it became a two-way traffic or rather a movement from the palace to the dwellings of the dancing-girls. That is probably how the harems of the royalty and nobility easily disappeared into narrow alleys and streets of Delhi. Their influx created a custom among elitist residents of maintaining a courtesan as a keep, and one was not considered a fashionable gentleman if he did not possess a prostitute in addition to his wife or wives. The guards of the harems, the eunuchs too took to singing and dancing as *bhands*. Historical and literary evidence points to the preponderance of *bhands*, pimps, procurers and prostitutes in Delhi and other major cities of northern India as the power of the Mughals declined.

After Abdali's victory at Panipat (1761) conditions became worse. "A Rohilla ruffian Ghulam Qadir"[31] attacked Shah Alam in 1788. His palace was pillaged, his eyes were put out and ladies of his seraglio were made to perform *mujra* (dance)





before Ghulam Qadir. Many "women of the harem were stripped, beaten and numbers died from hunger. Several threw themselves over the ramparts of the palace and were drowned in the Jumna.... The old queens of Muhammad Shah, Sahib-i-Nihal and Malka-i-Zamanih, the latter the daughter of Farrukh Siyar who had seen Delhi in its utmost splendour before the invasion of Nadir Shah, were forced from their houses and confined in one bastion."[32]

Khanazads and Salatin

Besides the ladies, there were servants and eunuchs as well as *Khanazads* and Salatin, all living or rather confined in the harem. Their presence was tolerated and even welcome so long as political power and financial position remained sound. But now these elements of magnificence became unbearable parasites. Eunuchs and servants could take to the streets when their services were dispensed with or starvation knocked at their doors. But the Salatin could not be thrown out. Indeed, they were not permitted to leave. These comprised the great mass of distant relations of the king. They were the descendants of former emperors going back to the time of Shahjahan. The *Khanazads* and Salatin were a problem to the Mughals. They were originally confined in the palace to prevent the possibility of their being used as tools by the designing nobles, for many of the Salatin had been married to the royal princesses, and could stake their claim to positions of power if not the throne itself. With the decline in Mughal political power they were reduced to the position of virtual prisoners. The practice of keeping the Salatin under surveillance in the palace or 'royal prison house' became strict in the time of Jahandar Shah (1712). Their number went on increasing while their allowances became lesser and lesser. In 1836 the number of Salatin who received pension was 795. In 1848, within a span of twelve years, their number increased to 2104.[33] They lived in the palace and their quarters have been described by Major George Cunnigham in an official paper as under:

"The Salatin quarter consists of an immense high wall so that nothing can overlook it. Within this are numerous mat huts in which these wretched objects live. When the gates were opened there was a rush of miserable, half-naked, starved beings who surrounded us. Some men apparently eighty years old almost in a state of nature, who from the earliest infancy had been shut up, others young men, some sons of kings whose mothers either had died or not been in favour...others young children.... The utmost allowed was a few blankets during the cold weather, distributed as if by the king, but in fact a private charity of Seton's." What could be done with them? The Salatins were kept confined to the palace, but no inducement was held out in the form of education or employment.[34] The palace itself





was now filthy. Bishop Heber, a reliable and friendly witness described in 1824 every part of the palace which he saw as "dull, desolate and forlorn....The Shah Burj was dirty, lonely and wretched: the bath and fountain dry: the inlaid pavement hid with lumber and gardener's sweeping, and the walls stained with the dung of birds and bats." Very few people ever gained admittance to the *zenana* or the houses of the leading princes, and so the rumour spread that the palace was a vast slum.[35]

The harem was sustained by wealth and beauty. In the early nineteenth century both took their departure. Two English ladies Mrs. Meer Hassan Ali and Mrs. Fanny Parks, who visited the royal harem in Delhi during this period describe the conditions therein. On arrival Mrs. Ali was conducted to the Queen's *Mahal* where she was received by King Akbar II (1806-1837). "After having left my shoes at the entrance", writes she, "and advanced towards them, my salaams were tendered, and then the usual offerings of *nuzzas* (*nazars*) first to the king and then the Queen, who invited me to a seat on her own carpet...I found the King seated in the open air in an arm chair enjoying the hooka; the Queen's musnud was on the ground, close by the side of her venerable husband. On taking leave...the Queen embraced me with warmth. I was grieved to be obliged to accept the Queen's parting present of an embroidered scarf, because I knew her means were exceedingly limited....A small ring of trifling value was then placed by the Queen on my finger, as she remarked, 'to remind me of the giver'."[36] This is about wealth. "As for beauty", writes Fanny Parks after her visit to the Delhi *Mahal*, "in a whole Zenana there may be two or three handsome women, and all the rest remarkably ugly".[37] The ugliness of face and lack of finance increased the ugliness of thought and attitude. Mrs. Parks found the *zenana* a place of intrigue and 'conflicting passions' and says that "never was any place so full of intrigue, scandal and chit-chat as a zenana."[38]

Social Degeneration

The effects of such a situation on society were far-reaching. Kings and nobles used to keep with them women claiming any pretensions to beauty. These women stayed in their harems so long as a decent living was available. Some influential ones married Europeans (e.g. Begum Samru, 1751-1836) But many went over to the profession of dancing and prostitution. They could not be married. No decent bachelors would have been prepared to marry them in spite of the polygamous harem-system in which many men married a plurality of women as a consequence of which many others used to remain unmarried. The worst consequence of the monopolization, seclusion and surveillance of the harem-women was encourage-



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ment to love of beardless boys by the needy but more so by perverts. This is amply reflected in a brief survey of social life in Delhi in the *Muraqqa-i-Dihli* (Album of Delhi) written by Dargah Quli Khan. Dargah Quli Khan visited Delhi in C.E. 1738-39 along with Nizam-ul-Mulk Asaf Jah and wrote his work as a travelogue. According to him two quarters of the city, Kasalpura and Nagal, were sprawling brothels. In Kasalpura there was singing and dancing in almost every house, while women solicited freely in the streets. In Nagal there was a saint's tomb, on the pretext of visiting which women went bedecked in all their finery, having made appointments with acquaintances and friends. 'and none came back disappointed.[39] Chandni Chowk, the principal bazaar promenade, and the Chowk of Sadullah Khan, located opposite the gate of the Palace which has since disappeared, were centres of congregation in the evenings. Here one found boys dancing and a world of lecherous sinners soliciting their heart's desire. *Amrads* (beardless boys) were as much in demand as courtesans.[40] Quacks too were there to sell tonics and medicines for venereal diseases and increasing potency. Most of the courtesans like Saras Rup, Nur Bai, Chimni, Chakmak Dhani, Kali Ganga (who was jet black) still went to king's palace to dance. Ad Begum, another prostitute, did not put on pyjamas, instead she painted her legs with patterns of chintz.[41] Pornographic literature abounded. There are many manuscripts belonging to the seventeenth-eighteenth century all entitled *Lazzat-un-nisa* or Pleasures of Sex. These are by different authors and are full of descriptions of erotic situations illustrated by similar paintings. Many of these give recipes for drugs used for increasing potency. One book says that the ministers, counsellors, geniuses, scholars and *jogis* were ordered by the King to tender advice on matters of sex. Another says that some women resorted to all kinds of vulgar tricks to arouse desire in men and Kings.[42]

Moral degeneration did not remain confined to Delhi or Agra. It spread far and wide, especially where the scions or governors of the Mughal established their independent States like Hyderabad or Avadh. In Avadh Nasir-ud-din Haider, the son of Ghazi-ud-din Haider (1814-1827), born of a maidservant, was brought up in an atmosphere of grossest superstition and disgusting effiminacy. Wajid Ali Shah, the last of the line was "perhaps the most depraved and foppish." We see in Lucknow a replica of the frivolity and lasciviousness described in the *Muraqqa-i-Dihli*. It is best described in the *masnawis* of Shauq (1783-1871) entitled *Fareb-i-Ishaq* (The Wiles of Love), *Bahar-i-Ishaq* (The Spring of Love) and the *Zahr-i-Ishaq* (The Poison of Love). These "reveal the fact that search for the delights of love was not unknown among women of respectable families.... The rules of *parda*....were observed, but festivals and visits provided opportunities to men and women for subsequent meetings and love making."[43]



