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Fashion, Attire and Mughal women: A story behind the *pardha*

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Abstract

This study is focused on the attire and fashion of the Mughal women. The heram life of Mughal women is always a prime centre of attraction. The life inside the heam and within the pardha is taken into special consideration in this article. This article tried to highlight the life style of Mughal women especially in the field of fashion and the concept of beauty. The heram women also played a vital role for cultural amalgamation. They belong from different religion and culture. Due to the Cosmo culture, inside the heram they were easily shared their views, thought and interest .The art and archicture of Mughal period also reveals this fact. The activities of Mughal women, within the four walls of heram and their contribution in the field of aesthetics were taken into special consideration.

Introduction:

By the early period of Mughal Dynasty the *pardha* was compulsory for women. It was an accepted way of life for royal and aristocratic families and in Muslim court. It had come to be a sign of strict adherence of Islam .Lots of romantic stories were written during those period based on the life in the *heram* .Many royal Mughal women played a dominant role in political arena. Akber`s mother Hamada Bano Begam was a capable advisor to both her husband and her son. Akber`s wife Salima Sultana Begum was also an intelligent women who was respected for her natural political ability. Jahangir`s mother Jodha Bai was very influential at court and was a major driving force behind Akber`s promotion of secularism.The increased wealth of Mughal court brought great prosperity to the women in the Zenena

(woman`s quarter in the place) All live together in the enclosure surrounded by high walls and beautiful water gardens. (Kumar, 2006) It is always said that behind a successful men there is a women, but it would rather say that there is a women behind the development of every culture. In support of this the spotlight can be turn to the mother goddess of Indus Valley where women was treated as a goddess .She not only played a vital role for the up liftman of her child but also played a dominant role in the development of a society. So, how they contributed in the Mughal society, especially in the field of fashion inside the Mughal harem is taken into consideration in this article.

The concept of fashion and attire in Mughal women:

Self adornment became natural phenomena for women since from ancient time. They used various methods for beautifying themselves. This is evident from various carving of khajuraho and paintings like those of Ajanta. The Mughal women`s were not behind in the use of cosmetics to beautifying themselves.(Mukharjee,2001) Jewellery being an important aspect of dressing was deeply patronised by the women of the Mughal harem.

According to Abul Fazl there are sixteen constituents by which a woman is adorned. Bathing, anointing with oil, riding the hair, decking the crown of her head with jewels, anointing with sandalwood unguent ,wearing various kind of dresses ,sectarial marks of caste and often decked with pearls and golden ornaments ,tinting with lampblack like collyrium ,wearing ear rings ,adorning with nose rings of pearls and gold, wearing ornaments round the neck, decking with garlands of flowers or pearls, staining the hands, eating pan and finally the artfulness. (Fazl ,1977)

The jewels of the Mughal women also reflected their status of men .All the Mughal princes had six to eight sets of jewels. The goldsmiths were continuously busy with making of ornaments in the fort, the best and the most costly of their production were for the king`s person the queens and princes. The princes usually wore necklace of jewels like scarves on both shoulders, added to three strings of pearls on each side. They had three to five rows of pearls hanging from their neck. Upon the middle of the head was a cluster of pearls which hung down as far as the centre of the forehead, with valuable ornaments of costly stone formed into the shape of the sun or moon or some star or at times imitating different flowers on the right side they had a little round ornament in which a small ruby was inserted between two pearls.(smith H.clifford,2002)

The Fashion outfits of the Mughal Women:

The clothes worn by Muslim women during the Mughal rule were not much different to the men`s. They wore long, loose *jama* like ribs, which had full sleeves and opened at the front. Underneath, an ankle length vest was worn and the ensemble was completed with a veil which covered the hair and most of the face .During the cold season, *qabas* (coat) made of Kashmir shawl cloth was worn as overcoats .Outside the *harem* they were usually clothed in the *burqa* ,which covered the body from head to feet leaving only a slit around the eyes. The women staying inside the Mughal *zenana* were usually clothed in the *burqa*, which covered the body from head to foot leaving only a slit around the eyes. The women staying inside the Mughal *zenana* were independently wealthy and had ample leisure time .Many of them conducted overseas trade. Nurjahan for example traded in indigo. She wrote poetry, blended perfumes and designed clothes and fabrics, dresses in a style all of her own that established the fashions for many years to come. She introduced the delicate art of white embroidery. The renound chikankari. (Fig 1) now associated with Lucknow, to the Mughal court, where it becomes the height of fashion.

