Chapter IV
THE HAREM AND PURDAH

A. THE HAREM

The term 'Harem' denoted the segregated place of residence of ladies within a house and included its female inmates. Harem consisted of wives, concubines, mothers, sisters, daughters and other female relatives, female slaves, the eunuchs and the attendants. The pivot of the harem was the Sultan, the Emperor or the noble who maintained it. The seraglio existed for them and the whole life within the seraglio revolved around them.

In the pre-Mughal period, a large harem was a status symbol. The size denoted the dignity and the status of the ruler. It was to maintain this "singularity of status, pride and aloofness", wrote Barani, that these Sultans of Delhi, like the Sassanid Kings of Iran, had the desire to build lofty palaces and to maintain harems with large establishments of domestics and attendants. Qazi Mughis-ud-din advised Sultan Ala-ud-din Khalji to increase the expenses of his harem ten fold with the set purpose that a big and splendid harem would generate awe and resultant respect for the King in the minds of the people. Imitating Kings, some of the Wazirs also had huge

2 Fatawa-i-Jahandari , (Tr.), p.40.
harems. Khan Jahan Maqbul, the Wazir of Firoz Shah Tughlaq had two thousand women in his harem including the beauties, not only from within the country but also from Rum and China. The provincial Kings like Feroz Shah Bahmani and Ghias-ud-din of Malwa also maintained large harems.

The harems of Babur and Humayun were small in size, not exceeding more than two hundred members each. With the coming of Akbar, the practice of large seraglio was re-established. His own harem contained more than five thousand women. Jahangir had three hundred wives besides other inmates in his harem. The harem of Shah Alam had two thousand women. Akbar's policy of seeking peace and strengthening relations by matrimonial alliances, which was also followed by his successors, was a major factor. Each campaign, generally, brought in as its consequence a girl of the vanquished ruler in marriage tie with the Emperor or the prince. The entourage of these ladies and also of Rajput princesses who joined Mughal harems added to the number of the harem-inmates.

4 Afif, (Text), p.400.
6 Lal,Harem, p.20.
7 Ain.,I,p.46; also V.A. Smith, pp.260-61. See also Fitch, p.17 (for his 800 concubines).
9 Manucci, II,p.320.
ACCOMMODATION

To accommodate such large establishment, many palaces were built from time to time. These palaces invariably had separate female apartments. Dwelling was provided to all inmates of the harem. Separate, spacious and splendid houses were the privilege of a selected few. The serving class lived in humble dwellings of mud and bamboo with thatched roofs, the ladies of lower rank in verandas and dormitories, more important queens in magnificent rooms and only some special women in exclusive palaces.

When the Mughal Emperors were on the move, a part of their seraglio also moved along with them. Mini palaces were built at different places for the moving harem. Akbar built many women's apartments at every few miles from Agra, each of which accommodated sixteen ladies with servants. These royal journeys, consequently, led to scattering of the inmates of harem which lessened the pressure of habitation at one place.

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11 Afif, (Text), pp.100-01; Ashraf, p.204.
12 Some of the exclusive mahals of the time were Jodha Bai Palace at Fatehpur Sikri for Akbar's queens and Mariyam's palace at the same place (Haig, IV,p.542); Khas-Mahal of Jahanara in Shah Jahan Fort (Ibid., p.561; M.U., II, Pt.I, p.268; Bernier, pp.267-68); separate dwellings of Shahzadi Khanam, Rukayya Sultan Begam and Gulzar Begam in Agra (Pelsaert, pp.2-3; De Laet, pp.37-39 and n.50); mahal of Shah Begam (Finch, p.164).
13 De Laet, p.44; Finch, p.149.
Houses of the nobles and the rich were divided into two distinct parts, Diwan Khana or the men's quarters and the Zanan-Khana or the ladies' apartments. The women's apartments were in the centre and one had to pass through two or three big courts and a few gardens before reaching there. Sufficient provision of water, air and gardens were made within these palaces. These houses were scattered in every direction, generally away from the royal harem, to avoid court intrigues.

INTERNAL ADMINISTRATION

To maintain and control such a multitude of women, a system of internal administration was required. This organizational arrangement was all the more important because of their sensitivity towards women.

The first concern of the administration was the security of the seraglio. During the Sultanate, the security of the harem from outside was entrusted to the eunuchs called Khwajah Sara. They were in such a demand that their supply was met out by castration and also by importing them from the

14 Pelsaert, p.67; Finch, p.151.
15 Tavernier, I,p.313.
17 Barani, (Text), pp.375,506.
neighbouring countries. These eunuchs worked as messengers and were a link between the harem and the outside world. They also served the Sultan in his private chambers. Therefore, their selection was made with great care and only really capable and dependable eunuchs were assigned this task. As a second line of internal defence, in the inner pavilions and halls situated outside the female apartments, there was another guard called *Sara-purdah-daran-i-khas*, headed by some reliable noble who was entitled *Purdahdar-i-Khas*. There was still another officer called *Uhdahdar-i-darha* or the officer of the gates whose duty was to ensure the proper closure of the gates and their supervision at night.

When the Sultans moved out for hunts, processions or

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18 I.H.Qureshi, *The Administration of the Sultanate of Delhi*, pp.63-64, of the view that since Prophet had prohibited human castration, their demand was met out of imports only. But the facts speak otherwise. Purchase of eunuchs in markets continued throughout the Muslim period. Castration also seemed to be common practice. It was very much prevalent during the Sultanate period (Lail, *Harem*, p.26). Barbosa and Abul Fazl mentioned about this being commonly practised in Bengal particularly in Sylhet (Barbosa, II, p.147, n.1; *Ain*, II, p.136). Jahangir informed that in Sylhet it became a custom with the people to castrate a few of their sons and give them to the Governor in lieu of their revenue demands. This practice was followed in other provinces too, so much so that the Emperor passed orders to check it (Tuzuk, I, pp.150-51,168). The practice, however, continued even thereafter and Aurangzeb brought injunctions against it (Ali Muhammad Khan, p.251; Manucci, II, p.72; Bernier, p.135; M.A., (Tr.), p.48; *Aurangzib*, III, p.61). The practice continued even thereafter.

19 Afif, (Text), p.279; Abul-Fadl-Baihaqi, *Tarikh-i-Baihaqi*, p. 817; also Ibn Batuta, p.80 (he called them *Amir-i-Pardahdaria*).

otherwise, there was another pocket of infantry, comprised mainly of slaves who defended the royal entourage. There were other officials named *Mutrads* who performed the guard duty. All this team guarded the Seraglio so zealously that it became almost impregnable. It is known that once rebel Ikat Khan, the nephew of Ala-ud-din Khalji, tried to enter the Sultan's harem. But Malik Dinar, who was in-charge of the security, stood like a rock on his way and did not allow him to enter the harem insisting that till he brought the head of the Sultan, he would not be permitted to do so. Similarly, relying on the tight security of the harem, Prince Mubarak Khan, son of Ala-ud-din Khalji, fearing an attack from Malik Naib, took refuge in the female apartment and came out only after the murder of the latter.

A *Hakima* or Governess was appointed to look after the internal management of the harem during the Sultanate period. She herself belonged to a noble family. The wife of Nizam-ud-din held this post during the time of Kaiqubad. The *Hakima* was assisted by many minor women officials, who not only did the guard duty or maintained the records of the income and expenditure of the harem but were also engaged in performing

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22 Qiran-us-Sadain, p.140.
23 Lal, Khaljis, pp.104-05.
24 Sirhindi, p.81.
varied duties within the seraglio.26

Some of the Sultans took keen interest in the management of their harems to make the living therein more harmonious and comfortable. In order to avoid any confusion or irregularity, Feroz Shah Bahmani (1397-1422 A.D.) framed rules which were to be strictly observed by the inmates of the harem. He allowed maximum three attendants to a lady who were always of the same nation and spoke the same language as that of the mistress. He divided his attention to them so equally that each lady fancied herself to be the most loved by the King. He liked his ladies to be away from the gaze of the strangers and therefore, harem-rules were observed strictly.27 For the convenience of his ladies, Sultan Ghias-ud-din of Malwa established a separate market within his harem in which all the necessary items of requirement were made available. In fact, organization-wise, his harem was a 'kingdom in miniature'.

