Mughal Women: Depictions of Female Characters in Select Writings on the Mughal Era in India

Thesis submitted to the University of Calicut
for the award of the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in
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by

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DECLARATION

I, **Poornima S. Unni**, hereby declare that the thesis entitled **Mughal Women: Depictions of Female Characters in Select Writings on the Mughal Era in India** submitted to the University of Calicut for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English, is an original bona fide work of research carried out by me at the PG Department of English and Research Centre under the supervision of Dr. K. Usha and it has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma or similar title.

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CERTIFICATE

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Dr. K. Usha
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Chapter I

Introduction

> Even in a democracy, history always involves power and exclusion, for any history is some one's history, told by that someone from a partial point of view. - Appleby et al

Over the decades, history eulogized the dominant and hegemonic classes and banished the rest from it or rendered them aphonic. New Historicism as an emerging critical practice showcases a resurgence of predilection in history with its focus on marginalized groups in societies whose voices are unheard in grand narratives of history. There is a paradigmatic shift from grand histories to little histories which even marked its affinity to literary texts. To be more precise, New Historicism makes a parallel reading or juxtaposition of the literary and historical texts of the same period. The recent developments of Feminisms have criticized New Historicism's apathetic attitude towards gender, especially Foucauldian New Historicism that detects, the oppressed and marginalized voices in the history that ignored women as Alison Conway in "Future Conditional: Feminist Theory" observes, "Feminist theory provides us with one way to focus our attention on the investments governing the histories we write" (27).

Feminist New Historicism offers a reconstruction of the past from a present perspective, and highlights the role of the marginalized, exclusively, women in remaking the past and making it more feasible to the present. Feminist New Historicism, by adhering to Foucault's concept, deviates from the traditional historical hermeneutics that claimed history and literature as reflections of a particular age's

shared ‘world view’ by upholding that no age and culture has a single homogenous structure but is internally diverse and hence heterogeneous.

The study of history is recently offering more dynamic possibilities in the contemporary world due to the application of cultural and sociological theories like Feminism, New Historicism etc, which has encouraged scholars to view history from divergent perspectives. This chapter also provides a brief survey on all the related areas of the study offering a glance to as much of the existing research as possible.

According to the Cambridge Advanced Learner’s dictionary, history is defined as, “the study of or a record of past events considered together, especially events of a particular period, country or subject”. Arnold Toynbee elucidates that “History, like the dramas and the novel, grew out of mythology, a primitive form of apprehension and expression in which- as in fairy tales listened to by children or in dreams dreamt by sophisticated adults the line between fact and fiction is left undrawn” (*A Study of History* 44).

J.A.S. Evans addresses Herodotus as “Father of history” or “Father of lies” in “The Repetition of Herodotus”, an essay in *Classical Journal* (1968). Evans censures Herodotus’ recording of history as “intentional lie, inconsistency, errors of fact and judgement, undue credulity and easy acceptance of unreliable sources of information” (15).

E.H. Carr in his book *What is History* (1987) observes that the duty of a historian is to select, interpret and present facts according to their experiences and interests. Carr considers history as “an unending dialogue between the past and the present” (30). Carr enunciates the importance of the interpretation of the historian in

history writing. He notes, “It used to be said that facts speak for themselves. This is, of course, untrue. The facts speak only when the historian calls on them: it is he who decides which facts to give the floor, and in what order or context” (11-12).

Mark Donnelly and Claire Norton in their book *Doing History* (2011) projects the fact that history is always contextualized to particular times, places and cultures. The book also gives some room of thought about histories from feminist and gender perspectives by Donnelly and Norton. Claire Norton states, “Feminist history has an overt agenda of political equality for men and women and seeks to democratize historical discourse by not only recovering women as active participants in the making of history, but also decentering the male subject and challenging the patriarchal ways of thinking and institutions that are presented as neutral, rather than socially constructed”(146). Feminist historians continue to argue that the romanticized portrayal of female domesticity is never an effective means of challenging patriarchal structures.

Keith Jenkins in his book *Re-Thinking History* (1991) observes, “Although millions of women have lived in the past, few of them appear in history that is history texts. Women, to use a phrase, have been hidden from history that is, systematically excluded from most historians’ accounts” (7). Apparently, feminists are now actively engaged in the task of “writing women back into history” (7) in order to fill the gaps in historians’ records due to his gender biases. To him, “History is produced by a group of labourers’ called historians” (21) based on their ideological perspectives. Countless narratives by women, blacks and other minorities reveal that the past can and will be sustained through their “historically contrived trajectory” (19). The

dominant discourses often silence the voice of the minorities who try to regain their lost articulations by rewriting their own histories.

Alan Munslow in his book *Deconstructing History* (1997) explicates the reason behind assigning such a title to his book since "history must be reassessed at its most basic level" (2). Munslow further adds that "history cannot exist for the reader until the historian writes it in its obligatory form: narrative" (3). He raises the question "Can we gain genuine and 'truthful' historical descriptions by simply following the historian's literary narrative—her or his story?"(5). Even though he acknowledges "her story", historians have often obliterated a genuine account of women by writing it only as "his story" (5). He concludes that "The past is not discovered or found. It is created and represented by the historian as a text, which in turn is consumed by the reader" (190).

Feminist historians set out to define a distinctive conceptual framework for women's history. An early feminist historian, Gerda Lerner in her book, *The Majority Finds Its Past: Placing Women in* H*istory* (1979) claims that feminist historians and social historians shared an interest in people outside the power structure. She comments, "As long as historians held to the traditional view that only the transmission and exercise of power were worthy of their interest, women were of necessity ignored" (3). She also argues that there was no "underlying conceptual framework" for women's history (4). In her introduction to the book *The Creation of Patriarchy* (1987), she exemplifies the importance of women's history. She claims, "Women's History is indispensable and essential to the emancipation of women" (3). She also notes, "No man has been excluded from the historical record because of his sex, yet all women were" (5).

Joan Wallach Scott in her book *Feminism and History* (1996) comments that "Countering stereotypes has built a tension into writing of women's history" (1). Historians usually argue that women were excluded from history due to their incapacities and limitations. Countering historians' attacks she claims that "Feminist historians have offered examples from many centuries and countries to counter contemporary claims that women are, by physical constitution and physical temperament, weaker, more passive, more concerned with children, less productive as workers, less rational, and more emotional than men"(3). In her point of view, "Feminist history has provided both a subject (women) and a lineage (a long line of foremothers) for contemporary feminist political movements as well as ways of analyzing the emergence of such subjects and movements in the past" (5).

Sheila Rowbotham in the Introduction to her book *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World* (1974) shrewdly observes that women are still divorced from the two words "mankind" and "humanity" (xi). Consequently, women are never part of the alternatives made by men. She says, "The idea of militant dignity exists in the word 'manhood' or the idea of 'virility' or the solidarity of 'brotherhood'. Women have only the neutered dignity men have allowed the women they have called 'good'. The indignity of femininity has been internalized for millennia. Sisterhood demands a new woman, a new culture, and a new way of living" (xi).

History refers to what happened in the past, while historiography draws our attention to what historians' record about what happened in the past. Historiography provides one with a methodology to interrogate and confront history as a product of socio-cultural, psychological and socio-political circulation. The term is probably used as a meta-description of the study on history, or rather, the historicity of history.

An often discussed agenda of historiography is to explore the possibilities of interactions and influences from other fields that are traditionally either opposed or quite different from the canonical history.

According to David Lodge, Fiction can be defined as "fiction about fiction: novels and stories that call attention to their fictional status and their own compositional procedures" (*The Art of Fiction* 206). Fiction is a literary narrative based on invented, unreal and imaginary events. Among the literary narratives, fiction according to Abrams is to "a prominent degree based on biographical, historical, or contemporary facts". (*A Glossary of Literary Terms* 95).

Andrew. M. Greeley observes, "History and historical fiction is necessarily not the same thing. The purpose of history is to narrate events as accurately as one can. The purpose of historical fiction is to enable a reader through the perspective of characters in the story to feel that she or he is present at the events. Such a goal obviously requires some modification of the events" (*Irish Love* 333). Both history and fiction are mediated by linguistic entities, it would be a good start to analyze the way language is assembled to convey meaning.

According to the Literary Dictionary (1998), "Historical Novel, is a genre in which the action takes place during a specific historical period well before the time of writing (often one or two generations before, sometimes several centuries), and in which some attempt is made to depict accurately the customs and mentality of the people of that period. The central character—real or imagined—is usually subject to divided loyalties within a larger historic conflict of which readers know the outcome". The novelists of the historical fiction strictly try to be faithful to the official history with a liking to the past.

Historical fiction is a fictional narrative which uses and abuses history for its needs. It applies history when history serves the purpose of the narrative. The novelists of the historical fiction make use of famous events, points of view and localized history, alternate history which may not be recorded in conventional history, with fictional characters either observing or actually participating in these actual events. Historical figures are also often shown dealing with these events while depicting them in a way that has not been previously recorded. Sometimes, the names of people and places are in some way altered.

Hayden White has commented on the similarities between aims and forms of historical and fictional discourses. He asserts in one of the essays of the book titled *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (1978) that the "technique or strategies that they use in the composition of their discourse can be shown to be substantially the same, however different they may appear on a purely surface, or fictional level of their texts" (121).White says that the production of history and fiction are not entirely dissimilar. The methods the historians and novelists use, the techniques both historians and fiction makers engage points to similar patterns of work. In his notable essay, "The Fictions of Factual Representation", he claims that the "way in which we know the past is through historiography which is subject to the same creative process as fiction". Additionally, he states that the writing of history is a "poetic process" (28). Hence, the current opinion is that history is a form of narrative just like the fictional narrative.

Linda Hutcheon has coined the term "historiographic metafiction" in her book, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988) and the term has become a subgenre, which has a connection with self-reflexivity. It refers to works that fictionalize actual historical

characters, places, and events emphasizing the processes of narrating and writing history thereby opposing and questioning objective history. She defines historiographic metafiction –"as novels that are intensely self-reflexive but that also both reintroduce historical context into metafiction and problematize the entire question of historical knowledge"(285). According to Hutcheon, the intention of historiographic metafiction is not to "deny the existence of the past [but to] question whether we can ever know that past other than through its textualized remains" (19-20). She continues to state that "History is not made obsolete: it is, however, being rethought-as a human construct" (16). After the creation of the text, a reader interprets it in accordance to his or her cultural context. Interestingly as a result of this, the text of the author is different from the readable text of the reader.

T.N Dhar in his book *History-Fiction Interface* (1999) says, "the problem of relating history and fiction has always hinged upon the similarities and differences between the two, which have constantly varied" (35). He adds further that "The points of convergence between the two have been seen in narrative, figurative and rhetorical terms, but emphasizing or blurring their similarities and dissimilarities is also a political act"(36). It is from the 19th century onwards that the critics have concentrated their attention on the novel's engagement with history. Some critics disapprove of novels claiming that the novels fail to represent what really happened. Commenting on such critics, Dhar observes that they "assume that the past is something already known, and has congealed into a fixed shape: if the novelists want to write novels about it, all they need to do is to incorporate it into their work faithfully. If they fail to do so they are bad artists" (20). Many critics even consider fictional narratives as

better than history which gives mere details and data. The book showers insight into the history-fiction connection in literature.

Lubomir Dolezel in the article “Possible Worlds of fiction and history” (1998) points out a difference in the treatment of gaps between fictional narrative and historical narrative. Dolezel defines the fictional world as “artefacts produced by textual poiesis and preserved and circulating in the medium of fictional texts” (785) in the one hand. On the other hand he defines historical worlds as “models of the actual world’s past” (788). Historians have limitations in recording historical facts as they have to focus only to readily available historical details. He notes, “We will never know how many children had Lady Macbeth in the worlds of Macbeth. That is not because to know this would require knowledge beyond the capacity of human minds. It is because there is nothing of the sort to know” (805). The article throws light on the historical narrative by historians as “heard melodies”, whereas historical fictional narratives as “unheard melodies” (806).

In the article “History and Historical Novels” (1957) Jay Williams comments on the problematic equations between historians and historical fictionalists. The historians dismiss the novelist for “being profoundly uninterested in the actions of unreal men and women, their trivial loves and hates, as opposed to the grander sweep of history itself ”(67) and that “he is frequently inaccurate in the presentation of true history”(67). Williams censures the historians for being too “dispassionate and objective” (68). He claims that “history is usually always distorted for opportunistic or chauvinistic ends” (70). He contends that “The historical novelist who is worth his salt, who is concerned with penetrating to the truth of history and making it graphic and human, is, as it were, the younger brother of historian”(74). The article concludes

by stressing the need of developing a mutual respect between a historian and a historical novelist.

Kathryn M.Olesko in the article "The World We Have Lost: History as Art" (2007) claims that historical novels do "teach history" (761). Olesko while differentiating history and fictional writing contends that the "opportunity to fabricate unreality in the midst of otherwise 'historical' facts and events is only one of the types of contradiction that can be explored through fictional writing" (763). Though, according to him, historians hesitate to practice history as art. But "there are some exceptional contemporary historians who have decided that the only way to write about their subjects is in a genre that blurs the line between history and literature" (764). Historical novels blur the border to "explore the artistic qualities of historical writing and to reflect on them in critical ways" (768).

Y.J. Dayananda in the article "The Novelist as Historian" (1974) observes the manner in which a historian perceives a historical novel as either a pure fiction or a fairy tale. To a historian "a historical novelist is a strange sort of chap, a bird with wings flying away from documented fact" (55). Dayananda proposes a "unique kind of imagination" (56) in novels conceptualized on Indian History. Some significant periods of history have always caught the attention of the novelists and they narrate it brilliantly as literary art making it more reader friendly.

According to Learners Dictionary, the term Mughal is defined as "any of the Mongol conquerors of India who established an empire that lasted from 1526 to 1857, but had only nominal power after 1830". Mughal history is the saga of the glories of valiant Mughal rulers especially from Babur to Aurangzeb who ruled the Empire.

Irfan Habib's essay "Forms of Class Struggle in Mughal India" (1995) manifests the class struggles of Mughal era from a Marxist perspective. In the essay, he claims that "There are, perhaps, few parallels in the world when the oppressors and the oppressed majority in society have joined together to keep a minority in such utter degradation" (235). He further contends that "Marx believed that the Mughal empire, or rather Indian society before the British conquest, was bereft of any fundamental, antagonistic contradictions. He held that society in India consisted of a basic layer of 'village communities' fixed their internal composition (peasants, artisans, village servants) by the caste system. The tribute extracted in kind from these communities maintained a ruling class, at the head of which an absolutely despotic king" (233). He also notes that the 'village community' supported an 'oriental despotism'. Moreover, he claims that "the Mughal administration repeatedly noticed how 'the big men', 'the dominant ones', repressed the 'small peasantry' by making use of their power to distribute the assessments" (236).

Romila Thapar in her historical discourse, *History and Beyond* (2000) offers insight into new historical territories relating to early India. In the section, "Time as a Metaphor of History", she considers time as an essential component of historical perspective and in India both linear and cyclic time was known. She notes that "the link between time and history is evident if history is a narrative of human activities of the past, purported to have happened and narrated in the present. Such narrative has an underlying sense of time: It is sequential, moving from the earliest to the most recent. There is a consciousness of change with conjectures or disjunctures underlying events. Because time is irreversible, the events of the past cannot be altered. However, the assessment of what constitutes an event and its interpretation as history as well as

the altering of history through changing causal explanations, is open to discussion"(8).

John.F.Richards's well known history book *The Mughal Empire* (2001) presents a detailed account of the Mughal reign from the point of view of an objective historian. He explains that "The Mughal Empire was the product of a prolonged political struggle whose outcome was in large measure due to the abilities and good fortunes of its founders and builders. The two founders of the Mughal empire, Babur and his son and successor, Humayun, eventually won a bitter struggle with the Afghans, for supremacy in northern India" (6). He eulogises Akbar thus: "The Emperor himself, rather than a physical site, was the capital of the empire" (12). Nur Jahan is the only Mughal woman who finds some mention in Richard's work as Jahangir's era is inextricably intertwined with her life period. However, the historian has not allowed her to occupy a space of more than a page in the voluminous book. He notes, "For over a decade, between 1611 and 1622, Jahangir relied heavily upon advice from Nur Jahan and her colleagues" (103). The historian's gender-biased statement which symbolized female power is interesting: "Ideally, the harem provided a respite, a retreat for the nobleman and his closest male relatives-a retreat of grace, beauty, and order designed to refresh the males of the household" (62).

William Dalrymple's *The Last Mughal* (2007) is generally considered an authoritative historical document and compulsively readable. The book sheds light on the 1857 revolt and the disastrous impact it had on a culturally thriving Delhi during the reign of the last Mughal, Emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar. The narrative begins at a time when the Britishers were fast spreading their tentacles and tightening their complete hold over the Mughals. Bahadur Shah Zafar was rendered powerless and the

Britishers were in no more any obligation to please him. Zafar, already in his 80's had no real say in whether to support the sepoys who were fighting for low salaries against the Britishers or not. But in the end, he offered tacit support to the rebels and a bloodiest massacre which resulted in the revolt of 1857 followed in Delhi. The English men were pulled out of their homes and killed mercilessly by the sepoys and jehads. Eventually, Britishers assault Delhi and win the control over the state by putting an end to the Mughal rule. Dalrymple has also given least importance to the role of royal women while recording the history of Mughal rule in India.

Empire of Mughal Series, a book by Alex Rutherford is a collection of six historical novels on Mughal history. The first of the collection is *Raiders from the North* (2009) which chronicles the life of Babur, a central Asian king of both Timur and Genghis Khan's lineage, who later goes on to establish the Mughal empire in India. This novel is more a romanticized version of Babur designed more by the author's imagination. The second book *Brothers at War* (2010) focuses on Humayun, the favourite son and heir of Babur. He started his reign so irresponsibly, being an addict to opium and ignored the possible threat from his brothers considering himself as the invincible heir to the throne. The third Book *Ruler of the World* (2011) is indubitably about Akbar, the greatest Mughal emperor and son of Humayun. The book prioritises him as the most tolerant and able of the Mughal emperors. The fourth book *The Tainted Throne* (2012) depicts Jahangir, the son of Akbar as a doomed man due to his marriage with a woman named Mehrunissa craving for excessive power. The book projects her as a plotting and manipulating woman who snatches the reign from her husband. The fifth book *The Serpeant's Tooth* (2013) chronicles the life of Jahangir's son Shah Jahan who has taken control of the Mughal Empire after a bloody

struggle of murdering his half brothers. His unending love towards his dead wife through the construction of Taj Mahal is also mentioned in the novel. The last book *Traitors in the Shadow* (2015) examines the reign of Shah Jahan's son, Aurangzeb, one of the most contradictory and vilified figures of Mughal history.

L.P.Sharma in his book *The Mughal Empire* (1988) follows the traditional method of tracking the history of the Mughal emperors' reigns. He has shrewdly allotted a few pages for Nur Jahan and a single paragraph for Mumtaz Mahal in his book. However, Sharma also censures Nur Jahan as a highly ambitious woman who "tried to keep the power of the state in her hands" (134). She formed a junta including the male members to escalate her power. He remarks, "Many nobles at the court felt dissatisfied with the increasing influence of a woman in administration and therefore, were opposed to Nur Jahan and her group" (135). He comments that "the interference of Nur Jahan proved harmful to the empire" (136). He mentions Mumtaz Mahal in a paragragh mainly because "Shah Jahan constructed the world famous Taj Mahal at Agra in her memory" (168).

S.M.Edwardes and H.L.O.Garrett in their co-authored book *Mughal Rule in India* (1962) gives a glorified account of the six Mughal emperors and their contributions to Mughal India. Garrett opines that "The manipulation of historical facts to suit the ideas of the author is unfortunately all too common" (1). The only sentence about Humayun's wife in the book is: "On 23rd- November 1542 Hamida Begum gave birth to a prince, afterwards the famous Emperor Akbar" (19). While describing Akbar's connection to Rajputs, Garret notes of Raja's expression of loyalty to Emperor Akbar by offering his daughter, "The offer was accepted and the lady became the wife of Akbar and the mother of Jahangir" (30). This Rajput lady is

nameless in most of the historical documents despite being Akbar's wife and Jahangir's mother. Garret does not fail to observe that Akbar is "a born leader of men and can rightly claim to be one of the mightiest sovereigns known to history" (53). On examining Nur Jahan's role in Jahangir's era, Garret remarks with a tinge of sarcasm, "her influence over the emperor, sodden with drunk and opium, was enormous" (60). Mumtaz Mahal finds a mention due to Shah Jahan's love for her, demonstrated through the construction of a tomb in her name.

The article "Towards the Interpretation of the Mughal Empire" (1978) by M. Athar Ali discusses facts about Mughal administration and the practice of religious equality during Akbar's rule. He compares the religious policy of the Mughal Emperor, Aurangzeb with that of Tughlaq, the ruler of the Sultanate period. Athar Ali notes, "The Mughals accentuated the consciousness of their exalted status by abstaining from marrying princesses of the dynasty to anyone except a member of the imperial family" (41). They prefer that their daughters remained unmarried rather than marrying someone from lower strata of society.

Some historical novels or documents depicting Mughal women offer interesting insights into the harems, which were basically, the woman's world in the palace. Apart from the queens, slave girls and transgenders also occupied those marginalized spaces.

Gulbadan Begum's biographical book, *Humayun-Nama*, translated by Mrs. Beverage is a commendable work by a Mughal woman about the major happenings during the era of Akbar. This work is worthy to be noted here as it well substantiates the erudite of mughal women in an age that has imposed too many restrictions to women. Gulbadan was the daughter of Babur and a very able lady who gives a picture

of Emperors' relationship with the wives and other women of the harem. Gulbadan describes the efforts of Hamida Banu Begum, the wife of Emperor Humayun and mother of Akbar in strengthening the relationship between Iran and Hindustan. Gulbadan records: "Due to the efforts of Hamida Banu Begum the relations between Iran and Hindustan always remained good" (240).

Rekha Misra's biography, *Women in Mughal India* (1967) gives a clear picture of the power exhibited by women in Mughal era. She comments: "The family of Babur which inherited the traditions of Chingiz Khan and Timur allowed their families sufficient political right and enabled them to share the political rights"(16-17). Misra describes Maham Begum, the wife of Babur thus "She held a very high place in the harems of Babur, Humayun and Akbar" (18). Babur's marriage to Bibi Mubarika is a quintessence of matrimonial alliance with clear political inclinations. She was the daughter of Malik Sulaman Shah who belonged to the Yusufzai tribe of the Afghans. "She strengthened Babur's hold in Afghanistan" (18-19). Similarly, in the reign of Humayun, the first lady who occupied an important position in the harem was Khanzada Begum, the eldest sister of Babur. "As principal lady of the harem, Khanzada Begum took fairly keen interest in the political affairs" (19-20). Misra records the strong influence of Mughal women even in matters like court verdicts concerning their favourite nobles. She quotes Salima Sultan Begum's words, "Your majesty; all the Begums are assembled in the Zenana for the purpose of interceding of Mirza Aziz Koka. It will be better if you come there otherwise they will come to you" (33). Jahangir was thus forced to visit the female apartment immediately and on account of the pressure exerted by the begums, he subsequently pardoned him. The

book sheds light on Shah Jahan's daughter Jahanara who is also considered as a genius in politics who tried to settle the rift between Aurangzeb and their father.

Fatima Mernissi in her biographical work, *Hidden from History, Forgotten Queens of Islam* (1993) mentions the two indisputable criteria of sovereignty in Islam: "The name of the head of state is proclaimed in the khutba at the Friday service in the mosque and it is inscribed in the coins" (71). Although Mughal men promoted their women to participate in political matters they never allowed them to share the privilege of khutba.

Zeenat Ziad in the book of history, *The Magnificent Mughals* (2002) records the important role of Mughal women in matters like appointments and promotion of relatives and friends to positions of political and financial responsibilities. Ziad observes: "The most noted example of this involvement in the shaping of court hierarchy was Nur Jahan whose family benefited tremendously from her position as Jahangir's wife" (49). Ziad also probes into the role of Mughal women as mediators and peace makers at court. In Ziad's words, "The most famous example of such intercession by women in the role of peace makers occurred at the end of Akbar's reign when the intense efforts of Gulbadan Begum, Maryam Makani and Salima Sultana Begum proved successful in bringing about a reconciliation between Akbar and Salim"(52).

R. Nath in his historical discourse, *Private life of the Mughals of India* (2005) opines of the prominence of Maryam uz Zamani, the Jaipuri queen of Akbar the great. Her marriage with Akbar made Hindustan an influential class of Rajput community in Mughal politics. It resulted in a union between Hindu and Muslim community and it ended the disputes among people of different religions. She plays a crucial role in

influencing that Jahangir to make matrimonial alliances with women of Rajput families. “Particularly in the case of Maryam uz Zamani she had equal rights as in political matters, official correspondence, domination in Harem etc. After her death there was a great tomb built as there were tomb of prominent Muslim Queens like Nur Jahan and Mumtaz Mahal”(48-50).

K.S.Lal in historical work, *The Mughal Harem* (1988) delineates Mahabat Khan’s jealousy of empress Nur Jahan’s escalating power ending in an open rebellion in which he takes her husband, Emperor Jahangir as prisoner. On hearing about her husband’s captivity Nur Jahan calls a council of nobles and castigated Asaf Khan and others: “All this has happened through your neglect and stupid arrangements” (84). Her tireless and strategic efforts lead to Jahangir’s release. “She cajoled the unwilling, she bribed the greedy…” (85). Jahangir’s death puts an end to Nur Jahan’s hegemony too despite her efforts to enthrone her son in law Shahryar. Finally, Shah Jahan occupies the throne thereby marking an end “to her political domination” (85).

Kathryn Lasky’s book *Jahanara: Princess of princesses (The Royal Diaries)* (2002) is a commendable discourse on Princess Jahanara, daughter of Shah Jahan and his wife Mumtaz Mahal. The first line of the book is poignant: “My father has four wives, but I am the daughter of the one he loves most…” (1). As a female member of the royal family, she leads a cloistered existence behind the opulent screens of the harem, yet her voice and her life sound surprisingly vociferous and active.

John Shors’ novel, *Beneath a Marble Sky* (2004) is an attempt from the part of a male writer to depict Jahanara as the stereotypical marginalized woman suffering in the dark harem due to her allegiance to her father and her brothers. The writer has praised her for enduring unending difficulties mainly out of her fidelity to her father.

The image of a dutiful daughter is highlighted in this novel. She is also portrayed as a sister struggling in the midst of murderous sibling rivalries. The author has miserably failed to capture a female voice in this novel.

Ruchir Gupta's *The Mistress of the Throne* (2014) is another fascinating tale about Shah Jahan's beloved daughter, Jahanara. The novel reveals the tough responsibilities of Jahanara which she has to undertake as the next empress after her mother's death instead of assigning the title to any one of his remaining wives. He deftly portrays Jahanara's anguish and helplessness at being forced to stay unmarried due to being the royal princess. Although Jahanara is the protagonist of the book, the writer is focusing more on Aurangzeb as the hero.

Ruby Lal in the article "Historicizing the Harem: The Challenge of a Princess's Memoir" (2004) of the journal *Feminist Studies* excavates information from Akbar's daughter Gulbadan's record of Mughal history which is more a hidden piece for the historians. Gulbadan's memoirs give a detailed picture of the interiors of the Mughal palaces including the lives of women who are ignored by history. Her memoirs present before us "a harem far different from that commonly presented to us" (593) by the historians. Ruby Lal has selected the most neglected sources like Gulbadan's memoirs for this article: "Gulbadan Banu Begam was the daughter of Babur, sister of Humayun, and aunt of Akbar. Gulbadan was thus close witness to the making of the Mughal monarchy, seeing it through many vicissitudes-from the inception of the Mughal kingdom in the early conquests of Babur to its established splendor in Akbar's reign" (594). The chief focus of biographies like "women worthies" is "on the visibility of imperial women and their power"(596). Ironically even these women biographers like the Mughal historiographers "excluded the

possibility of querying or even raising new questions about the accepted boundaries of family and household, public and private spheres, gender relations and political power"(596). This memoir also throws light on the hajj conducted by Mughal women under Gulbadan's leadership to which the historians paid little attention. Gulbadan's text provides a more palpable credibility rather than those provided otherwise.

Ellison. B. Findly's article "The Capture of Maryam-uz-Zamani's Ship: Mughal Women and European Traders" (1988) focuses on the truth that the Mughal women of the period were quite wealthy and most of them actively involved in highly risky foreign trade investments. The capture of Rahimi by the Portuguese had infuriated Jahangir because the owner of the ship was his mother Maryam-Uz Zamani. Findly notes that "the conspicuousness of the event lies in the fact that the owner of the ship was a woman, a Hindu princess from Amber who had married the Mughal emperor Akbar as part of a political alliance between her father Raja Biharo Mall Kachhwaha and her new husband"(229). Her new title was Maryam-Uz – Zamani. This event throws light on the substantial involvement of women in the crucial beginnings of modern Indian foreign trades. The article unveils the truth that "Mughal noblewomen of the early colonial period in India were singularly wealthy" (229). Foreigners had already chronicled accounts of Mughal women like Nur Jahan and Jahanara's active involvement in foreign trades. "Moreover, their confinement behind the marble screen may have made women even more curious and eager to engage in the activities of the outside world, made especially appealing because of the intrigue involved in getting through to their distant colleagues" (234).

Dr.Rukhsana Iftakhar's article "Behind the Veil: An Analytical study of Political Domination of Mughal" (2012) is about the Mughal Harem that directly or

indirectly influenced the Mughal politics. The ladies of the royalty enjoyed an exalted position in the Mughal court and politics. Iftakhar notes, “They were considered so influential that many persons succeeded in approaching the Emperor through them” (12). She further adds that “Alanquwa the mythical female ancestor of Chingiz Khan played an important role in the prehistory of Mughals. The chief wife of Timur, founding father of the Mughal dynasty was also a highly independent lady” (12). The article emphasizes the truth that Mughal women exhibited great dignity in the exercise of power. Iftakhar asserts that Razia Sultana of the Sultanate period can be viewed as a source of inspiration for the Mughal ladies to take part in politics: “In India the Turks who had fully assimilated political traditions of the Persians accepted the right of female to sovereignty already raised a lady Razia Sultanaa to the throne” (12). The Mughal women like Hamida Bano Begum, Nur Jahan, Mumtaz Mahal and Jahan Ara actively corresponded to nobles and other officials for diplomatic missions. Mughal women who imbibed court politics were efficient peace makers during tumults in the court.

The article “Recovering the Past in Jodha Akbar: Masculine, Feminities and Cultural Politics in Bombay Cinema”(2011) by Shahnaz Khan “examines the production and reception of the 2008 film Jodha Akbar both as process and product of complex historical, cultural and political nation-building projects in which gender plays a central role”(131). The Mughal women have a peculiar role in this film as “either the veiled woman within the traditional inner domestic space where her mobility and sexuality are confined by age old customs or is the courtesan outside of it”(134). The muslim woman portrayed as courtesans “has an erotically charged body while her mujra (dance) suggests that she is sexually available to the audience of the

celluloid screen" (134). Shahnaz Khan argues that "Jodhaa Akbar brings the Emperor Akbar out of the preamble into the centre stage of history" (136). Through her "dual roles of the veiled and oppressed woman or the erotic courtesan, the Muslim woman is not depicted as equal to the Muslim man and certainly not equal to the Indian man or woman (read as Hindu)" (134). "Certainly the assertive Jodhaa we see in the film comes to Akbar's harem on her own terms as an equal among other queens and royal Mughal princesses. As such she probably would have fit easily into a harem of strong women" (138).This article ascertains that "the film does little to further the Muslim woman's agency as having any role outside that of facilitating the desires of her male kin" (143).The article concludes that Jodhaa is more a spectacle rather than a powerful presence in the film.

J.N.Chaudhary in his book *Mumtaz Mahal, Islamic Culture* (1937) gives an account of Shah Jahan's wife Mumtaz who exerted considerable influences in the political matters during the initial years of Shah Jahan's reign. According to Chaudhary: "In 1628A.D when Shah Jahan ascended the throne she occupied the premier position in the harem and the emperor usually consulted her about private as well as state affairs" (373). She was the custodian of the Royal seal. She was given the privilege to imprint the royal seal in the state documents. But her career was short and she died in 1631A.D.

Razia Gauhar in her published Phd thesis *Harem Influence on Mughal society and politics* (1963-64) enunciates the privileges enjoyed by Nur Jahan. "Nur Jahan attained a position never before enjoyed by the wife of a prince in India" (75). She sometimes sat in Jharoka window dictating orders to officers and receiving the important messages. Coins were struck in her name. The domination of Nur Jahan

aroused the jealousy of many nobles and even prince Khurram. Tension developed between Nur Jahan and Khurram when he gained more power as King Shah Jahan.

N. J. Temuri in his unpublished Phd thesis "Jahan Ara" (1975) traces the significance of Mumtaz's daughter, Jahanara as the premier lady of the Harem. Shah Jahan's beloved daughter Jahanara very actively took part in political matters. Temuri observes: "Anyone, a stranger, a courtier or a governor who wish to obtain the favour from the Emperor found it necessary to win the support of Jahanara. As the first lady of the realm and as such among all the ladies of Mahal the Begum Sahib was the most respected" (45-46). She held a great influence in official correspondence and tried her best to solve the riots between her father and her brother. She was also a much adored sister to Aurangzeb.

Annie Kriegar Krynicki in the book *Captive Princess; Zebunissa daughter of Emperor Aurangzeb* (2005) is about Zebunissa's active involvement in political matters. She sat by the side of the Emperor and gave him advice regarding court affairs. "When prince Azam was punished (1701-5A.D) for quarrelling with the superintendent of his harem he sent the petition of pardon through his sister Padshah Begum" (51). She indulged in secret correspondence through letters with her younger brother Muhammad Akbar, who rebelled against their father. When the rebellion failed her letters were discovered and she was imprisoned as a consequence of her father's wrath, after which she dies in captivity.

Readings of history using new theoretical frameworks offer interesting insights into hitherto unexplored areas, thus opening new vistas of research and scholarship. New Historicism brings history to the centre stage by providing a vista to read a text from the cultural context to which it is embedded. According to M. R.

Raghava Varier, "New Historicism is keenly interested in marginal groups in societies since their voices are set aside or suppressed in the teleological grand narratives of history" (qtd in *History and Theory* 112). Vanashree Tripathi in her article "The New Historicism: Strategies of Reading" observes, "Foucault reminded the historians that it is impossible to enter the bygone ages. It is for this reason that he abandoned the earlier historians' attempts to understand events in terms of evolutionary process" (*Indian Response to Literary Theories* 209). New historicist approaches yield significant insights into Indian context as Tripathi notes: "the new historicists see through the schemes of appropriation and transform the locality of a historical space into a vast introspective question mark" (218).

Stephen Greenblatt in his book, *The Power of Forms in the English Renaissance* (1982) used the term New Historicism for the first time. In his Introduction to *Renaissance Self –Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (1980) Greenblatt critiques certain characteristic attributes which marked the identity of both male and female sexes like armour for men and beauty for women. Such examples illustrate how men who wielded weapon came to be considered as the brave and hence could occupy the centre space. He maintains that "Language, like other sign systems, is a collective construction; our interpretive task must be to grasp more sensitively the consequences of this fact by investigating both the social presence to the world of the literary text and the social presence of the world in the literary text"
(5). To Greenblatt "Self –fashioning is achieved in relation to something perceived as alien, strange, or hostile. This threatening other—heretic, savage, witch, adulteress, traitor, Antichrist—must be discovered or invented in order to be attacked or destroyed"(5).

Michel Foucault in his essay "Nietzche, Genealogy, History" (1971) shifts the focus from archaeology to the Nietzschean notion of genealogy which is based on the conflation of power and knowledge. Nietzsche's claim that history must be used to produce a powerful present defines the act of writing history as an act of power. Foucault observes: "The successes of history belong to those who are capable of seizing these rules, to replace those who had used them, to disguise themselves so as to pervert them, invert their meaning, and redirect them against those who had initially imposed them; introducing themselves into this complex mechanism, they will make it function in such a way that the dominators find themselves dominated by their own rules" (378). Foucault and Nietzsche see genealogy as distinct from history because genealogy does not seek the origins which history uses to construct historical continuities. Foucault's New Historicism is viewed with a critical eye by feminists for its gender blindness.

Terry Eagleton in his book *Ideology: An Introduction* (1991) unravels the diverse meanings of ideology and charts the history of ideologies from ages beginning from enlightenment to post modernism. In the chapter "What is Ideology" Eagleton observes that "Ideology has to do with legitimating the power of a dominant social group or class" (5). Eagleton maintains that "The force of the term ideology lies in its capacity to discriminate between those power struggles which are somehow central to a whole form of social life, and those which are not" (8). He notes that "the statement 'men' are superior to women" need not be ideological but it "might be a way of subverting sexist ideology" (14). This subversion of ideology is obnoxious to those who try to create a new history of the subalterns. Meanings are attached to the term

ideology based on certain discursive contexts. The ideology perpetuated by male writers that "women are less rational than men" (15) is absolutely fake.

Before discussing Feminist New Historicism it would be fruitful to make a quick survey of the seminal ideologies of Feminism, which is a continuously evolving genre. This is to show how this theory has influenced the re-visioning of history which is the topic of interest in this study. According to Cambridge dictionary, Feminism can be defined as "the belief that women should be allowed same rights, power, and opportunities as men and be treated in the same way, or the set of activities intended to achieve this state". The origin of Feminism, according to Adrienne Rich can be traced back to the days when women learned to have "the courage to say I" (*When We Dead Awaken* 49). The stories about women by women narrate woman's experiences of subjectivity and sexuality more credibly. Annette Koldony in "Dancing Between Left and Right" urges women "to take responsibility for recovering our history lest others write it for us" (464).

The first wave of Feminism generally refers to the period of political activism primarily concerned with women's suffrage during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The second wave of Feminism is associated with the concerns of the women's movement in the 1960s and 1970s, which focused on women's empowerment and gender equality in the public sphere. In the later years of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century, Feminism seemed to be faced with a kind of identity crisis: no longer defined by the urgent political activism of the second wave. However, twenty-first century Feminisms are as multi-faceted and diverse as their predecessors as Clarissa .R. Showden in "What's Political about the New Feminisms?"observes, "feminism has always been many movements

working for multiple ends" (167). She adds further that most of the brands of new feminism fall under the rubrics of either "post feminism" or "third wave feminism" (166). But these two represent two distinct branches of contemporary feminist thought, differentiated most patently in the degree to which they engage with contemporary culture and politics.

Third wave Feminism has enjoyed a revival in interest especially in academic scholarship recently and the majority of third wave scholars are rejecting the post feminist idea that Feminism is 'dead'. Sylvia Walby in *The Future of Feminism* (2011) unequivocally states that "feminism is not dead. This is not a postfeminist era. Feminism is still vibrant, despite declarations that it is over. Feminism is a success, although many gender inequalities remain. Feminism is taking powerful new forms, which makes it unrecognizable to some" (1). Hence it is clear that although Feminism has evolved taking on powerful new forms, it is still a significant and formidable cultural force. The third wave Feminism is a continuation and adaptation of the second wave, necessarily developed in the context of an ever-changing global culture. Postfeminism was a term first coined in 1982 by Susan Bolotin in her *New York Times* article, "Voices from the post-feminism generation", in which she observed that young women were already beginning to distance themselves from the 'feminist' label. Niamh Moore explains that "postfeminism is seen as a manifestation of the end of feminism, and third wave feminism is regarded as suggesting a defiant insistence on the continuity of feminist politics" ("Imagining Feminist Futures" 125). Some of the recent developments of Feminism and even post feminist ideologies have assiduously mingled with New Historicism to view history through the eyes of a woman.

Simone de Beauvoir in her revolutionary book *The Second Sex* (2011) makes an attempt to confront human history from a feminist perspective. In her opinion, the female subordination in history is tangibly the reflection of attitudes, preconceptions and injustices practiced by men in order to sideline women as the other. She caustically notes Pericles remark about women: "The best woman is she of whom men speak the least" (93) as an ample justification for 'hers' invisibility in history. To Beauvoir, man occupies the role of the self, or subject where as women as the object or the other and adds further that "she is refused equality with men because of her sex: the pretext for persecuting her becomes "imbecility and fragility of the sex" (96).

Helen Cixous' "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1975) has become a staple of feminist criticism because of its incisive critique of patriarchal politics. She exhorts woman to write herself and put herself into the text. Cixous urges women to reclaim their bodies, desires and identities through writing. She comments intuitively that "The new history is coming: It's not a dream, though it does extend beyond men's imagination, and for good reason" (883). She comments about the position of women in history as "her shattering entry into history, which has always been based on her suppression" (880). She censures the phallocentric language used for both literary and historical writing, "It is indeed that same self-admiring, self-stimulating, self-congratulatory phallocentrism" (879). Cixous insists that women should use language differently to liberate themselves from the fetters of masculinity. Such writings can provide "indispensable ruptures and transformations in her history" (880) that might even puzzle the entire world.

Judith Butler in her most popular book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and subversion of Identity* (1999) claims that "For Feminist theory, the development of a

language that fully or adequately represents women has seemed necessary to foster the political visibility of women" (4). She elaborates that "Within a language pervasively masculinist, a phallogocentric language, women constitute the unrepresentable" (14).

Elaine Showalter in her celebrated seminal essay "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness" (1981) affirms that "Both historians and anthropologists emphasize the incompleteness of androcentric models of history and culture and the inadequacy of such models for the analysis of female experience. In the past, female experience which could not be accommodated by androcentric models was treated as deviant or simply ignored" (199). This is true to a great degree if we assess the subordinate position of women in history. She quotes Gilbert and Gubar's rhetorical question about literary patriarchy from *The madwoman in the Attic*: "If the pen is a metaphorical penis, from what organ can females generate texts?"(6). Showalter tries to define literary maternity with an interesting counter question in jocular parenthesis: "(If to write is metaphorically to give birth, from what organ can males generate texts)" (188).

Sally L. Kitch in the article "Feminist Literary Criticism as Irony" (1987) observes that "feminist criticism can be seen as casting an ironic light upon other forms of criticism and even upon literary history" (7). The paper meticulously explores two types of ironies underlying the feminist literary criticism namely delusional irony and contrapuntal irony. Delusional irony is considered as "the irony of hidden or deceptive meaning" (8). Contrapuntal irony "involves the coexistence of simultaneously contradictory meanings within a given work" (8). She also mentions the irony lurking behind "the delusion of the male universal" (9) considering male

experiences as universal and female experiences as particular. The article hints at the "inevitability of subjectivity" (17) in both male and female characterization unmindful of the gender of the writers.

Ruth Yeazel in her article "Fictional Heroines and Feminist Critics" (1974) notes that an important argument put forward by feminist critics about characterization is: "to identify the fully human with male—to see women as flat embodiments of a particular force or theme, to see them mythically, allegorically, symbolically, but never realistically—as fully rounded, complex human beings" (29). Yeazel argues how male written texts see "women as metaphors or as symbols rather than as realistic analogues of the self" (30). She believes that "criticism of limiting and destructive stereotypes works most persuasively when it attacks those areas of the culture which are in fact grounded in stereotypes" (30).

Rosalind Gill in her book *Gender and the Media* (2007) discusses the notion of Postfeminism as one of the most important in the lexicon of feminist cultural analysis. She argues that Postfeminism is best understood as a distinctive sensibility made up of a number of interrelated terms. The postfeminism as a sensibility means the ubiquitous characterization of gender representations in the media, as listed by Gill: "The notion that feminity is a bodily property; the shift from objectification to subjectification; the emphasis upon self-surveillance, monitoring and discipline; a focus upon individualism, choice and empowerment; the dominance of a makeover paradigm; the articulation or entanglement of feminist and anti-feminist ideas; a resurgence in ideas of natural sexual difference; a marked sexualization of culture; and an emphasis upon consumerism and the commodification of difference"(255).

Ann Brooks in her book, *Postfeminisms: Feminisms, Cultural theory and Cultural forms* (1997) defines Postfeminsm as a need to "signal a complete break in a previous range of usually 'oppressive' relations" (Introduction 1). Brooks contends that Postfeminism is "about the conceptual shift within feminism from debates around equality to a focus on debates around difference" (4). The book is divided into three parts. The first part, "Challenging and fragmenting the consensus of the second wave" explores the interrogation and disruption of second wave feminism from; 'inside' and 'outside' feminism. In the second part, "Feminisms Turn to Culture—A Paradigmatic Shift in Feminist Theorizing?"describes the various epistemological, Foucauldian and psycho analytic intersections with feminism. The third part "Postfeminism and Cultural Forms" focuses on cultural forms in the academy, popular culture and representations, media and film theory, sexuality, subjectivity and identity. In the Introduction, she also notes Postfeminism "as critically engaging with patriarchy" (2).

The task of an amalgamation of the feminist and new historicist theories is to re-read culture so as to amplify and strategically position the marginalized voices of the ruled, the exploited, the oppressed and the excluded.The term Feminist New Historicism is coined by Sara Lennox in her article "Feminism and New Historicism" and it concentrated on the male dominated cultures which have often subjugated the woman as the appendage or the inessential. Feminist interpretation can offer new understandings of history and even create new history. Feminist New Historicism advocates the need of women's "own authentic voices and actions that must determine the change and re definition. Their voices and actions must have primacy no matter how sincere and sympathetic is the position of the privileged, that are also

in a power position which brings with it all the implications of domination and appropriation"(*Indian Response to Literary Theories* 217).

