

## **ORIENTAL HAREMS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF OTTOMANS AND MUGHULS**

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### **Abstract**

The etymology of this word related to Arabic word “*Harim*” means a sacred place which is forbidden for outsiders. In Turkish word seraglio is used and in a Persian harem it is better known as *Zenana*. A place where women apartments are situated especially, the women of royalty and this place is not accessible for men except for the King/Sultan. In medieval Islamic world, this institution was very much common where the empire sustains this institution which has always remained mysterious and controversial. In Muslim civilisation two harems were contemporary, Mughuls and Ottomans. These two harems were over exaggerated by all travellers of Muslim world. This paper highlights the compositions of these two harems- Mughuls and Ottomans. It is the estimated study which deals with those queens who changed the fate of empires with their political sagacity and wisdom. The harem intimates of Ottomans and Mughuls who belonged to ordinary background how they raised the status of chief queens and contributed to the public and private life of Sultan/King. The critical analysis of war of succession in which harem played a decisive role created the golden chapters of medieval history which is also the part of the last section of this paper. The research method is descriptive used both primary and secondary sources to analyze the institution.

**Keywords:** *Oriental, Seraglio, Purdah, Saray-i-Atik, Haseki, Harem, Valide*

### **Harem as an Institution**

The subject of the harem was mostly deals in a sensuous way through European writings especially the travellers who made their voyages to East in 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. The word *Harim* is Arabic and used in both Ottoman and Mughal empires. The primary sources of

Mughuls and Ottomans Empire did not speak much about the infrastructure of Harem due to *Purdah* in Muslim world. In Mughul sources *Humayun Nama* and *Akbar Nama* shed light on the organization of Mughul harem.<sup>1</sup> In the primary sources of Ottomans, *The Age of Suleyman the Magnificent (1520-1566)*, *The Golden Age Ottoman Art* help in this regard.<sup>2</sup> In modern scholars Leslie Peirce discussed this subject in detail, *The Imperial Harem: Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire*, and her later works, *Empress of the East: How a Slave Girl Became Queen of the Ottoman Empire* shed light on the role of women in Ottoman harem. *Gulru Necipoglu, Architecture, Ceremonial and Power: The Topkapi Palace in 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, Galina Yermolenko, *Roxelana: The Greatest Empress of the East* discussed the influence of the women in Ottoman court and their political activities beyond the Empire. *Kishori Saran Lal's* work, *The Mughal Harem* is the groundbreaking work on this Mughul institution. *R. Nath* also contributed, *Private life of Mughals of India* emperors and in modern works *Ruby Lal's* work on *Domesticity and Power in the Early Mughal world* discussed the royal life of Mughul women. These works deal with the ideas of women sovereignty but the harem organization as an institution of the state, how it worked and its mechanism has randomly mentioned.

Women and female relatives lived in Mughul and Ottoman Harems. Most of the women came in this quarter through birth, marriages and sometimes as gifts of the King/Sultan, king for the Mughuls, and the sultan for the Ottomans. The Muslim world especially harem was governed by the strict rules of *Purdah*. They were not allowed to move out without the permission of the *Padishah/Sultan*. In the reign of Mughul King Akbar (1556-1605), Mughul harem was officially established and more than 5000 women resided in this forbidden place as quoted by the court historian *Abul Fazal*.<sup>3</sup> Each woman had her own room and those who were very near and closed to Akbar had their own apartments in the capital city of *Fatehpur Sikri*. Female *Darogahs* (security guards) and eunuchs were appointed for the security of harem. *Tehwildars* (accountants) for the financial management of the harem and *Mahaldar* for the intelligence of this place were directly appointed by the Emperor. In Mughul harem *Anagas* (wet nurses) had a special status who looked after the future king through her skilful training.<sup>4</sup> In Ottomans the organization of the harem started from Sultan Mehmed II. Royal family members resided in the capital. The royal household was the essential part of Sultan's palace. In Ottomans the harem was the part of *Saray-i-Atik* (old palace) where 250 women were lodged to look after the royal family. Before pregnancy women lived in a *Saray-i-Jedid* (new palace) if

they conceived, they were sent to the *Saray-i-Atik* for the preparation of the royal birth where expert women trained them for certain task of their lives. After marriage the women shifted to *Saray-i-Jedid*, Hurrem was the first women who lived with Sultan for a long time. In the reign of Sultan Salim II, the salary register showed that 49 women drew their salaries and in 1595 this number was increased to 200 though the Sultan's wives and 27 daughters were not part of it. The Ottoman harem's population was increased between 1552-1652 A.D. It was 167 mentioned in the privy purse register and reached to 967 in the year 1652 A.D. Three categories of women were listed: Elite (*Valide Sultan, Haseki, Prince and Princesses*), Chief officers (Midwives, Stewardess, all administrative staffs), third and the largest were slaves, servants and eunuchs.<sup>5</sup>

