Prophet Mohammad had exhorted his wife Ayisha at the time of his death that women should not interfere in public affairs, yet she was instrumental in opposing Hazrat Ali's election to the Caliphate. Since then, Muslim women have taken part in politics whenever opportunities appeared, despite disapproval and criticism from moralists, zealots and other vested interests. The Muslim women in India were no exception. Their role in the Politics of Delhi Sultanate and Mughal empire has been a well researched subject in various monographs dealing with various rulers and dynasties. A concise account is presented here for a fuller understanding of the status of Muslim women.

AN OVERVIEW

The Turks brought along with them the Perso-Arabic heritage and gradually, assimilated indigenous Indian traditions. They allowed women's participation in politics and accepted their right to sovereignty, drawing inspiration from the Iranian tradition. The Afghans also allowed their ladies to have some say in political affairs. The Mughals permitted their ladies to enjoy political clout without a

1 Two daughters of Khusrau Parvez - Puran Dukht and Arjumand Dukht - ascended the throne of Persia one after the other in the seventh century (Habibullah, A.R.M., "Sultanah Raziah", IHQ, Vol. XVI, No.1, March, 1940, p.753).
The Muslim women influenced the politics of their respective times in three ways: a. actively participating in political activities as a sovereign; b. working as regents of minor Kings or incapacitated Monarchs; c. operating behind the scene as political manipulators. This influence of the women varied from time to time according to their personality, family connections, political situation and the character of Sultan or Emperor. The nature of this impact on the state also varied from time to time according to the motive and insight of the lady at the helm of affairs. At one time, by virtue of their intelligence, diplomacy and tact, they strengthened the empire but, at the other, by their intrigues and selfishness, they created more problems and weakened the fabric of political life. Right from the rule of Turks till the reign of Aurangzeb, the ladies of high birth, royalty and nobility participated in the political arena. In the post-Aurangzeb period, instead of queens, princesses or ladies of high birth, concubines and dancing girls of low origin became prominent in the power-politics. Being upstarts, they tried to grasp both power and pelf through their nefarious designs and intrigues, without any concern for the prestige of the state.

2 Once Shah Begam of Badakhshan wrote to Babur that she being a woman could not attain sovereignty while her grand-son, Mirza Khan could hold it (Mirza Haider, (Tr.), p.203).
THE SULTANATE PERIOD

The earliest instance of a lady interfering in political activities in the Sultanate period was that of Shah Turkan. She was the wife of Iltutmish and mother of Rukn-ud-din Firoz. From a Turkish slave-maid she rose to the status of chief queen of Sultan Iltutmish. She wanted her son Rukn-ud-din to succeed while Iltutmish had nominated Razia as heir-apparent. She won over a section of nobility and with their support manipulated her son’s succession.

Rukn-ud-din Firoz was totally incompetent. Shah Turkan concentrated all political authority in her hands and issued royal commands. She utilized her authority for settling her personal scores and exterminating her son’s opponents. She tortured the inmates of the harem and executed some of them. She got Qutb-ud-din, another son of Iltutmish, blinded and ultimately killed. She conspired to eliminate Razia. Her reckless behaviour antagonized the nobles and provincial Governors. They rose in revolt and ultimately, she was overthrown. Rukn-un-din, in all

3 Ahmad, M. Aziz (Political History and Institutions of the Early Turkish Empire of Delhi, p.191), name her Turkan Khatun. But as per T.N., (Raverty), I,p.630), Turkan Khatun was the name of Razia's mother and not of this lady.

4 T.N., (Raverty), I,p.630, 631, n.4. He depicted her as "head" of the Sultan's harem while at p.638, he referred Razia's mother as" greatest" of the ladies. In the original text, the word used for Shah Turkan is "Mahtar" (Mahtar) at p.181 and that for Razia's mother is "Bujurgtar" (Bujurgtar) at p.185. Since the status for both could not be the same, it appears that Shah Turkan was his first concubine in point of time and age while Razia's mother was his chief wife. See also Isami, (Text), p.128; Nigam, S.B.P., Nobility Under the Sultans of Delhi, p.28; Aziz Ahmad, p.188. Both these modern authors support Raverty's view.
probability, was also put to death.  

Razia succeeded Rukn-ud-din Firoz. Her accession heralded a new epoch in the history of Muslim women in India and established woman's right to sovereign power. Her administrative qualities were visible even during the reign of her father. Since the late Sultan noticed in her indications of sovereignty and high spirit, inspite of her being a daughter, he groomed her to be his successor. He made all efforts to give her proper training in administration. He allowed her to exercise authority in the affairs of the state. When he left Delhi for an expedition to Gwalior in 1231 A.D., she was left behind to manage the affairs at Delhi which she did with perfection. Therefore, when the Sultan returned from Gwalior-conquest, he directed Taj-ul-Mulk Mahmud, the Mushriif-i-Mumalik (Secretary of State) to draw a decree naming

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

5 T.N., (Raverty), I,pp.631-36; Sirhindii, pp.21-23; Ferishta, I,pp.120-21; T.A.,(De), I, pp.72-74; Badaoni, I,pp.97-98. Strangely, J.sami totally overlooked her fair and foul activities.

6 Raverty in his translation of T.N., converts Razia into Raziyyat by contending that Raziyyat has a meaning while Razia does not have. But, it is not necessary that a name should have a meaning. Since she is famous in history as Razia, the same has been used in this study.

7 T.N.,(Raverty), I,p.638. It is said that he even struck a coin in Razia's name to lend her popularity among the masses (Habibullah,A.B.M., The Foundation of Muslim Rule in India,p.114). Nelson Wright, (Coins and Metrology of the Sultans of Delhi ,p.40,n.161A), opined that Razia as Queen herself issued it and dated it 1237 A.D.
her as his heir-apparent.  

