

Role of Nur Jahan: The Mughal Empress of India

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Abstract

The history of Nur Jahan is, in part, a story of ambition, power, military skill, and courtly endurance. Nur Jahan can easily be distinguished from any other comparable women of the medieval period like Raziyya Sultana, Rani Durgavati, Chand Bibi, and Mumtaz Mahal. By the exceptional good fortune of her circumstances, she married the most powerful man in India, and lived at a time of great cosmopolitan and international diversity. She had an exceptionally intimate relationship with her husband, Jahangir. As far as her role as Mughal empress is concerned, her personal abilities extended beyond politics and economics, into the areas of art and architecture, literature and religion, travel and gardening and were such that the range of her contributions to Indian culture remains almost unparalleled by any other person even today. Her interest in jewelry and textile design, verses which she wrote with superb wit and imagery, boundlessness and munificence of her charity, all endure as a dynamic and indisputable undercurrent in the Mughal heritage of India.

Introduction

The Mughal empire was one of the largest centralized states known in pre-modern world history. This empire was a dynamic and multifaceted entity in the sixteenth and seventeenth century and Nur Jahan was one of its most fascinating figure. Also known by her original name, Mehrunnisa, Nur Jahan remains the only queen, in the history of subcontinent, whose name was struck on the coin alongside that of the emperor. Nur Jahan ruled not only over the heart but also over the empire of Jahangir, and these were two very difficult territories to kept under control simultaneously. For the heart of Jahangir was as full of contradictions as the kaleidoscopic country that he ruled. Jahangir owes his long years of peaceful rule to Nur Jahan just as much as he owes his ill health and frailty to his habit of alcohol abuse. In this research paper descriptive and analytical methods have being used to bring into light the relevant facts.

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Early life

Nur Jahan was born in 1577 A.D., near Qandahar, when her father Mirza Ghiyas Baig, after having some misfortune in Persia, fled with his family from Tehran to India. She was given the name of Mehrunnissa, a name which her future title of Nur Jahan has almost brought into oblivion. Mirza Ghiyas got some *jagir* (property) from Akbar and, on account of his hard work and honesty, he rose to the high position of *diwan* of Kabul. He rose further in rank, and continued in service later during Jahangir's reign with the title *Itimad-ud-Daullah* or 'pillar of the state'. In 1594 A.D., at the age of seventeen, Mehrunnisa was given in marriage to Ali Quli Khan Istajlu, a Persian adventurer. Ali Quli had been a *safarchi*, or table attendant, to Safawi monarch Shah Ismail-II of Persia, but on the Persian king's assassination he fled through Qandahar to India.¹ He was given the rank of a high noble in Bengal and also bestowed the title of *Sher Afgan* (the lion killer) by the Jahangir. Soon Jahangir came to know that Sher Afgan was an insubordinate and disposed to be rebellion. Consequently, Qutub-ud-Din Kokultash, the foster brother of Jahangir, and the new Governor of Bengal, was directed to chastise him. When Qutub-ud-Din went to carry out orders, he was killed by Sher Afgan who himself was put to death by the attendants of Qutub-ud-Din.² In 1607 A.D., Sher Afgan's widow Mehrunnissa and her little daughter Ladli Begum was brought to Agra as royal detainees.

When she was merely a noblewoman at court, and until she was thirty-four years old, there was nothing in her life that gave an indication of how famous, or powerful, she would eventually become. In March 1611 A.D., Jahangir saw Mehrunnissa in the new year's feast and married her on 25 May of the same year. Afterwards, Jahangir proclaimed her a partner in his powers and gave her the title of '*Nur Mahal*' (light of the palace) and later on, she was given the title of '*Nur Jahan*' (light of the world). Undoubtedly, she proved to be the light of the emperor's eyes. Her inclusion in the harem introduced a new force into the life of the court. 'Slowly but steadily she spread her influence to every nook and corner'.³

¹ B.E Findly, *Nur Jahan: Empress of Mughal India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p.14.

