

The Female Gaze vs the Male Gaze in the Mughal Court: Recreating a Picture of the Royal Women Through Humayun-Nama and Muntakhab-ut-Tawarikh

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Abstract

Historical texts have played an important role in determining the narratives people form around a historical period, and the way history is written is always impacted by the ideologies and personal biases of the author. Mughal history has been a subject of fascination for historians around the globe. While several studies have been undertaken to understand the politics, religion, or administration of the time, very few sources give an insight into the lives of the royal women of the *harem*. This paper aims to recreate the lives of the royal women of the Mughal Court through a textual analysis of Gulbadan Begam's *Humayun-Nama* and Abdul Qadir Badauni's *Muntakhab-ut-Tawarikh*. The texts are analysed through a gendered lens to understand the difference in perspectives of the portrayal of women through the male gaze and the female gaze. The paper has used both primary and secondary sources for data collection. The limitations of the research are discussed as well, which include but are not limited to anachronism, selection bias, and personal biases of the authors. The analysis of the texts has helped understand how the lives of the royal women were shaped by the issues of marriage, customs and traditions, and the influence over the Emperor.

Keywords: Humayun-Nama, Muntakhab-ut-Tawarikh, Gulbadan Begam, Abdul Qadir Badauni, Mughal Court, harem

Introduction

Historical texts have always played a key role in enhancing our understanding of our past and scrutinising events from the past as a lesson for the future. Studying history is essential to be aware of where we have come from and how that has shaped our comprehension of the world around us. The sources we read determine the narratives we form around history. The way history is written is always impacted by the author and their opinions and biases, which are extremely difficult to eliminate. Therefore, it is always argued that history is the story of the victors since it is written by them. There are various sources of information for a historian, but one of the most important is written or literary sources. Literary sources give an insight into the time they were written and the society and culture of the people. Memoirs, travelogues and government documents are significant because they help us understand the administrative, political and personal lives of the emperors of the time. Leopold von Ranke classifies sources into primary and secondary sources; primary sources are closest in time and space to the events because of their authenticity and accounts of actual eyewitnesses. Interpretations and textual analysis of these historical works shed light on issues that are hard to be found elsewhere yet are extremely important for a detailed perspective of the period.

Mughal history has been a subject of much fascination for scholars around the world, with several studies undertaken in various spheres of the period to understand the functioning and policies of one of the most successful empires in Indian history. While a lot of focus is given to texts of the time that are centred around religious, political, or administrative issues such as the *Akbarnama* or *Ain-i-Akbari*, there is a paucity of sources that give an insight into the everyday activities of the *harem* and the fundamentals of the royal household. Historian Ruby Lal says that all works describing the Mughal *harem* portray it as “a sexualised, secluded, feminine domain (albeit not for the “old and ailing”), centrally premised on a crude principle of sensual pleasure that was supposed to regulate the “private” lives of imperial women and men” (2004, p. 592). As Lal explains, this is a wildly inaccurate representation of the *harem*, which is sadly perceived by most people around the world. Very few surviving texts provide insight into the harem, and even fewer give an insight into the lives of the common women of that time. This paper compares two primary literary sources to understand the Mughal harem of that time, thereby understanding the socio-cultural history of that period – the *Humayun-Nama*, an official memoir written by Gulbadan Begam for emperor Humayun that talks about the lives of the women of the royal *harem*, and *Muntakhab-ut-Tawarikh*, an unofficial account of the history of the early Mughals in India by Abdul Qadir Badauni, giving an insight into the lives of the common women of the time.

Gulbadan Begam's text is revolutionary because it gives an insider's perspective into the *harem*, one that is true to its essence in showing the complexities of the *harem* and the interpersonal relationships that were formed within it. She writes about the lives of the royal ladies, which were undocumented at that time, and the pressures they had to face within and outside the *harem*. Abdul Qadir Badauni's text, on the other hand, has a stark difference in the way he describes the *harem*. When he speaks of the royal women, he calls them "ladies veiled with the veil of chastity, but he believes them to be one of the instigating factors for the Emperor" (Majid, 2010, p. 249) as he introduced new ideas and thoughts to the court. He believed that the ladies of the *harem* wielded influence over Emperor Akbar and were one of the major factors in his change of policies towards religious tolerance and secularism that irked Badauni. His text often blurred the line between historical accuracy and stories and anecdotes that were twisted to his benefit, therefore, his description of the *harem* and the royal household is extremely colourful and fitting to the social context. This research aims to understand the daily activities of the Mughal *harem* and the royal household through a gender perspective, analysing how similar events were perceived differently through a female gaze and a male gaze, therefore changing the narrative of the event as well as the discourse surrounding it.