Theoretically and constitutionally, the Turks were not opposed to Razia's nomination nor did any Muslim jurist question its legality. However, they were men of the 'Man's' age and did not like a lady to rule them. They represented against this nomination to the Sultan. The Sultan silenced them explaining the incapability of his sons and the competence of Razia: "After my death, it will be seen that not one of them will be found to be more worthy of the heir-apparentship than she, my daughter." After the Sultan's death, they side-tracked her and raised Rukn-ud-din to throne. When Rukn-ud-din's indolence and Shah Turkan's reign of terror annoyed the nobles, she rose to the occasion and sought their support. It is said, she addressed the army from the Jama Masjid at Daulat Khan, reminded them of her father's good reign and his 'Will', promised to relieve them of the oppressive regime and resolved to abdicate if she failed to keep her promise. They lent support and elevated her.

---

8 T.N., (Raverty), I, p.638; T.A., (De), I, p.74; Isami, (Text), p.126; Ferishta, I, p.121. It is opined by some authors that he later on cancelled Razia's nomination and opted for Rukn-ud-din Firoz (Yusuf Ali, Medieval India, Social and Economic Conditions, p.76). This view is not supported by any of the contemporary authorities.

9 It was only 400 years later that Shaikh Abdul Haq expressed his surprise at the conduct of jurists and Shaikhs in giving this tacit approval to Razia's succession to throne, (Religion and Politics, p.172; Schimmel, A., Islam in the Indian Subcontinent, p.12 (hereafter cited as Islam)).


229
to the throne. 11

Her work as a sovereign is too well known to need mention. However, her attempt to organize a group loyal to her only proved her undoing. Malik Hindu Khan, a slave of Iltutmish and of Indian origin, continued to be her treasurer besides being in-charge of the fort of Uch. 12 She appointed Jamal-ud-din Yaqut, an Abyssinian slave, to the high post of Amir-i-Akhr (the master of the imperial stables). Isami, followed by Sirhindi, Nizam-ud-din Ahmad, Ferishta and Badaoni charged Razia of too much intimacy with Yaqut and considered it an important factor leading to her fall. 13 Minhaj, with all praise for her qualities of head and heart,

:\n
11 Ibn Batuta, p.34; Isami, (Text), pp.126-27; T.N., (Raverty), I, p.636; also Religion and Politics, p.136. As per Isami, she addressed the people and it was a people's rising. T.N. did not narrate about her having addressed to the people but indicated about people's rising. Nizami also considered it so basing his view on these authorities. As per Ibn Batuta, she addressed the annas who after listening to her agreed to appoint her as their ruler. The word annas literally means 'mankind'. This signified army or soldiers and not the people in general. This meaning is supported by the word asakar meaning 'armies' used in the very next line which runs: "When Rukn-ud-din was killed the armies (asakar) agreed unanimously to appoint his sister Raziya as ruler."

Asakar is the plural of askar, the Arabic form of the Persian word lashkar meaning 'army' (Ibn Batuta, p.34, nn.2-4, 99, 104). This is a convincing view since the concept of people's rising for the political upheaval was unknown during those days. It must be the rising of the soldiers and amirs. In fact, Minhaj's description in very next para in the same page also points at this wherein he described how the soldiers and the amirs dethroned the King and Shah Turkan thereafter.

12 T.N., (Raverty), II, pp.745-46. Imad-ud-din Raiham was another officer of Indian origin (Aziz Ahmad, p.200, n.1).

13 Isami, (Text), pp.130-31; Sirhindi, p.25; T.A., (De), I, p.73; Ferishta, I, pp.122-23; Badaoni, I, p.120.

230
lamented,"... but as she did not attain the destiny, in her creation, of being computed among men, of what advantage were all these excellent qualifications unto her." 14

Another lady participating in court politics was the wife of Malik Nizam-ud-din, a noble during the reign of Kaiqubad. She was the daughter of Fakhr-ud-din, the Kotwal of Delhi. She gained a complete hold on the administration of the royal harem and came to be regarded as queen-mother of the Sultan. Simultaneously, she also furthered the cause of her father and husband in the administration. 15

Malika-i-Jahan, the wife of Jalal-ud-din, the mother of Rukn-ud-din Ibrahim and the mother-in-law of Ala-ud-din Khalji, played politics in the capacity of these three relations. During her husband's reign, she had complete sway over the administration. So much so that when once the King wished to be entitled *Al Mujahid Fi SabiJulah* (the fighter in the path of the Almighty) and thought that the proposal should come from the nobles, he sought her help. Malika-i-Jahan had such influence upon the nobility that she manoeuvred them to sponsor the proposal. However, the Sultan changed his mind and declined to accept the same. 16 She could sense Ala-ud-din's plans and constantly warned her husband. Her

14 T.N., (Raverty), I, p.638; also (E&D, II), p. 332. His translation is more clear: "...but she was not born of the right sex and so in the estimation of men all these virtues were worthless."


16 Barani, (Text), pp.196-97; T.A., (De), I, pp.139-40.
influence embittered the relations between them. She goaded her daughter to have a nagging attitude towards him. After Jalal-ud-din's death in 1296 A.D., Sultan’s eldest son Arkali Khan, a reputed soldier, could be best choice as his successor. He was at Multan. The queen neither waited for him nor did she consult any of the nobles and declared her infant son Rukn-ud-din Ibrahim as the next Sultan with herself as regent. She tried to win over the amirs by lavish gifts. However, her machinations failed and Ala-ud-din routed her. She fled to Multan. She realized her mistake and even sought Arkali's pardon.

Ala-ud-din Khalji's despotism left little room for women's role in politics. Amir Khusrau recorded that his attack on Gujarat was partly due to the solicitation of Kamla Devi. His chief queen Mahru intrigued for her brother Alp Khan. She managed the marriage of his two daughters to her two sons, prince Khizr Khan and prince Shadi Khan. When Ala-ud-din fell ill, she conspired with her brother for securing the

17 Ferishta, I, pp.171-72.
18 Lal, Khaljiis, pp.42-43; also Ibn Batuta, p.40. The author of Zafar-ul-Waleh, (Rizvi, KKB, P.230), however, considered that Ala-ud-din's secret love for Mahru marred his domestic peace. Ala-ud-din married her later on.
20 Dewal Rani Khizr Khan, (Rizvi, KKB), p.173; Lal, Khaljiis, pp.297-98.
throne for her son Khizr Khan. Her plan misfired and consequently, Khizr Khan was imprisoned, blinded and then killed. 22 Mahru was also imprisoned.

