



Arts

CONTRIBUTION OF ROYAL MUGHAL LADIES IN THE FIELD OF ART AND ARCHITECTURE FROM 1526-1707 A.D: A BRIEF SURVEY

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Abstract

Indian woman since ancient days had played an important role in the socio-cultural and philosophical development of the country. Especially in Medieval India, the royal ladies of the Mughal court were almost as remarkable as their male counterparts. Royal Mughal ladies like Hamida Banu Begam, Haji Begam, Nurjahan Begam, Jahanara Begam, Roshanara Begam, Zeb-un-Nisa Begum etc. not only played a dominant role in contemporary politics but also contributed a lot to artistic field. The present article is an attempt to highlight the contribution of Royal Mughal ladies especially in Artistic field.

Keywords: Pietradura; Arches; Sarai; Mosque; Persian; Mausoleum.

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1. Introduction

Indian woman since ancient days played an important role in the socio-cultural and philosophical development of the country. Especially in the medieval India, the royal ladies of the Mughal dynasty were almost as remarkable as their male counterparts. Royal Mughal ladies like Gulbadan Begam, Nurjahan Begam, Mumtaz Mahal, Jahanara, Zebunisa etc. not only played a dominant role in contemporary politics but also contributed a lot to artistic field.

The Mughals were men of artistic inclinations. They were great builders, literati, musicians, Painters, dress designers and patronizers of almost all forms of Arts and crafts. The contribution of the Royal Mughal Ladies too, in the field of Art and Architecture, art of Decoration and Designing etc, is without doubt remarkable.

2. Architecture

During Mughal period, we do not find any building worth mentioning constructed by the Mughal women during Babur's or Humayun's time.¹ It is generally said that the first monument built under

the supervision of any Mughal lady in India was the Humayun's tomb in Delhi built by one of the Humayun's widows named Haji Begam² during the reign of Emperor Akbar. It is one of the first garden tombs built by the Mughals in India and in some ways provided the model of the later built Taj Mahal.³ The construction of the tomb began in 1560 A.D and was completed in 1571A.D. According to Percy Brown,⁴ " the Humayun's tomb is not only one of the most arresting examples of the building art in India but it is also an outstanding landmark in the development of the Mughal style." In structure and spirit the Humayun's tomb is an example of the synthesis of the Persian and the Indian building traditions. To Havell," it is a Persianized version of Shershah's tomb".⁵ Apart from this, Haji Begam also built a sarai called Arban Sarai in 1560 A.D, which had an accommodation of 300 people.

Nurjahan Begam, another prominent royal Mughal lady contributed a lot in the field of Art and Architecture. She designed and supervised three Sepulchral edifices.⁶ These are tombs of her father Itimad-ud-Daula, of her husband, and that of her own. The tomb of Itimad-ud-Daula at Agra took six years to get completed i.e. from 1622 to 1628 A.D. The tomb is situated on the left bank of the river Yamuna in Agra. It is also said the design of the tomb is intensely feminine.⁷ It is built entirely of white marble and covered throughout with inlay work called 'Pietradura'. Percy Brown speak highly of the monument when he says, "There is no building like it in the entire range of Mughal architecture, the delicacy of treatment and the chaste quality of its decoration placing it in a class by itself. The tomb of Itimad-ud-Daula was an innovation in many ways. It marked a transition between the Indianized red Sandstone and marble constructions of Akbar and Jahangir and the Persianized pure marble creations of Shahjahan."⁸

Nurjahan Begam also supervised the construction of Jahangir's tomb at Shahadara. It is situated six miles north-west of Lahore (Pakistan). The building is also made of red Sandstone with 'Pietradura' inlay work. Besides this, Nurjahan Begam also designed her own tomb in Lahore. The tomb is very simple and humble compared to the other rich and lofty buildings of this age. It was square in shape, one story with seven arches, opening out the corridors on each of the four sides. Apart from this Nurjahan also built one sarai in Jalandhar⁹ and another in Agra.

During 17th century daughters of Shahjahan, Jahanara and Roshanara like some of the royal Mughal ladies were actively involved in Art and Architectural field. Jahanara Begam supervised two famous Mosques, one in the Kashmir valley and another Mosque in Agra. Apart from this, Jahanara is also said to have constructed Carvan-Sarais (resting places for moving traders) and market places.¹⁰ She designed her Mausoleum too. Roshanara Begam, another daughter of Shahjahan too designed her own tomb along with its garden, situated in the North-western parts of Delhi. The Mausoleum is beautiful built in pure white marble with exquisite ornamentation on the exterior parts.

During Aurangzeb's reign, two of his daughters, the eldest Zeb-un-Nisa and the second Zinat-un-Nisa contributed a lot in the field of literature, Art and Architecture. Zeb-un-Nisa Begam built a number of gardens like the Char Burzi and Nawan Kot in Lahore, where she was finally buried. Her tomb was made of fine marble with a pinnacle of gold.¹¹ Aurangzeb's second daughter, Zinat-un-Nisa Begam also built a number of Caravan-Sarais. She also built a splendid Mosque in Delhi.

During Mughal Age, we also have some monuments that were inspired by the Mughal Emperor's love for his lady. The greatest monument ever built to commemorate the love an Emperor for his Empress is the Taj Mahal¹² at Agra-the finest monument of conjugal love in the world. It was built by Shahjahan for his beloved queen Mumtaz Mahal.

3. Mughal Gardens

The Mughal rulers and their ladies were just not satisfied with building beautiful monuments; but were also fond of laying exotic gardens. During Mughal age, some of the famous Mughal gardens were constructed in Kashmir, Lahore, Delhi, and in Allahabad.

It is important to note here that the royal Mughal ladies rights from the time of Babur have been actively taking part in laying gardens in different places and amidst beautiful surroundings.¹³

Especially Royal Mughal ladies like Haji Begam, Roshanara, Jahanara and Nurjahan Begam contributed a lot in this art.

4. Other Arts

The Mughal men and their ladies were interested and themselves engaged in a number of other forms of arts like the art of decoration and designing, music & Dance, cooking etc. Gulbadan Begam in her Humayun-nama¹⁴ speaks of several occasions when the royal ladies took upon themselves the task of looking into the decoration of their places, garden and surrounding areas. Maham Begam, wife of Babur took such initiatives many a times. Especially under the able hands of Nurjahan Begam textile, dress and jewellery designing reached great heights.¹⁵

Besides this, she encouraged classical music and dance. Nurjahan also introduced a number of specialty dishes in the Mughalai cuisine which are still found in standard cookbooks and finest restaurants.¹⁶ It is also observed by some modern historians that Nurjahan could paint well.¹⁷ She must have also influenced Jahangir's choice of paintings. Thus she contributed a lot in different Arts.

5. Conclusion

To sum up we can conclude that the Mughal age saw substantial development in the field of architecture and some other forms of art where the Royal Mughal ladies contributed considerably.

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