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Mughal Harem in Retrospect

The Mughal harem lost its grandeur, but not wholly. It continued right up to middle of the nineteenth century, and in replicas its significance endured even after that, in the princely states built upon the ashes of the Mughal empire. Looking at it retrospectively in its heyday, the imperial harem was not only economically viable, but even profitable. Each matrimonial contract brought a lot of wealth. Each Rajput princess brought a lot of dowry. The marriage settlement of Man Bai, the daughter of Raja Bhagwan Das with Prince Salim was fixed at two *krors* of *tankahs*. "The dowry bestowed by Bhagwan Dass included a hundred elephants, several strings of horses, jewels, numerous and diverse golden vessels set with precious stones, utensils of gold and silver, 'and all sorts of stuffs, the quantity of which is beyond computation.' The imperial nobles were presented with Persian, Turkish and Arabian horses, with golden saddles, etc. Along with the bride were given a number of male and female slaves, of Indian, Abyssinian and Circassian origin."[44] A hundred years later, the amount paid by Raja Ajit Singh in the marriage of his daughter with Farrukh Siyar amounted to a *kror* of rupees.[45] Rajput princes vied with one another in providing rich dowries to their relatives married in the Mughal house. Muslim rulers and nobles seeking alliance with Mughal royalty too gave rich and handsome treasures in the form of gifts in gold and jewels and pearls. These marriages thus were a source of economic gain to the emperor and the empire, and wealth of many kingdoms, provinces and individual rulers used to be sucked into the imperial treasury because of the harem-system. The system also made the rulers of princely states subservient to the Mughals and in spite of the bitter memories left behind by some marriages, the presence of hostage princesses in the harem discouraged, if it did not completely rule out, organised opposition.

More than the political and economic gains was the harem's contribution to culture. Akbar's induction of ladies of Rajput royal houses into the harem through matrimonial alliance was of utmost significance. The dwellers of the harem comprised Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Irani, Turani, Portuguese and women of many other European nationalities. Slave-girls from all over the world gave it a secular, cosmopolitan and almost international character. Harem-ladies belonged to all the regions of the country. They spoke and thereby indirectly taught their spouses and others the various local languages, and acquainted them with the regional cultures of the country.[46] Through them Indian dance, music, painting and other fine arts of various schools and states influenced the Mughal art and *vice-versa*. They patronised scholars. So many queens and princesses constructed places of religious worship and public utility like palaces, mausoleums, mosques, tanks, wells, bridges and other buildings and laid out gardens on their own. Some of these exist to this

Pl. V





day as an evidence of their contribution to the field of art and architecture. The life style of ladies of royalty and nobility was exceedingly magnificent requiring the services of a large number of people of every vocation. This provided employment to artisans and service class in and outside the palace, in the royal *karkhanas* and to private artists. The superiority of Indian muslins, brocades, jewellery, decorated utensils, tapestry and carpets in India and abroad owes much to the demand for the best both in quality and quantity of these stuffs by the harem-dwellers. Their clothes, ornaments, cosmetics and make-up articles, *pan dans* and caskets provided sustenance to art and artists. "The arts in the Indies would long ago have lost their beauty and delicacy", writes Bernier, "if the monarch and principal Omrahs did not keep in their pay a number of artists who work in their houses....and stimulated to exertion by the hope of reward and the fear of the *korrah*. The protection afforded by powerful patrons to rich merchants and tradesmen who pay the workmen rather higher wages, tends also to preserve the arts."[47]

These are some plus points. But the minus points outweigh. The origin of the harem is to be found in the polygamous nature of man and the unbounded love of sex of the Mughal rulers and nobles. They concentrated on their harems at the cost of everything else. Prince Muazzam or Shah Alam had a harem of 2000 women, remained a hard drinker even at the age of 66, but did not care for his soldiers.[48] Similarly, "The Governors...instead of maintaining troops, they fill and adorn their *mahals* with beautiful women, and seem to have the pleasure-house of the whole world within their walls".[49] The nobles gave to the kings 'infinity of presents' during their life time,[50] and because of the law of escheat they practised the philosophy of eat, drink and be merry with the result that harem-women, courtesans and prostitutes consumed most of their wealth. Consequently, the nobles remained in debt, and from the *Umara* to the soldiers all lived from hand to mouth.[51] Such a way of life was detrimental to the wellbeing of the individual, the society and economy of the State.

The large establishment of wives and servants rendered the nobles immobile. No Indian scholars, engineers or travellers went abroad to learn the skills the European were developing in their countries. While people from Europe were frequently coming to Hindustan, no Indian nobleman could go to the West because he could not live without his harem and he could not take with him his cumbersome harem to countries situated so far away. Europe at this time was forging ahead in science and technology through its Industrial Revolution, but the Mughal elites kept themselves insulated from this great stride because of inertia. Consequently, the country was pulled back from marching with progress, a deficiency which has not been able to be made up until now. Indian nobles and princes, by and large, could only ruin their bodily health and impair their understanding in the society of concubines.[52]

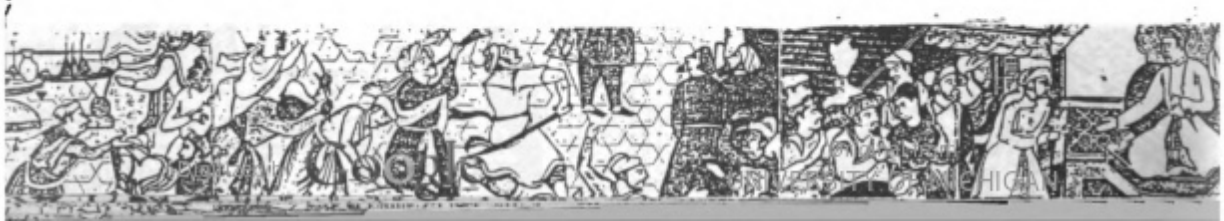




For the king, the nobles and the rich, medieval times were the days of women, wine and war. These three were also the greatest killers. The atmosphere of the harem was artificial and sexy. The harem was a prison house for women says Manucci. It was a 'stable' for women established to satisfy the lust of kings and nobles. Craving for sex and homosexuality knew no limits, and young boys were kept for 'wicked use'.[53] Practice of incest was not unknown. "That filthy disease, the consequence of incontinence, was common amongst them."[54] All kinds of drugs were taken for increasing potency.[55] Still, excessive indulgence inflicted severe punishment. Many people became ineffective even in young age. "The king and his great men maintain their women", writes Edward Terry, "but little affect them after thirty years of their age."[56] Many of the princes and nobles destined to die of excessive use of wine actually died of excessive indulgence in sex. Some had great interest in producing children—Said Khan alone had sixty sons[57]—while some women saw to it that their husbands had children only from them. In the harem-system sentiments of women were of no consequence, they were not supposed to have sentiments.[58]

Their suppression led them to intrigue, cruelty and sometimes participate in the struggle for succession to titles, property or the throne. Making of eunuchs for manning the harem was atrocious, violating all norms of humanism and human dignity. These unfortunate eunuchs, who have continued as a legacy of the harem-system, still play a pernicious and parasitical role in Indian Society.

For the State, the harem was a white elephant, maintained at the cost of efficiency of army and effectiveness of administration. The harem-inmates consisted of princesses of the highest families as well as beauties of the slums including scums of the brothels, resulting in the induction of their low born men relatives in the court. By the time of Aurangzeb and Shah Alam, besides the salaries and lands, gifts and presents given to the ladies, and the overall expenses on the harem, "one thousand four hundred elephants were employed to carry the queens, princesses and the concubines, the tents, the baggage and the kitchen utensils."[59] This alone should suffice to show how adversely the prowess of the army would have been affected. There are many references to indicate that officers and men were paid only a few months' salary instead of for the whole year, naturally marring their efficiency and honesty. It is often said that the men who came with Babur were strong men in ruddy boots, while the Mughals who marched under Aurangzeb to the Deccan were minions in muslin petticoats. They were enervated if not quite effiminated by the luxurious atmosphere of the Mughal harem-society. Still they did not give up their ways. Rulers, princes and nobles used to dally with village damsels when they went out on *shikar*.[60] Such aberrations sometimes incited people to rise in arms.[61] In the post-Aurangzeb period the king and nobles lived in cities, enjoying in their harems, protecting it and





being protected by it. The countryside gradually became free with rebellions growing and gaining sway.

