



QUEENS, PRINCESSES, AND POWER: REASSESSING WOMEN IN MUGHAL POLITICS

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RESEARCH ARTICLE



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Abstract

The Mughal Empire (1526-1857) is also a significant and popular research on its administrative systems, military conquests, and cultural accomplishments. Nevertheless, the political contributions of women and the same imperial setup have generally been downplayed. This paper investigates the role of royal women of the Mughal dynasty in politics and how queens, princesses, and empresses could shape administration by means of diplomacy, patronage, succession problems, and economic powers. The paper identifies leaders in the history of Mughal politics, including Hamida Banu Begum, Mariam-uz-Zamani, Nur Jahan, Jahanara Begum, and Roshanara Begum, through the narratives of history, memoirs, and the teaching of secondary scholars. The results indicate that, even though Mughal women were not formally employed in administrative offices, women had a strong informal influence, and the zenana is an important location of political bargaining.

Keywords: *Mughal Empire, Women's Politics, Harem, Zenana, Gender, Power*

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Introduction

The history of the Mughal Empire has long been of great interest to experts, historians, and the general public alike. Spanning three centuries (1526–1857), the Mughal dynasty ruled the political and cultural life of the Indian subcontinent, leaving behind the architectural grandeur, administrative elegance, and cultural syncretism ^[1]. Since 1526, when Babur conquered the State of Delhi, to 18th century, when imperial authority began to weaken, the empire underwent dramatic changes in its governance, society, and culture. However, on the history timeline of the Mughals, almost all the main characters have been emperors, courtiers, generals, and ministers; they were all men. Women, in comparison been cast to the outside; presumptions of isolation and motherhood have swept aside their input ^[2]. This unequal situation is a tribute to the patriarchal system of the Mughal court as well as the gender prejudice of future historians. The fact of the matter, however, is more complicated. The women of the Mughal family did not sit back and watch the action, but were fully participating in politics, diplomacy, and bureaucracy, thus determining the course of the empire, which is something that requires keen academic focus ^[3].

In order to realize women in Mughal politics, it is very important to reconsider the role of the zenana, imperial harem ^[4]. Traditionally, the zenana is the symbol of a female passivity that has been distorted in its traditional perception as a place of luxury and confinement. As a matter of fact, it was a very organized and politically charged institution. Queens, princesses, concubines, attendants, and slaves all worked within a highly structured hierarchy that was managed by senior women and was fenced off by eunuchs, all of this housed in the Mughal harem ^[5]. It was a place where individual closeness with the emperor might turn into political authority, factional alliances were formed, and where riches were handled at an unparalleled scale. Zanana was, in a much ways, a rival court that was closely united with other political and administrative systems of the empire ^[6]. This acknowledgement makes scholars go beyond the stereotype of female invisibility, therefore, observe the way women acted as power brokers, patrons, and decision-makers. The agency of Mughal women could have various forms. Cultural production was also used indirectly by some women, who influenced politics, like Gulbadan Begum, who, in her memoir, the Humayun-nama, recounted the life of her brother Humayun but also provided an insight into the problems of surviving in the

dynasty, court affairs, and the strength of Mughal women ^[7]. Other people, like Hamida Banu Begum, were powerful as conciliators and defenders of the continuity of the dynasty ^[8]. Others, like the Marians of the Zamani, proclaimed independent status by economic activity in which they owned trading ships and participated in foreign trade ^[9]. Nur Jahan was on the summit of female authority and reigned virtually with her husband Jahangir, and she issued farmans, even featured on coins. Subsequently, such princesses as Jahanara Begum and Roshanara Begum played a crucial role in the succession game between Dara Shikoh and Aurangzeb, thus proving the decisive role of women in the fate of the empire ^[10].

The role of women in Mughal politics is not only individual but on the structural level of the role played. They also came in favor of succession crises, usually balancing the two competitors of another. They controlled jagirs (land grants), property, and business affairs and thus equipped themselves with self-sufficient financial assets, which could be utilised in political ambitions. They served as the mediators between the court and the emperor groups, either leveling the disputes or, in some cases, fueling them. They also used symbolic power- in the form of architectural patronage, Sufi connections, and the issue of farmans to strengthen their political position. These processes point to the aspect of flexibility of the Mughal political culture, though being patriarchal, it had opportunities for women to exercise agency ^[11].