Among the Tughlaqs, the reign of Muhammad bin Tughlaq is important for ladies' participation in court politics. It is surprising that none of his wives is mentioned in the historical chronicles. The very fact of his marriage is shrouded in mystery. From a passing reference of Afif, it appears that he did marry in early part of his father's reign. 23 But no details about this are recorded. The contemporary authorities mention the role played by his mother and sister. While the mother's role provided sublimity to women's participation, the sister, once again, drew it back to the narrow circles of selfish intrigues.

Makhduma-i-Jahan's direct interference in politics and the measures taken by Sultan Muhammad bin Tughlaq is nowhere mentioned. But Sultan had immense regard for her political acumen. Her counsel was an important factor for granting clemency by the Sultan to the rebel nobles like Ain-ul-Mulk, Ali Shah Kar, Hushang and Nusrat Khan. 24 Besides, she participated in day to day court life, received envoys (like Ibn Batuta) and royal guests and exchanged gifts with them. 25

Ibn Batuta, pp.42-43. He named her Mahhaq instead of Mahru. See also Barani, (Text), pp.367-68 (he, however, wrote that Ala-ud-din himself had declared Khizr Khan as his heir-apparent).

Afif, (Text), pp.49,54.

Haig, III, p.160.

Prasad, Qaraunah Turks, I, p.310.
Khudavandzada, a sister of the Sultan appeared on the political scene after the death of Muhammad bin Tughlaq. She raised the claim of her son Dawar Malik for succession but the impending danger of Mongol invasion silenced her. Firoz Shah Tughlaq succeeded with the help of the nobles. He tried to keep her in good humour and got himself coronated through her. He visited her every Friday and discussed the issues of importance with her. In spite of this magnanimity shown towards her, the lady hatched a conspiracy to kill him. Luckily, the conspiracy was exposed and the Sultan escaped. She was imprisoned, her vast wealth was confiscated and her husband Khusrau Malik was banished.

Among the Lodis, the ladies played varied political roles. While Shams Khatun was an instigator, Bibi Mattu held the command in the war field and Bibi Ambha was involved in succession politics.

Shams Khatun was chief queen of Bahlol Lodi. Her brother Qutb Khan was imprisoned while Bahlol Lodi was fighting against Mahmud Shah Sharqi of Jaunpur in 1457 A.D. Meanwhile, Mahmud died and was succeeded by Muhammad Shah Sharqi. A peace was signed between the latter and Bahlol. But, when Bahlol was still on his way back, he received a letter from Shams Khatun asking him not to relax till her brother was freed. Her message was sufficient for the Sultan to retrace his steps and re-attack Jaunpur with greater force.

---

26 Afif, (Text), pp. 45-46, 100-04; also Jauhri, pp. 10, 15, 38-39.  
Bibi Mattu, wife of Islam Khan Lodi, showed her heroism and leadership during the time of Bahlol Lodi in 1452 A.D. Bahlol was away to Sirhind and there were only a few males in the fort of Delhi. Mahmud Sharqi of Jaunpur besieged the fort. Unnerved, Bibi Mattu rose to save the fort. She made the ladies to dress like men and take positions on the rampart of the fort. She gave guidance for each and every detail and then ordered beating of the drum, giving the semblance of victory for her forces. All this led Mahmud to raise the siege.28

Bibi Ambha, another wife of Sultan Bahlol Lodi, was daughter of a Hindu goldsmith. After the death of Bahlol in 1489 A.D., among the hordes of contenders for the throne, she pressed the claim of her son Nizam Khan. Isa Khan, nephew of Bahlol and one of the contenders of throne, rebuked the lady telling her that a goldsmith's son was not worthy of throne. She won over the nobles and raised her son Nizam Khan to the throne under the title Sultan Sikander Lodi.30

Ibrahim Lodi's mother played a negative role by poisoning Babur to avenge the death of her son.31

---

28 Abdullah, pp.246-47; Ahmad Yadgar, p.311; Mushtaqi, (Rizvi, UTKB, Pt.I),pp.95-96 (he called her Bibi Mastu); also Halim, p.21 (he depicted her as widow of Sultan Shah Lodi and mother-in-law of Bahlol Lodi).

29 Niamatullah, (Roy), Introduction, p.xxiv; Ferishta, I, p.328 (named her Bibi Zeina). Haig, (III, p.235), named her Ziba; Ahmad Yadgar, (p.315), called her Hema; Halim, (p.58), called her Bibi Sonari. It seems that Bibi Ambha was competing on account of weak lineage as compared to lineage of other claimants. It will not be out of place to mention that different lineage groups jockeyed for power and influence from time to time.


31 B.N., (Bev.), II, pp.541-43.
THE MUGHAL PERIOD

During Babur's time three generations of ladies - his maternal grand-mother, mother and wives - were actively involved in politics. Babur was only eleven years of age when his father died. Surrounded from all sides by enemies and rivals, it was through the wisdom and far-sightedness of his grand-mother Ehsan Daulat Begam that he steered clear of the rough political weather. "Few amongst women," Babur himself wrote, "will have been my grandmother's equal for judgement and counsel. She was very wise and far-sighted and most affairs of mine were carried through under her advice." Acting as the real head of affairs, she managed the administrative complexities with all tact and sagacity. She also foiled the conspiracy of Hasan to dethrone Babur.33

Babur's mother Qutlugh Nigar Khanam always shared her son's political vicissitudes and wanderings advising him in need and supporting him in adversity. "She was," wrote Babur, "with me on most of my guerilla expeditions and throneless time... Few of her sex excelled her in sense and sagacity."34

Babur's Shia wife Maham Begam stood by him through all odds.35 It was at her instance that Mir Khalifa's conspiracy fizzled out.36 After Babur's death, she continued taking

32 B.N.,(Bev.), I, p.43.
33 Williams, R., An Empire Builder of the Sixteenth Century, pp.34-36.
36 Prasad, Humayun, pp.33-34,36,38; also Williams, pp.171-72.

236
active part in contemporary politics till her death. In order to win over Yusufzai tribe, Babur married Bibi Mubarika of this tribe in 1519 A.D. She helped him in ending the bitterness with Yusufzais.