Conclusion

But this study of the Mughal harem need not be closed on a pessimistic note. After all nothing much could be expected from an establishment which was meant only to provide pleasure to the king or the society's elite. The harem was not expected to make any contribution to the longevity of the Mughal rule or to the strength of its army or finance. It was expected to provide enjoyment and merriment to the great. And this function it did perform. Incidentally, it helped in the continuation and preservation of the Mughal culture.

Indeed, the Mughal harem continued to preserve the Mughal culture even in its days of adversity. Mughal dress, Mughal manners, Mughal cuisine and dishes, Mughal elegance of language and Mughal sophisticated behaviour were continued by princesses and plebians right up to the end of the Mughal empire and after. Even the *Khanazads* and *Salatin*, decrepit and starving, tried to cling to this culture to the end for good or bad, even indulging in kite-flying and cock-fighting. The salons of the *tawaifs* were an appendage to the harem. These too preserved this culture. To them were sent small boys of gentry to learn the rudiments of good etiquette and elegant speech. To them went the old to listen to music, to drink and to remember the good old days. To their dance-and-song sessions went the young to have 'a good time' and escape from the sensibility of an empire falling. But, most important, these salons preserved the cultural synthesis and social amity in Delhi and Agra and Avadh, and most of northern India, between the middle of the eighteenth and most of the nineteenth century. Such syncretization was never there before, nor has it survived thereafter.

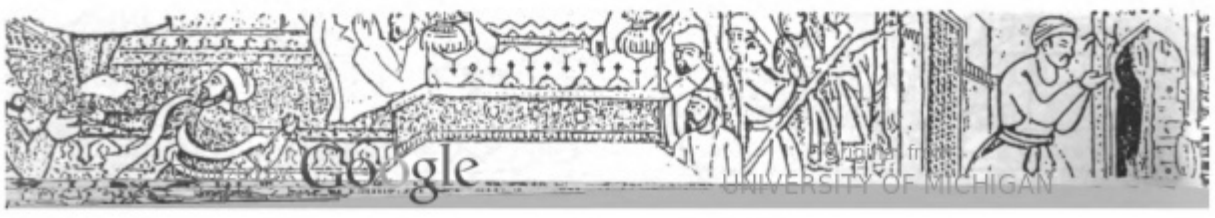
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42. In the National Museum at New Delhi alone there are eight to ten such Mss. I am obliged to Mr Nasim Akhtar of the Manuscript Section for bringing these works to my notice.
43. Mujeeb, *op. cit.*, p. 512.
44. Beni Prasad, p. 24; *T.A.*, II, p. 393; *A.N.*, III, pp. 677-78.
45. Khafi Khan, VII, p. 883. When she was taken back to Jodhpur after Farrukh Siyar's death, she carried "with her all her jewels and valuables, amounting to a *kror* of rupees in value."
46. e.g. Asad Beg, *Waqia*, pp. 152-53. Also Manucci, III, p. 302. The noble Kifayat Khan knew Portuguese and Latin besides Indian languages.
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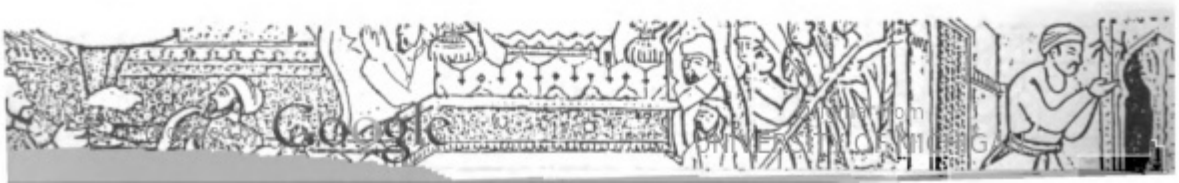
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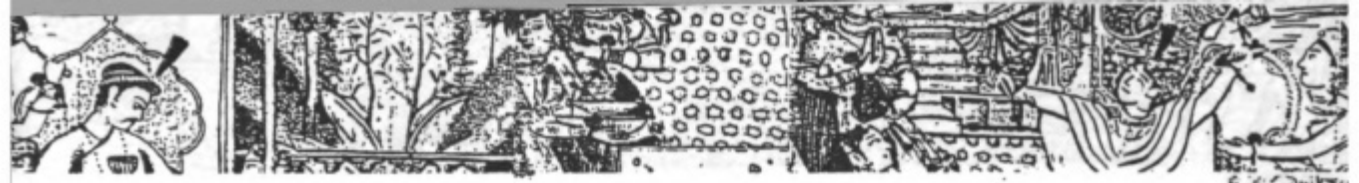
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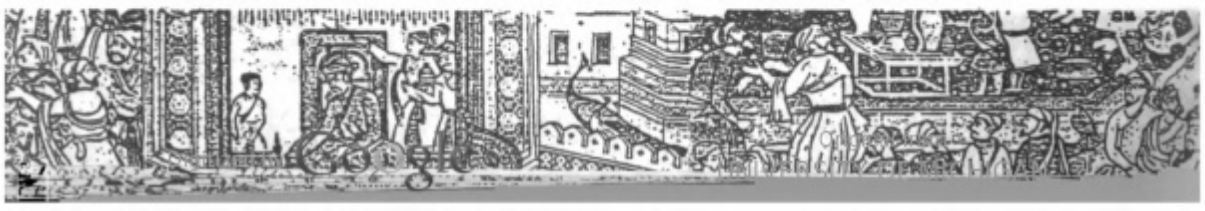
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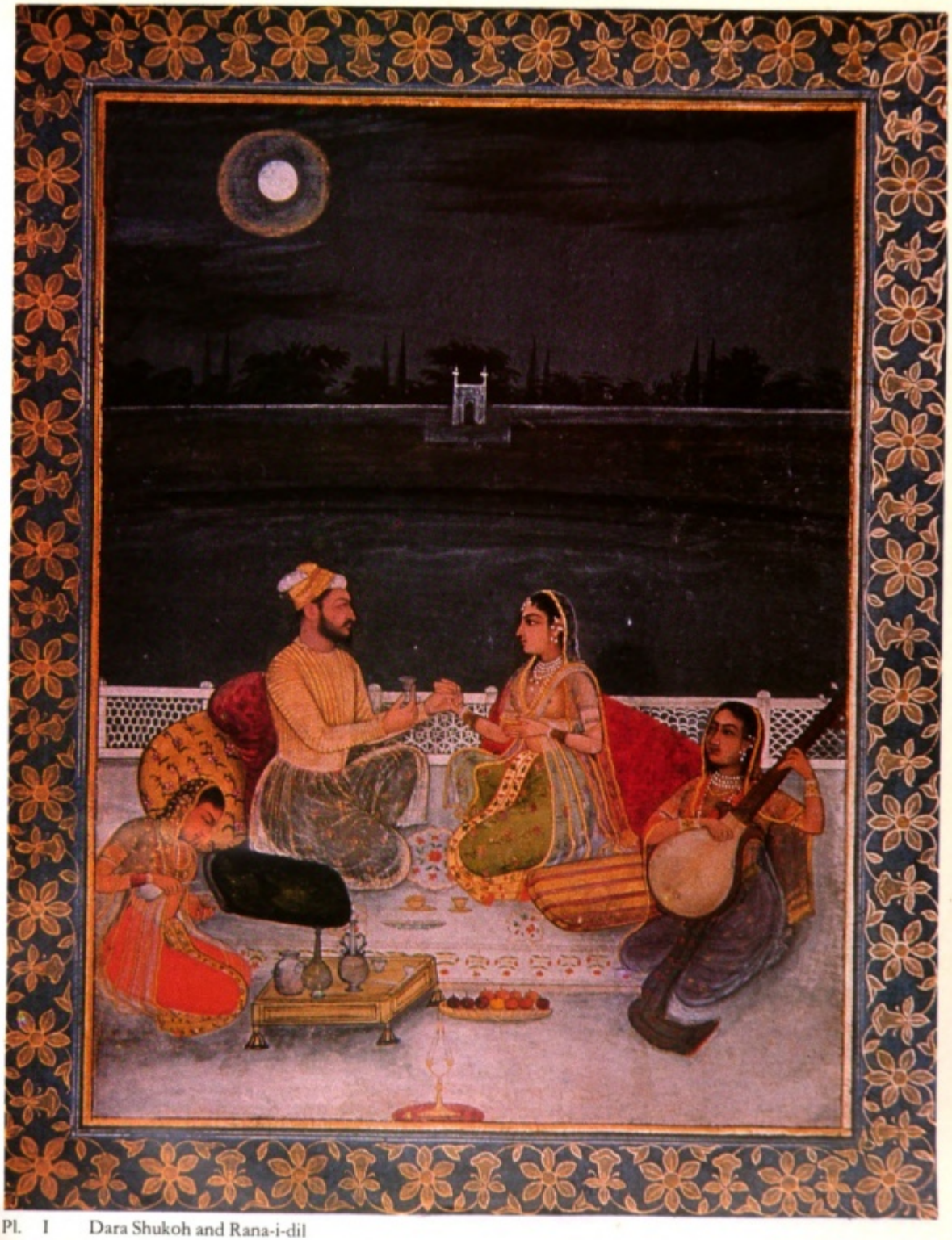


