



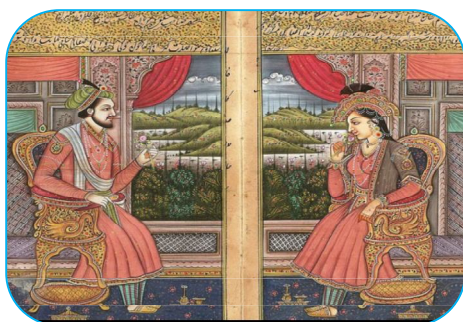
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## TWO TRAGIC LIVES REVISITED: KHUSRAU MIRZA AND LADLI BEGUM

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### ABSTRACT:

Mughal history is filled with references of many Kings and Queens, Princesses and Princes. However there are a few names that draw our attention not for their successes but failures. Their very names evoke sympathy and pity in the mind of the readers. One such figure was Khusrau, the eldest son of Jahangir and grandson of Akbar who had great Rajput Mughal general Man Singh as his uncle and Khan-i-Khana Aziz Koka for his Father-in-Law. The other was the daughter

of famous queen Nurjahan and step daughter of Mughal King Jahangir. Incidentally both boasted an illustrious lineage but were destined for miserable lives. Khusrau was very popular among the masses for his charming personality and pleasing manners. As a young prince he had shown all signs of future greatness and distinction. Than what brought about his fall ? His life that could have been an example of great success and achievement became the greatest example of a life gone wasted and perhaps wronged. On the other hand was Nurjahan's daughter from her first husband Sher Afghan, who widowed at a young age spent most of her life in exile with her mother. Through this paper an attempt has been made to look closely into the lives of these ill-fated individuals.

**KEYWORDS:** Mughal, King, Queen, Jahangir, Nurjahan, Sher Afghan, Exile.

### INTRODUCTION:

Looking into the life of Jahangir's eldest son Khusrau we come to know that fate had not been kind to this tragic figure both in life and even after death. He had an abnormal childhood as he felt neglected by his father Jahangir, who loved his step-brother Khurram dearly. While his Rajput mother Manbai suffered from neurosis and was addicted to wine and opium. Manbai's tragic death caused due to an overdose of

opium deprived Khusrau of parental love and affection. However love did come to him in the form of his chief wife, the daughter of Aziz Koka. It is worth mentioning that Khusrau refused his stepmother Nurjahan's proposal to marry her daughter Ladli Begum. Had he chosen to do so, he could have easily chosen a life of luxury and perhaps become the Emperor of India. However he refused that respecting the faithful affection and companionship of his wife. Memory of Ladli Begum who was the only child of Nurjahan remains obscured in the shadow of her more celebrated mother.

Often it is recorded that poor Ladli became pawn in the hands of her over ambitious mother. However, is that true? Or her mother was just trying to be over protective towards her only child?

### BIRTH & EARLY LIFE

Khusrau was the eldest son of Mughal Emperor Jahangir, born at Lahore on August 16, 1587.(Beveridge,2000) He was born to Manbai, the daughter of Raja Bhagwan Das, the Kachhwaha ruler of Amer. After Khusrau's birth, his mother Manbai had been given the title of Shah Begum. Khusrau's

favorite wife was the daughter of Mirza Aziz Koka, the Khan-i-Azam. Khusrau was dear to nobles and the general public due to his pleasing manners and amiable disposition during his early life. Ladli Begum was born in 1605 to Miherunnisa (later Nurjahan) and Ali Quli Istajlu, famously called Sher Afghan.(Sharma,1999).As fate would have it, Sher Afghan died in 1607 and Miherunnisa became Jahangir's wife in 1611.This event changed Ladli Begum's life forever.

### LATER LIFE: AS IT WAS MEANT TO BE

Around the time of Khusrau's birth the relations between his father Salim (Jahangir) and grandfather Akbar had become very troubled. Akbar even suspected his son of poisoning him for the sake of the throne in 1591 A.D. However with advancing age and failing health Akbar became desperate to find a worthy successor to the Mughal throne. While Salim's addiction and bad ways irked Akbar, two other possible claimants to the throne Murad and Daniyal died in quick succession. At this time Salim went into open rebellion establishing his independent court at Allahabad.(Eraly,1997)However due to timely intervention of Akbar's mother and other senior ladies of the harem peace was struck between Akbar and his rebel son. At the same time there were efforts at the court to replace Salim with his teenage son Khusrau. Prominent nobles like Raja Mansingh who was Khusrau's uncle and Aziz Koka who happened to be his Father-in-Law took his side. Amidst all this Khusrau's mother Manbai distressed due to animosity between her husband and son committed suicide in 1604 A.D. (Findly,1993)

