



## MUGHAL PRINCESSES: SIGNIFICANT PERSIAN POETESSES

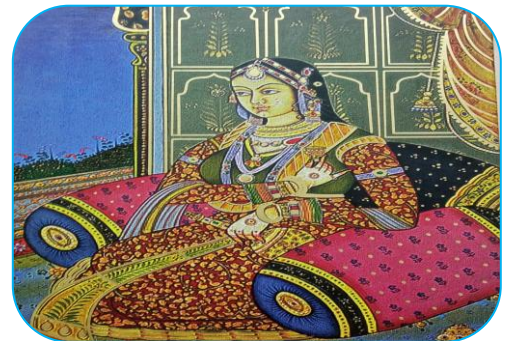
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### INTRODUCTION:

Persian language and literature enjoyed a unique status in India during the Mughal reign. We witness that the reign period of Mughal dynasty was the one where Persian language, literature, arts & culture etc. bloomed magnificently & touched to its zenith. Persian poetry was in such a widespread trend & vogue that its poetry became the part of the royal 'Harem' and some of the royal ladies were came to known as highly qualified Persian poets too who were involved in reading, writing and collecting books and patronizing the Persian poetry in India very earnestly like Zeibunnisa, Noor Jahan & Gulbadan Begum etc.. The present research paper is an academic note focused on their characteristic of being poets and the contribution to Persian literature especially to Persian poetry.



### MAIN ARTICLE:

As we observe the Islamic philosophical thought, we witness an immense emphasis was made on educational aspirations. We also witness some Hadiths always encouraging and inspiring in order to attain utmost knowledge as much as possible like *"The seeking of knowledge is obligatory for every Muslim<sup>1</sup>"* & *"The learned are the heirs of the Prophets<sup>2</sup>."*

Following the ideal Islamic basics, Mughals also paid very high attention to learning and education. The Turko-Timurid commander Zahiruddin Babur established the Mughal Empire in 1526 AD with its unique etiquette, ceremonies, art, music and poetry that constituted a culture so richly flavored that it retained its recognition and appeal even after its decline<sup>3</sup>. The impetus of the Great Mughal Emperors to literature, poetry, historiography and calligraphy produced a never before seen extensiveness of work in these fields. The amalgam produced added to the identity of the Mughal Empire as a cultural state possessing an active intellectual environment which was easily accessible to royal Mughal ladies too.

We witness that the reign period of Mughal dynasty is the era when Persian language, literature, arts & culture etc. developed magnificently & touched to its zenith in this period. Persian poetry was in such a widespread trend & vogue that Persian literature especially its poetry became the part of the royal 'Harem' and some of the royal ladies came to known as highly qualified Persian poets too who were involved in reading, writing and collecting books and patronizing the Persian poetry in India very earnestly. As we see that they were highly skilled and possessed an extensive high command on Persian even they were capable enough to play with words and composed Persian verse on spot within some seconds quickly like Gulbadan Begum, Noor Jahan & Zeibunnisa Begum etc.

They were the poetesses composing Persian verses as hobby in their spare time but nowhere, it was found that the class of their couplets was less than any other professionally paid Iranian poet belonged to Mughal court. This is also true that they were never promoted as poets and their works remained confined till 'Harem' and became the matter of the private gatherings and friend circles. Their intellectual contribution to arts and literature especially to Persian literature have never been less than any other male scholar of Persian. The association & attachment of royal Mughal queens and princesses with Persian literature especially with Persian poetry was the part of their daily life and also the major mean of entertainment but regrettably their roles and contribution to Persian poetry were never got the appropriate position so far.