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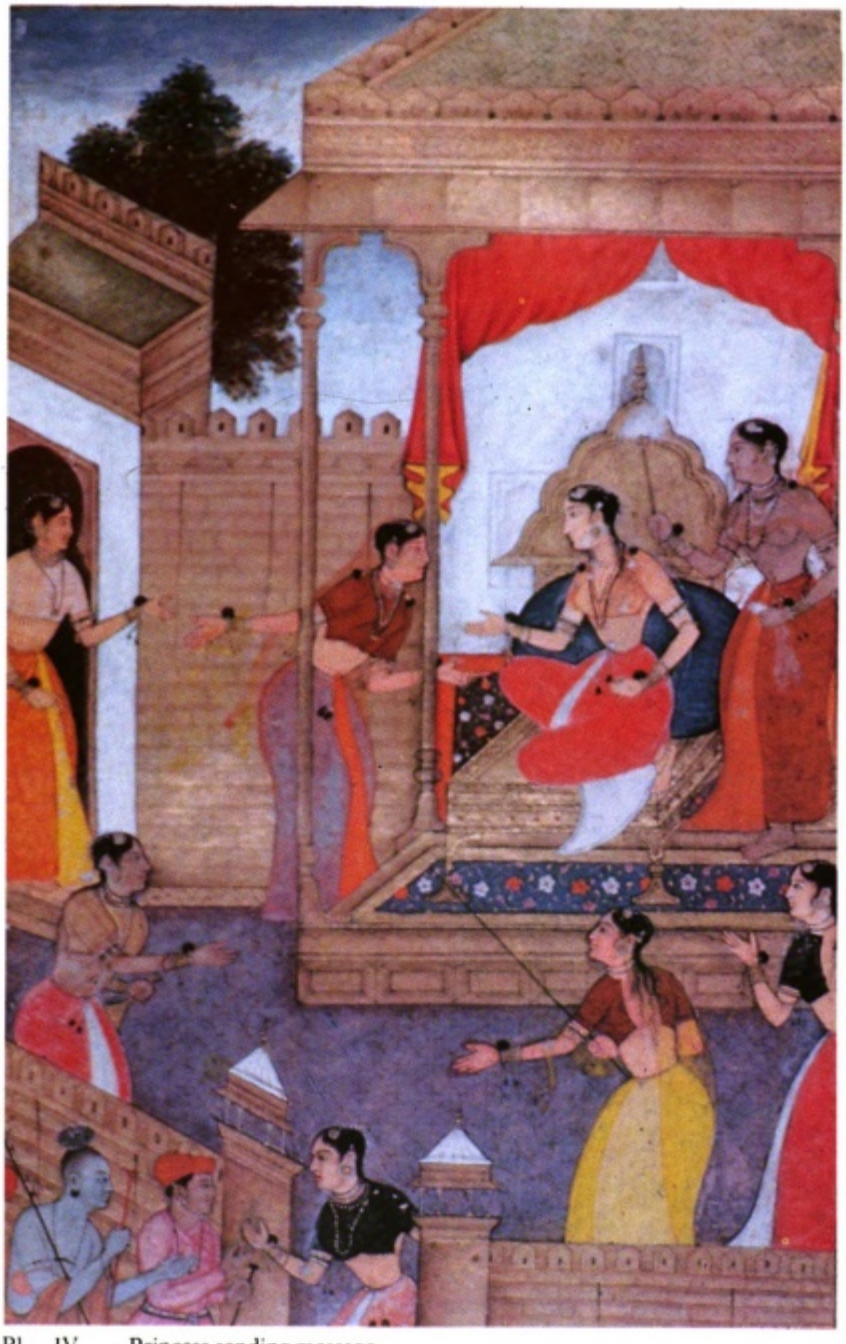
Pl. II Prince in bedchamber

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Pl. III A moment of tender love

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Pl. IV Princess sending message

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Pl. V Princess rewarding suppliant

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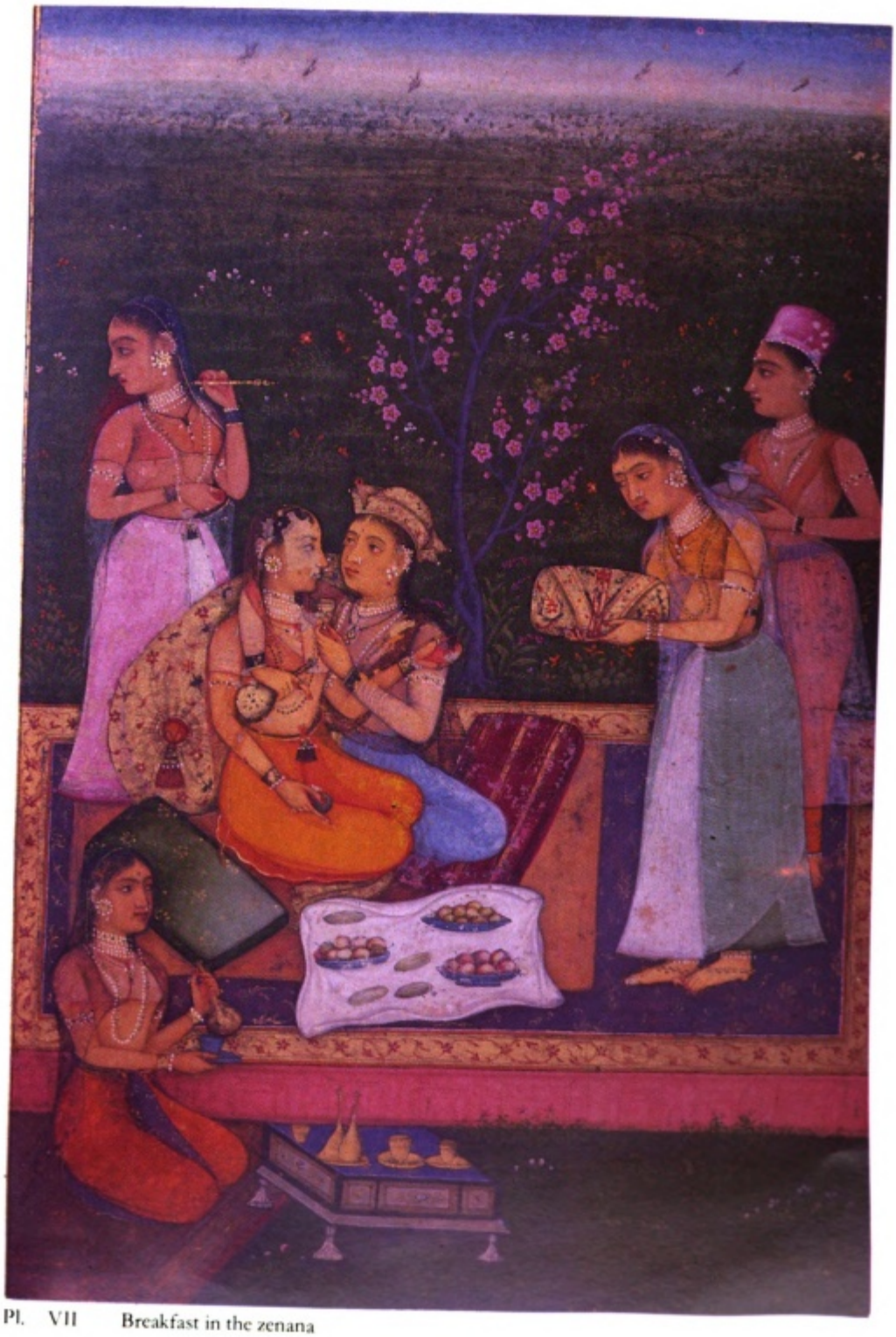
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Pl. VI. Birth of Prince Murad