² V.D Mahajan, *Mughal Rule in India* (New Dehli: S. Chand & Company Ltd., 1992), p.128.

³ B.P Saksena, *History of Shahjahan of Dehli* (Allahabad: Central Book Depot., 1962), p.13.

How far Jahangir was responsible for the murder of Sher Afgan?

There has been a lot of controversy regarding the circumstances of the death of Sher Afgan and the marriage of her widow Mehrunnissa with Jahangir. Most of the historians are of the opinion that Prince Salim (Jahangir) loved Mehrunnissa and was responsible for the murder of her husband, Sher Afgan. This love story has a lot of prominence in Indian history. Dr. Beni Prasad, the author of his monumental work on Jahangir, writes that Prince Salim had never seen Mehrunnissa before 1611 A.D. He maintains that no contemporary Persian source has supported the view that Jahangir as a prince desired to marry Mehrunnissa, or Jahangir, in any way, was responsible for the murder of Sher Afgan. Likewise, the contemporary European travelers and missionaries are also silent on this point.⁴ It was purely an accident during the execution of an administrative issue in which Sher Afgan and Qutub-ud-Din, both were killed in a rival situation.

Nur Jahan's personality and her dimensional role

Nur Jahan complemented Jahangir's shortcoming in many ways. She had a perfect balance between mind and heart. According to Jahangir Nur Jahan won his heart with her devotion.⁵ Nur Jahan married Jahangir at the age of 34. She gave him no heirs, yet Jahangir loved her so deeply and obsessively that he transferred his powers of sovereignty to her. With her natural beauty she combined the most fascinating manners and high intellectual attainments. Her quick wit, charming and refined conversation, elegant manners, graceful and dignified deportment and keen intelligence made her the most welcome companion in the circle of the ladies of rank and the royal family. Nur Jahan was fluent in many languages and was an excellent conversationalist. She came from a family that had a strong background in literary and scholarly accomplishments. She wrote poems and prose and opted the pseudonym of '*Makhfi*' (the veiled one) as a poetess. Mughal women were physically confined behind the walls of a harem, lived behind a veil, and were thought of as being inconsequential in the country's politics or even in their own social circles. The ladies of the harem did not generally participate in outdoor games both because of *parda* (veil) and the physical exertion involved. As a queen, Nur Jahan did not observe *parda*, her portraits too are probably after her own model. 'Nur Jahan is probably the lone example among harem women who shot tigers and

⁴ Beni Prasad, *History of Jahangir*, Urdu Tr. Rehem Ali Hashmi (New Dehli: Taraqi-e-Urdu Bureau, 1984), p.180.

⁵ K.S Lal, *The Mughal Harem* (New Dehli: Aditya Prakashan, 1988), p.3.

lions'.⁶ She challenged the social and cultural conventions of her day and pushed them to the greatest limits without breaking them.

Nur Jahan had a preference for representational art perhaps reflecting the more emblematic art in her homeland, Persia, and also brought new subject matter into the Mughal fabric. She combined her artistic ideas with influences from the secular subjects coming in from Europe, creating many new paintings with subject matter that had not previously been rendered in Mughal India. Nur Jahan was a woman of great distinction and many interests; she excelled at playing musical instruments and singing. Her accomplishments made her an irresistible companion and her taste extended beyond the patronage of painting and architecture to the designing and creation of new patterns in palace interiors, room-decorations, gold ornaments, brocades, carpets, lace, gowns and dresses so that the fashion in women's clothing adopted in her time were still in vogue.⁷ Women's clothes also went through a change at this time because of Nur Jahan, who was responsible for bringing in a number of new materials and styles from all over the world. These new materials were for both the royalty and the populace. Many new patterns and stitches were invented by Nur Jahan. A particular brocade of pattern called *nur-mahali*, *do-dami*, *panchatolia*, *badha*, and *kinari* are still famous. A custom introduced by her, that is still current in India and Pakistan is the white floor cloth commonly known as '*farsh-i-chandani*' (white floor sheet).⁸ The thrust of Nur Jahan's innovation was on providing something that could be used by the rich and the poor alike. She was careful to bring out and introduce items that not only had a large group appeal but which were relatively inexpensive. Jahangir was a lover of fashion and new designs. His clothes and turbans are said to have been extremely more elaborate and luxurious than any of the other previous emperors. The new fashions and designs that he wore were accounted for during the time of his life with Nur Jahan.

