

Chapter VII

Mughal society through the lens of fashion culture-

Mughals lived a life of luxury. Their palaces in which they lived were fabulously made. They had many wives. They were very fond of music and dance, food and especially beautiful and costly costumes. They had big gardens and pools in their palaces. They really lived like kings as kings should. But Babur and Humayun led a very turbulent life. They move from one battleground to the other and could not settle down to a peaceful life. It was Akbar who founded the institutions which determined the course of the life of his descendants.¹ The Mughals did not have family life in the right sense of the term if we wish to put it. The legally married wives, concubines and slave girls, young and beautiful, who were numerous in count, were attached to the emperor's bed. The emperor alone presided over the *harem* like the golden cock among his gilded hens.² (Plate no.23)

Wives of Mughal Emperors:-

An extremely important place in the Mughal harem was occupied by emperor's wives. All the Mughal emperors had many wives but all the wives did not enjoy the same equal status. Only the chief queen and other prominent queens lived in big Mahals and enjoyed great luxuries.³

The chief queens of Babur, the founder of Mughal dynasty, as recorded by Gulbadan begam, were- Ayisha Sultana Begam, Zainab Sultana Begam, Maham Begam, Masuma Sultan Begam, Gul-rukh Begam, Dildar Begam and Bibi Mubarika. The Afghan lady among them who was Humayun's mother, Maham Begam, was the chief queen. Humayun's wives were Bega Haji Begam, Hamida Banu Begam Akbar's mother, Gunwar Begam, Shad Bibi, Khanish Agha Khwarizmi and Mah-Chuchak Begam.⁴

Akbar's Wives- The wives of Akbar's are Ruqaiya Begam, Salima Sultan Begam (previously the wife of Bairam khan and after Bairam khan's assassination she was accepted as Akbar's wife), Rajput princess of Amber Jodha Bai (also known as Harka Bai), daughter of Raja Bihari Mal.⁴ Other Rajput wives were: daughter of Kanhan, the brother of Rai Kalyan Mal of Bikaner,⁵ daughter of Rawal Har Rai of Jaisalmer,⁶ and sister of Rana Udai Singh of Marwar,⁷ the princess of Merta and Dungarpur,⁸ he also married Bibi Daulat Shad, and daughters of Abdullah khan Mughal and Miran Mubarak Shah of Khandesh.⁹

Jahangir's wives- The wives of Jahangir were Man Bai, daughter of Raja Bhagwan Das of Amer,¹⁰ daughter of Rai Singh of Bikaner,¹¹ Jodh Bai or jagat Gosain daughter of Mota raja or Udai Singh of Marwar,¹² Raj Kumari Karamsi, the daughter of Keshav Das Rathor,¹³ daughter of Jagat Singh,¹⁴ daughter of Rawal Bhim,¹⁵ Kanwal Rani the daughter of the ruler of little Tibet,¹⁶ daughter of Ram Chandra Bundela,¹⁷ others were Sahib-i-Jamat, the daughter of Khwaja Hassan, Nur-un-Nisa Begam, sister of Muzaffar Hussain, Saliha Banu daughter of Qasim Khan, daughter of Mubarak Chak and Hussain Chak of Kashmir,¹⁸ and finally Mehur-Nisa, the famous Nurjahan Begum.¹⁹

Shahjahan's wives- The wives of Shahjahan includes daughter of Mirza Muzaffar Hussain Safawi, the daughter of Nur Jahan's brother Asaf Khan, Arjumand Banu Begam (known as Mumtaz Mahal) and daughter of Shahnawaz Khan.²⁰

Aurangzeb's wives- Aurangzeb had four wives, Dilras Banu Begam, Aurangabadi Mahal, Nawab Bai, and Udipuri Mahal.²¹

Harem of the Mughal Emperors:

The Harem conjures of the vision of a sequestered place ensconcing beautiful female forms in mysterious magnificence. It was indeed made so by the Mughal Emperor Akbar during his long reign of half a century. He brought in a large number of inmates to adorn it. He provided