Humayun's wives took active interest in the affairs of the state. Bega Begam's brother-in-law Zahid Beg was favoured when he was appointed Governor of Bengal which the latter declined. Humayun wanted to punish him but she interceded, though in vain, to seek the Emperor's pardon for him. Hamida Banu kept him informed about the political developments during his illness. She interceded to save her recalcitrant brother Khwaja Muazzam.

Mahchuchak Begam, another wife of Humayun, was active at Kabul. Humayun had appointed Muhammad Hakim, her three-year-old son, as the nominal Governor of Kabul under the regency of Munim Khan. This arrangement was irksome for the lady and she contrived to free her son from the control of the regent. Munim Khan left for the court in 1561 leaving behind Ghani Khan, his son, as regent and helped by Abul Fath Beg. The new regent was weak. Mahchuchak conspired with other three nobles.

---

38 This was one of the most ferocious among the nomadic clans of the time. They inhabited the mountainous region north of Kabul river and stretched west from the Indus. They created a lot of problems for Babur (Augustus, II, pp.167, 171).

237
viz. Fath Beg, his father Fazl Beg and Wali Atgah. When once, Ghani Khan was temporarily absent from the town, she got the gates of the city closed for him with the help of these three nobles. Thereafter, she got exterminated Fath Beg and Fazl Beg. About the third counsel Wali Atgah, it was rumoured that he had a love-affair with Mahchuchak. So, Akbar sent Munim Khan with a force to set things right. But the royal forces were routed at the hands of this lady and Munim had to flee for life. She then put all those, who were suspected of infidelity, to death. Wali Atgah was one of them. Haider Qasim became her new advisor to whom, it is learnt, she got married later on. Meanwhile, Abul Ma'ali, a rebel, being pursued by the imperial forces, took refuge at Kabul. Impressed by his affirmations of faithfulness, she married her daughter to him. But the latter proved treacherous. He murdered both Mahchuchak and Haider Qasim and usurped all authority. Thus he "fixed a term to the sanguinary deeds of this terrible woman".

Khanzada Begam, a sister of Babur, was divorced by her first husband Shaibani Khan for her favouring Babur in disputed matters. During Humayun's time, she was made the principal lady of the palace after Maham's death in 1532-33 A.D. Her help was frequently sought by Humayun and his

-----------------------------

42 GHN, Introduction, p.63.
44 GHN, Tr.note, p.251.

238
brothers. In a tussle over Qandhar between Hindal and Kamran, Emperor Humayun engaged her to bring about the reconciliation between the two. Later on in 1545 A.D., when Humayun’s forces had besieged Qandhar and Askari was holding the fort, Kamran sent a secret message through this lady that he should hold on till his arrival. When the fall of the fort became imminent, Askari sent her to negotiate peace pleading a mild treatment for him. Dildar Agacha Begam, mother of Hindal, tried to dissuade him from disloyalty towards Humayun.

In the early part of Akbar’s reign, Maham Anaga and other ladies endeavoured to control and run the administration. It is a matter of controversy as to what extent was Akbar under the tutelage of Maham Anaga. Her role in the fall of Bairam

45 GHN, pp.160-61; also Prasad, Humayun, p.216. The Begam, however, did not succeed in her mission.

46 A.N., (Bev.), I,pp.338-39; Prasad, Humayun, p.129.

47 Augustus, (I,p.94); Haig, (IV, pp.79-84) and V.A.Smith, (p.35), considered Akbar totally under their control. Smith wrote, “Akbar Shook off the tutelage of Bairam only to bring him under the ‘monstrous regiment’ of unscrupulous woman.” But Tripathi, (Rise and Fall, p.183); S.R.Sharma, (Mughal Empire in India, p.119); A.L.Srivastava, (Akbar the Great, I,pp.71-72); Ishwari Prasad, (A Short History of Muslim Rule in India, pp.343-44); Rekha Mishra, (p.29) did not agree to this. The influence of the group was only for a short time. All these authorities, pro and against, agreed that their influence remained only upto 1562 A.D. except V.A.Smith, (p.36) and Haig, (IV, p.78) who extended it upto 1564 A.D.
Khan is also controversial.48 When Akbar went out of Agra for hunting, Maham Anaga and party managed to bring the Emperor to Delhi under the pretext of illness of his mother. At Delhi they complained about the authoritative power of Bairam Khan and that Akbar would not get real power in his hand till he remained in authority. Maham Anaga and Shahab-ud-din even offered to proceed to Mecca.49 Akbar, already dissatisfied with Bairam Khan, utilized the opportunity and dismissed him.

In the state of confusion that prevailed after Bairam Khan, Maham Anaga along with Shahab-ud-din Ahmad Khan started functioning like de facto Prime Minister. But over-ambitious as Maham was, she wanted to make Shahab-ud-din merely her tool. This arrangement failed and she, therefore, got Shahab-ud-din removed and brought Bahadur Khan Uzbek in his place. This arrangement also did not click because of her over-assertiveness. So, she won over Bahadur Khan’s supporters and thereafter not only got him removed as Prime Minister but also sent him to Etawah. Munim Khan joined her

48 Badaoni, (II, pp.30-31); Augustus, (I, pp.78-84); Haig, (IV, pp.78-79) and Nizam-ud-din Ahmad, (T.A., (De), II, pp.237-38) held 'harem-party' responsible for this while Abul Fazl, (A.N., (Bev.), II, pp.141, 161-67); Tripathi, (Rise and Fall, pp. 178-83); Srivastava, (Akbar, I, pp.40-42); Elphinstone, (pp.431-33) opined that Khan-Khana's own actions concerned Akbar personally and paved the way for his dismissal. M.U., (I, pp.372-73), also held Maham Anaga and party mainly responsible for perverting Akbar's feelings toward him though Bairam's highhandedness gave the final blow.

49 T.A., (De), II, pp.237-38; Ferishta, II, p.119; M.U., (De), II, pt.II, p.846; Haig, IV, p.77; V.A.Smith, pp.32-33; Augustus, I, p.83. The last author considered that Akbar went to Delhi of his own.
as Prime Minister in September 1560 A.D.. He found it difficult to run the administration without Maham's help. Akbar appointed Shams-ud-din Atka Khan, his foster father, to succeed Munim Khan in November, 1561 A.D.. Since he did not toe Maham's line, he was murdered by Adham Khan, Maham's son.

