

Princess Zeb-un-Nisa Begam and the voice of womanhood: an aspect of gender identity in 17th century mughal royal house

Abstract

The advent of *Turko-Mughal* power led to the significant changes in the social and cultural sphere of medieval India. The former continuation of manliness had mingled with the newly emerged Muslim orders, and gradually intensified it towards the women of that age. But, in spite of various restrictions, the royal ladies of *Mughal Harem* had shown their versatile excellence in the fields of politics and learning, simultaneously, directed a counter-reaction against the existing masculine approach. Among them *Zeb-un-Nisa Begam* was the most prominent female figure. Although number of works have conducted on the other distinguished women of that time, like- *Jahanara Begam*, *Noor Jahan Begam* and *Mumtaz Mahal*, but less attention has given to *Zeb-un-Nisa Begam*. This paper is an analysis about her scholarly achievements and also a voice of femininity. In this respect, the contemporary primary sources such as *Zab-un-Nisa's Diwan-E-Makhfi*, *Maasir-i-Alamgiri*, *Ahkam-i-Alamgiri*, and the accounts of foreign travelers supplied ample evidences to represent her life, and notable secondary works of *Krieger Karynicki Annie*, *Rukhsana Iftikhar*, *Rekha Mishra*, *Sudha Sharma* and *Poonam Pant* are equally helpful to comparatively evaluate this theme.

Keywords: Zeb-un-Nisa, Mughal, Aurangzeb, Makhfi, feminism

Volume 6 Issue 1 - 2021

Imon ul Hossain

History, Visva-Bharati University, India

Correspondence: Imon ul Hossain, Visva-Bharati University, Santiniketan, India, Tel 7908446039, Email imonulhossain@gmail.com

Received: August 01, 2021 | **Published:** September 27, 2021

Introduction

The beginning of human civilization is marked by the evolvement of two gender identities-male and female, on which our thought currents as well as recent academic circles are widely enclosed. In the course of time, depending upon the phenomenon of ethnical, geographical and historical background the characteristics has been differed. If we go through the north East Indian tribal kingdoms, a significant matriarchal tendency is still noticeable which they have inherited from far ancient times. Inversely, our most noted northern Indian dynasties were followed by the patriarchal sway since the days of primitive social formation. Under the asylum of Mughal royal house, the women's position took considerable transformation than the former Delhi sultanate period. On account of the initiatives taken by the Mughals, the room of female education received much impulse inside the royal Harem. Hence, if we observe the cases from the reign of Babar to Aurangzeb, we have adequate numbers of lady talents who had established themselves in every sphere of politics, learning, dancing, singing and literary contents. It is essential to give a proper review of secondary works to operate our analysis more meticulously. Firstly, Poonam Pant in her 'Women in Medieval Indian Politics (1236-1627)' provided a prolific discussion on many prominent women figure of Mughal period from Babar to Jahangir, including the infrastructure of Harem. But the political scenario of later period remained untouched. Secondly, we have 'Women in Mughal India' by Rekha Mishra, here we get the detailed account of the status of females of this period in every aspect of their political, cultural and religious roles. But she didn't not elaborate more regarding Zeb-un-Nisa's mystic and liberal poetic endeavors, just simply remarked an overview depending upon two primary and some secondary sources.

Thirdly, Rukhsana Iftikhar 'Indian Feminism: Class, Gender and Identities in Medieval ages' gives few interspersed information about Zeb-un-Nisa's life and career which has no reflection on her gender

questions and counter-challenges against patriarchy. Needless to say, she has taken much collaboration from Rekha Mishra. Lastly, we have another related work of Sudha Sharma-'The Status of Muslim Women in Medieval India', likewise, the themes of former authors she adopted nothing new on Zeb-un-Nisa. That's why, hitherto, it may be generalize that no particular study has been conducted on *Zeb-un-Nisa*. Before the beginning of my discussion, I must do an abridge overview about how a girl or female child was treated in medieval Indian society. The birth of a girl was always unwelcomed during our period of study. *Amir Khusrau*, a genius author and scholar of medieval century who had mourned for the birth of his daughter, by saying- "I wish you were not born and if you were, it would have been better if you had been a boy". Probably, Khusrau was aware that how his endeared daughter would face vehemently by social restrictions in forthcoming days of her life.

