Theoretically, the Muslim women were bestowed with abundant economic rights and privileges. The Qoran elaborated rules for the entitlements of a Muslim woman, to her maintenance and to mahr. It bestowed on her property rights through inheritance and through other means.

**RIGHT TO MAINTENANCE**

Women were considered to be the honour of the family and as their movements were restricted by purdah and seclusion, it was not considered honourable for any family to allow them to go out for earning their livelihood.\(^1\) As was also provided in the Qoran, both rich and poor, considered it their duty to provide for the basic needs of their women-folk. The women of the commoners, who had to undertake different economic activities or seek a job outside for their maintenance, were not given a respectable place in society. The upper class ladies who remained confined within the four-walls of their houses

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1 "The ability", writes Jeffery Partricia, "to keep women in seclusion and uninvolved in economic activity outside the home is an important index of relative wealth and ... of a family's worth in an economic sense, but it also becomes indicative of their social worth, or their honour." She has written this is context of the present position of the Muslim women but it was very much applicable on the family psychology of the medieval times (Frogs in the Well, Indian Women in Purdah, p.25).
harem became their ideals and the symbol of social honour. Whosoever had sufficient resources for maintaining his family, his first concern was to stop ladies of the house from going out for a job. The rich people who maintained large harems would also make provision for them on priority. Sultan Ghias-ud-din of Malwa who had fifteen thousand ladies in his harem, Akbar who had five thousand women in his seraglio and prince Shah Alam who had two thousand women to support, all tried to maintain them in a dignified way. Each female in the harem was given an allowance according to her position.

Elaborate arrangements were also made for the upkeep and comfortable living of royal and noble widows and other women attached to them, for which they maintained separate widow-houses.

The expenses incurred by the royalty on their harems varied according to their financial resources. Since the Mughals were much wealthier than their counterparts in the Sultanate period, their ladies got more allowances than the

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2 Jahangir, for instance, enhanced the allowances of all the *purdah nashin* ladies of the royal harem from 20% to 100% according to their condition and relationship and all the domestics by 20% soon after his accession (Tuzuk, l,p.10). Also Manucci, II, p.310.

3 A.N., (Rev.), Ill, p.107 (care of Humanyun's widow); Finch, p.186 (for maintenance of Akbar's widows). M.U., II,Pt.II,p.1078; Latif, S.M., Lahore, Its History, Architectural Remains and Antiquities, p.58 and Ain., I,Tr.note,p.574 and n.(for allowance of Rs. two lac p.a. provided to widow Nurjahan. Elphinstone by mistake wrote it as two lac p.m.); M.A., (Tr.), p.23 (Hamida Banu, the widow of Khalilullah Khan, Subedar of Lahore, being provided with an annual stipend of Rs. 50 thousand by Aurangzeb); Manucci, II, pp.118, 286.
royal ladies of the earlier period. Some among them were specially privileged. The bestowal of maintenance grant in the form of jagirs and inams was a common feature with the Mughals. Usually, out of their total allowance, half was paid in cash from the royal treasury and the other half in the form of these jagirs or land-rents. The collection from these land-rents always yielded more than the amount in exchange for which they were granted. Babur had assigned houses and lands to ninety-six begams and khanams. Sher Shah gave a grant of some villages to Bibi Fath Malika, widow of Mustafa Farmuli, for her maintenance. Nurjahan held so many jagirs spread all over the empire that on the basis of her rights she could be conferred with the title equivalent to that of Commander of 30,000. She held the jagir of Ramsar located about twenty miles south-east of Ajmer. She was also bestowed with the

4 Muntaz Mahal’s annual allowance of Rs. 10 lac (Lahori, Vol.1, Pt.I, p.96); for Jahanara’s annual allowance starting from Rs. six lac p.a. by Shah Jahan then raised to 12 lac p.a. and was further enhanced to 17 lac p.a. by Aurangzeb (M.A., (Tr.), p.36; Saksena, pp.63-64. Latif, (p.58) by mistake, has written her allowance as Rs. 60 lac p.a. during Shah Jahan’s time); For Lal Kanwar’s annual allowance of Rs. two crore besides jewels and clothes (Haig, IV, p.326; Irvine, William, Later Mughals, I, p.194). For a modern estimation of expenses on cash allowance and wages on Akbar’s harem worth 3.50 lac dams annually i.e. 42% to total harem expenditure (Moosvi, Shireen, The Economy of the Mughal Empire, pp.248-50, 276. Dam was a copper paisa/coin (Richards, pp.20, 173).

5 Mishra, Rekha, Women in Mughal India, p.61.

6 Abbas, (Amb.), p.254. Also refer (E&D), IV, p.355 wherein grant of two parganas has been mentioned.

7 Tuzuk, I, p.342; Ain., I, Tr.note, p.574.
Jagir of Toda, on the occasion of Khurram's Deccan victory in 1617 A.D., which had an annual revenue of two lac rupees. Similarly, Haji Hur Parwar Khanam, Nurjahan’s maternal aunt (and also her sister-in-law since she was married to her brother Ibrahim Khan Fath Jang) who lived up to the middle of Aurangzeb’s reign, held Kol Kalali as altamgha. Jahanara Begam was the greatest beneficiary. She owned the villages of Achchol, Farjahara, Safapur, Doraha, Medina and Panipat. From Panipat alone she was getting an income of one crore dams. Such was her luxury that while Doraha was given to her for the maintenance of her gardens, the revenue of Surat, one of the biggest commercial centres of the time, was

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8 Tuzuk, 1, p.380 and n.1. He referred to it as Boda which seems to be a mistake. See Ain., I, p.294 for reference of Toda.

9 Ain., I, Tr. note, p.575. Altamgha was a 'Grant in Seal', a special tenure introduced by Jahangir in which "the grant was to be made under a particular form of seal and was not to be altered or resumed so that by contrast with the other tenures of the period, it may be regarded as permanent, though, an absolute Emperor couldn't be prevented from annulling it" (Moreland, W.H., The Agrarian System of Moslem India, pp.127, 270).

10 Lahori, I, Pt.II, p.51; Qazwini, III, fol.626. The village is named as Shahbabad by the former and Begamabad by the latter.

11 Lahori, II, p.582.

12 Lahori, I, Pt.II, p.27.

13 Rukkat, (Bilmoria), p.77.


granted to her to meet out her betel expenses.16 In the later Mughal period, Qudsia Begam possessed full estate of her own including jagirs around Ujjain.17

Some of the Kings showed concern for the maintenance of their female subjects of all classes. During the time of Iltutmish, the widow of the iqta holders continued to retain the iqtas for their upkeep and when, at a later date, Balban confiscated many of them, he compensated those ladies by giving them necessary allowances for their living. During the time of Firoz Tughlaq, in case of separation, the wife of a respectable person was entitled to a maintenance allowance which was estimated according to the standard diet taken by that class.18 During the Mughal period, because of the escheat system, all belongings of a deceased noble would automatically become the property of the state. But in practice, the Emperors ordered to leave behind a lot for the widows and children of such nobles.19 For the needy Muslim women, the help rendered by the Kings like Firoz Shah Tughlaq and the royal ladies like Makhduma-i-Jahan, mother of Sultan Muhammad bin Tughlaq, Maham Begam, Nurjahan, Mumtaz Mahal

18 Ashraf, p.219, n.7 on the authority of "Fiqh-i-Firuz Shahi".
needs special mention. Because of this, many of the destitute women could maintain themselves.

One noteworthy contribution of Mughal royalty was their patronage of the women who were without any means of livelihood. They gave them suyurghal grants or donations of land as assistance for their livelihood. Help in the form of warifa (subsistence allowance) was given before the Mughals. About Sher Shah, Abbas Sarwani wrote:

He gave money in cash as pension ... to those of its residents who in matter of their requirements had been incapacitated to earn their livelihood with their own hand, such as the blind, the old and the infirm, the widow, crippled and the sick ....

The help in the form of madad-i-maash seemed to be an innovation of Mughals. Abul Fazl's classification of the persons being covered for this grant did not contain any

20 For details see Chapter VI.

21 This was a charitable grant given to needy, learned, religious or destitute men and women and was given in the form of land or subsistence allowance. The latter, paid in cash was called warifa and the lands bestowed were known as milk or madad-i-maash (Ain., I, p.278). Suyurghal is a Turki word and is translated by Arabic word madad-i-maash or madad-o-maash. Smith, (p.148), however considered it Persian word. It means 'assistance of livelihood' and its equivalent is milk (property). It denoted lands given for benevolent purpose (Ain., I, p.280). Badaoni called such grants as aymah and also used the term, at times, in the sense of aymah-daran, i.e. holders of grant lands (Badaoni, II, pp.207, 261). See also Datta, K.K.(ed.), Some Mughal Farmans, Sanads, Parwanahs Etc., Introduction, pp. iii, iv).


