



The Mughal Empress Nur Jahan: A Fashion Icon of Her Age (1577-1645)

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Abstract

During the Mughal Empire rule between 1526 and 1707 fashion emerged as a way to show identity and power through art and culture. This study examines how Empress Nur Jahan (1577–1645) brought high fashion for Mughal India and made it a refined expression of modern style during her reign. This research examines both Mughal style and Nur Jahan's special role as a leading fashion designer of her era. Her elegant design principles from Persian culture helped the Mughal style evolve by adding multiple fabrics colors and patterns reflective of imperial openness. Through her stylistic blend of Persian and Indian materials and decoration Nur Jahan both transformed Mughal fashion and made it important worldwide. Female fashion designers studied Mughal trends because of Nur Jahan's worldwide influence as a fashion icon. It is a qualitative analysis based on archive research and study of Tuzk-e-Jahangiri to examine how Nur Jahan shaped Mughal fashion. Secondary sources supplement primary research to show how Nur Jahan's work changed society during that era. This research places Nur Jahan's fashion achievements in the context of Mughal history to argue that her work molded an enduring design legacy which motivates fashion creators today.

Key Words: Nur Jahan, Fabrics, Textiles, Women, Mughal Fashion

1. Introduction

Noor Jahan was the biggest fashion icon and a trend Centre for loyal and the local women as well. Like today people used to follow different ideals or models to adopt new fashion and trends likewise the Noor Jahan was ideal for the women to adopt new styles of fabrics and fashion. Noor Jahan was also responsible for the influence of bright and deep color in the



Mughal textiles. The significant contribution towards the dress style of Mughals by encouraging the use of chikankari work was very light work on cloth which originated in her own country Persia. It was something they wanted to embrace; this style started being adopted by the nobility and high ranking women of the Mughal court; popularizing the fashion icons of that time (Sylvia, 2022).

The Mughals who dominated the major part of India and Pakistan till the early half of 18th century are famous for their culture and art which includes its fabrics. Just like other articles of clothing, textiles formed a major part of Mughal life and where a person sat in the social hierarchy, wealth and power as well as artistry, the Mughal women also set themselves an important part in developing these traditions and the example here is one of the most powerful empresses, Noor Jahan. A prime patron and advocate of Mughal art and architecture, she was the brains behind the push to improve the fashion of women in her era.

The love for art, architecture and textiles had inspired Noor Jahan a lot, and she was involved in supporting many of the Mughal Arts.

The rich Paithani silk sarees from the Deccan part of the empire became a part of her regular dressing code and helped to popularize these pieces all over the empire. Another area where Mughal fashion was taken up by Noor Jahan was by the use of embroidery, and gold threaded brocade specially.

During the reign of Noor Jahan the dresses of Mughal women became more elaborate and stunning. The Persians introduced the ‘ajina ka kaam’ type of inlay work where mirror-like tiles were given on fabric to get the required reflectivity. The added richness to the cloth was by delicate embroidery, intricate zari work and colourful motifs, all depicting the Mughal architectural style (Nikki, 1990).

This article explores the pivotal role of Empress Noor Jahan in shaping Mughal textile traditions and fashion, highlighting her influence on the artistry, techniques, and cultural symbolism of fabrics during her era. By delving into her patronage of chikankari embroidery, the integration of Persian and Deccan textile elements, and her promotion of intricate designs and rich colors, the study examines how Noor Jahan's contributions not only elevated Mughal women's fashion but also established enduring legacies in South Asian textile history (Pooja 2015).

The study extends and further specifies the role of Persian and indigenous Indian influence in the further incorporation of the Mughal aesthetic in textile arts, how Noor Jahan's tastes and innovations reverberated within and without the harem. Further, motif, pattern and fabric preferences are also identified through thematic analysis and how these textiles defined the Mughal harem and the politics of power under Nur Jahan's supervision is also presented.

2. Literature Review

The rulers of the Mughal dynasty are one of the most important chains of medieval India's rulers. Most of the historical sources include Persian texts and occasional remarks by foreign travelers, paintings, monuments, and structures tell the Mughals' unusual story. Notably women of the royal lineage of Mughals, and their contributions to society have been analyzed in several historical books. The ensuing reviews reveal the strengths and weaknesses of each work in providing a solid platform from which to understand women during the Mughal period.