Meanwhile, the restrictions placed on Mughal women should be mentioned. It is hardly likely that they held office in office, as vizier, governor, or military commander. Their power depended on how close they were to the emperor and their status, even in the imperial family. The political lives of women could grow and decline with a drastic change in the change of dynasty and personal competitions ^[12]. An example is that when Jahangir died, the authority of Nur Jahan declined, and with the consolidation of power, Roshanara lost her power following the consolidation of the rule by Hatshepsut (Aurangzeb). In this way, although Mughal women might have a considerable amount of power, its nature was rather unstable and informal.

Indeed, the historiography of Mughal females has developed quite significantly over the past decades. The previous colonial historians had the tendency to depict them either as exotic court decorations or as a violent presence in the political arena whose participation in government affairs was deleterious. These stereotypes have, however, been criticized by modern scholarship. The agency of Mughal women is prefigured in the works of scholars like Ruby Lal, Ellison Banks Findly, and Lisa Balabanlilar, who focus on the role of Mughal women in influencing imperial politics and culture. These works make one aware of the necessity to consider not only women as exceptions but also women as part of Mughal politics ^[13-15]. Another way they highlight the difficulties of the methodology of studying women in a patriarchal empire is through the shortage of sources authored by women themselves and the lack of emphasis on their contributions by male chroniclers ^[13-15]. The significance of examining women in the politics of the Mughals is not limited to the scope of the history of gender, but the study adds value to the picture of the Mughal rule overall. The political ecology of the empire is further understood by looking at the way in which women brokered power, dealt with resources, and controlled what decisions the empire made. It also makes the story of patriarchy more complex, demonstrating how women were able not only to cut across systems of male dominance but also to circumvent them as well. It also emphasizes the mutual relationship between domestic and political levels of life, indicating that the zenana resembled the diwan-i-khas (hall of private audience) in terms of the negotiation levels ^[4, 6].

To frame this study, the questions to be used to direct the inquiry are as follows: How did Mughal women engage in political agency within the deficits of a patriarchal empire? How did they affect the governance: economic, diplomatic, or symbolic? How reliant were their positions on relationships with emperors, and to what extent were they based on general institutional frameworks? And lastly, what happens to our idea of the empire with the introduction of women in Mughal political history? This introduction thus preconditions the in-depth discussion of the role of Mughal women in politics. The subsequent sections will outline the methodology employed in this research, present case studies and thematic discussions of women's political engagements, and conclude with an assessment of their significance. By situating Mughal women within the larger political framework of the empire, the study seeks not only to recover their voices but also to reframe our understanding of Mughal politics as a gendered enterprise.

Methodology

Women in Mughal politics require an interdisciplinary and source-sensitive study. The roles of women are generally preserved only in the scattered records, memoirs, and here and there in official histories, unlike those of emperors and male courtiers, the lives of whom had been exhaustively documented. Accordingly, a cautious synthesis of primary sources, secondary scholarly and interpretative forms have been used to recreate the agency of Mughal royal women.

Primary Sources

The coating of analysis is based on the current Mughal writings. The fragmentary work based on a female perspective of the imperial family and the role of women in political transfers is presented in Gulbadan Begum's work Humayun-Nama, which is rather fragmentary. Akinghazem, Akbarnama, and the Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri give information on the power of royal women, albeit frequently through a male perspective. Furthermore, Persian court annals (histories), royal edicts (farmans) as well as numismatic material like coins minted in the name Nur Jahan can be useful indicators of female political presence.

Secondary Sources

The second stratum is based on the contemporary academic work. The political role of the zenana and its residents has been highlighted by historians like Ruby Lal, "Domesticity and Power in the Early Mughal World dropped out of view", and Ellison

Banks Findly, “Nur Jahan: Empress of Mughal India dropped out of view”). Their writings contain interpretive contexts of understanding the gendered power in the Mughal court. This paper uses their arguments in order to offset the silence and distortions of primary sources.

Analytical Approach

The approach uses a historical-analytical design, which incorporates the textual analysis with the contextual interpretation. It concentrates on the case studies of some well-known women: Hamida Banu Begum, Mariam-uz-Zamani, Nur Jahan, Jahanara Begum, and Roshanara Begum, who are the most vivid examples of political agency with various modes. These case studies will be placed in the institutional context of the *zanana*, which was a domestic and political area. The focus is on such mechanisms of influence as succession politics, economic autonomy, and symbolic authority.