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separate category of women grantees. However, his narrations reveal that needy women were covered under one of the four specified categories with a preference and special privileges to the Irani and Turani women. Yusuf Mirak mentioned about Musammati grants whereby all the recipients were women. These were hereditary grants and differed from the

23 The grant holders were habitual of encroaching on other’s lands. Akbar made a rule that in case of grantees holding more than 100 bighas, the excess of land above 100 bighas, which was not found specified in the farmans was reduced to 2/5th, 3/5th being confiscated by the state (Ain., I, p. 279; Badaoni, II, pp. 261, 282). Mentioning about this rule, Abul Fazl wrote, “Irani and Turani women alone were excepted from this rule.” The statement points at: (a) Turani and Irani women were definitely holding such grants. (b) This was a special privilege to these ladies. After all, they were foreign Muslims belonging to the ruling class and, hence, had a higher status in society as compared to the Hindustani Muslims. (c) Nonetheless, it didn’t deny the women other than Irani and Turani origin the right of possession of such grants. This rule was applicable only to grantees having more than 100 bighas. Such big chunks of land only the women of Irani and Turani origin might be receiving and the rest of the lower strata Hindustani Muslim women having only smaller chunks. Might be, because of this that Abul Fazl incorporated the names of Irani and Turani women only while mentioning about this special privilege. The author, therefore, tends to differ from learned modern writers like Rekha Mishra, (p.136 n.7) and Rafat Bilgrami, “Women Grantees in the Mughal Empire”, QJPHS, Vol. XXXVI, July, 1988, Pt. III, p.207 (hereafter cited as "Women Grantees") who tend to draw from this that only Irani and Turani women held these grants during Akbar’s time.

24 Yusuf Mirak, p.158. He listed two categories of grants, one held by men which was known as Musakkarati and other held by women known as Chakha-i-Musammati.
Jagirs which were conferred for specified period. The women heirs were not only the co-sharers in such inheritance but their holdings also passed on to their heirs after their deaths. There is a parwana of the tenth year of the reign of Alamgir I (1667 A.D.) according to which 20 bighas of land was settled in Shaikh Bhikham as madad-i-maash by Jahangir. After his death, the land passed on to Shaikh Habi-bullah and Musammat Salima Khatun. When both of them died, the

25 It appeared that during the time of Akbar and Jahangir, this inheritance was not well defined. As per a farman of renewal of the year 1575 A.D., the madad-i-maash grant given originally in 1559 A.D. was taken away by the state after the death of the initial recipient. His heirs had to approach the Emperor afresh for its restoration which was done through this farman (Srivastava, K.P., Mughals Farman, I, pp.5-6). Thereafter, during the period when Mr. Fathullah was the Sadr (1585-89 A.D.), another order was brought. As per this, if a co-sharer, wherein the shares were undefined, died, his share in such land was taken away by the state and was restored to his heirs only after they applied afresh (Ain., I, p.280). The first regulation allowing the heirs to inherit directly a part of such grants was heard of during the time of Shah Jahan when, as per the order of fifth year of his reign, all grants of 30 bighas or less were to be wholly distributed among heirs on the death of the grantees. Out of grants larger than that, half was to be distributed among the heirs and the other half was resumed back by the state unless the heirs, by presenting themselves before the court, obtained sanads for the same too. A new order was brought by him on his eighteenth year vide which it was propounded that only in case of the grant documents containing the word "with his offspring" after the name of the grantee that half of it was to be allowed to the heirs. Otherwise, the whole of the grant was escheated. Aurangzeb lifted this condition and in his third year, practically brought back the condition to that of Shah Jahan's order of fifth year with the difference that the limit of whole grant passing in inheritance was brought down from 30 to 20 bighas above which half was resumed as before unless the heirs could manage this half too from the court (Habib, Agrarian System, pp.305-06; Shaikh Abdur Rashid, "Suyurghal Lands Under the Mughals", ed. H.R. Gupta, Essays presented to Sir Jadunath Sarkar, pp.313-22).
land was given to their heirs Inayatullah and Musammat Zainab. In another parwana of the year 1676 A.D. the claim of Sayyid Muhammad as heir of Bibi Shaha over the madad-i-maash land possessed by her during her life was confirmed.

No uniform set of rules prevailed for the division among the heirs of the grantees. Usually, the heirs abided by the Muslim law of inheritance. Aurangzeb, for the first time, laid down code of inheritance for madad-i-maash lands in 1690 A.D. The Emperor declared such lands as ariyat (given on loan). He overlooked Shariat rules with regard to them: (a) If a married daughter was a co-sharer with a son in the grant of their deceased father and she had property from her husband's side also, then, she was debarred from inheritance. If the said daughter was a widow without any source of income and there were other female heirs also, then the son was responsible for their maintenance out of the income of the grant land. (b) If a daughter was the only child of the deceased and there were other agnatic heirs also, the daughter's succession to the whole grant was to be recognized in elimination of other heirs. (c) If a grantee died childless, it was wife's privilege to enjoy the grant during her life.

26 Datta (ed.), Pw. no.503 , pp.110-11.
28 Bilgrami,"Women Grantees", p.210(mentioned about two farmans or the time of Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb respectively whereby the property division had been made as per Shariat ).
time and only after her death would it pass on to the heirs of her husband. In case there were no surviving relations of the husband, then it would pass on to the relatives of the wife. (d) If a mother, grandmother or some female Qoranic heirs survived the grantee, whose maintenance was a charge on him, then the property was to pass on to them.

A plain reading of these rules shows that these regulations were twisted, at times in favour of [(b) and (c) above] and at times against [(a) above] the ladies concerned. The main consideration seemed to be the extent of need of the different female heirs of the grantee. Irrespective of these set rules, in the later Mughal period, they were not always followed.

The granting of such lands to the needy women, both in individual and joint names, continued throughout the Mughal period. Under Jahangir, the policy was quite liberal because of the influence of Nurjahan. It was ordained that all such land grants to the ladies should be made at the orders of Nurjahan. Some available farmans of her time, where the grantees were ladies, do contain her reference indicating

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29 Mughal Farmans, I, Sr. no. XLII, pp. 70-71.
30 Oriental Records, I, D. no. 44, p. 19 (where Qazi Abdur Razzaq's only surviving heir was a daughter named Bakhi and the latter's only surviving heir, again, was a daughter named Man Bai. But Malik Bhikari, a nephew of Abdur Razzaq was considered a co-sharer with Man Bai being an agnatic heir and thus point (b) of Alamgir's rules, as discussed above, got ignored).
thereby that the lands were granted at her behest. 31 Jahangir created a new post of Sadr-un-nisa to deal exclusively with the matters of land grants of ladies. 32 Only ladies could hold this post. 33 It was expected that the department of Sadr (dealing with religious and charity matters) would hold good all grants made under her signatures. Out of the documents available, only a few bear the seal of Sadr-un-nisa. 34

There are many grant documents available which stand testimony to the generous grant of lands to destitute ladies during Jahangir's time. In 1616 A.D., Musammat Bibi Sandal and others were given 100 bighas of land as madad-i-maash which was renewed in 1616 A.D. 35 In the same year, 

31 Mughal Farmans, I, Sr.nos.XV, XVI, XVIII, XIX, pp.24-26, 28-31. She has been referred to as Nawab Mahd Uliya in all these documents.

32 Blochmann, (Ain., I,p.574), named this post as sadr-i-anas while Rafat Bilgrami, ("Women Grantees", p.207), called it Sadr-i-inath. In M.U., Dilarani has been referred to as Sadr-i-Anath (I, Pt.11,p.1077-78) while Sati-un-nisa and Fatima Begam (of the time of Aurangzeb) as Sadr-un-nisa (I, pp.295,355). Sarkar named it as Sadr or 'Superintendent of the harem' (Sarkar, Studies, p.24).

33 Haji Kuka was the first incumbent of this post. Then came Dilarani, Nurjahan's favourite servant followed by Sati-un-nisa (Muhammad Hadi, p.398; Intikhab-i-Jahangir Shahi, p.447; M.U., I, pp.260-61, also II, Pt.II, pp.1077-78.

34 Oriental Records, II, D.no.161, p.34 (bore seal of Haji Kuka); Mughal Farmans, I, Sr.nos.XV-XIX, pp.24-31 (issued through the risala of Haji Kuka); Farman-i-Salatin, D.31 (it referred to at its back Ismat Wa Iffat Dastgah Haji Kuka). Perhaps it was a recommendation of this lady because of which a grant of 30 bighas was made to Adar Banu.