Babur and Humayun could not do anything worthwhile. Khwandamir wrote that Humayun made the gradation of the ranks of his officials by distribution of arrows. There were total twelve orders or arrows, the twelfth and eleventh arrows belonged to the King and his relations respectively. In this ranking, sixth arrow was awarded to the harems and to the well behaved female attendants, fifth to young maid-servants, fourth to treasurers and stewards, second to the menial

27 Ferishta, II,p.228.
servants and first to the palace guards, camel drivers and the like. With the coming of Akbar, great improvement took place. According to Abul Fazl, the imperial harem and household were "in the best order".

At the outermost cordon of the security of the seraglio were posted the nobles, Rajput guards, ahadis and other troops. This practice of appointing Rajput contingents originated with Akbar and continued till the beginning of the eighteenth century. Rajputs were considered to be devoted towards their duties. During Aurangzeb's reign, when the Marathas attacked Jahan Banu Begam's camp, these Rajputs defended her devoutly and as a reward for this, the Begam gave her pearl necklace to their commander Anurudh Singh. Next to the Rajput guards, on the outer fringe, were placed eunuchs. These eunuchs were organized in hierarchical order. A number of them were under a senior eunuch called Nazir who was under a chief Nazir with the title Itimad Khan or Aitbar Khan.

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28 Khwandamir, Humayun-Nama, (F&D, V), p.123; see also Tr. Baini Prashad, pp. 31-32, and nn.1-3 (his translation with regard to sixth and fifth ranking is different from that of F&D. It runs: "The sixth was assigned to the heads of clans and the good tempered Uzbegs and the fifth was given to young volunteers." He considers the terms "young maid servants" as an incorrect translation).

29 Ain., I, p.45.

30 Ibid., p.47; Mundy, II, p.201; Bernier, p.258.

31 Ansari, Social Life, p.71.

32 Ain., I, p.47; Manucci, II, pp.326-27. He gave a list of Nazirs of the time of Aurangzeb, each having a separate title given by the Emperor.
Within the harem, this hierarchy of eunuchs was of great importance. The chief Nazir was highly respected by the King. He was not only in-charge of all the palace expenditure on linen, precious stones, jewellery, but also of every thing that went into or came out of the palace. Nazirs were the persons of great confidence. One Aitbar Khan accompanied Akbar's mother and other begams from Kabul to Hindustan in 1558 A.D. Another eunuch entitled Itimad Khan escorted the daughter of Miran Mubarak Shah, King of Khandesh (1555-66 A.D.), to the harem of Akbar. Each queen, princess or other lady of the royalty had a Nazir in-charge of her property, lands and income. In the later period, particularly after Farrukhsiyar, their importance increased still further. They were made in-charge of Gulalpara (incense and perfume department) and also the steward of the household.

All the major officials, slaves and servants were obliged to submit a report of their activities to the Nazir. The eunuchs under them not only worked as messengers but also as guards at the palace gate. Everybody, including doctors and unknown ladies, were put to thorough investigations and search before he/she was allowed to go inside the harem. All items

33 Manucci, II, p.328.
34 Ain., I, p.442.
36 Manucci, II, p.328.
37 Sivar, (N.M.), I, pp.146-47, also (Briggs), p.131.
were also scrutinized thoroughly to check smuggling of intoxicants or other objectionable articles. As a part of vigilance, they also closed all the gates of the palace at sunset by bolting them from outside and torches were kept burning the whole night. 38 Inspite of such tight security, there were incidents of surreptitious entrance of men-folk inside the harem. Jahanara and Roshanara were reported to have managed smuggling of men to their respective rooms. 39

Inside the harem, sober and active women were posted as armed guards known as Urdu Begis. The most reliable were placed near the royal apartments. Abyssinian, Tartar, Turki, Uzbeg, Kashmiri and Pathani women were generally posted on such duties. They were tough and good at use of lance, arrow and sword. 40 Their cadre was constantly replenished through imports. Aurangzeb, for instance, was reported to have purchased Uzbeg and Tartar women from the Balkh envoys who visited him in 1661-62 A.D. and put them on such duties. 41 So strong were these ladies that Aurangzeb did not come to meet Shah Jahan during war of succession lest he would get killed by these Tartar ladies. 42 Similarly, in 1719 A.D. when Farrukhsiyyar took shelter in his harem for fear of his...

38 Manucci, II, p.328.
39 Bernier, pp.12-14, 132; Tavernier, I, p.300; Manucci, II, pp.30-32, also p.177, reporting Roshanara keeping nine youths in secret. But this is discredited by J.N. Sarkar (Aurangzib, III, p.39).
41 Manucci, II, p.38.
42 Bernier, p.65.
opponents, these Abyssinian and Turkish women were determined to fight in order to check their entrance to the harem. Even when the royal seraglio was on the move or in camps, these women guards, along with the eunuchs, performed their duties zealously and anybody trying to come too near the royal procession or tent had to face their wrath.

For the general administration within the harem, there were all women officials who were divided into three sections—the high (Mahin Banu), the middle (Paristar-i-hudur) and the low (Paristar or Sandis). The first two grades consisted of superior staff while the third one of the menial servants and slaves. The highest female official who was overall in-charge of the harem was Mahaldar. She was the chief supervisor of the harem. The author of Ahkam-i-Alamgiri narrated two incidents bringing forth the importance of these ladies in contemporary harem life. Hamida Banu, Mahaldar of the harem of prince Muhammad Muazzam spied for Emperor Aurangzeb. She wrote her confidential notes in a memorandum book. The Emperor had ordered her that she or her deputy Sharf-un-nisa should be personally present whenever the prince wanted to see her pen-case and memorandum book. The prince made it a practice to take them in his private chamber where his ladies also used to be present. As per etiquettes, the Mahaldar could not go inside. So, she reported the matter to the Emperor and sought his fresh instructions. Aurangzeb once

43 Khafi Khan, (Text), Pt.II, pp.814-16.
44 Bernier, pp.373-74; Manucci, II, p.437.
again ordered her not to leave these things with the prince.

Mahaldar Nur-un-nisa had a tussle with prince Muhammad Azam, because the latter expelled her from his assembly. When reported, Emperor Aurangzeb supported the Mahaldar and believing complaint of Bahroz Khan, the Nazir of the prince that the prince had mis-behaved with Nur-un-nisa, he asked the prince to beg pardon of her and fined him fifty thousand rupees.  

Under Mahaldar, there were Darogas or Matrons. They were in-charge of general administration and also controlled the maid servants and the dancing girls. A group consisting of ten menial staff formed a section and each Daroga or Superintendent was in-charge of a section or a group of sections of the subordinates. Darogas or Matrons were appointed by the Emperor himself on the basis of merit and trustworthiness of the lady. Since it was considered to be a prestigious post, many ladies of high families and nobles, like the mother of Nurjahan, were also appointed for this post. They read out the reports of Waqia Nawis and Khufia Nawis to the King. The officials outside also received through them the orders of the Emperor issued from within the harem. They worked as spies for their masters. At times, some educated Matrons also worked as tutors to the princesses.

45 Hamid-ud-din, pp.58-59, 64-65, see also pp.63,73.
46 Ain., I, p.46; Manucci, II, pp.308,312-13. He referred to them as Matrons while to the in-charge of sections of the dancers and singers as Superintendents. He has also given list of the names of some important Matrons and Superintendents of Aurangzeb's time.
47 Tuzuk, II, p.216; Ain., I, pp.45-46.
Sati-un-nisa was one of them who tutored Jahanara. Other lady officials were Tahwildar, the in-charge of the accounts and Waqia Nawis and Khufia Nawis who kept all the details about the harem. There were also female store-keepers called Ashraf who took charge of the supplies and accounts and put forth estimates of the expenditure for the next year.

The harems of the nobles were equally well guarded. They also kept eunuchs and Bengali slaves for the safety of their wives and to ensure that they were not exposed to any other male. If any eunuch failed in his duty, he was severely punished.

Thus, the harems segregated the women from the outside world. Manucci was not far from the truth when he likened them to virtual "prisons".

**TITLES AND EPITHETS**

Many ladies were given high titles by the Kings to show their reverence and to satisfy their ego. Shah Turkan was entitled as Khudawandah-i-Jahan. The title of Malika-i-Jahan was bestowed on the wives of Jalal-ud-din Khalji, Husain Shah Sharqi, and the mothers of Sultan Nasir-ud-din.

