

A Study on the Courses and Curricula of the Education of the Princesses and Ladies of the Imperial Mughal Harem from Babur to Aurangzeb

¹Anju Agarwal, ²Dr. Usha Rathore,

¹Research Scholar, Department of Education, M.D.S. University, Ajmer, India

²Lecturer, HBUTT College, M.D.S. University, Ajmer, India

Email – ¹tajanju@gmail.com, ²urathore629@gmail.com

Abstract: *This research paper aims to provide an analytical study of the courses and curricula employed in the education of the princesses and ladies residing in the Imperial Mughal Harem, spanning from Babur to Aurangzeb. The Mughal Empire, known for its opulence and refinement, fostered a unique educational environment within the confines of the harem. By examining historical records, primary sources, and scholarly works, this study aims to shed light on the educational practices, subjects taught, and overall curriculum structure prevalent during this period. The findings contribute to our understanding of the socio-cultural dynamics and intellectual pursuits within the Mughal harem.*

Keywords: *Mughal Harem, Royal Ladies, Education, Course and Curricula.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Princesses and other women in the Mughal harem received a variety of educational programs over time and under different emperors. First, royal ladies received instruction in religion, housekeeping, embroidery, etc. In addition to this, the Royal Ladies were tutored in a wide range of disciplines throughout the Mughal era, including prose, poetry, humanities, theology, study of languages like Persian and Arabic, courtly etiquette, etc. Manucci discusses the education of Mughal women, noting that certain individuals instruct princesses in literacy skills, often focusing on the recitation of romantic poetry. Alternatively, these ladies find solace in reading literary works like "Gulistan" and "Bostan," authored by a writer known as Shekh Sa'di Shirazi. ¹Description of the subjects included in the course and curricula of the princess and ladies of the imperial Mughal Hare is as follows:-

- **Religious Education And Islamic Studies:-** The Mughal princesses were given a complete education in Islamic doctrines, including knowledge of the Quran, Hadith (sayings and deeds of Prophet Muhammad), and Islamic law, according to Gulbadan Begam's account in the "Humayun-Namah." They received training in the beliefs and customs of Islam and encouraged to follow religious traditions.

The women dedicated their lives to their religion. They devoted their time to reading the Quran and praying (namaz), all in the service of God. Jahanara Begam dedicated much of her time to God and engaged in religious activities. ²In her Risala-i-Sahibiya, she claims that God has intensified in her the burning desire to seek out the true way. ³Despite the princess's devotion to the Chishtia order, her brother Dara Shukoh persuaded her to join the Qadiriya order. ⁴She adopted Mulla Shah as her spiritual mentor and advisor. ⁵

Emperor Aurangzeb displayed a notable inclination towards religious matters, with his daughters in the harem being instructed by him in the essential principles of their faith. They actively participated in religious practices such as worshipping God, reading and copying the Quran, and striving to cultivate virtues and prepare for the afterlife. ⁶He raised Zinatunnisa, the second daughter of Aurangzeb, "in knowledge of doctrines and the essential laws of faith. ⁷His other daughters, Zebunnisa and Badrunnisa, also dedicated themselves to memorizing the Quran and extensively reading religious texts. ⁸

The royal princess had to have a religious education, and mastering the Quran was seen as being of utmost importance. When Mehrunnisa was a little girl living and travelling with the royal ladies and princesses in Agra, she was taught the Quran ⁹ Zeb-un-Nisa, the educated daughter of Aurangzeb, became a "Hafiz" at the age of seven when she memorised the Quran. ¹⁰, Zeb-un-Nisa was well-versed in the Quran's tenets and beliefs. She was frequently called upon to resolve religious disagreements before the Court. ¹¹

- **Languages:**

The princesses would have completed their education in Persian, which was the Mughal court's official language, by learning to read, write, and speak it. As the Mughal Empire expanded its domain into the Indian subcontinent during Babur's rule, they might also have been exposed to other languages spoken in the area, such as Turkic, Arabic, or even Indian languages like Hindustani or Sanskrit. Women were also taught Urdu, a newly emerging language during the Mughal era. During the Mughal era, royal ladies received instruction in Persian and Arabic language study in addition to training in domestic skills.¹² The Mughal women spoke Turki inside the harem, whereas the Hindu women and the women from other Indian provinces spoke Hindi or other regional languages.¹³ Achieving proficiency in Persian, which was the language of poetry and literature, was regarded as an achievement.¹⁴ Manucci says:Among them are some who teach reading and writing to the princesses, and usually what they dictate to them are amorous verses. Or the ladies obtain relaxation in reading books called 'Gulistan' and 'Bostan', written by an author called Sec Sadi Chiragi (Shekh Sa'di Shirazi) ¹⁵.