At that time, a peculiar custom was prevalent among the Muslims in which after the birth of a boy they dressed them like girls to avoid the evil eyes and jealousy of the peoples. Even in Mughal royal house we have seen the birth of a prince had been ostentatiously celebrated, but not the princess. However, Emperor Akbar performed the birthday of his grand-daughter (daughter of Prince Salim- Jahangir). In fact, the expectation of male child had always been inculcated among the Mughal emperors. *Ain-i-Akbari* and *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri* informed us regarding the sacred journey for having a male child at the *Chisti* Sufi shrine by Akbar and Jahangir, respectively. The strict Islamic law enforced *Purdah* system which was compulsory to abide by every Muslim woman. If anybody dared to defy the order she had to suffer under bitter punishment. The practice of polygamy marriage has softly permitted in holy Quran (Surah An-Nisah enunciated that a man can have four wives). In due circumstances, one can easily understand the broad discrimination between men and women. Now, why the study Zeb-un-Nisa is important to us. I would like to put forward the reasons on several angles, - firstly, there were other

female examples to be characterized in the light of womanhood, but the condition of *Zeb-un-Nisa* seems to have been divergent due to her rebellious tendency; secondly, we have noticed the former association of Jahan-Ara with Sufi thoughts under her affectionate brother *Dara-Shoukh*, and she rarely confronted with difficulties among the royal princess, inversely, *Zeb-un-Nisa* was extraordinary because of her assimilation of Sufism in a romantic fashion of poetries as well as her general Islamic theological excellence in the subjects of Shariah; thirdly, the term '*Makhfi*' literally means 'hiding the real identity' i.e., the pen names used by the princess, we can only realize this risky authorship in her works which was apparently an effort to surpass the banner of patriarchy. I shall do this discussion later.

It is difficult to delineate the details of her life as these were not written in a connected biography, thence, we have to explore from scattered evidences. One of the most valuable sources of Aurangzeb's reign '*Maasir-i-Alamgiri*' recorded that '*Zeb-un-Nisa Begam*, born on the 10th Shawwal, 1047/15th February, 1638, to Begam (Dilras Banu)'¹. Initially, we should review her political activities to signify a replete contradictory perception. There had always been the long inherited Turko-Mughal tradition which engaged in the form of women's participation as 'power behind throne' for king's selection in pure lineage, and to have an incessant grip over administration or policy making of the court. One thing can clearly be discernable that except Sultana Raziya and few other minor incidents, the women of Mughal royal house had greater involvement in direct political affairs from princess to queens than that of the preceding milieu of Delhi Sultanate. In 1658, when the war of succession was going on among Aurangzeb and his brothers, at that time emperor's father-in-law, Shah Nawaz Khan didn't extend any cooperation for him; instead, he had gone in favor of *Dara Shoukh*. It has been alluded in '*Ahkam-i-Alamgiri*' that Shah Nawaz Khan was arrested at the end of skirmishes - "The nobles who came to pay the [customary] visit to the sick, were ordered to enter alone and one by one, leaving their attendants outside. Thus, on the second day, when Mirza Shah Nawaz Khan came. Shaikh Mir promptly arrested him, tied him hand and neck, and placed him handcuffed and chained on the liawdah of an elephant. That very moment Aurangzib gave the order to march. After reaching Burhanpur, Shah Nawaz Khan was imprisoned..."².

Finally, due to *Zeb-un-Nisa*'s (the new Padshah Begam) earnest pleading emperor released him, as he was her maternal grandfather—"After the victory over Dara Shukoh, at the entreaty of *Zeb-un-nisa* Begam, —who had abstained from food for three days, saying that she would keep fasting till her maternal grandfather was released, —Aurangzib with anger and displeasure ordered him to be set free and appointed him Governor of Ahmadabad, which province had been without a Governor since Murad Bakhsh left it. But Aurangzib said, "My mind is not free from anxiety [about him]. I have issued this order under compulsion, but I shall reconsider it carefully afterwards. As he is a Syed, it is hard to order his execution. Otherwise, there is the well-known saying, 'A severed head tells no tale'³. We have instances that *Zeb-un-Nisa* often used to appear at the court with veil on her face to assist her father in his discourses. One may be astonished to see that how Aurangzeb depended on his eldest daughter while he wrote a letter for the recommendation of some posts, even mentioned without her approval this work should not be introduced. We can witness another case from "*Ahkam-i-Alamgiri*" that manifested how