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48 Manucci, II, pp.308-09, 311; Sarkar, Studies, pp.21-26.
49 Ashraf, p.57.
50 Pelsaert, p.66.
51 Manucci, II, p.326.
52 T.N., (Raverty), I, p.630, n.3.
53 Barani, (Text), p.221.
54 Ferishta, IV, p.218.
Mahmud Shah 55 and Muhammad Shah Bahmani I. 56 The mother of Muhammad bin Tughlaq was adorned with the title *Makhduma-i-Jahan*. 57 One of the wives of Ala-ud-din Shah Bahmani II (1435-57 A.D.) was given the title of *Perichehra* (fairy face). 58

Akbar's mother was given the title of *Mariyam Makani* (the Mary of both the worlds or dwelling with Mary). 59 Jahangir's mother enjoyed the title of *Mariyam-Zamani* (the Mary of the universe). 60 Shah Jahan's mother was entitled *Bilqis-Makani* (the lady of pure abode). 61 Jahangir's favourite wife Mehr-un-nisa received the title of *Nur Mahal* (the light of palace) in 1611 A.D. which was, later on, replaced by the title *Nur Jahan* (the light of the world). 62 The title of *Shah Begam* was given to Man Bai, the Rajput wife of Jahangir and to Roshanara Begam, the sister of Aurangzeb. 63 The title of *Padshah Mahal* was given to Saliha Banu Begam, a wife of Jahangir. 64 Zinat-un-nisa, the second daughter of Aurangzeb

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55 T.N., (Raverty), I, p.676.
56 Ferishta, II, p.185.
58 Ferishta, II, p.262.
60 Tuzuk, I, p.76.
61 Qazwini, I, f. 49a.
62 Tuzuk, I, p.319; Mutamad Khan, p.405; Muhammad Hadi, p.398.
63 Tuzuk, I, p.56; Kazim, p.368; Tavernier, I, pp.299-300.
was entitled Padshah Begam. Shah Jahan’s wife Arjumand-Banu Begam enjoyed the title of Malika-i-Jahan and was popularly known as Mumtaz Mahal (exalted one of the palace), a title bestowed on her by Shah Jahan on his accession. Jahanara Begam enjoyed the title of Begam Sahib. She was also give the titles of Padshah Begam, Nawab Qudsia and Sahibat-uz-Zamani. The last title was bestowed on her death. Aurangzeb’s wife Dilras Banu was entitled Rabia-ud-daurani and another Rahmat-un-nisa as Nawab Bai. In the later period, Lal Kanwar was conferred with the title of Imtiay Mahal (the chosen of the palace). Muhammad Shah’s mother was entitled Hazrat Begam (the exalted lady) or Nawab Qudsia or Qudsia Begam. His chief wife Badshah Begam was having the title of Malika-uz-Zamani (queen of the world). His another wife Udham Bai, the mother of his son and successor

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68 Aurangzib, I, pp.33-34; Ishwar Dass, p.93 (for Nawab Bai).
69 Faruqi, f.37a; Irvine, I, p.193.
70 Ashub, I, f.27b; Irvine, II, p.125 (for Hazrat Begam); Siyar, (N.M.), I, p.146 and n.130; Shahnama, p.120; Irvine, II, p.264; Malik, Muhammad Shah, pp.56-58 (for Qudsia Begam).
71 Ashub, I, f.20b; Irvine, II, p.124.
Ahmad Shah was given the titles of Bai-Jiu Sahiba Nawab Qudsia, Sahiba-uz-Zamani, Sahibjiu Sahiba, Hazrat and Qibla-i-Alam.²²

At times, many epithets were also added to the names of the ladies to denote their class or to show respect to them. During the Sultanate period, the epithets of Khatun and Bibi were generally found like Nusrat Khatun (famous singer of Jalal-ud-din Khalji's reign), Shams Khatun (chief queen of Bahlol Lodi), Bibi Ambha (Hindu wife of Sultan Bahlol Lodi), Bibi Mattu (wife of Islam Khan Lodi of Bahlol's time), Bibi Bai (wife of Islam Shah Suri). The Mughals used the epithets of Begam, Khanam and Mahal with the names of their ladies. Begam was most frequently used.²³ At times, the nature of job and consequent status was also depicted by such words. During Aurangzeb's time, the names of the Matrons of the kingdom ended with Banu and those of dancers with Bai.²⁴ In the later Mughal period, since many of the ladies rose from their ranks even to become queens, we find these epithets used even with the names of queens and their relations. Muhammad Shah's mother was known as Udham Bai, his favourite wife as

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²² Sarkar, Fall, I, p.210; also Stephen, p.274 (for Qudsia Begam). She also received title of Mumtaz Mahal after the accession of her son (Malik, Muhammad Shah, p.407, n.1).

²³ Manucci, II, pp.310-11 (giving the list of names of these ladies of Aurangzeb's time).

²⁴ Ibid., pp.312-13. A list of their names has also been given by him.

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Inayetpuri Bai and his wife’s niece (sister’s daughter) as Dilafroz Banu.75

POMP AND MAGNIFICENCE

Cut off from the general society, the majority of the inmates of the harems passed their lives in extravagant festivities, meaningless intrigues, vocal jealousies and showy vanity which effected the status of women adversely. These ladies spent their time by enjoying the pleasure of possessing and spending money. They lived a life of luxury, pomp and magnificence. Everything related to them—their persons, houses, food, dresses, mannerism, habits—smacked of luxury and licentiousness.

TOILETS AND ADORNMENTS

With the aim of remaining attractive for their master, the King or the noble, the ladies of royalty and nobility spent a major portion of their time and money in toilets and personal adornments. Sixteen constituents of Hindu women’s toilet were adopted by the Muslims. Amir Khusrau, Malik Muhammad Jayasi and Abul Fazl referred to them. Manucci gave a vivid and true-to-life description of the beautification of these ladies.76 Everything fine, gilded, silvered, jewelled, precious-stone-studded and scented attracted their attention.

75 Sarkar, Fall, I, p.334. Paradoxically, the title of Begam and Khanam came to be attached with the names of the dancers as was done in the case of lady-accompanists of Nur Bai, the famous dancer of Muhammad Shah’s time (Muraqqa, p.111).

76 Jayasi, M.M., Padmavat, Khand 27, Doha 296-300, pp.346-51; Haath Bahisht, p.31 (referred to Hapth-wa-nuh); Ain, III, pp. 342-43; Manucci, II, pp.316-18.
Their clothes were embroidered with gold threads and laces and so were their shoes gilded and studded with jewels and covered with silver and golden flowers. Muhammad bin Tughlaq kept four thousand manufacturers of golden tissues weaving gold brocades which were worn by the ladies of the royalty and also gifted by them to amirs or their wives. According to Manucci, the shoes of the wife of Khalilullah Khan (Subedar of Lahore) were worth three million rupees on account of the precious stones studded in them. The cloth of their attires was so finely woven that one could see through it. This is reflected in the paintings of Mughal harem also. Their shawls were so thin that they could be passed through a small finger-ring and so were their dresses too. Tavernier mentioned about a kind of muslin named Sironj which was totally transparent. It was manufactured exclusively for the use of Mughal seraglio in the summers. When Aurangzeb reprimanded his daughter for wearing scanty dresses, the princess replied that she was wearing seven garments made of muslin known as Ab-i-ravan. In spite of their being so expensive and exquisite, these dainties

77 Umari, (Rizvi, TKB, Pt.I), p.316, also see (E&D,III), p.578 (he gave the number five hundred instead of four thousand). See also Barani, (Text), p.157 (for dresses of slave girls embroidered with gold thread); Afif, (Text), p.363 (for gold and silver brocaded dresses of the dancing girls costing even up to 40 thousand tankas); Roe and Fryer, p.384; Manucci, II, p.318.

78 Manucci, I, pp.186-87. See also Bhushan, Bhushan Granthavali, Kavitt 5-6 (for costly shoes of the royal ladies).


80 Tavernier, I, p.47 and n.1.
would put them on only once after which they gave them away to their servants. This extravagance was visible even in the head-gear worn by some of the ladies with special permission of the King. It was a sheet of cloth studded with gold pieces or a turban with an aigrette having pearls and precious stones all around.