Nur Jahan was fond of arranging great feasts and had become a model for the royal ladies. She also cared for the poor and the dispossessed, and made the cause of orphan girls especially her own.⁹ She was supposed to be a social worker, a generous patron of many

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.128.

⁷ G. Hambly, *Cities of Mughal India: Delhi, Agra and Fatehpur Sikri* (London: Paul Elek Productions Ltd., 1977), p.83.

⁸ Mohammad Yasin, *A Social History of Islamic India 1605-1748* (Lucknow: D. W Publishers, 1958), p.41.

⁹ S. Crowe & S. Haywood, *The Gardens of Mughul India* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1972), p.92.

needy suppliants, especially of dowry less girls. Through her influence the Mughal court was filled with great nobles from Persia.¹⁰ Nur Jahan's mother Asmat Begum also invented '*itr-e-gulab*' (rose perfume) which was named '*itr-e-Jahangiri*'¹¹ and has been erroneously regarded as Nur Jahan's invention.

The Persian influence on the Mughal architecture, as in other spheres of contemporary life, had been mounting with the domination of Mirza Ghiyas Beg and his daughter, the Queen, Nur Jahan, in the court.¹² Jahangir's court, particularly under the influence of his imperious consort, Nur Jahan, patronized a culture, no doubt eclectic in character, in which the foreign especially the Persian element predominated.¹³ She supported and illustrated wall-carvings in the buildings with the different types of patterns and styles of embroidery. She was also responsible, almost single-handedly, for many artistic, architectural, and cultural achievements of the Jahangir era. Her cultural and artistic achievements, derived largely from the immense resources at her command, were also, in equal measure, due to her unflagging energy and the keenness of her aesthetic vision. Jahangir and his queen, Nur Jahan, made the famous Gardens of Nishat and Shalimar.¹⁴ Her architectural achievements include Nur Mahal Sarai at Jalandhar, the Moghul Gardens of Kashmir and Agra, and the tomb of her father Itmaduddaula, also in Agra. Nur Jahan built this tomb after her father's death in January 1622 A.D. It took six years to finish the tomb and 1.35 million rupees (1,350,000) to pay for it. The tomb built was in her father's gardens on the east bank of the Yamuna (Jamna) River across Agra. It was the first example of the use of white marble embellished with the precise inlay of precious stones into the surface of marble facing, and technically said to be ahead of even the construction of Taj Mahal. Nur Jahan also created many different gardens throughout the empire, both public and private. Unfortunately many have been lost with time. Keeping a garden healthy and tended for five hundred years is a task that is not easily

¹⁰ N. Manucci, *Storia Do Mogor*, Eng Tr. William Irvine, *Mogul India*, Vol.I (London: John Murray Albemarle Co. Ltd., 1906), p.164.

¹¹ N.M Jahangir, *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*, Eng Tr. Alexander Rojers, *The Memoirs of Jahangir* (New Dehli: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers (Pvt) Ltd., 1978), pp.270-71.

¹² R. Nath, *Colour Decoration in Mughal Architecture (India Pakistan)* (Jaipur: The Historical Research Documentation Programme, 1989), p.27.

¹³ Sir J.N Sarkar & S.K Saraswati, *Glimpses of Mughal Architecture* (Calcutta: Gossain & Company, 1953), p.41.

¹⁴ R. Godden, *Gulbadan: Portrait of a Rose Princess at the Mughal Court* (New York: The Viking Press, 1981), 145.

accomplished. All that remains are accounts of what they would have looked like and what species they may have contained. Nur Jahan created a tradition in the gardens design of using water to accentuate the layout with fountains, pools and channels.

