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## Political and Economic Roles of Rajput Women in the Mughal Statecraft (16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries India)

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### ABSTRACT

The entry of Rajput ladies into the imperial Mughal Empire played a significance role in shaping the political and economic landscape of the Mughals and had its own interested history in Medieval India. Although they lived within the confines of the royal household, but some rare women were far from passive figures. Instead, they acted as important links between the Mughal court and the powerful Rajput states of North India. This present study explores the various roles played by Rajput queens within the imperial Mughal Empire framework, and their influence beyond the walls of their residential area. Especially under the rule of Akbar and Jahangir, Rajput princesses entered in the Mughal court and became principal mediators of political diplomacy, strengthening ties between the Mughal throne and regional Rajput states. The participation of Rajput women in imperial Mughal court contributed to the consolidation of imperial power and provides a unique status between Mughals and Rajput states. Economically, their resources and properties allowed them to influence community economics, local trade, and drive altruistic initiatives. By examines contemporary accounts, court records, and translated works, this study re-evaluates the legacy of Rajput queens in the royal Mughal Empire and highlights their vital contribution in shaping the political, and economic traditions of the Mughal Empire.

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## I

Rajput ladies has a special importance in the history of the Mughal Empire (1526-1707 A.D.). Present research aimed to study the significance of Rajput women who were part of the Mughals during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries in India. Generally, Rajput women were brought into the royal Mughal court through political marriages or alliances between Mughals and Rajputs. This work shows the important roles of Rajput women in political, and economic life. Special attention will be given to prominent historical figures and Rajput wives of Mughal Emperors such as Mariam-uz-Zamani also known as Harka Bai (1542-1623 A.D.), Rajput princess of Amer, Rajkumari Man Bai known as a Shah Begum (1570-1604 A.D.), daughter of Raja Bhagwan Das and granddaughter of Raja Bihari Mal of Amber, and Jagat Gosain also known as Jodh Bai (1570-1619) of Marwar.

Jalaluddin Muhammad Akbar was a great Emperor in the History of the Mughals, and treated well to his Hindu wives well. The Rajput women of Akbar played significant roles in various aspects. One of the most famous Rajput princesses was Mariam-uz-Zamani, a very active lady in the Mughal court. She contributed greatly to the Mughal activities. She was the eldest daughter of Raja Bihari Mal of Amber,<sup>i</sup> and the first Rajput lady to marry Akbar in 1562 A.D. as a part of a political alliance. She is commonly referred to by historians as Jodha Bhai and Harka Bhai. After marriage, she was given the title of "*Mariam-uz-Zamani*", which means "*Mary of the Age*". Some other Rajput wives of Akbar were the daughter of Kanha (the brother of Rai Kalyan Mal of Bikaner),<sup>ii</sup> the daughter of Rawal Har Rai of Jaisalmer,<sup>iii</sup> the princess of Merta and Dungepur, and the sister of Rana Udai Singh of Marwar.

The first Hindu wife of Nuruddin Muhammad Jahangir (1569-1627 CE), known as Prince Salim, was the daughter of Raja Bhagwan Das of Amber, Man Bai. Raja Bhagwan Das was then the governor of Punjab<sup>iv</sup> (Raja Bhagwan Das held the governorship of Punjab from 1582-1589 A.D.). This marriage took place on 13 February 1585 and was conducted in both Hindu and Muslim styles.<sup>v</sup> She has a warm corner in Salim's heart. After the birth of her first son, Khusrau, she was bestowed with the title of "*Shah Begum*". Overcome by emotions, she ended her life on May 6, 1606, when Khusrau revolted against Jahangir. Another Rajput wife of Jahangir was the daughter of Ray Rai Singh of Bikaner and granddaughter of Ray Kalyan Mal, who was married to Prince Salim in 1586, when he was only 17 years of age. In the same year, in June 1586, Jahangir married to daughter of the Mota Raja Udai Singh and granddaughter of Raja Maldeva of Marwar, Jagat Gosain, known as Jodh Bai, Man Bai or Mira Bai.<sup>vi</sup> She passed away during Jahangir's lifetime, who gave her the title of "*Bilas Makani*" (*lady of pure abode*). She was the mother of Shahjahan.<sup>vii</sup> The daughter of Keshav Das Rathore, Karamsi, and the daughter of



Jagat Singh (eldest son of Raja Man Singh), daughter of Rawal Bhim (brother of Raja Kalyan Mal of Jaisalmer), were the other Rajput wives of Jahangir who used to stay in the royal Mughal court of the Empire.

