

HISTORY OF WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN ART, ARCHITECTURE, AND EDUCATION IN 18TH CENTURY

Anju Bala

Designation: JBT Teacher, GPS Suketri, Panchkula

Email id: anju.lohan88@gmail.com

Abstract

The change in socio-cultural life is natural process irrespective of any area or any period. This is applicable to eighteenth century Delhi and Awadh also. Looking at the chaotic condition one gets an impression that the eighteenth century was an unfavorable era for creative activities. But the fact is that the disintegration of Mughal Empire coincided with the development in sociocultural activity. This article is an attempt to study the changes which marked the period of eighteenth century different from the previous periods in terms of the participation of women in the cultural growth of Delhi and Awadh regions. It would be interesting to study the contribution of women belonging to different section of society and the various perception related to these women emerged thereafter.

INTRODUCTION

The most significant class of women whose contribution was remarkable in the development of artistic field is the courtesans. In the context of eighteenth century, the courtesans became so important that the culture which developed in this period, came to be known as courtesan culture, their strong and appealing presence marked the century apart from the earlier periods. The courtesans were considered fit for love as a model of grace, charm, gaiety, and refined etiquette. They became source of inspiration for the artists and the poets; they also became the themes of paintings. They adored for their charm of personality and artistic accomplishments. In the first half of the eighteenth century Delhi was the centre of cultural developments. The courtesans exercised great power over the reigning Emperors. It is interesting to note that many of them became the wives and chief consorts of the Emperors, and gained immense power. In the reign of Jahandar Shah, LalKunwar, who belonged to the class of kalawant i.e. dancers and singers, as his chief consort occupied great position in his court (Figure 1).



Figure 1: - LalKunwar dancing before Jahandar Shah, miniature from a Persian manuscript, c. Late eighteenth century. (Nautch girls of the Raj, p. 136)

MunshiYar Muhammad Qalander provides us extremely important information on the dancing girls associated with the court of the Mughals. He was informed by a dancing girl Ganga Bai that Jahandar Shah after becoming the Emperor expelled one thousand and four hundred women from the palace of Bahadur Shah, Muhammad Azimush Shan, Muhammad Rafiush Shan, and KhajustaSair. Some of them dispersed to other places and many of them got themselves married.

The description of the courtesan culture during the reign of Muhammad Shah is based largely on MuraqqaiDehli, an account of DargahQuli Khan Salar Jung, who was a famous historian of his age. He informs us that Muhammad Shah patronised many courtesans who were expert in the art of singing and dancing. His court was adorned by twenty-two noted and talented women singers. There were many courtesans in his court who had great skills in khayal singing such as, Allah Bandi, Kamal Bai, and Uma Bai.⁵ DargahQuli Khan has talked about PannaBai, an expert in Khayal style of singing. She received generous favours from Muhammad Shah. She had a voice like a nightingale and cast amorous glances towards her listeners.⁶ DargahQuli Khan has also cited the names of some other prominent singers and dancers of Muhammad Shah's reign such as, AsaPura, Gulab, Ramazani, and RehmanBai. Another well-known courtesan was Sujan who was in love with Ghananand a famous poet of that time. However, he was banished from Delhi by the Emperor due to his intimacy with Sujan.

The growth in architectural field in eighteenth century contributed a lot in preserving Mughal culture and the participation of women in this field showed their remarkable talent of architectural maneuvering in Delhi and Awadh. Some ladies of royalty and nobility took keen interest in the construction of buildings and gardens and for this purpose they invested large sums of money from their own pocket. The types of buildings constructed by the ladies were mainly mosques, sarais, tombs, imambarahs, and gardens.