Judith Lowder Newton in her seminal essay "History as Usual? Feminism and the New Historicism" (1989) draws attention to a most debated notion about history that "hegemonic power is part but not all of the story, that 'history' is a tale of many voices and forms of power, of power exercised by the weak and the marginal as well as by the dominant and strong" (89). She attempts to fuse theories of Feminism with those of New Historicism to focus more on "writing women into 'history' in new ways, writing the history of the way in which women have constructed culture too" (90). Newton recalls how Jane Marcus in an unpublished essay has observed: "She who writes history makes history" (92). She further adds to this statement that "she whose activities are visible as 'history' has a kind of power that she whose contributions are placed at the margins of 'history' does not" (92).

Judith Newton's book, *Feminist Criticism and Social Change* (1985) is a collection of lively and controversial essays that sets out to theorize and practice a 'materialist-feminist' criticism of literature and culture which asserts that the material conditions in which men and women live are central to the understanding of culture and society. It emphasizes the relation of gender to other categories of analysis, such as class and race and considers the nexus between ideology and cultural practice, and the ways in which all power relations change with changing social conditions. In the Introduction, *Toward a materialist-feminist criticism* , Judith Newton and Deborah Rosenfelt argue that this concept is all about "making our knowledge of history, choosing to see in it not a tale of individual and inevitable suffering, but a story of struggle and relations of power" (xv). They conclude that "In its insistent

inclusiveness, in its willingness to embrace contradictions, material-feminist analysis seems to us the most compelling and potentially transformative critical approach to culture and society, offering us theory for our practice as we work toward a more egalitarian world"(xxx).

Sara Lennox in her essay "Feminism and New Historicism" (1992) censures Stephen Greenblatt for remaining "astonishingly unconcerned with gender and women" (159) in his book *Learning to Curse*. In this essay Lennox attempts to find "what gender issues New Historicism can successfully address" (160) by analyzing Louis Montrose's "The Work of Gender in the Discourse of Discovery". Lennox notes Montrose's argument that "Ralegh's portrayal of Guiana-in contrast to Virginia-as a female country yet to be deflowered is a gesture of masculine power and resistance to the authority of his female sovereign" (161). She adds: "It is also worth remarking that, with the exception of Queen Elizabeth, surely an exceptionally great woman, there are very few women in Montrose's essay, and even Elizabeth rarely speaks in her own voice" (163). Through her own work on Ingeborg Bachmann, Lennox proscribes the suppression of female voice in narratives. The influence of dominant ideologies of "male-dominant society" (167) has always failed to represent women's experience. Lennox censures the male writers for imposing a "subversive female authenticity" (168) in their discourses concerning women. The feminists' interest in history is "to recover the lost voices of women" (168).

Ellen Pollak in the article "Feminism and the New Historicism: A Tale of Difference or the same old story" (1988) asserts that "The new historicism challenges the dictates of the traditional literary canon as well as the presumed 'objectivity' of nonfictional forms of narrative" (282). Feminist New Historicists try to interrogate the

objectivity of mainstream writers who equip themselves in a serenely male way of seeing history. History is interestingly encoded with theory by feminists with the aim of "historicizing textuality and textualizing historiography" (282). Pollak comments that "the new historicism dovetails with the theoretical and ideological interests of feminist criticism by encouraging us not simply to repudiate traditional standards of literary value but to rethink the entire process of exclusion by which canons are defined and then sustained"(283). In assessing traditional canons, they share many common traits. A common thread underlying both the theories is their interest in excluded categories of history though there is difference in their conception.

Sara Friedsrichsmeyer and Jeanette Clausen in their co-authored article "What's Missing in New Historicism or the 'Poetics' of Feminist Literary Criticism" (1993) opine that "feminist approaches to literary and cultural analysis have been a convincing disavowal of 'old' historicism" (254). They also state: "The investigation of sex differences and inequality that lies at the heart of all feminisms except those rooted in an essentialist view of the sexes cannot be and never has been separated from women's experience" (255). The trajectory of women's experience can be fully traced from the specific historical context. After examining various theories in New Historicism they established that "the task of reclaiming a historical role for women and for others outside the dominant cultures is far from completed" (256). They consider "feminist new historicism, as a catchy phrase, but it is one we can all do without" (257).

Wai-Chee Dimock in the article "Feminism, New Historicism, and the Reader"(1991) states, "If the feminist chronicling of women's oppression and celebration of women's difference have appeared misguided to many New

Historicists, the New Historicist universalization of power and blurring of genders have stuck many feminists as nothing short of reactionary"(601). Dimock has made an attempt to find the relationship between Feminist criticism and New Historicism with the key emphasis to reader in assessing those theories. Dimock analyzes "Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper," a story that has inspired numerous feminist readings, which turns out to be an ideal text for an imaginary New Historicist exercise..." (606). She claims that a reader with a "historically recognizable profile" (611) is enjoying the position of authority. She assesses the reader as a woman, "Professionalism was something denied to women and something they were trying to attain" (613). She considers men as "inadequate reader" (618) especially about women. She affirms that "a feminist reading must also be a historical reading" (620). She voices the need of proclaiming of "grounding of gender in time" (620) citing the importance of history in feminist studies. By pointing to the gendered reader of The Yellow Wallpaper, she asserts that history is not homologous or synchronized but instead it is "a field of endless mutations and permutations" that provide even a space for alternatives with an "unexhausted and inexhaustible possibility" (622).

An overall analysis of the above works related to Mughal history, as well as relevant and theoretical premises has helped to provide a framework to develop a study by critically analyzing the portrayal of women from the Mughal era in India by men writers and women writers which is comparatively a less investigated area. While analyzing the theoretical premises of Feminism, New Historicism, and Postfeminism, this chapter further examines how women writers have been inspired by emerging branches of theories like New Historicism and Feminism to investigate

and explore the hitherto insignificant women of histories, by interrogating the existing parameters and theoretical canons regarding representations of history.

History mystified as a single valid objective version of the past is invalidated by new historicists like Foucault and Greenblatt. The new historicists assume that historical writing does not refer to actual reality of the past because history like fiction mediates through language. Traditional histories with its operation of power look monolithic and hierarchical. The power imparts repressive dimensions to the dominant discourses where the women find it impossible to breach the dictations of greatest male bastions. The notion of power is the central assumption of New Historicism which bases its notions mainly on Foucault's conception of power as not only ubiquitous and repressive but as also producing subjects.

When compared to historical narratives, historical fictional narratives are more compatible in dealing with the complexities and contradictions in power paradigms. The historical novels despite the gender of the authors try to present plurality of voices which offers multiple perspectives and ideas which are in a continuous process of being informed and informing. But there are striking differences in the representations of women by historians, male novelists and female novelists upon which the present study focuses. While the male discourses are centered around preoccupation with powerful male heroes, the women novelists begin to view novel as a conducive field to interrogate and problematize the invisible presence of women in such discourses. Analysis of historical and fictional representations of women of Mughal dynasty on which this study focuses to prove that female writers stress on more inclusive 'herstories' celebrating 'difference' as against monolithic workings of male narratives which adhere on 'sameness'.

On examining the different periods of Indian history, it is tangible that the country has been colonized by innumerable invaders whose ideology of suppression has mainly affected the already marginalized and suppressed groups. Recordings of the history of women are largely confined to the period of British colonization there after, due to the lack of availability of written records about the women of invader dynasties in the ancient periods. During the British invasion, their women faced gendered disadvantages: "Memsahib's position of power and privilege in the colonial hierarchies of race/class was ambivalent and complicated by gender disadvantages when it came to her position with regard to the men of her own race/class within the colony" (*Women and Empire* 11). But a very significant and powerful history of the colonization in which women's position has been detected according to the available documents is the Mughal invasion. While depicting Mughal women in the male oriented texts including histories, the authors endorse the doubly marginalized status of women as just the inmates of the harems of the ruling Mughal emperors. So they are either reduced to objects or erased to irrelevance in male centered narratives. Such information offers more scope to compare the depiction of Mughal women by both male and female authors in their respective discourses.

Maithreyi Krishnanraj in the chapter, "Writing Women's History or Writing Women into History?" observes:

> If men are seen as the sole creators of civilization and they record their doings, whether they portray women, or if they do, how they do it, will hinge upon what they regard as important. Since all history is in a sense selective, the recorders choose what they wish to highlight. The fact of women being missing from history is in itself a revelation of

> several things: that men held power and women appeared not to have had the power to write themselves in (*History and Gender* 37).

The charge against mainstream history is that it writes narrowly on dynasties, on wars and empire builders and the powerful that the powerless including women will never occupy a crucial part of the picture. As a result, historians have always created an impasse regarding the roles and contributions of women in history. Naturally, history has quite obviously neglected gender as Laurie Finke, a gender theorist observes in her book, *Feminist Theory*, *Women's Writing*: "History, conceived as an unresolvable tension between 'what really happened' and the multiple and dialogic narratives about it, provides a means by which feminists might destabilize oppressive representations of gender and locate on the margins of discourse-in the 'noise of history'-possibilities for more egalitarian cultural formations not yet even recognizable as representations"(11). The historical novels by women writers document the lives of historically neglected women of different eras in order to reclaim the validity of women's experience which is obscured in histories. Their fiction can, thus, rightly be regarded as 'alternate histories' or 'herstories' that breaks the gender asymmetries of hegemonic discourses to trace more genuine representations of womanhood.The term 'herstory' is a neologism term coined as part of a feminist critique of conventional historiography, which in their opinion is written as 'his story'.

History, in the present context, has been regarded as a discourse constructed by a 'literary imagination' and 'power relations' and in this sense it is ideological and subjective, always open to multiple inquiries and re-interpretation. Michel Foucault's notions of history have led to new approaches to historical understanding by

subjecting itself to constant revision. New Historicists have assimilated the Foucauldian idea that power is omnipresent and that it produces subversion within its own discursive formation. Contrary to the past historians, Foucault claims that history is neither "linear" nor is it necessarily "teleological". (*Archaeology of Knowledge* 7). According to Foucault, "Effective" history differs from the history of historians in being without constants" ("Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" 380). Foucault's radical interpretation of history in terms of power relations based on concepts, hierarchies and oppositions of the discourses of a particular era re-defines and expands the boundaries of historical inquiry.

Judith Lowder Newton, the most frequent commentator on New Historicism develops some of her basic concerns and assumptions from Foucault's 'historicity' that parts company with traditional historical hermeneutics, and has been working on alternate possibilities to understand history more inclusively. Foucault's New Historicism has left no place in which women in history can articulate their selves despite its polemics against'traditional history'. Building on Foucault's notions of New Historicism, Newton views history by refusing to see it as a single and coherent line of progress but instead focuses on the 'dynamic and productive nature of power' that refutes the decentered positions of women in history. Judith Newton has accused it of ignoring gender and refusing to take Feminism seriously.

Newton feels that a non feminist New Historicism has to be critiqued for its totalizing power of the ideologies informed by elite male values. It should take 'material' conditions seriously in order to provide some channels for the voices of repressed others. However, the evolution of Feminism from the first wave to the third wave and further to Postfeminism, has added new dimensions to the concepts of

gender and subjectivity, asserting its pluralistic nature and demanding the eradication of all sorts of inequalities. Hence like all post modern theories, Feminism and New Historicism also have become fluid. Therefore it would be appropriate to choose a New Historicist methodology of challenging history from various quarters. However, for the present purpose of my thesis, I have based my arguments on New Historicism, mainly that of Judith Newton's Feminist New Historicist concept that only when women's contribution to culture and that of other oppressed groups can be taken adequately into account can New Historicism produce something more than "history as usual"(121). I will use a few relevant feminist theories also to validate my examination of how women are portrayed in the select narratives of both male and female writers. The search for new possibilities of looking at New Historicism from a post feminist perspective is also addressed in this study.

The history of human civilization for the past several thousand years evolved from notions of men underlining their experiences as universal. Women had been assigned no vital role and their experiences are trivialized in popular myths, histories and literatures. Down the centuries, women have learned these lessons of gender inequalities disseminated by historians, without daring to object only to be challenged and critiqued later. Gisela Bock in her essay, "Women's history and Gender history" observes:

> The pursuit of 'restoring women to history' soon led to that of 'restoring history to women'! Women and female experience have a history which though not independent from men's history is nonetheless a history of its own of women, as women. To explore it, the hierarchies between the historically important and unimportant had

> to be overturned. What women have done, should do and want to do is being scrutinized and re-evaluated (*The Feminist History Reader* 105).

The universality of women's marginalization in history "re-enacts and resediments dominant patriarchal and misogynist values" (*Community, Gender and Violence* 67). In history and historical fictional narratives by men, the images of women are constructed to gratify male interests which is inimical to her female identity and consciousness. The women writers have evoked a radical deviation from the phallocentric models that have dominated history. Ranjit Guha states specifically of a "new historiography sensitized to the undertones of despair and determination in women's voice, the voice of a defiant subalternity committed to writing its own history" (*The Small Voice of History* 317).The select women writers have been chosen for rearticulating history as herstory dismantling the male bastions of homogenous structures.

In the introduction to the book, *Gender and Literature*, Iqbal Kaur considers gender as "a straight jacket in which men and women dance their unequal dance" (xi). Gender differences are emphasized with masculine superiority and insistence of female inferiority in the select texts by male writers. A patriarchal social set up is well evident in the narratives of male writers where masculinity implies action, strength, courage, self-assertion and domination where as feminity projects passivity, weakness, docility, obedience and self-negation.

The male oriented writings usually portrayed women's experiences as trivial and sentimental. In the introduction to the book *The Image of Women in Indian Literature*, Dr. Yashoda Bhat says, "women as an achiever, as a leader, or as a strong

individual are by and large, either non-exixtent or rare" (ix). The ideal woman in the male authored texts are the selfless, self-effacing and submissive daughters, wives or mothers who perfectly internalized the idea of inferiority without questioning the gender defined role assigned to her by the rigid patriarchal society. Hence, the experiences of the muted female half of the society were not candidly reflected either in history or in literature. Later women realized that gender is just a construct that can be deconstructed or reconstructed. With such incisive understandings, writings try to free women characters from the strong hold of masculine imagination of women as passive, dependent and helpless victims living in the mercy of men. The inner experiences of women are given importance in female writers' fictional worlds shattering the traditional image of women in male narratives.

Women writers extend their writings from masculine coded structures to dethrone the myth of femininity. Many texts on women by women now depict the insignificant women of histories or myths as coming out of the margins to occupy the centre stage as active subjects. The women writers are employing a feminine writing style that redefined the subjectivity and sexuality of women as sheroes just like that of the male heroes of popular narratives. Their novels are populated with female protagonists who affirm their autonomy and independence concomitant to their abilities in taking new roles, responsibilities and challenges. They wish to build a world that is truly human based on equality which is free from domination. New women's history depicts women who possess a heightened individuality and self awareness so that they can overcome all the constrictions imposed upon their lives by patriarchy. The new woman of her stories has learnt to call her soul her own by combating the constant attempts of men to repress her.

Feminism's engagement with history has helped me to develop the objectives of my study as:

1) To locate the absence of women in history in order to understand how far the genre is a prerogative of men.
2) To identify the biases in the representation of women if and when women are included in male centred narratives like history and historical fiction.
3) To examine the attempt of women writers in developing 'herstories' in their historical fictions making them more inclusive and pluralistic than the monolithic narratives.

Two male authored texts based on history, one a historical narrative, *Emperors of the Peacock Throne* (2000) by Abraham Eraly and the other a historiographic novel, *Taj:A Story of Mughal India* (2004) by Timeri.N.Murari,are juxtaposed against female authored historiographic novels, like *Taj Mahal Trilogies* (*The Twentieth Wife* (2002), *The Feast of Roses* (2003) and *Shadow Princess* (2010) by Indu Sundaresan and *Nur Jahan's Daughter* (2005) by Tanushree Podder in this study in order to identify the differences in the depiction of Mughal Women as 'female characters'. The present study titled "Mughal Women: Depictions of Female Characters in Select Writings on the Mughal Era in India" tries to ascertain how far the female authored novels present history with a striking difference by making it more polyphonic when compared to the male authored texts based on monologues, since they look at history from the vantage point of male perspectives.

Abraham Eraly was an Indian writer of history, a teacher and the founder of Chennai-based magazine *Aside*. He wrote a series of books on Indian history, especially on Great Mughal era. *The Mughal World* (2007), *The Last Spring: The*

Lives and Times of the Mughals (1997) and *Emperors of the Peacock Throne* (2000) are a few of his remarkable works on Mughal history. Timeri.N.Murari is an Indian novelist who authored fourteen published novels, including best sellers like *The Taliban Cricket Club* (2012) and *Taj* (2004). He has also written extensively for Indian and international newspapers including The Guardian. He has brilliantly intertwined history and fiction in his novel *Taj.* Indu Sundaresan is an Indian-American author of historical fiction. Her best selling collection *Taj Trilogies* are historical novels based on Mughal era. Tanushree Podder, a well known travel writer and novelist is also known for her historical novel based on Mughal history. *Escape from Harem* (2012), *Nur Jahan's Daughter* (2005) etc are a few to name. The select works of these authors have provided scope for my study on Mughal Women.

The study tries to establish that the historical narrative, *The Emperors of the Peacock Throne* by Eraly and the historical fictional narrative *Taj* by Murari has either stereotyped or objectified women by relegating them to irrelevant spaces as mere 'victims'. But the historical fictional narratives by women writers, *The Taj Mahal Trilogies* by Indu Sundaresan and *The Nur Jahan's Daughter* by Tanushree Podder portray women as 'self actualized beings' who judiciously prove their self-worth in their rearticulations of histories either through 'active rebellion' or by 'choosing a life that made them happy'. The chapters are divided keeping all these points in focus.

This introductory chapter, after discussing the salient features of various discourses by male and female writers, also underlines the importance of women novelists in creating alternate histories as a strategy that makes possible a feminist historicist reading of history to view women either as 'rebel' or 'victor humanist'

releasing them from the patriarchal label of 'victims'. This chapter also provides a general survey of various theories and definitions of history and fiction touching upon the related areas of the topic selected for the study taking care to provide an outline to as much of the existing research as possible.

The second chapter discusses the shrinking space of women in constructed histories by historians with special reference to *Emperors of the Peacock Throne* by Abraham Eraly, a definitive biography of the six great Mughals. A thorough reading of the text would reveal an unbalanced and partial stand of the author who cleverly ignores the contribution of women to the existence of the Mughal dynasty. This chapter examines the partial stance taken by the historian in his treatment of women characters in the select text. The characters who appear in the source text are analyzed by categorizing them on the basis of their significance. While the male characters would be placed as the Invincible, the women would be divided as The Invisible, The Visible, and The Partially Visible based on the importance given to them. The women in The Invisible space are further categorized into The Completely Invisible and The Partially Invisible. The focus here is on examining the masculine agenda of representing women in history as anonymous.

The third chapter discusses how the monolithic historical discourses are revised and fictionally revived by male novelists, here represented by T.N.Murari who endorses Abraham Eraly's ideology in his novel *Taj*. The theoretical framework for analysis in this chapter would be New Historicism, to support which feminist ideologies that critique patriarchal power politics will be used. This chapter would examine the different ways in which historical or social constructions become political when it is made with a patrairchal agenda, thereby assigning only marginal

spaces to women and other subalterns, with special reference to *Taj*. The chapter has been divided into various sections based on the thematic concepts that objectify and victimise women in the novel.

The fourth chapter analyses the first two novels, *The Twentieth Wife* and *The Feast of Roses* of Indu Sundaresan's *Taj Trilogies* that focus on the retelling of a particular time in Mughal era where the women behind the veil remained invisible both to the world and to themselves in an exclusively male- oriented cultural mileu. Her historical novels are attempts to remedy previous exclusions by delineating the roles of women also in deciding the history of a dynasty. The author refuses to send the women to the margins as in the conventional narratives, adhering to the feminist ideologies in New Historicism. Thus these two novels are analyzed as interesting re-visions of history, where women characters receive just and equal treatment as men, and are depicted as intelligent and capable to indulge in matters of administration. The transformations of women from 'victims' to 'resistantes' in these novels is the interest of investigation in this chapter. They are taken together for analysis as both these works make the 'othered' women characters of the Mughal dynasty speak as 'subjects' by acquiring their selfhood through deconstructions of the known notions of gender roles and suppressed identity through resistance.

Chapter five focuses on the image of the new woman in fiction written by women novelists who transformed the sacrificing, victimized 'object' to an independent and free thinking 'subject'. The two historical novels, Indu Sundaresan's *Shadow Princess*, the last of *Taj Trilogy* and *Nur Jahan's Daughter* by Tanushree Podder are analysed using post feminist interpretations of New Historicism in which the woman is an empowered individual with an inherent self confidence and hence claims a

space of her own naturally. Since the protagonists of these two novels exhibit, adhering to the post feminist ideology, their true feminine selves as active desiring sexual subjects, unlike the resisting females of *The Twentieth Wife* or *The Feast of Roses*, the intention here is to search for new possibilities of looking at New Historicism from a post feminist perspective.

The concluding chapter sums up the thesis statement and the findings that evolved from the analysis of various historical and fictional narratives. The attempt is to trace the relevance of women writers in giving voice and space to the invisible women of Mughal histories thereby presenting them in a more inclusive and pluralistic perspective, contrary to the monolithic representations of women in the select male authored texts. With their texts, the women writers deconstruct the concept of woman as 'victims' generally popularized by men by transforming them to 'rebels' and 'victors' or 'humanists'.

Chapter II

Abraham Eraly's *Emperors of The Peacock Throne*: 'His'tory as Usual

> History has been defined in many ways and its definition goes on changing from time to time but the important thing is that history continues to grow and widen. It has ever widening dimensions and ever-lengthening horizons with its focus increasing larger and deeper.
>
> - Ramlal Parikh

Readings of history have always been informed by changing cultural codes, historical position of the author and acceptable critical assumptions through which it evolves, grows, changes and sometimes become insignificant. As new critical practices evolved, analyses of history, myth etc also acquired new dimensions with more inclusions. Critical ideologies like New Historicism, Cultural Materialism etc offered different perspectives to history, asserting the need to include the silenced voices also as Alison Conway observes: "new historicism has fostered a critical interest in power—the operations of containment, the possibilities of subversion, and the individual and collective acts that together shape the meaning of cultural artifacts and their circulation in the world"("Future Conditional: Feminist Theory, New Historicism" 25).

Since the onset of human civilization, History has evolved as a monolithic entity with a historian as its powerful controller of what should come in its purview. Foucault's theory of power relations has influenced theories like New Historicism and

Cultural Materialism which adhere to his argument that power decides knowledge that is endorsed through discursive practices. Accordingly new historicists analyse texts, trying to find how power is being manifested through discourses and subsequently arguing how a text becomes a failure at a given point of time. Foucault enunciates power as continually articulated knowledge and vice versa; that knowledge always endorses the position of the powerful and that knowledge is created by power structures. Foucault based his approach both on his theory of the limits of collective cultural knowledge and on his technique of examining a broad array of documents in order to understand the episteme of a particular time. Thus, following the Foucauldian mode of analysis, new historicists seek to find examples of power and manifestation of discursive practices, how they are dispersed within the text, and how they contribute to establishing the "greatness" or "failure" of a text at a given point of time. (*Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings* 105).

Foucault finds it inappropriate to consider history as a series of monolithic causes and effects controlled by an omniscient identity. He foregrounds the importance of viewing history as divergent, incorporating marginalities and disunities which can offer ever widening dimensions and horizons to history. To Foucault, "A characteristic of history is to be without choice: it is prepared to acquaint itself with everything, without any hierarchy of importance; to understand everything, without regard to eminence; to accept everything, without making any distinctions. Nothing must escape it and, more important, nothing must be excluded" ("Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" 383).

Biddy Martin in her article, "Feminism, Criticism and Foucault" observes that Foucault's "polemics and his methodological breaks with traditional social theory

make him interesting for feminists, whose political and theoretical projects converge at important points with the provocations of Foucault" (3). Further, Feminisms tend to replace the dominant voices which they questioned and challenged with a "pure voice of liberation" (17). In order to avoid being hurt by the double edged sword of resistant power while making marginalized women visible on the New Historicist stage, what a feminist does is to challenge history and male narratives from different quarters. They have to resist the monolithic workings of male narratives that completely ignored female gender and subjectivity.

Judith Newton in her seminal essay "History as Usual? Feminism and the New Historicism" challenges the androcentric theories which legitimized sexism that operated along cultural lines. Judith Newton observes that "non-Feminist New Historicism, in its non-cultural materialist modes, has been widely criticized for its tendency to insist upon the totalizing power of hegemonic ideologies, ideologies implicitly informed by elite male values" (118). Hence, the relevance of Feminist New Historicism which firmly adheres to a feminist genealogy of diversity, plurality and difference as against non Feminist New Historicism. However, the effort here is to prove how far the historian has resorted to a monolithic narration, looking at history from the vantage point of male perspective thereby overestimating 'male values' and underestimating 'female'.

The historical narrative *Emperors of the Peacock Throne: The Saga of the Great Mughals* (2000) by Abraham Eraly, follows the traditional strategy of highlighting the accomplishments of six Mughal Emperors who ruled India while deliberately ignoring the roles of powerful women in the dynasty. This chapter attempts to examine with a revisionist spirit the shrinking space of women in the

constructed histories by male historians, as represented in the historical narrative chosen for study and asserts the need to have histories without lopsided perspectives about gender. Since the historian's recordings of history are influenced by his own cultural and linguistic codes, his narration need not be perfect as he tells only 'a' story and not 'the' story.

Emperors of the Peacock Throne by Abraham Eraly, a definitive biography of the six great Mughals is an interesting and readable epic saga which, however, contains a hidden political agenda, whitewashed by the comment on the back cover by another known historian William Dalrymple as a 'balanced overview'. A thorough reading of the text would reveal an unbalanced and partial stand of the author who cleverly ignores the contribution of women to the existence of the Mughal dynasty. This observation will be explained in this chapter by placing the women characters who appear in the source text, by categorizing them on the basis of their significance. While the male characters would be placed as 'The Invincible', the women would be divided as 'The Invisible', 'The Visible' and 'The Partially Visible' based on the importance given to them. The Invisible is further categorized into 'The Completely Invisible' and 'The Partially Invisible' in order to probe into the depth of invisibility of women characters.

Abraham Eraly's work has been selected especially because it interestingly does provide some information about other Mughal queens apart from Nur Jahan, unlike the other history texts. However, even this historian fails to look at history from the perspective of the subalterns. Discussing on History Foucault demands thus:

> Rules are empty in themselves, violent and unfinalized: they are made to serve this or that, and can be bent to any purpose. The successes of

> history belong to those who are capable of seizing these rules, to replace those who had used them, to disguise themselves so as to pervert them, invert their meaning, and redirect them against those who had initially opposed them; introducing themselves into this complex mechanism, they will make it function in such a way that the dominators find themselves dominated by their rules ("Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" 378).

Ironically, among Foucault's list of subalterns like the insane, the prisoners, the homosexuals etc, women who have constantly been erased from history finds no place. In the preface of *Emperors of The Peacock Throne*, Eraly insinuates a dichotomy in gender roles, in quoting Herodotus, the father of history "that the actions of men may not be effaced by time..." (xv). Accordingly, only one female character, Nur Jahan, who survived the author's sorting process, should be remembered as the 'visible female' while the remaining, are either completely/partially 'invisible' or partly 'visible'.

The suppression of the marginal voices and the privileging of the dominant and the powerful is a repeated practice in traditional mainstream history writing. The constructed histories informed by patriarchal ideologies represent destructive archetypes which condition women to come to terms with their inferior status. In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir records the comments of great Greek philosophers and statesmen in this regard. According to Greek statesman Pericles, "The best woman is she of whom men speak the least" (92). Contrary to the leniency of Greek philosopher Plato who approved of giving a liberal education to girls, his disciple, Aristotle equates women almost to slaves when he comments, "The slave is entirely

deprived of the freedom to deliberate; woman does have it, but she is weak and powerless" (93). Such conditionings have influenced writings down the ages, of which historical narratives are also a part.

Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* with its celebrated manifesto, 'One is not born, but rather becomes a woman' maintains that 'male' and 'female' are not fixed ontological essences but are products of historically specific form of mediations. Her book dismantles the truth that throughout history, 'woman' has been constructed as man's other and denied access to an autonomous existence. This 'othering' is central to *The Emperors of the Peacock Throne* also while documenting the history of the Mughal dynasty which ruled India from 1526 to 1857.

Judith Butler's Gender *Trouble: Feminism and Subversion of Identity* critiques "the pervasive cultural condition in which women's lives were either misrepresented or not represented at all" (4). This observation becomes relevant regarding narratives like *The Emperors of the Peacock Throne* written with a visible patriarchal agenda of undermining women in their constructed histories.

The Invisible Females

Down the centuries, the patriarchal assumption of the feminine is a quaint amalgam of ideologies, concepts, behavioral patterns, dress codes, culinary and artistic talents etc. S. C. Raychoudhary quotes Prof. Ashraf regarding the position of women in medieval India thus: "The function and position of women were distinctly subordinate and in the long run come to be understood as the service of the male and dependence upon him in every stage of life" (*History of Mughal India* 11). The women in *The Emperors of the Peacock Throne* endorse this ideology. Among The

Invisible Women of Eraly's text, there are some who are Completely Invisible whereas a few others are Partially Invisible. While describing the Mughal advent in India with the conquest by Babur, Abraham Eraly traces his parental lineage thus, "Nothing much is known about Babur's mother, except her name, Qutluq Nigar Khanum, and her Mongol lineage. Babur himself has little to say about her. But there is a lively, candid profile of his father in his memoirs" (*Emperors of the Peacock Throne* 5).

If the mother is thus irrelevant and completely invisible, the grandmother is worth mentioning since Babur respects her for showing maternal concern regarding his well being and hence both are partially invisible. Elaine Showalter's observation in "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness" is significant here, "In defining female culture, historians distinguish between the roles, activities, tastes, and behaviors prescribed and considered appropriate for women and those activities, behaviors, and functions actually generated out of women's lives" (98).

Foucault says that the "The historian's history finds its support outside of time and claims to base its judgments on an apocalyptic objectivity" ("Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" 379). Such an objective approach to history is impossible due to the truth that there are no possibilities in it of closure. The power relations in historical discourses like *The Emperors of the Peacock Throne* which provide 'suppressed knowledge' have to be challenged and revised from time to time. While describing the relationship between power and knowledge, Foucault contends how certain knowledge is 'suppressed' and other knowledge is produced through 'power'. Babur is not much interested in "Omar Khayyam's paradise, women" (12). For the Mughal Emperors, their women are meant only to provide the "pleasures of the

harem" (12). Babur is a bashful lover to his first wife, Aisha who "deserted him during his days of homeless wandering" (12). Eraly observes: "By and by Babur acquired other wives and several concubines, as behoved a prince, and he fathered a number of children, as duty required of him, to ensure the continuity of his line" (12). Women are mere reproductive tools meant to provide male offsprings to ensure the continuity of conquering lands and expanding the empire. If Aisha is made invisible with a clear political agenda, Babur's daughter, Gulbadan Begum is also punished by neglecting, for making significant contributions by recording the chronicles of her father as well as of Humayun.

Eraly's initial claim of Babur's lack of ardour for women ironically changes later: "And, though he had not till then shown any great fondness for the company of women, he now became attached to two Caucasian slave girls, Gul-nar and Nar-gul, whom he had received as a gift from Shah Tahmasp of Persia a couple of years earlier" (34). The comparison of women as commodities to be exchanged as gifts are the quintessence of the phallogocentricism at work in this narrative. Eraly celebrates, in this, manner, the "certainty of absolutes or apocalyptic objectivity" of monolithic histories which deviate from Foucault's point that "Effective history differs from the history of historians in being without constants" (380).

In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir dwells elaborately on the commodification of woman:

> Man thinks himself without woman. Woman does not think herself without man. And she is nothing other than what man decides; she is thus called the 'sex,' meaning that the male sees her essentially as a sexed being; for him she is sex, so she is it in the absolute. She is

> determined and differentiated in relation to man, while he is not in relation to her; she is the inessential in front of the essential. He is the Subject; he is the Absolute. She is the other (21).

The women in Eraly's narrative also find themselves being treated as mere commodities for the sexual gratification of the male. Foucault argues that "The traditional devices for constructing a comprehensive view of history and for retracing the past as a patient and continuous development must be systematically dismantled"(" Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" 381). The politics behind the author's portrayal of women as unworthy of further analysis and the traditional method of such constructions have to be critiqued and dismantled.

Babur's wife, Maham Begum another weakly portrayed woman character who should have been provided a better treatment by the author is shown as a woman whose existence depends on the husband and son. She is seen consoling her husband after receiving the message of their son, Humayun's illness, "Do not be troubled about my son. You are a king: what griefs have you? You have other sons. I sorrow because I have only this one" (35) shows how she fits into the traditional slot predefined for a woman. Babur fondly assures her that "Maham, although I have other sons, I have none as I love your Humayun" (35). Despite being an important person in the story of Babur's reign, Maham Begum is also obliterated in historical records. Beauvoir comments that "Humanity is male, and man defines woman, not in herself, but in relation to himself; she is not considered an autonomous being" (*The Second Sex* 1). Maham Begum does not receive a respectable treatment by the author while recording those events and hence pushed to the margins.

Speaking on the continuity of historical tradition, Foucault observes:

> An entire historical tradition (theological or rationalistic) aims at dissolving the singular event into an ideal –continuity as a theological movement or natural process. 'Effective history', however, deals with events in terms of their most unique characteristics, their most acute manifestations… The forces operating in history do not obey destiny or regulative mechanisms, but the luck of the battle. They do not manifest the successive forms of a primordial intention and their attention is that of a conclusion, for they always appear through the singular randomness of events…We want historians to confirm our belief that the present rests upon profound intentions and immutable necessities. But the true historical sense confirms our existence among countless lost events, without a landmark or a point of reference ("Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" 381).

The 'true historical sense' which Foucault felt essential is seen missing in Eraly's narrative that consistently ignores 'countless lost events' concerning the 'marginalized 'thereby retaining the 'monolithic' narrative pattern containing 'immutable necessities'. While glorifying Humayun as the luckiest to become Babur's (and Maham Begum) favourite son to be his heir, the author eulogises the magnanimity of Dildar Begum for not being a jealous wife and mother. Although Humayun is Babur's chosen heir, the war of succession follows when his brothers Kamran and Hindal start manoeuvring to win the throne. Babur's wife Dildar Begum, mother of Hindal is so upset of her son's avarice for throne that "she put on mourning clothes when he ascended the throne" (54). Dildar Begum is never jealous of Maham

Begum's son becoming Emperor. The angelic temperament of the woman attracts the author and hence feels it deserves a mention.

The important event which marks Humayun's sojourn in Sind is "it was there that he met and married Hamida, and begot by her a son, Akbar, who would become one of the greatest rulers of India" (64). When Humayun expresses his wish to marry Hamida, she "firmly rejected the proposal" (65). Hamida is bold enough to resist Humayun's desire by expressing her individuality but persuaded by Dildar Begum, who functions as a patriarchal tool and curbs her self esteem. According to her, "A king's desire, even a fallen king's desire, in such matters could not be denied in that age" (65). Gulbadan Begum, daughter of Dildar Begum, also becomes a passive party to silencing Hamida by proudly admiring the efforts of her mother to succeed in changing the mind of the girl. "For forty days the begum (Hamida) resisted and discussed and disagreed… At last her highness my mother, Dildar Begum, advised her saying: After all you will marry someone. Better than a king, who is there?" (66). Hamida adroitly replies that "Oh yes, I shall marry someone; but he shall be a man whose collar my hand can touch, and not one whose skirt it does not reach" (66). But it is with a sense of relief that Gulbadan mentions how Hamida finally relented, "Little Hamida thus became Hazret Maryam-makani, Hamida Banu Begum, the queen" (66).

The familial relations in the Mughal kingdom adhere to the concept of patriarchy mentioned in Adrienne Rich's seminal work, Of *Woman Born*:

> the power of the fathers: a familial-social, ideological, political system in which men by force, direct pressure, or through ritual tradition, law and language, customes, etiquette, education, and the division of

> labour, determine what part women shall or shall not play, and in which the female is everywhere subsumed under the male (57).

The identities of women like Dildar Begum and Gulbadan Begum "had been culturally constructed" ("History as Usual" 93) in such a way that they never desire to assert their identity. They instead try to mute the voices of other women who try to articulate their desires or differences of opinion. They are contented to rule the harem as commanded by the emperors.

Judith Newton observes of "women's experience that out of the contradictions we felt between the different ways we were represented even to ourselves, out of the iniquities we had long experienced in our situations" (93). With the birth of Akbar, Hamida also is shifted to the margins as her role for a historian ends with the birth of a son and that too the heir to the throne. Simone de Beauvoir considers marriage and motherhood as oppressive weapons imposed by patriarchy to confine her in a private space of domesticity that compels her to abandon her freedom and devote herself to the wife-mother roles. Beauvoir observes that "from infancy woman is repeatedly told that she is made for child bearing, and the splendours of maternity are forever sung to her" (*The Second Sex* 508). She rejects the mystification of motherhood by considering it as a hidden agenda of patriarchy to enmesh women in its web of embodied immanence. Hamida Banu is too much engrossed in the duty of motherhood that she forgets that she is an individual with identity. If she "is not a complete individual as a wife, she becomes it as a mother: the child is her joy and justification" (427). So she too fails to usher in the winds of change in the conventional mindset.

In the days of exile, Humayun entrusts his son, Akbar in the "loving care of his grand-aunt, Babur's elder sister Khanzada Begum" (109). Gulbadan notes the words of Khanzada who used to joyously kiss the baby's hands and feet thus, "They are the very hands and feet of my brother, the Emperor Babur, and he is like him altogether" (109). Women like Khanzada are strong advocates of patriarchal agenda and are engrossed only in the dreams of their sons and grandsons becoming emperors. Hamida Begum though a woman with a voice becomes invisible after becoming a mother. The nurturing of the son is vividly described with a definitive political agenda. The competition of the wet nurses in suckling the emperor-to-be is with a futuristic intention- of winning favors for their men folk.

> The baby was put to the breast of his mother, and then handed over to wet nurses. Hamida herself, as was the royal custom, would never again give milk to the child. Ten wet nurses were provided for the lusty infant, and there was quite a competition among them to suckle Akbar, for foster motherhood established an advantageous link with the heir-apparent, by which they could later promote the careers of their husbands and sons, especially of sons, who as foster-brothers of the king, were linked with him, as Akbar would later remark, by 'a river of milk' (115).

Women are supposed to retain the firmness of their body to facilitate male gaze and sexual assaults. Hence they were not allowed to suckle their children even if they wanted to. In this regard, Butler observes that "acts, gestures, enactments, generally constructed are performative in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through

corporeal signs and other discursive means. That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality" (*Gender Trouble* 173). Thus women play passive roles as mere 'objects' to be played with by men who are 'active role players' in the constructed history. Akbar's mother Hamida is important in the narrative mainly for birthing Akbar, praying for his sustenance until her death: " On 10th September 1604, the grand old dowager empress passed away, aged seventy-seven, having outlived her husband by forty-eight years" (226).

The historian has not failed to mention the selfless dedication of Jahangir's wife, Man Bai while detailing Jahangir's era. At fifteen, Jahangir marries Man Bai who suffered mental ailment and died by her own hand like her father. Eraly claims that "Khusrav was the unhappy progeny of this inbreeding" (273). To Jahangir, the reason behind her suicide is her son Khusrav's rebellion with his father. Eraly again underlines the self-sacrificial wife-mother roles assigned to emperor Jahangir's wife in his memoirs and hence she is also 'The Partially Invisible' in this narrative.

Shah Jahan's daughter, Raushanara is casually mentioned by Eraly as not so good looking like her sister Jahanara. The historian also records that during Aurangzeb's reign "With Jahanara's return to favour, Raushanara, Who had ruled the roost in the imperial harem till then, receded into the background, to die in obscurity five years later…"(380). Shah Jahan's younger daughter Goharara Begum is completely ignored until her death as Aurangzeb's "last surviving sister" (510). Aurangzeb "married his first wife, Dilras Banu Begum" who according to Aurangzeb was "a woman of extreme imperiousness" (395). He takes three more wives "and in all sired ten children" (395). Even while showing Aurangzeb as a considerate

husband, the historian wryly remarks that "he had no passionate attachment to any of them" (395). Aurangzeb with his puritanical temperament has "barred women from visiting shrines… to prevent lasciviousness in holy places" (408). The historian mentions this aspect of Aurangzeb's character just to affirm his stand that women are commodities lacking access to the central domains of 'man's world' fearing their irresistible tendency to fall into temptations of the temptresses called women. Eraly quotes Manucci that "to curb wantonness, Aurangzeb ordered that women "must not wear tight trousers like those of men, but wide ones" (410) as if to prove that sexuality of women is dangerous.

Eraly also provides very few details about Aurangzeb's daughters. Aurangzeb's favourite daughter and his son Akbar's sister, Zebunissa "was deprived of her allowance… and confined in the fort of Salimgarh" (427) for helping her rebel brother. She is completely marginalized in the narrative by the historian. The historian is jubilant to note that Aurangzeb is fortunate to be "looked after with devotion by his daughter Zinatunissa—an old maid of sixty-three herself—and his wife Udipuri" (510). Although Zinatunissa is noticed by historian as a dutiful daughter, her name is invisible in his records. The women presented under this category are presented as embodiments of virtue who live with the only goal of pleasing their fathers, husbands, brothers, sons and grandsons.

Susan Gubar in her essay "The Blank Page and Issues of Female Creativity" says that male writers often use literature as a tool to create women characters the way they would like them to be created. To Gubar this "model of pen-penis writing on the virgin page participates in a long tradition identifying the author as a male who is primary and the female as his passive creation—a secondary object lacking autonomy,

endowed with often contradictory meaning but denied intentionality" (253).Women lack 'autonomy' and there is little scope for their 'emancipation' in patriarchal discourses.

Newton in the Introduction to *Feminist Criticism and Social Change* says that women's "lived experience of men and even of male domination is too complex" (xxix). The rift between Akbar and his son Salim are mainly based on their sexual affairs, as if they are the deciding factors in matters of the state:

> The Mughal court was rife with rumours about the tension between the two, because of Salim's escapades and Akbar's resentment over them. The most romantic and persistent of these stories linked Salim in secret liaison with Anarkali (Pomegranate Blossom), a beautiful and accomplished concubine of Akbar and possibly the mother of Daniyal—legend has it that a wrathful Akbar entombed Anarkali alive for the crime of exchanging a smiling glance with Salim. Another tale was about Salim's infatuation with Mihrunisa (Nur Jahan), which Akbar is said to have thwarted (237).

According to Gilbert and Gubar, "the chief creature man has generated is woman . . . from Eve, Minerva, Sophia and Galatea onward . . . patriarchal mythology defines women as created by, from and for men, the children of male brains, ribs and ingenuity" (*The Mad Woman in the Attic* 12). Akbar's barbarous punishment of Anarkali is an example of his assertion of man's pride that he is superior and hence can silence woman by frightening. Thus the Mughal dynasty becomes a metaphor for the unjust and partial ruler who has set different moral standards based on gender, class, race etc. The cultural codes which exhibit double standards based on gender

differences have been accepted throughout history and are clearly visible in documenting it. It is when the historian too internalizes this agenda that recording of history becomes monolithic and singular. Such injustices are portrayed as the concern of the ruler to provide peace, instead of arguing that they are meant to victimize and mute the voice of the victim. The story of Anarkali's affair with Salim is labeled as 'outrageous' by Abraham Eraly also who records the incident with a male bias.

Eraly clandestinely blames the women as the cause of sudden detachment of Akbar from the virtuous Bairam Khan, while they actually are trying to make him more self dependant. Their interventions become problematic when they differ from the conventional roles, "the presence of Akbar's mother Hamida Banu Begum and foster mother Maham Anaga in the royal camp ended Akbar's exclusive dependence on Bairam Khan" (125). Eraly mentions succinctly Akbar's leniency in allowing his women to go for haj pilgrimage: "In 1575 he sent his wife Salima, his aunt Gulbadan and several other distinguished Mughal ladies on a haj pilgrimage" (189). Akbar's glory has risen to such heights that even the begums were chanting, "There is no god but Allah and Akbar is his prophet" (213). It is clear that women's lives during Mughal era were completely under the mercy of reigning emperors.

According to Alicia Ostriker, culture defines woman as, "genitally defective, sexually pure, and personally self effacing" ("Anne Sexton and the Seduction of the Audience" 63). Curiously enough, men are free from all the cultural restrictions stated by Ostriker. Eraly inculcates the dynamics of 'domination' while describing the indefatigable sex drives of Mughal emperors like Shah Jahan. Eraly records Shah Jahan's "post-Mumtaz promiscuity" thus: "Though he did not marry again, nor apparently turn to his other wives, he now acquired several concubines, and entered

into numerous illicit liaisons, even committing, according to bazaar gossip, adultery with married women, perhaps even incest" (305). Despite the pain of losing his dear wife, Shah Jahan finds it hard to live without fulfilling his needs as a real man. Eraly has glorified the excessive sex drives of men as a mark of manhood in their works.

