



Imperial Transgressions and Spiritual Investitures: A Begam's "Ascension" in Seventeenth Century Mughal India

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Abstract

Islamic jurisprudence and social customs regarding laws of inheritance privilege Muslim males as legitimate successors to family legacies and wealth. Furthermore, these heads of households were and are expected to sustain and uphold family values while representing the noble "face" of their legacies. Though women in pre-modern Islamic societies were awarded property and income to support them, they were neither required nor encouraged like their male counterparts to use their agencies or largesse to make banner representations of their lineage or heritage. This essay challenges androcentric ideas and practices surrounding Islamic laws of inheritance through the example of the Mughal princess Jahānārā Begam (1614-81) and her articulations of ascension. This analysis demonstrates how the princess's extraordinary relationship with her emperor father, Shah Jahān (r. 1628-59), facilitated her spiritual and imperial achievements and elevated her rank in imperial and Sufi hierarchies.

Keywords

Mughal, Sufism, Women Saints, Qāderiya, Jahānārā Begam

Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Mughal India the patterns of imperial succession, informed by Islamic laws of inheritance, remained specific to male members of the royal family. The oldest son or heir-apparent assumed his father's, the emperor's, rank and with it political and fiscal powers. Additionally, each heir to the throne was charged with perpetuating legacies as "reifications" of the imperial past and legitimizing the future of the dynasty. Though Mughal emperor Shah Jahān's (1592-1666) reign was plagued by competing sons who made rightful claims to the throne in 1631, his eldest daughter, Jahānārā Begam (Bēgom), by default assumed the role of head of the

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