- **Literature:**

Since the reign of Babar, the Mughal ladies have been actively pursuing their literary interests. Babar is supposed to have acquired his artistic and intellectual abilities from his maternal grandmother Aisan-daulat and mother Qutluq-Nig Khanum, both of whom were highly educated women and had a significant impact in shaping Babar's life. Gulbadan Begam was a poet with remarkable talent. She is credited for having a great deal of lyrical aptitude and writing many lovely lines.¹⁶ The memoirs of Gulbadan's brother Humayun, Humayun Nama, is the best representation of her literary accomplishments. ¹⁷ Salima Sultan Begam was an accomplished writer and intelligent woman. She had a reputation as a poetess and had a solid command of the Persian language.¹⁸ Nur Jahan Begam, was a woman of exceptional literary ability who had mastered Persian literature by the time she was fifteen.¹⁹ The work Munis-ul-Arwah, which Jahanara wrote in 1681 AD, stands as the pinnacle of her literary accomplishments.²⁰ The eldest daughter of Aurangzeb by his wife was a well-known poetess.²¹ The poems of Zeb-un-Nisa deal with spirituality, sadness, beauty, and love. Her scattered writings were compiled in a book called Diani--Makhfi, or The Book of the Hidden One, in 1724 A.D.,²² As per her own testimony, in the realm of poetry, I exist as a hidden entity, akin to the fragrance of a rose that remains concealed within its petals. Those who encounter my poetry are naturally drawn towards me.²³

- **Courtly Etiquette:**

The Mughal princesses received instruction in politeness, manners, and courtly conduct. They were instructed in proper royal court behaviour, how to deal with nobles and dignitaries, and how to carry themselves in public as representatives of the royal family. They received training in diplomatic techniques as well because they would be involved in royal alliances and marriages, which were crucial for preserving political stability and bolstering the empire. They received training in political tactics, diplomatic etiquette, and social graces in order to be prepared for their future responsibilities as royal women.

- **Political and Diplomatic Affairs:**

The princesses would have received instruction in political and diplomatic matters, including the nuances of court politics. Babur's grandmother, Ehsan Daulat Begam, was of great assistance to him at this crucial time. She took care of the immediate administrative issues, and handled herself so diplomatically that Babur did not suffer significantly. ²⁴

Khanzada Begam, the eldest sister of Babur, took a deep interest in political matters.²⁵

Jahangir's wife, Nurjahan Begam, was blessed with the ability to comprehend political issues.²⁶ Aurangzeb's daughter Zeb-un-Nisa also had a powerful voice in appointment matters.²⁷

- **Music and Dance:**

During the Mughal era, dancing was not regarded as respectable. Only a few professional groups were allowed to participate. But vocal and instrumental music was popular among harem ladies. Mumtaz Mahal, Zeb-un-Nisa Begam, and Nur Jahan Begam²⁸ were all talented musicians.²⁹ Nur Jahan, a poetess herself, even wrote music for songs. Mumtaz's lovely voice appeared to impact Shahjahan deeply everytime she sang.³⁰ It is thought that Nadira Begam, the lovely wife of Dara Shukoh, the oldest son of Shahjahan, and the devoted wife of Prince Parvez, a son of Jahangir, was a gifted classical singer. Shahjahan like her interpretation of the Dhrupad very much.³¹ She had received a collection of Mian Tansen's ragas and raginis from Shahjahan.³²

- **Painting and Calligraphy**

The harem system taught calligraphy, painting, and other handicrafts to the women.