Judith Kegan Gardiner observes that, "In a male dominated society, being a man means not being like a woman. As a result, the behavior considered appropriate to each gender becomes severely restricted and polarized" ("On Female Identity and Writing by Women" 189). Akbar's rejection of "the gift" sent by the Sultan of Kashmir in the form of "a bride" (156) owes to the Sultan's refusal to be his vassal. This incident throws light on the power monger's hegemonic agenda to rule the inferior in socio-political relationships. Eraly admires Akbar for having "in his harem, as wives and concubines, some 300 women, from many races and different religions" (169) though it was common in those days for kings to have as many concubines as possible. Eraly goes into raptures while showering praises on Akbar for being a sexual predator:

> In his twenties, Akbar's sexual appetite had seemed insatiable. In 1564, when he was twenty two and already a much married man, we find him casting about for fresh mates, sending panders and eunuchs into the harems of nobles to select women for him. His eyes fell even on married women, and as Badauni reports, in one case at least he forced an amir to divorce his 'wonderfully beautiful and altogether a charming wife without peer' and send her to the imperial harem. The amir, Sheikh Abdul Wasi, had no option but to consent, for it was the Mughal custom that 'if the emperor cast his eye with desire on any

woman', the husband should divorce her and give her over to the emperor (170).

Sheikh Salim Chrishti's sons and nephews express their fears of losing their wives, when Akbar entered their private apartments once. The wordly-wise sage's response tinted absolute disrespect to women sounds caustic, "There is no dearth of women in the world. Since I have made you amirs, seek other wives, what does it matter!"(170). In the Mughal world, marital relationships meant only a license for men to quench their lust. Women were conditioned in such a way that they never expected their men to either love them or giving them a space of their own. The men have to discard without remorse their beautiful life partners the moment the emperor cast his eyes upon them. The emperor and sage alike, both supposed to be the well wishers of their subjects, played vital roles in making woman insignificant and hence 'invisible' in documents which recorded history.

Simone de Beauvoir vehemently lashes her pen against the treatment of woman as the 'other' sex when she says: "… she is simply what man, decrees; thus she is called 'the sex' by which is meant that she appears essentially to the male as a sexual being. For him she is sex-absolute sex, no less. She is defined and differentiated with reference to men… she is the incidental, inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute-she is the Other" (*The Second Sex* 16). The majority of women described in this section like Babur's mother-Qutluq Nigar Khanum, grandmother, wives-Aisha, Dildar Begum, sister-Khanzada Begum, daughter- Gulbadan Begum, Humayun's mother-Maham Begum, Akbar's mother-Hamida Banu Begum, Jahangir's wife-Man Bai, Shah Jahan's daughters,-Raushanara and Goharara Begum, Aurangzeb's wives- Dilras Banu Begum,Udipuri and his

daughters-Zebunissa and Zenatunissa are 'The Partially Invisible' in the narrative. Eraly's portrayal of women described under The Partially Invisible category are perfect representations of womanhood as daughters, wives, mothers, grandmothers and sisters from a male perspective as Chandra Nisha Singh in her book *Radical Feminism and Women's Writing* observes: "All feminine characteristics of patience, self-sacrifice, love and care that construct and support the cult of true womanhood result from and foster the essential image of ideal womanhood" (196).

Like the earlier historical narratives, *The Emperors of the Peacock Throne* also ignores the wives of Akbar, including, Ruqayya Begum, Salima Begum, unnamed Amber princess, Jahangir's wife-the Rajput princess, Shah Jahan's two surviving wives, daughter and Aurangzeb's two nameless wives etc. and hence they come under the category 'The completely Invisible'.

The role of Ruqayya Begum as Akbar's wife is completely ignored except a sentence to glorify Akbar's marriage as boy king, "On the way, at Jalandhar, Akbar, not yet fifteen, took his first wife, Ruqayya, Hindal's only daughter" (123). The historian mentions about her once again in the book for taking care of Akbar's grandson, Khurram who later ascends the throne as emperor Shah Jahan. At the same time Bairam Khan, "who was then in his fifties, married another young cousin of Akbar, the richly talented Salima Begum, daughter of Humayun's sister Gulrukh" (123). Later, Akbar marries Bairam Khan's widow, Salima Begum as if that is the only way to make amends for deserting him. Discussing about Salim's mother, Eraly adds, "His mother, the Amber princess, was not very much in the picture" (235). Thus Ruqayya, Salima Begum and Amber princess, who give birth to Salim are also just casually mentioned as Akbar's "noteworthy spouses"(171).

The name of the Amber princess whom Akbar marries remains anonymous in Eraly's version also, though she is supposed to be Salim's mother, thereby calling for the need of revisionist investigations into the existing discourses. Feminist attempts to produce alternate histories have been continuing for some time by censuring patriarchal agenda that invent strategies in linguistic discourses including historical/ mythological narratives to fortify and perpetuate hegemonic ideologies. Women writers like Chitra Banerji Divakaruni with her revisionist investigation to the Mythology, Mahabharata has brilliantly recreated an alternate story, *Palace of Illusions* that has rendered a powerful voice to Draupadi, usually casted as a shadowy presence in the lives of the larger than life heroes by great sage, Vyasa. The select novels of Indu Sundaresan and Tanushree Podder also offer such an understanding of the past by considering a few of history's most neglected women in their alternate histories.

Rekha Misra in her biographical work on Mughal women observes that "In a society where women live in seclusion, public references are avoided as far as possible" (Preface to *Women in Mughal India* V). The dogmatic taboos of the society exemplified in Misra's statement might have doubly motivated the historian to take a prejudiced stance in his portrayal of 'women figurines' of Mughal history. While describing Shah Jahan's reign, the name of his mother Jagat Gossain is referred only once. But she is paradoxically invisible in Eraly's text as Jahangir's wife while detailing his era. The Rajput princess Jagat Gossain is unimportant to Eraly as Khurram (Shah Jahan) has grown under the soothing care of Akbar's childless wife, Ruqayya Begum. Surprisingly both the women are 'The Completely Invisible' in the narrative. Shah Jahan's two surviving wives, "Akbarabadi Mahal and Fatehpuri

Mahal, and his daughter Purhunar Begum, his first child" (379) are also completely invisible. It is clear that Shah Jahan's wives other than Mumtaz Mahal are as insignificant in histories as they are in harem. His elder daughter is also completely invisible. They are mentioned only once by Shah Jahan before his death while entrusting them to the care of his beloved daughter, Jahanara: "Shah Jahan consoled her, and entrusted to her care his two surviving wives" (379). Eraly mentioned that Aurangzeb has four wives, but he failed to record the names of two wives by making them also 'The Completely Invisible'.

Foucault makes contentions about the linear construction of history in his essay, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" :

> History becomes 'effective' to the degree that it introduces discontinuity into our very being-as it divides our emotions, dramatizes our instincts, multiplies our body and sets it against itself. 'Effective' history leaves nothing around the self, deprives the self of the reassuring stability of life and nature, and it will not permit itself to be transported by a voiceless obstinacy toward a millennial ending. It will uproot its traditional foundations and relentlessly disrupt its pretended continuity. This is because knowledge is not made for understanding; it is made for cutting (380).

Eraly's historical narrative has firmly adhered to the idea of developing history as a linear development which is against Foucault's historiography. Foucault maintains that historical knowledge is made for dismantling the pretended continuity by shattering the known knowledge like giving primacy to subjects ignoring the 'marginalised'.

The Partially Visible Females

In the Introduction to *Feminist Criticism and Social Change*, Judith Newton observes that "A materialist-feminist analysis offers a more complex and in the end less tragic view of history than one polarizing male and female, masculine and feminist; constructing gender relations as a simple and unified patriarchy; and constructing women as universally powerless and universally good"(xxviii).

Eraly's narrative also, succeeds in providing only a secondary position to women, trying to veil their performances using clever strategies. Apart from the women mentioned in the first category, Arjumand and her daughter, Jahanara etc. also receive only passing references though they deserve better treatment. However, their 'otherness' in the discourse is visibly felt in spite of the author's patriarchal construction of representation. Hence they would be placed under the category 'The Partially Visible.' *In the Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir shows how the Greek poet, Simonides of Amorgos, for example, expresses his partial mindset regarding women...: "Women are the greatest evil god ever created: if they sometimes seem useful, they soon change into trouble for their masters" (*The Second Sex* 93).

Eraly gives a fleeting reference to Khurram's betrothal to Asaf Khan's daughter, Arjumand Banu Begum. Eraly notes "Khurram's engagement to Arjumand was unusually long—they were married only five years after their betrothal… when he was twenty and she nineteen" (300). It is interesting to quote Eraly's words on Arjumand in this context:

> Arjumand was a fecund woman, and she bore Khurram all the children he needed, fourteen in all, eight sons and six daughters, in the nineteen

> years of her life with him, averaging a child every sixteen months. She died young, only thirty-eight years old, giving birth to her fourteenth child (300).

Arjumand is a positive role model for historian as an embodiment of wifely and motherly virtues and hence she is partially visible in the narrative. Another historian, Vikram Singh's observation about Mumtaz is notable: "Despite her frequent pregnancies, Mumtaz travelled with Shah Jahan's entourage throughout his earlier military campaigns and the subsequent rebellion against his father. She was his constant companion and trusted confidant and their relationship was intense" (*Encyclopaedic History of India Series: Mughal Culture* 175). Arjumand's tragic death in the birthing process is often recorded by men historians as a strategy to confine her merely to biological functions. Patriarchy always 'overused' motherhood to subordinate women thereby enforcing patriarchal laws as 'universal'. So Mumtaz is important to historians as Shah Jahan's beloved wife who delivered his fourteen children.

'Motherhood' is appreciated by historians as the provider of heirs to the empire but ironically denies the same glory to 'womanhood'. It is as Adrienne Rich in her book *Of Woman Born* observes: "It is not simply that woman in her full meaning and capacity is domesticated and confined within strictly defined limits. Even safely caged in a single aspect of her being—the maternal—she remains an object of mistrust, suspicion, misogyny in both overt and insidious forms" (127). Historians always consider motherhood as respectable in India as begetters of sons as heir to the king or emperor heroes. Shah Jahan has honoured his wife Arjumand as the "Paragon

of the Palace" (301).While tracing some similarities between Shah Jahan's obsessive love to Mumtaz and Jahangir's excessive dependence to Nurjahan, Eraly observes:

> Mumtaz was not just a beautiful woman with whom Shah Jahan was in love; she was his helpmate, the anchor on which he moored himself. He was as dependent on Mumtaz as Jahangir was on Nur Jahan. But unlike Jahangir, who did not care for convention and was not bothered about who knew of his dependence, Shah Jahan was careful about appearances. Still, it was widely known that he consulted her on all important state matters, and it was she who placed the royal seal on his firmans, which gave her a chance to examine the final drafts of documents. Unfortunately, she died within four years of his accession; had she lived longer, her influence and authority would undoubtedly have grown and would probably have been exercised more openly (304).

Shah Jahan is a true patriarch in every sense of the word as he feels it embarrassing to reveal of his dependence to his wife like his father. Shah Jahan fears of losing veneration of people if he disclosed of his wife's participation in the decision making process along with him by reinstating women as inferior to men.

Discussing the role of language in stereotyping women as inferior beings, Dale Spender comments:

> It serves to structure thought and reality so that the speakers of the language can 'see' men only in superior position and women in an inferior one. Male supremacy is at the very core of language, thought

> and reality and it has been allowed to develop in this way by precluding women from the process of legitimating any positive names they may have for themselves and for their existence. As a muted group, the meanings female may have generated have been systematically suppressed (*Man Made Language* 170).

Historians like Eraly have been writing in a language which encoded women as invisible by developing a language that suppresses their identities. Eraly has not completely evaded the possibility of Arjumand emulating her aunt Mehrunissa in exhibiting power openly if death has not courted her within four years of her husband's reign. The historians propagate a male culture that has extremely depended on the subjugation of women by men. Eraly claims that Arjumand might also have fallen in the spell of power if blessed with more longevity there by stressing the vulnerability and susceptibility of women to flaws on account of their growing ambitions. Mumtaz has to endure "a painful death, after a thirty hour labour, giving birth to her fourteenth child, Goharara Begum" (304). Mumtaz is important to historians mainly because her husband has constructed a "great mausoleum, Taj Mahal" in her memory. Shah Jahan's Mumtaz can hence be defined as only 'The Partially Visible' in Eraly's narrative.

The description of Jahanara's physical beauty extends to detailing the rumours that her father Shah Jahan has incestuous relationships with her. Eraly discusses the father-daughter relationships with sexual undercurrents:

> Was there an incestuous relationship between Shah Jahan and Jahanara? We will never know. All deep affections, even between a parent and child, have a sensuous vein, and given Shah Jahan's ardour,

> and Jahanara's frustrations of maidenhood in the lascivious ambience of the seraglio, it was only natural that there should be titillating rumours about them (307).

Eraly fails to fully neglect the possibility of such gossips by citing reasons from a man's perspective. He quotes Berner that "it would have been unjust to deny the king the privilege of gathering fruit from the tree he had himself planted" (307). He also quotes Manucci that "Jahanara had lovers smuggled into her residence, and that she used to indulge in Bacchanalian orgies" (307). Eraly unveils the fact that Jahanara has possessed a 'tempting sexuality' that is ascribed as socially dangerous in a man's world and such aspects give better visibility to her in his work. The masculine coded linguistic representation of women is clear in his description of Jahanara. Such masculine coded linguistic discourses circulate the idea that only men can be 'active sexual subjects' whereas denigrating women to be 'passive objects of male desire'. It is unconvincing that a respectable 'feminine identity with active sexuality' is lacking in Eraly's delineation of women historical figures. Shah Jahan's daughter, Jahanara like her mother can also be categorized as 'The Partially Visible'.

Eraly comments on the role of harem in the war of succession between Shah Jahan's sons, "THE WAR OF SUCCESSION between the brothers was joined in the imperial harem too, where Jahanara and Raushanara, sisters and rivals, matched their wits against each other, with Jahanara supporting Dara and Raushanara intriguing for Aurangzeb" (338). By beginning the war of succession in block letters, Eraly hints that in Mughal society the role of a 'sister' is to support her 'brother', who may be the probable heir to the throne. The daughters are rather 'passive observers' when compared to their brothers who are 'active participants' as heirs to the throne.

Even though he placed the names of many Mughal women in his historical narrative unlike usual historians, it is clearly on the basis of 'insignificance' as the main yardstick to ignore their precedence if at all they have any. Of all the women characters of Eraly, only a single woman deserves to be presented as the 'The Visible Woman'. The excess of 'The Invisible women' and exclusion of other 'marginalized categories' in Eraly's historical narrative throws light to Foucault's point that how dominant power structures maintain their 'superiority' over the 'margins' through the creation of particular discourses.

Eraly's women of his historical world including both the major and minor characters are adroitly restricted more to insignificance. Even the most remarkable queen of Mughal era, Nur Jahan is not accorded a better treatment which consolidated the 'unequal power distributions' of a male-authored text. Eraly has tried his best to write with a balanced view as Darymple claimed by offering a few details about the notable wives of six great Mughal emperors, unlike the other historians to whom they are completely invisible except Nur Jahan. But it is tangible that he has mentioned about them with a hidden agenda of undermining them more to irrelevance and thereby to invisibility instead of liberating them. The only difference is that he has deviated a bit from the usual path of historians by providing some details about Mughal women with 'gendered subjectivity' which the other historians have seldom tried. The others practiced the gendered subjectivity by ignoring women completely instead of presenting them in the order of their 'invisibility'. This politics of inequality advocated by men historians may resuscitate women to think of Newton's remarks that "Women as usual! No wonder we're interested in history!" ("History as Usual" 106). The 'power structures' of male narratives open women's eyes to an

inconvenient truth regarding their inadequate space of recorded history despite being half the population. So women have a predilection for history at least to locate many feisty women whose 'stories' need to be told mainly to fill the gaps formed in male narratives.

The Visible 'Female'

Judith Newton observes how "the idea that literature, history and experience itself are apprehended in culturally constructed languages or symbolic systems is sometimes extended to the view that humanbeings are imprisoned within discourse" ("Historicisms New and Old" 451). Beauvoir notes that "In contemporary accounts as in ancient legends, the man is the privileged hero… All important events happen because of men." (*The Second Sex* 254). Even if that is the repeated practice, Nur Jahan (Mehrunnisa) finds an undeniable space in historical accounts as Jahangir's wife. However, her unavoidable presence in even the conventional constructions of history has triggered the possibilities of creating alternate histories with a revisionist agenda to revive her from the systematically 'imprisoned' image of male histories. She is the only Mughal queen who is worthy of discussion in *The Emperors of the Peacock Throne.*

Jahangir's dependence on the rising power of his dominating wife was severely censured by almost all the historians when Eraly claims, "his stature might shrink further when seen through the frowning glance of Victorian historians who disapproved of his libertine ways and despised him for being henpecked" (239). To be under the sway of a woman is proscribed even if she has remarkable abilities. Jahangir has to encounter rebellions from his elder son Khusrau who is impatient to ascend the throne, but Nur Jahan tries to pacify him and made an effort to

"rehabilitate him by marrying him to Ladli Begum, daughter of Nur Jahan (Jahangir's all-powerful queen) by her first marriage" (258). It is with a tinge of sarcasm in the way that Eraly designates a parenthetical space to describe Nur Jahan, who, as per convention, should be contented with a place in the margins. She is a powerful woman who will break boundaries in order to assert her subjectivity and not be contented to remain in the passive roles like the other women of her dynasty. Her urge for power and creativity invites the ire of both the men of her times and the later historians who rejoiced in her fall, which according to them is the punishment for violating the paternal dictum. Eraly too has shown partiality to depicting this powerful character by offering only a single chapter to her in his grand narrative. This shows his reluctance to acknowledge the social and political implications of her role in the Mughal era as empress, Nur Jahan.

The valorous queen Nur Jahan is censured throughout history for her husband Jahangir's sudden antipathy towards his favourite son Khurram (Shah Jahan). Eraly suspects Nurjahan's interference when he ponders: "WHY WAS JAHANGIR so implacable? Because of the influence of Nur Jahan, his domineering wife? He was very much under her sway at this time, and it is unlikely that he would have taken any major decision without consulting her" (267). The reason behind Shah Jahan's malignity towards Nur Jahan is also discussed by Eraly in words containing phallocentric undertones:

> Who, or what stood between Shah Jahan and the throne? Nur Jahan? Likely. Nur Jahan and Shah Jahan had been allies for many years, and he was as much her favourite as Jahangir's. Yet Shah Jahan had good reason to resent her. He was the heir-apparent, but she, not he, was the

> second most powerful person in the empire. She was in fact the de facto emperor. Would she not try to retain that role even after Jahangir's death? If Shah Jahan succeeded Jahangir, she risked losing her privileged position. She needed a week successor. So, as Jahangir's health failed, the interests of Nur Jahan and Shah Jahan diverged. They both wanted power, but one could have it. Did she then drive Shah Jahan into a corner to ruin him? (267).

Shah Jahan as a true patriarch feels thwarted to see a woman's power outgrowing his. In fact, Nur Jahan inflicts a wound on the patriarch's arrogance by enjoying the ability to even controlling Khurram, the heir to the throne. Eraly's sarcasm is evident when he points out the reasons behind Nur Jahan-Shah Jahan rivalry. He observes that "if Jahangir was under the influence of Nur Jahan, Shah Jahan was similarly under the influence of his wife, Mumtaz Mahal" (268). He also finds fault with the imperious character of the two begums Nur Jahan and her niece, Mumtaz Mahal for their dreams to be powerful behind the veil. Moreover, Nur Jahan has arranged her daughter Ladli Begum's betrothal with the imbecile prince, Shahryar so that she can continue her reign as the power behind the throne. By doing so she openly challenges the heir apparent, Shah Jahan. Though uncertain about the reasons Eraly is eager to censure Nur Jahan: "circumstantial evidence is strong that one way or another Nur Jahan was involved in the estrangement between Jahangir and Shah Jahan" (268).

The Emperor of the Peacock Throne functions as a linear and pretentiously honest narrative recording even the minute details regarding the Emperors of various decades but shows unusual impatience while narrating the major events pertaining to

women, and sometimes even twisting them according to his whims. Hence he uses capital letters to denote the importance of Shah Jahan even while in exile. Eraly writes, "WITH SHAH JAHAN in virtual exile, Nur Jahan's influence, which had been growing steadily over the previous decade, peaked" (271). His intention is to establish that Nur Jahan's rising power owes specifically to the absence of a man from the scene of actions. He quotes Jahangir's courtier Mutamid Khan's words to consolidate his stand: "At last her authority reached such a pass that the king was such only in name" (270). Eraly observes that "Nur Jahan had come rather late into Jahangir's life, when he was forty-two and she thirty-four" (271). According to historians, Jahangir referred Nur Jahan in his memoirs only two years after their marriage and that was as a mark of gratitude for nursing him well during his illness. Jahangir valorizes the archetypal role of Nur Jahan as a dutiful wife but fails to acknowledge her performance as a clever ruler. Eraly employs 'marriage' and 'wifely duties' as instruments to curb the relevance of even a powerful woman like Nur Jahan in the narrative.

The details regarding Nur Jahan's birth as Mihrunissa to the Persian refugees in the desert of Kandahar and her father's appointment to Akbar's service in Mughal India are briefly presented. During Jahangir's reign, as "Itimad-ud-daula was energetically climbing the ladder of success in the Mughal hierarchy, his infant daughter had grown into a beautiful, vivacious and richly talented young woman" (272). Her subsequent marriage with a Persian noble and her coming back as a widow are also described in brief. Eraly dismisses any possibility of Jahangir's role in Mihrunissa's husband, Sher Afgan's death, "if Jahangir desired Nur Jahan, there was no need for him to murder Sher Afghan; he only had to ask for her, for it was the

Timurid custom that if the emperor desired a woman, her husband should divorce her and gave her to the emperor" (272).

Discussing on sexual politics inherent in gender differences, Catherine MacKinnon comments that genders are "created through the eroticization of 'dominance' and 'submission'. The man/woman difference and the dominance/ submission dynamic define each other. This is the social meaning of sex" (*Toward a Feminist Theory of the State* 113). This observation suits to the Mughal social system where women are just sex toys to fulfill the carnal pleasure of the emperors. Eraly asserts that mughal women are expected to willfully submerge her sexual identity within the phallic system as mere 'possessions'.

Eraly underlines Mihrunnisa's predicaments more by claiming that With Sher Afgan's death "she remained some time (four years, in fact) without notice" (272) in the harem as lady in waiting to Ruqayya Begum. But her fate to be the most popular empress of Mughal India is predetermined that the Emperor is so captivated by her charms at the very first sight during the sixth year of his reign and added her to his collection of select women in the harem. "By the time Jahangir married Mihrunnisa, he was a much married man, with many wives and numerous concubines" (273). Modern scholars are of the opinion that Jahangir has twenty wives and 300 concubines. Whatever be the number, Nur Jahan "was his last wife and had no children by her" (273).

Eraly claims that Mihrunnisa "was the exact opposite of Man Bai in character and temperament" (274) who has even committed suicide out of utter disillusionment seeing her husband and son's rebellion for the throne. He records Jahangir's infatuation for her for being differently attractive:

> Right from the beginning, Jahangir placed her on a plane different from that of all his other wives. At the time of their marriage, he gave her the title Nur Mahal, Light of the palace; Light of the World, and on the death of Salima Begum she was designated as Padshah Begum, the first lady of the empire (274).

Eraly's description of Mihrunnisa endorses the fascination in patriarchal writings to indulge in suggestive connotations which paint women as a feast to the eye. Such descriptions seen in historical narratives which revel in detail about the physical appearance are usually verbal reproductions of portraits drawn by male artists at the command of the emperors. The description of Mughal women also were imitations of portraits drawn by male artists "who had the works of women artists of the harem as models. Besides they had Jahangir, an authority on painting to advise them" (274). While describing her large eyes, broad forehead and of her sharp nose, Eraly has not forgotten to say that her face is strong but not hard just to indicate her womanliness synonymous to fragility that demarcates her from the hard looks which are the assets of men. The author condescends further to elaborate on her tastes in designing patterns on carpets and garments and interior decoration. The historian also appreciates her culinary, artistic and poetic talents: "…more than everything else, Jahangir was pleased with Nur Jahan, for she made a conscious effort to please him" (274). The historian eulogizes her inventiveness to stimulate her husband's jaded spirit by offering the best always. Her hunting abilities are described by the historian with awe and wonder as if it was unlikely for a woman to hunt in those dark ages. Her strength, for the historian, was "in firming up Jahangir and reassuring him of his self-worth" (275).

The historian foregrounds the gender prejudices of the age to condemn her rather than to commend. Even while reluctantly admitting that "Nur Jahan won her place in the empire by Jahangir's favour, but her place in history by her own exceptional political and administrative skills" (275), he comments wryly, "But there was one fatal flaw in her. She was a woman. An ambitious woman" (276).

Foucault argues that identity is an effect of power relations: "This form of power applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorises the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, and imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize in himself" (*The Subject and Power* 212). In male versions of history, the author designs, defines and popularizes female identity and sexuality in his interest, establishing it as universal truths. This is visible in the historians' portrayal of Nur Jahan too who deserves a deeper and truer analysis based on her ability to maintain her own self while participating in the known history.

The patriarchal politics of male historians have always confined the empowered women to a very limited space in their voluminous works. S.C.Raychoudhary observes that Nur Jahan's "influence continued to grow year after year till ultimately Jahangir virtually became a tool in the hands of Nur Jahan and the real power of the state began to be exercised by Nur Jahan" (*History of Mughal India* 143). No historian ever dared to present Nur Jahan in a copious light but instead blamed her for overpowering her husband, unlike other Mughal queens who internalized the task of complete subservience to their men. Yet Interestingly, Nur Jahan is the only visible presence in the records of Mughal history. Jahangir's general, Mahabat Khan in his anguish on seeing Nur Jahan's rising power, openly protests to the emperor:

> The whole world is surprised that such a wise and sensible emperor as Jahangir should permit a woman to have so great an influence over him… History, he said, did not record 'any king so subject to the will of his wife', and he advised Jahangir to think about how future generations would judge him (276).

In male versions of history, there is no crucial role for women in decision making. Down the ages, women have been kept away from strategic discussions in the field of politics and administration. Hence it is rare to find history texts documenting her role in important events and further, burying deeply her contributions if any, so that excavating 'her' story from the debris becomes a herculean task. The historians have loyally followed the same pattern all along, thereby cementing the paradigm that the woman's role is to function as a decorative piece, making herself always available for male gaze and physical encroachment.

Eraly enumerates various reasons for Nur Jahan's rise and fall in addition to the main flaw that she was a woman. He argues that, as a woman it is impossible for her to rule without the support of male members of her family: "She could not rule directly, by herself; she had to stay in purdah and could interact only with her family members" (277). So to overcome such limitations she has formed a Nur-Jahana clique that "consisted of Nur Jahan herself, her father Itimad-ud-duala, her brother Asaf Khan, and for, a while, Shah Jahan, who had married Asaf Khan's daughter" (277) for administrative necessity. In this context it is significant to note Giri Raj Shah's viewpoint on purdah: "In fact, Purdah proved an added factor in depriving women of any participation in public affairs, any activity in political or social fields"(*The Encyclopaedia of Women's Studies* 25). The rise of her family along with her power

resulted in resentment among the nobles. Moreover, Mahabat Khan is punished for speaking unfavourably about the queen. Historians like P.N.Chopra blame Nur Jahan as the power behind the throne of Jahangir by practically ruling as the sovereign after his marriage to her. He comments that "Nur Jahan's influence was, however, not all for the good of the state. Her inordinate love of power, her womanly vanity and her subtle devices to make the Emperor her slave led to troubles which seriously threatened the peace of the empire"(*A Comprehensive History of Medieval India* 155). Eraly remarks, "What was unusual in Nur Jahan's involvement in public affairs was that Jahangir, instead of keeping it quiet, flaunted it..." (278). Eraly sarcastically surmises that "Nur Jahan could not act against his will" (278) by erasing 'her' to margin thereby asserting 'his' (Jahangir) significance.

Nur Jahan's unquenchable thirst for power is foregrounded by the historian. With mounting uncertainties in her life, empress Nur Jahan arrange the marriage of her daughter Ladli Begum to Shahryar, "generally considered a nincompoop" (286) to continue to wield her influence from behind the throne. Eraly observes that "The marriage was therefore seen as a manoeuvre by Nur Jahan to facilitate the continuation of her grip on power through the succession of the weak prince" (286). The historian eulogizes her for abstaining from malice in her schemes:

> Nur Jahan did not gloat over her triumph. There was no ruthlessness in her pursuit of power. Nor was there any indication that she was bent on the ruination of Shah Jahan. The surrender terms offered to him were generous. She could have destroyed him. But she didn't (287).

Eraly's glorification of Mehrunissa as the only visible 'female' is nothing but an authorization of certain values that confirm and justify her subordination to Shah

Jahan in the end. In fact, the historians are counseling women with some necessary virtues to survive in a patriarchal society through their writings. Moreover, she has to face rebellions from Mahabat Khan and Shah Jahan. Mahabat Khan failed in his instantaneous rebellion as "it was entirely beyond him to counter the subtle manoeuvres of Nur Jahan" (292). Eraly exemplifies the fact that Jahangir's death has devastated Nur Jahan as "The moment he died, her power too died" (294). He asserts that the power of woman can be judged in relation to the male heads alone. Jahangir's death made a sudden transition in Nur Jahan that "There was no attempt on her part to interfere in politics" (296). Ironically, it is Nur Jahan's brother Asaf Khan's calculated moves and malice that has crushed Nur Jahan's power and secured the throne to his son-in-law, Shah Jahan. Eraly concludes that "After eighteen years of contented obscurity, on 18 November 1645, the great empress, aged sixty eight, passed away" (296). Empress Nur Jahan is resting in tranquility "in a mausoleum she had built for herself beside that of her husband" (296). Despite all her immense abilities, the historian has not elevated her among 'The Invincible' in the narrative.

Like Eraly another historian, S.R. Bakshi comments of Nur Jahan's position as a powerful empress as a mere privilege obtained out of her husband's unflinching love to her: "As the talented wife of a effect Emperor she attained much fame and her word become law and her wish a commandment. There is history in all women's lives, particularly in the lives of those women fortune favours and singles out for a mission right from birth" (*Advanced History of Medieval India* 81). In the initial pages, he too glorified her as a legend, a puzzle for historians and above all as the most beautiful woman in Indian history, a truth that all historians readily agreed. But he cites out her flaws on account of being a woman as the reason behind her fall.

S.R.Bakshi notes that "over-ambition and self-centralism spoiled her image somewhat. She was a woman, not a goddess. Her feelings were a part of her endowments. All facets of her personality are of a piece with her gender" (77).

The Invincible Males

Foucault was not interested in power as such but in how power was wielded. The male characters who stalk the platform of *The Emperors of the Peacock Throne* are rulers who had power in their hands and hence capable of subjugating the marginalized including 'women'. This closed text, which with a definite patriarchal agenda refuses to examine history from a revisionist perspective. Hence the author's focus is on the male characters whom he happily valorizes. According to Lacan, "the paternal law structures all linguistic signification, termed 'the symbolic', and so becomes a universal organizing principle of culture itself" (*Gender Trouble* 101). Eraly uses linguistic tools to portray the men as 'invincible' and the women as mostly 'invisible'. He justifies the choice of Babur's name thus, "The name meant tiger, and proved fitting" (5). The historian also compliments of Babur which meant "fulfillment as a monarch and empire-builder" (9).The historian feels the irony in the name of Humayun which meant 'fortune' as he was an unlucky prince whose fortune was uncertain, "No other Mughal monarch, except Babur, had to endure as much suffering and privation, as many twists and turns of fate, as this hapless prince" (113). Akbar is authoritatively labeled by the historian as the invincible Emperor because "success came easily to Akbar, and never once in his long reign did he have to suffer the humiliation of defeat in the battlefield" (149).The author feels the relevance of Akbar's name as "'great', and he would live up to its promise" (163). He adheres to the glorification of Akbar by the earlier historians who felt his rise to the celestial

heights, and equated him to the Almighty. Eraly quotes Badauni thus: “There were rumours that in the harem the begums were chanting, There is no god but Allah and Akbar is his prophet” (213).

Akbar’s son Salim “took the title Jahangir, Seizer of the World” (234).The historian tries to prove “Jahangir was not a failure, as he is often portrayed to be” (239). Jahangir, who has been depicted in history as a hen pecked husband, appears in Eraly’s version as “the most endearing of the Mughals “(239) for being good to his subjects and bringing prosperity to the land. He refuses to acknowledge Nur Jahan’s role in better governance of the empire during the reign of Jahangir. Instead he diverts the attention of the reader to the fact that “there was no noteworthy expansion of the empire under Jahangir” (254) more to berate Nur Jahan rather than Jahangir. The historian assesses that the influence of a woman has arrested his growth unlike his powerful father, Akbar. Eraly endorses the statement of Shah Jahan’s chronicler, Inayat Khan who blames Nur Jahan for interfering in the rule, “At last her authority reached such a pass that the king was such only in name” (270). Finally, with a single comment, “Nur Jahan could not act against his will”, Eraly erased all possibilities of Nur Jahan enjoying monopoly during her husband’s reign.

The historian’s portrayal of Shah Jahan abounds in compliments as a man behind “a Pharaonic mask” (300). If the physical features of women characters are highlighted in their portrayals, Shah Jahan’s qualities are enumerated while describing him. Hence the artistic perfection of the Taj Mahal is equated to the virtues in the character of Shah Jahan who built it, “Only Shah Jahan could have built the Taj. The qualities of the Taj—opulent and startingly beautiful, and yet also austere, perfect in symmetry and balance, meticulous and painstaking in craftsmanship—are all qualities

which Shah Jahan cherished in his own life" (309). Even the unquenchable lust of the king for woman in his old age is seen with sympathy by the author. He quotes the words of chronicler, Manucci to justify his argument: "Shah Jahan brought this illness on himself, for being already an old man… he wanted still to enjoy himself like a youth, and with this intent took different stimulating drugs" (331). This event is recorded with the modus –operandi of relegating women as mere 'bodies' for man's sexual gratification. That the same man who was completely broken at the loss of his wife in whose name he even built a monument is still yearning for a woman's body is strange and despicable, but worthy to be recorded in a male centered text.

Eraly praises Aurangazeb for his valor and spirited nature, "in fact utterly fearless, and would never turn away from an adversary, man or beast, nor ever retreat from a battlefield" (394). Yet, the historian has to half heartedly admit that "the reign of Aurangzed marks the beginning of the end of Mughal glory" (413). Even when he fails in his duty of providing peace and prosperity to his kingdom, Eraly spares no praise for him and chooses to be very careful in agreeing that he was a failure.

The text is full of lengthy descriptions on the physical attributes, character, personality, predilection towards women, hunting, rebellions, wars and territorial expansions in which the men indulge etc. Even minor incidents connected with them find a place in the narrative, making it lengthy and pulpy. Hence even a quick reading of the text would reveal the enormity of their relevance. At the same time, the politics of the author in giving a secondary role for women and pushing them to the margins of history is also evident.

Concluding his points on historicity, Foucault observes:

> The historical sense gives rise to three uses that oppose and correspond to the three Platonic modalities of history.The first is parodic, directed against reality, and opposes the theme of history as reminiscence or recognition; the second is dissociative, directed against identity, and opposes history given as continuity or representative of a tradition; the third is sacrificial, directed against truth, and opposes history as knowledge ("Nietzsche, Genealogy, History"385).

Foucault acknowledges that there is no power that is exercised without a series of aims that it results from the choice or decision of an individual subject and hence history has to be viewed as parodic, dissociative and sacrificial. But Eraly has appropriated himself with the earlier historians who wielded power with a clear patriarchal ideology in examining a much discussed history using the same looking glass. Newton observes in "Family/Value: Reflections on a Long Revolution that "Since in men's history, finally, competing categories of Politics, race, religion and class already crowd the frame of reference, investigations of masculinity may more easily pinpoint the contingency of gender determination and its co-construction with other systems for organizing identities, relations, and meanings as well" (575). This is apparent in the select historical narrative.

Judith Newton comments of a common notion that "'history' is best told as a story of power relations and struggle, a story that is contradictory, heterogeneous, fragmented" ("History as Usual? Feminism and the New Historicism" 89). The historian Eraly's statements are not contrdictory, heterogenous and fragmented as they adhere to the male ideology but, instead are compatible, homogenous and

monolithic. All the women figurines of this narrative except empress, Nur Jahan are mere inmates of harem, where they are atrociously enmeshed into a pantheon of darkness by an insensitive male society that enjoyed supreme 'power'. All these can offer an understanding of women's experience at different moments in history as 'victims' rather than agents of 'social change'.

The minor characters like Sher Khan, Bairam Khan, Sir Thomas Roe, Mahabat Khan, Dara, Shivaji etc also occupy a significant place in the narrative. The rise of Sher Khan to Sher Shah as "The master of Hindustan, a vast empire" (73) by defeating Humayun is detailed in a lengthy account. The prime significance of Bairam Khan in moulding Akbar as an exemplary ruler is underlined when he "considered himself indispensable to Akbar in governing the empire" (125). Maham Aanga, Akbar's foster mother is described as a 'canny schemer' (125) who would plot the fall of Bairam Khan. Eraly gives a remarkably better treatment to Bairam Khan when compared to the women of his narrative. The entry of an English Aristocrat, Sir Thomas Roe as "the first British ambassador accredited to the Mughal court" (279) also extends to many pages. Mahabat Khan's rebellion against Emperor Jahangir is recorded by historian with great precision as the amir "had always chafed under Nur Jahan's authority" (288). Despite Dara's inevitable fall before Aurangzeb, the historian details his inexhaustible fight for the throne. "As the crown prince it was Dara's responsibility to suppress the rebels, and he believed that he had the necessary means to do so" (345). While Dara's story is relevant, his wife, Nadira Banu is irrelevant in the narrative. The Maratha campaign under the leadership of

Shivaji is also detailed in many pages, especially his transformations from the role "of a war lord to that of a great king" (476).

L.P.Sharma, a historian in his work, *Mughal Empire* also has followed the usual pattern of providing the margins to its women characters except Nur Jahan and Mumtaz Mahal whose descriptions are condensed into short paragraphs or a few sentences. Another significant historical work, *A History of India* by Burton Stein offers a succinct and engaging yet partial narrative about the Indian subcontinent, interesting in this context for completely erasing the role of the royal wives in the trajectory of its evolution. Stein's version goes to the extent of ignoring even the most powerful Mughal queen Nur Jahan while delineating the reign of Jahangir in the Mughal era.

In the article "The Productive Hypothesis: Foucault, Gender and the History of Sexuality", Carolyn J. Dean observes that "historians use normative frameworks that make their role in producing the historical subjects whose actions they describe and interpret invisible" (273). Hence, women become the excluded, unspoken and invisible in history when the historian used his 'canon' specifically "to represent universal man and his experiences" (274). Theorists like Judith Newton have amply used Foucault in myriad ways especially to rethink the normative frameworks of history. Like Foucault, she refuses to see history as a single and coherent line of progress but instead focuses on the dynamic and productive nature of power that dismantles the decentered positions of 'marginalized categories 'in history.

However, the closures in Foucault's theory have been critiqued by women theorists and women historians as well. Carol Thomas Neely maintains that New Historicism has tended to "oppress women, repress sexuality and subordinate gender

issues" ("Constructing the Subject: Feminist Practice and the New Renaissance Discourses" 7). Myra Jehlen complains that New Historicism collapses "all levels of reality into one level of representation and makes it difficult to talk about intentionality, causality and change". ("Feminism and New Historicism" 159). A historical narrative like *The Emperors of the Peacock Throne* have to be analysed in these terms, regrounding gender issues and using an alternate perspective which includes the marginalized. This chapter thus tried to assess how far the male constructed histories are "exclusive and monolithically male" (Preface to *Feminist Criticism and Social Change* xii) ignoring the female voices as 'Invisible'.

Devahuti observes that "History and culture encompass a very large area of intellectual activity to include multiple genres of man's response to objects, events, and ideas of which he is at the same time creator, observer and recipient. (Introducton to *Bias in Indian Historiography* iii).The constructed histories by male historians have always concentrated in making women invisible or veiled , based on the assumption that they themselves are the 'creator', observer' and 'recipient' of 'his'tory, which represents "unrelenting male domination"("History as Usual" 117). A centripetal reading of such androcentric discourses would point at the need to have more texts which intervene in discourse and history, by finding new ways to include representations of women's experience and open new horizons of 'herstory'.

Chapter III

Timeri.N.Murari's *Taj: A Story of Mughal India*:

'His'tory Represented

> History is no less a form of fiction than the novel is a form of historical representation. -Hayden White

Timeri N. Murari's historical fiction, *Taj: A Story of Mughal India* (2004), a well crafted novel on Mughal era in India, acclaimed to be an exotic, passionate novel (by *The Guardian*), depicts violence and eroticism(according to The Telegraph) and Bill Aitken in Sunday Observer, wrote a full page review on the 'masterly historical novelist' for brilliantly portraying history authentically in a fiction.The Outlook compliments Murari for "skillfully weaving fact and fiction, steering the narrative back and forth in time"(www.timerimurari.com/review of Taj).

The powerful narrative, which uses modern strategies to explore the complexities of the eventful era, however, disappoints a reader who expects in its rendering a revisionist analysis of the unjust exploration of women and other subaltern identities. In this aspect, it reduces itself to a mere fictionalized version of the existing historical narratives, including Abraham Eraly's *The Emperor of the Peacock Throne*, discussed in the previous chapter. This shows how male writing, as Helene Cixous remarks, is always marked by "a libidinal and cultural- hence political, typically masculine economy" ("Laugh of the Medusa" 879). The gender biased representations adopted in their works have dexterously reduced the female to a passive and objectified creature with no creativity or intellect of her own.

Commenting on the term 'bias', K.V. Soundara Rajan notes that "Bias, as a term, is perhaps primarily biological, and is part of a tribal instinct in man to like or dislike a thing intensely"(*Bias in Indian Historiography* 261). Murari's misrepresentation of women too either as sexual objects or as vile schemers also is the product of such bias and hence usually considered normal and pardonable in the works of male novelists.

Foucault describes the historian as one who "is divided against himself: forced to silence his preferences and overcome his distaste, to blur his own perspective and place it with the fiction of a universal geometry, to mimic death in order to enter the kingdom of the dead, to adopt a faceless anonymity" ("Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" 383-384). Carol Thomas Neely also maintains that New historicism do not "much concern themselves with women, sexuality, gender relations, marriage and the family, and when they do, their concern is to master women"("Constructing the Subject: Feminist Practice and the New Renaissance Discourses" 8). Ellen Pollak complains that "Feminist critics have been vexed for some time by the indifference both of the old historicism… new and old, to the realities of women's cultural exclusion" ("Feminism and the New Historicism: A Tale of Difference or the Same Old Story" 281).

The Feminist New Historicist attempts to look at history, asserting the need for more texts to intervene in discourse and history, by finding new ways to include representations and articulations of woman's experience also. The focus of this chapter would be to critically examine the lopsided way in which history of the Mughal era in India has been depicted by the male novelist,T.N.Murari, how he endorses the patriarchal strategies of the male historians in this matter, represented by Abraham Eraly and what are the fictional tools used by him to propagate this

ideology. The theoretical framework for analysis would be New Historicism, to support which feminist ideologies that critique patriarchal power politics will be used.

In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault points out: "Where there is power there is resistance; and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power" (95). The subversive resistance of anti-phallocentrism and anti-repression occupy the heart of every theory and practice of a feminist genealogy. Hence, discussing on feminist concepts like 'construction of subjectivity and sexuality, Judith Newton says:

> And one is left, all over again, to ask why feminist theory has been so hard to see, especially for men and even for those in sympathy with feminist politics. Why, in particular, one is prompted to inquire, has feminist theorizing of such concepts as the construction of subjectivity or sexuality received relatively little attention outside of feminist communities, while the same concepts as theorized by men have been duly and widely received with a sense of discovery and great seriousness?("History as Usual" 95).

This chapter would examine the different ways in which historical or social constructions become political when it is made with a patriarchal agenda, thereby assigning only marginal spaces to women and other similar subalterns, with special reference to *Taj*. The chapter has been divided into various subplots based on the thematic concepts that objectify and victimise women.

While analyzing fictional discourses like the *Taj*, the focus is on challenging the essentialist presumptions, like fixed characteristics that limit the possibilities of

change regarding a woman's identity as is traditionally passed down through known texts on history. Murari's characters propagate patriarchal ideology either as powerful males or as women who are victims of/party to that ideology. Hence the novel becomes more of an erotic novel instead of being a truthful historical document. Murari thus emulates the existing historical versions while depicting Arjumand in a copious light, giving enormous room for all to compare and contrast her with her aunt, Mehrunissa. As a consequence, both the women characters embody the two polarities of characteristics usually attributed to women while portraying them as archetypal symbols of femininity.

Judith Newton observes on ideological division of the world "into 'public' and 'private,' into a world of men and a world of women, into a world where labor was seen as labor and a world in which real labor was in most respects invisible, into a world which was equated with 'history' and a world which lay just beyond 'history's' margins" ("History as Usual" 91). This chapter examines how far these ideological differences are apparent in the novel *Taj*.