The ladies were fond of a variety of costly ornaments. The list of ornaments given by Abul Fazl and the detailed discussion of Manucci show that these ladies were laden with ornaments from head to toe. Each princess owned six to eight sets of jewels alone besides other sets. They vied with one another to possess a costlier item. Nurjahan, for example, wore a necklace containing forty beads, each bead costing forty thousand rupees. This necklace was presented to her by Shah Jahan.

Similar was their fascination for perfumes. Their hair had scented oil. They also used costly *itr* (scent) extracted from flowers and other sources for their bodies and dresses. The consumption of these scents was so much that Akbar even opened a special department for it under the name *Khushbu Khana* with Shaikh Mansur as its in-charge.

81 Manucci, II, p.318; Bernier, p.259.
83 Price, p.46. See also *Tuzuk*, II,p.74 (for Nurjahan's another string of pearl and rubies, each ruby costing Rs.10 thousand and each pearl was worth Rs.one thousand).
84 *Ain.*, I, pp.78-81; Manucci, II,p.318.
85 *Ain.*, I,p.78; *T.A.*, (De), II, p.494.
Jahangir, the experts working in this department worked hard to invent "exciting perfumes and efficacious preserves". 86 Esmat Banu Begam invented an essence named *Jahangiri Itr* and Nurjahan discovered another from rose water. 87

They used all sorts of make-ups for body-decoration. Besides floral adornments, the frequent use of soap, *ghasul* (a liquid soap) *opatnah* (mixture of butter, flour, some colour and scented oil), pounded sandal-wood, hair-dyes, *kazal*, *missia* (a sort of black powder for blackening between the teeth), *anjan* (antimony) for darkening their eyelashes, *mehndi* for colouring their feet, hands and nails, *betel leaf* for reddening their lips besides making different hair styles find repeated mention in the contemporary writings, literature and paintings. 88

**INTERIOR DECORATION**

The interior decoration of their apartments was another example of their pomposity. These houses were decorated with exotic carpets, splendid paintings, valuable porcelain vases and flower pots, grand mirrors, gold, silver and stone studded pillars and ceilings. The surviving example of this is Shah Jahan's Delhi Fort. The *Diwan-i-Khas* attached with the royal

86 Pelsaert, p. 65.

87 *Tuzuk*, I, pp. 270-71. About Esmat Banu's scent, he wrote,"There is no other scent of equal excellence to it. It restores hearts that have gone and brings back withered souls." See also Manucci, I, pp. 158-59.

88 *Ain*, III, p. 342, also I, pp. 79-80; Manucci, II, p. 318; Jayasi, *Padmavat*, Khand 41, Doha 47, p. 603 (*missia* referred to as *masi*). See also Prataditya Pal, *Court Paintings of India*, fig. M 67 (showing a lady colouring her feet. It is of later Mughal time); Lal, *Harem*, Pl. 14.
apartment and used by the Emperor mainly for recreation with royal ladies was resplendent with gilded decorations and ceiling and pillars studded with gold, silver and precious stones. There was an inscription in one of the walls: "if there is a paradise on earth, it is this, it is this, it is this"—a couplet which matched the life style of these harem-inmates. The residential portion of this was equally magnificent with its gilt domes, hanging balconies, inlaid colourful and gilded carvings, marble-paved floors, ornamental fountains and beautiful paintings. Even the very names of the buildings like Hira Mahal, Moti Mahal, Rang Mahal and of canals like Nahr-i-Bahisht (stream of Paradise) sounded affluence and "breathed the very spirit of romance". A recent excavation done by Aligarh Muslim University under professor R.C.Gaur at Fatehpur Sikri near the Samosa Mahal revealed harem buildings which were internally decorated with "dado paintings in black, flanked by red lines"; another room with all paintings and still another with mural paintings. The water channels had shallow pools at regular intervals; the ornamental gardens were divided into six parts with walk-ways made of rubble stones and "the whole have been knitted into one single harmonious whole with an octagonal tank".

The interiors of the apartments of the ladies of nobility

89 Haig, IV, pp.556-58; Bernier, pp.256-58. The Persian text of the couplet is:

Agar Firdaus bar rue zamin Ast,
Hamin ast hamin ast wa hamin ast.

90 Lal, Harem, p.40.
were equally glittering. They might not be having as big establishments as those of the Kings, nevertheless, they did not lag behind in extensive use of gold and silver and costly decorations of carpeting, curtains, wall paintings, exquisite flower pots and vases, comfortable mattresses and the like. Even their bedsteads, wrote Pelsaert, were "lavishly ornamented with gold and silver". Sultan Firoz Tughlaq's order against the use of silver and gold plated and ornamented ewers and goblets, cups and other articles of use in the houses, shows that such articles were in common use during the Sultanate period as well.

KHUSHROZ

The Mughals introduced a peculiar celebration named Khushroz (joyful days). It began with Humayun; Akbar modified it and Shah Jahan made it most elaborate. During these days, a special market known as Meena Bazar (fancy fair) was held. It was meant for the amusement and enjoyment of the harem-inmates of royalty alone. Hence, no male except the Emperors and princes were permitted to enter this bazar. It was organized at different intervals and for many days at a

91 Pelsaert, p.67; also Bernier, pp.247-48.
92 GhN, p.126; Khwandamir, (Baini Prashad), pp.138-39; Coryat, p.278; Mundy, II, p.238; Manucci, I, p.188; Bernier, pp.272-73; Thevenot, pp.70-71.
93 Ain., I, p.286 (once in a month); Badaoni, II, p.350 (every year on New Year day); Bernier, pp.272-73 (Initially sometimes during festivals but with Shah Jahan, on every festival). Manucci, I, p.188; Coryat, p.278 (once in a year).
Bernier called it a "whimsical kind of fair". In this fair, beautiful ladies of all classes, high and low, rich and poor put their stalls of different items. Their purchasers were the King, the princes, the *begams*, the princesses and other distinguished ladies of the seraglio. The way the Emperor haggled with these beautiful ladies for each penny created a lot of fun and frolic. The gaiety enhanced further during the time of Shah Jahan, who specifically appointed dancing and singing girls known as *kanchanis* for this occasion. Their main duty was to entertain the King, the *begams* and other ladies by singing and dancing the whole night.

For the Kings, this bazar served as the best opportunity to satisfy their carnal desires. Manucci aptly remarked:

> "For the Kings, this bazar served as the best opportunity to satisfy their carnal desires."

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95 Abul Fazl, *Ain.*, I, p.287, tried and understandably so, to attach a sublime motive to Akbar behind arrangement of this fair when he wrote, "His majesty uses such days to select any articles which he wishes to buy or to fix the price of things and thus add to his knowledge. The secrets of the empire, the character of the people, the good and bad qualities of each office and workshop, will then appear. "But this seems to be defence of a court poet. Otherwise, many other contemporaries are one to hold the sensuality of these Kings behind the genesis of this fair. Badaoni, *II*, p.350 wrote, "And the important affairs of those who were outside the harem, and marriage contracts and betrothals of sons and daughters were transacted in those assemblies." Tod was more vocal when he wrote, "The ingenuous Abul Fazl thus softens down the unhallowed purpose of this day... there is not a shadow of doubt that many of the noblest were dishonoured on the Noroza." (I, pp.344-45). Manucci, (I, p.188) was equally candid to write that it was Shah Jahan's constant "search for women to serve his pleasure" that this function was organized. See also Bishan Bahadur, "Akbar as Depicted by Prominent contemporary Hindu Poets", *PIHC*, 45th session, Annamalainagar, 1984, pp.461-63; Bernier, p.273.
that for the ladies who sold goods in those stalls, "the best piece of goods she could produce was her own body". The ambitious ladies, therefore, made it a point that their young daughters accompanied them to the fair with the hope that they might be selected by the King to be fit for being in his harem. Tod narrated that when the eyes of Emperor Akbar fell on the wife of Rai Singh in one of such fairs, she returned to her house only after her chastity was despoiled. Wife of Prithviraj Singh, younger brother of Rai Singh, could save her chastity with great difficulty.