Ila Mukherjee's work 'Social Status of North Indian Women', focused on the social position of women during this period with reference to their role as wives and mothers. Mukherjee describes the struggles of women; they were fully dependent on male family members, and there were few opportunities at that time for women to achieve self-promotion. Yet, she limits her analysis to social issues only, and tremendous gaps can be pointed out in the investigation of women's activity in the political and military domains. This keeps her work valuable for illustrating the domestic and societal functions of women but wanting in revealing their other function in the processes of governance and in the history of the Mughal Empire in particular (Mukherjee, 1992).

In 'Muslim Women in Medieval India' the emphasis is given not on the royalty but ordinary Muslim women of the medieval period which is presented by *Zinat Kausar*. The challenges of women highlighted in her study include social oppression, women education, and limited politically and economically engaging in public activities. Kausar's work expands our vision of the potential for understanding by drawing the women of different social states, of the middle and lower orders as well as non-aristocratic households. Nevertheless, her story is concerned more with the social aspects of female existence and omits their political, artistic and warfare roles. Her book has its shortcomings, but it provides a useful background to the general history of Muslim women of this period and a call for the research on their multifaceted roles (Zinat, 1992).

In another book 'Women in Mughal India: Speaking for Myself', *Rekha Mishra* tries to offer an all-embracing view of women in Mughal times, although concentrating only on noblewomen of the Mughal royal court. Mishra also speaks about comfort and lavish living, regional and cultural contribution, and art support these women had, however, she briefly mentions some restrictions of the harem system. However, she tries to discuss almost all aspects of the Mughal society, her discussion is comparatively short and rather sketches than can be considered as genuine research, with the politics, economy, or the social contributions of Mughal women limited to the high class women only. Her work enlightens the western social minds about the upper-class Mughal women but fails to give a clear idea of the other classes of women or their vivacious roles in the society (Rekha, 1967).

In 'The Mughal Harem' there are many aspects that *K.S. Lal* examines, some of which are related to art and culture. From the viewpoint of textiles and fabrics, Lal cast a historic light on the glamorous life that the harem inhabitants enjoyed, detailing the need for fine fabrics and

laboriously embroidered garments to suit their standing in society and their taste. The women of the harem were considered possessing high standards of fashion and used silks, brocades, muslin and zari embroidery on their and other garments not only for their beauty but as a status statement for the richness of their personages. Also, the book talks of the roles of harem women in supporting weavers and artisans, who were contracted to design clothes for the palace. Even though it is still a work primarily about elite women, the specificity of the descriptions is helpful for understanding the textiles that created the visual context of the Mughal period (K S Lal, 1988).

As a continuation to *Soma Mukherjee*'s scholarly work titled, 'The Royal Mughal Ladies and Their Contributions' explain the active participation of Mughal women in cultural sponsorship textile art. The book describes how elite women participated in procuring such luxurious fabrics and supported the enhancement of the textile production that was critical to the empire's aesthetic image. Burgeoning from anxious to show their social standing and status, royal women presume control over specific aspects of garment construction, including attractiveness, which stimulated complications of Mughal textiles such as embroidery work, block printing, and weaving. His work also describes their role in improving the basic fabric such as Banarasi sari and muslin fabric also. But by focusing on the royal patronage, it fails to give the women from other classes, who were as active in creating and designing the textile during the Mughal period their due credit. This narrow view is useful but restricted in capturing the bird picture of the textile trend from the perception of Mughal women (Mukherjee, 1991).

'A study of Mughal Empire Costumes And Designs During Sixteenth and Seventeenth century' research work done by *Pooja Chaudhary*, provide insight into the social structure and growth of one of the most significant sectors of the Mughal empire, the costumers and designers of India during the sixteenth and seventeenth century that helped form the fabric of the fashion industry during this crucial period in Indian history The study creates awareness on the socio cultural historic significance of Mughal oriental costumes, they established the fact beyond doubt that during the Mughal rule the costumes were not only a basic human need but also equal to the social, material and cultural need. This paper also uses miniature paintings and historical writing to decode how the Mughal court costume deteriorated by focusing on transformations introduced by the rulers including Akbar who adopted the Hindu and Persian costumes to create the appropriate Mughal style. The analyses of the roles of textile designs also reveal how structure foreign techniques for instance the integration of shikagara motives originated from Persia to be featured into local styles to enhance production of exquisite motives that symbolized Mughal textiles. As the form of the one-centralised textile industry, the emergence of regional centres and differentiation of clothes owe to the weakening of the Mughal empire in the early eighteenth century. The review also noted that the idea of homogeneity was dissolved in the end (Pooja, 2015).