All were paid from the national treasury even the king who was the owner of all lands and treasurers was assigned pocket money. *Valide Sultan* got the maximum *mevacib* (stipend) which was 200 to 300 aspers in the period of Sultan Suliman. Later, it was increased to 2000 aspers and Sultan Mehmet raised it to 3000 aspers daily. In Ottoman harem, the superior rank was called *jariyes* means female slaves and *kul* for male slave. In the reign of *Sultan Suliman* this harem was known as *Dar-us-Saade* (abode of good fortune/abode of bliss). A special group of distinguished persons "*Jamaat muteferrika*" was part of harem from Sultan Suliman onward. Sometimes special people were inducted in for some reasons like *Gulfem Khatun* who was a stewardess, may be the wet nurse of Suliman's younger son and an Imam was also appointed to the royal harem. The stipends varied according to their rank as wet nurse received 150 aspers a day, *Iman* got 10 aspers and servant of lower ranks got like *jariye*. The staff of royal household increased with the passage of time, but the privy purse register had not highlighted the actual number of the royal staff under any Sultan. The mistress of *Camasir usta* (laundry) got 100 and the mistress of *kiler usta* (pantry) got 100 aspers daily. The palace mistress has the highest rank, but she got 100 asper daily mute coiffeur master (*büyük dilsiz berber usta*) had the salary of 80 aspers. These were the 1<sup>st</sup> grade mistresses and the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade (*ikinci hazinedar*), the master who hired to taste food received 50 aspers. In the administrative officers (*ikbals*) got 40 aspers. At the rank of 40 aspers, six princesses have to appoint one steward who lived outside the new palace.

In the Muslim theory of succession, a son born from Muslim woman has all the qualities to become the legitimate heir of the kingdom rather empire. A Muslim concubine who gave birth to a male child gains a more enhanced position. If the Sultan had to marry her, then he had to

manumit her. The legal wife of the Sultan enjoyed more dominant position and her children were considered the legitimate heirs of the realm. Matrimonial alliance was celebrated with great pomp and show. Ottomans were fond of concubine mothers, but this concept was not common in Indian culture.<sup>6</sup>

In the Ottoman Empire, mothers were mediators when their own son was involved in a revolt against their own fathers in their lifetime. The role of women especially queen mother/*Valide Sultan* was in the war of succession. The mother of a single son could easily secure her son's right of succession. Ottoman princes were deputed in a province for training when they became adults. *Manisa*, Konya and *Amasya* were considered best training camps for the training of prince because *Manisa* was considered the right wing of Sultan's army and *Amasya* was the left. The mother stayed with him during training. She was considered the ears and eyes of the Sultan during his training. They were shifted to the new palace. Sultan's mother decided the nature of her career. If a concubine was chosen for the bed of the Sultan than she was immediately shifted to new palace and if she conceived, then she got a functional role in the harem. After becoming the mother of a son, she got a higher position in the harem. If a concubine was not able to conceive, the sultan gave her to a slave.<sup>7</sup>

Mughul gave their wives a legal position which was different from Concubines. The mother of a prince was considered the legal guardian of all political matters of heir apparent. She accompanied the princess in their expeditions and wherever the Emperor appointed them as the governors of the respective provinces. Prince Jahangir was appointed in Allahabad as a governor in the reign of Akbar (1605-1627). Shahjahan was appointed as a governor of Rajasthan during the period of Jahangir (1627-1668).

Their presence with the princess indicated the political concerns of mothers towards the empire. During the wars of succession if a prince died, then the mother would busy herself in the construction of the Prince's tomb. The mother of Prince Mustafa was killed by Sultan Suliman then his mother constructed his tomb after his death. Prince Khusrau's mother Manbaie spent her life in charitable work after the demise of her son. The Emperor visited old palace periodically just to change the atmosphere. Many feasts were arranged in the palace like birthdays, weddings etc. The old palace also served as training institution for concubines.<sup>8</sup>