To recreate a picture of women's lives through these two narratives presented in Gulbadan Begam and Badauni's text, the paper answers the question, "How can one understand the lives of the royal women in the Mughal *harem* by analysing the Humayun-Nama and Muntakhab-ut-Tawarikh through a gendered lens?" The variables for this question are looking at excerpts from both texts focused on the *harem* and women in general and assessing them based on how they view the *harem* from a female gaze versus a male gaze. This analysis helps to understand the difference in perception of the *harem* through the male and female gaze and whether they match the preconceived notions created through mainstream texts. The paper also evaluates existing literature on this topic and provides a brief on the kinds of research that have already been undertaken in the field.

Literature Review

Several studies have been conducted in the past to understand the relevance of the two texts and infer the Mughal *harem* based on the descriptions of these texts. Several secondary works of literature are available for both which interpret and analyse the texts and make inferences based on the analysis. In the case of Humayun-Nama, scholars focus on Gulbadan Begam's relevance in describing the *harem*, and historians have written extensively on her importance as one of the most important female writers of the time with the only surviving text. Most of the works done on Gulbadan are contemporary, thus explaining gender discourse through her memoir. Scholars have studied Badauni's works to analyse his description of the Mughal court, especially that of Akbar's reign as he was a courtier at that time. His perspective of being an outsider in the court

gave us a different outlook on every event that transpired at that time. His works not only talk about governance, socio-political discourses, and the royal *harem* but also give an outlook into the lives of the common people in tandem with the Mughal court.

Historian Ruby Lal brought attention to Gulbadan Begam's memoir in the academic world through her books and papers, which explore domesticity, cultural conduct and the role of women in the Mughal *harem* and has worked on various papers exploring Gulbadan's importance in the literary community. Her article *The Domestic World of Peripatetic Kings: Babur and Humayun, c. 1494-1556* (2001) aims to analyse the meaning of the role of women in the household, marriages, and family and their interactions with emperors Babur and subsequently Humayun. It also explains how the domestic life of these emperors was impacted by the political gains or instabilities during their reign and gives a detailed account of all interpersonal relationships in the *harem* and events such as marriages, feasts, festivals, births, and deaths. Another article, written by Lal, *Rethinking Mughal India: Challenge of a Princess' Memoir* (2003), focuses on the study of gender dynamics in the Mughal court and how these newfound revelations of the Mughal court lead to a new narrative in terms of political, social, and cultural affairs. Turning away from Mughal historiography's general analysis concerning military and administrative affairs, she introduces new challenges concerning hierarchies and power in the *harem*. Lal's article *Historicizing the Harem: The Challenges of a Princess's Memoir* (2004) uses excerpts from Gulbadan's text and K.S. Lal's contemporary work on the Mughal *harem* explains how these two texts have a striking contrast in the way they have portrayed the royal women and the *harem* because of the difference between the female gaze and the male gaze of the authors. Through this paper, she tries to dismantle the previously accepted notions of the *harem* and domestic life as portrayed by the male authors. Through all her articles, Lal has written a history of Mughal domestic life, one that was not undertaken before on an academic level. She specifies that she has "not unearthed any new sources" but has "returned to sources that have been available all along" (2004, p. 593). Through this method, she has incorporated sources that were previously neglected because of them not being mainstream enough, such as Gulbadan's memoir, and used them to strengthen the central narrative around the Mughal harem.

Some other works on Gulbadan Begam's memoir include M. A. Scherer's *Woman to Woman: Annette, the Princess, and the Bibi* (1996) and Rebecca Gould's *How Gulbadan Remembered: The Book of Humayun as an Act of Representation* (2011). Scherer's article tries to form a connection between Gulbadan Begam and Annette Beveridge, the translator of her memoir. Gould's article is a study on the interaction between history and memory through the lens of Gulbadan, the first female author of Mughal India. According to her, Humayun-Nama is a "genre-crossing historiographic memoir" (2011, p. 187), with little authorial self-reflection in the text. This article gives a profile on Beveridge and how she came to translate Humayun-Nama,

thereby introducing the world to the literary genius of Gulbadan and bringing the female perspective into the Mughal narrative.