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Pl. VII Breakfast in the zenana

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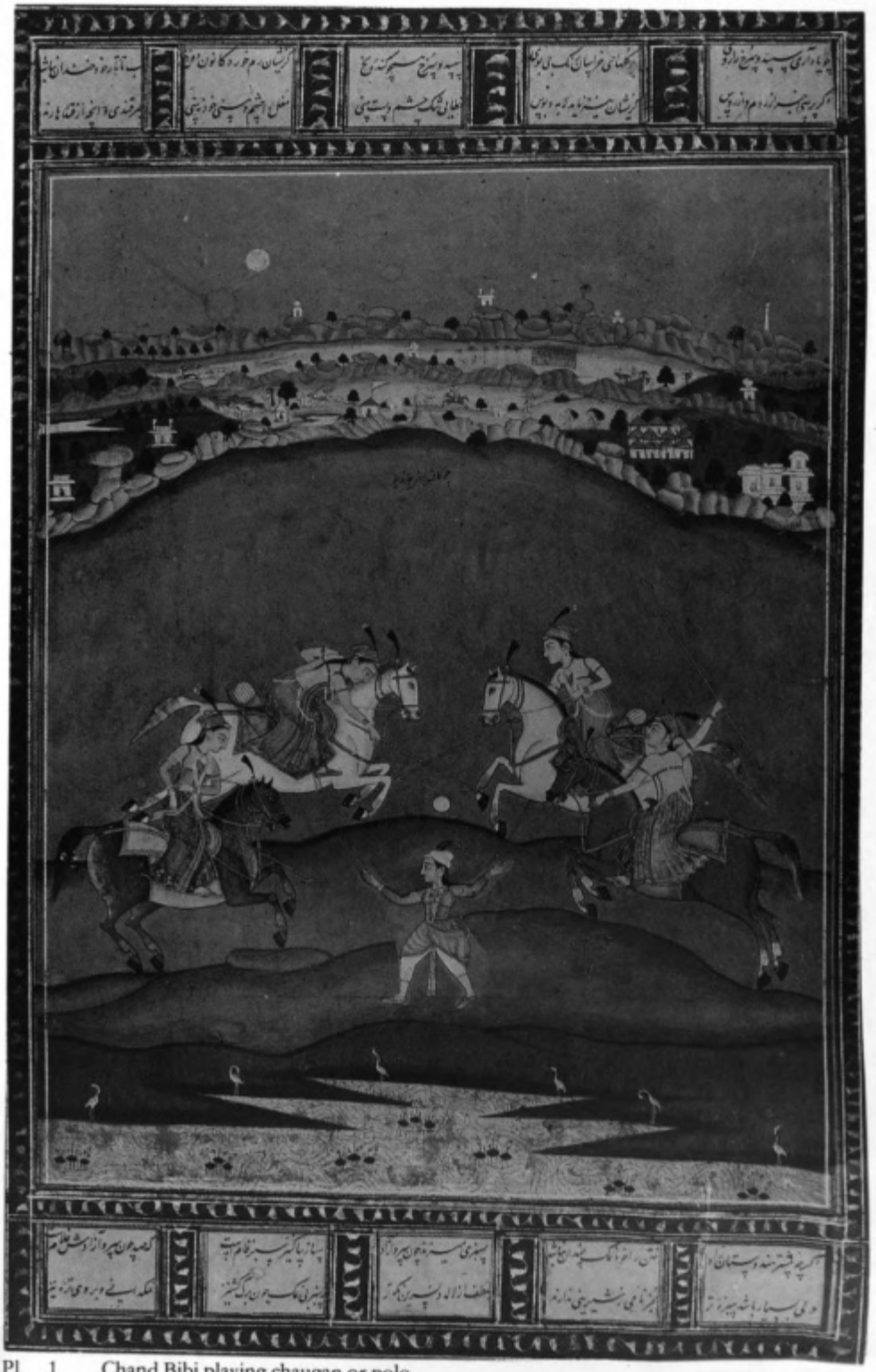
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Pl. VIII A couple in dalliance

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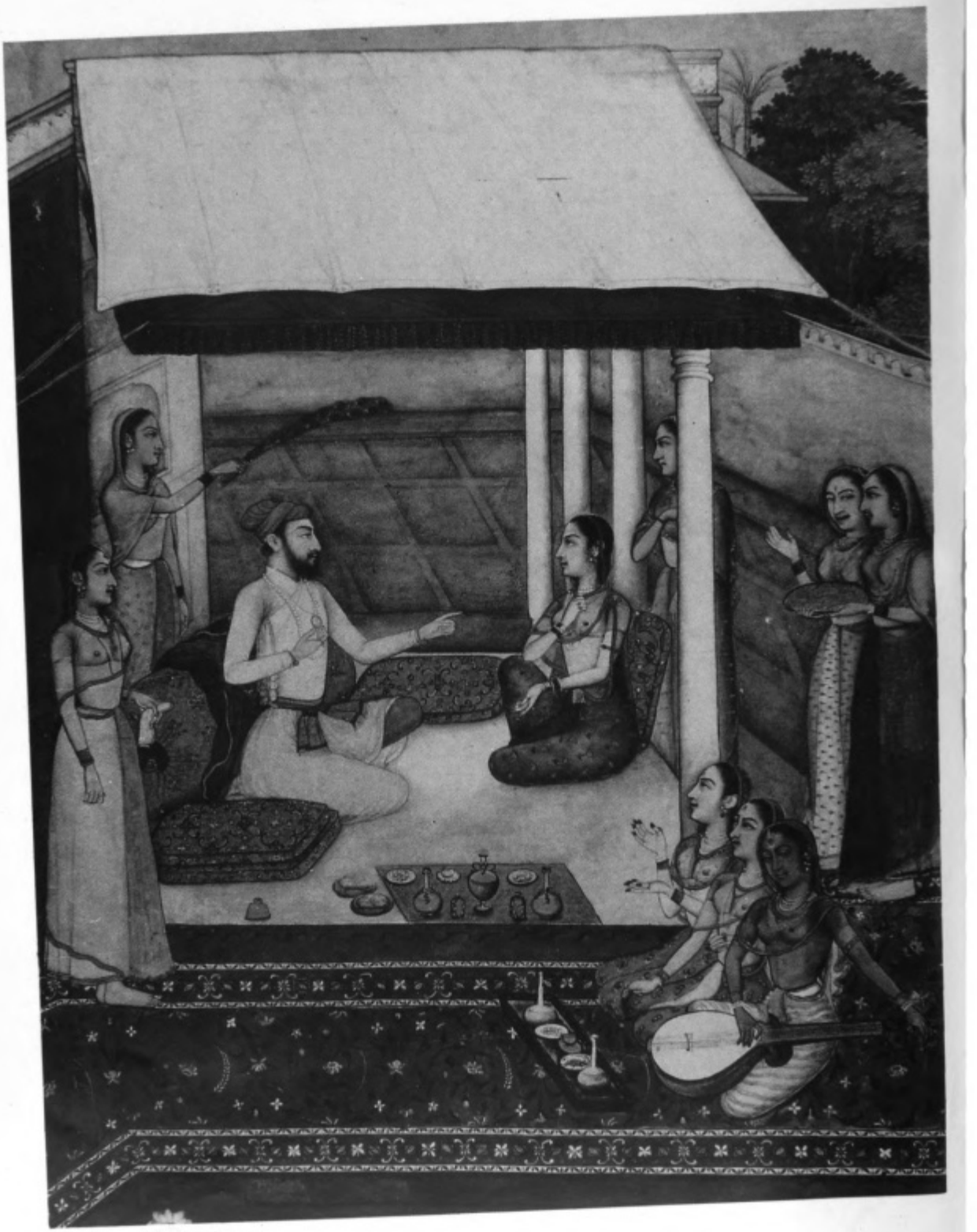
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Pl. 1 Chand Bibi playing chaugan or polo