Table1:List of mosques constructed by the royal ladies in Delhi region in the eighteenth century

	Mosque	Builder	Year	Location
1.	Aurangabadi Masjid	NawabAurangabadi Begum	1703	Lahori Gate of Delhi(no.32)
2.	Zinatul Masjid	Zinat-ulNisa Begum	1707	River bank of Fortress, Delhi, (no33)
3.	Fakhr-al Masjid	FakhrunNisaKhanum	1728	Kashmiri Gate (no.36)
4.	Qudsia Masjid	Qudsia Begum/ UdhamBai	1748	Near Kashmiri Gate
5.	Jawed Khan'sMasjid	Qudsia Begum/ UdhamBai	1747/51	Outside the Delhi Gate of the Red Fort
6.	Qudsia Masjid	Qudsia Begum/ UdhamBai	1750-51	Inside QudsiaBagh

Stephen Blake has talked about the *Begumi-Amiri* or elite rank mosques built by begums and the great amirs of Shahjahanabad. Table-1 shows that royal women took considerable interest in the construction of mosques. In the early eighteenth century NawabAurangabadiBegum, wife of Aurangzeb built a mosque at prominent place in Shahjahanabad.

A splendid mosque was constructed by Zinatunnisa Begum at her expense in Delhi, which came to be famously known as ZinatulMasajid or „Jewel of mosques“ (Figure2). She was buried there after her death, but British military authority removed her grave somewhere, when they occupied the building. It is believed that she demanded the amount of her dowry from her fatherand spent it in building this mosque. The mosque resembles the Jami Masjid to a great degree. Made out of red sandstone the mosque courtyard is large and contains the mandatory ablution tank in its centre. At the south of the mosque thereis a *baoli*, said to have been built by Zinat Begum. But it is in a ruined state and contains no water.

NawabQudsiya Begum, wife of Muhammad Shah also constructed a mosque situated either outside the enclosure or adjoining the QudsiaBagh in a very simple style (Figure 3). UrvashiDalal has provided information based on the description of Cathrine B. Asher, that Qudsia Begum constructed a mosque in 1750-51. The mosque stands on a *chabutra* and is constructed of brick masonry finished with plaster. It consists of three compartments roofed with domes terminating in red stone finials.



Figure 2: Zinat-ul Masjid or Taj-ul Masjid Built by Zinat-un Nisa Begum in 1707 (Delhi)



Figure 3: Qudsia Masjid Built by Qudsia Begum in 1748 (Delhi)

Mosque also contained chambers for the accommodation of *mulla*. Inscription on the mosque shows that it was repaired by Bahadur Shah II in 1833-4 A.D. The mosque was heavily damaged during the uprising of 1857.

There is also reference about the mosque of Jawed Khan built by order of Nawab Qudsia Begum outside the Delhi gate of the Red Fort, inscribed: „naqsha-i masjid-i Navab Bahadur „Ali Khan bare qil“a“. The mosque consists of three domes and the domes and the pinnacles of the mosque were covered with copper-gilt plate that is why known as Sonehri Masjid or Golden Mosque (Figure 4). The mosque presents a perfect combination of smallness of size with perfect symmetry of forms. Qudsia Begum also built a mosque known as Sonehri Masjid in 1751 A.D., southwest of the Red fort

There is also reference about a mosque associated with the name of a lady Babbi, the mosque is known as Sahibzadi's Mosque, also called Babbi Rangrez's mosque. The mosque is three arched and is roofed by three domes.

The real contribution in the field of architecture in the early eighteenth century was made by Zibunnisa and Zinatunnisa Begum. Zebunnisa Begum constructed a number of gardens like Char Burj and Nawab Kot in Lahore, where she was finally buried. However her tomb was later demolished and her coffin with inscribed tomb stone was shifted to Akbar's mausoleum at Sikandra. Soma Mukherjee has also cited information from Magan Lal's *diwan* of Zebunnisa

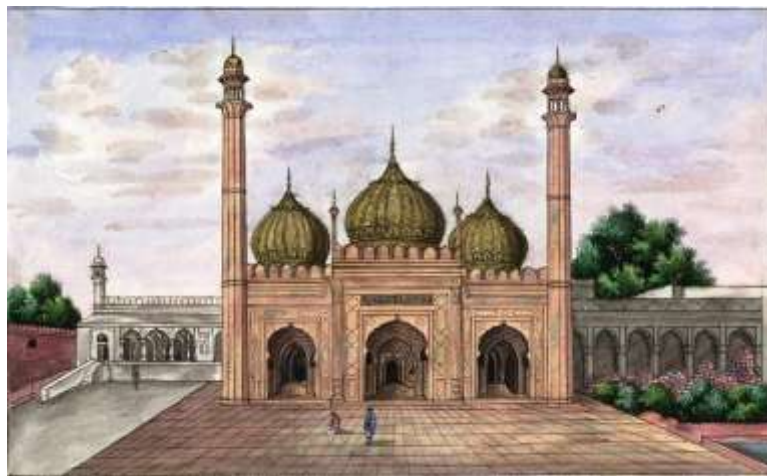


Figure 4: Sketch of Sonehri Masjid (1747 A.D.) of Jawed Khan Prepared by Thomas and William Daniel in 1789.