The *Tuzk-e-Jahangiri* gives substantial information about the importance of textile in the context of the Mughal Empire and its relation to power and cultural identity. Speaking about

Jahangir's memoirs one has to mention that the author often pays much attention to the description of the precious fabrics and garments worn in the royal court, their designs being rich in ornament, colors diverse and the seams unique. There are mentioned textiles such as brocades, velvets, muslins often used gold, silver threads which indicated the skill and creativity of Mughal weavers. The text also describes the manufacture as well as transfer of textile goods, which formed the backbone of the empire's economy and interaction with other civilizations. With Jahangir's inclination toward elaborate descriptions of ceremonial attire, gift items made of fabrics, and the employment of textiles in interior decoration, the importance of these materials is revealed strongly in the Mughal Empire. Apart from that the mentioned descriptions also praise the beauty of Mughal textiles while also emphasizing their importance in conveying authority, prosperity and artistic tradition (Alexander, 2914).

3. Research Methodology

This research will identify existing patterns of textile in the Mughal harem area of interest; costumes and fabrics of women during the patronage of Noor Jahan through qualitative historical research. It entails analyzing both primary and secondary sources; the Narrative is a reconstruction of Mughal court histories, histories-door historical records, and contemporary Mughal representations thereby understanding socio-cultural and artistic transformation of Mughal women during her era. Exploration of all surviving features of textile and garments of Mughal period Icons such as chikankari, zari work, and vibrant colour which can be associated with Noor Jahan are discussed pictorially. Comparative analysis is also used in evaluating the progression of textile designs and techniques prior to and during her patronage and Analytical functions are thus used in comparing the progression of the designs and techniques in textiles before and during her patronage to show how she influenced these traditions.

This article relies on Tuzuk-e-Jahangiri (The Memoirs of Jahangir) as primary source which provides the firsthand look into the 'Amir-i-Khalikat' institution and Noor Jahan's instrumental in creatively altering the Mughal textile and fashion. Literary books, journals, documents and academic papers available in sites like Internet archive, library genesis, are used. Further material collected from RSML Library of Quaid e Azam University and Agha Khan Library of Sargodha University.

4. Discussion

Cultural histories of India also provide textual evidence along with the descriptions of foreign travelers about the evolution of textile in the country. In Rig Veda, one of the ancient Indian sacred books, there are references to weaving and dyeing significant in ancient Vedic families (Yusuf, 1900). Herodotus and Megasthenes are some of the early Greeks who reported on cotton in India and when they did so they were awestruck by this material because the Indians spun their fiber from trees that produced wool like vegetation. These observations lead to the recognition of improved weaving technology and Indian textiles' export fame. Many fabrics originated from India and gradually developed into defining structures of global trade over ages tying the subcontinent with European, Middle-Eastern, and Southeast Asian countries. But such

colonial policies and later industrialization adversely affected it as the local artisans could not compete with machine-produced articles. Nevertheless, the legend of using Indian textiles has not turned selective, and people keep adoring their use, not only because of Indian history but also because of the quality of the mere artistry (Taylor, 1851).

5.1. Empress Nur Jahan

Nur Jahan (Mehr al-Nesa) was born in 1577 in Kandahar, present-day Afghanistan and broke the mold of the traditional women's power in the Mughal Empire. Her impact discredited the traditional and post-modernist impressions of Mughal harem inhabitants, who, as the Weicker and the Dyers wanted the global audience to believe, were mere objects of beauty whose sole aim in life was to beautify themselves and be passive dolls of conformist aesthetics of Mughal socio-cultural construct (Zoya, 2016). Nur Jahan, however, went beyond all these limitations and became more or less the regent of India during the latter half of her husband Emperor Jahangir's rule (1605-1627). Being a woman, she had more political power than any other woman in the Mughal Empire and participated in the administration and politics and the art and culture of the empire wholeheartedly (Catherine, 2023).

