



## SHAH JAHAN AND JAHANARA IN INDU SUNDARESAN'S *THE SHADOW PRINCESS*

**S. REVATHI**

Research Scholar  
Department of English  
Sri Sarada College for Women  
(Autonomous)  
Salem – 636 016 (TN) INDIA

**DR. A. SELVALAKSHMI**

Assistant Professor  
Department of English  
Sri Sarada College for Women  
(Autonomous)  
Salem – 636 016 (TN) INDIA

### ABSTRACT

*Shadow Princess is a brilliant art work of Indu Sundaresan. Indu Sundaresan depicts the story of Mughal India after the death of Mumtaz Mahal. The central character Jahanara is depicted entirely from a women's point of view by the author. Princess Jahanara became powerful after her mother's death and was never allowed to marry. There is an ideal relationship between the father and the daughter throughout this novel. Indu Sundaresan uses Princess Jahanara as a stunning icon in her novel.*

### INTRODUCTION

*The first daughter whom he had was Begom Saeb (Begum Sahib), the eldest of all, whom her father loved to an extraordinary degree...and this has given occasion to Monsieur Bernier to write many things about this Princess, founded entirely on the talk of low people. Therefore it is incumbent on me...to say that what he writes is untrue.*

*-Niccolao Manucci*

Indu Sundaresan was born in India and moved all over the country as a child. Her father was a fighter pilot in the Indian Air Force, and the family went from one military base to the next. Sundaresan developed her love of storytelling as a child. She also won the Washington State Book Award in the year 2003. *Shadow Princess* is a brilliant art work of Indu Sundaresan. Indu Sundaresan brings to life, the Mughal Court, and the lives of the royals, the aromas of food and the texture of silk through this novel. *Shadow Princess* is an exciting combination of personality and incident, feeling and conspiracy, luxury and architecture.

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*Shadow Princess* is the zenith of the saga. Indu Sundaresan depicts the story of Mughal India after the death of Mumtaz Mahal. The description starts with the fourteenth child delivery by Arjumand Banu and her demise during the process. She leaves this world leaving behind two daughters, Jahanara and Roshanara beside with four sons. On the death of her mother, Jahanara becomes the Padshah Begum Sahiba of the imperial harem, leaving behind Shah Jahan's other two wives in the run for the title. In the period of his beloved wife's death, Emperor Shah Jahan depends very much on his daughter for passionate support and matters of governance. Jahanara looks after her father and kingdom so well that the emperor grows extremely attached to his eldest child and refuses to give her away in marriage to anybody.

With the unexpected death of her mother Mumtaz Mahal, Jahanara's life has not only changed the changing aspects of the majestic household but also changed in the terms of implementation of power. Shah Jahan depends on his eldest daughter Jahanara for everything. It became inevitable for Jahanara, to take over her mother's role, in running the harem as a chief consort, and keep her father going. Shah Jahan being her father not ever concerned to allow Jahanara to get married, and she had to secretly accomplish her isolated life. She continued to remain with the father all through, taking over the errands of getting the brothers wedded; instructing the father on political difficulties, supporting to art and architecture. She kept herself busy employed for the welfare of her society in the kingdom.

The central character Jahanara is depicted entirely from a women's point of view by the author. Jahanara means the adorer of the world, and the name was given to her by her grandfather Jahangir. The situation, in which Jahanara was caught, made her realize her power, at the young age of seventeen years. Jahanara persuaded Shah Jahan to take up the State affairs by instilling confidence in him that, they can go ahead in future life in the absence of his beloved Mumtaz Mahal. Shah Jahan discovered a woman in his daughter after the death of his wife. "When the sun lifted itself from the night and bathed the upper ramparts of the fort at Buranpur, it would light up Shah Jahan's face with the newly minted glory and create awe, just as the Jharoka appearances were always meant to do." (*Shadow Princess* 69)

Jahanara's power in the harem was established during Shah Jahan's jharoka appearance. Jahanara was behind the veil and the walls of her father's harem, and exerted power. The seventeen year old Princess Jahanara became the powerful woman, on whom the Emperor lent for support for the rest of his life. She was understanding, and innate and loving figure upon whom each one in the family depended upon. She always completed the duty of comforting understanding with her father in the times of self-distrust. However influential Jahanara was, she could not evince her authorities openly. She was instrumental to instil confidence in Shah Jahan at the jharoka, but she could not margin him on the stage, because



women have their limitations in male-controlled society and they are narrowed to private sphere of influence.

Male-controlled civilisation forms numerous codes of behaviour to women to internalize and follow them. Disobedience of the prescribed norms was not tolerated by the patriarchy and society in general. But, Jahanara's disobedience of the recognised code began early in the novel, soon after her mother's demise; Jahanara articulates her aversion to wrap her mother's body in simple plain cloth although that was an accepted religious stricture. She preferred to preserve her mother's corpse with decorations and silk coverings.

Jahanara attended her mother's funeral against the prevailing societal norms, even though Satti Khanum, a powerful eunuch, and Aurangzeb, her third brother dissuaded her from attending it. She consoled her siblings while controlling her emotions. More than any other child, she is ever present to attend and fulfill her father's needs. Readers can observe through the following lines.