Discussion

In the Mughal Empire, the focus of scholarship has long been on the emperors, court male courtiers and nobles. Patriarchal society and isolation of space did not permit women to assume a political role and they long were thought to be irrelevant politically. This account was strengthened by colonial historians, who depicted the harem as a hedonistic cage whereby women end up being passive decorations. But a closer reading of sources, including the books of Gulbadan Begum, the *Humayun-nama*, as well as those of European travellers, and coins bearing the name Nur Jahan and coins bearing the name *farmans*, give us a very different narration. Mughal women were not just a peripheral area of imperial politics, they were both participants of the succession maneuvers, diplomacy brokers, trade and purveyors of culture. The discussion below raises some examples of women who lived during the Mughal and how each one of them managed to work around her patriarchal system to have an impact. It seeks to leave behind the personal biography to represent trends of female power and place them in the broader political ecology of the empire.

1. *Khanzada Begum (c. 1478–1545): Custodian of Dynastic Legitimacy*

The starting point is a significant Khanzada Begum, who was a sister to Babur. Before the formation of the Mughal Empire in India, there was the struggle that Babur had to encounter in Central Asia. The political value of Khanzada was associated with her manner of negotiating on behalf of the dynasty: she got married to the opposing warlords because of the political expediency and made personal sacrifices in order to carve out the future of Babur. When Babur had made his way and established in India, she appeared as a respected stateswoman and later counselling be to Humayun in the tumultuous years after the demise of Babur. Modern historians accentuate her esteem and power, mentioning that she enjoyed obedience of nobles, and was even a negotiator of conflicts. Her character depicts how women were hard and indispensable to the existence of the empire even prior to the establishment of the empire. The early Mughal household, as described by Ruby Lal is both a residential and a political unit and the women such as Khanzada were the ones that maintained stability in a dynasty ^[16, 17].

2. *Maham Anga (d. 1562): Foster Mother and Regent in Akbar's Youth*

Maham Anga shows the way in which non-royal women may also be powerful. She, being the wet nurse and foster mother of Akbar, had tremendous influence as Akbar was in his minority. She was the regent and dominated the court appointments; her own men were promoted and she also hoped to increase her family influence by her son, Adham Khan. She conspicuously featured in the early court, and chroniclers of the Mughal described her as scheming and ambitious in numerous cases. This was her own undoing when Adham Khan assassinated a general, which angered Akbar, who ordered him to be executed, and he fell out of favor with Maham Anga. However, during a transitory season, she was the embodiment of a possible solution to the problem of foster kinship as the path to power. Another theme of her narrative is the instability of this kind of power- too much reliant upon the favour of the emperor and too prone to influence in the court ^[18, 19].

3. *Gulbadan Begum (1523–1603): Historian of the Household*

A female-authored text is very rare, and the only one that survived was the work left by Gulbadan Begum, daughter of Babur and sister of Humayun, the *Humayun-nama*. Even though she was not directly involved in the governance, her memoir was in itself a political action. It gives detailed descriptions of the exile of Humayun, challenges that women had to endure during campaigning, and how the imperial family stood up. Her account anticipates women being actors in political shifts, as even professionals (Humayun is guided into exile and survival is bargained by her) she goes with her. Documenting these events, Gulbadan created the context in which the subsequent generations, such as Akbar himself, perceived the history of their dynasty. Harbans Mukhia has presented a claim that the text by Gulbadan can be interpreted as a challenge to male monopoly in writing history which also proves that female authors also created political memory ^[7, 20].

4. *Hamida Banu Begum (1527–1604): The Matriarch and Mediator*

Spouse of Humayun and the mother of Akbar, Hamida Begum depicts the female power politics of the Mughals. She was married when Humayun was in exile and her fortitude led to the future of the dynasty since she kept Akbar safe. Akbar was just in his teenage years in 1556 when Humayun passed away and left Akbar at the throne. In 1556 Hamida, Banu was the one who took the role of the guardian and middle person. She is equally respected even in the reign of Akbar as she was an elderly matriarch. Nobles used to seek her advice during periods of conflict and she would offer

some stability during political unrest. The fact that she is buried in the Tomb of Humayun with her husband shows her rank ^[21, 22].