**FAIRS AND FESTIVALS**

The public celebrations of *Nauroz* (the Persian New Year day) brought pompous enjoyments for many days. The queens and the princesses witnessed this from separate enclosures. They celebrated it themselves also inside the harem. For this, the ladies of the nobility of the court were required to attend the royal harem. They brought presents for the royal ladies and in return, received robes of honour. They remained within the seraglio till the celebrations lasted. They were entertained by dancing and singing girls. Ultimately, they

97 Manucci, I, p.188.

98 Tod, I, pp.345-46. These incidents were, however, discredited by A.L. Srivastava, (*Studies in Indian History*, pp.135-36).

99 Religion and Politics, p.94, n.3 on the authority of *Fawaid-ul-Fuad*, p.127 (celebrations for four days); *GHN*, p.179 (for 17 days). Hawkins, p.117; De Laet, p.100 (both for 18 days). *Ain.* ,I, p.286; *Tuzuk*, I, pp.48-49 (for 19 days). Monserrate, p.175; Manrique, II, p.192; Thevenot, p.71 (for nine days). Manucci, II, p.322 (for six to nine days).
departed with presents known as khichri (mixture of gold and silver coins and precious stones). Even the religious festivals like Shab-i-barat and Id had less of serenity and more of pomp and grandeur in their celebrations by the royal harem. While state banquets, rejoicings and exchange of gifts marked the Id celebrations, the celebration of Shab-i-barat was conspicuous by the extensive fire work.

RECREATION

Enjoying more freedom as compared to that of their counterparts in the Sultanate period, the Mughal ladies whiled away their time in outdoor recreations like sight-seeing, picnics, boating, garden-parties and even hunting. During his sojourn in Gujarat, Jahangir was entertained for some days by one of his queens named Khair-un-nisa Begam in the garden of her father. There was sumptuous feasting. The King was presented with jewels, pieces of richest fabric, horses of highest value, all valuing not less than four lac rupees. The King in return, gave her a chaplet of pearl valuing five lac rupees. Shah Jahan laid out many gardens - Anguri Bagh in

100 Manucci, II, pp.322-23; T.A., (De), II, pp.559-60; also Monserrate, pp.175-76; Thevenot, pp.70-71.
101 GHN, p.104 (Babur's excursion with harem-ladies to Dholpur) and pp.190-91 (for their excursion with Humayun). Humayun, in fact is credited with the introduction of river picnics (Ashraf, p.232). A.N., (Rev.), III, pp.543, 889 (their excursion to gardens with Akbar); Tuzuk, I, pp.106-07 (their sojourn to Kabul with Jahangir and merriment at Shaharara Bagh), also pp.384-86 and II, p.199; Bernier, pp.350-51, 361 (for Aurangzeb's journey to Kashmir and Lahore with Roshanara and other ladies).
Agra Fort, Shalimar Bagh at Lahore and another at Radli Sarai for the enjoyment of the harem-ladies. They went along with the Emperor on his hunting trips also. Nurjahan herself was a very good shot. She killed many tigers on different occasions. Her success in hunting brought her costly presents from her husband.

Another amusement of these ladies was to lighten large torches made of wax or oil at night. As per Manucci's estimation, the expenses on this amounted to more than one lac and fifty thousand rupees. People used to illuminate the bazars (Ain-band) to mark the days of festivity. The practice was made more extensive by Maham Begam, wife of Humayun. At her initiative the King's palace, the houses of the nobles and also the residences of the soldiers were illuminated. After this, such illuminations became common in India.

**MODE OF TRAVEL**

Purdah and inaccessibility was the yardstick of their respectability. Hence, these ladies, generally, travelled by

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105 Manucci, II, p. 318.

106 GHN, p. 113, n. 3.
veiled palanquins and covered wagons. There were other modes called *dolas* or *hindolas*, *palkis* and *dolis*. Ibn Batuta described the *dolas* of ladies as having the shape of a cot, knitted with silken threads, covered by bent stick and overhung with silken curtains.

It is revealed from the writings of the contemporary European travellers that the Mughals introduced new modes, besides the old ones, for the travel of their ladies. They were *chaudol*, *khajwah* (capacious litters suspended between two camels or elephants), *hauda* (used for elephant ride) *mikdembers* (a type of *hauda*) and *amaris* (a covered *hauda* or litter) which suited their showy behaviour. There was another carriage with wheels pulled by female attendants. It carried the princesses inside the houses of the nobles after they alighted from the palanquins at their gates. Nurjahan, in her exquisite style, used an English coach which was presented to her by Sir Thomas Roe. A number of camels,

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107 Palanquins were covered litters carried on shoulders by six or eight men. They were used for long distances. *Hindolas* and *dolas* were like palanquins and were used for short distances. See Ibn Batuta, p.79; M.A., (Tr.), p.103 (for *palki*, *doli* and *dola*). Thévenot, p.76; Mundy, II, pp.189-91; Ovington, I, p.113; Della Valle, I, p.31 (for palanquins). Manucci, II, pp.330-31 (for covered seats with peeping windows having netting of gold); Sarkar, Fall, I, p.334 (for covered wagons).

elephants and horses were maintained by the Emperors for this purpose. The striking feature with regard to all of them was their scintillating decoration with gold, jewels, precious stones and looking-glass-carvings, gold or silk nets, velvet cushions, embroidered tapestries, beautiful fringes and tassels and so on and so forth. The animals were decked with bells, rich trappings and multi-coloured mantles that brought out vividly the grand living style of these ladies.

A royal lady moved in a grand group, surrounded by eunuchs, female guards, prominent nobles on elephant, horse or camel backs or on foot, making frantic efforts to guard her from any intruder, to clear the way by shouting, pushing and jostling people and also by getting water sprinkled in front to lay the dust. Describing Roshanara's journey to Kashmir along with Aurangzeb in 1664 A.D., Bernier wrote:

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109 Mundy, II, p.191 (for khajwah); Bernier, pp. 371-73 (for description of chaudol, khajwah and mikdember); Monserrate, p.79 (for hauda); Tavernier, I, p.313 (for special wheeled carriage); Della Valle, I, pp.31, 62 (for elephants and coaches); Manucci, II, pp.66-67 (for elephant litter. He called it pitambar). M.A., (Tr.), p.103 (for chaudoli). Nijat-ul-Rashid, p.460; Careri, pp.227, 370, n.77 (for amaris). Roe, II, p.324 (for Nurjahan's coach). After Jahangir, the use of coaches seemed to have become out of fashion.

110 Bernier, pp.371-72; Monserrate, p.79; Tavernier, I, p.313; Manucci, II, pp.66-67.
Stretch imagination to its utmost limits and you can conceive no exhibition more grand and imposing than when Rauchenara Begam, mounted on a stupendous 'Pegu' elephant and seated in a Mikdember, blazing with gold and azure...followed by five or six other elephants...nearly as resplendent as her own and filled with ladies attached to her household...(then) chief eunuchs, richly adorned and finely mounted a troop of female servants, Tartars and Kachmerys, fantasticaly attired and riding handsome pad horses...several eunuchs on horseback, accompanied by a multitude of Pagys...for...clearing the road...followed by...fifteen or sixteen females of quality...with a grandeur of appearance, equipage and retinue more or less proportionate to their rank...Their is something very impressive of state and royalty in the march....

Manucci's elaboration of Jahanara's going to court is equally high sounding; with "much cavalry and infantry and many eunuchs"; with sprinkling of water on the roads; with her palki decked with rich cloth or net of gold, sometimes ornamented with precious stones; with eunuchs driving away flies with the help of peacock feathers having handle adorned with gold and silver and shouting for clearing the way and so on. Such were the etiquettes of the time that if any nobleman happened to pass that way, he stood with hands crossed out of respect. In case the princess wanted to honour him, then she sent pan to him wrapped in gold brocade bag.

The wives of the nobles imitated the ladies of royalty.