Her political role

Nur Jahan was a woman of unusual ability. Acquiring a great ascendancy over her husband, she became the joint ruler of the kingdom and exercised political authority with intelligence, courage and astuteness. Jahangir was weakened by alcohol and asthma; by 1620 he could not dominate affairs of the court. Nur Jahan exercised a good influence on her husband and got mammoth power in the court. Her husband took on less and less responsibility as he sank further and further into clouds of opium smoke. She gained dominance at the court and soon became a powerful, resourceful and honored woman over a relatively short period of time. Her success raised her ambitions and, in course of time, her influence and active participation in state affairs increased. Nur Jahan was a woman of great judgment and, of a verity, worthy to be a queen. 'Jahangir struck coins in her name, which had for symbol the twelve signs of the zodiac, and in her time these were current money'.¹⁵ The royal seal also contained her signature.¹⁶ This was the first time in Indian history that a woman had ever been allowed to do this. Jahangir's heavy gold coin of unit 1000 *muhar* has now become world's heritage and remains unrivalled world wide. Though the author is still unknown, his couplet about this gigantic decorated *muhar* is worth of being reproduced below:

Ba Hukm Shah Jahangir yaft sad zewer

Banam Nur Jahan Badshah Begum zar

It means by the order of Jahangir, gold attained a hundred times its beauty when the name of Nur Jahan, the first lady of the court, was impressed upon it.

All her relations and connections were raised to honor and wealth. Mirza Ghiyasuddin in consequences of his daughter's marriage with the emperor was made *Vakil-i-kul* or prime-minister, and a commander of 6,000, 3,000 horse. He also received a flag and a drum, and was later allowed to beat his drum at court, which was a rare

¹⁵ N. Manucci, *op.cit.*, p.162.

¹⁶ Sir J.N Sarkar, *Mughal Polity* (Delhi: Idarah-i-Adabiyat-e-Dehli, 1984), p.82.

privilege.¹⁷ Nur Jahan's relatives had been in high offices in the reign of Jahangir and Shah Jahan.¹⁸ Nur Jahan's role in the rise of her family's fortune was significant; it is true that before 1611 A.D., none of her family member held a provincial governorship under Jahangir, and between 1611 and 1627 A.D., about twelve of her family members held such posts.¹⁹ The significance of this family lies in their hold and dominance at the Mughal court as well as on Jahangir, as he writes in his Tuzuk that 'I presented Itiqad Khan (Asaf Khan) with one of my special swords called Sar-andaz (thrower of heads)'.²⁰ Likewise Sadiq Khan, the nephew of Itimad-ud-Dowllah, who was permanently employed as Bakhshi, was honored with the title of 'Khan'. The family in general and Nur Jahan in particular also contributed to the extravagant lifestyle of both Jahangir and Shah Jahan; which inspired the subsequent use of the word 'Moghal' in the English language.²¹ There is no doubt that until Asaf Khan's death in 1641 A.D, for over three decades, this obscure family from Iran wielded enormous power in the Mughal empire and exerted significant influence on the politics and culture of their time.

It is said that Shia and Persian influence spread fast in Hindustan during the ascendancy of Nur Jahan'.²² In view of Nur Jahan's influence which she exercised in the affairs of the state, many historians have recognized the domination of her small family clique during 1622-27 A.D; while others have postulated the existence of Nur Jahan's junta for the period 1611-22 A.D. Junta, was an specific team which included Nur Jahan's mother, Ismat Begum, her father, Itimadud Daulah, her brother, Asaf Khan and Jahangir's second son, Prince Khurram²³ who was married to Arjumand Banu Begum, daughter of Asaf Khan in 1612 A.D. This junta roused the jealousy of older nobles like Mahabat Khan and others. The entire Mughal nobility was divided into two factions: the adherents of Nur Jahan junta and their opponents.²⁴ While the theory of Nur Jahan's junta has rightly been disputed, it is difficult to deny the fact of her ascendancy during the last five years of Jahangir's reign when

¹⁷ Abul Fazl, *Ain-i-Akbari*, Eng Tr. H. Balochmann (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Benga, 1927), p.573.