5. *Mariam-uz-Zamani (Harka Bai, Jodha Bai) (1542–1623): Economic and Diplomatic Authority*

Mariam-uz-Zamani, the Rajput mistress of Akbar is not just remembered as the mother of Jahangir, but also as an effective economic player. Other than her representation in closing the alliance between the Mughals and the Rajput, she dominated a lot of wealth in her own trading activities. According to Portuguese accounts and Jesuit reports, she had a fleet of ships that were involved in a sea trade across the Indian Ocean carrying spices, textiles and other luxurious items. This provided her with great political power because she had an independent economic foundation. She was able to provide religious and charitable endowment and shape imperial trade policies, sponsor architecture and finance it. Her participation in trade was also an indication of a wider Mughal receptiveness to female financial freedom. According to Ellison Banks Findley, Mariam-uz-Zamani was in-between the domestic queenship and international diplomacy, so the zenana was connected with the international trade routes ^[21, 22].

6. *Nur Jahan (1577–1645): Sovereign in All but Name*

The most vivid case of the direct female rule in the Mughal Empire is Nur Jahan. She was born to the Persian immigrants as Mehr-un-Nissa, and she was married to Jahangir in 1611 and became a prominent person soon. She was able to rule the empire successfully in excess of ten years. Her power was not hidden. They minted coins in her name- a marvellous claim to sovereignty in a woman. She gave out farmans in her own seal, nominated officials, and established alliances with nobles like her father, Itimad-ud-Daula and brother Asaf Khan. She engaged herself in military campaigns, the most popular being when Jahangir fought Mahabat Khan. The European voyagers like Sir Thomas Roe were amazed by her power, and she was the one who was actually running the throne of Jahangir. Although other chroniclers focused on her dominance in a negative light, the contemporary historians, such as Findly, view her as a ruler who was able to employ the imperial power effectively. Nur Jahan transformed the concept of queenship by demonstrating that female rulers were able to fit in Mughal political systems provided that they met some conditions ^[23-25].

7. *Mumtaz Mahal (1593–1631): Intimate Adviser and Symbolic Presence*

The Taj Mahal is the most memorable thing that reminds us of Mumtaz Mahal, the chief consort of Shah Jahan. But her power was not limited to love affairs to politics. Modern sources tell that she provided advice to Shah Jahan on appointments in the court, and was the one who was reliable in governance. She even went out on campaigns alongside him, which further strengthened the perception of alliance in the ruling. The memory of the young Shah Jahan was used as a tool of politics, and her death at a tender age devastated the king. Although the Taj Mahal was a personal mausoleum, it also broadcast imperial stability, grandeur, and piety. Mumtaz still managed to influence the cultural and political identity of the empire through her symbolic afterlife. Her example shows how the affective and symbolic aspects of the queenship might have long-term political implications ^[26, 27].

8. *Jahanara Begum (1614–1681): Princess, Politician, and Sufi Patron*

Being the firstborn daughter of Shah Jahan, Jahanara became Padshah Begum, practically the first lady in the empire after the demise of her mother. She managed a great amount of wealth and funded significant architectural works, and served as an advisor to her father. She backed Dara Shikoh in 1657-58, when he had a succession war and she funded his campaign and used her spiritual authority by affiliating with the Chishti Sufi. The fact that she patronized the Ajmer Sharif dargah provided her with strength in terms of being seen as a political and a spiritual leader. After the victory of Aurangzeb, she still had her voice and she went ahead to reconcile with Aurangzeb and proceed with her cultural projects like Chandni Chowk in Delhi. The fusion of religion and politics in the role of Mughal queen is explained by historians as a woman who was both spiritually charismatic and politically pragmatic, which was Jahanara ^[28, 29].

9. *Roshanara Begum (1617–1671): Pragmatic Strategist*

Roshanara, younger sister of Jahanara, chose a different path in the succession struggle. Aligning with Aurangzeb, she secretly informed him of Dara Shikoh's military plans, tipping the balance in his favor. In return, Aurangzeb rewarded her with land, wealth, and political privileges. Her story reflects the pragmatism of Mughal princesses, who made calculated choices to secure their survival. However, once Aurangzeb consolidated power, Roshanara's influence declined, demonstrating the precariousness of female political fortunes. Unlike Jahanara, whose Sufi patronage ensured enduring respect, Roshanara's career reveals the risks of relying solely on factional politics ^[30, 31].

