

## **The Self Igniting Womanhood of Mughal Empire: A Feministic Study of the Female Counterparts of Mughal Emperors concerning Indu Sundaresan's The Taj Mahal Trilogy**

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### **Abstract**

Historical facts demonstrate a solid and unbeatable female counterpart for the Mughal emperors. However, they are not fully unveiled and brought to the limelight. This demands a reassessment of the Mughal period, especially along the lines of gender. Reclaiming and reconstructing these powerful women's not yet sufficiently visible existence is difficult due to the history of a male-dominated Mughal dynasty. However, the attempt is rewarding as it offers an opportunity to perpetuate their legitimate place in literary history. The study proposes to go about the project by observing and gathering detailed insight into India's life and the Times during the 15th-century Mughal rule. The study will thus turn out to be an exploratory attempt to recreate the ways in which the legendary women of the Mughal India handled and controlled the imperial powers from behind the screen to shape a powerful kingdom.

**Keywords:** Patronize, Historiography, Stereotype, Calligraphy, Harem, Oriental.

### **1. Introduction**

At a given time, nearly half of its members are women in any society. That is why the social thinkers think that unless the life of women in the society is of a progressive and ideal nature, the progress of the society on proper lines will not take place. The ancient Indian social thinkers were also of the same view. As a result, they held a noble and respectful view of the women in their society.

Women in India played a significant role in the country's social, political, and economic development. During the medieval period, women especially made remarkable contributions to their male counterparts. Earlier studies analyzed the socio-economic condition of women to which significant contributions have been made so far. The medieval society observed the change in the way Indian society positioned women. Mughals, both men, and women, contributed notable developments. They were great builders, artists, musicians, designers, painters, and patronizers. Thus, Mughals came from an elevated artistic background. Mughal age thus witnessed glorious achievements from the end of emperors, princes, and princesses. Even the royal ladies of the Mughal dynasty were

remarkably standing equal to their men. Gulbadan Begum, Gulrukh Begam, Nur Jahan, Mumtaz Mahal, Jahanara, and Zebunisa are some of the outstanding political and artistic figures who contributed to the development of society.

The current study mainly focuses on the female Mughal women characters, and with the help of feminist historiography, it tries to reread the history from a female perspective. These highly educated, intelligent, and intellectual women added flavors to the social, cultural, literary, artistic, and economic fields. Besides, they proved their dominant role in politics. It is traced down that these women played an influential role in shaping the whole Mughal Dynasty.

Moreover, the study attempts to bring the powerful Empresses to the limelight that stand as the strong pillars of feminist thought. The study will light the power of female characters that broke the existing stereotypes. The exact need for the research is to elaborate on the political power of the female, especially during the Mughal Rule.

## 2. Aims and Objectives

The objective of the current study is to investigate, identify and explore the contributions of the Mughal ladies, especially Nur Jahan, Jahanara, and Roshanara. The paper attempts to perform a detailed character analysis of Nur Jahan, Jahanara, and Roshanara. The relationship between power and women of the Mughal Dynasty will be reviewed. Also, the

feminist theories explaining the power will be addressed. The role of influential female icons is highlighted in the study. It will also focus on the caste system that determines freedom rights, particularly in Indu Sundaresan's *The Taj Mahal Trilogy*. It will also discuss women's rights in the Mughal Period, how women were treated compared to the previous Mughal Period, and how women were breaking the stereotypes. Therefore, the study mainly revolves around the selected female characters and how they shaped society during Mughal times.

## 3. Literature Review

Anurag (2012) opined that women of the Mughal Dynasty made a remarkable contribution to the fields like art, architecture, design, and others. The Mughals came from the background of several cultural, intellectual, artistic, and literary achievements. Mughal emperors themselves excelled in artistic and cultural accomplishments. They were titled multi-talents. Thereby, the men gave liberty to the women despite the religious norms and seclusions of *Purdah*. This freedom gave them enough time and space to pen down the great literary works. Women utilized the time and produced excellent works of art. While some ladies utilized their time for cultural and literary activities, others were involved in music, dancing, and other skills (Iftikhar 2010).