¹⁸ K.S Lal, *op.cit.*, p.194.

¹⁹ B.E. Findly, *op.cit.*, p.3.

²⁰ N.M Jahangir, *op.cit.*, p.203.

²¹ P. Pal, J. Leoshko, J.M Dye & S. Markel, *Romance of the Taj Mahal* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1989), p.24.

²² Mohammad Yasin, *op.cit.*, p.163.

²³ G.H.R Tillotson, *Mughal India* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), p.89.

²⁴ S.A.I. Tirmizi, *Edicts from the Mughal Harem* (New Dehli: Idarah-i-Adabiyat-i-Dehli, 1979), pp.xii-xiii.

‘she actively participated in the politics of her time as is evident from a number of *hukms* (royal orders) issued by her. These *hukms* had either of the two seals of Nur Jahan: one refers to her as queen-consort, while another mentions her as empress, which is quite significant in determining her ascendancy’.²⁵

The power of junta was substantial and could be carried, as it often was, to extreme excess up to impossible advancement. Nevertheless, the group managed, by an intricate network of communication and vested interest, to promote their own concerns while at the same time protecting the king from unnecessary responsibility. According to Pelsaert Francisco, a Portuguese traveler during the Jahangir’s era, the junta worked as follows:

If anyone with a request to make at Court obtains an audience or is allowed to speak, the King hears him indeed, but will give no definite answer of Yes or No, referring him promptly to Asaf Khan, who in the same way will dispose of no important matter without communicating with his sister, the Queen, ... who regulates his attitude in such a way that the authority of neither of them may be diminished. Anyone then who obtains a favor must thank them for it, and not the King.²⁶

Thence, ‘the first open indication of the new shuffling of political parties was given in December 1620 A.D., when Shahryar was betrothed to Ladli Begum. Jahangir’s incapable youngest son, henceforward became Nur Jahan’s candidate for heir ship to the imperial throne’.²⁷ It is said that Nur Jahan tried her very best to marry Ladli Begum, first to Khusrav, Jahangir’s eldest, then to Khurram, but neither could be made to take an interest in Ladli. Shahryar was then an immature young man with dissolute inclinations, whose mother had been a concubine. The formal betrothal took place at Lahore to be followed by a wedding at Agra.²⁸ Thereafter, the seed of trouble between her and Khurram was sown. It was naturally presumed that she would throw her

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.xxxiv.

²⁶ Pelsaert, *The Remonstrantie of Francisco Pelsaert*, Eng Tr. W.H Moreland and Geyl, P., as *Jahangir’s India* (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons Ltd., 1925), pp.50-1.

²⁷ Riaz-ul-Islam, *Indo-Persian Relations* (Lahore: Iranian Culture Foundation, 1970), pp.81-2.

²⁸ *The Cambridge History of India*, Vol-IV (New Dehli: S. Chand & Company, 1957), p.168.

influence on the side of her son-in-law.²⁹ Khurram's marriage with Arjumand Bano Begum (Mumtaz Mahal) daughter of Asaf Khan may have been the cause of some ill-feeling between Khurram and Nur Jahan. The interests of Nur Jahan and Asaf Khan were at variance; Asaf Khan supported the cause of his son-in-law Khurram and the energies of Nur Jahan were at work to promote the cause of her son-in-law Shahryar. Thereafter, they ceased to work in unison as their interests clashed.³⁰