The Fairy Tale Existence

A feminist reading of the popular fairy tales reveals that:

> A primary goal of gender construction in patriarchal culture is to prepare young girls for romantic love and heterosexual practices, girls come to know that their value lies in man's desire for them and the characteristics and qualities that will assure their desirability are revealed in cultural storylines ("Ella Evolving: Cinderella Stories and the Construction of Gender-Appropriate Behaviour" 136).

The women occupying the fictional world of the *Taj* are portrayed as helpless damsels in distress, always living in the shade of men and waiting for men to solve their problems for them. For this, they have to be physically attractive like Cinderella or the wife of Bluebeard in fairy tales and inefficient in dealing with matters in the public sphere. Like the fairy tales which are "narrated from a position of omniscience and authority so that a reader is passive and not engaged in the sense that they participate in interpreting the tales," ("Spinning New Tales from Traditional Texts: Donna Jo Napoli and the Rewriting of Fairy Tale" 58). This novel also rewrites history with a clear agenda of silencing not only the characters but even the reader, who is lured to accept the given versions as the only one.

Kate Millet observes that "patriarchy has a still more tenacious or powerful hold through its successful habit of passing itself off as nature" (*Sexual Politics* 58). Like Cinderella, women like Arjumand internalize the patriarchal philosophy that marriage is their ultimate goal of life that makes them contented. As Beauvoir observes: "In a more or less disguised way, her youth is consumed by waiting. She is waiting for Man" (*The Second Sex* 286). Arjumand is waiting for the love of her life as if she harbours no other aspirations.

The novel opens with the central character, Arjumand dreaming of her imminent love affair with a man whose face she is trying to decode, "The excitement was not in the air, but, in myself in the sweet remnants of my dream" (*Taj* 13). Murari portrays Arjumand as a girl whose life's ambition is to fall in love. The novelist endorses the hegemonic stance of the era by elaborating on scenes where women like Mehrunissa and Arjumand look forward to being made available for men. For the celebrated Meena Bazaar, women prepare themselves with anticipation:

Are n't you getting ready? Mehrunissa asked me

Am I going as well?

Why not? You're old enough now. Someone might notice you and propose marriage (15).

The indulgence in romantic aspirations has been considered by the feminist ideology as an emotional manipulation by patriarchy and hence an obstacle for the woman to understand her own true self: "Romantic love also obscures the realities of female status and the burden of economic dependency" (*Sexual Politics* 37). Arjumand, like the girls of her age, "dreamed of romance" (15) and longed for security under the shelter of a man, resembling a fairy tale princess.

The eagerness and enthusiasm of the women to make themselves available to 'male gaze' are detailed by the novelist. Women are earnestly preparing for the bazaar, where they can flirt with royal men including the emperor if fortune smiles at them. Mehrunissa makes an interesting comment: "It is better not to be seen, but to see everything. Mehrunissa said sharply. It makes men wonder about us and dream" (16). She gives a magical coating to woman's beauty using euphemisms to trick men to them by hiding it behind a veil, to tempt them thereby camouflaging her own identity. She can be at the same time a sorceress, a witch and a disarming dame, all to win the attention of the male. Such examples of manipulations can be seen throughout the novel, creating a set of models for patriarchal discourses to come in course of time. The author uses them to endorse the traditional political, gendered histories documented by historians including Abraham Eraly. The androcentric parameters set for beauty, femininity etc are intentional strategies meant to make women narcissistic

and ignorant about possibilities to understand her true identity or subjectivity. In the *Dialectics of Sex*, Shulamith Firestone expresses her indignation at the male constructed images that impose yardsticks to her beauty and physical appearance. She observes: "women everywhere rush to squeeze into the glass slipper, forcing and mutilating their bodies with diets and beauty programs" (136).

In the Meena Bazaar, Arjumand feels, "I was not totally at ease without my veil in the presence of complete strangers, although secretly it was what I had wished" (23). The novel *Taj* is passionate and sensuous in content. This is because it discusses abundantly the erotic relationships which the emperors have with their wives and concubines. But while delineating the woman's efforts to satisfy man's sexual urge, it overlooks the theme of female sexuality and her articulations regarding them and thus continues with the strategy of treating her as the 'other'. The myth of romantic love coaxes women to concede themselves willingly to male domination. Kate Millet observes:

> The image of women as we know it is an image created by men and fashioned to suit their needs. These needs spring from a fear of the 'Otherness' of women. Yet this notion itself presupposes that patriarchy has already been established and the male has already set himself as the human norm, the subject and referent to which the female is the 'Other' or alien (*Sexual Politics* 46).

Arjumand reminisces about her dream of anticipating her lover's identity with great excitement. She also considers Emperor Akbar's having "four hundred wives and five thousand concubines" (20) as a true hallmark of manliness.

Bodies That Don't Matter

According to Judith Butler, bodies and gender are two separate things. Since gender is acquired gender performativity, a ritualized socially constructed norm that one follows but "bodies never quite comply with the norms" (*Bodies That Matter* 2). In being a man, Shah Jahan acts out socially sanctioned masculine performance by using women's bodies to quench his lust. Shah Jahan's pride in his capacity to indulge in endless sex acts is described in phallocentric diction:

> I had heard nobles, a favoured few, boast about their conquests, sigh longingly of the pleasurable nights spent with a lady. I too was not inexperienced in these matters. I had lain with my slave girls and sometimes, for amusement, had gone with companions to the dancers in the bazaars and paid for their bodies (26).

The focus is on the materiality of woman's body as a space for experimenting with his sexual capabilities, as if it is devoid of its own sexuality "through a forcible reiteration of those gender norms"(*Bodies That Matter* 2). Though he claims "I could choose any girl in this chamber to sate my lust" (26) from the very first meeting with Arjumand, he "was bursting with words and feelings" (28) due to an irresistible thirst to touch her, "I still felt the seductive softness of her cheek, like a brand pressed into my skin" (29). To Shah Jahan, love is physical and he begins to view Arjumand as an object of pleasure from the very outset. Their love-at-first sight romance is valorised as if it is a rewarding experience for both the partners, "I felt your touch in my heart over distance, as you feel mine" (30).

According to Carol Thomas Neely, "The gender inflections of the floating signifiers of the discourse remain remarkably fixed, with man in the subject position and woman as the essential other" ("Constructing the Subject" 10). Hence, Shah Jahan can at the same time, make love with the slave girls, and think of Arjumand. The slave girls become a patriarchal tool by eulogizing Shah Jahan's infatuation inspite of their bodies being used for his sexual experiments.They encourage him instead, "… look on her ecstasy, lord… look, on your own strength" (58).

Irigary observes that ". . . for woman is traditionally a use-value for man, an exchange value among men; in other words, a commodity" (*This Sex Which Is Not One* 31). So in this novel, the emperor becomes the consumer and his wives, concubines and slave girls whose role is to gratify his sexual interests, all become commodities whose value he will decide. It endorses Irigary's argument that "Female sexuality has always been conceptualized on the basis of masculine parameters" (23). She continues by saying that "For the most part, this sexuality offers nothing but imperatives dictated by male rivalry: "the strongest being the one who has the best 'hard-on', the longest, the biggest, the stiffest penis,.."(25).

Good Enough Mother

In her work *From Panthers to Promise keepers* (2005) Judith Newton observes how "dominant gender norms, apart from socialization, affirmed women's nurturing role and men's right to be at the emotional center of women's lives. Unable to acknowledge the loss of the holding environment, that good-enough-mothers provided to their infants, men often felt that others, especially women in the domestic situations should make up for the original loss" (45). The notion of the good enough mother, according to D.H.Winnicott, a known psychoanalyst, is the connection of the

"mothering process to the child's cognitive development and that of a healthy concept of external reality" ("Transitional objects and transitional phenomena" 89-97).

Arjumand remembers that her beloved son Dara was "conceived in joy, in happiness, in laughter and loving" (196). Isa'swords are also worthy to be considered when he says, Arjumand's "affection for Dara never changed. She could cuddle and cosset him, shower him with her kisses" (200). Arjumand remembers, "I had been so innocently joyous at Dara's birth, but during the others, I cared not which season it was" (211). Mother's attitude and state of mind are clearly evident in the personalities of her two sons, Dara and Aurangzeb who are diametrically opposite in their perspectives toward life. Julia Kristeva, known for her consistent emphasis on motherhood, explains in a talk "Motherhood Today" how this good enough mother ideology of the womb "as sacred and the marketing of the 'perfect child,' 'the child king,' than weigh the risks and benefits that this passion holds for them, their children, the father and the society at large" (Lecture).

Murari's Arjumand enjoys motherhood as if there is no other task left for her apart from being a woman and wife, "But I placed his searching mouth to my own breast, aching to have him suckle me" (196). Judith Newton in "Historicisms New and Old" claims: "All are within 'power' and are victimized by power in turn. Because ideological operations of power are carried on homogeneously throughout culture, moreover, gender and class appear to make little difference even in the degree to which women and men perpetuate disciplinary power or in its effects"(455).

Exploring the performative role of woman as Mahadevi Varma observes: "Motherhood is revered because it keeps the society alive and wifehood is lauded because it caters to man's fulfilment" (qtd in *Women in Patriarchy* 227). Arjumand

has no time to rest due to her consecutive deliveries. This is the heavy price she has to pay for gratifying Shah Jahan's lust. The author cleverly puts the blame on Arjumand by assuming that she enjoyed surrendering herself to the continuous conquests of her body. Hence she considers herself responsible for the endless pregnancies which took a toll on her health and pretends to enjoy each one of them, "He could not be blamed for my own lust" (344). Nancy Chodorow observes that "Women's mothering contributes to the perpetuation of their own oppression… 'the desire to mother' signals women's ongoing engagement with and nurturing of others, which offers a preferable social model of the self and society" (qtd in *Gender and Sexuality* 56-57). Thus Arjumand becomes an agent in perpetuating male hegemony by tirelessly rendering the procreative capacity of her womb in spite of becoming weaker.

Murthi's wife Sita is also not free from the pains of womanly duties, "Sita lay stunned and tired, wet and sweat; her face had the calm placid look of one who has gone through immense agony" (217). Both Sita and Arjumand are tired of their constant pregnancies which eventually suck out lives from them, Sita "was not well; it was a sickness she knew of old. She had not bled for many days and knew, unhappily that she was pregnant again" (96). Isa's comment about Arjumand's unending pregnancies is also interesting in this regard: "Having waited so many years for her beloved prince, his children now tumbled out of her body" (200). Phallocentricism in social and familial relationships lead to confining woman's roles in the private space where she is "nothing but a mother" (*This Sex Which is not One* 83). Man's paternal function is limited and hence can occupy the 'public space,' which in this case, is ruling the empire.

The othering of the female in the novel has its reflections on treating the girl child also as the secondary. Arjumand after giving birth to her daughter laments, "We had prayed for a son. God gave us a daughter, Jahanara" (194). Sita's longing for giving birth to a boy who would be 'like' her husband also is the effect of the conditioning that the woman's happiness is complete only if the newborn child is a boy. Sita also longs for a son like her husband due to the influence of the dominant patriarchy, "She whispered a prayer: a son, Siva, Vishnu, Lakshmi, a son. If there had been a temple nearby, Sita would have bathed, dressed in a clean sari, woven jasmine into her hair and carried simple offerings to the gods. She would have given the priest a few coins to recite a special puja for her newly formed baby and prayed to the sound of the chanting that it would become a boy"(97).

The Exclusive valorization of Man's Needs

This section sheds light on "a system of difference based on the natural divisions of sex" ("History as Usual" 116) which valorize man's needs and ignore women's needs. Considering women as an object of transaction among men alone, Irigary rightfully observes that "The law that orders our society is the exclusive valorization of men's needs! desires, of exchanges among men" (*This Sex Which is not One* 171).This is evident in Murari's glorification of male sexuality.

When Arjumand, after repeated warnings from hakim about her deteriorating health due to her continuous bearing and birthing children, complains of Shah Jahan's sexual cravings, his comment is "May be I should take a second wife" (227). He disinclines to see his wife's pain by disrobing her right to resist him at times at least to prolong the longevity of her life. Jack Holland in the book *Misogyny: The World's Oldest Prejudice* observes that "As a wife, a woman was placed under the absolute

rule of her husband, who had the power of life or death over her" (39). This is vivid in Shah Jahan's behaviour as a rude patriarch who cares for his wife as long as she satisfies him with bodily pleasures. He remains detached to her for many days until she pleased him by accepting ten thousand kisses and his seventh child. The cruel irony is that she has to win his attention thereby making him remember their first meeting and come back to her. He is pleased and she is consumed in his unending passion with the usual zest. Even in the midst of all the hurdles and difficulties Shah Jahan finds time to enjoy his wife as a commodity. In the parallel story, Murthi is also like Shah Jahan in destroying his wife, Sita with his inexhaustible lust of a man. Both the women died of their husbands' passion while the former is out of revenge and the latter is out of love. Murthi torments and penalizes his wife for a second place in her heart as the first being preoccupied with his brother, Isa years back. The author is reflecting the general expectations of men from wives like Arjumand and Sita that is to satiate the lust of their husbands as passive objects of desire even without uttering a single word of protest. Beauvoir observes that "a man is in his right by virtue of being man; it is the woman who is in the wrong" (*The Second Sex* 20). Beauvoir's observation suits to Shah Jahan, Murthi and their wives in this context.

Shah Jahan and Arjumand continue their love making sessions as their only means of solace amidst mounting tensions which only doomed her further to more pregnancies: "Our love was all the magic we could command; it held fear at bay. We bestowed it on each other through our touch, our lips, our bodies, enfolded in it we felt ourselves invisible to the surrounding world"(256). Murari incorporates Freud's concept of male sexuality as aggressive activity and female sexuality of passivity.

Irigary observes that "Freud himself is enmeshed in a power structure and an ideology of the patriarchal type leads" (*This Sex Which is not One* 70).

> The emperor's appetite for women had never abated. Slaves, devadasis, nautch girls, princesses, begums; the most beautiful, the most voluptuous, all lay with him day and night. He could not be sated. A demon lived between his legs; he had taken a potion to increase his powers and it had blocked the passage. He could not pass urine and writhed in agony (271).

Shah Jahan has an irresistible urge to enjoy the flesh of women even in the midst of his acute depression in losing his dear wife. To the writer, he is a man who still concentrates in his 'man's needs'. His insatiable appetite for lust has prompted him to indulge in lovemaking with any women he, please. Ironically the sons of Shah Jahan and Arjumand fight against each other casting a shadow to their passionate love. Shah Jahan's lust never ceases, "Flesh, he would demand then, wanting comfort in his solitary bed. The women waited for his call, knowing his needs, and lay beneath him," (338). Isa realizes that Shah Jahan considers the pleasure obtained from the bodies of women as the only means of consolation to his tired mind even in his old age. He continues his unending passion for women till his last breath despite his so called eternal love to Arjumand. Double standards on matters of sexuality and morality on the basis of gender differences are well evident in the novel *Taj*. Murari's fictional narrative like Eraly's historical narrative is modelled on sexual indifference and on the submission of one sex to the other. In this regard, Irigary notes that "We may nevertheless observe that men are the ones who have imposed this model of

mastery historically, and we may attempt to interpret its relation with their sexuality" (*This Sex Which Is Not One* 128).

The love relationship of Arjumand and Shah Jahan is constructed on the foundation of male sexuality. Naturally, Arjumand is jubilant in her preparations to celebrate Royal Meena Bazaar as such events often made her nostalgic of her first meeting with her beloved. She wonders whether Shah Jahan has fallen for her if she stayed there with her veiled face years back, "How can one fall in love with a piece of cloth?"(353). To her, love is a bodily attraction that offers no scope for faceless or bodiless concepts. She resists her husband for almost a year but he continues to fulfil his 'mans needs' with the women she chose. She ensures no woman is allowed to visit him more than once out of her fear of losing him. Arjumand strongly clings to the viewpoint that offering bodily pleasure is the only way to retain her husband's love forever.

On designing wedding costumes that seductively revealed a woman's breasts, Mehrunissa lets her niece know that "It is what men most like to see" (165). Murari presents women characters as too keen in exposing themselves as commodities to the male gaze. According to Butler, "'sex' not only functions as a norm, but is part of a regulatory practice that produces the bodies it governs, that is, whose regulatory force is made clear as a kind of productive power, the power to produce—demarcate, circulate, differentiate—the bodies it controls" (*Bodies That Matter* 1). Murari's women characters differentiate their bodies from those men by wearing seductive costumes as a sign of productive power revealing their bodies to captivate men. The characterization of women in this novel has undergone a recurring pattern of describing their beauty and sexual charisma. The peripheral features are described

from a strictly male point of view focusing on certain distinguishing parts of female body.

The sufferings of the downtrodden labourer, Murthi and his wife Sita is also narrated parallel to Shah Jahan and Arjumand's story. Both Sita and Arjumand are tired of the womanly duties assigned to them by patriarchy.

Woman as an Image of and for Man

Judith's Newton, in her analysis of Dickens' *Bleak House*, counters the arguments of male theorists that real history is masculine, "the novel tends to be read as a site on which threats to traditional gender difference are reproduced and then recontained"("Historicisms: New and Old" 456). Murari's novel *Taj* also can be analysed in the same light. The text's representation of gender difference is a central point of focus.

In the male narratives, women are quite commonly portrayed as "the ubiquitous image of the other" ("Learning Not to Curse" 74). Murari has congenially denied subjectivity to characters like Arjumand on the basis of gender. Butler rightfully observes that "As in the existential dialectics of misogyny, this is yet another instance in which reason and mind are associated with masculinity and agency, while the body and nature are considered to be the mute factity of the feminine, awaiting signification from an opposing masculine subject" (*Gender Trouble* 48). This is clearly evident in Murari's portrayal of characters on the basis of gender. With incisive understanding of her inherited secondary position, Arjumand accepts that her education "was as much as was considered suitable for the narrow existence of a nobleman's wife" (15). From childhood onwards, she is nurtured in

such a way by her parents that her identity is wholly defined in her relation to male members like father, husband and sons. Sangeeta Dutta in her paper "Relinquishing the Halo: Portrayal of Mother in Indian Writing in English" claims that a woman's identity "revolves around the wife/mother roles beyond which no individuality needs to be established or recognized" (84). As Dutta's observation, Arjumand in the novel *Taj* has no other ambition but waiting incessantly for her lover to get married and begin a family life.

Irigary observes that "woman serves as reflection, as image of and for man, but lacks specific qualities of her own" (*This Sex Which is not One* 187). Shah Jahan always fails to see Arjumand as a subject with a mind. Shah Jahan repeatedly insists that Arjumand should wait for him in spite of his marrying another woman. Such a reiteration that "If she marries another, Iam lost" (116) from Shah Jahan's part indicates his masculine superiority that demands complete loyalty from women. Shah Jahan marries another woman as a dutiful son leaving Arjumand in the lurch for an infinite period. Arjumand is a girl who longs to be loved "Love was kismet; if it came into one's life. If not, a loveless life seeped away into the grave" (125). To Shah Jahan's word of taking her as his second wife, Arjumand shamelessly agrees "Even your concubine. My happiness is to be by your side" (81). Arjumand's romantic and impulsive longing to be the lover and wife of Shah Jahan persuades her to surrender physically and emotionally even to the level of sacrifice, shamelessness and self-abnegation. The author offers gender dimensions of subordination through such dialogues.

Common men like Murti often express their curiosity to know more about the dead empress, Mumtaz for whom they are tirelessly perspiring to construct the dome

obeying emperor's command. Murti fails to get a convincing reply to his oft repeated question about Empress Mumtaz, "What was she like?"(37). This highlights the insignificance of an empress' face in Mughal society. She is exclusively a private property of the Emperor because no other male had any idea about her face while she was alive. She is just a visual object of desire owned by her husband as all other men are barred from having a glance of her face in her lifetime and even after death. Arjumand expresses her doubt to Isa, "Has his love for me ended?"(76). Her doubts underline the different love rules patriarchy prescribed for men and women. Arjumand fears that "I would wait as he commanded, but promises made in passion can be swiftly forgotten by princes" (81). The author is here exposing the superiority of men negating the true essence of women characters through the public display of fears and doubts by women characters as a strategy to celebrate the superiority of men over women. Characters like Shah Jahan and Murthi exhibit active hostility towards female subjectification through their indifference to wives as well as girl children.

Aristotle in his work *Politics* explicates his theory of sex difference that demarcates male superiority and female inferiority as the "one rules and the other is ruled" (qtd in *Blackwell Guide to Feminist Philosophy* 48). This dichotemy based on gender or sex is vivid in the dialogues, thought processes and certain complexes exhibited by women characters. Arjumand's mother chides her, "You are old, old!"(126) as a woman who underestimates her daughter on the basis of gender as a result of her firm adherence to patriarchal ideologies that dominated her life. In her mother's perspective, men hesitate to marry her sixteen year old daughter. Ironically these ageing rules are never applicable to men who are young even in their sixties. Arjumand's mother is an agent of patriarchy who firmly adhered to different ageing

rules to both genders. She makes her daughter feel ashamed of her femaleness by stressing the inviolable prescriptions of womanhood from a typical masculine point of view. Murari denies subjectivity to his women characters by staunchly establishing male-female dichotomies through the dialogues that differentiate feminine and masculine genders.

Shah Jahan does not mate with the princess whom he married as he is waiting for Arjumand, "I would not blame her because in truth she had come such a vast distance only to lie unused in her bed" (129). To Shah Jahan, sexual bliss is the ultimate reward any woman expects from her marital life. Ironically, Shah Jahan's indifference to his wife sounds incredulous as he is taking fleshly pleasure from his slave girls, "other women drained the swollen lust of my body" (129). Chodorow tangibly observes that "But, because men have power and cultural hegemony in our society… [they] have come to define maleness as that which [is] basically human, and to define women as not men…" (qtd in *Gender and Sexuality* 56). Historically speaking, Shah Jahan has children in his other wives as the historian Eraly mentioned in his *Emperors of the Peacock Throne*: "Khurram's first child, a daughter, was born to him by his first wife; by his third wife, Khurram had a son, but the child died in infancy"(300) . But in this novel, Murari even distorts historical facts to elevate Shah Jahan as the true lover of Arjumand resisting his first wife despite his frequent enjoyment with other women which justify his maleness. Chodorow's observation is relevant in this context.

Murari portrays Arjumand's mindset with sarcasm. Her mind throbs with the same fears and complexes when she doubts whether Shah Jahan's love would cease if he sees her in the new look of an old woman. She exhibits the inferiority complex of a

woman in a man's world. While observing the construction of the Taj, Shah Jahan feels guilty at times for his wife's untimely death, "I destroyed her, I destroyed her" (151), the words which taint his wife's subjectivity even after her death. Arjumand's anger knows no bounds when the Feringhis have a glance of her face because no strange men had ever dared to view her face till then. She is the representative of a true submissive female in a male dominated society. A glimpse of her face by strange men is considered as a mark of humiliation for Arjumand who willingly accepts the subordinate position. To Psychoanalytical theoreticians like Freud and Lacan, "psychoanalyzing a woman is tantamount to adopting her to a society of masculine type" (*This Sex Which Is Not One* 73). Arjumand's doubt that, "Had I grown too old to bear a child?"(190) is generated by her adherence to the patriarchal norms applicable only to women. Arjumand feels empathy for the suffering women as her own condition is not different from them, "Like me they could only protest in mute silence and carry the burdens in their bellies like stones of servitude" (210).

By imparting an attitude of subservience for female characters the author offers subjectivity to male characters alone through unjust hierarchical practices and assumptions. Murti is one among the many who are to work for the completion of Empress Mumtaz's tomb and "His pregnant wife Sita huddled close to him for protection" (36). The author reveals the patriarchal concept that woman should always expect protection from men for sustenance. Even while missing her parents and humble village, Sita feels it is her duty to accompany her husband, Murthi to Agra, "I am Sita, Sita thought, like Sita, wife of Rama. She too followed her husband into exile. She could have remained at home in comfort but insisted on going with Rama into the jungle, because it was her karma as a wife" (94). Sita, like Arjumand is an

ideal wife of patriarchal mould who faithfully considers her husband's well being as primacy unmindful of her sufferings. The patriarchal mode of prescribing limits to female identity is obnoxiously reflected in this male centered text. The dialogues rendered by female characters are drafted in male terms where there is less scope for female essence.

Shah Jahan articulates his terrible anguish to his beloved wife when she denied his inescapable sexual cravings only once and that too out of ill health. He is unconcerned of his wife's sufferings when he says, "I feel I am lying with a corpse" (225). According to Mahahdevi Varma, "Whenever this living image of display desires to express her separate individuality and reveals her own distinct inclinations, ideas and opinions, the man unfailingly becomes agitated at first and then discontented" (qtd in *Women in Patriarchy* 235). Shah Jahan becomes completely agitated and discontented when his wife tries to express her desire to resist him for some time to recover her health. Arjumand notes her husband's reaction, "Forever? The harshness came and went, like breath escaping in the cold, and I could not control his fear, his anger" (226). Being a speaking subject, he never sees his.. wife as an autonomous being. Arjumand bursts out in rage to her husband's wish of taking a second wife if she continues to fail in pleasing him anymore, "And a third and a fourth and a fifth. Akbar took four hundred. What stops you?"(227). Shah Jahan's fury over her words and action does not subside until she pleased him by offering herself as an object of pleasure after thirty-five days of complete indifference from his part. Murari delineates male characters like Shah Jahan and Murthi as typical clichéd husbands who prioritize the sexual dimension of love by remaining unconscious to their wives' subjectivity. Shah Jahan's dialogues and subsequent behaviour of active

hostility is the quintessence of male world's indifference towards female subjectification. Arjumand and Sita are representatives of victimized womanhood who have no autonomy even over their bodies.

Murari hesitates to describe Shah Jahan and Arjumand's deep love for their daughter, Jahanara while giving special care in describing Dara as their most favourite son. Shah Jahan's superstitious mind considers a boy child as a good omen while a girl child as an indication of his impending defeat, "A good omen or bad?... If it were a boy child, good: if a girl, bad" (259). The consequent birth and death of a female child are again judged by Shah Jahan as a sign of ill luck. During Aurangzeb's rebellion, Shah Jahan's request to his daughter to appeal her brother for saving his beloved son is notable: "Dara. Save Dara. Save your brother, the Great Mughal Shah Jahan had commanded his daughter Jahanara. You are loved by Aurangzeb. He will listen to your prayer, not mine" (305). In addition, the true essence is lacking in Jahanara when she begs Aurangzeb to save her dear brother's life: "You claim you have always had great love for me. Look at him through the eyes of my love. Let it temper your hatred…What else do I have? I have no armies, I can use no weapons. I am your sister. I am a single woman. Our blood is the same" (307). Such dialogues project her helplessness rather than her ability to tackle crises. Jahanara's irrelevance in Murari's *Taj* throws light on the fact that women are always placed in a position of exclusion in man's discourses. Similarly, Murthi prays to God to enrich his family with sons instead of cursing them to impoverishment due to daughters, "Sons I asked for. Sons who will learn my work, care for me when I grow old" (64). Murari uses Murthi's story also to underline his patriarchal agenda regarding the gender based duties in the domestic space. Patriarchy prescribes the laws regarding masculine and

feminine characters stressing the specificities of gender. Women cease to exist as a gender in the language mastered by men as Irigary observes, "Man seeks her out, since he has inscribed her in discourse, but as lack, as fault or flaw"(*This Sex Which is not One* 89).

Speaking on the repressive paternal law in language, Butler quotes Lacan thus:

> The paternal law structures all linguistic signification, termed 'the symbolic', and so becomes a universal organizing principle of culture itself…the Symbolic becomes possible by repudiating the primary relationship to the maternal body. The 'Subject' who emerges as a consequence of this repression becomes a bearer or proponent of this repressive law (*Gender Trouble* 101).

Lacan has tried to universalize that repressive paternal law in language thereby prompting mainstream writers to destroy the essence or subjectivity of female characters. Beasley also highlights the concepts of psychoanalysts like Freud and Lacan that have always inspired men to perpetuate hegemonic ideologies that restrict woman rather than facilitating autonomy to her. Beasley further quotes Lacan's concept that "The Father/phallus is a cultural representation of power, as the child takes on language" (*Gender and Sexuality* 66). Like Arjumand, Sita is also a helpless victim when her husband Murthi avenges her in all possible manners for loving and for being a prospective bride of his long lost elder brother, Ishwar (now Isa) years back. Sita remembers, "One day he had taken the cattle out to graze, and they returned alone, without him… She mourned deeply and humbly accepted the second choice:

his younger brother, Murthi" (153). Murthi expresses his regrets for ill treating his wife while exchanging a few dialogues with his brother Isa after her untimely death:

> 'She's gone,' he told Isa, bewilderment in his voice.
>
> 'I know.'
>
> 'I thought she loved only you. I didn't treat her well for that.'
>
> 'Did you ask her?'
>
> 'Never. You were a ghost. We didn't speak of you. It seemed at times the way she looked at me… I imagined her longing that I would turn into you.'
>
> 'Yes, you imagined. She had forgotten me. If you too had forgotten, forgiven, she would have been happy. It is too late.'(245).

Sita's sufferings are mainly induced by her husband out of sexual jealousy: "It was his dharma to make children; his woman's to bear them. He was proud of himself; his loins held power" (215). As a husband, Murthi is little concerned about his wife's fading health. Sita's character lacks essence as she is forced to marry her lover's younger brother and share a life of misfortunes with him. Both Arjumand and Sita in this novel countenance untimely deaths due to their husbands' neglect toward their fading healths as for this men "Pregnancy, with its pains and sufferings was preordained by God as part of the punishment, along with work and death, which Eve had incurred for her wicked inquisitiveness…"(*Misogyny* 39). When Arjumand begs Shah Jahan not to break the Timurid law by murdering his brother Khusrau, he adamantly replies that "Go, This is my business" (251). Female characters like

Arjumand, Sita and Jahanara occupy the narrow space in manmade tales who can only articulate in male defined terms, which alienate her from her body and her true feelings. T.N.Murari has constructed female subjectivity in a clever manner that is disastrous to woman's identity throughout this novel and gives the impression that "unified subjectivity is a myth" ("Historicisms: New and Old" 463).

Victims of Antilove

In the "Laugh of the Medusa", Cixous judiciously observes the clever tactics of men in creating animosity among women thus:

> Men have committed the greatest crime against women. Insidiously, violently, they have lead them to hate women, to be their own enemies, to mobilize their immense strength against themselves, to be the executants of their virile needs. They have made for women an antinarcissicism! A narcissism which loves itself only to be loved for what women haven't got! They have constructed the infamous logic of antilove (878).

In the *Taj*, women appear either too submissive or too outrageous. The ever subjugated Arjumand hates her aunt Nur Jehan for being bold and articulating. Nur Jehn's daughter Ladli also is a patriarchal tool who scorns her mother for not being feminine, "She only wishes to match wits with men, and win" (167). Murari creates the stereotypical women who are either victim or villain. Arjumand, who is agreeable to the male ideology of an ideal woman, views her aunt, Mehrunissa with suspicion and malice. Arjumand's submissive nature adds to her charm which patriarchy prescribes. Arjumand's passivity and femininity are applauded whereas her aunt

Mehrunissa's words and deeds are severely proscribed. Mehrunissa is equated to a demon because she transgresses the patriarchal conceptions of gender that circumscribe women to dependency and inactivity. The ideological mode of feminist criticism for Showalter is that which "is concerned with the feminist as reader, and it offers feminist readings of texts which consider the images and stereotypes of women in literature" ("Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness" 182). Murari's text offers ample scope for feminist readers to study the angel-demon dichotomies pervading the male oriented writings.

Just as, Lilith, the first wife of Adam, labelled as demon for her refusal to submit to her husband's dominance, Nur Jehan is ostracized both by the other women as by the author himself for trying to find her own subjectivity. "… the figure of Lilith represents the price women have been told they must pay for attempting to define themselves" (*The Mad Woman in the Attic* 35).

Arjumand observes her aunt Mehrunissa and realizes that "beneath the beauty of my aunt flowed an ice-cold current of ambition" (22). Arjumand's eunuch, Isa also makes similar comments about her arrogance, villainy etc for openly exhibiting power over her husband, an emperor, "Her authority was stamped in her upright posture, and in that silence which those in power use to humble others. Power is silence, for the powerful do not have to negotiate: they only command. That weapon gave her a secretive serenity" (320). Isa blames Mehrunissa's malicious nature for generating an antipathy between him and her eunuch, Muneer, "His dislike of me had in no way abated and I could feel his triumph at the capitulation of my master to his mistress" (320). When Arjumand meets blind Khusrao, he too makes an insensitive remark about her aunt, "Has my father satisfied his lust for that Persian whore?"(141). He

further warns her that "You believe that your aunt whispers your name: 'Arjumand, Arjumand,'into the ear of my beloved father as they lie together. No. I will tell you the name she whispers for Shah Jahan: 'Ladilli, Ladilli, Ladilli'" (145). Mahabat Khan shares his words of apathy to Mehrunissa with Shah Jahan and blames her as the reason behind his sufferings, "He only listens to that… woman, much worse than before. He spat. 'He only listens to that… woman,' I do not bow to an emperor now, but to an empress. Every hour I receive her messages. Attack, attack: destroy Shah Jahan" (261). Hence, it is quite apparent that Mehrunissa is severely criticized through the dialogues of almost all the major and minor characters of the novel as a strategy of novelist to undermine her relevance.

Murari's Mehrunissa is wicked in her machinations to fulfill certain individualistic goals unmindful of her husband and her daughter. She authoritatively controls her husband, Sher Afkun, who is otherwise very brave in the battlefield, "Mehrunissa was an overwhelming woman, though very beautiful. She beguiled or bullied those who did not bend to her wishes, and even her husband, General Sher Afkun, whose bravery on the battlefield was unquestioned, fell silent in her presence"(16). A woman who indulges in conspiracy with her lover for the death of her husband is a shocking and incomprehensible character, not worthy of further analysis according to the author. Arjumand and Mehrunissa are mere pawns for the author's pen as Virginia Woolf observes: "women are frequently represented in literature by men, but even the most famous heroines represent what men desire in women, but not necessarily what women are in themselves…" (qtd in *Women's Writing* 3).The angelic Arjumand is idealized for being fragile, pure, innocent, submissive and passive. Mehrunissa, on the other hand, has a rebellious temperament

which is the cause of her downfall. Mehrunissa is severely castigated for her power lust as patriarchy assigns only the domestic space for her. In this context, it is apt to quote Jasbir Jain that "Negative stereotypes are created by a society which seeks scapegoats, and women readily fall prey to this because of their deep-rooted sense of economic and social insecurity" (*Women Images* 80). The book is loaded with the ideology of patriarchy that perpetuates and reinforces gender stereotypes.

Commenting on the insignificance of women in ancient legends and Myths, Beauvoir observes that "Mythology's goddesses are frivolous or capricious, and they all tremble before Jupiter; while Prometheus magnificently steals the fire from the sky, Pandora opens the box of catastrophes" (*The Second Sex* 254). Murari's Mehrunnisa, like the legendary Goddesses, leads to the catastrophes in the Kingdom, as shown in the novel. She is wicked from the point of view of Arjumand, Shah Jahan and Isa, the three narrators of the novel. In Isa's viewpoint, Mehrunissa is a cunning woman who cheats her husband by pretending love and affection. Isa realizes that "Jahangir lusted for her" (40). Isa has already heard whispers about Jahangir's mad obsession with Mehrunissa. Murari uses the usual angel-devil descriptions of women characters when Isa contrasts Mehrunissa's "threatening stare" (44) with her niece Arjumand's gentle looks.

Shah Jahan's comment on Mehrunissa is noteworthy: "She was a puzzle, an entangled coil which I had to unravel within the silent, private world of my own mind" (55). He criticizes her for her ambitions that are "as limitless as the empire itself" (55). He fears her for being so close to the throne if his father continues his mad obsessive love to her. He wants her to continue as a mere concubine that keeps her "far from the throne" (55).

Arjumand's subservience and self-effacing love allow her to bury her dreams, wishes and needs for the sake of the man she loves and even arrange women to her husband at times to quench his lust. Stereotypes like Arjumand are incredulously good that they become abstracts of ideal rather than realistic representations of humanity. Moreover, Arjumand even earns the title of a martyr in her selfless love towards Shah Jahan that resulted in her untimely death. Shah Jahan bids adieu to his beloved wife after her fourteenth delivery with an insatiable passion that sucks "her last breath away" (363), that points to his carnal love instead of the true concern to his dying wife.The stereotypical characters are proof of the author's effort to create a work of art as "the product of a set of manipulations… the product of a negotiation between a creator or class of creators, equipped with a complex, communally shared repertoire of conventions, and the institutions and practices of society" ("Towards a Poetics of Culture" 12).

Isa considers Mehrunissa as a scheming woman on seeing the gift she has commanded him to hand over to Emperor, Jahangir. Isa is surprised to see that it is a painting of Mehrunissa herself who "lay on a divan revealing every part of her beauty for his eyes and he did not lift his head from the pleasure of gazing that painted form" (46). She invents strategies to keep the King's fire of passion for her remain burning. When Emperor visits Mehrunissa's father, Ghiaz Beg's home, "She remained in the zenana, waiting—she knew it would come—for his specific summons" (47). In Isa's perspective, Mehrunissa is a dangerous seductress who bewitched Emperor to such a level that her family's fortune changed overnight. She is scorned as a woman adept with wily arts of manipulation to fructify her goals.

According to the author, it is Mehrunissa's ambitious nature that has provoked Jahangir to commit more atrocities without any prick of conscience. Murari uses Arjumand to impose the blame on Mehrunissa when she says, "I suspected that her happiness was due not to my presence, but to the gold casket that lay in my box" (88). Mehrunssa's warning to her niece, "Don't mention these gifts to your uncle. He might misunderstand" (89) is shown to heighten her villainy. She tries to dissuade Arjumand with a spark of jealousy by claiming that Shah Jahan "is not the only young man in the world" (89). Mehunissa seems totally disinterested in the Arjumand-Shah Jahan love affair that she tries her best to see that it does not blossom further. Arjumand's malice is evident when she says of her aunt that, "I could read her thoughts better than her husband, but it is said that men are easily beguiled by a kiss or a caress, and Mehrunissa was well versed in those arts" (90). Arjumand is contemptuous of her aunt as a woman who governs men with her wiles. Mehrunissa with her demon like qualities is the pervasive feminine stereotype commonly populating the fictional world of male novelists.

Discussing the representation of women as stereotypes in men's literary works, Ruth Yeazell in her article "Fictional Heroines and Feminist Critics" observes:

> And it is hardly surprising, though surely deplorable, that a literature produced primarily by men should thus have tended to see women as metaphors or as symbols rather than as realistic analogues of the self. But the danger of stereotype-hunting is that, like biological classification, it soon becomes an end in itself, that it leads to a habit of mind that does not so much discover fixed patterns as impose them. Criticism of limiting and destructive stereotypes works most

> persuasively when it attacks those area of the culture which are in fact grounded in stereotype… (30).

The author depicts Sher Afkun as a good natured and innocent man becoming a mere ploy in the hands of his wicked wife. Arjumand comprehends her aunt's role in her uncle's planned murder. Her words endorse Mehrunissa's villainy at its peak, "I realized that she was not afraid, and worse still, she was not even surprised. She seemed to know exactly what was happening" (92). Mehrunissa has plotted against her husband at the cost of her daughter Ladilli's well being. Arjumand later comprehends the meaning of the gift that she provided to her aunt as ordered by Jahangir. She perceives the truth that "Death would always be the companion of such a gift" (93). Instead of considering Mehrunnisa's behaviour as a criticism of the systematic oppression by patriarchal figures in history, Murari is contented to fix her in the traditional patriarchal framework of a cruel and self centred woman who is the cause of all the misery and tragedy that happened in the life of her husband. Surrendering to Mehrunissa's demonic influence, Jahangir has eliminated his wife, Jodi Bai from his life. Arjumand comprehends that "Only Mehrunissa herself now stood in the way of their marriage, for though the Empress Jodi Bai had recovered from her illness for a while, she had most mysteriously fallen ill once more, vomiting food and blood, and a week after the new sickness descended, she died… in the silence one heard the whispers: poison!"(102). The author depicts her as the corrupt influence behind Jahangir's plot in the murder of innocent Jodi Bai and Sher Afkun.

Mehrunissa, even in her position as lady-in-waiting exposes the authority of an Empress by welcoming Shah Jahan's wife like her son's bride. Arjumand views all her actions with a critical eye and remarks:

> There must be a few things in life even an emperor cannot easily acquire. I will be one of those things. In his eyes it will give me greater worth than the throne itself. If I had swooned immediately at his interest—and how many of his discarded women did so?—he would have lost all desire. Already he calls me in his poems, Nur Mahal, I am the light of his palce, the candle in his heart (131).

Mehrunissa does not easily succumb to Jahangir's passions since she has already made him a puppet in her hands even before marriage. Arjumand suspects that Mehrunnisa's love is more to the "golden throne" (131) rather than to the emperor. Murari shows Mehrunissa as a stone hearted woman who gleefully plays with others' emotions. Mehrunissa has designed her costumes for her wedding that reveals her beauty. Jahangir honours Mehrunissa with the title "Nur Jehan" on an impulse, overwhelmed by her charm, "She is my Nur Jehan,' he intoned solemnly when he came to the end of his epic, and drank deeply from the golden cup to the Light of the World who, having shed her coyness, now watched his performance with a critical eye"(140).

Arjumand considers her aunt as a stumbling block that prevented her union with Shah Jahan, "In such pale sympathy lay the serpent of deceit" (132). Khusrav warns Arjumand of Mehrunissa's hidden motives in preventing the union of Arjumand and Shah Jahan, "I will tell you the name she whispers for Shah Jahan:"Ladilli, Ladilli, Ladilli" (145). Murari's Mehrunissa is cruel to its core with no room for any positive qualities. In Isa's viewpoint, Mehrunissa is not generous like Arjumand to help the poor, "But now I could n't imagine her aunt, now the empress Nur Jehan, labouring among the stinking poor under a beating sun" (158). Arjumand

fears to share her worries with her aunt, "I should not discuss our love with her. With Mehrunissa it became a state matter. Who knew how she would distort even such a private thing to her own ends?"(206). Murari's chosen narrators criticize Mehrunissa by equating her to a witch with no true feelings to anyone other than fulfilling her high dreams. She is portrayed as a selfish, treacherous and deceitful woman.

Mehrunissa is depicted as a power monger who plans to offer her daughter Ladilli to Shah Jahan as his second wife thereby sidelining her niece. On knowing her plan, Arjumand, who is afraid of losing her hold on Shah Jahan, shedding her coyness immediately gives information to her father and grandfather. As a result due to their timely interference Nur Jehan is forced to discard her dream and give consent to Shah Jahan's wedding to Arjumand. Mehrunissa tries to convince her niece that "marriage isn't all that one expects or hopes for" (164). Arjumand considers her aunt's designing of wedding costume as compensation for "her devious machinations over the years" (165). Arjumand's eternal love makes her instrumental in acting at the right time to win her lover defeating her aunt's callousness. Murari has cleverly ignored gender throughout the text by focusing only on Mehrunissa's demerits rather than her countless merits. More importantly, Arjumand is eulogized as an ideal lover with the qualities of patience, determination and unflinching devotion.

According to Irigary, "The architectonics of the text, or texts, confounds the linearity of an outline, the teleology of discourse, within which there is no possible for the 'feminine,' except the traditional place of the repressed, the censured" (*This Sex Which Is Not One* 68). Arjumand feels uncomfortable to wear a revealing dress designed by her aunt being the archetypal good woman. Mehrunissa's reply to Arjumand's protest is to belittle her as an unscrupulous woman, "It is what men most

like to see, … Even Prince Shah Jahan" (165).This is well evident in the portrayal of women characters in *Taj.* Further, Murari proscribes Mehrunissa not only through male characters but mainly through female characters including her daughter Ladilli. Ladilli's observation about her mother is significant:

> It's not the marriage that makes her so happy… 'No, it's not the marriage'. That alone could never satisfy her. What she wanted most is to be occupied, to be useful, to be powerful. Now she is happily immersed in matters of state. She plunges into them like a diving crane. She only wishes to match wits with men, and win. Women bore her with their talk of children and clothes and tamashas (*16*7).

Arjumand hints at Mehrunissa's role in sending Shah Jahan to Mewar manoeuvring that his defeat may increase her power. Arjumand describes her aunt's entry to see the new born baby again with a tinge of sarcasm, "Our gestures betray us more than our words" (197). Mehrunissa pretends affection with malicious intensions lurking deep inside her mind. Mehrunissa again prefers Shah Jahan for the Deccan campaign after his Mewar victory. This makes Arjumand's life more miserable with continuous pregnancies and arduous journeys.

Examining the central qualities of 'eternal feminine' created by men, Beauvoir says:

> As group representations and social types are generally defined by pairs of opposite terms, ambivalence will appear to be an intrinsic property of the Eternal Feminine. The saintly mother has its correlation in the cruel step mother, the angelic young girl has the perverse virgin: so mother will be said sometimes to equal Life and sometimes Death,

> and every virgin is either a pure spirit or flesh possessed by the devil (*The Second Sex* 229).