During the Mughal age, the daughters of the empresses took the place of high honor, although girls' babies were less welcomed than that of a boy. Mughal emperors loved their daughters very much.

Moreover, the girls were provided with the best education career and helped them cultivate inner talents. Women during the Mughal era enjoyed freedom, where they occupied the most critical position in society. Even if the women are childless, they are provided with the freedom of adoption. Girls, like boys, received access to education in Maktabas. When it comes to higher education, women belonging to the upper castes had ample opportunities to obtain proper training (Iftikhar 2010). Various subjects like Persian and Arabic Literature, Elementary Arithmetic, Theology, History, Astronomy, and Mathematics were taught in the Maktabas. Moreover, they earned proficiency in medicine, law, and even the art of calligraphy. The art of administration was also equally important for the ladies to maintain the tensions of household activities.

Nurjahan Begum is one of the most prominent Mughal Lady to contribute to art and architecture. The upper-class Mughal ladies were highly educated and flourished in writing, reading, and composing verses. She is known for designing the tomb of her father, Etimad-ud-Daula, her husband, Jahangir, and the course of her grave. In short, she is a lady of an aesthetic sense. Born into the upper caste Mughal family, her parents provided her with a quality education. Being an intellectual and intelligent lady, she is ultimately fond of all the music, painting, and poetry (Anurag, 2010).

From the above lines, the real power of women can be understood. It can be

concluded that Nurjahan carried solid administrative skills during the rule of the Mughals. Again in the seventeenth century, the two daughters of Shahjahan and Mumtaz, Jahanara and Roshanara, just like Nurjahan, actively participated in art and architecture. It is a widely known fact that Jahanara Begum supervised two famous Mosques in Kashmir and Agra. Jahanara also constructed caravan-serais and Market places. Roshanara Begum, sister of Jahanara Begum, also built her tomb situated in Delhi. In addition, these strong will-powered ladies also contributed to the classic cookbooks. Therefore, although they faced suppression, these royal Mughal ladies came up with exceptional talents. Thus, it can be argued that Muslim women in pre-modern India tried breaking the stereotypes.

### 3.1 Theories of Feminism

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy defines feminism as a movement that fights for women's socio-economic and political rights. It seeks justice for women and is defined in many different ways. To some, feminism refers to the political movement in the United States and Europe: to some others, it relates to the belief that women are not treated equally. Later in the 1800s, feminism referred to the qualities of the female. Although feminism in English is rooted in the woman, the late nineteenth and early twentieth century saw the efforts to obtain justice for women.

Feminism is a complex set of ideologies, theories, movements, and

actions that promotes changes in the social structure. Both modern and traditional social structures constructed that men take the superior hand in all the cultural, political, and economic decisions. The central assumption of feminism is that women are not treated equally to men and have been oppressed in sexuality (Lewis, 2018). In short, feminism seeks to achieve equal treatment of men and women, although they play different roles.

It manifests in various disciplines such as feminist geography, feminist history, and feminist literary criticism. Feminism can be further divided into post-feminism, French feminism, Social and Marxist feminism, Radical, Liberal, Black, and Post-colonial or Third-world Feminism.

The current study will analyze the women selected for the study in the eyes of Liberal Feminist theory. To radical feminists, women are capable of asserting their ability to achieve equality in society. They claim that the existing notions of the patriarchal structure can be changed without altering the social structure.

Delving into her reign, it can be argued that she was a good administrator, an excellent political astute, and a champion of women's rights. She is known for initiating marriages with her companions, transforming herself into a female icon. At the same time, she offered choices to the underprivileged and thus was labeled a feminist during the Mughal period, says Lal (2018). Apart from this, Nurjahan is known for her poetry, clothing,

building, and gardening. Therefore, Nur Jahan is the woman of the 15th century who broke all the rules, empowered women, and reigned sovereign.