It is believed that at this point even Akbar had given Khusrau's candidature a serious thought and an elephant fight was arranged on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1605 between elephants of Salim and Khusrau to settle the succession issue. However the fight led to a gruesome fight between the opposing parties. This incident caused great mental anguish to ailing Akbar. However before closing his eyes the third Mughal declared Salim as his successor. On his accession to the throne Jahangir forgave all the dissidents including Khusrau. However watch was kept over him. Urged by conspirators Khusrau rebelled shortly after Jahangir's coronation. On pretext of visiting his grandfather Akbar's tomb at Sikandra, Khusrau fled with a small bunch of men.(Majumdar,2007).During his flight he was blessed by Sikh Guru Arjun Dev. The imperial forces finally caught Khusrau and his men. Later he was blinded and sent to prison.(Srivastava,1952)

Khusrau's life seemed to have come a full circle, as a blind man could be no threat to the throne. However a lot more tragedy was still to unfold in the life of Jahangir's eldest son. Under Jahangir's orders Khusrau's sight was partially recovered. For the next fourteen years Khusrau remained imprisoned. During the Deccan campaign of 1620-21 Shahjahan asked for his elder brother's custody. Jahangir reluctantly gave in to Khurram's wish. Towards the end of 1621 Khusrau reportedly died of colic at Burhanpur.(Prasad,1922). Jahangir must have grieved over the death of his eldest son but he took no measures against Khurram.(Saxena,1968). In fact he attained status of saint as small memorials and shrines cropped up at various places. Khusrau's body was finally laid to rest in the garden of her mother Shah Begum's mausoleum. Thus the curtain came down on the life of one of the most tragic figures of Mughal history.

It is no secret that Nurjahan gained paramount ascendancy over her new husband's heart. She in fact became the de facto ruler. The famous Nurjahan Junta that comprised of her parents, brother and husband of her niece was the real political force from 1611-1622. However the things took a turn when Nurjahan's daughter Ladli Begum was married to one of Jahangir's sons Shaharyar. It is worth mentioning that before this marriage Nurjahan had tried to marry her daughter to Khurram and on his refusal to Khusrau. However owing to his unflinching devotion to his wife, Khusrau refused this proposal.(Valle,1892)It was at this time when the paths of these two ill fated stars of Mughal history briefly crossed each other. Had Khusrau married Ladli the course of history might have taken a different turn. Who knows if not Khurram but Khusrau would have become the next Emperor of Hindustan. However as fate would have it, after Khusrau's refusal Nurjahan had to settle for the not so competent Shaharyar as the husband of her daughter. After Jahangir's death in 1627 and Khurram

(Shahjahan's) accession Nurjahan's sway came to an end and she was pensioned-off to Lahore along with her daughter Ladli Begum who had also become a widow by now.(Nath,2005)

### Place in History: Remembering Khusrau and Ladli Begum:

Contest for power among Mughal brothers was not uncommon. Even a son rising in rebellion against his father found a precedent in Khusrau's father Jahangir who himself had revolted against his own father. However Akbar was more magnanimous in forgiving his rebel son. Luck too favored Salim as Akbar's other two sons had already died so he had no other option but to choose his only surviving son Salim as his successor. However when Khusrau revolted, Jahangir had another option in the form of Khurram. Hence Jahangir had the liberty of choosing while Akbar didn't. It is worth mentioning that a storm of emotions swept across the Mughal Empire on the death of prince Khusrau. In fact small memorials and shrines were built up on the spots where Khusrau's body had rested on its final journey to Khuldabad. However these shrines were destroyed by Jahangir.

Ladli Begum on her part lost her father early. When she came off age her mother tried to find a suitable match for her. In this quest she opted for two capable sons of Jahangir: Khurram and Khusrau. However both of them refused her proposal. This in turn would have negatively impacted the psyche of young Ladli Begum. Finally she was married off to the Nashudani Shaharyar who too died early leaving Ladli a widowed mother at twenty two. Ladli Begum and her mother Nurjahan spent their remaining lives in exile in Lahore.(Mukhia,2004)Ladli Begum survived her mother and after her death she was buried by the side of her grave.

### CONCLUSION:

Khusrau was a capable prince but his circumstances were unfavorable to him. It is a pity that the seeds of ambition were sown in his heart at an early age by his close relatives like his uncle Man Singh and Father-in-Law Aziz Koka. However he lost to his more powerful father. Had Khusrau accepted Nurjahan's offer of marriage with her daughter Ladli Begum, his fate could have been different. However he chose to be with his first wife. Khusrau has in fact set an example of conjugal fidelity, a rare trait in the polygamous Mughal household. As far as Ladli Begum is concerned it is hard to say that whether she was a victim of her cruel fate or that of her mother's swelling ambition. Nurjahan's attempts at marrying her daughter into the imperial family formed part of a doting mother's desire to secure the future prospects of her offspring. The real problem lies with her mother's larger than life image that obscured Ladli Begum's prospects. Her case seems a perfect example of those cases where the children of more successful parents are obliged to lead lesser known lives. Ladli Begum lies buried in the shadow of her celebrated mother just as she did all her life.

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