she had endeavored on behalf of her brother Prince Azam to remit him from a punishment given by Aurangzeb for quarrelling with the superintendent.⁴ This fact I am citing from the text —Muhammad Azam Shah reported to the Emperor 'The Prince has behaved badly towards Nur-un-nisa, the mahaldar, so that he did not take her with himself [in his visits] to the Imperial garden at Ahmadabad. The mahaldar sent a letter outside [the harem to me] forbidding the Prince's journey. So, this slave {i.e. the writer} came and stopped the riding out of the Prince, in the absence of any order [from the Emperor]. The Prince expelled the mahaldar from his assembly {inajlis}The Emperor wrote this order: —"The mansabdars appointed [to that province] and Khwajah Ouli Khan, with his own troops and those of the Rajah of Narwars hold co-operate and prevent the Prince from riding out or giving audience, pending the arrival of order from me"⁴.

Hearing this harsh measure, the prince sent a petition through *Zeb-un-Nisa* that ultimately led to his pardon. "Next day, when the Prince got news of it, he sent a petition through his sister, Padshah Begam, begging pardon for his offences, and enclosing an agreement to a compromise sealed with the seals of the nazir and the mahaldar. On the petition the Emperor wrote: —"I refrain from transferring your mahals (z. e., jagir). But if no pecuniary punishment is inflicted, you will retain the audacity to do this sort of work again. Fifty thousand rupees should be taken from the cash salary of this short-sighted, base-minded and foolish son, into the public treasury as punishment for this offence"⁵. The last political interference caused the demise of this great princess; this was also for her another brother. In 1679, on the way to fight against the Rajputs, prince Akbar was given the command of advance military division, naturally, he had large number of armies to associate him in campaign. In the midst of battle, perchance, he had been deviated by few evil advisors to overthrow his father from throne. In the course of revolt, princess exchanged a latter with her brother which had been explored at the end of war. Aurangzeb had become very much aggressive towards his trusted daughter, and that resulted to the confiscation of her pension and wealth. Regrettably, she was exiled at Salimgarh where she died in 1702 AD⁶.

I want to elucidate the diverse engagement of *Zeb-un-Nisa* at the royal Harem. '*Maasir-i-Alamgiri*' writes about her wisdom - "through the auspicious upbringing of the God-knowing Emperor (Alamgir) she learnt the Quran by rote, for which she received from the emperor a reward of 30,000 gold coins"⁷. Following the footsteps of her aunt Jahan Ara who herself was a renowned Persian scholar of that age, "she Completely mastered the Arabic and Persian languages, and in writing various kinds of hand, such as *nastaliq*, *naskh* and *shikastah* correctly, she had full competence..."⁸. As like as Aurangzeb, she also patronized the religious scholars and theologians who had been entrusted in many academic jobs such as- calligraphy and translations of sacred books and were regularly paid under her care. It is cited in *Maasir*—"...large numbers of theologians, scholars, pious men, poets, scribes and calligraphists by this means came to enjoy the bounty of this lady hidden in the harem of grandeur; e.g., *Mulla Safi-ud-din Ardbili* by her order took up his residence in Kashmir and engaged in making a translation into Persian of the "great commentary on the Quran", which came to be entitled "*Zeb-ut-Tafasir*", "the ornament of commentaries". Other tracts and books have been composed in her honoured name"⁹. In this century, hardly anybody could imagine that

⁴Ibid.p.71

⁵Ibid.p.72

⁶Sarkar JN. *History of Aurangzeb*. MC Sarkar and Sons. 1928;(3):54.