35 Oriental Records, II, D.nos.161,162, pp.34-35; also D.no. 163, pp. 33-34 for another such grant.
Musammat Zohra and others were bestowed with 200 bighas of such grants.\textsuperscript{36} By another farman in the same year, eight needy ladies of different families were jointly bestowed with 200 bighas of land, each having her specified share in the same.\textsuperscript{37} Shah Jahan followed the policy of Jahangir. In 1642 A.D., 100 bighas of arable land was granted to Musammat Bibi Suhbat and others as madad-i-maash.\textsuperscript{38} There is another parwana of 1643 A.D. vide which 100 bighas of rent-free land worth cultivation in village Buhauddin Chak in pargana Chausa was given to Musammat Bibi Aulia.\textsuperscript{39} We have still another document according to which 100 bighas of land, granted to Bibi Jiu and others, was consolidated in 1653 A.D.\textsuperscript{40} Aurangzeb continued bestowing such grants. In the year 1677 A.D., he gave 100 bighas of cultivable land to Musammat Zahra and others, each with a specified share.\textsuperscript{41} Some other documents testify that 200 bighas of rent free land, granted to Bibi Niamat and others, were brought under consolidation.\textsuperscript{42} And there are many more such

\textsuperscript{36} Oriental Records, I, D.no.750, p.86.
\textsuperscript{37} Mughal Farmans, I, Sr.no.XIX, pp.30-31. See also Sr.no.XV-XVIII, pp.24-29 for other grants.
\textsuperscript{38} Oriental Records, II, D.no.156, p.59, also D.nos. 158, 159, 160, pp.36-38 for other examples.
\textsuperscript{39} Datta (ed.), Sr.no.289, p.70.
\textsuperscript{40} Oriental Records, III, D.no.874, p.26, also I, D.no.759, p.80 (for grant of 210 bighas of such land to Mst. Bibi Saha and others in Pargana Hisampur, sarkar Bahraich).
\textsuperscript{41} Mughal Farmans, I, Sr.no.XI, pp.66-67.
\textsuperscript{42} Oriental Records, III, D.no.881, pp.28-29.
During the later Mughal period, many such grants were conferred upon needy women. Bahadur Shah I, during his second year of reign (1708 A.D.) granted village Sultan in Pargana Ander in the name of Musammat Fatima and others, heirs of Shaikh Abdul Hamid and got it released in the same year. 44 Farrukhsiyar released 200 bighas of rent-free land to Bibi Aulia and 220 bighas of such land to Musammat Bibi Sahaba in the year 1716 A.D. and 1718 A.D. respectively. 45 Similarly, he granted 85 bighas at Kol to one Aisha and another 2 bighas at Jalali to Shah Bibi. 46 In the year 1729 A.D. Muhammad Shah bestowed grant of village Chak Wali as madad-i-maash on Musammat Hafiza and her sons. 47 We have documents at hand whereby Shah Alam II gave grant of village Bhatoria in sarkar Purnea to Musammat Pearl Bai and 201 bighas of rent-free cultivable land in village Kojri in the district of Purnea to

43 Oriental Records, II, D.no. 165, p.46 (for giving 250 bighas of land in pargana Haveli of sarkar Bahraich to Mst. Hamirah and others as madad-i-maash); "Aligarh Farmans" (Farmans preserved in AMU, Aligarh), nos. 212,213 & 220 (for grant of 70 bighas of rent-free land at Kol to Mst. Khatoon and 45 biswas of land at the same place to Mst. Maham); Datta, (ed.), Sr.nos.77,79,82,90,373, pp.17,18,19,85 (for grant of 100, 200,150, 300, 120 bighas of land worth cultivation to Msts. Banga Jani, Saleha, Aesha, Fatima and Zainab etc. resp.).

44 Datta (ed.),Sr.no.82 , p.34.
45 Ibid., Sr.nos.311 , 310 , pp.73-74 resp.; see also Sr.no.84, p.18.
46 "Aligarh Farmans", nos.195, 196, also Fr.nos.176, 198, 201, 205,207,209,216,221,223-225, 238 , 246, 255 in this regard.
47 Datta (ed.),Sr.no. 484,p.107 ; also Sr.no.246, p.63.
It was observed that at times, instead of land, a portion of the land-revenue of a particular piece of land was bestowed as grant. We have two documents of the third year of the reign of Alamgir II whereby grant of 27,000 dams each were made from parganas of Nizamuddinpur and Gadh Chaund in exchange of daily allowances to Musammats Khair-un-nisa and Amin-ul-Fatima as madad-i-maash. There are two other documents of the sixth year of his reign which stipulated the release of the grant of 1,30,490 dams in pargana Kasmar as gift to Saiyada Karim-un-nisa and 37,000 dams from pargana Saraisa, sarkar Hajipur, suba Bihar to Musammat Mehr-un-nisa.

Many release orders were issued by these Emperors from time to time. Whenever there was delay in implementation of their farmans making such grants, parwanas followed for enforcing them. A study of the available documents revealed that while some of them were issued soon after the issue of the farman, there were others which were released after years of gap between them and in some other cases, the farman was issued by one Emperor and release order was passed by another. There is parwana dated January 10, 1643 A.D. of Shah Jahan's reign for the release of 100 bighas of rent-free cultivable land in village Bahuddin Chak to Musammat Bibi.

48 Datta (ed.), Sr.nos.345, 343, pp.79-80 resp.
49 Ibid., Sr.nos. 545,546 , pp.118-19.
50 Ibid. , Sr.nos. 126 , 424 , pp.42,95.
Aulia in accordance with the *farman* issued three years earlier, in 1640 A.D.\(^51\) Another *parwana* of the twentieth year of Aurangzeb’s reign (July 13, 1677 A.D.) was for the release of 40 *bighas* of rent-free land to Noor Bibi in accordance with the *farman* issued twelve years earlier in the eighth year of the Emperor’s reign.\(^52\) For the *farman* of Alamgir II for grant of 27,000 *dams* each in the names of Khair-un-nisa and Amin-ul-Fatima, the release orders were passed by Emperor Shah Alam II in 1765 A.D.\(^53\)

The women grantees were not free from such corrupt practices as were generally associated with men grantees, lamented Abul Fazl.\(^54\) The practice of annual verification and scrutiny were followed when the land grant of a deceased was to pass on to his/her successors. The grant was confirmed or renewed accordingly.\(^55\) In case of any disorder, it was reduced

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51 Datta (ed.), Sr.no.289, p.70.

52 Ibid., Sr.no.77, p.33.

53 Ibid., Sr.no.548, p.119. For other release orders, see Sr.nos.296, 328, pp.71,76.

54 They not only encroached upon the neighbouring lands but also changed their own lands, at times, with some more fertile piece in some other area. For details see *Ain.*, I, pp.279-80 and Tr. note, pp.281-82; Badaoni, II, pp.261, 282,379.

55 Mughal *Farmans*, I, Sr.no.XXX, pp.48-49; Datta (ed.), Sr.nos. 102, 105, pp.37,110; "Firangi Mahal Documents", nos. 7,5,16,18 (for examples of confirmation of grants of women). See also Mughal *Farmans*, I,Sr.no. XXXVIII, pp.62-63; Datta (ed.), Sr.nos.241,246-248,496,pp.62,63,109; *Oriental Records*, II,D.no.166,169, pp.47,41-42 resp. (for cases or renewal of grants of women).
or confiscated. Aurangzeb reduced, at his own will, a grant from 150 to 100 bighas of Musammat Shahi and six other ladies, at the time of its renewal in 1666 A.D. and also revised the share of each co-sharer accordingly. Sometimes, on an application, the old grants merged with the khalsa land, were again revived in favour of the ladies after proper verification.

The verification required personal presence of the grantee. During the reign of Jahangir, exemption from verification and personal presence were made. Yusuf Mirak wrote that some zamindars of Sind acquired madad-i-maash land by buying musammati farmans. Later on, the scrutiny of all such cases, including those of women, became more and more strict. By the time of Aurangzeb, it was only after an on-the-spot enquiry or and the production of any reliable evidence that a renewal and confirmation of a previous grant and the exemption from annual verification was given to women grantees. They had to prove that they had no means of


57 Datta (ed.), Sr.nos.81(1631 A.D.), 399 (1661 A.D.), 379 (1718 A.D.), pp.17-18, 399,379 resp.

58 Mughal Farmans, I, nos.XV, XVI, XVIII, XIX, pp.24-26, 28-29.

59 Yusuf Mirak, p.191. See also Lahori, 11, pp.365-66 (for people getting grants without being presented) and pp.165-66 (showing how one of the complaints against Musawi Khan, one of the Sadrs of the time of Jahangir, was that he made grants without bringing the grantee before the Emperor's presence). It is because of this that he was removed from office during the time of Shah Jahan (M.U.II, Pt.1, p.327).
livelihood. For instance, Musammat Bibi Hafiza and others, heirs of late Muhammad Omar and others, produced not only the reliable witnesses but an on-the-spot enquiry was also made for ascertaining their genuineness and financial conditions before their application for renewal of previous grant of 420 bighas of land was accepted in 1695 A.D. Bibi Jan and others, the heirs of Sayyid Ahmad, produced not only reliable witnesses but also a certificate from the previous Sadr to the effect that they had no means of livelihood and that they were already in possession of the land. It was only after this that the renewal of this grant of 220 bighas of land was granted to the applicants.