## II

Mariam-uz-Zamani had the good fortune of becoming the mother of Salim, the future Emperor. The relatives of Rajput ladies were also given high posts in the Mughal administration. Her father, Raja Bihari Mal, was given the highest rank of the official aristocracy, as a “*Mansabdar of 500 horses.*”<sup>viii</sup> Later, her brother Raja Bhagwan Das was given the title of “*Amir-ul-Umara*” and her nephew, Raja Man Singh, was appointed a “*Mansabdar of the rank of 7000*”. Whereas such high positions were given only to Akbar’s son, Salim, and Daniyal.

Mughal royal women, including Rajput women, possessed considerable wealth, often exercising significant economic agency within the Empire. The extent of their wealth and resources were closely correlated with their proximity and importance to the Emperor. Mughal royal women, were given regular allowances and maintenance grants to cover their expenses. These payments came from the imperial treasury and reflected their high status in the royal household. The funds allowed them to manage their own needs, support charitable works, and take part in cultural activities. As Mannucci said, “women were granted pensions based on their lineage and status within the imperial hierarchy. These allowances were often supplemented by generous gifts as funds for luxuries such as betel, perfumes, or footwear”.<sup>ix</sup> Some important Rajput women received large jagirs (land grants) from the Emperor, making them economically powerful. Women like Mariam-uz-Zamani used this wealth to support religious and educational activities, also known as to spread education among common people.<sup>x</sup> Their ownership of Jagirs shows that women in the Mughal court could hold real power and influence beyond the walls of their palace.

Mughal ladies, included Hindu Rajput also took part in many different pastimes and creative tasks. They constructed luxurious palaces for themselves, while also establishing markets, caravanserais, and stunning gardens that transformed the urban landscape of their Empire’s capital cities. Noble women from the royal family engaged in high-level trade and accumulated significant wealth in the international shipping trade. Many of them engaged in both international and local business ventures. Rajput women also participated in commercial activities spanning both foreign and domestic markets. They also owned ships that carried on sea trade on their behalf.



Jodha Bai (Mariam-uz-Zamani), was the owner of a huge fleet of ships that sailed to Mecca. She was greatly interested in the trade and commerce and was the first lady who participate directly in it. “*Rahimi*” is the largest ship in this fleet. Jagdish Narain Sarkar called the ship “*Rahimi of Surat*.”<sup>xi</sup> Sometimes foreigners call it “*Ramee*”<sup>xii</sup> and John Jourdian calls it “*Beheme*”.<sup>xiii</sup> The vessel facilitated the transportation of approximately 1500 individuals, including both passengers and religious pilgrims, to the ports of Mecca or Jeddah, serving as key maritime gateways to the holy city of Mecca. In William Finch’s words, “The Emperor’s mother, along with agents acting on her behalf, engaged in extensive commercial activities. At that time, one of her vessels was being prepared for departure to Mocha”.<sup>xiv</sup> *Rahimi* played a significant role in the transregional trade networks by exporting a variety of high-demand products, including cotton, indigo, silk, leather, metals, carpets, opium, and precious jewels. In return, they facilitated the import of luxury items, comprised gold, silver, ivory, pearls, amber, perfumes, wines, intricately woven brocade fabrics, refined cutlery, and decorative glassware, sourced from diverse international markets. This exchange highlights the intersection of economic activity and elite consumption patterns in medieval and early modern trade. *Rahimi* also facilitated the travel arrangements for pilgrims performing the Hajj, providing essential transport services to Mecca.

The Mughal Emperors recognized the significance of women’s participation in trade and accordingly implemented measures to facilitate their commercial activities. Comprehensive arrangements were made to offer them optimal trading infrastructure, alongside protective measures to ensure the safety of their merchandise and vessels.