Actually it was not encouraged to write on the women's affairs especially of royal Mughal women, so very less could get known about them. The matter of Mughal princesses' education, literary activities, intellectuality and their literary and educational gatherings etc. have always been the least discussed topics and didn't get specific attention. Ironically, their literary virtues were never got serious attention. The reason behind might be as of that time, it was very common practice in all the communities and also part of the social culture to keep all the affairs related to women covered and least discussed and if belonged to royal ladies, so lesser was discussed. It was not common practice and was not considered appropriate to discuss matters related to women in men's gathering. So, it was very common that the matter of women's education, literary activities, intellectuality and their literary and educational gatherings etc. were also remained covered and un-discussed. Also, it was not a common practice the poetry in which women expressed her feelings got place among men and became the point of discussion as this could reason of gossip and if this was the matter pertained to royal women used to get more sensitive, hence less discussed. As during that time life was not very materialistic and art practices like painting, singing, dancing, cooking, composing poetry, music were not matter to get publicized like present days while used to be considered very private matters of personal hobbies. It was considered very awful if got public especially if it belonged to royal women, the matter got more sensitive & lesser discussed. Hence, it was not generally encouraged to write on the women's affairs especially if pertained to royal Mughal women, so very less could get known about them but the indirect sources and historical references prove that their contribution was not less than the Mughal princes & the kings. It is proved that they were also highly qualified, well-educated and their personalities and achievements are really magnificent.

Another major reason might be that the couplets composed by the Mughal ladies were the parts of their personal diaries. Diary-writing was a very popular trend of that time and in diary, they used to express their emotions in verse forms and sometimes it was very personal too and it was also not customary trend the verse composed by a woman became the hot topic for others especially if she belonged to a royal family.

If we see that Babur's mother "*Qutluq Nigar Khanum*" & grandmother "*Aisan-Daykat*" were also very highly educated women of their period and they were the ones who seeded the trend of getting high education and achieve knowledge for women too. They also provided intellectual environment for Babur.

1. **Gul Badan Begum (1523-1603):** In the list of Mughal princesses, the very first name that appears is of Gul Badan Begum, daughter of Babur and Dildar Begum. She could be named the first lady of Mughal family who penned. Gul Badan Begum was highly educated of her time, got the hereditary excellence in arts and poetry. Gul Badan Begum was a noble & virtuous poet, used to compose in Turkish and Persian<sup>4</sup> but due to her very famous prose work "*Humayun Nama*" her poetic merits & dexterity in verse composition remained un-noticed and her this intellectual aspect did not get the proper attention of the researchers and scholars.

2. **Gulrukh Begum:** She was another daughter of Babur & Saleh Sultan Begum. She had high level interest literature and poetry and used to compose verse in Persian. Nawab Ali Hasan Khan, the author of "*Subah-e-Gulshan*" has provided the detail description about her Persian poetry. In some Tazkiras like "*Riyazzush Shura*", "*Makhzanul Gharaayab*" & "*Subah-e-Gulshan*".

3. **Salima Sultan Begum:** She was the daughter of Gulrukh Begum, married to Bairam Khan "*Khan-e-Khanan*" first and to King Akbar later. Salima was a very wise educated woman, King Akbar was also highly impressed by her wisdom, intellectual, high level of understanding and caring nature. She possessed diplomatic quality which she displayed when Prince Saleem revolted against his father.

Syed Sabahuddin Abdur Rahman, author of "*Bazm-e-Taimuriya*", narrates that Jahangir was very influenced by her intellectual & literary merits and when she died, he wrote a detailed note on her in "*Tuzuk-e-Jahangiri*".

Salima Begum had a special interest in collecting good books and maintained a very high level library<sup>5</sup> where some very rare and valuable books were placed and after got transferred to the royal libraries of Shah Jahan & Aurangzeb<sup>6</sup>.

4. **Maham Begum:** She was King Akbar's step-mother. She was highly educated lady and also had a special attention of education & knowledge; in this order she established a Madarasa named "*Khairul Namaz*" in Old Delhi but no remaining or ruin left today. The famous Indian Islamic scholar Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, in his book "*Asarus Sanadeed*", mentioned her intellectual attributes and contribution to education. Sir Sayyid has also tribute her composing some couplets on her contribution and service to Persian.

Her verse used to be of very religious and moral nature and she is seen to teach the morality and guide the generation through her verse<sup>7</sup>.

5. **Jaanaan Begum:** She was the daughter of Bairam Khan & sister of Abdur Rahim "*Khan-e-Khanan*". She was married to Akbar's son Daniyal and was very famous as beauty with brain. Jaanaan Begum was very talented, intelligent, wise and educated woman and used to patronage scholars and helped poor always. She like to accompany the gatherings of Persian poets. She was the poet of high level and her verses are to be of moral teaching, sufistic, spiritual and sometimes very complaining to destiny.