The situation has already become fluid as consequence of these marriages. Subsequently, Nur Jahan started to create difficulties for Khurram who was then tackling for the extension of the Mughal empire in Daccan, and have already earned from Jahangir the title of '*Shah Jahan*' (the king of the world). In 1622 A.D., the news reached to Mughal Court that Shah Abbas-I of Persia have besieged Qandahar, which had already been, from hundred years, a bone of contention between Mughal and Safawid empires. Nur Jahan, now securely in power herself, with decisions for the administration of the empire almost totally in her hands, saw Qandahar as a way to get Shah Jahan into trouble. Consequently, Shah Jahan was ordered by Jahangir to proceed to Qandahar to aid in its defense. These orders were actually instigated by Nur Jahan who wanted to place him in a difficult situation. Shah Jahan was then left with no choice except that of rebellion. Emperor quickly retorted by giving the leadership of Qandahar campaign to his unskilled son Shahriyar and depriving Shah Jahan of his *jagirs* in Hissar and Doab.³¹ Soon Shah Jahan's revolt was crushed and it seemed that his chances of ever regaining sufficient power to contest the succession had been irretrievably damaged.³² During this troublesome period, Nur Jahan remained busy in safeguarding her interest of getting the future throne to her son-in-law. It is true that Shah Jahan fell into rebellion gradually, and all that happened was mainly due to Nur Jahan's nefarious policy of pushing him aside and forcing him out of the lines of power. In this tussle Mughal empire had to loose on two sides, one was Daccan and the other Qandahar.

Nur Jahan, however, did not stop here. She also wanted to ruin General Mahabat Khan who apparently was a hurdle in her authority and

²⁹ R.P Tripathi, *Rise and Fall of the Moghal Empire* (Allahbad: Central Book Depot., 1960), p.392.

³⁰ Afzal Husain, *The Nobility under Akbar and Jahangir, A Study of Family Groups* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distributors, 1999), pp.188-89.

³¹ R.P Tripathi, *op.cit.*, p.395.

³² I.H Qureshi, *The Administration of the Mughal Empire* (Karachi: The Director of Publications, University of Karachi, 1966), pp.7-8.

efforts of grasping the throne for Shahriyar. To implement her ambitious designs, she tried to kneel down and humiliate Mahabat Khan in numerous ways and finally she accused him of embezzlement and disloyalty. He was called upon to clear his position. Under these circumstances, uprising of Mahabat Khan in 1626 A.D., yielded disastrous results. Mahabat Khan had the impunity to tell the empire in no ambiguous words that it did not befit a man to become subordinate to a woman. Finding his advice insufficient to move the emperor, eventually, the situation became so bad that Mahabat Khan even had to capture the emperor when the imperial camp was crossing River Jehlum for Kashmir. Nur Jahan then went to Mahabat Khan and made peace with him; Jahangir was released but died soon afterwards.³³ The death of Jahangir on 29 October 1627 A.D., brought the question of the succession to the fore. Nur Jahan, in expectation of the crisis, had for a long time been making almost frantic efforts to perpetuate her domination. In a final bid to retain her power, Nur Jahan 'hurriedly sent a messenger to her son-in-law, Shahriyar, to prepare for a struggle, and even tried to imprison her brother. But Asaf Khan was quite alert, and proved too astute to fall a prey to her machinations'.³⁴ It may be mentioned here that on the eve of the death of Jahangir's son Prince Pervaiz on 18 October 1626 A.D., Shah Abbas-I, the Safawid ruler of Persia, had sent a condolatory embassy under Takhta Beg with four letters; two were for Jahangir, one for Prince Shahriyar and the most interesting one was addressed to Nur Jahan Begum. This letter which makes a brief mention of recent Persian victories against the Turks, condolence over Pervaiz's demise, and finally, making a reference to his (Shah's) close friendship with Jahangir, says:

If your majesty were to consider this House (Persian Dynasty) as your own and were to assign to servants of this dynasty any business at this end, it would further augment mutual amity and union.³⁵

This is a unique letter, being addressed by a king to a foreign queen; the only one of its kind in Indo-Persian state correspondence. The letter also indicates the understanding of Shah Abbas towards Nur Jahan's dominant position in the Mughal empire.