At times, personal presence of women grantees was also pressed upon. However, for old ladies and those in purdah, representation through vakil was allowed. There is an interesting case in this regard. Musammats Kasban, Rabiah and Khayrun had received 100 bighas of land in pargana Sahali from Jahangir. They did not come personally to the court for the confirmation in 1651 A.D. (Document 7). But, when they required such confirmation again just three years later (Document 5) and again during third year of Alamgir's reign, they had to personally present themselves in the court (Document 16). Twenty years later, during twenty-third year of Alamgir's reign, they were too old to be personally present. Hence a vakil was sent on their behalf for such verification.

60 Oriental Records, II, D.no.166, p.47.
61 Oriental Records, II,D.no.169, pp.41-42; also III, D.nos.1228,815-1, 2, 816-1, 2, pp.4-5, 19-20.
Madad-i-maash grants were non-proprietary in nature since they could not be sold or transferred except through inheritance. There is a judgement to that effect of the time of Aurangzeb (1666 A.D.). The hereditary share of Bibi Lajyat out of the madad-i-maash grant of her father Sayyid Muhammad was usurped by one Sayyid Usman on the plea that the former had transferred the ownership of the land to him along with other property. On this, the order was issued that since such grant was not alienable, the land had to be restored to Bibi Lajyat. But, before the passing of the judgement, such lands were subjected to partition and transfer. In a partition deed dated 1629 A.D., Sayyid Afzal divided his madad-i-maash land measuring 75 bighas in five equal parts, two portions, out of which were given to Musammat Ghammu and one portion jointly to Bibi Man and Bibi Shah. In another deed of the year 1679 A.D., 115 bighas of rent free land of Sayyid Afzal was divided into five equal parts out of which one portion was transferred jointly to Bibi Man and Bibi Khumar and two portions to Bibi Chaheti. In the eighteenth century, due to the weakening of the Mughal empire, the legal position of the

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64 Ibid., D.no.895, p.52.

65 Ibid., D.no.1210, p.54.
un-alienability could not be enforced and such grants came to be freely sold. 66

Apparently, such legal security of maintenance created an impression that Muslim women were privileged. Later historical developments reveal as to how heavily they had to pay for such a privilege. Since a man was considered superior to a woman because he provided for the latter’s necessities of life, an element of subordination among women was evident.

The madad-i-maash grants brought only some relief to a few destitute women of the lower strata. Because of the prevalent corruption and the checks on their free movements, they had to face many odds. For instance, it was stipulated with regard to these grants that half should be comprised of tilled land and the other half of cultivable land. But, this rule was rarely followed, particularly with regard to women. In the beginning, major portion (3/4th) of the grants comprised of fallow lands. 67 But in the later period, most of the grants made to them comprised of barren lands. 68 These lands were

66 Oriental Records, II, D.nos.457, 439, pp.1-3 (showing exchange of zamindari rights in a plot of land received as madad-i-maash for a residential plot). Though no lady was involved in these cases, but they showed that such lands were alienated in later period. These documents pertain to 1763-64 A.D.). See also Alam, Muzaffar, The Crisis of Empire in Mughal North India: Awadh and the Punjab, p.223 and nn.62-65.

67 Oriental Records, 11, D.nos.161, 162, pp.34-35; Mughal Farmans, I, nos.XV, XVI, XVIII, pp.24, 25, 28. All these documents pertain to Jahangir’s time.

68 Ibid., D.no.163, p.33(Jahangir’s time); D.nos.158-160, 156 ,pp.36-38,59 (Shah Jahan’s time); Datta (ed.), Sr.nos.77,79,98 ,236, pp.17,19,71 (Aurangzeb’s time), Sr.no.246, p.63 (Muhammad Shah’s time).
exempted from government demands and taxes, yet the zamindars and jagirdars did not lag behind in extracting money from them in different forms, like charging of muqarrari and land revenue, under threat. Yusuf Mirak, who himself belonged to the aymah (grantee) class had narrated some cases wherein such grantee women sought redress from the appropriate authorities. He reported the extortion of money by the revenue officials from the madad-i-maash lands in Sind. When the matter was brought to the notice of Jahangir, due confirmation of their lands was granted to the complainants. Similarly, during the Governorship of Ahmad Beg Khan in Sind, his brother Mirza Yusuf fixed exhorbitant land-revenue on all the Musammati as also on some of the Muzakkarati grants. Once he did not give any respite even at the time of natural calamity during the rabi crop. The matter was reported to Shah Jahan. On his orders, due consideration was shown and whatever was collected during the rabi crop was returned. Such cases were only a few as it was difficult for women to visit the court for lodging complaints.

69 Yusuf Mirak, p.146 (for charging money in the form of land revenue); Oriental Records, I, D.no. 5, pp.34-35; II, pp. 35-36 (for charging a fixed amount known as muqarrari-i-aymah). This document mentioned about the charge of 1/2 rupee per bigha from one Begam Birlas on her land measuring 476 bighas and one biswa. This muqarrari was later on abolished by Shah Jahan in two instalments; Datta (ed.), Sr.no. 78, p.17 (for the payment of muqarrari by one Mst. Sajidah having land grant of 250 bighas).

70 Yusuf Mirak, pp.146-47; also Datta (ed.), Sr.no. 78, p.17 (Mst. Sajidah as referred to in preceding f.n. could get rid of forced muqarrari only after getting written exemption from Alamgir I, in 1695 A.D.).

71 Yusuf Mirak, pp.158-61.
MAHR AS ECONOMIC RIGHT

In Islam, marriage was a contract and the mahr was the price of it and hence a pre-requisite before the consent of the girl was taken for entering into a wedlock. If the husband died without paying it then, legally, the wife's claim took precedence over his other heirs.72 Its payment might, however, be prompt or deferred for a later date. In India, it was mostly the deferred promise which met the condition of law of Muslim marriages, though instances of prompt payment of mahr were also available.73 Observing about Mohammadans of Cambay, Barbosa wrote, "They can divorce themselves whenever they wish on paying to the wife certain moneys which they promise her at the time of marriage, if they changed their minds after a certain time."74 Ibn Batuta confessed that while returning from the Maldives, he had to pay the full amount of the mahr to his Maldivian wives when he had to divorce them as was the prevailing custom of the area.75

72 M.M. Siddiqi, op.cit., p.48.
73 Ibn Batuta, pp.81-82 (prompt payment of mahr in the marriage of two sons of Khudavandzada (he accompanied Ibn Batuta) to the two daughters of the Wazir Khwaja Jahan); pp.211, xxvi (for prompt mahr in Ibn Batuta's own marriages); GHN, p.151 (wherein she reported that when Humayun got married to Hamida Banu, he "gave the mir two laks of ready money for the dower." Mir was Mir Abul-baqa who conducted the marriage ceremonies); Price, p.46 (for the description of Jahangir-Nurjahan marriage and the dower of Rs.7.2 crore. He wrote that eight lac asharfis of five methkals, which sum Nurjahan "requested as indispensable for the purpose" and hence, was given without any grumbling).
74 Barbosa, I, p.121.
75 Ibn Batuta, p.214.

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Manucci wrote, "He (mulla) makes them husband and wife on condition that if there is any divorce the bridegroom will have to pay the bride so many millions." All these statements refer to the deferred mahr only. In such mahr, the point that remained to be seen was whether anything substantial passed to the lady or not, in the event of divorce or death of the husband. Ibn Batuta did pay this price. There are a few documents of the Mughal period wherein the widows were granted a share in family properties and holdings in lieu of their mahr deferred partly or fully. According to a tamlik-nama (deed of transfer) of 1625 A.D., Musammat Bibi Sappo had a share in a plot of land in village Sama-ud-Dinpura which she inherited from her husband as part of the dower debt. In another case even the zamindaris (villages) were received by the women in payment of the mahr. In view of these examples, Rafat Bilgrami dismissed the erstwhile belief that mahr was mere "matrimonial ritual" and a symbol of "bridegroom's status" and not an amount which anybody expected to be paid.

A scrutiny of the cases quoted by Bilgrami reveals that these were the cases of the widows who seemed to have been given share in property out of sympathy. They have not

76 Manucci, III, p.144.
77 Oriental Records, Il,D.no.326, p.11.
78 "Shamsabad and Bilhaur Documents", p.70.
79 Bilgrami, Rafat, "Property Rights of Muslim Women in Mughal India", PIHC, 48th session, Goa, 1987, pp.261-70. For erstwhile belief see Hughes, p.91; Kozlowski, Gregory C., "Muslim Women and the Control of Property in Northern India", IESHR, 24,2 (New Delhi, 1987), pp.163-64.
elaborated the method of evaluating and working the family property and the share of women in this. If she happened to be a joint holder of the family property along with other members of the family, her individual rights were subjected to so many restrictions. In such a case, she did not have any right to alienate her share separately. Management of the joint property always remained with the men-folk who took all decisions about it including that of selling it. Regarding *mahr* on divorce, it appears to have been honoured more in breach than following. The contemporary European travellers like Barbosa and Manucci have not discussed any instance of dower having been paid to any lady at the time of divorce or otherwise. Pelsaert has given a full description of the ceremonies of a Muslim marriage, but he has not mentioned *mahr* at all. According to him: "The ceremony consists merely in the registration in the *qazi* book, showing that such and such a person has acknowledged taking such and such a woman as his wife."80 The conspicuous absence of the mention of *mahr* of Lad Malika on her marriage with Sher Shah Suri by a Muslim author like Abbas Sarwani, particularly when he has given great details of her presents to him, is not without significance.81

In the beginning of medieval period, the amount of dower fixed was small and so, it was easy to pay. But with the passage of time, the amount of dower increased beyond the

80 Pelsaert, p.83.
81 Abbas, (Amb.), pp.205-06.
paying capacity of the husband. Consequently, high amounts of mahr announced at the time of marriages became mere promises. Abul Fazl has written, "His majesty disapproves of high dowries; for as they are rarely ever paid, they are mere sham; but he admits that the fixing of high dowries is a preventive against rash divorces." 

