

**THE ISSUE OF REPRESENTING THE MUGHAL ERA IN GULBADAN BEGUM'S WORK
"HUMAYUNNAMA"**

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Abstract: This article analyzes Gulbadan Begum, one of the most prominent female figures of the Mughal era, and her work "Humayunnama." In this historical source, Gulbadan Begum recounts key events of the dynasty based on her personal memories and heard accounts. The work contains valuable information about the lives of Babur and Humayun, as well as the inner life of the royal court. The article highlights "Humayunnama" as an important written source in the study of Mughal history.

Keywords: Gulbadan Begum, Humayunnama, Mughals, royal court, historical source, India, cultural heritage.

Introduction.

The Mughal dynasty, one of the major empires in the history of India during the 16th–18th centuries, brought significant political and cultural changes to the region. Numerous historical sources exist for the study of this period, among which the memoirs of the dynasty's members hold a special place. One such work is Humayun-Nama, written in Persian by Gulbadan Begum. This book not only presents historical facts but also vividly reflects the inner life of the Mughal court, including family relationships and political processes. Gulbadan Begum composed the work at the request of Emperor Akbar, compiling valuable historical details about the reigns of Babur, Humayun, and Akbar.

This article analyzes how political and social processes of the Mughal era are depicted in Gulbadan Begum's "Humayun-Nama" examining the stylistic features of the work as well as its connection to historical accuracy.

Main Part.

Gulbadan Begum, a prominent member of the Mughal dynasty, was born in 1523 in the city of Kabul. According to historical sources, she was the daughter of Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur and his wife Dildar Begum. Dildar Begum's real name was Soliha Sultan Begum, and she was the daughter of Babur's uncle, Sultan Muhammad Mirza. Historical records emphasize that Babur treated this daughter with great affection and valued her highly [1].

Gulbadan Begum's mother, Dildar Begum, was in fact Soliha Sultan Begum, the daughter of Sultan Mahmud Mirza — the uncle of Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur. According to the tradition established in

medieval court life, royal children who showed an interest in learning were usually entrusted to the care of a senior princess. Consequently, Gulbadan Begum was raised under the patronage of Princess Mahim Begum. Mahim Begum was one of the most educated and cultured women of her time, providing Gulbadan Begum with the opportunity to be educated in the circle of scholars. Having been brought up from an early age under her guidance, Gulbadan Begum refers to her biological mother as “Dildar Begum” and to Mahim Begum as “my lady mother” in her Humayun-Nama [2]. The Humayun-Nama vividly depicts the inner political life of the Mughal era, the relationships among members of the dynasty, and distinctive aspects of the court’s educational system. Its uniqueness lies in the fact that it was written directly by a member of the dynasty, offering an insider’s perspective on historical events.

In Humayun-Nama, the inner life of the Mughal court, political events, and important information concerning the activities of Humayun and his son Akbar are presented. Gulbadan Begum composed this work at the behest of Emperor Akbar; in it she discusses the court’s daily life, relations among members of the dynasty, journeys, and military campaigns in detail and with a literary approach. [3]

In the introduction of Humayun-Nama, Gulbadan Begum explains the reasons for writing the work and her chosen style. According to her, the idea of composing the book arose directly from the order of Emperor Akbar. She notes that she was only eight years old at the time of Babur’s death and could therefore recall only certain events from that period. Nevertheless, she based her narrative on stories she had heard, family traditions, and the details preserved in her own memory. In the opening pages, one can sense the sense of responsibility with which Gulbadan Begum undertook this task. She states that she wished to write about her father Babur as “blessed and happy memories” and felt it necessary to recall him again, even if such accounts had already been recorded. This reveals not only her commitment to historical truth but also her deep respect for the dynasty’s legacy and her personal emotional connection to it.

Moreover, the introduction highlights a distinctive feature of Humayun-Nama that sets it apart from other historical works: events are presented not only in an external chronological sequence but also from the perspective of inner court life, emotional states, and relationships among family members [4]. It is precisely this aspect that makes Humayun-Nama a unique and valuable source for studying the history of its era.

According to the accounts in Humayun-Nama, women played an active role in court life during Humayun’s reign. Notably, on festive and ceremonial occasions, they wore male attire—contrary to traditional expectations—and took part in activities such as horseback riding and tent-pegging competitions. In addition, women actively engaged in archery practice, which encouraged their physical preparedness and vitality. The work also emphasizes that women were not merely participants in court life but also played a significant role in decision-making processes. Their personal opinions and will, especially in matters of family and marriage, were taken into consideration [5]. This reflects relatively progressive social attitudes for the time and demonstrates that women in the Mughal court enjoyed a notably strong social status.

In Humayun-Nama, the author provides important details about Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur’s personal qualities, his attitude toward family members, the political events of the final stage of his life, his illness, and his death. The work also covers the political and social processes that took place during

the reign of Humayun until 1555 [6]. It presents clear and well-founded information about the personal lives of Babur and Humayun, particularly Humayun's relationships with his brothers, as well as certain aspects of the family environment. These elements form the core content of the work.

Abu'l-Fazl, the renowned historian and court scholar of Emperor Akbar, provides important information about Gulbadan Begum's life in his work Akbarnama. According to his account, Gulbadan Begum set out on a pilgrimage to Mecca in 1575 and returned from this long journey in 1582. The source states that she passed away in 1603 at the age of 80 [5]. This information shows that Gulbadan Begum was active not only in court life but also in the religious and spiritual sphere.

In the 19th century, French Orientalists paid special attention to the study of the history of India and Central Asia. Scholars such as Garcin de Tassy and Jules Mohl showed great interest in the political structure, architecture, and art of the Mughal dynasty. In particular, Baburnama by Babur was regarded in French academic circles as a primary source, as it reflected the personal life and views of the dynasty's founder. By contrast, Gulbadan Begum's Humayun-Nama was considered a secondary source, since it focused more on the inner life of the court, family relationships, and the position of women [7]. Nevertheless, despite being evaluated as a secondary source in Western scholarship, Humayun-Nama remains a unique written record that vividly portrays the court life of the Mughals.

Conclusion.

Humayun-Nama is one of the key sources that portrays the life of the Mughal court, its political processes, and the relationships among members of the royal family from an insider's perspective. Its unique value lies in the fact that it was written by a woman author and a member of the dynasty, Gulbadan Begum. Her style, keen observation, and use of historical memory make the work an important first-hand written testimony of the Mughal era with significant scholarly value.

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