

# EXPANSION OF PERSIAN ART UNDER MUGHAL PRINCESSES

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## **Abstract**

**India is a great diversity in itself. It is not only one of the most ancient countries of the world but also the oldest continuous culture and civilization. Owing to this, India is loved by its indigenous people and by foreigners, migrants, rulers and invaders as well. Many of them made India as their home country and got influenced by the culture, tradition, food, dress and language of the people of India. However, they too, knowingly or unknowingly, influenced the people of India by their own tradition and hence contributed to the composite culture of India. This paper endeavors to analyze the role of Mughals, more particularly the princes, towards the propagation and promotion of Persian culture and literature.**

**Keyword: Diversity, culture, civilization, tradition, architecture, society.**

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

India is undoubtedly recognized as one of the important multicultural and multilingual countries of the world. The reason behind this can surely be the various kings or kingdoms that ruled India over some period of time. They all have contributed in one way or the other in enriching India's culture, but the way Mughals contributed towards the development of India's culture is worth appreciating. From the very beginning of the sixteenth century, Mughals started their imperialistic campaign against India. After various earlier attempts, Babar in 1526, succeeded in establishing the Mughal rule in India that continued for centuries. The period in India is not only famous for its rule but also for architecture, culture, education, economy, etc. The Mughal emperors especially the Mughal ladies have a great role in progressive movements. The Mughal

Harem were one among the front runners, who contributed a lot in many ways. These ladies, apart from establishing monuments and schools, also nurtured the society and promoted art and culture in the country. The princesses were educated and true patrons of art, culture and literature. There were a handful of ladies from the Royal Harem who had contributed in many ways in the promotion of Persian language. Among these, Babur's daughter i.e., Humayun's sister and Akbar's aunt, Gulbandan Begum was the first princess of the Mughal empire whose name can be written in golden words for the same. She was born in 1523 AD in Kabul. After receiving her early education at Kabul she got hitched up at the age of sixteen to Khizra Khan. After performing the Hajj pilgrimage, she spent her last days in Agra and died there in 1653 A.D. Akbar used to consult her on many political and administrative issues. She acquired education and had command over Persian and Arabic languages. She was patron of knowledge and used to encourage poets and writers. She was witness to the rise and fall of Babur and Humayun. She was a poet too and had *Diwan* to her credit but unfortunately it is lost now.

Gulbandan Begum started writing the events which occurred during the period of Babur and Humayun on the request of Akber. Her book "Humayun Nama" is based on the historical events. Most of the events mentioned in the book is having a great literary importance for being a great source of history for future scholars. This book is also considered as the only source of history about Humayun. In this book there is brief history of wanderings of Humayun after defeat at the hands of Sher Shah Suri.

The second famous princess was Jahan Ara. She was the eldest female child of Shah Jahan and Mumtaz Begum. She was born in 1614 AD in Ajmer. She learnt Quran and got a solid command over the language of Persian and Arabic. After the death of her mother in

1631 A.D., she had to go through a stiff period. Being the eldest daughter, she was supposed to embrace dual responsibilities- the social responsibility and the responsibility towards her father's kingdom. Her firm belief and strong will power help her in doing the both. When Aurangzeb revolted against his own father, Shah Jahan and put him under house arrest, she volunteered herself to accompany her father in the cell and served him there in his older days. Like many Mughal ladies, she too had a great taste of Politics. Moreover, she used to patronize poets, writers and historians and built some monuments and gardens. In 1648, she built a mosque in Agra at the expenditure of five lac rupees. She also built Madrasas and Buddhist monastery in Agra. For tourists, she built some night shelters in different cities. Last, but not the least, she further built a water reservoir in Delhi and a separate guest houses for foreigners, which came to be known as known as Begum Sarais. Unfortunately these Sarais were damaged in the revolution of 1857.

Jahan Ara shifted to Delhi after the death of her father. She died fourteen years after the death of Shah Jahan. As per wish she was buried near the tomb of Nizamuddin Aulia in Delhi. She had a close attachment with Sufism and wrote a book on the Sufis and saints of India named as "Monis\_ul\_Arwah" at the age of twenty six in 1640 AD. The book is on the lives and teachings of the Sufis like Moinuddin chisti, Nizamuddin Aulia, Shiekh Hamiduddin Nagori, Qutbuddin Kaki, Baba Farid Ganj Shekar etc. Like her brother Darashikoh, She was influenced with the philosophy of Sufism. Apart from being a prose writer she was also a poetess. She has recited some couplets in Monis\_ul\_Arwah and has praised the Almighty in her Hamd (couplets) and has also written Marsia on the death of her father.