*"That Satti Khanum, who officially bore the title Matron of the Harem but in reality had been Mumtaz's chief lady-in –waiting, had not come to pay her respects to the newly powerful women in the Zenana. That instead that child Jahanara had taken over the duties she, the first Empress, should have performed for her lord in his time of need. How could a daughter take a place of wife?"(Shadow Princess 17)*

Jahanara was skilled of virtuous governance, and the advice she gives to her father Shah Jahan on regency was an evidence. The longing for supremacy began to be felt both by Dara, the eldest son, and Aurangzeb the third son. If any one of them were asked to become the king by Shah Jahan, in a flash, they would have put on the crown. But, Jahanara thought contrarily. Regency was not for the empire she thought, as many problems would have to be faced. She felt it to be an excessive hazard to the Mughal Kingdom. If Jahanara had not been an attorney to her father, he would have abandoned his throne in misery. The Mughal Kingdom would have declined much earlier than it actually took place. The good influence of Jahanara saved the empire.

*Jahanara stepped back and glanced at him. A regency would also be unwise.....There is no precedent for this Bapa. Would you be willing to allow another man to counsel your son in matters of state? Shah Jahan rubbed the side of his neck thoughtfully. Tell me, how much has this lunacy of mine affected your brothers? Dara...he thinks he will be your choice, as I think*



*also. Shuja goes know yet. Aurangzeb wants to be Emperor, but, Bapa, he is only thirteen.”(Shadow Princess 63)*

Shah Jahan thought that a girl child is a blessing from the Lord, when compared to boys. A Girl child, he thought, were a blessing from Allah, sons only caused worry. Almost from the commencement, Jahanara had been balanced, quiet, and had passed through her childhood without actually touching it. She reminded Shah Jahan of her mother in the early days of their marriage through the following lines.”Jahanara was seventeen years old, willowy and upright. She had a thin, sharply structured face, all planes and angles, brows that had plucked to arch thickly above the bones surrounding her eyes, hair drawn back in this heat and plaited down her back ”(Shadow Princess 3)

The condition of women is described in a male-controlled society from a marginally changed viewpoint. Usually, fathers get married their daughters to whom so ever they want, with no choice of their daughter. Here, Shah Jahan for his self-sake did not want to marry off Jahanara. Though, she was the most much-loved child, she was limited to her father’s harem alternatively. Jahanara recognised this situation not all together reluctantly. Her love for her father, allowed her to accept with the situation. He needed her, and she could not leave him.

Jahanara interfered in the quarrel between father and the son with a heart-breaking plea to Aurangzeb, through a letter, persuading him to retreat his troops, and accept allegiance to his father’s will for Dara ,as the heir apparent. She aided and advised Shah Jahan on several political matters, but she always did it from behind the veil. There was unselfishness in Jahanara, just as there was self-centredness in Aurangzeb. Only a woman like Jahanara could think, not of herself but of the kingdom. At a very early age of nearly thirty years, she was honourable and graceful in expressing her skill, equability and religiosity to tackle Aurangzeb. Jahanara’s efforts went futile in convincing her aggressive brother. In a vulnerable moment during Shah Jahan’s sickness, Aurangzeb gathered an army in rebellion against his father and incarcerated Shah Jahan, and Jahanara, at their fort in Delhi.

Jahanara’s judgment to live in confinement with her father once again speaks about her durable personality. She is not a person who would leave her father at a time, when he needed her the most. In the confinement, Shah Jahan and Jahanara discussed Aurangzeb’s rule, and his silliness for imposing tax on the Hindus. Jahanara decided with Aurangzeb, entreating him to withdraw the tax levied on the Hindus, but she refused to see him, or enter his harem. Her impartial concern for all the Muslims and Hindus in the empire spoke well of her statesmanship. Jahanara had the custom of advising her younger brothers and correcting them whenever she disliked any of their activities. But, as the oldest daughter in the imperial



household, who had worn the mantle of responsibility for many years, she felt it was her duty to put her brothers in the right path.

Shah Jahan's and Jahanara's internment did not bring them gloom. They had their personal happy time being together. Though, Jahanara did not see her grandpa Jahangir, Shah Jahan's stories about his babyhood, and about Emperor Akbar, his father and mother and so on, exposed to her many things about their family, more than the official histories could record. Shah Jahan's imprisonment was blissful, that he lived with his beloved daughter even in imprisonment. It is evident to the readers through the following lines:

*You have been good to me, Jahan." He tried to speak again, but the words choked his throat and he cried soundlessly. Jahanara put her arms around him and laid her head lightly on his thin chest. They stayed like that for a long time, until she heard her father's breathing calm into a rhythm as he slept. She closed her eyes, willing him to live, knowing that he probably would not. (Shadow Princess 314)*

Subsequently after nine years of confinement, Shah Jahan died on the thirty first of January, 1666. As Jahanara desired, she was near him to close his eyes on his death. She disobeyed the policies of the society again, by following her father's dead body, and by attending the funeral. The author describes this, "They hesitated when the veiled princess followed them, and one of the men began to protest, but her stride was firm, her attitude inflexible- Jahanara meant to bury her father herself; she had earned the right to do." (Shadow Princess 316)

Shah Jahan was buried near the tomb of Mumtaz Mahal. Jahanara stood at one corner because she was veiled but boldly she came forward to lift a handful of mud from the earth and throw them upon her father's body. Readers can notice from the words of Jahanara "You are with Mama now, Bapa," she whispered, then moved back to her place as the gravediggers piled mud over the grave and laid a white marble slab on top of it." (Shadow Princess 316)

Jahanara seems to be a woman hidden inside a veil, who had enormous power and exercised that power to the best of her abilities. She had many obstacles in her way, Jahanara was not allowed to marry also. Jahanara was the beloved daughter of Shah Jahan. Therefore Jahanara becomes the shadow Princess in her Father's Harem. Readers can find unconditional love between Father and daughter in this novel.



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