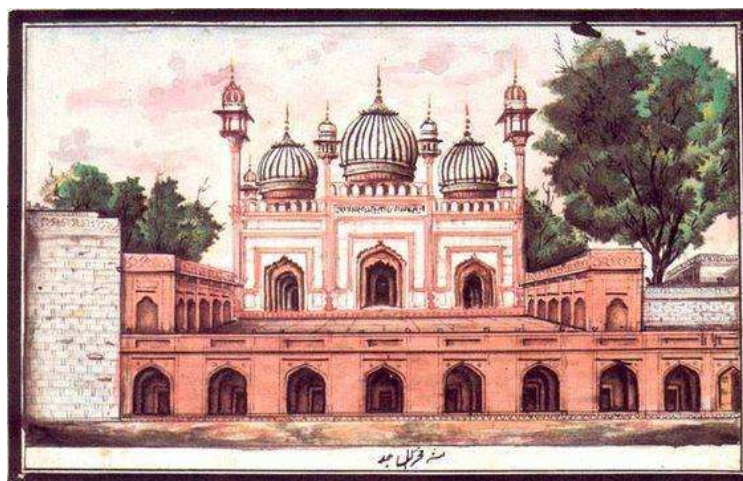


Figure 5: Fakhr-al Masjid constructed by Fakhru-n-Nisa Khanum in 1728.

Soma Mukherjee has also cited information from Magan Lal's *diwan* of Zebunnisa that the remains of the *Chau-Burj* (four towered) consists three out of four minarets over the main archway and these are ornamented with tiles in patterns of cypress trees and flowers and also inscriptions in Arabic and

Persian. From one of these inscriptions it is known that she presented this garden to her old friends and instructress Miya Bai.

Some sources say that Zebunnisa was buried in a garden at Nawankot at Lahore and her tomb was made of fine marble with a pinnacle of gold. But Jadunath Sarkar writes that she was buried in a garden of Tees Hazari gardens in Delhi, outside the Kabuli gate. Her tomb was later demolished for the construction of a railway line. Her coffin and inscribed tomb-stone are now in Akbar's mausoleum at Sikandara.

Princess Zinatunnisa Begum had built fourteen *caravansarais* on the roads out of charity to poor travellers and merchants. She also undertook a project to construct a number of inns of the highway linking Oudh with Bengal.

ShamaMitraChenoy has informed that many women of rank managed to live in their own establishment in a society which ordained women to live in seclusion, under the umbrella of protection unfolded by their men. She has cited the names of *havelies* or palaces associated with the names of the royal ladies for example, *haveli* of Qutbi Begum, a Mughal princess; *haveli* of Azizabadi Begum also known as MatiyaMahal. She was the wife of a Mughal Prince, who added a mosque to the complex; *haveli* of SahibaMahal, widow of Muhammad Shah.⁶⁸ She has also talked about an area known as Khwasapura i.e. an area outside the fort inhabited by the widows of the late emperors. However, William Irvine has called it Suhagpura, after the death of Jahandar Shah, Lalkunwar was sent to the settlement of Suhagpura.

The contribution of NawabQudsia Begum in the field of architectural activity is remarkable. She constructed several mosques and shrines in Delhi. It is interesting to see that the only palace constructed during the eighteenth century was the contribution of NawabQudsia

Begum. She constructed the Palace called QudsiaBagh or KulsiyaBagh Palace after her name in 1748 the year when Muhammad Shah, her husband died. The whole complex included a palace, garden, and a mosque.

The garden was laid out on the bank of Jumna at a short distance from the Kashmiri gate and it contained an extensive palace. Her palace was a double-storied building of considerable pretention. This palatial building has long since disappeared, but it is clearly shown in a drawing by Daniel made in the year 1795 (Figure 6). The picture clearly shows that the river Yamuna, which once flowed under the garden wall, on the east side, has now receded far away from it.