***Valide Sultan* or Queen Mother**

Mother of Ottoman Sultan gained honour and prominence in the period of Murad III (1574-1595). But before that Sultan Suliman's mother Hafsa Sultan was a lady of esteem, sophistication and dominance. Hurrem gained immense power in her region as a *haseki*, as queen and then as a mother. But in the reign of Sultan Murad, she gained the most exalted office of the Ottoman Empire. She received unprecedented honour. Now her role was not confined to the private chamber, but she was also a partner in Ottoman sovereignty. This rise has started from the age of Kosem. Although Hurrem Sultan had already contributed to increasing the power and authority of a queen or queen mother. Sultan Suliman's mother Hafsa Sultan was very much dominant in the Harem. It was the politics of reproduction through which a *haseki* got the status of chief queen. She played a key role in the outcome of succession. Due to the danger of child mortality, death due to illness, or death of a Sultan in the battlefield, it could be more secure for the dynasty was if many women give birth to healthy sons. The position of *Haseki* was not strong in Ottoman harem. In late 16<sup>th</sup> century the institution of *Valide Sultan* emerged. The most important reasons behind its emergence were the consolidation of one imperial household despite princely households as in the reign of Sultan Suliman. Women of household could play their role in the politics and ultimately in succession. As the head of imperial household queen mother authority was justified under royal harem. She must stay in new palace with Sultan and retired queen had to move to old one.<sup>9</sup>

Hurrem established the authority of women in various arena and laid the foundation of *Valide Sultan* prerogatives. Sultan Suliman's mother Hafsa was the lady of high esteem and dominance. She exercised her authority as the head of the imperial household. There was a long tussle between Hafsa and Hurrem over the dominance on imperial household, but Hurrem never got the status of a noble woman. In the reign of Sultan Murad, a proper title of *Valide Sultan* was given to the mother of Sultan, and she joined the status of most exalted official of the empire. She received unprecedented honour. Her role was not confined to private chamber but shared the sultanate sovereignty. The case of Nur Bano was the typical example. The death of Nur Bano Sultan was the largest event of mourning in the history of Ottomans. For forty days' people of the highest ranks came to pay homage to that lady. The miniature painting of this procession is still saved in the extensive collection of Topkapi Palace Library. Nur Bano's funeral procession was unprecedented in the history of Ottomans. She was buried in the tomb of Salim II. The union of Nur

Bano with the Sultan showed her extra-ordinary position in the harem. Sultan Suliman and his daughter Mehrimah also shared a tomb. The mother of the Sultan had a *de facto* power to use in sovereignty. The victory in a war was an occasion on which mother of Sultan came out of the city to greet her son on his success. Kosem Sultan greeted her son Murad IV after the conquest of Baghdad in 1638, she went to Izmir, two days' journey from Istanbul at that time. All her grand *wazirs* and religious dignities were in her procession. She rode in a gold carriage, was followed by 12 chariots which helped to move the royal family from one place to another.<sup>10</sup>

Jean-Bapiste Tavernier (1688), the French traveller, recorded the movement of *Valide Sultan* from old palace to new palace, when Sultan's mother was entered in Istanbul. This journey was guarded by a *Silahdar*, the trusty of Sultan. 200 men were under the command of this chief officer. She rode into a coach of slides curtains of different colours followed by 60 attendants, the grand *wazir* was in the command of 100 guards. The *wazir* was followed by 500 to 600 guards. Next came the representative of the religious institution, 200 judges in plain dressed in Moroccan leather shoes and turban on their heads, they marched in tight manners and 2 muftis in their official dress. Tavernier had never seen such a huge assembly before. Funeral of a queen mother was a public occasion among Ottomans. On the death of Handan, the mother of Murad III a large sum of alms was distributed for the peace of her soul. Royal women were known for their public works known as *Hayrat* normally common under the Ottomans. The construction of mosques, travellers' inns, distribution of alms. Safia Sultan ordered the establishment of a mosque on the shore of the Golden Horn. The mosque of Turhan Khatun had a school and market. The mosques had public libraries. The mother of the Sultan also patronized builders, artists, book binders and other skilled workers. Kosem started these charitable services on large scale, water for pilgrims making their way to holy cities: to Makkah, Madinah, and Jerusalem. She gave stipends during the month of Rajab, Shaban and Ramadan. Turhan also distributed cooking oil, rice, and eatables to the poor and destitute. She ordered for endowment for the recitation of the Holy Quran in the kingdom and 30 *Hafizs* who recited the Holy Quran in *Aya Sofya*. Kosem Sultan arranged the marriages of her slaves every year.<sup>11</sup>

Same is the case with Mughuls. Noor Jahan asked her slaves who attained the age of 40 years to marry and paid the expenditure of their marriages. Turhan also built a fortress (*Kale-i-Sultaniya*). This fortress contained a primary school, mosque, public baths, and homes for soldiers,

shops and market in it. Queen mother also spend at the time of state crisis. Queen had a lot of wealth in her kingdom. Ibn Battuta noticed that among Turks and Tatars....