Afshan Majid has extensively written about Badauni's texts in various papers, understanding the impact of Badauni's works in recreating a picture of the Mughal court and the position of women at that time under Emperor Akbar. Her article *Women and a Theologian: The Ideas and Narratives of Abdul Qadir Badauni* (2010) explores how Badauni works *Nijat-ur-Rashid*, and *Muntakhab-ut-Tawarikh* are helpful "in understanding the social milieu... (and) the study of gender emanates from the study of society" (p. 248). Through various examples of policy changes and anecdotes, he explains how women had an influence over the change of heart of the Emperor and turned him astray from religion. The paper also explains the idea of *Mutah* or temporary marriages and how Badauni's opinions helped clear the dispute about the legality of the Emperor's many marriages. Her article *Ideology and Personal Grievances: Badauni's Career at Akbar's Court* (2011) is insightful in understanding how he became a part of the Mughal court under Emperor Akbar. It gives a brief about Badauni's life before entering Akbar's service and his interactions with other courtiers and nobles. Different stories and anecdotes describe how he was either neutral or critical of Akbar's measures. Through his works, it was understood that he was not given the true position he deserved in the court, and while he was "ready at first to make concessions for advancement in service", he ultimately failed "to keep up with the development of ideas in Akbar's mind" (p. 351). Her article *Emperor Akbar's Views on Women as Recorded by Badāūnī and Abu'l Fazl* (2014) explains the views of Akbar on women through the lens of recorded written history. Akbar's views on women can be explained in two stages – the "immature phase or the phase of evolution" and "his mature views" (p. 289). Badauni's works give an idea about his second or the mature phase through a more direct narration.

Other sources explaining Badauni's texts are Fauzia Zareen Abbas' paper *Abdul Qadir Badauni – A Voice in the Wilderness* (1991) and Angbin Yasmin's '*Middle Class' Women in Mughal India* (2014). Abbas' paper explores the position of Badauni in the Mughal court and how he acquired that position, which was ultimately reflected in his texts. She also explains how Badauni wrote for posterity, stating that "it is the only historical work written during the reign of Akbar but not for Akbar" (p. 263). She defends his motives and works by stating that his personality and position were overshadowed in the court and historians have misinterpreted him. To explain the role of the so-called middle-class women in society, Yasmin's article takes anecdotes from different texts written by various people during the Mughal rule, such as the *Ardhakathanak*, *Munshat-i-Namakin*, *Ain-i-Akbari*, *Padshahnama*, and *Muntakhab-ut-Tawarikh*. There is also reference to miniatures, legal documents, and paintings to explain further the different perspectives in the treatment of these women. While talking about Badauni, she says that he gives biographies of physicians, pious men, and poets, and amongst the various male poets, one biography is that of a woman named Nihani. He provides a couplet written by her and

states, “although the poets of the age have all attempted to answer this couplet yet none of them has equalled it; what manhood is this, that cannot cope with a woman?” (p. 298).

While these secondary texts have immense details on the original sources and have made comparisons through a gendered lens with other relevant sources, no scholar or historian has made any comparison between the *Humayun-Nama* and *Muntakhab-ut-Tawarikh*; as far as the researcher knows, thus this study has aimed to be original in its research and findings.

Method

For this paper, the best way to answer the research question is through textual analysis. Textual analysis is a method of research through which researchers understand the various cultures and subcultures of society by interpreting literary sources of the time. This method helps understand and gather information about how the Mughal *harem* functioned through the interpretations made after reading both texts. This method of research provides an in-depth analysis of both the texts and helps understand how the gendered differences in the analysis have shaped our perception of the harem, the royal household, and the Mughal court. A well-defined research question is used for the textual analysis and gendered viewing of both texts.

Case Selection

The two texts that are chosen for comparison are *Humayun-Nama*, written by Gulbadan Begam, and *Muntakhab-ut-Tawarikh*, written by Abdul Qadir Badauni. This paper specifically focuses on excerpts from both the texts which talk about the Mughal *harem* and royal household under the various emperors.

About Gulbadan Begam and Humayun-Nama

Gulbadan Begam was born around 1523 AD to Zahiruddin Muhammad Babar, the first Timurid sovereign ruler in India and the founder of the Mughal Dynasty, and his wife Dildar Begam. Babur was consequential in uniting two of the highest Central Asian aristocratic family lines – Taimur the Turk and Changez Khan. Before beginning his conquest of the Indian subcontinent, he was the ruler of his father’s principality of Farghana in present-day Uzbekistan. When forced to abandon, he moved southwards and captured Kabul and the surrounding areas of Kunduz, Badakhshan, Bajaur, Swat, and Kandahar (Begam, 1902). Gulbadan was taken under the tutelage of Maham Begam, another wife of Babur and the chief lady of the royal household. She was a woman of extraordinary talents as she had mastered several languages and had become an accomplished poet, but her most important literary achievement was writing the *Humayun-Nama*, the memoir of her brother. She started working on the *Humayun-Nama* (also known as the *Ahval-i-Humayun Padshah*) somewhere around 1587 after requests from the