them all luxuries and made elaborate arrangements for their seclusion and security. During the time of his successor Jahangir, Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb the Mughal Harem attained the peak of excellence.²² Each night he visited a particular wife or Mahal and was received warmly by the wife and slaves who dressed for the special occasion, seemed to fly rather than run about their duties. In hot weather, they undressed the husband and rubbed his body with pounded sandalwood and rose water or some other scented or cooling oil. Some slaves chafed the master's hands and feet or sang, played music or danced. The wife sat nearby all along. In the evening, they drank a great deal of wine for the women learnt the habit from the husbands and drinking had become fashionable in the last few years. The husband sat like this until midnight, until drink or passion sent him to bed. Then if one of the pretty slave girls caught his fancy, he called her and enjoyed her, his wife not daring to show any signs of displeasure, though she would take it out on the girl later.²³ No doubt the harem is the relaxing and merrymaking place for the emperors; they paid special attention for the security of the harem where the ladies of all races live together. The security of the harem which was a very sensitive matter was in the hands of faithful and absolutely trustworthy eunuchs, known as *khwaja Sara*. They were castrated or emasculated men who were employed customarily in women's quarter. The Mughals used the title, *Khwaja Sara* respectfully for the keeper, incharge or superintendent of their harem. Precisely, it was the title of the administrative officer of the harem who regulates its supplies of stores, salaries and stipends and kept its account, fixed duties of the servants and maintained perfect discipline.²⁴

Meena Bazaar

During the Mughal era Meena Bazaars, also known as *Kush Ruz* (Day of Joy) were exclusively held for women, while the emperor and a few princes were the only males present.²⁵

The Bazaars took five to eight days during the *Nauroz* (New Year) festival. Emperor Humayun was the first to organize them, but Akbar and his successors made them more elaborate. The fair was closed for the public, while the women of the harem, Rajput ladies and the wives and daughters of the noblemen in the court, set up their own stalls to sell cloth, jewellery, handicrafts etc. Only the emperor, princes and some nobles were allowed to enter the bazaar to purchase the goods, which were sold at high prices.²⁶ The ladies of the harem and other women attended it and there was brisk buying and selling. The king used such days to select articles which he liked and also fixed prices of the things. He utilised this occasion also to scrutinise the affairs of the harem people, and to arrange marriages of boys and girls.²⁷ This custom is said to have been borrowed by the Mughals from the Turkisthan and Transoxiana where such bazaars were held once or twice a week in every village, but there women as well as men participated in buying and selling.²⁸

The *Meena bazaar* was an exclusively women's affair and not open to the general public. Beautiful stalls were set up by the royal ladies and other harem women and also the wives and daughters of the nobles, who acted as traders, to sell a variety of commodities ranging from handicrafts, jewellery, clothes, brocades, fruits, flowers, etc. The commodities were sold at high prices and the return went for the charitable purposes. A lot of bargaining was done in this bazaar, the women who sold these articles were very charming and beautiful, and quite skilled at the art of conversation and therefore became good sellers.²⁹ *Meena bazaar* was held by his successors also. Jahangir is recorded to have held meena bazaar inside the fort (of Agra) at night. It was a private affair, exclusive to the ladies of the harem, around which many a romantic tale was woven. Like a village *hath* or *painth*, it was a weekly fair and the surprising feature is that it was held regularly in tents even when the king was travelling and living in camp. Shah Jahan continued to follow the custom. This is how it was institutionalised. Certainly it provided an occasion to purchase clothes, ornaments, cosmetics

and other things of their daily needs and to while the time in shopping. During the time of Shah Jahan these bazaars were even more *une affaire de grandeur*.³⁰

Celebration of *Nauroz*:

It is a court function; the participation of harem ladies was incidental. The celebration of *nauroz* or the New Year's Day was borrowed from Persia and was the greatest festival in the Mughal era. It marked the advent of spring and was held on 20th or 21st march, the first month of the Persian year.³¹ It was the greatest festival during the Mughal times and was celebrated for nineteen days.³² Most chroniclers and many foreign travellers have described the gaiety and splendour of the festivities when "wine flowed in rivulets, verse and ode flew in hundreds, gaiety and merriment ruled everything", while dance and music thrilled the hearts of all.³³ Preparations for the festival were made months ahead, the palaces, porticoes, gardens, private and public audience halls and even the market places were richly decorated. The common people also decorate their houses and wore good clothes.³⁴ Musicians and nautch girls thrilled the audience by their performances. The festival of *nauroz* was introduced by Akbar and continues till it was abolished by Aurangzeb on grounds of his religious orthodoxy.³⁵

Emperor's Birthday:

The Emperor's birthday was another extremely joyous occasion at the Mughal court. On this day the emperor was weighed against some precious metals and commodities in imitation of the Hindu fashion. Humayun was the first Mughal emperor to adopt this custom of weighing.³⁶ Akbar celebrated both his solar and lunar birthdays on these days the weighing ceremony formed an important part of festivities.³⁷ Akbar's regulation about weighing continued under Jahangir and Shah Jahan. Most of the foreign travellers witnessed the brilliance of this ceremony and have written about it.³⁸ Sir Thomas Roe's description may be

quoted at some length in evidence. “*The king’s birthday and the solemnity of his weighing to which I went----- was carried into a very large and beautiful garden, where was prepared the scale, being hung in large trestles, and a cross-beam, the seals of massy-----, here attended the nobility, all sitting about on carpets and ladies watched from behind the curtains. The king appeared clothed, or rather laden with diamonds, rubies, pearls, and other precious vanities, so great, so glorious. He was weighed with gold and jewels and distributed among the poor*”.³⁹

Marriage ceremony:

Marriages of the Emperor and other members of the Mughal royal used to be celebrated in extreme grandeur and amidst gaiety and merry making. In such occasion, the royal ladies had an important role to play. The royal marriages were usually arranged by the emperor, even in the case of love matches. But the entire responsibility of arranging the feasts and festivities depended on important royal ladies of the Mughal harem. Marriages were celebrated lavishly.⁴⁰ Betel leaves were given as a mark of acceptance of proposal by the elders of the bride’s family. The *heenabandi* ceremony was performed next in which henna was applied on the bridegroom’s hands and feet by the harem ladies.⁴¹ Then came the day of actual wedding. On the day of the wedding princes and nobles went to the groom’s place to offer him wedding presents. Then a magnificent procession was taken out where the groom mounted an elephant and was followed by important men, some on decorated horses and some on foot, till the procession reached the *Diwan-i-Aam* (Hall of Public Audience). The emperor himself tied on the groom’s forehead the *sehra* made of pearls and gems. Then the marriage procession started for the bride’s place where they were cordially received and at an auspicious hour the marriage was performed by the Qazi in front of the emperor. Finally gold and silver coins and gems were showered on the newly wedded couple.⁴² One of the grand

Mughal royal family marriages was that of Shahjahan's eldest son Dara Shukoh with Nadira Begam, the daughter of Prince Parvez, another son of Jahangir.⁴³ (Plate no.24). Mughal history is quite abundant with stories of grand marriages like that of Aurangzeb to Dilras Banu Begam and marriage of Dara's daughter Jani Begam to Sultan Azam, son of Aurangzeb.⁴⁴

Coronation of the emperor:

Another grand festive was when a new king comes to the throne. The king did not let the coronation ceremonies lack any sort of grandeur or gaiety. The coronation festivities usually continued for about a week. The palaces, gardens, market places and other public places were grandly decorated. Fireworks were displayed at night. Tournaments in archery were also organised. Jagirs were given to the nobles, the chief ladies of the harem also became the recipients of a lot of money and valuables.⁴⁵

Purdah system:

Purdah meant living in seclusion or behind a screen or at least covering off the face by a veil. The lives of harem ladies were governed by strict rules of purdah. These ladies usually did not have the liberty to move out but well hidden behind veils. But inside the harem they could move around as they pleased. They were also provided with various kinds of luxuries and comforts. The daily life in the harem was full of gaiety and mirth.⁴⁶ During the Mughal era all Mughal emperors emphasized on the enforcement of purdah but Akbar made a regulation to which Badaoni refers, "And if a young woman was found running about the lanes and bazaars of the town and while so doing either did not veil herself or allowed herself to be unveiled she was to go to the quarters of prostitutes and take up the profession". Young girls were directed by their elders to seclude themselves from the eyes of strangers.⁴⁷ According to Manucci and Bernier, who once came as physicians in the harem gave in their accounts that

the ladies in the harem led lives of great comfort in their accounts that the ladies in the harem led lives of great comfort, luxury and materialistic pleasure. They lived in a grand apartments luxuriously furnished, with lovely gardens, fountains, tanks and water channels attached to them. They wore beautiful and expensive clothes made from the finest material and adorned themselves with jewellery from top to toe.⁴⁸ Whenever the ladies moved outside their palaces they put on veils, usually white in colour, which covered their faces,⁴⁹ they seldom travelled on foot, they mostly travelled in covered palanquins with several servants and eunuchs surrounding them on all sides. They also travelled in covered howdahs on elephant backs, *chaudoles* and sometimes in carriages covered on all sides to maintain purdah. When a lady rode an elephant, the animal was made to enter a tent near the palace gate and the mahout covered his face with a cloth so that he was unable to see the princess when she entered into the covered howdah.⁵⁰ Whether the ladies travelled in palanquins, *chaudoles*, howdahs or carriages, proper care was taken to hide them from the view of the people outside and they became almost inaccessible to the sight of man.⁵¹ Not only outside the palaces but also within the palaces the Mughal ladies followed strict purdah. No one at the court was allowed to see the women housed except the emperor and few selective relatives.⁵² The men having this special privileges included the fathers and brothers of the royal ladies living inside, they too could meet the women only in the presence of her husband.⁵³ Roe writes about Jahangir and his wives that “No man enters his house but eunuchs; his women were never seen”.⁵⁴ But from the strict core of purdah system, Nur Jahan broke the purdah convention and did not mind to come out in public. But the majority of the women were deprived of this opportunity for this even painting of Mughal ladies were rare because of strict purdah.⁵⁵