Mehrunissa mocks her niece for her ongoing pregnancies concomitant to assisting her husband during the campaigns leaving the luxuries of the court. Mehrunissa boasts of the perfect shape of her body as she allows Jahangir to lay with her only once in a month, unlike Arjumand. She is not bothered like her niece if her husband seeks the company of slave girls. Mehrunissa criticizes Shah Jahan for his uncontrollable lust to which Arjumand harshly retorts that "I will satisfy my husband as long as he desires only me" (205). Mehrunissa is branded as a selfish woman to whom maintaining youth and beauty are more important than her duty towards her husband. Patriarchy is critical of women like Mehrunissa for undermining her man's needs to that of her beauty and health. To Murari, Arjumand's quality of selfless love that eases her to satiate her husband's needs each time is a sort of 'female heroism'.

Arjumand's words of indignation and spite towards her aunt, Mehrunissa for ruling in the name of Jahangir is interesting:

> Mehrunissa, Mehrunissa, Mehrunissa. The dundhubi beat her name solemnly across the empire. The heart of its power was in her hand: she stretched a finger, taxes raised or lowered; another finger, an official fell or rose; a third, and commerce ceased or flowed anew; a fourth, and laws were enacted and repealed (211).

Through such words the author cleverly criticizes Mehrunissa as the one who corruptly misused her power. Mehrunissa finds it hard to bear her father's demise as it is he whom she depended for her achievements, "Mehrunissa wept loudest. He had

not only been father, but her friend and adviser, her mentor. He had guided her destiny as God had guided his" (224). Murari' again berates her through the words of Arjumand by attributing her rising power as an outcome of an intelligent man's guidance, "For years she had leant on her father and could not barely support herself"(225). She decides to construct a tomb, the very moment she overcomes her grief, for her father in order to heighten her glory, "It was to be built in the city, on the banks of the Jumna. She hurled her great energy into choosing the builders and the design. She knew what she wanted" (225).

Mehrunissa's plan to make Ladilli marry the imbecile Shahriya is showed as her cruel foul play. Ladilli conveys to Arjumand of her mother's cruel decision. Mehrunissa wants her daughter to marry a prince so that only then she can achieve more power. Shah Jahan remarks of her plan as, "She would be in control of Ladilli and, through her Shahriya. Emperor Shahriya perhaps, the buffoon emperor, an idiot king" (231). Mehrunissa is portrayed with an ambitious mind who is concerned about widening her power rather than restricting herself to the role of a mother who gives primacy to her daughter's happiness. The writer is directing a scathing attack against Mehrunissa for female aspirations forgetting her role as a woman as the "stereotypes of women …vary in response to different masculine needs…they appear not as they are, certainly not as they would define themselves, but as conveniences to the resolutions of masculine dilemmas" ("A Mirror for Men: Stereotypes of Women in Literature" 207).

Mehrunissa weaves plans with reinvigorated eagerness to continue her reign even after Jahangir's death, "She had pushed her idiot good-for-nothing son-in-law one step closer to the throne, pushed herself one step further towards ruling after

Jahangir's death" (255). Arjumand considers her aunt as the reason behind the alienation between her husband and her father. Mehrunissa has forced the romantic couple, Shah Jahan and Arjumand to suffer a prolonged exile in order to leave the throne safely to Shahriya. According to them, Mehrunissa is always a vicious influence upon their father Jahangir. They even doubt the possibility of Mehrunissa forcing Jahangir by discarding Timurid law to suck life out of Shah Jahan if he surrenders, "Who knows what Mehrunissa will do? Your father won't harm you, but she isn't of the Timurid line. She might persuade him to take your life" (292).

If Mehrunissa is shown as the villain, Shah Jahan does the role of the victim. He angirily remarks, "She knew that once I gained control I would leave no room for her anywhere near myself, my family or the throne" (258). When Mahabad Khan hints of Mehrunissa's assurance of not doing any harm to Shah Jahan, he furiously responds, "Mehrunissa! And my father? I do not care about her promises" (261). He exhibits in many such situations the temperament of a true patriarch in degrading a woman's authority. Shah Jahan writes a letter not to Mehrunissa but to his father Jahangir, expressing his willingness to surrender. But the reply comes from Mehrunissa exhibiting her power so openly putting forth many demands. The demands include their prolonged stay in distant lands but to send their sons, Dara and Aurangzeb to "her as hostages" (303). Arjumand continues to castigate Mehrunissa for imposing more and more sufferings in her life, "I missed Dara, and Aurangzeb; I had a longing to clasp them in my arms. Many months had passed and, like a breached fortress, I felt as if I had two ragged gaps in my heart" (322). Shah Jahan's indignation for Mehrunissa's interference in turning their lives miserable just to ensure continuity to her rule heightens her villainy. Mehrunissa is censured by Shah

Jahan and his wife for wielding power over men which is against conventions imposed by patriarchy, "Mehrunissa has spread her poison. It cannot be stopped" (256).When Shah Jahan whines about losing his father's love Arjumand replies, "My aunt sucked it out of him" (255).

Mehrunissa is headstrong when she adheres to Shahriya's claim by nurturing ambitions "to rule Hindustan for yet another generation through Ladilli" (320). She arrogantly utters that Shahriya is not strong enough to rule the empire assuring the continuity of her reign in his name. Mehrunissa's attitude of non-compliance creates tremendous ripples among the dominant class of nobles. This fuels the nobles to openly support Shah Jahan rather than preferring a woman's reign in Shahriya's name. Arjumand never wants to rise to power like her aunt even if she becomes Empress. Shah Jahan is triumphant as his father died finally leaving the throne, but Arjumand is still suspecting of her aunt's evil machinations, "Mehrunissa lurked unseen, manipulating her son-in-law, building armies, beating the drums for war" (326). Murari's descriptions on Mehrunissa as devil incarnate are recriminating with usual misogynist sentiments of malecentered texts.

Simone de Beauvoir observes of the general attitude of men toward women's pregnancy as "five minutes of pleasure: nine months of pain… It is part of this sadistic philosophy: many men relish feminine misery and are repulsed by the idea of reducing it" (*The Second Sex* 372). Murari castigates Mehrunissa for not immersing herself continuously in painful childbirths like her niece, Arjumand. Mehrunissa feels proud of her body and speaks caustically of womanly duties like pregnancies:

> The pain! One was more than enough for me. I cannot bear pain, I hate it. Lying there screaming and bellowing like a beast. What for? A

> child.' She looked down at her body, through the silken choli her breasts were still round and firm, the nipples painted red, her belly above her churidar was flat with barely a wrinkle, her legs remained slim and strong (323).

The above quote about Mehrunissa is to denigrate her both as a commodity and an ambitious woman who prefers power to the pains of motherhood. Arjumand is an ideal woman according to the ideology of men due to her countless pregnancies and her obstinacy to remain by her husband's side enduring all hardships. This angelic image of a woman is severely criticized by Mehrunissa as it resulted in Arjumand losing her beauty and shape by playing the stereotypical role of a dutiful wife to her husband. Murari unfolds the conventional angel-demon stereotypes through these characters. Arjumand is adored for playing the role of a submissive wife whereas Mehrunissa is scorned for being a dominating wife. Mehrunissa is condemned and rebuked for digressing from the archetypal wife-mother figure, who ought to be engrossed only in the well being of her family. In patriarchal societies, for a wife, any slight deviation from the exemplary behaviour is intolerable and this is vivid in the animosity expressed in the words of the author towards Mehrunissa's portrayal as a wicked and vicious woman. The novelist degrades her in the book not only through the words of her niece, Arjumand but also in the words of her daughter, Ladilli. She shares her fears about her mother's decision with her cousin, Ajumand, "I will marry whomever my mother tells me. How could I do otherwise? She will shout and scream and cajole. You know how she chooses her weapons wisely" (166). Another instance is when Laadli says "One day you will be the Empress Arjumand" (167), Arjumand

replies that"And how would Mehrunissa behave when that day came" (167) which clearly reflects her attitude towards her aunt.

Shah Jahan remembers the manner with which Mehrunissa managed to escape from Mahabat Khan's camp. He has to half heartedly admit Mehrunissa's prowess as general too, "Even as a general, Mehrunissa was victorious" (331). The very next moment he belittles Mehrunissa's victory over a man by claiming that Mahabat Khan has diligently fled from the battlefield only out of fear from the consequences. In this context, it is interesting to quote Yeazell: "Novels have tended, to identify the fully human with the male—to see women as flat embodiments of a particular force or theme, to see them mythically, allegorically, symbolically, but never realistically—as fully rounded, complex human beings" ("Fictional Heroines and Feminist Critics" 29). Murari's male characters are realistic humanbeings whereas Arjumand and Mehrunissa are feeble allegorical representation of virtues and vices respectively.

The author dismisses Arjumand's death as a normal one, thus ignoring the role of the husband who exploits her for sexual fulfillment. As a result of constant pregnancies that kill the vitality of her life day by day, Arjumand commands the doctor to provide him a potion to murder her newly formed child. She can't hide her sorrow for murdering "the seed of her beloved prince" (212). She is habitually confined to the tasks of pregnancies, birthings, child rearings and caring her husband. Moreover, Shah Jahan's affliction in parting with his wife for a year or two coxes Arjumand to accompany him in the journey that aggravates her illness associated with pregnancy. She is delineated as an embodiment of patience, endurance and resilience until her untimely death. While expressing views on stereotyped images of womanhood Cynthia Griffin says, "A stereotype may become, by a sort of perversity,

an image of reality that even women seek to perpetuate" ("A Mirror for Men: Stereotypes of Women in Literature" 206). Male novelists create stereotypes without any candid perception of real women as an agenda to influence women readers so that they willingly give primacy to masculine needs.

Considering the main focus of masculine writings, Cixous in "The Laugh of the Medusa" observes:

> Writing has been run by a libidinal and cultural-hence political, typically masculine economy; that this is a locus where the repression of women has been perpetuated, over and over, more or less consciously, and in a manner that's frightening since it's often hidden or adorned with mystifying charms of fiction; that this locus has grossly exaggerated all the signs of sexual opposition (and not sexual difference), where woman has never her turn to speak… (879).

Murari propagates the repression of women using two women as tools, Arjumand and Mehrunissa. On seeing Shah Jahan's unflinching determination to murder his brother Khusrau, Arjumand tries her best to revert him from such a crime. But her words fall on deaf ears resulting in Khusrau's death breaking the Timurid law that none of his predecessors has broken before. She prays vigorously for the well being of her husband and sons fearing the curse for doing such an ominous crime to win the throne, "Since Khusrav's death, thunder roamed the skies outside, rolled within my heart making me tremble for my beloved"(256). As a devoted wife, she is eager to care for her husband during the times of war and its trials. Arjumaand feels contented to be her husband's beloved wife despite his sexual cravings. She is portrayed as a courageous woman for assisting her husband even during wars and

exiles. She is the loving wife and caring mother of the patriarchal mould. Ironically, it dismantles the truth that men expect such loyalty from their wives in order to uphold them as bold and beautiful in their own terms. She is the personification of all essential virtues whereas her aunt is represented as the evil incarnated in the novel.

Being a woman least interested to rule like her aunt, Arjumand accepts the imperial seal unwillingly out of her husband's compulsion. She comments like a woman who very much enjoyed her subordinate position to Shah Jahan, "You are the king, my beloved, not I. I have no wish to rule like Mehrunissa" (334). She loves to be known as Arjumand Banu despite her new title as empress Mumtaz-i-Mahal. She feels relieved as there is no need for her to combat with other wives like the former empresses even though she considers the title of empress as a burden. She indulges in charity works to retain her disinterest in her new position as empress: "I was empress, and as my beloved built palaces, I built humbler places: schools, hospitals for the treatment of the sick, homes for the homeless… Each week… I fed the poor" (349). All her deeds reaffirm the truth that she is socialized in such a way that she acts in complicity with hegemonic male ideologies. Her depiction reproduces the traditional stereotypes of mainstream literature. Characteristically, she is passive, submissive, obedient and compliant to her husband fulfilling all the expectations of an ideal wife of patriarchal society. It is coherent that "Sometimes idealized, sometimes denigrated, woman is repeatedly the Other—her personality and her life's plot confined with stylized limits, her meaning fixed in relation to the more fully developed male characters who inhabit her fictional world" ("Fictional Heroines and Feminist Critics" 30). An idealized Arjumand is happy to be defined in relation to her man while

Mehrunissa is denigrated for not confining to the stylized limits drawn by patriarchy. Thus Mehrunissa's character is more a target of author's chilling ridicule.

Mehrunissa's fall is celebrated by Murari, by blaming her lust for power and self love for her decline. She accepts her defeat and visits them hesitantly yielding to Shah Jahan's imperial summons. She notices the seal on Arjumand's table as if her eyes are always seeking power. Shah Jahan hates Mehrunissa more than anything immensely for her corrupt influence upon his father. His remarks about Mehrunissa is contemptuous, "She had used his weakness to further her own ambitions, and I had suffered" (334). It is hard for him to resist his rage for this woman he incessantly cursed during the four years of hardship. She breaks away from the traditional role of the submissive female by exhibiting the characteristic traits, supposedly of men and hence is destined to fall. In Murari's novel, Mehrunissa falls to a yawning pit by trying to step into the kingdom of men, as she experienced the anger and sarcasm not only from the male world but also from the most intimate female bonds like daughter. A masculine discourse "prefers to experiment with speaking, writing, enjoying 'woman' rather than leaving to that other any right to intervene, to act,in her own interests"(*This Sex which is not one* 157). When Mehrunissa tries to act in her own interests, she becomes a demonic image with extreme viciousness. In this novel, she is treated more like a "diminished and distorted" figure ("Fictional Heroines and Feminist Critics" 30).

Commenting on the sarcastic attitude of men towards women, De Beauvoir notes:

> From a man's mouth, the epithet 'female' sounds like an insult; but he, not ashamed of his animality, is proud to hear: 'He's a male!' The term female is pejorative not because it roots woman in nature but because it

> confines her in her sex, and if this sex, even in an innocent animal, seems despicable and an enemy to man, it is obviously because of the disquieting hostility woman triggers in him (*The Second Sex* 32).

This observation is relevant in this context when Shah Jahan harbours an antipathy towards the powerful Mehrunissa just because, she is a female. Shah Jahan lauds his wife's saintly pardoning of her aunt considering it as an essential trait of womanhood, "Arjumand rose immediately and embraced her aunt. In her, there was forgiveness" (335). Mistresses and prostitutes are acceptable parts of Shah Jahan's life before and after marriage and even after his wife's death. On the contrary, Arjumand is portrayed as the symbol of chastity before marriage and purity after marriage revealing the double standards regarding sexual morality in man's world as Jasbir Jain notes: "Men want to possess not only their present but also their past; thus feeding the ancient myths of the virgin bride and the virtuous wife" (*A Companion to Indian Fiction in English* 126).

Murari celebrates the victory of a man over an ambitious, power lusty woman while describing Mehrunissa's submission before Emperor Shah Jahan. Even while waiting for Shah Jahan's judgement, Mehrunissa's arrogance is projected by the author through her words to emperor, "I could not relinquish it easily. You understand power as well as I" (335), to complete her picture as personification of evil. Mehrunissa prefers to stay in Lahore mourning the death of her husband as a mark of resignation from her power drives. Shah Jahan spitefully notices that Mehrunissa's grief of losing her husband has in no way affected her gorgeous dressing style, "She settled down beside Arjumand, sighing in mourning, although her sadness had in no way lessened the glitter of her finery" (335). She also expresses her wish to build a

monument in memory of her beloved husband. Shah Jahan castigates her for marrying her daughter Ladilli to Shahriya with a vicious intention to keep her power secure. Mehrunissa boldly asserts that "I was not meant to remain a weak, silly woman whiling away her years and energy in the harem" (335). She vociferously justifies her actions stating that Jahangir has happily conferred upon her such high powers due to his disinterest in stately duties, "Your father only too gladly gave me that… I could not allow the empire to disintegrate through his neglect. I ruled as best I could" (335). Afterwards, she leaves to Lahore to build a tomb for Jahangir. The writer insists that this is the destiny that awaits a woman if she dares to compete with powerful patriarchy which makes one wonder of Butler's comment, "the oppression of women has some singular form discernible in the universal or hegemonic structure of patriarchy or masculine domination"(*Gender Trouble* 6).

The dying scene of Arjumand is portrayed emotionally so that she gets the readers sympathy for her destiny. She gives birth to a girl child after a painful delivery that is almost fatal. In accordance with her demand, Shah Jahan rushes to her side but his face seems blurred to her. Her last words are, "Do not marry again, my beloved prince"(363). Arjumand's insistence to vow indicates such a dreadful possibility from her husband. Her last words before courting death underscore her assertion of a mother's impeccable concern for the well being of her children. She is the perfect wife and ideal mother in patriarchy. Manjit Kaur in her paper "Breaking the Stereotype: Women in Indian Fiction in English"contends that "In order to earn respect in a society, it is essential for a woman to belong to the preferred category of wife or an ideal woman and be oriented towards being obedient, devoted, self sacrificing as the mythical figures of Sita, Savitri and Draupadi"(49). The male ideology is to shower praises on women like Arjumand who never wish to gain a

voice and space of her own in their world. But, at the same time, Mehrunissa is chastised for not making herself and her gifted abilities invisible. Thus Nur Jahan is indicted for her "unbecoming enhancement of her own ego" ("Historicisms New and Old" 456) especially for causing disorder in Jahangir's life with her over dominating, devilish and ambitious nature.

In the novel, Arjumand is shown as a vibrant woman with many essential traits like beauty, purity, sympathy etc. She is eulogized as bold and courageous for pleasing her husband. She begs with a compassionate heart to her husband not to murder his own brothers. Shah Jahan feels proud of his wife for her dedicated love that makes her least ambitious unlike many women in the harem. She is always vociferous in her love vows to her husband with the same passion they felt in the first encounter. She is evidently enacting the stereotypical roles expected of them in a gender-biased world as N.Geetha observes:

> Women are usually cast into a few stereotypes of a narrow range of characterization. There are two basic types of image: positive roles, which depict women as independent, intelligent and even heroic, and a surplus of misogynistic roles commonly identified as the bitch, the witch, the vamp and the virgin/goddess ("Exploding the Canon: Feminist Writing and Intertextuality" 61).

Even while using non-linear and multilayered narration, including that of the downtrodden labourers who built the Taj Mahal, the names of the women characters of those communities are Sita, Savitri, etc. the stereotyped women characters from Hindu mythology. The writer has therefore indelibly ingrained stereotypic images through all his women characters in this novel. Hence it is clear that as mere

stereotypes "women in this novel seem to dwindle at the end into figures who exist for the sole purpose of sustaining male political rebirth" ("Family/Value: Reflections on a Long Revolution" 574).

Hackneyed Phallocentric Vocabulary

Beauvoir observes that "The hackneyed vocabulary of serialized novels where the woman is described as an enchantress or a mermaid who fascinates man and bewitches him reflects the most oldest and most universal of myths" (*The Second Sex* 158). Feminist writers describe language as phallocentric, arguing that language privileges the masculine by promoting the values appreciated and perpetuated by male culture. They question the way the politics of language affects and even determines women's role in a culture. According to Judith Newton, "there is no 'objectivity', that we experience the world in language, and that all our representations of the world, our readings of texts and of the past are informed by our own historical position, by the values and politics that are rooted in them"(History as Usual" 88). Murari's novel, *Taj* that showcases the chauvinistic world of men, where the woman's space is confined to the margins.The Mughal culture as presented in the novel is highly hedonistic in which women are viewed as commodities. Murari manifests sexism throughout the novel by portraying women 'enchantresses' who bewitched men. He attaches feminine qualities to Arjumand's dome so as to arouse the carnal instincts of men who touch it. Shah Jahan's Taj Mahal is compared to "a beautiful woman gazed into a mirror which faithfully returned every perfection" (249). Another instance of the objectification of woman as commodity is Shah Jahan's interference in designing the dome of Taj Mahal's tomb. Not satisfied with the shape of the dome designed by the famous designer of domes, he orders a slave girl to bare her breast which he squeezes

upwards and asks the designer to take the measurement. He also insists that the bottom of the dome should be "like her waist" (99). The diction used in such instances, plunges into the standard of porn language, which does not suit the said purpose of the novel.

Murthi's son, Gopi enjoys the beauty of the marble dome "touching every part like the body of a woman" (340). Even Isa is not different when he replies, "I could not reply truthfully" to Shah Jahan's question, "No other woman has ever had such an effect upon me. Arjumand! Have you felt like this, Isa?"(115). Isa uses similar language while describing Nur Jehan, "her waist could still be spanned by the two hands of a man" (320). Even blind prince Khusrav reached out and touched Arjumand's breasts boldly claiming that "I am allowed some liberties. You are a woman of beauty, I am told. That is what I miss most, looking on beauty: girls and women" (141). Hence women are portrayed as either desirable, craved for or condemned in vituperative language.

Butler observes "'Sex' is always produced as a reiteration of hegemonic norms" (*Bodies That Matter* 107). The novel is loaded with sexist implications within the multilayered narration. On seeing Shah Jahan's mad love towards Arjumand, Jahangir with indignation "singled out a Kashmiri girl and pushed her across to me. Take one of these to douse the fire. It is only lust you feel" (56). Afterwards, a frustrated Shah Jahan commands slaves to "prepare a woman and bring her to me" (57). He describes the woman's bodily features with typical male propensity. Khusrav's soldier also speaks sensuously about Arjumand when Murthi's son, Gopi enquires of her, "I dared to lust for her, and that frightened me" (312). Even Empress Mumtaz becomes an object for male gaze. Arjumand says thus about the male doctor

who examined pregnant women, "Some women use illness only as an excuse to feel a man's caress" (212). Shah Jahan's attitude towards women is apparent when he says, "Hard riding has not made me soft and round like a woman" (332). To him, strength and toughness are the attributes associated with men alone especially, "In its tendency to naturalize a representation of dominant forms of power as inescapable" ("Historicisms New and Old" 458). The love making scenes of Shah Jahan and Arjumand are detailed unnecessarily showing the novelist's interest more in narrating an erotic love story rather than depicting history truthfully.

Murari's attempt of holding a mirror to a very interesting historical period in India has been successful due to the research and hard work undertaken in documenting factual details. However, the erasures, the patriarchal politics and power consciousness expose gaps which have to be filled by revisionist readings which include and provide space for articulation from the margins. History cannot be read like a Mills and Boon romance since it has more intricate nuances to be explored and debated. New Historicism, and more significantly Femininst New Historicism offers a subversive examination of history to excavate and relocate the erased identities. Judith Newton rightly remarks that "feminist criticism shares a materialist assumption: that gender is socially constructed and that its construction enforces unequal power relations" (Introduction to *Feminist Criticism* xviii). In this context, the novel sheds light to the truth that"women, female sexuality and gender become merely allegorical" ("Constructing the Subject" 11).

The attempt to analyse the *Taj* is to critique its creation of ideological divisions built on male domination and female powerlessness, which is also the agenda of *The Emperors of the Peacock Throne* analyzed in the first chapter. Two

male-authored texts based on history have been analysed in these two chapters, one a historical narrative and the other a historiographic novel, in order to show how the boundaries between history and fiction are lucid and hence their relationship ambivalent. The effort here is to prove the problematic relationship between text and context as both the works have in a similar way resorted to a monolithic narration, looking at history from the vantage point of male perspective. The intention of the thesis is also to find works by women writers on the same historical period and investigate their strategies to make the marginalized voices also audible, which will be done in the coming chapters.

Chapter IV

Indu Sundaresan's *The Twentieth Wife* and *The Feast of Roses* as 'Her'stories: Assertions of Acquired Selfhood

She who writes history makes history. -Jane Marcus

Foucault challenges the historians with his concept of power which is less monolithic and monologic and insists on the need of viewing history as divergent and more inclusive. But his neglect of gender is always a point of contention among many feminists, who are interested in developing Foucauldian New Historicism to include the voice of the 'othered' women also. Newton has accused Foucauldian New Historicism for ignoring gender and refusing to take Feminism seriously. According to Sara Lennox, "Newton attempts to distinguish a 'feminist new historicism' regrounding gender issues and women's agency from a 'Foucauldian new historicism' that treats power as faceless, anonymous and irresistible". ("Feminism and New Historicism" 159). Lennox further condemns new historicists for their notions which are "astonishingly unconcerned with gender and women" (159). Judith Newton's "History as Usual" has revised genealogies of New Historicism from a feminist perspective, and "thus challenged masculinist assumptions about who makes (and what counts as) history, theory and politics" (Review of *Starting Over* 84).

The fictional discourses by male writers generally adhere to the traditional canonical parameters of historiography by ignoring gender and female subjectivity. The hegemonic stance of such narratives demands the necessity for women to break into the male bastions and create alternate histories or 'herstories' which will be

"inclusive and pluralist rather than exclusive and monolithically male" (Preface to *Feminist Criticism and Social Change* xii). By rejecting the usual voice of history, which is viewed as merely a series of documents recording a fixed series of objective facts, women writers open new horizons of 'herstory' where a male-centered historical vision based on 'dominance' and 'authority' has stopped short, thereby enriching the diversity and multiplicity of history. They try to unmask and attack the foundations of male-oriented history which are based on hegemonic ideologies that always neglected the 'marginalized', by offering new pointers to the past including the women's voices too in the monolithic structure of history. It is interesting to note that "herstory is history with a difference" (*Historicism* 194). From time immemorial, patriarchal power structure admittedly has reduced history into 'his' story by correspondingly minimizing or totally ignoring women's roles.

Feminist theorists have always expressed their apprehensions regarding the muting of women's voices in discourses including that of history. Along with their contention against male authored texts, they have also displayed disharmony in the feminist ideologies which have often turned out to be monologic. Along with their trajectory through the various phases of development, Feminist theories, beginning with the first phase to the Postfeminism, have inspired writings simultaneously. In this context, linking Feminism with New Historicism, also, has become problematic. In analyzing the first two works of Indu Sundaresan's Trilogy, hence, it would be appropriate to adopt the methodology of using radical feminist theory along with the Feminist New Historicism popularized by Judith Newton, since the novelist depicts the female protagonist as acquiring selfhood and empowerment through stiff resistance against male hegemony.

This chapter focuses on the initiative of a woman writer in tracing 'her story' about women of the Mughal era from the woman's perspective in order to highlight their roles, contributions and achievements which have been rendered almost invisible in androcentric historical and historiographic fictional narratives represented in this study by *The Emperors of the Peacock Throne* and *Taj* respectively.The attempt of women writers in providing a more candid probing into woman's identity while tracing the trajectory of a history usually represented by male emperors, is subject to analysis in this and the following chapter.

Indu Sundaresan's *Taj Mahal Trilogies* (*The Twentieth Wife, The Feast of Roses & Shadow Princess*) focus on the retelling of a particular time in Mughal era where the women behind the veil remained invisible both to the world and to themselves in an exclusively male- oriented cultural milieu. Her historical novels are attempts to remedy previous exclusions by delineating the roles of women also in deciding the history of a dynasty. The author refuses to send them to the margins as in the conventional narratives, adhering to the feminist perspectives in New Historicism. Thus the first two novels in the Trilogy are interesting re-visions of history, where women characters receive just and equal treatment as men, and are probably more intelligent and capable to indulge in matters of administration. Usha Bande in her book *Writing Resistance* observes that "The act of 'revision' provides a key to locating and defining women's experience within the hegemonic value systems. By looking back, women's discourse deconstructs the locus of power and reconstructs the past" (172).

The transformations of women from 'victims' to 'resistantes' in the first two novels is the interest of investigation in this chapter. They are taken together for

analysis as both these works make the 'othered' women characters of the Mughal dynasty speak as 'subjects' who acquire their selfhood by dismantling the known notions of gender roles and suppressed identity through resistance. According to Haynes and Prakash, "Resistance should be defined as those behaviours by subordinate groups that contest hegemonic social formations but threaten to unravel the strategies of domination. 'Consciousness' need not be essential to its constitution" (Introduction to *The Entanglement of Power and Resistance* 3).

The Twentieth Wife (2002) the first in the trilogy traces the trajectory of Mehrunissa, wife of Jahangir, who elevates herself from an ordinary woman to the mighty empress, the power behind the veil. The purpose of the author is to create an 'alternate history', thereby making the process of writing itself a mode of resistance focusing on negotiating with the traditional writing patterns like those in the creations of Eraly or Murari.

History is one of the most challenging arenas to contest the conceptions of male ideologies as the allocation of central space in history is too powerful and dominant with phallocentric canons. Indu Sundaresan makes 'alternate history' with her version of Mughal history through her bold and resistant female protagonist in the first two novels of her Trilogy contrary to Murari's *Taj* that focused more on women characters as targets of oppression. The first two novels of Indu Sundaresan's *Taj Mahal Trilogies* are interestingly decodings of equations in Mughal history, including, in its fictional representation, the contribution of women also in deciding its trajectory. Judith Newton attempts to fuse her theories of Feminism with the theories of New Historicism to focus mainly on "writing women into 'history' in new ways,

writing the history of the way in which women have constructed culture too"("History As Usual" 90).

Indu Sundaresan reconstructs history "to challenge traditional masculine authority and suggest a refreshing capacity for change" ("Learning Not to Curse" 73). The novel *The Twentieth Wife* opens with the birth of Mehrunissa in a desert to poor parents. Her parents, Ghiaz Beg and Asmat Begam choose to name her 'Mehrunissa'- meaning "Sun among Women" (*The Twentieth Wife* 5) for their daughter born in Qandahar desert who later, true to her name, becomes an indispensable and powerful presence in the Mughal dynasty. Mehrunissa, the daughter of Persian refugees thus finds shelter in Mughal India under Emperor Akbar's reign. She harbours the dream to be an empress of Hindustan right from her childhood, "What bliss to be in the Emperor's harem, to be at court. How she wished she could have been born a princess. Then she would marry a prince-perhaps even Salim" (21).

Mehrunissa is positioned as a 'subject' who desires prince Salim's love rather than be placed as an 'object' of his desire when she falls in love with Emperor Akbar's son, Salim at the age of eight and never deviates from that dream even if her life moves in different directions twisted with hardships. Judith Newton challenges the post modern theorists like Foucault, Lyotard etc, whose general assumptions about New Historicism while practicing it is that "there is no transhistorical or universal human essence and that human subjectivity is constructed by cultural codes which position and limit all of us in various and divided ways"("History as Usual" 88). By adhering to a "universal human essence"(88), the novelist dismantles the existing notions of 'subjectivity' as a product of cultural power which creates specific slots for gender roles regarding social responsibilities.

Describing the significance of the name, Mehrunissa, Robert Ghunter observes:

> The daughter of Ghiaz Beg who had been so providentially preserved in the desert as she grew up excelled in personal attractions, all the loveliest women of the East and was therefore honoured with the designation of Mihr-ul-Nissa: the Sun of women. The extraordinary event which had distinguished her birth seemed but as the prognostic of future distinction. The child of the desert grew to be the perfection of women (*Nur Jahan and Jahangir* 11).

Mehrunissa of *The Twentieth Wife* is cognizant of the patriarchal strategies which subjugate women in the Mughal palace. She feels irritated with the system for insulting the women. She has to stand and watch Salim's wedding from the zenana balcony, "It was unfair that her brothers were allowed to be present at the courtyard below while she had to be confined behind the purdah with the royal harem" (27). She is throughout portrayed as a rebel with individuality and courage right from her childhood that resulted in her meeting with Padshah Begam, Ruqayya which marks a turning point in Mehrunissa's life and provided her an opportunity to get closer to the workings of the zenana and the court.

By observing Akbar's favourite wife, Ruqayya Begam during the visits to serve her, Mehrunissa learns,

> The title of Padshah Begam was not lightly bestowed nor lightly taken. Everything that happened within the harem walls and quite a bit

that happened outside, came to Ruqayya's ears through various spies. Nothing was too big or too small for the Empress's notice… (36).

According to Barbara Harlow "The literature of resistance sees itself further more as immediately and directly involved in a struggle against ascendant or dominant forms of ideological and cultural production" (*Resistance Literature* 29). As a resisting female protagonist, Mehrunnisa even dares to resist the prevalent practices of her society by accompanying her brother to nashakhana once disguising as a boy. She is always bold and wishes to widen her horizons rather than exist behind the veil. When her brother Abul rebukes her for her infatuation for prince Salim, she boldly retorts, "if I wanted to marry him, what would stop us?"(41). Her firm replies mark her strength of mind and determination. Sundaresan employs Mehrunssa's dream of becoming an Empress of Hindustan as a leitmotif throughout the novel. She presents Mehrunissa as a symbol of the powerful woman who relentlessly tries to become the mistress of her own destiny despite the hurdles on the way to achieve that goal. There are various instances where she questions and challenges the gender roles prescribed by the race. She often asks her father "why a woman has to stay in the house when a man can go and come as he pleases" (45). Asmat, who wants to confine her daughter to the domestic space is a typical stereotype of the subjugated woman, conditioned to be happy in her marginal existence. Ghias, on the other hand, is afraid of losing his daughter's intelligent assistance in his official responsibilities if she is forced to stay behind the purdah.

In the Introduction to the book *Writing Resistance: A Comparative Study of the Selected Novels* by Women Writers, Usha Bande observes:

> Resistance involves re-interpretation so as to bring the marginalized into the center; it also recognizes the need to 'hear voices' and give consideration to the dispossessed. By its semantic nature-it is derived from Latin word-resiste're, meaning to stand against-it denotes a slow but insistent, invisible but enduring behavioural strategy having the potential to dislodge the dominant structure, if not dismantle it (2).

Mehrunissa realizes, "the older she became- she was now fourteen-the more Bapa and Maji imposed restrictions on her… These restrictions would be part of her life from now on, for she was a woman" (48). She is intelligent enough to perceive the truth that royalty can bestow the women behind the veil with more freedom rather than leading a less eventful life as a noble man's wife. She cleverly plans to fulfill her dream of becoming an empress only if Salim notices her as "a woman ready for marriage" (48). To Mehrunissa, Ruqayya seems a model for the dream she nurtures out of pure optimism. She learns many qualities essential for an Empress from Ruqayya Begam. She wonders at the ease with which Ruqayya manages Akbar's innumerable wives and concubines, especially her bonding with her co-wife, Salima Begum untainted by rivalry. Mehrunissa recognizes the truth that Salim's second wife, princess Jagat Gosini has failed to win the favour of Ruqayya and has to pay for it as "her child had been whisked away from her" (63). Further, she learns many useful tips from Ruqaiyya like, "A woman must not be completely reliant on a man, either for money or for love" (63). She preserves all those ideas in her mind as essential tips for future use.

Mehrunissa's relationship to Prince Salim's second wife, Jagat Gosini is that of rivalry and competition right from their initial encounter as both yearn to be

powerful as women with an identity of their own. In the novel *Taj*, Jagat Gosini is referred as 'Jodi Bai' and Murari portrays her as a "shy, quiet and sad woman" (22) without any identity of her own. But for Sundaresan, Jagat Gosini is smart enough to attain supremacy among all the wives of Jahangir in the zenana till Mehrunissa's entry as 'Twentieth Wife'. Neeta Jha in her article "Pleasures of Being a Woman Writer" comments that "it is only natural that we should find a more authentic insight into human nature only in the literature created by women" (146). Mehrunissa feels humiliated when the princess coldly says that she hasn't heard anything about her father. She firmly decides, "The princess might not know who her father was, but she would remember Mehrunissa" (68) for sure and only that can compensate for the wound inflicted on her mind. She plans to capture the attention of Prince Salim as a mark of revenge to Jagat Gossini. She tries to update herself about the "zenana life, Salim's likes and dislikes and the situation at court" (69). To Mehrunissa, hearing about the proposal of Ali Quli from her father is almost a swan's song to her dream of ruling the Mughal empire. She even retorts to her father, unable to control her anguish: "Why?... "Why could it not be Salim?"(77).

Sundaresan portrays Mehrunnisa as a woman who voices her opinions adhering to her own coherent perceptions without inhibitions to boldly "counter the seesaw male images" ("Images of Women in Literature: An Evolution" 34). The manner in which she retorts and silences Jagat Gossini reveals the self confidence and inner strength of her character. Jagat Gossini also, a strong willed woman, takes care that Mehrunnisa does not benefit in any way in spite of winning the appreciation of the King for teaching her a lesson. To Salim's suggestive question, "Who are you,

beautiful lady?"(82), she does not respond in a manner befitting a girl who would dance to have caught the glance of the prince.

Marriage, for Mehrunnisa, is a patriarchal construct. Simone de Beauvoir observes: "Marriage has always been a very different thing for man and woman. The two sexes are necessary for each other, but this necessity has never brought about a condition of reciprocity between them" (*The Second Sex* 300). She waits for Salim, "to call for her, never really believing that she would marry Ali Quli" (88) even while the preparations of her marriage is going on. She unabashedly flirts with the Prince, though Emperor Jahangir denies their union in marriage. Marriage, for her, should be founded on love and moreover, it should benefit her in providing the best living condition. It should also provide a ladder for her political ambitions. She thus upholds her identity by expressing her desire to marry Salim. As a woman with feminist convictions who gives primacy to her ambitions, marriage with Ali Quli becomes just a "subtle expression of patriarchal control and the most powerful weapon for female subjugation" (*Radical Feminism and Women's Writing* 53).

The incident where Mehrunnisa discloses to her mother the news about her pregnancy is an excellent example of the concept of sisterhood, which happens here not immediately but later as explained by Adrienne Rich in her work, *Of Woman Born* (1976). Adrienne Rich says that "Mothers and daughters have always exchanged with each other—beyond the verbally transmitted lore of female survival – a knowledge that is sublimal, subversive, preverbial: the knowledge flowing between two alike bodies, one of which has spent nine months inside the other" (216). Her mother who chides her, for failing to reveal the 'glad' news to her husband first, "Your husband must always know more than we do, for you belong to him now, not to us (111)"

illustrates the patriarchal conditioning of womanhood, and motherhood. To this, Mehrunnisa retorts, "Why do you defend him? It is me you must worry about. You are my mother, not his. Have you given me away so completely to him that you care no longer about how I am?"(111). Thus she subverts the conventional notion that woman is a property or commodity to be exchanged between parents and husband. She objects to hegemonic impositions thus, "There were always strictures in society: how one must live, eat, even what to talk about and what to keep silent on" (112). Asmat too slowly realizes the truth in her daughter's arguments and identifies with them though it is too late. Her empowerment, therefore, though acquired, does not offer much scope for discussion. However, it is interesting to see a sisterhood developing between the two, thus showing that empowerment of woman can be enhanced through sisterhood as envisaged by Adrienne Rich. Mehrunissa adheres to Rich's notion that "As daughters we need mothers who want their own freedom and ours. We need not to be the vessels of another woman's self-denial and frustration" (*Of Woman Born* 247).

Mehrunissa's resistance lies in her refusal to be a silent sufferer and in her protest against injustices. She rebels against some of the "sex-role expectations" of her society and culture. ("Women in Indian English Literature" 121). She does not glorify her husband's sexual cravings like Arjumand of *Taj* but coldly admonishes him for seeing him with a slave girl in her bed, "Perhaps it is better you have another wife" (115). Ali Quli's caustic remarks are interestingly a compliment about her self assertion, "You talk too much for a woman, Mehrunissa-as if you were a queen, as if you expected to be a queen…" (116). There are various instances in the novel to show that she is a woman who loves freedom and selfhood and also exhibited the courage

to articulate them. She walks through the bazaar least bothered about the admonitions of her husband and father if they came to know about it. She wishes for motherhood of "her own child, not the fruit of some other woman's womb" (164) to eliminate her loneliness and to silence queries about not being a complete woman if she does not bear children, though she believes that mothering is not the only way to bliss. Hence when the husband fathers an illegitimate son, Mehrunnisa's reaction is compassion to the woman who delivers the child. She helps the mother during labor because of her sympathy and not as an act of sacrifice. She proudly declares that she will not be an adoptive mother of someone else's offspring and moreover she is optimistic that she will soon deliver her own child.

> The delineation of female sexuality usually kept hidden in male centered writings is subverted when women write with the agenda that it deserves to be expressed and debated. Cixous observes that "By writing herself, woman will return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her, which has been turned into the uncanny stranger on display—the ailing or dead figure, which so often turns out to be the nasty companion, the cause and location of inhibitions. Censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time" ("Laugh of the Medusa" 880). Anne Sexton who places the bodily experience of women as central in her poems, as in "In Celebration of my Uterus": "Sweet weight, in celebration of the woman I am… I sing for you. I dare to live" (*The Complete Poems* 55). Indu Sundaresan similarly uses her women charcters to challenge the male authority in literature with her female-sexed texts. She breaks the silence that women have inherited with regard to their sexuality. Mehrunissa unabashedly describes her experiences of painful miscarriages thus, "Then, that first year of the marriage, after Ali Quli's return,

Mehrunissa's monthly blood did not come… She slept only little, in brief snatches during the day. Then one day, as she sat in a warm bath, the water pooled crimson around her body. The pain from that miscarriage had been like being pulled apart by elephants, slowly, limb by limb, until only a numbness was left"(109). While helping the slave girl Yasmin for her delivery, Mehrunissa commands her with the diligence of a doctor "The next time a pain comes, I want you to push hard. As hard as you can" (146). The entire process of delivery in which Mehrunissa helped the child to come out of the slave girl's frail body is detailed in a feminine language which is taboo in women's articulations in patriarchy. As Helene Cixous warns, the novel proves that "The new history is coming: It's not a dream, though it does extend beyond men's imagination, and for good reason" ("The Laugh of the Medusa" 883). It is beyond men's imagination because in such new histories, "women's autonomy is often represented by women's bodies and sexuality" ("History as Usual" 120). After years of painful miscarriages, her apprehensions while giving birth to her daughter are described in a powerful language:

> Her knees buckled and a gush of wetness flooded from her body. Heart pounding, she put a hand between her legs over the silk of her ghagra, uncaring that she stood in the front courtyard in front of all servants. It was too early: only eight and a half months. Was her treacherous body going to expel this child too? Her hand came away sticky with a clear fluid… Not blood, thank Allah, not blood (209).

Using such female centered language, Sundaresan challenges male authority in defining woman's body. Cixous remarks: "Smug-faced readers, managing editors and big bosses don't like the true texts of women-female-sexed texts. That kind scares

them" ("Laugh of the Medusa" 877). *The Twentieth Wife* uses language as a tool to resist phallic discourses which ignore female sexuality in terms of a woman's perspective. She thus breaks the silence that women have inherited with regard to their sexuality and tries to reclaim the sexual identities of historically neglected women in her novels.

Mehrunissa tactfully plays games to win the attention of the emperor during her niece Arjumand's engagement ceremony with Khurram. Jagat Gosini is no match for Mehrunissa who is "the consummate actress" (263). She drops a goblet on the floor which attracts the attention of the emperor to her. When he notices her, she knows that her plan has worked and this makes her proud of her ability to turn things in her favour using intelligent tactics which she cleverly uses later, "In Bengal Ali Quli ignored her and the coolies gazed at her stupidly. But here among all these beautiful women, she, the mother of a child and old in the eyes of all men, could command the attention of the man who had everything. It was the best feeling in the world" (262).

Jagat Gosini also plays tactics to divert her husband's attention from Mehrunissa. To Mahabat Khan, the minister and partner in crime, she says "Mehrunissa is somehow…. Different. Her presence in the zenana will be a threat to me-and maybe even to you" (272). She knows that Jahangir wants Mehrunissa, "not for the title she bore- she was no princess-and not for her family connections- her father was, after all and would always be, just a Persian refugee-but for herself" (273).

Mehrunissa proves to be a good statesperson and an able administrator, the qualities which are usually attributed to men who dwell in the public space. She chides her father for collecting bribes and being unjust, showing her abilities as a

clever ruler who can convince hearts using diplomacy. Ali Quli falls to jeopardy mostly because he ignored his insightful wife's practical advices. Mehrunissa survives the tough days after her husband's death with sheer will power, fortitude and indomitable courage as she is alone in Bengal with spies searching her to revenge her for her husband's follies.

The optimistic attitude of Mehrunissa is highlighted in the novel by describing how she handled her alienation. Mehrunissa searches for the possibilities of women rather than worry about their limitations:

> As the months passed Mehrunissa started to sew and paint when Ruqayya gave her the time. Soon she was designing and making ghagaras and cholis for the women of the harem. The money from this she kept carefully in a wooden casket. For what, she did not know yet, but it was the first time she had money of her own-not from Bapa, not from Ali Quli, not from Ruqayya (314).

Another striking woman character who asserts herself is Rukaiyya who employs strategies to win her way. She plays a pivotal role in uniting Mehrunissa and Jahangir mainly to take revenge on Jagat Gossini. In Jahangir's concept of his courtship with Mehrunissa, "Nowhere was there a mention of marriage, of a wedding. Her face flamed with shame" (347). She critiques Jahangir's approach to man-woman relationship by refusing the 'status' of his concubine, "I cannot— I will not—be your concubine" (348). She vehemently resists the offer of 'protection' if she agrees to be his concubine, thus articulating her sense of freedom, both psychological and economic, from the fetters of marginalization, "You forget that I have looked after myself for four years now, with no help from either you or my Bapa. I will doubtless

be a fallen woman, but I will not—absolutely will not—come to your zenana as a concubine" (349).

Mehrunissa proves to be an empowered woman who attains economic independence by congenially using her multiple talents. This status gives her the self confidence to challenge and defy even the emperor of the throne. The author shares the feminist ideology of subverting the assigned gender roles of a woman fixed by patriarchal assumptions. Hence Mehrunissa's culinary skills or narcissistic love of her body finds no place in *The Twentieth Wife*. Instead, her thirst for freedom of self, empowerment through financial independence, diplomacy in administration, intelligence etc is asserted by Sundaresan. By boldly facing her alienation, widowhood and humiliation, Mehrunissa surprises even the Emperor: "She scorned the rules, trod on them" (352). He is forced to admit her shrewd calculations in administration.