Contrary to many legends of her youth in Jahangir court, according to historical works, the first meeting of Nur Jahan with Jahangir was in 1611. Following her marriage, however, she took a very active part in the running of the empire, signing imperial orders (farmans) in her own name, having coins struck in her titles, and acting at every level. Her political skills and temper were quite astonishing; she was not simply a powerful queen but very much a co-regent in all (Catherine, 2023).

The legacy of Nur Jahan is also political indeed, but it has much more. She altered the ambience of the Mughal court cultural taste, commissioning architecture, literature and art. She confirmed and expanded guidelines for women of her era and has become one of the most highest ranked females in India.

There was no other woman in Indian history who governed for such a long time as Nur Jahan did. From being a poor widow with a child she was a Persian soldier's wife to being the most powerful woman of the Mughal empire. Despite not technically being queen or even queen consort since she was never, to the author's knowledge, officially crowned or enthroned, Nur Jahan was the one who held true power in the empire despite Jahangir sitting on the throne. She participated in political decision making, bearing the approval on issuing of coins, designs of buildings, overseas trade and monopolized some ships plying on the Arabian Sea. In addition to her politics, she was described as a philanthropist; she adopted some orphans, and presided over women's organizations (Munshi Lal, 2002).

Despite this, marital rows over the imperial grappling and her strategic desire over some of the subsequent years of Jahangir's reign contributed to unrest within the Mughal empire domain. She however surpassed her rivals and was acclaimed as a leader with wisdom. Jahangir would

once say that he has put her in charge of the empire for a cup of wine and some muttons. Empress Nur Jahan's personal development from a widow to one of the most powerful women in the world, experienced her powerful rule and great miseries of her life and died a wiser woman than she was when she assumed the throne (Anju & Usha, 2025).

Nur Jahan who was equally gifted when it came to choosing fashions helped change the face of Mughal fashion by working with textile designers and bringing in new developments such as floral printed light muslin (dudami), light-weight cotton veils (panchotiya) and silver wired lace (badhah). She was not limited to the upper class, she had adorned creations for the middle class too such as Nur Mahal, the affordable wedding fabric. The attire that she made fashionable for a civilization, namely the kurti-trouser ensembles & the white coverer (farsh-i-chandani) became long-lasting; the emblem of the portrayal of textile designing & the of textile ranges from upper classes Due to her life and designs, she established Atlas as a leading company when it comes to textile industry.

Nur Jahan who was described as very prudent turned the discarded post office bags into the cloth of royal elephants especially as mentioned by Khafi Khan. She brought a new unique style in the court dress with the fabrics like silver-threaded brocades, lace and lighter floral printed fabric favoured for veils and gowns She also released her fabled fragrance 'Atri Jahangiri.' Also, she invented the inexpensive wedding dress for couples who are caretanie but genuine care for the needy. She cared for more than five hundred poor young women during her lifetime; all of them are thankful for her beneficence (Tom, 2016).

5.2. Nur Jahan as Embodiment of Mughals Women Fashion

Mughal royalty was a big fan of art in all forms and manners including buildings, foods, clothes and jewelry. Jewelry making was given a lot of importance during the Mughal period and thus we see beautifully carved and designed designs with extra large beads and enamel motifs (Clifford, 2002). These complex and large stones were sported by the members of royal families and other nobles, including wearing them on turbans and heads as well as on feet. Jewelry played not only an attractive role but also a signaling role. Mughal women used about thirty-seven different types of adornment Mughal ornaments Sis-Phul, which is a belt of multicolored types of raised, made from gold and silver, hollow ornaments and tone has many types of attachments. This was pinned at the crown of the hair and had a pearl drop which reached the forehead, joined by valuable stones made as suns, moons, stars or flowers. Other ornaments, many of which had ear ornaments attached to ears and reached nearly up to the shoulder, were made of gold, silver or Copper. The karna phul or the 'ear flowers' worn by royal ladies including zari, papal patti and peacock motifs are described by Abul Fazl.