The royalty and nobility did not pay much attention to the directives of the Quran and broke the tenets in different matters including mahr and marriage rules. The Quran gave power to the woman to forgo her mahr and this was considered a very pious act. In the face of such provisions, it was not difficult for authoritative husbands to get a remittance of the mahr amount from their voiceless and suppressed wives. Under such circumstances, the best course for the ladies was not to put forth their claim of mahr. Doing so, they not only protected their maintenance by their husbands but also became pious in the eyes of the religion. There was yet another method to get rid of the wives and still avoid the payment of mahr. A man could torture his wife to such an extent that the latter would be forced to initiate a divorce even at the cost of losing her right of mahr. The promise

82 Hodivala, S.H., "The Dirham-i-Sharai", JASB, New Series, Vol.XIII, 1917, pp.47-48 (for abortive efforts of Aurangzeb to abolish the demand and payment of extravagant sums as dower which as per him, had become customary in those days. But he gave no example of mahr actually paid to any lady).


84 The practice is prevalent even in the modern times. See Fyzee, pp.335-36; ICSSR, Status of Women in India, p.15. Refer also supra, discussion on divorce, Chap.11.
of high marriage portion, therefore, could only give some mental solace to the ladies.

The mahr varied from lady to lady depending on latter’s social worth. For instance, while Jahanzib Banu, daughter of Dara and a pet of Jahanara was promised a marriage portion of six lac rupees while marrying prince Azam, Zubdat-un-nisa, Aurangzeb’s daughter, got it at four lac rupees while marrying Sipihr Shukoh, Dara’s son. Shahr Banu, the princess of Bijapur but a war captive, was promised only five hundred dirhams while marrying prince Azam.85

Thus mahr, which was supposed to be paid to the women, in prompt and deferred way, lost its practical significance and it failed to bring the desired financial support to women and deterrence to men against rash divorces.

PROPERTY RIGHTS

Muslim women enjoyed definite inheritance rights. The Qoranic rules of property-division were very complex. It recognized several classes of heirs and claims of some of them had a priority even to the total exclusion of others. These

85 M.A., (Tr.), pp.49,77,129. See also pp.73,103 (for marriage portion of Rs. five lac and two lac at the time of Salima Banu Begam marrying prince Muhammad Akbar and Khwaja Yaqub marrying daughter of Murad Bakhsh resp.). Also Lahori , II, p.305 (for mahr of Rs. one lac for Sakina Banu while marrying prince Murad); Sakse na , p.312 (for mahr amounts of Rs. five lac and four lac for the brides of Dara and Shuja resp.); Irvine, I, p.304 (mahr of one lac gold coins fixed for marriage of Ajit Singh’s daughter with Farrukhsiyar. Shahnama, (p.6 and n.21), however, mentioned this figure at Rs.50 crore); Ibid. ,II, p.124 (for mahr of Rs. 50 lac fixed for marriage of Farrukhsiyar’s daughter with Emperor Muhammad Shah in 1721 A.D.); Ishwar Dass, p.179 (for mahr of Rs. two lac for Sahia at the time of her marriage with prince Bidar Bakht).
rights came into force only after the death of the person whose property was to be divided and not before that. It was in their position as wife of the man or mother or daughter of the deceased person that, theoretically, women could never be excluded from inheritance. A number of instances revealed that women, both of upper and middle classes, inherited property in the form of houses, lands, zamindaris. During the time of Firoz Shah Tughlaq, the practice was that when an amir died, his position was taken by his son, son-in-law, slaves and near relations in the order of succession and when none of them existed, only then his wife was taken as his successor. She was not given the post but only the grants attached to the post. 86 It has also been reported by the author of Mirat-i-Sikandari that Sultan Mahmud Begrah of Gujarat had ordained that when any of his amirs or soldiers died fighting or otherwise, then his jagir should be bequeathed to his son and in case he had no son, then half of it should go to his daughter and in case he had no daughter also, then it should be distributed among his relatives. It is interesting to note that once, when a person pointed out about the son of an amir not being worthy of holding a jagir, the Sultan retorted that the jagir would make him worthy of that. 87 During the reign of Sultan Muzaffar II of Gujarat (1511-26 A.D.), the Qoranic principles of inheritance were reported to be followed regarding aima grants and a woman got half the share of that of a man. 88

86 Futuhat, (Text), rules 25,26, p.18;Afif, (Text), pp.96-97.
87 Sikander, pp.301-02.
88 Ibid., p.375-76. These grants were given to men of piety and learning.
During the Mughal period, women inherited a share in the family property or in the property of the husband. From some of the documents at hand, it has been brought out that in some communities and families of the suba of Awadh, such inheritance by women was a set practice. But, it is not clear from these documents whether the women received the legal share or not.\(^{89}\) The will of Hamida Banu, mother of Akbar, stipulated that her large treasure should be divided among her male descendants.\(^{90}\) Similarly, after the death of Mumtaz Mahal, half of the property left by her comprising more than a crore of rupees was inherited by Begam Sahib (Jahanara) and the other half was divided among her other children including daughters.\(^{91}\)

Shariat law of inheritance was not followed while determining women's share. It was subjected to adjustments because of the personal influence of the ladies, as happened in

\(^{89}\) Oriental Records, 11, D.nos.325,366,415, 459,471, pp.75,79, 80, 88, 84, 82, 15 resp. (showing daughters of Sandnagar family of Qasba of Sandila inheriting their share. Their daughters-in-law were also given a share in the property of their deceased husbands); "Bilgram Documents", nos. 46,78 (showing recognition to women's property rights in Sayyid family of Qasba of Bilgram. As per D.no.46, the wife inherited land from her husband. These documents pertain to the years 1734 and 1732 A.D. resp.; "Sharaif-i-Usmani Documents", nos. 157-159 (showing Shaikh families of Qasba of Bilgram recognizing women's property rights); Oriental Records, 111, D.no. 1241, p.55 (for wife inheriting from her husband), also II, D.nos. 319, 322, 429, 467, 460, 408, pp.60,61, 62, 65, 69, 73 resp. (for other references in this regard).

\(^{90}\) V.A. Smith, pp.229-30.

\(^{91}\) M.U., I,p.295.
the case of Jahanara, or because of the local customs. However, the Monarch had the over-riding power. He had unlimited authority to take away any property and to distribute it in any way he liked. There was, for instance, a noble named Mian Muhammad, son of the sister of Sultan Bahlol, who held jagirs under Bahlol, Sikander and Ibrahim Lodi and amassed great wealth. He had a daughter, Fath Malika besides a son named Mian Niamu from a slave girl whom he had acknowledged as his son. When he died during the reign of Ibrahim Lodi, the Sultan ignored the inheritance of his son and daughter. After taking possession of his resources he declared Shaikh Mustafa, husband of Fath Malika, as his successor and bestowed majority of his property on him, except some parganas which were given as jagir to Niamu. Though, indirectly, majority of the wealth came to the possession of Fath Malika, daughter of the deceased, but the Sultan did not allow it to happen in natural course according to Shariat law. Similarly, after the death of Itimad-ud-daulah, his daughter Nurjahan was given all his property and establishments inspite of her having other brothers and sisters. Muslim women often did not receive their share unless there were no close male relatives or the


93 Tuzuk, 11, p.228; also Ain., 1, Tr., note, p.576 (for pedigree table of Itimad-ud-daulah).
parents were very wealthy. They were not in a position to assert for their rights also. They could not afford to affront their fathers or brothers on whom they depended for their maintenance in the event of their widowhood or divorce.