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112 Manucci, I,p.212; also Monserrate, p.79 (for general description).
113 Manucci, I,p.212.
UNSATIETY AND REACTION

Inspite of all luxuries and resources at their command, the harem-women were an unsatiated lot. According to Pelsaert:

These wretched women wear indeed ... the most expensive clothes, eat the daintiest food and enjoy all worldly pleasure except one and for that one they grieve saying they would willingly give everything in exchange for a beggar's poverty.\textsuperscript{114}

Such unsatiety is more revealing in the writings of contemporary chroniclers of the Mughal period. There are many examples which show that majority of these ladies maintained only an outward docility while they were always on the look out to satisfy their natural desire. Manucci was the physician of the royal harem. He has narrated about one Dil-jo, a female servant of Shah Alam's harem suffering from a strange disease which got cured after she got married to a male-slave on his recommendation. After that he found many other fellow maid-servants pretending to be ill and imploring him to suggest the same remedy.\textsuperscript{115} He mentioned about harem ladies getting the vicarious satisfaction by his mere touch. When he extended his hand behind the curtain to feel their pulse for diagnosis, they pressed and kissed it and even softly bit it. At times they applied it to their breasts too.\textsuperscript{116} Coryat, writing at the time of Jahangir, mentioned about the checks being imposed on entry

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{114} Pelsaert, p.66.
  \item \textsuperscript{115} Manucci,II,pp.372.
  \item \textsuperscript{116} Ibid.,pp. p.329.
\end{itemize}
of virile objects inside the harem for fear of their 'unnatural abuse'. Writing fifty years hence, Manucci corroborated the same being followed in the Mughal harem.117

There are references of secret love-affairs of these ladies when messages were sent through slave girls.118 The travellers also mentioned about smuggling of men inside the harem as referred to earlier.119 Ghasiti Begam, the daughter of Alivardi Khan (Nawab of Bengal) was notorious for her sensual pursuits. Her husband Newazish Mahmud Khan was given to feminine joy. Hence Ghasiti Begam was always ready to listen to petition of any good looking man. It was believed that she used to send invitations and messages and a "stout, handsome man was not always safe in the streets".120 They freaked out, at times, under some pretext. In one of the readings of the time of Aurangzeb, twelve nobles went to Dilkush garden in Delhi for flirting. One of them was caught red-handed because the woman he was teasing, turned out to be his wife. Interestingly, the lady herself was an adulteress and had gone there with the same

117 Coryat, pp.278-79; Manucci,II, p.329.
118 Manucci,II pp.200-01, 176(for his own love affair with the widowed daughter of Dindar Khan and secret love affairs of daughter of Chief Qazi respectively. He even solemnized her marriage without knowing about it).
119 Refer supra, p.185 and f.n.39. Though the authenticity of many of such scandals cannot be tested since they were based on hearsays, nonetheless, the very fact that they became the talk of the public, they indicate the sexual unsatiety of these ladies.
120 Siyar, (N.M.),I, p.422 and n.23.
References also appear of these ladies having unnatural relations with eunuchs or the prevalence of lesbianism. Jahanara was even scandalized of having incestuous connection with Shah Jahan. In the later Mughal period, Khanazads and Salatins provided good substitutes for these ladies to gratify their desires. Khanazads were men like foster-brothers who were born and brought up within the harem.

121 Manucci, II, pp.435-36. See also Ovington, I, pp.93-94 for a similar narration.

122 Compare Mandelslo, who observed, "They (women) have also a great kindness for the Eunuchs in whose custody they are, to engage them to afford their more liberty in their restraint, which they brook so ill, that in those parts a man would think polygamy should rather be permitted to women then (than) the men." (p.64). Also Pelsaert, p.66; Manucci, II, p.74. See also Elliot, H.M., "Institutes of Jahangir" in E&D, VII, Appendix, p.505 (for two incidents of amorous affairs with eunuchs during Jahangir's reign); Hilde, op. cit., pls. 33,34 (Showing paintings of lesbianism of Jahangir's time); Tarikh-i-Ahmad Shah, (E&D, VIII), pp.113-14, (for Javed Khan as gallant of Qudsia Begam, mother of Emperor Ahmad Shah). For Mughlani Begam's objectionable relations with eunuchs and others, see Ganda Singh, p.142; H.R. Gupta, op.cit., pp.122,141,154; Sarkar, Fall, II, pp.35-37.

123 Bernier tops in scandalizing this affair (Bernier, p.11). Manucci, termed Bernier's statement totally wrong considering it to have been founded on the talk of low people (Manucci, I, pp.208-9). So is the view of Catrou who considered it "a popular rumour which never had any other foundation than in the malice of the courtiers." (Bernier, p.11,n.1). Tavernier, I, p.275] also made reference of the prevailing suspicion of her having improper relation with her father, though he did not give his own view. But, his translator V. Ball, I, p.276 f.n.1 considers it a mere court gossip, so does B.P. Saksena (op.cit., pp.338-42). Richard Temple also regarded it "scandalous gossip". (The Indian Antiquary, 1915, pp. 111-12). But V.A. Smith, relying on the evidence of De Laet and Thomas Herbert, held, "Although it may be reasonably regarded as improbable, it cannot be dismissed summarily as incredible." (The Indian Antiquary, 1914, pp.240-44).
Salatins were the descendants of the earlier Emperors, going back to the time of Shah Jahan. Since many of them were married to princesses, they were confined within the palace so as to check the possibility of their being used by ambitious nobles. Because of their familiarity these Khanazads and Salatins were an easy excess for the harem ladies.\textsuperscript{124}

Under Maslow's 'Hierarchy of Needs',\textsuperscript{125} the social need, which entails the desire for social recognition, comes only after the fulfilment of basic and security needs. Sex was the basic need unfulfilled for these ladies. Thus, deprived of the basic need, these ladies neither craved for having a social recognition for themselves nor did they try to achieve one.

Drinks and other intoxicants provided a good diversion to the craving hearts of these harem-ladies. The ladies of Sultanate period were also not free from these vices but, they became more pronounced during the Mughal period. Writing about the time of Jahangir, Pelsaert observed:

In the cool of the evening, they (the noble ladies) drink a great deal of wine, for the women learn the habit quickly from their husbands and drinking has become very fashionable in the last few years.\textsuperscript{126}

The addiction became worse and the ladies called for these intoxicants stealthily. So much so that during the time of

\textsuperscript{124} Lal, \textit{Harem}, pp.181,199; Manucci, I ,p.210 (about Jahanara-Dulera affair. The latter was a Khanazad).

\textsuperscript{125} Maslow is the renowned human behavioural scientist of the twentieth century.

\textsuperscript{126} Pelsaert , p.65.
Aurangzeb, the eunuchs had tough time in checking intoxicants like wine, opium, *bhang*, nutmegs and drugs being smuggled inside the harem. Manucci wrote about the excessive drinking of Udaipuri Mahal and Jahanara. Jahanara virtually had to be lifted to her bed after drinks. In order to replenish her quota, she not only distilled wine herself but also imported it from Persia, Kabul and Kashmir. In the later Mughal period, Lal Kanwar's losing senses because of excessive drinking is well known. There are numerous paintings of the time which also throw ample light on their drinking habit and other addictions.

The enjoyment of material pleasures in the most magnificent and lustrous way became the only aim of the life of most of the harem-ladies. Pelsaert summed up their life like this:

Their Mahal are adorned internally with lascivious sensuality, wanton and reckless festivity, superfluous pomp, inflated pride and ornamental dainties.

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127 Manucci, II, p.328.
128 Ibid., pp.99-100 (for Udaipuri) and I, p.211 (for Jahanara).
129 Khafi Khan, (Text), Pt. II, p.690.
130 Goetz, Herman, *Art and Architecture of Bikaner State*, pp.174-75; Lal, *Harem*, Pl. 8; Randhawa, Pls. 26,28 (showing women smoking *hookah*).
131 Pelsaert, p.64.
Equally revealing is Manucci's description who observed:

Thus the women, being shut up with this closeness and constantly watched, and having neither liberty nor occupation, think of nothing... but malice and lewdness... If they have any other thought, it was to regale themselves with quantities of delicious stews; to adorn themselves magnificently, either with clothes or jewellery, pearls etc., to perfume their bodies with odours and essences of every kind... to enjoy the pleasure of the comedy and the dance, to listen to tales and stories of love, to recline upon beds of flowers, to walk about in gardens, to listen to the murmur of the running waters, to hear singing, and other similar pastimes.

In short, with all this glamour, lethargy and relaxation, they pined to bring the heaven down to the earth. But destined to be only hurris for the enjoyment of the Kings, princes and the nobles, they themselves remained a starved lot and at times, they even stooped too low for the satisfaction of their basic desire. Amidst such a life style of self-conceit and petty pursuits, barring a few exceptions, they remained the objects of sensual pleasure of the harem owners.