Zeb-un-Nisa was skilled at writing in various Persian handwriting styles, including nastaliq, maskh, and shikaste, with grace and accuracy. Additionally, Princess Zeb-un-Nisa had a scriptorium in Kashmir, where this work continued to be done on a regular basis thanks to the excellent Kashmiri paper and scribes.³³

There are many works of art from that era that serve as evidence for the interest of Mughal ladies in painting,³⁴ like the nim qalam drawing "Lady painter in the harem" (c. 1635–1640) in the Bharat Kala Bhavan in Varanasi (No. 683), which depicts an unknown Mughal woman who is painting.³⁵ Another artwork depicts the artist Hasan Ghulam introducing a portrait to Nur Jahan as she examines it in the Darbar.³⁶ Beni Prasad claimed that Nur Jahan was a skilled painter.³⁷ A copy of Hafiz's diwan, which Khwaja Abdus Samad Shirinqalam wrote during Akbar's reign and illustrated with miniatures during Jehangir, carries Nur Jahan's seal, indicating that Jehangir may have given it to her at some point.³⁸ This demonstrates her keen interest, comprehension, and level of education in the field of painting.

- **Fashion Designing/ Method of beautification**

The use of cosmetics to enhance one's appearance was also the integral part of the Mughal era.

The many beautification techniques demonstrate the Mughal women's high level of beauty consciousness, which would not have been achievable without the study of that particular subject.

They massaged their bodies with various oils, such as narayana oil.³⁹ as well as rice powder, rice bran oil, sandalwood oil, kusum flower oil, pulse flower powder, and turmeric paste to wash their body.⁴⁰ According to Abul Fazl, oils obtained from a few fragrant flowers were applied to the skin and hair.⁴¹ Manucci mentions "scented oils distilled from various flowers" as well.⁴²

In his memoirs, Jehangir talks of a novel kind of perfume that Nur Jahan's mother Asmat Banu Begam made from rose petals and dubbed Itr-i-Jehangiri.⁴³

- **Jewellery and Dress design:**

Textile, clothing, and jewellery design all advanced greatly under the skillful direction of Nur Jahan Begam. It is well known that she had a strong interest in embroidery when she was little and was extremely good at it. The novel textiles that Nur Jahan introduced were many and varied. Among them were the panchtoliya, a cotton fabric used for veils that weighed five tolas and was decorated with flowers, the kinari, a form of silver-threaded lace, and the hadla or badhah, a type of silver-threaded brocade.⁴⁴ She also introduced the Nur Mahal, a low-cost brocade marriage outfit that was easily attainable for the poor and could be purchased for just 25 rupees. Her farsh-i-chandani, or sandalwood carpet, became well-known throughout the nation and was offered in a variety of hues and patterns. Some of these designs continue to be well-known.⁴⁵ She introduced fresh patterns and sophisticated designs for gold jewellery.⁴⁶ Khafi Khan, who wrote a century later, claimed that Nur Jahan's styles still controlled society.⁴⁷

- **Cooking:-**

Several speciality dishes that Nur Jahan Begam introduced into Mughlai cuisine can still be found in standard cookbooks and the best restaurants today.⁴⁸ According to legend, Nur Jahan Begam owned a beautifully carved fruit knife with gem accents that is currently on display at the Salar Jung Museum in Hyderabad.⁴⁹ Princess Jahanara enjoyed cooking some foods. For the Sufi saint Hazrat Miyan Meer, she herself made vegetables, bread, and other dishes.⁵⁰ When she had invited Aurangzeb to her chambers, Udipuri Mahal once made a ragout or stew.⁵¹

- **Architecture and Interior Design:**

The eldest, Zeb-un-Nisa, and the second, Zinat-un-Nisa, were two of Aurangzeb's daughters who made the real contributions to architecture during his reign.

Zeb-un-Nisa Begam constructed a number of gardens in Lahore, where she was eventually laid to rest, including the Char- Burji and Nawan Kot.⁵²

In the field of architecture, Zinat-un-Nisa, the second daughter of Aurangzeb, has constructed about fourteen caravansarais.⁵³ When he was 37 years old, Zinat-un-Nisa began work on a project to build a number of inns along the roadway that connected Oudh and Bengal. Her father was pleased with her work and praised her.⁵⁴

The art of decorating reached its pinnacle under Nur Jahan, whose ingenuity knew no limitations. She had a fantastic eye for colour harmony and design symmetry. The Musamman Burj at the Agra Fort, where Shahjahan spent his incarceration days and which served as Nur Jahan's residence during her lifetime, was furnished

according to her own specifications.⁵⁵ She also created the exquisite "pietra dura" inlay work on Etimad-ud-Daula's tomb in Agra.