> What surprised him was that she knew, that she—merely a woman— would be interested in the affairs of the empire. It thrilled him to be able to talk with her about it. Unlike his ministers, she was a safe counsel; she had no personal agenda, no wish other than what he wanted (354).

When Mehrunissa's parents chide her for turning down the proposal to be Emperor's concubine, she boldly replies, "you know him as a king, an emperor, but I know him as a man. A man in need, not of another concubine-he has plenty for those-but of a woman with a loving hand to guide him, to be with him always"(357). She is confident that she can save Jahangir from the wrong influence of his cohorts.

Resistance for Mehrunissa is the aggressive assertion of her self. She wills the Emperor to ask for her hand in marriage. She refuses to be the 'other' in marital relationship, that the Emperor is forced to correct Jagat Gossini thus, "But she will come here as my wife, not as my concubine" (363). Nur Jahan transgresses the boundaries of traditional femininity by winning the Emperor's hand in spite of being a widow with a daughter at thirty four. She takes sweet revenge on Jagat Gossini, by taking the ownership of her chief eunuch, Hoshiyar Khan who wields great power in the zenana.

The self assertion becomes more meaningful when the woman is able to convince the male counterpart that she will be accepted for what she is and not because she is essential in any way. Hence the title he confers upon her "The Light of the World" should be considered an accolade to her acquired empowerment.

Mehrunissa discontentedly thinks of not according equal importance to women with that of men in governing the empire and remembers the words of a visitor to the kingdom:

> European queens shone in court beside their husbands. Why, there had been one English queen who ruled alone, who had come to the throne in her own right as the daughter of a king (372).

Mehrunissa knows, "she had no such advantages.She would not be able to rule beside the Emperor, only behind him, hidden by the veil" (372). But she has boldly decided to fight for supremacy not only in the harem but also at the court by becoming "the force to reckon with behind the throne" (372). She wants Jahangir to consider her as worthy to be councelled in all important events and court proceedings.

Thus, Feminist writings prove how the subaltern can speak even from the margins. According to Cixous,

> If woman has always functioned 'within' the discourse of man, a signifier that has always referred back to the opposite signifier which annihilates its specific energy and diminishes or stifles its very different sounds, its time for her to dislocate this 'within,' to explode it, turn it around, and seize it; to make it hers, containing it, taking it in her own mouth, biting that tongue with her own very teeth to invent for herself a language to get inside of ("Laugh of the Medusa" 887).

Mehrunissa creates 'her'story by ruling the kingdom from behind the veil. That she does not find the deserved acknowledgement in historical references does not reduce her contributions to the trajectory of the Mughal rule in India.

Indu Sundaresan foregrounds the necessity to reject the unfair distinctions seen in projections of Mughal history.Therefore, the roles of Jagat Gossini, Ruqaiyya, Begum, Salima etc, apart from that of Mehrunissa have been explained and justified in the novel. Akbar asks Ruqaiyya, "How is it you are so wise? Where does that wisdom come from?"(124). Their interventions get added significance as they speak from the dark corners of a male centred dynasty: "Behind the throne, the zenana ladies crowded in balcony, hidden from view by a latticework marble screen" (203).

Speaking of feminine texts, Cixous observes:

> A feminine text cannot fail to be more than subversive. It is volcanic; as it is written it brings about an upheaval of the old property crust, carrier of masculine investments; there's no other way. There's no

> room for her if she's not a he. If she is a her-she it's in order to smash everything, to shatter the framework of institutions, to blow up the law, to break up the 'truth' with laughter ("Laugh of the Medusa" 888).

The Twentieth Wife also becomes a feminine text in this sense, which deconstructs the presumed fixity of gender roles in the existing social order. Newton recalls how Jane Marcus in an unpublished essay has observed: "She who writes history makes history" ("History As Usual" 92). Elise Boulding, a feminist historian, states the reason behind writing a book adding the contributions of women to the history of mankind thus: "*The Undesirable of History* was originally conceived to correct a massive injustice-the wholesale omission of recognition for the contributions to the histories of civilizations by one half of the human beings ever to have populated the earth" (Foreword to *The Undesirable of History* xiii). As Boulding states, the women writers have been questioning the ways in which women have been silenced or submerged throughout a male constructed written world by creating alternate stories and alternate histories.

The Feast of Roses (2003) traces the evolution of Mehrunissa from the position of Jahangir's queen to a powerful monarch who wields power. Her resistance arises from the need to assert her identity in a political milieu which is usually dominated by patriarchal monolithic articulations. Hence the rise in power inevitably results in her fall from the exalted position to an ordinary woman. But this does not prevent her evolution to an empowered individual though setbacks in a traditionally male centered public space are mandatory.

Resistance for Nur Jahan is the unconscious exhibition of her anger over her subjugation. In this novel, Sundaresan's focus on Nur Jahan's resistance is as Usha Bande observes: "Representation of 'resistance' in women's fictional narratives articulate both the existence of the dominant power structure and the female desire to disavow and defy that structure. In doing so, it becomes a vehicle for expressing the cultural, literary and feminist dilemmas concerning the validation of female agency and the recovery of the female voice. Resistance is a part of the dynamics of social life" (Introduction to *Writing Resistance* 2).

Commenting on the efforts of feminist veterans to reconstruct history as a genuine account of their stories before less sympathetic versions are generated, Judith Newton notes:

> This narration of the past, however, while it serves to give voice to our own versions of our histories and to press the claims of our historical significance, may have less defensive purposes as well. It may serve as an exercise in reconstructing the history not only of our achievements and losses but also of our failings and our errors. It may serve not only as a means of rethinking the past but as a preparation for, and a means of entry into, a different future ("Feminist Family Values; or, Growing Old and Growing Up with the Women's Movement" 327).

Mehrunissa becomes a thinking subject in questioning the existing patriarchal norms regarding gender roles which refuse an opportunity for woman to have a say in political issues:

> Mehrunissa sat behind him in the zenana balcony, watching as the Emperor dealt with the day's business. Sometimes, she almost spoke

> out loud, when a thought occurred to her, when an idea came, then she stopped, knowing that the screen put her in a different place. That it made her a woman. One without a voice, void of opinion (6).

Mehrunissa's tale is a story of never ending battles with those ideologies. Though the twentieth wife, she becomes the only one to desire for gender equality. She challenges the subjugation boldly, "Would he defy these unsaid rules that fettered her life as his Empress, as his wife, as a woman?"(6). She remembers, "All her life she had wanted the life of a man, with the freedom to go where she wished, to do what she wanted, to say what came to her mind without worry for consequences"(6). Resistance to hegemony is apparent in her thoughts, words and deeds and sometimes her resistance is even "overt and vocal" (Introduction to *Writing Resistance* 6).

Nur Jahan's resistance is apparent in her aggressive and commanding gestures to the attendants, which were until then the privilege of the ruling monarch, "They had strict orders not to leave the Emperor's presence unless commanded by him… and only by him. No wife, no concubine, no mother had that power. But this wife, she was different" (8). Jahangir gives her absolute authority to command which no royal women had previously enjoyed. She wants to share equal space with the Emperor in the public sphere instead of remaining "within the walls of the zenana" (9). She tries to assert her identity by expressing her wish to accompany Jahangir to the "jharoka balcony where Jahangir gives audience to the people three times a day" (9). She insists, with an authority hoping that she won't be ignored, "I want to be with you in the balcony, standing in front of the nobles and the commoners" (10). The Emperor accepts her demand knowing, "It was the first time a woman from the imperial harem had appeared in public, veiled from view, but boldly present"(13). For the first time in

the history of Mughals, a woman steps into the jharoka balcony with her husband and authoritatively interferes in public affairs. She observes diligently to learn the manner with which her husband is dealing with the petitioners. She boldly raises her voice against Mahabat Khan by preventing the Emperor from heaping more rewards to his friends and relatives. She softly yet shrewdly advises him to help the needy. She strives to become as powerful as the male in asserting her needs at the right time.

Mehrunissa exhibits her modest forms of struggle by resisting, defying and disavowing the patriarchal structures. Her efforts are aimed at enabling herself to achieve 'a fully human life' which "entails a quest to know and understand what it is to be a female and to break the silence so as to reveal the sense of wrong suffrent- the inequalities, the denials and the restrictions imposed stunting the female growth, and the tyranny of invisibility and victimization. Feminism itself entails resistance to invisibility and silencing" (Introduction to *Writing Resistance* 15). The news about her jharoka disturbs not only the men but also the women of the zenana especially, Dowager Empress Ruqayya's and Padshah Begum, Jagat Gosini's ears. Ruqayya warns her, "A woman's place is in the harem, behind the zenana walls. Even I never asked Emperor Akbar for such a favour" (18) to which Mehrunissa retorts, "But you asked for other things, your Majesty" (18). Jagat Gosini's anger knows no bounds when she thinks of the morning Jharoka, "Did he not know, did she not have any sense of how highly unbecoming it was to the dignity of a Mughal woman to show herself thus in public? (32). The courtiers also consider this as an "unprecedented occurrence" (16). Jahangir too endorses that "the women of his zenana, whatever their relationship to him, had always stayed behind the brick walls of the harem" (10). But Mehrunissa never fears to establish her identity in such a prejudiced society. Her

transgressions make serious impact not only in the private zenana but also in the public domains. She prefers to assert her right to be an independent subject rather than remain as a shadow of the emperor.

The fear of the men in the escalating power of a woman is vivid in the discussions of Mahabat Khan and Muhammad Sharif. When Mahabat Khan expresses his anxiety about the new Empress, Muhammad Sharif contemptuously replies, "A woman? Cause for concern?"(25). Sharif views her as a mere commodity when he thinks of her presence in the Jharoka balcony as merely "the result of a night of pleasure for the Emperor" (26). In their eyes, Mehrunissa is an ageing old woman of thirty four not worthy to be gazed at. "Age had come to Mahabat too, in the greying of his hair, in the lines on his face, only it did not matter so much. For he was a man, and his importance was not based on his physical appearance or the ability to bear children" (28). Sundaresan foregrounds the general attitude of apathy towards women in patriarchal societies through the scathing sarcasm in diction. Their words are coloured with the politics of masculinist hegemony that underlines the "enormity of repression that has kept women in the 'dark' that dark which people have been trying to make them accept as their attribute" ("Laugh of the Medusa" 876). Mahabat then remembers how much Jagat Gosini has tried to prevent the entry of Mehrunissa to the imperial harem considering her as a serious threat. Despite their sarcastic comments that she is a mere woman, their minds are disturbed with thoughts about the Emperor's 'twentieth wife'.

The noble men's words about a woman who strived to curb the power of another woman draw our attention to Cixous observation: "Men have committed the greatest crime against women. Insidiously, violently, they have led them to hate

women, to be their own enemies, to mobilize their immense strength against themselves, to be the executants of their virile needs" ("Laugh of the Medusa" 878).

Jasbir Jain asserts that "Women have had to discard their passivity, rebel against their merger into a permanent 'other' and to realize the nature of desire" (Introduction to *Women's Writing* xv). Jagat Gosini as the chief lady of the zenana has discarded her passivity and achieved that title competing with other wives. She is not a helpless victim but a woman with an identity of her own but her ambitions are not as endless as Mehrunissa's. She has learned to talk intelligently with the Emperor, can even use the bow and arrow to please her husband during hunting and most importantly has given birth to Khurram, the heir to the throne. Jagat Gosini "had kept her power in the zenana, not interfering too much in court politics or appointments" (34). A common woman's rationale in attaining all those privileges which she never aspired sows the seeds of competition and insecurity in Jagat Gosini's mind. Besides she feels humiliated while losing her chief eunuch to Mehrunissa. She plans to join the Emperor and Mehrunissa in "the royal hunting party" (35) with an anticipation to outshine Mehrunissa at least in hunting skills. To her surprise, it is not the Emperor but Mehrunissa who has given her permission for accompanying them. Mehrunissa's abilities kindle her feelings of jealousy, anger and apprehension. Although she is not a resisting woman like Mehrunissa, the question of power is central in her thoughts also.

Mehrunissa determines to win the title from Jagat Gossini in order to destroy all possibilities of competition:

> As long as Jagat Gossini was considered Jahangir's most important wife, as long as she had possession of the emperor's seal, Mehrunissa

> would be inconsequential, no matter how much time Jahangir spent with her. The title of Padshah Begam, the seal that was so powerful that even the Emperor's word could not revoke its orders- these were the real bastions of authority in the harem (40).

Mehrunissa knows of her difficulties in competing with her rival, Jagat Gossini who shared twenty five years with the emperor. She has already decided not to respect her as the padishah Begam which inspired her to speak first even without performing a konish. People begin to watch the new Empress with admiration and awe: "How brave she was, how proud, what a noble bearing for a woman born to Persian refugee" (49). With calculated moves, she breaks the hierarchy of power politics controlled by both men and women showing that women have to fight against themselves to assert their self.

Michel Foucault observes on power relations:

> Power-relations are dependent upon a number of deftly designed strategies. Most important one of these strategies is the tendency on the part of the dominant to ceaselessly refuse to acknowledge the dominated subject's separate identity and the dominant power structures constantly strive to drive a wedge between the oppressed group, gender or class to which she belongs (*The History of Sexuality* 125)

For women, writing becomes a subversive attempt to undermine the challenges posed by patriarchy. Indu Sundaresan asserts herself as a writer by expressing resistance through the female protagonist in this novel as Usha Bande

notes: “literary resistance is contestatory in nature and it is used for a genre of oppositional wrting, a writing meant not only to protest but also to materially and conceptually change the existing situation to allow for empowerment” (Introduction to *Writing Resistance* 4). Jahangir knows that “Mehrunissa wanted the royal seal, and the title of Padshah Begum, but he wants her to earn it meritoriously. Jahangir would not interfere in the matters of the zenana, even though he had the power to give Mehrunissa anything in the world” (51). Mehrunissa has to prove her mettle to attain such high titles. Jagat Gossini’s victory over Mehrunissa in the hunting party has wounded her ego mainly due to the tussle between them in power relations. Jahangir can confer upon his twentieth wife anything like the title ‘Nur Jahan’ but he wants her to win all that with her abilities rather than snatching it from Jagat Gossini. She has a high degree of perseverance to achieve what she wants and that has made her prove in hunting too through vigorous practice. Thus she wins the royal seal by defying convention boldly and outrageously by proving her prowess even in hunting by defeating Jagat Gassini in the subsequent hunts. She feels contented as “With this piece of metal, she owned the empire” (74). She always wishes to develop a reciprocal involvement by upholding equality, involvement and continuity in her marriage to Jahangir.

Discussing the possibilities of women’s writing, Cixous comments:

> It is by writing, from and toward women, and by taking up the challenge of speech which has been governed by the phallus, that women will confirm women in a place other than that which is reserved in and by the symbolic, that is, in a place other than silence. Women should break out of the snare of silence. They shouldn’t be

> conned into accepting a domain which is the margin or the harem ("The Laugh of the Medusa" 881).

Sundaresan's female protagonist, Nur Jahan becomes an active participant in almost all the male dominated spheres of activities, unlike Ruqayya and Jagat Gossini who are contented to be powerful only in the women's harem. Mehrunissa climbs the ladder of power over all the women of zenana from the time she stepped in as Emperor's Twentieth Wife: "A lot of people watched Mehrunissa's swift ascendancy with interest, both within and without the walls of the imperial zenana. For the harem's inmates, it was a source of wonder. Most of the women had not even seen her, so vast were the women's quarters, but they heard of her from the slaves and eunuchs" (83). Women in the harem, who are not ambitious, enjoy watching Mehrunissa's rising power. But "For Empress Jagat Gossini, the hurt was immediate, and it was accurately placed. Having been at the very top, she was losing the most when Mehrunissa wandered near that position" (84). For the Dowager Empress Ruqayya "was ecstatic about Mehrunissa's growing power. If she could not rule the zenana any more, at least she would through Mehrunissa. Or so she thought" (84). Power is the focus of interest not only for the men but also for the women in the dynasty, though it is the sour grape for the latter. In this context, Mehrunnisa's efforts to make her own signature in history are noteworthy. The women characters like Mehrunissa, Ruqayya, Jagat Gossini and even Arjumand Banu are portrayed as different from the "stereotyped images of women in literature as angels or monsters" (*The New Feminist Criticism* 5). Refusing to be silent victims they function as autonomous subjects with strong convictions unlike the female representations seen in the works of Eraly and Murari discussed in the first two chapters of the study. As

Newton said, for women 'the stories' of these Mughal women are "felt like a moment of empowerment, not of impotence" ("History as Usual" 93)

Mehrunnisa's rise to power is described by the author as the talk of the town:

> Outside the zenana walls also, among the courtiers of the empire, the English merchants in Agra, and the Jesuit priests, Mehrunissa was much talked of. Here too there was marvel and disbelief. How could a mere woman have so much authority? That did not stop these men—who would not credit her with intelligence or influence—from thronging her jharoka appearances, deeply curious (85).

Resenting being sidetracked, Jagat Gossini clandestinely meets Mahabat Khan to plot against Mehrunissa unaware of her son's intentions. Khurram, the most promising heir among the four sons of Emperor Jahangir decides to please Mehrunissa realizing that "she would be the person who decided where the crown would be vested" (88). Mehrunissa is raising a powerful and threatening challenge to the ideology of male hegemony which is vivid in Khurram's decision to appease her to attain power.

Jagat Gossini schemes to prevent her son, Khurram from marrying Mehrunissa's brother Abul's daughter, Arjumand. She suspects, "If the marriage took place, Abul would be father-in-law to her son, and if his daughter had the same charms as her aunt, she could lose Khurram all over again" (98). She assures herself that "without someone like Khurram—an heir to base hopes upon—Mehrunissa had nothing" (98). Jagat Gosini tries in all possible manners to balance the power equations by securing her title through her silent struggles.

Defying all the established norms of womanhood of the age and land, Mehrunissa combats her rivals by forming a junta of sorts with the three men she can rely on- her father, her brother and Jahangir's son prince Khurram (later Shah Jahan). "And so Mehrunissa stepped tentatively into history pages, dipping her foot into the ink that inscribed the names of men and writing her own" (110). She fulfils her dream of experiencing the power to rule, attitude to revenge and affinity for independence that are often branded as male realms accessible only to powerful men in historical records. Sundaresan in the afterword to this novel says: "It was evident, to courtiers and travellers alike, that from behind the veil it was Mehrunissa's voice that commanded the actions of these three men" (454). Inarguably, Empress Nur Jahan is making history with her 'her story'.

Mehrunissa is diligent enough to realize the need to mother a son in order to hold on to power: "It had not been important before Ladli, but now, with the empire in her hands, this child should be male" (117). Expecting a son, she worries over her hasty support to Khurram as the heir to the throne. She knows that for a woman in that world, life means a complete subordination to patriarchy. Despite her qualifications, even a woman like Mehrunissa can wield power only behind a male ruler. It is impossible for her to sit besides the Emperor in the court and rule but can only occupy a seat behind him that restricts her power. The loss of her child results in the inevitability of framing new plans to remain in power. Mehrunissa tries to dismantle the domination of male authority in order to get equal rights and dues in governing the empire. In her resistance, as James Scott observes, she requires "little or no co-ordination or planning; they often represent a form of individual self-help" (*Weapons of the Weak* 29)

Mahabat Khan, the chief cohort of the Emperor can be viewed as a true male representative of the age who has a low esteem towards the women. His words are caustic when he says, “It is unseemly to leave the entire supervision of an empire so large in the hands of a woman. The whole court is shocked that so wise an Emperor as your majesty should leave affairs of administration under the supervision of an Empress” (161). Mahabat Khan tries his best to free Jahangir from the fetters of his wife’s domineering influence. He makes him cautious of the way the posterity views him “As a man ruled by his wife” (162). His culturally preoccupied mind never views a woman as equal partner in sharing power with her emperor husband. However, Mehrunissa recovers her female voice and space by constitutionally incapacitating all those who schemed against her.

The resistance writers use their words as swords and their pens as weapons against their dominators who always subjugated and berated them. Indu Sundaresan resists the dominant power structures through her ‘written words’ when she describes Nur Jahan’s open fight with her emperor husband as a short lived impact of Mahabat Khan’s words: “ She slapped Jahangir four times with an open palm” (172). Mehrunissa’s words and actions make her different from other Mughal women who never dared to do so to the patriarch. These incidents even resulted in the widespread speculation that “It was the end of the reign of the Empress” (177). She apologises only when Jahangir felt guilty for yielding to the noble’s words of misogyny and they unite with more fervour receiving another majestic favour: “To be literally feasted thus, so sumptuously, with roses. This was a banquet like none other… and simply for treading upon with feet” (185). Her actions substantiate that “Domination gives rise to

resistance and resistance emerges as a consequence of power play" (*Writing Resistance* 2).

Indu Sundaresan subverts the known version that it is Arjumand who takes initiative to solve her rift with her husband Shah Jahan as endorsed by Murari in his novel *Taj.* As it is believed that if a marriage goes wrong the wife is responsible and is the sufferer. In *Feast of Roses,* Sundaresan thus establishes that men and women play an equal role in maintaining the bonds of conjugality as mutual beneficiaries. Significantly, the writer asserts the truth that maintaining the marital relationship is not only the need of the woman but also the necessity of man.

Sundaresan symbolically portrays Arjumand's desire for self assertion through the words of Shah Jahan. He realizes that Arjumand feels envious to hear of the Emperor's blind fascination to her aunt who is now an old woman and that she "wanted this feast of roses for herself, wanted it to bear her name, not Mehrunissa's" (186). She pretends to be submissive but deep within her mind nurture dreams to be powerful like her aunt. He knows that with this his father conferred upon her more power, "now and for always" (186).

Cixous observes that "Because the 'economy' of her drives is prodigious, she cannot fail, in seizing the occasion to speak, to transform directly and indirectly all systems of exchange based on masculine thrift. Her libido will produce far more radical effects of political and social change than some might like to think" ("Laugh of the Medusa" 882). Nur Jahan reveals her knowledge regarding foreign affairs, war and administration to Mahabat Khan by inviting him to the imperial zenana to play a game of shatranj. He feels he ". . . had been invited here to be humiliated, belittled by

this woman who thought she led the Emperor and the empire by the nose" (196). He realizes that he has been defeated both verbally and in the game by the intelligent Empress and feels ignominious to think of the news spreading throughout the empire of his defeat to a mere woman. She commands him to move away from the court as governor of Kabul and that completes his cycle of defeat in front of the Empress. Her intention obviously, is to end his influence upon the Emperor in the court thereby intelligently removing an obstacle in her path. Mahabat Khan has to pay a heavy price for his sarcasm towards women. The Empress teaches him an important lesson that not all women are trivial enough to be trampled over. Mehrunissa's repugnance to the callousness of men like Mahabat Khan is exhibited through her words and deeds with audacity.

Resistance for the victim comes through assertion of power. Mehrunissa insists that Khurram should marry her daughter, Laadli with an intention to keep her position secure through him even after her husband's reign. She knows, "If anything, Arjumand was too much like her, and had—this Mehrunissa admitted to herself just once—as much of a hold on Khurram as she had on Jahangir"(223). Khurram also resembles his father in his sexual infatuation. He is so much obsessed with his wife Arjumand that he resists Mehrunnisa's request to marry Laadli. Even Arjumand in this novel is not a living embodiment of the "stereotypes spun from the male imagination" ("Images of Women" 46).

Cixous says that "A woman without a body, dumb, blind, can't possibly be a good fighter. She is reduced to being the servant of the militant male, his shadow. We must kill the false woman who is preventing the live one from breathing. Inscribe the breath of whole woman" ("Laugh of the Medusa" 880). Mehrunissa is no longer the

false woman as she makes men around her realize that it is imperative for them to bow before a monarch even if she is a woman. Mehrunissa commands that the Portugese be arrested for capturing Indian ships including that of Ruqayya's:

> She used her personal seal rarely, but in this case, she wanted the Viceroy to know that this was on her orders. That she would play no more games of diplomacy with him, that if he wanted to keep his head in India, it should be bowed towards her (242).

It is impossible for a Mughal woman even to dream of such power that Mehrunissa enjoyed ruling with equal authority to the Emperor. So "Next to Jahangir's name, Mehrunissa wrote with an unwavering hand, Nur Jahan, the Queen Begum" (242). With these deeds, she paves way for a slight improvement in woman's position in the Mughal palace. Discussing on the position of women in different cultures, S.K.Tripathi observes that "Nur Jahan practically governed the whole empire" (*Position of Women in Different Cultures* 131).

In the foreword to *The Feast of Roses*, Sundaresan notes: "Sir Thomas Roe mentions Mehrunissa copiously in his memoirs, realizing, quite soon after his arrival in India, that the 'beloved wife' was the real power behind Jahangir's throne" (455). To Mehrunissa, claiming equal space along with her husband is synonymous with her desire for self expression because only that can provide vitality and meaning to her very existence. She is a woman who wants to play an active role in economic, political and social life rather than confining herself to motherhood. So due to mounting responsibilities of an empress, she turns blind to her daughter's discontent and solitude. She wants her daughter to marry one of the four sons of Emperor Jahangir just to continue her power unmindful of Laadli's sentiments. Mehrunissa

wants the world to notice her as a powerful woman ruler of Mughal era first and then only as a mother. She deviates from the usual self effacing mother we come across in male narratives like *Emperors of the Peacock Throne* who sacrificed everything for their children's joy.

The shift of power at this juncture is from Mehrunnisa to Arjumand, who interpolates into the plot with her tactics. She tries to prevent the union of Khurram and Ladli in order to curb the rising power of her aunt at least after Jahangir's reign. Emperor Jahangir wants Khurram to marry Ladli so that his beloved wife can continue her powerful influence in ruling the empire even after his reign. Mehrunissa is unable to persuade Khurram as Arjumand's influence is too strong for her to overcome. Even in a drunken state, he rejects Ladli's proposal as, "this was a lust, not a passion. So Arjumand told him" (254). Significantly, Khurram is also very much under the sway of his wife, Arjumand.

Mehrunissa's presence, however, determines the plot of the novel as its progress is centred around her role. A man named Nizam bets with his friends to get a glance of the veiled Nur Jahan in the zenana which is a prohibited area for men. Mehrunissa detects the man hiding in the zenana garden and kills him with a single arrow, revealing her mastery in archery. As an immediate repercussion both the Emperor and Empress's sleep is perturbed by the earsplitting unbearable clank of the chain of justice in the palace. Nizam's mother accuses the Empress for killing her son. Mehrunissa has a strong conviction that she is right in killing him as men are "forbidden to see the exalted ladies of the zenana" (299). The men enthusiastically watch the trial scene of Mehrunissa. She wonders at "so much repugnance from the men… what had she done to deserve such distaste?"(312).

> But her pride did not desert her. If she were to die today, she would die as an Empress would. Inside, she could even smile, the irony of this not escaping her. She wanted to leave her name in the mouths of people hundreds of years from now. If her actions did not secure her fame for posterity, her death—and dying thus—certainly would (312).

Mehrunissa becomes an epitome of power and courage even in the face of death. Even while encountering challenging situations, Mehrunissa tries to convince the blind prince Khusrau to marry Ladli which underlines her sanguine mindset in the midst of adversities. Khurram waits to see the imminent death of Mehrunissa but is flabbergasted to see her walking scot-free with the Emperor. This is her reply to a society of men that badly treated her and with resistance as an effective tool she makes herself visible and audible in a male centred world. The Emperor awards her appropriately for looking after him in his illness. He

> . . . allowed her to mint coins in her name. It was an immense privilege; all through Mughal rule in India, no woman had her likeness or name on the currency of the empire. Now Mehrunissa did…The minting of coins gave her a solid place within the empire's structure. Mehrunissa was now a sovereign too. She sat at the jharoka; she had coins with her imprint upon them; as he was Emperor in all but name (342).

Mehrunissa is no longer a mere woman to be looked down upon by the proud patriarchy including nobles. She has already attained two among "three badges of sovereignty in Mughal India—the ability to sign on farmans, the imprinting of coins

with a name or likeness" (342) except the third, Khutba. She is successful as an Empress but a failure as a mother as it is unconditionally believed that a woman has to become first wife, then mother, both roles being sacrificial but blissful also. But Mehrunissa refuses to tread the usual path by preferring titles to motherhood. She is not willing to restrict her life to the joy of conjugality and motherhood that demands passivity as a necessary attribute. Discussing on the concepts like maternal instincts, Simone de Beauvoir observes: "The mother's attitude is defined by her total situation and by the way she accepts it. It is as we have seen, extremely variable" (*The Second Sex* 453). Mehrunissa's love towards her daughter, Laadli varies according to the demands of the situation. For instance, she cares for her in times of need but becomes detached once she gets involved in her role as Empress.

Mehrunissa's efficiency in planning strategies to prolong her power is apparent in the manner in which she tries to convince Ladli, who marries Shahryar: "You can have what I do not Ladli. A child who will wear the crown, whose name will live on for posterity to remember, and because of him your name will live on" (380). The birth of a baby girl to Laadli completely crushes Mehrunissa's hope to continue the rule through her grandson. Ruling has always a passion and joyous experience to Mehrunissa unlike her daughter. According to Beauvoir, that "motherhood is enough in all cases to fulfill a woman" is a "dangerous misconception" (*The Second Sex* 462). As an ambitious woman, Mehrunissa is never contented with motherhood alone but on the contrary, her daughter Ladli attains complete fulfillment with motherhood.

As a typical brother of the patriarchal mould, Abul scorns his sister for being so authoritative forgetting that she is a woman. His daughter Arjumand is very much

like Mehrunissa in having a firm hold on her husband as he can't decide anything without her consent. Mehrunissa argues "She was the one who made sure khurram did not marry Ladli" (368). Arjumand is like her aunt as she doesn't like to share her husband's love with any other woman. Arjumand knows very well that if she gives permission to her husband to marry Ladli, her powerful aunt would diminish 'her' significance to posterity.

Mahabat Khan's indignation over the rising power of a woman is exhibited through his open combat with Mehrunissa by taking Jahangir as captive. He puts her in confinement as a punishment for sending him to Kabul. He wants her to be faceless under a thick black cotton veil before she steps out and "She must not raise her voice in public; a Mughal woman's voice must never be heard" (422). His words truly reflect the ill-concealed malice of old patriarchy towards rising power of a woman in the Mughal era. Mehrunissa is not willing to accept defeat in front of a man like Mahabat as she manages to defeat him by slaughtering his soldiers while in confinement. Thus Mehrunissa with her sharp mental faculties defeats a man who harboured culpable anger and hostility to her just because she is a woman. Mehrunissa becomes a self asserting female protagonist who always tries to project her autonomous self with a keen sense of individuality and desire to resist male domination. The author presents Mehrunissa with a revolutionary zeal as Mridula Garg in her article "Intervention of Women's Writing in Making of Literature" claims that through writing women "have a vision of an alternate world, substantially different from the given world, in which our own self also has a different connotation" (181).

With Emperor Jahangir's death Mehrunissa realized that it is not easy to continue her power with her less capable son in law who may even fail to win the support of courtiers and nobles:

> Mehrunissa knew she was asking for something difficult—Shahryar had not, could never, inspire confidence as an Emperor. But she would help him. He would have her strength, her power behind him (438).

Even though Nur Jahan has all the qualities to rule the empire but as a Mughal woman, she can't ascend the throne and rule directly. She is acutely aware of the paradox of men underestimating the capability of women in occupying supreme positions of power. So it is of prime importance to get the support of the important male members of the society to rule as an Emperor. She realizes that only with a male heir she can continue her rule from behind the veil. She even dares to be revengeful to Khurram when he turns down her proposal to marry Ladli. She gives consent to Khurram and her niece Arjumand's wedding hoping that she would give birth to a male heir soon. Ironically, she fails to have a son that leads to her decline which is accentuated by her distancing Khuram, the only able prince of Jahangir. Hence, instead of accepting her for her potentials, history has often misrepresented her as a 'demonic stereotype' with never ending ambitions in male narratives as discussed in the last two chapters. Cixous comments that "You only have to look at the Medusa straight on to see her. And she's not deadly. She's beautiful and she's laughing" ("Laugh of the Medusa" 885). Sundaresan's Mehrunissa too, thus becomes a beautiful figure who laughs at the way she is distorted in known histories.

In the afterword to *Twentieth Wife*, Sundaresan says:

> In an age when women were said to have been rarely seen and heard, Mehrunissa minted coins in her name, issued royal orders (farmans), traded with foreign countries, owned ships that plied the Arabian sea routes, patronized the arts and authorized the building of many imperial gardens and tombs that still exist today. In other words, she stepped beyond the bounds of convention (374).

Indu Sundaresan uses the 'written word' as a weapon to resist the phallocentric canons of historiographic fiction by portraying strong female characters who play an equally important role in inscribing the story of the Mughal dynasty. In the introduction to her book, *Subversive Women: Historical Experiences of Gender and Resistance*, Saskia Weiringa asserts that "women's act of resistance are not only subversive, but 'sub-versive,' highlighting how, internationally, women are deeply involved in circumventing, uncoding, and denying the various, distinct, and multi-layered verses in which their subjugation is described, and in replacing them with their own verses" (1-2). Indu Sundaresan adheres to this statement by depicting women, in both the above mentioned novels, as thinking, speaking and acting subjects who are able to create history on their own. The chief reason for Mehrunissa's fall is her support to good for nothing prince Shahryar. She is too strong but the man who has to lead from the front is too weak that she has to accept her defeat to Abul and Khurram. Arjumand looks visibly happy when her father proudly addresses her as Empress. The title is sweet after long struggles: "But this hard-won, hard-fought-for-victory over Mehrunissa would not stay with Arjumand for very long. Even as she sat

behind Khurram, pride overwhelming her at the sight of the heron's feather in his turban, death came stalking" (447).

For Arjumand, her life as Empress Mumtaz Mahal comes to an abrupt end within four years during her fourteenth delivery. Arjumand's immediate death demolishes her dreams to emulate her powerful and individualistic aunt. Mehrunissa survives her for more years but only to lead a life of exile at Lahore in the empire's soil. She overshadows her aunt despite her short term as Empress as posterity remembers her more through the Taj, her husband constructed in her memory thereby marginalizing the jealousy she felt to her aunt when Jahangir laid out the Feast of roses to honour Empress Nur Jahan Begum. Arjumand's jealousy is also an exposition of her silent struggle to be powerful like empress, Nur Jahan.

Khurram (Shah Jahan) has literally won in the battle with Mehrunissa but he is indebted to her in emulating her fantastic design of her father's tomb for his Taj Mahal. Mehrunissa knows that "Each day that Khurram bowed his head in front of the Taj Mahal, he bowed it in front of Mehrunissa, for in the design and construction of the Taj, Khurram had copied her own style" (449). This is obviously a victory to the once powerful Empress who dared to exhibit woman's power in a man's world. Intriguingly, women are systematically excluded from most historians' accounts patronizing women writers to write women back into history. Empress Ruqayya's presence in Akbar's life cannot be taken lightly as she is the brain behind many of his important decisions. He asks his wife, "How is it you are so wise? Where does that wisdom come from?"(124). Still, Eraly has failed to mention adequately about emperor Akbar's cousins turned wives, Ruqayya begum and Salima Sultan Begum in his historical narrative.

Emphasizing the need for a new insurgent writing, Cixous observes:

> She must write herself, because this is the invention of a new insurgent writing which, when the moment of her liberation has come, will allow her to carry out the indispensable ruptures and transformations in her history, first at two levels that cannot be separated…Write yourself. Your body must be heard. Only then will the immense resources of the unconscious spring forth… An act that will also be marked by woman's seizing the occasion to speak, hence her shattering entry into history, which has always been based on her suppression. To write and thus to forge for her self the antilogos weapon. To become at will the taker and initiator, for her own right, in every symbolic system, in every political process ("Laugh of the Medusa" 880).

Sundaresan develops the plot through the representation of Mehrunissa (Nur Jahan) as a 'taker' and 'initiator' through her 'new insurgent writing' in her first two novels of the Trilogy. She takes pen as a weapon to showcase the resistance of the most powerful empress of Mughal era through these two novels. Nur Jahan is portrayed as a powerful queen in the novel who actually ruled the empire in the name of the king as a reminder that history has ignored her contributions to the developments in the Mughal dynasty. In an interview with Uma Girish, Indu Sundaresan elucidates about the strong, heroic, daring women protagonists of her fictional world: "All my work is constructed around female protagonists and I always want to explore in these women the possibilities of stepping beyond society's restrictions and to see then what would happen, how they would react, what would really matter to them" (*The California Literary Review*). The confluence of many

essential traits like intelligence, courage and will power, mark Mehrunissa, the protagonist of two novels, *The Twentieth Wife* and *The Feast of Roses*, as an active subject who dares to transcend the inviolate and inviolable boundaries of the male dominated Mughal society. Mehrunissa with her revolutionary spirit challenges the subject-object polarizations by surmounting the impasse and succeeds in establishing herself as a complete person. She is a rebel with strands of radical feminism compared to Ruqayya and Jagat Gossini who restricted their ambitions within the women's allocated space. While speaking on feminist scholarship that always raised new and difficult questions about identity and selfhood of woman, Supriya Chaudari and Sajni Mukherji in their work *Literature and Gender* observe that "By focusing on the denials, repressions and blank spaces that made a certain kind of history possible, feminism sought to re-examine questions of authority and self-making, to expose the tensions of a concealed dialectic that runs through the apparently homogenous texture of recorded history"(2). Empress Nur Jahan has actually run the Mughal court during Jahangir's reign and still, she is not numbered along with Mughal rulers in histories foreground the bitter reality that the historians have never represented the lives of 'elite women' with the same zeal with which they documented the lives of 'elite men'.

Indu Sundaresan brilliantly portrays Nur Jahan as a rebel who always fights for her rights to attain 'equality' and even 'superiority' over all the important men in her life including her husband and emperor, Jahangir. Shashi Deshpande in The Keynote Address to the book *Indian Women Writing in English* says that "When a woman writes, she is turning her back on tradition, she is proclaiming herself, she is saying 'I will speak, I will say what I want to say'. The very process of writing is a

loud declaration of the self-something that tradition barred her from" (9). Sundaresan's portrayal of Mehrunissa's resistance against the regime of power structures is a kind of loud declaration of a writer's anguish about the invisibility of women in history. Nur Jahan's identity fails to merge with the cultural conditioning that a woman usually ascribes to which limits her as an ideal woman contented with the roles of wife and mother. She fights against such conditionings by attaining positions of power and prestige and by dismantling gender differences because ultimately as Sheila Rowbotham suggests, "the liberation of women necessitates the liberation of all human beings"(*Resistance and Revolution* 11).

Apart from Nur Jahan, Sundaresan delineates other remarkable women characters as well also like Ruqayya Begum, Salima Sultan Begum and Jagat Gossini without reducing the significance of male characters. So instead of adhering to the 'sameness' of homogeneous history and male narratives, the writer brings forth a 'difference' by giving voice to the women also. Resistance narratives reinterpret 'history' and insist on making female voices heard. It is imperative to note that such writers produce "history in a way which allows us better to account for social change and human agency" ("History as Usual" 118). In these novels, Sundaresan challenges the centers of power through Nur Jahan's resistance, thus demonstrating how, through resistant writings, women empowerment becomes a futuristic possibility.

Judith Newton contends that the articulation of assumptions and practices however "differs in feminist and nonfeminist work and is tied to the politics, the needs and desires of the practitioners" ("Historicisms New and Old" 450). Thus Feminist New Historicists are interested in recovering lost histories thereby exploring mechanisms of repression, oppression and subjugation stressing on the 'difference'

contrary to the ‘sameness’ that we often encounter in the male narratives. It is of paramount consideration that Feminist politics can give ground breaking articulations to New Historicism. Feminist New Historicism is not only an attempt to make women’s voices heard to make others see them as in history but also to see themselves in history to give value to themselves. Thus women writers like Indu Sundaresan give value to themselves by challenging “traditional, masculinist, ‘objective’ ‘history’ by making women visible, by writing women into history” (“History as Usual” 99-100). Apart from recreating the lives and achievements of royal women, Sundaresan has also tried to incorporate the story of a slave girl, Yasmin’s sufferings as well, thereby initiating the path to perceive history “as composed of many voices”(103). Thus Sundaresan illustrates how the prevalent monolithic ‘his’tories can be re-read as ‘her’stories too.

Chapter V

Indu Sundaresan's *Shadow Princess* and Tanushree Podder's *Nur Jahan's Daughter* as 'Her'stories: Celebrations of Inherent Selfhood

> Writing women into 'history' might well mean that traditional definitions of 'history' would have to change. - Gerda Lerner

Post modern theories have been searching for a 'beyond' in New Historicism with the aim of including the untouched areas of interest in it. Though many areas have been included consequently, in the genre, woman's position still remains in the margins. Male new historicists, starting from Stephen Greenblatt, remain traditional regarding their silence about gender biases in history. Looking at this necessity to go 'beyond' the existing limitations of New Historicism from an Indian perspective it would be helpful to note that many modern Indian women, at least the educated, have gained a new confidence with a new self reliance, gaining more freedom to enjoy equality through economic stability. Hence, the image of the new woman in fiction written by women novelists also has changed from a sacrificing, victimized 'object' to an independent and free thinking 'subject.' In this context, it would be interesting to examine, using Feminist New Historicism, two historical novels, *Shadow Princess* by Indu Sundaresan (the last of her *Taj Mahal Trilogy*) and *Nur Jahan's Daughter* by Tanushree Podder in which the woman is an empowered individual with an inherent self confidence and hence claims a space of her own naturally. Since the protagonists of these two novels exhibit, adhering to the post femininst ideology, their true

feminine selves as active desiring sexual subjects, unlike the resisting female of *The Twentieth Wife* or *The Feast of Roses*, the intention here is to search for new possibilities of looking at New Historicism from a post feminist perspective.

The notion of Postfeminism has become one of the most important and contested terms in the lexicon of feminist cultural analysis. Postfeminism can be seen as a critical stance focus on sexual empowerment and the celebration of gender difference instead of the alleged rigid 'man-hating' of the second wave feminists. Rosalind Gill, the noted cultural theorist and feminist, in her discussion on Postfeminism, argues that it is a 'sensibility' which focuses on the shift from women being portrayed as submissive, passive objects to being portrayed as active desiring sexual subjects. However, the term is widely used in media and popular culture to signify that women enjoy and exploit their femininity and sexuality freely.

The Postfeminism as a sensibility means the ubiquitous characterization of gender representations in the media, as listed by Gill:

> The notion that femininity is a bodily property; the shift from objectification to subjectification; the emphasis upon self-surveillance, monitoring and discipline; a focus upon individualism, choice and empowerment; the dominance of a makeover paradigm; the articulation or entanglement of feminist and anti-feminist ideas; a resurgence in ideas of natural sexual difference; a marked sexualization of culture; and an emphasis upon consumerism and the commodification of difference (*Gender and the Media* 255).

In essence, Postfeminism as a sensibility makes women realize their 'true feminine selves'. The right to adorn oneself and consume is not the only aspect of postfeminist sensibility as the right to one's own sexuality is also a great part of post feminist culture. To be more precise, Postfeminism focuses on female achievement through individualism and self expression. The study also tries to locate the ideology of Postfeminism apparent in the two female protagonists of the select novels.

The unsaid history of the 'oppressed groups' especially women remains repressed and unnoticed simply because our understanding of the past is governed and concealed by the conventional historiography we share. Foucault's 'historiography' gives a venue to the culturally and psychologically oppressed and marginalized categories in the society. Yet, it is palpable that among the various voices thus incorporated into readings of history, women find their stories being excluded. Judith Newton asserts the need for women to claim a central position in the trajectory of history.

Women's writing recreates a ' female identity' that is more candid to their nature and desire in their novels which is different from something fathered upon 'women' by patriarchy in their respective writings about women. The evolution of Feminism from the first wave to the third wave and further to Postfeminism has added new dimensions to the concepts of gender and subjectivity, asserting on its pluralistic nature, demanding the eradication of all sorts of inequalities. Hence Feminism and New Historicism become fluid by challenging monolithic history from various quarters. Newton insists that women's contribution to culture and that of other oppressed groups if taken adequately into account, "can new historicism produce something more than history as usual" ("History as Usual" 121).

The last of Indu Sundaresan's *Taj Mahal Trilogies*, *Shadow Princess* and Tanushree Podder's *Nurjahan's Daughter* deliberately shift the focus from the oft mentioned wives of the Mughal emperors to their less discussed, self-reliant daughters from a woman's perspective subverting the monolithic constructions of history, in adherence to the observation of K. Meera Bai that "Women come to occupy the central position in the fictional world of the women novelists" (*Women's Voices and The Novels of Indian Women Writers* 21). Through their works, these two novelists give voice to the usually unheard women in Mughal history. Jahanara and Laadli, the female protagonists of these novels are capable women who can wield power whenever and wherever required, hence cannot be 'made' passive spectators of history. Through the character of Jahanara, Sundaresan looks at woman's sexuality through the female kaleidoscope. Through the character of Laadli, Tanusree Podder sheds light on the female celebration of inherent self hood and self reliance.