There have been some cases where women moved to the court for their property rights. In one case, Musammat Banu, wife of Jahan and also of Fattu, filed a suit against Abdul Halim Chaudhary in 1656 A.D. for appropriating her sattari (zamindari) dues from village Karna Chaura which she had inherited from her husbands. The Qazi, however, decided the matter against her on the evidence that her husbands had relinquished their rights on the property in favour of Chaudhary during their life time. In another case, a widow Musammat Maham filed a petition against her step-son Buddan from another wife in 1666 A.D. for not releasing half share in her husband's property which the latter had given to her during

94 Fysee , pp.335-36; Bevan, Jones, pp.242-44; Eglar, Z., A Punjabi Village in Pakistan, pp.45,186-99. See also Levy, (pp.cit., pp.245-46), wherein he wrote, "In most lands of Islam, it is the exception rather than the rule for daughters to inherit, in spite of Koranic prescription. Accounts of the customary laws prevalent amongst the communities of... Muslim India show that where there are sons or sons' sons, female children and often both parents too, are excluded from succession to property, particularly if it consists of land or other immovable possessions."

his life time. The matter was decided in favour of the lady.96 But such instances were only a few. In most of the cases, an illiterate purdah-nashin Muslim woman could hardly take to such a recourse. Some times, exploiting the weakness of sisters, the brothers appropriated more productive parts of land for themselves leaving the less fertile portion for them.97 In view of such instances, Orme observed:

No property land admits of disputes concerning them. The slavery to which the rights of parent and husband subjects the female ... abolishes at once all suits of dowries, divorce, jointures and settlements ....98

Notwithstanding the above, the women did enjoy full ownership rights which entailed independent holding of the property, its control and management and the right to alienate it. They held properties independent of all males including their husbands.99 Besides, they were also found their

97 "Shamsabad and Bilhaur Documents", D.no.48, p.63.
98 Orme, p.281. See also Suri, Pushpa, Social Conditions in Eighteenth Century Northern India, p.237.
99 Oriental Records, III, D.no.1211, p.65 (for Sharifa Banu and Zahida Banu holding village Diwanpur as Jāṣīr in lieu of their salaries in 1679 A.D.; also "Bilgram Documents", nos.31, 34.
properties through bequeathal, gift, mortgage and transfer. There were numerous cases of sale of samindari and land owned by a lady individually or jointly with other co-owners. Musammat Shaubha Nau, for instance, sold her land comprising one third of village Debidaspur in 1681 A.D.

100 "Bilgram Documents", nos. 37, 77 (showing a family of Bilgram bestowing its entire property. Women were also co-sharers in this, also no. 44 (for bequeathal of property by a lady on her grand son); "Shamsabad and Bilhaur Documents", no. 39, p. 54 (showing the widow of Nawab Rashid Khan bequeathing whole or her property during Aurangzeb's time).

101 "Bilgram Documents", no. 42 (for gift of family land, in which women also were co-sharers, to Abdul Wahab during Akbar's time); Oriental Records, III, D. no. 1241, p. 55 (for gift of village Antura Buzurg by Bibi Achhi, in favour of Nur Muhammad, the adopted son of the bestower, in 1732 A.D.).

102 "Aligarh Farmans", no. 52.

103 Oriental Records, II, D. no. 326, p. 11 (tamlik-nama of 1625 A.D. on behalf of Mst. Bibi Sappo for voluntarily transferring all her rights in a plot of land to Abdul Halim), also III, D. no. 1191, p. 58 (informing about Mst. Lodhiyan having transferred half of the village Sikandarpur to her grand son Muhammad Qaim).

104 Oriental Records, III, D. no. 1216, pp. 35-36. For other cases of individual sale, see Ibid., II, D. no. 452, p. 79 (for Bibi Ujyali selling her share in residential plot held jointly), nos. 322, 344, pp. 61-62 (for Bibi Haibat selling the house inherited by her from mother, one half to Abdul Hamid in 1626 A.D. and other half to Muhammad Jafar and Muhammad Sharif in 1643 A.D.), no. 429, pp. 61-62 (for wife of Mian Omar selling land measuring 2 bighas and 5 biswas to Mian Saiduddin in 1634 A.D.), no. 464, p. 62 (Bibi Shah Jahan selling her land for Rs. four and 50 tankas in 1645 A.D.); "Aligarh Farmans", nos. 2, 22 and 49, 57 (for showing Bibi Rakhi, Sukhi and Saba selling their respective lands through the representation of husband, a vakil and son respectively).
In another case, Muhammad Mahmud and Bibi Baghi, joint owners, sold 4 *biswas* of land in *mauza* Kahjari. It is interesting to note that during those days, before a transfer of property actually took place by whatever way, the three things were generally verified viz. the source from where the property was acquired (purchase, inheritance or in case of women even *mahar*); whether it was in possession and use of the owner at the time of transfer and the ownership duly witnessed to the effect that he/she was the real owner. Clearly, the women who sold their properties during this period were the legal owners of such properties. In these property transactions, some Muslim women even signed the documents of their own.

Gifts also added to the immovable properties of the ladies. On certain occasions, some women got such gifts from the state. One such lady was Musammat Nija, a prostitute, who was bestowed with a grant of 900 *bighas* of rent free land as gift through a *sanad* of the reign of Aurangzeb (1662 A.D.).

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105 Oriental Records, II, D.no.319, p.60. For other cases of joint sales, see D.nos.290 (1710 A.D.), 467 (1712 A.D.), 460 (1753 A.D.), 458 (1764 A.D.), 470 (1747 A.D.), pp.65-66,69, 77-78 resp.

106 Ibid., D.no.319, p.60 (1579 A.D.); 458, p.77 (1746 A.D.).

107 Datta (ed.) , Sr.no. 309,p.73 . See also Shahnama, p.129 (for gift of a part of deceased Hazrat Begam's property to Mihr Pawar Begam. Hazrat Begam is shown as the daughter of Aurangzeb. She must be Zinat-un-nisa Begam who died in May, 1721 A.D. . All the other daughters of Aurangzeb died during his life time (Aurangzib, I, pp.37-39).
Sometimes, in order to safeguard the shares of the females in the property from being encroached upon by some male members, some families singled out their female members and by writing tamlik-nama (bestowal deed) gifted properties to them.¹⁰⁸

**WOMEN AND FAMILY ECONOMY**

Being confined within the house, the foremost economic activity of the Muslim women, except those of higher strata, remained the household work like cooking, weaving, sewing, spinning and fetching water. In fact, home was considered the right place for women and the contemporaries vehemently propounded women's engagement in the domestic activities alone.¹⁰⁹ Even though house management entailed a constant hard labour, still it was not given any importance because it could not be measured in terms of tangible economic gains.

The women belonging to the agricultural and labour class were always a helping hand to their men-folk in their economic activities like agriculture, animal husbandry, spinning, weaving and tailoring. They were equal partners in supplementing their economic resources. For their products, village was the ready market. They supplied their goods and services on customary basis and took in return a share in the agricultural produce.¹¹⁰ In the cities, the artisans supplied

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¹⁰⁸ "Shamsabad and Bilhaur Documents", no.70,p.92 (late seventeenth century); "Bilgram Documents", nos.31, 34.


articles to meet the luxury needs of the royalty, nobility and the well-to-do. According to Orme, in the coast of Coromandal and in the province of Bengal, it was difficult to find a village where every man, woman and child was not engaged in making a piece of cloth. He recorded how at Dacca in Bengal, which supplied a major part of fine linen and silk for the King and his seraglio, the women of these artisans did all the primary work up to weaving with expertise. About the silk industry he wrote:

The women wind off the raw silk from the pod of the worm. A single pod of raw silk is divided into twenty different degrees of fineness; and so exquisite is the feeling of these women, that whilst the thread is running through their fingers so swiftly that their eye can be of no assistance, they will break it off exactly as the assortments change, at once from the first to the twentieth, from the nineteenth to the second.

Similarly, about the acrobatics of the jugglers, English ambassador Norris has narrated how the female members of the family also displayed accuracy, fineness and perfection in giving their shows. He recorded his appreciation for items like woman sitting at the top of five earthen pots placed on the head of her man or a woman climbing at the top of a stick about a yard and a half high placed on the head of the man and showing different types of risky tricks or a girl of ten years climbing at the top of a rod measuring twenty six yards high.

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111 Orme, pp.263,265. See also p.303 (for women's contribution in agricultural processes). Also Desai, Neera and Krishnaraj Maithreyi, Women and Society in India, p.53; Datta, Alivardi, p.249.
and showing her gymnastic tricks over there. It was because of this close economic association of lower class Muslim women with their men-folk that they remained free from practice like purdah and did not suffer seclusion.

**SERVICE**

Muslim women of the economically backward class were engaged in varied jobs for financial gains. Some of the women of the higher class also took up these jobs after they were captured in the wars. These workers were mainly of two types viz. those who worked for wages and those who followed their independent professions for earning their living.