Status of girl child:

The daughters of the Mughal family or the Mughal princesses occupied places of great honour in the seraglio. The birth of a girl in those days was less welcomed than that of a boy. But the Mughal emperors loved their daughters a lot and made the best arrangement for their education and cultivation of their talents. They were brought up in great luxuries and had for themselves available all the exclusive material things that life needed. But, many of them, especially after Akbar's time onwards, remained unmarried. Many writers and foreign travellers like Manucci have blamed Akbar for starting this tradition, but many scholars do not agree to this theory because Akbar got his sister and daughters married off to eligible men.⁵⁶ What he disapproved was marriage between first cousins.⁵⁷ Even by the time of Shah Jahan, certain restraints on the marriage of princesses is seen. Probably this was done to limit the contenders to the throne. But Aurangzeb got some of his daughters and nieces married to first cousins. Apart from this one factor, the Mughal princesses had almost everything they wanted including the love of their father and brothers. Shah Jahan's love for his eldest daughter Jahanara is well-known. So did Aurangzeb loved his eldest daughter Zeb-un-Nisa, till she became a threat to his policies and his throne.⁵⁸

Etiquette and court manners of the Mughal:

In a social milieu where status rather than wealth was the ruling concern, etiquette reflected an reinforced hierarchies. The Mughal court etiquette had a long lineage behind it, although the Iranian prototype, especially the *Sasanid*, seems to have been the primary inspiration. Many of the court rituals and norms of conduct, especially the notion of a visible imperial majesty and grandeur. Among those replicated in the Mughal court were: prostration before the Emperor or his throne; kissing his feet or any other limb, the hand in particular; several forms of salutation by bending from the waist downwards; and the custom of distribution of

gifts, titles and in particular; several forms of salutation by bending from the waist downwards; and the custom of distribution of gifts, titles and offices on special occasions such as royal birthdays, or festivals.⁵⁹ There were several levels of etiquette within the court, where concessions could be granted by the king but infractions of the norms led to severe punishments; within the royal family, where age, relationship, and gender were important factors. *Kornish* and *Taslim* have been mentioned by Abul Fazl the recognized odes of salutation to the king. *Kornish* consisted in placing the palm of the right hand on the forehead and bending down the head. While offering *Taslim*, the person placed the back of his right hand on the ground, raise it slowly till he stood erect when he put the palm of his hand on the top of his head.⁶⁰ Akbar issued orders that *Taslim* should be repeated thrice. *Taslim*, however, became common mode of greeting among nobles during the succeeding reigns but Aurangzeb forbade it in April 1670 and introduced *Salam-alekum* instead. Akbar, the founder of Din-illahi, introduced another salutation called *Sijdah*, perhaps at the insistence of his friends admirers and disciples.⁶¹ As it consisted in bowing down the forehead to the earth, it was looked upon as man-worship by the orthodox. Akbar thought it wise to forbid this practice in *Darbar-i-Am* but allowed it in private assemblies. The custom appears to have been continued during the reign of Jahangir when the subjects prostrated themselves before the king in grateful return for any royal favours conferred on them and also on receipt of royal mandates⁶²

Within the family the mother and elderly aunts are shown the greater courtesy with titles and offices on special occasions such as royal birthdays, or festivals. Many Mughal miniatures open a window on the formatting of etiquette over time. Many paintings of Shah Jahan's court are marked by the display of overpowering grandeur, order and immutability. A very large number of courtiers, richly attired, each standing in the exact spot assigned to him

according to his rank and all of them in the same erect posture, eyes fixed on the Emperor's face.⁶³ (Plate no.25)

Period of experiment and innovation:

The knowledge of India's ancient dress is based on works of art, such as sculptures and paintings that survived over time. Since this art was almost always financed and created for the pleasure of the upper classes, our picture of ancient India's clothing is primarily the dress of the royals and their deities. Members of the subcontinent are vast and varied regional groups wear, and have worn, clothing and ornaments designed to clearly define their status in Indian society. Two garments predominant in India: the dhoti for men, and the sari for women. These items of clothing have been the basis of Indian costume from as early as the second century B.C., and probably date back even further to pre historical times. Clothing styles of the Indian subcontinent underwent a major change in the twelfth century, when Arab Muslims conquered north and central India; they were followed in later years by the Mughals, from central Asia. Muslim religious codes required that the body be covered as much as possible, bringing about the use of the *jama*, a long-sleeved coat reaching to the knee or below, belted with a *sash*, and combined with wide hipped trousers called *isar*. Another garment, the *farji*, a long, gown-like, short-sleeved coat, was worn by scholars, priests, and other high officials. Since silk was forbidden by their religious laws, Muslim men wore garments of cotton or wool, and sheer cotton became a luxury fabric. The Koran did not forbid the use of silk by women, and ladies of the court wore luxurious silks to great advantage. The earlier Muslim woman's costume consisted of wide-topped trousers fitting snugly from calf to ankle; a long shirt-like blouse called a *kurta*; and a fitted outer jacket and *dopatta*. Under the rule of Emperor Akbar, a graceful new style appeared: a pleated, open-fronted skirt called a *ghaghra*. It was worn with an apron-like panel tucked into waist to

cover the front opening. The upper garment was short-sleeved, breast-length blouse called a *choli*. To this day, the *ghaghra* and the *choli* continue to be basic elements of the Muslim woman's dress, the apron-like panel having metamorphosed into the traditional *sari*, which is worn as an over garment, with one end draped around the hips and the shoulder and, perhaps, the head. The Muslim rules of dress had little effect on the costume of south India. The dhoti continued to be preferred by most Hindu men, although it was forbidden by a few castes (social classes within Indian society), and the *sari* became the favoured garment of most women.⁶⁴

The Mughal period was not only a period of experiment and innovation but also a period of continuation and culmination of those processes that had their seeds sown in the later part of the rule of Delhi Sultans. In other words, the spirit of harmony and synthesis that commenced in the closing years of the Delhi Sultanate continued and culminated in the Mughal period. In short the dress, manners, social amenities and festivals which the Mughals introduced in India ceased to be foreign and were accepted by the people. Akbar's desire to weld the two people into a unity and social cohesion led to the Hindu- Muslim synthesis in dress, diet, etiquette modes of living, functions and festivals. The Mughals Emperor were very much particular about their dress and spent lavishly over it. Akbar was fond of his dress. Jahangir adopted for himself certain special clothes of which "Nadir's coat" was one of them. Shah Jahan was very fond of splendour and loved gorgeous and flowery dresses with delicate embroidery. The Royal ladies were also fond of soft wearing saris along with silk petticoat.⁶⁵

The Mughal grandeur famed worldwide was very well reflected in the clothes worn by the Mughal men and their ladies. Their garments revealed not only their riches and tastes but also the excellent work done by the tailors in those times. The fashions in garments introduced to our land by the Mughals have come down to us in their various modified forms which are found even today.⁶⁶

Akbar like his successor, lived in a world of textile, clothes and jewels and created elaborate rules restricting the wearing of some emblem, jewels and types of clothes to certain rank in Mughal society.⁶⁷ Akbar himself introduced many trends in dress which was adopted by fashionable courtiers, instead of *jama* he says *sarbagati*, *izar* he says *yar-pirahan*, *nimtana* to *tanzeb*, for veil he says *chitragupita*, *patka* he says *katzeb*, for shawl, *param-naram*.⁶⁸