NEGLECTED LIFE

In the whole set up of harem system, the society did not seem to have ever felt that women too could have an emotional world of their own, an urge to be free and yearning to be exclusive claimant of their master's love. Their sentimentality seemed to have been buried so deep under the layers of social apathy and negation that women of the harem themselves appeared to have accepted the subordination they

132 Manucci, II, p.329.
were subjected to, as their \textit{fait accompli}.

A life of luxury and pomp without any worthwhile capability cannot provide, to anybody, a permanent social status. The life of the harem-ladies provided a testimony to this. It is too well known how the harem of the last Sultanate King Ibrahim Lodi became a part of war-booty-distribution-spree undertaken by Babur. These ladies were still lucky since they found Mughals as the successor to their master and hence, got a secure place to live in, though most of them became dancing or slave girls. But the ladies of the later Mughal period had neither any capability to fend for themselves nor any powerful King to look forward to for a safe haven. They could not maintain their superficial awe in the society because of the declining power and the diminishing resources of their masters.\textsuperscript{133} The plunder by the invaders like Nadir Shah and Ahmad Shah Abdali and reckless squander of royal treasury by the King and his harem-inmates brought the resources to almost a total depletion.\textsuperscript{134} Therefore, in 1757 A.D., during the reign of Alamgir II (1754-59 A.D.), when the kitchen did not run for three days, the princesses, unable to bear the starvation, rushed out of the palace to the city in

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total disregard of purdah. Luckily, the fort gates were closed and hence, they remained in men's quarters for a day and a night. It was with great persuasion that they could be prevailed upon to return to their quarters. It was clear that it would not be possible to keep a large number of women and eunuchs confined, hungry and naked, within the harem enclosures for long. The day showed its face very soon when, at the fall of Abdullah, one of the Sayyid brothers in 1720 A.D., as soon as the news of the his captivity reached Delhi, his large harem was in dismay and barring a few, a majority of the ladies made best of the opportunity. They seized whatever they could and disguising themselves under the cover of veils and sheets, ran away before the royal guards arrived. Such incidents of the ladies coming out of the harem continued even after that. Since these ladies had not learnt any skill or developed any vocation to fall back upon in rainy days, they could not earn a decent living for themselves. They did not stand a chance of a decent marriage either. The only way left for them was to change the course of history and instead of dancing girls and prostitutes visiting the royal palaces, it was now the royal ladies who, out of their sheer helplessness, joined the profession of dance and prostitution. The eunuchs took to dancing and singing as bhands at the same time. Thus, the vast harems of the royalty and nobility got lost in the crowd. This explains the preponderance of bhands, 

136 Khafi Khan, (Text), Pt.II, pp.933-34.

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B. PURDAH IN PRACTICE

The Qoranic theory behind purdah has already been discussed in the first chapter. Here an attempt is made to describe its practice. (DEVELOPMENT

In the Indian conditions, purdah among the Muslim women became common. A girl started observing seclusion near her puberty and generally, continued to adhere to it till her death. Though the tenets of the Qoran allowed her to dispense with it after she passed the child bearing age, but by that time she got so much used to it that she felt more comfortable living in seclusion than out of it. 138

Two factors were mainly responsible for this. Firstly, since the royalty and nobility religiously practised it to maintain their exclusiveness, it came to be regarded as a symbol of respectability. It percolated down but only to the extent the lower classes were able to afford it. Secondly, the threat of invaders and also the sensual laxity and outrages perpetrated by the Muslim royalty and nobility of the Sultanate and the Mughal periods had instilled a sense of insecurity among the Muslim subjects, as also among the Hindus.

137 Lai, Harem, p.198.
Consequently they relegated their women meekly behind the purdah so as to save them from the lustful eyes of these masters. The more was the slackening of the morals, the stricter became the rules of women-seclusion.

A majority of the Muslim population of India were the Hindu converts. These Neo-Muslims were more zealous in following the tenets of the 'Faith' embraced than those to whom it came as a matter of course. Such persons enforced the purdah norms most assiduously upon their women-folk.

There was a direct nexus between the rules of Muslim marriage and purdah. The Qoran has prescribed the list of prohibited relations with whom one can not enter into matrimonial alliance. Such persons are called *mahrams* (forbidden). Purdah from such persons was only a matter of routine and not strictly enforced. All others i.e. those with whom matrimonial alliance can be established are called *na-mahrams*. Purdah was strictly propounded from such persons.

The contemporary society tried to compensate itself for the weakening moral values of the men-folk by over-emphasizing the chastity and morality of a girl. Purdah was taken as the safest instrument to avoid contact with the *na-mahrams*. Under the conditions, the men-folk not only refrained from giving social freedom to their women but also abstained from marrying the ladies who enjoyed such liberties.

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140 Ashraf, p.175.
OBSERVANCE

From the beginning, the royal and aristocratic classes were more rigid in adhering to the rules of purdah. Not only the walls of the harem became higher and stronger with the passage of time, the restrictions imposed also increased successively. So strict was their seclusion that even when they fell ill, the attending doctors were not allowed to touch and feel their pulse. Therefore, for their examination, a handkerchief was first wrapped all over the body of the patient, this cloth was then dipped into a jar of water and it was through its smell that they were required to diagnose the disease and prescribe the medicine. Later on, some selected physicians like Bernier and Manucci were allowed to feel the pulse of the harem-ladies. But such special privilege was given to them only after an established familiarity and a long testing. They were also subjected to surprise checks. Manucci narrated that once when he stretched his hand inside the curtain to feel the pulse of a lady-patient, it turned out to be the hand of Shah Alam himself. Nonetheless, these physicians were not permitted to see the ladies. Whenever their services were required inside the harem, their heads were covered by the thick shawl hanging

142 Manucci, II,p.373.
down to their waist or feet and were led in and brought out like blind men by the eunuchs. The ladies too were such touch-me-nots that if they were to show some ailing part of their body to the doctor they would see to it that he could see only that part. Even the old mother of Shah Alam, who needed to be operated upon for gout twice a year, would put her arm out from the curtain, only uncovering two fingers wide of the affected part and the rest of it would be carefully covered with cloth.

The whole outer world was inaccessible for these ladies. If ever they moved out, it was in covered palkis and dolas surrounded on all sides by alert guards. So much so that if they were to travel on elephants, they would ride them inside a tent pitched near the palace gate. Even the mahouts of the elephants covered their heads so that they could not see the royal ladies while they rode the animals. On the elephant-backs they sat inside covered haudas. Their slave girls were also made to move in covered conveyances. The slave girls of Tatar Khan, a noble of Sultan Firoz Shah Tughlaq were reportedly carried in locked conveyances lest the eyes of na-mahrams would fall on them.

Purdah, in-fact, had come to be regarded as a symbol of honour. The worst punishment they could think of for their

144 Manucci, II, p.331.
145 Ibid., p.311.
146 Afif, (Text), pp.393-94.
enemies was to parade their women-folk unveiled and best honour they could extend to a person was by asking their harem-ladies to unveil themselves before him.\textsuperscript{147}

The stress on observance of purdah differed during different periods. Muhammad bin Tughlaq, for example, was so scrupulous in this regard that when he entered his harem, he was careful that his eyes did not fall on a \textit{na-mahram}.\textsuperscript{148} But such strictness was not found during the time of the Mughals. With their Turkish bent of mind, the first two Mughal Emperors relaxed undue restrictions of purdah on the harem-ladies. "It appears probable", wrote Annette Beveridge, "that there was no complete seclusion of Turki women from the outside world. The ladies may have veiled themselves but...they received visitors more frequently...." She noted how the senior nobles and officers of Babur regaled harem-ladies in Kabul with interesting stories about India.\textsuperscript{149} According to Gulbadan, the ladies of royal harem of Humayun mixed freely with their friends and visitors; went out dressed like males at times; enjoyed picnics and music with their mates; played polo and so on and so forth. In \textit{Meena Bazar}, all ladies appeared without purdah following the principle, as narrated by the author of \textit{Qanun-i-Islam}, that "Women need not be veiled..."

\begin{verbatim}
\textsuperscript{149} GHN, Introduction, p.7.
\end{verbatim}

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before the king or a bridegroom, both known as Shah".  