Nur Jahan's sense of style and inventiveness can be seen throughout the entire structure of Shalimar Bagh in Kashmir.⁵⁶ Ellison Banks Findly is of the opinion that Nur Jahan's contribution to Shalimar's design is more clearly visible in the functional segmentation of the individual terraces, which transformed it into a location not only for personal enjoyment but also for the performance of imperial tasks.⁵⁷ In the Zenana garden, where "women were no longer veiled bearers of morality by visible paradigms of the affirmation of the body and its sensual attributes."⁵⁸

- **Martial Training, Physical education Shooting and sports**

Gulbadan Begam cites a few ladies who could play polo, shoot a bow and arrow, and other sports. The princesses received instruction in physical education and sports during Akbar to keep them healthy and active. They engaged in a variety of outdoor pursuits, including horseback riding, archery, and hunting, which were regarded as crucial noble abilities.

Mughal women who were proficient with weapons included Nur Jahan Begam and Zeb-un-Nisa Begam.⁵⁹ Aasaish Banu Begam, the granddaughter of Shah Jahan and the daughter of Murad Baksh, is reputed to have been an excellent shot and hunter.⁶⁰ The Mughal women frequently accompanied their ruler on hunting outings.⁶¹ Emperor Jehangir's wife Nur Jahan Begam frequently accompanied him on hunting trips. She had good shooting skills. She once killed a bird called a qarisha that weighed 19 tolas and 5 mashas.⁶²

- **History and Geography**

The princesses and ladies of the harem were educated about the history and geography of the Mughals' illustrious dynasty.

The Mughal Emperors used to employ educated women to teach their daughters, generally Persian women.⁶³ Such female tutors were employed by Shahjahan and Aurangzeb for his daughters. Persian, Arabic, Theology and History⁶⁴ studies were all part of the curriculum.

- **Mathematics and Astronomy:-**

In order to understand the calendars and astronomical events, princesses and ladies were partly taught mathematics and astronomy.

Princess Zeb-un-Nisa studied Arabic, mathematics, astronomy, and other subjects with a woman teacher named Miyabai.⁶⁵

- **Commerce and Trade:-**

Several notable women from that Mughal era were known to have actively participated in trade and commerce, including Shahjahan's daughter Princess Jahanara, Nur Jahan Begam, and Jehangir's mother Maryam-uz-Zamani.

In addition to creating markets, royal Mughal women controlled ships that carried out sea trade on their behalf. These vessels often ran between Surat and the Red Sea ports. The first regal Mughal lady to actively engage in trade and commerce was Jodha Bai, the wife of Akbar and the mother of Jehangir. She operated her own ships and conducted brisk trade from the port of Surat to numerous Red Sea locations. The renowned Rahimi of Surat was one of her ships.⁶⁶ William Finch wrote that, "the Emperor's mother, or others acting under her protection, carried on extensive trading operations, and at this time a vessel belonging to her was being laden for a voyage to Mocha."⁶⁷

Sir Thomas Roe also mentioned Maryam-uz-Zamani's ships in his accounts.⁶⁸

Nur Jahan Begam engaged in more than only marine trading for his business. She is renowned for having constructed marketplaces and sarais and owned ships that engaged in brisk sea trade.⁶⁹ Her brother Asaf Khan served as her principal agent in all of her foreign trade-related endeavours.⁷⁰

Like Nur Jahan Begam, Princess Jahanara created caravansarais and markets, participated in maritime trade, and generally showed a keen interest in trade and commerce. She held numerous jagirs, just like Nur Jahan Begam, and received the income from them. Jahanara Begam designed and oversaw the construction of the Chowk Sarai Bazaar in Lahore⁷¹ and Chandni Chowk, in Delhi which was erected around 1650 A.D.⁷²

- **Philosophy:-**

Akbar encouraged his daughters and other princesses to pursue their studies in these fields since he had a deep interest in philosophy, astrology, and other sciences. They were exposed to the writings of eminent academics and thinkers of the day, and Akbar frequently had philosophical debates with them.