Akbar whose aesthetic taste for attire was high and employed skilled tailors to improve the styles of the costumes in his wardrobe. Akbar generally changed his dresses daily to match them with the colour of the planet of the day. Akbar changed the fashion by ordering court dress to be made with a round skirt and to be tied on the right side double (*doshalla*). Paintings of the last decade of the sixteenth century in *Akbar Nama* show that the dress consisted of a knee-length coat lengthened and later in the eighteenth century the skirt became full and was gathered into a high waist.⁶⁹ The court costume consisted of an unlined outer coat (*jama*), trouser (*paijama*) and a turban. These garments were worn with a sash (*patka*) at the waist, ceremonial weapons and elaborate jewellery often including a turban ornament. The word *jama* is a generic name for coat or outer garments and can be used for many different garments. In Govardhan's painting Akbar wears the typical Mughal *jama* made of a fine somewhat transparent white *fabric* depicted with a faint regular all over pattern of flower sprigs in gold. The long sleeves are close fitting and the *jama* front closes in a similar way under the outer arm, with several length of fabric that matches the *jama*. *Jama's* full skirt extends below Akbar's knee. The crumpled legs of his *paijama* extend from below the *jama* to his ankle. This crumpled look is probably created by cutting the snug lower leg of the *pyjama* longer than the wearer's leg length and then crushing the excess fabric into small folds around the ankle. Akbar's *pyjama* is probably made of silk brocaded with another gold floral pattern; a favourite design became synonymous with Mughal decorative art. Akbar wears a relatively flat red and gold striped turban wrapped around his

head. One end of the turban forms a fan like cockade at the front. This shape is often described as a couch shell “and many be derived from the Hindu Rajput style *pagri*, and indigenous turban of non-Muslim design. The *chakdarjama* introduced by Akbar in his court reportedly introduced the convention of Muslim time the *jama* under the right arm and Hindus tying theirs under the left. This practice made it possible to tell an individual religion quickly and easily. The court costume shown in Akbar’s period continued to be the standard dress during his son Jahangir’s rule. Clothing like the court itself became increasingly elaborate formal and codified. An aesthete known for his exquisite taste and always involved in the design process, each of Jahangir’s garments was expressly designed for him and like all garments worn by royalty was worn only once, no matter how many months and how much labour went to its creation. The court followed his fashion closely⁷⁰, Jahangir decreed that certain textile and garments should be made should be made for his use alone. As a reward of his high honour, the emperor rewarded selected courtiers with gifts of clothing and jewellery. One of these garments, the *nadiri* was a special sleeveless over coat design by Jahangir himself. The emperor is also credited with a number of innovation in *quba* (over court) decoration including embroidery at the hems of the garment’s long sleeves and a new folded collar style. The *tus* shawl made of the finest wool from Kashmir introduced by his father, Akbar, has another garment that could be worn only if received from the emperor. Jahangir also introduced the *salimshahi* a sleeper with a finely pointed to, that was still in used during the late twentieth century.⁷¹ During the Mughal era, clothing could also be used to humiliate and degrade. Aurangzeb disgraced his defeated eldest brother Dara Shikoh and his young nephew by dressing them in dirty rags of the poorest quality and parading them through street.⁷²

The Mughal emperor Jahangir inherited the imperial wardrobe; the Indo-Islamic dress was already quite distinctive. The fashionable high heeled shoes were replaced by equally

fashionable soft slippers (plate) and the *Safavid* turban of multi coloured striped stuffs had become popular.⁷³ Jahangir was in habit of covering himself with strings of pearls or precious stones. In 1615 he introduced pearl ear ring for men. At that time a piece of the finest muslin fifteen yards (13.71m) long and are yard (0.91m) wide was made at Dhaka in Bengal. To make such a piece of cloth which contained between one thousands and eighteenth hundred warp threads per width, the weaver required five months..⁷⁴

In Shah Jahan's time the *jama* reached almost to the ankles, and the turban became a mass of thin material with innumerable folds, hanging down at the back and round with strings of jewels, in such a way that the cap became quite invisible.⁷⁵ (Plate no. 26)

Fashion of the Mughal Begums and princesses:

Married or spinster, happy or unhappy, the princesses lived in the *mahal*, well protected and well looked after. They rarely went out. They did not visit ladies of nobles; it was the other way round. In the event they went, they did so with the special permission of the king; they left at nine o'clock in the morning, accompanied by three or four eunuchs and dozen ladies of honour, and returned before nightfall. They live in luxury and magnificence; they spent most of their time and money in toilet and beautifying themselves. Beauty of the face mainly in the eyes, the lips and the nose and these were given special attention. The nose was decorated with a *nath* or clove, which was usually studded with diamond. The *nath* was generally a love token presented to the bride by the bridegroom.⁷⁶

According to Berneir, the dresses of the Begums are superb and costly perfumed with the essence of roses. They changed their dresses several times a day, especially in summer when they put on such exceeding thin raiment that their skin shows through. Tavernier says, their clothes were so fine that one could see all the skin as though it was uncovered. Mannucci says that the ladies of the harem wear two or three garments each weighing not more than one

ounce and worth from forty to fifty rupees each. He says that Roshanara was fond of wearing sari, the traditional dress of the Hindu women. Berneir says it was so delicate that it is also wore in night.⁷⁷ Tavernier says they sleep in these clothes and never put them on again but give them away to their servants. While sleeping the only apparel put aside was *dopatta*, a cloth worn over the head, something reaching down to the knees which was made of the finest muslin and woven with gold thread.