Mughal women were very much fond of perfume. Detailed account of various kinds of scent and oil and their price is given by Abul fazl in Ain -i-Akberi. There were special perfume department by Akber known as *khusbukhana*. Jahangir writes in his memories about a new kind of perfume prepared from rose patels by Nurjahan`s mother Asmat Banu Begam who called it as *itr-i-jahangir*. Meena Bazaar an event institute established by Akbar for enjoyment of the women of *zenana* and for himself. The intermingling within the harem culture and races from different parts of the world creates a diversity of sartorial style. Every queen has a separate apartment for herself .Each has a regular monthly allowance for her expenditure, jewels and clothes. Paintings of royal women are rare only two paintings depict the royal women in a more

candid style. The first is a miniature painting of Birth of Jahangir,(Fig 2) comes from a page of Jahangirnama. This painting is an unique record of fashions within the *zenana*.It gives a description of women clothing during those time. It is not possible to match any given description to the specific garment but a great variety of Hindu and Persian origin is in evidence. And a second painting depicts the wife of Jahangir, Nurjahan on hunting.(Fig 3) As her hunting costume suggest, the women of the court were often identically dressed to the men. Her ensemble is made up of a fine cotton *jama*,a roughed *pajama*. A *patka*, a turban and embroidered shoes.

The Fashion Jewellery of Mughal Women:

Women had a natural love for jewellery in all ages. The purpose of using jewellery is not to attract the attention of others but it becomes a statement of status also. In India also both Hindus and Muslims have given a religious significance to the uses of jewellery. Hindus consider gold ornaments auspicious where as Muslims believed on holy armlets and ornaments with stone setting. A large number of evidence were found from the various accounts of foreign travellers and Mughal paintings regarding the uses of ornaments by the Mughal ladies.

Head ornaments

The Mughal ladies love to decorate each part of their body with different type of ornaments. They use thirty seven types of ornaments. Among them there is five type of *Sis-Phul*,which was a raised belt shaped piece of gold and silver, hollow and embellished from inside with attachments fastened to the hair over the crown of the head.(Fazl,1977).Upon the middle of the head is a bunch of pearls which hangs down as far as the centre of the forehead with a valuable ornaments of costly stones formed into the shape of the sun ,moon ,star or at

times imitating different flowers.(Manucci,1986)

Ear ornaments

A large number of ornaments were made out of gold , silver and copper which hung down from the ears almost touching the shoulders .Abul Fazl speaks of certain ear ornaments like *karna phul* (ear flower)with various motifs. The motifs of papal-patti, the motifs of peacock were popular among the royal lady.(Fazl,1977)

Nose ornaments

The fashion of wearing nose ornaments was brought into India probably by the Muslims invaders from the North West. However nose ornaments were popular in Mughal Haram. The reference of nose ornaments named *Besar* in Ain -i-Akbari.Which was a broad piece of gold to the upper ends of which a pearl was attached and at the other a golden wire which is clasped on to pearl and hung from the nose by gold wire.

Necklaces

Various kinds of necklaces made of gold and silver studded with gems and pearls were worn by Mughal women. *Golaband* consisted of five or seven rose shaped buttons of gold strung on to silk and worn round the neck. Mughals women were fond of using five to seven strings of gold beads and pearls hanging from the neck, coming down as far as lower part of stomach.