Each woman possessed towns and districts and vast revenues. It was Turco-Mongol tradition to share patrimony in the members of royal's family. It is called *Pasmaklik* for women grants which were not transferable to the next generation, if women died without an issue her money turned back to royal dominance."<sup>12</sup>

*Hass* was an agricultural land given to these women. Kosem generated 2 million aspers from her *Hass* land. As a *haseki* she possessed the income of 23 villages. On the birth of prince Murad, due to increase of her *Hass* land her income increased to 3,20,000 aspers per year. She also possessed gold, silver, other metals, and precious gifts from foreign lands. *Valide Sultan* played her role as a diplomat. Nur Bano and Safia Sultan developed good relations with the Republic of Venice.<sup>13</sup>

In the Mughul harem two ladies had a leading position, Hamida Bano Begum and Salima Sultan Begum. The mother was considered the centre of the harem activities and the most respected woman in the realm. Emperor Jahangir visited his mother and bowed before her in order to give her respect as it was the custom of his great ancestors Timur and Chingiz Khan. One of the influential ladies of lady of was Manmati, mother of Emperor Jahangir. She was honoured with the title *Maryam Zamani*. These women were not only involved in the decisions of the Mughul court but also had their independent status to issue orders on their own, to look after their estates and were deeply involved in commercial trade with other countries like Hamida Bano Begum had her own commercial vessel to carry spices, clothes, and other articles of the East for trade. After the death of Hamida Bano Begum the other lady raised in harem was Nur Jahan who acted as a regent in the last days of Emperor Jahangir (1623-1627) due to the bad health of the Emperor. She was the only Mughul empress who issued coins and issued royal orders by her name. The last dominant lady of the Mughul harem was Jahan Ara, the daughter of Emperor Shah Jahan. Women of the harem played a vital role in the war of succession, as was common between Ottomans and Mughuls. The bloodiest period for the wars of succession started under the rule of Jahangir. His third son ascended to the throne as he murdered all his competitors before his coronation. The women who played a role in his succession was his wife Arjumand Begum, her father secured the throne for many days as Shah Jahan returned to the capital and his actual coronation has done. Women were also involved in the state affairs

specially to receive ambassadors. Sir Thomas Roe bought many gifts for queen Noor Mahal when he visited the Mughul court.<sup>14</sup>

All the Mughuls and Ottoman women were involved in public works, in building mosques, given orders to construct travellers' inns and charitable works for poor needy people of the empire. The Mosque of Nur Bano was very famous. She ordered to build her tomb in her lifetime. Nur Bano and Turhan both have the mosques on their names with libraries. They patronized the book binders and other skill workers in their lives. They employed 32 camels, 6 camel drivers, 60 water carriers for the Hajj to the holy cities of Makkah and Medina. They have given stipends during the holy months of Rajab, Shaban and Ramazan. Turhan distributed rice, cooking oil, clothes, blankets. She also created endowment for the recitation of holy Quran on many places, 30 hafiz who memorized holy Quran were appointed in the mosque of *Aya Sofia*. *Kosem* Sultan organized the marriages of her slaves every year, contained a mosque, primary school, homes for soldiers, public baths, shops, and markets.

The Queen mother owned land as *Ibn Battuta* noticed that Turks and Tartar women..... each Khatoon possessed several towns and districts with vast revenues. In Turco Mongol tradition of sharing the patrimony among the members of royal family *Pasmaklik* was not transferred to the next generation. If a woman died with this deed, it was transferred to the royal lands again. Hass was known as agriculture land. Handan Sultan also got her share from mining of the land. *Kosem* Sultan got a big share of the *hass* as got two million aspers from this land."<sup>15</sup>

### **Haseki**

The favourite concubine of Sultan enjoyed a dominant status in imperial harem. She had no blood relation with sultan but ranked higher than sultan's own sisters, aunts, and princesses of the dynasty. Her status elevated as she was the mother of potential successor. Suliman's mother Hafsa was the *Haseki* of his father and received 200 aspers a day as her stipend. Suliman's *Haseki* Hurrem got 2000 aspers a day towards the end of her career. Nur Bano also got 1000 aspers a day. *Kosem* continued to receive 1000 aspers a day. After that the extra-ordinary amount is only granted to Sultan mother.<sup>16</sup>

In the Mughul harem, those women to tie a knot in official wedlock received the title of Begum. The Agha and Aghacha rose to the status of Begum as mentioned by Gulbadan Begum in *Humayun Nama*.