European hats became popular among the begums during the reign of Jahangir. An English merchant in 1614 asked his principals in England for half a dozen of coloured beaver hats for the begums in Jahangir reign.⁷⁸ Mannucci claims that the begums were heavily bejewelled as on his visits to the *harem* for treating the inmates, jewels were brought to him in trays for his appraisal, or as an opening for conversation. Some of the stones he says were of extraordinary size and strings of pearls much equal in size, there were strings of rubies pierced and strung together just like the pearls and about the size of a nut. Zinat Causar, a modern researcher who has taken the trouble to catalogue the various ornaments of the Mughal lady, lists eight head ornaments, sixteen for the forehead, thirty one for the ears, fifteen for the nose, one for the teeth (gold or silver studs fitted to the front teeth), twenty nine for neck, sixteen for the arms, twenty four for the wrists, three for the palms, nine for the waist, fifteen for the feet and ankles and five for the toes. It seems as if begum was a walking treasure house.⁷⁹

The begums for their fine dress, jewels and perfumes where somewhat backward in their ablutions retaining the habits of their distant ancestors in central Asia though there were *hammams* (turkish baths) in the harem, instead of having a bath very day, the begums only wash their face, hand and feet, perfume them self-applied cosmetics. On Friday they had an obligatory bath. They bathed in rose water, they clean their teeth with a twig and a tooth powder prepared with crushed pearls, musk, amber, aloes wood and camphor⁸⁰.

Sometimes imitating Hindu women, the begums decorated their forehead with moons, and stars of gold and silver dust⁸¹. Women as whole had a deep liking for cosmetics to beautify themselves since ancient times as is evident from Ajanta paintings and mythological legends suggest. In Mughal times too women were not left behind in the use of cosmetics to beautify themselves. As in all ages, it were the women more than the men of those days, who gave importance to toilette and cosmetics making their daily routine of dressing up and beautification an elaborate and complicated affair. They used different kinds of oil like *narayana* oil to massage their bodies and turmeric paste, sandalwood paste, paste of *kusum* flower, pulse flower powder, rice powder and many other things to wash their bodies.⁸³ Abul fazl says that oils extracted from certain sweet smelling flowers were used for the skin and hair.⁸⁴ Great emphasis was laid on hair care and hair decoration. Hair dyes, methods for curing baldness and removing unwanted hair were also used.⁸⁵ Sometimes hair was washed with *amlaki* fruits.⁸⁶ Manucci reported “their hair is always very well dressed, plaited and perfume with scented oil.⁸⁷ The Mughals were very fond of chewing betel leaf. The Mughal women’s habit of chewing this leaf had reached such proportion that it is said that Jahanara Begum⁸⁸ and princess Zeb-un-Nisa spent the entire revenue of the port of Surat on providing betel for the entire household during their respective times. The leaf when chewed coloured the lips red. The frequent use of betel leaf discoloured the teeth which turned red, but was considered one of the beauties of Indian women.⁸⁹ *Lakha* a form of lip-dye rolls of betel leaves filled with a solution of *cathechu* and the essence of *kevra* blossoms were preserved overnight in a piece of damp cloth, to be chewed early in the morning after treating the lips with black *missi* powder.⁹⁰ Apart from this the women used *collyrium* for the eyes, antimony to darken the eyebrows and eye lashes and *mehendi* and *mahawar* to colour their hands and feet.⁹¹ Manucci writes: All women in India are in the habit of scenting their hands and feet

with a certain earth, which they call *mehendi*, which colours the hands and feet red in such a way that they look as if they had on gloves.⁹²

Men's toilet:

Sweet-scented oils of various kinds were exported from Bengal and applied to the hair and also rubbed on the body. The poor people used coconut oil, and the nobles would anoint their bodies with sandal and other oils extracted from various flowers. In Gujarat, they anointed themselves with white sandal-wood paste mixed with saffron and other scents.⁹³ In hot weather, the rich would add rose-water to keep their skin cool. *Santak* and *argajah* were also used for the same purpose. They used a sweat-powder like that of sandal-wood to get the sweat out of their bodies and head, and daubed it (head) with oil. Hair-dyes were also freely employed to make one look younger. Muhammadans, who usually kept hair on their upper lips, would not let it grow grey even when old by combing it continually with lead black combs.⁹⁴