³³ S.F Mahmud, *A Concise History of Indo-Pakistan* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1998), p.151.

³⁴ B.P Saksena, *op.cit.*, p.57.

³⁵ Riaz-ul-Islam, *A Calendar of Documents on Indo-Persian Relations*, Vol. I (Tehran: Iranian Culture Foundation, 1979), p.220.

At the time of political crisis in 1627 A.D., after the death of Jahangir, Shahriyar, at the instigation of Nur Jahan, proclaimed himself emperor at Lahore. In these unacceptable circumstances Asaf Khan played a very important role in securing the succession for his son-in-law, Shah Jahan. After his accession in January, 1628, Shah Jahan confirmed Asaf Khan in the post of *wazir/vakil-i-kul* (prime minister) which he held till his death in 1641 A.D.³⁶ Nur Jahan's power came to an end after Shah Jahan became the emperor. She worked against the interests of Shah Jahan in the lifetime of Jahangir and after his death for the intention of lifting up Shahriyar to the throne. If a man had done it, he would have paid the last penalty and been executed, but Nur Jahan was given a handsome pension and treated with consideration. She also had the good sense of retiring completely from the political arena.

Nur Jahan had ruled India for nearly sixteen years and lived afterwards for another eighteen years, till 1645 A.D., when she died at Lahore and was buried by the side of her husband Jahangir. Yet we know almost nothing about this long period of her life. We have general information that she never wore any color except white after Jahangir's death, and that her days were spent in extending charity to the needy and the poor. However, there is one powerful testimony to recall those days, it is probably her tomb.

Conclusion

No women had wielded more power and for such a long time in Indian history as Nur Jahan. She played a hefty role in influencing and shaping the Mughal empire, which encompassed almost entire modern-day Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and a massive chunk of northern and central India. The manner, in which Nur Jahan came in Indian history, as only a widow with a child, to don the robes of an empress, is worth noticing. A vast change can be observed in Nur Jahan's circumstances, from being the wife of a Persian soldier to an wife of the emperor, on her way to become the most powerful woman of the Mughal dynasty.

The empress Nur Jahan was not formally a partner in sovereignty; she was neither enthroned nor crowned but she took an active part in the politics of the empire and became quite powerful; her influence can be felt in every segment of her era. In fact, she was the real sovereign, the power behind Jahangir's throne. She was able to influence political decisions, coins, designs in materials, architecture, the structure and layouts of gardens, traded with foreign countries, owned ships that

³⁶ A. Dadvar, *Iranians in Mughal Politics and Society (1606-1658)* (New Dehli: Gyan Publishing House, 2000), p.89.

plied the Arabian Sea routes and influenced many other aspects of Mughal life as well. Nur Jahan, was in contrast to her ambitious also mother to orphans of the poor, a leader of female society and generous to the needy people. Her ambition to rule the empire and her intrigues to safeguard her dominance created troubles during the last few years of Jahangir's reign. To some extent; the reaction to the rise of the family of Nur Jahan, the rivalry among princes, and groups of court nobles, all helped to shake the stability of the Mughal empire.³⁷ Nevertheless, she proved herself more than a match for the ablest personnel and politicians of her age.

The facts stated above leads to the conclusion that Nur Jahan's role at the Mughal court was immense. Once, Jahangir said that Nur Jahan was wise enough to conduct the business of state, and additionally, Jahangir used to say 'that he had handed her the country in return for a cup of wine and a few pieces of mutton'.³⁸ She reaped as a widow what she had sown as the empress. Her distress at the death-bed was a measure of her disillusionment with destiny. She died wiser than she was at any stage of her ascendancy.³⁹

³⁷ Afzal Husain, *op.cit.*, p.10.

³⁸ S.M Ikram, *History of Muslim Civilization in India and Pakistan* (Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture, 2000), p.384.

³⁹ Munshi Lal, *Mughal Glory* (Delhi: Vanguard Books (Pvt.) Ltd., 1988), p.78.