The image of women in literature has undergone a change during the last four decades as Masoumeh observes: "Women writers have moved away from traditional portrayals of enduring, self-sacrificing women toward conflicted female characters searching for identity no longer characterized and defined simply in terms of their victim status" (*The Woman Question in the Contemporary Indian Women Writings in English* 116). Through these novels, Indu Sundaresan and Tanushree Podder reconstruct the experiences of those decentred women making them active subjects whose articulations have to be listened to and recorded as a priority in order to revive the buried past. Unlike the radical rebel, Nur Jahan, of the first two novels in Indu Sundaresan's Trilogy, Jahanara in *Shadow Princess* never competes with male counterparts to procure supremacy over them as she is empowered in her own way,

refusing the stereotypical roles attributed to a woman/princess. If Jahanara is a 'victor', Laadli, the protagonist of *Nur Jahan's Daughter* is more a 'humanist' with an innate capacity for self-realization that is lacking in her 'super egoist' mother, Nur Jahan.

Judith Newton contends that Feminism can offer different articulations to New Historicism by defining it in a broad way. It can also raise consciousness about potential social effects of different articulations incorporating the oppressed categories like women. According to Newton, the most important goal of writing Feminism to New Historicism is not just to suggest that "feminist articulations exist but to argue that feminist articulations of the assumptions and techniques associated with 'new historicism' can produce histories that are different in ways which should prompt all of us to think beyond some current understandings of 'history' and social change, understandings which often inform less feminist versions of 'new historicism'"("History as Usual" 92-93). Mary Jean Corbett in her review of Starting over: Feminism and the Politics of Cultural Critique writes that Newton's own reading practice "remains alive to the manifold and sometimes contradictory meanings that can be read from—or read into—the writings of the past"(85).

This chapter addresses the efforts of women writers like Indu Sundaresan and Tanushree Podder in developing 'New Women's History'. The novelists draw our attention to the 'lonely and individual struggles' of two women, whose names are usually written out of history. This chapter tries to establish the significant role of female historiographic fictionalists in dismantling the patriarchal assumptions of history by interpolating the existing notions of historicity. It also flashes light on the attempt of women writers in reinterpreting histories to recreate alternate histories with

women characters in the subject position that seek to project their experiences from the point of view of feminine consciousness and sensibility. The untold tales of history gain voice and space in the 'herstories' of the select women novelists. These writers invent a new language to rewrite the history of women as not 'victims' but as 'victors' though not 'rebellious'. This chapter examines these two novels from a post feminist perspective, thereby trying to prove the need for more women writers to create empowered, self confident and inspiring women characters who can tell tales so far unheard and not discussed.

The novel *Shadow Princess* (2010) opens in a labor room, a space where only women have access and where only women can perform. The birth of the last daughter of Mumtaz in the presence of her two elder daughters and her subsequent death after which the eldest daughter takes charge of not only the family but also the kingdom intend to show the inner strength of an independent woman. Sundaresan foregrounds the hidden truth that Mumtaz's death was the shameful consequence of the ever increasing lust of her husband for her body which resulted in her delivering fourteen children in nineteen years of marriage and her premature death due to child birth at the age of thirty eight.

Judith Newton asserts the need to "frame alternate histories thereby suggesting lines along which we will have to rethink what significant 'events' in fact are and how historical periods might be newly delimited if gender is to be written into our histories" ("History as Usual" 112). The first instance of Jahanara's self assertion is her dismissal of the head strong brother Aurangzeb from their mother's birthing chamber saying that "this is women's work" (9). She has the ability to control her siblings authoritatively, being the elder daughter. In a conservative society governed

by conventions even the emperor is prevented from viewing the delivery of his wives. Sundaresan reconstructs women's history by not emulating the male writers but by highlighting the life of women whose history might be 'different' from that of men.

According to Rosalind Gill, the discourses that reflect Post feminist ideologies foreground the "primacy of individualism" with its "active, freely choosing, self reinventing post feminist subject" (Introduction to *New Feminities* 7). Sundaresan gives prominence to the character of Jahanara, since she takes up reigns of the palace which would have otherwise crumbled under Shah Jahan, a listless widower, who became disinterested in ruling. Throughout the novel she is presented as an active, freely choosing, self reinventing post feminist subject. With Mumtaz Mahal's unexpected death, Jahanara with great presence of mind realizes "that something had changed in their lives from this moment" (14). Jahanara, a teenager then, is depicted as a pillar of will power and confidence, who refuses to be a mere metaphor for men and handles her unexpected burdens efficiently and rationally. The shift from objectification to subjectification is vivid in the portrayal of Jahanara. It is she, "who had chosen this spot where their mother was to lie" (16) due to the sudden shift in status as the Padshah Begam. It is she who washes her mother's body and decides what her mother should wear, "refusing to listen to any reason" (17) about the usual kind of burial. The role she takes after her mother's death is more of an empress than of a protective mother. She acts strongly in tough situations as if she is courage personified. She brushes aside her brothers' reluctance to attend their mother's funeral with a single command, "We will all be there, Jahanara had said, almost, almost shouting" (18).

> But her tears were staunched, because she seemed to be only one who had some control over what was happening. With their mother's unexpected, so unwanted death, the rest had all disintegrated (18).

The above quote substantiates princess Jahanara's resilience in a moment of crisis to handle which her father and brothers fail miserably. She has a commanding voice and skill to deal with complicated situations. Even as her brother Aurangzeb and the Imam disapprove the presence of women at the funeral, she remains adamant ignoring their indignation: "And Aurangzeb…he had protested against their—Jahanara's and Roshanara's –being at the funeral because they were women and not allowed to take part in so public a ritual" (19). To the practical minded Jahanara, the protest of male chauvinists' like Aurangzeb and Imam is an issue to be sarcastically ignored than to be adored. She feels sympathy to these men for being as "rigid and obstinate as an ass" (19).

Meena Kelkar and Deepti Gangavane in their article "Identity, Freedom and Empowerment" claim that "The question which becomes important is: Do women participate in making the world of culture by becoming knowers, actors and enjoyers? If we look at the history, we find that these roles have been denied to them because the normative theory of human life which determines these roles, is at the basic level founded in social hierarchy" (*Feminism in Search of an Identity: The Indian Context* 24). Mahabat Khan comprehends the importance of Jahanara in matters of "counsel, advice, and strength" (33) as the emperor is not intimate with any other women in the harem. Aurangzeb's caustic comment about Jahanara is interesting, "If Bapa could make Jahanara emperor, he would" (40). Aurangzeb knows that Jahanara is even dearer to their father than his sons. Jahanara's crucial role as a brilliant daughter in

supporting her father who lost interest in governing the empire is highlighted through the words of strong patriarchs who generally have no high regard about women.

Jahanara's effortless adaptation into the new role is portrayed graphically by Sundaresan, showing her ability to wield power without any hassle as it is inborn. Her first step is to boost the morale of her father, who plans to hand over the throne to his sons due to his grief. She praises his desire to honour his wife by building a tomb in her name, "No other emperor before and none after, would ever think of honouring a mere woman with such radiance in marble" (73). She convinces her father to continue his reign for the sake of the empire and its people. She has to perform multiple tasks as the padsha begam not knowing that "posterity would only know her as a beloved daughter and an adored sister" (74). She boldly endures many accusations including even the meanest that "Emperor Shah Jahan bore the same love for Princess Jahanara Begam that he had for Mumtaz" (75).

Jahanara is instrumental in prompting her father to attend the jharokha which is the symbol of his assurance to his people that he is still their ruler. She commands her four brothers to stand to the left and right of the emperor tired of noticing the alarmed voices of suspicion regarding emperor's identity from the crowd. Seeing the sons the crowd identifies that the man who presented before them in the jharoka is none other than their beloved emperor Shah Jahan. Jahanara prevents her sister Roshanara from moving to the balcony along with their brothers by chiding her that "you can do little, Roshan, you are but a second daughter" (80) establishing her authority over her and the entire women of the zenana. She adheres more to 'post feminist sensibility' here by establishing her power in women's zenana instead of aspiring to gain control over the empire. She is equally skillful here in 'monitoring'

and ‘self-discipline’ which is an essential theme of a Post feminist ‘distinctive sensibility’ as Gill notes: “In a culture saturated by individualistic self-help discourses, the self has become a project to be evaluated, advised, disciplined and improved or ‘brought into recovery’… it is women and not men who are addressed and required to work on and transform the self” (“Postfeminist Media Culture” 16). She feels happy for her father’s immediate acceptance by the crowd as well as her rising power in the zenana.

It is Jahanara who dissuades her father from the verge of almost abandoning the throne in a state of utter desolation. Besides she wants to teach her brothers a lesson that governing the empire as an emperor is not a child’s play. When the sons openly support Shah Jahan, having no other choice but to obey Jahanara’s order in the jharoka balcony, Shah Jahan “felt with a slight pang, that one of the hands holding his ought to have been his beloved Jahanara’s, for it was she to whom he had called out when he was so overwhelmed, she alone who had known how to react in an instant” (83), a privilege denied, merely because she is a woman. But she being a self contented woman, remains composed. According to Amber E. Kinser, “postfeminist rhetoric and images are positioned in opposition to any liberatory feminism, claiming that real liberation for women can finally only be found in accepting male dominance while denying its pervasiveness and restrictive power” (“Mothering Feminist Daughters in Postfeminist Times” 24). Jahanara, like a post feminist subject, willingly accepts male dominance by denying its restrictive power, even if it comes from her father, brothers or lover.

The dismantling of the beautiful Raja Jai Singh’s haveli which is the pulse of a civilization to build the tomb of Mumtaz reveals the power hunger of the emperor.

Felling of trees for this purpose is compared to the assault on women, "When the trees were felled, despite their age, their trunks were as slender as a woman's waist" (88). The passage reflects the ecofeministic ideology which argues how the paternalistic capitalistic society becomes destructive to both woman and nature.

Judith Newton makes an insightful statement that "she whose activities are visible as 'history' has a kind of power that she whose contributions are placed at the margins of 'history' does not" ("History As Usual" 92). Jahanara's relationship with other women characters constitutes the minor sub plots which intertwine to make the main plot intricate and interesting, thus opening new leaves in the historiographic narrative. She finds the presence of the first lady, Satti Khanum as "too cloying, too domineering, almost too condescending" (96) knowing well that the lady has not taken such liberty with her mother. To Roshanara's question, "you Begam Sahib… Are you the Padshah Begam now, Jahan? What of Bapa's other wives?"(96), Jahanara states matter-of-factedly, "Roshan…We are … supreme now" (96). Jahanara has sent Satti to Agra with Mumtaz's body and orders her to wait for them there "to teach her a lesson in humility" (97). "She must know never to cross me again" (97). Roshanara's response expresses her frustration: " No one must? Roshanara said faintly" (98). Jahanara cleverly responds: "Not even you" (98) dismissing all possibilities of overpowering, including Roshanara.

Considering history as usually a record of male experience, Gayle Greene and Coppelia Kahn argue:

> History has been a record of male experience, written by men from a male perspective. What has been designated historically significant has been deemed so according to a valuation of power and activity in the

> public world… It is the task of the historians of women to reconstruct the female experience, the buried and neglected past, to fill in the blank pages and make the silences speak (*Making a Difference* 12-13).

Jahanara's self confidence is revealed in her relationship with Najabat Khan. She falls in love with him in the very first encounter, "All of a sudden, Jahanara wanted to marry Najabat Khan" (102). She does not feel it necessary to suppress her femininity and exhibits her true feelings to him without any hesitation. She has strong convictions in her actions as well as decisions. When the eunuch Ishaq insists that Jahanara should marry Najabat instead of planning for clandestine meetings, she doggedly replies, "I intend to… And I will one day, but not for some time to come yet; I am wanted in the imperial harem" (123). Her words and actions make deep imprints in history:

> She had been brave here, in letting a man who was not her husband see her face, audacious in inviting him to the polo grounds in the middle of the night for a meeting, perhaps unwise also. But in that first moment when they talked, Jahanara forgot everything else (125).

Jahanara is not shy in exhibiting her true feelings to the man she loved. Since her mother's decision to marry her to Najabat Khan remained an unfulfilled dream, Jahanara is determined to win amir's love all by herself. Her boldness is vivid when she invites him to the chaugan grounds as she wants to demonstrate to him her courage and authority as the most powerful woman of the zenana. Najabat admires Jahanara for her exceptional abilities. She is positioned in the novel as a subject who desires rather than an object of desire. Jahanara as the active desiring sexual subject "represents a shift in the way that power operates: a shift from an external, male

judging gaze to a self-policing narcissistic gaze" ("Postfeminist Media Culture?" 258).

Jahanara easily transforms into an able political leader when the situation demands. When Shah Jahan fails in his responsibilities as ruler after the death of Mumtaz, and Dara, the next heir, immersed irresponsibly in entertainments, Jahanara orders Dara to "do something" (131) about the Portuguese rebellion in Hugli: "The Portuguese grow more and more conceited every day, and they must be stopped" (131). Sundaresan hints that powerful emperor Shah Jahan has defeated Portuguese by listening to his daughter's fruitful counsels. "But they should not have underestimated either the wrath or the power of Emperor Shah Jahan and his favourite daughter, the Begam Sahib Jahanara" (133). It is Jahanara who gives many important suggestions to a careless Dara. Moreover, she assures her brother of arranging a marriage with their cousin Nadira by weighing all the pros and cons. She knows that it is easy for Dara to have a wife, "of how easy it had been to furnish Dara with a wife, and one of his wanting. If only she could herself arrange…" (134). But Jahanara is unwilling to be a sacrificing woman when she decides to continue her meetings with Najabat Khan to fulfil her wanting too though she never shows jealousy or malice toward her brothers for enjoying the high prerogatives of men.

Jahanara has to face no stiff competition from other female counterparts, including her mother in earning the affection of and consequently wealth from her father. She is annoyed at the interference of her mother's helpmate, who cannot accept that the princess has grown up: "Satti had taught Jahanara Persian and verses from the Quran, and, in the change of power from Mumtaz Mahal to her daughter, had forgotten that princess Jahanara Begam was no longer her student" (138). Satti feels

slight jealousy to Jahanara for availing such a huge income from her father that facilitated her to give the most expensive gifts to Dara. Jahanara laughs away the advice to marry as she knows her father would never agree to part with her.When Nadira, her sister-in-law offers to find a husband for Jahanara, she "felt laughter spill over her" (141). Satti also gives similar advice: "We are born to but one purpose-to be wives and mothers, there is no other self to us than that. You must marry too, some day, and go to grace your husband's home" (141). Her angry reaction to this is "it applied only to women who has no wealth, no status, no eminence in society" (141). Jahanara knows that "In the Mughal harem, the most powerful woman was the one most dear to the emperor, and in this case, for the first time in the history of the Mughals, it was the daughter and not the wife" (142). With all this "Jahanara knew that she was etching her name in history" (142). Jahanara feels proud as she "had more money than Dara, the crown prince, the much-touted heir, all of this had cost her about a tenth of her annual income"(143). She hates to think that Nadira and Satti , inconsequential themselves will consider her so, "just because she did not have the protection of a husband. Even more insulting was that they thought she would lose the protection of her father" (143).

Jahanara is portrayed as a self confident woman who is capable of taking her decision in matters connected with herself. Satti's warning against her clandestine meeting with Najabat during Chaugan at midnight is unacceptable to Jahanara as something "far beyond a servant's duties" (143). To Satti's suggestion of discussing Jahanara's wish to her father, she retorts, "I will speak with Bapa when I consider it necessary" (143). She makes it clear that she will not allow her servants to cross their boundaries. She intelligently counters all the questions of Satti Khanum by

establishing complete supremacy in all matters. Jahanara uses her arrogance as a tool to exert power in both the zenana and the court.

> Without the persuasive influence of Empress Mumtaz Mahal, was it possible that Emperor Shah Jahan—having just lost one beloved woman in his life—would allow the other, his daughter, to marry and carry her affections away from the imperial zenana to the harem of another man?(144).

The above question baffles not only Satti but also the entire subjects of the Empire. Shah Jahan's comment while gifting a farman as the most expensive wedding gift is crucial, "Your sister has given you so much; your father can do no less" (146). Shah Jahan underlines the prominence of his eldest daughter in all important matters even more than his son who is the heir to the throne. Jahanara's mind gets perturbed with an unexpected yearning to take a break to explore and experiment the art of love even in the midst of administering wedding festivities. She seems completely unaware of the future trials waiting for her while receiving her brother Dara and his new wife, Nadira that results in "the final shadow cast upon her, upon a life that held such promise today"(149).

Jahanara has exhibited her supremacy in the harem when she "hosted a dinner for her victorious brother Aurangzeb on the night of the elephant fight and invited all her other brothers, their wives, Roshanara and their father" (174). It is here that emperor Shah Jahan teaches a lesson to his sons yearning to wear the crown even before his death. Jahanara realizes that her father is exercising "his right as the master of his harem" by selecting a woman from many who paraded in front of them not only to satiate his needs but also to exhibit his authority as emperor over his sons. Jahanara

is unashamed to satiate her woman's needs by taking a lover just like her father. Jahanara waits "for a man who would teach her what it was love" (188). In her article, "Postfeminist Media Culture" Rosalind Gill observes that: "One of the most striking aspects of postfeminist media culture is its obsessional preoccupation with the body. In a shift from earlier representational practices it appears that femininity is defined as a bodily property rather than (say) a social structural or psychological one"(152). This is applicable to the written media as well. To a woman like Jahanara, femininity is her 'bodily property' as she is willing to explore her 'sexuality'. It is difficult for a woman like Jahanara to free herself from the humiliation "she had felt when Mirza Najabat Khan left her waiting" (189).

Jahanara is delineated as a self exploring woman who boldly invites the musician's son as her chosen love for the night, "All she wanted from him, was a night, perhaps more if he pleased her" (189). But with Najabat Khan, she expects a lifelong companion. She also exhibits her authority as Begam Sahib while reacting to the words of hesitation from the chosen lover mainly out of fear, "I intend for… this to happen" (189). Thus she boldly learns the art of love making by deviating from the traditional notions of sexuality that always privilege man as the initiator of sexual act. By asserting her biological need for a man, Jahanara becomes an individual who upsets the permissible gender boundaries marked to women by patriarchy. This could be seen as a victory of the post feminist celebratory attitude to female sexuality indicating that having sex outside marriage is not equal to being a prostitute and that sexual pleasure should not induce guilt and the right of woman to decide what is acceptable to her. As a desiring subject, her transgressive acts may be marked "as the freely chosen wish of active, confident, assertive female subjects" ("Postfeminist

Media Culture" 158). She is unperturbed by the gossips being the Begam Sahib unlike the other women of zenana who court death for seeking pleasure from men.

Jahanara's transgressions are symptomatic of a deeply ingrained feeling to fulfil her needs instead of suppressing it with guilt and shame. The writer makes it clear that fulfilling needs is a woman's prerogative too. The women of harem are scared to put into notice of the emperor about his daughter's night with a lover: "Jahanara was not a wife or a concubine but a daughter, one so powerful that her father might well forgive her for snatching a few moments of gratification-the only thing he could not give her himself" (191). The women innately agree that there is no physical relationship between father and daughter despite the rumours.

Jahanara's concern to her younger sister Goharara Begam is more an expression of maternal affection when she takes immense care while narrating the 'Laila and Majnu' story "using the word love with care… as only a feeling from the heart and from the head" (197). But her relationship with Roshanara is strained mainly due to her futile attempts to win everything her elder sister loves or enjoys. She even challenges Roshanara "Call for him… If he comes, you can have him" (222), when she tried all dirty politics to captivate the man, who already fell in love with her elder sister. Jahanara remembers after that night, she has called musician's son many times to satiate her bodily needs "that had nothing to do with her heart" (197). Thus in all possible manners, she enjoys the absolute power of a "Begam Sahib" along with fulfilling all her duties prudently. At one point, Aurangzeb thinks with slight bitterness that his sister Jahanara is like a man who "could leave the zenana when she pleased, without questions" (248). Even while talking to her lover, Jahanara says, "I am not used to being told what to do, Mirza Najabat" (235).While

she desires to be with her lover, she coolly dismisses even her father's dictat, "There is no time today for matters of state. Take it away and tell Bapa I said so" (236). When Aurangzeb warns her sister insinuating about her affair with Najabat khan, she bursts out "It's not for you to tell me what I must do and what I must not" (250). She boldly reacts against such gender biases by finding clandestine ways to fulfil her wishes with "a universal feminine urge to self-actualize by transcending the gender-related constraints" (Preface to *Women's Writing* i). She is never in the position of a helpless victim while speaking to men including her father, brother or lover.

Jahanara breaks the social conventions by remaining single but boldly reacts against her father's selfishness in not allowing her to marry her lover. She carefully makes nocturnal visits to her lover Najabat Khan and they make love, wherein she too satisfies her bodily desires: "Are you afraid?" he asked her. "Not any more. This I have wanted for a very long time,' she said simply" (239). In The Second Sex, Beauvoir says of normal coitus where man wants to affirm himself as possesser" (*The Second Sex* 157). But Sundaresan's Jahanara asserts her sexuality by possessing the man she loves without any fear or coyness as a possesser. She gives rather than allowing herself to be taken by force. She is no more a passive object of male gaze but instead, she gaze at Najabat Khan with love. In accordance with post feminist ideas, it is acceptable for women to objectify men since men have been objectifying women for so long. So Najabat is looked through Jahanara's objectifying gaze. The writer boldly articulates Jahanara's sexuality through her words and deeds which has been long suppressed in the phallic system. To Jahanara, her father's selfish motive does not stop her from the avowed objective of redefining her womanhood. She returns to the traditional image of a 'lover' in front of the man she loved which is a mark of post

feminist sensibility. It seems that in the post feminist zeitgeist, being sexy means being acceptable and attractive. So she decides to look most attractive in excellent costume and fine jewellery before meeting her lover. The focus on the sexual body calls for constant self-improvement, which can be achieved through "careful planning and self-monitoring" (*Gender and the Media* 270).

As a woman who always wishes to move to autonomy, Jahanara has to countenance the challenges that come along with it like the ones including her pregnancy and child birth. She tries to manage the crisis all alone as an autonomous woman with an impeccable strength of mind. A true expression of femininity and female sexuality is vivid in each and every deeds of emperor's bold daughter, Jahanara. Shah Jahan notices that his daughter Jahanara "moved ackwardly, with none of her usual grace and elegance, hampered by the skirts of her ghagara and the long, full cloak she wore over it. Her arms were crossed over her chest and rested on the small bulge of her belly" (260). He wonders about her great endurance and resilience with which she is trying hard to overcome all the difficulties related to pregnancy all alone. It is obvious that no women of the zenana dare to speak of her pregnancy in the emperor's presence.

> His heart ached as he watched his beloved daughter negotiate this hurdle all by herself. He could not talk to her about; she would not want it, for it would mean admitting the presence of Najabat Khan, and admitting also that his strict injunction against her ever marrying had led her to this (261).

The words of guilt from her father exemplify the truth regarding his daughter's courage to fulfil her wishes without hurting him. Shah Jahan knows that his oldest

daughter Jahanara has all the qualities her brothers lacked to become an emperor "but she was a mere woman" (262). The prejudice of Mughal India where women are never accorded the rights to become heir to the throne even if they deserve is reflected in his thoughts. Jahanara manages to part with her father for child birth: "She had taken the bold step of accepting Najabat Khan as her husband without the sanction of a marriage; now she would have to carry and have their child by herself—this was the path she had chosen" (265).

Jahanara has an indomitable courage to manage the entire crisis by herself. Being a woman, she is so determined to know the pains and pleasures of motherhood. Discussing pregnancy and motherhood, Beauvoir notes: "It is a strange miracle to see, to hold a living being formed in and coming out of one's self" (*The Second Sex* 450). This curiosity is evident in Jahanara's bold decision to give birth to her child even if she fails to acknowledge it publically. With these, she defines her selfhood, freedom and personal space in highly individualistic terms irrespective of the big compromise she made for her father's contentment. Her deeds justify her as a woman who has complete autonomy over her body with a focus on her individualism.

Jahanara willingly accepts all the complexities of birthing process as a duty that only a woman can perform. She is proud of her 'femininity' rather than being ashamed of it. She names her son Antarah and resolves to entrust him completely to the care of his father, Najabat Khan with a condition that he should familiarize him with her as a "mother he will never know" (282). Jahanara stoically decides to part with her baby after enjoying brief moments of motherhood to help her father in matters of administration "to resume her duties as the Begam Sahib of her father's harem" (284). The decision, though, is painful, "Her nipples leaked when she heard

her son's cries—real and imagined—but Jahanara doggedly stayed in her bed, not once asking for the child to be brought to her"(283). The baby is entrusted to the care of Najabat Khan's childless wife on the fourth day of his birth. Beauvoir considers having a child as a commitment rather than an obligation which none can impose upon the mother. She observes: "The relation of parents to children, like that of spouses, must be freely chosen…That the child is an ultimate end for woman is an affirmation worthy of an advertising slogan" (*The Second Sex* 464). Jahanara's honest devotion to her duties as padshah Begam and to her father as a caring daughter inspires her to freely choose a self imposed separation with her child. She is indubitably a woman with absolute control over her mind and body which reflects the post feminist sensibility of 'choice and empowerment'. In her work, "Postfeminst Media Culture", Gill observes that "The notion that all our practices are freely chosen is central to post feminist discourses which present women as autonomous agents no longer constrained by any inequalities or power imbalances or whatsoever"(12).

Jahanara's strength of mind is highlighted in her involvement in her family matters to ward off the pain of continuing in the unmarried state which resulted in leaving her son, "She, who was the best loved of all of her father's children, had just given up her only child because she would never marry" (285). She feels jealous of her brother's wives "who could openly carry children in their wombs, bear them in comfort, never send them away" (285). However, her insightful ideas help her father to take brilliant diplomatic moves in regaining Qandahar.

The post feminist obsession with the body and outward appearances is attributed to the character of Jahanara who takes pride in her sexuality and physical attractiveness. She wears a revealing dress and asks her father's opinion about it.

When he replies that her mama never wore such dress, she coolly retorts, "And I am not Mama" (300). This bold reply to her father reveals her personality as a sexually aware, strong-minded woman. Her words reflect her self confidence and her desire for self affirmation by refusing to comply with the traditional norms regarding woman's performativity. The writer presents Jahanara as a woman aware about her identity as a human being who should also think for herself. Sundaresan uses the post feminist ideology that woman articulates her sexuality as part of her 'self assertion'. Jahanara is aware of her femininity and is willing to emphasize it by make up and dress; femininity is "figured as a bodily property" (*New Feminities: Post feminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity* 4).

Jahanara feels sympathetic to the women who were banished to farthest corner of zenana when they lost the charm of youth. She feels, "There were only a few women in the empire to whom age would be of little matter, and Princess Jahanara Begam was the first of those" (302). She is proud of her own appearance and is bold enough to express her sexual desires, unlike the other women who are conditioned to be sacrificing dames:

> She had been proud of herself, thinking as she walked that being thirty years of age was no great difficulty for a royal princess who had her beauty, her immense wealth, the love of her father and her brothers--- would it be enough to have just the later two now? Would she still be revered and respected as she had been?... She had lost something here, something that crushed her vanity, the only weapon a woman had, and had most certainly lost Najabat Khan's love (302).

This aspect is further stressed in relating the episode of Jahanara's accidental fire burn. She cries not due to the pain but more "because she knew that the fire had disfigured her" (309). It is as Gill adeptly puts it, "The body is presented simultaneously as women's source of power and as always … requiring constant monitoring, surveillance… in order to conform to ever narrower judgements of female attractiveness" ("Postfeminist Media Culture" 6). Her emphasis upon self surveillance makes her cautious about her good looks even after crossing the desirable age according to male standards. Hence the fire accident, which deprives her of her charms at least for a while, disturbs her. She is worried of losing the affection of her dear ones due to this and hence the chances to weild power. To Jahanara, 'looks' are of prime significance to regain her self-confidence and individuality. Jahanara regains health and along with it, she reasserts her identity, "the wounds dried up… they had almost completely healed" (318).

Jahanara's illness is marked by important political events leading to the shift in ruling power, "By the time she realized anything, it was too late. And this one insult would sow the seeds of a turning point in the empire's history" (307). Her inability to involve in the crisis makes matters like her brother Aurangzeb's rebellion with their father worse. Moreover, she continues to remain as the doting and dutiful daughter of her father, refusing to leave him for refuge and boldly walks out of house arrest to join her lover and son only after the death of Shah Jahan. Despite repeated pleas from Aurangzeb and Najabat Khan to occupy their zenana, a strong willed Jahanara does not concede to leave her father in the lurch. Her words to Najabat Khan are touching:

> I do not stay with Bapa because it is my duty… though it is. I adore my father, and when he dies, Najabat, it will be my hand that will close his eyes, my image he will take with him on his final journey" (351). She is considering Aurangzeb as a bad sovereign and even has an intuition that 'Was this then the end of the Mughals?'(352).

Another incident that shows Jahanara's strong will power is her insistence on burying her father, ignoring the protests of men, "Jahanara meant to bury her father herself; she had earned the right to do so" (357) by nursing him till his death. Jahanara handles the crises in her life with composure, including her mother's untimely death, her hibernation during pregnancy and childbirth, accident and subsequent trauma, father's dethroning and murder of brothers, as well as self imposed separation from her only son. The author has adopted a post femininst perspective in portraying the character of Jahanara as a woman who believes that "a 'seize the power' mindset and more vigorous individualism will solve all women's problems" (*Prime Time Feminism* 207). Thus the writer delineates Jahanara's personality, hitherto remained submerged in the debris of history, by making her experiences of womanhood as the central theme of the novel.

Mumtaz Mahal also remains a powerful presence throughout though she dies in the beginning of the novel. The author is particular that if it is the woman who bears and brings the child to this world, she should have the right to name it also. Hence Mumtaz breaks the tradition by naming her fourteenth child as Gohanara, which is accepted unconditionally by Shah Jahan. As the title suggests, the novel is not about the women in shadow, but the women who cast their shadow on others. The novelist unravels the power politics not only among male rulers but also among the

women in the harem. The jealousy of the other two wives of Shah Jahan for his blind love towards Mumtaz is notable: “Even in death, Mumtaz Mahal cast a long shadow over the women who had been such pitiful rivals for her husband’s heart” (22). Her daughter Jahanara has already snatched the title of padshah Begam from their hands forcing them to remain as powerless as before. The first wife marvels, “How could a daughter take the place of a wife” (22). They try to find temporary happiness in the simple burial to their arch rival Mumtaz least aware of the ironical twist of destiny. The ghost of Mumtaz keeps haunting them as an invisible rival, by having control over Shah Jahan. Thus the wives of Shah Jahan become “as insubstantial when her mother was dead as when she had been alive” (142).

Mehrunissa, Jahangir’s wife, another powerful woman in the Mughal Kingdom, yet living in exile also becomes a small but indispensable presence in the novel. Emperor Shah Jahan decides to construct a tomb to honour his dead wife with Mehrunissa’s design for her father’s tomb as the touchstone to his model. To Mehrunissa, the tomb “symbolized her power, her authority over the empire, her immense wealth” (64). Shah Jahan is forced to secretly appreciate her great architectural skills in designing a beautiful tomb, “And so, Emperor Shah Jahan would see this tomb that woman who had sent him into exile had built and use it as a model for the one he was thinking of building for his wife at Agra” (66). Shah Jahan has to very briefly acknowledge “Mehrunissa’s contribution to Mughal architecture” (67) nevertheless his innate antipathy to her.

The author glorifies Nur Jahan’s exceptional architectural skills through descriptions such as “Nur Mahal Sarai had become a hallmark of perfection” (198). Jahanara keenly observes the Nur Sarai with great curiosity thereby silently admitting

her grand father's twentieth wife's multifaceted talents, a truth that even her father who hates her can't fully ignore. She notices her father moving on without noticing the Mahal as "Empress Nur Jahan was a woman Emperor Shah Jahan detested, even though her niece had been his wife, and her brother—his father-in-law-was still one of his dearest supporters" (198). But she realizes that her father wants her to see the Mahal so that she can make use of her money to make better mahals. Dara's comment about Mehrunissa is that "She had imagination" (199). Jahanara replies to her brother that "She is not dead yet" (199). To Shah Jahan, it is impossible to forget Mehrunissa's attempt of putting another son who married her daughter on the throne. She is denied any access to the court and restricted to the city of Lahore. Jahanara reminisces, "For the last six years, they had not spoken her name in his presence; it was as though she did not exist" (200). This is the reason that prompted Dara to mention Mehrunissa in the past tense. Similarly, Mahabat Khan labels Mehrunissa as a "devious woman" (35) in another context to Shah Jahan.

Jahanara's intelligence helps her in sensing the danger of Dara "gaining a reputation at court for being discourteous" (203). She seeks the advice of none other than the other intelligent woman, Mehrunissa, the schemer, to find a redressal to Dara's foolish ways of handling relationships. It is Mehrunissa whom Jahanara approaches to clear her confusions regarding both personal as well as political matters since she knows "the workings of the imperial zenana as though she had been born into it, who had conspired and schemed; who had won numerous times, who had lost in the end" (203). Mehrunissa comprehends the nature of Jahanara and her predicaments within no time with the precision of a psychologist:

> She had strength, Mehrunissa thought—courage, yes, they had already established that, but also a streak of stubbornness in that firm chin and that upright neck and that balanced gaze. And something else, some sorrow that flickered in those eyes (208).

Mehrunissa is portrayed in the novel as an able woman who knows the dangers and possibilities of wielding power. The warnings that she gives to Jahanara prove that a woman cannot be underestimated regarding qualifications needed for ruling a kingdom intelligently. She instructs Jahanara to kill the source of rumours leaking out of the Zenana to "even this far away in Lahore" (208) if she wanted Najabat Khan to be with her. Mehrunissa applauds herself for becoming the inspiration for Shah Jahan's choice of design to construct a white marble tomb for his wife and feels a fierce pride to see him emulating her vision. Mehrunissa is confident that "she—the daughter of a Persian refugee—would always have been the first to build a tomb of all-white marble in the Mughal Empire" (209) even if Shah Jahan does not acknowledge it. She is intelligent enough to foresee that Aurangzeb also cherishes the dreams of becoming an emperor, "Watch Aurangzeb, and make Dara watch him also" (210). She also asks Jahanara to send apologies on Dara's behalf through his women to Sadullah Khan, the amir, whom Dara had insulted. She advises her to show affection to Aurangazeb, in order to get his support, as Roshanara did. Mehrunissa's final advice is crucial, "If your Bapa will not allow you to have a legal alliance with Mirza Najabat Khan, you must find another way to do so. Guard your personal happiness carefully, Jahanara; no one else will be willing to do it for you" (212).

Indu Sundaresan presents Roshanara also as a character with an identity of her own. Merely two years after her mother's death her memories start fading from her father's mind when he utters proudly that "If this tomb survives through the ages as I intend it will, it will be my name that will flourish" (162). Roshanara blurts out the truth, "And wasn't that your intention in constructing this monument to Mama?" (162). Shah Jahan's dislike to his second daughter is mostly because of her blunt truthful statements.

The relationship between the two elder daughters of Mumtaz is not bonding or sisterhood but of competition and rivalry, since they do not consider themselves as victims but are individuals with an identity of their own. Jahanara does not allow her sister to interfere in her personal matters, "It is not any of your business whom I marry or how the alliance comes to life" (93). Roshanara later weaves strategies to win the same man her sister loves. Their relationship with others also is based on political parameters. To Roshanara's loaded question about their brother, Dara "Why do you like him so much, Jahan?" (93), she snubs her "He is the heir of the empire and we love him, Or we should" (93).Sundaresan mentions about two sisters, Jahanara and Roshanara in the afterword to this novel thus: "They were both said to have been powerful in their own right: Jahanara almost from the moment of her mother's death, Roshanara from behind the walls of Aurangzeb's zenana" (361).

Roshanara's relationship with her sister becomes all the more problematic when she weaves a plan to win her sister's lover. Roshanara is so "determined that, somehow, she would become the wife of Mirza Najabat Khan" (112). Roshanara's competitive mind focuses on defeating Jahanara at least in her love relationship, if not in ruling the kingdom. She proves that power games can be the forte of women as

well. She disguises as Jahanara and visits Najabat Khan with the only intention of denying her sister a chance to be happily united with her lover. She feels disheartened that her sister Jahanara has already captured his heart, "What Jahanara wanted, she usually got, because she was Bapa's favourite daughter, the one who had his affections, the one who had hosted Dara's wedding" (151). Roshanara presumes that "Jahanara was in love with the courtier, or she would not have risked scandal in meeting him under the cover of darkness, she would not write to him as often she did" (152).

Roshanara, in a fit of ire, even fabricates stories about their father and sister like "Emperor Shah Jahan had indeed ceased mourning his dead wife because he had found another, in the person of the Begam Sahib of the empire" (153), which lead to a temporary separation between Jahanara and Najabat Khan. Moreover, Roshanara conspires in all possible manners to snatch Najabat Khan's love from her elder sister. Even while knowing that it is Jahanara who fascinated him, she harbours hope that he will forget her sister the moment he sees her. But the subsequent happenings make her realize that no amount of treachery can help her to win the man whom her sister has already captivated. She envies the courage and shrewdness of her sister to hibernate for child birth in the name of pilgrimage. She wonders "what would she do with the child when she returned?"(274). Her frustration is vivid when she thinks that seeing the beauty of mausoleum, posterity would think of mama as the most beloved wife of Shah Jahan:

> What of her, Roshanara? Would anyone remember her? Jahan would have her child, one she could not acknowledge in public, true, but she would leave a little of herself in the world. Roshanara had nothing. No

> powerful lover at court, no opportunity to become a mother… perhaps even no tomb to tell future generations that she had once lived (274).

Roshanara's anger and frustration evolve mostly out of her competitive spirit with her sister. She writes a letter to Aurangzeb indicating the true reason behind Jahanara's hibernation. She is also bold like Jahanara while inviting the musician's son to please her for the night, "She felt as though she was taking something away from Jahanara, since she couldn't, after all, shake the love that her father, Najabat Khan, Dara and even Aurangzeb had for her older sister" (275). Roshanara feels thwarted "unable to do anything to her quietly powerful sister" (288). Sundaresan moves Jahanara and Roshanara "away from the superegoized structure in which she has always the place reserved for the guilty" ("The Laugh of the Medusa" 880) by showing them as never guilty for guarding their personal happiness like a man in man's world. The only difference is that they have to claim it clandestinely compared to their brothers who can do the same without inhibition.

The denial of a legal consummation of their love affairs by a patriarchal father does not dissuade them from seeking their lovers. Shah Jahan's statements that "Sons must be married" (154) trivializes the emotional wants and needs of his daughters and destroy every possibility of his daughters getting married. But his daughters, Jahanara and Roshanara never consider themselves as pawns to be shunted to the fringes of the harem by finding ways to actualize their dormant urges as potential subjects. Through the major and minor transgressions, the two sisters revolt against the absolutism and selfishness of male authority including their father.

Roshanara has the shrewdness to foresee that finally, Aurangzeb will be the next emperor and hence, tries to win his favour from the very outset. Even before the

coup she escapes to the palace of Aurangzeb and becomes the Begum of his zenana. Roshanara longs to be more powerful than Jahanara, but lacks her tactics in handling difficult situations without revealing her inner turmoil. Jahanara's prevention of her sister standing in the balcony along with her brothers is an example of such tactics. In this context, it would be apt to quote Meera Bai thus: "In the novels of women writers, women are shown to be struggling for self-fulfilment and trying to assert their individuality. The conflict between their imbibed traditional values and acquired individuality is realistically portrayed in the works of women writers" (*Women's Voices* 133). Hence, Roshanara's story can also be read as the nascence of an identity that fails to fructify as her sister Jahanara's.

Sundaresan subverts history by also providing a reasonable slot to history's the most misrepresented figure, Aurangzeb in the novel. Aurangazeb is portrayed as a character misunderstood by his beloved sister Jahanara who blindly dots on Dara. His comment to his father that "Bapa, death comes even to emperors" (173) is interpreted by Jahanara as an expression of his desire to become the emperor even while his father is alive. She believes that it is he who prevented her marriage with Najabat Khan. However, it is Aurangzeb who recognizes Antarah as Jahanara's son and provides an opportunity to his sick sister to meet him and Najabat Khan. It is with his help that Jahanara's son Antarah sees her so close for the first time "ravaged by a fire" (316). Jahanara accuses even Najabat Khan for his blind support to Aurangzeb. She sends a missive, blaming Aurangzeb for his avarice to wear the crown even before his father's death. However, Aurangzeb's love towards her sister Jahanara is worthy to be noted despite her doubts about him, "If Jahan was supreme here, in Bapa's harem, she would be more powerful in his" (249).

Aurangzeb is a typical patriarch who considers purity as the hallmark of a woman in order to safeguard the reputation of all the male members associated to her. His double standards regarding love affairs are questioned by Jahanara when he chose a little girl as his concubine. His counter argument is phallocentric: "he was a man, with man's needs, and she was a woman in purdah who should have had the prudence to remain behind the veil and not attempt to besmirch all of their reputations" (337). Aurangzeb represents the male ideology that approves the sexual hungers of man but never acknowledges them in a woman.

According to Foucault, "The forces operating in history… do not manifest the successive forms of a primordial intention and their attention is not that of a conclusion, for they always appear through the singular randomness of events" ("Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" 381). Aurangzeb who is usually branded as a tough tyrant in history, is subverted here to be prone to partiality and misunderstandings. Shah Jahan, who never trusted him to be a faithful son considers him as a fool and denies him important or challenging assignments which he entrusts to his eldest son Dara. However, Dara or the other sons lack the qualities of leadership, like courage, diplomacy etc. His love for Jahanara remains undeterred, in spite of her apprehensions about him. Roshanara offers her loyalty to Aurangzeb due to her animosity to Jahanara who supported Dara. Aurangzeb thinks that "he would take Roshan's help, but his love was for Jahan" (194). He justifies killing his brothers and putting his father under house arrest by saying that history is being repeated as this was how his father also came to power. Aurangzeb gets a face lift in this novel which tries to probe into his intricate mindset.

Sundaresan thus uses various strategies to prove that history is not the 'usual' but has many more layers to be explored, by giving space to the less or the least visible characters of the Mughal kingdom, mainly focusing on the women's voices. Discussing women's history and gender history, Gisela Bock observes: "history, then, is not only one of male, but also of female experience. It should not be studied only in male or apparently gender neutral perspectives, but also in female and gender-encompassing perspectives" (*The Feminist History Reader* 115).

Tanushree Podder's novel *Nur Jahan's Daughter* (2005) narrates the tale of history's most ignored figure, Laadli, daughter of powerful Mughal empress, Nur Jahan in her first husband. Newton contends that 'New Women's History' is about the gap between the prescription of roles and women's actual behaviour. She argues that women's activities and struggles are seen as having a causative relation to the areas hitherto associated with men. New Historicism, in her opinion, juxtaposes the voices of men and women on the same social topics and movements and here the emphasis is not on organized women's voices, but on the "lonely and individual struggles". (*Historicism 1*52).

Tanushree Podder makes history through the "the lone voice in the wilderness having absorbed the voices of those who did not get it right" ("Learning Not to Curse" 74). There are many commonalities between Laadli and the female protagonist of the *Shadow Princess* of Indu Sundaresan's *Taj Mahal Trilogies*. In the Introduction to *Nur Jahan's Daughter*, Podder notes that Laadli "was the reluctant princess on whom destiny had thrust royalty"(X). Laadli's life is completely dominated by her ambitious mother that she countenanced with stoic optimism many tragedies like losing her beloved father in her childhood. Yet she showers an unflinching love,

loyalty and devotion of a dutiful daughter to her mother until her death. In the historical chronicles, only a powerful woman like Nur Jahan survives the sorting process of historians to some extent where as her silent, gentle daughter, Laadli becomes an absolute non-entity. While analyzing the position of women in the Mughal period, Dr. Mahesh Vikram Singh in his book *Encyclopaedic History of India Series: Mughal Culture* records that Nur Jahan "arranged the marriage of her own daughter Ladli Begum, born of her first marriage, to her stepson Shahryar" (170). The historian has not felt it important to mention anything more about Ladli, so an attempt from a woman writer to trace 'her' story in this text, *Nur Jahan's Daughter* is commendable. The story centers around the two female protagonists, Nur Jahan and her daughter Laadli. The two characters, Nur Jahan and her daughter, Laadli are set in juxtaposition to each other, the former rebellious and the latter self contained.

Tanushree Podder's novel also opens in a labour room where only women have access describing the complexities of a task that only women can perform. Commenting on women's writing style, Cixous observes: "There is always within her at least a little of that good mother's milk. She writes in white ink" ("The Laugh of the Medusa" 881). In *Nur Jahan's Daughter*, like in *Shadow Princess*, the author writes herself in 'white ink' as it also deals with every woman's issue of problematic mother-daughter equations as importantly as female sexuality. Even after enduring so much pain, Mehrunissa's face blooms with a contented smile "as she looked at her daughter" (3). The clever deployment of post feminist arguments has undoubtedly resulted in multiple ambiguities and paradoxes for mothers and daughters. In addition, Feminism and Postfeminism exist in relation to and in tension with each other as Jane Kalbfleisch in "When Feminism met Postfeminism: The Rhetoric of a Relationship"

use "(Post)feminism to refer simultaneously to feminism and post feminism"(263). In the novel, Tanushree Podder has presented Nur Jahan, Laadli's mother as a powerful woman who at times even adhering to post feminist ideologies of 'mothering' despite being a rebel throughout the novel. Hence, it is of much significance to probe the mother-daughter equations through which the writer has developed the story. Amber E. Kinser in her article, "Mothering Feminist Daughters in Postfeminist Times" comments that "Postfeminism's clever deployment of choice arguments as a diversionary tactics and, frankly, feminism's less-than-vigilant use of them too, have made it exceptionally difficult for either mothers or daughters to comprehend how much or how little choice they and other women are in fact exercising in their own lives, much less how to identify and what to do with the choices they do have" (28). Further, Judith Warner argues "We came to understand that, we had choices and that it was our responsibility to make good on them (or not)" (*Perfect Madness; Motherhood in the age of Anxiety* 181). Hence it would be appropriate to assess Mehrunissa as a (Post) feminist mother who is at once a feminist and post feminist in her relationship with her daughter.