Furthering the cause of her son Adham Khan, Maham Anaga managed for him to head an army against Baz Bahadur of Malwa so that he got an opportunity of acquiring wealth and glory. Simultaneously, she sent Pir Muhammad along with him as his counsellor and thus, very tactfully, removed "an inconvenient rival from court". Adham Khan defeated Baz Bahadur in 1561 A.D.. All his treasures and the harem fell into his hands. After the victory, he sent only a few elephants to the Emperor and kept back the rest of the treasure and also the beauties with him. This enraged Akbar and he personally marched towards Malwa. Maham Anaga, as a shrewd politician, sent a message to her son fore-warning him about the Emperor's march and herself started towards Malwa along with royal seraglio. But Akbar reached earlier and took Adham by surprise. Adham Khan submitted but it was only after the arrival of Maham Anaga and at her intercession that, ultimately, the Emperor pardoned him. Adham Khan presented whole of the war-booty to Akbar but again kept back two of the beauties of Baz Bahadur's harem for himself. When this was discovered, Maham, with all brutality, got those girls killed. This crime was detected but Akbar ignored it.  

Immediately after returning


241
from Malwa, Akbar recalled Adham Khan. Later on, when he murdered the Prime Minister Atka Khan, the Emperor did not leave him and imparted the severest punishment of being thrown from the palace parapet till death. Akbar himself broke the news of his death to ailing Maham Anaga. She simply murmured, "You did well" and not being able to bear the shock, died just forty days after the death of her son.\footnote{A.N., (Bev.), II, pp.235, 268-75; M.U., I, pp.147-48; Haig, IV, p.81. Also Yasin, p.128. He opined, "Maham’s failure to rise above the weakness of a mother made her unworthy of rule."}

Hamida Banu Begam, Akbar’s mother, also took interest in politics. She was a party to Maham Anaga in bringing about the downfall of Bairam Khan. Salima Sultan Begam mediated between Akbar and Salim (Jahangir). On Salim’s rebellion at Allahabad, she along with Hamida Banu and Gulbadan Begam brought rapprochement.\footnote{A.N., (Bev.), III, pp.1222-23, 1228, 1230.} It is noteworthy that Akbar’s Rajput wives have not been mentioned for having played any active political role.

In the very first year of Jahangir’s reign, his eldest son Khusro revolted. His mother Shah Begam (Man Bai), Jahangir’s favourite queen, tried to restrain Khusro assuring him Jahangir’s kindness and affection. Failing in her attempt, she committed suicide hoping that "her fate would bring her undutiful son to contrition". Khusro’s revolt was suppressed. At the intercession of his step-mothers, sisters and Mahabat Khan, Jahangir pardoned him and allowed audience in the

\footnote{A.N., (Bev.), III, pp.1222-23, 1228, 1230.}
Khusro's supporter Mirza Aziz Koka was also pardoned at Salima Sultan Begam's recommendation.

"No incident in the reign of Jahangir", wrote Beni Prasad, "has attracted such attention as his marriage with Nur Jahan. For full fifteen years that celebrated lady stood forth as the most striking and most powerful personality in the Mughal Empire." Good or bad, her influence was discernibly felt in every sphere. She was almost the de facto ruler.

The salutary impact of Nurjahan improved the health of the Emperor and made him more serene in his public behaviour. With her qualities of wisdom, drive, hard-work, presence of mind, resourcefulness, bravery and leadership, she proved herself to be an able administrator and a capable commander of her army. Her aesthetic taste and philanthropic pursuits brought splendour and benevolence. Later on, when her parents died and Jahangir's health failed, the scene changed dramatically. Her desire to remain at the helm of affairs even after Jahangir died, led to well known revolts.

---

54 M.U., I, p.328; Ain., I, p.345.
55 Beni Prasad, p.147.
56 Lannepoole, Stanley, Mediaeval India Under the Mohammedan Rule, p.298.
57 Mutamad Khan, p.405; Beni Prasad, p.159. See also Tirmizi, S.A., Edicts of the Mughal Harem, pp.20-53 (for Nurjahan's extent of influence in administration).
58 See also Chapter VI for details.
of prince Khurram and Mahabat Khan. "The issue was perfectly clear," wrote Beni Prasad, "Nur Jahan must either soon retire from public life or supersede Shah Jahan by a more pliable instrument." Out of the other three sons of Jahangir, Khusro was already dead and Parvez was a spent force. Shahryar, a lad of sixteen and nashudani (good for nothing), was Nurjahan’s choice. She got her daughter Ladli Begam married to him. She also got the fiefdom of Dholpur bestowed on him as against Khurram’s asking for it. With the intention of sending Khurram out of India, she obtained Jahangir’s order appointing him for Qandhar campaign. Khurram put many conditions and was declared a rebel. After three years of miserable life, Khurram’s rebellion ended in utter failure. Nurjahan forced him to surrender the forts of Rohtas and Asirgarh and send his two sons Dara and Aurangzeb as hostages. He was left with Balaghat only.

Mahabat Khan could be another challenge to Nurjahan. He was an officer who had opposed her sway over Jahangir and, with his usual frankness, had impressed upon the Emperor to free himself from the petticoat bondage. She was apprehensive of Mahabat Khan joining hands with Parvez. Both had worked together in quelling Shah Jahan’s revolt. Nurjahan asked Mahabat Khan to send war booty collected during Shah

59 Beni Prasad, p.274.
Jahan's revolt. Her designs were evident to Mahabat Khan and he rose in revolt. It was a novel rebellion wherein, without harming the Emperor, he just imprisoned him and separated him from the company of Nurjahan. Nurjahan was able to free the Emperor tactfully and Mahabat's rebellion failed.

On Jahangir's death at Lahore, Nurjahan called a meeting of the nobles. Asaf Khan, who was supporting the cause of his son-in-law Shah Jahan, did not allow it to be held. Nurjahan managed to send a message to Shahryar to collect army and come to Lahore. Asaf Khan, on the other hand, declared Dawar Bakhsh, son of Khusro, a make-shift Emperor till Khurram came from the South. He sent an army against Shahryar. Shahryar was defeated and blinded. After the arrival of Shah Jahan, Dawar Bakhsh was removed and Shah Jahan ascended the throne. Nurjahan retired from politics. So complete was her political eclipse that according to the records of English Factories, within a few months of her husband's death, all rupees bearing her stamp were called in and "were not to be uttered" at Agra.