Nur Jahan possessed leadership qualities and proved herself as an efficient and eminent woman ruler. A few days after her marriage, she released the order to protect the land rights of an employee who was being exploited. She dared to voice the problems faced by the underprivileged. Moreover, this is why she is seen as a true leader. Moreover, the history recorded that she led an army to protect an emperor who got captivated. A liberal woman of thought, Nur was the first woman to defy the purdah system, which the patriarchal social structure considered mandatory (Dailyhunt, 2015). Therefore, history records Nur Jahan as the true feminist icon, who broke all the rules, empowered the other women of her age and ruled the kingdom.

### **3.2 Power of Women in the Mughal Period**

In an article titled, "*Position of Women during the Mughal Period*," Aggarwal compares Hindu and Muslim women and how they are treated, especially during the Mughal period. The article says that Hindu women enjoyed more respect in terms of status. The families provided them with access to good education and literary fame. Still, society treated women worse and made them suffer all social evils. While Muslim women, on the other hand, had to live with the religious constraints laid down by the Islamic law and the patriarchal structure as well. Living under restrictions,

women painted, wrote, read, sewed, participated in female rites, and even rode horses wearing the hijab. The birth of the girls was welcomed less when compared with the boys.

Even the Quran advised gender equality, but they recommended a hijab for the genders when they had to communicate.

Moreover, women from the upper-class Mughal family had more options than lower caste women. The fathers allowed their daughters to secure an education. In other words, higher education was only provided to upper caste women. At the same time, the ladies of the poor class had the opportunity to be involved in domestic and farm work. They spent time with children and hardly found leisure for intellectual pursuits (Ramanathan 10).

In Akbar's household, establishment women employees were divided into two grades. Those in grade I received a monthly stipend ranging from rs.20 to 51, and those in grade II, from rs. 2 to 40. The lowest wage for unskilled woman servants was rs.1.5 a month; the women employed in the imperial Harem appear to have been much better paid. (Moosvi 2008)

During the Mughal period, women enjoyed a position of great respect. There are many instances of women acting as mediators in resolving essential disputes. For example, it is well known that the differences between Akbar and his rebel son Jahangir were patched up through the intervention of Salima Begum. She strengthened the bond between them:

"Yet, you must not think he does not love you, has little affection for you. In some ways,

He was still a child, easily led by his supporters, unthinking of consequences. I cannot believe he wished for your death.

Similarly, Sha Jahan pardoned Aurangzeb and restored him the dignities and emoluments at the instance of his daughter Jahanara.(Raychoudhry 255)

### **3.2.1 The Matriarchal King Makers**

Babur established the Mughal Empire, defeating Ibrahim Lodi. The Mughal Dynasty produced more and more capable leaders who formed political unity. It is a known fact that the administration of Babur ran with ultimate peace and prosperity within the empire. No trace of matriarchy was found in Asia. However, then, it freed the women from enjoying their public life. Babur was born to a mother whose lineage went directly to the Mongol ruler Chengiz khan, and from his father's side, his descent went to Amir Timur, the Turk. Therefore, from both the parental sides, Central Asian blood runs in the veins of Babur. In addition to Asian Daulat Ahmed, since childhood, with a high interest in participating in politics, she guided her grandson in a time of crisis. She used to make immediate decisions, and Babur always used to seek advice from her. The actual power of administration lay in the hands of Daulat (Mukherjee, 2001).

### **3.2.3 Petticoat Government**

Maham Anga is the chief nurse of Akbar, who is considered a brilliant and ambitious woman. Besides, she is known to be a political advisor. After the demise of Bairam Khan, the Mughal Empire came under the spell of Maham Anaga, who became supreme after that. Petticoat government is the rule of the women, be it in politics or domestic. The petticoat government of Anga turned to triumph, and she also influenced her son towards commands. She instilled her pride and loyalty in her son, which helped her succeed.