Other forms of ornaments include those worn in the nose for instance the Besar mentioned by the Ain-i-Akbari. Above these were a large piece of gold with a pearl attachment at the end and the gold wire clasp for the nose hung forward. Although some modern historians question the use of these words, mughal women wore an array of Persian style gold and silver necklaces set

in gems and pearls including a necklace of five to seven rose shaped gold buttons placed on a silk thread. They also liked chains of gold beads and necklaces of pearls where many strands hang below the low belly. In Mughal culture, arms without ornaments were considered inauspicious or ill-fitted, so women wore bajuband armlets on the upper bend of the arm, the bands being about two inches in width and studded with stones. Pearl bands were also used as a bracelet, which wrapped several times around the wrist. Both silver and 9K gold plated silver anklets were worn, plain anklets were also embellished with stones, while others were engraved. They hung strings of small trinkets, gemstones or pearls inside the anklets and tiny gemstone toe rings were fastened to the anklets by jeweled strings (Kumar, 2006).

The fact that Mughal female fashion was quite similar to male fashion has been established long ago. They usually dressed in long, flowing jama (which is robe-like garments) with full sleeves, which was opened at the front. Under these robes, they had ankle-length vests and matched shoes; the women's hair and most of their faces were covered with a veil. During winter (coats) made of Kashmir shawl cloth were used as outer garments or overcoats, as the weather in those months became extremely cold. Thus in the harem the women wore veils that hid their entire body except for the face and the hands and outside the harem they wore burqa; an envelope which covers the entire body of the woman up to her eyes. The women of the Mughal zenana were financially also quite emancipated and most women had a lot of leisure time where many women traded in global markets. For example, Nur Jahan engaged in the selling of indigo, creating poems, creating fragrances, and creating distinguished apparels and textiles that shaped the stipulated trends. Later she taught the fine craft of white work known as Arabesque or chikan to the court of the Mughals and it became tremendously popular (Kumar, 2006).

Similar to cosmetics, perfume too was 'dear to the hearts of Indian women', especially those of the Mughal era; the specifics of which Jahangiri has given elaborately mentioning various types of perfumes and their prices in his *Ain-i-Akbari*. Akbar created the department of khana, Jahangir remembers the itr-i-Jahangir created by Nur Jahan's mother Asmat Banu Begum through rose petals. The Mughal zenana was also a place for women to socialize with one another, Akbar even created the Meena Bazaar for the women of the harem and himself. The cloistered nature of the Zenana meant that women from various provinces affected fashion decisions of the time. Every queen had her rooms and a monthly budget for cares, ornaments, and costumes (Sumita, 2013).

5.3. Costumes

The dress code of women of Mughal Empire was befitting the general standard of living and was influenced by social, economic and geographical region, and was also noticeable of their cultural and religious affiliations. Hindu women mostly dressed themselves in saris which are extended lengths of cloth worn around the middle of the body and over the shoulder. Saris weaved in length and quality; the rich women clad themselves in Muslin, silk or cotton sari and

the poorer women used jute or less expensive fabrics. Other styles of weaves discussed were Tasar, Ganga Jali, and Megh-Dambur; Bengali sarees had beautiful motifs such as Nilambari and Hiranman. Top class women wore their sari using an angiya or kanchuli, a form-fitting blouse wearing, which could use Dashavatar motifs (Mukherjee, 1972).

Muslim women wore trousers, tunic, and over them a scarf, the dupatta to cover the head and upper part of the body. While the elite wanted a lot of embroidery and elaborate embroidering on higher quality cloths, tunic had gold and silver threads. Royal women used to wear an additional garment, known as the qaba during winters while the common burqa was the full body sheet. Aurangzeb gave a brief ban on tight trousers wearing however this was reversed by Princess Jahanara (Sylvia, 2022).

Bengali women dressed up with rich and colourful sarees, bell-bells round the stomachs and some special styles of saree draping such as the kocha. Kashmiri women, for example, wore long tunics known as pattu through which they rarely bathed and a veil to cover their bodies. Some upper garments were seams for women of Orissa and the weakest classes used leaves for their clothes (Altekar, 1938).