then-emperor Akbar, who wanted to chronicle the lives of his father and grandfather. More importantly, since she was one of Humayun's closest sources – witnessing Humayun's initial rule, his exile and victory again, and the Mughal household during Humayun's reign – we are presented with a literary masterpiece that focuses on royal life from a unique domestic perspective. It chronicles personal conversations and important events such as marriages, births, festivals, and celebrations but also “it provides a glimpse of the ruler outside the formal environment of the court, thus portraying him in a human light” (Hosseini, n.d.). While she does not talk about her marriage in her text even once, we are made aware of a son Sa'adat-yar, whom she has mentioned once towards the end of her manuscript. Her book is extremely simple yet interesting as she documents the day-to-day lives of Humayun and Babur with their families and the social activities they undertook, which is unconventional in the texts written during that period since every event is recounted from a woman's perspective. The remaining records of her life are scanty, and she died at the age of eighty due to fever, with Hamida Begam by her side till the end. While the women of the royal *harem* undertook a *haj* journey over the course of four-six years, the description of the journey and the pilgrimage is not mentioned by the Begam, which would have been a very insightful source in understanding the religious meaning that women devoted to this journey.

While Mughal women were encouraged to learn and excel in various fields such as art, literature, poetry, and even politics, Gulbadan Begam's work particularly stands out. Most records and biographies gave an insight into the political strategies, wars, alliances, laws, and governance of the time, thereby describing the way an emperor managed his kingdom. Gulbadan Begam's record of her brother Humayun's rule is an exception because she focuses rather on the everyday domestic life of the royal family and the *harem*. She describes various events and happenings through “the anxieties and pressures as womenfolk experience them...even the emperor's travels are charted through the minds of the women in his household as the men ride away to war and women anxiously scan the horizon for them to return” (Tharu & Lalita, 1991, p. 99). Through her work, she gives us well-described and rounded characters like her father Babur, his wives, her brothers Humayun and Askari, and Humayun's wife Hamida. It also gives us an insight into events that have not been talked about in such detail in other records such as the feasts organised by elder relations of the royal *harem* to celebrate various occasions such as marriages, births, or otherwise. The book gives the readers an insight into not only the socio-political events of the time but can be considered an insider's perspective into the culture and lifestyle of the Mughals. It is not literature per se, but a day-to-day record of what she saw or heard around her. Nine copies of Humayun-Nama were made in accordance with Akbar's orders – two went to the Emperor's library; three to princes Salim, Murad, and Danyal; two to Abu'l Fazl, one was given to the Begam, and one perhaps to the author (Begam, 1902, p. 76). This allotment also points to the fact that Gulbadan Begam collected and read books. Gulbadan Begam's text is also the only available historical source of that time that was written by a woman, therefore understanding her perspective is extremely important to analyse the Mughal court through a gendered lens.

Gulbadan's history "lights up a woman's world" and is "the most valuable contemporary record of the period", according to Annette Beveridge, who first translated the text in 1902 (Begam, 1902).

About Abdul Qadir Badauni and Muntakhab – ut – Tawarikh

The Mughal Period, especially under Emperor Akbar, was prolific in the progression of literature and historiography and authors like Abul Fazl, Nizam-ud-din Ahmed, and Abdul Qadir Badauni came to the forefront. However, scholars such as Fauzia Zareen Abbas are of the opinion that with the emphasis on ideas of secularism and religious acceptance in modern-day society, Badauni and "his traditional approach to religious problems have been overshadowed" (1991, p. 264). In traditional historical studies, the literature and ideas of Abul Fazl have been emphasised with such great detail that "Badauni's personality has been eclipsed and deprived of its share of glory...he has been misrepresented and misinterpreted by historians" (Abbas, 1991, p. 264). Abdul Qadir Badauni was born in 1541 in Kota Bhim, part of the Kacchwaha principality in Amber, Rajasthan. As his name suggests, he was not originally from Badaun but shifted and settled there after 1561. His orthodox beliefs and adherence to strict religious laws stem from the education that he received under Shaikh Mubarak, a strict follower of Mahdavidism, and Miya Hatim Sambhali, an orthodox religious professor during the period. Badauni was proficient in a variety of subjects, both in the arts and sciences, that included astronomy, history, and Indian music. He was also an accomplished chess player and a player of the *rudra veena*.