### **3.3 Royal Ladies of the Mughal Empire**

Empress Nur Jahan, the most influential woman of the seventeenth century, exercised her powers in running the Mughal Empire. She possessed an excellent capability of ruling the Dynasty diversely. Many other royal ladies patronized music, art, architecture, and politics other than Nur Jahan. Nur Jahan is believed to have unlimited powers in her hands. It is traced that she is the woman with extraordinary, fascinating powers to rule the Dynasty. Thus, Nur Jahan is known to be a remarkable leader in this male-dominated society. Domesticity is the conscious process of cultivating affection in the family (Brown, 1982). This new system emphasized the role of women, providing new ideas of femininity. It analyses the role of women within the home, assuming a woman to be the center of the family or the light of the house. All the royal ladies, although notable figures, maintained their family lives successfully. Even the films set in the Mughal dynasty center around the significant women figures trying and

managing both familial and political life. The three films, Jahanara, Taj Mahal, an eternal love story, and Mehboob Khan's Humayun, portrayed the undying love between husband and wife, were in women characters, although meek and tedious, had strong willpower.

#### ***3.3.1 Nur Jahan: the Asian empress in disguise***

The most prominent female personality of the Mughal Dynasty is Nur Jahan, the last wife of Jahangir. Also named Mehr-Un-Nisa is the daughter of a Persian noble and thus carried responsibility in the Mughal administration.

In 1611 Jahangir met, wooed, and married the young widow of a Mughal officer slain in Bengal. Mehrunnissa, serving in the entourage of one of Akbar's widows, was a classic Persian beauty, thirty years of age. Her father, Imad-up-Beulah, was a high-ranking nobleman at Jahangir's court. The new queen rapidly became Jahangir's favored wife (from among a total of twenty) under the title Nur Jahan or "Light of the World." Nur Jahan's beauty, her great love for the Emperor, her strong personality, and her abilities which ranged from fashion design to hunting, gave her unusual influence over Jahangir. She had an inventive brain and devised new dresses, ornaments, and styles of fashion and decoration. At the time of her marriage to Jahangir, she prepared a gorgeous dress called Nurmahli, which remained popular among the women of Harem for many years to come. (Mullick 2011). Her father became the imperial diwan or the chief minister. Her brother, Asaf Khan, rose quickly to

become one of the leading noblemen in court.

Nur Jahan formed an alliance with Jhangir's second son, Khurram, who, as heir-apparent, held the jagir of Hissar pargana in the Punjab and the right to pitch crimson tents. In 1612 Khurram married Arjumand Banu, later Mumtaz Mahal, the daughter of Asaf Khan. After this marriage, the alliance was sealed, celebrated by the prince and Asaf Khan with ostentatious splendor

These four persons-Nur, Jahan, her father, Imad-and-Beulah, her brother, Asaf Khan, and Khurram, the Timurid prince-exerted enormous influence over Jahangir. Imperial rescripts were sometimes issued in Nur Jahan's name. (Richards 1993) Most startling, however, are the silver rupees minted bearing Jahangir's titles on the obverse and the legend "struck in the name of Queen Begum, Nur Jahan" on the reverse. (Wright 1975) Adding her name to his coins, Jahangir publically proclaimed Nur Jahan's sharing of his authority as a prerogative central to Islamic kingship. For over a decade, between 1611 and 1622, Jahangir relied heavily upon advice from Nur Jahan and her colleagues. Nur Jahan had extraordinary powers like issuing imperial orders, painting, and coins minted in her name and therefore became the ruler of the Mughal dynasty (Mukherjee, 2001). It is known that all the offices never went beyond the words of Nur Jahan; instead, they exhibited favoritism.

Nur Jahan's wise and prudent actions shaped the Dynasty at crucial

points. Jahangir's health deteriorated to the point that Nur Jahan took active charge of the empire's day-to-day running. Tensions between Nur Jahan and Khurram rose as the prince looked forward eagerly to his patrimony and acted more and more like a ruling sovereign. In response, in 1620, Nur Jahan arranged a marriage between Shahryar, Jahangir's youngest son, aged sixteen, with her daughter Ladili Begum. This marriage brought about a difference in power politics. She would then have a living male heir to the throne under her control when her husband died. The rupture between Nur Jahan and Khurram was complete. This bold action established three royal princes- Khurram, Khusrau, and Shahryar- as contenders for the throne. (Richards 1993). It is one of the best examples of her practical wisdom.