The concubines were mostly called *aghacha* and *ghunchcachi*, *sarari* and sometime only *bibi*. *Akbarnama* mentions many *Aghas*. All free and servile wives were called *Paristarani*. The clear differences of allowances of these people paid to them. The higher one was Rs.51-20 per month and lower one was given Rs.40-10 per month. King Jahangir called concubine *Khawas Khidmatgaran*. The arrangement of Mughul harem with three different classes like legal wives, free slave wives, and concubines. The *Paristarani* title was used for the free and servile wives. The legal wives of Mughuls felt insecurity due to several concubines in the harem, so a marriage contract appears in *Siyaqnama*, a manual of Mughul administration of 1694-96 imposed on the emperor to give protection to legal wife against concubines in the Mughul harem. In the Ottoman harem the ordinary concubine did not get any power unless she gave birth to a son. Few concubines got higher status in the period of Murad III as they were able to manage charitable endowments and have done some work of public welfare. But in the Mughul harem this task of producing a male heir was normally the prerogative of the wives and some of king's children were from concubines, but they got all legal rights.<sup>17</sup>

### **Prince and Princesses in Royal Harem**

The harem was the maternity home for both Ottomans and Mughuls. Both sons and daughters were important in the Ottoman dynasty. Sons were the centre of their career and daughters were used for the political alliances among Ottomans. They got the heirs from concubine before Hurrem Sultan. The legal wives were not common and after the birth of a son the child was normally handed over to the most experienced lady for training and grooming. Mughul Emperor Akbar remained under the influence of his wet nurse *Maham Anga*. So, he organized his harem for the better training of future Mughul princes and princesses. All the formal and informal education was given in harem. Teachers were deputed for the better training like Sheikh Abd- un- Nabi was appointed as *Ataliq* of prince Jahangir. When Akbar's grandson was born, Akbar gave him the name Khurram and his duty was assigned to Salima Sultan Begum. Princesses got their education religious and secular under the guidance of the most educated women of the realm as Jahanara's (daughter of King Shahjahan) was assigned to Sati-un-Nisa. The harem was the centre of all kinds of festivals and celebrations like circumcision, birthdays, and weddings and funerals. The Mughul king Humayun celebrated the circumcision of infant Akbar, and it was sketched in *Akbar Nama* in form of a painting. Prince remained in harem until they entered marriage and develop their own harem. They got their allowances according to their marital status.

Ottoman prince got 100 aspers day before marriage but after marriage 300-400 aspers per day due to establishment their own harems. Princess in Ottoman Empire also got 100 aspers per day. The stipend of the prince was always on higher side as Suliman received 67 aspers when he was in Manisa and his unmarried sister only got 40 aspers per day. They were normally married at a very early age and education was normally confined to military training and war experiences. Mughul king Shahjahan fixed the stipend Rs.1,000 per day for his elder son Dara Shukoh, Rs.750 for Shah Shuja, Rs.500 for Aurangzeb and 250 for Murad, after his accession in 1628. In adulthood princes were given certain duties and jagirs. Akbar was nine years old when Humayun appointed him to take the charge of Ghazni in 1551 with the increase of allowances. Mughuls entered matrimonial alliances, but Ottomans were not inclined towards matrimony. Mughuls spent lavishly on the celebrations of Lunar and Solar birthdays of kings. Wedding was considered the most auspicious occasion. The most celebrated wedding was of Prince Dara and Nadira Bano Begum. According to chronicles 32 lakhs was the cost of this marriage and Shahjahan's elder daughter *Jahanara* spent 16 lakhs from her pocket money. The official account of Aurangzeb describes the illuminations on the marriages of sons and daughters was so much that public could be able to see the sky.<sup>18</sup>

The news of the death of Sultan concealed due to the political chaos in the empire. It was also common among Mughuls. The news of the death of Zaheer-ud-din Muhammad Babur (1526-30) was not disclosed till his successor Humayun reached the capital. Same was the case of Shahjahan. His father-in-law Asif Khan made all arrangements as he reached capital Delhi.<sup>19</sup>