Unlike many works of his time, Badauni did not write Muntakhab-ut-Tawarikh for the perusal of Emperor Akbar and therefore his style of writing and commentary was not impacted by the fear of retribution or the idea of pleasing the Emperor. Muntakhab-ut-Tawarikh was a political chronicle of the rule of the Muslims in India, with a focus on Emperor Akbar. He talked about his views in a simple and straightforward manner and his work is "history written with a suppressed ebullition an outburst of his emotions...it is the only historical work written during the reign of Akbar but not for Akbar" (Abbas, 1991, p. 263). The book is divided into three volumes – Volume I focus on the Muslim rule in India from the Ghorian invasion until Humayun's reign, Volume II deals with Akbar's reign from its beginning until 1595, and Volume III consists of biographies of various *ulemas*, physicians, *mashaikhs*, and poets. Based on his notings in Volume III of his book, the readers can assume that Badauni completed the volume around 1596 AD, but it only was made available for circulation to the public after twenty years of completion, between 1614-1616 AD (Rezavi, 2020). As scholar Nadeem Rezavi suggests, Badauni was hesitant to circulate his work during his lifetime because of the fear of persecution or hostility from the Mughal authorities because of his sharp criticism of Akbar's religious tolerance and policies. Readers can observe a lot of contradictions in Badauni's opinions, especially in Volume II of his work where he talks about Akbar's reign. There are conflicting assertions about Akbar and his policies – while in many instances Badauni refers to Akbar with

much respect as *khalifat uz zamān* and talks fondly of the Emperor, in several other places Badauni has harshly criticised Akbar for being swayed by his nobles and *begams*, and his policies towards religion, calling him a heretic. It was during this period that Badauni's views toward the Emperor began to drastically shift because of the conflict between religion and tolerance and this can explain why he had such wide-ranging unbalanced views in Volume II, and subsequently in Volume III as well. It seems that as he was writing Volume II, "his views had become rather extremist...he had come to the conclusion that the position of Islam in India has become untenable due to many factors including Akbar's policy, and he was trying to put it straight by apportioning the blame of the catastrophe" (Rezavi, 2020). However, Muntakhab-ut-Tawarikh is a brilliantly written work, intertwining the chronology and description with the personal narratives of the author and covering not only political happenings but also social, religious, and literary activities of the time, thus giving the readers a rounded view of the period.

Nature of Sources

To answer the research question, the paper uses both primary and secondary sources for data collection and analysis of the texts. The primary sources include the original translations of both the texts, as done by Annette Beveridge for Humayun-Nama and G.S.A. Ranking (Vol. I), W.H. Lowe (Vol. II), and T.W. Haig (Vol. III) of Muntakhab-ut-Tawarikh. The sources also include secondary literature by scholars and historians based on their analysis and interpretation of the texts, blog articles, websites and research articles on the texts as well as the respective authors.

Limitations of the Research

There are a few limitations in this research that are unavoidable, both in the methodology and the texts used for comparison. Selection bias creeps in while using the comparative case study method because the two texts are not selected in a truly random manner for analysis but at the convenience of the researcher and the limited availability of such historical texts. While analysing both the texts, it has to be kept in mind that these are translations in English and not the original texts, since the original texts are not accessible to people and are written in different languages. When studying these translations, one must be aware of the biases that can be reflected in the translator's opinions and beliefs and thus analyse the text accordingly. In this case, both texts are translated by Britishers who would not understand the Mughal culture or the events that were talked about in much detail, and thus there could be a shortcoming in the translation as compared to the original texts. Anachronism is yet another problem that the researcher has to keep in mind while studying historical texts. Anachronism refers to the idea of picking up a modern concept and linking it to an earlier time when such opinions did not exist, thus forming biases and misconceptions and degenerating the core theory of the subject. Therefore, the safest practice is to refer to a time period with its own terminology and reduce

anachronism. Other limitations of the text include the personal biases of the authors which can be reflected in the text. In the case of Humayun-Nama, it is unlikely that Gulbadan Begam would write in contempt of Humayun and criticise his policies due to their close relationship. Badauni, on the other hand, would define the events happening in a way that he seemed fit, which would not necessarily match the actual event. There could also be a case in both texts where more important information would not get recorded at all because of the limited scope of the authors. While reading both the texts, one also has to be careful of the time they are set in – while Gulbadan's text is set in the 16th century, Badauni's work spreads over more than 600 years, from the Ghorian invasion of India to the end of Akbar's reign. Thus, while they are in proximity in terms of space, Muntakhab-ut-Tawarikh is spread across different time periods and will therefore have a difference in the way various cultural or social events have been described as compared to Humayun-Nama. Gulbadan Begam's original manuscript ends abruptly and has missing pages; depriving the readers of information that could be critical in understanding a tradition or custom of the court. these are some limitations that have to be kept in mind while reading the text and analysing the paper for a more authentic experience.

Analysis of the texts

Humayun – Nama

Gulbadan Begam's work is revolutionary in its approach because of the way she has looked into the everyday lives of the Emperor and makes him seem more human in his approach. Through showing the interactions between Emperor Babur or Humayun and the women of the royal *harem*, she has shown a different perspective on their lives, one free from the socio-political or economic views of the court.