Apart from this, she tried to be the best daughter, wife, and mother to her family. She relieved Jahangir of much of the drudgery of state administration and care and anxiety, which must always accompany all rulers and administrators. She successfully enhanced the splendor of the Mughal court and ably seconded the efforts of her husband in patronizing learning and arts. She distributed a great deal of charity and extended protection and patronage to women in more than one respect. Thus her influence over Jahangir was good and benefited primarily the poor and the needy, and the votaries of letters and arts. (Srivastava 1970)

Nur Jahan possessed a strong and virile intellect and could understand the

most intricate political problems without any difficulty. No political and diplomatic complication was beyond her comprehension, and the most extraordinary politicians and ministers bowed to her decisions. She was fond of poetry and wrote verses that are still admired. She was a genuine lover of beauty and did much to increase the splendor and glory of the Mughal court. She set the fashions of the age, designed new silk and cotton fabrics varieties, and suggested new models of jewelry hitherto unknown in Hindustan.

Nur Jahan broke all the chains of restrictions put on her by the patriarchal society. When Jehangir asks her about her wish, she expresses her desire to be outside the walls of the zenana. "I wish to come with you to the jharokha tomorrow" (TFR 9). This was an unexpected statement to the Emperor, a wish that no Mughal empress had asked for. She added further:

"I want to be with you on the balcony, standing in front of the nobles and commoners." (TFR 9-10).

Simon de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* puts it:

"She is, of course, excluded from public affairs and prohibited from any 'masculine office'; she is a perpetual minor in civil life." (Beauvoir 102).

She possessed considerable physical strength and courage and went out on hunting tours with her husband. On more than one occasion, she shot ferocious tigers, and Jahangir was so pleased by her feats of valor that he gave her a bracelet of diamonds worth 100000 rupees and

distributed 1000 shares among his servants and poor to mark his pleasure.

Alexander Dow exalts Nur Jahan in his work *The History of Hindustan* as a woman with great charm and strength.

"Her abilities were uncommon; for she rendered herself absolute, in a government in which women are thought incapable of bearing any part....Noor Jahan stood forth in public; she broke through all restraint and custom, acquired power by her address, more than by the weakness of Jahangir". (qt. in TFR 131).

Nur Jahan is an actual embodiment of a contemporary woman who defies all the laws of patriarchal society. Simon de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* says that:

"Society has always been male; political power has always been in men's hands. Political authority, or simply social authority, always belongs to men." (82)

Nur Jahan fights to acquire that power and becomes a fountain of inspiration to the whole women folk.

Nur Jahan was interested in the affairs of the court, and she got involved in every aspect of it with extreme keenness.

"Mehrunnisa sat behind him in the zenana balcony, watching as the Emperor died with the day's business. Sometimes, she almost spoke aloud when a thought occurred to her. When an idea came, she stopped, knowing that the screen put her in a different place. That it made her a woman.



One without a voice, void of opinion".  
(*TFR* 6)

Many courtiers became infuriated by a woman's presence on the balcony with the Emperor. Mahalath Khan and Muhammad Sharif were some of them. They could not even imagine a woman being there to be with the Emperor.

"Mahabath's flare of wrath at her, as though he could see through and beyond the cover of her veil, proved this." (*TFR* 14)

Men never accept the power of women. When women take charge of a position, they feel inferior. They always assign her a place on the four walls of the house. In *The Last Spring; The Lives and Times of Great Mughals*, Abraham Early makes it clear:

"But there was one fatal flaw in her. She was a woman...And in the prejudice of the age, women had no public role, and ambition was the prerogative of men"(qtd. in *TFR* 22).

The conversation between Mahabath Khan and Muhammad Sharif is indicative of their hatred and the value they have given to a woman. According to them, she is negligible.