Women in the Ottoman dynasty were responsible for the smooth succession of princes. Queen mother Nur Bano preserved the body of his husband as her son Murad reached Istanbul, executed all his brothers, and buried his father to claim the right of his sovereignty. Aurangzeb (1665-1707) did the same, executed all his brothers and confined his father to fort of Agra till his death. Mother as a sovereign in the presence of minor heirs was the dominant issue until Kosem Sultan. She had seen the period of four rulers. There was a division of power between Kosem and Turhan Sultan. Both were known as younger and elder *Valide Sultan*. Sharing of power created lot of problems between them as this tussle ended on the murder of Kosem Sultan being ordered by Turhan. Sharing of power between two women created a chaos in the country. Istanbul was completely shut down for 3 days in the morning of the death of Kosem Sultan. Turhan had to face a lot of difficulties to stabilize the empire. She

curtailed her power and transferred it to the grand wazir. Among six sultans come to the power in 17<sup>th</sup> century four were of 14 years of age and 2 were completely minors even they were not able to rule but Ottomans never used the term of regency to describe the rule of *Valide Sultan*. Mother was the political mentor of Sultan. The duty of the mother was the training and supervision of the Sultan. Kosem was the exceptional case in regency as she was trained her 7 years old grandson Mehmet IV. Queen mother had to manage all political alliances like military, Ulama and sometimes grand *wazirs* in the favour of her legal heir of the throne.<sup>20</sup>

### **Wet Nurses**

Mughul emperors and Ottoman sultans had remained respectful to their wet nurses (Daye Khatun). They were considered an indispensable part of the harem and as she became the mentor of the kings. Mughul Emperor Akbar's wet nurse remained the most powerful woman of his empire from 1560-1564 as she attended court and sat on the right side of Akbar. She was considered the *de facto* prime minister of Akbar. Mughuls had a tradition to appoint female guards and they were very close to the king. Fatima Anga served as an ambassador in Emperor Humayun's court. She assisted him in the expedition of Balkh, visited him in Kabul. She was the administrator of the country. Badakhshan, a Mughul territory was ruled by a queen, Shah Begum.<sup>21</sup> Ottoman wet nurses got importance in the post Suliman period. Wet nurse of Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror was significantly endowed with the income of Sultan to construct two mosques in Istanbul and Edirne as Mehmed's mother died after three years of his accession as Sultan. The wet nurse of Osman II performed the role of his mother in during the last two years of his reign and he remained under her regency. They were mediators between the royal family and servants of the empire. Sultan Salim II spent his time playing chess with the mother of Sultan Pasha, an old woman who was his nurse. These nurses got married to the trustworthy staff of Sultan to establish their position firmly in the royal harem. The next women who was very important, were harem stewardess. Her role was to give training to those women who directly served Sultan. The most dominating woman was Janfeda Khatun in the reign of Murad III. Nur Bano brought her from the old palace and made her in charge of 40 slave women who had to serve Murad. After the death of Nur Bano, Murad placed her to look after all the duties of management and organization of the harem.<sup>22</sup>

In the Mughul harem, Sati-un-Nisa Khanum performed these duties in the period of Shahjahan. She was first appointed to give training

and education to Jahanara, the elder daughter of Shahjahan but later she took on the responsibilities of harem especially in making all arrangements of weddings of the children and grandchildren of Shahjahan.<sup>23</sup>

### **Harem as Training Institution**

The Harem served as training institute for both Mughuls and Ottomans. It was training centre for young women who entered the bed chamber of the Sultan, for attendants who served queen mothers and other ladies of the upper hierarchies who would marry princesses. Slave marriage were very much common, and Ottomans took this legacy from the Abbasids Caliphs. These marriages developed an organizational and educational pattern in Ottoman household. In the period of Kosem Sultan, women were separated into the palace in same number of chambers as the pages. In the Mughul harem every woman had her own apartment and they got their food from the same kitchen. Education and training were the purposes of this institution. Education of the female slaves and their training, education of princes and princesses and their training in royal etiquette. In the Ottoman harem, there was a striking change in the shifting towards new place to trained eunuchs who inhabited the third courtyard of the harem. The inner organization of the Ottoman harem was divided into two chambers, greater chamber (*buyuk oda*) and lesser chamber (*kucuk oda*). Servants who worked on these two levels were not transferred. In the Privy Chamber the members of the highest ranks were appointed. The members of this chamber had the same titles and privileges as Sultan had. The privy chamber was the in charge of all commodities of Sultan like his dresses, sword, and stirrup holder and his private secretary was also supervised tasting, coiffeur, ablution, ewer, and the scribe etc.<sup>24</sup>