Harman Goetz has described the architectural style of this palace as the great link between the Mughal and post-Mughal art, and also referred it the decisive step towards the Hinduization of Mughal art due to the use of flower motives for ornamentation (Figure 7).

In the mutiny of 1857 during the siege of the city Shahjahanabad by the British troop two siege batteries no. III and IV were located in the Qudsia Garden. The palace was damaged during this period.

We also come across the structure of enclosing wall and gateways known as Aliganj constructed in 1750-1 A.D. according to the orders of NawabQudsiaSahibaZamania, mother of Ahmad Shah. The building of the fort, the *majliskhana* (the congregation house), the mosque and the tank, was completed in one year, under the supervision of NawabJawid Khan Sahib.

Qudsia Begum professed the Shia faith, which is reflected in the buildings constructed by her. During the reign of her son when her influence was at its greatest, she constructed a few religious buildings in the complex of Aliganj and enclosed them all with a massive parapetted wall. The enclosure had a bastion at each of its four angles and was furnished with four gatewaysand two posterns. The inscription over its arch refers to its construction by Qudsia Begum and alludes to the enclosure as “fort”.

Another structure dedicated to her Shia faith is the Qadam Sharif (a sacred footprint), in the centre of the enclosure of the Dargah of ShahiMardani.e Ali. The Qadam Sharif, a small marble enclose, is the most important structure in the Dargah (Figure 8). It contains a footprint believed to be of Ali. The QadamSarif is a small piece of stone impressed or rather carved with a footmark. It is set in the centre of the bottom of a marble tank. The tank is filled with water, which is also considered sacred.

Sayyid Ahmad Khan under „ShahiMardan“ writes “In the year 1137 A.H. (1724-1725 A.D.), there came into the possession of NawabQudsia a stone on which there was a footprint. It was said that the mark was of the foot of Ali. She had it set up here in the tank, constructed a marble flooring under that tank, and inscribed this distich on its edge.”



Figure 6: QudsiaBagh Palace, built by Qudsia Begum in 1748 A. D., Painting made by Thomas Daniel in 1795



Figure 7: Kanguras and Quoin Tower of the entrance, Harman Goetz, described pattern inspired from Hindu architecture, lotus petals.



Figure 8: Dargah of Shah-e Mardan, Qadam Sharif(image in the right) built by Qudsia Begum in situated in the left side.

Chenoy has also provided information about the *havelies* and places associated with the names of women who belonged to the class of nobility, for example Qamaruddin Khan *wazir* of Muhammad Shah, constructed palaces for his daughters Shah Tara, Fathunnisa Begum, and Rajna Begum. By the end of the eighteenth century only *kucha* or lane remained of Shah Tara's name. There is a reference of Rabia Begum, wife of Muhammad Khan Bangash, subedar of Farrukhabad, Agra, and Allahabad. She took great interest in construction activity and employed Faizullah Khan to build *sarais*, mosques, bridges, palaces etc. The buildings constructed at her order were Sarai Bangash, Kamra-iBangash, and PulBangash. There is also the reference of a *kothior* building in the premises of Raushan-ud-Daulah's haveli constructed by Begum Samru in 1803 in Delhi. This building also included a large garden at the back and an *ihata* with barracks for her army.

CONCLUSION

It is concluded that the ladies of the royalty and nobility, and also a number of middle-class women, possessed an inclination for education. Attention was also paid for the education of eunuchs. This transitional phase from Medieval to Modern also marked the transition from Persian to Urdu as the language of poor and elite alike. This development made education to the reach of common people. At the same time we cannot ignore the fact that in eighteenth century the general decay and deterioration of Muslim learning on the disintegration of Muslim power in India had its set back on women's education in Muslim homes. If we talk about the lowest section of society their life remained unaffected from this crisis because education since the beginning has never been the part of their life. In spite of the dark picture of the eighteenth century in regard to the female education, one need to appreciate the fact that even if the ladies remained behind *Purdah* and no proper arrangements related to education was extended to them until the 19th century, still their performance was appreciably high. Thus, the fact remains that women in their personal capacity could rise to any degree of intellectual height in every age.

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