⁷Op.cit. *Maasir-i-Alamgiri*. p.322

⁸loc.cit. *Maasir-i-Alamgiri*

⁹loc.cit. *Maasir-i-Alamgiri*

¹Saqi Mustaid Khan. *Maasir-i-Alamgiri*. Translated into english and annotated by Sir Jadunath Sarkar, Calcutta. Royal Asiatic society of Bengal. 1947. p. 322.
²*Ahkam-i-Alamgiri*, Anecdotes of Aurangzeb and historical essays, translated into english with notes by JN Sarkar, MC Sarkar Sons. Calcutta. 1917. p.48.
³Ibid. p. 49

a woman of restricted Harem had such intimate desire to collect books in personal library. Although, previously *Gulbadan Begam* and *Jahan-Ara* used to have their own collections, but Zeb-un-Nisa was different due to her varied experiments of knowledge and patronages than that of the predecessors. We can take excerpt from the same text- “She appreciated the value of learning and skill; and all her heart was set on the collection, copying and reading books and she turned her kind attention to improving the lot of scholars and gifted men. The result was that she collected a library the like of which no man has seen;”¹⁰. Rukhsana Iftikhar have shown in her work that she had promoted men of letters like *Mirza Khalil, Nazir Ali, Shams Waliullah, ChandarBhan* and *Bahraaz*.³⁻⁵

There was a grand tradition inside the royal harem of Mughals regarding dress, ornaments and indoor games, foreign travellers like *Barnier* and *Manucci* had become strange to see such pompous attires of princess and queens. It is well known that Zeb-un-Nisa spent much of her time playing chaupar with her girlfriends¹¹. She introduced a woman garment named *Angiya-Kurti*¹². *Manucci* writes. “They wear neither gloves nor stockings on account of the great heat which prevails in India”¹³. We have to venture through Zeb-un-Nisa’s scholarly works to locate the voice of femininity. But before that we need to have a proper depiction of literary practices at the Mughal harem. In spite of hindrances in terms of exotic connection, the emperors were quite concern to educate their royal ladies who occupied themselves in reading, writing and composing poetries. Mughal emperors used to employ the educated lady teachers to teach the princess who were known as ‘*Nazir*’. The curriculum of learning’s imparted the study of Persian, Arabic, theology and history etc. Aurangzeb educated his daughters not only in religious sphere but also, they acquired comprehensive knowledge of linguistics. He appointed Hafiza Mariyam and Mulla Said Ashraf Mazindarani, an intellectual lady and a great poet, respectively. Zeb-un-Nisa had an estimable position as a scholar in Persian literature of that age, and her poetry had reached among the distinguished audiences of central Asia. She is remembered as a mysterious and romantic figure of her time.

In this regard, I have decided to study the poetries written by her, which are known as ‘*Dewaan-E-Makhfi*’, comprised of 421 Ghazals and several quatrains. Here I sought to portray three subjective themes in her poetries -firstly, composite literary identities and secondly, historical consciousness, and thirdly romanticism and mystic pursuit. Initially, I want to explain the composite nature of her work. Nasir Ali who was a patron poet of her own once said this verse- “O envy of the moon, lift up thy veil and let me enjoy the wonder of thy beauty”. She replied in another verse -

“I will not lift my veil
For, if I did,
Who knows?
The bulbul might forget the rose,
The Brahman worshipper
Adoring Lakshmi’s grace
Might turn, forsaking her,

To see my face
My beauty might prevail.
Think how within the flower
Hidden as in a bower
Her fragrant soul must be,
And none can look on it
So, me the world can see
Only within the verses I have write
I will not lift my veil”¹⁴

Her idea regarding non-Muslim deities and priesthood can be remarked from these lines, and the fanciful allegorical expression of her mind as well. Similarly, in Zeb-un-Nisa’s composition, the tradition of Akbar’s multi-cultural and concept of pluralism had been profoundly projected. Most of the times she had constantly spoken together about mosque and temple. Even, a learnt reader of our present generation would be surprised to see her desperate verses that how she had surpassed the limits of so called ‘theology orientations’ of contemporary society. As instance –

“No Muslim I,
But an idolater,
I bow before the image of my Love,
And worship her
No Brahman I,
My sacred thread
I cast away, for round my neck I wear
Her plaited hair instead”¹⁵.