10. *Zeb-un-Nissa Begum (1638–1702): Intellectual Resistance*

Zeb-un-Nissa, Aurangzeb's eldest daughter, represents the intellectual and cultural dimension of female politics. Writing poetry under the pen name "Makhfi" ("the Hidden One"), she cultivated literary circles that celebrated Sufi mysticism. Her ideas contrasted with Aurangzeb's orthodoxy, positioning her as a subtle critic of his rule. Eventually, her sympathies with rebellious factions led to her imprisonment, but her poetry survived, shaping Mughal cultural memory. Zeb-un-Nissa illustrates how women could participate in politics not only through direct governance but also through ideological resistance and cultural patronage ^[32, 33].

Thematic Patterns: Across these ten women, several recurring themes emerge:

- a) Dynastic Mediation and Stability – Khanzada, Hamida Banu, and Maham Anga ensured continuity during instability.
- b) Economic Power and Diplomacy – Mariam-uz-Zamani and Jahanara mobilized wealth for political leverage.

- c) Direct Governance – Nur Jahan ruled in practice, showing the system's flexibility.
- d) Succession Politics – Jahanara and Roshanara decisively shaped the outcome of dynastic struggles.
- e) Symbolic Authority – Mumtaz Mahal's memory and architectural patronage projected political legitimacy.
- f) Intellectual Engagement – Gulbadan (as historian) and Zeb-un-Nissa (as poet) inserted female voices into political discourse.

Historiographical Debates: Colonial authors tended to represent such women as Nur Jahan as dangerous usurpers, who interpreted political activities in a negative way. However, this prejudice has been confronted by modern historians. Ruby Lal underlines the political nature of the Mughal court; Ellison Banks Findly reassesses Nur Jahan as an effective ruler; Lisa Balabanlilar focuses on the performance and symbolism of being a queen. Collectively, these views indicate that Mughal women were not exceptions but parts of the imperial politics. As they represent the sister of Babur to the daughter of Aurangzeb, the lives of these ten women illustrate the scope of the female political agency in the Mughal world.

Mughal women played the key role in the functioning of the empire whether it was under the control of the dynasties, direct ruling, economic enterprises, succession wars, or cultural sponsorship. Instead of being mere cogs in the zenana, they influenced the politics of the empire in the most critical situations and left their legacy that can never be ignored in the complete history of the Mughal empire.

Conclusion

The history of the Mughal Empire is mostly told by the names of its emperors, military leaders, and male nobles, but the facts that are exhibited during this study leave no doubt that one cannot complete the story without mentioning the part of women. Quite the contrary, women of the Mughal dynasty were always active, involved in the political, economic, diplomatic, and cultural life and left their marks that transformed the course of the empire. Even the zenana, often distorted as an object of silence and seclusion, was a potent political institution. It was an ordered space in which the access to the emperor was strictly regulated, resources were concentrated and reallocated, as well as networks developed, extending into the court and even further. Females negotiated this area in a strategic manner relying on their positions in the family, economic independence, spiritual support, and symbolic power and influence to shape issues of governance. The ten influential women have been discussed in case studies; this depicts the number of different ways in which they were able to contribute to politics. Khanzada Begum preserved the dynasty at its initial years, and Maham Anga exercised her foster friendship with Akbar to exert her will upon him in his minority. Gulbadan Begum kept the history of the dynastic conflict in her memoir, and Hamida Banu Begum made sure her son Akbar survived in the times of crisis. Mariam-uz-Zamani extended Mughal influence to world trade, and Nur Jahan reestablished her control over the empire by becoming a direct authority of the empire. Mumtaz Mahal was not a ruler, but impacted the imperial politics in a very close way through her close advice and symbolic inheritance. Jahanara Begum rallied wealth and religious patronage on behalf of Dara Shikoh, and Roshanara Begum changed the succession by taking sides with Aurangzeb. Another kind of politics, but a different kind, was Zeb-un-Nissa, who was put behind bars due to her independent thinking, yet her poetry and learning were her way to oppose the orthodoxy. When combined, these women demonstrate the extent and the scope of female political agency in the Mughal centuries.