During Shah Jahan's time, his wife Mumtaz was the centre of attraction. She became the chief lady of the harem and was frequently consulted by her loving husband in the matters of the state. She was entrusted with royal seal to be put on

the state documents after they were finally drafted. Saif Khan, her brother-in-law, was removed from the Governorship of Gujarat and was ordered to be arrested because of his dubious conduct during Emperor's march from Gujarat to Delhi. It was at the intercession of Mumtaz that Shah Jahan ordered Sher Khan, the new Governor, not to inflict any injury on him.

During this march, Shah Jahan had looted the rich Hindu merchants of Ahmedabad. The officials continued the looting even after Shah Jahan's departure. It was at the interference of Mumtaz and her sister that the Emperor forbade the plunder.

The trouble with the Portuguese was initiated at her instance as they had carried away two of her slave girls. The persecution of the Portuguese was the outcome.

After the death of Mumtaz Mahal, Shah Jahan's eldest daughter, Jahanara Begam, popularly known as Begam Sahib, took over the role of principal lady. Bernier wrote:

... her ascendancy in the court of the Mogol should have been nearly unlimited; that she should always have regulated the humours of her father, and exercised a powerful influence on the most weighty concerns.

As such, she was the most respected lady of the court. In the

---

68 Manucci, I, p.176; Saksena, pp.106-07, n.10.
69 Bernier, p.11; Manucci, I, p.208; Tavernier, I, p.15.
administrative sphere, her hold was so pervading that all matters passed through her. The Governor of Thatta was to be punished for his tyranny and extortion. Since he pleased her with presents, the punishment was forgiven. He was rewarded with the Governorship of Allahabad. Similarly, Prithi Chand, the King of Kashmir took the help of Jahanara to please Shah Jahan. Aurangzeb, the then Viceroy of Deccan attacked Qutb-ul-Mulk, the ruler of Golkunda in 1656 A.D. for non-payment of arrears of tribute. When the prince was about to annex it, the Emperor asked him to call off the siege after realizing the indemnity. Jahanara, in connivance with Dara, was responsible for this.

Several letters written to or by Jahanara showed the recommendations made by or to her in favour of a specific person for a specific appointment. The records of English


Aurangzib, I, pp.130-31, 208; also Bernier, pp.20-21; Qanungo, I, pp.137-38; Tripathi Rise and Fall, pp.468-72 (he considers their impact only partly true. Shah Jahan himself did not want to entangle his forces in a prolonged fight).

"Adab", fols.197a,b,200a,b; "Rukkat", (Aligarh), fols. 200a,b, 201b, 198b, 199a. Vide "Rukkat", fol. 200a and "Adab", fols. 197a,b, Aurangzeb recommended the case of Murtaza Quli Khan for appointment. Vide "Rukkat", fols. 200a,b and "Adab", fols.200a,b, Jahanara recommended Muhammad Nabi to open a karkhana in Burhanpur and Machlipattam. Vide "Rukkat", fols. 200b and 201b, Aurangzeb requested Jahanara to help him in getting back the fort of Asirgarh which was handed over to Murad after being taken away from him. Vide "Rukkat", fol. 198b, Jahanara recommended Aurangzeb to appoint Mir Nasir in place of Multafit Khan which Aurangzeb promised to do. Vide "Rukkat", fol.199a, Jahanara wrote to Aurangzeb about the claims of Aatish Khan to which Aurangzeb replied that her wish would be carried through. Also M.U., II, Pt.II, pp. 1021-22 (Jahanara recommending Zahid Khan Koka for promotion to one of the princes).
Factories testified as to how foreigners in India sought her favour to promote their interests. Dutch traders frequently approached her through her *Diwans* and maids to get her *nishans* so as to facilitate the recovery of their debts.  

She supported the cause of Dara in the war of succession. She tried to persuade her brothers to avoid the battle and proposed a partition of the empire. She also tried to arrange a meeting between Aurangzeb and Shah Jahan. After her failure, she joined Shah Jahan in confinement. She entreated the captive Shah Jahan thrice to forgive Aurangzeb and succeeded ultimately to get a formal pardon for him. Aurangzeb held her in great esteem. He restored her all powers and made her head of the harem. Sipihr Shukoh and Izid Bakhsh, sons of Dara and Murad respectively, were released at her instance and rewarded with suitable *mansabs*. She counselled Aurangzeb against re-imposing *jazia*. 

---

74 *English Factories*, (1646-59), pp.219-20 (mentioned how one Hakikat Khan assured the Dutch to procure a *nishan* from Jahanara for helping them to recover their debt from Chattarsal); (1651-54), p.50 (about David's visit to Jahanara to pay respect to her immediately after landing in India); (1655-60), pp.15, 73-74 (how with the help of her *nishan*, Dutch could recover their insurance money).

75 Aqil Khan Razi, *Waqiat-i-Alamgiri*, pp.16-17, 28; Ishwar Dass, pp.36-37; Tavernier, I, p.299; *Aurangzib*, II, pp.258, 264; Bernier, pp.61, 64.

76 Khafi Khan, (Text), Pt.II, p.188; *Aurangzib*, III, p.36.

77 Tavernier, I, p.299; Manucci, II, pp.117-18; *Aurangzib*, III, p.37.

78 Ishwar Dass, pp.93-94.

79 Manucci, III, pp.275-76.
remained effective till her death in 1681 A.D.. Aurangzeb deeply mourned her death and ordered her name to be entered in all official papers in future as Sahibat-uz-Zamani or 'the mistress of the age'.

Some of Shah Jahan's mistresses also exercised influence in contemporary politics. Farzana Begam, wife of Jafar Khan was one of them. In order to get her, Shah Jahan wanted to eliminate her husband. But it was at her asking that not only did the Emperor shelve this idea but he also sent her husband as the Governor of Bihar. Similarly, when Khalilullah Khan was punished for teasing a kanchani, it was at her recommendation that Shah Jahan pardoned him.