Zeb-un-Nisa was greatly influenced by medieval mystic prospects; in fact, she was a fond of her uncle Dara Shikoh. By virtue of her intimacy, she had often been suspected to her father emperor Aurangzeb that she might have affected by his liberal ideas¹⁶. She used to hold discussion with her uncle and in a compiled “*Deewan*” of Dara Shikoh, we are told, she had contributed valuable poetries.⁶ Same reflection we have in her verses in which she proposed the same path of being nearer to almighty and emphasised upon the devotion of heart-

“To the forbidden path turn not aside,
And, tyrannous Beloved, let thine eye
Look on thy victims trampled in thy pride,
Who for a glance from thee would gladly die?
Some pay their worship at the Kaaba shrine,
Some pray within the Temple courts apart,
But, *Makhfi*, think what secret joy is thine,

¹⁰loc.cit. *Maasir-i-Alamgiri*

¹¹Sarkar JN. *Studies in Mughal India*. Calcutta, MC Sarkar. 1919. p. 82.

¹²Rekha M. *Women in Mughal India*. Munshiram Manoharlal. Delhi, 1997.p.123.

¹³Manucci. *Storia Do Mogor*. JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET, London. 1907, p.341.

¹⁴Lal Magan. *The diwan of Zeb-un-Nissa*. JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET, London. 1913. p. 12.

¹⁵Ibid.p.22

¹⁶Ibid.p.11

To bear thine idol ever in thy heart"¹⁷.

Here I want to bring the kind attention that Zeb-un-Nisa sustained the notions of Amir Khusrau, which I should termed as 'understanding the counter community'. It is an outcrop of cordial cognition between the two major different faiths in Indian sub-continent, and Amir Khusrau was the pioneer of this school. If we look into his poetries, we can perceive such offshoots where he had recognized the Brahmans being a reverent superior caste. Same thing had been repeated in Zeb-un-Nisa's 'Deewan' because she also admired the faithfulness of 'Brahmans' -

"We wait and tire,
And sight of the Beloved Face desire
In vain, till in our hearts the hope is born
Of Resurrection morn.
O heart, thine be no less
Then the ascetic Brahman's faithfulness,
The knotted veins his wasted body bears
As sacred thread he wears"¹⁸.

The second aspect of her poetry was historical consciousness. It can be conceivable that while romanticising numerous poetical themes she had categorically used notable examples from 'tarik' (history), either to assimilate her utopian viewpoint or as a simile. I am alluding her lines -

"Dust falls within the cup of Kaikobad
And King Jamshid,
Nor recks the world if they were sad or glad,
Or what they did"¹⁹.

We can see in the above passage that how she combined her imagination with Kaikobad who was the dearest grandson of Sultan Balban, and king Jamshid of Persian mythology. Again, we can notice that she included Alexander's example in poetry-

"Oh fortunate,
More blessed than Alexander's lot is mine.
Come to me, O ye thirsty: this -my fate
To know the giver of celestial wine"²⁰.

In this consideration, we have to look back in the far developed traditions of Indo-Persian culture which had a profound impact upon this Mughal princess. Under the shadow of these conventions, the Muslim inhabitants of central Asia and Arab said to have engendered a rich academic practice in which memorizing the past was a pivotal trend. In fact, if we assess the works of most reputed medieval authors like- Zia-Barani, Mohammed Isami, Amir Khusrau and AbulFazl then it would be more transparent that how they have used the examples of past. Zeb-un-Nisa as a learnt lady intellectual of that time was more familiar with those curriculums of knowledge that she had incorporated. Now, I would like to proceed with another perception of her poetry which I want regard as 'romanticism and mystic prospect'. After a careful survey of 'Deewan-E-Makhfi', one can realize that

how a woman figure of medieval age could excellently think about her own emotions, love and mystic adventures of heart, despite the restrictions of the royal house. That's why, it is essential to bring forward our discussion on this angle. We can point out her liberal views from the second poetry of this book in which she had candidly opined against the discrimination in the name of religious worships-

"...Within us stirs the leaven of Thy love,
As streams of water of Thy mercy run.
Look from above
And bless Mahmoud and all that he had done.
Whether it be in Mecca's holiest shrine,
Or in the Temple pilgrim feet have trod,
Still Thou art mine,
Wherever God is worshipped is my God..."²¹