There are at least two clear examples, those of Razia \(^{151}\) and Nurjahan \(^{152}\), when a lady came out of the covering of the *burqa* and discharged the administrative responsibilities like their male counterparts. Nurjahan even came to the balcony for *Jharokha-Darshan*. Rajput queens in the Mughal harems did not observe purdah on many occasions. \(^{153}\) Similarly, the Kashmiri women guards of the palace were, generally, found without purdah. \(^{154}\) The lively painting of Maham Anaga in *Akbar-Nama* with her impressive facial contours and white and yellow robes, clearly indicates that it could not be the work of imagination but of some one who had observed her closely. \(^{155}\) In the later Mughal period, Mughlani Begam looked after administration of Panjab without observing any purdah. \(^{156}\) On the other hand, their are examples like that of Chand Bibi who, inspite of her active political career, supported a veil. \(^{157}\) Similarly, Zeb-un-nisa

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150 Jafar Sharif, p. 80.
151 T.N. (Raverty), I, pp. 638, 643; Ferishta, I, p. 121; "Tarikh-i-Haqqi", Per. Ms. No. 89, Cat. No. 537, OPL, fol. 8a. She broke the purdah norms in the later part of her career. Sirhindi, (p. 25), however, confirmed about her coming out but "with veils on ".
152 Beni Prasad, p. 159.
153 Tod, II, p. 355.
154 Manucci, II, p. 328.
156 Sarkar, *Fall*, II, p. 42.
helped Aurangzeb in administration and court discussions and yet appeared in purdah. 158 Taj Mahal, the chief queen of Emperor Muhammad Shah was so strict in her observance of purdah that she would not take a male child in her lap and would cover her face even before a boy of four. Even when she was on her death bed, she permitted no doctor to feel her pulse. 159 As a general rule, since the harem was inhabited by women only, no purdah was needed within the harem except when persons like physicians, goldsmiths, jewellers, artisans and masons visited the seraglio on asking. But, in the later half of seventeenth century and after when Khanazads, Salatins and other na-mahram relatives also started staying within the palace, the contact among them was discouraged by the observance of purdah within the harem also. 160 In the later Mughal period, because of moral laxity, political disorder and financial constraints the purdah-norms for the ladies of royalty and nobility also got slackened. When prince Jahan Shah made a surprise attack on his brother, Emperor Jahandar Shah, the Emperor ran away covered under a burqa while his lady Lal Kanwar fled with the crowd without any veil. 161

160 Lal, Harem, p.115; Ovington, I, p.92 (for women of Aurangzeb closely guarded and not visible to anybody except the Emperor and the eunuchs).
161 Siyar, (N.M.), I, pp.31-32, also (Briggs), p.28.
Among the Muslims, in general, purdah was a common practice. The contemporary writers like Isami and Amir Khusrau vehemently advocated total seclusion of women so that they were free from all types of suspicions and allegations regarding their chastity. Khusrau, in his metaphorical expression, compared a free woman with a bitch in his *Hasht Bahisht*. Similarly, stressing the importance of *dupatta* (an upper covering like a scarf) in his another poem *Matla-ul-Anwar*, he likened it to the crown of a Sultan. He considered an unveiled face just like an uncovered food open for cats and dogs to smear.

Firoz Tughlaq enforced purdah on his subjects for the first time and forbade the Muslim women from visiting the tombs of the saints, considering this practice as un-Islamic. Sultan Sikander Lodi continued these restrictions. Akbar made the rule still harder. According to Badaoni, he ordained:

> And if a young woman was found running about the streets and bazars of the town, and while so doing did not veil herself, or allowed herself to become unveiled,... she was to go to the quarter of the prostitutes, and take up the profession.

It was directed that a woman should live within the four walls.

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163 *Futuhat*, (Text), rule 10, pp.8-9. Also Afif, (Text), pp.373-74; *T.A.*, (De), I, pp.259-60.
164 *Ferishta*, I,p.343.
165 Badaoni, II,p.405.

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of her house, keep herself covered with chadar, use covered amari while on journey and travel only under the supervision of a man. 166

Numerous references of observance of purdah are found in the writings of the contemporary foreign travellers. Barbosa wrote that the Mohammadans of his time kept their women carefully guarded. 167 Thereafter, a number of them - Terry and Della Valle of the time of Jahangir, De Laet of the time of Shah Jahan, Manucci of the time of Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb, Ovington, Thevenot, Careri, Fryer and Marshall of the time of Aurangzeb and Hamilton of the period of Aurangzeb and beyond (1666-1732 A.D.) - confirmed this view. 168 Many of them described categorically that purdah had come to stay as a symbol of decency, status and modesty and only women of easy virtues or of the poor families were seen out moving without veils. 169 The practice prevailed not only in the Delhi empire but also within the territories of other Muslim states in

166 Nijat-ul-Rashid, p.460.
167 Barbosa, II, p.147, also I, p.121.
168 Terry, p.309; Della Valle, p.411; De Laet, p.81; Manucci, I, p.61; Ovington, I, p.93; Thevenot, p.53; Careri, p.248; Fryer, II, pp.117-18; Marshall, p.328; Hamilton, I, p.163.
169 Terry, p.309 (he wrote, "The Mahometan women, except they bee dishonest or poor, come not abroad."); De Laet, p.81 (he informed, "The Mahometan women do not come out into public unless they are poor or immodest; they veil their heads..."); Careri, p.248 (as per him,"The Mohometan women do not appear in public, except only the vulgar Sort, and the leud Ones.").
India. To maintain the sanctity of purdah, instructions were issued that elephants should not pass by the houses where ladies lived, without permission. In another anecdote of the time of the Nizamat of Nawab Jafar Khan, an English factory chief wanted to construct two and three storeyed buildings near Hugli. Since high buildings endangered the privacy of the women of nearby houses, there was great opposition to this from the Muslim population. As a result, the Nawab had to issue orders to stop the construction.

The women of the lower strata were comparatively freer from the restrictions of this seclusion. The women of agricultural and working classes lent a helping hand to their husbands in outdoor activities as well. Such women could not afford and so, did not support elaborate burqa. For them, covering of their head and a part of their face with their dupatta or other head dress, when they passed a stranger, was sufficient. There are abundant references to the common sight of women water-carriers walking along the street without purdah.

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170 Bamzai, p.467 (for purdah in Kashmir excepting lower classes); Sastri, p.316 (he quoted Varthema (1505 A.D.) having written about the Muslim ladies of Bijapur that "go with their faces quite covered according to the custom of Damascus").

171 Mirza Nathan, II, p.523.

172 Riyazu-s-Salatin, pp.31-32.

173 Barani, (Text), p.56; Ain-ul-Mulk Abdullah, Insha-i-Mahru, Letter No.94, p.179; Ovington, I, p.142. See also Lal, Early Muslims, p.149.
IMPACT

Purdah, as an institution and in the form it was adopted by the Muslim society, did a great harm to the Mohammadan women and their standing in society. The conservatives might support its observance as a part of the social need of the time. But the very fact that it curtailed woman's freedom of growth and advancement and made her subservient to the will of man was a great blow to her independent status in society. It segregated the whole gamut of social life into two exclusive spheres, outdoor and indoor. The male dominant society closed the gates of outer world of action and challenges for the woman and confined her within the four walls of the house. The closed and dingy atmosphere within was not conducive for her physical and mental growth. Not only her health suffered but her mental development also became circumscribed. She had to satisfy herself with the roles of a serving mother, docile wife and tolerant daughter-in-law forbearing the pangs of torture and neglect and of consciousness of being an unwanted and second-rate member of the society. She was denied the enlightenment of education and the upliftment of her personality. Thus, groping in the darkness of zanana with equally ignorant inmates and having been denied the company of men or the exposure to a wider horizon, superstitions, taboos and prejudices became a part of her life. In the long run, her development was

obstructed and she became totally dependent on man for meeting out even her basic needs.

The rigours of purdah were a little less stringent for the ladies of the higher strata. They had the facility of private coaching and exclusive entertainments. They were, however, deprived of the knowledge of the outside world and the experience of a mixed society. 175

With the observance of purdah, Muslim women were destined to a life of prisoners suffering from feeble health, dulled senses, ignorance and prejudices.

175 P. Thomas, P. 252.