Mughuls started to use the harem as a training institution in the reign of Emperor Akbar (1556-1605) as he established this institution as Abul Fazal mentioned in *Akbar Nama* as *Shabistan-i-Iqbal*. All female relatives of the king and queen lived in the harem. Royal kitchen (*Mutbukh*) was the part of Mughul harem. All women in the harem had certain duties to perform. The Queen Mother was the in-charge of this institution but in the reign of Nur Jahan, this responsibility was shifted to the Queen. . Hamida Bano Begum enjoyed the position of Queen Mother. When she travelled from Agra to Lahore, Akbar took her palanquin on his own shoulders while crossing the river. She managed all the affairs of the harem from celebrating lunar and solar birthdays to arranging royal

marriages, to managing the feasts, Meena bazars, *Norouz* and other festivities.

Harem was important in a way that the royal seal of Mughuls were always kept in harem as the Emperor/King normally checked his royal correspondence, issued orders on the state affairs while in the harem. The singing and dancing girls were also attached to the harem. The first circle of the Mughul harem was comprised of queens, princesses, princes, and their families. The others were the female servants of the harem who served according to the will and consent of the king as many of the concubines lived in harem. Mughuls begot their children from concubines. The children got their legal status, but the mothers considered such women below them, and they could not compete with the queen who was the legal wife of Mughul king and considered women from the high birth. In the reign of Shahjahan, the title of Badshah Begum was given to his elder daughter Jahan Ara after the demise of his chief queen. Jahan Ara supervised all the activities of his harem including the supply of food to the emperor.<sup>25</sup>

The harem remained the network of power for both dynasties, Ottoman and Mughuls. Although these women were under tight security and surveillance except the Queen Mother. She could venture outside the palace because of her age and her status in the harem. But *Purdah* was very much necessary for both dynasties. In the war of succession Mughul dynasty adopted same rule of power as Humayun had to struggle throughout his life with his brothers although he was the elder son of Zaheer-ud-din Babur and had legitimate power to rule the empire. But this war of succession became more frequent in the period of later Mughul kings like Jahangir and Shahjahan. In these years, Mughul heir had to murder all his male competitors before his formal coronation. The war of succession among the sons of Shahjahan is very notorious in Mughul history. In Ottoman, in the war of succession, King had to murder all his brothers till his accession. Suliman even murdered his elder son Mustafa on the instigation of Hurrem. Sultan Mehmet also had to murder his brother and it was the fate of every Ottoman prince to die before the coronation of his brother.<sup>26</sup>

### **Architecture of the Harem**

Harem was always a concealed place due to strictness of *Purdah* under the great Mughuls. This place was strictly guarded by the eunuchs and bodyguards. All apartments in the harem were interconnected. The apartment of the queen mother and queens were larger than the prince and princesses. As the remaining architecture of the Rajput queen Jodhabai

shows the night apartment of Akbar's chief queen with a temple on its entrance. It is typical style of red sandstone building in Indian Sub-continent. The central courtyards are attached to the gardens, fountains, and orchards for the women. There was a special bath in the Lahore fort completely covered from all sides and having the fountain in the centre indicates the presence of Hammam for women in the palace. There was the arrangement of the toilets in the palaces for females. Each Mughul queen maintained her own household. There are ventilated basements in the Lahore Fort which show these underground chambers were used for the summer to avoid the heat in this region. In Red Fort, Delhi other women lived in the dormitories and the verandahs of the female apartments.<sup>27</sup>



Figure 1: Mughul harem inside the red fort Delhi belonged Mumtaz Mahal (queen of Shahjahan)

The building of the Ottoman harem was constructed in the reign of Sultan Mehmet in 1465 and it was completed in 16<sup>th</sup> century by the royal architect Mimar Sinan. The harem was in the Topkapi Palace on the right wing behind the imperial council. This building clearly indicated the power of the harem in the Ottoman Empire. In the first room *Valide Sultan* resided with the concubines. There are large apartments around the queen mother's room, these rooms were given according to the status and power of the women. The building of the Ottoman harem is double story erected with the marble and stone. It is properly ventilated and have the access of sunlight from each side. Doors and windows are very large in size. The roofs are well decorated. There are approximately 400 rooms in the harem of Topkapi Palace. The room of queen mother and other

queen have a platform and canopy for sitting and bedding and it is always on one side of the room. Every room has a specific place for fire. There are small boxes with arches in every room which indicate the use of light at nights. The building of the harem has the facility of water in it. The verandahs opened in the big courtyard. The blue ceramics work is visible in the overall building of the harem. The wooden pieces provided support to the outer layer of the building. The kitchen is also attached with the building of harem. The rooms of the servants are in the outskirts. Some residential features of the Ottoman harem are unknown. As the physical structure of the harem consists of dark room, narrow streets, and faded pavilions. It is difficult to imagine that such successful influential and powerful women lived in these rooms. These rooms could be under the use of slaves, troopers or royal staff, the primary sources of Ottoman Empire are quiet about physical manifestation of such infrastructure.<sup>28</sup>