6. **Noor Jahan Begum (1577- 1645):** Noor Jahan did not belong to Timurid race but she was the one who ruled the Mughal dynasty<sup>8</sup>. She was actually a Persian lady married to one of Jahangir's commander Sheer Afgan and married to Jahangir after her husband died in war and thus became the queen of India. It is said that Jahangir was the one who got her husband Sher Afghan killed just to access Noor Jahan<sup>9</sup>.

Syed Sabahuddin says in his book "*Bazm-e-Taimuriya*" that Noor Jahan was famous for making instant couplets and there are numerous instances mentioned in the history books of her quality. It was called "*Baddiya Gooyi*"<sup>10</sup>. Further, he gave many instances of "*Baddiya Gooyi*" of her. Some of them are being quoted here.

Syed Sabahuddin Abdur Rahman had mentioned a very important point in his book and said that the author of "*Maasirul Umara*" has mentioned in the first volume of page no: 134 of his book that Noor Jahan used title "*Makhfi*"<sup>11</sup> and the interesting and noticing point is here that all the ladies who composed verse used the same title. This is a matter of further research.

**Mumtaaz Mahal (1593- 1631):** She was the beloved wife of King Shah Jahan and got the title "*Mumtaaz Mahal*". She was a very talented lady and achieved high education. She was a wise lady and had the quality of witty & prompt replying like Noor Jahan whose instance are found in the books written in that era.

**Jahan Ara Begum (1614- 1681):** She was the daughter of King Shah Jahan & Mumtaaz Mahal and was very famous for her wit, love for arts and her significant role in the contemporary politics.

She got her initial education from Sattiun Nisa Khanum, sister of famous Persian poet Talib Amuli. As Sattiun Nisa, herself, was a great scholar, a 'Hafiza' with expertise in music, medicine, linguistic and literature etc. so, she trained her enormously and transferred her all intelligence and attributes to her.

Jahan Ara was a very wise and intelligent, authored "*Monisul Arwaah*" in 1049 H. when she was 26 years only. The book is about Hazarat Moeenuddin Chishti and other great Islamic Sufi leaders of '*Silsila*' school of thought.

Jahan Ara Begum was a high quality scholar and poet of Persian. Syed Sabahuddin Abdur Rahman recalled her as a high quality poet and copied some of her Persian couplets from "*Monisul*"

*Arwaah* in "*Bazm-e-Taimuriya*". He said that "*Monisul Arwaah*" is the book in that her couplets could be found in good numbers.

Syed Sabahuddin Abdur Rahman mentioned a book "*Taarikh-e-Agra*" authored by "Munshi Sheel Chand" in Urdu language and has copied three beits of a Marsiya which was composed by Jahan Ara Begum at her father's death referred from the above mentioned book. She was buried in the compound of Nizamuddin Aulia in a very simple grave<sup>12</sup>.

7. **Zeibunissa Begum:** She was the first child of Aurangzeb & Dilras Banu Begum<sup>13</sup>. As per the Islamic tradition learnt Quran very first with full dexterity and came out as a "Hafiza". This caused the extreme happiness to her father and gifted her three thousand Asharafis. She learnt Arabic & Persian also very well and possessed a good command on them too.

Based on the reference of "*Makhzanul Gharayeb*", Syed Sabahuddin mentioned "*Zeibul Manshaa'at*", a rare book claimed to be written by her own comprising the collection of her writings and verses composed by her<sup>14, 15</sup>.

Zeibunissa was a high quality poet and possessed a '*Diwan*' too. She was a poet of Sufi nature and genre which is reflected in her verse too.

This is also a reality that other daughters of Aurangzeb were also highly qualified and were involved in the service of knowledge and education but their contribution didn't get as attention before Zeibunissa's fame and popularity.