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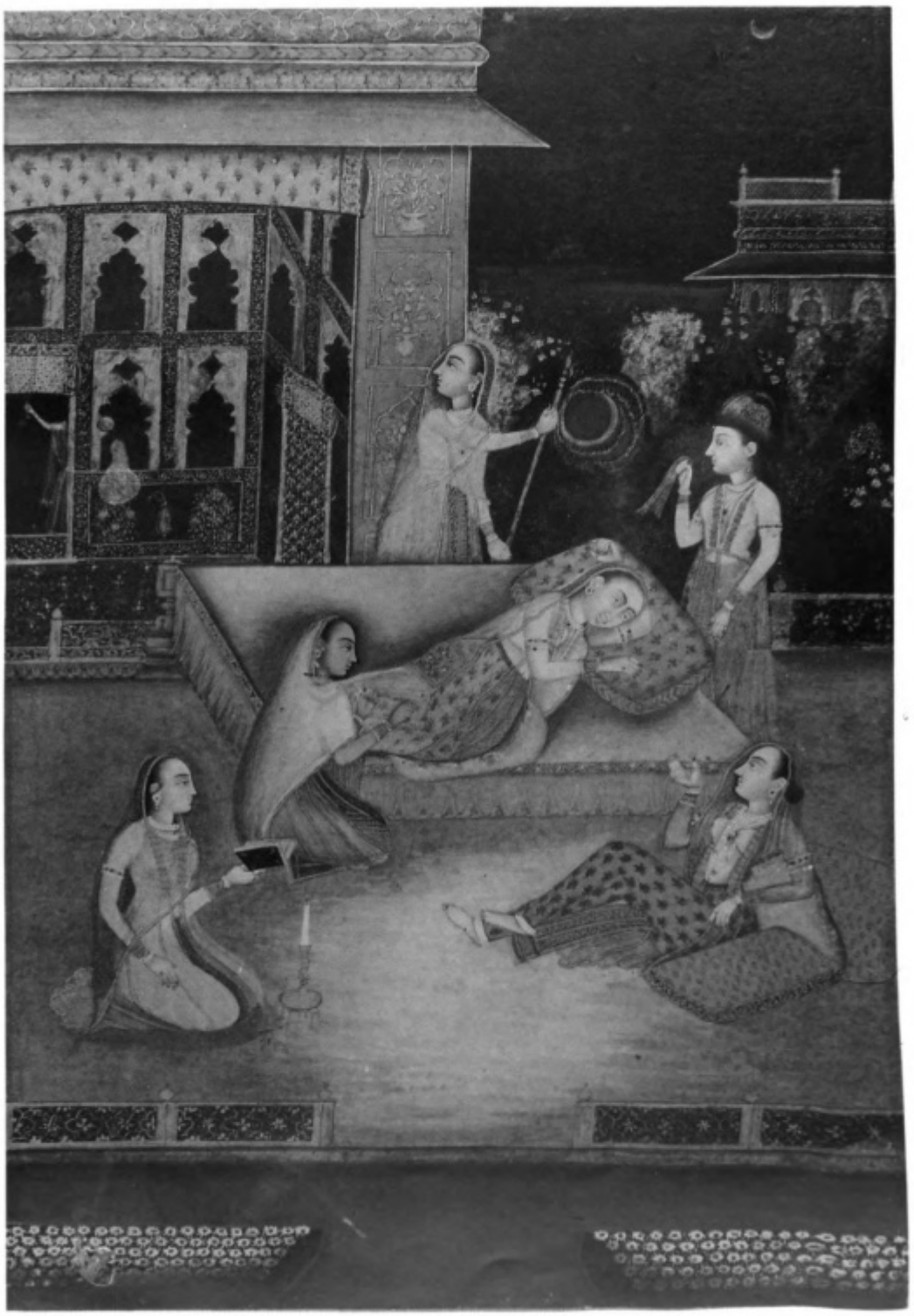
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Pl. 2 Prince in harem

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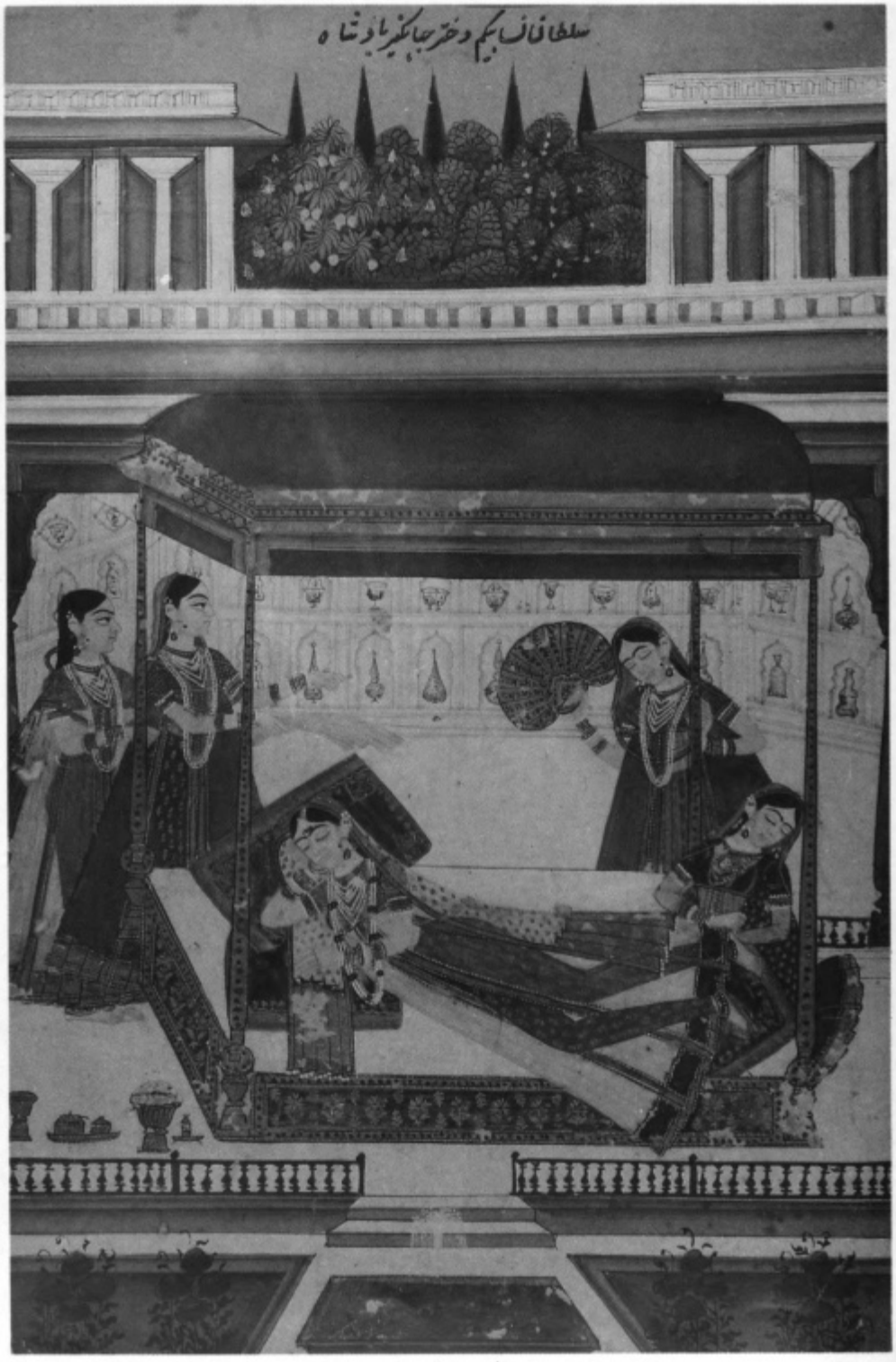
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Pl. 3 Princess sleeping beneath a night sky, eunuch in attendance

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Pl. 4 Princess Sultan-un-nisa Begum, daughter of Emperor Jahangir

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Pl. 5 Jahangir with his ladies in a garden pavilion