Mughal women became patrons of art and decoration or indulged in painting and other forms of artistic output whenever they got a chance. Gulbadan Begum, in her Humayun Nama, spoke of how the royal women themselves were involved in embellishing the royal residence, palaces, gardens and other such areas especially during such occasions. But it was Nur Jahan who took Mughal decoration to heights even higher than those achieved by earlier Mughal emperors. One of the most creative and inspiring Mughal women of her time, Nur Jahan belonged to the creative lineage of women and she certainly understood harmony, symmetry and color as a creative option like nobody's business and this had an enlarging effect on Mughal art during her time. Her work is further evidence of how she came to be a most outstanding artistic individual who played a crucial role in the cultural historiography of the Mughal Empire.

She has worked dedicatedly for the growth of textiles, clothes, and jewelry designing during her era and for which she had a commendable work. She was particularly famous in the area of embroidery, which she applied in training and offering the requisite input to fashion textiles and dressing. The dress she designed was particularly for a female and gained much acclaim, making her even more recognized as the pioneer in Mughal designing. In her lifetime, she patronized several finely woven textiles among which were some innovations. She came up with affordable but sophisticated clothes for marriage for the lowly class people and these can be purchased at Rs. 25. She also fully designed a Carpet called as Farsh-i-Chandani or the 'Sandalwood Carpet' which was prominently popular throughout the area because of their complex geometrical patterns and beautiful colors many of which are today considered classic.

5.4. Mughal Queens Dress Codes

The costumes of the Mughals were always amazed with the richness of the ornaments and the extraordinary beauty of lines (Zaid and Zeenit, 2002). For more details one would have to go through the noble outfits, hairstyling, and jewelry system of early Mughal period, which had strong parks of Central Asia but fascinating cultural assimilation and dynamics process started during Akber's tenure bringing reforms and integration. This process began during Jahangir's rule and reached the peak during Shah Jahan rule with fresh and innovative dresses with gold and silver embroidery on it. But the communication progress of Aurangzeb's period was quite lower and the later Mughal period's civilised advancements transpired to the courts of the provinces. Fashion trends of the Mughal period remained popular even today (Rekha, 1967).

The earlier vision of the Mistresses of the royal courts during the rule of Babur and Humayun embodied the dress of Khurasan and centre Asian standard. The women of the emperor's household are described as appearing in wide, and very loose painted drawers superimposing. Begums of the Mughal period wore bright colours with lots of embellishment; style clearly echoing influence from Iran and Central Asia (Chopra, 1956).

According to Mannucci, each female garment was estimated at 40 to 50 rupees; even more, on some occasions. Bernier pointed out that a piece of dressing, especially one made from fine needles, could be priced at ten to twelve crowns and just as delicate, was not long-lasting. A good example to give on royal ladies who wore male clothes, is Nur Jahan where she is portrayed holding a matchlock and wearing what can only be described as male regalia.

The mode of dressing of women from this empire was also lavish not only limited to women of the royal chamber. By interacting in social life with many Hindu women during gatherings, Mughal women embraced different varieties of women's wear or garnets such as the sari. Roshan ara begum was known to wear a saree; however, angiyakurti, the new fashion for women, was initiated by Zebunissa during aurangzeb reign (Findly, 1993).

There were more Hindu and Muslims' festivals occasions that were observed loudly, and women from both groups appeared and even dressed similarly. As per the customs during the reign of Humayun, geisha was a headgear called 'taqi' that was a lofty cap and married woman covered her head with a 'taqi' and a or . A number of officials and their spouses were entertained by women of the royalty, while the emperors Sivaji and Shah Jahan arranged ladies only fairs known as Meena Bazaars. These events were also participated by Rajput women.

Clothing type principles related to the occasion styled symbols or tight-fitting pajamas or shalwars, cholis garments or bodices and garments, which have been oiled, semitransparent, open front and reached the ankles. were usually loose, and the material in the front opened at the neck and at times had V-shaped collars. These clothes such as the silks and cottons are having beautiful gold and jewel embroidery on the surface. It has also captured dancers dressed in muslim , churidar pajamas, odhanis, ghagras and cholis during dance parties. Certain sets had a , that is, a long sleeved coat which buttoned from the chest down to the waist, again the full

sleeved being worn in cooler countries. (!) Known as Kati-Mekhla or Chhudr-Kantika, the waist belts studded with precious stones were in use, as Abul Fazl points out (Henry, 1772).