Paijama and *achhkan* formed the ceremonial costume. Under Mughal influence long skirts became the fashion even it is meant hiding the foot ornaments. The bodice a kind of ladies garment was greatly popularised and brought into fashion by the Mughals in India. Its latest form is said to have brought into fashion by one of the daughter of Aurangzeb.⁹⁵ For the innovative designs in dress that we find in Mughal times, we thank their ladies whose boldness sometimes made them go against the established traditions in many fields including garments and brought many new fashion in their attire. The Mughals ladies were not just content with wearing beautiful, costly and decorative garments. Some of them like Nur Jahan went a step forward and introduced new fashions and design in dress, costumes, jewellery and perfumes. In place of the '*peshwaz*' or ladies gown, she introduced a very light dress called '*dudami*' which weighed just two dams. Her *panchtoliya* a scarf weighing only five

tolas too was a light substitute for headcover or *orhani*, and *badhah*, *kinara* and *farsh-i-chandani* or sandalwood coloured carpets became famous and well known during her time. When it came to colours, the Muslim women preferred white dresses, either plain, or wrought with gold flower. (Plate no.) The other colour among both Hindus and Muslims was red.⁹⁶ She made the royal harem a fashionable place with magnificent clothes, costly jewellery rubies, and pearls where women were inspired to be flaming torches of love, fellowship and chastity.⁹⁷ She had a keen sense of colour combination and symmetry in designs. She was a master mind in innovating fashions and style.⁹⁹ Designed by Nur Jahan had a high price of forty rupees each. An elegant item of female dress known as *Jammu* became popular which consisted of a tightly fit '*kurti*' upto the knee and tight sleeves fastened upto the breast, decorated with frills in front and worn with *Angiya*. Tight fitted trousers were worn with it. Dopattas of thin cloth were worn with this dress.¹⁰⁰

The craft of dyeing flourished during the Mughals and used different patterns big and small articles in their personal clothing.¹⁰¹ Nur Jahan popularized embroidery and sewing and stitching among the young women. Women who had no royal lineage specially flocked around her and time in knitting, sewing, designing and embroidery industry which Meherunisa (Nur Jahan) started in her apartments. Her embroidery work of *Zari* and *Kimkhab* soon made her famous. She worked with soft and skilful fingers and painted silks and carved embroidery and sold them to the women of Harem in the Mina Bazar. She was acknowledged throughout the empire as the oracle of fashion and taste.¹⁰²

Empress Nur Jahan of Mughal dynasty was said to have seen stone tracery on a monument that she found particularly beautiful. She wanted the same designs to be replicated on her clothing and she got an embroiderer to make them for her. Nur Jahan gathered together block makers and printers as well as embroiderers to recreate the design. The Empress' own interest in the craft then set a trend that spread to the rest of the Mughal court.¹⁰³

All the Mughals continued the Islamic court tradition of gift giving. As can be seen from the goods at the weighing ceremony. Textiles and clothing played a major role in this practice. Clothing worn by the emperor became *Malbus-i-khas*, a special costume which was permeated with his royal essence. *Khil'at*, robes of honor, came in sets of three, five or seven pieces depending on the rank of the recipient. These sets were *sarapa*, a turban, and a ceremonial sash. The only surviving garment that has been reliably identified as a court garment from the rule of great Mughals is silk coat. It is variously dated to the rule of either Jahangir or Shah Jahan, between 1605-1658. The coat's fine chain-stitch embroidery shows a complex scene in the Persian style. Lions prey on bounding antelope or doze contentedly and birds fly through the air, all in a fabulously blooming landscape full of tulips, daffodils, poppies and iris, embroidered on a soft, cream-coloured satin ground. The trim around the neck and partway down the garments front opening is the only part of the exterior of the coat that is not embroidered indicating that it may have been expressly fur collar, a style that was frequently worn in cold weather.¹⁰⁴

Cloth and clothes received as presents or commissioned or bought in the open market were carefully kept and classified by the day of the week and the day in the month on which they arrived at court, as well as by price, colour and weight. There was a rank order of clothes and cloth: those received on the first day of the month.¹⁰⁵

The Mughal kings were very particular about new fashions and variety in dresses. They made every possible way to maintain their fashion, and created history by innovating different patterns in dresses and help in the development of textiles industry.¹⁰⁶

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