"A woman? Cause for concern? Surely you jest, Mahabath."  
"You saw what happened in the morning's jharokha? She stood in front of us, brazenly like a woman of the streets. You saw this, and you do not think we need to worry?"(*TFR* 25)

Men think of women as merely suitable for caring for their children and perfectly doing their household duties.

Nur Jahan emerges to be so privileged at the court. Over time she proved to be more efficient than Jahangir. Simon De Beauvoir in the *Second Sex* writes:

In certain privileged cases, a wife can succeed in becoming a natural companion for her husband: she discusses his plans, gives him advice, and participate in his work. However, she is deluding herself if she thinks she can accomplish work of her own like that: she alone remains the active and responsible freedom. To find joy in serving him, she must love him: if not, she will experience only vexation because she will feel frustrated by the fruit of her efforts. (525)

Indu Sundaresan, in her novel *The Feast of Roses*, rightly unveils the free and feminist mind of Nur Jahan:

"All her life, she had wanted the life of a man, with the freedom to go where she wished, to do what she wanted, to say what came to her mind without worry for consequences." (6-7)

These words are enough for us to portray her as the supreme incarnation of a feminist icon.

### **Power from Behind the Veil**

One of the immediate impacts of the Muslim rule in India was introducing the purdah system. It may be noted that the system of Purdah was more prevalent among the high-class families of both the Hindu and Muslim communities rather than the lower-class families. According to certain scholars, the purdah system was prevalent in India even before the arrival of the Muslims. The ancient system of ghongat was nothing but a kind of Purdah. The chief reason for the adoption of pariahs by the Hindus was that they wanted to protect their beautiful young girls and women from the ill-designs of wealthy nobles(Raychoudhry 253)

Nur Jahan was a great ruler though she exerted her power behind the veil.

"Nur Jahan watched the men below, knowing no one could see her face. This life of hers from behind the veil had

its advantages. Her hands were cold. It was the first time a woman from the imperial Harem had appeared in public. Veiled from view, but boldly present". ( TFR 13)

In *The Feast of Roses*, the pariah seems to be connected with the concept of *izzat*, sexuality, and morality. Pardah in the novel not only refers to the veil but also to the local spheres where women were not allowed. Nur Jahan, in this particular situation, especially during her visit to the jharokha, uses the veil as a weapon against them. (Lalotra 830)

In Indu Sundaresan's novel "The Feast of Roses," Nur Jahan emerges as a typical modern feminist figure who realizes the need for women's financial independence. Her position in the court asserts her supremacy over the male oppressors.

### **3.3.2 Mughal Women Synonymous with Richness and Wealth**

History provided us with details of money and wealth acquired by Mughal noblewomen. These women of the early colonial period in India were singularly wealthy. Unlike the other Indian women at this time, women at the Mughal court could not only own the property outright but had numerous channels through which they could acquire and manipulate large quantities of income. A lavish lifestyle at

court, with its obligatory practice of gift giving, provided numerous ways for Mughal women to amass their wealth. First, they were given regular monthly allowances and maintenance grants which could be supplemented whenever their high personal expenditure warranted. Second, on special occasions such as birthdays, military victories, and hunting expeditions, Mughal women received presents from the Emperor or other well-placed courtiers. They wanted to express their pleasure or bestow a simple favor. Gifts included cash, jewels, costly dresses, perfumes, elephants, and armed cavalry troops, but could be confiscated, no matter where they were from, whenever the beneficiary annoyed the Emperor.

Often gifts arrived from European travelers and merchants at the court, who came either to convert or establish trading agreements with the Indians. They gave these gifts to buy influence in the chambers where they rightly thought the real power lay. Third, women could inherit the wealth of a family member or fellow courtier under the imperial practice of confiscating a dead man's property and bestowing it upon whoever fell into the Emperor's favor. The best-known example of a woman recipient was Jhangir's gift in 1622 to his favorite queen Nur Jahan of her father's enormous estate. This gift completely bypassed the expected beneficiary, her brother Asaf Khan, one of the highest ministers of the court and an exceedingly vengeful man, as the later life of Nur Jahan testifies.