Aurangzeb's favourite sister Roshanara helped him during the war of succession and handed him over all the gold and silver she possessed. While arranging a meeting between Aurangzeb and Shah Jahan, Jahanara had conspired to arrest the former with the help of Tartar women. It was Roshanara's spying that Aurangzeb came to know of this conspiracy and did not visit Shah Jahan. After the arrest of Dara, she demanded capital punishment for him. After his accession,
Aurangzeb kept the seal of the empire under her care. The signet with which it had to be impressed was kept back by him to ensure that the princess did not make use of the instrument to promote any sinister design. She fell from favour during Aurangzeb's illness in 1662. She misused the royal seal in her possession for writing letters to Governors and Generals seeking support for Sultan Azam, Aurangzeb's nine years old son, in the event of Emperor's death. This enraged Aurangzeb and led to her eclipse.

Aurangzeb's daughter Zeb-un-nisa was adept in politics. She frequently attended the court and helped her father. Her correspondence with Aurangzeb shows her administrative participation like making appointments, disbursing salaries, dismissing and promoting officials. Shah Nawaz khan, her maternal grand-father was released at her

86 Khosla, p.44.
87 Bernier, p.123; Manucci,II,pp.49-51, 54-55; Aurangzib, III,p.38; Tavernier, I,p.300. The last author considered the smuggling of a young man by the princess into her compartment for 15-20 days as the reason for their strained relations.
89 "Rukkat", (Aligarh), fols.313a,b(whereby Aurangzeb wrote to her suggesting a particular name for a particular post, adding , however , that the final choice lay with her); fol.312b(she asked Aurangzeb for disbursement of the pay of some official to which Aurangzeb informed having sent necessary instructions to the clerk concerned. Aurangzeb also wrote to her that if Hakim Abdulla was not dependable then he should be replaced by Kokazada after being promoted ); Rukkat, (Bilmoria), p.160,n.1(at her asking , Muhammad Ibrahim , the pay-master was raised to the post of Seh-Hazari with a title of Mirza Khani and a present of Rs. two thousand).
Her secret correspondence with her rebel brother Muhammad Akbar brought about her fall. She was deprived of her property and pension and imprisoned at Salimgarh where she died in 1702 A.D.  

Zinat-un-nisa played a reconciliatory role in the family. She secured interview with the Emperor for erring princes Kam Bakhsh and Azam. She was entrusted with the task of looking after the Maratha captives, Yesu Bai, widow of Shambhaji and her son Shahu. She developed a soft corner for them and helped in their release from the Mughal control. She managed her father's household in Deccan for a quarter of a century till her death.

Among Aurangzeb's wives Udaipuri Mahal managed pardon many a time for Kam Bakhsh. Nawab Bai got her two sons Muhammad Sultan and Muazzam pardoned. When Muhammad Sultan was imprisoned for his rebellion, his mother managed his release and a mansab of 8000 + 2000 for him from the Emperor. During the expedition against Rana of Chittor, the Rajputs

---

90 Hamid-ud-din,p.43.  
91 M.A.,(Tr.),p.126;Ishwar Dass , p.182; Aurangzib, III,p.35.  
94 Aurangzib ,I,p.38;Haig,IV,p.302.  
95 Aurangzib ,I,p.35;Manucci,II,pp.296,438.  
96 Ishwar Dass , p.93.  

251
instigated Muazzam to rebel but Nawab Bai dissuaded him. 97

Jahandar Shah's mistress Lal Kanwar played significant political role. Her worthless relatives and friends were raised to dignity with mansabs, titles and presents. Her brother Khoshal Khan received a mansab of 7000 and her uncle Niamat Khan of 5000. Khoshal Khan also coveted the Viceroyalty of Akbarabad to which the Emperor agreed. However, such usurpations were highly resented by the nobles and Zulfiqar Khan very aptly and sarcastically brought it to the notice of the Emperor. He delayed the preparation of the farman in this regard and asked for a bribe of five thousand guitars and seven thousand trimbels. The matter was reported to Lal Kanwar, who conveyed her resentment to the Emperor. The latter called for the explanation of the Wazir and wanted to know the reason for such a demand. To this, the Wazir replied that since the high positions had already been occupied by the dancers and singers, he wanted these musical instruments to be distributed among the dispossessed Governors and Generals to learn them so that they could fill the vacancies created by the dancers and singers, in order to earn their living. Khoshal Khan could not get the Subedari nor

97 Khafi Khan, (Text), Pt.II, p.264; But at other occasions, she could not check her sons from rebellious inclinations. Muazzam was even arrested for this [M.A., (Tr.), pp.63,178-79, (and for Muhammad Sultan) 17,74; also Aurangzib, I, p.34].

252
could the Emperor punish the Wazir. 98

Many of the lowly placed acquaintances of Lal Kanwar were highly favoured. Zahra or Zohra, a vegetable seller, rode an elephant magnificently decorated and surrounded all around by her people who were equally insolent and insulting to the passers-by. In one of her journeys, when Chin Qulich Khan (afterwards Nizam-ul-Mulk), the ex-commander-in-chief, happened to pass her way, without any provocation, she called him 'the son of a blind man' and then complained against him to Lal Kanwar. It was his good luck that at the behest of the Wazir, the matter was ultimately dropped. 99

Farrukhsiyar's daughter Malika Zamani managed the support of Husain Ali Khan, one of the Sayyid brothers, with the help of other harem-ladies. 100 Thereafter, his mother Sahibai-Nishwan fully ensured his favour through her negotiations. 101 With the help of Sayyid brothers,

98 Siyar, (N.M.), pp.36-37, also (Briggs), pp.31-32; Faruqi, ff. 37a, 37b (Niamat Khan depicted as brother of Lal Kanwar and pining for Governorship of Multan); Khafi Khan, (Text), Pt. II, pp.689-90 (held Khoshal Khan's mansab as 5000 + 3000). His narration too differed a little bit. As per him, Zulfiqar Khan explained to the Emperor that he wanted the bribe of guitar players and drawing masters (ustad-i-nakkashi) in order to make the nobles to learn their art and be fit for high offices which the Emperor had started bestowing on such persons). See also Irvine, I, pp.193-94; Satish Chandra, p.72.