Their tactics of influence were varied and regular. Others acted as negotiators of warring groups to ensure peace; others as lords of estates and jagirs, and even of trading ships, in an economy as independent as nobles, and capable of competing with them. Some of them, and especially Nur Jahan, issued farmans and had coins minted in their names, demonstrating that the Mughal system could, under certain conditions, admit the direct sovereignty of women. The number of people that were involved in the succession politics shifted the balance in dynasties wars that defined the future of the empire. The legitimacy of imperial power was influenced by others who sculpted cultural fabrics by constructing mosques, gardens, and markets or by identifying themselves with Sufi networks, which gave them spiritual power. Others, such as Gulbadan and Zeb-un-Nissa, also shaped politics with the word of God, introducing the female voice into history and literature. These tactics indicate that Mughal women were not exceptions, but they were part of the political ecology of the empire. Their power, however, was limited, too. The Mughal women did not hold official offices, whether in the administration or military, as was the case with male nobles. Their power was mostly unofficial, based on their closeness to emperors or the position of motherhood, wives, or daughters. This rendered their strength tentative, which could be destroyed at any time without much notice, with the death of an emperor, the decline of interest or the unification of new rulers. The fall of Maham Anga following the insurrection of her son, the shadowing of Nur Jahan following the death of Jahangir, and the relegation of Roshanara when no longer required by Aurangzeb portray the weakness of female power. Nevertheless, these instances do not undermine their importance; on the contrary, they emphasize the structural constraints within which women were able to playfully manipulate to create room for agency. The recognition of these roles compels the revision of Mughal rule. The emperors did not run the empire but relationships supported the empire and women had inseparable roles. The results of succession, the alliances of dynasties, negotiations of peace, and projects of culture were also marked with the female intervention. The zenana was not in insularity of the court but it was related with the court, a parallel place where politics was plotted and power was exercised. Realizing this, the history of the Mughal Empire is enriched and more precise, more true to the realities of the gendered political system.

The past history of Mughal women has changed radically over the last several decades. The harem was exoticized by colonial authors or demonized potent women like Nur Jahan as rebellious upstart women. Instead, women's agency has been emphasized by modern historians. Ruby Lal has demonstrated the fact of the household itself being a political space, Ellison Banks Findly

has rebuilt the reign of Nur Jahan into one of legitimacy, and Lisa Balabanlilar has highlighted the symbolic value of queenship as a part of Mughal identity. This work contributes to that scholarship by interweaving several examples over centuries together and demonstrating that female influence was not a singular case but an ordinary and structural phenomenon of Mughal politics. When Mughal women are put into a broader world context, there are some significant similarities as well. The Ottoman Empire experienced the era of the Sultanate of Women during which consorts and queen mothers influenced the imperial policy. Royal women took part in the diplomacy and succession conflicts in Safavid Iran. The case of Mughal falls into the broader history of early modern Islamic empires in which women, despite limited political power, were unquestionably powerful. Meanwhile, some of the characteristics, like the maritime trading activities of Marians-uz-Zamani or the literary opposition of Zeb-un-Nissa, demonstrate some unique variants of agency that grew beyond the schemes observed elsewhere.

The general implications of this research are two. First, it shows that Mughal politics were never male and always entailed a contact between genders, though that conversation was organized according to the hierarchy and segregation. Second, it emphasizes the necessity of altering the history of politics as such. When governance is understood as simply as possession of office or military control, women do not seem to be there; when it is understood as more inclusive, as having an impact, making legitimacy, and managing resources, women come out at the center. The Mughal Empire, as understood in this context, was not only supported by emperors and the nobles but the clever interventions of their women.

Ultimately, the works of Khanzada, Maham Anga, Gulbadan, Hamida Banu, Mariam the-Zamani, Nur Jahan, Mumtaz Mahal, Jahanara, Roshanara, and Zeb-un-Nissa help us to remember that history cannot be reduced to the efforts of men only. Women made dynasties stable, funded wars, determined alliances, legitimized rulers, and kept memories alive. Their authority can have been informal, relational, and even weak, yet it was transformative. The recovery of their stories does not only mean inclusion of women in the past but rather reshaping the concept of Mughal politics into a collective undertaking that involves women and men. The history of the Mughal Empire is incomplete without recognizing its influence on it, and even better, it is more complete, more complex, and more authentic to the reality of early modern South Asia.

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