### **3.3.3 Roshanara and Jahanara: Beloved daughters of Shahjahan**

On the other hand, Jahanara Begum and Roshanara Begum are the two daughters of Shahjahan. Jahanara, the adorer of the world, influenced her father to take up State affairs by instilling confidence. So she was a woman of great enthusiasm. Being behind the veil and her father's Harem walls, Jahanara exerted power (Revathi and Selvalakshmi, 2017).

In 1631, Sha Jahan's beloved wife, Mumtaz Mahal, died of her fourteenth child birth. He depended on her in all matters, including war and politics. With the death of Mumtaz, Emperor Shah Jahan loses interest in everything, and his sons conspire and scheme to gain control over the empire. Jahanara, Shah Jahan's most beloved daughter, is only seventeen when the burden of power is thrust upon her. She sacrifices her own life and dreams for the sake of her father. Sha Jahan depends upon her so much that he refuses her to be away from him. Jahanara rises to the power of an empress. She controls the revenue, business, and major ports, which is unusual at that time. She shares some of the characters of her great-aunt Nur Jahan. While Nur Jahan mentally controlled Emperor Jahangir, Jahanara became a soothing medicine for Emperor Shah Jahan's agony. Jahanara is a revered Indian icon today, a woman who had considerable powers in a time when royal women were scheduled and not allowed many liberties. (Vijayan 2018)

Jahanara remained unmarried till the end of her life and dedicated herself to her family and kingdom.

“No Mughal daughter of the Emperor is allowed to marry. None of your aunts married, and none of their aunts married. You and your sisters have been damned to a celibate existence, while your brothers will enjoy harems of 300 women each”. (Gupta 2014)

While Roshanara was called a woman of extraordinary genius and vivacity, she had political inclinations towards Aurangzeb and always helped him out during the crisis. Unlike her sister Jahagara, she had no courage to face the mishaps. While Jahangara is considered a saint, noble, and virtuous, she is also said to be a believer in virtuousness (Mukherjee, 2001).

### **3.4 Political and Architectural Contributions of Royal ladies**

Women constructed the most prominent buildings and monuments during the Mughal empire. The first monument has been built under the supervision of the lady was the Humayun's tomb in Delhi. Later other royal ladies like Nurjahan Begum, Daughters of Shahjahan Jahanara, and Roshanara were crucially involved in the architecture field. They built and supervised tombs and mosques in Delhi and other parts of India.

Nur Jahan constructed her father's tomb in a garden along the bank of Jamuna in Agra. Completed six years later, the elegant mausoleum, built of white marble

with rich inlaid colored traceries, became one of the architectural treasures of the Mughal period (Richards, 1993). She also constructed a library that consisted of many meritorious works. (Mullick 2011). These women also constructed Mughal gardens. To conclude, the Mughal age saw substantial development in architecture.

Politically these women expressed great strength, willpower, and confidence. Nur Jahan leaves her marks in the field of politics irrespective of the restrictions of patriarchy in medieval India. Nur Jahan not only participates in political affairs but also commands over her male sovereigns. For sixteen long years, Nur Jahan wields tremendous influence over her husband, Emperor Jahangir. She advises him on the critical matters of the court, and she sits beside the king to issue the farmers. (Lalotra 2017).

In old Delhi, Chandni Chowk's town was designed and developed by Emperor Shah Jahan's beloved daughter Jahanara Begum. She also designed a wonderful garden adjacent to it. It is regarded as the monument of Mughal grandeur and architectural elegance.

Shah Jahan's daughters advised him to take up the state matters. Jahanara asks her brothers to stand by their father Shah Jahan and succeeds in preventing political disasters. And Nur Jahan was a great political leader, the first person to think from a different outlook. Thus, these royal women break the traditional notion of being feminine. They stand as examples of

breaking the stereotypes which the patriarchal social structure laid down.