2. CONCLUSION:

The study on the courses and curricula of the education of the princesses and ladies of the Imperial Mughal Harem holds relevance in the modern Indian context for several reasons: Cultural heritage and identity: Understanding the educational practices and subjects taught to the women in the Mughal era contributes to the preservation and appreciation of India's rich cultural heritage. It sheds light on the intellectual pursuits and achievements of women during that time, highlighting their contributions to literature, arts, music, and various other fields. Empowerment of women: Examining the educational opportunities provided to the princesses and ladies of the Mughal harem can serve as a reminder of the capabilities and potential of women in history. It challenges traditional notions of gender roles and underscores the importance of education in empowering women in contemporary society. Education and gender equality: The study reveals that even in a historical period marked by patriarchal norms, women in the Mughal harem had access to education in various disciplines. This can be seen as an example of women's education existing alongside the male-centric educational institutions of that time. It highlights the significance of gender equality in education and serves as a source of inspiration for promoting equitable access to education for women today. Multilingualism and linguistic diversity: The study emphasizes the importance of languages, such as Persian, Arabic, and regional Indian languages, in the educational curriculum of the Mughal princesses. This aligns with India's linguistic diversity and the value of preserving and promoting different languages. It also underscores the relevance of multilingualism in the modern Indian context and the potential benefits of learning multiple languages. Artistic and cultural expressions: The education provided to the princesses and ladies of the Mughal harem encompassed various artistic and cultural pursuits, including literature, painting, music, dance, and fashion. These forms of expression continue to be valued in contemporary Indian society, and studying their historical roots can contribute to the understanding and promotion of India's artistic heritage. Women's leadership and participation: The study touches upon the involvement of Mughal princesses in political and diplomatic affairs, highlighting their role in decision-making processes. This can be seen as an early example of women's leadership and participation in governance, which remains a relevant topic in the contemporary context of women's empowerment and political representation. By examining and understanding the educational practices and curricula of the Mughal princesses and ladies, we gain insights into the historical achievements of women in various fields and can draw inspiration for fostering gender equality, cultural preservation, and the promotion of diverse educational opportunities in modern India.

REFERENCES:

1. Manucci, Storia..., Vol. II, p. 331
2. Jahamara by Yazdani, Journal of the Punjab Historical Society Vol. II, 1912, p. 163.
3. Risala-1-Sahibiya of Jahanara Begam, Aligarh University Manu script.
4. Dara Shukoh-Life and Works by B. Hasrat, pp. 82-83.
5. Ibid.
6. M.A., p. 318.
7. Ibid., p. 323.
8. Zubdatunnisa, another daughter of Aurangzeb, employed herself in adoring the creator and thus gaining boundless reward, MA.. p. 323.
9. Padmini Sengupta, The Story of Women in India (New Delhi: 1974), p. 134.
10. Magan Lal (tr.), The Dewan of Zeb-un-Nisa, p. 8 (Introduction).
11. Magan Lal (tr.), The Dewan of Zeb-un-Nisa,(London: 1913) p.11
12. Sarkar, Studies in Mughal India, p. 301.
13. E.B. Findly, Noorjahan, Empress of Mughal India (New York: 1993), p. 122.
14. Humayun Nama (tr.), p. 79 (Introduction).
15. Manucci, Storia..., Vol. II, p. 331.
16. A.S. Beveridge in Humayun Nama (tr.), p. 76.
17. A.S. Beveridge in Babur Nama (tr.) Vol. 1, p. 441 (Translator's Note); AS Beveridge in Humayun Nama, pp. 76, 78.
18. A.S. Beveridge in Humayun Nama (tr.), p. 58, Key, Indian Education in Ancient and Later Times, p. 80.
19. Mutamid Khan, Iqbal Nama-i-Jahangiri, tr. in Elliot & Dowson, Vol. 6, p. 405.
20. R.C. Majumdar ed., The Mughal Empire (Bombay: 1974), p. 14
21. Jadunath Sarkar, History of Aurangzeb, Vol. 1, pp. 68-69, Studies in Mughal India, p. 79
22. Magan Lal tr., The Dewan of Zeb-un-Nissa, p. 20.
23. Ila Mukherjee, Social Status of North Indian Women (Agra: 1972), p. 105.
24. An Empire Builder of the Sixteenth Century by Rushbrook Williams, p.34
25. Rekha Mishra, Women in Mughal India p. 20

