

Zeb-un-Nisa- A Sufi poetess of Mughal Period

Mrs. Boni Dutta

Assistant Professor, Dept. of History
Alipurduar Mahila Mahavidyalaya
Alipurduar, West Bengal

Abstract: *The Royal Mughal ladies played a very important role in literary development of the Mughal era. The Mughal period is also marked by the contribution of their writings. We can also get information about the Mughal period through their writings. One of the most talented lady of Mughal Period is Zeb-un-Nisa whose writing skill mesmerize the Historians to write about her in the pages of history as one of the most literate lady of Mughal period. Her poems were evidently acquainted, not only with the theories of Sufism, but also with the experience and practices of her life.*

Key Words: *Mushairas, Makhfi, Rubias, Ghazals, Quran, Calligraphist, Religious fanatic, Hafiz, Doctrine.*

A trend among male literate in the Darbar of the Mughal was a fashion, whether a writer, biographer, or chroniclers. This shackle was broken down by many a Mughal Ladies, namely Salima Sultana Begum, Mehurnissa, Roshanara Begum, Zeb-un-Nisa. Mostly they kept themselves under a pseudo name, 'Makhfi'. One such character came to surface through Zeb-un-Nisa.

Zeb-un-Nisa (the ornament of womanhood) the eldest daughter of Aurangzeb was the most educated, intellectual and cultured lady with a mystic bent of mind. She was a great patron of the arts, a gifted calligraphist, collector of manuscripts and a lover. She was a deeply religious lady but not in the conventional sense of the term. In fact she was not a religious fanatic, rather liberal in her religious views. She had a deep knowledge of the principles and doctrine of Quran. She even became a Hafiz at the tender age of seven years, when she learnt the Quran by heart. The greatest achievement of Zeb-un-Nisa in the literary field lies in her poems. She even engaged in poetical tournaments known as 'Mushairas', a sort of war of wits.

Zeb-un-Nisa wrote under the pen name 'Zeb' also as 'Makhfi'. Her poems deals with feelings of love, beauty, pathos and spirituality, her writings were collected in a book named 'Diwan-i-Makhfi' or 'The Book of the Hidden One'. It contains 421 *ghazals* and several *rubias*. The beautiful verses of 'Diwan-i-Makhfi' reveal great poetic talent and Sufi ideas, where, God Almighty is worshipped as a form of supreme beauty, the Devine Beloved, who is loved and adored, but who is tyrannical and reduces the lover to despair, but bestows on him a ray of hope when he is at the point of death. Zeb-un-Nisa had a pleasing personality. She herself was conscious of her winsome looks and once wrote-

"When from my cheek I lift my veil,

The roses turn with envy pale"

The poem signifies the beauty of her writings and the thoughtful essence of her spiritual world. She, unlike her father, had liberal ideas about religion and believed in the worship of one God with the name and in the form of the Divine Beloved, the Supreme Friend. Some of her verses reflect the feeling of harmony.

Zeb-un-Nisa's verses more than anything else, reflected the pain and misery she underwent in life. Perhaps this grief that she experienced turned her thoughts towards spirituality. But her liberal religious views prevented her from becoming a religious fanatic like her father.

Travelers like Berneir and Tavernier said that she did not marry throughout her life as she had fallen in love with someone disliked by Aurangzeb. Zeb-un-Nisa led a pious life without marriage and died on 26th May 1702 A.D. though Aurangzeb loved Zeb-un-nissa very much for her intellectual skills but at the same time he was not kind to her when she supported her younger brother prince Mahmud Akbar who revolted against him.

Like other Mughal Royal Ladies, she was a great patron of learning, and not just satisfied with composing verses and getting good education; she went a step forward and composed works of great literary, historical and cultural values.

The sufi views of Zeb-un-Nisa was not liked by her father Aurangzeb. She was imprisoned for 20 years for her Sufi views and conspiring with a brother against him. Her 550 *ghazals* and *rubais* in Persian are deep, spiritual and at times truly heartbreaking. The correct forms and spiritual meaning are preserved in this large selection of her poetry. The *Diwan-i-Makhfi* beautifully describes about the life of Zeb-un-Nisa and about her poems which describes about the beauty of Sufi views. In her poetry *Makhfi* - the hidden or invisible one - is a metaphor for her invisibility at the main Court and at the cosmic level the invisibility of God

REFERENCES:

1. Mukherjee, Soma, *Royal Mughal Ladies and Their Contributions*, Gyan Books, New Delhi, 2001.
2. Krynicky, Annie Krieger, *Captive Princess: Zebunissa daughter of Emperor Aurangzeb*, Oxford University Press, 2005.
3. Jain, Simmi, *Encyclopaedia of India Women through the Ages: The Middle ages*, Gyan Publishing House, 2003.
4. Smith Paul, *Prince Dara Shikoh & His Niece Princess Zeb-Un-Nissa: Two Sufi Poet martyrs under the Fundamentalist Mughal Emperor of India*, Create Space Independent Publishing Platform, 2017.
5. Ernest Sutton Whalley, Paul, *The Tears of Zebunnisa: Being Excerpts from the Diwan-i-Makhfi*, W. Thacker & Company, 1913.
6. Iftikhar, Rukhsana, *Indian Feminism: Class, Gender & Indentity in Medieval Ages*, Notion Press, 2016.