In mystic literary traditions we have several characteristics such as- devotional prayers in the name of God for salvation from material to spiritual world, and to some extent these writings rejected the formal practices of worships. An extreme love for creator beyond the barrier of religious customs had become their prime theme of discourse. In this respect, they wanted to imbibe God as beloved, and in Sufi literature we have many citations of the term "Ashiq" (lover) through which they placed God in a female-centric entity for whom the lover (Ashiq) sought to incline. Zeb-un-Nisa's poetries are widely adjoined in that norm, and we can visualize that how she had romanticized every inseparable part of Muslim religion, sacred places and sometime prophet Muhammed. Indeed, she also believed that the compulsory faiths are unable to inculcate God in pious soul. In poetry of Deewan, therefore, such things have been depicted and entry at the holy house Kaaba seems not to be her drastic desire -

"O Makhfi, if the Kaaba keeper closes
To thee his door,
Complain not thou possess even more
A holy place;
For look into the Well-Beloved Face,
Over His Eyes
Arches fairer than Kaaba gates arise
Thy heart shall bend,
Itself an archway welcoming the Friend"²²

Her imagination not merely limited in Indian culture and religions but such concept of using the examples of Jesus has also been reflected in another verse -

"Let no one know the secrets of thy love. On
The way of love, O Makhfi,
walk alone. Even
if Jesus seek to be thy companion, tell him thou
desires not his comradeship"²³

¹⁷Ibid.p.42

¹⁸Ibid.p.56

¹⁹Ibid.p.43

²⁰Ibid.p.47

²¹Ibid.p.27

²²Ibid.p.29

²³Ibid.p.18

Her reflection upon the divine attachment of human heart can be located in another verse where she tried to claim that God alone knows her true zeal-

“...I humbly sit apart

The Kaaba courts the true believers tread,

I dwell outside, nor mix my praise with theirs

Yet every fibre of my sacred thread

More precious is to God than all their prayers

He sees the heart”²⁴

In above discussions I have analysed the different aspects related to Zeb-un-Nisa’s career as a women figure. Now, I would like to expound here that how she had to confront in her performance as a female. As we have seen before that Zeb-un-Nisa’s ideal was far different than her father because emperor Aurangzeb was a bigot Sunni Muslim and fanatic in nature, whereas this great princess was actually a mystic liberal follower of religion and didn’t shared her father’s prejudices. She appeared to be more influenced by her uncle rather than her father, precisely in her world of thought. In this context, the first contradiction in terms of discrimination can be remarked from the incident when she was prevented to write the commentary of holy Quran by her father as she was a woman, and had no right to interpret this holy book. At the royal Harem she had a tutor known as Shah Rustam Ghazi who reported to have encouraged Zeb-un-Nisa to compose poetries. But usually, all princesses had been forbidden to do so, therefore, she used to write secretly. Here one thing is essential to point out that there was an interesting genre of literary practices among the Mughal princess popularly known as ‘*Makhfi*’, on which Rekha Mishra and Rukhsana Iftikhar have adequately focused in their works. The term ‘*Makhfi*’ literary means hidden or conceal, the princess used this as a pen name to hide their real identity while composing any romantic verse. Perhaps, they had to be more cautious to avoid the eyes of male members, especially the emperor for not being caught in the name of guilty. If we go through the text of ‘*Deewan-E-Makhfi*’, in the conclusions of every poetry we can notice that numerous times Zeb-un-Nisa applied this word to refer herself. Another fact we should evaluate that only few peoples inside the harem were familiar about her literary accomplishment, while she shared her works in a broad platform of Persia and Arab without revealing original name and origin. Once a scholar of Arab after reading her Arabic verse said – “Whoever has written this poem is Indian. The verses are clever and wise, but the idiom is Indian, although it is a miracle for a foreigner to know Arabian so well”²⁵.