26. Rekha Mishra, Women in Mughal India p. 33
27. Ruggar, ff. 313a-313b.
28. Beni Prasad, History of Jehangir, p. 172; John J. Pool, Famous Women of India (Calcutta: 1954), pp. 91-92.
29. Rekha Misra, Women in Mughal India, p. 95.
30. Maharani Sunity Devee, The Beautiful Mogul Princesses, pp. 17-18.
31. Muni Lal, Shah Jahan (Ghaziabad : 1986), p. 209.
32. Ibid., p. 209.
33. Magan Lal tr., The Dewan of Zeb-un-Nissa, p. 13.
34. George Michell, et. al., In the Image of Man (New Delhi: 1982), p. 136, no. 141: Vijay Krishna, Chiteri-Lady Artist and her Model', Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art, Vol. XI (Calcutta: 1970), pp. 60-63.
35. Asok Kumar Das in A. Jan Qaisar & S.P. Verma (eds.), Art and Culture (Jaipur: 1993), p. 44.
36. Stchoukine, plate vii.
37. Beni Prasad, History of Jehangir, p. 172.
38. A.K. Das, Dawn of Mughal Painting (Bombay: 1982), p. 83.
39. T. Raychaudhuri, Bengal Under Akbar and Jehangir, (Calcutta: 1953), p. 194
40. A.L. Srivastava, Akbar the Great, Vol. III (Agra : 1982), p. 199.
41. Abul Fazl, Ain-i-Akbari, Vol. I, tr. H.Blochmann, pp. 78-79.
42. Manucci, Memoirs of the Mughal Court, tr. Michael Edwardes (London: 1963), p. 35.
43. Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri (tr.), p. 270.
44. Findly, Noorjahan..., p. 222; Beni Prasad, History of Jehangir, pp. 184-85.
45. Beni Prasad, History of Jehangir, p. 185.
46. Beni Prasad, History of Jehangir, p. 185.
47. Khafi Khan, Vol. I, p. 269.
48. Findly, Noorjahan..., p. 221.
49. Ibid., p. 221.
50. Rekha Misra, Women in Mughal India, p. 93. 258-59.
51. Manucci, Storia..., Vol. III, PP. 258-9
52. P.N. Chopra, Some Aspects of Society and Culture During the Mughal Age, p. 22. Maharani Sunity Devee, The Beautiful Mogul Princesses (London: 1918), p. 56.
53. Manucci, Storia..., Vol. III, p. 40; Terry in Foster ed. Early Travels in India, p. 323
54. Samuel Purchas, Early Travels in India (Glasgow: 1864), p. 76.
55. E.B. Havell, A Handbook to Agra and the Taj, p. 27.
56. Bernier, pp. 399-400.
57. Findly, Noorjahan...., p. 98
58. Ibid. p. 108
59. Magan Lal tr. The Diwan of Zeb-un-Nisa, p. 14.
60. Kabir Kausar and Inamul Kabir, Biographical Dictionary of Prominent Muslim Ladies ,p. 3
61. Humayun Nama (tr) Vol.I, P.348.
62. Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri (tr.), Vol. I, p. 348.
63. Sarkar, Studies, p.301
64. Ibid.
65. Mustaid Khan's Maasir-i-Alamgiri tr. in Elliot and Dowson, Vol. 7, p. 196; Jadunath Sarkar, History of Aurangzib (Vol. I & II), pp. 37-38 (Vol. I); Maharani Sunity Devee, The Beautiful Mogul Princesses, p. 55.
66. Jagdish Narain Sarkar, Studies in Economic Life in Mughal India (Delhi: 1975), p. 274.
67. William Finch in Foster ed. Early Travels in India, p. 123.
68. Nicholas Withington in Foster ed. Early Travels in India, p.
69. Manucci, Storia do Magor, tr. W. Irvine, Vol. I, p. 157.
70. D. Pant, The Commercial Policy of the Mughals (Bombay: 1930), p. 166.
71. Amal-i-Saleh, Vol. III, p. 47.
72. The 'Son et Lumiere' Show conducted at the Red Fort, Delhi.