100 Siyar, (N.M.), I, pp.42-43.

101 Ibid., p.47, also (Briggs), p.41; Satish Chandra, pp.91-92; Irvine, I, p.206; also M.U., I, p.710.
Farrukhsiyar ultimately succeeded to the throne of Delhi. During the reign of Muhammad Shah, his mother Qudsia Begam (Fakhr-un-nisa) was instrumental in getting the throne for her son and also in the downfall of Sayyid brothers.  

Another woman was Rahim-un-nisa, the daughter of a dervesh and popularly known as Koki Jiu. She came into prominence after the fall of Sayyid brothers and death of Amin Khan, the Wazir. She became a confidant of the Emperor and was entrusted with the royal seal with authority to imprint it on the state documents. She was a corrupt woman and accepted gratifications. Muhammad Khan Bangash paid her one lac rupees on his being appointed to the government of Malwa. 

She formed a clique with Roshan-ud-daulah Zafar Khan, the Bakshi, eunuch Khwaja Khidmatgar, a close companion of the Emperor and Abdul Ghafur, a dervesh who became popular in the harem through his art of magic. This group collected a lot of money as peshkash. Nizam-ul-Mulk the Wazir was an eye sore for them and was forced to withdraw from the scene.

---

102 Malik, Muhammad Shah, pp.57-59; Irvine, II, pp.3-4, 57, 60-61; Satish Chandra, p.157.


104 Irvine, II, p.265.

105 Khafi Khan, (Text), Pt. II, pp.940, 951; Sivar, (N.M.), I, p.244, also (Briggs), p.223; M.U., II, p.606. See also Irvine, II, p.265; Malik, A Mughal Statesman, pp.49-50; Satish Chandra, p.213 (as per him, Khwaja Khidmatgar was averse to bribery, hence, he fell from the group).
and leave for Deccan. Her influence lasted till 1732 A.D..

During the reign of Ahmad Shah, his mother Udham Bai (Nawab Qudsia) had great political sway. Her brother Man Khan, a male dancer, was raised to a mansab of 6000 along with a title of Mutagad-ud-daulah because of her influence. Eunuch Javed Khan, her gallant, became all powerful in administration by her backing. After the murder of Javed Khan, Ahmad Shah left administration to her, himself relegating to pleasures. She became de facto administrator transacting all the state business. She was actively involved in the factional court rivalries of the time and conspired infructuously with Turani group headed by Intizam-ud-daulah to kill the then Wazir Safdar Jang. The conspiracy failed because it was leaked out to the Wazir by Malika-uz-Zamani, the other widow of Muhammad Shah.

Away from the Delhi politics, in the far flung provinces of the Mughal empire, some ladies showed interest in the political activities of their husbands and relations. In Bengal, after the death of the Governor Murshid Quli Jafar Khan, there was a tussle for Governorship between his son-in-law Shuja-ud-din Muhammad Khan and latter's son Serferaz Khan. It was through the mediation of the widow of Murshid Quli Jafar Khan that Serferaz Khan agreed to submit in


favour of his father. Thereafter, Alivardi Khan, the then Deputy Governor of Bihar, having an eye on the Governorship of Bengal, tried to create dissensions between Serferaz Khan and his step brother Taqi Khan. Though the Governor could bring reconciliation between his sons, yet being angry with Taqi Khan for his behaviour, he forbade him from coming to see and salute him. It was at the intercession of Zinat-un-nisa Begam, mother of Serferaz Khan that the matters were settled between them. When Alivardi Khan was given the Deputy Governorship of Azimabad, she, on her own, conferred on him not only rich khilat but also the government of Bihar from her side. Nafisa Begam, sister of Serferaz Khan was responsible for furthering the cause of her son Murad Ali Khan. It was at her asking that her son was married to the daughter of Serferaz Khan, the Governor of Bengal after Shuja-ud-din, and was gradually raised from the post of Superintendent of the Nawarah (war-vessels) to the Deputy Governor of Jahangirnagar (Dacca). So important was she that when Alivardi Khan became the Governor of Bengal


109 Riyazu-s-Salatin, pp.297-98. Zinat-un-nisa was the daughter of Murshid Quli Jafar Khan (Siyar, (N.M.), I, pp.274-75 ; Stewart, p.445).

110 Siyar, (N.M.), I,pp.281-82.

111 Riyazu-s-Salatin, pp.304-05 and nn.1,3; also Siyar, (N.M.),I,p.340 (he referred to her not as sister, but as the mother of Serferaz Khan).

256
after killing her brother, off he went to her for begging pardon and allowed her to retain her personal estate yielding more than one lac rupees per annum. Durdanah Begam, another sister of Serferaz Khan, was a great instigator. She was married to Murshid Quli Khan, the Governor of Orissa. Alivardi Khan, after getting the Nizamat of Bengal, attacked Orissa. Murshid Quli Khan wanted to patch up but Durdanah Begam wanted to avenge the death of her brother and insisted on her husband to fight.

Alivardi Khan's wife, Nawab Begam Sahib, moved along with her husband on an elephant in the battle field and counselled him even in critical moments. During the battle with Marathas under Raghoji Bhosla, she played the role of supreme political officer. The Begam sent a political mission to Raghoji's camp for a peace treaty.

Ghasiti Begam, daughter of Alivardi Khan, was also active politically. After Alivardi, Siraj-ud-daulah, the son of his youngest daughter Amna Begam and also his heir-apparent, succeeded him. Ghasiti Begam opposed his succession and appointed Mir Nazar Ali as Commander of her vanguard and Nawab Bairam Khan as General of her army. But on the

112 Yusuf Ali, Ahwal, pp.89-90; Riyazu-s-Salatin, pp.320, n.2, 339, n.1; also Sarkar (ed.), p.442; Datta, Alivardi, p.36.
113 Siyar, (N.M.), I, pp.349-50; Stewart, p.449.
114 Riyazu-s-Salatin, pp.329 and n.1, 339, n.1; Datta, Alivardi, pp.246-47.
115 Yusuf Ali, Ahwal, p.116; Siyar, (N.M.), II, p.11; Sarkar, Fall:, I, pp.76-77.