Under the patriarchal hierarchy of Mughals, Zeb-un-Nisa was truly the voice of femininity by sternly countering the existing gender discrimination. Her earnest will-power of learning obliged emperor Aurangzeb to accept her all acts of solicitation. Obviously, it is an unbelievable event of medieval Indian history that a person who never fostered the poets and poetry, but the cause of his daughter’s plea led him to allow both at the royal house. Her preference for self-prestige and self-choice which was beyond imagination among the medieval women can also be ascertained from another contemporary event regarding marriage- once, Mirza Farukh, a prince of Iran, son of Shah Abbas II, wanted to marry her; Zeb-un-Nisa offered the prince to come at Delhi so that she might see what he was like. The evidence recorded that Zeb-un-Nisa feasted him with the veil upon her face. Meanwhile, he asked the princess in a poetic word that also

meant he wished to kiss her. In reaction she bitterly insulted him for this naughty behaviour and replied- ‘ask for what you want from our kitchen’²⁶. Thereafter, she reported her father that in spite of the prince’s beauty and rank she discovered no other quality; therefore, she was displeased and denied the marriage proposal. Even after this incident prince Mirza Farukh sent her this verse -

“I am determined never to leave

this temple; here will I bow my head, here

will I prostrate myself, here will I serve, and

here alone is happiness”²⁷

Zeb-un-Nisa mocked him in reply –

“How light dost thou esteem this

game of love, O child. Nothing dost thou

know of the fever of longing, and the fire of

separation, and the burning flame of love”²⁸

Same liberty of choice she exercised in another fact. It was on 1662 when Aurangzeb shifted his resident at Lahore with his family and court, due to the prescription of his physician to change air. At that time, Akil Khan, the governor of that city. He was aware about Zeb-un-Nisa and wanted to meet with her. After having the meeting, they have fallen in love for each other, and that rumour rapidly reached to Emperor Aurangzeb. In due circumstances, he was preparing for the marriage of princess. Hearing such commotion, Zeb-un Nisa claimed for her freedom of choice and wished to see the portrait of male suitors²⁹.

Conclusion

We have seen from all such roles of this dissent princess of 17th century India, a course of regeneration in terms of womanhood despite living under manliness. The reaction which she had shown to the contemporary static social order is still beyond our imagination. If we compare both Jahan Ara and Zeb-un-Nisa then one generalization may not to be more inappropriate to confer Zeb-un-Nisa as the pioneer of early modern female consciousness, whereas Jahan-Ara remained in her poetic dignity. Previously we have noticed that how much depended and trusted the emperor was, notably upon her political sagacity. Presumably, the queens of Aurangzeb were much deprived in this aspiration which she had accomplished. Indeed, Zeb-un-Nisa conveyed the legacy of Lel Daad and Meera Bai who vehemently spoke up against the patriarchal orders. Although, she did not actuate such extremity in her works but incessantly conducted everything beyond her limit as a woman of that time. She was triumphant in her genius poetic wisdom and she wrote “for I have risen to fortunate from despair”. It might be unknown to Aurangzeb that the scholarly exertion of her great daughter went far away from the boundary of this country. In fact, I must point out here that it was Sultan Iltutmish who recognized Raziya being the only qualified monarch for the throne, simultaneously, we have to reiterate the case for Aurangzeb when he took various political and administrative consent from Zeb-un-Nisa and not from the princes. Another factor we must not ignore was her universal perception about religion and peoples which was not subjectively deficient in her works than that of AbulFazl and Amir Khusrau. It is true that somewhere she had been obstructed because of

²⁶ibid.p.10

²⁷ibid.p.11

²⁸loc.cit

²⁹ibid.Diwan.p.16

²⁴ibid.p.52

²⁵ibid.p.9

her gender identity, but she annihilated the rigidity of male dominance by proving herself as their capable peer.

Acknowledgments

None.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

Funding

None.

References

1. Saqi Mustaid Khan, *Maasir-i-Alamgiri*. Translated into Eenglish and annotated by Sir Jadunath Sarkar, Calcutta, royal Asiatic society of Bengal, 1947.
2. *Ahkam-i-Alamgiri, Anecdotes of Aurangzeb and Historical Essays*, Translated into english with notes by JN Sarkar, MC Sarkar and Sons, Calcutta. 1917.
3. Sarkar JN. *History of Aurangze*. MC Sarkar and Sons, 1928;3.
4. Rekha M. *Women in Mughal India*. Munshiram Manhorlal. Delhi, 1997.
5. Manucci, *Storia Do Mogor*. JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET, London. 1907.
6. Magan L. *The diwan of Zeb-un-Nissa*. JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET, London. 1913.