For those who worked for wages, the houses of the economically well-off and the harems of the royalty and nobility were the main places of their employment. Besides being a good help in household activities, they did all sorts of jobs for the rich ladies. Within the seraglio of Sultan Ghias-ud-din of Malwa, there were two corps of amazons of five hundred each, one of Abyssinian origin and the other of Turkish slave-girls who flanked the throne from two sides in public audiences. From among the fifteen thousand ladies in his harem, there were women trained in different trades and they were organized in different departments. There were lady musicians, singers, dancers, teachresses, goldsmiths, blacksmiths, shoemakers, weavers, potters, tailors, makers of bows, arrows and quivers, carpenters, wrestlers and

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112 Norris, pp.166-67. See also Ashraf, p.248 (about rope tricks shown by juggler-women).
jugglers. Many ladies were working in the administration also. They performed duties as Hakima, Mahaldars, Darogas and Tahwildars or as one among the hundreds of workers and slaves posted under them. They worked as guards of the harems also. There was universal employment of dancing and singing girls to rejoice the masters and mistresses. There were also lady mimics to amuse the aristocratic and well-to-do class.

The ladies were paid according to their ranks. Sultan Ghias-ud-din made payment of fixed salaries to his lady employees of the harem. He paid daily two seers of grain and two tankas of copper to each individual working therein.

Abul Fazl wrote that during Akbar's time, among the lady employees, the highest rank received between Rs. 1028/- to Rs. 1610/- per month. For the rest of the servants, the salaries ranged between Rs. 2/- to Rs. 51/-. These payments were not made at random. If a woman employee wanted anything within the limits of her salary, she applied to one of the Tahwildars (cash-keeper) of the seraglio. The latter, a lady officer, then, sent the memorandum to the accounts officer who, after checking


114 See infra, Chap. IV; supra, Chap. II.

115 Randhawa, Pl.29(Painting showing women mimics in front of Lucknow Nawab).

116 Ferishta, IV, p.143; Haig, III, p.362. Also Umari, (Rizvi, TKB, Pt. I), p.316 (he informed that Sultan Muhammad bin Tughlaq paid his slaves a daily ration of three seers of meat together with other necessaries and a monthly ration of two mans of wheat and rice. Besides, they were paid 10 tankas per month and four suits of clothes every year).
sent it to the general treasury where the payment was made in cash.\textsuperscript{117} By the time of Aurangzeb, these salaries had been revised upwards. According to Manucci, the Matrons, Superintendents of music and their women-players received, generally, between Rs. 300/- to Rs. 500/- per month while the other slaves and servants received between Rs. 50/- to Rs. 200/-. As compared to the other official of the empire, these harem employees were more regularly paid and did not face so much inconvenience as others would face.\textsuperscript{118} All these ladies were paid in ready money.\textsuperscript{119}

The salaries were greatly supplemented by the daily awards and presents they received from their lavish masters and mistresses. The quantity of such bounties depended on the extent of pleasure and satisfaction the employer class derived from their services.\textsuperscript{120} Being near the royalty and their confidants, many of the ladies working in the royal harem made a lot of extra money through gratifications or otherwise.

Once, when the assets of a maid were confiscated for committing the crime of kissing an eunuch, they amounted to one lac and sixty thousand rupees in cash and jewellery on evaluation.\textsuperscript{121} Similarly, out of the vast accumulations made by

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[117] \textsuperscript{117} \textit{Ain.}, I, p.46.
\item[118] \textsuperscript{118} Manucci, \textit{I}, pp.308,315,366.
\item[119] \textsuperscript{119} Ibid., p.351.
\item[120] \textsuperscript{120} \textit{Ain.}, I,p.46; Manucci,\textit{I}, pp.308,310.
\item[121] \textsuperscript{121} Ansari, M.A., \textit{Social life of the Mughal Emperors}, p.71, n.57.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
the favourite maid of Jahangir, who served him for thirty
three years, Aqa Aqayan built a garden, a *sarai* and her
tomb.\(^{122}\)

Outside the harem, the women were engaged in important
jobs, particularly in the work of spying for the royalty. Sultan
Muhammad bin Tughlaq had infiltrated slave-girls in the
house of the *amirs* who passed all information about them to
the Sultan. He engaged female sweepresses who had free access
to the houses of the nobles for sanitation. With the
connivance of the slave-girls-cum-spies already present there,
they gathered secret information and passed it on to the
King.\(^{123}\) Women spies were actively engaged within the Mughal
harems also. A lady named Aqa-i-Sarvkad was in the harem of
Babur, Humayun and Akbar. She worked as spy against Abdur
Rahim Khan-Khana and other *amirs* of the time.\(^{124}\)

The second category was that of the self-employed women.
Many of them adopted the profession of midwifery. They worked
within their own circles which were well demarcated. A lady in
this job would get a definite number of households in
inheritance from her mother-in-law. In fact, the profession
had become so popular that in due course, a separate exclusive
caste of ladies was found practising it and they were having
their special uniform too. They could be recognized by the

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\(^{122}\) *Tuzuk*, 11, pp.110-11.

\(^{123}\) *Ibn Batuta*, p.105.

\(^{124}\) *Bayazid*, p.290. See also Srivastava, *Nawabs of
Awadh*, p.203 (for Wazir Safdar Jang infiltrating eight
women spies in royal seraglio to keep a watch on queen
mother Udham Bai).
"tufts of silk on their shoes or slippers, all others wearing plain".125 There were women who made bracelets (churigars).126 Others made veils and scarfs out of muslin.127 Still others earned money by unknitting woollen end silken fabrics after their colours got faded.128 The job of wet nurse was also very popular, who were paid ten tankas for suckling a child during the time of Amir Khusrau.129 There were many who worked as domestic slaves. Being attached to the households, they did not require to be paid any wages. However, the employer had to ensure their maintenance.130

COMMERCIAL ACTIVITIES

The women of the lower classes were found running shops wherein they sold different merchandise. For instance, Chamoo, a common woman had a shop in Delhi where she sold opium.131 Sultan Ghias-ud-din of Malwa had a women's market within his seraglio where all vendors were women.132 At times, royal

125 Roe, Thomas & John Fryer, Travels in India in the Seventeenth Century, p.281; Gupta, S.S. (ed.), Women in Indian Folklore, p.267 n..
126 M.U., I,p.532.
127 Tavernier, I,p.42.
128 Chopra, P.N. Some Aspects of Society and Culture During the Mughal Age, p.122. Hereafter cited as Some Aspects.
130 Hamid Qalander, p.138.
131 Matla-ul-Anwar, pp.57-58.
ladies, following the austere behaviour of their King involved themselves in some sort of selling and earned their living. The royal women of Firoz Shah Bahmani's time (1397-1422 A.D.) supported them by selling the garments embroidered by them. Badaoni referred to a woman running a wine shop during Akbar's reign. Jahangir's mother, Mariyam-Zamani sent ship-loads of commodities for sale to outside countries. She also had her own ships. Finch has recorded that once in 1610 A.D., her agents were out to buy indigo from the Bayana market in order to send it for sale to Mecca. Meanwhile, Finch gave bid against her agents and bought whole of indigo. This annoyed her and she complained to the Emperor. As a result, Hawkins (Finch worked under him) fell into disfavour and had to be called back by the East India Company.

Nurjahan maintained a number of ships and traded in indigo and embroidered cloth and made huge profits. The volume of her trade was so much that she hired other high-land ships also for the purpose. It is known that in 1622 A.D., the English seized many Indian ships returning from Mecca. Out of them,
the goods loaded in one of them belonged to Nurjahan. She had friendly relations with the Dutch and the English with the help of whom she extended her commercial activities and earned huge profits.

INCOME FROM GIFTS AND PRESENTS

Gifts and presents in cash, jewellery or other movable assets received at different occasions contributed a lot to the resources of the royal ladies. They received these gifts from their male or female relations, the nobility, the public and even from the foreigners. But, among all of them, the


138 Farhat, Hasan, "Two Official Documents of Jahangir's Reign, Relating to the English East India Company", *PLHC*, 46th session, Amritsar, 1985, p.334 (for *Hukum of Nurjahan of June 13, 1627* which made it incumbent upon the officials of her *Jagirs* between Akbarabad and Surat to obey Jahangir's *farman* of 1624 A.D.). This *farman* exempted the English from *zakat* (road tolls) and other cesses once they paid usual customs at Surat or Bharooach. She forbade levying *zakat* and other unauthorized cesses on the English.

139 Roe and Fryer, p.144.

140 Pant, D., *Commercial Policy of the Mughals*, p.165.

141 Ibid., p.211.

King remained the greatest donor. Every Sultan gave away something to somebody for any excuse and almost every day. Ladies, invariably, enjoyed his bounty. These royal gifts were magnificent both in quality and in value. Muhammad bin Tughlaq was known for his lavish gifts.

The Mughal Emperors surpassed the Sultans who preceded them. Not only the gifts they gave became of fabulous amounts but they also added many more occasions for the distribution of regular gifts, like the garden parties or weighing ceremonies of the Emperors etc. Babur's gifts to his lady-relations, all other ladies of the harem and also to the ladies of his kinsmen and officers after his victory in the battle of Panipat are well known. To each begam, he gave one gold plate full of jewels, two small mother-of-pearl trays full of asharfis (gold coins), two trays of shahrukhis and all sorts of stuff besides a dancing girl. In the mystic feast, Humayun distributed gifts of asharfis and shahrukhis to the begams present on the occasion. Akbar, with all the grandeur of his empire, continued this practice on all occasions of mirth and gaiety. The occasion of such gifts increased more and more.