Marriage and related practices are mentioned in detail in the Humayun-Nama and give the readers an insight into the traditions and customs that were followed during the Mughal period about marriages. When talking about Babur's initial rule and the invasion of Samarqand, where he was besieged, Shahi Beg Khan told him that if Babur were to marry his sister Khanzada Begam to him, there would be peace and a lasting alliance between them (p. 85). When Babur was on his deathbed, he also commanded Maham Begam to arrange marriages for Gulbadan's sisters, Gulrang Begam to Isantimur Sultan and Gulchihra Begam to Tukhtabughha Sultan (p. 106). This shows how marriages for alliance and security were customary since Babur's rule either to expand their kingdom, protect their alliances, or make new alliances. Marriage for an alliance had been predominant not only in Mughal culture but in other kingdoms as well in India and across the world. Even in Elizabethan England, the purpose of a royal marriage was to cement an alliance with another kingdom, and royal children were usually betrothed at a very young age, such as Mary, Queen of Scots, who was betrothed at the young age of 5.

Marriages were not about love but security and expanding one's kingdom, and it was hardly that a member of the royal family married out of love to someone of their own choice. Gulbadan Begam also talked in great detail about the feasts arranged by Maham Begam on the occasions of the first anniversary of Humayun's accession and Mirza Hindal's marriage to Sultanam Begam. They lit up not only the *bazaars* but also the soldiers' quarters and other such places, and it is through this tradition that illumination became a custom in India (p. 113). She had given details of the feast, from the seating arrangements to the process of giving gifts according to the ranks, the decorations, and the setting. During the feast, Emperor Humayun ordered all the *mirzas* and *begams* to bring gifts and divided them into three trays of *ashrafi*s and six of *shahrukhis*. He asked Hindu Beg to give one of *ashrafi* and two of *shahrukhis* to the *mirzas*, *chiefs*, *vazirs*, and soldiers; another heap of the same quantity was to be given by Mulla Muhammad Farghari to theologians, religious men, ascetics, devotees, and the poor and the needy. The third heap was kept for his pleasure to be divided amongst the members of the royal *harem* who attended the feast (p. 124-125). Gulbadan Begam also described the gifts given to the bride, Sultanam Begam, when she described the feast arranged in honour of her marriage to Mirza Hindal. Another feast that had been mentioned in the text is the circumcision of Emperor Akbar when he was five (p. 179). Through these descriptions, it can be understood that arranging feasts was an essential part of the Mughal custom and traditions and was seen as a way to express joy and celebrate a momentous occasion. Gift-giving also played a crucial role at the time and was also reflective of the hierarchy in the harem and the society. The kind and quantity of gifts given were based on the position of the receiver in the society and how high they ranked. In the *harem*, gifts were given based on the position of the *begam*, from senior most to junior *begams*, and whether they were a favourite of the Emperor. She had dedicated a good portion of her text to explain the process of giving presents to the members of the *harem*. In one instance, she stated how when Khwaja Kilan Beg requested Emperor Babur to move back to Kabul, the emperor sent some valuable presents that had fallen into their hands through the victory over Ibrahim Lodhi to the elder relations and sisters in the royal *harem*. The Emperor made a list of how everything was to be distributed – each *begam* would receive a special dancing girl of the dancing girls of Ibrahim Lodhi; a gold plate full of jewels such as rubies, pearls, diamonds, emerald, topaz, and turquoise; two small mother of pearl trays full of *ashrafi*s and on two other trays *shahrukhis*; and all sorts of things by nines – that is four trays and one plate (p. 94-95). Babur then asked for arrangements to be made for the *begams* to give their thanks for the gifts and novelties. In another instance, she mentioned that the *begams* and *khanams* received gifts and houses and lands to their heart's desires (p. 97). It can be said that gift-giving was an integral part of the royal household, and the women were regularly bestowed with different objects, which would have been more than enough to sustain themselves and manage their day-to-day spending, not having to rely upon the Emperor or the treasury for their every expense.

Gulbadan Begam has, on various occasions, talked about how emperors Babur and Humayun interacted with the older relations of the *harem* regularly, thereby reflecting their domestic side.

These emperors, who have only been viewed from an administrative or political standpoint in history, now had a different side to them – it was a shift from their masculine and intimidating aura of an Emperor to that of a doting son, father, brother, or a husband who looked after the well-being of the members of the *harem*. She told the story of how when Babur was in Agra, he would go every Friday to visit his paternal aunts. One day when it was extremely hot, Maham Begam asked him to not go on that particular day, and he exclaimed that the daughters of Abu-Sai'd Sultan Mirza had been deprived of their fathers and brothers, so if he did not cheer them up, who will (p. 97). After Emperor Babur and Maham Begam left for heavenly abode, Gulbadan Begam found herself in great affliction, helpless, and lonely. At this time, Humayun visited her several times to comfort her and showed her kindness and sympathy (p. 116). She also narrated the story of how when Humayun visited any *begam* or sister's quarters when he was in the garden during court das, all the *begams* and all his sisters used to go with him. One day, one of his wives, Bega Begam complained that he had not paid a visit to her quarter even though he had been in the garden for a long time. He responded by saying that he first visited the quarters of all his elder relations because that was a necessity laid on him to make them happy, and he was fulfilling it because he was ashamed of not seeing them often (p. 130-131). Through these instances, Humayun's familial relations and domestic duties can be seen, which he tried to fulfil on all occasions and maintain cordial ties with everyone irrespective of age or position.