Hand ornaments

Arms without ornaments were not considered a good omen. The upper part of the arms above the elbows were ornamented with armlets called *Bajuband* usually two inches wide inlaid with precious stone. In Abul Fazl`s list of bracelets e have *kangan* which were of different design. Sometimes the bracelets were in form of pearl bands which went round the wrist nine or twelve times.(Mukharjee,2001)

The impact of religion upon the fashion and attire of Mughal women

Throughout the development of every civilization, religion played a very sensitive and passionate issue for all tribes. And it is not surprising that the Mughals were not far

behind that, they brought their own culture which is largely depends on their religious beliefs. As the law of Islam they preferred to keep their lady under cover. The women were not allowed to reveal any part of their bodies. They were forced to use *burqa*. Manucci also observes that among the Mohammedans women it was a great dishonour for a family when a wife was compelled to uncover herself. According to the laws of Islam a man can marry as many times as he wanted. This leads towards the development of harem culture. Where at one point of time 5000 women can lived together.(Fazal,1977)

The word Harem means a holly place or a sanctuary.(Ansari,1960).In times to come the word Harem acquired sanctity and respect. th term was evoked to denote a place where the women folk of the Royal Household lived.(Layden.1924).The women inside the Mughal Harem leads a luxurious life.(Fig 4) They spent their time to adorn themselves magnificently. The only purpose of their life is to please the lord of the Harem. so all of their activity was entered to attract him in various way. While describing the life inside the Harem, Manucci mentioned that the princess wore the turbans with the permission of the king. These turbans were highly fashioned along with various precious stones and pearls. The Mughal harem becomes the centre for the development of

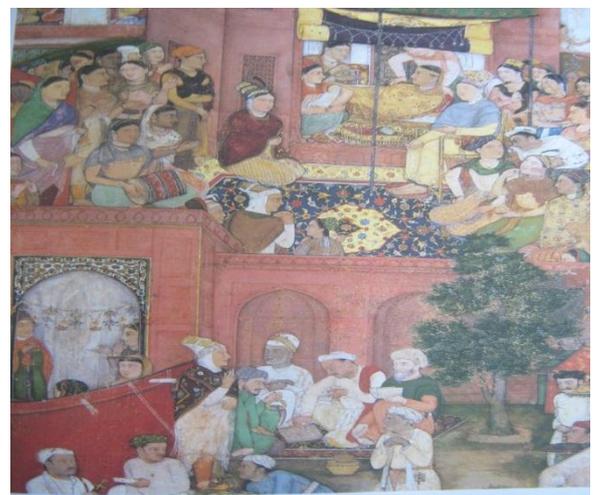


(Fig 1) chikankari work, discovered by Nurjahan Begam wife of emperor Jahangir.

Mughal culture, dress, .manners, dance and music. Thousands of women in Harem remained busy in weaving cloths and designing dress and ornaments. They spent a good time in embroidery, knitting and stitching. Nurjahan developed some new fashion of embroidery. She was so skilled in embroidery and knitting that she herself prepared *jhuls* for the personal elephant of the emperor. The other women too showed interest in these craft. Jahanara had directed and monitored the designing and tailoring of the special dresses of the bride during the marriage of *Dara* and *Suja* and appreciated by the shah jahan .

Conclusion

The harem women were very intelligent, beautiful as well as creative. The policy of most of the Mughal rulers was to encourage and patronized creativity. It was because of the leisure lifestyle they got lots of time for experiment. Only motto was to please the king with something new and innovative, which gave rise to some very pleasant discoveries. For example Itr-i-Jahangir the finest perfume was created during these periods. Although the only purpose of harem women was to please the emperor but somehow these harem life help the Mughal women to develop their skill and creativity to enrich the culture of Mughal dynasty.



(Fig 2) Birth Of Jahangir, miniature painting from Jahangirnama



(Fig 3) Nurjahan Begum in Hunting costume.



(Fig4) Miniature painting of Nurjahan .Patna Musuam.Bihar.

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