143 Barani, (Text), pp.460-62; Muhammad Bihmad Khani, p.353; Umari, (Rizvi, TKB, Pt.I), p.322. See also Ibn Hatuta, pp.80,122.

144 GHN, pp.95-96; also T.A.,(De),II, p.25. Shahrukhi was a coin of silver of one misqual weight (about 4.6 grams). It was commonly in use during the time of Babur and Humayun. Its minting in India was stopped in 964 A.H. (Richards, p.14).


146 See for Akbar's gifts to Hamida Banu, Gulbadan Begam and others on the occasion of Nauroz festival (T.A.,(De),II, pp.559-60).
more during the time of his successors. Jahangir's Memoirs make frequent references to such gifts and presents on different occasions. On the occasion of marriage of Khurram in 1612 A.D., presents were made to the begams. Similarly, in recognition of the invention of a new itr (perfume) named itr-i-Jahangiri in 1614 A.D., a string of pearls was gifted by Jahangir to Esmat Banu Begam, his mother-in-law. Khurram presented two lac rupees to Nurjahan and sixty thousand each to other begams at the time of celebrating his Deccan victory in 1617 A.D. At the time of his marriage with the daughter of Jagat Singh, Jahangir presented to his bride eighty thousand rupees as part of her sachaq. Shah Jahan spent one crore and sixty lac rupees in his coronation. Out of this, only thirty lac were gifted to the nobles, the rest were spent on presents to the members of his family. Mumtaz Mahal alone got a gift of two lac asharfis and six lac rupees (silver) besides an annual allowance of ten lac rupees; Jahanara Begam was given one lac asharfis and four lac rupees besides an annual allowance of six lac rupees and Roshanara and Surayya Begam were to share an amount of three lac and fifty thousand rupees with Murad and Lutfullah.

147 Tuzuk, i, pp. 224-25.
148 Ibid., pp. 270-71.
149 Ibid., p. 401.
150 Ibid., p. 144. Sachaq was pre-marriage presents given to the would be bride by the would be bride-groom.
151 Lahori, 1, Pt. 1, pp. 96-97; Tripathi, R.P., Rise and Fall of the Mughal Empire, p. 420.
During the Nauroz which followed immediately after his coronation, besides other costly gifts, he distributed an amount of twenty five lac rupees among his sons and daughters except Jahanara who was separately given an amount of twenty five lac rupees and ornaments.\(^{152}\) During the marriage of prince Murad Bakhsh with Sakina Banu in 1642 A.D., the latter was given jewels and ornaments worth one lac rupees and cash gift of forty thousand rupees besides costly dresses and other articles as part of her *sachaq*.\(^{153}\) When once, his aunt Shukr-un-nisa Begam came from Akbarabad to felicitate him on his victory at Balkh, he showered his magnanimity on her by giving her a *jal* (precious stone) worth forty thousand rupees besides cash of one lac rupees as present.\(^{154}\)

Aurangzeb, notwithstanding his austerity, was also zealous in bestowing presents on the royal ladies. *Maasir-i Alamgiri* and other contemporary authorities have given a number of instances of such gifts bestowed on different occasions. At the time of his second coronation in 1659 A.D., he awarded five lac rupees to Padshah Begam (Roshanara) in recognition of her services to him. Of his four daughters, he gave rupees four lac to Zeb-un-nisa, two lac to Zinat-un-nisa, one lac and sixty thousand to Badi-un-nisa and one lac and fifty thousand rupees.

\(^{152}\) Lahori, \(^{1}\), Pt.I., 191-92; Khafi Khan, (Text), Pt.1, p.400 (who, however, stated that Rs. two lac were given to Jahanara and Rs. five lac were distributed among other royal children).

\(^{153}\) Lahori, \(^{1}\), p.305; also Quamruddin, M., *Life and Times of Prince Murad Bakhsh*, p.49.

\(^{154}\) Khafi Khan, (Text), Pt. 1, p.646.
to Zabat-un-nisa The royal maids were also rewarded. On the eve of *Id* in 1666 A.D., he gave one lac gold coins along with enhancement in annual pension to Begam Sahib (Jahanara) and one lac rupees each to Pur Hunar Banu Begam and Gauharara Begam, daughters of Shah Jahan. On the eve of Muhammad Azam's marriage with Jahanzib Banu Begam (daughter of Dara Shukoh), the latter was given one lac and sixty thousand rupees as *sachaq*. During the later Mughal period, the depleted treasury could not afford lavish gifts. Yet, Lal Kanwar received huge gifts. On the occasion of marriage of Emperor Muhammad Shah with Badshah Begam, valuable presents were made to his mother Qudsia Hazrat Begam.

The generosity of the Kings aside, these ladies received presents from the foreign entrepreneurs, nobles and the public as well. Mughal ladies like Nurjahan, Jahanara and their lady employees got frequent presents from the foreign entrepreneurs.

155 Khafi Khan, (Text), Pt. II, p.77; *M.A.*, (Tr.), pp.13-14; *Aurangzib*, II, p.385; Kazim, p.368.
156 *M.A.*, (Tr.), p.36.
157 *Ibid.*, p.47, also p.49 (for present of one elephant worth Rs. 15 thousand to Begam Sahib (Jahanara) and two elephants to Jahanzib Banu on the occasion of marriage of Azam in 1669 A.D.). In 1617 A.D., on the eve of *Id*, Pur Hunar Banu Begam and Gauharara Begam were presented with five thousand *mohars* each (*Ibid.*, p.67). Getiara and Iffatara Begams, the daughters of Muhammad Azam were presented with ornaments worth Rs. eight to ten thousand, each on the occasion of their visit to the court (*Ibid.*, p.306). On the recovery of Jahanara from her burns in 1644 A.D. Aurangzeb gave her jewels worth Rs. 10 lac (*Aurangzib*, I, p.41). Also Ishwar Dass, p.179 (for Aurangzeb's gift worth Rs. two lac to Sahia, bride of prince Bidar Bakht).

158 Irvine, II, p.125.
Hawkins presented jewels to Shukr-un-nisa Begam and Nurjahan, Jahangir's sister and wife respectively. Similarly, Robert Covert, another Englishman gave a ruby-studded gold whistle to Jahangir at the time of his departure in 1611 A.D. from Agra which the Emperor "gave to one of his great women " (in all probability to Nurjahan). Thomas Roe also presented Nurjahan many things, chief among them being an English coach, a mirror chest and many toys. Jahanara Begam received presents from the Dutch who sought her favour to settle their problems. The English gave her numerous gifts in the form of perfumed oils, broad and embroidered cloth, mirror and cabinets. Gifting, in fact, had become such an accepted vice that while giving the guide-lines for the establishment of French factories in the Mughal empire and realizing the weight which Roshanara could carry with Aurangzeb, Bernier wrote on March 10, 1668 A.D. from Surat: "Roshan Ara Begum is so much in favour that it would perhaps be better to give her a few presents." However, he suggested, at the same time, to be cautious while doing so.

159 Hawkins, p.94 and n.3.
160 Ibid., p.67, n.1.
162 English Factories, (1651-54), pp.11, 50, 112; (1646-50), pp.219-20.
163 Ibid., (1646-50), p.304; also JASH, 1911, pp.453-54.
When Jahangir visited his mother's apartment along with the nobles, the latter offered gifts to the queen mother. Similarly when Itimad-ud-daulah threw a royal entertainment in honour of Jahangir in 1619 A.D., he offered gifts worth one lac rupees in jewelled ornaments and clothes to the begams and other ladies of Jahangir’s harem. These different sources brought fabulous amounts in possession of the royal ladies. The individuals, however, had wealth varying according to their economic and political involvement, their closeness to the King and also according to the period to which they belonged. There is no doubt that such women, in general, were wealthy.

To sum up, the maintenance of Muslim women was well cared for during the period. The state provided for them in the form of jagirs, retention of iqtas, suyrghal grants, cash warifa, grants of villages and right of collection of land revenue. Many among the royalty and nobility undertook philanthropic activities aimed at helping the women. The mahr, her Qoranic right, was paid only in the early years when the mahr amount used to be low. With the increase in the amount, it came to be reduced to be a mere promise. Some of them inherited property, enjoyed ownership rights and even went to courts to defend them. But the purdah-nashin ladies were handicapped, as all property transactions remained mainly the handiwork of their

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166 Tuzuk, II, p.80.
men. The upper-strata Muslim ladies of Mughal time were engaged in lucrative trade while the common Muslim women undertook different occupations outside as salaried employees, slave-girls or independent professionals. The ladies of agricultural and labour class provided a helping hand in their family bread-earning activities. Muslim women, of both upper and lower classes, got a lot of money through gifts and gratifications from different sources. On the whole, the ladies of the Mughal period were richer than their counterparts in the Sultanate period.