Mehrunissa names her new born baby as "Laadli, the adored one" (*Nur Jahan's Daughter* 4). She feels grateful to God for blessing her with a daughter despite her husband's fury and frustration, "Minutes, hours, days and weeks passed, yet Sher Afghan didn't return to his wife and daughter" (10). Mehrunissa is highly determined in all her endeavours, "Mehrunissa knew when to use her guile; she was adept at it. There lived no man who could resist her when she exerted her charm. Neither could her husband" (13). Cixous exhorts women to "Write! Writing is for you, you are for you: your body is yours, take it" ("The Laugh of the Medusa" 876).

Podder like Sundaresan invents a language that effectively counters phallogocentrism by giving expression to female sexuality which has been repressed through ages.

Wendy Hollway in, "From Motherhood to Maternal Subjectivity" reminds us that "mothers who are mothers are not only mothers" (8). The post feminist mothering ideology is apparent in Mehrunissa when she uses her sexuality as a tool to manipulate situations. Mehrunissa as a wife, mother and even as a widow is presented as a sexualized being with a sexual agency that culminated in Jahangir accepting her as his twentieth wife and as the most powerful empress. She is tactful enough to use her feminine charms to placate her husband's fury and indifference to their new born baby. After a long time, the couples made love which eventually ended in Mehrunissa drawing her husband's attention to their daughter for the first time, "Gone was his dreams of nurturing a son, teaching him the intricacies of soldiering, sword-fighting, dagger-wielding and horse riding" (13). He begins to appreciate his wife for giving birth to his beautiful daughter: "Tears of joy clouded her eyes as she clung to his strong body; he had not chided her for bearing him a daughter" (13). In a society where sexuality is considered as the prerogative of men, Mehrunissa is portrayed by Podder as a woman who is aware of her needs. She demands the love and attention of her husband to their baby daughter by fulfilling her natural sexual urges first there by satisfying her husband too. She makes her husband acknowledge her 'womanhood' and 'sexuality' thereby accepting their daughter without gender bias.

Mehrunissa is not the self sacrificing mother when her strategies and deeds vacillate between resistance to celebration of selfhood. As Rottenberg notes: "she is individuated in the extreme, this subject is feminist in the sense that she is distinctly aware of current inequalities between men and women. This same subject is,

however, simultaneously neoliberal, not only because she disavows the social, cultural and economic forces producing this inequality, but also because she accepts full responsibility for her own well-being and self-care"("The rise of Neoliberal Feminism" 420). Mehrunissa's apartment in the harem is in accordance to her inferior position of a widow but "Her mind was already buzzing with a hundred ideas that could help secure her position in the harem" (97). She is tactful enough to use her talents to design costumes to the women in harem while leading the life of a widow. Her ambitions are as wide as a neoliberal feminist subject, who is empowered and is constantly striving for financial success along with power. She considers her daughter secondary only to her endless ambitions to achieve more, "The fire of ambition consumed her totally; she wanted to achieve more" (104).

> Distracted by her project, Mehrunissa barely noticed that Laadli was getting more uncommunicative… Seated in a corner of the room, the child refused to go out and make friends or play with the other children. Insecure and friendless, she spent more time with birds and flowers than with human beings (101-102).

In the façade of a mourning wife, Mehrunissa negotiates with Emperor's love to her as she "dreamed of being the Empress of the Mughal Empire" (125). She is not satisfied with the position as emperor's concubine by yielding immediately to his wishes as she knows she is special to him: "As the days passed, the emperor continued to pine for his beloved Mehrunissa, but she kept him away with the excuse that she was still mourning for her dead husband" (129). Her marriage is not solely based on the idea of romance rather it is about how she can benefit from the marriage to an emperor. This representation of a 'widowed mother' negotiating with an

emperor's love is palatable in a post feminist argument because as Jane Juffer notes: "she constantly demonstrates her self-sufficiency, distancing herself from the welfare mom" (*Single Mothers: The Emergence of the Domestic Intellectual* 57). Mehrunissa proclaims to the emperor that she will never be happy to acquiesce to his wishes as a concubine. Moreover, her second condition is "Laadli, will wed your son and your heir" (141). She even invents strategies to use her daughter as a pawn to seize and continue power.

The author's portrayal of Mehrunissa as worrying over her six year old daughter's disinterest in clothes and jewellery is more relevant in the Post feminist parlance. Mehrunissa begins to teach her many subjects that augment her talents, "I want her to rise above the others, declared the mother. She is special" (115). In this regard, it is important to note the findings of Rose Glickman's work that "daughters of feminists 'squirm' under the weight of the different and heavier expectations they answer to and sons do not" (qtd in *Mothers and Children: Feminist Analyses and Personal Narratives* 210). Nur Jahan wants her daughter as a princess to be "skilled at everything—administration, politics, hunting or hawking" (192). Empress Nur Jahan advices her daughter "to work hard at being an empress,'… It is not easy" (184).

Jahangir marries Mehrunissa by offering one of the most coveted titles, Nur Jahan. After the marriage, she gets more estranged with her daughter to keep herself equipped with the new duties of an empress. In her journey to success and fame, empress Nur Jahan turned blind to her daughter's needs and feelings. She deviates from the conservative paradigms of womanhood that find pleasure only in enacting the role of a culturally stereotyped mother above all her personal aspirations. Podder portrays Mehrunissa as an individual claiming her life to be her own, wherein she

could seek personal gratification and self-fulfilment rather than taking pride in restricting herself to mere duties of motherhood like service and self-sacrifice. Mehrunissa considers her personal goals as far more superior to 'men' and 'motherhood' in her life which made her accept her husband's murderer to acquire 'power' unmindful of her daughter's disinterest. Even while celebrating the glory of motherhood, Podder simultaneously attempts to question the unquestionable superiority of mothering through the ambitious character of empress Nur Jahan.

> For the first time in Mughal history, a queen was endowed with so much power. No grants of land was conferred upon any one except under her seal. The emperor granted Nur Jahan the rights of sovereignty and the imperial seal was handed over to her. On all firmans receiving the imperial signature, the name 'Nur Jahan, the Queen Begum', was jointly inscribed. She even sat by the emperor during his daily public appearances at the jharoka (149).

In their co-authored article, "Feminist Perspectives on Motherhood and Reproduction", Gerda Neyer and Laura Bernardi observe that "Most women become mothers, and many feminists have regarded motherhood as a uniting element among women and have based their claims to rights for women on it" (5). Hence to Mehrunissa, the rejection of motherhood as an experience is not a pre-requisite for overcoming her subordination and gain equality to men but she begins to scheme ways to force her daughter Laadli to seduce prince Khurram who inherits the throne to continue her power as a 'queen' than as a 'selfless mother'. She has also planned to marry Laadli to Shah Jahan initially in order to continue her power through him which failed. Laadli is brought up by a powerful mother who defied the conventional notions

of womanhood and motherhood in an atmosphere of power struggles. She commands her daughter, "The only way to learn the intricacies of politics and administration is to be present when the court is in session. You have to learn these things, Laadli. I expect you to know them since you will be an empress one day, Nur Jahan rebuked her when she expressed her reservations about attending court" (213). Mehrunissa always keeps her ambitions above the 'selfless love of motherhood' as a true rebel throughout the novel.

Mehrunissa's dream of marrying Laadli to Khurram with a motive to escalate her power gets shattered when Khurram marries her niece, Arjumand. Mehrunissa demands her helpless daughter to flirt with the blind prince, Khusrau expecting him to be the next emperor, "She intended making an empress out of her daughter" (174). Mehrunissa plots a plan to continue her power by arranging her daughter's wedding with the good for nothing prince, Shahryar. Moreover, even Jahangir is surprised to hear of his wife's devious plan of consummating Laadli's wedding.The writer subverts the male image of mother with Mehrunissa's scheming to consummate her daughter's marriage with the only goal to have a grandson to continue her power. In the post feminist parlance, media prescribes norms for maternal behaviour through the binaries of the 'good' and 'bad' mother:

> The good mother, the noble mother-saint, makes her family her highest priority, continually sacrifices her own interests for the good of her family and conforms to expected gender roles of femininity. The bad mother is… depicted as self-centred, neglectful, preoccupied with career, or lacking in traditional femininity ("Media Morality Tales and the Politics of Motherhood" 9)

Mehrunissa's actions demonise her as a 'bad mother' when she crossed conservative gender norms of femininity and maternal representations. She is a woman who puts her ambitions first rather than considering 'motherhood' as the only priority of her life. Mehrunissa's unconventional mothering strategies have completely shattered her daughter's belief in her mother's purity when she unabashedly consents to marry her father's murderer. As a mother, her character never conforms to the stereotype images of mainstream narratives when she gives importance to her 'needs' as an individual.

Mehrunissa satisfies the nobles, artists and harem women with the most accurate judgements:

> Her vibrant energy, diplomatic excellence, perception, shrewdness, calculative intelligence, artistic skills—everything seemed to have an overpowering effect on Jahangir. Those who dealt with her either hated or loved her, but no one could ignore her (159).

With Shah Jahan's ascendancy to the throne, Mehrunissa has no other option but to wait for the punishment. Her niece, Arjumand Begum is given the title Mumtaz Mahal, the empress. The clever twist of destiny to a woman who always wants to see her daughter as empress has to witness her niece in the very same position now. Nur Jahan appeals to Shah Jahan which made her daughter and niece equally wonder about her shrewdness:

> With just a few sentences she had managed to convey her acceptance of Shah Jahan's rule, gained sympathy as a hapless widow, and also managed to force the emperor's hand for a grant of money for the

> construction of Jahangir's memorial. Was it any wonder that she had ruled the Mughal Empire for so many years? (327).

Podder makes it clear that empress Nur Jahan is powerful enough to be ennobled rather than to be degraded with her exceptional abilities. Mehrunissa is not the good, loving mother of the patriarchal mould as she gives precedence to fulfilling her dreams. Yet she is an epitome of courage, self-respect and multifaceted genius to her daughter.

Judith Newton in her "History as Usual" contends that

> how a literary/historical practice tends to produce 'history' in a way which allows us better to account for social change and human agency. To persons engaged in progressive politics, which they still feel to be vital, such models of history are at once more useful and have greater explanatory power than those which tend to deny the possibility of change and agency both… to construct the complex 'cultural grid' through which overlapping and conflicting representations passed- a very different access for men and women to social space (117-118).

Tanushree Podder presents the central character, Laadli as an autonomous agent as Gill notes that at the heart of a postfeminist subject "is the notion of the 'choice biography' and the contemporary injunction to render one's life knowable and meaningful through a narrative of free choice and autonomy—however constrained one might actually be" ("Postfeminist Media Culture" 13). Laadli's evolution as an autonomous agent who wishes to be different from her mother is the area of interest here. So it would be interesting to investigate further "The mother and daughter

negotiating their interdependence" ("When Feminism met Postfeminism" 251) to project the dialogic relationship between an unusual mother and a loving daughter. While tracing the trajectory of Laadli's life, the first instance of a heart-rending tragedy begins with her father, Sher Afghan's fatal death, "Not a tear escaped the four-year old Laadli's eyes as she stared fixedly at the spot where her father had fallen" (86). Laadli is aware as well as upset of emperor's obsessive love towards her mother which prompted her to find shelter in his harem. Her thoughts after seeing Ruqayya Begum is interesting:

> Queens are supposed to be slender and beautiful houris, not fat and bovine. My mother would make a much better empress. The thought had come unbidden to her mind, but she never forgot the day when she had, for an instant, imagined her mother as an empress. Laadli would wonder what had sparked that thought in her mind (98).

Laadli's life of ennui and boredom continue until she finds ecstasy in the company of prince, Khurram, "Laadli felt happy in his company. She shared her dreams and aspirations with him. No one, not even her mother had been privy to the girl's innermost thoughts. Gradually she felt herself warming to the prince" (111). The prince likes the girl more for her innocence compared to the flirtatious and ambitious girls who dream of "marrying royalty" (111). She even shocks Khurram with her words of anguish towards his father once, "I hate the emperor. He killed my father" (112). She stoically accepts and endures all the challenges in her life and reacted boldly in many situations.

As a girl who tries to find meaning in Khurram's company, Laadli is eager to meet him in the Meena Bazaar with splendid dreams about her future. But a sudden twist disturbs Laadli:

> Watching the two, and sensing the strong affection flowing between them, a sudden stab of jealousy struck Laadli's heart. She quickly packed the purchases to hurry him away from the stall, but the prince hung around, looking for more objects to buy. His eyes constantly sought Arjumand's, but she refused to meet his gaze. With growing alarm, Laadli realized that the prince was truly enamoured by her cousin. Her only true friend had succumbed to another's charm (122).

Laadli calmly endures the pain and willingly accepts the role of a messenger when she realized the depth of Khurram's love to her cousin. Laadli realizes that Khurram's "heart would belong to just one woman, and that was Arjumand" (123). She even gives a pragmatic suggestion, "Marry the Persian princess and then ask for Arjumand's hands" (129). As a woman of composure, she has an ability to easily cope up with the realities of life.

The consecutive rejections by the princes make Laadli share her worries over her looks with her friend Benazir, "If I were beautiful, would n't I be getting married to prince Khurram today, instead of my cousin, Arjumand?"(167). Her dialogues with her friend project the insecurities about her looks which reflect a post feminist sensibility. Although Postfeminism claims to celebrate female sexuality for the sake of women themselves, it often seems that the validation of being sexy and attractive needs to come from men. According to Imelda Whelehan, it is lamentable that the

"image of the successful woman increasingly correlates with the sexy one" (*Overloaded: Popular Culture and the Future of Feminism* 63).

Podder describes an important aspect of female sexuality by detailing Laadli's day of reaching menstruation at the age of twelve. The Women of the harem celebrate Laadli's coming of age, "From child to adolescent, the princess had blossomed unnoticed by the inmates of the royal zenana" (172). The ladies of the harem mock the princess as "Late bloomer" (172). In their calculations, she is a bit late to mature as many of them bloomed at a very young age. Such descriptions showcase those aspects of women's lives which were ignored as embarrassing in histories are employed here to reaffirm the validity of women's experiences. It is as Newton says "feminine modes of representing subjectivity and sexuality not only central but dominant" ("History as Usual" 112) in these writings.

Laadli finds true love in a musician named Imraan who offers more colour to her fading dreams and lackadaisical life. She becomes cheerful in his company as she "had not laughed in such a blithe manner for a very long time" (234). Fearing the dangerous consequences, Imraan resolves to remain detached to the princess. But Laadli is determined to capture her tutor's heart. Her friends warn her that "There will be trouble if the empress hears you" (235). Like a post feminist subject, Laadli shows willingness to accept natural division of sexes by finding solace in the company of men including Khurram and Imraan. She never competes with men like her mother who always dreamt to rule like 'emperors'. Love provides more courage for Laadli to speak with strong conviction and clarity as her words indicate:

> All my life I have done my mother's bidding! When she thrust me on prince Khusrau, I didn't object despite the fact that I considered him

like a brother. Then her next target was Khurram and she pushed me on him. Tell me, am I a puppet in her hands, to fulfil her ambitions? Do I have no say in the matter of matrimony? (235).

Laadli also like Jahanara of *Shadow Princess* becomes a desiring subject when she candidly expresses her feelings to Imraan and even decides to play an interesting trick to win her man's love. She demands him, "You will paint mine and I will paint yours, without seeing each other" (238). The artist humbly accepts her demand and tries to have a glance of her face with the help of a mirror, "To Imraan, the princess was far more beautiful than any woman he had seen" (242). So there opens an endearing relationship which too has a tragic foreboding. Imraan detects the unrelieved solitude of a powerful mother's daughter and rejuvenates her life with his unalloyed love, understanding and care.

Laadli enjoys the fragrance of love by sharing joyous moments with her lover: "She breathed in the air greedily, exulting in her new-found freedom. For the first time in her life, she had stepped out of the harem without the protection of the eunuchs. It was an exhilarating experience" (251). Podder describes their relationship as Vimmie Manoj in her essay, "Post Modern Feminism in the Fiction of Indian Women Writers: Enunciating the Unheard Voices" notes: "The Indian women writers do differ from the western post modern feminist writers in the sense that they have not shunned the union of man and woman, instead they have pointed towards an equalized society, a society where men and women acquire their assigned status and not that as being a dominating or a dominant"(*Feminine Fragrance: Reflections on Women's Writing in English* 129).

Laadli's love story comes to a tragic end when the empress finally detected her daughter's secret rendezvous with her tutor, Imraan. Laadli's attempts to find Imraan fails miserably and she bursts out to her mother, "In my entire life, I have met just two valiant men—my father, Sher Afghan, and Imraan.Unfortunately, both of them were victims of your machinations" (270). Her words throb with her excruciating pain of losing 'two men' who really cared her. This reflects the post feminist notion of 'natural sexual difference' that proved 'men' as inevitable part of her life. According to Gill, "Feminism was deemed to have lost its way when it tried to impose its ideological prescriptions on a nature that did not fit; what was needed,---was a frank acknowledgement of difference rather than its denial"("Postfeminist Media Culture" 19).

Laadli's desire to lead a peaceful life free from royalty does not reach fruition for quite a long time due to the influence of her dominating mother, who is a true representative of female power. Her disinterest to power and titles are bluntly ignored by her ambitious mother who is determined to continue the power through her wedding to one of Jahangir's sons. She loves to enjoy the life of a common woman as "The crown held no lure for her" (160). Podder presents two different versions of empowered female subjects through the mother and daughter. The mother feels 'empowered' if only she can enjoy the ultimate power of an empress but her daughter finds herself 'empowered' only when she is freed from the fetters of royalty. Laadli gets empowered acquiring the traits of her feminist mother as Kristin. J.Anderson notes that "Post-feminist rhetoric often acknowledges… and incorporates some of the language of the feminist movement such as empowerment and choice" (*Modern Misogyny -Anti-Feminism in a Post-Feminist Era* 20). Thus Laadli adheres to notions

of ‘empowerment’ and choice to individuate herself which are central to the post feminist sensibility. Laadli always dreams of her ‘choice’ to settle in life with husband and kids free from the burden of royalty like a traditional wife.

As a daughter, Laadli is relieved to see Jahangir wooing her mother and getting rejected each time, “She was convinced that her mother’s love for her father, Sher Afghan would not allow her to submit to Jahangir’s wishes” (140). Laadli is confident that her mother will never yield to emperor’s desires. But soon she watches painfully her mother yielding to the emperor by putting before him conditions that even affect Laadli’s life. Laadli’s resentment and disillusionment are graphically portrayed:

> Laadli could barely control her revulsion. Why was her mother succumbing, and why was she including her in her list of conditions? In that moment she knew all was lost. She realized that her mother had only been playing a game with the emperor: all she had wanted was a good bargain. It had nothing to do with emotions or mourning or love. Laadli’s heart broke. A sob escaped her throat. She watched helplessly as her fate was sealed (141).

Jahangir marries Laadli’s mother, Mehrunissa and even proclaims that “With this wedding I adopt her little daughter, Laadli, who will, henceforth, be known as Shehzadi Laadli Bano” (144). But Laadli is strong willed when she “refused to attend the marriage ceremony despite the pleas of her friends” (145). Laadli feels unhappy with royalty affixed upon her by her mother’s selfish decision. She feels only a kind of repulsion to her new title as ‘daughter of a queen’. ”For Laadli, her mother was a traitor who had let her husband down” (142).

Laadli is least impressed by her mother's rising power. She silently endures her pain and anguish as her mother marries Jahangir without daring to voice her protest overtly. Yet, her anger paves way to true concern and affection of a daughter when her mother got imprisoned once by royal order. Laadli feels no sympathy to emperor who is so upset of the trial event, "Oh, how I hate him, Laadli thought, clenching her fingers in a tight fist" (153). But her steadfast support to her mother in difficult situations is remarkable to be mentioned. She remains by her mother's side as a caring daughter watching her mother's trial scene that ended in a verdict that released her. After the trial Laadli rushes to her mother with a sigh of relief only to get more embittered to hear her mother's insensitive words, "Don't ever allow anyone to see your tears, Laadli,' she patted the tearful child. 'They will presume you are a weak person and take advantage. You have to remain strong. There will be many incidents of this kind in the palace. Don't let them break you,' Nur Jahan told her daughter" (157).

Laadli is confused between her love and hatred towards her mother for forcing a step father on her. Baker and Kline's remark that "daughters of feminists can feel resentment, resignation and a sense of neglect" (*The Conversation Begins: Mothers and Daughters talk about Living Feminism* 31). Laadli reluctantly accompanies her mother for hunting expeditions. Nur Jahan is flawless in her hunting, "Her aim was unerring and two large beasts fell with arrows stuck in their hearts. She then picked up the guns and dropped the other two tigers in quick succession" (193). Her daughter feels only revulsion to see the poor creatures lying dead, "I will never hunt, no matter if people take me to be weak and incompetent. I don't have to prove my ability by shedding the blood of innocent creatures, 'she murmured under her breath" (195). She

always held strong convictions regarding her attitude towards life and belongs to that category of young women who have "no intention of using their mothers' examples as models for living" ("Mothering Feminist Daughters in Postfeminist Times" 33).

After losing the love of her life, Laadli makes a futile attempt to convince her mother by expressing her wish to remain unmarried stating Akbar's dictate about Mughal Princesses to continue maidenhood. But Mehrunissa laughs it aside saying that Laadli is a princess by name and not by birth, "At that moment, Laadli hated her mother more than she had thought possible. She was a ruthless woman and nothing touched her insensitive heart" (277). Laadli is torn between her own desires and high expectations of her mother when she poignantly says:

> I do not want to be an empress. I want to be happy. Do you hear that? I want to be happy. I want to escape from the disgusting environment of the harem. I want to live a life of freedom. Please set me free, 'she begged, clutching her mother's feet (278).

Laadli makes history by expressing her desire to be different from her powerful mother. Her 'choice' is to embrace happiness and freedom in preferring a life away from the harem which confirms to the post feminist sensibility as Gill observes, "Notions of choice, of 'being oneself', and 'pleasing oneself' are central to the post feminist sensibility" ("Postfeminist Media Culture" 11). Laadli has never tried to imbibe her mother's ambitious nature and dreamt of becoming a queen, instead, she always wishes to lead a life of absolute freedom.

Even though there is no active rebellion on Laadl's part, she is not ashamed to speak about her unfulfilled desire. Laadli criticizes her mother by saying that her

ambitions are making her more powerless with feelings of fear and insecurity. She tries to express her right by seizing the occasion to speak out her frustration as Susan Chase and Mary Rogers in their work *Mothers and Children: Feminist Analyses and Personal Narratives* note: "daughters thrive—they learn to stick up for themselves and to speak their truths—when they have strong relationships with adult women, which they often find with their own mothers" (215). Even while preparing for the wedding with Shahryar, Laadli's mind is disturbed by her mother's insensitive decision to erase Imran from her life in order to fulfil her dream of making an empress out of her daughter. The overtly reticent Laadli is endowed with a quiet strength to endure all the adversities of her life. She yields to her mother's demands mainly due to a strong relationship with her and her speech of anguish towards her mother's ambitious nature "signifies self expression and liberation" (*The Woman Question* 132).

Laadli is forced to oscillate between passivity and activity by being permeable to her powerful mother's repeated demands. Mehrunissa continues to plot for fear of losing her power and seeks the help of a courtesan, Hira Bai to consummate her daughter's wedding. Laadli reluctantly yields to her mother's clever manipulations of replacing Hira Bai after seducing Shahryar in the darkness in order to fulfil her ever cherishing dream of 'motherhood'. The mother and daughter unite here in the manipulations with different motives although Laadli knows that her mother will be contented only if she delivers a son:

> I know that my mother is pining for a grandson so that her reign can continue for another generation. Her craze for power never ceases to amaze me. I want a daughter so that I can bring her up the way I want.

> Moreover, if I have a son, I will soon have to part with him, where as a daughter can live with me in the harem, forever (289).

Contrary to Nur Jahan, the writer presents Laadli as a model of 'perfect motherhood' which is a post feminist ideal. She feels contented in the realization of having a baby, the only reason for her sustenance. According to Douglas and Michaels, "the myth that motherhood is eternally fulfilling or rewarding, that it is always the best and most important thing [mothers] do..." (*The Mommy Myth* 3-4). Her ecstasy continues when she gives birth to a daughter, "To Laadli's delight and Nur Jahan's disappointment, it was a girl" (292). She feels her life as fulfilling by becoming a mother.

Jahangir's description of Laadli to Nur Jahan is notable: "That daughter of yours has a mind of her own. She may seem to be a meek person, but the girl has inherited your stubbornness" (293). Laadli is decisive when she calls her daughter 'Arzani' who proves to be her lifeline. With losing her intelligent father, Mehrunissa begins to depend on her daughter for counsels regarding affairs of the state. Nur Jahan feels proud of her meek, self deprecating daughter turning to be an astute politician. She feels that motherhood has provided confidence and poise to her daughter's personality:

> She will make a better empress than me,' thought Nur Jahan, 'because she is not as rash or ruthless as I am.' To her credit, the empress was objective about her own faults. (295).

Laadli becomes the most trusted advisor to her mother during adversities, "In Laadli, Nur Jahn found the perfect foil—intelligent, mature, calm and even-tempered"

(296). Nur Jahan has even defeated the mighty general of Mughal army with her daughter Laadli's support. After emperor Jahangir's death, Laadli judiciously advises her mother to leave the throne to Shah Jahan so that they can live peacefully. In one moment she even rages to her coward husband, "You should be fighting the enemy troops instead of hiding behind the skirts of the servant girls" (321). She begs her mother that they should flee themselves to Persia. "If only mother had listened to me, she thought with a sigh as she waited for Shah Jahan to pronounce judgment on their fate" (322).

While Shah Jahan ousts Laadli's mother unceremoniously from his life and court to lead a life of exile he remarks to her thus: "I hope that your wisdom will guide your mother's steps and restrain her from imprudence" (328). Laadli feels admiration to Arjumand's eldest daughter, Jahanara who is a very mature and level-headed girl with many talents like her, "With much in common, there was an instant rapport between the two of them" (329). In the Introduction to the book, *Signifying the Self: Women and Literature*, Malashri Lal observes that "The backlash of 'post-feminism', frequently seen as a 'lite' version of feminism fuelled by the media, which enjoys the hard-won privileges of second-wave feminism but is less willing to blame patriarchy for women's ills, aided by the restrictions of earlier leaders of the movement, saw 'Feminism' as a term of literary and political discourse fraught with trouble"(1). Laadli, like Jahanaara of the above discussed novel never competes with men and are post feminists in their sensibilities compared to the radical spirits of Nur Jahan.

As the loving daughter, Laadli inspires her mother to lead a different but contented life in the final stage of her life. Mehrunissa accepts her daughter's ideas

saying "As usual, my wise daughter is right. Practical and balanced, you always find a solution" (334). Of course, Laadli provides her mother emotional anchor with her unconditional love and pragmatic solutions in all the turbulent situations. As the daughter of a feminist mother, her words and deeds are more susceptible to the usual arguments that feminism is the cause of her ills and "moving 'beyond' it to 'post' feminism the remedy"("Mothering Feminist Daughters in Postfeminist Times" 31).

Laadli continues to act as a protective shell to her mother at times of trials and tribulations. She wants her mother to enjoy life without royalty like her daughter and granddaughter. Laadli's daughter Arzani, eighteen is the "only ray of sunshine in the lives of the older women" (339). Jahanara's timely interference helps these women to arrange the wedding of Arzani thereby ending a beautiful chapter of Mehrunissa's life. Laadli finds it hard to depart with her married daughter, but happily blessed her for her new journey. The arrogant empress has transformed into a humble woman towards the end of her life in the company of her sedate daughter when she decides to sell all her precious jewels gifted by Jahangir for the marriage of destitute girls. Laadli's anger and discontent surface only once when her mother tried to justify her deeds while in deathbed. Laadli's incisive reply to her mother is worthy to be noted:

> You were a good seamstress and a designer. We could have made a good living,' cried Laadli. 'You wanted to be the empress and that is the truth. All your life you wanted to be queen; that was your dream, wasn't it? And it was more important to you than me (352).

Despite all the sufferings, her ambitious mother heaped upon her life, Laadli fails to hate her. She prefers to live with great endurance notwithstanding the irretrievable lose of her dear father and lover. She is adept to withdraw into an ironic

silence that renders her active inner life of peacefulness. Like Jahanara of *Shadow Princess,* Laadli takes care of her mother until her death as a dutiful daughter with great love and devotion. She is the quintessence of a daughter's duty and devotion to her mother. Ironically, Laadli is free from the clutches of royalty which she hates more than anything with Mehrunissa's death, "No fetters, no regalia nor expectations—the beginning of a long and lonely life" (354). So in the end, after her mother's death, Laadli becomes a completely autonomous being and steers the course of her life singularly thus dismantling the known notions of a woman's position in a patriarchal milieu. In her own way, she prepares the ground for asserting her own space and centrality not by emulating her powerful mother but by imbibing her strength of mind that enables her to lead a life of inner peace that she always cherished. However, the author makes it clear that the mother-daughter bonding though not conventional empowers Laadli with a mindset to face the hostile situations in her life. She becomes empowered in her own right by choosing a calm life to a glittered life. Laadli's decision to lead a secluded and independent life after her mother's death can be viewed as a post feminist ideal as Maitrayee Chaudhuri in her book, *Feminism in India* notes: "Concepts like 'autonomous', 'freedom' and 'choice' can be read only within the historical context of their utterance. It is important and recall that the language of self-reliance and a non-alignment of a pre-liberalized era also stemmed from a desire for freedom and dignity" (272). Laadli always aspires to lead a life of self-reliance that provides her with freedom and dignity.

In the epilogue to *Nur Jahahan's Daughter*, Podder observes that Laadli's "loyalty and dedication towards her mother was unflinching, to the end" (355). Laadli's life of sacrifices has never impressed the historians as she is ignored in

history despite being the daughter of the most powerful Mughal empress, Nur Jahan. Podder notes in the introduction to the novel that Laadli's "life has remained unveiled by historians, although it is more interesting than many… too long it had remained hidden amongst the dusty tomes of history" (xiv). Thus Podder brings out Nur Jahan's daughter, Laadli from the matrix of marginality by giving language to her experiences which are marked by differences. Thus these writers throw light to hitherto unexplored areas of Mughal history. In the introduction to the book, *Women's voices*, K.Meera Bai reveals that "women writers by virtue of their feminine sensibility have shown great insight and deep understanding in portraying the women characters" (7).

While assessing the characters of Jahanara and Laadli, it is thus interesting to note that:

> Postfeminist heroines are often much more active protagonists. They value autonomy and bodily integrity and the freedom to make choices. What is interesting, however, is the way in which they seem compelled to use their empowered post feminist position to make choices that would be regarded by many feminists as problematic, located as they are in normative notions of femininity ("Postfeminist Media Culture?" 269).

Jahanara and Laadli's choices are always in accordance to the "normative notions of femininity" when they prefer a life with the man they love dearly as more fulfilling than aspiring for power to rule the empire like Nur Jahan. Indu Sundaresan and Tanshree podder belong to this category of women writers who delineated realistic women with throbbing pulse, longing for self-expression and individual fulfilment in their alternate histories with great insight and understanding. In the

female protagonists, Jahanara and Laadli of *Shadow Princess* and *Nur Jahan's Daughter*, one can notice many interrelated themes of 'post feminist sensibility' like focus on individuality, choice and empowerment etc when they take the ultimate responsibility of choosing their own paths which made them truly happy. Hence, these writers provide a medium for "self-expression, enlightenment, autonomy and, thus, rewriting the history of India" (*The Woman Question* 117).

Indu Swamy in her book, *The Woman Question in the Contemporary Indian Women Writings in English* observes:

> Literature being the mirror of the society does not remain unaffected but explores the women's questions extensively and vociferously. If literature is entrenched in its cultural context, then the ever-changing perspective on women is best seen in the way women have been represented in the literary works. In feminist literatures, women's experience becomes the central concern. This type of literature seeks to demythologize the myth that man is the universal representation of humanity, and woman as the unnamed and the invisible" (7).

In a powerful move, these writers made situations where female characters speak with rare courage by involving themselves in the process of subjectification. Thus the windows of the fictional world of Indu Sundaresan and Tanushree Podder are wide open for the fresh air and light to endow new life and colour to the narrow and dark harems of the Mughal women. Their works can be rightly called as contemporary women's discourses that "subvert and reinvent existing cultural patterns and ideologies oppressive to women and create an emergent and emancipatory writing strategy" (*Writing Resistance* 171). The compelling women

characters of the four novels analyzed in these two chapters are never victims but instead are either rebels or victors who stoically try to overcome many unexpected hurdles in their lives with an exceptional degree of will power and endurance. The central women characters of these novels by women writers are potential subjects rather than objects of oppression. Interestingly, at least a few Mughal women's unvoiced, unchronicled experiences are projected in alternate histories by these writers. According to Newton, "feminists contributed in a crucial way to perspectives which have been largely appropriated and popularized by men" ("History as Usual" 97).

In the *Shadow Princess*, Indu Sundaresan has provided adequate space even to male characters like Jahangir, Aurangzeb, Shah Jahan etc along with central female protagonist, Jahanara. Similarly, Tanushree Podder has interspersed a small tragic tale of a painter, Imraan, who genuinely loved the protagonist, Laadli and even courted murder for her. Apart from royal women, Podder has also presented the roles played by common women like Firdauz and Benazir in the lives of empress Nur Jahan and her daughter thereby making history more inclusive. For instance, Firdaus comment after the birth of a girl child to Mehrunissa is notable as a deviation from the usual loathsome responses, "He's sent an angel to bring joy and laughter to this house" (2). The old wet nurse, Firdaus has always cared Mehrunissa like a daughter in all the crisis situations. These novels usher in winds of change by blurring the boundaries of subjectification in novels based on gender with "its insistent inclusiveness" and "willingness to embrace contradiction" (Introduction to *Feminist Criticism and Social Change* xxx).

Newton comments that the "postmodern assumptions and historicizing practices currently associated with New Historicism, although they have been attributed to male (if not masculinist) literary practices and philosophies, were partially generated by the epistemological breaks of the women's movements and by the developments of feminist theory and scholarship in the 1970's. The way in which these assumptions and practices get articulated, however, differs in feminist and non feminist work and is tied to the politics, the needs, and desires of the practitioners" ("Historicisms New and Old" 450).The different waves of Feminism have inspired women writers to give different versions to the marginalized women of malecentric discourses like history. This chapter analyzed the third novel, *Shadow Princess* of Indu Sundaresan's Trilogy and Tanushree Podder's novel, *Nur Jahan's Daughter* by adopting the methodology of Feminism, especially post feminist ideologies along with Feminist New Historicism as the novelists presented women characters who are empowered in their own way.

The fictional attempts of these two women novelists gain added significance due to their efforts to subvert the existing monolithic notions regarding history by asserting the subject position of women in its trajectory. They have succeeded in creating alternate histories or 'her'stories with empowered heroines, Jahanara and Laadli to whom empowerment is a "knowledge which makes them aware of their own existence as real human beings" (*Feminism in Search of an Identity: The Indian Context* 25). Romela Thapar the noted Indian woman historian, for instance, criticized historians for representing ancient women of India as a "uniform group conditioned in the same way and conforming to the social codes" ignoring the presence of many significant women in history ("IWA Endowment Lecture"). However, her

contributions to write women into history are questionable. In this context, it is interesting to see how these two writers occupy a liminal space in the genre, offering new possibilities of linking the ‘beyonds’ in Feminism with those of New Historicism.

Chapter VI

Conclusion

History, as a continuous process, has necessitated and also been perpetuated by paradigmatic shifts in ideologies. Exclusions and inclusions have been part of its trajectory, configurated by shifting cultural codes, changing socio-political contexts, linguistic patterns, geographic and demographic mappings etc. Incessant deconstructions, revisions and restructurings have made history vibrant and open to newer areas of investigation. These aspects inspired the making of this thesis, which built its premises using six works taken as symbolic representations of locating the history of a particular era in Colonial India. The thesis examines the treatment of women, who occupied the Mughal palaces, in historical versions and fictional narratives on history about the Mughal dynasty. The argument raised in the study is that while the historical narrative *Emperors of the Peacock Throne* by Abraham Eraly and the historical fiction *Taj* by Timeri N. Murari continue with the patriarchal tradition of making these women anonymous, the historical novels (*The Twentieth Wife, The Feast of Roses, Shadow Princess*) of Sundaresan & (*Nur Jahan's Daughter*) by Podder, re-create history by bringing to light the contribution of women in the evolution of that dynasty. The methodology was to use theories like New Historicism, various phases of Feminism etc as the tool, in order to validate this argument.

In an attempt to differentiate history from historical novels, Jay Williams notes that "the value of history is to provide as accurately as possible a chronicle of the lives of men for the entertainment and stimulation of their descendants. The serious historical novel does this. At the same time it may also be probing for the truth in a

given period of history or drawing what parallels you like" ("History and Historical Novels" 70). In constructing a historical and fictional narrative, both the historian and novelist make choices in framing that narrative, opting a beginning and end, giving emphasis to particular events, personae and qualities compelling the general public to accept their interpretation of events as 'facts' even while purporting to be detached and impartial. New Historicism began to question the limits of history by offering a parallel reading of history and literary works with its renewed, emancipatory attention to project the voices previously marginalized or trivialized. New Historicism and Feminism shared similar concerns in their approaches to historiography. Yet, New Historicism's lack of political commitment regarding women's absence for history is viewed critically by feminists. The various phases of Feminism have made a profound impact on the study of history and historical fiction with its agenda to critique and challenge male representations of women in them. They stressed on the new historicist principle of impossibility of an objective universal historical narrative and instead affirmed on the need to transform history as inclusive and pluralistic.

The misogynist attitude of the historians are vivid in the words of Buddha about not according equal status and rights to women in the vedic age as noted by Sermon Basket: "Women,…, are uncontrollable…envious…greedy…weak in wisdom…A woman's heart is haunted by stinginess…jealousy…sensuality" (qtd in *A History of India* 71).The grand narratives of history are pervaded by hegemonic ideologies that ignored the powerless while delineating the role of those who wielded power. New Historicism and Feminism are inextricably intertwined in their common notion to review history including the perspectives of marginalized too. Hence, the relevance of a Feminist New Historicism that seeks to explore the intricacies in the

notions of truth and representation of known historical and fictional versions in order to construct alternate inclusive versions of history. It has inspired women authors to reconsider the importance and role of women in historiography and has persuaded them to reposition women with the figments of imagination within their fictional representations of particular historical moments and to offer their characters alternative avenues of empowerment, social agency and sexual expression.

While discussing on women characters in male authored novels, Meera bai observes: "Women, whose strength lie in her unquestioning acceptance of life with all its trials and tribulations and her capacity to endure the ills of life with forbearance, often figures in Indian English novels, especially written by men" (*Women's Voices* 125). The select male authored texts glorify the heteronormative power relations with its passive heroines who always acquiesce to patriarchal ideologies where as, the select female writers try to redress the absences of women, both within the historical fictional genre and the grand historical narratives.

Over the centuries, writers have moulded the historical characters to suit their own political stands, to act as vehicles for their own motives and to promote their own interpretation of historical facts. In her article, "History through the Gender Lens", Maithreyi Krishnaraj observes that "The process of women becoming conscious of their place in history, and their relation to history, begins with their engagement with feminism. Feminism discovered that what we consider as history and who gets to write history, who is the subjects of history, are all subject to 'gender' bias. It is men who get to write history; they decide who is important, and if they write about women, it is through men's eyes" (*Historiography Past and Present* 119).

Elizabeth Badinter, a second wave feminist theorist argues that within sexual relationships, "women are always put in a position of submission or constraint" (*Dead End Feminism* 77). The select male authors reveal a clear patriarchal agenda in denying their female characters their sexuality and thereby their identity. The select female authors, on the other hand, celebrate the unrestrained expression of sexuality of their female characters as the core of their identity which leads to their empowerment. Their independent and strong-willed heroines get what they want from life, like relationships and most importantly sex. For them, sex is a key to self-realization. In the introduction to the book, *Feminism in Search of an Identity,* Meena Kelkar observes that "The theory that woman has equal rights and a right over her body and mind has made women aware of the exploitation they had to experience and it has at least evoked a possibility of awakening their minds" (12)

The certainty and fixity of history are debunked and new perspectives from even dalits and working class people began to appear like women's histories.The present study made use of theories like New Historicism and various phases of Feminism to analyze the select texts. An act of privileging a woman's perspective of a particular historical era represents the most significant and progressive impact of a Feminist New Historicism on the genre. Hence, all these may offer ample scope to widen the perspectives by making use of Marxism, Post Modernism, Psycho Analytic theories etc to add more dimensions and new insights to the study of different historical characters and their tales of different eras of Indian and even world history.

Commenting on the stereotypical roles played by women in male narratives, Elaine Showalter says, "If we study stereotypes of women, the sexism of male critics and the limited roles women play in literary history, we are not learning what women

have felt and experienced, but only what men have thought women should be"("Towards a Feminist Poetic" 130). In the essay, "Does a Sex have a History?" Denise Riley comments that "women have banded together under the collective noun 'women' at various times in history, of course, but never without conflict or exclusion" (*The Feminist History Reader* 149).

New cultural theories have been questioning prevalent versions of history and myth for their homogenous accounts of the past, blaming them for being partial to the powerful and hence, hegemonic. New Historicists specifically have indulged in revisiting history by refusing to accept it as closed. The present study which combines feminist theories with New Historicism for looking at known history from a subversive angle shows that such examination is possible in similar and yet unexplored areas in history and myth, including fictional discourses based on them. They may be analysed in future research, searching for hidden voices, lying submerged in the debris of monolithic discourses. Many such possibilities opened up in the course of research on this topic but could not be explored in detail.Though the focus of this study was the Mughal queens and princesses, certain omissions could not be ignored in the novels of Indu Sundaresan and Tanusree Podder, which were mainly the underprivileged women and the eunuchs inside the harems as well as the women laborers outside the palace who played strategic roles in the existence of the empire and the building of monuments like the Taj Mahal. The chosen novels may be examined to reveal new insights into these areas as well which would lead to further research in the topic. Other interesting novels in this genre would be Ruchir Gupta's *Mistress of theThrone* (2014), Kunal Basu's *The Miniaturist* (2003) etc set in the background of the Mughal India. *The Miniaturist*, for example, deals with the love of

the artist Bizhad to his master Akbar and the author gives a reasonable space to minor characters like the Khwaja's wife, the eunuch Jalil Khan and Bizhad's wife in the story narrated from the perspective of the artist.

Recent English historical novels like the series by Philippa Gregory open up interesting areas of investigation on similar lines. Her *The White Queen* (2009) graphically portrays the Tudor history through its women, beginning with Elizabeth Woodwille, the White Queen. Her *The Red Queen* (2010) about Margaret Beaufort, mother of Henry VII of England and *The Lady of the Rivers* (2011) narrated by Jacquetta of Luxemberg, mother of Elizabeth Woodwille are excellent examples of female authored historical novels. *Roan Rose* (2012), a popular historical novel by Juliet Waldron, examines the Wars of Roses from the perspective of Anne of York, queen of Richard III, focusing on the peasant girl, Roan Rose, who first becomes Anne's servant and later develops an affair with Richard III.

Like history, mythology also has fascinated theorists and writers, thus expanding itself further to incorporate new inclusions down the ages. Since mythology is the reflection of historical culture and traditional foundation of a society, retellings of myths attract the masses towards the culture and help to blur the thin line between history and mythololgy. Women novelists like Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni and Kavita Kane have carved a space of their own in this genre, subverting the existing notions of mythology as those of history. Though Divakaruni has moved on to other areas of fiction after her *Palace of Illusions*, Kavita Kane has so far produced four revisionist novels focusing on the 'othered' women in the epics, Ramayana and Mahabharatha. *Karna's Wife:The Outastes's Queen*, *Sita's Sister*, *Menaka's Choice* and *Lanka's Princess* are examples of the novelist's assertion that

the epics are not just the heroic tales of men at war but also of the powerful women, capable of equaling them if not to excel. If feminist theories could be clubbed together with New Historicism to analyse the subversions in history, similar experiments may be viable in proving that mythology too is pluralistic and multilogic.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni in an interview to The Hindu: Literary Review (February 19, 2017) remarks that "It is important for men to read books about strong women and enjoy these books, because things like that begin to change social attitudes". The growing interest of women writers in the traditionally androcentric areas of history, mythology etc, has widened the scope of research in these areas, making them more democratic and exciting, proving that "feminine constructions of history has cultural power" too. ("History as Usual" 120).

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