8. **Badrin Nissa:** Based on the reference of the author of "*Maasir-e-Aalamgiri*", Syed Sabahuddin recalls Badrin Nissa<sup>16</sup> as another daughter of King Aurangzeb. He further says that she was also a 'Hafiza' like her sister Zeibunissa and learnt whole Quran by heart. It is said that she was very pious lady, inclined towards religious activities and had special interest in the Islamic studies.

9. **Zabdatun Nissa:** Syed Sabahuddin wrote about Zabdatun Nissa<sup>17</sup> with reference of the book "*Maasir-e-Aalamgiri*" that she was very educated and pious person and spent whole life in the service of education and religion but unfortunately very less is known about her.

10. **Zeenatun Nissa:** She was another daughter of King Aurangzeb and was highly educated and pious woman<sup>18</sup>. Author of "*Bazm-e-Taimuriya*" writes in the page no. 244 of his book merits of Aurangzeb's other daughters left faded and less discussed before the academic fame of Zeibunissa but the reality is Zeenatun Nissa was also the talented and educated like Zeibunissa. Syed Sabahuddin further says from the reference of the book "*Maasir-e-Aalamgiri*" that she also paid serious attention on the facilities provided by her father Aurangzeb for education and attained the high level of education and came out as an expertise of Islamic theology, literature, religious affairs and others.

## • CONCLUSION:

Finally, we reach to our conclusion that Mughal princesses were very high class poets and most of the times '*Harems*' were engaged in literary and academic activities and also from the historical books, we come to know that '*Harems*' were the centers of literary gatherings and serious academic discussions. The verse of famous Persian poets of India and Iran were recited and discussed always. Jahan Ara Begum was the one who used to spend her maximum time in her library set inside the '*Harem*'. Aurangzeb's daughter Zeibunissa Begum had her own library and an academy for research works inside the '*Harem*' known as "*Beitul Uloom*" and the books published from her academy had names compulsorily starting with "*Zeib*"<sup>19</sup> as a mark that the book belonged to Zeibunissa's academy. The literary congregations of '*Harem*' were always engaged in high level literary discussions and researches which were more serious and academic in nature than of male gatherings.

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- 2 Abu Dawood, *Book of Knowledge, Book No. 25*, Hadith No. 1631.
- 3 Gordon Jonson, ed. The New Cambridge History of India, vol. 1, *The Mughal Empire* by John F. Richards, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) p- 1.
- 4 Beveridge, "Introduction", *Humayun-Nama*, p- 76.

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- <sup>5</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, *The Empire of The Great Mughals History, Art and Culture* tr. Corinne Attwood (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 2005) p- 161.
- <sup>6</sup> S.C. Welch, *India, Art & Culture, 1300-1900 AD* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art & Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1985) p- 153.
- <sup>7</sup> Syed Sabahuddin Abdur Rahman, *Bazm-e-Taimuriya* (Azamgarh(Uttar Pradesh):Darul Musannafeen, Shibli Academy, 2009, ISBN: 978-93-80104-23-2) p- 228.
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid. p- 230.
- <sup>9</sup> Purshottam Nagesh Oak, *Bharat Mein Muslim Sultan, Part- II*, (New Delhi: Hindi Sahitya Sadan, 2011) p- 109.
- <sup>10</sup> It was the art of that time in which a person made one misra and another person has to complete the beit by making next misra instantly.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>13</sup> Dr. Taufiq Subahaani, *Nigaahi Be Tareekh-e-Adab-e-Farsi Dar Hind*(Tehran: Shoora-e-Gostaresh-e-Zaban-o-Adabiyat-e-Farsi, 1377, ISBN: 964-6371-42-6) p- 539.
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>15</sup> Syed Sabahuddin Abdur Rahman, *Bazm-e-Taimuriya* (Azamgarh, Uttar Pradesh): Darul Musannafeen, Shibli Academy, 2009, ISBN: 978-93-80104-23-2) p- 240.
- <sup>16</sup> Ibid. p- 245.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>18</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>19</sup> Syed Sabahuddin Abdur Rahman, *Bazm-e-Taimuriya* (Azamgarh, Uttar Pradesh:Darul Musannafeen, Shibli Academy, 2009, ISBN: 978-93-80104-23-2) p- 240.