The biography of Mughal Emperor Jahangir aggressively underlines the identity of Nur Jahan as one of the most influential figures that popularised Mughal fashion. These include Nur-Mahli bridal outfit, and other new light wears such as the dodami which were said to weigh as little as two dams. Her designs including Pancholia scarf took the place of odhani. She introduced new designs in badla, silk, and lace; some of her designs were Nur-Mahalli consisting of nobility and fineness and could be as cheap as 25 rupees.

5.5. Chikankari Introduced by Nur Jahan

Chikankari is a very fine form of hand embroidery regarded as very important in the tradition and art of the Indian subcontinent. This magnificent art form, which goes back to history, was probably created in the region of Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh (Shella, 1989). This tradition is nothing but exquisite Hand craft made in Chikankari embroidery, enhancing its supremacy, people love and admire this work in India and worldwide. Its background is lost in the annals of history, but perhaps the most familiar legend attributes the beginning of the art form to the Mughal empress Nur Jahan (Laila, 2007).

Chikankari means the delicate art of embroidery work which is completely based on detailing. The type of embroidery practiced in Chikan is recipes of fine white or pastel color threads, on sheer fabrics like muslin, cotton and silk etc. The use of chain stitch and satin stitch are made by hand by professionals to make floral motives and geometric designs. Each is an impressive characteristic of the artisan that with ornaments have motifs that refer to the so-called Mughal style of sophistication and grace.

Historical records regarding Chikankari's origin remain inconclusive as they pertain to Nur Jahan's direct role in its introduction, however, there is no denial in the fact that she was fond of exquisite work and baroque embroidery and in her position of a cultural melanger or a trend-setter and proclaimed taste-maker did bring polish to Chikankari. Her reign was characterized by integration of Persian and Central Asian influences with the Indiuvre arts which further enhanced Chikankari and the other crafts of that period.

Over the centuries women's work of Chikankari degenerated, but the art was handed down from one generation to another. All this led to the continuity of the craft to the extent that not only did the craft survive but grew from strength to strength, aurally, changing with fashion but never losing its core identity. Chikankari is now recognized all around the world as one of the finest and most beautiful forms of hand embroidery. Still, it is used as a source for modern fashion designers, while original craftsmen maintain traditional methods today (Ashok, 1992).

Over a period of 2 months, the Chikankari embroidery ways seem to teach a lot more than just how to make a piece of cloth. The story itself forms the fabric of India. It remains a testimony

of new art and culture and crafts as well as a living example of craftsmen's work. Thus, the pioneer of Chikankari has a connotation of Nur Jahan who promoted the arts of Chikankari but the real strength of the art belongs to an awe-inspiring number of Chikankari workers who enlighten the beauty of the art even today.

5. Conclusion

The power of Noor Jahan regarding the new changes to the Mughal textile arts and concerning women's dress sense was a significant change in the social history of India. By incorporating the glorious aspect of ancient Indian textiles, weaving techniques and embellishment containing features of Mughal traditions, Noor Jahan appears to have set up a new trend as a symbolic art form touching both social and political realms. Chikankari embroidery pioneered and the concept of the complex dressing codes of the Mughal queen marked a fine balance that she possesses between the modernity and the tradition. These contributions not only helped the women in getting better status at imperial harem but also signalled their position of strength in Mughal society. As the episode under discussion demonstrates, clothing transformed into an instrument with which confidence, high culture, and creativity could be expressed due to her extraordinary female patronage.

With textile art and fashion occupying the central position in the cultural construction of Mughal identity, Noor Jahan was contributing to further enshrinement of design as a tool of imperial assertion and segmentation of society. While she focused on the sophisticated details of garment work, as well as the richness of fabrics, which produced a new vision of Mughal clothing leaving a great legacy of Indian clothing. Her dual accomplishments affirm how textiles and fashion can go beyond their sensory actuality of aesthetic uses and significations, but also become an epitome of creative, political authority and amalgamation of cultures. From this work of Noor Jahan, we are given a reminder and example of how art, politics and identity intertwined to fashion the history of existence.

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