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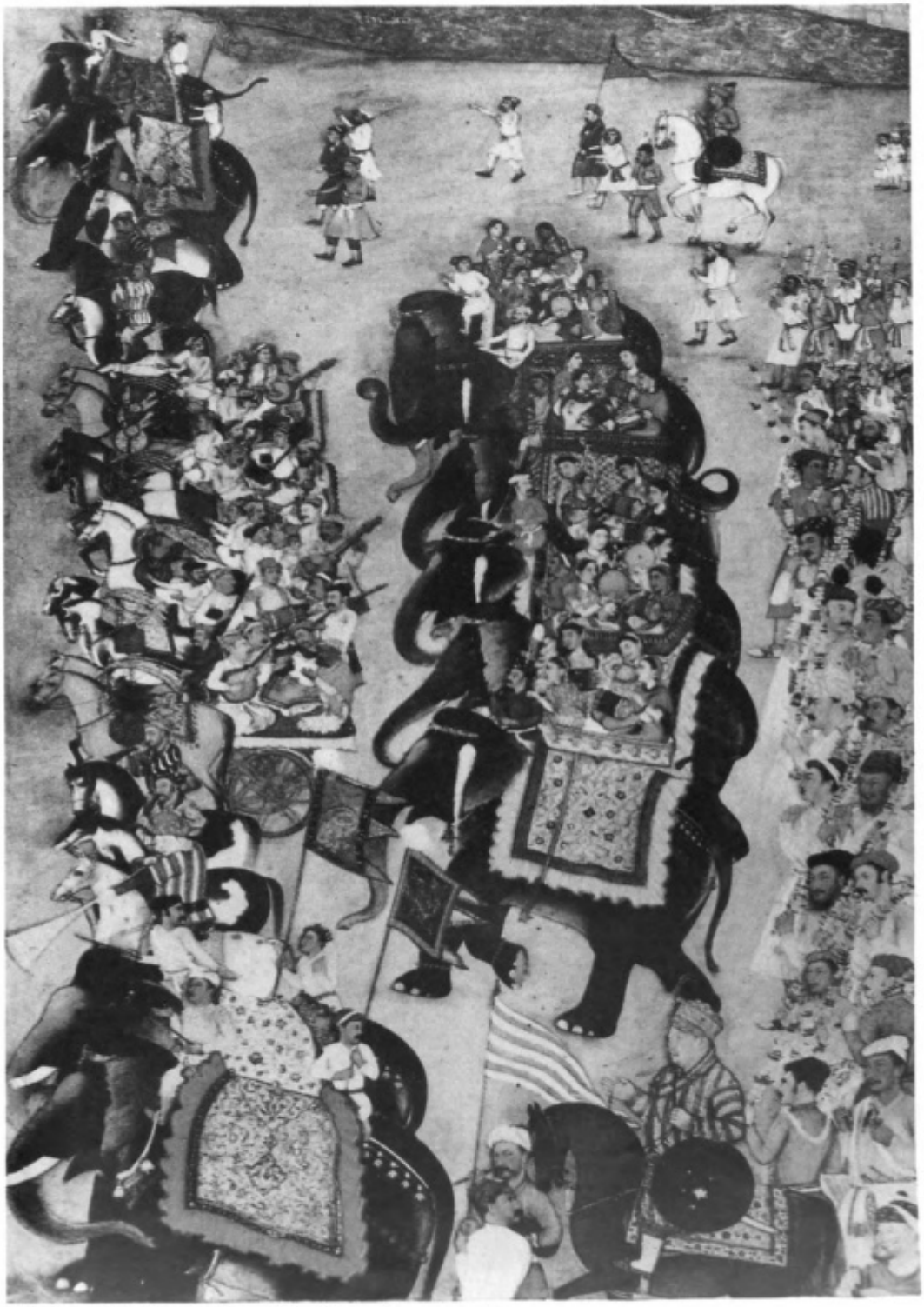
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Pl. 6 Marriage procession of Prince Dara Shukoh

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Pl. 7 Musicians in Dara Shukoh's marriage procession

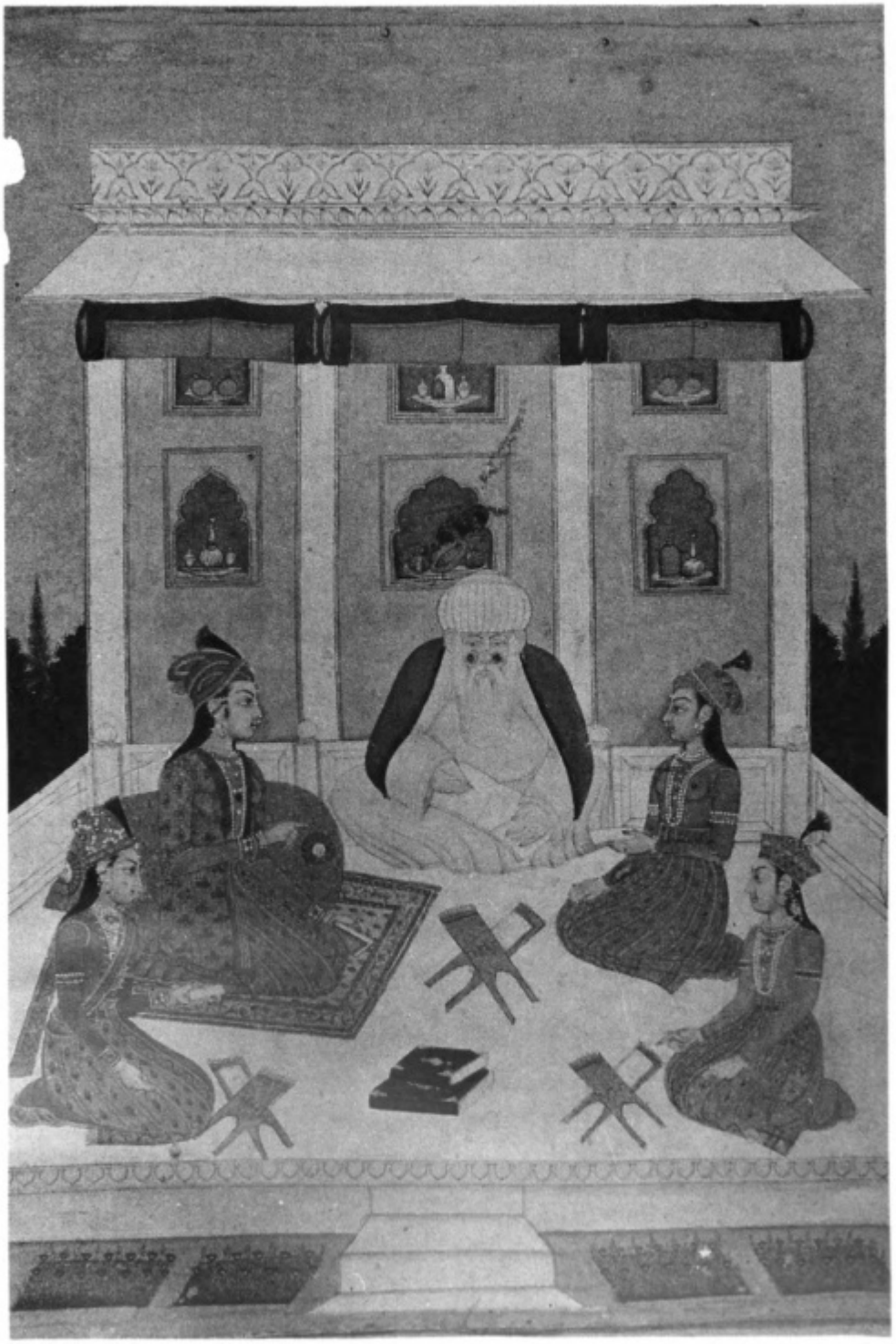
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Pl. 8 Princesses drinking wine

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Pl. 9 **Princesses with their teacher**

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Pl. 10 Prince receiving beloved



Pl. 11 Display of fireworks

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Pl. 12 Prince playing holi in his harem

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Pl. 13 Reception of Jahangir and Shahjahan by Nur Jahan at Mandu

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Pl. 14 Princess having her toilet in the zenana