While describing Mihrangez Begam and Shad Begam, she said that they wore men's clothing and had various accomplishments to their names, such as playing polo, making thumb rings and arrows, and shooting with the bow and arrow. They also played many musical instruments (p. 120-121). This is also proof that the royal women specialised in various fields, including those that were traditionally considered male-oriented activities. Wearing men's clothing or engaging in such activities was not considered taboo or completely shunned in the Mughal society. In another instance, when Emperor Humayun halted in the Qibchaq defile in Kabul and required an army, he sent a message to Haram Begam to send him the army of Badakhshan as quickly as possible. In no time, the Begam sent horses, arms, and some thousand men and herself superintendent and came with the troops as far as the pass (p. 195). Haram Begam's timely action and support provided immense support to Humayun and showed us how women of the nobility had control of their military resources as well. This proves that women were not solely confined to the *harem*, but they were trained to be self-reliant and defend themselves and had the resources to learn various skills and administer them when the need arose.

Muntakhab-ut-Tawarikh

Across the three volumes of Muntakhab-ut-Tawarikh (1590-1615), Badauni addressed his ideas on the various variables of marriage and related practices, the influence of the women in the Mughal court, piety and virtue, and love affairs and scandals. Since Badauni was not a part of the nobility, he had an outsider's perspective and therefore gave an account of the lives of the

common women as well. This can help draw a comparison between the lives of the royal women of the harem and the common women and how the societal idea of the female gender implemented itself in their lives.

While talking about marriage and the customs associated with it, Badauni gave information from the royal decrees and proclamations; therefore a picture of Akbar's policies surrounding marriage can be recreated. In the second volume, he reported that in 1586-87, Akbar ordered to raise the marriageable age of girls to twelve years (p. 355-356). This shows that before this order, the age of marriage for girls was extremely low, even less than twelve in various cases, which resulted in the prevalence of child marriage and because these brides became young mothers, the infant mortality rate was high as well. This is also apparent in Gulbadan Begam's text as well, where she mentions how the various women of the royal *harem* lost their children at an infant age. Increasing the age of marriage was a welcome move towards reducing mortality rates and ensuring that young girls were not privy to marriages at such a tender age.

Emperor Akbar also ordered that widows should not be stopped from remarrying (p. 355-356), therefore striving to raise their status in society and not outcast the widows. This was also done because the practice of *Sati* was prevalent among the Hindus and the Emperor; wanted to control it and give widows the dignity they deserved. While talking about polygamy, it is perceived that the practise was widespread among the people; therefore the Emperor passed orders that a man should not have more than one wife unless she cannot bear children (p. 355-356). Badauni himself was of a similar opinion and critical of polygamous relationships because he criticised Husain Khan for his second marriage, despite having affections for his first wife (p. 125). It can thus be observed that while polygamous relations were prevalent, they were deemed unfit by the Emperor even though he had many wives of different faiths in his *harem*. He narrated an account of 1562-63 when Emperor Akbar desired a woman who was already married therefore her husband was advised to divorce her and send her to the Emperor, and he did the same. He was consoled by saying that he could always remarry since there were many other options in the world (p. 61). Shaikh Salim Chisti also gave a similar counsel to his sons when they complained that their wives were becoming estranged from them due to the Emperor's frequent visits (p. 109). This proves that the Emperor frequently desired women, even those who were married, and they or their husbands had no choice but to comply with his wishes, thereby losing the sanctity of their marriage. In the third volume of the text on the topic of divorce and separation, Badauni wrote in Shaikh Muin's biography that if any woman asked the Shaikh for separation from her husband on the grounds that he was away for too long, the Shaikh responded that while he would provide her with monetary support, he would ask her to not separate from her husband (p. 96). This shows that women often complained of being abandoned by their husbands and therefore asked for separation on financial grounds. As men took more wives, they seemed to abandon or move away from their older wives and eventually stopped providing financial support to them or

their children; therefore it was important for women to be provided with monetary support, at least in such cases.