Last but not the least to be mentioned here is Zebunnisa, who was the eldest daughter of the Aurangzeb; she was born in 1639 AD at Daulatabad Deccan. She learnt Quran and become Hafiz at the early age of seven; she had keen interest in Persian, Arabic, Mathematics, Astrology and music. She started written Persian poetry in early age and persuaded her father Aurangzeb to allow her to visit the whole country and Iran to select and invite the poets and scholars to form an academy, where writers, poets and scholars engaged in academic and literary activities. Many books got translated in this academy. The name of every book used to be started with "Zeb" Aurangzeb played an important role in establishing this academy. It was an exception

since he stopped patronizing the poets. In the court of Zebunnisa there was sometimes conduction of Mushairas in which many renowned poets of the period used to participate. She used to get four lacs rupees annually from her father, which she mostly used on the patronage of art, language and culture. She built a library where apart from collecting books calligraphers were employed to write the important and precious books. She died in 1701 AD in Delhi and was buried in Tees Hazari, Delhi. Although there is a controversy over the book Diwan\_e\_Makhfi twenty three years after her death and her book was introduced. Few scholars claimed that it was the book of a poet who comes from Khurasan during Shah Jahan's period. The first fifty Gazals of this book were translated into English by Jessie Duncan Westbrook throws light on the life and works of Zebunnisa. There are almost five thousand couplets in Dewan\_e\_Makhfi, which consists of Qasidas, Rubais, Hamd and Naat. In this book Gulbadan Begum has written the lives of the emperors and the situation of ruling period.

In this book she also focused on the lives, society and culture. Begum also gives good information about this period such as their education, day to day life, customs and tradition. According to Gulbandan Begum, women were expert in archery, polo and music. She says that women used to ride horses for travel and used to hunt and participate in the wars. They have also well dressed like men.

In the history of literature Mughal period is called the Golden period of Persian literature, because there was well developments in many fields. Gulbadan Begum informs that during the Mughal period people used handicrafts materials, silk and embroidery to decorate their houses. She says that the cities of Agra, Gawlior, Skier, Lahore and Benares were very famous and the prices in the markets were cheaper. The Mughal princess also visits to these cities. When Sher Shah defeated the Humayun, he left along with his family and took shelter in Iran. The ruler of Iran Shah Tamasap helped him a lot. In conversation with Shah Tamasap referred India as bigger and better than India. He stressed that Indian goods were better than those of Iranians. In this book Gulbadan Begum gives information about the Indian market, and also informs how much foreigners used the Indian goods in their own houses for the purpose of decoration. She also informs that it was not only Indian

art that was prevalent in India only, the European art also made significant presence.

Like many of their male counterparts the princess of the Mughal harem also had deep faith in Sufism. Jahan Ara not only had the faith but also wrote a book on the lives and teachings of the famous Sufis of India, named as *Monis\_ul\_Arwah*. In fact this book reveals her faith on Sufism, About the famous city Ajmer Jahanara says that "Aja" was the name of a king who had his territory till Ghaznin and it also means the "sun" and the meaning for "mer" is mountain in Hindi language, She says that the first wall on any mountain in India was built on the mountains of Ajmer and the first water reservoir was built in Pushkar near Ajmer.

Zebunnisa had too faith with Sufism. She was very much influenced by her uncle, Dara Shikoh, who was a great scholar, writer and a secular prince. He wrote a book "*Majma\_ul\_Bahrain*. In which hatred to synthesize the philosophies of Hinduism and Islam, one can find the same philosophy prevalent in the poetry of Zebunnisa. She wanted that type of society where people lived in peace, harmony and without any discrimination. She used the pen name as "makhfi" the hidden one. She did not see any difference between the religions. She told that all religions are equal, they have same purpose, but paths are different. She was the daughter of the emperor but she was very simple because of her faith in Sufism.

In spite of the fact that they lived in Harem but the voices of the Mughal ladies were not restricted to the walls of the fort. They were in veil but their services to the society were hidden. Finally they played a very important role in many fields and contributed to the formation of society where everyone was equal and united with one another. The ladies of the Mughal harem through their writings urge the people not to fight each other on petty religious issues and to live in peace and harmony.

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