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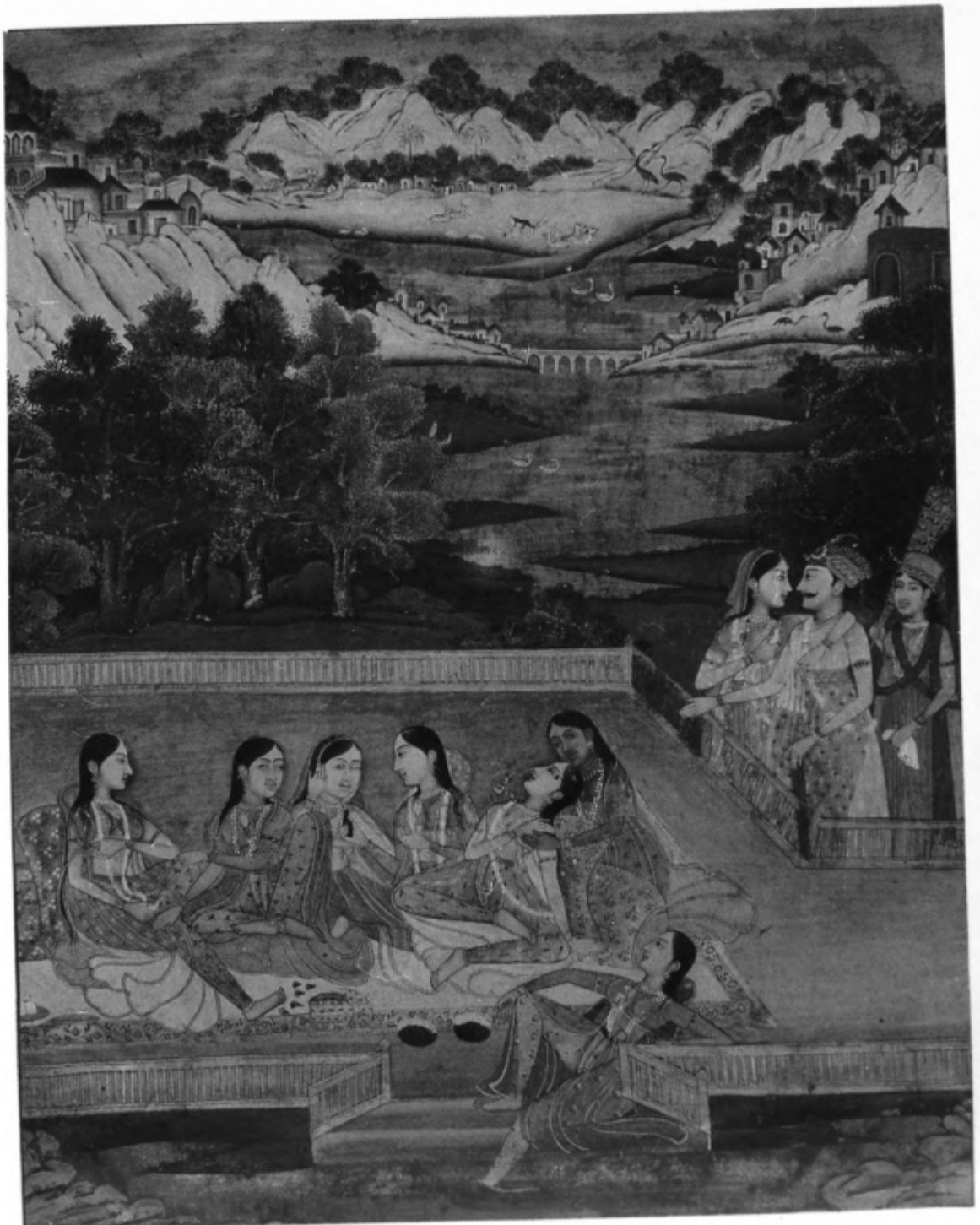
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Pl. 15 Prince Salim in bedchamber

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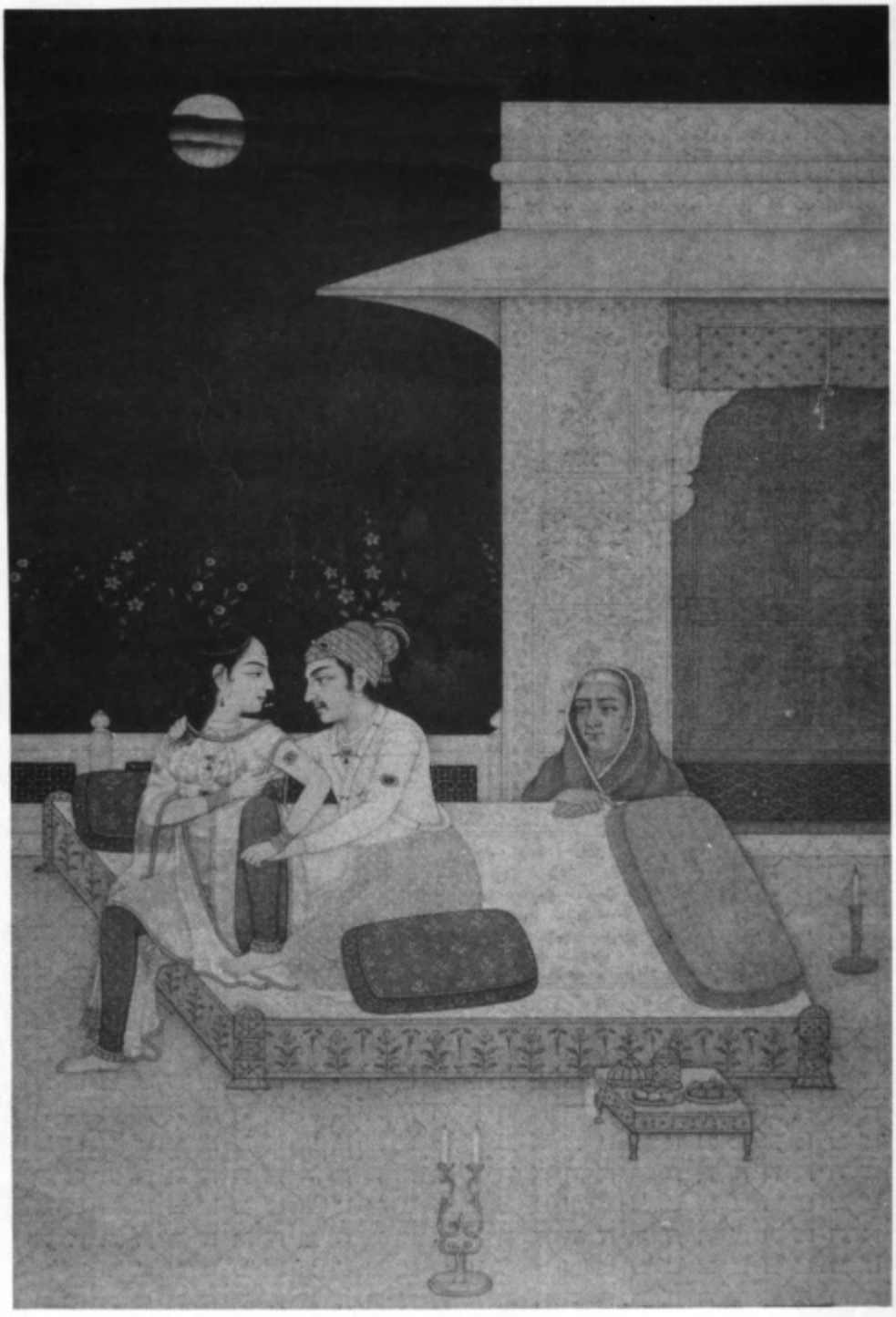
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Pl. 16 Lovelorn princess awaiting arrival of lover

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Pl. 17 Tryst with a beauty with chaperon in attendance

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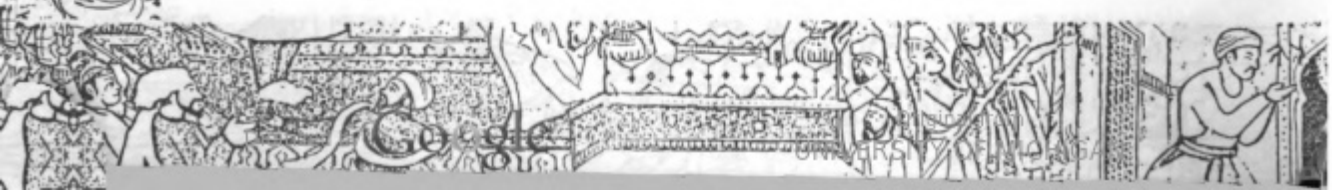
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