Badauni was of the opinion that women were a bad influence on the policies and opinions of the Akbar and was constantly vocal about the same. His opinion is reflective of the men around him; therefore it can be said that this could have been the general opinion of men at that time. Whenever he described a new secular policy of Akbar, he mentioned how the women of the *harem* influenced and instigated him, such as turning him against eating garlic or beef (p. 303). This goes on to show that the women of the *harem* had an influence over the habits of the Emperor, and Badauni was bitter about it because this influence was likely coming from Akbar's Rajput wives. The Emperor's giving up garlic and beef is a positive evidence of the same. On the death of Yusuf Khan, he also exclaimed that indulgence in wine and women could be fatal to men (p. 84-85). In the *Nahj-ul-Balagha*, Mir Abdul Hayy quoted that a day will arrive when a council of women will run the government and Badauni lauded him for the same (p. 65). This statement was made while criticising Maham Anga, the *wazir* of the Mughal Court. Through this statement, it can be observed that women held power and considerable influence in the decision-making process in the court, and Akbar followed the tradition of taking the opinion of the royal women into account. It also shows that a woman could rise to a huge advisory and administrative position because of her experience and qualification. In the third volume, Badauni called women robbers on the road to God (p. 111) and recounted a particular incident where Shaikh Abdun Nabi had ordered the execution of a Brahman against the Emperor's commands. He claimed that the harem women then incited the Emperor against Akbar, yielding the power and position to do so.

Badauni narrated a few love affairs in the second volume of his work and talked about them in a very open and positive manner, thereby explaining that people had a more liberal attitude towards romances. He narrated the story of Saiyid Musa and Mohini (p. 110). Through his narration, a few points can be noted – first, he did not have an issue with the inter-religious romance of Saiyid Musa, a Muslim, and Mohini, a Hindu. But perhaps he sympathised with Mohini because she converted to Islam after Sayid Musa's demise. Though Badauni had his own way of narrating this story to put forth his ideas, a close reading indicates how Mohini was determined to be with her lover and thereby defied everyone in the process. He also puts forth the story of Shaham Beg and Aram Jan (p. 22). Aram Jan was a dancing girl and the wife of Khan Zaman. Shaham Beg had fancied her, and therefore Khan Zaman let her go. Shaham Beg, however, refused to give her up further to Abdur Rehman Bin Muayyid Beg, who desired her as well. The two ended up in a quarrel, and Shaham Beg was killed; Badauni thus describes him as a martyr for love. These two love stories tell a lot about the position of the women in these spaces. Although inter-religious, Saiyid Musa and Mohini's romance was not considered taboo or unnatural, stating that such romances were not rare and accepted in society. Mohini's beliefs and opinions were given an equal voice as that of Saiyid Musa's, which contrasts sharply with

Aram Jan's treatment. This could be because Mohini was a goldsmith's daughter and therefore from a well-respected background, whereas Aram Jan was a dancing girl. She was a Muslim and the wife of Khan Zaman, yet she was shunted around as a mere commodity in the hands of these men who passed her on without any hesitation or regard for her opinion. The narration does not mention her thoughts or opinions as well, thereby further proving that she was looked at as a mute object. These two incidents give us an idea of the spectrum of the behaviour of men toward women and also the various kinds of women that existed in society. It also indicates the caste and class position vis-a-vis women and how these factors impacted the way women were looked at and treated by the people.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research has aimed to understand the female gaze and the male gaze of the authors of the texts *Humayun-Nama* and *Muntakhab-ut-Tawarikh* and understand how they viewed the daily activities and hierarchies of the *harem*, thereby gaining a more well-rounded perspective on the royal household and the role of women in these scenarios. Through a close reading of the two texts, it can be understood that the lives of the royal women were entangled with the happenings of the Mughal Court, and there were various activities that they partook in, which were not only limited to the so-called activities for women such as traditional and religious practices, marriages, or organising feasts, but they were also actively involved in the policies and administration of the court. They also had an active influence on the ideologies and beliefs of the Emperors, especially Emperor Akbar. The domestic life of the Emperors and their interactions with the members of the *harem* also reflect them in a different light, which is not usually seen in other works of the Mughal court. These interactions reflect their humanistic life and show them in their family relations – in the roles of fathers, husbands, or sons.

Badauni's work is also reflective of the lives of the common women, one that is missing in Gulbadan Begam's text. Since Badauni was not a part of the royal family and just a mere observer, his observations reflect the society around him. Badauni provides us with a different perspective as compared to Gulbadan Begam, his ideas were inclusive of the lives of the common women as well. He reported everything as it was supposed to be, without any biases and his work was a reflection of the society and the status of women of that time. Badauni and Gulbadan Begam were both ahead of their times – one was a woman author at a time when the male text was prevalent and the other provided an outsider's perspective at a time when propaganda court text was prevalent.

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