Figure 2: Inside the ottoman Harem

### **Travellers Accounts about Harem**

Oriental harems were the object of the critique of almost all travellers accounts. The reason was its seclusion beyond the eye of a strangers. It was the part of bazar gossips as travellers usually visited the bazars and took their information from there. European view came in form of paintings which reflects the luxurious and polygamous palace harem in their narratives. As per western perception, gender, race and carnal behaviour influenced oriental harems. All Ottoman activities of society, politics and power occurred in private. All western writers focused on slavery and sexuality. French painter Jean Auguste

Dominique and Fernand Cormon painted their artwork which revolved around the luxury of the imperial harem. All this artwork is the “imaginative geography” defined by Edward Said in *Orientalism*. The women in all their painting were having fair skin and male were normally dark especially the eunuchs. These painting were resembling the painting of western ladies.<sup>29</sup>

As the Italian painter Titian painted the most dominant ladies of Sultan Suliman, Harem and her daughter Mihrimah are extremely like western ladies, but the difference was the headdress of Ottoman women. Many of the travellers who never visited a harem in their lives, so it is possible that their depictions were neither authentic nor accurate. A few women who visited Ottoman Empire in medieval times and narrated their actual experience of the empire. Like Lady Mary Montagu praised the slave institution of the Ottomans and she believed that the condition of the women was worse if they were not in harem. As a woman, Lady Montague was more focused upon the appearances of women, dresses, jewels, their social status, their work and how they lived their lives. She admired the beauty of Turkish women and compared them with European women of those days. Lady Mary denied the euro-centric approach in which eastern women are normally victimized by the male in society. An English woman in Turkish harem was another piece of work by Grace Ellison who tried to correct the English attitude towards oriental societies. She claimed that English should make a better attempt of understanding Turkish women. In harem she lamented that women were not able to see outside the palace, they stay there because they wish to stay, and they were happy, but their existence seems to be a waste of human life. Ottoman cruelty was not limited to concubines, but it extended toward eunuchs. She criticized the act of veiling calling it a form of slavery.<sup>30</sup>

Mughul harem was fantasized by all almost all travellers of that age. Sir Thomas Roe, the first official ambassador of the Company wrote that the king who kept thousands of women in his harem. *Thomas Coryat* commented on King Jahangir that emperor had ten queens, one thousand concubines and many eunuchs. Famous Italian traveller Francoise `Bernier considered the harem as the place where thousands of women were busy in the service of their emperor. Manucci's depiction of the Mughul harem is more malicious as compared to other travellers that the king built a hall for the satisfaction of his lust, and he believed that all expenses of the harem only spent on the adoration of women. Even Perter Mundy believed in Bazar gossip. The sick minded people of Europe who could not understand the meaning of father – daughter relationship. Bernier was also the believer of this bazar-gossip of Shahjahan period.



Most of the travellers criticized Mughuls for not being interested in marrying their sisters as these women had illegal relations with men of that time. All the Mughuls rulers were very conscious about their family rations. These European travellers never confirmed such scandalous stories from other sources or accounts. And somehow, they also describe the hollowness of western civilization by relating all the stories of their own mind.<sup>31</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The Harem played a very significant role in the political life of Ottoman and Mughul empires. The way this institution was depicted by the European writers in the historical sources of both the empires are not justified. West has the different idea of “Orient” which is exotic and sensuous. The study of orient could not be limited in the life of harem only. Harem was an abode of Emperor/Sultan generation, and it had its political, cultural and social importance which should be highlighted by the historians of Medieval ages. In the eastern environment this institution served in many ways to train the future generations of the *Padishah*/Sultan and it has its own signification in the personal and public life of emperor. This institution protected the legal heirs of *Padishah* and Sultan. The women history is deeply connected with the study of harem. Its study should not be sensuous, but it would help the historians to rather construct a better approach to human history. This institution had many similarities in both empires (Ottoman and Mughuls) which depicted how the women contributed to the life of empires which shows that gender role could not be minimized, not only in the realm of empires, but also on the pages of history.

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