### 3.5 Royal Ladies as Great Traders.

Mughal empresses have proven that trade and commerce were not the sole monopolies of men; they vigorously engaged in trading and commercial aspects of the Dynasty and paved the way for its prosperity and richness. Historical accounts of the Mughal period give us mainly three names who consistently engaged in inland and overseas trade.

Nur Jahan's activities are the most well documented of the three women usually mentioned. She collected duties at Sikandarabad on goods as they came from Bhutan and Bengal; she granted special favors to the British, hoping that they might help send her goods on British ships to ports outside India; she traded with Portuguese merchants of Daman and Diu despite their practices, because they could acquire rare objects from more easterly countries; she encouraged the indigo and embroidered cloth trade in particular, with whomever it might be; and she oversaw the actual transport of goods either in her fleet of ships or in those she hired from some other owner. (Bhargava 2010).

Nur Jahan possessed a vast number of ships that sailed on the sea. She was bold enough to trade with the West and made commands over them whenever it was needed. In *The Feast of Roses*, there is an instance of her valiant decision-making when she learned about the disobedience of the Portuguese to the royal orders: "She

needed to make a decision, needed not to feel helpless against these men." (TFR 241)

Nur Jahan emerges to be an enormously powerful empress.

"She used her seal rarely, but in this case, she wanted the Viceroy to know that this was on *her* orders. She would play no more games of diplomacy with him, that if he wanted to keep his head in India, it should be bowed towards her. Next to Jahangir's name, Mehrunnisa wrote with an unwavering hand, " Nur Jahan, Queen Begum" (TFR 242)

Nur Jahan's tradition of trading was later maintained by Nur Jahan's step-grand daughter Jahanara, the accomplished and favorite daughter of Sha Jahan and the most liberally financed among the women of his Harem. Perhaps because of her position in court, Jahanara could trade voluminously on her account, running many ships herself and entering into enormously successful trading relations with the Dutch and the English. (Bhargava 2010).

Princess Jahanara had ships of her own and carried on extensive commerce

with the help of the Dutch and the English (Chandra 2003).

Among the most prodigious women, traders were Maryam-uz-Zamani, mother of Jhangir and a woman of substantial personal wealth. She was the only member of the court to have the rank of 12000 calvaries and was known to receive a jewel from every nobleman 'according to his estate' each year on the occasion of the new year's festival. Like only a few women in the court, Maryam-uz-Zamani was granted the right to issue official documents. Like Nur Jahan, she used her wealth and influence to build gardens, wells, and mosques. No other noble woman seems to have been as adventurous a trader as the queen mother, and no trader's ship seems to have gotten into as much trouble as hers.

Mughal noblewomen generally supported, encouraged, and even protected trade with Europe. It was in their best interest to have ships available to carry their goods and to have advantageously positioned trading partners. Moreover, their confinement behind the marble screen may have made women even more curious and eager to engage in the activities of the outside world, made appealing because of the intrigue involved in getting through to their distant colleagues. (Bhargava 2010)

#### 4. Findings and Discussions

The study found that the royal ladies made innumerable contributions to art, literature, architecture, trade, commerce, and politics. Although they lived under the constraints of religions and patriarchy, they exhibited the characteristics of a liberal

female. They enjoyed political status and respect and, at the same time, stood as the feminist icon of the seventeenth century. Only the women from the upper caste enjoyed freedom, whereas the poor sections had no access to education or intellectual pursuits. Therefore, caste-based discrimination prevailed during the Mughal Rule. Despite the perceptions, the Mughal Empire is well known for the contributions of significant historical figures.

#### 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Mughal ladies like Nur Jahan, Jahanara, and Roshanara stand as iconoclastic figures to the whole world. Today, they are considered the tremendous literary women figures for breaking the women stereotypes and stepping into politics for the first time. They are known for their successful administration, extreme confidence, and perseverance. They marked themselves in political life and society. However, the study also has limitations that future studies can focus on. The study is limited to upheavals of the literary icons and mainly their positive contributions.

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