The incorporation of Rajput women into the Mughal Empire through matrimonial alliances also precipitated significant transformations in the Mughal economy. The marriage of Prince Salim with Man Bai of Amber contributed substantial wealth to Akbar’s treasury as part of her matrimonial dowry.<sup>xv</sup> The dowry was established at seventy-five lakh tankas in the marriage alliance with Jagat Gosain of Marwar.<sup>xvi</sup> Subsequent to this matrimonial alliance, Udai Singh (father of Jagat Gosain) was formally bestowed the honorific title of “*Raja*”, and in addition, he was assigned a mansab of 1000 zat.<sup>xvii</sup> Jagat Gosain’s brothers and nephews also received royal favors. With help from the Mughal Empire, Udai Singh defeated the vassals of Marwar and brought them under control. As a result, he gained considerable wealth in the form of tribute. Historical accounts suggest that Udai Singh extended his full cooperation to Akbar in furthering the Mughal Empire’s political objectives. In recognition of his loyalty and administrative capabilities, Udai Singh was entrusted with the governance of Lahore in 1592.<sup>xviii</sup>



On 28 May 1586, Salim, future Emperor Jahangir, was married to the daughter of Rai Singh, the ruler of Bikaner. This wedding took place at Fatehpur Sikri. The dowry provided by this marriage amounted to 2,50,000 rupees.<sup>xxix</sup> In 1608, Emperor Jahangir entered into a matrimonial alliance with the daughter of Jagat Singh of Amber. This marriage was conducted at the residence of Mariam-uz-Zamani, underscoring her prominent status within the Mughal imperial household. This union appears to have been initiated largely due to Jahangir's personal interest and political considerations. As part of the customary ceremonial exchange, the Emperor presented Jagat Singh with a marriage gift amounting to 80,000 rupees, symbolizing imperial favor and reinforcing the alliance between the Mughal court and the Rajput nobility. European tapestries of great beauty were sent to Jagat Singh from the port of Cambay,<sup>xxx</sup> showing the importance of the port in luxury trade and cultural exchange. Man Singh, the bride's grandfather, presented sixty elephants as part of the dowry, reflecting both his wealth and the cultural practices of the time.<sup>xxxi</sup>

### III

Entry of Rajputs or Hindu women into the Mughal Empire was not a tradition started during the Mughal period, but it was a popular practice since the time of the Delhi Sultanate. During the Delhi Sultanate period, Hindu ladies were also part of their Sultanate.<sup>xxii</sup> The marriage of the Khilji Sultan Alauddin Khilji (1296-1316 CE) with the Kamla Devi (wife of Rai Karan Baghela of Gujarat) was the first example of this practice.<sup>xxiii</sup> The daughter of Ram Chandra Dev was also married to Alauddin Khilji.<sup>xxiv</sup> His son, Khizr Khan, was married to Deval Devi, the daughter of Rai Karan.<sup>xxv</sup> Apart from this, just as many Mughal Emperors were the children of Rajput women, similarly, some sultans of the Delhi Sultanate were also born to Hindu women. Sultan Firoz Shah Tughlaq (reign 1351-1388 CE) was the son of a Rajput lady, and Sikandar Lodhi's (reign 1489-1517 CE) mother was also a Hindu woman. However, the ladies' entry into the Delhi Sultanate had a notable or significant impact, but sultans were yet to recognize the value of a blended culture.

But, the contribution of Rajput women in the Mughal Empire was not limited to inside the walls. This research tries to show how these women have played important roles in the Mughal Empire, contributing to political stability, and economic development. The matrimonial relations between them were not just personal relations but strategic moves that united the Mughals and Rajput kingdoms, brought peace and encouraging collaboration between the two major ruling groups in India at that time.

Politically, these women acted as important links between their birth families and the Mughal rulers, and their unique positions gave them the ability to mediate during conflicts and influence



decisions at the highest levels. Economically, Rajput women had access to personal wealth through gifts, land grants, and revenues from jagirs. Women also actively participated in trade and commerce and used this wealth to fund religious institutions and charitable works. Their patronage helped in the growth of local economies and the spread of art and learning. In short, Rajput women also were influential figures whose roles went far beyond their expected domestic duties. Rajput women in the Mughal harem were not limited to matrimonial alliances, but through political negotiation, and economic support, they helped to shape the Mughal Empire in significant ways.

### Notes And References:

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- <sup>iii</sup> Ibid, pp.518-519.
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<sup>xvi</sup> C.M. Agarwal, *Studies in Medieval Indian History*, Jalandhar, 1988, pp. 48-49.

<sup>xvii</sup> Ibid, p.49.

<sup>xviii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xix</sup> H. Beveridge, *The Akbarnama of Abu-l- Fazal (tr)*, vol.II, p.364.

<sup>xx</sup> Soma Mukherjee, *Royal Mughal Ladies And Their Contribution*, p.129.

<sup>xxi</sup> Alexander Rogers, *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri (tr)*, vol.I, pp. 144-145.

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<sup>xxiii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xxiv</sup> Ibid., p.12

<sup>xxv</sup> Ibid.